

# The Heart of a Movement

by **STEPHANIE JOHNSTONE-LAURETTE** /// EAC Staff



Walkshop participants arriving at Station 2 - Coal Town Trail.  
PHOTOS: Sari Sari Story

In 2021, children and youth made up more than a quarter of the population in Glace Bay. Yet, when we discuss community successes, the voices of children and youth are often neglected, favouring older generations whom our society views as “the professionals.” But in doing so, we risk discounting some of the more practical, innovative and inspiring success stories offered by the younger demographic in our communities.

In 2025, Parachute, a national organization focused on injury prevention, reached out to the Ecology Action Centre seeking recommendations for the first Atlantic Canada community in their “Walkshop” project. A Walkshop is a mobile workshop following a set route, with stations for participants to stop and learn about initiatives relating to traffic safety, built environment and active transportation. Walkshops engage communities by moving beyond traditional audits and providing structured sharing of active transportation interventions. Previous participants included Guelph, Quebec City, Ottawa; a typical Atlantic Canadian recommendation might have been Halifax, Fredericton or even St. John’s. Instead, we recommended the town of Glace Bay.

Glace Bay once prided itself on being the largest town in Canada, but over time its population has declined from 25,000 to a modest 17,000 (StatsCan, 2021). It faces significant socio-economic challenges, with one in every three children living in poverty (CCPA, 2024). Deeply

**Stephanie Johnstone-Laurette** (she/her) gets her motivation working with youth in their communities. She is a Senior Transportation Coordinator with EAC.



## TAKE ACTION

Learn about what youth are up to in your community; attend youth presentations, events and school meetings; practice deep listening when youth are sharing concerns and ideas; consider how you or your organization/workplace can support youth, both in-kind and financially.

rooted in history, Glace Bay still maintains its original structural layout built around the rail lines that connected the coal mines to the steel plant. While this history inspires local pride, new generations recognize the town has changed and celebrate new projects.

Building on Glace Bay’s evolving community identity, the EAC and Parachute worked with local organizations to plan the Walkshop. Early conversations showed a new way to frame the event: rather than focusing on the engineering and planning concepts of a safe commute, we emphasized social needs linked to active transportation. Given Glace Bay’s strong youth presence, we wanted to showcase what youth contributed through sustainable mobility and safe spaces.

This article outlines four youth from Glace Bay and the role they played in redefining and reshaping spaces in their town. Our Walkshop had seven stations, two of which were led by youth under 21. Additionally, two youth from Glace Bay High facilitated our follow-up discussion. Their participation reminded adults that youth play a foundational role in community development.

**Glace Bay...has so much opportunity; all the land that we have, the space that we have, these trails that we have – we just need to...make them more accessible and usable for everyone in the community.”**

– Quin Losier



**Quin Losier & Kail Hewitt**

**School/University:** Grade 12, Glace Bay High

**Project:** Walkshop, Glace Bay

**Background:** Members of Changemakers (Glace Bay High)

**Successes:** Quin and Kail are active community members focused on active transportation and safe spaces for youth to connect. They have participated in several youth-led events supporting leadership and community needs.

**Role in Walkshop:** They helped lead the post-Walkshop discussion, fostering conversation about what participants learned and what could improve. Their leadership highlighted youth excellence in a space usually led by adults, addressing key issues and expertly engaging the audience.

**There’s so much unity here, and strength – I can’t help but give back.”**

– Chris Kaiser

**Chris Kaiser**

**School/University:** Cape Breton University

**Project:** Undercurrent Youth Centre, Glace Bay

**Background:** A previous patron of Undercurrent, Chris wanted to give back to his community and support it as it supported him when he needed it most. After graduating high school, he began volunteering and later working at Undercurrent, which supports hundreds of youth with food, clothing, mental health services and activity spaces.

**Successes:** Chris demonstrated to the next generation of Undercurrent patrons how being an active member of this space can shape who you are and how you can contribute to a safer, stronger community. His leadership demonstrates how youth can support and inspire each other.

**Role in Walkshop:** Led Station 4 outside the Undercurrent Centre, highlighting Undercurrent’s role, the history of the space and the impact of the new space on youth in the community.

**Throughout the three-year period, we were really able to transform the space and make it positive for us and our community.”**

– Daniel MacGillivray



**Daniel MacGillivray**

**School/University:** Cape Breton University

**Project:** The “Burr” Pedestrian Bridge and Pathway, Glace Bay High

**Background:** While in high school, Daniel was part of a school group, The Changemakers, who participated in a Youth Mobility Audit in 2019. During this audit, the youth identified the need for a safe walking space to connect the school to nearby amenities. Locally known as “The Burr,” the space was unsafe physically and socially. These youth wanted to transform the space into “something positive, something everyone can benefit from – where for all seasons, students could continue to walk for positive physical and mental health without any safety barriers.”

**Successes:** Daniel co-led this group through various presentations to key stakeholders, funders and decision-makers. With the help of adult supporters, over \$200,000 was raised to build a steel pedestrian bridge and a safe, accessible pathway connecting the school to nearby stores used daily by 800 students.

**Role in Walkshop:** Led Station 3A; facilitated discussions on Glace Bay High Burr Pathway on how youth-led projects can create community assets and future leaders.

Younger generations do not simply speak out about their communities’ needs, they also plan, support and follow through on their vision of the best future for their community. I continue to be inspired by youths’ practical, action-oriented approaches of helping a community or movement thrive.

As the newly inaugurated Mayor of New York, Zohran Mamdani, stated, “If you treat young people with the respect they deserve, not only can they be a part of your movement, but they will be the heart of your movement.”

**FIND OUT MORE:**

**Parachute’s Vision Zero - Glace Bay Walkshop**

**Glace Bay Walkshop Video**

**Undercurrent Youth Centre**

**Glace Bay High Pathway**