



Name of Organization: Dunbar Residents Association

Name of Project: The Fireweed Club

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What happened last year:

The bulk of our 2021 energy and resources went to building the wheelchair-height garden bed and bulletin boards at Balaclava Park, so that older adults and people with disabilities can participate in garden activities and build social connections. With support from the mentoring relationship that we developed with Riley Park Community Garden, the Balaclava Pollinator Garden was fully planted in 2021, and with the addition of the woodwork, the Balaclava Garden now exudes warmth and permanency, which we anticipate will lead to greater social interaction and engagement this year. Many seniors live near the park and even though covid social restrictions were still in place, neighbours felt safe enough (outdoors) to stop for conversation while keeping their distance, and we began to see many 'regulars' at the park who come for a walk or visited the playground with their grandchildren.

Balaclava also signed up 4 artists to lead eco-arts activities: Camille Gingras: performing artist; Robin Ripley: multi-media eco-artist; Lori Snyder: Metis herbalist and Indigenous educator; and Laura Lee Coles from IMAPON, a multi-media artist group. Due to the ongoing pandemic social restrictions, followed immediately by the heat wave, hosting events at the park was not possible during the summer. Instead, two eco-arts workshops took place at Aberthau Mansion (West Point Grey Community Centre) in the Fall of 2021. These workshops attracted a small yet eager group of 5 to 8 seniors from Dunbar, Kitsilano and South Granville. There was sincere interest in the workshop topics and the artists themselves. And seeds of friendship were evident. It is unknown if any of the participants were formally diagnosed with dementia but at least 3 participants had a relation to the dementia community.

Challenges and opportunities: One intention of the 2021 DRA project was to build up digital and social media capabilities. This was partially completed in that we had a UBC student via the Centre for Community Engaged Learning (CCEL) complete audio-video content of the DRA Salmonberry days history, and interviews with Salmonberry days founders. However, the content was not transferred to podcast/website as intended, as the DRE has lacked capacity in its communication committee through 2021. Fortunately, we had two new board members join the team this winter and are hopeful that the Digital Communications work can be resumed and completed in 2022.

What's envisioned for next year?

For the 2022 season we would like to amplify the work started at Balaclava Park and build deeper relationships with the artists who started working with us in 2021. Also incorporating performing movement and musical artists, we envision building on the Aberthau Mansion eco-arts workshops, and plan to host bi-weekly eco-arts workshops between May and September with a wrap up celebration at the beginning of October.

We will host a kick off planning session in April, followed by a pollinator seed and plant swap later in the spring. Once the Balaclava Park storage room is secured, we will be able to have all our tents, tables, and outdoor games equipment readily accessible on site, so that the Fireweed Lounge can be set up on sunny days between May and September.