

# STORYTELLERS' FOUNDATION

Annual Report 2015



A great accomplishment for 2015 was purchasing our building that we have rented for almost 20 years.

## Who We Are

### Our approach

Storytellers' Foundation challenges assumptions about poverty, literacy and citizenship by directly engaging people in issues and opportunities that affect their lives. We're organized around three focus areas:

**Practical Intervention:** Popular education, experiential education, literacy and food sovereignty activities provide opportunities for people living in poverty to build capacity, hope and happiness.

**Local Infrastructure:** Community development approaches engage diverse citizens to co-create change for the good of the community.

**Strategic Intervention:** Our practice and approach of validating the place-based, sustenance economy of the Upper Skeena is a culturally relevant solution to relieving poverty.

### Our Staff

Our staff are community organizers and informal educators. These two terms are often new to people.

A community organizer works with groups of people to have more influence over solving problems that directly impact their lives.

A community organizer helps build the leadership skills of the group to put their ideas in to action.

An informal educator works with people to meet their learning needs. By building skills, knowledge and confidence in individuals and groups, an informal educator helps people identify learning goals, work on these goals and take more control over their lives.

### What we do

We work in a variety of community settings with diverse groups of people. This can sometimes confuse people about what we do - it is a comprehensive approach to building healthy communities and challenging injustices.

The next few pages introduce some of the people and projects we've worked on throughout 2015.

# What we do *Practical Intervention*



## Practical Intervention - Working with individuals



**Youth Works** employed 15 youth this year. Youth Works continues to supply the Gitanmaax Gas Bar, Skeena Bakery and Mercedes Beans + Model Teas with sandwiches, soups and baked goods. Youth Works grew and harvested their own garlic this year and continue storefront sales of jams and jellies. In 2015 Youth Works sold squash and kale as well as the ever popular pizza and lasagnas.

**The Farmers Market Coupon program** was our busiest ever with 30 low income households + 10 seniors receiving weekly coupons for the Farmers Market. These same families increased their food skills through cooking, preserving and composting. We could not meet this year's demand and had a wait list of families wishing to access local, fresh foods.

**The Iron Chef** competition was yet again a big hit. A fun competition to promote local food sees volunteer chefs cook local food in front of a volunteer panel of judges along with the 50+ spectators who really enjoy the show. Courtney Gunanoot our summer student organized this year's Iron Chef - thanks Courtney!

**Berry Picking** with elders was a 2015 highlight for Youth Work employees. Not only did everyone harvest berries for our jams and for their households, they also developed trust and deep feelings for each other. Both youth and elders describe feeling happy that they were on the territories and being "useful" - they also described feeling more motivated to engage with their community.

**Community Kitchen** hosted 26 people weekly over 6 months for a meal and literacy activities. Kitchen activities include discussions on topical issues; board games and video analysis. The Kitchen continues to be busy and active.

**Backyard Gardeners** built knowledge, skills and confidence around local food production. 11 people met weekly this season and together built 3 new gardens in Gitanmaax and Kispiox. The Backyard Gardeners also volunteered on Senden and supported new gardeners to grow their own row of potatoes.

**Games night** was a new initiative stemming from the local literacy network. We hosted 3 games nights during November and had over \_\_\_ people participate. Games night allowed for family fun and offered support to parents around filling out forms, accessing information important to them and general adult literacy supports. Games night was a partner project of Storytellers' and LOG's.





# What we do *Local Infrastructure*



**Our community organizer is supporting and leading several partner projects to increase wellbeing, safety and protective factors of people in our region:**

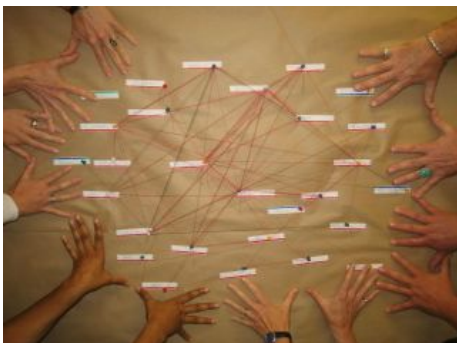
**The Literacy Outreach Network** continues to organize around literacy. A focus is on building awareness and skills for more literacy support to be given to adults, children and families. The network continued its popular *Brown Bag Lunch* series to highlight the diverse sets of literacies being given attention in the Upper Skeena. Tutor training for reading, writing and numeracy was delivered early in 2015 and tutors were used in several community programs. Tutors also helped build food skills; increase individual's confidence to access community supports and help adults sort out how to address issues in their lives. A literacy day at Kitwanga elementary was a great success with kids, parents, teachers and community members learning together.



**The VIR** (Violence in Relation) group works together around 5 goals to lessen violence; increase wellbeing and help people overcome trauma. This group has put in place an I-Cat team; organized Mental Health first aid training; advised a holistic youth development program on the Senden site and is currently planning a men's campaign on stopping violence.

**A Youth storytelling project** led to - a series of case studies that informed an affordable housing forum - a presentation at an academic storytelling conference - a case study for the BC Civil Liberties right-to-food campaign - and is the catalyst for a youth driven poverty reduction strategy for 2016. This group of 7 young adults identified protective factors for transitioning out of poverty. Their stories and case studies not only identify what individual households and community can do but target strategies for local, provincial and federal governments to change conditions that influence community. Watch out for action to take place in 2016.

**An Affordable Housing Forum** was held in February 2015. This forum included youth led break out sessions that tackled the complexities of poverty. The Forum conversations are reported in an affordable housing strategy, which includes a check list of actions needed to address housing in the Upper Skeena. This Forum was funded by the District of New Hazelton and attended by representatives from almost all our local governments. A lack of funding is preventing the work plan from being implemented.



**Resilient Communities** project is a partnership project with the Upper Skeena Development Centre and Storytellers'. This project worked with community partners to research and identify local solutions steeped in traditional practices of the Gitksan to lessen trauma and increase wellbeing in youth and their families. The solutions put forward by community members were tested on Senden throughout the summer. A holistic youth development program will be launched in the new year

# What we do Strategic Intervention



As we learn more about what we want as a community we use this learning to organize for change at a systems level. This work includes training and mentoring leaders in the Northwest; working with groups + organizations in the Northwest working for similar change; and sharing our experiences with government and influencers of government.

**Rural Roots Learning Consortium** is our social enterprise. Launched in the Fall this social enterprise blends social and economic benefits. There are three focus areas including a suite of consultancy services; the Rural Roots Mentorship program and the Rural Roots Learning network. Consulting services took place throughout the year. Some of our customers included: Office of Wet'suwet'en; Town of Smithers; Smithers Community Services; Bridging Committee; Nadina Community Futures; Gitwanganak Education Society; TIDES Canada; New Economics Society. The Mentorship program and Learning Network will launch in January 2016.



**Settler Conversations** was the project for our 2015 intern. Diana Cullen did a practicum with us as part of her Masters of Arts in Canadian Studies. Diana has been studying the need for settlers to have “unsettling” conversations about colonization and the economic benefits many of us gain because of how governments treat indigenous peoples. Diana led several workshops in Hazelton and Smithers. We have continued Diana’s work by holding “book clubs” every 6 weeks where people read an article and come together to discuss. Book clubs happen in Hazelton and Smithers. We are investigating ways to continue to work with Diana to provide a guide for others who may wish to have these critical conversations.



**Publishing our learning** is important to us. We do this through teaching, writing and presentations. In 2015 we presented to the Education Committee of School board #82; we submitted an electronic presentation to the BC Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government; and we presented on a National Community Change Webinar which attracted almost 100 participants. We have been visible with photos and articles in the Interior News and submitted one article to a Victoria community development magazine. We continue to teach inside the SFU Community Economic Development professional program. And we distributed several of our research reports to individuals and organizations across Canada.



**Social Economy Christmas** is our annual event at Christmas in Hazelton. This is an opportunity for educating people about purchasing gifts that reflect personal and local values. It also supports non-government organizations and volunteer driven groups. Groups who have benefited from this event include Youth Works, Amnesty International; SWCC,

**Pathways: Local Foods to Schools** is a national research project. We have spent the past year learning about and building relationships with health researchers and 3 other communities across Canada. We are collectively informing a three-year research project that will look at how community economic development models of working together can bring more local, traditional and healthy foods into schools. This is still in the proposal stage - in early 2016 we will learn whether or not we have funding to move this project forward.

# What we're learning

## Popular Education drawing out the knowledge within youth and adults

**A common approach within all our work is the use of popular education. Popular education is not about helping the “disadvantaged” or giving services to an individual. Popular education is about the struggle for a more just and fair society.**

Popular Education is used by people who believe those most affected by a problem are the ‘right’ people to solve that problem. Based on this assumption, popular educators work alongside people to: develop learning plans that stem from the concrete experiences of the people involved; focus on group learning and development rather than individual learning; and forge a direct link between education and social action.

Popular Education is learning in action. The group is supported to identify real life situations that they want to address, usually problems they want to solve. It is only once the situation is identified that a curriculum for education can be designed. The curriculum focus on teaching skills, knowledge and confidence for the group to take leadership around changing their present circumstances. So popular education is both a method for *transformational learning* (deepening our thinking and understanding) and *transactional learning* (action or productivity).

Popular educators work with certain assumptions and biases. We believe that everyone holds knowledge and that how we hold knowledge and value knowledge stems from cultural, social and economic experiences. The job of the popular educator is not to only share new knowledge but more importantly to draw out the knowledge that people hold. Popular educators believe the role of education is to equalize rather than be selective as to

who gets to share knowledge. Popular educators are committed to social and political change - for justice to happen. When we work with groups we first begin by building intentional relationships - we are citizens of the same communities who may hold different roles in a learning relationship.

We use a variety of experiential learning techniques to draw out what is important to people and what it is they wish to change. Change could be that a group wants to become more food secure or overcome the fear of visiting their child’s school. Change may be that a group want to challenge oppressive systems or access housing that is decent, stable and meets their needs. Regardless of the change there are similar steps in the learning process to organize the group to make the change happen. We must learn what the group already knows. This means we must get to know the group well - what are their values and beliefs - what are their dreams? Popular educators draw out the visions that the group have for their future. This is followed by discovering opportunities and challenges to walk in to this vision. What are skills that need to be developed; what are fears that have to be overcome? What are external conditions that hinder the group from making change happen? As popular educators we link the immediate with a larger, global picture. By doing this the group can break free of “being done to”. They can become producers rather than passive consumers.

In our literacy work we use popular education to explore with the group why they wish to become literate. How will it help them make change happen? What will change because they develop their literacies? Which literacies will most help them articulate how they believe the world ought to be? Which literacies will help them interpret and

I am able to use my thoughts and words to get done what I need to do. I am being more confident around dealings involving my son. I see now that I am needed and have a right to share

Learning Shop participant

find meaning in the world in which they live? Popular educators don’t shy away from questions? By using popular education we see more people gain control over their lives and the lives of people around them. They help their neighbours, they address the complexities of poverty, they vote, they stand up and they speak up.

Although we see individual change happen the focus is always on the group. Popular education is a collective effort. Participation is expected from everyone. Everyone teaches and everyone learns. As popular educators we facilitate to make sure that new ideas arise and eventually lead to action. We don’t teach another person - we facilitate another’s learning and we help each other as we learn. It is a cycle of knowledge, reflection, action.

In their handbook for popular education techniques, Eleonora Castano Ferreira and Joao Castano Ferreira describe the hope of what popular education can lead to:

..”That learning will liberate the participants from the social pressures and internalized ideas that hold them passive in conditions of oppression - to make them capable of changing their reality, their lives, and the society that they live in.”



## Letter from our Chair Dr. Peter Newbery

Are you looking for evidence of Spirit in our community? Are you looking for evidence of commitment, and dedication? Are you looking for evidence of programs that truly engage people? You have no need to look any further than the unique organization known as the Storytellers' Foundation, part of the fabric of the Hazeltons.

With deep interest in people, and an even deeper commitment to enriching life in a practical way, this organization, its board and particularly its staff, provides a remarkable example of how a small group, with careful planning, and thoughtful leadership, can make a great difference in the lives of people.

In this annual report you will see hints of the imagination, intelligence, and dedication that the Storytellers staff bring to their work every day. From youth works, under the guidance of Janet Melanson, to interventions coordinated by Anissa Watson on behalf of the Violence In Relations committee and literacy network, to practical, local, thoughtful actions on behalf of our community, our staff, led by Anne Docherty and Beth DeMaio, have been doing a quiet, sensitive job of bringing creative, thoughtful, positive change in quiet but lasting ways in our community.



*Beth leading some board members in policy review*

## BOARD + STAFF 2015

### BOARD

Chair: Peter Newbery  
Vice Chair: Diane McRae  
Secretary/Treasurer: Ursula Heuberger  
Directors: Linda Locke, Joe Francis, Art Lew, Shyla Reviakin, Laura Eustace, Kathy Clay

..with thanks to Lu Ann Deitrich for her service on our board until August 2015

### STAFF

Executive Directors: Beth DeMaio, Anne Docherty  
Youth Works: Janet Melanson  
Community Organizers: Angelique Lalonde, Ben Laurie, Anissa Watson



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