

# Thriving in a Time of Uncertainty: Grant Impact Report

Rural Communities Foundation of Nova Scotia

April 2022

Report created by Sarah Lavallée with grant recipients as collaborators

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**PhiLab**

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PARTNERSHIP  
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## Acknowledgements

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## Overview

This report aims to provide a deeper understanding of the impacts of the various grants awarded by the Rural Communities Foundation of Nova Scotia on rural communities across the province. Eight impact interviews were conducted in February and March of 2022 with eight past and current R.C.F.N.S. grant recipients. From the interviews, it was clear that the grants had significant short-term and long-term impacts on the grant recipients, project participants, and the wider community in which the project was located. In addition, the R.C.F.N.S. grants helped address disparities between rural and urban regions, particularly for disparities experienced disproportionately by marginalized populations.

Seven (7) key themes emerged from the interviews: (1) the importance of place-based projects, (2) R.C.F.N.S. funding was used to leverage more funding from other organizations, (3) project was able to amplify the work of other community organizations, (4) ability to amplify marginalized voices due to the power of story-telling, (5) tradition and heritage in rural communities act as a strength and a barrier, (6) lack of resources in rural communities as a major barrier, and (7) the mutual aid model is one of the greatest strengths of rural communities. Although the grant recipients expressed their gratitude for the grants provided by R.C.F.N.S., many grant recipients continue to face challenges in

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terms of operating with minimal resources and funding that lead to burn-out and decreased capacity within the organizations. Grant recipients offered some insights into ways that R.C.F.N.S. can offer further support by (1) taking a stronger role in facilitating the leveraging of funds and (2) offering opportunities for increased knowledge sharing between grant recipients.

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## Introduction

The Rural Communities Foundation of Nova Scotia [R.C.F.N.S.] is a registered charity and community foundation with the purpose of supporting community organizations in rural Nova Scotia through grant-making, convening, and capacity-building. The Rural Communities Foundation seeks to improve their understanding of community issues and support community-based solutions through their annual grants that are focused on initiatives such as leadership, gender-equality, and climate action.

The grant recipients included in this report represent five past and current grants offered by the Rural Communities Foundation of Nova Scotia. A list of each grant and a description of the grant criteria are included below.

### **Joan Feynman Climate Change Fund**

This grant is for community projects that address climate change through innovation, creativity, and change. In particular, projects that address marginalized communities and issues of environmental justice are prioritized. This grant is offered in the form of micro grants of \$2000 for youth-led projects and \$5000 for projects led by adults.

### **Gender Equality Grants**

The gender equality grants are provided to organizations that are dedicated to supporting women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender diverse individuals in working towards justice, equity, and inclusion. The grant can support community projects of various purposes that include new initiatives, solutions to persistent challenges, or to support a just recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

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## **Soaring Eagle Fund**

The Soaring Eagle Fund is for individuals who identify as 2SLGBTQ+ and work with the community. This grant is a collaboration between Cape Breton Artist Drake Jensen and the Rural Communities Foundation of Nova Scotia. The Soaring Eagle Fund is meant to start a conversation on the issues and challenges faced by the 2SLGBTQ+ community in rural Nova Scotia in order to identify community-based solutions. The initial emphasis of this grant is on youth but it may expand to other age groups in the future.

## **Emergency Community Support Fund**

The Emergency Community Support Fund (ECSF) is a rapid response fund initiated by the Government of Canada to support qualified donees and non-profit organizations working with vulnerable populations impacted by the COVID-19 crisis. CFC, United Way Centraide Canada (UWCC), and the Canadian Red Cross (CRC) are working together with the federal government to deploy the \$350 million Fund at the community level. CFC, which will be allocated a portion of the total, will flow these funds through the community foundation network enabling qualified donees coast to coast to coast to receive support. Funds were dispersed on a rolling basis, with the entirety of ECSF disbursed to qualified donees by September 30, 2020. Due to high need, a second round of ECSF were dispersed in 2021.

## **Rural Vitality Grant Program**

As part of the Community Foundation of Canada's 150th Fund, the Rural Communities Foundation of Nova Scotia (RCF) ran the Rural Vitality Grant Program that supported 16 exciting and diverse projects in rural communities. Despite their enormous diversity, all the projects addressed one question: What is the future we want in rural Nova Scotia? The projects ranged from very local to provincial in scope, addressed a range of social, economic and environmental issues, and engaged with different groups, including Mi'kmaq communities.

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## Methodology

Sarah Lavallée, undergraduate Community Development student at Acadia University completed this report as part of her work placement with PhiLab Atlantic and the Rural Communities Foundation of Nova Scotia. Eleven grant recipients were chosen from a thorough review of past and current grant recipients and input from R.C.F.N.S. board members. The selected grant recipients represent a diverse range of projects (i.e. art-based, environmental education etc.), grant types (Joan Feynman Climate Grants, Gender Equality Grants etc.), and populations (2SLGBTQ+ youth, Indigenous populations etc.). Eleven grant recipients were contacted via e-mail to arrange an interview time. Although all eleven recipients responded, eight grant recipients were available for the interview. The end of the fiscal year or a lack of capacity was the reason given for the three grant recipients who were unable to be interviewed. The grant recipients who were available were located across the province, including Digby Neck, Truro, Annapolis Royal, and Lunenburg among others. Most grant recipients had received their funding in 2020-2021, however, one grant recipient received the funding in 2016.

Each recipient was invited to an online interview on zoom for a duration of 40-60 minutes. Grant recipients were encouraged to invite other project members to the interview. Most of the interviews were conducted with single individuals who had applied for the grant, however, two interviews were in a group or pair. The interviews took place between February 8<sup>th</sup>-March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

During the interview, grant recipient(s) were asked about the impacts of their specific grant as well as the strengths and challenges unique to their rural community. The following questions guided each interview:

1. Tell us about the project you received RCF funding for? What was its focus?  
How did it come about? How did you folks get involved and why? What kinds of activities were involved and who was involved?

2. What issue did the project address in your community? What was the contribution of the project to your learning as grantees?  
Has the project contributed to any sustainable change in your community? Have you continued this work in any way?
3. What are the major strengths and assets you see in your rural community? Are they fully mobilized? If not, how might they be?
4. What are the enduring challenges that your rural community faces? How might they be addressed?
5. What might be another project that would build on the work you did in this project?
6. Other areas/aspects you wish to speak to?

Once the interviews were completed, each interview was transcribed and themed. Relevant themes were grouped into sub-categories that are presented in this report.

## Summary of Findings Related to Interview Questions

Interview Questions	Response Summary
1. What was your project? How did it come to be?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ People getting involved through their networks informally</li> <li>○ Grant recipients identified a market opportunity or gap</li> <li>○ Personal experience as a source of inspiration to make change</li> <li>○ People recognized their ability to allocate resources for the benefit of others</li> </ul>
2. What did you learn as recipients in the process?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Personal growth</li> <li>○ Learning about local history</li> <li>○ Project was a slower process than anticipated</li> <li>○ Necessary to re-imagine concepts</li> <li>○ People need to see it to believe it</li> <li>○ Change requires hard work and can take a personal toll</li> <li>○ Necessary to find the right people to support the project</li> </ul>
3. What issues did the project address in your community?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Honoring the struggles, triumphs, and journeys of women</li> <li>○ Women are still not valued as much as men in current society</li> <li>○ Addressing racism and stigma for marginalized populations (particularly the 2SLGBTQ+ community, young people, individuals who struggle with substance use disorder, and Mi'kmaq populations)</li> <li>○ Strengthening the connections to each other as women and to our past</li> <li>○ Ability to tell our stories as women</li> <li>○ Addressing the lack of place-based services/supports</li> <li>○ Supporting individuals at all levels of their careers/stages of life</li> <li>○ Addressing the lack of opportunities and recognition for individuals in certain fields of work in rural communities</li> <li>○ Crisis intervention</li> <li>○ Increasing social cohesion among community members</li> </ul>



<p>4. Has the project contributed to sustainable change in your community?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Increasing collaboration with other community organizations</li> <li>○ Increasing female representation</li> <li>○ Bringing together women and individuals from various community organizations</li> <li>○ Supporting the local economy</li> <li>○ Helping to shine a light on rural stories in particular</li> <li>○ Helping to decrease stigma</li> <li>○ Increasing the resilience of rural communities faced with external stresses</li> <li>○ Increasing the community's ability to be innovative/creative</li> </ul>
<p>5. What are the persisting/major challenges you find in your rural community?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Gender-based violence and child abuse</li> <li>○ Traditional gender roles, inequalities between genders, and traditional perspectives of family</li> <li>○ Rural communities resisting change</li> <li>○ Lack of resources</li> <li>○ Barriers to participation in programming for rural participants</li> <li>○ Barrier from a lack of family/historical connections to the community; can be isolating</li> <li>○ Equity vs. equality mindset</li> <li>○ Large geographical regions as a challenge for adequate service provision</li> <li>○ False perceptions of quaint, rural communities that ignore or hide serious issues</li> <li>○ Stigma associated with certain topics</li> <li>○ Divisiveness between rural communities in close proximity</li> </ul>
<p>6. What are the major strengths/assets in your community? Could they be better mobilized?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Living in a small town facilitates collaboration with other organizations/individuals with similar interests</li> <li>○ Beautiful scenery</li> <li>○ Tight-knit communities support each other more out of necessity</li> <li>○ Having people return to the rural communities that they came from to offer their skills back to the community</li> <li>○ Lack of awareness about the impact that women have on others</li> <li>○ Ability for rural community members to take initiative on project ideas</li> </ul>
<p>7. Are there any projects that were inspired or came out of this one? Plans for the future?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Projects that focus more specifically on Indigenous communities</li> <li>○ Projects that focus on 2SLGBTQ+ populations</li> <li>○ More projects that engage newcomers in the community</li> <li>○ Projects in the mental health field</li> <li>○ Projects that involve different stages of life</li> <li>○ Hoping to develop more partnerships, especially with the corporate sector to fund some community projects</li> </ul>

## Key Themes

Overall, seven main themes emerged from the interviews: (1) the importance of place-based projects, (2) R.C.F.N.S. funding was used to leverage more funding from other organizations, (3) project was able to amplify the work of other community organizations, (4) ability to amplify marginalized voices due to the power of story-telling, (5) tradition and heritage in rural communities act as a strength and a barrier, (6) lack of resources in rural

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communities as a major barrier, and (7) the mutual aid model is one of the greatest strengths of rural communities. These seven themes are discussed in detail below.

## **Theme 1: The Importance of Place-Based Projects**

Grant recipients expressed the importance of projects that are specific to the local context in terms of both the 1) issues addressed, 2) the congruence of the project with the local culture and values, and 3) the ability of the project to honour local history. Participants expressed that programs or projects that address certain issues (e.g. homelessness) cannot necessarily be replicated in another rural community as each community is unique and therefore requires solutions tailored to the community's specific needs. In addition, participants expressed frustration at national or provincial-level initiatives that do not take into account the particular challenges faced by rural communities.

### **Addresses Context-Specific Issues**

Each of the grant recipients owed the success of their projects to the fact that they addressed specific issues that were pertinent to their own communities. For example, the programs run by Many Hands Make Light Work aim to address the opioid and overdose crisis in Northern Nova Scotia. While the opioid and overdose crisis is not only an issue in Northern Nova Scotia, the projects undertaken by Many Hands Make Light Work are specifically-tailored to meet the needs of the clients that access harm reduction services in this region. As another example, the creation of a newsletter and summer festival by the Digby Neck Collective was a direct response to the geographical challenges faced by the communities along Digby Neck. The two projects undertaken by the Digby Neck Collective were rooted in the unique place-based needs of the community.

### **Ensuring Projects are Congruent with Community Values**

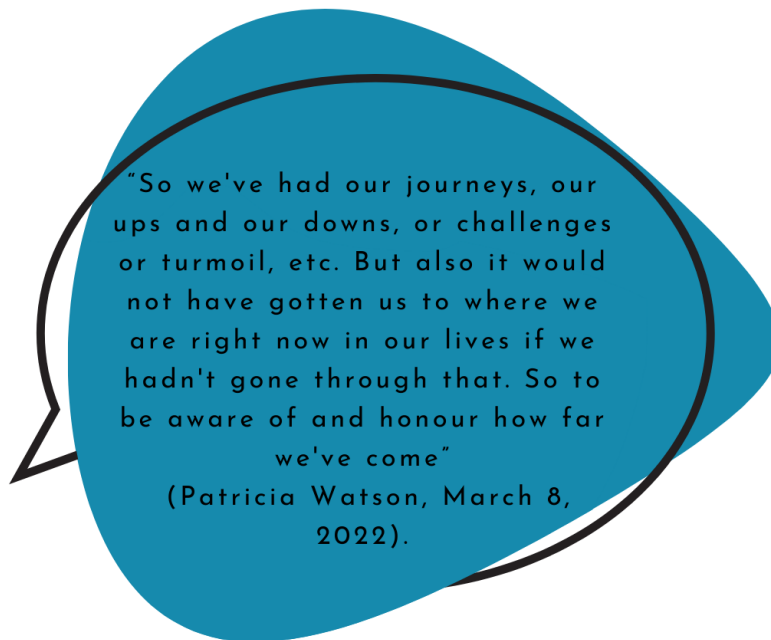
Additionally, grant recipients expressed the importance of ensuring that community projects were congruent with the local community's values and culture. One recurring

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comment mentioned by several grant recipients was the challenge with rural communities accepting change. The values and cultures of an organization may not necessarily reflect those in the communities where they are trying to work. Such is often the case with the Clean Annapolis River Project (C.A.R.P.) where conflicting values about resource management pose a challenge for the conservation work that C.A.R.P. undertakes. It is imperative therefore that C.A.R.P. works closely with each community to ensure that they are not alienating community members who rely on natural resources but are also gaining support for funding to be spent on natural resource conservation projects. Similarly, Many Hands Make Light Work must continually work with community members and community organizations to decrease the stigma associated with mental health and drug abuse. While the values of neighbourliness and social support are strong in the communities where Many Hands Make Light Work operate, certain topics such as drug dependency and sexual health continue to be stigmatized. While grant recipients expressed the belief that the most impactful projects were congruent with local cultures and values, this does not mean that the projects should not challenge the status-quo as in the case of the work of Many Hands Make Light Work.

### **Honouring Local History**

Finally, grant recipients expressed the belief that honouring local history was an important component to the impact of their R.C.F.N.S. grant-funded projects. Grant recipients who were involved in the Women Strong documentary talked about the documentary's success at sharing the local history of women in the South Shore, including the local history of Mi'kmaq and Black Nova Scotian women in the area. One of the Women Strong Documentary project members expressed the importance of honouring the lived experiences of women from the past and the present.



Many grant recipients expressed their desire moving forward to work on community projects that honoured and engaged Mi'kmaq populations, reflecting the importance of embedding local history into community projects to ensure the greatest level of impact.

## **Theme 2: Leveraging More Funding from Other Organizations**

Numerous grant recipients acknowledged that the funding received from the Rural Communities Foundation of Nova Scotia was impactful in its ability to leverage further funding from other sources (private donors, government funding, municipal or provincial funding, or funding from other organizations). This was true for organizations that had received small or large grants, ranging from \$5,000 to \$63,500. This finding supports previous impact assessments completed by R.C.F.N.S. that were presented in the 'Vital Conversations' on Rural Philanthropy in Nova Scotia report of 2016. The ability for

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community organizations to leverage the grants provided by R.C.F.N.S. to obtain other sources of funding is particularly important in three ways: (1) helps to address the lack of sustainable funding issue that many rural organizations face, (2) allows organizations to offer free or subsidized programming, and (3) increases the collaboration between community organizations.

### **Addresses a Lack of Sustainable Funding**

Grant recipients expressed that a lack of sustainable funding makes it challenging to plan ahead within the organization as budgets are only able to be determined once a grant or other funding source is obtained. For example, the Culture Link CIC utilized their initial \$30,000 from the R.C.F.N.S. Emergency Grant to gain an additional \$150,000 from the Department of Communities, Culture, and Heritage to provide support to local artists during the pandemic. Not only does the funding provided by R.C.F.N.S. assist the organization itself in obtaining more funding, but it also helps the community members/clients/participants indirectly in acquiring further funding sources. In the case of Culture Link CIC, local performing artists were able to acquire further funding on their own once receiving the initial financial support from Culture Link CIC & Link Performing Arts Society. However, as expressed by Marc Almon and Tara Taylor from Culture Link CIC & the Link Performing Arts Society, the initial funding was critical for artists to “get their foot in the door” for other bigger funders.

### **Allows Organizations to Offer Free or Subsidized Programming**

Secondly, the ability to leverage R.C.F.N.S. funding is also important so that organizations can offer subsidized or free programming in rural communities where the cost may act as a participation barrier, particularly for marginalized populations. Courtney Connor from the MacPhee Centre in Dartmouth is a recipient of the newly launched Soaring Eagle Grant. Courtney expressed the importance of free programming for the 2SLGBTQ+ youth that the MacPhee Centre serves. One of the main objectives of the

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Soaring Eagle Grant is to destigmatize the arts for rural 2SLGBTQ+ youth, allies, and school peers; art programs are often perceived as elite and inaccessible due to their cost. This sentiment was echoed by Katie McLean concerning the Youth Leading Environmental Change program run by the Clean Annapolis River Project (C.A.R.P). The R.C.F.N.S. grant was used to leverage other funding that ensures that the Youth Leading Environmental Change program is free for participants. This is particularly important as many of the regions where C.A.R.P. conducts their youth conservation programming is remote and thus does not have other options for youth to participate in hands-on conservation education. Furthermore, the Youth Leading Environmental Change program has impacted participants in ways that extend beyond the program, with many past participants having gone on to pursue university degrees in biology or conservation-related fields. This long-lasting impact may not have been possible had the program cost money to participate.

### **Increases Collaboration Between Community Organizations**

Thirdly, leveraging R.C.F.N.S. funding also increased the collaboration between community organizations. For example, Many Hands Make Light Work in Truro utilized some of the funding from R.C.F.N.S. to initiate four opioid councils representing the four regions of Northern Nova Scotia. These councils will help communities with decision-making in regards to the continuing opioid crisis by providing various perspectives including first voice, law enforcement, health responders and rehabilitation workers. In addition, Many Hands Make Light Work utilized the funding from R.C.F.N.S. to join the Truro Chamber of Commerce which will assist them in acquiring further funding in the future. Similarly, the Government FOCUS group was able to utilize R.C.F.N.S. grant funding to partner with various community organizations including the Coady Institute, the St. Francis Xavier extension, the Cape Breton Partnership, and elected officials and First Nations communities to leverage additional funding for their mentorship programs and leadership schools.


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### **Theme 3: Ability to Amplify the Work of Other Community Organizations**

The community projects supported by R.C.F.N.S. grants often amplified the work of other community organizations through raising awareness, fundraising, or providing other resources (human resources, space etc.). For example, the Women Strong Documentary directed by Janice Rofihe has helped other local organizations on the South Shore to raise money through screenings in their own communities. Organizations like the International Women's Group in Halifax and the Chester Playhouse plan to host fundraisers by screening the documentary; other community organizations can reach out to Janice Rofihe through the Women Strong website for screening permission. Another example is the newsletter created by the Digby Neck Collective that promotes local events, businesses, churches, and other non-profits every month. The newsletter was established with the support of an R.C.F.N.S. Community Vitality Grant and has now become a mainstay in the community. Particularly for the communities along Digby Neck that are faced with a unique geographical challenge, a centralized communication system is paramount to fostering social cohesion within and between these communities.

Furthermore, R.C.F.N.S. grant supported projects amplified the work of other community organizations at varying scales, from within municipalities to beyond the province of Nova Scotia. For example, the Government FOCUS group is comprised of board members from all sixteen communities in Eastern Nova Scotia that include women in both past and current government roles, as well as women who are natural leaders in their communities. The FOCUS group is able to build upon the knowledge and government practices from each community, helping to create a more equitable environment for women in leadership positions across the Eastern region. At a larger scale, Culture Link CIC is helping to showcase the work of artists from all across the maritime provinces. Culture Link CIC actively networks with performing artists within and outside of Nova Scotia with the goal to assist in jumpstarting the careers of new performing artists that may not have access to the professional resources they need.

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"We're trying to reach far  
and beyond our province"  
(Tara Taylor, March 14,  
2022).

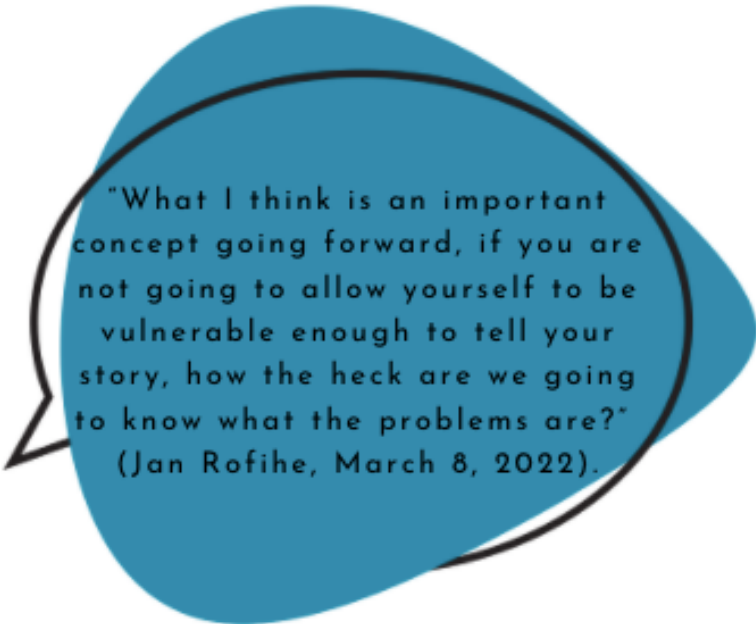
Similarly, the Hope House in Cape Breton has a partnership with an organization in Western Canada that offers trauma-specific programming. The Hope House is supporting this organization by assisting them in creating gender-based programming; this knowledge sharing will help the organization employ a gender-based lens that is often lacking in trauma and crisis intervention work. On a smaller scale, Many Hands Make Light Work helps amplify the work of an internal program called the Rose Hip Women's Group by selling the fabric bags made by women in the group at the local Farmers' Market. In addition to generating income for vulnerable women, this initiative also helped some of the women in gaining employment during the pandemic through the creation of mask-making and personal protective equipment.



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## Theme 4: Ability to Amplify Marginalized Voices Due to the Power of Story-telling

One recurring impact that grant recipients mentioned during the interviews was the power of story-telling in amplifying the voices of marginalized populations. Many of the community projects that were supported by an R.C.F.N.S. grant actively worked to address racism and stigma for marginalized populations that include Indigenous populations, members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, youth, women, and individuals who struggle with substance use disorder. While some of the projects' primary objectives were to share the stories of individuals, such as the Women Strong Documentary, other projects involved story-telling as a way to build relationships and gain first-hand knowledge of the issues faced by certain populations in their community. Janice Rofihe, director of The Women Strong Documentary, expressed her view that story-telling plays a critical role in identifying the key issues facing certain populations.




"What I think is an important concept going forward, if you are not going to allow yourself to be vulnerable enough to tell your story, how the heck are we going to know what the problems are?"  
(Jan Rofihe, March 8, 2022).

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This sentiment was echoed by Al McNutt from Many Hands Make Light Work who expressed the desire to collect stories from the 250 individuals who received their Christmas Hampers to demonstrate the significance of the program in the lives of low-income and homeless individuals in the community. Particularly for those living with a substance use disorder (SUD) who face multiple interrelated challenges that include food insecurity, homelessness, and poverty, providing their personal stories and lived experiences is key to begin addressing these issues. Furthermore, individuals that are struggling with SDU face a significant amount of stigma in their community that can act as barriers to gaining access to support. This is also the reason that the newly created Opioid Councils in Northern Nova Scotia have at least one individual with lived experience of substance use; Many Hands Make Light Work recognizes that the people who know best are the ones with lived experience of the issues faced by the substance using community.

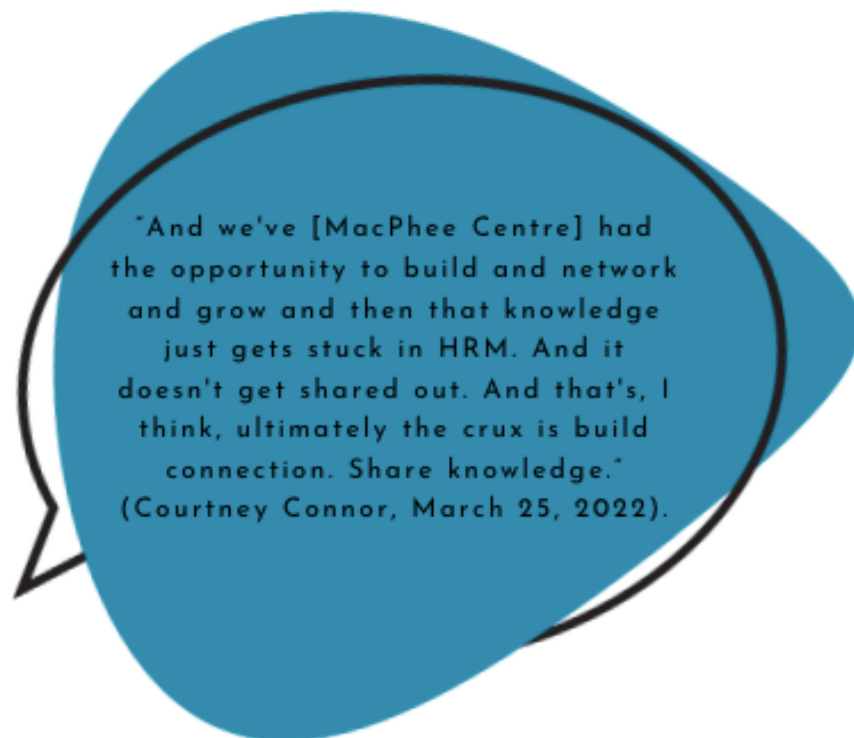
Similarly, the government FOCUS group recognized that the newcomer women in their mentorship program needed to be the ones positioned as the mentors to the current female residents in the community. Brenda Chisolm, mayor of the Town of Port Hawkesbury and member of the government FOCUS group, recognized the value of a mentorship group with newcomer women that flipped the roles of mentor and mentee. While most people would position newcomers as the ones requiring mentorship, Brenda wanted to position the newcomer women as the ones mentoring the current residents in the community on ways to become better allies.



"They [community women] were there as the mentees and she [one of the newcomer women] was there to kind of tell her story: The good, the bad. You know, and basically, create a narrative"  
(Brenda Chisolm, March 14, 2022).

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Furthermore, grant recipients expressed how story-telling is a powerful tool to share knowledge and build connections in rural communities where marginalized individuals often feel disconnected from the larger community. Courtney Connor from the MacPhee Centre in Dartmouth expressed that knowledge sharing and information transfer can sometimes be slower in rural communities, resulting in individuals who are operating with information that is incomplete or that lacks nuance.



'And we've [MacPhee Centre] had the opportunity to build and network and grow and then that knowledge just gets stuck in HRM. And it doesn't get shared out. And that's, I think, ultimately the crux is build connection. Share knowledge.'  
(Courtney Connor, March 25, 2022).

While knowledge-sharing can take many forms, ultimately, grant recipients recognized that there are many stories in rural communities that are not shared because there is a lack of dissemination methods. Community organizations that can mobilize resources to help people in rural communities share their stories realized that there are many stories to tell. Furthermore, grant recipients expressed that they see their role as

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disseminators of stories, helping to amplify the important messages that they need to share with the world.

These kind of stories that might otherwise have gotten no coverage, you know, this is our opportunity to let these stories, particularly the stories of rural Nova Scotia shine"  
(Marc Almon, March 14, 2022).

"And I'm sure every woman that is here today, has many, many stories that they have not shared, having to do with being a female, or have shared with only very, very few people"  
(Jan Rofihe, March 8, 2022).

"We're just adding a little more fire to the messages"  
(Jan Rofihe, March 8, 2022).

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Furthermore, the grant recipients themselves were very eager to share their own stories during the interviews, including the challenges and successes that they faced during their community projects. The grant recipients expressed gratitude in having the opportunity to share their stories; this finding suggests that there is a need to provide further opportunities for story-telling among grant recipients in addition to the participants of their projects.

### **Theme 5: Tradition and Heritage in Rural Communities as a Strength and as a Barrier**

While grant recipients were able to list many strengths and barriers to rural living, the role of tradition and heritage came up multiple times as both an asset and a challenge in rural communities. The role of tradition and heritage was perceived as a strength in the sense that generosity and looking out for one's neighbour is woven into the cultural fabric of many rural communities. On the other hand, tradition and heritage acted as barriers in four key ways: (1) maintaining traditional gender roles and perspectives of a family unit, (2) resisting change, (3) maintaining false perceptions of idyllic rural communities that ignore or hide serious issues, and (4) isolating newcomers with a lack of family history or connections in the area.

#### **Trust and Neighbourliness Strong in Rural Nova Scotia**

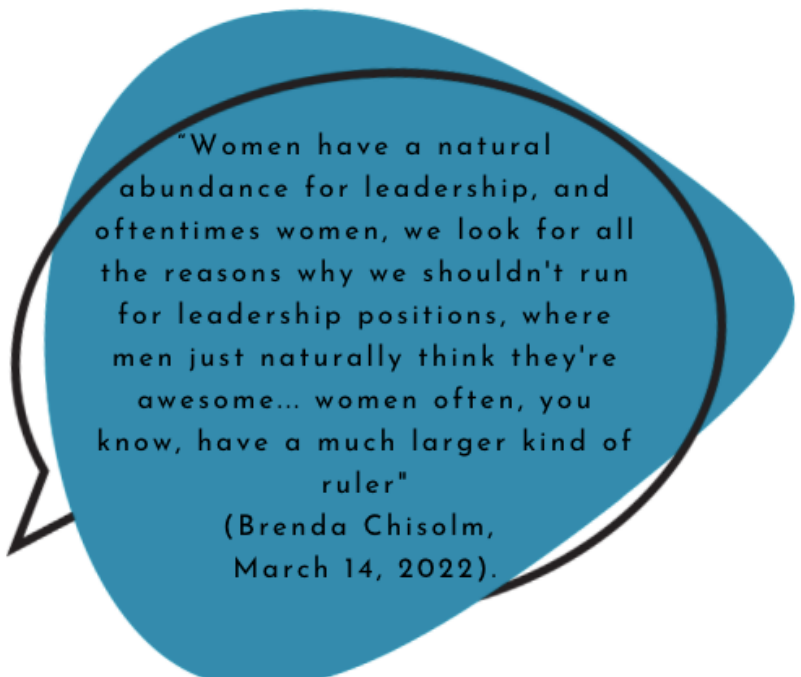
On the positive side, grant recipients expressed that one of the greatest strengths of rural Nova Scotian communities was the level of social cohesion, intimacy, and increased sense of responsibility from knowing one's neighbours. Grant recipients expressed that there was a lack of the NIMBY (not-in-my-backyard) mindset in rural communities. Laura Whyte, grant recipient of one of the Emergency Grants for the Hope House in Cape Breton, expressed that her community consists of a beautiful array of individuals from all backgrounds. Even though there is a great diversity in socio-economic status, profession,

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and cultural background, Laura expressed that her neighbours “look after one another”. Similarly, Sharon Jackson, participant of the Women Strong Documentary, expressed that it is “easier to ask for help when you know people”, reflecting the mutual aid model that is prominent in rural communities.

## **Traditional Gender Roles and Views of Family**


Grant recipients expressed that their rural communities still struggle with traditional views of gender and family that act as barriers to certain individuals from achieving success in certain professions or accessing the support they need. For example, the participants from The Women Strong documentary expressed that making the documentary demonstrated the gaps that still exist in achieving gender equality. Particularly when it comes to younger generations of women, there is still a lack of recognition for the challenges and stories of women in rural communities. Negative perceptions and stereotypes about women’s roles in leadership positions continue to hinder women in the workforce. Brenda Chisolm from the government FOCUS group expressed that women are still not valued as much in society as men and therefore often struggle to see themselves in leadership positions. Brenda expressed the importance of having people “see it to believe it”, particularly when community perceptions do not match the capabilities of certain populations.



“Women have a natural abundance for leadership, and oftentimes women, we look for all the reasons why we shouldn't run for leadership positions, where men just naturally think they're awesome... women often, you know, have a much larger kind of ruler”

(Brenda Chisolm,  
March 14, 2022).

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One of the reasons why we really wanted to talk about leadership and celebrate women's leadership is oftentimes women have to see it before they can believe or be it, you know, for themselves. And sometimes you have to do that for community members as well"  
(Brenda Chisolm,  
March 14, 2022).

Similarly, Al McNutt from Many Hands Make Light Work expressed that the traditional perspective of “the family unit” continues to act as a barrier to certain populations from accessing support. For example, a grocery chain stopped funding a healthy snack program for clients that access the harm reduction services through Many Hands Make Light Work due to a change in branding to target traditional families and therefore stopped offering gift cards. Al McNutt expressed that there is an old-fashioned mindset when it comes to raising young people in many rural communities. Al has observed that many people believe that young adults should struggle as a rite of passage like their parents did. However, this mindset disregards the notion of equity, particularly when it comes to marginalized communities. There is a disproportionate number of Black and Indigenous clients that access the services of Many Hands Make Light Work, reflecting the need to recognize systemic racism and barriers for certain populations.

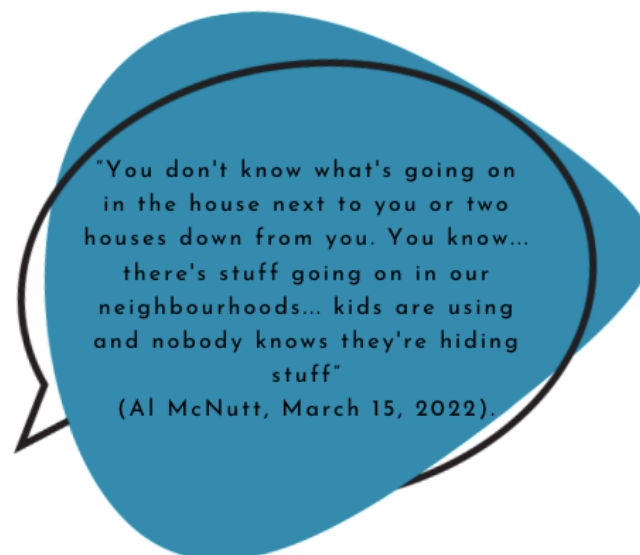
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## Rural Communities Resistant to Change

Additionally, many grant recipients expressed that a major challenge in rural communities was a resistance to change due to the fact that certain things have stayed the same or have “always been done this way” for many years or generations. Consequently, many organizations face push-back from some of the communities in which they work. For example, C.A.R.P. must effectively navigate differences in mindsets concerning resource management, particularly when it comes to communities that are reliant on natural resource industries, such as coal or pulp. Similarly, many community members perceive the services provided by Many Hands Make Light Work as enabling drug use or unwanted pregnancies. Grant recipients expressed that there continues to be challenges in rural communities concerning inclusion with increasingly diverse communities.

## False Perceptions of Idyllic Rural Communities that Ignore or Hide Issues

In conjunction with rural communities being resistant to change, many grant recipients expressed that rural communities often portray a false perception of being idyllic, quaint communities while hiding serious issues. Particularly when it comes to stigmatized issues such as substance use disorders or sexual health, Al McNutt from Many Hands Make Light Work expresses that many communities do not want to accept that these problems are happening in their community.





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While many community members do not want to accept that there are individuals struggling with substance use disorders (SUD), Al McNutt has empirical evidence to suggest otherwise. Many Hands Make Light Work creates emergency drug use bags that are available at various pharmacies in rural communities; Many Hands Make Light Work can hardly keep up with the demand. As expressed by Al McNutt, “*someone* is using them,” even if community members do not want to believe it. Similarly, Courtney Connor from the MacPhee Centre explained that for members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, there are very few resources and support systems in rural communities, much less role models. Although people often believe that rural communities are wonderful and idyllic places to grow up, this is not the case for everyone. Furthermore, this misconception often leads to ignorance concerning the lived reality of many individuals in rural communities.

### **Isolation from a Lack of Family Connections to the Community**

Finally, grant recipients expressed that having little or no family or historical connections to the community can act as a barrier to successfully integrating into the community. Pam Greer, a participant from the Women Strong Documentary, expressed that even though she has lived on the South Shore for many years, she continues to struggle with some feelings of isolation since she has no family that lives in Nova Scotia. The risk of isolation is especially high for immigrants and other newcomers to rural communities, where many people have generations of family connections in the area that can offer support. Consequently, many grant recipients expressed the desire to engage newcomers specifically through their grant supported projects.

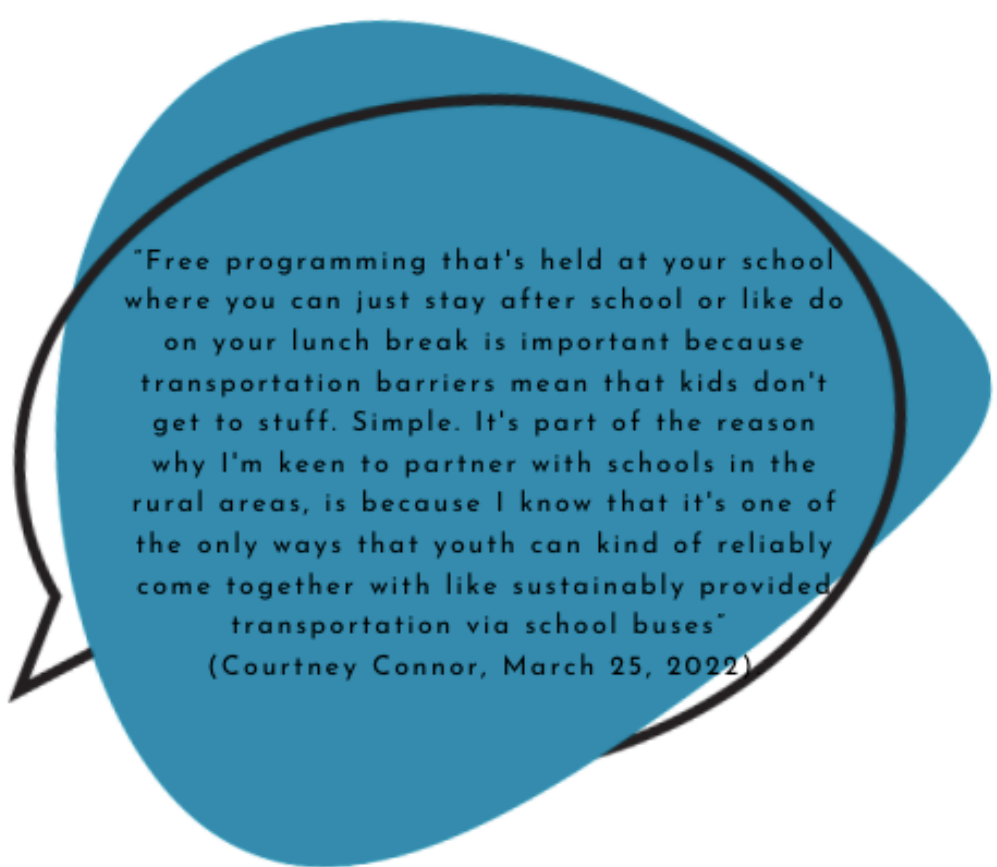
### **Theme 6: Lack of Resources in Rural Communities as Major Barrier**

One of the major barriers in rural communities is a lack of resources, particularly in the form of transportation and funding. Grant recipients expressed that a lack of programs, services, or supports continues to negatively impact certain populations in rural

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communities. Some of the most common barriers that grant recipients expressed in rural communities were: lack of equipment to produce professional-level content for local artists, lack of human resources, lack of transportation options, lack of funding, lack of healthcare, lack of affordable housing, lack of trauma-based programming, and a lack of close proximity to basic necessities such as groceries and healthcare. The lack of resources in rural areas affects the ability of organizations to employ full-time staff members and reach their target populations.

Furthermore, specific barriers to participation in programming in rural areas are: lack of childcare, lack of transportation, context-specific barriers depending on the location of the community, lack of internet service, and cost. Barriers in transportation is particularly prominent for youth. Courtney Connor, recipient of the Soaring Eagle Grant, expressed the importance of programming at schools to reduce the barrier of transportation for youth.



"Free programming that's held at your school where you can just stay after school or like do on your lunch break is important because transportation barriers mean that kids don't get to stuff. Simple. It's part of the reason why I'm keen to partner with schools in the rural areas, is because I know that it's one of the only ways that youth can kind of reliably come together with like sustainably provided transportation via school buses"

(Courtney Connor, March 25, 2022)

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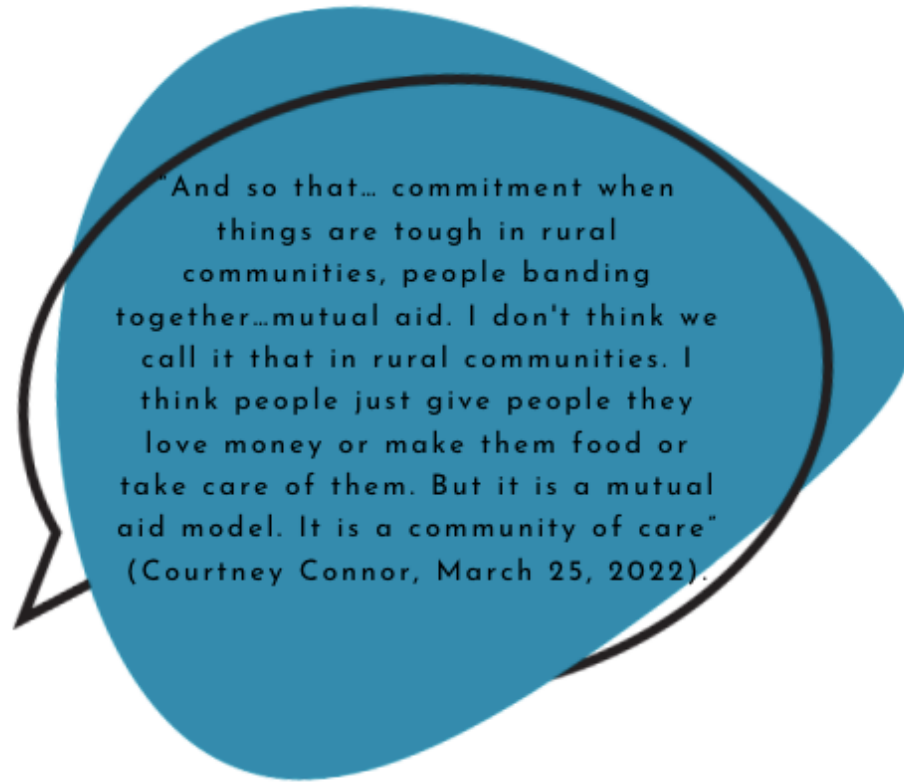
Furthermore, the cost of many extra-curriculars are often prohibitive for certain individuals. While urban areas often have access to more funding to offset program costs, there are relatively few funding sources dedicated exclusively for rural communities. This was one of the reasons that Courtney Connor was so happy to find out about the Soaring Eagle Grant that is exclusively for rural youth. Courtney has witnessed first-hand the differences in access to resources between urban and rural youth and noted that there are significant discrepancies that affect the overall performance and well-being of rural youth. Furthermore, lower youth populations in many rural areas does not incentivize further funding for free programming, even though there is a great need.

### **Theme 7: Mutual Aid Model as one of the Greatest Strengths of Rural Communities**

Although grant recipients expressed that there were many persisting challenges in rural Nova Scotian communities, they perceived the mutual aid model as one of the greatest strengths of rural communities. Grant recipients expressed that “tight-knit” communities support each other more out of necessity because there are fewer resources and other supports available. Furthermore, grant recipients expressed the belief that asking for help is facilitated by the fact that one typically knows more people in a smaller community compared to a larger one. Additionally, grant recipients believed that it is easier to see when others need help in a smaller community, as “everyone knows everyone’s business”. Grant recipients expressed feeling an intimate investment in supporting other people in their community, supported by the increased amounts of volunteerism typically seen in rural communities compared to urban ones. Although there were instances of divisiveness amongst rural communities, grant recipients expressed that people will always come together when faced with serious external threats. Tragedies like the recent mass shooting in Port-au-Pique are prime examples of the willingness of rural community members to come together when others are in need. Courtney Connor from the MacPhee

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Centre in Dartmouth discusses how rural communities are often “communities of care”, even when they are not perceived as such by community members themselves.



## Future Directions

Based on the interview discussions, a few themes emerged as future project ideas or focus areas for grant recipients. Firstly, grant recipients expressed the desire for more opportunities for further knowledge sharing amongst individuals in rural communities. Grant recipients believed that there was lots of untapped expertise in rural areas, but that forming these partnerships requires time and increased capacity of which many community organizations do not have. Secondly, grant recipients expressed the desire for more projects that focus specifically on Indigenous communities and individuals. Grant recipients expressed the desire for more cross-cultural projects that delve deeper into the diversity of cultures in Nova Scotia to gain a deeper understanding of how culture shapes

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equality across the province. More partnerships with Indigenous communities were desired by various grant recipients, such as the Indigenous sub-committee that helps inform the projects of the government FOCUS group in Cape Breton.

Thirdly, grant recipients expressed the desire for more community projects that address different stages of life with a focus on how age, culture, and gender intersect. Many grant recipients expressed the desire to expand their programming to include other age groups, such as the Hope House that wishes to expand their programming from focusing exclusively on women to include families and children as well. Fourth, grant recipients expressed the desire to develop more partnerships, especially with the corporate sector, to increase their funding sources. Fifth, grant recipients expressed their desire to capitalize on the ability for rural community members to take initiative on project ideas more easily compared to urban areas. This is believed to be due to less red tape as compared to urban areas. The ability for community members to make use of their skills and talents and share it with the community is facilitated in rural communities where those with decision-making power are typically more accessible than in urban areas. Finally, grant recipients expressed the desire to retain or entice individuals who leave their rural communities to return and offer their skills back to the community.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the ideas expressed by the grant recipients, R.C.F.N.S. could help further support their current and future grant recipients in three key ways: (1) by providing the space and opportunity for knowledge sharing between various grant recipients, (2) by playing a stronger role in facilitating the leveraging of funds for larger grants, and (3) by implementing a simple and time-conscious assessment method for grant recipients to share the impact of their projects with R.C.F.N.S.

Although the grant recipients that were interviewed worked in various different fields, they shared many of the same challenges. Therefore, it may be helpful for the grant recipients to have an opportunity to discuss their projects, challenges, and solutions with

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each other. This would achieve both increased networking and knowledge-sharing and would facilitate the sharing of best practices. R.C.F.N.S. may be able to provide such opportunities virtually to accommodate the locations of grant recipients across the province at a low cost.

Grant recipients expressed that one of the most important impacts of the R.C.F.N.S. grants was the ability for them to leverage the funding to obtain larger grants from other sources. Since this was an impact that was mentioned frequently by nearly all grant recipients, R.C.F.N.S. may be able to play a stronger role in facilitating this leveraging by creating grants in areas where larger funding pools already exist. For example, Culture Link CIC expressed their gratitude that the R.C.F.N.S. Emergency Grant helped them to obtain a \$150,000 grant from the Department of Communities, Culture, and Heritage. Nonetheless, this important impact warrants further research on the ways that R.C.F.N.S. can further support community organizations in this capacity.

Finally, grant recipients displayed a strong eagerness to share their stories during the interviews, even though many expressed that they had little capacity in terms of time or resources. This suggests that grant recipients are eager for opportunities to share their stories and feel that it is important enough to warrant time taken out of their work-day. Although R.C.F.N.S. requires grant recipients to complete a report following the completion of their project, it may be beneficial for R.C.F.N.S. to implement a simple, time-conscious method that would allow all grant recipients to share their stories in an informal, conversational way. Although the impact interviews are an important method to assess the impact of the grants, they require significant human and financial resources to sustain. Furthermore, only a select number of grant recipients are chosen to participate in the impact interviews. A simple method where grant recipients are asked to submit a short video recording of themselves discussing the impact of their project or a social media page for grant recipients where they could share photographs and short stories about their projects are possible examples of sustainable ways that R.C.F.N.S. could provide all grant recipients with the opportunity to share their stories.