

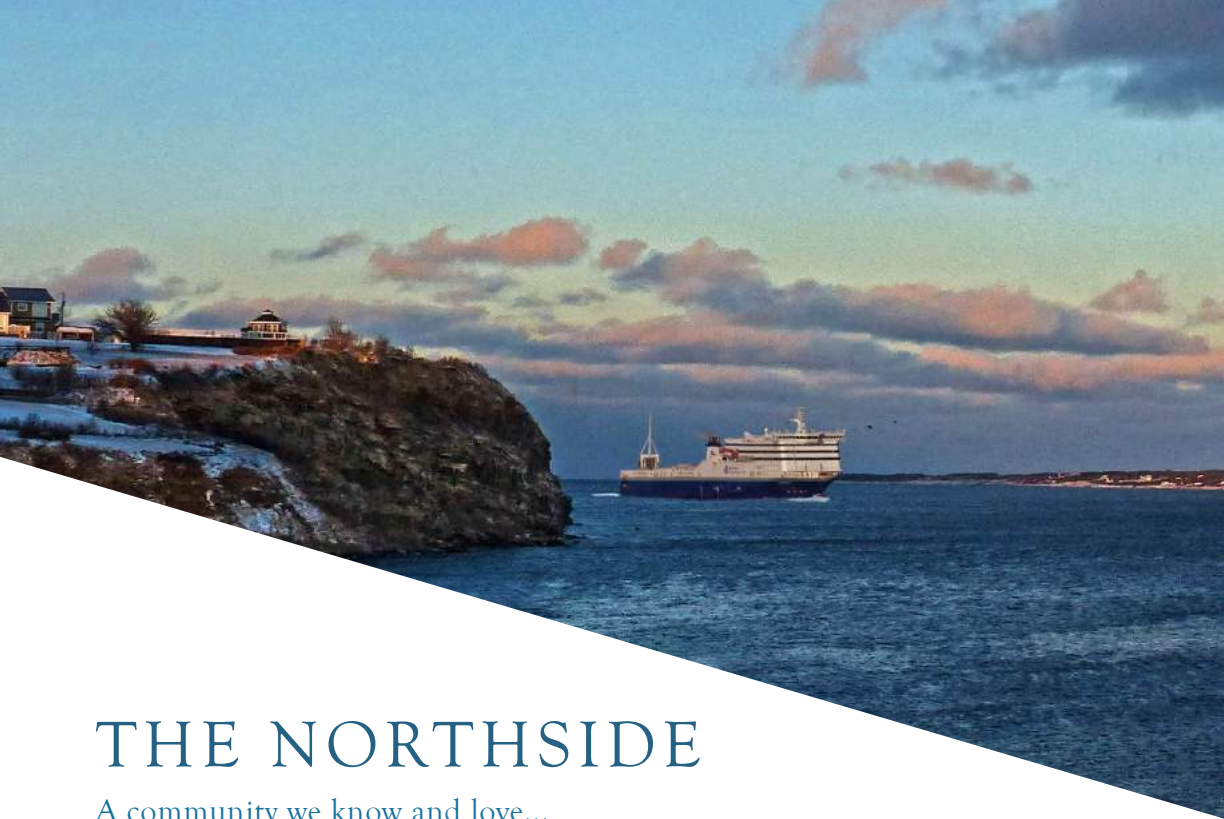
COMMUNITY REPORT



NORTHSIDE rising

Learn about & join this community & government-driven initiative that's rising up against significant challenges on the Northside.





THE NORTHSIDE

A community we know and love...

The Northside is a community of communities. The sweeping landscape is a mix of small towns and rural communities along the sea that extend into a beautiful countryside. Much of what makes the Northside a wonderful place to live and raise a family was built by dedicated community volunteers, small business owners, and a modest social sector (including many health, education, nonprofit, and faith groups). Early residents were pioneers of community development; building hospitals, recreation facilities, libraries, museums, businesses, and affordable housing.

Today, residents continue to show strong leadership. There is a wonderful culture of “paying it forward,” through which people lend a hand to neighbours in need and improve the quality of life for everyone. There are pockets of renewal and transformation, much of it led by innovative and devoted entrepreneurs.

Yet, over the last twenty years the community has fallen into social and economic crisis. The social sector is shouldering the weight of trying to respond to the growing needs of people facing isolation, addictions, food insecurity, poverty, and health issues.

The story of resident-led community building on the Northside is inspiring. It’s all being done against a constant backdrop of social and economic decline, which speaks to the spirit of citizens who remain hopeful in challenging times.

THE PERFECT STORM

Even with the Northside's notable economic history, it was not prepared for the harsh drop in resource and industry based economies that hit the area in the 1990s. By the early 2000s a growing number of individuals, families, and neighbourhoods were in crisis. While the strong culture of "neighbouring" helped some adjust to a new way of life, many families came apart under the stress.

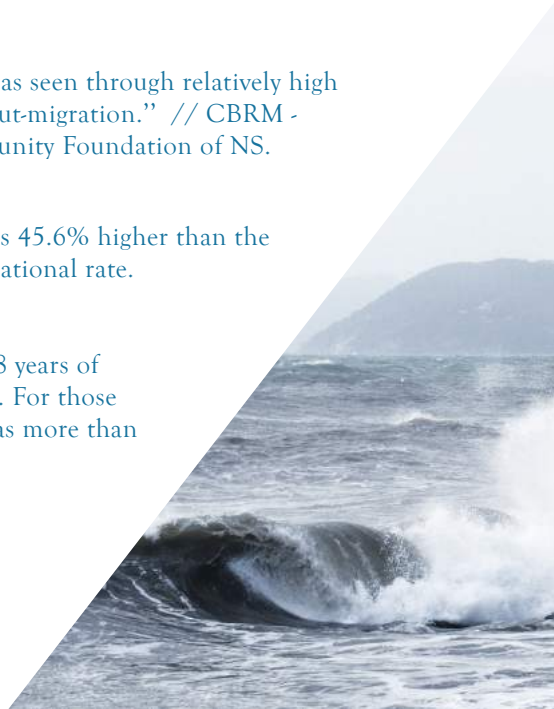
The community tried to find a new economic footing, but ultimately we saw businesses close and food banks expand. Despite efforts to navigate out of the "perfect storm" that was sweeping Cape Breton, the fabric of the community fell apart.

Children and youth were drawn into a violent street culture of drugs, alcohol, and crime. We could not have foreseen that years later they would be caught up in a battle for their lives.

The Northside was also hit with an aging population and out-migration of young people. The divide between those who were thriving and those who were struggling had grown wider. Many young people now refer to this life as the "new normal" and they have given up on change.

This "new normal" is reflected in data from our local food banks, Statistics Canada, and by organizations like the ALLY Centre of Cape Breton. Combined with first-voice stories of affected residents, the facts are chilling:

- "CBRM's youth population is under threat, as seen through relatively high levels of youth unemployment, crime, and out-migration." // CBRM - Vital Signs Report, published by the Community Foundation of NS.
- 2012 unemployment rate for youth 15-24 was 45.6% higher than the provincial rate and 85.3% higher than the national rate.
- 2010 child poverty rate for children under 18 years of age was 69.4% higher than the national rate. For those children under the age of 6, CBRM's rate was more than twice the national average.



NAVIGATING OUT OF THE “PERFECT STORM”

In spite of these statistics, a tangible spirit of readiness to change the community can be felt on the Northside. Real change happens when we reach out with compassion and listen deeply and respectfully to those who have the courage to share their stories. Everyone has something to contribute, including those who are struggling. Together, we can shine a light on the lived experiences of the people here, and shift the story from an individual journey of poverty, loneliness, addiction, and homelessness, to a community effort for prosperity and health.

A huge amount of goodwill and community building energy is already here on the Northside. Neighbours help each other when they can. Organizations both inside and outside of the community collaborate with those working on the ground.

No one organization, sector or government department will be able to navigate out of this storm. With help and resources the community can - and must - find its compass. Northside Rising represents that opportunity.

INTRODUCING INSPIRING COMMUNITIES

Northside Rising is part of a broader provincial initiative called Inspiring Communities. The Northside was identified as one of its first sites based on the challenges at hand, and the spirit of readiness for change.

Inspiring Communities aims to develop and support collaborative relationships to better tackle the complex challenges facing Nova Scotians - such as poverty, addiction and isolation. Residents, community organizations, businesses, and governments come together in a way that honours their unique views and valuable contributions. It is supported by eight social policy departments in the provincial government who see an opportunity to change how to work within and across communities, and between government and communities.



The work is grounded in the principles of “Collective Impact.” It starts with a process of identifying a shared agenda that highlights priority areas of focus from the community’s perspective, and provides resources for a “backbone” team to coordinate organizing

efforts across sectors and with residents. Data is collected to guide decision-making, stakeholders are kept in the loop on progress, and areas where we can more effectively align resources for impact are identified. What we learn at the community level will help shape government decision-making about programs, policies, and resources.

Inspiring Communities is currently working in three Nova Scotia communities: Dartmouth North (“Between the Bridges”), the Northside (“Northside Rising”), and Digby. It’s a growing network that is helping us learn from our experiences and have a broader influence on how to work differently, together.

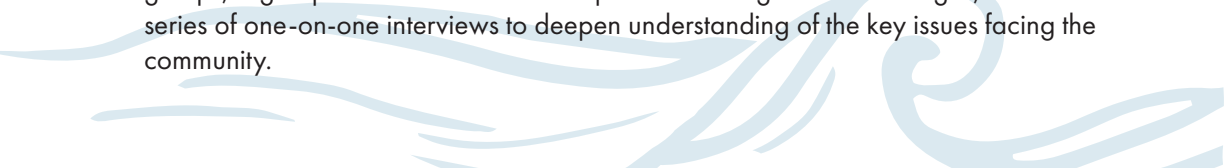
STIRRING UP THE WATERS

The formation of Northside Rising...

As the appetite for change in our community became increasingly apparent, we moved ahead with the first stage of our journey – connecting with local residents and exploring the opportunities and challenges facing the Northside.

In February 2017, the first gatherings were held to introduce the idea of “collective impact.” People from diverse backgrounds shared what was already happening in the community, or what could happen with the right opportunities and supports.

From there, the community conversations continued:

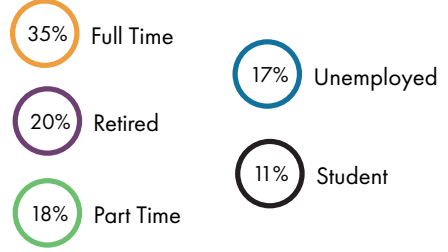
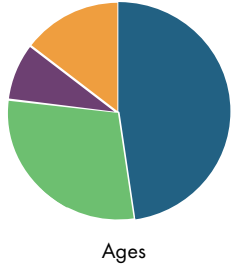
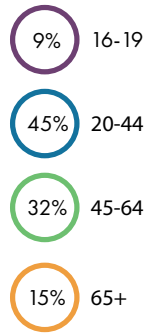
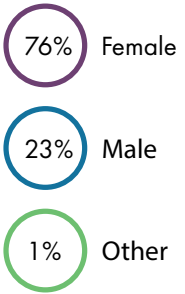
- A local steering committee was created to guide and support the engagement process and propose a path forward.
 - Newspaper and radio stories helped spread word about the new initiative.
 - An infographic was created showing population change, employment levels, food bank usage, and more.
 - Special events raised awareness, including a “Northside Wellness Fair” that highlighted local resources in our community.
 - A “tree of community” mural was created by middle-school students on ideas of what makes a community healthy.
 - An extensive community input process was undertaken including a survey completed by 553 residents; discussion forums conducted with community organizations, faith groups, a group of women with lived experience facing social challenges; and a series of one-on-one interviews to deepen understanding of the key issues facing the community.
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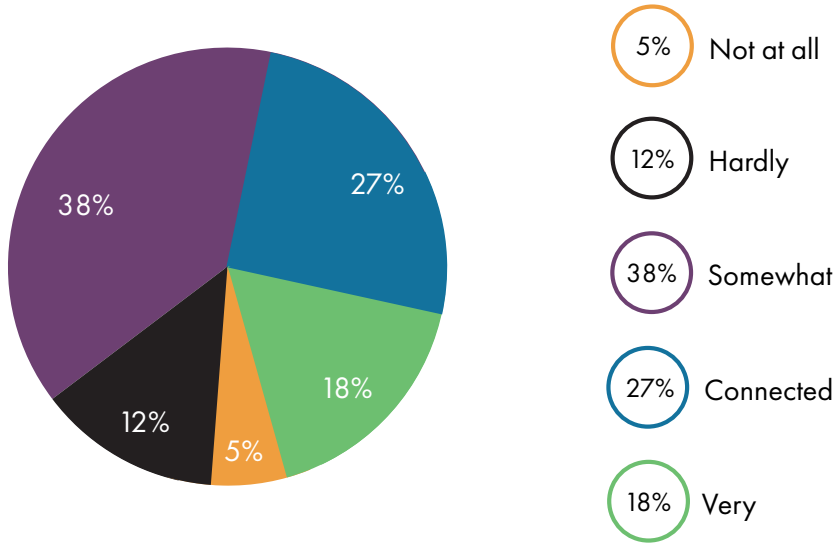
COMMUNITY SURVEY RESULTS

We were able to generate the most wide-reaching information from our community survey, which tells a sobering story of the Northside.

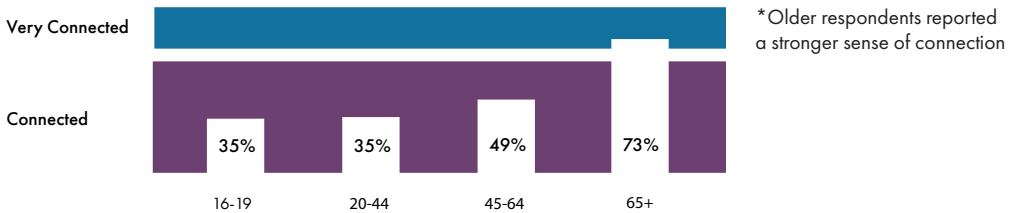
Here is a summary of the results:



Q1. HOW CONNECTED DO YOU FEEL TO THE NORTHSIDE?



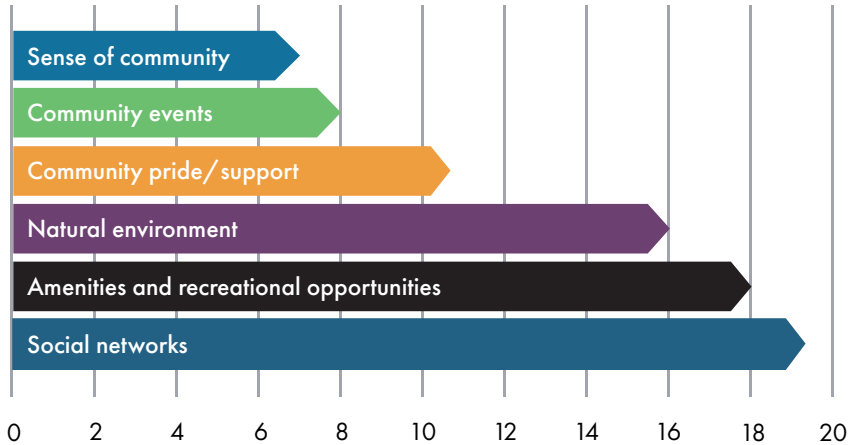
Connection by age...



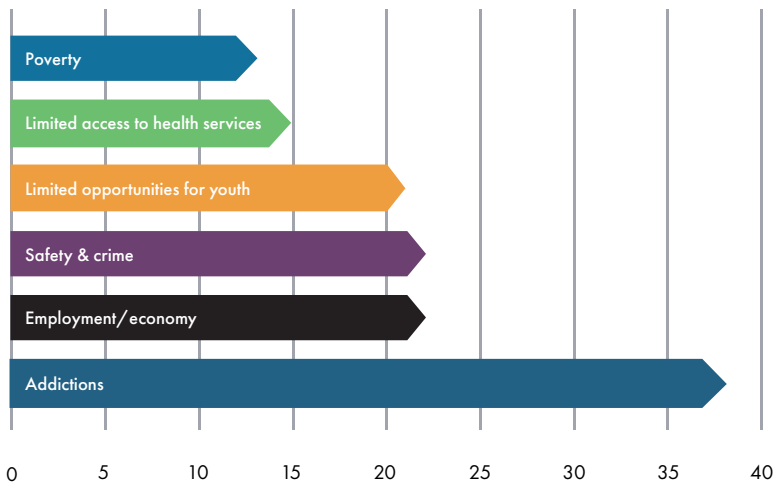
Connection by gender...



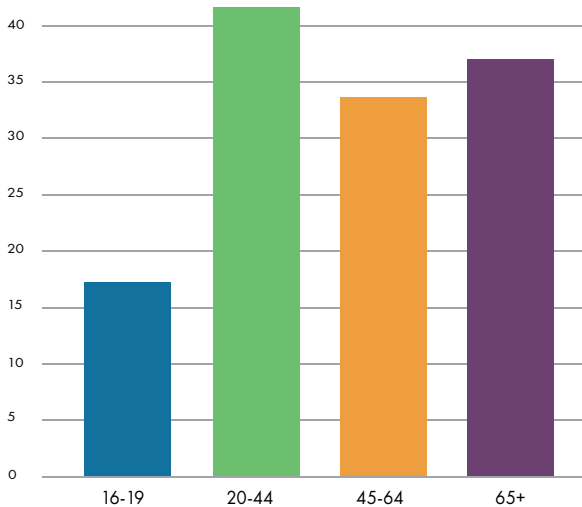
Q2. WHAT DO YOU APPRECIATE ABOUT THE NORTHSIDE THAT YOU WANT TO BE SURE IS PART OF IT'S FUTURE?



Q3. WHAT ARE THE TOP TWO CONCERNS ABOUT YOUR COMMUNITY? WHAT KEEPS YOU UP AT NIGHT?

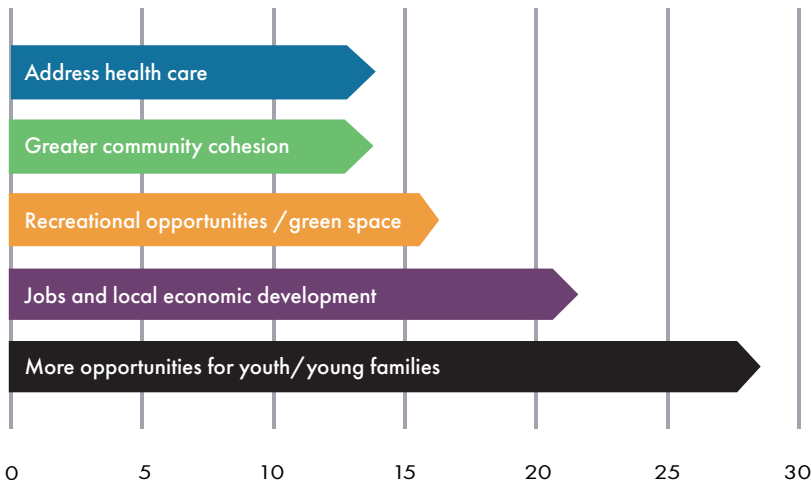


Addictions by age (those concerned about)...

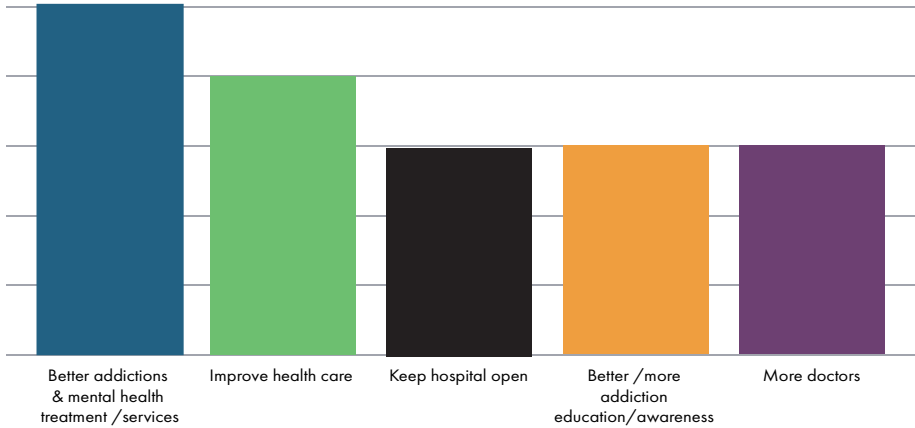


*The youngest respondents were less likely to be concerned about addictions.

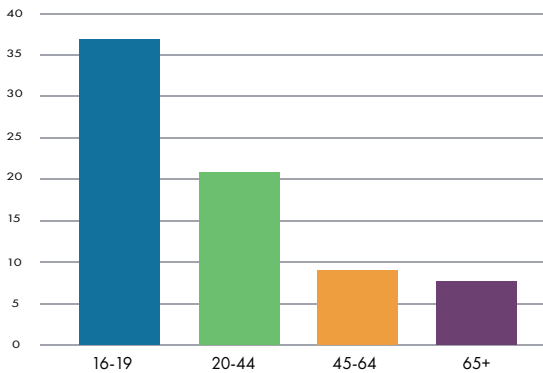
Q4. WHAT CHANGES WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE? WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE TO CREATE A STRONGER COMMUNITY?



Health Care broken down...

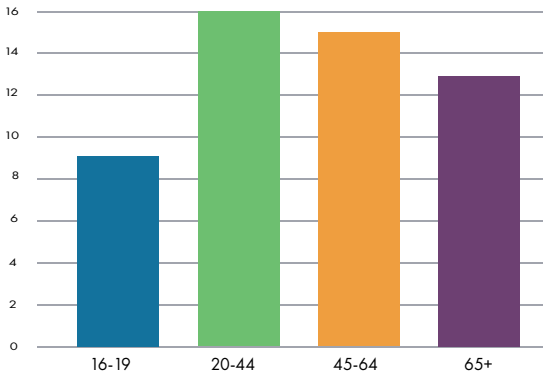


Recreational opportunities / green space by age...



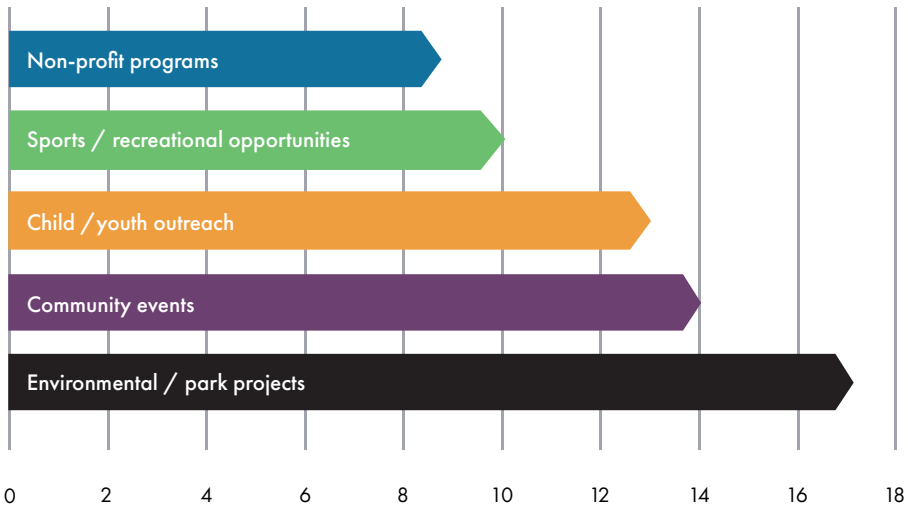
*Younger respondents were more likely to identify recreational opportunities/green space than older respondents as a change they would like to see.

Jobs and local economic development by age...

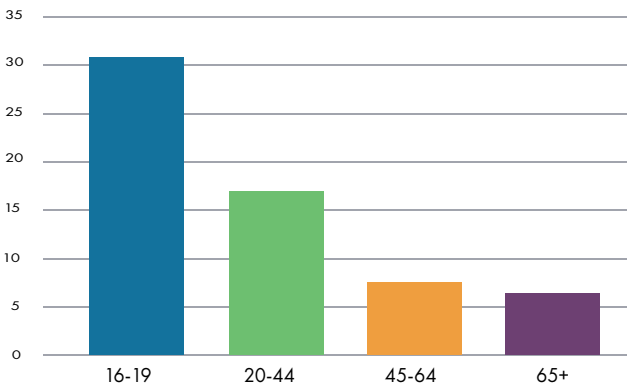


*Middle-age respondents were more likely to identify jobs and local economic development than younger respondents as a change they would like to see.

Q5. WHERE ARE THE GOOD THINGS HAPPENING THAT WE CAN BUILD ON?



Community events by age...



*Younger respondents were more likely to identify community events than older respondents as good things happening that we can build on.

All survey data were collected by four students during the summer of 2017. Students went to community events, local businesses, and organizations. Online surveys were also completed.

Strengths of the survey results include:

- The number of people who responded (553 in total).
- The similarity between the findings reported here and other research.



RISING UP AGAINST THE CHALLENGES

After reviewing these survey findings with the community, we found widespread agreement that high levels of addictions are a major issue in our community. Many people also observed that addictions is connected to many of the other challenges that came out in the survey: unemployment, poverty, crime, health, and the need to create more opportunities for our youth and young families. These are all important starting points for collectively shaping our community's future.

In short, the crisis of addictions needs to be challenged directly and with determination. For too long it has plagued our community, taking the lives of loved ones and robbing the community of its future. Most of our community members, if not all, have been touched by addictions - either directly through the suffering of friends and family, or indirectly through its impact on the life of our community.

And yet, in this crisis there is also extraordinary opportunity:

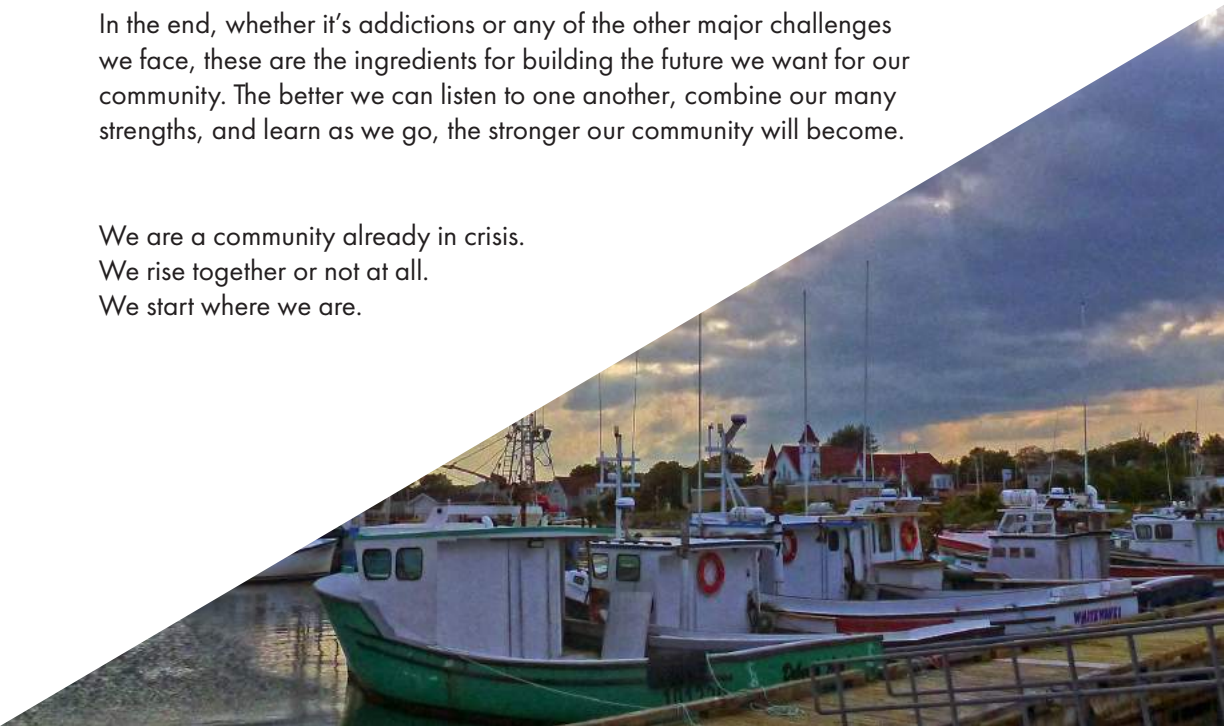
- The potential to strengthen the fabric of our community by connecting all of us in a common cause, including and especially those who have experienced the challenge of addictions most directly.
- The opportunity to respond to immediate needs, but also to help protect future generations from the same challenges.
- The chance to see addictions not only as a concern in itself but as an entry point for addressing many of the factors that help make a vibrant, healthy community.

THREE MAIN STEPS OF ACTION:

- #1** ***Deepen our collective understanding about the challenge of addictions in our community*** – This work begins by listening to people who have experienced addictions firsthand and the organizations who work closely with them for the many insights they hold about the nature of this issue and possible responses.
- #2** ***Identify the contributions that we all can make to address both immediate needs and root causes*** – Like the village that learned it could turn “Stone Soup” into a glorious meal when everyone contributed what was in their means, we can accomplish together what none of us can accomplish alone.
- #3** ***Act, learn, and change*** – Track the progress of our efforts, determine what works and what doesn’t, and create better ways to achieve our goals.

In the end, whether it’s addictions or any of the other major challenges we face, these are the ingredients for building the future we want for our community. The better we can listen to one another, combine our many strengths, and learn as we go, the stronger our community will become.

We are a community already in crisis.
We rise together or not at all.
We start where we are.



HOW CAN YOU HELP?

Tell me where to sign up...

Northside Rising wants to invite groups and individuals in our community to organize and work collectively for our common good - starting with a collective impact on the issue of addictions. At the same time, we also want to challenge the community to find new ways of working together so our actions and efforts support one another.

In these early days, there are three primary ways you can get involved:

#1. OUR RESIDENTS' ROUNDTABLE:

The Residents' Roundtable is a place where people come together to plan. It will be composed of Northside residents from all walks of life. They will bring views of those living and dealing with difficult issues such as poverty, lack of education, substance abuse, and trauma. Residents will also come to the table with skills and knowledge gained from years of volunteering, engagement, and advocacy for themselves, families and others. Marginalized groups often unheard will be vital to this table.

#2. OUR WORKING GROUP ROUNDTABLE:

This table will lead the day-to-day work needed to tackle important and complex problems the community takes on. It will likely include some members who have professional experience and credentials in addictions and other areas we agree to work on, but that will not be a requirement. Some members of this group will work on the Northside, some will work in other parts of Cape Breton.

Importantly, this table will have members from the Residents' Roundtable; therefore the residents and people with "first voice" will always be a part of our decision making. It is the collaborative combination of these two roundtables that will ultimately decide what issues the community takes on and how the work will be done.

The Terms of Reference for these two roundtables can be accessed on the Northside Rising website: www.northsiderising.ca and on our Facebook page, www.facebook.com/northsiderising.

One of the first tasks for the Working Group Roundtable will be to promote, receive, and approve applications for the Rising Tide Projects, which is our third major way to get involved...



#3. RISING TIDE PROJECTS:

Even though we know making an impact on our community will take time, we want to ensure change starts now. Therefore, we want to introduce what we're calling "Rising Tide Projects." These projects will generate the early impacts that drive us toward change and hope.

There are so many good ideas in our community that could be used to improve life on the Northside - serving everyday citizens, disadvantaged groups, youth, the hungry, and so many others.

We want to give these ideas a chance to become reality!

If you have a project or idea you think could improve the community, seize the opportunity to apply for modest funding through a simple, clear process with a short turnaround from application to approval.

Some ideas for projects include: murals, recreation equipment, benches, mini-libraries, neighbourhood clean-ups, gardens, community needs, carnivals, record-breaking challenges, start-up funds for larger community improvement projects, and much more!

As the saying goes, a rising tide lifts all boats... This is our hope for the Rising Tide projects, that they will raise awareness, build capacity, encourage our spirit of community, and provide front-end, immediate community impact for those living on the Northside.

Guidelines and application forms for our Rising Tide Projects can be found online at www.northsiderising.ca





JOIN THE RISING

This is your community...

We know this work is not for the faint-hearted. We know the challenges the Northside is facing are diverse, complicated, and overwhelming. However, we cannot and must not give in to hopelessness. This is our community, and all those hurting and feeling alone are our neighbours. Together, we must rise up against whatever separates or weakens us, and join together as a community dedicated to a healthier, stronger, more vibrant Northside.

Like all those who already belong to Northside Rising, raise your hand to our Declaration of Commitment:

- I. I believe in a healthy, prosperous Northside and commit to pursuing real change that will most effectively help our community realize its' fullest potential.
- II. I believe rising up our community means we must first raise up our forgotten voices.
- III. I will shift tides on the Northside by committing time and resources to the movement.
- IV. I commit to sharing my information, networks, and resources with others in the movement to ensure a stronger collaborative impact is made.
- V. I will validate issues, set goals, and measure benchmarks based on unbiased data about my community.
- VI. I only wish to move forward if every voice in our community is moving forward alongside me.

Join the Northside Rising. Join the movement that is committed to seeing change happen on the Northside.



NORTHSIDE rising

CONTACT INFO

If you have any questions about this report, the survey results, or how you can get involved - please contact us. We'd love to connect with you!

Find us online at www.northsiderising.ca

Find us on social media at www.facebook.com/northsiderising

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Your voice & your
contributions are needed to
help make the Northside a
thriving community...

JOIN THE RISING.

*All photos of the Northside taken by Robert R. MacDonald