

The History of Community Links

How it began:

Community Links is the result of a community development project called Challenge in Participation or CHiP which was sponsored by the Anglican Diocese of Nova Scotia, VON Nova Scotia and the Nova Scotia Hospice / Palliative Care Network between 1989 and 1992. During the consultation stage of the Nova Scotia Royal Commission on Health Care which reported in 1989, two Commissioners - the late Sharon Marshall, Provincial VON Executive Director, and Bishop Russell Hatton of the Anglican Diocese of NS and PEI - noticed the significant difference in the number and variety of seniors' programs and services available in urban and rural areas. They submitted the CHiP proposal to Health Canada's *Seniors Independence Program* and it was accepted.

- 1989-92 CHiP worked with six isolated rural areas of Nova Scotia to provide support and encouragement as the residents, mostly senior volunteers, assessed the needs of older community members and people with disabilities. Volunteer programs were organized to meet some of these needs. Four full-time CHiP provincial staff and six part-time community coordinators assisted the local volunteers.
- 1992 A long-term goal of CHiP was to spread this community development approach of meeting seniors' needs and priorities to other rural communities. A "Think Tank" (January 1992) of seniors from six rural communities, three of the original CHiP pilot areas and three interested areas, refined the original concept of "adopt-a-community" into the Community Links project. The "Think Tank" decided that the focus should be on "equal partnerships in which each community had something to share, there would be a mutual exchange which was valuable to each, bonds would be formed and a chain reaction set in motion".

The **Community Links** project proposal was submitted to Heath Canada's *Seniors Independence Program* in February 1992. Approval came through in June and a smooth transition between CHiP and Community Links took place September 1, 1992. Two provincial CHiP staff members continued with the new project as paid and volunteer staff. CHiP donated its materials, equipment and furniture and the new project stayed on in the Sunday School rooms of St Francis by the Lakes Anglican Church in Lower Sackville.

Since 1992 Community Links has evolved on several fronts:

How it is governed - In its early years Community Links included business sessions at all its meetings and workshops so that everyone who attended had a say as part of the *Nucleus Group*. During the mid-nineties when funding was less certain, member representatives from each of the counties in which there were members served on a *Provincial Coordinating Committee* which had a revolving letter to help keep in touch. Later, the *Board of Directors* was established to meet Charitable and Societies Act requirements. The current Board has representation from nine regions around the province. The Board has always tried to maintain geographical representation with a focus on rural seniors.

How it does its work -

Projects: Community Links started as a project and continues to do much of its work as a charitable association sponsoring projects or co-sponsoring projects within partnerships. The projects have grown in scope: there are more organizations involved, they require additional staff and they are having significant impacts. Major projects have included:

1992 - 1995	<i>Community Links Project</i>
1995	<i>New Horizons Community Action Workshops</i>
1996 - 2000	<i>Community Health Partners Project</i>
2000 - 2002	<i>Rural Volunteers Project - Phase 1</i>
2001 - 2002	<i>Working Together to Prevent Falling Among Seniors – Phase 1</i>
2002 - 2010	<i>Preventing Falls Together</i>
2002 – 2004	<i>Rural Volunteers Project –Phase 2</i>
2002 - 2003	<i>Developing Rural Seniors’ Skills for Influencing Policy Project</i>
2004-2005	<i>Developing Seniors Skills for Influencing Policy on Transportation</i>
2003-2007	<i>Canada Volunteerism Initiative</i>
2005-2008	<i>Seniors Growing Seniors Skills</i>
2006-2007	<i>Seniors Influencing Health Public Policy</i>
2007-2008	<i>Attitude Makes a Difference</i>
2009-2010	<i>Atlantic Charities Learning Exchange</i>
2009 -2010	<i>Seniors and Gambling Project</i>
2009-2010	<i>Mobility Workshops</i>

Partnerships / coalitions / networks:

1997 - 2002	<i>Western (NS) Heart Health Partnership</i>
1997	<i>Community Health Promotion Network Atlantic</i>
1998	<i>Atlantic Seniors Health Promotion Network</i>
2002	<i>Health Promotion Clearinghouse (NS)</i>
2002	<i>Healthy Communities Partnership / Network</i>

2003 – 2007	Canada Volunteerism Initiative - Local (NS) Network
2004-2010	Gerontology Association of Nova Scotia
2007	Community Transit –NS (NSCBTA)
2007	Health Promotion and Protection – Volunteerism

Current Partnerships (2010) please see *Resources Partnership* Section in Board Manual.

Affiliations: In 2008 Community Links became the Nova Scotia Division of Canadian Pensioners Concerned. This affiliation entitled Community Links to join the Group of IX, the Seniors Advisory Council of Nova Scotia

Provincial Office:

Services for member organizations and Community Links operations are provided through the Provincial Office. The level of staffing has varied from a combination of paid / volunteer to totally volunteer to part-time or full time depending on financial support. Currently there is a full-time Executive Director with a full-time Coordinator of Administration and Communications which enables Community Links to:

- fundraise to support the association and its work and projects, eg, preparing funding proposals, developing and maintaining working relationships with current and potential funders
- provide an information clearinghouse, eg, newsletters, information via phone / fax / mail / e-mail, materials and contacts for members, other community groups and organizations, all levels of government, and the general public
- administer and assist projects, eg, hiring project staff, project management, financial reporting, involvement in Steering Committees and their work, liaison with funders, networking with project partners
- coordinate representing the interests of rural seniors, volunteers, member organizations and the voluntary sector in numerous consultations, forums, presentations, conferences, networks, coalitions, partnerships– locally, provincially and nationally
- support the Board of Directors and committees
- organize the Annual General Meeting
- provide general administration functions

Who the members are

Again, in its early years, the members of Community Links were rural communities. The original member communities were represented by seniors’ clubs and initiatives in Long and Brier Islands, Mosher River, Advocate Harbour, Framboise, Johnstown, and Hants Shore. The 1st three listed were involved with CHiP. Over time, membership changed from communities to community-based organizations and in 2009 expanded to include individual members. Our current membership is 248 These members include volunteer

programs for seniors and others, seniors' projects, seniors' clubs and county councils, senior centres and drop-ins, community health boards and centres, primary health programs, community development associations, resource centres, support groups, outreach programs, community-based programs such as alternative transportation, auxiliaries, libraries, municipal recreation departments and provincial organizations.

Where the Provincial Office is located -

From its original location in Lower Sackville, Community Links moved in 1995 to share office space with Canadian Pensioners Concerned Nova Scotia in both the Halifax and Bayers Road Shopping Centres. As money got tighter, the Provincial Coordinator gradually started working more at home. The office completely moved to the Dartmouth location around 1998. When a new Provincial Coordinator was hired in January, 2004, the Provincial Office was relocated to 5516 Spring Garden Road, Suite 309. It rented space from Recreation Nova Scotia. Contracted staff work from their own home offices in various locations around the province. In January of 2006, Community Links moved to a larger office space (Suite 201) in the same building (5516 Spring Garden Road). All materials and files are now kept at this location. (2008)

Who the earlier leaders were:

Community Links has had the benefit of many experienced and committed volunteers providing leadership through the years. Among them have been the former Presidents of Community Links:

John Abram (Framboise)
Ronald Gaudet (Westport)
Jessie Miller (Moser River)
J Roland AuCoin (Cheticamp)
Canon Sid Davies (Kentville)
Prem Dhir (Truro)
Carol Welch (Brier Island)
Carol Ward (Bridgetown)
Barbara Carthew (Kingsburg)