



PROMOTING OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH THROUGH COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Introduction

Across Canada, youth retention and success have always been key in ensuring the continued vitality of official language minority communities (OLMCs). Within the context of Quebec, retention in particular is a constant challenge, where English-speaking youth are disproportionately apt to pursue professional opportunities outside of the province. While this option should never be condemned, it is nonetheless important to ensure that those who wish to remain have access to the resources necessary to help them thrive therein. With this in mind, and considering that youth retention is equally beneficial to the state, policy-makers need to be in a position to support organizations that are working towards this objective.

Recommendation

Community and educational organizations that work closely with English-speaking youth should develop partnerships, both amongst themselves and with local employers, in order to develop and maintain programs that promote employment, and thus retention, in Quebec.

A POLICY BRIEF BY
EDWARD LAI,
ADRIENNE WINROW,
AND CHARLIE ORME

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CONTACT

Youth for Youth Québec
5964 avenue Notre-Dame-de-
Grâce, Suite 204
Montréal QC H4A 1N1

514-612-2895
info@y4yquebec.org
www.y4yquebec.org



Investigative Context

It is common knowledge that English-speaking youth are more likely to leave the province than their French-speaking counterparts, a trend that has contributed to the community's demographic decline over the past few decades. As mentioned in our first policy brief in September 2018, a lack of proficiency in French is likely a contributing factor. As recommended in that brief, public institutions can play a key role in addressing this issue.

That said, it is essential to look beyond language skills, as there are likely other dimensions that can be explored as well when looking at ways of promoting youth retention.

With this in mind, Y4Y Quebec embarked on a tour of Quebec's regions in order to examine what different English-speaking communities across the province were doing in order to promote youth retention. A region whose strategies proved particularly captivating was that of the Magdalen Islands, where educational and community organizations have implemented successful programs to tackle this very issue. Through both in-person and telephone interviews, it became clear that this region, which has under 1,000 English-speakers, was serious about retaining young talent. Given this, these programs were examined in more detail, with the goal of determining whether they can be generalized to other regions of Quebec. The results of this exploration, which are drawn entirely from primary sources, are delved into below.

Solutions that Foster Success

Through meetings with English-speaking parents from the Magdalen Islands, Adrienne Winrow, the director of Y4Y Quebec, found there was a high level of community engagement when it came to investing in youth retention. Although the community is small in numbers, it is backed by strong institutions working towards this goal. Key amongst these are Grosse Ile High School (GIHS), as well as the Council for Anglophone Magdalen Islanders (CAMI).



As it turns out, both of these organizations understand the need for programs that foster youth retention, and both were very keen to discuss these with Adrienne when approached.

Through an interview with Amber McKay, a Community Development Agent at GIHS, on March 15, 2019, it was determined that there is indeed a high interest amongst high-school-aged English-speakers in remaining and working in the region. Indeed, in a survey of twelve youth aged 10-14, eleven were willing to spend the summer working in the tourist industry, which forms the bedrock of the region's economy. Even when they were made aware that they would be working primarily in French, these eleven youth were just as interested, and even showed a keen willingness to participate in mentorship programs to improve their French skills. This small sample size being purely a result of the small size of the community itself, these results indicate that, within Quebec's regions, young English-speakers are indeed open to opportunities that allow them to work side-by-side with their French-speaking fellow citizens. While GIHS is not an employment agency in and of itself, this discussion indicates that educational organizations can and do play a key role in fostering interest among youth when it comes to local employment.

When it comes to translating this interest into concrete results, CAMI has been particularly active in ensuring that English-speaking youth are able to achieve their goals of finding employment on the Islands. Based on an interview between Adrienne and Helena Burke, Executive Director of CAMI, on March 25, 2019, it was clear that the organization's programs for placing youth in local employment were successful. These programs have resulted in these youth getting jobs both internally within CAMI-managed organizations and other organizations within the Islands' tourism industry, the vast majority of which operate in French.



This successful integration of ambitious English-speaking youth into the local economy was further confirmed by yet another interview between Adrienne and an employee from Auberge Salicorne, an inn on the Islands. Through that conversation, they confirmed that they do indeed employ English-speaking youth, who successfully work in an environment where French is the predominant language of day-to-day interactions.

With all of the above in mind, it is the opinion of Y4Y Quebec that these existing community programs in the Magdalen Islands can serve as a template for similar programs throughout the province, all while taking into account the unique characteristics of each of its regions. In particular, it is encouraging to see that when educational, community, and employment organizations work together, youth are able to thrive, even in a minority-language context.

As a topic for further exploration, we would recommend examining the prospect of taking youth engagement to the next level by looking at avenues that could help them start their own organizations, possibly to explore untapped markets. For example, in the case of the Magdalen Islands, a feasible pilot project could be one that looks at attracting more tourists from the Maritime provinces to the Islands. This idea stems from the fact that although the Islands receive 75% of their tourists from Quebec, they are geographically closer to the four maritime provinces than they are to mainland Quebec. In this context, English-speaking youth would be well-positioned to help expand the industry in a way that would result in very positive economic gains for the region. Ideas such as this, however, are for another time, as they contain enough food for thought as to perhaps warrant their own policy brief.
