

Cobscook Currents

Fall 2023





SAVE THE DATE:
25th Anniversary Celebration
Saturday, September 28th, 2024



Cobscook Currents
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Formerly Cobscook Community Learning Center

Direction

Dear Friends,

The compass is a handy tool. It helps the user know where they are and how to find their way. Partly, for this reason, in our early years the Cobscook board chose the image of a compass as their symbol, and for years we referred to our board as the Compass Rose.

While in more recent years we've moved away from that moniker, our board, made up of local and regional volunteers, is a critical group that guides Cobscook in setting a direction in line with our mission, vision, and values. At their urging, we embarked on a process to assess and clarify Cobscook's direction for the coming years. In this issue of Currents, we are pleased to share with you some of the results of that wayfinding. You'll read about our work to create a new strategic plan, a map for the years to come. You'll also read about some of the new and revived initiatives we're digging into - a revived round of long-haul work to support improved well-being for all in our community.

One of the grounding forces in our landscape, though, is continued feedback, ideas, and engagement with you. Cobscook does its work better when members of the community step up and in and help guide our work. It's because of community feedback that we have an innovative high school program, which just entered its 13th year. It's because of interest and activity from the community that the Monday Night Music circle has gone strong for over two decades. More recently, it's because of community interest and engagement that we now have a professional print studio for digital photography and art, equipment to support paper making, ongoing pottery, yoga, and movement courses, and a Friday morning playgroup for younger members of our community. Community is the landscape of our map, and we also take direction from you. If you have an idea for a program, class, or initiative you'd like to see come to life, Cobscook can work with you to help make an idea a reality.

Stop by or give a call. We'd love to hear from you.



Kara McCrimmon
Co-Director and Director of Cobscook
Experiential Programs

Our Team

Staff

Nikki Brown
Custodian

Michelle Cousineau
*Pottery Studio Manager
& Executive Assistant*

Ryan Cross
*Grounds & Maintenance
Associate*

Shaun Haskins
*Co-Director &
Development Director*

Beana Hopkins
*Campus Cheerleader
Programs and
Communications Coordinator*

Daphne Loring
*Co-Director & Director of
Partnerships and Innovation*

Bonnie Lyons
*Facilities Manager,
Custodial Coordinator &
Guest Relations Associate*

Kara McCrimmon
*Co-Director &
Director of Cobscook
Experiential Programs*

Maria McMorrow
*Cobscook Experiential
Programs Teacher*

Dylan Pardue
*Director of Technology
and Systems*

Valorie Peasley
Bookkeeper

Damon Weston
*Cobscook Experiential
Programs Teacher &
Human Relations Steward*

Board

Noela Altvater

Ron Beckwith

Leslie Bowman

Alan Furth

Mark Hoffman

Colby Soctomah Lewey
Co-Chair

Kevin Thompson

Frank Trocco
Co-Chair

Bo Yerxa

TREE Reroots at Cobscook

Ten years ago, Cobscook launched a bold new initiative- TREE: Transforming Rural Experience in Education. Designed as a practice and research project, the primary aim was to research and develop practices in rural schools that leverage student voice to address trauma and inequity. Over the course of a four-year pilot project, TREE staff, educational researchers, students, teachers, and clinicians brought the project to life in vibrant ways, and researchers documented remarkable improvements in the partner schools involved. The pilot concluded in 2021, and *Trauma-Responsive Schooling: Centering Student Voice and Healing* (Brown, Biddle & Tappan), which documents the results, was published by Harvard Education Press in 2022.





With the initial research project complete, we've been grappling with the question - what's next? Those who have followed TREE know, the final year of the four-year pilot coincided with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. Amid the unique challenges faced by all partners, Cobscook transferred the TREE program to the Rural Vitality Lab (RVL), an educational research collaboration between the University of Maine and Colby College,

to ensure the completion of the project. RVL did just that and continues to share the results of the project through publications and teaching. But we all know there's more to do. The impacts of trauma and inequity continue to plague schools.

As such, Cobscook Institute and Rural Vitality Lab are delighted to announce that TREE, renamed Trauma-Responsive Equitable Education, has been formally transferred back to Cobscook Institute. Among the first steps toward the next decade of resilience and equity-focused work, Cobscook and RVL are moving forward with the following:

- 1: A research and practice project with Cobscook Experiential Program high school students. During the 2023-24 school year, RVL researchers and Cobscook Institute educators will work with students to create replicable practices that leverage student voice and create more inclusive and connected classrooms.
- 2: Professional development opportunities for educators, guidance counselors, clinicians, and others who work with children and youth, designed to broadly apply the lessons learned from the pilot project in formal and informal educational settings.
- 3: A summer 2024 conference for educators, guidance counselors, and others, focused on supporting trauma-responsive and equity-centered teaching and learning.

There's no doubt that the findings from the initial research project have profound implications. Outcomes for students improve when they are invited in as co-creators of their learning environment. We're excited to move into a new phase, and to engage in a new generation of work to support improved outcomes for youth.



Top: the Facilities Circle gathers around our new electric lawn mower, part of furthering our sustainability goals; facing page: the Communications Circle discussing plans for our 25th Anniversary Celebration.

Circles and Shared Governance

“As a team we accomplish many goals. If one team member can’t think of a way to resolve an issue, another does. It shows each employee that they hold equal value and that their voice matters.”

- Bonnie Lyons, *Facilities Manager*

In 2020, as part of our response to unexpected leadership transitions and the arrival of COVID as an everyday fact of life, Cobscook Institute began exploring a redesign of our organizational structure. This exploration led to the decision to try an experiment—to set up a formal arrangement that would reflect the vision of community action and connection that has always driven our work. With the agreement of the full board and staff, we designed around two big ideas: Shared Governance and Distributed Leadership.

We’ve already talked about Distributed Leadership in this space over the last year: the most obvious form this takes is our executive team of three Co-Directors, each with a different area of responsibility but with overlap in our shared duty to oversee the effective function of Cobscook as a whole on behalf of the community we serve.

Shared Governance is bigger and more ambitious because it impacts every part of our organization directly, every day. At its core, it is as simple as every member of our

team feeling a sense of ownership over the work that is their responsibility, and ensuring our culture honors the perspectives and contributions of all no matter the topic or area of work. Of course, the reality of making that happen and managing the unexpected in a busy organization is more complicated. So, the idea we adopted to put these values into practice is Circles.

From the beginning, Circles were imagined like a grassroots community effort: each one would be composed of members who shared a commitment to a specific kind of activity or outcome, be self-organizing, and responsible internally to each other and to the group as a whole for both the outcomes of their work and for communicating about where it might impact the work of other Circles or individuals.

Over the last couple of years, we've operated with circles for Facilities, Finance, Communications, Fundraising, and Programming, that all do about what you'd expect given their names, as well as convening a weekly Great Circle that gathers almost all the staff together to share updates from the smaller Circles, coordinate larger pieces of work (including strategic planning), and provide a place for shared training and professional development.

This is an experiment, and our vision of it remains exploratory. This includes a continual review of what's bringing success (not to mention joy) and where we need to gather new tools, knowledge, skills or capacities to enhance our work. It requires an investment of time and energy in building skills and capacities that are not at all universal: soft skills connected to careful deliberation and consensus building; nonviolent communication methods; and patient, intentional inclusion of as many perspectives as we can gather.

As part of ongoing refinement, this year brings a major change to our Circles—in practice, the responsibility for both strategic governance and day-to-day operational

“Shared governance is one of the things that attracted me to work here. It's hard to imagine creating change with a diverse community where everyone's voice is essential, without our own internal work mirroring that.”

-Shaun Haskins, *Co-Director*

management have overlapped within the domain of each circle, but this has kept us from bringing members of our Board fully into some Circle activities. As a result, we are separating out those two spheres of activity to ensure that valuable participation can happen as broadly as possible. Changes like these also support our newly-ratified strategic plan Goal Two, which aims to strengthen our efforts to advance community-driven initiatives with regional impact.

Our journey to embrace Shared Governance and Distributed Leadership has been transformative. Through Circles, we've empowered team members to take ownership and foster a culture of inclusion. As we refine our approach, separating strategic governance and operational management, we remain dedicated to our mission of community-driven impact. This experiment continues to shape our commitment to community action and connection, propelling us forward with enthusiasm and purpose.





Left: Shaun Haskins and Newell Lewey; right: a student visiting from Sipayik Elementary School throwing a pot in our pottery studio; facing page: Vera Francis storytelling at one of the first Cobscook Gatherings.

Strengthening Education of Place through Indigenous Models

By Shaun Haskins and Newell Lewey

The seed that would eventually become Cobscook Institute was planted in 1999 as an exploration among people from three nations—Passamaquoddy, North American, and Canadian. The three waves on our logo represent those three peoples. When we look at the logo, we see those people in conversation and connection, and the spreading of the waves reflects their strength in working together.

At that time, one of the important questions we asked was: **“What would improve life in this rural region?”**

In the more than two decades during which the seed of our answer to that question has sprouted and grown, Cobscook Institute has created an exceptional public high

school option, a range of intensive summer outdoor experiences, research projects and services to improve education across our region, and a dynamic hub of community learning, creation and connection.

But we have thrived in our work by continually looking at the future to see and understand how we can make life even better. Employees, community members and the board of directors all collaborate and discuss new ideas. This is a continuing focus of Cobscook Institute, and it is why we are creating a new position at Cobscook Institute.

This position would oversee our organization’s ties and culture to the Passamaquoddy people. This new position

would have direct contact with the tribal citizens and together they could create cultural events, sponsor artisans, drumming events, language learning and other cultural teachings.

This role at Cobscook Institute is much needed and will create a stronger connection between Cobscook Institute and the Passamaquoddy. This connection is a 24-year-old founding idea. Though Cobscook Institute has worked with members of the Passamaquoddy community and has had many successful programs and collaborations, this new position is part of an effort to make more consistent improvements to the programming with a focus on Passamaquoddy culture, language, and history.

It is a new chapter in the history of Passamaquoddy people giving identity, shape, and direction to Cobscook Institute. Through the years, Passamaquoddy people have created and shaped education offerings, served as leaders of community action, and offered outreach and mentorship, but we recognize the limits of Cobscook's current role in serving as a community resource for Passamaquoddy people. Giving this new position a name, and building a foundation for it to become part of a legacy for the future, is a step to grow, once again, into being a multicultural space, which Cobscook's founders - Euro-Americans, Canadians, and

Passamaquoddy - affirmed was essential for the health and well-being for all in our region.

The need for this role is great and it is at the forefront of Cobscook Institute's mission and vision of the future. It's an opportunity to expand on current programming in the classroom, at the Center, and in the natural environment that is also our home. This in turn will bring our communities more closely together and allow for more understanding of all our cultures.

In the spirit of that goal, members of the current Cobscook Institute staff and supporters are organizing public sessions this fall to meet with citizens of the Passamaquoddy nation and other interested community members to hear the community's shared wisdom about the greatest need for this position and this work so that we can make the addition to our staff this winter—knowing that even this is only one step in a process of years.

**To share your thoughts, learn more,
or get involved, please contact:**

Shaun Haskins: shaun@cobscookinstitute.org

Newell Lewey: newell.lewey@gmail.com

Daphne Loring: daphne@cobscookinstitute.org



Strategic Planning

Starting the Next Quarter Century with a Refreshed Roadmap

When Cobscook Experiential Programs staff want to take students out on a field-based learning expedition, they start with a pile of information - details about the participants they're working with, a sense of the academic and social-emotional objectives they'd like to work on or meet. They consider the resources they have to work with, and they think about what might have the biggest impact on the students. Ultimately they come up with a plan.

The staff and board who currently steward Cobscook Institute just completed a similar process. We are almost three years into an experiment with shared governance and distributed leadership. We required a new map for Cobscook, one that sets direction for the coming years based on specific goals responsive to community need. The following goals will guide the evolution of Cobscook Institute's next chapter:

- **Manifest a community homeplace that foregrounds nurturing pathways to improved individual and community well-being in all aspects of its function.**

Within this goal, we will focus how Cobscook programs and activities support the well-being of all, especially vulnerable populations within our community. We'll work to maximize the ways in which folks can access Cobscook and its capacity to work with community members to imagine how we can make things happen together. We'll also focus on how to be more impactful with our signature programs and reach more with what we're already doing well.

- **Foster a culture that catalyzes and advances community-driven initiatives with regional impact.**

With this goal, we will strengthen the ways the surrounding communities inform and help build the programming at Cobscook Institute while fostering meaningful engagement with all communities around the region, including the Passamaquoddy Nation and those who experience issues related to lack of access, poverty, and isolation.

- **Cultivate long-term resiliency and sustainability for our region by responding to the challenges of climate change.**

In the next three years, we'll produce a climate response roadmap for our campus and operations and be a partner in providing educational programming on climate change and the green energy transition.

- **Build long-term organizational health through strategic investment in governance structures, operational systems, and staff well-being.**

A strong and sustainable organization is built on strong policies, practices, and plans, the ability to invite a diverse group of folks in to create a vibrant, effective organization, and the tools needed to communicate the impact of our collective efforts. Within this goal, we'll focus on these facets of Cobscook Institute's operations so that we're strongly positioned to make a difference in Downeast Maine and beyond for the next 25 years.

We're excited about the shared map we've created, and where it is taking us as a community supporting organization. If you'd like to join us moving any of these specific goals forward you can find more information on our website.



Current Cobscook Institute Board & Staff

Standing:

Leslie Bowman, Damon Weston, Beana Hopkins, Alan Furth,
Dylan Pardue, Maria McMorro, Shaun Haskins, Frank Trocco, Bo Yerxa

Seated/Kneeling:

Michelle Cousineau, Kara McCrimmon, Bonnie Lyons,
Colby Soctomah Lewey, Daphne Loring

Not Pictured:

Noela Altvater, Ron Beckwith, Nikki Brown, Ryan Cross,
Mark Hoffman, Kevin Thompson & Valorie Peasley

10 Commissary Point Rd.
Trescott, ME 04652 USA

*Creating responsive educational opportunities that
strengthen personal, community, and global well-being.*



Near or far, join our campus for Zoom, hybrid or immersive programs!

Monday Night Music Circle

Every Monday, you can join our in-person circle via Zoom, 6:00 - 8:30 pm EDT

Iota Short Forms Writing Classes

Throughout the year, join experts in Q&A's, prose, essays, flash and more via zoom.

Movement Classes

Join our weekly classes via zoom for a hybrid Yoga or Balance & Bone Building Class.

Winter Ecology Weekend: January 18th - 21st

Wilderness First Aid: March 5th - 7th

Ecological Design Weekend: Late April

Spring Birding Festival: May 24th - 27th

TREE Conference: June 27th - 29th

Migration Birding Festival: August 16th - 18th

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