

STRENGTHENING
RURAL
CANADA



RENFORCER LES
COMMUNAUTÉS
RURALES DU CANADA

Our people. Our communities. Our future.

STRENGTHENING RURAL CANADA:

Summary of Rural Newfoundland and Labrador Community Visits



Prepared for the Strengthening Rural Canada initiative by Literacy Newfoundland and Labrador and
RESDAC

This project is funded by the Government of Canada's
Adult Learning, Literacy and Essential Skills Program

Canada 

ROADMAP FOR CANADA'S OFFICIAL
LANGUAGES 2013-2018

EDUCATION
IMMIGRATION
COMMUNITIES

INTRODUCTION

Strengthening Rural Canada-Renforcer les communautés rurales du Canada is a comprehensive study on the human and social capital dimensions of rural, small town and remote communities in Canada. Using the latest Census and National Household Survey (NHS) data, the initiative is examining the socio, cultural, economic and organizational attributes of the community and population of 28 communities in select provinces across Canada (Ontario, British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Newfoundland and Labrador).

Funders/Partners

Strengthening Rural Canada is funded by the Government of Canada's Adult Learning, Literacy and Essential Skills Program and in part by the Roadmap for Canada's Official Languages 2013-18: Education, Immigration and Communities. Partners on the project include Essential Skills Ontario, Decoda Literacy Solutions, Literacy Newfoundland and Labrador, the Saskatchewan Literacy Network and Réseau pour le développement de l'alphabétisme et des compétences (RESDAC).

How Communities Were Selected

Due to the diversity of rural areas, a common set of criteria was developed across all provinces to select a diverse group of communities for the purpose of this initiative. The criteria examined the following factors: population size, demographics and degree of rurality. For more detailed information please visit www.strengtheningruralcanada.ca/the-initiative/selecting-communities/

Newfoundland and Labrador communities selected:

- Bonavista
- Trinity Bay North
- St. Lawrence
- Harbour Breton
- Burgeo

Community Visits

Over the past eight months, Literacy Newfoundland and Labrador and RESDAC visited five rural and small communities across Newfoundland and Labrador. During our visits we interviewed a wide range of individuals: mayors, municipal representatives, economic development officers, service club members, employers, employment services providers and local residents. Through these visits we were able to gather the information necessary to paint a picture of each community, including its strengths, opportunities and challenges. Each person we met with welcomed us into their community and provided insights we would not have been able to gather without their help.

BRIEF HISTORY AND BACKGROUND OF RURAL NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR COMMUNITIES

Rural and small town communities across Newfoundland and Labrador are inherently unique, with different histories, cultures, residents, industries and political backgrounds. Based on our visits, there were however, some common factors between these communities that play a large role in shaping these communities:

- Traditional fishing communities
- Single industry communities (resource industries: primarily fishing, also mining)
- Seasonal tourism communities and/or emerging tourism potential
- Presence of and/or potential growth of eco-tourism and outfitting employers
- Communities that are distant from larger urban centres and/or major transit connections
- Communities that are enabling work opportunities by engaging in regional 'co-opetition'
- Small service hub communities that provide regional services to surrounding rural and remote communities (government, health and retail services)
- Retirement destination communities
- Communities with large senior populations and low educational attainment

For the most part in Newfoundland and Labrador, the story of rural and small town communities reflected the broader patterns of decline in the fishery, with inshore fishery and fish processing decline, and resource industry boom and bust cycles. Some of the communities have lost major fishery-related industry, or their industries have been significantly declining over the years. Common to all communities, the population and the workforce was aging, and a significant migratory workforce was impacting the social fabric of these communities.

Yet while some communities were facing challenges, we visited others that were embracing opportunity. These communities appear to have been influenced internally by community leaders in seeking and welcoming external participation in industry growth and/or repurposing of infrastructure. These communities were identifying new industry and new ways of seeing themselves within a larger regional context. Community members themselves were charting new directions -growing small businesses as well as changing strategies to revitalize their towns.

Based on numerous conversations with rural residents, business owners and representatives, the general sentiment we heard was one of embracing a dual vision. On one side, there was the thinking that each community would need to come up with their own individual vision and strategy suited to their communities' needs. Equally important, these same communities were embracing opportunities to work cooperatively within a regional context to 'raise all boats'.

Francophone Communities

Based on our visits, there were some common and interconnected factors between these communities that play a large role in shaping rural Francophone Newfoundland and Labrador communities:

- Francophones are a group more often than in decline due to mixed marriages between Francophones and Anglophones.
- In predominantly Anglophone communities, Francophones speak the language of the majority for work as well as socially, and French is often only spoken at home. There is a new phenomenon that

has been identified by researchers that was conducted with high school students on identity. It was discovered that most of the younger generations don't necessarily identify themselves as Francophone or Anglophone, but rather identify as bilingual.

- There are less educational opportunities for Francophone youth than Anglophone youth, therefore Francophones often must leave their communities to pursue education and career opportunities.

COMMON THEMES AND LEARNINGS

There were a number of issues that recurred through our visits to rural communities across Newfoundland and Labrador. Of major prominence was the outmigration of youth, with many relocating to larger urban centres to pursue post-secondary education and/or employment. Based on our visits and interviews, the high level of youth migration is creating what we believe to be a 'hollowing out effect' in many communities - where skilled youth are leaving or attaching to a migrating workforce. The high level of migratory workers was impacting social and family structures in most of the communities we visited. These workers were choosing to reside in rural communities, but migrated out of province and even out of country for work. Migratory work brought in financial gains to individuals and families, increased construction of new homes and support to the municipal tax base. However, migratory work also meant enforced absences from home, and often left a single parent with the task of child-raising and participating in community life. There were few immigrants attracted to these communities, despite the general increase in tourism, and where these were present, they were in the larger communities. In all of the communities we visited there had been an increase in the number of retirees and often a lack of suitable housing for these residents. All communities were challenged to sustain a large enough tax base to keep up with providing existing services and managing aging-infrastructure costs.

There were also some other issues expressed by community members, including:

- Lack of activities for young adults and families
- Increased levels of substance abuse
- Availability of health care and transportation services
- Resistance to community change
- The challenge and/or the value of municipal and regional cooperation
- Declining school enrolment, school closings and lack of available education and training opportunities

Across all the communities we visited, many residents and representatives felt that the rural and small town voices were rarely heard at the provincial level of government, and that policy decisions that were made often had major implications on the economic sustainability of municipal government and employers.

Other learnings that occurred through our visits and interviews:

- Communities can be revitalized: small actions and initiatives can have big impacts
- Communities can create larger impacts if they work with neighbouring communities in their regions
- Human capital is important for rural communities: it is critical to have people with the skills, ideas and experience to come up with creative solutions to solve and address local issues

- Newcomers and/or people who have left the community and come back can be crucial assets for communities. They often bring different skills, have different perspectives about the community, and can often bring about change

Francophone Communities

There were a number of issues that recurred through our visits to rural Francophone communities across Newfoundland and Labrador, which included:

- Mining rights is creating some land issues in Labrador
- Lack of affordable housing in Labrador
- Public facilities need renewing in some areas
- While the construction of new facilities may be funded by the government, it is a challenge to find the funding to maintain and manage these facilities
- Daycare is an issue, as there is no training in either English or French in some communities – and online training is not often recognized as formal training, making it difficult for those in remote regions to get the proper accreditations.
- Lack of funding to offer services in French is a challenge for these communities

RURAL SUCCESS STORY

Garry and Shelly Blackmore are the owners and operators of Captain Blackmore's Heritage Manor located in Port Union, in the Municipality of Trinity Bay North. Originally built on the ocean's edge by Captain John Hann Blackmore in the early 1920s, the property underwent four years of restoration with Garry and Shelly working side by side throughout the process. In June 2005, Captain Blackmore's Heritage Manor received its first B&B guest, and has since provided a welcoming retreat to hundreds of guests from across the province and the world.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS MOVING FORWARD

Through our community visits and interviews, we have concluded that the following key considerations be taken into account when moving forward in these rural communities:

- Municipalities need to be supported in implementing economic development planning. In most communities we visited, this effort is currently being carried out by a volunteer effort at the municipal level.
- Economic development plans need to tie in human capital strategies at local and regional levels.
- An increase in technology skills development is a must for these communities in order to help retain a viable workforce and attract new businesses.
- Viable and innovative education and training opportunities for youth and adults needs to be implemented, including training for older adults with low levels of educational and training, and localized small business training, trades and apprenticeship training. In many communities we saw

that the existing apprenticeship criteria and training opportunities are forcing people to leave their communities and small trade employers to close down.

Francophone Communities

- Strong community visions are needed in order to plan for future development and growth – strategic plans are essential for survival of these communities, especially in mono-industry towns.
- Internet connection is key for these communities – internet needs to be available in all rural communities in order to attract new businesses.

To read the profiles of the rural Newfoundland and Labrador communities we visited, please visit:

www.strengtheningruralcanada.ca/communities/newfoundland-labrador/