

Dialogue Summary Report – Stephenville

September 8, 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 – Stephenville

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

The population of the Stephenville – Port aux Basques Rural Secretariat region is 30,554 according to 2007 statistics.¹ The region encompasses the Stephenville, Bay St. George South and Port au Port Peninsula areas extending to Codroy Valley and Port aux Basques area in the south. It also includes communities along the south coast from Isle aux Morts and extending as far east as the community of Francois.²

There were 49 participants from all parts of the region at the dialogue in Stephenville on September 8, 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. Afterwards, 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/RSR4.asp

Breakout Group 1

Common Ground

- Competitive salaries and quality jobs are critical. Quality jobs are seen as full-time, permanent positions that offer new skills and the opportunity to advance.
- Quality services such as health care, recreation and entertainment are valued. Participants feel it is important to have access to these services in rural areas.
- Participants express a willingness to sacrifice higher wages that could be earned elsewhere to remain where they want to live in the province, as long as long as the services they need are available and accessible to them.
- Participants feel education on cultural differences, class, lifestyle, sexual orientation, etc., is important.
- Participants question whether the province is prepared for an economic boom. They feel there is a need to strengthen and expand existing infrastructure to prepare for the consequences of the boom. Participants feel that youth are ready but question if political leaders are ready for the boom.

Breakout Group 2

Common Ground

- Job security is a top priority; full-time, permanent jobs, not short-term “make work” projects. Benefits, such as health, dental, preparation for retirement, etc., are critical. It is important to have a higher minimum wage and an increase in the rate of pay for professional/skilled jobs without an increase in the cost of living.
- Although job security is important to this group, they are willing to trade-off high wages to have the quality of life they want. Participants believe that access to services, i.e. health care, child care and sources of entertainment, particularly for youth, is important to quality of life. They feel there should be centres in each region to provide accessible services to rural areas.
- Participants want to trust the government and believe in their promises. However, they perceive that many promises are never fulfilled. As a result, they are doubtful of the benefits of the current boom. They value maintaining the environment and prioritizing the environment over the economic boom.

Areas of Difference

- There are differences in opinion in this group as to whether Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are willing to change the culture of rural communities to accept immigrants.

Breakout Group 3

Common Ground

- Jobs are very important. A top priority is having higher wages. Entry-level jobs are crucial, so that there is a job there when you graduate.
- Affordable education for all types of post-secondary education is valued. Participants feel that there are more financial aids, and training opportunities for college trades than there are for university programs, and that this is unfair.
- Rural lifestyle is very important in terms of family ties, the sense of community and friendly people, as well as the physical environment and outdoor activities.
- Participants feel that the current generation is open to diversity (including different cultures, sexual orientation but also women and people with disabilities, etc.). However, participants recognize that they have not been exposed to much diversity. They see cultural diversity as an opportunity to learn and become more accepting.

Areas of Difference

- There are contradictions in that participants generally value being open to diversity but are not prepared to say that the province should be open to immigration. There is a fear of losing their own culture, or losing job opportunities with an influx of immigrants.
- There is a difference of opinion on the need for recreational activities for young people. Some participants think it is very important to have urban-like amenities in every small town. Others feel it is unrealistic, and that rural areas have lost some facilities they had in the past because the youth do not use the facilities.
- Participants value having diverse economies in small towns to sustain them. If a town is dependent on one business and it crashes, the community goes down with it. However, there is divergence on the extent to which participants believe small town economies can be sustained.

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.

- High paying jobs are a top priority. Groups 1 and 2 emphasize job security and group 3 emphasizes entry-level job opportunities.
- Groups 1 and 2 are both willing to trade-off of having higher paying jobs elsewhere in order to stay in the province for the quality of life. For group 1, that is as long as the services they need to live comfortably are accessible.
- Access to services is very important. Groups 1 and 2 prioritize health care services and group 1 specifies especially for rural areas. For group 3, affordable education is a top priority. In terms of quality of life, group 3 values the rural lifestyle.
- Groups 2 and 3 share differences of opinion on openness to diversity. Group 1 feels there needs to be education around issues of cultural diversity and different lifestyles.

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.

- Some participants are willing to make the trade-off of higher wages for the quality of life. They are willing to accept a “comfortable” wage in relation to the cost of living, meaning they can live comfortably on those wages. Whereas other participants value having a high wage that is competitive with wages elsewhere.
 - Participants concluded that quality of life means something different to everyone from family connections, to salary expectations, outdoor lifestyle or urban entertainment.
 - Therefore the trade-off was highly dependent on personal choices. Higher wages may or may not bring a higher quality of life.
- Participants expect “reasonable” access to services in regional centres in determining the trade-offs between valuing accessible services and wanting to maintain rural lifestyles.
 - The trade-off has to be made because it is not practical to provide the same services in every small community that you would expect in an urban centre with a large population.
 - Having access centres within a reasonable distance to all populations in the region is achievable.
- The discussion on openness to immigration and newcomers brought out various voices.
 - Some participants feel an influx of newcomers is necessary to support economic development; others worry that bringing people into the province will increase competition for jobs.
 - Some participants favour in-migration noting that cultural diversity would enrich the province. Others worry about being able to maintain the traditional lifestyle they value in the face of outside influences.
- Some participants place priority on keeping and bringing back Newfoundlanders and Labradorians before considering recruiting new people to the province. Others feel that the population is not exposed to much diversity within the province and that education is needed to confront racism as it would be a barrier to getting immigrants to come and to stay.
 - Supporting and furthering the view that racism is a problem for youth in the province, some participants feel that Aboriginal people experience prejudice from people who resent that they get extra benefits such as health and education coverage.

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. Develop community education centres where youth are valued for their diversities and can help educate community members on diversity and help integrate newcomers into the community.
2. More government funding to make education more accessible and affordable for all students.
3. Affordable financing for all types of PSE programs. Government and banks should offer longer interest relief, and offer more extensive educational grants, such as SWASP (Student Work and Service Program).
4. Government, universities, colleges, employers, and students should work together to provide dramatic cuts in student debt, with conditions, to offer incentives to stay and work towards a career.
5. Hold traveling clinics in rural communities that do not have hospitals or access to medical services.
6. Attract entry-level workers by offering extended work contracts and a signing bonus, competitive salaries and incentives for all workers.
7. Offer free tuition while guaranteeing employment.
8. Implement strategies on funding students and providing promising careers through government subsidies, funding, and contracts for post-secondary students for job security and as an incentive to work here.
9. For college and university students, decrease tuition costs and increase rewards the closer you are to completing your degree. Offer rewards for exceptional performance and more and longer co-op and work terms. Colleges and university would identify the students and government would help with funding. Employers would learn of highly skilled workers coming through the system.
10. Lower tuition fees for those who are willing to work in Newfoundland as an incentive to stay in the province.

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