

**June 5, 2020**

**Dare we imagine moving towards something even better than the old normal?**

Phase Two of the province's pandemic response, BC's Restart Plan, has been rolling out for three weeks now. With cautious re-openings of some businesses, a modified return to school and the gradual expansion of people's social interactions, we're all watching the case numbers hoping they continue to remain low and we're anticipating Phase Three. It's hard to resist the desire to get back to "normal", as quickly as possible. But I wonder if we really will ever be able to go back to the same lives we were living before? And maybe we shouldn't.

A vaccine is likely to take until late in 2021. We're being asked to re-imagine the ways we've done business, and develop hybrid ways of providing services, so we're able to expand and contract depending on the path the virus takes over the coming months and years. So the choice we have is to lament the loss of the old familiar comforts and bemoan that things will never be the same again – or – we can look to the future with hope and a commitment to make that future vibrant, challenging and exciting.

We need to unleash our collective imaginations and think about what could be. There will be changes in our society, in our communities and we will be doing things differently for months if not years to come. However, different does not have to be worse than before. Different can be better, more fulfilling, and more fair. There is a greater opportunity in this moment, than the chance to snap right back to the way things were.

People have come together during this pandemic, working in a spirit of cooperation, to help those hardest hit, and to keep us all going. Food banks have received increased levels of support to meet the increased demand they have faced. That has been a great emergency response. But moving forward, what if we could organize our society so that food banks were no longer needed? People would need access to a community garden, to a community kitchen, and to have a sense of belonging. We can advocate in our communities for these things and we could look beyond our communities and explore with senior governments the concept of a guaranteed wage so that everybody had enough income to lead a dignified life.

We have been learning to work from home. What would the effect be if this became commonplace and part of the new "normal"? Think of the positive impact on the environment with fewer cars on the road. Imagine the benefits of having no commute: less stress, less expense, and more time to spend on the important parts of life. What if we listened more to our First Nations neighbours and learned some of their language and teachings? What if we committed to decolonizing our thinking or our systems?

As we approach Phase Three, I encourage you to consider whether, despite the discomfort of being in unfamiliar territory, you want to try to get back to exactly what you were doing before or whether you might be able to conjure a more satisfying life? Rekindle your imagination. Look around at this wonderful region of ours. Let's be thankful to live in such a place and imagine how we can get to know it better.

