

## **Sustainable Communities in Canada's Oil Sands Region – WHOC Media Brief**

**Sustainable Communities** OSLI's Sustainable Communities Working Group (SCWG) is meeting social sustainability challenges in the oil sands region by developing ways of building meaningful and long-lasting relationships between industry and local communities in northeastern Alberta. Communities in the area are largely comprised of Aboriginal peoples, with 500-2000 inhabitants – many under the age of 35. The communities of Janvier and Fort Chipewyan are located in this area, where the SCWG has launched two pilot projects.

Using collaboration, which emphasizes a holistic approach that requires active commitment and engagement from all participants, the group has taken a grass roots approach to identifying community needs. By engaging working group members, key influencers (such as elders, community members, elected officials) and key stakeholders (f government, health care, law enforcement and education officials), community members have taken an active role in determining how they can shape the future of their community. The result has been a focus on the future of their youth.

**VSP Tool** In collaboration with the University of Carleton, the group used a 'Values, Structures, Processes (VSP) Tool', which is a diagnostic and planning resource to assess, plan and implement successful and sustainable initiatives. Values determine why things are done, structures determine how to organize to get things done, and processes determine how individuals work together, leading toward safe, healthy and sustainable communities.

"Our group is using this approach with Aboriginal communities close to operations in northern Alberta to assist them with reaching their vision for their community. We were looking for an approach that would foster a different kind of relationship between industry and communities." – Helen Jacobs, Chair of the SCWG

**Pilot Projects** In the town of Janvier, the pilot project has focused on partnership and involvement of the entire community, turning ideas into youth-led projects, and establishing a community board. A youth-led board was started called Sekweha, which means "for the youth" in Dene/Chipewyan, the language of the Chipewyan Prairie Dene First Nation. Sekweha's vision is to create a healthy, safe and sustainable community that helps children and youth gain the knowledge, confidence and skills they need to make a positive contribution to their own future and that of their community.

The Fort Chipewyan pilot is in its early stage, where the community develops its own vision, processes and structures. Similarly to Janvier, there is a focus on involving youth in the community and the Lake Athabasca Youth Council has been established to provide support to the community's youth. An innovative process for consulting with youth has been developed, allowing them to identify and prioritize their interests and concerns, and then work to turn their ideas into action.

Both pilot projects use the same tools and processes to determine what is important to each community, and how they can move forward collaboratively. Measurement tools are in place and the VSP tool provides a theoretical support for the work taking place.

"The pilot projects have focused on youth engagement and leadership as they work towards a sustainable future." – Helen Jacobs, Chair of SCWG

**Lessons Learned** The group has identified several lessons learned which can be used to shape future projects. These include:

- invest in authentic collaboration;
- build on trust;
- identify goals to meet objectives;
- use innovative approaches to work and encourage a willingness to change;
- develop or work towards a shared vision; and
- use the shared vision to connect like-minded partners.

“Our group is using this approach with Aboriginal communities close to operations in northern Alberta to assist them with reaching their vision for their community. Our long-term goal is for industry to be one of many collaborators working with communities toward a united vision.” – Helen Jacobs, Chair of the SCWG

*The Oil Sands Leadership Initiative (OSLI) is a collaborative network of companies operating in the Canadian oil sands working together to achieve improved environmental, social and economic performance in the region. Formalized in April 2010, the initiative is founded on a common understanding among OSLI members of the need to work together to meet the challenges of responsible development. On March 1, 2012, based on the success of OSLI and other industry-led collaborative structures such as the Oil Sands Tailings Consortium and the Canadian Oil Sands Network for Research and Development (CONRAD), a larger collaborative effort was launched by the major oil sands operators, called Canada’s Oil Sands Innovation Alliance (COSIA).*