

Considering community hub

Exploring many services working under one roof

Darlene Wroe
Speaker Reporter

HAILEYBURY -- A gathering of close to 80 people from across Temiskaming was held at Northern College on Wednesday, January 11, where the concept of a South Temiskaming community hub was discussed.

Many organizations were present at the event and included representatives of the Timiskaming District Social Services Administration Board (DTSS-AB), the City of Temiskaming Shores, the Town of Cobalt, and the Timiskaming First Nation. Sponsors, supporters and participants represented both local groups and presenters and facilitators from other parts of the province.

Discussions during the gathering focused on whether it would be possible and desirable to bring at least some of the needs of the community together under one roof as a community hub.

The concept of a community hub revolves around the sustainability of a centre shared by more than one group.

HC Link Resources actively assisted in the organization of the gathering, and stated in its literature that a community hub is "a place where people from across the district come together to share, to interact and to access a broad range of community services."

HC Link Resources stated that a community hub could be a "gathering spot for everyone to participate in recreational,

cultural, educational and community-building activities."

Participants explored how the concept of a community hub could be implemented.

Cobalt Mayor Tina Sartoretto asked the participants to consider "how we can all work together to make our communities so much better."

POSSIBILITIES

Organizers also identified the opportunity to consider virtual hubs as a means of providing some service needs and improving access to services.

Guest speaker Charles Cirtwill, president and chief executive officer of Northern Policy Institute, told the gathering that Northern Ontario is increasingly experiencing a time when "doing more with less is going to continue to be a day-to-day challenge." He continued that "the challenge we have is that we are fewer, we are older, and our working base population is getting smaller every year." He added that "we continue to have a declining population."

However he stated that young people have a better chance of securing employment in Northern Ontario than they do if they move to London or Toronto.

He supported the concept of developing community hubs. "Collaboration saves costs for sure," he said. Hubs can also improve access to services, he continued. Co-delivery can improve efficiencies, and through community hubs clients could see their needs more quickly assessed and be provided with better response times, he also



Margaret Panipak of Parry Sound (left) and her daughter Leetia, 11 months old, were among the many participants in the "Changing Our History" community hub gathering at Northern College on Wednesday, January 11. They are pictured here with event organizer Dani Grenier-Ducharme, children's services manager of the District of Timiskaming Social Services Administration Board. Mrs. Panipak's husband, Scirish, was one of the presenters at the event. (Staff photo by Darlene Wroe)

suggested.

There could be indirect benefits, he added, such as a better understanding of the services offered by professionals. A community hub could also create opportunities for professional development, he continued, with improvements through sharing of best practices, innovation and problem solving.

DTSSAB children's services manager Dani Grenier-Ducharme welcomed all the participants at the gathering, and outlined the opportunities to bring services for different groups, such as youth and seniors, under one roof.

FOCUS GROUP

He noted that a collocation of services has been completed in Kirkland Lake at the North

Eastern Ontario Family and Children's Services Centre, and said now a focus group will be formed to determine if it is possible to push to the next highest level in creating a community hub in south Temiskaming.

One of the possibilities that could be looked at would be turning a school building into a community building, he suggested.

Mr. Grenier-Ducharme said that there will be a need for people to think in a different way about buildings where services can be housed.

"You need to have flexible thinking," he said. "You have to

be prepared to identify and re-define" needs. But he added that money is also required "if you want collaboration."

Along with the needs of children, families, youth and seniors, also being considered are the needs of Indigenous people, francophone people and anglophone people, he noted. Families, parents, and community members at large also need to be brought in on the discussion for a community hub, he suggested.

Agencies and municipal representatives were mainly represented at the January 11 gathering.

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