

History of People for a Healthy Community (PHC)

“Well, what are we going to do about it?”

That was the challenge that started the chain of events that led to the formation of PHC. Those words were spoken by Liz Steele to Diana Mumford in 1994, after an infant was badly shaken, resulting, as was found out later, in permanent brain damage. At the time, Liz and Diana were actively involved with the Gabriola Rug Huggers Circle and had met the young mother of the abuse victim at Rug Huggers. They were shocked and dismayed that something like that could happen on Gabriola, and wanted to do something to improve family support services in our community.

March 9, 1994 – an initial meeting was held around Patsy Thomson’s dining room table. At that first meeting, the concept of a Family Resource Centre—a place where people could come for information, services and support—was discussed,

The second meeting was held at the school. At that meeting the name “People for a Healthy Community” was chosen by the people in attendance and Kathy Ramsey of Gabriola Artworks produced a statement that was the guiding mission statement of the group for some time.

“We want to promote Gabriola as a community that cares—where someone in crisis can find the help they need, where teens have a voice, where families count, and where isolation is a matter of choice not a fact of life. A healthy community doesn’t just happen, it needs a heart “.

The third meeting was held at the Community Hall. At that meeting five general areas of concern were identified: Family/Individual Support; Teen Programs and Facilities; Isolation; Emergency Networks for Families in Crisis; Poverty.

A core group of people continued to meet monthly in the United Church hall and then at the Home Support office. Various projects were undertaken such as the annual the What’s On Gabriola directory, several annual health fairs and a number of workshops and courses.

March 1995 – A survey was distributed to 30% of Gabriola households to solicit feedback on the type of services needed on Gabriola. The writing, editing, production, distribution and analysis of the survey took nearly a year.

November 1996 – the organization became a registered not-for-profit society.

During this time, the Healthy Communities Initiative was introduced to the province. The regional coordinator, Molly Henney, lived on Gabriola and helped PHC fit into the bigger Healthy Communities picture and apply for funding. For some time this moderate funding was the main source of support, supplemented by community fund raising efforts and membership fees.

Fall 1998 – leased the house at 787 Lochinvar from Bob & Dee Lauder to establish the Community Resource Centre. The community responded with amazing support and generosity, furnishing the entire house with donations. The Community Resource Centre served as a meeting place for various community groups and become the Gabriola home for the international Rainbows program, Nanaimo Family Life’s Volunteer Counselling and Senior Peer Counselling Programs.

Janice Kerr-Donahue had approached the Board previously with the idea that we needed a source of emergency food on Gabriola for people who were experiencing a crisis. When the house became ours, a space was made for the Emergency Food Depot.

Fall of 1999 – PHC granted registered charity status.

October 1999 – PHC assumed responsibility for The Gathering Place, which had been operating as an independent business and hired Jessica Plante to continue working with youth. The Youth Programs were very successful and included a Drop-in, Friday night music session, movie night, peer support counseling, peer employment coaching, after school program. PHC funding sources for youth programs seriously expanded with government contracts and the beginning of Bingo Licences and Gaming funds. The Gathering Place operated out of the space where the Credit Union is now located (though much smaller).

In June 2001 – regretfully closed the Resource Centre on Lockinvar as it became too difficult to operate two centres (each in a separate building). The Lauders were selling the house on Lockinvar and gave PHC first dibs on a bid. After much discussion and consideration, the Board of the day determined we were unable to buy the house and property. We continued to operate the Gathering Place out of the space at the Plaza Villa (where Credit Union Insurance office is now). Food Depot moved to several different temporary locations including the Rollo McClay hut, Silva Bay, and out of the back of a car!

March 2002 – moved into the old Raven Feed Supply space (formerly Good Bones). The Gathering Place and Food Depot shared very tight quarters until March 2004.

June 2002 – A Food Programs Coordinator, Debi Brummel was hired and expanded Food Programs to include Cooking With community/Community Kitchens.

Feb 2004 – Gathering Place separated from PHC and moved under the umbrella of the HOPE Centre; PHC moved to 650 North Road (above Suzy's Restaurant). Concentrated on consolidating the Food Depot and food programs. This year was a time of great reflection as the Board spent several months on strategic planning and reviewing our mandate, vision and mission statement. Out of this quiet reflection and strategic planning process, we envisioned a 3 to 5 year plan which we called The Healthy Living Project. (see details below)

Jan 2005 – created the position of General Manager and hired Shelagh Huston. Significant and bold move for PHC, not without risks, but which helped to focus our attention on organizational excellence and effectiveness in the community.

September 2005 – moved to Gabriola Commons; created position of Executive Director and hired Andy Telfer in November (Halloween Day to be exact!). Another significant move which further expanded the footprint in the community and raised more exciting opportunities as well as challenges.

October 2007– When Andy moved on to other challenges, PHC hired Barbara Saunders as the Executive Director. Under her watch, a women's Violence Prevention program was launched, the Food Bank grew and a Food Bank Garden, Seniors Garden and a Kids Garden were developed.

September 2009 - Kathryn Molloy took over the leadership reins and with her vast and deep non-profit management experience we have seen a number of changes including a new

strategic plan, a revised website, a quarterly newsletter, a new client education garden, an affordable housing research project, the continued growth of client support with the continued support of the Food Bank and 3 days of soup social plus 2 days “coffee & cards” and an improved volunteer management system including the placement of a “volunteer” volunteer coordinator.

Executive Summary – Healthy Living Project (2004 – current)

Our health is influenced by many factors – food security, shelter, safety, employment, education, a clean environment and positive relationships. At the core of PHC services and activities is the commitment to health promotion and preventative approaches which enable individuals, families and the community to gain and exercise control over their own health and health choices.

At PHC, we believe that the health and well-being of our community members depends upon effective and nurturing social support networks. Community support networks enhance self-care, mutual aid and a broad based sense of well-being. Social support is crucial for increasing options available to people in times of crisis, for improving an individual’s sense of self worth and self-esteem and for reducing the stresses in our lives.

The skills and expertise to solve problems and achieve goals exist within our community and contribute to concrete and effective community action in setting priorities, making decisions and implementing health strategies.

Like the folks who gathered around a kitchen table ten years ago, People for a Healthy Community continues to envision a community that is child centred; a community whose strength is in equity and diversity; a community where the safety and security of all citizens is paramount; a healthy and vibrant community where individuals achieve their fullest potential and families flourish.

The Healthy Living Project aims to: facilitate the movement from crisis response to community support networks that reduce stress and isolation; improve health awareness and practices; create a sense of connection in the community and ensure equitable access to information and resources.

In order to meet the goals of the Healthy Living Project, we have identified the following objectives:

- To enhance Food Security in our community – Community Food Support Network
- To ensure that women & children in our community live in a safe and violence free environment.
- To support those facing employment and disability barriers with access to information and resources
- To work with families & caregivers to build family strengths, and promote healthy childhood development