# Alberta Rural Development Network

## ARDN

### ARDN Staff
Dee Ann Benard, Executive Director
Roch Labelle, ARLO/ODAR Project Manager
Joshua Bénard, SHI Project Manager
Sandra Di Cesare, Finance Manager
Jonn Kmech, HPS Program Manager (since July 2016)
Zain Abedin, Research & Strategy Manager (since December 2016)

### 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

### 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.
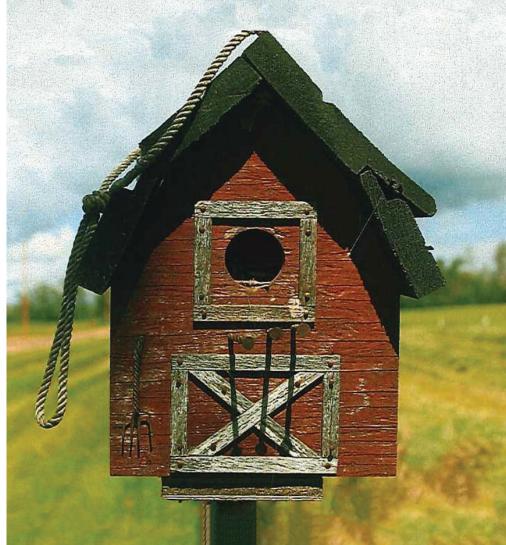Our Mission is to create a model of rural community development through collaboration.
Our Vision is a strong sustainable network that is the leading source of trusted rural development projects and information.

## Alberta Rural Development Network ARDN

# 2016 - 2017 Annual Report

## Chair's Message

What a year it's been! Like rain on seeds in parched earth, ARDN is blooming again! ARDN is flourishing because its many projects have created new opportunities for our rural communities. Many thanks to the many committed supporters of ARDN; our current success is because of you.

Executive Director Dee Ann Benard's persistent knocking on doors was heard. ARDN's reputation for managing rural projects was recognized by many. ARDN's Board thanks Dee Ann for persevering and holding true to ARDN's spirit. Gratefully, the Board saw the new role and need for ARDN.

The Sustainable Housing Initiative (SHI), now our pillar project, gained traction after receiving funding, which enabled ARDN to hire a project manager. Joshua Benard spent nine months as a passionate volunteer, and is moving full speed ahead on an ever-growing number of affordable housing projects.

This past year also saw an expansion of the Rural Access to Justice initiative. New funding created the Justice Bus, which provides job shadowing opportunities for law students, and legal information and advice in rural communities from lawyers and law students.

Despite our success, the future may identify other needs and present new opportunities. We must be ready for this transition as we have been in the past if we are to remain a viable and reliable organization. ARDN is a shape-shifter that has evolved to meet changing needs since it began in 2009. ARDN continues to adapt and succeed because of its people and the passion it inspires in others.

I applaud the individuals and post-secondary institutions who had the vision to start this organization, and am respectful and thankful for those who remain involved and supportive; in particular, charter board members Robert Woodrow of University of Calgary and Dietmar Kennepohl of Athabasca University, who have lent their expertise and talents to championing and empowering rural Alberta.

ARDN is undertaking socially meaningful work that is positively impacting the lives of rural Albertans. Together with our institutions and partners—both urban and rural—we are bridging the rural-urban divide and strengthening Alberta's rural heartland.

Dr. Trent Keough, Board Chair

## Executive Director's Message

While 2015-2016 was a year of renewal for ARDN, progress was the order of the day for 2016-2017. ARDN built on the foundations that were started, welcomed new staff, prepared to move offices, found new funding, and formed exciting new partnerships that have charted a new course for the organisation. We are on a new and exhilarating path, full of challenges and opportunities.

One of the key ways ARDN seizes opportunities is by identifying gaps, then determining what role is needed and how the ARDN can help. This means that, depending in the project, ARDN assumes a different role. We are leaders, as with the Sustainable Housing Initiative, which started as a volunteer's vision. We are administrators, as we manage Alberta's rural and remote homelessness funding for the federal government. We are publishers, when we wrote the first-ever rural homelessness estimation guide. We are researchers, helping find ways to treat gambling addictions in rural communities. We are champions, piloting the Justice Bus that brings legal information and advice to rural communities while providing job-shadowing opportunities for law students. But most of all, we are innovators and groundbreakers, because much of what we do has not been done before.

I am proud to be working with such a fine and dedicated group of board members, staff, and partners. The ARDN board is wise and experienced, the staff is energetic and enthusiastic, and our partners are supportive and engaged. I am excited by the process of identifying critical gaps in rural development, and working to fill them.

ARDN has taken on many new projects which will provide meaningful benefits to rural Alberta. I am thrilled by the response we are receiving from those living and working in our rural communities. We all share a deep passion for seeing rural Alberta thrive and succeed. By working together, we increase the likelihood that we will all prosper.

ARDN's success is rural Alberta's success. With the unwavering support of our board, members, staff, and partners, ARDN is ready for the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. There will undoubtedly be ups and downs, false starts, and breakaways. But as ARDN finds its groove, I look forward to an even more rewarding future.

Dee Ann Benard, Executive Director

## Sustainable Housing Initiative

The ARDN continues to collaborate with municipalities, other not-for-profits, as well as academic and industry partners to develop a multi-stakeholder strategy to create more emergency, transitional, and affordable housing. This is all in service to the goal of promoting new partnerships across Canada, leveraging existing resources, and allowing communities to address a growing problem instead of downloading it to the urban centres.

This project will help communities build different types of affordable housing. The keys to accomplishing this are both building capacity by facilitating access to information and resources; and getting greater value for services by having communities work together on shared aspects of their projects.

We are currently working on securing funding and agreements for a minimum of eight initial projects across the province. The ARDN will work with each stakeholder to implement this framework, monitor progress, assist with challenges, collect data, and report on outcomes. The ultimate outcome of this project will create and test a sustainable model for building and operating affordable housing that does not rely on long-term government support. The model from these demonstration projects will then act as a framework that will be the basis for a step-by-step 'tool kit', created by the ARDN, for building, managing, and operating emergency, transitional, and affordable housing projects that will be available to organizations and municipalities across Canada.

Each project will:
· Support and serve mixed groups that are in any stage of the housing continuum
· Reduce operational costs by making buildings net-zero
· Reduce operational costs by promoting healthy living through healthy building design utilizing a research-based approach incorporating the principles of psychology of aesthetics
· Up to 18% reduction in construction costs for eight communities
· Up to 12% reduction in construction costs for future communities that adopt best practices from the tool kit

The project framework will include templates for creating and conducting an analysis of need and demand to identify the need for affordable housing in the community, an analysis of financial viability, a business plan, and a generic schematic design for building modular-style buildings that could be easily adapted for completing a proforma and permitting. If all goes as planned, this project has the potential to be a game changer for building affordable housing right across the country.

Joshua Bénard

## Rural and Regional Access to Justice

This year saw the development of a new pilot project that strengthens the overall initiative now commonly known as ARLO (Alberta Rural Law Opportunities) / ODAR (*Occasions en droit dans l'Alberta rurale*). Last year, we had floated the concept of job shadowing with many rural law firms across the province as a bridge for students to secure summer and articling positions in rural Alberta. Inspired by California's Justice Bus initiative, we have developed two streams of a Rural Alberta Justice Bus that will roll out in the summer of 2017.

The first stream is a Job Shadowing Justice Bus that will travel to two communities. Law students will be transported to and from the towns of Brooks and St. Paul, where they will be dropped off at participating law firms to spend a full day shadowing a lawyer in a rural law firm. These tours will be sponsored by the University of Calgary & University of Alberta Faculties of Law. The Canadian Bar Association – Alberta Branch will sponsor a networking luncheon for all participating law students and lawyers.

The second stream is a Legal Information and Summary Legal Advice Justice Bus pilot project for which we have just obtained funding from Justice Canada under the *Roadmap for Canada's Official Languages 2013-2018: Education, Immigration, Communities*. Therefore, these tours will be conducted in French as we work to secure funding to extend this project to Indigenous communities and the province at-large. In this stream, law students and a lawyer will travel to over half a dozen rural communities that have a sizable French-speaking population to offer a legal information presentation after which the lawyer will offer private consultations. Law students will be actively involved in the presentation, but will be observers of the private consultations. Hence, this experiential learning activity is a complement to a law student's education and exposes them the wealth of legal career opportunities that exist in rural Alberta.

This year, ARLO has been a panelist, speaker, and exhibitor at a pair of events at both the University of Calgary & University of Alberta Faculties of Law. ARLO has also coordinated outreach tours of law firms in St. Paul, Red Deer, Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, Okotoks, Nanton, Claresholm, and Pincher Creek, where we met with 32 different firms to assess their needs and encourage them to hire students for summer jobs and articling positions. ARLO has been directly credited for placing four law students in St. Paul (two), Lethbridge, and Medicine Hat.

With our ever-increasing presence and involvement with rural law firms and law students looking to practice in rural Alberta, we are looking to have greater results next year and more positive impact on access to justice across the province.

Roch Labelle

## Rural and Remote Homelessness

Our rural homelessness programs effectively doubled in number this year, further expanding our scope and reach across the province. For the Homelessness Partnering Strategy, a doubling of our funding for the 16-17 and 17-18 fiscal years meant a new Call for Proposals for the fall. We received 33 applications requesting a total of approximately $4.7 million. As the Regional Advisory Board (RAB) had just over $832,000 to allocate over the two fiscal years, it was an incredibly competitive process and there were approximately five to eight projects with applications good enough to fund that nevertheless ended up on the chopping block.

In the end, the RAB funded seven new projects, as well as giving amendments to three existing projects. Projects include a land purchase for a new second-stage transitional shelter for women fleeing domestic violence in Rocky Mountain House, beds in Fort Macleod for people with addictions waiting to get into inpatient treatment, and pre-development funds for new transitional housing units in Banff. This also marked the first time that HPS funds helped another ARDN program, as several projects funded are working with our Sustainable Housing Initiative.

Several HPS projects also concluded this year. Slave Lake Native Friendship Centre finished their research into the feasibility of a Housing First model for Slave Lake; St. Albert Food Bank completed their research project into homelessness in their community; and the Edson Native Friendship Centre, in conjunction with the ARDN, helped plan the Creating Rural Connections 2017 conference in April in Nisku, AB, where more than 125 delegates from across the province came together for a full day of discussion on rural homelessness and housing issues. As of the start of the 2017-18 fiscal year, there are 13 active HPS projects, and there will be another Call for Proposals for fall 2017 for more projects for the 2018-19 year as Service Canada has indicated they will be maintaining funding levels until the current HPS program ends in March 2019.

In addition to the new HPS projects, we also had additional projects made possible thanks to a $250,000 grant from Alberta Human Services, which was directed to rural homelessness caused by the 2016 Fort McMurray wildfires. After a Call for Proposals in August, three short-term projects began in September, with end dates in May. The projects were rocky at times, as funding had to be withdrawn from one project and another project concluded early due to disagreements between the project coordinator and community members. However, we received an extension from Human Services until September 2017, which allowed several new projects to start, and by June, the program hit its stride.

Jonn Kmech

## Other ARDN Projects

Homelessness Estimation Guide

The lack of data on homelessness in rural areas—and the resulting difficulty many communities face in getting funding to address the issue—spurred us to create a step-by-step guide of best practices for estimating homelessness in rural areas. The guide is available free of charge in both official languages to any rural community across Canada that wants a cost-efficient and reliable way to determine the extent of homelessness in their town or county, allowing them to develop evidence-based strategies to reduce or prevent it. This is the first guide of its kind that we're aware of. In September, one of our subprojects, Mountain Rose Women's Shelter Association, will be testing the guide for the first time when they conduct a rural Point-in-Time count for their county, comparing methodologies and results between the PiT Count and the Estimation Guide.

Zain Abedin

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