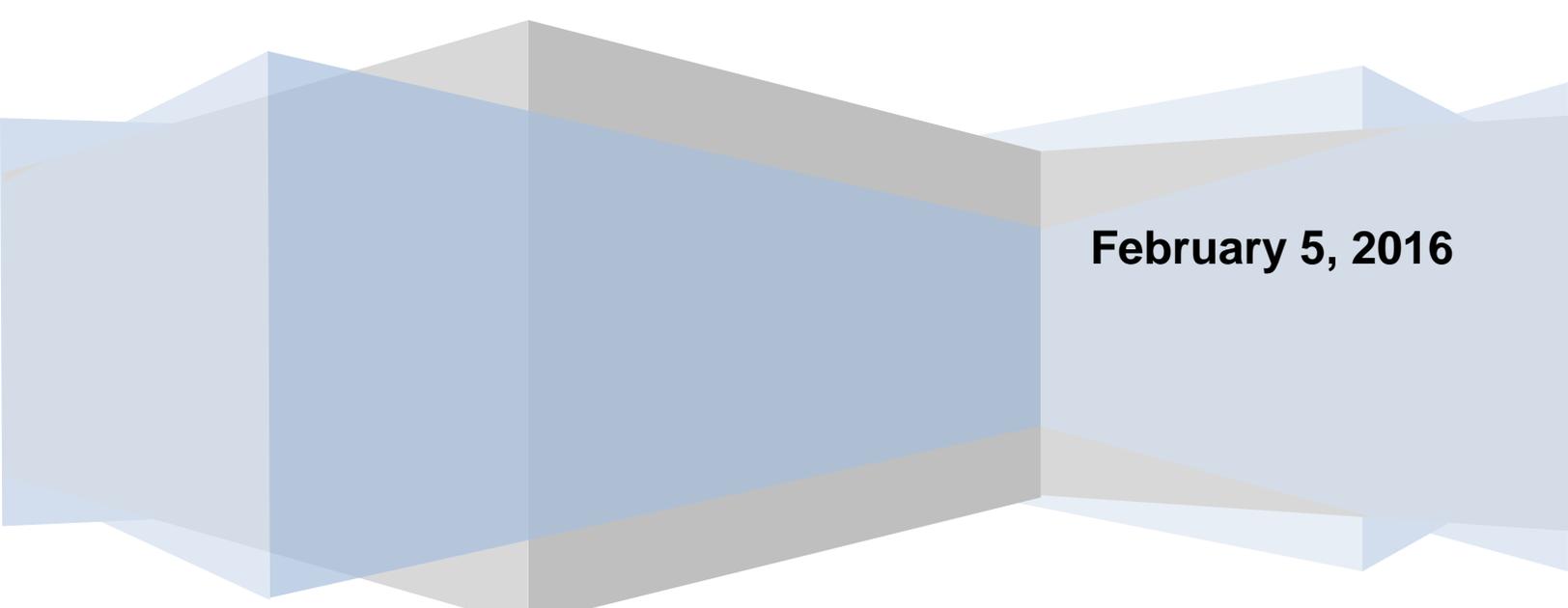**University of British Columbia**

LFS 350 – Land, Food and Community II
Proposal Report

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Introduction

We decided to focus our project on the severely food insecure population of Vancouver Downtown Eastside. Our objective is to assist this vulnerable population by increasing food asset accessibility. The issues that will be addressed are:

- Identifying available food assets in the community and sharing results in an accessible and understandable format;
- Providing enough information that will allow for individual empowerment and community involvement.

Our information gathered will be done mostly through online research and phone communication if necessary. We will ensure that in gathering the information for this vulnerable population, identities are protected and information is accurate.

In completing our objective, we aim to answer the following questions:

- "What are the food resources available to vulnerable populations?"
- "Where are they located?"

Background and Significance
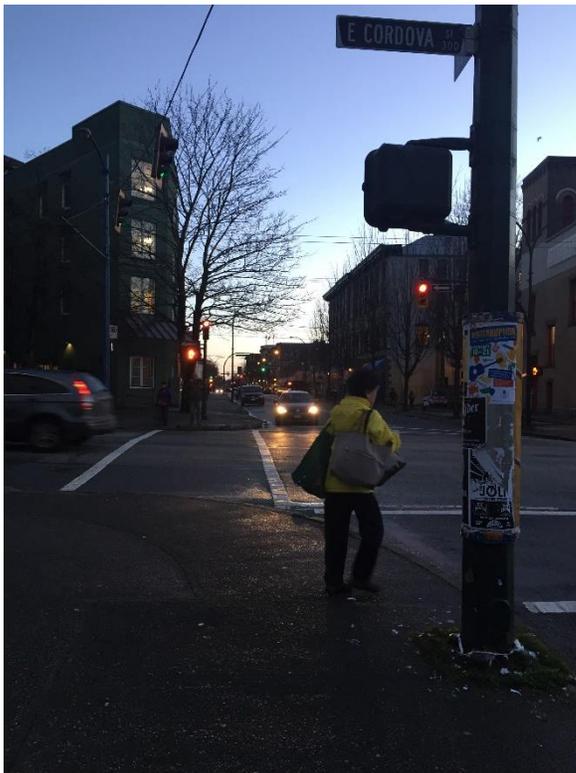
The Vancouver Downtown Eastside has been an area of interest for many years. A study revealed that Vancouver, BC holds "Canada's poorest postal code" (Linden *et* al, 2012) containing vulnerable, marginalized and transient populations. The vulnerable people of the Downtown Eastside may suffer from HIV/AIDS, mental illness; are often without

homes and lack consistent food consumption.

Food insecurity is a global issue frequently due to inaccessibility. Vancouver is not immune to this issue; despite being listed third in the world by Mercer's Quality of Living rankings (Dyck, 2015). According to a Vancouver Food System Assessment, Vancouver's vulnerable population struggle to meet their dietary needs daily. (Barbolet *et* al, 2005) In reviewing the literature, one issue is charitable options are not always easily reached, especially to those challenged with lack of mobility or mental illness. Community food resources are also geographically uneven and not always attainable by the most food insecure. (Miewald, 2009).

While initiatives are being taken to address food security, they largely focus on policies and outside sources rather than current assets. Our project is based on the concept of Asset-based Community Development laid out by Mathis and Cunningham's paper (Mathie *et* al, 2003). Asset-based development moves away from a "needs-based approach" (p. 475) to one that uses the society's current strengths. Instead of bringing in outside help, the skills of the community members build the community. Any organization that offers free food in the form of meals, snacks and/or grocery items will be considered a food asset. In order to reach our objective, assisting the vulnerable population by

increasing food asset accessibility, we will need to know what food assets already exist. The existing food assets will be mapped in user-friendly ways to provide greater information about what is available in the area. This part of our project expands on the Vancouver Food Strategy by empowering people in their food choices (Poole *et* al, 2013). The asset map will present the options available, allowing those who lack control over their dietary intake to gain some power back and enhance opportunities to take part in the food network.

Even with the initiatives and food asset maps currently in existence, there is nothing specifically for the home-insecure people of Downtown Eastside Vancouver. Our objective is to address this gap between food insecurity and accessible community services. We will be able to provide connections between community centers and potential donors. We can also educate the population about healthy and nutritious food so that when they increase involvement in their community they can make better choices to consume healthier foods. This project could branch out from the Downtown Eastside to address accessibility in all parts of Vancouver.

Methods

The majority of our data collection will consist of online research. We will use reliable websites with recent information whenever possible. To ensure accuracy, online data may be confirmed through phone, email, informal interviews and observations. Our group developed a basic set of questions to focus our research and facilitate efficient interactions with charitable organizations (Appendix A). As previously mentioned, a final stage in our research will be confirming our information through observation of our selected area and casual conversations with the populations that currently use charitable food resources.

In speaking with and researching organizations involving vulnerable people, there are a variety of ethical considerations. If it is necessary to interview organizations or talk to people directly, identities will be kept confidential by refraining from recording conversations. In regards to the age of our correspondents, only those visibly over the age of eighteen will be approached. This eliminates the need for parental consent. All conversations will be casual without promise of compensation or results.

The analysis of our data will take place after research and interviews are completed. The community food assets will be kept strictly within the area of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside defined as north of Keefer Street, between Carrall Street and Clark Drive. Additionally, data will only be gathered for free food resources to keep our information concise and relevant. The data will be compiled into a practical resource map of food assets for vulnerable populations in the target area. The map will be digital with an option for organizations to print out copies, containing a legend and basic information about each community resource such as location, hours of operation, and participant eligibility requirements or restrictions.

Success Factors

From our group's perspective, our success can be measured not only by the successful completion of our project, but also the feedback we receive from the teaching team and each other. In particular, we will measure our success by considering all feedback and responding with improvements. From the community's perspective, our success can be evaluated by how we incorporate their opinions into our asset map. These perspectives will assist in making an informative and practical resource for all community members.

In order to keep ourselves moving forward, we will be mindful of the purpose of our project and work towards our goals as a team. We will maintain frequent communication between our group members via email and have weekly group meetings outside of tutorial to plan the next steps and share ideas. This will allow us to provide constructive feedback to each other in order to meet deadlines. Frequent updates with each other enables us to address complications quickly and effectively.

Being open-minded to criticism and suggestions will be vital to our group's success. The creativity and curiosity the group can offer will enhance our learning experience. There will be challenges to overcome but we will benefit from enjoying the experience of interacting with this community. Although the execution and completion of our project is an obvious success factor, one of equal importance is learning more about this community and enjoying the process as a team.

Appendix A

Research questions will be used to guide our interactions over email and in person with organizers of food resources.

1. What are the hours of operation and location of the organization?
2. How do the organization obtain the food?
    a. Is there access to a transportation system to pick up food or people?
    b. Are the organizations resources adequate for the amount of people served?
3. Does the organization focus on any particular aspect of food insecurity?
4. Does the organization host any events or workshops related to food?
5. Is there a space for people to sit down to eat and socialize at the organization?
6. Are there options for program users to volunteer or participate?
7. Are specific diets including allergies or cultural and religious restrictions considered?
8. Do meals offer more than one food option?
9. What are the eligibility requirements or restrictions for participants?
10. Does the organization do any self-promotion or marketing?
11. If a map of food assets was created would there be an interest in it for the people that frequent the facility?
12. What other information is available about the food program?

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Photos by Behnaz Sadri