OPPORTUNITIES FOR A MORE INCLUSIVE AND WELCOMING COMMUNITY ARE ENDLESS

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Located in Northern Nova Scotia, New Glasgow is a scenic riverside town with a year round trail system, an indoor/outdoor performing arts centre, and many modern facilities. The town was settled by Scottish immigrants in 1784 and incorporated in 1875. Much like its namesake city, Glasgow, Scotland, the town has evolved from a shipbuilding community into a thriving, diverse commercial service/cultural centre with strong entrepreneurial spirit and community pride.

In January of 2010, the Town of New Glasgow, Nova Scotia formally approved a historic declaration to join CCMARD and to follow its 10 Commitments. Our first task was to form a Race Relations and Anti-Discrimination Committee, with terms of reference to develop an action plan. Forming a committee was easy as we had many great community members from whom we could select. As we had anticipated, they all accepted and work began with much enthusiasm and motivation.

When we looked at developing our Action Plan we learned that a nearby municipality had already prepared a plan and was willing to let us examine it. Through this communication it became evident to us that we, as a town and community, were already undertaking much work aimed at combating racism and discrimination. We were impressed with the wonderful advances we identified in the struggle for basic human rights, cultural diversity, and respect that were made possible by citizens, stakeholder groups, organizations, and elected officials. We were on a successful path because our residents quickly stepped forward to do their part to ensure that our town's CCMARD membership was enriching.

Having accomplished a considerable amount of work in the early stages, we reflected on the gaps in our approach and found that additional work related to the creation of an Action Plan was necessary. Additional work was undertaken, including public consultations with community members and stakeholders who enabled us to effectively deliver an Action Plan that was meaningful, attainable, and sustainable–three important tenets for success. The Plan was presented to our Town Council for their official approval and it was launched publicly on September 27th, 2013 as part of a province wide initiative called "Culture Days". The Plan was received with congratulatory remarks by many in attendance and was strongly supported by local and provincial media outlets. Pairing our launch with "Culture Days" was a success because the extra media coverage resulted in increased interest of participating organizations and community groups and encouraged a greater number of people to come show their support. Even after the launch, one media outlet contacted us to do a more thorough interview. After meeting our mandate of crafting an Action Plan we quickly got to work holding monthly meetings and discussions to inform our planning and next steps.

We continually look to the Action Plan and the ways in which we can improve the quality of life for all members of our community. We are all still so excited, committed, and motivated to ensure that our community will have the tools to deal with incidents of racism and discrimination. Committee members will know, as will the community at large, how discrimination will be addressed and this brings credibility to our work. The Race Relations and Anti-Discrimination Committee is mandated to create positive change by promoting basic human rights for all our residents so that the social, cultural, and economic needs of everyone are met. Through its reflection, planning, and collaboration the Committee seeks to continue to rise to that challenge.

With a well-structured Action Plan to combat racism and discrimination and remarkable people wanting to effect real change, the opportunities for a more inclusive and welcoming community are endless. In a Town that demonstrates strong progressive leadership, our focus needs to reflect solid community partnerships with well-established groups and organizations and individuals who want to make positive contributions. It is our dream that with this Action Plan New Glasgow will be viewed as an extended arm of CCMARD and that neighboring municipalities will follow suit and reach out to us for assistance in developing their own plans. With strong connections to the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities and the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission, we feel that an even greater degree of accountability and sustainability is possible as we move forward to support cultural diversity.

In New Glasgow, we recognize that there will always be new areas to explore and about which to learn, and different groups around which to center our work. Having gone through the amazing experience of developing an Action Plan, it is our hope that more Canadian municipalities, and hopefully someday all of them, will recognize the opportunities that exist to enhance their communities and will reach out and sign on to this wonderful project. Advancement in the field of human rights, respect, equality, dignity, and unity should be everyone's concern. With the help of our Action Plan we are striving to make a difference one commitment at a time.