

## **Reaching out Two Villages set to go province-wide**

Laura Button

Two Villages is about to get bigger. Troy Mitchell and Krista Percy are partnering with Clarenville High to promote their international agenda: helping a village a world away.

"It's not about the money - it's about global citizenship," says Mitchell. He and Percy began fundraising for projects in third world countries two years ago with a lot of help from Clarenville-area schools and businesses. The Two Villages project has partnered with larger not-for-profit organizations to get their funds overseas - first to a school in Nepal, then to Zambia towns.

Mitchell and Percy welcomed the executive director of USC Canada (formerly the Unitarian Service Committee of Canada) to Clarenville last week to launch their next project: raising funds to build a seed bank in Northern Ethiopia.

Susan Walsh has been in the business of international development for more than 20 years, but she says this kind of partnership and initiative is unique.

"It takes Newfoundland to lead the way," she says. "It's like a re-birth of that kind of activism. I feel like there's new momentum and I'm very excited about it."

That activism is simple stuff: students giving up their lunch money in exchange for a bowl of plain rice. These small projects mean the world to people a world away.

Walsh says the energy of students revitalizes the USC. Some of the members still serving have been there since it all began some 63 years ago.

Having already conquered the Burin Peninsula, Two Villages is taking their message further afield. That's where Ian Davidson, assistant principal of Clarenville High, comes in. He will network with other schools in Newfoundland and Labrador to make Two Villages a provincial affair. No small feat, but he is up to the challenge.

"There's this marvelous technology, and it's not Facebook..." jokes Davidson. It's Rafiki, an online technology that links schools all over the globe.

This year, Two Villages is focusing on student leadership. Davidson hopes to find two student ambassadors from each school to launch fundraising projects for the Ethiopian seed bank. He says it's a win-win situation: students will become more internationally-minded while building their resume and helping overseas.

Walsh echoes that sentiment.

"It's as much about a movement around food sources and how our world works as it is just about keeping people fed (and that's a big 'just.')

The seed bank will be a simple affair: adobe walls with a basic cooling system. Low-cost, made from local materials. Though a world away, the technology is not so far off. Walsh explains, "kind of like a root cellar idea."

The seed bank will give Ethiopian families an extra layer of protection against anything that may threaten their annual crop. Once they eat, sell, and store their harvest, they'll squirrel seeds away in the event of locusts or drought.

"Like a security-deposit box," says Walsh. "Unless they saved those seeds, they were going to lose their capacity for a future."

"Our world is not that big that what goes around is not going to come around," says Davidson. He didn't hesitate to get onboard when Mitchell came to him with the Two Villages idea.

"It just felt right. I can't describe it other than that. It's something I didn't even have to think about."

Davidson hopes other schools will be as ready to take on Two Villages. Mitchell is sure they will.

"We're not going to take over the world yet... but someday."

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