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TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL

'I'm really getting my education together' - New Brunswick Telegraph-Journal

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Summary

"And my attendance in school has gone way up - and so have my grades." Her goal is to attend the University of New Brunswick Saint John and eventually become a photographer. It's thanks to ONE Life - a program for homeless youth in Saint John's old north end - that Roy's life is turning around. And it's stories like Roy's that will be featured in a new ry made for the Health Council of Canada. Roy's living room was transformed into a mini TV studio Thursday, as a producer and cameraman filmed her telling her story.

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Seven months ago, she had a rough relationship with her mother and skipped a lot of school.

"Now, me and my mom get along a lot better - me and my whole family get along a lot better," Roy said, in her tidy apartment off Victoria Street in the north end, her black kitten circling her feet. "And my attendance in school has gone way up - and so have my grades."

Her goal is to attend the University of New Brunswick Saint John and eventually become a photographer.

It's thanks to ONE Life - a program for homeless youth in Saint John's old north end - that Roy's life is turning around.

And it's stories like Roy's that will be featured in a new documentary made for the Health Council of Canada. Roy's living room was transformed into a mini TV studio Thursday, as a producer and cameraman filmed her telling her story.

The grassroots program, which has been around since 2004, first caught the attention of the health council a couple of years ago when they featured it in a print publication.

This week, a film crew came to Saint John to produce a three-minute segment that will be aired on the public broadcaster TVOntario and the Internet's YouTube in November.

"What struck me is the passion and enthusiasm residents have to improve the quality of life of their neighbourhood," said Lesley Frey, manager of communication services for the health council.

"They look at health in the broadest sense," she said. Not only can residents access a nurse practitioner, but the program addresses issues such as housing, poverty and life skills. "It was really that focus on the whole health of the person and the community that really got our attention."

The idea is for other communities across the country to glean ideas from ONE Change and find ways to adapt it for their own neighbourhoods.

Poverty, high unemployment and drug abuse led to the establishment of ONE (Old North End) Change five years ago. At its office on Victoria Street, residents have access to a community police officer, computers, youth programs and health resources.

"When it comes down to nuts and bolts, it's making a difference," said John Coleman, a volunteer who was in the ONE Change office Thursday. He was laid-off as an insulator at Canaport LNG in June.

"If you get at the right age group at the right time, it's going to impact them for the rest of their lives," he said. "All you have to do is see the kids' faces."

Roy's face was bright as she spoke to the cameras Thursday.

"Because of ONE Life, I'm really getting my education together," she said.

That means a lot to Tara Parlee, the program's co-ordinator and Roy's case worker.

She said there are four teens in the program, but there are 65 on the waiting list.

"And that doesn't even scratch the surface," she said. "There are so many kids out there."

Most of the teens come from unstable households where their education is at risk. They technically have to be homeless to qualify.

"Stability is a big thing," Parlee said. "The main thing is, we want them to go to school."

The teens are responsible for handing over one-third of their monthly income for rent. For people like Roy, that amounts to about \$90. The federally funded program covers the rest, plus heat.

The video can be viewed online at www.healthcouncilcanada.ca starting in mid-November.