

ACCESS

British Columbia

Café Society Transforms Lives of Low-Income Residents in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside

by Jaskiran Uppal
WD Communications, Vancouver

Getting a job after long-term unemployment can be challenging. The Potluck Café Society is making that transition easier.

Among other programs, this unique not-for-profit organization helps Vancouver's Downtown Eastside residents get employment skills. Specifically, the organization helps develop work-based and professional development skills for the restaurant and catering business.

Potluck provides a forum for building confidence and self-esteem. The organization offers trainees a social support network by providing a specialized focus on individuals.

"We knew that something was working for us when we had a 98 per cent attendance rate over the last 18 months and virtually no attrition," said Elizabeth Lougheed Green, Executive Director of the society. "We learned that trainees view the Café as a positive force in their



Program participants celebrate the second anniversary of the Potluck Café.

lives and as a surrogate family that provides them with support, friendship and mentorship."

To help subsidize its programs, Potluck operates one of the top four catering businesses in Vancouver. By combining the needs of a successful catering business with its social goals, "the organization offers essential services to downtown eastside residents who would otherwise not be taken care of," said Green.

Established in 2000, the Potluck Café Society aimed to create employment opportunities for at-risk Downtown Eastside residents within a financially stable organization.

Western Economic Diversification Canada supported the Potluck Café Society with \$15,000 to develop a business plan for expanding catering services. The funding will lead to more opportunities for Downtown Eastside residents.

"Western Economic Diversification Canada's funding has helped us build the capacity Potluck needs to hire more at-risk residents," said Green. "This partnership with Western Economic Diversification Canada is important because Potluck is structured in a way that requires partnerships in order to be successful."

For more information about how Western Economic Diversification Canada is involved with the social economy, visit www.wd.gc.ca/ced/se/default_e.asp. ■

by Jillian Glover, WD Communications, Vancouver

Co-op Empowers Women Through Art

While the media often portray Vancouver's Downtown Eastside as Canada's poorest neighbourhood, everyday stories of hope, community and progress emerge.

One of these stories comes from a building that doesn't look like much from the outside. However, inside is a beautifully renovated, spacious area where Downtown Eastside women are learning to be artists and entrepreneurs for the first time.

The *Enterprising Women Making Art* project is a co-operative development project that began operating in the Downtown Eastside in August 2003.

The Atira Women's Resource Society originally launched the project at its Bridge Housing for Women, a 36-unit supportive housing program in the Downtown Eastside. Atira is a not-for-profit society established in 1983 to provide residential and non-residential programs for women and their children who have experienced violence or abuse.

With over \$62,000 in support from Western Economic Diversification Canada, Atira was able to develop a business plan and renovate a new location for the *Enterprising Women Making Art* project, which allowed the society to offer the project to more Downtown Eastside women.

"The *Enterprising Women Making Art* project provides women who may have struggled with substance use and serious physical and mental health issues with an opportunity to develop skills that

build a sense of confidence and independence," said Janice Abbott, executive director of Atira. "The project is a creative response to the employment issues facing women in the Downtown Eastside."

By working with established artists, the *Enterprising Women Making Art* project provides group-based skills training, education and support to women interested in creating marketable artisan items and developing an artisans' co-operative in the Downtown Eastside. The project envisions that co-operatives

can broaden the range of employment opportunities available to women with low incomes.

Atira also received support from the Enterprising Non-Profit Program. VanCity Credit Union created this program in collaboration with Western Economic Diversification Canada and other organizations. The Enterprising Non-Profit Program provides matching grants to non-profit organizations in B.C. that are interested in starting or expanding a business in order to improve socioeconomic conditions in their communities. ■



The Honourable Hedy Fry, MP for Vancouver Centre and Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, admires arts and crafts made by women in the Enterprising Women Making Art program. She announced Western Economic Diversification Canada's support at the program's launch.

by Erin Macpherson, WD Communications, Vancouver

Sweet LeiLani Cosmetics — a Small Business with a Social Cause

Creating a successful business can be extremely gratifying. When the venture helps people who suffer from the effects of cancer, burns or birthmarks, the experience can become infinitely rewarding.

Twenty years ago, LeiLani Kopp was employed in the film industry as a hair and makeup artist. When the long days interfered with family life, she switched careers, and ended up volunteering for the Cancer Society. She styled wigs and helped patients improve their self-esteem with makeup. “I know how makeup transforms us on the outside,” says Kopp, “but I’ve realized how it can transform us on the inside.”

LeiLani’s search for a pure cover makeup that would work on sensitive, post-operative skin came up blank, and provided the inspiration for her Vancouver-based business venture called *Face the Future*.

She developed the Studio Cover Stick, a gentle makeup that camouflages post surgical burns, scars and bruises. It was an instant success with occupational therapists at the Vancouver General Hospital. Sales grew steadily, enabling her to donate 15 per cent of profits back to the burn and plastic surgery unit.

With her business established, expansion was inevitable. “That’s when I

realized I needed a complete line of makeup,” she notes. Sweet LeiLani cosmetics were the result. The water-based makeup for everyone contains no fragrance, mineral oils or petroleum.

Kopp’s sister Tana McNicol has a business background and agreed to take the cosmetics to market. After two years, the partners broke through the retail barrier when Save-on-Foods stores in B.C. agreed to carry their products.

Having exhausted several financial avenues, Kopp and McNicol turned to the Women’s Enterprise Society of British Columbia for assistance. The initiative, part of Western Economic Diversification Canada’s business service network, provides business information, resources and financing to women entrepreneurs. Thanks to a solid business plan, the sisters secured a loan from the society.

Today, Sweet LeiLani is in all B.C. and Alberta Save-on Foods stores that feature cosmetic departments. Pharmasave B.C. and Alberta also carry their products. The company’s success has earned Kopp a Langley Chamber of Commerce Woman of Excellence award.

“Follow your dreams,” says Kopp. “It’s what keeps you going. It’s what lets you reach your full potential.” ■



Sweet LeiLani's Studio Cover Stick can be used to cover severe post medical surgical bruising, scarring, birthmarks and burns.

by Karl Yeh, WD Communications, Vancouver

Guilt-Free Fast Food...for Cars

Kees Schaddalee is a managing partner of WISE Energy, a biodiesel market and project development firm in Victoria. As he drives to work each day, there is a difference between his vehicle and the other vehicles he passes.

His diesel car is running on leftover grease and vegetable oil — biodiesel to be exact. Schaddalee is one of the growing number of people using this renewable source of fuel.

“As a person working in the biodiesel industry, I felt it was important to practice what I preach,” said Schaddalee.

“I made no modifications to my vehicle and it has been running smoother and quieter on biodiesel for the past two years. Running my vehicle on pure biodiesel has allowed my family to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions by five tonnes per year.”

Why is biodiesel becoming a popular commodity? Its simplicity! Imagine a fuel source derived from the leftover grease of a typical fast food hamburger. Biodiesel is a ready-for-market, biodegradable fuel source that can be combined with petroleum diesel to fuel diesel engines. It significantly reduces greenhouse gas emissions and also helps curb vehicle maintenance costs by reducing engine wear.



Minister Stephen Owen joins BC Minister Richard Neufeld, Vancouver Mayor Larry Campbell and Fraser Basin Council's Patrick Reid in fueling a crew-cab with BC biodiesel.

On March 30, 2005, biodiesel took another step toward becoming a viable alternative to petroleum fuel. Through a partnership among Western Economic Diversification Canada, the Province of B.C. and the Fraser Basin Council, six municipalities across the Lower Mainland agreed to use biodiesel to fuel their public vehicles. The cities of Vancouver, North Vancouver, Richmond, Burnaby, North Delta, and Whistler will use approximately 80 million litres of biodiesel fuel over the next five years.

“Purchasing blended biodiesel for our fleets provides the opportunity to reduce greenhouse gases and improve air quality,” said Vancouver Mayor Larry Campbell.

As diesel prices continue to soar, biodiesel has the potential to be the alternative fuel of choice for fleets and consumers looking for a clean, renewable and affordable energy source. Finally, a guilt-free fast food...for cars at least!

For more information on BC municipalities' biofleet pilot initiative, please visit www.bcbiofleet.ca.

For more information on Western Economic Diversification Canada's support for alternative energy, visit www.wd.gc.ca. ■

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