



July 2010

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walk a mile in my shoes

One step at a time we are making a difference

Sailing on Green Waters

In fall 2010, with the help of **the Trillium Foundation** and **the May Court Club of St. Catharines**, **the RAFT** will be well on its way to completing it's newest project: improving the energy efficiency of our 17 Centre Street Facility. **The RAFT** plans to renovate the centre's windows, hot water tanks, AC and heating systems to improve the building's overall efficiency, reduce operating costs and make the RAFT a little more eco friendly.

The building was constructed in the 1980's and is still equipped with its original windows. By installing new energy efficient windows, **the RAFT** will reduce its heating costs and ease the strain on the HVAC system. Moreover, the new windows will increase the amount of natural light as well as provide a facelift to the building.

As the volume of youth using **the RAFT** has increased over the last few years, water shortages have

become more common due to the limited capacity of our current water tanks. "When you



have twenty kids trying to shower in the morning with only two water tanks, things can get pretty hectic" says Mike Lethby, Executive Director of **the RAFT**. The new renovations will replace the original water tanks with a new hot water system that will eliminate the likelihood of running out of hot water and will reduce **the RAFT's** energy costs. The renovation will also replace the current furnace and air

conditioning systems with new energy efficient models. The current boiler and HVAC system, which were part of the building's original equipment, are inefficient and outdated. By replacing the two out-of-date systems, operating costs will be reduced and **the RAFT** will have a more environmentally-friendly facility.

As part of the Niagara Community, and as a good neighbour, we will use local suppliers and contractors to complete the project.

It is estimated that by making these energy improvements to the hostel, **the RAFT** will reduce its utility costs by 20%, while also reducing its carbon footprint. By reducing our operating costs more money can be directed towards youth services.

Our Next Green Project

The RAFT is doing its part for a greener tomorrow by reducing its carbon footprint. **The RAFT** is currently fundraising for the second part of its energy efficiency project: **to renovate the hostel's washroom facilities**. The current washroom facilities are out-dated, inefficient and unable to accommodate our

increasing numbers. Our plans call for the installation of energy efficient toilets, shower heads and faucets, the re-tiling of the walls and floor and the installation of new showers, toilet stalls and sinks. The upgrades are designed to accommodate twenty-one teenagers,

reduce shower wait times and increase capacity. The renovations will improve safety and accessibility while reducing water consumption, increasing efficiency, decreasing overall operating costs and improving the youth's hostel stay.

Life is a Roller Coaster

Life is difficult for many of the at risk youth who walk through the RAFT's front door. These youth are forced to grow up so fast, they miss the normal fun of being a teen, like spending all day riding the rides at a theme parks or hanging out at a water park.

One of the most popular community outings offered by the RAFT is the annual trip to **Canada's Wonderland**.

Through a combination of donations and fundraising, everyone helps to make this happen. This year, **Canada's Wonderland** helped out by giving us 15 free tickets.

The youth have been fundraising to increase the number of sign-up spots and defer the cost. The youth will be holding a car washing fundraiser, where the youth work together so that everyone can get a chance to go.

The benefit of the out-

ing lasts more than one day. The youth who may come from broken families or feel they have no future or can't seem to get a handle on their lives, can forget their troubles and have fun.

Community outings foster independence and build self confidence. Youth are given an opportunity to experi-

ence the lighter side of life. Something that is often foreign to youth who, at times, experience a harsher reality than many people can only imagine.

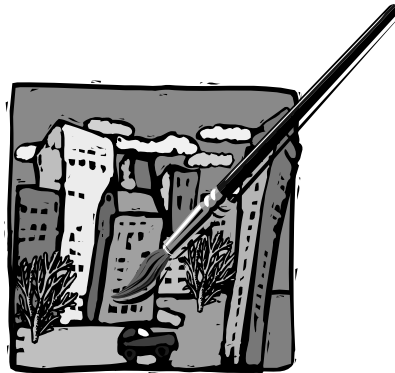
At **the RAFT**, we believe that learning to have fun is an important part of learning independence and transitioning to adulthood.



July 2010

"How can you improve the health of a community?"

Our New Community Animator



How can you improve the health of a neighbourhood? By working together with everyone who lives and works in the neighbourhood. That is where the Community Animator comes in! The role of a community animator encompasses the idea of 'two heads are better than one' and 'five heads are better than two.' The job is to bring together all individuals living in a neighbourhood into one, large community in order to accomplish more than one person would be able to accomplish alone. With funding from the **Niagara Prosperity Initiative**, Suzanne Veenstra has been hired as a community animator. She will be working within three neighbourhoods helping them to become stronger communities. These neighbourhoods are **the Haig (Manchester area), Old Western Hill (Rykert area) and the Queenston Street Neighbourhood**. Suzanne has already met with agencies, residents and businesses from these neighbourhoods to discuss areas of improvement and is in the process of planning events and programs that will help to bring the community members together. Suzanne hopes that with her help, these community-based initiatives will increase the neighbourhoods' prosperities. For more information about the progress in each neighbourhood, visit :

www.commonspace-stcatharines.blogspot.com.

WALK A MILE IN MY SHOES

Bus Passes to Possibilities

Public transit is a vital part of any community. Buses provide easily accessible transportation around the community, allowing riders to get to where they need to go, for a relatively low price. Many people take public transit for granted. However, for some, access to public transit is a luxury, one they often can't afford. No transportation creates a barrier to accessing education, employment and many other important services. It is for this reason **the RAFT** and the **Niagara Prosperity Initiative** are working together to provide bus passes to at-risk youth living in the Niagara Region. The initiative hopes to improve the independence and resources of at-risk youth and ultimately strengthen their connections to the community and their peers. Giving these youth a means to get around their community provides them with more options than hanging around the streets, where boredom can often lead to trouble.

Bus passes provide youth opportunities to access a



broader range of resources, as well as expanding the area where they can seek employment and services.

Providing at risk youth something as simple as a bus

pass can open a world of possibilities and make a profound impact on their lives. These bus passes could be the difference that changes their lives forever.

Fun in the Sun with the RAFT

Summer 2010 marks the first session of **Summer Camp**, a free day program that brings youth from stressed communities together in an environment that promotes healthy lifestyles and develops life skills. The camp was developed with help from **Niagara Regional Housing**. Participants learn important skills that

will help them in everyday life. There are six sites for the camp (**Rykert, Old Pine Trail, McLaughlin, Bowden, Warden & Waters and Manchester**) each with its own age



bracket and age-specific activities. Participants enjoy a broad range of activities including games, arts and crafts, reading and more. This program builds on the success of the **After School Program** and the **Community Development Program**. One of the most important events will be the community volunteer projects that bring youth and parents together to improve their community. These projects will reinforce the advantages of teamwork and friendship as well as developing community pride.

The skills learned at **Summer Camp** will benefit the participants throughout their lives, and help to develop not only healthy productive youth but healthy communities as well.

Looking Forward to After School

The RAFT, the District School Board of Niagara, Niagara Regional Housing, the United Way of St. Catharines & District and the Region of Niagara have collaborated to bring a free, after-school activities program to schools in Thorold, Beamsville and St. Catharines with one goal in mind: getting kids off the street and keeping them in school.

The After-School Program strives to bring neighbourhood youth together in a safe and positive environment. Participants experience opportunities that they might not otherwise be able to experience. Youth have access to a wide variety of fun and educational programs that range from drama club and cooking classes to leadership opportunities and recreational activities. The program offers homework help, where youth can access computers and the internet and as well as support from peers to help them succeed.

The After-School Program aims to educate its participants with the skills required to lead healthy lifestyles. It does this through nutritional help, healthy after-school snacks and anti-drug, alcohol and smoking programs that all contribute to a well-rounded view on healthy living.

The RAFT hopes that by introducing this program into schools, students will develop important life skills and a resiliency that will contribute to their success in life. **The After-School Program** gives its participants the ability to live healthier lives and make smarter choices which will lead to success later in life.



ONE STEP AT A TIME WE ARE MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Committed to the RAFT

Since it first opened its doors in 1994, **the RAFT** has always been supported by a caring community. Here is one community member's story about her involvement with **the RAFT**:

*"I first heard about **the RAFT** in 2001 when a friend's daughter was doing a co-op placement through Niagara College. She would talk to me about **the RAFT** and the youth, some of whom I met and a few who were former students of mine. Upon retir-*

*ing from teaching and subsequently becoming a cook for a catering company, **An Affair to Remember** in St. Davids', I began to take food to **the RAFT**. It became a weekly trip from St. Davids' to the old RAFT building on the corner of Church St. and Niagara St. in St. Catharines. **The Niagara Church of the Nazarene of Thorold** became involved six years ago. Donations of non-perishable food items, toiletries and clothing have been taken to*

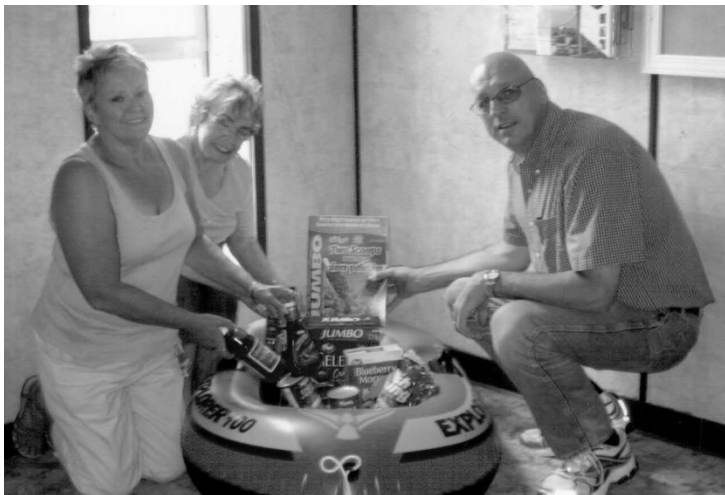
***the RAFT** over those 6 years with the approval of the Church board. This ministry continues as the "raft" is filled and emptied approximately every two weeks. This is a community outreach for our members. Two years ago, we put together hygiene kits*

*for the youth. This included a towel, toothbrush, toothpaste, soap, deodorant, comb, and shampoo for the youth. They received this upon arrival at **the RAFT**. In continuing our outreach, we will be starting cooking sessions with the youth on Saturdays. A team of two church members will work with the youth to help prepare healthy meals for Saturday and Sunday evenings.*

"Feed a man a fish and he eats for a day. Teach a man to fish and he eats forever."

- Submitted by Carolyn Romanin

The RAFT would not survive without the generous donors and support of a caring community. We would like to say thank you to not only Carolyn and **the Church of Nazarene of Thorold**, but to all those who continue to donate.



Ready or Not, You're on Your Own

The **Steps to Independent Living Program** provides one-on-one and group activities to encourage independence and self-sufficiency as well as improving self-esteem. It is funded by the **United Way, Prevent Challenge** and the **Branscombe Foundation**. Activities in this program include employment preparation, housing search help, crisis counseling and life skills training. Many of the youth who come to **the RAFT** must learn how to be independent and support themselves in a very short time without parents or guardians to guide them.

This was the case for a young woman we will call Stella. While staying at the hostel, Stella needed to find a permanent place to live and she began calling landlords of several apartments. Her call started something like this:

"Hi...um... I am looking for a place, like, that I could ... um...live, it says here... um, that you have a place like that, that ... um I could rent."

Not surprisingly, nobody seemed to be willing to rent to her. After seeing her struggling, a RAFT Youth Care Worker worked with Stella to develop

her housing search skills. Stella learned how to create a budget to figure out what she could afford. Stella refined her search to areas close to her school and on a bus route and short listed a number of apartments. The Youth Care Worker taught Stella how to make a business call, and taught her the right questions to ask landlords. Stella gained knowledge and the confidence she needed to be able to find a place of her own (which she did). But more importantly, she now has a life skill and believes in her own abilities.

Awakening Neighbourhoods

Awakening Neighbourhoods is about building stronger, caring communities. In Niagara, certain communities have been identified as high stressed neighbourhoods. These neighbourhoods often have higher crime and vandalism rates, higher unemployment and school drop out rates and lower average incomes. Growing up in these neighbourhoods can put youth at risk and families without adequate support.

Awakening Neighbourhoods

Initiatives seek to empower individuals and groups to make positive changes in their communities.

These initiatives seek to strengthen neighbourhoods by developing sustainable community assets. The program is guided by two principals: (i) to foster and develop connections and partnerships between neighbourhoods and community agencies and (ii) to connect and engage young people by fostering empowerment, self-esteem and positive role modeling.

Awakening Neighbourhoods Initiatives come in all shapes and sizes from the work of a community animator to create shared neighbourhood conversations, to After-School and Summer Recreation Programs, to creating bio fuel fields and neighbourhood gardens. Our partners who are committed to **Awakening Neighbourhoods** through these initiatives include **Niagara Region, Niagara Regional Housing, United Way of St. Catharines & District** and the **City of Welland**.



About Us

The RAFT is a non-profit charitable organization that links at-risk and homeless youth to resources in Niagara. Services provided by **the RAFT** include the Drop In Resource Centre, Steps to Independent Living and the Emergency Hostel. Community services include Youth Reconnect, Neighbourhood Conversation, Community Development and Community Animator. All of the community based programs are part of our **Neighbourhood Awakening** Program. Services are provided in West Niagara, Grimsby,

Welland, Fort Erie and Port Colborne. **The RAFT** contributes to the welfare of the Niagara Community by helping at-risk youth become independent and self-sufficient, while strengthening their emotional and social well being. It also acts as a referral source that re-connects youth to the community.

The RAFT provides a safe place that is free from violence, intimidation, exploitation, discrimination, drugs and alcohol. We believe that working together, one step at a time, we can make a difference.

The RAFT focuses on youth who are homeless or at risk of being homeless, without jobs, in danger of dropping out of school and engaging in unhealthy lifestyles. The work of **the RAFT** is made possible through the generous donations of our many friends and community supporters. Core funders include **Regional Municipality of Niagara, the United Way of St. Catharines, Niagara Regional Housing, Prevent Challenge and the Faith Community**.

For more information on **the RAFT** and its services, please visit its website at: www.therafthelps.ca

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WALK A MILE IN MY SHOES

Community Partners



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