

# AMPLIFY!



published in December 2023 by Let's Speak Up!

The Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood House is situated on the ancestral, traditional, and unceded territory of the xʷməθkʷəyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səlilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.



## Table of Contents

Introduction • PAGE 2

Project Development & Discussions • PAGE 3

The Focus Groups • PAGE 5

Themes • PAGE 8

Conclusion • PAGE 14

LSU! Member Bios • PAGE 16

Art Credits • PAGE 24



THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



# Introduction

## **LSU! WORKING GROUP**

Let's Speak Up! (LSU!) is a participant-led group of DTES residents that support one another and work on issues that affect their lives in the community, which means that group members decide on what topics and issues to tackle and which projects to pursue. LSU! encompasses a working group that meets to develop, learn, and practice leadership skills, civic and political literacy, and systems change capacity. Our meetings also provide an opportunity for folks to maintain a grounded, safe, and familiar space on a weekly basis, building on participant-led connections with one another. We are committed to meaningful participation in civic decision-making processes in the DTES and this year LSU! has taken a deeper exploration into how capacity building and peer leadership can take shape.

## **UBC URBAN ETHNOGRAPHY FIELD SCHOOL**

With funding from UBC Community-University Engagement Support (CUES) 2023, we were able to continue a long-standing collaborative relationship between the DTES Neighbourhood House (DTES NH) and the UBC Learning Exchange's Urban Ethnography Field School (UEFS). We hosted a cohort of UBC undergrads this past summer to

*Amplify!* the community-led model, work, and advocacy of LSU!. *Amplify!* is modeled after three goals as determined through extended conversation amongst LSU! members;

1. for both groups to work together on a common project
2. to create opportunities for LSU! participants to be leaders in their community and to put into practice their existing experiences, knowledge, and expertise
3. to provide an opportunity for UEFS students to engage with the DTES community in reciprocal and meaningful ways while also utilising their academic skills and capacities.

## *Project Development & Discussions*

### **PLANNING**

Initial conversations revealed a shared ideal of taking the spotlight away from the often intense and negative discourse surrounding the DTES community. We (understandably) spend much time and effort focused on such challenging circumstances, but what about the positive? What would be some ways in which we could hold space for meaning, solidarity, positivity, and joy when one thinks about community life? To begin, LSU! members have been engaged with a number of leadership, facilitation, and capacity building based work for a long time. Members expressed strong interest in real opportunities to practice

these skills in the community that they are experts in. With these themes in mind, we decided upon hosting a focus group as a way in which we could structure rich community conversation around a specific topic or theme. **A focus group is a meeting in which specifically selected people with common knowledge meet to explore a related topic, glean participant's qualitative opinions.** Led by a facilitator, conversation is able to flow in an intentional direction while dialogue allows for deeper grounding and richer conceptual meanings to be generated that is often left out of singular interviews or surveys. LSU! members facilitated their table discussions with our students participating in note-taking and support roles.

It was important for folks in LSU! that beyond self-identifying as a DTES community member, there was no eligibility criteria or target group for this event. In looking to draw on themes of community positivity, there was no need for any further specificity, and it was agreed that this diversity would be a great strength in conversation. Central to LSU! is our connection to the DTES NH food philosophy. A meal is always served at every LSU! meeting, and we are all familiar with the ways in which sharing food and space together can be a first step in nurturing individual and thereafter community engagement. Meals were served prior to beginning the focus groups, allowing time for folks to settle in to their table, chat with their tablemates, and of course, enjoy food together.

## OUTREACH

To make our event known and invite community members to attend, we planned a number of outreach undertakings throughout the DTES the four weeks leading up to the event. Outreach leaned on LSU! members to draw on their community experience and knowledge in selecting where to go while also providing an opportunity for members to lead the accompanying students in a leadership capacity. The students were able to participate in outreach throughout a variety of locations and events in the community, learning and observing first hand community ongoings. In all, LSU! members and students visited over 15 sites and events throughout the DTES, engaging with participants and sometimes even participating in the event.

*Photos of LSU! members' outreach are on pages 12-13.*

## *The Focus Groups*

At each of the four tables were two LSU! members who led discussions as co-facilitators and one student supporting and writing the discussion minutes. In all, 28 people participated alongside ten LSU! members and three students. Discussion minutes from each table were separately coded into prominent themes which then were subsequently collated together. The discussion findings reflect a number of both widely agreed upon and unique perspectives on positivity in the DTES and how we can continue to move forward in our dynamic community.

*flyers distributed during outreach (front)*



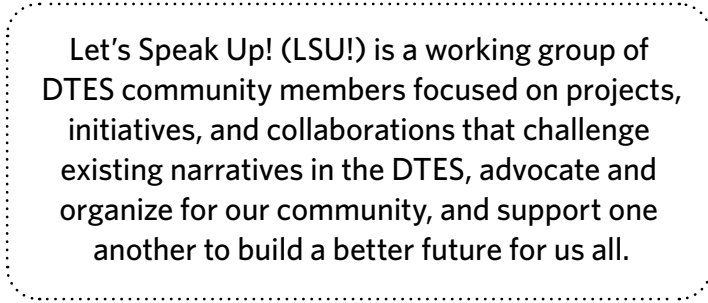
Let's celebrate the  
positive aspects of our  
lives in the DTES!

***Participate in our focus group to share and honour the things in life that bring you joy, meet new people, and learn from peers about other activities you might love too!***



Friday June 9th from 1-3pm  
Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood House  
(Princess & Hastings / 573 E. Hastings)  
\$40 stipend (must stay for whole event)

*flyers distributed during outreach (back)*



Let's Speak Up! (LSU!) is a working group of DTES community members focused on projects, initiatives, and collaborations that challenge existing narratives in the DTES, advocate and organize for our community, and support one another to build a better future for us all.

This event is hosted by LSU! with support from UBC Urban Ethnography students who will be assisting us.

LSU! intends to create something that documents the ideas shared in the focus group, and the outcomes of this event. The sole purpose of this creation is to ***celebrate and honour participants' contributions— to share the outcome back with them as a momento, and to share with others in our community so that they may benefit as well.*** We will honour all participants confidentiality, and all information will be anonymized.

If you have any questions about this event, please contact Mason at [letsspeakup@dteshouse.ca](mailto:letsspeakup@dteshouse.ca) or leave us a voicemail (604-215-2030)

## Solidarity & Mutual Aid

The experience of giving and/or receiving support was probably the most widely discussed theme. The act of **pulling one another up, providing for someone in need despite ones' own material precarity, and including strangers in groups or events** were important for feeling a sense of belonging to the community. Many extended that these actions were one of the most important ways in which we can enable the recipient to feel seen, heard, understood, loved, and ultimately, that they inherently matter. Coupled with this mutual support was the positive emotional benefits that are derived from helping others; developing a deeper connection with their sense of community in addition to a derived purpose came from this.

**"Years ago I ended up expecting to be homeless just before Christmas—no shelter beds—talked to some family—nobody even responded—but I have a friend he took me in and I had one of the best holidays or Christmases I've ever had in my life—they resparked that for me"**

**" [I] started doing community things—volunteering, not paid. I go consistently because I know I'm needed there—this gives meaning to my life, I know I'm needed and I go"**

## Interests & Passions

Participants noted the value in pursuing personal recreation and activities, highlighting the importance of **physical activity in daily life, citing swimming, walking, and biking. Jam sessions with friends, reading, sitting by the beach, classes, having extensive conversations with others, and going to religious events** were also important. Discussions also touched on the value in observing and appreciating others pursuing their own interests and passion.

**"The library, using the internet there for up to 4 hours a day, there are movies and books. It is generally quiet, taken care of, clean, makes you feel safe"**

**"Communicating with new people. Things I can connect or identify with my passions. Being able to sit here and being able to relate—[I] can still appreciate someone else's passions"**

**"[I love] to walk, it is free and good for you—vitamin D. I try to walk on busy streets where I get to see lots of nice cars"**

## Access to Community Services and Resources

The extensive network of services and resources in the DTES is well known. Participants appreciate the work that organisations do in the community, including but not limited to **food service, outreach, housing advocacy, and support groups**. Some of the most mentioned places included the Neighbourhood House, UBC Learning Exchange, Union Gospel Mission, Tattoo Heart Society, Gateway, the Vancouver Public Library, Carnegie Community Centre, VANDU, and Dude's Club.

"I used to volunteer here [at the Neighbourhood House] and there's tons of other places—places you can get your foot in the door, experience life, there's a lot of places like this, like community gardening"

"When people hand out bagged lunches or snacks, that is huge, that brings me joy. Sometimes you miss out finding food, but then people come and give you a snack."

"there are so many places that help"

"Tattoo Heart Society, they give a lot of opportunities, you can become an employee too. You can help so many people out. Those guys are always there for you. They are good people."

## Acceptance

Discussions circled around the idea of feeling generally accepted and valued within their relationships, groups, organisations they participated with, and the wider community. Folks felt that their contributions, labour, time, and existence were valued, recognised, and validated.

"You can be yourself, people aren't judgemental"

"Good to be included, it makes me feel more human. People wanting me to participate, it makes me feel I have something offer"

## Community Connection

Intertwined is the importance of interpersonal interactions and relationships. Connection with a network of acquaintances, friends, and strangers was vital for feeling positivity in the community.

"To be able to get out—even just a Wednesday lunch. Get some kind of humanity, human experience in the concrete jungle"

"I've learnt the hard way you need people, so for now [I'm] doing this; accessing the community"



HEAT RESPONSE OUTREACH 🍌



## Capacity Building

In the DTES, community members talked about the importance of capacity. The need to continually support the building of capacity within one's self and in others is a prerequisite to being able to help, connect, and support others in need. Developing one's self as a leader or peer in their community is a way in which people can practice self care and preservation; the means to move forward in their own lives while also helping others.

"Feeling connected, feeling validated in myself; so participating in any opportunity my community might present."

"What is my role? I'm a member—I've been told I'm a champion dude, I run the baseball program at Oppenheimer."



## Conclusion

The importance of bottom-up guided processes are prominent in the minds of not only LSU! members but also the community at large throughout all stages of this project.

One thing that encompasses all the themes highlighted above is the simple fact of **doing enjoyable things together with people in proximity**. This was highlighted throughout not only the planning process within LSU! but also in discussion with community participants during the focus group event. The point we wanted to make with this project was to highlight the unquantifiable; to sit and eat together, be in conversation with others, learn from one another about things one may want to try or participate in, or potentially even make a new friend or acquaintance. As is often the case in community capacity building, **impact often occurs within people, groups, and communities over more extended and imprecise periods of time**.

In developing and facilitating this project, we took away with us many lessons to be incorporated in the future. There is clearly a need for further consideration in **accessibility** while working amidst the capacities of physical space. To conduct outreach and invite folks in the community for an event with a limited number of seats was a challenge adding to the discussions about how many seats we could realistically offer.

Throughout the focus group, participants reaffirmed the importance positive space and relationships are to living a good life. In a city with so many barriers already imposed upon social and civic engagement, **capacity for solidarity with others is key**. Such themes manifested in the desire for improved recreational space in the DTES, need for further community programming and support (especially those staffed by community peers), and even additional events like ours held on a more regular basis. Our event was a way to show how a community can gather and engage fully with the complexities of human life without the greater discourse that often burden conversations about the DTES.

It is our hope that similar events can be organized and held in the future, with greater capacity, reach, and depth. It is clear to all who engaged, participated, and contributed to this project that to amplify our community, processes must be guided, driven, and led by the community. Participants are acutely aware that **barriers to participation in decision making and related political processes are rooted in the disconnect between the institutions that offer solutions to such socio-economic challenges and the people that are most affected**. In what ways can we move forward in centering community commentary and shifting towards more productive and positive discourse in regards to the DTES?

## LSU! Member Bios

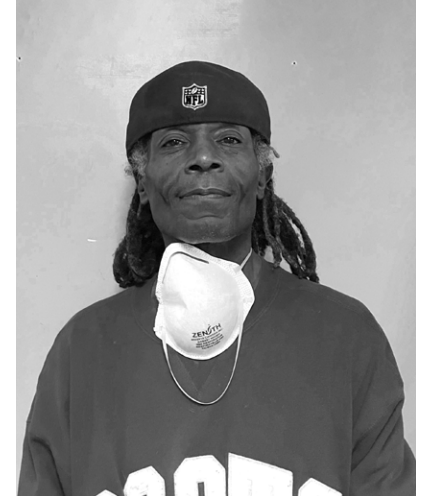


*SAMMY*

Not long ago I was wondering what I should be spending time on other than wandering around Hastings doing nothing pretty much, caught up in various challenges blocking my way in having to take wiser directions for change. I joined the Neighbourhood House as an LSU! member where we have meetings once a week to discuss various topics that we experience in the DTES community. We've had great discussions with the students taking them around Hastings and talking about positive experiences living in the DTES. We ended up visiting UBC for a conference organized by the university. It was a positive experience to get involved and share perspectives about the DTES regardless of the negative challenges that might be seen.

*PAUL*

I'm Paul Henry I live in the DTES, I like to volunteer in the Hood on occasions, alone time is sacred to me. I'm a part of the leadership program at Neighbourhood House to learn about the community where I live to improve the quality of living life in the Eastside.



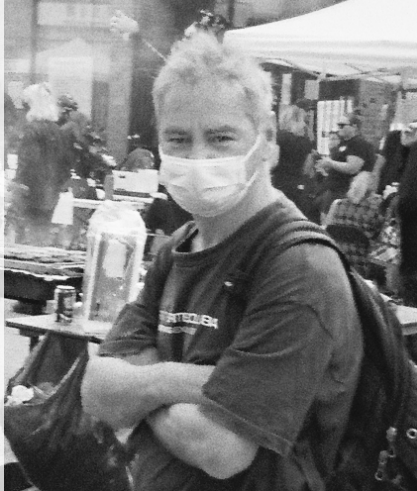
*FORM*

I am called Form. I understand and take my reality with joy. I understand each and every person I meet. I love to explore and use all my senses. Growing up on a farm is next to nature. My understanding is each one represents myself at one point in my carnation. I am here to express myself in respecting everything. I do not accept or deny anything. I am open to all that is possible.



## *DIANNE*

In gratitude, I reflect. My name is Dianne Campbell. I am 55 years old of Indigenous descent, Manitoba Ojibwe. Generally I have been a member since 2016. There have been different angles of learning such as governance and community involvement with Matt. Mason undertook the final chapter of how we use that info giving us an overview through different topics: facilitation, outreach, interaction with our UBC students, giving our version through our own experience as well as time to learn in a walkabout to share insight for future ideas and allowing these folks to see the reality from our perspective. Each UBC student took notes as they saw of the topic—what makes you happy in the DTES. We led workshops to facilitate a meeting on anything we saw fit to be a learning for all to take the same position. I ran a motivational video workshop on the goose, seven lessons to meet a goal as a team working together.



## *BILL*

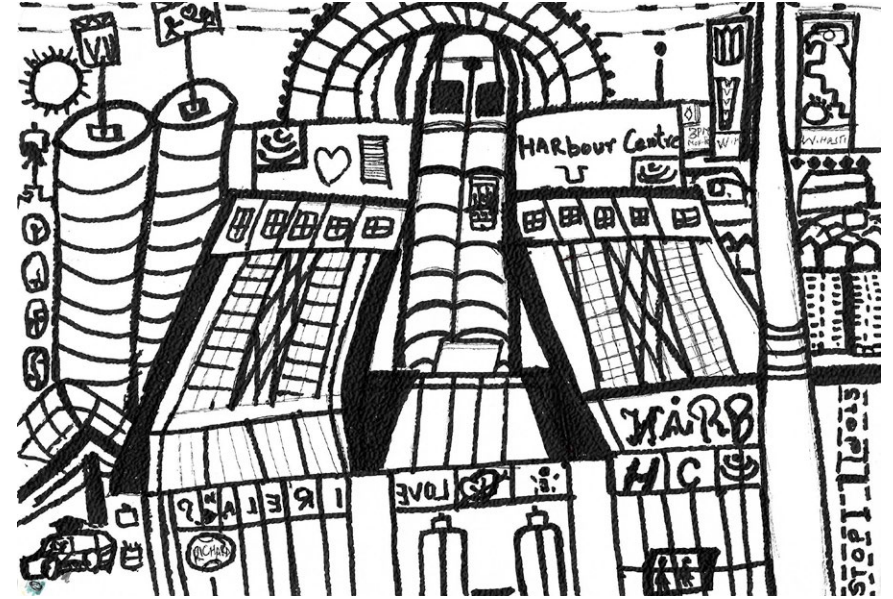
My name is Bill and I volunteer at CCAP and LSU! and have been involved with CAN and PRC. I'm on the Neighbourhood House Board and enjoy meeting people, serving food, and getting to know people by name.

To conclude, Let's Speak Up! was my own commitment to stay involved no matter who I liked and my objective was to stay engaged no matter my own personal health glitches. I refused to leave my team members to take on my slack. We all play our own role in community and are compassionate for helping ourselves to a better place and that will be something special we share in common to give ourselves to a job of taking care of our own selves and showing those who are open to change. Thanks to all our facilitators, funders, and community who inspire us.



RICHARD

Hi, I'm Richard (alias), resident of the DTES community since the beginning of 2022. I have been a volunteer and employee of the Downtown Eastside Neighborhood House. I have also associated and collaborated as a volunteer with other non-profit organisations that fight against injustice and support improvement of the residents who are marginalized, poverty-stricken, suffering from substance abuse and addiction, and victims of cultural and racial biases. It was a great experience collaborating with the students this summer. We teamed up together to do outreach and wellness walks in the DTES, distributing necessary supplies to the struggling people. I also helped organize and participated as a facilitator for a big focus group consisting of DTES residents and the UBC students which provided a great learning opportunity to understand the struggles and coping mechanisms to stay positive. I also invited the students to the baseball practice I organize every week at Oppenheimer Park supported by DUDES Club Vancouver which is a lot of fun and a great way to



connect to people living in DTES. The students participated in the practice multiple times and had the chance to connect with residents and have real and unrestricted conversation with people of different ages and walks of life. I consider myself a person who has and is still going through hard circumstances and aim to connect with others going through similar situations. I help and guide them on the basis of my lived experience of overcoming some of those challenges. The fact that I find most interesting about the DTES is that even with all the negativity, anguish, crime, and stigmatisation, the residents are optimistic and helpful towards one another.

## ALI

I've lived here almost 15 years after coming back from Japan. I lived above the Chinese Library and was really shocked at the terrible conditions of my housing.

I moved 35 years ago to Canada. At that time, the government put me in a hotel as an immigrant. It was fun and nice for a couple months, a good life until I left and moved to Japan.

Then I came back and started a new life in Vancouver.

Hastings was a big shock to me because Toronto didn't have that. Vancouver was supposed to be cleaner. I was disappointed but had to accept it and moved. I found the Neighborhood House 14 years ago and I met some LSU! members about 8–9 years ago. I didn't know about it because I was new to Vancouver. The food is good, I come 2–3 times a week for breakfast. The group has helped me a lot. They help me with my emotions and we talk more seriously. A different experience that was good for my life. I still continue. I learn many things about society, systems, and gaining more knowledge. Opening my mind. At home, we talk about daily life with friends. Here it's something a little bit different—we talk about reality and we need it. I don't know how much we can help, I don't know. It's good to see more. This is life. Until death, we have to run. It's part of our life to always be moving.



## ADAM

My name is Adam. I've been in the Neighbourhood for a long time. I enjoy being in LSU! And have been a part of it since the beginning. I'm looking forward to the many good things that come out of our program to improve the community and better our lives. I enjoyed working with the students over the spring and summer, making connections with folks in the DTES. I enjoy coming to the Neighbourhood House, the food is organic and amazing. You get to make new friends and a chance to talk about pressing issues. It's a good place to be. Thank you!

## BRITTANY

My name is Brittany and I live in East Van. I've enjoyed being the LSU! Program Assistant for the past 2 years or so. I'm grateful I've had the opportunity to work with this awesome group of wise, caring, and driven people. I will cherish the time we've spent learning and laughing together. It's been very meaningful to work closely with a small, dedicated group, and a privilege to witness neighbours with varying perspectives and life experiences work together to address important issues in their community—supporting one another and navigating conflicts that are sure to arise along the way.



MASON

My name is Mason and I've been working with the Neighbourhood House since 2016 chopping veggies in the kitchen as a weekly volunteer. I'm so thankful for the opportunity to help support our current iteration of the LSU! project alongside everyone else who has contributed so much to this vital but also really cool work. This past summer was incredibly fun and interesting, having the opportunity to put so many of the skills building and workshops we've been working on into practice with the UEFS students in the community that our group members love and know so well. I credit the DTES community with humbling, guiding, and teaching me so much about life, patience, empathy, and what it means to be a better human every day.

*Art Credits*

FRONT COVER: ADAM  
INSIDE COVER: ALI  
PAGE 1, 20-21: RICHARD  
BACK COVER: PAUL

*We would like to extend our thanks to all who contributed and participated in this project!*



*LSU! PHOTOGRAPHED WITH UBC STUDENTS & THEIR FINAL PROJECT AT UEFS COMMUNITY EVENT, JUNE 2023*



IT STARTS FROM THE TOP.  
SHIT ALWAYS ROLLS DOWN THE PYRAMID.