



## Engaging in a *Place-based Approach* to Foster Equitable and Inclusive Communities that are supportive of Aboriginal People in Vancouver

**ALIVE (Aboriginal Life in Vancouver Enhancement) Society** exists to promote, enhance and foster the social, economic, and cultural well-being and health of Aboriginal peoples in Vancouver. Working within a place-based framework to develop inclusive strategies to support Aboriginal individuals, families and extended families where they find themselves, ALIVE creates opportunities for urban Aboriginals in the city of Vancouver to fully engage as citizens in their neighborhoods and in the city as a whole. Founded in 2010, ALIVE now has over 800 Aboriginal members and counting!

ALIVE strives to build effective partnerships and collaboratives, promoting initiatives and strategies that *Enhance* the experiences of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. The recent Environics *Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study (UAPS)* supports our findings that the majority of Aboriginal peoples in Vancouver feel empowered to contribute to community life within their neighborhoods and that they can make Vancouver a better place to live. The UAPS reports that for them success means a balanced life, close to family and friends, raising healthy, well-adjusted children who contribute positively to the community. A large proportion of Aboriginal peoples in our city report multiple barriers to participation, including feelings of stigmatization and negative experiences accessing supports and resources such as housing, education, childcare and employment. ALIVE believes that, using a place-based strategy, we can create avenues for Aboriginal citizens to have meaningful impacts in their communities and to negotiate their role in the urban 'place' on their own terms.

Former ALIVE President Grace Tait and Executive Director Scott Clark celebrating ALIVE—Georgia Straight's Best in Vancouver 2011



### What do we mean by 'Place-Based'?

*Place-based thinking* is a strategic way of looking at how we structure our communities. It acknowledges unique and complex local realities including community norms and values, policies that affect the community and its members, agencies providing services in that area, and the built environment. This approach recognizes communities as spaces where the potential exists to reorganize existing systems in a manner that better reflects the particular social, political, cultural, and ecological variables of 'place'. *Place-based* approaches mobilize resources and capacities to be responsive to local needs and aspirations.

The place where one resides affects all aspects of life. Issues faced by already vulnerable groups, including Aboriginal peoples, immigrants, single-parent families and the elderly, are compounded in communities with pervasive social exclusion, poverty, and poor health. Place-based approaches work to remove barriers, and promote people-centered, participatory service delivery. ALIVE's strategy adopts a strengths-based approach, valuing and drawing on the diverse skills and gifts of each 'place' to create comprehensive, holistic, and integrated solutions which meet both individual and broader community needs.

"People live in places, contribute to places and are affected by places. Poverty and disadvantage are mediated by place, and places are affected by the poverty or otherwise of their inhabitants" (source: Griggs et al, 2008, p.1).

## The Problem with Traditional Approaches

Traditional approaches do not account for individuals and areas faced with a range of interconnected problems such as inadequate housing, poor health, low incomes, safety issues, and crime. Segregated service delivery models addresses these issues in isolation. They fail to offer the appropriate combination of programs/ services which will truly meet the needs of vulnerable individuals and communities



## Common Principles of a PLACE-BASED framework:

### ***Increase social connectedness, decrease***

***isolation.*** Creating opportunities to establish relationships among residents and between residents and neighbourhood institutions is crucial, as research demonstrates that social inclusion is a key factor in increasing the safety and well-being of individuals and the community as a whole.

***Build on and connect existing community supports.*** Service providers partner with local agencies, such as schools, community centres, and neighbourhood houses that are already well-established and trusted in the area, and work collaboratively to “complement, extend and enrich”, rather than working in silos and creating programs and services that are redundant and unconnected.

### ***Increase the capacity for citizens to navigate systems, access resources and lobby for themselves.***

*Community capacity* is defined as the social and material resources that can be leveraged to solve collective problems and improve or maintain the well-being of a given community. Individuals and organizations with credibility, and familiar with local conditions are key to developing new connections and championing the goals and interests of the community. When leaders emerge within a community, their status as peers enables them to serve as role models, and sources of knowledge for other community members.

### ***Engage the community in planning -- ensure mechanisms for input into planning processes and service delivery .***

Place-based approaches feature mechanisms that respond to community concerns, needs, and aspirations. Policy-makers and service providers collaborate to gather community input and feedback, consistently providing opportunities for citizens to have a real voice in issues, policies and services that affect them.

***“Just as we know that parents are in the best position to make decisions for their families, the best solutions to the diverse challenges confronting Canada’s communities are often found locally.***

***Every day, the power of innovation is seen at work in communities across this country, as citizens, businesses and charitable groups join forces to tackle local problems.”***

***- Speech from the Throne, 2010 (Canada)***

## Place-based in Action

In early 2011 in Vancouver’s Inner City, a group of Aboriginal mothers with young children came together with a mission. They were frustrated by discriminatory policies and practices that prevented them from accessing the resources they needed to adequately provide for their families. Determined to have their voices heard and to bring about positive changes for themselves and other families in similar situations, they began to meet at a trusted local community centre. They enlisted the help of two dedicated resource workers and with these necessary supports, began brainstorming ways to break down the barriers. Out of this process, they developed the seed of an innovative peer support and mentorship program. Supported by a successful grant application, they have implemented a training program which will improve their leadership and parenting skills,