

Community Schools Tap into Wealth of Local Resources

by Jane Barry, The Greater Saint John Community Foundation

When you hear a teacher say that many of her students have a variety of challenges, it's no wonder that authorities concluded it was time to call in special community resources to provide support. We all have a stake in how our children succeed at school and in life so it makes sense for us to play a part in that success, complementing what parents, family and schools offer. As taxpayers, we can support the concept of fully utilizing costly school buildings and infrastructure to the maximum, not just from 9 to 3 but after school hours as well. Community members may have special talents and valuable skills they are willing to share with schoolchildren as volunteers.

Two years ago the Province of New Brunswick adopted a new initiative called "*When Kids Come First*", which includes the establishment of Community Schools. They add resources to 51 designated places of learning around the province which could particularly benefit. School Districts 6 and 8 in greater Saint John have several such schools. A community school creates a new alliance between the school and its community. They use local resources such as volunteer groups, parents, public services, along with recreational and cultural opportunities which transform a school into a unique community centre of learning.

There are differences and commonalities between each school. Their community-based committees complement the teaching mission by tapping into services from outside the walls of the building, in cooperation with the principal. More concrete, interactive learning takes place by introducing these resources in broader time frames. Community schools bustle with after school programs, family activities, adult education, literacy and employment training after hours. It's similar to a bank opening longer hours to better serve their clients, but in this case the clients are children and adults who are enriched with new learning experiences, savings are gained and assets built which benefit the entire community.

In District 6, Quispamsis Elementary School, (QES) (with approximately 10 formal partnerships) and Sussex Middle School, (with approximately 9 partnerships) have set the pace for newcomers this year, Rothesay Elementary School and Rothesay High School, to total over 9000 students, supported by 401 volunteers who gave 6000 personal hours. Business partners, Government departments and not for profit groups also contributed, for an estimated value of \$175,000.

Projects such as Marigold Magic, Junior Achievement, Rothesay High School's 'Redhawks' Make a Difference and Parent Education Sessions, The Big Rothesay Read, 1 & 2, in-school mentoring programs, breakfast and lunch programs, reading tutors, fundraising for the community and enrichment activities are some of the activities coordinated by the Community School program.

At QES, Candice MacLean is a natural fit to help coach grade fours how to create a school newspaper. The KV Style editor, has articles which have been created, proof-read and edited, along with Valerie Conrod, their teacher, for the fledgling QES Journal. "KV Style was happy to partner with the Community Schools program to launch a series of visits to QES to talk about journalism. The Grade 4 classes have been eager and quick to catch on to the ideas of storytelling in newspapers and how to write an article.Now they are writing their own stories and doing their own interviews" she states.

Amelia, Hannah and Adam are keen on the project which helps build writing and language skills while doubling as a fun activity. Nancy Littlewood, who has a wealth of community experience, is the in-school coordinator. She works with Kent Staal, who is based at the District office and oversees all four school programs, each with unique elements, yet all vibrant; stimulating; resourceful; engaging; welcoming and student-centered. He states, "Sometimes, our best teaching is not from the textbook".

You don't have to convince the school's principal, Janet Miller, about the impact that Community School designation has had on her school. "Our QES students are truly fortunate to have the support of many community partnerships. Over the past three years, we have been able to provide many enriching activities, thanks to the strong community connections our school has created, which we showcase at our annual school wide community pancake breakfast" she notes.

A company, business or organization, and its employees, can make a difference at a local school by acting as community resource instructors and speakers; being a reading buddy; serving as mentors to students, and providing positive role models; assisting with use of school libraries; providing individual assistance and attention; sharing a hobby or collection with classes; driving for extra curricular activities; coordinating and assisting with special events, field trips and fund-raising efforts or supporting school enrichment initiatives. It is rewarding and pays unexpected personal dividends.

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www.district6.nbed.nb.ca/programs/Community/index.html



Photo by KâtÈ Braydon/Telegraph-Journal

Photo: Quispamsis Elementary School is one of 45 specially designated New Brunswick community schools. Students Amelia McCavour, Hannah Gillis and Adam Robichaud are proud of their school newspaper project and pictured with volunteer Candice MacLean, teacher Valerie Conrod and Principal Janet Miller (Note: some photos have Kent Staal, Dist. 6 coordinator and Nancy Littlewood, school coordinator also pictured)



Community Profile is a weekly column highlighting community causes and work done by non-profit organizations in the Greater Saint John area. It is contributed by Jane Barry, executive director of The Greater Saint John Community Foundation. Contact the foundation at 506-672-8880, sjfoundation@nb.aibn.com . To view other Community Profiles go to www.saint-john-foundation.nb.ca