

A Westside Future



Kitsilano Neighbourhood House Strategic Plan

2015-2020

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This plan describes a vision for the Westside community and the role of Kitsilano Neighbourhood House (Kits House) in achieving it. It represents the ideas of about 135 people directly and many more indirectly—people who are committed to a vibrant Westside community. The strategic planning process included a wide range of stakeholders, methods, and research, yielding a meaningful plan for the way in which Kits House intends to serve the Westside over the next five years.

Our Vision

Vancouver's Westside is a healthy, vibrant and connected community where everyone thrives.

Our Mission

Kitsilano Neighbourhood House creates community for all by connecting people, ideas, and opportunities.

Our Values

- respect
- diversity
- collaboration
- compassion
- accountability
- democratic participation
- dignity
- humour
- interdependence
- leadership

Strategies

- Strategy 1: Inspire every community member to share their gifts and voice in creating an inclusive, interconnected community.
- Strategy 2: Provide innovative neighbourhood-based programming that responds to the emerging needs of people, accessible in the neighbourhoods in which they live.
- Strategy 3: Nurture our people, ensuring our workplace reflects our values and promotes a culture of excellence, accountability, and collaborative learning.
- Strategy 4: Promote financial sustainability by expanding and diversifying financial support for programs and services in our neighbourhood.
- Strategy 5: Lead and empower our community to engage in dialogue and take actions on issues.

THIS PLAN

This plan describes a vision for the Westside community and the role of the Kitsilano Neighbourhood House (Kits House) in achieving it. It represents the ideas of hundreds of people who are committed to a vibrant Westside community.

Planning Process Followed

The process for creating this plan involved about 135 people directly and many more indirectly. Neighbours were invited to be involved in a very vibrant conversation about their community. They formed relationships with each other and deepened their relationship with Kitsilano Neighbourhood House. And, in the process, they shared great stories, concerns and ideas for the future of the House.

The process included:

- a Board strategic planning committee process
- a half-day staff appreciative inquiry process
- a three-hour appreciative inquiry process with the Community Board
- a review of demographic data
- a review of Vital Signs, Kits House research, the neighbourhood house model, and the Association of Neighbourhood Houses of BC's planning process
- a day-long community World Café
- an online survey
- dialogue circles with program participants
- two strategic planning sessions with the Board and senior management
- a review of vision, mission, values and strategies by Open House participants
- development of a business plan by the Executive Director; and
- review and approval of the plan by the Community Board.

In the Plan

The plan begins by describing Kitsilano Neighbourhood House. This section introduces neighbourhood-based community development and highlights Kits House strengths and challenges.

The planning context is then described, first by situating Kits House within a broader urban environment. An overview of the opportunities and risks that currently exist within the non-profit sector are then provided. This context sets the stage for a plan that positions Kits House well for the next five years.

Our plan builds from a clear vision for the community, a specific mission, or role we play in achieving that vision, and values we hold in doing our work. The strategic component introduces strategies and actions to contribute to the achievement of the vision.

WHO ARE WE?

Kitsilano Neighbourhood House is a neighbourhood-based community organization dedicated to building and supporting a sense of community on Vancouver's Westside. It's part of a network of neighbourhood houses serving the Lower Mainland that comprises the Association of Neighbourhood Houses of British Columbia (ANHBC). Through ANHBC, Kits House is also part of an international movement, the International Federation of Settlement Houses.

What is a Neighbourhood House?

According to the Association of Neighbourhood Houses of British Columbia, a neighbourhood house is:

A welcoming place where everyone, all ages, nationalities and abilities can attend, participate, belong, lead and learn through programs, services and community building.

Neighbourhood houses are the foundation of place-based community building and are committed to universal access to programs and services.

Building Community on Vancouver's Westside

Kits House has served the Westside since 1974 and in that time has made a significant contribution to a strong sense of community in the area. Some highlights over the years include:

- 1974 Kitsilano Neighbourhood House officially opens

- 1974 Green Peace begins meeting regularly at Kits House as they develop their new direction focusing on environmental justice and animal rights

- 1974 Sunny Seniors group moves from Alex House to Kits House

- 1979 The Kitsilano Theatre Company starts operating at Kits House providing innovative, artistically and politically challenging theatre to the Kits community

- 1982 Kits House collaborates with local social workers to reach out to isolated seniors living in senior housing complexes

- 1983 Kits House works with the Kitsilano Local Area Planning Committee to open a community garden at 6th and Maple
- 2008 Kits House completes the Westside Youth mapping project, engaging over 500 youth in the process
- 2010 Kits House receives a “Places that Matter plaque”
- 2011 UBC university professor documents history of Kits House in a document called “A place on the corner,” highlighting the role Kits House plays in healthy vibrant and connected neighbourhoods
- 2012 Kits House supports the development of and takes on the operations of 30 affordable housing units for seniors and people with spinal cord injuries
- 2014 Kits House completes the seven-year \$20M Kitsilano Neighbourhood House redevelopment project incorporating affordable housing for seniors as part of the development.

Our Programs and Services

Kits House has approximately 12 full-time and 22 part-time staff providing programs and services to people of all ages on the Westside. Located in and serving Kitsilano, Kits House also responds to community needs in Arbutus Ridge, Dunbar, West Point Grey, Shaughnessy, Kerrisdale, and UBC.

Although our programs are constantly changing, there are key programs that build on community strengths and meet the needs of:

- children
- families
- youth, and
- seniors.

All programs are supported by community advisory groups and strong partnerships with other community organizations. For example, seniors are involved in the design and development of programs through a Seniors Advisory Committee. The committee works to identify the concerns of seniors in the community, create plans for

Building Community One Story at a Time

At the 2012 AGM volunteer recognition dinner, Evelyn, a long-time volunteer, announced she had just been chosen to be a resident of Linden Tree Place. She was so excited! And she spoke about how Kits House meant so much to her and how her dream had been fulfilled by getting to live as a senior at Linden Tree Place. As a board member involved in the final stages of Linden Tree Place, I was proud and so pleased to have helped in a small way. Giving back to her, a volunteer, was a high point for Kits House.

action, and share wisdom and ideas for improving the wellness of seniors in our community.

Kits House also plays a leadership role in supporting interagency collaboration. For example, it facilitates the Westside Early Childhood Development Network 4 Community Table made up of organizations providing early childhood programming.

Our Approach to Community Development

As noted, Kits House adopts a neighbourhood-based community development approach in all its community engagements, programs and services. This approach has implications for how people, internally and externally, see the neighborhood house, and how they see the neighbourhood house as different and/or similar from other local agencies and other non-profit organizations.

Overall, neighbourhood-based community development is a process whereby neighbours come together to explore their gifts and identify issues, plan, and take action together to improve their community.

Community development occurs when we:

- help people to experience and contribute their gifts rather than treat them as clients;
- provide an open and welcoming door, a safe gathering place, and stepping stones for all residents, recognising that people may come for one reason and then stay for many other reasons;
- encourage and support relationships, recognising that people want to belong and connect;
- encourage residents to get involved in volunteerism and voluntary action;
- work with and respond to the ideas and needs of all residents; particularly of those who are more vulnerable and/or at risk;
- are incubators and catalysts for others to come together to learn, inform, play, work, and act together in addressing individual, family, and neighbourhood issues;
- provide opportunities for residents to become more informed and to learn new skills in building their own lives, their families and local neighbourhoods; and
- advocate with local residents for social justice and for sustainable changes that will make a real difference at neighbourhood, city, provincial and national levels.

Building Community One Story at a Time

On Saturday I volunteered at the Kids Art Auction as the Board representative. What really stuck with me was how much the staff came together to make it happen. They worked with the kids painting the pictures and then sat with us the whole day for the fundraiser. I could really see the pure sense of commitment and connection from the staff and the children and parents who attended.

Community development projects and processes often take considerable time, and involve dealing with uncertainties and complexities. The relationships developed are as important as the products. The result is a sense of connectedness between neighbour and the neighbourhood, as well as with businesses and organizations that support the neighbourhood.

Our Strengths

The planning process highlighted Kits House strengths in several key areas.

History as a Welcoming Place

Kits House has a long and vibrant history in the community. It has provided a space for people to come together and for movements to be nurtured. It is very welcoming to all and is a friendly place in a rushed world. It is a place where all ages and cultures can meet and get to know each other. As a neighbourhood house it is a home rather than an institution. We now have a new space, with amenities that will enhance our capacity to support the community to fulfil its vision of community where everyone thrives.



Leadership

Leadership was repeatedly mentioned as a key strength, within the Board, management team and the staff. The Board brings diverse knowledge and skills to the organisation. The people who work at Kits House are passionate and prepared to challenge the future. They are innovative, creative and articulate. They are proactive and able to see where opportunities are and capitalize on them. There are “strong relationships among staff and staff teams.”

Community Engagement

Community engagement at Kits House seems to begin with each person who walks through the door. Kits House is inclusive and respectful of all, building on the strengths of the people who live and work here. They listen to what the issues are and are open to new ideas.

Building Community One Story at a Time

First time I ran Youth Leadership with Kendal, two newcomer youth – a brother and sister – came to the program. They then encouraged their Mom, Janice, to join Kits House to make new friends. Since then, Janice has led a successful scrap booking Neighbourhood Small Grants project. Janice often tells me how Kits House has been like family to her. Her self-confidence has improved. Janice has become the poster child of Kits House. She continues volunteering and encourages others to get involved with Kits House.

A key component of community engagement is the volunteer commitment. There are over 300 “loyal and committed volunteers” with a range of different experience and skills working on various initiatives to strengthen their community.

Partnerships

In our commitment to building community, Kits Houses truly recognises the role of partnerships. In addition to engaging residents, Kits House routinely reaches out to other organisations and businesses in the community as full partners. Our partners include:

- Artists in Our Midst
- ASK Friendship Centre
- City of Vancouver
- Maple Crest Apartments - Shalom Branch #178 of the Royal Canadian Legion
- Society Promoting Environmental Conservation
- Spinal Cord Injury BC
- United Way
- University of British Columbia
- Vancity Credit Union
- Vancouver Public Libraries
- Vancouver Foundation
- Village Vancouver
- West 4th Avenue Business Association
- West Broadway Business Improvement Association
- Westside Family Place
- Whole Foods Market

A key element in these partnerships is regular and meaningful communication, collaboration and resource sharing. We deeply value these and other partnership relationships; they make a big difference in our ability to serve the Westside community.

Programming

A key strength is that Kits House is committed to community development, responding to community-identified needs and engaging community assets. The programming offered is very diverse, relevant and responsive to the needs of community members. The programming is offered in a way that addresses risks of social isolation. In particular, we have:

- strong connections with families in the neighbourhood, and
- a deep capacity for the development and management of seniors housing.

Internal Challenges

The challenges that Kits House faces are similar to other organizations in the non-profit sector. However, our role is also unique in that we are the only neighbourhood house on

the Westside, an increasingly diverse area of Vancouver. Key challenges that Kits House faces as we endeavor to build community on the Westside are:

- maintaining a balance between purpose and capacity;
- prioritizing activities in a way that best meet diverse needs;
- maintaining an ability to respect and respond to the many great ideas that come our way;
- finding effective ways to respond to the emerging diversity in the community;
- framing the needs of the Kitsilano community within a sectoral environment which often focuses on low income people in other parts of Vancouver; and
- raising funds to respond to emerging needs and opportunities.

Possible Future Roles

Kits House clearly has an important role in addressing Westside issues. Some possible future roles that were identified in the strategic planning process were:

- promotion of awareness, community engagement, and action on community issues such as affordable housing;
- coordination of a hub of ideas and information, connecting and linking organizations and residents;
- providing needed services, particularly focused on reducing isolation especially amongst those who experience social exclusion; and
- building on the assets that already exist in the community.

THE PLANNING CONTEXT

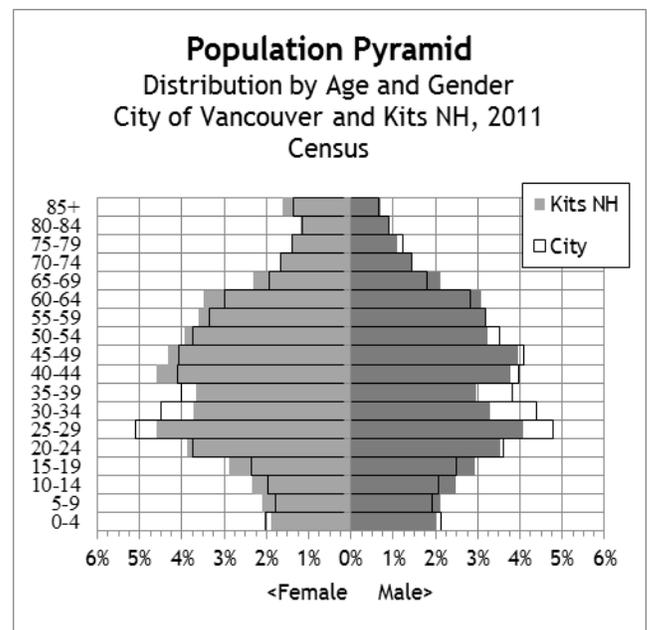
Kits House as it currently stands is a vibrant, inclusive space for neighbours to gather. But we are planning for Kits House in a world that is rapidly changing. Although in Canada we have unprecedented sense of abundance, the pace of change is not without a cost. People are connected electronically but not personally. Our population is aging. Loneliness and isolation is rampant. Canadians are aware of the precarious state of our natural environment but feel helpless to do anything about it. We notice economic inequality in our communities, particularly for families, but this does not seem to change year after year. Our communities are very diverse and, in some neighbourhoods, people are experiencing social exclusion and do not always feel welcome.

A review of conditions in our neighbourhood, city, and sector provide a good starting point for thinking about strategic directions for Kits House.

Our Neighbourhood

Our neighbourhood is sometimes considered the most beautiful part of Vancouver. With a rich history in social justice movements, it is a place where people through Vancouver's history have loved to gather, be it swimming at Kits Beach, walking at Pacific Spirit Park or attending Bard on the Beach at Vanier Park. It includes amazing markets and beautiful gardens. The environmental movement, the Folk Festival and the Children's Festival have deep roots here.

Geographically, Kits House, as the only Neighbourhood House on the Westside, fosters community in a large geographic area bordered to the west by the Strait of Georgia, to the East by Granville St., to the North by English Bay and False Creek and to the South by the Fraser River. The area has a population of about 118,930. There are slightly more women (53 percent) compared to Canada as a whole (51 percent). There is a higher proportion of residents who are aged 55 -75 than in the city as a whole and more children between the ages of 5-19.



Thirty-three per cent of the population has a mother tongue that is a non-official language and 21 per cent use a language other than English at home.

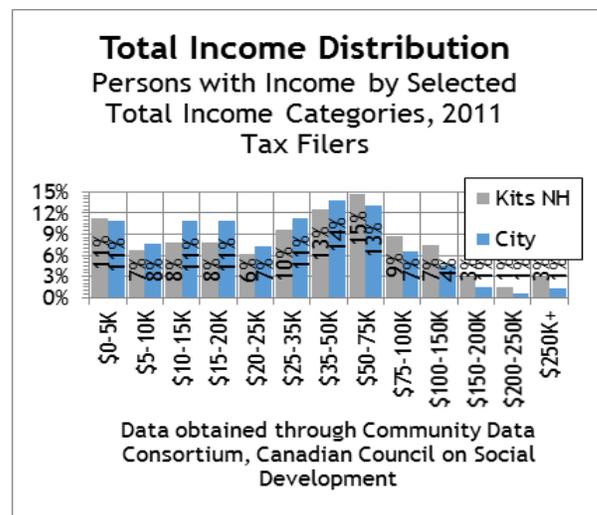
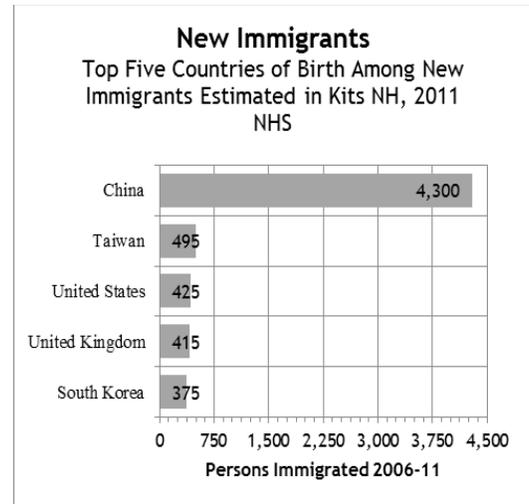
Generally, there is a higher proportion of Westside residents who have an income above \$50,000 than other residents of the city as a whole. However, there is an equal or almost equal proportion who have an income of under \$10,000. There is also a significant difference between neighbourhoods, with the Kitsilano neighbourhood having a higher proportion of people with a low income than other areas of the Westside.

Some of the strengths of Westside neighbourhoods are:

- great public spaces;
- diversity of people, natural environment and community resources;
- stable services;
- access to the University of British Columbia;
- a large population of young people here for post-secondary education; and
- a strong tradition of activism.

Some of the challenges facing the community are:

- limited access to affordable childcare;
- many grocery stores are unaffordable for those on limited income;
- family housing in the neighbourhood is becoming increasingly unaffordable;
- seniors are not able to access the services they need in their community;
- many people feel isolated;
- there is a lot of traffic congestion; and
- public transportation does not meet the needs of a changing population.



The City as a Whole

Many of the strengths and challenges identified on the Westside are mirrored across the city. A recent Vancouver Foundation Vital Signs report noted that generally residents of the Lower Mainland appreciate a high quality of life. In particular 87 per cent of residents indicate that the quality of life in Metro Vancouver is either excellent or good. Aspects of life in the Metro Vancouver area that contribute to the quality of life are the natural environment and temperate weather. Recognizing the inter-relationships among various

dimensions of our lives, the Vital Signs report card shows that we scored highest on political engagement (B-) and environmental sustainability (B-).

However, the lifestyle afforded by our environment comes at a cost. Metro Vancouver gets a failing grade when it comes to housing (D) and affordability (D+). British Columbia, and Vancouver in particular, are some of the highest areas with respect to family poverty and in Metro Vancouver, 22 per cent of children show vulnerability in key indices.

Some of the issues facing our city in the next ten years are:

- an inadequate supply of affordable housing;
- limited access to quality childcare;
- absentee ownership of residential properties;
- high cost of living;
- gentrification and a corresponding displacement of low-income people;
- an inadequate transportation system; and
- food insecurity.

Of the issues facing Vancouver, the issues that were identified by the community as having the biggest impact on Westside communities are:

- an aging population
- transportation issues
- limited child care availability
- homelessness

The Non-profit Sector

It is most often the non-profit sector in partnership with government that mitigates the impact of community issues such as these. However, we also see that the non-profit environment is changing.

A key issue is that public fiscal restraint will remain a driving factor in the life of this plan. For many years services have been downloaded to the community sector without corresponding resources to support these services.

There will be increased pressure on the voluntary sector at a time when volunteers are aging. There is a very limited amount of core funding to support volunteer development and coordination.

Economic instability has also affected private funders. Many foundations have experienced a decrease in portfolio revenue. There is donor fatigue and increased competition among non-profit organizations. Funders are increasingly funding new or

'pilot-testing' ideas and there are very limited resources for ongoing programs. Within this insecure funding environment, it is difficult for many organizations to sustain programs and commit to staff for the long-term.

Implications for Kits House

The overview of the strengths and challenges experienced by Kits House and the changing local, sectoral and city-wide environment have implications for the planning process. In summary, the demography of the Westside is changing. There is a clear need to respond to the aging population. There are also a significant proportion of newcomer families who often experience social isolation. But resources for programming are becoming increasingly difficult to access. With significant economic fluctuation facing the Western world, this is not likely to change in the next few years. It is important to diversify our funding sources. And our community wants to have a voice in how we address inequality and other concerns. Kits House is well positioned to support community engagement on the issues facing our community and the city as a whole.

OUR PLAN

Serving the Westside community for over 40 years, engaging over 300 volunteers per year, Kitsilano Neighbourhood House is committed to safe, healthy and inclusive communities.

Our Vision

Vancouver's Westside is a healthy, vibrant and connected community where everyone thrives.

Our Mission

Kitsilano Neighbourhood House creates community for all by connecting people, ideas, and opportunities.

Our Values

The values that guide us are:

- respect
- diversity
- collaboration
- compassion
- accountability
- democratic participation
- dignity
- humour
- interdependence
- leadership



Strategic Actions



Strategy 1: Inspire every community member to share their gifts and voice in creating an inclusive, interconnected community.

Actions:

- Undertake an ‘Inspire’ campaign about inclusion and interconnection.
- Develop and support more volunteer-led programs that create an inclusive and interconnected community.
- Undertake asset-based community development¹ with small groups of neighbours, identifying and building their neighbourhood based on individual and collective strengths.



Strategy 2: Provide innovative neighbourhood-based programming that responds to the emerging needs of people, accessible in the neighbourhoods in which they live.

Actions:

- Create a five-year vision for family support programs.
- Undertake research on seniors aging-in-place.
- Provide programs for seniors that meet the emerging needs and incorporate best practices.
- Expand life-skill building programs for youth.
- Develop a comprehensive and integrated food security system in collaboration with our partners.

¹ McKnight, John. Asset Based Community Development Institute at <http://www.abcdinstitute.org/>



Strategy 3: Nurture our people, ensuring our workplace reflects our values and promotes a culture of excellence, accountability, and collaborative learning.

Actions:

- Develop a baseline report, documenting what we are currently doing, barriers that have been experienced, and ideas of innovative ways to strengthen our capacity to nurture our staff.
- Foster dialogue on what a culture of excellence means and what we need to do to create this.
- Strengthen internal communication to promote a culture of excellence.



Strategy 4: Promote financial sustainability by expanding and diversifying financial support for programs and services in our neighbourhood.

Actions:

- Expand the Board's role in fundraising and stewardship.
- Create a promotional video to support fundraising initiatives.
- Expand the capacity of staff for promoting the financial sustainability of their programs.
- Promote a culture of neighbourhood-based philanthropy on the Westside.



Strategy 5: Lead and empower our community to engage in dialogue and take actions on issues.

Actions:

- Provide leadership on community hubs such as seniors, food security, and early childhood programs.
- Promote Kits House as a place and resource for community initiated dialogue and broad based organizing on community issues.
- Share the story of our innovative work on seniors housing and aging-in-place, promoting expansion of these best practices into other communities.

