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# Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House

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MPNH

## Leveling the Playing Field: A Participatory Action Research Project

### Purpose:

Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House (MPNH) is one of three communities in BC to receive funding from First Call: The BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition as part of their initiative to do research, analysis, public education and community action around poverty, isolation and social inclusion of young children and their families. The global project is federally by the Social Development Partnership Program and the three community action projects are just one aspect of the work that First Call has undertaken, which includes creating tools and awareness about social action related to poverty and social inclusion. The purpose of the community action groups is to initiate local, collaborative actions that help to level the playing field for young children. MPNH's project focuses on exploring systemic barriers and practices that affect immigrant families.

### Context:

For the fourth year in a row, British Columbia has ranked as the worst province for child poverty in Canada (Child Poverty Report Card, 2007). Poverty affects many different types of families, but some are more vulnerable, such as lone parent families (CPRC, 2007). Mount Pleasant has over 24% single parent families, and 35% of families who live below LICO—low income cut-off rate (BC Stats, 2001). Recent immigrants are also at greater risk of poverty than are other Canadians, and are particularly vulnerable to poverty in both the short and the long term (*A Study of Poverty and Working Poverty among Recent Immigrant to Canada, HRSDC, 2007*). Over 45% of Mount Pleasant's population are immigrants (BC Stats, 2001), with 12% being recent immigrants. Dominant ethnic groups are Chinese, Vietnamese, and Filipinos and over 16% of the population speak neither English nor French in the home, with Chinese, Vietnamese, Tagalog and Spanish representing the second languages typically spoken in homes in Mount Pleasant (BC Stats).

MPNH has specifically targeted Vietnamese- and Spanish-speaking immigrant families with children 0 to 6 years old. In our discussions with our advisory group, comprising representatives from Immigrant Services Society of BC, MOSAIC, Pacific Immigrant Resources Society and Vancouver Coastal Health, we determined that these immigrant communities were particularly vulnerable. The Spanish- and the Vietnamese-speaking communities are some of the most marginalized and least resourced new immigrant populations in this area. Recent data from the Human Early Learning Partnership indicates a small shift upwards in the vulnerability of children in Mount Pleasant, however, this area continues to rank 7<sup>th</sup> in terms of vulnerable communities. In a recent session, Dr. Hertzman isolated the data for language specific participants, and indicated that for Vietnamese children there is “clear excess vulnerability” in the dimensions of language, cognitive and

communication (Understanding Early Child Development in ESL Populations discussion group, October 29, 2007).

**Project Approach:**

Our unique approach to this project is to conduct a participatory action research (PAR) project which incorporates “kitchen table” discussions and group information sessions in Spanish and Vietnamese to explore systemic barriers and long-term solutions to social exclusion and economic equality within these communities, as well as within the larger communities of Mount Pleasant and the City of Vancouver overall. Our goal is to build capacity in these communities by:

1. Training first language parent mentors to help facilitate the action research process;
2. Build awareness by holding first language discussions regarding systemic barriers;
3. Provide advocacy skills to participants and help facilitate community mobilization activities;
4. Facilitate the building of a wider support network by creating cross-cultural networking opportunities and linking the immigrant groups to other broader social movements.

While the PAR results are specifically targeted to the participant groups that take part in the project, conducting simultaneous processes with both the Spanish and the Vietnamese speaking community will also enable us to make comparisons and build community connections. Therefore, this project has the potential to be applied to other immigrant communities in the future. As well, we anticipate that learning about and connecting to broader social movements in the City of Vancouver, Province of British Columbia and across Canada will potentially have broader community impacts outside of the targeted immigrant populations.

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