

Community Matters

stories of connection, hospitality & reciprocity in the community

Community Matters is a newsletter by the Building Caring Communities Team.
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Check Mate

Contributed by: Katherine Allen



I'm sitting opposite Bryan, black and white chess pieces scattered across the table between us. Alan, the organizer of the club, unrolls a chess mat with a quick flick of his wrist and hands it to me. A 'casual club' the email read – the only requirement to join being that 'you're still breathing'. But looking around the room, I realize this isn't a casual club, it's a league of masters.

Clocks and minds tick in unison – their gears cranking with every subtle move across the checkered boards. There is no chance here, only strategy. Suddenly I feel acutely aware of my complete lack of knowledge for the game, but Bryan seems up for the challenge of sharing his wisdom with this complete 'newbie'.

And so we play. Bryan distills pieces of advice with every move in turn. I ask him how he learned the game because, it turns out, Bryan is a chess master just like the others. He was the president of the Chess Club in high school. He tells me about how he missed his graduation ceremony because the school principal challenged him to a match. "Who won?" I ask. His principal. I can tell this bothers him still. Trying to make light of the subject I ask "what's more fun – a grad ceremony or a chess game?" to which he replies "chess". Not a moment's hesitation. Like I even needed to ask.

Our game slowly progresses. Though Bryan is a patient and thoughtful teacher, I start to lose pieces, one by one. It dawns on me that this is one of those games that becomes exceedingly more difficult the more you know. With this realization comes a new sense of admiration for Bryan and the other chess masters in the room.

"Check mate" Bryan announces, a bright grin accompanies his words. And, with one smooth gesture, Bryan's queen assassinates my king. He laughs and I can't help but join in. Bryan will return here to take on the chess masters time and again. He won't always win, but he will always enjoy the game and the people he's meeting.

Looking to get more connected in your neighbourhood?

Do you have a great community initiative you want to spread the word about?

Contact the Building Caring Communities Team at the HUB: hello@buildingcaringcommunities.ca

Urban Acupuncture *Contributed by: Laura Kosciecha and Nick Janzen*



Just as Traditional Chinese Acupuncture can be used to relieve stress in our bodies, [Urban Acupuncture](#) is a social/environmental theory that uses urban design and small scale interventions to transform and relieve stress in the city. Inspired by [Improv Anywhere](#), the Building Caring Communities team decided that the hustle and bustle of Burrard Sky-Train station needed some stress relieving.

It was the crack of dawn on a crisp fall day when we came together to create an early morning disruption. We stood in a line on the stairs next to the escalator exiting the station with five separate signs that read (in ascending order): "Nick Wants..." "To Give You..." "A High Five!" "Get Ready!" "Nick! (with an arrow pointing to Nick)" and at the top of the escalator, commuters were greeted by cheery, witty, energetic, charismatic Nick and a high five.

It was simply amazing how unanimously positive the response was from the commuters as they were invited out of the tedium of everyday routine to become transformed, all within the time it took to go up a single-flight escalator. Whatever degree of frown, however loud the volume in the headphones, however badly a day was going, the non-stop flow of people presented a cascade of transformative smiles.

Our experience at Burrard Station inspired us to offer this same intervention one month later at the SW Marine Drive Skytrain station. There, the experience was much the same for us as people constantly lit up at the prospect of friendliness without motive. Dozens of people, smiles aglow after receiving a high five, turned around to ask why we were doing this only to be met with "For you! To make your day better!". This inevitably caused their smiles to grow wider. Two police officers even showed up during our act of urban acupuncture, curious as to why we were doing this. They beamed after hearing our explanation and professed to loving the obvious effect this was having on commuters. They suggested that this type of intervention would undoubtedly greatly improve their experiences working around transit, as an entire vein of the city's transit was now snaking its way into the heart of downtown, with each smile undoubtedly creating its own ripples.

Sometimes the best gifts to share are those of an experience that later - around the water cooler, or dinner table - become the gift of a story. Our hope is that these acts of Urban Acupuncture not only improve the days of those we encounter, but that our interventions will be so meaningful and simple that others will be inspired to perform their own interventions in their neighbourhoods - that unsolicited friendliness will become something we do with intentionality. In this way, we can use Urban Acupuncture to create positive chain reactions and a culture of connection.

We invite all Vancouverites to join us in performing Urban Acupuncture!

Shopping Around *Contributed by: Laura Cuthbert*

We joke, "How are you doing so much shopping with no money?!"
"I thrift." "Ohhh, like consignment stores?" "No, Laura. I thrift everywhere."

That's something I really like about connecting with Lena, she gets things sorted, and adjusts until everything is comfortable. She's not afraid to say "no," even when I am.

For a little over a month, we had been talking about volunteering at a thrift store together and so each Thursday, we go out, and make sure to go to at least one thrift shop nearby, as we explore the rest of the community.

Often leaving with a few trinkets in hand, I'll ask "So what did you think about that one."

Lena will pause, "I'm not sure...I didn't like the atmosphere."

The atmosphere, for a while, I thought would end it all. Nothing felt perfect, and second chances for the second hand were not an option. Lena once mentioned "If they aren't great the only time I've been there, that means that most of the time they aren't great."

This memory has always made me smile, but it also speaks so truly to Lena's gifts: she's incredibly self-aware, even shopping shows that. Someone will hold up a sweater, ask if it's right for her, and the honest answer will come out: yes, or no. Lena knows what she wants, and that's exciting.

We continued to struggle to find a match until we started looking at what makes a good place to volunteer. For Lena, it's about building friendships... and trying on clothes doesn't hurt either! And I agree!

Fun, with people who care and are supportive is the best situation in anything. So throughout this process, finding the right store has become more guided towards meeting people, having fun and making friends. We're discovering that the place has a lot less to do with an experience than the people inside.

So, we keep looking, finding other amazing things in between. And now, as we leave with trinkets, we'll figure out the parts of the stores we like, and sometimes volunteer for a day, trying to find the right fit.

To find the right connection, you've got to shop around—and Lena is a good shopper.

Get connected in your community: UPCOMING EVENTS

A Little Lunch Music Series

Where: Encores Cafe at Shadbolt Centre for the Arts - 6450 Deer Lake Ave., Burnaby

When: Thursday, November 27, 12 noon-1pm

Stop by for a live concert by some local musicians who will perform in all genres of music, including jazz, classical, pop and folk. Free admission!

For more information, visit: <http://www.burnaby.ca/Things-To-Do/Arts-and-Heritage/Shadbolt-Centre-for-the-Arts/About-the-Shadbolt/A-Little-Lunch-Music.html>

Free Programs and Activities at Britannia Centre

Where: Britannia Community Centre, 1661 Napier Street, Vancouver

When: Ongoing (September - December)
These free activities require Britannia Centre membership: Free public swim: Tuesday and Thursday, 3:00pm-4:55 pm; free youth (13-18) swim: first Friday of every month, 8:00pm-9:55pm (Sept. 5, Nov. 7, Dec. 5); free youth (13-18) skate: Thursday, 3:15pm-4:30 pm; free adult skate: Friday, 1:45pm-3pm; and members free workouts (16 and over):

Tuesday & Friday, 10:00am-12 noon.

For more information, visit: <http://www.britanniacentre.org/>