

IMAGINE BC

Dialogues on the Future of British Columbia
SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

HEALTH AND COMMUNITY YEAR IV CONSENSUS STATEMENT MARCH, 2008

BOWEN ISLAND, BC | OCTOBER 21–24, 2007



DIALOGUE PROGRAMS, CONTINUING STUDIES
In association with the Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue

The 2007 Imagine BC Delegates and Facilitators

<i>Program Director</i>	Joanna Ashworth	<i>Delegates</i>	Warren Bell Judy Brownoff Mae Burrows Nadia Chaney Calvin Chrustie Dominique Collin Michael Curnes Mike Evans Trevor Hancock Theresa Healy Georgia Kyba Donald MacPherson Rudy North Larry Odegard Lorene Oikawa Douglas Todd
<i>Facilitators</i>	Nadine Caron Tony Penikett		
<i>Program Analyst</i>	Jessica Plescia		
<i>On-site Coordination</i>	Freydis Welland		

Dinner Delegates

The Imagine BC Bowen Dialogue always features a working dinner including a larger group of guest participants. This group together with the core delegates, developed the set of trends they see impacting the province now and over the next 30 years. This year's invited guests included:

John Blatherwick, Retired Chief Medical Officer, Vancouver Coastal Health Authority
Catherine Hume, Policy and Research Director, Canadian Mental Health Association
Vickie Cammack, Executive Director, PLAN Institute for Caring Citizenship
Tim Lynch, Health Consultant, INFO-LYNK Consulting Inc.
Jon Cooksey, Film-maker, "How to Boil a Frog"
Michelle Hoar, Business Director, The Tyee
Kate Dilworth, Healthcare worker and Associate with SFU Learning Strategies Group
Danna Murray, Executive Director, Minerva Foundation for Women
Siobhan Ashe, Assistant Professor, Undergraduate Semester in Dialogue SFU
Christopher Pollon, Journalist and Researcher, Globe and Mail

Table of Contents

Background	4
Introducing the 2007 Imagine BC Delegates — great expectations	5
Rethinking health	7
What is community?	8
Forgiveness and community health	11
From awareness to ...?	12
Three imagined futures	13
Four directions for change	14
A view of the World's future, to ignite activism or desperation	15
BC's assets that inspire us	17
Now what?	19

Background

Imagine BC is a non-partisan program that invites creative and informed citizens to examine issues and trends that will affect British Columbia one generation from now. The goal is not to predict where we will end up, based on current circumstances. The goal is to lift our gaze to the far horizon — to begin thinking about and planning for the future that we want for ourselves, our children, and our province.

Under the leadership of Simon Fraser University's Dialogue Programs at the Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue, and sponsored by North Growth Foundation and the Province of British Columbia, Imagine BC began a five-year initiative in 2004, engaging a small, but diverse group of experts in the examination of several broad questions: Is there a distinctive BC culture? What should BC be in 30 years? How might we have economic prosperity, environmental sustainability, and healthy communities? And what are the choices we must make today to achieve that future?

The inaugural dialogue in 2004 inspired and informed a series of larger dialogues throughout that first year and across the province, engaging members of the public, as well as experts in economics, ecology, education, health, Aboriginal issues, and culture. It also laid a solid foundation for a series of more specific dialogues, beginning in 2005 with an examination of the future of British Columbia's economy and ecology, and following on in 2006 with a look at the future of education and culture.

This year's Imagine BC theme is health and community. The dialogue takes a hard look at the general state of our health and considers the influences that highly functional (or dysfunctional) communities have on the health of their individual members.

As in previous years, the dialogue held in retreat on Bowen Island has given rise to this consensus statement, which is intended as a provocation to extend the discussion into the broader community. As is so often the case, there are issues within these subject areas that can best be resolved by engaging the largest number of people in an informed and purposeful dialogue. Our aim, as ever, is to inspire that larger public conversation and, in so doing, to inform and inspire the policy makers, analysts, academics, business leaders, and health professionals who can make the changes we need to achieve a desired future.

"I am mostly interested in preferable futures, not probable futures," said delegate Trevor Hancock's at the opening of this dialogue to which, Joanna Ashworth, Director of Dialogue Programs at Simon Fraser University and convener of Imagine BC agreed, saying: "This is not an exercise in prediction; it is an exercise in imagination."

Indeed, our purpose is to Imagine BC at its best.

Introducing the 2007 Imagine BC Delegates — Great Expectations

The participants in Imagine BC’s Bowen dialogue are thought leaders drawn from various professions and fields of endeavour. Their work, study, and life experience have given them a particular wisdom or insight that is valuable to the examination of health and community. More importantly, the delegates have distinguished themselves as people who honour dialogue — people who are willing to speak openly, to listen patiently, and to withhold judgment.

In this, the fourth year of the Imagine BC process, there were 15 delegates, many with specific credentials in health and health care and all with a record of engagement and commitment in their own communities.

In a role fitting for the professional reporter, the *Vancouver Sun’s* **Douglas Todd** introduced what became a frame for the conversation. Todd generally writes about spirituality, ethics and, increasingly, psychology — arguably broad issues reflecting personal, public and community health. But he noted that, as his parents age, he has also wandered increasingly into specific health issues: his father’s schizophrenia and his mother’s Alzheimer’s -- a reminder that no matter how much we might try to concentrate on the theoretical issues of health and community, ultimately the issues become personal.

To which **Warren Bell** might add, “urgent.” As a family physician in the Shuswap area and a founding member of the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment (CAPE), Bell thinks of himself as an anthropologist, stepping back and looking at the practice of modern medicine as it intersects with public health. What he sees has convinced him that the issues we face today can no longer be addressed with business-as-usual solutions — with band-aids. Although many physicians and other “experts” resist innovations ranging from alternative medicine to alternative water treatment, Dr. Bell said he is convinced that, “We need fundamental change.”

Trevor Hancock is also a physician, now working in public health in BC and was co-founder, with Warren Bell of CAPE. More than 20 years ago, he was one of the founders of what is now a world-wide movement for healthy cities and communities. He is an internationally recognised health promotion consultant and health futurist and has worked at all levels -- from local communities to the World Health Organization.

Donald MacPherson is the Drug Policy Coordinator for the City of Vancouver, a position that has taken him to the centre of the Vancouver community that is most at risk. From a frequent viewpoint at the Carnegie Centre at Main and Hastings in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside, MacPherson said that he can see the best and worst of community. He sees residents with a sense of place, a high degree of mutual concern and an appetite for activism — what he called an ability to mobilize. At the same time, he sees a “public health policy disaster and a criminal justice policy disaster.”

Dominique Collin, a former federal public servant and a national expert in social venture and community economic development, also condemned the historic failure of our “advanced” economy and culture to help communities. Collin, a Quebecois among Anglophones and a person of Aboriginal heritage living amidst a white majority, has watched many times as Canadian governments offered assistance to functional First Nations communities that undermined existing community structures, often, leaving those communities even less capable of helping themselves.

Mike Evans, a Research Chair at UBC Okanagan, said that his work and especially his community-based research, has led him to believe that “the root cause of all evil is poverty and that poverty is also the root consequence.” He said he hoped in the unfolding dialogues to challenge the wider community and public policy makers to begin to address this issue directly.

What’s the Point?

In the opening of the fourth Bowen Dialogue, one delegate asked what precisely such an event is expected to “deliver.”

Starting with a response nestled in theories of quantum mechanics, one delegate advises that when you examine something, you change it and it can change you. A defining quote from the leading British futurist James Robertson was also brought to the foreground: “Thinking about the future is only useful and interesting if it affects what we do and how we live today.”

The answers were promising and poetic.

Michael Curnes, the Director of Recreation and Community Services for the City of Prince Rupert was equally attuned to the issues of poverty and of what he called the “widening gap between people who can take advantage of new opportunities and people who, for whatever reason, can’t.” In his community, the development of a major shipping gateway is shining a bright light on that gap, as some residents enjoy a sudden increase in fortune, while others continue to be left on the sidelines.

Theresa Healy quite openly included herself among those all too familiar with life on the social and economic fringe. Moving from an impoverished family to a dangerous street when she was just 14, Healy passed several years at high risk. Her path eventually led to academia — to a PhD in history and an adjunct professorship at the University of Northern BC — but her passion has led her back to the streets, where she conducts community-based research with people at risk.

Judy Brownoff, a Saanich municipal councilor since 1993 and a director on the board of the Capital Regional District, approaches community engagement from a different direction. Working for years to connect the sometimes-divided members of her community she has come to value the dialogue process. The trick, she said, is to get everyone speaking to one another when there is not a contentious issue on the table. That’s when a true dialogue can most easily occur.

Several delegates said they approached the Bowen dialogue either with a lively agenda or with a sense of perspective that they hoped would be helpful.

Lorene Oikawa, vice president of the BC Government and Service Employees’ Union, represents the view of her members — 60,000 people, many of whom work on the front lines of health care and public policy.

Dr. Georgia Kyba brought an expertise in naturopathic medicine and a wealth of personal experience as someone who has worked extensively with First Nations communities.

Calvin Chrustie, an RCMP inspector with the Criminal Operations Branch, and a veteran of several United Nations peacekeeping missions, brought views informed by his own glimpses of “the grittier aspect of life and some of the grittier places.” He said he hoped for dialogue that would allow people to “lead by the heart rather than by the head.”

Larry Odegard, CEO of the British Columbia and Yukon Council of St. John Ambulance and a veteran civil servant from three western provinces, said that he has always tried to act as a “health provocateur” — to ask hard and embarrassing questions for people in the health policy world. That, he said, should never stop.

Nadia Chaney brought her commitment to art and activism in every day life. As an artist, she believes “in hip hop as a tool for dialogue,” throwing a fresh perspective on a form that is often greeted with hostility in conservative circles. “Art,” she said, “belongs in public life and in the political sphere.”

Mae Burrows is the executive director of the Labour Environmental Alliance — a group conceived to demonstrate that there is not necessarily a battle between what is green and what, in some political circles has been labelled “brown.” Her group is particularly committed to removing toxins from the workplace and, eventually, from the environment. As a “relentless activist,” she hoped to make this issue everyone else’s passion as well.

The facilitators for this year’s dialogue were **Tony Penikett** and **Nadine Caron**. Penikett is a former Deputy Minister and a former Yukon Premier and Minister of Health, who remembers making mistakes by rushing into solutions before completely understanding the problems. The process of dialogue is intended, at least in part, to overcome that shortfall of wisdom.

Nadine Caron is a widely traveled and highly trained general and endocrine surgeon with an unusual corresponding interest in public health. She also has a masters degree in Public Health and endeavours to make sense of issues like trauma surgery by looking at the dangerous roads on which the original trauma occurred.

Rethinking Health and Community

What is Health?

There is a trend in the public discourse to medicalize health — to talk about it only in the context of disease, illness, treatment, and care. Experts search for metrics to define the state of our health. They look to infant mortality rates or longevity, and then they try to measure the performance of our health care system by dividing these numbers into the total health care expenditures.

But the 15 delegates at this year’s Bowen Dialogue retreated from the medical definitions — health as the absence of pain or the absence of disease — and tried instead to fix on a definition that was more relative, a definition that is a little closer to that proposed by the *Oxford English Dictionary*: “the state of well-being in body or mind.”

Linguistically, “health” arises from the old English word ‘hael,’ from which roots we also derive: whole, holy, heal, hale (as in hearty) and hello. Functionally, however, there is a degree to which that the “state of well-being” is really a state of mind. Health, said delegate Trevor Hancock, is “the perception that all is internally well.” Not so much an endpoint, health is what allows us the energy and freedom to pursue the great goals of our lives. It is also very often defined against expectations. Someone who years ago had lost the use of his legs might nevertheless define himself as healthy. A senior citizen, juggling the advancing complications of chronic diabetes, heart disease, and osteoporosis might still count her blessings for feeling “healthy” on any particular day.

In that way, health can also be seen as a synonym for resilience. Whether you’re talking about individuals or whole systems, a healthy body is generally considered to be one that can withstand a sudden shock. Just as the “healthiest” individuals in a community are most likely to survive an influenza epidemic, the healthiest systems are the ones that prove to be the most robust in times of crisis. In that instance, health is not an absence of disease; it is the ability to tolerate or conquer all but the most virulent and dangerous threats.

The definitive statement on health probably came from Imagine BC facilitator and general and endocrine surgeon, Nadine Caron: “Health is not cutting out the tumor; health is preventing the tumor in the first place.”

In Sickness or in Wealth

There is a tendency — and for very good reason — to link health with wealth. The World Health Organization reports that, “Poorer people live shorter lives and are more often ill than the rich.”

But as many rich people have discovered, health is not something that you can reliably buy. While living in dire poverty is almost a guarantee of ill-health,, once a nation’s Gross Domestic Product per capita rises above \$5,000, other determinants of health begin to take over. Then again, wealth, like health, must be understood in a context. An average income of \$5,000 per year might be enough to lift the people in a developing nation out of a dangerous degree of poverty, but in the expensive cities of British Columbia, that amount of money would barely pay for shelter, much less cover the other components (beginning with nutritious food) that go into maintaining good health.

There is something more than pure numbers that defines poverty. Delegate Dominique Collin reached into his native French in search of a synonym for poverty: it is “*misère*,” not quite “misery,” not quite despondency, but a poverty of the spirit. It can be a poverty of powerlessness — of being isolated and disenfranchised within a larger community. It can be a poverty defined by disparity — a sense of being critically underprivileged against the standards of the larger community. Or it can be a personal or spiritual poverty — reflecting a lack of meaning in life, the absence of a sense of purpose.

By any or all of those definitions “health” and “poverty” are mutually exclusive.

What is Community?

If health is difficult to define in simple and clear terms, “community” is impossible — because community is not a single thing. There are geographic communities, professional communities and communities of interest — all of which might easily overlap. There are communities that are “healthy”, where community members support one another in ways that maximize everyone’s happiness and productivity, and there are communities that are exploitative and damaging, where the resources of a community are held exclusively by an elite and used to the disadvantage of others.

When the word community arose from the Latin roots of *con* (which means “together”) and *munis* (which has to do with performing services), the assumption was probably of a small geographic community whose members shared a set of common interests and were accountable to one another — i.e., the Greek Polis, that might, in fact, take advantage of the different strengths and potentials of all individual members to build a healthy *communitas*.

In today’s sprawling cities, geographic communities can be divided by everything from ethnic differences to highway interchanges. There are communities sharing a common interest and, increasingly, there are virtual communities in which people know one another’s email addresses or Facebook identities, but are not in any personal way acquainted. As a result, it is surprisingly easy to live in this or that community and still be isolated — to still be anonymous, unaccounted for, and unaccountable.

Communities We Have Known and Lost

It is easy to see the traditional model of a community in the history of the isolated northern Quebec First Nations settlement of Puvirnituk. Delegates noted from past experiences that some alienated rural communities such as Puvirnituk, by World Bank standards, would be in a state of abject “poverty.” but what the delegates noted was how functional many of these communities are, with extended families well integrated and practiced at looking after one another.

The First Nations community’s experience with a major federal investment was described as having a devastating effect. The government built an airport, which immediately employed a small number of community members, introducing an economic disparity that was previously unknown. The planes then brought new and expensive consumables, drugs, and alcohol. The traditional community support systems began to break down and within a very short time the community was less poor, but a lot worse off.

The historic loss of First Nations communities that have been undermined by policies aimed at destroying old cultural traditions such as the potlatch cannot be overlooked. The decisive blow in these stories comes with the successive generations of children being removed from their parents for an education in the residential school system.

Michael Curnes pointed out that at times provincial ministries and even community leaders are inclined to undervalue the traditions and inherent strengths of the Aboriginal population. Wouldn’t it be more effective, wondered the delegates, if a community identified its own health solutions, perhaps soliciting the wisdom of the elders, rather than have the larger community try to impose “expert” solutions that often don’t easily translate? This is particularly important for traditional First Nations, where community structures would be more supported if new solutions generated from within.

Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside was noted as a vibrant, but dangerously dysfunctional community that is often defined less by its geography and more by its poverty and, especially, the drug, alcohol and mental health problems that plague its population. It is a perfect example of the dislocation that arises from disparity and from the broken links that can develop within larger communities. Here, we witness a population that has been marginalized and disenfranchised — and then blamed for their own failure by a majority population that avoids taking responsibility by staying away from that part of town.

These sometimes dysfunctional community divisions seem to get worse as the size of communities and the disparities in wealth increase. In a vast metropolis where they don't have to deal personally with many of their neighbours, people are less likely to be accountable. Those in wealthy communities are always better able to protect their interests than those from poor communities. Thus, we wind up with layers of law and regulation that privilege some groups at the expense of others.

Communities that Get Lost — and Found

Regardless of the forces that act to drive people and communities apart, there also appears to be something inherently “communal” in the human spirit, a healthy force that can be triggered by crisis or merely by an unexpected opportunity to gather together.

Delegates offered a few examples of healthy community response in times of crisis: public reaction to the Quebec ice storm in 1998, during which many hundreds of residents were reported to have left the safety of their homes for no purpose other than to check on their neighbours. The spirited response in Prince Rupert when that community was isolated last year by a series of natural and man-made disasters (the sinking of the BC Ferry, a landslide and a bout of flooding) is another example. Again, people reached across the usual divisions to ensure that every member of the greater Prince Rupert community received the help they needed.

From a pro-active healthy community standpoint, the Commercial Drive Car Free Festival was noted. This is an annual celebration on Commercial Drive in which organizers do little more than close down the streets — removing automobile traffic to make space for the people. The community pours forth in the tens of thousands.

However you define “community,” it appears to be resilient by nature and healthy by inclination.

Health in the Global Community

We have reached a point in human history at which no community can truly insulate itself from the actions of every other community on the planet. By the size of our population and by the reach of our technologies, we have shrunk the finite world. Whether we are thinking about it or not, our local actions have global impact.

In fact, in a way that becomes more obvious when you view pictures of the Earth as seen from space, we live in an interdependent planet and community with all the other plants and animals on the earth. Yet we have not developed the mechanisms necessary to manage or nurture the planetary community. We have failed to protect ocean species that are endangered by exploitation from many countries. We cannot prevent water pollution from finding foreign shores or air pollution from drifting across international boundaries. Greenhouse gases alone threaten the global climate and yet no international organization has come to grips with the problem, much less the solution.

If such a global agency existed, however, it would likely make people in smaller, more diverse communities nervous, as it would force them to cede power to an overarching authority. Trevor Hancock recalled an observation of a Swedish political scientist at a WHO Health Futures Forum some 15 years ago who suggested that as we move to supra-national organizations — think European Union (EU), Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), World Trade Organization (WTO), etc., — people become overwhelmed and are inclined to turn back to more local or regional polities. As we develop metropolises and megacities we may see the re-emergence of localized community in direct reaction.

“When I first saw a photograph of Earth taken from outer space, it powerfully brought home to me how small and fragile the planet is and how petty our squabbles are.”

– His Holiness
the 14th Dalai Lama

Currently, large international trade organizations already tend to create as many issues as they address.

Trade, which is promoted for its ability to distribute wealth, also enables distant communities to exploit one another without facing the consequences of their actions. Canadians can “employ” child labour in the developing world. Chinese factories can export lead-tainted toys to North American consumers. People living in isolated, environmentally pristine Nunavut communities can wind up ingesting toxins that entered their food chain from air pollution coming from thousands of miles away.

The Seton Lake First Nations community in BC’s interior was brought to the group’s attention. This community’s pristine environment is tainted by a self-reported cancer rate affecting more than half the population. Nearby mining and hydro-electric activities dedicated to sourcing resources for far-distant consumers are thought to be the cause.

International trade organizations also work hard to “harmonize” environmental and social regulations — which often turns into a process of setting the regulatory bar to the level of the most lenient potential trading partner. “They talk about leveling the playing field,” said Lorene Oikawa, “but I call it lowering the playing field.”

These forces of globalization result in forms of global environmental change, all of which can have serious health consequences. These can be categorized as follows:

- Climate and atmospheric change
- Pollution and ecotoxicity
- Resource depletion
- Loss of habitat and bio-diversity, and species extinction

The latter point raises again the question of resilience. The more you simplify a natural system, the more fragile it becomes, while diverse systems tend to be highly resilient. By our activities, humans are “simplifying” systems aggressively, driving to extinction species that, in many cases, have not even been enumerated or recognized.

This global process has brought the world to an unsustainable state. We are consuming the Earth’s resources more quickly than they can be replaced and we are doing so in a manner that could take centuries to regenerate. Isn’t this analogous to the actions of someone who rents a house from friends for a summer getaway and then trashes the place? The humans currently living in the larger global community are assuredly not leaving the Earth the way we found it.

Forgiveness and Community Health

Trevor Hancock recently attended a conference in Kelowna on Cities Fit for Children. This speech so inspired him, he offered it for inclusion here. It is a portion of a dialogue that occurred between Stewart Alsgard, Mayor of Powell River and ShePaTes (Walter Paul), Chief Councillor for the Tla'Amin First Nation.

Stewart Alsgard, Mayor of Powell River

We cannot predict the future. We cannot even predict what is around the next corner. However, we can be committed to always giving this relationship [between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals] our best shot.

In order to do so, and I am speaking to the non-Aboriginal people in this room, we have to acknowledge the past. While uncomfortable and difficult, and while one or two generations removed from us, there is no way around it.

We are dealing with the aftermath of past centuries of European colonial expansion. That expansion was justified in the minds of colonial powers because they could not imagine non-European and non-Christian cultures to be of value. Aboriginal people were used and abused as it suited the purposes of the colonizing companies and the imperial government.

Ships of the British, Spanish and American Navy enforced political, commercial and personal interests on the coast. Aboriginal populations were decimated by disease, and confined to reserves. They were prohibited from practicing their cultures and barred from participation in the life of the new colonies.

While individual immigrants coming into the country were usually oblivious to the fate of the aboriginal population, the embarrassing truth is that their opportunity was built on the space and resources removed from Aboriginal control. Tla'Amin capital Tees'Kwat was located where the Powell River paper mill stands now. That is no coincidence – it was a prime location where many economic factors came together.

ShePaTes (Walter Paul), Chief Councillor for the Tla'Amin First Nation

In time, the European culture that could justify centuries of oppression was changed by the consequences of that very oppression. The resistance of my and other Aboriginal people here and around the world challenged European notions of right and wrong.

By the late 20th century a new standard of human rights had arisen. That standard recognizes the legitimacy of all cultures and the inherent rights of Aboriginal people. The Canadian law now reflects that standard due to the uninterrupted political struggles of Aboriginal leaders.

There is now a chance to reconcile some very bad history.

Stewart Alsgard, Mayor of Powell River

While we have made great strides as a society in reframing our views in recent years, the aftermath of 200 years of colonialism on the West Coast is the continuing marginalization of First Nations and individual aboriginal people. And while understanding what happened is essential, understanding without contributing to remedies is nothing. And so it is up to us to address that marginalization in everything we do.

There is no room for stereotypes and racism, no matter how unconsciously ingrained or cleverly disguised. To those of you who may feel stuck on a regular basis trying to do business with First Nations I suggest that you work first on your own thoughts and attitudes before expecting any such thing from the Aboriginal people at the table.

I cannot ask Chief Walter Paul to work with me without this acknowledgement of our history and without expressing my respect for the incredible strength of his community. With all the grief they had to endure, those 1000 people continue to be distinctly Tla'Amin, determined to keep their language, culture and heritage alive, determined to reach just accommodation of their aboriginal rights and title, no matter what the cost, determined to do business on their terms in their traditional territory. Determined to face challenges and move forward.

We can all learn from that strength of character and that power of determination.

From Awareness to ...?

Paradoxes in the Global Community

Late in the 19th century, the great scientist Louis Pasteur said, “Chance favours the prepared mind.” And yet, in the wake of the environmental, social and economic collapse of New Orleans in the face of Hurricane Katrina, an American Congressman said that he and his colleagues hadn’t learned “a damn thing,” from the event. On the contrary, he said, they had been well warned and had not taken action.

This tragedy demonstrates a disconnect in how we deal with our personal health and how communities make health related decisions: We often know what is right, or what is wrong, and yet, through indirection, self-delusion, or momentary disregard, we still make the wrong choices.

Several delegates wondered aloud as to whether we have the information that we need to achieve societal health. Some were concerned that citizens are too often misled, or given inadequate information by community leaders — in government and in the private sector. One delegate pointed out how easy it is to become hopeless in the face of the huge global forces that affect our lives: “Do we really, viscerally understand what’s happening to us?”

Other delegates noted concerns about misrepresentation in the public conversation. Despite the stunning and obvious increase in material wealth that our society enjoy, “The public discourse is always about *lack*.”

Sometimes our failure to choose wisely reflects a breakdown in our education system. In Georgia Kyba’s work as a naturopath, she frequently sees people who don’t understand the implications of their food choices. Even among those who have a chronic diet-related condition like diabetes, there are too many who have had no education about nutrition, and just don’t know what is healthy and what is not.

Conversely, it was noted that most of the information we need to improve our health, is already available somewhere in the world. One problem is that we don’t share information well, or we don’t follow through on our successes. Said one delegate, Canada is a nation of pilot studies. And quoting community

development expert John McKnight, “while institutions learn from studies, communities learn from stories” — and those stories need to be told more frequently and more loudly.

The challenge — the structural social problem, according to some — is that we have developed what is “an efficiency model; not an effective community model” for the organization of our government and the delivery of services. This has institutionalized a social fragility in which all service delivery mechanisms are judged first by their costs not by their effectiveness, or ultimate resiliency. We try to arrange “just-on-time delivery” on items and services even when we should be considering the usefulness of maintaining a prudent surplus.

The delegates spoke of the broad implications of this corporate model. Although governments should function in pursuit of the greater good, they have picked up the tactics and techniques of the corporate world, which were designed to advance the interests of the individual — and most especially of the individual who controls the corporation. Thus we have “CEOs” in charge of public institutions, using corporate benchmarks to report on “efficiency,” rather than using outcomes to measure success.

Thus people who are *not* medical professionals — people who are unlikely to be expected to be highly informed about issues like nutrition — are left to make choices between what is healthy and what is easy or inexpensive. These short-term decisions then have difficult long-term costs.

This points to a direction for further deliberation: What can people in the wider community do to rebalance the political decision-making process? When politicians are choosing between the right choice and the easy choice, how can we make it easier for them to do the right thing?

Three Imagined Futures

In a visioning exercise, delegates broke into three groups and created three scenarios – three stories of a possible future – that would illustrate both current concerns about health and community and future changes that might cement or alleviate those concerns. The scenarios were presented as one- or two-act plays that introduced characters at risk and then showed how a community might respond.

Two groups each presented two alternative futures.

In the first, the protagonist was a 13-year-old girl from a small Northern community who had traveled to Vancouver to escape an abusive home. In the first scenario, she seeks help from a provincial bureaucrat who offers her a series of long-term “solutions,” most of which would involve turning around and going back to her abusive home – and all of which demand that she read and fill out a series of complicated forms (a potential roadblock for many 13-year-olds at risk). This was an apparently “efficient” process for government: it took up a minimum amount of the bureaucrat’s time and, because none of the programs were immediately useful, it cost the taxpayer nothing. The longer term cost in human misery and in the young woman’s ongoing health and social expenses are calculations for another day.

In an imagined alternative, the young woman finds a community youth worker who is able to meet her in a public place, quickly resolve her immediate needs for food and shelter and begin the process of ensuring that she will find a safe place in the community and resume her education. This is a riskier alternative for government in terms of expense and accountability: it leaves both cash and judgment in the hands of a community worker and it wagers that a small front-end social capital investment will pay a dividend – a likelihood that is difficult to prove in the short term or to track over time.

The second group presented two futures for an immigrant child growing up in Canada: one in which people are judged to be assets and one in which

people are treated as commodities. In the human-centred future, which celebrates diversity and works to develop human potential, the immigrant family is welcomed and supported, and the baby grows into a stable and secure adult who makes considerable contributions to a new generation. In a future measured only by immediate economic benefit, the immigrant family struggles against racism, intolerance, and a regulatory environment that will not recognize foreign qualifications. Growing up in a world of resentment and mistrust, the child is offered training for narrow tasks rather than a fully rounded education and she matures into an embattled adult in a degraded environment.

It wasn’t clear how differently the economies of the two futures would function in the early years – how much each would cost – but it was obvious that there were high long-term social costs in the economy-centred version.

In the third scenario, the group tracked the evolution of a self-made forest industrialist who is justifiably proud of the wealth and jobs that he has created, but ideologically incapable of accepting criticism of any part of his operation. Through the accidents of time and the efforts of a dynamic young social activist, the executive begins to shift his perspective and he begins to reinvest his wealth in sustainable alternatives to old-style forestry.

This was a good illustration of the importance of dialogue among people with contradictory views – the importance of finding common ground. There was also a recognition that while the health of the community and the planet rests in everyone’s hands, the power to change tends to be concentrated in the hands of a much smaller group. In working toward a healthy and sustainable future it is essential that we find a way to capture the attention and goodwill of that group.

Four Directions for Change

The Imagine BC delegates conceived many questions but fixed on four broad points as being significant entry points to change. Within each of these directions, the delegates see potential for profound shifts in socially, economically, and environmentally healthy communities. These are offered in the spirit of inquiry and exploration, for public dialogue, policy research and local, regional and provincial consideration and action.

1. *Full Cost Accounting:* Those who recognize the importance of market economies are nevertheless often not very accepting when those markets externalize their costs. For example, no one is collecting payments for the damage done when we pour pollutants into the atmosphere. If we were able to create a tax regime that would “make prices tell the truth,” it is likely that markets would correct very quickly for the environmental damage currently being done. (Carbon taxation is one policy example that is currently being legislated in BC).
2. *Education:* People need help to be educated and informed. They need to work past the mystifying

jargon that makes economic policy opaque to the general public. And the best form of public education is through dialogue – through a conversation in which all parties are engaged.

3. *Local Food/Food Security:* Sharing food is a method of building community. It also addresses a lot of issues that can otherwise be a challenge to human health. If we source our food locally, our health outcomes improve. We have a greater chance of controlling its growing conditions or preventing the use of toxic pesticides or tainted inputs such as polluted water. Eating locally cuts down the waste of energy that is typical when we buy tomatoes from Mexico and then ship our own produce to the United States.
4. *Citizen Persistence:* This capitalizes both on the instinctive human reaction to band together in times of crisis and on the ability that people have shown in the past to overcome great social threat. Witness the relative public victory over the tobacco industry. People have proved before that they can prevail when health is at stake.

A View of the World’s Future, to Ignite Activism or Desperation

In a world in which a segment of the population enjoys a level of health and prosperity unequalled in human history, it is easy to become complacent – easy, that is, unless you invite Andrew Nikiforuk around as a dinner speaker.

Nikiforuk is a renowned journalist and author who is specializing increasingly in “plagues, scourges and emerging viruses.” His most recent book is entitled *Pandemonium: Bird Flu, Mad Cow Disease, and other Biological Plagues of the 21st Century*. Nikiforuk offered a relatively frightening overview to the Imagine BC participants.

Nikiforuk’s conclusion is that biological invaders are threatening our health and habitat at unprecedented speed. The combination of unfettered free trade in living organisms, increased mobility, and urban crowding has created an increasingly volatile environment for the world’s 6.5 billion people. In this interwoven global community, pests, weeds, and germs have a free ride in the overburdened system of international trade. Everything from disease-carrying mosquitoes and antibiotic resistant viruses, to flu viruses and tainted food products carries risks that can easily be transmitted around the whole world.

After setting out the challenge – a worrying prospect of global pandemics – Nikiforuk offered this quote, from the poet Alfred, Lord Tennyson: “I lose myself in action, lest I wither in despair.”

Clearly, in any positive imagined future, action must be the prescription.

Ten Trends: Imaginers Contemplate the Forces of the Future

With Nikiforuk’s compelling presentation at the forefront, this year’s guests were asked to identify trends that would have major impacts in the next three decades. Here, in no intentional order, are the group’s Top 10 Trends:

1. Environmental Degradation — Climate change, air and water pollution, species extinction. The human population has already wrought unprecedented planetary changes, the implications of which will continue to be felt for decades, perhaps centuries.
2. Globalization — The ease and abundance of international travel and trade have also changed the face of the world, making lives easier and more prosperous in some cases, but creating social, environmental and health risks in others. We can pass benefits among the world’s people quickly, even if we don’t always do so. But the dangers tend to move around without our help.
3. Localization — As we come to understand the risks and environmental cost of sourcing food from great distance, more and more people are choosing to “eat local,” to try to keep their trading footprint small. Climate change-related concerns about energy use also tend to inspire people to stay local — to travel less and to keep their economic associations as local as possible.
4. The Asian Ascendance — As the United States wrestles with post 20th century economic concerns, the economies of China and India are growing like never before, increasing pressure on the world’s resources and pulling the political and economic centre of gravity to the East. This will have implications for everything from human rights and living standards to environmental decline.

5. Terrorism — The events of September 11, 2001 showed that no country or community can assure its safety against the threats of terrorism, threats that may well get worse as environmental degradation forces the dislocation of large populations, and as disparities become more extreme. Last century's isolated resource wars could become this century's global terror campaigns.
6. Fragmentation of Communities — Perversely, the process of "globalization" can have a corollary effect of breaking up or disenfranchising smaller communities. In this fast-paced, rich-and-poor world, people living in large metropolises can easily become sidelined, growing lonely and isolated as the decisions that affect their lives are increasingly concentrated at a greater and greater distance.
7. Individualism — The social isolation that can flow from community fragmentation has other sources as well. Technological factors like the personal stereo and the computer allow people to move through the world without actually interacting. Internet services like FaceBook allow people to maintain "friendships" that include no personal contact. At the same time, technology also empowers individuals to educate themselves and to communicate in ways never before contemplated. The individual could become isolated and weak — or all-powerful.
8. Equity — Gender equity, racial equality, religious tolerance are not a given, in the whole world, but the status of women and minorities has risen markedly in the developed world and progress is being made in most countries and cultures the world over.
9. Aging — This is a trend of great concern in North America, Europe and Japan, where a dominant demographic bulge — the famous Baby Boom generation — is advancing in years. This can be expected to increase health care expenses and to create social — and infrastructural — challenges as our communities learn to accommodate a large population of elderly people, many with reduced mobility. There will also be serious economic issues as a smaller population is left with the tax and social costs of this Baby Boom group.
10. Denial — The foregoing trends are sufficiently daunting that many people merely look away. They don't want to know about climate change or contemplate the complications of peak oil or global pandemics. And in looking away, they may fail to grasp the positive trends which could resolve many of the issues we face. The first task as we move forward will be to engage leaders and followers alike in an informed conversation about our risks and opportunities.

BC's Assets that Inspire Us

Joanna Ashworth, Program Director, interviews Imagine BC Delegates

What is the one thing that BC has going for it, that we can build on towards a positive future?

Tony Penikett: Well, British Columbia has beauty and brains and we should be able to take advantage of both. But somehow we haven't been brainy enough to protect the beauty all of the time. Some of our iconic resources, the cedar and the salmon, are at risk because of climate change. We haven't successfully figured out how to deal with that yet. Nor do we know for sure what kind of economy we will transition to or yet what kind of a society is going to emerge, or yet again, even if there is something that we could safely or comfortably call a British Columbian culture.

Nadine Caron: I think as a group of citizens, we should not only enjoy today, but really start working together as communities and protect what our communities have... That's what Imagine BC is about — it is a dialogue that looks at the trends that are positive and looking at the trends that concern us and ...understand how we can utilize the assets to get to the future that we want for our kids when we're gone, that is better than what we have.

Mae Burrows: The one asset that we have in British Columbia is that we have people that are trying to work through their problems and have that resilience to do it. We've proven it before and we can do it again. But what we've got to work together to do it.

Michael Curnes: I think that it's just our stubborn independence that will see us through anything.

Dominique Collin: I think it's the fact that we're so small, that we can talk to each other, and this is such a beautiful place, people are here to stay; they're not in transit. ...we have a very diverse population with a variety of lively opinions, and that capacity to think and work, almost a pioneering spirit are sort of the types of people that come to BC from elsewhere. And we have a wealth of information and knowledge in our First Nations people. And I think we've got to find the way of weaving all of those assets together in a way that does not privilege one voice over another.

Georgia Kyba: Well, when you look at traditional medicine, and it's the reason why I chose naturopathic medicine, the philosophy is about looking at the whole person, and looking at all aspects. It's not just individual health, but community health, workplace health. And I think that that's important. We need to focus more on that, as well as prevention and respect for the environment.

Lorene Oikawa: The greatest asset for BC is the people. The passion. That's the power. The passion of the people's voices speaking out. When we engage people, they actually participate... and they can make changes.

Trevor Hancock: I agree. The greatest asset any community has, is its people.

Calvin Chrustie: I think that BC is slightly different than other places; the social conscience of the people I think is its asset.

Larry Odegard: It's not so much the passion, but the compassion that goes with that. They are motivated but they are also sensitive and aware.

Donald MacPherson: One asset that will see us through, I think, is the growing understanding and learning about the importance of engaging young people in all of these issues that we are talking about. And really, really, engaging them; not "teaching" them, not telling them, but involving them and engaging young people and talking about these real nitty gritty issues that are going to affect the future of British Columbia.

Nadia Chaney: I think an asset that will help us over the next few decades is the trend towards network deliberation. The ways that people are bringing new voices into real communication before making decisions.

Warren Bell: One asset is a gradual shift from a vision of the world as a bunch of straight lines to a giant web. As we think of life as a web, so we become less fragile and more resilient.

Doug Todd: I think we need to increase the role of government again. Government has become a kind of bad word in the past couple of decades. I think we need to have the word *bureaucrat* to become a positive word. Governments can do a lot, and I think that our society has gone way towards the market system and has forgotten that governments can do very positive things.

Judy Brownoff: I'm hoping that in 30 years, communities will be more connected – our youth with our elderly people for example. I think that in BC, we have a real strong asset in our resilient communities.

ROUNDNESS

BY NADIA CHANEY

one day I found this, the roundness
the reason for being, breathing and leaving
the mountains of patience it takes to keep facing this place and its placement
keeping still while it's all rearranging
in its infinite cycles and seemings
the heights and the dreamings
the depth and the length of the light while it's beaming
the oceans of tears that keep streaming down from the sky
The tight, nagging need to ask why

the day that I found it my way became rounded
my self was astounded I held onto my ground and was still able to fly

I flew over the boarders, the fakes and the hoarders
the wars and the poorest, the valleys and forests
and deep in my ears I heard only a chorus
again and again as if heaven were porous and dripping into my skin
so I opened my soul, and let the roundness rush in

it's a cousin of fancy, fantasy and romancing
but the roundness is whole and it's not always dancing
it takes chances and happens to be
in the rancid when it turns back to languid

the roundness is change
it's the flux and the flames
it's always aligned
and it never holds blame or shame or remorse
But it's responsibly constant, and honest, of course

with the roundness inside I knew I'd never get bored
or need to keep score or crawl around on the floor
looking for more than my share
I'm tapping right into the sky and the air
'cause I know that the whole keeps its invisible millions up there

it gives me the space in my body to care
to stay full in myself and the courage to dare
to break all the boxes till I'm pulling off veils
I have the strength to be full at the times when I fail
when my pride is pulled off I don't cover or cough
with the roundness inside I can still stay aloft in the presence of growth
and the growing of pain, with the roundness my love doesn't look for a name

the roundness is found in three sixty vision
making choices in stillness, not making decisions,
fusing death with the living, using words with precision
believing that the deeps of the heart will be risen
once the light reaches the dark and they both become stark
when everything's whole that once was apart

Now What?

Imagine BC invites you to talk with each other wherever you are — at dinner tables, board rooms, school gyms, coffee parties, municipal halls, community centres, neighbourhood houses, Co-ops, libraries, block parties or book clubs -- about what health and community mean to you. What stories can you tell about what makes a community resilient, connected and healthy?

In what specific ways do you think we need to act to create the conditions for resilient communities **now** that will contribute to the kind of healthy community we want in BC **30 years from now?**

Use this document as a catalyst for conversation, debate, dialogue. Use it to challenge your thinking and stimulate ideas that will move you to action.

Write to us at: dialogue-info@sfu.ca and tell us what health and community mean to you and what stories you have to share.

IMAGINE BC is a series of annual dialogues presented by Simon Fraser University's Dialogue Programs, Continuing Studies that has set out to change the way British Columbians think and talk about the future of their province.

IMAGINE BC gratefully acknowledges the support of the North Growth Foundation, the Province of British Columbia, CBC Radio and **IMAGINE BC's** Advisory Council.

NORTH GROWTH FOUNDATION



IMAGINE BC
c/o Morris J Wosk Centre for Dialogue
Simon Fraser University Vancouver
515 West Hastings Street
Vancouver, BC, Canada V6B 5K3

www.imaginebc.ca | imaginebc-info@sfu.ca