

# STORYTELLERS' FOUNDATION

## Our Approach

Storytellers' Foundation challenges assumptions about poverty, literacy and citizenship by directly engaging people in issues and opportunities that affect their lives.

Our work is organized around three focus areas:

### Practical

Popular education, experiential education, literacy and food sovereignty activities provide opportunities for people to build skills, knowledge and confidence.

### Local Infrastructure

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

### Strategic

Our practice and approach of validating the place-based sustenance economy is a culturally relevant solution to relieving poverty.



## 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.

## Our Staff

Our staff are community organizers and informal educators. Our community organizing approach is people-based. Community organizers at Storytellers' work with the people who are most impacted by a problem, supporting and building the leadership skills of the group to move ideas into 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, identify the steps to move towards these goals and take more control over their lives.



# What we do...

## Practical

**Community Kitchen** runs weekly from September to March. In 2016 we supported learners to build relationships, set goals and to take action, learn from each other and cook healthy meals together. We ran CK out of the Learning Shop in Hazelton and supported a community kitchen in Sik-e-dakh.

**Youth Works** is a social enterprise where youth are supported in a busy workplace setting to identify assets, set goals and build work and life skills within a local food economy. In 2016, Youth Works made sandwiches for the Gitanmaax Food and Fuel, soups and chili for the Skeena Bakery, and baked goods for Mercedes Beans. Youth Works also offers local catering, sells ready-to-bake lasagne year-round and fresh wreaths at Christmas time.

**Get It Together** is a drop in literacy program where learners are supported to identify steps to reach self-identified goals. Our informal educators work alongside people to take action in their lives.

## Community Infrastructure

**Backyard Gardeners** is a self-organizing group that meets throughout the growing season. In 2016 the BYG supported new gardens in local backyards, visited fishing holes and farms, built new relationships and strengthened old ones.

**Local + Traditional Food to Schools** project has been growing momentum since the Annual Gathering was held in the Fall of 2016. A network of community members has formed to take action to create more opportunities for children and youth to connect with local and traditional foods in schools. Three schools are participating in this project so far, with support from farmers, community organizations, and the Gitxsan Government Commission. We will continue to expand our network over the course of 2017.

**The Violence in Relationships Committee** focused on community education and awareness around the issue of domestic violence in 2016. In events like the Walk a Mile in Her Shoes held in Gitwangak, or the Bridging the Gap awareness event held at the Hagwilget Bridge, VIR members collaborated to celebrate our community strengths while bringing awareness to gender based violence. Goals that emerged from strategic planning in the Fall of 2016 include providing workshops and support to youth, young adults, and couples around consent, healthy relationships, and crisis support. The VIR continues to work together, engaging community members and front line workers across the Upper Skeena from Gitanyow to Kispiox to address, educate, and empower members to build healthy, safe communities.

**Literacy Outreach Coordination** is an organizing role that Storytellers' has held in the Upper Skeena for over a decade, supporting the Upper Skeena Literacy Task Group to identify, set and take action on goals that support literacy in the communities. Storytellers' advocates for a broader understanding of literacy as *"The ability to dream a future, see myself in that future, and make goals and take steps to get there."*

## Strategic

**Genuine Progress / Community Based Economic Development:** We've been exploring ways to work in cross-movement coalition with Skeena Watershed Conservation Coalition (SWCC). This work has laid out ways that a social justice and a conservation organization might work together as well as when we wouldn't work together. We also secured funds that will support people living on the Gitksan territories and other northwest BC communities to enrol in Simon Fraser University's professional CED program. This program teaches about economies that are respectful of, and built on, indigenous and ecological methodologies.

**Settler Dialogue:** We launched a new project that bring non-indigenous people together to reflect, and act on, how we can begin to find ways to give up power and privilege in our lives and in our communities in order to move to decolonization. In this project we provide people with a workshop and mentorship to meet regularly, in small groups over a one year period. This work will continue throughout 2017 and will eventually bring the small groups together for a one day gathering.

**Rural Roots Learning Consortium** is a blended value social enterprise. That means it exists to both carry out the mission and the purposes of Storytellers' Foundation and to generate a profit we use to run programming. Rural Roots offers consulting services, customized trainings, a Learning Network and a Mentorship Program.



# What we are learning...

Our work as community organizers and informal educators is not a set path. One of the most challenging things about working with diverse groups to make change is the ability to hold a “blurry” vision of the future. Often we don’t know what the outcome will be, where we will land. So we hold tension between measurable outcomes and the flow of processes, of human dynamics. When we work with groups, we challenge ourselves to be iterative in our approach. An iterative process is about inquiry. It allows us to critically examine ideas and process. It removes us from the immediacy of our work so we have multiple opportunities to reflect on the implications of ideas and practice.

Storytellers' has a short history of operating on unceded Gitksan territory. Capitalism and colonialism have a somewhat longer history, yet this relatively short period of contact has been long and deep in its influence and disturbance of the land and the Gitksan people who have lived here for over 10,000 years. We navigate this history by looking at our own work and our own place here on this land. We are guided by the values of Storytellers' and are continually learning how to imbue these values into our work. We are learning to be curious. And we are learning to be respectfully unapologetic.

**Social Justice** - enabling people to claim their human rights and have greater control over decision-making processes which affect their lives.

**Ecology** - resisting homogenization of people and their actions and slowing down climate change through our daily practice, information and knowledge sharing.

**Learning** - recognizing the skills, knowledge, confidence, and attitudes that we each hold, and need to develop, to tackle social, economic and environmental action.

**Cooperation** - working together to identify and implement social, political, economic and environmental action.

**Participation** - facilitating democratic involvement by people in the issues that affect their lives based on autonomy, shared power, skills, knowledge and experiences.

**Equality** - challenging attitudes and practices that discriminate against and marginalize people.

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Social Justice • Ecology • Learning • Cooperation • Participation • Equality

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# Who we are

Art Wilson created our logo. It is a sim'o'lo, a mythical creature who as it extends an arm to give, another arm grows to receive.

## A Quick History

Storytellers' Foundation started after the first set of Treaty talks with the Gitksan, British Columbia and Canada ended in 1993. All of our original staff had been involved in public education about the treaty. During that time we were told over and over again that people, locally, find it hard to work together. However, what we were witnessing in our work was different. We saw people willing to try and talk with each other and overcome differences of opinion so they could live together as neighbours. We also saw people take on courage so they could learn about, and talk about, sensitive issues. This inspired us. We left that work feeling energized and excited to belong to our community. We were inspired how learning together was leading to action together. The chiefs that had worked on this treaty process also told us they wanted our work of engaging people (especially young people) to continue. They liked how Storytellers' brought Gitksan and non-Gitksan people together to dream about a culturally diverse community that could work together to increase both social and economic assets while sustaining healthy ecosystems. And so we rented a building in Hazelton and evolved in to our present organization, which is a non-profit with a board that directs and supports us, and a staff to carry out project activities.



## Who we are today

Storytellers' Foundation challenges assumptions about poverty, literacy and citizenship by directly engaging people in issues and opportunities that affect their lives. We are a fiercely place-based and community driven organization. We serve as a catalyst for grassroots learning and organizing. Through informal education, participatory research + development, and our social enterprises, we help create spaces for people to gain skills, knowledge, and confidence to act on their dreams for justice and equality within a locally controlled economy.

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## Storytellers' Foundation Board and Staff 2016

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### Board of Directors

**Chair:** Anne Docherty (Peter Newbery)

**Vice Chair:** Diane McRae

**Secretary/Treasurer:** Ursula Heuberger

**Directors:** Joe Francis, Art Lew, Linda Locke, Shylah Marshall, and Kathy Clay....*with thanks to Laura Eustace for her service on our board until Spring 2016*

### Storytellers' Foundation Staff

**Executive Directors:** Beth DeMaio and Anne Docherty

**Youth Works Informal Educator:** Janet Melanson (in December 2016, we said goodbye to Janet who is now working with the Gitksan Government Commission as a Wrap-around Facilitator).

**Community Organizers:** Angelique Lalonde and Anissa Watson

**Executive Director Transition:** A founding member of Storytellers' Foundation, Anne Docherty has held several staff positions over her 23 years with the organization. Anne's final role was as the Executive Director. In 2013, Beth DeMaio accepted the ED position while Anne assumed the role of ED mentor and research and development. In the Spring of 2016 Anne resigned as a staff member and became the Chair of the Board in order to build board capacity and to allow for more involvement in Storyteller's social enterprise, Rural Roots Learning Consortium.



### Contact us

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