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# THROUGH THE LENS: HCHRPL NEWSLETTER

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Are you or your organization using the HCHRPL? If so, please get in touch so we can learn more about your experience and perhaps profile your work in a future issue of the HCHRPL newsletter. Contact: Sheila Schuehle, Project Lead at Gateway Centre of Excellence in Rural Health 519-600-5195 or via email at [s.schuehle@gatewayresearch.ca](mailto:s.schuehle@gatewayresearch.ca)

The HCRPL tools can be downloaded by visiting: <http://www.gatewayruralhealth.ca/huron-county-rural-policy-lens.html>

Welcome to the first issue of the Huron County Healthy Rural Policy Lens (HCHRPL) newsletter! We want to keep our community stakeholders updated about the use of the HCHRPL near and far. We hope to encourage agencies not yet using this local and valuable tool in their planning processes to take a second look. We are here to help.

## How it all began...

The HCHRPL was identified as a priority project under the Community Needs Section of the Take Action for Sustainable Huron – Sustainability Plan which was released in December 2011 (to view the plan: <http://www.huroncounty.ca/sustainablehuron/downloads/SustainabilityPlan-complete.pdf>)

At that time the Huron County Health Unit took the lead in developing the tool, working with the Sustainable Huron Committee. In June 2014, the tool was presented to and adopted by the Huron Board of Health “as a framework for policy and program assessment and evaluation at the Huron County Health Unit” (Board of Health Meeting Minutes, Thursday, June 5, 2014). Later that same month, at the Huron County Committee of the Whole, a motion was made and carried “that the Huron County Lens be implemented by County Council.” (Huron County Committee of the Whole – Day 2 Minutes June 18, 2014). Huron County now had a new locally developed tool to help future planning and policy development.

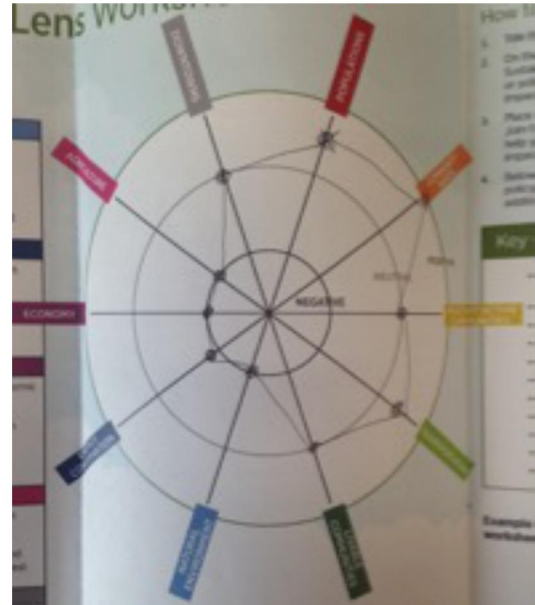
Fast forward to January 2016 and an exciting new opportunity to continue promoting the HCHRPL became

available. The Rural Ontario Institute's Measuring Rural Community Vitality Initiative (<http://www.ruralontarioinstitute.ca/programs/measuring-community-vitality>) is a 30-month applied research and analysis project funded by the Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Its focus is on deepening understanding of effective practices for quantifying rural civic engagement, social capital and community well-being. It will also demonstrate methods for municipal evaluation of community impacts and social return on investment. Huron Business Development Corporation successfully applied to become one of the eight rural communities across Ontario involved in this Initiative. Through the support of the Rural Ontario Institute, continued promotion and evaluation of HCHRPL is now underway. Gateway Centre of Excellence in Rural Health has been contracted to complete this current HCHRPL project.

## Healthy Rural Policy Lens Educational Workshop

On May 11th, Sheila Schuehlein, Project Lead for the HCHRPL, facilitated an educational workshop at the University of Waterloo School of Pharmacy. In attendance were pharmacy, optometry and medical students, many of whom were interested in eventually opening a rural practice. The purpose of the workshop was to introduce the students to a Healthy Rural Policy Lens and to provide an opportunity for them to consider rural priorities (Huron County specific). The students were able to try out the rural lens and see first-hand how the tool brings a rural perspective, often not considered from an urban vantage point, and helps the user identify unforeseen issues and opportunities as well as promoting potential solutions. Students were able to select an initiative of interest to their small group, such as establishing a rural health education program (i.e., tobacco cessation) and had to review the checklist included in the HCHRPL (full tool). Later the groups were asked to plot their findings on the indicator diagram (HCHRPL pamphlet version).

Questionnaires were administered to the students and feedback



Pictured above:  
Pamphlet version of  
the lens plotted out by  
students attending the  
workshop in Waterloo

regarding the tool was received. Survey results showed for the statement “The toolkit is well organized” 53% of students strongly agreed, 41% agreed and 6% were neutral. In regards to the statement “The toolkit is easy to understand” 41% strongly agreed, 50% agreed and 9% were neutral. Results from the statement “The toolkit meets my needs” displayed that 44% strongly agreed, 41% agreed and 16% were neutral. In regards to the statement “The toolkit is informative and useful” 63% strongly agreed, 34% agreed and 3% were neutral. Future aims for the HCHRPL include plans to follow-up with the students to see if/ how they have used the information and/or the Lens following the workshop.



## **Municipality of Grey Highlands Decision-making Framework**

At a meeting in February the Municipality of Grey Highlands (MGH) Council approved a plan to work with four students from the Rural Studies program at the University of Guelph (UofG) to develop a decision-making framework, much like

that used in Huron County. Councilor Cathy Little, who along with Councilor Peggy Harris are the liaisons for this new project, says of becoming a councilor, “It’s a lot to take in... and it’s all academic until you’re called on to make a decision. But we had no formal framework for doing that.” “I had a concern about the way decisions were made, especially if only economic factors, not social or environmental, were used,” Little says. Working with the students, “we wanted to find a framework that could build on strengths, rather than simply addressing deficits.” Little says that the ad hoc committee and the UofG students looked at a five different examples and decided that the Huron Rural Lens was a strong contender that can be modified to suit MGH. For more information please visit: <http://www.theflesherton.ca/council-seeks-rural-lens/>.

### **Interesting fact straight from the lens: Cost of living versus quality of life in Huron County**

Huron County residents enjoy a cost of living that is 26 per cent lower than in the rest of Canada. However, this comes at a price: while tax rates may be low, the accompanying loss of services such as health care and rural schools provide a challenge. Rural municipalities may also struggle to provide efficient fire services, which are largely run by volunteers, as the population ages.

## The Huron County Healthy Rural policy Lens in Action: AMDSB Gifted Program

On May 30th, students from the Avon Maitland District School Boards Out of School Gifted Withdrawal Modules gave incredibly thoughtful and creative presentations on possible solutions for current problems for one of the ten indicators found on the Huron County Healthy Rural Lens. The participating students were in grades seven or eight and had worked on these presentations over the course of four days. To help the students with this unique task, community 'experts' met with students on March 4th. Their role was to represent one of the ten indicators identified on the Healthy rural lens. Experts shared a plus, a minus and something interesting about their indicator as well as answering students' questions about their professions and role in the community. After learning about the different indicators on the HCHRPL, students brainstormed solutions to rural issues they felt passionate about. The "problems" the students addressed aligned with the various indicators. Presentation topics included Piezoelectric roads, which harvest traffic energy to generate electricity and creating portable ramps built by high school tech students to help increase accessibility for individuals with disabilities. To learn about all of the presentations, please contact: [jessica.Leney@ed.amdsb.ca](mailto:jessica.Leney@ed.amdsb.ca).



Pictured above:  
AMDSB Gifted  
program students  
meeting the Experts