

Dialogue Summary Report – Marystown

September 10, 2008

*Making Newfoundland and Labrador a
Province of Choice for Young People*

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About CPRN

Canadian Policy Research Networks creates knowledge and leads public dialogue and discussion on social and economic issues important to the well-being of all Canadians. Since its beginning in 1994, CPRN has provided advice to Canada's leaders on the issues of our times and produced policy options to move Canada forward.

CPRN carries out its mission by:

- Having experts do original research in all major socio-economic areas;
- Conducting Canada-wide dialogues and roundtables to discuss policy issues, raise awareness, and align outcomes with public attitudes and expectations; and,
- Broadly disseminating its research to promote the engagement of Canadians in policy issues.

CPRN specializes in outreach to young Canadian leaders, helping them develop their skills and encouraging them to participate in public issues and policy development.

These approaches have made CPRN one of Canada's most recognized sources of high quality, social and economic policy ideas, as well as a leader in civic engagement.

For further information on this and past dialogues, please visit CPRN's website at www.cprn.org.

Dialogue Summary Report – Marystown

Introduction

Many young people are leaving Newfoundland and Labrador to seek opportunities in other Canadian provinces. This long-term trend of out-migration has had a significant impact on families and communities throughout the province. Recently there have been more people moving into the province, but the number of young people leaving is still greater than those coming in, causing a net loss of young people.

On June 5, 2008, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador announced the development of a *Youth Retention and Attraction Strategy* to counter the negative impacts of youth out-migration, strengthen the labour market and support the economic development of the province.

Canadian Policy Research Networks (CPRN), on behalf of the government, conducted a series of deliberative dialogues with young people from Newfoundland and Labrador aged 18 to 30. In total, 13 dialogues were held, 11 in centers across the province and two outside, in Fort McMurray, Alberta and Ottawa, Ontario, where many young people have relocated. At least one in-province dialogue was conducted in each of the nine Rural Secretariat regions with three in the Avalon Peninsula.

The goal of the dialogues was to help identify ways to encourage young people to stay, live and work in the province. The project's findings and recommendations will inform provincial government policy development and decision-making. It will provide the government with an understanding of the trade-offs and choices young people are prepared to make and which they expect to be considered by government, business and communities in setting future directions for the province.

Dialogue Process

CPRN's well established deliberative dialogue method was used to engage young people in a day-long process. The purpose was to bring the voices of young adults into a conversation about how to address the outflow of young people. Participants examined, discussed and worked through critical issues, learning from each other, gaining an understanding of different perspectives and identifying ways to move forward. The dialogue process offered participants the chance to use their knowledge and experience of the province to reflect on some of the difficult choices that could be taken to reduce net out-migration among young people.

Participants were recruited using various methods, including random selection, referrals by family members and friends, various communication networks and through media blitzes.

About the Region

Marystown is located on the Burin Peninsula which according to 2007 regional population demographic statistics is 21,280.¹ The Peninsula is comprised of 40 communities, which are mainly located on the Southern coast.² There were 41 participants at the dialogue session held in Marystown on September 10, 2008.

Agenda

The day started with introductions and a presentation of the dialogue process. Participants were then divided into three breakout groups of 10 to 15 people.

Three approaches were presented for discussion within the breakout groups (See Appendix A). The approaches reflect different values, perspectives, assumptions and experiences. The participants worked through each approach – identifying what they liked and disliked about each approach. They then determined what their common ground and areas of difference were.

Participants returned to the plenary to further explore the choices and trade-offs that they would be willing to make. After which they were divided into smaller sub-groups in which they identified bold actions that could be implemented in the future.

Common Ground and Areas of Difference

Common ground is defined as the set of values, principles and strategies that the group thinks is important and represents what they really care about in moving forward on the issue of youth retention and attraction.

Areas of difference, divergence or tension represent matters on which the group could not agree, or where there was some level of agreement but the group identified tensions and challenging trade-offs between values.

The participants were divided into three breakout groups for this exercise. Below are their common grounds and areas of difference.

¹ Demography Division, Statistics Canada; Economics and Statistics Branch, Department of Finance

² www.exec.gov.nl.ca/rural/RSR8.asp

Breakout Group 1

Common Ground

- Participants value quality of life in rural areas specifically around family, generosity and safety – factors which keep people in the province.
- The provincial government should promote services in rural areas, especially basic services (such as water and sewers), transportation, child care, education and health care. It should focus on strengthening education opportunities that lead to jobs/careers in the province and help entice youth to stay.
- The economic boom must protect and not displace working class people through measures like rent control. The example of the current St. Lawrence windmill power project was mentioned, where tenants are being kicked out of low income housing and rent prices have shot up dramatically.

Areas of Difference

- Participants believe that diversity is a good thing, but question how much would be too much.
- A strong sense of identity limits regional cooperation which can be an impediment for attraction of others.
- Participants held different views regarding whether quality of life is more important than pay.
- How services should be distributed between regional hubs and rural areas and the cost associated with it.

Breakout Group 2

Common Ground

- To attract youth the provincial government should increase recreational services in quasi-rural and rural areas.
- There is a need to further develop tourism to raise the province's profile and cultivate a positive image of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians among other Canadians.
- Great value was placed on diversity and learning more about other cultures; on community living; and on the need to prioritize the repatriation of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who have left.
- Encouraging jobs that offer long-term security, rather than higher wages would help to retain and attract young people.

Breakout Group 3

Common Ground

- Participants value:
 - Fair salaries that match the cost of living and type of work.
 - Improved access to health and recreational services.
 - Safety and family in rural areas were highly valued by participants.

- Participants advise the government to:
 - Regionalize opportunities for growth throughout the Burin Peninsula together (sharing between communities).
 - Offer quality entry-level positions, e.g. co-op programs and trade positions.
 - Centralize essential services such as health care and entertainment in a hub.

Areas of Difference

- The group could not agree on which deserved a greater focus, the environment or cultural programs/services.

Comparison across Breakout Groups

In the plenary session, participants presented their common ground and areas of difference. They were asked to identify key similarities and differences among the groups.

- Rural life-style, safety and family values are important; improving access to health care and essential services in a centralized hub was key to maintaining rural areas.
 - Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are practical people who would like practical solutions.
- All three groups also agreed on employment and were concerned with fair wages, job security and strengthening the link between work and school.
- The environment was only raised by one group.
- The issues of cost and service distribution (who gets what) in rural areas as well as how much is too much in terms of diversity were only raised by one group.

Exploration of Trade-Offs

The participants then further discussed some issues where there seemed to be tension between different values and perspectives or contradictions between common grounds. They explored trade-offs that may have to be made to maintain or achieve what they value most.

1. Regionalization of Services amongst Communities:

- If you are willing to stay in small towns you have to be willing to drive for basic services.
- People choose to live where they live, have to be willing to give up certain things depending on where you live.
- People were willing to drive for the following essential services: health care, e.g. child birth, ultrasound and MRI on Burin Peninsula; and drug and alcohol rehabilitation centers.
- People were not willing to drive for: groceries, education for children (should not travel for more than 20 minutes), a family doctor within 20 minutes of home but will drive an hour to a hospital hub.
- Could trade off recreational facilities but not willing to trade medical services.
- Not willing to drive for child care, there are no daycares in outskirts of Marystown.

2. Fair Wages for Quality of Life:

- Salaries should be comparable and fair for the cost of living and type of work.
- Majority of participants said they would accept less money in order to maintain their current lifestyle.
- They would be willing to live with: entry level positions that you can survive on and pay bills; keeping family units together (would take pay cut to keep family together).

Bold Actions

Bold actions are creative ideas and strategies that could be implemented to make Newfoundland and Labrador a province of choice for young people. The bold actions identified below are the key ideas identified by the participants that they considered most important and relevant. Other suggestions from individual brainstorming are described in Appendix C.

1. Student debt elimination.
2. Student loan program that involves not paying income tax until student loan is paid in full.
3. Free education.
4. Government sponsored child care/babysitting which would enable families to have child care, have families sooner and both be employed.
5. Free education (“Today’s Children, Tomorrow’s Future”). It would encompass: attraction to the province, less financial burden, draw to rural areas for private schools, more trained employees, broader course selection, tune courses to labour market and class equality in access to education.
6. Public Trades College.
7. Government paid postsecondary education and living expenses if student agrees to stay and work in NL. This will lead to entry-level jobs being made available to the public.

Next Steps

Participants were told that they will receive a copy of the session report. A Provincial Summit will be held in St. John’s on November 14-15 with 160 participants randomly selected from the dialogues and 40 decision-makers.

Appendix A. Summary of the Three Approaches Used in the Dialogues

Approach 1: Making a Living in NL – Focus on the Economy

Strengthen and diversify our economy so that it can support a skilled and educated young workforce.

Most young people do not want to leave Newfoundland and Labrador. They leave because they have to pay off student debts quickly, find jobs they cannot get in the province, or earn a salary they can live on. Once they leave and make their life in another place, it is hard for them to return.

Approach 2: Enjoying Life in NL – Focus on Quality of Life

Build on Newfoundland and Labrador's strengths and ensure that the quality of life in the province is second to none.

People have stayed in Newfoundland and Labrador even during tough times because of the quality of life here. They enjoy the environment, the slower pace of life, the rural lifestyle, the sense of belonging to a community, and the rich cultural life and heritage. But we are not keeping up. Our programs and services (social, health, environmental) cannot keep up with the need, especially in rural areas. There are not enough programs and services for young people or young families such as entertainment, recreation, programs for youth-at-risk, public transportation and communication. Big city problems such as crime, urban sprawl and differences between rich and poor are growing in the Northeast Avalon. Young people no longer believe the province has the best quality of life around.

Approach 3: Opening NL to the Rest of Canada and the World – Focus on Diversity, Tolerance and In-Migration

Attract newcomers, especially young people, to Newfoundland and Labrador and help them to stay.

The population loss in Newfoundland and Labrador will continue even if our young people stay. Some say “Newfoundland and Labrador has existed in its own bubble for too long.” In the age of globalization, we must be open to outside influences and to immigration, without losing our sense of what makes us different. We are already a friendly people, but some of our views are too close-minded and narrow. We are not always open to different lifestyles and attitudes and we are not always welcoming of people of different races and cultures. If people do not feel their differences will be accepted they will not move here or stay.

Appendix B. Dialogue Agenda

Breakfast, Registration, Initial Questionnaire

Welcome, Opening, Introductions

Presentation of Key Information

Overview of the Process

Breakout Groups: Discussion of Personal Experiences

Breakout Groups: Dialogues Using Three Approaches

Breakout Groups: Elaboration of Common Ground and Areas of Difference

Plenary: Report Back on Common Ground and Areas of Difference

Plenary: Exploration of Trade-Offs

Small Work Groups: Bold Actions and Strategies

Plenary: Report Back on Bold Actions

Closing Comments

Final Questionnaire and Evaluation