

Long time Living Wage advocate **Deborah Littman** has taken her passion for social justice organizing from the streets of London, England to Metro Vancouver.

EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES

Deborah Littman's superpower is connecting people to people. On any given day, she's juggling any number of issues – introducing HEU members at Inglewood to sympathetic church members in West Vancouver, taking a delegation of leaders to meet with the mayor, or hosting a forum on the transit referendum in Richmond.

It's her passion for building relationships and finding solutions that drives Littman. And she takes that passion into her work with Metro Vancouver Alliance.

The Alliance is a non-partisan group of over 50 labour, faith, community and educational organizations, including HEU, who believes that by working together we have the power to change our communities for the better.

But according to Littman, developing the trust needed to make that change among uncommon allies takes time. Hence, Littman has a long-term vision for the possibilities that can be achieved through making these connections.

Littman says the organizations that people are part of outside of their workplace are the bedrock of the Alliance: “The mosques, temples, churches, community centres, unions and other groups are the organizations that build the Alliance, which in turn

builds stronger communities for all of us.”

Littman's perseverance – she's been working with community leaders to pull the Alliance together in Vancouver since 2011 – recently reached a tipping point, when 800 people from 50 organizations turned out for a municipal election accountability assembly last October.

And it demonstrated that working differently by focusing on people, has the power to make a huge impact.

“Often groups go to a city council and ask politely for something. Politicians may tell you they'll have a look at your proposal,” says Littman. “But if 50 organizations say they want the same thing, with one voice and one position, and there's a commitment to work together to make it happen, you get a different reaction.”

Littman is no stranger to this type of organizing. She worked on the successful living wage campaign in London, England for over a decade. And she was a key person to plant the seed for HEU's living wage campaign in 2007.

Littman's philosophy is based on an international model of community organizing which operates on the principle of “power before program,” making listening a priority and directly asking people what they need as a key first step.



“If you miss listening to people, you don't ever focus on the issues that really move people forward,” says Littman. “If you miss the face-to-face time, you have a lot of empty action.”

The process of creating personal ties and deepening understanding across differences allows members of the Alliance to agree on areas they can work on together.

This develops sustainability over the long haul, ensuring that members are working on the issues that matter most to them. Locally, the Alliance is campaigning on key demands related to housing, transit, poverty and social isolation.

Once bonds are formed, Littman is passionate about getting people to the bargaining table, turning up the heat on employers, and holding politicians' feet to the fire. “The notion of making those in authority accountable to their communities is a powerful one for me,” says Littman.

Littman's work has significant potential to shift the way we think about coalition efforts. “Coming together to win something teaches diverse communities how to build bridges, and combats the corrosive influence of the right-wing press that tell us to blame each other for our troubles.”