

The Social Garden Research Project

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Abstract

The Gateway neighbourhood in Prince George, British Columbia, is often characterized as being the most dangerous area of the city. As it is easy to become both disconnected and untrusting when living in such a neighbourhood, it is important to explore how to provide the opportunity for residents to rebuild a sustainable and meaningful community. The intent of phase one of the Social Garden Research Project is to explore participant perspectives on the Growing Community Garden (GCG), and its role in the Gateway neighbourhood. Thirteen people of varying participatory roles and demographics were interviewed throughout the second season of the GCG regarding their experiences with the garden, motivation behind participation, description of the neighbourhood, as well as any concerns they did/did not have regarding the neighbourhood and/or city. Throughout the interviews, four themes arose: (1) the desire to meet and interact with people in the neighbourhood, (2) personal connections and learning through activities, (3) the growing potential of the garden to influence change in the neighbourhood, and (4) concerns regarding drugs and crime in the neighbourhood. Participant perspectives on the neighbourhood and the role of the community garden is essential to help enhance the activities and direction of the Growing Community Garden.

“In our hectic, fast-paced, consumer-driven society, it’s common to feel overwhelmed, isolated and alone. Many are re-discovering the healing and empowering role that community can bring to our lives. The sense of belonging we feel when we make the time to take an active role in our communities can give us a deeper sense of meaning and purpose.”

– Robert Alan

“We can begin by doing small things at the local level, like planting community gardens or looking out for our neighbours. That is how change takes place in living systems, not from above but from within, from many local actions occurring simultaneously.”

–

- Grace Lee Boggs

“We have all known the long loneliness and we have learned that the only solution is love and that love comes with community.”

- Dorothy Day

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Disclaimer:

The views in this paper are not necessarily the views of the researchers or the University of Northern British Columbia. The suggestions and recommendations are a collection of quotes that have come directly from the interviewees.

Introduction

The Gateway neighbourhood in Prince George, B.C. is an area characterized by low-income housing and high crime levels. Unfortunately, this can lead to the residents of the neighbourhood to be weary of trusting people living around them and constantly worrying not only about their personal safety, but also of their family. With increased levels of poverty and crime, it is easy to feel disconnected and isolated from society, which creates a cycle of people disengaging with their neighbours and community. It is for these reasons that it is important to explore different methods that could help build meaningful and sustainable relationships between people living in a dangerous neighbourhood.

The Growing Community Garden was established in early 2010, on the property of the Christian Reformed Church, with the intent of creating an opportunity for people living in the Gateway neighbourhood to grow some fresh produce, meet new people and become involved in a new project. Throughout the summer, there were numerous activities geared toward both the plot owners and the community as a whole, including cooking classes, art sessions (gARTivism), work parties, informal gatherings, and was also part of the Artists in the Garden annual fundraiser for the Two Rivers Art Gallery. The season was concluded with the 2nd Annual Harvest Feast, hosted at the Growing Community Garden, with food donations from surrounding businesses and prepared by the Salvation Army (more than 250 people attended this event).

The researchers of the Social Garden Research Project recognized the need to explore the GCG participants' motivations, experiences and perspectives of the current community of the Gateway neighbourhood in order to gain insight on the use of community gardens as a way to generate trust and stewardship within a "troubled" neighbourhood. The interviews of 13 participants of varying demographics and roles in the GCG are used to gain a rich, detailed description of their experiences, which can be used to evaluate the project and look for direction for future years. All participants were involved with the Growing Community Garden during the summer of 2010.

Main themes

Throughout the interviews, four themes arose: (1) the desire to meet and interact with people in the neighbourhood, (2) personal connections and learning through activities, (3) the growing potential of the garden to influence change in the neighbourhood, and (4) concerns regarding drugs and crime in the neighbourhood.

Participants shared personal experiences and perspectives on the garden, the Gateway neighbourhood and Prince George as a whole.

Meeting and interacting with people

First, most participants chose to participate in the GCG in order to meet and interact with people; sub-themes also included the desire for participants to learn something new or building their knowledge around gardening, as well as concern regarding nutrition and access to fresh produce.

What did you hope to gain from your participation in the garden? / If you could only choose one, which represents the main reason you participated in the garden: (1) to meet and interact with people, (2) to garden and grow plants, (3) to be outside, (4) to grow your own food, or (5) to try something new or different.

“Nutrition. Socializing. Participation. Knowledge.”

“Other – my daughter has a health problem, and she needs no fat, high iron food. It’s really about learning, and trying to make our lives healthy and add nutrition by gardening. There’s so much to learn about.”

“I’m a single mom, and have a 15-year old daughter. I thought I’d give it a try. It’s a real learning experience for sure.”

“Just learning. Fresh vegetables are the best. And to see if I could actually grow something.”

“To try something new and different and to meet other people. [Salvation Army] told me to be brave and give it a try.”

“We really like the idea of getting to know people in our community and people that live near us... we want to just have fun doing that and learning how to grow things. But what I think the biggest thing is, we just with our lives, our desire is to impact the world around us, and to express the love that we’ve received from God, in the lives of other people. And in our minds, a place that builds community like this is an awesome opportunity to love other people and to build relationships.”

“To meet and interact with people, definitely.”

“All of them, but most is to meet and interact with people.”

“To get some good growth in our gardens that has not been grown with chemicals and crap. [...] This is down to earth, proper growing and I think we can benefit from that.

Another this is I wanted to teach [my granddaughter]. She's been raised here in this apartment, and has no clue how to see things grow and put things in the garden."

"To open up to the other growers and trade experiences and you know, teach them stuff. I've already taught [other participants] quite a bit, on how much to do things. We all have our different ways, but somehow I have always been lucky and successful with that I grow."

"All of the above... but to grow and to learn, yes."

"More knowledge, and to see if I could help raise some hope for people who might think they can't afford fresh vegetables, or didn't realize that there were other people helping, and that they could eat healthy."

"To meet and interact with people, I would say is the most important."

"I don't expect to gain anything. Just the friendship that work over there and to get to know them."

"To meet and interact with people, the first one."

"Fresh vegetables. Kind of meeting people in the neighbourhood."

"... why I wanted the garden in the first place was to meet people, and not feel disconnected with my neighbours and that sort of stuff. Because everything seems scarier when you don't know people."

"Grow some of our own food. We've been doing that for years anyway, but it gets pretty hard when you're in apartments... So it's nice to have the opportunity to have a big plot of land that's not deep in a creepy neighbourhood."

"Fresh greens. To grow some of my own food."

"Vegetables. I don't have the financial means to have a garden at this point in my life... so for me it was a real cool opportunity to spend some time doing that and meet other people and that sort of thing."

"It's a really special activity, there's a lot you nurture in yourself through being involved in a gardening project like this one. I think it's more than just gaining the vegetables themselves. I think mentally and emotionally you can really benefit from spending not only the time outside, but nurturing something and watching your food grow."

"I just wanted to be more connected to the earth and where my food was coming from."

“The most true would be to grow some of my own food.”

“Maybe just being single parents, or families that are trying to make ends meet. They want their fresh vegetables, and if they can save a few dollars here and there, it’s a good thing to do.”

“Just the enjoyment of going down there and I guess to see that garden grow and to do that. But it’s to go down there and see everyone’s garden and be a part of a whole thing.”

“I originally wanted to come to make [another participant] happy. When I arrived, it was so much more than I expected, and it was just such a wonderful community thing.”

Personal connections, learning through activities

Activities around socializing and personal connection seemed to be built the most memorable memories for the participants (e.g. cooking class, informal gatherings and the Harvest Feast).

Are there any memorable moments that you’ve spent in the garden that you’d like to share?

“Just watching the plants grow, every other week we would check in and they would all be really excited because things were starting to grow... I liked the cooking classes too, they were really good.”

“It’s nice meeting everybody and I did enjoy the cook-out thing they did.”

“I think the day we planted the garden was really neat, just because we didn’t have any idea of what we were doing. So, just planting in faith, and hoping something would grow and it’s been exciting to see things actually grow.”

“I really enjoyed the cooking lessons.”

“I like the staff, the people who look after it... I can see enjoying more later on, as we get to meet everybody and see the results – like the Harvest Dinner was perfect last year. The meal was fantastic, we got to taste some of the garden produce... I was shocked to see that that many people were actually interested in healthier living style and get more into fruit and vegetables and things like that. And the comradeship that was displayed that evening was unbelievable. We didn’t want to go home.”

“We do have some bad influences around here, so people like us, we need to get away from this place sometimes and go and do something we enjoy, like the garden.”

“Definitely last year’s Harvest Feast, how excited people were about the get together and the food, and the tasting of the food and the vegetables, and how the food looked.”

“The first cooking event we did, hearing some of the stories from participants, the people that were there. And how excited they were and how it changed them last summer, and how they were excited for this year and inspired by vegetables and people getting together.”

“It’s just fun, you get to know a lot of people, people who put it on, people who do some work over there. Building stuff. It’s good. I’m glad it’s there – put it that way.”

“... going downstairs and talking to everyone was really nice. That was the general meet and greet, and there was hot chocolate which was great.”

“That nice couple (that came to the first meet and greet) who made cinnamon buns that were very yummy.”

“The woman, she had made some cinnamon buns and shared them with everyone. And I think the four of us had a really nice chat, so to come and think about it, that is really the memorable moment. Our good chat and cinnamon buns. Our conversation too, it was kind of wide ranging conversations that went everywhere.”

“... the dinner that we had recently. I just thought that it was a really interesting gathering of people, and I think it was a really neat community, and perhaps brought together a bunch of people that perhaps wouldn’t interact in a different setting. ... I think that’s the whole point, gaining a better and different sense of community. That for me, when I saw that, and all the people there, and the food, I thought ‘This is what it’s all about’ and I think that’s pretty cool.”

“Doing what we’ve done today so far, just talking and visiting with each other before the interview. And people that we’ve met at the garden, and doing the art project. Even going and doing the weeding, I mean it’s all been part of meeting and relating to people in a nice atmosphere and doing something that’s common to all of us.”

“The Harvest Dinner is really special with the entertainment there and everybody socializing. It was really wonderful and I’m sure it’s a lot of work on your part and the organizers, but it seems to be well worth it and I hope you’re well paid - in one way or another. There’s more than one way to get paid!”

The growing potential of the garden to influence change

Many participants felt that the garden has added to the community, or has the potential to influence change and build connection in the future.

Do you feel like the garden has added to the community?

“I like it there, it’s good and I know I’d participate in it again.”

“I think so. I don’t know, they’re all popping up all over and they’ve all had good responses from the community.”

“I’d say so for sure. I think it’s a really good thing. I know there’s more people involved and being impacted by the garden than I’ve seen, because I know there’s lots of people with garden beds that come and go at times that we’re not there.”

“I think it has a lot of potential, even to grow more. I love the community that is being built there.”

“I appreciate how intentional the staff and people involved are, in getting more people involved and meeting people and helping out. It’s very welcoming, and it’s really good.”

“Well, honestly I enjoyed it for being able to teach [my granddaughter], and I enjoyed being able to get out and get away from sitting within four walls. Get out and hopefully meeting some people. [...] And have a good activity in life, rather than something that could be harmful.” I think it’s a very creative and healthy activity; getting back to the basics.”

“I hope to see this grow. Not only our plants in the garden, but us in the community, to get to know each other and see everything flourish. Because that’s the way things should be.”

“I feel the word ‘giving’ comes to mind. People giving their time and energy, and the, again, selflessness of just doing it because it’s the right thing to do.”

“I get excited. I do, I get expectations and think ‘this town’s going to change!’ and see, that helps me stay in the positive mind frame. I know there’s hope. I have a lot of hope in my life, I couldn’t see it seven years ago, but now I choose to see it everyday. And I like to share my hope, and when I see other people sharing their hope, that’s pretty cool, and it makes me want to share more.”

“Oh yeah, people live it – they talk about it, they even meet over there. [...] There’s a guy over there the other day, and he was there for two hours. I asked him what he was doing, and he said ‘I’m just sitting here talking with my girlfriend. It’s a nice, quiet place, and

it's like a community garden isn't it?' I said yes, but you're year just to look, not to take? He said 'yup', so I said okay, enjoy your day. He was there for about two hours. I watched him, and he didn't do anything [but sit and talk]."

"People will come over and they get other people talking, and then a whole bunch of people get over there. I have people in the building that have plots over there, and they bring along other people who also enjoy it."

"It took a big empty space, and gave it a purpose. It's somewhere nice just to go sit, I see a lot of people just going through."

"It's a clean place, it's well maintained, obviously people care for their plots, you always see somebody here. And they're all friendly, nobody is glaring at you. I think it's really benefited people in that way."

"Without having anything more than passing conversations [with other participants], I can't answer that. No, I can't answer that, but I feel that it has a lot of potential though. [...] I think with all that good will out there, that I can't see it not succeeding."

"Absolutely. I think it's added so much, I'm so excited about it. Just personally, because I'm not in the socio-economic situation to, I hate the idea that gardens are just for the rich. [...] I love the garden because I think it allows for people like us who don't have that luxury, it gives us that opportunity to take care of not only our health, but like I was saying earlier, our emotional health and well-being."

"It sort of speaks to the whole mentality that if we bring those things to the downtown areas, we'll start to see more pride in our area and I hope people start to take more ownership and pride for those sort of things."

"[The garden] is really trying to bring people together, and I'm sure the community sees that and the garden sees that."

"When I was at the harvest dinner and I saw the kids getting in there and playing hoola hoop and water, the kids were having a ball. And that's everything that you guys are creating - you guys are creating way more than a garden. The community is growing, and it's a beautiful thing if you can pull it all together."

"The thing I enjoyed there was, I watched an old fellow. He looked like he was probably a street man. And he went along and picked up after people and put it in the garbage bags. And it was so good, he wanted to partake and be a part of it, and he knew what needed to be done. When you break those barriers, you've broken down a lot. If you can get the respect from the neighbourhood that they don't trash the garden."

“It’s surprising what will grow in a community garden. And I don’t mean weeds and plants. You’re starting to grow a community, together.”

“I think the community garden is just beginning and it can go a lot further to benefit the community, and not just the little neighbourhood community. It benefits the whole city. It’s just like anything good that’s going on in the city - it benefits the whole city.”

“I can see there to be an opportunity to have all these kids in wheelchairs that can’t do anything come down, but have a big brother, big sister, whatever, go with the and help them build a garden. Look at the pleasure that that would give.”

Concerns regarding drugs and crime in the neighbourhood

Participants were concerned around the drugs and crime that surrounded the community, relating many stories of mistrust and concerns regarding broken families in the area. Two participants said they did not have concerns regarding the community, but still mentioned drugs and crime were common in the area.

Could you describe the neighbourhood?; Are there any concerns or issues you have around the community?

“Drugs, yeah. That one day they had to block off that whole street, Quince, and there was a shwack of cops going down the street so we moved and we’re in a quieter area.”

“You can’t really let your kids out. Unless you go to a park, like Fort George Park.”

“I’m kind of leery of the area, because I always hear people talking about the “hood”. [...] It’s tough, you always wonder, is that street good anymore? I used to play down there when I was a little girl, but that was 40 years ago, and that isn’t anything like it is now.”

“No, not really. I guess I’m just used to Prince George. But I do stay out of certain areas. There’s crime yeah, and drugs. I think that’s the main reason I try to stay out of those areas. I wouldn’t want to put my daughter in that area or situation. She doesn’t need to see it.”

“We’ve gotten to know a lot of our neighbours now, and there are some really nice people. It’s been a good experience for us I would say, but it’s a very busy neighbourhood. I notice a lot of people walking right by our apartment all the time. It’s a lot of foot traffic, and every once in a while the police show up.”

“It’s strange going from more middle class, and I lived in the country in a nice house, then moving into a place like that, and hearing domestic arguments and having police come. It’s a very different thing. But it’s a good place to be.”

“There are a lot of broken homes, a lot of poverty. There’s a lot of need there.”

“Economically, it’s more lower class, there are needs per se, but I think mostly there are a lot of broken people and a lot of broken families around us. That’s the concern that we have. Along with that, it’s our desires to reach out to those people and to do what we can to help.”

“But it’s not just a quick fix of the government putting money in and restoring houses or building a park or anything. It’s the emotional level and the bottom level of families and restoring families and dealing with modern issues of poverty, and drinking and the emotional issues causing these problems.”

“I’m concerned about the vandalism. And the lack of supervision of the young ones. [...] I don’t know if it’s the financial circumstances in our lives but it’s like getting to be dog eat dog. Steal what you can and have no remorse; damage what you can and think nothing of it. You know it’s... sad. Too many idle minds, a lot of these people here, they’re good, strong and healthy – they should be working. But they won’t work because they’re only getting \$8.50/hour. [...] Keep them occupied with something that’s creative and they ain’t going to get into trouble.”

“There are some people, shut-ins, and it’s a transient neighbourhood, a little rougher.”

“Just concerns that there is a long going on in that neighbourhood. I hear a lot about drug activity and guns. Scary stuff.”

“When I moved here it was not as nice as it is now. We used to have a lot of unwantables, if that’s a word... When I took over (living here), people were breaking windows and stealing things. That was 26 years ago now. Once in a while we have an issue, but not like it was 20 years ago.”

“The neighbourhood is not good. Not good. There is people over there that drink regularly and hoot and holler until two or three in the morning. One night this winter I came out to start my car and let it warm in the parking lot for a while, and there was a man frozen, laying in the snow bank. He’d been beaten up, blood all over and I had to come back and call the police, and they came and attended to him.”

“Well I’ve lived here for 18 years, and I don’t even know everybody in this building. It’s sad to say. In this area here, we are sort of considered dangerous because we have the Yew Street group home next door and then we have the St. Patrick’s house next door. And it was a guy from St. Patrick’s house that came and stole my car that one night at Christmas time. Broke into it, stole it, and drove to William’s Lake to the reserve, and it was totaled.”

“I got walked home by three drunk guys last night coming home from the community garden; that’s what it’s like. I was really scared. [...] I was totally scared until I got closer to them and thought, whatever, I’ll just wrap my keys around my hand in case I have to punch someone with pokey things. But they were really nice and walked me home. The community is surprising. You expect the worst, but you always somehow get the best, and it can be pretty awesome.”

“There’s a lot of violence in our neighbourhood, because we’re along the Strathcona neighbourhood. There’s a lot of violence with the little kids, and gangs apparently. Apparently there were some shootings down the street. It’s not so bad for us, because we’re on the nice side of Strathcona, but you do see drugs outside our fence.”

“Since I’m going to be having a child, people doing heroin in the bushes and stuff isn’t cool.”

“There’s a whole nice, paved and very pretty area, but it sucks at night or when it’s starting to get dark. One side is really nice and clear, and you can see the ball fields and the water for the Slough and ducks, but the other side is all bushes, between the path and the car-lot and electrical stuff. All of that, you go back two feet and it’s hollowed out and filled with garbage and needles. People go in there, party and get drunk, and leave all their crap in there.”

“The cops don’t do anything unless you call and say, come pick these people up. Which nobody wants to do, because you’re going to be ticking off people. It’s a little scary. But we have lots of neighbours too that come to your aid if you need them to, so it’s not that bad of an area. There is some community there.”

“I think a lot of people just think ‘it’s not my problem – I’ll just tell my kid not to play there.’ Sweep it under the rug; who cares?”

“I guess my first impression which helped was that it was a low income neighbourhood. I think there’s a half-way house on the corner, and there’s like a youth group home right across from where I was living. I was living in one of those townhouses on Yew Street. I think it would be classified as sort of the lower end of the socio-economic demographic.

“There were a number of issues like that, where I guess you could say a lot of hard-luck issues. In a sense, some people who slipped between the cracks because they don’t have access to some of the social safe guards that those of us with higher economic, or socio-economic brackets have.”

“I find that it’s a really kind of mixed area. I certainly feel at times that there are a lot of concerns in the area in regards to violence and crime. But there are certainly a lot of positives living in this area as well.”

“Sometimes when people feel like their neighbourhood isn’t safe, or feel concerned, then they’re initial reaction is isolating, and to shut themselves in somewhat. Or stay home more, which is what I do after dark, I want to stay home more, but I think that projects like the garden make people want to go out and feel like they’re in a safe environment to socialize and do things.”

“I don’t particularly feel safe. [...] Sometimes, it’s that kind of feeling you have, that you can’t leave your bike on your own window for five minutes while you run in to grab something. That kind of feeling, you know, like I’m in a same-sex relationship and in broad daylight, my partner and I were walking somewhere and I believe holding hands, and we got harassed and called dikes. So I don’t particularly feel protected or safe.”

“It is a negative area and it’s known to be one of the worst areas in town. But having the Church there, and it’s off set just slightly, so far it seems to be working.”

“There are a lot of bad things going on in our city right now, and I think that the people should be looking after it or trying to look after it, it’s gotten so big and so bad. It’s not just our city, I think it’s just about every city. It’s society as a whole right now.”

“The drug problem in Prince George is way out of control. And the crime that goes with it.”

“Not just the drugs, there is a lot of white-collar crime that I can attest to, and it’s deadly. I’ve talked to the people that I think need to have been talked to, the best of my ability, and you have to let it go where it’s going to go and pray. Because people are getting hurt. Young people are getting hurt.”

“The drug trade in Prince George is way out of control. I can go downtown here and watch people dressed up in business suits, middle aged men, women - all buying drugs. [...] Just the other day on Tuesday, around 10a.m., I was waiting for (my partner) to come out of somewhere and I watched four transactions right in front of my van. [...] If you can sit there, and watch for an hour and see four people, four transaction right on the street, things aren’t good.”

gARTivism

Part of the Social Garden Research Garden was “gARTivism”, or creating art that expresses each person’s sense of gardening, community and grassroots creativity. There were four sessions in which participants were invited to come to the church and create one or more canvases around the theme of gardening. Each session had between 6-15 people participating, from children to seniors. The gARTivism truly reflects the visual and textural stories of how resilient and thoughtful Prince George residents feel about their city, nature, and the ways people can connect to each other.

The sessions were co-facilitated by Dr. Si Transken and Serena Black. Dr. Scott Green, Sarah Boyd and Marli Bohdi were present at many, if not all events. The art was displayed several times throughout the summer, including when the Growing Community Garden was special featured in Artists in the Garden (an annual fundraiser for the Two Rivers Art Gallery), at the kick-off of the University Farmers’ Market, and at the 2nd Annual Harvest Feast.

A great thank-you to all those companies that donated items for the art sessions, including but not limited to the Prince George Auto Wrecking Ltd., Pinedale Auto Wreckers 1989 Ltd., C.F.I Steel Ltd. ,the Salvation Army, and to Dr. Si Transken. Below are pictures from the gARTivist sessions, as well as some of the pieces created, accompanied with the artist statements when available.

Cooking with Chef Paul (Salvation Army)

Often, people living in low-income neighbourhoods have less access to fresh, healthy food. Also, on a broader scale, there is often a lack of knowledge of how to cook with different produce and how to incorporate healthier choices into your diet. While it was unsure which activities would prove successful, cooking classes with Chef Paul Charron from the Salvation Army proved to be an activity that attracted a diverse group of participants, and was mentioned by several participants as a highlight of their participation with the GCG. The cooking demonstrations were focused on how to prepare healthy and nutritious food that is quick, easy and affordable.

The first event was a great success, with about 15 adults participating, 5 children (child care was provided for all events, and proved an important aspect for several plot owners). The second event was co-hosted with the Canadian Diabetes Society, which allowed a much larger group (between 35-40 adults, along with about 10 children). This event also featured a nutritionist that was able to speak to the different aspects of eating healthy, and was available to answer specific questions from participants. Both events were free for the participants, and included different levels of involvement. Participants were able to help prepare in a hands-on manner during the first event, and Paul Charron

circulated the room to describe the different dishes, how to prepare them, the nutritional value, and how to store them.

Harvest Dinner

In early September, the Growing Community Garden hosted the 2nd Annual Harvest Feast as a windup to the summer growing season. Harvest celebrations are a world-wide, ancient tradition that dates back to when humans first began to cultivate crops instead of continuing as hunter-gatherers. The entire Prince George community was invited to the free event, hosted at the garden. One of the goals of the Growing Community Garden is to build lasting and meaningful relationships with those involved, within then neighbourhood, and within the city as a whole. Food for the event was prepared by Chef Paul Charron, from the Salvation Army, and food was donated for the event from the following local businesses: **(Marli - provide a comprehensive list?)**.

The event included live music, where there was a small stage set up and people at the event were invited to showcase their own talent. Dr. Si Transken gave a poetry reading, and the gARTivism art displayed throughout the garden, allowing people to walk through the garden and view the art. The Harvest Dinner attracted more than 250 people, and included people involved in the project throughout the summer, people from the University of Northern British Columbia, and many new faces from around the community. The open event attracted a diverse group of people, but brought together by a common interest surrounding the community garden. The Harvest Dinner came up as one of the best moments for many participants of the Growing Community Garden, and was mentioned as a tangible example of how participants have began to feel connected to the garden and to the people involved.

Conclusion

The Gateway neighbourhood is a low-income, high-crime area of Prince George. Such areas often lead to residents becoming disengaged and untrusting, ultimately leading to a lack of community and feeling of connection to place. Phase One of the Social Garden Research Project explored the GCG participants' motivations, experiences and perspectives of the current community of the Gateway neighbourhood in order to gain insight on how a community garden might generate trust and stewardship. From 13 interviews, the main motivation to becoming involved was to meet and connect with new people, as well as having access to fresh, affordable produce. When sharing memorable moments, most participants spoke of interactions that promoted personal connections

with other people (informal gatherings, and especially the Harvest Dinner celebration at the end of the year), as well as activities that enabled participants to gain new skills and knowledge (e.g. cooking demonstrations, gARTivism). Participants also expressed concerns surrounding the high levels of drug and crime activity in the area, and the appearance of “broken families” and concerns regarding youth in the area. Finally, it appears that participants either fully believe having a community garden in the area was improved the level of connection and stewardship within the neighbourhood, or at least has the potentially of making a difference in the future, as it continues to grow. These insights will provide critical in aiding the organizers of the Growing Community Garden to develop and enhance the project and plan future activities accordingly.