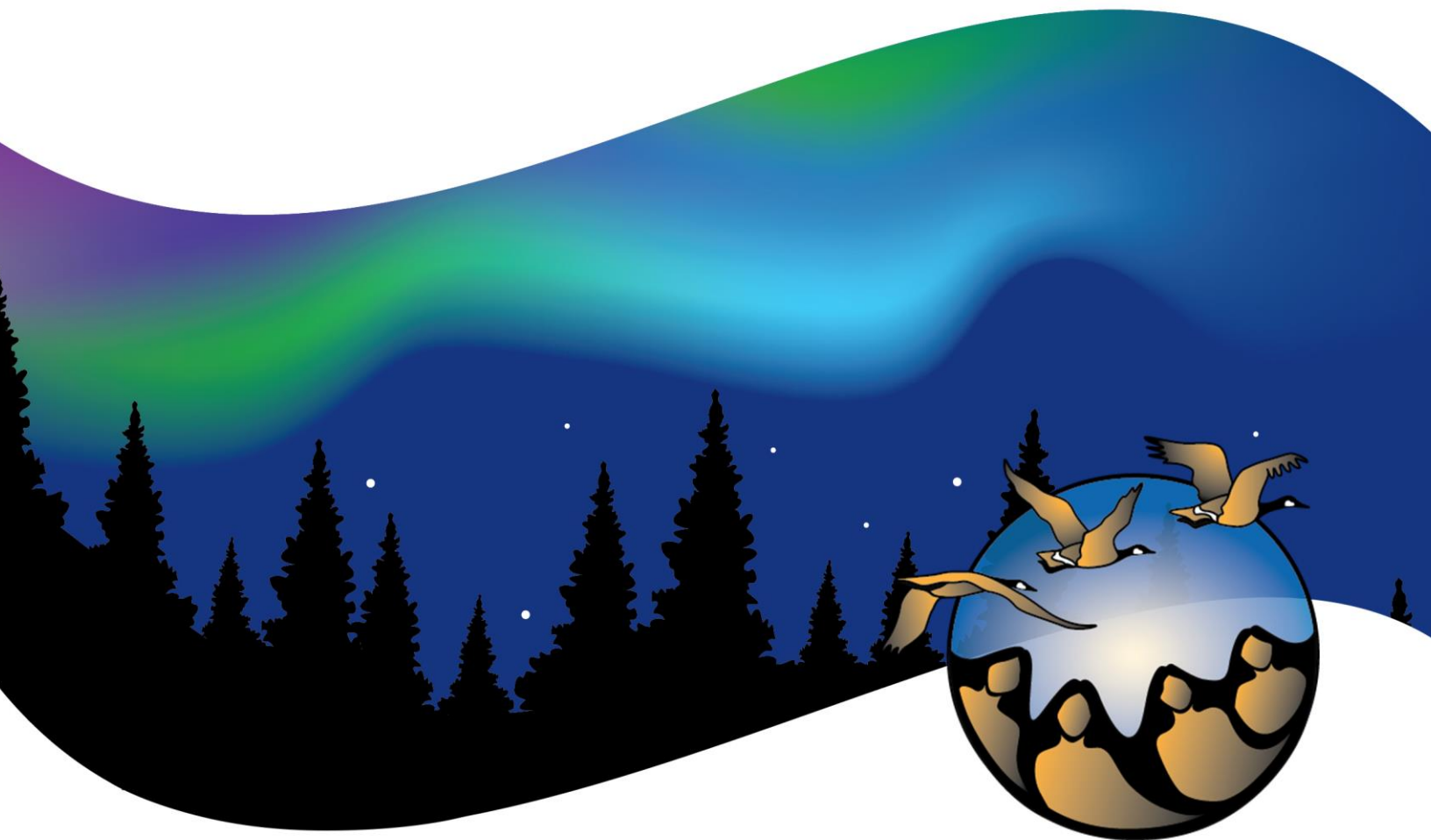




No Vacancy

A Look at the Housing Crisis in Labrador West

Written by Brianne Messina, Megan Johnston & Jane Stinson



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CRIAW acknowledges its presence and work on Indigenous Territories. We respectfully recognize the legacy of colonization upon Indigenous Peoples.

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INTRODUCTION

Labrador West is located in the iron ore rich region of western Labrador surrounded by picturesque lakes and wilderness (Levac, 2014). This report focuses on the neighbouring towns of Labrador City and Wabush, which developed through the mining of natural resources—iron ore in particular (Levac, 2014). The town of Wabush started to develop in 1960-61 when the Wabush Iron Company (WIC) started up its processing plant. Labrador City was established shortly afterwards in 1962 upon traditional Innu land by the Iron Ore Company. Labrador West evolved beyond these two mining towns as people chose to create homes and to raise their families in the community. There are now three generations in the community.



Figure 1. Aerial view of Labrador West.

The community's mining history has long-time local residents well seasoned in coping with the many boom and bust cycles associated with their region's dependence on the natural resource sector. Currently, the region is experiencing a boom from increased demand for iron ore from foreign markets, resulting in high levels of production forecasted to persist through to 2018. Although the local economy is thriving and many residents are enjoying employment with high wages, the social infrastructure (including housing, healthcare, childcare, and education) is suffering. The weakened social infrastructure is the result of a community ill-equipped to resolve existing resident needs as well as accommodating the huge influx of new residents and temporary mining workers. The most pressing need comes from a shortage of the basic necessity of adequate, affordable housing. The lack of adequate, affordable housing has left municipal officials and local stakeholders struggling to meet demands of a somewhat unpredictable population growth (Labrador Morning, 2011).

This report provides a comprehensive overview of housing in Labrador West. The housing data presented for Labrador West was compiled in 2010 and 2011, and interviews of local women were conducted in 2012. The trends reported here of housing scarcity and high housing costs have continued. Ongoing data collection is needed to effectively continue to monitor the situation.

In hopes of sparking further discussion, this report also offers an analysis of alternative approaches to housing needs that have emerged in other mining communities both within and outside of Canada.

HOUSING



Figure 2. New housing developments cannot keep up with demand in Labrador West.

Housing is a basic need, for an individual's wellbeing and their participation and support of the social and economic development of an area. Because women, especially aboriginal, racialized, immigrant or refugee, disabled, senior and young women, tend to experience greater poverty and violence at home than men, they have a great need for affordable housing (Canadian Women's Health Network).

The recent iron-ore boom in Labrador West has put considerable strain on the social infrastructure of the region, especially on housing. The increased demand for housing stems from the expansion of mining sector jobs in the region attracting a new influx of workers and residents. As a result, housing demand is outpacing supply and inflating housing and rental costs. For example, in 2011 there were 3,651 existing, occupied housing units in the region with approximately 150 homes which were existing and available for purchase or being constructed for purchase (LWHHC, 2011). With an estimated 900 new residents to the area the projected housing requirement of 395 new units still results in a reported housing gap shortage of approximately 226 units (LWHHC, 2011; LWCC, 2010).

The shortage of available units has steadily and steeply increased the cost of home ownership. The average housing unit costs \$250,000 or more for mini-homes up to over \$300,000 for detached, single-family dwellings, and rates continue to climb. A decline in demand for minerals from China stalled mining expansion in 2012 and 2013 and put new housing projects on hold in Labrador West (Labrador Morning, 2013). Since then the international market for minerals from Labrador West has picked up and house prices have stayed high. This shows how global forces are able to shape local conditions due to Labrador West's dependence on the mining sector. It also demonstrates the volatility of that dependence when the local economy stalls or booms because of changing global demand for iron ore.

RENTAL

The increased cost of home ownership has left many new and existing residents to rely on rental units. However, the cost of renting both houses and apartments has skyrocketed. Conservative estimates for the cost of renting an apartment are anywhere from \$900 - \$1200 per month (LWHHC, 2011; LWCC, 2010). Meanwhile trailers cost, on average, \$3000 a month and single-family dwellings rent for upwards of \$6000 a month (Labrador Morning, 2012).

In addition to the iron-ore boom, several additional factors push up rental rates. A key factor is the lack of rent controls in the provincial *Residential Tenancy Act* (2000). The *Act* is meant to protect the rights of landlords and renters with rules and guidelines for rental agreements, termination of rental agreements, and any grievances the renter or landlord may have (*Residential Tenancy Act*, 2000). Noticeably absent from the *Act* are rent control provisions, which allows landlords free reign to increase rent as much as they see fit with each new tenant and even with existing tenants. The only requirement on the part of the landlord is advising the tenant of the increase in rent at least 3 months in advance for month-month renters and only four-weeks in advance for week-week renters. The result is inflated rents that only high-income earners can meet. Additionally, there was no new construction of apartment units from 2006 -2011 which has severely hindered the ability to meet new housing demands (LWCC, 2010). Since 2011 many new housing units have been added including mobile homes, industry lodges for a fly-in, fly-out workforce, and new housing developments. But this increase is still not enough to keep up with the growing population and need for affordable housing.

TEMPORARY/SHORT-TERM HOUSING

The lack of housing has impacted temporary and short-term options such as hotel or motel stays. In 2010 there were approximately 170 available hotel rooms, almost always at capacity, between Labrador City, neighbouring Wabush and the closest nearby town, Fermont, which is located 28km south in Quebec (LWCC, 2010). New hotels are quickly bought or taken over by companies needing to house their workers. For example, a mining contracting company leased a newly built 24-room hotel on a yearlong contract to accommodate their workers.



Figure 3. Hope Haven Transition House, the regional shelter for women and children fleeing domestic violence.

Local businesses and community organizations planning events must book well in advance for the chance to get hotel rooms. Emergency housing for people in need is also severely impacted by the lack of available hotel rooms. For example, Hope Haven Transition House, an emergency shelter that provides confidential and safe shelter to women and children who are experiencing violence or abuse, needs to use hotel rooms when its beds are full but available rooms are often difficult to find (LWCC, 2010; Hope Haven Transition House).

INCREASES TO CORE HOUSING NEED THRESHOLD

Core housing need refers to households that are unable to afford shelter that meets adequacy, suitability, and affordability norms (CMHC, 2012). Affordability is determined by the percentage spent on housing. The maximum allotted for housing is 30 percent of household income (*Residential Tenancy Act*, 2000). According to 2006 census of Newfoundland and Labrador approximately 27,000 households are in core housing need, with 22,000 households spending more than 30 per cent on housing. In Newfoundland and Labrador, the provincial income average of those in core housing need was just over \$17,000 (NLHC, 2009), however, the average reported earnings of those in Labrador West was \$38,000 (LWHHC, 2011). The higher average of earnings in Labrador West underlines the need for an increase to the provincial low-income threshold, at least in communities where average earnings and cost of living are considerably above the provincial average.

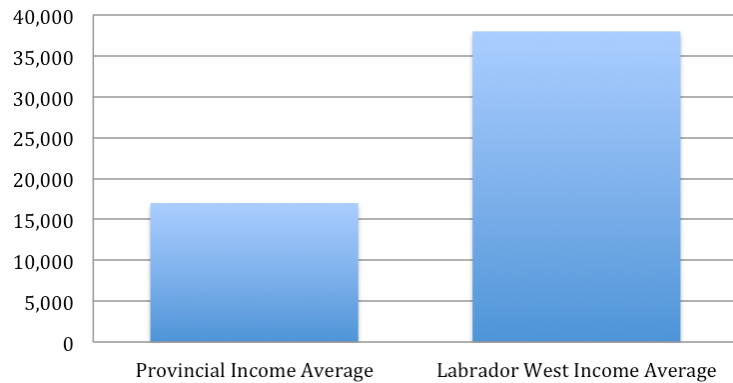


Figure 4. Comparison of income averages for houses in core housing need between the province of Newfoundland and Labrador and the community of Labrador West.

Extensive lobbying by the Labrador West Housing and Homelessness Coalition in partnership with Newfoundland & Labrador Housing Corporation identified the need for and successfully got the provincial income threshold for Labrador West increased in 2012. It jumped from \$32,500 to \$65,000 because of the high local housing prices.

HOMELESSNESS

The lack of affordable housing in Labrador West has increased the region's homeless population within the last five years (LWHHC, 2011). There is currently no official rate of homelessness available for Labrador West. Labrador West does not have a homeless shelter, nor are there plans in place to create one. This makes undertaking research on homelessness rates rather difficult, so it is unlikely any official numbers will be available in the near future.

Without official numbers, government officials have been slow to act on housing issues. However, the establishment of the Labrador West Housing and Homelessness Coalition is an important step in the right direction. Their mandate is to develop strategies to help people in

the area to locate affordable and maintainable living arrangements (Higdon, 2011). Labrador West Housing and Homelessness Coalition has reported a growing problem of hidden homelessness and individuals at-risk of homelessness (LWHHC, 2011). Hidden homelessness can be understood as those individuals who do not have a permanent residence and create a patchwork of places to maintain shelter, such as staying at family or friends' homes for short periods of time. At-risk persons belong to households spending more than 50 per cent of their income on housing and those individuals recently evicted in search of another residence (LWHHC, 2011; Bailey, 2012). With increasing numbers of individuals and families on the brink of being homeless or making a patchwork of living arrangements to avoid living on the street, attention needs to be directed towards increasing the stock of affordable housing and establishing a homeless shelter.

EMERGENCY SHELTER

Shortages of available, affordable housing may increase violence against women as women may be forced to return to or to remain in a violent relationship if they cannot afford or access adequate shelter on their own (Menard, 2001). Currently, there is only one organization, Hope Haven Transition House, which provides confidential, safe emergency shelter to women (with or without children) who are experiencing violence and abuse. Hope Haven has a 9-bed capacity with possibility of additional space available to women and children for a period of six weeks.

The lack of additional emergency shelter affects more women than men since women are disproportionately victims of abuse (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2009). It is particularly important to increase the number of emergency shelters because Newfoundland was the only jurisdiction that saw an increase of overall rates of abuse between 1994-2004 (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2009). Without adequate supports and services for women experiencing intimate partner abuse the chances of them leaving harmful environments are severely reduced (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2009).

IMPACT OF HOUSING SHORTAGES

The lack of adequate housing impacts an individual's livelihood but also the economic vitality of businesses. Businesses reported difficulty offering wages that were competitive with the high wages offered in the mining sector (LWCC, 2010). New business development also suffers because without affordable housing potential new employees cannot afford to live in the area. In addition, current community residents employed outside of mining sector are impeded from home ownership or upgrading because their wages cannot keep pace with the increased cost of housing. For example, teachers are finding it difficult to remain in the area because they simply cannot afford the rent (LWHHC, 2011).

THE ROLE OF MINING COMPANIES



Figure 5. An old school in Labrador West has been converted into housing for mining workers.

The major mining company in Lab West, the Iron Ore Company of Canada (IOC), has taken some action to address the housing crisis in the area. However, local residents believe the mining industry is largely responsible for the current housing crisis.

Due to increased mining activity in the region, mining companies and local businesses have started buying houses and offering landlords and local owners large sums of money to sell their homes in order to accommodate incoming employees. The result is local residents being evicted to accommodate workers (Bailey, 2012). In 2012 the Labrador West

Regional Task Force was created to address the local housing shortage. The task force brings industry stakeholders to the table with provincial and local government representatives to find solutions to local housing needs.

Mining Company Housing Solutions for Workers

To accommodate the influx of non-resident mining workers the local mining companies are utilizing temporary work camps, also called Lodges. The work camps operate on a constantly rotating schedule with new workers coming and going at all times. From the

mining companies' perspective, the creation and implementation of work camps aids in housing demands needed for a growing workforce. However, from the perspective of local long-term residents, work camps pose a variety of issues (Labrador Morning, 2012b). For example, work camps are primarily populated with younger male workers who have no permanent ties to the community and who are looking to unwind and relax on days off in town (Labrador Morning, 2012b). With money to spend and time to kill, work camps are becoming notorious for drug and alcohol use increasing the safety concerns of community residents.



Figure 6. An example of work camp housing for mine employees.

Without alternative solutions to the temporary influx of workers, work camps are the main model used in Lab West for housing short-term area mining workers.

LOCAL ACTION

The local community has been active in voicing and trying to address the troubles resulting from housing shortages. For example, in 2008 the community worked with IOC and Betchel to develop and implement a code of conduct designed to regulate the behaviour of those staying in work camps. Residents of the Labrador Lodge are now asked to sign an Accommodation Pledge as part of their employment contract (IOC and Betchel, 2008). By signing this document, residents agree that they will refrain from having

visitors in the residences past 10pm and that they will refrain from harassment of any kind both within the lodge and in the community (IOC and Betchel, 2008). This development represents an important step for community relations as well as a concrete effort to help reduce violence against women.



Figure 7. The recently constructed Habitat for Humanity Homes in Labrador West.

Additionally, with the creation of Facebook pages and recurring housing topics on the local *Labrador Morning Show* on CBC, residents are trying to get more funding and increased action from the municipal and provincial governments. Successes have been achieved through community members' activism, including the establishment of the Labrador West Housing and Homeless Coalition. The Coalition, which helps people find secure affordable housing, has recently secured funding for a 10 unit social housing complex to accommodate single-parent families. They have also formed a partnership with Cabot Habitat for Humanity to create an Adopt a Home program. Four new homes were added between 2012-2013, with the hopes of building 1 – 4 homes the following year (LWHHC, 2011; Bugden, 2011).

As a result of local and provincial lobby, 8 housing support workers were hired across the province in 2011 with funding through one of Newfoundland's Poverty Reduction Strategy programs. One of these housing support workers is located in Labrador West. The worker's primary role is to find affordable housing for people with complex needs. They also deal with evictions, do eviction prevention work and other related duties.

The provincial *Residential Tenancy Act* has been the focus of housing and homelessness coalitions locally and across the province. They identified the need for the government to review it in order to provide adequate protection to tenants and improve their rights, conditions of apartments, health and safety and rent controls. Also as a result of local and provincial lobbying, a public consultation on homelessness and low-income renters was conducted across the province in the fall of 2012. A public report on its findings and recommendations to address homelessness is expected for release in 2014 after significant delays.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS FROM CANADA AND ABROAD

There are no easy or quick answers to the housing dilemma in the region. With an unpredictable length of booming mining production, the solution to housing becomes very complex. Should Labrador West build more homes, whether they are module or traditional home constructions, there is a real possibility that when a bust occurs the area will be left with an overflow of vacant properties. But if there is no new housing developed the numbers of individuals who become homeless or at-risk will continue to rise. There is a delicate balance to maintain and possible solutions could come from looking at actions taken by other provinces rich in natural resources, such as Manitoba, or by countries abroad such as Australia, which has experienced the pitfalls of a booming mining sector.

Thompson is no stranger to the boom and bust associated with reliance on a natural resource sector. Nestled in northern Manitoba, Thompson is known as the 'hub of the north', servicing non-residents from a variety of surrounding outside communities and temporary mining workers (FemNorthNet, 2012). It has been plagued by a similar housing crisis as that of Labrador West, witnessing dramatic rent increases and a 0% vacancy rate (FemNorthNet, 2012). In order to increase cash

flow and address the housing shortage, the City of Thompson introduced a 5% municipal hotel tax fee in 2009 (FemNorthNet, 2012). The revenue generated from this new tax is allocated to an infrastructure reserve, community safety reserve, and an affordable housing reserve



Figure 8. Warambie Estate in Australia was built to address a housing crisis for service workers after mining operations moved into the region.

(FemNorthNet, 2012). The housing reserve is being used to create new affordable units and to attract provincial and federal funding (FemNorthNet, 2012).

Internationally, a good example of an affordable housing solution comes from Australia, which has a long mining history. Western Australia has weathered many boom and bust periods associated with their mining sector, complicated by concern over preservation of aboriginal and local communities. Many initiatives have been developed to support communities affected by mining in an effort to support sustainable environmental, economic, and social development. One such innovative initiative is the Royalties for Regions program that is run through the Government of Western Australia's Department of Regional Development and Lands. Royalties for Regions has been reinvesting 25% of royalties gained from mining and petroleum industries into regional initiatives since 2008 (Royalties for Regions, 2013). Funds are allocated to a variety of projects that support social infrastructure, community wellbeing, and sustainable growth (Royalties for Regions, 2013). These include projects that focus on healthcare, education, literacy, food security, childcare, and community resource networks, among others (Royalties for Regions, 2013).

An example of a project funded through Royalties for Regions is Warambie Estate, which received \$32.54 million. Warambie Estate is a community of 100 homes recently constructed in Karratha in Western Australia by LandCorp (a government land development agency), the Department of Regional Development and Lands, and National Lifestyle Villages (Residential Developer, 2012). Karratha, like many other regions in Western Australia, has been suffering from a housing crisis characterized by shortage of housing availability, as well as high housing costs. Just as in Labrador West, mining and resource companies have taken up much of the available housing to provide for their employees. This has meant that small businesses have faced difficulties in maintaining staff and attracting new workers to the local service industry (Residential Developer, 2012).

Warambie Estate is specifically designed to support small businesses and the local economy through provision of affordable, quality housing to individuals working in the service industry. Among the new community's residents are individuals representing a variety of occupations including taxi drivers, cleaners, childcare workers, hairdressers, pharmacy assistants, etc. (Residential Developer, 2012). These service workers and their families are able to live in newly constructed, modern, environmentally sustainable homes while paying an affordable rent of \$350-500 per week (Residential Developer, 2012). Additionally, the Estate was specifically designed with the intent of creating convenience and a sense of community. Large community areas were intentionally incorporated into the design, and these areas are open to others who do not live on the estate but may come and enjoy the green spaces (Residential Developer, 2012). A daycare was also created using two of the housing units. This business is able to provide affordable day care as a result of lower overhead costs, largely helped by the reasonable rent (Residential Developer, 2012). Residents moved into the community between May and November 2011. Thus far, Warambie Estate has proven to be a successful initiative that has retained and attracted service workers. Other communities in Western Australia are looking to replicate the model (Residential Developer, 2012).

These examples provide possible avenues for Labrador West to pursue and emphasize the importance of increasing revenue flows into social infrastructure development, which could benefit both Labrador West and regional mining companies. A recent publication by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives argues that Newfoundland and Labrador could improve the provincial economy as well as social infrastructure by generating more revenue from corporate taxes (Gibson & Flanagan, 2013). The low corporate taxes in the province, 4-14%, are contrasted with the Norwegian and Australian examples in which companies are taxed at a minimum of 25% and highly profitable companies are taxed at a higher rate (Gibson & Flanagan, 2013). Additionally, both countries' taxes are designed to capture windfall profits in the resource sector, as a change in the market price of resources can result in profits not anticipated in normal tax and royalty structures (Gibson & Flanagan, 2013).

These sorts of initiatives could also help with the gross inequality in distribution of income found in Newfoundland and Labrador. Newfoundland and Labrador now leads amongst other resource intensive provinces (and within Canada as a whole) in the degree of inequality in primary distribution of income (or the inequality between profits of companies and wages of workers) (Fast, 2011).

The solution to Labrador West's housing crisis may lie in provincial and/or federal governments increasing revenue for spending on social infrastructure, such as affordable housing, through increased taxes on mining company profits. This, in addition to encouraging companies to be more positively active in the social fabric of the community, would go a long way to achieving more sustainable and equitable development. The solution is not easy but with continued local activism and collaboration with municipal, provincial, and federal governments, local industry, and community residents, the situation can improve.

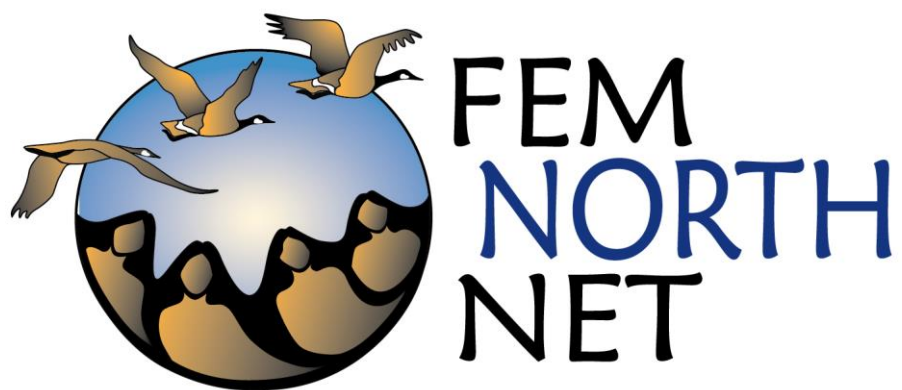
APPENDIX A – COMMUNITY RESOURCES

The following chart provides a list of community resources and programs available in Labrador West.

Organization	Programs Available
Cabot Habitat for Humanity 55 Kenmount Road, P.O. Box 8910 St. John's, NL A1B 3P6 Website: www.habitatnl.ca Contact@HabitatNL.ca Tel: (709) 737-2823 Fax: (709) 737-5832	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Builds affordable housing and promotes home ownership as a means to breaking the cycle of poverty ➤ ReStore accepts donations of quality new and used building materials
Hope Haven Transitional House 350 Booth Avenue Labrador City, NL A2V 2K1 Website: www.Hopehaven.ca Email: hopehaven@crstv.net Office: (709) 944-7124 Fax: (709) 944-7747 Crisis Line: (709) 944-6900 Toll Free: 1-888-332-0000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 24 hour emergency accommodation seven days a week ➤ 24 hour crisis phone line ➤ Crisis intervention and prevention ➤ Referrals to appropriate services (housing, income support, legal services etc.) ➤ Advocacy, outreach and education ➤ Additional programs include: Stopping the Violence, Helping Hands (Children's Programs), Employers Tool Kits, Healthy Relationships, Assertiveness Modules, Decision Make Modules, Self Care
Labrador West Housing and Homelessness Coalition Contacts - Noreen Careen (Co-Chair): (709) 944-6562 Mernie Kelly (Co-Chair): (709) 944-3747	
Supportive Living Partnership Program Website: http://www.aes.gov.nl.ca/forcommunitypartners/slcpp.html	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Provides funding to community-based organizations to develop comprehensive housing supports for people who need them

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