



RURAL  
CHANGE  
MAKERS



.....  
**Evaluation**  
Report  
.....

2023-2024

# CONTENTS

<b>RESULTS SUMMARY</b>	<b>3</b>
PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS	4
PROGRAM OUTCOMES	5
STRENGTHS & AREAS OF GROWTH	7
PROGRAM FEEDBACK	6
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>RESULTS</b>	<b>10</b>
SKILL DEVELOPMENT	11
EMPLOYABILITY	12
INCREASED RURAL RETENTION	12
MAKING A DIFFERENCE	13
COMMUNITY CONNECTEDNESS	13
ADVANCING FUTURE GOALS	14

## SUMMARY

The Rural Ontario Institute's (ROI) Rural Change Makers program (RCM) is aimed at strengthening leadership capacity of rural young adults to facilitate collaborative problem solving and mobilize collective action around complex community issues. Good Roots Consulting supported ROI to design and develop an evaluation framework capturing lessons around program delivery and outcomes for participants. ROI has continuously grown this framework to align with program evolution derived from youth feedback.

In 2023, 36 rural youth (aged 18-35) were recruited to participate in the program. Program participation grew exponentially by 1500% over the previous year. Recruitment was very successful with over 45 applications received and a waitlist maintained. In August 2023, ROI welcomed a third cohort of emerging leaders to the change maker program. During a welcome session change makers completed the first in a series of evaluations: Pre-program, Pre-Community Economic Development (Pre-CED - herein referred to as Mid Program) and Post Program evaluations. In addition, Rural Change Makers completed supplemental evaluations as part of their program journey including personal resource inventories, Disc profiles, Leadership Style evaluations, Ignite Action Lab evaluations and complimentary RBC Funder evaluations.

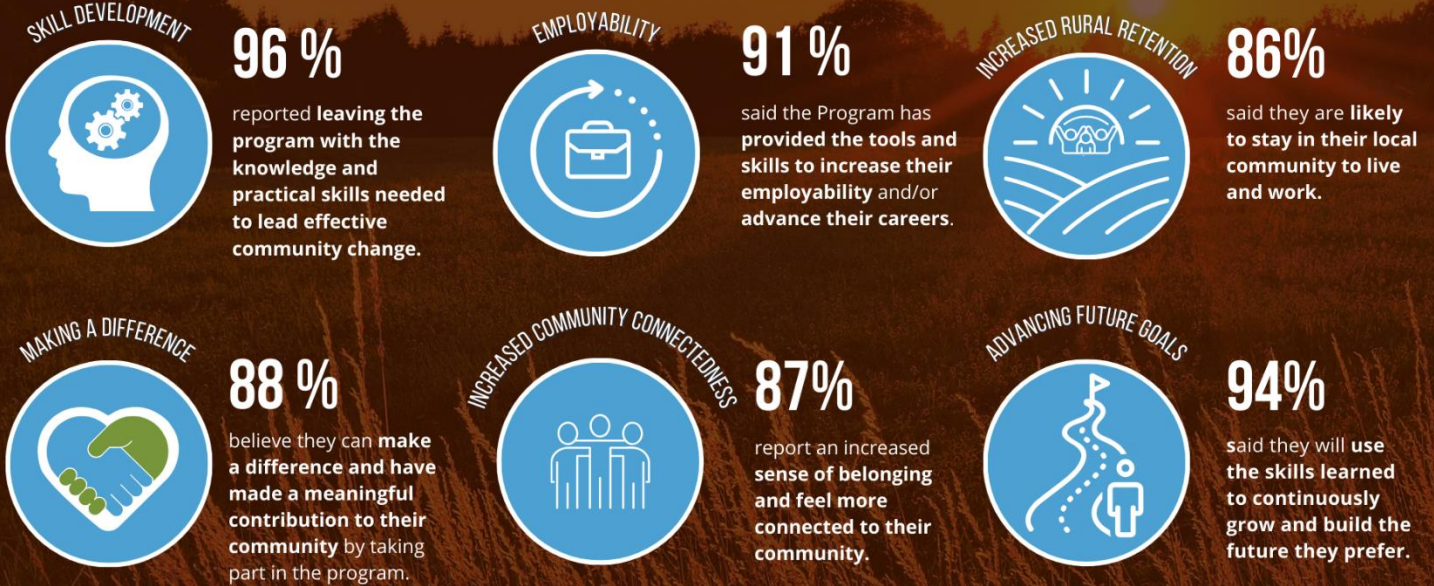
Results from program evaluations are used to track participant progress and overall program impact. Supplemental evaluations are confidential - used solely for individual participant growth development during skills training and curriculum delivery – and are not included in this report.

This report presents participant evaluation results from pre, mid and post program surveys. Of the 36 participants accepted into the program, 28 completed Pre-Program Evaluations. Shortly afterward four participants accepted new employment opportunities and transitioned out of the program early on. Ten other participants were invited to reapply for the 2024-25 program due to personal health and wellbeing priorities that required their withdrawal early in their learning journey. In total, 22 participants completed the Change Makers program, 18 completed the mid-program survey, 15 completed the post-survey, and 15 completed all 3 surveys.

**Here is a summary of what was learned about the difference the program made for participants.**

# PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

## RURAL CHANGE MAKERS PROGRAM IMPACT



### RURAL CHANGE MAKERS BUILDING FUTURE LEADERS

The most recent Rural Change Makers program (RCM 3) experienced a 1500% increase in youth engagement AND



## Program Outcomes

The program resulted in improved outcomes for participants in areas such as new knowledge and skills for collaboration and community development, increased belonging and community connectedness, strong belief they can make a difference and have made meaningful contributions, improved leadership confidence, increased employability, advancement of future goals, and strong likelihood to remain in their rural community to work and live.



**New knowledge and skills:** 96% of Change Makers surveyed reported that they were leaving the program with the knowledge and practical skills needed to lead effective community change. When asked to share the most useful pieces of knowledge, skills, and/or ideas that they were taking away from the program, Change Makers expressed the value of understanding their unique leadership and personality style in working with others, how to apply a resource lens personally and at the community level, how to leverage tools from their toolkits to engage with groups in their community. They also expressed an understanding of the importance of collaboration to solve problems, learn from one another, and share responsibilities. Change Makers commonly said that their most useful takeaway from the program was learning about community development, which they can now apply to their own communities and learning tools and concepts for community building.



**Leadership competence:** Skill development is intrinsically tied to leadership confidence with 85% of class participants (90% of Ignite attendees) feeling confident in their ability to be an effective leader while facilitating a group meeting in the community. 89% of change makers expressed increased confidence in planning a fundraising event and 92% aware of opportunities to engage with other community leaders.



**Increased community connectedness:** 87% of participants reported an increased sense of belonging and connection to each other and their communities as a result of participating in the program. Three key regional program partners including Opiikapawiin Services (representing 24 remote First Nations), Community Futures Huron and the Timmins Youth Wellness hub were critical in fostering community connections for change makers as they embarked on community projects. The addition of regional program partners has helped to increase the sense of connection and expand the networks of youth by leveraging resources within local networks to support change makers in community building.



**Making a difference:** 94% of participants completed their learning journey feeling hopeful about the future of their rural community, 94% believing they can make a difference in their community, and 85% felt they had made meaningful contributions to their communities. 78% feeling a sense of belonging in their community.



**Increased rural retention of youth:** Community connection, a sense of belonging and the belief that one can and has made a positive difference are powerful motivators that encourage rural retention of youth. Participants often express their deep sense of place and hope for the future of their community during learning labs. 89% of participants agree they are likely to stay in their local community to work and live. This is an increase of 17% since the previous cohorts and a strong testament to the power of belonging in leading community building.



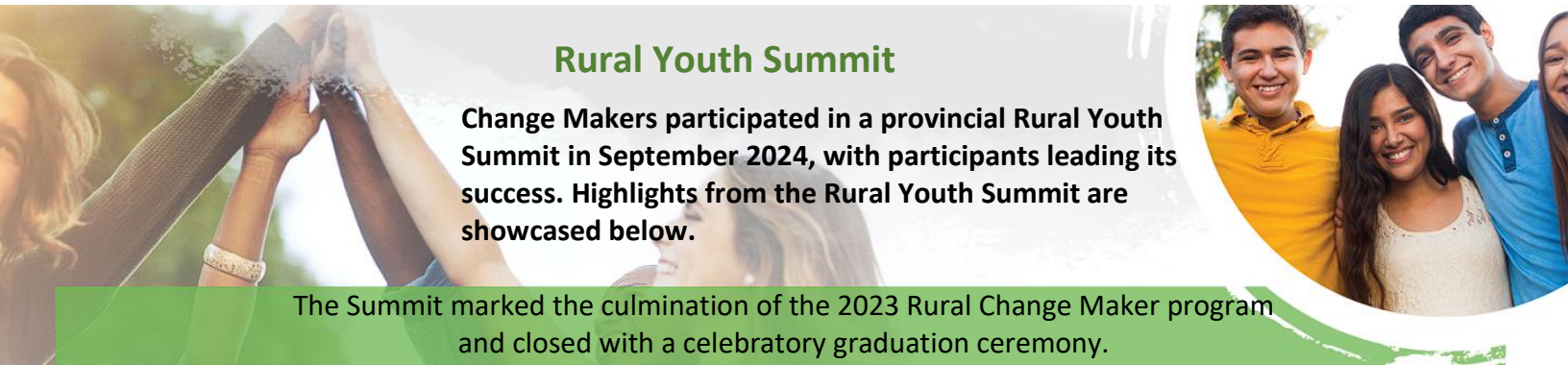
**Improved employability:** After completion of the program, 91% participants agreed that the Rural Change Maker Program had adequately provided the tools and skills to increase their employability or advance their current work or volunteer activities. 9% of change makers moved from underemployed to employed. 9% grew or started new businesses and 18% advanced their careers moving into new leadership roles.



**Advancing Future Goals:** Change makers bring their own unique dreams, experiences and goals with them to the program as they build their futures. 94% of participants strongly agreed that participation in the program complimented their future goals and they would use the skills they learned to continuously grow while building their preferred future.



**Youth awareness and commitment to lead community change:** Change Makers expressed (100%) an increased awareness of the issues facing their community and felt aware of opportunities to engage with community leaders.



## Rural Youth Summit

Change Makers participated in a provincial Rural Youth Summit in September 2024, with participants leading its success. Highlights from the Rural Youth Summit are showcased below.

The Summit marked the culmination of the 2023 Rural Change Maker program and closed with a celebratory graduation ceremony.

### Knowledge & Skill Development



Said they were likely or very likely to use the skills they learned.



Youth felt engaged

74%

of youth reported gaining new connections from the Summit ranging from 5-12 new connections per attendee.

84%

of youth reported they felt empowered to advocate for positive change in their community!



Youth made connections that inspired them to be change makers!

### Perspective & Understanding



## STRENGTHS & AREAS FOR GROWTH

Participants completed a **community leadership self-assessment tool** to help them explore and reflect upon their own strengths and areas for growth as a community Change Maker. The tool assessed 7 competency areas which successful community leadership teams possess. Average participant scores increased in all 7 areas.

Competency area	Pre average (/10)	Post average (/10)	Average point change
1. Understanding myself and others	7.9	8.9	1.0
2. Community development	7.3	7.3	0.0
3. Big picture or systems-thinking	7.9	9.1	1.2
4. Commitment to continuous improvement	7.8	8.9	1.1
5. Agent of change	7.4	8.6	1.2
6. Catalyst for citizen responsibility	7.9	8.9	1.0
7. Quality of life advocacy	7.0	8.7	1.6

Across the 7 competency areas, the specific measurement items where we saw the largest self-assessed improvement among participants were:

### 1. Understanding myself and others

- a. I understand my areas of growth as a leader (1.7 point change)
- b. I understand my strengths as a leader (1.6 average point change)
- c. I am comfortable facilitating the use of a variety of leadership tools in a group setting.

### 2. Community Development

- a. I can facilitate a planning approach that is community-led (2.4 point change)
- b. I can describe different approaches to planning (2.2 point change)

### 3. Big Picture or Systems Thinking

- a. I prioritize collaborative approaches (2.8 point change)
- b. I apply outcomes based approaches (1.8 point change)
- c. I apply techniques that encourage innovative thinking (1.8 point change)

### 4. Commitment to Continuous Improvement

- a. I have a learning plan that will help me develop as a leader (3.1 point change)
- b. I practice reflection as a way to enhance my effectiveness (2.5 points change)
- c. I initiate relationships with others from whom I can learn (2.4 points change)

### 5. Agent of Change

- a. I can explain the role of a facilitator (2.4 point change)
- b. I can apply appropriate facilitation tools (2.3 point change)
- c. I make effective public presentations (2 point change)

### 6. Catalyst for Citizen Responsibility

- a. I can facilitate consensus building (2.1 point change)
- b. I can apply a community development process for leading change within my community (1.9 point change)

### 7. Quality of Life

- a. I can describe approaches used to measure economic development. (2.7 point change)
- b. I work with others to influence public policy (2.1 point change)

## PROGRAM FEEDBACK

Participants shared the following **success factors** related to the program that contributed to the changes they had experienced:

- The community of likeminded Change Makers
- The in-person Ignite session which helped to strengthen connections, showcase different viewpoints and put theory into practice
- The flexibility and understanding of ROI

*“I wanted to take a moment to express my deepest gratitude for your hard work and dedication in coordinating the 2023-24 Rural Change Makers Program. The opportunities you provided have been truly transformative, and I feel incredibly fortunate to have been part of this incredible experience. Through the program, I was able to connect with many leaders and organizations in the community that I never would have had the chance to meet otherwise. These connections have already proven invaluable, and I know they will continue to shape my journey as I work towards making a positive impact in rural Ontario.”* **2023-24 Rural Change Maker Krystal Brideau, Huron County.**

*“It was a pleasure being a part of the ROI Changemaker program this year. I gained so much valuable learning and discovered amazing initiatives that I'm excited to adopt. I would highly encourage all youth to consider this opportunity and be a part of creating positive change in our community.”* **2023-24 Rural Change Maker Hardik Patel, Rural Change Maker**

*“The change I feel inside me is a small step but means a lot because I feel brave, and I am not afraid of embracing positive change. Meeting so many different people at Ignite and experiencing things I have never done before through this program has had a really big impact on me. I'm cherishing this time.”* **2023-24 Rural Change Maker Mahbuba Airin**

*The passion and inspiration of the RCM leaders has spread within other youth in our community. Youth who took the RCM program shared that the in person learning lab was "The most productive they have ever felt" and some youth got to travel outside of the city for the first time. Youth have talked passionately about the skills they have learned and the application to their real life. This inspired other youth from our region to apply for the next RCM cohort, and I could see this having a snowball effect to bring forward so many future changemakers for years to come that will make a massive impact on our local community.* **Regional Program Partner**

“

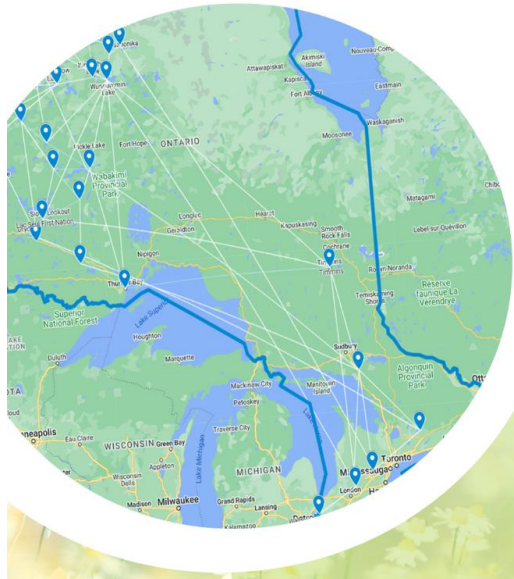
This has been a confidence building experience for me as I was able to plan and implement a community initiative from start to finish.

”



# INTRODUCTION

The Rural Ontario Institute’s Rural Change Makers program is aimed at strengthening the leadership capacity of rural young adults to facilitate collaborative problem solving and mobilize collective action around complex community issues. Participants represented more than 30 rural Ontario communities, including a collective of 24 remote First Nations in northwestern Ontario.



## RCM 3 IMPACT MAP

### Change Maker Community Impact

**32 EMERGING LEADERS** - from over 31 rural communities including a collective of 24 First Nations in NW Ontario, Timmins, Southwestern, Eastern and Central Ontario Communities

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

***Building meaningful local rural development outcomes** that reflects the values, priorities and diversity of people, places and industry of Rural Ontario Communities.*

**#LEADINGtheFUTURE**

Change makers completed a series of evaluations during their program journey that complimented the following model.



## RESULTS

The purpose of participant surveys was to assess intended program outcomes. 28 participants completed the pre-program survey and 15 participants completed the post-program survey. 18 participants completed the Mid-program survey and 15 participants completed all three surveys. Post-program results participant surveys are shown here.

Participants were asked to choose the answer that best represented their agreement with a series of statements related to intended program outcomes, such as leadership competencies and community connectedness.

Statement	Average (1-10)	% participants >6 (Agree)	% participants >7 (Strongly Agree)
I am likely to stay in my local community to work and live.	8.1	89%	83%
Average 86%			
The Rural Change Maker program and community development project has strengthened my knowledge and skills to effectively lead community change.	8.7	94%	83%
The Rural Change Maker Toolkit and Learning Labs have given me the tools and skills I need to engage with my community.	9.3	100%	100%
I have learned tools through the Rural Change Maker Program that will benefit me in my community development activities.	9.0	100%	100%
<b>Reported leaving the program with the knowledge and practical skills needed to lead effective community change.</b>		Average 96%	
I believe I can make a difference in my community.	8.1	94%	83%
I believe I have made a meaningful contribution to my community through my community development project.	8.6	89%	83%
<b>Belief they can make a difference and have made a meaningful contribution to their community by taking part in the program.</b>		Average 88%	
I made new connections with people in my community.	8.5	89%	83%
I feel more connected to my community and the people in it as a result of my community development project.	8.4	94%	83%
<b>Report an increased sense of belonging and feel more connected to their community.</b>		Average 87%	
The Rural Change Maker Program has adequately provided me tools and skills to increase my employability and or improve current work or volunteer activities.	9.1	100%	83%
Average 91.5%			
The Rural Change Maker Program has adequately prepared me to consider future leadership opportunities in employment or education, entrepreneurial pursuits...	9.1	100%	83%
I will continue to use the skills I have learned through the Rural Change Maker program to continuously grow, learn and build the future I prefer.	9.5	100%	94.44%
Average 94%			

### Evaluation Criteria

0 to 2 Strongly Disagree, 3 to 4 Disagree, 5 Neutral, 6 Agree, 7 to 10 Strongly Agree

This report presents participant evaluation results from the pre and post surveys, and community leadership self-assessment tool. In total, 22 participants completed the Change Makers program in its entirety. Out of those participants, the following participated in each of the evaluation tools:

Tool	# of participants (N=22)
Pre-survey only	28
Mid-survey only	18
Post-survey only	15
All 3 surveys	15
Matched Surveys	13
Self-assessment tool	28

## KEY PROGRAM INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

Results from Mid (Pre Community Economic Development) and Post Program Evaluations Indicate the following outcomes reflecting 6 key program performance indicators.

*Results are averaged on a scale of 10.*

### 1. SKILL DEVELOPMENT

96% of participants reported they are leaving the program with the knowledge and practical skills needed to lead effective community change. **91.5%** of participants reported **strong agreement** and **100%** of participants reported **agreement**.

Key Indicators	Average	STDEV
I have learned tools through the Rural Change Maker Program that will benefit me in my community.	9.3	0.08-0.09
The Rural Change Maker toolkit and learning labs have given me the tools and skills I need to engage with my community.	9.3	

Other Indicators of Skill Development	Average Results
I expect my community development project to strengthen my knowledge and skills for leading effective community change.	8.3
I am confident in facilitating a group meeting in my community.	8.3
The Rural Change Maker Program has prepared me to apply a community-led approach to planning and action.	9.2
The Ignite Action Lab gave me the opportunity to experiment with tools and techniques for facilitating community engagement.	9
I have gained important skills and tools to ensure the talents, strengths and resources in my community are considered and mobilized to collectively participate in change.	9

## 2. EMPLOYABILITY

91.5% of participants reported the program has provided the tools and skills to increase their employability and/or advance their career. 100% of participants agreed and 83% strongly agreed.

Key Indicators	Average	STDEV
The Rural Change Maker Program has provided me with the tools and skills to increase my employability or improve current work/volunteer activities.	9.1	1.1 – 1.2
The Rural Change Maker Program prepared me to consider future leadership opportunities in employment or education, entrepreneurial pursuits or within my current job or position.	9.1	

Other indicators of Job Readiness and Employability	Average Results
Rural Change Maker tools and training helped prepare me for my future (explore leadership opportunities in my community, job, education or organization).	8.95

## 3. INCREASED RURAL RETENTION

86% of participants reported they are likely to stay in their community to work and live. This is an increase from 71% likelihood in previous cohorts. 89% of participants reported somewhat agreement and 83% of participants reported agreement. Two participants reported they are unlikely to stay in their rural communities to work and live.

Key Indicators	Average	STDEV
I am likely to stay in my community to work and live	8.1	2.2

Other indicators influencing Rural Retention	Average Results
I feel hopeful about the future of my community.	7.8
I am aware of opportunities to engage with my community leaders.	8.2
I am aware of current challenges facing my community.	8.7

## 4. MAKING A DIFFERENCE

88% of change makers believe they can make a difference and have made a meaningful contribution to their community through participation in the program. 94% agree and 83% strongly agree.

Key Indicators	Results	STDEV
I believe I can make a difference in my community.	8.1	1.5 –
I believe I made a meaningful contribution to my community through my community development project.	8.4	2.1

Other indicators of Making a Difference	Average Results
My community development project helped to strengthen my knowledge and practical skills for leading effective community change.	8.5
I am confident in planning a fundraising event in my community.	8.1

## 5. COMMUNITY CONNECTEDNESS

Change Maker represented more than 30 different rural communities and made over 720 network connections collectively throughout their 12-month long program journey. These connections introduced participants to thought leaders, industry specialists, knowledge holders, Indigenous experts, community – economic development, workforce, labour, municipal and business development mentors and coaches. Community connections were inspired during skills building and deepened during community economic development projects by participants including a Provincial Youth Summit co-developed and lead change makers.

87% of change makers reported an increased sense of belonging and feel more connected to their community. 89% agreed they made new connections, 94% agreed feeling more connected because of their community development project and 77% agreed they have a sense of belonging in their community.

Key Indicators	Results	STDEV
I have a sense of belonging in my community.	8.2	2.2 –
I made new connections with people in my community.	8.5	1.9

Other indicators of Making a Difference	Average Results
I feel more connected to my community and the people in it as a result of my community development project.	8.4

## RURAL YOUTH SUMMIT

Change Makers participated in a Provincial Youth Summit hosted in Belleville Ontario in September 2024. The summit showcased change maker activities and young entrepreneurs through a tradeshow and series of speakers, workshops and activities through the one-day event. Summit participants registered participated in leadership workshops, improvisational skill development and stem activities with more than 300 registered instances for various activities by youth.



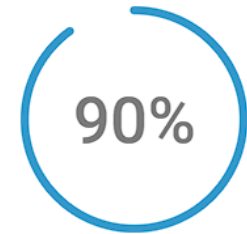
Youth felt engaged

84%

of youth reported they felt empowered to advocate for positive change in their community!

74%

of youth reported gaining new connections from the Summit ranging from 5-12 new connections per attendee.



Youth made connections that inspired them to be change makers!

## 6. ADVANCING FUTURE GOALS

94% of change makers said they will use the skills learned to continuously grow and build the future they prefer.

Key Indicators	Results	STDEV
I will continue to use the skills I have learned through the Rural Change Maker program to continuously grow, learn and build the future I prefer.	9.5	0.8

# Thank you

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