



October 8, 2008

Just Start! – How to Green your Organization

*A year ago John Richards, a manager, proposed that Abbotsford Community Services green its entire operations. Yes! Yes! Yes! said ED Thelma Schrock, the management team, and the board. John's story is the first in a special series of **Perspective at 10 Big Thinks** to celebrate the Co-op's 10th anniversary. We see greening as an essential lens at this critical time in the human and planetary history. We bet you do too!*

I can't say it often enough: Greening is very practical. It doesn't come from consultants' reports and lengthy planning exercises. It comes from asking, "What would your grandmother have done?" -- earlier generations used resources wisely.

There's nothing earth shattering: most of us already know the processes and approaches. What people perhaps haven't thought of is how greening can connect every part of a multi-service organization.

Once we had agreement from Management and the Board the next thing was to involve the staff.

We already knew ways to green the organization but that wasn't the point. If they were our ideas, it wouldn't work -- we wouldn't get buy-in.

So we organized a forum for the entire staff – offsite, on-site – everybody. Only we didn't call them staff. We called them stakeholders. We are all stakeholders in greening our organization.

The first forum was cancelled because of a snow storm, but the second launched the program.

In small groups, 80 people answered the question: *What do you think we should do to green Abbotsford Community Services?*

The forum mixed people up – across departments, programs and sites. Greening is the only program in ACS that links everyone on a day to day basis. Our common goal of helping the environment has been great for unity and cohesion.

Through a facilitated process, we identified four spheres of action (Waste, Energy, Materials and Transportation), and we also named obstacles such as lack of awareness, apathy, inconvenience, and the time commitment.

One by one we addressed the obstacles: there WAS interest, energy and willingness to green ACS.

From the forum we created a "Green Team" that includes board members, managers, front line workers, people from accounting... and the Fraser Valley Regional District. (Green Teams are a 15 year old concept, and they work!)

The team took the ideas from the Forum and developed a plan, focusing on one sphere at a time and starting first where we could have the biggest impact – in our case -- Waste Management.

It's important to have measurable results. We arranged to have one week's worth of garbage diverted and audited. That showed 47% was recyclable and 35% was compostable: we could reduce waste by over 80%!

This inspiring statistic was communicated to stakeholders through the Green Team's [Green Line Bulletin](#) (an information newsletter integral to our success) prior to launching systems for recycling and composting in May.

Soon we'll do a follow up audit, and tackle the next sphere – materials (paper, cups, supplies, etc.)

Down the road we envision inviting our clients to be part of greening the community. Commitment is that high!

Parting words?

- Just start – it's better to recycle 10 kgs of paper than to produce 1 kg of reports.
- Keep it simple; make it practical. Some get bogged down measuring carbon footprints.
- Involve your municipal engineering department from the get go – a key ally.

John Richards retired recently from management of the legendary recycling program at Abbotsford Community Services. He continues to be a catalyst for greening! Naming too few, **Lisa Sullivan**, **Leah Desjardins** and **Nadine Power**, managers and members of the ACS Green Team, between them spearheaded creation of the forum, the Green Line Bulletin, and the greening stations. They welcome queries!