

The City of Vancouver, Metro Vancouver and Vancouver Coastal Health combine to host discussion on catalyzing social connections

In 2012, the Vancouver Foundation presented the results of a survey of metro **Vancouver** revealing that people in the region identified their greatest concern as a growing sense of **isolation**. You can read the entire study at:



<https://www.vancouverfoundation.ca//sites/default/files/documents/VanFdn-SurveyResults-Report.pdf>

Since that study, social isolation and ways to remedy it has been the subject of frequent discussions. In December, 2016, the City of Vancouver, Vancouver Coastal Health and Metro Vancouver presented **CONNECT: Catalyzing a Social Movement**, a day-long event that offered a range of activities to engage and teach participants about making connections. The conference was facilitated by **The Leverage Lab**, a project incubated by SPEC, and Richard Drake, Coordinator of the SPEC Elders Circle, co-hosted the workshop on inclusiveness.

The conference brought together people from diverse backgrounds to share music, food, and workshop experiences. Workshops were presented by academic, non-profit and government practitioners who study, advocate and deliver services to vulnerable populations or who are responsible for preparing for events that threaten our normal systems of communication, transportation, medical support, food security, etc. Participants explored our collective impact on energizing a movement around social connectedness in the Metro Vancouver region.

Workshop topics included:

- measuring social connection,
- boosting social interactions through housing design,
- enhancing community resilience through neighbourhood networks,
- accelerating inclusion of hard-to-reach populations through specific outreach strategies,
- creating more engaged and connected communities through the arts and culture.

Besides the workshops, there were a number of 'connecting experiences' that quickly crossed the barriers of separateness and put participants in touch with each other. I met several new people, some peripherally but with four new people I exchanged cards and put them immediately on a list to follow up with to build on our common interests.

This is a good news story at a time when we seem to be pulling apart and straining the seams of our social bonds. Kudos to the local political and health authorities for addressing the barriers of isolation and separation. These barriers make us vulnerable to messages of fear that lead to suspicion of differences and indifference to vulnerabilities. We can bring civility, preparedness and resiliency into our relationships through housing and other programs that rebuild our sense of 'The Commons.' And we can revitalize bonds of trust, mutuality, and safety that are the heart of community and allow us to respond effectively and compassionately to crises.

The City of Vancouver, Metro Vancouver and Vancouver Coastal Health are seeking ongoing feedback and connection with citizens about this issue and these concerns. SPEC, an urban environmental organization recognizes the profound link between social and environmental sustainability and supports all elements of this outreach to citizens. If you're someone who feels drawn to start a neighbourhood conversation or learn information and/or skills that support these connections, download the city's VanConnect APP at <http://vancouver.ca/vanconnect.aspx> Or you can call or email SPEC. We are partnered with Kitsilano Neighbourhood House in an ongoing outreach to our urban community to make and sustain the connections of social harmony, resiliency and environmental integrity.

Society Promoting Environmental Conservation – now in our 48th year.

www.spec.bc.ca or info@spec.bc.ca 604-736-7732