

# **Coastal Communities Network 2006 Conference**

## **Recognizing Your Strengths ....The Power of Potential**



**April 28th & 29th  
Tatamagouche Centre  
Tatamagouche, Nova Scotia**



**CCN** Coastal  
Communities  
Network

**Coastal Communities Network's** 2006 Learning Conference, Recognizing Your Strengths... The Power of Potential took place on April 28<sup>th</sup> & 29<sup>th</sup> at Tatamagouche Centre. From the comments of participants and the evaluation, we really hit the mark! The place was buzzing with excitement as groups gained new skills and ideas to take back to their small rural communities. At least half of the 41 participants were new to CCN and they loved it.

The afternoon of the 28th started off a networking lunch, which lead into our afternoon workshop; Finding, Resorting & Maintaining Your Strengths, which was presented by Jackie Race. As usual Jackie brought laughter while we learned new insights into ourselves.

That evening a networking dinner was held, and participants were invited to take part in our fund raising silent auction. We held our annual Nova Scotia Trivia Contest. This contest was a great way for participants to support each other by trying to guess the correct answers. This event was full of laughter and excitement as participants tried their luck as winning some great prizes. Our evening wound up with a "jam session" that was filled with laughter, singing and dancing. This social event was a relaxing way for participants to end the day.

A brief outline of Friday afternoon's workshop is as follows:

**Finding, Restoring & Maintaining Your Strengths**  
**Presented by: Jackie Race**

Jackie Race presented the first CCN workshop at the annual conference held in Tatamagouche on Friday afternoon. The workshop focused on emotional intelligence. Jackie explained that wisdom is our emotional intelligence as opposed to your IQ, which is knowledge. The workshop allowed for some interactive exercises that included a stand up and move version of musical chairs "getting to know you" through the sharing of actions and personal information. In addition to sharing in people's strengths through this exercise she also pointed out how CCN members could help to discover inner strengths and maintain personal power.

Using the Inuit Inukshuk model she had participants list visually on this model what is valued by each individual in terms of personal strengths and skills. This workshop allowed CCN members to reflect on their own attributes and it set the tone for looking at how personal power is important to the role individual's play in organizational and community settings.

### **Saturday:**

On Saturday the 29th four workshops were offered; the participants had a choice of one of two in the morning and one of two in the afternoon.

#### **The two morning workshops were:**

⇒ **A.M. Yoga**

⇒ **Understanding Your Potential**

#### **The two afternoon workshops were:**

⇒ **Understanding Your Strengths**

⇒ **The Re-population Challenge**

Brief outlines of the workshops are as follows:

#### **A.M. Yoga presented by: Michele MacLean**

**The A.M. Yoga** class began with guided meditation which helped the participants feel comfortable and connected before the movements began.

After the meditation and relaxation the class moved into beginner Yoga poses. Next the instructor asked if any participants had particular issues they wanted to work on (sore neck, back, etc...). This was very helpful to those who had pains or injuries as the instructor had many great tips on strengthening the problem areas.

In the final part of the class the participants were asked to pair up and each take a turn with partner pranasage. One partner would first lie on the mat and get comfortable while the other partner was guided by the instructor step by step to massage and share energy with the other, this stimulated various pressure points and provided a great feeling of relaxation and well being.

The a.m. Yoga was refreshing, uplifting and relaxing. The instructor was very knowledgeable, patient and humorous. Overall, this was a great workshop!

#### **Understanding your Potential & Understanding Your Strengths Presented by Dennis Pilkey & Erin Whiteley**

This two-part workshop was presented by Dennis Pilkey & Erin Whiteley, Nova Scotia Department of Finance. The workshops involved a grassroots approach to looking at a community's demographics as well as studying the assets that communities possess. The workshop dealt with the issue of learning about community potential by using Community Counts, an ambitious portal that could be used for a statistical source of information.

Before studying the statistical tool, participants were introduced to what Community Counts was all about and the very user-friendly approach to designing a community counts model.

Much of the focus with the first part of the workshop (Understanding Your Potential) dealt with the importance of why it is useful to incorporate maps in the process of

studying what a community has to offer. It also showed what resources are presently available as well as how to create an asset map.

A visual representation of what assets exist was created with the participants defining what community means. Through a series of exercises the participants developed a series of questions regarding community. To get a sense of community it was pointed out that community leaders and volunteers had to look at what is most needed and what area of concerns exist. In addition to these definitions a more demographic approach was also examined looking at trends in population, family structure, incomes, employment stats as well as the social welfare of the community. By cross-referencing data you could see an overview of population trends over the last 15 years.

The appearance of the province, from the perspective of a map system painted very clear pictures of just what the province looked like. Not only could existing data be applied on an electoral district basis, it broke down maps to be looked at on a community-to-community basis. The maps highlighted differences from area to area-including age group distribution, median income, population density, education level and employment levels. The maps are very successful as they provide in depth overviews as well as a broad based look at how the province is changing to socio-economic trends.

The Community Counts site is always being updated and upgraded and is an excellent tool for doing quick and involved research; [www.gov.ns.ca/communitycounts](http://www.gov.ns.ca/communitycounts) . Through the exercise of using your own community as a model, this workshop allowed participants to “start asking questions differently.” It was also noted that very often people are not aware of just what assets do exist in their communities or even how to go about asking the questions that need to be asked when it comes to things like community development, business planning, special projects or just being informed about the make up of your community.

Along with the process of this exercise, participants took a look at profiling through SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses Opportunities and Threats) analysis as well as what information was lacking along with the existing information base. There is 100,00 data screens presently in existence on the site. By looking at how things are headed, what knowledge exists at present as well as the use of anecdotal information?

The second phase of the workshop was titled Understanding Your Strengths and this exercise focused on how the asset mapping model could be best applied to community planning, what type of resources were available and how to create an asset mapping plan. The concept of what an asset is and how it is connected to the process of community sustainability focuses around what the pluses are in that community and the people who live there. The traditional idea of community development was to look at what a community needed – what was lacking. It involved looking at all the negatives in a community. The idea of what is an asset, a plus, and building on that strength is a positive approach to community development. By using the Community Counts system a community can see surprising strengths that they didn't even realize they had.

Participants from a number of very small rural communities were delighted to find that statistics and community mapping could be a very positive, insightful experience. Much like taking inventory of what goods things exist with people and organizations it focuses on the skills such as building agendas and resident's problem solving abilities. The crux of the mapping exercise also looks at how much the community wants to invest as well as their control and creativity in the project. Mapping involves the community from the point of talents and skills, what assets exist from within and also works on getting people and organizations together. The three components are people, formal institutions and informal organizations and combining the expertise from all three sources is what makes for successful asset mapping.

Community Counts allows quick and easy access to large amounts of information, puts assets in context and shows, visually, how things fit together that otherwise may not in another format. Mapping can take on a number of forms, shown by visual depictions of different structural maps.

One type of map is called an internal map, which has its basis in the more societal and heritage based setting; a more anecdotal form of map that is difficult to quantify, given that it is not always accurate and tends to be very personal. The other types are paper and digital maps/GIS. In this format the data is easy to update, analyze, be modeled for the future and can include the personal knowledge and history through multi media presentations. In terms of disadvantage special training and software are part of making the website up to date and accessible to the publics using it.

In conclusion, the two workshops provided definite usable tools for communities and inspired people to take a fresh look at the strengths that could be built upon to ensure a better future for rural Nova Scotia.

### **The Re-population Challenge**

#### **Presented by Gwen Zwicker, Research Associate, Mount Allison University**

The purpose of this workshop was to explore and discuss the general issues around re-population, raise awareness about population trends and think about possible strategies and solutions. Two questions were discussed:

- What can individual communities, organizations etc. do/work on to further attract immigrants/youth/repatriation to their area?
- What can regional agencies and organizations do on your collective behalf to address barriers to re-population, and to support local efforts at re-population?

Rural communities or non-metro adjacent population were defined as communities with a population of less than 10,000.

Three groups of individuals were discussed:

- Youth, especially those between 18-24
- Seniors
- Immigrants

Discussion around the barriers of returning, repatriation and/or welcoming various success stories was discussed as was historical population trends. The importance of having a welcoming community, which includes: employment opportunities, being hospitable, housing, cultural and multicultural events, anti-racism and education to name a few.

As for what governments can do; infrastructure, create conditions for repopulation, business development and finances, public services, regulate land use and support development and implementation of regional economic development plans. Also they can help provide information around issues, build capacity and encourage and support repopulation plans where appropriate. It is important that the community works with all government levels. The most important thing to encourage repopulation is for the community to be welcoming.

### **The Last Word is Yours!**

#### **Comments from Participants:**

“Wonderful in every way. Meeting and sharing with new people, learning from workshops a treasure.”

“How can you do it so cheaply!”

“ Not sure how you come up with your ideas, but they are great, always seem to be timely and fun.”

“Tthe event was very beneficial, informative and interesting.”

“Wonderful setting, food! And people. A relaxing and informative getaway.”

“Friday Night Entertainment was great.”

“Food was excellent! Overall format and activities were very good and well run.”