A woman with long dark hair, wearing a pink textured dress, stands in front of a large, ornate building with green trim and white balconies. She is looking upwards and to the right with a slight smile. The building has multiple stories with arched windows and decorative railings. The sky is overcast.

# vancouver foundation

STORIES OF MODERN  
PHILANTHROPY

2019

## The Power of Song

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Author Madeleine Thien  
shares Chinatown's  
history through opera

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**SILENT NO MORE**  
Poetry gives voice to  
residential school survivor

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**OUT OF THIS WORLD**  
Students make history with  
NASA space experiment

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BUILDING A BETTER FUTURE THROUGH INNOVATION





## Walk and Talk Innovation

At Vancouver Foundation we understand that innovation is key to building a better future. In its broadest sense, innovation is the desire to make things better ... but it encompasses so much more.

While innovation can be somewhat defined, how it touches people's lives cannot be confined. This is demonstrated to us through the successes of the many projects Vancouver Foundation funds thanks to the generosity of our donors. These projects which we touch upon in this issue are having a meaningful and lasting impact on our neighbourhoods and communities.

We continue to be inspired by our community. There is a tremendous amount of people doing such great work and we consider ourselves fortunate to be occupying a space in the community that means we are a convener; we have the good fortune of speaking to donors, listening to what interests and moves them, and working with inspiring community organizations.

Extensive research, existing and new partnerships, and community engagement has taught and continues to teach us a lot. One of those lessons is that to make a meaningful and sustainable impact requires innovative thinking that has a firm understanding of the importance of systematic, rather than piecemeal change.

It is important to anticipate what's next and what will make those big shifts necessary in our community. It's never "business as usual" here at Vancouver Foundation as we continually try new things, build on best practices, form unique partnerships, and learn from our failures.

We take our role in the community seriously and recognize that to be innovative you sometimes need to fund projects that others consider risky, and that will have a catalytic effect and inspire others.

Open dialogue with people from all backgrounds and cultures remains a top priority. We are proud to have been part of this year's Women Deliver conference in Vancouver that focuses on the health, rights, and well-being of women and girls, and in particular Indigenous and racialized immigrant and refugee women.

This year we are also proud to launch our new LEVEL Initiative, which is taking a unique approach to leadership. Read all about it on page 19!

This coming year will be very exciting for us as we explore what it means to walk and talk innovation in a deeper way. We are currently updating our Vital Signs research which measures the state of community in our province, to ensure we remain abreast of societal changes and help build healthy, vibrant, and livable communities across B.C.

As we learn the outcomes from many of the projects we have funded and continue to learn and share that knowledge, you can be confident that we will continue to move the dial.

Change is never easy, but always possible. ∞

*Vancouver Foundation is situated on the traditional and unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh peoples.*

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CHAIR, BOARD OF DIRECTORS,  
VANCOUVER FOUNDATION



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# vancouver foundation

2019 VOLUME 12

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This magazine is published annually by Vancouver Foundation  
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Tel: 604.688.2204

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www.vancouverfoundation.ca

Charitable Registration No. 119281640RR0001

PRODUCED BY



CANADA WIDE MEDIA LIMITED | canadawide.com

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Vancouver Foundation magazine is produced by Canada Wide Media Limited for Vancouver Foundation. Send change of address notices and undeliverable Canadian addresses to: 200 - 475 West Georgia Street, Vancouver, BC V6B 4M9. Publications Mail Agreement No. 40065475.

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## Projects Vancouver Foundation and our donors recently supported



### When I Grow Young

**The mutual benefits** of children's interacting with seniors is a concept largely missing in our culture, but one of great importance to Amber Dukart and Mary Zheng.

Surprised by a lack of intergenerational programming in Vancouver schools, Zheng, a kindergarten teacher, and Dukart, a social service worker, started a community initiative called When I Grow Young.

Dukart explains, "We both have strong relationships with our own grandparents and seniors in the community. We know first-hand the mutual benefits these relationships have and

wanted to create opportunities for others to build friendships across generations."

Supported by an initial \$300 Neighbourhood Small Grant from Vancouver Foundation, the pair connected Queen Alexandra Elementary School with Royal Ascot Care Centre for monthly visits. Three

years later, the program has four elementary schools partnered with four care homes.

During the visits, the "little buddies" colour, read, and play board games with their "grand buddies." Through repeat visits, the children and seniors have a chance to build meaningful relationships and share stories and knowledge across generations and cultures.

Zheng says, "An impactful moment from the program was celebrating a grand buddy's 105th birthday during a visit with the five-year-old little buddies. They have a century between them, yet they were able to connect and celebrate together. The grand buddy had tears in his eyes as he told us how special this birthday was for him."

INITIATIVE HELPS DEVELOP CONNECTIONS BETWEEN GENERATIONS

### BLUE CABIN RESIDENCY PROJECT

**The small blue** shack (complete with over 4,000 pieces of moulding) built in the 1920s or 1930s as a float home is the ideal venue for a floating artist residency — but it took the persistence of Glenn Alteen, Program Director of Grunt Gallery, Barbara Cole of Other Sights for Artists' Projects, and Esther Rauschenberg of Creative Cultural Collaborations, to make it happen.

The Blue Cabin is one of the few remaining squatter dwellings that once dotted foreshore sites around Vancouver. It was home for over 50 years to artists Al Neil and Carole Itter, and when their friend Alteen rescued the cabin from demolition by purchasing it in 2015, Grunt Gallery and its colleagues began refurbishing it.

More recently, they were aided by a

\$225,000 grant from Vancouver Foundation that will allow their new Blue Cabin Residency Project to build programming and fund exhibitions, tours, and an online interface.

Alteen says, "In August, the cabin will be docked by the Plaza of Nations in False Creek until the end of 2020, and the first resident will be an Indigenous artist from Australia. The first residencies will focus on weavers from the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh nations."

Alteen concludes, "Blue Cabin is a unique part of Vancouver's history, and our project's intent is to present regional histories from marginalized groups using accessible and creative means, and put them back in the landscape."



### THE NORTH COAST INNOVATION LAB

**What's a good** way to encourage economic growth and diversification, as well as address issues such as social inclusion? In Prince Rupert, whose 12,000 residents are vulnerable to economic boom and bust cycles, one solution is the new North Coast Innovation Lab (NCIL), created by Ecotrust Canada to try new ways of ensuring lasting, positive change for the town.

The NCIL was made possible with a \$225,000 grant from Vancouver Foundation and draws on learnings from the Local Economic Development Lab (LEDlab), an Ecotrust Canada collaboration with RADIUS SFU. Based on the belief that the best ideas for building local economies come from the people and organizations that reside there, NCIL plays a key role in stimulating innovative projects

through community engagement and visioning.

NCIL Project Manager Nathan Randall says his lab currently has three tangible innovation projects being tested in the community, including restorative ocean farming, growing food in a greenhouse for Indigenous food security, and planning a marketplace geared for cruise ship passengers.

Randall is gratified that the NCIL has hit the ground running in a relatively short space of time. "Plus, we've already established four new projects with supportive organizations for next year," he says, adding, "Vancouver Foundation's support was integral to our launch, and many exciting developments are in store for us in the near future."

### Game Design and Coding Workshop

**Gaming has become** the entertainment of choice for an overwhelming number of youths, but several years ago Xin Tong and Bill Zhao thought gamers' fascination for that world — as well as their cognitive skills — would broaden immeasurably if they organized a design and coding workshop for them and their parents.

Tong, a School of Interactive Arts & Technology (SIAT) graduate and Simon Fraser University (SFU) student whose passion is creating games for educational purposes, says, "Bill and I conducted a few sessions at the Richmond Public Library with great response, but our project really took off when we learned about Vancouver Foundation's Neighbourhood Small Grants Program and received a \$278 grant to broaden our activities."

Today, Tong not only teaches game design to SFU undergraduates (while Zhao is an educator at the Centre for Digital Media), but their design and coding workshops in other venues attract students from grades 3 to 7.

Tong says the youngsters almost intuitively understand what it takes to make a game come alive. "We teach actual codes and the logic behind them, and the gamification learning process is amazing as it allows the kids to pick up the skills quickly. They have even more time and motivation to learn during our summer sessions, to the point where they produce games they've either developed or modified.

"Playing games is fun, but it's really cool to see kids learn enough to take an active role in the media they love."

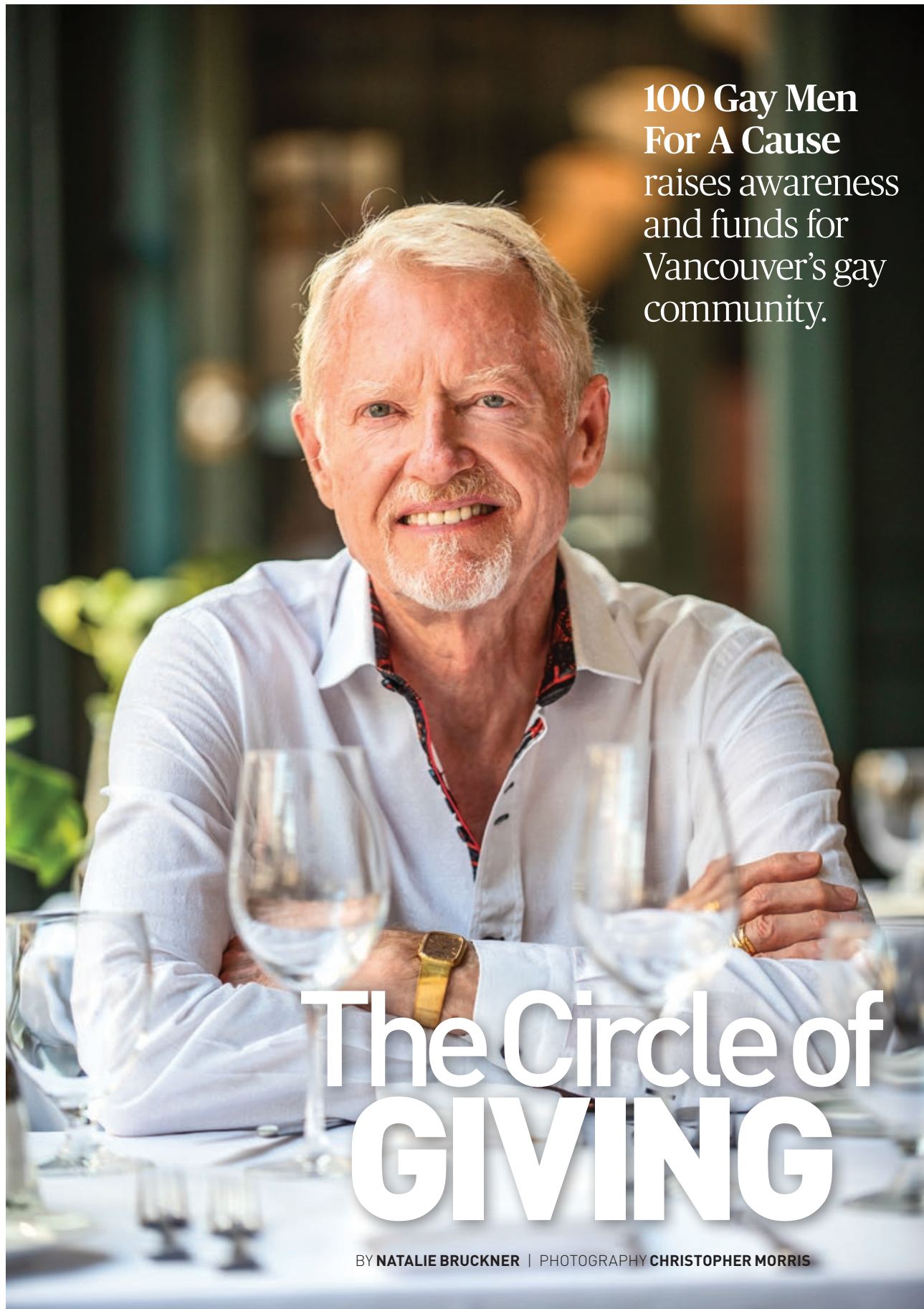
TEACHING YOUTH AND PARENTS THE PRACTICAL SKILLS OF CODING







100 Gay Men For A Cause raises awareness and funds for Vancouver's gay community.



BY NATALIE BRUCKNER | PHOTOGRAPHY CHRISTOPHER MORRIS

When Ken Haycock came across a post on social media for the charity 100 Women Who Care it sparked something in him, so he decided to delve a little deeper. "The charity seemed to combine my interest in social/professional networking and donating for impact," says Haycock. "Through my research I discovered there were many variations of the charity, but none specializing in serving the unique needs of gay men in the Lower Mainland, an often overlooked charity sector."

Haycock contacted the 100 Who Care Alliance, which provides support and resources to more than 650 chapters across the world, and with the help of the Alliance set up 100 Gay Men For A Cause earlier this year with the idea of bringing together a network of like-minded philanthropic gay men under a giving circle model who would leverage donations for greater impact.

"The concept is quite simple," explains Haycock. "Essentially, each man donates \$100 each quarter. Then every three months members gather as a community during a social evening and learn about three pre-verified charities through five-minute presentations. They then vote on the charity they most support, but no charity goes home empty-handed!"

In fact, the system that Haycock has set up is extremely fair. Following the presentations, members vote using two poker chips each and ballot boxes. The organization that receives the highest number of votes currently receives \$2,000 and the other two charities receive \$500 each. This amount is expected to increase as 100 Gay Men For A Cause is exceeding expectations and more members sign up.

The impacts of these social fundraisers are far-reaching, beyond what Haycock could have even imagined. "During the evening we learn about charities many of us never knew existed. Many members have gone on to volunteer with those charities or donated on their own," he says.

Haycock firmly believes that bringing light to LGBTQ2+ issues and supporting people both financially and emotionally is one way to help unleash the capabilities and capacities of each individual, allowing them to feel free to be authentic and yet still vulnerable. "I learned early on in life how to be successful in the eyes of others, how to perform roles. Sadly, I lost sight of who I was until several life-changing experiences that forced me to dive deeply into who I am. It is crucial to enable young people to see themselves in the experiences of others, and to enable them to make wise choices with the support of their community," he explains.



Vancouver is home to the largest gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, gender diverse, queer, and Two-Spirit (LGBTQ2+) community in western Canada.

And this is exactly what Haycock is doing. "When I set up 100 Gay Men For A Cause I contacted Vancouver Foundation, as I had a very positive experience with them previously setting up my own Donor Advised Fund as a primary way of giving. It was very easy and extremely effective," says Haycock.

"It turns out that our arrangement with Vancouver Foundation for 100 Gay Men For A Cause is the envy of the Alliance continent! Vancouver Foundation looks after the donations, so we know in advance of our gatherings how much we have to donate. This is a wonderful model and enables us to support important work being done by charities in the community and truly make a difference to ensure a happy, healthy, and engaged community of gay men in the Lower Mainland."

Previously Haycock had worked with Vancouver Foundation to establish the Sheila Tripp Endowment Fund for the Performing Arts. "This is in honour of my amazing late wife, an outstanding school principal. The fund now supports more than 15 performances by arts groups each year in Vancouver's public schools."

He adds that Vancouver Foundation provides the framework and support to provide an enduring legacy. "They are there to help to make your ideas a success. I have received much from the generosity of others and want to continue that ripple effect. We need to care for each other; that is what builds strong communities and makes this country so wonderful." ∞

A Donor Advised Fund at Vancouver Foundation is a great way to support your favourite charities and help future generations. For more information call Kim in Donor Services at 604.639.3051 or visit [vancouverfoundation.ca/create](http://vancouverfoundation.ca/create)



# A Rising of Voices

Author Myra Pierre's poems provide a glimpse into her life as a residential school survivor.

BY LAURA WALKER | PHOTOGRAPHY MARINA DODIS

Every year, Vancouver Foundation's Downtown Eastside Small Arts Grants program helps emerging artists working and living in the Downtown Eastside to advance their art practice. Among those talented artists is Myra Pierre, whose newly published collection of poetry *A Rising of Voices and Other Poems* presents an intimate and heart-wrenching journey of her life as a residential school survivor.

Her poetry not only provides a glimpse into her life living through the school's brutality and the destructive aftermath on her family and culture, but demonstrates her beautiful, resilient soul and the importance of family and community as part of the process of healing.

Born in Mount Currie into the Lílwat Nation, Pierre's traditional name, Ka'zez'semaka7, means "Busy Hands" – a celebration of her creative personality. "When I received the name I got so excited because it encompasses everything I am. I'm always busy making something," says Pierre. "I like beading, cedar weaving, and pine needle weaving. I can't get enough of any of them."

At the age of seven, Pierre and her older brother were taken away

from their family and sent to a residential school in Sechelt. "It took four years before we were able to come home," explains Pierre, recounting the heartbreaking experience. "A lot of us got banged on the head, slapped or punched. We weren't allowed to look at our family across the way. There was a lot of hitting and punishment over nothing."

The emotional wounds inflicted on Pierre and her family during her time away persisted even after she and her brother were able to rejoin their family on the Lower Mainland. However, her art and creativity offered an outlet for expression.

Her son was two when Pierre moved with her family to Vancouver, and it was then that Pierre's experiences and feelings started coming out in the form of poetry.

"When my kids were little I didn't really think anything of it. I just started writing," she explains. "It kept accumulating. I had scrap book after scrap book. Sometimes I would write on any paper I could find and I'd put it in my book. Later on, I would end up editing them."

Now, with help from a \$1,000 Downtown Eastside Small Arts Grant and the support of the Learning Centre at Carnegie Community Centre, Pierre's

poetry has been curated into *A Rising of Voices and Other Poems*.

Since the book's publication, Pierre has been sharing her poetry through book launch events with public readings at various branches of the Vancouver Public Library. "A lot of people who hear my residential school poems are pretty touched," says Pierre. "You can see it in their faces while I am reading. They have tears with me. Different cultures, even youth, it really touches them. I never expected people to feel the way I feel, to feel the pain."

While her poetry expresses painful feelings and difficult experiences, it also offers a relentless hope toward healing. In *A Rising of Voices*, the title poem of the book, Pierre explains: "It's about my parents. My mom was deaf, so in this poem it's like magic. At the end of the poem she is in the spirit world with my dad and she's shaking a rattle . . . my mom can hear."

Through Pierre's warm, open expression and willingness to share, *A Rising of Voices and Other Poems* stands as a new opportunity for education about an all too real history, offering collective healing and opening the door to building community and the sharing of cultures. ∞



Through poetry readings from her newly published collection, Pierre is helping raise awareness of a history that should never be forgotten, while bringing communities together.

To support important initiatives like the Downtown Eastside Small Arts Grants program, contact Kristin in Donor Services at 604.629.5186 or visit [vancouverfoundation.ca/give](http://vancouverfoundation.ca/give)





# LET THE **Good Times Roll**

The **GRAGOPEAN SCHOLARSHIP TRUST** is helping change the lives of people with spinal cord injuries in B.C.

BY **STACEY McLACHLAN**

**J**essica Kruger made her fair share of cookies and cupcakes with her mom and grandma growing up, but she didn't get serious about baking until she found herself with a spinal injury (the result of a fall from a ladder at the age of 15), a new wheelchair, and a lot of time on her hands.

"I was looking for new hobbies and one of the things I did was take a cake decorating class," says Kruger. "I kind of fell in love with it."

Soon Kruger was showing up to wheelchair rugby practice with containers full of cupcakes, and the requests started to roll in from friends and family for custom cakes for birthdays, weddings, and celebrations. When people started offering to pay for her sweet

services, she realized she might actually be able to take the passion from hobby to career. "Just realizing people thought my work was good enough to be worth paying for was a revelation," says Kruger.

Her friends weren't the only ones who thought her work had professional potential; so too did the Spinal Cord Injury BC Scholarships Committee, the award administrator of the GRAGOPEAN Scholarship Trust held at Vancouver Foundation.

The trust was originally established at Vancouver Foundation thanks to four generous donors – each with spinal injuries themselves – who wanted to be identified by their professions: a child psychologist, a chemical engineer, a paraplegic Royal Canadian Air Force veteran, and an architect.

The idea behind the GRAGOPEAN Scholarship is to provide financial support for educational development to individuals with a spinal cord injury in a wide-range of disciplines – everything from aviation to law to engineering to, yes, baking, and Kruger was a recipient of part of the \$83,000 the fund provided to students last year.

With the help of that GRAGOPEAN Scholarship, Kruger became the first-ever student in a wheelchair to be accepted into the baking and pastry arts program at Vancouver Community College (VCC).

Of course, the 11-month program wasn't without its challenges. "Pastry is not a field that is designed to accommodate someone in a wheelchair," Kruger points out. The supplies are often stored out of reach, equipment isn't always easy to use while seated, and

countertops are too high . . . and those are just the physical barriers. "When I entered the program, my teacher was a little hesitant about having me there, and voiced concerns that I wouldn't be able to keep up," she recalls. But as an accomplished athlete (she plays on the provincial wheelchair rugby team and trains two to four times a week), Kruger is no stranger to pushing herself.

VCC provided an electric work station that could be lowered to accommodate her needs, and in the kitchen she proved herself to her instructors and fellow students. "By the end, my teacher came to embrace having me there," says Kruger, who adds that he even went so far as to tell Kruger she'd changed his mindset. Her classmates learned to make space for her in the tiny 16-person training kitchen as they helped pass her tools and praised her decorating skills. She graduated the program with flying colours.

One thing Kruger didn't have to worry about during her time at school were finances. "There were so many daily challenges, so to not have to stress about the financial challenge was a big barrier that they took away," says Kruger. "I'm just really touched and grateful that the scholarship committee thought my schooling was something they wanted to support."

Kruger is currently enjoying a well-deserved break before pursuing a career in the pastry industry, but her enthusiasm for taking on new challenges remains. "Go in with an open mind, even when people tell you that you can't do something. There's always a way to make things work," she says. "If you're hesitant, bite the bullet and take the risk. The reward is far greater." ∞

*Jessica Kruger's dream of owning a bakery is close to becoming a reality thanks to her determination and the scholarship, which took away the financial barriers of adult education.*

Inspired by this? To create a scholarship or bursary at Vancouver Foundation, contact Calvin in Donor Services at 604.629.5357 or visit [vancouverfoundation.ca/create](http://vancouverfoundation.ca/create)



## CHINATOWN'S HISTORY

# Brought to Life

Award-winning author Madeleine Thien set to open eyes and hearts with her inaugural opera, *Chinatown*.

BY NATALIE BRUCKNER | PHOTOGRAPHY CLAUDETTE CARRACEDO

Janet Lea, City Opera Board President, with author Madeleine Thien finding inspiration in the historic Lim Sai Hor Kow Mock Benevolent Association building.

While on a seven-hour train ride from Leiden, Holland to Berlin, Germany, award-winning Canadian author

Madeleine (Maddie) Thien finally closes her laptop and takes a deep breath. She has just completed the first draft of her inaugural opera *Chinatown* – City Opera Vancouver's latest commission. "There is something about being in motion and seeing the landscapes pass by while on a single journey that helped with the writing," explains Thien.

When Charles Barber, City Opera Conductor and Artistic Director, approached the Board of Directors with the idea of creating an opera that would pay homage to the unique history of Vancouver's Chinatown, Thien was the obvious choice to tell the story. Janet Lea, City Opera Board President, explains: "I had just finished reading Maddie's book *Do Not Say We Have Nothing* and I found her writing so magical and lyrical. She has this amazing way of telling a story and getting into the characters, and she was from Vancouver, so I threw out her name, and everyone agreed."

You could say Thien was made for the part. For City Opera, finding a librettist who not only has validity in the community and prior knowledge of Vancouver's Chinatown and its history, but someone who could also give voice to the Chinese community through the unique capacity for storytelling, was essential. It didn't faze them that Thien had never written an opera, and, in turn, Thien was also unfazed.

"Charles got in touch by email and told me how City Opera wanted to turn its attention to this geographical space and history, and wondered if I would be interested in working with them. My immediate response was yes, but I had so many things on my plate at the time I was worried I wouldn't be able to give it the attention it deserves," says Thien.

Patience and perseverance paid off, and in the fall of 2018 Thien began researching and writing the story. "I embraced the challenge. I felt that the place and the subject history deserves operatic treatment. It's a quiet history that I don't think many Canadians know about."





## THE INTERPLAY OF CHINESE ARCHITECTURE AND CULTURE

The Lim Sai Hor Kow Mock Benevolent Association building's significance to the Chinese community lies in its cultural heritage and architectural design.

Constructed in 1903 by the Chinese Empire Reform Party (whose members were among the most prosperous Chinese merchants in Vancouver), it is a perfect example of regional Chinese building influences in what is now considered classical Chinatown architecture.



Originally home to the Chinese Empire Reform Association, the building became the headquarters of all Lim Societies in Canada. It was purchased by the Lim Sai Hor Kow Mock Benevolent Association in 1945 and renovated. Clan associations such as these provided vital social supports for new Chinese immigrants and formed the bedrock for Chinatown's community.

The heritage building recently underwent an intensive conservation project that saw the restoration of both the original 1903 façades fronting Carrall Street and Shanghai Alley.

Today it proudly stands as a Historical Site of Significance.

Barber's initial idea – sparked by discussions that Vancouver's Chinatown be designated as a UNESCO World Heritage site to serve as a reminder of the crucial contributions of Chinese-Canadians – was being brought to life through Thien's artistic penmanship and made possible through a \$300,000 grant from Vancouver Foundation.

For Thien, the biggest challenge was pinpointing a moment in time from which the story could be told. "Chinatown has such a long history that dates back to the building of the railway. There are so many things to take into account too, such as the series of racist legal barriers that were put in to encourage labour but prevent settling. How do you tell a story that spans such a long period of time?"

But Thien knew from her experience as a novelist that it would come down to the characters. "I had an idea of who the core group of people would be, and I chose 1961/1962 as the time period as it could act as a pivot point – the characters would have enough of a history to look back, but also look forward to a younger generation," says Thien.

To help bring the story to the operatic stage, the board reached out to award-winning Director and Dramaturge Rachel Peake. "When I heard about this project I was very excited as I lived in Vancouver for a long time. Charles invited me to have a conversation with Maddie to see if we had a good connection. We did!

Having worked on *Stickboy*, which is based on a novel in verse, Charles knew I had worked with people unfamiliar with the medium of opera before, and I could guide and steer Maddie when necessary," says Peake.

Exact details of the opera are currently being kept under wraps as the story continues to evolve with the help of the Chinese community (there will be around 200 community meetings in total before the premiere), however, Thien is aware that the subject matter could evoke a complex set of emotions from its audience when it goes up in September 2021. "In addition to matters like the head tax and Exclusion Act, there are so many hidden stories concerning sexuality and false papers. Some of it is considered shameful by the community, but it is a testament to their incredible resilience and desire to be equal citizens."

For City Opera, if *Chinatown* can challenge views, evoke empathy, and make opera accessible and relevant to all, the team has succeeded in their goal. For Lea and Barber, they are grateful they have the opportunity to shine a light on such important local topics: "Vancouver Foundation's boldness and generosity with its funding, the fact they will not shy away from controversial topics, and they find worth in this art and these stories, allows us to give a voice to those who may not have been heard before or forgotten," says Lea. ☺

To support important projects like this, call Kristin in Donor Services at 604.629.5186 or visit [vancouverfoundation.ca/give](http://vancouverfoundation.ca/give)

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vancouver foundation

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Amie Peacock was inspired after purchasing a camera from a second-hand shop and started a project that brings strangers together through pictures.

# The Polaroid Effect

## Using old technology to help tackle the growing problem of loneliness and social isolation.

BY ROBIN BRUNET | PHOTOGRAPHY ROBERT KARPA

**W**ho would have thought that obsolete technology in the form of a 40-year-old Polaroid camera could be a catalyst to help end social isolation?

Amie Peacock did in 2015, when she walked past a second-hand shop on Main Street in Vancouver and saw the camera in the display window. “It has often been said that modern technology contributes to loneliness, but I had a hunch that this outmoded piece of equipment could bring strangers together,” she recalls.

Peacock is all too aware that one in four people claim to feel socially isolated, and that the problem grows as the population ages. “I immigrated to Canada from the Philippines in 1991, and it took me five years to commit to living fully and actively in my new country because I experienced a profound sense of being disconnected from everything, especially my family,” she says.

The despair that comes from feeling totally alone was especially apparent when Peacock’s mother visited Vancouver in 2001. “She couldn’t speak English and had no friends. Six months later her health had deteriorated to the point where she returned to the Philippines,” she says.

But it’s not just the elderly and immigrants who feel disconnected. A report released last year by Vancouver Foundation found that nearly a third of 18- to 24-year-olds across Metro Vancouver experience loneliness “almost always” or “often.”

After purchasing the camera and receiving a \$250 Neighbourhood Small Grant from Vancouver Foundation, Peacock launched The Polaroid Effect Project in various Mount Pleasant venues. “Companies such as JJ Bean and IGA, plus local libraries and community centres, allowed me to set up a display consisting of the camera and photos taken by it, and it

was amazing how many people converged to ask about this old technology and how it worked,” she says. “One morning in the space of two hours over 70 people approached me, interacted with each other, and shared conversation and laughter.”

The message was clear: although isolation can lead to depression and physical illness, sometimes the simplest props can cause people to emerge from their shells and partake in social discourse, which in turn encourages other forms of engagement.



Peacock went on to found Beyond the Conversation, a non-profit organization that stages regular conversation circles and supports people who are experiencing loneliness – including those with disabilities, new immigrants, refugees, youth, and seniors. “We’ve established over 13 conversation circle groups in Metro Vancouver and our goal is to open 100 new locations for small group meet-ups by 2020 through partnerships with business improvement associations, faith organizations, and community agencies,”

she says, adding that Beyond the Conversation raised awareness of her cause by staging the first annual Walk to End Social Isolation last September in Olympic Village Square.

As was the case with the Polaroid camera, the strength of Peacock’s strategies is their simplicity. “Ending isolation begins with making people feel welcome, saying hello to one another, and then chatting,” she says. “From there, connections are strengthened through peer support, cultural education, mentorship, events – a range of services that can be accessed through Beyond the Conversation.”

Peacock concludes, “My biggest joy is connecting with people and inspiring them to become involved in their community. It all starts with realizing we feel isolated and could use some help.” ∞

To support great initiatives like this contact Calvin in Donor Services at 604.629.5357 or visit [vancouverfoundation.ca/give](http://vancouverfoundation.ca/give)



# Taking Action on the Overdose Crisis

BY ROBIN BRUNET

Six days a week at three different harm-reduction sites in Victoria, University of Victoria (UVic) professors Dennis Hore and Bruce Wallace oversee a unique project that aims to combat one of the most serious public health issues in Canada's recent history: the overdose crisis.

At these sites, Hore and Wallace (Professor of Chemistry and Associate Professor of Social Work respectively) and a small team of technicians and researchers offer a free and confidential drug-checking program. People are able to check their drugs, discuss the results, and access information and supplies for safer drug use.

Wallace, who is also a scientist with UVic's Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research (CISUR), says, "We've been working on this project since last fall. So far we've tested street drugs, and it may come as no surprise that the vast majority of heroin or 'down' we test contains fentanyl. The opioid that is linked to so many overdoses is less prevalent but still shows up in other types of drugs tested at the sites."

The team is relying on data from three different spectrometers, and the technology not only identifies fentanyl (in samples as small as a grain of sand) but also what fillers or cutting agents have been used in any



given drug supply. "Our project serves two purposes," says Wallace. "First, we're able to show people exactly what they have and offer harm-reduction options. Second, we're researching the cost, portability, and effectiveness of the suite of spectrometers to determine which technologies can best be used in the community."

The team is motivated by grim statistics: the BC Coroners Service reports that fentanyl or its analogues were detected in approximately 83 percent of illicit drug toxicity deaths in 2019 and 87 percent of illicit drug toxicity deaths in 2018. While there is no single

solution to the epidemic, Hore and Wallace are hoping that effective drug checking will be one answer.

The three-year pilot project was initiated by a \$1.7-million grant from Health Canada's Substance Use and Addictions Program, augmented by a \$70,000 grant from Vancouver Foundation. The community-based research team is comprised of policy makers from the BC Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions, Island Health, Victoria's primary drug user agency (SOLID Outreach), Vancouver Island's primary harm reduction agency (AIDS Vancouver Island), a health provider from Victoria Cool Aid's Community Health Centre, several industry partners, and a harm reduction pharmacy (STS Pain Pharmacy).

Wallace says that data gathered during the pilot may also lead to researchers being able to detect and report on the concentration levels of fentanyl and other active ingredients to inform people not just what is in the drug, but also its potency. Service users are currently being surveyed to assess what testing works best for whom and in what settings.

Judy Darcy, BC Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, summarized the importance of this project by saying, "This pilot will tell us how drug-checking services can be expanded and adapted so that we can save more lives and connect more people to the treatment and recovery services they need, when they need them." ∞



# LEVELLING UP! Investing in Youth Leaders.

BY STACEY MCLACHLAN | PHOTOGRAPHY ROBERT KARPA

John Michael Koffi is wise beyond his years. He is one of 15 on Vancouver Foundation's LEVEL program Advisory Committee – an initiative that seeks to advance racial equity by empowering and providing leadership opportunities to Indigenous, racialized immigrant, and refugee youth and young adults. Quite an achievement for a 21-year-old.

Koffi is a perfect example of the Advisory Committee's diversity and a reason why it has been so successful. A refugee himself, Koffi was invited to apply to the LEVEL Advisory Committee after staff heard him on CBC's North by Northwest discussing his book *Refuge-e: The Journey Much Desired*.

As a child, Koffi was forced to flee the Democratic Republic of the Congo, but today he is living in Canada as a published author, a university student, a musician, and a representative for the Africa Awareness Initiative at the University of British Columbia (UBC). He is also a philanthropist, operating an educational initiative in Swaziland where his family lived in a refugee camp for many years.

The opportunity to help with this new youth initiative appealed to Koffi because it was an opportunity to contribute to the community as a whole. "For me, it is about giving back to society," he says. "I had a tremendous amount of support to get me where I am today, and I want to return that favour."

Now in his role as an adviser, he is using his personal experiences to help inform decisions that will help a new generation thrive. "I was sat around a table with people [the Advisory Committee] who would be considered minorities – young women, Indigenous people, refugees like myself, and migrants – and we were told, 'Oh yeah, you'll be directly influencing decisions.' It was very empowering," he says. "It was one of those rare moments where I felt my thoughts and experience mattered."

To address racial inequity, LEVEL takes a three-pillar approach: the Youth Policy Program, which invests in the



“By including youth now, we're making sure we are creating citizens who understand and will explore the needs of the communities and make decisions that are going to influence the community.”

– John Michael Koffi

capacity of young people to understand and influence policy change; Youth Organizing, which invests in the capacity and civic engagement of grassroots youth groups; and Youth Granting, which invests in the capacity of the charitable non-profit sector to engage youth in staff and board governance leadership.

"By including youth now, we're making sure we are creating citizens who understand and will explore the needs of the communities and make decisions that are going to influence the community," explains Koffi.

In just one year, LEVEL has funded a number of inspiring projects throughout B.C., from Indigenizing poverty reduction projects to creating youth arts administrator positions. "When I read about all the beautiful projects coming from communities and young people who truly care, I was touched."

To have so many great ideas and outstanding youth ready to take on the world is inspiring. "When I look at what I'm trying to do for my own Swaziland community and the clubs at UBC, and what these people are trying to achieve, I get very emotional," says Koffi. "This is what everyone deserves in life." ∞

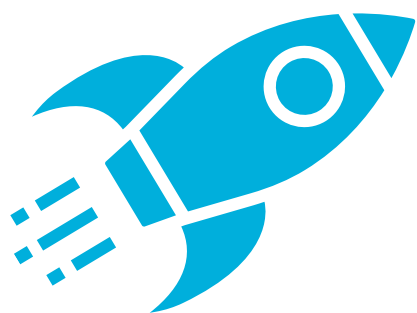
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To learn more about the LEVEL initiative and to receive updates, visit [levelvf.ca](http://levelvf.ca)





# Reach for the Stars



Student science experiment makes history as flatworms are launched into orbit.

BY ROBIN BRUNET

**M**egan Poteryko, Parker Davie, and Abigail Sitler recently graduated from Nanaimo District Secondary School with a distinction few other alumni can lay claim to: making history in outer space.

Specifically, the three youths were chosen from over 250 grades 8 to 12 applicants to have a science experiment they developed involving flatworms conducted by NASA astronauts at the International Space Station.

The opportunity was provided in part by the National Center for Earth and Space Science Education, as a Student Spaceflight Experiments Program (SSEP) that would launch in the spring of 2018. And while Poteryko, Davie, and Sitler are the first Vancouver

Island students to have an experiment launched into orbit, Mary Anne Perkins-Goater, a senior biology/science teacher at Nanaimo District Secondary School, stresses that the overarching success of the project was inspiring so many young people to create experiments that could be conducted in space.

“The best teachers try to instil a passion for science, and the way to do so is to make it fun by getting students to do things in addition to reading texts,” she says. “This project was amazing because all these kids were extremely motivated to research, design, and write their own proposals on microgravity experiments. It was competitive in the most positive way.”

Perkins-Goater credits fellow educator Martha Parker for helping

**Student Experiment: Testing the effectiveness of L-Carnitine in preventing muscle loss in microgravity.**

the students fine-tune and review a total of 50 proposals, which covered research into bacteria, cell biology, zoology, proteins, inorganic crystal growth, fluids, and plant studies. While all of them had considerable merit, a review board singled out Poteryko, Davie, and Sitler’s idea as being truly relevant and innovative.

The trio proposed to test the drug L-Carnitine and its effectiveness in preventing muscle atrophy, which is a threat to astronauts in long-term space travel, in a microgravity environment. In the experiment, the drug would be injected into flatworms and if they came home weighing the same as they did when they were launched, it could indicate the efficacy of L-Carnitine.

Perkins-Goater and her colleagues were also impressed by the trio’s ability to fulfill the complex guidelines pertaining to space-bound payloads. “The restrictions were overwhelming, yet they persevered,” she says. “At one point they figured out how to tattoo the flatworms for easy identification, which I thought was brilliant – only to be informed by NASA that the dye they used was unacceptable. Instead of being

frustrated, they substituted the original dye with India Ink, and that got the green light from the space agency.”

Poteryko says of the experience: “It taught us so much about writing research papers, reading a variety of topics, and the importance of teamwork.”

An equal amount of determination was exhibited by Perkins-Goater and her colleagues when it came to funding the students’ efforts. “The total cost to get a payload to the International Space Station is \$24,000, and our fundraising at one point even included cold-calling people,” she recalls. “Vancouver Foundation was incredibly supportive of what we were doing, and so many sponsors and donors ultimately pulled together to make this happen.” While they received generous donations from Island Savings, Nanaimo Ladysmith Public Schools, BC Hydro, and Magellan Aerospace, the bulk of the funding came from the Blue Moon Fund, a Donor Advised Fund held at Vancouver Foundation.

Although the flatworms were left exposed for too long on the space station to be used and the earth-bound portion of the experiment was compromised by a heat wave, Poteryko, Davie, and Sitler’s achievement remains intact and part of an SSEP program that hopes to inspire the next generation of scientists and engineers.

“I’m proud of that team,” says Perkins-Goater. “They were so mature for their age and determined, as well as respectful. But I’m proud of every student who participated in this exercise. It showed just how passionate young people can be about science.” ☺

A Donor Advised Fund at Vancouver Foundation is a great way to support innovative projects like this. For more information, call Kristin in Donor Services at 604.629.5186 or visit [vancouverfoundation.ca/create](http://vancouverfoundation.ca/create)



# Women & Children FIRST



Drop-in centre provides services to support vulnerable women and their children.

BY LAURA WALKER

**T**he Downtown Eastside Women's Centre (DEWC) stands as a source of stability and safety to many women from all walks of life who live in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. The Centre provides a non-judgemental drop-in centre and emergency shelter where basic need services and supports, self-help programs, and safe social space are offered.

With more than 450 women accessing the drop-in centre and around 200 women passing through the doors of the emergency shelter every 24 hours, the organization has turned to the power of an endowment fund to ensure its ongoing sustainability.

The organization became a Vancouver Foundation charity endowment fund partner four years ago. "At the time we had received a very large unrestricted donation, which is why we created the endowment fund in the first place," recalls Alice Kendall, Executive Director of the DEWC. "We wanted to invest it in a way that could produce some long-term sustainability. However, as a women's centre, our specialty is not investment or that type of money management."

By establishing the Downtown Eastside Women's Centre Association Transferable Fund, the organization has been able to leverage Vancouver Foundation's experience and knowledge of investment, finance, and donor services, receiving advice and guidance on everything from what financial tools to set up the endowment to ideas for marketing and growing the fund with donor support.

Kendall explains that the benefits of the endowment fund arrangement extend beyond Vancouver Foundation's investment expertise by bringing in new types of donors and donations that may not have found their way to the DEWC before. "As an endowment fund partner of Vancouver Foundation, donors are able to donate to the organization in a more sustainable way."

Looking to the future, the endowment fund offers the DEWC the ability to make much-needed service or program decisions, independent of grants.

"Funding from grants and other sources doesn't necessarily keep up with our needs," explains Kendall. "This was a way to support our grassroots organization in a way that allows us to say, 'Okay, here's a need but there's not really any funding for that, and here's a way for us to respond.'"

Utilizing an endowment fund model also enables the organization to ensure donated funds are used in an ethical and transparent manner. "As an organization you have to be responsible for the unrestricted donations that you receive," says Kendall. "People are donating to us because they want to make a difference in the lives of women, and for us as an organization, it is important ethically to ensure that is what happens with those funds." ∞

Each night DEWC shelters up to 150 women with beds for 57 women, many of whom have been rejected by other shelters. As the focus is harm-reduction, women will not be turned away.

If your organization wants to create a reliable source of income, call Linda in Donor Services at 778.309.0963 or visit [vancouverfoundation.ca/give/charities](http://vancouverfoundation.ca/give/charities)

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