

Introducing Alison Brewin

Blog
Alison Brewin
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Board: Effective Governance



Alison Brewin has joined us as the next Executive Director of Vantage Point. To get to know Alison a bit better - we have compiled a series of questions to learn everything from her favorite books to her life motto.

Welcome to Alison, we are glad to have you on Vantage Point team!

How would you describe your leadership approach/philosophy?

Leadership is about giving hope – hope that we can succeed, hope that complex problems can be solved, hope that the world is a grand place where most people want to do the right thing. It is also about following through on promises made. I am an empathetic person with a solid core of logic, and as a result I can articulate a vision to get behind, as well as the pathway to get there.

I am also a fan of design-thinking: extrapolate from what you know and the information you can find, try something that might work, evaluate how it went, and try again. One you have found what works, offer it up to those who still find it helpful and encourage them to adapt it so it will improve their lives/work, then put your mind to a new problem to solve. In leadership that means not being afraid to act while engaging everyone in the analysis – focus people on the problem, not fighting with each other about the theory.

What is your life motto?

I have a tendency to earnestness (Mead) which I counter with play, enjoyment, and connecting with others (Goldman). Wandering off the well-worn path (Tolkien) gives us a glimpse of a bigger world, a different and diverse world. And, I heartily approve of wandering, despite my love of a good, practical plan.

What is the biggest risk you ever took?

Other than having children? Leaving West Coast LEAF to become a consultant was a really big risk for me. I had no clarity about whether it would work, whether I would be able to earn enough to support my family. I had done a fair bit of planning and testing the marketability of my skills with people in the field, but there was no certainty.

What is the best advice you've received?

'Three years will go by, whether you go to law school or not.' My father told me that when I was twiddling my thumbs at a minimum wage job at a bookstore, unclear about what to do with myself. He was right. Three years went by and I had a law degree.

If you could have dinner with anyone alive or dead, who would it be?

Other than my family and my spouse? George Eliot, aka Maryann Evans. She wrote the best novel in English literature, Middlemarch, but she was also an amazing woman who ignored the social norms of her era, was uber-smart and was a complex, passionate person

What keeps you up at night?

Everything. Donald Trump, whether my dog needs a haircut, the housing crisis in Vancouver... I don't sleep well.

What do you do for fun?

Play board games with my family. Cook dinner for friends. Read novels. I tend to reread my favourites over and over again like Middlemarch, Jane Austen and Harry Potter. Also I write things. I have written two novels and a third of a book on feminism. I also love traveling – the world is infinitely interesting.

What still surprises you?

I want to say something fun, like the fact that the cherry blossoms come out every year, but the truth is I am perpetually surprised that inequality persists in Canada. Despite a lifetime commitment to making change, I am regularly overwhelmed by the persistence of discrimination and frustrated by my lack of impact on it.

What are you reading right now? Or what music do you listen to?

I always have a non-fiction book and a fiction book on the go. Right now I am reading Shifting Terrain, a book about the advocacy role of non-profits in Canada, and, before you get all impressed by my commitment to the sector, I am also re-reading the Goblet of Fire.

How do you nurture your sense of wellbeing? I read Harry Potter. Ok, ok, I do a few other things. I have a dog who loves walking around Trout Lake every day, a spouse who loves talking politics over morning coffee, and a family who loves traveling. I also enjoy afternoon naps on the weekend to catch up on my sleep and I ride my bike a lot.

What brings you joy?

Traveling. Cooking. Feeding people. Writing. Helping other people to do well! I take great joy in working with an organization, then seeing them take off – knowing I have helped them move to a new level. What did you want to be when you grew up? Apparently when I was in preschool I was asked what I wanted to be and I said 'a baby tiger'. I didn't understand they meant a profession! Who wouldn't want to be furry, happy, and orange. Most of my life, from a pretty early age, though, I wanted to be a writer. Still do.

What do you consider your greatest achievement?

My children. They are awesome. I'm pretty proud of my work at West Coast LEAF too; I think I had a real impact in making that organization a valuable voice for women's equality in BC. I also survived breast cancer, though I would give surgeons and the BC Cancer Agency credit for that for the most part!

What is the one thing you can't live without?

Chocolate.

Truly, though - my family. They are so important to me. My children, but also my partner Elisabeth, my three step children, my siblings, my parents, in-laws, nieces, nephews and aunts and cousins and uncles and...I am blessed with a big family that lifts me up.