



RURAL CHANGE MAKERS

BUILDING YOUNG LEADERS FOR TODAY'S RURAL CHALLENGES



Building
**vision, voice
& leadership**

RURAL CHANGE MAKERS IS DELIVERED BY The Rural Ontario Institute (ROI) - a charitable not-for-profit whose mission is to build vision, voice and leadership in rural and northern Ontario.

We do this by offering leadership programs, providing leaders with data and analysis to make informed decisions, and by connecting leaders so they can share innovative practices around opportunities and challenges.

ROI envisions thriving vibrant rural communities



OUR PURPOSE

The **Rural Change Makers (RCM)** program shapes emerging leaders in rural Ontario to lead community economic development solutions with their communities. Young leaders are critical to the future of Rural Ontario. Skills developed within the program are transferred back to rural communities through youth initiatives and activities as part of their program journey.



OUR GOALS

- **PROVIDE** professional development opportunities for young adults.
- **BUILD** rural youth leadership capacity .
- **CATALYZE** impactful rural development outcomes for communities and regions.
- **BROADEN** public engagement in rural development initiatives.



PROGRAM JOURNEY

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

ROI

PARTNERS

EXPERTS

LEADERSHIP LEARNING LABS

Transformative Skills Building

- Expert-led
- Transferrable specialized curriculum
- Equipping leaders with advanced skills
- Spans 6 months of training

PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF SKILLS LEARNED

IGNITE ACTION LAB

Gathering Together

- Multi-day gathering
- Practicing skills learned
- Leadership & wellbeing supports
- SMART Action Planning
- Change Maker lead skills sessions

ACTIONING SKILLS IN LIFE, WORK & COMMUNITIES

COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

Community Building

- Actioning SMART Plans for community projects
- Actioning life blueprints for career development
- Business planning
- Actioning goals for life stabilization & education

COMMUNITY



FIVE AREAS OF FOCUS

1. Regional Partnerships

- **Regional partnerships** are established prior to the beginning of each program (Winter). Program partners support local recruitment of youth to benefit from the program. Select program space is allocated for partner regions.
- **Program funds, curriculum partners and sponsor relations** are also developed during this time.

5. Tracking Outcomes

- **7 Key Leadership Competencies** are Developed
- **6 Key Outcomes** are Measured (Increased Rural Retention, Increased Skills, Increased Community Connectedness, & Making a Difference, Increased Employability, Advancing Future Goals).
- **3 Critical Evaluation Checkpoints:** Pre-Post Program & Pre Community Development Phase.



2. Youth Recruitment

- **Program Communications and Engagement** (Spring)
- **Recruitment** applications open April 2026, close July 2026
- **Applicant Selection** (July-August 2026)

3. Program Delivery

- **12 Month Learning Journey** (Fall 2026 - Fall 2027)
- **Learning Labs** (Fall/Winter): 12 to 14 learning labs beginning Sept. 2026, & held 1 evening bi-weekly. 3 hour sessions.
- **Practicum** (3-5 days in March 2027): In-person Ignite Action Lab.
- **Community Economic Development Activities** (March - August)
- **Graduation & Provincial Youth Summit:** Fall 2027

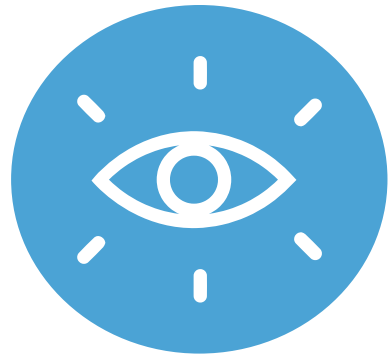
4. Economic & Community Development

- **Community Development Planning** (Winter/Spring): Change Makers develop SMART Action Plans and Life Blueprints for community-future building.
- **Community Development Activities** within Change Maker Communities (Spring/Summer and beyond).

SKILLS BUILDING



Becoming
CHANGE
LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT



Foundational resources for change thinking

Essential resources for stability. Resource inventories - individual, community, institution.



Co-active Leadership & Future Visioning

How to see the change you want and lead change together.



Indigenous Governance

Lighting the 8th Fire - gaining perspective through respect & understanding of Indigenous Governance systems, the constitution and case law.



High Impact Communication Leadership Styles

Advanced communication for relationship building. Cognitive behavioural Leadership & personality styles.



Fund Development & Financial Literacy

Grant writing, resource acquisition & management. Budgets, taxes and self-identified learning.



Project Management & Evaluation

Effective project planning and oversight. Advanced project & evaluation tools for measuring impact.



Community Development - Enterprise

Identifying need, relationship development, community leadership, RCM Toolkit, SMART Action Planning, Business development.



Civic Engagement & Healthy Democracies

Community engagement practices (Open Space Technology, theory of change, dotmocracy, community needs assessment).

Suzie Johnson-Smith
Coaching & Consulting



And Then I Was Free



NEW IN 2026



Entrepreneurship & Business Development

Expansion of business, social enterprise and entrepreneurial skills building.



Policy Development

Policy development from imagination to actualization.



Municipal Governance & Healthy Democracies

Municipal governance - structure, practices and procedures supporting healthy & inclusive democratic participation.



Succession Planning & Fierce Conversations

Enhanced communication training for difficult conversations and succession planning.



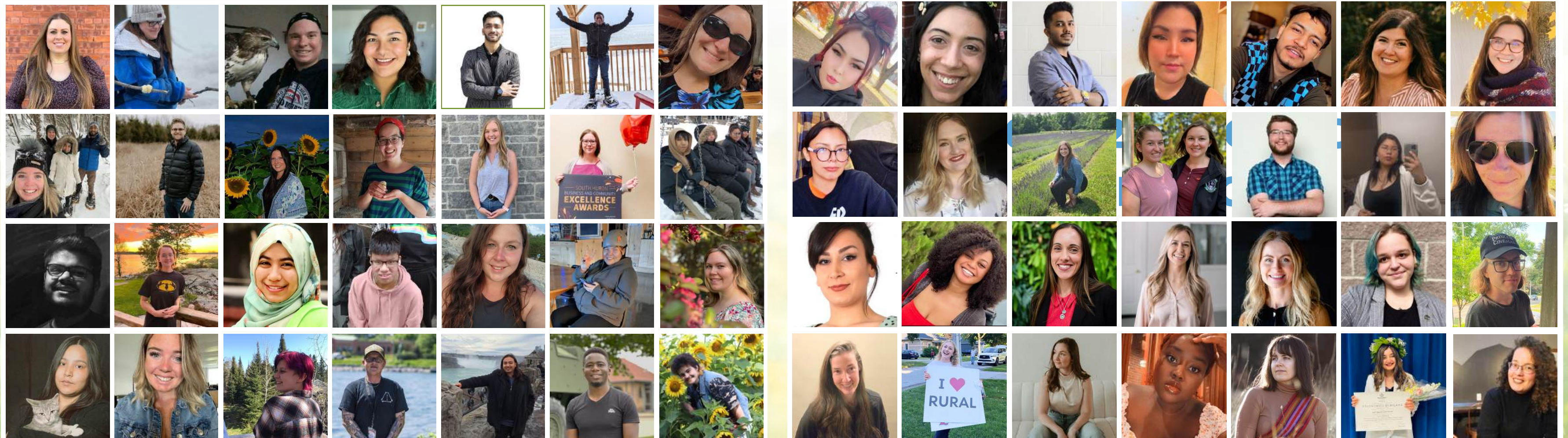
The co-design of the Rural Change Maker Program is informed by change makers and the perspectives of hundreds of rural, remote and Indigenous youth, leaders and community members as a result of extensive outreach and consultation through the Young Rural Resilient project - a youth led project of the change maker program.

LEADING CHANGE

80+ **EMERGING LEADERS** - from over 60 rural communities including a collective of 24 First Nations in NW Ontario.

*A **robust social ecosystem** and cross pollination of inter-regional, cross-sector networks creating over 2500 connections.*

Building meaningful local rural development outcomes reflective of the values, priorities and diversity of people, places and industry of rural Ontario communities.



OUR IMPACT



SKILL DEVELOPMENT

98% of Change Makers reported that they were leaving the program with the knowledge and practical skills needed to lead effective community change.



INCREASED RURAL RETENTION

90% of Change Makers said they are likely to stay in their local community to work and live.



INCREASED COMMUNITY CONNECTEDNESS

94% believe they can make a difference and have a sense of belonging within their community.



ADVANCING FUTURE GOALS

97% said the program increased their employability or advanced career and future goals.

36 -40% OF CHANGE MAKERS UNDERTAKE LIFE-STABILIZING ACTIVITIES AND FUTURE EDUCATIONAL GOALS EACH YEAR.



COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

55% of change makers launched or grew community economic development initiatives & projects in 2025.

27% of those within municipal or First Nations governance.

50% of projects were incorporated into paid work.

BROAD SECTOR IMPACT

32% led cultural, literacy and environmental initiatives to benefit their communities in 2024 and 23% entered the Ag sector.

14% started initiatives and projects in the arts and culture sector in 2025.

9% led non profits supporting mental health, wellbeing & diversity.



CAREER ADVANCEMENT & NEW BUSINESS

18% of change makers accelerated and advanced their careers moving into new leadership roles in 2024.

9% moved from under-employed to employed.

14% started new businesses in 2025

CHANGE MAKER IMPACT

Community economic development activities of 2025 Change Makers



- **www.officialhumansofcanada.com** - Celebrating the stories of Canada, one Human at a time! *Social Enterprise!*



- **Blueprint for collaborative governance** in Head - Clara - Maria Township – empowering small, rural Ontario municipalities to lead with community-driven, collaborative strategies. *Employment Aligned!*



- **Wellspring Digital Farmers' Market** - Digital Expansion of Trade and Agricultural Marketplaces for local farmers in the Timmins area. *Community Building!*



- **Wellspring Farms** - Social enterprise plans for locally sourced and supported food distribution business in the Timmins region. *New Business!*



- **Travelling Metis** – art and podcast project ensuring the stories and history of Métis elders and people are preserved for generations to come. *Arts, Culture & Heritage!*



- **Paving The Way Project** - supporting the entrance of women into the trades. A collaborative project to create clear pathways for young women entering/re-entering the trades, provide supportive networks for tradeswomen and to motivate, educate and encourage hiring of young tradeswomen. + *Career Advancement!*



- **Youth Pride in the Park** - Prince Edward County – creating safe and affirming spaces, connecting youth to resources, increasing community awareness and encouraging collaboration among community members, businesses and organizations. *Community Building!*



- **Municipal Community Service Projects** – Actioning new network resources in municipal Poverty Reduction Strategies bringing Bridges Out of Poverty training to community partners and members at large, and repurposing technology for community members in need. *Employment Aligned!*



- **Uplift Youth Summit** – municipal youth summit creating opportunities for engagement, belonging and leadership with children in the region of Eganville. *Employment Aligned!*

- **Lead Local: Womxn of Haliburton County** – inclusive and welcoming community-driven engagement movement and forum designed to amplify the voices of women across the region and help shape local municipal strategic planning. Co-hosted by change maker entrepreneur and business owner of Reform & Restore Wellness Hub. *Business Aligned!*



- **Deep River Wellness Hub** - Development of centralized multi-service resource hub in eastern Ontario providing harm reduction, pre-natal resources and mental health and wellbeing supports to community members. *Community Building!*



- **Community Safety and Wellbeing** – employment related community safety engagement and planning in remote Northwestern Ontario First Nation. *Career Advancement!*



- **Development of an Environmental Consulting Business** - supporting private and public sector projects with culturally informed land use practices centred around traditional knowledge and environmental expertise. *Future Building!*



- **Employment related housing security work** - Using skills and training to support housing security projects in Huron County including local Housing Symposium. *Employment Aligned!*



- **Advancing the arts** – planning first record launch and tour of local southwestern Ontario band blending storytelling, humor, and songwriting. *Arts, Culture & Heritage!*



- **Behind the Curtain of Health Care** - dedicated to inspiring youth to explore and pursue careers in the healthcare industry, providing accessible educational resources and support to students, educators, and community partners. *Community Building!*



- **Bop a Stay** – short term accommodation initiative bridging the gap between housing abundance and housing insecurity among seniors and newcomers in Thunder Bay, ON. *Community Building!*



- **Brighton Young Professional Network** - fostering growth and creating opportunities for young professionals in Northumberland County, Ontario. *Employment Aligned!*



- **Youth Amplifier and Advocacy** - supporting connection, belonging, community development and empowerment among First Nation youth in Thunder Bay region. *Employment Aligned!*



- **Labour Market Indicators Advisory Table** – collaborative business development and employment services programming in Parry sound, Hurst, Timmins, Sault St. Marie, Moosonee (James Bay Coast), Wawa, Parry Sound and North Bay regions. *Employment Aligned!*

#LEADTHEFUTURE

RURAL
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MAKERS

GET INVOLVED



Applications open Spring 2026



Share Gifts of Knowledge & Expertise

Many partners support curriculum learning labs providing speakers, experts and content.



Provide Financial Support for Program Delivery and Resources

Partners and sponsors support delivery of the program and the purchase of curriculum resources.



Share Gifts of Time and Encouragement

Many partners and elders provide coaching and mentorship one on one to change makers.



Support Promotion & Recruitment of Local Youth

Regional partnerships support program promotion and local recruitment of emerging leaders.



Build Wrap around Supports for Equity Deserving Youth

Partners support program inclusion by minimizing barriers & connecting youth to resources & community supports.



Align Values, Priorities and Shared Objectives with Resources.

All program partners work toward our shared strengths, values and priorities, giving our collective resources to care for the future.

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Thank you RURAL CHANGE MAKER PARTNERS



Foundation



And Then
I Was Free



LET'S STAY CONNECTED

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