

UPDATE

Our Kids Are Worth It

Our Sixth Year

Strategy for Children and Youth



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January 2014

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Introduction

This report describes the work of the Child and Youth Strategy from October 2012 to December 2013. It showcases the regional tables, the four focus areas, an overview of promising practices, and the Leaders of Today (LOT) network, and describes intersections between the Strategy and other provincial initiatives such as jobsHere, the Mental Health and Addictions Strategy, and the 18-Month Developmental Screening for all Children.

Four focus areas continue to be at the centre of the Strategy’s work: enhancing youth engagement, promoting collaborative service-delivery approaches, improving horizontal (governance) practices, and developing better evaluation, data collection, and sharing approaches.

It has been a productive year in the four focus areas.

- **Focus Area 1 (Youth Engagement)** concentrated on LOT as the nucleus for youth engagement as the program evolves and builds a greater provincial profile. The goal is to use LOT and its regular gatherings and activities to connect youth with government work that impacts young people. The LOT summit continues to be the primary opportunity for this, with the new LOT Youth Corps and a growing number of regional activities complementing the connections. More than 130 people attended the Fall Summit.
- **Focus Area 2 (Collaboration)** developed a tool to collect data on collaborative practices across Nova Scotia; these will be included in Community Counts Map Centre as community assets. Focus Area 2 also finalized the Collaboration Checklist to help regional networks identify collaborative projects. This fillable PDF form will be posted on the Child and Youth Strategy website for easy access by the public.
- **Focus Area 3 (Horizontal Practices)** developed a form and guidelines for tracking communications requests. To be effective the Strategy requires information to flow both vertically and horizontally. The Child and Youth Strategy Committee approved a process for the vertical exchange of information and requests within the Strategy’s governance tables, and will use the Communications Request Form to track exchanges.
- **Focus Area 4 (Evaluation)** reviewed the provincial, regional, and community tables in February 2013 to evaluate the current status of outcomes for the Strategy. The outcomes were found to be meaningful, and a new logic model has been prepared for the Committee that reflects minor modifications and outlines indicators.

The Strategy is supported by the LOT network of youth and youth agencies. LOT informs our work, strengthens the voice of youth, and offers a respectful space for youth and government to learn from one another. Collaboration is at the heart of the work we do. LOT played an important role this year in the government’s response to the Rehtaeh Parsons tragedy; the action team assembled by Minister Marilyn More consulted with LOT to obtain the perspective of youth on how to make schools a safer space.

The regional and community tables were very active again this year. This report reviews and describes an initiative of Child and Youth Strategy tables in each of the four regions. The tables continue to play a crucial role in bringing together government, community groups, and young people to better coordinate approaches to engage and serve youth in Nova Scotia.

This report also focuses on promising practices that have emerged from community groups associated with the Strategy in each region. Promising practices that better serve children, youth, and families are being tried throughout in Nova Scotia. They are starting to yield good results, which “causes a buzz” locally. The Child and Youth Strategy tries to tap into and share that energy and emergent knowledge.

The Child and Youth Strategy Committee asked for a review of the lessons learned from the SchoolsPlus information sharing and consent form development, findings that will be useful to future government initiatives. Members of the committee that led the SchoolsPlus work are prepared to advise other government departments working on similar initiatives about the lessons learned.

Finally, the Strategy has received a mandate to refocus its youth engagement efforts on sexual violence and bullying for the next two years. This is in response to an action item from the report of the Action Team on Sexual Violence and Bullying, which was assembled after the death of Rehtaeh Parson by Marilyn More, Minister responsible for the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women.

Promising Practices Across Nova Scotia

The raw edge of emerging child and youth strategy activity

What is a promising practice? Promising practices are ideas, activities, or strategies that are being tried in local communities to better serve and engage youth. These emerging practices often seem like “no big deal” to the people using them, and there may be no formal evaluation results to show how they are effective. However, they make intuitive sense and often come from “Aha!” moments as people discover ways of engaging youth and adults that work and make a difference.

How does this support youth in the Nova Scotia? The promising practices highlighted in this report demonstrate the theme of having “*places to go, things to do, and someone to talk to.*” This theme emerged from a series of conversations the Antigonish Women’s Resource Centre hosted with young people during a multi-year research study on violence against girls and young women. What youth said they needed to thrive in their own communities boiled down to these three ideas. A number of communities have adopted “*places to go, things to do, and someone to talk to*” as a guiding principle when engaging youth and attempting to make their communities more youth-friendly.

Why is the Child and Youth Strategy sharing these practices? This collection shares some initiatives to engage youth aged 13–19 years that are working well in the province. The sharing of promising practices can spark creative exchanges, foster innovation, promote learning, and increase connections among practitioners. At a practical level, we imagine you might read a story here, and give the organizer a call to find out more. Or, you might take the story back to your own organization to plant a seed about strategies that seem to work well elsewhere. Let us know how you use these!

How did we choose these practices? The stories shared below were identified by a “snowball” method. Individuals doing innovative work with youth were contacted for more information and invited to suggest others who could share lessons about engaging youth. Each contributor connected us with several others in the province.

Promising Practice: Northern

PLAY IT AGAIN, KID

A promising new initiative, Outdoor Play in the Early Years Setting, is focused on bringing back the fun and benefits of traditional play.



“This project is part of a movement to get children, youth, and families outdoors and playing. Play is pivotal to the development of a child and helps them to understand their social and cultural world. Yet 46% of Canadian children engage in less than three hours of active play a week,” says Peter McCracken, regional representative for the Fundy Region, Physical Activity, Sport and Recreation, a division of the Department of Health and Wellness.

Last winter the Outdoor Play team—which includes Mount Saint Vincent University, local community health boards, the Department of Community Services, the Municipality of East Hants Recreation, and the East Hants Community Learning Association—worked with seven early learning centres to conduct focus groups. They explored the opportunities and the challenges day-care employees face in providing time for outdoor play.



The initiative, called the East Hants Outdoor Play Partnership Project, had another goal. “We also wanted to help increase the knowledge and skills of workers so that they would be able to incorporate more outdoor play into their programs,” explains Peter.

This led to the development of workshops for employees and directors of the seven early learning centres, complemented by on-site mentoring.

The on-site coaching was important in two ways, notes Peter. It not only helped workers transform theory into reality at their centres, but also helped employees address parents’ concerns, licensing regulations, and other issues related to changing outdoor play activities and play space environments.

The next priority is a communications strategy and development of a manual with playful ideas that different groups, including parents, can use.

Programs like the Outdoor Play in the Early Years Setting are gradually getting more kids and their parents playing outdoors. “The environment and the approach have changed,” notes Peter. “Kids want to go out more. And their parents want to go with them.”

Promising Practice: Central

HOPE BLOOMS

Hope Blooms (the North End Community Garden, Greenhouse and Youth Herb Dressing Business) engages at-risk youth and the community at large in building positive environments that foster personal empowerment and community growth. Social entrepreneurship, ecological agriculture, health, and relationship cohesion are the main pillars of this project. In this youth-led model future leaders are the change agents in their community. Youth learn how to grow food, produce and successfully market value-added products, and build a small social enterprise from the ground up. They are demonstrating that material poverty does not mean one cannot be rich; in fact, they are creating a culture of abundance and ownership that is informed by hard work, accountability, and trust.



What sets our project apart? Not only have we built a comprehensive program that addresses the social determinants of health—including healthy child development, social inclusion, safety support networks, food security, and employable skill development—but all of our programs are youth-driven. Youth grow the vegetables and herbs, make the dressings, and successfully market them. We get in the kitchen ourselves for our monthly community suppers to provide a healthy

three-course meal to more than 50 neighborhood residents. Youth work with a chef and registered dietician to create fresh, organic soups and baby food for local seniors and mothers who might otherwise not have access to nutritious meals. Our programs are not only providing a valuable service to the community, but also teaching youth that they have the power and ability to give back.

There is an old saying, “It takes a village to raise a child”—yet through Hope Blooms, we have learned that sometimes it takes the children to raise the village. Over the past six years we have seen incredible growth in the number of youth joining Hope Blooms. For the most part, participants are peer-recruited or self-identified—they see the program as a place of belonging, and they want to be a part of it. While joining a community garden may seem like a simple decision, in reality it is a very powerful act of courage that is having a ripple effect throughout the community. By showing that they are willing and excited to step up and contribute to the betterment of their own community through hard work, these youth have inspired many adults to also take part. The youth have created a paradigm shift in their own neighborhood, one that challenges the patterns of dependency and isolation with ownership and family.

Youth have few places where they feel in control over anything or where they can be themselves without their actions being judged as right or wrong. Key to our success has been involving youth every step of the way and letting them see how their work pays off. While there are many successful community projects that involve or serve young people, Hope Blooms youth are empowered to take



control and actively steer the direction it takes. They take ownership over their contributions and experience the true freedoms of their own efforts. Integral to this strategy is the practice of relationship-building. In this environment of trust and inclusivity, knowing that everyone has something to offer and that every voice is heard, youth feel equal and valued. Prioritizing relationships and experiences over products and outcomes has empowered everyone involved to work harder and take chances, secure in the knowledge that they have a family-type safety net if they need it. While relationship-building is an investment that requires constant attention, it is invaluable in empowering people and places.

Building on the culture of youth empowerment, our next step is to encourage the youth to take on more responsibility within the project. Some of our oldest youth who have been involved since the beginning are ready to further develop their leadership skills in agriculture, nutrition, culinary arts, business, and philanthropy. Our goal is to help our youth specialize in these areas so that they can eventually lead and facilitate these program components themselves. Recognizing their knowledge and telling our story to others is also important, so having the youth present at more conferences and take advantage of various academic, media, and community platforms to spread the word is a priority. We believe that the Hope Blooms model can be used by many other communities. After experiencing its positive impact in the North End community, our next step will be to take this model outside Halifax.

Promising Practice: Eastern

UNDERSTANDING VIOLENCE AND BUILDING SKILLS FOR LIFE

This promising practice is already being cited as a “best practice.” Youth helping youth is at the heart of a violence-prevention program that is becoming part of the curricula in more Nova Scotia schools. Healthy Relationships for Youth (HRY) was developed by the Antigonish Women’s Resource Centre in 2006; last year it was offered in 10 schools under the jurisdiction of the Strait Regional School Board.

Two aspects of the program make it particularly engaging and effective. First, it involves youth in the classroom, schools, and communities. Grade 11 and 12 students are trained as peer educators, then offer a 12-week program to Grade 9 students as part of the Healthy Living curricula. The interactive sessions are designed to reduce the risk of youth violence by developing young people’s skills and knowledge about creating and maintaining healthy relationships.

“The classroom teacher is still present, but the high school students teach the class. It’s very exciting for them,” says program coordinator Laura Swaine.

The second important aspect of the program, which last year was added as a best practice to the Public Health Agency of Canada’s Canadian Best Practices Portal, is its focus on diversity. This helps students understand and connect issues related to different forms of oppression, exclusion, and violence. “It’s a broad picture,” stresses Laura. “Bullying, for example, is a hot topic, but we go beyond this. The goal is to recognize and challenge racism, sexism, and homophobia as forms of violence.”

The goal is to recognize and challenge racism, sexism, and homophobia as forms of violence.

—Laura Swaine

The goal of HRY, which is unique in Canada, is being attained. Over the past seven years the program has reached 3,550 Grade 9 students and 534 youth facilitators have been trained. An evaluation of the program last year found that 89% of Grade 9 students agreed or somewhat agreed that they could explain different kinds of violence in relationships.

More than 77% of Grade 9 participants also agreed or somewhat agreed that they were more comfortable sharing their opinions and experiences because of the program. As one participant noted, “I learned that it is okay to talk about my feelings to others and trust that they won’t be told to other students around the school.”

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—program participant

Now HRY is expanding. During the past year high schools from the South Shore and the Chignecto Central regional school boards offered the program for the first time. There also are plans to offer HRY in schools in Parrsboro and the Annapolis Valley Regional School Board.

“This program changes people,” says Laura. “It builds a community of tolerance and understanding.”

Promising Practice: Western

BRIGHTENING UP A SPACE—AND RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUTH

In 2009 individuals involved in programs for youth and children in Lunenburg County came together with one goal: to enhance their work with youth. “We wanted specifically to look at how the Lunenburg District Office could improve the work it does with youth and engaging youth,” said Gail Moore, an employment support case worker with the Department of Community Services in Bridgewater.

The newly formed Youth Services Committee did a youth-based strength assessment in 2009, the first year of the initiative. This approach trains young people to conduct research into the issues that affect them. In 2010 youth-action research, again with young people at the helm, looked at improving relationships between staff in the Lunenburg District Office and youth, as well as developing youth-friendly spaces. The inaugural research resulted in a report called Get to Know Me. In 2011 the youth research culminated in a document entitled We’re Getting Heard.

“One thing we learned was that young people wanted space within the Lunenburg District Office that was youth-friendly. They wanted alternatives to a desk, brighter colours, and couches instead of chairs. Our interview rooms



are basic and neutral, and the youth wanted something more vibrant,” says Gail.

The District Office was undergoing renovations, so a youth room was incorporated in the plans. Youth designed, painted, and decorated their room, capturing their hard, creative work on video.

Youth also reached out into the community with their creative ideas. To enhance the county’s environmental footprint and brighten up neighbourhoods, youth painted benches in their communities. This was based on a Place-Making Community Concept.

Gail and her colleagues also began an asset mapping initiative in 2011. “We worked with staff to identify what was working well and what could be improved,” she notes. This resulted in the development of an action plan this past winter.



Since then much has happened. In 2013 Bridgewater’s DesBrisay Museum was looking for individuals to film local artisans, many of whom had special heritage skills such as rug-hooking and aboriginal bead work. A 10-week program was developed to provide the youth with training and direction, after which they created memories that their communities will have for more than a lifetime. “The initiative,” notes Gail, “was also an opportunity to build employment skills, including interview skills and networking.”

The project has done much more, as one participant noted. “I’ve never been a really social person, so this is good for me—getting up my confidence, and working with a team, and just getting to know people,” Matthew said. “That’s something I’ve been trying to do for quite some time. I finally have an opportunity.”

Community Tables Success Stories

The Community tables, which may be the most important link in Nova Scotia’s Child and Youth Strategy, are central to providing children and their families a foundation on which to build a healthy, happy life. Connecting community and government, the tables identify local interests and priorities on issues that need to be advanced.

The tables operate at the local level. By bringing together the key players that know their community—including front-line staff, service providers, and management—they promote collaborative, community-based service to children, youth, and families. They advance regional needs and opportunities through the model for action. The Community tables also play an essential role in the Strategy’s governance structure.

Following are descriptions of each regional community table and stories about their work.

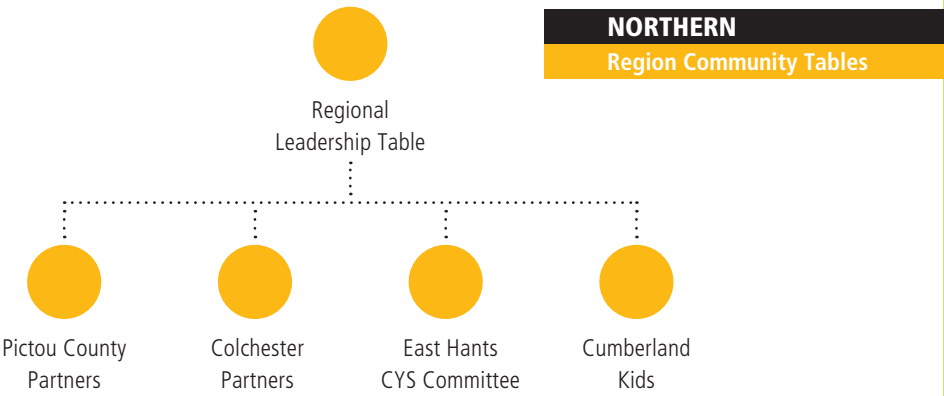
Success Story: Northern

A FISH TANK NAMED COLLABORATION

In spring 2010 the East Hants Child and Youth Strategy Committee, a district-wide group, was established. Today its impact is being felt through the community.

The committee brought individuals and organizations involved with youth together with young people. “We wanted to look at how we could engage and involve youth and enhance networking,” says James Shedden, a health promotions specialist with Mental Health and Addictions Services in the Colchester East Hants Health Authority and chair of the East Hants Child and Youth Strategy Committee.

The initial work looked at the strengths of the community and areas for improvement. The focus was development of a youth resource in East Hants, something that reflected what youth wanted. Feedback was obtained from parents and committee members through an online questionnaire, and from youth through interviews. Young people were also trained to do focus groups with middle school students.



The committee, which meets at the Hants East Regional High School, came together in April to discuss what it had learned and next steps. Youth participants indicated that something was missing for them: the young people called it “community happiness.”

“We looked at what that meant to people and how we could capture the feeling,” says James.

The youth came up with an idea: “They want to donate a fish tank and fish to the high school because fish make people happy.”

They’re now working to make the idea reality. “The youth will raise funds, get the school’s permission, make the purchases, and keep the tank up and running,” James says.

It’s an idea the young people are committed to, he adds. “The adults raised objections and the youth addressed each one. They will make this happen.”

Something else has happened: the pledge to really check in with youth and hear what they have to say became ingrained in how the committee works.

“There is a real energy among the committee members,” says James. “We’ve worked hard to get here. It’s great to see things taking shape.”

Success Story: Eastern

ONE COMMITTEE, ONE SAFER COMMUNITY

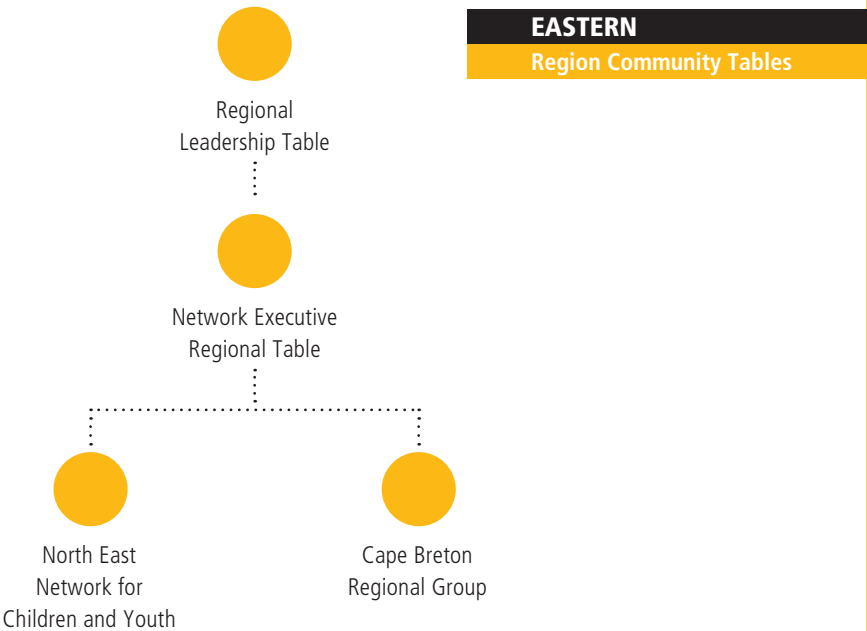
Residents in northern Cape Breton, an area affectionately dubbed North of Smokey (NoS), have come together to make their communities safer. Their work has resulted in the formation of an active committee, acquisition of funds to hire a part-time crime prevention coordinator, and collaboration with many partners.

The NoS Safer Communities Committee formed in 2012 after a two-day exercise that resulted in a crime prevention plan for the area. The committee is chaired by Janet Bickerton, who works with Mental Health and Addictions Services of the Cape Breton District Health Authority.

The focus for the first year was two-pronged: community safety and youth. The committee quickly realized that it would be difficult to move forward with the actions identified in the plan without first addressing the safety concerns of the community, which were paramount. And the need was considerable, notes Nancy MacDonald, executive director of Family Service of Eastern Nova Scotia. “The crime stats for these communities, which include Meat Cove and Ingonish, are significantly higher than the rest of Nova Scotia.”

Seeking support, community members asked to have their concerns brought to the local, regional, and provincial tables of the Child and Youth Strategy. In addition, because policing is a municipal responsibility, it was necessary to involve the municipal councils for Inverness and Victoria counties. The Cape Breton Regional Municipality/Victoria County Advisory Committee, the Network for Children and Youth Executive, and the Child and Youth Strategy Leadership Table were all informed of the concerns and held significant discussions. All agreed to provide support by raising awareness of the issues facing the NoS communities. The Network for Children and Youth and the Leadership table wrote letters to the municipal councils and to the Child and Youth Strategy Committee expressing concern over the situation.

Increased awareness resulted in meetings with both municipal councils and there is now municipal representation on the NoS Committee. After meeting with the NoS committee, officials from the Department of Justice committed funding to support a part-time crime prevention coordinator. Both municipal councils also contributed to the cost of this position. The crime prevention coordinator was hired in late 2013. “This person will bring together the RCMP, government, and committee



members to address safety issues and put measures in place to make communities safer,” notes Mary-Jo Church, director of professional services with Family Service of Eastern Nova Scotia, and co-chair of the Cape Breton Regional Municipality/Victoria Advisory Committee.

Family Service of Eastern Nova Scotia also responded to community requests for increased services. The agency now offers clinical therapy services in the Bay St. Lawrence area once every two weeks and provides youth outreach services once a week. Cape Breton’s Family Place Resource Centre provides office space where Family Service staff can see clients when in the area.

“This work reflects a community-based need that made its way through the Child and Youth Strategy process and got implemented. It shows what can be done when we collaborate,” says Church.

The work being done North of Smokey—and the approach being applied—can help communities across Nova Scotia. “This is a model other communities can use,” notes MacDonald. “This demonstrates collaboration at its best.”

Success Story: Western

ENHANCING ACCESS TO RECREATIONAL FACILITIES— TOGETHER

In 2013 an opportunity to submit a proposal became an opportunity to cement a partnership. Requests for funding were being accepted under the province’s Major Community Sport and Recreation Facility Access Program, and in Western Nova Scotia government, community groups, and health professionals came together to respond with one voice.

The access program has two goals: to increase the number of free, unstructured activities for families at major facilities, and to increase physical activity opportunities for groups for whom there are barriers to access. As a stepping stone to developing a unified proposal from the South Shore, the Facility Access Team was established. It comprised the Lunenburg Queens Recreation Coordinators/Directors Association, the Yarmouth Shelburne Municipal Recreation Directors Association, Public Health Services in Southwest Nova and the South Shore, and the Department of Community Services.

“We came together and in a very short period of time put together a comprehensive proposal that reflected the needs of our community. The commitment of all the partners was incredible,” says Debby Smith, regional representative for the South Shore with the Department Health and Wellness Physical Activity, Sport and Recreation Branch.

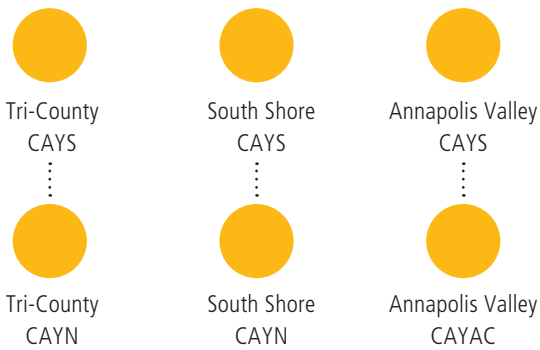
*We wanted to capture the voices of families.
We wanted to learn what would help us improve access to
sport and recreation venues.*

—Debby Smith

Under the leadership of the committee and in collaboration with the Healthy Beginnings: Enhanced Home Visiting team, 50 interviews and five focus groups were held throughout the region. “We wanted to capture the voices of families,” says Debby. “We wanted to learn what would help us improve access to sport and recreation venues.”

The local Children and Youth Network was a key player. It helped diverse partners connect so they would understand the Facility Access initiative, its purpose, and

WESTERN
Region Community Tables



how various departments and organizations could contribute. The network also reached out to others with helpful insights who could open communication with families to better identify the opportunities they wanted and the supports they required. Many of the regional table partners are now going to be directly involved in distribution of sport and recreation facility passes to families.

It quickly became apparent that the barriers to taking part in physical activity go far beyond not having the financial resources to pay for gym memberships or program fees. “Transportation is a major barrier, and child care is an issue,” notes Debby. “This work helped us understand the broad picture.”

That picture has been captured in two reports, one for Lunenburg–Queens and one for Yarmouth–Shelburne, that contain numerous recommendations to improve awareness, scheduling, transportation, child care, affordability, and age-appropriate opportunities. Based on that report and the work done within the community, the Facility Access Team has submitted a proposal for funding to the Department of Health and Wellness.

“We’re hopeful we will be able to build on the work we have done to date—and together,” says Debby.

Success Story: Central

SCHOOLSPLUS + DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY SERVICES
= SUCCESS

In the Central Region a commitment to collaborative service delivery resulted in the alignment of the Department of Community Services action plan with the Department of Education SchoolsPlus model.

SchoolsPlus promotes the collaborative delivery of services and resources in schools throughout Nova Scotia. Representatives from the departments of Community Services, Justice, Education, and Health and Wellness work with the community to seamlessly provide services that respect and address local needs. The model also encourages sharing of information and resources among agencies, and provision of services beyond the school day.

In the Central Region, each site is connected to the Child and Youth Strategy and SchoolsPlus regional advisory committees. Their role is to help identify and resolve gaps in services or resources.

With SchoolsPlus having sites in every school board in Nova Scotia, the Department of Community Services began in 2012 to align its services with that model of service delivery. After an analysis report examined services for SchoolsPlus children, youth, and families who had involvement with Community Services, the department responded by developing its provincewide action plan.

We're able to identify and address issues and collaborative opportunities, improving access to services for children, youth and their families.

—Ann Osborne

In the Central Region the department had already implemented a plan to align its services with SchoolsPlus in 2011. It included Child Welfare, Employment Support Services and Income Assistance, Services for Persons with Disabilities, and Early Childhood Development/Community Outreach. The Collective Wisdom Solutions report comments on the Central Region action plan, according to Ann Osborne, the Child and Youth Strategy's regional specialist: "Work plans have been



developed with each Community Services division with respect to SchoolsPlus, and there is a strong commitment to implement these plans. There is a sense of ownership, collaboration and accountability."

The coming together of SchoolsPlus and Community Services is having an impact. "We're able to identify and address issues and collaborative opportunities," notes Osborne, "improving access to services for children, youth and their families."

Community Services staff have been informed of the SchoolsPlus consent form and the guidelines for sharing information about clients. Shared-case planning meetings can be arranged at a family's request; program information sessions are held for SchoolsPlus staff, parents, school administrators, and teachers; and SchoolsPlus staff is invited to Community Services staff meetings.

As a result of the collaborative efforts, the number of SchoolsPlus sites in the Central Region expanded from 28 schools to 37 schools in September 2013.

In addition, the action plan was used as a template for the Child and Youth Strategy Regional Advisory Committee working groups to develop action plans with Justice, Halifax Regional Police, and SchoolsPlus; Health and Wellness, Halifax Regional Municipality Recreation, and SchoolsPlus; Education, the IWK Hospital, Health and Wellness, and SchoolsPlus; and Labour and Advanced Education's African Nova Scotian Labour Market Strategy and SchoolsPlus.

It's all about making a difference. Together.

Intersections and Collaboration with other Government Strategies and Initiatives

Intersections—Central—jobsHere and African Nova Scotian Labour Market Strategy

RAISING THEIR VOICES, MAKING THEIR CHOICES

Earlier in 2013 more than 100 black youth came together to hear what each other had to say and to ensure their voices are heard in the wider community. The results resonated with participants and the partners who helped create this unique conference for youth entitled Raise Your Voice, It’s Your Choice.

As one youth leader noted the day after the event, “I woke up feeling such a great sense of pride. The students at my school are still talking about the great time they had, and they’re asking for more. Students that didn’t get to attend were upset with me because they didn’t get to come. That’s a good sign.”

*I woke up feeling such a great sense of pride.
The students at my school are still talking about the great
time they had, and they’re asking for more.*

—youth leader

The seeds for the one-day conference were sown months before the event. Wayne Talbot, coordinator of the African Nova Scotian Labour Market Strategy with Labour and Advanced Education, had attended a Leaders of Today conference in 2012 to ask black youth how to engage youth of African descent to talk about issues important to them and their futures in Nova Scotia. As a result of this initiative, LOT, Phoenix Youth Programs, the African Nova Scotian Labour Market Strategy, the YMCA, and the Child and Youth Strategy worked together to host a conference for black youth at Mount Saint Vincent University in spring 2013.

But the partners took a back seat to the real organizers of the event, the youth leaders. “The conference was planned by black youth, for black youth, to host conversations about ‘hot issues’ and what they saw lay ahead for their future in

Nova Scotia,” says Ann Osborne, Child and Youth Strategy specialist in the Central Region.

The conference had three goals:

- To amplify the voice of black youth in Nova Scotia.
- To inform the work of the Child and Youth Strategy.
- To host a conversation with youth about staying in school, getting the right courses for the careers and jobs they want, and to understand the things that get in the way of preparing for good paying jobs and a future in Nova Scotia.

Conversations with youth took place in four discussion groups:

- “Pop a molly I’m sweatin”. . . Alcohol and Addictions
- “Young and I’m gettin’ it”. . . Getting the right courses for the jobs and careers you want
- “Stayin’ Down Home”. . . Living and working in Nova Scotia
- “Fast Money”. . . Impact of choices on future job opportunities

A “Career Fishbowl” was also held with black professionals to answer questions from youth on “how they got there,” notes Ann.

The conference was timely, as the province looks for ways to help young people stay in school and then transition from high school to post-secondary education and the labour force.

Getting from here to there will involve more conversations and more opportunities to hear directly from youth. The conference was a great start. One young woman described it as “an amazing day.”

Intersections—Northern—18- and 36-month touchpoints

AN UP-CLOSE-AND-PERSONAL LOOK AT NOVA SCOTIA’S LITTLE ONES

The Well Child System Working Group, which works with the Child and Youth Strategy, has a vision that all families with children in their early years are linked to a circle of supports through their personal networks, community, and health

service and support providers. The Well Child System Working Group is now led by the Early Years Branch of the Department of Education and Early Child Development and includes participation from the departments of Health and Wellness and Community Services, among others. The Early Years Branch has a vision for development of comprehensive touchpoints for children aged 18 months and 36 months and their families.

One of five priorities of the Mental Health and Addictions Strategy Together We Can is to promote the positive mental health development of children by identifying potential problems and intervening early. As outlined in the Mental Health and Addictions Strategy, every 18-month-old child will be screened for delays and developmental concerns so that problems are detected early and children and their families can be connected with treatment and support services before the children reach school age. The screening tool for this initiative is the 18-month Rourke Baby Record, a standardized tool that is used by primary health care providers here and in other Canadian provinces to assess developmental milestones. In Nova Scotia information on the screening conducted in primary health care clinics will be collected at six demonstration sites. This will determine the extent to which 18-month-old children are screened and referred to community resources when problems are detected.

Post-screening referral to existing community resources was the focus of a consultation in Stellarton last spring with the Pictou County Partners, a network of community groups and government departments aligned with the Child and Youth Strategy and the Early Years Branch. Approximately 40 individuals and organizations from the Northern Region attended. Participants discussed how community organizations can collaborate with the primary care demonstration sites so that the families of at-risk children identified in the screening process could be connected with existing resources.

Data from the six demonstration sites will identify logistic challenges of this complex screening initiative in preparation for the expansion of the program to communities across the province. It will also inform the further development of the 18-month and 36-month touchpoints.

In addition there is an ongoing need to build relationships among primary care practitioners and community providers so that all are informed about what support is needed and what is being developed. This will make it easier for children and families to get the support that they need sooner.

Leaders of Today Across Nova Scotia

Leaders of Today (LOT) has matured into its role as a vehicle for government/ youth consultation and intercultural learning. LOT has expanded into all regions and groups are present and active in communities across Nova Scotia. This section features LOT’s involvement in a provincial initiative as well as activities of LOT youth in each region.

LOT consultation for the “External Review of the Halifax Regional School Board’s Support of Rehtaeh Parsons” report

On April 18, 2013, the Government of Nova Scotia established a review to learn from the tragic death of Rehtaeh Parsons. The review examined policies and protocols of the Halifax Regional School Board (HRSB) and associated agencies that were relevant to the tragedy. The review focused on Rehtaeh’s after-care in an effort to shed light on the pathways and barriers to coordinated care for students who need treatment for mental health issues and substance abuse, particularly when the justice system might be involved.

The reviewers were given 10 specific questions to explore, the answers forming the foundation of the report. Among the 111 people they consulted were superintendents and school board staff, principals, teachers, other school staff, Rehtaeh Parsons’ parents, other parents, school advisory council chairs, and youth in and out of school.

The reviewers consulted with LOT youth and the province’s Youth Advisory Council to get the perspective of youth who were involved in organizations outside of school. Specifically, the authors wanted to know what made those outside organizations desirable and safe places for young people. They also wanted to explore how youth-servicing organizations outside the school system could be part of the solution.

The meeting was set up to be safe and respectful. Tables were arranged in a circle and during introductions participants were able to use the pronoun piece, an exercise where everyone identifies their preferred pronoun. This removes assumptions about people’s gender identity and allows all to feel included and comfortable.

Reviewers asked about the experiences of the youth in school and what could be done to make schools a safer environment. They also asked the youth to share



how they felt about working with LOT, and how schools could be made to be as safe as the LOT environment. At LOT the youth are directly involved in decisions that affect them. A parallel would be giving students a greater say in creating safe school spaces.

The authors wanted to get the perspective of youth who were involved in organizations outside of school the authors wanted to know what made those outside organizations desirable and safe places to participate.

“Things we need to do: more support for LGBTQ children, young adults, education in youth, teaching importance of consent and what it is. Empowering both women and men to say no if they truly do not want to be involved sexually. Educating those would-be rapists to understand that consent, while drunk, is not consent.”

The LOT youth also related that they had positive experiences with Youth Health Centres.



“Our public health nurse, she’s interested, she cares, she listens to everyone—so once you establish that friendship, when she tells you it’s a safe space, you believe her.”

LOT ACTIVITY IN WESTERN REGION

Windsor LOT. After spring summit 2013 we were pretty excited to try and make a difference in our community. We spread word about LOT around school. At first only people who had attended the summit were interested in doing something. We decided to hold a Java Gym (coffeehouse) as a fundraiser to try and get donations of food and money for the local food bank. More students came on board to help out and we managed to raise \$60 and a giant bin of food. I got help bringing it all to the food bank. The people at the food bank were very happy to see the food and donations. Most people donate through the winter when perceived need is greatest. Having the food come in during the summer was a godsend because their stocks were low. They said, “We need this so bad.” The youth indicated, “I got hugged a lot.”

Annapolis LOT. We decided to hold a one-day LOT Summit for our area to introduce youth here to LOT and what it can be. We made posters and arranged announcements at each of the schools in our area. Most students didn't know what LOT was. At Bridgetown School about 30 students, local government, the RCMP, etc. condensed the usual three-day LOT Summit schedule into one day. Students really enjoyed it, but we all found it was a long and tiring day. We raised a lot of awareness about what local youth need. Teachers and adult supporters were not aware of what local youth needed. It was a really great experience. We had never organized anything like that before. We learned a lot about making decisions, enhanced our organizing and leadership skills. It also built confidence among the organizers.

LOT ACTIVITY IN EASTERN REGION

A number of youth and their adult supporters had the opportunity to attend a provincial LOT Summit in 2012. They thought it was a great experience and wondered about creating a similar opportunity closer to home so more youth could participate. The Child and Youth Strategy specialist brought together the LOT coordinator and supporters from the Youth Outreach, SchoolsPlus and Healthy Relationships programs, and a regional LOT event was planned.



Ten youth became part of the host team and received a day of training to help them facilitate the event. A total of 37 youth and adults from various areas of Cape Breton Island, Antigonish and Guysborough counties came together to network and discuss issues.

There is interest in staying connected regionally, but even that is a large geographic area so youth are interested in having smaller LOT groups in their own communities. For instance, a group from Sydney has actions they want to work on. One of the participants points out: "There are issues that need to be worked on such as school safety/volunteer issues/job issues. As one of our first projects, we set up YouCan, a mentoring program where older students act as mentors for younger students. Twenty youth from grades 4–6 as well as grades 10 and 11 participated from school. They all gave up one lunch hour to talk. The older students act as mentors and positive role models for the younger students. The younger students were selected based on need; they had no positive role models and/or were getting into trouble at school. The mentors receive training on how to explain issues to the mentees. "I want more programs and more opportunities for youth in my community. LOT gives me that opportunity."

LOT ACTIVITY IN NORTHERN REGION

In October 2013 several youth from Northern Region attended their first LOT summit, which was an eye-opener for them. "The LOT Summit was overwhelming at first. We were thrown into a sea of people. Our perception has grown into trust, people are lovely and welcoming. It is hard to communicate with adults, but here it is natural. There should be more youth involved from our area. It's fun!" The youth attending the LOT summit indicated they look forward to increased LOT involvement in their region.

LOT ACTIVITY IN CENTRAL REGION

A plan to set up eight paid positions for LOT youth, distributed across the province, was initiated in summer 2013. This program, the Health and Wellness Youth Corps, was designed to involve young people in health promotion issues and create important jobs in our local communities. Youth were to be employed to

work on the actions identified by young people who attended the Healthy Living LOT Spring Summit in March.

In Central Region, one LOT youth hired for the Health and Wellness Youth Corps worked with Teen Mental Health, which has been holding a coffeehouse called Youth Against Stigma. The free coffeehouse is designed to be accessible and is held every third Friday. The LOT youth was to provide more supports to Teen Mental Health for the coffeehouses and help expand their reach by partnering and building relationships with other organizations. One of the first activities was to network with other programs and groups. This helped the coffeehouses become a platform for many different groups, community members, and organizations, and for them to see it as a space to which they could come.

The coffeehouses covered issues such as mental health and stigma. They were a learning experience for people who know nothing about the challenges youth face. LOT's role in this case was to highlight things that are already working and build partnerships, make connections, and support each other's work.

According to the LOT youth involved, "It is important to reach larger communities because stigma affects so many. Mental health is something that everyone is impacted by in their life. One in five people are living with a chronic mental illness, and many other factors such as racism, homophobia, addictions, etc., also can impact someone's overall mental health. We want the coffeehouses to help people find support, connections and be a place for anyone to use their voice and art to express themselves and help reduce this stigma happening."

LOT has helped by providing a large base of networks and groups to connect to easily, and is a good resource to help spread the word.

