

BACKGROUND FOR AMBASSADOR FOR SAFETY – VOLUNTEER

KEITH MCPHEE

Keith McPhee is a retired school principal who has dedicated himself to Youth in his retirement. Five years ago he started a group called CIK, Community Initiative for Kids. Four years ago he met with Safe Communities of Brockville, the Lanark, Leeds and Grenville health Unit, YMCA, United Way, Brockville Police and other agencies to seek support. In summary, all agreed that children and youth issues were so complex and important that a focused coalition dealing exclusively on youth issues would be a far more efficient and effective process.

As a result, a new coalition was created from a number of Safe Community partners, top focus on youth issues called EKIOC; (Every Kid in our Communities) of Leeds and Grenville. All agencies agreed that Keith McPhee was the logical choice for Chair, due to passionate concern for Children and Youth. Due primarily to his untiring volunteer effort, the EKIOC coalition developed very quickly. Within the first year, members had the opportunity to learn from each other and better understand the supports and difficulties that are present in a young person's life (both advantaged and disadvantaged young people).

Through Keith's efforts, and ability to nurture relationships, EKIOC provided the focus of identifying gaps and energizing attendees to come together to act together in working group within a Window of Focus. This has had real value in sharing experiences, stories, ideas and spawning genuine cooperative partnerships to build on the concept that kids need to be seen as whole beings - rather than as a collection of agency-mandate defined pieces, and that the silo-approach has inculcated.

Keith's intent is that every child is safe, healthy and valued, and like a crop that has to have a certain amount of fertilizer... not too much and not too little... the secret is to apply it correctly and make sure it nourishes.

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Community Capacity Building is about building assets for and in adults as well as kids because asset rich parents and communities build asset rich kids... and further, you need to look at the level of assets present (do research and measurement) to inform your effectiveness.

He advocates that success can only be found if we go beyond the partnerships we hope to see at the lead table, to the partnership of influence that must be at the ChampionTable where the integrated partnership of real, concrete action is spawned at the Community Partners Tables, as staff and interested citizens come together to share stories, challenges, hopes and plans.

It is the partnership of focused action that happens in the Working Groups as staff, volunteers and old retired folks come together to make something happen with the support of all their other partners. Like any system, no one part is more important than the other but all contribute to the outcome of increased thriving for every kid... and their kids and theirs....etc.

It is Keith's beliefs, dedication, commitment and hard work that has been responsible for the dramatic growth of EKIOC which now includes Triple P (Positive Parenting Program). This is because of his belief that it would be of little effect to focus only on Asset Building for Positive Youth Development, in order that children and youth are safe, valued and healthy if we do not also support both kids and parents. Further, while encouraging and empowering kids to be involved in their communities EKIOC like organizations must work to ensure that the environment in which children and youth live is conducive to support. Pooled financial and in-kind support of members of Every Kid has allowed sustainable actions to take place that will strengthen parenting, increase organizational integration of actions and enhance opportunities for kids. Increased human resources for the coalition also allows community members to "champion" the vision of every child and youth being a safe, healthy and valued member of their communities.

Community Champions, advocated by Keith, use the respect and influence they have within their communities to act as cheerleaders and catalysts for the actions of the coalition of Every Kid in Our Communities. They share a broad community perspective with those members whose daily work supports families and communities to build assets and promote the safe and healthy development of all children and youth in Leeds & Grenville.

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CHAMPIONS were recruited as leaders from across all sectors in the Counties of Leeds and Grenville with a mandate to work in partnership to champion the goals of Every Kid in Our Communities.

They have brought a new dimension of community contacts, resources, insights and energy to Every Kid in Our Communities.

In these days of volunteer burnout, numerous community committee meetings which become confusing, and increased difficulty to maintain interest and attendance in most organizations, Keith has encouraged and advocated we should consider very seriously, a partnership built into the program that could add value for Every Kid and both Safe Communities and Crime Prevention (Crime Reduction).

Keith recognizes a safe community concept is a readily identifiable, user friendly, non-threatening descriptor that is immediately accepted by citizens and organizations for buy-in as a shared responsibility. Safe schools, traffic safety, seniors safety, child safety, water safety, winter safety, community safety,(including anti-bullying), prevention of substance abuse through Racing against Drugs, multi-media presentations in secondary schools on peer pressure, FAS and race relations, all take place together in Brockville as a part of our Safe Community Coalition umbrella organizations initiatives.

With an original high of 86 Safe Community partner organizations in a city of 22,000, he recognized that an integrated group is a more effective formula for smaller communities. Citizens and businesses are more likely to support and engage when they feel they can impact on issues that relate to them where they live, learn, work and play.

Keith recognized that we have not had turf wars between organizations and agencies. Also, just because we had a number of "focused" coalitions spin-off from Safe Communities;(Racing Against Drugs, Risk Watch, Harm Reduction, Every Kid in our Communities) over the years, the concept of retaining an "umbrella group" is a formula for success to help motivate, sustain and maximize marketing for consistent messaging, each of the organizations are promoting.

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He believes it is more effective to encourage engagement and participation in an all-encompassing Safe Community or Community Safety and Crime prevention model which is better able to attract the interest of diverse groups within a community, who are all working towards a common goal. A safer community to most citizens suggests a Safe Community and also commutates one with reduced crime.

With Safe Communities Canada having the experience of creating, developing and nurturing broad based partnerships nationally, and now accelerating their recruitment, their infrastructure, policies and guidebooks would serve well for other initiatives that could be integrated. Also, available funding could be shared and serve as the fuel for the engine that Safe Communities already has available. We often talk about avoiding duplication, maximizing effort, mitigating confusion and leveraging on to something that works.

There was an opportunity, and as a leader and risk taker, Keith worked in concert with Safe Communities of Brockville, Leeds & Grenville throughout this past year to bring about an agreement for an official MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) whereby the Safe Communities and Every Kid in our Communities formed a joint administrative and support linkage, sharing administrative support, the Safe Community Centre, their Community Partners and Champions. This also minimizes the duplication of organizations people are asked to join and maximizes their influence in Community Safety, Health and Well Being.

The Safe Communities motto is "Partners for a Safer & Healthier Community" and our common goal is: To make Brockville, Leeds & Grenville the Safest and Healthiest Community in which to live, learn, work and play In Canada. This is about a holistic approach to reducing harms in a community for children and youth as well as all citizens and visitors through injury prevention, crime prevention, preventing alcohol and drug abuse and minimizing risky behaviors.

The Safe Community Formula, integrated into partnerships with other like minded organizations at the local, provincial and national levels can become the spark to motivate a national expansion of injury prevention, asset building for youth, positive parenting and safe communities. The result would be a win-win.

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There exists the ability to be proactive, lead progressive change and encourage integrated leadership. Local Safe Communities should be encouraged to use their existing links, networks and community partnerships to develop and nurture integrated programming into a joint, all encompassing strategy that fits within the scope and mandate of Safe Communities.

Coalitions with a full or part time coordinator, dedicated to pulling together the various community interests and providing a secretariat, are far more successful than those operating within a strictly volunteer base. With a proper support structure, Safe Communities and many other struggling organizations will be able to harness the unlimited potential, mix it with new and exciting programs and make a difference. The potential of what can be achieved and can occur with the right formula for success and a shared support model is unlimited.

Keith was never hesitant to share, integrate, support others or offer whatever resources he had at his disposal. The untiring efforts he has demonstrated over the past four years, as a pure volunteer, is worthy of the Nomination for Brockville's AMBASSADOR FOR SAFETY AWARD.