

Niagara-area agency building human, community capacity

Community Living Port Colborne-Wainfleet is on a mission to create better citizens.

With the support of a \$125,500 Ontario Trillium Foundation grant over three years, the association is providing training aimed at building human capacity and community in Port Colborne.

The association that supports people with intellectual disabilities is the first community in its area to offer 'asset training.'

The training, which focuses on positive reinforcement, is aimed at giving parents, volunteers, agency members, businesspeople and service club leaders the skills to incorporate the principles of asset building into their programming and interactions with children and youth.

"It's so simple building assets in kids but we don't do it," says Lesley Rickard, a Community Living Port Colborne-Wainfleet staff member who wrote the application for the Trillium grant.

"I spend a lot of time with the young people of Port Colborne and I believe we have some awesome kids in our community."

Rickard says assets are qualities or skills a person needs to be successful in life and make a community contribution. For instance, empowerment is an asset. In the context of youth, it involves including young people as active participants in groups and events. She says another asset is positive identity which entails dwelling on what youth are doing well and listening when they speak.

“Having more assets can help children and youth cope and make the right decisions when difficult things happen. Building strengths in children makes our community stronger, making everyone feel more connected. It won’t happen overnight, it takes time to engage an entire community, having everyone on the same page, but through training and support, families, schools and business can put the principles in place. Community Living has started the wheels of progress. It’s up to the community to climb on board.”

The local association’s staff and volunteers are trained and trainers have extended the knowledge to community partners including local agencies, organizations and businesses.

Rickard says a colleague attended a conference and learned about asset-building and brought back what she learned to her colleagues at the Community Living association.

“She was always gung-ho about working with kids as a community,” explains Rickard.

In Canada, Thrive! is the national asset-building organization. Its mission, according to its website, is “to provide leadership, knowledge and resources to develop capable young Canadians of positive character.”

Thrive! The Canadian Centre for Positive Youth Development was established in 1988 and is based in Waterloo.

“A registered charitable organization, Thrive! believes that the power and breadth of our mission can best be achieved through dynamic, mutually beneficial relationships with other individuals, organizations and associations.”

For more information, visit the website at www.thrivecanada.ca