



# Community Champions

## Working for the Public Good

by Pam Lutz and Kevin Little

The Public Good Society was formed in Dartmouth about four years ago. It aims to bridge the gap between low-income families and individuals and some of the local services available to help them improve their lives. The society's founding members were business leaders, Community Health Board staff, educators, politicians, Community Services staff and HRM policy analysts. Although food banks, employment support networks and life skills training were available, the people who could benefit the most from these agencies did not know about them or didn't know how to go about getting assistance from them.

A federal grant initially allowed the society to pay people to steer those who required assistance to the appropriate agencies. Then the provincial government supplied a grant for the hiring of a "facilitator-connector."

This facilitator is Kevin Little. Kevin works with people using downtown Dartmouth food banks



or meal programs such as Feeding Others of Dartmouth. He has been effective in helping displaced people find work and giving people with mental health issues the confidence they need, through training, to be integrated into the workforce. Kevin meets people on their own turf and "connects" them with the service providers they require. His client base comes from Margaret House and five food banks in Dartmouth.

Kevin's professional background includes 18 years in the church ministry where he volunteered at street shelters for homeless men in Ottawa, Toronto and Halifax. He worked at the Brunswick Street Mission in Halifax for two months on a part-time basis. When the Public Good Society was scouting for a facilitator, the Mission gave them Kevin's name.

Four days a week, Kevin meets with people

who enjoy being with someone who will listen—people with stories to tell. He has met people who have lost their jobs through layoffs or downsizing, and who have had to resort to food banks, losing their self confidence over time. Kevin has brought many people to the Employment Centre at the Wyse Road Plaza, where they can talk to a counselor, update their resumes and, hopefully, get a job placement.

In other instances, his client may suffer from mental illness. Kevin has introduced some of his clients to Lake City Woodworkers, where they can develop skills that can integrate them back into paying jobs.

**Holy Flea Market Batgirl!** Doris MacKaracher is getting ready for the flea market at Holy Trinity Emmanuel Church coming up on November 1st.

He also brings clients to the Dartmouth Work Activity Centre. If they've been out of work for a long stretch, the centre has a program that teaches life skills and helps prepare clients for re-entry into the workforce.

Some clients with mental health issues can benefit from social activities. A senior or young person may take advantage of the programs offered at New Beginnings on Portland Street.

On the day I spoke with Kevin, he had just introduced a person to the Dartmouth Work Activity Centre. That client has been without work since 2002. He is now optimistic about the future. Kevin says,

"That was emotional for me. I can help people navigate from a negative or hopeless position to a position of hope."

Kevin grew up in a middle-class neighbour-

hood in Halifax but he was surrounded by poverty. He realized early on that some people, through no fault of their own, fell through the cracks in society and needed help to survive. In university he decided his calling was the social ministry. He particularly enjoyed pastoral visits, getting to know people in their own living rooms and kitchens and getting involved in the community. He graduated from the Atlantic School of Theology, married an Anglican minister and they have one daughter.

The Public Good Society has long term objectives to strengthen or improve the services for people living in difficult circumstances. Kevin would like to hear your story and help you get back on track with your life. If you know of anyone who could benefit from talking with Kevin, please call 476-0785.



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