

# PROJECT AND EVALUATION REPORT:

DOCUMENTING THE COMMUNITY OUTREACH PROCESS FOR WOMEN IN FISH AT THE 10TH ANNUAL DOWNTOWN EASTSIDE HEART OF THE CITY FESTIVAL

1/13/2014

Christa Brown

School of Community and Regional Planning



## **INTRODUCTION**

This report documenting the community outreach process for *Women in Fish* at the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Downtown Eastside Heart of the City Festival is the result of a Community Service Learning project partnership between Vancouver Moving Theatre, urban ink productions, and myself, a student in the Social Learning Studio course at the School of Community and Regional Planning. Envisioned as a learning opportunity for all, the purpose of this project was to document the community outreach process and *Women in Fish* theme-related activities and events at the *Heart of the City Festival*, to evaluate the outreach process for this production of *Women in Fish*, and to provide recommendations for future community outreach projects.

In what follows, I will provide some background on the project and the organizations involved – Vancouver Moving Theatre, urban ink productions, and the School of Community and Regional Planning's (SCARP) Social Learning Studio course. I will also briefly describe community service learning, which is the format followed by the SCARP course, as well as explain the rationale behind social learning, the objective of this project. Community engaged art production will be defined and then I will discuss the specific outreach and engagement process that occurred for this phase of *Women in Fish* before moving on to provide an evaluation of the engagement process and its impacts. Finally, I will make recommendations around the future application of social learning for Vancouver Moving Theatre and urban ink productions.

## **PROJECT BACKGROUND**

This fall, I had the pleasure of meeting Savannah Walling and Rosemary Georgeson and having the opportunity to be part of a project they were involved in – community outreach to accompany a production of *Women in Fish* at the *Downtown Eastside Heart of the City Festival*. Savannah is the Artistic Director at Vancouver Moving Theatre and Rosemary is the First Nations Community Liaison with urban ink productions. I am a planning student at the University of British Columbia's School of Community and Regional Planning. They brought me on as an intern as part of my Social Learning Studio course, to help with aspects of the production and outreach surrounding it. In turn, I was given the chance to learn about how their organizations operate, inspire, and engage communities. This unique intern relationship also offered an opportunity for mutual learning, a chance to collectively think about the process of outreach and engagement within community engaged productions, the impact such productions have on communities, and ways in which outreach such as this might be structured in the future to continue to be a positive force in the Downtown Eastside community and beyond. This kind of process of mutual, experiential learning is termed social learning – one of the main focuses of the course that brought Savannah, Rosemary, and I together in this partnership (Friedmann, 1987). This

social learning project focused on *Women in Fish* has provided an opportunity to evaluate the outreach process and understand it more fully in relation to the objectives of both Vancouver Moving Theatre and urban ink productions. My report serves as documentation of the outreach process and also as an evaluation of this process, its impacts, and its relevance to future engagement processes for VMT and urban ink.

*Women in Fish* is a multimedia show produced by urban ink productions that was presented at the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual *Downtown Eastside Heart of the City Festival*, an annual festival produced by Vancouver Moving Theatre. The production was accompanied by community outreach and theme-related activities that were coordinated by Rosemary Georgeson with support from (and in cooperation with) Vancouver Moving Theatre. As part of the Social Learning Studio course at the University of British Columbia's School of Community and Regional Planning, I was brought on as an intern to assist with aspects of the project and community outreach. The components of *Women in Fish* and accompanying theme-related activities that were presented at the festival, along with details of the outreach process, will be described in further detail below. To begin with, a brief background will be provided describing organizational objectives of the three organizations involved in the social learning partnership – Vancouver Moving Theatre, urban ink productions, and the School of Community and Regional Planning.

## **VANCOUVER MOVING THEATRE**

Founded in 1983, award winning Vancouver Moving Theatre (VMT) is a professional arts organization dedicated to creating art that celebrates the power of the human imagination and spirit; builds shared experiences that bridge diverse cultural traditions, social groups and artistic disciplines; and gives voice to residents of the Downtown Eastside and beyond. After 15 years of touring over four continents, VMT currently produces the flagship *Downtown Eastside Heart of the City Festival*, and pioneers high impact, innovative theatrical projects that focus on making art for, with and about the people, art forms and cultures of the Downtown Eastside. These community engaged and transformative artistic projects contribute to the neighbourhood's economic and cultural development, nurture artistic talents of residents and emerging artists, showcase cultural treasures, and bring new dimensions to the practice of professionally produced and community-engaged arts. VMT delivers professional service and value with an attitude of partnership, cooperation and respect for community needs. The company shares theatrical research via national theatre journals and presentations at national community play conferences (Vancouver Moving Theatre, 2012, p.132).

The annual *Downtown Eastside Heart of the City Festival* promotes, presents and facilitates development of artists, art forms, cultural traditions, history, activism, people and great stories about Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (Heart of the City Festival,

2013, p.55). Produced by Vancouver Moving Theatre in partnerships with the Carnegie Community Centre, the Association of United Ukrainian Canadians and a host of Downtown Eastside community partners, the two week festival annually presents hundreds of professional and community artists at over 100 events in 35 plus DTES locations (Savannah Walling, personal communication, December 2013).

### **URBAN INK PRODUCTIONS**

Igniting passions and inspiring change, urban ink exists to serve the voice and visions of Indigenous and Intercultural artists. After six years under the leadership of Artistic Director Diane Roberts, urban ink has grown into a vibrant, innovative and relevant company with an artistic reach that cuts across cultural, social, economic and generational barriers. urban ink is nationally and internationally recognized for its unique vision – a vision that deliberately and emphatically promotes Indigenous values, intercultural collaboration and the ideal of a borderless village. urban ink's proud and essential role is to incubate works that would otherwise not find an audience and to maximize their exposure through national and international touring (Catalogue of Independent Arts, 2013). urban ink is all about:

- Artists in residence – Cultivating new voices in Canadian theatre
- Community engagement – Courageous, compelling and collaborative
- World premieres – Rooted, raw and revolutionary theatre

### **SCHOOL OF COMMUNITY AND REGIONAL PLANNING – SOCIAL LEARNING STUDIO**

Founded in 1951, the University of British Columbia's School of Community and Regional Planning (SCARP) was one of the first dedicated planning schools in Canada. Vancouver is one of the most scenic urban settings in the world and home to a culture of environmentalism and pluralism with a long history of activism and action. It is also home to formidable socio-economic problems in the Downtown Eastside and throughout Greater Vancouver. SCARP's mission is 'to advance the transition to sustainability through excellence in integrated policy and planning research, professional education and community service', and SCARP'S vision is 'Sustainability through the Democratization of Planning' (SCARP, n.d.).

One of the primary goals of the Social Learning Studio course is to assist students to develop professional skills and capabilities through guided 'hands-on' experience in a real life environment. This is achieved through a community service learning internship whereby the student partners with a community organization on a project to learn how the community organization works to help build inclusive communities.

## **COMMUNITY SERVICE LEARNING**

Community service learning is a type of experiential learning that includes a classroom component along with voluntary service aimed at meeting community needs, where real life experiences in the community are linked to academic content through processes that encourage critical thinking and reflection. With an emphasis on service and learning, community service learning has less of a focus on specific skill development and more of a focus on improving the students' understanding of community issues and their own role as a citizen (Fryer and Newnham, 2005). Additionally, community service learning ideally should be a partnership between the community organization with whom the student is placed, the instructor of the course, and the student – whereby each of the members has a voice in deciding the outcomes and benefits that should result from the partnership (Beck, 2005).

The partnership between VMT, urban ink, myself, and the instructor of the Social Learning Studio course, Nathan Edelson, is an example of community service learning. We drafted a project agreement together that outlined the roles and expectations of each partner, as well as deliverables for the project, one of which is this report documenting the community outreach process that was undertaken for *Women in Fish* at the *Heart of the City Festival*. The purpose of this report, besides documenting the process, is to capture the voices and experiences of those involved in the project. A second report, shorter in length and written in plain language will also be drafted that will summarize the community outreach process and its impacts and can be used by the partner organizations for future communications regarding the work that they do.

## **SOCIAL LEARNING**

Why undertake a project such as this that aims to reflect on the process of community outreach and engagement? The concept of social learning provides one explanation. According to Friedmann (1987), social learning is a form of tacit and informal learning whereby actors (individuals, small groups, communities, or social movements) through action can acquire useful information that may lead to cumulative learning. Both VMT and urban ink have specified organizational objectives for the work that they do as described above. A project such as this asks the question of whether those objectives are being met and if so, how? If not, it opens up opportunity for reflection, a place to ask how things could be differently in the future. In short, it provides an opportunity for these organizations to learn about themselves, their relationship to one another, and to the community. It asks, 'are we achieving what we set out to achieve?' and, 'are we having a positive impact on the development of this community?'

## COMMUNITY ENGAGED ART PRODUCTIONS

“The arts are a powerful tool in building and sustaining successful neighbourhoods. Community-engaged art-making is a unique and effective approach to community building that fosters relationships between artists and residents, while producing exciting, unique art, and nurturing mentoring opportunities. The result is a dynamic explosion of creativity that changes how art is made, how communities are built, and how we live together... These locally-rooted projects bring residents and artists together. The result is more vibrant communities – mosaics, murals, theatre, dance, media arts, music recording, storytelling, poetry, painting and photography. The results astound the on-looker while bolstering confidence in participants and pride in place” (Neighbourhood Arts Network, n.d.).

Both VMT and urban ink are involved in what can be termed community engaged art productions. As Savannah Walling described in an interview, there is a spectrum when it comes to the level of community involvement or engagement for each of VMT’s productions, but at the core of their practice, community engaged art is art that is made with, about, and for the community it is serving. It is art that is created in collaboration that can celebrate, commemorate, and heal. As Lowe (2001) describes, there is recognition of the power of art to effect change in individuals and communities and for this reason it is often called upon to address social problems and promote healthier communities within an increasingly disconnected and isolated society. Newman, Curtis and Stephens (2003) concur, stating that arts projects are expected to have positive impacts on social capital and thus have become an important part of community development strategies, even if the impacts are difficult to measure.

I asked both Rosemary and Savannah what they saw as the benefits of community engaged art productions. Rosemary said that with community engaged productions, people feel like they have a stake in what they’re about to see and that the experience has a deeper impact on individuals and the community if they feel they have a personal place in it or connection to it. Savannah described some of the benefits as: creating an opportunity for shared experience; contributing to collective memory; providing a means of looking at difficult community issues in a way that doesn’t polarize; and, replacing negative stereotypes with new options. She also spoke of the new jobs and volunteer opportunities, the potential to stimulate further projects, and creating a sense of identity and pride.

As Savannah pointed out, the level of community engagement for any particular production can be viewed as falling along a spectrum. For the purposes of the following discussion about *Women in Fish*, community engagement is defined as the sharing of stories, hands-on participation or inquiry at events, and the contribution of artifacts.

# ***WOMEN IN FISH AT THE HEART OF THE CITY FESTIVAL***

**BACKGROUND: *WOMEN IN FISH* – A COMMUNITY ENGAGED ART PRODUCTION**

*Women in Fish* can be described as a community engaged art production. Originally created in 2004 as a community production on Galiano Island, *Women in Fish: Hours of Water* became a radio documentary produced by CBC. It was written by Marie Clements, inspired by stories Rosemary Georgeson and Eileen Lorenz shared and Marie then wove together. The film and live performance version began touring in the summer of 2010. Touring presentations include an installation as a memorial of the contributions of women to the fishing industry, public workshops, and a live multi-media performance (urban ink, 2013).

In support of the project, Vancouver Moving Theatre presented *Women in Fish* and related outreach activities at the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Downtown Eastside Heart of the City Festival. The festival hosted a series of events to commemorate Vancouver’s fishing industry including a Walking Tour; a fishing industry Community Art Installation and Reception; Rosemary Georgeson’s film *We Have Stories: Women in Fish*; and two performances of *Women in Fish*, one followed by a question and answer period, the other by a panel discussion (Table 1). VMT also agreed to support creation of a PowerPoint slideshow about the waters and relationships to the land of the Downtown Eastside. This presentation accompanied the *Women in Fish* performances as a prelude.

**Table 1: Summary of *Women in Fish* Activities at the Heart of the City Festival**

EVENT	DATE	TIME	LOCATION	# OF ATTENDEES
<b><i>Women in Fish</i> Walking Tour</b>	Sat, Oct 26, 2013	11:30am – 1:10pm	Chinese Cultural Centre Courtyard, 50 East Pender to G & F Financial Group	12
<b>Community Art Installation Reception</b>	Sat, Oct 26, 2013	1:10pm – 2:30pm	G & F Financial Group, 803 East Hastings St	16
<b><i>We Have Stories: Women in Fish</i> Documentary Screening</b>	Sat, Oct 26, 2013	3:25pm	Carnegie Theatre, 401 Main St	68
<b><i>Women in Fish</i> Performance and Q&amp;A</b>	Sun, Oct 27, 2013	3:00pm	Carnegie Community Centre Gym, 401 Main St	55
<b><i>Women in Fish</i> Performance and Panel Discussion</b>	Sun, Oct 27, 2013	7:00pm	Carnegie Community Centre Gym, 401 Main St	40

“The *Women in Fish* residency and theme-related activities presented at the *Heart of the City Festival* represented the intersection of multiple communities past and present,” said VMT’s artistic director, Savannah Walling. “These included urban ink’s community of artists; Galiano Island community participants who contributed to the original production; and workers, families, and organizations involved in Vancouver’s fishing industry. They also included audience members drawn from Greater Vancouver as well as from the festival’s Downtown Eastside community – those who live, work, volunteer, and/or have family, ancestral or cultural connections in the historic district.”

### ***WOMEN IN FISH WALKING TOUR***

On October 26<sup>th</sup>, the 90 minute Walking Tour (Figure 1), led by Rosemary Georgeson, began at the Chinese Cultural Centre courtyard at 50 East Pender Street and took participants on a walk through the Downtown Eastside, describing the importance of these lands, waters, and local businesses to the historic fishing industry. The Walking Tour culminated at G & F Financial Group at 803 East Hastings Street.

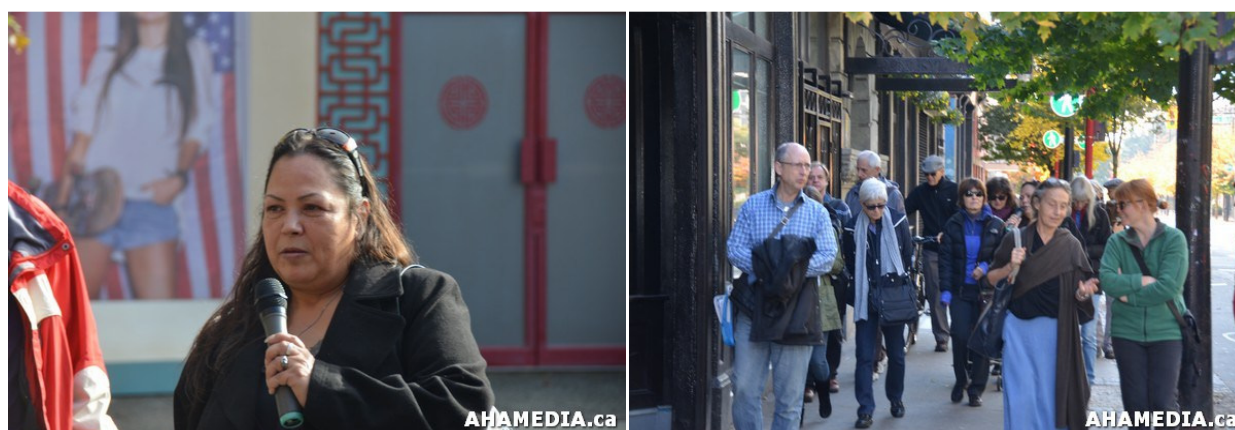


Figure 1: *Women in Fish* Walking Tour (Photo Credit: Richard Czaban, Aha Media)

### **COMMUNITY ART INSTALLATION & RECEPTION**

A West Coast fisheries themed Art Installation (Figure 2 & Table 2) was set up at G & F Financial Group, formerly the Gulf & Fraser Fishermen’s Credit Union, and was available for viewing from October 24<sup>th</sup> through November 1<sup>st</sup> during operating hours. On October 26<sup>th</sup>, following the *Women in Fish* Walking Tour, an opening reception hosted by G & F Financial Group was held that provided an opportunity for viewing of the installation and discussion with Rosemary Georgeson and Branch Manager, Nadine Prett.





Figure 2: Community Art Installation (Photo Credit: Richard Czaban, Aha Media)

**Table 2: Summary of Art Installation Contributors and Artifacts**

CONTRIBUTOR	ARTIFACTS
Canfisco	Coveralls Aprons Gloves Fish cans Rubber boots
Georgeson Tug	Towline Lanterns Life ring Knots Spliced rope
Gordon Georgeson	Gillnet Fishing gear
Lorrie Thompson	Book "Gumboot Girls" Poster for book "Gumboot Girls"
Nikkei Place	Poster covers for books "Spirit of Nikkei Fleet" & "Nikkei Fishermen on the BC Coast"
Rosemary Georgeson	Wooden net floats Memorabilia Children's toys Records and 8 track tapes
Rosemary Georgeson Sr.	Gulf & Fraser Fishermens Calendar
Sylvia Surette	Book "Salmon: Our Heritage" by Cicely Lyons (received after <i>Women in Fish</i> events)
Terry Baird	Net hanging bench
Tymac	Photo of Donna Chisolm Book "Saltwater Women at Work" by Vicki Jensen
Wendy Pedersen	Case for fish canning jars

### ***WE HAVE STORIES: WOMEN IN FISH* DOCUMENTARY SCREENING**

On October 26th *We Have Stories: Women in Fish* (2013, 25 minutes), a film directed by Rosemary Georgeson, was presented followed by a question and answer period. “*We Have Stories* weaves together intergenerational accounts gathered along the west coast, telling of the deep and enduring connections between indigenous women, communities, water and fish. *We Have Stories* asks what the disappearance of fish means for these relationships” (Heart of the City Festival, 2013, p.19).

### **HISTORIC FISHING INDUSTRY & WATERFRONT POWERPOINT SLIDESHOW**

On the afternoon and evening of October 27<sup>th</sup>, immediately prior to each performances of *Women in Fish*, a Powerpoint Slideshow was shown of the historic fishing industry and waterfront of the Downtown Eastside and Greater Vancouver. The Slideshow was set to an instrumental piece and showed approximately 100 images gathered from the City of Vancouver archives, Nikkei National Museum, Vancouver Maritime Museum, Vancouver Moving Theatre’s archives, Rosemary Georgeson, and one local resident.

### ***WOMEN IN FISH* PERFORMANCES & PANEL DISCUSSION**

*Women in Fish* is a multi-media production that incorporates film images and live performance to share the personal histories and memories of women who lived and worked in the West Coast fishing industry. *Women in Fish* weaves a survival story from the sinking in 1962 of the fishing boat Loretta B with the larger tragedy of the demise of the world fishing industry. Two performances of *Women in Fish* were offered at the festival, an afternoon and an evening performance on October 27<sup>th</sup>, at the Carnegie Community Centre Gym. The afternoon performance was followed by a short Question & Answer period and the evening performance by a Panel Discussion with four women who had worked in the fishing industry – Rosemary Georgeson, Lou-ann Neel, Wendy Pedersen, and Debbie Blair.

### **ENGAGEMENT PROCESS**

The engagement process for *Women in Fish* included a number of community outreach activities prior to the start of the festival, as well as interaction with audience members and panelists from the Downtown Eastside community and fishing industry who attended the various festival events: Walking Tour, Art Installation Reception, and *Women in Fish* performances (Table 3).

The community outreach activities were led by Rosemary Georgeson, with the assistance of Jane Diston. The majority of outreach activities occurred in October and included meeting with and leaving packages for representatives from First Nations (Tsleil-Waututh Band Office, Squamish Band Office, Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre), cultural organizations (Nikkei Place, Japanese Language Hall), and fisheries-related businesses and organizations (Maritime Hall, Canfisco, Tymac). A presentation was made by Rosemary Georgeson for approximately 50 First Nations elders at the Elders’ Luncheon at the

Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre on October 9<sup>th</sup>. Additional meetings occurred with the co-authors of ‘Gumboot Girls’, and staff of Canadian Fishing Company (Canfisco), and G & F Financial Group in the process of gathering artifacts and arranging the Community Art Installation.

The Walking Tour, Reception at the Community Art Installation, Film Presentation, creation of PowerPoint slideshow, and the Panel Presentation after the *Women in Fish* evening performance provided further space for sharing of stories and engagement with community members, both from within the fishing industry and from the Downtown Eastside. Comment cards requesting feedback were available at both the Community Art Installation and the *Women in Fish* performances for attendees to share their thoughts about what they had experienced.

**Table 3: Summary of Outreach Meeting and Key Contacts**

OUTREACH MEETING	KEY CONTACTS
urban ink	Cathy Gibler, Lorrie Thompson
Canfisco	Don Macloud
Gumboot Girls	Lorrie Thompson
Nikkei Place	Linda Reid
Tymac Launch Services	Lesley Connors
Squamish Band Office	Newsletter article
G & F Financial Group	Nadine Prett
Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre	Laura, Elders Program Coordinator
Tsleil-Waututh	Kari Chambers, Elders Coordinator

### EVALUATION OF ENGAGEMENT PROCESS & IMPACTS

As Newman, Curtis and Stephens (2003) discuss, although there are many positive outcomes attributed to the arts and community-based projects specifically, such as improved social capital, it can be difficult to measure these effects. One way to gauge the impact of a production is simply to ask participants for their reactions. Depending on the type of activity, observing and assessing participant behaviour can also provide some insight into the level of engagement. Finding appropriate ways of recording attendee responses can prove challenging, but is certainly a worthwhile endeavor when trying to assess whether a particular production or form of outreach is having the desired effect.

The *Women in Fish* performances and associated Walking Tour and Community Art Installation were no exception when it came to the challenge of developing appropriate measures by which to gather attendee and participant feedback and thus gauge the impact of the production. One of the greatest challenges encountered with regards to community

outreach was having adequate time and resources to conduct the outreach prior to the festival as well as at events.

Rosemary and Savannah both spoke in their interviews with me of the difficulties arranging enough community outreach within the time and with the resources that were available. Ideally, community outreach for *Women in Fish* would have been wide-ranging, involving as many people as cared to participate. As is often the case in life, those involved in producing and presenting *Women in Fish* also had many other commitments occurring simultaneously. In addition to producing a festival with over 100 events at more than 35 venues, VMT simultaneously produced *Bread & Salt*, an original community engaged production featuring a cast of 90 professional and community performers and the assistance of 75 volunteers. With the scope of the outreach potentially being so large in a city the size of Vancouver, it simply was not possible to reach as many people, within all the varied communities identified, as everyone would have liked. “Given these realities,” Savannah said, “in contractual agreements drawn-up in October between VMT and urban ink, and between VMT, urban ink and SCARP, the decision was jointly made by the partners to support five activities that could provide an achievable scale of outreach in VMT and urban ink’s Downtown Eastside community – an outreach strategy to match the available resources of time, people and funding.”

One of the challenges identified was how to gather feedback from those who contributed artifacts to the Art Installation. Originally it had been conceived that I would gather artifacts during outreach along with Rosemary and return them after striking the Art Installation, giving me an opportunity to conduct mini-interviews with contributors. As we quickly realized, with my full time school schedule and Rosemary’s additional commitments, we were going to have very little time together to gather artifacts from community members. “In smaller communities,” Savannah noted, “the gathering of artifacts had been conducted by local community members in consultation with Rosemary. This time Rosemary would be personally gathering artifacts and creating a commemorative art installation.” In circumstances such as this, a degree of flexibility is required in order to find a different way to meet project objectives. I decided instead to try to obtain feedback from audience members through written comment cards at the Community Art Installation at G & F Financial Group and at the performances of *Women in Fish* at the Carnegie Community Centre. Through observation and note taking and a limited number of one-on-one conversations during the Walking Tour, Reception, and Panel Discussion, I was able to gather further evidence of the high level of interest of audience members and commitment of participants. Additionally, audience questionnaires from the *Heart of the City Festival* provided further feedback on the *Women in Fish* performances.

Despite the challenge of limited resources and time, a great deal was still accomplished. As described above, Rosemary contacted a number of people and organizations, many of

whom became involved in various ways with the project as a result, either contributing artifacts to the Art Installation, attending the Walking Tour, Reception, and *Women in Fish* performances, and even participating on the panel after the evening performance. As Rosemary described to me, unfortunately the success of a production is often measured by the number of attendees, rather than how deeply it touched those that were there. Even though there were not as many people at the Walking Tour or evening performance as we may have liked to see, those that were there seemed to be deeply engaged and moved by what they saw and heard. As an example, one audience member at a *Women in Fish* performance provided the following comment on the cards provided:

“I was very touched. I lost 4 of my family members from the sea. I was very young. It helped me to finally be at peace with it. My cousin dog paddled for 8 hrs or more and survived. My uncle and 3 cousins drowned. He tried to rescue them and lost his life as well. I don’t know why it happened but again it helped me to let go. Thanx. Chris Quesnelle. Metis Blessings to you all.”

Others shared:

“Women of the sea. What an awesome insight to the way it was. I urge you to tell more.”

“Thank you for a wonderful performance of a story that has to be told. It meant so much to me.”

“Fantastic. This story has to be told.”

Although there were a limited number of comment cards and questionnaires received in total from audience members at the Art Installation and performances, they provided some insight into how the production was received and what resonated with the audience, as well as what did not. For example:

“I loved *Women in Fish*. Such a powerful and evocative production that shed light on the dramatically and tragically reduced BC fishing industry and the strength and tenacity of the people in the industry, the strength and role of women in the fishing industry and a mother’s determination to survive. Told with artistry, beauty, love, and a deep care for a way of life and for artistic practice. Improvements? The production is slightly long at 90 minutes. I felt the section about the writer wanting to tell the story dragged the main thrust of the story a bit.”

In addition to the comment cards, the questions at the panel discussion gave a good indication of the engagement of audience members. They asked to know more about the fishing industry, the production itself, the challenges women faced in the fishing industry, and the personal experiences of the panel members.

More people than were anticipated attended the screening *We Have Stories: Women in Fish* – 68 in total, including a large group of post-secondary students – making the documentary film the best attended of the *Women in Fish* theme-related events at the festival.

The Walking Tour and Art Installation Reception drew a smaller audience, but it provided a very intimate setting in which the women fishers that were present were able to share their stories with one another and the other attendees. Kathy, one of the co-authors of *Gumboot Girls*, who attended the Walking Tour and Reception, commented to me about the importance of telling the history of women, First Nation's people, and the Downtown Eastside as it relates to the fishing industry. She spoke of how it was a history that is often overlooked and thought it was important that Rosemary, as a First Nations woman and former worker in the fishing industry, be the one to tell the story.

My own record of impressions from the events shared the same sentiment – that it was important to share the history. The process began with members of the Galiano community who contributed to the original production, expanded through touring productions to small BC communities, and now in the Downtown Eastside was reaching an audience of almost 250 people (including the 50 aboriginal elders from the Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre) and at least a dozen people who shared their artifacts and stories – people who were part of the fishing community. My feeling was that this experience – part of an ongoing continuum of *Women in Fish* related community engagement over time – provided just the type of environment necessary for connections to be made that could lead to further projects in the future that might reach a broader audience.

## **APPLICATION OF SOCIAL LEARNING**

There are two main focus areas for potential social learning that I see arising from the outreach process for this project. First, what do our own reflections on the outreach process suggest worked well or could be done differently? And second, what can we learn from the feedback that we did gather? From this it is possible to make recommendations on what to do in the future to continue the process of evaluating the impacts of outreach and engagement processes, as well as how to structure such processes. And potentially, some of these learnings can also be extended to other community engaged arts productions that fall somewhere else along the spectrum of engagement. In this way, VMT and urban ink may continue to gauge how well they are meeting their own expectations as organizations concerned with having a positive impact on the development of the communities they work within.

Beginning with our own reflections on the outreach for this project, it was clear that all partners agreed that more time and resources would be needed to meet the level of

outreach ideally envisioned for the project. Taking into consideration the constraints faced due to a change in management at urban ink and the busy schedules of the partners, the outreach accomplished was likely in line with what could be expected. As Savannah noted in our interview, the potential scope and scale of the outreach was enormous; the co-producing partners limited the project's scale of outreach to match the realizable resources of time and staff available. For the future of *Women in Fish* events, it would be ideal to ensure adequate time and resources exist to conduct massively inclusive outreach, so that as many people as wanted to participate could be involved. Starting the outreach process earlier is one way to achieve this, but even with adequate resources at the outset, unexpected things can occur. The ability to be flexible and make adjustments as the outreach process develops is also an important part of ensuring success.

Another take away gained from this process is that sometimes quality of engagement may be more important than quantity. As Savannah spoke about in her interview, VMT's community engaged productions have frequently had ripple effects. It is my guess that this is more likely to happen when a small number of people are deeply moved and then take it upon themselves to share their own stories in the future, rather than if a large audience attends a production that hardly moves them at all. From the feedback gathered, it is clear that there was interest in the topic and a desire to hear more stories told like those presented in *Women in Fish*. In addition, many of the women involved in the fishing industry, as well as First Nations elders at the pre-festival outreach, were keen to share their stories of being involved in the fishing industry. This suggests there is an opportunity to create new projects or expand on this one to open up more space for sharing and storytelling about this historically important industry to the Downtown Eastside and its many cultural communities.

Beyond expressing an interest to know more, the feedback from participants also suggests that the *Women in Fish* production does have an effect on its audience. It is impactful and it is a story that hasn't yet fully been told. It is my assessment that even though community outreach for this fall's *Women in Fish* production was modest, the production itself and the related outreach and activities did achieve aims of VMT and urban ink: five theme-related events were presented to a total of close to 200 audience members; at least a dozen community members, six local organizations, and 50 aboriginal elders were involved; and quality feedback was gathered from some of the audience members and participants.

The *Women in Fish* project and its theme-related outreach activities created a safe space for sharing common experiences and engaged individuals from a variety of cultural communities, including Coast Salish, Japanese and Anglo. And most importantly, it generated interest in learning more, creating the potential for further creative endeavors to take root and blossom in the neighbourhood.

My recommendation is for VMT and urban ink to continue on the well tested journey they have already embarked on: to continue to build on the strong relationships they have already created within the DTES community, as well as to forge new ones and see where they lead. For instance, during the community art installation reception, staff from the G & F Financial Group expressed interest to Savannah in the idea of hosting a history talk at next year's *DTES Heart of the City Festival* featuring old-timers and former board members of the credit union involved in the fishing industry. VMT already incorporates a post-mortem process into each of their productions, which I urge them to continue. For this production of *Women in Fish*, they have scheduled a post-mortem meeting with urban ink in mid December. As they did with the *Women in Fish* performances, I urge them to continue to collect audience feedback through surveys and to expand this evaluative process to regularly gather feedback from participants and community members in all future community engaged productions they are involved with. Taking time to reflect on the process, what worked, and what might be improved upon is an important part of the social learning process. My impression from the brief time that I was involved in this project is that this reflection is already happening and that speaks to why these organizations have been so successful and continue to impact the DTES community in a positive way.

## CONCLUSION

My own experience working on this project broadened my understanding of the historic significance of the Downtown Eastside geographically, economically, and culturally. I learned about the important roles of different cultural groups as well as women in the fishing and related industries. And most importantly, I learned about the significant role community-based arts and cultural productions have played within the DTES community in terms of challenging stereotypes, supporting community members in their own artistic and creative development, and the tremendous dedication local artists have for working in and with the community they serve.

Art is a powerful medium for conveying information. It engages our senses and can trigger emotions. I feel grateful to have been given the opportunity to be part of *Women in Fish* and *The Downtown Eastside Heart of the City Festival* even in a small way. To have witnessed just one person being moved by hearing and seeing a part of their own personal history reflected back at them from the stage makes it worthwhile, but in fact, there were many. I view that as a success.



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