



Rock the Boat

Here Today, Here to Stay



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Rock the Boat: Here Today, Here to Stay

Message from the Council

Dear friends,

The subject of population decline has been discussed widely in the media and among policymakers in New Brunswick, lately. Many concerns raised have pointed to the urgent necessity of somehow stemming the migration of our residents, particularly youth, to other jurisdictions in search of economic opportunities. There is also a recognition that our province must effectively welcome and retain newcomers in far greater numbers if our population is to be sustained to continue to improve New Brunswick as it moves towards self sufficiency. Not an easy task, but one that all residents in this province have a responsibility to help with, especially youth. We will be inheriting the results of public policymaking that happens today, and we have to be part of the solution.

So, what is the problem from a youth perspective? What do youth think ought to be done to reverse the demographic trends that we are experiencing in New Brunswick? How can adults go about meaningfully involving youth in policymaking around the issue?

The Government of New Brunswick, along with business and many organizations, are all taking active and collaborative measures to make New Brunswick a more attractive place to stay, live, learn and raise a family. Recognizing the tremendous importance of this goal, the New Brunswick Advisory Council on Youth (Youth Council) has been working closely with the Population Growth Secretariat and other valued partners to bring a youth perspective to the issue.

The Youth Council is the advisory body to government on youth issues in the province. Thirteen members direct the organization's work, which involves research, consultation and capacity-building activities. The Youth Council's Rock the Boat model has evolved into a powerful youth-driven dialogue process that actively engages youth in discussions of importance to them. The Rock the Boat process has been an ideal platform for discussion on many different topics, such as how to increase youth involvement in the democratic process, and on health and wellness. Rock the Boat was used as a first step towards getting young New Brunswickers involved in thinking and talking about population growth and youth retention, and the result of that work is in the report you are reading now.

This report outlines the findings from the Youth Council's Rock the Boat – Here Today, Here to Stay! consultative tour and the Big Splash Summit that followed. During this work, the Youth Council was continually reminded of what young New Brunswickers are looking for: to be more fully engaged with adults in



Rock the Boat

making decisions that will affect them, as well as having regular opportunities to have their voices heard.

The Council will take the contents of this report directly to government, and will seek opportunities to have its findings become part of future public policy around this issue. The Youth Council will also continue its dialogue process with New Brunswick's youth to help them take a more proactive role in the development of population growth policy in their communities and their province. I invite you to read this report and join with us in continued discussions on this topic that affects us all. The future of our province rests with us today.

Let's continue to Rock the Boat together!

Sincerely,

Ivan Corbett
Executive Director

Executive summary



Introduction

New Brunswick is facing a major demographic and labour market challenge. In coming years, the government has set itself a goal to address these by developing strategies in order to significantly increase its population by the year 2026. The reversal of the current population decline is essential if the province is to meet its labour market demands and become self-sufficient. So what is the role of young people in all of this? What is the youth point of view on this issue? How do they see the situation? And what can they do to help? These questions cannot be easily or universally answered. However, one way to start is by opening a dialogue and getting young people talking.

In February 2008, the New Brunswick Advisory Council on Youth started a dialogue. With the help of the Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour; the Population Growth Secretariat; the Health and Education Research Group; 21 inc.; la Fédération des jeunes francophones du Nouveau-Brunswick; Dialogue N.-B.; the Department of Education; 3D datacomm, and many others, the Youth Council launched the *Here Today, Here to Stay* Rock the Boat tour and Big Splash Youth Summit. The tour included a series of 22 community youth forums organized to discuss and address issues of population growth and retention in New Brunswick as they relate to our youth. The summit brought these youth together in one location to explore the issue in more detail. They came. They spoke. We listened.

Provincial tour

Participants were invited to attend the forums and discuss questions which addressed strengths and challenges in the community, as well as ways to transform challenges into strengths (see Appendix A for Rock the Boat forum questions).

Participants were also asked to complete a survey which asked them a variety of questions related to their perceptions of opportunities available to them in their communities and in the province. It also asked them their thoughts on leadership, belonging and communication between youth and adult leaders (see Appendix B for full Rock the Boat Survey).

Consulting with more than 200 youth through 22 forums in 15 different communities, eight dominant themes and possible solutions emerged during the focus group discussions, and were categorized as:

1. Job opportunities – Many participants felt that:
 - better-paying jobs and a higher minimum wage would be points to convince people to stay in the province;
 - communities need to avoid relying on one industry to supply jobs;
 - there is a lack of on-the-job training and skill development for new employees;
 - opportunities for jobs, careers and related training need promotion.
2. Access to a wide range of education and training programs – Many participants were concerned with:
 - having access to a variety of quality post-secondary education options in the province;
 - the high cost of education;
 - New Brunswick literacy levels;
 - better accommodating the needs of new community members for English second language training;
 - integration of new technology in the school system.
3. Entertainment – Many youth felt that:
 - there is a lack of entertainment options for youth, and that in small communities it can be hard to find something to do;
 - entertainment options need to be fun;
 - there need to be more opportunities created in the arts for youth.
4. Promotion of events/meeting places for youth – Some participants found that:
 - there is a lack of places in the community for youth to meet and hang out;
 - when activities do take place, they're poorly promoted and youth don't know about them.
5. Environment
 - some youth are very concerned with the state of the environment, would like to embrace a more eco-conscious society and promote recycling.

6. Dissatisfaction with leaders –Some participants stated that:

- their provincial and community leaders were disconnected from youth concerns;
- youth lack opportunities to learn about government.

7. Community pride

- many youth felt that if they had a sense of belonging and pride in their community, they would be more likely to stay or return. Many wanted community successes celebrated, and more showcasing of what youth are doing.

8. Local economy development –Some participants felt that:

- we need to start thinking ahead in terms of industry. Industries should be more sustainable, and rely less on natural resources;
- tourism can be better developed;
- roads must be improved
- the cost of living in comparison to salaries should be addressed.

Bringing it all together

As a follow up to the community forums, participants and youth at large were invited to attend the *Here Today, Here to Stay* Big Splash provincial youth summit in Fredericton, held from May 31 to June 1, 2008. The eight dominant themes that emerged from the Rock the Boat community forums (as described previously) were presented to the participants at the summit, and they were given the opportunity to discuss and to vote on the themes which they felt most important.

The top three themes that were chosen for further discussion were:

- job opportunities;
- education; and
- entertainment.

Groups were assigned one of these themes, and each group was tasked to come up with its top recommendations in response to the challenges presented for each topic. Recommendations provided by the groups were then compiled, analyzed and presented to the youth for approval. Once approved, they were presented to the public the next day. The following were their final recommendations:

Recommendations Based on Responses from the Big Splash

Theme 1: Education

Action 1.1: Action for the first theme focused on making sure that students have access to the **financial resources** they need for post-secondary education (after high school):

- we should lower tuition costs;
- we need to make the application procedures for loans and bursaries simple and easy for students.

Action 1.2: Action for the second theme involved making sure that students have equal **access to courses** to prepare them for future training:

- we need to make sure that students in every high school have access to the right courses;
- we should also encourage schools to have a variety of courses related to students' interests and career choices.

Action 1.3: Action for the third theme dealt with the importance of providing **secondary language training** for all students:

- we should make sure that all students in New Brunswick have the opportunity to learn both French and English;
- we should provide youth who arrive in New Brunswick from other countries with the support they need to learn French and/or English.

Action 1.4: Action for the fourth theme involved providing students with **real job opportunities** as part of their education:

- we should have co-op placement opportunities as part of college and university training/education;
- we need to help students connect with potential job placements following their training/education.

Theme 2: Job opportunities

Action 2.1: Action for this theme focused on **making sure that youth are more aware** of and prepared for **job opportunities** that are available:

- we need to centralize job opportunity information in a way that is easy for youth to locate;

- we need to provide youth with practical skills on how to find and apply for jobs;
- we need to promote local and provincial job opportunities for youth.

Action 2.2: Action for the second theme involved **making funding available to support job readiness training or to provide career placements** for youth:

- we need to encourage employers to create opportunities for youth employment;
- we need to provide financial support for initiatives that help youth find meaningful work in New Brunswick.

Theme 3: Entertainment

Action 3.1: Action for this theme focused on the importance of having entertainment, leisure, arts, recreation and tourism activities that are **youth-focused:**

- we need to design and promote comfortable meeting places where youth can meet and have fun;
- we should increase the number of leisure, entertainment, recreational and arts activities for youth;
- we should create an inventory of, and promote, current community activities for youth;
- we need youth to be involved as leaders in planning youth-focused activities.

Theme 4 (a theme that emerged from all discussions): Youth participation and decision-making

Action 4.1: Action for this theme focused on making sure that communities **believe in and recognize youths' perspectives and strengths:**

- we need to eliminate the stereotype that youth have nothing to offer;
- we need to recognize that youth are a vital part of the economy, and contribute to economic development;
- we need to ask youth more often what they think is important;
- we need to increase opportunities for youth to take responsibility and to participate in decision-making in communities and at all levels of government.

Introduction



In April 2007, the Government of New Brunswick created the Population Growth Secretariat in an effort to reverse the trend of population decline in New Brunswick. The government's goal of becoming self-sufficient by the year 2026 was seen to be largely influenced by current demographic trends. The initiative to reverse these trends involved the creation of this secretariat, which was charged with four main objectives: improving the retention of New Brunswickers in the province, especially youth; the repatriation of New Brunswickers who have left the province; improving and increasing the services for immigration and settlement for newcomers; and finally, to market New Brunswick as a great place to live and work.¹

Statistics Canada reports that in 2006 the population in New Brunswick decreased by 3,144. Comparatively, in 1996 there was an increase of 27,158. Factors playing a role in this trend include natural increase (births and deaths), and net migration (people moving to the province and people moving from the province).² As part of its Population Growth Strategy, the Population Growth Secretariat has identified the retention of youth through youth engagement as a priority in its efforts to reverse current trends and ensure a self-sufficient New Brunswick.³ Hence, the Population Growth Secretariat and the Youth Council partnered to launch the Here Today, Here to Stay, Rock the Boat tour and Big Splash Youth Summit.

Rock the Boat is about being young in New Brunswick. It's about getting involved, being active and shaking up things; challenging assumptions and making one's voice heard. It's talking about ways youth can and do get involved each and every day to make their schools, communities and province better places to live, learn and play. Rock the Boat is about youth recognizing and promoting healthy lifestyle choices, community involvement, civic engagement, capacity building, and leadership development while taking action to make a difference in New Brunswick.

The information contained in this document comes directly from young people living in New Brunswick. They have indicated a strong desire to become engaged and involved in their communities in a meaningful way. The discussions the Youth Council had with them provided a youth perspective on changes that will help encourage increased participation and interest among youth in our communities with regard to population growth and youth retention issues. The report will include three sections which will lay out the processes followed in both the Rock the Boat tour (Section 1) and the

¹ Communications New Brunswick Press Release, Feb. 16, 2007

² Population Growth Secretariat, "It's time to Act", 2007

³ Population Growth Secretariat, "Be our future: New Brunswick's Population Growth Strategy, 2008

Big Splash Youth Summit (Section 2), as well as the results found during these initiatives. It will also include recommendations developed by the youth who participated in both of these events. Also provided in this report are objectives for next steps in this process (Section 3).

It is important to recognize that the process does not end with this report. Rather, the goal of this document is to share the discussion with a broader audience and to invite others to join in. Youth and adults will need to work together in order to ensure that the New Brunswick boat is not only rocking, but that it is also moving forward. The future of the province cannot wait until tomorrow. It starts today.

Rock the Boat – Provincial tour

First steps

The Youth Council is the advisory body to government on youth issues in the province of New Brunswick. Thirteen members direct the organization's work, which involves research, consultation and capacity-building activities. The Youth Council's Rock the Boat process has evolved into a powerful youth-driven dialogue that actively engages youth in discussions on importance to them, and offers an opportunity to become empowered to take positive action in their communities and beyond. The Rock the Boat process is an ideal platform for discussion on many different topics, and was recognized as a solid first step towards getting young New Brunswickers involved in thinking and talking about population growth and youth retention.



The consultative process

Engaging youth in their communities requires a well-thought-out dialogue. We need to know what they think. An ideal process creates an open and supportive dialogue, where each participant feels respected and comfortable to speak his or her mind freely. The Youth Council held a series of 22 community forums with youth in 15 communities throughout the province, from February through May 2008.

The tour sought ideas and suggestions from youth on how to reverse current demographic trends, and what would encourage them to stay in the province to live, work and play. This consultative process allowed for a wide regional, linguistic, cultural, academic and socio-economic representation. Participants also had varying levels of prior engagement and participation in other activities. It was important for the Youth Council to get the views of a variety of youth in order to get a more accurate picture of the various realities that exist for youth in the province. The tour involved over 200 youth, and permitted an opportunity to connect with as many youth as possible in their communities, giving them a chance to discuss local and provincial issues. It also allowed for discussion with youth who might normally find transportation to major city centres difficult to secure.

Community youth forum locations included:

- Tracadie-Sheila
- Shippagan
- Grand Manan
- Fredericton
- St. George
- Saint John
- Chipman

- Dalhousie
- Bathurst
- Grand Falls
- Bristol
- Campbellton
- Miramichi
- Elsipogtog First Nation
- Moncton

The dialogue design

Focus group discussions were held with small groups of participants. When necessary, large groups of 12 or more were divided into smaller working groups in order to allow for an atmosphere where everyone had a chance to contribute to the conversation and to express themselves freely. Each working group had its own facilitator to keep discussions focused, as well as someone who took detailed notes of the discussion that took place.

The forum was divided into two sessions to discuss four questions:

Session 1

1. What are some of the strengths and positive things about your community (that is, what are the opportunities that exist in terms of work, learning, living and playing)?
2. What are some of the challenges of living in your community?

Session 2

An increasing number of young people are leaving New Brunswick to live and work elsewhere.

1. What steps should be taken by your community, family, school, employers and government to encourage youth to stay in New Brunswick (be creative and think outside the box)?
2. What can YOU do?

A facilitator maintained the focus of the discussion while the note-taker transcribed the discussion, using a laptop computer. In order to maintain the integrity of comments made during the sessions, the note-taker was instructed to record the participants' comments as closely as possible. The lead facilitator also made use of a flip chart to provide a visual representation of the group's brainstorming activities. Comments were not summarized. Participants ensured that their thoughts and opinions were being captured correctly by reviewing the notes. They were asked for clarification and/or elaboration whenever necessary.



“Adult leaders actually listen and try and help us (youth) out.”

“It’s easy to get involved in the community.”

“If you were to break down on the side of the road, it wouldn’t matter whose house you went to, they are willing to help.”

“There’s a sense of community. You can say ‘hi’ to people. It’s warm and friendly.”

“On August 15, everyone celebrates as though it were their own birthday.”

“There’s a great quality of life.”

“Wages are too low for the cost of living.”

“Everyone’s going out West because there’s nothing to do here.”

“People don’t know about the opportunities.”

Results

Many great discussions emerged from the questions. The Youth Council received plenty of ideas and suggestions for changes to make the province a better place to live, learn, work and play. The Youth Council also got a chance to get a glimpse into how participants view their communities. The first session of the forum was meant to get an idea of what youth see as the strengths and challenges in the community. The goal was to provide a snapshot of the community from the perspective of the youth who live there, not necessarily a complete and accurate account of what it is like in any particular community.

What are some of the strengths in the community?

When asked about the positive aspects of their communities, participants highlighted a number of different things. Many of the answers varied greatly between participants and between communities. Some participants highlighted the sense of community and belonging they felt in their community, as well as the safety that came with living in a smaller place. In some communities, participants said that they liked their ability to get involved in projects and activities, and the openness of adult leaders who listened to and involved the youth in their community. Many also brought up the natural environment surrounding their community, the ability to enjoy its beauty, and the various activities related to having these things available to them (such as, hiking, camping, swimming, skiing, boating, fishing, etc.) Others brought up access to services and entertainment offered to youth in their community.

What are some of the challenges in the community?

In order to get a well-rounded picture of how participants viewed their communities, they were also asked to list some of the challenges they experienced there. Some participants found it easier to answer this question, some viewed it from a different perspective after having looked at some of the positive aspects of their communities, and others felt uncomfortable talking about some of the challenges that they face in their communities and in the province. Responses to this question were also varied.

Lack of job opportunities

Many participants noted the lack of job opportunities in their communities, and the fact that many people were leaving because of it. Some noted that there were some job opportunities, but that they were limited to specific sectors, which limits the opportunities to people who have specific skill sets. Also, some participants recognized that there were job opportunities available, but that these were unknown or did not pay enough. Although some recognized that their communities needed economic revival and diversity, they also observed the lack of interest in re-investing in the community. A number of participants in the northern part of the province said that they felt that the north was neglected on a provincial level.

“You have to go too far away to go to university, and it costs too much.”

“Young people don’t have enough to inspire them”

“Young people want to get involved, but they don’t want us under their feet.”

“To get clear water, you have to buy jugs.”

“A lot of young deaths –Young people who do suicides. A lot of young kids [are] into drugs and alcohol (between 10 and 13 years old smoking drugs and drinking and having sex).”

“It’s a challenge for me to walk home at night. There should be cameras and stuff on the street.”



Education is vital

In terms of education, some participants noted the challenges related to access to post-secondary education. For some participants, travel was felt to be too far, and that it was too expensive to continue with post-secondary studies. Others talked about the quality of education available in both high school and post-secondary studies. In particular, some participants noted the difference in curriculum and access to certain classes or programs, based on the size and location of the school. Some participants worried about the level of ability in both French and English for students. Also on the issue of language, some participants expressed concern about access to education for second-language acquisition.

Lack of youth involvement in decision-making

One of the things that many participants noted as a challenge was the lack of ability to be involved in decision-making about the things that affect them. Many participants said that they felt as if they were not taken seriously by adult leaders. Some mentioned that they felt youth were often stereotyped as troublemakers, instead of productive members of society who have a lot to offer. One participant said, “We need to change the way that people view kids and teenagers. We are the future and we are the now. We need to change attitudes.” Some participants noted that one of the challenges in their community was that the adults, who have the ability to make decisions, don’t share the views of youth. Youth did not feel that they were sufficiently represented, either on a municipal or provincial level.

Another common challenge that was brought up was that there is not enough for young people to do. For some, they felt there wasn’t enough in terms of entertainment, but others also felt that there wasn’t enough in terms of meaningful involvement. Participants also noted that when there are things directed at youth, they are not developed by or run by youth, and therefore don’t necessarily match the interests or priorities of youth.

Other challenges

There were a variety of other challenges listed. It was mentioned that the environment was an issue that young people took to heart, but leaders did not seem to take it seriously. Some participants also noted a lack of transportation as a barrier to participating in activities. Other serious challenges, such as the lack of access to clean drinking water; personal safety; problems with drugs, and alcohol; suicide; teen pregnancy; stereotypes; racism; and discrimination were also mentioned.



“Cars slow down and look at you and if you make eye contact, they stop.”

“Some young people become pregnant on purpose so they can get government assistance.”

“Child and family services is really busy because parents are neglecting their children. . . That’s where it all starts.”

“Entire economy is Natural Resources. [We] need to change priorities.”

“They need to make government more ‘kid-friendly’.”

“I think the government is a little bit disconnected from the youth.”

Rural communities: both sides of the coin

The views of community strengths and challenges varied by participant and by community. In some cases, things seen as community strengths were also viewed as challenges. For example, some participants in smaller communities noted that “Everyone knows everyone” was both a positive and a challenge. On that note, one participant noted “Because it’s a small town, it’s ‘cliquey’ and if you’re from outside of town, it’s hard to fit in.” Also, although some participants enjoyed the quieter, slower pace of life in smaller communities, others found that there was a lack of excitement, and would like to have more entertainment and activities that are more commonly available in larger urban centers. On the other hand, many participants also highlighted the beauty of their friendly, safe and tight-knit communities, and how great it was to be part of such a community

What steps should be taken to encourage youth to stay in New Brunswick?

The Youth Council heard many great ideas about what participants thought were important areas of improvement for the province and their communities. Personal choices and preferences certainly play a role in what people choose to do and where they choose to live. However, there are common themes that participants identified as important, and things that would encourage them to stay.

Youth need to earn a living

Among the most notable similarities in most communities were jobs and salaries. In most cases, when asked what could be done to encourage young people to stay, participants first answered “more jobs,” and “better salaries.” This is perhaps not a surprising finding, but it is a strong one, nonetheless. It is important to note that in some cases, participants clearly stated that they loved their community and their province, but they felt that it was impossible for them to make a living here. Others suggested that young people are just not aware of the opportunities that are available to them.

Interest in government

Participants also talked about their desire to learn more about government. They would like to see more of their government representatives, to know more about them, and to have better access to them. Some participants noted that they felt distanced from government and the decisions it makes. In fact, one of the recommendations mentioned repeatedly was that young people want to be more involved and engaged. One participant put it simply, “Listen to us! Listen to youth!” There are a number of participants who mentioned their desire to be involved and to be heard at all levels of government. Their suggestions included the creation of entities that could voice their opinion, or

simply promote and improve the entities that currently exist. Many participants noted the importance of being well informed, whether through their own initiatives, through the education system, or by various other organizations whose responsibility it is to ensure that young people receive the information that they need.

Education and career information are key

Education also ranked as a common topic. Many participants raised concerns about the cost of post-secondary education and student debt. One participant said, “Give us a discount on tuition and a reason to stay.” Participants also noted the difficulties of getting work after they are finished school, not to mention the difficulties in deciding what careers they would like to pursue in the first place. Some participants said that it would be great to have more programs that would make the transition between school and work a smoother one. On this topic, some participants suggested they would like more information about the career options, which could possibly include having more opportunities in high school to shadow someone who works in a field of interest to them. Some also talked about making job fairs a bit more personal, with more opportunities for participants to discuss the various options with the presenters.

Employers should take the needs of younger employees into account

When probed specifically on what employers could do, some participants noted that it is important for employers to be flexible when hiring students for part-time work. Participants said that they were very appreciative of employers who valued their education, who understood the importance of putting their school work first, and who understood the value of participating in other extracurricular activities. Participants also suggested that it was important for employers to trust the skills and abilities that youth have to offer, and that employers need to be provided with tools to better engage their young employees. One participant suggested that “employers should come together once a year, or every 6 months with the employee to discuss work and workload,” highlighting the importance of keeping an open dialogue between employers and their employees.

Protect the environment

The protection of the environment was a topic that was brought up in numerous communities. Many participants felt that it was an important issue. When they talked about economic development in New Brunswick, many also noted that this should not be done at the expense of the environment. They also talked about the importance of having environmental education in school, and programs in place that promote healthy environmental practices.

“It’s great to make money, but not at the environment’s expense. We have to think about those who will be coming after us – we need to be smarter with the industries we create.”





“Somebody could put together an information package about the hidden gems. . . things that people don’t know exist. You’d be surprised who doesn’t know about this place [youth centre].”

“If a person feels supported, they are more apt to stay and support their community.”

Provincial and community pride

Participants suggested that more efforts should be placed in promoting pride of New Brunswick in its residents. One participant said, “When you go to hockey games, they sing ‘Oh Canada’. It represents Canada as a whole. New Brunswick should have something to encourage people to be proud to be a New Brunswicker. [I] would like to see more commercials/advertisement about New Brunswick.” Some participants also mentioned that there should be opportunities and events that bring together New Brunswickers from various backgrounds to celebrate all of the things that the province has to offer.

Priority themes and top findings

As may be seen in the two previous sections, the community forum questions elicited a variety of responses, and the ideas that stemmed from the discussions were varied. With the help of the Health and Education Research Group at the University of New Brunswick, the data collected was analyzed and categorized into main themes. When looking at the data collected from Session 2, two major questions were developed.

What can youth do?

In terms of what youth can do, participants talked about being socially responsible and about being an example to others. A number of participants said that when trying to communicate a message, young people were more likely to communicate better with their peers. Some of them recognized that they need to drive the change in attitudes towards young people to ensure that stereotypes can be shown to be false. Some also talked about getting involved, and the importance of acting collectively. When talking about the responsibility held by young people in these efforts, one participant said, “Find your own voice. Pick one thing that you want to improve on, and run with it. We are really good at complaining, but what do we do?” Another participant said, “Youth need to step up to the plate if we want to be responsible voters, responsible citizens.”

What can others do to help?

In looking at what others can do to help on a broader level, some of the major recommendations involved adults appreciating the value and capabilities of youth, to recognize youth as an example, and to invite the participation of youth in community leadership. One participant said, “We know what we want to say. Let us talk!”

In terms of more specific things that should be done to encourage young people to stay in the province, the following categories were developed:

“When you finish university, there are no jobs; you have a hard time making your way.”

“If we could get our education cheaper, then people will stay. It’s the debt that we are getting into before we start the real world.”

“Bring back the arts [...] there needs to be more than just work to bring people here.”

“School is pretty much the only place to hangout.”



1. **Job opportunities** – Many participants felt that:

- better-paying jobs and a higher minimum wage would be points to convince people to stay in the province;
- communities need to avoid relying on one industry to supply jobs;
- there is a lack of on-the-job training and skill development for new employees;
- opportunities for jobs, careers and related training need promotion.

2. **Access to a wide range of education and training programs** – Many participants were concerned with:

- having access to a variety of quality post secondary education options in the province;
- the high cost of education;
- New Brunswick literacy levels;
- better accommodating the needs of new community members for English second language training;
- integration of new technology in the school system.

3. **Entertainment** – Many youth felt that:

- there is a lack of entertainment options for youth, and that in small communities it can be hard to find something to do;
- entertainment options need to be fun;
- there need to be more opportunities created in the arts for youth.

4. **Promotion of events/meeting place for youth** – Some participants found that:

- there is a lack of places in the community for youth to meet and hang out;
- when activities do take place, they’re poorly promoted and youth don’t know about them.



“Protecting the environment is a big issue with youth, but it doesn’t look like our community is doing much.”

“Our leaders don’t listen to us. They don’t ask anything of us, don’t ask us to go see them.”

“Give us a real voice to make us feel that it’s our community. If you’re involved and you’re present, you’ll think twice before going away.”

“Municipal government isn’t doing much for development.”

5. **Environment**

- some youth are very concerned with the state of the environment, would like to embrace a more eco-conscious society and promote recycling

6. **Dissatisfaction with leaders** –Some participants stated that:

- their provincial and community leaders were disconnected from youth concern;
- youth lack opportunities to learn about government.

7. **Community pride**

- many youth felt that if they had a sense of belonging and pride in their community, they would be more likely to stay or return. Many wanted community successes celebrated, and more showcasing of what youth are doing.

8. **Local economic development** –Some participants felt that:

- we need to start thinking ahead in terms of industry. Industries should be more sustainable and rely less on natural resources;
- tourism can be better developed;
- roads must be improved;
- the cost of living in comparison to salaries should be addressed.

These themes formed the base of the discussions that were held at the youth summit. They provided a starting point from which participants would later develop recommendations that are discussed later in this report.

Rock the Boat survey

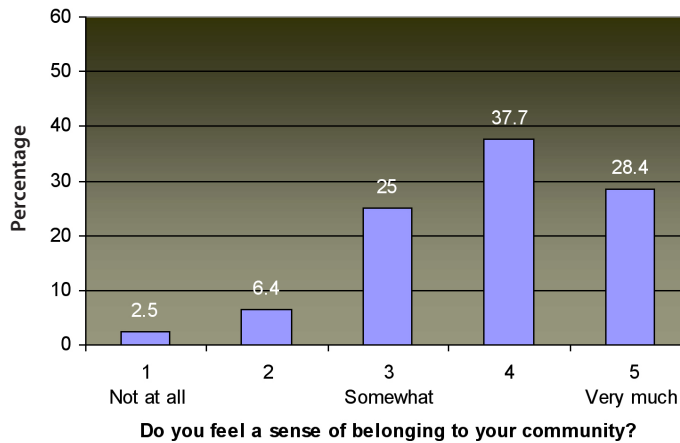
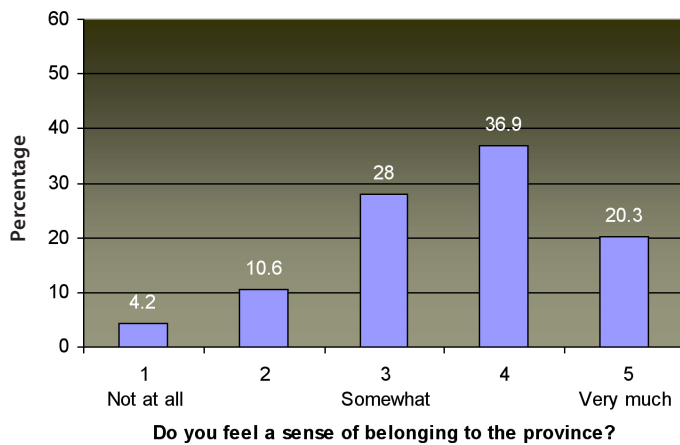
The Rock the Boat process also included a quantitative research element. With the help of the Health and Education Research Group at UNB, a survey was developed to provide a more complete picture of some of the thoughts of young New Brunswickers. This survey was completed at the beginning of the Rock the Boat session so that participants could start thinking about some of the questions that would be addressed during the group discussion.

The survey included 17 questions, which were aimed at getting participants’ opinions on work, education and entertainment opportunities; their sense of belonging; their thoughts on the interactions between youth and leaders; and all of these things as they related to participants’ communities and to the province. The survey also asked if participants were expecting to stay in New Brunswick, and if so, why. Most questions were rated on a scale from 1 to 5,

1 being not-at-all and 5 being very much, with the exception of questions related to demographics and whether or not they intended to stay in the province. After each question, participants had the opportunity to provide comments. These comments were also compiled in order to get a fuller view of participants' thoughts on the subject. To view the full survey, please see Appendix B.

A snapshot of survey findings

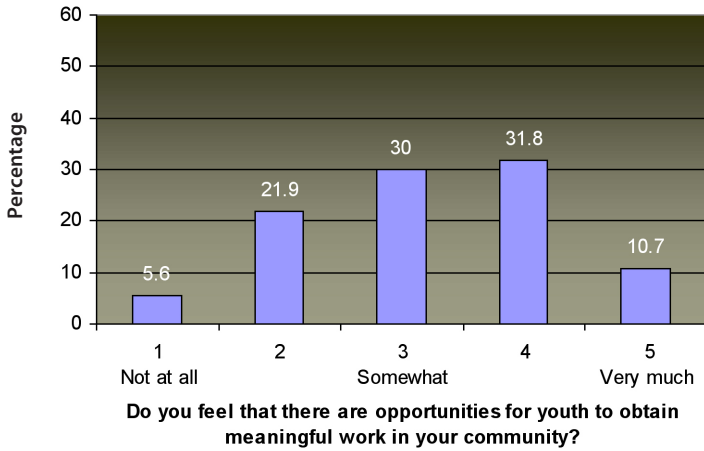
Sense of belonging



"If young people are asked their opinion, they develop a sense of belonging."

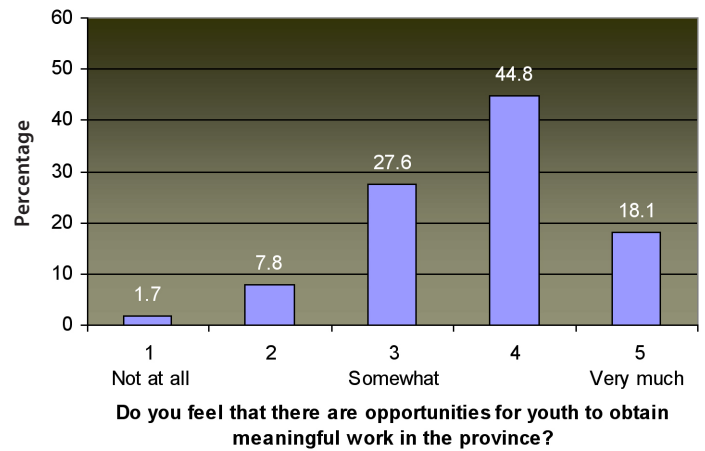
"I feel the need to get involved in order to enable others to do the same."

Meaningful work



“Have confidence in young people when it comes to jobs and policies.”

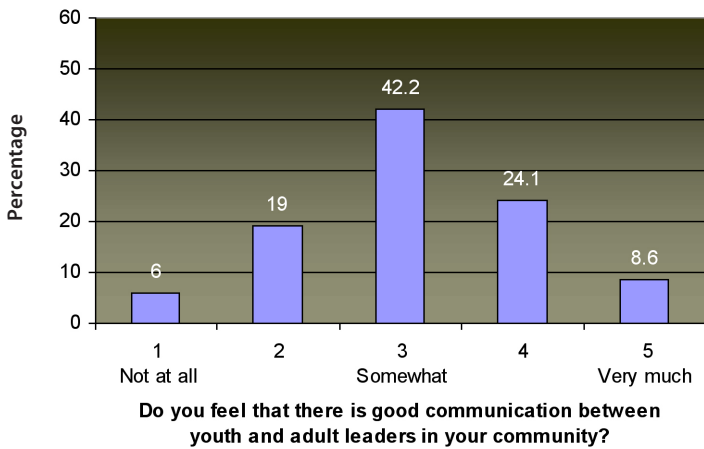
“Nothing’s impossible, we just have to work a little more than young people in other regions.”



“There are just as many opportunities here as there are in other provinces.”

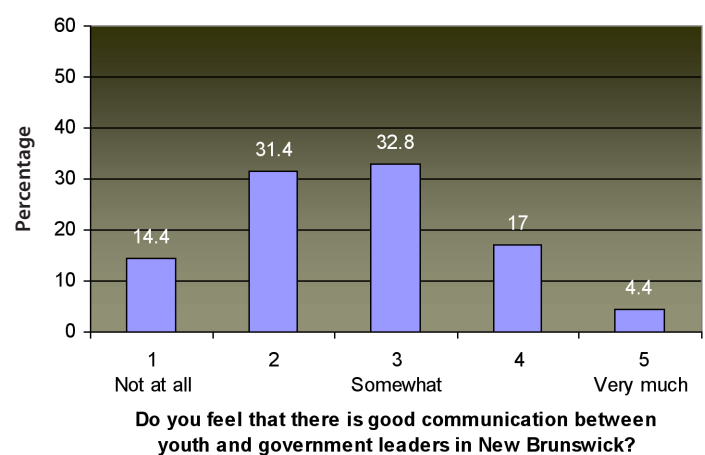
“People feel that they have to get out [of the province] to become something, to accomplish something.”

Communication



“The middle age people have all the say and don’t care about what young people are saying.”

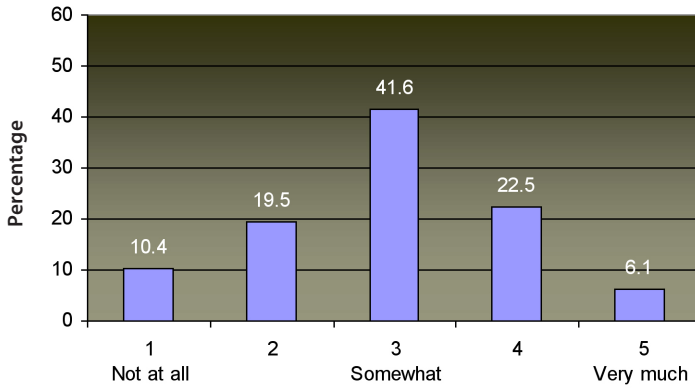
“Is it real? I think sometimes communication may just be formality.”



“It’s the government that makes the decisions, but we’re the ones that have to live with them.”

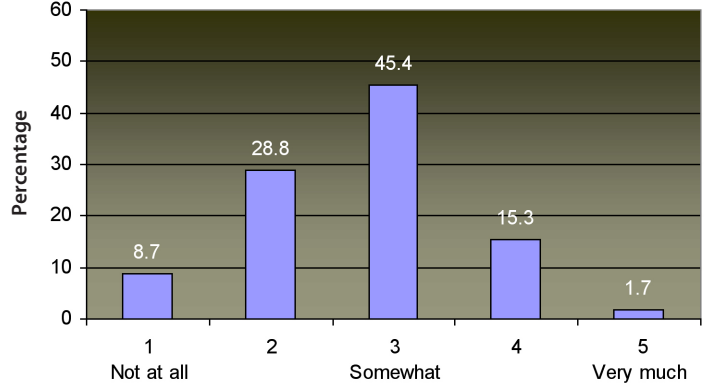
“There’s a deadlock, because young people wait for someone to come get them and the adult leaders wait for young people to come to them.”

The youth voice



Do you feel that leaders in your community hear and understand the voice of youth?

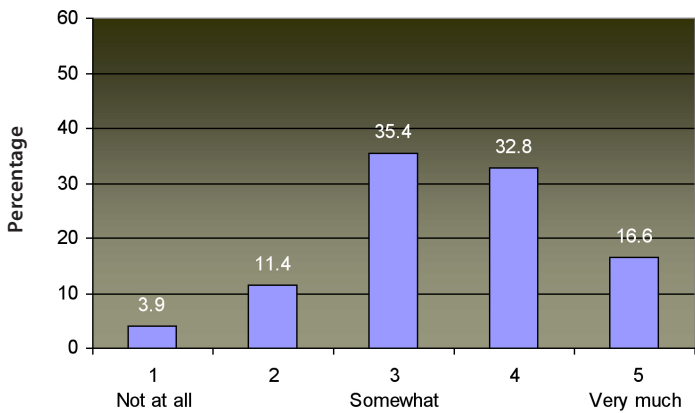
“The cries of young people don’t seem to be as disturbing as they should be when it comes to post-secondary education debt loads.”



Do you feel that government leaders in the province hear and understand the voice of youth?

“We need to change the way people view kids and teenagers. We are the future and we are the now.”

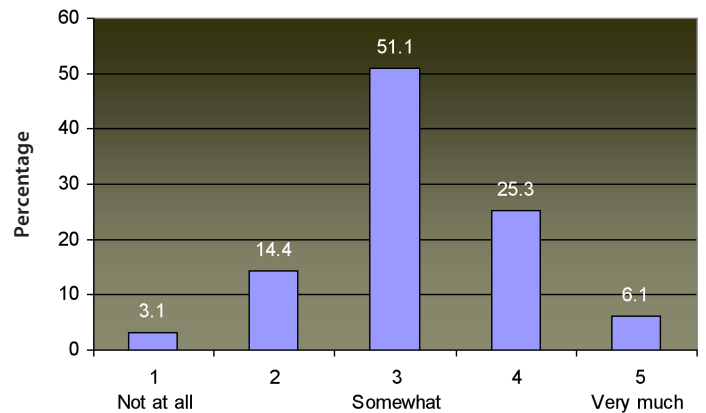
Support



Do you feel supported by your community?

“I think that the community wants us to do well, but doesn’t know how to support us.”

“There’s always people helping in any community.”

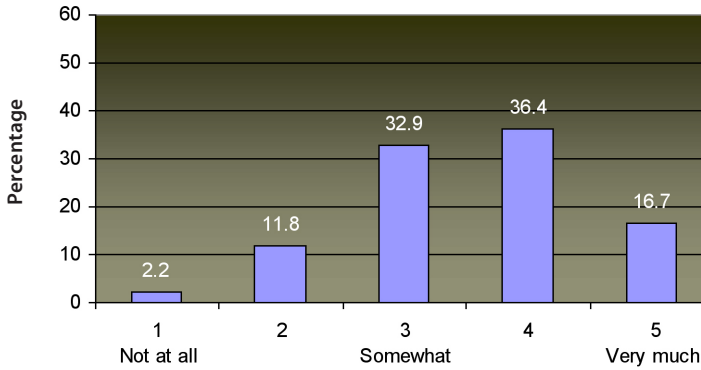


Do you feel supported by the province?

“Well, they’re not in my way. I don’t feel not supported.”

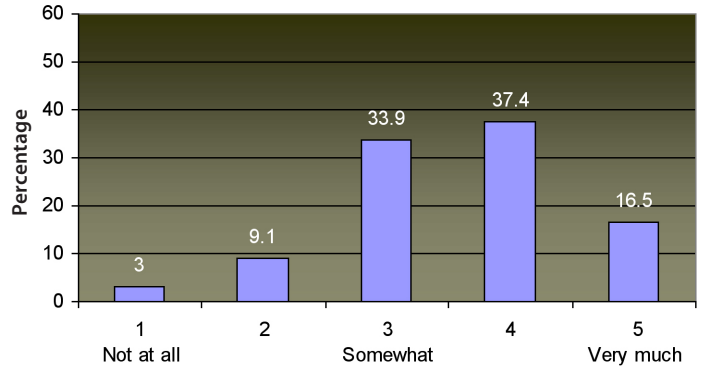
Rock the Boat

Education and career



Do you feel that you have a good understanding of educational and career opportunities that are available to you in your community?

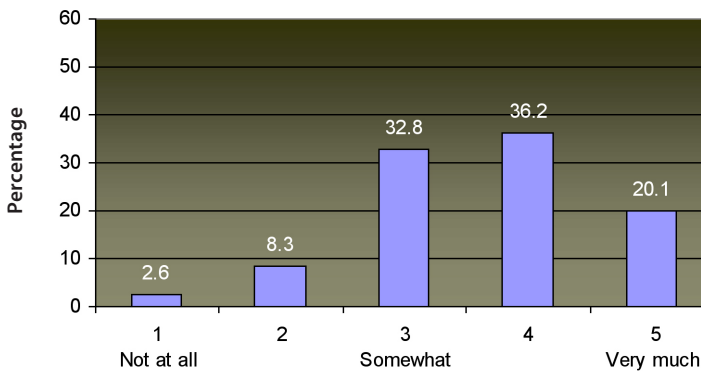
“We are not very well informed on what we can become when we are finished school.”



Do you feel that you have a good understanding of educational and career opportunities that are available to you in the province?

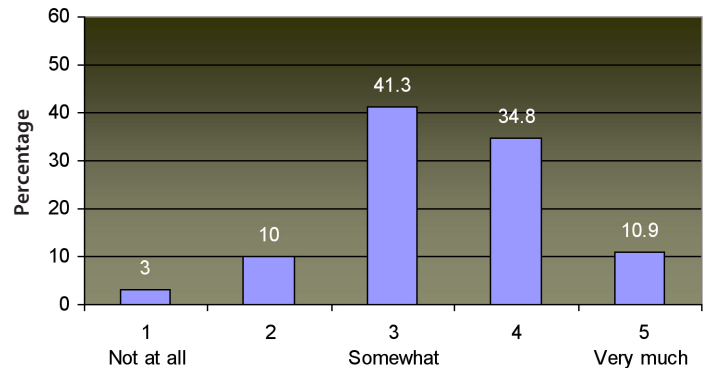
“Educational programs are not promoted.”

Recreation



Do you feel that you have a good understanding of recreational opportunities that are available to you in your community?

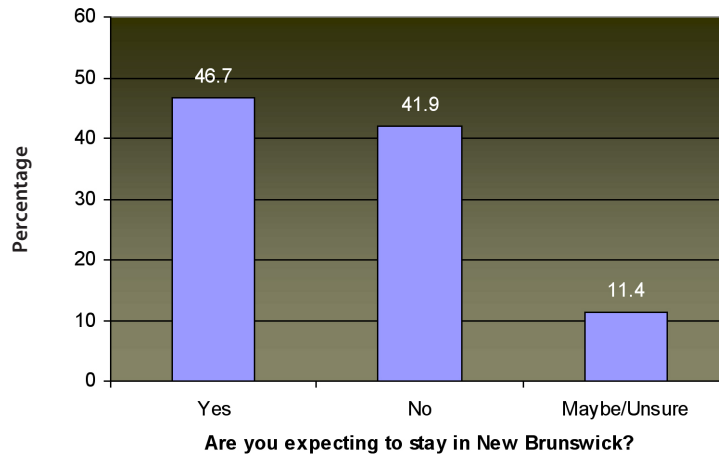
“A teen centre of some kind would be great... have a place to hang out.”



Do you feel that you have a good understanding of recreational opportunities that are available to you in the province?

“If young people started getting involved when they are young, then maybe they would stay here.”

Are you expecting to stay in New Brunswick?



"If they want us to stay here, things have to change."

The Big Splash provincial youth summit



Overview – how it worked

As a second phase of the community consultation process, the Youth Council hosted the Big Splash provincial youth summit, which was held in Fredericton from May 30 to June 1, 2008. The main focus of the weekend was to initiate discussions on the issues that are affecting young people, and their decisions as to whether they will stay in the province.

Eighty-nine participants from various communities across New Brunswick gathered at the St. Thomas Conference Centre to take part. The participants included youth that had been involved in the community forums, as well as youth that had an interest in the topic at hand but had not been previously involved with work on it.

The Big Splash was designed to bring together youth with community leaders, business leaders, government officials and employers to discuss the topic of youth retention from a provincial standpoint, and to build recommendations based on the topics that were brought up during the Rock the Boat Tour. Participants were provided transportation to Fredericton, accommodations and meals. They participated in discussion groups; saw presentations by New Brunswick entrepreneurs and youth organizations; and discussed labour market issues with New Brunswick employers. They also had a chance to hear from Premier Shawn Graham about some of the issues facing New Brunswick today, and some of the initiatives that the government has launched in order to address these issues. Business New Brunswick Minister Greg Byrne, who is also minister responsible for the population growth secretariat, and Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour Minister Ed Doherty, – were present for the recommendations presentation on Sunday, and were given an opportunity to speak to youth in response to what they heard.

Engaging employers

Early in the discussions on the design of the summit, it was recognized that the inclusion of youth-adult dialogue would be an important aspect of developing stronger, more rounded recommendations, and would be a valuable experience for both youth and adults who would take part in the discussions. Employers are a very important stakeholder on the issue of youth retention in the province, and the Big Splash provided a venue for them to have a dialogue with youth on this topic. This was done in a number of ways. Space was provided on Friday evening for information booths to be set up while participants registered. Among the booths were the Service Canada Centre for Youth, and the New Brunswick Safety Council –Safety Start program

on workplace health and safety. Over the weekend, youth also had the opportunity to hear from two of New Brunswick's successful entrepreneurs: Gene Fowler from Fatkat Animation Studios, and Pierre Pelletier from Olivier Soaps.

On Sunday, some of New Brunswick's employers took part in roundtable discussions with youth to share information about opportunities and challenges in the workplace. It was a chance for youth to get direct access to an employer with a great deal of knowledge about opportunities. It was also an opportunity for youth to share their opinions on issues that they face when looking for work and choosing career paths.

A number of the employers who participated in the discussion said that they came out of the session with a better appreciation and understanding of the priorities of today's youth. They also mentioned that they did not often have the opportunity to have an audience with youth, and felt that this experience was very valuable to them.

One of the major points that they took away with them was that many youth are not aware of the opportunities that are available to them in the province. Some also noted a lack of knowledge about industries and the work of government. This suggests that there is a missing link in the communication between youth and those who are trying to provide them with information.

Employers also noted that the session wasn't just an occasion for participants to list all of the problems, and play the blame game, but more importantly, it was an opportunity to discuss possible solutions and to share ideas of how to achieve solutions. For instance, on the issue of how to better reach youth and provide them with the information that they need, one of the ideas suggested was the use of Facebook. In response to this, one employer said, "It's (Facebook) not just a fad, it's an important social network. It's not just a place where they post pictures, it's where they find out information and share concerns." She also talked about the importance for employers and the government to listen to this if they hope to be able to reach youth where they are.

Many participants noted that information on careers, jobs and training opportunities was too scattered. The information needed to be more centralized and equally accessible to all people in the province. Youth also expressed a desire to receive more information about their career options when they are making decisions about these things. Some of the suggested ways for youth to receive this information included:

- job fairs that are a bit more personal, where there are more opportunities for face-to-face discussions with young, new employees, and/or recent graduates from various programs of study;

- more opportunities for job shadowing;
- more opportunities and support for co-op placements;
- Facebook and/or other centralized web location;
- mentorship.

What some of these ideas suggest is that youth want more opportunities to sample a career before making a decision to follow that path. On the other hand some employers noted the breakdown in communication in terms of opportunities that are currently available. One employer pointed out that there were opportunities for co-op placements within that company, but it had a hard time finding New Brunswick students to fill them. It was also mentioned that there needs to be more discussion between industries in New Brunswick and post-secondary institutions about labour market needs and the training/ education programs offered.

Another point discussed was that job ads should be simplified. Some participants felt that the long list of qualifications that are often posted in job ads were discouraging to young people who did not meet every one of them. It was suggested that in making workplaces more youth-friendly, employers would also have to be ready and willing to provide some training and skills development to young people who may not have all of the skills desired upon commencement of work, but who had a willingness to learn.

The Big Splash dialogue design

Before the summit discussions began, participants were presented with the eight themes that had emerged from the discussions held during the provincial tour. Key findings and quotes were outlined, giving participants a chance to view the overall results of the community forums.

Participants were assigned to discussion groups for the morning and afternoon sessions. Each group was assigned a lead facilitator and a note-taker. Much like the community forums, the duties of the lead facilitators were to: moderate the discussion and to ensure that every participant had a chance to speak; to ask questions and probe further when necessary; and to record on a flip chart the ideas being discussed. The note-taker recorded the discussion on a laptop computer, maintaining the integrity of the comments being shared. Notes were saved on USB keys, then provided to the research team which later compiled the data for analysis.

During the morning session, participants were divided into eight groups, each of which was assigned one of the eight main themes. The following questions were asked to each group:

(a) what does this theme mean to us, as a province and as a group?;

(b) what are the top issues related to this theme?;

(c) why is it important to focus on this theme this weekend?

As part of this discussion session, they were also tasked to come up with a five- minute presentation that would explain to the rest of the participants why that particular theme should be discussed further during the weekend. Once these had been prepared, each group got a chance to present its topic to the larger group, and to demonstrate the importance of the theme. After all the presentations had been completed, every participant was given the opportunity to vote on the three themes that they felt needed to be discussed further. As a result of this vote, the following three themes were chosen for further discussion:

- job opportunities
- education
- entertainment

In the afternoon session, participants were again divided into small groups and were assigned one of the three themes chosen during the morning session. Their task was to develop provincial recommendations to respond to some of the issues that are factors for youth in each theme. Participants worked to develop recommendations, and collaborated with other groups who were discussing the same topic, to prepare the top recommendations for that theme.

Once each group had completed this process, all notes and recommendations were given to the research group, which further analyzed the data. The research group included members of the Health and Education Research Group, the Population Growth Secretariat, and the Youth Council. A review of the notes gave the research group an opportunity to identify main ideas presented in each of the discussion groups, and therefore provided more information to support the recommendations developed by the participants. It also allowed for an identification of common themes discussed in each of the groups, as well as avoidance of repetition in the final recommendations. Participants were presented with the final document in order to give them the opportunity to note any inconsistencies with the discussions held. No changes were suggested, and the document was given to 11 participants who worked together to plan a presentation which was delivered to all participants, guests, New Brunswick employers, and policy-makers the following day.

Main themes

The process used for the discussions at the Big Splash was meant to funnel the ideas and discussions that began during the Rock the Boat tour into a set of recommendations that could be concise and that would encompass what participants felt was important. The democratic nature of all parts of these discussions was a very important factor in the design of the discussions in order for the recommendations to reflect what the participants wanted to say. The following eight actions provide an overview of the recommendations for that particular topic, followed by specific recommendations developed by participants.

Theme 1: Education

Action 1.1: Action for the first theme focused on making sure that students have access to the **financial resources** they need for post-secondary education (after high school):

- we should lower tuition costs;
- we need to make the application procedures for loans and bursaries simple and easy for students.

Action 1.2: Action for the second theme involved making sure that students have equal **access to courses** to prepare them for future training:

- we need to make sure that students in every high school have access to the right courses;
- we should also encourage schools to have a variety of courses related to students' interests and career choices.

Action 1.3: Action for the third theme dealt with the importance of providing **secondary language training** for all students:

- we should make sure that all students in New Brunswick have the opportunity to learn French and English;
- we should provide youth who arrive in New Brunswick from other countries with the support they need to learn French and/or English.

Action 1.4: Action for the fourth theme involved providing students with **real job opportunities** as part of their education:

- we should have co-op placement opportunities as part of college and university training/education;
- we need to help students connect with potential job placements following their training/education.

Theme 2: job opportunities

Action 2.1: Action for the first theme focused on **making sure that youth are more aware** of and prepared for **job opportunities** that are available:

- we need to centralize job opportunity information in a way that is easy for youth to locate;
- we need to provide youth with practical skills on how to find and apply for jobs;
- we need to promote local and provincial job opportunities for youth.

Action 2.2: Action for the second theme involved **making funding available to support job readiness training or to provide career placements** for youth:

- we need to encourage employers to create opportunities for youth employment;
- we need to provide financial support for initiatives that help youth find meaningful work in New Brunswick.

Theme 3: Entertainment

Action 3.1: Action for this theme focused on the importance of having entertainment, leisure, arts, recreation and tourism **activities that are youth-focused:**

- we need to design and promote comfortable meeting places where youth can meet and have fun;
- we should increase the number of leisure, entertainment, recreational and arts activities for youth;
- we should create an inventory of, and promote, current community activities for youth;
- we need youth to be involved as leaders in planning youth-focused activities.

Theme 4 (theme that emerged from all discussions): Youth participation and decision-making

Action 4.1: Action for this theme focused on making sure that communities **believe in and recognize youths' perspectives and strengths:**

- we need to eliminate the stereotype that youth have nothing to offer;
- we need to recognize that youth are a vital part of the economy, and contribute to economic development;



Rock the Boat

- we need to ask youth more often what they think is important;
- we need to increase opportunities for youth to take responsibility and to participate in decision-making in communities and at all levels of government.

Conclusion



The Rock the Boat process continues to develop and evolve, and the Here Today, Here to Stay! tour saw many additions to its toolkit. Among them were: the inclusion of a survey at community forums; more adult-youth discussions at the youth summit; and the involvement of a number of partners in the planning of the Big Splash. These were all efforts that helped add value to the process, and made for a very successful project. All of these hold much room for more exploration, and the Youth Council looks forward to refining these techniques in the near future.

Some very clear messages came out of the Rock the Boat youth dialogue sessions, as well as the recommendations developed at the Big Splash. Among the most notable were that youth care about their communities and their province, and they want to be consulted and involved in decision-making, especially in areas that affect them. Youth repeatedly expressed the desire to feel that they were part of something, and to feel proud of their province. One participant stated, "If a person feels supported, they are more apt to stay and support their community." It could be argued that this message underlies many of the other comments, suggestions and recommendations provided by the youth and presented in this document. This is why the Youth Council will continue its work with the Population Growth Secretariat and numerous other partners to ensure that youth voices get heard in New Brunswick, so that it continues to be a place where youth belong. The goal is to establish this sense of belonging so that no matter how far young people travel, they will want to come back to stay.

"I love it here, but it's a big world and I wouldn't mind leaving and seeing something else. I'll move away, but I'll come back. This will always be my home."

Next steps

Our commitment to YOUth

The Youth Council and the Population Growth Secretariat will conduct further research on the issues raised in this report. The findings from the Rock the Boat tour have provided very useful information, which will require continued dialogues. These dialogues will focus on generating further action-oriented recommendations, and will aim to inform public policy development from a youth perspective. A discussion paper will be released to facilitate further deliberation. The results of all these efforts are expected to be used by the Population Growth Secretariat to address youth retention in New Brunswick.

Specific activities that will align with this next level of research and increase the civic engagement of youth on this issue:

AWARENESS

Partnerships and collaboration:

The Youth Council will continue to seek partnerships and collaborate with stakeholders to work collaboratively on the issues raised in this report. Where possible, discussion forums will be convened to help promote continued and meaningful youth deliberation on those issues. Findings will be shared directly with top policy-makers in government.

Community development:

The Youth Council will promote research, programs and services supporting youth engagement in communities.

The Youth Council will conduct research and provide continued support of government departments, communities and organizations demonstrating strong interest in youth engagement processes and programs. Identifying these will increase awareness of existing capacity, and provide opportunities for collaboration, partnership and policy development.

ENGAGEMENT

Community development:

The Youth Council will develop and release a youth-engagement tool kit for use by departments, municipalities and organizations to help build capacity for youth involvement in decision-making.

The Youth Council will continue to act as a facilitator/convenor in the process of youth engagement, offering its insight, experiences, resources and guidance to government departments and organizations seeking to meaningfully engage youth in policy development and other decision-making opportunities.

The Youth Council will continue its consultations with youth to promote youth engagement and help adults learn more about what can be done to promote youth as leaders in solution development and action.

In an effort to continue to effectively and meaningfully consult and engage youth, the Youth Council will seek to apply principles introduced in the Government of New Brunswick's Public Engagement Initiative (It's more than just talk).

The information contained in the Rock the Boat report will be presented to government. The Youth Council will seek to actively engage senior policy-makers in the development of future policy on population growth, and any other policy areas which affect youth.

HERE'S HOW YOU CAN GET INVOLVED

The Youth Council and the Population Growth Secretariat want your input. You are invited to get involved in the ongoing discussion.

Hey YOUth!!

Here's what you need to know:

- *your involvement is not finished;*
- *you will be contacted for more input in the near future;*
- *check out our website for more information on the Youth Council, and find our profile on Facebook;*
- *keep in touch; and*
- *stay tuned for a discussion paper in the near future, with questions that will keep the conversation going.*



APPENDIX A

Rock the Boat 2008: Here Today, Here to Stay! -- Discussion questions for focus groups

Session 1

1. What are some of the strengths and positive things about your community? (opportunities that exist to work, learn, live and play)
2. What are some of the challenges of living in your community?

Session 2

An increasing number of young people are leaving New Brunswick to live and work elsewhere.

1. What steps should be taken by your community, family, school, employers and government to encourage youth to stay in New Brunswick (be creative and think outside the box)?
2. What can YOU do?

Summary questions

1. What is the most important thing that we talked about today? What is the most important action we should take?
2. How did today go? Any suggestions for making it even better?

APPENDIX B



Rock the Boat “Here Today, Here to Stay” Survey

Age: _____

Sex: Male Female

What region of the province are you from? _____

Are you... (Please circle all that apply)

a) A high school student	If yes, what is your grade?
b) A post-secondary student (i.e. university, college, etc...)	If yes, please note the type of institution and the last year completed:
c) Working full-time	If yes, please note your occupation:
d) Working part-time	If yes, please note your occupation:
e) unemployed (not a student)	

Please provide a rating response for each question. You may also add a comment to your rating.

1. Do you feel a sense of belonging to your community?

Not at all Somewhat Very much
 1 2 3 4 5

Comments (optional): _____

2. Do you feel a sense of belonging to the Province?

Not at all Somewhat Very much
 1 2 3 4 5

Comments (optional): _____

3. Do you feel that there are opportunities for youth to succeed in meeting their goals in your community?

Not at all Somewhat Very much
 1 2 3 4 5

Comments (optional): _____

4. Do you feel that there are opportunities for youth to succeed in meeting their goals in the Province?

Not at all Somewhat Very much
1 2 3 4 5

Comments (optional): _____

5. Do you feel Do you feel that there are opportunities for youth to obtain meaningful work in your community?

Not at all Somewhat Very much
1 2 3 4 5

Comments (optional): _____

6. Do you feel Do you feel that there are opportunities for youth to obtain meaningful work in the Province?

Not at all Somewhat Very much
1 2 3 4 5

Comments (optional): _____

7. Do you feel that there is good communication between youth and adult leaders in your community?

Not at all Somewhat Very much
1 2 3 4 5

Comments (optional): _____

8. Do you feel that there is good communication between youth and government leaders in New Brunswick?

Not at all Somewhat Very much
1 2 3 4 5

Comments (optional): _____

9. Do you feel that leaders in your community hear and understand the voice of youth?

Not at all Somewhat Very much
1 2 3 4 5

Comments (optional): _____

10. Do you feel that government leaders in the province hear and understand the voice of youth?

Not at all Somewhat Very much
1 2 3 4 5

Comments (optional): _____

11. Do you feel supported by your community?

Not at all Somewhat Very much
1 2 3 4 5

Comments (optional): _____

12. Do you feel supported by the province?

Not at all Somewhat Very much
1 2 3 4 5

Comments (optional): _____

13. Do you feel that you have a good understanding of educational and career opportunities that are available to you in your community?

Not at all Somewhat Very much
1 2 3 4 5

Comments (optional): _____

14. Do you feel that you have a good understanding of educational and career opportunities that are available to you in the province?

Not at all Somewhat Very much
1 2 3 4 5

Comments (optional): _____

15. Do you feel that you have a good understanding of recreational opportunities that are available to you in your community?

Not at all Somewhat Very much
1 2 3 4 5

Comments (optional): _____

16. Do you feel that you have a good understanding of recreational opportunities that are available to you in the province?

Not at all Somewhat Very much
1 2 3 4 5

Comments (optional): _____

**Are you expecting to stay in New Brunswick?
Please explain why.**

Thank you for your Participation!

Council Staff Only

Date: _____ Location: _____

Acknowledgements

The New Brunswick Advisory Council on Youth expresses its appreciation to its project sponsors and partners:

The Government of New Brunswick, Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour; and Government of New Brunswick, Population Growth Secretariat.

The Youth Council also gratefully acknowledges the contributions of all those who helped to make the Big Splash a huge success. The council thanks the following speakers, presenters, volunteers, and community partners for all of their hard work:

for speaking during the conference: Premier Shawn Graham; Ed Doherty, minister of post-secondary education, training and labour; Business New Brunswick Minister Greg Byrne, minister responsible for the population growth secretariat; Éric Mathieu Doucet, Fédération des jeunes francophones du Nouveau-Brunswick; Scott Crawford, The Resource Centre (Saint John); Gene Fowler, Fatkat Animation Studios; Pierre Pelletier, Olivier Soaps; Janique Robichaud-Savoie, Government of New Brunswick, Department of Human Resources; Jean-Claude Power, Government of New Brunswick, Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour; Dave Small, Spielo; Hilary Howes, Construction Association; Lisa Steeves, Irving Oil; Joanne Callahan, NB Power; Pierre Pelletier, Olivier Soaps;

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Rock the Boat

Notes