

Nova Scotia Child and Youth Strategy

# **Shining the Light on Promising Practices**

2013 Provincial Symposium





# Introduction

The theme for this year's Child and Youth Strategy (CYS) Symposium is to shine the light on some of the wonderful work that is happening within Nova Scotia communities and across government to create better outcomes for children, youth, and families. The CYS cannot lay claim to these initiatives, but it is partly our mandate to identify them when and where they occur, and then to share the knowledge and tools that are emerging so that we – as practitioners and service providers – can all benefit.

So, part of this exercise is to showcase and better understand promising practices. This year, we are doing that in two ways: we've asked for submissions of "stories" of practices from around the province. We've compiled these into this booklet, which will be shared at the Symposium. As well, we've asked 5 promising practices proponents to attend the Symposium and present their initiatives.

The ones that have been asked to present at the Symposium are:

- Western Region: Youth Lead Education
- Central Region: Shared Care in the Schools
- Northern Region: NS Hodgepodge Program
- Eastern Region: BaM (Body & Mind)
- Provincial: Leaders of Today (LOT)

What is a promising practice? These are ideas, activities, or strategies that are being tried somewhere in Nova Scotia to better serve children, youth, and families. They may seem like "no big deal" to the people using them, and may not have any formal evaluation results showing in what ways they are effective. However, they make intuitive sense and often come from "ah-ha!" moments as people discover ways of working that yield good results, which in turn causes a buzz in the community or system where they are happening. We try to tap into that energy and emergent knowledge so that it can be shared.

When shared, we believe that promising practices can spark creative exchanges, and foster innovation across Nova Scotia. By compiling these stories, we hope to promote learning and increase connections between practitioners. Practically, 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. Let us know how you use these! {Note: this text was adapted from an earlier work published in Northern Region and researched/written by Camille Dumond.}

We gave the following parameters to those making a submission: to keep it to one or two pages, and to respond to the following questions/requests:

- Give a brief description of what your initiative does and who it serves. (i.e., what would you say to someone whose attention you would like to get during a 10-floor elevator ride that would give them the basics while grabbing their interest)
- What is it about your initiative that makes it so innovative or promising? (we are not so interested in all the detail – e.g., the 37 activities that are now happening – as we are in the key characteristic(s) of the initiative that is generating the most buzz)
- What has been your biggest challenge in this work? Surprise? Learning? Success? (pick one of these to answer – the one that resonates with you the most)
- What did you discover to be the key “strategy” or “principle” that was underlying this work and made it so successful?
- What’s next? (again, not the 17 projects on the horizon, but one “experiment” that you hope to try that has great promise)

We received 27 submissions and in the telling of their stories, they often strayed from our “instructions” – which was fine by us as we were absolutely delighted with what we got.

Happy reading!

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# Western Region

## Youth Lead Education

**Contact: Taima-Lyn Urquhart** *tinx@live.ca*

My full name is Taima-Lyn Urquhart and I am a high school graduate from Digby Regional High School. I wish to present on my own experiences of Youth Lead Education throughout the final years of my secondary schooling. I was involved in a co-op placement at my school, and for two years I participated in over 400 hours of peer-to-peer educational programs through the SchoolsPlus program and the Tri-County Women's Centre's programs Youth Truth Matters, Sexual Violence Project, and the SHYFT Youth Services. The majority of these hours were gained through the participation and creation of workshops for youth which focused on issues which concerned students but often were not addressed in schools. On top of this I also volunteered with the local RCMP, to talk about Cyber Bullying and Sexting in schools across Tri-County. The results were always positive, and often I would be overcome by the questions youth would ask me. Even though many had never met me, they would often confess that they felt uncomfortable talking about these subjects with the adults in their lives.

Here's a brief background on each of the programs I mentioned:

Co-op education: Helps students prepare to enter the workforce, by helping them gain certifications that make them stand out in their fields of interest, as well as giving them the tools to locate jobs and volunteer opportunities in their area. Students must gain 100 hours of volunteer workplace experience in order to gain an academic high school credit. <http://dvl.ednet.ns.ca/co-op-education>

Youth Truth Matters: A program facilitated by the Tri County Women's Centre and funded by Health Canada in which youth learn about and teach their peers the truth about drugs and the influences which push them toward them. The four year program culminated in the production of a tool kit which would become available in schools and to other interested youth service providers. <http://www.tricountywomenscentre.org/youth-truth-matters.html>

Sexual Violence Program: A program facilitated by the Tri County Women's Centre which focused on civil engagement, including that of youth. Helped create open discussions between all people within a community on the issues surrounding sexual violence. The program ended with the creation of a tool kit recommended for all interested schools and community service providers.

<http://www.tricountywomenscentre.org/sexual-violence-project.html>

SHYFT Youth Services: Supportive Housing Youth Focus Team recognizes the problem of increasing amounts of youth homelessness and displacement and works to try and provide safe reliable housing for homeless youth. Youth involvement in the program includes empowering youth and educating them to talk about the problems that cause and effect youth homelessness.

<http://www.shyft.ca/index.html>

RCMP Community Action Group: Youth working with local law enforcement select and discuss relevant topics, and present to their peers in order to begin and facilitate educational discussion.

SchoolsPlus: This program notices gaps in service provision and utilizes already existing community resources to bring them to students within the schools they service. The student advisory committee serves as a direct link from the wants and needs of the students to the community outreach worker.

The committee also helps to inform students of the resources available to them that they may not have known about. <http://schoolsplus.ednet.ns.ca/schoolsplus>

## Quest for Knowledge

**Contact: Amy Theriault** [amy.theriault@tcrsb.ca](mailto:amy.theriault@tcrsb.ca)

The Digby Education Committee, in partnership with Digby SchoolsPlus and Digby Regional High School, hosted their second "Quest for Knowledge" Summer Program for African Nova Scotian Students in grades 4, 5 and 6. The focus of the camp is on Academic Enrichment (in the areas of Math and Literacy) and Cultural Exploration. This year's camp ran from July 22nd to August 16th and took place at Digby Regional High. SchoolsPlus played a major role in promoting, participating and organizing the 4-week camp. The camp hosted 21 students who attend school within Digby County.



The themes for the camp were:

- Week 1 - Cultural History, Exploration and Expression
- Week 2 - Business Development and Entrepreneurship with "Business Is Jammin"
- Week 3 - Science Week
- Week 4 - Understanding our Town and Communities

The program hired 5 staff which included the Program Coordinator ( Ben Elms), Math Instructor (Tamara Horner), Literacy Instructor (Joan O'Neil), Tutors / Recreation Staff (Nathaniel Fells and Trevor Smith). The Community Outreach Worker (Carmelita Cromwell) organized the camp, put together the 4-week schedule and supervised daily. The camp also included the use of Youth Peer Leaders from the March Break Youth Leadership Camp.

The camp was a great success and Digby SchoolsPlus will be gearing up for their spring March Break Youth Leadership Camp.

## Restorative Justice

**Contact: Josh Purdy** [jpurdyslrc@gmail.com](mailto:jpurdyslrc@gmail.com)

Split Rock has been accessing the services of the Tri County Restorative Justice (RJ) organization as well as partnering with them for several years. They benefit our clients by providing an alternative when youth are facing the Justice System. By taking part in RJ our clients are able to not only avoid a criminal record they also see people working in the Justice System who are working with the youth to provide them with a more positive outcome than the alternative. By not having a criminal record our youth are able to find employment easier as well as enter into some college and university programs which deny people with records. It has also been an amazing service in the schools as well. Instead of youth being simply expelled from school RJ is able to work with the teachers, administration and students to reach an agreeable solution that allows everyone to acknowledge the problem in question but to also work with each other to keep the youth in school and avoid future conflicts that might come up. This has prevented many of our youth from being expelled and causes them to have a better view of the school administration as well.

# Nova Scotia Trauma Informed Network

**Contact: Art Fisher** *alternatives@ns.sympatico.ca*

Alternatives in Western Region, [www.alternativesinstitute.com](http://www.alternativesinstitute.com), in partnership with Family Service of Eastern Nova Scotia [www.fsens.ns.ca](http://www.fsens.ns.ca), have applied for and received Provincial funding to co-found and co-support the development of a Trauma Informed Network across the Province. Whether we are involved in Trauma Specific work or not, the Trauma Informed lens invites all of us to:

- recognize the prevalence of trauma across categories of age, ability, gender, culture and diversity
- understand and honor the ways in which diverse people respond to trauma
- put this awareness into helpful and invigorating collaborative practice together with the people and communities we serve.

The Trauma Informed lens is a key support for Restorative Practices service transformation, enhancing our community capacity to: meet people where they are, work together from a child, youth, adult, family, and community centered perspective, and provide the supports citizens identify are needed.

# South Shore Transdisciplinary Working Group Supporting Service and Community Transformation

**Contact: Art Fisher** *alternatives@ns.sympatico.ca*

Alternatives in Western Region has been leading the development of a Transdisciplinary Approach to community collaboration on the South Shore.

Transdisciplinary collaboration (familiar within early childhood intervention) is distinct from “inter-disciplinary” or “multi-disciplinary” work, in part because a Transdisciplinary Approach acknowledges that complex problems – like violence and trauma – cannot be fully understood or addressed from a singular perspective.

Each discipline brings something that complements and in some cases overlaps

with the helpfulness of others. And each member of a Transdisciplinary working process sees themselves and their commitments reflected in that process. This Transdisciplinary approach intensifies generalist knowledge across disciplines and increases consistency of supports and services. It increases our community capacity to integrate Social Determinants of Health, Trauma Informed, and Outcome Focused lenses. It is an essential, critically reflective tool, supporting Restorative Practices service transformation in our work together with children, youth, adults, families, and communities.

## Name the Shame

**Contact: Shirley Burris** [sburris@ssrsb.ca](mailto:sburris@ssrsb.ca)

South Shore SchoolsPlus (Shirley Burris and Bridgett Morgan), along with RCMP constables Brandy Steeves and Susan Foote are members of a partnered team who have developed, with youth, the Name the Shame program to support the prevention of sexual harassment and assault (funded by NS Crime Prevention). The program has been ongoing for three years. We have developed the program with consultation from Dr. Angela Connors, Clinical and Forensic Psychologist, East Coast Forensic Psychiatry Hospital, and with consultation from Avalon Sexual Assault Centre. We recently have taken a week-long training with Dr. Gail Dines, (Stop Porn Culture) in Boston. The training is inclusive.

We have been working with youth throughout the South Shore Regional School Board (SSRSB), and continue to do so, engaging them in developing projects, events, and materials of their own. You may have seen the presentation that our youth gave at the Crime Prevention conference in the spring.

In addition to our work in the schools, we have developed a number of talks, presentations, and workshops for parents, organizations, and community groups, dealing with the effects of media on the hypersexualization of our children, the connection to the pornography industry, human trafficking, and the abuse of our children and youth. Critical is the need for ongoing healthy discussion of media and sexual health with our youth in the interests of healthy and safe sexual wellness. We have added to our presentations through our work, as well, with Dr. Dines.

The shorter presentations and longer workshops are part of work with community groups, parents, and organizations, and can be arranged (free of charge) with the team. The connections between media, need for healthy sexual discussion / health,

safety and wellness, pornography, prostitution, and human trafficking are strong. There is need to go into community with an eye to developing community and personal strategies for prevention. In some of the presentations, youth will take a leadership part. Some will be for adults. It is a critical and timely issue for our youth and families.

It is our intention to provide three (free) day-long workshops in community this coming year, to take place on Saturdays (October 19, January 18, and March 22). Locations have not yet been booked, and are open for those who wish to book the team. As well, we can be available for a number of shorter (free) presentations through the year to parents, groups and community.

## Kids in the Forest

**Contact: Dave Brennan** [dbrennan@ssrsb.ca](mailto:dbrennan@ssrsb.ca)

Kids in the Forest day was an opportunity for students to walk the trail at the New Ross Farm Museum. Along the trail they visited 9 different themed stations including: geology, insects, reptiles and amphibians, GPS technology, tree identification, wildlife and ecosystems, conservation awareness, and fire safety and prevention. Each Station was run by an expert from the Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

This initiative is promising for a number of reasons, some of which are:

- It included 150 students across 5 schools and ran smoothly
- It showed our students a number of different professionals that have enjoyable careers which allow them to do things that they enjoy, from playing with insects to expensive technology. This made the day accessible to everyone from the student who really likes school/school activities, to the student who would rather be playing in the woods.

My biggest success here was in forming a relationship with DNR because we have not only talked about doing the KITF day again, but we have also discussed doing smaller group activities throughout the year and that is very exciting.

The key principle that helped this day go so smoothly, was collaboration/planning. No one person tried to do too much, for example each DNR expert planned his/her station, classroom teachers know students best so they chose groups and school

principals booked busses. Sharing up the responsibilities in this way meant that nobody was overwhelmed, everyone's ideas were appreciated, and everyone had a great time.

This year I have a high school on my caseload and I am hoping that I can engage students in a DSLR photography club; the school has 4 or 5 of these cameras and it is a hobby of mine. DSLR cameras offer much more range than traditional point-and-shoot cameras and this allows for more creativity in the way you take a picture and in your ability to edit it. I would like to show them tips for taking better photos and introduce them to the process of digital editing.

## Lunenburg District Offices Youth Engagement Practices

**Contact: Gail Moore** [MOOREGL@gov.ns.ca](mailto:MOOREGL@gov.ns.ca)

Within the Lunenburg District Office (LDO) of the Department of Community Services, we have been working together to provide an atmosphere that encourages youth engagement. We have done this through the establishment of a Youth Services Committee (that encompasses staff from various programs), conducting participatory action research on what youth need and partnering with HeartWood Centre for Community Development to provide programs to youth which are making a difference in their lives. We serve the youth of the Lunenburg District Office (LDO)

What sets us apart is that we have embraced HeartWood's Framework For Community Youth Development which has the following components:

- Meaningful Contribution-Youth feel that they have made a meaningful contribution to the community. One of our projects that we had was a group of youth who made an archival video for the DesBrisay Museum. The youth connected with the staff at the Museum and to other community members. They also knew that they had contributed to the Museum by producing a video that would go down in the history of the museum. The youth later went on to present about the project at the Nova Scotia Career Association conference.
- Youth/Adult Partnerships- Youth feel supported by their Caseworkers and Social Workers. LDO staff have been involved in the projects, such as, painting the Youth Room

- Challenging Learning-We encourage youth to go outside their comfort zone. This could be different things for different youth. It could include making a phone call or even speaking in front of a group, learning new skills.
- Empowering Culture- Youth feel they have a voice and they are being heard. LDO Youth wanted their own space to meet with staff and our Youth Room was born. The youth also painted and designed the room.
- Supportive Peers: Youth need to feel that they are accepted by their peers. Within our office we support youth to be involved in recreational activities with their peers. We also provide projects where they participate with other youth their age.

What's Next? We are planning to offer more projects encompassing these principles. The youth Services Committee has an Action Plan which they will be working on in the next year to further promote Youth Engagement in our office. We also plan to share our story to other offices, communities and departments to demonstrate what is possible in shifting cultures around Youth Engagement.

# Central Region

## Shared Care in the Schools

**Contacts:** **Joan Rankin** *Joan.Rankin@iwk.nshealth.ca*

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**Description:** We are a team that provides mental health assessment, treatment and referral for children, adolescents and families in community settings. Most recently we have expanded to include two Elementary Schools and an additional High School.

**Why we are innovative and promising:** We bring mental health services into schools where youth are in a familiar and comfortable setting. We provide early mental health intervention to our youth and families. We facilitate access to IWK programs when and where appropriate. We work collaboratively with school staff to improve the mental health of children, youth and families and we respond to the specific mental health needs of the school community. We provide programs and services to families and youth who would not normally seek help directly from the IWK. In doing our work in the community and in using the resources of the community effectively, we prevent admission to more expensive and further away programs, and admission to hospital.

**Challenges:** Our biggest challenge has been bridging the system differences between health and education, for example, issues of confidentiality, documentation and consent for treatment.

**Key strategy:** We work collaboratively with school staff in the youth's natural school environment.

**What's next?** We hope to expand Shared Mental Health Care services into additional community health clinics working collaboratively with an IWK Pediatrician, and into Junior High Schools in HRM.

# Girls United

**Contact: Sharon Martin** *martins@halifax.ca*

Girls United is an outreach project of the Halifax Youth Advocate Program, in partnership with over ten community partners and funded through a NS Department of Justice's Lighthouse Grant. Girls United focuses on girls aged

12 - 14 years old who are either involved in the Youth Advocate Program or girls outside this program, whose life experiences have left them at greater risk of crime. Girls with two or more of the following risk factors can be referred to the program:

- alcohol or drug use
- frequently in trouble with the law
- high commitment to friends involved in criminal activity
- friends/family members who are gang members
- conflict between home/school life
- gang in or around school/neighbourhood
- lack of adult and parental role models
- parent criminality, parents with violent attitudes siblings with anti-social behaviour

Research into girls at risk of criminal and gang involvement have identified a causal link between certain gender specific risk factors and delinquency. In particular, girls risk increases, if she has experienced or been exposed to: sexism; gender based exploitation, sexual abuse, child pornography, prostitution, and poverty. Her vulnerability intensifies if these life events are coupled with one or more of the following:

- negative & critical mothers
- family conflict
- multiple care givers
- frequent family moves



- harsh discipline
- long periods of time with single parent
- poverty
- early maturation

Referral forms can be found on our website at [www.halifax.ca/youthadvocateprogram](http://www.halifax.ca/youthadvocateprogram)

A referral does not guarantee acceptance into the program, yet is necessary for the youth to be considered. Her acceptance is determined on the outcome of an assessment that measures the following: how often the risk factors are experienced, the severity of underlying issues, coping skills, the availability of resources and access to a support network. An independent evaluation of the project will be carried out by Dalhousie University's Resilience Research Centre.

Our strategy is to use a wide range of activities and strong positive relationships to support girls who have experienced or have been exposed to gender specific risks. Program modules are delivered using a variety of methods: including outdoor adventure based pursuits, field trips and camping, guest speakers, recreation, sport, health and wellness based activities. Further, the venues are also varied, they include: HRM's Adventure Earth Centre, scuba diving, white water rafting, high ropes course, East Dartmouth Boys & Girls Club, Superstore & Sobeys' Community Rooms, HRM Recreation Centres, Banana Republic Store. Girls United learning modules are designed to help build self-reliance and resilience. Modules topics include:

- Program Launch 2 days at Camp Mockingee
- Healthy Lifestyles/Healthy Habits
- Self-understanding, identifying, accepting & challenging
- Independence,
- Conflict Management
- Communication
- Solution Focused Life Skills
- Tying it All Together (Wrap Up Camp)

# Hope Blooms

**Contact: Jessie Jollymore** [jjollymore@nehc.com](mailto:jjollymore@nehc.com)

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. This project consists of four main pillars that inform and support our strategy: social entrepreneurship, ecological agriculture, health, and relationship cohesion. Through this youth-led model these future leaders are the active change agents in their community. Youth learn how to grow food, produce and successfully market value-added products, and to grow a small social enterprise from the ground up. Through their actions 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 is not only that we have 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 that all of our programs are youth driven. Youth are at the center of growing the vegetables and herbs, making the dressings, and successfully marketing them. We get in the kitchen ourselves for our monthly community suppers to provide a healthy three-course meal to upwards of 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. These and many other programs are not only providing a valuable service to the community, but teaching youth about the power and ability of giving 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 an incredible growth in the number of youth joining Hope Blooms. For the most part, they are peer-recruited or self-identified- they see the program as a place of belonging and want to be a part of it. While joining a community garden may seem like a simple decision, this is in fact a very powerful act of courage that is having a ripple effect throughout the community. By showing that they are not only willing, but excited to step up and contribute to the betterment of their own community through hard work, these youth have inspired many adults in the community to also come forward and take part. Essentially,

the youth have created a paradigm shift in their own neighborhood: one that challenges the patterns of dependency and isolation with ownership and family.

For youth, there are few places where they feel they have control over anything or where they can be themselves without the judgment of the rightness or wrongness of their actions. 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 youth, Hope Blooms youth are empowered to take control and actively steer the direction it takes. In doing so, they take ownership over their contributions and are able to experience the true freedoms of their own efforts. Furthermore, integral to this strategy is the practice of relationship building. An environment of trust and inclusivity, and the knowledge that everyone has something to offer and that every voice is heard, has shaped a space where youth feel equal and valued. By prioritizing relationships and experiences over product and outcome has meant that everyone involved is actually willing to work harder and take chances, knowing that they have a family-type safety net if ever they need it. While this may seem like a simple concept, relationship building is a large and on-going investment that involves constant up-keep, yet one that we see as an invaluable part of cultivating empowered people and places.

Building upon the culture of youth-driven empowerment, our next step is to continue providing an environment where the youth can take on more responsibility within the project. Some of our oldest youth who have been involved since its beginning are ready to further develop their leadership skills in the areas of agriculture, nutrition, culinary arts, business and philanthropy. We are working towards helping our youth to specialize in these areas with the end goal of having them lead and facilitate these program components themselves. Recognition of this knowledge is also important, as is telling others of our story. Therefore having the youth present at more conferences and using various academic, media and community platforms to spread the word is a priority. We believe that the Hope Blooms model is one that can be used by many other communities. After experiencing the positive impact of it in the North End Community, our next steps will involve taking this model outside of Halifax.

# Working with Junior High School Guys — A Pilot Project

**Contact: Moe Green** *Morris.Green@gov.ns.ca*

During the 2012 – 2013 school year there was a unique project underway at Oxford School in Halifax. All the grade nine boys participated in a twice-weekly session to discuss youth health issues, with a specific emphasis on masculinity and its impact on the health of guys, the health of other genders, and the health of the community. The sessions were tied to the curriculum outcomes of Healthy Living Nine and were co-facilitated by Morris Green, the Coordinator, Youth Health, with the Department of Health and Wellness, and Sobaz Benjamin, a local filmmaker and founder of In My Own Voice (iMOVE).

The genesis of the project was two-fold. First there was an interest in having conversations with guys about masculinity and how some longer term sensing might complement work underway in the areas of sexual violence, bullying, and hypersexualization. Second was the concern around how few guys access the province's Youth Health Centres (YHCs). Typically most users of YHCs are girls and the weekly sessions were an opportunity for the guys to become more comfortable talking about their health, how to recognize when they might have a problem and how to normalize the act of seeking help. By the end of the school year about 15 per cent of the youth had come forward seeking assistance with a variety of health issues and were able to be referred to a Youth Health Centre coordinator or other service.

Each session was held in a circle with strict rules around confidentiality and respect. Most sessions were designed to move the youth through an interactive experience that created a space for conversation about a variety of different topics. There was often a check-in or check-out question – sometimes both – with a variety of techniques used to generate conversation.

A few issues did surface during the project – most notably the sensitivity around gender identity and the message a “guys-only group” might send to youth who are trans or may be questioning their gender identity. This concern is top of mind, and will be explored further during the follow-up year with the staff and students.

Several of the guys had an opportunity to attend sessions with educators and health professionals during the spring where they shared their thoughts on the sessions – including how the experience was impacting their own lives. Some of the guys were also able to work during the summer to help revise the sessions for a follow-up year with a new group of grade nines. The follow-up year will include a formal evaluation.

A number of teachers, YHC coordinators, Schools Plus staff and community groups have expressed interest in the project and work is underway to plan how to expand this area of programming inside and outside of schools.

## Leaders of Today – Youth and Government in Partnership

**Contact: Steve Gordon** *steven@heartwood.ns.ca*

The Leaders of Today (LOT) Network has been operating in partnership with the Nova Scotia Child and Youth Strategy (CYS) since 2006. See: <http://www.leadersoftoday.ca/about> The network consists of youth and youth serving organizations that engage with the provincial Government at every level to better serve the needs of all. We create spaces that are safe for both youth and adults, in the form of bi-annual summits, to have meaningful conversations about what they need and how they can work together.

We believe that listening to the voice of youth who have experienced programs and services is the best way to improve them, and listening to the needs of service providers will help youth better inform their work.

LOT's Aims:

1. Amplify youth voice to the provincial government.
2. Inform the CYS to improve practice and policy.
3. Create a place of intercultural learning between youth and government, developing relationships of trust, for collaboration on shared outcomes.

Some of our successes include: having youth involved in hiring of the Department of Health and Wellness Youth Engagement Coordinator, youth working with the Department of Education to ensure GSA's in schools across the province, youth consulting with the Action Team on Sexual Violence and Bullying, and having youth involved in a Review of the Halifax Regional School Board.

There has been a huge amount of learning from these conversations, however one of the most important lessons learned has been the value of building relationships of trust between youth and adults – this is central to the idea of youth being engaged and adults being engaged, creating true youth/adult partnerships.

# Northern Region

## NS Hodgepodge

**Contact: Linda Legere** *maggiestruro@ns.aliantzinc.ca*

NS Hodgepodge is a re-imagining of the Winnipeg Bookmates Program: Alphabet Soup, and has been developed by the Colchester Stirring the Pot Community Partners Group in Truro. The members of Stirring the Pot include Maggie's Place, Public Health Services and Colchester-East Hants Public Library. Group members have been offering Alphabet Soup around the county for a few years now and thought it was important to create a NS program. The new program includes local foods and has an addition of a parenting component. It was piloted in Spring 2013 in Stewiacke and plans are underway to offer it in the fall in Truro.

The Four main areas the NS Hodgepodge Program covers are:

- Nutrition
- Literacy
- Active Play
- Parenting

Some of our key messages to parents include:

- Parents as role model: your family is your child's most important teacher.
- What are your eating habits teaching your children?
- Be active every day in a family fun way!
- Play is valued and respected as the principal way children learn.
- Turn everyday experiences into learning experiences, i.e. grocery shopping, eating breakfast.
- Rhyming & Singing together is learning together & can be calming & soothing & a learning experience for all

- To inspire creative thinkers help children to see themselves as creative thinkers whose ideas are appreciated and valued.

NS Hodgepodge is a 10-week program which helps preschoolers (two to five years of age) and their parents learn the basics of healthy eating and physical activity through the love of reading, rhyme and song and group activities.

Some of our program goals:

- To promote the benefits of physical activity and healthy eating from an early age in order to reduce incidence of and delay onset of chronic illnesses such as diabetes and heart disease.
- To encourage the belief in and practice of healthy living by providing participants with the experiences and tools they need to make physical activity and healthy eating part of daily living.
- To offer information about community resources for keeping active.
- To provide a safe environment where families can get to know each other and strengthen their community ties.

NS Hodgepodge creates an environment for creative fun and age-appropriate physical activity for toddlers and preschoolers. It gives adult participants a chance to learn about the importance of physical activity for themselves and their children. They also learn how to help their children develop their movement skills.

Our future plans are to continue developing the program using learnings from our spring 2013 10-week pilot. Our second 10-week pilot will be offered in Fall 2013 and a Community Health Board application is in development to have the capacity to offer District 4-5-6 and provincial training for this new program.

Challenges to date have included time to develop the program and get partners together to compare notes on each other's portion of the project. The development of this program has been an excellent community collaboration between Maggie's Place, Public Health staff and the Colchester East-Hants Public Library who are all members of the Stirring the Pot Community Partners Group.



# Operation Unfriend Bullying

## *You're Not Alone*

**Contacts: Brandin Arsenault** *brandinarsenault@oub.ca*

**Emily McInnis** *emilymcinnis@oub.ca*

### **To the person I am seeing on a 10-floor elevator ride:**

I'm one of the youth Founding Presidents of a small volunteer based, youth-led, antibullying organization based out of Truro, Nova Scotia. Our team travels all across the province to provide education in the most effective way: from youth! In addition to our in-person education we also promote our online services and resources through our website: <http://www.oub.ca/>

### **To the person wondering what makes OUB so innovative or promising:**

OUB is providing education to our participants from a different level and perspective: from a youth. The common statement made by our volunteers is "We always hated sitting through long and boring presentations where adults were throwing over-our-head facts at us." Our peers want a way to RELATE to something. By sharing our personal stories and our REALISTIC facts, participants are more engaged into the conversation and will participate and feel more comfortable.

### **To the person wondering what our biggest challenge in this work is:**

Working in OUB is always a challenge. Due to the fact our team made up of youth we are always getting looked at in a negative way. We, from adults, often get "oh you're just teenagers" or "I know more than you". This often comes into play while trying to gain access to certain schools for our organization to conduct presentations. We are rejected because we are "youth." Principals for some reason feel like we don't know any more than an adult they would bring in would, when in fact, often times, we do.

### **To the person wondering what our key to our success is:**

Our organization has a huge success in the education sector of what we do. That is, once we are granted permission to go into a school to speak with the students. But the thing is, we had our key to success from day one: youth. We don't need any special speakers, special facts or anything like that. Heck, we don't even need a PowerPoint presentation or half of the technology that we use. Every youth we talk to wants someone around their age to either relate or talk to, and we give them that. Due to the fact we have and will always stick by our policy of youth volunteers only,

our key is always there, because our main goal is to make a difference in our schools, and those schools contain a bunch of youth that need help or someone to talk to.

**To the person wondering what's next:**

In our next year of operation (as we are approaching the completion of our second year) we will continue all of our current operations.

## After-School Program Partnership

**Contact: Rae Gunn** *coordinator@activepictoucounty.ca*

Last year, an exciting partnership began between communities and the Department of Education. In response to the overwhelming evidence that children and youth were not engaged in healthy behaviours during the afterschool time period (3 to 6 pm). Most children and youth were sedentary but - if given the choice - would rather be playing with friends.

With increasing demands on staff time and expanding list of services schools should be providing, our local Health Promoting School Committee felt that this initiative could be handled by someone who is already in the after school programming business - municipal recreation departments. They have systems in place to hire and train leaders, access to equipment, and community connections.

Parameters of the after school time period programming were laid out by the Department of Education - it must be free, target children between the ages of 10 and 14 years, be led by trained staff, be offered between 3 pm and 6 pm and include physical activity & healthy foods. Perfect!

The program began in Chignecto-Central Regional School Board (CCRSB) late 2012 and involved a lot of relationship building between the recreation and education worlds. Slowly programs across the region got underway and students were exposed to a variety of recreation, physical education and sport activities that they may have never had the opportunity to do before. Some programs were offered only for girls other saw both genders participate together.

With great foresight, partners from the Fundy region saw the value in conducting a thorough evaluation of the first stage, the process stage of the After School Program's development. An evaluation team from Dalhousie University was engaged and proceeded to gather information through focus groups, surveys

of stakeholders and tracking forms from individual programs. The information collected has provided guidance as we enter into another phase of this journey.

The partnership between the Department of Education, Department of Health & Wellness, School Board and municipal recreation departments is definitely a “Promising Practice” as we attempt to collaborate, reduce competition & duplication, and serve our children & youth better.

## TIPS — A Pre-Parenting Program

**Contact: Nancy MacDonald** [nmacdonald@fsens.ns.ca](mailto:nmacdonald@fsens.ns.ca)

In 2011-2012, a pilot program was developed and delivered by a Pictou County partnership to address challenges in providing appropriate services and support to families at risk in the community. It was recognized that the psycho-social needs of the parental figures in these families were not being met by traditional educational-based family support programs. As a result, therapeutic-based programming became an identified gap in the service delivery fabric of Pictou County.

Originally developed and facilitated as a pilot program by a subcommittee of Pictou County Partners, a second program has been initiated in 2013. The program, which uses a trauma informed lens, is designed to enhance an individual’s coping skills and self-awareness in order to strengthen their role as a parent. The group is approximately 21 weeks long, runs for about three hours a session, and has a food mentoring component. Referrals come from Addiction Services, Mental Health, Kids First Family Resource Centre, Child Welfare, Family Service of Eastern Nova Scotia, and other youth servicing agencies in the community.

## Outdoor Play in the Early Years

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Play is pivotal to the physical, cognitive and emotional development of a child and helps them to understand their social and cultural world (Dietze). Currently, 46% of Canadian Children receive less than 3 hours of active play per week. Increasing outdoor play opportunities for early year’s children and educating early childhood

educators and parents on the importance of play for childhood development are key elements of the Outdoor Play in Early Years Setting project in the Fundy region (Health and Wellness, Physical Activity, Sport and Recreation).

The NS Department of Health & Wellness (Fundy PASR office) is working with community partners to lead the Outdoor Play in the Early Years project. Mount Saint Vincent University (MSVU) has taken a lead role of developing, implementing and evaluating a new training module for Early Childhood Educators around Outdoor Play, which is a core component of the project. A steering committee has been established through a variety of partners who are taking a hands-on role implementing the remaining project objectives. The partners include, East Hants Adult Learning Association, the five Community Health Boards of Colchester East Hants, East Hants Municipal Recreation Department, Department of Community Services, East Hants Family Resource Centre, and 7 licensed Early Learning Centers in East Hants.

Our objectives:

1. To enhance outdoor play opportunities in the early childhood education environment.
2. Create a sustainable training model for early childhood educators based on outdoor play.
3. Educate parents and the surrounding community on the importance of outdoor play for healthy childhood development.
4. Work with community partners to enhance surrounding outdoor recreation/play supports in the community.

Use of a professional learning model has been an innovative approach: "...current research on professional learning for early learning and child care staff emphasize the importance of creating delivery models that combine theory and application and use a variety of experiential learning strategies." With this project, "participants (ECEs) have opportunities to experiment with new ideas and determine if, how, and why they may wish to reconfigure their philosophical orientation and ultimately their practices. Discussions among colleagues bring clarity to the potential of transferring new learning to their environments." – project interim report.

Early Childhood Educators were initially fearful of making changes to their practice around outdoor play activities and play space environments due to parental attitudes and licensing enforcement/regulations.

A key post-workshop strategy is visiting centers in person to offer on-site coaching to transfer theory into practice that is individual to each center.

Readiness is one of the key principles of learning. As with any project attempting to change knowledge, skills and, ultimately, behaviours, participants who are ready to embrace new ideas and ways of “doing” is critical to success. As the interim report states, “learning professionals who are motivated to learn and find positive value in making changes to their practice are making changes.” Furthermore, “early learning professionals with directors who are supportive of making changes to their outdoor programming exhibit a higher level of transferring theory to practice, than in the early learning centres that do not have a champion for the project.”  
– project interim report

What’s next? The steering committee will lead the creation of a communication/ awareness campaign, targeting provincial, regional and local organizations/ individuals to spread our Outdoor Play message, including newsletters, press releases, presentations and research reports. There will be a strong emphasis on parental education. We will also enhance outdoor play spaces through the development of an Outdoor Play Space Assessment tool. Finally, an Outdoor Play in Early Years manual to be shared with other Early Learning Educators will be developed.

## Youth Municipal Council in Oxford

**Contact: Hailie Tattre** [basketball.hails@hotmail.com](mailto:basketball.hails@hotmail.com)

*{Note: this story was written by Camille Dumond in March 2013  
in a publication of promising practices from the Northern Region}*

Hailie Tattre lives in Oxford, Nova Scotia, where she is currently a Grade 12 student. For years she had heard the refrain “There’s nothing for us to do here!” from other youth in her town. Many events were planned for younger children, adults or seniors, but there was a big gap in community activities for 13-18 year olds. In addition, many youth felt discouraged and resigned to the idea that their voices did not matter to decision-makers. There were no significant opportunities in Oxford for young people to organize, support each other, or even name the pressing issues.

With all this brewing in Hailie's mind, she attended a "Leaders of Today" youth summit. This dynamic gathering was full of young people from other rural communities, some of whom had created Youth Town Councils to address these very issues. Something "clicked" for Hailie. In her words, "I wanted to do awesome and amazing things, but I realized I couldn't do it on my own. I needed to collaborate with other awesome youth. I started to ask, why am I just sitting here?"

When Hailie first started recruiting support, she inspired them by keeping her vision very clear. "I knew this wasn't just about 6 youth, it was bigger than that. For me the vision is to give the entire youth population a voice. Not just jocks. Not just popular kids. My aim was to support EVERY YOUTH in Oxford to have their voice heard and to have something to do". When Hailie began talking to local councilors and youth about these ideas, her passion was contagious. In a few weeks, she had brought together a core group of volunteers in grades 10, 11, and 12, and a committed local town councilor, all of whom shared her vision.

To strengthen youth voices and create opportunities for something to do in Oxford, Hailie says their strategy is to "Be loud!" Youth Town Council members go to community enhancement and Town Council meetings and raise ideas and issues they have heard from the youth they represent. She adds, "We've focused on giving youth things to do, and now after a year, we're starting to hear about other issues like bullying and lack of post-secondary options".

The Oxford Youth Town Council faces a number of challenges in working with adult partners. One is the fear some adults have that youth may not be responsible in taking care of borrowed spaces. Hailie says her approach has been to acknowledge that adult partners have legitimate concerns and needs. Instead of getting upset, she has supported her committee to take a proactive stance to negotiate for what they need. For instance, in cases where the Youth Town Council has had difficulty obtaining space, she suggests a sign-out key system to track who uses a space, so if damage occurs it will be easy to hold people accountable. She says, "We have to understand each other's needs. It's hard sometimes but we're taking responsibility for building trust."

So when the YTC hears "no" from adults, they don't just walk away discouraged. They "unpack" the refusal by asking questions about real concerns. Then based on new understanding, they explore potential solutions collaboratively to increase youth-centered places to go, things to do, and people to talk to.

Hailie says that it's been a slow process to build trust between adults and youth, and among youth. She says, "After a whole year, it's only now that some youth are starting to open up to us and mention ideas about what they want to do or talk about." Her advice to adults, "Don't expect youth to jump up scream and shout this is what I want to do! You may go literally months with nothing. Put in the effort, kids are used to going unheard and not seeing things being put into action. Over time, you can show that you're not just talking, you're doing! That's how we became more approachable about the bigger issues youth face here."

{Note: Earlier this year, Hailie "...was recognized at the 39th Annual Provincial Volunteer Awards ceremony and received the 2013 Specialty Award for Youth for the many contributions she has made in her young life."}

## Eastern Region

### BaM (Body and Mind)

**Contact: Ellen Polegato** [ellen.polegato@gov.ns.ca](mailto:ellen.polegato@gov.ns.ca)

The goal of BaM is to engage youth in the process of developing healthier communities through a leadership conference and ongoing support in their school communities. BaM hosts two weekend-long conferences each year where youth learn leadership skills and develop action plans for their schools and communities. School leadership teams made up of youth then create a plan for physical activity opportunities for themselves and other youth in their schools. The focus is on forms of physical activity that are accessible to all and might appeal to those who aren't getting their required daily physical activity. The youth teams at the schools have focused on walking, various forms of dance, zumba and yoga. BaM is open to all students in grades 8-11 throughout the Cape Breton region with a special focus on youth who are not currently involved in organized groups. Each school can send between 6-8 students.

In addition to increasing the physical activity levels of youth in the represented communities, the goals of BaM also include an increase in confident, enabled, youth leaders, an increase in healthy adult-youth relationships at the school and community levels, and an increase in youth coordinated and led physical activities



BaM is a partnership among 9 Cape Breton schools, several municipalities, Mental Health and Addictions Services and Department of Health and Wellness. Most of the actual planning and content for the conferences has come from the youth themselves. One adult supporter comments:

*"I have been greatly impressed by the passion and ability of these youth to take on these tasks with enthusiasm and to respond to any problems that have come up along the way. I have learned a great deal from them. If we trust youth and give them responsibility, they will flourish and not let us down. If we allow them ownership over their health and physical activity, they will be more likely to make healthy choices."*

Experience has shown that the Youth Action Teams are most successful when there is an adult champion in the school. The role of the supportive adult is to act as a coach or mentor to work with the youth to help connect them to resources they might not otherwise know how to access.

There has been a marvelous cultural exchange that has resulted as a byproduct of this initiative. Students from all cultures in Cape Breton have been involved and have learned a great deal about each other.

## APlace4US

**Contact: Shayla Mootz** [smacmootz@gmail.com](mailto:smacmootz@gmail.com)

A Place 4 Us is a start-up organization in Antigonish that originated with the intent of opening a youth center in our town, yet, it has morphed into something more substantial. We are geared towards providing youth with a place within their community in which they feel valued and needed, and have begun building our "youth center" as energy rather than a physical location for the first few years. The idea behind the initiative is that youth identify their own needs and become active agents in getting what they need out of their community with the help of supportive adults and community partners.

In the first year, we are focused on getting youth involved in the organization and helping them become community leaders. Our biggest challenge has been spreading the word to youth that we need them. We need their leadership. We need their input. In an effort to rally youth, APlace4Us hosts monthly youth events that are geared towards gaining youth membership. These events are organized



and run by youth leaders with the support of the adult group. Likewise, we hold extra- curricular workshops for youth to introduce them to as many different ideas and possibilities as we can.

Community activism has been our biggest and most successful strategy in beginning this endeavor. APlace4Us counts on the community to take responsibility for cultivating interested and involved youth to become community leaders. The idea is to turn a community problem (not having an outlet for youth) into a community collaborative that is led by the needs of our youth as identified by them. So far, Antigonish has stepped up. We have a community that wants youth to succeed, and wants to teach them how to become leaders. Our local newspaper, radio DJs, restaurants, businesses, organization and individual community members have all been excited to take part in our project.

We are still a newborn organization, so there are many things that we still want to do for the future, first and foremost is creating a stronger youth presence in our meetings so that everything that we do can be youth directed. In the next year we hope to continue to provide extra-curricular workshops and special fun events, but will also expand to provide tutoring, special issues workshops for youth and partner APlace4Us with existing organizations. In the next year we will be building a bridge between our youth population and the community of Antigonish by connecting youth to existing outlets in the community, be that with arts, sustainable food, county recreation etc. Once we make those connections strong, our possibilities are endless.

## Caperbase Youth Outreach

**Contact: Janet Bickerton** [bickertonj@cbdha.nshealth.ca](mailto:bickertonj@cbdha.nshealth.ca)

Caperbase Youth Outreach with Mental Health and Addictions Health Promotion and Prevention works at several levels to engage youth at risk and to provide early intervention programs and services. They work throughout the Cape Breton District Health Authority in communities and in junior and senior high schools. Caperbase works in 3 domains:

- Screening (developing and promoting the use of best practice screening for all youth to ensure problems are identified early and appropriate services and referrals made)

- Youth engagement and early intervention through one brief counseling and through 3 key group programs: Free2BU, Getting Started, and Connections
- Community Linkages and Outreach: Caperbase strives to build capacity by partnering with communities and other agencies to access at risk youth and to offer group recreation and early intervention programs in urban and rural settings. Caperbase also works with partners like the Sharp Advice Needle Exchange and policing services to access those youth most at risk.

Caperbase has a unique youth developed website - [www.caperbase.com](http://www.caperbase.com) - that provides information and links around substance use, mental health, sexuality and youth health in general.

Caperbase uses a youth centered, non-judgmental, harm reduction approach to engage youth. We start where youth are - using recreation, music, culture and other activities that youth are passionate about. External Evaluators (Pyra, 2013) have identified that the Caperbase approach should serve as a blue print to guide the delivery of outreach services not only for Caperbase in Cape Breton but for any health or social service that is provided to adolescents.

Caperbase, through its use of community development approaches, has enhanced collaboration and linkages both within the system and externally in the community and is reducing barriers to services for at risk youth and their families. Caperbase works with individuals and communities to build their capacity for understanding the complex issues facing youth and we promote and work toward creating more supportive environments for youth throughout the island.

A challenge for Caperbase has been re-orienting the system to work in a youth centered approach. A welcomed success has been the reception and willingness of youth, families and community to participate with Caperbase in improving services and creating healthier communities for youth.

# Guys Have It

**Contact: Debi Tobin** *dtobin@cbymca.com*

Guys Have It is a program designed to meet the needs of youth at risk between the ages of 15-18. This program was designed to build self-esteem, empowerment, prepare youth for their first job interview (summer and part time employment) and discovery of self-worth, abilities as well as the world around them.

The first project was at the Port Hawkesbury Y and provided transportation for participants to attend as well as providing snacks for the sessions. They were given a gym membership, had guest speakers come in, and participated in trial classes for Tae Kwon Do. The workshops included resume and cover letter writing, mock interviews, life skills such as opening a bank account and budgeting, healthy relationships, awareness around social media and privacy/confidentiality, respect, and bullying.

Even though there was skepticism about the turnout, the program ran on Friday nights. Kids who could not afford to go to the hockey games and others who were just hanging around heard of the group and asked if they could join. We had planned for 12 but ended up with 15 participants.

For our second program we partnered with Schools Plus and offered a lunchtime program. Some different workshops were offered and in order to help the youth build a resume we tried to incorporate a community involvement project for them to volunteer in. This aspect was very successful. One group decided to do a letter writing campaign to our service personnel in Kandahar. They went a step further and got the entire school involved, presented the letters to a veteran who shared his experiences with them. Several of the boys involved in that project later joined the Reserves.

Our projects turned out great and we touched the lives of 72 kids just in outreach projects this past year alone.

We hope to offer the program again and also hope to design programming for the 11-14 year age group. Guys Have It was able to be offered with the financial support of the Youth Development Initiative with Department of Community Services.

# Healthy Relationships for Youth Program

**Contact: Laura Swaine** *ruralityouthawrc@ns.sympatico.ca*

The Healthy Relationships for Youth (HRY) program is a school-based violence prevention program offered in partnership with the Strait Regional School Board by the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre (see: [www.antigonishwomenscentre.com](http://www.antigonishwomenscentre.com)). HRY consists of a series of twelve cumulative sessions within the grade nine health curriculum that are delivered by trained youth facilitators. The sessions are designed to reduce the risk of violence for youth through developing skills and knowledge about creating and maintaining healthy relationships. HRY has been cited as a promising practice program for the way it involves youth as peer educators in the classroom, schools and communities. The program has been offered to local schools since 2006. Over the past seven years, HRY has reached approximately 3500 grade nine students and has trained 534 youth facilitators within the school board.

The HRY program uses peer facilitation as a way to engage grade 9 students in important topics such as communication, boundaries, stereotypes, gender and sexual identity, power and violence. Youth facilitators in partnership with the classroom teacher encourage younger students to examine the root causes of violence such as homophobia, racism and sexism and teach them ways to create skills for creating and maintaining healthy relationships. This innovative approach works from the ground up to create sustainable and meaningful relationships that expand from intimate relationships, classroom relationships, to the greater school and local community, resulting in youth who are better able to navigate a challenging and changing world with confidence and skill.

Our biggest success with this work has been the positive development and growth of the youth facilitators who participate in the program. The youth facilitators really take on a leadership role within the program which allows them to build self-confidence, communication and facilitation skills, as well as become role models within their school communities. This not only strengthens students' personal relationships but allows them to have confidence in other aspects of their daily life. Youth facilitators who have been involved in the program for consecutive years develop a strong analysis of important issues such as stereotypes, violence prevention, power dynamics, and the impact of social media, allowing them to make links between issues and critically think about the society and culture they live in.

The key strategy underlying the positive work of the HRY program is the focus on diversity and the peer facilitation. Having peers facilitate the program brings a sense of camaraderie and relatability for the younger students. The program also encourages respect for diversity of race, gender and sexual orientation which can reduce incidences of violence in the classrooms, school and community.

Our hope for the HRY program is to continue to provide support for schools around the province to explore the underlying issues of healthy or unhealthy relationships and provide opportunity for youth to develop skills, grow as leaders, and maintain healthy relationships. By continuing to shape the program to address emerging issues, HRY remains relevant and interesting for students and builds a sustainable network of peers who support and work together to make a stronger community.

## EPIC: Youth Peer, Breakthrough, and Parents PEACE

**Contact: Barry Waldman** [epic@ns.sympatico.ns.ca](mailto:epic@ns.sympatico.ns.ca)

The core operations of EPIC (Educational Program Innovations Charity) has 3 components.

- Youth Peer is 2½ hours after-school for youth ages 8-18 referred by 24 community agency partners to address social and academic challenges. Each week, 70 at-risk youth are matched 1-to-1 with high school or university tutor/mentors volunteers who help youth overcome academic struggles and engage in structured social activities including art, guitar, and educational games. Youth, volunteers and staff together generate a magical atmosphere of trust and respect that reduces risks to self, family, and community, and increases self-esteem, school achievement and positive behaviours.
- Breakthrough involves weekly 2 hour group discussions empowering high risk youth ages 14-26 to help other youth develop resiliency to rise from crises.
- Parents PEACE (Practicing Esteem-building Awareness Communication & Evaluation) is a weekly 2 hour parent workshop. Facilitated sessions help parents better understand interactions with their kids using practical tools and a safe place to discuss critical topics. Participants identify their most challenging issues and the Facilitator highlights coping strategies, enlisting volunteer community agency specialists to guide further discussion.

Youth Peer participants are referred from 20 different schools and registered with minimal wait time. Participation rates by youth of Aboriginal or African descent are sustained at 3 times their populace ratio. Program services, healthy snacks and transport are provided free. Volunteer mentor/tutors are thoroughly screened and comprehensively trained.

Breakthrough participants serve as volunteers in weekly sessions generating a notebook to help other youth overcome crises through resiliency. Older youth are honoured for their expertise on rising from pitfalls and for helping others, while younger youth receive group acceptance supplementing 1-to-1 peer support. Breakthrough breaks down barriers by reaching youth who thrived in Youth Peer but face ongoing challenges. It expands collaboration with Child and Adolescent Mental Health and empowers high risk youth as givers.

Parents PEACE is open to any caregivers of school-aged children. Parents freely attend sessions that interest them without having to be referred by a particular agency or attend a mandatory block of sessions.

The support participants receive from the Facilitator, expert presenters, and each other is often life-changing. A Board officer voluntarily supervises the program and meets with management each week. Dedicated staff, most of them with exceptionally high credentials, receive support beyond expectations, prepare for the unexpected, and willingly back-up other staff. New innovations are carried out each year based on staff/youth feedback. Staff/participants co-sign Freedoms & Expectations to clarify mutual commitments and boundaries. Staff and volunteers are acknowledged for patience, compassion and understanding of differences. Senior staff are encouraged to direct without micromanaging, foster leadership in others, and generate a supportive atmosphere for all. Youth volunteers experience personal fulfillment in transforming the lives of marginalized youth. New funders and program partners are added each year. Success is measured by referral and participation growth; social and academic advancement; and youth, caregiver, social agency and school feedback.

EPIC's mission - to advance marginalized learners through innovation, empathy, volunteerism, diversity, and partnership is fulfilled through every program activity. Our biggest challenge, learning and success are the same - advancement of at-risk youth who fall through cracks in the services intended to serve them. EPIC is community-based with few constraints from its funders, virtually no administrative costs, and the capacity to respond quickly and flexibly to identified needs, develop

innovative activities, accommodate differences, engage volunteers, encourage diversity, and collaborate with partner agencies.

EPIC has received the \$5,000 Donner Foundation Award for Excellence in Services for Children in 5 of the last 6 years making EPIC Canada's highest ranked non-profit program for children. In 2010, EPIC also received the \$20,000 overall Donner Foundation Award as the highest performing non-profit out of more than 500 applicant social agencies across the country. In 2012, EPIC received the \$5,000 Drucker Award for having Canada's most consistent record of excellence and innovation in the management and delivery of social services. In 2013, EPIC's Youth Peer Breakthrough and Parents PEACE Program has been selected again as a Donner Award finalist in Services for Children. The winner will be announced in November.

## Conseil Scolaire Acadien Provincial: Prom Dress Program

**Contact: Annette Kehoe** *Annette.kehoe@gasha.nshealth.ca*

This initiative started when I worked as Public Health Nurse at École Beauport and Richmond Academy. There were several issues at the Academy that some girls were struggling with: a) not having the money to purchase a prom gown, b) feeling guilty about using funds from their family to purchase an expensive dress that they would wear only once for a few hours and c) they didn't really want to borrow a dress from someone local as everyone would have seen it before and would know that it was borrowed.

After speaking to several girls who had these issues and even more girls who knew of others who had these issues and were fearful that their classmates would not attend prom because of it, I decided to try to compile a collection of prom dresses that would be loaned (or given ) free of charge. My hope was to obtain dresses from different regions so the worry of others having seen it before would be lessened.

Initially I reached out to the community in local church bulletins and the response was overwhelming, People donated dresses, shoes, purses and some even made monetary donations for girls to have hair and makeup done for the special event.

We have expanded to partner with a local consignment shop. If someone cannot find a dress in our collection they can take a look at what the consignment shop has in stock and if something is suitable we will ask people with accounts to make donations to enable the purchase. On several occasions the owner of the consignment shop has waived her portion of the profits to make the dress more affordable. At the end of the season the shop owner will contact the owners of any prom dresses that have not sold to see if they would like to donate the dress to our collection- more often than not it is donated. In August she donated over 80 dresses to our collection.

We are now going to be actively collecting suits for the same purpose and the consignment shop owner was more than happy to help again with this campaign as well.

Now that I am a SchoolsPlus Facilitator, and attend monthly provincial meetings, it enables me to send dresses province wide. This year youth from Amherst were able to access dresses for their prom. As well, with the expansion of SchoolsPlus in the North East region of CSAP, I will be able to expand to others who may need this service in both the French and English schools as well as possibly increasing our collection.

One of the main issues that I am experiencing is finding the space to store the dresses. At this time we have an expansion happening at École Beauport in Arichat and I am hopeful that when it is completed I will be able to acquire some room for storage.

In the future I would like to catalogue and photograph our dress collection so that students could view what we have over the internet. In September I will be speaking with the teacher responsible for the Co-op program in the hopes that we can partner to make this happen.



# Access 808

**Contact: Peggy Vassallo** [peggy@access808.ca](mailto:peggy@access808.ca)

808 George St, Sydney is now the home to a drop-in centre for youth ages 16-24.

Our Mission is: To ensure at-risk youth of the Cape Breton Regional Municipality have opportunity to access a continuum of services and supports, which include prevention programs, emergency response, and accommodations. We are committed to working with youth, families and other community partners to support the development of effective solutions to break the cycle of youth homelessness.

Since opening in January 2013, we have experienced a growing number of youth crossing the threshold. Our statistics show a multi barrier, high need population with high rates of mental health disorder and substance abuse issues, low school and work place attachments, cycles of homelessness, and the unawareness or inability to connect with community resources.

The need identified is significant and broad in scope. John Rolls, Social Worker, provides daily emotional support and navigational services to our youth with a very kind and non-judgmental disposition. Peggy Vassallo, Coordinator, works to administrate and support the operational needs of the Centre while building critical partnerships with a view to on-going operational sustainability. The organization and staff are supported by an expert, engaged Board of Directors that represent youth serving agencies and local community businesses.

Our delivery model is based on a three pillar approach – prevention and early intervention strategies, emergency response, and supports focused on transition out of homelessness. Success thus far is undoubtedly rooted in the collaborating efforts of the multi-agency involvement and individuals that worked, and are working, so hard to make this centre possible. Referral assistance and response from youth servicing organizations is outstanding and more than meet our expectations. The mobilizing efforts to meet the needs of youth in distress are working. Youth are receiving the help they need and opportunity for change is possible.

“I got into some rougher times. I was staying outside. I was really depressed. They helped me through getting back on my feet, getting me more confident about myself, they helped me with income, getting a job, everything really. Access 808 is a friendly environment; you can come here for everything you need.”

Male, 18 years old

