

First Nations Housing & Infrastructure Network

Issue #2

Newsletter

April 2012

Darlene Marshall, Eskasoni First Nation Housing Director

Nestled alongside the beautiful Bras d'Or Lake in Eastern Cape Breton Island, Eskasoni First Nation is the largest Mi'kmaq community in the world. With a population of over 4000 Mi'kmaq people, this culturally rich community has made great strides in developing a solid infrastructure on which to grow and prosper including their own community-operated school system from kindergarten to grade 12, supermarket, community rink and cultural centre. We sat down and talked with Darlene Marshall of Eskasoni First Nation to discuss her vital role as Housing Director for her people of this growing community.



The men in the back left to right: Marshall L. Marshall, John A. Poulette, James Simon and Donald Francis
Ladies sitting left to right: Kylie Young, Darlene Marshall and Mary B. Toney.

Tell us a bit about yourself.

I am a resident of Eskasoni but originally moved to my community from the United States when I was little and I am one of 11 children who reside in Nova Scotia and the United States. I'm a single parent of five children and many grandchildren that I love spending time with, and am very active in my community through promoting positive activities and initiatives. I work very hard and believe in what I do as a Housing Director.

I applied for a job with housing and have been working for our band for 20 years. I grew into the job and with commitment and dedication; I am in a position to make a difference. I have seen the changes over the past 20 years as an employee of the Eskasoni band. With experience and support by networking with other housing people, I gained a lot of knowledge in the housing field. I also provide support to other departments. Housing is the hardest field in band administration so you either love it or hate it.

Why did you choose a career as a Housing Manager?

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Darlene Marshall, Housing Director

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What are your day to day duties as a Housing Manager?

We are a staff of seven, consisting of three technicians, two clerks and one new housing foreman so I organize staff on a daily basis with various projects. As the director, I have long term objectives to protect and advance our communities housing achievements, be it large or small. We're always looking for alternative projects for additional funding to enhance our housing program. I liaise with Chief and Council, at clients' requests, as I do hear client's grievances. I handle proposals, budgets, purchase orders and organize workshops. I work directly with contractors, outside suppliers, ordering of materials, schedule deliveries and I deal with home insurance and adjusters. My role also requires me to work with external agencies and we have our own extensive housing data entry that our staff oversee and continuously provide input into.

What are the challenges that you encounter on a regular basis in providing Housing services?

The challenges are the age and deterioration of units and not being able to meet the needs of our young and growing members. This is in large part due to budget restraints and lack of resources. There is a lack of human resources to accommodate the size of our community and a shortage of homes to meet the ongoing growth of membership. There is also the inability to fully address the health and safety concerns. We deal with overcrowding, the lack of land/infrastructure, the lack of programs and interest in the housing program. There is a lack of knowledge and information to the community on program budgets and we continue to deal with vandalism, drugs, dependence and a lack of initiative. The challenges we face as housing staff are employee and agency turnover. As the director, I continue to struggle with consistency regarding housing.

What do you find most rewarding about your job?

The progress is very rewarding when you reflect from the past to present and where we have been and where we are today. The housing program/department is one of the resources that support our community's economy by employment to all trades of diverse skill levels. We no longer have the restraints of co-management and we're able to move towards alternative or innovative housing projects. We are also able to support our own community's economy through new and better projects starting up. I look at my own family and their needs and feel that each employee is here for our community as we wish to be part of a solution to meet the community's needs. The achievements we have had are from the support and dedication from my staff and co-workers in working in partnership on projects and seeing them through to completion. I'm fortunate to be working with staffs that have a common goal to provide a better quality way of life for our Eskasoni community members. We're providing healthy homes for healthy living.

How would you encourage others, especially our youth, to pursue a career in Housing?

Housing will always be a necessity and encouraging youth to pursue a housing career in either a trade or administration role will support our own First Nations community's economically. It will instill pride and self-worth in being a part of the community infrastructure and resource personnel. I encourage all youth to research their community's needs and pursue a housing career. All youth need to remember that they are our future and we're depending on them.

Mi'kmaq Maliseet Atlantic Youth Council

Recently, MMAYC was invited by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) and the Atlantic First Nations Housing & Infrastructure Network (AFNHIN) to find new ways of delivering information to youth by youth in Halifax on January 13, 2012.

MMAYC's meeting welcomed an overview on housing and infrastructure, water and waste water, manager/director, inspector, trades to success stories, career opportunities, work placements, and much more.

MMAYC expresses that new opportunities are important to educate our First Nations youth in order to understand the policies, costs, procedures, and maintenance around rental and home ownership programs, and how CMHC is helping assist First Nations communities in areas such as mold and indoor air quality, sustainability, climate control and innovation. MMAYC feels youth need to understand that there are programs available for community development, like: building affordable housing for seniors and investing in home insurance.

MMAYC's biggest exposure to the harsh realities of costs facing our Housing departments at this meeting occurred when we played a simple 'The Price is Right' game. This game exposed the true cost of on-reserve housing. For Example, the annual costs to operate a \$125,000 home outside of maintenance costs include: mortgage \$10,000; insurance \$500; utilities \$3,000 for a total cost of \$13,500 annually. As a youth, this was awakening, seeing how much it costs to own a home. We were also exposed to costs for basement and bathroom renovations; front door fixtures; and remodeling a bathroom. These costs projections are the realities of our future and, as youth, we need to understand the underlying message here is that families need to take better care of their homes. First Nations youth need to understand, as

the fastest growing population in Canada, the direction forward is solely on us to prepare for the next 7 generations. It starts now, let us, the youth, spread the mission: to enhance the foundations of housing administration, operations and management; and to improve policies, budgeting, expenses, revenues and clinic counselling dealing with renters or home owners. MMAYC encourages people to undertake this holistic development approach to community housing policies and examine the benefits of having in place community housing policies that are community-driven.



Picture Below: Left to Right: Michael R. Denny (Eskasoni, NS), Ashley Julian (Indian Brook, NS), Denny Isaac (Restiguj, QE), Vince Klyne (CMHC), front: Noel Joe (Conne River, NL), back: Aaron Barlow (Indian Island, NB), Samantha Lewis (Lennox Island, PEI), and Ryan Moulton (Tobique, NB).

We, as youth, encourage community members to better understand eviction policies, and review and renew them for legality purposes. Our communities will, more importantly have in place available a structure for housing availability for youth at risk, single parents and seniors.

Youth want our communities to build methods of responding to these challenges that face our First Nations communities not only in the Atlantic but across Canada. Educate us and we, the younger generation, can help housing providers deliver and administer housing programs and services on reserve by using the 7 Generational thinking.

Wela'lin
Ashley Julian, MMAYC Piktuk Representative

Safe Drinking Water Vital to

Beginning with the powerful singing of the Mi'kmaq honour song by Brian Knockwood of Indian Brook First Nation followed by opening remarks from Chief Darlene Bernard of Lennox Island First Nation in Prince Edward Island, the importance of water as a life giving resource was clear.

We all know that water is life, which is why we need to be diligent when we look at water safety. A threat to safe and clean drinking water can happen anywhere and at any time. Therefore, it is important to build capacity and have resources available for water operators and water monitors to ensure that emergencies can be mitigated or prevented.

The Atlantic Policy Congress, in collaboration with Health Canada and Aboriginal Affairs & Northern Development Canada, held a First Nations Community Based Water Monitor's and Water Treatment Plant Operator's Workshop on October 25th to 27th at the Dartmouth Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC) Waterfront Campus. Various presentations were made to over 50 First Nations public works employees on reserve and allowed for open discussion on various issues of water regionally, nationally and globally, water maintenance, water management and by exploring the multi-barriers approach to water safety which includes preparing for water related emergencies.

Members of the Nova Scotia Department of Environment presented on "Wells and Septic Systems" reinforcing the importance of proper maintaining both when dealing with your own home. The presenters gave an overview of on-site disposal systems for sewage (septic tanks) and provided helpful tips on proper maintenance for home owners. Here are a few helpful tips:

- Inspect and pump your septic system every

3 to 5 years by a certified septic tank pumper

- Spread water use out over time (rather than do five loads of laundry in a day, spread it out over the week so it doesn't make your septic system work overtime)
- Do not dispose of hazardous waste (paint, harsh cleaners, etc) in your septic system.

Jennifer McDonald of Nova Scotia Environment presented on "Well Construction and Water Quality". She provided an overview of what a drilled well is as opposed to dug wells and the proper care and placement of both. Here are some helpful tips to ensure that your well is properly constructed, located and maintained for a safe water supply:

- Locate your well (especially important for new home owners) at a higher elevation to prevent surface water (ex: rain) from entering and ensure your well is easily accessible
- Inspect your well at least once a year for any bacteria, viruses and dissolved minerals, such as hardness, salt and arsenic
- In the event of finding bacteria or if repairs were made to your well, be sure to have it disinfected right away

Barry Manuel, of the Halifax Regional Municipality, provided a presentation on "Emergency Management" and it was a great piece of information because it made the participants think about how to address it in their First Nations communities. He discussed the four pillars of Emergency Management which are preparedness, prevention/mitigation, response and recovery. This was an interesting part of the training because he raised not only examples of past emergency response cases, but the importance of

Health of Our Communities



During the First Nations Community-based Water Monitor and Water/Wastewater Operator training session at Nova Scotia Community College, Dartmouth, Brian Polchies, Water Monitor and Operator, for Woodstock First Nations receives a Certificate of Achievement along with 2.5 Continuing Education Units (CEU's) presented by Len O'Neill, Regional Manager, Environmental Public Health, Health Canada, First Nations and Inuit Health Branch, Atlantic region.

awareness, education and training on what the public needs in order to be prepared. Any past events that took place are always lessons learned and what can be done to prepare for any other future potential emergencies.

Participants were put through an Emergency Preparedness & Response Exercise that was facilitated by members of the Nova Scotia Emergency Management Office, the Halifax Regional Municipality and Public Safety Canada. Participants were split into groups to come up with plans for what to do in events of emergencies in their First Nations communities. Since participants were from all over the Atlantic First Nations communities, the same cultural values and priorities rang true. The great thing about First Nations communities is that everyone knows each other and their own needs and resources so this is a strong attribute towards First Nations ensuring that they have their own emergency plan. While some First Nations do have their own emergency plan, not every First Nations community does so the

need to prepare is crucial.

The Canadian Red Cross provided updates on their work nationally and globally and how disasters can negatively impact people's lives with the lack of basic necessities. For example, in Haiti, the Canadian Red Cross were able to assist in providing 2.5 million litres of water to over 300,000 people every day. Only half of their population, however, have access to safe drinking water from their Earthquake in 2010.

The workshops help to build on skill sets and improve on the expertise needed to monitoring and maintain drinking water and water treatment systems. And the workshop allowed for building on and improved networking for the water operators and water monitors. This year it is hoped that the First Nations participants, based on what they learned, will be able to write their community emergency response plans and be better prepared to deal with drinking water emergencies.

Spring Home Maintenance Schedule

- After consulting your hot water tank owner's manual, carefully test the temperature and pressure relief valve to ensure it is not stuck. Caution: This test may release hot water that can cause burns.
- Check and clean or replace furnace air filters each month during the heating season. Ventilation system, such as heat recovery ventilator, filters should be checked every two months.
- Have fireplace or wood stove and chimney cleaned and serviced as needed.
- Shut down, drain and clean furnace humidifier, and close the furnace humidifier damper on units with central air conditioning.
- Switch on power to air conditioning and check system. Have it serviced every two or three years.
- Clean or replace air-conditioning filter, if applicable.
- Check dehumidifier and drain – clean if necessary.
- Turn OFF gas furnace and fireplace pilot lights where possible.
- Have well water tested for quality. It is recommended that you test for bacteria every six months.
- Check smoke, carbon monoxide and security alarms, and replace batteries.
- Clean windows, screens and hardware, and replace storm windows with screens. Check screens first and repair or replace if needed. Open valve to outside hose connection after all danger of frost has passed.
- Examine the foundation walls for cracks, leaks or signs of moisture, and repair as required.
- Ensure sump pump is operating properly before the spring thaw sets in. Ensure discharge pipe is connected and allows water to drain away from the foundation.
- Re-level any exterior steps or decks that moved as a result of frost or settling.
- Check for and seal off any holes in exterior cladding that could be an entry point for small pests, such as bats and squirrels.
- Check eavestroughs and downspouts for loose joints and secure attachment to your home, clear any obstructions, and ensure water flows away from your foundation.
- Clear all drainage ditches and culverts of debris. Repair and paint fences as necessary – allow wood fences to dry adequately before tackling this task.
- Undertake spring landscape maintenance and, if necessary, fertilize young trees.



Photo Courtesy of CMHC.

Gathering to Prepare for Emergencies

Steps have been taken to prepare First Nations for emergencies in the Atlantic Region. The Mi'kmaq Confederacy of Prince Edward Island (MCPEI) successfully held a three day "First Nation Emergency Management Gathering" on November 28-30, 2011 at the St. Mary's First Nation Cultural Centre near Fredericton, NB. This was the 5th annual event held to date and the theme for 2011 was an "All Hazards Approach to Emergency Management". The gathering had various presentations on emergency issues and it was about First Nations learning from each other. The Gathering was very well attended with over 70 participants.

The highlights of the gathering included hearing from the First Nation communities as they presented on their best practices, innovative techniques and readiness to respond in the event of emergency. The presenters were: Steve Perley (Emergency Preparedness Coordinator, Tobique First Nation) on emergency management; Travis Dymont (Water and Waste Water Manager, Lennox Island First Nation) on water emergency response planning; and Kevin Barlow (Indian Island First Nation) on what occurred at Indian Island during the 2010 storm surge event and the impact this had on the community.

Also, Gary Sacobie (Kingsclear First Nation) spoke on lessons learned from an emergency event. Peter Stevens (Emergency Coordinator, Eskasoni First Nation) provided a First Nations perspective on the importance of an All Hazards Approach to emergency response planning. Nikki Robichaud and Lise DeGrace (Eel River Bar First Nation) provided a presentation on emergency response and the community's recovery process after a storm surge.

Mike Murray (Kildoon Management Consulting & Training) provided Incident Command System (ICS) 100 training to First Nations. The



Matilda Ramjattan, Health Emergency Management Coordinator for Mi'kmaq Confederacy of Prince Edward Island.

ICS is a standardized, on scene, all hazard incident management system that allows for an integrated organizational structure. Forty First Nations returned to their communities with a certificate in ICS 100.

MCPEI would like to acknowledge Chief Candice Paul for her welcoming remarks and warm reception to St. Mary's First Nation Community, Councillor Alan Polchies who organized the dancers, drummers and catering, and both Elders Maggie Paul and Donna Augustine for the opening and closing prayers.

Further acknowledgement is given to the planning committee: Matilda Ramjattan (MCPEI); Norah Ward-Osmond (APCFNC); Hart Perly (Tobique First Nation), Peter Stevens (Eskasoni First Nation) and Linda McCallum (Health Canada). Finally, we acknowledge the moderator of the event, Madlene Sark (Lennox Island First Nation), and all the participants that all helped make this year's Gathering a success.

Preventing Spills from Fuel Storage Tanks

Leaks from fuel storage tank systems (underground & above-ground 2500 litres) can have devastating environmental and economic impacts. Small quantities of diesel and gasoline can cause offensive odours, contaminate soils, make groundwater unsafe to drink and create explosive build-ups of vapours in basements and other underground structures.

In 2008, Environment Canada introduced the Storage Tank Systems for Petroleum Products and Allied Petroleum Products Regulations to prevent soil and groundwater contamination from storage tank systems located on federal and Aboriginal lands. Many of the requirements of these regulations are being phased in over a four-year period. On June 12, 2012, several more regulatory requirements will come into force.

By June 12, 2012, owners and operators of petroleum storage tank systems on federal and Aboriginal lands are responsible for ensuring that systems have a fuel transfer area designed to contain spills, which may require a system upgrade. Section 15 of the regulations refers to this requirement, which applies to all storage tank systems greater than 2500 litres.

Some tank installations pose a risk to the

environment and, under the regulations; they must be permanently withdrawn from service and removed by June 12, 2012.

They are as follows:

- Aboveground tanks installed underground. (section 5)
- Underground tanks installed aboveground. (section 6)
- Partially buried tanks. (section 7)
- Single-walled underground tanks that, as of June 12, 2008, lacked corrosion protection and leak detection, groundwater monitoring wells or vapour monitoring wells. (section 9)
- Single-walled underground piping that, as of June 12, 2008, lacked corrosion protection, leak detection, groundwater monitoring wells, vapour monitoring wells, single vertical check valves or mechanical line leak detection devices. (see subsection 10(2))

You can find the regulations, helpful tips and contact information at: www.ec.gc.ca/rs-st

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