



BUILDING RESILIENT NEIGHBOURHOODS



FOUR YEARS OF LEARNINGS

2012-2016

BUILDING RESILIENT NEIGHBOURHOODS



PARTNERS & FUNDERS

2012-2016

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January 2017



VICTORIA
FOUNDATION



THE BUILDING RESILIENT NEIGHBOURHOODS PROJECT

FOUR YEARS OF LEARNINGS (2012-16)

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INTRODUCTION



Building Resilient Neighbourhoods (BRN) is a collaborative effort to help create more resilient communities and neighbourhoods in British Columbia's Capital Region. From 2012-2016 the project was led by the Community Social Planning Council of Greater Victoria and Transition Victoria, and was assisted in its development by support from BC Healthy Communities, Canadian Centre for Community Renewal and Fraser Basin Council's Smart Planning for Communities program. As of 2017, the Building Resilient Neighbourhoods' project is hosted by BC Healthy Communities.

Our 2014 report, *"Strengthening Neighbourhood Resilience: Opportunities for Communities and Local Governments"* (see Appendix), explored the main characteristics of resilient communities and reviewed examples of the roles that citizens, non-profit organizations and local governments could each play in successful resilience efforts. This new report provides the results of Building Resilient Neighbourhoods' "pilot phase" – our four years of efforts to help implement these principles of practice in the Capital Region.

THIS REPORT INCLUDES:

- A brief introduction to the importance of resilience and specifically of place-based resilience building.
- An explanation of BRN's multi-leveled approach to building resilience.
- A review of BRN's main activities at the regional, municipal and neighbourhood levels from the beginning of 2012 to the end of 2016.
- A summary of key strategic learnings from the project grouped into three overarching themes of developing citizen and organizational involvement, igniting collective action, and sustaining long-term engagement in resilience building.
- A description of the next steps that BRN is taking to enhance resilience building efforts in the Capital Region.
- An Appendix with web links to BRN's main publications and resources that are identified in this report.

ABOUT COMMUNITY & NEIGHBOURHOOD RESILIENCE

Resilience is all about strengthening our community's ability to respond and adapt to major changes and deep challenges. It's about all of us working together to build stronger, more connected neighbourhoods and communities that are intentional about balancing the diverse needs of people and the planet for current and future generations.

To be resilient in the face of complex, changing circumstances, we need the relationships, leadership and skills to work together: neighbour to neighbour and across different organizations and sectors. We also need to be open to new ideas, encourage diversity, and experiment and innovate so that we are continually learning.



Communities today face a complex range of social, environmental and economic challenges. Many people are seeing that new ways of addressing these challenges are needed – approaches that acknowledge the interrelated and dynamic nature of the issues in ever-changing communities.

Using “resilience” as a lens to assess our communities, and as a reference set of capacities that we need to strengthen them, can help us respond to this dynamic complexity.

Resilient communities take charge of their current and future circumstances themselves, and also seek the resources or expertise that they need from outside. In addition, resilient communities do this in ways that ensure citizens’ basic needs (food, shelter, water, energy, livelihoods etc.) are met. Whether at the level of a household, apartment building, street, neighbourhood, or whole community, the basic resilience capacities remain the same and, to build resilience, we need ways to encourage and support these capacities at all of these levels.

“Resilience is our ability to respond and adapt to change in ways that are proactive, build local capacity, and ensure essential needs are met.”

Why is Resilience so Important?

By using a “place-based” rather than an “issue-based approach”, we support people, organizations and groups in neighbourhoods to build relationships and social capital where they live.

If ever there was a need for neighbours, neighbourhoods and whole communities to come together to adapt to change, it is today. Across the country, communities are experiencing the pressures of deteriorating infrastructure, climate change, financial instability, growing income inequality, and the rising prevalence of chronic health conditions.

Our natural resource base is diminishing and many ecosystems are threatened. Many people are experiencing a greater sense of isolation from their neighbours. But amidst these vast challenges, there is a spreading hope and optimism that we have the methods and the means to transform our communities to have better chances of surviving and thriving into the future.



Why a Place-based Focus in Neighbourhoods?

The Building Resilient Neighbourhoods project focuses at the neighbourhood scale because of our interest in supporting comprehensive, place-based change. (Though our work has occurred mainly in urban settings, many of our approaches can transfer to – or be easily adapted for – rural settings.) By using a “place-based” rather than an “issue-based approach”, we support people, organizations and groups in neighbourhoods to build relationships and social capital where they live.

This shared connection to place helps engage residents and organizations in building long-term resilience to respond to a multitude of changing situations. A focus on neighbourhoods also provides a manageable scale where people can often see first-hand the impacts of their actions. This, in turn, has the potential to create more attachment to people and place, strengthen pride, and promote more engagement.

The Building Resilient Neighbourhoods Approach

The Building Resilient Neighbourhoods approach builds on the many examples of best practices in comprehensive community and neighbourhood development, while bringing a unique focus on resilience capacity-building.

Based on our work to date, we have identified four core aspects of a community that are involved in enhancing neighbourhood resilience, and our goal is to assist communities in building these capacities locally:



1. Shifting **ATTITUDES & VALUES** towards greater social cohesion and positive, solutions-focused outlooks.



2. Identifying and addressing gaps in human, natural and built **INFRASTRUCTURE & RESOURCES**.



3. Strengthening local ownership and control of the **LOCAL ECONOMY**.



4. **ENGAGING LEADERS**, groups and citizens in **NEIGHBOURHOOD-BASED PLANNING** and action to ensure local needs are met by building on local strengths and assets and leveraging resources from outside the neighbourhood.

WHAT DID WE DO?

WHAT DID WE DO? (Pilot Phase 2012-2016)



The Building Resilient Neighbourhoods project was launched in 2012 as a collaborative effort to strengthen cohesion and capacity within neighbourhoods in the Greater Victoria region. During this pilot phase, our interest and intention was to test and learn as much as possible about the capacities that “make a difference” towards increasing neighbourhood resilience, and to discover what approaches to resilience-building gain the most traction and have the most potential.

THIS PILOT PHASE FOCUSED ON THREE MAIN AREAS OF ACTIVITY:

1. RESILIENCE EDUCATION & CAPACITY-BUILDING ACROSS THE REGION.

- Directly engaged over 900 residents across the region in 14 different workshops about resilience-building.
- Facilitated educational workshops to residents and leaders in five different neighbourhoods to help identify strengths, vulnerabilities and priorities for resilience action.
- Developed the tool, “Characteristics of a Resilient Neighbourhood or Community – a Checklist,” to support individual and group assessments and engagement around resilience strengths and vulnerabilities.
- Produced the report “Strengthening Neighbourhood Resilience: Opportunities for Communities and Local Government”.
- Involved 150 residents in regional resilience-building through community theatre and arts-based engagement.
- Published “Laughing Allowed: A How to Guide for Making a Physical Comedy Show to Build Neighbourhood Resilience”.

2. RESILIENCE ASSESSMENT, PLANNING, & COLLABORATIVE ACTION IN PILOT NEIGHBOURHOODS & MUNICIPALITIES.

- Partnered with the Esquimalt Residents Association and Township of Esquimalt to facilitate resilience assessment, visioning and planning workshops, and a Resilient Streets pilot.
- Engaged 180 residents and over 20 neighbourhood groups in comprehensive resilience assessment and action planning in the demonstration neighbourhood of Victoria West.
- Hosted a “Resilient Neighbourhood Resource Table” of approximately 15 representatives of organizations, businesses and citizen-groups in Victoria West, and facilitated networking and action planning.
- In collaboration with the Vic West Resilient Neighbourhood Resource Table, supported the launch of the first-ever Vic West Street Fest.

3. STRENGTHENING NEIGHBOUR-TO-NEIGHBOUR CONNECTIONS & COLLABORATION IN PILOT NEIGHBOURHOODS & MUNICIPALITIES.

- Supported 24 individuals/groups and approximately 300 households in our Resilient Streets pilot program focused on building neighbour-to-neighbour connections on residential streets and in multi-family residential buildings.
- Partnered with BC Housing to offer discussions, coaching and support in resilience-building to tenant leaders.
- Hosted peer learning sessions for Resilient Streets block champions.

WHAT DID WE DO?

Feedback from Workshop Participants:



"I'd like to take the resilience checklist to our community association, as I think that it might be a useful way for guiding the association's activities."



"I gained a greater awareness of community organizations and what is going on in my community."



"Everyone I met was new to me. I am more engaged now than I ever have been."



"Everyone I met was new to me. I am more engaged now than I ever have been."

WHAT DID WE DO?

Resilience Education & Capacity Building Across the Region *cont'd*

Along with these workshops, the BRN team provided a range of other mentorship, peer support and learning events to assist citizen and organizational champions in identifying resilience strengths, vulnerabilities, and priorities for action, including:

- **Workshops for community association members and residents** in the Victoria neighbourhoods of North Saanich and North Park, and in the District of Highlands.
- **A partnership with BC Housing** which offered education, coaching and support for tenant leaders to develop and deliver a Resilient Streets program for other tenants. (For a description of BRN's Resilient Streets program, see the section "Building neighbour-to-neighbour Connections through Resilient Streets".)
- **A partnership with the District of Saanich** which offered a customized resilience learning series for residents of Saanich, leading to Resilient Streets and citizen-led project activities.
- **A partnership with the Esquimalt Residents Association and the Township of Esquimalt** that offered two resilience visioning and planning workshops, follow-up support for three cross-sectoral table action-planning sessions, and the delivery of Resilient Streets workshops and micro-grants.
- **A regional community-based theatre project** which brought together a group of citizens from Victoria West and other neighbourhoods to develop and perform an original comedic musical show, "Laughing Allowed! – The Slapstick World of Neighbourhood Activism." The final show was performed for a regional audience and was followed by an interactive conversation between audience and performers. This project also led to the writing and web-release of a free, do-it-yourself guide to using physical comedy as a method for building neighbourhood resilience.
- **Presentations** by the Building Resilient Neighbourhoods team at three provincial and national-level learning events.

Laughing Allowed!

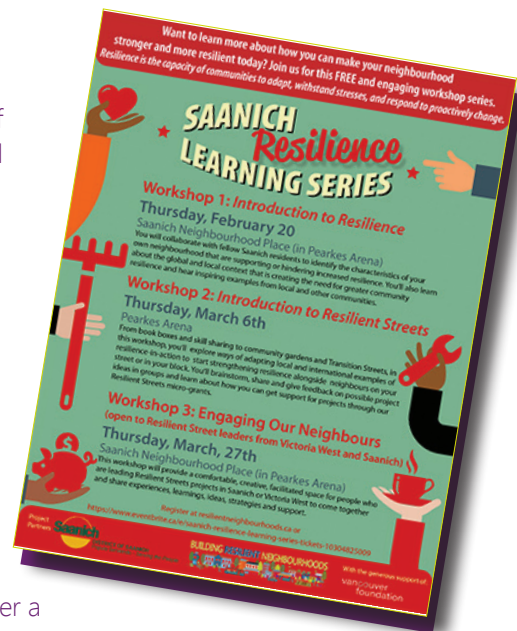


Using Community Theatre and Arts-based Engagement to Build Resilience

In the fall of 2014, a group of people from across the region who shared both an interest in their neighbourhood and a quirky sense of humour were brought together to explore a question: *Could they turn their experiences of the ups and downs of neighbourhood leadership, activism and volunteering into physical comedy sketches?*

Project participants were trained in theatre and physical comedy techniques over six weeks and collaboratively developed a show called "Laughing Allowed! – The Slapstick World of Neighbourhood Activism."

The final show was performed for a regional audience and was followed by an interactive conversation between audience and performers. The show and ensuing collective conversation explored the "rewards, pitfalls and pratfalls" of neighbourhood volunteering, and afforded opportunities for a shared examination of the vital roles of artistic creativity and humour in building resilience.



Resilience Assessment, Planning, & Collaborative Action in Pilot Neighbourhoods & Municipalities

WHAT DID WE DO?

In our efforts to more effectively learn about what it takes to build neighbourhood resilience, we focused the majority of our efforts in one pilot neighbourhood over two years: Victoria West in the municipality of Victoria. In addition, in 2014, Building Resilient Neighbourhoods was invited to collaborate with the Esquimalt Residents Association to do resilience

engagement work in the nearby Township of Esquimalt (population 16,000), and we agreed to participate. We considered that this would provide a unique opportunity to compare different community resilience-building approaches, at different scales, with different levels of involvement from BRN.

VICTORIA WEST RESILIENCE ASSESSMENT:

Beginning in 2013, we partnered with residents and organizations in Victoria West for an intensive process that engaged us collectively in assessing, planning and taking action on neighbourhood resilience. As a first step, we invited residents, neighbourhood groups and organizational leaders to help assess the resilience strengths and vulnerabilities of their neighbourhood. We explored how Victoria West responds and adapts to change in four main dimensions of neighbourhood resilience: attitudes and values; resources and infrastructure (built and natural environments); local economy; and leadership, engagement and community-wide planning.

During this process, we drew on Statistics Canada data and engaged with close to 180 Victoria West residents through a series of surveys, interviews and workshops, including “Neighbourhood Living Rooms” set up at various events and venues to engage citizens in conversations about their neighbourhood. This resulted in a detailed document of data and analysis – a “Resilience Snapshot” of the neighbourhood. Residents and champions were then gathered together for a “Resilience Assembly,” where the Resilience Snapshot was used to guide discussions and the setting of action priorities to strengthen resilience in the neighbourhood.

“I think the experience of diverse groups working together to create a neighbourhood event creates bonds that will likely last. Hopefully those bonds can be reactivated to address the community vulnerabilities.”

~ Vic West Resilient Neighbourhood Resource Table members

“It always helps to build and maintain community connections – I know that going forward, when we are looking to share information, or ask for insights or support, that we have a much larger network of folks from which to choose.”

“It confirmed what I’ve believed already: It is cooperation and collaboration that will help us all to get where we want to be, and not competition. And it is possible. There are so many good people in Vic West willing to help out and be part of the moving-forward process.”



WHAT DID WE DO?



One of the key resilience priorities identified through the Victoria West Resilience Snapshot and Resilience Assembly was an interest in bridging across the neighbourhood. Many neighbourhood groups and organizations were interested in coming together to build networks, collaborations, and a more “joined up” approach to neighbourhood development. Many also identified concerns about growing economic and geographic divides among Victoria West’s “sub-neighbourhoods.” With these and related resilience interests in mind, the Resilient Neighbourhood Resource Table decided to undertake a tangible project together which would enable them to foster greater collaboration between groups and organizations: They collaboratively coordinated the first-ever Vic West Street Fest.

In June of 2015, the outdoor festival took over a prominent street along the downtown waterway, showcasing and celebrating the groups, organizations, businesses and people of the neighbourhood, and drew an estimated 2,500 visitors over the course of the day. The event occurred again in 2016 without any involvement from BRN.

Resilience Assessment, Planning, & Collaborative Action in Pilot Neighbourhoods & Municipalities *cont'd*

VICTORIA WEST RESILIENT NEIGHBOURHOOD RESOURCE TABLE (RNRT):

Following the Resilience Assembly, the Building Resilient Neighbourhoods team convened and supported regular meetings over 18 months of a Resilient Neighbourhood Resource Table (RNRT) in Victoria West. The RNRT was comprised of a core group of approximately 15 people from organizations, businesses and associations representing

diverse interests, sectors, and stakeholder groups based in the neighbourhood, including schools, community associations, social service agencies, housing providers, faith groups, real estate developers, grassroots community groups, and not-for-profit organizations. Together, the RNRT:

- Reviewed and discussed the research that was done on Victoria West’s resilience strengths and vulnerabilities, and evaluated possible priorities for action.
- Explored ways to build greater neighbourhood resilience, such as “connecting the dots” between activities already going on, identifying resources already available, taking a comprehensive approach to neighbourhood activities, inviting new participants to the RNRT, and building stakeholder relationships.
- Identified priorities and developed a shared agenda and action plan for the RNRT, and began to implement these.
- Engaged in ongoing sharing of reflections and learnings about the RNRT efforts.
- Conducted networking activities and provided assistance to each other on small projects.
- Collaborated on organizing the first-ever Vic West Street Fest, an outdoor celebration and showcase of neighbourhood groups, organizations, and businesses.

As of June 2016, the Victoria West RNRT has been continuing its activities for nearly a year without BRN’s assistance, being sustained by local neighbourhood champions and leaders.



ESQUIMALT RESILIENCE ENGAGEMENT PROCESS:

In contrast to our more comprehensive work in Victoria West, we did not undertake any type of resilience assessment surveys, interviews or research in the Township of Esquimalt. Instead, Esquimalt citizens, elected officials, and organizational leaders attended two half-day workshops where they were introduced to resilience and conducted their own SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis of each of the four dimensions of resilience for their community.

By the end of the second workshop, participants had selected four projects to move forward, and each project had a lead named to convene a subsequent planning session. BRN then helped convene and facilitate several subsequent meetings involving organizations in Esquimalt that shared the specific interest of developing ways to strengthen citizen engagement and leadership. (See the Case Studies in the “What Did We Learn?” section for more details and discussion.)



WHAT DID WE DO?

Building neighbour-to-neighbour connections through "Resilient Streets"

In the Victoria West neighbourhood, the Township of Esquimalt, and the District of Saanich, we developed and implemented a "Resilient Streets" program

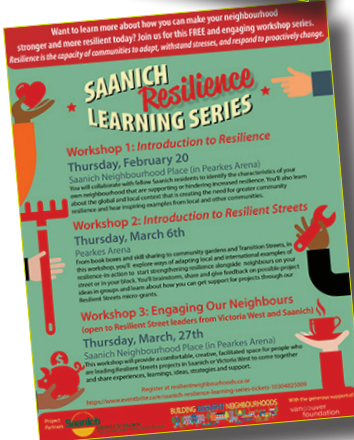
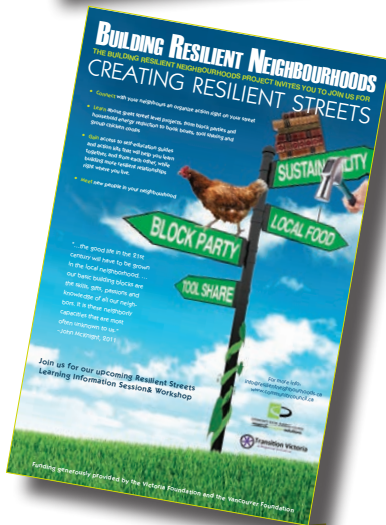
to offer specific support for fostering stronger neighbour-to-neighbour connections on residential streets and in multi-family buildings.

The Resilient Streets program provided practical support to individuals and groups of citizens in four key ways:

- 1) Orientation and learning sessions that provided inspirational ideas for neighbours coming together to build resilience on their streets or in their buildings.
- 2) A downloadable and printed, take-home "Resilient Streets Toolkit" of ideas and resources that provided a menu of options for types of activities that people could initiate with their neighbours.
- 3) Small micro-grants of \$40 to help pay for food and beverages for an initial neighbour get-together, and up to \$200 for group resilience projects.
- 4) Coordination, networking and shared learning with other Resilient Streets champions.

Altogether, through this small pilot, we gave out 24 micro-grants and approximately 300 households directly participated in various Resilient Streets activities.

On the following pages are some examples of the events.



GATHERINGS & CELEBRATIONS:

These were events designed to begin to nurture social cohesion through celebratory get-togethers. Activities included block parties, street potlucks and celebrations, outdoor street hockey tournaments, and pancake breakfasts that brought neighbours together to create a vision for their block.



SHARED SPACES & PLACES:

Some projects that emerged from initial neighbour gatherings included street beautification and murals, garden sharing, free mini-libraries (book-boxes), and community benches that created “bumping space” for neighbours to encounter each other and connect.



“We held our planning picnic last Sunday with great success. So great, in fact, that we ended up painting all the poles on our street that same day. I really wasn’t prepared for that outcome, but one neighbour in her 70s showed up ready to get going! So we brought out whatever paints we had from past household projects and a friend ran down to [a hardware store] for a couple primary colors and an off-tint – and voila!

– Vic West Resilient Streets Champion
(Pole Painting)

“I struggle with health challenges to do my own gardening, so it was just really heartening for me to see the offers of support, and assistance should I ever need it. It just has me feeling much more connected with my fellow Vic Westians.

– Vic West Resilient Streets Champion
(Shared Garden Project)

WHAT DID WE DO?

Building neighbour-to-neighbour connections through “Resilient Streets” *cont’d*

SHARING AND THE LOCAL ECONOMY:

Many neighbours developed opportunities for more sharing between neighbours, such as regular meal sharing and sharing of tools, gardens, and even cooperatively owned backyard chickens. Others came together with a focus on the local economy, and started a bulk food-buying club, collectively purchased products to improve home energy efficiency, or hosted street-wide garage sales.



PEER LEARNING & ACTION:

These were typically more ambitious projects to build local self-reliance through focused learning and action. For example, one group of neighbours participated in the “Transition Streets” program – nine households worked through a series of modules on conservation issues such as food consumption, waste production and recycling, and household energy use. Results included five households installing heat pumps, four getting insulation upgrades, six putting in clotheslines, five installing low-flow toilets, and seven initiating composting.



"The Transitions Streets program had a very powerful impact on my street. Before the program neighbours would wave to one another but seldom reached out to talk to one another. Now we know each other so well that it feels more like a big family. We often get together for work (and play) parties to help one another with projects and events. We also support each other with house/pet sitting, sharing gardens/harvests, sharing tools, repairing equipment, figuring out how to vote and a host of more trivial things. Transition Streets has transformed my street into the type of community that can deal with anything, good or bad."

— Vic West Resilient Streets Champion
(Transition Streets)

"We had our first Food Buyers meeting today thanks to the \$40 [Resilient Streets] grant – thanks so much for kick-starting the action. WOW, what started as 'let's buy organic food together to share costs' exploded into so many other offerings of sharing support... chicken coop, carpool to local farms to support local farmers and buy local food, pet sitting, seed sharing, yard sharing, home-grown food swapping, street canning parties.... and the food buying group of course!"

— Vic West Resilient Streets Champion
(Food Buying)

"Even people who did not attend have been friendlier, as they now know our name and where we live. There are now more conversations on the street and less [invasive] ivy in the park. There is garden produce being shared and more greetings being called out as people drive or ride by. Now we are at work planning a bee-friendly garden to occupy an empty lot."

— Vic West Resilient Streets
Champion
(Block Party)

"Now that people know each other, conversations can happen more easily. I set out just wanting to get to know a few more faces on the street. I think this is the first step to community building and resiliency. I didn't have an agenda other than that; thinking that next year, now that we've taken this first step, would be a good time to introduce some topics of discussion such as resiliency, emergency preparedness, community involvement and support networks, etc."

— Vic West Resilient Streets
Champion
(Block Party)

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

WHAT DID WE LEARN?



Our main learnings from our activities from 2012-16 can be grouped into three thematic areas. Essentially, these themes follow the trajectory of people's involvement in building resilience: We learned about what it is that makes citizens and organizational representatives become interested and more involved in building resilience, what helps keep them engaged and taking action, and what helps them sustain their resilience efforts.

These themes themselves reflect one of our most important learnings from all of our work. Our "Characteristics of a Resilient Neighbourhood or

Community" checklist divided resilience into four dimensions: Attitudes and Values; Infrastructures and Resources (Natural and Built Environments); Local Economy; Community-wide Leadership, Engagement and Planning. While these are important dimensions of resilience, what we found is that ultimately all of these were in an important way secondary to an overarching factor: the social capital and networks borne of trusting, dynamic interpersonal and professional relationships. This theme, more than any other, is the underlying thread that weaves together all of our other learnings.

What Inspires and Helps Us to Connect and Become Involved in Building Resilience?



Strengthening connections to place strengthens interest in building resilience.

A sense of connection to the people and places where we live is central to building resilience. Yet in the neighbourhoods and municipalities where we were involved, we found that most people lived in one neighbourhood, worked in another neighbourhood, and shopped in yet another.

The communications media with which they regularly engaged, such as television, radio, email, periodicals, social media and the web were often not very connected to their neighbourhood or even to their broader communities. This was mirrored at the sectoral level: Many organizations, businesses and groups that were active in a particular neighbourhood were not specifically neighbourhood-focused in their mis-

sions or activities, and indeed often had few direct personal or professional involvements with their immediate neighbours.

This situation is of course common in modern urban areas, but it produced important learnings for us. First, it was difficult to utilize media to connect with people in specific neighbourhoods, or for neighbours or organizations to learn about and connect with each other through these mediums. Second, these communications challenges sometimes undermined people's already eroding "sense of place."

Conversely, through our work we found that, as people "made an investment" of their time in getting to know each other and their neighbourhood better, this in turn deepened their sense of place and neighbourhood identity, and strengthened their appreciation for it.

We also saw that people were drawn to taking action to enhance that sense of place, by taking on projects that enhanced neighbourhood design, such as creating “bumping spaces” for spontaneous encounters. People also took action to bridge gaps between the differing types or depths of connection to place often experienced by more transient renters, owners of single-family dwellings, or owners of condominiums in the neighbourhood.

Crossing interpersonal barriers and creating space for relationships is challenging but exciting – and key to resilience building.

The social fragmentation that is common in modern urban areas, we learned, has for some people contributed to creating anxiety in relation to interpersonal connecting with their neighbours. In short, many of our participants told us that they felt uncomfortable simply knocking on the doors of strangers, or calling up local businesses or organizations simply to “connect”.

For citizens, we heard that our Resilient Streets Toolkit (with sample projects, handbill invitations for neighbours, posters etc.) and micro-grants helped people overcome this anxiety by providing them with a small, extra sense of professionalism, legitimacy and purpose. When we brought Resilient Streets leaders together, we again heard this theme that people were deeply appreciative just to be given this loosely guided opportunity to connect. Similarly, in our regional workshop series we heard frequently that people were grateful to be provided with a

space to meet and talk with others about resilience building.

And finally, participants in the RNRT told us that BRN’s role as an outside facilitator steering meetings with a flexible resilience-building agenda helped move the group forward until they started experiencing for themselves the significant rewards of networking and collaborating on neighbourhood initiatives.

In essence, we repeatedly found that all of the circumstantial impediments to interpersonal and inter-organizational connecting actually provided significant opportunities for resilience building. This was the case because, for many people, this context had created a yearning for greater connection and belonging that simply needed a small amount of support and encouragement to become activated.

We observed that multi-family buildings such as apartments and condominiums, however, posed more significant challenges for people to overcome, because their design structures often restricted communications from outside parties and did not always support spontaneous encounters between their inhabitants. Our research also revealed that more work could be done to develop resilience-building project ideas that are appropriate for people living in apartments and condominiums, especially since these can often house the majority of inhabitants in urban areas.



“It’s easier than it seems to just do it, to just get out there and talk to people and make something happen. People want to be a part of community and to be invited.”

— Resilient Streets Champion

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

What Inspires and Helps Us to Connect and Become Involved in Building Resilience *cont'd*

Engage diversity through the head, heart and hands: It's vital to meet people "where they are at" by working at multiple scales with guides, examples, tools and resources to support different ideas and interests.

We heard that many people felt extremely concerned, but also easily overwhelmed and powerless in the face of social, environmental and economic challenges. In that context, at the street, neighbourhood and regional levels, we consistently found that practical, solutions-focused, highly-localizable examples and resources for building resilience inspired people. Some were more motivated to prepare for large-scale threats in the future, while others were more motivated to constructively and positively re-shape the present in small but important ways. In essence, though, many people were deeply drawn to resilience-building because the

approach helped shape both big-picture and small-scale solutions with both the short and long-term view in mind.

By working at multiple scales – household, street, neighbourhood-wide, municipality-wide, and regionally – we were able to engage a greater diversity of people in resilience building. Some were drawn to activities at the household or street levels, while others were more engaged by neighbourhood-wide initiatives; some were interested in social cohesion while others were concerned about food or water issues. People liked to be able to get involved through activities that engaged either their head (e.g. learning about resilience capacities), hands (e.g. taking action on small-scale resilience projects) or heart (e.g. developing relationships and strengthening social connections). It became clear that having opportunities for a range of activity options at different scales – meeting people where they are – is vital to building resilience.



What Motivates Collective Action for Resilience Building?

It is valuable to assess local resilience to help optimize limited resources – but the timing and scope of the assessment should be adjusted for the situation.

In our neighbourhood-wide and municipal-wide resilience building efforts, we started with the assumption that it was important for residents, groups and organizations to have a picture of current resilience strengths and vulnerabilities in order to set priorities and develop an action plan

for enhancing resilience capacity. The unplanned, fortuitous opportunity to conduct different resilience assessment processes in the neighbourhood of Vic West and in the Township of Esquimalt contributed to our learning about how to approach resilience assessment moving forward.

In the initial stages of our efforts in Vic West, we spent significant time and resources in conducting interviews, surveys, an assembly, a statistical study, and other analyses to create a "Resilience Snapshot"



that successfully identified key resilience strengths and vulnerabilities in the neighbourhood. We believed that this would help people prioritize actions and optimize the use of limited resources for creating resilience.

However, we found that the Snapshot had more limited effects on galvanizing action on specific priorities than we initially anticipated. (So far, at least – the Vic West RNRT and many Resilient Streets continue as of this writing). The people involved in Resilient Streets or who participated in the RNRT took the Snapshot into consideration, but in the end it appeared that many preferred to decide for themselves what the priorities for action would be, based on their own and their shared interests, skills, energies, and financial resources.

We concluded that the scope and comprehensiveness of a resilience assessment should be adjusted for the situation – ideally, the people taking leadership on priorities themselves determine what kind or scope of assessment is needed to help guide them. In addition, building robust community engagement processes into the analysis and action-planning phases after an assessment is critical. Participants need to set aside sufficient time to consider what data they will seek, how they will analyze that data, and who will be engaged in what ways to evaluate, rank and take action together on the resilience priorities that emerge. Choosing the “right-for-you” resilience assessment, community engagement, and action-planning processes can assist in building the relationships between citizens, leaders or organizations that will be essential for taking action later.



What Motivates Collective Action for Resilience Building *cont'd*

The Link Between Resilience Assessment & Action: Two Case Studies

CASE STUDY 1: The Vic West resilience assessment process

was intended to engage citizens and organization/group stakeholders in thinking about resilience strengths and vulnerabilities in their neighbourhood, help guide the setting of priorities, and galvanize action.

We found that the statistical research, questionnaires, on-line surveys, and in-person interviews conducted over several months were labour- and time-



intensive. While the efforts did yield a significant amount of new data for the Resilience Snapshot, during discussion at the Resilience Assembly several important concerns were raised. Some felt that the number of responses was not large enough to allow for robust interpretations. (We had obtained 179 completed surveys, representing about 3% of the approximate 6,000 population.) And due to the extent of the focus in our data gathering on subjective “perceptual” indicators (where people reported on their personal perceptions of the neighbourhood’s resilience strengths and vulnerabilities), the consequent “objective” validity or meaning of certain results was debated.

Finally, attempts to order the emerging priorities in an action plan were hampered by a need to collectively take much more time to first establish the criteria for evaluating and ranking those priorities (e.g. Would we rank a resilience priority higher if it was more laudable, or more feasible? Or if it affected a large number of people in small ways, or a small number of people in large ways?)

Later, the Vic West RNRT was formed with the intention of creating a multi-sector,



comprehensive, collaborative group that could give leadership and take action on some of the priorities identified. While we imagined the RNRT would quickly select a priority to act upon, participants instead requested time to learn more about each other and about the activities of their respective organizations and groups before taking on a large-scale project together. In the end, the actions the RNRT took on tended to reflect a dynamic combination of the priorities identified in the Resilience Snapshot and the particular interests, skills, resources and capacities of the various RNRT members.

CASE STUDY 2: In the Township of Esquimalt, a much less comprehensive and quicker Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) approach to assessing resilience got participants engaged in thinking about resilience in their community.

However, this approach was not robust enough or diverse enough to surface some of the underlying issues affecting community resilience. Projects selected at the planning workshop resulted

We concluded that a quick assessment of resilience based on residents' "gut sense" can be valuable, but only if there is a diverse enough base of participants and enough time to ensure that a shared understanding of the community emerges.

In addition, as in Vic West, we learned that it is critically important for participating groups and organizations to feel a sense of ownership of the assessment process and priority setting, if they are



from some residents having "energy" to take action on them, rather than from a deeper analysis of root causes and vulnerabilities.

Later, informal discussions and subsequent meetings surfaced a particular, widespread resilience vulnerability among organizations in the community, yet it became clear that no organization was ready or able to take leadership on that particular issue.

the ones most likely to be responsible for taking leadership on priorities.

Out of these learnings, we revised our Characteristics of Neighbourhood and Community Resilience – A Checklist to outline a range of approaches to assessing neighbourhood resilience. This tool now provides suggestions for both "light touch" and "deeper dive" assessment activities.

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

What Motivates Collective Action for Resilience Building *cont'd*

“You held the RNRT together, provided structure and consistency. Allowed the RNRT the time to establish a project without judging or too much guidance – just enough to keep everyone going and aware of time passing.

By facilitating the meetings, sending out email notices and reminders, you kept the RNRT on track, so now there is a concrete example (Vic West Street Fest) of what a diverse group of neighbours can accomplish.”

— Vic West Resilient Neighbourhood Resource Table member

Convening and “secretariat” support can be light, but may be vital to keep groups going.

We observed that optimally facilitating the Resilient Neighbourhood Resource Table (RNRT) required substantive BRN staff time – more than a volunteer could reasonably take on in most circumstances.

We also heard from participants that having an external, neutral partner providing some “light touch” leadership, guidance and administrative support to the group was valuable.

As with many neighbourhood collectives, the RNRT was made up of volunteer leaders (representing less formal or grassroots community groups) as well as organizational representatives who were able to participate as part of their paid staff positions and/or were able to contribute financially in support of particular activities. In this context, it was identified as a valuable contribution to the group dynamics to have BRN as an external, neutral partner helping in different ways to “balance” participation and influence in ongoing ways.

The multiplying value of social connectedness and network capital rapidly becomes visible, and self-reinforcing.

We did not have to persuade people about the value of meeting others, networking and collaborating to build community and neighbourhood

resilience. Whether thinking at the level of the street, neighbourhood or region, most people not only understood that the “sum can be greater than its parts”, but yearned to activate the social and network capital and resilience potential of collaboration. Relationships and trust were key to activating these collaborations, and those relationships could be built either by taking time to get to know each other (and/or to learn about each other’s organizations), or through the experience of successfully accomplishing things together.

Resilient Streets groups were more likely to continue collaborating after their initial meeting or project micro-grant if the people had developed shared interests and felt excited about being together – this basic social cohesion spontaneously led to more shared projects. Similarly, at the RNRT, we found that participants valued time spent at meetings updating each other and networking, and that many small, spontaneous shared projects emerged when participants realized that they could help each other in relatively easy ways by sharing resources, skills, tools etc.

When the RNRT successfully executed a large-scale project – the Vic West Street Fest – this deepened the participants’ trust in each other and further inspired them about the possibilities of continuing the RNRT.

Creative and artistic approaches provide opportunities for learning and can revitalize resilience champions and leaders.

One of the most important learnings from our “Laughing Allowed!—The Slapstick World of Neighbourhood Activism” theatre project (see page 8) came clear during the post-show discussion with the audience. We heard that many members of the audience watching the show had experienced precisely what the performers of the show had experienced while developing it: They felt invigorated and revitalized by seeing familiar tropes, vulnerabilities, contradictions and challenges of neighbourhood engagement reflected and examined in humorous ways. Some remarked on the value of art and humour for helping people openly discuss challenging topics that often remain unspoken or under the surface. They said that they wished more of this kind of light-hearted creativity would infuse their ordinary community work. (One participant from the show later did indeed take clown noses to give to everyone to wear at a community meeting.)



It was an important reminder that a constant focus on “getting to the goal” can reduce the time and space for shared reflecting and self-questioning, which ultimately can restrict shared learning and group creativity and innovation – important underpinnings of resilient communities.

Ongoing learning contributes in important ways to building resilience.

A characteristic of resilient communities is that they are open to learning and innovation in ongoing, adaptive ways – and we saw abundant evidence of that. The more eager that people were

to discover, learn and experiment, the more likely that they could find ways to enjoy exploring collaborative opportunities and trying things out. Especially for groups that were collaborating together over time in more serious ways, it was often a helpful reminder for everyone that a primary aspect of building resilience is to learn how to build resilience together, i.e. that building resilience is not only about the goal but also the process, and any arising difficult situation is in fact the next great learning opportunity.

“I appreciated the fact that you guys know all the things that we worry about and all the things that community engagement is concerned about: People are not showing up, or no volunteers, and so on and so forth. You actually put a little humour into it.”

You made me feel better about the parts that suck!”

~Audience member of Laughing Allowed!

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

How Do We Transition Towards Sustaining Resilience Capacity Over Time?

Working comprehensively, at multiple-scales, and across sectors, is key for strengthening neighbourhood resilience.

The Resilient Streets program inspired people to give leadership, gather neighbours, and take action. Successful Resilient Streets in turn inspired others and created motivation and energy for replication, and thereby created opportunities for scaling. In this small pilot phase, we did not get enough Resilient Streets going in a concentrated area to discover what would happen if they began to overlap and link up, but strategic support for such an effort looks as though it holds great promise.

However, we observed two important limitations that may affect the potential to grow and expand its resilience building. First, many sectors that are important for resilience may not be represented in a particular neighbourhood. Second, the particular neighbourhood is not necessarily central to the mandates of many of the sectors that may be represented there (e.g. a social service organization may have a mandate to support children and families, but not neighbourhood community-building more broadly.)



The RNRT, as an example of a structure supporting cross-sector collaboration and networking, similarly showed potential for incorporating more participants and expanding its resilience reach and impacts. It became very evident to us that comprehensive, cross-sectoral approaches that strengthen social networks across neighbourhood groups and organizations is a critical foundation for resilience. One factor crucial to the continuation of the RNRT was that some of the participating organizations developed a sense of ownership and commitment to the RNRT.

These two factors can create key sector gaps at the RNRT as well as place limits on the contributions or capacities of the participants. Expanding the reach and impact of these kinds of multi-sector tables ultimately may require strategically expanding beyond the neighbourhood level, while not losing the central focus on place and neighbourhood identity.

Organizational leadership can be a critical element of long-term resilience – but leadership can be shared.

From the outset of our work in Esquimalt and Vic West, we believed that the emergence of organizational leadership would be essential for sustaining resilience efforts over the long term. In Esquimalt, we saw how the lack of any single organization with the resources, mandate, and sense of ownership of the resilience agenda hindered continuation of the work that had been started. In Vic West,

however, a different process unfolded. Specific organizations “anteed up” with significant contributions to help sustain the RNRT activities, and that spurred contributions from other organizations at the table. A shared ownership and shared leadership approach emerged, and the RNRT was then able to continue without any further BRN involvement.

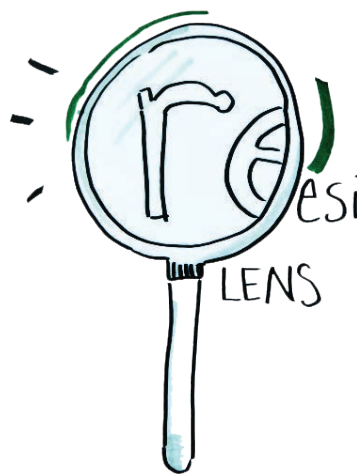
The resilience lens can add value when moving beyond traditional neighbourhood and community planning.

In both Esquimalt and Vic West, we saw that both simple and extensive resilience assessment processes quickly brought a broader range of important issues forward which were often not included in traditional planning, such as resource usage, local business ownership, and community leadership and volunteering. However, we also observed that, while resilience is a powerful lens for neighbourhood and community leaders to view their community, “building resilience” is a longer-term, more complex proposition than the more typical project-by-project approach to community building. The focus on capacity building can also be daunting; many of us tend to be more

comfortable building with bricks and mortar than we are engaging with each other around, for example, attitudes and leadership skills. And without an

immediate emergency or similar “pressure” driving people, it can be difficult to generate the commitments necessary for developing relationships that may only become essential much later. For all of these same reasons, though, the resilience lens provides important opportunities for inspiring new discussions

and galvanizing new approaches.





SUMMARY: The Building Resilient Neighbourhoods Principles

- HEAD •
- HEART •
- HAND •

Being open to deeper, stronger social connections with each other and with the places we share.

Doing through action in small-scale projects.

Learning together and developing the capacities that drive resilience building.

Over the course of four years of experiments, explorations and discussions with neighbourhood champions, organizational collaborators, and many other participants, we have gradually condensed and digested all of our learnings into a set of principles. These principles now guide all of our efforts at building neighbourhood resilience

Work Comprehensively

Work comprehensively, at multiple-scales, and across sectors: While nurturing specific, small-scale (e.g. street level) projects that build social cohesion and address immediate issues, work to facilitate connections and cross-sector collaborations both within and outside neighbourhoods. This approach fosters the internal and external connections that neighbourhoods need, and also begins the process of building city and region-wide connections grounded in shared interests.

Encourage

Encourage both the short and long-term view: Foster quick-action projects at the household, street and block level, while also supporting the longer-term work of neighbourhood-wide, comprehensive planning and action.

Inspire

Provide inspiring examples of change to create hope and motivate action: Many people feel daunted by the prospect of trying to bring about meaningful change, so it can be helpful and inspiring to draw on a myriad of varied examples, big and small, of people successfully working together to create resilience in neighbourhoods and communities.

Assess **Assess local resilience to optimize limited resources:** Use the characteristics of resilience as a guide for helping neighbourhoods assess their resilience strengths and vulnerabilities at the level of detail and complexity that is right for their circumstances. Encourage communities to invest their energy and resources where these will have the most positive impacts.

Go Beyond **Go beyond conventional planning:** Focusing on resilience can help communities consider a broader range of important issues that are often not included in traditional planning, such as resource usage, local business ownership, and social determinants of health and well-being. The resilience lens can be valuable to draw attention to the capacity side of the equation: the leadership, skills, and attitudes needed to work successfully in this complex environment.

Learn Adaptively **Constant learning and innovation are key aspects of resilience.** An informal developmental evaluation approach that includes team learning and reflection processes, and reflective processes at meetings and gatherings can support building this critical “resilience muscle”.

Engage **Provide opportunities for people to engage in different ways:** For a process of resilience building to be successful, it must engage all interests of the community, including citizens, organizations, businesses and local leaders. A more diverse range of people and organizations can be engaged by meeting people “where they are at” through a three-pronged approach of engaging the “head, hands and heart”.





WHERE ARE WE GOING?

In an effort to build on the successes of our work from 2012-16, and in light of our many learnings, Building Resilient Neighbourhoods will be taking action in the following areas in 2016-17:

- 1) Expanding the Resilient Streets program across the City of Victoria.
- 2) Expanding on the theme of multiple entry points or meeting people where they are, and also extending our own collaboration. We have engaged representatives from the municipal government, and a diverse range of other organizations interested in fostering neighbour-to-neighbour connections on issues such as social cohesion, emergency preparedness, and community safety. We all share a desire to strengthen social cohesion at the neighbour-to-neighbour level, and there are opportunities for all of us to work more effectively in collaboration.
- 3) Expanding the Resilient Streets Toolkit with new modules, including ideas for resilience activities that are appropriate for “Vertical Streets” like apartments and condominiums.

Stay in touch!

For more information or to find out what we’re up to:

info@resilientneighbourhoods.ca



APPENDIX:

Tools and Resources for Building Neighbourhood Resilience

All of our publications are available for free downloading at the Building Resilient Neighbourhoods website: www.resilientneighbourhoods.ca

Also see our website for links to a comprehensive list of other resources for building resilience.

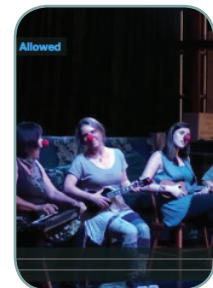


Characteristics of a Resilient Neighbourhood or Community – a Checklist

The checklist comes with a guide to using the framework in different ways.

Laughing Allowed! – The Slapstick World of Neighbourhood Activism

Videos from the show



Strengthening Neighbourhood Resilience: Opportunities for Communities & Local Governments

Laughing Allowed! – A How-to Guide for Making a Physical Comedy Show to Build Neighbourhood Resilience



Resilient Streets Toolkit

Victoria West Resilience Snapshot



Resilient Streets Tools and Templates

Poster, invitations, checklists, & more

