

Think tank tackles education

North Shore woman behind dialogue idea

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A North Shore resident is behind a program that pulls together a diverse group of deep thinkers to ponder big questions about the future of the province, while also bringing the public into the conversation.

"If we don't learn to be actively involved in making and understanding the decisions that affect us then we're going to feel like we have no say in what kind of future we are going to have," said Joanna Ashworth, director of Imagine B.C. and Simon Fraser University's Dialogue Programs.

Launched in 2004, Imagine B.C. is an initiative of SFU's Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue. The five-year series of dialogues provides a forum for people from various sectors of society to come together to address issues that the province will face in the next 30 years. It's a different approach to the usual kind of consultation where, for the most, part people are talked at, said Ashworth.

"This is a very different way of public learning," said Ashworth. "It's a shift in a culture of how people who are experts actually talk to each other with citizens and try to bring those different points of view together."

"It's a chance to really get a sense of how differently people look at the same question," she added.

The third annual SFU dialogue on B.C.'s future will take place Oct. 15-18 at Bowen Island's Rivendell Retreat Centre and is focused on education. Delegates are coming from a variety of backgrounds, including arts and culture, science and technology, business, education, environmental studies and politics. Participants will discuss what kind of future is imagined for the province and what might challenge the ability to provide good education. Issues like changes in the environment and economy as well as population growth and new technology will be discussed.

Suggestions for action will be combined into a document that will be taken around the province for further discussion by school districts, municipalities and different levels of government.

Interested communities can request Imagine B.C. representatives to work with them to address their respective issues, said Ashworth.

"The more opportunities for people to talk to each other and to try and understand the different points of view, the healthier (the) society we are going to have," said Ashworth.

Past dialogues have considered the theme of ecology and the economy.