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Empowering individuals to build strong rural communities

(GUELPH, ON) – Devoting more time on one’s greatest strengths or assets can lead to positive change in individuals, their organizations and their communities. By utilizing these resources and investing in themselves, a community can work towards the creation of a strong, positive and vibrant future. **Steps to Leadership** is a package of three leadership programs that strengthens participants’ innate and learned leadership abilities and engages them to take action.

After delivering the program in seven communities between 2009 and 2011, the program has now been confirmed by a number of community partners for 2012. To date, the 2012 partners are the Town of Smiths Falls, the City of Temiskaming Shores, Volunteer Thunder Bay, Réseau de développement économique et d’employabilité de l’Ontario (RDÉE Ontario), and Centre de santé communautaire Hamilton/Niagara.

“Volunteer Thunder Bay is excited to present and deliver **Steps to Leadership** programming in the Northwestern Ontario region. Our goal is to reach as many regional and local grassroots organizations that could benefit from such training and provide a valuable networking opportunity. We believe in our communities and the power of these volunteer run organizations that make such a difference,” says Deborah Poole-Hofmann, Executive Director of Volunteer Thunder Bay. Marie-Eve LaRocque, Development Officer, SDG Region is pleased that the programs will be delivered in Eastern Ontario’s Prescott-Russell and Stormont, Dundas & Glengarry areas to the Francophone community. “The capacity building and the creation of strategic partnerships generated by the project will be an essential lever to strengthen the practical skills and meet the needs of our francophone communities,” shared LaRocque.

The need for leadership and capacity building in rural Ontario is growing. Changing demographics is putting stress on existing leaders and a shortage of emerging leaders is on the horizon. “We are excited to be working with five new partners this year who recognize this need, and through the **Steps to Leadership** programs will be offering individuals and organizations within their communities the opportunity to build the next generation of leaders and provide current leaders with relevant skill-building opportunities,” said Alicia Evans, project manager of leadership programs at the **Rural Ontario Institute (ROI)**.

Steps to Leadership is an initiative of the Rural Ontario Institute and 4-H Ontario, funded in part by Agriculture and Agri-food Canada through the Agricultural Adaptation Council, and delivered locally in partnership with rural communities. For more information about the **Steps to Leadership** programs and the delivery dates within each community please visit www.stepstoleadership.ca.

- 30 -

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