# Waterview Community Garden Project Report to Investors Group, Victoria Branch Pacifica Housing Advisory Association December 14, 2010

The following report outlines the progress of the Waterview Community Garden Project, which took place between February and November, 2010. The project was dedicated to the creation of a community garden at Waterview Apartments in Victoria, a 49 unit residence whose tenants are formerly homeless and at risk Victoria residents.

### What the project achieved

A total of 12 tenants began taking part in Waterview community garden project in February of this year. Each tenant had a different challenge or disability including various types of mental illness, such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, or chronic depression-physical disabilities such as 10% vision; or addiction issues such as alcoholism or drug abuse These and other issues were obstacles to their functioning well, both personally and with one another, and contributed to the personal challenges and social isolation that many experienced. In addition, low income and/or lack of knowledge about growing and/or preparing nutritious foods contributed to many people making poor food choices and experiencing poor health situations.

What has happened as a result of the project? In the process of planning, building, planting, and maintaining their gardens, the participants were offered the opportunity to learn a range of skills. Depending on their interests and abilities, some people chose to do a small number of activities such as building the raised beds, while others become involved in a wide range of tasks, from plant starts and building a transplant table to moving soil, participating in garden maintenance, and attending the weekly group meetings and workshops. And while many preferred one-on-one work with the coordinator to working together as a group at any given workshop or learning session, about 60% of the gardeners would take part in any given session. Nine of the twelve who started the year gardening completed the season and are planning to garden again next year. Following are some of the participant's comments on the difference the project and the garden have made for them and/or the Waterview complex:

- "The garden activities brought the tenants involved in the garden group together as a community. The activities were enjoyable and got me outdoors."
- "I learned the basic things about gardening and David's tips were useful."
- "It made the place more homey."
- "It brought the people here together."

• "I know for me it gets my mind off my illness [terminal cancer]. It is a place to come and relax and gives us something to look forward to. I get to leave my mark on something that will be around long after I'm gone."

## Wider Benefits to the Community and Environment

A number of articles were published or appeared in the media, including the Victoria News, Times Colonist, the Oak Bay News, the A Channel and Pacifica Housing's public relations and tenant newsletters. These news items highlighted both the people and accomplishments of the garden project. This included human interest stories on individual participants, a lead Times-Colonist article on the many health and personal benefits of food gardening entitled 'The Feel Good Food Movement' (June 30<sup>th</sup>), a photo on the front page of the T-C featuring Waterview gardeners painting a 30 foot countryside mural on the wall overlooking the garden (July 7<sup>th</sup>), as well as other articles. The combination of a good looking garden and a beautiful mural, both accomplished by very marginalized Victoria residents, served to raise public awareness and interest in gardening. It may also have helped address some public stereotypes as well as some of the limiting beliefs the participants may have had about themselves. There are few better ways for people to feel good about themselves than learning to grow their own food.

However, some of its most important accomplishments occurred in the areas of local food production together with limiting our collective and individual environmental footprint..Each participant had their own 4' x 8' raised bed garden when they learned to grow their own food using organic methods. Not only were the participants able to learn how to garden and eat the fruits of their labours, but other tenants were able to watch and learn as well. And with the addition of a 8' x 30' mural—depicting a countryside scene—on the wall overlooking the garden, the garden has become a beautiful demonstration garden. Ten of the twelve original gardeners plan on returning to garden in 2011, together with 7 more Waterview residents. With the publicity it received, the garden also challenged members of the public to ask themselves, "If they can build this and do these things, why can't I?"

Another important accomplishment of the project this year has been the building of a large composter out of donated pallets. This composter is now being used for composting the food scraps of many of Waterview's tenants and creating a successful complex composting program while providing much needed compost for future Waterview gardens.

With regard to community involvement, there was exemplary support from community businesses that assisted with donations of everything from soil and tools to a garden shed and watering system and carpentry expertise. There were also two workshops held at the site involving members of a Hillside-Quadra gardening group, as well as hosting a public 'unveiling' of the wall mural in August, which was well attended. And Waterview tenants worked hand in hand with twelve of your Investor's Group financial planning consultants who volunteered their time to help fill the garden beds with soil and build a composter out of donated pallets. We are very happy and grateful to have the continuing support of the Investors Group with your continued assistance towards an expanded garden project in 2011.

## **Evaluating the Project**

The project's progress was monitored almost every week verbally at workshops and workbees held with the project coordinator and the tenant participants as well as with consultations with Waterview support staff on site. Adjustments and changes were made as needed as a result of these sessions. The ways in which the twelve initial participants benefited directly are outlined in the attached master of the final evaluation that was given to them at the end of the project. In addition, other members of the complex benefited from food shared by the participants who do not have the capacity to store the food they grow and hence shared it with other tenants, thereby improving relations among them. Also, all 49 tenants benefited from the improved appearance that Waterview took on and their shared sense of ownership around the project. As a result, while the project lost 2 participants to personal problems during the course of the season, there are 6 additional tenants who have already asked to participate in 2011. And the Waterview garden's example was not lost on a neighbouring supported housing complex, Medewiwin, 12 of whose 26 tenants have requested a similar project for their complex in 2011.

### **Sharing Our Story** The Creation of a Garden Mural

It all began with an idea. In May the project coordinator, David Stott, invited a fellow gardener he had worked with on a number of garden projects to visit the site of a new garden that had just been built on top of a concrete slab at Waterview. Overlooking the site was an off white wall about 8 feet high and 30 feet long that provided enhanced sunlight for the new garden beds but little else. Jackie Robson had helped him create several previous gardens and has a good sense of how to create a pleasant atmosphere in a garden. Looking at the garden, her first comment was, "Why not paint a mural on this wall? You could get an artist to design it and the tenants could paint in the design s/he created?" That was how it began.

The next step was to consult with support staff and the gardeners themselves about it. Everyone thought it was a great idea. But how to find an artist? After some searching around, David was able to contact the Victoria Arts Council which agreed to publicize a request for assistance. With only a small honorarium to offer, no one was sure who might respond. However, within a few days 4 excellent artists had offered their services. With the help of the artist's portfolios on their websites, the group then had to decide which artist's work they preferred. They unanimously voted in favour of Joanne Thomson, a local artist and art teacher whose website depicted countryside murals and paintings that were very colourful and full of life.

Thus began a short but exciting and satisfying period for everyone involved with the project. Joanne, besides being an artist, is a trained facilitator. She worked with the participants as they designed and then painted the mural. Each gardener was invited to paint a part of the mural and most took part in the process. As they did so, each person's pride in the garden increased as they saw their collective efforts bearing beautiful artistic fruit. In the end, what emerged was a lovely mural that offered itself as a piece of art by and for the people who created it. On one part of the

wall are written the names of the donor organizations and community groups that supported the project and made it possible including prominent mention of the TD Friends of the Environment and the three other primary donors. Based on the enthusiastic support of all who participated in supporting and creating it, we believe that the garden will serve as a neighbourhood asset that everyone can be inspired by or learn from and that increases the gardeners' sense of pride and commitment to their garden and to where they live.

#### How the grant has been spent:

Please note: A request for \$3,800 was made and a donation of \$4,000 was made by two Investor's Group branches. The following is a breakdown of how the money was spent.

Item or activity	Budgeted I.G. Contribution	Actual Expenditure	Other Funders Actuals
Coordination	\$500	\$1,200	\$11,352
Garden Materials	\$2,900	\$2,000	\$1,270
Workshop and Facilitation Expenses	\$600	\$800	-\$2,530
Total	\$4,000	\$4,000	\$15,606
Budgeted and Actuals: Total expenses on garden materials—budgeted at \$5,950—were only \$3,270, or about 50%, due to donations. However, this required more coordination time to			

secure them, hence greater expenditure on this category.

Report compiled by David Stott, Project Coordinator