



Uplifting Kids in the Community: A Day at the Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood House

In the heart of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside lies United Way's School's Out Program at Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood House. The Neighbourhood House focusses its efforts on serving this resilient community and the children and families attending school in this area, offering programs three days a week to 35 local kids throughout the school year. Their lives are deeply connected to these communities, which can bring its own set of hardships and struggles. However, their strong bonds and sense of belonging to this tight-knit community endure.

Offering vital resources and a safe space where resilience is nurtured.

"When working with the kids, it is crucial to understand that many of them are dealing with a lot," Sophie, the School's Out Coordinator at the Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood House, explained. When the kids arrive at the Neighbourhood House, they are welcomed into a space where they can grow and prosper and fully embrace the joys of childhood.

Cooking Up Fun in School's Out

The cooking program is a fan-favourite amongst kids in United Way's Schools Out Program at the Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood House. Through shared moments in the kitchen, Sophie has witnessed firsthand how the influence of these cooking sessions reaches far beyond the culinary realm. Sundays are a time to inspire the children, nurturing their individuality and personal growth in remarkable ways.

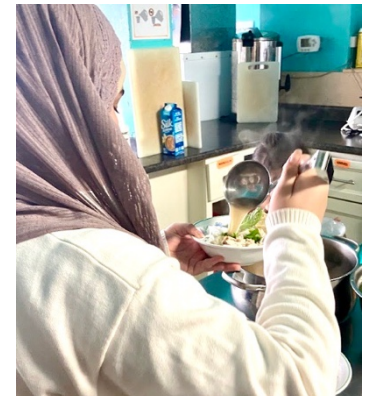
12:00pm — The kids arrive at noon, their excitement evident as they stow away their backpacks and wash their hands in preparation for the fun day of cooking that lies ahead. From ramen to fresh fruit popsicles, sushi to the timeless classic of chocolate chip cookies, the kids eagerly dive into the culinary world. Guided by the School's Out Coordinator, Sophie, and other leaders at the Neighbourhood House, they find joy and fulfillment in crafting these dishes, reveling in the unique combinations and flavors that they discover along the way.



“We encourage the kids to share their culture, their background, their favorite foods. The children come in with a remarkable openness to diversity and a genuine appreciation for other cultures. Each kid gets to customize the meal of the day however they want – they have control over what they’re making and what they’re eating – giving the kids agency to try new foods and find new confidence. The children get the opportunity to witness the excitement of their peers and observe the ingredients they helped prepare, inspiring them to give it a try.”

1:00pm — As the final touches are added to the dishes and they begin to cook in the oven or simmer on the stove, the children begin kitchen cleanup. Together, they restore order, tidying counters, washing dishes, and composting scraps – learning about cleanliness, community preservation, and respect for shared spaces, fostering pride and ownership.

“When the meal is ready, we sit down at the table and eat our meal with all the adults and all the kids sitting together family-style. In this time, the kids get to connect, share their thoughts about the food, and even rate the meal. This is a space where the kids can share anything they want to.”



2:00pm to 2:30pm — “After the meal, we pack up any leftovers. Food security is an important aspect to consider, as many of the families rely on their children having multiple meals at school during the week. Being a place where the kids can come and eat a healthy meal on the weekend makes a difference for the families.” As 2:30pm comes around, parents and caregivers arrive for pick up, taking home a copy of the recipes and a very happy kid.

“We make it possible for kids to be kids.”

“Providing safe spaces for children is incredibly important to us,” shared Sophie. “This ‘third space’ offers a place for children to thrive, free from the challenges they may face at home or in school. Creating opportunities for the kids to flourish, connect, explore their interests, and discover their passions and abilities in a secure environment is crucial for their development. The Neighbourhood House is a catalyst for personal growth, connection, and the exploration of untapped potential, which has meaningful reverberations throughout their communities and in their everyday life,” Sophie concluded.



Community programs, like the Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood House, play a vital role in uplifting children in need, providing essential resources and a supportive network to children who may be facing various challenges, such as food or housing insecurity, language and academic barriers, or the need for a friend to talk. The value of children enjoying their childhood is immeasurable. It is during this time of happiness, wonder, and growth that their identity, creativity, and resilience are shaped. By prioritizing the nurturing of children's enjoyment during their early years, we lay a solid foundation for a life that is fulfilling and prosperous.