

ARDN Partners with iCCAN and Lethbridge College to Gain Understanding of Virtual Education in Alberta

June 20, 2011 – Approximately one third of Albertans live in rural communities and lack sufficient access to education and training opportunities. By collaborating with iCCAN (Innovative Communities Connecting and Networking) and Lethbridge College to deliver a \$50,000 research project, the Alberta Rural Development Network (ARDN) will help increase not only understanding of virtual education, but the opportunities available to rural residents.

Complementary to a larger project funded by Alberta Advanced Education and Technology, this project will contribute a “snapshot” of virtual education in Alberta and help further the main project’s goals: enhance regional stewardship and further develop credit and non-credit program opportunities in Alberta communities; leverage the power of videoconferencing; increase resident capacity in target communities; and create a clear pathway for learners to access post-secondary institutions.

“ARDN is proud to be involved with this project,” says ARDN’s Executive Director Dee Ann Benard. “This is what ARDN was created to do: connect communities and organizations to universities and colleges to address rural issues through research and collaboration.”

iCCAN is a partnership between Community Learning Network, Literacy Alberta, and Volunteer Alberta that is creating efficiencies, innovation, and collaboration through videoconferencing. Lethbridge College is a Comprehensive Community Institution with a mandate to facilitate access to foundational and post-secondary programming within its region. Together, they will work to conduct surveys, interviews, and literatures reviews to ensure the results are practical and relevant to rural Alberta.

General Manager of iCCAN, Esther Vardy, says that “the results of this research will contribute to further development of blended delivery strategies, potentially enhancing access to adult educational opportunities by leveraging the power of videoconferencing. The relationships built throughout this project will last well beyond the final report.”

Results from the project will be available in January 2012.

The Alberta Rural Development Network (ARDN) is a not-for-profit partnership of Alberta’s 21 public colleges, universities, and technical institutes. ARDN members work together to support and enhance the well-being of individuals and the vibrancy of communities. It draws on the strengths of rural communities, post-secondary institutions and community-based organizations. ARDN is funded in part by Rural Alberta Development Fund whose funding is provided by the Government of Alberta. To learn more, visit www.ardn.ca.

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Media Contact:

Melissa St. Dennis, Communications Officer
Alberta Rural Development Network
780-449-1006 ext 224 (office)
780-340-5026 (cell)
communications@ardn.ca