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WELL-BEING IN FOCUS

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The Social Determinants of Health

A Story about Upstream, Downstream & Working Together

One bright, sunny day a couple were fishing at a river's edge. After some success, they were alarmed to see a man screaming for help as he drifted down the river with the rapids. The current was strong, but they managed to rescue the man. No sooner had they called an ambulance; they spotted a child fighting the turbulent white water. Without hesitation, they quickly jumped in and saved the child. The couple were exhausted but decided to investigate why they were in such dangerous water in the first place.

After a 15-minute hike up the river, they noticed a small encampment. They discovered families were making the area above the river their home. The small, makeshift community were using the river as their water source despite the potential hazards. Upon closer inspection, there were no signs to indicate the dangers or even a barrier to protect those who were fetching water. Without the proper safety measures, people were not only falling in the river, but they were also being exposed to illnesses while drinking unsafe water.

The couple immediately contacted Parks Canada and the local city council to discuss a plan of action to prevent further accidents. For their short-term needs, large, colorful signs were posted to ensure visibility and a sturdy barrier was built at a safe distance from the edge of the river. Donations poured in from local groups. Potable water was donated by the Lion's Club, warm clothing was brought by religious denominations, while the 50+ Clubs in the area took turns providing hot meals. Long-term solutions involved park officials educating about water safety to all who visited the park, while the local housing council worked on securing temporary housing and collaborating with Habitat for Humanity to build tiny homes before winter arrived.

In this case, access to clean water, safe housing and risks associated with the environment represent some of the Social Determinants of Health (SDoH) and how they impact personal well-being. So, like homelessness, poor nutrition and unsafe drinking water made achieving better health difficult for the characters in this story resulting in the scenario downstream. As a part of the community, we each have a responsibility to work together to create equal access for all, or in other words, we need to focus our efforts upstream to ensure we each have what we need to become healthier. For more information on the SDoH visit **https://www.canada.ca**

(Adapted from the primary source document titled "A Case for Refocusing Upstream: The Political Economy of Illness (John B. McKinlay)

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SWITCHED OFF AT ST. PAUL'S INTERMEDIATE

Gander

A group of students at the mini-workshop learning about outdoor survival and putting their skills to the test.

Tablets, phones, smart watches, and game consoles. There are so many screen distractions for children and youth and that can be problematic. Time spent on screen should be balanced to promote healthy child development and finding that balance is a shared responsibility of the whole community. Health Canada suggests no screen time for children under 2, and learning and social development should be the goal when children of 2-5 years have limited screen time. What about older children and youth? How do we prevent screen time from dominating school and home life? The simplest solution is to keep youth busy with meaningful activities.

St. Paul's Intermediate School in Gander did just that. It offered a day long wellness event with the support of the Central Wellness Coalition called Switched Off Skills. The initiative was designed to encourage students to step away from their screens and explore their creativity with various hobbies, meant to help reduce time spent screen gazing.

More than 400 students participated in 21 different interactive workshops led by teachers, community organizations, and volunteers. Activities such as line dancing, drumming, darts, macrame, crocheting, knitting, junk journaling, and outdoor survival skills were on offer. The mini-workshops provided students with two hours of immersive, hands-on learning, and an opportunity to discover new interests!

The impact of the event was both immediate and lasting. Students were highly engaged and many participants continued their involvement after the event - leading to the creation of new school clubs! This opportunity encouraged social connections, skill building, and self-confidence. Most importantly, the day had a very positive impact on students' mental health and wellness.

(Story contributed by Central Wellness Coalition Chair, Jalisa Clarke)

GROS MORNE - STAYING ACTIVE IN WINTER

Rocky Harbour

Newfoundland and Labrador likely experience the longest and coldest winter months in Canada. That may be debatable (depending on which province you are from), but one fact that we can all agree on is that it's challenging to stay active during winter and even harder not to hibernate during the colder months! If you give it some thought, there are numerous activities that you can do in winter while you wait for spring! Physical literacy all year long is very important to our overall health, and the community of Rocky Harbour agrees.

The Western Wellness Coalition supported the Gros Morne arena to offer winter activities to the whole community. The initiative encouraged participation in skating and snowshoeing and offered them free of charge! Participants were also given access to safety gear and equipment. As a result, the Rocky Harbour arena and the Wellness Coalition removed the financial barriers families experience so people can try a new winter activity or do more of the sports they love. The town of Rocky Harbour is committed to extending the program. Local schools will be given priority to book the arena, while the safety equipment will remain available to schools and other community groups - a perfect partnership to promote physical literacy!

(Story contributed by Western Wellness Coalition Chair, Amanda Earle)

THE LOFT-COMMUNITY YOUTH NETWORK - Nourish & Flourish Café

Clarenville

"...we welcomed 78 youth through our doors, whether they participated in the lunch program or the art activities."

Cafés are known for their freshly brewed coffee, sweet treats and free Wi-Fi. While that's the common description, Nourish and Flourish is a special, one-of-a-kind café that offers youth weekly after-school sessions focused on teaching practical food skills and building an appreciation of food literacy. Participants learned how to prepare nutritious meals, which they then enjoyed together. Two other components that were included in the sessions were knowledge and self-confidence - much needed ingredients to support healthier eating habits.

The Nourish and Flourish program integrates guided art-based activities that promote creative expression, emotional regulation, and overall well-being. The initiative was delivered in partnership with the Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services, Violence Prevention East, and the Autism Society. The Eastern Wellness Coalition provided the funding to support the purchase of food supplies, the equipment for the food skills component and the materials for the art-based activities. According to The Loft's Executive Director, "...we welcomed 78 youth through our doors, whether they participated in the lunch program or the art activities."

The project successfully focused on health equity simply by providing youth with opportunities to develop life skills, improve knowledge about healthy behaviors, provide access to nutritious food, and build supportive social connections in an inclusive environment. The program contributed to the overall health and well-being of participants, offering the perfect recipe for youth engagement.

(Story contributed by Eastern Wellness Coalition Chair, Tracey Sharpe-Smith)

CULTIVATING COMMUNITIES - Labrador South

Pinware

On the southern coast of Labrador, situated in a cove near the mouth of the Pinware River sits the community of Pinware. This small town (in partnership with the neighboring town of Red Bay) are reaping the benefits of self-grown food. With funding from the Northern Wellness Coalition to purchase tools, supplies and canning equipment, the working group expanded their greenhouse to introduce communal gardening and to grow foods to support cooking skills and social health. The garden is also teaching the importance of helping others and connecting with the community in which they live, work and play.

Community gardens are more than just places to grow food. They also provide benefits such as improving social health and well-being, a sense of community and an awareness of the environment around us (Community Garden Toolkit, Food First NL, 2024). Adopting and shaping a patch of land to grow food is deeply rooted (no pun intended) in the culture of Newfoundland and Labrador. While growing our own food was once commonplace, we moved away from this practice when convenience and grocery stores emerged.

In recent years, there's been a resurgence in community gardens. Not only has this improved access to fresh, nutritious and lower costs for food, there are other noteworthy benefits:

- It's an opportunity for physical activity,
- It's a social hub to gather and to share stories and knowledge,
- It's a method to learn more about seeds, harvesting or the food system,
- It's a place to improve your self-confidence in your gardening skills,
- It enhances outdoor spaces, and
- It inspires others to become caretakers of the environment.

(Community Garden Best Practices Toolkit: A Guide for Organizers in Newfoundland and Labrador, Food First NL)

To learn more or to explore how to start your own community garden please visit **https://www.foodfirstnl.ca**

(Story contributed by Northern Wellness Coalition Chair, Karla Loder)

CELEBRATING CULTURAL DIVERSITY – ASSOCIATION FOR NEW CANADIANS

Grand Falls-Windsor

The Celebrating Cultural Diversity Project was organized by the Association for New Canadians in Grand Falls-Windsor, creating meaningful opportunities for people of all ages and cultural backgrounds to connect, share experiences and learn from one another. The project offered a series of community-based events, including a family paint night supported by the Youth 2000 Centre (CYN), a Black History Month potluck hosted by the Grand Falls-Windsor black community, and an outing to an international music event hosted by local group, Laughing Heart Productions (62 Broadway). These events provided opportunities for newcomers to connect with others in the community, create friendships, share information about their cultures, and learn a bit about local Newfoundland and Labrador food, culture and traditions.

Strong partnerships with local organizations supported the delivery of these activities and helped create welcoming, inclusive space for both newcomers and long-time residents. Feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive, highlighting the impact of the project on strengthening community connections and fostering a greater sense of belonging.

(Story contributed by Central Wellness Coalition Chair, Jalisa Clarke)

CONNECTING WITH OTHERS

Happy Valley-Goose Bay

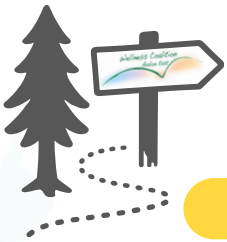
Multi-cultural groups connect to their community in many ways. They can share their love of music, crafting or sports, but one commonality among all cultures is the love of food! Mealy Mountain Collegiate with help from some community partners, planned fun activities to help learn about culturally diverse places and people.

Positive connections with others are essential for our mental, physical and social well-being. It improves personal growth and is a fundamental component of overall health. Children spend much of their day in the classroom, creating opportunities to interact, share and learn from each another. Mealy Mountain Collegiate is passionate about fostering those connections and their recent Culture Week event encouraged students to do just that!

The students and teachers planned classroom activities such as crafting, cooking and language sessions. A school wide assembly with 400 in attendance set the tone for the day. One of the highlights of the event was a potluck - students could sample delicious international foods, often for the first time. The event not only included local cultures but sampled the recipes of Ukraine, India and the Philippines. It was such a success that the school hopes to offer similar activities as part of an annual event!

(Story contributed by Labrador Wellness Coalition Chair, Danica Genge)

WARMING UP TO WELLNESS



Torbay

The Wellness Coalition Avalon East (WCAE) members enjoyed a day of learning, connection, and self-care at the Winter Wellness Gathering held on November 25 at Torbay Commons. The event brought people together from across the region to explore the different aspects of wellness while building relationships with fellow community partners. The day began with a networking nature walk led by Lori Dalton of Cloudberry Outdoor Play and Education Centre while attendees could warm up with a nutritious break sponsored by the Community Sector Council NL.

A workshop featured engaging presentations on the key dimensions of wellness and included financial health with Lauren Howell from Credit Counselling NL and stress management with Bailey Reid from NL Health Services. Participants gained practical tips and tools to support their own well-being and to share within their own organizations and communities. Information booths provided the opportunity to connect with local organizations like the Smokers' Helpline (SHL), Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services (NLHS) -Public Health and the Multicultural Women's Organization Newfoundland and Labrador (MWONL). The gathering was a valuable opportunity to learn and strengthen partnerships. The participants were inspired with new ideas and resources to support wellness in their communities. The WCAE extended sincere thanks to all presenters, exhibitors, sponsors and attendees who helped make the event a success!

(Story contributed by Avalon East Wellness Coalition Chair, Sarah Burton)

WARMING HEARTS & MINDS AT ST. BONIFACE ALL GRADE

Community SPIRIT!

Ramea

"...warmth, laughter and lasting friendships"

St. Boniface All Grade transformed the cold winter months into a season of warmth, laughter and lasting friendships with the help of the Western Wellness Coalition. Last fall, the school was successful in securing a grant to support their intergenerational project called Creating Community Connections. This funding has allowed the planning team to host weekly activities during winter for all community members.

The goals of the project aimed to build community spirit, bridge the gap between seniors and youth and break down the barriers of social isolation. The team focused on many health themes such as physical literacy, social and mental health, etc. This ensured that there was something for everyone. Way to go St. Boniface All Grade for helping keep the heart of a small town beating!

(Story contributed by Western Wellness Coalition Chair, Amanda Earle)

MAKING FUTURE READY KITCHENS

L'Anse au Loup

Food literacy is an important life skill and according to Health Canada, cooking and food preparation should be promoted as a practical way to support healthy eating. Traditionally, children and youth learned food skills from their parents, caregivers and extended family. Changes in working hours, busy family lives and stretched incomes have challenged this norm. Fewer Canadians are making meals from basic ingredients, and many are reliant on highly processed food that require fewer or different skills (Health Canada, 2002). Equally important is acknowledging how culturally vital it is for families to shop, prepare meals and eat together.

Food literacy and life skills are the concepts that Chef Angela Dumaresque, a Red Seal Chef (a universally recognized certification of apprenticeship in Canada) hopes to impress upon Grade 10 and 11 students with an afterschool culinary program at Labrador Straits Academy, L' Anse au Loup. The program focuses on building foundational food knowledge, safe food-handling practices, and practical cooking skills that support healthy living, independence and future readiness. Through hands on instruction, the program equips students with the confidence and ability to prepare nutritious meals, to understand basic nutrition and food safety principles, and make informed food choices. The program also aims to promote mental and social well-being by fostering teamwork, responsibility, problem-solving, and a sense of accomplishment in a positive, structured environment. With this program, food literacy becomes a life skill that students take with them when they graduate and as they start the next chapter of their lives.

Photo: Chef Angela Dumaresque; official FaceBook page,

(Story contributed by Northern Wellness Coalition Chair, Karla Loder)

FROM NEED TO NOURISHMENT:A COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP IN ACTION

Building PARTNERSHIPS

Mount Carmel

One of the many ways the Eastern Regional Wellness Coalition supports its members is by connecting communities with the resources, expertise, and partners needed to bring wellness initiatives to life. When the Town of Mount Carmel received funding through New Horizons, a seniors program, they were seeking support to enhance their community programming and incorporate food and nutrition education into their activities. Through the Coalition's network, the town was connected with Public Health Nutrition Consultants from NL Health Services and community partners, who collaborated to support the planning and delivery of nutrition-focused programming. The partnership soon expanded beyond the initial request. Through connections made by the coalition, Public Health Nutrition Consultants from NL Health Services also participated in the town's weekly youth day camp. During the session, children learned about where food comes from and prepared fruit salad using fresh, frozen, and canned fruits, including berries harvested from the community garden. The hands-on activity helped build food skills while making healthy eating fun and engaging.

The impact of these partnerships was evident in the feedback received from program organizer Brenda: "Thank you again for the session with the kids. We were pleasantly surprised at how much of the fruit salad they ate! We've continued to offer fruit with various berries and fruit since then. We also held a banana muffin baking class where participants chose their own toppings, and all the muffins quickly disappeared. Thank you both for the great session." This story highlights the power of collaboration and the role Wellness Coalitions play in connecting communities. Sometimes a single request for support can grow into a lasting partnership that contributes to healthier communities.

(Story contributed by Avalon East and Eastern Wellness Coalition Chairs, Sarah Burton & Tracey Sharpe-Smith & Photo by Brenda Kielly, Town of Mount Carmel)

Cartwright

LEARNING THROUGH GENERATIONAL TEACHING

Connecting with community and engaging with all generations creates wonderful opportunities for lifelong learning. Individuals learn from one another's experiences and share knowledge, creating stronger community relationships. This is exactly what the residents of Cartwright set out to do during an Easter Fair event in the community.

With approximately 250 people in attendance, the town event brought children, parents and grandparents together to engage in traditional games and to learn about hunting and gathering foods from the land. During the fair, meals including fish and brewis and homemade jams were served, along with other traditional delicacies.

The event created opportunities for individuals to connect and for younger children to learn about games and pastimes that relatives competed in while growing up. Stories were shared of how food was harvested and collected to ensure that the traditional methods of providing for oneself isn't forgotten. The residents of Cartwright were happy to be a part of an event that demonstrated the importance of connecting with one's culture and encourage opportunities to learn from each other.

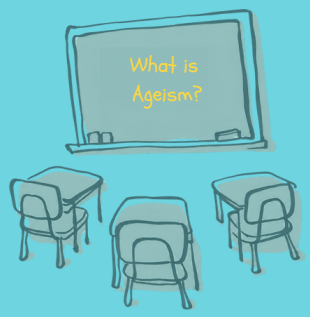
(Story contributed by Labrador Wellness Coalition Chair, Danica Genge)

St. John's

LET'S TALK ABOUT... AGEISM

Ageism is described as the stereotypes (how we think), prejudices (how we feel) and discrimination (how we act) towards others or oneself based on age (World Health Organization, 2025). To teach children about ageism, a session titled "Let's Talk About Ageism was held on May 20th, and June 3th of this year. It was described as an innovative initiative blending Hazelwood Elementary School Grade 5 students and staff as well as volunteers from St. Luke's (Anglican Homes Inc.) The intergenerational learning experience was designed to increase awareness and a better understanding of ageism. Using interactive presentations, art activities, and meaningful conversations, participants explored the impacts of ageism, challenged stereotypes, built empathy, and strengthened connections across generations. One comment heard during the session was... "I get it, racist is about the color of your skin and ageism is about your age but it's all the same thing."

"...I get it, racist is about the color of your skin and ageism is about your age, but it's all the same thing..."



The project was made possible through strong community partnerships. Local artist and entrepreneur Lesley, from Brush Strokes with Lesley, led the creative art component with art design and helped participants express what they had learned through collaborative artwork. SeniorsNL had the original idea, developed the learning curriculum, and provided the transportation for the seniors! By combining education, creativity, and relationship-building, the Let's Learn About Ageism project demonstrated the power of partnerships to promote mental well-being, healthy aging, and positive intergenerational connections. Most importantly, this is just the beginning of intergenerational conversations. SeniorsNL hopes to host many more opportunities to talk about ageism and bridging the generational gap.

(Story contributed by Avalon East Wellness Coalition Chair, Sarah Burton & Catherine Connelly of Seniors NL)

Canadian Mental Health Association
Newfoundland and Labrador

The Canadian Mental Health Association Newfoundland & Labrador branch facilitates access to the resources people require to maintain and improve mental health and community integration, build resilience, and support recovery from mental illness. For more information please visit: **https://www.cmhanl.ca**