

on the table.

Community Reflections & Insights 2019

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2020



Photo from the *On the Table* event hosted by Jordyn Taylor-Robins in Bralorne, BC.

Introduction

It's a simple yet powerful idea: a call to action to gather friends, neighbours, coworkers, or strangers, and share conversation over food.

The idea for *On the Table* originally emerged as a response to Vancouver Foundation's 2017 Connect & Engage report, which found that members of our communities were feeling isolated and longed for in-person, face to face connection. Now in its second year, this BC-wide annual event has continued to evolve and gain momentum across the province, with over 6,500 participants having taken part this year.

Social isolation is a complex issue to solve, but creating opportunities to connect face to face can be easy. Rather than host a single event, we opted to create a platform that encouraged and supported people to organize a gathering of their own. This subtle shift made a big difference; not only were we able to have thousands more citizens connecting with one another across the province, it also allowed each host to tailor the event to their community and unique interests. The format of the initiative was straightforward; pick a food to be served, whether it's a simple snack, a homemade dinner, or even a potluck, and a topic of discussion. From there, we asked a simple question that ignited hundreds of conversations across British Columbia; "What's on your mind?"

We're excited to share with you what transpired this year.

The On the Table team at Vancouver Foundation



We started the morning with polite hellos and left with warm goodbyes and hugs.

Photo from the *On the Table* event hosted by Hoovie in partnership with Dogwood and Matchstick Coffee



Pulse of British Columbia

When we asked British Columbians, “What’s on your mind?”, the events that evolved and the topics brought to the table were as unique and diverse as the community across the province that came together to share their thoughts.

528 Hosts

6,500+ Guests

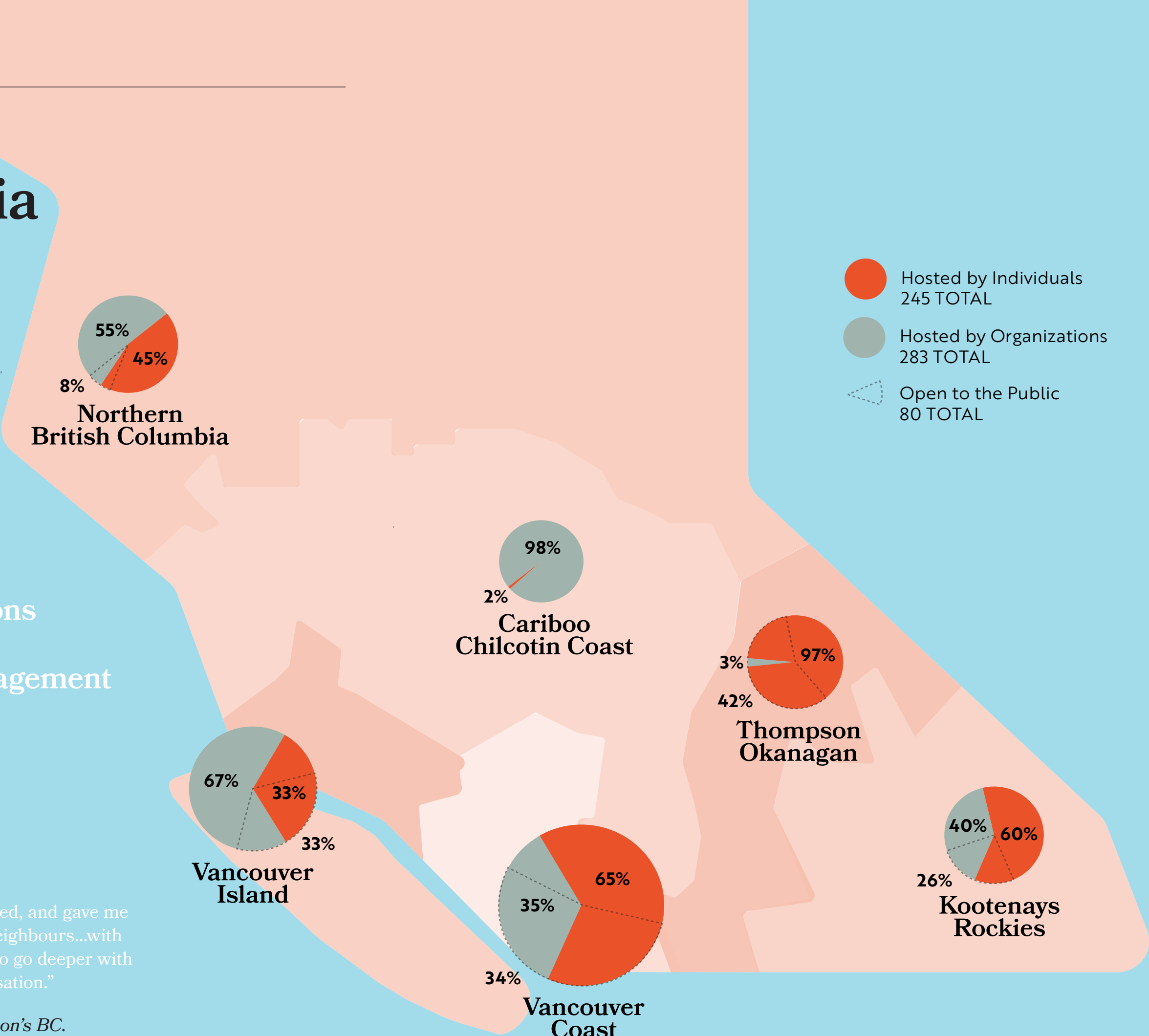
819,911 Online Connections

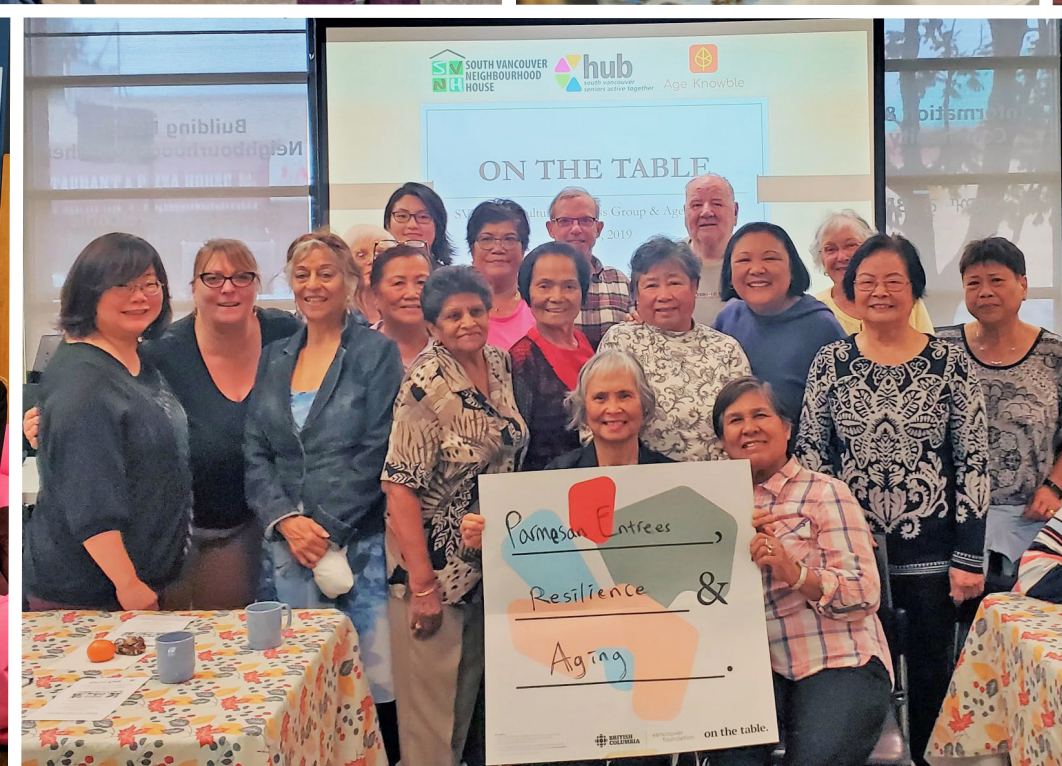
4,369 Online Social Engagement



“On the Table facilitated, and gave me a reason, to gather neighbours...with an upfront intention to go deeper with a meaningful conversation.”

Carolyn Nelson, Gibson’s BC.





Photos from On the Table events that took place across BC.

Host Spotlights

Anyone can be a catalyst for building community and forging connection - sometimes all it takes is a gentle nudge and a good excuse to come together.

We followed a handful of our hosts throughout their *On the Table* journey to learn about their hosting experience and hear their reflections post-event. This is what they had to say.

On the Table

Community Reflections & Insights

**Steak, wine
& inter-racial relationships.**

**Dara Parker
Vancouver**

VP of Grants and Community Initiatives at VF

"My partner and I love bringing people into our home to share a meal, and I think what's been key to doing that in our lives is not being stressed about having it perfect. The house can be a bit messy, the food doesn't have to be fancy, but actually just gathering people to talk about things and connect is really powerful."



**Dumplings, tea
& longevity.**

**Wilson Liang
Chinatown, Vancouver**

Downtown Eastside Community Member

"I moved to Chinatown and got a lot of help from people. I really felt it and I want to just simply give back. Bringing people together is always in my mind, so it's good to have people connect to each other. That's something I love to do."



**Beer, film &
rainbow refugee.**

**Hilary Henegar
Duncan**

Sharing Economy Marketer

"The role of a host is an important one in our society, one that a lot of us have lost touch with as lives get busier. When you welcome someone to your space, when your arms are open in this way, it's a public service that we all benefit from. Yes, there are natural hosts, but all of us can do it. It's not a small thing as it does take time - you might need to take time off work, clean your bathroom, make food - but it is important and nourishing."





Coffee, cinnamon buns & encouraging volunteerism.

Chris Mathieson
Keremeos

GM at the Grist Mill and Gardens

"I think the kinds of topics that we want to focus on here have to do with this place, with sustainability in particular. Moving here from the big city into a small town, one of the things you notice is that your impact is much more obvious. I'm really excited to be in a place like this where you can create those conversations, those opportunities for dialogue."

Lunch, charcuterie & how VR builds community.

Prem Gill
Vancouver

CEO of Creative BC

"I hope that my On the Table event will inspire those who are attending to continue the conversation with others, to spark more curiosity about the subject matter or their own creative content, and really serve as a jumping point into learning more about immersive content and the power it can have on our culture and society."



Harvest dinner, song & story & friends of the Similkameen.

Kelly Terbasket
Similkameen Valley

Program Director of IndigenEYEZ

"After the film, I explained why it mattered to me and asked how it landed with others. I used the circle format to ensure everyone had a chance to speak, and then a cool thing organically happened. We ended up in small groups talking about specific topic areas and what baby steps could be taken towards land stewardship, which then led to two actions – a group of people organizing regular 'forest bathing' walks to inspire an appreciation for the land, and one of the attendees hosting another meal to focus on the health of the Similkameen Valley, and how to help the average person feel empowered to tackle the complicated issues we face here."



We're grateful to the hundreds of hosts who opened their homes, met at their favourite park, or came together in their community to gather people together for a meaningful conversation.

Want to learn more?

Visit On the Table on Youtube to watch a short featurette on each of these hosts.

bit.ly/OnTheTableBC-YouTube

Community Reflections

From homemade meals to coffee with coworkers in the lunchroom, we saw gatherings of all shapes and sizes. The conversation topics were just as varied, and we've categorized them here to give you a sense of what issues were top of mind.

Conversation Topics

1. Community Engagement 25%
2. Inclusion & Belonging 15%
3. Wellbeing & Vitality 12%
4. Learning & Storytelling 8%
5. The Built Environment 8%
6. Climate Action & Emergency 7%
7. Arts, Culture & Creativity 7%
8. Social & Environmental Shifts 6%
9. Food Security & Nourishment 5%
10. The Voice of Youth 4%
11. Just for Fun 3%

To see a full list of all topics discussed during On the Table, please visit onthetablebc.com/2019topics

"The Parksville Qualicum Beach Community Foundation and the Parksville Pathfinder met to discuss the upcoming Federal Election. About twelve girls aged 12-15 discussed politics: who's running, what issues matter, why it matters, what they would ask the prime minister, and why are there not more women in office."

Terra Kaethler, *Parksville*

"The topic of the day was "Community for All", discussed over wine and cheese. We talked about what made the community feel welcoming and what factors made the difference in feeling included. It was a wonderful opportunity to gather community members from all sectors, to share ideas and discuss important issues. We hope to put an event like this on again!"

Ana Yost, *Cranbrook*



"Our Potato Kugel, Apple Kugel, Jewish community and food security potluck was an enjoyable evening full of delicious food and lovely people from a variety of backgrounds and communities."

Caramel Tanaka, *Vancouver*

"We really liked the part where we shared about a garden/food memory from each of our childhoods - we're so often caught up in our projects that we don't make time to get to know one another in a more personal way. It was nice that several people suggested we do this more often. As the host, it certainly pushed me to connect better with people that I respect, and to open my home and share a great meal with cool people."

Robin Jenkinson, *Salt Spring Island*

"Magical! We had three rounds of conversation on intergenerational collaboration. We came up with a lot of tangible ideas that the project is going to try and infuse into our existing events and activities. Stories were shared, culture shift and values discussed, tacos eaten. Older and younger folks offered and requested writing help, going for walks together, joining a choir, storage space, help with financial planning, cooking help etc."

Daniela Gunn-Doerge, *Vancouver*



“Typically when people who don't know each other are brought together, it can be mostly uncomfortable “small talk” - about the weather, the Canucks, etc. But when a specific subject was put on the table, the depth of the conversation was remarkable.

”



Insights & Outcomes

Constructive conversation: the fuel needed to spark collective action

A number of survey respondents shared that tangible follow up plans sprung from their *On the Table* event. From organizing farm trips for elementary students to advancing the topic in future gatherings with community neighbourhood leaders, the conversation ignited action and inspired next steps for many – a ripple effect we hope will continue to carry the conversation forward long after the tables have been cleared.

Expanding networks and forging connections

We all have a role to play in opening the circles within our communities as well as casting our net further. *On the Table* created opportunities to bring together community members from all walks of life, resulting in expanded networks and supportive environments that created a sense of belonging for many. Having an excuse to invite new friends and strangers alike to join in on the conversation was a common thread enthusiastically shared by our hosts and guests.

An open invitation: new friendships through shared interests

The most significant evolution from our first to second year of *On the Table* was likely in the tremendous increase in public events held by hosts. With 80 gatherings across the province open to anyone who felt compelled to pull up a seat and join the discussion, organizations and individuals alike extended an inclusive invitation for people in their communities to meet new faces and share ideas; an ode to being truly “community inspired.”

On the Table in the workplace

Many events this year took place within organizations and workplace environments. For some, this provided a unique opportunity to bond and share thoughts with colleagues around personal topics otherwise not discussed in a professional setting, while for others, it offered a branded vessel to convene a larger, more diverse audience, giving stakeholders an opportunity to prioritize what is important and look for solutions.

Connecting face to face: a starting point for ongoing connection

The most repeated feedback was that people enjoyed attending or hosting an event so much that they’ve decided to continue it as a weekly dinner, monthly meetup, or quarterly tradition. Time and time again, we see that despite living in this digital age, we’re all seeking a simple, inherently human connection. Beyond spending time together face to face, there continues to be a collective need to create enabling environments on a regular basis; spaces where we can engage with one another on a more meaningful, open, and intentional level.



Benefits Of Hosting

- 62% said it gave them a reason to gather people together
- 54% said it gave them a platform to talk about something important
- 49% said it helped them connect with people they don't see that often
- 47% said it gave them the nudge they needed to convene people

Benefits Of Attending

- 78% said it connected them to new people
- 68% said it gave them new ideas or insights
- 52% said it was nice to be invited and made them feel part of something
- 20% said it shifted their thinking about something

93%

of hosts said that *On The Table* provided an opportunity to host a conversation that wouldn't have happened otherwise

86%

of hosts said that *after hosting* an *On the Table* event, they felt an increased sense of belonging or connection to others.

On the Table 2020

When we launched On the Table last year, we weren't quite sure whether the idea would take flight. Now, with year two wrapped up, the enthusiastic participation and positive response made it clear: with your involvement, this platform continues to be an accessible way to bring our communities closer together.

At Vancouver Foundation, we're continuously learning about community challenges through a variety of listening and research efforts. Our recently released Vital Signs report focusing on community participation showed a common thread with the On the Table initiative: 45% of British Columbians want to be more involved in community life, and both the youngest and oldest generations shared similar challenges of not knowing how to do more in their community. It seems that regardless of age or demographic, at our core, we're all simply looking for ways to connect with one another in deeper, more meaningful ways. Whether as a host or a guest, On the Table has continued to provide an accessible format for British Columbians to reach out and share what's on their mind.

As for 2020, we're excited to have On the Table set to come back in its third iteration. With each year, we continue to learn from you to ensure the platform is responding to your feedback. We hope you'll continue to carry the intention of On the Table throughout the year - and we'll see you around the table September 2020.

The On the Table team at Vancouver Foundation



Photo from the *On the Table* event hosted by Wilson Liang in Chinatown, Vancouver, BC.

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#200 – 475 West Georgia St
Vancouver, BC Canada V6B 4M9

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on the table. AN INVITATION FROM The Vancouver Foundation logo, with "vancouver" in a lowercase, sans-serif font and "foundation" in a smaller, all-caps, sans-serif font below it.