

Webinar Questions

1. Can you give a concrete example of a strategy to build trust within the service sector and/or community?

I have read more strategy papers concerning the future of the Island than I care to remember. What is needed is not strategies per se, but as Liz said during the webinar, a sense of urgency, and as I believe, political will and the development of self-aware elites. In Quebec, it took nationalist and federalist thinkers, protagonists like René Lévesque and Pierre Elliott Trudeau, to inspire their compatriots to create a modern Quebec. Is Cape Breton capable of a [Quiet Revolution](#)? If the past is prologue, the answer may be yes. Fathers Jimmy Tompkins and Moses Coady led the [Antigonish Movement](#) in Cape Breton during the early twentieth century. Its principles and practices are still studied worldwide. The Antigonish Movement may have died aborning in Cape Breton. But it established a precedent: Island leaders with moral courage can shake the foundations of a fusty, somnolent system of governance. Action plans are a dime a dozen in the land of [ACOA](#). People with backbones are rare birds.

2. Are there any examples of community initiatives, programs/projects that seem to be pulling people together in these communities in a hopeful way?

Absolutely, yes. Let's focus on the Northside. Northside Rising runs a promising [Changemakers](#) program. [Community Cares](#) will put a shirt on a poor man's back and send him home with groceries. In addition, the [Clifford Street Youth Centre](#) and the [511 Youth and Family Centre](#) sponsor movie nights and games days for underprivileged children. Church groups and the food bank provide the basics for many Northsiders. It is disheartening that many of these groups can barely afford to keep the lights on and the furnace running, let alone hire the staff they need. Now and then, [cabinet ministers sprinkle money on these groups](#), but the sums are paltry. In my view, you'd have to triple the funding of civil society institutions on the Northside even to begin to make a difference in the lives of the people they serve. The same is true for the rest of Cape Breton.

3. Was vaccine hesitancy higher in CB than Nova Scotia? The social data may seem to indicate this.

Our research team conducted its work on the Northside between July and November 2020, before COVID-19 vaccines were rolled out. Therefore, I can't comment firsthand about vaccine hesitancy on Cape Breton Island. However, I can say I did witness near-universal compliance with the indoor masking policies instituted on the Northside at the end of July 2020. In addition, vaccine uptake across Nova Scotia was remarkably high. So, I have no reason to believe that Cape Bretoners were more hesitant than mainlanders to get their shots.

4. I cannot add another question in the Q & A so I am putting it here. Ed, you seem to have had a personal victory (i.e. final bullet) so aren't you evidence that there are final bullet solutions in the context of at least individuals?

If you're referring to the trajectory of my mental health, then I am happy to report that my quality of life is better than ever. Even so, I suffer from bouts of depression that I work hard to manage. I have excellent support (a loving wife, a first-rate therapist, and friends) and a lust for life that sees me through dark days. I take nothing for granted, though. My aspiration as a Buddhist is to achieve enlightenment for myself and the well-being of all people. That's my path, and I have far to travel before I reach my goal.

5. How can you balance the fact that cultures can't turn on a dime with the fact that you mentioned earlier -- communities are burning and need immediate support?

Good question. If we stick with the fire analogy, we could say that many houses on the Northside have already been razed. And many more are beginning to burn. My analysis of the data tells me that the Millennials of the Northside are already a lost generation. It may not be too late to salvage the area's Gen Ys and Gen Zs.

Regarding the substance-use epidemic, harm reduction is one way to help those struggling with addiction. The [Ally Center of Cape Breton](#) is a powerful advocate for this sensible strategy. In addition, adequately funding first-rate not-for-profits like [Undercurrent Youth Centres](#) could save many at-risk youths. Unfortunately, the state of health care on the Northside and elsewhere is, in the words of the local physician and advocate, Dr. Margaret Fraser,

“[abysmal](#).” Worse, I see no evidence of a coherent plan to fight the fires of addiction raging on the Northside. Nor am I confident the political class has the courage or attention span to do a job that will take much longer than the four-year election cycles that drive policy making in Nova Scotia. I pray I am wrong about this; I fear I am not.

6. Did Northsiders actually say they did not trust their neighbors? Is it people that they don't trust?

Yes, they often did in the interviews and focus groups we conducted. One interview participant summed it up succinctly. She said people are so nosy she had to keep her “social circle ... so small it’s a semi-circle.” Remember, the Northside is a cluster of small towns, subdivisions, and hamlets, and the population has been stagnant for a century. This combination has created a goldilocks zone of paranoia. The Northside is small enough that anyone can have an ambient sense of their neighbours’ business but large enough that anyone can assume a sort of anonymity. The result is pervasive suspicion.