

Positive energy, strength, and community - Taq Bhandal

2016-2017 chair of the Vancouver Women's Health Collective

PhD Student, Social Justice Institute, University of British Columbia

I joined the Vancouver Women's Health Collective in 2014 as a resource centre volunteer and was elected to the Board of Directors (BoD) in 2015 serving as Chair from September 2016 to July 4th, 2017.

Over the past three years, I've learned so much about the history of the VWHC, the practice of implementing feminist principles into supporting underserved women achieve their everyday health needs, and about the Downtown Eastside neighbourhood.

More importantly, the VWHC has taught me how much positive energy, strength, and community is built when women come together around health as a unifying principle.

I'm wishing the VWHC the best of luck for the next year, and look forward to continuing to support the organization in other capacities.

An Oasis for Women on the Downtown East Side Gisèle Yasmeen

Volunteer Board Member (2014-2017), Vancouver Women's Health Collective

For nearly three years, it has been a privilege to serve as a board member for the Vancouver Women's Health Collective, which has the powerful motto "women helping women help themselves". As the time has come for me to make place for other voices, I want to pay tribute to this incredible organization and the journey it has taken me on in terms of connecting with issues of women's health – particularly for those who are less privileged than me. While the collective is open to all, its location on the Downtown East Side highlights issues of the social determinants of health where poverty, homelessness, addiction and mental health issues are daunting but where there is also a vibrant grassroots community movement committed to empowerment and social change. VWHC has been committed to such a movement for more than 40 years from the perspective of women's health. I think of the collective as an oasis of safety where women can not only access health services thanks to a partnership with the BC Women's Hospital but also equip themselves with knowledge, healing activities and bonds of support and friendship. At least one regular visitor of the collective credits the place with saving her life. The place is volunteer-driven and small, but very powerful and transformative.

While I will remain committed to supporting VWHC in every way I can going forward, I also wanted to take a moment to pay tribute to the incredible individuals I have met and worked with along the way both within the VWHC family and in sister organizations and causes. My thanks to our Executive Director, France-Emmanuelle Joly and current and past board chairs, Taq Bhandal and Andi Cuddington for their talent, inclusiveness and commitment as well as all my fellow board members, past and present. Thanks to those who have supported us such as David Choi, CEO of Royal Pacific Group and other friends and family who have made valuable financial and in-kind contributions. While we were not successful in securing funds for an initiative on women, food/nutrition and health as we had hoped, we developed positive relationships along the way with individuals within organizations such as Vancouver Coastal Health, SUCCESS, Potluck Café, the YWCA of Greater Vancouver, CityFarmer and the University of British Columbia. My sincere thanks to all those who supported us and I hope they will continue to do so in the future. Thanks for the memories!