

Community Advocates Network [CAN]

by John Cox

Most of the motivation behind Community Advocates Network [CAN] startup and early activism stemmed from a community response to inequities and much inequality regarding the Nova Scotia Department of Community Services and its policies. Today the issues have evolved a bit, but the central emphasis pretty much remains the same. Two big areas of concern that continually have been on the front burner of CAN's agenda are an advocacy to raise the social assistance rates, and also a demand to provide greater access to education for social assistance clients, that is, education in general and

also, very importantly, access to post-secondary education. Which brings to mind one of the issues that have morphed over the years at CAN: giving post-secondary students, meaning college and university students the right to collect assistance, if needed. This has emerged as one of the big issues that CAN has taken on.

Several years ago social assistance underwent some face-lifting, or rather a sea change of a sort, which among other things, altered the perceptions around the community. Or at least it was hoped that this would happen by the braintrust (we sometimes wonder!) at the

Department of Community Services. The idea was to change the optics, mainly, as well as tinker with cash configurations and policy a bit and shift the name of the game. From being referred to as "social assistance" or "welfare" to "employment support income assistance." This marked the launch of CAN, to take on the issues raised by such a change.

The political power of CAN comes from the fact that it is not just a simple committee, or organization, but a coalition of various groups, which include Community Action on Homelessness among many others. Individual residents of the

community are also invited to join and are found throughout CAN's membership. The basic structure of the group is such that it meets monthly and plans its immediate agenda at these meetings. These meetings are usually at Veith House in the north end of Halifax and members come together at 9:30 am to 11:30 am on the third Thursday of the month.

The discussions at these meetings usually centre upon tossing around ideas regarding some urgent issue or issues that are right up front and hot at the time of the meeting, and then, brainstorming and then planning the CAN response to these crises or

events of the moment. Which usually means planning an action. Also, typically, two annual events that CAN always gets involved with are the National Day of Action on Homelessness and the National Day For the Elimination of Poverty, both of which occur in the autumn.

Another important activity undertaken by CAN over the past few years has been and continues to be addressing the Standing Committee on Community Services, a three party committee, that meets at Province House. Then there are other tasks that CAN takes on.

Among others, CAN has catalyzed a poverty

reduction strategy along with its coalition partners which resulted in a huge public meeting. This poverty reduction strategy is an ongoing process, and the membership is quite hopeful that it will successfully create the conditions to germinate and also grow some new progressive initiatives to lessen the burden of poverty on the dispossessed. Among one of the highlights of this strategy, as previously mentioned, is a call for an increase in social assistance rates. If you want to know more about CAN, call the Veith House at 453-4320 or Paul O'Hara at the North End Community Health Centre at 420-0303.

Hiring Fairs to Showcase Hundreds of Nova Scotia Jobs

Job seekers in Nova Scotia will have direct access to hundreds of jobs through a series of hiring fairs and online job postings.

The new initiative, Opportunities Nova Scotia, is designed to better connect job seekers and employers. About 50 employers and other partners gathered today, May 2, at Casino Nova Scotia for a kickoff event.

"We launched Opportunities Nova Scotia to help Nova Scotians stay home and find fulfilling work here," said Education Minister Karen Casey. "With an aging workforce and spiking retirements, we need to keep our talent in Nova Scotia. We also

need to help employers meet their workforce needs — their success keeps our economy strong."

The province is partnering with The People Bank, Jobboom.com, regional development authorities, local municipalities, the Nova Scotia Come to life initiative and employers to host a series of signature events across the province. The goals are to better connect job seekers and employers, help job seekers find careers they want and help employers meet recruitment needs.

About 400 opportunities are being showcased at a series of Opportunities Nova Scotia

hiring fairs. Jobs are also posted online at www.thepeoplebank.com and, to date, about 900 resumes have been received.

That type of response is encouraging for partners, such as Halifax Regional Municipality.

"HRM has a vested interest in keeping our talented and educated job seekers here in our

region," said Halifax Regional Municipality Mayor Peter Kelly. "It's all about people — if we want people to stay, we have to get out there and actively recruit potential employees. Opportunities Nova Scotia will help us reach the right people."

Successful Opportunities Nova Scotia events have already been held in Truro, Bridgewater

and Wolfville. The line-up for coming fairs is:

Tuesday, May 8: 11 a.m. to 7 p.m., Sydney, Membertou Trade & Convention Centre, 50 Maillard St., Membertou.

Thursday, May 10: 2 p.m. to 6 p.m., Port Hawkesbury, Civic Centre, 606 Reeves St., Port Hawkesbury.

Tuesday, May 22: 1 p.m. to 6 p.m., Rodd

Grand Yarmouth, 417 Main St., Yarmouth.

Opportunities Nova Scotia will expand to other jurisdictions within Canada. It will target expatriots living and working in places such as Ottawa, Toronto, Calgary and Edmonton. The timing for Phase 2 will be announced after the Nova Scotia events are completed.

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E-mail: nsupe@ns.sympatico.ca