

Climate change activists target everyday folks

New community project to be launched this month

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A non-profit society is launching a grassroots project aimed at combatting climate change called Be the Change, March 29 in Vancouver.

The project involves forming "action circles" of a dozen people or less to support each other in reducing their footprints on the earth. The project borrowed its moniker from pacifist Mahatma Gandhi, who famously said, "You must be the change you wish to see in the world."

The Be the Change Earth Alliance is behind the initiative headed by program director Maureen Jack-LaCroix.

Jack-LaCroix founded Jack of Hearts Productions, which has produced events including Tears are not Enough--the Canadian entertainers 1985 response to the African hunger crisis--Music West and Slam City Jam.

She sees Be the Change as a way to encourage individuals to alter how they live on a daily basis through a support network. "It's much easier to do in a circle than on your own," she said. "This program is particularly important because it's personally empowering. It brings it to the individual to take

responsibility for where we are today."

Jack-LaCroix cites an August 2007 Harris-Decima poll that revealed Canadians saw climate change as their most important issue. Eighty-three per cent believed they could personally take action on climate change. "This program is designed to enable them to do just that," she said.

The March 29 symposium, presented by Be the Change, the San Francisco-based Pachamama Alliance and the Canadian Memorial Environmental Ministry Team, is billed as a workshop providing practical information on stopping climate change. Facilitators trained by the Pachamama Alliance will lead the workshop with video clips from notables such as Desmond Tutu, Brian Swimme, Matthew Fox, Julia Butterfly Hill, Paul Hawken, Lynn Twist and Van Jones.

Further symposiums are expected each month.

Be the Change Earth Alliance envisions 1,000 Vancouverites joining "action circles" by early October when a festival and conference is planned. Action circle participants will be expected to reduce home and office energy consumption by 20 per cent, cut automobile travel by 20 per cent, trim meat consumption by 20 per cent, increase use of local, organic produce by 20 per cent, and recruit five people annually to action circles.

They will also try to increase their efforts to lobby governments on environmental issues by 20 per cent and improve their "happiness quotients" by 20 per cent. Happiness quotients are measured by a series of questions about subjects such as connections to others and feelings of isolation. Jack-LaCroix said the focus on happiness quotients turns around the idea of consuming for happiness. "The whole

process of change isn't about feeling bad about [giving up] things," she said. "The things we're giving up create more time and space in our lives for things that really make us happy."

The Be the Change symposium runs from 9:30 to 4:30 p.m. at Canadian Memorial Church at 15th and Burrard, March 29. Registration, which costs \$45 in advance and \$50 at the door, is at Canadian Memorial Church at 604-731-3101.

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