



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Britannia is on the traditional, ancestral and unceded territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səl̓ ilwətaʔt̓ / səl̓ íl̓ wítulh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations. Operating within a colonial system of municipal government, Britannia Community Services Centre offers a space for Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination to motivate local change. The writers of this report acknowledge that both the immediate and enduring impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic emerge from and contribute to the histories of this land.

The grief brought about by COVID-19 has been disproportionately experienced within the Britannia community. This pandemic has worsened existing inequities in health care, education, early childhood development, employment, food security, housing, and mental health and the compound effects of the co-occurring opioid crisis. While this report focuses primarily on the constructive aspects of Britannia's response, the incredible loss experienced in the Britannia community cannot go unacknowledged. As of March 11th, 2021, 260 people have been lost to the virus city-wide, since the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic nearly one year prior. In that same time, over 400 people in Vancouver have died from overdose. The compounding of crises exacerbates structural injustices through acute health risks and disruptions in access to necessary care and support.

SOURCE: [vancouver.sun.com/news/local-news/covid-19-update-for-march-11-heres-the-latest-on-coronavirus-in-b-](https://vancouver.sun.com/news/local-news/covid-19-update-for-march-11-heres-the-latest-on-coronavirus-in-b-)

## Keywords

*Britannia Community Services Centre, COVID-19, Pandemic Response, Essential Services, Community Resilience, Vulnerable Residents, Indigenous Youth, Indigenous Elders, Latin American Youth, Vietnamese Seniors, Food Security, Social Isolation, Digital Divide, Family Support, Community Partners, Community Development, Volunteers.*

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## What can you do?

These recommendations are for community members looking to increase resilience within their community, at the block-, building- and ground-level. These recommendations can be used by individuals, families, households, school groups, clubs, neighborhoods blocks, and any motivated group of community members or residents hoping to strengthen their community.

1. Get to know your neighbors. If you don't know your neighbors on a first-name basis, introduce yourself. Figure out ways that you can communicate and connect with those in your neighborhood. You can also join a neighborhood Buy Nothing or Facebook Groups (if they don't exist, start one!). Start thinking about different vulnerabilities that may exist within your own community, and the inequities that your neighbors may experience.
2. Get involved with a local community centre, library, or other community hub. Not only does this provide connection with your neighbors, it also increases the participation, support, and funding that community-based programs and activities often require to keep operating.
3. Support community organizations and local businesses that are actively working to build community connections and/or serve vulnerable groups within your community. Support can take the form of participation (in activities, programs, events), volunteering, purchasing (goods, services) or donating (goods, funds).
4. Ask your local community centres and organizations what they are doing to strengthen the community and increase community resilience. Ask your local representatives what they will do to prepare your community for an emergency and how they will support vulnerable community members.
5. Get involved with local politics and advocate for the consideration of vulnerable groups and community involvement in the development of community planning, and emergency preparedness planning.



# What can community organizations do?

These recommendations are for formally structured organizations that may consist of staff or volunteers. These recommendations can be used by community centres, faith organizations, schools, non-profits, and local businesses to facilitate and drive community connection and strengthening.

1. Build and nurture relationships with other organizations and groups within the neighborhood. Assess common interests and priorities to determine ways to collaborate and support one another, in times of normalcy.
2. Create a vulnerability map of the community to understand who will be most greatly impacted in the event of a natural disaster, or other times of disruption. Consider: What would these groups need in the event of a disaster? How would you communicate with these groups? How would you provide them with or connect them to the resources that they would need? What are you currently doing to address the needs of these groups?
3. Create asset maps of the neighborhood. Ensure that the maps are available and accessible to community members in digital and physical form. Asset maps should include access to free wifi, food, emergency resources (including medical clinics and first aid), earthquake safe buildings, designated emergency gathering locations, access to water, access to phones, community centres, access to first-language support.
4. Share learnings and resources. If you are hosting a vulnerability mapping workshop, invite neighboring organizations to participate. If you've completed an asset map, share the results of your findings throughout the community. Building relationships takes time and creating opportunities of reciprocity can help to nurture them.
5. Nurture your relationships with volunteers, past, present, and future. The strength of an active and engaged volunteer force cannot be underestimated. Decide on a minimum number of volunteers that will always be available at any time (have been pre-screened, have had a police check (if required), and have gone through training). Find ways to engage and involve volunteers, even those that are inactive.
6. Diversify communication methods. It's not only about reaching the most number of people as possible, but ensuring that your communications are accessible to all members of the community. Ensure that this information (communication methods, how to access them, how to use them, how to deliver them) is easily available and accessible to multiple people within the organization.
7. Build emergency preparedness into the registration process of your programs, events, and activities. Request consent from community members to contact them in the event of a community emergency, or for the purpose of wellness check-ins during times of disruption



LOVE YOUR  
NEIGHBOUR

# What can local government do?

These recommendations are for municipalities and other forms of local government, to embed resiliency into their community, to support existing, and to provide the infrastructure, resources, and support to empower communities to be proactive, so that they are able to be reactive in times of emergency and disruption.

1. Embed staff reallocation into organizational emergency planning. Plan to reassign staff members to support facilities and operations as a part of emergency response efforts. Planning to mobilize staff will avoid staff layoffs, and contribute to emergency preparedness.
2. Assess and plan for digital and other communications infrastructure. Plan to provide free wifi and computer access through-out the city, beyond commercial areas. Prioritize access in low income neighborhoods and housing developments.
3. Build off of the City of Vancouver's Resilient Neighborhoods Program, and allocate staff time and municipal resources to facilitate resilience building workshops within community organizations and hubs. Regularly facilitate these workshops and trainings (every 3-5 years).
4. Develop a city-wide emergency food procurement and distribution network, partnering with existing organizations, and building off of existing and successful initiatives.
5. Listen to communities. Facilitate workshops and engagement events to understand how communities are already creating connecting and increasing resilience. Fund and support existing actions and resources before developing and implementing new ones.
6. Embed community building and community resilience into the mandate of municipal-run community centres. Ensure that community centres position themselves at the centre of the community, not only recreation centres.
7. In times of emergency, open an Information Technology hotline to field basic questions around internet access, phone service provision and device operation questions should continuity of service delivery depend upon digital literacy.



# CONTENTS

## PART 1: INTRODUCTION

<b>Britannia's Mandate</b>	7
<b>Message from the Board</b>	7
<b>How to read this report</b>	8
<b>Why this report was written</b>	9
<b>Foundations</b>	10
Background	12
Profile of the Britannia Community	13
<b>Process</b>	14
Guiding Principles	14
The Actions	15
The Experience	16

## PART 2: THE RESPONSE

<b>Summary of the Response</b>	19
Leading up to Lockdown	20
<b>Support for Seniors and Elders</b>	21
55+ Wellness Calls	22
55+ Programs	25
Social Isolation and the Digital Divide	27
Additional Resources for Seniors and Elders	30
<b>Britannia's COVID-19 Food Centre</b>	31
Grandview-Woodland Food Connection	33
Food Security and Community	36
<b>Support for Young People and Families</b>	38
Family at Britannia	39
Support for Britannia's Youth	41
Girls Who LEAP	44
<b>Activating Community Partnerships</b>	46
A Community Force: Britannia's Volunteers	47
East Vancouver Emergency Network	50
Community Liaisons	52
<b>Keeping Our Doors Open: Life at the Centre during COVID-19</b>	54
Site Mapping: Past, Present and Future	55
Continuity of Britannia's Programming	58
Site Partners and Networking the City-Wide Response	60

## PART 3: RECOMMENDATIONS

<b>Summary of Recommendations</b>	65
What Can You Do?	66
What Can Community Organizations Do?	67
What Can Local Government Do?	68
<b>Closing Remarks</b>	69
<b>The Team</b>	70
<b>Appendix</b>	71

# INTRODUCTION

## Britannia's Mandate

### **Our dream:**

The wellbeing, sense of belonging, joy, and empowerment of everyone in our community.

### **To realize our dream:**

We are stewards of spaces that support social connection, creativity, recreation, reconciliation and the realization of the full potential of people and communities.

In partnership with our communities, we create integrated programs, services, and opportunities on the unceded territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səliłwətaʔt / səliłwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

## Message from the Board

During the COVID response we were asked to stay at home, most of us could safely do so, relying on the resilience that we built over the years with the help of the internet, digital devices, mobile services and financial assistance. Many people did not have the option to stay at home safely, apart from mobility, health and resources, the systemic conditions of race, gender, age and class profoundly impacted the health and safety of the most vulnerable in our neighborhood. Many lost income, or they did not have access to the technology to keep informed and engaged, some had others to care for or too much to take care of and their home away from home, their 'family' – the community centre was closed. At this time we saw neighbors helping each other, strangers stepping up to ask what they could do to help at a time when family and friends could not. Britannia Board of Management knew that there were people in our community who needed help even though we could not have direct daily in person contact with them. As a Board we made a decision to keep our staff working and the Centre operating even though it was closed to the public. We really did not know what to do except to listen to our community and try as best as we could to help them stay safe and healthy at home. We are like a village and in a village people help each other through difficult times. This research will help us understand what happened and how we can plan for the future with the goal of being of service to our community.

Annie Danilko  
President, Britannia Board of Directors - 2020/21

# HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

This report has been divided into three sections. The first section, **the Introduction** [page reference], provides context for the research that went into this report as well as a brief history of the Britannia Community Services Centre and the neighborhoods within its catchment area.

- Further information around the process of this research can be found here:

<https://www.britanniacentre.org/britannias-covid-response>

The second section, **the Response Summary** [page reference], presents the story of Britannia's actions leading up to and throughout the COVID-19 pandemic in Vancouver. Each header in this second section is subdivided into 'action,' which outlines the activities facilitated through Britannia, and 'experience,' which stories the community experience with those actions. It is important to note that, while each subsection focuses on a different aspect of Britannia's response, the coordinated community response is fundamentally intertwined. To resist compartmentalization, links from one subsection to another are provided in the margins. Sufficient information is provided in each subsection such that reading out of order does not compromise understanding.

The third section, **Recommendations** [page reference], outlines a set of comprehensive and interlinked recommendations towards future crisis preparedness, be it another pandemic, a natural disaster or any other disruption to community support networks. Recommendations are provided on institutional-, community- and neighborhood-levels to indicate that all three layers of involvement are essential to the work of crisis preparedness. Where applicable, recommendations refer to existing community plans and policies, documents that are linked at the end of the report.

**The Appendix** [page reference] collects all supplemental information and documents referred to throughout the prior three sections.

A copy of this report can be found online at: <https://www.britanniacentre.org/britannias-covid-response>



# WHY THIS REPORT WAS WRITTEN

## A Message from Britannia's Executive Director, Cynthia Low

In March 2020, not many people understood how the pandemic was going to shape our new reality. As a community centre we were faced with the challenge of meeting the unknown needs of our community and to support residents in unpredictable conditions.

In the eight months following the initial shut down, so much happened while simultaneously it seemed like NOTHING was happening. This project is an opportunity for us to understand what happened, why it happened, who was involved, and how it impacted individuals and their loved ones. As a community centre we are unaccustomed to assessing, evaluating and/or researching these types of questions, particularly in the context of a pandemic that is still affecting us locally, regionally, nationally and internationally.

It is in Britannia's nature and common practice to step into the unknown and to reach out to those with whom we already have relationships. These are our volunteers and neighbors, our community, organizational and institutional partners. This is a neighborhood with a long history of community engagement with residents and community members representing multiple interest groups that have a central value in civil society, social justice and equity. Our employed staff are also involved in the community; many staff live and volunteer in the community. Emily Lomax, a local Strathcona resident, with skills, knowledge and interest in sustainable communities, was the first one who volunteered to help push this project along. The First Nations and Indigenous Studies (FNIS) program at UBC, who has partnered students with Britannia in the past, provided the connection to Ben Lickerman. FNIS also provided the rigor of the academy to undertake necessary ethics review, application of methodologies, discipline, and structure to support the project technically and practically through set timelines.

This project was implemented in the same way that the COVID response was activated at Britannia; by gathering people together. The intention of this report is to tell our story of resilience and service to the community, for the purpose of ensuring knowledge for the future. While very grateful for support from the City of Vancouver, Federal Government and donors, we also know Britannia could have done more; now our monumental task is to do better. We were unable to support residents who were vulnerable because of homelessness, suffering from addiction or isolated from community, we don't know and may never know the families and households that we did not help through this pandemic. Organizations, schools and individuals in our community have worked very hard for decades, for generations, to address the systemic inequalities of our society, to gain some sense of stability, belonging, social, cultural and financial security. All this gain has been disrupted because of the pandemic, we need to understand how we can support these families and individuals to recover and minimize the continuing impacts brought on by COVID-19.

# FOUNDATIONS

Britannia Community Services Centre (“Britannia”) is a seventeen acre site, located in East Vancouver, made up of gyms, a pool, skating rink, library seniors centre, teen centre, child care, and a secondary school. Britannia is a collaboration between five public sector entities: The Britannia Community Services Centre, the Vancouver School Board, the Vancouver Public Library Board, the City of Vancouver, and the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation. The Britannia Community Services Centre Society, a non-profit, has been contracted and funded by the City of Vancouver to manage the site that is co-owned by the VSB and the City, and plays a leadership role in developing and facilitating educational, recreational, library and social services for the communities of Grandview-Woodland and Strathcona. This is done through an elected board with a community centered governance model and City funded staff that oversees various facilities, programs, and activities.

Britannia sits on the traditional, ancestral and unceded territories of the *xʷməθkʷəy̓əm* (Musqueam), *Skwxwú7mesh* (Squamish), and *səl ilwətaʔt / səl il wítulh* (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations and within its catchment area is home to one of the greatest densities of Urban Indigenous peoples. Britannia’s work prior to and throughout the pandemic strives to remain accountable to the story of these territories as well as the continued presence of the stewards of this land in the community. Additionally, Britannia’s catchment area is home to the greatest density of Urban Indigenous peoples in Canada. The diversity of cultures present in the Britannia community puts the Centre in a critical position, that of an active community hub that caters to a variety of interests. The experience Britannia, as an organization, and its staff have had fostering social cohesion among such a diverse community over the years puts it at a unique advantage to respond to emergency and make sure that nobody gets left behind.

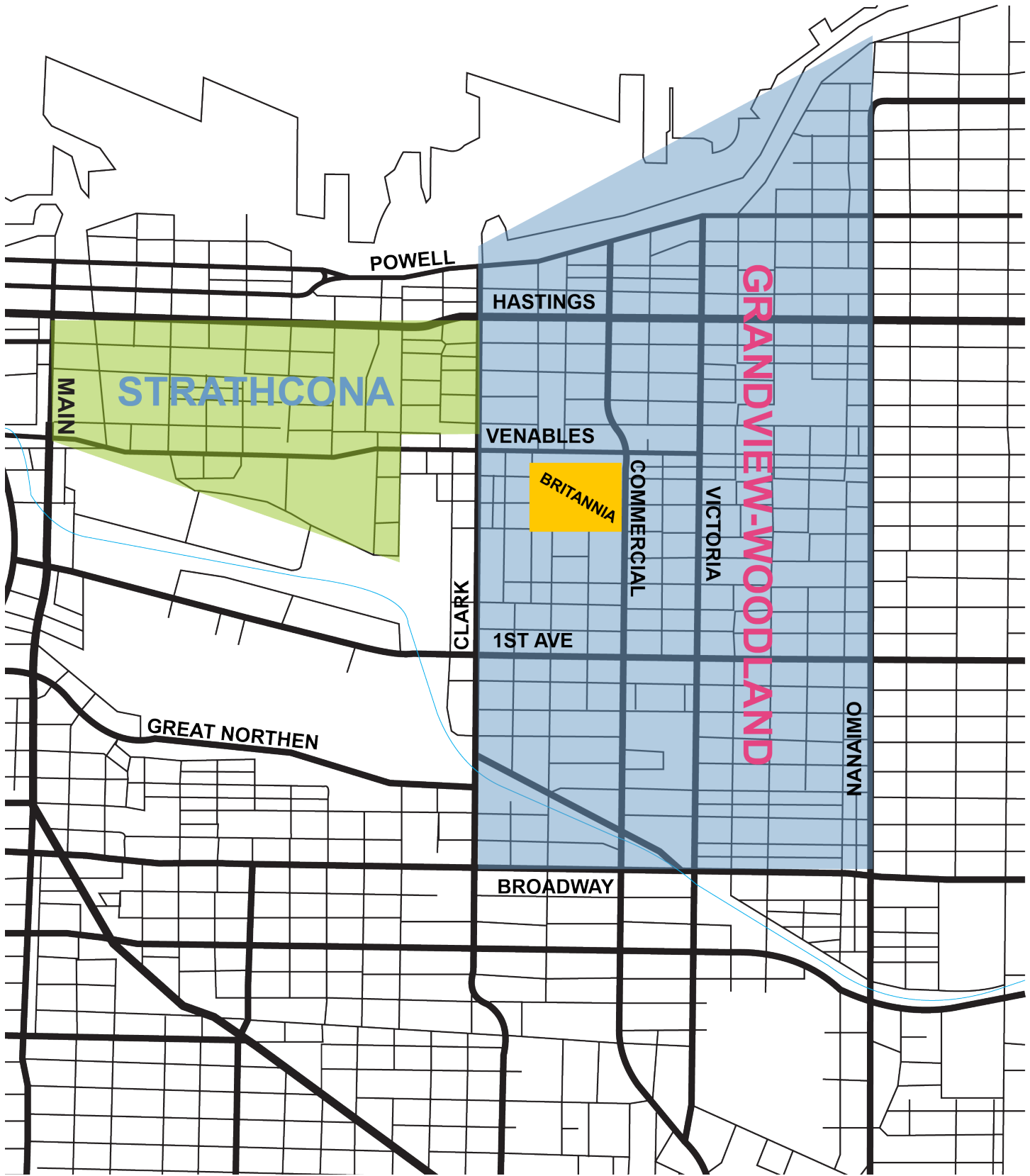
Britannia serves a large portion of the population who experience a high burden of effects arising from structural inequities related to social determinants of health, such as poverty, systemic racism, and food insecurity. These groups include seniors living alone, low-income families living in crowded spaces, children with behavioral and developmental challenges, and single parent households. Prior to the pandemic, many households, families and individuals were already dealing with the impacts of these inequities. See ‘Profile of Britannia Community’ on page XX for more.

On March 16, 2020, Britannia Community Services Centre, along with other community centres and facilities throughout the City of Vancouver and the Province of British Columbia, were directed to close all programming and services to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

Due to the need of its community, Britannia and its partners, throughout the community, initiated The COVID-19 Response, to protect its vulnerable residents, to provide essential services, and to serve all members of its community and especially those that were already disproportionately impacted by societal inequities. The response consisted of Wellness Calls to senior residents, Britannia’s COVID-19 Food Centre, comprehensive transition to online programming and the networks of communication necessary to set up and maintain these community services. This report outlines the actions taken in response to the community need that came with mandated closures, the impact that was had on the community, and the experience of individuals within the community during this time.

Britannia’s Response included thousands of short-staffed hours of Wellness Calls to seniors to guarantee that they remained socially connected, had access to crucial health information, and were supported by the social and health services that they required. These calls would also prove essential to networking the community-wide response and informing the Centre’s priorities throughout the pandemic. Britannia’s COVID-19 Food Centre, operated collaboratively by the Grandview Woodland Food Connection, ensured Emergency Home Food Delivery to individuals and households who were food insecure and/or unable to leave the house to obtain essential goods. These programs were supplemented by an incredible effort to maintain engagement with children and youth to ensure their safety and wellness through such difficult times. Transparent communication between Britannia staff, volunteers and partners in both the community and the City was crucial to the coordinated response. So too were the decades of community development and trust-building that has been Britannia’s commitment from its inception in the 1970’s. In and amongst all of the efforts was a team of staff, volunteers, and partners that mobilized and came to action when the community was in need.

Looking forward, the City and individual neighborhoods will inevitably encounter crises again, be it the ongoing pandemic, food supply chain disruption, impacts of climate change, industrial accident or social unrest. Resilient communities are those best prepared to take care of those most vulnerable to the impact of these crises. Since these impacts vary widely depending on the emergency - nearly all of the emergency response strategies in-place prior to COVID-19 relied on the continued ability for residents and response workers to gather - what is needed most is a comprehensive and dynamic understanding of the community. To achieve this understanding, all levels of government, civil society, corporate business and local community need to collaborate in preparation to assess and mobilize available resources in case of emergency.



# BACKGROUND

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF BRITANNIA

Prior to the arrival of European settlers in the late 1800s, the foot of Victoria Drive that meets the inlet was known as khupkhahpay'ag, the Skwx wú7mesh (Squamish) word for the Cedar tree. This area was shared by the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwx wú7mesh (Squamish), and səl il-wətaʔ / səl il witolh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

With the arrival of European settlers, was the establishment of the (current) Britannia site in 1910, and the construction of Britannia Secondary School. The Britannia Community Services Centre was formed in 1974, by local citizens and civic agencies motivated to provide a wide range of services of interest and need to the neighborhood's residents (Davitt and Martin 2001). At the time, the Centre was one of North America's largest facilities. Britannia has served, since its inception over 40 years ago, as a model of integrated services, increasing community wellness and capacity. Its design, which has remained innovative decades later, effectively provides recreation, learning, and social facilities, services, and programming.

Britannia has established itself as a platform for community action, agency and activism. It's role in not just facilitating and supporting, but driving community change has embedded a 'challenge the status quo' mindset into the cultural fabric of Britannia's community and operations.

Establishing the unique Britannia partnership (1974)

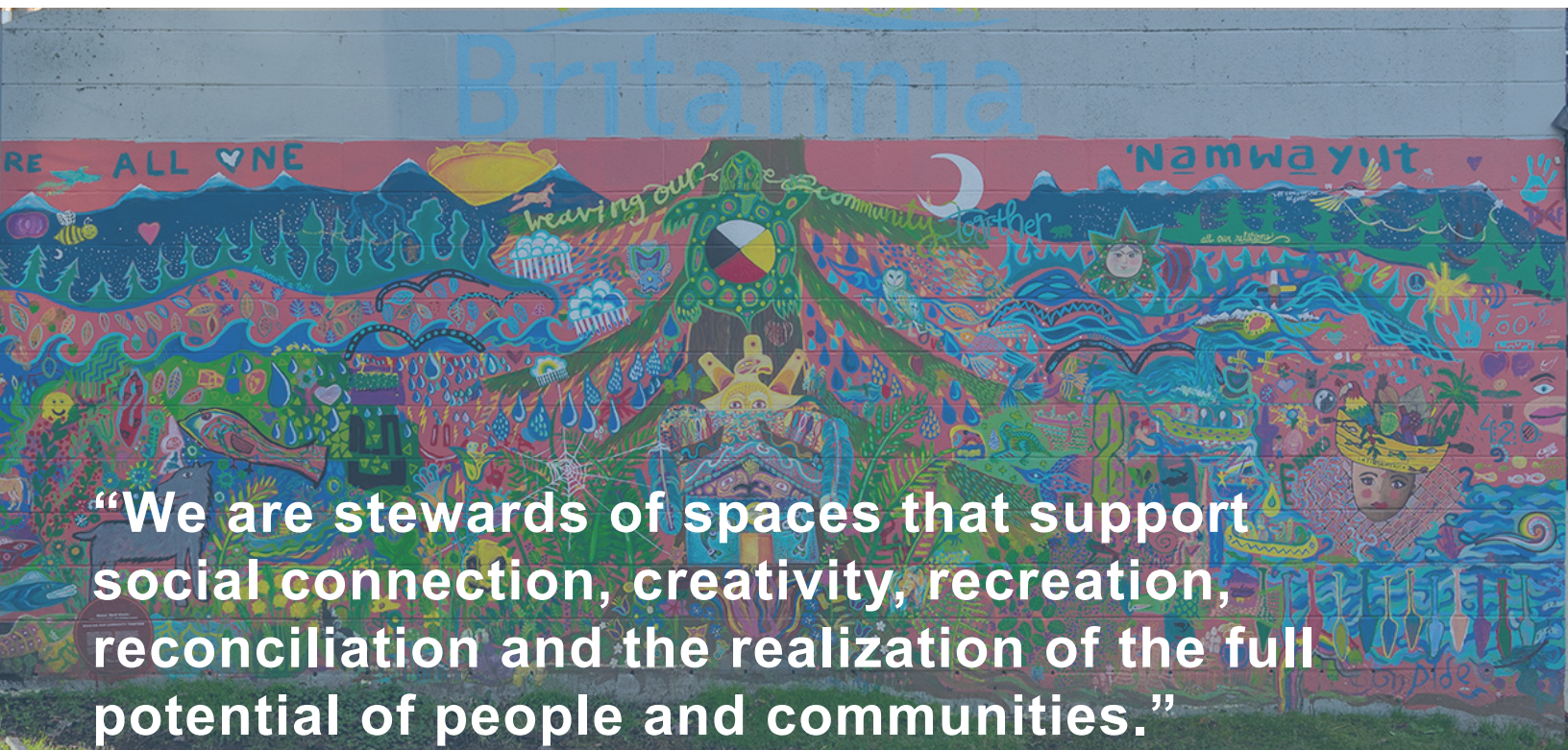
The creation of the Stone Soup Festival (1995)

Supporting the creation of East Van Kickstand (2012)

Building the first publicly accessed Indigenous carving facility (2014)

Britannia's embedded value of resilience and capacity building occurs informally through its programming, activities, and services, but also formally through workshops and training. Britannia has participated in two recent resilience training sessions with its staff; Britannia was a part City of Vancouver's Resilient Neighborhoods Program kick-off training (2017), and was also involved in the development of the Grandview-Woodland block-level resiliency toolkit, in partnership with City Studios and the Langara Applied Planning Department (2018). While capacity has been a barrier to the development of a comprehensive and strategic emergency plan, awareness and understanding of the importance of its services to the community is something that Britannia has been very much aware of.

Further information on Britannia's history can be found here: [www.britanniacentre.org/about\\_us/about\\_us/articles/1036.php](http://www.britanniacentre.org/about_us/about_us/articles/1036.php)



# PROFILES OF THE BRITANNIA COMMUNITY

Social Indicator	City of Vancouver Average	Grandview-Woodland	Strathcona
Low-Income Households	26.6%	35.2%	59.4%
Single parent households (% of families with children with a single parent)	29%	36%	48%
Unemployment Rate	6.0%	7.8%	11.1%
Rented Households	53%	64%	81%
Population Age 65+	15%	12%	22%
Individuals living alone	18%	23%	36%
Seniors (Age 65+) living alone	29%	44%	56%
Population with Indigenous Identity	2.4%	7.8%	10%
Population in a Visible Minority Group	52%	28%	45%
Population with Non-English Mother tongue	44%	27%	39%

Strathcona Social Indicators Profile - City of Vancouver (2020)" and "Grandview-Woodland Social Indicators Profile - City of Vancouver (2020)

# PROCESS

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. Grounding the work in the community
2. Continuous accountability and renewed consent
3. Engaging the work that is already being done.

The scope of this project was guided by Britannia's Seniors, Elders and Advocates (SEA) committee which, by the time this project was introduced in Fall 2020, had long since adapted to the rhythms of the monthly Zoom meeting. The project proposal was brought to the seniors and elders present at the November meeting, many of whom indicated interest in and emphasized the importance of this work. A few SEA committee members suggested that they would like to participate in the research process beyond the meeting time, either sitting for an interview or offering informal support, and there was consensus that this project be a regular agenda item at meetings going forward. Three guiding principles emerged from these early conversations that would shape the project to come.

### Grounding the work in the community

Given the community-based nature of this research, having a group of seniors and Elders offering their valuable time to guide this project has been very important. SEA committee members have, in the space of the project, shared many stories of what Britannia has been, is now and can become in the face of the current pandemic. These stories, and the generosity with which they are told, underscore the immediate relevance of the project and the gravity of this work. It is in the continued interest of the SEA committee as to the latest project updates, the stories shared by seniors and Elders who see their role in this work as vital, the readiness with which the Britannia community has invited this project team into its network of relations, that this community-based research becomes truly grounded. That this first principle of our guiding framework, grounding the research in the community, has been taken up with such enthusiasm is not only a testament to the relevance of these stories, but the importance of how they are told.

### Continuous accountability and renewed consent

Being able to ground our work with the perspectives of community members is not something to be taken for granted; it demands accountability. At each subsequent SEA committee meeting, we have presented project updates, answered questions and provided an open forum for feedback that directly influences the next steps of the project. These updates are not simply informative, they demonstrate a commitment to the continued relationship between the SEA committee members, the research team

and the project itself. Our presence at the SEA committee meetings is our way of demonstrating how the stories that the seniors and Elders share are grounding the work in practice. This iterative process continues the accountability commitment we made at the first SEA committee meeting in November. Further, we have come to understand that every chance to share this work is a chance to learn something new ourselves; particular areas of concern, aspects of its relevance, potential impacts today or tomorrow. The continuous accountability to the SEA committee is the second principle of our guiding framework.

### Engaging the work that is already being done.

Conveniently, this open forum for questions and feedback offers a chance for the seniors and Elders to further ground the work with their insights and course-corrections. Thus, a cycle is established: a reciprocal relationship between the grounding guidance from the SEA committee members and the accountability from the project team. From this cycle of reciprocity emerges the third principle of our guiding framework; engaging the work that is already being done. The SEA committee is a longstanding advisory group, a social space for Britannia's 55+ members and a relevant forum for community-centered conversation. In bringing our project updates to the SEA committee each month, we are upholding the leadership that is already evident in the community. To seek guidance for this project from Britannia's SEA committee demonstrates that, in a time of significant uncertainty, their leadership is necessary, perhaps more-so than ever before. Here is a diverse group of community members, seniors and Elders who, unable to continue meeting in person, have maintained a consistent monthly meeting online, who have found a way to safely share time and space with each other amidst a global pandemic. For this research to be grounded in and accountable to this immense resilience, to this work that is already being done, is what has made this project everything that it is.

# THE ACTIONS

In order to understand a measurable impact of Britannia's Covid-19 Response, details of the different components of the Response were gathered from individuals directly involved in each. This information was gathered through the form of a questionnaire, and was separate from the interview process that was undertaken to understand the experience of the COVID-19 Response.

Understanding the extent of the actions was difficult, as it relied entirely on information that was collected and recorded during the time of the Response. All information and data was self-reported by various staff members, volunteers, and partners. The information reported in this document most likely does not account for the entirety of the actions made or the impact had.

Due to the intensity of the work involved, especially in the early days of the Response, there will be inevitable discrepancies between the reported measurements (i.e. number of volunteer hours, amount of food delivered) and the actual measured amounts. By the very nature of the Response, it was impossible for staff and volunteers to record precise metrics given that all energy and capacity was devoted to the coordination and delivery of the emergency response services efforts.

Three primary exploratory questions were used to guide the development of a questionnaire to investigate the impact and actions of the Response:

1. What pre-existing relationships between community members were in place that provided the foundation for Britannia's response?
2. What actions were taken in the first month (March 16th – April 16th, 2020) of COVID-19 that distinguished Britannia's from the city-wide municipal response?
3. What is the absolute measure of activities facilitated through Britannia Community Services centre as part of the COVID-19 response program (March 16th – October 31st, 2020)?

The intention behind these three questions was to understand what primed Britannia for the actions taken during the Response, what actions both before and during the Response were pertinent to its success, and what measurable impact was had (the results of the action).

Individuals who participated in the questionnaires included representation from the core components within the Response:

- Latin American Youth Program (Britannia)
- 55+ Programmer Team (Britannia)

- Volunteer Programming (Britannia)
- Grandview-Woodland Food Connection
- Vietnamese Seniors Program (Britannia)
- Child Care Services (Britannia)
- Seniors, Elders, and Advisors Committee (Volunteer Committee)
- Recreation (Britannia)

Follow-up communications with the questionnaire participants provided additional information needed to understand the impact and extent of the impact of the Response and the actions that took place.

# THE EXPERIENCE

The inquiry into the experience of Britannia's COVID-19 Response consisted of twelve conversations with fifteen community members, volunteers and staff experienced in various aspects of the community-led programs. Where prior working relationships existed, such as among the three members of Britannia's 55+ staff team, individual conversations were consolidated into a single focus group discussion. Conversations were held on Zoom or over the phone from mid-January to early-March of 2021. Outreach for these interviews mirrored the networks of formal and informal communication evident in Britannia's COVID-19 Response; while initial participants were identified, the project team remained open to referrals to ensure the widest possible representation of community voices. Starting with the staff members overseeing major components of the response, Britannia's 55+ staff team, the Grandview-Woodland Food Connection and Britannia's Volunteer Coordinator were invited to interview for the project. Each of these staff, now familiar with the scope of the project, were encouraged to extend the invitation to community members who they believed would bring valuable perspective to the project. This way, site-partner staff members, families and recipients of Britannia's food distribution were able to contribute. In encouraging participants to help with the outreach process, the inquiry of the experience remained responsive to the network of relations representative of the research topic itself; Britannia's community-led COVID-19 Response.

Through this iterative process, one particular role emerged as imperative to both the research and the response: that of the 'Community Liaison.' This role was characterized repeatedly throughout the interviews as a person with extensive knowledge of the community and the ability to connect the work already being done with the people who are looking for it. In the context of Britannia's Response, Community Liaisons connected families in need of food security support to Britannia's COVID-19 Food Centre while, in the context of participant outreach, they connected those same families to the research team to share their experience. These Community Liaisons, in addition to playing a crucial role in Britannia's response, proved invaluable to the outreach process for this research as well. Given the pre-existing relationships of care and support between project participants and those who invited them to this research, the interview conversations were entered into with a considerable measure of trust. The importance of this cannot be understated: re-read the previous sentence.

The interviews and focus group discussions that comprised the experiential inquiry utilized a conversational approach to research that positioned both the researcher and interviewee as mutual collaborators in telling the sto-

ries. This conversational approach has been practiced in both western and Indigenous traditions of anti-oppressive research. University of Saskatchewan professor Margaret Kovach invokes Maori researcher Russell Bishop, who "introduces the notion of 'collaborative storying' which positions the researcher as a participant. As both parties become engaged in a collaborative process, the relationship builds and deepens as stories are shared"<sup>2</sup>. In the context of this project, collaboration became necessary with the understanding that this research was inviting participants to reflect on their experiences with COVID-19 while still living its effects, that is, as it is still ongoing. For many of the project participants, COVID-19 had changed nearly every aspect of their daily lives: it had become their everyday experience. Because of the ongoing nature of the research subject, abundant space was made in the interview for participants to share topics and themes that they felt were relevant to their experience according to criteria that they themselves set. This was framed as a 'benefit of the research today' (i.e. The opportunity to pause and reflect) as contrasted with the impact of what they have shared, a 'benefit of the research tomorrow' (i.e. On future crisis preparedness). Responding to open-ended research questions, the interviewee could direct the conversation towards their relevant experience, towards what they felt it was necessary to share. The researcher could then ask more specific follow-up questions to continue these lines of relevant inquiry. Thus, the particular experience of the participant not only shaped how the questions were answered, but how they were asked. In this way, the interviews became conversations in which all participants, researcher and interviewee, collaborated in the storying of Britannia's response to COVID-19.

This research-focused collaboration continued beyond the interview conversations themselves through a process of renewed feedback and consent. As the researcher worked the interview quotations into the drafts that would become this report, participants were invited to review their contributions in two rounds of feedback and consent. Here, again, is the commitment to accountability which guides this project. Practically speaking, this deepens the relationship between the participants and the research to which they are contributing by demonstrating that their role in the project is adaptable and responsive throughout the process, not just at the time of the interview.

Processes of ongoing consent, too, are deeply embedded in Britannia's community culture. Integrating ongoing consent into the project timeline as space for renewed feedback demonstrates the project's commitment to engaging the work that is already being done. In adjusting the process to meet the community's self-determined standards, the researchers "contribute to conversations that the



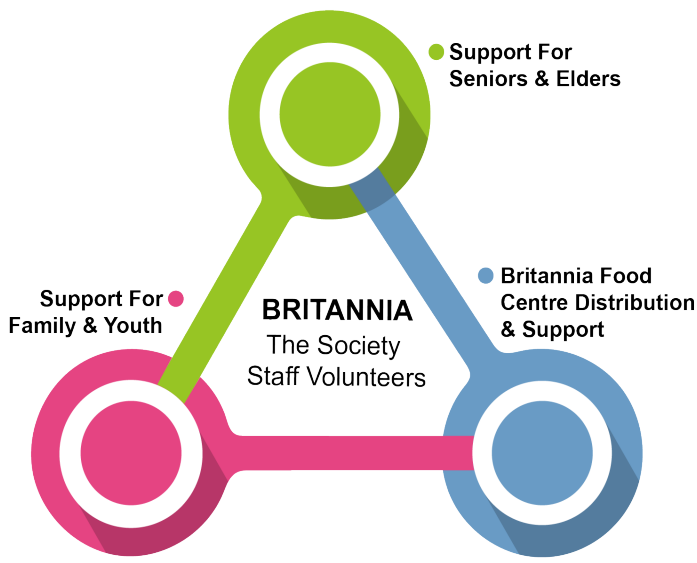
communities themselves understand to be important, and who make themselves answerable to the rules of conduct and inquiry that govern those communities”. From the initial outreach to the distribution of the draft report for feedback prior to publication, this research process has been grounded in and accountable to the Britannia community, telling the stories of one community’s adaptation to a ‘new normal’ by holding up work that has been ongoing for quite some time

<sup>3</sup>Eve Marie Garoutte, quoted in Howard, Heather. “Healing Research: Relationalism in Urban Indigenous Health Knowledge Production.” In *Indigenous Research: Theories, Practices, and Relationships*, 271–81. Vancouver, BC: Langara College, 2019

<sup>2</sup>Kovach, Margaret. “Conversational Method in Indigenous Research.” *First Peoples Child & Family Review* 5, no. 1 (2010): 40–48.



# SUMMARY OF THE RESPONSE



As the community is still surviving within the state of a pandemic, the true and total impact of Britannia's response is not yet known. The measured actions, as well as the experiences shared in this report, are but a representation of the total impact that was and is continued to be had on the community. The impact of Britannia's Covid-19 Response cannot be underestimated.

Britannia's ability to take swift action in response to the lockdown was made possible by the immediate support, understanding, and cooperation of supervisors, management and the Britannia Board. Additionally, the flexibility and collaboration amongst staff and volunteers in every area of Britannia's response charged the mobilization and adaptability that was required to deal with the changes that were arising every day.

**"Having lots of amazing volunteers that are already engaged with us... That allows us to get going really quickly." - Yao Zhang, Volunteer Coordinator**

The Response would not have been possible without the support, motivation, and perseverance of hundreds of volunteers. Because of Britannia's close relationships with its volunteers, its community partners, its community residents, with staff, and with neighboring organizations, the impact of the efforts were amplified through the community.

Throughout the response Britannia maintained transparency and open communication with all those impacts by and involved in its response. The hosting of weekly meetings with its partners and services providers, and maintenance of open and frequent communications with the community, including staff and volunteers was key. At a time when anxieties were high and many people were in want of more information, maintaining this openness created a trust that was essential to the success of the Response.



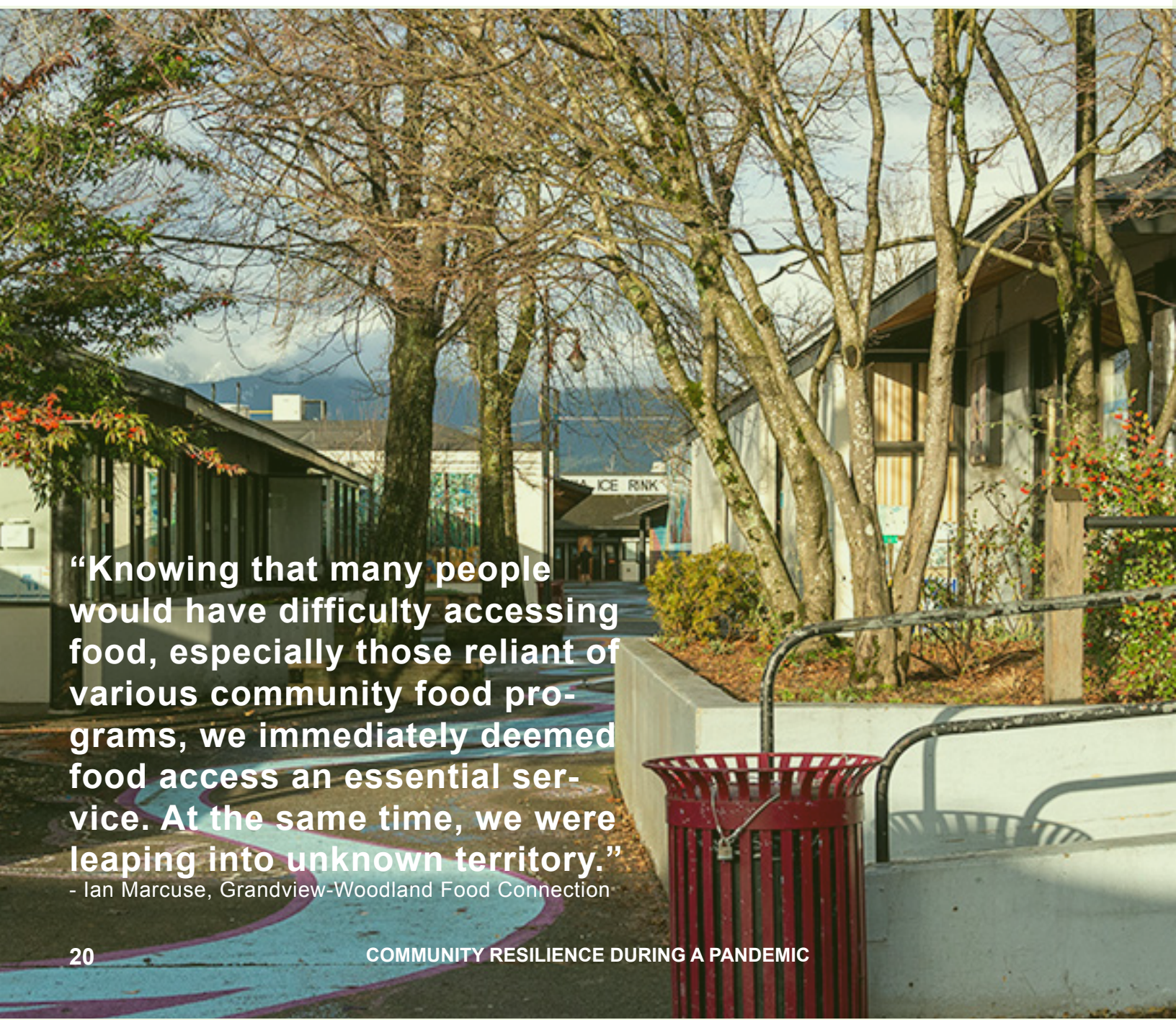
**"This work didn't just happen overnight. We've been working with volunteers for forty-plus years and because Britannia has been around for [that long], a lot of community members have that close relationship and love for Britannia: we were able to draw on that."**  
 - Ian Marcuse, Grandview-Woodland Food Connection

# LEADING UP TO LOCKDOWN

Prior to March 16th, 2020 (the date of the mandated lockdown), there were some conversations amongst staff and volunteers about the impact of a potential lockdown and how best to support the community should this event occur. These conversations were initiated by staff, informally, as there was little clear direction or guidance from the City of Vancouver beyond the order to shut down operations. Information from the Provincial Health Officer did stress the continuation of essential services, which included vulnerable population service providers.

Informal discussions emerged into three main areas: seniors support, youth support, and food delivery. There was a general consensus that food was an essential

service and that some form of a food program would be necessary. Similarly, there were conversations with youth program staff to understand how to support youth, specifically during spring break, in the case of a lockdown. In the little time that was given to prepare, written surveys were handed out to seniors and Elders to gather contact information and determine who would need support, and what support would be needed in the event of a lockdown. Despite these initial ideas that would lead to Britannia's eventual COVID-19 Response, there was no formalized plan set in place, nor any idea of what would be required in a state of lockdown. The vast majority of the Response occurred out of necessity, in direct response to the specific needs of Britannia's community and its many members.



**“Knowing that many people would have difficulty accessing food, especially those reliant of various community food programs, we immediately deemed food access an essential service. At the same time, we were leaping into unknown territory.”**

- Ian Marcuse, Grandview-Woodland Food Connection



**SUPPORT FOR SENIOR & ELDERS**

# 55+ WELLNESS CALLS

## Summary

The 55+ Wellness Calls, for seniors and Elders was the first support program to be initiated by Britannia. Seniors and Elders are a significant part of the Britannia community and have strong ties with many other groups, which has been supported by the 55+ Centre. The 55+ Centre at Britannia is a dedicated space (prior to March 16th, 2020) in which seniors, Elders, and older adults could gather, socialize, and participate in regular programming managed independently, or by Britannia staff (the 55+ Programmer team). Prior to the lockdown, the initial acknowledgment that seniors and Elders would need support, resulted in the distribution of a survey at the 55+ Centre, which was a first glimpse of how the group would need support. In the second week of the lockdown, the Wellness Calls commenced, which included routine and regular check-ins with seniors and Elders, primarily through phone calls. The Wellness Calls were used to understand what support was needed, to refer to additional resources and agencies, and to offer social interaction and emotional support to mitigate the impacts of isolation. For some seniors and Elders, the Wellness Calls were the only social interaction and support that they would receive. The program was initially powered by staff, who were no longer working in other areas, who made the initial calls to make contact with seniors and Elders, using Britannia's contact database. After the initial call, households provided consent to receive future calls from volunteers, supported by Britannia staff. Volunteers were trained, and provided support through call scripts, regular updates, and frequent support and communication with staff members.

- Every senior member contacted within the first three weeks of the lockdown
- 1500+ seniors contacted
- 133 seniors paired with volunteers for weekly 55+ Wellness Calls
- 900+ total Wellness Calls
- 200+ hours dedicated to Wellness Calls

## Experience

In early February, 2020, Britannia circulated a survey through its 55+ centre to gauge what support would be needed in case of a citywide emergency. Britannia's Executive Director, Cynthia Low, explains the catalyst for this survey; "When people asked me, 'what do you think is going to happen?' And I didn't know, I thought I'm going to find out what people think and we're probably going to be better off for it." Cylia Wong, who received the survey through the 55+ Centre, recalls that, "the survey asked if you wanted phone line support should something happen." Although this survey only gathered twenty-two responses, it provided a clear directive to the Britannia staff, and the 55+ Programming Team in particular, towards what would become a comprehensive program of Wellness Calls with the Britannia's registered membership over the age of 55. "Never underestimate the voices of a small group of mindful people," reflects Cynthia Low, "those twenty-two responses were profound – twenty-two more voices and much more knowledge than we had before. That was really important because most of us who were not in that [precarious] situation did not even think about it."

Given the uncertainty leading up to the initial lockdowns

on March 16th, 2020, this survey served a dual purpose. For Britannia, Cynthia Low says, "the survey was about hearing from the community what their concerns were and trusting that they understand what is most needed," while, for the community, it was about, "re-assuring them and allowing them some forum to talk in which we [as staff] are listening." This survey was distributed to seniors

and Elders, a demographic that would come to be seen as the most vulnerable to COVID-19, with the implicit understanding that they would be in the best position to offer guidance and direct Britannia's response. Cynthia Low recalls, "that's where we first got this idea

about having to shelter safely at home," a key mobility limitation that would augment all aspects of Britannia's response, from food delivery to the wellness calls. As for the immediate, pre-COVID impact on the community, Cylia Wong recalls, "Britannia wanted to make sure their community [knew they were] being taken care of."

When the city was placed on lockdown, this preliminary information allowed Britannia's 55+ staff team to jump-start their response. 55+ Programmer Anne Cowan explains, "we already had ways of reaching those who were in our programs; who were connected through Facebook

**“Never underestimate the voices of a small group of mindful people,”**

or through a certain program. But what about those who weren't [connected], who were still members of our community?" The 55+ staff team understood, however, that the seniors and Elders most actively engaged in programs were only a small fraction of those older community members particularly vulnerable to the health and mobility challenges of COVID-19. Between the 55+ staff team, seniors and Elders already working with Britannia, there was a significant pre-existing awareness at the Centre of the gap in communication with the community's wider senior population - including those living in isolation - and, with even a preliminary understanding of the health risks posed by COVID-19, this was a gap that could not go unaddressed.

To address this gap in communication, Britannia started a comprehensive Wellness Calls program that would connect community seniors with staff or volunteers in their neighborhood, who could then connect them to the active and available support services. Starting with Britannia's contact database to identify all registered community members above the age of 55, 55+ Programmer Daniel Cook recalls, "We were able to quickly start a phone tree for all the seniors in the community." Understanding the needs of the community's seniors upfront was a necessary step towards a better coordinated response, "we were then able to quickly speak to other community organizations in terms of 'this is what we can do and this is what you can do,'" Cook continues, "being able to talk about that, to make sure that we can best respond to the community during the pandemic was crucial."

Casting such a wide net, calling all registered community members over the age of 55, reflects the extent of pre-existing relationships that Britannia has with its senior community. It also meant that some Wellness Call recipients were in more of a position to help with Britan-

nia's response than they were in need of support from it. "I mean, I got phoned," explains Ros Breckner, who herself was volunteering with the Wellness Calls, "they just contacted in general, asking if I wanted someone to call me again." Due to privacy concerns, staff placed all of the initial calls. "Those people who said yes," continues Breckner, "we [as volunteers] were assigned to them." Among site-wide layoffs and staffing uncertainty, getting the Wellness Calls up and running had to be an all-hands on deck approach. "People who didn't even work [with seniors] just jumped in," Anne Cowan says of the team effort, "we had people that worked as Pool Programmers or Rink Programmers making one-on-one calls to seniors in the community because, as a team, we realized who is the most vulnerable, what is needed, what are they lacking and how we could support them." In the immediate aftermath of the city-wide lockdowns, Daniel Cook remembers, "there were thousands of seniors on that phone tree and no staff members except the programmers that were left, six or eight of us." Once the initial calls had been placed, the low numbers of paid staff were supported by an overwhelming number of community volunteers, recruited by Volunteer Coordinator Yao Zhang, vetted through criminal record checks and trained by the 55+ staff team. Cowan recalls that, "there was a lot done in a very short time; preparing training for the volunteers, having a script for them - and for staff that don't normally work with seniors - to feel comfortable making the calls." Volunteers, like Ros Breckner, worked alongside staff members to keep an online log that would track the seniors contacted, how they were contacted, whether they wanted food delivery and if there were any concerns they had after talking. "We were each given five or six people to call," recalls Breckner, "and we would just check in with them. Everybody got asked if once per week was enough, if they wanted to be called once every two weeks



or twice per week. So, we had our little group of people that we would phone and check in on.” The online log was not only key to Britannia’s broader response, but to good communication between the 55+ staff team and volunteers as well. “There were so many little details, things that had to happen behind the scenes,” Cowan re-iterates, “all of those little details are hard to put together.”

With so many moving pieces behind the Wellness Calls, clear communication between staff and volunteers was of utmost importance. Volunteer Coordinator Yao Zhang was pro-active in supporting volunteers, inviting the call team to weekly online check-ins. These open forums for feedback were a priority, both from the seniors to the volunteers and then from the volunteers to the staff team, who could then better coordinate the wider response. “We checked in,” explains Yao Zhang, “we did lots of phone call check-ins with volunteers before they felt burned out. We would say, ‘hey, how are you doing with your tasks? Is it too much? Do you need time off?’ We did a lot of that and it was well received.” Support for the volunteers was especially important given the emotional demands of the calls. “They let us know if they felt overburdened,” continues Zhang, “if seniors start talking to them about very serious psychological or family issues – all this we did not know. As a staff team we then talk about the kinds of training that are necessary going forward.” Both proactive and responsive support between staff and volunteers created a mutual learning experience towards a better foundation for future Wellness Call programs, should they become necessary again. As Zhang recalls, “All of these things, the volunteers let us know, we learned along the way.”

While the wide net of the initial phone tree covered some of the apparent gaps between Britannia and its senior community, it was only through word-of-mouth communication that the Wellness Calls were as thorough as they could be. “Something I noticed right away,” 55+ Program Assistant Kya Prince remarks, “was the sense of community that our members have in their own lives. So, in the initial shut down, those folks who know us as a safe site and an active site just contacted [the 55+ staff team] when they knew of people in their buildings, among their neighbors, who might benefit by getting in touch with us.” This way, community members who were not on Britannia’s original phone tree, members who would have otherwise fallen through the cracks, were referred to the 55+ Wellness Call program. This network of support speaks to Britannia’s role as a hub within the community, as a place of contact during times of uncertainty and the culture of neighborliness that the Centre promotes. “Knowing

they could still use us as a contact for someone they were concerned about was really great,” Kya Prince continues, “Just seeing that the community isn’t just who we are already reaching, but is extended by word-of-mouth as well.”

The 55+ Wellness Calls themselves also provided word-of-mouth information about Britannia’s wider coordinated response, often with unexpected benefits. Daniel Cook explains that, “often it would be a grandchild or a child that answered the phone, having been recently laid off or at home for whatever reason.” An unexpected benefit of this comprehensive contacting strategy emerged; “there was a good number of them who said, ‘is there something that I can do?’”, Continues Cook, “even though they’re in uncertain times, they were offering whatever they could back to the community.”

**“Even though they’re in uncertain times, they were offering whatever they could back to the community”**

While the Wellness Call program was initially designed to address a specific gap in support for the 55+ community, it ended up as an integral network for coordinating Britannia’s wider response. “One of the calls that I made was to the Director of the Catering at the Italian Cultural Centre,” remembers Rink Programmer Susy Bando, “I got on the phone, you know; ‘we’re calling all of the 55+ members from Britannia, to make sure our members have the support they need and if not, where we might be able to assist them,’ and Fabio responded; ‘no, I’m fine but wow, this is such a great thing you’re doing and if there’s anything we can do to help...’ And that was how Britannia’s [COVID-19] Food Centre was connected with the Italian Cultural Centre. The Italian Cultural Centre, through grants and donations, were providing prepared food to school children, but committed, ‘anytime we have anything left over, we’ll bring it to you.’ This amounted to a huge amount of prepared food for at least four months that was appreciated by the recipients; they provided us with so much. The connection with the Italian Cultural Centre may have happened in other ways, but the connection was made because of the Wellness Calls we were doing for seniors.” Britannia staff quickly realized what was needed to facilitate the involvement of community members and partner organizations who first heard of the response through the Wellness Calls. “With lots of people now unemployed,” Anne Cowan recalls, “who wanted to do something, who wanted to give back, did we have a strong enough structure to get that set up and in motion?” With its role in communicating both the needs of community seniors and as a reference point for community members willing and able to help out, the 55+ Wellness Check-In program was a core component of Britannia’s continued support for its senior and Elder community.



# 55+ PROGRAMS

## Summary

Programs for seniors and older adults were moved online by the third week of the lockdown. The success of this transition was largely attributed to the support of programming staff assisting seniors and Elders with access to and education surrounding the online platforms. Online programs were not confined to the Grandview-Woodland and Strathcona Neighborhoods; Program registration came from different neighborhoods within Vancouver, as well as different municipalities.

### Online seniors programs:

- 55+Quirk-E: Weekly meetings, three arts workshops, two workshops on racism
- Health Aging Through the Arts (HATTA): Weekly hat weaving gatherings
- Weaving Our Community Together: Weekly cultural classes, weaving, drum circles, socials
- 55+ Program: Weekly socials
- Seniors, Elders and Advocates Committee of the Board continued meeting throughout the pandemic to provide expertise and knowledge around the needs of seniors

Several community events were also organized that encouraged seniors and Elders participation to foster connectedness and community amongst a typically isolated group of people, most especially during the pandemic. The community events included the Cultural Sound Walk, Orange Shirt Day, National Indigenous People Day, Remembrance Day, the Christmas Social and Storytelling (55+Quirk-E and Elders), and the Change of the Season Celebration

## Experience

Like many of Britannia's 55+ community, Vera Jones maintains an active role in the community through her role as a Board Member, on the Seniors, Elders and Advocates (SEA) committee, work as a Resolution Health Support Worker/Elders Liaison with the Indian Residential School Survivors Society (IRSSS) and through her participation in a diverse array of Britannia's Programs. The citywide lockdowns on March 16th precipitated a major shift in how she would continue her community engagement; "I was at the [IRSSS] office," Vera Jones recalls, "when one of my co-workers came in and said, 'we're sending you home. You're going to be working from home now because of this virus.' It was a big adjustment." For Britannia's 55+ community, the citywide lockdown and shifts to online programming have fundamentally altered their rhythms of involvement with the Centre. The necessary adaptations to this new normal have exposed gaps, challenged assumptions of community relations and highlighted practices that Britannia plans to continue once a return to in-person seniors programming is possible again.

A grounding presence through this period of change has been Britannia's long standing SEA committee. As an advisory committee, social space and community leadership council, Britannia's SEA committee continued meeting regularly via Zoom throughout the pandemic to share space and discuss how best to facilitate safe and engaging seniors programming through the centre. When the citywide lockdown hit, "the SEA committee already existed," 55+ Programmer Anne Cowan stresses, "they already had their own Facebook pages and chats."

This allowed the seniors directly involved to remain in touch, anticipating the shift to virtual programming. As fellow 55+ Programmer Daniel Cook recalls, this virtual shift was an iterative learning process: "While we did respond pretty quickly, it took us a while to solidify our virtual programming. We didn't know how to start virtual classes." This was particularly challenging for program facilitators, many of them seniors and Elders themselves, who taught in their spare time. Daniel Cook continues, "Our facilitators, while quick, were still learning." Through this transition, Facebook pages allowed "the instructors to stay engaged with the community based on what they needed," says Anne Cowan, emphasizing the seniors' sense of community already present online. The transition from in-person to virtual programming brought to light a set of challenges particularly felt by Britannia's 55+ community; what we have come to understand as the digital divide. Many SEA committee members noted inconsistent participation as a symptom of a deeper problem, "because either they don't know how to get into Zoom or don't have a computer," SEA committee member Cylia Wong notes, "again, it's back to that gap." Vera Jones emphasized the role of the 55+ team in supporting the SEA committee members through this transition, stressing that "Dan [Cook] just jumped in with both feet, setting up Zoom for the Elders." Specifically "taking the time to spend with each Elder and senior that wasn't tech savvy, [Dan] would guide them, 'ok do this and do that.' That, to me, was really good." The relative continuity of Britannia's SEA committee meetings indicates the impact of this one-on-one approach to dig-

ital literacy. Especially true in getting older generations online, instruction with care and attention to where the seniors are coming from is essential to building a virtual foundation for community relations. Education is only one aspect necessary in addressing the digital divide. In the continuity of the SEA committee meetings, the instructional efforts of the 55+ Programming team helped maintain a pre-existing sense of empowerment and mitigate the separation felt by many of the committee members: as Jones re-iterates, “I didn’t feel like I was completely isolated.”

This transition to virtual programming also brought to light a portion of Britannia’s senior community, “a previously unseen community” Daniel Cook describes as “a community that feels more comfortable accessing programming from their own home. There are some seniors and Elders that are safer at home that began accessing our programming because it was online.” Vera Jones makes a similar observation, that “there were a lot of other community members who were not really a part of 55+, but, because they didn’t have many connections [during COVID-19] – to the best of my knowledge – when they heard about [SEA] and Zoom, they got in touch with Dan and were connected that way. So we do have some new members through Zoom that you wouldn’t normally see at the 55+ centre, that’s been good.”

Having programs available online has also allowed members of Britannia’s network currently living around the world to reconnect with their home community centre. Daniel Cook runs “a drum circle on Tuesday nights. One of the members that attends is originally from Squamish, here in Vancouver, but he moved down to Mexico ten years ago. He’s been missing singing his songs and practicing his culture, an opportunity he doesn’t have in Mexico. So, when we were having virtual drum circles, he was attending. He could sing his songs with his family. There’s an unexpected plus in providing virtual programming.” For Britannia 55+ members living closer to the centre, too, virtual programming has its benefits. Todd DeVries leads the HATTA weaving group on Wednesdays and “now, when he is facilitating, he records the workshops. Then Kya or Dan will post it on Facebook,” Vera Jones observes, “[Once we are back at the centre] if they are recorded, then we can go home and connect with that video. That’s another step up in our process.” The 55+ team emphasizes similar takeaways from this crash course in virtual programming: “once we’re not in an emergency, we will continue to offer virtual programs from here forward,” says Anne Cowan.

In speaking with seniors and Elders for this project nearly a year after the initial lockdowns, an overwhelming

gratitude for the ability to stay connected emerged as a key theme. Cylia Wong’s experience with Britannia’s seniors cultural programming, “has [been] really good. I think that really helped a lot of the [55+] members to stay connected. Daniel, Kya and Anne were really instrumental in doing that for the group.” Once the 55+ Programming team got virtual programming up and running, “they had a hangout meeting on Tuesdays, where the seniors could come on and talk about whatever they felt like talking about,” explains Vera Jones, “and then crafting on Wednesday and Friday; so they were connected at least three times a week. That worked out really well.” Jones was just helping a new program – Connections with Kith and Kin (CKK) – get started in partnership with Vancouver Public Library before the pandemic hit; “Of course, when they shut everything down, they shut us down. We were shut down in March and then it was around November that I suddenly realized we had a program we were starting to get going and these participants are left hanging in the dark.” Such has been the experience of many programs across the city, both at Britannia and beyond.

**I didn’t feel like I was completely isolated**

Though, the success of Britannia’s 55+ virtual programming encouraged Jones to advocate for CKK to make the jump online. “It was January when we got [CKK] going again. We had a big class last Tuesday – fortunately there were enough librarians on there so we could go into breakout rooms.”

Despite the connection that’s been possible online, there is widespread recognition that it’s not the same as connecting in-person. Even with “the things that Britannia has done to get through this,” says community member Ros Breckner, “it’s the physical connection with the space. That’s important. It was certainly a relief in September when we could start using some parts of Britannia again.” Despite the prioritization of a return to in-person programming, “The seniors centre is not set up so that anyone can go in there, right now,” observes Cylia Wong, “so that could be considered a gap in the way that things are, physically.” Britannia’s youth, as well, have missed the Elders’ presence around the centre “We used to hang out with the Elders at least once a month,” says Mitra Tshan, mentor with Girls Who LEAP. This speaks to the core value of intergenerational connection that has its home in the 55+ Centre. Still, there is understanding among the 55+ Programming staff that the return to in-person programming will have to adapt to this new reality; “Once we are able to have in-person programming again,” says Daniel Cook, “we’re still going to be providing the virtual connection, because there are still going to be those that are nervous about making the trip to Britannia and we need to make sure that they are still connected.”

# SOCIAL ISOLATION & THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

## Summary

In addition to Wellness Calls, and online programming, seniors and Elders were supported by Britannia through accessibility to different communication channels. The presence of existing online platforms and communication methods (such as a Facebook page) facilitated the transition to exclusively online platforms. A large barrier to communication via digital platforms was both lack of access to the required technology (i.e. wifi, laptop access), and absence of experience in using them. Both of these were addressed by Britannia in efforts to increase accessibility to the essential communication services. With this transition, It was still understood that digital communication was not accessible, available, or possibly desired by some community members. Britannia continued to support its seniors and Elders by phone, as well as by including weekly physical handouts in the Home Food Deliveries, which included updates, resources, and contact information that people would not otherwise have access to.

- Online Facebook pages and chat rooms connected 500+ seniors and Elders
- Facebook pages had members from throughout the province
- Weekly physical handouts were provided
- Technical support provided to connect to digital communication platforms
- Devices (i.e. cell phones) and prepaid phone cards distributed

## Experience

According to the 2016 census, 44% of seniors over the age of 65 live alone in the Grandview-Woodland Neighborhood, compared to the 29% average for the City of Vancouver. In the Strathcona Neighborhood, 56% of seniors over 65 live alone. These facts were brought to light with the isolating impacts of COVID-19. Although Grandview-Woodland does report a stronger than average 'social support network' (more than four people that can be relied upon for support), concerns about viral spread and absence of previously available services have limited access to these networks, exposing a gap in these seniors' access to essential services, social life and basic resources. This gap was made visible in large part through the Wellness Check-Ins, phone calls which Volunteer Coordinator Yao Zhang focused much of his work recruiting support for. Yao Zhang reflects, "One thing we did not know about our community, before COVID, was how many seniors live by themselves and identify themselves as 'no-support meaning relatives, children, spouse or neighbor, at all.'" When it comes to accessing basic needs to get through the week, Yao Zhang continues, "that means they don't have a neighbor willing to check in on them or help with grocery shopping or to rely on; This is something that, living here, I was not aware of. COVID exposed this reality." The presence of strong 'social support networks,' coupled with the high percentage of seniors living alone suggest that the social aspects of community life play a large role in maintaining a balanced sense of well-being.

The initial city wide lockdowns in March, 2020 had an immediate impact on the ability to socialize. As Elder Diane Champagne recalls, "It may not seem much to a young-

er person that has a social life, but because of COVID, I had five visitors, socially distanced off of my porch. Five in six months. So you can imagine; I went from going to the library, accessing programs at Britannia, going to ceremonies, doing workshops all around, doing my advocacy work, I am a singer, I drum and sing all over Vancouver, I'm a powwow person. I went from that enormous social life down to seeing five people." While Britannia's virtual programming offered the opportunity for social connection online, barriers of access and education – particularly felt by the 55+ community – were considerable and have come to be understood as a digital divide that stands between community members and basic needs that are increasingly accessed through digital technologies. Diane Champagne emphasizes the abruptness of this digital shift during the first months of COVID; "Six months I was in isolation – and all of a sudden everything shifts on to computers. And I'm in isolation; no-one will come, no-one can come and teach me how to use a computer. I was gifted a computer through a church, a laptop, but I had never done email. One of my kids set up email so I could get Facebook. So I was saying, 'I want to do all these programs,' because there's all these arts and crafts programs from the Elders, and they said 'just email!' Well, I didn't know how to email. I attempted to try and get into that program four or five times but, because I had no understanding of technology at all, I couldn't." Champagne points to the widely assumed baseline of technology access and digital literacy evident at all levels of COVID-19 Response; from phone application based contact tracing, to online grocery ordering, to mutual aid organized over social media. To mitigate the isolating effects of COVID-19 on some of the most impacted popula-

tions, comprehensive support is necessary on both sides of the digital divide while baseline technology access and digital education are addressed such that, in times of emergency, everyone in the community stays connected. In the wake of the initial city wide lockdowns, the shift of essential services, education and resource access online was rapid. Girls Who LEAP mentor Mitra Tshan recalls, “We went virtual and online in the split of a second. That doesn’t help when you have a lot of families that are without reliable wifi, or they’re hotspotting wifi from someone down the hallway. Or there are families that don’t have laptops or devices. Or even if they have devices, it’s got a cracked screen.” Access to necessary infrastructure, such as working devices and reliable wifi, was often a barrier to people trying to make the virtual shift.

At Britannia’s 55+ Centre, the importance of helping their community of seniors to make the shift online was not lost on the team. 55+ Programmer Daniel Cook says, “I was confident that I would be able to learn what I needed to learn [to set up virtual programming]. I was more worried, as a team, what we would do for the seniors that don’t have the money to be able to get a device, that don’t know how to call Telus to set up internet in their homes.” Getting connected online began with ensuring baseline access to the technology, access that was not equitably distributed among Britannia’s community. “Remember; people don’t have the money to buy a cell phone or a computer,” continues Diane Champagne, “so even if you teach them, there needs to be that money, that access. And you might give them a computer and they can’t afford wifi. So, there’s a whole raft of things that need to happen for our most disadvantaged populations; not just Elders, but people in poverty.” SEA committee member Cylia Wong observes a similar trend, “some of the gaps I saw as COVID unfolded were; various levels of income, that’s obvious, and various levels of technology. Technology is a gap. It relates to money, right? Ability to pay.” From the data collected in the preliminary survey distributed amongst 55+ members, Britannia was able to anticipate this access gap and acquire and distribute gently used phones and pre-paid data cards from Telus. Other gaps in access were filled by similar device drives and fundraising efforts, but a lack of structural support limited these initiatives to stopgap measures.

Britannia’s information and outreach efforts throughout COVID-19 reflected an awareness of these gaps in access to digital technologies and, thus, did not limit themselves to online communication. 55+ Programmer Anne Cowan emphasizes that, “we work hard to not forget those in the cracks that aren’t being reached. So we did weekly handouts that went out with the food baskets.” 55+ Program Assistant Kya Prince recalls the impact of similar analog communications; “A lot of pos-

itive feedback we were able to get was from when we did that little postcard handout and the Britannia newsletter. Another active way that all community centres get in touch is brochures. Not everyone has time or remembers or knows how to get onto the Britannia website or the Facebook groups. Having those one-pager update sheets to stuff in the food boxes was really crucial.” At a time when much of the information emerging from Federal and Provincial Health Authorities was distributed online, Britannia doubled down on “old school print outs,” Mitra Tshan recalls, “we literally printed things out and highlighted it.” These efforts point to an awareness of the digital divide and an unwillingness to leave behind those who, because of barriers to access or education, are not able to make the shift online. This mentality was integral to Britannia’s response, as Anne Cowan explains, “part of that is if you don’t have internet or you’re not interested in internet; here’s the other way to do it.”

Spreading the word about Britannia’s virtual programming proved to be another challenge for the 55+ Programming Team. Although some seniors and Elders were staying connected over social media, the platforms were limited in their ability to reach the wider community. “Social media is great,” explains Anne Cowan, “but not everyone has social media. A lot of times those people that don’t have it are the ones most in-need.” Here, again, word-of-mouth communication became relevant; “Just word-of-mouth, too,” Cowan continues, “I remember, more than once, someone said ‘I have a neighbor, who’s in her nineties and I know she’s never been to Britannia and I know she doesn’t have social media, can you help her too?’” Despite the outreach efforts of the Britannia staff, some community members still felt isolated. “I still have such a low understanding of technology that I’ve been completely isolated from any programming from Britannia,” says Diane Champagne, who understands that she’s not alone, “I would imagine there’s an enormous number of Elders who would have gone to Elders programs, but now everybody’s relying on digital links, where a lot of these people only understand phone calls. Texting, even, would be a stretch for some of these people.” The absence of sufficient structural support in addressing the digital divide means that the access and education efforts at Britannia are limited by the capacity of their staff, who are already managing their own learning curves around virtual programming.

**“part of that is if you don’t have internet or you’re not interested in internet; here’s the other way to do it.”**

East Van Resilient, Version 1, 2019.

For the community seniors and Elders who have been able to join Britannia's virtual programming, the importance of social connection during this pandemic cannot be understated. "To get the Elders online and doing their crafting and their beading; that is enormous!" observes Mitra Tshan, "I don't think you understand how huge that is for them." This impact goes well beyond Britannia, as Diane Champagne exclaims, "I learned how to get onto Zoom and that's been freakin' awesome! I've taken university courses from Ireland on Irish mythology and I'm part of a group that's very involved with Reconciliation. Now that I'm on Zoom, this has opened up a world of free courses." There's also a personal aspect of this; "Now these Elders are not feeling as isolated; they've also learned how to Zoom and FaceTime with their families," continues Tshan, "It's not just one aspect of being online, it's all of it." For Champagne, her experience on both sides of the digital divide has emphasized the importance of technological education; "I think there should be an enormous incentive; 'this is what you can access if you're willing to learn about computers. And we'll teach you.' One-to-ones would be really incredible." While more and more of Britannia's 55+ community are joining in virtual programming, the digital divide remains a stark presence in the community.

Looking ahead to the integration of virtual and in-person programming, Kya Prince stresses the importance of remembering the lessons of this time. "Technology's only going to advance," Prince says, "and the digital divide is only going to get wider so I think that closing the digital divide should be a top priority regardless of 'in case of' scenarios." For Prince, 'closing the digital divide' requires a comprehensive approach "that goes hand-in-hand with interest in [virtual] programs – we did have a computer literacy program here, on site, but it needs to go beyond that. Not just answering questions on how to use a desktop device or your smart phone, but closing the digital divide goes into what kind of internet access do you have at home, do you have a phone provider, do you have questions that your landlord can answer if you live in an apartment building? Getting those devices to vulnerable members; not just to seniors but to youth as well." This requires systematic change beyond what Britannia can affect locally, as Anne Cowan questions, "on a provincial level, why isn't it that, as part of your rent, there's an internet connection? I think there needs to be responsibility that the City has open, public wifi in all community centres and why not BC housing, why not First Nations housing, why not seniors homes? If you're building a seniors home, why is it not your responsibility to include internet?" Internet connectivity, as evidenced over the past year, is more than just a convenience. "Get-

**“If you're building a seniors home, why is it not your responsibility to include internet?”**

ting people online comes first," Prince continues, "We're leaving some people behind and that's not really acceptable. This has just shown that internet is not a utility anymore," "It's a necessity!" Finishes Cowan. Although the necessary change goes beyond Britannia's community, it needs to be informed by local conditions. One such condition that Britannia's seniors and Elders highlight is the mis-assumption of where the work needs to begin, of baseline access; "It's not where you think it is, you know," says Diane Champagne, "It's there for anyone, let's say, under fifty. But not for the rest of your population." Another key lesson learned over the last year at Britannia is to not overlook analog communication, such as word-of-mouth and paper informatics. "We can't just keep advancing and expecting people to learn it on their own," Kya Prince cautions, "If we're going to take away physical mediums that a huge chunk of our society is used to, then we're going to need to pony up and help that demographic access digital mediums." Being informed by local conditions means that there's necessarily a personal element to broad systemic change. For Champagne, this comes to the forefront in why she wanted to contribute her story to this project in the first place; "There's a huge segment of our population that's extremely isolated by COVID. So, by me sharing what my experience of not knowing all of this and what I've had to go through – that I went through six months of isolation with five visitors, and I'm probably more social than some of the Elders out there – that this would be useful information to helping our most isolated people."

## Additional Resources for Seniors and Elders

As with the other actions taken during the response, one of the most impactful functions that Britannia provided was in connecting its community to additional support services, and acting as a 'referral' agency to connect the community members with the resources, education or other support that they were in need of. Resources were shared with community members through the online platforms, as well as a weekly print-out that was included with the Home Food Deliveries. These resources connected seniors, not only with community programming, but also with essential services such as physical and mental health support, food, connections to community, and housing services.

- The SEA committee connected its Elders to other online community programs hosted by UBC Learning Centre, DTES Women's Centre, REACH Indigenous Programming, as well as YMCA computer classes.
- Assistance was provided to over 200 seniors and families to help them file their income tax and receive tax returns for that year (at a time when many were in need of financial relief)
- Seniors were assisted with registration with the Office of Seniors Advocate
- Vietnamese Seniors Program assisted seniors and families with their essential needs, such as picking up medications, groceries, and referring to other programs such as Emergency Home Food Delivery through Britannia's COVID-19 Food Centre.



# BRITANNIA'S COVID-19 FOOD CENTRE



## Summary

Food was identified as one of the primary essential services that would need to be provided to community members, in a state of lockdown. In the second week of the lockdown, Britannia's COVID-19 Food Centre, in collaboration with the Grandview-Woodland Food Connection, was created to organize Emergency Home Food Deliveries and address food insecurity in the community. Emergency Home Food Delivery was just one component of Britannia's COVID-19 Food Centre, which also coordinated food waste recovery, meal preparation and food distribution at all levels of the local food chain.

Through Britannia's COVID-19 Food Centre, coordinated by staff and powered by volunteers, was the collection, assembly, coordination and delivery of weekly food hampers to households in need of food and other supplies. The food hampers were also used as a necessary means of communication to some residents, who otherwise were out of touch or not in communication via online methods (printed handouts with resources, services, and updates were included in the hampers).

The success of the food delivery program, through Britannia's COVID-19 Food Centre was the result of incredible support from and collaboration with different partners, donors, funders, and co-collaborators. The program relied entirely on donations in both food and financial form from local businesses, community groups, urban farms, as well as community members. A GoFundMe page was launched in the third week of the lockdown, followed by the acquiring of the first of a series of federal food grants, in the fourth week.

Food was donated, collected, grown, and purchased to create the food hampers that were delivered daily, by car and by bicycle, to households in the surrounding neighborhoods. Individuals were referred to the food delivery program by word-of-mouth, through Britannia's ongoing programs, as well as by countless other organizations with which Britannia has connections and relationships.

- \$242,000 raised by hundreds of community members, local organizations, funders and critical federal government COVID relief support.
- 180 volunteers
- 6125 volunteer hours
- 1600 individuals supported
- 9120 food boxes delivered
- 319,200 lb of food (60% purchased, 40% donated or recovered)
- 20+ community organizations, acting as referral agencies to connect community members in need
- 40+ community partners provided food donations or financial support





# GRANDVIEW-WOODLAND FOOD CONNECTION

The Grandview-Woodland Food Connection (GWFC), established in 2004 in partnership with Britannia, functions as a community food hub in the inner-city neighborhood of Grandview-Woodland and Strathcona. GWFC works to address social concerns of inclusion, health, and economic well-being through the development and support of grassroots initiatives to address food security issues.

GWFC is working to develop a full continuum of integrated food programming, including a primary focus on the needs of low income community members, that supports capacity building through various engagement and inclusive approaches. The primary initiatives include the establishment of school food and community gardens, affordable bulk buying groups, food preparation and preservation workshops, and community kitchens. GWFC is dedicated to supporting the health and well-being of all residents and in particular, those most vulnerable living in Grandview-Woodland and nearby neighborhoods, by promoting an inclusive, accessible, just, and sustainable food system. GWFC seek to build capacity of the neighborhood through education, information sharing, and the creation of grassroots initiatives to address food security and justice issues.

## Experience

The initial citywide lockdowns in March 2020 had a major impact on community access to food, exacerbating longstanding food insecurity in the Grandview-Woodland and Strathcona Neighborhoods. From its pre-existing partnership with the Grandview-Woodland Food Connection, Britannia understood that this access gap would need to be addressed with an emergency food program that could deliver groceries and meals to those who were self-isolating or who did not feel safe leaving their homes for crowded supermarkets or food bank lines. The need for an emergency food program was widely recognized throughout the Britannia community, notes Britannia Executive Director Cynthia Low, “our partners on-site were already connected to families who were food insecure like the school providing meals to students, but they didn’t have the infrastructure [to deliver food] and families had to come every day to pick up the lunches.” Grandview-Woodland Food Connection’s Ian Marcuse saw the potential of a crisis as access to food dwindled; “Many households had no access to food. Seniors and Elders were locked in and the food bank shut down temporarily. Grocery store delivery was backed up for weeks and of course there were those long line ups.” Girls Who LEAP mentor Mitra Tshan recognized that the closure of schools and cancellation of spring break programming would compound the problem. “Remember, the school feeds the kids half of the time,” Mitra Tshan points out, “so now, all of a sudden, you’ve got four or five kids under your roof that normally get fed at school.” “I realize that there are other food-bank kinds of things, but the food bank has moved to Burnaby,” notes community member and Food Centre volunteer Cylia Wong, “there are other agencies, but they don’t offer delivery.” Under provincial health orders to stay at home, Britannia recognized that their food program would need to be a delivery service. Ian Marcuse recalls that “Britannia

**Britannia immediately understood that there’s a need out there and that food is an essential service; supporting our seniors, elders and youth is critical so let’s just do it**

immediately understood that there’s a need out there and that food is an essential service; supporting our seniors, elders and youth is critical so let’s just do it.” Britannia’s COVID-19 Food Centre was organized and operated in partnership with the Grandview-Woodland Food Connection, a longstanding community partner and advocate for food security citywide. With staffing capacity at Britannia uncertain, the Food Centre relied on volunteers to get up and running. “When we started operating the food distribution program we did not know how long it would last,” recalls Volunteer Coordinator Yao Zhang, “so when I sent the call-out and was speaking with volunteers, I gave them my best estimate, you know, ‘the next two to

three months.” “Ian had started the emergency distribution Food Centre, which was an enormous task and was putting in long hours and relying on volunteers,” remembers Susy Bando, who was reassigned from her position as Rink Programmer to assist in

coordinating the Food Centre. “There was a realization that the food centre needed more support, so I was asked to assist in the Food Centre, ‘we need help staffing it, giving orientations and Ian needs time off.’ ‘Of course, I was willing to assist.’ ‘They needed help with administrative tasks, sourcing food donations, supporting other logistics, I really tried to assist in every way I could.’” Uncertainty was commonplace as the Food Centre started operations. Cylia Wong, volunteer, explains that, “I was working full days at the beginning, because they didn’t have a lot of volunteers. When you don’t know what’s happening, it’s kind of risky: do you take the bus? All the safety protocols weren’t in place at the time.” As with the Wellness Calls to 55+ members, volunteer recruitment was a continuous learning experience for all involved. “There were a bunch of people who turned up to their first shift and said ‘the boxes are too heavy, I have a back problem,’ remembers Yao Zhang, “so then we learned to screen for that.”

More information on the Grandview-Woodland Food Connection can be found here: <https://gwfoodconnection.com/>.

Wong explains the attitude that enabled her to continue volunteering with the program; “I just take things in stride. I showed up, I got training, you know, in the protocols of washing your hands and wearing a mask and gloves. The safety protocols changed as the requirements changed. The City is very aware of what the health orders are, so a few things got adapted as time progressed. That was ok. You just go with it.” Diane Champagne, a recipient of the food program, emphasizes the hard work of the volunteers; “the team, too, I mean they’re hauling groceries around on bicycles! In the pouring rain! They are devoted, kind, loving people. Really amazing volunteers.”

Volunteer turnover was a regular occurrence in Britannia’s COVID-19 Food Centre. “Two months became three months, three months become four months, four months become five months; we have gone through a lot,” continues Yao Zhang, “people’s commitments changed, people’s lives changed. So we are constantly in the process of recruiting people. If people stayed with us for a month, that’s pretty good.” For Cylia Wong, however, “the experience has been really good. I often have to train people now, since I have been there from the beginning.” Having a balance between new and experienced volunteers has enabled Zhang to give volunteers the flexibility they need to feel comfortable with the work. “So the people we get to volunteer in March for a couple months might then quit,” explains Zhang, “because they’re going back to work or whatnot. Or people who commit a lot then take a break and then want to come back; we have a lot of those. We have people who did not reply to the first five call-outs for volunteers and are now available. And you also have people who initially responded and I said ‘no’ because we were good.” While volunteers themselves were coming and going, the work they were doing was consistent and rigorous. “They’re working their butts off hauling those bicycles around,” reiterates Diane Champagne, “I really want to acknowledge those volunteers.”

Recipients of the Emergency Home Food Delivery program were contacted through a variety of networks. The 55+ Wellness Check-Ins were able to refer isolated seniors to the program and youth were often a family’s first point of contact. Juan Gamez was one recipient who initially heard about the program through his kids. “A lady at the school district, she knows the kids within the community and in the Spanish community, in particular,” recalls Juan Gamez, “she called up my wife and

said, ‘If you are running into hard times with this pandemic, there’s going to be a food program. If you want to participate, you are welcome to do so.’” For Gamez, it was critical that the invitation allowed the family to determine their own needs; “they were not saying ‘go ahead and do it’ they were asking families if they want to become a part [of the program].” Britannia’s COVID-19 Food Centre was, necessarily, a relief-model program and it was key to lead with respect for the ability of community members to self-determine their own food security. Gamez’ family was on and off the program throughout the summer months, in accordance with their needs. It was when COVID-related layoffs hit the hardest that “we took that opportunity and saw it as something that could help us out through this process.”

Another key focus of Britannia’s COVID-19 Food Centre was the nutritional quality of the food it was distributing. For Diane Champagne, who was invited to the delivery program through her sons’ past volunteering experience with Ian Marcuse, “I couldn’t have afforded the fruits and vegetables I was getting. The food that was being dropped off was organic, it

**“The food that was being dropped off was organic, it was fresh. Not to mention the bags of organic grains; lentils. All of a sudden, I’ve got sunflower seeds and pumpkin seeds and dried fruits. My quality of life went up!”**

was fresh. Not to mention the bags of organic grains; lentils. All of a sudden, I’ve got sunflower seeds and pumpkin seeds and dried fruits. My quality of life went up!” Juan Gamez underscores the importance of healthy eating habits throughout the pandemic. “They have provided us with a lot of good foods, good meals,” continues Gamez, “to get all the vitamins and all the things you need on a day-to-day basis: that’s something they emphasize and I was very glad they did. It makes you aware exactly what is good to eat, nowadays, to be strong and that your body gets what it needs to prevent sickness from coming on.” “There was some pre-cooked meals, because I wasn’t well enough to be cooking for myself,” reiterates Champagne, emphasizing the Emergency Home Food Delivery program’s responsiveness to her needs, “there were all the things I needed, because COVID takes a toll on your stomach. When I could eat, it had to be light vegetarian stuff, fruit and vegetables. And that’s what most of the food was! I’m pretty sure that food saved my freakin’ life.” While the food delivery itself was an emergency stop-gap measure, a safety net addressing food insecurity in the Britannia community, the emphasis on healthy eating habits contributes to the larger project of building community food security. During a time of elevated health risk, the Food Centre’s commitment to providing nutritious food was essential to the well-being of delivery recipients.

With many food distribution centres closed in the initial wave of lockdowns, Britannia's COVID-19 Food Centre expanded their network of support for community members beyond the local Grandview-Woodland and Strathcona Neighborhoods. The expansion of the food program beyond the Britannia catchment area is indicative of Britannia's holistic understanding of community and family. "I have a daughter who is in Surrey who can't be a part of the Britannia program," explains Diane Champagne, "but every time she comes over, she has five children and their backpacks are full going back." Distribution of support through familial networks is difficult to measure, but Champagne asserts that such sharing is a core value of her community; "You can't just give someone a food box and expect it to stay here. It travels to every part of the family, it gets spread out to the community. By helping an Indigenous family, you're helping your community. It's that holistic approach." It was through such informal networks, by word-of-mouth, that information of Britannia's COVID-19 Food Centre spread. With Britannia as a neighborhood fixture for so many years, families who have since moved to other parts of the city returned to the Centre for support. "I get calls from people in Burnaby and New Westminster and Coquitlam," explains Ian Marcuse the lack of food delivery in other parts of the city, "there's no program for them where they get home delivery and they don't want to go outside, to the food bank, because they have compromised health." "We had one family from South Van," recalls Mitra Tshan, "that drove in every single day when we had food, because they weren't getting that amount of support at other sites that were completely on lockdown." "We were serving people in Burnaby and the West End and in New West," says 55+ Programmer Anne Cowan, who notes that the structural capacity for this holistic approach "comes from having a shared strategic plan [for standard operations] ahead of time and [understanding that] community comes first. That's helped us keep that going." The continuous expansion of Emergency Home Food Delivery beyond the Britannia catchment area, for Marcuse, was an indication that this service needed to be scaled up; "We're only serving 560 households, it's not like we're doing thousands. But we could have!" Britannia's COVID-19 Food Centre had the infrastructure and volunteer capacity to scale up, according to Marcuse, "we were prepared to move into the ice rink, bring in more refrigeration, more staff and we'll deliver to two thousand families if we needed to— that's over six thousand people we could have helped with just a little extra support. That's

**When our emergency Food Centre closes, the gap will still be there. Ultimately people need proper income supports so they are not left in such vulnerable circumstances**

what it would have taken. And that's not inconceivable." Despite the imminent need, however, the structural support and funding for the Food Centre from the City was limited. Despite these constraints, Britannia strove to support the broader community network beyond its catchment area. "Those people contacted Britannia because they still feel that it's their community centre," emphasizes 55+ Programmer Daniel Cook, "it also says something about Britannia that they said 'yes, we will accommodate all the people we can, whenever we can.'"

The impact of Britannia's Food Centre is limited by the relief-model it adopted as an emergency stopgap in response to food insecurity during the initial COVID-19 lockdowns. This model, Ian Marcuse understands, is not sustainable on a community level. "Emergency food relief is not part of our mandate," Marcuse says of the Grandview-Woodland Food Connection, "but, because it's an emergency, if we can help decrease people's stress at this critical time, we'll do it. But that's not what we want to keep doing." "It's a temporary measure," agrees Cylia Wong, "Ian has always stated, up front, that he doesn't like to have to do this." What Britannia's COVID-19 Food Centre has been able to offer should be the baseline for food security throughout the city, whether in times of emergency or not. Baseline food security implies stable funding, full-time staffing and infrastructural support in place prior to crisis. As COVID-19 has highlighted, "there are no systems in place for this kind of service – the service includes door-to-door safe delivery. So people have been warned," continues Wong, "that [Britannia's COVID-19 Food Centre]

is only temporary. Depending on if Ian can find money or not, we'll see if the program proceeds." With other community organizations returning to regular operations, Britannia can focus its partnership with the Grandview-Woodland Food Connection to

build up comprehensive community food security. Marcuse warns that, "when our emergency Food Centre closes, the gap will still be there. Ultimately people need proper income supports so they are not left in such vulnerable circumstances." This sentiment has been echoed by recipients of the program, many of whom are not ready to return to the 'business as usual' that, for many, means food insecurity. The impending closure of the Food Centre, however, does not diminish the impact that it has made during such a crucial time. "In essence," reflects Wong, "people are grateful that there is this service and that someone stepped up to do this. Ian saw the need and he just spearheaded it and he got it going."

# FOOD SECURITY & COMMUNITY

Over the past 25 years, Britannia Community Services Centre has been a leader in building awareness around food security in the community and across the city. This journey began, in large part, with Britannia's first flagship community event; the Stone Soup Festival. Inaugurated in 1995, this celebration of the work of community members in the food sector was organized by residents mindful of the long-term importance of food security. The onset of COVID-19 before this Stone Soup's twenty-fifth anniversary offers an opportunity to reflect on Britannia's efforts towards comprehensive food security as well as a chance to strategize how best to direct these efforts moving forward.

Even with a quarter-century of food security advocacy at the community level, COVID-19 has revealed a substantial disparity in secure and reliable access to food throughout the Britannia community. Grandview-Woodland Food Connection's Ian Marcuse points out that, "COVID revealed critical weaknesses in our food system, whether our food supply chains or resulting socio-economic inequity." The fundamental link between socio-economic well-being and basic food security was evident when many food distribution centres, including food banks, shut down in response to the first wave of COVID-19 in Vancouver, at a time when safe access to food was most necessary. "Food is a basic need. Shelter is a basic need," recognizes community member Cylia Wong, "these kinds of things are not being met for everybody."

When Britannia's Food Centre began providing necessary food security in the form of an Emergency Home Food Delivery program to its community, another link between socio-economic well-being and basic food security became evident. "Because of the food deliveries," explains community member Diane Champagne, "I've been able to cover my bills. Otherwise, on regular disability and even though I'm in subsidized housing, it's a choice between food and bills." In providing basic and safe access to food during the COVID-19 lockdowns, Britannia's COVID-19 Food Centre increased community quality of life. This becomes especially relevant given the limitations to social life and isolating impacts of COVID-19, when continued access to social interaction over digital devices is dependent on the payment of a data plan or wifi bill and, thus, socio-economic well-being. For Diane Champagne, Britannia's Emergency Home Food Delivery program indirectly mitigated social isolation; "I've managed to get wifi and I've managed to keep it. That came through the food program, you know what I mean? You free up one area, then you can actually live normally."

Looking forward towards future emergency preparedness, Ian Marcuse suggests that emphasis be placed towards the common root of the social isolation and food insecurity that have been social symptoms of COVID-19. "We need to deal with food insecurity, which means poverty reduction," implores Marcuse, "and we would rather put resources into programs that aren't about food insecurity. Our program should not be about food insecurity; that's a government problem that needs to be solved with government policy." Marcuse says that organizations at the community-level, such as the Grandview-Woodland Food Connection, are best equipped to build food security in the broader sense of building community well-being through food rather than provide stopgaps for unaddressed insecurity. "Typically, our mandate is skill-building, education, skill-sharing, capacity-building around food," explains Marcuse, "it's not necessarily about directly addressing poverty, it does indirectly address poverty but that should be dealt with."

**“Food is a basic need. Shelter is a basic need,” “these kinds of things are not being met for everybody”**

The necessary structural support for a better pandemic response includes proper funding for food programmers for every neighborhood in the city. "Resourcing the community food sector at this level would make Vancouver a world leader in community food security... by far," says Ian Marcuse, adding that "these 22 positions could be funded with less than 1% of the annual police budget, the equivalent of \$1.8 million." This would build the necessary stability for educational programs around healthy eating and more capacity for things like urban food gardens. "That's just the human resources part of it," continues Marcuse, "then you've got to grow food locally – that's a whole other conversation. But you [first] need the human capacity. You need the humans to make the connections with urban farmers, with food storage and distribution throughout the food chain and all the other work that goes into getting healthy food to the people who need it the most." "There's a lot of food that gets thrown out," adds Cylia Wong, referring to another element of food insecurity in the City. "Ian has been using food runners for rescue food, even more so now because local restaurants are not getting enough patrons, even when they're back up and running, there will still be food waste; there always is." Prior to, through and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, safe and reliable access to food remains a basic need both in the Britannia community and city-wide. "There's always been a need for more food security," continues Wong, "certain populations just don't get taken seriously."

The impact of community development in food security is difficult to measure, given the educational and cyclical nature of building awareness around all necessary components of the food system. “This past year,” continues Ian Marcuse, “we were going to celebrate our twenty-fifth anniversary, a quarter century of food security, of the Stone Soup festival. We are thinking; let’s bring closure to this festival up, let’s celebrate our quarter decade of food security programming, let’s go out with a bang, let’s do something really special. I think we’ve accomplished a lot in our community, we’ve helped changed the culture around food.” This cultural shift towards a community more aware and engaged around food security is evident in the plans for Britannia’s upcoming Site Renewal, to

which a new Food Hub is an essential component. “We have not had to make a strong case for this [new] Food Hub,” explains Marcuse, “Britannia has recognized that food is a core program and everyone sees how central food is in our lives.” As for the Stone Soup festival, it’s twenty-fifth year may be its last. In light of the impact Britannia was able to make during COVID-19, Marcuse sees a new opportunity to integrate the teachings of the Stone Soup festival into a broader celebration of community life. “Let’s get other departments at Britannia involved. I would love to see this festival get all of our partners involved and create something broader about social change...celebrating what is great about our community but building awareness around the crises we’re going to face in the future.”



**“There’s always been a need for more food security, certain populations just don’t get taken seriously.” - Cylia Wond Food Centre Volunteer**



# SUPPORT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE & FAMILIES

Photo By: Lung

# FAMILY AT BRITANNIA

## Summary

Britannia's support for families through the lockdown was unique, and speaks to the interconnectedness of Britannia with its community. Throughout the response, support for community members often results individually, through a friend, a neighbor, or another family member. Due to the close relationship that Britannia, and its partner organizations have with the community, word-of-mouth and the use of existing relationships to disseminate information and connect with more members in need allowed the services to reach and service families. This occurred for all ages and types of family, but especially those with young children and teens, who had existing and ongoing relationships with Britannia, and other closely connected organizations. When the schools closed, many of the services normally provided to youth and families, such as hot meal programs were halted, so it was essential that those involved in the response found ways to connect with family members, creatively.

- Support for parents and access emergency food resources, employment search, and assistance in applying for emergency government assistance
- First-Language support for parents, including information about Covid-19, and access to additional resources
- Support for families and youth with temporary or no immigration status to find resources that were available for them, especially for those more at-risk or facing unemployment
- Provision of food and other necessary items to youth and families, such as school supplies, and cleaning supplies
- Britannia's Child Care Hub remained open for children of front line/essential workers and for at-risk children
- 80% of the camps were offered for free to the community, as many members have been severely impacted financially
- Latin American Youth Program connected youth and families to support through the Spanish Multicultural Liaison Workers at Vancouver School Board when schools were closed.

## Experience

Since its inception in the 1970s, life at Britannia Community Centre has provided support to all aspects of the family life cycle. Britannia's current Executive Director, Cynthia Low, recalls what drew her to this community; "I started working here twelve years ago, in part because I saw this community as being a place where particularly marginalized women and children living in poverty or with intergenerational trauma could succeed and be accepted and aspire for theirs and their family's future." Volunteer Coordinator Yao Zhang, in addition to his professional relationship with the Centre, highlights the role that Britannia plays in his family life.

"We interact with the facilities on a daily basis," he reflects on his interactions with Britannia prior to COVID, "we were here all the time. Work and play here; that's exactly what it is." That staff members such as Cynthia

and Yao also connect with the Centre as members of the Britannia community underscores the strong foundation that Britannia provides for families in the nearby neighborhoods. "Community centres are very important when it comes to family engagement," says community members Juan Gamez, "they fulfill some of the gaps in activities that kids may have, outside of school curriculum. Having a community centre that gets involved with the fami-

ly and gets the family involved with the community is a plus." The strengthening of relationships and building of trust both with youth and with their families over the years was a key factor in the success of the Response.

Over the years, the Britannia Centre has grown alongside the community members that call it home. Kya Prince reflects on how important the sense of community that Britannia has brought to her family life; community is a really strong foundation and sense of being. My Grandmother set her roots here, in the Lower Main-

land. Then she had my mom, and my mom had me and my siblings. So this is a community that we have grown our roots and have spread out in. Being off-reserve, you feel that sense of missing something, since your culture and your family and your relatives are

so far away. My Grandmother did a really great job of making sure we weren't lacking in that by being in constant contact with our relatives from home but also creating contacts and that sense of family here. And so a big joke is that Britannia can't get rid of me, because I keep coming back to it through all stages of my life.

**“Community is a really strong foundation and sense of being.”**

Prince, who now works as a Program Assistant with the 55+ staff team has lived in the Grandview-Woodland area from early childhood, attended Britannia daycare and Britannia High School and graduated from the Outreach program. In her professional life, she has landed back at Britannia and continued working with the Centre's various departments for over seven years. In many ways, she is exemplary of a natural life cycle at Britannia that is widely recognized throughout the community. Fellow 55+ Programmer Daniel Cook offers similar insights from his own journey through the Britannia community; "When I was at UNYA; those same youths that I worked with, who would be walking to the library at Britannia, who would be registered for classes at Britannia; they're young adults now. Britannia is such a big part of growing up in the community." Rink Programmer Susy Bando is another staff member whose family story is deeply embedded in Britannia. "My grandmother was born in East Vancouver," explains Bando, "she went to Britannia High School in the [19]30s but then she and her family moved back to Japan. It is nice to work at Britannia, seeing that original structure, with the knowledge that my grandmother and her six siblings went to that school." "I see generations coming through," says Girls Who LEAP mentor Mitra Tshan, "I'm not that old, but when I say this it's because everyone is related in one way or another and people stay in the neighborhoods because they know where the resources are and where they can plug into if they need assistance in some way. So I've seen families from when their kids are born to when they've graduated and are coming back to help and work. There's that natural cycle." This natural cycle speaks to the integration of family and community life, an impact which is summarized by Daniel Cook as "your neighbor is your neighbor, but also family." Britannia's roots in the life cycle of the community have made it, in the words of 55+ Programmer Anne Cowan, "a community based on the people who live there, from birth until death."

Prior to COVID-19, Britannia's opportunities for the whole family would attract members from all parts of the city, from all walks of life. Although Juan Gamez lives outside the Grandview-Woodland Neighborhood, he explains, "I didn't mind to go a little farther to Britannia, as long as the kids were actually doing something. Commercial [Drive], it's not that far and the facilities are much bigger there; they have a soccer field, basketball [courts] and a lot of activities going on. It's a full Centre." For Diane Champagne, Britannia played "a vital role for both myself and my children. Because we were so low income, my kids took programs there – one of my sons took hockey training for youth. I was a single mother of six with no car and it was vital, just vital." The scale of Britannia's family impact prior to COVID-19 set a precedent for the scope of Britannia's

response; it had to account for the entire family and, with classes suspended halfway through the school year, special focus had to be placed on keeping the kids engaged.

Britannia's Emergency Home Food Delivery was one such COVID-19 response action that took the whole family into account. "For me and for the family," says Juan Gamez, "we have all had the joy of being part of the [Emergency Home Food Delivery] program. That helps not only me, but my two kids and my wife." "My health and my sons' health has gone up, has skyrocketed because of the fresh fruit and vegetables" from the Emergency Home Food Delivery program, emphasizes Diane Champagne. "They've been really committed," reiterates Juan Gamez, "they even asked, 'do you guys need some extra food? Just give us that call, just follow up with us so that we can supplement some extra food for the family.' We've been very grateful." The support that Juan and his family have received has encouraged him to recommend Britannia's services to other families he sees struggling. "Let's say we see a family that's in great need," says Gamez, "we always indicate that they can approach [Britannia] for any assistance, because we receive it. If a family may need some assistance, depending on what it is – involving the kids in programs or any other thing we can help with – we can pass along that information. In the long run, communication-wise, it's the best way to get the word around." During the first waves of the pandemic, word-of-mouth was integral to making sure that families received the support they needed. In spreading the word, families too played an important role. Greater levels of trust between parents and youth coordinators meant that essential support, such as emergency food deliveries, could get to those who needed it most. Mitra Tshan recalls, "we had kids at our summer camps bringing home more than one bag for their neighbor because I can't get a hold of them because everyone is home right now 24/7 and they've disconnected all their phones so they don't need to pay the bills or there's no wifi or there's only one laptop between six kids. That informal way of communication has been massive."

Although COVID-19 has interrupted much of Britannia's family programming, the Centre has continued to make family a priority across its response. This emphasis is not lost on the community; "we are very grateful," Juan Gamez says, "being part of this community and for Britannia being a part of our family as well." Yao Zhang, who has been heavily involved in various parts of Britannia's response, demonstrates the continued involvement of the family at the Centre despite COVID-related programming restrictions; "we're still working here, still playing here, just a little bit less."



# SUPPORT FOR BRITANNIA'S YOUTH

## Summary

Over 250 youth were supported by Britannia throughout the lockdown. As one of the primary groups identified prior to the lockdown, Britannia staff understood that direction action would need to be taken to ensure that youth were connected both with one another, and with Britannia, and that they were provided with the social, emotional, and technical support needed to transition to online schooling and socializing. As with the great effort put forth through the response, relationships with community partners were essential. Multiple online methods were used to connect youth; Safe online spaces were created for youth to chat with one another, and with Youth Programmers. Social media (Facebook) was also used to provide support information and services to youth, especially concerning mental health and wellness. Britannia programming pivoted quickly to provide online programs for youth, as well as to offer safe, outdoor sports activities and in-person classes in the Fall. In addition to online communication methods, Britannia staff also made phone calls to families and youth during the lockdown to provide emotional support, connection, and information about access to additional resources when needed.

- Connection to support and resources for mental health services
- Support for families and youth during their back to school transition, continued throughout completion of school year online
- Online group chats, safe online hang-out spaces, one-on-one support, online workshops, programs, and activities.
- Support for graduating highschool students to help complete graduation requirements, complete college applications, and to transition out of secondary school.
- Support for youth to find employment
- Latin American Youth programmers connected youth and families with the Vancouver Latin American Cultural Centre, which provided free workshops and cultural activities.

## Experience

When the first wave of lockdowns hit Vancouver, schools were on spring break. Although programming at Britannia over the break was interrupted, the holiday hiatus complicated an immediate response plan for community youth. "Nobody foresaw that this was going to be a long-term deal," remembers Girls Who LEAP mentor Mitra Tshan, "we kind of had an inkling but, we figured, it's still spring break, everyone is still on holidays, you're still in that mode. No one actually thought much about it until we were supposed to come back to school and we weren't coming back to school." For Britannia staff, however, the implications of the citywide lockdowns spurred immediate response. "Week one I was already knocking on doors," continues Mitra Tshan, emphasizing the role that the school's food programs played in family food security, "because the kids are usually in programs where we knew they would get two snacks and a square meal, so we knew they'd at least be fed and taken care of." Given that food security was an integral part of Britannia's immediate COVID-19 Response, by the time that school was scheduled to return from spring break, staff were already putting in motion a comprehensive response that accounted for the interruption of students' food programs.

The high priority of Britannia's Emergency Home Food Delivery program, coupled with limitations on available space at the Centre meant that the youth community lost access to a vital organizing space at a crucial time. 55+ Program Assistant Kya Prince reflects that "the youth community took a huge hit, as well. As incredible and

amazing as it was to get the Food Centre up and running and functioning so quickly and with such support from the community, it was a huge loss to the youth because it's being run out of the youth centre; not that there is really safe programming that could happen. But that loss of connection was really hard." Connection emerged as a key theme in focusing the support programs for youth, especially given the lack of a regular school curriculum following the first wave of lockdowns. One way that this connection was emphasized was in the consistency of online programs offered. "I am big on consistency and a schedule," says Mitra Tshan, "especially when it comes to children and youth. I find that, when they can get into a routine, there's a sense of normalcy for them." With the normal routine of school interrupted, Tshan "scheduled programs at three o'clock every single day, knowing that teenagers like to sleep in. [Programs] looked different every day; could be as simple as work-outs online, we did homework club." Connection also came up in the reciprocal involvement of different age groups in the early programs. "I actually tapped into the alumni to run Homework Club online," Tshan reflects, "because they were done school in April. That was the beauty of things; being creative around it." The transition to online programming benefited from a shared understanding of responsibility that is fundamental to the students' sense of place in the broader Britannia community. "I've always stressed to the kids," Tshan continues, "there's a community supporting you, what are you doing to support your community? That's a similar message no matter if you're

in grade four, to grade twelve to an alumni.” With the normal routines of the school year upended and students looking for ways to stay connected, online programming gave them a chance to give back to their community. The reciprocity here is not lost on Tshan; “our kids get a lot, no doubt about it. They get a lot because they may need it, more than others, but at the same time they value what they have and they understand while others are supporting you, you can still do your part. It doesn’t take money. What it takes is effort and energy. And for you to be conscious and not to feel entitled to it.”

As the weather grew warmer, Britannia took the opportunity to run safely distanced youth programs outdoors. Summer camps, under the City of Vancouver umbrella, were some of the first times that youth met up in person since the initial lockdowns. Britannia’s Youth Programmer Tom Higashio put in the behind-the-scenes work necessary to make possible this return to safe in-person programming. In coming together physically, Tshan saw new opportunities for the youth to make an impact in their community that were not available to them online. “One group knew that folks were spending a lot of time outside,” Tshan reflects, “so they made chalkboards and ‘may or may not have illegally put them up around the parks and playgrounds, providing supplies to allow the youth and the children in the neighborhood to enjoy more activities outside.’ We also built a couple of community book libraries and may have left them in places we weren’t supposed to, but they’re still up around now and have grown their own legacy at this point.” Over the summer, youth programming through Britannia made the most of the opportunity to come together, putting collective time and energy into giving back to the community. The impacts of these programs are visible in the physical objects placed around the city for the community to enjoy, but run much deeper in the lives of the youth who participated.

After the experience of running both springtime online youth programs and outdoor in-person summer camps, the re-institution of stricter health protocols in the Fall was the impetus for Britannia to get creative. “We ran three hundred Girls Who LEAP sessions for neighborhood youth in the Fall,” emphasizes Mitra Tshan, “whether it was a combination of outdoor fitness or indoor basketball or online zoom; we did a lot of blended versions. There were still a lot of isolated youth, so those ones joined us via Zoom while we ran in-person sessions.” The continuity of pro-

gramming throughout the year also offered youth opportunities to support the seniors and Elders, many of whom were self-isolating at home. “In the fall, they dropped even more COVID kits off at seniors centres and care homes,” Tshan recalls, “they made toiletry kits for street stores, they fundraised some money and bought meals to give out, knowing that they couldn’t make the meals like they normally do.” Tshan returns to the theme of giving back, telling that the youth “made a hundred scarves – and that’s coming from the Elders who showed them how to make scarves last year, it’s a reciprocal thing. They wrote letters to the seniors. So they were pretty active in doing different things to contribute back. And that’s not unusual. Being in the middle of a pandemic doesn’t stop it, you’ve just got to find different ways of doing it.” Over the course of a year which upended any sense of normalcy, Britannia’s youth programming engaged younger community members in acts of reciprocity to which they were accustomed. With widespread impacts of the virus on all ages of Britannia’s community, the initiative taken up by Britannia’s youth and youth programmers is especially significant. As Tshan emphasizes, “even the young ones figured out they can still make an impact, during COVID.”

**Being in the middle of a pandemic doesn’t stop it, you’ve just got to find different ways of doing it**

The Britannia High School graduating class of 2020 was particularly impacted by COVID-19, as the initial lockdowns coincided with the very end of their senior year. “It didn’t feel like a chapter had closed for them,” Mitra Tshan observes, stressing the mental and emotional impacts of COVID-19, “it hit a lot of them hard and it still does.” For those starting university in the Fall, COVID-19 radically altered their expectations for what higher education would be. “You go from not imagining what your grade twelve year is going to look like,” Tshan illustrates, “to now, sitting in front of a computer, day-in-day out and staring at a black screen. That is hard. I can’t even do that.” And for those graduates expecting to find work over the summer, “You can’t get a job, who’s going to hire right now?” Recognizing how high school graduation signifies a transition in community roles, Tshan has opened up pathways for the graduating class of 2020 to assist with Britannia’s youth programs. “It’s been one of the hardest transitions for them,” Tshan stresses, “so for them to still feel like they can come back and contribute, giving them that sense of purpose and a little direction is huge, absolutely.” Tshan hopes that the class of 2020’s experience with COVID-19, while difficult, “hopefully coming out of this, they’re going to learn to look at things in different light, in different ways. And not always set on ‘it has to be this way.’ Those are life skills. Those are things

you can take forth after COVID, things that have taught you to move forward and be able to pivot and adjust and not be so rigid in how it's always been done.”

For many of Britannia's youth community, the health orders to stay at home exacerbate difficult living situations that make the continuity of connection and involvement available at the Centre all the more important. “The home is sometimes not a very safe spot for the kids,” reflects Mitra Tshan, “it hasn't been an easy journey. But, having a break in their day or having the support, having men-

tors look after them, having someone that they can turn to and just a little bit of engagement goes a long way.” Awareness of this particular issue provided much of the incentive for Britannia to jumpstart their youth programming during a time when the city was shutting down. “Sometimes the easiest thing to do is close down your doors,” recognizes Tshan, “but when you're working with at-risk youth, with vulnerable youth you should be opening your doors and finding ways. That's one of the things Brit has done really well.”



**“Even the young ones figured out they can still make an impact, during COVID”** - Mitra Tshan, Girls Who Leap

# GIRLS WHO LEAP



Girls Who LEAP is a youth mentorship and empowerment program in partnership with Britannia Community Services Centre that has continued to offer programming throughout the pandemic. In response to the unique challenges brought about by COVID-19, Girls Who LEAP has transitioned from under the City of Vancouver umbrella to a non-profit entity so that it can continue to operate under provincial health orders. Other after school programs, of which Girls Who LEAP was one, have been unable to meet in person since the initial lockdowns in March, 2020. For Mitra Tshan, a Girls Who LEAP mentor, the inability to connect safely in person was limiting the impact of a program that was especially necessary during a pandemic. “[Girls Who LEAP] attempted to go online,” recalls Tshan, “but we had to make sure kids had access to wifi and technology.” The challenge of rapidly switching online was met with support from the wider community. “I was already getting phone calls from folks,” Tshan continues, “funders were asking, ‘how can we help?’ We were really fortunate; we managed to cobble together \$53,000 to buy 180 laptops for the school and community to be delivered by the end of April. So, in less than a month we were able to fundraise and get technology into kids’ hands so that they can 1) start school and 2) join us for online programs.” With the available resources, Girls Who LEAP were able to resume programming in April, 2020 and maintain a consistent online presence into the summer. Mentors, all of them volunteering their time to the program, kept up wellness check-ins each week through the transition online. Amidst the uncertainty of the first wave

More information on Girls Who LEAP can be found at <https://www.girlswholeap.com/>.

of COVID-19, Girls Who LEAP made a significant impact “especially at a time when there’s nothing else running,” emphasizes Tshan, “we deal with this from a holistic perspective; the mental, the spiritual, the physical and the emotional components. When we’re doing our programming, we’re touching on all of them.” Despite the success of the fundraising and continuity of Girls Who LEAP online, Tshan reflects, “I knew I couldn’t reach the ones that were falling through the cracks, the ones that needed it the most. That’s why we ended up going non-profit. We knew we had to at least attempt doing some in-person stuff, even if it was a small group of kids.

While the support for Girls Who LEAP throughout its adaptations to the ‘new normal’ – first to online programming, then to an independent non-profit – was significant, it stood in stark contrast to the lack of support for the program in years prior. “People don’t really realize that there’s always a need, not just during COVID,” says Mitra Tshan, “COVID has brought out all the ‘hey how can I help.’ That need has always been there, it hasn’t just been there because of COVID. There’s been years where I’ve been writing grants left, right and centre – trying to scramble and find some money. All of a sudden, with COVID, there’s all these funders and all these grants – for Christmas people were writing me a thousand dollar check and telling me to put it towards a family who needs it: that has never happened before. It’s been phenomenal to see the generosity of humanity rising up, it really has.” Support for Girls Who LEAP has also come

in the form of community partnerships, “including the place we’re running out of right now. They approached like ‘what do you need?’ ‘We need a space, man.’ So all these folks have been rising up to provide for the youth.” For Tshan, COVID-19 and the outpouring of support has provided the space for Girls Who LEAP “to be more purposeful with what we’re doing. L.E.A.P. Those are the four pillars; Leadership, Empowerment, Action and Purpose.”

One of the ways that fourth pillar, Purpose, has clarified has to do with pivoting and perception. “The world ‘resilience’ is the most over-used word in 2020 and 2021,” Mitra Tshan observes, “so using the words ‘pivot’ and ‘perception’ as our themes, we’re looking at things from different angles. When you talk about what we’re able to do and what we’re unable to do, we’ve pivoted a lot, we’ve had to make a lot of adjustments. And just because it doesn’t look like what it’s supposed to – what you think it’s supposed to look like – it’s okay for things to look a little different.” In articulating this to the girls in the program, Tshan utilizes a helpful analogy; “It doesn’t look like an omelet, you know, but it still tastes like an omelet – that one’s for the kids.”

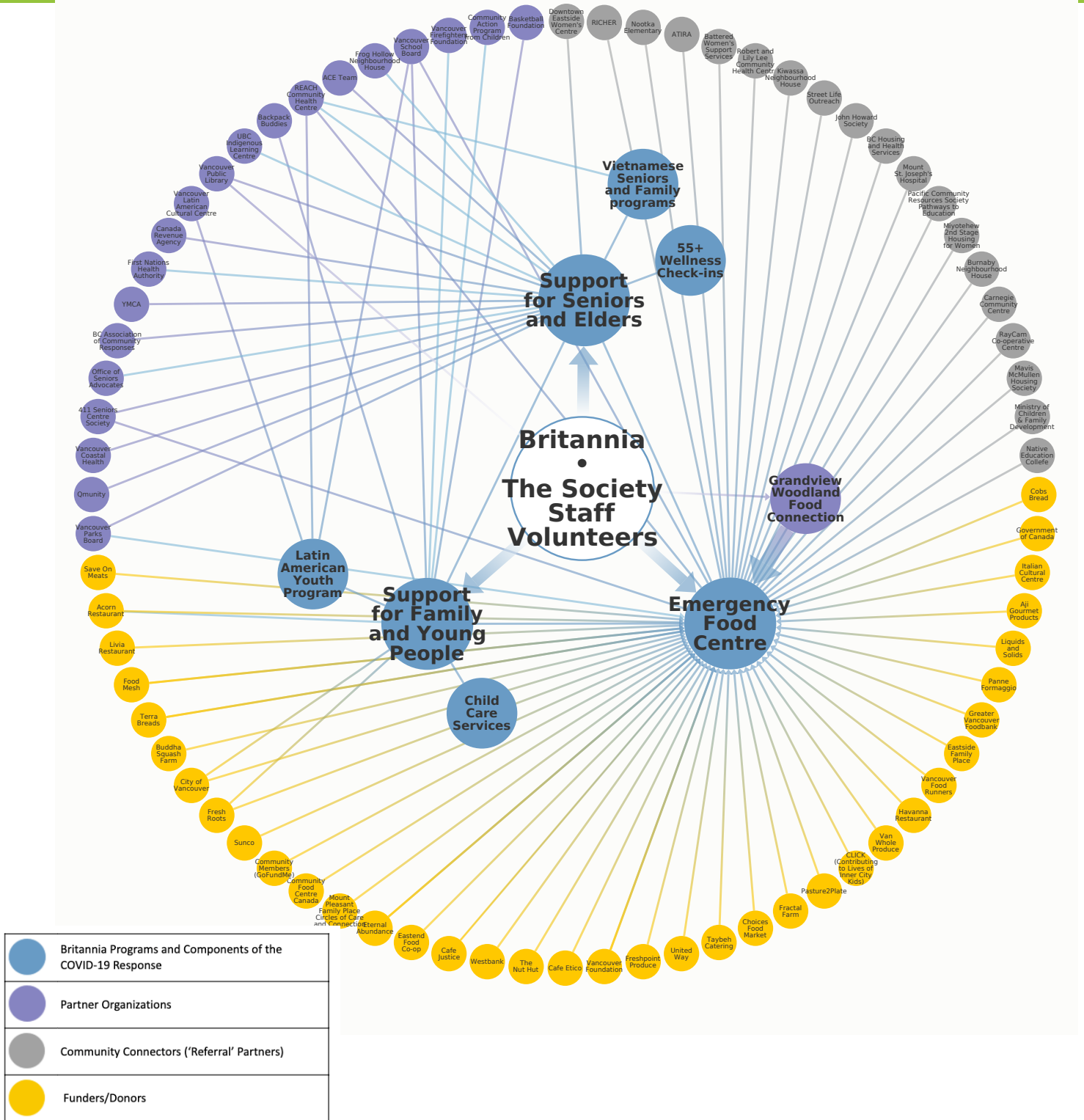
As 2020 drew to a close, “we did a gratitude exercise with the kids. And we asked the kids to write down what they’re thankful for. I went in and looked at them after every session, just to see what they said. The last session, I didn’t, because I was so concentrated on cleaning up – it had been a long week. But I went and took photos of the tree so I can look later. ‘I’m grateful to be alive’ was the last photo I took. And I had to zoom in, because I wasn’t sure if I was reading it right. So it’s been a lot of changes for a lot of these kids. There’s been a lot of stressors, there’s been a lot of anxiety and that’s one of the things that came out of the sessions: ‘I’m grateful for Girls Who LEAP because it gave me a reason to be alive.’ And I realized we were doing the right thing.”

Girls Who LEAP has undergone significant changes since the start of COVID-19, yet has maintained a consistent presence in the lives of the girls who participate. “When everything else seems different and out of the norm,” Mitra Tshan reflects, “this has been the one norm for them.” To balance the demand for the program with provincial health orders, Girls Who LEAP has had to scale up their operations. “Everything we do now, we have to do three, four times,” explains Tshan, “because we’re keeping it in small numbers and we have that many kids, we have to do that much more work.” To assist in this effort, Tshan has turned to recent alumni that have experience with the program and who are grappling with the challenges of graduating high school during a global pandemic. “For them to feel connected and to feel that they can give back in one way or another has been huge. Just tonight, I had a couple of alumni there as mentors. Next week, two of them are heading up our Black History Month, working with the youth. So it’s not anything new, but it does give them a better sense of purpose. And having that chapter not close, but still feeling like they can have added responsibility so they’re not ‘just a youth.’ That stepping stone has been huge for them.”

**“So it’s been a lot of changes for a lot of these kids. There’s been a lot of stressors, there’s been a lot of anxiety and that’s one of the things that came out of the sessions: ‘I’m grateful for Girls Who LEAP because it gave me a reason to be alive.’ And I realized we were doing the right thing.”**



# ACTIVATING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS



This map is a visual representation of the relationships and connections that exist between the different individuals, organizations, and groups that facilitated the success of Britannia's Covid-19 Response. The networks and relationships shown here are those reported by the participants of the questionnaire. It should be known that this display is by no means comprehensive and does not fully capture the extent to which the interconnectedness of Britannia's community members weaves the fabric on which Britannia's culture and community is built.

[Link to pdf of full partner map on Britannia website](#)

# SUPPORT FOR BRITANNIA'S YOUTH

## Summary

Prior to the pandemic, Britannia had a rich and strong culture of volunteerism and community service. At any given time, approximately 300 to 500 individuals were actively engaged, as volunteers, in events, programs, and other activities.

When the lockdown occurred and the demand for support and effort came from the support services activated for the community, the existing relationships with volunteers were essential to mobilize quickly and effectively. The strength of the existing volunteer relationships meant that there were contacts to call for assistance, and that these individuals had already been pre-screened by Britannia's volunteer program, as well as had their police record checks completed, which allowed them to be involved in the immediate response. It's been recognized by Britannia staff that police record checks were a barrier to getting volunteers involved in the immediate community response.

Many of the volunteer groups that existed, such as the 55+ Centre volunteers were transferred directly to the COVID-19 Response, either to the Food Centre, or to the 55+ Wellness Calls. These volunteers, beyond having gone through a pre-screening and having obtained their police check, were active members of the community, familiar with Britannia, its services, and its community members; increasing the capacity to respond effectively and appropriately to the community members in need.

Some of those who volunteered were in fact staff members prior to the lockdown. Some auxiliary staff who no longer had hours, as well as Parks Board staff who were laid off, due to the closure of services and programs, chose to continue working at Britannia as volunteers.

## Experience

Under the vital leadership and coordination of Britannia's staff, the collective force of Britannia's volunteer community made possible the immediate Response. Staffing capacity was limited in the wake of site-wide layoffs and volunteers stepped up to assist with the 55+ Wellness Calls and the COVID-19 Food Centre. The outpouring of volunteer support throughout the pandemic enabled the scale and extent of the programs' reach as well as its consistency through the summer, fall and winter months. Grandview-Woodland Food Connection's Ian Marcuse recognizes the decades of community-building at Britannia and among its partners that went into the emergency response; "this work didn't just happen overnight. We've been working with volunteers for forty-plus years. And because Britannia has been around for all those years, a lot of community members have that close relationship and love for Britannia. And we were able to draw on that." "I've known Ian Marcuse for many years," emphasizes Cylia Wong, who volunteered with the COVID-19 Food Centre, "I've worked with him as a volunteer. And I also started volunteering at the 55+ centre on Mondays and Fridays doing lunches. So I started volunteering at Britannia pre-COVID." Longtime com-

**This work didn't just happen overnight.  
We've been working with volunteers  
for forty-plus years**

munity resident Ros Breckner points out the diversity of volunteer opportunities at the Centre over the years as a particular incentive to get involved; "Yes, you can go to an organization and say 'I'd love to volunteer, what is it that you want me to do?' But [volunteering at Britannia] gives a person the opportunity to do what they really love doing." While the COVID-19 Response hinged on a limited set of volunteer roles, it was the culture of flexibility that cultivated collective motivation to volunteer to address immediate needs. "There are some volunteer positions at Britannia that people have a passion for and, because there's lots of opportunity, they can work on that passion," continues Breckner, "then you don't have to worry about them doing the work because they do way more than they need to anyway, because that's something that they love to do. They do it because they love doing it."

One way that Britannia facilitates a diversity of involvement opportunities is through its Volunteer Committee, of which Ros Breckner is a member. "The Volunteer Committee helps to coordinate and suggest volunteer activities and gives support to Yao, the Volunteer Coordinator," explains Breckner, "besides meeting on a regular basis,

one of the things we helped organize, for two years prior [to COVID-19] was community bike rides.” Team-building opportunities for Britannia volunteers took various forms, continues Breckner, from bike rides to “the beach clean-up that people would organize. And out-of-town visits; this past year we had already organized several drives with one of the Britannia vehicles to different places like Reifel Bird Sanctuary.” “We did a lot of things we had never done before, thanks to the committee,” says Volunteer Coordinator, Yao Zhang, “those things were very well responded to; it helped people who volunteered in numerous sectors to socialize. For people who come to volunteer, one of the needs is to participate in community living, to be able to socialize with their neighbors, to socialize with people from different walks of life.” Recognizing the desire for connection that commonly motivated volunteers, the Volunteer Committee could foster community around activities that would later become central to Britannia’s COVID-19 Response. “Some people had an idea,” remembers Yao Zhang, “and said ‘hey, let’s do some cooking together,’ so, once a month, a volunteer would take the lead and we would cook some food to share together. A lot of volunteers that participate in that program also volunteer in food serving related programs.” At Britannia, opportunities for volunteer team-building became opportunities to build community food security, an intersection of interests that would have a direct impact on the COVID-19 response. Again, however, it is the diversity of opportunities that keeps Britannia’s volunteers connected across all walks of community life. “It allows us to be cross-sectional,” explains Zhang, “one volunteer might not know how to ride a bicycle, but may be interested in sharing soup. Or people who don’t enjoy cooking, they might be interested in visiting a monastery. All those things forged a relationship among volunteers. And for me, as a coordinator, gave me the opportunity to put a face to the name; that helps a lot.” The long-term community building work of

the Volunteer Committee provided a solid foundation for volunteer involvement when it became most necessary.

When volunteer recruitment began for Britannia’s COVID-19 Response, the outpouring of support was impressive. Yao Zhang found himself leaning heavily on the existing volunteer coordination infrastructure that Britannia had integrated just a few years prior; “In 2017, we implemented a web-based volunteer platform. When I started this position we were using Word and Excel to manage our volunteers; it just wasn’t working, it was a massive amount of people to be managing on pen and paper and Word and Excel. Implementing the software took roughly a year for us to train everybody on the system, and it’s increased the productivity quite a bit.” With the online database providing a solid structural foundation, Zhang could focus on clear and transparent communication in liaising with the volunteers. “I work very intensively communicating, intaking, onboarding, dealing with whatever issues volunteers may have – that’s really my focus,” explains Zhang, “pre-COVID, let’s say we have twenty or thirty active positions where volunteers are required and I am involved in various degrees in those programs. Let’s say one of those programs is in the pre-school, then I communicate directly with the pre-school about their volunteer needs and their timing and a schedule; I collaborate with everybody.” The significant uncertainty surrounding both the continuity of existing volunteer positions and the new volunteer demands for the COVID-19 response meant that transparent communication was essential to maintaining trust with volunteers. “During the intake process, we make it quite clear what a volunteer’s role is supposed to be,” continues Zhang, “I’ve been very up front to all the volunteers; this is very new to us, things might not work as smooth, things might not make sense yet. We’re trying our best but if there’s anything not working, let us know. It took a lot of things like that to adjust along the way.” During the city-wide





lockdowns and the first wave of COVID-19, the volunteer onboarding process was a collective learning experience on all sides. “I did not go to school to become a volunteer coordinator,” says Zhang, “so it’s a lot of learning on the job. It’s a lot of interpersonal communication, really.”

For Britannia’s volunteers, transparent communication about the roles and expectations was necessary for community members to feel safe showing up. “When this opportunity to volunteer came up I was glad to help,” explains Cylia Wong, “I consider myself very healthy and I take care of myself. But other people, they need to keep themselves safe. And everybody has a different point of reference. We all start from a different place.” When COVID-19 interrupted her standard volunteer engagements, Wong was able to pivot her involvement with Britannia towards what was most needed at the time. “I was volunteering Mondays and Fridays, pre-COVID, and then there was the lockdown, then there was two weeks where I didn’t volunteer,” continues Wong, “and then I started volunteering for the emergency Food Centre. So I’ve been volunteering with the Food Centre since the beginning. I only had two weeks off [laughs], that’s what I say – but that’s ok, I don’t mind.” Yao Zhang recognizes his responsibility as a Volunteer Coordinator to remain accountable to the needs of the volunteers themselves; “they’re here to help, right? I am enabling them to help. There’s no point to present the reality other than what it is, or what I know of it, I just find that works the best when you can be honest with people. From the first email, we’re trying to be as up front as possible; it just works so much better.”

While the initial volunteer call-outs were met with an outpouring of support, of community members stepping forward to offer their time and energy, a long term understanding of the task at hand helped Britannia staff discern the best way to engage volunteers. “When we started out, it’s not like we want as many volunteers as possible because we don’t have the capacity set up,” says Yao Zhang, “in the beginning, we might want fifteen people, no more, because of physical distancing measures in place. We needed a set amount of people at a set date and time.” This approach enabled the consistency of volunteer support for Britannia’s response. “That’s the reason why it’s constant,” continues Zhang, “it’s ongoing because our need is changing all the time. It depends on how many baskets people are requesting, it depends on the donations we get; these things change a lot. But the base of volunteers we get doesn’t change.” The online database infrastructure helped Britannia focus its volunteer call-outs based on specific needs and conditions, which were in constant flux. As evident in the weight-lifting requirements for volunteering with the Food Centre, simply attempting to onboard as many volunteers as quickly as

possible is just a waste of everyone’s time. “The [online] platform allows us to broadcast very quickly to very specific targeted group of people,” emphasizes Zhang, “one example; let’s say we need people to be delivery drivers. It’s pointless to send the call-out to sixteen year-olds, who can’t drive, who likely don’t have a car. And we need people who have certain food certificates, then it’s pointless to send to me or to you, who don’t have those. So the platform gives us the ability to increase our productivity and limit our callouts.” With an understanding that there would be not just one, but many call-outs for volunteers as the COVID-19 response continued, this method of focused contacting became particularly important. “We try not to send out unnecessary emails to people, because then people will say ‘hey, take me off the list,’” continues Zhang, “it allows us to be very laser-targeted with our messaging. And the response rate is very high.”

Although recruitment was driven by specific needs at specific times, the overwhelming response from the volunteer community sent a very important message to Yao Zhang; that the support was there. “The constant interest, the reply rate is very high; that surprised me,” says Zhang, “at first I was uncertain, but the outpouring of people who want to volunteer, it overwhelms me and it warms my heart.” Volunteers such as Cylia Wong, who have been volunteering consistently throughout the pandemic, contribute an additional sense of security as uncertainty abounds and needs continue to rise. “We have a solid core of people that I am personally familiar with and I know, when I call them, that they will show up,” continues Zhang, “that’s a very powerful thing. It’s a very empowering feeling for me, as a Volunteer Coordinator, to know that we have those folks.” The support of Britannia’s volunteer community was especially critical given the employment insecurity around the Centre during the initial lockdowns. “A lot of people were laid off,” remembers Zhang, “so we had a limited handful of staff working in the Food Centre and we have sixty or seventy volunteers working [Emergency Home] Food Delivery.” Amidst the uncertainty and stress of Britannia’s immediate COVID-19 response, “having volunteers that are already engaged with us and having them already pre-vetted [through the City of Vancouver protocols], that allows us to get going really quickly.”

**“The outpouring of people who want to volunteer, it overwhelms me and it warms my heart”**

# EAST VANCOUVER EMERGENCY NETWORK

The city-wide lockdowns in March, 2020 prompted community- and neighborhood-level action towards filling the gaps in support services not being identified and addressed at the municipal level. In this grassroots galvanization of organizations across East Vancouver, Britannia saw the opportunity to leverage its role as an emergency hub towards a comprehensive networking of the community response. Whereas other community centres, other potential emergency hubs, closed their doors, Britannia's relative autonomy enabled the Centre to mobilize towards its mandate; "to realize the wellbeing, sense of belonging, joy, and empowerment of everyone in our community."

Although the city-wide lockdowns mitigated the extent of Britannia's response, the actions taken would not have been possible without pre-existing infrastructure and resources from the City. "Britannia has always operated from a community-centered approach," explains Executive Director Cynthia Low, "the constitution and the by-laws of Britannia is focused on our mandate to do with and for people in the neighborhood. That is just a culture and a practice and we really don't know any other way." Nearly fifty years of operating in this community-centered approach has brought Britannia into working partnership with many community organizations, many of whom saw opportunity to make a local impact amidst the first wave of COVID-19. Britannia's role as "an umbrella host for a number of community organizations," continues Low, "is part of that Britannia culture, and drives our ability to understand what is needed in the community and provide access to public assets." Seeing its partnered organizations begin to mobilize their various responses to COVID-19, Britannia set up the East Vancouver Emergency Network (EVEN) to facilitate inter-partner understanding of what was most needed and what work was already occurring.

During a time when global uncertainty and misinformation around the novel coronavirus was at its peak, Britannia invited partner organizations in the Grandview-Woodland and Strathcona Neighborhoods to join EVEN, envisioned at the time as a forum to address the vacuum of knowledge and better coordinate a local response. The pre-existence of the Grandview-Woodland Area Service Team, "a group of about thirty community organizations that met monthly to talk about the emerging issues of the neighborhood, everything from housing to removal of park benches," outlines Cynthia Low, provided the template for EVEN. Britannia had been coordinating service delivery between its community partners prior to the arrival of COVID-19 and, with the onset of emergency, that experience became the foundation for a networked community-level response. "[EVEN] was primarily about information," explains Cynthia Low, "but also resources and referrals for folks who needed food or child care or contact from a volunteer; any of those. It really depended on talking to our partners and saying 'what are you doing out there? Is there still a need? What kind of support do you need to continue this work?'" A comprehensive and continued awareness of the work being done on the ground enabled Britannia to coordinate the local COVID-19 response through referrals, a reciprocal approach to servicing community needs. "It's easy to be overwhelmed at the large number of people who are in need, but knowing that there was a connection of agencies, helps to focus on the delivery of services," explains Food Centre Coordinator Susy Bando, "then, rather than the onus being on us to communicate and connect individually all the time, we are able to work with agencies, to



ensure we are properly servicing the need. The network is how people were referred to Britannia in the first place, so it was also important for us to rely on the partners when we needed help communicating back to the community.” If community members came to Britannia with urgent needs, EVEN enabled Britannia to figure out where those needs were already in the process of being addressed. With limited available resources during the city-wide lockdowns, this referral-based approach to the coordinated community response was essential. “Having a connection with the East Van network in total transparency helped in not having everyone trying to do the same thing on their own,” emphasizes 55+ Program Assistant Kya Prince, “having a structure that was already built that we could share: ‘this is what worked for us, this is how we did it, take it all and fit to your needs’ and vice versa. We were really leaning on each other and it was something that everyone saw as important. Hopefully, it’s something we can use as a foundation if ever there is a need later on.”

The effectiveness of the East Vancouver Emergency Network is a testament to the relationships that Britannia has built with community partners over the years. One such partner, Grandview-Woodland Food Connection’s Ian Marcuse, emphasizes the benefits of this approach; “Bring in partners! Support the partners; they have the expertise and the skill to bring added value to the community centre, creating a collaboration at the core of community development.” 55+ Programmer Anne Cowan stresses just how integral this collaboration is to Britannia’s culture; “where Britannia was successful is where it was driven by the people and the participants and the instructors and [staff] were just there as tools to make that happen.” “Think about what Britannia is doing,” continues Marcuse, “build a relationship with these partners because they can bring a lot of value to you. We were provided an office, admin support, printing capacity, and more which is a huge help for a small organization like the Grandview-Woodland Food Connection.” As the East Vancouver Emergency Network makes evident, Britannia brings to its partners not only the capacity to network with other community organizations, but essential resources as well. “We have volunteers,” says Cynthia Low of Britannia’s COVID-19 response, “part of it is ‘what kind of resources do we have that we can mobilize? And what needs to happen out there?’ We had volunteers that we could mobilize and that was a huge piece because many people were very limited in their ability to move around the city.” In times of emergency, the ability to mobilize resources to support community partnerships is especially important, though the foundational relationships from which those community partnerships activate their emergency response, relationships equally important to a coordinated response, depends on the provision of resources prior to and in preparation for crisis.

The coordinated activity of Britannia and its partnered organizations at the community level, despite the shutdown of facilities at the municipal level, is unsurprising to anyone familiar with the Britannia culture. “We’re driven by the community,” explains Anne Cowan, “we’re not waiting to hear from someone outside the community, it’s the other way around.” “It also comes from an attitude at Britannia that we can do something,” says Cynthia Low, “that we’re not just going to shut our doors and that, if provincial health orders say – or the city says – ‘you’ve got to shut your doors,’ that we’re going to look a little bit deeper into what we provide that falls under ‘essential services.’” With COVID-19 bringing about particular challenges to safe mobility and social cohesion in the community, Britannia saw the continuity of its active role as a community hub as imperative to fulfilling its mandate. The East Vancouver Emergency Response Network was an attempt to “understand, as much as we could at the time, what the pandemic meant to vulnerable households, to understand what their needs are and what would be the best use of our resources. What could we do,” asks Low, “to support individuals to be successful in keeping themselves and their families safe?” Cowan identifies a particular value of this community-centered approach in light of the particular health challenges of COVID-19; “Connection – I think we all knew it before – but connection is health. Community connection is health. I think we’ve found a bigger connection with our partners across the city through this.”

Britannia’s role as a community hub has strengthened over the past year. As community organizations in the Grandview-Woodland and Strathcona communities continue to transition their operations in response to COVID-19, the longstanding Grandview-Woodland Area Service Team and recent East Vancouver Emergency Network have laid the foundation for community-oriented collaboration going forward. “The process of engagement and consultation allows my staff to be able to speak to other professionals in the same situation and to share,” explains Cynthia Low, “it’s a debriefing process for them, to think about what has happened. When we reflect on stuff like that, inevitably we’re going to be thinking about; what next? That’s part of the intention. We have to think of COVID as enduring as we think about our role in the community. That’s very important to me, to our board and to our staff; to understand the relevance of what we do every day.” As new conditions of COVID-19 emerge through its endurance, Low believes that it is imperative to not lose sight of the community members most impacted in the first and second waves, “because, you know, some folks are doing just fine. But there are communities that have been decimated and we need to remember to focus our efforts on lifting those individuals up. That’s part of the remembering.”

# COMMUNITY LIAISONS

The effectiveness of Britannia's Response was a direct result of the strength of its relationships that already existed between Britannia and its community members. Rather than creating new relationships, or programs, to mobilize an initial response, Britannia activated its existing network of relationships, modifying its programs and operations to serve the direct and immediate needs of the community. The collective pivoting of the community, in a collaborative and united approach, enabled the response to become more than the sum of its parts. This, in turn, increased the capacity of the response program to reach community members in need, both those within and beyond Britannia's catchment area, to provide directly or refer them to the services they required.

Britannia's ability to activate collaborative community partnerships essential to the coordinated COVID-19 response, begins with meaningful interpersonal relationships. Many of the people working with Britannia's COVID-19 response, whether as staff, community partners, or as volunteers, are embedded in the community in more ways than one. "Before I worked as Volunteer Coordinator," recalls Yao Zhang, "I was working in the swimming pool as a lifeguard. As a swimming instructor, I've taught hundreds of children how to swim. I've taught seniors exercise programs as well, as a fitness instructor. I know a lot of people in this community." "Many people see me with only one hat on," says Girls Who LEAP mentor Mitra Tshan, "what they don't see is that I've been in the community for twenty years." These years of experience in the community allow liaisons to build key relationships that, in the context of community work, follow them from job to job, organization to organization. "The continuity is really in those personal relationships," emphasizes Ian Marcuse, "it's in knowing who is doing what, where and how. And it's not just organizations, it's community members, it's the personal connections. That's a big part of our work with the Grandview Woodland Food Connection: relationship

building." In prioritizing community partnerships, Britannia is a catalyst for these relationships affecting change at the organizational level. "It's a very smart decision to bring in outside organizations that have slightly different mandates and the ability to work beyond the community centre," continues Ian Marcuse, "those relationships are built on years of trust. They know you well, they trust that you understand the work but you've also proven your work. That comes back and it makes all the work we're doing [during the pandemic] so much easier than starting from nowhere. All of that comes back."

While the organization-level coordination of the East Vancouver Emergency Network is well documented, the impact of the interpersonal relationships behind Britannia's COVID-19 response is difficult to measure. One key role these relationships played was to identify and support community members who were slipping through the cracks. "A lot of what I do is on my own time," explains Mitra Tshan, "and a lot of what I do is because I've been there for so long and I see the gaps – I know the families that have been there for generations." Amidst the city-wide lockdowns at the outset of the pandemic, organizational capacity was stretched thin, meaning that community members were inevitably falling through the cracks. If a senior living in isolation in the Grandview-Woodland Neighborhood was not registered with Britannia, for example, they would not have been included on the initial call-outs of the 55+ Wellness Check-Ins. Aware that these gaps existed, Britannia was able to rely upon the knowledge and allocate resources based on the personal experience of its staff, volunteers and partners. Tshan highlights the importance of community knowledge in her experience over the years; "I've gotten to know a lot of the families quite well; that person is related to that person, that grandmother is taking care of three other kids that are not hers. That stuff comes easy to me and where I think it comes in handy when a lot of what I do is help navigate these families to what they need. To help fill the



gaps.” Latin American Cultural Enrichment Youth Worker Stephanie Angel-Garay kept Juan Gamez’ family informed throughout the pandemic. “She would let us know,” says Gamez, “do you want to participate in this activity?” So she’s always alerting us and giving us any information as to what’s happening [at Britannia] and that’s a good thing, that’s what really makes a close relationship with the community centre.” For Ian Marcuse, “that connected, embedded relationship [with community members] comes from living and zworking in the community for thirty-plus years. My work is much more than just a job... it’s about building the kind of community that I want to live in.”

Britannia’s COVID-19 Food Centre, in particular, benefited from the embedded nature of its workers – staff, partners and volunteers alike – in the communities that the Food Centre aims to serve. One of Mitra Tshan’s many hats is that of a basketball coach and she explains that “when we’re driving kids home on the bus, I know which building they lived in and I know who lives in that building; other kids, other families. So it was very easy for me to know which families needed to be reached out to.” This way, “if a family comes and picks up [food] in one building,” continues Tshan, “they’re picking up for three or four other families. And they all take care to look out for each other. That’s the beauty of what COVID has actually done is that; everyone is not just out for themselves, but everyone’s there to look out for each other too.” The trust that Tshan has built with these families also encourages the dissemination of information through word-of-mouth. “They’ll tell each other [about Britannia’s Food Centre],” explains Tshan, “they’ll tell the other people in the complexes. It’s an old school way of telephone tag.”

Grandview Woodland Food Connection’s Ian Marcuse understands the significance of Britannia employing or partnering with these community liaisons in the larger context of community development. Communities are textured and layered spaces and the people best equipped to create meaningful change in those spaces are the ones with deep understanding of the community’s complex dynamics. “Having worked for a lot of [community] organizations in the past,” explains Marcuse, “I am embedded in the community and so I understand well the social economics, community demographics and other organizations with which I’ve built long and lasting relationships.” In facilitating the work of community liaisons such as Marcuse, Britannia demonstrates its commitment to grassroots cultural and social change at the community-level. “We know that it takes years of dedicated relationship building and, at the same time, funding for community developers continually gets cut because funders don’t always see the immediate impact of community development work,” says Marcuse. In the public health sector, for example, while

food security is recognized as a key social determinant of health and well-being, most funding goes towards acute care, where the immediate impact of investments are easier to measure. Although, typically, impacts of community development can take generations to become recognizable as such, COVID-19 has provided an opportunity to witness the work in progress. “We have now proven to ourselves,” continues Marcuse, “perhaps more than at any other moment, how critical community development work is. This work is needed to build the resources, the assets, the skills, the connections the partnerships that are the social fabric, the resilience that is needed in facing crises, whether it’s the pandemic or climate change or poverty or lack of affordable housing. And now it’s time to recognize that value with more funding.” While the meaningful community relationships necessary for this work cannot be shortcut, funding remains a barrier for community liaisons already at work in their neighborhoods. “I think the depth of our connections have made this work a lot easier,” recognizes Marcuse, with regards to future emergency preparation, “but you could do it if you had someone in that position who was paid full-time. [If you needed to] immediately pull all those pieces together; you could do it.”



# KEEPING OUR DOORS OPEN: LIFE AT THE CENTRE DURING COVID-19

Photo By: Lung

# KEEPING OUR DOOR OPEN

Britannia has been operating out of its current facilities for nearly fifty years, in which time it has grown to become a hub for the Grandview-Woodland community. “Like a few other people at Britannia,” explains community member and volunteer Ros Breckner, “I’ve been involved in one way or another at Britannia since before it was built. So it does have a different meaning to me; it’s become my second home, in some ways.” For Breckner, the layout of Britannia’s site contributes to community connection with the Centre; “when Britannia was first built, it was built intentionally almost village-like.” The trust and accountability that characterizes Britannia’s relationship with its constituent community through COVID-19 was built over time. “When we first started our programs and we were broadening,” remembers 55+ Programmer Anne Cowan, “there wasn’t a lot of participation from Indigenous families, seniors especially. One of the stories [that was raised] was about coming into a community centre, anywhere in the city – yeah, there’s programs, but not feeling a sense of belonging.” This sense of belonging originates from the land which Britannia sits on; the unceded territories of x̱w̱məθḵw̱əy̱əm (Musqueam), səliłwətaʔt (Tsleil-Waututh) and Skwxwúmesh (Squamish) peoples. Over the years, continues Cowan, “our community has made a space to welcome everybody, to give them a voice and recognize and acknowledge the land we’re on and, going forward, building the community based on that. And it feels like family. It comes from the grassroots, it comes from the people who live here.” “Britannia prides itself on its safe spaces for the community,” explains 55+ Program Assistant Kya Prince, “it prides itself on programs that reflect the existing community. The families, the youth, the elders and the adults that live in this area or come to this area for specific needs that aren’t being met in other parts of the city.” This community-centered approach is reflected not only in the many and varied partnerships that make Britannia a community hub, but in the people employed at the Centre as well. “That’s probably what draws not only community members to Britannia,” continues Prince, “but staff to Britannia as well.” “Our role as staff; it feels more than just staff,” Cowan agrees, “it feels like we are there to make a pathway, there to be a part of that community. It’s very unique.”

The culture that Britannia has built around the Centre over these years of reciprocal relations with community members has not gone unnoticed. “There’s an interconnection at Britannia,” observes Elder Vera Jones, “it’s all part of the anti-racism, anti-oppression and decolonization; I feel that [Britannia] is more advanced in that department.” “The people are more welcoming and more accepting of where you’re at,” explains Cylia Wong about her involvement with the 55+ Centre, “it’s not that other [community centres] don’t try to make an effort there, I don’t think. I just felt more welcomed [at Britannia] and like I could

fit in.” In a city as dense and diverse as Vancouver, Britannia’s culture of belonging and interconnectedness is especially significant. “Vancouver, it’s a big city,” observes community member Juan Gamez, “getting involved with Britannia is special for us. You not only get that closeness to a community centre, but what Britannia does: it gathers not one specific community, but many other communities.” This culture extends beyond the Centre itself, up and down Commercial Drive. “Just walking on the drive,” says 55+ Programmer Daniel Cook, “you get to know people and see them all the time. In going to the grocery store, you’re bumping into people and chatting. It’s a five minute walk, but it’ll take you half-an-hour just to get there. A lot of people know each other, a lot of people care about each other and a lot of people want to know how you’re doing; so you just stop and chat.” For Ros Breckner, this culture ties directly into mental health; “it’s about being amongst people. If I want to talk to someone, I just go out my front door and there’s inevitably somebody walking by who I know.”

COVID-19 brought about particular challenges to the community cohesion that centres around the Britannia Site. Provincial health orders and lockdowns have kept residents away from the site, school and facilities for much of the past year. Prior to COVID-19, Britannia’s disaster plan was, in large part, contingent upon safe community access to the site itself. “Britannia is a hub, it’s a disaster hub,” explains Kya Prince, “but a natural disaster is very different from a global pandemic. That’s something that no-one was wholly prepared for.” With the site closed during the initial city-wide lockdown, Britannia had to physically adjust its method of support and service delivery. “I don’t know what the site would have looked like at the time,” continues Prince, “if we didn’t have an understanding of why everyone’s role is so integral to make the community centre function as it does and as it should. Having a strong guidance from our management team really helped in terms of doing a basic needs assessment; what we are able to provide for the community and where we are able to fill those gaps.” Despite the closure of the buildings themselves, Britannia’s village-like design meant that community members were still able to enjoy the site’s open-air spaces. “In March and April, 2020,” recalls Ros Breckner, “one of the things I found was just walking through Britannia on my way to Com-

**You not only get that closeness to a community centre, but what Britannia does: it gathers not one specific community, but many other communities**

mercial Drive, once I got the courage to go that far, and seeing the odd staff person that I know and being able to say 'hello' to them brought some form of grounding because of the connection that I feel to the community centre." Breckner, like many members of Britannia's community, now lives closer to other community centres, yet is still compelled to return to the site; "It's Britannia I go to because I used to live very close to Britannia. My community centre connections are there."

In keeping its doors open through the initial city-wide lockdowns and through the reputation for trust and dependency that Britannia has built over the years, many community members living outside of Britannia's catchment area returned to the site for support. "Some live in Surrey," explains Daniel Cook, "and they still make that long trek back to Britannia because they still feel part of the community. Those people contacted Britannia because they still feel that it's their community centre." Britannia's emphasis on food security throughout the pandemic, in particular, attracted people from across the Lower Mainland. For Grandview-Woodland Food Connection's Ian Marcuse, this emphasis has a holistic impact on the community; "food is a core program in the Centre, not just for building social connection and community engagement but, in the case of a pandemic, it's proven to be a key Britannia response; it's an essential service." For Juan Gamez, it's Britannia's holistic approach that inspires his willingness to make the journey to Commercial Drive; "that's what I like about it; it's a complete, whole centre." That Britannia's community extends beyond its catchment area, that people across the Lower Mainland look to Britannia during uncertain times, is positive reinforcement for the staff who put in the effort to make it so. Kya Prince emphasizes that "knowing we're a site and a team that our members and our volunteers can trust, to a degree like that, is really uplifting."

Despite considerable efforts to maintain community co-

hesion online, physical connection at the Britannia Site has been sorely missed over the past year. Although it's had to adapt, connection at Britannia has always been about in-person connection. "You realize what you miss by not actually seeing someone, by not actually being with someone," reflects Ros Breckner. Being able to continue in-person relationships online has mitigated some of the loss of physical connection, however. Breckner notes that "most of the Zooms I've been doing with Britannia have been with people I had already met [in-person. It's like meeting up with old friends, I guess, when you can do that." Still, Breckner makes it a priority to maintain a relationship with Britannia's physical site; "it's that touch of normality to see staff out there, you know who they are and they know who you are. That's something that's needed and that's a good thing about this community." As the rainy season begins, it becomes harder to safely enjoy Britannia's Site. "There are no spaces, other than outside, that people can gather," observes Cylia Wong, "there's the [carving] pavilion – but it's awfully cold in the wintertime. That might be something for the future." Britannia's immediate future involves a comprehensive site renewal, approved in 2015 and in its Master Planning phase at the onset of COVID-19. Britannia's experience facilitating a COVID-19 response has many community members wondering if the renewal will reflect the specific needs that have arisen from the past year. Ultimately, however, emphasis remains on preserving the values at the core of Britannia's community and that begins with the values and voices of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), səliwətaʔt (Tsleil-Waututh) and Skwxwúmesh (Squamish) peoples. "That's everywhere, but more crucially important to the Indigenous Nations throughout the Lower Mainland," explains Elder Vera Jones, "this land is their land. They need to feel safe on their land." For Jones, this work of Reconciliation should be up front and centre in the renewal; "it would be a dream come true if Britannia, with their renewal program, would set something up specifically for Indigenous Elders. I would

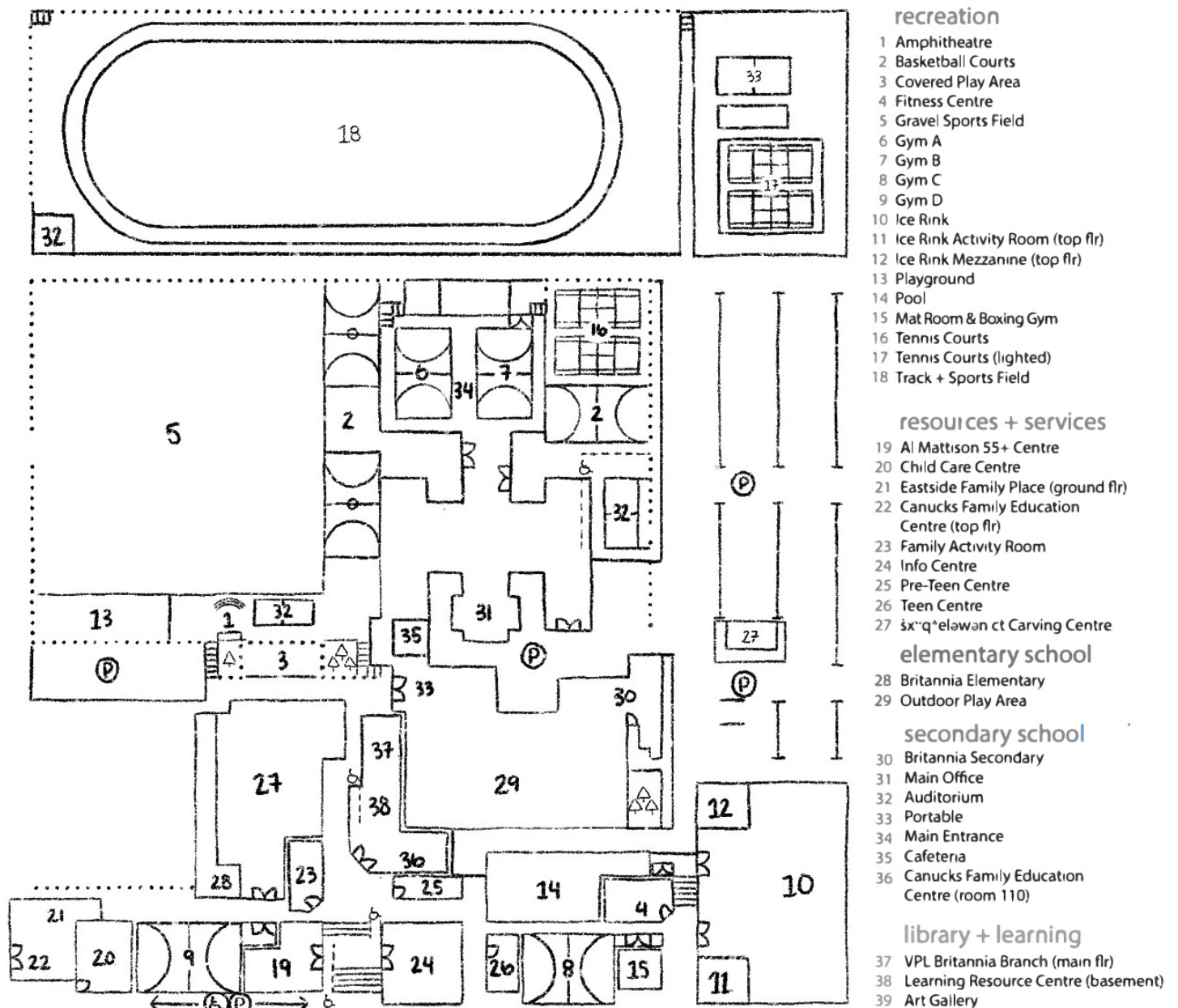
# Teen Centre



like to see an Indigenous centre, specifically. A go-to place where the Elders are going to feel safe.” Long-time Britannia member Ros Breckner observes a trend in how other community centres are being designed today. “A lot of the community centres now,” explains Breckner, “have one large building and everything goes on inside of it. Whereas with Britannia it’s like visiting a town centre. It’s been very important to me, with the redevelopment, that it retains that down to earth, community feeling.” For Breckner, that feeling is at the heart of what Britannia means to its community since its inception and through COVID-19, that community feeling that has proven to lift

up those who visit the site and been vital to maintaining a sense of connectedness over this difficult year.

## MAP OF BRITANNIA COMMUNITY CENTRE



Map Traced By: Krystal Cheena

# CONTINUITY OF BRITANNIA'S PROGRAMMING

When the city went into lockdown, Britannia decided to not only jumpstart new and essential service delivery such as the 55+ Wellness Calls and the COVID-19 Food Centre, but to find creative ways to continue its diverse selection of programming as well. Grandview-Woodland Food Connection's Ian Marcuse sees the history of socially-relevant programming as an asset for Britannia during the current emergency; "since its inception, we've had a diversity of programs and partnerships that are quite unlike any other community centre in the city. And I believe that is fundamentally core to how well we responded to COVID." In offering relevant programs that reflect the diverse community, Britannia becomes a hub of social life in the neighborhood year-round. "The variety of programs that they do provide there," emphasizes community member Juan Gamez, "[in] summertime, it works pretty nice because they have a lot of open space for the kids to play soccer or practice basketball. Even in the winter, I've seen that they do have swimming and also hockey so, as I said, they're a really complete facility that allows you to participate any time of the year. They keep the kids involved at all times." 55+ Program Assistant Kya Prince notes that the culture of collaboration present between the Centre, program facilitators and program participants was essential to the continuity of programming through the first months of COVID-19. "Our instructors were really on-board with a lot of changes that had to be made, the contacts we had to do to shut down programs on site," says Kya Prince, "when we were able to have limited in-person programming, how on-board our instructors and our volunteers were to adapt when we had to change our format completely online, how willing and able our instructors were able to take that format and move forward with it in a way that worked for them, for the participants and for us as staff."

The transparency of communication between staff, program instructors, volunteers and participants at the individual level mirrors the organizational transparency of the East Vancouver Emergency Network and the institutional transparency of Britannia's communication with its site partners and the City of Vancouver. As a community hub, Britannia was able to provide a continuity of programming through the uncertainties of COVID-19's first wave by maintaining transparency at all levels of communication.

The continuity of Britannia's programs over the past year in accordance with provincial health orders has seen numerous shifts between virtual and in-person programming. Although each transition offered an opportunity for Britannia to scale back, staff recognized programming serviced social connections that were still very much needed. "Everyone we are reaching is a big scale, but it's a little bubble of active participants," recognizes Kya Prince, "so it's about reaching out to those who are not as active and who don't want to come onto the online programs but still need help and resources." When provincial health orders allowed for in-person programming, Britannia was able to address this gap. Juan Gamez remembers that, "[Britannia] indicated 'we do have more programs, but we have to get the go-ahead from the city as to how we're going to approach it; what will be the maximum number of kids that will be allowed to attend the program...'. They always kept us up to date. In any event, if the program was closing for a while they would let us know 'we'll be going back to the activity next week' or they would give us a time frame. They would let us know exactly what changes they were applying based on what information the city was providing. We were always up to date." Rink Programmer Susy Bando highlights this transparent communication as



Photo By: Lung

one of the lessons-learned from adapting programming in accordance with each new Provincial Health Order. “One of the things that I’ve learned is to acknowledge what we know,” explains Bando, “when Dr. Henry makes an announcement and we’re waiting for official documentation; there is a time lag. We have often just waited, but that has caused stress the community. If you acknowledge that ‘we know that this information that is out there and we’re awaiting more clarification’; that first point of communication, even if it’s ‘we don’t have any information, but we acknowledge that there is going to be a change and we will communicate back as soon as we know.’ That has really been effective. That leads to [the situation] feeling more transparent, and the building of trust with our members.” This lesson applies not only to communication with program participants, but with partnered organizations as well. When the directive does come through to Britannia, continues Bando, “then all of a sudden it was go-time and we would have to let people know about the change. It really is a matter of learning how to do good work quickly.” Britannia’s pro-active role in maintaining social cohesion throughout the pandemic by continuing to offer as much of its diverse programming as possible has been greatly appreciated by its community members. “You’re always either looking for help yourself or, in this case, they reach out to us,” continues Gamez, “they know exactly what the community is and if anybody in that community needs assistance. They’re doing their part as active community leaders.” Girls Who LEAP mentor Mitra Tshan emphasizes the importance of Britannia’s programming continuity amidst city-wide lockdowns; “I like to think that we were able to make an impact. When most organizations scaled back, we scaled up. The community of staff, volunteers and partners is amazing and the support they provided is unparalleled.”

The progressive re-opening of Britannia’s facilities over the winter months has brought additional challenges to site staff. “When we first re-opened, I did overtime like you wouldn’t believe,” remembers Pool Programmer Marie Beesley, “unfortunately, the auxiliary staff did not get called back – I had to fight, I was on the phone almost every day, fighting to get my staff called back because they got missed off the list – so I was short-handed and had to do a lot of work myself.” “Similar with us, in terms of the rink auxiliaries being missed,” echoes Susy Bando, “I was called back [to my Rink Programmer role] a week-and-a-half later than the Park Board Rink Programmers. Luckily, I was on-site working in the Food Centre, because I was able to start transitioning back to the rink before my official start date. If I wasn’t working [at the Food Centre] and I started working on re-opening the rink on my official start date, the rink wouldn’t have opened on time. With such a push to re-open the facility in such a short time frame, you

just had to work.” Marie Beesley points out how the drive to offer consistent and timely programming to Britannia’s community inspired an adaptable mindset; “we didn’t have enough time to get started, when we re-started, but we pulled it off. Now I feel like I can take on the world, in some ways, because I had to figure things out so fast and adapt so fast and changes constantly kept getting thrown at me for the first two months. Now, we’re actually in a holding pattern and I’m waiting to make changes.”

Jumping forward to March of 2021: as vaccines roll out through the Lower Mainland, Britannia continues to scale up its programming with a critical awareness of the enduring impacts of COVID-19 on its community. Many staff at Britannia see value in continuing some of the emergency programs initiated in response to the first wave. “We’re not looking back because we’re not done yet, we’re looking forward,” says Volunteer Coordinator Yao Zhang, “we’re looking forward and saying, ‘maybe these phone check-ins should be a part of our core programs because of the need.’ If there’s five seniors that can benefit from it, that’s great; if there’s one, that’s awesome. Maybe there are fifty, I don’t know, but maybe it should be one of our core programs post-COVID. This is looking forward.” The chance to step back and reflect on the impact of Britannia’s COVID-19 Response is crucial for the continuity of Britannia’s programming going forward. With all the diverse and time-sensitive pieces of Britannia’s COVID-19 Response, it has been difficult for any single staff member involved to understand the full scope of what happened. “As many hours as I’ve spent on-site and as well as I know the families, I still don’t think I understand all the intricacies,” continues Tshan, “because in a time like COVID you are isolated from others and you don’t have that communal sit-down dinner where you share the stories. When we’re able to see parts of that larger picture and the impact within our families, our youth and our Elders [of which we’ve been] that little bit of a puzzle piece... everyone is working double-time just to get through this. So we stop and listen and reflect.” While a sense of the larger picture is necessary to make the best informed decisions around continuing Britannia’s programming, it’s those little puzzle pieces, those interpersonal relationships that have driven the impact at the community level. “In reality, it is positive having a community that supports you in hard times,” continues Gamez, “Having a community that is always looking for families in the city that may not be doing great or may need some assistance; that’s been a plus for us.”

# SITE PARTNERS & NETWORKING THE CITYWIDE RESPONSE



One unique aspect of Britannia's capacity to act as a community hub in times of emergency is the master agreement between its institutional site partners, including the Vancouver School Board, Vancouver Public Library, Parks Board Vancouver and the City of Vancouver and Britannia Community Services Centre (BCSC) as an independent organization.. When the City went on lockdown in response to the first wave of COVID-19, BCSC's connection as an independent department in the City umbrella enabled it to continue operating. Due to the cooperative nature of the site partner operating agreement, Britannia's continuity of operations was implicated in the city-wide response. Response timelines were often incongruous with community needs. "While people were coming back to the site after [spring break]," Girls Who LEAP mentor Mitra Tshan explains, "Britannia already had a system going. We already had a schedule of which families were coming to pick up certain things on this day or that day and doing a rotation, because we didn't want people to have to congregate." Amidst the lockdowns of many site partner facilities, Britannia's immediate response was contingent on the ability for staff to recognize what needed to get done and get creative around how to do it. "Team work," stresses Volunteer Coordinator Yao Zhang, "have a collective of people - staff, volunteers and leadership - and a willingness to do something for neighbors and the community and we can pull it off." This attitude was especially important in navigating a collective response between the various interests of Britannia's site partners. "I think we all have a good understanding of working collaboratively with our [site] partners," explains Rink Programmer Susy

Bando, "and despite the outside force of 'you're School Board, you're Parks Board, you're Britannia Society, and that there are multiple reporting structures, there is a commitment from all the staff at Britannia of getting the work done for the community.'" "The staff members at Britannia are pretty unique," agrees 55+ Programmer Daniel Cook, "If there's a hole that needs to be filled, they'll do it." With staff members contracted to different site partners trying to collaborate amidst the lockdowns, job insecurity hindered Britannia's ability to make an immediate impact. "What also was a little bit nerve-wracking was our employment security," remembers Daniel Cook, "wondering what was going to happen. Everything's shutting down, 'is my funder going to allot money elsewhere?' That tinge of wondering is still there, especially when you see your team-mates being let go." Pool Programmer Marie Beesley was one of the Britannia team who got re-assigned in response to the first wave of the pandemic. "I actually got pulled away from the whole Britannia team to work on Parks Board projects for PB Aquatics. So I had different duties and I wasn't a part of what was going on at Britannia," remembers Beesley, "so I kind of felt alienated in some ways, because I hadn't been involved [in Britannia's response] right from the beginning." "At one point there were three full-time staff working," emphasizes 55+ Programmer Anne Cowan, "we depended so much on them to get [response] programs up and running." While job security was a key factor in Britannia site staff's working capacity, the drive to help out the community came from a much deeper place; particularly so for the staff who were community members before they came to work at Britan-

nia. “Having community members as staff on your site is so important,” continues Anne Cowan, “people growing up in the community, being mentored and then working as staff. So you’re not always recruiting people from outside the community. A lot of the teens are mentored, are volunteers and then they become staff.” “The doors are open for them,” echoes 55+ Program Assistant Kya Prince who herself was raised in the Grandview-Woodland community, “the connections are made, 100%. Even on a higher up level, programming staff have worked here for years and years. So, all of a sudden, losing them based on city hours, either laid off or redirected; that was really scary. Everyone had to juggle a lot. All of a sudden, losing those connections that have been built was really horrifying.” As Cowan points out, this job insecurity is symptomatic of a structural inconsistency; “For a lot of employees; them being employees is a decision made outside of Britannia’s community. Layoffs and staff re-posting could be better made by each community Hub or Centre. Each community knows best what their Essential needs and Services are. And especially during disaster times, that decision should be given back to the community. One of the first steps is to give that back to community.”

While the City of Vancouver’s lockdown did hinder Britannia’s ability to make an immediate impact, the Response would not have been possible without the staff and facility resources already available on-site, through the master agreement. Britannia’s role, both prior to and throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, remains to make these resources available to the community members who need them most. Britannia staff quickly realized, during the first wave, that this would only be possible if they kept their doors open, something that their relative autonomy within the operating agreement allowed them to do. Despite the City’s broad directive to shut down, Britannia’s Executive Director Cynthia Low made sure to keep the City informed on every step of their process, confident that Britannia operations met City mandate to continue

essential services to vulnerable population. “My strategy was to continue to share information out,” explains Low, “this is what we’re doing. This is how we’re doing it. Is this still needed? Is this still relevant?” Once the City’s Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) was up and running, this information was integrated into the city-wide response. Britannia did advocate for scaling up its Food Delivery and 55+ Wellness Check-In programs to the city-wide level, which was never approved. For the community-level programs that Britannia brought to the EOC, Low recalls, “usually I just got a ‘yes, continue’ without much insight into the scope of what was going on citywide.” Despite the lack of context city-wide, Britannia came to trust the working relationship it has built with its institutional site partners over the years of operations. For Britannia to take the initiative on its COVID-19 Response, continues Low, it was about “learning to trust that, if we’re sharing this information, [the City will] let us know if there’s an issue. Just putting it out there and we expect [the City] knows we’re here, but generally we didn’t hear [that there were any issues] so we just assumed it was okay.”

While personnel around the site were eager and willing to step in and fill gaps created by staffing layoffs, bureaucratic processes made transitions difficult. “On a team-basis, people just stepped in when there was a need,” explains Cynthia Low, “there was a bit of administration and bureaucracy that had to happen to officially assign staff onto the various projects. Staff were doing the work and having to wait for the institution to catch up and that was a little stressful for the staff involved who were like ‘I’m just going to continue doing this, but am I going to be doing this next week?’ And we had to answer ‘I don’t know, but just continue doing it, we’re assuming so.’” Rink Programmer Susy Bando began working as the Food Centre Coordinator before the position was formalized by the Emergency Operations Centre. “Early after the lock down, Cynthia approached me to assist in the Food Centre as my skill set was transferable and my knowledge of Britannia’s op-



Photo By: Lung

erations and community valuable. I was already doing the work in the Food Centre, but had to then apply for the position through the EOC. I was told, 'nothing guarantees that you're going to continue this work. We know you can do the work, but you have to apply for it. So put together a resume and somebody will call you...' It was very stressful to know that I was able to do the work, but I had to go through a process to secure the position." The uncertainty around the new staff positions, such as the Food Centre Coordinator, created to facilitate the Response, meant that external hiring was not an option. "It wasn't a situation where we could send a call-out because we didn't know what those job descriptions were," continues Low, "we didn't know what they were doing, we didn't know how many hours it was going to be or what it was going to look like in two weeks." With emergency financial assistance programs rolling out at the national level, the economic well-being of the staff was an added concern; "there was also a risk of not wanting to jeopardize people's eligibility for CERB [Canadian Emergency Recovery Benefits]. That was a huge threshold; were we going to be able to pay them more than CERB? Or is this not reaching that threshold and then we're jeopardizing their economic security. This was a big deal because we didn't know how long this was going to go on for." Although Pool Programmer Marie Beesley was initially re-assigned to projects outside of Britannia's site, the Centre was able to involve her in the response when her employment status changed. "I was on CERB and Britannia actually brought me back in to work on projects," recalls Beesley, "they paid me to top up my CERB. I worked hard, don't get me wrong, I did a lot of research during that time. But it was unique to have that put forth and so it brought me closer to Britannia in a lot of ways. From where I was separated from them in the beginning, all of a sudden I'm being brought back in a way that makes me feel appreciated." Susy Bando's reassignment to the Food Centre was another example of Britannia looking out for its site partner staff. "At the start of the lockdown, the youth and

senior's programmers that still had work to do," explains Bando, "and Marie and I, with our facilities closed and no staff. Had less work and were facing layoff. Cynthia approached me and said 'I know you like food, you have contacts ; do you have the ability to support in the operations of the Food Centre. Are you able to do them?'"

Throughout the staffing transitions, preserving the good faith of Britannia's site partnerships remained a priority and transparent communication with all interested partners was maintained throughout. "We were trying to do what we think is logical under the collective agreement and human resource management," says Low, "we did communicate directly with the unions themselves, to let them know what we were doing and seek their concurrence. For us, it was important that we had direct relationships with the union and with labor management at the City to be able to continue doing what we were doing and allow the bureaucracy to catch up."

As for the staff themselves, their flexibility to take on new types of work at such a charged time made an impression on their colleagues. "As a team we work with vulnerable seniors and youth all year around," explains Anne Cowan of the 55+ team at Britannia, "in reflection, what was amazing was the other staff who don't necessarily work in that way jumping in and agreeing 100%; now our work is to support the most vulnerable community however we can. Some of our co-workers don't work a lot with the public, and yet, because of our shared work experience, strategic plans and workshops and knowing what the community focus is; they jumped right in." The collective understanding, among Britannia staff, of what needs to be done is a direct byproduct of their pre-existing involvement in the site-wide strategic plan. "Britannia already has a pre-existing approach where all staff are part of the strategic plan, where all staff are welcome to those meetings," continues Cowan, "and there's education workshops where we're focusing on decolonizing our system; we all had the years



prior to this pandemic of going through that together and we had a shared focus of what our community was, what our community needed. As a team, we were prepared for that, we were already working in that direction.” In retrospect, the collective involvement of the site staff with Britannia’s drive and direction constituted a form of emergency preparedness that could be replicated city-wide. It goes beyond the job description, emphasizes Susy Bando; “during my reassignment [as Food Centre Coordinator], I performed different job, but I had the skill set and knowledge of Britannia to be support the programs that were going on.” It goes beyond the job description, emphasizes Cowan, it takes personal commitment; “We had already built connections outside the 9-5 formatted programming. It’s not about having a disaster plan, it’s about having a strategic plan and working as a community.”

The involvement of Britannia staff with the strategic plan speaks to the interpersonal relationships behind much of the Centre’s COVID-19 Response. The existence of this network of relations prior to COVID-19 proved to be essential in maintaining a flexible, supportive and creative work environment throughout the initial lockdowns. “We are a very collaborative environment,” explains Volunteer Coordinator Yao Zhang, “people won’t say ‘no’ or ‘yes.’ We’d probably have a discussion.” This collaborative environment became particularly important when Britannia’s operations shifted in response to the pandemic. “There was a lot going on in the seniors’ area and the youth area,” points out Susy Bando, “my area wasn’t as busy and wanted to help ‘you can count on me, whatever you need.’ It was nice to know I could count on them [too], when I needed support.” According to Cynthia Low, Britannia staff involved in the response were “Ready, willing, able, who understood what the risk was to themselves, who were interested in being a part of the response. It was not a situation where we had clear guidelines, so it had to be someone who felt flexible in that context and that we have a strong enough relationship to be able to do that.” “I never felt like ‘that’s not my job,’” continues Bando, “everybody was just going to do it. And we were going to do it for each other to be supportive to the team and the community.” Changes to site access for staff members brought challenges to interpersonal communication. “We can’t have those conversations that you would have in the hallway,” recalls Marie Beesley, “where someone might say, ‘oh, hey, can we talk about this quickly, while I’ve got you here?’ We don’t have that anymore, so I do find there is a communication barrier. We don’t have that day-to-day communication that we used to have. You actually have to make more of an effort now to communicate because there aren’t those opportunities that used to be there.” Good communication between staff members is imperative, stresses Daniel Cook; “One of the things I hope

we can hold onto is the communication between the staff members. With the 55+ staff team we were lucky because we were a team. But many of the others are siloed and don’t have a team. We would come together every other week at our staff meetings, but after that they would go back to their office where it’s just them. Making sure that the staff members that are in a situation like that, that there’s regular communication with them.” “I work in a building with no windows,” points out Susy Bando, “the only time I would see people and feel part of Britannia was when I would get up and walk to the info centre or walk to the seniors’ area and have these conversations. [COVID-19] ended that.” “There’s a whole bunch of people I can’t relate to that I used to see daily,” agrees Marie Beesley, “I’ll see someone when they’re going by on a walk or I’ll meet Hai to get colour photocopies because I can’t get to the colour photocopier anymore. It’s different, it’s hard to explain.” With the added stress of job insecurity, a collaborative and communicative work environment becomes all the more important. “I see how I would have been able to do the job if I was by myself, but I would not be mentally stable,” continues Cook, “having the pre-existing team and having that family-feel definitely brought us through the really difficult parts.” With the rapid changes staff members have had to adapt their lives to, in staying committed to Britannia’s COVID-19 Response, come concerns around the support for staff available at the Centre. “We ask our staff to work on the front line, they’re out there all the time,” continues Bando, “I’m always concerned; the staff have a family life outside of work. I carry the weight that the staff are doing work that puts them in some risk. It’s been incredible, what people are doing, but I don’t necessarily know if we, as an organization, are doing enough to address the toll this is taking on people. Yes, there are emails that say ‘we understand you’re doing very difficult work’ and services are offered to the staff, but it takes a lot for people to make that call for help, so instead they live with their stress.” For Anne Cowan, support for staff begins by fostering a collaborative work environment as part of crisis preparedness; “building relationships between the staff, when there’s not an emergency: that’s part of our work.”

Foundational relationships of mutual support and collaboration enable flexibility and creativity during times of emergency if the work is motivated by an outstanding community need. “I think everyone knows what needs to be done – sometimes we’re just caught by red tape,” explains Mitra Tshan, “and I think that’s the beauty of Britannia and where it sits right now [with its site partners], that we have that ability to co-exist together and understand that we’re here for the good of the greater community.” The comprehensive operational transition necessitated by COVID-19 was possible with “the relationships between the people

working on site, volunteers and staff,” re-iterates Yao Zhang, “we’re able to work together, we understand each other’s working styles and that helps us to transition into a new operations fairly quickly.” “Overall it just showed how much trust Britannia put in us as staff members,” reflects Kya Prince, “we were shown a lot of trust that we could get things done in ways that worked for us.” Daniel Cook emphasizes that, while staff members were working hard to mobilize resources to support the community, Britannia was mobilizing resources behind the scenes to support the staff; “I’m really thankful to Britannia for being that firm support to us as staff members; ‘yeah, do what you need to do to make sure people are safer, are still connected, are being responded to in a good way.’” Susy Bando echoes the flexibility of support Britannia provided for its staff site-wide; “the majority of auxiliary and full-time staff were laid off and receiving CERB, but Britannia was able to bring many staff in one day per week to help top-up their income. There was a sense that Britannia was looking after the staff in ways that wasn’t happening at other community centres in the city” For Tshan, the collective focus of staff towards the community is what drives Britannia’s response and, in light of evolving health protocols, finding creative ways to make the same impact. “I would like to think that you don’t always have to do things the same way to get the same outcomes,” reflects Tshan, “you’ve got to think outside the box, it may just look a little bit different. You want to do a community project? Great, just find a different way around [COVID]. It’s about meeting the needs of the community.” “Our work is directly affected by COVID-19,” continues Bando, “every day, all of the things that we do, all of the changes to our operations are because of COVID-19. Other people work from home, but they still do the same job or a similar job. Whereas everything we do, [COVID] is just so much a part of my being, it’s hard to get away from that. But, through this experience, it reinforces to me why Britannia means so much to me. Often it feels like a fight to keep what is meaningful for Britannia; the sense of community and the work we do for community. This past year has reminded me why.”

In reflecting on the multifaceted nature of Britannia’s response, many at the Centre emphasize the challenge of seeing the big picture when there’s still work to be done. “When you look at every single – for lack of a better word: department and every little aspect of the community centre,” continues Mitra Tshan, “there are a lot of moving parts and stories yet to be told and none of us can see the bigger picture yet. But I know we’ve made an impact in one way or another.” In the rhythm of the response, the strong foundational relationships between staff and the integrated nature of the strategic plan enables personnel to trust that the impact of their work extends beyond what they might be able to perceive at any given moment. Opportunities to step back and reflect, then, offer the chance to critically assess and motivate the next stages of the response. For Kya Prince, this task of reflection requires an emotional investment; “It’s about not allowing ourselves as a community centre, or as staff or as people to get into a sense of complacency and not let ourselves forget how scary it really got and the toll it really took on emotional well-being and mental health and social isolation. Because we’re seeing the sun come out on the other side, now is the time to reflect and see where we missed some things.” One intention of the research that went into this report was to provide this opportunity for reflection. With the direct impacts of COVID-19 enduring both in the community and at the Centre, the work of Britannia’s response continues. As a research team meeting this work in-motion, it was important that participation offered immediate benefits to the staff, volunteers and community members who gifted their time and experience to this project. As Mitra Tshan reflects;

I’ll be honest, I wasn’t going to do this interview. But the last question you asked [What does it mean to you to be able to share these reflections while COVID is ongoing?] Is the reason why I chose to do it. I think that it is part of a bigger picture and a story that needs to be told about a special place that wouldn’t let a pandemic stop it from doing what it’s meant to do.





# SUMMARY OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS

Success was observed in Britannia's COVID-19 response, both in the number of community members supported, as well as in the experience of residents and community members living through a lockdown and pandemic. Based on this success, the following recommendations have been drafted for community members, community organizations, and local governments to strengthen the cohesion of their communities, to increase resilience leading up to emergencies and to increase wellness during periods of crisis.



# What can you do?

These recommendations are for community members looking to increase resilience within their community, at the block-, building- and ground-level. These recommendations can be used by individuals, families, households, school groups, clubs, neighborhoods blocks, and any motivated group of community members or residents hoping to strengthen their community.

1. Get to know your neighbors. If you don't know your neighbors on a first-name basis, introduce yourself. Figure out ways that you can communicate and connect with those in your neighborhood. You can also join a neighborhood Buy Nothing or Facebook Groups (if they don't exist, start one!). Start thinking about different vulnerabilities that may exist within your own community, and the inequities that your neighbors may experience.
2. Get involved with a local community centre, library, or other community hub. Not only does this provide connection with your neighbors, it also increases the participation, support, and funding that community-based programs and activities often require to keep operating.
3. Support community organizations and local businesses that are actively working to build community connections and/or serve vulnerable groups within your community. Support can take the form of participation (in activities, programs, events), volunteering, purchasing (goods, services) or donating (goods, funds).
4. Ask your local community centres and organizations what they are doing to strengthen the community and increase community resilience. Ask your local representatives what they will do to prepare your community for an emergency and how they will support vulnerable community members.
5. Get involved with local politics and advocate for the consideration of vulnerable groups and community involvement in the development of community planning, and emergency preparedness planning.



# What can community organizations do?

These recommendations are for formally structured organizations that may consist of staff or volunteers. These recommendations can be used by community centres, faith organizations, schools, non-profits, and local businesses to facilitate and drive community connection and strengthening.

1. Build and nurture relationships with other organizations and groups within the neighborhood. Assess common interests and priorities to determine ways to collaborate and support one another, in times of normalcy.
2. Create a vulnerability map of the community to understand who will be most greatly impacted in the event of a natural disaster, or other times of disruption. Consider: What would these groups need in the event of a disaster? How would you communicate with these groups? How would you provide them with or connect them to the resources that they would need? What are you currently doing to address the needs of these groups?
3. Create asset maps of the neighborhood. Ensure that the maps are available and accessible to community members in digital and physical form. Asset maps should include access to free wifi, food, emergency resources (including medical clinics and first aid), earthquake safe buildings, designated emergency gathering locations, access to water, access to phones, community centres, access to first-language support.
4. Share learnings and resources. If you are hosting a vulnerability mapping workshop, invite neighboring organizations to participate. If you've completed an asset map, share the results of your findings throughout the community. Building relationships takes time and creating opportunities of reciprocity can help to nurture them.
5. Nurture your relationships with volunteers, past, present, and future. The strength of an active and engaged volunteer force cannot be underestimated. Decide on a minimum number of volunteers that will always be available at any time (have been pre-screened, have had a police check (if required), and have gone through training). Find ways to engage and involve volunteers, even those that are inactive.
6. Diversify communication methods. It's not only about reaching the most number of people as possible, but ensuring that your communications are accessible to all members of the community. Ensure that this information (communication methods, how to access them, how to use them, how to deliver them) is easily available and accessible to multiple people within the organization.
7. Build emergency preparedness into the registration process of your programs, events, and activities. Request consent from community members to contact them in the event of a community emergency, or for the purpose of wellness check-ins during times of disruption



LOVE YOUR  
NEIGHBOUR

# What can local government do?

These recommendations are for municipalities and other forms of local government, to embed resiliency into their community, to support existing, and to provide the infrastructure, resources, and support to empower communities to be proactive, so that they are able to be reactive in times of emergency and disruption.

1. Embed staff reallocation into organizational emergency planning. Plan to reassign staff members to support facilities and operations as a part of emergency response efforts. Planning to mobilize staff will avoid staff layoffs, and contribute to emergency preparedness.
2. Assess and plan for digital and other communications infrastructure. Plan to provide free wifi and computer access through-out the city, beyond commercial areas. Prioritize access in low income neighborhoods and housing developments.
3. Build off of the City of Vancouver's Resilient Neighborhoods Program, and allocate staff time and municipal resources to facilitate resilience building workshops within community organizations and hubs. Regularly facilitate these workshops and trainings (every 3-5 years).
4. Develop a city-wide emergency food procurement and distribution network, partnering with existing organizations, and building off of existing and successful initiatives.
5. Listen to communities. Facilitate workshops and engagement events to understand how communities are already creating connecting and increasing resilience. Fund and support existing actions and resources before developing and implementing new ones.
6. Embed community building and community resilience into the mandate of municipal-run community centres. Ensure that community centres position themselves at the centre of the community, not only recreation centres.
7. In times of emergency, open an Information Technology hotline to field basic questions around internet access, phone service provision and device operation questions should continuity of service delivery depend upon digital literacy.



# CLOSING REMARKS

The impacts of COVID-19 will continue to be felt both in and beyond the Britannia community for generations to come. This report was drafted to better understand what has happened and to better prepare for what is to come. What is to come not only includes the potential of other, compounding crises, but the growing pains of this new 'normal.' As the stories in this report have attested, certain communities were left behind in the immediate city-wide response to COVID-19 and this report stands as evidence that they must be prioritized in the coming recovery. This can only happen through relationships of trust and respect, accountability and reciprocity, support and healing.

COVID-19 has exposed the fundamental inequities that characterize 'business as usual.' The healing process that is needed thus goes beyond the immediate ruptures caused by the pandemic; these harms are a compass that points towards deeper root injustices. Britannia's commitment to the sense of belonging, joy and empowerment of everyone in its community is a commitment to addressing these injustices from the grassroots-up. To build a newer normal that is better prepared to support the well-being of the whole community through the next crisis, this commitment must be shared across all levels of government, organization and community.



# THE TEAM



## Ben

My involvement in this project was made possible through a partnership between Britannia Community Service Centre and the First Nations & Indigenous Studies Practicum Program at the University of British Columbia, where I am currently finishing an undergraduate degree. In many ways, this report has been my introduction to the Britannia community and I wish to acknowledge all of the generosity and hospitality that has been extended during these past eight months, without which this project would not have been possible.



## Emily Lomax

I am a resident of Strathcona Neighborhood and a frequent visitor to Britannia's library branch. I have a background in community and operational sustainability and currently work in healthcare. I got involved with this project out of a desire to contribute to Britannia's Covid-19 Response efforts but being unable to do so through the Food Centre deliveries, or the Seniors Wellness Check-ins I am grateful to have worked alongside Ben and Cynthia in the last eight months, and am humbled by the dedication, the charge, and the grace by which Britannia's community has acted in response to the challenges arising from the pandemic.



## Cynthia Low

Cynthia is the proud president of Britannia community centre and takes pride in everything that the community centre offers and bring to those who need it. The community is very much a second home to anyone who would like to call it that.



**APPENDIX**

# APPENDIX 1:

## COMMUNITY PARTNER QUESTIONNAIRE

These are the questions given to those involved in the main components and actions of the response.

### BCSC Covid-19 Response Questionnaire

#### Introduction

This survey is being distributed to staff and possibly volunteers involved in Britannia Community Services Centre's Covid-19 Response from March 15, 2020, until October 31, 2020. The purpose of this survey is to collect data to inform a quantitative evaluation of the Response, by community researchers. Please note that, depending on how you were involved with the Covid-19 Response, responding to these questions may take a significant amount of time.

BCSC's COVID-19 Response includes:

- Vulnerable Seniors and Adults Outreach
- Vulnerable Youth Outreach
- COVID-19 Emergency Food Delivery

The evaluation informed from the data of this survey will be used for a publicly available report. All participants will remain anonymous.

If there is information that is not within your knowledge or relevant to your involvement with the Response, please feel free to leave them blank. If there are any questions that you are not comfortable answering, please leave them blank. Additionally, if there are any questions that you believe require greater space or context to answer, please state so as a response.

There are aspects of this survey that may take some time looking into. If that is the case, you are able to make edits or additions to your responses after you've submitted them. \*Note: In order to access your saved survey response, you will need to copy and save the web link.

If there is a more convenient, or efficient way to communicate information (such as a spreadsheet or reports from existing management systems), you can contact Emily Lomax by email at [emilyirenelomax@gmail.com](mailto:emilyirenelomax@gmail.com).

If you require any clarification about the survey or have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

We are hoping to have the surveys completed by Friday, December 30

Thank you for participating in the collection of information for the purpose of this evaluation. It is greatly appreciated!

1. Email Address:
2. Name:
3. Phone:
4. Your position with/relationship to Britannia Community Services Centre:
5. May Emily Lomax get in touch with you for elaboration or clarification of any of your responses?
6. Preferred method of contact:
7. Please provide a brief description of your involvement with Britannia Covid-19 Response.



## Stakeholder Relationships

Feel free to leave any of these questions blank if you do not wish to answer, do not know the answer, or if the question is not relevant to you

1. Please provide a list of stakeholders related to your involvement in the Response and a brief description of how they were involved (i.e. donated food, donated funds, volunteered time, etc.). Stakeholders may include specific community groups, sponsors, collaborations, or coalition partners.
2. Were there any pre-existing partnerships with stakeholders that were essential to Britannia's Covid-19 Response? If yes, please provide a brief description of Britannia's history or relationship with them.
3. Were there any new partnerships that formed, due to the COVID-19 response? If yes, how did these relationships come to be?
4. Were any new relationships made with community members or groups, as a result of the action and support provided through the Response? If yes, please provide a brief description.
5. What aspects of the existing volunteer program facilitated an effective Covid-19 response?
6. Please provide a brief description of volunteer programs at Britannia, prior to March 16, 2020.
7. Were there programs or services run through Britannia Community Services Centre that remained open as a part of Britannia's Covid-19 Response? If yes, which ones?
8. Is there any other additional information about stakeholder information that you would like to include?

## The Immediate Response

A look into the actions taken following the March 16th provincial lockdown. We are hoping to understand what immediate actions were taken (in the first weeks and months).

Feel free to leave any of these questions blank if you do not wish to answer, do not know the answer, or if the question is not relevant to you

1. What pre-existing administrative and operational infrastructure allowed for the immediate response? (I.e. existing relationships with community partners, volunteer networks, staff capacity, etc.)
2. What was the decision-making process involved in the initial implementation of the Covid-19 response? (I.e. What were the key steps from ideation, to providing support?)
3. What planning or discussion about providing community support through the Response occurred prior to lockdown? (March 16, 2020)
4. What is the timeline of actions taken between March 16 and October 31, 2020? (Including planning, implementation, volunteer engagement/

- outreach, community engagement outreach)
5. Was there any point between March 16 and October 31 that required a pivoting of support efforts, or a significant change in how support actions were being managed or carried out?
  6. What methods were used to engage with community members who may need support?
  7. What methods were used for volunteer engagement?
  8. What actions could have been taken to mobilize a more effective response?
  9. Is there any more information about the immediate response that you would like to include?

## Community Impact - Emergency Food Delivery

A measurement of the COVID-19 Emergency Food Delivery Program.

Feel free to leave any of these questions blank if you do not wish to answer, do not know the answer, or if the question is not relevant to you

1. How many families were supported by the food delivery program?
2. What was the distribution of deliveries received by families? (i.e. x number of families received 1 delivery, x number of families received 2 deliveries, ... etc.)
3. What was the total number of food deliveries?
4. What was the total quantity of food delivered? (In kgs)
5. What was the total amount of volunteer time dedicated to the food delivery program?
6. What was the geographical range of the food delivery program?
7. Is there any more information about the Emergency Food Delivery Program that you would like to include?

## Community Impact - Vulnerable Seniors and Adults Outreach

A measurement of the Vulnerable Seniors and Adults Outreach Program.

Feel free to leave any of these questions blank if you do not wish to answer, do not know the answer, or if the question is not relevant to you

1. How many seniors were supported by the support calls?
2. What was the distribution of calls received by the seniors? (i.e. x number of seniors received 1 call, x number of families received 2 calls, ... etc.)
3. What was the total number of phone calls?
4. What was the total amount of volunteer time dedicated to senior support calls?
5. What was the geographical range of the outreach?

6. Is there any more information about the Vulnerable Seniors and Adults Outreach Program that you would like to include?

## **Community Impact - Vulnerable Youth Outreach**

A measurement of the COVID-19 Vulnerable Youth Outreach Program.

Feel free to leave any of these questions blank if you do not wish to answer, do not know the answer, or if the question is not relevant to you

1. What services were offered to support youth, as a part of Britannia's Covid-19 Response?
2. How many youths were supported?
3. What is the age range of youth supported?
4. What was the total amount of volunteer time dedicated to the youth support program?
5. Is there any other additional information about the Vulnerable Youth Outreach Program that you would like to include?

### **Conclusion**

Are there any aspects of Britannia's Covid-19 Response that this survey didn't cover, that you believe would be useful to its quantitative evaluation?

# APPENDIX 2:

## Interview Script for Project Participants

### Preamble:

For the purposes of this conversation, when I refer to COVID-19, I am referring not just to the viral pandemic, but the broader adaptations of our daily lives that have resulted from it. In the same vein, when I refer to Britannia's response program, I am referring to any support services facilitated through Britannia Community Services Centre between March 16th, 2020 and October 31st, 2020.

Also, a reminder that you are free to pause, step back from or terminate the interview at any time and you do not have to answer questions that you do not want to. This conversation is expected to run for one hour, although I am available to continue the conversation beyond that time if you would prefer.

Are there any questions before we start the interview?

### INTRODUCTION:

1. Can you please introduce yourself, how you would like to be referred to and any affiliations you would like to be identified with for the purposes of this project?
  - a. How long have you been living in the greater Britannia neighborhood?
2. Can you tell me a bit about how you understand and relate to the greater Britannia community?
  - a. Are there any stories you would like to share about what this community means to you?
  - b. Is there anything else you would like to share about the place you live?
3. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, how did you access Britannia's facilities, staff, programming or other operations?
4. Prior to this pandemic, were there any support services, through Britannia or otherwise, essential to your well-being?
  - a. What makes these services essential to your well-being?
  - b. How did you access these services?
5. Is there anything else you would like to add about yourself or your relations to community, Britannia or support services prior to the pandemic?

### LOCKDOWN:

1. In the days immediately following the city wide lockdown on March 16th, 2020, how were your relations to community impacted?
  - a. Would you like to share any experiences from this time period?
  - b. Did you find community in any unexpected places during this time?

2. In the days immediately following the city wide lockdown on March 16th, 2020, were any essential support services impacted?
  - a. Were there any interruptions to these services?
  - b. Did you find support in any unexpected places during this time?
3. Is there anything else you would like to share from this initial lockdown period?

## **RESPONSE PROGRAM:**

1. Can you tell me about your experience with Britannia's COVID-19 Response Program?
  - a. Did the Response Program provide you any essential support?
2. Can you tell me a bit about the timing of Britannia's COVID-19 Response Program?
  - a. Was there any lapse in support between the initial lockdown and the Response Program?
  - b. Were there any gaps in support during the Response Program?
3. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience with Britannia's COVID-19 Response Program?

## **REFLECTIONS:**

1. What would you like to hold onto from your experience with COVID-19, the initial lockdown and Britannia's Response Program?
2. How has your experience with COVID-19, the initial lockdown and Britannia's Response Program affected your relationship the place you live?
3. In the context of everything that you've shared, what does community resilience mean to you?
4. Given that the COVID-19 pandemic continues to be a major part of our lives in community, what does this opportunity to reflect and share your experience mean to you?
  - a. How would you share these reflections with future generations?
5. In reflecting back on this time, is there anything else you would like to add?

# APPENDIX 3:

## BRITANNIA'S COMMUNITY PARTNERS

These are many of the community partners who facilitated the success of Britannia's COVID-19 Response.

<p><b>Community Organizations</b></p>	<p>411 Seniors Centre Society ACE Team Backpack Buddies Basketball Foundation BC Association of Community Responses Community Action Program from Children Canada Revenue Agency First Nations Health Authority Frog Hollow Neighborhood House Grandview Woodland Food Connection Office of Seniors Advocates QMUNITY REACH Community Health Centre UBC Indigenous Learning Centre Vancouver Coastal Health Vancouver Firefighters Foundation Vancouver Latin American Cultural Centre Vancouver Parks Board Vancouver Public Library Vancouver School Board YMCA</p>
<p><b>Community Connectors (‘Referral’ Partners)</b></p>	<p>Atira Women's Society Battered Women's Support Services BC Housing and Health Services Burnaby Neighborhood House Carnegie Community Centre Downtown Eastside Women's Centre John Howard Society Kiwassa Neighborhood House Mavis McMullen Housing Society Ministry of Children &amp; Family Development Miyotehew 2nd Stage Housing for Women Mount St. Joseph's Hospital Native Education College Nootka Elementary Pacific Community Resources Society Pathways to Education RayCam Co-operative Centre RICHER Initiative Robert and Lily Lee Community Health Centre Street Life Outreach</p>

**Funders/Donors**

Acorn Restaurant  
Aji Gourmet Products  
Buddha Squash Farm  
Cafe Etico  
Cafe Justice  
Choices Food Market  
City of Vancouver  
CLICK (Contributing to Lives of Inner City Kids)  
Cobs Bread  
Community Food Centre Canada  
Community Members (GoFundMe)  
Eastend Food Co-op  
Eastside Family Place  
Eternal Abundance  
Food Mesh  
Fractal Farm  
Fresh Roots  
Freshpoint Produce  
Government of Canada  
Greater Vancouver Foodbank  
Havana Restaurant  
Italian Cultural Centre  
Liquids and Solids  
Livia Restaurant  
Mount Pleasant Family Place Circles of Care and  
Connection  
Panne Formaggio  
Pasture2Plate  
Save On Meats  
Sunco  
Taybeh Catering  
Terra Breads  
The Nut Hut  
United Way  
Van Whole Produce  
Vancouver Food Runners  
Vancouver Foundation  
Westbank

# APPENDIX 4:

## EXAMPLE OF PRINT OUT FOR SENIORS AND ELDERS

Weekly resource information sheets were printed and delivered to Seniors and Elders.

### COVID-19 Resources

Info on COVID-19:

#### COVID-19 UPDATES:

- Government of Canada - Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) Updates
- BC Centre for Disease Control
- BC COVID-19 Symptom Self-Assessment Tool
- BC Coronavirus Information Line: 1-888-COVID19 or via text message at 604-630-0300
- A Well Organized Quick Info Sheet – COVID 19 resources – click here

#### BC Coronavirus Information Line:

1-888-COVID19 (1-888-268-4319) or via text message at 604-630-0300

#### COVID-19 Multilingual Resources

<https://digem.med.ubc.ca/covid-19-multilingual-resources/>

#### Need Help Now – 24 Hour Service: Crisis Line

Crisis Line	604-872-3311
Helpline for Children	310-1234
BC Suicide Line	1-800-784-2433
Mental Health Support Line	310-6789
Kids Help Phone	1-800-668-6868
BC211 Resource Directory	211 ( <a href="http://www.bc211.ca/">http://www.bc211.ca/</a> )

#### MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES:

- Child and Adolescent Response Team: 604-874-2300
- Mental Health Services Intake Line: 604-675-3895
- Broadway Youth Resource Centre: 604-786-2228
- Inner City Youth Clinic: 604-806-9415
- [www.anxietybc.com](http://www.anxietybc.com)
- [www.heretohelp.ca](http://www.heretohelp.ca)
- [www.openmindbc.ca](http://www.openmindbc.ca)
- [www.keltymentalhealth.ca](http://www.keltymentalhealth.ca)
- Mindshift App
- Breathr App
- Stop, Breathe & Think App



- Headspace App
- Tools for Managing Stress and Burnout: 6-Week Online (Adults)
- Tools for Managing Uncertainty and Change: Free Online (Youth)

## **LGBTQAI2S+ YOUTH FRIENDLY RESOURCE GUIDE FOR COVID-19:**

- <http://www.vancouverpride.ca/index.php?id=289548> put together by The Vancouver PRIDE Society for LGBTQAI2S+ youth and their families.

### **Extended resources for youth in care**

- <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2020CFD0042-000596>

## **HOUSING RESOURCES:**

- BC Housing Homeless Prevention Program: Provides people at risk of becoming homeless with rent supplements and support services. For info phone: 1-800-257-7756
- PCRS Housing Rental Assistance Program: Provides youth ages 16-24 with temporary financial assistance while attending training, school, or work. Monthly subsidy of \$250 for up to 18 months to help pay rent, utilities, or transportation costs. Phone: 604-709-5721 or Email: [byrc@pcrs.ca](mailto:byrc@pcrs.ca)
- Vancouver's Tenant Union Resources
- COVID-19 Renter's Toolkit

## **BC Housing**

- For those living in BC Housing, no evictions can be given for non-payment of rent
- Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) and other mortgage insurers offer tools to lenders that can assist homeowners who may be experiencing financial difficulty. These include payment deferral, loan re-amortization, capitalization of outstanding interest arrears and other eligible expenses, and special payment arrangements.
- Check with your lender about payment deferral options

## **FINANCIAL RESOURCES:**

- COVID-19 Youth Support Fund
- Detailed List of Government Supports available for Individuals and Families – [click here](#)
- Department of Finance Economic Response Plan Canada announced new economic measures to support Canadian workers and businesses during this time of uncertainty.
- Employment Insurance Information
- Surrey, White Rock and Delta Emergency Loans for low-income individuals and families: Apply online at [www.sourcesbc.ca](http://www.sourcesbc.ca)

- Harvest Project North Vancouver: Provides interest free loans to individuals and families in North Vancouver who are at risk of eviction. Call 604-983-9488 to leave a call back number; the case worker will return calls between 11 am and 3 pm Wednesdays and Thursdays
- Labatt Better Together Grant: Offers financial assistance to provide basic essentials and support services to improve the quality of life of individuals and families in need. Website: [www.labattbettertogether.ca](http://www.labattbettertogether.ca) or Email: [bettertogether@labatt.com](mailto:bettertogether@labatt.com)
- Watari – Vancouver: Supports homeless and at-risk youth to live more independently with financial assistance, life-skills groups, and one-to-one case management. Website: [www.watari.ca](http://www.watari.ca) or Email: [info@watari.ca](mailto:info@watari.ca) Ceridian Cares Grant
- Ceridian Cares Grant: Offers financial support to Canadian individuals and families in need; grants cover food, clothing (including footwear), and household items. Website: [www.ceridiancares.ca](http://www.ceridiancares.ca) or Email: [ceridiancarescan@ceridiancares.com](mailto:ceridiancarescan@ceridiancares.com)

## **BC Hydro – Bill Deferral & Payment Plans Available call 1-800-BC-HYDRO**

- The COVID-19 Customer Assistance Program provides customers the option to defer bill payments or arrange for flexible payment plans with no penalty. Customers are encouraged to call BC Hydro's customer team at 1 800 BCHYDRO (1 800 224 9376) to discuss bill payment options.
- Customers facing temporary financial hardship and possible disconnection of their service due to job loss, illness, or loss of a family member may also be eligible for BC Hydro's Customer Crisis Fund, which provides access to grants of up to \$600 to pay their bills.

## **Income Assistance (IA) and Persons' with Disabilities (PWD)**

- A one-time payment that can be provided to recipients of Income Assistance (IA) and Persons with Disability (PWD) who face unexpected emergency needs to prevent imminent danger to their physical health or safety of a child. Emergency/Disaster Supplements are available when all other resources have been exhausted
- To find out if eligible call 1-866-866-0800 from 9am-4pm weekdays

## **ICBC Insurance**

- Customers on a monthly Autoplan payment plan, who are facing financial challenges due to COVID-19, can defer their payment for 90 days with no penalty. Customers can apply for deferrals online or call our customer support team at 604-661-2723 or 1-800-665-6442 to discuss

your payment options

## Extra Time to File Income Tax Returns

- Due date for 2019 tax returns have been deferred to June 1, 2020
- Any new income tax balances due, or installments will be deferred until after August 31st, 2020 without incurring interest or penalties
- If receiving GST cheques and Canada Child Benefit, it is suggested to not delay filing 2019 taxes so entitlements are properly calculated.

## New Canada Emergency Response Benefit

- Will provide a taxable benefit of \$2,000 a month for up to 4 months to:
- Workers who must stop working due to COVID19 and do not have access to paid leave or other income support.
- Workers who are sick, quarantined, or taking care of someone who is sick with COVID-19
- Working parents who must stay home without pay to care for children that are sick or need additional care because of school and daycare closures.
- Workers who still have their employment but are not being paid because there is currently not sufficient work and their employer has asked them not to come to work.
- Wage earners and self-employed individuals, including contract workers, who would not otherwise be eligible for Employment Insurance
- Application details My CRA and My Service Canada, beginning the first week of April.

## Compass Card Partial Refunds

- For those eligible and are currently not using their compass card due to being quarantined/self-isolation, a partial refund can be requested to the month of March. Call: (604) 398-2042
- Online Form – [click here](#)

## Financial Assistance:

The Department of Finance Canada announced new economic measures to support Canadian workers and businesses during this time of uncertainty.

<https://www.canada.ca/en/department-finance/economic-response-plan.html>

For Canadians without paid sick leave (or similar workplace accommodation) who are sick, quarantined, or forced to stay home to care for children, the Government is:

- Waiving the one-week waiting period for those individuals in imposed quarantine that claim Employment Insurance (EI) sickness benefits. This temporary measure is in effect as of March 15, 2020.
- Waiving the requirement to provide a medical certificate to access EI.

Contact the dedicated toll-free number if in quarantine and seeking to waive the waiting period: 1-833-381-2725, 1-800-529-3742 (TTY).

- Introducing the Emergency Care Benefit providing up to \$900 bi-weekly, for up to 15 weeks. This flat-payment Benefit would be administered through the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) and provide income support to workers who do not qualify for EI and parents with children who require care or supervision due to school or daycare closures, and are unable to earn an income, irrespective of whether they qualify for EI or not. Application will be available in April 2020.

## **Food Assistance:**

- Vancouver Food Asset Map
- COVID-19 Vancouver - Emergency Food Services and Community Supports
- BYRC Food Security - Vancouver: Pre-packaged cold meals available and Emergency Food Kit (couple of bags of groceries) Call ahead so they can prepare a bag of food for you: 604-709-5720
- Share Food Bank Tri Cities, Wednesday picks up of food hampers.
- Greater Vancouver Food Bank: Free food available for pick up.