

ACTIVITY AND PROGRESS REPORT

September 2005

Labour Market Partnership Quality of Life CHALLENGE – Sustainable Incomes Priority July 2005–June 2006

Prepared by the Community Social Planning Council of Greater Victoria

Introduction

The Quality of Life CHALLENGE is a comprehensive community initiative to build the capacity of the community within British Columbia's Capital Region to be able to work together and create solutions to those issues that threaten our quality of life. Until 2006, the priorities of the CHALLENGE are housing, community connections and sustainable incomes. The target for the latter is:

By December 2006, 5,000 low income unemployed or underemployed people now have sustainable incomes from paid work.

Vibrant Communities is a pan-Canadian Learning Network that brings together people who are engaged in comprehensive poverty-reduction initiatives in 15 urban centres. Together with three national partners, we are developing, implementing and sharing our learning about new ways to move people out of poverty. The Quality of Life CHALLENGE is one of the Trail Builders within Vibrant Communities, accessing expertise, funding and partnership from the national and community partners – and sharing our learning and experiences with them.

The Steering Working Group of the CHALLENGE is responsible to the Board of the Community Social Planning Council of Greater Victoria for the overall vision, direction and evaluation of the CHALLENGE. The Sustainable Incomes Working Group is accountable to the Steering Working Group to ensure that the Sustainable Incomes target is achieved, and for the direction and evaluation of the work related to that target.

Since early in 2003, HRSDC has been a partner in the Sustainable Incomes priority of the CHALLENGE, enabling the work to move forward through leadership and financial support. Year two of a Labour Market Partnership finished June 30, 2005. This is the proposed plan for year three.

(A) Continued awareness raising in the wider community about issues faced by people living on low incomes through the work of the Community Action Team.

Activities and milestones will include:

* By March 31, 2006, at least 5 local, influential businesses attend at least one Community Action Team fishbowl forum to raise awareness about waged poor issues.

The Community Action Team has selected November 9th as the date for their next fishbowl. The fishbowl will focus on issues faced by low income people as they look for work. Employers will be invited to observe the forum discussion.

* By March 31, 2006, 4 Poverty Experiential Tool exercises, focusing on sustainable incomes issues, have been shared with the business community, facilitated by the Community Action Team.

The Poverty Experiential Tool exercise is a twenty-minute facilitated group game that moves participants through a series of questions and answers in a scenario faced by an imaginary low income individual. Participants get to consider for themselves how they would resolve challenges and weigh risks from the perspective of living on a low income.

In September, the Community Action Team developed three new Poverty Experiential Tool exercises around the issue of the working poor. Members of the Community Action Team presented the Poverty Experiential Tool exercise on two occasions in September: once to the Employer Task Force on September 20, and once to the Steering Working Group of the CHALLENGE on September 29.

Presenting the tool to CHALLENGE working groups accomplishes three purposes. First, it familiarizes the rest of the CHALLENGE with the work of the Community Action Team and the tools that the team is making available to the rest of the CHALLENGE. Second, it provides the Community Action Team facilitators a chance to hone their skills as facilitators before taking the tool out to the broader community. Third, local business people sit on a number of CHALLENGE working groups (especially on the Employer Task Force) and sharing the tool with them and receiving feedback on its impact is a first step in reaching the broader business community.

Training for Community Action Team members and staff in facilitation skills is currently being explored with a local adventure therapy company that works extensively with experiential learning. The training would help build team spirit, and enhance the participants' facilitation skills and understanding of the working of experiential learning.

* By May 31, 2006, evaluate, document and disseminate the learning and actions from the fish bowl forums and Poverty Experiential Tool exercises both locally and nationally through Vibrant Communities' network partnerships.

(B) Support existing mentorship programs in BC's Capital Region, geared at mentoring low income citizens, through the work of the Mentorship Task Force. Explore the feasibility of developing an umbrella organization to oversee and coordinate ongoing support of local mentorship activities.

Activities and milestones will include:

* By September 1, 2005, contract a Mentorship Coordinator to facilitate the work of the Mentorship Task Force to the end of 2005 and to develop a sustainability plan for the activities/work of the Mentorship Task Force past December 2005 that carries forward the vision that has been developed by the task force.

A Mentorship Coordinator was hired September 19 to facilitate the work of the Mentorship Task Force and help it carry out its vision of creating an umbrella

organization of mentorship agencies that would provide support for mentorship in the Capital region.

On September 26, the Mentorship Coordinator and 28 community participants took part in a half day visioning session to determine what, exactly, an umbrella mentorship organization would look like. A coach to lead the visioning process, which took participants through the following process:

- Articulating dreams
- Defining goals for a year from now
- Listing who needs to be enrolled
- Listing first steps
- Listing milestones at 3 months
- Listing milestones at 6 months

The group, representing a cross-section of individuals and agencies interested in mentorship in the region, articulated a vision of a central hub for resources, support, training and information on mentorship for low income people in the Capital Region. Please see the attached document, "The Culture of Mentorship," for full details.

A follow up meeting to determine who will do what next and what the group plans to accomplish in the next three months has been set for Tuesday October 4.

* By October 31, 2005, complete a follow up evaluation of the April 20, 2005 mentorship training event with each of the participating community agencies.

* By November 30, 2005, host a mentorship training workshop with at least 10 community agencies participating.

* By May 31, 2006, complete a follow up evaluation of the November 2005 mentorship training event with each of the participating community agencies.

* By May 31, 2006, document and disseminate the learning and actions from the mentorship training events and related research both locally and nationally through Vibrant Communities' network partnerships.

(C) Support to employers through a formalized engagement strategy to make changes to their human resource practices to reduce poverty through the work of the Employer Task Force and the Sustainable Incomes Working Group.

(c.1) Activities and milestones will include:

* By September 30, 2005, complete and implement the Employer CHALLENGE Engagement Strategy and develop associated communication tools (if any).

Work on the Employer CHALLENGE Engagement Strategy is complete. The strategy (harmonized with the CHALLENGE's overall Communications Strategy) is articulated in the Sustainable Incomes Outcome Mapping Plan.

The Sustainable incomes Outcome Mapping plan states as follows: While the Sustainable Incomes priority area has a numerical target (see intro to activity report), it also has a target to impact systemic change. The systemic change target states as follows:

A substantial number of employers will have gained a deeper understanding of both the barriers faced by the waged poor and the benefits to business of implementing better human resource policies. Of these, many employers will have made a positive change in their HR, including paying a sustainable income. The business community will inspire and sustain these behavioural shifts as they increasingly share in the responsibility for all community members' quality of life.

The Employer CHALLENGE Engagement Strategy is meant to fulfill the numeric and systemic goals of the Sustainable Incomes priority area. To that end, the Employer CHALLENGE Engagement Strategy is comprised of four strategies:

- 1) encouraging employers to change by recognizing their efforts;
- 2) encouraging employers to change by deepening their understanding of the issues;
- 3) encouraging employers to change by helping them identify with their peers who have already made changes; and
- 4) directly asking employers to change.

The Employer CHALLENGE Engagement Strategy recognizes that systemic change occurs because of multiple influences. These four strategies are seen as overlapping and complementary.

* By December 31, 2005, evaluate the effectiveness of the Employer CHALLENGE Engagement Strategy.

While a more formal evaluation will take place by the end of December, this section is a good place to report on some of the activities and outcomes of the Employer Task Force's work through the fall.

Strategy 1: Recognition:

On September 14, an Employer Champion made a decal presentation to Val Green of Volunteer Victoria, in recognition of the fact that Volunteer Victoria, after hearing a CHALLENGE presentation about the costs of living in the Capital Region, raised their lowest wage bracket. Interestingly, there was a lively discussion at the meeting about the low wages amongst non-profits and the need to build realistic wages into agencies' budgets.

On September 22, two CHALLENGE decals were presented at the Values-based Business Mixer. The first, presented by an Employer Champion, was presented to Small Potatoes Urban Delivery, a local organic produce delivery company. The company was featured in issue 29 for their practice of paying an employee each day to cook a healthy meal for all their employees. The second decal was presented to the Values-based Business Network itself, for providing a forum for and support to ethical businesses in the Capital Region.

In September, the CHALLENGE also nominated two businesses, Shady Creek Ice Cream and Frontrunners, for Ethics in Action Awards (in separate categories). Both businesses are members of the Employer Task Force and were appreciative of the support of the CHALLENGE.

Strategy 2: Understanding:

As mentioned above, in section A of this report, the Community Action Team has begun to roll out their new series of Poverty Experiential Tool exercises which focus on the waged poor, facilitating two exercises in September.

On September 28, the Employer Task Force launched their major communication tool, the "HR options for action" at Brown's the Florist. Employer Champion Rob Reid spoke about the booklet, which gives 50 business tips that address issues faced by low income employees and which can also benefit the business. Brown's followed up Rob's talk by sharing their story of dealing with falling profits by opening their books to employees, challenging their employees to find ways to save costs, and sharing a third of the resulting profits with their employees. Employees at Brown's have just received their third semi annual profit sharing cheque, each amounting to approximately 8% of their salaries. The launch was attended by about 20 local businesses people. Mayor Alan Lowe was in attendance as well. A mail out of the booklet is planned to a further 100 prominent employers in the community.

Strategy 3: Peer identification:

The Employer Champions have been deepening relationships with the rotary clubs in the region, having made two presentations to clubs already about the importance of supporting low income employees. A presentation with the Oak Bay Rotary Club is in the works and further links with rotary are being developed.

Strategy 4: Direct Ask:

The Employer Task Force has developed a "call to action" post card which states what an employer must do to receive a Quality of Life CHALLENGE decal. These cards will be inserted the "HR options for action" that are mailed out to the business community.

* By March 31, 2006, the Employer Task Force has developed a sustainability plan for their work after June 30, 2006.

The Employer Task Force has scheduled the first of its planning meetings for October 25.

* By April 15, 2006, 22 new stories of local businesses which are employing good HR practices in their businesses have been shared through "the employer CHALLENGE" newsletter.

Two stories of local employers were shared in September: Issue 33 – Island Savings and Issue 34 – Brown's the Florist. The Island Savings story focused on the company's compassion fund, and how that fund has made a critical difference in the lives of their entry level employees. The Brown's the Florist story focused on how the retail outlet was able to save costs and implement profit sharing by opening their books to their employees.

*By May 31, 2006, evaluate, document and disseminate the learning and actions from the work of the Employer Task Force both locally and nationally through Vibrant Communities' network partnerships.

* By May 31, 2006, at least 25 employers have committed to changing or enhancing their HR practices to reduce poverty for their entry level employees (in the period July 1, 2005 to June 30, 2006).

Since July 1, 2005, 3 employers have reported that they have committed to changing or enhancing their HR practices to reduce poverty for their entry level employees.

In addition to these three businesses making changes, one Employer Champion reported that as a result of the information on costs of living in the Quality of life CHALLENGE Indicators Report (launched in June 2005), seven businesses with whom he works have made changes to their HR policies. Details are being confirmed.

Finally, at the launch of the “HR options for action,” a local business sought information on how to improve its hiring practices to make a difference to low income job seekers

(c.2) Activities and milestones will include:

* By November 30, 2005, complete research on the definition of a living wage for BC’s Capital Region.

On September 14, the living wage researcher presented 3 final reports to the Sustainable Incomes Working group:

- o research on a living wage for the Capital Region
- o the results of a focus group with employers on reactions to the living wage to a second joint meeting of the Sustainable Incomes Working Group and the Employer Task Force.
- o A literature review of existing studies on costs to employers of hiring and firing workers

A living wage was defined as follows:

A living wage is an hourly rate of pay that enables a person employed full time to

- a. feed, clothe and shelter their family,
- b. maintain the health of family members,
- c. participate in the social life of the community,
- d. enjoy pursuits and activities that are an ordinary element of life in the community.

It does not include a level of income necessary to purchase a home, save for retirement, pay debts such as student loans, or save for the post secondary education of children.¹

The costs of living calculated were based on existing studies and statistics wherever possible.

The Sustainable Incomes Working Group will carry on with focus groups throughout the fall to test the reactions to the living wage in the business community. The group has also determined to hire a communication strategist to help them in the early stages of their design of the public launch of this information.

¹ Tim Richards, “Report on Living Wage,” Quality of Life CHALLENGE, August 30, 2005, p. 2

* By January 31, 2006, implement a communication plan and communication tools to create awareness about living wage in BC's Capital Region.

* By May 31, 2006, evaluate, document and disseminate the learning and actions from the living wage research and awareness-raising both locally and nationally through Vibrant Communities' network partnerships.

(D) Tracking, monitoring and reporting on activities and outcomes to community and stakeholders.

(d.1) Activities and milestones will include:

* By April 30, 2006, report out to the community on progress towards the Sustainable Incomes Target.

* By April 30, 2006, evaluate and report on the issues involved in tracking shifts in sustainable incomes through paid work in BC's Capital Region.

(d.2) Activities and milestones will include:

*By December 31, 2005 and May 31, 2006, produce progress reports of outcomes identified through evaluation and learning from the implementation of strategic ideas including indicators of shifts in the labour market and in human resource practices to reduce poverty through sustainable incomes.

Through September, CHALLENGE staff developed an evaluation plan integrating the outcome mapping of all three priority areas. Outcome mapping was presented at the Vibrant Communities Face to Face gathering in September as a useful tool for other communities to use when measuring the impact of their work.

Over the next year, the Sustainable Incomes priority of the CHALLENGE will test the effectiveness of Outcome Mapping. Lessons learned will be shared across Canada through the Vibrant Communities network. Evaluation methods are a primary focus of a September joint meeting of all fifteen of the Vibrant Communities.

(E) Sustain the Quality of Life CHALLENGE (Sustainable Incomes) past July 2006.

Activities and milestones will include:

* By September 30, 2005, funding commitments are in place to complete the work to the end of 2006.

The CHALLENGE confirmed in-kind support to re-architect the CHALLENGE website in 2005, and evaluate and enhance the website through 2006.

A successful corporate breakfast in June brought together 85 community and corporate leaders. Throughout August, the Task Force has been continuing to following up directly with corporate leaders to begin or strengthen their relationship with and commitment to the CHALLENGE.

A second training session for volunteers committed to supporting fundraising for the CHALLENGE was held in September. Volunteers are working with potential

prospects to secure funding for the CHALLENGE beyond 2006. This type of work is challenging for volunteers – work in this area is slow, but moving forward on a solid base.

* By May 31, 2006, a final report on the LMP is completed.

Attachments

1. "The Culture of Mentorship: Notes from the September 26 Mentorship Visioning Session"
2. Living Wage Report
3. Living Wage Calculation
4. Survey of Employer Responses to the Living Wage Research
5. Summaries Reports and Articles Supporting a Higher Wage

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