

# **Child and Youth Strategy Provincial Symposium 2012**

*Best Western (Glengarry) Truro*

**Wednesday, October 17, 2012**

**11:30 a.m.      Registration desk opened to delegates**

**1:00 p.m.      Welcome/opening remarks**

Linda Atkinson, Director of the Child and Youth Strategy, greeted everyone and introduced Associate Deputy Minister of Community Services, David Ryan. He welcomed participants to the Symposium on behalf of Minister Denise Peterson-Rafuse and Deputy Minister Robert Wood. He noted that the Symposium's sessions have been designed around topics proposed by Strategy stakeholders. This reflects the importance of partnerships, which are necessary to make the Strategy a success.

Linda shared regrets from George Savoury, Chair of the Child and Youth Strategy Committee (CYSC, the provincial leadership table), and Lynn Cheek, Health and Wellness representative on the CYSC. Linda then asked JoAnna LaTulippe-Rochon to explain the artwork prepared by Eastern Region members at their October 5<sup>th</sup> regional meeting where they discussed "What does collaboration look like?"

Linda explained that the videographers present were a group of youth from Leaders of Today (LOT) who would attempt to capture highlights from the Symposium. She concluded by indicating that all presentations would be available upon request and/or posted to the Strategy's webpage.

**1:40 p.m.      Traditional Mi'kmaq Welcoming Ceremony**

Ella Paul conducted a Traditional Mi'kmaq Welcoming Ceremony, which included a "smudging". This involved passing sacred smoke over people's heads (thinking good thoughts), over the eyes (seeing good things), over the ears (hearing good things), and over the mouth (speaking good things).

Ella gave thanks to all who present, and encouraged them to look ahead and build a place where our youth can become good leaders and good grandparents.

**2:40 p.m.      Break and opportunity to network**

**3:00 p.m.      Promising Practices**

John Ure, Regional Specialist for the Northern Region, explained that one of the purposes of the Symposium was to share "promising practices", which are different than "best practices" (i.e., promising practices are innovative and emergent, seem to be getting good results, but are as yet unproven). He noted that we have 28 presenters giving 14 different promising practices.

Presenters sat at a numbered table in the room. When a bell was sounded, participants chose a table and sat down. The presenter asked everyone to introduce themselves, gave a brief summary of their "promising practice" and how it was achieving success, and then opened the discussion for questions and comments. After 40 minutes, the bell rang again and participants switched tables and heard about another promising practice. Each participant had the opportunity to hear two promising practices.

Notes about all promising practices are available in the *Promising Practices: 2012 CYS Symposium* booklet (attached).

**4:20 p.m. Large Group reconvened to hear/share learning, insights, comments, and questions from the Promising Practice sessions, such as:**

- Phenomenal things are going on in our province but may be in small pockets and many groups are struggling to keep their levels of funding. These programs need to be kept and the successes spread.
- Youth Health Centres – successes of Public Health staff are encouraging but these services are under resourced. If we want results, we need to allocate resources.
- There are problems serving youth 16-19 years. DCS participants were able to give updates on what is happening on this question, such as the successes with Empire House in Lunenburg.
- The passion of people who are involved in the work is AMAZING.
- In order to have issues get the attention they need, we have to have groundswell support from the community. Community mobilization – getting grassroots engagement - is crucial.
- When asked “What is most important to you to have in your communities?” young people consistently identify the following:
  - a place to hang out
  - something to do
  - someone to talk to

**4:50 p.m. Sessions end**

**5:30 p.m. Supper**

**7:00 p.m. Dr. Clyde Hertzman presentation**

Linda Atkinson introduced Minister of Education and Minister responsible for Youth, Ramona Jennex, who welcomed participants to the keynote event. She pointed to the importance of government and community working together and the strides that have been made under the CYS initiative. Dr. Clyde Hertzman, Director of the Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP), was introduced. Dr. Hertzman has played a central role in creating a framework that links population health to human development, emphasizing the special role of early childhood development as a determinant of health.

**7:15 p.m. Keynote: Dr. Clyde Hertzman**

Dr. Hertzman presented “Lessons from 15 years of research on the Early Years.”  
(see attached Power Point) An abridged version of his comments follows.

“The early years really do impact one’s lifetime,” he said. “The incidence of school failure, teen pregnancy, and criminality are all shaped by the early years of life (the first and second decades). Early experiences also impact the incidence of obesity, blood pressure and depression in the third decade. Coronary heart disease and diabetes can result from early experiences. Premature aging and memory loss can also be impacted by early years.”

“Our understanding of the nature of humans is changing,” said Dr. Hertzman.

“Biological embedding occurs when early experiences alter biological development. Biological embedding includes experiences, behaviours, neural circuitry, cell development, synopsis, and gene function. Most brain activity occurs from the time a woman is pregnant to when a child becomes school age; this is when kids are most sensitive to their environment. It is a period of disproportionate sensitivity.”

“Children learn facial expressions, language, speech, communications, peer social skills, emotional skills, and hearing. All these things impact life development.”

“Canada (and Nova Scotia) now uses the PanCanadian Early Development Instrument (EDI) to assess development. It is conducted in February each year in kindergarten. It involves rating children on five scales – physical, social, language, communications and cognitive – to determine their level of development (or non-development). In other words, their vulnerability.”

“In Canada, more than half of all children start school in a vulnerable state despite high education and economic levels. We have a high proportion of ‘avoidable’ vulnerability or ‘surplus’ vulnerability.”

“EDI also shows the degree to which socio-economic experience impacts development. It can also show which communities are doing better or worse than predicted and why. Trending is available using EDI as well.”

“Research might be expected to show that less-advantaged youth have more vulnerability. But, in fact, most vulnerable children come from lower middle class.”

“We need to develop programs to reach all youth, although this alone will not resolve the issues. We also need more directed programs, but there are barriers to participation. Barriers include but are not limited to cost of programming, cost of transportation, availability of transportation, work schedule of parents, language in which programs are offered, and lack of encouragement by parents for children to participate.”

“Another need is universal programs at a scale and intensity required to reduce barriers. We need partnerships made up of senior funding agencies and local leadership.”

“‘Social epigenesis’ impacts cell function. The ‘Butterfly’ example proves that cells do not define you on their own. Other factors still have great impact (e.g., nurture). This doesn’t just occur in fetal development but continues into life.”

“After-school activities do work to reduce vulnerability.”

“Canada is under-investing in families and child development.”

**8:00 p.m. Small group discussions followed Dr. Hertzman’s presentation, after which he opened the floor to Q&A. Some of the discussion included:**

- The Schools Plus Program is an example of “proportionate universality” (facilitation & community health outcomes).

- True Connection – Dr. Hertzman mentioned that the early years last a lifetime. At the opening of the Symposium, Ella talked about children becoming good elders. Both comments make the same point about the reach of the influence of the early years.

**8:30 p.m. Social gathering**

#### **Thursday, October 18, 2012**

**7:30 Continental breakfast**

**8:30 a.m. Welcome/opening remarks by Linda Atkinson**

**8:45 a.m. Youth Engagement Workshop**

Isabelle LeVert-Chiasson, from the HeartWood Centre for Community Youth Development, conducted a one-hour youth engagement workshop. She showed a video produced by the Child and Youth Strategy that reminds people of the importance of youth engagement (see *Everyone Wins* at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GHMaj8dgT4Y>) and the impact it could have on Nova Scotia communities, especially rural areas. She also showed a video by Community Foundations of Canada with some startling statistics on youth employment, health, crime, and education. (see *Why Youth?* At: <http://www.vitalsignscanada.ca/en/vitalyouth>)

**9:45 a.m. A whole group discussion followed as to how we can use this info to better engage young people in our Regions.**

When asked “What would be the benefits of youth engagement? For adults? For organizations? For communities? For youth themselves?” People said:

- Energy gets created
- Building inter-generational relationships & respect for each other. Youth teach adults and visa versa
- Importance of arts and culture to building our identity. Having their own identity in the community will keep them (youth) there
- Trust - there needs to be a true trusting to believe in the process & what needs to happen needs to be authentic. Cannot be “tokenism”
- Engaged teens have less negative behaviour
- Youth are key to a sustainable community. They want to be listened to and youth CAN contribute today. Organizations are enlivened and communities grow stronger
- The “process” is a benefit in itself - a great foundation. We need to invest in youth and in adults to learn skills to work together

When asked “What would be the risks/challenges when inviting youth ‘in’?” People said:

- The Membertou First Nations developed a successful youth program that saw them go from having the highest crime rate in Canada to the lowest. They even found that some former “criminals” have become best parents.
- “Operation Un-Friend Bullying” – website developed by youth for youth and has already received over one million hits. See: <http://oub.ca/>

- processes in our community have changed, opportunities for youth have declined
- anxiety is increasingly becoming a REAL issue

Linda commented: If you want to be an Advocate for Youth Engagement, keep having this conversation. Youth Engagement Workshops, like the one that Isabelle presented, are available in differing lengths. If you are interested in hosting, contact the Child and Youth Strategy.

**10:15 a.m. Break and opportunity to network**

**10:35 a.m. Fish Bowl discussion with youth on topics suggested by participants**

Five youth sat in the center of the room with the adults gathered around to listen and observe. Each youth took a turn answering questions gathered anonymously from participants earlier in the Symposium. Here are the questions and some of the responses:

If you could change everything about education from 1-12, what would it be?

- more hands on
- have teachers that really do want to be there
- have lots of guidance counsellors, start in middle school so there is NO waiting to see one

If you could talk to the Province's new Anti-bullying coordinator, what would you tell her?

- get youth involved because youth will listen to youth more than they listen to adults
- also, feeling judged by peers is easier than being judged by adults, so youth should be involved
- make sure she is engaged with the schools
- my expectation of her is that she needs to "DO SOMETHING"

Young people face stigmas, how do you deal with this?

- my friends pull me through
- have no one to talk to so I just "deal with it"
- starting a blog for myself

What is the biggest problem with youth in your area?

- Have nothing to do, so they go to drugs, smoke, party, getting in trouble
- lack of free/affordable programs
- lack of jobs we are interested in, that would benefit us

What can we do to help youth become the best they can be?

- Be there, get to know the youth and they will open up to you, be the guide, having a supportive adult creates a big change, youth knowing they can talk to you
- have room for failure, too. Not have the expectation that you have to do it right
- give youth opportunities, make time when the youth needs you
- give us a chance to lead
- let youth be a part of creating, be a member of the planning process

What is the most frustrating experience for youth today?

- peer pressure that leads us into “wrong” behaviours
- being shot down by an adult makes you feel like you are doing something wrong and you can become shut out
- living in rural communities; feeling like all programs are in Halifax

Can young people recognize healthy families? What are the indicators?

- Support and love felt in the room
- depends on how the youth has been brought up to recognize what is “normal”

From a youth perspective, who would you go to for help?

- I go to my friends as they seem to understand me the best. Will not go to my Mom as she will judge me
- In a really serious situation, I go to volunteers at Slate Youth Centre (Truro) or my friend's Mom who is a youth worker – go to an adult who understands me
- to my teachers and principal – who I trust; different issues with different people
- anybody who genuinely shows s/he cares

What has been successful in dealing with drug/prescription drug abuse?

- Slate is like a second family
- as a friend, get friends to try to stop
- teaching safe habits

Cyber-Bullying is leading many young people to despair. What can we do about that?

- People need to know what cyber-bullying really is
- bullies need to be educated, need to go into a workshop. They are bullying for a reason – not necessarily bad kids
- cyber-bullying goes unchecked because we do not see any reactions to what is said
- recognize that it is happening, both sides need to be educated about what bullying is

When you hear the word “community” what does it mean to you?

- People working together happily
- people playing off each other's strengths,
- working together on something, helping others, any number of people who have ups and downs

As a way to re-energize the group and work out the kinks from sitting so long, Simon (long-standing member of LOT) lead us in a “Shakedown” exercise.

**11:15 a.m. Linda Atkinson gave an update/overview of progress in the CYS over the past year and where we are headed next.**

The Child and Youth Strategy worked on 4 Focus areas:

1. Youth Engagement Practices:

- Department of Health & Wellness has initiated a Health Promotion Youth Corps and it is in alignment with the CYS. Through LOT, each region will have 2 paid positions for youth, starting next summer. The objective is to further involve young people in health promotion issues that

- affect their peers & also to create purposeful engagement opportunities in their communities
- 1<sup>st</sup> Health Promotion Youth Corps Camp was held at Brigadoon in March 2012. DHW will fund another retreat, beginning next spring (It will act as a second LOT and be a March Break Camp in 2013. Sponsored by Health & Wellness)
- LOT is working hard to be more aligned with the regions. LOT is attending this Symposium and extending a genuine invitation to regions for leadership opportunities. All here are invited to come to the Debert LOT Summit Oct.26-28. If you are not available for the whole time, Sunday morning is a time for regional focus. This Summit is NOT aimed at youth programming – this time is to help adults and organizations work better with young people (capacity building with your organizations)
- Youth Engagement Workshop is available through the Public Service Commission (N S is the only province that we know which has this type of training)

## 2. Collaborative Service Delivery Approaches:

- A jurisdictional review (literature review, interviews, focus groups & online surveys) was conducted to increase understanding of collaborative models. Found there is a need for early and ongoing commitment at a strategic level from all participating partners. Trust needs to be built and it takes time. Broad-ranging recommendations include:
  - identify ways that each Dept can support collaborative practices in business plans and senior leadership performance appraisals & review policies to ensure barriers are minimized
  - increase opportunities for knowledge exchange (use developed modules for inter-departmental workshops)
  - develop a communications strategy and map these practices

## 3. Horizontal Practices:

- fostering greater understanding of governance. Work plan deliverables:
  - establish a working group (key activity was the development of Terms of Reference for the Regional Leadership Tables and committees. This will serve as a template)
  - confirm & validate roles & accountabilities
  - develop a communications framework (CYS Committee's commitment to meet in the regions, annually meet with regional chairs, annually meet with Focus groups)
  - prepare an education plan
  - finalize an implementation plan

## 4. Evaluation & Data Collection & Sharing Protocols:

- Commitment made to strengthen evaluation & data collection & foster environment of evaluation.
  - logic model simplification
  - need for data for evaluation, not only provincially but regionally
  - the work being done by Community Counts to map assets for children, youth, and families has been moved to this focus area

Linda noted some successes not tied specifically to the Focus Areas:

- Education's Expansion of Schools Plus

- DCS and their ongoing work to improve alignment of its services with the Schools Plus model
- Schools Plus has taken the lead on provincial info sharing practices. In government, sharing data is a challenge and it is hoped this will become a template that can be replicated in other areas

Some of our challenges:

- CYS staff team complement – down from 7 to 5 but hope to fill spaces soon
- reality of government's limited fiscal ability

#### **11:30 a.m. Questions/comments on the update and overview**

- Terms of Reference template works really well
- communications is still a challenge
- technology challenges; e.g., government needs to invest in compatible video-conferencing
- Regional Specialists are making sure the work in other regions, and on more corporate files, is being shared and many thanks to them for their leadership, ie. TOR, collaboration workshop (which is grounded in "complexity science" because our social problems are becoming more acute and complex and we need to work together to find effective solutions)

#### **12:00 p.m. Lunch with new friends**

#### **1:00 p.m. Open Space re: What can we do to work better to improve outcomes with children & youth?**

Linda introduced the process of Open Space. Seven individuals proposed the following themes for their discussions groups.

1. Challenging negatives attitudes about our youth
2. What is something we can do to help educate the bullies and the bullied?
3. What are we doing to support grandparents who are parenting?
4. Working with a group provincially to advance 18<sup>th</sup> Month Visit for all children in NS. What do we need to consider moving forward? in the context of supporting families?
5. How do you engage parents/caregivers in programs?
6. How can we evaluate the effectiveness of our collaboration between government, non-government and community groups in the health and well-being of the lives of young people?
7. What actions can I take to have municipal councils involve youth in community?

#### **2:00pm Circle sharing of insights from the group discussions**

#### **2:30pm Regional group discussions**

Tonya Comeau, Regional Specialist for the Western Region, asked the audience to divide into regional groupings and reflect upon the following questions.

1. What stood out for you these two days?
2. How can you apply your insights in your regions?
3. How are you able to align with our provincial priorities?

#### **3:00pm Report-outs from the regions**



People were invited to take refreshments and reconvene as a large group to hear highlights of the regional discussions.

Central:

- how can we get youth at our table and then, help youth to have some advocacy training so youths' priorities will get into the political agenda? This will be taken back to their table and Ryan will take it back to HeartWood as well
- the invitation to do the same was extended to all regions

Eastern:

- our table has lost its focus so we need to take back horizontal practices
- we recognize that each community is different. It's not about replicating – it's about enhancing what exists in the community

Northern:

- hearing youth voice here these 2 days & how this can change the work we do
- Amherst will bring Brandin & Emily to their area
- Fish Bowl in the Mall to change attitudes
- create some way to document/evaluate collaborations
- regions need to be informed what the CYS priorities are and how the priorities could align with the regions (18<sup>th</sup> Month Visit touch point, Mental Health Strategy, NSCC has such a commitment to service learning)

Western:

- greater awareness of the issues and their root causes, need to educate community and go back to the community for solutions
- need to focus on age 16-19 years boys and not let them fall between the cracks
- success in numbers across the province and how can we work better together

### **3:30pm Wrap-up**

Linda made the following thank you's:

- Media team
- Emily & Brandin & LOT team
- all present who hung in over a long two days. The quality of conversations was extremely high.

### **3:40 Finish**