

# Talking Sustainability in Port Alberni

## Community Engagement Summary Report

### OVERVIEW

**Date**..... May 31, 2017

**Location**..... Alberni District Secondary School  
Port Alberni, BC  
Traditional territory of the hupačasath  
and cīšaa?ath people

**Hosts**..... PJ Bell & Emma Lavery, *ECollaborate Now*

**Attendees**...Grade 11 students

**Event**.....World Café-style engagement session

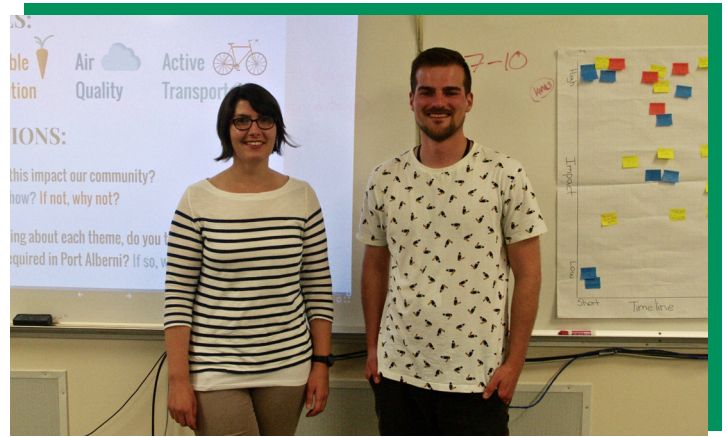
**Purpose**.....Encouraging students to consider the local impacts of transportation, air quality, and consumption

### CONTEXT

ECollaborate Now is a consulting firm in Port Alberni, BC, that seeks to address sustainability through community engagement and inter-agency collaboration and to develop localized approaches to building healthy, resilient communities. ECollaborate Now is run by Sarah Thomas, *MSc (Planning)*, and currently has three primary focuses: Port Alberni Air Quality Council, Alberni Valley Gleaning Project, and Cycle Alberni.

PJ Bell and Emma Lavery were hired as interns with ECollaborate Now as part of the United Nations Association in Canada (UNA-Canada) Canada Green Corps programme. This youth employment programme is designed to bridge talented, yet un- and underemployed, Canadian youth to meaningful employment to ignite Canada's green economy. Green Corps participants undertake four or six-month work-integrated learning placements with various companies, governments, associations, universities and civil society organizations across Canada.

As part of this programme, each Green Corps participant is required to initiate a community engagement session in order to “inform and empower stakeholders to elevate their community's current sustainability efforts.” To meet this requirement, PJ and Emma teamed up to speak with Grade 11 students at Alberni District Secondary School about environmental issues in their community. The specific topic areas—transportation, air quality, and responsible consumption—were inspired by ECollaborate Now's current initiatives.



*Emma Lavery & PJ Bell during engagement session*

### PROCESS

Three separate community engagement sessions took place on May 31 with Grade 11 classes (8-17 students each). The sessions began with an overview of the Canada Green Corps programme. Next, we played an icebreaker game called “spider web.” The students and hosts stood in a large circle, with one host holding a ball of yarn. Whoever had the ball of yarn shouted out a job in Port Alberni (e.g. nurse, teacher, etc.) and then threw the ball to another person while holding on to a piece of yarn. Each participant did the same until every participant had spoken and there was a web of yarn across the circle. We then discussed green jobs, describing how each of the jobs mentioned could be made more sustainable. The objective was to demonstrate the interconnectedness of the green economy. We then had fun getting the participants to untangle the web by following the yarn in reverse order.

After the ice breaker, we began the World Café engagement session by dividing the students into three discussion groups. Each group was given coloured sticky notes and assigned a topic: transportation, air quality, or responsible consumption. They then had approximately ten minutes to write down the answers to two different questions about their topic:

1. *Does this impact our community? If so, how so? If not, why not?*
2. *Thinking about each theme, do you think any changes are required in Port Alberni? If so, what changes?*

After answering those questions, the groups changed tables, leaving behind the sticky notes and answers. They then repeated the task, answering the same questions about the next topic. However, they were able to see the last group's answers, so they could build on

those without repetition. The groups then switched one last time so that they each discussed all three topics.

Once these three rounds were completed, participants were instructed to take all of the answers to question two and place them on a matrix at the front of class. This matrix had “timeline” (short to long) along the x-axis and “impact” (low to high) along the y-axis (see figure to the right). The students could place the sticky notes wherever they felt the ideas fit best. Students were free to move sticky notes within the matrix. Ideas from all topics were placed on a single matrix in order to reinforce the interconnectedness of the themes.

Once all of the notes were placed on the matrix, we discussed their content and placement. In some cases, the host would suggest moving the note to a different location while explaining why this might be more fitting. This allowed students to better understand the rationale behind their choices. This discussion concluded the engagement session.

## OUTCOMES

Overall, the students demonstrated a solid understanding of the three themes and of local conditions, with much discussion involving fishing, forest fires, and major industries such as the logging, transportation, and milling of lumber. The jobs mentioned during the icebreaker included a mix of traditional roles and more locally-focused jobs (BC Hydro, forestry, tree planting, etc.). It took some effort to get participants discussing what they would change, with some students seemingly content with the status quo in Port Alberni. However, once the conversation got going, they came up with excellent suggestions to address complex environmental issues.

Students indicated that it is relatively easy to get around Port Alberni, with driving the most popular form of transportation. The hilly topography presents either a real or perceived challenge to walking and cycling, while transit could be improved. Although a few students complained that the new bike lanes take up too much road space, many others called for driving less and doing more walking, cycling, rollerblading, or even futuristic modes like hoverboards and Segways. Alternative automobile fuels were discussed numerous times, as was regional transportation such as the SkyTrain.

Air quality issues included forest fires, garbage burning, wood stoves, vehicle and industrial emissions, smoking, logging, and allergies. Additionally, the Thunder in the Valley drag racing competition has recently been moved into the city centre and thus has a more direct impact



*Idea matrices from three different engagement sessions*

on city residents. Students were generally familiar with the Alberni airshed, where the valley’s topography traps and inverts air, compounding local air quality concerns.

Issues pertaining to responsible consumption included over logging and inadequate replanting, oil spills from boats, summer water consumption, over fishing, local farming, food waste, recycling, and international supply chains. Suggestions for improving air quality and responsible consumption covered a wide range of topics, including waste and resource management, fire safety, industrial production, and the individual consumption of goods. The proposed solutions would require a combination of public education, government regulation, and greater enforcement of existing laws.

The matrix exercise proved to be a successful learning tool that helped to initiate dialogue. For example, one student challenged a host after placing “roller skating” as a long term item of medium impact. The host explained that it would be fairly simple to acquire roller skates, so the idea should be short term. However, the student displayed community-level thinking by explaining that although it may be easy for one individual to start roller skating, it would take time and effort to convince everyone in the community to do it instead of driving. The host and student agreed to meet in the middle, making it a medium term item along the timeline.

Overall, these community engagement sessions proved to be quite successful. Students were generally engaged in the conversation and the smaller groups made it possible for each student to have their voice heard. Hopefully some of them will consider the UNA-Canada Green Corps programme in the future and will strive to make their community more sustainable.

