



Leading Communities BC Successful in Gold River and Tsaxana

By Bill Metcalfe

Interactivity was one key to the success of the *Leading Communities BC* program in Gold River in the spring and summer of 2007. Twenty-one participants from the adjoining communities of Gold River and Tsaxana didn't have to sit through lectures for very long during their 70-hour, five-weekend leadership skills course. They were too busy discussing, playing, collaborating, problem-solving, brainstorming, drawing maps, planning projects, and pushing their own boundaries.

The result? Participants excitedly reported increased knowledge, personal growth, and bonding between the two communities.

"I learned to be patient, to be a better listener, and not jump to conclusions when someone says something," said Arnold James, a Chief of the Mowachaht-Muchalaht First Nation. "I really enjoyed it, and I got to meet people I never knew before."

Dawn Dakin, a Gold River resident who teaches pre-school for the Mowachaht-Muchalaht First Nation at Tsaxana, spoke enthusiastically of the workshops. "It was a growing experience, and an eye-opener. I got a chance to really look at my strengths and weaknesses in leadership. And I got a lot of knowledge about different ways to be a leader."

A third participant, a resident of Gold River, put it more simply: "It was freaking awesome!"

Leading Communities BC is an action-oriented community leadership training program which works with emerging, potential and experienced leaders in rural communities to develop and enhance their leadership skills for collaborative community action. The program is developed and delivered by the Centre for Innovative and Entrepreneurial Leadership (CIEL), based in Nelson, B.C.

Those skills include such things as effective communication, youth engagement and leadership, team learning, dealing with conflict, building and sustaining community collaboration, facilitating effective meetings, community development models, building an entrepreneurial community attitude, leading innovation and change, and working with different personality types.

In addition to "in class" learning, the group was given the task of coming up with a collaborative community project, and implementing it.

"Research undertaken by CIEL indicates that leadership training for rural communities needs to focus not on traditional individual leadership," said CIEL Executive Director Mike Stolte, "but on the skills required to bring people together across differences."

The Leading Communities B.C. curriculum was designed accordingly.

"It was designed to be participatory, with collaborative learning," says Stacy Barter, CIEL's Director of Education and Program Development, who designed the curriculum and helped to deliver it. "It is both experiential and practical. We wanted a diverse group of people to be given an opportunity to learn together, and also to develop new relationships in the community. And we wanted it to be fun."



Diversity was built in to the group. CIEL carefully selected group members from a large number of applicants, taking care to create a mix of age, gender, culture, interests, socio-economic background, and experience. Four of the participants were under twenty-five.

"I really enjoyed having the youth there," said James. "I found that they had a lot of knowledge. They know what's going on in the world, but nobody listens to them."

The relationship between Gold River and Tsaxana was an underlying theme throughout the sessions.

"This group gave people from both communities an opportunity to understand each other as individuals," said Dakin. "It was an opportunity to set aside assumptions. We were able to relate openly and honestly, and that was because the facilitators made it safe to do that."

The Mowachaht-Muchalaht Band Council and the Gold River Municipal Council had their first-ever joint meeting shortly after the *Leading Communities* sessions.

As for collaboration, the group worked actively together in a variety of ways.

In a session on "Innovative and Entrepreneurial Communities", participants were challenged in a game to come up with new ways of thinking about a seemingly unsolvable problem or unfeasible challenge. They were then able to draw on this experience to examine how they might promote this attitude of innovation in their community.

In a community mapping exercise, participants mapped out assets and strengths in their community, focusing on what makes their community unique, and turned this into large wall sized visuals.

Later, they used this information as a resource in developing their collaborative community project idea: a community celebration to link the First Nations and non-First Nations communities in the area.

Leading Communities B.C. was also delivered in Dawson Creek, BC and Golden, BC in 2007 and 2008.