2026 BRIEF

Canadian Centre for Rural Creativity (CCRC)

Taking Rural Talks to Rural (R2R) on the Road

Reflections on Shore to Shore and the CRRF-NAF Conference 2026



Taking Rural Talks to Rural on the Road: Reflections on Shore to Shore & CRRF-NAF Conference2026

From June 16–23, 2026, the Canadian Centre for Rural Creativity (CCRC) was honoured to serve as a co-host alongside national, international, and local partners for the joint Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation (CRRF) Conference, North Atlantic Forum (NAF), and **Shore to Shore (S2S)** gathering across Western Newfoundland.

This week-long gathering across Western Newfoundland explored rural life through art, Indigenous knowledge, science, food,music, and community connection. Drawing participants from Port aux Basques in the south tothe Great Northern Peninsula and Labrador in the north, the gathering explored the vital relationships between wellness, culture, environment, and place.

For CCRC, this journey marked a major milestone: **the very first time we took *Rural Talks to Rural* (R2R) "on the road" outside of Ontario.** Having rooted previous R2R gatherings in our home community of Blyth, Ontario, we brought our core pillars of **community, connection, and creativity** to the East Coast for an inspiring look at how place-based dialogue flourishes across regions.

The week unfolded across three distinct hubs:

● **Corner Brook (June 16–18)**
Hosted at Memorial University's Grenfell Campus as part of the 2026 Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation (CRRF) annual conference and bi-annual North Atlantic Forum (NAF), featuring presentations, panels, workshops, and field trips.



● **Norris Point, Gros Morne (June 18–20)**
Hosted by the amazing Joanie Cranston and her team at the Cottage Hospital—a rural wellness, health, community, and research centre—for three days of stories, music, and sharing good ideas.



● **Flat Bay, Bay St. George (June 20–23)**
Where we travelled next to visit the Mi'kmaw community of Flat Bay, gathering on the land to celebrate National Indigenous Peoples Day and learn directly from Mi'kmaw leadership and community champions.





Moments That Moved Us: Four Themes Brought to Life

Guided by four interconnected themes—**Relational Wellness**, **Environmental Stewardship**, **Culture & Sense of Place**, and **Two-Way Knowledge Sharing & Co-Creation**—our time across Western Newfoundland brought community, connection, and creativity vividly to life:

- **Relational Wellness:** At the heart of the week was prioritizing the human connections that sustain rural, island, and northern communities. In Flat Bay, participants were billeted directly in local homes and invited into Mi'kmaw ceremony, history, language, and traditions. As someone remarked during the week, the rest of the world should visit Newfoundland to understand what respect and welcome look like—and in Flat Bay, we experienced an entirely new level of both. Met at the doors of our billets with the words "welcome home," we were reminded that true rural resilience begins with radical hospitality, care, and showing up for one another as neighbours.

- **Environmental Stewardship:** Site visits, such as connecting with social enterprise and conservation champions at Pollen Nation, alongside art rooted in ecological care, showcased how rural communities are leading the way in protecting fragile ecosystems while building sustainable, circular local economies.

- **Culture & Sense of Place:** Gathering on the land in Norris Point and celebrating National Indigenous Peoples Day in Flat Bay grounded every conversation in local heritage and lived experience. From regional music and food to centring Mi'kmaw leadership, Indigenous knowledge systems, and data sovereignty, the week affirmed that rural vitality is inseparable from the stories and stewards of the land.

- **Two-Way Knowledge Sharing & Co-Creation:** True to CCRC's belief in creativity as a catalyst for change, participatory art transformed passive audiences into active collaborators. Multidisciplinary artist, filmmaker, and educator Evan Butler captured the entire rural gathering on film, while Sarah Langer's interactive exhibit Our Common Threads —initiated from a stray fishing net found in the sea that killed an orca in 2019— invited participants to weave stories of the sea into a living textile mosaic of sustainability and inner values. In Flat Bay, Mi'kmaw artist Matt Perrier led a transformative participatory art installation with a bear hide that brought everyone together, alongside a moving theatrical adaptation of Tempting Providence led by rural healthcare professionals.

Reflections from the Road:
Nurturing Our Core Values Away from Home

Taking R2R out of Ontario for the first time invited us to reflect deeply on what it takes to nurture **community, connection, and creativity** in new places:

- **Cultivating Community Trust from Afar:** In Blyth, R2R draws on years of deep-rooted local relationships and familiar spaces. Co-hosting across three Newfoundland communities alongside multiple academic and grassroots partners taught us that building trust from the ground up takes patience, humility, and an ability to adapt to distinct regional rhythms.

- **Making Room for Genuine Connection:** Weaving together a structured research conference (CRRF/NAF) with an organic, relational gathering (Shore2Shore) meant balancing packed schedules with open-ended dialogue. Our biggest takeaway is that meaningful connection cannot be rushed—we must fiercely protect unhurried breathing room so authentic storytelling never feels crowded out.

- **Bringing Creative Adaptability to New Spaces:** Stepping into unfamiliar venues and coastal settings affirmed one of CCRC's greatest strengths—our ability to adapt and co-create on the fly. Anchoring participatory art in local voices and lived experience proved just as powerful on the shores of Newfoundland as it is in Ontario, showing how naturally our creative approach translates wherever rural people gather.








Looking Ahead: R2R27 in Clearwater, Manitoba

Every lesson, story, and friendship forged in Western Newfoundland is already shaping our next chapter. From **July 14–16, 2027**, CCRC will take *Rural Talks to Rural* on the road once again—this time heading west to **Clearwater, Manitoba**.

Hosted by the **Harvest Moon Society** in collaboration with CCRC, **R2R27** will bring people together from across rural Manitoba, Canada, and beyond to explore the vital relationship between healthy land and healthy communities. Stepping forward as a true co-host alongside our Manitoba partners, we are excited to carry the spirit of Relational Wellness, Environmental Stewardship, and creative co- creation from the Atlantic coast to the prairies.

From there, this cross-country journey will continue to grow:

- **Ontario (2028):** R2R will return home to Ontario for **R2R28**, bringing fresh insights and national connections back to our provincial roots.
- **Interior British Columbia (2029):** Following Ontario, R2R will head west once more to the interior of British Columbia for R2R29.
- **Rural Nova Scotia (2030):** Looking even further ahead, plans are taking shape to return to the East Coast for R2R30 in rural Nova Scotia.

Thank you to our co-hosts, local organizers like Joanie Cranston and the Cottage Hospital team, artists Evan Butler, Sarah Langer, and Matt Perrier, and the extraordinary communities of Corner Brook, Norris Point, and Flat Bay for welcoming us home—and proving that when rural communities talk to rural communities, lasting change follows.

Photo Credit and Description
Photos provided by Casandra Bryant

Descriptions:
TITLE PAGE: The shoreline at Flat Bay
PAGE 1
1. A conversation with Elder Albert Marshall (Eskasoni Mi'kmaq First Nation) at Grenfell University, Corner Brook
2. Joanie Cranston and Peter Smith at The Old Cottage Hospital at Norris Point
3. Artist Matt Perrier – Leaving a Mark Interactive Art (Bear Hide) Project in Flat Bay

PAGE 3
1. Tempting Providence presentation at Norris Point
2. Artist Sara Langer Crochet Flower
3. Introduction to the Tapestry Project by Sara Langer
4. The Tapestry
5. Turtle Island Panel – Moderated by Peter Smith with Ellie Joseph (Mohawk, Six Nations), Elder Albert Marshall (Eskasoni Mi'kmaq First Nation) and Patrick Michell (T'eqt''aqtn'mux, Kanaka Bar Band)
6. Pollen Nation Farm Field Trip, Little Rapids