

**T**he Rabbittown Community Association was established in 1984 by a group of tenants of Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation in Central St. John's. There are approximately 294 NLHC housing units in the Rabbittown area with 74% of tenants receiving social assistance, 23% unemployment benefits and the remaining 3% "other" income. Many of the tenants (105) are single parents.

The Association's major objectives are to provide social and economic opportunities to neighbourhood residents through a variety of programs and activities. The Association operates a community center as a meeting place and recreational service to the more than 700 young people in the neighbourhood. It has been operating a single-mother's support group for almost two years, as well as offering other programs that respond to the needs of local women.

After a community survey and visits to community based programs in Ontario, it was recommended that the Association establish a community based adult literacy program at the Rabbittown Community Center. Start up funds were received from the Department of Secretary of State and the program opened on May 2, 1988.

Unique to the program being developed at Rabbittown is its combining of methodologies and approaches. Its eclectic strategy is a response to community dislike of the traditional classroom, and also the tradition of community development in Newfoundland, which is "characterized by mutual self-help, collective improvement through joint voluntary action and a respect for the uncertified accomplishments of individuals."<sup>1</sup> The program combines group process, Adult Basic Literacy (using Ministry materials), and a Client Centered Needs focus through one-on-one tutoring. The group process concentrates on community issues, documenting them as part of a process of creating learning materials that focus on the community's expressed concerns. The program's long-term goal is to train their own learners to become tutors themselves. Prior to the opening of their community center in 1986, a survey was carried out in the area to find out what programs were needed. Some people said that adult literacy should be offered at the center.

# "I'm very glad the program is here"

*Rabbittown Community Association  
Adult Literacy Program*

**By Shirley Hickey**

Three women write about their experiences:

*My name is Ann and I was born in Ferryland on the Southern Shore. At an early age I was put in a foster home and at the age of eight I was sent back to my mother and stepfather. I didn't get much learning because there was a lot of problems at home. There were nine of us in the family. I had to take care of them because my mother and stepfather were always drunk and they didn't care whether I went to school or not. At the age of ten I went to court for not going to school.*

*I came to this program to upgrade my skills in writing and reading and spelling so I wouldn't have to depend on other people to do things for me and to help my children with their homework.*

*I feel good about coming here because I feel comfortable with what I am doing. I am learning what I want to at my own speed. I am happy that the program is here for me. This is the best thing I could do for myself.*

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*My name is Rebecca. I am a single Mom with three children. I came here to the literacy program to upgrade my skills in reading and writing so I could learn to spell words I didn't know and to help my children.*

*In the literacy program I am learning things that make me feel important. I can't express the feelings I have for being in the program. I feel excited, good and like I'm a great person. In this program I learned a great deal about myself, that I am a person and that I am important to*

*myself and my children. When I first came here I felt like a dummy but I've been here for only three weeks and I know words that I never dreamt of learning when I was in school.*

*In the program they don't push you. They understand what you are going through. They know when you push a person they are not going to learn. I'm glad the program is here.*

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*My name is Bella. I was born in Goulds. I dropped out of school when I was 15 with only a Grade 8 education. The only work I was capable of doing was waitress work or housework.*

*When I reached the age of 21 I was married. As time went on I had four children which made it impossible for me to go back to school. It wasn't until I was faced with a situation where my husband became ill and couldn't work that I knew I needed a better education to find a job. In 1986 I did a 20 week work program at the Rabbittown Center and became involved with the Tenants Association. While sitting at the meetings there were times when I didn't know what was going on because I couldn't understand some of the words that people used. When the Literacy Program started I was very happy to be able to participate. Since that time I feel that I have learned a great deal. I feel very confident that I will be coming out of this program with enough skills to obtain my high school diploma.*

<sup>1</sup>Rabbittown Community Association: *Adult Literacy Proposal, Phase 2*, April 1988, p. 2.