



Rural Report

SPECIAL ISSUE ON HEALTH

Northerners Share Their Stories

To build an understanding of the challenges experienced by northerners in accessing health services, residents of northern communities in Manitoba and Saskatchewan are sharing their stories with researchers from Brandon University and the University of Regina. Northern residents are identifying barriers and offering their perspectives for potential solutions. These stories will be used to demonstrate the complex factors that must be managed within and beyond communities, if access is to be improved.

Residents of Pikwitonei and Thicket Portage are the first from among the member communities of the Bayline Regional Round Table (BRRT) to share their stories. Dr. Fran Racher, Ryan Gibson and Anisa Martin travelled from Thompson on the Hudson Bay Railway to spend time in both communities. Residents, health service providers and community leaders described the implications of relying on the railway as the primary means of transportation into and out of their communities. The two hour



Pikwitonei, Manitoba.

train rides to Thompson are becoming longer as trains slow to negotiate the rail beds eroded by unseasonably frequent rains. Winter roads of ice over the lakes, rivers and muskeg offer an additional mode of transportation for three months during the winter. Air strips in both communities accommodate small planes but flight costs grow increasingly prohibitive for community residents. Air service is used for emergency medical evacuations and to bring public health nurses and staff from health programs to the

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Rural Health Researchers Launch Newsletter

Researchers concerned with rural, northern and remote health now have a newsletter to share information. In the spring of 2005, the Canadian Rural Health Research Society (CRHRS) launched *Rural Health Research News*. In the newsletter, researchers discuss their current research projects and disseminate findings, rural research institutes contribute updates of their work, and members supply listings of recent publications and successful research grant proposals. The newsletter provides an opportunity for rural health research organizations to share information on their activities, gives members a discussion forum, and

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Editor's Message

Welcome to this special health edition of the Rural Development Institute newsletter! We are excited to share with you updates on health-related projects and activities undertaken by researchers, students and members of the Institute.

We have just returned from two adventuresome yet awesome weeks in Northern Manitoba meeting with residents and health providers in the communities of Thicket Portage, Pikwitonei, and Thompson. Their compelling stories about the challenges they experience in accessing health services reaffirm the importance of our new research partnership to undertake the CIHR funded project, *Community Collaboration to Improve Health Care Access of Northern Residents*. This issue of the newsletter offers an initial glimpse into this evolving work with smaller isolated

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Newsletter Launched

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communicates information on upcoming events of interest. Currently, Dr. Robert Annis is publisher of the newsletter and Dr. Fran Racher is editor. The CRHRS published its first issue in April, second issue in August, and a third issue is forthcoming in December. The newsletter is available at <http://crhrs-scrsr.usask.ca>.

The CRHRS is a network of researchers concerned with rural, remote and northern health. RDI is a member of the Society, whose mission is to facilitate research and knowledge translation aimed at understanding and promoting the health of people living in rural and remote Canada. The CRHRS is being developed as a network of networks among researchers focused on rural and remote health. By connecting researchers from independent research projects, it is hoped that they will be able to support one another in ways that are mutually productive. RDI is a corporate member of CRHRS and as Director, Dr. Annis retains the active privileges. Two Brandon University professors, Dr. Barbara Gfellner (Psychology) and Dr. Fran Racher (School of Health Studies), are individual members of the Society and both have been elected to the Board of Directors.

The CRHRS reports that through its network to date, a number of research groupings have developed and have been successful at obtaining national research funding in areas such as rural and remote nursing, rural environmental and occupational health, community resiliency, and access to health services by northern residents. In addition, researchers are investigating ways to create sustained linkages for sharing data and research tools; opportunities for intensive research training; and strategies for research students to benefit from rural and remote research expertise at universities and community sites across the country.

The Rural Development Institute, Brandon University and the Public Health Agency of Canada are pleased to support the development and publication of the *Rural Health Research News*. ■

Editor's Message

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communities in northern Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

Central to this issue is the *Community Health Action Model* developed through our work with rural communities over the past several years. Collaborations with the communities of Shoal Lake, Virden and Leaf Rapids were pivotal in its creation. Strategies for effective application of the model continue to progress as we work with northern communities.

Photovoice projects conducted with youth living in Leaf Rapids, Manitoba and more recently in agro-rural Souris, Manitoba are highlights of this issue. Young people used photography to illustrate their connection to the land, provide their perspectives of their communities and make suggestions for future development. Their pictures portray their relationships with and appreciations for the northern and rural environments in which they live.

The various health promotion projects at RDI and the School of Health Studies offer excellent learning opportunities for students at Brandon University. I would

like to welcome Anisa Martin as a Research Intern on the CIHR health service access project. Welcome also to Ryan Gibson, a recent graduate of the Rural Development Masters Program, who now takes on new roles with the RDI team. The three of us have many tales to share following our recent trip north and we look forward to a return stay in November. My thanks also to Ryan Gibson and Anisa Martin for their work on this newsletter.

Students in the Community Health course offered by the School of Health Studies continue to build health promotion skills at the community level through practical experience. The article describing this course depicts an array of completed community projects and invites those interested in community health to contact me with their ideas for future projects.

I hope you enjoy this issue. I thank you for your interest in rural and northern health and am most delighted to share that interest with you. ■

Fran Racher, R.N., Ph.D.
Associate Professor, School of Health Studies
Research Affiliate, RDI

Sharing Stories

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communities on twice monthly rotations; air service at the mercy of variable weather conditions.

To better understand northern health care issues, details regarding access to services are being documented and examined from the perspectives of northerners and their health care providers. Researchers are exploring aspects of health care including availability, accessibility, accommodation, affordability and acceptability. Population characteristics, environmental factors, health behaviours and related outcomes also are being studied.

Researchers are planning trips to the communities of Cormorant, Ilford/War Lake, and Wabowden for later this year. In Manitoba RDI is partnering with the BRRT and the Burntwood and Norman Regional Health Authorities. Workshops to discuss issues with program planners and policy makers across jurisdictions are being organized for later phases of the

project. Residents in northern Saskatchewan will be sharing their stories with researchers from the University of Regina (Prince Albert site) in later 2005 and 2006.

This project will create a forum for community residents, organizations, health service providers, and others interested in health care access to identify the issues and generate potential solutions. By having their voices heard and their ideas valued, northern community residents and their providers hope to influence future program planning, service delivery and health policy development.

Dr. Robert Annis of the Rural Development Institute and co-applicants, Dr. Fran Racher of the School of Health Studies, Brandon University, and Dr. Bonnie Jeffery of the Faculty of Social Work, University of Regina (Prince Albert site), received a Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) grant to support this research with northern residents. The project, *Community Collaboration to Improve Health Care Access of Northern Residents*, will continue until 2007. ■

Nursing Students Promote Community Health

Students in psychiatric nursing and post-diploma nursing programs at Brandon University participate in, design, and deliver projects to promote health at the community level. This practical experience is a key component of their Community Health course. Community members and organizations work with students to identify topics of interest and undertake projects to improve the health and well-being of the community as a whole.

Students embark on projects that will make a difference. They leave learnings, resources and other beneficial outcomes and products with the organizations and groups with whom they engage.

Recently, students worked with staff of the Crisis Stabilization Unit to develop a presentation to assist community residents in recognizing a mental health crisis. Information about available services and methods of accessing the services were included. Two students developed a board game for children and youth to promote farm safety and reduce agricultural injuries. A student worked with public health to develop a display on hanta virus, which was exhibited at the Royal Winter Fair in Brandon. Another student worked with the public health nurse to develop a presentation on travel health for travel agents and a brochure on healthy travel for use with the public. Students worked with the Canadian Red Cross to develop and deliver classroom presentations for Grade 8 students on violence and abuse prevention; partnered with the YWCA, Assiniboine Community College's media production class, and BU's drama department to generate a public service video on dating violence; and created a website offering information about Westman Association for Terminal Care in Hospice (WATCH) and palliative care.

Student nurses participated in projects to promote healthy body image; encourage safe and correct use of infant and child car seats; prevent suicide among adolescents; and decrease incidence of heart disease and stroke among seniors. Students developed education sessions on living with depression; managing arthritis; preventing diabetes and quitting smoking. They conducted focus groups with seniors to

assist staff of a seniors' residence in improving the recreation program. Students assisted the Alzheimer Society of Central Region to gather input from seniors and health providers to determine education and information needs. A student worked with several community organizations in planning a health fair and created a "health passport" for use by participants. Another student worked with parents and teachers at a private school to develop family life and reproductive health education sessions for middle-year students. Public health nurses, community mental health workers and other health promotion experts act as resources to nursing students on the various projects.

Last year students in the Community

Health course partnered with groups and agencies to undertake 22 projects to promote health at the community level. The course is required within Brandon University's psychiatric nursing degree and the post diploma degree programs for registered and psychiatric nurses. It is anticipated that this course also will be offered in the new Baccalaureate in Nursing (BN) program at BU. Dr. Fran Racher and Dr. Renée Robinson have been teaching the course for several years and continue to offer it in the winter term from January to April both on site and by distance education over the Internet. Another section of the course is offered to psychiatric nursing students at our Winnipeg site.

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Canada 2007: Health Promotion Comes of Age

The 19th International Union for Health Promotion and Education (IUHPE) World Conference *Health Promotion Comes of Age: Science, Policy & Practice for the 21st Century* is scheduled for June 11 - 15, 2007 in Vancouver, Canada. The IUHPE conference will provide a forum to encourage debate and advocate for strategies that take action to promote health, while reducing inequities and disparities including the social, economic and political factors that create these inequities. IUHPE holds this conference every three years, with the last event hosted in Melbourne, Australia in 2004. In Canada 2007, participants from all over the globe will build upon the Melbourne conference theme of valuing diversity and reshaping power.

Health promotion evolved to take action on the determinants of health and in 1986, the Ottawa Charter described five action strategies to address these determinants. Now, over twenty years later it is timely to revisit the relevance of these strategies in response to global changes. Hosting this conference in Canada provides an

excellent opportunity to commemorate and revisit the 1986 Ottawa Charter, challenging the health promotion community to become reenergized by the profound responsibilities.

In 2007 the conference will be hosted by the Canadian Consortium for Health Promotion Research (CCHPR). The Rural Development Institute of Brandon University is one of 14 member centres from across Canada who comprise the Consortium. Currently, Dr. Annis is a board member of the corporation. The mission of the CCHPR is to enhance health promotion research, policy and practice in Canada through linking research, capacity development and information dissemination.

Organizers envisage Canada 2007 will enhance partnerships and intersectoral collaborations generating a lasting legacy for the science, practice and policy of health promotion and education. The work of the IUHPE, including its conference, is an excellent fit with RDI and its various research projects. More information on the conference is available at <http://www.iuhpe.org/>. ■

RDI Develops Collaborative Model for Community Health Action

The *Community Health Action Model* has evolved through several years of collaboration and consultation between rural community residents, rural organizations and researchers at the Rural Development Institute. The model is unique in its ability to merge a community development process with a compatible community assessment, planning, implementation and evaluation framework. Community development and community health promotion are seen as synonymous.

Using this model, members of the community take ownership, give direction, and assume responsibility for their activities and the resulting outcomes. Through public participation, community residents come together, and interact as a collective unit. They express and demonstrate a sense of community, before moving to action to gather information, determine goals, implement plans and evaluate outcomes. This community development process is not linear but may be sequential and is often iterative in nature. The community action model supports community participation leading to community-engaged assessment and change. The model is about doing the right things in the right way, with a focus on both the content and the process of community development or community health action.

The core of the model, Figure 1, involves *being* or interactions as people come together to form a collective unit, leading to *belonging* or expression by the group of

a sense of community, leading to *becoming* or community action by the group. This community action entails the processes of assessing the community, setting goals and planning for change, implementing change, and evaluating both the processes carried out and the outcomes or change undertaken.

A comprehensive community assessment requires information collection about the people and the social, physical and economic factors that contribute to the health of the residents and the community as a whole. Ten categories comprise the data collection including population; health; social supports; community processes; recreation, heritage, and arts; safety and security; community infrastructure; environment; economics; and education. A community may begin working in one area and move to include others or take on several categories simultaneously, depending upon the goals and priorities of its residents, the resources available, and the proposed timeline. The assessment informs the planning which leads to the implementation and evaluation. Results of the evaluation influence future assessment as illustrated by the white feedback loop.

The *becoming* or community action informs future *being* or interactions as a collective unit as expressed by the black feedback loop. Stressors may have an impact on the community at any point in time as demonstrated by the jagged arrows. The overall *being*, *belonging*, and

becoming depend upon the assets and strengths of the community and its members. These assets and strengths vary and change over time as shown by the grey line encompassing the core of the community. The black line depicts the health and well being of the community which depend upon the synergies derived through the community processes of *being*, *belonging* and *becoming* in combination with its assets and strengths and those of its residents. As a community engages in collective action to manage stressors, using its assets and strengths, health and well-being are enhanced and the community demonstrates resiliency and builds capacity. Community resiliency and community capacity are depicted by the outer grey line which illustrates community growth.

The genesis of the model has been a building of layers over time. Through observation, participation, and critical discussion the facets and phases of the model have evolved. Existing literature offered insight and language to support the process and inspire the resulting diagram. Four models in particular have contributed to this work including: the Centre for Health Promotion Model for Quality of Life (Renwick & Brown, 1996; Raphael et al, 1999); the Revised Community Resiliency Model (Kulig, 2000); the Neuman Systems Model (Neuman, 1995); and the Community-as-Partner Model (Anderson & McFarlane, 2004).

The goal of the model is to improve community health, that is the health of the community as a whole. The utility of the model rests within its ability to support people and their organizations in undertaking community development.

Rural Community Health and Well-Being: A Guide to Action, edited by Robert Annis, Fran Racher and Marian Beattie and published by the Rural Development Institute, uses an earlier version of the model with a framework for rural community assessment and indicators to measure rural community health and well-being. Tools to support an effective community action are also included. This guide is accessible for use by community residents and leaders. It can be viewed, downloaded and printed from the RDI website at www.brandonu.ca/rdi. ■

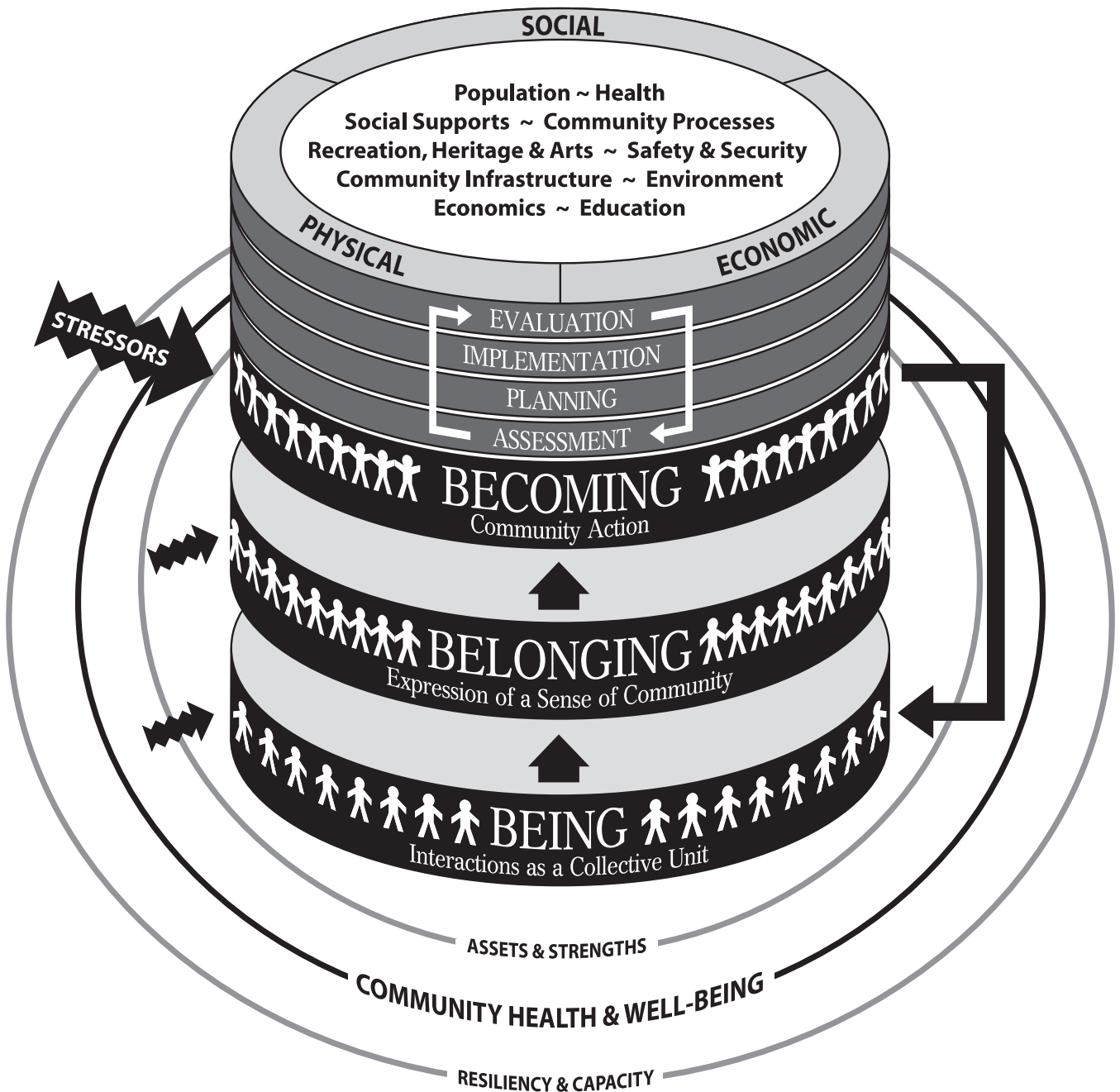
Nursing Students Promote Community Health

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Leaders within community organizations committed to health promotion often contact the course instructors with ideas for projects. Community members and health professionals suggest topics of interest and seek students as partners to embark on projects. Currently citizens of the rural community of MacGregor are involved in discussions with course instructors to undertake a community assessment of their community with the assistance of students over the next winter. The

community will give direction to their project and provide financial resources, while students will offer assistance and gain experience as they participate in the community assessment process. Organizations and groups seeking partners to assist with new and innovative health promotion projects at the community level are invited to contact Dr. Fran Racher by email at racher@brandonu.ca or by phone at 727-7414, or Dr. Renée Robinson by email at robinson@brandonu.ca or by phone at 727-9721. ■

Figure 1: The Community Health Action Model



In Brief

Publications

Annis, R., Racher, F., & Beattie, M. (Eds.) (2004). *Rural community health and well-being: A guide to action*. Brandon, MB: Rural Development, Brandon University. Available at www.brandonu.ca/rdi/publications/guidebook.pdf

Racher, F., & Annis, R. (2005). Community partnerships: Translating research for community development. *Canadian Journal of Nursing Research*, 37(1), 169-175.

Racher, F., Vollman, A., & Annis, R. (2004). Conceptualizations of "rural": Challenges and implications for nursing research. *Online Journal of Rural Nursing and Health Care*, 4(2). Available at www.rno.org/journal/issues/Vol-4/issue-2/Racher_article.htm

Ryan-Nicholls, K., & Racher, F. (2004). Investigating the health of rural communities: Toward framework development. *Rural and Remote Health*, 4, #244. Available at http://rrh.deakin.edu.au/publishedarticles/article_print_244/pdf

Research Grants & Awards

Annis, R., Racher, F., & Jeffery, B. (2004-2007). *Health care access for northern residents*. CIHR, Aboriginal Peoples' Health Grant, \$277,323.

Annis, R. (2005-2008). *Community collaboration project: Empowering communities and building capacity*. Rural Secretariat, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, \$1,110,500.

Annis, R. (2005). *Broadband economic impacts research project for Churchill, Manitoba and Parrsboro, Nova Scotia*. Industry Canada, \$50,000.

Armstrong, H., Gfellner, B., Corenblum, B., Simard, L., Keeper, L., & LePlante, L. (2005-2009). *Community-based Aboriginal curriculum initiatives: Implementation and evaluation*. Community-University Research Alliances (CURA), Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, \$1,000,000.

Racher, F. (2005). *Community through the eyes of youth*. Brandon University Research Committee, \$4,000.

Upcoming Presentations

Annis, R. & Racher, F. (2005). *A model for action on rural community health and well-being*. To be presented at the Sixth Annual Scientific Meeting of the Canadian Rural Health Research Society, Québec City, QC, October 27-29.

Gfellner, B. (2005). *Youth Speak Out: Aftermath of Devolution in a Rural Northern Community*. To be presented at the Sixth Annual Scientific Meeting of the Canadian Rural Health Research Society, Québec City, QC, October 27-29.

Racher, F. (2005). *The Canadian Rural Health Research Society*. To be presented at the National Rural Research Network Annual Conference, Twillingate, NL, October 12.

Racher, F. (2005). *Community photovoice: Leaf Rapids through the eyes of youth*. To be presented at the Sixth Annual Scientific Meeting of the Canadian Rural Health Research Society, Québec City, QC, October 27-29.

Robinson, R. (2005). *Profound but obvious: Enhancing quality of life for people with serious mental illness living in rural areas*. To be presented at the Sixth Annual Scientific Meeting of the Canadian Rural Health Research Society, Québec City, QC, October 27-29.

Community Through the Eyes of Leaf Rapids' Youth

There is an old saying that "a picture is worth a thousand words." Perhaps a picture can be even more than that! Perhaps photography can help us to understand the thoughts, ideas and perspectives of others.

In the fall of 2004, young people of Leaf Rapids in northern Manitoba participated in a photovoice project to share their thoughts about their community. The Leaf Rapids National Exhibition Centre partnered with the Leaf Rapids Youth Centre and the Rural Development Institute of Brandon University (RDI) to undertake the project entitled *Community Through the Eyes of Children and Youth*. Researchers worked with community members to coordinate the project, supply the cameras, and facilitate the development and enlargement of the photographs. Joan Seddon, Director of the Exhibition Centre, developed a photography exposition for display at the Centre.



Residential street, Leaf Rapids, Manitoba

The goal of the project was to give Leaf Rapids young people, from grades 5 to 12, an opportunity to examine and share their community through photography. They were provided with disposable cameras over a 2 week period and took pictures to illustrate what their community was to them. Students recorded the content of their pictures and their significance in journals.

Photovoice is a process that engages community members in taking pictures of their everyday lives. These photos can be used to tell stories, and inform others about issues of importance or concern. Photography creates a permanent artifact, visually recording an aspect of the environment along with the cultural context. During this project, participants



Bay 6 Pond, Leaf Rapids, Manitoba

could identify, represent, and enhance their perspectives of their community through photography.

Youth demonstrated their perspectives on the importance of people and place, people in relation to place and their connection to the northern environment. Through analysis of the photos and corresponding journals, a variety of themes emerged including:

- people — family, friends, and roles in the community;
- community structure — the town centre, residential areas, community services and transportation;
- the "big back yard" of trails, bush, and rock gardens;
- culture within and history of the community; and
- appreciation for the natural environment.

The photovoice project enabled youth to record and reflect their thoughts about their community's strengths and concerns. The pictures were used to promote critical dialogue and knowledge exchange about important community issues through group discussions. Community leaders and other decision makers became aware of the perspectives of the young people and their involvement in community planning was facilitated as the community mobilized for change.

The collection of photographs was displayed at the National Exhibition Centre in Leaf Rapids in December 2004 and the display will be mounted for exhibit at RDI. ■

Students Picture Their Rural Community

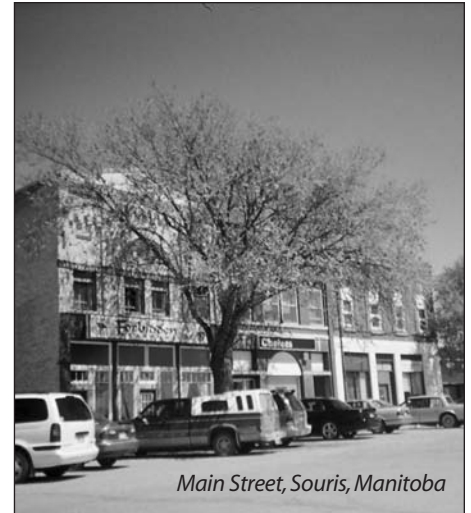
What do young people who are growing up in rural Manitoba think about the concept of community? How might their perspectives compare and contrast with those of youth living of northern communities? As a long-time rural resident, born and raised in a rural community, and who moved to the family farm with her husband to raise their four daughters, Dr. Fran Racher pondered these questions. They continued to perturb her throughout the Leaf Rapids Youth Photovoice Project. She posed them to friend and colleague Joy Dornian, Economic Development Officer with the Souris – Glenwood Community Development Corporation (SGCDC). The response was “Let’s find out.”

Partners were sought and a proposal was written for funding to seek an answer to the research question, “What do agro-rural youth think about community?” In addition to RDI and the SGCDC, partners included the Souris School, the Souris District Arts Council, and the Souris Beautification Committee. Brandon University Research Committee provided funds which have been supplemented by the RDI to undertake the project *Community Through the Eyes of Rural Youth*.

The goal of this project was to give youth, from grades 4 to 10 who attend Souris School, the opportunity to look at their community through the use of photography. Sandy Black, well known photographer of “all things rural” shared tips and pointers for taking quality photographs with classes of students. Using disposable cameras, students documented their reality of community. By sharing and talking about their photographs, they used the power of the visual image to communicate their perceptions.

Although analysis of the several hundreds of photographs is currently underway, much work is still ahead. One lesson is clear. Like the northern youth, these young people are connected to the land. They see relationships between people and places, decidedly rural places, demonstrating their connections with the rural communities in which they live.

Under a very tight time frame, teachers worked to set up a preliminary display of photographs at the school by the end of the term in June. Community exhibits are being developed by the members of the Arts Council and Beautification Committee. Teachers are making plans for use of the photographs in projects for the fall. Other creative uses for the photos



are being planned for Souris’s 125 Year Homecoming in 2006. Joy assures us that the lessons put forth by these young people, and hopefully some of the young people themselves will be present at future community development events.

Photographs and lessons learned from the Leaf Rapids and Souris projects about the use of photovoice in community development will be shared at the National Rural Research Network Conference in Twillingate NL and the Canadian Rural Health Research Society Conference in Quebec City in October.

Graduate Student Internship

Originally from Brandon, Anisa Martin has been working as a graduate student intern with RDI since the April 2005. Anisa is a second year Masters of Rural Development (MRD) student at Brandon University. With an undergraduate degree in sociology, Anisa has an interest in community development, population studies, and immigration issues in rural areas.

As a graduate student intern Anisa is involved in a wide variety of research activities primarily related to three research projects 1) The Community Collaboration Project (CCP): Empowering Communities and Building Capacity, 2) Community Collaboration to Improve Health Care Access of Northern Residents, and 3) Rural Community Through the Eyes of Youth.

One of Anisa’s first challenges was



project coordination for photography, journals and student interviews during the Souris photovoice project. Anisa’s work will be pivotal in the analysis of the project data and development of presentations and publications. Through her internship, Anisa has been conducting key informant interviews and focus groups with residents of northern communities in Manitoba. She has also been working with the Manitoba Regional Round Tables to develop logic models to assist in evaluating the CCP project.

In addition to her work at RDI, Anisa

reports a very busy summer. In July she attended the International Comparative Rural Policy Studies summer school in Leuven, Belgium. Two weeks following the summer school Anisa married Alex Martin, also a student in the MRD program and working at RDI.

Anisa has been interspersing her trips to work in Northern Manitoba with her work on her thesis focusing on immigration gap analysis within smaller urban communities.

“This internship experience allows me to take what I have learned in the classroom and apply it in the community. It has permitted me to learn from community members, from youth, and from residents up north. I look forward to future knowledge and skill building opportunities enabled through this internship.” ■

What is a Healthy Rural Community?

With the assistance of rural residents in southwestern Manitoba, researchers at the Rural Development Institute gained a better understanding of a healthy rural community. By asking rural residents to share their values, priorities, experiences and perspectives, researchers began building a template for community members to use in assessing the health, quality of life and well-being of a rural community.

In 16 focus groups over 150 rural residents of southwestern Manitoba described their visions of a healthy rural community and shared their collective wisdom. A healthy rural community is a safe place, "you can send your children outside and you know that even the neighbours will look out for them." Families live and work together. There is racial and religious tolerance, and social activities and organizations for all ages. People need personal contact with other

people. People are friendly, "Everybody waves at you — it's the prairie wave." People work toward common goals with a sense of vision and a sense of stewardship. Good leadership, partnerships, connections with other communities, and effective communication within and outside of the community are key to community well-being. Residents participate on boards and in organizations working for the good of the community. "People are forward looking" and "with a willingness to change." They vote and participate in decision making. A core of essential businesses, employment, and financial stability are required. "Agriculture needs to be profitable."

Transportation services including "an effective student-friendly busing system" are important. As are street and road maintenance and improvement, an adequate safe water supply and waste management systems, health and emergency

services, education available across the lifespan, and affordable and accessible daycare. "The community supports the school and vice versa." Rural people are long-time recyclers and eager newbies at Internet and Broadband communication.

With a better understanding of what makes a rural community healthy, researchers worked with residents to develop a framework for rural community assessment and to identify indicators to measure rural community health and well-being. The result is the RDI publication *Rural Community Health and Well-Being: A Guide to Action*, edited by Robert Annis, Fran Racher and Marian Beattie. This document builds on the information gathered from rural residents and provides an accessible guide for use by community residents and leaders. A copy of this publication can be viewed, downloaded and printed from the RDI website at www.brandonu.ca/rdi. ■

Youth Speak Out: Aftermath of Mine Closure in a Northern Community

When a major employer in a small community closes, the quality of life in that community is greatly affected. The community of Leaf Rapids, located in Northern Manitoba, lost the main employer when the mine closed in 2002. The impact of this loss has affected all members of the community, including the youth.

To assess the perceptions of youth, Dr. Barbara Gfeller, Professor of Psychology at Brandon University, interviewed students from grades 9-12, who attend Leaf Rapids School. The focus of the study was to identify the major challenges faced by students. Students were asked to describe challenges experienced by young people in the community, discuss ways the school meets their needs, and share their plans for the future. Interviews were also held with the principal, school counsellor, teachers, members of the Parent Council and local resource people such as the nurse at the community health center and youth workers at the youth centre.

A range of cognitive, social, emotional and behavioral problems including bullying and teasing are seen among younger students. These challenges are emphasized by the lack of teachers' aides and high student to teacher ratios in the lower grades. A major challenge with younger students is dealing with attitudes and values from home. Teachers are over-worked in meeting the diverse range of academic and behavioral difficulties experienced by students. The findings from the study show that teachers are making progress tackling challenges from the bottom-up, however, the notable lack of resources tends to impede progress.

In April 2005, Dr. Gfeller presented the findings from this study at the 10th Annual Congress on Rural Education in Saskatoon. Education policy makers and school administrators joined Dr. Gfeller in discussing issues related to youth in communities with similar situations. Dr. Gfeller will be presenting a paper on this project in Québec City at the 2005 Canadian Rural Health Research

Society's *Bridging the Distance* conference in October. Discussion will focus on ways to engage students, keep them in school, and promote cultural identity, as well as raise awareness and support integration in the process of community development. ■

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