



HEAL

*Dig in & plant the seeds of
HEALth in Northern BC*

Healthy Eating & Active Living
in Northern British Columbia
Issue #10: June 2004



We're on the bus The HEAL Caravan is headed your way

The HEAL Caravan is about to pull out of the station and hit the road. Following northern BC's main highways, the Caravan will celebrate healthy eating and active living in communities along the way.

The HEAL Caravan will draw attention to the ways in which rural communities are stepping up to the plate to make healthy choice the easy choice.

When the HEAL Caravan arrives in your town, jump on board. You'll meet members of the Rural Roots youth forum, experts on turning good ideas into policy, people who know how to make projects sustainable, folks preparing a film to document the Caravan, and more. Some will be traveling with the Caravan. Others are your neighbours.

Add your voice and your energy to the growing coalition of people who are making our northern communities healthy, active, welcoming, and the best possible places to live and work. Join the HEAL Caravan when it reaches your community. Some of the many highlights along the route:



Wednesday, June 9, Canoe Creek - This First Nations community has been doing some amazing things. They have gardens throughout the community, bicycles for children and youth (many thanks to Red Shreds and their crew of volunteers!), recreation for all ages, a good food box program and energy. They'll be signing off on their newly created community food policy.

Thursday, June 10, Williams Lake - There are lots of HEAL Heroes in this Cariboo community, and the Caravan will meet some of them. After breakfast at the Child Development Centre's community garden, there'll be a tour of HEAL schools, feasts on the site of the Williams Lake farmers market, and a sunset walk along the River Valley Trail.

Friday, June 11, Quesnel - This whole community was declared a HEAL Hero because of its work in creating an urban trail system along the river.

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News around the North

Dawson Creek Community Gardens

by Anna Bridges

Northern communities gearing up for the 2004 gardening season will find inspiration reading about Dawson Creek's success last year.

The Dawson Creek Community Gardens Network met on April 8, 2003 to determine the course of action for the year. We travelled down the Garden Path with facilitator Mary Parslow recognizing areas needing strengthening, action ideas, goals, our vision for the next five years, and the rocks in the way. As a result of the meeting, Kiwanis Enterprise Centre became the manager of the Community Gardens and hired a coordinator. The Community Gardens were also a participant in our city's "Communities in Bloom" program.

We used the remaining part of a HEAL grant to operate and knocked on many doors receiving donations of sand, manure, rototilling, truck driving, etc.; primarily through Northern Lights College. Local businesses donated a garden shed and paint.

Community Gardens set up a booth at the Trade Fair April 25th – 27th in conjunction with Food Share. This proved to be an excellent promotion and all 24 garden plots were filled by the end of the Fair. Part of the display was a wheelbarrow garden. With snow falling and a cold wind blowing outside, the wheelbarrow proved to be an attraction. We had several press releases throughout the summer and a spot on local TV so our community was becoming more aware of the gardens and pending funding we need to expand this year.

We had a diverse group of gardeners consisting of retirees, apartment dwellers, church groups, a group from the hospital, families, singles, and a group from Scotia Bank. Some of our gardeners would classify as master gardeners and some first timers, so we had some mentoring happening too. Local food banks benefited from the gardens and as more is harvested will again.

August 21, 2003, a Gardeners and Friends meeting celebrating a bountiful harvest was held at Northern Lights College. This event began with



a potluck buffet provided by the gardeners. Following dinner, Bob Davidson, Principal of the College, spoke regarding the history of the gardens and project's originator, Lise Ecclestone. He also commended the gardeners on a job well done. Marina Buchan, coordinator of the Food Security Research Project, brought us up to date on the Research Project and had a survey for the gardeners to complete. The evening ended with a garden tour and a preview of the gates under construction. (Barbara Swail designed and built garden gates. They were installed late September and are a beautiful addition.)

As summer progressed and the gardens flourished we began to hear positive feedback from the community. This should help in establishing new gardens in other areas around our city.

All in all 2003 was a very positive year for Dawson Creek Community Gardens. Gardeners with us last year have first opportunity for a plot this spring. Pending funding we will have new sites available.



HEAL Youth on the Go

by Melanie Sondergaard

Last fall northern youth gathered in Prince George to kick off Rural Roots. Here's what happened.

"It's really harsh for us, you know." That was a summative message from young people at the October HEAL gathering for youth. The two-day event which kicked off the Learning Shop's Rural Roots Project (a network that will support northern activists) and invited youth to get on board with the HEAL movement brought together young leaders to explore the realities of Healthy Eating and Active Living in their lives as well as the community conditions in which they are leaders.

As over twenty young people explored leadership and healthy eating and active living we learned that they are struggling with messages that bombard them to eat certain foods, look a certain way, behave a certain way. They're pushing against a current of fast foods, technological 'advancement', peer passivity, parental pressure and a lack of control to make the decisions that affect their lives. And yet, these young leaders are trying to influence those around them to waken up to the world we live in and begin to make the change that they want to see happen. They're doing this through school cafeteria projects, practicing traditional hunting methods, leading environmental clubs, leading community service projects, singing, personal lifestyle choices and by encouraging play among their peers. And they're feeling discriminated against, lonely, unskilled, uncertain and that adults have power they're not always willing to share. As they told us – it's harsh out there when you are young and try to change the status quo.

The two-day Prince George kick off was exhilarating. Young leaders have a creativity and energy unlike any other generation. We saw it as we laughed, cried, yelled and shared silence with this group. At the Learning Shop we practice what's known as participatory action research' – a process

that believes that those most affected by an outcome, issue or condition must be central to responding to that issue. And so at the Prince George kick-off I kept thinking this is the generation that will inherit the mass problems of type 2 diabetes.

At the Learning Shop we go where youth lead us and so we engage in many areas of community life and yet we keep coming back to the dreadful thought that if we don't really focus on healthy eating and active living – how many leaders will we have in our community? Our community is remote rural and first nations we have all the conditions for a type 2 diabetes epidemic. And so, why not integrate the leadership mentoring that we do with healthy eating and active living projects? And who better to

lead than this generation of teenagers?

This started at the PG session—while performing forum theatre and then while learning to use mapping as a tool for community dialogue we heard about fears around passivity, obesity, eating disorders and

the availability of foods that they know are killing them. We began supporting these young leaders to tackle these huge life-threatening issues when Joanne handed out cameras and instructed the youth (along with their adult community mentors) to take photos of everything they and their friends eat.—"Just take the picture of the food around you and send the camera's back.... we'll do the rest and show you the results...."

And so the youth and their adult mentors left this incredible experience and are back home. They've shared how they have been influenced by people around them, they've identified where and how they are now influencing others, they've shared common problems and common successes, they've learned about community mapping and they've gained the invisible skills of transformational learning – confidence, awareness, esteem, identity, relationship building – the skills that allow us to create change.



More Caravan highlights [from p. 1]

They have lots to crow about with a model school meals program, a farmers market, good food box, HEAL schools and a supportive municipal government. They'll showcase some of that when the Caravan stops here

Monday, June 14, MacKenzie, Chetwynd & Fort St. John - These three communities have some of northern BC's most active community organizers. Kick off the community garden in McKenzie, visit HEAL schools in Chetwynd, and learn about opportunities for trails in Fort St. John.

Tuesday, June 15, and Wednesday, June 16, Fort Nelson - The trek to this northern community will be well worth the long drive. Tour the community forest and the community garden. Get involved in developing a school food policy or learning how to fundraise. Nominate healthy eating/active living role models and join in the HEAL Heroes celebration.

Wednesday, June 16, Prophet River - Tour the school garden in Prophet River and learn why this is a model for other schools to follow.

Thursday, June 17, back in Fort St. John - Back in Fort St. John in time to tour the community garden and learn how local schools are supporting children in making healthy choices.

Friday, June 18, Dawson Creek - Dawson Creek has long been a northern leader in food security initiatives. Among them is the Community Garden Network (see p. 2), which will dedicate the stunning new gate. The film crew will capture the good food box project, the community's trail system, and local HEAL schools.

Saturday, June 19, back in Quesnel - The Highland Games are a good model for making healthy living a part of community fun. The city's lively farmers market makes healthy eating fun, with its mix of vendors, performers, and crowds of happy customers.

Sunday, June 20, Prince George - The spring Caravan ends with Heels to HEALth day. The city pulls out all stops to celebrate community gardens (learn to make a greenhouse for under \$100), community kitchens, recreation, dance, trails, and cultural diversity.

Many communities along the Caravan route will issue HEAL Proclamations. Film crews will capture the excitement for an upcoming documentary. And in every stop northern communities will create awareness of the many ways they weave healthy eating and active living throughout the fabric of community life. All this and more - including a late-summer Caravan heading out Highway 16 - are coming your way from the many northern HEALers.



If you've spotted a HEAL Hero...

Host a Heroes celebration in your community. HEAL will provide certificates, decals and a guide to celebrating HEAL Heroes. See box to the right for contact info.



Write, call, e-mail, fax or send snail mail & let us know how you are Planting the Seeds of HEALth



To join the growing network, contact HEAL:

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