

DOWNTOWN EASTSIDE NEIGHBOURHOOD HOUSE

right to food zine

“Charity sees the need, but not the cause.”



MY PERSPECTIVE: BRINGING
DIGNITY, CHOICE AND
EMPOWERMENT TO FOOD IN
THE DTES

PAIN STREET

URBAN FARMING IN AN EAST
VANCOUVER BACKYARD

MANDATE

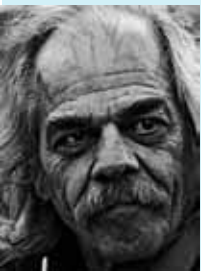
The *Right to Food (RTF) Zine's* mission is to promote the human right to food that is healthy, nutritious, affordable, and presented with dignity. Our voices reflect the diversity that is the Downtown Eastside. Our articles, research, and recipes will speak to DTES residents, social justice groups, and beyond. Our readers will be kept informed, yet hungry to know more and to become more engaged. We are part of the local community and strive to act as a community-building tool.

ZINE CONTRIBUTORS



Above, left to right: Donna, Rory, Rebecca, Ricki, Ludvik, Stan, Kim, James, Peter.

Below, left to right: Hendrik, dm, John, Janice, Brian, Ludvik.



Missing: Donald, Mary Catharine. Front and back cover art: Janice Jacinto.

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INTERVIEW WITH DONALD ISBISTER

My Perspective: Bringing Dignity, Choice and Empowerment to Food in the DTES

Written in collaboration with Mary Catharine Breadner

I moved to the Vancouver area from Saskatoon in 1994. Since then I have witnessed the evolution of the food scene in the Downtown Eastside. I will be the first to acknowledge that although there have been improvements, there is a long way to go. This article was written to highlight my experience and bring a grateful appreciation for what I would account of my struggle for food that has been ongoing for almost 20 years.

Food, well there are a couple of ways to look at this, many people think that we should be thankful to simply get what we get. But I can tell you first hand, that if you have spent a day trying to source out food by walking around to various food providers, whether at the Food Bank, the Lutheran Mission, the Union Gospel Mission or others, you don't really know how appalling the hunt can be. It is rare that I can find the food that I want

or the food that will make me feel full and satisfied from one place. Don't get me wrong, I appreciate the efforts of everyone, but I ask you: do you know what it feels like to never be able to choose, to simply take what you are given and to accept the way in which it is provided? Many of the organizations provide food that is of poor quality and high in sugars and starches. Distribution is at times unsanitary and many are unconcerned with food quality with regards to nutritional value or hygiene. I know this because when I voice my objection, I am told to be thankful

for what I am receiving. I am subjected to sickness and diseases from the poor health of the people who access these places. While in line others coughed on me, are allowed to handle food with filthy hands, and no sanitary stations are usually set up, all people share one common bathroom which to say the least are not known for their cleanliness.

The charity model for food donation has also subjected me to food that is out of date, and in some cases by the time we receive it is weeks out of date. Fresh vegetables and fruit are not always available and at times on the edge of going rotten and most likely won't meet health standards of food for purchase, but food provided at no charge rarely meets the same standards. All these factors cause unhealthy behaviors and stress. In my opinion, good health means high quality foods with a supply of vegetables and fruit, along with

sanitary conditions, and people who are motivated by equality for all.

I know that there have been articles before that have discussed the issues with food line-ups before this one, but when talking about food provided in the DTES it is hard to avoid this topic. People driving through the DTES hate seeing the line-ups, people walking along the streets dislike the line-ups, but I am here to tell you—so do I. Line-ups are undignified, you have to line-up and wait, with the hopes that when you get your turn there is going to be food

“I have spent time waiting only to have to eat and then line-up again for enough to get full... I think that people who have never lined up really don't understand how harsh this practice can be.”

available for you. Not only is there the stress of lining up, you also have the aspect that you are lining up for food that you have no choice about what you get, how it was prepared, or where it came from. You also have the added anxiety of lining up with people who are agitated because they are hungry, possibly sick due to malnutrition, some people are coughing all over and don't have good personal hygiene. I really find these line-ups personally tough for me, and although I need the food that is available, this is not the way that I want to fight for it.

I have also had personal experience being discriminated when I get to the front of the line and am provided with a ration of food that simply isn't enough. I have spent time waiting only to have to eat and then line-up again for enough to get full. It is a degrading and dehumanizing experience. I think that people who have never lined up really don't understand how harsh this practice can be.

This is an everyday occurrence for many people living down here; we are living on government assistance, which simply isn't enough money to feed, house, and live. We are stressed about meeting our basic needs on a daily basis. This is happening every day, at every time of day, which leads me to the next point that I need to make. People need to be able

to take food home with them, and the real problem is that I have to go and travel to all these places to access the food, and most places will not let you take food home with you. You must eat and present yourself according to their schedules. My hope is that more providers will allow for people to take food with them, and make a choice not only about what but also when they are going to eat.

As someone that lives this every day, when I was approached by the *RTF Zine* to tell my story I had so much to say. The purpose of sharing my story is to help make it better. There are lots of places, like the DTES NH that are making it better. They provide healthy meals in a hygienic, dignified way. I think that if more people could understand what it is like to live in the DTES, as well as on social assistance, society could create more collaboration and movement towards better opportunities. More people need to understand where I am coming from in order to address many of the problems faced by people accessing food in the DTES. We don't need more programing, we really need the opportunity for inclusion and decision making. From my perspective things are getting better, and with more collaboration we could achieve so much more.

At first glance, the question “who decides about food and nutrition?” seems to be a rhetorical one. It would seem natural that the people themselves decided about what to eat and what not. The right to decide and to control which food to have is inherent to the human right to adequate food. This decision is to be taken by the rights-holders themselves. However, in reality, hundreds of millions of persons on this planet, and especially those most affected by hunger and malnutrition, have lost this decision power, at least in part.

— Right to Food and Nutrition Watch 2012

Pain Street

By *dm gillis*

I remember my childhood trips to Woodward's with my mother. We'd ride a BC Hydro trolley that cost a dime to board. As we passed over Main Street along Hastings, my mother would often tell a favourite story of seeing an Egyptian mummy that was once displayed in Carnegie Library.

It wasn't called the Downtown Eastside back then. It was just a nameless transitional region between the residential east end and downtown. To my childhood imagination, however, it was a fabulous quarter of ancient granite architecture, smelling of sweat and cough drop eucalyptus. It was a land of furiously smoking old men in Sunday-best suits over rough plaid shirts. Retired loggers, my mother would say—almost dismissively. And there were the bars with mysterious Ladies with Escorts Entrances.

We'd get off the bus at Hastings and Abbott, where bits of Chinatown spilled over off of Pender. A White Lunch Cafeteria across the street. There were shops selling everything along West Hastings. And thousands upon thousands of people, or so it seemed. Everyone going

somewhere important. I could tell by the looks on their faces, the pace of their step. They had parcels and brief cases. Vendors hawked the Sun and Province. Cabs dropped fares and picked up new ones. Cops strolled by whistling. All the men had hats, and every woman a stylish purse.

Let's go, my mother would say, taking my hand. And we'd disappear into Woodward's to shop, drink tea and eat ten-cent doughnuts.

That was then. We all know what happened.

Woodward's eventually failed, and the loss of it and all that it anchored made Vancouver a doughnut city. Empty at its centre.

The emptiness was eventually filled, of course. The retired loggers died off. Their social clubs closed. And the once proud, if slightly dingy, hotels they'd occupied became SRO slums. The poor and vulnerable found a home here. Riverview Hospital closed, leaving patients nowhere else to go. Drug dealers moved in for the kill.

Vancouver looked away and let it happen. Intervention would be too costly, and the people who populated what had become the Downtown Eastside weren't worth the effort. Perhaps, if the very good people of Vancouver closed their eyes, it would all go away. But it did not.

Once, while waiting for a light at Hastings and Main, I noticed that someone had placed an adhesive

letter "P" over the "M" in Main Street. Pain Street. It was like a short but very sad poem.

But despite the complacency of the people of Vancouver, the Downtown Eastside became something more than Pain Street. The pain remained, but the Downtown Eastside became a neighbourhood. Where once people

were relegated, they now lived. They were poor, and the streets remained hard and dangerous. But as Vancouver looked away, the residents of the DTES began to look to one another. They became their own voice, and began to be heard. They created community. It wasn't always pretty, but it was their own.

Then outsiders began to pour in. Looking for cheap retail and residential rent, and, cynically, an unearned claim to the grit of the DTES. Street cred rented, not earned. Opportunists creating economies out of scale. Crazy leaky-condo developers with ready cash and bulldozers. The condescension of a self-congratulatory entrepreneurial class, full of

"I noticed that someone had placed an adhesive letter "P" over the "M" in Main Street. Pain Street. It was like a short but very sad poem."

charity but unwilling to fairly share wealth. Displacement and the pressing of long established residents into a few desperate blocks, surrounded by a growing boutique gentry. The hurtful disparity of sandwich token handouts and the three-dollar doughnut.

Will these newcomers to the Downtown Eastside continue to use their comparative wealth as a tool of acquisition, compelling those they judge surplus to

leave? At the moment, it looks that way. But the current drivers of gentrification must know that they're small fry compared to the corporations that will follow, using corporate power and wealth to displace them. And when all that is left is a Disney-fied strip mall of Starbucks, 7-Elevens and Money Marts, will they be proud to say that they made it all possible?



Photos by dm gillis

Gentrification or Revitalization: Doughnut... or Do-Not

By Brian Miles

Gentrification or revitalization? That seems to be the way the Downtown Eastside (DTES) is developing, and which of the two urbanization models it depends on who you ask. With the proliferation of higher salary condo owners and a wave of designer cafes and restaurants entering the area, those living in SROs and/or receiving government assistance are unsure which of those two headings apply. It definitely represents change. So why are some of us opposing the rapid influx of new businesses and residents? A recent entry into the debate was the introduction of Cartems Donuterie pop-up store under the Hotel Pennsylvania at Carrall and Hastings, which has polarized opinion as to the advantages or disadvantages this new urban density expansion is having on the community. Some feel that the \$3 donuts contribute to segregation between economic classes, creating a neighborhood of “haves” and “have-nots.” The business has been thrown into the fray by poverty rights and advocacy action groups as evidence that this expansion may be having harmful effects on the lower income portion of the population (most of whom survive on \$7.50 per day, which makes a \$3 donut non-inclusive due to monetary restraints).

To Jean Swanson, a coordinator with the Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood Council and Carnegie Community Action Project, the donut shop is “an example of gentrification and isn’t good for the low income community in the DTES. Because the city is encouraging so many condos in the neighborhood, richer people are moving in. This pushes up land values, rents in hotels, and rents in stores. This creates ripple effects where the poor are pushed out, unless they live in

social housing. If they live in social housing, they just become more and more uncomfortable in their neighborhood. In the meantime, hotels that used to house people at welfare rate, like the Burns Block, are now renting for over \$500, \$600 and even \$1,000 a month.” So what are her considerations in achieving a resolution? “Some of us in the Downtown Eastside Neighborhood Council and Carnegie Community Action Project are hoping that the current local area plan process can create some rules that will slow gentrification and create some allies to push for more social housing in the DTES.”

Jordan Cash, co-owner of Cartems Donuterie, believes his shop represents revitalization: “Gentrification is also called revitalization and urban renewal; those buildings did not always look so neglected. Anyone who has lived here more than two decades will tell you the whole city has changed radically.”

And his thoughts on the detractors and the \$3 donut price? “While I understand our store is construed as a symbol of the very layered and dynamic issue of gentrification, we are a small business still working towards creating a sustainable operation. We chose that price, after taxes, to make it simple for ourselves and our customers, and to cover a wide array of unknown costs we had in starting the business.” He continues, “We have all lived in or around urban poverty before in other cities. The only thing that is different about this neighborhood is that the transition to the rest of the city is so abrupt. Moreover, we were all well aware of the economic structure and class divisions long before we opened. There is a large degree of coexistence happening and it will continue to be that way as more and more spaces

“There is a large degree of coexistence happening and it will continue to be that way as more and more spaces are developed.”

are developed. There seems to be an underlying ‘us vs. them’ type of mentality, which is not a viable and sustainable way to make this area work. Most of the rancor comes from the commentators and the leadership of various non-profit groups in the area who have never met us or been in the shop.”

He also feels that the business has been attempting to contribute to the overall community, with varying success, by offering discounts to people who “cannot pay full price.” He is also trying to develop a discount coupon to be distributed through the Pigeon Park Savings Bank, “but despite numerous attempts and efforts to push that process forward on our end, nothing has happened.”

So there you have the two sides: how do you decide? Gentrification or revitalization? Keep in mind that various attempts to house or detoxify or support residents of the DTES in other urban locations around the Lower Mainland have been met with much opposition and NIMBY mentality. May we not ourselves be accused of the same NIMBY aesthetic now that the roles are reversed? Or is it that we are not given the choice of an input or say in our own neighbourhood development that gives us the incentive to rise up and protest?

It really depends on who you ask.

Doughnut... or Do-Not?



Alex Pope, “Cartems Doughnuts,” August 21, 2012, Flickr (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

“Beggars Can’t Be Choosers” with Save On Meats’ Sandwich Token

By Peter Driftmier

We all know the expression, “beggars can’t be choosers.”

On the heels of the holiday season, Downtown Eastside restaurant mogul Mark Brand Inc has launched a meal token program targeting those who would like to support others in need. The meal token, at a cost of \$2.25, is intended for use in place of spare change when a panhandler approaches someone who has purchased this token. It is redeemable for a breakfast sandwich at the window of Save On Meats, Mark Brand Inc’s only location affordable for those on modest incomes.

The following description of the program is found in the press release announcing the program:

“The Meal Tokens solve the dilemma that many people find themselves in. The reality is that people are hesitant to give money rather than food to people who they see on the street. With the Meal Tokens, donors can rest assured that what they give will be going towards providing much needed sustenance and at the same time, supporting Save on Meats’ social enterprise.”

Let’s revisit the expression “beggars can’t be choosers.” The reality of the Downtown Eastside is that the majority of its residents who get by on fixed low-incomes already rely heavily on charitable food sources. Charitable food, despite already being structurally unequipped to provide adequate nutrition and sustenance for people living in poverty, is a model of food distribution that is designed without decision-making power resting in the hands of those who rely on it.

Between direct cuts and rate freezes, the real value of social assistance rates have stagnated, increasingly denying Vancouver’s poorest residents the ability to decide what foodstuffs they provide themselves and their families. The majority of Mark

Brand Inc’s enterprise is out of reach to those on a monthly \$610 social assistance budget for single “expected to work” adults. Restaurants aside, the Dieticians of Canada have calculated that no best-practice budgeting can stretch a BC social assistance budget to accommodate healthful eating. This is something that low-income people have long been saying, and which participants in Raise the Rates’ Welfare Food Challenge overwhelmingly confirmed this fall.

In the context of the vast majority of DTES residents struggling on incomes that deny any purchasing power, businesses and their Business Improvement Associations have a growing stake in the gentrification of the Downtown Eastside. Mark Brand Inc does not break out of this trend, but re-packages it with a charity sandwich as a marketing strategy to disassociate itself with gentrification. (This is in addition to the fact that the company lets one BIA operate out of Save On Meats.)

Mark Brand Inc isn’t a charity. It is a private business. It has a bottom line to meet, and purchasers of the tokens are helping consolidate a market for Save On Meats. While customers are being targeted for their altruism to purchase the tokens, these same customers will have a harder time speaking against Mark Brand Inc’s role in the gentrification of the

Mark Brand Inc isn’t a charity. It is a private business. It has a bottom line to meet, and purchasers of the tokens are helping consolidate a market for Save On Meats.

neighbourhood. For a business-plan that depends on not being associated with the more clear-cut gentrification mandate of the rest of that company's projects, the building of an ally-base is essential.

Mark Brand Inc's press release cuts straight to the core of our society's distrust of low-income people: those with money or power are able to make decisions on behalf of those without it, believing themselves better equipped to do so. The "dilemma" that Mark Brand Inc is attempting to solve exists only in the minds of people who want to help the materially poor, but can't move beyond their ideological train-

ing that simply giving them what they are asking for is doing them more harm than good.

The real "dilemma" at stake is the position that panhandlers receiving these tokens are put in. With each token one receives, one has less self-determination over something so intimate as what one eats, and that same person is told that the person who gave her the token is supposed to be her ally.

Peter Driftmier is the Right to Food Initiatives Program Lead at the Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood House and a former sandwich worker at Save On Meats.



Photos by dm gillis

INTERVIEW

Irene Jaakson, Executive Director

By James Kim

Irene Jaakson became Executive Director of the Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood House in November. Irene grew up in Toronto, but some of her fondest memories are of her parents' farm near Arthur, Ontario. After moving to Vancouver, Irene worked as a Coordinator with Vancouver Coastal Health and was the Director of Emergency Services with Lookout Emergency Aid Society. Most recently, she was a social worker at BC Women's Hospital, working with women who have chronic, complex mental issues and long-standing issues with substance dependence.

Q: What first attracted you to the DTES NH?

It was the Right to Food philosophy, hands down. The other piece was the fact that it's the Downtown Eastside. I love the community, I love the neighbourhood, I love the people, I love the complexity, and I love the heart that's in the community.

One of the things that has always challenged me is the reliance on the provision of services. There is a power structure that is created when a person or a group of people—or, indeed, a community—is always in the position of receiving something. That's not a healthy or a motivating place to be. In the Neighbourhood House, we challenge that. We turn that model on its ear. I love the fact that we do that using food as a mechanism to work in partnership with people and mobilize community members.

Q: How do you usually start your day here?

Every day is different. I don't have an answer [laughs]. There is a fair bit of administrative work. Trying to get a firm understanding of where we are financially and so on. The other consistent piece is looking for funding. That's something that has always been an element of the day.

Q: What's the most important thing you've learned in your first month here?

We go against the grain in so many ways. We do work in a way that others would generally see as almost being impossible. That's incredibly powerful to me. We challenge that charity model. We challenge that idea that members of our neighbourhood cannot truly act in partnership. There's a real beauty and justice in the way that we do things that provides other options, that provides a bit of choice for people. I love my learning around that.

Q: Were there any unexpected challenges you encountered after starting?

I've never been an executive director before. That, on its own, is a huge learning curve. There are facility issues that are new to me—how much power we need for the new industrial dishwasher, and so on. Even in things like that, there are the most creative ways of managing some of those struggles and some of those issues.

Q: Where do you hope to see the house in one year's time?

We're definitely moving in the right direction [but] I would love to have some core funding. I would love to work with the Board, and the members of

“We do work in a way that others would generally see as almost being impossible. That's incredibly powerful to me. We challenge that charity model.”

the community, and our staff team on developing a strategic plan on where we all see the NH in a few year's time. In the next year, I'll be able to spend time with the community to find out what our neighbours want our Neighbourhood House to look like.

There is [a strategic plan] but we have a plan that looks at broad strokes. It would benefit us, and the neighbourhood and the community, to bring that down to specific steps and actions.

Q: What do you do outside of the NH?

My dog is with me as much as possible. She's a great gal—her name is Molly. She's a labradoodle, which not a real breed, but I like saying it.

I spend as much time as possible outdoors. At this time of the year, I'm an avid snowshoer. When I was coming in this morning, I looked at the mountains. The sun was on the mountains and there was all this fresh snow... we're so fortunate to be here in this beautiful city. I'm learning how to [downhill] ski. One of my nieces was recently hired



as a ski instructor, so she was my inspiration for learning how to ski.

I wear a couple of other hats as well. I coordinate the Extreme Weather Response program for the City of Vancouver. When the weather is very bad, there's an entire system mobilized to bring the [homeless] off the streets in different parts of the city.

My family is back east in Ontario, which hurts my heart a little bit, because I'm really lucky to have a fantastic family. My sister has two teenagers, and I never talk to them on the phone, I only ever text

them, which is bizarre to me. We have a great, very close relationship via text. I have to watch *Glee* every week to sustain the relationship.

Q: Is there anything else you would like to say that we didn't talk about?

It's such a privilege to be here. I love waking up and doing "work"—because to me, it's not. I'm one of a fortunate few who can say that. It's a privilege to be working with this team... and to learn from them and to learn from members of this community.

Urban Farming in an East Vancouver Backyard

By John Hughes

Green tendrils have sprouted into urban crevices in ways thought unlikely, if not impossible only a decade ago: roof-top gardens, proliferating bike paths and community agriculture have forced their way onto Vancouver's blacktop. Not all of these innovations are popular. Some, such as the City of Vancouver's bike path construction, have been derided as impractical, inconvenient and merely enviro-chic. But there are those who envision a more verdant Vancouver, one that comes with an economic shift and a significantly reduced carbon footprint. Kim Del Valle Garcia and her partner Rowan Melling live near Broadway Skytrain Station. They raise chickens in their backyard.

Four hens cluck and peck in a pen in one of the three plots of land that comprise Del Valle Garcia and Melling's Back Alley Urban Farms. The fowl are part of a nascent land reform movement taking root in Vancouver. Del Valle Garcia says the idea behind the farm network is to use "any useable space, whether it's legal or illegal" for the purpose of feeding people in the neighbourhood. Back Alley Urban Farms also grows vegetables. Along with the eggs, the farms produce enough to feed the two farmers. There is also surplus, and the chickens do their part. The birds each lay an egg a day in the summer, but fewer in the winter, with the cold bringing down their production. Even with the seasonal drop in egg laying, the chickens contribute fertilizer to the enterprise. And, at peak levels, there are enough eggs and vegetables to sell at farmer's markets in the city, as well as enough to do a brisk business selling produce from their backyard.

Back Alley Urban Farms uses all local stock. The fowl are "Vancouver born and raised" says Del Valle Garcia. And despite running the occasional guerilla farm plot, she and Melling are generally in compliance with City of Vancouver by-laws, which allow a maximum of four chickens (but no roosters). The City website says the regulations are in place to "help you get involved in your own food production." Del Valle Garcia and Melling are proving that all it takes to get started is the will to make it happen. "They're easy to raise," says Del Valle Garcia. The feel-good, hands-on localization of food production is more than just a pesticide-free money saver for cash-strapped vegetarians; the reduction in environmental costs is big. Local production greatly reduces dependence on the supermarket food model. Consider that eggs raised even as close by as the Fraser Valley must be packaged, trucked in, stocked, shelved and sold before they become omelets. Raising the fowl in Vancouver cuts out just about all of that energy expenditure.

"It's got much more of a flow to it. I can put in a day of work without realizing that I've put in a day of work."

Freed from big-box store prices, people who worry about high food costs may have a viable option in raising their own chickens and growing their own vegetables. And Back Alley Urban Farms' tactical approach addresses more than just economics. Rowan Melling describes the process of tending an

urban farm as a personally worthwhile pursuit: "It's pretty easy to grow food and pretty rewarding. I think the time you spend working for money and then translating that money into food—you could spend a lot less time and a lot more meaningful time growing your own food." Of course urban farming requires dedication, but Melling says that the demands of city agriculture obviate the mind-numbing drag of

a punch-clock nine-to-five: “It’s got much more of a flow to it. I can put in a day of work without realizing that I’ve put in a day of work.”

As Back Alley Urban Farms enters its second year in 2013, Del Valle Garcia hopes it will expand in a couple of areas. First off is an educational component: the farmers have set up a demonstration model at a local school where students can learn about farming in the city. Secondly, they plan to encourage others to use more city land for farming as a means to change food economics: “It’s a matter of diversifying

the food system. This is not going to replace the large-scale farms out in the country, it’s just an addition to it. And it’s something that people in the city should be doing.” She says that, with cooperation, the urban farm could become a major piece in the Vancouver food puzzle: “I mean there’s no reason why you can’t have a farm in your backyard. Not everybody has the time and the ability to have a farm in their backyard, but that’s where other members of the community like us can step in and lend them a hand.”



Photos by Kim Del Valle Garcia

Brain Food: The New Nutritional Neuroscience

By Rory Sutherland

The human brain has around 100 billion nerve cells—and at only 2% of the body’s weight, consumes an astounding 20% of the body’s energy supply. This energy comes from the proteins, fats, carbohydrates, vitamins and minerals that are present in our diet. Dietary factors are well recognized as contributing to physical health, but there is a rapidly growing body of empirical evidence demonstrating that what we eat also affects our mental health and influences mental processes.

In a recent study that received a great deal of media attention, UCLA nutritional neuroscience researcher Fernando Gomez-Pinilla found that a high-sugar

diet can negatively affect learning and memory (1). In the study, rats spent several days learning to navigate a maze and then were fed a high-sugar diet for six weeks. The results showed that the high-sugar diet caused significant problems for the rats as they tried to solve the maze and remember the

correct escape route. Gomez-Pinilla suspects that a high-sugar diet interferes with the brain’s ability to use insulin. While it is known that insulin regulates blood sugar, these findings suggest that this hormone is also important to memory and learning. To function effectively, the brain’s nerve cells must be able to communicate with each other and insulin appears to be essential to this process.

Further problems with the consumption of a high-sugar diet are revealed in a University of Minnesota study showing chronic sugar consumption can actually affect the brain’s ability to tell us when to stop eating (2). Previous studies had shown that sugar consumption stimulates the brain to produce and absorb feel good chemicals such as dopamine and opioids, but this study focused on oxytocin. As well

as being associated with positive feelings, oxytocin helps to tell our brain when we’ve had enough to eat. The researchers found that a high-sugar diet reduced the brain’s ability to respond to oxytocin in relation to food consumption.

An additional concern associated with our modern diets is the high prevalence of saturated fats. Just as sugar disrupts the brain’s ability to feel full, high-fat diets have been shown to have the same effect (3). British researchers found that high-fat diets damaged the hypothalamus in mice. This region of the brain controls body temperature, sexual desire, and feelings of hunger. In an interview with *The*

Independent, the lead researcher notes that, while this study focused on mice, brain scans of humans also link this type of hypothalamus damage with obesity.

Other research shows the direct effects of saturated fats on memory and overall cognitive functioning (4). A study published in the journal

Annals of Neurology last year examined the differences between people who consumed “good” fats, monounsaturated fats, and those who consumed “bad” fats, trans and saturated fats. The study analyzed data from women aged 65 and older and found that diets high in saturated fats were associated with worse scores on tests of memory and cognitive performance.

As more and more information is gathered on how eating well promotes optimal cognitive functioning, connections between dietary factors and mental illnesses are also being revealed. The Canadian Mental Health Association’s Minding Our Bodies project promotes nutritional intervention as an important aspect of recovery from mental illness. The project has conducted literature reviews linking poor diet to

“Diets containing a healthy balance of whole grains, meat, fish, fruits, vegetables and healthy fats translate into better mental health.”

mental health problems such as ADHD, depression, and even a tendency to carry out a suicidal act (5). The general consensus from this type of research is that diets containing a healthy balance of whole grains, meat, fish, fruits, vegetables and healthy fats translate into better mental health.

There is a great deal of evidence highlighting the mental health benefits of a well-balanced diet. However, sometimes finding the time to maintain such a diet can be a challenge. Given this, taking a multi-vitamin supplement may be a good way to keep your brain sharp when your diet lapses. Recent research has shown this intervention to be helpful in fighting stress, fatigue, and improving cognitive performance (6).

Those who have the resources and time to acquire healthy food and nutritional supplements are likely to be able to maintain better mental health than others who are not so fortunate. Members of the more than

800,000 households that Health Canada has shown to be unable to afford adequate food suffer serious consequences. Canadians living in food insecure households have shown deficiencies in a number of nutrients, vitamins and minerals that have proven critical to many aspects of mental health: protein, vitamin A, thiamin, riboflavin, vitamin B6, folate, vitamin B12, magnesium, phosphorus, and zinc (7).

While the growing body of knowledge about nutritional neuroscience is pointing to the importance of a good diet from the mental health standpoint, it also increasingly brings into focus the fundamental unfairness of denying people living in poverty something that so profoundly affects health and well-being.

For this article's website references and related material, please see the online version of the article at <http://dtesnhouse.ca/zine>



WELS.net, "Horn of Plenty," November 8, 2006, Flickr (CC BY-NC 2.0)

Feeding Hungry People More than Loose Change

By Rebecca Ipe

Poverty has remained surprisingly constant in an inconstant world where every dawn brings news of astonishing new technologies and inventions hoped to facilitate human life. Revolutions and wars have wrought changes in social systems of yore, leading to increased gender and racial equality and an expanding appreciation for cultural differences.

Yet poverty has remained, stubbornly clinging to society like a leech, draining it of its vitality. The image of a beggar with a hand held out for spare change remains steadfast to the point that it seems like a stone statue. At its core, hunger is both the parent and offspring of poverty.

And when people hunger for food, life becomes a struggle instead of a song. At the Raise the Rates campaign conducted on December 7 in front of CBC Plaza to coincide with CBC's Food Bank Fundraising

Day, an impassioned group of those with low incomes gathered to voice their opposition to charity. This was the cry of a people desperate for long-term solutions to eradicating poverty instead of the stop-gap measures charity comprises today.

I listened to the voices; they wanted real change, not the clinking handful our society thrusts at them.

Andy explained it thus: "I thank Vancouver and all the people that give charity from the bottom of their hearts because they know there's a need. But there is a moral issue here that is not recognized."

Rocky, who struggles with physical health problems, described his struggle: "A lot of the food that I got in the last six months... was out of date and my allergies don't allow me to have some of the food. Now all I have is a box of macaroni and a bit of rice."

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"It's embarrassing, it's frustrating, [the kids are] hungry, they're cold and you have to stand there. Half the food you probably won't even use."



p0stcap, "121207 cbc foodbank day11" and "121207 cbc foodbank day8," December 7, 2012, Flickr

recipe

Kim's Winter Squash Pesto

Researched and kitchen-tested by Kim Del Valle Garcia.

This recipe is seasonal, healthy, and vegan; everything can be found at Sunrise Market (300 Powell St.) for under \$8.

Winter squash can be found in abundance right now and is a power vegetable (technically a fruit): it delivers an ample dose of dietary fiber, making it exceptionally heart-friendly. For this recipe I picked up a large kabocha squash from Sunrise Market for \$1.50. These are the green ones with the thick skin—hard to cut, but worth it!

Cost: \$7.78

Ingredients

- 1 winter squash (butternut or kabocha squash work best) – \$1.50
- ¼ cup of parsley – \$1 (parsley is also winter hardy and may be found in gardens throughout the winter)
- ½ cup of nuts (I like to use pine or pecan) – \$2.99 for a bag of pine nuts (nuts can be found cheaper at stores with bulk sections)
- 3 tbs of olive oil
- 2 cloves of garlic – \$1 for a huge bag at sunrise market
- 1 cup of coconut milk (almond or soy is also good) – \$1.29
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Honey or sugar to sweeten if the squash is slightly bitter

Directions

- Preheat oven to 350°F.
- Cut squash in half, remove seeds, peel and slice into cubes. Place squash on baking sheet with a bit of olive oil and bake until the squash is tender (20-30 minutes).
- Combine all ingredients and puree using blender or mash with hand tool.
- Serve over pasta, rice or anywhere you may need a sauce.

Serves: 6–8



Photo by Kim del Valle Garcia

recipe

James' Roasted Broccoli and Apple with Sriracha, Honey, and Lime Dressing

Recipe provided by James Kim. Researched and kitchen-tested by Kim Del Valle Garcia.

Broccoli is a great, winter hardy vegetable that has numerous health benefits. On this trip to Sunrise Market, I also grabbed a head of organic cauliflower on sale for \$2 to add to this dish—another winter hardy veggie that I love to use this time of year. It also happens to be citrus season, making limes, lemons and oranges plentiful. Sunrise market had limes on sale, so I snagged 6 limes for \$1.

Cost: \$7.12



Photo by James Kim

Ingredients

- 2 broccoli heads, cut into florets – \$2.12 (cauliflower or any other “sale” veggies could be used as well)
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 apple, cored and diced – \$1 bag
- 2 tsp of Sriracha sauce or other hot sauce – \$3
- 2 tbsp honey (or substitute with agave, maple syrup or sugar for a vegan option)
- 2 tbsp lime juice (juice from about ½ lime) – \$1 for 6.

Directions

- Preheat oven to 450°F.
- Put broccoli and apple in large bowl, and toss with oil to coat. Sprinkle with salt and pepper. Transfer to rimmed baking sheet. Roast 20 minutes, stirring at the 10 minute mark.
- While broccoli is cooking, prepare dressing. In a small bowl, stir together Sriracha sauce, honey, and lime juice. Taste and adjust if desired.
- Remove broccoli from oven and put into large bowl. Drizzle the dressing over the broccoli and toss until lightly coated.
- This recipe is good served over rice, as a side or even as a salad.

Serves: 4–6

Justice, not Charity

This letter is reprinted with permission. It was originally published in The Globe and Mail (Letters to the Editor, p. A10) on Monday, November 5, 2012.

Food banks were initially developed to provide emergency food to people in need, but they've been institutionalized in communities across the country as a result of inequality ("Food-Bank Usage Soars" – Oct. 30). Although food bank services are absolutely essential, we need to move from food charity to social justice.

All Canadians should have the resources they need to feed themselves and their families. By taking food banks for granted—assuming poverty can be “managed” through donations—we allow the government to abdicate responsibility for redressing income inequality and ensuring a life of dignity for Canadians.

We must continue to care for one another, but we shouldn't allow charity to take the place of justice—or let our politicians off the hook.

—Kathe Rogers, Toronto

*There may be times when we are powerless
to prevent injustice, but there must never
be a time when we fail to protest.*

—Elie Wiesel, writer, Nobel laureate (b. 1928)

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Stacey, a widowed mother with two children, listed her difficulties in accessing the Food Bank's charity: "It's embarrassing, it's frustrating, [the kids are] hungry, they're cold and you have to stand there. Half the food you probably won't even use."

The food that poor people receive thanks to the dubious kindness of others is barely adequate and in many cases inedible because it is long past expiration. I stood there in the cold and drizzle as story after story poured from the lips of people crying out for dignity. When you line up for hours and are rewarded with a few paltry items which might not satisfy your dietary needs, it makes poverty sting all the more. And all this takes place in a country bursting with surplus wealth. Around this time last year, Canadians had spent \$433 million on Christmas gift shopping.

And money flows over the heads of the poor and into the coffers of charities who sell their reassurances and sycophantic gratitude for the price of a donation. The Food Bank is a good institution in providing short-term relief. But the problem lies in the fact that it is now being used as a long-term solution, with all the effectiveness of using a pebble as a dam against floodwaters.

How can a man wracked with HIV nourish his body with Kraft dinners? How can a mother satisfy the bellies of her clamouring children? "Justice, not charity!" the people yelled. Instead of attempting to bandage poverty, we need to reassess our systems and move towards long-term options that aim to eliminate it completely. Now that's true charity.

About the Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood House

The secular, grassroots Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood House (DTES NH) embraces people of all ancestries, genders, ages and descriptions, annually welcoming almost 9,000 DTES residents in a community where 70% of our neighbours have low incomes, 700 are homeless and 5,000 are under-housed.

Our programming is community inspired and varied, a sampling of which has included a Chinese Elders Community Kitchen, a Traditional Aboriginal Grandmothers to Granddaughters Community Kitchen, Leadership Development for Grand/Parents, a Children's Community Kitchen, nutritional outreach activities (Mobile Smoothie Project and Banana Beat), Recipes Against Racism, The Young Men's Healing Circle, a Harmonica Club, Right to

Food Mobile Mural Making, Kitchen Table Storytelling, a Family Drop-In: Families, Farming and Food, Blender Nutrition, and the production of a Right to Food Zine.

Those who built the DTES NH put the right to food at the heart of our work, as nutritional vulnerability is a theme familiar to all. Our goal around the right to food is to reform the nutritional impact, quality, abundance and delivery of food in the DTES in consultation with residents, community food providers, non-food community organizations, healthcare professionals, policy makers, growers/suppliers, food/beverage industry professionals and researchers.

Visit our website for more information about the Neighbourhood House: <http://dtesnhouse.ca>

Next issue:

The Raise the Rates protest on CBC's Annual Food Bank Fundraising Day was only the beginning, throwing a ray of light onto the struggles that people on welfare and low-income people fight daily to obtain food. In the next issue of the Right to Food Zine, we will be highlighting families in the Downtown Eastside. We will be looking at the ways low-income parents provide for the nutritional needs of their families. In a society rife with canned dinners and food lines, Zine contributors are questioning whether or not families in the neighborhood are able to satisfy their dietary requirements with healthy, tasty meals suited to their needs and cultural practices. Stay tuned for discoveries and surprises!

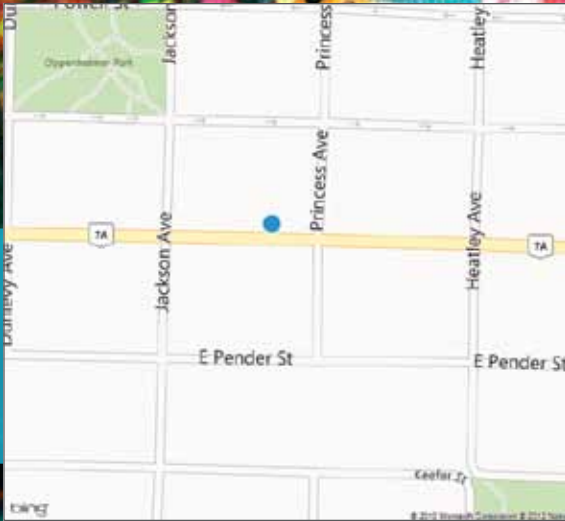
Visit the RTF Zine website for more stories, references, and the podcast: <http://dtesnhouse.ca/zine>



Photos by Kim Del Valle Garcia

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LOCATION

Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood House
573 East Hastings Street
Vancouver, BC V6A 1P9
604.215.2090
<http://dtesnhouse.ca>

CONTRIBUTING TO THE ZINE

Interested in contributing to the *RTF Zine*? We're always looking for articles, artwork, or ideas that reflect the right to food. Let us know who you are at zine@dtesnhouse.ca, find us online at <http://dtesnhouse.ca/zine>, or introduce yourself at the Neighbourhood House during operating hours (ask for Bill).

Donations of dishes, cups, and cutlery to the NH are also gratefully accepted. (No plastics, please.)