



ARDN Staff

Dee Ann Benard, Executive Director
Roch Labelle, ARLO/ODAR Project Manager (since April 2016)
Joshua Bénard, SHI Project Manager (since June 2016)
Sandra Di Cesare, Finance Manager (since February 2016)
Chelaine Winter, Program Director (until February 2016)
Kyle Miller, Project Manager (until January 2016)
Monica Fadul, Administrative Assistant (until December 2015)

ARDN Board of Directors

Chair: Trent Keough, Portage College
Vice Chair: Dietmar Kennepohl, Athabasca University
Treasurer: Robert Woodrow, University of Calgary
Director: Erasmus Okine, University of Lethbridge
Director: Susan Bansgrove, Grande Prairie Regional College
Director: Ann Everatt, Northern Lakes College
Director: Sandy Vanderburg, Lethbridge College (until Nov. 2015)

Our Members

Athabasca University
Grande Prairie Regional College
Keyano College
Lethbridge College
Medicine Hat College
Northern Lakes College
Portage College
University of Calgary
University of Lethbridge

THE ALBERTA RURAL DEVELOPMENT NETWORK represents nine Alberta public post-secondary institutions.

Our Mandate is to use the combined expertise of our members to support rural development and help rural communities grow through research and learning.

Our Mission is to create a model of rural community development through collaboration.

Our Vision is a strong sustainable network that is the leading source of trusted rural development projects and information.

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2015 - 2016 ANNUAL REPORT



CHAIR'S MESSAGE

The past year was a turning point for ARDN. We began to emerge from acute financial uncertainty into a promised land; after years of failed financial commitment, we are finally respected for our work and given support by our government. We are excited to be participants in Premier Notley's strategy to improve the lives of vulnerable Albertans. We make a difference!

Our continued engagement would have been impossible without the consistency of effort and dedication of ARDN's Executive Director Dee Ann Benard. Dee Ann proved how flexible and adaptable she and the ARDN could be in very trying financial times. Fortunately, a motivated core of charter members stepped forward to own an ever-evolving ARDN. Not only did ARDN's focus get refined, it also lost its offices in a cost-cutting strategy! No office? Reach out to ARDN's partners. The AFC came through with free office space for a full year. Failing finances also dictated losing all our staff and reducing our Executive Director's salary. No staff, with a demoralized leader, perhaps? Still inspired by what we do, Dee Ann attracted no less than three working volunteers. One of them dedicated nine months to bringing the Sustainable Housing Initiative to fruition. For their efforts, they received no pay, only our sincere thanks. Why did we make it, maintain solvency, and demonstrate success? Because of the credibility and respect Dee Ann and the ARDN have gained over time, the continued commitment of our members, and the passion shared by many to keep a focus on 'vulnerable' populations alive and thriving.

ARDN began with a commitment by all Alberta public post-secondary institutions to work together to serve rural communities in innovative ways. The mandate was broad at first; now we lead in efforts to address rural homelessness. As our credibility grows, there will be more funding as success brings opportunity. Now ARDN can look back to its roots and forward from its present to join urban and rural more intimately. A growing challenge is the vulnerability of our students, 20% of whom deal with anxiety, a learning disability, or mental illness. Are we only addressing the ugly symptoms of this when acknowledging the preponderance of campus sexual harassment, violence, physical illness, and increasing drop-out rates? Maybe we can utilize ARDN to create an Alberta innovation to revolutionizes services to vulnerable students!

ARDN may be best positioned to facilitate systemic solutions aiding this vulnerable student population. We have mastered the art of partnership in applying research to practical problems. Whether ARDN will add a new social policy direction and seek to address the needs of vulnerable students will be on the agenda at our next AGM and board retreat. I am convinced that ARDN has the professionalism, sensitivity and compassion to lead the way.

Dr. Trent Keough



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

What a difference a year makes. While last fiscal year saw a dramatic decline in ARDN resources and therefore output, this fiscal year has been one of renewal. New project funding materialized and resulted in some new hires. We ended the 2015 – 2016 year with three new staff members: Roch Labelle, project manager; Sandra Di Cesare, part-time finance manager; and Joshua Bénard, project manager. We were sorry to say goodbye to Kyle Miller and Chelaine Winter. ARDN also "officially" moved our offices in with the Agriculture and Food Council, ending our forced experiment with virtual offices, while creating new and exciting opportunities for collaboration. The hiring of Roch Labelle meant our Rural and Remote Access to Justice project finally has a bilingual project manager. Rural homelessness is finally getting its due, and 2016 saw new funding agreements that will kick in for the next fiscal year.

I am very enthusiastic about the new initiatives ARDN has gotten off the ground: the Sustainable Housing Initiative (SHI), started through Josh's efforts on a volunteer basis, now has funding and five communities working to make affordable housing a reality. With funding and work in place, hiring my nephew was an interesting exercise in how to deal with a conflict of interest in the workplace, but thanks to the guidance of ARDN board chair Trent Keough, we are confident that excellent controls are in place.

In an exciting development, we found a way to combine last year's Municipal Sustainability Project with the Glenwood and District Economic Development Society with Medicine Hat College's (MHC) excellent 2014 Small Business Training Pilot Project. An MHC business student was placed with the Village of Glenwood and a comprehensive community marketing plan was born.

As well, ARDN is back in research mode, as we worked with the University of Lethbridge to find funding for a new project to treat gambling addictions in rural Alberta, which will launch in fall 2016; and we are working with a researcher at the University of Calgary to make sure our SHI shipping container houses can be net zero (or almost so). We are also making good on a commitment we made in 2014 - we have begun working with our four northern Alberta College members and Women Building Futures to bring that concept to northern Alberta.

Despite the gloom of last year, we were, indeed, well positioned for the future. The hard work and commitment of ARDN's board and staff are paying off. I am so grateful we chose to remain optimistic.

Dee Ann Benard



Sustainable Housing Initiative

Rental accommodations are hard to come by in rural Alberta. Affordable rental accommodations are even more rare. Without housing for low-income people, communities cannot attract new residents, especially for lower paying retail and tourism jobs. Without these types of workers, rural communities quickly stagnate, unable to grow and prosper. Without services and housing for the homeless and those at risk of becoming homeless, communities may send their vulnerable citizens to larger centres, where their problems can quickly escalate.

After being contacted by more than 40 rural communities regarding their need for affordable housing, ARDN created the Sustainable Housing Initiative (SHI) in 2015 to help communities find and implement innovative solutions for creating sustainably built, affordable housing for rural-based, marginalized Albertans. ARDN helps rural communities and organizations by:

- Providing information about options and opportunities to create sustainably built affordable housing
- Acting as the liaison between designers, architects, engineers, local planning departments, communities, and organizations
- Assisting with project management to ensure a seamless construction process
- Ensuring all projects have a comprehensive long-term management plan

In fall 2015, ARDN helped 17 communities apply for Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) funding; five of them received a total of \$45,000. In spring 2016, ARDN received \$25,000 from the Alberta Real Estate Foundation to work on creating a sustainable model for building and managing cost-effective, innovative, attractive, and durable affordable housing in rural Alberta communities.

As a result, several rural Albertan communities are conducting affordable housing needs assessments and feasibility studies economically and collaboratively. Ultimately, this will create cost-effective, innovative, sustainable, and affordable housing developments.

There continues to be a great deal of interest from new communities and continued support and engagement from funders. Since starting off as a volunteer run project, the SHI has grown rapidly. After securing significant resources and creating a clear set of goals and objectives, our volunteer could become a dedicated, full-time paid staff member, meaning this project has the opportunity to redefine how affordable housing is built in rural communities.

Joshua Bénard

Funded by a grant from the Alberta Real Estate Foundation



Rural and Regional Access to Justice

The “greying of the legal community” in rural Alberta has been observed and quantified by recent studies. Worse yet, small communities have lost their lawyers over the past year and other communities are only a few years away from seeing whole cohorts of lawyers retire. Now in its second year of operation, the ARDN’s Rural and Regional Access to Justice (RRAJ) project coordinates the placement of law students, articling students, and recent law graduates in rural Alberta communities and regional centres.

The RRAJ has been branded with an easier to remember name: ARLO (Alberta Rural Law Opportunities) and ODAR (Occasions en droit dans l’Alberta rural). This project is funded by Justice Canada and the Government of Alberta’s Francophone Secretariat and also works to match French-speaking law students with rural Alberta law firms that offer legal services in French. ARLO’s main virtual platform is its new website: www.rurallaw.ca / www.droitrural.ca along with Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. For the latter, an ARLO Group has been created where an ever-increasing number of rural law stakeholders are congregating to form the hub of an ecosystem of everything that is related to the practice of law in rural Alberta.

ARLO has been working closely with the Faculties of Law at the Universities of Calgary and Alberta to raise the profile and awareness of opportunities to practice law outside of Edmonton and Calgary. Kyle Miller and Dee Ann Benard respectively participated as panelists at the UofC’s Window to Small Firm Life event and the UofA’s Opportunities Outside Edmonton & Calgary event. ARLO also coordinated Outreach Tours of law firms in Red Deer, Medicine Hat, and Lethbridge, where we met with several law firms to assess their needs and encourage them to hire summer law students and articling students.

The economic downturn has led many rural law firms to reconsider the hiring of summer students and articling students, so ARLO has been encouraging law firms to offer job shadowing opportunities. Two law firms in St. Paul piloted the concept with great success and rave reviews from both students and lawyers. Many firms are signing up to post job-shadowing opportunities through the ARLO website, since it allows them to connect with law students at no cost. The benefit for a law firm is they get to know the students better on a personal level, which may lead them to offer a summer or article position. As for the students, they have unique opportunities to shadow with lawyers in various law firms to get a better feel for the practice of law in a small community before making a commitment to “go rural”.

Roch Labelle

Funded by Justice Canada and the Government of Alberta’s Francophone Secretariat



Rural and Remote Homelessness (HPS) Program

With the worst economic downturn in years hitting Alberta, the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) Rural & Remote Homelessness funding program has become more necessary than ever in its third year. Several project sites have reported increased use of their services and have struggled to keep up. Despite this strain, the community projects are working hard to provide essential services.

Several projects have reported substantial, sustainable progress. In Rocky Mountain House, as part of the Mountain Rose Women’s Shelter Association’s project, the Housing Steering Committee created to look at affordable housing will be turned into a foundation to ensure long-term development and planning of affordable housing. Other projects report that their support workers, hired using HPS funding, have become the go-to source for connecting people with local housing, income supports, rent assistance, educational and employment opportunities, and more.

Despite these successes, not everything has gone according to plan. Due to capacity issues, the Boys and Girls Club of Cochrane was no longer able to continue their project. Thankfully, the Town of Cochrane FCSS stepped up and took the reins. A knowledge transfer occurred and the town is continuing the project. This versatility indicates that while capacity and resource allocation remains an issue in rural areas of the province, there are committed groups of people dedicated to change, and the ARDN remains dedicated to helping them succeed in any way possible.

In another example of our community partners going above the call of duty, one of our HPS-funded groups, the Drayton Valley FCSS, was involved heavily in responding to the Fort McMurray wildfires, coordinating with local and provincial emergency response teams to help more than 300 evacuees. At ARDN, we responded to the wildfire crisis by presenting a proposal to the Government of Alberta’s Human Services ministry to fund three projects targeted specifically at preventing or relieving homelessness in rural areas of northern Alberta affected by the fires.

Following an announcement by the federal government in February, ARDN learned that funding for rural and remote homelessness will double in the coming year. We are excited by and optimistic about the prospect of new investments in rural and remote homelessness by both the federal and provincial governments.

Finally, due to the relationships we have built, several of our HPS-funded organizations are now working with our Sustainable Housing Initiative to address the lack of affordable housing in their communities, a major factor leading to homelessness.

Jonn Kmech

Funded by the Government of Canada’s Homelessness Partnering Strategy



Other ARDN Projects

Municipal Sustainability (Helping Small Communities Grow and Thrive)

Small rural communities want and need to attract new residents and businesses, but may lack the resources to develop a strong plan to do so. To address this, ARDN and Medicine Hat College embarked on a pilot project with the Village of Glenwood and Area Economic Development Society to help them develop a comprehensive marketing plan for their community. If successful, this exciting initiative will provide a blueprint to help other communities.

Workforce Development (Bringing Women Building Futures to Northern Alberta)

ARDN is finally bringing to fruition a goal set in 2014 – to find a way to bring the Women Building Futures concept to northern Alberta. Working with our four northern Alberta college partners, we have started on a path to make this idea a reality.

Vulnerable Populations (Treating Gambling Addiction in Rural Alberta)

Addiction is an important societal issue that may be even more prevalent in rural Alberta than it is in the cities. ARDN is working with the University of Lethbridge to conduct research into finding new, innovative, cost-effective and more successful ways to treat gambling addictions in rural Alberta.

Transportation (Addressing the Rural Transportation Issue)

A lack of transportation options is one of the most ubiquitous issues facing rural Alberta and a key limiting factor for growth. ARDN continues to work with the Association of Life-wide Living of Alberta (ALL) to tackle the transportation issues faced by rural Albertans who do not or cannot drive. ARDN participated in the 2016 Rural Transportation Information Day held by ALL, and is now part of the Rural Transit Next Chapter Team.

Funding for ARDN provided by:

