Cooking from the Bottom-Up
An Exploration into the Use of Vancouver’s Community Kitchens as an Empowerment Tool

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis was to explore the effectiveness of community kitchens as an empowerment tool. This thesis observes the ways in which community kitchens empower their participants, how they are being used to foster community development, and the opportunities and constraints in using community kitchens as an empowerment tool. The research questions are addressed in a variety of ways. First, a comprehensive literature review was undertaken to define the meaning of empowerment and community development as used by this thesis. Secondly, a multiple case study approach involving participant observation, key informant interviews and a survey was conducted to examine these questions. A total of seven community kitchens were involved in the case studies.

The research suggests that community kitchens do empower participants but at an individual level. Participants learn skills such as cooperation, cooking and socialisation, and are empowered through self-help and by gaining confidence and self-esteem. At a community level, efforts have been made to empower the community and contribute to community building processes but with limited output. In some community kitchens, community development initiatives (such as volunteering to cook for a larger community) are in place but community kitchens as a whole has a minimal effect in creating community. Community kitchens, however, are effective at empowering individuals which is considered the first step to community empowerment.
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Chapter One
Structure and Components

1.0 Introduction

What is a community kitchen?

A community kitchen consists of a group of people who meet on a regular basis to cook, and share the cost of preparing healthy meals. Community kitchens such as “canning groups” have existed informally for hundreds of years but the first organised community kitchens were found in Latin America in Chile and Peru. “Ollas Commun” or “The Common Pot” stemmed from a grassroots movement in the early seventies when groups of local women would meet every day to cook, eat and sew together. From Latin America, the Common Pot idea spread to North America and appeared in Vancouver in 1991.

1.1 Research Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to provide some insight into why, to what extent and how community kitchens can be used as an empowerment tool and whether they can be used to enhance community development. Information on community kitchens from a planning perspective is limited as it has traditionally been researched by dieticians or by sociologists and anthropologists interested in Latin America. This study will also add to the existing body of

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2 According to Diane Collis, Vancouver’s Community Kitchens Coordinator, “ollas comun” is the term used for community kitchens in South America, in countries such as Chile while “comedores populares” is used in Central America, in countries such as Peru. The term “comedores populares” is introduced in Chapter Two.
empowerment literature in planning, in which there are few sources that discuss the link between empowerment and community development.

1.2 Problem Statement

Community kitchens are a vehicle that can be used as an empowerment tool but the ways in which they empower has not been explored. A more comprehensive understanding into the workings of community kitchens and their effects on participants is needed. By exploring this issue, it is hoped that community kitchens can be adapted and used in communities that may be marginalised by current community development and planning approaches.

1.3 Research Questions

The research questions for this thesis are as follows:

i. In what ways do Vancouver’s community kitchens empower their participants?

ii. What are the opportunities and constraints facing attempts to use community kitchens as an empowerment tool?

iii. How can Vancouver’s community kitchens be used to foster community development?

1.4 Approach and Methodology

In this thesis, research was conducted by using a combination of techniques. The approach was based primarily on qualitative (with some quantitative) research and was gathered through five research methods.
(1) A review of empowerment literature related to community development was conducted as background research for the study. Findings from this review are used to provide a definition for empowerment and community development. A preliminary examination of community kitchens in Vancouver was also conducted for the author to become familiar with the operations of community kitchens.

(2) Participant observation in both kitchens and at community kitchens’ leaders workshops was conducted to provide insight into the workings of a community kitchen.

(3) Key informant interviews were conducted with community kitchen leaders to identify the effectiveness of community kitchens in promoting empowerment.

(4) A survey was conducted with participants for their insight on community kitchens.

(5) A comparative case study was used to determine the role of community kitchens as an empowerment tool in community development.

The following section provides a more in-depth look into why the above research methods (except the literature review) were chosen, how they were approached, and the strengths and weaknesses of each method.

1.4.1 Multiple Case Study Approach

A multiple case study approach was selected because a diverse number of community kitchens were being observed. There are many types of community kitchens in Vancouver, such as the Bread Burners - a senior men’s community kitchen, SLICK - a gourmet community kitchen for women, and Young Moms and Young Moms To Be - a kitchen for pregnant teenagers and young mothers at risk. By using a multiple case study approach, similarities and
contrasts between and among community kitchens can be observed. As patterns are discovered and described, an exploration into the similarities and contrasts in how these groups operate will provide the researcher with a clue into how community kitchens empower individuals and foster the building of communities. As stated by Colin Robson, “Findings, patterns of data . . . from these case studies which provide this kind of support, particularly if they simultaneously provide evidence which does not fit in with alternative theories, are the basis for generalization.” (Robson, 1993). The type of case that will be used is described by Robson as the “community study”, where one or more local communities (or in this case, community kitchens) are observed. Community case studies focus on “the pattern of, and relations between main aspects of community life.” (Robson, 1993). The kitchens that were studied were selected to provide a broad cross-section of community kitchens in Vancouver. They were selected according to the following criteria: length of time the group has been cooking together, the social makeup of the group, and location. The criteria will be discussed in greater detail, later in the study.

**Strengths of the multiple case study approach**

In general, the strength in using a case study approach is that the case study is explorative and “encourages the use of multiple methods of investigation.” (Robson, 1993). By using the case study approach, both quantitative and qualitative data can be gathered. The multiple case study’s main strength is that it is vivid and can bring the theory being studied to life.
Weaknesses of the multiple case study approach

The weakness of the multiple case study approach is that it may be considered a “soft option” in some disciplines (Robson, 1993). If the researcher does not take care to incorporate quantitative analysis into the design of the case study, the research may be too qualitative. A quantitative research method such as surveys, should be used to ensure numeracy (Robson, 1993).

1.4.2 Participant Observation

Participant observation for this thesis was not the main source of data for the research. A number of community kitchens are sponsored (in part) by the Vancouver Food Bank and the researcher feared that her presence may have used food or taken the place of someone who needed access to a community kitchen. Instead, the researcher participated by cooking in a few of the kitchens and attended a number of community kitchens’ leaders workshops that were organised by Vancouver’s Community Kitchens Coordinator. Participant observation, in the form of participant-as-observer, was useful to the research as it allowed the researcher to observe the interaction between group members, and gave the researcher an opportunity to ask questions which greatly enriched the study.

Strengths of participant-as-observer

The strength of participant-as-observer research is that it allows the researcher to interact directly with community kitchen members. For this thesis, participant observation was useful in scoping the research. The main strength of this method was that it gave the researcher an
opportunity to meet members of various community kitchens who were later approached to participate in the questionnaire and/or key informant interviews.

**Weakness of participant-as-observer**

The use of participant-as-observer as a research method has several weaknesses. The first is that the participant-as-observer may have inadvertently influenced the actions of other participants. The second is that it is a time consuming process. The third weakness is that the researcher may have difficulties in presenting an unbiased view after participating and establishing relationships with the groups.

1.4.3 **Key Informant Interviews**

Key informant interviews add an element of richness to the thesis and supplemented the multiple case study with qualitative data. Interviews (please refer to Appendix I for key informants and Appendix II for questions) were conducted with community kitchen leaders/coordinators and were used to document the history of each community kitchen. Information provided by the key informants was also used to determine how community kitchens empower individuals, and what opportunities and constraints are encountered.

**Strengths of key informant interviews**

The strength of key informant interviews is that they enrich the thesis by supplementing quantitative data with details that are not obvious to the outsider. Informants usually possess
“inside knowledge” and are able to provide valuable insight or explain anomalies that might be disregarded or overlooked.

**Weaknesses of key informant interviews**

The weakness of key informant interviews is that with informants, “what they ‘know’ is probably a mixture of fact and point of view.” (Babbie, 1995). Before interviewing key informants, interviewers should have a strong understanding of the subject so that the difference between fact and point of view can be discerned.

1.4.4 **Questionnaire surveys**

A survey was conducted with participating members in various community kitchens to supplement the multiple case study approach with quantitative data. A questionnaire (please refer to Appendix III for the questionnaire) was used and incorporated both matrix format (where participants respond by using a scale) and open-ended questions. The questionnaire tried to assess how well community kitchens empower their members by asking participants to answer questions related to empowerment. The questionnaire also tried to incorporate triangulation by asking questions that were similar to those asked in the key informant interviews. Participants were also asked more general questions such as why they had joined the community kitchen and what they liked and disliked about their participation in their community kitchen. The questionnaires were anonymous and were conducted under the umbrella of Vancouver’s Community Kitchens Program.

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3 Questions about empowering skills such as leadership, communication and conflict resolution were asked.
Strengths of questionnaires

The strength of questionnaires is that they are strong on reliability because answers are usually dependable. Another strength is that the anonymity and privacy associated with questionnaires might encourage a more candid response. However, the researcher is aware that anonymity does not guarantee truthfulness.

Weakness of questionnaires

The weakness of questionnaires is that they represent “the least common denominator in assessing people’s attitudes, orientations, circumstances and experiences.” (Babbie, 1995). Depending on the number of questionnaires, the analysis may be complicated and time consuming.

1.5 Complementarity between research methods

The multiple case study approach acts as the overlying umbrella under which the research was conducted. The multiple case study approach was chosen because more than one community kitchen was observed. Within the multiple case study approach, contact with the community kitchens was made through participant observation. Participant observation provided the researcher with insight into how the community kitchen groups interacted. This also established a relationship between the researcher and the various groups.

Surveys were conducted after the researcher had established contact and provided quantitative data for the thesis. The use of the questionnaires also ensured that members in each group had a say during the research (although filling out the questionnaires was optional). Key
informant interviews provided the thesis with qualitative data and were undertaken after the questionnaires were conducted.

1.6 Description of thesis structure and content

This thesis is organised into six chapters. The first chapter introduces the concept of community kitchens and presents the statement of purpose, research questions and methods of research.

The literature consists of chapters two and three. Chapter two provides a history of community kitchens from its beginnings as a social movement in Peru to its appearance in Vancouver, while chapter three provides a review of empowerment and community development. A history of each theory is presented and the concepts are defined. An empowerment framework has also been adapted to assess the level of empowerment the case studies have reached.

The research findings are presented and analysed in chapters four and five. An introduction to the case studies is provided in chapter four. Brief histories are given for each community kitchen, and common procedures and goals are described. The research is discussed and an analysis is drawn in chapter five.

Chapter six concludes by drawing out the major findings from the research. Planning and policy implications are considered along with areas for further research.
Chapter Two
The History of Community Kitchens

2.0 Introduction

"Essentially, community kitchens are about people connecting with people, helping themselves and each other, and building community around food."

Andrea Taylor
Former Vancouver Community Kitchens Coordinator.

Unlike soup kitchens, community kitchens empower its members because the participants learn skills such as cooking and/or cooperation, while they prepare their meals. In North America, community kitchens are not limited to those in need but are organised by people from all walks of life. Some community kitchens operate to ensure access to food and save money, while other kitchens are a collection of people who wish to improve their cooking skills, explore new cuisine (e.g. vegetarian cooking) or socialise around food. Not all community kitchens are based on financial need; in many community kitchens the feeding of the soul is as important as filling the stomach.

Social interaction is an important element in many community kitchens and some groups believe that eating together after the meal has been prepared is as important as preparing the food itself. In this way, Vancouver’s community kitchens play an important role by connecting people and building community through the use of food. According to Lucho van Isschot, “sheer need may drive many [participants] to organise communal kitchens [but] the friendships and the positive energy that are developed in these kitchens encourage a sense of collective purpose.” (van Isschot, 1996).
A number of community kitchens exist for seniors, single parents, young mothers-at-risk and new immigrants. For new immigrants, the participation in a community kitchen provides an opportunity to socialise as well as learn new skills such as shopping for food in a new country. For single parents, community kitchens help to save both time and money (because food is prepared in bulk), and since the food being prepared is for personal consumption, cooking can take place anywhere. If the group is small, cooking can be done on a rotational basis in each members’ home. Larger groups may prefer to meet in a common place, such as in the kitchens of community centres, neighbourhood houses, schools or local churches.

In Vancouver, community kitchens that express a need are funded in part (through food items) by the Vancouver Food Bank, making meals more affordable. In some neighbourhoods, community kitchens have led to the creation of community gardens fostering community development; a fundamental principle behind community kitchens.

2.1 History of Community Kitchens

The formation of community kitchens began in Peru as a grassroots movement in the late 1970s in response to high inflation rates and the uneven distribution of food aid. Known as “comedores populares”1, the first community kitchens appeared in 1978 as a result of IMF structural adjustment programs which cut real incomes and greatly reduced or eliminated many public food subsidies (Lenten, 1993 and Lind and Farmelo, 1996). To combat this problem,

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1 According to Lenten (1993), “comedores” literally means dining-room. In English, “comedores” has been loosely translated to kitchen.
groups of women would pool their resources (either food supplies or cooking equipment) and time to cook for a number of families at once making food preparation more efficient.

A movement started and used by women, comedores populares are commonly located in “pueblos jovenes” - shantytowns and slums in Peru’s poorest neighbourhoods. In 1978, there were 100 kitchens; compared to today where approximately 10,000 kitchens feed almost three million people in cities all over Peru (Jibrin, 1998). Comedores populares are also found in Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, Colombia and Argentina, along with many community kitchens in operation throughout North America.

With such a large population relying on comedores populares, several community kitchens in Peru have joined to form the Federation of Self-Managed Popular Kitchens (FCPA). The federation provides a voice for many Peruvian women in issues that extend beyond food security and into national policy debates; issues such as transportation, running water and public health. The movement has enough of a political voice to be considered Peru’s most powerful popular lobbying movement. An activist organisation, the federation also oversees the purchasing of bulk items, micro-enterprise activities and retraining programs while the kitchens provide a place to raise awareness about other community issues (Lind and Farmelo, 1996).

Although empowering for women, it should be noted that not everyone in Peru is pleased with the operation of the comedores populares. In Peru’s machismo society, many men are

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2 In the late 1970s, a common problem surrounding food aid was the uneven distribution of products. One family would receive a bag of flour while a neighbouring family would receive a bag of sugar. To better utilise food aid, the female heads of the households would trade food items. Eventually, the women realised that by pooling their finances they could also buy their food in larger quantities at lower prices. This led to the creation of the community kitchen. Government and non-governmental organisation (NGO) officials soon learned about the comedores populares and began to contribute food aid directly to the community kitchens (Lenten, 1993 and Jibrin, 1998).
opposed to the comedores populares because it is believed that a woman’s participation in a
community kitchen is because of a husband and/or father’s inability to provide for his wife and
family (Lenten, 1993 and Lind and Farmelo, 1996). Many comedores populares are also targeted
by Peru’s well-known terrorist group, Shining Path (Sendero Luminoso). Shining Path, the
Communist Party of Peru, is a guerilla movement that began in the early 1970s (Lenten, 1993).
Members of community kitchens have received death threats from Shining Path, forcing targeted
community kitchens to operate underground (Lind and Farmelo, 1996). Shining Path uses
intimidation tactics on groups such as community kitchens, because powerful social and political
organisations (in this case community kitchens) are a threat to Shining Path, whose movement
relies on fear. Despite these barriers, comedores populares continue to operate in Peru because
the social network and food subsidies they provide, have made their existence necessary for survival.\(^3\)

While the notion of community kitchens as a grassroots movement started in Peru,
cooking in groups to save time and money is not a new concept and has existed for hundreds of
years. At the turn of the century, women in North America often cooked together during barn-
raisings and quilting bees. Similar to today’s community kitchens, these events were highly
socialised community gatherings assembled around food.

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\(^3\) Some Peruvian women have said that given a choice, they would not continue to participate in a comedores populares but had to because of the food products and resources the kitchens are able to provide which are needed to feed their families. According to Lind and Farmelo, “the fact that communal kitchens have become accepted practices may not mean that they are desired, but rather necessary for survival.” (1996).
2.2 Community Kitchens in Vancouver

There are a number of community kitchens in operation throughout Canada from Newfoundland to British Columbia. An actual count of community kitchens in Canada is not available but the movement’s popularity and replicability can be ascertained. In 1991, the Ministry of Health in British Columbia reported forty-five community kitchens in operation throughout the province. Today, there are forty community kitchens in the Vancouver region alone.

Community kitchens in Vancouver are formed by groups from various social backgrounds and from all walks of life. The community kitchen network includes kitchens organised by seniors (both men and women), single parents, young mothers-at-risk, new immigrants, First Nations and welfare recipients. Within the city there are a range of community kitchens that include a community kitchen in a single-room occupancy hotel (SRO), a canning group for new immigrants and a gourmet cooking group; along with many other community kitchens throughout the city.

Most of Vancouver’s community kitchens cook once a week or once a month. If a community kitchen meets on a weekly basis, the session will include both the cooking of the week’s meal and the planning of the next. Community kitchens that cook on a monthly basis tend to have two meetings a month for each cooking session. The first meeting is to plan and organise the menu for the second meeting, when the cooking takes place. Cooking in a community kitchen can take place anywhere but Vancouver’s community kitchens are usually found in community centres, neighbourhood houses, schools and churches; buildings which have
large kitchens to facilitate group cooking. Many of Vancouver's community kitchens are found in Vancouver's Neighbourhood Houses.

Vancouver's community kitchens fall under the Community Kitchen advisory board which is made up of four partners. Sponsorship is provided by BC Gas in partnership with the Food Bank, REACH Community Health Centre and the Vancouver Health Board. Decisions are made by consensus and the advisory board meets once a month with the Community Kitchen Coordinator\(^4\) to oversee the development and progress of community kitchens. The philosophy behind Community Kitchens in Vancouver is based on the idea of "Building Community Around Food and Creating Opportunities for People to Cook Together". The community development principles that Vancouver's Community Kitchens subscribe to are:

- to increase the ability of individuals and the community to participate effectively in the decisions that affect their lives;
- to increase the ability of community members to identify and act on common issues;
- to ensure that the community or group develops independence and ownership over the initiative\(^5\).

In North America, many community kitchens are also tied into the food bank through alternative food distribution systems such as the "Good Food Box" in Toronto or the "Good Food Bag" in Vancouver. The Good Food Box and Good Food Bag distribute fresh produce and

\(^4\) The Community Kitchen Coordinator acts as a link for all of the community kitchens in Vancouver. Hired by the Advisory Board, the Coordinator is housed in the REACH Community Health Centre and runs the Community Kitchen Program. The Coordinator organises workshops on community kitchens for kitchen leaders and for people who are interested in starting a community kitchen. Basically, the Coordinator provides support to community kitchens that are in operation.

\(^5\) These principles are based on the community development model created by the Sandy Hill Community Health Centre.
extra food accumulated by the food banks and/or donated by sponsors, along with recipes to families in need. For many families, the additional bag or box of food each month is the difference between a nutritious meal and an unhealthy but cheap alternative. Food security advocates see community kitchens and gardens, and alternative food distribution systems as part of the solution to the global crisis in food management (van Isschot, 1996).

2.3 Conclusion

This chapter surveyed the history of community kitchens from its beginnings as a social movement in Peru to its popularisation in Greater Vancouver. In both areas, the premise behind community kitchens is to feed the body. In Peru, community kitchens are politically charged and are needed for survival. Food aid is often distributed through comedores populares and female heads of households usually participate in community kitchens to access food subsidies. A network of community kitchens known as the Federation of Self-Managed Popular Kitchens (FCPA) exists in Peru, and it provides a voice for many Peruvian women. This organisation tackles a variety of community-related issues and performs a number of functions such as providing micro-credit or retraining.

In Vancouver, community kitchens operate to ensure access to food but a number of groups also gather to create social networks. The Vancouver Community Kitchens Program is administered by an advisory board which is made up of four partners (which are BC Gas, the Vancouver Food Bank, the REACH Community Health Centre and the Vancouver Health Board). A network of community kitchens does not exist in Vancouver as it does in Peru but a coordinator is hired by the board to oversee the program. The coordinator acts as a resource
person for the kitchens; however, because there is no network, links between the kitchens are weak. Workshops for community kitchen leaders are held by the coordinator to connect the kitchens but a network has not been created.

This chapter provided a description of community kitchens. The next chapter continues with a literature review and defines the concepts of empowerment and community development.
Chapter Three
A Literature Review of Empowerment and Community Development

3.0 Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the use of community kitchens as an empowerment tool and whether they can be used in community development (CD). In the previous chapter, a general history of community kitchens was provided. This chapter continues with the literature review by defining empowerment and community development within the context of this thesis. A history of the two theories has been described and definitions have been provided for both. An empowerment framework has also been adapted and will be used later in the thesis as a benchmark to assess the level of empowerment each community kitchen has reached.

3.1 Empowerment Defined

As described by Ristock and Pennell (1996), “empowerment” is a term that is widely used in a variety of professions. The concept of empowerment is studied in fields as diverse as community planning, social work, psychology and health care. Each discipline has its own understanding of the term, but it is generally agreed that “empowerment is the process of increasing personal, interpersonal and political power so that individuals, families and communities can take action to improve their situations.” (Gutiérrez, 1995). Gutiérrez states that “within each field, empowerment has been described as a new way of thinking about developing programs, policies and services.” (Gutiérrez, 1995). Community kitchens have the capacity to
empower individuals because they allow people to increase their personal power through self-help.

3.1.1 The history of empowerment theory

The concept of empowerment was popularised in the late 1960s and is associated with the civil and social rights movements from that time. Historically, empowerment is a concept that has been associated with the voluntary/NGO sector and the fight for the rights of people who have traditionally been marginalised. A number of social development theorists argue that marginalised people empower themselves by challenging power relations and by taking power from those in power (Mayo and Craig, 1995). Other theorists believe that power is a resource that has potential or is present in every person or community. People and communities are empowered when they tap into the power and/or potential power that already exists in themselves and their communities (Checkoway, 1995).

Institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF specifically support community based self-help empowerment initiatives, such as community participation, as part of their agendas (Mayo and Craig, 1995). The literature in empowerment theory tends to focus on how an individual’s positive belief in oneself can contribute to individual, community and social change (Gutiérrez, 1995).

An ongoing question within the literature is the discussion of empowerment and its link to self-sufficiency. A common question is: to what extent must people be responsible for themselves before they are considered empowered? At one end of the argument, the definition of
empowerment is restricted only to situations of total self-help while at the other end, the act of participation is empowering in itself.

Social development theorists, particularly feminists, have recently challenged the ideology of empowerment. According to Ristock and Pennell, the criticism stems from the reaction of politicians, bureaucrats and professionals who “have taken empowerment to mean nothing more than individual self-assertion” and whose policies (in the name of empowerment) continue to disadvantage marginalised people, particularly women and children (Ristock and Pennell, 1996). Another argument is that governments are misusing the term empowerment to encourage communities and programs to develop organisations to fulfil the roles that governments are supposed to play. Community organisations and community development specialists are concerned that governments are gradually expecting communities to manage and take responsibility of the social welfare network of its citizens during a time when social welfare budgets are being reduced. A number of government reports, such as “Empowerment: A New Covenant With America’s Communities - President Clinton’s National Urban Policy Report” point to this trend.

3.1.2 A definition of empowerment

Gutiérrez’s review of the literature finds that “the goal of empowerment is most often expressed as an increase in personal power.” (Gutiérrez, 1995). For this thesis, the concept of empowerment is developed within the context of community development where the process is achieved through self-help, participation and networking and where the outcome can vary from personal satisfaction to community change.
Depending on the situation, the definition of empowerment that applies will also change. Ristock and Pennell (1996) provide a number of definitions to define empowerment from individual, interpersonal, organisational and societal perspectives. In general, Ristock and Pennell define empowerment as “the means to enhance our ability to control our own lives.” (Ristock and Pennell, 1996). According to their definitions, empowerment at an individual level is to draw inner strength by taking control of a situation and asserting oneself. Interpersonally, it means the sharing of resources for mutual benefit. Organisationally, empowerment is the ability to work democratically by participating equally and sharing in decision and policy-making, while at a societal level, empowerment is a political act that can range from acts of political resistance to mobilisation.

Empowerment has been described as “a process one undertakes for oneself; it is not something done ‘to’ or ‘for’ someone” (adapted from Lather by Ristock and Pennell, 1996). An individual’s participation in their own decisions is an important element of self-help and the empowerment process. The process is cumulative. Increased participation can lead to higher levels of confidence, self-esteem and knowledge. This in turn, leads to further participation until an objective (usually a change for the better) is reached (see Figure 3.1 - Community Excellence: Changing from the Inside Out).

Within the literature there are also distinctions made between “empowering organisations” and “empowered organisations”. Empowering organisations empower its participants by increasing the confidence and competencies of its members while empowered organisations empower and influence the environment and/or community surrounding the organisation. With these distinctions in mind, community kitchens are primarily empowering
organisations because the process of empowerment tends to occur at the individual level. If used as an empowerment tool in community development, community kitchens are empowered organisations because of their influence on communities.

3.2 Community Development

Christenson, Fendley and Robinson state that "the primary goal of community development is to help people improve their social and economic situations." (Christenson, Fendley and Robinson, 1989). Similar to empowerment, a number of definitions are available in the literature to describe CD. It has been acknowledged by community development practitioners that in the 1990s, the term has in some ways, become a catchphrase. This is because community development has become an important issue for the 1990s as federal and provincial government cutbacks make it more difficult for dependent communities to deal with
local problems (Christenson, Fendley and Robinson, 1989). Many organisations are incorporating the term “community development” within their proposals and mandates to attract more funding.

3.2.1 The history of community development

The literature reveals that the concept of community development first emerged in 1942 and was introduced by the British government. It was described as a movement to link local governments to “promote better living conditions for the whole community with active participation, and if possible, initiative of the community.” (O’Gorman, 1995). This definition attracted the attention of various organisations interested in development and was soon adapted to fit these institutions’ mandates. In the 1950s, the United Nations (UN) began using the term “community development” to describe self-help initiatives taking place in developing countries (O’Gorman, 1995). CD was promoted by both governments and institutions, such as the UN, as part of the following: movements to decolonise Africa and Asia; attempts to modernise underdeveloped agricultural societies and “backward” regions of developed countries; and the War on Poverty established by governments in more affluent Western countries. (Campfens, 1997). In 1963, the United Nations arrived at its own definition which, as noted by Christenson, Fendley and Robinson (1989), was later used as the basis for community development work.

The United Nations’ definition was:

“the process by which the efforts of the people themselves are united with those of governmental authorities to improve the economic, social and cultural conditions of communities, to integrate these communities into the life of a nation, and to enable them to contribute fully to national progress. This complex of processes is, therefore, made up of two essential elements: the participation by the people themselves in efforts to improve their level of living, with as much reliance as
possible on their own initiative; and the provision of technical and other services in ways which encourage initiative, self-help and mutual help and make these more effective. It is expressed in programmes designed to achieve a wide variety of specific improvements.” (United Nations, 1963 as quoted in Christenson, Fendley and Robinson, 1989).

During the 1950s and early 1960s, much of the discussion surrounding community development focused on developing self-help programmes and providing financial aid to developing countries, particularly Africa. By the end of the 1960s, communities in the developed world also embraced the community development movement and began to apply its principles to their own communities. Much of the movement was linked to the civil and social rights movements of the 1960s and the concern for the welfare of disempowered inner city neighbourhoods in many American cities.

In the United States in the 1970s, community development was often promoted from a “grassroots” perspective. Most of these efforts, particularly in cities such as Chicago (where racial tensions and disparities were high), focused on the revitalisation of lower and middle income neighbourhoods, through housing development, economic stimulation (later known as “community economic development”) and job training in response to the many unsuccessful urban renewal projects of the 1960s (Mitchell-Weaver, 1990 and Wiewel and Gill, 1995). CD practitioners worked in conjunction with neighbourhood advocates at the local level to deliver community development programs to address these issues.

Canada, on the other hand, did not share the same urban history in urban renewal or “ghetto-isation”. Two strands of thought are found in the literature. According to Mitchell-Weaver (1990), community development in Canada in the 1970s and 1980s focused on the problems facing rural and northern areas and the decline of single-industry towns, while Abucar
(1995), describes the Canadian government’s support for programs whose purpose was to improve the socio-economic conditions of marginalised groups. Similar to American efforts in the 1970s, the Canadian government created a program known as the Community Employment Strategy (CES) which dealt with education, housing, skills training and small business development (Abucar, 1995).

The 1980s saw community development shift from grassroots approaches to sophisticated community-based organisations entrenched in development. According to Wiewel and Gills (1995), this was a period when many organisations in the United States received financial support from a variety of public and private sources. Funding provided the organisations with legitimacy to pursue complex CD projects that sometimes involved public-private partnerships between these organisations and the government. This shift, however, from the simple to the sophisticated has in some ways, resulted in a “corporatisation” of community development away from advocates for the marginalised to partners in land development and speculation (Mitchell-Weaver, 1990). This was not the case in Canada where community development in the 1980s grew on the ideas from the 1970s but with a more holistic approach to community development that emphasised community economic self-sufficiency (Abucar, 1995). But at the same time, there was a growing interest in community development among both non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and in the voluntary sector that linked community development to, and sustained, its grassroots past (Campfens, 1997).

Community development has become an important issue in North American cities as government cutbacks have made it difficult for communities to obtain public funding. Although many American community development organisations are able to fall back on private sources,
Canada does not share the same history of philanthropy. In the 1990s, a growing concern is the fear that the term has become a catchphrase and an opportunity for the state to shirk its social duties. While community development has received support from all levels of government, it is often because community organisations and initiatives have filled the roles the state used to play but without the required funding. As Mayo states, “there has been official support for community participation and community development from international agencies through to government and local government organisations . . . but . . . reductions . . . in aid to precisely the types of community organisation that have been mobilising self-help efforts.” (Mayo, 1994). Craig reiterates this point by saying that government support of community development “is admirable . . . but . . . might also be regarded as merely another means by which cuts in essential services are hidden behind a rhetoric of voluntarism and community involvement . . .” (Craig, 1998).

Craig (1998) points to another dimension of community development that has evolved in the 1990s. He states that CD has traditionally been treated as a local approach to problem-solving. Craig (1998), similar to Abucar (1995), Christenson, Fendley and Robinson (1989), Mitchell-Weaver (1990) and Wiewel and Gills (1995) also acknowledges the “remarkable growth in interest in the concepts of community and community development at local, national and international levels.” (Craig, 1998). His argument, however, is related to the globalisation of the economy and his belief that in these times, “community development needs to rethink its approach to incorporate a global dimension.” (Craig, 1998). The greatest challenge currently facing CD is where to place the idea within a global context in a world where financial resources are shrinking.
3.2.2 A definition of community development

There are many definitions for the term “community development”. Christenson, Fendley and Robinson’s (1989) review of the literature reveals four approaches to community development. As described by I.T. Sanders in 1958 (see Table 3.1 - Four Ways of Viewing Community Development), community development can be viewed as: a process, a method, a program and a movement (Christenson, Fendley and Robinson, 1989). Community development in practice, however, is not so easily categorised because it is heavily influenced by geography and the society in place. Depending on the situation, community development can be adapted from one or all of the following definitions. Sanders’ breakdown nevertheless, is a useful departure point for discussing community development, although the concept has evolved.

Most of the definitions found in the literature share common elements. In general, community development can be defined as a group of people, usually in a locality although sometimes not, who are willing to make changes to their community to improve the physical, social and economic conditions of their communities through government action and the community’s own efforts (Christenson, Fendley and Robinson, 1989; Florin and Wandersman, 1990). The underlying theme of community development, however, is the betterment of people by people. As Christenson, Fendley and Robinson state, the betterment of people is achieved through community development that is “concerned with public policies, governmental actions, economic activities, institution building and other types of actions that not only affect people but can be affected by people. It focuses on the humanistic elements involved in change and how such change contributes to social and economic well-being.” (Christenson, Fendley and Robinson, 1989). Boothroyd also describes community development as “...organising, learning, and mandating practices which
increase capabilities not only to reach existing goals, but also to work toward a broader range and higher level of goals." (Boothroyd, 1996).

Table 3.1 Four Ways of Viewing Community Development

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<tr>
<th>I. A PROCESS</th>
<th>II. A METHOD (Progress and Objective)</th>
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<tr>
<td>CD as a process moves by stages from one condition or state to the next. It involves a progression of changes in terms of specified criteria. It is a neutral, scientific term, subject to fairly precise definition and measurement expressed chiefly in social relations; e.g., change from state where one or two people or a small elite within or without local community make decisions for the rest of the people to state where people themselves make these decisions about matters of common concern; from state of minimum to one of maximum co-operation; from state where few participate to one where many participate; from state where all resources and specialists come from outside to one where local people make most use of their own resources, etc. Emphasis is upon what happens to people, socially and psychologically.</td>
<td>CD is a means to an end; a way of working so that some goal is attained. Other methods (such as change by decree or fiat; change by use of differential rewards; change by education) may be supplementary to the CD method which seeks to carry through the stages suggested under process in order that the will of those using this method (national government, private welfare agency, or local people themselves) may be carried out. The process is guided for a particular purpose, which may prove “harmful” or “helpful” to the local community, depending upon the goal in view and the criteria of the one passing judgement. Emphasis is upon some end.</td>
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<tr>
<th>III. A PROGRAM (Method and Content)</th>
<th>IV. A MOVEMENT (Program and Emotional Dynamics)</th>
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<td>This method is stated as a set of procedures and the content as a list of activities. By carrying out the procedures, the activities are supposedly accomplished. When the program is highly formalized, as in many Five-Year Plans, the focus tends to be upon the program rather than upon what is happening to the people involved in the program. It is a program that CD comes into contact with subject-matter specialties such as health, welfare, agriculture, industry, recreations, etc. Emphasis is upon activities.</td>
<td>CD is a crusade, a cause to which people become committed. It is not neutral (like process) but carries an emotional charge; one is either for it or against it. It is dedicated to progress, as a philosophic and not a scientific concept, since progress must be viewed with reference to values and goals which differ under different political and social systems. CD as a movement tends to become institutionalized, building up its own organizational structure, accepted procedures and professional practitioners. It stresses and promotes the idea of community development as interpreted by its devotees.</td>
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It is important to note that there is no single view of community development and definitions of CD differ depending on the profession. Psychologists for example, have their own interpretation of community development which is similar but not the same as community planners, which in turn is similar to but not the same as social workers.
3.3 Empowerment and Community Development

"Community development is about empowerment. It assumes that communities have the latent potential to identify and act upon their own issues, with only minimal outside interference." (Hannis, 1988). In this statement, Hannis equates community development to empowerment. While community development and empowerment share common elements, contrary to what Hannis says, community development should not be confused with empowerment.

Empowerment at the individual, interpersonal, organisational and societal levels, looks at the distribution of power and how an individual or a group can attain power or change power structures. Meanwhile, community development, as described by Christenson, Fendley and Robinson, "implies improvement, growth and change" within the community whether it relates to government policies, economic activities or institution building (Christenson, Fendley and Robinson, 1989). While community development encompasses many aspects of empowerment, empowerment is only one element of many in community development. As mentioned by Florin and Wandersman, and Rappaport, "empowerment is a mechanism by which people, organizations, and communities gain mastery over their affairs." (Florin and Wandersman, 1990 and Rappaport, 1987). It is my contention that empowerment is a tool or process that is used in community development and community kitchens are used in this thesis to explore this notion.

3.4 The Framework to be Tested

The framework that will be used to test the effectiveness of community kitchens as an empowerment tool in community development is based on the "ladder of empowerment" that was produced by Elizabeth M. Rocha. This framework was designed to be used specifically by planners
whose work focuses on economic development, community participation, and grassroots coalitions, formed around the provision of goods and services (Rocha, 1997).

Rocha’s ladder of empowerment defines five types of empowerment that moves from individual to community empowerment. As mentioned by Rocha (1997), the arrangement of the ladder is not to suggest that one type of empowerment is better than another, but rather that the ladder moves from individual to community empowerment by building on the outcome from the previous step. The basis for Rocha’s argument is that for community empowerment to occur, individual empowerment must take place first.

The five types of empowerment as described by Rocha (1997) are:

**Type one** - atomistic individual empowerment: Considered the traditional understanding of empowerment, this type of empowerment focuses on the individual. Empowerment is achieved by providing the individual with increased coping skills (or life skills) to alter the emotional or physical state of the individual.

**Type two** - embedded individual empowerment: This form of empowerment also focuses on the individual but the emphasis is on the individual’s environment and its effect on the person. The most important setting for this type of empowerment is the organisation and how the individual relates to others in that structure, what role the individual is allowed to occupy, and how much decision-making power he or she actually possesses.

**Type three** - mediated empowerment: This type of empowerment is highly professionalised. Empowerment in this form, is mediated by an expert or professional and the focus is on the individual, the community, or both. The professional provides the individual or community with the knowledge and information required for individual or community decision-making and action.
Type four - socio-political empowerment: This form of empowerment is based on “transformative populism”, where the focus of community development is to develop “the people who comprise the community as the first priority, then ... the physical development of the neighbourhoods in which people live.” (Rocha, 1997). The emphasis of socio-political empowerment is to challenge and change the community’s social, political, or economic relations in a way that will benefit its inhabitants.

Type five - political empowerment: The focus of this type of empowerment is on the community (usually a marginalised group) where a community is “a network of like-minded individuals with or without a geographic dimension as its defining characteristic” (Rocha, 1997). The process of empowerment here, is political action through institutional change and the fight for expanded access to resources such as: education, housing, employment, government representation, etc. Individuals are empowered through changes that are made for the benefit of the community.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.2 Empowerment Types</th>
<th>Rocha (1997)</th>
<th>Ristock and Pennell (1995)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type one: atomistic individual empowerment</td>
<td>Individual empowerment: drawing on inner strength to take control of a situation and assert oneself.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Type two: embedded individual empowerment</td>
<td>Interpersonal empowerment: sharing resources for mutual benefit or working together co-operatively.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Type three: mediated empowerment</td>
<td>Professionalised empowerment: facilitating and collaborating rather than prescribing and treating.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Type four: socio-political empowerment</td>
<td>Organisational empowerment: working democratically, participating equally, and sharing in decision-making and policy development in the work environment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Type five: political empowerment</td>
<td>Societal empowerment: political activity that ranges from individual acts of political resistance to mass political mobilisation aimed at changing the nature and distribution of power in our society.</td>
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</table>
Based on these two sets of definitions, a framework to test empowerment has been adapted from Rocha's (1997) ladder of empowerment. This framework was created to distinguish between the five types of empowerment and is used in this thesis to assess to which level of empowerment a community kitchen may have reached.

Table 3.3 Empowerment Framework.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Locus</th>
<th>Atomistic, Individual</th>
<th>Embedded, Interpersonal</th>
<th>Mediated, Professional</th>
<th>Socio-political, Organisational</th>
<th>Political, Societal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goals</td>
<td>• personal satisfaction • increased coping ability</td>
<td>• personal satisfaction • competence in negotiating daily environment</td>
<td>• knowledge and information for proper decision making</td>
<td>• individual development • expanded access to community resources • community benefits</td>
<td>• expanded access to community services, goods and rights • community benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processes</td>
<td>• life skills • self-help</td>
<td>• participation • sharing resources • cooperation</td>
<td>• facilitating and collaborating</td>
<td>• organisational participation • collaborative grassroots action • working democratically • participating equally • sharing in decision-making</td>
<td>• political action, voting, protest • political representation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Rocha (1997) and Ristock and Pennell (1995).

The locus is the intended arena of change. The goals are the intended outcomes of each empowerment type and the processes refers to a variety of methods that might be used to reach these goals. To assess the level of empowerment reached, the processes and outcomes of each community kitchen will be reviewed. This framework will be used as a benchmark, to test whether, and to what level, community kitchens empower its participants.
3.5 Conclusion

The focus of this chapter was to define the concepts of empowerment and community development as it is being used for this thesis. Many disciplines such as psychology, social work and sociology discuss empowerment and community development, but each field has its own unique interpretation of these two ideas.

Empowerment as defined in this thesis has many definitions. Generally, empowerment is defined as a process that individuals undertake to improve their social, economic and political situations. However, the concept of empowerment is complex and the definition of empowerment can change depending on the intended target. Within this thesis, definitions were provided to define empowerment from several levels ranging from the individual to society in general.

The issue of community development is just as complex. In this thesis, community development is described as the betterment of people by people, through change that contributes to a community's social and economic well-being. Ideally, development occurs through social action that is achieved through the community’s own efforts.

Finally, in this chapter, an empowerment framework was adapted to assess the level of empowerment a community kitchen has attained. Used as a benchmark, the community kitchen’s empowerment processes and outcomes are observed and reviewed against the framework. The framework is applied to the case studies and is discussed in Chapter Five. The next chapter, Chapter Four, introduces the community kitchens that were selected for the case studies.
4.0 Introduction

Community kitchens in Vancouver gather for a variety of reasons and their numbers continue to rise. A higher profile in the city through the media and at community events (i.e. community booths) has contributed to the kitchens' popularity. In recent years, community kitchens have doubled, increasing from twenty in 1996 to forty in 1998.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an introduction to the seven community kitchens profiled for the case studies. The selection of the community kitchens was based on the following criteria: the length of time the group has/had been cooking together, the social makeup of the group, and the location. A cross-section of newer and older groups was desired to compare and contrast group dynamics. Participants of all ages from all social incomes were also targeted to observe how and why community kitchens were being used. Finally, a selection of community kitchens from across the city were considered to determine the effect of location.

A brief history was written for each community kitchen. Common elements such as similar organisational procedures and goals have also been described.

4.1 Histories

The Barclay Manor Bread Burners

The Barclay Manor Bread Burners has been cooking for five years at Barclay Manor in the West End of Vancouver, and is exclusively for senior men. This community kitchen finances itself and is more like a cooking club but identifies itself as a community kitchen. The Barclay
Manor Bread Burners are a very social group and the act of eating together is as important as the cooking of the meal. The coordinator for the Bread Burners said that the main priority for the group and the reason why he started it is “to get senior men, such as myself, out of the house.” Participants often socialise outside of the community kitchen. Some members have formed a hiking club while others meet for coffee or for walks. As one member mentioned, “It’s a good thing for an exchange of ideas, and it’s also a social thing.”

**Downtown Eastside Community Kitchens: Pacific Hotel**

Before discussing the Downtown Eastside Community Kitchens program (DECK), a description of Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside is necessary. This is not to say that the locations of other community kitchens are not worthy for discussion, but the socio-economic issues that affect the Downtown Eastside should be noted. The Downtown Eastside is considered to be the poorest neighbourhood in Canada. A total of 16,076 people, or 3.1% of Vancouver’s population live in the area that is bounded by Chinatown on one side and historic Gastown on the other. Used needles litter the streets and the sale of cocaine, crack and heroin is prevalent. Prostitution is also common and the area is known for the number of unsolved disappearances and murders of women who have walked its streets. The average median household income is $10,586 and the area contains 77.9% of Vancouver’s single room occupancy (SRO) units. (Mulgrew, 1998).

In the summer of 1996, the Downtown Eastside Residents Association (DERA) conducted a survey to see if there was a need for community kitchens in the neighbourhood's single-room occupancy hotels (SROs). Many of the SRO rooms do not have kitchens in their units and hotplates (because of fire bylaws) are not allowed. The results from the survey
identified a need for community kitchens and support from local organisations was indicated. Support was strong because while there are a number of kitchens in operation in the downtown eastside, they were not accessible to the population living in the SROs\(^1\). In March 1997, the Downtown Eastside Community Kitchens program (DECK), a pilot project, was implemented and six community kitchens were established in the following hotels: Central Residence, Dodson Hotel, Oppenheimer Park, the Pacific Hotel, Pendeira Hotel and Tellier Towers. As part of this program, ten volunteers were trained as coordinators by the Neighbourhood Helpers Project, the Carnegie Centre, and Community Kitchens. Funding was provided by the Vancouver Health Department to purchase basic kitchen and food supplies. The Vancouver Food Bank also funded the kitchen through the provision of food.

The community kitchen at the Pacific Hotel was in operation until the end of 1997. It has recently been restarted with leftover funds donated by various organisations to DECK. As of May 17, 1998 the kitchen has been operating once a week (except during welfare week), on Sundays. The kitchen receives an average of twenty to twenty-five participants (all of whom are on social assistance), approximately one-third of the hotel's population\(^2\). The numbers fluctuate depending on the time of the month but the coordinator has found that the closer the week is to the welfare cheque issue date, the greater the number of participants. Most of the members are male but one-fifth of the kitchen is female\(^3\) and ninety percent of the participants return each week.

\(^1\) Community kitchens in the downtown eastside focus on women, children and families - not the single population that tends to inhabit SROs.
\(^2\) Seventy five residents live in the Pacific Hotel.
\(^3\) The number of female participants has increased. In the first community kitchen at the Pacific Hotel, only 10% of its members were female.
Jubilee House Community Kitchen.

The Jubilee House Community Kitchen originally began in 1995. It was in operation for two years but ceased cooking in November, 1997 because the Downtown South Jubilee House Housing Society opened a new building. The community worker for the Jubilee Houses was involved in the construction and didn’t have time to organise the kitchen. The Downtown South Jubilee House Housing Society manages three buildings; all of which are subsidised housing. There are three hundred people who live in the residences. The majority are men (only thirty women live there) whose average age is fifty-five, and all of the residents are on social assistance.

The community kitchen was restarted in February, 1998. Some of the original members still attend but there are a number of new participants. There are more people in the second kitchen than there were in the first and a few female participants (there were no women in the first kitchen). The original community kitchen had eight members from the two operating houses while the current kitchen has approximately twelve members (the same twelve do not always attend) from all three houses.

Kiwassa Canning Kitchen

The Kiwassa Canning Kitchen has been cooking for the last four years at Kiwassa Neighbourhood House in East Vancouver. This community kitchen is attended mostly by immigrant women and the sole purpose of the kitchen is to preserve food to store at home.

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4 The Jubilee House Community Kitchen coordinator noted that female residents are not as interested in participating in the kitchen or in cooking activities in general. He believes that this is because most of these women were usually the primary homemakers in the past. Many of these women were in abusive situations and cooking reminds them of their troubled history.
Food items are funded through the Vancouver Food Bank and occasionally, recipes are adapted to take advantage of the fruits and vegetables available. In the past, the kitchen also received support in the form of jars, lids, etc. from Bernardin Ltd., a canning supply company. Other sources of funding include BC Hothouse and private donations.

The kitchen is actively pursuing ideas to sustain itself financially. Depending on the session, a surplus of canned goods are sometimes available. With the help of the coordinator of the kitchen, and Vancouver's Community Kitchen Coordinator, the group is hoping to sell their canned items to local bed and breakfasts and/or shops to generate an income.

**SLICK**: (St. James Ladies’ International Community Kitchen)

This community kitchen is exclusively for women and has been in operation since September, 1997. There are ten women who participate from neighbourhoods across Greater Vancouver. Cooking takes place at St. James Community Square in the west side of Vancouver (Kitsilano). The focus of the kitchen is on gourmet cooking. The group does not eat together (because they meet at night) but often finishes the session with a glass of wine at a local pub.

Similar to the Bread Burners, this community kitchen is also self-sufficient in terms of financing. Because the emphasis is on “gourmet cooking”, cooking expenses are slightly higher. On average, grocery costs range from $10 - $14 per session. The community kitchen does not operate out of need but is used by its members to socialise and save time.

SLICK publishes its own newsletter and has organised several “food explorations” to Seattle and the Okanagan for wine tours and food tastings. SLICK’s coordinator, is actively involved with Vancouver’s Community Kitchens and is working with Karen Barnaby, a local
chef and Vancouver’s Community Kitchens Coordinator, to create a cookbook featuring recipes used by Vancouver’s community kitchens.

**Young Moms and Young Moms To Be Community Kitchen.**

The Young Moms and Young Moms To Be Community Kitchen is part of the Healthiest Babies Possible Program and has been cooking since February 1997. Young Moms and Young Moms To Be is a community kitchen for pregnant teenagers and young mothers at risk. The participants receive social assistance and the purpose of the community kitchen is to ensure that these young women (pregnant or not) receive at least one nutritious meal a week. Participants of this program are also involved in the Good Food Bag Program sponsored by Vancouver’s Food Bank, various grocers and independent donors. The purpose of the program is to deliver a bag of food to each participant once a month, the week before welfare cheques are due, to ensure that both the mother and the baby has access to nutritious food.

The Young Moms and Young Moms To Be is part of the Healthiest Babies Possible program which is sponsored by a $20,000 annual grant from Health Canada. The premise behind Healthiest Babies Possible is to improve food security for young mothers at risk (and their babies). In addition to the community kitchen, the grant also covers the operating costs of the Good Food Bag, a First Nations Pre-Natal Healing Circle and the coordinator’s salary. The Vancouver Food Bank also supports this program.
YWCA Crabtree Corner

The YWCA Crabtree Corner community kitchen has been cooking for nearly five years. The kitchen meets at Crabtree Corner in Vancouver’s downtown eastside. The group consists primarily of, but is not limited to, native women. This kitchen is unique because it is multi-generational. The participants’ ages range from under eighteen to the mid-forties. Mothers had introduced their daughters to the community kitchen. The daughters in turn joined and brought their children to the nursery and daycare located at Crabtree Corner.

This community kitchen is funded by Vancouver’s Food Bank and through community programs at Crabtree Corner. The group both eats together and brings meals home to their families. An important aspect of the meal however, is the “smudging” that takes place before the group sits down to eat. While the group was originally brought together for financial reasons, it is very social and many of the members socialise outside of the community kitchen by having coffee, or looking after one another’s children.

4.2 Cooking and Organisational Processes

Except for Jubilee House and SLICK (which both cook once a month), all of the community kitchens described above meet on a weekly basis. In general, most of the community kitchens follow the same pattern where half the group cooks the meals while the other half plans the next session (these positions are usually rotated either weekly or monthly). Recipes are selected and ingredients are written down and given to either the coordinator or a

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5 “Smudging” is an aboriginal ritual of using the smoke from burning herbs to cleanse the body, an object, or a given area of negative influences.
6 The Pacific Hotel community kitchen is also an exception. It cooks once a week except during welfare cheque week.
designated person. Coordinators in community kitchens that fully rely on funding usually fax their list to Vancouver's Food Bank a few days before the group is supposed to cook and missing ingredients are purchased (with money from funding or donor organisations) one or two days before the cooking session. In the Jubilee House and the Pacific Hotel community kitchens, ingredients are low in cost because the recipes are usually quite simple. The participants in these two kitchens prefer hearty "meat and potato" type dishes that are easy to prepare but are a break from "line-up" food (soups and sandwiches served in soup kitchens).

Some community kitchens partially or fully finance themselves. In these community kitchens, a person is designated (either a permanent or rotated position) to delegate the organisational tasks. In some kitchens, the grocery list is divided among the group members and the cost of the meals are tallied at the end of the next cooking session. Usually, a partially funded kitchen has a designated person to collect money at each session for extra ingredients. Depending on the kitchen, the cost of ingredients will vary. A partial community kitchen might ask its participants to contribute a dollar whereas a gourmet kitchen such as SLICK, can run tabs as high as fourteen dollars (per person).

The amount of food prepared will also vary. In some community kitchens, only one meal is cooked while in other community kitchens, a week of meals might be prepared. Each community kitchen is different and the way in which they operate is usually decided through a consensus decision-making process.
4.3 Goals

The community kitchens in the case studies share similar reasons for operating their community kitchens. The researcher identified three goals that were common to all of the above community kitchens. They are:

- to provide an opportunity for participants to socialise;
- to provide access to nutritious meals;
- to provide participants the opportunity to learn new skills.

The first goal is particularly important to community kitchens whose participants tend to isolate themselves and have difficulty communicating and cooperating with others. The coordinators for the Jubilee House and Pacific Hotel, both mentioned that their community kitchens were formed to help participants break their feelings of isolation. Other community kitchens such as the Barclay Manor Bread Burners and SLICK use cooking as an opportunity to socialise and their kitchens were formed to fill a social need.

The second goal identified was to provide access to nutritious meals. This is an important goal for participants whose access to food is insecure. Certain populations (such as single seniors who need to be motivated to cook or pregnant teenagers who do not know what or how to cook) are at greater risk than others, and community kitchens can be used to reach these groups.

The final goal focuses on learning. Coordinators mentioned that a number of skills can be learned by participating in a community kitchen. In a community kitchen, participants work together to create an end product that they can enjoy while learning through a process of doing.
4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, seven community kitchens were selected as case studies from a possible forty. A brief history of each was provided to place the thesis in context. The case studies varied a great deal but common elements such as the cooking and organisational processes, and goals were similar. The community kitchens gathered to socialise, create better access to nutritious food, and provide an opportunity for people to learn. In the next chapter, the results from researching the case studies are presented. The research explores how community kitchens empower their participants, and the opportunities and constraints to using community kitchens as an empowerment tool. The possibility of using community kitchens to foster community development is also examined.
5.0 **Introduction**

This chapter discusses and analyses the research findings. Information for the case studies was gathered by using three different research methods which were: participant observation, key informant interviews and a survey. As mentioned in Chapter One, participant observation was used to scope the research while the researcher cooked with the kitchen participants and during leaders workshops. Key informant interviews were conducted with community kitchen leaders\(^1\) (please refer to Appendix I for key informants and Appendix II for the interview questions) and a survey (please refer to Appendix III for the questionnaire) was polled among participants to compare and contrast their answers with the leaders.

The purpose of this chapter is to identify how Vancouver's community kitchens empower their participants and to analyse the use of community kitchens as an empowerment tool in community development. The first part of this chapter presents the findings while the second half discusses how community kitchens empower and if they can be used to enhance community development.

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\(^1\) It should be noted that community kitchen leaders and coordinators are the same. Usually, a leader has been designated by the community kitchen group whereas a coordinator has been appointed by a program or person outside the community kitchen. A distinction however, needs to be made when the author mentions Vancouver's Community Kitchens Coordinator. As mentioned in Chapter Two, Vancouver's Community Kitchens Coordinator acts as a link for all the community kitchens in Vancouver and is hired by Vancouver's Community Kitchens' Advisory Board.
5.1 The processes of empowerment in community kitchens

From the case studies, a number of empowerment processes were identified. Community kitchen leaders were asked to describe how participants were empowered and what skills were learned. They mentioned that participants were empowered by learning the following life skills: communication, self-help, and social networking. Leaders also mentioned that participants were empowered by gaining confidence and self-esteem. Similar responses were provided by the participants in the surveys when asked what skills they had learned and what they gained from their community kitchen experiences.

5.1.1 Learning life skills

Life skills are the skills that people use on a daily basis to cope with everyday living. The ability to communicate, help oneself (self-help) and socialise are important life skills because they help individuals become self-reliant.

Communication:

In the survey, when asked (in an open-ended question) to identify what skills the participant had learned from his/her community kitchen group, 3% mentioned that he/she had learned to communicate. However, when asked on a scale of one to five how comfortable participants felt about expressing their feelings (one meaning uncomfortable and five meaning very comfortable), close to half (44%) of the respondents said that they were “very comfortable”.


The survey also tried to assess how well the group communicates. When asked on a scale of one to five how well the group communicates with each other (one meaning communicates poorly and five meaning communicates well), 44% of the participants answered that their group communicates well. No one said that their group communicates poorly.

Figure 5.1 How comfortable do you feel about expressing your feelings, even feelings about people in the group?

Figure 5.2 How well does the group communicate with each other?
While only 3% of the respondents indicated that they had learned to communicate, community kitchens appear to encourage and facilitate communication skills. Over time, leaders noticed that participants who were normally quite shy, had begun to assert themselves once they were comfortable in the kitchen group. This was a rewarding experience for the leaders to see a member express and make real decisions about what he/she wanted to cook. To further encourage communication, some kitchens would use “participatory decision-making” tools. When a decision had to be made, the leader would “go around the table” and ask each member to comment. This ensured that all participants had an opportunity to speak. Heckling was not allowed and it was hoped that this tool would give members the confidence to communicate their ideas.

**Self-help:**

Encouraging participants to learn to help themselves was another goal that leaders had identified. Leaders believe that community kitchens emphasise self-help because they are “an alternate method of feeding people in a dignified self directed manner.” According to one leader, “The difference with community kitchens is that it is not a handout. Nobody, even the poorest people want a handout. To be able to participate in producing the end product and being able to enjoy it is such a sense of accomplishment. It’s also a sense of giving back so they don’t feel like they are a burden to the system. They are actually contributing toward making their lives better. It’s about people coming together and creating community but also [about] being able to look after yourself in a way that you may not have been able to do in any other way.”
The Barclay Manor Bread Burners described a situation where self-help was used to empower a participant that had been disempowered. This member, an active participant within the group, had suffered a stroke and was left with partial use of his left arm. After recovering at home and learning to live with his paralysis, he returned to the community kitchen to inform his peers that he did not think he would be able to continue cooking with them; a thought that did not please him. The group however, thought otherwise. Although he could not work as quickly as before, they believed he could still contribute and he was given tasks that did not require the use of both hands (such as mixing ingredients). A sense of accomplishment was achieved which encouraged this member to continue to participate in the kitchen. He admits that this experience has also given him the confidence to take back his life in other areas as well.

In another case, a few of the participants in the Young Moms and Young Moms To Be community kitchen have mentioned to their coordinator that they are planning to further their education in careers related to food. A number of these young women have not finished high school but because of the skills learned and the confidence gained in the group, they believe they will succeed because they enjoy learning in the kitchen. Some of the women have already taken courses (ranging from income tax, to first aid and sewing) that were offered at Cedar Cottage Neighbourhood House where the kitchen is located. The program directors at the Neighbourhood House have made a point of letting the women know of other house activities. Exposure to the community kitchen has positively affected other areas of their lives.
Social Networks:

A common goal shared by many community kitchens is to provide an opportunity for participants to socialise and create networks. When asked why community kitchen leaders had formed their groups, the most common reason was to create an opportunity to socialise. As mentioned by one of the coordinators, “My goal is to get the girls out of the house and into a place where they can interact with each other because it is really hard for young women that are pregnant and/or parenting to have any kind of social life. This way they can. They come, they bring their kids, they’re interacting with each other, and they’re talking about their pregnancies, child care and everything. For some of them, this is the only opportunity they get to mingle with young women their own age. A community kitchen also provides consistency. Being pregnant, going through labour and having a baby is such an upheaval in these girls’ lives. Many people come and go [in their lives] but at least the girls can count on the community kitchen happening.”

The survey respondents echoed this objective. Although a number of the community kitchens in the case studies involve populations whose access to food is slightly insecure, only 9% of the respondents joined the kitchen for food while 13% wanted to save money (see Figure 5.3).

The most common answer was to learn (63%) while 44%, or just under half of the respondents joined for friendship. If the percentages for fun (6%) and friendship are combined, exactly half of the respondents participate in community kitchens for social reasons. In the survey, one of the participants mentioned that it was encouraging for her to be with other single mothers. “They are understanding. [It is] good to have someone there to give you support.”
Many of the leaders believe that social networks were created and the effects have been positive. When respondents were asked if they had connected with other participants, 63% said yes.

**Figure 5.3**
Why did you join this community kitchen group?

**Figure 5.4**
Have you connected with other participants? If so, how?
When asked how the members connected, there were many different answers that ranged from carpooling to exchanging parenting tips. A few respondents mentioned that they enjoyed participating in their community kitchen because they could bring their children (or grandchildren) to the group. As one participant said, “I learned new recipes and met other women and my granddaughter got to meet other kids her age.”

The coordinator at Jubilee House saw friendships develop outside of the kitchen. “They [participants] started to hang out together which is a great payoff. They have started to network outside of cooking.” This was also observed in the Pacific Hotel community kitchen where “people were living next to each other but didn’t know each other. A lot of people feel isolated and this [community kitchens] cured a lot of [the] loneliness they suffer. Some participants even got together and started switching recipes.” The Pacific Hotel coordinator also mentioned that after the kitchen shut down, some of the participants continued to cook and eat together. After a while, this activity was not sustained but it indicates the potential outcome community kitchens can have in participants’ lives.

Other skills

Along with acquiring communication, self-help and social networking skills, a number of other skills were mentioned in an open-ended question that asked participants to identify the skills that they had learned.

A variety of skills were identified and in one case, a participant said that with what she has learned, she would eventually like to volunteer for the community kitchens program. In this case, confidence was gained, but was not identified by the respondent.
5.1.2 Other gains

Along with learning life skills, community kitchen participants were also empowered in other ways by gaining confidence and self-esteem. Community kitchen leaders noticed in their participants, increased levels of confidence and self-esteem over time. As one leader said, "I have seen the girls go from being pregnant and insecure in the kitchen to making real decisions about what they want to cook and how they want to cook it. I have seen the girls' self-esteem and confidence go up as they develop more cooking skills. It has been a real positive experience."

Participants were asked to answer on a scale of one to five (one meaning no change and five meaning much better) if they felt better about feeding themselves and/or their families since joining their community kitchens.
Figure 5.6  Do you feel better about feeding yourself and/or your family since joining this community kitchen?

Close to half (44%) felt much better about feeding themselves and/or their families since joining their community kitchen. One respondent said that he had gained more confidence in cooking for his wife and others, and with the skills he has learned, he is supervising a senior men’s class.

5.1.3  Satisfaction

Overall, both the leaders and the participants appeared to be satisfied with their community kitchens. Leaders believed that participants were empowered by learning life skills which led to increased confidence and self-esteem. When asked about their community kitchens, survey respondents said that they were satisfied with their experience.

When asked to answer on a scale of one to five (one meaning not at all and five meaning completely), to what extent participants were satisfied with their community kitchen experience, exactly half of the participants were completely satisfied.
5.1.4 Presenting the Empowerment Framework

To observe the ways in which community kitchens empower their participants, the following framework (see Table 5.1 - The Empowerment Framework) has been created. It draws out the findings gathered through the interviews and surveys and is based on Rocha's (1997) ladder of empowerment as presented in Chapter Three.

From the table, it can be observed that most of the empowerment processes used by community kitchens in the case studies, were individually and interpersonally empowering. However, a few clarifications should be made. In profiling the Jubilee House and Pacific Hotel community kitchens, the researcher would say that both community kitchens provide their participants with an opportunity to learn increased coping ability but at a level that is not sustained. While participating in the community kitchen, a number of positive life changes were observed, but the participants in these two community kitchens really needed to cook
continuously in the community kitchens to sustain these positive effects (it should be noted that this was less obvious in Jubilee House than in the Pacific Hotel).

In the Pacific Hotel, a number of participants did make attempts to continue cooking as a group, after the kitchen closed. Without the coordinator’s intervention and the organisation of a formal community kitchen, however, the participants gradually lost momentum and reverted to their former lifestyles. In the Jubilee House community kitchen, the outcome was not so drastic but when the community worker stopped the kitchen (during the construction of the third Jubilee House), none of the members offered to take his place which suggests that members are dependent on the community worker to organise the kitchen. The researcher believes that in both community kitchens, a greater emphasis could be placed on teaching leadership skills and encouraging participants to take initiative.

Nevertheless, the researcher is aware that teaching such skills might not be possible in some kitchens (such as the Pacific Hotel) and that participation for these groups is enough of an achievement. As mentioned by Vancouver’s Community Kitchens Coordinator, “for marginalised groups, participation alone will increase the person’s confidence. From there, after a period of time, the person will acknowledge that he/she can actually get it together to participate in his/her own well being. After a period of time, the person will do just that and slowly he/she has been achieving what I think is the ultimate goal of community kitchens. Encouraging people to work towards taking full control of their well being.”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Kitchen</th>
<th>Empowerment Type</th>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Goal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Bread Burners</td>
<td>• individual</td>
<td>• life skills</td>
<td>• personal satisfaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• interpersonal</td>
<td>• (self-help, social networking)</td>
<td>• increased coping ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• organisational participation</td>
<td>• competence in negotiating daily environment</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Jubilee House</td>
<td>• individual</td>
<td>• life skills</td>
<td>• personal satisfaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• interpersonal</td>
<td>• (communication, self-help, social networking)</td>
<td>• increased coping ability (not sustainable)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• organisational participation</td>
<td>• community benefits</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• community receives services and goods</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kiwassa Canning Group</td>
<td>• individual</td>
<td>• life skills</td>
<td>• personal satisfaction</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>• interpersonal</td>
<td>• (self-help, social networking)</td>
<td>• increased coping ability</td>
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<td>• community receives services and goods</td>
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<td>The Pacific Hotel</td>
<td>• individual</td>
<td>• life skills</td>
<td>• personal satisfaction</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• interpersonal</td>
<td>• (self-help, social networking)</td>
<td>• increased coping ability (not sustainable)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• community receives services and goods</td>
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<tr>
<td>SLICK</td>
<td>• individual</td>
<td>• personal satisfaction</td>
<td>• personal satisfaction</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• interpersonal</td>
<td>• social networking</td>
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<td>• organisational participation</td>
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<td>Young Moms and Young Moms To Be</td>
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<td>YWCA Crabtree Corner</td>
<td>• individual</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• interpersonal</td>
<td>• organisational participation</td>
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On another note, it is interesting to observe that of all the community kitchens in the case studies, the Jubilee House and Pacific Hotel were the most active kitchens in reaching out to their respective communities. Other community kitchens also managed to create a sense of
community through their kitchens, but their efforts focused on activities (such as hiking or going for coffee) that involved their own groups. Community efforts made by Jubilee House and the Pacific Hotel involved people from their communities but who were not a part of the community kitchen, which shows greater community outreach. These efforts will be discussed further in a later section of this chapter.

5.2 The outcome of empowerment in community kitchens

As mentioned in Chapter Three, empowerment “is most often expressed as an increase in personal power” and is defined as “the process of increasing personal, interpersonal and political power so that individuals, families and communities can take action to improve their situations.” (Gutiérrez, 1995). A review of the findings show that community kitchens have the greatest impact on individuals. As an empowerment tool, community kitchens empower the individual by providing an opportunity for people to effect changes in their lives by learning to cope through a “process [that] consists of altering the emotional or physical state of the individual.” (Rocha, 1997). The empowerment processes discussed in the findings appear to exert emotional change. Individual empowerment is effective when used to address problems that “do not require alterations in systems, social relations, or structural changes (over which the individual has no control) for its success.” (Rocha, 1997). Individual empowerment rarely affects community change because it does not address social problems. Individual empowerment however, is an important element in community building because the relationship between the two is reciprocally enhancing. A community’s strength is often in the hands of its citizens, and empowered individuals are better able to effect community change.
As described by Kahn and Bender, "self-help groups are rarely community or neighborhood political action-oriented, at least at their inception. However, at later phases they may begin to emulate and reproduce some of these expressions via grassroots citizen-participation during the formative stages of social development." (Kahn and Bender, 1985).

5.3 The potential for using community kitchens to foster community development

Based on the findings, community kitchens as it currently operates has limited community development output but the concept has potential. A number of the community kitchens in the case studies are involved in activities that benefit the community. The Jubilee House and Pacific Hotel community kitchens are two examples.

The coordinator of the Jubilee House community kitchen said that operating the kitchen has benefited the Jubilee House community. As part of the community worker program, the coordinator of the kitchen (who is also the community worker) organises a large community dinner in the months that extend over five weeks (also known as the five week welfare month). The dinner is free for the residents but all the organisation and cooking is supposed to be done by the people who live in the Jubilee Houses. The dinners are a lot of work because approximately seventy or eighty people attend but there are often few volunteers. However, since the creation of the community kitchen, the kitchen participants have offered to cook the meal. Through their participation in the kitchen, they have gained confidence, are comfortable in the kitchen, and know that they have the skills needed to organise the dinner. Eventually, the members of the community kitchen began to volunteer for any event that required food. Their participation and individual empowerment has benefited the community as a whole.
This spinoff was not expected by the kitchen coordinator. "The transition was surprising. To see them become really comfortable in their group and then offer to come and volunteer for other events. I never would have imagined that this would occur."

The Pacific Hotel had a similar effect. In their case, the participants offered to prepare Christmas dinner for the residents in the SRO. The coordinator for this community kitchen has a number of other ideas. Eventually, he would like to implement a program where participants cook an extra meal and share it with seniors living in the SROs. Many of the seniors have become "shut-in" and have no motivation to leave the hotel to access the food bank or stand in line at a soup kitchen. If participants shared their meals, the seniors would be fed and the participants would feel self-reliant. The coordinator (who at one point had also lived in a SRO) believes that many participants suffer from the "handout phenomenon", where everything in the downtown eastside is a handout. Since the community kitchen began operating, he has noticed a boost in many of the participants' self-esteem. Implementing this idea would further increase self-esteem because the participants would be helping others and themselves.

5.4 The role of Vancouver's Community Kitchens Coordinator in community development

The Vancouver Community Kitchens Coordinator (VCKC) holds an important position and can play an important role in fostering community empowerment and development. If we follow Rocha's (1997) description, the VCKC appears to occupy a mediated empowerment position where empowerment in the form of knowledge and services are provided by the

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2 The acronym VCKC will be used in this section to distinguish Vancouver's Community Kitchens Coordinator from the coordinator and/or leader of each individual community kitchen.
“expert” (in this case it is the VCKC) and used by the community and/or the individuals within it.

At present, the VCKC is primarily a resource person who connects Vancouver’s kitchens to each other and to the larger community through a community kitchen newsletter. Other responsibilities include organising workshops for people who would like to start a community kitchen and for leaders whose kitchens are already in place. Workshops cover a number of topics that range from: organising a community kitchen, to food safety and canning foods properly, to cooking ethnic dishes.

A number of community kitchens would like to see the VCKC organise workshops on how to access funding, grants and other monetary sources. A fundraising scheme is currently being put together by the VCKC, local kitchens, and Karen Barnaby, a highly esteemed chef from Vancouver. The production of a Community Kitchens cookbook with recipes from local kitchens is underway. Tentative plans involve Whitecap Publishing. If the plans go through, Whitecap Publishing has offered Community Kitchens all its services at cost (including distribution across Canada); profits will be divided and/or shared by Vancouver’s community kitchens.

The Vancouver Community Kitchens Program is currently revisiting the program’s goals and assessing the direction that they believe the program should move toward. Cooking equipment is the main expense when starting a kitchen and once these supplies have been purchased, the VCKC would like to see the participants contribute a few dollars toward ingredients. When cooking in bulk, a little bit of money can go a long way (unless gourmet foods are being prepared). As an example, the researcher attended a workshop with twelve other
people, and four recipes (corn bread, chuckwagon casserole, vegetarian lasagne, and sweet and sour lentils) were prepared in four hours to feed twenty people (with leftovers). A few of the ingredients were purchased in bulk (for example, the lentils) and the cost of the meal came to $65.30. Divided among twenty people, the cost for each person is $3.27 for a very complete meal. By simplifying the meal even more (by cooking only one entrée) the costs can be further reduced. The VCKC believes that by contributing a dollar, participants are empowered by knowing that they are helping to make their kitchens more sustainable. By putting this measure into place, kitchens are also less likely to fold if funding is pulled.

A review of the community development principles that Vancouver’s Community Kitchens subscribes to reveals that these principles should be revisited and reassessed. As mentioned in Chapter Two, the CD principles that guide the program are:

- to increase the ability of individuals and the community to participate effectively in the decisions that affect their lives;
- to increase the ability of community members to identify and act on common issues;
- to ensure that the community or group develops independence and ownership over the initiative.

As discussed previously, it appears from the case studies that community kitchens fulfil to some extent the first principle. As noted in the questionnaires, community kitchens do increase the ability of individuals (but not the community) to participate in the decisions that affect their lives. The last two issues are related to community empowerment and development which, as stated before, community kitchens have yet to develop. A network connecting
community kitchens might encourage participants to think about community development which would facilitate the development of the last two principles.

As mentioned in Chapter Three, Christenson, Fendley and Robinson define community development as the betterment of people through "public policies, governmental actions, economic activities, institution building and other types of actions that not only affect people but can be affected by people. It focuses on the humanistic elements involved in change and how such change contributes to social and economic well-being." (Christenson, Fendley and Robinson, 1989).

Based on the above definition, a network would greatly enhance the ability of community kitchens to contribute to community development. In Peru, community development issues, such as transportation and access to clean running water, are addressed through the Federation of Self-Managed Popular Kitchens (FCPA). The network is effective because it provides support and strength in numbers. By using the network, community kitchens are better able to organise themselves to engage in collective action. The creation of a network would be of benefit for community kitchens in Vancouver. While a program exists, links between the kitchens are weak. A network could be used by kitchens to support each other, and provide the community kitchens program with a voice to discuss and pursue community development issues.

5.5 Constraints facing attempts to using community kitchens as an empowerment tool

Reviewing the case studies reveals that certain qualities need to be in place for community kitchens to be successful as empowerment tools and as effective organisations. The qualities identified were:
A group of committed individuals: A group of committed individuals is required from both participants and volunteers (if volunteers, such as Neighbourhood House Helpers, are used). The Jubilee House Community Kitchen uses a volunteer and the coordinator mentioned that her contribution ensured the success of the kitchen because he could rely on her. The Downtown Eastside Community Kitchens Program, did not have reliable volunteers and this affected the operation of the kitchens negatively because volunteers would not show up or would forget to do things that needed to be done. Likewise, with respect to the participants, a committed group of individuals is also necessary. When key informants were asked what was needed to create a successful community kitchen, a core group of committed participants was the most common answer, because their presence help to create solidarity which ensured the continuance of the kitchen. This answer was given by all the community kitchens, regardless of the social makeup of the group.

It is important to note that in some cases, a committed group might also lead to exclusion. One of the survey respondents had joined her community kitchen after it had been operating for a few months. While this person enjoyed the community kitchen, she sometimes felt excluded.

Consistency: For some groups, consistency is an important factor. In the Young Moms and Young Moms To Be community kitchen, the coordinator knew that if the kitchen cooked only once or twice a month, the participants would forget. To counter this problem, she decided to operate the kitchen on a weekly basis. In some ways, this made the kitchen simpler to organise (a routine could be established) and it was easier for the women to remember. This consistency
helped to develop stability which encouraged participants to attend. The women felt secure in the community kitchen because they knew what to expect. In this particular kitchen, consistency was very important because it developed trust and established a pattern, which made it easier for the participants to remember.

**funding:** The operation of some community kitchens depends entirely upon funding. While there are a number of kitchens within Vancouver which are self-sufficient financially, kitchens such as the Pacific Hotel and Jubilee House are reliant on funding because their participants are on social assistance. Other kitchens which have paying members also rely on the Vancouver Food Bank. A number of community kitchens have had to stop cooking because they were not able to secure funding. The Vancouver Community Kitchens' Coordinator is presently assisting groups by helping them seek alternatives and solutions to this constraint.

**location:** Location is an important element for most community kitchens. In SLICK, one participant mentioned that the only complaint she had with her community kitchen, was the commute. In Young Moms and Young Moms To Be, access to public transit was a factor because many participants did not own cars. For the Downtown Eastside Community Kitchens Program, careful consideration had to be given to the location because certain hotels are in areas that are known for supplying alcohol and/or drugs. In general, however, if a location is not easily accessible, the kitchen would be constrained because it would be difficult for members to attend.
participation: An important factor in community kitchens is participation. It is important for the coordinator and other members to ensure that everyone is participating equally. One respondent in the questionnaires mentioned that her community kitchen focused too much on North American or European food. Giving this participant an opportunity to select a recipe would solve this dilemma. As mentioned by another participant, “People need a chore or job that they can do. Otherwise people are bored. A good community kitchen is one where there is participation and learning.”

5.5.1 The Role of Leadership

Leadership is an aspect of community kitchens that because of its importance and significance, warrants some discussion on its own. In any group, a sense of leadership is necessary in some form. As described by Katrina Shields, “it inevitably emerges in groups no matter how egalitarian the ideology is . . . If leadership roles are not acknowledged overtly, they inevitably happen covertly or indirectly.” (Shields, 1994). Community kitchens require a lot of coordination and involve many tasks and a leader (or leaders) is sometimes needed to ensure that tasks are delegated and completed so that the group can cook.

Naturally, there are good and bad forms of leadership. Good leadership could be defined as “a willingness to think about the group as a whole and to offer some direction and influence in helping the group meet its goals.” (Shields, 1994). In other words, good leadership encourages and motivates whereas bad leadership tends to dominate. An effective leader has the ability to make the impossible happen. In some community kitchens, funding secures the kitchen’s
existence but it is the leadership (by an individual or shared by the group) which ensures the kitchen is sustained.

The Kiwassa Canning Group is an example. Until recently, this community kitchen was funded with canning supplies from a canning company. With the loss in supplies, the kitchen has had to dip into their savings to purchase their canning goods. A situation arose where the group members wanted to make some jam. In the past, the group could rely on their savings to purchase the extra ingredients but with the loss in funding, the kitchen had to act more frugally. The group discovered some leftover blackberries but there was not enough to make a full batch of jam. Blackberries were in season, and a participant suggested that she could pick a basket full of berries to contribute to the supply. Other members said that they would contribute as well. The following week, the group was curious to see if enough berries had been picked because it would represent the group’s commitment. In the end, enough berries were picked for each member, and the group not only survived the test but in the process, found a solution to their problem.

Leadership in many instances is also about desirability and the ability of either one or a few people to translate this desire into action. Leaders are ordinary people who have a vision for their organisations and communities and are able to inspire others and help them understand the potential of change. They have a propensity for action and an enabling capacity that allows them to delegate, empower, recognise and translate the “gifts” of individuals into positive energy for change (Farquhar, 1994.).

In linking leadership to empowerment, it should be emphasised that within a group, a sense of leadership must be shared. A problem in some organisations is that leadership
predominates, but it has very little following. As mentioned by Miller, Rein and Levitt (1995), empowerment in this type of setting is remote and weak in all forms. A fine balance exists between those who lead and those who follow. A review of the top 50 model communities in the world by Friends of the United Nations revealed self empowerment and leadership as common elements in the communities.

“For these communities a predominate theme was empowerment - the ability to participate and take action on decisions which affect their lives. Empowerment was not conceded from the outside, but was self-help. Empowerment was characterized as beginning with knowledge through education or consciousness raising. It required the solidarity of the group for support, and access to resources, including money. Financial aid alone, however, was not sufficient for empowerment. . . . Sometimes the vision was provided by a strong leader, sometimes it came from the group itself. It became clear that individuals alone could not effect the needed changes, collective action was required . . . a new form of leadership emerged - leadership with people rather than leadership from the top down.” (Seymoar and Ponce de Léon, 1997).

5.6 Opportunities in using community kitchens as an empowerment tool

There are many opportunities in using community kitchens as an empowerment tool. During the key informant interviews, each leader mentioned that the difference with community kitchens compared to similar programs, is that it is not a handout.

The community worker and kitchen coordinator for the Jubilee House Housing Society, believes that community kitchens could be used to train volunteers. He mentioned that granting agencies, while funding programs, always want to know if people will be employed. He would like to see granting agencies and the government support programs similar to community kitchens, to train individuals as volunteers. In his words, “There will always be people that are unemployed. What is important is whether or not a program can provide a person with skills that they in turn can contribute to the community. People can contribute on a volunteer basis.” The
population that he deals with are not employable but do have the time to volunteer, which would benefit both the community and the government when social cuts are made. Governments are expecting agencies such as the United Way, to pick up the slack, but there are fewer people available to volunteer. While his population might not be considered the "ideal" volunteer, they can still contribute and this would foster both empowerment and community development.

Opportunities were also identified in the surveys. A number of participants mentioned that they would like to connect with other kitchens to create a sense of community. Creating a network would enable kitchens to share recipes, seek joint funding, and discuss community development issues.

5.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, the results from the case studies were presented and analysed. From the research, it was observed that community kitchens are effective at empowering individuals and do so in a number of ways. Community kitchens tend to empower their participants by teaching life skills and by enhancing confidence and self-esteem. Participants mentioned that they gained many benefits such as learning to communicate, becoming self-reliant and increasing their social networks. However, it was determined from the case studies that community kitchens do not effectively contribute to community development. The empowerment processes that community kitchens are engaged in tend to focus on the individual because they effect changes in an individual’s life. Nevertheless, individual empowerment is important to community development because the development of communities occurs through the efforts of individuals. The creation of a community kitchens network was suggested to enhance community

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3 Community development issues were actually mentioned in the questionnaires.
development. Linking community kitchens to each other provides the program with a voice that can be strengthened over time, and used to address community issues. The Vancouver Community Kitchens Coordinator plays an important role by connecting the city’s community kitchens, but these links are weak and they need to be formalised.

The next chapter reviews the major findings from this research. Planning and policy implications are highlighted and areas for further research will be discussed.
Chapter Six
Community Kitchens in Vancouver: Implications and Conclusion

6.0 Introduction

The purpose of this thesis was to explore the ways in which community kitchens could be used as an empowerment tool and whether they can be used to enhance community development. The research focused on community kitchens in Vancouver where the number of kitchens has doubled in the last two years. The first part of this final chapter reviews the major findings from the research. The second half tries to identify the planning and policy implications related to using community kitchens as an empowerment tool and their potential to enhance communities. Further areas of research are also discussed.

6.1 Major Findings

From the case studies, the researcher observed that community kitchens do empower their participants but through individual empowerment. As described in Chapter Three, there are five types of empowerment ranging from the individual to the community. It is important to emphasise that one form of empowerment is not necessarily better or more desired than another, but the outcome of each empowerment type will vary.

With this in mind, community kitchens are individually empowering in a number of ways and they achieve this empowerment through a person’s participation. Community kitchens are a form of self-help and a participant’s contribution to the community kitchen is a contribution to his/her own well-being. In the case studies, individual empowerment processes focused on learning and increasing levels of confidence and self-esteem.
These processes are interrelated. Through the community kitchen, participants were taught life skills (such as communication, self-reliance and socialisation) and having this knowledge encouraged confidence and self-esteem. Increased confidence and self-esteem means that participants are better able to make decisions about their lives. In turn, the ability to make decisions contributes to a person’s sense of control in his/her life. Having this sense of control contributes to community development because individuals need to have a sense of control in their lives before they are able to make decisions on other issues, such as those related to community.

Through the research, it was discovered that community kitchens as they currently operate, do not contribute significantly to community development. This does not mean that community kitchens do not have the potential to be used in community development, but they have a limited community output. As mentioned previously, this is because individual empowerment does not effect community change because it focuses on the individual. However, a number of empowerment theorists have said that for socio-political empowerment to occur, “individual transformation is theoretically and practically important.” (Rocha, 1997).

Community development has been defined as the betterment of people through “public policies, governmental actions, economic activities, institution building and other types of activities . . .” (Christenson, Fendley and Robinson, 1989). Community kitchens can be used to contribute to community development by developing their propensity to effect change through community outreach. However, it should be noted that there are differentiated principles that is dependent on the community kitchen. Depending on the social makeup of the group, some community kitchens are more internal or inward-looking than others. In terms of community
development, certain community kitchens reach internally to develop the empowerment skills of their participants and the community while other kitchens reach out externally to the greater community at large. The present focus of community kitchens in Vancouver is on the individual and there is little emphasis placed on the community. As mentioned in the findings, a network of community kitchens could be used to develop communities. At present, there is no public forum for community kitchens to discuss community issues and the creation of a network would enable kitchens to tackle issues collectively.

Certain qualities should be in place within community kitchens if they are used to develop communities. While researching the case studies, common qualities were observed that appeared to contribute to the success or effectiveness of using community kitchens as an empowerment tool. The qualities identified were: a group of committed individuals, consistency, funding, leadership, location, and participation. Of these qualities, leadership seemed to be of particular importance. In a preliminary review of community kitchens, the two factors that appeared to contribute the most to a kitchen’s downfall were a lack of funding and leadership.

Leadership was of greater importance. In cases where funding was insecure, if the leadership was strong, the kitchen would continue to operate whereas if the leadership was weak, the kitchen would cease to exist, making it ineffective at both empowering individuals and developing communities.

6.2 Planning and Policy Implications

This thesis has shown the value of using community kitchens as agents of empowerment. Although community kitchens are more empowering at the individual level, empowered
individuals and their actions can lead to empowered communities. The researcher believes that community kitchens have the potential to become empowered organisations to influence community development, and a network to link kitchens would facilitate this activity. In its current state, a number of community kitchens are searching for funding, etc. independent from each other. A sharing of information needs to occur to prevent granting agencies from being flooded with requests and the researcher believes that collective action would strengthen funding proposals as well as providing a forum for kitchens to discuss community issues.

A concern is that a number of community kitchens are moving away from financial self-sufficiency. The Vancouver Community Kitchens Coordinator and the Advisory Board are planning to revisit the goals and objectives of community kitchens. It is their belief that community kitchens need to be financially self-sufficient, to be empowered organisations. Many community kitchens are reliant on funding, and to effectively teach the principles of self-help and sufficiency, the organisation should reflect its own lesson.

Planners can play a role in helping these organisations become more self-sufficient. There is a desire in community kitchens to grow community gardens. In kitchens where the participants are unemployed or underemployed, members could use their time to cultivate vegetables for the kitchen and for resale. Planners can facilitate this process by providing unused greenspace where community gardens can be grown. Likewise, the planning department could ensure that marginalised areas within the city, have locations where people can cook. In the downtown eastside, many of the SROs do not have any type of kitchen facility in either the rooms or the hotels. A bylaw or regulation that requires the construction of some form of kitchen should be examined to provide the population living in the SROs with an opportunity to cook. A
person can be empowered by knowing that they have options and a choice between standing in a line or cooking at home.

6.3 Areas for Further Research.

The research in this thesis evaluated community kitchens as an empowerment tool within community development. The ways in which community kitchens empower, and the opportunities and constraints they faced, was also examined. Nevertheless, there are a number of areas that can be further researched and investigated. Among them are:

1. A full evaluation. This thesis evaluated only a few community kitchens out of the forty that are currently in operation. To assess the full impact of community kitchens on participants' lives, a complete assessment should be undertaken.

2. Financing alternatives. Community kitchens that are being used by marginalised populations are currently being funded through a number of public and private granting agencies. In a society where social cutbacks are the reality, alternate options need to be explored to help community kitchens start their operations, and eventually become financially self-sufficient.

3. A temporal study. In this thesis, a snapshot of selected community kitchens was conducted in the research. To fully appreciate and understand the use of community kitchens as an empowerment tool, a latitudinal study should be undertaken where the researcher would follow
the history of a kitchen (or kitchens) and its members to observe the impact of the kitchen in empowering its participants through time.

4. Links between community kitchens and the city’s social planning department. Links between community kitchens and the city are virtually non-existent. Further research should be undertaken to forge a relationship that would be of benefit to both community kitchens and the city.

5. Organisational empowerment. The strength of community kitchens is their ability to empower individuals. Methods and tools need to be considered to tap into the potential community kitchens have in empowering the society in which they operate.

6.4 Scholarly contributions

In this thesis, the possibility of using community kitchens as a link between empowerment and community development was explored. Through the research, it was discovered that the strength of the link depends on the type of empowerment being used. Individual empowerment tends to have a lesser effect on communities whereas community empowerment exerts more. This thesis also contributes to the literature by assessing what qualities need to be in place for organisations such as community kitchens, to be used as effective empowerment tools.
Bibliography


Appendix I
Key Informants

Kerry Armstrong
Jubilee House Community Kitchens

Camie Jolin
West End Seniors’ Network Community Kitchen

Kitty Kuk
Frog Hollow Neighbourhood House Multicultural Cooking Club

Ivor Parry
Barclay Manor Bread Burners Community Kitchen

Andrea Robertson
SLICK (St. James Ladies’ International Community Kitchen)

Karin Scheurs
Young Moms and Young Moms To Be Community Kitchen

Rogan Sinclair
The Pacific Hotel Community Kitchen

Ellen Wickberg
Kiwassa Canning Group
Appendix II
Key Informant Questions

1. Name of your Community Kitchen.

2. Your position.

3. How many years have you been a part of this Community Kitchen?

4. Briefly describe how your Community Kitchen was formed and why.

5. What has your experience in this Community Kitchen been like?

6. To your knowledge, do you know of anyone who became employed as a result of his/her participation in a Community Kitchen?

7. What do you think is the most important skill the participants in your Community Kitchen have learned?

8. What other skills have participants gained through their participation in this Community Kitchen group?

9. How long did it take for the members in the Community Kitchen to "gel" or become a group? What was the turning point and what factors created or affected this turning point?

10. How do you define a "good" Community Kitchen?

11. What do you think needs to be in place to create a successful Community Kitchen?

12. What is successful about this Community Kitchen?

13. What needs to be improved? How do you think your Community Kitchen could improve? What are some of the problems or difficulties you have experienced in this Community Kitchen?

14. Do you think location is important to the success of a Community Kitchen?

15. What are some resources you would like to be able to share with other Community Kitchen groups?

16. What other community projects is this Community Kitchen involved with?
17. Why do you think people participate in Community Kitchens? What experiences or skills do you think they hope to gain?

18. Does your Community Kitchen receive funding? If yes, what is the source of funding? Describe your present funding situation. Is it secure?

19. How has your funding situation made an impact on the operation of your Community Kitchen?

20. Which of the following processes does your Community Kitchen practice? participatory decision-making decisions reached by consensus decisions reached by voting keeping a logbook
Appendix III
Vancouver Community Kitchens 1998 Questionnaire

1. Why did you join this Community Kitchen group?

2. On a scale of 1-5, to what extent have you been satisfied with your Community Kitchen experience?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>not at all</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>completely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

3. Do you feel better about feeding yourself and/or your family since joining this Community Kitchen?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>no change</th>
<th>much better</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. In this Community Kitchen, is attention given to encouraging leadership skills among members?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>no encouragement</th>
<th>high degree of encouragement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. How well does the group communicate with each other?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>communicates poorly</th>
<th>communicates well</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. How comfortable do you feel about expressing your feelings, even feelings about people in the group?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>unsafe</th>
<th>very safe</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
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</table>

7. Are different perspectives (e.g. age, ethnic, cultural and class perspectives) respected and included?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>little respect</th>
<th>lots of respect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8. Are conflicts handled effectively?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>conflict handled ineffectively</th>
<th>conflict handled effectively</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9. What skills do you think you've learned from participating in this Community Kitchen group?

__________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________

10. How long do you feel it took for your Community Kitchen to come together as a group? Was there an event that brought the group together?

__________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________

11. Please finish the following sentences:
   a. What is good about being part of this Community Kitchen for me is/are...
      ________________________________________________________________________________

   b. What is hard about being part of this Community Kitchen for me is/are...
      ________________________________________________________________________________

   c. What I would like help with is/are...
      ________________________________________________________________________________

12. Have you connected with other participants? If so, how? For example, for coffee, to carpool, etc.

________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________

13. Are there any stories about your Community Kitchen that you would like to share?

________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________

14. Please make any suggestions you have about Community Kitchens below, or call the coordinator, Andrea Taylor, at 254-8300.

________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________
This questionnaire is anonymous, but we would like to know if you are: (please circle)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>under 20</td>
<td>20-25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>31-35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-40</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>56-60</td>
<td>61-65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>over 65</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

Thank you for participating in our survey.