



## Comunn Gàidhlig Toronto Year in Review 2014 - 2015

### **This Year's Accomplishments**

#### ***Gaining Momentum***

This past year we emerged from a quieter period of Comunn Gàidhlig Toronto's history, into a time characterized by vibrant community, sharing and connection. Gaining momentum from the incredible show of support by our members during the 2014 Annual General Meeting, the 14 member Board of Directors set about diligently implementing members' direction to hold events and activities that would continue to grow the Society and promote Gaelic language, culture and community.

In the last year, we have been thrilled to help raise awareness about Gaelic language and culture throughout Ontario, and spread the word about Comunn Gàidhlig Toronto. We've seen our membership grow to over 60 people, held 10 successful events, established a thriving online presence, and created connections with people and organizations also celebrating the Gaelic community. We've learned some key lessons through our successes and identified areas of need, and continue to look forward to future opportunities to grow the efforts of Comunn Gàidhlig Toronto.

#### ***Strengthening & Engaging Community***

A primary focus of the Board this year was to create vibrant opportunities to bring the Gaelic community together. By holding a diverse range of events, approximately one every month, we aimed to strengthen and engage the Gaelic community across Ontario.

Our events, grounded in language and cultural traditions, were crafted to appeal to a wide range of interests, and for all ages. This year, music, language, song, skits, poetry, history, literature, film, and dance found their way throughout our well-attended events.

We were able to connect and engage the Gaelic community by developing a regular communications network built on emails, mail outs, phone calls, a new website, Twitter, and Facebook. This made us consistently more accessible, and helped to raise awareness amongst the Gaelic community to know who we are and what we're up to, the resources are available to them, and most importantly - how to be involved.

We have seen so much interest in the Gaelic culture from many people. People - locally and globally - want to know what's going on in Ontario and how to become engaged. Our social media efforts are especially revealing: the website regularly gets up to 150 page views each day, and up to 270 views when there's a special event. Our Twitter account has over 140 followers, and Facebook has over 100 "likes."

And last but not least, we are so pleased to see the strength in our community through the volunteers and members who have come forward to support the efforts of the Society in a multitude of ways - through putting on events, assisting with



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communications, sharing photos, manning the Gaelic Language Booth, etc. Our efforts this year were made entirely possible through time, talents, and sage advice graciously shared by the Gaelic community.

### ***Sharing Language & Culture***

This year we focused our efforts through the lens of sharing Gaelic language and culture. We launched our efforts by bringing the community together to celebrate Christmas with a luncheon and Ceilidh in December. Later this past winter, we held Làtha Filmeachan Gàidhlig / Gaelic Film Day. FilmG was gracious in sending us a selection of clips by past winners. We also held Òrain Luaidh agus Gnìomhachdan Eile / Waulking Songs & Other Things, where tradition bearers taught us about the history and methods of tweed making and waulking songs, paired with a lively demonstration. At Strùpag 's Òran - A Cuppa and a Song, we shared a cuppa together, learned a bit of Gaelic and some songs and were entertained by various persons in attendance. We're lucky to have such talented and engaged members to fill our get togethers with poems, skits, tunes, and dancing.

We were especially pleased to help promote the efforts of others sharing the language and culture. This past winter and spring we helped support the ever popular Cànan agus Òran, a day long workshop of Gaelic language and song, which was brilliantly organized by Lorrie MacKinnon. We were also pleased to help advertise language initiatives occurring throughout the province and beyond, like the Toronto Gaelic Learners Association classes, King City classes, the Ontario School of Piping & Drumming's immersion week, the Atlantic Gaelic Academy, and in person and online Gaelic conversational groups.

### ***Creating Connections***

Through all of our efforts this year, another key focus was to create connections with people and organizations also celebrating the Gaelic community.

This summer we took to the outdoors, creating connections and making friends along the way. We kicked up our heels, dancing in the park at Edwards Gardens with the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society. In July through September, we took our Gaelic Language and Resources Booth for the 4th straight year to 5 Highland Games and Festivals in an effort to make the Gaelic language visible and connect with persons of Gaelic heritage. Thanks to the efforts of our volunteers, were able to create connections with festival organizers at Kincardine, Cambridge, Uxbridge, Fergus and the Beach in Toronto.

Festival organizers and goers alike were eager for knowledge and awareness of the Gaelic language. Many people who visited the booth asked us about opportunities to learn the language. With help from Siol Cultural Enterprises out of Nova Scotia, we were able to make Gaelic language resources available as well. Our presence at these



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events reinforces for us every time that there are many people out there who want to connect with their Gaelic heritage and are interested in the language aspect as well.

This fall we were so pleased to co-host Cuirim-Chiùil Ghàidhlig agus Seòladh Leabhair / Gaelic Concert & Book Launch with the University of Toronto Celtic Studies Course Union. It was a great opportunity for us to partner with an engaged and enthusiastic group of young people who share our interest in the language and culture. We welcomed Gaelic scholar Michael Newton and Nova Scotian Gaelic poet and singer Lewis MacKinnon, who shared through recitations and songs, *Seanchaidh na Coille / Memory-Keeper of the Forest*, an Anthology of Scottish-Gaelic Literature of Canada. Later this October, we look forward to the Young Pipers Championship, and following *Ceilidh with Scantily Plaid*.

Additionally, the Board reached out to the University of Guelph's Centre for Scottish Studies to welcome their new Chair, Dr. James Fraser. We were so encouraged to hear his enthusiasm for growing the Centre's involvement and promotion of Gaelic language and culture. We were also pleased to financially support the Ryan Russell Memorial Pipe Band, and had the pleasure of young pipers opening some of our events this year.

### Lessons Learned

We learned some key lessons this year regarding our successes, and what we need to address for our areas of need:

- We developed a successful and diverse events calendar for the year that we can use as a model to guide future activities.
- We built a thriving communications network and online presence that we can rely on to connect with people interested in Gaelic language and culture.
- Through all of our events, language booths, and connections with our partners, we continued to see a huge demand for learning and accessing Gaelic language and culture, from all ages and across Ontario. We need to continue to create and support rich, diverse opportunities to meet this need.
- We forged various partnerships with other groups and were the stronger for it. We will seek to maintain these connections and to increase collaborations with other organizations where we can provide more successful outcomes by partnering.
- Given the demand for language learning, we need to establish solid criteria and structures, grounded on expert advice and best practices, for how we can support the advancement of the Gaelic language to meet the demand that we've observed exists. If we are going to continue to promote the language, we need to be actively engaged in creating opportunities to learn the language.



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### What's Next: Future Opportunities

This upcoming year is full of opportunity. To start, we can:

- Begin a detailed exploration with members to undertake strategic planning, providing us with a clear vision, purpose, principles, and key efforts to focus on.
- Finalize revisions to the Constitution so that it is a current, legally sound document that accurately details the operations of Comunn Gàidhlig Toronto.

We continue look to our membership to shape and direct how we move forward together as Comunn Gàidhlig Toronto.