

Health Promotion: A Key Community Investment

Research has demonstrated that voluntary, nonprofit organizations are making major contributions to the social, economic, environmental, and cultural determinants of health (Phipps, 2000).

- *One in four (27% or 6.5 million) Canadians volunteered in the year 2000, (McKeown, 2003).*
- *Volunteer work has the value of \$12 billion a year to the economy, (Pfeiffer, 1999).*
- *In 1999, not for profit organizations (in Canada) numbered close to 60,000 (McMullen and Schellenberg, 2002).*

The BCHPC believes that all of this energy plays a valuable role in contributing to the philosophy and process of health promotion as outlined by the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (WHO, 1986).

Health promotion has the following features:

- Allows people to have greater control over the improvement of their own state of physical, mental, and social well being.
- Gives people power to identify their issues and come up with solutions.
- Provides long term solutions to society's health concerns.
- Permits people to challenge and reduce inequalities in their lives.
- Addresses the determinants of health through cooperation and community participation.
- Provides resources that people can control, not services that are controlled by those supplying them.

Health Promotion in Action

The old saying, "It takes a whole village to raise a child", rings true for many families who have participated in productions with Rainbow Youth Theatre over the past fifteen years. The actors seen on stage are a very small part of what takes place to put on a production. Ages of people participating are from preschool to seniors. To put on shows takes the talent of many. Tasks range from doing publicity to carpenters, who build sets.

The idea of Rainbow Youth Theatre came about during a conversation while waiting for the Powell River ferry. Four adults talked of wanting to do something to boost the confidence of youth in the Comox Valley. Now fifteen years later, seven shows are being proposed for this coming season. This society does not have an office, any full time staff or a building. Rainbow Youth Theatre's policy is that everyone who shows up to audition will be given the opportunity to perform.

Through these efforts, children who couldn't find their voice in public gained confidence to get up and sing on stage. Families have become stronger working together to make shows happen. The community as a whole gets involved to ensure the ongoing existence of these opportunities. More details about Rainbow Youth Theatre are available on their website at <http://www.rainbowtheatre.com>

Current Funding Situation

Despite their substantial contributions to addressing the determinants of health, community groups and frontline professionals remain under-funded and under-recognized for the work they do.

Challenges in accessing funds:

- Restrictive funding guidelines and criteria.
- Cutbacks in provincial funding, increasing the need to search for funding.
- Political influences, including a centralization toward big cities and the southern part of the province, and funding practices that encourage competition amongst community groups.
- Community organizations are not encouraged to take risks or adapt and change programs to suit the evolving needs of society.
- Some organizations where funding is available have taken on more of a corporate image putting them out of touch with the grassroots.
- Funding guidelines are focused mainly on economic development issues rather than the broad determinants of health.
- Difficulties are created due to lack of communication between funders and community groups.

Successful Strategies for Accessing Funds:

- Strong, positive leadership.
- Communication with the funder that is positive and trusting.
- Thorough writing of proposals.
- Accountability that is characterized by detailed documentation, i.e., uses a variety of approaches to measure outcomes and demonstrate success.

Cost Benefits of Health Promotion

In today's climate of stretching health care dollars, governments look for evidence of how health promotion activities save money. Looking at outcomes of health promotion primarily from a financial perspective does not give a clear picture of its effectiveness. Reasons for this include:

- the far-reaching effects of the determinants of health, affected by health promotion activities, make outcomes difficult to measure (Zollner and Lessof, 1998).
- the needs of people and the benefits to communities change over the span of a health promotion project, making cost benefits difficult to pin down.
- when the focus is on cost effectiveness and efficiency, real issues in the community can be missed (Dixon and Sindall, 1994).
- activities associated with health promotion have wide ranging effects, touching more people than those originally proposed, blurring where the cost benefits exist (Health Canada, 2002).

True evaluation of health promotion comes with a variety of approaches. This means listening to people's narratives and using participatory, community-directed methods along with statistics.

Health Promotion and the Community Charter (Nebbeling, 2003)

- The image of a new funding body for health promotion in British Columbia leans toward the same concepts presented in the 2003 Community Charter.
- The charter promotes community empowerment and self-determination. It means that citizens can play a greater role in determining the futures of their own communities.
- Through this legislation, local governments gain more autonomy to meet their individual needs.
- By developing a new funding body for health promotion, the BC Health Promotion Coalition is looking to achieve similar goals.

Four goals of the BC Health Promotion Coalition

- To nurture an environment in which health promotion is valued.
- To establish a sustainable, made-in-BC model and source of funding for health promotion that advances “the empowerment of communities, their ownership and control of their own endeavors and destinies” (World Health Organization, 1986).
- To develop an approach to current funding practices that communities find to be more fair, equitable and responsive to their strengths and priorities.
- To build a province-wide peer resource network that consists of Web-based learning options and mentorship support for community groups, organizations and frontline professionals.

The BC Health Promotion Coalition believes that:

Funding guidelines for health promotion need to place communities in a leadership position.

Funding bodies must have as few barriers as possible, be flexible, and responsive to community-identified priorities.

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