

UNBSJ & Hazen White-St. Francis School Team Up

By Jane Barry, The Greater Saint John Community Foundation

Of the many encouraging initiatives happening in our community to reach out to priority neighbourhoods and their youngest members, one that stands out is the partnership between UNB-Saint John and Hazen White St. Francis School (HWSFS). The principle of one-on-one mentoring between two individuals, one usually older, is a tried and true approach employed by many reputable and successful community agencies. But imagine if you had to find well over one hundred willing and suitable mentors all at once.

The UNBSJ-Hazen White St. Francis Community Partnership is attracting attention with no less than five elements to date, all of which involve drawing on and engaging its considerable depth of human resources: students, faculty, alumni, corporate and government partners. The lead personalities are very committed. By targeting their intervention based on the teaching staff direction and following their lead, a successful collaborative academic intervention process results.

Peter McGuire is the Community Engagement Facilitator, on secondment from the Province of New Brunswick and part of a small collaborative team, along with Leah Richardson and Stephen Stone, who work diligently toward their goal. His enthusiasm is contagious and shared with School Principal Jennifer Carhart. McGuire says Carhart as Principal is key, providing "outstanding leadership" "who goes well beyond" and who knows her school and 140 children well. All are very excited and committed to the Partnership's success.

They have the wholehearted support of a large number of those connected to UNB in one way or another from President Eddy Campbell and Vice-President Robert MacKinnon down to student mentors in their first year. They make up the strongest force by their sheer numbers, close to one hundred fifty. The incredible commitment they make each week to spend time individually with each HWSFS student after school for an extra hour is significant and rewarding.

In addition to weekly school visits, it's also very important to introduce youngsters to the campus, only a kilometer or so away, but for many it could be worlds away. There, summer science camps, literacy programs, yoga classes and interactive theatre make the university a place to have fun and experience positive learning. McGuire explains "we bring the children onto campus so they can physically and socially experience the university culture. We believe that this gives the children a 'frame of reference' with respect to what a university is." The idea is to provide a continuum of learning starting in elementary, progressing through middle school and on to high school with the watchful eyes, support and oversight needed to encourage completion of high school first and then hopefully on to post-secondary education.

That's where extra funding from the Province is enabling extra support for those who leave HWSFS through the critical high school years, an opportunity many of their parents and peers never had. Test scores are improving at the school. A "data room" at the school tracks each students' progress, visually depicting outcomes in reading writing and math. The Partnership's Corporate partners Brunswick, Pipeline and Innovatia, are offering hope and support for potential graduates to continue their education, a dream which may not be far off.

Peter McGuire lauds the support and "full cooperation" of the UNB-Saint John Faculty and volunteers like Dr. Ruth Shaw, Dean of Science and Dr. Frances Fullerton, who mentors in math. The Associated Alumni under the leadership of President Larry Hachey and past President Carey Ryan have also offered significant support. A visit to the Medical School is being planned.

Here's a sample of what the students say: "I love my mentor because she carries my book bag when it's time to go. She always helps me" says Brianna Doyle, in grade 2. "It's pretty awesome having a mentor because I get special attention every week" adds classmate Darius Raynes. "My mentor loves playing Battleship, he's always friendly with me and makes sure I do my work" says Adam MacLaren, also in grade 2. "I have lots of fun with my mentor. He plays all kinds of fun games with me" says Bryston Gray of the grade 3 class. "My mentor always plays catch with me and she play special games with just me" says classmate Cheyanne Lank. "I love my mentor because we play fun games" states Gavin White a grade 1 HWSFS youngster. The bonds that form between them are meaningful and lasting and can truly make a difference in a child's life.



Jennifer Carhart, principal of Hazen White-St. Francis School, and Peter McGuire, co-ordinator of the UNB-Saint John-Hazen White St. Francis Community Partnership, are leading the efforts of the university, students, faculty and alumni in a new partnership, making a difference in the academic successes of every student at the north end school.

Photo: Noel Chenier/Telegraph-Journal



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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.

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