

Out of the Silos: Implementing Solutions Together

Justice Summit – Labrador

Summary Report

February 2018

Prior to the event, participants were asked to come prepared to discuss:

- What issues are causing challenges for the criminal justice system to work effectively and efficiently in Labrador?
- Why are these issues occurring?
- What are the solutions to addressing these issues and who would be part of implementing those solutions?

The Department of Justice and Public Safety organized a Justice Summit on the criminal justice system in the Labrador region. The theme for the Summit was “Out of the Silos: Implementing Solutions Together.” The forum provided a space where various stakeholders could participate in an open dialogue about how the criminal justice system is working in Labrador and how challenges can be overcome through collaboration.

Approximately 50 invited participants attended the event. Participants included, but were not limited to, representatives from Indigenous governments and organizations, Supreme Court of Canada, Supreme Court of Newfoundland and Labrador, Provincial Court, court administration, Victim Services, RNC, RCMP, Adult Probation, Correctional Services Canada, Provincial Crown, Legal Aid, members of the legal community, women’s organizations and others. The day-long event began as follows:

- The Honourable Andrew Parsons, QC, Minister of Justice and Public Safety and Attorney General, welcomed participants and discussed the purpose of the event;

- The Honourable Malcolm Rowe, Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada, delivered opening remarks and reflections; and
- Todd Stanley, QC, Deputy Minister of the Department of Justice and Public Safety provided a brief overview of the criminal justice system in Labrador and context for the discussion that followed.

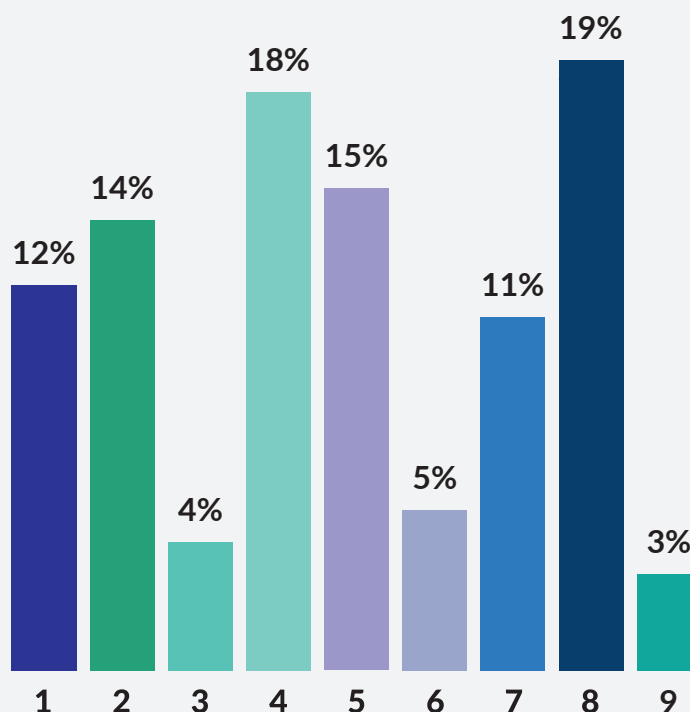
Participants then engaged in facilitated small-table discussions to identify the top issues they each felt need to be addressed in the criminal justice system in Labrador. The top issues identified by participants were:

1. Repeat offenders using scarce resources (e.g. for low level crime and due to overcharging).
2. Cultural and language barriers for Indigenous peoples: oral and written communication challenges; traditional approaches to justice not being used; lack of interpreters.
3. Transportation to court appearances: this is challenging for victims, offenders, lawyers, court officials, and others: limited alternatives available to appearing in court in person; need more/better access to transportation.
4. Delays within the court system: issues with scheduling; inadequate resources; high frequency of delays, transportation delays, lack of information leading to delays.
5. Recruitment and retention of staff: high turnover, staff have high volume workload, causing delays in system.

6. Lack of court circuit in some locations (i.e. Sheshatshiu). Participants noted that this increases financial strain on people attending court who require food and transportation.
7. Too many people working in silos (e.g. RNC, RCMP, CSSD, JPS, etc.): lack of communication across service providers; lack of information sharing.
8. Lack of alternatives to the current justice system: need for further emphasis on restorative justice and diversion programs.
9. Safety issues waiting for court appearances due to physical layout of available infrastructure (e.g. inadequate separation between offenders and victims and others).

Participants then voted on the top three issues they wanted to discuss for the remainder of the day. The results are shown below.

- Repeat offenders (low level crime and overcharging)
- Cultural and Language Barrier for Indigenous peoples
- Transportation to court appearances (victim, offender, lawyers, court staff, etc)
- Delays within the court system
- Recruitment and retention of staff
- Lack of court circuit in some locations (ex. Sheshatshiu)
- Working in silos (RNC, RCMP, CCSD, JPS, etc.)
- Lack of alternatives to the current justice system - (e.g. restorative justice)
- Safety issues while waiting for court appearance



Based on the results of the polling above, the three issues selected for discussion for the remainder of the day were:

- Lack of alternatives to the current criminal justice system;
- Delays within the courts; and
- Recruitment and retention of staff.

Participants discussed each of these issues and were asked to focus on what challenges need to be addressed in relation to those issues and what possible solutions exist. All comments and ideas expressed by participants were compiled, with the following common themes emerging for each.

Issue 1: Lack of alternatives to the current criminal justice system

Challenges identified by participants:

- Cultural insensitivity and language barriers.
- Infrastructure issues with court rooms.
- Limited resources, programs and supports available (i.e. mental health supports, interpreters, staffing shortages, etc.) and limited knowledge of what programs are offered.
- Minor offenses and overcharging taking up a lot of time in the court system.
- Lack of communication among various components of the criminal justice system.

Possible solutions identified by participants:

- Mental health and trauma training.
- Cultural sensitivity training.
- Diversion programs for youth and adults; restorative justice programs.
- Bail monitoring systems in communities.
- Implementation of specialty courts.
- Increased resources (e.g. online courses, service navigators, etc.).
- Further discussions on alternatives involving the Crown, victim services, defense counsel, community groups, and others.
- Look to other jurisdictions.

Issue 2: Delays within the court system

Challenges identified by participants:

- Inadequate physical infrastructure for courts and overbooking.
- Challenges with recruitment and retention of staff, especially in northern or remote areas.
- Minor infractions are clogging the system.
- Logistical challenges associated with geography and transportation.
- Lack of interpreters.
- Lack of knowledge of language and culture.
- Delays in defence counsel receiving disclosure.
- Lack of a dedicated bail court.
- Lack of persons to write Gladue reports.
- Poor telephone and Internet service.

Possible solutions identified by participants:

- Interpretation and Gladue report services available fulltime in courts through local recruitment.
- Use technology for appearing in court, interpreters.
- Stronger partnerships between Legal Aid and Indigenous groups to help Indigenous offenders.
- Cultural sensitivity training for those working in the criminal justice system.
- Enhance incentives for employment in Labrador.
- Dedicated bail court is needed.
- Expansion of physical court infrastructure.
- New court building to address infrastructure issues.

Issue 3: Recruitment and retention of staff

Challenges identified by participants:

- Cost of living – food, housing, childcare, etc.
- Court circuits difficult for staff with family responsibilities.
- High caseloads causing staff burnout.
- Understaffed provincial court.
- High turnover of staff creates repeating cycle.
- Staff burnout due to high volume of cases and lack of employees and resources.
- Stigma of limited opportunities.
- Lack of cell/internet service.
- Social isolation faced by newcomers.

Possible solutions identified by participants:

- Offer incentives such as relocation package, subsidized housing, travel bursaries, paid leave, bonuses, tax breaks, job sharing.
- Partner with airlines to accommodate travel needs.
- Improve video and phone infrastructure.
- Enhance recruitment efforts at universities.
- Work with Indigenous governments to recruit, train, and enhance social inclusion of staff.
- Replicate Nunatsiavut Government program for social worker recruitment to recruit other professions (e.g. lawyers).
- Contractual commitments for retention.
- Improve awareness of opportunities in schools.

What's Next?

The Department of Justice and Public Safety is analyzing opportunities to address challenges and implement solutions suggested by participants at the event. Further details related to progress will be made available through 2018.

For more information:

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