

A Place on the Corner

Kits House and the Kitsilano Community

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A Place on the Corner¹

The Kitsilano Neighbourhood House has been a consistent strength in a changing community. Over the past 40 years, the work at Kits House has put into practice the mission of Neighbourhood Houses.

Neighbourhood Houses Make Good Neighbours

Kits House, like other neighbourhood houses, emerged from the Settlement House movement and can trace its roots back to London's Toynbee Hall established in 1884 and Chicago's Hull House established in 1889. These early examples led to the proliferation of community based organizations that still work today to strengthen local communities and enhance the lives of local residents.

Neighbourhood houses have always held the humanistic mission of helping individuals to grow, and achieve their greatest potential. This potential is seen holistically, including artistic experiences, cross-cultural dialogues, and outdoor opportunities. Indeed, educational and recreational pursuits have always been a principal part of neighbourhood house activities. A key to this mission is respecting the self-determination of individuals. Neighbourhood houses work with individuals to facilitate their own engagement in and determination of their pursuits. This can be seen as community members start their own programs, engage in the governance of the house, and develop the awareness and skills necessary to engage important social issues in their communities.

Central to a neighbourhood house is the notion of neighborliness. On one hand, this interest in neighbors calls attention to the whole community including the disadvantaged, marginalized and excluded. Helping those who most need it has always been a vital part of the neighbourhood house tradition. On the other hand, neighborliness also describes the Neighbourhood House's relationship with local residents and the community. Neighbourhood Houses make good neighbours.

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Neighbourhood Houses in Kitsilano

The Settlement House movement came to Vancouver in 1938 when the first neighbourhood house was opened at the corner of 7th Avenue and Pine Street in Kitsilano. The Alexandra Neighbourhood House was originally a women's and children's hospital opened in 1891. The hospital operated for 3 years, but closed as it was difficult to attract doctors to work at the location. In 1894, the hospital was converted to an orphanage formed under the Alexandra Community Activities

Society (Alexandra Society

from here on). The

Alexandra Society was one of

the first charitable societies in

British Columbia. In the

1930s, as orphanages across

Canada were replaced by

foster homes, the orphanage was closed and the house underwent its final

transformation.

1891: Women's and Children's Hospital opens at 7th
Ave and Pine Streets

1894: Hospital becomes a Children's Orphanage

1938: Alexandra Neighbourhood House opens

1966: Neighbourhood Services Association formed

After consultation with experts in social welfare, and driven by a desire to improve the lives of those residing in the area around the orphanage, the Alexandra Society opened the first Neighbourhood House in Vancouver on the site of the orphanage. The success of the Alexandra House led in 1942 to the opening of Gordon House in the West End, and Cedar Cottage Neighbourhood House joined the Alexandra Society in 1963. In 1966, with three active neighbourhood houses in operation, the Alexander Society changed its name to the Neighbourhood Services Association. The name change included a renewed emphasis on community development that resulted in a number of new neighbourhood houses forming in Vancouver. The Kitsilano Neighbourhood House at 7th Ave. and Vine Streets was the first of these new Houses.

As early as 1968, a survey of Kitsilano residents expressed a desire for a neighbourhood house in the western part of the neighbourhood around Yew and Vine Streets. Kitsilano had changed quite a bit in the years since the Alexandra House was established. The western parts of the neighborhood were more

developed residentially and there was also an influx of young adults. Over 3,000 new young adult residents moved into the neighbourhood in the late 60s.

The desire in the area for services that neighbourhood houses typically provide was becoming clear. Elmer Helm, then director of the Neighbourhood Service Association, addressed

the need for a new Kitsilano Neighbourhood House to combat youth alienation, family breakdown, and anti-social behavior resulting from

1968: NSA purchases Hay House
1971: NSA Purchases Greek Orthodox Church
1974: Kitsilano Neighbourhood House opens
1981: Association of Neighbourhood Houses formed

poverty and urban life. The Provincial government, concerned about seniors living in the area, supported the establishment of a neighbourhood house that would act as a recreation center for seniors in the area.

In 1968, the Association purchased a yellow heritage home at 2325 West 7th Avenue known as the Hay House. In those early years, the Hay House operated as a western satellite location for the Alexandra House. The immediate neighbor of the Hay House was St. George's Greek Orthodox Church located on the corner of 7th and Vine. The Church was the center of the Greek Community in Kitsilano since its erection in 1930. In 1971, St. George's offered to sell the building to the Neighbourhood Services Association. The expansion of services associated with the purchase of the Church initiated the development of the Kitsilano Neighbourhood House as we know it today. The area including Hay House and St. George's Church was rezoned for the neighbourhood house in 1971. After some remodeling, the neighbourhood house first opened its doors in 1972, and formally began operating as Kits House in 1974.

The development of a new neighbourhood house in the western part of Kitsilano was not without its critics. Chief among them was the Kitsilano Ratepayers Association, one of the oldest community organizations in the neighborhood. The primary interests of the Ratepayers were encouraging the development of single-family homes in the area, discouraging rezoning for non-residential uses, and protecting property values. They did not see a new

neighbourhood house as fitting their vision of Kitsilano. In a letter to City Hall, they declared themselves:

"...a group of protesting rate payers appealing to you to set aside the decision to use the present buildings on the site of the old Greek Orthodox Church at 7th and Vine as a neighbourhood house..."

The letter includes a number of objections to the rezoning, and a petition signed by 45 local ratepayers.

Interestingly, one of the ongoing concerns of the Ratepayers was the influx of young people to the neighborhood – the hippies of Kitsilano. Today, the counter cultural history of Kitsilano is celebrated in festivals and events, but the hippies in Kitsilano were not always welcomed. In her account of the Kitsilano Ratepayers Association history, Adrian Carr notes that the Ratepayers worried that hippies represented the wrong type of resident for Kitsilano. Tensions between the city of Vancouver and hippies were high in the early 1970s, peaking in the summer of 1971. That August, the Georgia Straight called for a counter cultural rally in Gastown to protest drug laws and recent drug raids in the city. Estimates range from 1000 to 2000 young people gathered for the rally. The large gathering soon led to clashes with police, arrests, and was later memorialized by the artist Stan Douglas. Mayor Tom Campbell came down strongly against the hippies in the conflict. The Kitsilano Ratepayers shared the concerns about hippies bringing an unwelcome element to their neighbourhood.

It was during this period that the Neighbourhood Services Association began taking steps to form the Kitsilano Neighbourhood House on 7th Avenue at Vine Street. At the meeting regarding the rezoning of the new neighborhood house, Mayor Campbell linked the new Kits House with the counter cultural movement declaring it would be a "crash pad" for hippies.

Despite opposition from the Ratepayers and Mayor Campbell, the rezoning application for the new neighborhood house passed. Kitsilano Neighbourhood House never became the crash pad the Mayor feared. Instead, it became an important meeting place for people of the Kitsilano community. The Kits community was very diverse, and people from all walks of life, including the Kitsilano hippies, soon found value in the new meeting place where community work could be realized.

A People Place

Kits House has always been a hub for the local community; a place where people can drop by to see their neighbors, learn about local issues, and seek help for specific needs. When he took over as the first Executive Director of Kits House, Bill Duncan aptly described it as "A People Place." Some of the longest running programs offered since Kits House opened its doors include the law student clinic, tax programs, housing and babysitting referral services, parent and tots drop in and youth leadership programs. They have also housed classes for the community that ranged from dance and yoga to computer and ESL. Over the years, classes like this have made up from 20 to 37 percent of the programming at Kits House, reflecting the changing interests of the community.

Kits House Executive Directors

Bill Duncan, 1976 to 1987

Joanne Harmina, 1987 to 1996

Marilyn Ackerman, 1996 to 1997

Beryl Cole, 1998 to 2006

Catherine Leach, 2007 to present

KNH has enabled many individuals to prosper by creating expressive outlets and social connections. Several programs have invited those facing physical and social isolation to share in the warmth of community. One way we see this is in their relationship to the Greek community. Despite the relocation of St. George's Church to a site further east, Kitsilano was still the heart of the Greek Community and Kits House worked to meet their needs throughout the 70s and 80s. Program guides and calendars were partially written in Greek until the 80s to encourage participation of those who did not speak English. For at least ten years there were Greek family nights, an English class for Greek Canadians, and a MOSAIC social worker dedicated to the community. Other programs specifically for the Greek community included social outings and folk dancing for adults and teens.

In 1984, Kits House started a Recreation Group for Middle Age Greek Women. Including 48 members, the group proved highly successful and of great significance to the Greek community. Many women in the Greek community suffered from health problems and were at a disadvantage in accessing community resources due to their lack of education, low income and poor English. Several of the women were the last members of their family to be given help to integrate into

Canadian Society. The women struggled through depression, obesity and other stress symptoms. To counter this, the program aimed to provide education on nutrition, health and aging support. This was considered imperative as these women were caretakers and served the social needs of both the older and younger generations in the Greek community.

The relationship with the Greek community captures the way Kits House activities reflects the concerns and interests of its neighbours. This is also reflected by the neighborhood houses' relationship with persons with disabilities and demonstrating an ability to adapt to local needs, and show concern for marginalized groups.

Darlene Millar was an Olympic Wheelchair medalist with a strong commitment to the disabled community who was also very involved at Kits House. She pioneered many unique programs such as wheelchair square dancing and ceramic and leatherwork classes. In part inspired by Darlene's involvement, Kits House initiated Operation Wheelchair aimed at developing leadership skills within the disabled community. Key to the program's success was the installation of two wheelchair ramps in 1978. The ramps were part of an overall improvement of the facilities, including a new playground between Hay House and Kits Hall. The opening included a large public event including the community and public officials.

One of the first members of Operation Wheelchair was Pat Forgraves. Born with cerebral palsy, many wrote her off, destined to spend her life in institutions and a wheelchair. KNH helped her to purchase a "speak-and-spell" attachment for her telephone and a similar device for her wheelchair. Pat soon secured a talking apparatus, and became involved in educational and speech therapy crafts, and gained self-assurance and esteem through group involvement. With her newfound confidence, she went on to medal in the International Wheelchair Olympics held in Fort Worth, Texas.

When Kits House unveiled the new wheelchair ramps Darlene Millar was joined by *Sunny Seniors* founder Lillian Jasper to cut the ribbon. There has always been a special relationship between Kits House and local seniors which has endured since the inception of the first neighborhood house in Vancouver. One of the primary motivations for opening Kits House was for a seniors' activity/recreation

center. Kits House has engaged seniors by supporting several senior groups as well as supporting the establishment of several key resources in the area such as The *New Moon Center for Seniors* and the *Drop in Center* on 4th. As early as 1982, they collaborated with social workers in outreach work seeking isolated seniors in Senior Housing Complexes and bringing programs to them.

The *Sunny Seniors* served as a constant source of support, inspiration and purpose for the Kits House from its beginnings. Started in 1960, the group provided a bridge between the activities of the Alexandra House and the new Kits House. This group was the oldest seniors program in Vancouver and lasted almost thirty years. The seniors enjoyed a variety of activities together and had lunches provided to them by another community group, The Truce Club. The Sunny Seniors were considered the backbone of Kits House, as several were neighborhood house members for twenty years or more.

Their importance for Kits House was reflected in the recognition they often received. In 1982, 37 Octogenarians and 3 Matriarchs were honored in an event at Kits House (where the program stated):

"Their exemplary strength, demonstrated as they traversed plains to this place and their liveliness now lends constant hope and purpose to all our lives."

In 1985, Sunny Senior Anna Wright turned 100 and Kits House hosted a celebration, which aired on cable TV and was recognized by the Prime Minister and other government officials. Anna advocated to the United Way of the importance of the neighborhood house in her life. She regularly came to the meetings every Tuesday all the way from the east side to meet with 30 other enthusiastic elders.

The *Krafty Kits* were also an important group for seniors at Kits House. Starting in 1976, they hosted a wide variety of activities including games, guest speakers, films, ceramics, excursions, potlucks, and bingo. The group was made



up of both seniors and disabled house members, including Pat Forgraves. Krafty Kits was extremely active and fully integrated into the neighborhood house. Members could be counted on to bake, cook, attend or help out with anything happening at the house making them an invaluable support to the house. This was reciprocated by constant and direct communication with the Executive Director as the house sought to meet their specific needs.

The *Be Well Clinic*, started by the Krafty Kits in 1985, was open to all seniors 55 and over. The creation of the clinic began with asking local seniors about their definitions and ideas of what a wellness program should be. The aim was to offer various activities, consultants, and mutual support groups so that seniors could take responsibility of their own health. Kits House assisted the Be Well Clinic through rent, labor, furniture, equipment, Kitchen facilities, advice, transportation, advertising, staff, and board membership.

After an extensive outreach study in 1997, Kits House re-oriented its seniors programming to emphasize community building. One outcome of this change was the publication of the seniors' newsletter *News and Views*. The newsletter was written by and for seniors to provide information and a forum in order to enhance communication among seniors and between the neighborhood house and seniors in the area. It also provided an important outreach to people who were not aware of Kits House as a seniors' resource. Starting publication in 1996 with 700 copies every two months, it eventually grew to a circulation of 1,500 to 2,000. News and Views became one of the strongest seniors' initiatives with the most volunteers. On a more intimate level, the newsletter served as an empowering, creative outlet; a reason to regularly come together and generate poetry and short stories to share with one another. Not only did it improve the lives of seniors, it also fostered several partnerships between Kits house and other local organizations that contributed content and helped with distribution.

Another outcome of this re-orientation was the Seniors Advisory Committee, which advocated for seniors in the area and networked with other communities. The committee took a governance approach to seniors programming by ensuring a broad range of activities and services, enabling seniors to foster direction and development in seniors' programming, and overseeing services and outreach.

Today, the KNH continues to advocate and work towards enabling disabled and elderly to overcome social and physical barriers through its establishment of social housing. One third of rooms at their 8th Avenue and Vine Street location are set aside for those with spinal injuries in collaboration with the BC Paraplegic Association. Their housing mission in Kitsilano also includes housing for low income seniors, ensuring that they will have opportunity to share and enhance programs and services.

An Arts and Cultural Center

Neighborhood Houses have always been unique for having a multi-service mission that includes artistic and cultural activities. These events play a unique role in a neighborhood by providing a recreational outlet and allowing individuals to develop their own talents while also building a sense of community. Kits House has always attempted to provide this for the neighborhood. After attending a concert at Kits House, columnist Bob Cummings captured well the spirit of these events:

"The quality ranged from an excellent flutist to some very funny satire to merely good acts that rated higher on enthusiasm than polish. What made the evening a hit was the atmosphere, the combination of people doing their best to entertain their neighbors and those neighbors feeling they were sharing something that belonged to them."

Cummings concludes by suggesting Vancouverites can escape the emotional chill of the city in a place like Kits House that provides a sense of a village.

From 1974 to 1987 the Kits House Folk Fest was one of the most notable of the arts and cultural activities at the House. Each folk fest began with a children's decorated bike parade beginning at Delamont Park and ending at Kits House. An outdoor stage at Kits House would host as many as 100 different performers throughout the day. These included music, dance, and other performances from acts representing different

KITS FOLKFEST '82 — ENTERTAINMENT SCHEDULE	
12.00	Children's Parade with Captain Bananas
1.00	Performance for Children
1.30	Opening Presentation
2.00	Troupe 1 (Afro-Jazz Dance)
2.20	Greek LevendMa dancers of Bayview School
2.40	Rahma Dancers (Middle Eastern Dances)
3.00	Sunshine 'Cowboy' Band (Old Time Music)
3.20	Surrey Square Wheelers (Square Dance)
3.50	Outriggers (Hawaiian & Mauri Dances)
4.10	Paula Ross Dancers (featuring Leslie Dancers)
4.30	Donald Guertin (French & English Folksongs)
4.50	Rancho Folclorico Cruz de Cristo Portuguese Dancers
5.10	Outriggers (Tahitian Dances)
5.30	Silicilian Folk Society Dancers
5.50	Ragtime Ralph (Guitar Instrumentalist)
6.10	Olaza Latin American Dancers
6.30	Royal Scottish Country Dance Society
6.50	Cirrus Singers (Contemporary)
7.10	Derek McNeil (Folksinger)
7.30	Joan Murray Dancers (Highland)
8.00	DANCE in Kits Hall with The Sherman McNeil Band

cultures from around the world. Food from around the world was also on hand. Crowds were in the thousands, and the festivities were typically kicked off by the current Mayor.

One of the most important parts of Kits House history is the long running relationship with the Kitsilano Theatre Company (KTC). Like many neighbourhood house programs, the KTC emerged from the local community. In 1979, Sid Rosenberg was interested in producing his own play "*The Wrestler*". Looking for local help, he found a recent UBC graduate Kico Gonzalez Risso. They turned to the local neighborhood house, and together brought the play to the stage in the Hall of the former church. Today, we don't know what happened to Rosenberg, but Risso went on to found the KTC and to stage dozens of performances at Kits House.

Risso held a vision of theatre as providing cultural exchange and community and social development. With the help of Bill Duncan, he proceeded to put this vision into practice at Kits House. For the next ten

**From 1979 to 1993 the
Kitsilano Theatre Company
provided innovative
international theatre to the
local residents of Kitsilano**

years, the KTC and Kits House staged original Canadian scripts as well as Canadian debuts of plays from countries around the world such as Cuba, Argentina, France, and Spain. For some of these plays, Risso was responsible for the translations as well as direction. Occasionally the authors flew in to be present for the Canadian premiers of their plays.

The plays were often challenging both artistically and politically. A few examples stand out. Following *The Wrestler*, Risso spent months working to secure the rights for a Chilean play *Paper Flowers*, which confronted the audience with an unsettling relationship highlighting the realities of class and loneliness in modern society. The KTC staged four Czech plays including two by Vaclav Havel, *Protest* in 1984 and *The Increased Difficulty of Concentration* in 1988. *Protest* features the recurring character, and Havel's alter ego, Ferdinand Vanek as he tackles issues of resistance to political power. Havel began his life as a dissident artist before becoming the first President of Czechoslovakia. He spent many years in prison and



The dancer Jeni LeGon was well known on stage and screen through the 1930s and '40s. She performed with legends such as Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, Cab Calloway and Fred Astaire. Her work has been recognized by the Black Film Makers Hall of Fame, the American Tap Dance Foundation, and in a National Film Board documentary *Jeni LeGon - Living a Great Big Way*.

In 1969 LeGon settled in Vancouver and became a fixture at Kits House through the '70s and '80s. She taught dance classes, led a youth dance troupe, and performed regularly as part of the Kitsilano Theatre Company productions.

his plays were banned in his own country at the time of their production at Kits House. These plays challenged local residents to confront difficult political realities around the world, and also brought attention and critical acclaim to Kits House.

Putting on a play at Kits House was not an easy task. There were logistical struggles with integrating the theater into the neighborhood house framework. Kits Hall was not built for theatre production, so that meticulous scheduling and pre-planning was required to cover two productions a year. The production process took four to five months. Each required 120 to 150 hours of rehearsal and an average of \$4000 to \$5000. Local business and restaurant sponsorship typically raised \$2,000-\$2,500 through ads in the theatre bill. Remaining funds came from ticket sales. Between 30 to 40 people were directly involved in each production and approximately 1000 people viewed each play over 16 to 18 performances. Arranging this while carrying out the many other Kits House programs was no small task.

The KTC was soon renowned in Vancouver for being an amateur theater company offering professional-quality productions, making bold political statements, and including the most foreign and original plays premiered in Canada by any theater company of the time. The Vancouver Courier recommended the KTC to those "looking for an evening of unusual entertainment in an intimate setting," and the Vancouver Province thought it, "produced consistently high caliber social drama" and "genuinely interesting theater over the past couple of

years...". The Vancouver Sun considered it the "most tuned in to international theater trends", and the Latin American Theatre Review thought it provided "Gourmet tastes of Latin American drama" in Kitsilano. In 1992, the KTC was recognized by the professional theater community with an invitation to join the Vancouver professional alliance.

Being situated in the Kitsilano Neighborhood House, the theatre company became an important community development tool. It brought theater to the community encouraging individuals to be creative. In the production of *Paper Flowers*, senior citizens helped make the stage decorations, the daycare center donated the rehearsal space and a youth group served refreshments at the performances. The popularity of *Paper Flowers* in the community led Duncan to hire Risso as the Kits House Cultural Programmer and make theater an integral part of Kits House activities.

It would be hard to estimate how many lives the KTC touched while at Kits House. Though some roles were reserved for professional actors through the Canadian Actors' Equity Association, community involvement was inherent. It included many people with existing interests in theatre such as professionals wanting to test their skills on their own projects, students on the verge of turning professional, retired people wanting to continue working, and artists new to Vancouver wanting to showcase their talents. There were also people with little experience in theatre who wanted to fuel an interest, people who didn't have jobs wanting to work, people with physical handicaps wanting to contribute and finally people who just wanted to be involved. This community approach was captured in a 1981 theatre program:

"The level of each production is, in a sense, determined by the input of a) the business community which financially supports the company by buying ads or giving donations, b) the people who volunteer their time and talent for a production and c) the audience who supports the company through its attendance and critical appraisal, and encourages the advertisers by supporting their businesses."

The KTC became a training ground for student graduates, an outlet for volunteers and a showcase for professional actors and designers, and it raised the profile of the neighborhood house from a 'drop-in' center for seniors, to a center of cultural activity.

The curtain closed on the KTC at Kits House in 1993. Most theatre companies were suffering in the 1980s and '90s, but the KTC was able to last a relatively long time as it was sheltered by the neighborhood house and also led by Risso's genius at producing plays of a professional caliber on a shoestring budget.

A Resource in the Community

Kits House has been integrated within its community since its earliest days, and it has often facilitated community organizing that goes beyond the walls of the House. This type of work is different from programs and activities that make up the core operations of the neighborhood house. Instead, these include collaborations with other local groups with shared missions in which the Kitsilano Neighborhood House would open up their facilities for community activities and organizations getting off the ground, and serve as a meeting place when the community needs to hold a one-time meeting or event.

In the last 40 years, Kits House has been a valuable resource for the community innumerable times. They let organizations like the alternative school The Vinery use their space to get off the ground; they formed a partnership with the Vancouver Library to bring parenting books to families; they helped residents organize around issues like the demolition of rental housing around Delamont Park or the development of the mall at 4th Avenue and Alma. One area where Kits House has always been an important resource for community groups is in the environmental and green movements. Perhaps most notable is the small, but important, role Kits House played in the early history of Greenpeace.

It is well known that Greenpeace started with a meeting in the home of Dorothy and Irving Stowe in 1971. The 'Don't Make a Wave Committee', as it was originally known, began its early work in the anti-nuclear movement by protesting nuclear testing off the coast of Alaska. A relatively small group of passionate activists met regularly in each others' homes for five years. During this time they organized a number of successful actions in Alaska and France and began to develop a global reputation.

In 1974 the group was in a transition as many original members moved on to other activities and Irving Stowe himself died tragically of stomach cancer. This

transition led Greenpeace to drop its primary focus on disarmament and adopt what came to be known as the Great Whale Conspiracy as its official campaign. The group was becoming too large to meet in local homes, so Bobbi Innes arranged to hold Greenpeace meetings at Kits House. Rex Weyler vividly described the opening of a meeting in December 1974:

"Fifty volunteers crowded the room, young people sat on the floor, an older couple sat on the sofa with Mel Gregory squeezed against the armrest. Next to this couple sat an elderly man whom I had not seen before. He wore a beaded headband around his long, grey hair. On the lapel of his tweed jacket he had Greenpeace buttons, dolphin buttons, and a small tree pin. He held a beaded eagle feather."

Weyler paints a vivid image of the Kits house meetings. From September through January 1975 Greenpeace met at Kits House every Wednesday as they developed their new direction focusing on environmental justice and animal rights. The elderly gentleman Weyler described became known as the Shaman for his recitation of mystical poetry at meetings. His financial help contributed to the purchase of Greenpeace boats that would later come between whales and the harpoons of hunters.

**From September 1974
to January 1975
Greenpeace met every
Wednesday night at
the Kitsilano
Neighbourhood House**

There are many accounts of these early days of Greenpeace and the meetings at Kits House. One autobiographical account by Robert Hunter captures the importance of holding Greenpeace meetings at Kits House. He describes the first meeting at Kits House in September 1974 where 70 people attended. Holding meetings at the neighbourhood house regularly meant sometimes the unexpected occurred:

"The meeting was interrupted several times as ballet classes ended in the adjacent room and white-stockinged young ballerinas came fluttering across the floor on their way to the dressing rooms. We applauded them with gusto. They were both embarrassed and pleased. Their passage back and forth became a regular feature of the meetings."

Hunter found the ballerinas somehow captured the tone of the meetings. This encounter between Greenpeace activists and ballerinas also captures the tone of neighborhood houses. Where else but a neighborhood house could these groups be colleagues; all a part of the same organization and mission.

In January of 1975 Greenpeace set up its first public office on 4th Avenue. The project developed at Kits House led in April to the launch of the Great Whale Conspiracy mission. The boat launch left Jericho Beach with a large music concert as a send off.

When Greenpeace set up their first public office, they shared the space with SPEC (Society for Promoting Environmental Conservation). SPEC and Kits House also share a long history. Together they started the first community gardens in Vancouver.

Kits House always supported local gardening, including giving awards to residents who created outstanding gardens in the neighborhood. Starting in 1976, Kits House provided garden plots on its property. They began collaborating with SPEC in 1980 on the Garden Demonstration Project. The goals were to bring attention to food production and distribution and to inform local residents about the quantity and quality of food that can be grown in an average garden. SPEC and Kits House arranged workshops about backyard and green house gardening, and about food preservation techniques. In addition to the educational aspects of the project, Kits House hoped to promote community development through food cooperatives and allotment gardens as well.

In 1983, Kits House realized its goal of promoting allotment gardens by working with the Kitsilano Local Area Planning Committee to open a community garden on the North side of 6th Avenue at Maple Street. The property was owned by the city and the Committee was interested in promoting a garden. They needed someone to take the lead in the project. Kits House stepped in as a natural sponsor for the allotment garden, and SPEC worked with City Farmer to set up



the garden. The area was divided and let out to people in the neighborhood. At that time, the new allotment garden was considered a model for future gardens throughout the city, making it the forerunner of the Community Garden movement that has spread throughout Vancouver. Today you can walk the length of 6th Avenue from Maple through Fir Streets admiring hundreds of community garden plots.

SPEC and Kits house continue collaborating on local food issues today. Along with the Westside Food Security Collaborative, they organize the Pocket Market, a weekly community food market. Throughout the summer months the Pocket Market provides a local, affordable food option for neighborhood residents. It also brings attention to important issues surrounding food production, distribution and preparation through direct interaction of residents with vendors and through workshops. With the Pocket Market Kits House continues its long-term contribution to food security in Kitsilano.

Where would the neighborhood be without Kits House?

Neighborhoods are dynamic. People move, children grow, demographics shift, and landscapes are transformed. It is the nature of the neighbourhood houses to change accordingly. Often, these neighborhood changes in Kitsilano have paved over the many ways Kits House has influenced the community. Despite this, we can still ask ourselves, where would the neighborhood be without Kits House?

The City of Kitsilano would look different. Kits House has always mediated community concerns and municipal decision making. Concerned citizens gathered in the Kits House hall to discuss the construction of high rises, changes to Delemont Park, and the development of shopping malls, among others concerns. While community members voiced concerns in the hall, neighborhood staff participated on municipal planning committees to ensure that opinions were not just heard.

Kitsilano would be less green. Kits House has always coordinated community interests with environmental organizations and initiatives. When Green Peace membership started to grow, they turned to Kits House for a meeting space

where they began holding weekly meetings. In the 70's, Kits House nurtured the community gardening initiative by acting as an intermediary among community members, SPEC, City Farmer, and the municipality. Kits House provided funds, staff, and a place to organize. The familiar community gardens along 6th avenue began as a Kits House program.

Significant educational and artistic pursuits would be lost. For many years Kits House has provided shelter to the arts, enabling a creative and alternative spirit to thrive. The alternative school program, The Vinery, was created and first housed at Kits House. The hall was a constant venue for many local artists, and launching pad for aspiring artists, providing the opportunity to discover, harness and develop skills. Some artistic journeys began at Kits House; for close to 15 years The Kitsilano Theater Company operated in the neighborhood house, receiving national acclaim for its professional quality productions. Several KTC members went on to become great successes. Others like dance legend Jenni Legon, were artistic veterans who arrived later in their careers. Legon, who had shared a stage with Fred Astair, chose to mentor others through courses and programs offered to adults and children over several years at Kits House. As well, large celebrations of the arts were organized such as the Kits House Folk Fest with close to 2,000 community members attending the display of cultural arts and music.

More people would spend their lives in isolation. For over forty years, KNH has been a place where elderly and those with disabilities can come to escape angst and isolation. Single mothers and newcomers can feel accepted, find support and become empowered. All groups, including new immigrants and youth, can play an active role in program creation. For example, seniors have been able to gather together every week to write and share poetry, publish their own newsletter, create their own wellness clinic and gain access to valuable information and resources. In the late 70's and early 80's, the Greek community in Kits benefited from a myriad of resources including a special social worker, cultural family nights and health programs for women. While encouraging individual development, the House brought all these people together, bettering their lives through a shared feeling of neighborliness.