

More collaborative strategies urged to address social ills linked to illiteracy

N.S. child and youth strategy executive says new models needed to ensure literate population

By TERESA WRIGHT
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Obvious links between illiteracy, crime, ill health and injury are why more co-operative strategies in these areas are needed to offer more effective help services, says the executive director of Nova Scotia's child and youth strategy.

As part of the Atlantic Summer Institute on Healthy and Safe Communities, Robert Seymore Wright addressed a roomful of social, justice and health workers from across the Atlantic provinces in Charlottetown last week.

He told them they need to join their respective services together.

"Illiteracy equates poverty and health and injury and crime and so many other things — teen pregnancy, domestic violence — and a host of other social ills of which illiteracy is both a cause and an effect," he said.

He pointed out that those who can't read likely had parents who couldn't read, which made it likely they didn't have good jobs.

And without good jobs they were likely poor, lived in the wrong neighbourhoods and probably couldn't offer proper health plans or nutrition for their children.

"It's also likely that in the wrong neighbourhoods, they likely have the wrong associates, and if they have the wrong associates, they are more likely to engage in the kind of knucklehead behaviour that would get them



Robert Wright, presenter, speaks with Sarah Stewart-Jackson of the Mi'kmaq Confederacy and Jennifer Jones of the Atlantic Evaluation Group after speaking at the Summer Institute at UPEI. The topic of Wright's seminar was if you can read this: Linking Literacy, Crime, Health and Injury Among Children and Youth. Guardian photo

coming up against the law."

These kinds of parallels demonstrate why more collaboration is needed between health, correctional and social programming in order to address the problems more fully.

"The only way that we can address both the cause and the effect of all these things is to mobilize what I like to call a full court press," Wright said.

"This would require new models among government

and community stakeholders to ensure — not just promote — but ensure a literate population."

Jill Lightwood, who works for the P.E.I. attorney general's office, said she fully agrees with Wright's idea that linking community and government help services is necessary.

"A lot of people do a lot of excellent work in their respective disciplines. It's not that anyone's not working hard but we are not working

across systems, generally speaking."

She said she hopes Wright's presentation will inspire those present from all these sectors to try to work more collaboratively or perhaps to begin thinking about doing so.

"You want a correctional officer to think, 'maybe a social worker can help me.' Or you want a nurse to think, 'maybe I should talk to a police officer,'" Lightwood said.