

Cobscook Currents

Fall 2020



Navigating into Safe Harbors

Welcome to the fall edition of Cobscook Currents! It might feel like it has been awhile since you received one of these—that is because we chose not to send one out at our usually scheduled time of late March due to the many uncertainties of the pandemic. We hope this fall edition will bring you up to speed about our recent work and developments. You can read past editions of Cobscook Currents, and of our e-newsletter, Cobscook Waves, on our website: www.cobscookinstitute.org.

In challenging times like these, we all rely on safe harbors—those calm places that provide the opportunity to reflect and reassess our navigation forward. As the Board Chair since this past summer, I have been facilitating our team process of bringing Cobscook Institute back into the safe harbor of collective, community-based work—to realign the organization for these times and around our core values of peace, honesty, respect, and empowerment—and invite the next generation into our work.

Cobscook Institute has served as a community safe harbor for more than two decades, and continues to serve as one now. In this edition of Cobscook Currents, you'll read about how our virtual programming has been a safe harbor for many, near and far, and you'll hear from high school students about how Cobscook Experiential Programs have impacted them. We share some exciting developments in the work of TREE: Transforming Rural Experience in Education, and about Cobscook Institute's role in a promising new worldwide initiative that will help us all chart a path towards local, regional, and global health. You will also read about two particular friends of Cobscook Institute who have supported us with their skills and commitment for the past several years.

Cobscook Institute's grassroots, community-centered work, which is responsive to the realities of the times, is more important now than ever. The greatest gift that we can give to support this work into the future is to realize that we are all one family: people, the forests, the sea, the animals, and the tides—all life is in this together and we all must work as one thoughtful and cooperative being.



Frank Trocco
Board Chair





Cobscook Center

While Cobscook Center has been closed to the public for community programming since COVID-19 came to Maine in March 2020, we have continued our commitment to community programming via virtual formats for the past several months. A big thanks goes out to the Maine Arts Commission and Maine Community Foundation's Belvedere Traditional Handcrafts Fund for helping make so much of our community programming accessible.

Community Programming Highlight: Monday Night Music

A cornerstone of Cobscook Institute community programming since 1999, Monday Night Music is now happening online via Zoom. Ed Brine (below left) has enjoyed Monday Night Music for the last twenty years. The guitar picker and former principal of Campobello, NB schools shared that, "The whole concept of sitting around in a circle and taking your turn singing a song, playing an instrument, reciting a poem, or telling a story is so relaxing and enjoyable. Everyone is made to feel welcome no matter what one's level of accomplishment may be....no pressure, just enjoyment! Virtual Monday Night Music has become a much-needed respite from what's been going on in the world."

Diane Getchell (below right), a Cobscook Institute founder and resident of Campobello, does not play an instrument herself, but she enjoys listening and sometimes sings along. When Monday Night Music shifted to a virtual format last spring, Diane reflected that she was "so delighted to just be with people on Zoom. Being on Campobello, we can't go over to Maine for non-essentials. But with music nights on Zoom, I can be home and see people that I know. It's the next best thing to being there."

Diane added, "Virtual Monday Night Music has definitely felt like a safe harbor during the storm that is COVID-19. It is one of the main things I can enjoy right now. I like that there are different people from many different places and that we get to know each other."

If you would like to join us for Monday Night Music or have ideas for other virtual programming you'd like to see, contact Daphne Loring at (207) 733-2233 or daphne@cobscookinstitute.org.





Cobscook Experiential Programs Student Perspectives on the High School Program

By Hazel Stark
Co-Founder of Maine Outdoor School, L3C

Now into its second decade of programming, the Cobscook Experiential Program for High School Students is enjoying steady enrollment. When I arrived at the beautiful Cobscook Institute campus on a recent foggy autumn morning to talk with students, they were preparing for their first canoe trip of the school year.

Due to the pandemic, this four-day canoe trip required preparing for a little differently. Without enough tents for each student to have their own, for example, students had researched tent-camping alternatives so that no one would have to share sleeping spaces. Some had chosen to hammock camp and others had learned how to build effective tarp shelters. What a great example of experiential learning: solving real-world problems through research and practical application.

The impact of this program comes through best from the words of the students themselves, so here is a small sampling of what students shared with me in early October:

Why are you a student here?

- “I did well at my previous high school, but I didn’t enjoy learning by just sitting in the classroom. Here, you move around a lot more, which I realized I need. We have many different methods of learning here, including learning outdoors.”
- “It’s more hands-on. I fidget a lot, and at other schools, that got me in a lot of trouble. Things are calmer here and the teachers are kind.”
- “I actually didn’t want to come here for high school at first. I wanted the typical high school experience, like with prom! But I attended River Camp, went on my first canoe trip, and I liked it. I decided to come to high school here and I made more friends than I had at my previous school, and my grades even got better. I don’t feel lost in a crowd. And now I’m going on my sixth canoe trip!”

What has been a highlight of your time here?

- “I really like our little community. There is always that moment when you walk up to school in the morning and you’re tired and think you don’t want to be there. But once you open the door and everyone is there having a good time—it feels good to have that positive attitude greet you every day. It makes me want to come to school.”
- “The trips: learning and experiencing things that not everyone has the opportunity to do. Everyone has a niche they fulfill here. It’s like a puzzle, where every one of us brings something different to a greater whole.”

I asked all students whether they think the high school program is important. Everyone said yes, accentuated by enthusiastic nods, big smiles, and wide eyes. The bond they have with



A student practices setting up a tarp shelter with teacher Damon Weston

each other and with their teachers was a common theme, as was the fact that they learn real life skills. Emrys, who is in his third year of the program, added, “I think that if more programs were to take this example, it would have a very positive effect on helping more students develop broader perspectives and think for themselves. One size doesn’t fit all, so there should be more educational options like Cobscook.”

Several students added that if any potential funders want to learn more about the program, they are invited to come play four-square with them at lunchtime.

Featured Staff Member: Michelle Cousineau

With a background in pottery, Michelle was pleased to learn of our pottery studio when she returned to the area in 2016. In exchange for studio time, she began making mugs for Cobscook Institute, which helped raise scholarship funds for community programs. She also has taught many pottery classes here.

In 2019, Michelle became an Administrative Assistant within Cobscook Center and in support of the Development team. “This employment has kept me grounded in reality and has given me a chance to focus outside of COVID-19, and outside of my own fears and personal concerns. We have clear guidelines for pandemic management, which all of the staff follow. I consider it an incredible gift to have a safe workspace, and income, when so many people are experiencing so much hardship.”

Due to reduced school bus capacities this year, Michelle stepped in to drive the van to transport the high school students to and from school. “The students are considerate with wearing their masks,” she said, “I feel like we are all caring for each other successfully, given the situation.”

Thanks, Michelle, for your continued contributions to Cobscook Institute!



Huge thanks to our 2019-20 donors

Our March edition of Cobscook Currents is usually where we thank all the many donors that made our work possible in the previous year, so please enjoy reading and celebrating their names here. Thank you. Together, you keep all our programs and activities going.

This work only happens with you.

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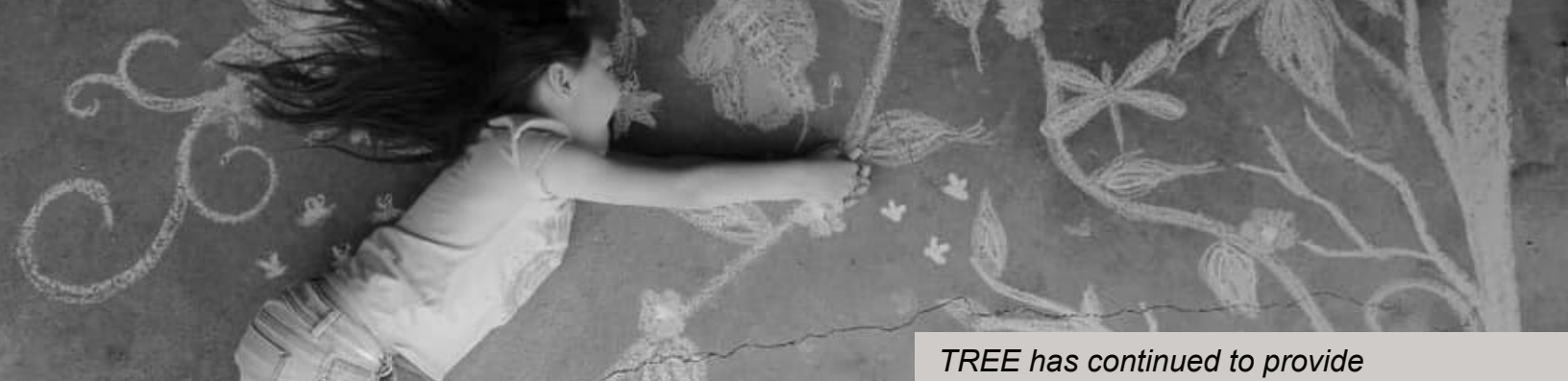
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much appreciated.
We have carefully
reviewed this list to
include everyone
who supported our
work in 2019 and
through September
2020.**

**If your name has
been omitted in
error, please let us
know.**



TREE's Branches are Growing

TREE has continued to provide community support through the pandemic, including through this fun sidewalk chalk art competition.

In our August 2020 edition of Cobscook Waves, we announced the exciting development of transferring TREE to the capable oversight of a collaborative research partnership between the University of Maine and Colby College, known as the Rural Vitality Lab. TREE's branches are now able to reach even farther under the continued leadership and teamwork of Director Brittany Ray and Trauma Responsive Educational Specialists Laura Thomas and Ashley Cirone.

This transition comes at a time when TREE is in the final year of its pilot phase, compiling the many positive outcomes of the pilot and preparing for application of the TREE process more broadly. "Having the ability to have such a stable incubation through Cobscook Institute over the past several years has given us the freedom to pursue what we have felt all along is most important: that Transforming Rural Experience in Education is a process, not a model," said Lyn Mikel Brown, Colby College Professor of Education and member of TREE's Research Practice Partnership Team. "You need people to have faith in that along the way for it to bear fruit over time. We have come to develop an even deeper respect for place-based work, the power of community, and of community-school relationships. It is so important that we all see this as a system-change approach, not a piecemeal thing. This next year, we'll be working on moving the work forward in that way."

Cat Biddle, Associate Professor of Educational Leadership at the University of Maine, holds a broad perspective of Maine schools and their relationships with their communities: "The kind of relationship that TREE has with schools is unusual. When COVID-19 hit and schools closed, most community organizations were shut out. But TREE wasn't, which speaks to the strength of the relationships that TREE has. Because of those deep relationships, TREE staff were able to be nimble and shift to make sure they were helping to address basic needs. Families knew who to ask for what they needed, and TREE was able to support them. It felt so powerful and unique." Cat added, "Cobscook Institute has been the place that allowed TREE to grow through the nascent stages, to build community relationships and partnerships across the country."

Alan Furth, Cobscook Institute Co-Founder and Founding Director applauds this development, "This transfer of TREE is a development that honors all that has gone into bringing TREE to life and holds promise for an enduring future of continuing to contribute to improvements in rural teaching and learning. The transfer makes both Cobscook Institute and TREE leaner, more nimble, and sustainable through these challenging times."

Mark Tappan, Professor and Chair of Colby's Education Program, agreed. "TREE would not be here without that nurturing incubation. But just as kids eventually leave home and take on more autonomy and freedom, so too do exciting initiatives like TREE."

A grayscale map of the Gulf of Maine region, showing the coastline of Maine and the surrounding waters. The text "Gulf of Maine" is overlaid on the map. A dark gray banner at the top contains the title.

Our Place in the Transformations Systems Mapping & Analysis Working Group

The Gulf of Maine is warming faster than any other body of water on the planet. Image from NASA Earth Observatory, 2018. Accessible at cobscook.co/news

Around the world, we are seeing dramatic inequities and injustice resulting from human influence on the many systems of which we are all a part: increasing storm intensities, sea level rise, human migration—and a global pandemic...the list goes on. In order to change these systems, we need to better see the systems we exist within. This is where the new Transformations Systems Mapping & Analysis Working Group comes in.

Glenn Page, a longtime friend of Cobscook Institute, and whose wife Jane serves on our Board, helped launch this working group in April 2020. He pointed out that as a society, we are good at seeing the small scale with very powerful microscopes and seeing very far away with powerful telescopes. But what if we had a “macroscope,” something that would allow us to view the systems we are living within in sharper focus and from a community and place-based perspective? That is where Cobscook Institute comes in, as a partner helping to see the greater Cobscook/Passamaquoddy Bay and St. Croix watershed as part of the larger Gulf of Maine.

“I’ve always been impressed by the power of community-based organizations such as those rooted in the folk school tradition, like Cobscook Institute as seers of the wider social and ecological systems,” Glenn remarked. “With over twenty years of engaging deeply with the community, Cobscook Institute is a perfect partner to better see, connect and accelerate change in the region because they move at the speed of trust in collaborating with the community and focusing on issues that matter to the people of greater Cobscook Bay. It makes perfect sense for an initiative like the Transformations Systems Mapping & Analysis Working Group to have a bit of a home here.”

Glenn added that, “We’re all part of systems: food systems, healthcare systems, education systems, etc. But so much of them are invisible to us. If we can better see the systems that we’re part of, we can begin to see new opportunities. At the end of the day, this work, in which Cobscook Institute plays an important role, is about improving wellbeing, creating greater access to jobs, healthcare, clean drinking water, transportation, even broadband—it’s about all the things that matter most to the people of this wider community. I’ve never seen anything more holistic, systemic, and meaningful and it will be exciting to further develop this here with Cobscook Institute.”

Featured Friend: Jennifer Kane

Jennifer Kane, Founder and CEO of Empower Philanthropy, has been a strategic partner of Cobscook Institute for the past four years. Her practice at Empower Philanthropy emphasizes connecting donors to leading social entrepreneurs working on the causes they care about, and vice versa. “It is my great privilege to be able to introduce Cobscook Institute leaders to more allies and donors on the west coast,” Jennifer said.

For example, Jennifer organized a house party in 2016 to introduce members of the TREE team to California philanthropists and others interested in learning about the important ideas and practices in transforming rural education. “My job is basically to be a bridge,” she reflected, saying that the formation of an East Coast-West Coast collaborative centered upon rural education has been especially gratifying: “We’ve been able to demonstrate to people who are considered experts in the field of child development and environmental education that wonderful, creative, innovative things are happening in a remote area at the easternmost point of the USA.”

While Cobscook Institute has undergone many big changes in the past year, Jennifer continues to be committed. “I am so endlessly impressed with the educators at Cobscook Institute. They have demonstrated a deep commitment and understanding of the community they’re serving and bring all their hearts and heads to the work of helping rural communities feel heard, empowered, and strengthened. The physical campus itself is clearly a place that honors learning and nature, and creates stunning spaces for people to grow, reflect, connect and become their best selves.”

Funders all over the country are recognizing and respecting what is happening here in Maine. Jennifer added, “Cobscook Institute should feel proud and empowered by what it has accomplished. In every small corner of the most remote places, human beings can do amazing community-building. I am so grateful to be able to play a small role in inviting new friends to discover the magic that is happening at Cobscook Institute.”



Invest in Rural Communities Everywhere with your Gift

Thanks to each and every one of you who have contributed financially to help create the safe harbor impacts within our communities, and within Cobscook Institute itself, that are reflected upon in this edition of Cobscook Currents. Cobscook Institute's ongoing legacy of creating responsive educational opportunities that strengthen personal, community, and global well-being is only possible with your generous support. To you, our continued supporters, we need you now more than ever. If you are new to Cobscook Institute and find these storylines inspirational, please become a member of our absolutely essential circle of support.

Gifts of every size make a difference. Folk singer Pete Seeger's hauntingly beautiful song, "One Grain of Sand," reminds us that every act, every being, matters. Cobscook Institute needs your support; it needs us all to do what we can to help it weather these stormy times.

By giving what you can now, you sustain the very personal impacts exemplified in the words you have read from our Cobscook Experiential Program students, from COVID-isolated community members like Diane and Ed, and from Cobscook Institute staff members like Michelle, for whom work here is so much more than the essential gift of having a job. Your gift combines to create very personal and real safe harbors such as these.

Your generous 2020 gift sustains current programs and impacts while allowing our staff, board, and collaborating partners to plan and prepare for post-COVID times. Your gift allows our Retreat Center staff to work with community and client partners from near and far to prepare for a future when we are once again able to congregate—safely—to learn and share together in beautiful and welcoming settings as exemplified by our Trescott, Maine campus and larger region. The TREE team will offer courses and workshops on the Cobscook Institute campus and global initiatives, such as the Transformation Systems Mapping & Analysis work that Glenn describes, will be well-served by being able to converge and learn in the Gulf of Maine utilizing our campus as a home base.

As Jennifer reflected, this work shows that humans can do amazing things in the most remote places around the world. An investment in Cobscook Institute is an investment in support of rural communities everywhere. Your support is essential to keep that spirit burning bright as we shelter in the safe harbor that we are creating—together.

Visit cobscookinstitute.org/donate or call (207) 733-2233 to make a one-time or monthly gift or learn about gifts of stock and giving through your will.

Thank you for being a part of this essential work.



Alan Furth
Co-Founder



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