



Atlantic Summer
Institute on
Healthy and Safe
Communities

l'Institut d'été
sur les collectivités
sûres et en santé au
Canada atlantique

Posterboard Presentation

Engaging Grassroots People in Community Learning and Advocacy for Youth Wellness

Description of Presentation

In 2006 and 2007, Breaking Barriers Resource Centre (BBRC) conducted participatory social action research in the central area of Kent County, NB. Co-presenters worked with community members who are committed to interfaith inclusion and cross-cultural relationship building. Project activities took place in Canadian and First Nation communities.

BBRC's goal was to create public awareness and dialogue about social issues in our diverse "Highway 116 Neighbourhood." In specific, we asked public officials to pay attention to resolving these issues:

- high school "dropoutism"
- illiteracy
- poverty
- suicide ideation and completions
- underemployment and unemployment
- substance abuse
- domestic and sexual abuse
- alcohol-related violence and vehicle accidents

A challenging and successful aspect of this participatory action research was the youth-led creation of a play called "The Lost Three". The project began with teaching self-expression and improvisation skills in an experimental cross-cultural drop-in setting.

The play's storyline was developed by almost 100 youth over a nine-month period. Initially, we relied on the very strong oracy skills in all local cultural communities. Diverse learning strategies were used to engage the youth. After the separate tragic deaths of two local teens in March 2007, some youth decided to speak out publicly about their issues. Community attitudes towards the youth caused a huge change in script in the final six weeks, and the

Presenters

Ann Pohl and Katrina Clair



Ann Pohl (M.Ed.) and Katrina Clair (B.Ed. in process) met while volunteering with the Nogemag project at Elsipogtog First Nation. They are close friends and colleagues.

Ann is a mother, foster-mother, auntie, and grandmother of European Jewish heritage. She is also a cross-cultural popular educator, professional development facilitator, social researcher, crisis intervention worker, social policy planner, community animator/navigator, and human rights activist. Ann moved to rural Kent County, NB in Nov 2004. She met Katrina six months later. Ann pays the bills by providing home care services and doing consultancy work.



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youth (surprisingly!) became very concerned with improving their literacy skills. This exciting development almost compromised the artistic and advocacy aspects of the production. On June 16, 2007, "The Lost Three" was "workshopped" to a packed house and received rave reviews.

Other activities facilitated by BBRC during this participatory action research project included:

- A Focus on Change for Youth Wellness community workshop that used the Tree of Hope model presented in these images. It engaged 38 youth and youth advocates of diverse faith and cultural heritages.
- Youth leadership development and agency networking opportunities.
- A summer youth arts camp that produced a local social history mural and video.
- Community based research findings from surveys and focus group sessions.

Katrina is a proud Mi'kmaq woman. She survived her mothers' death at Elsipogtog four years ago, and became legal guardian for her 14 year-old brother. Katrina is enrolled in second year of the First Nation Teacher Education Program. She wants to develop and share a new "Indian Education" history curriculum that is based on Mi'kmaq knowledge and culture, and which includes the history of colonization and assimilation. Katrina earns her living as a business manager in her community.

How you will benefit

Many of the social issues affecting the 116 Neighbourhood are found throughout Atlantic Canada. Two of the greatest barriers to social change for excluded and oppressed peoples are "silencing" and a defeatist attitude.

- This presentation explores how participatory action research based on interfaith and cross-cultural respect can mobilize effective grassroots community engagement.
- It highlights strategies for development of youth leadership and advocacy skills, based on interactive arts programming, oracy strengths, mentoring, and inclusive approaches.
- Current social change trends are examined.

Handouts

"Concluding Observations" from the 116 Neighbourhood Study



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Resources

Online

The 116 Neighbourhood Youth and Community Program Needs Study
(Pohl, with Dr. Cyndy Baskin; December 2007; BBRC).

Download from http://www.edu.yorku.ca/~Ann_Pohl/

The "116 Neighbourhood Study" is, in part, an implementation feasibility study based on this national research study: Learning About Walking in Beauty: Placing Aboriginal Perspectives in Canadian Classrooms (Coalition for the Advancement of Aboriginal Studies, Principal Researcher: Ann Pohl; November 2002; Canadian Race Relations Foundation)

Order a print copy from CRRF at www.crr.ca, or download it from:
<http://www.crr.ca/Load.do?section=26&subSection=38&id=316&type=2>

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