



taking steps

A collection of images shared by mothers in
Vancouver's Downtown Eastside community



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THE UNIVERSITY
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PREFACE

by Dr. Francine Darroch

Taking Steps: Warrior Women's Wellness was co-created through community-based participatory research in partnership with the University of British Columbia, YWCA Crabtree Corner, and women living and/or accessing services in the Downtown Eastside (DTES) of Vancouver.

The groundwork for this program and research began in 2016. Our preliminary research findings demonstrated a strong desire for physical activity programming and resources, but a dearth of programs that met the unique needs of pregnant and/or parenting women in the DTES. Under the guidance of a community-advisory board, we endeavoured to co-create a trauma- and violence-informed physical activity (TVIPA) program. The women-led programming includes a weekly walking group and introduction to new physical activities led by community partners (such as yoga, non-contact boxing, dance, strength training, and soccer).

We have just completed our first year of the *Taking Steps* program. We have accomplished a lot in the last year, including

connecting over 70 women with programming, the creation of a TVIPA tool-kit, run numerous TVIPA training sessions, and developed a resource book for existing physical activity programs in the DTES. We have partnered with other physical-activity focused organizations and harnessed the power of connections to inform local women about programs and resources available. As we continue to take steps forward, we will carry on our programming, offer new physical activity options, and aim to scale up our services to support more women. The community advisory board and participants will continue to lead this work; communities are powerful agents of change, especially communities of mothers!

As we continue our work, we challenge other organizations to offer and/or enhance physical activity programs to meet the needs of pregnant and/or parenting women. We will continue to address the social determinants of inequities in physical activity at the individual, organizational, and structural levels. Access to physical activity is a fundamental human right. ■

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Critical Research in Health & Healthcare Inequities (CRHHI)

CRHHI is a research unit operating as a resource for the UBC School of Nursing, Faculty of Applied Science, the University and wider community. We offer an intellectual space to draw together those interested in critical inquiry regarding health and health care inequities. Our purpose is to foster a vibrant and supportive research environment for students, faculty, and others engaged in such inquiry.

YWCA Metro Vancouver & Crabtree Corner

Since its inception in 1897, YWCA Metro Vancouver has worked tirelessly to achieve women's equality. Today, we are one of Metro Vancouver's largest and most diversified non-profit organizations. Our holistic, integrated programs and services help lift women and families out of poverty, provide the best start for children, and create new opportunities for education, employment, and leadership.

Crabtree Corner houses a range of programs and services under one roof to help women and families living in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside feel healthier, more connected and empowered to make positive choices. From transitional housing for expecting and new mothers with substance use issues to child care, parenting programs, a community kitchen and violence prevention, Crabtree meets women and families where they're at, providing them with the support to move forward in life.

ABOUT

OUR TEAM



Dr. Francine Darroch is a Banting Postdoctoral fellow in the UBC School of Nursing and will be an Assistant Professor at Carleton University as of May, 2019. Her feminist participatory action research focuses on social determinants of health and creating equitable access to physical activity. Francine is the principal investigator for *Taking Steps: Warrior Women's Wellness* program. Francine is mom to two little girls, Sasha and Spencer.



Dr. Colleen Varcoc is a professor in the University of British Columbia School of Nursing. Her research focuses on violence and inequity, with an emphasis on both structural and interpersonal violence. Her current research includes studies to promote equity (including cultural safety, harm reduction, and trauma- and violence-informed care) in primary health care and Emergency and studies of health interventions for women who have experienced violence.



Jessica Webb has been working with women and children in the Downtown Eastside since graduating from the University of British Columbia in 2013. She currently works as an Aboriginal Infant Development Consultant at YWCA Crabtree Corner and as a Research Assistant with UBC School of Nursing. She is a co-founder of *Taking Steps: Warrior Women's Wellness* program.



Robyn Fabiosa is of mixed Cree and Scottish heritage, granddaughter of a residential school survivor and member of Frog Lake First Nation. Robyn graduated with a Bachelor's Degree from MacEwan University (Edmonton, AB) in 2009 and has worked with various non profit organizations in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, as well as, her Research Assistant work with the UBC School of Nursing. Robyn recently relocated to her home Treaty 6 Territory of Edmonton, AB.



Cleo Neville was born and raised in East Vancouver, completing her BA in Health and Community Services with the University of Victoria in 2018. Since 2010 she has worked in the areas of mental health and substance use in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside and has been a Research Assistant in the UBC School of Nursing for 2 years. Cleo recently moved to Peniticon, BC, where she is Manager of Harm Reduction Services with the South Okanagan Women in Need Society.



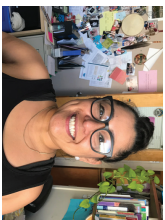
Gabriela Gonzalez Montaner was born and raised in Vancouver, BC. She is currently completing a Masters of Public Health with a focus in social inequities at Simon Fraser University and works as a Research Assistant with UBC School of Nursing. Gabriela has previously worked in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside community in various capacities focusing on mental health and homelessness.



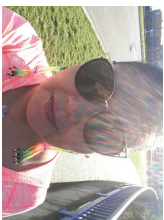
Jen Muranetz is a documentary filmmaker and accomplished video journalist with more than eight years' experience producing, writing, shooting, and editing news-worthy, original content. She is also the founder of Estoria Productions, a video production company specializing in people-focused storytelling. Jen was first introduced to the *Taking Steps* program as a childminder before going on to direct and produce a 14-minute short documentary about the program.



Michelle Paquette is of mixed Cree and European ancestry. She lives and is raising her four children on the traditional and unceded lands of the Squamish, Musqueam, and Tsil'et-Wautuh Peoples. She is currently attending Langara College with a focus on Indigenous Studies. Michelle is happy to be giving back to her community through her work with the Advisory Board.



Lucy Maria Giron is the mother of two boys. She has been working for YWCA Crabtree Corner as Kitchen Coordinator for the last fourteen years. She loves that Taking Steps motivates the women in our community to practice self-care and have a healthy lifestyle. Maria's positive outlook and big voice always keeps us motivated as we walk around the neighbourhood.



Crystal Katcheech is a mother of four and lives in the Downtown Eastside. She was born in Saskatchewan and is Saulteaux, Cree and Lakota Sioux. She has accessed Crabtree Corner with all of her children. Crystal's killer sense of humour and kind spirit are at the heart of Taking Steps and the Advisory Board.



Jennifer Ellenberger was born in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. She lives in the community with her husband and children. She has been attending programs at Crabtree and Sheway for eight years and has been an active participant in Taking Steps. She joined the Advisory Board in 2018. Jennifer is a strong advocate for the importance of physical activity within her community and for her family.



Sarah VanBalkom lives in Vancouver with her children. She has been involved with Taking Steps and the Advisory Board since it all got started. She has provided a great deal of guidance throughout this process and we value her input tremendously. She is also a wonderful friend to many of the women at Crabtree.

INTRODUCTION

by Jessica Webb

Pictures have always played a big part in the *Taking Steps: Warrior Women's* wellness program. How could we not be inspired to capture a beautiful sunny view of the North Shore mountains from Crab Park? Or adorable moments with the children who join our weekly walks? Or the excitement of being in a real boxing studio for the first time?

As we were approaching the one year mark of the research process, we wanted to consider alternative ways of engaging the clients to record their experiences in the program and also critically reflect on these experiences and the conditions in which they live.

PhotoVoice is a term that was originally coined by Wang (1999) whereby individuals identify, represent and aim to describe their communities through photography. We chose to add a PhotoVoice component to our work as we thought it would be great tool to see "through the eyes" of the women of YWCA Crabtree Corner and their experiences of living in and around Vancouver's Downtown Eastside.

There were many laughs and a few tears shed as participants shared their own stories behind each of their photographs. We were so inspired by their beauty, intelligence, and depth that we decided to gather all of them into a book and share it with the rest of the community.

This book is a collection of a few of the photos and quotes that came in through the PhotoVoice process, some of our own photographs, and a few stills from our documentary *Taking Steps: Reclaiming Wellness Through Trauma and Violence-Informed Physical Activity Programming*.

As a co-founder of this program it is my honour to share some of the magic that I got to experience walking alongside these incredible women and their children every week. We hope you enjoy and that this work inspires to you take what steps you can to make physical activity accessible for all. ■

Having a daughter is like,
seriously the most beautiful
thing in the world because
I can teach her to be a strong
woman as well, and I'm being
an example to her by doing
what I'm doing every day.



Rather than physical activity as a means to getting fit, I think it's been more helping keep balance in my life, using that as an outlet.

That is how my thinking has really changed in the last six months to maybe even a year, about physical activity. Before it was to work out and try to get in better shape, now it's just really more about feeling better.



I really notice that if I miss that opportunity to come to the group, I miss out on the community, I miss out on the movement, and then I miss out on that little boost of feeling better through my day as well.



There's always shit on the street, barf on the street, just drug paraphernalia on the street, and users all of the time.

That's what I really like about our group is that we're all walking together. It's not just two people, there's at least four or five of us and sometimes it's like ten of us and that's just the mums. And then there's the kids and stuff.



Challenges in general for me are the kids, that's why I have to incorporate them in a lot of the stuff that I do because I don't have childcare. Otherwise, I would take the boxing classes at night. There are lots of things. That's the solution, obviously childcare.



It's important to be physically fit and active just for yourself especially because if you're not healthy physically and mentally, how are you supposed to be able to be there for your kids?

They're so active all the time, you got to be able to keep up. And just your quality of life and their quality of life goes down dramatically so I think it's just a really important part for yourself and as a parent to be physically active.



POSITIVE VIBES

by Crystal Katcheech

Hi my name is Crystal Katcheech. I am a mother of four and I live in the Downtown Eastside. I was born in Saskatchewan and I am Saulteaux, Cree and Lakota Sioux. I've lived in Vancouver off and on throughout my life. My Mom was the one who first introduced me to Crabtree. She used to take my brothers and sister to the daycare when they were young. I've been a part of Crabtree Corner since my kids were born in some way or another.

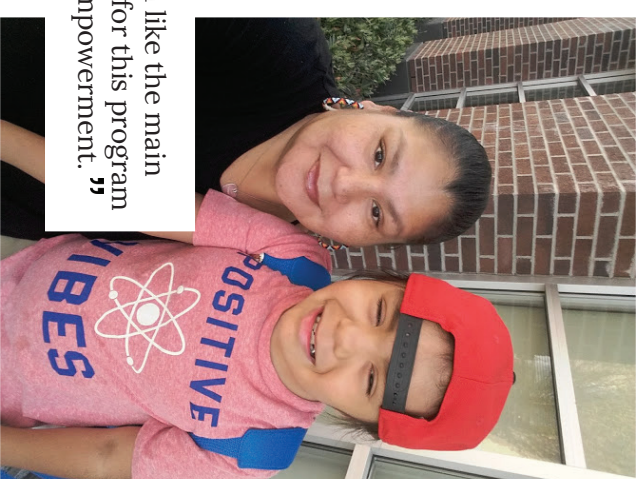
I take as many opportunities as I can when it comes to groups and programs because for me, it's all about learning, meeting new people, and making friends. So, when this Taking Steps program started I was excited not only to start working on my health but also to meet new moms and new people. I thought, "maybe put a name to the face I've seen around the neighbourhood so many times?"

It's been a year now and I've loved every part of it and I look forward to the following years.

I'm honoured to be on the Advisory Board - I think it's wonderful that they find my humour and my wacky craziness an asset. When I think of Taking Steps I think of the empowerment it provides to the future moms that will join and I look forward to helping them and guiding them, answering questions. Maybe there are some things that I can fill them in on or, you know, spread positive vibes, share recipes or whatever?

But I feel like the main reason for this program is empowerment and when I look at all of these beautiful women that have joined our group it's unbelievable to see the blossoming of every single woman and mom.

So, I'm so proud to come here and be a witness to the next steps in this journey with my own eyes and I look forward to the future. ■



“ I feel like the main reason for this program is empowerment. ”

I suffer from a lot of physical pain in the winter time. Mostly arthritis, back pain, shuffling through the snow, slipping, falling, I have a lot of injuries from it.

So that's my challenge is to hopefully one day be able to break free from winter.



We're going even though it's pissing rain out and we've got boots on and everything. We still get out of the house and go. No matter what kind of weather it is, we're still doing it and it's still something we're doing together. And even though we get soaking wet, it's still fun to go.



It just made me think about how there's no limits, right? Like the sky's the limit, but not even really that.

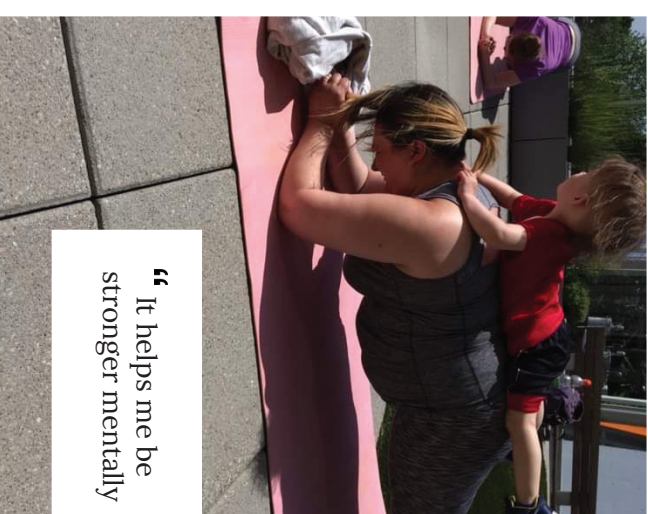
You can take yourself wherever you want to go and you know, like there may be downs and there may be ups, but like you can just always keep persevering and like everything that happens you learn from.



This program helps. It helps me be stronger mentally and it helps me not go back to ... like if I feel triggered, especially living in this community.

But this is our community. This is our home.

And there's so much beauty and there's so much friendship if you just look for it.



“It helps me be stronger mentally”

MEDICINE WHEEL

by Robyn Fabiosa

The Medicine Wheel is an Indigenous tool that is used to increase wellness in a variety of ways, one of which includes examining the four equally important parts of yourself. These four parts include the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual aspects within us. Being knowledgeable about these parts of ourselves and how one can strive towards creating better balance in all four areas is a lifelong journey that can help to create not only strong, healthy, healing individuals, but strong, healthy, healing communities.

Before the inception of *Taking Steps: Warrior Women's Wellness* program, service providers and community members within the Downtown Eastside had all been noticing and voicing that there were existing opportunities and

programs to access mental, emotional and spiritual supports; however, that there was a lack of service for women and mother's to access low-barrier physical wellness opportunities.

The ability to access physical wellness not only for yourself, but alongside your family is a basic human right and need. Access to physical wellness should not depend on your level of physical skill, income, social status, your gender, the amount of kids you have, or your culture. We should all have the ability to try a new activity out for the first time, get back into that activity you enjoyed when you were younger, or enjoy a variety of different activities within your own neighbourhood – if you want and when you are ready!

When you improve or work on one aspect of your medicine wheel (your physical, emotional, mental or spiritual wellness), you feel the benefits in all other parts of yourself and your life. Women and mothers in our program have reported feeling better about themselves and more comfortable in their bodies, they felt like they had a stronger support system and sense of belonging, they felt good about being a healthy role model for their families and children, they felt safety within a group setting, and they felt confident that they could try something else new!

Taking Steps: Warrior Women's Wellness program is a physical wellness program that started out as a method to get women and mother's

active. But this program, that carves out space in our community for women and mother's to access low barrier, trauma- and violence-informed, fun and welcoming physical wellness activities, has bloomed into so much more. This program has allowed women to create and continue their own healing journey, improve their own physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual health and wellness, as well as, creating an outstanding example that ripples into their community and to the generations that will follow. ■

I am a warrior woman because my mom showed me how to handle the pressure of stress and anxiety.

It's a learned behaviour, and I want to show that to my daughter. That she is powerful. She is strong in her own way. I want her to go far in life, I don't want turmoil or hurdles to stop her or prevent her from living her life.

So every day I push myself to come out of my comfort zone.



I was told one time to go to mother earth for
my healing when I felt that there was nothing
I could do for my pain, my physical pain,
and my emotional pain and stuff.

And so I started gardening.

My first garden I've ever grown, and it's kind of
my haven and it did take me away from all of
my problems. So I use all my plants as my
healing, my haven where I can just sit
and meditate and not feel so alone.

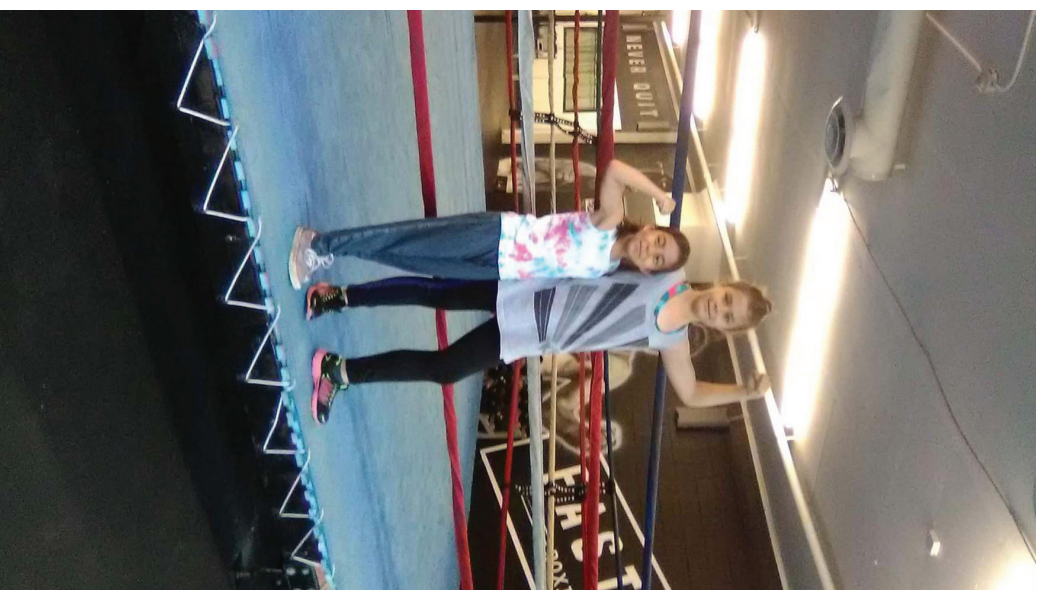


Just being together with everybody and the [Women's Memorial] March is such an emotional but strong feeling. And just being at the front of the line with everybody, I felt really good about that, made me feel important and like I was actually a part of something really big.



That's our future and that's the
future of our family, to keep
the matriarchs going in life.

That's who's going to be
taking my crown after.



My daughter and her grandma. Her grandma's helping her stand up and walk. She's super sweet and very supportive. It's kind of what being a warrior woman looks like to me. Just the whole generation part of it and having strong women in your life.



What makes me feel strong is being able to speak up for myself, and speak up for others who can't do it for themselves, and take care of myself. To try to have a good life, and being healthy is a big part of that.



LETTER TO FUTURE PROGRAMMERS

by Michelle Paquette

The *Taking Steps: Woman's Warrior Wellness* Advisory Board is made up of five community members: Sarah Van Balkom, Jennifer Ellenberger, Maria Giron, Crystal Katcheech and Michelle Paquette. Each woman has brought her own strengths and life experience to the group in helping shape and grow this program. These women have contributed much time and energy over the course of the last year because they know how beneficial physical activity has become in their lives and their children's lives.

Their dream is that this good work is continued so that many other women have access to trauma-informed and truly accessible physical

wellness opportunities in their own communities. One way to turn that dream into reality is to build relationships with new community partners. If you are reading this, that probably means you are one of the people we are looking for! Women are told to be active but there's no support for them to actually follow through. Our big challenges are fear of being judged, finances and balancing our responsibilities as mothers.

While developing programming and expanding *Taking Steps*, we have learned all kinds of lessons and we would love to share some of them.

1. First and foremost, if you carve out space for women, they will show up. But, it needs to feel safe and be inclusive for all women. Everyone has their own story and we appreciate being met where we're at. This means a space where we won't be judged and can feel free to try things at our own level.
2. For many of us, that means supporting us as mothers as well - childcare options are a must! The kids have loved being a part of our program and watching their mom's participate in activities. We love the opportunity to model healthy choices to them!
3. Another important piece of advice is consistency. If you want the women to show up, you need to as well - same day and time each week. Our lives get complicated sometimes and we have to come late sometimes or we miss a few. But it's nice to know that the program is always happening.
4. Finally, remember who you are doing the work for - beautiful, resilient and strong women of our community. Physical wellness is important for everybody and we hope you find this list helpful. ■

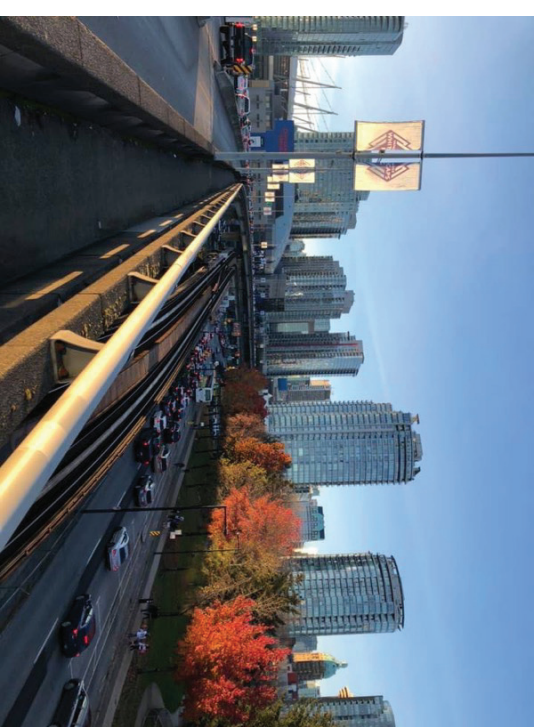
I was always big on sports, so I'm
hoping she has that part of me.

I'm gonna be the loudest parent there.



This was a walk that I did by myself with my daughter from Crabtree to Costco and then up the elevator and I walked down the viaduct. It was just a good walk, just to get out and get some steps in.

If you can't get to the gym,
just go out for a walk.



I think that the group encourages
friendship between other families
and brings people together.
I've made quite a few friends.

I think that we just build each other up
instead of like, a lot of people are so
negative and they pull each other
down. I think that at the group,
everything is so positive.

We're all just there to support one another.



The Downtown Eastside is notorious for a lot of things. But what often goes unreported is how many children and families are living down here.

The block where Crabtree is located is always bustling with children and parents dropping into Sheway or Crabtree, heading out to school or appointments.



To be able to be a parent full-time and to be able to take them to kickboxing groups and walking groups, it's really cool because I get to share my experience of being a parent with everybody in the community.

They always say it takes a community to raise a child and I strongly believe in that.



It's to show resilience, to show the power of women and how in our community we're held so high, whether you're Aboriginal or not. To embrace how women are treated and loved in the Downtown Eastside, I think needs to be shared more.

I do think there is a higher level of respect towards women and children in the community, when we even walk around, the way that people see us. Like kids on the block! You know? People know.



I think this program has been changing for me. I open up. I talk to more people. I'm not so shy. And I'm getting physically active.



When we're in walking group, everybody's pushing everybody's stroller. Everybody's holding other kids' hands, kids are running over that way, kids are running way back there. We all kinda split up but other parents are always watching other people's kids.

We got each other, because we all know what it's like to be parents. Right?



Women actively want to participate in physical activities. Especially programs that might include their children or have a space for their children and if you provide it for them, **they will be there.**

We have shown that over and over and over again.



We would like to acknowledge the traditional,
ancestral and unceded lands on which this
program took root and grew.

Thank you to the Coast Salish peoples –
Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), Sto:lo and
Selilweta?/Selilwitulh (Tseil-Waututh) and
xʷməθkʷəʔyam (Musqueam) Nations.

This book is dedicated to the women living
and healing within the Downtown Eastside.

To the women who have come before us,
we honour and remember you.

And to the women and girls who will inherit the
spirit of this important work, this is for you.



