

YOUNG FUTURES IN BURGEO

ENGAGEMENT REPORT



REPORT PREPARED BY

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BACKGROUND

In the heart of Newfoundland's coastal communities, young people can be powerful drivers of social and environmental change. The Burgeo Academy, Burgeo and Southwest Communities Alliance, as well as Master's Students from Environmental Policy Institute at Grenfell Campus, Memorial University, Environmental Policy Institute, and Moving Together for Marine Conservation joined forces to explore what young people in Burgeo might want for their future, and what steps they felt were needed to advance those futures. On March 6, 2025, graduate students from Memorial University met with Burgeo Academy's high school for an event, Young Futures. held at the +50 Club in Burgeo.

The gathering showcased a photovoice project from Burgeo Academy High School, a visual storytelling project capturing students' connections to their community and surrounding area. High school students were then asked to reflect on what they would like to see next in their surrounding community. They shared what they felt mattered for the fjords and beaches, entertainment, community culture, and well-being.



THIS REPORT SHARES WHAT WAS
HEARD AND LEARNED FROM HIGH
SCHOOL STUDENTS IN BURGIO

This was a community engagement facilitated by the Burgeo Academy and Moving Together for Marine Conservation. The Master's students came to Burgeo to learn from youth, and develop community-supported policy projects as part of the ENVP 6001 course. The engagement underscored the importance of incorporating youth voices in policy-relevant projects about communities. Their perspectives help centre community values and priorities for involving youth within the projects. The goal was to bring together researchers, community members, and youth to exchange ideas on how Burgeo could become a place where young people can live and thrive.

As part of the engagement, high school students learned about how to do research, as part of their Careers Class, led by Ruby Penney. They were introduced to social science research during a previous visit by Evan Andrews, who set up a photovoice project. Students took photos based on what they would like to see in Burgeo and the surrounding area. Those photos were enlarged and turned into an exhibit, which helped facilitate the brainstorming. As the students shared insights behind their photos, they learned about values, perspectives, priorities, that were elicited during the engagement.

After the exhibit, high school students participated in a small-group brainstorming sessions with the graduate students. The high school students shared ideas about desired changes in their community. Each group dedicated approximately five minutes to generating suggestions for youth wellness, entertainment, visions for the fjords and beaches, and participation in cultural values in Burgeo. Participants documented their ideas by placing sticky notes under the corresponding category.

Following each brainstorming session, a group discussion was conducted. During these discussions, one youth participant was invited to summarize the notes recorded under each topic for all attendees. The presentations encouraged varying responses from participants, including nods of agreement, laughter, enthusiastic cheering, and spoken reflections. Upon conclusion of the engagement activities, researchers photographed the notes and uploaded the images to a centralized shared document for further analysis.

The following pages of the report showcase the main messages and central insights from the engagement, along with ideas expressed for the fjords and beaches, entertainment, community culture, and well-being. Finally, the report summarizes what was heard and learned, as well as the next steps.

MAIN MESSAGES

A central message from the engagement was that youth were concerned about their future in Burgeo, and had perspectives about what needed to change for positive outcomes for the students. Ultimately, the students expressed interest in activities, outcomes and changes connected to economic growth, environmental stewardship, and opportunities for well-being, including recreation and employment. There were topics that high school students were eager to learn about, such as the fjords and efforts to protect them.

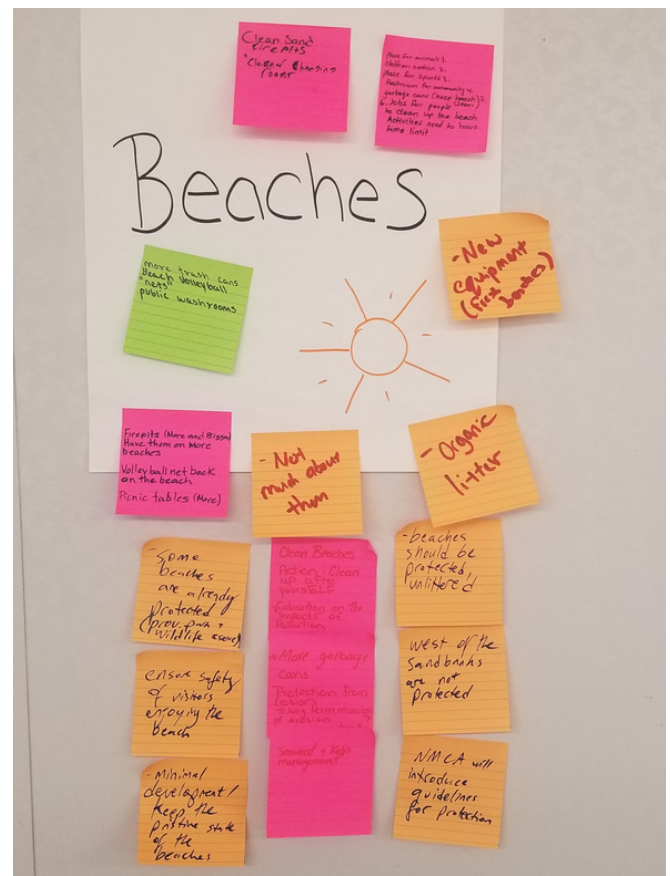
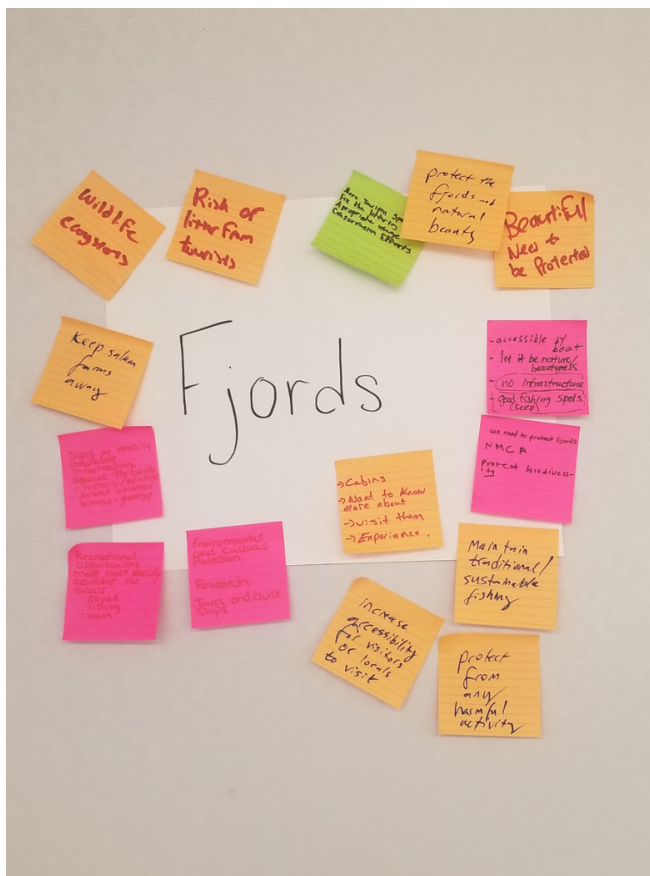


High school students expressed mixed perspectives about remaining in Burgeo, with many emphasizing the need for economic and social changes. Several youth articulated their willingness to stay in the community with improved employment opportunities, particularly through hands-on training programs and youth-oriented business development. Some advocated for enhanced vocational education through trade schools and career support services.

High school students wanted community amenities and opportunities to participate in cultural heritage. Students spoke about dedicated entertainment venues, featuring a theatre, museums, aquatic facilities, fitness centers, and recreational spaces for table tennis and board games.

YOUTH PERSPECTIVES: FJORDS AND BEACHES

High school students revealed two predominant themes regarding fjords and beaches: environmental protection and maintained access. Although the students said they did not know a lot about efforts to protect the fjords and beach, they were interested in preserving these natural areas, including through strict anti-littering measures, and protection from environmentally harmful activities. This sentiment was particularly evident among high school students who regularly engaged in outdoor recreational activities, including hiking, fishing, and wilderness exploration – practices that reinforced their connection to and stewardship of these landscapes. An emphasis was also made on accessibility. Youth emphasized the importance of preserving existing cultural and recreational access to the fjords, and creating opportunities for additional access through recreational programming and basic visitation infrastructure. The students highlighted the need for both improved infrastructure for the beaches and guaranteed rights to access these areas for traditional recreational uses. Participants identified a clear need for enhanced facilities, including additional garbage receptacles, fire pits, and picnic tables.



Participants consistently emphasized the limited leisure options currently available in Burgeo. Students argued for improved community spaces that facilitate social connection. The linkage between recreational infrastructure development and job creation emerged as a recurring theme. The students recognized the potential for facility expansions to simultaneously address both social and economic needs. Their perspectives pointed to recreational facilities that prioritize multi-use spaces to maximize community benefit, such as adding fitness equipment to existing community spaces. They also highlighted opportunities for youth with new infrastructure projects, where community projects should employ youth.



High school students wanted to engage more in cultural activities, including to learn from Elders, grandparents and other community members who hold considerable knowledge and skill. Students highlighted storytelling, land-based activities (e.g. hunting, fishing, building snowshoes), skill-building (e.g. baking, jam-making, music) and crafting as culturally significant. Protection of the land was also acknowledged as culturally inherent to identity. One student in particular identified how the culture of safety in Burgeo is really important, and he wishes that more people in his community recognized this. There was also a suggestion that more experiential learning integrated into the curriculum at school could be one avenue through which this could be achieved. The conversations highlighted opportunities for intergenerational connection, land-based learning perhaps facilitated in schooling, and new programs that can encourage knowledge sharing across generations.





HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS HAVE
IDEAS FOR CHANGE IN BURGEO
AND THE SURROUNDING AREA

LESSONS FROM YOUTH

High school students emphasized the importance of stronger social infrastructure, including more inclusive gathering spaces and opportunities to connect with peers and family. At the same time, some high school students mentioned that they were not strongly connected to broader environmental and economic issues. Addressing these gaps through accessible social opportunities, meaningful dialogue, and experiential learning can help empower youth to become active, connected, and environmentally conscious members of their communities.

Importantly, the high school students' perspectives suggest that they demonstrate strong readiness to participate in local development, and willingness to enrich attachments to community and family networks. They exhibit a clear passion for improving their hometown and having spaces and activities through which they can be heard, and involved in conversations about the future of Burgeo and the surrounding region. They argued for adequate spaces for them, well-organized recreational activities, and outdoor and indoor community facilities.

NEXT STEPS

For young futures in Burgeo, high school students emphasized continued interaction to shape a strategic direction for youth involvement and engagement. This can include more community workshops and discussions with different youth. It can also include finding ways to bring motivated youth into planning for beaches, fjords, well-being, and community cultural heritage, especially since that planning has implications for youth employment and recreation, as well as the infrastructures that may be developed along the way.

THANK YOU

The time spent with the high school students from the Burgeo Academy was insightful and enjoyable. Master's students had the privilege of talking with the high school students in meaningful discussions about their aspirations for the future of the community. Despite the challenges expressed about living in a small rural community, it was inspiring to learn about the high school students' enthusiasm for sharing ideas for positive change in Burgeo. The experience was mutually rewarding – high school students felt heard by Master's students and adult community members, while Master's students gained a deeper understanding of the community's dynamics for their project reports.

