



The University of British Columbia's  
Downtown Eastside Initiative

# Challenge and Promise:

Report of Summer Student  
Community Consultation

by

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## REPORT SUMMARY

As part of implementing Trek 2000, UBC's strategic plan for the future, UBC wants to expand its presence in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. This initiative is based on the premise that universities have a responsibility to reach out to the larger community and play a role in supporting social change.

We, the authors of this report, are UBC students who were hired to consult with the Downtown Eastside community about how UBC can most effectively develop its presence in the area. We talked with residents in a variety of settings and met with professionals from health and social service agencies.

In many of our conversations, we found a great deal of excitement about the potential benefits that UBC's expanded presence might bring. We also found a significant amount of skepticism. We discovered that trying to understand the Downtown Eastside is like looking into a kaleidoscope. From different angles, the pieces of the puzzle form different patterns, each one with its own truth. Although we heard diverse and sometimes contradictory perspectives about how UBC could contribute to this community, we did receive some very clear messages.

We learned that UBC needs to work collaboratively with those who live and work in the Downtown Eastside, to develop partnerships aimed at addressing the issues that the community identifies as important. These partnerships need to be reciprocal, characterized by mutually beneficial exchanges of ideas, knowledge and other resources. We were told that UBC needs to avoid duplicating or competing with already existing programs. And we were told that UBC needs to make a commitment to the area, to be willing to work patiently and respectfully to resolve the inevitable challenges it will face.

As a result of the consultation, we recognized that there is much more to be learned, especially about the situations of particular groups such as Aboriginals, youth, seniors, and women. It is clear that ongoing consultation with community members and with people at UBC who have knowledge of the Downtown Eastside will be crucial to the success of UBC's initiative.

Based on the input we received, we are recommending that UBC undertake the following activities over the next twelve months:

1. Develop a program to enable students to do volunteer work in organizations in the Downtown Eastside.
  2. Organize a drive on campus to collect clothing, food, and household goods and distribute the donations to organizations in the Downtown Eastside.
  3. Establish a community liaison office in the Downtown Eastside.
  4. Continue to consult with both the Downtown Eastside and the campus communities about the development of UBC's presence.
  5. Sponsor educational events for residents of the Downtown Eastside.
  6. Provide educational opportunities for service providers who work in the Downtown Eastside.
  7. Provide needed dental services to residents.
  8. Promote research partnerships between Downtown Eastside organizations and UBC faculty and graduate students.
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*“There is a difference between people’s image of the Downtown Eastside and reality. Yes, safety is an issue, but it’s safer here than lots of other places. There’s a core community that cares, that is very close-knit.”*

—Psychiatric Nurse

*“The Downtown Eastside is a closed, isolated community where outsiders shy away from its streets and residents are bounded from within.”*

— Community Worker

*“The Downtown Eastside is another world. It is like society’s black hole—all the issues society doesn’t want to look at end up here: poverty, mental illness, alcohol and drug use, prostitution, and violence.”*

— Child Care Supervisor

## INTRODUCTION

These descriptions of the Downtown Eastside come from people who live or work in the area. They reflect the diverse and sometimes contradictory perspectives we encountered in our conversations with members of the Downtown Eastside community over the past three months. We are both University of British Columbia (UBC) students: one a PhD candidate in interdisciplinary studies, the other an undergraduate civil engineering student. We were hired by the UBC administration to spend time in the Downtown Eastside consulting with residents, professionals who work in health and social service agencies, and other key people. We worked under the guidance of a committee of representatives from UBC, First United Church, Downtown Eastside Youth Activities Society (DEYAS), YWCA Crabtree Corner, and the City of Vancouver’s Social Planning Department. Our task was to elicit thoughts and opinions about how UBC can most effectively develop its presence in the Downtown Eastside.

The creation of an expanded downtown presence is one of the strategies UBC is pursuing in its effort to create stronger links with the larger community. The formation of collaborative partnerships with local and regional communities is one of the five central elements of Trek 2000, the University’s strategic plan for the future. UBC intends to promote social,

cultural, and economic development by providing educational programs, policy analysis, research consultation and expertise, student volunteer placements, and outreach programs.

For the past fourteen years, UBC has been working with the business sector through its University Industrial Liaison Office. This office connects industry and University researchers and helps them work together to resolve critical research problems and develop new products and technologies. UBC hopes to be able to promote similar successes in the social sector. By combining the University’s resources with those of existing health and social service organizations and the private sector, UBC hopes to contribute to beneficial social change.

## Consultation Goals

Our consultation with people in the Downtown Eastside was a continuation of a process begun by UBC’s President, Martha Piper, when she came to UBC in 1997. Over the past two years, the President and other UBC faculty, staff, and students have discussed UBC’s ideas with a wide variety of community members. As students hired for the summer, our task was to focus the discussion more specifically on how UBC can contribute to the Downtown Eastside and how the development of its presence could be approached. We explored ways that faculty and students could be involved in the community and discussed the idea of opening a community liaison office. Our objectives were:

- to learn as much as we could about the nature of the Downtown Eastside community,
- to find out what people think about UBC’s proposed initiative,
- to identify organizations where UBC undergraduate students could do volunteer work, and
- to elicit recommendations about how UBC should proceed with its plans.

We met with representatives of twenty-seven organizations and agencies that work in the Downtown Eastside area (see page 14). We also talked with residents in several settings, including a community barbecue and concert, a youth drop-in

centre, a drop-in centre for families, a community centre, and a church that provides social services. Our conversations were relatively informal. We tried to follow the lead of the people we talked with, focusing on the issues they felt were important. In addition to talking with people who live and work in the area about UBC's role, we accompanied a team of Vancouver City police officers who were patrolling the Downtown Eastside on foot on a Saturday night.

## OBSERVATIONS

Trying to understand the Downtown Eastside is like looking into a kaleidoscope. From different angles, the pieces of the puzzle form different patterns, each one with its own truth. The Downtown Eastside of the Chinese family which has lived in Strathcona for generations is different from the Downtown Eastside of the single, middle-aged man who has been displaced from his job elsewhere in the province and finds himself staying at the Salvation Army and lining up for free food while he looks for work. The minister whose church provides food, refuge and advocacy services has a different analysis of what needs to be done in the Downtown Eastside compared to a police officer who picks drunks and drug users off the streets night after night.

While we believe we have learned enough about the Downtown Eastside to provide some direction to UBC as it pursues its downtown initiative, it would be presumptuous of us to pretend that we have a comprehensive understanding of the community or what it needs. We have only scratched the surface. But we did receive some very clear messages from the people we spoke with.

### A Community of Communities

Many people emphasized that the Downtown Eastside is not the "Downtown Eastside" portrayed by the media. While the social and economic problems in the area are undeniable, the community also has strengths. There is an active community of artists and writers in the area, for example. Their work is inspired by the mosaic of life experiences and the colourful mix of people, ideas, and traditions in

the Downtown Eastside. In addition, the professionals who work in the Downtown Eastside are highly educated and committed. And, because of the immediacy of the difficulties faced by those who live and work in the area, people's relationships are often more direct and straightforward than is typical of less impoverished communities.

The paradoxes and complexities we encountered suggest that the Downtown Eastside is not one community, but many communities. There are diverse perspectives and opinions about what is happening in the area and why. At the same time, there seems to be a growing realization that the only way for the area's problems to be addressed is for people to work together. As John Turvey, a long-time activist and Director of DEYAS, said when speaking about the historical competition among social agencies in the area, "We are really in trouble if we continue in the old way—the way of cutting deals behind closed doors." The community mobilization process being undertaken in concert with the City is evidence of this drive to find common ground and take action. (See sidebar page 3.)

### UBC and a Collaborative Approach

One of the other strong messages we heard is that the people in the Downtown Eastside are tired of having outsiders impose development programs and initiatives on them, however well-meaning they might be. As Ruth Wright, the Executive Director of First United Church said, "The community is now standing on its hind legs saying, 'We don't want to be done to!' I haven't seen this kind of talk since the sixties. People are ready to go to the streets." The community members we spoke with insisted that UBC recognize the strengths and worth of people in the Downtown Eastside and pursue its plans in partnership with those who live and work in the area. People need to be treated with respect and care. UBC needs to be attentive to the concerns of the community and develop its programs gradually. It is clear that people in the Downtown Eastside are wary of the risk of exploitation and extremely protective of their interests.

## Downtown Eastside/Strathcona Community Mobilization Process

A coalition of residents and organizations in the Downtown Eastside and Strathcona neighbourhoods is working with the City of Vancouver to identify community-based action strategies aimed at addressing the most critical problems in the area. Community organizers will work with residents and professionals to develop areas of consensus about how to address six key themes:

- Housing,
- Safety/Well-being,
- Alcohol and Drug Use/Health,
- Children, Youth and Families,
- Sustainable Economic Development, and
- Women's Issues.

It was suggested that UBC could play a role in helping the community to access existing research relevant to these themes as well as helping to conduct new research.

Ideas arising from the community mobilization process will form the basis of the City's plan to revitalize the downtown eastside. The five-year community revitalization process is being financed by a \$5 million grant given to the City of Vancouver by the National Crime Prevention Centre in Ottawa.

## UBC's Commitment

UBC already has a presence in the Downtown Eastside. For example, UBC law students provide legal counselling and advocacy through the Carnegie Centre. For many years, students from Social Work, Nursing, and Medicine have been doing practicums in various health and social agencies. Graduate students and faculty in these and other disciplines have also done research in the area. While some of the residents and professionals we spoke with were aware of UBC's current activities, many were not. Some people described UBC as "a big unknown."

We encountered some skepticism about UBC's plans for an expanded downtown presence. Some people see the initiative as simply a public relations exercise. The consensus among people we consulted is that, for the initiative to succeed, UBC needs to proceed slowly, allowing mutual trust and awareness to build. Nancy Cameron, Community Services Manager at YWCA Crabtree Corner said, "UBC's commitment needs to be long-term. It takes a long time to earn trust and respect, especially from the Downtown Eastside. UBC needs to start with small, concrete things in the beginning." Ann Aram, the Director of the Youth Action Centre and a graduate of UBC, agreed. "The University has to show that it is here to stay and that it would not turn its back on the community once the novelty wears thin. There are many relationships to be developed before UBC can truly become a part of this community."

The skepticism stands in contrast to the enthusiasm many people expressed about what a strengthened UBC presence could mean for the area. For example, Ron Suzuki, Program Coordinator at Strathcona Community Centre, commented, "Having access to UBC's resources could really make a difference. Having UBC in the community might make the idea of going to university more accessible, more real. It could have a big impact on kids."

## Outreach and Inreach

Several people stressed the importance of reciprocity in the link between UBC and the community. It was suggested that not only could people from UBC come

to the Downtown Eastside as teachers and resource people, but people from the Downtown Eastside could take their knowledge to the UBC campus, perhaps by reading their poetry or teaching students about their life experiences. Similarly, a street youth said, "Why should we welcome them (UBC) into our backyards when we can't reach theirs? One way to show that UBC is sincere is by inviting the community, our people, to visit the University and use the libraries, swimming pools, and parks."

### **Co-operation**

Many people, both residents and professionals, emphasized the need for UBC to integrate its efforts with those of other organizations and agencies. In an area served by more than two hundred health and social service organizations, the potential for duplication and competition is significant. One resident said, "What we don't need is for UBC to come into the neighbourhood and do what is already being done. Any action that UBC takes should either add to an existing service or be completely new and different."

### **A Range of Needs**

Many of the people we consulted also pointed out that, in the Downtown Eastside, it is important to make sure that people's basic needs are met before trying to engage them in educational, social, or recreational activities. As one young resident said, "Everyone knows that you can't learn or play when you're hungry or cold." But, while the basics are important, there is also a place in the Downtown Eastside for activities and events that speak to people's other needs, such as the needs for connection, meaning, and hope.

Some people see UBC as playing a role in the fulfillment of these other kinds of needs. For example, Stephen Herbert, a priest at St. James Church, said, "UBC may not be the best agent to try to address the problems in the area, like the drug problem. UBC might be better to play a role in heightening people's creativity, to try to enhance community life."

There is a need for recreational activities as well. Many

people spend time on the streets because they lack the skills or knowledge to use their time differently. It was pointed out that some people grow up knowing how to derive pleasure only from drugs or alcohol. We spoke to one father of two young boys who works hard to avoid that. "I spend a lot of time draining these kids' energy with sports, games, and chores. They are learning some of the values of life and I think that they understand what it means to be productive members of the community. UBC may well help put some of those empty playing fields to good use."

## **COMPONENTS OF UBC'S PRESENCE**

We consulted with people about several possible programs that UBC could develop in the Downtown Eastside. These programs include providing educational opportunities to people who live or work in the area, placing undergraduate student volunteers in local organizations, collaborating on research projects, providing dental services, and opening a community liaison office.

### **Learning Opportunities for Residents**

In the fall of 1998, two UBC students developed a course called Humanities 101 and offered it to residents of the Downtown Eastside. The course provides the equivalent of a first-year liberal arts course to people with a passion for learning and knowledge, regardless of their financial situation or academic history. The initial classes are held in the Downtown Eastside. Classes later move to the UBC campus. Students receive a meal before each class. In addition, child care and bus tickets are provided. Instructors are UBC faculty and graduate students. Individual tutoring and help with literacy skills are provided by student volunteers. Last year, twenty-five people were enrolled in the course. This year, the course will run for two terms. Thirty students are enrolled in each term. In the fall term, the course will cover topics in poetry, literature, art history, architecture, and philosophy. In the spring term, students will discuss topics in social theory, anthropology, sociology, political science, gender studies, and popular culture.

Humanities 101 has been very well-received. There is a waiting list for this year's course. The success of this course confirms what many people told us. There is a critical need for educational, cultural and recreational activities in the Downtown Eastside. Residents need activities that will make their lives richer and more meaningful. At the same time, many people need education and training to make them more employable.

There are many things UBC can do to promote learning and growth among residents of the Downtown Eastside. Expanding the capacity of Humanities 101 is one obvious option. Other suggestions made by those we consulted include holding a series of seminars on particular topics or sponsoring single events such as lectures, presentations, or forums. It was suggested that life skills-related subjects should not dominate these events. One young woman declared, "I would rather listen to the stories of a world traveler than hang out on the streets. But you're not going to get me to sit down in front of another person that's going to tell me how to live a better life."

However, others believe that training related to specific skills such as conflict resolution would be useful. Such training could help residents deal with the kind of incidents that occur in their neighbourhoods. Michelle Fortin of WATARI said that seniors living in social housing who are at home during the day are sometimes approached by young people for help in domestic situations. "Providing resources to grandma and grandpa could help them contain some of the problems before they become messy."

In providing learning opportunities to residents, UBC will need to ensure that its offerings do not duplicate or compete with programs being provided by other organizations (e.g., the Carnegie Centre or the Vancouver School Board's Downtown East Education Centre). As is being done with Humanities 101, UBC will need to ensure that hunger, lack of transportation or need for child care do not block people's ability to participate in its programs. In addition, UBC will need to be sensitive to the particular learning needs of Downtown Eastside residents. Many people have had

negative experiences related to schools and learning. For example, young women who quit school when they were pregnant or First Nations people who went to residential schools may have to address emotional issues triggered by their participation in educational activities. In addition, cultural differences need to be taken into account and language barriers eliminated, where possible. UBC's programs need to be provided in an atmosphere of safety where students' desires for autonomy and control are respected.

### **Learning Opportunities for Professionals**

Some of the agency staff we consulted believe that UBC can contribute to the learning and growth of professionals who work in the Downtown Eastside. It was suggested that faculty and graduate students could design courses or workshops in consultation with professionals. Such courses could go beyond the basics and provide learning opportunities geared specifically towards the needs of participants. Suggested areas in which training would be helpful include community development skills, adult education skills, group facilitation skills, dealing with grief and loss, and case management skills.

The formation of collaborative partnerships between professionals and faculty members is seen as another way for UBC to contribute to the professional development of service providers. It was suggested that faculty members or graduate students and professionals could work together to do research and publish articles. Such partnerships would help service providers keep up-to-date in their fields. They would also be a way for academic work to incorporate the experiential knowledge gained by people working on the front lines. The point was made that some of the agencies in the Downtown Eastside are doing leading-edge work, but have little time to reflect on or publicize their efforts. Having faculty or graduate students working in partnership with professionals would promote learning on all sides. These partnerships could potentially result in new insights into the problems facing the Downtown Eastside and new ways of addressing those problems.

## Service-Learning at the University of California at Berkeley

UC Berkeley is home to the Service-Learning Research and Development Center where students are provided with opportunities to explore key social issues related to course content by drawing on community service experiences. The Center was created in 1994, after UC Berkeley was selected as one of eleven universities in the United States to receive federal assistance called the Learn and Serve America: Higher Education Demonstration Grant.

There are three basic units that define the Service-Learning Research and Development Center: service, research, and evaluation. The *service* unit comprises the work that is performed by students in the community. *Research* is the work the faculty members develop. Most of the Center's research efforts are focused on issues dealing with service-learning. The *evaluation* component provides more than 95% of the Center's operating budget. UC Berkeley has developed an evaluation program that assesses the quality of the work of service agencies and other service-learning centres.

Approximately 45 departments, offering over 150 service-learning courses, are involved with the Center. Faculty members meet periodically in forum-style meetings to share ideas, discuss needs in the community, and talk about current social issues. They may participate in a mini-grant program where each member may apply for up to \$1000 for work in service-learning. An annual award has been developed to recognize outstanding service in the community developed by a member. Other incentives for faculty members include publication of their work, which serves to enhance their careers and allow more sharing of ideas.

As the Center expands the list of services provided in the community and adds new service-learning courses, the question "How much is enough?" arises.

"I used to always ask that myself," said Andrew Furco, the director of the Service-Learning Research and Development Center. "At one point, I believed that there is only so much that we can do. For example, how can a Scandinavian Language course integrate with a service? Sure enough, a Scandinavian Language professor applied for a mini-grant and received the funding. She began placing students into seniors homes that are predominantly Scandinavian. The students practice the languages first-hand and learn about life in Scandinavia. The elderly enjoy the company and are happy to talk about their home countries. It turns out that there is a large Scandinavian population in Berkeley and there is a need for a service."

"Now I believe that anything is possible as long as there is a need in the community."

## Student Volunteer Program

As part of implementing UBC's Trek 2000 strategic plan, the University wants to have undergraduate students doing volunteer work in health and social agencies. Volunteer opportunities would be identified in collaboration with organizations in the community. Such volunteer work would increase students' awareness of social issues and develop their leadership and citizenship skills. At the same time, the community would benefit from the work accomplished by the volunteers. The ideal would be to have students' volunteer work integrated into courses in a variety of disciplines such as Anthropology, Sociology, Economics, or Political Science. The goal would be for students' volunteer experiences to become a vehicle through which theoretical concepts can be linked with real-life experiences. This kind of combination of service and education has been called "service-learning." It is being developed in other universities in North America as well. (See sidebar page 6.)

Most of the agency staff we consulted were very enthusiastic about the proposal to have students doing volunteer work in the Downtown Eastside. Several of the organizations will be able to readily integrate students into their existing volunteer programs. Others will require some time to develop volunteer opportunities. In most cases, students will need to make a commitment to participate in the organization on a regular basis for a specified time. The volunteer possibilities include providing individual literacy tutoring to children and youth, teaching computer skills, socializing with people with mental illnesses, and helping with administrative tasks such as fund-raising. (See sidebar page 8.)

Agency staff made several suggestions aimed at promoting the effectiveness of UBC's student volunteer program. Students must be given an orientation to the Downtown Eastside and to their role as volunteers. A plan for orienting the student volunteers is currently being developed. (See sidebar page 9.) In addition, students must be supervised by UBC, in partnership with each individual organization. UBC needs to design mechanisms or procedures that will make it easy for organizations to

play their part in supervising students. Further, students who will be exposed to disturbing experiences must be given opportunities for debriefing and support. Providing these opportunities is seen as being UBC's responsibility, however, there are many resources in the community that UBC will be able to draw on.

Some people felt that UBC needs to give special consideration to the safety of students who will be doing volunteer work in the Downtown Eastside. Students need to be prepared for the kinds of situations they might encounter in their placements. They need to be able to take care of themselves so they do not add to the already heavy workloads of agency staff.

It was also recommended that UBC should draw upon the rich cultural diversity of its student population to reach the many different groups that call the Downtown Eastside home. In the words of Doug Wilson, Youth Program Coordinator at Ray-Cam Community Centre, "There are many tightly-knit ethnic groups here. Cultural differences, traditions, and languages can create barriers. Sometimes it is much more effective to reach a certain group with people that can communicate in their language and can relate to their background and experiences. This is a good way to make initial contact, in hope of bridging the gaps in the future."

## Community-Based Research

Many professionals who work in the Downtown Eastside are excited about the potential to collaborate with UBC faculty and graduate students on research projects. However, the people we spoke with were adamant about the need for these research projects to be conducted using participatory approaches. We heard many criticisms of researchers who come to the community to pursue their own ideas, who collect data, and then leave, without contributing anything to the community. This model of doing research is seen as exploitative. In their frustration with this kind of approach, some organizations have begun turning away graduate students who ask for the organization's cooperation in their thesis research.

## Immediate Volunteering Opportunities at Strathcona and Ray-Cam Community Centres

The after-school learning programs for children and youths at Strathcona and Ray-Cam Community Centres are examples of volunteer opportunities that can be fulfilled by UBC students in the immediate future. There are many elementary and high school students in the Downtown Eastside that do not receive adequate time and attention for help in their studies away from the classroom. The community centres are trying to provide some of that attention and add to the education experiences of young people by having after-school and weekend tutoring programs. Two such programs, *Study Hall* at Strathcona and *Homework Club* at Ray-Cam, give opportunities for children to ask questions in various subjects, improve their reading and writing skills, participate in English as a Second Language (ESL) activities, learn about sportsmanship and team spirit through sports and other recreational activities, and do work on computers. This is possible if the centres can continue to find volunteers who are caring, respectful, and attentive to interact with the children.

UBC has the potential to organize students from various disciplines to volunteer on a regular basis and help meet the demands for youth education in this community. The University is currently working with the two community centres to identify requirements for the volunteers. The coordinators of both after-school programs have agreed to participate in the volunteer selection process and have offered their time and insights for the volunteer orientation program. The next step is for UBC to coordinate its student resources from the campus. The first volunteers are expected to begin their work at the community centres by January 2000.

In contrast, a more community-based approach to research is welcomed. This approach addresses questions that the community defines as important, facilitates community members' meaningful participation in all stages of the research, develops skills and abilities among research participants, and results in knowledge that can be used as a basis for action. The benefits of such research stay in the community. The kinds of research that people in the Downtown Eastside see as worthwhile include projects that can help determine the effectiveness of agency efforts (e.g., program evaluations), investigations of priority community issues (e.g., housing, communicable disease prevention, and Aboriginal health), and studies that can be used to support policy or funding proposals (e.g., research showing the number of people affected by particular problems, or research that furthers our understanding of critical health and social issues).

Combined with the enthusiasm about the potential to do ground-breaking research were some words of caution. People with some experience with participatory research pointed out that such research still needs to be "good" research, i.e., it needs to conform to traditional standards of quality. But, it can be difficult to both uphold academic standards and promote community members' participation in the design and implementation of research projects. And traditional research infrastructures do not encourage community-based research. Other research institutions and funding bodies (e.g., the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and the BC Health Research Foundation) are currently facing this same dilemma. UBC will need to connect with these other organizations and learn from their experiences. UBC may also need to develop innovative ways to support this kind of research.

### Dental Services

It has been suggested that UBC dentistry students could provide dental services to residents of the Downtown Eastside under the supervision of faculty members. The needs for preventive programs for children, for emergency dental care, and for cosmetic dentistry services to enhance residents' employability

have been identified as particularly acute. While some people we consulted support the idea of providing dental services, others pointed out potential problems. It might be difficult for some people to keep scheduled appointments or to commit to a prolonged course of treatment. It might also be difficult for some to maintain dental hygiene practices that would be a necessary complement to the dental work. The risks of transmission of HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis were also mentioned as concerns. While these problems are not insurmountable, they will need to be taken into account if a dental clinic staffed by students is developed.

### **UBC's Community Liaison Office**

Last year, UBC announced its intention to open a community liaison office in the Downtown Eastside. In our conversations with people in the area, we found a diversity of opinion about whether, when, and where UBC should establish a storefront office in the Downtown Eastside. Some people feel that a physical presence in the area will demonstrate the sincerity of UBC's commitment and make the resources of the University accessible. Others feel that the personal relationships that UBC faculty, staff, and students develop will be a more important contributor to UBC's presence than a storefront would be. Some suggested that the storefront should not be opened until these personal relationships have created a solid foundation for the programs a storefront would house.

Some people suggested that the storefront could not only provide computer access to campus resources like the library or the Museum of Anthropology, but should provide concrete benefits such as food and clothing as well. It was suggested that having a clothing drive among students and distributing clothing from the storefront would help to raise UBC's profile and develop appreciation for its presence in the community.

Some people expressed concern about the safety of students, staff, and faculty. Most of the people we consulted agree that a liaison office should be located away from the Main and Hastings area, where significant drug trade activity occurs. Many people

## Student Volunteer Orientation Program

UBC has begun working with several Downtown Eastside agencies to develop an orientation program that will help prepare students for their volunteer placements. This program will focus on what students should know about the community in general. Each agency will be responsible for providing an orientation to their particular setting.

The community orientation program will aim to change students' preconceptions about the Downtown Eastside so they can see beyond the media stereotypes. It will also aim to promote students' ability to listen, to be sensitive to different cultures, and to respond to the people and situations they encounter with open minds and hearts.

The orientation will have several components, including:

- An introduction to the community, including an overview of its history and the major issues it is currently facing.
- A discussion of what "service" means in the context of UBC's involvement in the community (e.g., that service does not mean "doing for" but "doing with").
- Instruction on ensuring one's safety, including how to be "street smart."
- Experiential sessions on "emotional competence"—e.g., self-awareness, empathic listening, and inter-cultural communication.

Orientation sessions will be held in the Downtown Eastside and will include presentations given by those who live and work in the area as well as walks through the neighbourhood guided by local community members.

suggested that the office should be further east in order to be safer and more accessible. Some service providers feel that UBC would be wise to locate its office close to or within the office of another organization. While UBC was advised to ensure that the liaison office is a safe environment, it was also advised not to go to extremes. Concerns for safety need to be balanced with accessibility and openness. Being accessible includes having flexible hours of operation to accommodate those who might not be able to use the resources during regular business hours.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

We believe that the further development of UBC's presence in the Downtown Eastside will be challenging. The University and the Downtown Eastside are very different environments with different cultures, different styles of communication, and different priorities. But, given our experiences over the summer, we are convinced that partnerships between people at UBC and people who live and work in the Downtown Eastside hold enormous promise. There are people with vision and commitment in both environments. There are a wealth of ideas about educational programs and research projects that could be of value to both the Downtown Eastside and the University. There are a variety of organizations that can readily incorporate student volunteers into their programs. And additional volunteer opportunities can be developed. These volunteer placements will enable students to serve the community and to gain worthwhile knowledge and skills. From our perspective, UBC's initiative has the potential to stimulate important changes. It may even contribute to individual and social transformation.

As UBC continues to develop its downtown presence, it will be critical for faculty, staff, and students to continue to consult with the community. For example, there is much more to be learned about the situation of particular groups in the community, such as Aboriginals, youth, seniors, and women. Ongoing consultation and evaluation should be an integral part of UBC's initiative. Consultation with other universities in North America that have pursued community-university partnerships will also be helpful.

We believe there is sufficient interest and good will within the Downtown Eastside for UBC to immediately begin implementing some of the programs that have been proposed. It will be important for UBC to mobilize its campus resources, while continuing to build relationships in the Downtown Eastside. We suggest that UBC proceed incrementally, building on relationships, trust, and knowledge as they develop.

Based on the input we received from people in the Downtown Eastside we are recommending that UBC pursue a number of activities over the next twelve months. These activities are listed below. They are not listed in order of priority. We believe all the recommendations should be pursued concurrently. Some recommendations will demand more developmental work and take longer to bring to fruition than others. Additional detail specific to the implementation of each recommendation is presented after the brief statement of our recommendations.

### Recommendations:

1. **Develop a program to enable students to do volunteer work in organizations in the Downtown Eastside. Start small and build on successes.**
2. **Organize a drive on campus to collect clothing, food, and household goods and distribute the donations to organizations in the Downtown Eastside.**
3. **Establish a community liaison office in the Downtown Eastside.**
4. **Continue to consult with both the Downtown Eastside and the campus communities about the development of UBC's presence.**
5. **Sponsor educational events for residents of the Downtown Eastside.**
6. **Provide educational opportunities for service providers who work in the Downtown Eastside.**
7. **Provide needed dental services to residents.**
8. **Promote research partnerships between Downtown Eastside organizations and UBC faculty and graduate students.**

### **Recommendation 1: Student Volunteer Program**

The implementation of this program will involve the following steps:

1. Develop and implement an orientation program for student volunteers, in consultation with Downtown Eastside agency staff and relevant faculty from UBC and other educational institutions.
2. Identify organizations which can integrate student volunteers into already existing volunteer programs.
3. Recruit students for volunteer positions.
4. Develop and implement procedures for student supervision and support, in consultation with Downtown Eastside agency staff, UBC faculty, and other educational institutions.
5. Match students with agency opportunities.
6. Explore how “service-learning” has been implemented in other universities.
7. Identify faculty members who are interested in integrating volunteer experience into undergraduate course work.
8. Support faculty in developing ways to link volunteer work with course work.
9. Develop UBC policies to promote and guide the integration of volunteer work into undergraduate course work, including policies aimed at rewarding faculty and student participation in the program.
10. Develop and implement mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the undergraduate volunteer program.

### **Recommendation 2: Campus Donations for Clothing, Food, and Household Items**

This is a project that would provide concrete benefits to the community. The following steps should be considered:

1. Identify already-established mechanisms on campus (e.g., produce from the Botanical Gardens, the Christmas food drive competition), so that efforts and services are not duplicated.
2. Identify organizations within UBC (e.g., Food

Services, Housing, individual student clubs) that could contribute to the expansion of established mechanisms or the creation of new ones.

3. Explore opportunities to coordinate donations to the Downtown Eastside and to create permanent donation drop-off stations on campus.
4. Investigate ways to promote awareness and encourage donations among UBC students, staff, and faculty members (e.g., offer a service to take away unwanted furniture and clothing from students moving away at the end of the school year).
5. Develop partnerships with service agencies in the Downtown Eastside that could distribute the donations.
6. Incorporate the distribution of donations as one of the roles of the Community Liaison Office.

### **Recommendation 3: Community Liaison Office**

We recommend that, over the next three to six months, UBC explore possible locations for a liaison office in the Downtown Eastside. In the meantime, we recommend that designated staff, faculty, and students begin undertaking the functions of the community liaison office so that relationships between UBC and the Downtown Eastside can continue to evolve. The role of the office could include the following functions:

1. Informing both the UBC and the Downtown Eastside communities about the goals of UBC’s presence.
2. Developing opportunities for mutually beneficial collaboration between UBC and the Downtown Eastside.
3. Continuing to consult with the Downtown Eastside and the campus communities about how UBC can most effectively play an enhanced role in the Downtown Eastside.
4. Connecting resources at UBC with resources in the Downtown Eastside.
5. Promoting the formation of partnerships between individuals/units within UBC and individuals/organizations within the Downtown Eastside.
6. Coordinating the planning and implementation of

educational opportunities for residents and for professionals who work in the Downtown Eastside.

7. Coordinating the student volunteer program.
8. Developing and implementing a model for the support of participatory, community-based research.
9. Coordinating other initiatives as appropriate.
10. Ensuring that the components of the downtown initiative are integrated with each other, and with the goals of Trek 2000.
11. Evaluating the effectiveness of UBC's initiative in the Downtown Eastside. The evaluations should focus on both process and outcomes and should use participatory approaches.

#### **Recommendation 4: Ongoing Consultation**

The ongoing process of maintaining a dialogue between the University and the Downtown Eastside could include the following activities:

1. Meetings with community organizations and key individuals in the Downtown Eastside that have not yet been consulted.
2. Follow-up discussions with those who have been consulted to pursue the specific aspects of UBC's initiatives that were of interest to each organization.
3. Informal conversations with residents about how UBC could contribute to the community.
4. Seminars, workshops, or presentations given on campus by people from the Downtown Eastside.
5. Meetings with UBC faculty and students to discuss this report and how they can be involved in the initiatives recommended.
6. Meetings with student volunteers at the end of each academic term to find out what they heard from the community about UBC's presence.
7. Information and Feedback sessions held at the Community Liaison Office.

#### **Recommendation 5: Educational Events for Residents**

Developing educational opportunities might include these next steps:

1. Identify faculty and graduate students who are interested in offering courses, seminars, or other educational events in the Downtown Eastside.
2. Identify possible venues for courses, seminars, or events.
3. Develop guidelines regarding providing supports for participants (e.g., providing transportation, food, or child care) and dealing with safety concerns (e.g., having some events for women only because of the tendency for women to under-utilize resources).
4. Identify potential sources of funding for courses, seminars, or events.
5. Identify potential sources of other resources, e.g., computers, books, on-site child care.
6. Begin coordinating educational events.
7. Develop mechanisms for evaluating educational opportunities.

#### **Recommendation 6: Educational Opportunities for Service Providers**

The following steps should be considered in the development of these opportunities:

1. Identify faculty and graduate students who are interested in connecting with agency staff and developing mutually beneficial partnerships (e.g., publishing articles together, discussing issues and experiences together, doing research together).
2. Identify community professionals who are interested in connecting with UBC faculty and students.
3. Develop mechanism(s) for matching UBC personnel with community personnel.
4. Explore partnerships with other institutions (e.g., SFU, the Justice Institute,) that could provide professional development opportunities which would be worthwhile for UBC faculty and students and for professionals working in the community.
5. Develop mechanisms for evaluating the educational opportunities provided.

#### **Recommendation 7: Dental Services**

We suggest that further consideration be given to the development of UBC's capacity to provide effective and efficient dental services in the Downtown Eastside. We recommend these steps be taken:

1. Assess and prioritize the needs for dental services among Downtown Eastside residents by consulting with agencies that currently provide dental services and other relevant agencies.
2. Develop a plan for staffing, including the use of dentistry students.
3. Secure an appropriate location for the provision of dental services.
4. Develop guidelines regarding service provision (e.g., regarding the scheduling of appointments)
5. Procure funding for equipment and supplies.

### **Recommendation 8: Research Partnerships**

Developing effective community-based research partnerships will take time and effort. We recommend the following activities be pursued:

1. Identify faculty and graduate students who are interested in doing participatory/collaborative research and who are knowledgeable about issues relevant to the Downtown Eastside.
  2. Explore models of community-university research partnerships in use within UBC and in other universities.
  3. Identify possible sources of funding for community-based research.
  4. Develop models for building research partnerships in the Downtown Eastside.
  5. Develop policy guidelines for university-community collaborative research, including ethical guidelines.
  6. Develop ways of facilitating and rewarding faculty and graduate students' participation in community-based research.
  7. Develop and implement mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating community-university research partnerships.
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## Appendix A: List of Agencies and Organizations Consulted

Carnegie Centre (preliminary meeting)  
Chinese Cultural Centre  
City of Vancouver  
City of Vancouver Police Department  
Downtown Eastside Residents Association (DERA)  
Downtown Eastside Safety Office  
Downtown Eastside Youth Activities Society  
(DEYAS)  
First United Church  
Four Quarters Institute  
Greater Vancouver Mental Health Services:  
    Strathcona Mental Health Team  
Health Canada  
Ray-Cam Community Centre  
Salvation Army: Harbour Light  
Second Mile Society  
Sheway  
St. James Church  
Storefront Orientation Society (SOS)  
Strathcona Community Centre  
The Lookout  
Triage  
United Chinese Community Enrichment Services  
    Society (SUCCESS)  
Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users (VANDU)  
Vancouver Native Health Society  
Vancouver Richmond Health Board  
WATARI  
Youth Action Centre (YAC)  
YWCA Crabtree Corner

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## Margo Fryer

Margo Fryer is a PhD candidate in UBC's Individual Interdisciplinary Studies Graduate Program. Margo has worked in the health and social service fields since receiving her M.A. in Psychology from UBC in 1974. She has done policy-oriented research related to a variety of issues including the needs of senior citizens, women's health care, and multicultural service delivery. She has worked with community groups to implement participatory research related to childhood sexual abuse, immigrant women's perinatal health, and child poverty. She has evaluated pilot projects aimed at implementing policy initiatives such as using community development strategies to promote health, involving the community in health care decision-making, and building collaborative partnerships among health care agencies.

Margo has taught research and evaluation principles and skills to members of the Vancouver Richmond Health Board's community advisory committees. She has also facilitated BC Health Research Foundation-sponsored workshops on community-based research in the Lower Mainland as well as in Williams Lake, Smithers, Nelson, and Prince Rupert.

Margo's PhD research integrates the social science disciplines of anthropology, sociology, and psychology with health policy studies. She is exploring the experiences of cancer patients and professionals who find themselves at the interface between conventional and alternative medicine.

## Brian Lee

Brian Lee is doing his third year of undergraduate studies at UBC in the department of Civil Engineering. In 1996, he graduated with honours from Sir Winston Churchill Secondary School in Vancouver and completed the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program. He is currently in the Co-operative Education Engineering Program and has completed four four-month work terms, two with Engineering Services at the City of Vancouver and two with the Transportation Division of Reid Crowther and Partners Limited. Brian intends to do graduate work in Community and Regional Planning with a focus in Transportation.

This fall, Brian will again work for the Vancouver Richmond Health Board in the school workshop component of *Condomania*. In 1997, he helped develop this sexual health education program and was one of the youth educators who spoke with adolescents in Vancouver elementary and high schools, and community centres.

Brian also volunteered as a resource leader for the Canadian Red Cross Youth Leadership Seminar. In two summers, he facilitated programs in leadership skills and promoted community involvement among teenagers from BC and Washington.