

Shelter on wheels

A UVic-community partnership leads to "shelter in a cart" for homeless "binners"

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Most binners in Victoria are homeless men between 40 and 59 years-old.

Binners in Victoria work five to seven days a week for up to six hours a day, earning an average income of \$10 to \$30 a day.

Sixty-four per cent of Victoria-area binners have completed high school, and 17 per cent have a college certificate.

Jutta Gutberlet heads the Community-Based Research Laboratory, based in UVic's Department of Geography. It's funded by the Canada Foundation for Innovation, the BC Knowledge Development Fund and UVic, and provides infrastructure such as computers, field maps and basic tools to do community-based research.

UVic researchers were awarded more than \$106 million in outside research grants and contracts in 2007/08. This more than doubles the annual research support of the previous five-year period.

TIMES COLONIST
Supporting education in our community

by Peigi McGillivray

You may think it's the end of the line when you put a beverage container into your recycling bin, but as Jutta Gutberlet knows, it's really just the beginning.

The University of Victoria geographer is finding ways to help make life better for informal recyclers or "binners"—people who make their living collecting the beverage containers we put in our recycling bins and dumpsters.

"Informal recycling is a widespread activity in countries around the world," says Gutberlet. "And it's becoming more and more prevalent in Canada. Binning is playing an increasingly important role in keeping recyclable waste out of landfills, especially in Victoria and Vancouver."

Binners, many of whom are homeless or socially isolated, often follow regular routes through city streets, travelling substantial distances and working long hours to collect and return bottles and cans. Because many binners are homeless, they may not have anywhere to leave their personal belongings while they're collecting. Transporting both personal belongings and collected containers is a big problem.

Gutberlet's Community-Based Research Laboratory at UVic has teamed up with Tony Hoar, an engineer and founder of Tony's Trailers, to create a unique "shelter-in-a-cart" that solves that problem—and more. The roomy, collapsible cart can be towed behind a bicycle, and when it's empty, it unfolds to support a built-in tent with an elevated cot built into the base. It's a livelihood and living accommodation all in one.

"It allows people to get around the city more easily, gather more recyclables, carry their own possessions with them—and have a safe, dry place to sleep at night," says Gutberlet. "While it's not a long-term solution to the problem of homelessness, especially in cold weather, it makes a significant difference to the quality of these people's lives. And it's something we can do right now, today, at a very low cost."

The Mothers Project, a pilot initiative in which Gutberlet participates, has provided four binners with carts, bicycles to tow them and the training on how to use them. It's part of a larger project to create awareness about the important role informal recyclers play in our community, to reduce the stigma and isolation they feel, and to create immediate solutions for the homeless.

"We've also worked with binners to create video

documentaries about the reality of their lives," says Gutberlet, "And we've completed a survey about the binning community here in Victoria to help us better understand who they are and how we can help improve their quality of life."

Informal recycling has fascinated Gutberlet since her childhood in São Paulo, Brazil. "It is very widespread in Brazil, where although there is no refund for recyclable materials, binners can make money by selling recyclables back to industry. However, they often must go through middlemen who take some of the profit," she says.

As the leader of the Participatory Sustainable Waste Management Project, an international development project in São Paulo, Gutberlet is helping to organize and train informal recyclers in Brazil. The purpose of the project is to target poverty, generate income for binners, improve living and working conditions, and ultimately help the environment.

"Binners are really environmental ambassadors, and the money they make allows them to live with more dignity," says Gutberlet. "Recycling bins can be the beginning of a better life for these people. It's our social responsibility to contribute to the reduction of poverty and marginalization."

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