MEGAPHONE
CHANGE THAT WORKS | FEBRUARY 2017
$2

LEADING MAN

DUANE HOWARD ON HIS JOURNEY FROM THE DOWNTOWN EASTSIDE TO 'THE REVENANT'

MEGAPHONE
CHANGE THAT WORKS

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Our goal is to provide a voice and an economic opportunity to homeless and low-income people while building grassroots support to end poverty.

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Colin Grainger
Journalist

Colin Grainger is a student of political science at the University of Victoria taking a minor in professional writing, journalism and publishing. As a budding journalist, he enjoys writing on topics with a political connection and following issues that affect people at the local level. He is a volunteer news writer for UVic's student newspaper, *The Martlet*, and has reported on topics like elections, electric cars, environmental issues, housing, and homelessness.

Carolyn Wong
Contributing Writer

Carolyn is a second-generation Chinese Canadian born in Vancouver. Among her childhood memories are trips to Vancouver's Chinatown for family gatherings. In 2003, she reconnected with the neighbourhood when she helped open Radha Yoga, a community-focused yoga centre founded by Yasodhara Ashram. She recalls attending *In The Heart of the City: The Downtown Eastside Community Play* before the centre opened. A compelling history of the neighbourhood performed by 80 community actors, the play left a strong impression and led her to get involved in a variety of community arts initiatives, including Hope in Shadows, which she coordinated for seven years. She currently sits on the advisory board for the DTES Small Arts Grants Project and works as a communications associate with Ecojustice, Canada's only national law charity.

Katrina Jones
Writer, Volunteer

Katrina Jones is a musician living in Vancouver. Her band, Vancouver crush-pop outfit Belle Game (Arts & Crafts), is currently working on their sophomore record. When not working on music, Katrina can be found writing anything from articles to lists, watching "30 Rock," and running her own creative agency, Fine Print.

Jackie Dives
Photojournalist

Jackie Dives is a self-taught documentary and portrait photographer living in Vancouver. For four years, she photographed women giving birth and shared these photos both in print and online in order to bring attention to a misunderstood topic. She is a two-time prize winner at the annual 12x12 Film Photo Competition, and the 2011 recipient of a two-week artist residency scholarship with the Metchosin International School of Art. Her work has been featured by The Tyee, the Huffington Post, Vice, the *Daily Mail*, My Modern Metropolis, the *Medical Observer*, Feature Shoot, Beautiful/Decay, and Disney.

Building connections instead of walls

So many aspects of our lives cross borders—migration, family, travel, culture. The construction of borders and walls—literal or figurative—is used to divide us from each other. Borders, though, for all their certainty on maps, cannot contain zeitgeist. They cannot contain the anxiety of a Trump presidency leaching north, or the cultural chill of Islamophobia. But love and resistance also find their way through borders.

Megaphone is a street paper, a magazine sold by people experiencing poverty. We are members of the International Network of Street Papers (INSP). In 35 countries there are 110 papers like Megaphone, with 27,000 low-income vendors who sell 23.3 million copies per year. From Greece's Sxedia (meaning "life raft" in Greek) rallying against austerity, to Street Sense in Washington, D.C. facing down a hateful Trump regime, street papers worldwide offer a hand up in solidarity to all people facing poverty and homelessness.

Our loss

In response to vendor Mike Illing's death on the streets in December's cold snap (obituary Page 10), Megaphone joined with advocates Pivot Legal Society and Judy Graves to call upon the City of Vancouver to open emergency warming shelters, in addition to the existing winter shelter beds. It should not have taken this needless death to compel action, but to their credit the city opened three neighbourhood community centres as emergency 'warming shelters'—places for someone who is homeless to get out of the cold and warm up. It's a stop-gap measure– but necessary given the full shelters and icy temperatures.

On January 12, I spoke alongside a long list of others in support of the warming centres, at an extraordinary meeting of the Vancouver Parks Board. Three NPA Parks Board commissioners brought forward a motion to immediately suspend the use of community centres as warming centres, and require board approval for any future use. This motion would effectively shut the warming shelters out of community centres, and place roadblocks in the way of future use.

In a few hours that day, we had rallied the Megaphone community to voice its opposition to this motion. In response, the board received more than 300 emails—"99 per cent" in support of the warming shelters, according to Green Party Parks Board Chair Michael Wiebe. It was an outpouring of empathy.

One of the 300-plus emails was from Sarah Cloud, staff at our sister paper Street Roots. Having seen Megaphone's call for support, Sarah wrote to convey the life-and-death stakes of homelessness, and to ask the board to keep centres open. She wrote from Portland, Oregon, where the street community lost four people to hypothermia in just the first 10 days of 2017.

The NPA motion was defeated, thankfully. It is frustrating to fight for a small victory, but if it could keep even a few people safe and warm, it's worthwhile. It's a small step to fight hate and lift up love, in our very own backyards.

Our connection with INSP reminds us social justice struggles know no borders. The local anguish of the overdose crisis and the homelessness crisis remind me of how we enforce borders in our own communities—borders between rich and poor, housed and unhoused, between healthy and sick, between white and racialized. Street papers can be part of the movement to break down those borders, by building understanding and connection.

#VendorWeek

In February we join with our street paper friends from around the world to mark #VendorWeek, a celebration of the work street paper vendors do every day to build strong communities and support to end poverty.

This year, we'll again be marking #VendorWeek with events in Vancouver and Victoria. At Megaphone's Big Sell, community leaders and local celebrities will stand alongside Megaphone vendors to try their hand at selling Megaphone for one hour. The event raises Megaphone vendors' profile and helps them build their sales—empowering vendors to earn income through meaningful work. Follow @MegaphoneMag on social media for all the details.

In tough times, you need good friends by your side. Thank goodness for the Megaphone community here at home, and our worldwide community in the INSP.

Jessica Hannon
Executive Director
Megaphone Magazine

This photo was taken at the INSP annual summit in Greece last year. Can you find Jessica?

NO PLACE TO GO

Victoria's lack of affordable options is keeping people homeless

By Colin Grainger

The availability of affordable rental housing is vital for people transitioning out of homelessness. But with Victoria's rental vacancy at less than one per cent in 2016, prices are rising fast, and some people trying to climb out of poverty find the next rung on the ladder out of reach.

"The bottom line for a lot of people is affordability," says Grant McKenzie, a spokesperson with the homeless services centre, Our Place Society. One of the things Our Place does is help people staying in shelters transition into market rentals. "But now that's more and more difficult," he says, "because market rents are so expensive that we have to get a huge subsidy. The government has to subsidize such a large part of the rent that they're not always capable of doing that."

McKenzie says there are about 160 people staying in emergency shelters waiting for a permanent home, including people in tents in a gymnasium at My Place, and 60 people sleeping on mats at First Metropolitan United Church. "That was supposed to be sort of an emergency weather shelter that we have now opened seven days a week, and it's been running for eight months."

As prices rise and vacancy rates bottom out in Victoria, shelters that should be temporary are becoming long term.

The average monthly rent for a bachelor apartment in Victoria was $785 in 2016, according to the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, with a vacancy rate of 0.4 per cent. But that figure includes bachelor apartments that have been occupied for years. New listings for bachelor apartments often run into the $900 range.

Historically, bachelor apartments have been the most viable option for low-income singles, says a 2015 report by the Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness. But with such low vacancy rates "the Victoria CMA [Census Metropolitan Area] rental market is becoming increasingly inaccessible for anyone looking to rent for less than $700/month or between $700 and $799 per month," the report says.

But the average welfare cheque doesn't come close to covering rent for a bachelor suite, McKenzie says. "It's so out of whack with the market."

Employable singles get a maximum of $375 per month from income assistance in B.C.—a rate unchanged since 2007. By the time a low-income individual pays their rent, there is little leftover for other necessities like food and utilities.

The coalition says the unavailability of safe and affordable housing is a barrier to ending homelessness and further de-stabilizes vulnerable people—and McKenzie agrees. "When you're living in a shelter, you're in survival mode the whole time," he says. "You can't really get stable and even start to think about working, getting healthy, and getting back on track with your income because you're just in survival mode.

"Every day it's like, 'How do I get through today?'"

And the growing population in Victoria isn't expected to slow down either. According to a federal report, an influx of 4,100 people per year is expected. The largest group of migrants are people aged 16 to 25, averaging 1,800 people per year since 2006—a group much more likely to rent and not buy.

While the rental supply will expand with 1,262 rent units currently under construction, CMHC expects vacancy rates to remain low as it isn't enough to meet the need.

Compounding the problem, students come from across Canada and the world to study in Victoria, only to find a lack of student housing. That forces them to compete for the bottom end of the market.

McKenzie believes if there were enough rental stock in the market, Our Place would be able to transition people out of homelessness much easier. However, he says, a big part of the solution necessarily involves government housing for both affordable rentals and supportive housing.

"The big thing is you probably need this housing to be either run by the government, or run by agencies like Our Place or Cool Aid or Pacifica, who are there to try and help people succeed rather than just letting them fail. So that's a very different kind of model," he says.

"Private landlords, I don't think, would have the same empathy for trying to help people succeed."

Our Place looks at transitional housing as a two to three-year process, McKenzie says. This is the time it takes to help those with addiction issues get them under control, and also to help people work on skills like balancing their budget, shopping, and cooking. Once they have these skills, transitioning into market rentals tends to be more successful.

But with such a lack of housing, the process has no end point.

"There's nothing worse than getting them up to that level where they're healthy and they're ready to go, and there's no place for them to go," McKenzie says.

Victoria's champion thanks her community

Evelyn Baron is Victoria's 2016 Vendor of the Year

"I've been a vendor for eight years. I became a vendor because I was doing the Salvation Army Kettle and that's only at Christmas time and there was a girl there who was selling the paper, and I watched what she did over the Christmas season. I got curious. I said, 'I like doing the Sally Ann Kettle and it's the same kind of work.' I asked her how I could become involved, and said I would be very interested for the new year. And that's how I got started, on January 4, eight years ago.

"My wishes for 2017 are for the weather to be a lot nicer. It hasn't been very nice over Christmas, there's been lots of black ice. I hope it gets nicer so I'm able to get out!

"I've had some medical problems in 2016, so I also hope for good health in the year 2017.

"I also hope to continue enjoying interacting with the readers as much as I have in the past, and I hope they continue to support me. I want to thank them very much for supporting me—they're wonderful people.

"To tackle homelessness, the government should open up some new housing for homelessness, there needs to be more housing for the homeless.

"My only fear is more bad weather in 2017. This time next year I would like to be in Hawaii, for the warm weather.

"The thing I enjoy most about being a vendor is the readers and the public, they make me laugh and I make them laugh. I have repeat customers. I wish them all well and that 2017 is a better year than 2016!

"If it's new readers, I say let me know what you think. I enjoy putting that out to the people, and then they come back and tell me what they think, I enjoy it, the compliments, the comments, good or bad or otherwise.

"To all the Megaphone readers, for the new year, I wish them all the best!"

Evelyn Baron sells Megaphone at the Cook Street Village, on the corner of Cook and Oxford streets. Photo by Priyanka Roy. Interview by Rosemary Newton.

Dream Girl

Vancouver vendor Bernie Bouzane shares a poem he wrote, set to music, 50 years ago

By Bernie Bouzane

Every night I go to sleep
And my date with her I keep
There she stands with a face so fair
Smiling eyes and long blonde hair
But comes the dawn and she's gone again.

Chorus:
Dream girl, dream girl
Can't you hear me calling
Dream girl, dream girl
In love with you
But what can I do?
Though true as it might seem
You will never be mine
After the twilight time
Cause it's only a dream

So I'll keep watching every day
Looking for dream girl
To come my way

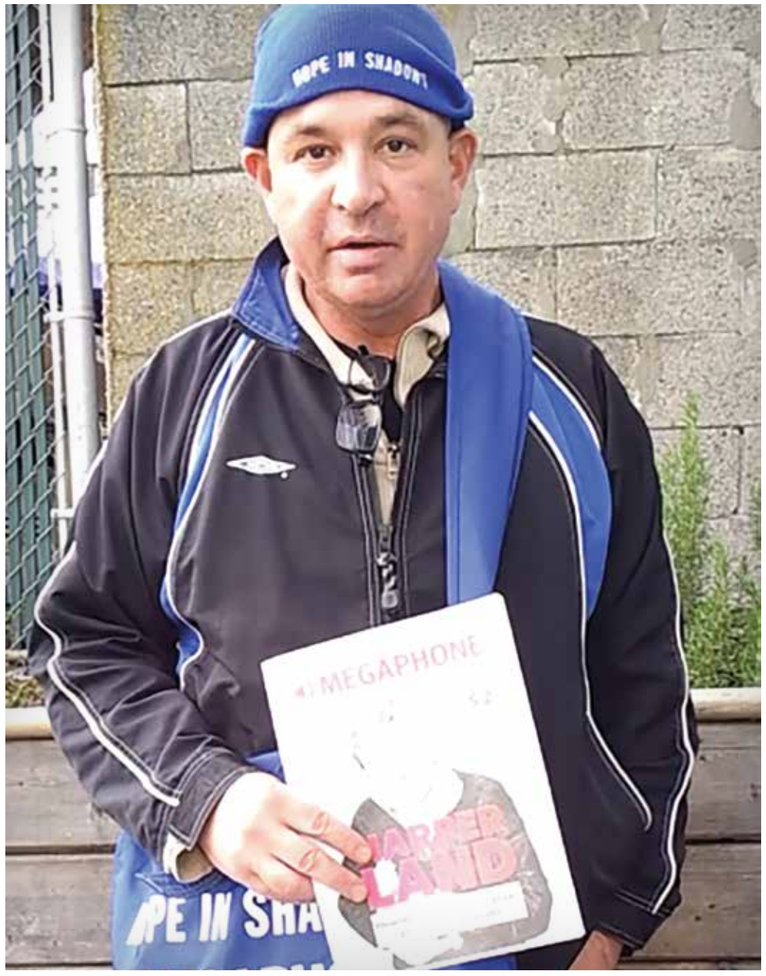
And when she does
I'll know she'll be
The one that was always
Meant for me
So dream girl hurry
With all your charms
From out of my dreams
And into my arms

Chorus:
Dream girl, dream girl
Can't you hear me calling
Dream girl, dream girl
In love with you
But what can I do?
Though true as it might seem
You will never be mine
After the twilight time
Cause it's only a dream.

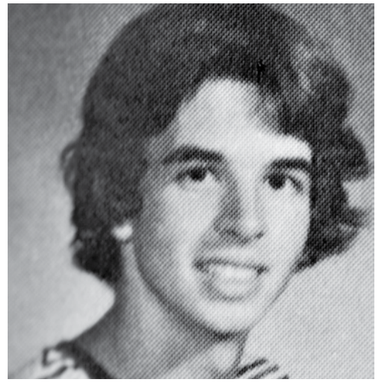
Bernie Bouzane sells in Vancouver and can often be found outside High Point on Hastings Street, between Slocan and Kaslo streets. Photo by Ryan Lai.

Michael Illing

October 25, 1959 – December 7, 2016



Michael Illing, our friend and Megaphone vendor, passed away on December 7 in Vancouver. Together with Mike's family, Megaphone staff wrote this obituary to remember Mike and celebrate his impact on the world.



Born in Ottawa, Ontario, the son of Roy and Joyce, Michael spent his first five years in Iran, where his father worked in the oil industry. By age five, Michael had travelled around the world three times. After resettling in Canada, his family moved to Victoria, Montreal, and Ottawa. After high school, Mike lived in Halifax where he worked for the Coast Guard. After settling in Vancouver, Mike started a family with Sue Walker; their son Yasha Walker-Illing joined their world and as a family they travelled through Mexico and the United States. Later in life, Mike married, living near Commercial Drive with his wife. With Yasha, Mike and his wife traveled to and enjoyed Barbados and many adventures.

During his childhood in Iran, Michael developed a love for the desert. He carried this love and a fearless love of travel with him throughout his life, becoming very fond of Texas, Arizona, Mexico, and Guatemala where he traveled and lived at various times in his life. Mike was particularly fond of Mexico where he volunteered his building skills on many housing projects, living in the communities he was helping.

Michael liked adventure, it found him and he found it.

Michael had an extremely creative flair and design talent, and an intuitive appreciation of form, shape, dimension, texture, and colour. He could create and fix anything he wanted to. While working in the Vancouver film industry, Mike crafted masterpiece sets ranging from space ship interiors to cavernous alleyways and everything in between.

Mike is survived by his son Yasha Walker-Illing, his former partner Sue Walker, his dad Roy Illing, siblings Debra and David, and many cousins

The Vancouver Commercial Drive community was a vital, anchoring and supportive centre for Michael for more than 20 years, where he had established a home base and community of friends.

An old Commercial Drive friend of Michael's was one of many to speak at his memorial in January. "We were part of a creative, bohemian sort of crew who hung out in a particular café on Commercial Drive about 20 years ago. Any time of the day you'd find at least a few of us there."

Another important part of the Drive community for Mike, particularly later in life, was the Clean Break laundry program run by the Grandview Cavalry Baptist Church.

Ingrid Fluevog, who knew Mike for nine years through Clean Break said, "He was a gentle, caring man … he didn't talk a lot about himself. But he never complained, never had a bad word to share about anybody." Michael was known by many for this quiet caring and kindness.

His caring for his friend Al demonstrates the kindness and support Mike offered others. Al, an elderly gentleman who passed away in 2015, was a staple in the Commercial Drive community too. He worked at the Washing Wells Laundromat for years, where he became good friends with Mike through the Clean Break laundry program. As Al's health failed and daily tasks became harder, Mike took careful loving care of Al, eventually moving in with him to help him with daily tasks. Al's death in 2015 was a hard time for Mike.

Mike will be remembered by Megaphone staff for his quiet kindness, his creativity, and his wry humour. He'll also be remembered for "the Megaphone rap"—a 30-second clip of hip-hop rhyming that he shared—something he came up with while he was selling, to pass the time and keep his mind busy.

Even when Michael (at times) had very little, he always had something to give in some way. Michael will be most remembered for the caring, gentle, active kindness at his core.

Mike was a Megaphone vendor for five years. He worked near the JJ Bean at 6th and Commercial, and outside the liquor store at Grant and Commercial. We often asked him if he'd like to be featured in a vendor profile, but he always said "No, not yet. I want to do it—but I want to do it when I'm in a better place in my life. When I've got a happy ending."

Mike was homeless at the time of his death. While we don't yet know exactly how he died, the short answer is homelessness. Health issues, stressors, and risk factors are multiplied when you're without adequate housing. It is hard knowing that Mike's death could have been prevented, given housing and some basic supports. Despite barriers of poverty, homelessness, and ill health, Mike contributed so much to the Megaphone and Commercial Drive communities. We'll miss him, and in his memory we will work to ensure everyone has safe and affordable housing.

Michael's spirit lives when we extend a kindness—big or small—a simple smile, a simple gesture, any act of kindness and help to someone else, any act to make someone smile or laugh. Do something kind and blame it on Michael: "Mike made me do it!"

Those who wish to make memorial donations in memory of Michael can direct their donations to community services he cared about, and who cared about him:

Megaphone and Hope in Shadows:
121 Heatley Ave, Vancouver, BC, V6A 3E9
www.megaphonemagazine.com/donate.

Grandview Calvary Baptist Church,
1803 East 1st Avenue, Vancouver,
British Columbia, V5N1B2
Phone: 604-255-1411, Email:
info@gcbchurch.ca

IT TAKES A VILLAGE TO RAISE A TOTEM POLE

Murdered and Missing Women, survivors, and the Downtown Eastside honoured in Survivors Totem Pole

By Carolyn Wong

Haida carver Skundaal has lately felt a sense of loss when coming to the Sacred Circle studio on West Cordova. The feeling crept in after the Survivors Totem Pole was moved out of the studio last November and raised during a ceremony in Pigeon Park. Skundaal recalls the outpouring of community members to the event and how the apprentice carvers spontaneously danced around the totem pole before it was raised.

Now plastic bags full of cedar chips sit on the studio floor where the totem pole was once laid. It was "quirky", says Skundaal, whose English name is Bernie Williams, but before carving she would lie with her arms wrapped around the 982-year-old cedar log and ask, "What is our journey today?"

The totem pole has had a long journey involving many people. Skundaal, who led the design and carving, is quick to credit Mark Townsend, former co-executive director of the Portland Hotel Society, with the vision. Concerned about displacement and a lack of adequate housing, he hoped the totem pole would empower the Downtown Eastside community.

Traditionally, the peoples of the Northwest Coast erected totem poles to communicate family histories and status. In modern times, totem poles take on new meanings. The Survivors Totem Pole is unique as it represents all groups in the Downtown Eastside that face oppression and racial injustice. Audrey Siegl, who is Musqueam First Nation and a Sacred Circle board member, says it "is a symbol not just of hope, but of strength and unity—and that we do matter. We matter to each other."

Elders from the Japanese, Chinese, South Asian, and Latin American communities were involved in the design and planning of the totem pole. The Sacred Circle Society also consulted with the Squamish, Musqueam, and Tsleil Waut-Uth First Nations, adhering to their protocols. And as the Haida are a matriarchal society, Skundaal consulted with the Haida matriarchs.

But it was a long journey for Skundaal to be able to do what she loves most: carve.

As a 13-year-old, she watched Robert Davidson carve the first totem pole in 90 years in Haida Gwaii. She knew then that she wanted to be a carver, except in Haida culture women are not permitted to carve. Being told she was not allowed merely deepened her determination to prove that she could. "I just always wanted to," says Skundaal. "I guess I was a rebel."

That rebellious spirit led her to become the only female carver to apprentice with the late Haida artist Bill Reid. She greatly admired his work and decided to ask for an apprenticeship. By then she was a mother with three sons and remembers pushing her youngest in a stroller as she walked to Reid's studio on Granville Island. Reid turned her away. She kept going back. Finally, he hired her.

For her first assignment, Reid gave Skundaal argillite and wood and asked her to carve something. She presented two carvings that he threw in the garbage. His seemingly flippant response angered Skundaal, yet she recalls what he said next: "I'm giving you your first lesson. Never get complacent with your work."

She carries that lesson with her, and the Survivors Totem Pole is her largest undertaking yet. She has carved 12 totem poles—two stand in Vancouver at Van Tech Secondary and First United Church. These totem poles, like her most recent work, were carved with high-risk youth and marginalized women.

Watching these first-time carvers—nine women and three men—transform strengthened her belief that "culture saves lives." Siegl agrees with the adage. She believes the cultural void—a legacy of colonialism perpetuated by a capitalist society—is one of the root causes of the current fentanyl crisis. The Sacred Circle Society tries to fill that void by providing space and equipment for indigenous cultural practices and art making.

In the studio, Skundaal points to drafting tables, an airbrush gun, and array of art materials. She lights up when she shows samples of the copper and silver jewelry she has been making. Other women come to Sacred Circle to make cedar hats, button blankets, and regalia out of elk hide, or simply to hang out in a safe space for a few hours. But the building is being redeveloped and the group must move. "We do a lot of good work in here," says Skundaal. "Where do we go?"

The question ties into broader themes of displacement and gentrification that threaten the Downtown Eastside. Because the community's story is still unfolding, Skundaal purposely left the Bear Mother depicted at the base of the Survivors Totem Pole unfinished. In Haida legend, the Bear Mother protects and cares for her twin cubs. "The Bear Mother is a sign of strength," says Skundaal. "She holds everybody up."

Skundaal embodies the Bear Mother. She walks the streets checking in with community members and has dedicated decades to advocating on behalf of the missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. Their photos cover a studio wall. Looking up at the wall through black-rimmed glasses, Skundaal sighs. The photos will be brought down before the move. A burning ceremony has been planned to honour these sisters, mothers, and daughters.

In the meantime, sage and cedar will be delivered to the studio. Siegl will use these traditional medicines in smudging ceremonies with community members and frontline workers at the centre of the fentanyl crisis.

The sense of loss in the face of this uphill battle for justice and equality is felt deeply by these strong, determined women. "I'm an artist. I'm a frontline worker. That's what I do," says Skundaal. "I care about the people. I do everything that I can to try to make this a better, safer place for them."

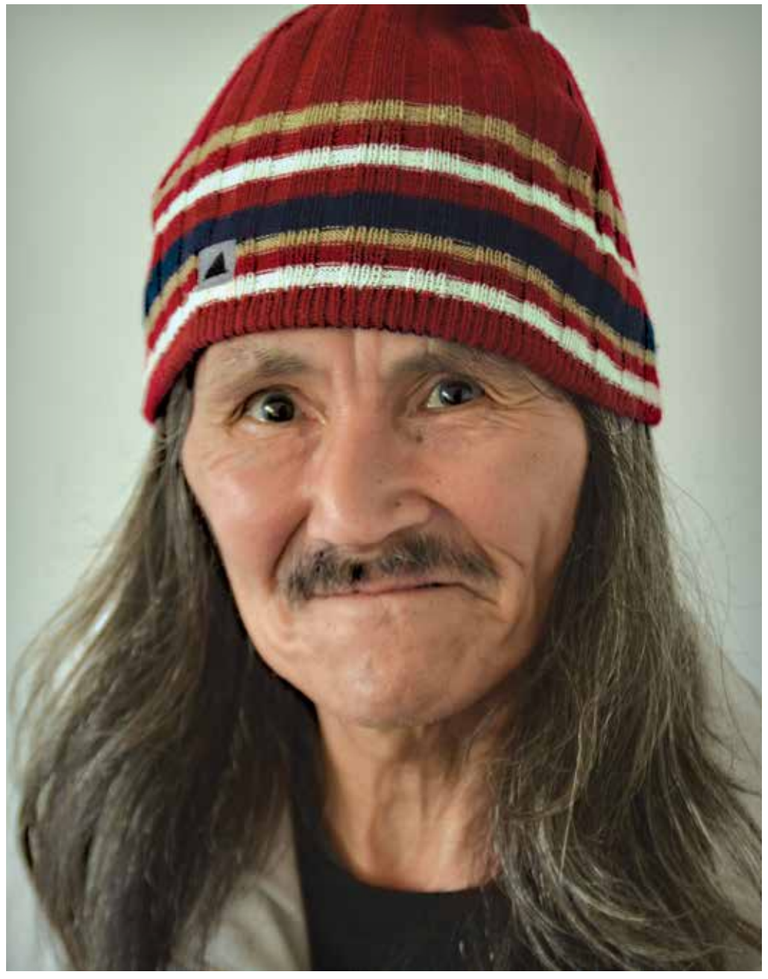
Skundaal is also known by her English name, Bernie Williams, and her Haida name, Gul Kitt Jaad. She invites anyone who can assist the Sacred Circle to find a new space to contact: info@sacredcirclesociety.ca

Skundaal carving the Survivors Totem before it was finished. Photos submitted.

Megaphone News

Mel Hennan

July 8, 1963-December 2016



Remembering Mel Hennan: a gentle warrior, a bright spirit, and a friend

By Jackie Wong

The first day I met Mel, he was crying. Something scary had happened, with yelling and breaking glass and a person storming off in a hail of violence and anger. While others in the room tried to steel themselves and puff up their chests so they wouldn't feel hurt, Mel just let the moment be. Then he gathered some tissues, and I brought him a glass of water, and we hugged.

It became clear in that moment that Mel was no stranger to the hard stuff. But he was able to show up for it, to be bravely present in it, in a way that I think is instructive for us all. Even in cheerier moments, Mel was never afraid to be present in tenderness. To offer a kind word or small gesture that would tell you, in his warm, winking way: heaveno—how lovely it is that we're together.

Instead of starting emails with "Hi" or "Hello," Mel would say "Heaveno," because it was nice to think of heaven. Comforting, perhaps, to consider a world beyond this one that held such hardship from his earliest days.

A friend of Mel's tells me that he was about six years old when he was taken from his family in Sachs Harbour, Inuvik, because the children were malnourished.

In his own words, Mel wrote, "the family I was born into was 'the Raddi Clan.' I was one of nine siblings—seven brothers and two sisters. The sisters are the book ends of the brothers, of which I was born right in the middle. Through lack of community intervention I was taken as a ward of the government of the Northwest Territories. I eventually was adopted by 'the Hennan family,' which consists of my parents and three older sisters."

Mel wrote this around the year 2012, when he was part of a longitudinal study to better understand people living with HIV. The study, which also included a photography project called, "The Way I See It" had participants create a photo collection of their life through their eyes.

Mel's photographs were exhibited at the now-defunct W2 Woodward's and compiled on YouTube, searchable through the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS' "LISA" project. Set to a cheery jazz piano soundtrack, Mel's photographs display places that were important to him, like the Dr. Peter Centre and the Vancouver Native Health Society Clinic, which "allows me to network, be engaged with the community, build friendships, trust, and a sense of purpose. And a sanctuary. A home away from home."

His photos are also places that remind him of darker times.

"I was the roommate of a very mean man," he writes of a photo of a building where he once lived. An acquaintance tells me he overcame very difficult, complicated circumstances not only in childhood but throughout his life.

Another photo shows an alley adjacent to the Washington Hotel. "Where I first OD'd on heroin," he writes. "My best friend massaged my heart and did CPR."

A former president of the Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users in 2004, Mel was strong as much as he was kind.

"Through trial and error interspersed with wisdom, knowledge and a meddle like no other city has, we have done our best to see that all people have a place in society," he wrote in the Carnegie Newsletter in May 2004.

"We will be there for the ones that don't want us there, we'll be there when we're most needed and once in a while we'll be there when someone wants us.... Integrity, seeking the truth and maintaining a sense of humour sounds absurd and too far reaching; however we have it in us as long as we believe in our selves and remember where we have come from and that we 'bow down' to no one."

In a 2012 photograph titled "Home," Mel depicted his most recent residence of 12 years, the Jubilee Rooms in the Downtown Eastside.

"Longest place of residence for me ever," he wrote. "First place I've ever called home."

Mel died in that Jubilee room over Christmas 2016, when the streets were covered in ice. He died of an opioid overdose, the preventable kind that has killed hundreds of people across B.C.

It is sad that he died alone because he loved people so much. We were always delighted to see him visiting the Megaphone office, and friends remember him popping into the St. Paul's Hospital urban health ward, just to check in to see if anyone there needed company.

Mel loved his community because he loved people. The Downtown Eastside, he wrote, "has inspired my artistic talents and energy. All my relations."

We miss you, Mel.

Editor's note: Mel was a longtime vendor and writer, who was published several times in Megaphone's Voices of the Street *literary editon.*

GETTING IT DONE

Downtown Eastside artist, stuntman, actor, motivational speaker, and mentor, Duane Howard has travelled the world but still supports his community

Story by Rosemary Newton
Photos by Jackie Dives

When Duane Howard met Megaphone for an interview in January on Commercial Drive, he had just finished working on a talk he would give the next day at an addictions recovery house. He was also preparing to head to Victoria in early February for the Victoria Film Festival for a screening of *The Sun at Midnight*, an independent film he co-stars in. One thing is clear: since his serendipitous casting as Arikara Chief Elk Dog alongside Leonardo DiCaprio in the 2015 film *The Revenant*, he's been busy.

His compelling performance as Elk Dog drew him acclaim and attention, and brought him to The Oscars. But the role was a culmination of years in the Vancouver film scene as an actor, background performer and stunt worker—experience he gained in between holding down jobs as a drug and alcohol counsellor, as an iron worker, and hosting outreach workshops for youth. The role also called on the actor to draw on his own personal struggles and hardships.

Howard, of the Nuu-chah-nulth First Nation on the Northwest Coast of Vancouver Island, talked to Megaphone about his standout role, his connections to spirituality, his passion for motivational speaking and his strong B.C. roots, planted firmly in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside.

Rosemary Newton: I read about some of your early life experiences; what was your childhood and young adulthood like?

Duane Howard: In the late 1970s I moved here to Vancouver with my older sister. The reason being was my dad and my mom had separated when I was 12 and, after my mom left us, there was six of us younger ones that my dad ended up being with for about two years.

I remember my first drink I had of alcohol was when I was 10 years old. During my teenage life, my family members are telling me, don't ever drink, don't ever do drugs, trying to influence me that way but it's kind of really challenging when I look back at it. It was challenging because it was right in front of us all the time. Yet feeling abandoned, having those abandonment issues of parents separating because we come from a large family, it was challenging as a young boy. I remember even being in elementary school and being bullied and teased because I was kind of a skinny little Indian boy. In my elementary school days, I remember being like that, just walking home and there's two, three guys, people that bullied me and taunted me and teased me, because I have a skin condition, eczema.

I grew up and alcohol was the solution and drugs were the solution for my life because I just numbed everything out so I really experienced that, but it was an uphill [battle], the last few years. Even though we had a nice, beautiful home, beautiful setting, a home to go to, I would always end up downtown, east end. I didn't want to go to school. I remember being in boxing because my father and my uncles and my grandfathers, they were bred into that boxing and fighting but it was a fun sport for them at the time, so I tried that a few times and went into the gym and started working out but still maintaining my alcoholism. It took a lot of anger out, and frustration.

Then I kind of had this profound awakening after talking to my late grandfather, who passed away in 1982. I always like to talk to our elders and our knowledge keepers, talking to them and asking them questions about life, how our people lived, what was it like? And every time they talked about it they always talked about family unity, and the family values, the principles and the laws of family, and it stuck to me all the time. And so he was gone out of my life and there were a few other people, two of my aunts who were really special to me, and they played my mother role in my life, they were murdered in the late '70s, and that came out in 1986. That's when I made a decision to change my life, because I knew I wasn't getting anywhere, I knew it wasn't worthwhile to do it anymore.

At the time, my dad sobered up, he went into treatment and changed his life and lo and behold the rest of us, the family members followed along with him. That's when I went back to school and got educated. I got my Grade 12, and got my drug and alcohol certificate at the Native Education Centre. And then I pursued that and I worked in the Downtown Eastside

for a while, on and off, then also into the school system, working with the schools and then travelling, doing workshops on drug and alcohol awareness in communities with other friends who were in the helping field. I did that for a number of years, just being involved in community and helping the best way I could. I got in deep into my spirituality and finding my culture, and I realized that what was really important to me was culture. I started identifying myself with who I was, and where I come from. I come from the Northwest Coast of Vancouver Island, Nuu-chah-nulth Territories, the Mowachaht/Muchalaht First Nation band. Through identifying myself, I found my roots and my family of who I was and my grandparents, and my great grandparents. I really looked at the family tree and really identified who I was, and I started going back home. I started learning the way to my best ability, and I still do that today, get involved back home, getting enriched with that, and adopting other ways of the plain style life.

started picking up, and that's when I got my agent now, and I've been with her since.

And my first big break was *Into the West*, that was my first role, a Steven Spielberg one, and then after that I did a Virgin Train commercial, and then *Bury my Heart at Wounded Knee*, and then "Da Vinci's Inquest" and then *Blade*, and it just started going, it started really picking up for me and I was really grateful for that.

I was struggling as an artist, as an actor, as a community member, going through hard times, and getting mad and upset that I didn't get the role, and I thought that's all right, next one, and I did that throughout the years. I took a break from my acting career before *The Revenant*.

"I HAD AN INTERVIEW ONE TIME, SOMEBODY ASKED ME, HOW DID YOU BRING ELK DOG ALIVE? AND I HAD THIS CLARITY MOMENT, AND IT WAS LIKE WOW, ELK DOG BROUGHT DUANE ALIVE."

RN: What was it like trying to get a role in a major motion picture like *The Revenant*?

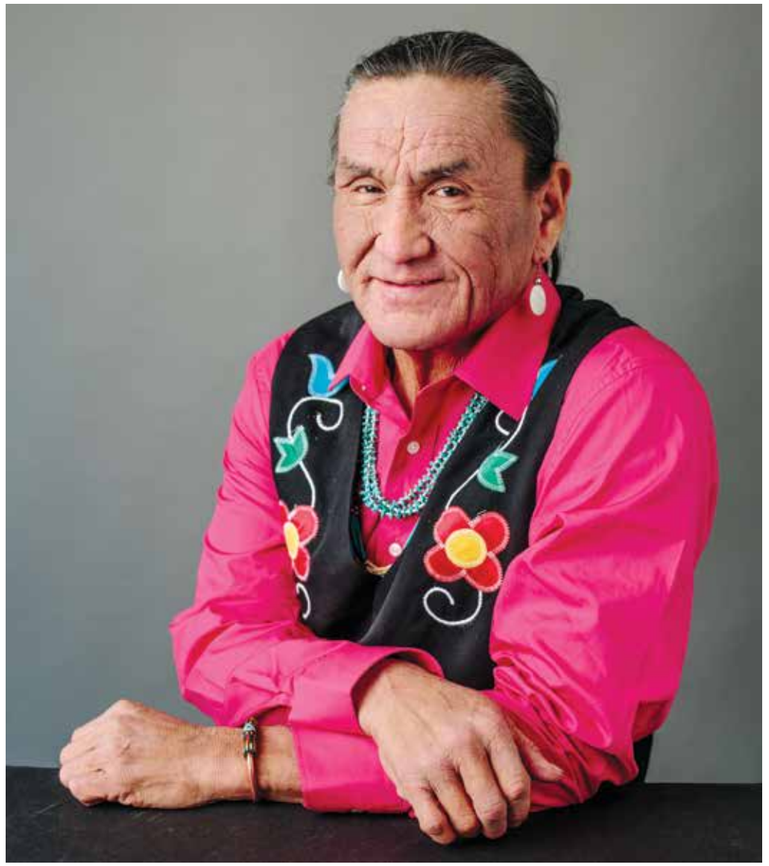
DH: A friend helped me out, helped me move into her house because she had heard I was homeless; so I moved in with them and I was grateful for that, and that's when I found out about *The Revenant*. I auditioned for it. I called up my agent and I said, 'Can you submit me for that role in that *Revenant* show?' So she did, she put my name in it and it was like June, just towards the end of June I guess, and she submitted and we didn't hear nothing from them for all the whole month of July. And two weeks before shooting *The Revenant*, they still hadn't found a lead role for the Native cast. Next, you know, it's Friday morning and I get a call from one of the stunt coordinators, his assistant called me, and he called me up and said 'Hey, I'm calling on behalf of Scott, he told me to give you a call and wants to know if you're available to come and work.' So I called [Scott] and he said, 'I'm working on this big feature film and we're looking for native riders and stuntmen and I noticed you on the union list.'

That following Saturday, they were in a production meeting and Scott, the stunt coordinator, was sitting there and he was part of *The Revenant*, and I didn't know. He was sitting there and they said we still haven't found anybody. And Scott took out my picture that I had sent him and he put it in between the casting director and the director and he goes, 'You guys should take a look at this guy.' Sunday evening, Linda my agent called me up and she goes, 'Duane, *The Revenant* called and you have an audition for tomorrow.' I was up all night. She kept on saying, 'You've got to get this, it's a big role, it could change your career.'

I went in the morning and I walked in and introduced myself to the casting director [Angela Gibbs] from LA and Michelle Allen, which was the casting director here, and she knew me. As soon as we finished, both her and Michelle just jumped out of their seats and said, 'We finally found him, we finally found him.' And right after that, they immediately sent the tape to Alejandro [Gonzalez Inarritu], the director. The following Tuesday, Linda calls me up and she goes, 'They loved your audition, and they want to fly you to Calgary for three days. The director wants to meet you.'

I went out there and we met him Wednesday night, and had a sit down and talked with him and he asked me questions about my life, and my background, my growing up, hardships, hard times. I sat with him for about half an hour, and he said, 'That was a great audition you did, I want you to do the same down here.' It's the whole film crew and some of the cast members were down there so I was like, 'What, right in front of everybody?' But he had the director of photography there, and they did it, and we went through it and the DOP had a camera right in front of my face, like just inches away from my face. I had to really maintain my focus, it was the first time having a camera that close to me, but I kept in character. Friday morning, the director announced, 'You're welcome aboard.'

Everybody was like, that role was meant for you.



RN: How did you get started in the film industry?

DH: The first taste of it was probably about 20 years ago. I started doing background work and my first show was "Hawk Eye", and "Da Vinci's Inquest." I was doing that for a while, but at the same time that I was doing that, I was involved with an organization working with young people on the streets. My boss kind of gave me an ultimatum, so I had to put that down for a while.

One day I just had this profound spiritual awakening and I realized I wasn't happy with what I was doing and I wasn't happy with my job. I wasn't happy with myself. I quit my job and I lived in my van for a while, and I lived with my mom and I started couch surfing. Then, my kids came into my life, and then I got into the film industry again. I got upgraded on a show called "Harsh Realm." I started doing stunt work, I did it in a few shows, and then it kind of dried up for a while there.

Then all of a sudden theatre came into my life. I started doing plays after that, and that's when my acting career, I started really enjoying it. My auditions really

RN: What did you think of your character, Elk Dog, in *The Revenant*?

DH: I had an interview one time, somebody asked me, how did you bring Elk Dog alive? And I had this clarity moment, and it was like wow, Elk Dog brought Duane alive. And I remember saying, how I brought Elk Dog alive was I had to face my darkest experiences in my life, I had to go deep within myself, I had to go to my dark place again, and it was really draining at times, really draining at the end of the day, and that's what I did. I look at myself with, I can do this, I can be who I am, and where I am, and what I'm doing. I can persevere in life and I can do whatever I want to do in life. So it really gave me a lot of confidence after that.

The influence of watching Tom [Hardy] and Leo, watching them on set, it was really nice, we would be sitting there talking just before they go to camera, and we would just be walking and out of nowhere we were our characters. It was really profound.

After a few months of shooting I remember the director came up and said you should be proud of yourself, this character, you brought him alive.

"HOLLYWOOD NEEDS TO OPEN ITS EYES TO FIRST NATIONS PEOPLE AND NATIVE AMERICAN PEOPLE ... THERE IS SO MUCH TALENT OUT THERE."

RN: You went to The Oscars, what was that experience like?

DH: That experience was—wow. It was the first time in 25 years since a First Nations actor had been at The Oscars. The last one was Graham Greene for *Dances with Wolves*. So I was really honoured for myself, and Forrest [Goodluck] and Arthur [Redcloud] to be there, representing our people.

It was surreal, but I took in every moment.

RN: What do you think needs to happen for there to be better First Nations representation in Hollywood?

DH: There's a lot of First Nations actors in Canada and in the United States who should have been up there already. I mentioned that down there, I said Hollywood needs to open its eyes to First Nations people and Native American people, that there is so much talent out there. I mentioned that to them because Hollywood is so white. As Chris Rock said right in front of everyone at The Oscars—Hollywood is so white. And now it's becoming, I think it will evolve eventually, especially after seeing this. This is the first major motion picture with First Nations people since *Dances with Wolves*, so what does that tell you about North America? I mean they've tried, but like Lone Ranger—Johnny Depp playing a native? Why? Scarlett Johansson playing an Asian? Why?

It's really challenging. People need to be educated about our First Nations people. Stop stereotyping us, we don't live in igloos and wig wams, and we all speak different languages. Hollywood, and even Vancouver, need to open up and give their head a shake—that they're visitors on this land. I've been encouraging a lot of our people in the industry to start writing scripts. We all have a story.

RN: You mentioned your connectedness to spirituality, how has your spirituality influenced your work, in acting or in your outreach and speaking?

DH: I just really put that into my life. I have those moments in my life where it's just between me and God, the Creator, and my culture, and as a sun dancer and doing sweat ceremonies and other ceremonies, getting myself involved in that and following those protocols that we have and those principles that apply to life.

RN: I read that you've done work for suicide awareness for indigenous youth. How did you get involved in this?

DH: Suicide awareness, the Attawapiskat Campaign, the Attawapiskat community up in Northern Ontario, I had met some people over that way from Ontario, and their campaign is called "I Love First Peoples," but they asked me to come aboard and be spokesperson of their campaign. At the time, Attawapiskat had such a high suicide rate.

I went to address that issue that we had to come together as a community, we really have to come together as a community. No matter who we are or where we come from, it's really important not to do this alone. We need everybody's involvement and we need everybody's love and support to come together as one mind, one heart as a community—not to judge our young people on what they're doing in their lives because they had to learn it from somewhere. I say how important it is as parents and as uncles and aunts that we have to step it up, and we have to be that example.

A lot of the communities have problems with drugs and alcohol, it saddens me. When I come from a community like that and I hear people complaining about all these small, little things, I look back at where I just came from and I give my head a shake. I'm still their main spokesperson for the campaign, and we're going out to some other communities this year.

Duane Howard is also a motivational speaker, works with indigenous youth, and is a talented artist.

USHERING IN A NEW WAVE

Indigenous hip-hop duo Mob Bounce are positioned to be heard nation-wide as they gear up for a breakout year

By Katrina Jones

Mob Bounce weave their experience and heritage into all aspects of their music; Travis 'Heebz the Earthchild' is of Cree/Metis descent and Craig 'The Northwest Kid' is mainly of Gitxsan heritage. Not only do their songs share their message of social change, spirituality, and healing, but Travis and Craig are also leaders in their community. They host workshops for young aboriginal musicians and lend their voices to various social and environmental protests and causes.

Through powerful lyrics, dynamic production and a desire for growth and change, their voices not only cut through a changing musical landscape, but will also help establish a platform for young aboriginal musicians for generations to come. Regardless of one's musical affiliation, Mob Bounce's 'music as medicine' philosophy is sure to inspire and instigate change.

Mob Bounce is set to release its first studio album in 2017 after recently signing to RPM Records. Be sure to be on the lookout for this group on the rise.

Mob Bounce wrote to Megaphone from their homes in Telkwa and Houston, B.C.

Megaphone: How did you first meet and make music together?

Mob Bounce: We were both introduced to music at a young age. We met in Houston, B.C. in elementary school, and our lives were very similar at home.

M: How does your musical collaborative process work?

MB: We like to talk about certain systems and ideas just as friends first, and I think that helps us achieve this parallel thought, so even if we are apart when we write, we still have this cohesiveness to it all.

M: How do you translate these ideas into your music and what are the main messages you hope to convey?

MB: That we need to be tender to ourselves and others by creating sacred spaces, and that music is a powerful tool that can speed up our personal development. I suppose we just want people to experience connection through [our] music.

M: You've mentioned in interviews that 'music is your medicine'. How do you keep your vision and message grounded after dealing with personal and community hardships?

MB: We tend to use these personal and community hardships as fuel and inspiration. In our writing process, it's about creating a lyric/song that can transcend the challenges that our communities and we face, even if it's just an affirmation and positive reinforcement in the lyrics. In our music, we share lots about indigenous issues, personal issues, but always end on a hopeful or more uplifting message. That's the medicine. It's important for us to be vulnerable and allow ourselves to open up our wounds to be able to sprinkle that medicine in.

M: You are both very involved in the mentorship and development of young aboriginal artists. What advice do you give them?

MB: I'd let them know that it's okay to be honest. The more truthful you are to how you are feeling, the better. Music is our sacred space, and when we perform these songs, you can affirm negative or positive things. If you try to sound like the stuff you hear on the radio, that's cool, but just grow, and don't peak there. Turn negatives into positives and make music medicine, so it connects with many people. That's what I've done with music and it has done wonders for my life.

M: Why do you run 'Hip-Hop and a Sacred Space' workshops and what do you hope to achieve through them?

MB: We are very passionate about the youth. We have influenced many young people on our journey in a short amount of time. We have youth from our community and surrounding communities who look up to us and have also told us personally how we have brought change to their lives. That is huge. With that, we cannot stop and we will only continue to strengthen our workshop so that it has the potential to impact more youth on a grander scale.

M: What do you want people to know about the Canadian aboriginal music scene in 2017, its changing landscape, and your feelings on the growing mainstream presence of aboriginal music in Canada? (Tanya Tagaq, Tribe Called Red)

MB: The Canadian aboriginal music scene has been on a steady rise. Our voices are being heard and we are not slowing. This is definitely a big year for Mob Bounce and the whole indigenous scene. We are a community and support one another. We have met many artists and musicians on our travels and it has been nothing but love. That's where it stands out from other scenes, because it seems other scenes are always competing. For the other artists we have befriended, we just continue to hold each other up and keep encouraging the journey. The indigenous scene has a narrative that is very important to this country. It is being more accepted and supported and it has the potential to bring many changes outside of music as well. The mainstream success of other indigenous artists is inspiring [as] it shows us that it is all possible. Before the success of Tanya Tagaq and A Tribe Called Red, the Native community didn't have too much to reference from. There is so much talent just waiting to burst on to the scene.

M: What do you hope for the next generation of aboriginal youth and musicians? What do you see for them?

MB: With the success and presence of the indigenous music scene now, youth and musicians have a lot to aspire for and we have witnessed first hand some of the young talent coming up. It's not just the talent that is present, it's also the strength and values some of the youth possess as well. We have some leaders in the making.

Travis 'Heebz the Earthchild' and Craig 'The Northwest Kid' make up hip-hop duo Mob Bounce. Photo by Dale Cutler.

MAINTAINED SROS PLAY CRITICAL ROLE IN HOUSING SPECTRUM

For many, vanishing 'single-room occupancy' hotels mean independent shelter within their budget. We can save them.

The Astoria is a notorious SRO hotel in the Downtown Eastside.

This is part 4 of a 6-part series exploring solutions to the homelessness crisis in B.C., funded in partnership through Megaphone crowdfunding donors and The Tyee's Housing Fix project.

BY STEFANIA SECCIA
PHOTOS BY CHRIS CHEUNG

In a year from now, 59-year-old Tom de Grey could lose his home. That's when his landlord will be released from a 15-year agreement with the city binding rents in his building to the welfare rate.

De Grey lives in an SRO—a Single-Room Occupancy hotel. To most, they're synonymous with cockroaches, bed bugs, and slumlords, but not all are so poorly managed. And for the low-income or homeless, SROs provide an integral option on a short list of shelter choices.

That, experts say, is why it's not always a great idea to tear down SROs and build something new—even if the new structure is also meant to include some lower-income tenants. In fact, cities might do better to leave them in place—but insist they actually meet existing health and building standards.

U.S. research shows that the loss of virtually any form of existing shelter for vulnerable populations leads to street homelessness. And that is true even if the housing is replaced—usually later, only partially, and often costing more.

If de Grey's rent is allowed to rise to market rates, the former film and construction worker says he'd face a "real crisis," leaving him no choice but to leave what he calls his "mini micro-bachelor" apartment. He fears winding up at another SRO hotel worse than the one he'll have to leave.

Before moving two years ago into his clean room in a 100-year-old heritage building with 12 suites outside the Downtown core, de Grey lived in the infamous and controversial Downtown Eastside landmark Astoria Hotel for seven years. It was "what you call a real SRO," he says. "And I certainly don't want to go back."

After the Astoria, he quips, his present space is "kind of like coming out of jail." His SRO unit is well maintained, near a park, and has a big enough kitchen and washroom for him to live independently.

De Gray lived on the North Shore for 20 years before circumstances put him in a cheaper apartment in Strathcona—until that too fell through and he wound up at the Astoria.

"I only planned to stay three days," he says. But after years of working and being able to support his family, a chain of events kept him there. "They used to call it the poverty trap," he says.

Despite their reputation, SROs are an important link in the chain of options that advocates say is necessary to address rising homelessness. Their demise in Vancouver, they say, is due to loopholes in their protection and not enough enforcement of SRO maintenance bylaws. And it's putting even more people on the street.

Particularly at risk are SROs like de Grey's, where rents are limited by agreements between the building owner and the city, supported by federal funding.

SROs getting fewer, costlier

A single adult on welfare in British Columbia receives $610 a month, and has a budget of $375 to pay their rent. Yet in 2015, the average of the lowest rents in Vancouver SROs surveyed by the Carnegie Community Action Project was $517, up from $398 in 2009. Average rents in the

It's Not Just Shelter

Inadequate shelter has consequences beyond a person's physical health. ***Dr. Jeff Turnbull*** *is medical director of the Inner City Health Project for the homeless in Ottawa. Here's his diagnosis about what happens to you when you don't have a stable home:*

"If you do not have a home, [there's] shelter that you can't access until 4 o'clock that evening. You'll probably be sleeping in [a place like his shelter in Ottawa where] one of our rooms is a 70-bed room with bunks three levels high. Or if that's full, on a cold night, you'll be sleeping on a mattress that's rolled out in the chapel.

"You'll be surrounded by people who have very serious mental health [issues] or addictions. Violence is prevalent. Infectious diseases are prevalent. Chaos kind of rules.

"And if you [yourself] have a mental health problem that you're doing your very best to kind of control or manage, this is not the place to do it.

"One aspect is you lack access to the usual services, because those are often contingent upon you having a stable address. If somebody's going to visit you because they provide [Community Care Access] services or homecare, well, if you live in a shelter that becomes almost impossible."

"eight fastest-gentrifying hotels" doubled over the same six-year period, from $444 to $905 a month. One hotel advertised a unit on Craigslist for $1,500 a month.

The Carnegie report calculates that for every eight units above welfare rate—slated to be built from 2014 until February 2016—there is one unit at the welfare rate built, which adds up to 1,663 "unaffordable" units to 205 units that low-income people can afford.

The report also notes the impending loss of an additional 157 SRO rooms to the planned demolition of the Downtown Eastside's Quality Inn. The hotel, formerly leased by the city to provide people a place to live, is now slated for redevelopment into market rental housing.

De Grey is fighting back by becoming active in the Downtown Eastside SRO Collaborative, which aims to preserve units and make them more habitable. The group wants the city to better enforce existing bylaws aimed at slowing the loss of the hotels.

"That's all we're asking for," says Wendy Pedersen, a longstanding advocate in the Downtown Eastside now active in the same group. SROs, she says, are "a pretty inadequate form of housing, but there is nothing else. We can't afford to let them go."

In 2015, the city changed its Single Room Accommodation bylaw in an effort to stymie landlords from using 'renovations' as small as fixing a sink as excuses to evict tenants. Landlords now need a city permit for any renovations. The fee to convert a single SRO room to another type, like student housing or a hostel, jumped from $15,000 to $125,000.

The city also fines landlords when they break health and safety codes and don't meet maintenance standards. According to a media release late in 2015, Vancouver City Hall issued "over 150 compliance letters and 75 orders" under the SRO bylaw that year. In the previous year, it levied penalties of $6,800 against landlords in what it calls "standards of maintenance" cases. It also formed an SRO hotel task force comprised of housing advocates, tenants, and owners to help guide the city on how to further pursue and enforce its laws.

But some SRO owners, critics say, continue to use legal loopholes—such as forcing tenants to sign fixed-term agreements—that allow them to hike room rents significantly, forcing tenants out.

According to a city staff report, there's also been a recent rise in people buying SROs in strategic locations as investments, then renovating them to maximize their revenue from commercial and retail space by attracting tenants with deeper pockets.

"These renovations, although helpful in enhancing the quality of the rooms," the city report states, "are resulting in the displacement of tenants due to their lack of affordability, which has negative impacts on the individual but also the community as a driver of homelessness."

The city has identified 17 buildings being gentrified, from a city stock of 155 SROs in total. Of those, 46 are non-profit or government owned and operated.

Downtown Eastside SRO hotels come in many varieties, but losing them is putting people on the street.

The Carnegie report and other critics say that Vancouver can do more. They urge it to give itself the power to impose non-profit management on hotels with outstanding maintenance complaints, and to limit incentives like renovation subsidies to owners that agree to keep units at the welfare/pension rental rate afterward. The province, the Carnegie report added, could provide more effective rent control and higher welfare and disability benefits.

'Affordable'—in whose eyes?

Seattle, San Francisco, New York, and Chicago, have all toyed with permitting new SRO-style micro-units to be built. But merely loosening zoning to allow for smaller rooms hasn't always increased affordable choices. Many new micro-units aren't built for lower income brackets, let alone those on welfare.

Vancouver already requires 30 per cent of units in new rental housing to be affordable to tenants with incomes low enough to qualify for BC Housing apartments. That works out to no higher than $912 for a bachelor. It's also nearly two and a half times what provincial welfare provides a single person for rent in the city.

Vancouver has a separate definition for the Downtown Eastside. There, a bylaw stipulates that a building within the neighbourhood's borders must rent one third of its units at the welfare rate, another third at the BC Housing rate, and the final third at what it vaguely calls "affordable market rents."

There are about 8,500 people living in the community on welfare and disability cheques, the Carnegie report states, and 4,000 more on seniors' pensions. That's roughly two-thirds of the neighbourhood's more than 18,000 residents who have between $375 and $403 a month for rent. According to critics, building one-third of the housing for two-thirds of the people isn't enough.

Meanwhile BC Housing says the province increased its total number of homeless shelter beds by a quarter between 2012 and March 2016. However the number of independent social housing units barely rose, by less than one per cent. The number of transitional, supported and assisted-living units actually fell, by about the same amount. Meanwhile, more than 10,000 names still languish on the BC Housing waitlist for housing, and at any one time an estimated 15,000 people in the province have no secure shelter at all.

'Help' that (also) hurts

Funding one type of shelter while letting others languish, as B.C. has done, has produced unintended consequences where it's been tried in the U.S.

Los Angeles, for example, shifted city funds away from transitional housing with the admirable motive of building more permanent units. But the result left more people on the streets.

Although the estimated number of homeless living in the City of Angels didn't change from 2015 to 2016, its "unsheltered population" rose by 1,400. The Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority blamed the rise on the disappearance of transitory beds to planned permanent housing—and cuts to funding for shelter programs in order to pay for the new construction.

The 220 low-rent rooms in the Panama Hotel in the city's infamous Skid Row neighbourhood, for instance, were recently vacated and gutted. It's expected to reopen in a year after remodeling into permanent supportive furnished housing. But there will be only 79 new units.

L.A.'s shift was encourage by the United States' Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) under former President Barack Obama. The agency bet on more permanent housing to solve America's

The San Francisco SRO

Advocates laud San Francisco's approach to single-room occupancy hotels as a model. Some of its features:

Tough inspections: In 1991, the city ordered building inspectors to watch for and take legal action against landlords who mistreat tenants.

Monetary investment: San Francisco has either bought or leased 500 SRO hotels which it leases to non-profits to manage. It spends US$37 million a year on 2,973 units.

Penalties: San Francisco brought landlords up on bylaw offences 485 times in 2014-15, levying about US$335,000 in fees and penalties. The revenue went into tenant-service programs that, among other things, help tenants organize and become aware of their rights.

An open, online process: If a tenant complains to the city about a landlord, it posts and updates all the details on its website, including any other complaints lodged against the same building.

Well-known architect Helmut Jahn designed Schiff Residences in Chicago for low-income residents.

Skid Row Housing Trust develops buildings for Los Angeles' most vulnerable population, but takes its design seriously—such as Rainbow Apartments (pictured).

homelessness crisis. To help pay for it, HUD cut funding to some 2,000 transitional housing beds across the country.

But it takes time to build. People who lost beds mostly didn't have an interim place to go, or a guarantee they would be able to get an upgraded unit when replacements were built.

No single 'happy home'

That's why it's important to understand what 'affordable' housing means to different people needing support, says Alina Turner, who played a role in eliminating long-term street homelessness in Medicine Hat, Alberta.

"The reality is that people vacillate through different housing types throughout their lives, depending on their experiences, situations, contexts," she says. "So it's unrealistic to think that one solution is going to solve all your problems."

"It's not black and white. There's an infinite grey scale to homeless people in terms of what kind of interior space and program they would like."

An architect of Alberta's provincial framework for defeating homelessness and a former vice-president of strategy at the Calgary Homeless Foundation, Turner knows what it means to be homeless herself.

"We were refugees from communist Romania," she says of her family. "We lived for two years in a refugee camp in Germany. Then when we came to Canada we bounced around," experiencing tenuous rental situations. When family conflict led to her removal by child-care workers, Turner lived in a basement suite by herself until she aged out of government care.

Turner's experience leads her to stress the importance of listening to those living without a home. "If you listen, you're going to know it's not going to be this 'one size fits all' [answer]," she says.

The best outcomes happen, she says, when the type of shelter—a temporary bed, transitional, or permanent—is well matched to an individual's needs. And, more surprisingly, when they're free to say, 'No thanks.'

"You have to have the flexibility that [if] someone is unhappy with the placement you've made, you have a course of action to address that," says Turner. "If we don't have enough homeless people that want that [specific form of] intervention, then that's kind of a waste [of] millions of dollars in programs. We better shift that money."

Turner contests an argument influential in the United States: that transitional housing isn't as "cost-efficient" as permanent housing. While efficiency is desirable and worth improving, she says, "That doesn't mean that we should do away with an entire sector."

Vancouver lawyer DJ Larkin agrees. The prominent housing rights advocate says the province needs to stop simply reacting to events.

Policy gestures in response to "a fuss" over symptoms, like the appearance of tent cities last year in Victoria and Vancouver, Larkin says, are "never going to solve the problem."

Rather, they prompt the province to "over-focus on one aspect of the housing spectrum to the detriment of others." Over the years, Larkin says, a shift of government focus to supportive housing has meant that other types "fall off the map a little bit."

"If we focus on permanent housing, there are going to be people who need transitional housing, who need shelter, and who are getting pushed out of those spaces where they currently exist," Larkin says, as happened in Los Angeles.

Meanwhile, "people living in poverty end up being quasi-institutionalized in supportive housing where they may not need it."

America: designing for the homeless

What many of the currently homeless really want, and as much as really need, may in fact turn out to be something very like a cleaned-up SRO.

Like Vancouver, cities across the United States are requiring the inclusion of low-income housing among middle-income or affluent residents. Architects are getting creative in meeting those wishes.

Half of the 217 units in Brooklyn's Schermerhorn House, an 11-storey building with a glass facade and rooftop garden in the middle of a luxury condo and townhouse area, are reserved for the low-income and formerly homeless. Its architect, the Polshek Partnership, had previously designed the Clinton Presidential Library.

Ivy League-trained Bryan Bell founded his New York-based non-profit DesignCorps in 1991, he says, after realizing that as a member of an "elite profession," he "would probably never address critical issues in the world." He changed course and started designing housing for migrant farmers in Pennsylvania. His non-profit connects graduates from architecture and planning schools to low-income communities.

The process starts by talking to "a real person," Bell says. "The first step would always be, how can we engage this community in a conversation and let them sit at the table as equals with an expertise about their life that a designer probably never would have had."

What usually comes up first in conversation with the homeless or low-income, he says, is simply having a place that's safe. Beyond that, he adds, "it's not black and white. There's an infinite grey scale to homeless people in terms of what kind of interior space and program they would like."

A decade ago Helmut Jahn, better known for glass skyscrapers, designed a new SRO hotel in Chicago. He used construction-grade materials like unpainted cedar and corrugated aluminum to create a modern-looking building that still rented at rates compatible with Illinois' welfare benefits. Los Angeles' Rainbow Apartments, development by the non-profit Skid Row Housing Trust, boasts scarlet window frames against a white concrete exterior.

Canada: money, but no plan

Canada's 2016 federal budget promised more money for the homelessness crisis. There was $111.8 million for the Homelessness Partnering Strategy; $208 million to the newly created Affordable Rental Housing Innovation Fund; and $30 million to assist with upkeep of existing rent-geared-to-income housing units.

But neither Ottawa nor Victoria have presented thought-out plans to keep all the necessary doors on the low-income/homeless housing spectrum open to those in need. And they haven't quite asked for the valuable input from those who would benefit from that shelter.

As for de Grey, he continues to work with the SRO Collaborative hoping to preserve affordable units like his.

"We've been crunching numbers, and half of them are gone—and by gone I mean they're over $500 a month in rent. They're no longer low-income," he says. Another "550 rooms, I believe, are being rapidly gentrified, renovicted, by any means possible."

The small rooms may not seem much to others. But to many seniors he knows personally, they're a locking door and a place to call home.

"Poor people have to live somewhere."

Megaphone readers supported this series through a spring 2016 crowdfunding drive. The Tyee's Housing Fix project separately supported this project. 2016-17 funders of The Tyee's Housing Fix Project are Vancity Credit Union, and Catherine Donnelly Foundation, in collaboration with Columbia Institute. Funders of The Tyee's special solutions reporting projects neither influence nor endorse the particular content of our reporting.

Running on Empty

By The Bear Whisperer

Got to be wise,
Got to go with the flow
I'm running out of time.

I'd love to stay and chat
But I have to go.

I'm running on empty
With nowhere to go.

I see a plane far away
It'll probably land with many people with places to go.
I have to get on that plane
So I'll have some place to go,
Time limits me for places to go.
I'm running on empty.

Got to have faith.
Got to have will.
Got to do what you got to do.
Because I'm running on empty.

Many things to do,
Many people to see.
Many decisions to make when
I'm running on empty.

Like a vehicle that runs on fuel,
I'm a human that runs on faith,
Will and working body parts.

The Bear Whisperer is a prolific poet based in the Downtown Eastside who has shared many poems with Megaphone, and has been published in the magazine and Voices of the Street *literary editions. Photo by Marius Rumpf, Flickr Commons.*

Foreign Radical // February 6-11 // Studio 1398 (1398 Cartwright St.) // Tickets $14-$30 // Vancouver

Join Theatre Conspiracy for a radical game of secrets. This award-winning interactive, multimedia experience has multilingual elements in Farsi and Arabic. Participants are invited into a game exploring security, profiling, freedom of expression, and privacy in the age of cybersurveillance. Throughout the performance, participants collaborate, compete, investigate, debate, and spy on each other. In my experience, that's generally what happens in a theatre audience anyway.

Valentine's Day: Dawn of the Black Hearts // February 14 // Copper Owl (1900 Douglas St.) // Tickets $10 // Doors 8 p.m. // Victoria

Like to be ironic on Valentine's Day? Are you into death metal? Does a promo poster in black with red-inked corpses on it sound enticing? This is definitely your jam, then. Check out Phrenelith (Denmark Death Metal), Necrot (California Death Metal), and "local maniacs" Altered Dead, and Usurpation. No minors allowed.

Gracie // Until February 19 // Belfry Theatre (1291 Gladstone Ave.) // Regular Tickets $31.50 // Victoria

Bountiful, B.C. is probably only famous for one thing—being the largest polygamous community in Canada. If you haven't heard of Bountiful, it's not a tourist destination unless your jam is sister wives and following a specific religious sect. We follow the story of Gracie's world, where she starts to question the faith she's always lived by.

Millenia: Asian Art Through the Ages // Until March 13 // Art Gallery of Greater Victoria (1040 Moss St.) // Tickets $13 // Victoria

Seventy of the rarest works of art hailing from Japan, China, Korea, Tibet, India, Thailand, and Vietnam will call the Victoria art gallery home for only a little while longer. The works include old and modern paintings, ancient bronze items, ceramic treasures, textiles, rare amber and ivory objects. Check out the celebration of these Asian and Middle Eastern works before they head back to their private collectors' shelves.

Girl Positive Book Launch & Panel // February 9 // The Cultch (1895 Venables St.) // Free // 7 p.m. // Vancouver

Tatiana Fraser and Caia Hagel got together to write a book to showcase diverse voices of girls and young women across North America, highlighting real-life accounts of how girls are making positive change. The panel, facilitated by the authors, will discuss the different ways female artists are being innovative.

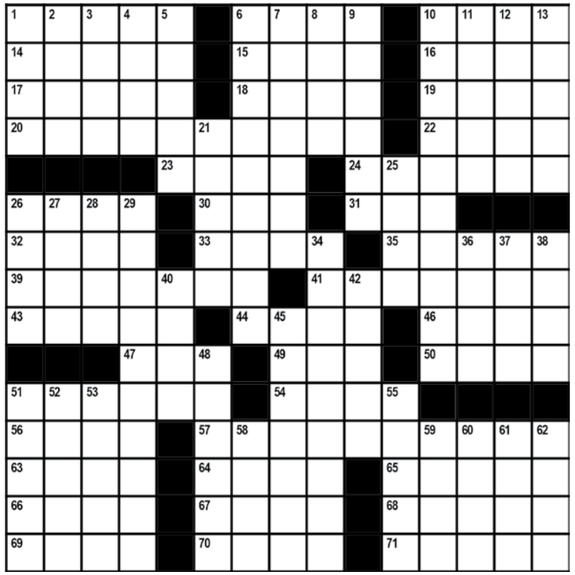
Kinky Boots // February 7–12 // Queen Elizabeth Theatre (630 Hamilton St.) // Tickets start at $30 // Vancouver

Check out this Broadway hit in Vancouver—featuring songs by pop icon Cyndi Lauper—that follows Charlie Price. He's struggling to live up to his father's expectations while running their family business. With the fate of their factory hanging in the balance, he gets help from an unlikely place. Inspired by true events, follow the story of a gentleman's shoe factory.

JFL Northwest // February 16–25 // Various acts, locations, prices // Vancouver

Just For Laughs—the Vancouver edition—has a pretty promising lineup this year. Comedians such as Sarah Silverman, Jim Gaffigan, and Trevor Noah headline the festival, but there are local talents featured as well. With different venues and prices along the way, check out if there's a comedian for you.

Crossword



Puzzle by *New York Times* contributor Patrick "Mac" McIntyre, courtesy of *Real Change*, Seattle's Street Newspaper.

CROSSWORD
Flip-a-Phrase

ACROSS
1 Trig ratio
6 Mimics
10 School group?
14 Michelob beer option
15 Croat, e.g.
16 Division preposition
17 Pizazz
18 Relative of a rabbit
19 500 sheets
20 Taxi ride charges imposed on former President Clinton? (3 wds.) (4,2,4)
22 Highlands tongue
23 Defrost
24 Like some grins
26 Brightly colored fish
30 "Oh, ____ is me!"
31 Polar worker
32 "Giddyup" opposite
33 Harsh means justifiers, for some
35 Severe Athenian lawgiver
39 Cord worn around the neck to hold a knife or whistle: Var.
41 20th letter of the Greek alphabet (UNSPOIL anagram)
43 Demanding
44 Hamburg's river
46 Schnozzola
47 Lennon's lady
49 Long-eared beast
50 Receives
51 Undergo pain or loss
54 Longtime Yugoslav leader
56 Asian nursemaid
57 Chronological landmarks for actor Hudson? (3 wds.) (4,2,4)
63 Kind of lamp
64 Civil wrong
65 Have a sense of belonging (2 wds.) (3,2)
66 The last word in churches
67 Instrument in a wind quintet
68 Best of the best
69 Circular data holder
70 Marmalade ingredient
71 Hem again

DOWN
1 Place for a link, maybe
2 Stewpot
3 Top banana
4 Lake near Niagara Falls
5 Billiards bounce
6 Popular hair color for female celebs (3-6)
7 Like cornrows (PLEAD IT anagram)
8 "Duke, Duke, Duke, Duke of ____..."
9 Slender
10 Lighter used by sportswriter Lardner? (3 wds.) (4,2,4)
11 Like some gases
12 Secret supply
13 Cozy and comfortable
21 Less
25 Cutlass or 88
26 Wise birds
27 Excellent, in increasingly dated slang
28 Excellent (1-3)
29 A notable loss for Former Secretary of the Treasury Paulson? (3 wds.) 4,2,4)
34 Barely survived (on)
36 Medicinal plant depicted on Egyptian stone carvings
37 Price
38 Small bills
40 Frank or Francis
42 Sauce with crushed garlic and basil
45 "In a while" (2 wds.) (5,2)
48 Keynote speaker, e.g.
51 Pre-entree course
52 So-called "fifth taste"
53 Ones you just adore
55 Don Corleone's may be impossible to refuse
58 Mongolian desert
59 More than annoy
60 Elevator inventor
61 Refer to, as an authoritative source
62 "...only I ____ then what I..."

SOLUTION FROM THE JANUARY ISSUE

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