

**A BOLD NEW WAY  
FOR PEOPLE  
IN BC'S CAPITAL REGION  
TO WORK TOGETHER**

**Annual Report  
November 2005**

**Quality of Life CHALLENGE ANNUAL REPORT 2005:  
EVALUATION AND LEARNINGS FROM THEORY OF CHANGE**

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# EVALUATION AND LEARNINGS FROM THEORY OF CHANGE

## SUMMARY

There is growing evidence that the Quality of Life CHALLENGE is a lever for change in BC's Capital Region. Shifts are beginning to be seen in established societal systems which mean that critical issues will be addressed further upstream over the long term. This report documents changes in BC's Capital Region because of the intentional application of the theory of change by the Quality of Life CHALLENGE.

One hundred and ninety-eight people from all sectors and income levels are sharing leadership in the Quality of Life CHALLENGE. The focus on employers during 2004 and 2005 has engaged more people from the private sector. Thirty-eight case studies of local employers have highlighted employment practices that improve quality of life and/or reduce poverty in the workplace. These stories have been told in the bi-monthly electronic newsletter - "the employer CHALLENGE", on the television and in the new publication, "HR Options for Action". There is a buzz in the business community about the CHALLENGE.

The CHALLENGE contributed significantly to changes in local government policies regarding housing affordability. A Regional Housing Trust Fund has been established, 6 new by-laws have been passed and a number of developments have been approved. Since 2003, 544 households now have safe, decent, affordable housing: 194 units for people in core housing need with moderate income and 350 units for people with low incomes. New projects housing 30 households have been approved for funding allocated from the 2005 Regional Housing Trust Fund.

The work of the Community Action Team is proving to be uniquely effective in breaking the myths and communicating the realities of living in poverty, particularly about the waged poor. The Poverty Experience, Fishbowls, personal stories, and application of the Inclusion Policy are some of the ways that people who are experiencing poverty are having an impact on the CHALLENGE and on the larger community.

Messages about housing and the waged poor are effectively communicated alongside information about what people can do to be part of the solution. There is growing evidence that people from all sectors are taking the initiative and the responsibility for the health of the community. The CHALLENGE is a catalyst, but the community is owning the outcome.

Through its recognition program, the CHALLENGE is able to document when people or organizations take up the challenge of housing or paid work. In 2005, 368 CHALLENGE decals were publicly presented to people who have taken action that improves quality of life in the region. Six groups were selected to receive Quality of Life Awards. The recognition strategy continues to be refined, and will take a more prominent place next year as an incentive for change.

Change in quality of life is being monitored and measured. A major report on broad quality of life indicators was released in June. A regional survey of self rated quality of life and quality of employment was completed in 2005. Because of lag time and infrequent data collection, significant changes in poverty rates and in quality of life indicators are unlikely to be seen for several years. But solid groundwork is being laid to improve the quality of life for people whose lives have been disadvantaged by low income and/or inadequate housing.

The outcomes and outputs of the Quality of Life CHALLENGE are monitored and measured quantitatively where possible. Starting in 2005, qualitative shifts and impacts are gathered and tracked using an adapted Outcome Mapping process. Activities and components of the Quality of Life CHALLENGE programs are evaluated.

Over the past three years much has been tried, much has been learned, and much has been gained. The effectiveness of poverty reduction strategies are being documented. Outcome Mapping is revealing changed behaviour and new relationships within and across sectors and income classes. The fibre of this community is stronger and more resilient because of the influence of the CHALLENGE. This comprehensive community initiative has the potential to shift the culture of this community.

## INTRODUCTION

### *IMAGINE*

*A sustainable quality of life for everyone in  
British Columbia's Capital Region.*

*Many of us take it for granted.  
Some of us struggle to achieve it.  
Each of us has a stake in it.*

The Quality of Life CHALLENGE is a bold way for all sectors to work together toward a sustainable quality of life for everyone in BC's Capital Region. The CHALLENGE has contributed to long term change in this region, particularly the reduction of poverty.

The approach of Vibrant Communities is based upon four fundamental concepts of social change. As a TrailBuilder within that Pan-Canadian poverty reduction initiative, the Quality of Life CHALLENGE is:

- A comprehensive community-based initiative;
- Collaboratively engaging all sectors and classes of the community;
- Building on existing community assets;
- A community that is learning from its successes and failures.

Seven assumptions about how social change can happen within communities have been integrated into the CHALLENGE since its inception in 2001. During 2005, these assumptions have been named more explicitly as the CHALLENGE's Theory of Change. Processes have been put in place to intentionally measure the impact of each assumption and the resulting shifts and amendments.

This report documents the learnings, evaluation and contributions of the Quality of Life CHALLENGE regarding poverty reduction and systemic change in BC's Capital Region. In this report there are seven sections, one for each of the seven assumptions that form the Theory of Change: shared leadership, monitor and measure change, raise awareness, inclusion, community ownership, recognition, and relationships. Each section begins with a context statement followed by examples showing some of the changes that have occurred. Where possible, movement toward Vibrant Communities' household targets are included. This is followed by a description of the challenges and how they are being addressed. Each section concludes with key lessons learned over the past year and the implications for future work.

### **1. SHARED LEADERSHIP**

*The Quality of Life CHALLENGE has contributed to change.  
Change has happened because individuals and  
organizations have stepped forward  
to take leadership within the CHALLENGE.*

Leadership implies influence. The CHALLENGE believes that everyone can be a leader and create change within his or her sphere of influence. Much of participation within the CHALLENGE is about pushing boundaries, recognizing the importance of stretching beyond personal comfort zones to achieve community goals.

From early on, the CHALLENGE resisted a leadership model with established, recognized community leaders. The leaders within the CHALLENGE are those organizations and individuals who are committed to the vision and priorities and who demonstrate the values. Leadership is intentionally shared among individual citizens with relatively small spheres of influence, and representatives of organizations who wield considerable power and influence. The diversity of those involved shifts the message and the balance of power.

198 people are taking leadership in the CHALLENGE by sitting on Working Groups and Task Forces, investing funds and/or expertise, using influence, or implementing a poverty reduction initiative:

- 17 Public sector (3 federal, 4 provincial, 6 local/municipal, 3 education, 1 health authority)
- 42 private sector
- 48 community groups
- 91 individuals (16 low income, 75 other)

### Examples

#### *Organizational leaders:*

Leadership Partners have made long term investments in the CHALLENGE, with multi year commitments of time and resources totaling \$100,000 and over. In addition to the Community Council, the Lead Partner and convener organization, there are six leadership partners in the CHALLENGE: Coast Capital Savings, Vibrant Communities, Shaw Cable, the Ocean and Jack FM, the Times Colonist and Service Canada. A growing number of organizations and businesses are supporting the CHALLENGE.

Coast Capital Savings was the first Leadership Partner. Its continuous commitment has been a significant lever to encourage new supporters. In June 2005, Lloyd Craig, CEO of Coast Capital Savings, extended his personal invitation to a Corporate Breakfast to all corporate leaders in the region. Eighty-five attended the event where Craig challenged them to join him as a Leadership Partner in the CHALLENGE. The Corporate Breakfast assisted in deepening existing commitments and new relationships with potential partners.

In the fall of 2005, meetings were held with media Leadership Partners to strategically refocus and maximize the way they are contributing to the CHALLENGE. Shaw presented a proposal to increase the impact of its investment in the CHALLENGE. In 2006, Shaw will make short videos about ten local employers whose human resource practices are helping to reduce poverty. In addition to showing these on television, Shaw gives free copies of these videos so that the stories can be shared more widely.

#### *Individual leaders:*

Individual citizens are taking leadership and investing their dollars. Those who sit on Working Groups and Task Forces thoughtfully determine the priorities and actions of the CHALLENGE, and model the values. They speak out and contribute to change in new ways.

Individuals are taking leadership through chairing Working Groups and Task Forces. The consistent commitment of the Steering Working Group has kept the CHALLENGE on course. The Fundraising Task Force has led the way in friend raising to make the CHALLENGE sustainable, with very helpful coaching from Wayne Hussey through Vibrant Communities.

*Fundraising takes me beyond my comfort zone, but my passionate belief in the goals of the CHALLENGE and our ways of working, pushes me to keep at it. And slowly but steadily we are seeing tangible results.*

*Susan Stovel, chair, Steering Working Group*

The Mentorship Task Force has been working since 2003 to support and promote mentorship services in BC's Capital Region. Several individuals have taken strong leadership in forming a new mentorship coalition. They initiated a new funding stream to research mentorship for employers and marginalized employees, starting in January 2006.

Hundreds of committed individuals and organizational representatives are involved in engaging people in the CHALLENGE and encouraging others to work to improve quality of life, particularly in one of the three priority areas. These champions are most active in the work with employers and with the Fundraising Task Force. Ten Employer Champions make presentations to employer groups, run workshops or meet one on one with other employers about poverty reduction and human resource (HR) practices.

People found the courage to make presentations to municipal councils on behalf of the CHALLENGE in support of a Regional Housing Trust Fund. Others met one on one with municipal councilors. These individuals helped to demonstrate the diverse community support for the fund.

*“When I presented to council about the housing trust, I was not sure what they heard. Three months later, while at the same council on another matter, much of our presentation re affordable housing was quoted back, in a very positive way, in reference to a development being proposed. Council heard, they absorbed and applied our principles to other situations.*

*Don Storch, Steering Working Group*

Quality of Life Awards and decals are publicly presented to recognize groups of people who have done something to improve quality of life in our community. These presentations are made by individuals and representatives of organizations who are engaged with the CHALLENGE. As relationships and commitment deepen with many organizations involved with the CHALLENGE, representatives of organizations are more willing to push boundaries in taking public leadership through the CHALLENGE.

New leaders are emerging who are making a huge impact. They are the members of the Community Action Team – people who are living on low income whose voices are being heard and felt. The leader of the Community Action Team, Karasima Brands, is a current participant in Leadership Victoria, building her skills in community leadership. See section 4 on Inclusion.

### Challenges

One challenge with our leadership model is that the ‘predictable’ people with power and influence in this region have not been closely engaged. The shared leadership model has developed a strong base of diverse leaders. If the CHALLENGE had engaged established leaders from the beginning, this base might not have been developed. The “old guard” of community leaders are beginning to take more notice of the CHALLENGE. At this time it is possible to begin to engage the more established leaders without endangering a principle of shared leadership and community ownership which we believe is fundamental to shifting power and making long term systemic change.

Despite solid commitment from many leaders in the community, fundraising and the work of the employer champions have been slower to yield results than anticipated. This is partly due to the time needed to build relationships prior to asking for commitment. People find it difficult to ask others to either invest money or to make changes in their human resource practices, particularly if they have not taken that action themselves. Despite training, a support system and strong communications materials, these actions require a new kind of courage for the people who have stepped forward to take up this CHALLENGE. The CHALLENGE believes this is a sound strategy, but patience is required.

### Lessons learned

The CHALLENGE is now working to engage more people with power and influence. As the CHALLENGE seeks to inform government policies, closer ties with elected officials are being sought. Similarly, the CHALLENGE is working to develop relationships with individuals who might have the financial means to substantially invest in the initiative. As case studies are selected for recognition, consideration is being given to the influence the employer might have in the community.

## 2. MONITOR AND MEASURE CHANGE

*The Quality of Life CHALLENGE has contributed to change. Change has happened because outcomes and indicators are measured and monitored through reliable research.*

It is necessary to know what is changing in order to make informed decisions about where to focus attention and resources. People are more motivated to take action when there is reliable information about the issues and emerging trends, and the outcomes are documented.

The CHALLENGE carries out research that monitors and measures change on three levels: research about specific aspects of quality of life that shed light on the state of the community, research that is linked directly with measuring and documenting the effectiveness and impact of the Quality of Life CHALLENGE, and the research that tracks movement toward the targets in the three priority areas of the Quality of Life CHALLENGE.

### Examples

*Research that monitors quality of life of the community.*

There is growing evidence that research conducted by the CHALLENGE is contributing to the credibility of this comprehensive community initiative, informing decision-making and helping to determine community priorities.

In 1999, prior to the creation of the Quality of Life CHALLENGE, the Community Council published a report on quality of life indicators for BC's Capital Region. Data from that report informed the priority setting process for the CHALLENGE. At the Corporate Breakfast in June 2005, "Quality of Life in BC's Capital Region 2005" was released, updating the baseline indicator report published in 1999. The key messages showed that housing, service sector employment and food security needed attention. These issues are all interconnected with poverty and inequality. The report received coverage from the daily newspaper, the Times Colonist - the first time that the CHALLENGE has been on the front page.

Augmenting the report on quality of life indicators, the CHALLENGE conducted a regional survey that provided locally specific statistically significant data on self-rated quality of life and quality of employment.

Research conducted by the CHALLENGE has contributed to capacity building in organizations that use this information to develop funding proposals and strengthen program delivery. The CHALLENGE has played a lead role in forming a partnership among organizations to measure environmental and economic indicators. The Community Council, the Roundtable on the Environment (Capital Regional District) and the Greater Victoria Economic Development Commission are working together to issue reports with a similar look and feel on these three components of sustainability.

This year this research has engaged a new supporter, The Victoria Foundation. In the founding stage of the CHALLENGE, the Victoria Foundation attended one event and provided a small grant for communications work, but has not otherwise been engaged. When the Victoria Foundation began to prepare a concise report of Victoria's Vital Signs to help direct philanthropic donations, they approached the CHALLENGE. The Victoria Foundation was aware of the work on social indicators in the publication "Quality of Life in BC's Capital Region 2005", as well as the efforts to provide a more complete picture of sustainability in the region by partnering with economic and environmental indicator groups. Most recently the United Way has become part of the collaboration. By working together it will be possible to focus more resources, political will and actions on clearly defined priorities.

The CHALLENGE pushes research boundaries. It recognizes the importance of the voice of experience, while maintaining rigorous research standards. David Stewart of "number 41 media" is one of the newest supporters of the CHALLENGE; his website and software development firm is investing in-kind support to develop a new website for the CHALLENGE. He reported that the mix of numbers and stories spoke to him. He said,

*"I read Making Room and I read the affordability data. I just hired a single mother and I was able to look at her salary compared to LICO. The stories from Making Room really impacted me."*

### *Research that measures the impact of the CHALLENGE.*

As part of the CHALLENGE's commitment to ongoing learning, significant resources have been allocated to an evaluation process called Outcome Mapping, an evaluation and planning tool developed by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC). Instead of assessing the products of a program (e.g., poverty alleviation) Outcome Mapping focuses on changes in behaviours, relationships, actions, and/or activities of the people and organizations with whom a development program works.

The CHALLENGE Information System (CIS), is a database system that has been developed to track the changes for those engaged in the CHALLENGE. More than 1,700 people have now been engaged; it is not possible to track change for all of these people. Instead, Outcome Mapping helps initiatives to focus efforts on tracking change for a manageable number of people and organizations. CIS has a field for each of the assumptions in the Theory of Change which can be analyzed by sector, level of engagement and priority area. The content of this report is largely drawn from CIS, based on the refinements that have been made to the tracking system.

Since its inception, the CHALLENGE has been committed to being a learning community. Numerous opportunities for participatory evaluation and sharing lessons learned are incorporated into all aspects of the CHALLENGE. In the past year, through Vibrant Communities, the Caledon Institute of Social Policy has supported the CHALLENGE in an annual participatory evaluation session, which yielded useful information for the CHALLENGE's learning community. Those engaged in the CHALLENGE are constantly learning from each other - as they work together to implement action plans as well as through their conversations and more formalized information sessions such as tele-learning conferences.

### *Tracking movement toward the targets*

Because of the systemic long-term nature of the work of the CHALLENGE, it has been difficult to track changes to household targets of Vibrant Communities that result from the work of the CHALLENGE.

The CHALLENGE set targets for the whole community. Movement toward these targets was not intended to be attributed to the work of the CHALLENGE, but rather be owned by the whole community (see section 5, Community Ownership).

#### Housing:

Target: By 2006, 1,000 low income households have safe, decent, affordable housing.

Since 2003: 544 households now have safe, decent and affordable housing:

- 194 units were created for people with moderate incomes
- 350 units were created for people with low incomes

#### Community Connections:

Target: By 2006, 1,000 stories are shared about groups of people who have enhanced quality of life in this region.

Since 2003, 758 stories gathered of people working together to improve quality of life:

- 153 shared on the website and through media partners
- 36 Quality of Life Awards have been presented.

#### Sustainable Incomes:

Target: By 2006, 5,000 unemployed or underemployed people will have sustainable incomes from paid work.

## Challenges

It has been very difficult to report towards the Sustainable Incomes target of the CHALLENGE. When this target was set it was planned that much of the reporting would come from employment service providers. It is no longer possible to track to this target because of the reporting constraints and high workload of employment service providing agencies, the Personal Information Privacy Act, the closure of employment service agencies who had agreed to report to the target, and a reluctance by the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance to release additional data on the outcomes of their funded employment programs.

An attempt was made to track information through labour market survey data, which might better reflect the impact of work with employers. Unfortunately this data does not show a positive change in the number of entry level jobs, despite a record low drop in the unemployment rate. It may be that local numbers are simply unavailable to show the change we are seeking to track in sufficient detail.

The wording of the target also presents challenges, as it suggests that individuals would have moved to a sustainable income out of poverty, rather than moved along the pathway to a sustainable income. Where the CHALLENGE has contributed to this change some movement has been tracked along the pathway; however, tracking broader community change continues to be extremely difficult.

Assessing the contribution of the CHALLENGE to the outcomes has proven to be challenging. Individuals and organizations tend to take ownership for changes that have occurred, and often are hesitant to acknowledge the impact an outside group has contributed to "their" outcomes.

The adapted version of Outcome Mapping adopted by the CHALLENGE has assisted in developing a systematic way of tracking change in the community. However, there are a number of stories about the impact of the CHALLENGE on organizations which are confidential by nature, even for internal discussions with working group members and staff.

Data have not always been available or accessible to provide a complete and up to date picture of social aspects of quality of life. Much of the data for commonly used social indicators comes from the census, which can be costly to purchase, is only collected every five years and is not released for several years after the collection. As a result, some data show a state of affairs which seems intuitively different than what is currently occurring in the community. Reporting on data from a regional perspective is also challenging as not all data is available for the same geographic boundaries. Data that is specific to neighbourhoods would be most helpful, but is rarely available.

## Lessons Learned

One of the lessons learned as the CHALLENGE seeks to engage new supporters is that information based on monitoring and measuring is lending significant credibility to the initiative, particularly with those from the private sector who have a strong focus on evidence based investment. The CHALLENGE Fundraising Task Force has been following up directly with corporate leaders to begin or strengthen their relationship with and commitment to the CHALLENGE.

*As a relative newcomer to Victoria, I was impressed with the data presented, and it was very useful to me as you don't see this type of information normally.*

Barry Dodd, Victoria Film Commission

Vibrant Communities has been very open to discussing challenges in measuring contribution to community outcomes, and we have learned from and contributed to this pan-Canadian learning process. The Caledon Institute of Social Policy is telling some of the stories of the impact of the Quality of Life CHALLENGE. Information for these stories is generated partly through interviews conducted by Caledon. It may be that people are more willing to discuss impacts with someone outside the CHALLENGE. However, the CHALLENGE is also working to find ways to discuss impacts without revealing confidential organizational details.

### 3. MOVE FROM AWARENESS TO ACTION

*The Quality of Life CHALLENGE  
has contributed to change.  
Change has happened because people are more informed  
about the issues and possible solutions.*

A central strategy of the CHALLENGE has been to create public awareness around quality of life issues – particularly around poverty, housing and sustainable incomes. This is based on the belief that an informed community will move from awareness, to understanding, to commitment and finally take action.

A major achievement this past year was the development of a comprehensive communications strategy for the CHALLENGE. This strategy assists the CHALLENGE to evaluate the overall effectiveness of communications work and to redefine our audiences, the appropriate tools to reach them, and the best use of the media.

While the CHALLENGE is proud of the research it is conducting, it is not enough to generate reports. Information is disseminated through a wide range of mediums – the Indicator (print newsletter), website, public events, media, publications, the employer CHALLENGE (electronic newsletter), reports and presentations. However, when information is presented with a personal connection it has a stronger impact. Information about the issues is coupled with options for action tailored to specific audiences. Without ways to move forward, information on the challenges may be disempowering rather than motivating change.

#### Examples

During the past year the CHALLENGE has focused its communications on housing information that would lead to the establishment of the Regional Housing Trust Fund, and information for employers about the waged poor and actions they can take to address that.

Early in 2005, all municipal councilors received a package of information about affordability in this region and specific housing information. At the same time presentations were made by CHALLENGE leaders to municipal councils. This concerted coordinated effort contributed to the decision of six of 13 municipalities to participate in the establishment of a Regional Housing Trust Fund. One municipal councilor commented that the package of housing affordability information had a significant impact on her council's decision. She said,

*The more we looked at it, the more it was clear that creating a trust fund was a social issue. We felt we needed to participate in it. Not one Saanich councilor voted against it.*

One of the items included in the housing information package was “the Indicator”, the joint newsletter of the CHALLENGE and Community Council. The Indicator has been identified by many people engaged in the CHALLENGE as one of the more useful communications tools because it is so widely distributed and covers a range of topics. Published three times annually, it is mailed to over 2,400 individuals and organizations. In January 2005, “the Indicator” was evaluated, with significant positive feedback on the publication of the community affordability statistics. As a result we are focusing more on sharing statistics with the community on our three priority areas.

The bi-weekly electronic newsletter, “the employer CHALLENGE”, has covered 38 case studies of local employers with exemplary human resource practices. One issue of this newsletter contributed to the decision of a local non-profit organization to increase the wages of its lowest paid employee, moving that position above the Low Income Cut off line (measure of poverty used by Statistics Canada). Reliable information, even distributed in a passive form, has resulted in reported change to reduce poverty and improve quality of life.

“HR options for action”, a booklet produced through the Employer Task Force, includes 50 human resource policies or practices, each coupled with the positive impact if implemented. The booklet has an implicit call to action, as it provides a response to human resource challenges employers may be currently facing. For example it states that increased compensation can help to address low employee retention rates. Launched in

September of 2005, the booklet has had an extremely positive response from employers and other labour market stakeholders. The first 500 copies printed were nearly all distributed through employer networks within three months. The publication was designed to allow for frequent updating based on ongoing feedback, so evaluation comments can be taken into account in the next print run.

“HR Options for Action” booklets are mailed or given out at events. They have greater impact when linked with a personal connection or presentation. One Employer Champion, Paul Paterson, a human resource consultant, used references about the waged poor from the report, “Quality of Life in BC’s Capital Region 2005” to motivate human resource changes in businesses he worked with. Of five businesses he approached, two businesses have made positive human resource changes and three are considering them. Mabel Jean Rawlins-Brannan, another Employer Champion, made a presentation to the United Way agencies regarding the number of waged poor in the region. This contributed to the decision of Volunteer Victoria to increase wages in an entry level position, and it opened a new discussion with the United Way and its member agencies about addressing the low wages in the voluntary sector.

### Challenges

With the growth of the CHALLENGE, competing demands for communications time and resources were being brought forward from various areas of the CHALLENGE. A communications expert assisted staff in identifying the communications services needed. A comprehensive communications strategy was necessary. The strategy is being implemented with assistance for the redevelopment of specific tools. The new re-architected website will be launched early in 2006.

### Lessons Learned

Over the past year the CHALLENGE has been refining its messages and communications tools.

A communications consultant met with people engaged at all levels and areas of the CHALLENGE to evaluate communications work to date and recommended that communications include a clear call to action, building on relationships, and having a clear message targeted to specific audiences.

A communications company, number 41 media, has committed to re-architect the CHALLENGE website in 2005, and evaluate and enhance the website through 2006. Options for action to take up the CHALLENGE will be prominently located on the CHALLENGE website. These options include actions for individuals, community groups, private sector organizations and governments. The CHALLENGE website receives between 2,000 to 3,000 unique visits each month.

The CHALLENGE is learning from our generous professional communications partners and advisors. Staff and volunteers are developing more communications skills in getting the messages out that will result in change.

## **4. INCLUSION**

*The Quality of Life CHALLENGE has contributed to change.  
Change has happened because  
people who are experiencing the issues first hand participate  
meaningfully throughout the CHALLENGE.*

Including a diverse group of people who have experience with living on low incomes is critical in developing effective poverty reduction solutions. For everyone to fully know and understand the varied needs of people living on a limited income, the voices of people who have experience with poverty must be heard. These stories inspire others to take action.

Over the past year, the CHALLENGE has developed or refined various tools for promoting inclusion.

## Examples

The Community Action Team is a working group of action oriented people with experience living on low or limited income. During 2005, the membership increased.

The Inclusion Policy, developed in 2004, was evaluated and amended by the Community Action Team.

The Fishbowl focus group, developed in 2004, was tested twice, evaluated and refined. This model alters power structures. People traditionally in positions of power listen to people whose voices are marginalized. Participants sit in a circle and talk about their experiences with a particular issue and actions that could make a difference. As in a fishbowl, they are observed from the outside of the circle by people who have the power to make change on that issue. The Quality of Life CHALLENGE has used this non-confrontational learning model before with great success. Refinements this year included providing the opportunity for observers and participants to talk together about actions and solutions.

*I came away with ideas of what I could do to make a difference.*

The Poverty Experience is a group exercise newly developed by the Community Action Team. For thirty minutes, participants are led through a series of scenarios of a fictional person living on a low income. The scenarios are based on the experiences of people living in our community. The workshops are always facilitated by people with experience living on low income. Since May 2005, 17 sessions of the Poverty Experience have been held, with 167 people participating, including CHALLENGE Working Groups, the Employer Task Force and 97 people at the November Celebration and Dialogue. The BC Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance requested the facilitation of a Poverty Experience exercise for a group of new Employment Case Workers being trained. The exercise is being marketed to community groups, government agencies and business organizations. The impact of the Poverty Experience has been memorable. Participants have said,

*I didn't just hear what the challenges were... I felt it.*

*I could see how the barriers add up. Separately they might be manageable but together they seem overwhelming.*

The CHALLENGE continues to promote the importance of ensuring inclusion of people living on low income in the community. Over the past year there has been an increase in the requests for spokespeople and participants with experience living on low income both within and beyond the CHALLENGE. A volunteer umbrella organization published an article about the challenges of volunteering for people living on low income when costs such as transportation and child care are not covered. More organizations are offering bursaries and sliding scale costs for community events.

## Challenges

The CHALLENGE has sought to provide opportunities for meaningful inclusion in the CHALLENGE for people with experience living on low income, without tokenizing participation. However, further evaluation is needed to assess its success.

As the voice of people with experience living on low income is increasingly sought, challenges have arisen. Speaking publicly about personal income issues is intimidating, and can serve to increasingly marginalize the individual or family who speaks up. The CHALLENGE coordinated spokespeople for an in depth article on the waged poor in the Times Colonist in February of 2005. All of the people interviewed initially felt negative impacts of seeing their story in print. One was contacted by phone by a stranger who looked her up in the phone book; others were approached on the street.

## Lessons Learned

The communications advisory group underscored the importance of including the voice of people living on low income for more effective communications. A resulting practice has been to bookend messages with a story about people who are making changes and a story about people who are directly impacted by these changes.

Though the intention may be to provide meaningful inclusion, the impression that people are being asked to participate as tokens may remain. This may be offset by providing opportunities for people to participate in various ways.

Those who have the courage to speak up about their experiences of poverty need to be surrounded with support. Individuals are being asked to expose their vulnerability. When asking for spokespeople, the personal risks should be made clear.

It takes money and time from staff and volunteers to practice inclusion. Policies and procedures must be in place and applied to ensure that inclusion is practiced consistently over time.

## **5. COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP**

*The Quality of Life CHALLENGE has contributed to change. Change has happened because individuals and organizations are taking responsibility for solutions through appropriate actions and initiatives.*

Energy and commitment to community building is released when people are unleashed to drive the process and self organize their efforts with others. Three community targets were adopted to inspire people to take action in the priority areas. All efforts are recognized, not only those that are a direct result of the CHALLENGE. The primary role of the CHALLENGE is to be a catalyst and facilitator for action. Control is decentralized.

Since its inception, the CHALLENGE has contributed to systemic change and to the creation of programs which will continue to focus on the current priority issues long after the CHALLENGE has shifted to other priorities. Many people and organizations who engage in the CHALLENGE begin by sharing leadership in the CHALLENGE and then move to create change within organizations or their own lives.

### Examples

#### *Local governments take responsibility for housing affordability*

In April of 2005, six of the 13 municipalities in BC's Capital Region agreed to establish a Regional Housing Trust Fund contributing a total of \$638,256 annually. It is conservatively estimated that these funds will leverage 12 times that amount from provincial and federal governments and other sources, resulting in approximately 50 to 75 new units annually. In October a commission was established to determine how funds would be used, and the Regional Housing Trust Fund was officially launched. Projects submitted for funding this year will provide approximately 30 units for single women and families who have experienced family violence.

The CHALLENGE contributed to the establishment of the Regional Housing Trust Fund, alongside the Housing Affordability Partnership and other housing stakeholders. The 2003 report "Making Room" helped put a human face on housing affordability statistics. The CHALLENGE subsequently held housing affordability week events, wrote letters and made presentations to every municipal council, and used media relationships to generate coverage for the issue. Henry Kamphof is CEO of the Capital Region Housing Corporation, and member of the Housing Affordability Partnership. He said,

*We have a strong core group of people who work on housing issues, and our respect and knowledge of each other's abilities is what helped us get everything lined up for the adoption of the fund. The CHALLENGE was able to extend our network deeper into the community, and its effort led to the groundswell of support we needed.*

The CRD Cities of Colwood and Langford have developed amenities funds which may be used for housing outside of the Regional Housing Trust Fund, thus ensuring that funds are used in their own communities. The City of Colwood's amenities fund has raised \$20,000 as of November 2005.

The CHALLENGE recognized and encouraged Colwood and Langford by presenting them with CHALLENGE decals during council meetings. These decals are displayed on the doors of each municipal hall.

Other recent housing successes the CHALLENGE contributed to include bylaw changes in seven municipalities, ranging from a commitment to use an affordability lens in assessing new housing developments, adaptable housing bylaws, legalization of secondary suites, to the creation of municipal housing trust funds apart from the regional fund. All these bylaws will improve housing affordability. Examples of the impacts of these bylaw changes known to date include:

- The City of Victoria's legalization of secondary suites in Gonzales neighbourhood has resulted in up to 20 new suites. The city is considering legalizing secondary suites throughout Victoria.
- Since Central Saanich passed their affordability lens as part of taking up the CHALLENGE, they have approved one affordable duplex, 39 assisted living units and four secondary suites. Central Saanich is also considering legalizing secondary suites.

Municipal councils also contribute to housing affordability through the approval of individual housing projects - often in the face of community resistance to densification and affordable housing developments. The CHALLENGE, the Community Council and the Housing Affordability Partnership have submitted letters of support for numerous housing projects, including: the Victoria Women's Transition House (23 units), Dockside Green (\$3 million to affordable housing) and the Esquimalt Lions Seniors Housing (39 units).

#### *Employers take responsibility for reducing poverty of the waged poor*

A representative from GT Hiring Solutions, which is a private sector employment service provider, attended the launch of the "HR options for action" booklet. GT Hiring Solutions had been interested in the Sustainable Incomes work of the CHALLENGE previously, but had not found an area where it fit. The representative asked her staff team if they could distribute the "HR options for action" in meetings with employers when developing job placement partnerships.

A small local business, iD2 communications, was interested in the CHALLENGE's work with employers but due to the nature of its industry did not have any lower waged employees so was unable to take up the CHALLENGE by reducing poverty for employees. They proposed designing a workshop for other small businesses to promote the value of internal communication with employees. Communication can be the first step to creating human resource policies that better meet the needs of employees, including reducing poverty. Twelve people attended the workshop and evaluation was positive. Several attendees subsequently have become engaged in the CHALLENGE in other ways.

Maureen Young of Coast Capital Savings heard about the Vancouver's Social Purchasing Portal, saw the good fit with the CHALLENGE and funded a feasibility study. The CHALLENGE was represented on the advisory committee. Support was in place for a pre-implementation phase and a host organization was needed for the Vancouver Island Social Purchasing Portal. The CHALLENGE was approached, but the Steering Working Group was clear that it was not the role of the CHALLENGE to manage programs. The Community Council, the lead partner in the Quality of Life CHALLENGE, was then approached and its Board of Directors agreed to host the Portal. Funding was secured and the Social Purchasing Portal is now in its pre-implementation phase, expected to launch in March 2006.

#### Challenges

It is difficult to measure or document the CHALLENGE's contribution to much of the change that is happening in the community. Groups who are making change feel strong ownership over their work. The CHALLENGE's approach has been to celebrate all change, regardless of whether contribution can be measured or reported on. It is more important that change happens than it is to be able to take credit for it. The challenge is the need to justify financial support for the process work of the CHALLENGE - raising awareness of issues and creating environments of readiness for change.

## 6. RECOGNITION

*The Quality of Life CHALLENGE has contributed to change. Change has happened because individuals and organizations are encouraged to do more because their efforts are acknowledged and recognized.*

Positive reinforcement is a powerful motivator. By sharing stories, people are encouraged to replicate what's working, have the courage to try something new or the strength to carry on with the good work they are already doing. Recognition also helps people to see themselves in roles as agents of change where they may not previously have self-identified.

Decals are awarded to recognize people and groups who have taken up the CHALLENGE to improve housing, community connections or sustainable incomes. Since 2001, 1,385 Quality of Life CHALLENGE decals have been distributed, 368 of these in 2005.

Recognition for work that improves quality of life - regardless of the contribution of the CHALLENGE - strengthens the message of the CHALLENGE. Solutions must be community owned and everyone's responsibility. At times, decals are awarded as part of the initial contact. By beginning relationships with a "give", rather than an "ask", people are more inclined to engage further with the CHALLENGE. People and organizations are proud to display their CHALLENGE decals.

### Examples

#### *Decals*

Vintage Hot Tubs, a local business, was presented with a decal because of their exemplary human resource practices. They referred to the CHALLENGE decal in their full page newspaper ad.

The Values Based Business Network brings its decal to all public events where it has displays.

The City of Langford proudly displays the CHALLENGE decal on the door to the municipal hall. Councilors were recognized for their Affordable Housing program, which requires ten percent of single family homes in large subdivisions to be affordable for sale for \$150,000 or less. Three houses have been built and the sale of two has been arranged. More than 30 houses are in the works, and the program will continue to generate homes.

#### *Quality of Life Awards*

Since 2003, 190 in depth stories and case studies have been shared and an additional 568 stories have been collected. Each one shows how people are making a difference to the quality of life in this region. Each year, six Quality of Life Awards are selected from the pool of stories and case studies collected for that year. These awards are presented to groups whose work exemplifies the working principles of the CHALLENGE.

The 2005 Quality of Life Award recipients are:

- Bridges for Women Society, for supporting women to find employment
- Hide and Go Homeless, for the courage of youth to make a film that challenges public policy
- The Friends of Music Society, for connecting music and mental health
- Wear 2 Start, for supporting women who are looking for employment to get appropriate business clothing and hair styles
- Rogers' Chocolates, for hiring people with disabilities
- Sooke Restorative Justice Society, for including everyone in the solution

When the award was presented at their annual general meeting of Bridges for Women Society, one board member noted that the award meant the world to them in reinforcing the value of their work, especially given the difficult year they had experienced with significant funding cuts and organizational challenges.

## *Other Awards*

In 2003, the CHALLENGE nominated Coast Capital Savings for an Ethics in Action award, which recognize businesses that are building new corporate models that balance principle and profits. At the time of the nomination, Coast Capital Savings had recently merged with another credit union and was undergoing some organizational changes, including harmonizing and refining its corporate identity in the community. Staff reported that the nomination and subsequent win of the Ethics in Action award helped Coast Capital Savings to recognize the strength of its role as a socially responsible corporation.

In 2005, the CHALLENGE nominated two businesses for Ethics in Action awards for their exemplary employment practices that reduce poverty for the waged poor. Each nominee won in his/her category. These awards strengthen the relationship between the CHALLENGE and business owners, as well as spreading information about exemplary human resource practices.

The Employer Task Force wants the CHALLENGE to incorporate Quality of Life Awards into existing business award programs such as the Chamber of Commerce annual awards. In this way the CHALLENGE would influence other organizations to put quality of life and poverty related issues on their agendas.

## Challenges

During the development of the communications strategy, it became apparent that the meaning of the CHALLENGE decal is not consistent amongst all decal recipients. The decal has greater potential than has yet been realized.

The CHALLENGE publicly recognizes those who have contributed to making change happen, while being cautious to publicly report on the contribution the CHALLENGE has made to the outcomes. The CHALLENGE continues to model collaborative partnerships, aiming for mutual recognition of contribution. In one instance when the CHALLENGE sent a thank you note to a partner organization for its role in bringing about a change, the partner organization responded with "You're welcome", with no acknowledgment that the other partner – the CHALLENGE – also played a role.

## Lessons Learned

In 2004, as the power of recognition became more apparent, recognition was added as a working principle of the CHALLENGE. The communications strategy recommended greater focus on the recognition strategy, particularly on the decal as a tool for change.

In 2006, an evaluation of the overall CHALLENGE recognition policy is planned which will assist in further developing recognition practices. A further evaluation will assess the impact of sharing stories both on the groups whose work is shared and with the wider community.

## **7. RELATIONSHIPS**

*The Quality of Life CHALLENGE has contributed to change. Change has happened because the network of relationships within our community is extending and bridging the divisions.*

As of November 2005, 1,513 people have been engaged in the CHALLENGE since its founding in 2001: at least 198 community groups, 128 private sector, 47 public sector, and 1,140 individuals. See the following table.

Engagement in the CHALLENGE is deepening and broadening. Movement is noted through levels of engagement as commitment to action deepens. Many people connected initially through one priority area have broadened their participation to other areas. The CHALLENGE has encouraged this by hosting events and structuring communications materials which touch on multiple areas of the CHALLENGE, discouraging the tendency to silo work on one issue.

As individuals are engaged, new networks are created and new relationships formed which reinforce energy and commitment to the work. Think about the impact when a series of small pebbles are thrown into a pond. The

CHALLENGE uses this rippling model of community engagement. Diversity is expanding by creating places where people from all backgrounds can network and begin to find common ground.

The CHALLENGE has committed to working multi-sectorally. People engaged in the CHALLENGE represent all levels of the public sector, small, medium and large private sector organizations, and community groups of all sizes and many different focuses. Numerous individuals are involved, again representing a diversity of income and background. The fibre of the community is stronger through the network of relationships.

### Examples

Referring to the strong network of people who worked together to support the establishment of the Regional Housing Trust Fund, Henry Kamphof said,

*In all human endeavours, the network of personal relationships among people involved in similar work can tip the balance in favour of a new idea or initiative.*

Sarah Webb, the Sustainability Coordinator at the University of Victoria, took the initiative to connect the CHALLENGE with a downtown business who had expressed interest in finding low cost transportation solutions for lower waged employees so they had more money in their pocket at the end of the month. Sarah connected the CHALLENGE's work with employers with efforts to help entry-level employees move out of poverty.

The CHALLENGE has been intentionally working to strengthen its relationships with community arts groups. River Chandler of TheatreWorks Consulting introduced the CHALLENGE to Target Theatre, which is now assisting TheatreWorks and the CHALLENGE to develop a forum theatre event for 2006 to raise awareness about the waged poor.

Building relationships across income levels within a poverty reduction initiative can be especially challenging. People with experience living on low incomes are now inviting others who are involved in the CHALLENGE out for coffee. Funding is provided for the person living on low income to be able to pay for coffee. This contributes to starting relationships on an equal footing. Coffee conversations include how and why each person is engaged in the CHALLENGE and in the broader community.

A retail sector employer - an Employer Champion - asked the CHALLENGE Employer Liaison for advice about a human resource issue. The Employer Liaison put him in touch with another Employer Champion who works as a human resource consultant. Through this new partnership, the retail sector employer has now taken up the CHALLENGE and made a change to his human resource practices.

During a CHALLENGE focus group, employers discussed the realities of paying living wages. One employer said that she had recently implemented a profit sharing program with great success. She offered to meet with and support another participant to develop a comparable program.

The CHALLENGE is in the midst of a serious fundraising campaign with a goal of \$976,000. Close to \$80,000 in new money has been raised with negotiations underway for additional dollars. The fundraising strategy's approach is based on relationships through friends of friends. A case for support has been developed, eleven fundraising volunteers have been recruited, two training sessions have been held, a list of 100 fundraising prospects has been developed (30 have already been engaged in the CHALLENGE) and fundraising volunteers are actively talking to eight prospects.

When Holly Harding, the branch manager of Vancity Credit Union, moved to Abbotsford, she introduced her successor to the CHALLENGE staff during the orientation, beginning a new relationship.

Relationships go both ways. Shaw, a Leadership Partner, asked the CHALLENGE for a testimonial to show how Shaw is involved in the community, which is part of their new promotional campaign. The chair of the Steering Working Group readily spoke on air about how Shaw is an exemplary community partner. The advertisement also promotes the CHALLENGE and deepens the relationship with Shaw. Each partner wins.

## Challenges

Some activities of the CHALLENGE have been delayed or halted because the sole contact in an organization leaves, and new relationships have to be built from scratch.

Some people or organizations only participated once and have not engaged at a deeper level. This may be because structures are not in place to connect people from one area of the CHALLENGE to another, resources are limited to do appropriate follow-up, or sufficient contact information was not gathered from the initial connection to allow for ongoing communications.

## Lessons Learned

It is important to develop relationships with more than one person in organizations. Where multiple contacts are developed, the organization begins to identify with the CHALLENGE. Then projects and timelines have continued when key contacts leave. Strong relationships with key contacts leaving organizations often result in ongoing relationships with the individual, or result in engaging their second organization as well.

The CHALLENGE database assists substantially in tracking the history and changes in relationships. The following table details the current levels of engagement for people and organizations involved in the CHALLENGE between 2001 and 2005. Staff are being more deliberate in asking for permission to collect contact information for people newly engaged in the CHALLENGE.

There is no way to contain the ripple effect of the ever expanding relationships of people who are taking up the CHALLENGE. But it is difficult to track. Relationships are organic. Stories of impacts are coming in anecdotally. There is a tension between trusting and letting it go versus hanging on to track the outcomes.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Quality of Life CHALLENGE is shifting the culture in BC's Capital Region. People are deepening their understanding of poverty and inequality. Unlike a decade ago, few who live here now deny that quality of life in this region is threatened by the local reality of poverty, housing affordability and low wages. Individual behavioural changes that address these realities are beginning to be documented. Some policies are shifting that will reduce poverty in this region for the long term, particularly at the municipal level regarding housing.

The Quality of Life CHALLENGE continues to gain credibility and momentum. Attendance at events is growing. New supporters are coming forward to donate time and money. Those who have been engaged since the beginning and those who are just coming aboard have an excitement and passion for this work. Brand recognition is growing. Evidence of change is just beginning to be documented. Hope remains high that we are onto something that is working. But more time is needed to see for the full impact of these efforts.

There is a continued need for this kind of comprehensive community initiative. The cost of housing is amongst the highest in Canada, and increasing. Most jobs are within the lower paying service sector. Poverty and inequality remain serious issues. Amidst these challenges there is a readiness to work collaboratively to build a sustainable community.

For the first three years – 2003 to 2006 - the Quality of Life CHALLENGE is an experimental pilot program. Much has been tried, much has been learned and much has been gained. There is now a strong commitment to sustain this work. In 2006, plans will be completed to implement phase two of the CHALLENGE from 2007 to 2010.

**Engagement in the Quality of Life CHALLENGE  
by sector, level of engagement, and priority area**

1,513 people have been engaged in the CHALLENGE to date: at least 198 community groups, 128 private sector, 47 public sector, and 1,140 individuals\*. The columns below are not mutually exclusive. The same organization may be engaged in more than one activity in more than one priority area at different levels of engagement.

Definitions:

Participated = Participated in one CHALLENGE activity

Interested = Participated in two or more CHALLENGE activity

Committed = Committed substantial time to the CHALLENGE i.e. shared expertise, joined a working group

	<b>HOUSING</b>	<b>SUSTAINABLE INCOMES</b>	<b>COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS</b>	<b>MEASURES&amp; INDICATORS</b>	<b>GENERAL&amp; COMMUNICATION</b>
<b>PRIVATE SECTOR</b>					
1. Committed	10	18	4	3	10
2. Interested	3	22	26	2	8
3. Participated	15	22	12	7	31
4. Financial Only	0	0	1	0	1
<b>COMMUNITY GROUPS</b>					
1. Committed	3	25	21	1	1
2. Interested	12	14	95	0	3
3. Participated	17	41	6	19	23
4. Financial Only	0	0	0	0	2
<b>PUBLIC SECTOR</b>					
1. Committed	7	8	0	4	3
2. Interested	1	2	8	1	3
3. Participated	6	4	4	7	16
4. Financial Only	0	0	0	0	3
<b>PEOPLE LIVING ON LOW INCOME</b>					
1. Committed	0	4	0	0	16
2. Interested	2	2	0	0	0
3. Participated	99	70	8	1	2
4. Financial Only	0	0	0	0	0
<b>INDIVIDUALS</b>					
1. Committed	9	12	29	11	26
2. Interested	10	6	0	1	21
3. Participated	33	16	524	25	30
4. Financial Only	0	0	0	0	1
<b>TOTALS to Nov 2005</b>	<b>225</b>	<b>265</b>	<b>738</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>199</b>
TOTALS to May 2005	221	253	727	77	138
<b>CHANGE</b>	<b>+2%</b>	<b>+5%</b>	<b>+2%</b>	<b>+7%</b>	<b>+44%</b>

\*Participation in some processes was tracked by number of participants only, no other contact information was collected, e.g. Community Celebration, Making Room interview participants, Poverty Matrix survey and focus group participants.