



# NAVIGATING EDUCATION IN THE DOWNTOWN EASTSIDE

A report based on the ideas of the participants at the  
Downtown Eastside Education Forum held on  
September 24, 2014

Prepared by The Downtown Eastside Literacy Roundtable  
November 2014

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This event was held at Vancouver Community College,  
on the unceded territory of the Coast Salish people.

## Why Host a DTES Education Forum?

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The DTES Literacy Roundtable is a coalition of adult educators working on the Downtown Eastside. Members understand literacy as having the knowledge, skills and confidence to participate fully in our lives. The group has been collaborating since 2005 to share skills, ideas, support and information.

On September 24, 2014, the Downtown Eastside Literacy Roundtable presented an event called the Downtown Eastside Education Forum. The event took place at Vancouver Community College's downtown campus on the unceded territories of the Musqueam, Skwxwú7mesh, Stó:lo and Tsleil-Waututh nations. Elder Kelvin Bee opened the event with a prayer and traditional canoeing song.

The event combined six "lightning talks" (concise and fast-paced presentations with striking visuals) and three rounds of small group discussions.

David Morita (Principal of Vancouver School Board's Downtown East Education Centre and Gathering Place) started us off by sharing information about how the Education Forum came to be. David explained that the Literacy Roundtable is a way for educators from a variety of contexts to break out of organizational silos to work together to provide education more effectively. This Education Forum arose from a desire to work more closely with and learn from additional frontline workers in the neighbourhood who see adult learners in different roles: residents, clients, patients, organization members, leaders, and activists.

To that end, the event brought together service providers working across many different sectors including housing, law, employment, health and education. About 50 people participated in the event, with representation from the following organizations:

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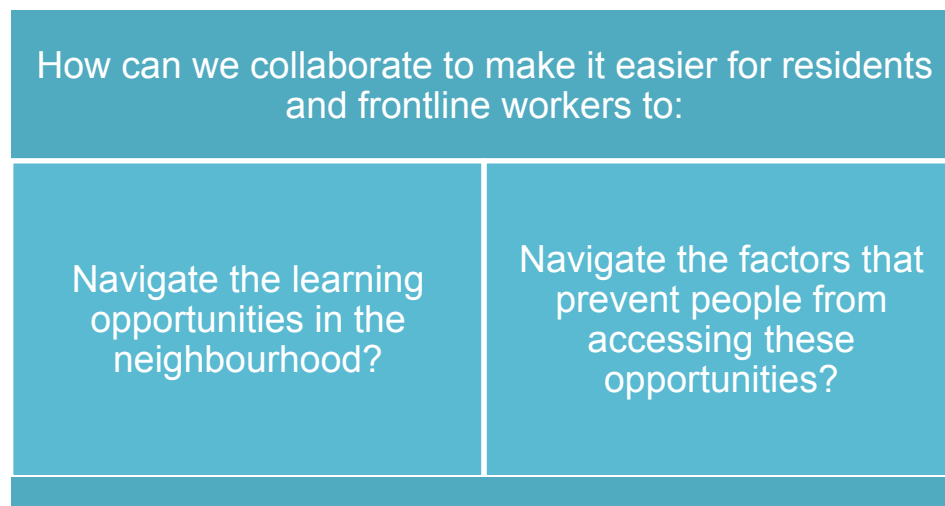
Aboriginal Front Door Society  
Belkin House, Salvation Army  
Capilano University  
Carnegie Learning Centre  
Crabtree Corner (YWCA)  
Decoda Literacy Solutions  
Family Services of Greater Vancouver  
First Nations Health Authority  
First Nations Mental Health  
First Place (Lookout Society)  
First United Church  
Hammer & Saw  
Healthy Living

NASCARZ  
Native Education College  
Open Door Group  
PACE Society  
Responsible and Problem Gambling Program  
Simon Fraser University  
Union Gospel Mission  
UBC Learning Exchange  
Vancouver Community College  
Vancouver Public Library  
Vancouver School Board  
Wish Learning Centre  
YWCA Career Zone

David reminded us that in 2010, the Roundtable collaborated on the *Plan for Strengthening Literacy in the Downtown Eastside*, which documents residents' thoughts on what is working well in education and where there are still gaps. This report stated that:

"Systems, bureaucracies, line ups, hoop-jumping and paperwork have a huge impact on life in the DTES – a large amount of time and energy is spent navigating food lines, shelters and social housing, Income Assistance, Employment Insurance, doctor's offices, Indian Affairs, and Band Councils."

As a result, navigation was presented as a theme for the forum:



Through the remainder of the afternoon, these questions were explored through presentations and conversations focusing on adult education policy, Aboriginal education, intergenerational learning, and education for youth. This report, written by Shantel Ivits, summarizes these presentations and conversations.

## The Policy Context of Adult Literacy in the DTES

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Dr. Suzanne Smythe presented research about the policy context of adult literacy, drawing connections between education and social policy we currently see in the DTES and what is happening around the world. On a local level, there is a sense of chaos caused by constant funding cuts and rapid change in policy and what services are available. This situation is a neoliberal economic trend unfolding around the globe to reduce government spending on public education and other public services and create incentives for corporate investment in a low-tax, low-service economy. In British Columbia, for example, tax incentives to the oil and gas industry is framed as an investment, while public education is framed as an expense. Along the way, responsibility for delivering adult literacy

programming is being downloaded to non-profits and volunteers who do not have – and are not provided with - sufficient resources to meet the need.

British Columbia is an aspiring petro economy - an economy that derives most of its wealth from oil and gas. This economic shift is reflected in the government's understanding of the role of education. As outlined in the Ministry of Education's *Skills for Jobs Blueprint*, the goals of education are shifting toward meeting the needs of the liquefied natural gas (LNG) industry. Suzanne suggested that the future of fracking and LNG is very unstable and if we put all our eggs in that basket, we are setting the province up for a precarious future.

“Educators must reject the shift to short-term, resource extraction focused skills training to reclaim holistic perspectives of what adult education can look like.”

Suzanne called on educators to reject the shift to short-term, resource extraction-focused skills training and to reclaim holistic perspectives of what adult education can look like. This calls for new alliances among adult educators in BC with indigenous rights, progressive labour, K-12 public education and climate action movements.

## Adult Literacy Table Talks

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What are the needs, constraints, and opportunities in adult education in the DTES?

This is a summary of what frontline workers had to say.

### Constraints

- ✦ **ESL Funding Cuts** – In 2014, the Government of British Columbia cut all funding for ESL programs in post-secondary education institutions. Many immigrants and refugees coming to Vancouver have job skills but need ESL language training in order to work in their field. The government's messaging is that there are plenty of opportunities in the community for people to study ESL, when this simply is not true for low-income people.
- ✦ **GED Funding Cuts** – The Government of British Columbia cut the GED program in November 2014. The GED is a high school completion program for adults wishing to access career programs and work opportunities. It is an alternative to the Adult Graduation Diploma, which is suitable for adult learners who want to pursue more academic careers. The GED has been a successful pathway for people who did not finish high school, including teen

mothers, aboriginal people, people with addictions, and people with disabilities. For many, the GED represented a second chance – but that chance has been taken away, adding more barriers to education for these already marginalized groups.

- ✦ **Reduction in ABE Course Offerings** - There has been a gradual reduction in Adult Basic Education course offerings within the Vancouver School Board, Capilano University, Open Learning, and Douglas College. This is due, in part, to the formula for government funding of full-time enrollment (FTEs), which makes it less desirable for Post-Secondary Institutions to enrol ABE and Development studies students.
- ✦ **Lack of Awareness of Opportunities** - Since funding for adult literacy programs tends to be available in small amounts and/or amounts that are not stable over time, many education programs in the DTES come and go. In this climate, it is difficult to know what programs are available to residents. This impacts both enrolment and perceived need.
- ✦ **Struggle to Meet Basic Needs** - The low minimum wage and low income assistance rates make it difficult to eat well, maintain housing, take the bus, and buy clothes. When these needs are unmet, enrolment and attendance in learning opportunities can be extremely difficult. Furthermore, the government health plan does not cover glasses or hearing aids, which many people need to be able to see their learning materials and interact with instructors and peers. Struggles with mental health and addiction can make attendance, concentration and working with others more difficult. The constant struggle to survive can make it hard to feel hopeful about the future and motivated to learn.
- ✦ **Discomfort with Education Institutions** – Negative past experiences with schooling and fear of the formality of schools can be a barrier to education. Some residents in the DTES feel ambivalent towards universities, in particular. They are concerned about the potential for university researchers to come into the neighbourhood to do a study that will earn them academic credentials while they, as residents, may see few benefits from the project. “Voluntourism” was identified as a threat, as well. Some volunteer opportunities may risk functioning as feel-good opportunities for the volunteer that do little to make a lasting difference or promote an understanding of the complexities of the situation in the neighbourhood.

## Strategies for Navigating Constraints

- ✦ **Low Barrier Programming** – There is a great need for low-barrier programs that are flexible to learner’s individual schedules (such as drop-in programs). Ideally low-barrier programs improve their accessibility by providing food, bus tickets, childcare and books. A harm reduction approach is key. This involves



creating a non-judgmental atmosphere; rather than looking for “what’s wrong with you”, we need to look for what people are doing well. Trust is built through good listening and caring about people’s well-being.

- ✦ **Holistic Education** - Many frontline workers felt strongly that education must be about much more than short-term, resource extraction-focused skills training – it is about building people’s capacity to lead meaningful lives and create healthy communities. For many people, employment is an unrealistic goal; their learning edge is how to be in a space with other people. Holistic education refers to education that meets people’s needs on a mental, emotional, physical and spiritual level in order to achieve collective well-being and long-term sustainability. This approach stems from indigenous approaches to teaching and learning. It is therefore a method for providing culturally appropriate education to aboriginal learners. Given the deep hurt and pain in the DTES, a holistic approach to education presents an opportunity for discovering a sense of empowerment, enjoyment, community, and purpose. In these ways, education represents an opportunity for healing. In more traditional academic programs, Learner Success Workshops are an effective way to build in more holistic supports.

“Given the deep hurt and pain in the DTES, a holistic approach to education presents an opportunity for discovering a sense of empowerment, enjoyment, community, and purpose.”

- ✦ **Funding** – Students can apply for ABESAP grants toward the cost of tuition, supplies, transportation, and childcare when they are enrolled in academic upgrading. Linda Devlin of the Open Door Group says that her organization has funds through WorkBC to support students and is open to meeting to discuss possible partnerships.
- ✦ **Building Coalitions** – Community organizations, adult learning centres, and post-secondary institutions have already formed a coalition through the DTES Literacy Roundtable, to share skills, ideas, support and information. There is an appetite for further coalition building; for example, there is a range of tutor volunteers who could be used more productively if they were shared amongst organizations. Adult literacy organizations could also strategically ally themselves with indigenous groups and environmental organizations to resist defunding of public education.
- ✦ **Building Circles of Support** – Many frontline workers pointed to the need for circles of support around learners. Ideally, this includes the support of family and a safe and connected community. Education programs can help build circles of support. For example, intergenerational learning can strengthen connections among family members (more on this shortly). Community capacity building programs can enhance the safety, health and connectedness of communities. Simon Fraser University’s Community

Education program ran an extraordinarily successful pilot program called Literacy Lives in 2010-2011, which embedded literacy learning in a community capacity building certificate program. SFU hopes to be able to offer this program again in the future and the curriculum is publicly available for anyone to use.

- ✦ **Getting the Word Out** - To promote awareness of services and opportunities, the DTES Literacy Roundtable published a *DTES Learning and Training Services Quick Reference Guide*. The United Way's bc211.ca website and Watari's Survival Manual are also useful wayfinding resources. A participant at the DTES Education Forum suggested that a DTES-specific database be created for education providers to keep up to date and available online. People imagined that an in-person one-stop navigation hub would also be extremely useful. It is also ideal when multiple services are provided under one roof. Broadway Youth Resource Centre was held up as a strong model – supports related to housing, education, counselling and health care are provided through this one centre. The Carnegie Community Centre is already a hub for a variety of services, and perhaps could one day include additional services, like counseling and health care.
- ✦ **Community Partnerships with Universities** – Community education providers noted that universities are often worth collaborating with because, through research grants and alumni donations, they have a fundraising capacity that many community groups lack. While some risks are associated with these partnerships, these risks can be managed through protocols that ensure the university-community relationship is not exploitive. An example is the First Nations' OCAP (Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession) Protocol, which sets out terms for conducting research in ethical ways. Action research projects were also highlighted as a method for researchers to ensure their work benefits the community it focuses on.

## Wayfinding Adult Education Opportunities

- **Basic Education at Vancouver Community College:** Reading, writing, math and computer classes up to Grade 9.
- **College and Career Access at Vancouver Community College:** English, Math and Science courses to the end of Grade 12.
- **Carnegie Learning Centre:** Reading, writing, upgrading, ESL and computer classes.
- **WISH Learning Centre:** A drop-in program for street-level sex workers
- **UBC Learning Exchange:** Drop-in ESL and computer programs
- **Hum 101 and Hum 102:** University level courses for residents in the DTES
- **Belkin House Life Skills Program**



- **Downtown East Education Centre (Vancouver School Board):** Academic upgrading courses through Grade 12
- **Gathering Place (Vancouver School Board):** Academic upgrading courses through Grade 12
- **Sunshine Choir at Oppenheimer Park:** Chinese seniors learn ESL through singing in the park

## Intergenerational Learning

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In the second theme addressed at the forum, Julie Iannacone, Manager of Services for Children and Teens at Vancouver Public Library, presented about the ways libraries facilitate intergenerational learning. Caregivers frequently bring children to the library with the child's needs in mind. However, programs like story time serve as an important gateway for encouraging adults to access the library for themselves. The twenty minutes before and after these programs are crucial opportunities for librarians to learn more about each family and their needs, as well as to build trust. During children's programming, stronger connections are fostered within and between families. Adults learn activities they can use with children to further encourage literacy and relationship building at home.

Some programs are based around the needs of caregivers, such as the BYOBaby Book Club. Caregivers bring their babies to the discussion group, and when a baby gets fussy, the group stops to sing a song before carrying on!

Teens play a key role in intergenerational learning, too. They are often keen to volunteer, whether to build their resume or to make a difference in their communities. The Reading Buddies program pairs teens with children to facilitate a love of literature. Teens also pair up with seniors to talk about books over tea and cookies. In these ways, libraries build relationships between library users and across generations.

## Intergenerational Learning Table Talks

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What are the needs, constraints, and opportunities in intergenerational learning in the DTES?

This is a summary of what frontline workers had to say.

### Constraints

- ✦ **Fear & Stigma** - Fear is a major barrier. People often fear admitting a need for education, filling out forms to enroll, the formality of education institutions,

the authority of instructors, having been out of school for “too long,” being a “poor learner,” or having to use technology.

- ✦ **Intergenerational Learning is Undervalued** – Education opportunities are often segregated based on age. In some cases, elders are not welcome in public schools (for example, it is common for grandparents to want to join their grandchild’s class for lunch, but this is generally discouraged).
- ✦ **Aboriginal Intergenerational Learning has been Violently Disrupted** – The passing down of indigenous knowledge, traditions and language was violently disrupted in Canada through colonization, racist laws, and residential schools. For this reason, the term “intergenerational learning” was triggering for some participants.

## Strategies for Navigating Constraints

- ✦ **Non-Formal Learning Opportunities** - Non-formal learning refers to education opportunities that occur outside of classroom-based, instructor-led programs. These learning opportunities are effective at easing fears around learning. More relaxed environments, like kitchens, cafes, parks, garages, gardens, greenhouses, and so on feel safer for many learners. Another advantage of non-formal learning is that that literacy can be embedded in a real-life experience, so that learners don’t feel as confronted by the stigma attached to literacy learning in formal institutions.

Non-formal learning programs often foster intergenerational learning in very organic ways. Focusing programs around interests like gardening, cooking, or making art appeals to people of all ages. Some people expressed that intergenerational learning should aim to foster more than knowledge and skills building; it should also be about strengthening relationships between people and creating spaces where people feel they belong.

The new trend of MakerSpaces was highlighted as an opportunity for encouraging informal intergenerational learning. A MakerSpace is a do-it-yourself, member-operated shared space where people collaborate and share tools, resources and knowledge. The Digital Inspiration Lab that is being launched at the Vancouver Public Library Central Branch in 2015 will be a digital variation of this concept. This space will offer to the public a recording studio, digital storytelling equipment, and self-publishing tools.

- ✦ **Supporting Families** – Families are integral to the success of intergenerational learning. Programs that offer guidance and support to caregivers as they educate their own children are crucial. These programs are most effective when they are structured to strengthen the bonds between children and caregivers, and help participants build their social network. There are some excellent programs for caregivers and their pre-schoolers, but fewer programs for caregivers and school-age children. Life skills

programs could be developed to appeal to children and adults, and support families in learning together.

- ✦ **Strengths-Based Approaches** - Many education providers in the DTES advocate using a strengths-based approach to engage people in literacy learning. A strengths-based approach recognizes and honours each learner's knowledge and abilities, rather than focusing on what they don't know or cannot do. One participant at the forum described this as "a shift from assessing limitations to assessing potential."

This kind of approach was contrasted with traditional assessment practices, which do not take a learner's context and life into account. Traditional assessment practices are often based on the instructor's definition of success rather than the learner's. Mainstream understandings of success often relate to the ability to generate a financial profit. Understanding success in this way has taken a toll on equality and the environment and contributes to feelings of low-self esteem and powerlessness.

- ✦ **Redefining Success as Sustainability** - Service providers at one table called for measuring success, both as a society and as educators, in relation to sustainability rather than ability to make a profit. This approach is more empowering to learners and to communities because it is based on fairness and cooperation instead of competition. The idea invites further reflection on what assessment tools that value sustainability might look like.

- ✦ **Peer Teaching** - Laura Pasut, an outreach worker with the Downtown East Education Centre, said that "people have as much to give as they have to gain" when they participate in learning opportunities. Everyone knows something they can share with others.

Peer teaching models build on this idea. At the UBC Learning Exchange, people drop-in and are gradually asked what they can teach. Then they are given opportunities to share their skills. Peer teaching recognizes the strengths of learners, builds self-esteem, is empowering, and fosters a sense of purpose. It also builds stronger social networks by fostering cooperative relationships among learners. As a participant at the Education Forum noted, "When we teach, we learn."

"People have as much to give as they have to gain when they participate in learning opportunities."

## Unmet Needs

- ✦ **Refugees** - Frontline service workers encouraged educators to reach out to refugee families who are facing aggressive and racist immigration policies that deny them citizenship. These policies create barriers that prevent them from pursuing a better life, including through education.

- ✦ **Seniors** - There is a need for engaging seniors in opportunities to share what they know.

## Wayfinding Intergenerational Learning Opportunities

- **Books, Bags and Babies** at Crabtree Corner: An aboriginal literacy program incorporating drumming, storytelling, acting and other traditions.
- **Enterprising Women Making Art**: An artisan cooperative for women that offers practical skills development workshops.
- **UBC Learning Exchange**: Uses a peer-teaching model to support ESL and computer learners
- **Vancouver Public Library** (Storytime, Babytime, BYOBaby, and more)
- **First Nations Languages Sharing Circle** at Aboriginal Front Door

## Aboriginal Education

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Aboriginal learning was another important theme at the Forum. John Jardine, an Instructor at Native Education College and a Consultant at Aboriginal Front Door, presented on determinants of educational success for Aboriginal people in Vancouver. His presentation was based on the findings of a series of community consultations held by the Metro Vancouver Aboriginal Executive Council.

The Executive Council found that families were the greatest determinant of success in school. Strong networks of peer support, encouraged through social media and gathering spaces, also contribute to Aboriginal student success. Cultural integration in the school system is crucial, too. This has improved within the Vancouver School Board, with the help of Aboriginal Enhancement Workers who support Aboriginal students and assist with the respectful integration of Aboriginal content in the curriculum. There is now an Aboriginal Focus School at Sir William Macdonald Elementary School, as well as a Nisga Language Pilot Program at the Aboriginal Friendship Centre. Native Education College supports youth in building a Digital Longhouse to capture Aboriginal knowledge for younger generations. Mentorship was an additional factor in student success. Vancouver Community College's Aboriginal Services program provides mentorship to several Aboriginal students in the district, promoting continuation into higher learning.

With these strategies in place, Aboriginal high school graduation rates in Vancouver are on the rise.

## Aboriginal Education Table Talks

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What are the needs, constraints, and opportunities in Aboriginal education in the DTES?

This is a summary of what frontline workers had to say.

### Constraints

- ✦ **The Aftermath of Residential Schools** - Many Aboriginal residents in the Downtown Eastside (or their parents and grandparents) went to residential schools. Students in residential schools were forcibly removed from their families. They were not allowed to speak their language or practice their culture. The goal of these schools was to erase Aboriginal cultures, so Aboriginal people would take on Christian beliefs and be absorbed by Anglo culture. As a result of this history, entering education institutions can be a major trigger for Aboriginal people.
- ✦ **Stereotyping and Invisibility** - Aboriginal people face stereotyping and invisibility in the curriculum of BC schools. There is a lack of cultural sensitivity and perspective in education programming. This problem contributes to the perpetuation of racism in our communities, as well as low self-esteem in Aboriginal youth. Aboriginal learners often get labeled or “pigeon-holed” as poor learners and too often teachers have low expectations of their success. For example, many Aboriginal public school students get funneled into Math Essentials, meaning they will automatically get a Leaving Certificate rather than a high school diploma. Finally, there are limited opportunities for learning about First Nations heritages and languages.

### Strategies for Navigating Constraints

- ✦ **Aboriginal Pedagogy and Curriculum** - Many education providers and learners in the DTES are confronting these challenges by embracing Aboriginal pedagogy and indigenizing the curriculum. Aboriginal pedagogy draws on experiential learning, storytelling, connections with the land, and self-reflection. Participants discussed how indigenizing the curriculum can mean teaching Aboriginal languages, incorporating traditions such as smudging and talking circles, teaching about Aboriginal history pre- and post-colonization, and including Aboriginal perspectives. Elders are an essential part of these programs, providing a strong connection between the past and present. Gathering Spaces in schools were also deemed to be important safe spaces for building community.

- ✦ **Education for Healing** - Education for healing was a significant theme across many of the table talks. One instructor spoke of the value of “constructive anger” in healing from colonization. He encourages his students to get angry, but to channel that anger into action that creates justice. A frontline worker spoke about reframing relationships between educators and students as family members, because family is medicine.

## Unmet Needs

- ✦ **Support for Elders** - One idea was to offer workshops by and for Elders that would support them in their essential role as educators.
- ✦ **Mentorship Opportunities for Youth** - Partnerships could be built between youth organizations and the Native Courtworker and Counselling Association of BC to recruit people who have found themselves on the wrong side of the justice system but, having turned around, could be mentors to Aboriginal youth.

## Wayfinding Aboriginal Education Opportunities

- **Eagle’s Nest Aboriginal Head Start:** Program for pre-schoolers that integrates Aboriginal cultures and languages.
- **Books, Bags, and Babies** at YWCA Crabtree Corner: Incorporates reading, storytelling, drumming, crafts and other traditions of Aboriginal peoples to encourage early childhood literacy.
- **Native Education College:** Culturally safe and relevant post-secondary programs.
- **Cree Language Learning program** at Aboriginal Front Door
- **Cultural Sharing Program** at the Carnegie Community Centre
- **Sne’waylh on Vancouver Coop Radio:** A weekly Aboriginal Language Learning Program
- **Urban Native Youth Association**
- **The Tu’wusht Project (Formerly the Urban Aboriginal Community Kitchen Project)** through Vancouver Native Health Society
- **Aboriginal Infant Development program** through Vancouver Native Health Society
- **Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY)** through Vancouver Native Health Society
- Cultural events at the **Aboriginal Friendship Centre**
- **Elder Support program** at Native Courtworker and Counselling Association of BC



## Youth Education

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In the final theme of the day addressing the education of our youth, Allison Schubert presented on the Never Again Steal Cars (NASCARZ) program. The program began in 2005 in response to high rates of youth car theft in the DTES. Many youth were really interested in car culture but did not have the money to pursue this interest. NASCARZ developed as a partnership between Ray-Cam, Vancouver Community College and the Vancouver Police Department. Youth come to the VCC campus and learn from instructors and police officers to repair and build cars. They develop real-life skills that they want to have while working on projects that interest them. As they find belonging and support at VCC, they are often helped to transition into post-secondary education. Many of the participants go on to become mentors to younger youth in the program. Allison said, “Kids are not hungry for crime. They are starving for opportunity.” Indeed, since the program began, youth car theft has been drastically reduced.

“Kids aren't hungry for crime. They're starving for opportunity.”

Tobias Atkinson presented on an up-and-coming youth organization called *Hammer & Saw*. He spoke of how being a student in overcrowded schools negatively impacted his learning and helped shape his vision for Hammer & Saw. This organization involves small groups of youth in woodworking and metal work projects that respond to a community identified need. Working together with tools naturally creates a forum to talk about community, mental health, suicide awareness, and suicide prevention. In their first project, the youth built garden boxes for a local community garden. Many of the members of the garden came out to feed the participants, which helped build intergenerational community and enhanced the learners' ability to focus on their work and enjoy a sense of belonging. Hammer & Saw is a partner with Britannia Community Services and the Urban Native Youth association (which provide referrals and space), as well as the Vancouver Tool Library. If your program needs something built, you are encouraged to get in touch with Hammer & Saw.

## Youth Education Table Talks

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What are the needs, constraints, and opportunities in youth education in the DTES?

This is a summary of what frontline workers had to say.

## Constraints

- ✦ **Learning Styles Not Accommodated** - Traditional education programs are especially geared towards people who learn by seeing and listening, but not so much people who are hands-on learners. Many of the youth who do not do well in school are hands-on learners whose needs are not met.
- ✦ **Education Experiences of Parents** - Many parents in the neighbourhood did not attend post-secondary programs and are not familiar with how to help their children navigate these post-secondary education programs.

## Strategies for Navigating Constraints

- ✦ **Experiential Learning** - Experiential learning is learning by doing. It is an excellent way to engage hands-on learners. In addition to NASCARZ and Hammer & Saw, the Take a Hike Program is an opportunity for at-risk youth to complete high school graduation requirements through adventure-based learning and community involvement. The key is to find something that youth are interested in and build an educational program around that interest.
- ✦ **Mentorship** – Many programs working with youth describe the adults involved as mentors rather than as teachers or instructors. When an adult acts as a mentor, youth see them as a person rather than an authority figure, creating a different power dynamic. The mentorship relationship feels more emotionally supportive to the learner and, as a result, is more supportive of learning itself. In this model, learners have greater say over what will be learned and how it will be learned. The reciprocal relationship between mentors and learners helps foster a cooperative, community-focused learning environment. Mentors can also help youth navigate higher learning if their parents are not able to assist in this area.

## Unmet Needs

- ✦ **Youth in Care** - Frontline workers encouraged educators to reach out to youth in the foster care system, and to those who have recently “aged out”, those who are over 19 and no longer qualify for government support for education and social services. These youth were identified as in need of greater support and encouragement.
- ✦ **Youth-Owned Spaces** - Frontline workers identified a lack of safe spaces for youth to socialize in the DTES. This may be because the neighbourhood is not traditionally associated with children. A dilemma was identified between funneling youth to opportunities outside of the neighbourhood and recognizing that those who are in the neighbourhood have particular needs that should be served in place. A space for youth to own would help address this gap and perhaps mentorship opportunities could be available through this space.

YouthCo might be a useful model for a new DTES youth organization. (YouthCo is a youth-driven organization that uses a peer education approach to empower young people to make informed decisions about their wellbeing and to end stigma around HIV and Hepatitis C.)

## Wayfinding Youth Education Opportunities

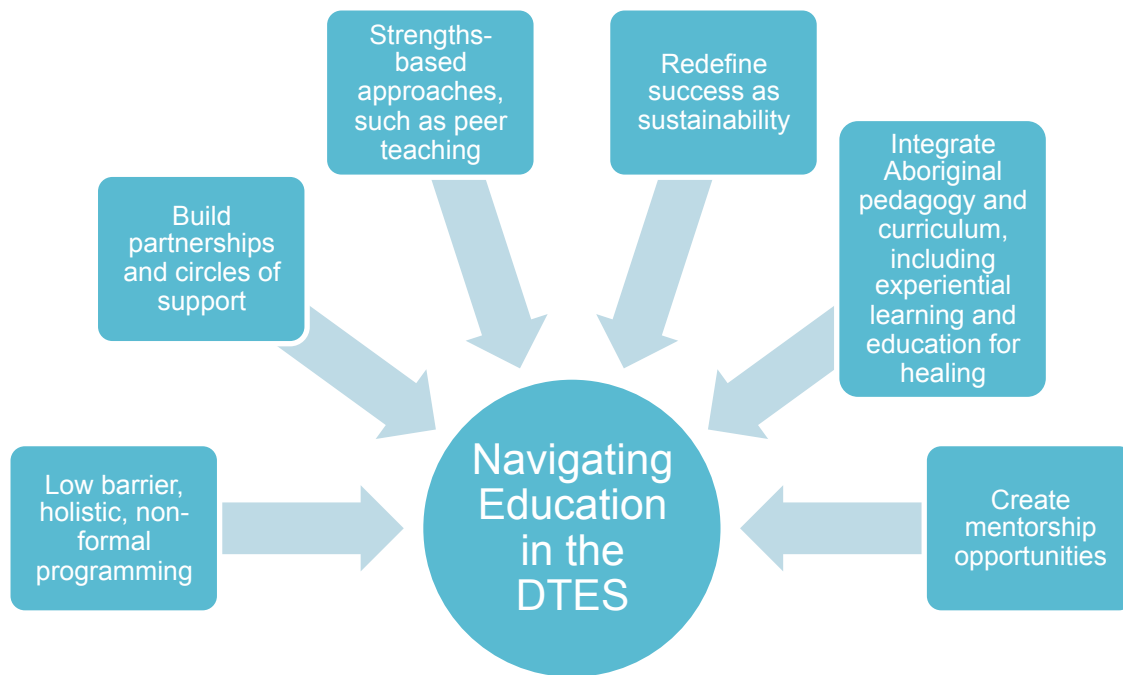
- **Broadway Youth Resource Centre:** Provides a wide range of social, health, education, employment and life skills services to homeless and at-risk youth ages 12 to 24.
- **Hammer & Saw:** Youth building community through woodworking projects.
- **Take a Hike:** Adventure-based outdoor education program for at-risk youth based at Britannia Secondary.
- **NASCARZ:** A program for youth to learn to build and fix cars and explore post-secondary options
- **Adult Basic Education Intermediate Program for Youth** at Vancouver Community College: A self-paced program at the Broadway Youth Resource Centre for youth aged 15 to 18.
- **Urban Native Youth Association:** Alternative education programs, mentorship, leadership training, and many workshops.
- **Writer's Exchange:** A space for inner city youth and mentors to exchange ideas, stories and knowledge at Queen Alexandra Elementary and 881 East Hastings Street.
- **STRIVE:** A YWCA Career Zone program that helps youth in care develop the life skills needed to transition into independent living when they reach the ceiling age for government support.
- **Kids Community Kitchen** at DTES Neighbourhood House.
- **Pinnacle Program:** A Vancouver School Board alternative school program for youth in Grade 11 or 12 with staff (social workers, mental health workers, probation officers, etc.) who support students' social and emotional needs.
- **Youth and Young Adult program at Gastown Vocational Services:** assists youth and young adults to obtain work experience, employment and/or to access educational and skill training programs. One-to-one job coaching and supported employment services are delivered to each 16-29 year old referred to the program.

## Conclusion

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Toward the end of the DTES Education Forum, there was a renewed sense of how to help residents navigate the learning opportunities in the neighbourhood, and the factors that make it difficult to access these opportunities.

Though these factors may be formidable, residents and frontline workers have met these challenges with a multitude of innovative strategies:



There was a palpable sense of purpose and possibility in the room, as well as commitment to building on the relationships and ideas generated throughout the afternoon. Many people expressed a desire to see more events like this one and an eagerness to continue these conversations among residents and frontline workers across a range of sectors and service providers.

Special thanks to everyone who participated and helped make the DTES Education Forum such an immensely successful event.