

A Community-Vitality Index for Happy Valley-Goose Bay, Labrador



History of the Project

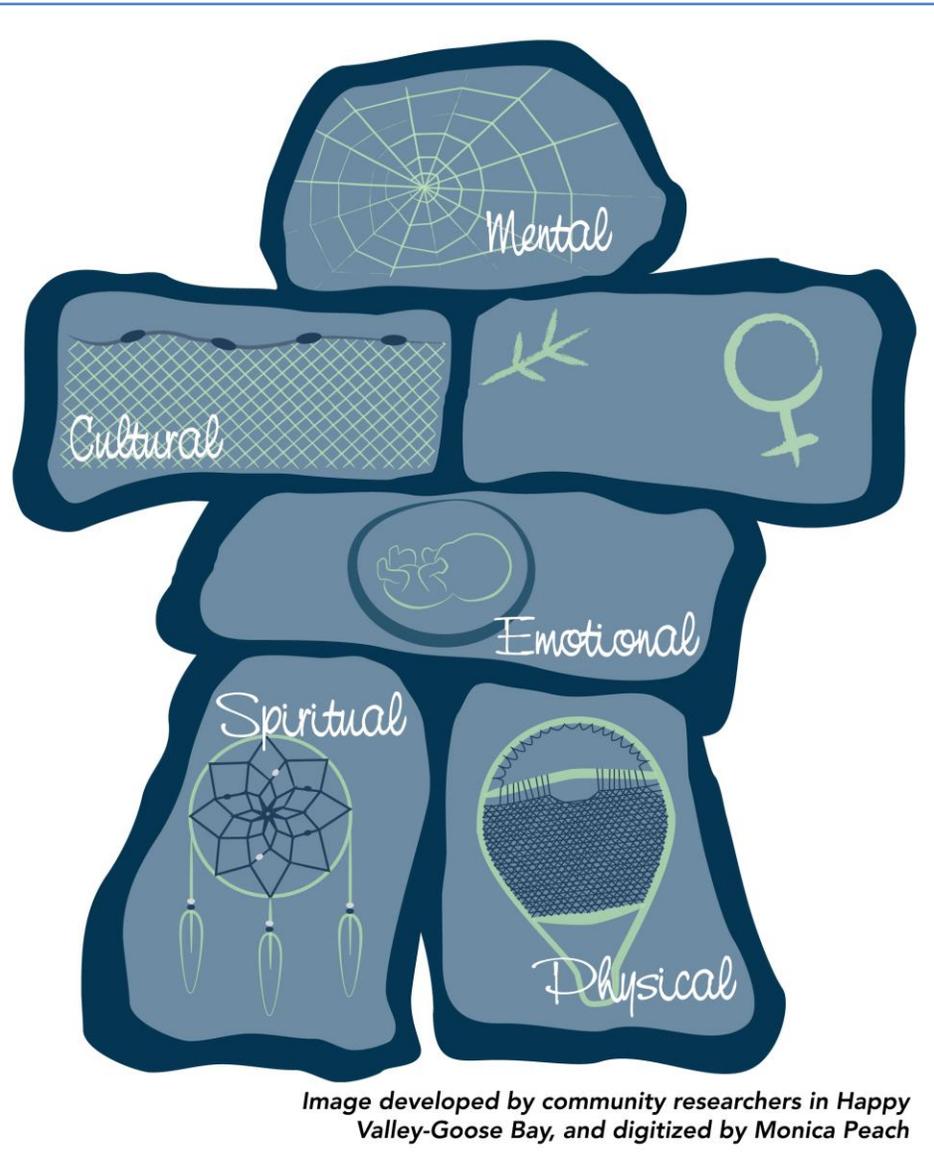
In 2012, a group of women from Happy Valley – Goose Bay (HV-GB) began working with university researchers as part of FemNorthNet to create the community vitality index (CVI). FemNorthNet uses a feminist intersectional approach to ensure diverse women are represented.

The purpose of the CVI is to track changes to the wellbeing of diverse women in the community.

With the arrival of the Lower Churchill hydroelectric dam comes “the potential for adverse effects...including increased substance abuse, and sexual assault, family violence and [other] effects on women and children in Happy Valley-Goose Bay...” (Report of the Joint Review Panel, 2011, p. xxviii).

Because the government of Newfoundland and Labrador is not tracking these potential impacts, the team developed a plan to try and track changes to the wellbeing of women in the community.

The CVI was developed through a series of community workshops, community discussions, and revisions, with the support of women in the community, student research assistants, and academic researchers. The CVI was piloted in the community in the winter of 2013, and finalized in the spring of 2014.



Community Vitality Index Framework

The Development of the Community Vitality Index – Process, Outcomes, and Promise



A Community Definition of Women’s Wellbeing

The wellbeing of women in the North depends on having the opportunity to enjoy and develop a healthy and sustainable relationship with the environment. Having the ability to value yourself – both where you have come from and where you are going – is also important. Wellbeing requires having a sense of safety and security, and having access to appropriate food, housing, resources, finances, and support services. Having a social support network, and being free from violent relationships are critical factors that affect wellbeing for all women. Food security; having or being able to learn coping mechanisms; being able to make choices about what’s best for you and your family; having access to information and resources; and social acceptance of diverse social identities are also critically important factors that affect women’s wellbeing. Women also need spaces where they can to meet to share and learn with each other. Overall wellbeing is made up of: (1) physical; (2) emotional; (3) mental/intellectual; (4) spiritual; and (5) cultural wellbeing (Community Vitality Index Workshop Participants, Spring, 2013).

What is Feminist Intersectionality?

Feminist intersectionality is:

- An approach to research and action.
- A belief that inequalities concretely affect the lives of women and other marginalized people.
- A commitment to exploring how inequalities work in relationship with individual identities, systems and institutions.

The Development of the CVI

Phase 1: Planning	Phase 2: Development	Phase 3: Piloting
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • review of literature on women’s wellbeing, tracking wellbeing, and community leadership • development of community collaborative (guiding group) • invitation to women to participate in phase 2 • design of phase 2 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • community workshops with 26 women to develop: definitions, images, and factors affecting wellbeing • refinement at Labrador Wellness AGM • creation of draft CVI, including framework, definitions, wellbeing survey • training community workshop participants to pilot CVI 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • meetings with women in the community to discuss and complete draft CVI • final revisions to survey • development of an online platform to host final CVI

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In Phase 3, 23 women in HV-GB completed the wellbeing survey. A shorter version of the survey was created to respond to their concerns that the full survey was too long. When the official survey is available online in 2015, community members will be able to answer a shorter or longer version of the survey.

Lessons about Community Vitality in Happy Valley-Goose Bay

Through the development and piloting about the CVI, we learned a lot about the wellbeing of women in HV-GB. The following charts and quotes are a tiny sample of some of the things we learned.

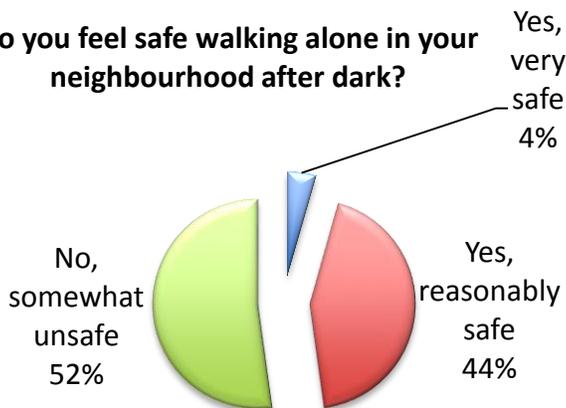
Physical wellbeing is affected by:

- food and water security
- physical safety (in home and community)
- exercise, leisure, and recreation
- safe, affordable, appropriate housing
- access to the land
- access to health services and information



HV-GB women at work on the development of the CVI

Do you feel safe walking alone in your neighbourhood after dark?



Emotional wellbeing is affected by:

- family and friend relationships
- positive support systems
- sense of purpose
- freedom of choice

Mental/intellectual wellbeing is affected by:

- feeling that your voice matters
- relaxation time
- opportunities for self-help
- learning new things/about your culture

“There was something too we were talking about...was the voices. Because we as women sometimes get shut down or people say ugly things to us and we just get shut down, and we just want to leave...and people want to be heard. So we thought we’d put ‘voices’ in there under mental [wellbeing] was it...because a lot of women just get shut down and don’t get heard” (Community Workshop Participants, Mar. 17, 2013).

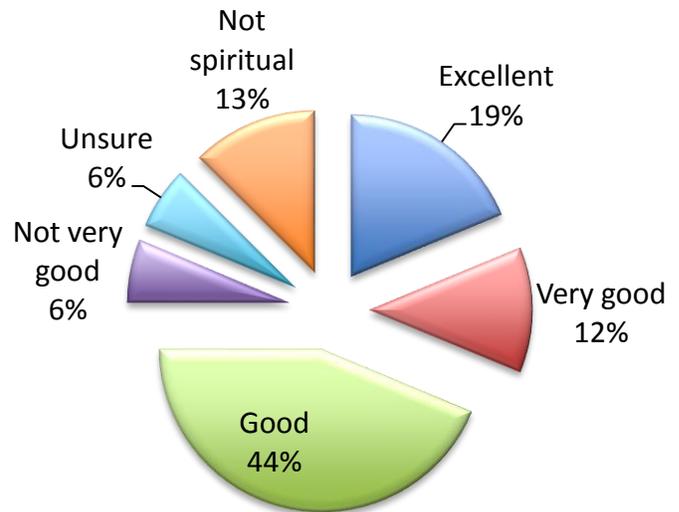
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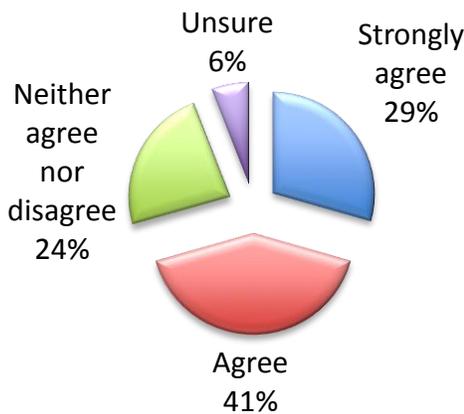
Spiritual wellbeing is affected by:

- freedom of thoughts and beliefs
- access to the land
- self-acceptance and self-actualization
- access to a healthy natural environment
- connection to spiritual places

Overall, how do you feel about your spiritual wellbeing?



I feel free to practice my cultural traditions.



Cultural wellbeing is affected by:

- freedom to practice your own culture
- acceptance of cultural differences
- sense of belonging to a cultural group
- access to traditional land

Moving forward, the CVI needs the support of members of the HV-GB community.

The CVI website will become an important tool to track changes to the wellbeing of women (and all people) in the community over time.

For more information on how to become involved in this project in the future, contact hvgbcvi@gmail.com.

“Sometimes I can get access to the land, but equipment and knowledge are barriers. I have those barriers like access. And a couple of years ago, I went to get a salmon licence, and I went three times, and the person who I needed to talk to wasn’t there, and so after three times I just gave up”.

“I was floored when I got here...I figured I was in Labrador, I could go fishing all the time! But when I got here, I realized there was no where to go if you don’t have access to your own boat...” (Pilot Survey Respondents, Spring, 2014).