

# Our Kids Are Worth It: a provincewide youth strategy (Part 3)

By MORRIS HAUGG

My two articles to date have explained the origin, purpose and overall operational objectives of this province-wide strategy, which is designed to help children and youth in general and, more specifically, prevent crime.

After all, it is the Province's response to the Nunn Commission, which itself was a response to a youth crime (the killing of a mother by a youth in a stolen car, while he was supposed to be in a court room in another county).

The world community had this to say, through its UNICEF agency:

"The true measure of a nation's standing is how well it attends to its children - their health and safety, their material security, their education and socialization, and their sense of being loved, valued and included in the families and societies into which they are born."

That seems to be the kind of motherhood statement with which one cannot argue. Nonetheless, it has taken a public inquiry to widely recognize and accept that our society, our province, has not done as good a job as we should be doing.

It has taken a lengthy, comprehensive strategy document to set forth our vision, objectives and

attempts at achieving the goals set by Justice Nunn's recommendations or to come close to living up to the ideal expressed by the UNICEF statement.

I am not privy to the success to date of the strategy as a whole. We are fortunate in our town and area, however, in that our schools were chosen as part of a pilot project. The Chignecto-Central Regional School Board was picked as one of four throughout the province. The board in turn has chose the Amherst area schools, which also include Northport Consolidated Elementary.

As I indicated in a previous article, the key approach of the Our Kids Are Worth It strategy is one of collaboration and co-operation between various agencies and service providers. The education system is, quite logically, a most appropriate area of service where this approach can be practised. It has been named "Schools Plus," So there is an "Amherst Schools Plus." Consistent with the overall strategy, its goals are:

- To improve student engagement and school success.
- To ensure timely access to services.
- To prevent difficulties by proactively supporting students and families.

More than 2,000 students are covered and served by this initia-

tive. It has the benefit of an advisory committee with representation from social services, mental health services, addiction services, law enforcement, restorative justice, probation services and education, of course. It has already met several times.

The program also has a facilitator, who is the liaison between the schools and the other services providers. Kim Wood for Amherst Schools Plus' job is "to advocate, co-ordinate, and expand services for students and families. They will help families navigate the system and get the services they need."

Who needs the help and how does one make use of Schools Plus? Referrals can come from anyone in the school system and from any service provider. More importantly, students and families can refer themselves. In other words, those needing help can ask for it.

Words! Mission and vision statements! More words! Strategy plans! More words! Program title! But is it working? I am grateful to have been invited to attend a focus group discussion recently as a guest observer.

More than 20 representatives of the schools and other agencies and service providers came together to share impressions and experiences as to the workings and success of the local Schools

Plus. All comments were positive and supportive. A lot of praise was directed towards the role of the facilitator and the excellent manner in which she is carrying out her role (she was not herself in the room).

The only remarks of a critical nature focused on the fact that most of the service providers serve a larger area than Amherst Schools Plus (such as Pugwash, River Hebert, etc.) and they wish there was a Schools Plus program everywhere.

Is it working? An unqualified Yes. It is too early to measure any results in the community, of course, but they will surely come and show themselves. I am convinced of that.

In this article, I quoted from the strategy report and pamphlet and have done no more than summarize the material that I have obtained. I just hope that I achieve my purpose, which is to publicize and seek wide-spread support of the Our Kids Are Worth It strategy and in particular, for Schools Plus.

For more information anyone can use the following contacts for Amherst Schools Plus, Box 790, Amherst, N.S., B4H 4B9; Telephone: 694-8581; Fax: 661-2455; email: woodk@ccrsb.ca.

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