

Mawlugti'gw
Gissa'se'wa'tutesnu

Ensemble, on peut
faire une différence



Together we can
make a difference

**LISTUGUJ
POINTE-À-LA-CROIX**



LISTUGUJ • POINTE-À-LA-CROIX

HARMONY TREATY

MAWO'LTIMGEWEI GISAGNUTMAGAN

TRAITÉ D'HARMONIE



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Project aimed at bringing together young people from different communities to improve and develop harmonious relationships between youth attending the Fohler School and the Alagaitu School.

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Introduction

We are very proud to present to you the results of more than four years of effort that two communities in the Gaspé region have invested in a common project. We have no interest in keeping the success of this accomplishment to ourselves; instead, we want to show you the path an Aboriginal and a non-Aboriginal community have taken together.



«Before all this happened, there were tons of fights between the Native people and Pointe-à-la-Croix, 'cause every time the weekend rolled around, there was always someone who'd get beaten, where now nobody is getting beaten any more, so everybody's doin' good.»

Hearing the young person who said this forces us to acknowledge the obvious: for more than 35 years, there have been problems between the communities of Listuguj and Pointe-à-la-Croix. It was this recurrent pattern which brought us to the decision to create an innovative and unique program. In 2002, the Coordinator of the youth centre in Pointe-à-la-Croix was overwhelmed by the racism, bullying, and delinquent behaviour of young people from both communities towards each other. In her opinion, changing these “archaic” mentalities had become a necessity; the young people of our communities had to develop a more positive outlook. Although her goal was admirable, there were bumps along the road towards accomplishing it. For one thing, not everyone appreciated her ideas, which were quite liberal for the two rural communities involved. Comments such as “You can't do anything with those Indians,” “you're dreaming in technicolour,” “it will never work,” and so on did not discourage the young, non-Aboriginal woman, however. She was determined to improve the social climate in our communities.

We would like to share with you, in this project guide, some of the highlights of the Inter-Community Harmony Project, from its earliest beginnings. As our project evolved, what turning points and hurdles did we encounter on the journey? The recommendations and conclusions arising out of this exciting adventure we've shared for more than four years have inspired us to invite you to grow together. The Listuguj / Pointe-à-la-Croix alliance is, for us, proof of the maturity and the positive initiatives we can be proud of. As we look back at the road we have already travelled, we are even more convinced of the importance continuing to build our alliances holds for the future of both of our communities.

Bonne lecture, Enjoy your reading, Welgijemg

The members of the Listuguj • Pointe-à-la-Croix Joint Committee

Please note that the use of the masculine in this document includes the feminine and is intended to make the document more readable. In addition, when talking about partners, we are referring to the partners in the two communities (of Listuguj and Pointe-à-la-Croix). When this is not the case, the relevant details are provided in the document. Most of the data contained in this mini-guide are drawn in part or in whole from the Research-Action Report on the Listuguj • Pointe-à-la-Croix Inter-Community Harmony Project, written in 2006 by Annik Chiron de La Casanière. All unreferenced English quotations were written or translated by the translator of the document.

The Context

The starting point of our project was a number of negative comments made by young people at Accès-Jeunes, the youth centre in Pointe-à-la-Croix. These comments incited the centre's Coordinator to think about relations between the communities of Pointe-à-la-Croix and Listuguj. In order to determine whether what she was hearing reflected real racism, she handed out a questionnaire to non-Aboriginal young people in classes ranging from Kindergarten to the second year of secondary school. This questionnaire made it blatantly obvious that racial prejudice existed and became more significant from Grade Five on. The questionnaire used a grid of a dozen positive and negative words; students were asked to write a word that reflected what they associated with each of the terms. The results revealed that, out of words like "beautiful," "ugly," "mean," "nice," "smells bad," "smells good," etc., students from Grade Five up wrote "Indians" beside most of the negative terms.

The study confirmed the impressions of the Coordinator and reinforced the importance of taking action to teach our young people how to overcome the racism and violence that were splitting our two communities apart. The social and economic costs of prejudice were considerable, and included the expenses of the legal system for young offenders, the deterioration of and damage to town property, and bullying among

young people. Every spring and fall, a resurgence of vandalism, robbery, and the taxing of the two communities depending on the complaints received by the town of Pointe-à-la-Croix. The rising costs were yet another confirmation of the urgent need for action, which led to the Inter-Community Harmony project.

This project was a necessity, and several indicators proved it. The next step involved finding funding sources to implement strategies to resolve the problem of violence among youth from both communities, and, in addition, to determine the extent of the problem in the Aboriginal community. There was, at this time, no concrete link between the two communities that could be used to define the prevalence and urgency of action in this area. This lack of communication pointed to the need to put more effective ways of communicating into place, in order for the communities to work together on youth issues.

A solution was found in the Community Mobilization Program, which is part of a national strategy for crime prevention, a joint project of the Department of Sécurité publique (Public Safety) of Québec and Public Safety Canada. The program is aimed at building safer environments through community partnerships, precisely what the Inter-Community Harmony project was designed to do.

When the first grant was received, in fall 2002, a steep learning curve began. Along with it was a process of learning about each other and making initial connections. Certain elements helped tame the tensions between the two communities: the fact that they shared a common history and territory, mixed or interracial families, a deeply-rooted heritage and ancient traditions, a similar life-style, shared public services, and people who could bridge the divide. These connections and similarities made it possible to establish a certain amount of political, economic and social cooperation in different areas, for instance, between police and fire services working towards common social and humanitarian causes such as the elimination of drug trafficking and environmental problems.

Naturally, several other issues separated the communities of Listuguj and Pointe-à-la-Croix: language barriers, a painful history, racism and prejudices, difference in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal rights, vested interests and "fiefdoms", the phenomenon of gangs, the economic situation and the time difference. All of these similarities and differences coloured the way the two communities learned to moved from the idea of inter-community harmony to the concrete reality of the project. We want to show you the ways these realities form an important part of the learning process.



Goals and Objectives of the Project

In the context of the funding described above, certain elements of juvenile delinquency clearly motivated us to propose solutions by means of the project. The project's goal was to bring about a transformation in attitudes and mindsets in order to reduce prejudice and racism and to help communities become safer by encouraging the two communities to know and understand each other better.

The objectives of the project focused on knowledge and understanding, and especially the recognition of our differences as contributions to the richness of our culture and communities rather than as obstacles to social and community development.

These were lofty objectives, and they had to be built on a concrete foundation if tangible results were to emerge. The first step of the project was crucial, because we needed to find a way to get all of the partners, whether they worked closely or indirectly with youth in our two communities, to come and sit together at the table. While this seemed like a simple task at the beginning, it soon became clear that, given the particular historical context of our communities, there was a certain amount of mistrust and our own prejudices, as youth workers, almost ended the project before it could begin. But the perseverance that came to characterize this project for the next four years helped us to overcome this first challenge and allowed us to create a common, safe space where we could exchange our ideas in a productive and respectful manner.

Structure of the Project

Joint committee

A joint committee was fundamental, not only to ensure consistency but also to give each community a voice. All of the decisions and activities of the Harmony Project started at committee level with this group, which consisted of youth representatives and youth workers from both Youth Centres, representatives from Sûreté du Québec and Listiguj Police Services, and representatives from both schools (primary and secondary), from both local governments, Social Services and, finally, people responsible for sports and leisure activities in the two communities. An inter-community program officer, Pierre Vicaire, who has a unique background in both cultures (his father is Mi'gmaq and his mother is a White Francophone) and speaks fluent English and French as well as Mi'kmawí'simk, was appointed as Project Coordinator and given the responsibility to coordinate all activities connected to the project, including bi-monthly meetings of the joint committee. At the beginning of the project, Pierre's work required a deft and delicate hand. There was a permanent state of tension and close-mindedness in both communities. From the time the project began, the twenty partners met every second month, and, despite the language barrier, were determined to work together on activities and project development. At every meeting, the most recent activities were evaluated, lessons learned were reviewed, new proposals were discussed, and responsibilities were clarified. This open sharing of how events were perceived by people in both communities was essential for the project to proceed smoothly and effectively.



Various activities

Phase I of the project was one of trial and errors, as we established a more clearly-developed framework for Phase II. The second year was more consistently structured around our three main objectives: first, to continue developing links among the leaders, the youth workers and the young people in both communities through sociocultural, educational, sports and other activities; second, to continue taking joint action on issues; and, lastly, to try to integrate activities into the plans and calendars of the different youth workers (Québec Culture Day on September 24, Aboriginal Day on June 21, Treaty Day on October 1st, Hallowe'en, Christmas, Valentine's Day, etc.). Activities were offered quite frequently; there was at least one activity a month and sometimes several. The activities required a considerable investment on the part of the youth workers and became part of the children's lives.

Sports offered young people a safe and peaceful activity that became essential for the program. Several times over the four years that the program operated, youth got together for different sports activities (bowling, lacrosse, basket-ball, etc.). The fun and active nature of the activities made the most of the youths' contacts with each other.

Cultural and educational activities also played an important role in the activity schedule. Aboriginal youth drew from a rich cultural heritage to share dancing, chanting, dream-catcher workshops and much more. Here, too, we focused on learning about each other in order to reduce prejudice and foster respectful contacts among the youth in the two communities.

The activities also included their share of social events, which added to the context of sharing, respect and cooperation. Basically, a multitude of opportunities for young people to be together were at the centre of the Joint Committee's work.

Special activities, such as a canoe trip down the river, were financed through fund-raising.

As well as young people from elementary and secondary school, some activities were also designed for adults from both our communities. The Joint Committee believed it was vital to raise the awareness of adults about the objectives of the Inter-community Harmony Project. Once again, enjoyment was on the menu for adult gatherings, and we had many opportunities to talk, share, and have fun together.

Finally, all the partners attended a tri-monthly meeting to review activities and plan the events calendar. There was ample room for innovations on both sides. The meetings brought out exciting ideas, enthusiastic discussion, and the commitment of the partners to grow together in a climate of mutual respect.

In the past four years, more than 120 activities were organized, reaching more than 1500 young people and 300 adults in our two communities. For the Joint Committee, the results are significant. The children who were in Grade 3 when the program started are now in Grade 6. They are more aware of the richness of both our cultures and less racist in their relationships with others. The shift in mindsets is already an accomplishment to be proud of, but it will require constant effort to ensure the philosophy of respect, sharing and mutual appreciation is sustained.



Results

In the past four years, we have been able to see a great reduction in the level of prejudice, racism, bullying and violence among the youth. Some isolated events still occur, but on the whole everyone agrees that there have been significant improvements on several levels.

For the Joint Committee, this progress is all the more gratifying because it was made together. From the earliest days of getting to know each other to the full program of activities we've organized, we have worked as a team. The partners on the Joint Committee have been unfailing in their efforts, overcoming the barriers that could have brought the project to a standstill. They have become more and more actively involved in the Harmony Project, so that now they can be more innovative in their approach. For us, this is a definite sign of success, because it means the partners believe in the project and have taken ownership of it. Attitudes of prejudice have decreased considerably and the fear of "being told what to do" by the other community is now a thing of the past. Organizing is done together, as respectful and productive allies.

We wanted to share the comments Ms. Chiron de La Casanière collected from the young people and adults involved directly or indirectly in the project; in the quotation below, they are speaking in their voice about the project:

"In this survey, there was a unanimous response: everyone asked recognized the differences in behaviour "before" the Harmony Project and "after." The term "change" appeared in 22 responses, and many respondents said they "felt" the change even more than they "knew" it, "even if it's hard to measure a change in attitude" (5, H, P). Sometimes small things that could seem insignificant were a sign of deep changes in the mindset. One example was the mother from Pointe-à-la-Croix (7, F, P) who said she now goes bike-riding with her children on the Reserve, has picnics on the church grounds or knocks on doors in Listiguj to sell tickets: "Before, we made detours, we were afraid of their dogs... That's over, now, completely over!" Another example is the woman who reported (3, F, P) that when she went out for Halloween she went on the Reserve: "It was like it was just another street in Pointe-à-la-Croix." Several people also told a cute story about a little girl from Pointe-à-la-Croix who waved to a little Aboriginal girl in a store in Campbellton. When her mother asked her why she was saying hello, the girl replied, very simply: "She's my friend." Another success story was that of the Aboriginal youth who got a job at the local Provigo supermarket; this came as a surprise, because no one expected the owner would hire Aboriginal people. In fact, none had ever applied. For the teachers and organizers, one story was an all-time favourite: a Grade 4 boy who didn't want anything to do with Aboriginal people had a complete change of heart after taking part in a dream-catcher workshop in December 2004. One parent talked about his son who now chatted with a child from the other school on his computer. Adults learned, too, as a Youth Worker from Pointe-à-la-Croix explained:

"My husband really sees things differently now. And he has lots of Native friends now. People we've been involved with indirectly all our lives, who are now in their forties and have kids the same age as ours, but that we never talked to before, and now..." (7, F, P).



Or this teacher

“In our school, we’ve seen a big change in the attitudes of students in all five grades. Once they started talking between classes, they started talking on the phone, doing things together, things they never had a chance to do before.” (6, H, L)

The young people also saw a big change

“Before ah... some of my friends didn’t approach or talk. They just were staying away from Cross Point. Now they’re like, they go to Cross Point and walk around and go there, buying some slosh or something like that. Yes, it’s a big difference. It’s because we signed the treaty. That we respect each other more, I think.” (1, JG, P)

“Well people were saying, like, oh I don’t like them, and that kind of thing, but when I saw them, I liked them!” (8, JF, P)

These words show better than any survey how the Harmony Project worked on more than a superficial level. This is a project that brings about a change in the mindset, that brings communities together, that demystifies stereotypes and prejudices. It also helps enhance the students’ pride in their identity, even in a difficult linguistic and provincial context. It is a big step forward towards harmony between two nations, a relationship that enables everyone to grow together, to be open to difference and, not insignificantly, to have fun together. This is what motivates the partners to continue interacting with each other. The way that our two communities have come together makes it possible to envisage joint economic and tourist projects and other kinds of partnerships. In fact, an Office of Inter-community Affairs has been established, based on the Harmony Project. This office will make other structured interactions between our two communities possible in the near future.

The project has also gained a provincial and national profile. It was presented as a model at the congress of the Canadian Police Association in Toronto. It was also awarded three prizes at the annual congress of the Réseau québécois Villes et Villages en santé, an organization dedicated to promoting healthy and safe communities, in September 2003, as well as the Anne Greenup award for anti-racism and anti-discrimination work in July 2005. Another proud moment was receiving the award for Community Impact from the Ministry of Health and Social Services of Québec in 2005. Recognition in the region has been remarkable: its principles are used as a reference for the ADR (Alternative Dispute Resolution) program in New Brunswick to resolve fishery conflicts. People who use the approach have found that it is as effective for prevention as for reconciliation.



Highlights and Strengths

We consider certain elements of the project essential for establishing better relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. The first is that the project stemmed from clearly-identified needs in our two communities. In addition, working with a committee that represented the full range of social sectors ensures that everyone respected the same objectives and avoided biases.

Another of the project's strong points was that it focused on realistic and simple activities that included a fun aspect in the development of healthy social and community values like the respect for differences, the reduction of prejudice, and so on. Actions were put forward, and were then analyzed and refined. Some plans were abandoned because they didn't seem to take hold in the two communities. This is where we can see the need for action to be "do-able" for the people we were trying to reach in both of our communities. Simple actions and realistic actions were another of the Harmony Project's qualities.

The project also relied on universal values like acceptance, sharing, openness, understanding and communication, common ideals that guided the members of both communities in their decision-making and actions.

Another of the strengths of the project was its approach with children. Children often don't have the same level of prejudice and fear as adults do. Their open-mindedness and curiosity can help them to integrate a mutual respect that will continue as they grow up. In addition, by taking part in activities, they can influence their parents, who may have preconceived notions and have come to expect racist treatment. When children show their parents that they can have fun together, it can be a very effective way for everyone to move forward towards greater respect.

Anchoring the project in elementary and secondary schools makes it possible to connect it to concepts being taught. For instance, as part of Treaty Day activities, children in Grades 4 and 5 learned what a treaty was and then drafted one of their own to guide their relations. The fact that young people were conscious of the need to treat each other with respect and were able to articulate how to do so could serve as an example for the adults in both communities.

Lastly, the project was both flexible and structured. The Joint Committee's discussions provided a critical but also creative assessment of the activities. Because the committee members were very much involved in the decisions, complacency and monotony never set in. Adults from very different backgrounds were able to maintain consistency in their behaviour and decisions. When a plan didn't work out, no one tried to blame anyone; instead, everyone tried to figure out what could be done better to make it work in the future. This degree of flexibility and acceptance was all the more surprising, considering that the two groups of people didn't know or speak to each other. Once again, it shows that anything is possible when people come to an agreement on basic goals and principles.

Naturally, the coordinator of the project stood out as one of its strongest assets. Because Mr. Vicaire had roots in both communities, he was able to open doors between them. He was the anchor that made it possible to maintain a space for creative and respectful exchange between our two communities. His understanding of their values inspired both groups to be more open and accepting.

Finally, we understand that the Harmony Project will need to grow and adapt in the future. Changing mindsets and prejudices requires time and continued efforts. The project has to be structured in a way that it will remain vital. Different ways of sustaining it and furthering it are being developed; for instance, it has become clear that the project could be exported to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities throughout Québec. To do so, all levels of government will have to make a commitment to pursuing this unique and innovative initiative so that other communities will live together more harmoniously.



Challenges and Weaknesses

The Harmony Project makes no claim to be perfect and continues upwards on the learning curve. Over the past four years, certain weaknesses have emerged. We need to meet these challenges in the near future.

This is especially true of the project's visibility. There are still Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in our communities who do not know what the Inter-community Harmony Project is. Despite impressive coverage in the press, there are people whom we haven't reached. We also need to be vigilant in order to avoid making this project into a "commodity"; advertising the merits of the project could lead some people to have unreasonable expectations.

Currently the project is undergoing major changes. After the first few years of refining the project, we are now a different stage, and taking calculated risks can improve and deepen the contacts between people in the two communities. For example, at the beginning of the project a major effort was required simply to get the young people to sit in the same bus; when they finally did so, they didn't talk to each other. Now it is important to increase their opportunities for positive interactions. Certainly, it is hard to overcome the language barrier, but learning another language can be very valuable if we think in terms of the broader educational objectives of the project.

Another weakness we have noted relates to the cultural exchanges. More often than not, it is the Aboriginal youth who showcase their cultural specificity in traditional dance, drumming, dream-catchers, etc. For the non-Aboriginal youth, it seems to be more difficult to share specific aspects of their culture, as if they don't know enough about their own culture to be able to share it. This is a question that the Joint Committee will try to answer over the next few months.

Naturally, adults were not called upon to take part in fun activities as often as young people. The project was geared to the youth, but we have come to realize that there is still a lot of prejudice to overcome among the adults. Efforts should be made to deal with these problems, even if adults tend to hesitate to take part. The painful history between the two peoples has left deep wounds. It is important not to hide or ignore this part of our common history, but rather use it to help our young people understand the need for the Harmony Project. We cannot change the past, but we can improve our relationships now and in the future.

Another weak point was perceived throughout the research-action plan, especially with the youth participants: there was a total lack of information and understanding of the phenomenon of racism in society. When we asked young people why there was so much violence, the answers were always the same: "I don't know, that's just the way it is" or "It's always been like that, there's nothing we can do to change it." An educational component needs to be added to the program so that young people can think more critically about their observations and their own actions.

Certain research studies seem to suggest that the more interactions there are between two groups of people, the more arguments there will be. These results are hard to measure, but it is obvious that this kind of risk is an integral part of our activities and, in the end, the positive outweighs the negative.

Finally, we noticed that some people believe that the project had a political agenda and that certain people involved were profiting from it. This false perception demands that we respond by making the action of the Joint Committee more transparent. In fact, the Joint Committee has always intended to work on prejudices rather than on political capital. We will have to see how we can demonstrate and share the Joint Committee's vision more effectively with the wider community. In addition, the way the project is funded has never been clearly described to the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. Doing so will help demystify the goals of the project, while at the same time overcoming the prejudices of adults in both communities who will see that the biases and misinterpretations have no rational basis to exist.



Conclusion

Since 2006, we have reworked several elements of our research-action project to improve the relations between our two communities. We feel it is important to add this section in order to share our accomplishments over the last four years.

Inter-Community Harmony Project

The 2006-2010 Phase

Naturally, funding remains the major problem facing the project and jeopardizing its continuation. A great deal of energy is dedicated every year to fund-raising and grant-writing, and this takes our focus away from our activities. The executive of the Joint Committee is intent on finding three-year funding in order to free us from the annual burden and to enable us to build more solid inter-community links. After suspending our activities for nearly a year, we managed to obtain ongoing funding for three years from the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, Mr. Normandeau's office and the communities of Listuguj • Pointe-à-la-Croix. With this investment of \$60,000 per year into our activities, we can now move forward and carry out our projects to improve the relations between our communities on an ongoing basis.

In order to maximize our investments, the municipality of Pointe-à-la-Croix decided to cover a portion of a salary for a facilitator to work in Pointe-à-la-Croix with responsibilities connected with those of the Intercommunity Relations Officer, Mr. Pierre Vicaire. The Band Council also invested twenty hours of salary to enable Mr. Vicaire's continued employment in their community. This meant that, starting in March 2009, two people were able to work in a 50-50 ratio in each community. We certainly have a lot to be proud of when we see our inter-community relations make it possible for a broader range of activities to be offered to a wider population.

First of all, our experiences showed us that after an initial familiarization phase it is essential to deepen the participants' contacts with each other. Thus, young people were encouraged to formulate questions that were exchanged with their peers in the other community. This exchange helped them to get to know each other better. Young people continue to be very involved in the project development, but now the relationships are becoming fuller and richer.



New target groups have been added to the project. For example, the Symposium Arts et Cultures attracts adult craftspeople from both communities. As well as finding out about the Harmony project, they have enjoyed learning more about the diversity of approaches to the arts and fine crafts.

Two more schools, in Escuminac and Matapédia, have joined the elementary and secondary level participants. The students get involved on trips and visits, but also through correspondence before the group visits take place. This is another way to deepen our mutual understanding. In addition, some of the young Aboriginal participants are working on a video entitled “Sowing Seeds of Harmony,” which will help equip communities with a toolbox of suggestions to improve intercultural relation. In fact, people in the Sept-Îles area have already approached the Joint Committee for help with their two communities.

We have also discussed the problem of the lack of cultural awareness among non-Aboriginal participants. This gap is being filled through the preparations being made to commemorate the 1760 Battle of Restigouche. The young people from the Aboriginal community pointed out that Mi’kmaq culture was not being represented in the activities being planned. The young people created a model to show how the First Nations were involved in this historical event.



There are also plans to produce a book on the Inter-Community Harmony project. The book would show everything that the project has accomplished since 2001. If this dream becomes a reality, the book would likely be published in 2012, when we would be able to talk about a 10-year-long project. Who could have imagined that this little idea designed to help deal with local incidents of racism and bullying among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth, would become such a high-profile project of national and even international scope?

The project gave the members of our communities the tools they needed to understand the importance of talking and working together for the benefit of all. The future looks very promising. Young people are much more accustomed to spending time and having fun together. Prejudice still exists, but it is a much less serious problem than it once was. The problems of vandalism and one community's raids on the other have also decreased. Political figures and authorities show more openness and awareness of the importance of maintaining good relations today. All these successes prove that we have been able and will continue to be able to sow the seeds of harmony and well-being in our corner of the world. The rural context will, in the near future, set an example for other communities that are dealing with racial and cultural tensions of all sorts. We have succeeded, and others, too, will be able to succeed. By learning and practising respect and acceptance, we discovered the rich diversity that colours our experiences in a creative and fascinating multiplicity of ways. It's up to us to continue leading the way, by sharing the tools we have invented and the rewards and recognition we have enjoyed throughout the years of the Inter-Community Harmony project's existence.



Lists of partners

Municipality of Pointe-à-la-Croix

Listuguj First Nation Band Council

Pointe-à-la-Croix Youth Center

Listuguj Youth Center

École Père-Pacifique de Pointe-à-la-Croix

Alaqsite'w Gitpu School of Listuguj

The Sûreté du Québec

The Listuguj Police Department

The CLSC of Pointe-à-la-Croix

Health and Social Services of Listuguj

Matapédia École des Deux-Rivières



Québec 

