

PRACTICING DEMOCRACY

A Legislative Theatre Project

Produced by

Headlines Theatre

March 3 – 21, 2004



Photo Lincoln Clarkes

Recommendations to Vancouver City Council

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Prepared by:

Carrie Gallant, B.A., LL. B.

Gallant Solutions Inc.

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PRACTICING DEMOCRACY

Legislative Report Executive Summary

This report is a gathering together of public input from audiences that attended and responded to Headlines' production Practicing Democracy. It is the result of an agreement between Headlines Theatre and Vancouver City Council to use the theatre as a vehicle for the public to communicate with Government.

This executive summary is lengthy, because it became apparent that readers of the summary needed to understand the recommendations in their entirety. Still, to understand them in the context of the theatrical project we *strongly recommend reading the whole report.*

On February 27, 2003, Vancouver City Council voted unanimously to endorse the Headlines Theatre "Practicing Democracy" Project. Practicing Democracy is a Legislative Theatre project, designed to use theatre to create a forum for public dialogue and participation in the creation of public policy and law.

Through consultation with City Council and its extensive networks, the central issue that emerged for the project was the question: "How can the City of Vancouver respond to the results of the cuts to welfare?" The BC government's two-year time limit on welfare was scheduled to impact many Vancouver recipients in April 2004. These cuts to welfare were of utmost concern to City Council and the public given that it is at the local level that the impacts of the cuts would be experienced.

When the BC government announced on February 6, 2004 the new exemption to the two-year time limit on welfare, the issue for the Practicing Democracy Project shifted, but only slightly. The anticipated April 2004 provincial cuts to welfare were only one instance of several years of cuts to social services and income assistance, imposed by both the provincial and federal governments. The City of Vancouver and its residents would continue to experience the impact of devastating cuts to social services.¹

The twenty minute play in Practicing Democracy was developed by the cast and production team during February 2004, from the experiences and real-life events of the participants in a week-long community workshop. The central issue that emerged from these experiences was the *danger* created by years of cuts to welfare and social services. This became the core theme in the play.

In looking at the question of the danger created by years of cuts to social services, one might be tempted to assume that the effects of the cuts to welfare are limited to a narrow

¹ On Saturday April 17, 2004, the Vancouver Sun ran an article by Jim Beatty titled: "New rules coming for those at risk -- Addicts and the mentally ill will have to draft 'employment plans'". It details how the Province of BC is going ahead with plans it said it was cancelling.

slice of the Vancouver community, and that other issues affected by cuts to social services, such as homelessness, addiction and prostitution affect only the downtown East Side (DTES). The Vancouver Agreement supports this assumption by targeting the DTES as the “first focus” of the Agreement², although it recognized that the issues do go beyond DTES.

The reality, as reflected by the characters in the play, is quite different. The cumulative impact of the cuts to welfare and social services cuts across age, gender, race, ability, education and other demographics. The audiences attending Practicing Democracy have mirrored this reflection; each night after the play was initially performed, Artistic Director David Diamond polled the audience – “If the issues in this play affect you, or someone dear to you, please remain standing” – across the three venues, the result was the same: 50 to 95% of the audience remained standing, even in performances on the West Side. Indeed, every night many in the audience had tears in their eyes as the house lights were raised and Diamond came on the stage after the play was performed.

Practicing Democracy performances were held during three weeks in March 2004 at three locations across the City of Vancouver. Audience members were invited to participate if they had an idea to change the action or outcome by intervening in the second performance of the play each night, and replacing a character engaged in a struggle and trying out their idea. These interventions, and further ideas that arose during discussion, were recorded and assembled by the legal consultant into this report to Vancouver City Council as recommendations for action by Council. The voice of this Report is not the voice of Headlines Theatre; rather it is the voice of the community. The role of Headlines Theatre was to provide a vehicle through which members of the community could communicate their desires and ideas for change.

Given the complex jurisdictional issues regarding social services and income assistance, some recommendations can not be implemented by the City of Vancouver alone, but call for collaboration with and commitment by the provincial and/or federal governments. Some of the ideas and recommendations that arise from the interventions will not be new to City Council. ***Some are very creative***, and provide a new way of looking at solutions already recommended in previous reports, such as *3 Ways to Home: Regional Homelessness Plan for Greater Vancouver*³; *The Vancouver Agreement*; and *Neighbourhood Liveability and Safety in Vancouver: Recommendations from the Mayor’s Forum*.

² The Vancouver Agreement records the commitment of the governments of Canada, British Columbia and the City of Vancouver to work together to promote and support sustainable economic, social and community development.

³ prepared by SPARC for the Regional Homelessness Steering Committee, November 2003.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

I. HOUSING

A. Target Groups

- Provide shelter options for those who need to be housed separately (eg. Women), and for those who would benefit from mixed housing (eg. Couples and families)
- Community housing
- Provide Co-ed shelters that permit couples to stay together; splitting couples up makes each individual more vulnerable

(1) Women

- Create City-funded women's shelters to replace provincially funded centres recently de-funded
- Provide housing specifically for pregnant women and low-income single mothers and children, including job training and transition to independent housing

(2) Seniors

- Create more co-op housing and public co-housing (residents develop ownership interest through contribution via welfare or pension), emphasizing mixed generational living – eg. UK and Europe, all ages living together in council housing; US program where seniors and university students share accommodation; White Rock BC
- Lobby BC government to amend provincial tenancy laws to impose some responsibility on landlords for well-being and safety of tenants (eg. seniors), not just for maintaining the property

B. Improve Accessibility:

- Mandate shelters to offer more flexible hours of operation
- Create and maintain a housing registry that will help link single mothers with seniors and others who are isolated – combining skills and resources can afford both better living accommodations and support
- Up to date information on shelters and services should be available 24 hours per day through drop-in centers or information kiosks; new services need more publicity, as many in attendance reported learning of new resources through a third party, often too late to help the individual in crisis
 - Drop-in centers stay open 24 hours per day; a place for homeless to access information on what services are available in emergency situations;
 - Staff drop-in centers with volunteer residents experienced in homelessness;
 - 24 hour kiosk, preferably staffed, or minimally with access to computer, with up to date information on shelter and support services available throughout the city, and on individual rights;
 - reinstate/expand Carnegie program involving street workers handing out information in DTES

C. Increase Availability:

(1) Emergency shelters

- Establish tent city as a legitimate, safe and ongoing place of shelter, accessible 24 hours per day, with facilities on-site or nearby;
- Establish an "urban campground" where for a small sum per night, homeless people could have access to hot showers, heat, and a hydro hook-up. Community breeds safety - the answer to alienation, isolation and desperation is not always in spending huge amounts of money - it's money spent wisely
- Use City owned buildings for emergency overflow housing: PNE buildings;
- Create emergency shelter using construction trailers that are no longer used, and place on city-owned land that is yet to be developed;
- Use community centers and neighbourhood houses as emergency shelter in the evening and night-time hours;
- Collaborate with churches that offer emergency shelter and support to synchronize efforts across the city;
- Make portable shelters available for pick-up at 24 hour location (eg. waterproof corrugated sleeping tubes; tarps to cover bus shelters; see PARAsites project in New York⁴)
- Reinstate hotel vouchers – Vancouver Police used to hand out

(2) Temporary Shelters

- Convert the many abandoned buildings in the city to shelters (many examples were cited, including buildings at 1st and Terminal, an old welfare office, a Buddhist Temple in Jericho):
 - Create time limits on building vacancies – limit how long a building owner can maintain an empty building before it is assumed by the City for conversion to shelter accommodation;
 - Legalize squatting (see City of Amsterdam for an example of organized squats that assumed abandoned buildings, renovating, establishing a community daycare for local businesses, and a nightclub – resulting in community rejuvenation);
 - Complete Woodward's plan with MORE affordable housing included
- Create a structure enabling community members to safely offer short-term accommodation to homeless
 - Foster parent model: build in safety measures for both parties; match suitability; provide financial support for “foster” home;

⁴ paraSITES were developed by Michael Rakowitz in New York and proposes the appropriation of the exterior ventilation systems on existing architecture as a means for providing temporary shelter for homeless people, which is attached to the intake ducts of a building's HVAC (Heating, Ventilation, Air Conditioning) system. The warm air leaving the building simultaneously inflates and heats the double membrane structure. The paraSITE units are small, collapsible packages with handles for transport by hand or on one's back. The cost to manufacture each inflatable tent structure is approximately \$5 each. More information is on: <http://www.possibleutopia.com/mike/parasite.html>
Civic laws regarding loitering and sleeping on the street may require amendment to accommodate parasites.

- Billeting model (eg. Foreign university students): Create a registry for community members who have a bed, or room and board to offer; match suitability
- Relax zoning regulations to:
 - permit secondary suites in single family homes, with incentives to provide accommodation to homeless or low income tenants
 - permit developers to build very small self-contained affordable units for private market
 - permit single family homes, eg. oversized “Vancouver Specials”, to be divided and rented out as single rooms

(3) Transitional Housing

- Create phased housing plan for individuals who need support in basic living skills as well as shelter – well intentioned for accommodations have been trashed and abused in the past (eg. VanCity Place for Youth). Supervision and life skills support, as well as involvement in development, construction or renovation of shelter (eg. Habitat for Humanity) can create commitment from residents to protect shelter, treat it and self with respect. Consider the experience of Covenant House and its Rights of Passage Programme for youth, and NOW Canada in Kelowna, which provides a graduated living program for sexually abused women.

(4) Long-term Housing

- Create more affordable housing units:
 - build on city-owned land
 - relax zoning by-laws to permit secondary suites in single-family homes; provides prospect of rental income to homeowners who may find themselves at risk or who are aging, and provides additional rental homes
- Relax zoning regulations to allow two to three non-related tenants to share studio and one-bedroom apartments, enabling affordable market rents for more residents
- Develop community housing options, where it is possible for singles and small families to live together; mixed generations will encourage space for seniors to avoid isolation
- Create opportunities to work towards ownership of housing, eg. rent-to-own
- Lobby CMHC to include extended family members within the meaning of a “family unit” to obtain subsidized housing
- Lobby BC government:
 - to amend welfare regulations that discourage and penalize family members from supporting each other and sharing living resources
 - to relax BC Housing rule limiting guests to 14 days per year
 - to re-establish Vancouver Housing Authority
 - to provide rent subsidies geared according to income – allows freedom of choice to individual regarding where to live, rather than a forced choice to live in a particular building or part of town (examples include programs in Europe...)
 - to require landlords to provide a percentage of non-market rental units; provide tax credit

(5) Financing creation of more shelters:

- Impose a development tax on builders who do not include affordable housing or shelter in their development plans, similar to a percentage of development costs relegated to public art and parks
- Increase development tax on condominium builders, as it has not been increased in 15 years
- Establish a donation program for community members to make small and large donations to build new shelters
- Impose a “tourism tax” to provide funding for shelters and social housing - see San Francisco for example

D. Improve Management of Shelters and Housing:

- Involve homeless, former homeless in operation, design and development of shelters. Their knowledge and survival skills are valuable, and involvement raises self-esteem to enable their own movement to another stage. As well, other residents could access peer support.
- Improve management of SRAs through SRA by-law; ensure residents can not be evicted for occasional overnight guests
- Limit SRA ownership to non-profit organizations

E. Improve Public Service Treatment of Homeless:

- Parks staff and Police should assist homeless in finding safe and appropriate accommodation, and treat individuals respectfully and humanely. Training in communications and respectful intervention should be provided and mandatory.
- The homeless have a right to vote, but no address to enable enumeration. In order to facilitate their participation in the democratic process, establish a city address (eg. a box office number) that homeless individuals can use to become enumerated

II. FOOD

A. Access

- Food delivery to homeless
- Provide free transit to low income residents – enables mobility to access food
- Create space for food distribution, similar to recycling centers, where residents can donate
- Information pamphlets available to show access points for food distribution
- Create a City owned restaurant, staffed by low income individuals, with food donated by organic farmers, community gardens, local restaurants and grocers
- Provide a 24 hour community kitchen
- Replace meal tickets, which were recently eliminated
- Create mobile soup kitchens that deliver prepared food to areas with individuals in need
- Create job training opportunities to work in film facilities in exchange for access to catered food

B. Supply

- Collaborate with the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority regarding the application of the *Health Act*, to the safe donation and distribution of excess food by restaurants, hotels, grocers and film production companies
- Lobby VCHA to relax health regulations to enable donations of excess perishable and prepared foods in a safe and healthy manner:
 - Excess could be donated to community kitchens - perishable food could be prepared in soups etc.; prepared foods could be served immediately
 - Collaborate with restaurants, hotels and grocers in developing policy and regulations that would allow donations and distribution of excess healthy prepared and perishable foods
 - Distribution process would require quick turn-around to maximize advantage – arrange for pick-ups at restaurants, grocers and events; create ways to allow restaurants, grocers to donate food at source. See Montreal for example: local restaurants and grocers have donation pick-up: run by volunteers, this program trains street youth in cooking and preparing food, which is delivered mostly to seniors. Volunteers from homeless, low income residents could deliver to others
 - Provide funding to Quest to purchase a freezer – Quest provides food pick up and deliver services; however it is unable to distribute majority of food before it rots
- Collaborate with farmers to provide fresh produce; subsidize farmers to grow food specifically for distribution to low income residents
- Fruit Tree Project – fund and advertise this program, inviting home owners with fruit trees to donate excess fruit; volunteers will pick fruit and deliver to food bank
- As part of new Food Policy, create a Planting Policy – on City owned property – boulevards, parks – plant fruit bearing trees that are accessible to all; change ornamental gardens to fruit and vegetables
- Community gardens: provide more land to create more community gardens, with food grown available to those in need, or grown and managed by them
- Collaborate with community organizations to combine work training with food growth, preparation and sharing. Example: UBC Learning Exchange in DTES links students in agricultural studies, who are learning about food growth and preparation, with DTES where the food is donated

C. Funding:

(1) Tax Revenue

- Create a tax on food waste for restaurants, grocers, etc. and channel funds to food programs and community kitchens;
- Create a tax on all take-out, disposable containers;
- Create tax incentives for restaurants and grocers to prepare, donate, deliver food, similar to tax incentives for developers

- Create a tax on higher priced restaurant bills to generate funds to create educational programs on healthy food and preparation to low income individuals
- Raise property taxes in wealthier neighbourhoods (eg. West Side) to support food for low-income individuals
- Create a voluntary “care tax” that residents could opt into to support food distribution for low-income individuals
- Create tax incentives for home owners to share fruit off their trees

(2) Other Sources

- When negotiating with film producers, ensure contract mandates that catering donates excess food;
- Redirect funds collected from advertising on the banners for 2010 Olympics towards food distribution

III. SAFETY

A. Police

- Create greater accountability of police to Vancouver City Council
- Increase review and checks on police behaviour and culture, relations with homeless, sex trade workers and low-income residents
 - Create stronger whistle-blower protection and programs to encourage within the police force; provide more support for officers to come forward
 - Create stricter penalties within the police force for wrongdoing
 - Create a separate, external “watchdog” body to review police actions – police policing the police has no credibility – city needs to take a stronger role in ensuring this happens – external body should be comprised of diverse pool of residents
 - Create an Internal Affairs department for police
 - Create “Civilian Chaperones” for police
 - Create a storefront complaints process for residents, similar to an external ombuds officer
 - Provide advocates for mistreated residents to go before independent Complaints board
- VPD should recruit more female officers
- Increase criteria to qualify for admission to VPD, raise the bar – eg. Quebec requires three year training program
- Ensure police culture and training includes:
 - Sensitivity and compassion for those living in poverty and on the margins
 - Anti-stereotyping of people in poverty, street people, sex trade workers, people with addictions
 - Diversity training
 - Understanding that “serve and protect” includes *all* members of the community
 - Non-violent methods of restraint
- Encourage dialogue between police and community

- Create forums where residents can tell their stories on policing issues, similar to ward discussions
- Develop workshops for residents who observe police brutality: what to do, how to handle

B. Community Safety

- Strengthen community liaison with police
- Stop closures of community police offices
- Provide Community police to visit seniors' residences
- Re-instate emergency phone booths that have been removed; despite the proliferation of cell phones, not every Vancouver resident has one
- Create neighbourhood resident foot patrols, eg. Guardian Angels
- Create intervention training programs – residents can learn how to intervene safely in assaults on others
- Expand “City Host” program (looking after tourists in Vancouver) to serve Vancouver residents
- Create a “Blue Light” system similar to UBC campus; residents in fear can touch Blue Light as they dash for safety; a security company monitors and will dispatch assistance immediately
- Practicing Democracy should be a regular production and forum for discussion, creates a perpetual dialogue with community

IV. SUPPORT

A. Seniors

(1) Connection

- Improve visiting and outreach services for seniors who are isolated, living alone, and/or with mobility issues
 - Outreach workers similar to street nurses, to visit seniors in isolation, provide emotional support, ensure medication taken appropriately;
 - Reinstate accessibility of home support hours
 - Support creation of a volunteer organization with a mandate to visit and connect with isolated seniors, particularly those with mobility issues
 - Provide incentives for community members to volunteer to check in on isolated seniors – eg. free passes to City owned attractions
 - Create a “Buddy System Check-In” within communities
 - Create links between youth programs and seniors;
 - Provide practical training programs to youth in working with seniors, youth gain career options in home care support;
 - Link student loan repayment to volunteer time;
 - Vancouver School Board create programs on awareness re: seniors; provide credit to students who visit seniors, prepare food
 - School Board could develop practicum for students in social service programs to visit seniors

- City Council could approach Telus to bridge the gap for isolated seniors on limited income by providing free or reasonably priced phone or cell phone plans geared to income;
- Create a regulation mandating SRAs to supply in-suite phone to seniors, individuals with mobility restrictions
- Support development of Network to connect seniors
 - Provide a place for seniors to get together, build friendships; Create a destination seniors' center, adult day centres, with activities and opportunities to develop friendships and community supports
 - Resource Network for seniors could be paired with resource network for homeless, where the two issues overlap, to bring together people with support needs to help one another – eg. senior women connect with street women
 - Provide a 24 hour friendship line for seniors
 - Provide more funding for peer support outreach and mentoring programs for seniors
- Community building initiatives that include seniors
 - Partner with landlords of buildings that house seniors living alone – help create a community within building and links to surrounding community; create space in building for gathering, connecting;
 - Encourage business improvement associations (BIA) to sponsor ways for individuals living in apartments to meet one another – help build community; alternatively, **community improvement associations** could be developed to create links among residents, particularly those in isolation
 - Promote community building initiatives that create trust and safety, integrate seniors in planning
 - Create structural opportunities to create community – eg. safe spots in parks for seniors to go and meet others; building designs should include spaces to interact, and less long tract hallways
 - Create community programs similar to Block Parents – safe homes for seniors to go to when they need help
 - Offer seniors and disabled year-long discounts at community recreation centers, rather than limited to one program per season

(2) Health Issues

- Provide more resources to enable doctors and nurses to do outreach and home visits to seniors
- Require doctors to perform minimum number of pro bono hours, similar to law society's requirement for lawyers
- Create a database of isolated seniors and their medications (eg. Healthwatch at Shopper's Drugmart), that would allow medical professionals and pharmacies to track prescriptions filled and flag potential over-medication risks;
- Seniors need better packaging for medication that is easier to open – child proof caps are often senior proof too; some seniors need help planning when to take medication – packaging could lay out days and times for each dose.

Regulations to compel pharmacies to develop and provide packaging that is easier to open and read by seniors

- Collaborate with VCHA to increase visits from public health nurses could assist isolated seniors with proper ingestion of medication – daily, weekly
- Vancouver City Council could take on more responsibility for home health care through transfer payments
- Lobby provincial government to provide MSP coverage for access to alternative medicine
- Mandate supply of medical assistance in low income housing

B. Women

- Support program for single mothers to share childcare
- Create more spaces in a graduated work program for pregnant women and single mothers
- Lobby federal government to provide EI maternity funding to laid-off workers on EI who become pregnant

D. Sex Trade Workers

- Proceed with development of policy regarding establishment of safe sex zones and houses; amend zoning regulations to allow safe sex houses run by women who understand what they are dealing with – see eg. Holland
- Lobby federal government to legalize prostitution – create safety for sex trade workers
- Fund PACE Society, help get women off the street and raise awareness
- Shelters and transition housing specific to, or with programs specific to women in the sex trade, and preferably outside common sex trade neighbourhoods, away from pimps and potential abusers
- Provide empowerment and life skills training at shelters for women, assistance in planning for transition to independent living, including opportunities to contribute to shelter operations
- Women at risk of abuse, including sex trade workers, should be able to walk into police station and be guaranteed help
- Vancouver City Council could place a major emphasis on providing safety to women, become known as a safe city for women

E. Urban Bush Dwellers

- Vancouver City Council to make provincial and federal governments aware of this issue – the extent of the impact of years of social services cuts
- On-site visitations by outreach workers, street nurses, provide on-site medical assistance
- Recognition and better service of marginalized at hospitals and clinics; treat with respect and dignity
- Provide and support advocacy to assist marginalized to find their way through bureaucratic hoops, such as income assistance applications.
- Train volunteers to deal with marginalized individuals, assist with skill development

- Provide a central place to get food and nutritional care consistently
- Meal delivery to marginalized and at-risk homeless
- Provide center for homeless to do free weekly laundry
- Secure storage place where homeless can safely store possessions and access them as needed
- Develop a skills exchange program that legitimizes skills and strengths developed in surviving the urban bush – provides opportunity for individual to contribute, building self-esteem, confidence and trust in others, and to learn from skills and strengths of others
- Mental health issues:
 - Proper assessment to ensure individuals with mental illness receive appropriate treatment
 - Out reach/advocacy workers to support finding appropriate housing, interface with landlords, government ministries and other agencies

F. Drug Addictions

- View addiction as a health issue, not a poverty issue; wealthy addicts are rarely newsworthy, and can gain immediate access to treatment with money; low-income addicts have to wait and are in a catch-22 situation, as it is difficult to access detox treatment during sick periods
- Proceed with the Four Pillars strategy, and in particular to create and make available more treatment programs
- Detox available on demand: requires more beds and programs
- More safe injection sites – eg. Community facilities; advertise existing ones; ease addictions by supplying drug in a safe way
- Make medical heroin available⁵; legalize access – see eg. Netherlands
- Provide alternative drugs eg. methadone

V. MONEY

A. Income Assistance:

- City of Vancouver should take over distribution of welfare; create civic welfare system (see City of Toronto for example)
- Provide advocacy to assist applicants to access welfare; many have difficulty finding their way through the system
- Facilitate ability of those without a fixed address to access welfare; provide city address or post office box number
- Facilitate access to money to cover damage deposit for rental accommodation, and to assist with non-payment of rent in order to avoid eviction
- Provide sources of emergency money
- Take a leadership role in lobbying the BC and federal governments to:
 - Restore and increase income assistance levels in Vancouver to match high cost of living and market rents

⁵ On March 15, 2004, the Development Permit Board of Vancouver City Council approved the development of the NAOMI Project, involving the clinical trial of medically prescribed heroin/methadone maintenance.

- Provide greater flexibility for recipients in covering damage deposit for rental accommodation
- Provide increased discretion to Financial Aid Workers (FAW) in assessing an individual's need for emergency money
- Remove barriers that inhibit or penalize recipients from helping one another, sharing living accommodation
- Broaden eligibility for income assistance and Employment Insurance for pregnant women
- Provide subsidized 24 hour childcare
- Create opportunities for Vancouver residents to lobby BC government – eg. name an official “Day of the Poor”, including a mass march to Victoria; create televised speakers’ corners for broadcast on Shaw TV, which could reinstate the community programming previously offered by Rogers
- Reinforce the City’s report to the UN on the human rights crimes that have resulted from provincial welfare cuts;

B. Employment, Job Creation

- Work with business sector to create employment opportunities for individuals living in poverty
- Create work training programs for youth and adults to work with seniors and isolated individuals: provides training and develops employment opportunities in social services, home care, and supports seniors and the isolated
- Provide municipal support to women’s centres, so workers like the character Elaine are not laid off from employment and become at risk of poverty and homelessness themselves
- Create a “job options training” program that provides subsidy during training, housing and programs for pregnant women, enabling them to qualify for employment after delivery. Available childcare is essential after delivery of baby
- Provide graduated work programs for pregnant women and single mothers
- Provide subsidized 24 hour childcare, enabling single mothers to search for and/or maintain employment – some jobs available require hours of work outside normal childcare hours.
- Create a support network for Employment Insurance (EI) recipients
- Provide free voicemail access numbers to low-income residents without a phone (see Toronto for example)
- Amend zoning regulations to allow safe sex homes, which will enable sex trade workers to work safely and earn income
- Provide a subsistence stipend for those who develop sustainable lifestyles – eg. community sustainable farms
- Repeal anti-panning by-laws

PRACTICING DEMOCRACY

Legislative Report *21 April 2004*

INTRODUCTION

On February 27, 2003, Vancouver City Council voted unanimously to endorse the Headlines Theatre “Practicing Democracy” Project. Practicing Democracy is a legislative theatre project, designed to use theatre to create a forum for public dialogue and participation in the creation of public policy and law.

Through consultation with City Council and its extensive networks, the central issue that emerged for the project was the question:

“How can the City of Vancouver respond to the results of the cuts to welfare?”

The BC government’s two-year time limit on welfare was scheduled to impact many Vancouver recipients in April 2004. These cuts to welfare were of utmost concern to City Council and the public given that it is at the local level that the impacts of the cuts would be experienced.

When the BC government announced on February 6, 2004 the new exemption to the two-year time limit on welfare, the issue for the Practicing Democracy Project shifted, but only slightly. The anticipated April 2004 provincial cuts to welfare were only one instance of several years of cuts to social services and income assistance, imposed by both the provincial and federal governments. The City of Vancouver and its residents would continue to experience the impact of devastating cuts to social services.

Headlines Theatre then proceeded to assemble 30 people to participate in a week-long Forum Theatre workshop during the first week of February 2004. Six of those people were identified during the selection interview process as cast members for the public performances. As a result of the experiences that emerged during the workshop, the central issue identified above metamorphosed into an even more urgent question:

“How have years of cuts to welfare and social services created danger in the City of Vancouver?”

The twenty minute play in Practicing Democracy was developed by the cast and production team during February 2004, from the experiences and real-life events of the participants in a week-long community workshop. Practicing Democracy performances were held during three weeks in March 2004 at three locations across the City of Vancouver. Audience members were invited to participate if they had an idea to change the action or outcome by intervening in the second performance each night, and replacing a character engaged in a struggle and trying out their idea. These interventions, and

further ideas that arose during discussion each night, were recorded and assembled by the legal consultant and translated into this report to Vancouver City Council, with recommendations for action.

THE PLAY – DEFINING THE ISSUE

Practicing Democracy opens with the character Trade going about his evening routine, emptying the garbage from the dumpster, and chanting slogans recently espoused by BC Premier Gordon Campbell in his February 2004 speech to the BC Chamber of Commerce: “We’re number one...in job creation; in small business confidence; in consumer confidence; in foreign investments; in housing starts.” The irony of the last phrase is not lost on the audience, as Trade climbs into the dumpster for the night.

As mentioned above, the play in Practicing Democracy asks:

“How have years of cuts to welfare and social services created danger in the City of Vancouver?”

In looking at this question, one might be tempted to assume that the effects of the cuts to welfare are limited to a narrow slice of the Vancouver community, and that other issues affected by cuts to social services, such as homelessness, addiction and prostitution affect only the downtown East Side (DTES). The Vancouver Agreement supports this assumption by targeting the DTES as the “first focus” of the Agreement⁶, although it recognized that the issues do go beyond DTES.

The reality, as reflected by the characters in the play, is quite different. The cumulative impact of the cuts to welfare and social services cuts across age, gender, race, ability, education and other demographics. The audiences attending Practicing Democracy have mirrored this reflection; each night after the play was initially performed, Artistic Director David Diamond polled the audience – “If the issues in this play affect you, or someone dear to you, please remain standing” – across the three venues, the result was the same: 50 to 95% of the audience remained standing, even in performances on the West Side. Indeed, every night many in the audience had tears in their eyes as the house lights were raised and Diamond came on the stage after the play was performed.

Each audience appeared to cut across age, demographic and socioeconomic lines, including individuals who had experience living with the issues in Practicing Democracy, some whose lives had been touched through family members or friends, and others who were concerned by or interested in the issues. As audiences came from across the Lower Mainland, there is some evidence these issues are experienced throughout Vancouver and beyond. As Diamond would say, the issues on the stage are in the room, and across the

⁶ The Vancouver Agreement records the commitment of the governments of Canada, British Columbia and the City of Vancouver to work together to promote and support sustainable economic, social and community development.

City and Lower Mainland. One does not need to be homeless or living on decreased income assistance to be affected by the issues.

The ten scenes in the play were based on real-life events and the experiences of the 30 workshop participants, and depict the impacts of years of cuts to social services and welfare:

- ⇒ Inadequate shelter and housing
- ⇒ Women living in abusive situations due to lack of safe and accessible shelter options
- ⇒ Panning and prostitution to raise money, due to inadequate income
- ⇒ Isolation and over-medication of elderly
- ⇒ Physical and mental health problems
- ⇒ Disenfranchisement and marginalization of welfare and former welfare recipients
- ⇒ Inadequate food distribution; fighting in food line-ups
- ⇒ Barriers to family members ability to look after one another
- ⇒ Unemployed social service workers
- ⇒ Poor relations between police services and the homeless and low income residents
- ⇒ Increased desperation leading to desperate acts, sometimes involving violence against strangers

The sense of desperation in the play is palpable, as the narrative builds towards the crescendo, or crisis point. Beneath the desperation lies a sense of helplessness, of hopelessness. The ability of some characters to access their good will towards others diminishes the more desperate they become. Audience members spoke each and every night about recognizing and understanding this desperation.

As in life, the events in the play are all connected; strangers are linked by less than six degrees of separation. Karla's lack of adequate shelter ultimately leads to the assault and attempted robbery of an elderly woman, Nan. Within the space of 24 hours, lack of shelter and a desperate need for twenty dollars escalates to this point; a change to any one of several conditions along the way could create safety, and lead to a different outcome for Nan and for Karla. This is where the outside world, the audience, has an opportunity to make a difference, to create safety and a different outcome.

FORUM THEATRE – CREATING SOLUTIONS

In the Forum Theatre part of the performance, Diamond asks members of the audience to intervene if they have an idea that will create safety in the world on stage, and work that idea through engaging in the struggle of one of the characters. In discussion, Diamond then asks the whole audience for answers to another question:

“After years of cuts to welfare and social services, what can the City of Vancouver do to create safety?”

Safety is something everyone is concerned with, and can relate to. Fear, lessened mobility and distrust of our neighbours, have implications for the whole community (“Advancing Community Safety”, SPARCBC, winter 2004, vol. 20, no. 2, at p. 14).⁷

The play raises complex issues regarding the danger created by the years of cuts; the solutions are no less complex. The answers to this second question, as provided by audience interventions and discussions, were complicated by the reality of tripartite jurisdiction over social services. The cuts to welfare and social services have been largely imposed by the federal and provincial governments, yet the impact is experienced locally, in the municipalities where people affected by the cuts live. As stated in the February 10, 2004 Policy Report to Vancouver City Council on Social Development:

Municipalities are the level of government with the least financial resources and authority to address the problems of homelessness, but the one that is experiencing the effects most severely. Those who are shelterless hang out on city streets, sleep in city parks and on private property, and often residents call on City staff to respond.

Given the complex jurisdictional web of social services, many interventions and ideas related to potential solutions that are presently within the provincial government’s purview. When faced with this reality, audiences were keen to see City Council take a leadership role in finding solutions for the Vancouver community, with or without the cooperation of the provincial government, and to collaborate with the community in developing strategies and implementing solutions.

A strong sense emerged during the run of Practicing Democracy that the issues pose a problem that City Council cannot solve alone. Certainly, government action is viewed as essential, and there appears to be no illusion that municipal government is solely responsible for providing remedies. The desire expressed was for a comprehensive solution, involving the participation of all levels of government and the community. Strong desires for community involvement and building of communities emerged from the interventions and discussions; the community wants to be involved, and wants opportunities for individuals affected by the cuts directly to be involved in crafting and implementing solutions. There was a strong desire to form links within communities, to take care of one another, to play a direct role in effecting change.

Effective solutions, even those implemented solely by the City, must be comprehensive. The collection of audience interventions suggests that while short-term solutions are essential to deal with the immediacy and urgency of some issues, long-term solutions are necessary to break the cycle of poverty and effect real change within our community.

⁷ Social Planning and Research Council of BC

Some of the ideas and recommendations that arise from the interventions will not be new to City Council. ***Some are very creative***, and provide a new way of looking at solutions already recommended in previous reports, such as *3 Ways to Home: Regional Homelessness Plan for Greater Vancouver*⁸; *The Vancouver Agreement*; and *Neighbourhood Liveability and Safety in Vancouver: Recommendations from the Mayor's Forum*. As recognized in these reports, many of the ideas in the interventions require involvement of two or three levels of government, and the community itself, for successful implementation. Ideas that are outside municipal jurisdiction point to solutions that City Council could negotiate or lobby for with the appropriate responsible jurisdiction on behalf of the city residents affected and the community at large.

DESIRE - MOTIVATION FOR CHANGE

Motivational theories for human behaviour, such as Abraham Maslow⁹'s hierarchy of needs, suggest an explanation for the mounting desperation that culminates in violence. Maslow places at the base of his famous pyramid basic human physiological needs for food, water and temporary shelter, and then safety and security needs, for long term housing, medical treatment, and stable income. When these basic needs are not met, the individual experiences sickness, pain and irritation; if deprived of these basic needs over a period of time, death is inevitable. Likewise, when these basic needs are met, the individual has some stability, and stability is key to moving higher in the pyramid to focus on meeting other needs, such as love, belonging, self-esteem, or self-actualization, at the highest level.

Maslow's theory also suggests that an individual's behaviour is connected to the level at which she or he is operating. It should come as no surprise then, to see desperate acts from an individual whose basic needs for survival are her main issue, or are threatened. There is no time to ask nicely for what you need when you *really really* need it. Individuals pre-occupied with meeting basic needs are focused on the short horizon, and are often not capable of long term planning for the future.

Forum Theatre provides the larger community, the audience, an opportunity to effect change in a world where the characters otherwise could not. Audience interventions are really an expression of a *desire* for something better, for change, for something different to happen, for a different outcome. Some desires expressed are practical ideas to change what is there; others are wishful, expressing a desire for a different reality, the way things "should be", but aren't in this reality.

The desire behind many interventions was that the characters, particularly Karla, would be able to make better choices, by having higher self esteem and worth. We want this for people, for them to become "good choosers". And yet, when basic needs are not met, any choices possible tend to be focused on survival, not self-esteem. Thoughts and behaviour may become controlled by the need for food, water, sleep and for shelter.

⁸ prepared by SPARC for the Regional Homelessness Steering Committee, November 2003.

⁹ Abraham Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, 2nd ed. (1970: Harper & Row).

People whose basic needs are compromised or not being met, tend to do and say things they might not do under “normal” circumstances.

RECOMMENDATIONS – WHAT DO WE DO?

This report is laid out in five key subject areas that emerged from the audience interventions in the Practicing Democracy performances:

- I. Housing
- II. Support
- III. Money
- IV. Food
- V. Safety

Within many of the key subject areas are several sub-categories. The desires underlying audience interventions are noted. The interventions are noted and framed as recommendations for action by City Council. By the very nature of the process for gathering public input through interventions, some may appear incomplete, in that there is an outcome recommended, but little or no suggestion for action, how to achieve the recommended outcome.

I. HOUSING

Housing is the biggest issue in Practicing Democracy and is a recurring theme throughout several scenes in Practicing Democracy, as all six characters are in various stages of housing crises. Three are homeless, two are marginally housed, and one is at risk of homelessness. Years of cuts to welfare and social services have contributed to these housing crises:

Karla: Homeless for seven months, Karla needs a place to stay at 2:30 a.m. when she enters the first scene; it is cold and raining. None of the existing shelters are open at this hour; some have closed down due to cutbacks. Many shelters have a one-night only policy – you have to pack up and leave in the morning. This has worn very thin for Karla, she is also getting into arguments with people at the shelters (staff and other homeless), and is now not welcome at many. Karla hates shelters and believes they do not offer her safety; she has had her possessions stolen, and been assaulted. A recovering addict, she does not want to be exposed to drug use, which pervades many shelters. She feels marginalized by the shelter system, and in particular by for-profit shelters. Karla would rather stay in an underground garage with heating ducts if her friend would go with her; they could take turns watching out while the other slept. Angel declines, for her own reasons. Karla’s only other choice is to stay with **Marty**, a drug addict who lives in a Single Room Accommodation (SRA) building, even though Karla knows it means she will have to have sex with him, which might get rough, and Marty will expect her to earn some money to support his drug habit.

Angel and Trade: Trade’s home is a dumpster; his partner Angel stays there with him most of the time, but stays with friends when she can. Although Angel receives disability income assistance, Trade eschews the welfare system because of the bureaucracy and its restrictions. Trade prefers the relative freedom offered by living in the “urban bush” of the dumpster¹⁰, even though his health is so compromised by exposure to the elements and living on garbage, he will die in six months to a year.

Marty: living in an SRA, Marty risks being kicked out by allowing Karla to spend the night; it is against the building rules to have overnight guests.

Elaine: an unemployed social services worker, Elaine is afraid she will soon lose her apartment, as her Employment Insurance runs out in a few weeks. She was laid off a year ago from her job at a women’s centre, due to cutbacks in social service funding, and has not been able to find another job. Elaine has just discovered she is pregnant, and hopes to move in with her grandmother until she can get on her feet.

Nan: an elderly widow, Nan lives alone on her pension in a tiny one room apartment, where she does not feel safe; another elderly woman down the hall was recently robbed and assaulted in her room. Dealing with her physical ailments and the rising costs of her various medications, Nan cannot help Elaine raise a baby in her one room apartment.

The underlying *desire* in the numerous interventions related to shelter and housing is to provide more safe and accessible options, and enable choice. Frustration was expressed at the numerous limitations to accessing shelter and housing. More beds, shelters and housing facilities are needed to meet the varying needs of the homeless, which is not a homogeneous group. About 500 people are turned away each month by the four largest shelters in the city due to lack of space or appropriate beds.¹¹

Many Vancouver shelters are now operated as for-profit businesses, and many are limited to homeless individuals who are receiving welfare, leaving those who are not eligible for welfare with fewer options for shelter. Many shelters have restricted hours, and are limited to one-night accommodation. There were several reports during the Forum Theatre discussions that homeless individuals sometimes look to hospital emergency services and jails when they have no other options.¹²

As noted by Shelter Net B.C.¹³, homeless individuals tend to fall in three categories of needs: the transitionally homeless, who are homeless for a brief period of time, often one time only; the episodically homeless, who are homeless for periods of time; and the chronically homeless, who rarely find permanent homes, and are most often suffering

¹⁰ This phrase, coined by Diamond during rehearsals of the play, describes the territory inhabited by people who have severed their relationship with systems that would offer them support: Welfare, shelters, etc.

¹¹ <http://www.shelternetbc.ca/homelessnessreport.htm>.

¹² *Supra*, note 4.

¹³ *Supra*, note 4.

from other ailments, physical or mental. Many interventions reflected these categories, calling for more options in emergency and temporary shelters, transitional shelters and in long term housing for low income residents.¹⁴

Desire was also expressed for shelter residents to receive more humane treatment, to be less at the mercy of “systematization”, by the management of shelters and SRAs, and by other public service workers. Shelters are experienced as “disempowering” and “marginalizing”; restrictions on freedom of choice and movement decreases self-esteem, and disempowers homeless individuals. More critically, many shelters are seen as “unsafe”: reports by some audience members of drug use, theft of personal possessions, abuse by staff, and assault by other residents were not uncommon. Some were keen to add that not all shelters are unsafe; however, the better ones are smaller, frequently full, limited to welfare recipients, and one night stays.

The themes of the interventions related to: increasing availability and accessibility of shelter and housing; improving safety and management of shelters and housing; and recognizing and meeting the special needs of the various groups of homeless and at-risk populations.

DESIRE :

- More shelters and housing for the three stages of needs. No one should be turned away from a bed when in need
- Emergency shelter should be available 24 hours per day, not dependent on the individual receiving welfare
- Certain target groups with special needs require separate shelter and housing, for example: recovering addicts who require an absolutely drug free environment; seniors; and women, particularly those at risk of or fleeing abusive situations.
 - The closure of women’s shelters in March 2004 is creating a crisis situation throughout Vancouver and BC¹⁵; the BC government needs to hear from City Council and residents about the impact on Vancouver women in crisis.¹⁶
- Temporary shelter should be available for short-term stays, longer than one night, with more flexible hours and rules, and treat residents humanely

¹⁴ See also “Three Ways to Home: The Regional Homelessness Plan for Greater Vancouver”, which the Director of Housing recommended to City Council for endorsement on February 10, 2004.

¹⁵ Women are uniquely at-risk of homelessness, and are over-represented in the 31% of homeless who are not sheltered. Women are also over-represented in other at-risk categories: persons with a disability, lone parents and seniors who are at-risk of homelessness were more likely to be female. See the *Research Project on Homelessness in Greater Vancouver*, prepared for the Greater Vancouver Regional District, July 2002.

¹⁶ See for example the following motion passed at City Council March 17, 2004:

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT Vancouver City Council urge the provincial government to rescind plans to cut core funding for women’s centres on March 31, 2004; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT Council urge the provincial government to continue to provide core funding for all 37 women’s centres in B.C.

- Family and community members should be able to assist in providing temporary shelter or housing without being penalized
- Transitional shelter should focus on assisting homeless toward a long term stable living environment, including providing additional support services in addition to shelter.
- Support services should be designed to help break the cycle of homelessness and provide counselling and training in various life skills, as needed by the individual.
- Mixed generation housing options will avoid isolation of seniors and singles in need of support.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

A. Target Groups

- Provide shelter options for those who need to be housed separately (eg. Women), and for those who would benefit from mixed housing (eg. Couples and families)
- Community housing
- Provide Co-ed shelters that permit couples to stay together; splitting couples up makes each individual more vulnerable

(1) Women

- Create City-funded women's shelters to replace provincially funded centres recently de-funded
- Provide housing specifically for pregnant women and low-income single mothers and children, including job training and transition to independent housing

(2) Seniors

- Create more co-op housing and public co-housing (residents develop ownership interest through contribution via welfare or pension), emphasizing mixed generational living – eg. UK and Europe, all ages living together in council housing; US program where seniors and university students share accommodation; White Rock BC
- Lobby BC government to amend provincial tenancy laws to impose some responsibility on landlords for well-being and safety of tenants (eg. seniors), not just for maintaining the property

B. Improve Accessibility:

- Mandate shelters to offer more flexible hours of operation
- Create and maintain a housing registry that will help link single mothers with seniors and others who are isolated – combining skills and resources can afford both better living accommodations and support
- Up to date information on shelters and services should be available 24 hours per day through drop-in centers or information kiosks; new services need more

publicity, as many in attendance reported learning of new resources through a third party, often too late to help the individual in crisis

- Drop-in centers stay open 24 hours per day; a place for homeless to access information on what services are available in emergency situations;
- Staff drop-in centers with volunteer residents experienced in homelessness;
- 24 hour kiosk, preferably staffed, or minimally with access to computer, with up to date information on shelter and support services available throughout the city, and on individual rights;
- reinstate/expand Carnegie program involving street workers handing out information in DTES

C. Increase Availability:

(1) Emergency shelters

- Establish tent city as a legitimate, safe and ongoing place of shelter, accessible 24 hours per day, with facilities on-site or nearby;
- Establish an "urban campground" where for a small sum per night, homeless people could have access to hot showers, heat, and a hydro hook-up. Community breeds safety - the answer to alienation, isolation and desperation is not always in spending huge amounts of money - it's money spent wisely
- Use City owned buildings for emergency overflow housing: PNE buildings;
- Create emergency shelter using construction trailers that are no longer used, and place on city-owned land that is yet to be developed;
- Use community centers and neighbourhood houses as emergency shelter in the evening and night-time hours;
- Collaborate with churches that offer emergency shelter and support to synchronize efforts across the city;
- Make portable shelters available for pick-up at 24 hour location (eg. waterproof corrugated sleeping tubes; tarps to cover bus shelters; see PARAsites project in New York¹⁷)
- Reinstate hotel vouchers – Vancouver Police used to hand out

(2) Temporary Shelters

- Convert the many abandoned buildings in the city to shelters (many examples were cited, including buildings at 1st and Terminal, an old welfare office, a Buddhist Temple in Jericho):

¹⁷ paraSITES were developed by Michael Rakowitz in New York and proposes the appropriation of the exterior ventilation systems on existing architecture as a means for providing temporary shelter for homeless people, which is attached to the intake ducts of a building's HVAC (Heating, Ventilation, Air Conditioning) system. The warm air leaving the building simultaneously inflates and heats the double membrane structure. The paraSITE units are small, collapsible packages with handles for transport by hand or on one's back. The cost to manufacture each inflatable tent structure is approximately \$5 each. More information is on:<http://www.possibleutopia.com/mike/parasite.html>
Civic laws regarding loitering and sleeping on the street may require amendment to accommodate parasites.

- Create time limits on building vacancies – limit how long a building owner can maintain an empty building before it is assumed by the City for conversion to shelter accommodation;
- Legalize squatting (see City of Amsterdam for an example of organized squats that assumed abandoned buildings, renovating, establishing a community daycare for local businesses, and a nightclub – resulting in community rejuvenation);
- Complete Woodward's plan with MORE affordable housing included
- Create a structure enabling community members to safely offer short-term accommodation to homeless
 - Foster parent model: build in safety measures for both parties; match suitability; provide financial support for “foster” home;
 - Billeting model (eg. Foreign university students): Create a registry for community members who have a bed, or room and board to offer; match suitability
 - Relax zoning regulations to:
 - permit secondary suites in single family homes, with incentives to provide accommodation to homeless or low income tenants
 - permit developers to build very small self-contained affordable units for private market
 - permit single family homes, eg. oversized “Vancouver Specials”, to be divided and rented out as single rooms

(3) Transitional Housing

- Create phased housing plan for individuals who need support in basic living skills as well as shelter – well intentioned for accommodations have been trashed and abused in the past (eg. VanCity Place for Youth). Supervision and life skills support, as well as involvement in development, construction or renovation of shelter (eg. Habitat for Humanity) can create commitment from residents to protect shelter, treat it and self with respect. Consider the experience of Covenant House and its Rights of Passage Programme for youth, and NOW Canada in Kelowna, which provides a graduated living program for sexually abused women.

(4) Long-term Housing

- Create more affordable housing units:
 - build on city-owned land
 - relax zoning by-laws to permit secondary suites in single-family homes; provides prospect of rental income to homeowners who may find themselves at risk or who are aging, and provides additional rental homes
- Relax zoning regulations to allow two to three non-related tenants to share studio and one-bedroom apartments, enabling affordable market rents for more residents
- Develop community housing options, where it is possible for singles and small families to live together; mixed generations will encourage space for seniors to avoid isolation
- Create opportunities to work towards ownership of housing, eg. rent-to-own

- Lobby CMHC to include extended family members within the meaning of a “family unit” to obtain subsidized housing
- Lobby BC government:
 - to amend welfare regulations that discourage and penalize family members from supporting each other and sharing living resources
 - to relax BC Housing rule limiting guests to 14 days per year
 - to re-establish Vancouver Housing Authority
 - to provide rent subsidies geared according to income – allows freedom of choice to individual regarding where to live, rather than a forced choice to live in a particular building or part of town (examples include programs in Europe...)
 - to require landlords to provide a percentage of non-market rental units; provide tax credit

(5) Financing creation of more shelters:

- Impose a development tax on builders who do not include affordable housing or shelter in their development plans, similar to a percentage of development costs relegated to public art and parks
- Increase development tax on condominium builders, as it has not been increased in 15 years
- Establish a donation program for community members to make small and large donations to build new shelters
- Impose a “tourism tax” to provide funding for shelters and social housing - see San Francisco for example

D. Improve Management of Shelters and Housing:

- Involve homeless, former homeless in operation, design and development of shelters. Their knowledge and survival skills are valuable, and involvement raises self-esteem to enable their own movement to another stage. As well, other residents could access peer support.
- Improve management of SRAs through SRA by-law; ensure residents can not be evicted for occasional overnight guests
- Limit SRA ownership to non-profit organizations

E. Improve Public Service Treatment of Homeless:

- Parks staff and Police should assist homeless in finding safe and appropriate accommodation, and treat individuals respectfully and humanely. Training in communications and respectful intervention should be provided and mandatory.
- The homeless have a right to vote, but no address to enable enumeration. In order to facilitate their participation in the democratic process, establish a city address (eg. a box office number) that homeless individuals can use to become enumerated

II. FOOD

The vast majority of Vancouver residents purchase their food, either at grocers, or restaurants and cafeterias. Some grow some food in their gardens. We connect our supply of food to our supply of money or income, consciously or unconsciously. However, basic nutrition cannot be something individuals “earn”.

The desire underlying audience interventions in Practicing Democracy was that access to food – healthy food – is a right for all Vancouver residents. Many expressed outrage at the vast amount of excess food, both raw and prepared, that is discarded every day in Vancouver, by grocery stores, restaurants, hotels, film catering crews, banquets, community events with catered food and meals. The sense of the majority in the audiences was that there is no shortage of food in Vancouver itself; the problem lies in distribution and access. However, even if the excess supply of food can be redistributed to those in need, there is a strong desire that the food be in good condition.

Audience members reported that current health regulations prohibit grocers and restaurants from donating excess perishable or prepared food. The provincial *Food Donor Encouragement Act, R.S.B.C. 1997*, appears to sanction the donation of food by individuals and corporations to food banks and community kitchens by limiting liability for any reaction to donated food, provided it has not been tampered with or rotted.

Some low income residents in the audiences reported that the supply of food at Vancouver Food Banks and community kitchens is insufficient. Indeed, it appears to be easier to obtain heroin and crystal methamphetamine than food in Vancouver. One tactic for combating the shortage of food is to stash packages of food in several hiding places, as was demonstrated in one scene in Practicing Democracy. During the Forum Theatre, there were reports of fights breaking out in food line-ups, including a fatal knife attack in 2003, due to a limited food supply. Line-ups require long wait times, and individuals who wait in one line long enough to discover the supply has run out, often find themselves with insufficient time to travel to another food line-up elsewhere in the city, particularly if transportation is required to get there.

Given the nature of Food Banks, which stock supplies of non-perishable food, the food supply is of little use to those relying on temporary shelter, or living in the urban bush, without access to a kitchen or food preparation supplies or equipment. They must rely instead on community kitchens for prepared food, and on their hours of operation, which are often limited to certain times of the day. Some with experience reported that their entire day would revolve around the timing of food line-ups and community kitchens. If they missed the timing, they would go hungry until the following day.

The City of Vancouver recently committed resources to a Food Policy Task Force to develop a “Food Action Plan”. Many of the interventions and ideas generated in Practicing Democracy reflect and support the action items in the Food Action Plan.

DESIRE: Treat food as a basic human right. Supply and access must meet demand.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

A. Access

- Food delivery to homeless
- Provide free transit to low income residents – enables mobility to access food
- Create space for food distribution, similar to recycling centers, where residents can donate
- Information pamphlets available to show access points for food distribution
- Create a City owned restaurant, staffed by low income individuals, with food donated by organic farmers, community gardens, local restaurants and grocers
- Provide a 24 hour community kitchen
- Replace meal tickets, which were recently eliminated
- Create mobile soup kitchens that deliver prepared food to areas with individuals in need
- Create job training opportunities to work in film facilities in exchange for access to catered food

B. Supply

- Collaborate with the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority regarding the application of the *Health Act*, to the safe donation and distribution of excess food by restaurants, hotels, grocers and film production companies
- Lobby VCHA to relax health regulations to enable donations of excess perishable and prepared foods in a safe and healthy manner:
 - Excess could be donated to community kitchens - perishable food could be prepared in soups etc.; prepared foods could be served immediately
 - Collaborate with restaurants, hotels and grocers in developing policy and regulations that would allow donations and distribution of excess healthy prepared and perishable foods
 - Distribution process would require quick turn-around to maximize advantage – arrange for pick-ups at restaurants, grocers and events; create ways to allow restaurants, grocers to donate food at source. See Montreal for example: local restaurants and grocers have donation pick-up: run by volunteers, this program trains street youth in cooking and preparing food, which is delivered mostly to seniors. Volunteers from homeless, low income residents could deliver to others
 - Provide funding to Quest to purchase a freezer – Quest provides food pick up and deliver services; however it is unable to distribute majority of food before it rots
- Collaborate with farmers to provide fresh produce; subsidize farmers to grow food specifically for distribution to low income residents

- Fruit Tree Project – fund and advertise this program, inviting home owners with fruit trees to donate excess fruit; volunteers will pick fruit and deliver to food bank
- As part of new Food Policy, create a Planting Policy – on City owned property – boulevards, parks – plant fruit bearing trees that are accessible to all; change ornamental gardens to fruit and vegetables
- Community gardens: provide more land to create more community gardens, with food grown available to those in need, or grown and managed by them
- Collaborate with community organizations to combine work training with food growth, preparation and sharing. Example: UBC Learning Exchange in DTES links students in agricultural studies, who are learning about food growth and preparation, with DTES where the food is donated

C. Funding:

(1) Tax Revenue

- Create a tax on food waste for restaurants, grocers, etc. and channel funds to food programs and community kitchens;
- Create a tax on all take-out, disposable containers;
- Create tax incentives for restaurants and grocers to prepare, donate, deliver food, similar to tax incentives for developers
- Create a tax on higher priced restaurant bills to generate funds to create educational programs on healthy food and preparation to low income individuals
- Raise property taxes in wealthier neighbourhoods (eg. West Side) to support food for low-income individuals
- Create a voluntary “care tax” that residents could opt into to support food distribution for low-income individuals
- Create tax incentives for home owners to share fruit off their trees

(2) Other Sources

- When negotiating with film producers, ensure contract mandates that catering donates excess food;
- Redirect funds collected from advertising on the banners for 2010 Olympics towards food distribution

III. SAFETY

A. Police

When Vancouver residents were asked about safety and neighbourhood liveability issues in the recent Mayor's forum, a major area of concern was policing and enforcement; participants strongly supported increased police presence on the street, and recruitment of more officers. **In Practicing Democracy, a major area of concern was safety *from* the police.**

As Karla is restrained by one officer, the contents of her purse dumped on the ground and her money taken by the senior officer, many audience members' mouths were agape. This scene was based on real-life events of the cast and workshop participants, and also on an incident witnessed by many of the participants and Diamond outside the Japanese Hall during the Practicing Democracy community workshop in February. During the Forum Theatre discussion each night, Diamond polled the audience to see if others knew whether this scene was a daily occurrence in Vancouver. Anywhere from 30 to 60% of the audience concurred, including high numbers during performances on the West Side.

Recent events like the Stanley Park beatings loomed large in the interventions for this scene. Many tried to find a way to replace the junior officer, Joe, and challenge the actions of the senior officer, much like the officer who blew the whistle on his Stanley Park colleagues. This scene highlighted the challenges faced by such actions, for example, the Sergeant, the senior officer would react to Joe's challenge by threatening to ruin his career, or his reputation.

Others tried to replace Karla and more forcefully and knowledgeably assert her rights, one even reciting the rights card from PIVOT Legal Services, and asking for a female officer, to little or no effect. Karla still lost her \$15. Some intervened as a bystander who challenged the actions of the senior officer, sometimes with effect and sometimes not.

There was a sense from many of the interventions and the discussion that Vancouver police have a different set of rules for street people than they do for "mainstream" Vancouver residents. There was also a strong sense that many Vancouver police officers are doing a great job, and that some officers who might engage in "questionable" tactics such as those in the scene with Karla, *believe* they are doing the right thing, and helping the Karlas get off the street by making it difficult for them to be there.

Many audiences expressed a concern that Vancouver police are not truly accountable to City Council, but should be. While the VPD are employees of the Vancouver Police Board, an entity independent from local and provincial government, the presence of the Mayor as Chair of the Board perhaps creates an illusion that City Council is accountable for the police. However, public input in Practicing Democracy indicates a strong **desire** that the role of government is to ensure the safety of its residents, and if residents require safety *from* the police, the **desire** is for City Council to be more accountable for the actions of City police.

Interestingly, although the Vancouver Police Department was explicitly invited to attend Practicing Democracy, there was no visible presence of the VPD during 18 performances.

DESIRE: Vancouver City Council should take a stronger level of responsibility and control over VPD, and improve accountability of police for inappropriate actions. It must be okay for civilians to observe and/or challenge police actions – intervene, call media, be a witness, make others aware.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Create greater accountability of police to Vancouver City Council
- Increase review and checks on police behaviour and culture, relations with homeless, sex trade workers and low-income residents
 - Create stronger whistle-blower protection and programs to encourage within the police force; provide more support for officers to come forward
 - Create stricter penalties within the police force for wrongdoing
 - Create a separate, external “watchdog” body to review police actions – police policing the police has no credibility – city needs to take a stronger role in ensuring this happens – external body should be comprised of diverse pool of residents
 - Create an Internal Affairs department for police
 - Create “Civilian Chaperones” for police
 - Create a storefront complaints process for residents, similar to an external ombuds officer
 - Provide advocates for mistreated residents to go before independent Complaints board
- VPD should recruit more female officers
- Increase criteria to qualify for admission to VPD, raise the bar – eg. Quebec requires three year training program
- Ensure police culture and training includes:
 - Sensitivity and compassion for those living in poverty and on the margins
 - Anti-stereotyping of people in poverty, street people, sex trade workers, people with addictions
 - Diversity training
 - Understanding that “serve and protect” includes *all* members of the community
 - Non-violent methods of restraint
- Encourage dialogue between police and community
 - Create forums where residents can tell their stories on policing issues, similar to ward discussions
- Develop workshops for residents who observe police brutality: what to do, how to handle

B. Community Safety

The final scene in Practicing Democracy depicts a culmination of how years of cuts to social services and welfare have created danger in the City of Vancouver. Five of the six characters are involved as Nan is assaulted for having no money.

Few interventions in the Forum Theatre were successful in creating safety for Nan, or the others at this point. Many nights there were no interventions at all, as most simply do not know what to do. This is the sad truth of bystander paralysis and fear, and rightly so, as the recent death of the young woman (Rachel Davis) who intervened in the fight in Gastown demonstrates.

Assuming none of the interventions in the earlier scenes have happened, the action in the beating scene happens quite quickly, escalating to a crescendo in moments. Since everything is connected, this scene doesn't happen at all if Karla has a safe shelter option for the previous night; she doesn't go to Marty's and end up owing him \$20, or go work the streets and lose the little she does make to an unscrupulous police officer.

Given the scene does happen, the vast majority of the ideas are generated in Forum Theatre discussion, rather than through interventions, and most are culminations of ideas expressed through the previous scenes and the issues raised there – if those issues are resolved, this scene doesn't happen. If Vancouver City Council can create safety around the other issues, it creates safety in this scenario as well.

That said, there were a few ideas generated that related specifically to creating safety for Nan in this scene.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Strengthen community liaison with police
- Stop closures of community police offices
- Provide Community police to visit seniors' residences
- Re-instate emergency phone booths that have been removed; despite the proliferation of cell phones, not every Vancouver resident has one
- Create neighbourhood resident foot patrols, eg. Guardian Angels
- Create intervention training programs – residents can learn how to intervene safely in assaults on others
- Expand "City Host" program (looking after tourists in Vancouver) to serve Vancouver residents
- Create a "Blue Light" system similar to UBC campus; residents in fear can touch Blue Light as they dash for safety; a security company monitors and will dispatch assistance immediately
- Practicing Democracy should be a regular production and forum for discussion, creates a perpetual dialogue with community

IV. SUPPORT

As expressed in *3 Ways to Home*, housing is inextricably linked with income and support in dealing with homelessness. Support Services are a critical component to creating safety after years of cuts to social services and income assistance. Each of the six characters in *Practicing Democracy* is in need of or reliant upon support services of some kind: information and referrals; counselling; training in life skills and motivation; human connection to combat isolation; and a range of health services for physical and mental health needs.

A. Compassionate Service

During the Forum Theatre events, the characters responded positively, and moved toward a changed outcome, when they were treated with kindness, respect, and dignity. A strong **desire** was expressed for service providers to improve treatment of low income residents and the homeless.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Provide training for service providers and in particular front-line workers:
 - to *listen* to clients, and to help them make decisions, one step at a time (reduces sense of being overwhelmed by bureaucratic requirements)
- Provide incentives to businesses to donate to the community in which it is located, to provide discounts to social service agencies

B. Seniors

Many seniors on a limited pension income like Nan are living alone, in small apartments or in SRAs, without amenities such as a telephone, which most Vancouver residents would consider a basic necessity. A pay phone in an SRA hallway is of little use to a senior like Nan, who is frightened of her own neighbours, has limited mobility and other chronic health issues. Women are over-represented in this category¹⁸.

Modern North American culture is youth-focused; many seniors are cut off from the broader community, and perhaps from family as well. Seniors in other cultures do not tend to live alone and isolated in their later, declining years; rather they are integrated within and supported by an extended family. Many seniors like Nan, especially women, live in fear, due to their isolation from others. Without adequate support, isolated seniors are more likely to be over-medicated and confused, and therefore less able to advocate for themselves, and to reach out to others. Unseen and unsupported, such seniors are at increased risk.

According to a 2003 research report published by Seniors Housing Information Program, *Out of Sight, Out of Mind: The Plight of Seniors and Homelessness*:

Adequate income, decent housing, preventative health services, and opportunities for social interaction and development of an individual's social support network,

¹⁸ *Supra*, fn. 5.

are fundamental requisites for aging with dignity. Yet achieving these for a segment of the senior population and adults with disabilities depends on decisions and choices that are not controlled by the individual themselves. They are heavily dependent on public policy decisions.

In its 1998 report, *Principles of the National Framework on Aging: A Policy Guide*, Health Canada reported:

Dignity, independence, participation, fairness and security are interrelated core principles that seniors in Canada have identified as key components that promote their overall health and wellbeing.

Although one of the characters, Angel, had a visible physical disability, there were no live interventions, nor any mention in Forum Theatre discussion, of the issues faced by persons with disabilities.

DESIRE: Close the gap for isolated and lonely elderly residents, create greater opportunities for connections within a community; support for seniors should include medical and emotional support. Develop community building initiatives that include integration of seniors and acknowledgement of their existence and contribution. Foster respect and appreciation of seniors within communities, promoting a shift in attitude toward seniors and elderly. Help seniors get out and into larger community. Reduce over-medication of seniors through increased support.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

(1) Connection

- Improve visiting and outreach services for seniors who are isolated, living alone, and/or with mobility issues
 - Outreach workers similar to street nurses, to visit seniors in isolation, provide emotional support, ensure medication taken appropriately;
 - Reinstate accessibility of home support hours
 - Support creation of a volunteer organization with a mandate to visit and connect with isolated seniors, particularly those with mobility issues
 - Provide incentives for community members to volunteer to check in on isolated seniors – eg. free passes to City owned attractions
 - Create a “Buddy System Check-In” within communities
 - Create links between youth programs and seniors;
 - Provide practical training programs to youth in working with seniors, youth gain career options in home care support;
 - Link student loan repayment to volunteer time;
 - Vancouver School Board create programs on awareness re: seniors; provide credit to students who visit seniors, prepare food
 - School Board could develop practicum for students in social service programs to visit seniors

- City Council could approach Telus to bridge the gap for isolated seniors on limited income by providing free or reasonably priced phone or cell phone plans geared to income;
- Create a regulation mandating SRAs to supply in-suite phone to seniors, individuals with mobility restrictions
- Support development of Network to connect seniors
 - Provide a place for seniors to get together, build friendships; Create a destination seniors' center, adult day centres, with activities and opportunities to develop friendships and community supports
 - Resource Network for seniors could be paired with resource network for homeless, where the two issues overlap, to bring together people with support needs to help one another – eg. senior women connect with street women
 - Provide a 24 hour friendship line for seniors
 - Provide more funding for peer support outreach and mentoring programs for seniors
- Community building initiatives that include seniors
 - Partner with landlords of buildings that house seniors living alone – help create a community within building and links to surrounding community; create space in building for gathering, connecting;
 - Encourage business improvement associations (BIA) to sponsor ways for individuals living in apartments to meet one another – help build community; alternatively, **community improvement associations** could be developed to create links among residents, particularly those in isolation
 - Promote community building initiatives that create trust and safety, integrate seniors in planning
 - Create structural opportunities to create community – eg. safe spots in parks for seniors to go and meet others; building designs should include spaces to interact, and less long tract hallways
 - Create community programs similar to Block Parents – safe homes for seniors to go to when they need help
 - Offer seniors and disabled year-long discounts at community recreation centers, rather than limited to one program per season

(2) ***Health Issues***

- Provide more resources to enable doctors and nurses to do outreach and home visits to seniors
- Require doctors to perform minimum number of pro bono hours, similar to law society's requirement for lawyers
- Create a database of isolated seniors and their medications (eg. Healthwatch at Shopper's Drugmart), that would allow medical professionals and pharmacies to track prescriptions filled and flag potential over-medication risks;

- Seniors need better packaging for medication that is easier to open – child proof caps are often senior proof too; some seniors need help planning when to take medication – packaging could lay out days and times for each dose. Regulations to compel pharmacies to develop and provide packaging that is easier to open and read by seniors
- Collaborate with VCHA to increase visits from public health nurses could assist isolated seniors with proper ingestion of medication – daily, weekly
- Vancouver City Council could take on more responsibility for home health care through transfer payments
- Lobby provincial government to provide MSP coverage for access to alternative medicine
- Mandate supply of medical assistance in low income housing

C. *Women*

Women face particular issues when social services are cut: the vast majority of single parents are women; single mothers are over-represented among those living below the poverty line. It is no coincidence that 4 out of the 6 characters in *Practicing Democracy* are women.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Support program for single mothers to share childcare
- Create more spaces in a graduated work program for pregnant women and single mothers
- Lobby federal government to provide EI maternity funding to laid-off workers on EI who become pregnant

D. *Sex Trade Workers*

The vast majority of sex trade workers on the street are also women; this is not a lucrative opportunity to make an income, as seen in *Practicing Democracy*, where Karla turns tricks for \$10 and then, in desperation, lowers the price to \$5. Nor is it a safe occupation; street prostitutes are at grave risk of assault, both by their pimps and by the johns, again as depicted in *Practicing Democracy*.

In many interventions in the scene between Karla and Marty, the desire expressed was for Karla to stand up to Marty's demand that Karla find \$20, and his suggestion that she prostitute herself for easy money. The audience wants Karla to be able to make a better, healthy choice. While it is understandable to want Karla to have greater self-worth and to refuse to compromise herself, complications arise in this context if Karla stands up to Marty. Routinely, there was consensus in the audience that Karla places herself in danger from Marty if she stands up to him, and refuses to meet his demand for money. Karla risks being assaulted by Marty, and ostracized from her only supports on the street, if Marty spreads the word that Karla didn't help him out. As well, Karla still has no real

shelter options for another night; if she wants to stay with Marty another night, she has to come up with \$20 so he can feed his habit. In this case, if Karla makes a “good choice” by refusing Marty, she reduces her already minimal shelter options, and places herself at risk physically.

Pairing real shelter options with empowerment and self-esteem training focuses on both the short and long term, providing immediate safety to women like Karla, and promoting capacity for making good choices.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Understanding that female sex trade workers are at far greater risk getting into cars with men than they are bringing them home; women are at less risk of getting murdered doing sex trade work in SRAs where Johns will be recognized; women do get badly injured and murdered in cars driven to remote areas where Johns will not be recognized:

- Proceed with development of policy regarding establishment of safe sex zones and houses; amend zoning regulations to allow safe sex houses run by women who understand what they are dealing with – see eg. Holland
- Lobby federal government to legalize prostitution – create safety for sex trade workers
- Fund PACE Society, help get women off the street and raise awareness
- Shelters and transition housing specific to, or with programs specific to women in the sex trade, and preferably outside common sex trade neighbourhoods, away from pimps and potential abusers
- Provide empowerment and life skills training at shelters for women, assistance in planning for transition to independent living, including opportunities to contribute to shelter operations
- Women at risk of abuse, including sex trade workers, should be able to walk into police station and be guaranteed help
- Vancouver City Council could place a major emphasis on providing safety to women, become known as a safe city for women

E. Urban Bush Dwellers

There is some evidence that some homeless individuals make a conscious choice to not seek shelter, and prefer to sleep outdoors. In the case of the character Trade, he sleeps in a dumpster every night, on a mattress made from a plastic garbage bag stuffed with rotting lettuce, and a urine-soaked sleeping bag. Despite the state of his world, Trade is very attached to his few possessions. Suffering from isolation and exposure to the elements and unsanitary conditions, Trade is covered in sores and will die within six months to a year.

The desires underlying the interventions related to Trade and his living conditions were focused on finding ways to get Trade out of the dumpster. In order to do that, intervenors

quickly learned they needed to help Trade re-connect with society, to re-build his trust in society in a way that allowed Trade to maintain his dignity and pride. Getting Trade's basic needs met was seen as critical. Trade's best chances for survival are linked with Angel, his partner and the only person he trusts and is connected to.

Although dumpster "diving" and "binning" are not news to most Vancouver residents, most at Practicing Democracy performances were unaware that people are living and sleeping in dumpsters as well.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Vancouver City Council to make provincial and federal governments aware of this issue – the extent of the impact of years of social services cuts
- On-site visitations by outreach workers, street nurses, provide on-site medical assistance
- Recognition and better service of marginalized at hospitals and clinics; treat with respect and dignity
- Provide and support advocacy to assist marginalized to find their way through bureaucratic hoops, such as income assistance applications.
- Train volunteers to deal with marginalized individuals, assist with skill development
- Provide a central place to get food and nutritional care consistently
- Meal delivery to marginalized and at-risk homeless
- Provide center for homeless to do free weekly laundry
- Secure storage place where homeless can safely store possessions and access them as needed
- Develop a skills exchange program that legitimizes skills and strengths developed in surviving the urban bush – provides opportunity for individual to contribute, building self-esteem, confidence and trust in others, and to learn from skills and strengths of others
- Mental health issues:
 - Proper assessment to ensure individuals with mental illness receive appropriate treatment
 - Out reach/advocacy workers to support finding appropriate housing, interface with landlords, government ministries and other agencies

F. Drug Addictions

Marty's addiction to drugs is a driver for a number of events in Practicing Democracy, including Karla's desperate search for \$20 to give Marty for his fix, and the ultimate attempted robbery, and assault on Nan. There were many interventions that involved Karla persuading Marty to get treatment for his addiction through a detox program. This is the stronger Karla the audience desires to create, as well as a healthier Marty. The reality, however, appears to complicate the success of the intervention: even when Marty is persuaded, and wishes to go for treatment, there is a minimum two-week wait for admission to a publicly funded detox program, particularly a residential program. In

Forum Theatre discussion, many reported that addicts are more likely to seek treatment when they are not in need of a fix, i.e. when they have recently had a fix.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- View addiction as a health issue, not a poverty issue; wealthy addicts are rarely newsworthy, and can gain immediate access to treatment with money; low-income addicts have to wait and are in a catch-22 situation, as it is difficult to access detox treatment during sick periods
- Proceed with the Four Pillars strategy, and in particular to create and make available more treatment programs
- Detox available on demand: requires more beds and programs
- More safe injection sites – eg. Community facilities; advertise existing ones; ease addictions by supplying drug in a safe way
- Make medical heroin available¹⁹; legalize access – see eg. Netherlands
- Provide alternative drugs eg. methadone

V. MONEY

Money, of course, is a key player in Practicing Democracy, and integral to the entire issue of creating safety in a world that has experienced its loss through years of reductions and funding cuts to social services and welfare. The play reaches the violent crisis point after a frustrated search for twenty dollars – an easily obtainable sum of money to most Vancouver residents; a “mountain” to others.

Given a lack of safe shelter options, Karla stays the night with Marty; in order to stay there another night, Karla must find \$20 so Marty can feed his drug habit and not be sick. Karla tries to raise the money by panhandling, and eventually turns to street prostitution, where she tries to turn tricks for \$10, and then in desperation, for \$5. Two police officers stop her, search her purse for drugs, and find her meagre earnings of \$15; the senior officer pockets the money as “stupid tax”. He is, from his own perspective, teaching Karla a lesson; he is trying to clean up the streets.

When Marty, desperate for his fix, catches up to Karla, he finds her with no money. Angel is also looking for Karla, who has taken Angel’s secret stash of food. The three of them then see Nan, who is out looking for her granddaughter, Elaine, and they search Nan for money; finding none in her heightened state of desperation, Karla strikes Nan.

Money is fundamental in the modern world to access life’s basic necessities. The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, provides a right to a basic standard of living:

¹⁹ On March 15, 2004, the Development Permit Board of Vancouver City Council approved the development of the NAOMI Project, involving the clinical trial of medically prescribed heroin/methadone maintenance.

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services...²⁰

Most Vancouver residents derive their income through employment, self-employment or business investments. Most individuals who are directly affected by cuts to social services derive their income from some type of income assistance from government sources such as welfare, disability pension, Canada Pension. The years of cuts in transfer payments and to income assistance, combined with the rising costs of housing in Vancouver resulted in a 49% increase in the number of households paying more than 50% of their income on shelter – a strong risk factor for homelessness – during the decade between 1991 and 2001²¹.

DESIRE: Restore and improve income assistance levels and access. Increase availability of employment and training to low-income residents.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

This may be the most challenging and difficult section of the report for Vancouver City Council, as welfare is under the jurisdiction of the BC government, and money is realistically finite. Nevertheless, public input during Practicing Democracy indicates a desire for City Council to have influence in this arena:

A. Income Assistance:

- City of Vancouver should take over distribution of welfare; create civic welfare system (see City of Toronto for example)
- Provide advocacy to assist applicants to access welfare; many have difficulty finding their way through the system
- Facilitate ability of those without a fixed address to access welfare; provide city address or post office box number
- Facilitate access to money to cover damage deposit for rental accommodation, and to assist with non-payment of rent in order to avoid eviction
- Provide sources of emergency money
- Take a leadership role in lobbying the BC and federal governments to:
 - Restore and increase income assistance levels in Vancouver to match high cost of living and market rents
 - Provide greater flexibility for recipients in covering damage deposit for rental accommodation
 - Provide increased discretion to Financial Aid Workers (FAW) in assessing an individual's need for emergency money

²⁰ Article 25, paragraph 1.

²¹ Neighbourhood Liveability and Safety in Vancouver: Recommendations from the Mayor's Forum (January 26, 2004), Appendix A at p.3.

- Remove barriers that inhibit or penalize recipients from helping one another, sharing living accommodation
- Broaden eligibility for income assistance and Employment Insurance for pregnant women
- Provide subsidized 24 hour childcare
- Create opportunities for Vancouver residents to lobby BC government – eg. name an official “Day of the Poor”, including a mass march to Victoria; create televised speakers’ corners for broadcast on Shaw TV, which could reinstate the community programming previously offered by Rogers
- Reinforce the City’s report to the UN on the human rights crimes that have resulted from provincial welfare cuts;

B. Employment, Job Creation

- Work with business sector to create employment opportunities for individuals living in poverty
- Create work training programs for youth and adults to work with seniors and isolated individuals: provides training and develops employment opportunities in social services, home care, and supports seniors and the isolated
- Provide municipal support to women’s centres, so workers like the character Elaine are not laid off from employment and become at risk of poverty and homelessness themselves
- Create a “job options training” program that provides subsidy during training, housing and programs for pregnant women, enabling them to qualify for employment after delivery. Available childcare is essential after delivery of baby
- Provide graduated work programs for pregnant women and single mothers
- Provide subsidized 24 hour childcare, enabling single mothers to search for and/or maintain employment – some jobs available require hours of work outside normal childcare hours.
- Create a support network for Employment Insurance (EI) recipients
- Provide free voicemail access numbers to low-income residents without a phone (see Toronto for example)
- Amend zoning regulations to allow safe sex homes, which will enable sex trade workers to work safely and earn income
- Provide a subsistence stipend for those who develop sustainable lifestyles – eg. community sustainable farms
- Repeal anti-panning by-laws