

From the Rural Routes of ATLANTIC CANADA

Our Communities... Our Successes!

Spring 2004

Learning while playing

Rural communities working to improve children's literacy skills

Good literacy skills are an important component to a successful and healthy community. Two rural communities in Atlantic Canada have successfully addressed the challenge of improving literacy skills in rural children with the help of the Canadian Rural Partnership.

Tiny Pencils (Les Petits Crayons)

Pre-school children in rural areas don't always have the same chances of socializing and learning as those in urban areas do, since they have fewer opportunities to meet other children. The region of Kent, New Brunswick, has one of the lowest literacy levels in the country. To change this situation, The Family Resources Centre started "Les Petits Crayons".

Every week, children and parents gather at a location that quickly takes on the appearance of a kindergarten, with crafts, games and reading. With the help of resource people, parents learn to lead and organize the sessions. After a few months, parents can easily organize activities, to the delight of their little ones. In the long term, parents learn as much as the children do! Through these contacts, parents learn about their community and get more involved in it. More than 200 families have participated in this project.

Stories-To-Go

For many years the Women's Institutes of Nova Scotia have known that there was a real need to promote good literacy skills to young children. Early in 2003, they decided to develop a resource tool that would encourage children to learn more about agriculture while improving their literacy skills.

After receiving funding from the Canadian Agricultural Rural Communities Initiative and the Agri-Food Industry Development Fund of Nova

Scotia, Women's Institutes of Nova Scotia designed a resource kit for children ages 5-8. Stories-To-Go kits include a good quality children's book and toys with an agricultural theme, literacy activities, writing tools and a parent/teacher guide. Altogether, 250 kits were distributed across the province to libraries, resource centres, hospitals and schools through the help of the sixty-five branches of the Women's Institutes of Nova Scotia.

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Building rural communities for success in the 21st century

The Government of Canada's commitment to communities «large and small» is clear from the 2004 Speech from the Throne. Rural communities play an important role in the national social and economic fabric, and Canada cannot thrive as a country without strong rural communities. That's why the government finds it so important that it help to provide communities and families with tools to find local solutions to address local problems.

Canadians, including participants at the 2002 National Rural Conference in Charlottetown, PEI, have made it clear that they expect their governments to work together for the common good. The Speech from the Throne articulates the Government of Canada's determination to work with provincial and territorial governments, which is consistent with ongoing rural development efforts.

Some of the initiatives outlined in the Throne Speech, which are of particular interest to rural, remote and northern communities are:

- Developing a Northern strategy, ensuring that economic development related to energy and mining is brought on stream in partnership with Northern Canadians and based on stewardship of our most fragile ecosystems.
- Safeguarding access to international markets and ensuring that farmers are not left to bear alone the consequences of circumstances beyond their control.
- Working closely with other levels of government to assist communities of all sizes by putting more money into the hands of municipalities.

- Leading in the establishment of a strong and responsive health care system and providing new opportunities to address the health challenges unique to rural areas and improving access to health care.
- Widening the scope of programs currently available to small and medium-sized enterprises to include social enterprises, to enhance the social and environmental conditions in communities.

The Government of Canada's direction, as described in the 2004 Speech from the Throne, will ensure that every region of the country has the opportunity to move forward, socially and economically.

Children getting familiar with their Stories-To-Go kits.

Seniors helping seniors : a rural Newfoundland success story

So, when the Newfoundland and Labrador Seniors Resource Centre identified that challenge, it decided to address the issue. With the objective to promote the independence and well-being of older

Rural Partnership.

Peer Advocates are volunteer seniors interested in helping other seniors. To become a Peer Advocate, volunteers attend a series of information sessions

what resources are available. The role of the Advocates is then to use those newly learned skills to provide information about services and resources to seniors living in rural areas to enable them to make informed decisions when trying to solve problems.

"The widely scattered population made it challenging to provide a full range of health and other services to seniors"

There is also a Seniors Information Line designed to help connect seniors with the services they need.

The new version of the old-fashioned house call

At one time, receiving a house call from a doctor was the norm. Now, with the help of advances in the telecommunications industry, a variation on the old house call is once again being revived.

Last year, the Department of Health and Social Services of Prince Edward Island and Veterans Affairs Canada joined together to implement telehomecare across the province, building on the successful West Prince Telehospiice Project.

Canada's health care system has seen a significant shift from institutional to community care in recent years. This has led to the home becoming the centrepiece of health care delivery, with patients having a greater say in their care and families and friends being recognized and trained to be primary caregivers.

The Telehomecare Project builds on that base. Through the use of basic, simple-to-use equipment in the home, patients and caregivers will be linked with a nurse working from a central site. The nurse

is able to provide such services as monitoring blood pressure, taking pulse readings, measuring blood sugars, listening to heart and lung sounds, viewing wounds and assessing oxygen levels, as well as providing information and answering both client and caregiver questions.

Telehomecare not only allows patients to remain in a familiar environment as long as possible, it also provides support to their caregivers in a way that best uses available health care professionals. The vision for the use of such telecommunications equipment would be a better quality of life for the clients, while providing the means for advancing health care, promoting healthy lifestyle choices, making better use of available health care personnel and keeping costs as low as possible.

Veterans Affairs Canada expects to gain knowledge and experience from this project that would be used to determine if telehomecare should be part of its services.

With the Telehomecare Project, the nurse is able to monitor blood pressure and take pulse readings, among other things.

Deep fryers used to cook up a plan

Concerned citizens of Bath, New Brunswick are working hard to build a stronger community. Last year a group of residents who had been monitoring the community development in the nearby village of Centreville, were eager to make their own community a better place to live.

The group wanted to look at health issues, economic development, housing, employment, youth and several other issues. Their concern was strong enough to prompt them to invite a representative from Rural Team New Brunswick to meet with them to discuss the challenges facing Bath.

"It all started with french fries," said Chuck Bowie, an Information Broker from the former Department of Human Resources Development Canada. "At first, the group, comprised mainly of public health nurses, requested help eliminating deep fryers from the school cafeteria. I wasn't sure how the challenge was related to my department's mandate, but it soon became clear."

As the meeting progressed from the presence of junk food in the school cafeteria into other community issues, it was evident to Bowie a strategic plan was needed, and HRDC could offer some facilitation support. "The group wanted to do more than just look at the issues; they wanted to improve them, one at a time. They needed support building a plan," said Bowie.

The Greater Bath Community Action Group has since been established and is responsible for creating and implementing the strategic community development plan. "It's about taking control of your future," explained Mayor Troy Stone.

"Responsibilities were divided and the process evolved as partners made commitments. Ideas were prioritized, decisions debated, and timelines established," said Bowie, adding that several successes have already been recognized while other larger initiatives are still in progress.

The future of the community of Bath is in the hands of its citizens, where it belongs.

Rural and Remote Canada On-line

The information superhighway has proven itself to be a great resource tool. Just pop a word or two into a search engine these days, and up come thousands of potential sources of information on any subject. Rural Canada is no exception, it now boasts a special dedicated Web site designed to transfer information to individuals and communities interested in rural development.

Rural and Remote Canada On-line (www.rural-canada.ca) is a single window to knowledge, information, programs and services for and about rural and remote Canada. The Web site, part of the Government On-Line initiative, offers one-stop access for an array of information specific to rural and remote communities.

There are tips for submitting successful funding proposals for government programs. Pathfinders are available with information on everything from pointing rural entrepreneurs in the right direction, to accessing microcredit, to assisting rural and remote communities in recruiting doctors and nurses. The site also hosts an on-line discussion on issues related to rural and remote Canada.

The Rural and Remote Canada Online site can also be found as a link off of the main Canadian Rural Partnership Web site at www.rural.gc.ca.

From teacher to entrepreneur

How a woman's idea is bringing home contracts from around the world!

Rachel Arseneau Ferguson saw a need and answered it. There's been no looking back.

A few years ago, Arseneau Ferguson was teaching a program in medical transcription at the community college in Campbellton, New Brunswick. The program was the only one in Canada that produced workers able to perform medical transcriptions in both official languages, so her students were in high demand. But the job offers were coming from places like Quebec and Ontario, and often the students did not want to move.

"I thought, if they couldn't get the employees there, we could get the work here," she explained. Two years of careful research followed, and she soon found that there was only one other company in Canada that produced medical transcriptions, and it only offered the service in English.

In 1996, Centre Transmed opened, becoming the

only company in North America to provide bilingual medical transcription and translation services. The company's clients include hospitals, private clinics and doctors' offices.

Doctors dictate their medical reports into a digital voice system in order to have them transcribed and included in patient files. With the company's software program, it can link to any hospital and download the voice files containing medical reports. "We can do work for anyone, anywhere in the world," Arseneau Ferguson explained. Some of the hospitals are linked directly with Centre Transmed, so doctors can punch in a code and dictate their reports directly to the

company's system while clients download the reports using the phone lines or by sending a cassette. "We have the flexibility to respond to our clients in various ways."

In one week, Centre Transmed can transcribe anywhere from 600 to 1,000 reports, and the company employs twelve full-time and three part-time workers. Arseneau Ferguson said running her own business has definitely been a challenge. "For us, it wasn't the competition. It was getting the confidence of our clients. Most hospitals aren't used to outsourcing their work."

Through ACOA's Business Development Program, Arseneau Ferguson has received interest-free repayable contributions to support the establishment and expansion of her company. She has also received support contribution from the Province of New Brunswick's Restigouche Chaleur Economic Development Fund.

"We can do work for anyone, anywhere in the world"

PEI Mi'kmaq and Acadian youth retracing their common past

Lennox Island is located on the north shore of Prince Edward Island, approximately 50 km northwest of Summerside. It was formally set aside as a reserve for use and benefit of the Lennox Island First Nation in 1970. Of its 250 native residents, many are

sponsoring a youth exchange program.

The youth exchange program is particularly innovative. The project was designed to foster partnerships between the community of Lennox Island and the West Prince Acadian

"Workshops were held in the area to promote public awareness of Mi'kmaq and Acadian culture, history and contemporary issues"

from Acadian descent. The linkage between the Prince Edward Island Mi'kmaq and Acadians is still strong today, sharing common names and traditions.

In 1999, the Lennox Island Aboriginal Ecotourism received funding from the Government of Canada, through several departments and agencies, to develop a Mi'kmaq/Acadian Cultural Education Program to make Aboriginal and Acadian youth more knowledgeable about their past and each other's culture.

In partnership with the Société Saint-Thomas-d'Aquin, they developed a program that consisted of several projects, including creating a Mi'kmaq / Acadian Interpretive Display for the Lennox Island Mi'kmaq Cultural Centre, holding inter-community workshops and

community. Two youth from each cultural group spent the summer living and working in each other's communities. They were tasked with researching the traditional relationship between the Mi'kmaq and the Acadians, while developing skills at the same time. The students also produced a large display for the Lennox Island Mi'kmaq Cultural Centre.

Workshops were also held in three communities in the area to promote public awareness of Mi'kmaq and Acadian culture, history and contemporary issues. These workshops included forums on racism and the media, as well as French Language Rights and the Marshall Decision. This cultural program also included cultural celebrations where artists and musicians from both cultures participated in a fund-raising activity for the Cultural Centre.

New Arts and Exploration Centre for Coast of Bays

For years, residents of the Coast of Bays region of Newfoundland and Labrador who wanted to visit an arts and culture center had to travel 200 kilometers to Grand Falls.

But that situation is about to change for people living in the region's 22 communities, scattered over the south-central part of the island. Thanks to a new Coast of Bays Arts and Exploration Centre, the region will experience both a dramatic increase in cultural offerings and a much-needed boost to the local economy. The Centre, slated for opening in early summer 2004, will highlight various cultural and tourism attractions throughout the local coastal communities.

As a multipurpose cultural space, the Arts and Exploration Centre will be available for the use and enjoyment of those who create art, as well as those who experience and appreciate it. The Centre will house Visitors will also see interactive exhibits and displays showcasing the history of fishing and logging in the area, as well as that of the Aboriginal peoples and early settlers.

The Centre will highlight cultural and tourism attractions.

The project was spearheaded by the Coast of Bays Corporation, one of 20 regional economic development boards formed in 1995 to foster sustainable social and economic development in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Tracey Perry, the Corporation's Executive Director, says: "This is a very exciting venture for us. There are great stories to tell, and there is vast potential for development of the arts and cultural industries - with the help of the provincial and federal governments, the history of the Coast of Bays will be preserved and celebrated for generations to come".

Support for the Centre has been provided by the federal government through the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA), Canadian Heritage and the former Department of Human Resources Development Canada ; and by the provincial government through the Departments of Industry, Trade and Rural Development and Municipal and Provincial Affairs.



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Nova Scotia volunteers working together in supporting their communities

Computer training and friendly competition : A winning combination

It is very difficult today to get along without the Internet and computers. Whether it's for work, information, or connecting with friends, computer use has soared in the last few years. But what do you do if you don't know how it all works? If you live in a rural area, it is not always easy to get training in how to use computers and the Internet.

Web-O-Tech, a Francophone pilot project developed by Connect NB Branché, Industry Canada, the Province of New Brunswick and the community access centres (CACs), is a training program for young people between the ages of 10 and 14 who want to learn more about the Internet and computers.

The training is provided through Web-O-Tech camps at the community access centres or cybercamps online. First of all, the kids learn the names for the various parts of the computer, the basic Windows shortcuts, computer terminology, how to use some applications and how to surf the net. Then it's time for some friendly competition. The competitions start at the local level and move on to the regional level. The goal is to be one of the eight people who qualify for the provincial final, which is held in the spring. Among the prizes to be awarded is a brand-new computer!

In its first year of operation, the program was only available in southeastern New Brunswick. It is now offered in four Francophone regions of the province: the Southeast, Restigouche-Chaleur, the Acadian Peninsula, and the Northwest. Officials are planning on adding English-language training in the future.

To stay healthy and strong and keep their quality of life, communities usually have to rely on volunteers. However, volunteer organizations face many challenges in rural areas: recruitment, burnout, motivation, retention and training, to name a few.

Community Links is an association of 177 member organizations in Nova Scotia. Its mission is to help volunteers support healthy communities in rural parts of the province. When the group realized that all volunteer organizations were facing so many challenges, its board members decided to do something about it.

They developed the Nova Scotia Rural Volunteers Project in partnership with 6 other provincial organizations working with volunteers. They received funding for their project from the Canadian Rural Partnership, the Nova Scotia Department of Health, and their provincial partners. They also have received in-kind support from the Nova Scotia Department of Economic Development, Municipal Recreation Departments and many other community groups.

The first part of the Rural Volunteers Project focused on networking and skill development for rural volunteers. Between 2000 and 2003, volunteers from several hundred organizations participated in locally-organized workshops where they talked about recruiting volunteers,

fundraising, effective meetings and legal responsibilities.

Now, the project is in its second phase. It will help rural communities take action and energize their voluntary sector with the creation of regional groups (coalitions). There are currently nine regional coalitions: Kings-West Hants, Yarmouth-Shelburne-

"The second phase of the project will help rural communities take action and energize their voluntary sector"

Clare, Colchester-East Hants, Cumberland, Lunenburg-Queens, Pictou County, Antigonish-Guysborough, Digby-Annapolis and Inverness-Victoria-Strait Richmond.

Recently, these coalitions have organized different activities including volunteer fairs, workshops and needs assessment and information sessions among volunteers. The regional groups are now planning to develop a strategy supporting volunteer capacity building. They will address this issue of importance to the health and well-being of their communities through volunteer training, joint action on shared issues, and regional planning and action.

If you have a question, comment or would like to receive a copy of this newsletter, contact :

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Labrador shines worldwide through its unique gemstone

Labrador has long been noted for a special stone called Labradorite, a semi-precious mineral which is multi-hued and crystallized. It has typically been cut from small outcrops for use as a gemstone, and in 1991, the Labrador Inuit Development Corporation formed Torngait Ujaganniavingit Corporation (TUC) to try to develop this mineral in an exciting new way.

In Europe, Labradorite is a popular material for facings in buildings and residences, and TUC's plan was to quarry the stone from sites near Nain, Labrador and supply the growing demand in international markets.

The barriers to mining and marketing this product were considerable, since Nain is far from a road link and arctic ice makes the shipping season short. The workers would have to commute from Nain to the site, which is on an island, by boat or snowmobile. In addition, there were no trained workers in this new industry and the new company had little knowledge of how to begin marketing their product.

The Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency has participated in many of TUC's

business development activities, including hiring a consultant and performing feasibility studies. TUC also formed a strategic partnership with well-established European company Demetra to purchase and market the stones. Test quarrying followed in 1992, when blocks were initially shipped to Europe via ports in Newfoundland and Quebec. After several years, TUC produced enough tonnage to get trans-Atlantic vessels to stop in Northern Labrador to collect the blocks.

Since its creation in 1991, TUC has gone from mining 150 tonnes to approximately 40,000 tonnes of Labradorite per year. For its 95 employees, the quality of work is as important as the quantity. The work is regular, well-paid, expands workers' skill set, and allows them to go home each night. This community-driven initiative also offers a promising future for employees, who have benefited from an invaluable source of training as rock sawers, blasters and heavy equipment operators at TUC.