

## *Seniors: Creating a Climate for Positive Aging*

**April 2008**

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### **Up Front**

Carol Welch

*Positive aging, aging in place, gray power, supportive*

*communities*, do these “new-fangled” phrases have real meaning for us?

At our recent People’s School, more than 80 participants talked, discussed, laughed, planned, suggested, questioned, and created. We applied some of the new terms, and many old ones, to the matter of healthy and contented living for seniors in this province. The two day Peoples’ School arose partly from the *Strategy for Positive Aging*, which in itself was the result of extensive input from seniors across the province. One of the aims of this gathering was to come up with positive and productive ways to influence public policies that affect our lives.

Using various types of activities, participants at the Peoples’ School experimented with methods of accessing and realizing this knowledge – guest speakers, group discussions, brainstorming, artistic projections, evaluations and a panel presentation with questions



Carol (right) thanks the Mel-O-Dees, led by Don MacCrae, who entertained us at the Peoples School.

from the floor. Some of the lessons we felt that we all learned from the experiences of the two days are:

- We need to think outside the box – if one method of coping with a situation is not working, then look for an alternate method.
- Leadership in any community effort must use a positive approach – not “what is our problem”, but “how can we live up to our own goals and change to meet new situations and challenges?”
- Partnerships and co-operation are so important in having a powerful influence on policies – perhaps some barriers will need to come down. Learn what these are, and look at how to affect change.
- Supportive communities consist of many institutions and groups working together – look at your community as a collaborative effort, and work towards that.
- Realize that we do have power over our own lives, and we need

to consider ways to make that power effective.

- Do your research before taking action – knowledge is power.
- Find out where to acquire the information you need.

We are encouraged by the measures already taken by government on behalf of seniors. We can certainly take some of the credit for this because of seniors speaking out, and making efforts to bring important matters to the attention of our representatives. Gray power – keep up the good work – we have only just begun. It has been said that you can tell you are getting old when you know all the answers, but no one is asking you the questions ! That is now changing !

## Shaping the Future For Seniors

by  
Sandra Murphy

In the world of volunteering there are many ways of serving. One person may never volunteer through an organization but will be the first one there with a hot meal and a willing shoulder in times of need. Another volunteer will work directly at organizations like the local food bank. Another may work at the board level trying to ensure that the organization behind the food bank is accountable for the resources it receives and that it will be there over the long run to meet the needs of people in the community who might otherwise go hungry. Then there is the individual who engages in trying to affect public policy

so that food banks can close their doors through lack of need. In many cases the face behind each effort will be a senior, and the same one.

At the recent Community Links **Peoples' School: Supporting Older Nova Scotians to Be Involved** we examined the *Strategy for Positive Aging*, a public policy document of the Government of Nova Scotia. If fully implemented, the *Strategy* will indeed make Nova Scotia a very positive place in which to grow old. This however, will only happen through a combination of efforts by governments at all levels: voluntary sector organizations, business, and of course by seniors and those who are concerned about seniors issues. In order for this to happen, there have to be senior leaders with an understanding of the importance of engaging in and influencing public policy

Sometimes the term “public policy” can be off putting and seem very mysterious and esoteric. Taking leadership around this



Sandra (right) with presenter Irene Rose “The ABC’s of Policy Engagement”

engagement can often seem harder than taking leadership to raise funds for a cause or run an activity or even an organization. The Peoples' School sought to demystify the public policy process by offering workshops like Irene Rose’s “ABC’s of Policy Engagement”, Jim Campbell’s “Leadership in Difficult Times” and Barbara Carthew’s “ABC’s

of Leadership.” Laurence Mawhinney, Mayor of Lunenburg, offered practical tips on working with municipal politicians, and a good dose of inspiration!

I have been around long enough to have lived at a time in Canada when seniors’ pensions were income assessed and when there were no universal health care provisions. Just recently, Tommy Douglas was voted the “Greatest Canadian” on a popular CBC television show because of his pivotal role in ensuring that Canadians have free and universal access to medical treatment. This was a massive public policy shift on behalf of the country. Douglas, and all the people who worked with him in the 50’s and 60’s, understood the importance of influencing and bringing about public policy change. Personally, I think it is great that Canadians chose this type of hero as our Greatest Canadian. We can’t all be a Tommy Douglas but we can in small ways work for change that will positively affect the lives of an aging population, not just for the day, but for the long term.

We mustn’t underestimate the importance of the caring neighbour or the volunteer working directly through a group to help provide service to those who need it—or the dedication of thousands of individuals who serve organizations on boards. It is only through their work that needed change can be identified at the individual and community level and given a face. This is all hugely important! But we also need the shapers, who can take the individual

and community stories and see the bigger picture and influence it.

*“A century from now, what shall be said of our journey in these times? And who shall the shapers have been? Who shall have shaped the future more? The hopeful dreamers who were strong enough to suffer for the dream? Or the fearful pessimists who were convinced that dreaming and hope are for sleepers only, not for those awake to the age? A century from now we will have indeed journeyed....backward or forward. Direction can no longer be given by the circumstances: real journeyers know that the direction is always chosen by those who make the journey. Who shall chose the direction? Who shall the shapers have been?”*

Lillian Smith The Journal, 1954



**Peoples’ School Planning Committee**

From left to right: Dawn Stegen, Carol Ward, Sandra Murphy, Pamela Fancey, Barbara Carthew, Susan King, Jean MacKay, John MacLean.

*“Courage, my friends; 'tis not too late to build a better world.”*

Tommy Douglas

*“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful and committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has”*

Margaret Mead

# The Peoples' School

## *Sharing our ideas*

Lively group discussions centered around four of the goals of the *Strategy for Positive Aging*: Transportation, Housing Options, Supportive Communities, and Health and Well-Being



*Telling our stories* Members of Grandparents International Storytellers Circle from Berwick and Lake Loon/Cherry Brook shared their publications— books of reminiscence, personal stories, and words of hope and inspiration. Left to right: Carol Boudreau, Alma Johnston, Ruby Beals



## *Learning and laughing together*

Joy McKay of Chebucto Links leads her group in an exercise on trust. Presenter (and Community Links Board member) Barbara Carthew used some innovative and fun methods to illustrate the **ABC's of Leadership**.

## Canadian Pensioners Concerned:



### Community Links

takes on a great tradition

In September 2007 Community Links was accepted as the Nova Scotia Division of Canadian Pensioners Concerned (CPC). This enables a great tradition of policy engagement on seniors issues at a provincial and federal level. It also means that members of Community Links will be informed of national issues through CPC and will be able to feed into its work through Community Links. Carol Welch, the President of Community Links, is sitting as a Board member of CPC and carrying the torch on our behalf.

CPC was founded in Ontario in 1971 by a group of seniors lead by Corabel Penfold, who were concerned about the erosion of the buying power of their pensions. They travelled across Canada to encourage the establishment of branches and as a result, CPCNS was established in Nova Scotia under the leadership of Edith Harvie. CPC was involved over the years in the battle for Seniors Pharmacare, education around seniors' law, living wills, elder abuse, lobbying on the GST, etc. One of the strategies which it used very effectively was the "Letter Brigade" organized around specific issues such as the indexing of the Old Age Security benefit. CPCNS as a separate entity wrapped up its operations in 2006.

Community Links is hopeful that we can build on the tradition and a terrific record

of involvement and concern around seniors' engagement in the years ahead.

## Attitude Makes a Difference Project

This project of the Atlantic Seniors Health Promotion Network was funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada and managed by Community Links. The project examined the concerns of lower income senior women dealing with diabetes. Four key needs identified by focus group members in the Atlantic region were:

- 1) **Accessible, understandable and reliable information and support.** This includes diabetes education in their communities, available right after diagnosis and 'refresher courses' for those who have been living with diabetes for some time.
- 2) **Drop-in clinics** where diabetics could have their blood checked or ask questions.
- 3) **Support groups**, places where they can go to discuss diabetes with others who share the same experiences or situation.
- 4) **Financial help** to manage diabetes and prevent complications, including the cost of eyeglasses, dental care, foot care, transportation and healthy foods.

For the full report of this project in both official languages, contact Community Links or visit our website:

[www.nscommunitylinks.ca](http://www.nscommunitylinks.ca)



## Preventing Falls Together

~a program of Community Links

### Coalition Highlights:

#### *Focus on Pharmacy*

Community Pharmacists can help reduce



falls among seniors. That is the message of several Preventing Falls Coalitions, who have been working on issues related to safe

use of medications. **Digby and Area, Colchester East Hants, and Antigonish Preventing Falls Together Coalitions** have worked with their local pharmacists on projects to distribute information about safe use of medications.

**Antigonish Coalition** members worked together to create “Preventing Falls Together – Know Your Risks”, a handout that was available to the public when picking up a prescription at a local pharmacy. Members distributed copies to local pharmacies in time for Falls Awareness Day last November.

The handout cautions people to think about the fact that medication can affect how alert you are, how clearly you think, and how well you can stand up and move around. It also lists other risky behaviours in the home, including wearing shoes that don't fit well or have slippery soles, using alcohol, eating poorly, not getting enough exercise,

reaching for objects in an unsafe way, using stairs that are unsafe, and sitting down in a chair that is not the right height.

If you are taking medication you can help protect yourself from falling by asking your health care professional about the risks and side effects (for example, sleepiness or dizziness), and how to take your medicine, as well as whether it is safe to take over the counter or natural medicines with your prescription. You should never take anyone else's medication, nor should you mix alcohol and your medication.

Other Preventing Falls Together coalitions are welcome to use the handout. For further information contact: [nscentral@preventingfallstogether.ca](mailto:nscentral@preventingfallstogether.ca)

### Take Charge of Your Medication

*Carol Welch, retired nurse, Community Links President and an active member of the Digby and Area Preventing Falls Together Coalition has the following advice for seniors regarding safe medication use:.*

Much has been written about safe practices with medications, but in our Preventing Falls coalitions we have been

stressing the importance to seniors of research and independent action. One important action is to look at our own attitudes towards health providers. We need to accept the fact that we are responsible for our own lives and we have the power to exert control over matters that affect our way of life, whether you are a care receiver or care giver.

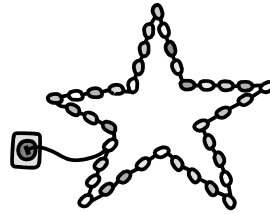
We have the right to information that concerns our well-being. Once we are able to make the decision to take some control, there are some very simple measures to be taken.

1. Don't accept any medication without question. You need to know:
  - What is it ?
  - Why do I need it – what is it for?
  - How do I take it – dose, time, frequency, etc.
  - Where do I keep it?
  - What measures could I use to avoid having to use it – diet, life style?
  - What are the side effects?
2. Tell those concerned with providing the medication:
  - All the medications you are taking – prescriptions, herbals, vitamins.
  - How it affects you – dizziness or drowsiness can lead to falls, nausea could affect diet, and so on.
  - Any allergies that you may have
  - Whether you smoke or drink alcohol.

3. Keep accurate records for your own use and for others who may be concerned in your daily life or in an emergency:
  - Keep a booklet containing all your medication, and keep up to date
  - Have a completed Vial of Life, and keep it updated.
4. Use common sense with your medications:
  - Take ALL of a prescription – don't stop because you feel better.
  - Consult the doctor if you feel you need to discontinue – there may be a certain method of doing that.
  - Never use someone else's prescription, or give them yours.
  - Return any unused medications to your pharmacist.
  - Ask your pharmacist about simpler ways to keep track of medications.

It is still not too late to apply for the **Seniors Pharmacare Program**. Due to changes in the program this year and an unusually high volume of calls to the information line, the deadline has been extended. Call 1-800-544-6191 for more information.

To see information about changes to Seniors' Pharmacare and options for medical coverage for those over 65, visit [www.gov.ns.ca/health/pharmacare](http://www.gov.ns.ca/health/pharmacare)



## Lighting the Way for Falls Prevention

### On the Lighter Side: A Special Poem for Senior Citizens- Author Unknown

*This poem was submitted by Leo Poirier,  
Community Links member for District 9*

A row of bottles on my shelf  
Caused me to analyze myself  
One yellow pill I have to pop  
Goes to my heart so it won't stop

A little white one that I take  
Goes to my hands so they won't shake  
The blue ones that I use a lot  
Tell me I'm happy when I'm not

The purple pill goes to my brain  
And tells me that I have no pain  
The capsules tell me not to wheeze  
Or cough or choke or even sneeze

The red ones smallest of them all  
Goes to my blood so I won't fall  
The orange ones very big and bright  
Prevent my leg cramps in the night.

Such an array of brilliant pills  
Helping to cure all kinds of ills  
But what I'd really like to know  
Is what tells each one where to go?



As we age, one or two trips to the bathroom at night are not unusual. Using nightlights to light your path from bedroom to bathroom, at the top and bottom of stairs, and other areas you may need to access at night is one of the many tips for fall proofing your home.

For two years, the Preventing Falls Together Program has partnered with **Conserve Nova Scotia** to supply LED (light emitting diode) nightlights to seniors who attend presentations about falls prevention, and for prizes at such venues as Seniors Health Fairs and the 50+ Expo.

Approximately 2000 seniors have received the nightlights at educational sessions offered by Preventing Falls Coalition members around the province.

These nightlights cost less than 20¢ a year to run and require no bulb changes, which make them ideal for being left on continuously. For more energy saving tips, visit

[www.conservens.ca/energysavingstips](http://www.conservens.ca/energysavingstips)

*"I don't mind being a symbol but I don't want to become a monument. There are monuments all over the Parliament Buildings and I've seen what the pigeons do to them."*

**Tommy Douglas**



## Coalition Member Profile:

Dolores MacGillivray is a member of the Pictou County Preventing Falls Together Coalition. Dolores, a retired school teacher and husband Wayne have three grown children: Wayne, Aaron and Elizabeth, as well as a grandson, Connor, Dolores is a very active volunteer in her community.

Dolores is the Chair and a receptionist for the Pictou VON Foot Clinic. She is a CND Associate, member of her church's liturgical committee and serves as a reader, Eucharistic Minister, choir member, and Past President of her parish CWL. Dolores is also a Pictou Town Garden member for 30+ years. She and her husband are long time volunteers with the De Coste Entertainment Center in Pictou.

Dolores serves as a member of the Worship committee for the Ecumenical Committee Conference for women in Cape Breton. She can often be found at seniors' homes, leading sing-along and enjoying it as much as her audience.

As a Board member of the United Way of Pictou County, Dolores is the senior's representative serving on the Pictou County Preventing Falls Together Coalition. She is also active with Seniors' Outreach, a senior serving organization that has 40 plus activities

Dolores was one of the initiators of the 'Senior Friends Project', which saw Pictou County Coalition members make presentations about preventing falls for



Doris and Pictou PFT Coalition members:  
From left: **Standing:** Lynn Langille, Sharon Purvis, Dolores, Jamie Morrison, Barb Dewtie **Seated:** Sheila Hoeg, Mary MacLellan

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seniors to grade five classes throughout the county's schools. School children connected with seniors in their lives and completed a checklist around falls prevention with them, which they then returned to their teacher.










Dolores enjoys visiting family and friends, traveling, singing, playing the guitar, reading, golfing, and gardening. She and her husband, Wayne, are busy volunteers who work hard to make Pictou County a great place to live.

Dolores states: "Serving others has always brought joy to my life. There are so many dedicated, caring and enthusiastic individuals in our communities and I am fortunate to work closely with some of them. Seniors are a very special group to share time with as they have experienced so much in life. They are very practical, have a great sense of humor and have super stories to share. I am happy to be a Pictou County Volunteer."



## Fall Proof Gardening

As spring looks like it is actually arriving, the gardeners among us are itching to start turning soil. Gardening for many is relaxing and therapeutic, as well as good exercise. Here are a few reminders to ensure that your gardening experience is safe and fall proof.

-  Do some gentle stretching exercises before starting.
-  Look into obtaining ergonomic garden tools that minimize strain.
-  Container gardening is a good choice for seniors. The containers can be placed at a comfortable height.
-  Bend at the knees and hips rather than bending forward from the waist to avoid back injury and lightheadedness.
-  When you get up from a crouching or kneeling position, take it slow in case of joint instability or dizziness.
-  Drink lots of liquids and protect yourself from the sun with a large brimmed hat and long sleeves.
-  Work for short periods at first to avoid fatigue and sun exposure. Early morning and evening are best to avoid the heat.
-  Ask for help with tasks that are too much to handle.
-  Morning and evening dew can be slippery! Wear sneakers or other sturdy, non-slip footwear.

## How Age-Friendly is Your Community?

A recent project by the World Health Organization identified a number characteristics of age friendly communities. Halifax and Guysborough County were participants in the project. A checklist of age friendly features included items like:

- ✓ Access to public and private transportation
- ✓ Well lit walking areas with paved pathways
- ✓ Accessible parking and public buildings
- ✓ Affordable housing with a variety of options.
- ✓ Opportunities for active leisure and social interaction
- ✓ A feeling of inclusiveness regardless of age

How does a community become more age friendly? According to the Public Health Agency of Canada, creating an age-friendly community is “based on the recognition that leadership by local governments and seniors is critical—and that every part of a community (including provincial governments, voluntary organizations, the private sector and citizens’ groups) can play a role in helping to build age-friendly communities.”

**Municipal Elections** will take place in Nova Scotia in **October 2008**. It’s not too early to start talking to your elected officials about their plans for working towards a more age friendly community.



# Notes and Notices

## Mark your calendars:

Community Links Annual General Meeting is scheduled for June 5, 2008 at Mount St Vincent University (Don McNeil Room). More information to follow.



Be sure to visit the Community Links/Preventing Falls Together booth (# 105) at the

50 + Expo, June 13 and 14, 2008 at exhibition Park in Halifax.

## What's Working in Community Development?

is an international conference on community development. It takes place at Acadia University in Wolfville, Nova Scotia, from June 23<sup>rd</sup> – June 25<sup>th</sup>, 2008. The conference plans for 300 participants from around the world. Early bird deadline is April 18. The full conference program is now available, and can be downloaded from [www.horizonscda.ca/upcoming](http://www.horizonscda.ca/upcoming)

## June is Recreation Month

What better time to check out the report of the **Connecting Seniors to Active Living Project**. This is an initiative led by Recreation Nova Scotia and supported by the Nova Scotia Department of Health Promotion and

Protection and Nova Scotia Department of Seniors. Print copies are available upon request from Recreation Nova Scotia (902) 425-1128. To view and download the report, go to:

[www.recreationns.ns.ca/connectingseniors](http://www.recreationns.ns.ca/connectingseniors)



Looking for a volunteer, or seeking to volunteer your services? Visit the new **Nova Scotia Volunteer Forum website** at <http://www.nsvolunteerforum.ca/>



**Do you enjoy speaking to groups? The Arthritis Society Speakers Bureau** is seeking volunteers to give presentations about arthritis to interested groups in the community. Training is provided by Arthritis Society staff, and volunteer speakers can use pre-written presentations, or plan their own presentations if they wish. Commitment sought is for 1-3 presentations per year. To volunteer for the Arthritis Speakers Bureau, or to find out more, contact Catherine Bennett at: (902) 429-7025 or [cbennett@ns.arthritis.ca](mailto:cbennett@ns.arthritis.ca)

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