Journal of Rural and Community Development

Evaluating the Dynamics of Rural Internships in Alberta

Author: Carmen Mombourquette

Issue Dedication:
This issue of the JRCD is dedicated to Cheryl Williams who passed away suddenly in 2010. She was in the first semester of her PhD program in Nursing at the University of Saskatchewan at the time of her death. Her co-authored paper in this issue is based on her master's thesis research. Pammla Petrucka was Cheryl's advisor. It was Pammla's wish to publish this peer-reviewed article in honour of Cheryl's work and her family.

Evaluating the Dynamics of Rural Internships in Alberta

Carmen Mombourquette
University of Lethbridge
Lethbridge, Alberta
carmen.mombourquette@uleth.ca

Abstract

Rural Alberta is decreasing in population with a resulting reduction in services to the people who continue to live outside the metropolitan areas of Calgary and Edmonton. As services within rural communities decline, a commensurate increase in stress occurs for the population that remains.

By delivering a program that matches post-secondary students with non-profit/voluntary sector (NPVS) organizations that are in need of skilled workers, Volunteer Alberta, through its sponsorship of the Serving Communities Internship Program (SCiP), struck upon a plan to provide for rural re-development. Volunteer Alberta worked through Alberta's 21 post-secondary institutions to promote internships that were available throughout the province. During the 2011/12 school year volunteer placements occurred. Throughout the fall of 2012 we conducted an evaluation of the program through a study that utilized comprehensive online surveys, as well as interviews with a purposeful sample of interns and NPVS organizations.

Survey and interview data revealed that both the interns and the NPVS organizations were highly satisfied with the SCiP format, the services provided to them by Volunteer Alberta, and the quality of the internships, and the interns they acquired. SCiP intern motivation came from the opportunity to use skills and knowledge developed in post-secondary programs in such a way that they could later use the experience as evidence of their ability to future employers.

Interview data from both the interns and the NPVS organizations in rural areas of the province revealed that volunteer post-secondary student exposure to rural community organizations led to a positive change in perception about the work of the NPVS in general and rural communities in particular. Evidence of change of perception was strong enough to indicate that a longitudinal study should be conducted to see if the positive perception of rural communities attained through working there will be acted upon, and lead to an increased movement toward paid work in the non-profit/voluntary sector in both urban and rural areas of the province.

Keywords: Rural development, youth internships, community development

---

1.0 Introduction

In September, 2011 Volunteer Alberta launched the Serving Communities Internship Program (SCiP). Funded by the Government of Alberta through the Ministry of Advanced Education and Technology, the 3-year pilot program works with Alberta's NPVS organizations to create meaningful part-time internship opportunities that are available to students in Alberta's 21 publicly funded post-secondary institutions.

Most of Alberta's post-secondary institutions are located outside of Edmonton and Calgary, but the bulk of the student population resides in these two urban centres. One of the core elements of SCiP is to support the capacity of NPVS organizations. Some organizations have found success in engaging student interns while others have struggled. This split has highlighted the challenges of operating a program with a provincial mandate.

The study examined organizations in both urban and rural communities that participated in the first year of SCiP. By gathering both quantitative and qualitative data, the evaluation aimed to illuminate the dynamics that led to success as well as the challenges in both urban and rural organizations. Of particular note to this study was determining any differences that might occur between urban experiences and rural experiences.

Additionally, it was believed this research could provide important data to support rural NPVS organizations by identifying a profile of best practices for attracting and engaging post-secondary students and increasing the capacity of community organizations. This research and evaluation study provides information that rural Alberta can leverage—and in the short-term it assists community partners in fulfilling the provincial mandate of SCiP. By researching and evaluating the first year of the program through a rural lens, the outcomes of SCiP are more likely to be realized in subsequent years and potentially add valued social capacity to rural NPVS providers—and through them to the rural communities themselves.

2.0 Literature Review

Over the course of the past 50 years Canada has witnessed a general trend of rural depopulation and urban growth (Bryant & Joseph, 2001). Part of the change is related to youth moving away from rural areas. With this movement, the remaining rural population faces an aging in place predicament (Bryant & Joseph, 2001). The out-migration of youth may be due to many factors, such as seeking higher education, accessing a greater variety and number of services, and/or possessing differing values. Migration also occurs due to patterns of job opportunities in urban versus rural space. The authors see this migration as devastating, as it serves as a withdrawal of potential entrepreneurial resources from rural Canada. Youth migration can result in "high unemployment, loss of purchasing power, low self-confidence, low solidarity, unwillingness to mobilize, and a dismal track record of failed development programs" (Bryant & Joseph, 2001, p. 135). Although Bryant and Joseph highlight the migration of youth from communities in rural Canada, they also speak to general migration of people from rural to urban Canada.

Related to migration, Bryant and Joseph (2001) also talk about aging as a key factor in the changing face of rural Canada. Because many young people are leaving rural communities for further opportunities, there is significant aging in many areas. This aging produces the need for restructuring of rural services, such as home-based support for elderly people, thus shifting the community's focus.

2.1 Rural in Alberta

Identifying the issue of rural population begs the question of how to define rural. Statistics Canada (2001) acknowledges that there are many ways to do this. They suggest that individuals consider the nature of their question in regards to rural life when choosing a particular definition. Rurality may be based on a geographical concept, location with boundaries on a map or a social representation, a community

of interest, or a culture and/or way of life. Thus, definitions of rural may be determined according to population density, population size, distance from an urban area, or distance to essential services. Depending upon the definition chosen, there may be a different proportion of Canadians considered rural. Statistics Canada provides six definitions of rural. Of these, they suggest that the "rural and small town" definition be used as a benchmark. This definition suggests that rural and small town refers to individuals in towns or municipalities outside the commuting zone of larger urban centres (those with a population of 10,000 or more). However, a census metropolitan area (CMA) has also been defined as having an urban core population of 100,000 and more (and a census agglomeration of an urban core population of 10,000 to 99,999). For our purposes the < 100,000 population is used as a base definition of rural (Statistics Canada, 2001, p. 7). In addition, the MIZ concept of rurality is also used, and distance from large population centres (cities with a population > 100,000) is ascertained and examined. The population of the province is examined from the perspective of proximity to large population centres, and hence is viewed as "urban" (> 100,000), "near rural," and "far rural."

Urban Alberta is dominated by two large cities (Calgary and Edmonton). Together they represent roughly 50% (1,967.050) of Alberta's total population of 3,828,484 (Government of Alberta, 2013a). However, when examined from the point of view of Metropolitan Area the combined population rises to 2,374,608. The remaining population is spread between a series of:

- smaller cities (15 in total with an average population size of 38,572),

- municipal districts (64 with an average population size of just under 10,000),

- towns (108 with an average population size of 4311),

- villages (93 with an average population size of 420),

- Métis settlements (8 with an average population size of 607), and

- First Nations (48 with an average population size of 1426). (Government of Alberta, 2013b)

When viewed through the lens of the entire province, Alberta continues to be an economic powerhouse. Alberta draws migrants from the rest of Canada and indeed the world. In the past year (2012) Alberta's population grew by three times the national average with most of the growth coming from net migration to the province (Grant, 2013). Once migrants reach Alberta, most settle within the Calgary and Edmonton Metropolitan Areas. However, many also live in work camps located around the oil rich areas of Alberta and remain transient, non-permanent residents, who look to their local communities in other provinces as their homes (Hinkson, 2013). On average people living in rural areas of Alberta earn less ($23.31 per hour) than their counterparts in Calgary ($25.85) and the Edmonton Metropolitan Areas ($25.32). The exception to this general rule pertains to the people (many of whom are migrant workers) who live in the Wood Buffalo-Cold Lake Region ($27.94) (Government of Alberta, 2011).

Even though Alberta's population is expected to exceed the 4 million mark in 2014, with much of that growth occurring in the Metropolitan Areas, it continues to have a healthy agriculture base. Agriculture remains an important rural industry, albeit employing fewer people than it once did, with 62,000 people employed in 2013

(Government of Canada, 2013) and generating the second lowest hourly rate ($17.16) when compared to all occupation groups (Government of Alberta, 2011).

Lower salaries, decreasing population relative to overall growth, a population that is aging, and increasing numbers of people who are best described as temporary migrant workers combine to place considerable stress on Alberta's rural population. The next section of this paper describes some of those stressors.

2.2 Rural Stressors

The work of Brannen et al. (2009) highlight one of the many factors associated with rural depopulation: the issue of stress impacting the remaining residents. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the nature of rural stress, a number of stressors were reviewed in the literature. These stressors were organized into the following categories: isolation, relationship, health, work, education, community, and housing. It was suggested that isolation was the most salient personal stressor. Poor health also contributes to stress in rural citizens as these individuals experience higher rates of obesity and smoking. In terms of mental health, little is known about rural populations (Brannen et al., 2009). However, it is suggested that rural mental health may be linked to unpredictable employment, out-migration, loss of infrastructure, and weakening of social support structures. In particular, depression, anxiety, and elevated suicide rates may be linked to such circumstances.

Another stressor in rural Canada is the lack of appropriate health care within a proximal distance. This is also true for domestic abuse services. In regards to occupation, rural workers may face more stress compared to their urban counterparts due to being subject to high-risk occupations, government policy changes, restructuring, and lack of a secure income (Brannen et al., 2009). The transient nature of some rural occupations may lead to marital conflict and escalated violence in the home. Furthermore, rural women are faced with the stresses of working a "third shift," and perhaps going without their spouses for extended periods of time. On a community level, stress can be created when out-migration occurs. When out-migration occurs due to increased urbanization, many of the skilled workers leave rural areas. Resources for these areas are then cut, leading to increased stress.

2.3 Dealing with Rural Stressors

Stress faced by residents of rural areas leads to the obvious question of what can be done to address the negative impact of depopulation on people who continue living in rural areas. A number of ideas to reverse some of the depopulation issues have come from education, health care, and the clergy.

2.3.1 Education

Lowe (2006) provides guidelines for recruiting and retaining teachers in rural areas. In doing so, he highlights aspects of rural teaching that will likely encourage more educators to choose work in rural settings. Lowe suggests that of utmost importance is promoting the climate, culture, and vision of rural schools. Rural schools should promote their unique communities to potential teachers. By building on this sense of community it is more likely that teachers will be drawn to working in rural areas.

Lowe (2006) also suggests that rural teachers need to be taken care of by the district and by the rural community itself. New teachers entering rural communities should be assisted with their transition into rural life. Lowe suggests this assistance is

sometimes lacking in rural teaching positions, which can contribute to high turnover rates. Once teachers have been recruited through learning about the rural community, there should be continual contact between them and the community until they are immersed in it. In addition, Lowe (2006) speaks to further recruiting methods, such as marketing, offering incentives, and forming cooperatives with training institutions. He also suggests that rural communities nurture the potential of "locally grown teachers."

2.3.2 Health Care

Understanding the reasons physicians enter rural practice also sheds light on how to attract and retain rural workers and in turn help expand the rural population base. Chan et al. (2005) acknowledge past research indicating that individuals who were raised in rural settings are more likely to work there. However, there are still many rural physicians who were raised in urban centres.

It was found that previous exposure to rural settings was the most salient factor for physicians choosing to practice in a rural setting. However, many rural physicians surveyed did not have this exposure, and yet still chose to practice rurally. Chan et al. (2005), however, suggest that if these individuals had not been exposed to a rural lifestyle and the challenges of working in a rural setting during their training, they would not have known about the benefits of working in a rural setting and would, therefore, have been less likely to choose rural work.

Penz et al. (2008) sought to add to the literature by addressing the job satisfaction of rural registered nurses (RNs). They felt this information was necessary to aid in recruitment and retention of qualified health professionals in rural and remote Canada. In the study, job satisfaction, individual characteristics, workplace characteristics, and community characteristics were assessed. It was found that, in general, females were more satisfied with their jobs in rural settings. However, this variable accounted for a very small amount of the variance and should be viewed with caution. The authors stress that in rural settings, the work lives and community/home lives of professionals are interwoven. They found this interweaving of lives to be different in urban workers. Therefore, when recruiting and retaining rural RNs and other professionals, this interconnectedness should be considered.

2.3.3 Clergy

In her review of the literature, Mellow (2005), found that nurses, doctors, social workers, mental health professionals, and lawyers reported many similar differences between rural and urban work in their professions. Mellow's work with clergy in rural settings was also consistent with the literature reviewed. A main theme is that rural professionals need to find and maintain a balance between the standards of the profession and the unique needs of rural society. It is suggested that professional standards have an urban bias. Thus, they are not always applicable in rural settings. For example, dual relationships are often forbidden for professionals. However, it is almost impossible to avoid such relationships in a rural context and is sometimes contraindicated. Therefore, many professionals must alter their professional standards to work effectively in rural settings and may experience stress as a result (Mellow, 2005).

2.3.4 Using Community Resources to Support Community Development

Research from the United States indicates that many rural communities are finding ways to lead community regeneration themselves. They realize that nobody from the

"outside" is going to come in and solve their problems. Rural communities already know that they are faced with three similar issues:

- the pool of people available to draw upon within the community was shrinking due to aging in place and out-migration,

- specialists were difficult to recruit, resulting in a greater reliance on local volunteers, and

- many communities were remote from post-secondary institutions and the resident expertise located there.

Even with these issues, many rural communities were able to find alternative ways to proceed and overcome some of the disadvantages facing them (Murray & Dunn, 1995).

2.3.5 Summary

Rural depopulation arising from out-migration of youth and not balanced by an in-migration of skilled workers has resulted in a phenomenon where rural communities are being required to find other means of meeting the basic needs of the residents who remain. Research into the recruitment of health care and education personnel has revealed that exposure to a rural lifestyle while workers are still in post-secondary school has played a role in helping to attract service providers to rural areas. The question remains, however, how to best expose urban workers to the benefits of working in a rural community. And of particular note to this study, is whether the SCiP program can help achieve the exposure required to get more urban dwellers into rural Alberta?

3.0 Study Description

In September, 2011 Volunteer Alberta launched the Serving Communities Internship Program (SCiP). Funded by the Government of Alberta through the Ministry of Advanced Education and Technology, the 3-year pilot program works with Alberta's NPVS organizations to create meaningful part-time internship opportunities that are available to students in Alberta's 21 publicly funded post-secondary institutions.

Most of Alberta's post-secondary institutions are located outside of Edmonton and Calgary, but the bulk of the student population resides in these two urban centres. One of the core elements of SCiP is to support the capacity of NPVS organizations. Some organizations have found success in engaging student interns while others have struggled. This split has highlighted the challenges of operating a program with a provincial mandate.

The study[1] examined organizations in both urban and rural communities that participated in the first year of SCiP. By gathering both quantitative and qualitative data, the evaluation aimed to illuminate the dynamics that led to success as well as the challenges in both urban and rural organizations. Of particular note to this study was determining any differences that might occur between urban experiences and rural experiences.

---

[1] This study was made possible through partnership with the Alberta Rural Development Network (ARDN). The ARDN is a not-for-profit partnership of Alberta's 21 public colleges, universities, and technical institutes working together to support rural communities.

Additionally, it was believed this research could provide important data to support rural NPVS organizations by identifying a profile of best practices for attracting and engaging post-secondary students and increasing the capacity of community organizations. This research and evaluation study provides information that rural Alberta can leverage—and in the short-term it assists community partners in fulfilling the provincial mandate of SCiP. By researching and evaluating the first year of the program through a rural lens, the outcomes of SCiP are more likely to be realized in subsequent years and potentially add valued social capacity to rural NPVS providers—and through them to the rural communities themselves.

4.0 Evaluating the Dynamics of Rural Internships

For the past 15 years population growth in Alberta has been dramatic, just as it has been uneven. From 1991 to 2006 Alberta's population grew by 29%. Urban areas in the Province grew by a whopping 36%, while rural and small town populations grew by a little more than 8%. However, between 2001 and 2006 urban populations grew by 15% and rural and small town populations actually shrunk by 4.5% (Government of Alberta, 2012). When the rural and small town population category is broken down into component parts the decline becomes even more dramatic. It is most dramatic when viewed according to what the Government of Alberta (2012) defines as *Metropolitan Influence Zone* (MIZ). An area with a Strong MIZ has 30% – 50% of its workforce commuting to a larger metropolitan centre for employment; a Moderate MIZ has 5% – 29% commuting; a Weak MIZ has 1% – 4% commuting, and No MIZ has 0% commuting. Surprisingly, the MIZ with the largest drop in population from 2001 to 2006 was the Strong MIZ, with a loss of 39% of its population, while areas defined as Weak MIZ grew a little (1.7%).

With rural depopulation, a restructuring of service provider organizations has occurred. One of the factors associated with rural depopulation is a phenomenon called *aging in place.* The average age of people who remain in small town and rural areas has risen, which has presented a number of issues related to provision of service (Reimer, 2004). A related factor is the swings that often occur in economic activity. Economic fluctuation has a more dramatic effect on rural than on urban areas because of economies of scale resulting from a small population base. The fluctuations result in stresses that impact social agencies that cater to the needs of rural residents (Reimer, 2004). Finally, we also see change resulting from the reorganizing and restricting of institutions like education, health, and social welfare agencies. These institutions have, in many instances, been regionalized and moved out of small towns into larger centres, forcing users to travel greater distances to access services (Rice & Prince, 1993).

Early studies conducted on the impact of using volunteerism to help alleviate some of the stresses presented by rural issues indicated that volunteers can play a role in addressing some of the difficulties being experienced in rural areas (Pinkau, 1980).

As we will see in the literature review section of this paper, Non-Profit/Voluntary Sector (NPVS) organizations can play a role in helping rural residents deal with the stresses and issues of depopulation, and other factors resulting from the fact that fewer people are available to take care of some of the essential features of a high quality of life. One method shown to provide some degree of success in matching people with the right job is exposing those soon to enter the workforce to a variety of work-related choices. Often, this exposure helps them decide which occupation is most appealing to them—it could be to work with an NPVS in the service of others

in rural areas. In other words, helping people to realize that an NPVS is the right fit might help motivate them to work in rural areas once post-secondary education is complete. Past research indicates that when organizational experiences are in line with people's interests and lifestyle, they tend to be more satisfied with their jobs (Bretz & Judge, 1994), achieve higher performance levels (Tziner et al., 2002), demonstrate reduced work-related stress (Meir et al., 1995), and, as a side bonus, acquire job stability and stay in the same job longer (Bretz & Judge, 1994).

5.0 Research Design

The findings by Murray and Dunn (1995) highlight the conceptual rationale for the SCiP study. Their work directs the focus of rural redevelopment toward the communities themselves, yet also identifies the need for building social capital capacity through recruitment of trained professionals to work in fields that local communities may not be able to provide if left on their own. This focus leads directly to the possible benefits of connecting post-secondary students with an NPVS, and through that connection potentially expose them to the benefits of working for an NPVS organization after graduation.

The focus of this paper is on rural communities, yet both urban and rural NPVS organizations and SCiP placements are included. It was felt that both the urban and rural results, and the comparison between the two, could provide valuable information and potentially offer suggestions for increasing the effectiveness of the program in rural areas.

5.1 Research Questions

The research questions for this study were:

1. What has been the impact of SCiP on the interns' perception of working for a NPVS organization?
2. What has been the impact of the SCiP interns on the NPVS organizations?
3. What factors positively contributed to the recruitment of the SCiP interns?
4. What factors negatively contributed to the recruitment of the SCiP interns?
5. How has the Serving Communities Internship Program met/not met its objectives to:
   a. Create meaningful opportunities for students to develop practical skills and deepen applied learning opportunities to support personal and career goals?

   b. Foster an appreciation of community engagement while supporting the efforts of Non-profit/Voluntary Sector organizations to achieve their mission and strengthen local communities?

   c. Increase student awareness of the important contributions of the Non-profit/Voluntary Sector to their communities and the possibilities of working in this sector?

5.2 Method

A mixed-methods approach took the form of online surveys—SCiP Intern survey, successful NPVS organization survey, and a survey of NPVS organizations not successful in placing an intern, subsequently supplemented with interviews of a

purposive sample of interns (five rural based interns were interviewed via telephone) and NPVS organizations who were highly successful in getting interns (four rural organizations interviewed via telephone). The surveys were developed so as to garner open ended responses as well as responses requiring the selection of an answer from the *Likert-type* rating scale.

Survey questions were developed based on the SCiP goals and objectives. Lists of potential survey respondents were supplied by Volunteer Alberta, and survey instruments were administered using Survey Monkey. Potential respondents included all NPVS organizations who successfully placed at least one intern, and all NPVS organizations who applied through SCiP yet were not successful in placing any interns, and all placed SCiP interns.

A letter was emailed to potential respondents informing them of the upcoming survey and encouraging them to complete it. At this time, 12 duplicate or defunct email addresses were encountered for the successful NPVS organizations. These emails were removed from the list used to send out the Survey Monkey invitations. During the initial and reminder mail-outs, two more individuals opted out and three emails bounced back for this group, leaving 124 potential respondents. For the cohort unsuccessful in filling a SCiP intern placement, 10 individuals opted out and 17 emails bounced back, leaving 288 potential respondents. Finally, for the intern group, five potential respondents opted out and 11 emails bounced back, leaving 281 potential respondents in this cohort.

At 44.4% (55/124), the survey return/completion rate was highest for the SCiP organizations with interns group. At 16.3% (47/288), the lowest return/completion rate was for the SCiP organizations without interns cohort. The return rate for the intern group was 36.3% (102/281). With the exception of the SCiP organizations without interns, the return rates were close to the 39.2% derived from a meta-analysis conducted by Cook et al., (2000).

Figure 1 provides a conceptual schema for the study's design:

Figure 1: Conceptual Schema for the Study's Design.
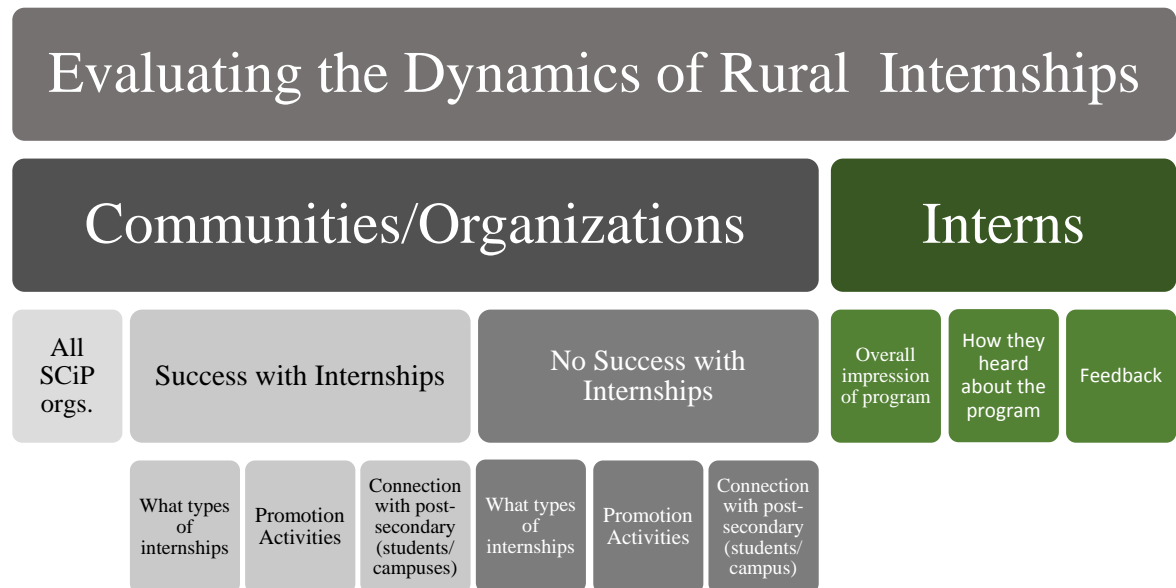
Source: Author.

6.0 Findings

In this section, we present the results gleaned from the surveys administered to SCiP interns, successful NPVS organizations, and unsuccessful NPVS organizations. We also relate the ways in which the survey results helped form the basis for the interview questions. We also present the data derived from interviews.

Data for the successful NPVS organizations and SCiP interns are presented in a three-section format:

Section 1: contains data derived from written expression response survey type questions.

Section 2: provides statistical type data pulled from survey questions requiring a selection from options given to participants. *(i.e., yes/no, number, choose between)*

Section 3: presents interview-acquired data.

6.1 Successful NPVS Organizations

6.1.1 Section 1: Written Expression Responses

Successful NPVS organizations found the interns' work to be of great benefit to their organizations and implied that the work was also valuable to the interns themselves. The organization representatives (number is shown in the parentheses) said the interns provided a variety of services, with most centering on:

- Technical Support (17),
- Research and Evaluation (14),
- Communication (11),
- Program Marketing (11),
- Fundraising (6), and/or
- Administration (5).

Various social media applications were used to promote the SCiP opportunity, including Facebook, Twitter, Kijiji, and websites.

When asked how they promoted the opportunity with post-secondary schools, surprisingly, 14 organizations said they didn't do anything. For those that did contact post-secondary schools the most common response (14) was to have talked to key contact people or to professors.

The most common approach for providing orientation to SCiP interns was one-on-one, whereby the intern engaged in tours, discussions, and meetings with a staff member knowledgeable about the organization and the intern's role.

"Valuable" was the most common word used when organizations described the worth of having interns, with 48 of 54 respondents indicating that the benefits of having SCiP volunteers outweighed the amount of work required to supervise and guide them. Of the 54 respondents who answered the question, "would you be willing to work with SCiP in the future to meet your volunteer needs?" 100% replied "yes."

6.1.2 Section 2: Statistical Type Data Responses

In the *Likert-type* question portion of the survey, Questions 7 through 19 asked successful NPVS organizations to rate various aspects of the SCiP intern's experience using a 1- to 10-point scale, where "1" signified exceptionally poor and "10" indicated exceptionally great. All rating questions attained a mean rating of 7 or greater. The lowest mean rating (M=7.1 SD=2.7) was obtained for Question 14: "The quality of office design ideas provided by the intern(s)." The highest mean rating (M=8.0, SD=1.5) was observed for Question 11: "The level of enthusiasm displayed by interns." The mean number of interns hired by responding organizations was 3.5, with a standard deviation of 5.0. There was a wide range in the total number of interns across organizations, ranging from a low of 1 to a high of 29, with 50% of the agencies having 2 or fewer interns.

Other responses of note were found in Questions 8–15:

- Help provided to organizations by officials from Volunteer Alberta (M=8.4, SD 1.7).

- Interns' level of talent (M=7.8, SD=1.6).

- Interns' level of intelligence and innovation (M=7.9, SD 1.5).

- Quality of solutions to organizational processes provided by interns (M=7.5, SD=2.1).

- Interns' level of insight into communication processes (M=7.6, SD =1.9).

- Interns' level of IT support provided (M=7.7, SD=2.5).

Questions 16-19 dealt more with process than with the interns' quality or value of work provided. They are:

- The opportunity to illustrate to interns why working and volunteering in the non-profit sector is a rewarding career choice (M=7.8, SD=1.3).

- How well did SCiP do in providing your organization with a support system you could call upon to meet your recruitment needs (paid or unpaid) (M=7.9, SD=2.0)?

- Rate the quality of innovative and tailor-made resources gained through participating in SCiP (M=7.9, SD=1.9).

- Participating in SCiP strengthened our organizational capacity to deliver programs (M=8.0, SD=2.0).

6.1.3 Section 3: Interview Data

Interview data with successful NPVS organizations also added value to information gained through the survey. Four organization leaders were interviewed by telephone. The organizations interviewed were all rural based. They holistically supported the SCiP concept and were very appreciative of the efforts of Volunteer Alberta (and through it the Government of Alberta) to support the work of rural organizations. They believed in, and related the importance of, work done by SCiP interns in their organizations.

The organizations were better able to meet their stated missions because of the expertise contributed to them by the interns, as well as the manpower they could not have afforded without the program. They also related that they, in turn, were able to provide meaningful and career-expanding experiences for the interns—experiences that the interns would not have been able to have without the program.

In the same light, they spoke to the important role played in exposing interns to both the purpose of the Non-Profit/Voluntary Sector and the value of working within it. They said that interns did not universally express interest in the sector, but without the exposure many would not have discovered the value in the work at all. However, the same expression of support didn't necessarily carry over to the idea of the interns working in rural areas. While NPVS organizations believed interns were more likely to eventually work in the sector, they were less optimistic that they would relocate to rural areas to do so. They thought some interns might, but were cautious about the opinion.

When asked about the value of the bursary as well as the SCiP program itself contributing to the organizations attracting highly qualified post-secondary students, those interviewed were unanimous in their belief that both contributed in a significant way.

6.2 SCiP Interns

6.2.1 Section 1: Written Expression Responses

When SCiP interns were asked what attracted them to the internship, 24 respondents identified the work experience they would gain as a prime motivator, illustrated by this response: "gaining experience to get into the professional job that requires experience in a starting position." Closely allied to this was the idea that the SCiP position was a good fit with the area of work they were interested in. However, many also noted the motivational value of the bursary they would receive. The desire to learn more about non-profit organizations and/or to give back to the community was also identified as key motivators. Even in this era of super-wired young people, many intern respondents reported that they found out about SCiP from personal contacts, not necessarily through electronic means. Yet the electronic connection served as the second main contact point.

Once hired, interns found their orientation processes helpful and very personal. Most received orientations on site and specific to the jobs they were going to do. Orientations involved tours of the building, meeting key people, exposure to procedure manuals, and other processes that could quickly get them up and running on their assigned projects. Some interns (8), however, said they never did receive orientations to their organizations.

When asked what SCiP could do to improve recruitment of post-secondary students, 26 respondents replied: "advertise more." Other comments included:

- 15 respondents suggested using newsletters, posters, and pamphlets to spread the word. For example: "Increase presence on school campuses through newsletters and posters."

- 14 respondents recommended using career tables, booths, and job fairs to increase recruitment

- 10 respondents recommended increasing the breadth of positions available.

- A few respondents mentioned items like social media and other forms of electronic communication.

When asked if they would do a SCiP internship again, 83 respondents said they would and 8 respondents indicated they would not. When asked to explain, 40 respondents identified the opportunity to gain work experience as their reason for considering another internship. Exemplar quotes included: "I love gathering

experience from the non-profit sector while being a student. Normally, it would be incredibly hard to get opportunities like this," and "Gaining much experience will help with my future career. Though education is important, experience is what employers look for." Even here, respondents were careful to note the importance of the bursary, with 25 respondents referencing this bursary as to why they would consider another internship. We would be remiss, however, in not pointing out that the 22 respondents who replied with a positive comment in general, such as *"great experience"* or *"it was fun,"* were almost as many as the bursary supporters. The 8 respondents who would not want to serve another internship, referenced items like the amount of time involved, lack of pay, unrealistic expectations, and job descriptions as barriers to future participation.

A total of 76 respondents reported that their experiences did impact their sense of connection to community because of what they did while 15 respondents reported that the program did not impact their sense of connection to community. Supporters reported that they learned more about the role and/or impact of non-profit and volunteer agencies within communities, or something about the community they served. Others mentioned the importance of making contacts within the community, meeting new people, and the altruism of serving these people.

6.2.2 Section 2: Statistical Type Data Responses

In the *Likert-type* question portion of the survey, Questions 1 through 13 asked SCiP interns to rate various aspects of their internship experiences. Mean ratings for Questions 1 through 13 were 7.8, 7.9, or 8.0. The questions achieving mean ratings of 8.0 (SD=2.4, 2.5 and 1.9 respectively) were:

- *Question 3*: My SCiP Internship placement allowed me to implement an initiative or project.

- *Question 10*: My SCiP Internship placement allowed me to utilize my fresh ideas in my initiative or project.

- *Question 11:* My SCiP Internship placement allowed me to focus my energy in a productive way.

The question attaining the lowest mean rating was Question 14: The $1000 bursary I received at the end of my SCiP Internship placement acted as the main motivator to get me to work with the non-profit/voluntary sector organization. The mean rating for this question was 6.1 (SD=2.8) suggesting that the bursary was not the main motivator for many of the interns. Other means and standard deviations for the intern portion of the survey were:

- The degree to which interns valued the learning experience (M=7.8, SD=2.1).

- Meaningfully planned the creation of an initiative or project (M=7.9, SD=2.4).

- Managed an initiative or project (M=7.9, SD=2.4).

- Increased their understanding of the value of the non-profit/voluntary sector (M=7.8, SD=2.1).

- Increased their understanding of the type of work done by the non-profit/voluntary sector (M=7.9, SD=1.9).

- Utilized their critical thinking skills (M=7.9, SD=2.2).

- Were allowed to innovate (M=7.9, SD=2.3).

- Create (M=7.9, SD=2.4).

- Take initiative (M=8.0, SD=2.5).

- Focus energy (M=8.0, SD=1.9).

6.2.3 Section 3: Interview Data

Interview data with SCiP interns (5 rural based interns were interviewed) added value to the survey responses already reported. Interns told us that their impressions of the Non-Profit/Voluntary Sector, although positive when they began the program, grew and expanded as they learned more about it. Importantly, they noted that they didn't really consider working for an NPVS organization prior to the internships but would consider something in the field now that they knew about what this sector does.

Complementing this openness to working in the field were their comments regarding what they considered to be SCiP's strengths. These comments included: "Providing a variety of volunteer opportunities to organizations that you wouldn't know existed or that you could contribute to in meaningful ways"; "SCiP is able to access the talented students by reciprocating with monetary resources to sustain the talent pool"; "It gives you an opportunity to practice skills recently acquired"; "I think that the fact that this program gets university students involved is it's [sic] greatest strength as many university students may not have many connections to the community that they can use to find volunteer opportunities. I was very impressed with the number of associations/events that were associated with SCiP."

Weaknesses of SCiP, meanwhile, were of a structural nature, like paperwork, prolonged wait in getting the bursary, or the NPVS organization not really being ready for the intern. When asked about working in rural areas of Alberta, two interns said they would now consider it, two said they were not sure, and one said no.

6.4 Unsuccessful NPVS Organizations

NPVS organizations that were unsuccessful in placing interns provided valuable information about the SCiP internship concept as well as its practical place within their organizations. These organizations received an average of only 1.2 applications for the positions available. When asked why they were not able to fill their positions the most common response (20 out of 47 responses) was that they did not receive any applications. However, most did not "blame" Volunteer Alberta for not filling their positions. In general, 21 organizations were satisfied with the level of support received from Volunteer Alberta and 13 organizations said that Volunteer Alberta could have been of more help.

The brief internship position descriptions provided by respondents fell into one or more of the following categories:

- Planning (11),

- Program Marketing (8),

- Research and Evaluation (6),

- Technical Support (6),

- Communication (6),

- Administration (5),

- Fundraising (3),

- Education (2),
- Lifeguard Duties (1), and
- N/A (6).

When asked to describe activities taken to promote the SCiP opportunity, responses clustered around two major categories: mechanisms for increasing awareness, and doing nothing. "Doing nothing" was also a common response when asked what they did to involve post-secondary schools in the recruitment of interns. Also noted in this area was frequent mention of not having a post-secondary institution in their area.

6.4.1 Rural/Urban Comparison Data

We divided the intern group into three sections:

- Urban : *(within 10 kilometres of Calgary or Edmonton)*
- Near Rural: *(11–99 kilometres from Calgary or Edmonton)*
- Far Rural: *(100+ kilometres from Calgary and Edmonton)*

The distribution of scores for Questions 1 through 14 were skewed and/or kurtotic when split by cohort, consequently the non-parametric test, Mann-Whitney U, was used to see if the distributions of ratings differed between those interns who experienced their internships within 10 km of Calgary or Edmonton; 11–99 km from Calgary or Edmonton; and, 100 or more km from Calgary or Edmonton.

With only two questions reaching significance we were able to ascertain that the overall results of the survey are pertinent to both urban and rural internships and that the findings can apply equally to groups involved. In Question 4, *My SCiP Internship placement allowed me to manage an initiative or project,* the average rating for the 0–10 km cohort was 7.7 (SD=2.5) and the average rating of the 100+ km cohort was 8.8 (SD=1.5). The mean rank of the 100+ km cohort was significantly higher than the mean rank of the 0–10 km cohort (U= 936.5, p=0.041), suggesting that the 100+ cohort believed they had more opportunity to manage an initiative or project. In Question 12, *The $1000 bursary I received at the end of my SCiP Internship placement was appropriate to the work I completed*, the average rating of the 0–10 km cohort was 7.5 (SD=2.6) and the average rating of the 100+ km cohort was 8.8 (SD=2.1).

The mean rank of the 100+ km cohort was significantly higher than the mean rank of the 0–10 km cohort (U=978.5, p=0.009), suggesting that the 100+ km cohort was more satisfied with the bursary amount.

6.4.2 Discussion

In this section we provide a series of interpretations based on the results gleaned from both the survey and interview data. First, we will provide some generalizations about the effectiveness of Volunteer Alberta as the sponsoring organization for the Serving Communities Internship Program. Second, a comparison of the experiences of NPVS organizations that were successful in getting interns with that of the organizations that were not successful. Third, the intern experience itself will be commented upon. Finally, we will examine the impact of the program on rural-based organizations.

6.5 Volunteer Alberta: SCiP Sponsoring Body

The Serving Communities Internship Program (SCiP) is listed as one of six programs operated by Volunteer Alberta. SCiP's intent as a program and the hoped-

for impact that it will have on Alberta is to simultaneously build stronger communities and stronger leaders in Alberta by engaging post-secondary students in the non-profit/voluntary sector. Through internships across the province, post-secondary students are provided with important opportunities to develop their specialized skills, gain meaningful work experience, and advance their understanding of the non-profit/voluntary sector. Based on both the survey and interview data it is evident that Volunteer Alberta has met its objectives and indeed provided for expanded NPVS organization capacity.

Specifically, organizations are encouraged to take on SCiP interns as a means to accomplish the following: placing qualified volunteers, leading to reduced stress in the NPVS organizations, and providing for increased succession planning opportunities.

Did Volunteer Alberta, through SCiP, meet this set of objectives? Again, the survey and the interview data would suggest—yes. However, each of these four points need further commentary and elaboration.

6.5.1 People

It would appear that without being able to call upon SCiP these NPVS organizations are usually faced with trying to get volunteers from the local community to fill some of the holes in their structures, and as such the volunteers do not necessarily come with the highly specialized skills required. The NPVS organizations were clear in their praise of the quality of the interns. The following questions about various aspects of intern quality were all rated in the high range:

- The talent level of the interns (M=7.8, SD=1.6)
- The level of intelligence and innovation displayed (M=7.9, SD=1.5)
- The level of enthusiasm displayed (M=8, SD=1.5)

Each indicated that once the interns went to work for the NPVS organizations their training and skills were put to use and in the end they added value to the organizations they served.

6.5.2 Stress-Reduction

Stress-reduction was described as interns being able to provide solutions to organizational processes, communication insights, office design, and IT smarts. Although the data supports the successful attainment of this objective, it was not as strong as the support attained by the other objectives.

With the possible exception of "office design" each of the other solutions were mentioned when NPVS organizations were asked about the type of work completed by the interns in their organizations. The general categories of research and evaluation, administration, planning, technical support, communication, program marketing, and/or fundraising were most often noted by the organizations. Specifically, they said the interns brought value to their organizations by completing tasks related to web design, technical support and software application, research, program evaluation, marketing the organization, newsletter development, and fundraising. Each task highlighted the need for interns coming into the organization to have skills and knowledge of a technical nature.

Survey responses to questions regarding the "quality of solutions to organizational processes provided by the interns," "quality of insight into communication processes provided by interns," "quality of office design ideas provided by the interns," and

"quality of IT support provided by the interns," all had reasonable means and standard deviations (means ranged from a low of 7.1 to a high of 7.7 and standard deviations from 1.9 to 2.7). The number of organizations that responded N/A was high, which spoke to these "solutions" not necessarily being a driver for the organizations and the tasks they assigned their interns.

6.5.3 Succession Planning

Succession planning was referenced as "demonstrating to the future of non-profit leadership how rewarding working and volunteering in the sector is." In other words, Volunteer Alberta was alluding to the need for NPVS organizations to have a mechanism through which they could promote the NPVS sector as a viable alternative for post-secondary students when determining their career aspirations.

When the NPVS organizations were asked about "the opportunity to illustrate to interns why working and volunteering in the non-profit sector is a rewarding career choice," all 55 answered the question, with an overall mean of 7.8 and standard deviation of 1.3 being achieved. This result spoke directly to the NPVS sector realizing the value of the internships as a method of promoting their organizations to future highly skilled workers. They were acknowledging the value of exposure as a means of recruitment, and through it the value of SCiP and the work of Volunteer Alberta.

6.5.4 Gain Access to Innovative and Tailor-made Resources

Volunteer Alberta, through SCiP, committed to providing support to the NPVS organizations that accessed their services. As one NPVS organization representative stated, *"We operate on a shoe-string budget. Like many not for profits we do not have resources that allow us to promote our organizations in an effective manner. We need to rely on programs like SCiP to help fill key skill areas and for us to gain information on how to grow our organization."* Of the 54 individuals who responded to the question, "would you be willing to work with SCiP in the future to meet your volunteer needs?" 100% replied yes. This data point speaks volumes for the service provided by SCiP to the organizations themselves. Survey data also pointed out that when organizations were asked about "the help provided to your organization by officials from Volunteer Alberta," we see the highest mean of all of the survey questions—M=8.4, SD of 1.7, with 54 organizations reporting.

6.5.5 Value for Work Provided

Forty-eight of 54 respondents (89%) indicated that the benefits of having SCiP volunteers outweighed the amount of work required to supervise and guide them. In addition, 98% (53/54 respondents) indicated that yes, the work assigned to the SCiP interns helped them focus their energy in a productive way. Overwhelmingly, organizations felt that the additional work they had to do to supervise interns was more than offset by the value they brought to the organizations.

6.5.6 Successful NPVS Organizations Compared to Not Successful

Success or non-success simply refers to the NPVS organization's ability to attract and retain SCiP interns. Fifty-five organizations found and placed interns (successful organization) and then completed the survey component of this study. Forty-seven completed the survey from the perspective of having not placed any interns (not successful). This element is included in the study so as to determine possible causes for the attraction/non-attraction. The areas addressed in this part of

the report include job descriptions, level of self-marketing, and level of post-secondary involvement.

6.5.7 Job Descriptions

The general job description categories of research and evaluation, administration, planning, technical support, communication, program marketing, and/or fundraising were the same in both the successful and non-successful organizations. However, as with so much in life—the devil is in the details. In this case, we see a few noticeable differences between the tasks described by successful and non-successful organizations. The primary tasks associated with the job descriptions in successful organizations were: web design, technical support and software application, research, program evaluation, marketing the organization, newsletter development, and fundraising. Non-successful organizations related to items like program/project planning and management, marketing, website design, writing articles, accessing community interest, and administrative-type jobs like manning the front desk.

Although there are more similarities than differences in the types of jobs being offered by the successful and non-successful organizations, some differences do stand out. The data indicates that non-successful organizations seem to stress more manual-type jobs (administrative), or jobs that appear more menial in nature (writing articles as opposed to writing the entire newsletter), or perhaps of a nature that leaves the intern to his/her own devices too regularly (accessing community interest). If one of the primary objectives of SCiP is to place highly skilled and knowledgeable post-secondary students in internships that will challenge them, the organizations need to be careful in designing their placements to meet this need.

6.5.8 Level of Self-Marketing

Although it would appear that marketing of SCiP to post-secondary students as well as to the organizations themselves was a responsibility of Volunteer Alberta, the level of self-marketing by organizations was different and indicated that it might play a role in successfully attracting and placing interns. Self-marketing by successful organizations was extensive, while that by non-successful organizations was less so.

Successful organizations to a much more extensive degree than non-successful informed their peers, colleagues, and partners about the placements available. They did so through staff meetings, posters, electronic communication, and/or through word of mouth. In the words of one respondent, *"We shared information at staff meetings and gave all organization staff SCiP information cards."* The successful also made better use of various social media applications for promoting the SCiP opportunity, including Facebook, Twitter, Kijiji, and websites to spread the word. Additionally, some forms of print media were used for promotion, specifically, flyers, posters, newsletters, and photos. Some even found that using people like board members, their management team, and various executives to "get the word out" helped.

6.5.9 Level of Post-Secondary Involvement

The level of involvement of post-secondary institutions takes on the same air of commitment and intensity as the area of self-marketing. Successful organizations tended to be more involved with post-secondary schools than non-successful organizations. Even though SCiP itself worked extensively with all 21 post-secondary institutions in the province, they met various levels of success. A number

of the NPVS organizations that completed our survey reported it appeared their local post-secondary had not heard about SCiP. As this past 2011/12 school year was Year One for the SCiP program, it is not surprising that there appeared to be a bit of a lag in getting the message widely acknowledged by post-secondary schools.

To a greater degree, successful organizations met with local post-secondary officials, spoke to various classes from which they thought they might get applicants, and even posted their own notices about SCiP placements throughout post-secondary schools. One of the successful organizations noted that making a personal connection with officials from the post-secondary institution helped fill their internships.

6.5.10 Intern Experiences

To begin the section on what we can learn directly from the experiences of the interns we should first look at why they said they volunteered for a SCiP placement. When asked what factors led to getting an internship, the single largest reason was related to work experience. They felt they would gain valuable skills and those skills would lead to future professional jobs that required experience in a starting position. Other items, like "project completion," "met desire to work in the field," and "making connections and networking" also played a role in motivating students to apply for a placement. These reasons fall into line with the objectives of SCiP and its desire to provide for future succession planning needs of NPVS organizations throughout the province—especially in harder to reach rural areas.

It would appear that word of mouth was the single most important contact point for students coming to know about SCiP. However, the virtual world also played a role. Some students used email, social media, and various Internet applications to find out about the program. A few students highlighted items like Twitter and Facebook, but those numbers were much lower than the ones who relied on some version of personal contact.

Once the students were placed as interns their orientation process was mixed. Orientation very much depended on the hiring organization. Some orientations simply consisted of being introduced, while others took place in full-day sessions typically offered to new hires. Because interns did not comment on it, we can't read too far into the value of the orientations, other than to say they were varied.

When asked what SCiP could do to get the message out to more students, answers typically turned to greater use of social media and other technology-based solutions. Yet they also identified the need to increase the program's presence on campuses throughout the province. This group of students referred to items like school newspapers, posters, and email alerts.

A similar type response was noted when students were asked about increasing the number of applications. Increasing use of technology was mentioned, but so too were items that emphasized the virtues of the program itself. Students highlighted the transferable skills accrued from working with an NPVS, and paid employment to be found after graduation. These types of skills should be highlighted in advertisements and information items.

SCiP got one of its strongest endorsements when 91% of the students who responded to our survey said they would do a SCiP internship again, and 98% would recommend the program to friends. It would appear from the data that students acknowledge the important role played by the internships in giving them the real-

world experience they believed employers look for when hiring students fresh out of post-secondary.

However, even with this group of students the bursary also played an important role. Answers ranged from needing the money and replacing lost income they could have earned working at another part-time job, to the bursary catching their eye and attracting them to the program. Yet in both cases job fulfillment inherent in the positions kept them focused on doing a good job. In this day and age it would seem like $1000 is not a great deal of money, but it appears to be an appropriate amount to get some highly skilled future workers actively engaged in the world of the non-profit/voluntary sector.

Aligned closely with work experience gained by the NPVS placement was students' connection to the community. Whether the NPVS organization was located in an urban, near rural, or far rural community, students felt a sense of connection that transcended the experience, with 83.5% of respondents reporting that their experience in their internship program impacted their sense of connection to community.

7.0 Impact of the Program on Rural-Based Organizations

Data reinforced the idea that the urban and rural internship experiences were very similar. Only two statistically significant differences were noted in the study: Students in far rural placements tended to find that their internships allowed them greater control over management of their projects, and perhaps they took part in their internships for more altruistic reasons, as the bursary was a weaker motivator for them than it was for their urban counterparts. However, what is of merit at this juncture is that the experiences of urban and rural were very much the same, and that allows us to make a number of generalizations that apply to the perceived impact on rural-based internships.

When asked about perceptions of the NPVS sector, one intern commented: "The small non-profit that I interned at amazed me. It had little resources, but the creativity of the people made things happened [sic]." In many respects this comment sets the tone for trying to determine the impact internships had on post-secondary students, and whether or not SCiP has achieved success by increasing the potential for skilled workers to consider the non-profit/voluntary sector in general—and rural NPVS organizations in particular—when graduating from post-secondary institutions.

Interview data indicated there was a pre-placement/post-placement shift in perception. Interviewees revealed that, initially, they did not really consider rural NPVS organizations a viable option for employment upon graduation. However, after completing their internships they were open to the idea. Based on our limited data, we should not construe that they will actually work for an NPVS upon graduation, but we can note a perception change that is positive. And the idea of exposure dealt with in the literature section of this paper seems to have actualized through the work of SCiP.

When students were asked why they decided to do a SCiP internship most pointed to skill development as being the primary motivator. It appears students recognized that being able to blend real work experience with the theory they get in post-secondary classes would be of great benefit when looking for a position after graduation.

The rural-based interns appreciated the opportunity presented to them by SCiP. They recognized that without SCiP they would not have been attracted to a rural NPVS and would have missed the opportunities afforded them by it. SCiP, to them, was the catalyst leading to their work with the NPVS sector. Once attracted, they were exposed to a host of organizations with differing jobs and possibilities for the use of their skills. It was noted by interns that SCiP expanded the connections available between students and organizations. Without something like SCiP, students would not have made the necessary connections to NPVS organizations; they simply didn't know enough people or groups within the communities to make it happen on their own.

Rural-based interns provided affirmation of the exposure rationale for SCiP and NPVS internships. Like their counterparts who took part in the survey, interviewed interns emphasized the importance of exposure and its connection to the possibility of future work with NPVS organizations. That sentiment was not universal but was strong enough to suggest transferability. A follow-up study is suggested by this finding. It would be valuable to rural studies to find out how much impact this type of exposure and enhanced sense of connection will have on employment in the non-profit/voluntary sector in general, and rural-based NPVS organizations in particular. The interns' perceptions are there to suggest that they will be open to working in rural-area NPVS organizations. The next step will be to find out if they actually follow through on their initial willingness.

8.0 Conclusions

Rural Alberta is decreasing in population (Government of Alberta, 2012) with a resulting reduction in services (Pinkau, 1980) to the people who continue to live outside the metropolitan areas of Calgary and Edmonton. As services within rural communities decline, a commensurate increase in stress (Brannen et al., 2009) occurs for the aging population that remains (Bryant & Joseph, 2001).

Research has shown that exposure to the benefits of a rural lifestyle during post-secondary study is an important ingredient to eventual employment in rural areas (Bretz & Judge, 1994). Studies from health care (Chan et al., 2005), education (Lowe, 2006), and other professional occupations (Mellow, 2005) were presented to highlight the important role rural organizations and community exposure play in employment.

By delivering a program that matches post-secondary students with NPVS organizations that are in need of skilled workers, Volunteer Alberta, through its sponsorship of the Serving Communities Internship Program, has struck upon a plan to provide for rural re-development. This matching is having a particular impact on rural organizations as they do not have as many options as urban-based organizations for enhancing capacity (Murray & Dunn, 1995). Unlike other programs that matched post-secondary students with paid internships and/or full-time jobs, Volunteer Alberta took a volunteer approach (albeit with a bursary at the end of the placement).

Volunteer Alberta worked through Alberta's 21 post-secondary institutions to promote internships that were available throughout the province. During the 2011/12 school year volunteer placements occurred. Throughout the fall of 2012 we conducted an evaluation of the program through a study that utilized comprehensive online surveys, as well as interviews with a purposeful sample of interns and NPVS organizations.

Survey and interview data revealed that both the interns and the NPVS organizations were highly satisfied with the SCiP format, the services provided to them by Volunteer Alberta, and the quality of the internships, and the interns they acquired. They also revealed that the $1000 bursary offered to interns at the conclusion of their internships attracted the students to the program, yet was not their main motivator for involvement. Motivation came from the opportunity to use skills and knowledge developed in post-secondary programs in such a way that interns could later use the experience as evidence of their ability to future employers. The bursary was important to get the students into the program, but the work itself with the NPVS kept them actively involved.

Interview data from both the interns and the NPVS in rural areas of the province revealed that volunteer post-secondary student exposure to rural community organizations led to a positive change in perception about the work of the NPVS in general and rural communities in particular. Evidence of change of perception was strong enough to indicate that a longitudinal study should be conducted to see if the positive perception of rural communities attained through working there will be acted upon, and lead to an increased movement toward paid work in the non-profit/voluntary sector in both urban and rural areas of the province.

Note: This study was made possible through partnership with the Alberta Rural Development Network (ARDN). The ARDN is not-for-profit partnership of Alberta's 21 public colleges, universities, and technical institutes working together to support rural communities.

References

Brannen, C., Johnson Emberly, D., & McGrath, P. (2009). Stress in rural Canada: A structured review of context, stress levels, and sources of stress. *Health & Place, 15*, 219-227.

Bretz, R. D., & Judge, T. A. (1994). Person-organization fit and the theory of work adjustment: Implications for satisfaction, tenure, and career success. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 44*, 32-54.

Bryant, C., & Joseph, A. (2001). Canada's rural population: Trends in space and implications in place. *The Canadian Geographer, 45*, 132-137.

Chan, B., Degani, N., Crichton, T., Pong, R., Rourke, J., Goertzen, J., et al. (2005). Factors influencing family physicians to enter rural practice: Does rural or urban background make a difference? *Canadian Family Physician, 51*(9), 1246-1247.

Cook, C., Heath, F., & Thompson, R. (2000). A meta-analysis of response rates in web or internet-based surveys. *Educational Psychological Measurement, 20*, 821-836.

Government of Alberta. (2011). *2011 Alberta wage and salary survey average wages by industry and economic region*. Retrieved December 26, 2013, from http://www.alis.alberta.ca/wageinfo

Government of Alberta. (2012). *Rural and small town Alberta population change*. Retrieved November 2, 2012, from https://osi.alberta.ca/osi-content/Pages/Catalogue.aspx?ipid=861&GOAViewMode=factsheet

Government of Alberta. (2013a). *Alberta population lists from 2000 - 2013* Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. Retrieved from http://municipalaffairs.gov.ab.ca/mc_official_populations.cfm

Government of Alberta. (2013b). *FMC official populations*. Retrieved December 26, 2013, from http://municipalaffairs.gov.ab.ca/mc_official_populations.cfm

Government of Canada. (2013). Labour market bulletin - Alberta: April 2013. Retrieved December 27, 2013, from http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/jobs/lmi/publications/bulletins/ab/apr2013.shtml

Grant, T. (2013, November 25). Canada's population continues to flow westward, *The Globe and Mail,* p. 1. Retrieved from http://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/economy/economy-lab/canadas-population-continues-to-flow-westward/article15587238/

Hinkson, K. (2013, September, 13). Alberta: Where good help is hard to keep, *The Toronto Star*. Retrieved from http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2013/09/13/alberta_where_good_help_is_hard_to_keep.html

Lowe, J. (2006). Rural education: Attracting and retaining teachers in small schools. *The Rural Educator, 27*(2), 28-32.

Meir, E., Melamed, S., & Dinur, C. (1995). The benefits of congruence. *Career Development Quaterly, 43*, 257-266.

Mellow, M. (2005). The work of rural professionals: Doing the Gemeinschaft-Gesellschaft gavotte. *Rural Sociology, 70*, 50-69.

Murray, M., & Dunn, L. (1995). Capacity building for rural development in the United States. *Journal of Rural Studies, 11*(1), 89-97.

Penz, K., Stewart, N., D'Arcy, C., & Morgan, D. (2008). Predictors of job satisfaction for rural acute care registered nurses in Canada. *Western Journal of Nursing Research, 30*(7), 785-800. doi: 10.1177/0193945908319248

Pinkau, I. (1980). A comparative evaluation of volunteer development services: Their nature, effectiveness, policy issue, and cooperative relations. *International Journal of Comparative Sociology, 21*, 207-224.

Reimer, W. (2004, March). Exploring diversity in rural Canada. *Measuring Rural Diversity, 1*(2), pp. 1-7. Mississippi State, MS: Southern Rural Development Center.

Rice, J., & Prince, M. (1993). *Lowering the safety net: How Ottawa spends 1993-94*. Ottawa, Ontario, Canada: Carleton University Press.

Statistics Canada. (2001). *Rural and small town Canada: Analysis bulletin*. Ottawa, Ontario, Canada: Statistics Canada. Retrieved from http://publications.gc.ca/site/archivee-archived.html?url=http://publications.gc.ca/collections/Collection/Statcan/21-006-X/21-006-XIE2001003.pdf

Tziner, A., Meir, E., & Segal, H. (2002). Occupational congruence and personal task-related attributes: How do they relate to work performance? *Journal of Career Assessment, 44*, 401-412.