



COLUMBIAN CENTRE CURRENTS

Autumn/Winter 2013

All That Other Stuff

Columbian Centre Board of Directors

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CCS Board Retreat June 1, 2013
at Bowen Park Complex

What's the Buzz about Social Determinants?

Since mental disorders and addictions are usually consigned to the healthcare domain, it is not surprising that most attention is channeled into the notion of illness and the medications which are employed to mitigate symptoms. However, "the primary factors that shape the health of Canadians are **not medical treatments or lifestyle choices** but rather the living conditions they experience. These conditions have come to be known as the social determinants of health." (Mikkonen, J. & Raphael D. *Social Determinants of Health: The Canadian Facts*, 2010).

Mikkonen and Raphael consider 14 social determinants of health. The list includes (in no particular order of importance):

1. Income and Income Distribution
2. Social Exclusion
3. Social Safety Network (including freedom from discrimination and violence)
4. Housing
5. Health Services
6. Food Insecurity
7. Disability
8. Education
9. Unemployment and Job Security
10. Early Childhood Development (including genetics)
11. Aboriginal Status
12. Gender
13. Race
14. Employment and Working Conditions

Studies indicate that health services (#5 in the above list) may have as much as a 25% influence on our health status, however, the overwhelming influence emerges from the other 13 factors. Even our individual genetics (#10), although important, play a small role in a population's health status. Until recently, genes were seen as an unchangeable blueprint for our bodies' development. However, our genes *and their expression*, according to (*continued on page 2*)

Our Mission Statement: To demonstrate service excellence in rehabilitation and housing for adults with psychiatric disabilities including those with co-occurring addictions. We promote community and develop programs that support social inclusion through personalized, respectful and caring service.

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the emerging field of epigenetics, are also highly influenced by the social conditions in which we live, throughout our lifetime. In the June 16, 2010 issue of Discover magazine, Carl Zimmer writes, “Our experiences don’t actually rewrite the genes in our brains, it seems, but they can do something almost as powerful. Glued to our DNA are thousands of molecules that shut some genes off and allow other genes to be active. Our experiences can physically rearrange the pattern of those switches and, in the process, change the way our brain cells work.”

This article focuses on two items of the social determinants list, namely income and social exclusion. Two surprising studies, featured on Columbian Centre’s (CCS) *People First Radio* broadcasts in September 2013, underscore the game-changing impact of poverty on people’s well-being. This article concludes by touching upon CCS’ program approach to “all that other stuff”.

To listen to the *People First Radio* podcast interview with Dr. O’Campo, please visit www.columbiancentre.org/?p=5951

To listen to the *People First Radio* podcast interview with Dr. Jiaying Zhao, UBC professor of psychology and participant in the Princeton based study, please visit www.columbiancentre.org/?p=5934

The first study published by a social epidemiologist, Dr. Patricia O’Campo, establishes that the impact of poverty on health in Canada is many times more destructive than had been previously understood. In fact, the study establishes that the risk for **multiple** health conditions for poverty stricken, new mothers is **20 times** that of new mothers at higher incomes.

Previous research had established that any one of a number of health conditions was **twice** as likely to occur in low-income new mothers. The simultaneous surveilling of multiple health conditions had not been undertaken before.

Dr. O’Campo’s study was undertaken at the Centre for Research on Inner City Health in Toronto. Health data was analyzed from the Canada Public Health Agency 2006 survey representative of more than 75,000 Canadian women who had recently given birth. The analysis linked the relationship between low income and the risk (*continued on page 3*)

“We were so poor when I was growing up, we couldn’t even afford to pay attention.” (author unknown)



On July 24, 2013, people living in the community with psychiatric disorders and members of the local RCMP detachment formed mixed teams and played in their friendly annual softball tournament.



Residents and staff enjoyed a four day retreat at Rivendell on Bowen Island in September. This annual retreat offers a beautiful natural setting for group activities and time for personal reflection.

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of experiencing three to five of these health conditions at the same time: adverse birth outcomes, postpartum depression, serious abuse, and hospitalization during pregnancy, and frequent stressful life events.

“The health care system, however, is not the only place - or even necessarily the most important place - to focus our efforts to improve the health of the population,” remarks Dr. O’Campo. “Instead, our evidence suggests the incredible potential of focusing our attention on low income itself. If we want to know how to improve the health of Canadians on a large scale, programs and health system changes - while very important - are not the answer. The answer is to institute policies that address the social determinants of health, such as education, housing and employment, and change the conditions themselves.”

The other research study, based at Princeton University, looked at something very different, that is, the effect of

poverty on cognitive function. Research was conducted in India and the United States. The study confirmed that human beings can multi-task, however, the extent to which they do so effectively is related to available “cognitive bandwidth”. When the “bandwidth” is “taxed” by pressing demands such as those that poverty imposes constantly, cognitive activity is diverted by immediate troubles.

“We tend to be patronizing about the poor in a very specific sense, which is that we tend to think, ‘Why don’t they take more responsibility for their lives?’ And what we are forgetting is that the richer you are the less responsibility you need to take for your own life because everything is taken care [of] for you. And the poorer you are the more you have to be responsible for everything about your life.”

Esther Duflo, economist

The study sheds light on the reasons that poor people seem to make bad decisions, often detrimental to their own interests. The mental juggling act of balancing money, time and health brought on by poverty often leaves reduced mental capacity for careful decision-making or beneficial long-term planning. A major reason why all available mental bandwidth is occupied by people who are poor is that when they are confronted with a challenging situation, the consequences of making a poor decision can be devastating. *(continued on page 4)*

“When will there be justice in Athens? There will be justice in Athens when those who are not injured are as outraged as those who are.” Thucydides, 460-395 B.C.



Above: Residents and staff had wonderful weather for the annual camping trip at Rath Trevor Beach near Parksville in July. These kinds of community activities are offered by CCS as ways to build social inclusion.

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One of the study's researchers, Dr. Eldar Shafir explains, "In our experiments, the distraction of poverty can cause subjects to drop about 13 IQ points in a matter of minutes. The effect is large. It's not unlike using a cellphone in a car. We think it may make us a bit less attentive, but in fact it's like being legally drunk behind the wheel. That's kind of stunning."

Writing earlier this year in the prestigious journal *Science* (341, 976), the authors of the study caution that their findings "are not about poor people, but about any people who find themselves poor".

At Columbian Centre, a concerted effort is made to address the social determinants of health in each resident's rehabilitation plan. CCS gives particular programmatic emphasis to items #2-7 from the list of social determinants appearing at the outset of this article. Like the Canadian Mental Health Association of Ontario, CCS considers social determinant #2

(social inclusion) to be of central importance to people recovering from mental illness. Residents are encouraged to avail themselves of public and private community resources, ranging from golf courses to libraries to educational institutions to campgrounds to spiritual retreat centres. In-house programming is kept to a minimum so as to create public interaction for the benefit of all citizens.

By intentionally taking a comprehensive approach to "all that other stuff", CCS attempts to foster sustainable improvements in the lives of residents (and the population in general). Through public education programs (*People First Radio*, *Hearing Voices That Are Distressing* workshops, film production and screenings, block parties), Columbian Centre encourages local communities to weave a sturdy web of health-promoting social determinants.

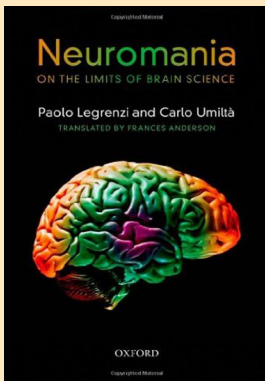
"The one function anyone else cannot perform for another person is that of empowerment. Empowerment is a reflexive activity, a process capable of being initiated and sustained only by the agent or subject who seeks power or self-determination. Others can only aid and abet this empowerment process. They do so by providing a climate, a relationship, resources and procedural means through which people can enhance their own lives."

Barbara Levy Simon



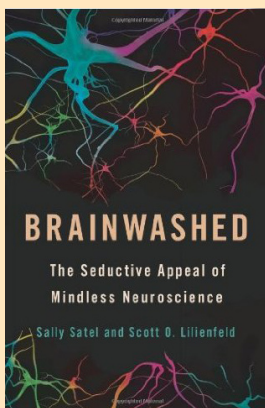
Left and above: The 3rd Annual Colliers International Charity Golf Tournament attracted enthusiastic golfers to the Nanaimo Golf Club on Sept. 11, 2013. Residents, staff, board members and community supporters spent a fun day on the links.

Recommended Reading



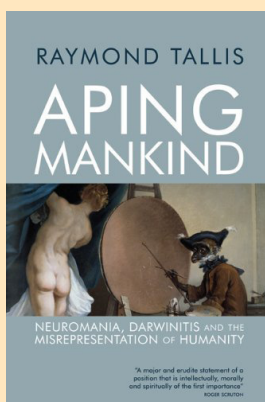
Neuromania: On the limits of brain science by Paolo Legrenzi and Carlo Umiltà *Oxford University Press 2011*

This fascinating, accessible, and thought provoking new book questions our obsession with brain imaging. The mass media are full of news items featuring colour photos of the brain, that show us the precise location in which a certain thought or emotion, or even love occurs, hence leading us to believe that we can directly observe, with no mediation, the brain at work. But is this really so? Written by two highly experienced psychologists, it discusses some of the familiar ideas usually associated with mind-body, brain-psyche, and nature-culture relationships, showing how the biased and unquestioning use of brain imaging technology could have significant cultural effects for all of us.



Brainwashed: The Seductive Appeal of Mindless Neuroscience by Sally Satel and Scott O. Lilienfeld *Basic Books 2013*

Psychiatrist Sally Satel and psychologist Scott O. Lilienfeld reveal how many of the real-world applications of human neuroscience gloss over its limitations and intricacies, at times obscuring-rather than clarifying-the myriad factors that shape our behavior and identities. Brain scans, Satel and Lilienfeld show, are useful but often ambiguous representations of a highly complex system. The “neurocentric” view of the mind risks undermining our most deeply held ideas about selfhood, free will, and personal responsibility, putting us at risk of making harmful mistakes, whether in the courtroom, interrogation room, or addiction treatment clinic. A provocative account of our obsession with neuroscience.



Aping Mankind: Neuromania, Darwinitis and the Misrepresentation of Humanity by Raymond Tallis *Acumen Publishing 2012*

In a devastating critique Raymond Tallis exposes the exaggerated claims made for the ability of neuroscience and evolutionary theory to explain human consciousness, behaviour, culture and society. The belief that human beings can be understood essentially in biological terms is a serious obstacle, argues Tallis, to clear thinking about what human beings are and what they might become. To explain everyday behaviour in Darwinian terms and to identify human consciousness with the activity of the evolved brain denies human uniqueness. We are, shows Tallis, infinitely more interesting and complex than we appear in the mirror of biologism. Combative, fearless and always thought-provoking, *Aping Mankind* is an important book, one that scientists, cultural commentators and policy-makers cannot ignore.

“Do not judge by appearances; a rich heart may be under a poor coat.” (Scottish proverb)

Columbian Centre Society Annual General Meeting



The Columbian Centre Society Annual General Meeting was held on June 25 2013. Members and guests watched the premiere of *On The Road ... To Find Out*, and interacted with a panel of people who appeared in the film.

Bidding Farewell to Valued CCS Board Members



Blake McGuffie

Blake McGuffie served on the CCS Board for 6 years. He and his wife Lois own Esplanade Tax Services, and has lived in downtown Nanaimo since the '70s. Blake has served on Nanaimo City Council, and has extensive involvement with community associations and boards, including Nanaimo Foodshare, Nanaimo Community Bingo, Downtown Nanaimo Partnership, and Nanaimo Child Development Centre. Blake brought all his insights of the workings of the city, and the political processes to our Board and for that we are grateful. He has also served as CCS Treasurer, and has been instrumental in evaluating real estate matters for us. He has made a difference to the community through his service. We also will miss his quirky sense of humor, and quick retorts.



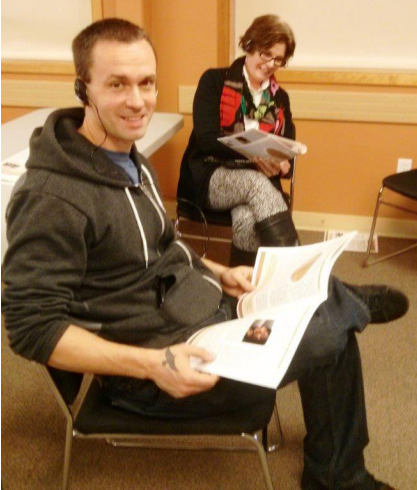
Dave LaBerge

Blake was partially responsible for bringing Dave LaBerge to the Columbian Centre Board. Dave is also a very well-known figure in the downtown and is frequently seen riding with his "posse", or standing by his bike chatting with "the locals". Dave has headed up the RCMP Nanaimo Bicycle Squad for 10 years, and has in-depth experience with the downtown issues. He has a calm, confident, sensitive manner and is very skilled in his interactions with people who have mental health issues. By the way, his wisdom and level-headedness has served the CCS Board members very well too! Dave has been hugely involved in rolling out the City's homelessness responses, including the affordable housing projects. He has spent many hours talking with local residents near the projects answering questions, actively listening, and providing much needed education to angry or bewildered neighbors. He has worked very closely with VIHA Mental Health and Addiction Services, particularly in the downtown area. Among his multiple other achievements, Dave has been recognized for the implementation of a crime reduction strategy, for which "his involvement has made a difference." Dave frequently came to CCS Board meetings after working long days or nights and little or no sleep. Despite that he always contributed thoughtfully to Board matters. We will miss his calming presence and smile.

"Attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity."

Simone Weil

On The Road ... To Find Out



Above: An afternoon workshop on *Hearing Voices that are Distressing* was offered on October 9 2013 in Campbell River, BC, sponsored by the Beacon Club.

Below: A *Hearing Voices that are Distressing* workshop was held on October 8 in Courtenay, BC, sponsored by the Eureka Society.

The new CCS documentary, *On The Road ... To Find Out*, was shown in the evening in both communities to the general public and prompted animated discussion about the effects of people leaving a smaller community to seek mental health resources in larger centres.



Columbian
Centre
Society

ON THE ROAD... TO FIND OUT

**New Documentary Explores
Rural ↔ Urban Mental Health Issues**

ON THE ROAD TO FIND OUT (2013) examines the re-location of people with mental illness, from smaller communities on Vancouver Island to the city of Nanaimo - in order to access mental health services. This film is intended to be a discussion starter...

What happens when people are taken out of their natural social setting after they become mentally ill? What are the positive and negative effects of re-location? Where is home once someone has been relocated for an extended period?

Filmmaker Paul Manly's work gives expression to three individuals who experienced re-location as well as to those people who have provided support. "Mental illness touches everyone in some way and the crew I work with is no exception," says Manly.



View the film trailer or purchase the DVD

<http://www.columbiancentre.org/?p=5082>

\$15.00 per DVD
(includes Shipping)



Right: The Courtenay *Hearing Voices that are Distressing* workshop.

Filmmaker Paul Manly, at right, helped facilitate and was present for the evening screening of *On The Road ... to Find Out*.



Community Support for CCS



Erin Warner (Board member), left, and Tom Grauman, Executive Director, at the conclusion of Columbian Centre Society's 30 km "Not-as-Great Lake Walk" on Sunday, September 22. The two had planned to take part in the 56 km. Cowichan Lake "Great Lake Walk" on September 21st, however, it was cancelled for lack of participants. Thanks to all who donated money to support our hastily invented alternative hike!



Susan Urban (at left) presented a \$5,000 cheque from Mid Island Co-op to Columbian Centre Society in June. Accepting the donation are Daniel Sliz, Manager of Rehabilitation Services, and Kari Fetherston.



Left: The third annual Mental Wellth Gala was celebrated May 10, 2013 at the Grand Hotel.

Columbian Centre Society is generously supported by



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