

# Youth Conference Report

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## Message from the Honourable Andy Mitchell

Young Canadians truly are the leaders of today and tomorrow, and agents for change and innovation in rural, remote and northern communities. This was evident at the first National Rural Youth Conference, held in Orillia/Ramara, Ontario from May 2-4, 2003. I had the

pleasure to meet with many of you and was impressed by your commitment and passion for building strong and vibrant rural communities. This was reflected in the time and energy you dedicated prior to the conference, by developing community project proposals and finding mentors.



As the conference showed, the Government of Canada is committed to helping young Canadians become leaders and innovators in their communities. I made several announcements at the conference that reinforced this, including a Rural Youth Awards program for outstanding contributions to rural communities. The selection of the first National Rural Youth Network Council, and a \$25,000 investment in the Network were other important announcements at the conference.

The Government of Canada recognizes that youth need to be involved in addressing the challenges facing

their communities. The Government of Canada is interested in hearing their perspectives and ideas and, with this in mind, I have committed to ensuring that youth have an increased involvement in the Rural Dialogue over the next year.

The conference was a special event with a legacy that will last far beyond the time we spent together. I hope the knowledge you gained from the inspiring presentations made during the conference will help you achieve your project goals. You can count on ongoing support from the Rural Secretariat. I will also, throughout the year, be visiting selected projects to see first-hand the progress you have made.

Youth delegates have now returned to their communities with the experiences, skills and information that they gained from the conference. I am confident you will use this knowledge to shape a brighter future for rural Canada. Together we can make a difference.

**“Rural youth need to realize their potential, and be proud of where they come from. Being a rural Canadian is a privilege.”**

► Dixie Lynn McLeod, Alberta  
(Conference Delegate)

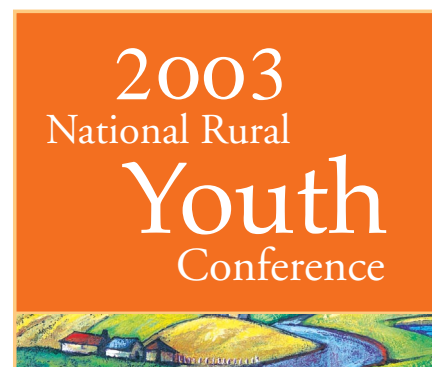
## Breakout Sessions Give Food for Thought and Fuel for Action

Informative breakout sessions explored the National Rural Youth Conference's themes of innovation, leadership and partnership. Dynamic presenters shared some of their experiences and insights on these topics, and offered delegates practical tips and tools to help them bring about change in their communities. Case studies, selected from the community project proposals, gave delegates an opportunity to exchange ideas and get inspiration for their own projects.

**Juan Tellez**, presenter for the session entitled *Innovation: A New Mindset*, encouraged delegates to think outside the box.

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Canada



May 2-4, 2003 • Orillia / Ramara, Ontario



# Community Projects show Innovation in Action in Rural Canada

Prior to attending the National Rural Youth Conference, participants were asked to develop project proposals on issues important to them and their communities. They came up with innovative projects that address issues close to their heart and make creative use of community resources. The following examples highlight some of the projects submitted by youth from across the country.

With the creation of the Cape Breton Regional Youth Council, **Keith MacDonald (Sydney, Nova Scotia)** hopes to give young people in his county a stronger voice. "By participating in the Council, youth will be able to provide input on local issues and increase their involvement in the community," says Keith. The Council will promote networking and resource sharing, as well as leadership training and skills development. Action plans will be developed by the Council to address priority issues for the youth of Cape Breton County. Keith is currently hard at work contacting local high school councils and looking for guest speakers to kick off the first meeting of the Youth Council.

As **Jérôme Baillargeon (Bellechasse, Quebec)** has discovered, working with youth who live on the streets requires adaptability and resourcefulness, especially when trying to secure funding. Grants may come from a variety of different sources without a guarantee of continued support. Contributors look for measurable results to renew the funding, but workers often have little tangible evidence to show the value of their work. This creates a sense of instability for organizations and employees who deal with youth living on the streets.

Jérôme would like to change that by creating a single source of ongoing funding for those who work with these youth. He will also try to raise awareness of the importance of their work and the need for steady funding.

Drinking and driving continues to impact the lives of thousands of Canadians. **Heather Weber (Ayton, Ontario)** has set out to do something about this by educating youth in her community about the dangers of drinking and driving. "This is an issue that affects our community and other communities across Canada," says Heather. "Our county has one of the highest alcohol (consumption) rates in Ontario. It is important to those in our community that we take a look at it." Through the Responsible Drinking project, Heather will work with high schools and other local organizations, building on the Don't Drink and Drive strategy. Her project has received interest from the local police, health unit, board of education and the Ontario Provincial Police.

In Lynn Lake, Manitoba, mine closures have forced many families to look for work elsewhere. This economic downturn led to buildings being abandoned and boarded up, many of which have now deteriorated to the point of collapse. The Lynn Lake Demolition and Renovation Project offers a creative solution to this problem. The project, led by **Geraldine Lobster (Lynn Lake, Manitoba)**, involves acquiring these run-down buildings and training youth to disassemble the buildings and reclaim the used lumber and building materials. These materials will then be used to do basic home renovations for families in need. The project creates a win-win situation for both the community and local youth.

The loss of traditional skills and values in her community has inspired **Sylvia Ivalu (Igloodik, Nunavut)** to create the Cultural Camp Program. The Cultural Camp will bring together Inuit youth with elders who will teach traditional hunting and gathering skills, along with crafts and culture. Through her project, Sylvia hopes to help both the youth, who will acquire new skills and a

better understanding of their culture, and the elders, who will have the opportunity to share their knowledge. "Many of our youth aren't connected with the Inuit culture the way people used to be," she says. "We want to get them connected, to remember the skills we used to have, such as sewing and hunting. These traditional skills will be very helpful to young people down the road." Sylvia is currently consulting with youth to find out what they want to include in the program.

**Eva Bogdan's** concern over the lack of opportunities for youth in her hometown of **Lumby, B.C.** led to her idea for a community garden run by youth. The Community Garden project will involve youth in each stage of the process, from sowing the seeds to marketing the products. Through their experience with the project, youth will acquire entrepreneurial skills, while learning environmentally sustainable agricultural practices. Eva hopes her project will encourage positive personal development and provide work experience.

In the coming months, youth delegates will continue planning their projects and putting them into action. The Rural Secretariat wants to hear about the progress being made on the community projects. Lessons learned from the projects will be compiled and shared with other young people across the country. The final date to submit an update using the evaluation questions found in the Community Project Planning and Evaluation Guide is March 5, 2004. Achievements and news from the projects can be shared through the Rural Youth On-line Discussion Group.

For more information, please visit the Rural Web site at [www.rural.gc.ca](http://www.rural.gc.ca) or call 1 888 781-2222.



# National Rural Youth Network Selects First Council



Congratulations to the National Rural Youth Network for choosing its first Council and Executive! The Network's 13 Council members, representing all provinces and territories were selected during the conference. The Council and Executive members are: Kyle Holland from British Columbia, Tiffany Smith from the Yukon, Shawna Wallace from Alberta, Steven Gauthier (Treasurer) from Saskatchewan, Samuel Bruyère from Manitoba, Jennifer Rooke (Chair) from the Northwest Territories, Beverly Young from Nunavut, Melanie Gorka (Vice-chair) from Ontario, Stephanie Maynard (Spokesperson) from Quebec, Amy Higgins (Secretary) from New Brunswick, Colin Dauphinee from Nova Scotia, Dawne Knockwood from Prince Edward Island and Andrew Normore from Newfoundland and Labrador.

Since the Network was launched at the second National Rural Conference in April 2002, a group of dedicated Steering Committee members has been busy putting together Terms of Reference, producing a Rural Youth Organizations Guide and making contacts for potential partnerships with a number of organizations.

The new National Rural Youth Network Council will continue where the Steering Committee left off. The Council has identified several key activities for 2003–2004. They will work to strengthen the Network by enlarging its membership and establishing sub-committees on important youth issues. They will also market and promote the Network, and facilitate communica-

tion and information exchange through a Network Web site. Another key activity will be the development of such partnerships with youth from the Americas and the Caribbean.

The Network is an important forum for young Canadians from rural, remote and northern communities across the country to share information, make contacts, and discuss their priorities and concerns.

For more information on the Network, please call **1 888 781-2222**. The Rural Youth On-line Discussion Group helps young people from across the country stay in touch and keep up-to-date on the Network activities. To subscribe, visit the Rural Web site at [www.rural.gc.ca](http://www.rural.gc.ca).



## Secretary of State Andy Mitchell Makes Key Announcements at the 2003 National Rural Youth Conference

Secretary of State Andy Mitchell made several key announcements at the National Rural Youth Conference, including the establishment of the first Young Leaders in Rural Canada Awards. The annual awards will recognize outstanding contributions of youth to rural communities. The Young Leaders in Rural Canada Awards will be presented in April 2004 at the third National Rural Conference in Red Deer, Alberta.

"A specialized awards program is the Government of Canada's way of recognizing rural youth who share their passion, spirit and skills to the benefit of their communities. Young people have many innovative ideas and we need to encourage their participation in their communities," said Mr. Mitchell.

The criteria and nomination process for the awards program are under development and will be announced in the near future.

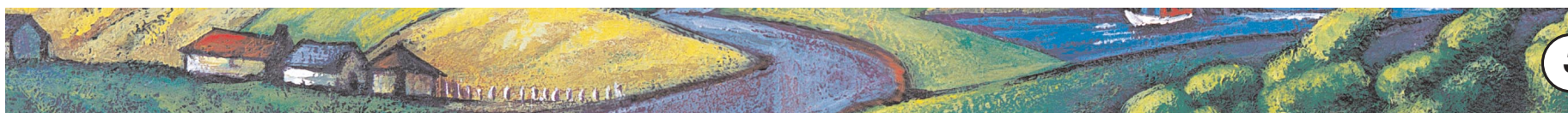
Mr. Mitchell also announced the creation of a Youth Task Force and an Industry Canada/FedNor investment

of \$50,000 to examine ways to increase the level of youth participation on Community Futures Development Corporation (CFDC) Boards of Directors in Ontario. The Youth Task Force's first objective will be to identify existing challenges facing Ontario CFDCs in the recruitment of youth as volunteers. It will also make recommendations to increase the level of youth participation on CFDC boards, and will set future targets and monitor progress.

"Small and medium-sized businesses are the lifeblood of the economy and CFDCs provide valuable assistance to help them succeed," said Mr. Mitchell. "By addressing the needs of young entrepreneurs in their investment strategies, and by encouraging youth to serve on CFDC boards, CFDCs will continue to foster diversification and stimulate employment growth."

**"The National Rural Youth Conference has given me the opportunity to network with other youth who are facing similar challenges. The workshops taught me new skills and by consequence has made me a more resourceful person."**

► Kyle Holland, British Columbia  
(Conference Delegate)



# Keynote Speakers Offer Encouragement and Inspiration to Delegates

Three keynote speakers offered words of encouragement and inspiration to delegates, giving them guidance as they move forward on their community projects. The keynote speakers touched on the topics of leadership, entrepreneurship and mentorship, and emphasized the importance of believing in one's potential.

**Ethel Blondin-Andrew, Secretary of State for Children and Youth**, told delegates that they have the power to become agents for change. While youth engagement and participation are key to bringing about change, one must have a vision and determine goals. It is important to never undersell the idea of mentorship, and take the opportunity to learn from others. She encouraged delegates to believe in their potential for greatness. She also advised them to visit their country, keep an open mind and exercise their right to vote.

**Simon Jackson, founder of the Spirit Bear Youth Coalition**, conveyed his experience of starting a campaign to save the Spirit Bear and the power of one individual to affect change. The key, according to Jackson, is to deliver a message with passion and to stay focused on the main issue.

It is also important not to be afraid to ask questions or try the impossible and not to lose hope if there are roadblocks along the way. As Jackson told delegates, if they believe in their message, ensure their voices are heard and stay the course, no challenge is insurmountable. He encouraged delegates to take the information that they learned from the conference and become active participants in their communities.

**Jonathon Strauss, recipient of the 2001 Young Entrepreneur Award**, realized from the start that to become successful in business, one has to be an all-around successful leader. This means becoming involved in the community, networking and learning from other leaders. One of the challenges of being a leader is to direct and manage people. Strauss emphasized that a leader cannot dictate to others, but should instead recognize each individual's strengths and use them to enhance the productivity of the project. Good leaders have to be able to make things happen, and have the vision and foresight to identify and seize opportunities.

A common message from all of the presenters is that youth can create change if they believe in themselves and their ideas.

## ► Breakout sessions . . . cont'd from page 1

He suggested creative approaches youth can use to bring change to their communities. Innovation in community development begins with identifying existing resources and using them in a creative way. The next step is finding opportunities to mobilize these resources, and encouraging people in the community to use new techniques.

Tellez noted that innovation comes from an open mind and commitment, and he counseled delegates to never underestimate the power of new ideas. Participants agreed resources and support are usually available, but also pointed out that there are many challenges that must be overcome to change the status quo.

**Laura Johnson** led the breakout session on leadership entitled *Making a Difference in Your Communities as Leaders: Recognizing Your Assets*. Participants heard that a leader

needs to be passionate about his/her cause and share that enthusiasm with others. Johnson spoke of the important role that a leader plays in inspiring and motivating others to reach a goal, while giving encouragement, feedback and continuous support. As she emphasized, effective communication is essential for getting a message across, motivating others and keeping the project on track. A leader needs to establish a clear direction and influence others to follow a common course of action.

Confidence is also key and it is important to ensure everyone has a chance to contribute and feel that they are part of the team.

The breakout session on partnership, entitled *You are not Alone: Building Partnerships and Teams*, focused on building relationships and developing social capital. Presenter **Brian Smith** noted that all members of a community can make important contributions if given a chance. There are also numerous assets (human, physical, economic, cultural, environmental) in a community, many of which go unrecognized. When trying to build partnerships, it is vital that these resources are identified so they can be fully utilized. Smith pointed out that building successful partnerships requires learning how to sell an idea effectively. It is important to show potential partners the tangible benefits of getting involved in the project.

"I think that by being young and living in rural Canada, you can make a bigger difference in your community than if you lived in a city."

► Jonathan Strauss  
(Keynote Presenter)

"One person can make a difference. It must be our challenge to empower and inspire youth to get involved, to show them they have a voice and that they can create change."

► Simon Jackson  
(Keynote Presenter)