

Legion #177 Mount Pleasant Final Report

Group 3
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LFS 350

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Background

A vital component to establishing a just and sustainable food system (Appendix A) in Vancouver is ensuring proper access to healthy, affordable and culturally appropriate food within a reasonable travel distance. Although the city is recognized as having one of the most agriculturally “productive peri-urban areas in North America” (City of Vancouver, 2013), 5% of the population reportedly lack access to such food (2013). In response, Vancouver has made it a priority to increase food assets by at least 50% from 2010 to 2020, a target set by both the Vancouver Food Strategy (VFS), and Greenest City Action Plan (City of Vancouver, 2013). Bringing justice and equity to the Vancouver food system involves leveraging existing food assets and facilitating the development of new ones, specifically ones that benefit vulnerable populations such as children, recent immigrants, and seniors (City of Vancouver, 2013).

Ensuring that vulnerable demographics have the capacity to access food programs has inspired interest in networks like the Royal Canadian Legion for exciting potential in food system community based-asset development (Appendix A). The Legion has a long-standing legacy of support for veterans and their families through advocacy, representation and financial assistance (Royal Canadian Legion, 2016). Since 1926, it is Canada’s largest veteran community service organization, and continues to support youth, health, and education programs in the community in addition to providing food vouchers to veterans and bursaries to students (2016). As a non-profit organization that offers a gathering space and resource centre primarily for senior veterans, its membership has recently expanded beyond the veteran community, presenting new opportunities for increasing community capacity and food-asset engagement. The Legion of focus in this research will be Legion Branch 177 in Mount (Mt.) Pleasant, a diverse neighbourhood with an existing food system supported by local community partners (City of Vancouver, 2013). The foundation of a just and sustainable neighbourhood food system has been laid, and the potential of engaging the Legion in the movement could benefit the community.

Significance

Food assets, as defined by the VFS, are “resources, facilities, services or spaces that are available to Vancouver residents, and which are used to support the local food system” (City of Vancouver, 2013). One subset of food assets the VFS identifies are community kitchens. Understood to be a “public facility where people have the opportunity to come together to share the cost, planning and preparation of healthy meals” (City of Vancouver, 2013), community kitchens are suggested to improve the cooking skills, nutritional intake, and social interactions of participants in a study done by laocovou et al. in 2012. Based on this, community kitchens play an important role in supporting a local just and sustainable food system by not only offering spaces where community members can prepare food, but as sites that host food-related community programming to promote food education, community-building, and interaction.

Legions are a site of opportunity to increase the number of food assets in neighbourhoods, particularly around community kitchens, as some contain commercial scale kitchens amongst their facilities. In order to identify how the Legion could best use their kitchen assets to benefit the community, a greater understanding of the Legion’s institutional food

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system and how it fits into the broader community food system is needed. This study will address some of these gaps in knowledge through a case study that will identify the components of a Legion's institutional food system, the roles each component plays within the community, and what interest exists within the organization to expand upon these roles.

Objectives and Inquiry Questions

Our objectives were to:

- Assess the existing food asset infrastructure at the Mt. Pleasant Legion
- Identify ways the Mt. Pleasant Legion currently utilizes their food asset infrastructure and food-related community programming
- Identify any interests the Mt. Pleasant Legion may have in increasing food asset accessibility

Our questions of inquiry were:

- What food asset infrastructure exists at the Mt. Pleasant Legion?
- What food-related community programming does the Mt. Pleasant Legion organize?
- What interest does the Mt. Pleasant Legion have in increasing food asset accessibility in the community?

Methods

To assess the presence of food asset infrastructure at the Mt. Pleasant Legion, we decided that, given the purpose and scope of our project, it would be most appropriate to adopt a qualitative approach where data would primarily be extracted through observations and interviews conducted with community members (Creswell, 2003). We aimed to interview the Legion's branch president, as well as 2-3 branch members, with two different sets of interview questions created specific to each group (Appendix B). Observations and notes taken during the interviews were to be stored digitally and, if permission granted, interviews were also to be recorded. We also prepared consent forms for all of our intended interviewees, as well as committed to applying the core principles of the Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS) and observing inclusivity and respect throughout our project, as we recognized our responsibility in conducting research ethically when it involves people.

Results

Due to unexpected difficulties establishing contact with Mt. Pleasant Legion, as well as scheduling conflicts due to the Legion's unavailability around Remembrance Day, we were unable to conduct our interviews as we had originally planned. Figure 1 details our communication attempts with the Legion over the course of the project timeline.

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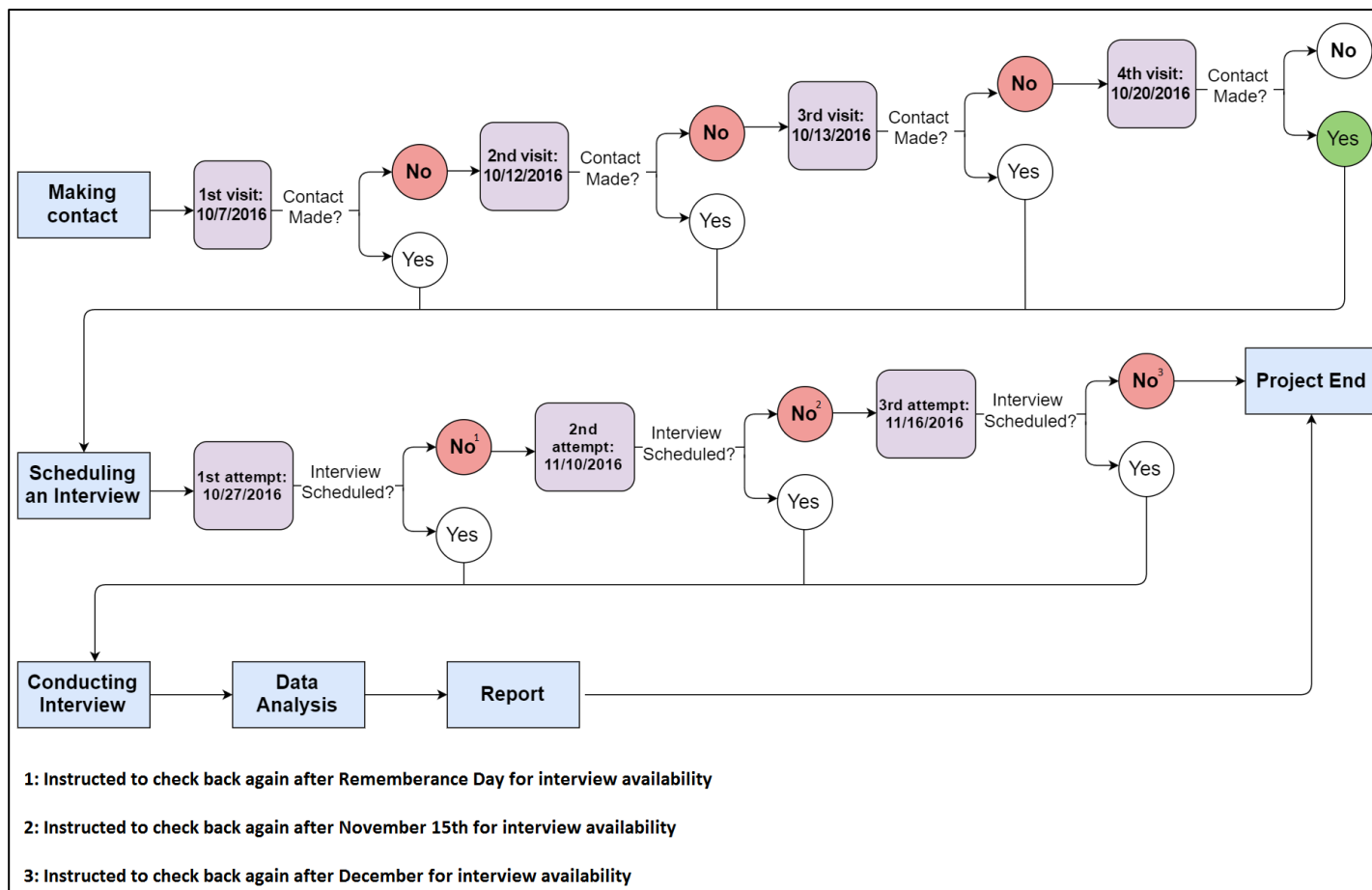


Figure 1: Communication attempts with Mt. Pleasant Legion during the months of October and November

Nonetheless, a team member was successful in having a short, informal conversation with the branch president and brief look at the kitchen. This yielded valuable insight into the infrastructure and services of the Legion (Table 1), and how the Mt. Pleasant Legion differentiates itself from other Vancouver Legions.

Table 1: Physical Food Assets and Community Services Present at Mt. Pleasant Legion

Physical Food Assets (obtained through observation)	Community Services (obtained through personal communication)
2 fridges	Senior bowling programs once a week
Electric stove	Social bowling to all members twice a week, with coffee available

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Electric grill	General Member Meeting on 4th Sunday of every month, with lunch provided (only branch with this service)
Microwaves	Occasional banquet events
Enough equipment to cater for 100-110 people	Volunteer opportunities for events

The Mt. Pleasant Legion branch distinguishes itself from most other Vancouver Legions by being a dry Legion, meaning it does not have liquor licensing except when hosting banquets, and limiting hours of operation to office hours from Monday to Thursday, between 9am and 1pm, excluding separate events.

Discussion

Engaging with the Mt. Pleasant Legion enabled us to address two out of our three research objectives, which led us to confirm that the Legion indeed has significant food infrastructures present in the form of a commercial kitchen and a banquet space with considerable catering supplies. The conversation with the branch president confirmed that the space is used for occasional banquets, and that the kitchen is used to prepare coffee and food for members during social bowling hours and for volunteers during specific times of year, such as the weeks leading up to Remembrance Day when poppy tagging fundraisers are held. However, the precise frequency that the identified food infrastructure is utilized remains unknown, as we were unable to conduct in-depth interviews. This also prevented us from fulfilling our third research objective, which was to “identify any interests the Mt. Pleasant Legion may have in increasing food asset accessibility”. According to the City of Vancouver’s definition of a food asset, it must be “available to Vancouver residents, and [...] used to support the local food system” (City of Vancouver, 2013). The research achieved in this project therefore cannot fully address the food strategy’s goal because we are unable to identify the Legion as a food-asset in the municipality’s terms. Nevertheless, we recognize that the Mt. Pleasant Legion harbours food-asset potential.

It is important to acknowledge that our team’s engagement unfortunately coincided with the Legion’s busiest time of year, when the Legion had no capacity to accommodate our interview requests. From what we could understand from our interactions and observations was that although the Royal Canadian Legion, as an organization, serves many demographics through financial support (The Royal Canadian Legion, 2016), the Mt. Pleasant branch’s programming, (ie. bowling and banquets), cater primarily toward its members. Elementary school outreach around Remembrance Day is also part of their seasonal programming, which is worth further inquiry in the future. Reflecting on our limited experience with the branch however, it appears that the Legion currently holds just enough capacity to maintain its current services,

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with little room to expand on its programming within its membership or into the surrounding community.

In light of the difficulty we had communicating and coordinating with this Legion, it is important to consider the trust and compatibility between researchers and their community partners before setting research expectations and timelines. Facilitating social connection and mutual cooperation is fundamental before any long-term community projects can take root, especially when attempting to build resources and bridges across diverse cultures, classes, and age groups (Putnam, 1995). Namely, a stable groundwork of friendly, comfortable, and trusting relations between stakeholders must first be built, and community members can then find their own version of engagement with projects, such as increasing the accessibility of the Legion's kitchen space.

Creating more spaces in the Mt. Pleasant neighbourhood that serve the community's path towards food system sustainability (Appendix A) is vital if the city is to address food justice (Appendix A) effectively (City of Vancouver, 2013), and the Legion holds the potential to be a resource for food literacy (Appendix A) initiatives as well as food-related social enterprise, which is what authors of the Vancouver Food System Assessment promote through their research (Barbolet, 2005, p. 12).

Conclusion

The Mt. Pleasant Legion is a tightly-knit community mainly composed of seniors, that maintains a steady program that serves social, financial, and community engagement goals within the organization. Whether there is interest in diversifying the Legion's programming to serve the wider community, particularly through expanding access to its extensive kitchen and dining facilities, has yet to be determined and is subject for further research. Seeing as this Legion branch is observed to have met its capacity in terms of its services and partnerships, it would be worth developing on its pre-existing partnerships, such as the elementary schools they work with around Remembrance Day.

Appendix A

Key Terms

Just and sustainable food system: “One in which food production, processing, distribution, consumption and waste management are integrated to enhance the environmental, economic, social and nutritional well-being of our city and its residents.” (City of Vancouver, 2013)

Community based-asset development: Using the potential of a community’s pre-existing assets to create a meaningful development process. (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003)

Food justice: “... three key arenas for action: (i) seeking to challenge and restructure the dominant food system, (ii) providing a core focus on equity and disparities and the struggles by those who are most vulnerable, and (iii) establishing linkages and common goals with other forms of social justice activism and advocacy—whether immigrant rights, worker justice, transportation and access, or land use.” (Gottlieb & Joshi, 2010)

Food literacy: “The ability... to understand food in a way [to] develop a positive relationship with it, including food skills and practices... to navigate, engage, and participate within a complex food system. It’s the ability to make decisions to support the achievement of personal health and a sustainable food system considering environmental, social, economic, cultural, and political components.” (Cullen et al., 2015)

Appendix B

Interview Guides

Interview Guide - Staff:

1. What food asset infrastructure exists at the Mt. Pleasant Legion?
 - a. Do you have a kitchen?
 - b. Would it be possible to view the kitchen?
 - c. If viewing the kitchen is not possible:
 - i. Which of the following does your kitchen contain? (make checklist)
 1. Food preparation (stoves, ovens, countertops, utensils)
 2. Food storage (dry, alcohol, fridge, freezer)
 3. Waste disposal (compost, recycling, garbage)
 4. Cleaning facilities (sinks, dishwasher)
2. What food-related community programming does the Mt. Pleasant Legion organize?
 - a. Do you run meat draws, poppy funding, bursaries, food-related events etc?
 - b. Who is the target group for the ____ program?
3. What interest does the Mt. Pleasant Legion have in increasing food asset accessibility in the community?
 - a. Is the Legion hoping to expand their programming?
 - b. Do you have a desire to increase membership or participation?

Interview Guide - Branch Members:

1. For what purpose(s) do you come to the Legion?
 - a. What Mt. Pleasant Legion events do you attend?
 - b. What type of events do you enjoy?
2. Would you be interested in increasing the number of events offered?

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Reflections

Student 1

Having gone through the whole experience of Community-based experiential learning and doing our project with the Mt. Pleasant Legion, it was overall a challenging experience but having a group like mine made the experience more manageable and gratifying. We had high hopes as a group to effectively coordinate with the Mt. Pleasant Legion but despite our efforts to pursue our community partner, it seemed like time was not on our side and failed numerous times to successfully make a solid connection with them. Regardless of the crisis we experienced, our group remained collected and never stopped being productive in order to compensate for the missed opportunity we had with our Legion. Our group utilized our flexible learning sessions extensively where we either met up as a group to work on our blog posts and plan our next approaches, or stayed online to work on our group projects and blogs. Looking back at all the setbacks we have gone through, I admired how resilient and positive my group was. Moreover, I also appreciated how this course has taught me how to see things based on their assets since it allowed me to have a more positive view on the projects I would take on. I was reminded that we do not necessarily need to fix things that are not broken, but what we need to do is to sustain and promote something that is already existing and thriving.

Student 2

The community-based experiential learning project with the Mt. Pleasant Legion during this term was often stressful and frustrating, but rewarding in terms of personal and team growth. Due to our difficulties connecting with our community partner, the experience of taking initiative and working in the local Vancouver community exposed me to the emotional stress of CBEL projects, and taught us how to reach positive outcomes under disheartening circumstances. Throughout the issues with our project I found myself increasingly thankful for the constant optimism of my team members and the level-headed advice of Colin. I would have had a completely different experience if my group had not taken everything with such positive attitudes and a renewed sense of fortitude and unity.

In relation to the organization of the course, meeting Sarah Carten and clarifying the objectives of the City of Vancouver as our community partner for this project was very helpful, but would have afforded us more direction if arranged earlier in the term. I particularly appreciated the freedom of the flexible learning session and the use of various teaching tools throughout the course in order to engage students with different learning styles. Additionally, the integration of different learning applications (eg. blogs, podcasts, and infographics) elevated the course material.

Student 3

I am impressed and grateful for the perseverance and optimism our group maintained throughout our CBEL project. Our organization proved to be particularly tricky to work with and these conflicts caused us constant distress and frustration. Had it not been for our group's hardworking nature and cohesion, group work would have been dismal.

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Community-based research are a bidirectional relationships where each partner has one hand on the steering wheel; the project will only be steered in the correct direction when both hands make active contribution. When our organization failed to fulfill their 50%, we focused on perfecting our 50% portion. Flexible learning sessions were utilized to their fullest by having group meet-ups to sort out issues, pivot plans, and collaborate on class assignments. We found that writing progress reports for our on-line blog when every group member was present enabled us to incorporate more information and points of view. Thus, our reports would be more comprehensive and more reflective of the entire group's experience. By having all group members present during these sessions, we were able to negotiate workload and make equal contributions to the project. Holding discussions in person kept everyone up to date and prevented miscommunication and conflict within the group. Having a well-synced group allowed us to efficiently and effectively respond to any obstacles that would occur during the CBEL project.

Student 4

Given the frustrations of our CBEL this term, I am extremely appreciative of the team that I got to work with this term. I have been placed in numerous group projects since starting university where I found myself having to do the work of multiple people and it was a welcome change to know that I could count on my team members to not only do their work, but do good quality work. The optimistic and supportive team dynamic we developed was also key in our ability to accept and work around the obstacles we faced, especially for me when, at one point, I had wondered if part of the reason why the Legion was so resistant to us was because I hadn't done a sincere enough job of communicating with them in our initial contact.

The highlight of the whole project though, would undoubtedly be when, during our infographic presentations in the Nest, we were able to engage with a sociology student who's also lived in Mt. Pleasant his whole life. Though he knew nothing about the world of food systems sustainability, he took an active interest in our work, and when he heard about our stories of rejection, he encouraged us to not be dismayed and instead keep going because he felt the work that we were doing was good for his community. Being able to engage with someone who is from the community we were working in in this way was very fulfilling, and reminded me of why, even after experiencing this difficult side of community research and engagement, I am still open to partaking in this type of work in my future. Because though it can be difficult on multiple fronts, when done right, asset-based community development can be such a positive force for change in a community. And I am grateful to LFS 350 for allowing me to witness one way that influence manifests.

Student 5

Having the opportunity to trial-run what community-based research might look like was truly valuable in demonstrating how non-linear, unpredictable, and adaptable qualitative research can be, especially when a certain extent of one's object of research involves people. I found that as much as our project goals seemed fairly straight-forward compared to others, I believe that the difficulty in communication and coordination with the Legion lied in the fact that the Legion president had no idea who we were, and what exactly we wanted out of our

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interviews. Something about the fact that the Legion president was not aware that her branch was assigned as an object of study in a UBC course, required that we be sensitive in how we approach the Legion and that we strategize accordingly. In whatever form the project took in the end, I was very moved by the dynamic of our group and how resilient and effective we were at maintaining project momentum and not letting our spirits sink. Engaging with the Mt. Pleasant Legion through an asset-based framework was a main factor in maintaining good team morale, and reminding us what the ultimate goal of research was for. Meeting Sarah Carten at the end was a very informative and inspiring way of wrapping up the course, although meeting her in the beginning may have aided our course of research and helped orient our approach a bit better, given how open-ended everything seemed upon our first Flexible Learning session at the Point Grey Legion. Being in the CityStudio space and hearing, and feeling like our inquiries with the Legion had some form of application in the wider community significantly enriched my impression of our work.

Student 6

This project has been an overall interesting experience and I'm thankful that it has introduced me to Legions, and furthered my understanding of food assets and food security. By taking part in this community research project, I have gained a greater appreciation for researchers who go into the field to conduct similar work. It is not easy and our project was a testament to that, through the failures and hardships that ensued. Pursuing the Mt. Pleasant Legion as our community partner was difficult due to bad timing and communication, but I am grateful for the lessons learnt and the wonderful team mates who I had the opportunity to share these experiences with. Not only did we communicate exceptionally well and put our best effort into every aspect of this project, but we remained supportive of each other through everything.

The project wasn't successful, however it has shaped my understanding of community based research, skill building, and teamwork. I thought that presenting our infographics was a great way to end this semester and to showcase the dedication and hard work that everyone put into their projects. Although we didn't have much information to present, I enjoyed speaking to others about our experience and findings. Furthermore, it was great to see what other groups were able to discover through their own CBEL projects and to hear what their experiences were like. I hope that these projects will continue on into future LFS 350 classes and that even more will be done with what we have started this year.