



Youth in Community Economic Development
LifeCycles & Common Ground



Acknowledgement and Thanks

This project was funded by Coast Capital Savings Credit Union, the Muttart Foundation, Human Resources and Social Development Canada and Industry Canada.

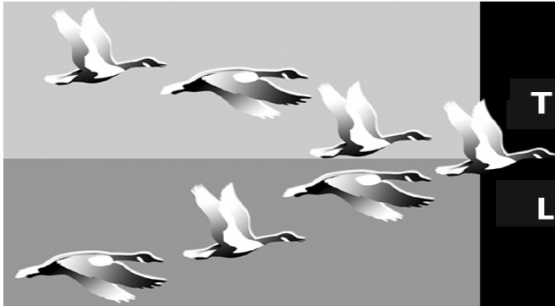
We would like to thank all of the funders of this project, the participants, staff and volunteers who helped provide direction. We look forward to continuing feedback, comments and suggestions.

Thank you to the following people who contributed to our research. There are many others who pointed us in the right direction, thanks to you as well.

Marc Nisbet, Allysha Larsen, Keith Jorgenson, Ola Nuga, Jennifer Morris, Jean Arnold, Doug Ragan, Maeve Lydon, Larry Jorgenson, Melanie Sondergaard, Anne Docherty, Doug Docherty, Megan Myres, Linda Myres, Éric Stephenson, Marie-Camille Lalande, Jane Rabinowicz, Michele Cherot, Linda Geggie, Tim Ewanchuck, and Joy Illington.

Compiled by Farrar Brodhead and Robin June Hood. Produced by the Canadian CED Network 2006.
Graphics and Design by Oliver Luke Delorie and Stewart Hertzog.





The Canadian CED Network

Le Réseau canadien de DÉC

Strengthening Canada's Communities / Des communautés plus fortes au Canada

Youth in Community Economic Development

LifeCycles and Common Ground: An Abundant Harvest

*We envision a world that recognizes our relationship with food
as key to maintaining a healthy planet.*

*This profile is one of
fifteen stories
examining youth
involvement in
community economic
development (CED).*

*The profiles have
been produced as
part of the Canadian
CED Network's efforts
to encourage effective
practices in youth
leadership and
engagement to
enhance the social
and economic
conditions of
Canada's
communities.*

*This work was
supported by Coast
Capital Savings Credit
Union, the Muttart
Foundation, Social
Development Canada,
and Industry Canada.*

*LifeCycles is empowering because it makes sense. It
creates possibilities. LifeCycles work makes people
happy, which is something we should never under-
value: it feels good to work in the earth, to plant seeds,
watch them grow, to eat what you've grown, to feel self-
sufficient.*

— past participants

LifeCycles is a great example of a small NGO that is cultivating a passion for food and farming among young people, of spreading that affection for the rich soil of everything organic and home crafted. Established in 1994 their mission is "to cultivate awareness and action about growing food, educate widely about the impacts of organic food, health and urban sustainability, and CED in the Greater Victoria area". This non-governmental organization focuses on building community connections for youth through hands-on projects that contribute towards improving local food production. They have built up strong networks in the areas of food security, urban agriculture and CED. Their programs involve numerous local and international partners; their latest international partners are in Cuba.

*The most effective aspects of the Youth Community
Entrepreneurship Program were the supports I received in all forms.
...I was able to finally take the risks involved in consciously creating
the life I want to love. I often say the program was the best thing
that ever happened to me. I am closer to fulfilling my professional
dreams, and the confidence gained through enhancing my employability, life and people skills increased
the benefits of all the practical business experience I was soaking up. LifeCycles is a real resource in*

our community. Sustainability is the key to growth and prosperity in any organization and LC has roots that go deep. I am thankful for everything I learned, the people I met and the groundwork I laid, while growing as a person and a green entrepreneur.

– Oliver Luke Delorie, 2005 past participant & owner Creative Culture Enterprises

Context

LifeCycles and its sister organization Common Ground are located in Victoria, British Columbia. Although commonly thought of as a prosperous region, the capital regional district also has high levels of homelessness, urban poverty and inner city at risk youth.

Urban encroachment and the escalating value of residential land have significantly reduced the land available for gardens and farming, but the region has recently put themselves on the map as a centre of the slow food and organic wine movement. These social and economic factors created the context for LifeCycles to emerge. A growing interest in sustainability within a largely knowledge based economy with high youth unemployment has continued to provide fertile ground for LifeCycles and Common Ground to expand their programs.

A deepening interest of young people in the green economy led to the creation of a social venture, 'Common Harvest' and later the Agro-Food Youth Entrepreneurship Program, which trains 8-10 young people a year in green business development. LifeCycles has had phenomenal success infusing the Greater Victoria region with a whole new generation of young farmers and green entrepreneurs. This profile will describe the story of their evolution.

History

LifeCycles was founded in 1994 when it partnered with "Generacion Alternativa" in Santiago, Chile, to create an international youth exchange. Working in partnership the two organizations identified a common need... "to spread awareness about food issues, and to get youth active in the promotion and creation of food gardens in urban areas."

LifeCycles developed and ran parallel community garden projects in Victoria to those already established in Chile. Underlying these projects was an understanding of the links between globalization, the corporatization of food systems, environmental degradation and human inequality. Their first projects were community gardens where food was grown for soup kitchens. Aware of the difficulties involved in overcoming health and wellness issues for persons living on a tight budget, LifeCycles offered a practical, logical, and hopeful solution for those who could not afford fresh produce. LifeCycles considered local action to be the most effective way to effect environmental restoration and protection, using the *"think globally act locally"* motto as its core philosophy for social and environmental action.

Linda Geggie, the founder of LifeCycles recounts how the organization developed: "LifeCycles emerged from another youth organization, the West Coast Environmental Youth Alliance. WCEYA was primarily focused on forestry issues and LifeCycles was more interested in urban sustainability. As part of the WCEYA we organized a conference that brought youth from as far away as Alaska and Chile together to consider sustainability issues and social justice. We met with this really interesting youth group from Chile who was planting gardens with marginalized people in the outskirts of Santiago as a social health and environment project. The group that I was involved with was very keen on community gardens as a way of uniting people and teaching where their food came from, and the resulting impacts. We thought it was a really amazing urban sustainability project for us to do alongside. Luckily there was this opportunity called "Home is Where We Live" and the Environmental Youth Alliance was looking for project partners. It was a one-year project involving a youth

exchange between youth doing concrete projects in their community. To make the story short, we teamed up with the Chilean project and got funded for a year, and LifeCycles was then formed. We split from WCEYA and got our legal entity. We were predominately a female work force. Then we received funding from the E-Teams from the BC Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks to work on garden creation and develop a composting centre at Holland Road.

Activities in CED

Linda Geggie continues to relate the story of how LifeCycles developed its CED programs in the organic agricultural sector:

“The roots of LifeCycles came from urban sustainability, food as the powerful connector of all – health, environment, economy, social cohesion; and the creation of community gardens was our first focus. Then the momentum and the ideas took off, there was a lot of synergy and we had funding to do youth projects which really coupled capacity building with community service. The funding was out there and because we had these youth teams that could put energy into these great ideas there was an impetus to grow.

“The other key part was partnerships. Because we were all youth we had no experience so we had to partner, partner, and partner, everywhere. We needed mentors, trucks, materials- everything was accomplished on a shoestring. So partnership, process, consensus based decision-making, many years doing youth capacity building and community service... and hence the projects came into being; the Fruit Tree project, Home Grown, Growing Schools; they were all related to what people were talking about. Issues like how to educate people about food, how to teach them how to increase their production, how to use more land... Farmers were coming in and doing workshops and youth were working for two weeks out on the farms. As the youth were going through these programs they

began saying, “Hey, I could do this as a living.”

“As we were also growing food on our demo site to give for emergency food distribution programs, we thought, why couldn’t we develop a revenue-generating project to sell some of our produce? All of these ideas were circling around!

“Business is Growing” was born, VanCity gave us \$10,000 to look at these ideas and we set up the business incubator of “Common Harvest”. Common Harvest evolved from the demonstration site where youth were learning, growing food and putting it into this box program. We gave some of the produce to the merchants for distribution and some went into the box program. LifeCycles did the distribution end of it, and trained the youth. And then it was youth who trained youth to grow, to create and deliver the boxes. Based on youth initiative we expanded the box program, and decided we’d work with a group of four or five farmers.

“That same year the Entrepreneur Program began. Some of the people joining the Entrepreneurship Program had also been either farming for a couple of years or had worked in the Common Harvest Box Program. They decided that they wanted a loan so LifeCycles got some funding to coordinate the box program and we did a box program that included the demo-site. Then the other farmers contributing grew a specific amount of produce, according to a specific plan and harvest schedule. They had support to do work parties on the farms, access mentors and attend workshops. Tim did masses of quality control and the administrator of the program, Tara, did the marketing. After a number of years we built up infrastructure to have a refrigerator, a docking bay and all the boxes. Common Harvest Box was a three-year project.

“The Common Harvest Box program worked really well because of the diversity of support. It had a coordinator that could do the business end of it, leaving the

participants to focus on the growing, allowing them to learn the business part more slowly. Because they had a supportive market they didn't have to learn everything at once. Though Common Harvest was successful we stopped it because we could not fund the coordinator on an ongoing basis, and the farmers became strong enough to be independent. The farmers who were involved in Common Harvest went on to be successful organic growers, like Saanich Organics and Maple Groove Farms."

All of LifeCycles programs are graduated, and they focus on meeting the emerging needs of the youth going through the programs. Business is Growing evolved into GroundWorks, a community learning centre largely funded by HRDC. The Youth Community Entrepreneurship Program was run out of GroundWorks. The idea was to develop into a business and farm support centre, as well as organic gardens. Now the Business is Growing Program has re-emerged, again using a ladder approach because the young farmers like Saanich Organics needed supports to move into supplying a larger market. The farmers needed better labels, websites and another injection of capital into their business to hire employees. The YCEP program accepts only 10 youth a year and participants have to fit restrictive government requirements, including being 'at risk'.

2005 is the first year of the new Business is Growing program. LifeCycles has partnered with Future Corp Cowichan, and hopes to also extend their work into the City of Nanaimo. Future Corps Cowichan is hosting a series of workshops and LifeCycles will offer a number of 'Food and Farm Business Opportunity' events. The goal is to gather farmers and chefs, and institutions and farmers, to discuss procurement policies and agro-tourism opportunities. Business is Growing is meant to create broader support to the young farmers and entrepreneurs as well as provide links to resources including capital, facilities,

Youth Community Entrepreneur Program (YCEP)

LifeCycles works cooperatively with youth to provide entrepreneurial development, mentorship opportunities and peer support, in an effort to help them create sustainable, environmentally and socially responsible community businesses. The Youth Community Entrepreneur Program focuses on the creation of primarily agro-food businesses to strengthen the local food supply. These businesses are integral to revitalizing a green community economy.

The program is designed to empower youth and help them develop avenues for self-employment. It also provides a "next step" for youth who have gained a broad range of hands-on, personal, and organizational skills through skills development programs and other personal experiences.

equipment, labour in addition to shared promotion and marketing opportunities.

Common Ground

Common Groundⁱ has been working closely with LifeCycles for the past several years. Currently the two organizations are merging.

Common Ground has a strong focus on mentoring youth and focuses on stimulating healthy and secure urban-rural food systems, youth empowerment, green community entrepreneurship, green city development and networking in the capital regional district of Victoria, BC. In a recent document describing its new partnership with VanCity Credit Union, Common Ground wrote, "[we] share VanCity's values of social justice, economic self reliance and environmental sustainability and its goal of helping communities thrive and prosper.

Our work similarly bridges social and environmentally responsible enterprise

*development, agriculture and food security,
urban greening and planning.*

Common Ground makes innovative use of participatory mapping methods for youth and community engagement, and their new financial mechanisms for young entrepreneurs. To link nationally and globally, Common Ground works closely with the International Green Map System. The Green Map's on-line tools and international linkages have been a foundation for inspiring and empowering their work and other community mapmakers worldwide.

Their key programs are organized into the following areas; green community economic development, community mapping and planning, regional food security, and networking. Common Ground occupies a critical regional niche in sustainable community development and network building, particularly in the neighbourhood, youth and food-agriculture sectors. They have a strong foundation in these sectors and they lead and support networks and initiatives related to food security and sustainable agro-food CED ventures, with strong youth participation throughout all their work. Along with a unique focus on participatory mapping they have recently partnered with VanCity to develop two small incubation funds for green enterprises founded by young entrepreneurs.

Green CED – the Peer Lending Circle and the Green Seed Fund

Common Ground manages a Peer Lending Circle and the Green Seed Fund. These two programs offer business and finance counseling. Green business development is linked with green mapping, highlighting business opportunities for communities. The Green Seed Fund is key in supporting not only food and farm programs but green community and health businesses, including co-ops. The fund provides small grants to youth-led businesses that benefit the environment, healthy food systems or contribute to community health. It prioritizes grants for equipment or materials purchase, training, mentorship or networking within the capital regional district.

Green Seed was another connection – we wondered, in small ways, through small grants, how do you enable things to “get moving”? We were inspired by what they are doing in Seattle. LifeCycles has always been entrepreneurial, but we are also looking at how we could be a model of enterprising thinking.

Community Mapping & Planning

Common Ground focuses on participatory community-based projects related to sustainability and climate change.

Inspired by the green map system they produced the Victoria and Region Green Map as well as several community green maps. These maps used participatory mapping methods in their production and involved thousands of people, young and old — reinvigorating community engagement and involvement in local planning processes. Several community events and workshops attracted and activated hundreds of people including the first, *People, Places and Green Spaces*. Common Ground also published *The Victoria Green Story Book* and received a Community Service award from the BC Society of Landscape Architects.

Common Ground Victoria has focused its efforts on making and enabling connections by facilitating mapping with community members of different ages and backgrounds, documenting the community mapping process and sharing the learning. Their effort is based on working partnerships with schools, neighbourhoods, local community organizations, and municipal and academic groups. International youth interns have worked with Common Ground and have passionately shared their experiences in community mapping in Argentina, El Salvador and Cuba. Common Ground is also part of the International Green Map System's international advisory group and has helped link community mapping methodology with green mapping. Leveraging and connecting local resources, and creating community and institutional partnerships and networks have laid down a solid foundation for Common Ground and LifeCycles.

Youth Inclusion in CED

In the initial years, LifeCycles was 100% youth focused and all of their programs were created for and run by youth. The first programs had a strong focus on youth empowerment and capacity building. As time passed, the staff recount, "we got old," and the youth coordinators became senior coordinators.

A strong focus on youth inclusion remains today. Youth are on the Board of Directors, they are core volunteers and they occupy most of the seasonal staff positions and the organization predominantly hires people under 30. Home Grown, the Growing Schools Program, Business is Growing and the international internship program are all focused on providing opportunities for young people, including children in elementary and secondary school. Tim Ewanchuck reflects; "Our staff is very youth oriented. We keep our youth attributes and energy in the organization, and provide a lot of opportunities for youth input and involvement."

Outcomes and Evaluation

Over their 11-year history, LifeCycles has developed several strategic plans, in addition to annual one-year work plans. In the past these have included broad participation from partners, youth participants and staff. Each program area also conducts overall program evaluations as required by funders. Currently the organization is undergoing a re-structuring process and the development of a strategic plan will be part of that renewal.

We asked how LifeCycles measures the impact they are having on the youth in their programs and in the community. Program coordinators conduct direct personal evaluations with participants in their programs twice a year and maintain longitudinal data through surveys with as many of their past youth as possible. Tim Ewanchuck estimates that two thirds of the 64 participants from the past seven years of the YCEP own their own businesses or are working in a related field.

The Victoria Fruit Tree Project - A Green Social Venture

Matt and Lee created this project, having grown tired of seeing the fruit in their communities go to waste. They started knocking on doors to ask if they could pick the fruit. Five years and nearly 50,000 pounds of fruit later we're still encouraging people to knock on doors. In 2005 the Fruit Tree project generated \$4,000 in revenue.

With a couple of ladders and lots of volunteers, the Fruit Tree projects picks fruit from backyard trees and distributes it in the community. Seventy volunteers come out each year and are an integral piece of the project.

The best part of the Fruit Tree Project is dropping off the fruit to the local community centres and food banks. Sometimes the fruit barely makes it inside the door. There are so many people that don't have access to fruit. It is amazing to see the juice run down someone's face when they eat a golden yellow plum for the first time. Or to watch someone eat a freshly picked cherry and find out how good it tastes. Moments like those make it all worth it - we really are making a difference to single parents, poor people, children who don't get fruit everyday.

The Fruit Tree Project, like all LifeCycles projects, is that it's not just about food; it's about using food as a way to empower people, to

They also conduct open round sessions with participants and funders together once a year and conduct follow up surveys. They maintain a database of all past participants and invite them to upcoming public events and workshops. Evaluations are conducted after all workshops and public events and incorporated into planning for further programs and

events. Anecdotal evidence from past participants, trainers, farmers and funders has indicated that they are effectively growing the green business sector and creating a supportive climate for more young ethically minded entrepreneurs.

The young farmers and entrepreneurs are now out in the community invigorating the ethical business sector and slowly changing the face of the socially responsible small business sector. Some past participants are now leaders in their communities and are providing back to the community and impacting past disenfranchised youth to believe that they can maintain their ethics and be an entrepreneur. Examples of businesses mentored through the Youth Entrepreneurship Program include businesses like organic market gardening, recycling, eco-tourism bike and nature tours, value-added food products, herbal products, aromatherapy, web design and programming, crafts, natural fiber clothing, a bakery and landscape design. Past participants (64 in seven years) include fourteen market gardeners and herb growers, bakers specializing in organic, naturally-leavened bread, an innovative recycling business, a heritage seed-saver, a landscaper that uses edible plants, and a bike-and-trailer supplier of veggie boxes. LifeCycles has not conducted a comprehensive formal evaluation that considers the overall outcomes and impacts from all programs areas due to lack of funding, but are keen to do so in the future.

Success Factors and Lessons Learned

LifeCycles credits their graduated approach to programming as central to their success in creating sustained businesses and people. Other attributes include a high calibre of staff, trainers and coordinators, the staffs' intense level of commitment and time, and a philosophy of 'having time for everybody' - particularly on a one-to-one basis. The organization has used social workers to provide extra support for at-risk and youth with addictions, and have coupled their business development skills with social develop-

Lessons Learned

- *Nurture all the people involved*
- *Provide proper skills for: business support, peer networks, personal support, confidence building, communications and conflict resolution skills, a mentor network*
- *Be consistent, be there, create a centre or place for ongoing support*
- *Open up to learning in all directions*
- *Maintain consistency with staff when possible*
- *Create networks of peer and sectoral support*
- *Ensure youth feel comfortable in the larger community*

ment, communication skills and supports for healing.

LifeCycles credits the community of supportive people and organizations with providing participants with caring social and business networks. Focusing on one sector has allowed LifeCycles to go far beyond providing merely training, to become a builder of networks and resources in green entrepreneurship. Every event and program they offer weaves more people into a larger network of support.

Social cohesion and healthy lifestyles...getting to know your neighbours, slowing down and taking time to talk and share resources... these are all cornerstones of LifeCycles practices that integrate participatory and comprehensive analysis.

I think one of the reasons our Entrepreneurship Program has been so successful is because of the linking in with our organizational networks. People are committed to the organization, and this is an emerging sector. Now there is lots of interest in the green economy, and we

have diversified our funding a lot. We've had to work hard.

— Linda Geggie

Policy and Future Directions

LifeCycles and Common Ground are currently in the process of merging the two organizations and consolidating their efforts. At their ten-year anniversary LifeCycles is considering creating more on going sustainable funding mechanisms. Linda Geggie explains;

I think there are some neat other models we need to look at, like co-op development. We shadowed the Enterprising Non Profits Program; I think there are lots of opportunities in that area, especially in marketing networks- some co-op marketing would be interesting. We need to compile the capacity-building pieces, to bring people together to explore how we can better link and support business ideas and community initiatives. They all have economic spin-offs: a centre where people can find resources, support, business counsellors, and obtain financing. I'd like to see Lifecycles improve at that. The community food action planning area also has a lot to do with social economic projects. There will be resulting spin-offs and our role is to support communities through that, as well as through the mapping and visioning aspects. A good role for us may be to continue to build our expertise as animators and facilitators. The whole planning and implementation side of planning is another area that we should continue to expand on.

Thanks to Linda Geggie, Tim Ewanchuck and Maeve Lydon for interviews and to LifeCycles for contributing photographs.

Published by

Canadian CED Network
211-620 View Street,
Victoria, BC V8W 1J6
Telephone (250) 386-9980
Toll free 1 (877) 202-2268
Fax (250) 386-9984

Emerging Leaders Coordinator
fbrodhead@ccednet-rcdec.ca

An electronic copy of this document will be available on the CCEDNet website: <http://www.ccedet-rcdec.ca/>

Ce document est aussi disponible en français.

Copyright © 2006
Canadian CED Network

This profile is contributing to the goals of the Emerging Leaders committee of CCEDNet which seeks to build leadership opportunities for young people in CED. Thank you very much to everyone that participated!

Contact Information

LifeCycles
527 Michigan Street
Victoria, BC V8V 1S1
Telephone: (250) 383-5800
Fax: (250) 386-3449
www.LifeCycles.org

¹ Common Ground Community Mapping Project is legally sponsored by The Community Social Planning Council. It supports the overall organizational development and the evaluation functions of Groundworks. The Groundwork's Steering Committee is made up of reps from LifeCycles. Common Ground and the CSPC oversee planning and governance. There are 13 formal partners in the 2002-2005 strategic plan.