

CAPE BRETON POST

Father, daughter team benefit from community clean-ups in Cape Breton

Premium content

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Neil Walsh, left, and his 17-year-old daughter Hannah hold a damaged lobster trap they picked up during a beach cleanup at Schooner Pond Road organized by the Cape Breton Environmental Association in early July. It was one of 10 cleanups in which they participated over the past year-and-a-half and they enjoy helping the community during their “good bonding time.” - contributed

'It's good bonding time'

GLACE BAY, N.S. —

Community cleanups make for perfect father-daughter bonding time according to Neil and Hannah Walsh.

Over the past year and a half, they've participated in 10 group cleanups of illegal dumpsites, waterways and beaches with organizations like Tower Head Volunteer Fire Department and the Cape Breton Environmental Association.

Their dedication to environmental issues was recognized by the Cape Breton Environmental Association on Aug. 27 when the father and daughter were given the organization's first volunteer recognition award.

"Neil and Hannah have been coming to our cleanups since before CBEA was even (officially) formed with joint stocks (registration)," said environmental association president Dylan Yates.

"We admire their dedication and commitment to their community and environment. It's community volunteers like Neil and Hannah that make our cleanups such a success."

NEIL WALSH

- **Age:** 41
- **Occupation:** Operator with Department of Transportation
- **Grew up:** Glace Bay
- **Graduated from:** Glace Bay High School, CBU
- **Hobbies:** Mixed martial arts, mountain biking, running

HANNAH WALSH

- **Age:** 17
 - **School:** In Grade 12 Glace Bay High School
 - **Career goals:** Veterinarian
 - **Plans after graduation:** Attend UPEI
 - **Hobbies:** Listening to music, caring for pet hamster
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The first cleanup the Walshs attended was at the bottom of Lake Road in Glace Bay, part of a migratory bird sanctuary area. Neil Walsh saw it posted on social media and his interest was sparked because he grew up near there.



Neil Walsh (left) and his daughter

Hannah pose with the plaque they received from Cape Breton Environmental Association on Aug. 27, for their dedication to volunteering with the organization – the first time the group gave such an award.

He asked his daughter and his son if they wanted to volunteer with him, but only 17-year-old Hannah was interested.

“I wasn’t surprised. She’s very kind-hearted,” Neil Walsh said. “And she likes helping people.”

“It’s nice to help out anyway I can,” said Hannah Walsh. “It’s a good feeling helping out the community. And the people are super sweet. It’s nice to meet people who have the same ‘want to help the environment’ attitude.”

Hooked after that first cleanup, the Walshs say the cleanups are “rewarding.”

“The before and after is crazy,” said Hannah Walsh. “The amount of stuff we collect is insane ... Even personal hygiene products (we find during beach cleanups) that people flush.”

“When you arrive on site and you see the mess, then after you finish you see it’s 100 per cent improved, that before and after is very rewarding,” Neil Walsh said.

Equally as rewarding for the father and daughter team is they’re volunteering together.

“Anytime you can spend time with your kids, it’s worthwhile,” Walsh said. “And you’re working together to (doing something good for the community) and reaping all of those benefits too.”

“It’s great to have a parent to do this with,” said the teenager. “It’s a nice bonding experience ... You spend time together when you’re walking around, talking. It’s good one-on-one time.”

Dr. Simon Sherry, a professor at Dalhousie University in Halifax and a practising registered clinical psychologist, said there is science supporting the benefits of volunteering and he sometimes prescribes the activity to his clients.



Dr. Simon Sherry is a practicing registered clinical psychologist and professor at Dalhousie University.

“(Scientific research is showing) you can help yourself when helping others,” said Sherry who also directs Dal’s personality research team.

Research has shown improvements to mental health and over all well-being, social interactions and longevity.

“(It could be) volunteering gets you out of the house, doing things, and this decreases sedentary lifestyle (which is known to be a leading cause of illness and death today),” Sherry said.

“Cleaning a beach, for example, results in leaving the house and being active, which are good for your mental health and you’re doing physical activity.”

There is also the altruistic side of volunteering, where you are doing something for others instead of yourself, which can help people feel good about themselves.

Sherry said research also points to a “darker side” of volunteering.

“Some people can get obsessively involved in volunteering, where they are doing too much ... Then burn out becomes a risk,” he said.

“It is possible to do too much good.”