

**RURAL YOUTH MIGRATION PLANNING:
THE COMPLEX STORY IN TUMBLER RIDGE, BRITISH COLUMBIA**

by

Jessica Froese

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Abstract

Rural and small-town places across Canada have been undergoing rapid sociodemographic and economic changes since the early 1980s. These changes are the product of the 1980s recession which fostered neoliberal public policies that reduced the role of the state and effectively shifted government initiatives away from community-building. Many communities in northern BC were originally developed to house the working families of the post-war natural resource economy. Since then, service infrastructure has aged, the original workforce is retiring, and many youth and young families have migrated out of these communities. In the context of a changing rural, out-migration of local youth and little in-migration of young people has long been identified as a pressing issue. My research explored the migration plans of senior high school students through a mixed methods exploratory case study of Tumbler Ridge, BC. The focus was exploring senior high school students' feelings about staying, leaving, or returning to their community, and what factors contribute to those decisions. Economic opportunities are often assumed to be the most significant factor in youth migration planning, but my findings speak to differences in youth's priorities. While education and employment were the drivers of youth out-migration, quality of life and sense of place were the most significant factors in determining where youth planned to migrate, and why. My research broadens the dialogue on what rural youth are seeking in their communities.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Youth Migration in a Changing Rural Landscape

Rural and small-town places across Canada have been undergoing rapid sociodemographic and economic changes since the early 1980s (Halseth *et al.*, 2019; Markey *et al.*, 2008a; Markey *et al.*, 2012). These changes are the product of the 1980s recession which fostered neoliberal public policies that reduced the role of the state and their public sector involvement, offloaded government assets, contracted out services, and effectively shifted government initiatives away from community-building (Markey *et al.*, 2019; Ryser & Halseth, 2014). Many communities in northern British Columbia (BC) were originally developed to house the working families of the post-war natural resource economy. Since then, service infrastructure has aged, the original workforce is retiring, and many youth and young families have migrated out of these communities (Barnes *et al.*, 1999; Halseth & Ryser, 2018; Markey *et al.*, 2008b). At the same time, significant economic transition is occurring as the natural resource economy becomes increasingly digitalized, reducing the number of required rural and small-town workers (Halseth, 2016; Storey & Hall, 2018; Storey, 2023). The changing resource economy combined with an unsuitable service infrastructure has changed the nature of rural and small-town places for the young people seeking employment and quality of life within them (Smith & Power, 2021; Sullivan *et al.*, 2014).

In the context of a changing rural, out-migration of local youth and little in-migration of young people has long been identified as a pressing issue, contributing to the aging and shrinking of many rural communities. The most commonly cited reasons for young people to leave their home community are education and employment opportunities, as well as recreational, social, and lifestyle factors (Liu, 2015; McLay & Foster, 2023; Robichaud, 2014). However, the

majority of literature on rural youth migration in Canada comes from the east coast (e.g., Looker, 2021; MacBride, 2014; McLay & Foster, 2023) and there is a small body of literature from Ontario (e.g., Avis, 2013; Liu, 2015; Robichaud, 2014). There is little representation of BC, and even less that focuses on resource towns, outside of declining Atlantic fisheries communities. My research seeks to fill this gap by exploring the issue of rural youth migration through a mixed-methods exploratory case study of Tumbler Ridge, BC. The focus was exploring senior high school students' feelings about staying, leaving, or returning to their community.

Tumbler Ridge was selected as the case study because the District of Tumbler Ridge expressed concern about local youth out-migration following high school graduation, a lack of influx of other youth, and a desire for economic and community development geared towards young people. Additionally, Tumbler Ridge is a resource town with a significant reliance on their natural resource economy, has an aging resource workforce, and experiences high levels of population fluctuation. This research is relevant to Tumbler Ridge to improve their understanding of local youth migration, relevant to other rural and small-town places across BC struggling with youth retention, and relevant to the academic literature as an important part of the rural story.

1.2 Research Objectives and Questions

This research will contribute to the rural community development literature by bringing the voices of local youth into discussions about how we can re-imagine small places as inclusive and how we can empower local youth to play a role in the future of their community. In this research, youth is defined as teens between 15 and 19 years old because their experiences are unique from those of children and young adults. The objective of this research is to explore senior high school students' experiences of being a young person in Tumbler Ridge and how

these experiences contribute to their future migration decisions. This research explored youth's feelings about staying, leaving, or returning to their community following high school graduation, and what aspects of Tumbler Ridge push or pull those decisions. As my research was designed to amplify the voices of current Tumbler Ridge youth, local youth retention rather than recruitment was the focus.

Following conversations with community stakeholders in Tumbler Ridge during my initial visit in early April 2024, my three research questions are:

1. What are the push/pull factors of Tumbler Ridge for young people?
2. What are the future education, employment, and migration goals of youth in Tumbler Ridge?
3. How is Tumbler Ridge supporting local youth (or not)?

1.3 Thesis Outline

This thesis is organized into seven chapters. Following this introduction, the second chapter reviews the relevant literatures that frame this research, including rural community change, resident recruitment and retention, and youth sense of place. The third chapter describes the research methodologies and methods from guiding frameworks to data collection and analysis. The fourth chapter provides a case study overview, discussing the history, economy, and demography and Tumbler Ridge. The fifth chapter presents the results of the interviews and focus groups. The sixth chapter discusses the research results in the context of the literature and presents recommendations for Tumbler Ridge and other rural communities. Finally, the seventh chapter provides a summarized response to each research question, considers the lessons learned from this research, and presents opportunities for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

My research explores community change and rural youth migration in Tumbler Ridge to better understand what aspects of community matter most to senior high school students. To accomplish this research, two bodies of literature have been reviewed in-depth to build contextual knowledge for the study. First, theoretical and empirical research on the social, cultural, political, and economic context of northern BC was reviewed, including literature on rural community development. The second body of literature focuses on resident recruitment and retention in rural and small-town places in Canada, with a special focus on youth, including rural youth's sense of place.

2.1 Rural Community Context

2.1.1 Resource Towns in Northern BC

The rural landscape of Canada prior to the Second World War was sporadic with uneven levels of community development and service availability. Following the major highs and lows of the 1920s to the 1950s, Canada entered an era of 'nation-building' characterized by Keynesian public policy approaches that allowed the state to be heavily involved in economic and community development (Gibson & Barrett, 2018). In the early 1950s, the political goal of these policies was to address two imperatives: 1) the re-employment of millions of soldiers, and 2) addressing the massive infrastructure deficits to transition from wartime industrial production to consumer goods (Halseth *et al.*, 2019). In BC, the goal was accomplished through a model of industrial resource development, resulting in a 25-to-30-year period (1950s to 1980s) of rapid economic and community growth (Halseth *et al.*, 2019; Markey *et al.*, 2008a). Under this setting, many new resource towns were created across the northern BC landscape under the Instant Towns Act (1965), the most recent being Tumbler Ridge, constructed in 1981 to accommodate a

locally based mining workforce (Storey & Hall, 2018). These resource towns were developed to build both the natural resource economy and the provincial population.

The development of resource towns in northern BC and continued reliance of the region on the natural resource economy has many theoretical explanations, including staples theory and evolutionary economic geography. Staples theory, first developed by Harold Innis in the early 1900s (Hayter & Barnes, 1990), and then adapted by Watkins (1963), describes patterns of uneven economic development over space and time, and the “peripheral role extraction economies assume within the global economy” (Markey *et al.*, 2019, p.26). According to Argent (2017), Innis’s staples theory includes three major elements: 1) geography, which shapes the development fortunes of staples-dependent areas through the physical resource base and broader physical environment which determines access to those resources; 2) institutions, which determine access to natural resources and provide the large initial investment for resource development to take place; and 3) technology, which controls the demand and supply of staples commodities and the transport of the resources.

Staples regions are prone to volatility because they are vulnerable to external forces, characterized by what the literature calls, the staples ‘trap’ (Argent, 2017; Ryser *et al.*, 2019). This trap exists because of the inherent dependence of staples regions upon the demand of external markets, embedding a certain level of economic vulnerability. Staples regions also experience dependence on external sources for the large capital investment required to fund the high costs of natural resource development (Markey & Halseth, 2017). This funding is often in the form of foreign investment, stripping local autonomy over resource economies and contributing to what Innis coined as ‘truncated development’ (Markey *et al.*, 2008a). Building off this issue of control, Ryser *et al.* (2019) state that natural resource development activities

typically occur on Crown land governed by the provincial government. Under this model, local governments have no access or control over the fiscal resources to address the social and infrastructure pressures of resource development, including its boom-bust cycles, or to chart new development pathways (Ryser *et al.*, 2019). Powerful structural and behavioural processes produce and reproduce the staples trap as it becomes part of the rural local identity, impacting local cultural practices and politics (Argent, 2017).

Evolutionary economic geography (EEG) builds off staples theory but allows more space for human agency in the discussion of rural restructuring (Markey & Halseth, 2017). While staples theory is concerned with economic relationships, EEG is concerned with analyzing economic change over space and time (Argent, 2017; Markey *et al.*, 2019). In addition to the economic relationship of geography, institutions, and technology in staples theory, EEG also recognizes behavioural factors which impact how economic systems are shaped by actors, including individuals, companies, and institutions. Like the staples trap, EEG describes the path dependence faced by resource towns (Ryser *et al.*, 2019), referring to “past applications of specific technologies, previous rounds of investment, sunk costs, dynamic increasing returns, historical institutional structures, and social routines” (Argent, 2017, p.24) locking regions into a particular development trajectory.

2.1.2 Rural Economic Change

The post-war era in northern BC saw the development of many communities to house the working families of the natural resource economy. This development can be partially accredited to the election of the WAC Bennett’s conservative Social Credit Party in 1952 with their clear policies of province building and public investment (Markey *et al.*, 2008a). This period of economic and community development spurred the creation of many resource industry towns in

northern BC (Storey & Hall, 2018; Williston & Keller, 1997). The public investments during this time were focused on “transforming a sporadically settled hinterland into an integrated economic and political landscape” (Markey *et al.*, 2008a, p.414). The post-war era of economic and community growth lasted around 30 years until the early 1980s.

The 1980s marks another development era of considerable economic restructuring. The pressures of an increasingly globalized economy, on-going trade disputes, and a global recession contributed to the adoption of a neoliberal public policy approach (Ryser *et al.*, 2021). This approach liberalized property rights and market regulations, reduced barriers for the mobility of natural resource companies, and increased access to natural resources across the world (Halseth *et al.*, 2019). While the state still pursued natural resource development in northern BC, the focus shifted from community-building to lowering costs of production, resulting in state withdrawal in both social and economic terms (Gibson & Barrett, 2018; Halseth & Ryser, 2018).

The restructuring of the natural resource economy in the 1980s contributed to layoffs and closures, altering employment patterns, and replacing the post-war industry experience of growth and stability with intense economic fluctuations known as boom-bust cycles (Markey *et al.*, 2008a). The post-1980s also saw changes in the demands for the availability and mobility of labour as companies transitioned from single industry towns to relying on mobile drive-in/drive-out or fly-in/fly-out workforces (Storey & Hall, 2018). As a result, northern BC began losing rural population for the first time since the Second World War, impacting the region’s age structure with aging adults and the net loss of youth, a challenge that rural communities are still grappling with today. More recently, the natural resource economy is becoming increasingly digitalized reducing the number of required rural and small-town workers (Halseth, 2016; Storey & Hall, 2018). While digitalization can contribute to increased worker safety, increased

productivity, and cost savings, the impacts on rural and small-town places are significant. Not only will many jobs become remote and re-locate to major cities, but many entry level jobs, primarily located where the resource extraction takes place, will be lost (Storey, 2023).

Reduced financial support and increased downloading of government responsibilities through state downloading of service and infrastructure responsibilities further impacts rural and small-town places in northern BC (Ryser *et al.*, 2019; Markey *et al.*, 2008a). Increased responsibility for local governments to provide community infrastructure and service needs requires a robust local economy, but the significant economic changes occurring in the natural resource economy inhibit this. Further, the revenues of resource development are isolated from the costs associated with its success in the areas where natural resource extraction occurs. Senior government and natural resource companies acquire revenue while local governments bear the cost of the ongoing instability of boom-bust cycles (Ryser *et al.*, 2021). Development costs for natural resource communities can be exacerbated by a mobile workforce which can strain services such as housing and healthcare without contributing to the local tax base. Moreover, it is difficult for local governments to recoup the costs of natural resource development with capped municipal property taxes and reduced corporate tax rates. This applies if resource development activities even occur within municipal boundaries or if there is a benefit agreement in place (Gunton & Markey, 2021; Ryser *et al.*, 2019). The changing resource economy combined with state downloading of responsibility to local governments has transformed the nature of rural and small-town places for the people seeking employment and quality of life within them (Smith & Power, 2021; Sullivan *et al.*, 2014).

2.1.3 Rural Service Infrastructure and Provision

Prior to the Second World War, service availability and delivery in rural and small-town places across Canada was characterized by unevenness. Rural communities were entirely responsible for infrastructure and service provision, aside from major state infrastructure such as railroads. As a result, wealthier communities could provide better services, including healthcare and education, which led to better community futures than those of less wealthy communities (Halseth *et al.*, 2019). This unequal service pattern was restructured following the Second World War through extensive welfare state service investments in areas such as health, education, transportation, and recreation (Gibson & Barrett, 2018; Halseth & Williams, 1999; Ryser & Halseth, 2014).

Since the 1980s however, rural and small-town places across Canada have been undergoing rapid sociodemographic and economic changes (Halseth *et al.*, 2019; Markey *et al.*, 2008a; Markey *et al.*, 2012). These changes are the product of the 1980s global recession which fostered neoliberal public policies under the false assumption that economic and social goals could be separated (Gibson & Barrett, 2018). The transition from a Keynesian to neoliberal public policy approach reduced the role of the state and their public sector involvement, offloaded government assets, contracted out services, and effectively shifted government initiatives away from community-building (Markey *et al.*, 2019; Ryser & Halseth, 2014; Ryser *et al.*, 2018). From a service provision perspective, neoliberalism increased the role of the market and encouraged entrepreneurial leadership in public services, offloaded service delivery to the local level, and enhanced state focus on financial efficiencies rather than the quality or outcomes of services. These trends accelerated through the 1990s in rural Canada, increasing pressure on local organizations to respond, and contributing to the “fragmentation and erosion of the public

sector” (Ryser *et al.*, 2021, p.1624). While the private sector often picks up much of the infrastructure and service responsibility in urban areas, rural communities are often left without support due to small population size and large distances between communities, making them unfavourable for private service providers (Kelly & Hynes, 2018). Instead, rural communities are forced to seek creative service arrangements or withdraw services altogether (Halseth & Ryser, 2018; Ryser & Halseth, 2014).

The downloading of state responsibility to the local level without the downloading of jurisdiction or fiscal resources has resulted in increasing pressure on the non-profit sector to become service providers, “a role that was once played by government” (Gibson & Barrett, 2018, p.111). While service provision by local non-profit organizations and volunteers may increase the relevance of services, major challenges impede their success, including attitudinal, operational, communication, financial, human resource, infrastructure, and policy barriers (Ryser & Halseth, 2014). New models of rural service delivery that provide a foundation to create social capital, provide flexible and innovative services, support regional connections, recognize place-based solutions, and encourage collaborative approaches are required (Halseth & Ryser, 2006; Halseth *et al.*, 2019; Sullivan *et al.*, 2014). One of these innovative responses is shared service and infrastructure arrangements, which “pool financial resources and expand infrastructure capable of supporting local government and community service initiatives” (Ryser *et al.*, 2018, p.162). Overall, the literature states that a solution to the challenges of rural service provision is increased synergies between all levels of government, with top-down actors and agencies alongside bottom-up communities and regions to co-create initiatives that are place-based and sustainable.

2.1.4 Rural Community Development

Local governments are responsible for building local capacity in the context of state withdrawal and downloading of service and infrastructure responsibilities (Nel & Connelly, 2018; Ryser *et al.*, 2019). Pertinent to this capacity building is the development of social capital and social cohesion (Halseth *et al.*, 2017; Ryser & Halseth, 2014), which directly impacts local resilience to economic, political, and social pressures (Halseth & Ryser, 2006). Markey *et al.* (2008b) describe building social capital as creating social assets, which in economic terms, can be understood as stock (levels of trust) and flow (collective action). Bonding activities between group members and bridging activities with new group members build collective trust which can be called upon for collective action (Markey *et al.*, 2008b). With local governments facing greater responsibility to provide services, new models of rural service delivery must provide a foundation to create social capital to support flexible and innovative bottom-up approaches (Halseth & Ryser, 2006). Similarly, new models of community service provision “recognize the important role that social capital and social cohesion play in the capacity of small communities” (Sullivan *et al.*, 2014, p.235).

Despite the withdrawal of the state from rural and small-town community development, the literature asserts that successful community development initiatives must be co-constructed with top-down government actors and agencies and bottom-up communities and regions (Halseth *et al.*, 2019; Ryser *et al.*, 2018). The limited jurisdiction and authority of local governments requires partnerships with senior levels of government; however, local control of community development initiatives is still critical (Halseth & Williams, 1999; Markey *et al.*, 2008b). This call for collaboration requires local government models to transition to ‘governance’ models (Ryser *et al.*, 2021; Zirul *et al.*, 2015). Ryser *et al.* (2021) describe the transition from

government to governance as “the shift from formal structures and responsibilities of government to cross-sectoral partnerships and networks with private sector and civil society stakeholders that become more integrated with the state and engaged in flexible decision making and implementation of strategies” (p.1620). The shift to governance relies on the development of social capital and cohesion as it is dependent on the trust and collective capacity of the community (Ryser *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, Markey *et al.* (2008a) explain that shifting to local governance fosters regional dialogue and cooperation, and local participation in governance fosters a sense of ownership over community development initiatives and outcomes.

Community development initiatives have often undervalued the potential contributions of youth (Theodori & Theodori, 2015). However, political and economic restructuring provides an opportunity to engage youth in the development process and make targeted investments to improve youth’s human and social capital that could ‘spiral up’ to other forms of capital (Ryser *et al.*, 2012). Youth engagement in community development fosters empowerment which is linked to local resiliency, “youth are empowered to the extent that they are able, and allowed, to make contributions to the community, seen by others as resources, and feel free of threats to participation” (Brennan *et al.*, 2017, p.15). Youth that are engaged in community development are more invested in the long term outcomes of the community, fostering a local sense of place.

For community development to effectively engage top-down and bottom-up actors in governance models, it must also recognize the importance of place and be grounded in an understanding of the region (Halseth *et al.*, 2017; Hayter, 2017; Ryser *et al.*, 2019; Sullivan *et al.*, 2014). The literature discusses the importance of a place-based approach to community development which understands local context and capacity. Sullivan *et al.* (2014) argue that new models of community development must address place-based differences “with regards to

governance, identifying priorities, and optimizing strengths and assets” for new models to “fill gaps in a neoliberal era” (p.237). This place-based perspective must also understand the context of the wider region, described in the literature as ‘new regionalism’ (Markey *et al.*, 2008a). Including a new regionalist perspective in rural and small-town community development includes scaling-up and working in partnership across the region to address the structural conditions which hinder rural community development (Halseth *et al.*, 2019; Zirul *et al.*, 2015). In addition to developing regional capacity, a new regionalist perspective also requires communities to situate themselves within the “broader (even global) context of resources, competition, and patterns of change” (Markey *et al.*, 2008b, p.348) to create contextually appropriate development activities that can be sustained.

2.1.5 The Future of Rural and Small-Town Places

While Canadian public policy still fits under the neoliberal approach, some scholars argue that we have entered a new era characterized by economic collapse, the unevenness of globalization, and the reactionary incoherence of public policy (Halseth *et al.*, 2019; Markey *et al.*, 2019; Ryser *et al.*, 2021). This policy incoherence is caused by reduced state investments in community development with no change to the authority of the state, thus increasing the responsibility of local governments but not their jurisdiction, authority, or access to fiscal resources. This relationship between upper level and local governments further exacerbates policy incoherence as federal and provincial governments try to set a policy agenda and be in control while downloading the responsibility to execute the agenda and allowing flexibility of the market. The result of this chaotic public policy approach for rural and small-town places is the lack of a coherent vision for rural development and constraints on an ability to set their own vision. This lack of vision has enabled state response to rural issues being to revert to old

economic models of chasing natural resource development rather than strategically investing in the future of communities (Halseth *et al.*, 2019; Markey *et al.*, 2012). Halseth *et al.* (2018) do argue however, that this era is also marked by a willingness for innovation and experimentation in community development.

The rate of sociodemographic and economic changes in rural and small-town places have accelerated over recent decades, requiring new visions for the future of these places (Markey *et al.*, 2012). However, this pace of change also challenges the responsiveness of large institutions such as senior government, thus bottom-up community development that builds on local capacity is critical. A major challenge facing rural and small-town places is the need to recreate themselves in the context of significant economic and sociodemographic change. The changing nature of the natural resource economy combined with state withdrawal from community development is forcing rural and small-town places to attract residents, especially youth, for reasons other than traditional employment (Connelly & Nel, 2017). Hayter (2017) explains this shift in rural community identity as moving from a ‘workplace’ to a ‘homeplace.’ This reorientation requires local governments to shift from a managerial role to an entrepreneurial role, requiring flexibility, a willingness to take risks, and the ability to stay focused on the future (Halseth *et al.*, 2019; Hayter, 2017; Sorensen, 2017). This shift will not look the same in every community as some communities have the resources to provide high-level amenities and services and others do not (Connelly & Nel, 2017). Overall, rural and small-town places must take ownership of their future, forging a new path that it is different from their resource-dependent history.

2.2 Resident Recruitment and Retention

Sociodemographic change has been a constant in rural communities since the economic and service restructuring of the early 1980s. Since then, service infrastructure has aged, the original workforce is retiring, and many youth and young families have migrated out of these communities (Barnes *et al.*, 1999; Halseth & Ryser, 2018; Markey *et al.*, 2008b). The most pressing issue for rural communities is not only that youth are leaving following high school graduation, but that many are not returning at all, and other young people are not migrating in. This issue of youth out-migration and a lack of in-migration of young people is exacerbated by the aging population of residents who do stay in rural communities. Rural resident recruitment and retention must then target *all* age groups, from youth to seniors, and be tailored to their needs and general trends. However, there is evidence of rising migration to some rural areas in Canada, largely due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Breen & Robison, 2021; McLay & Foster, 2023; School of Environmental Design and Rural Development, 2023).

The other side of youth out-migration is the aging of the population that stays, discussed in the literature as ‘aging in place’ (Halseth & Ryser, 2018; McQuillan & Laszlo, 2022; Ryser & Halseth, 2014), and in northern BC’s resource towns specifically, ‘resource frontier aging’ (Halseth *et al.*, 2019; Ryser *et al.*, 2012; Ryser *et al.*, 2018). Since resource towns were originally built to house the working families of the natural resource economy, many lack appropriate infrastructure and services to support aging in place (Sullivan *et al.*, 2014; Winterton *et al.*, 2018). The lack of physical and social infrastructure for seniors is exacerbated by the distance of rural communities from urban service centres.

2.2.1 Push Factors

There is a vast literature on rural out-migration, and the out-migration of youth to urban areas is a prominent concern. The most cited reason for youth to leave rural areas is employment and education opportunities (Avis, 2013; Demi *et al.*, 2009; Stalker & Phyne, 2014; Looker, 2021; MacMichael *et al.*, 2015). These studies do reference other quality of life factors, such as social opportunities, but education and employment opportunities are regarded as the most pertinent aspect of youth migration planning. However, McLay and Foster (2023) note that migration “is a subjective process that is influenced as much by perceptions and discourses that link success with big cities as by actual job opportunities” (p.24). The economic restructuring of rural places has impacted job stability and availability for local youth, prompting out-migration to more economically diversified locations. Many scholars recommend linking education and local employment in rural communities to address youth out-migration (Foster & Main, 2018; Stalker & Phyne, 2014; Robichaud, 2014; Schafft, 2016; Theodori & Theodori, 2015). For example, Avis (2013) recommends promoting summer student and co-op opportunities to connect high school graduates with local employers.

In addition to the lack of post-secondary institutions, readiness for post-secondary has been identified as a push factor for youth in rural and small-town places. Rural high schools face challenges with limited course offerings, including lower access to Advanced Placement (AP) courses (Anderson & Chang, 2011; Gagnon & Mattingly, 2016). As a result of poor access and low teaching capacity, rural students are less likely to enroll in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) courses (Nielsen & Nashon, 2007; Saw & Agger, 2021). There is not a robust body of contemporary literature on student readiness in the northern and rural BC context; most of the literature is based in the rural US. These studies found that rural high schools are under-

resourced with low teaching capacity and high levels of poverty (Bouck, 2004; Morton *et al.*, 2018), contributing to lower academic outcomes for rural students compared to national statistics for college readiness (Corley, 2018). While the Canadian context differs in some ways, one study of rural BC high schools also reported high turnover rates of teachers which affected course availability, staffing stability, and student success (Neilsen and Nashon, 2007). Research from both Canada and the US found that students from families with high socioeconomic status are the most likely to pursue post-secondary education and aspire to leave their rural communities (Bouck, 2004; Corley, 2018; Sherman & Sage, 2011).

Researchers have also made connections between rural out-migration and demographic factors, including gender and socioeconomic status. McLay and Foster (2023) found that parents' education and socioeconomic capital influenced youth's chances of out-migration and the benefits they gained from leaving, including pursuing higher levels of education. Additionally, more young women than men leave their rural communities for education as well as more diversified labour markets (McLaughlin, 2014). While rural communities are encouraged to improve education and employment opportunities for all youth, it is critical to consider whether these opportunities cater more to certain demographics, such as men. Gender may also influence youth's sense of place and feelings about community life. Young rural women often express more discontentment and feelings of constraint in their home community than men (Donkersloot, 2011; Glendinning *et al.*, 2003). However, Robichaud (2014) found that more women returned to their rural communities later in life than men, often to raise families.

Quality of life factors have also been shown to influence youth out-migration, including the prevalence and diversity of recreational, social, and lifestyle opportunities (Liu, 2015). For example, MacMichael *et al.* (2015) found that quality of life factors were the main motivator for

out-migration for rural youth, and some youth were willing to trade economic stability for their desired lifestyle. To address this gap in rural communities, the literature recommends youth-focused planning (Anderson, 2015) and involving youth in community development (Eacott & Sonn, 2006; Foster & Main, 2018; Robichaud, 2014; Theodori & Theodori, 2015). Community development that focuses on social and recreational opportunities for young people requires a reorientation of rural communities from supporting working families to supporting quality of life and amenity migration. This reorientation is closely related to employment and educational opportunities as the literature is recognizing the changing nature and mobility of work (Markey *et al.*, 2012; McQuillan & Laszlo, 2022).

2.2.2 Mitigating Factors

A growing body of literature explores the relationship between youth migration and feelings of belonging, place attachment, and sense of place (Choi & Kramer, 2024; Demi *et al.*, 2009; MacBride, 2014). Place attachment is understood as the positive emotional bond between individuals and their environment (Bernsen *et al.*, 2022), a concept that reflects how youth relate to their environment and community. Sense of place builds on place attachment as a “multidimensional concept that includes identity, attachment, and dependence” (Bernsen *et al.*, 2022, p.568). While tangible factors, such as employment opportunities, are important drivers of youth migration, it is sense of place factors that primarily influence where youth migrate, including whether they return to their home communities. Stough-Hunter and Lekies (2020) found that the strongest predictor of rural youth returning to their home communities following post-secondary graduation was place attachment, defined by Bernsen *et al.* (2022) as the inherently emotional positive bond between individuals and their environment. However, place attachment was closely linked to community satisfaction which refers to physical community

aspects, demonstrating that place connections are not only emotional. In other studies, strong sense of place among rural youth was linked to higher levels of community engagement (Brennan *et al.*, 2007). Similarly, Eacott and Sonn (2006) note, youth that feel accepted by their community are more likely to access the resources and opportunities afforded to them, thus increasing their community engagement. Therefore, engaging youth in the community and fostering their sense of belonging is community development.

Place connections begin early in life, so it is critical that youth are engaged in their community from a young age (Theodori & Theodori, 2015). As Robichaud (2014) argues, “the more young people like their environment and get involved in their community, the more they want to live there” (p.75). In many rural communities, place connections are built through the natural environment. Mc Laughlin *et al.* (2014) found that rural youth who valued outdoor recreation and a clean natural environment were more likely to stay in or return to their home community. Due to the connection between the natural environment and rural sense of place, Foster and Main (2018) and Robichaud (2014) recommend promoting outdoor recreation, environmental appreciation, and the small-town lifestyle for rural resident recruitment and retention. For some rural residents, place connections established during childhood extend through the life course. Casey (2021) and Porter (2022) both found that many residents chose to migrate to rural communities because they believed that it was best for their children. These beliefs were often based on positive associations with their own rural childhoods. The influence of positive childhood experiences illustrates the importance of quality of life factors that begin early in life for community development.

2.3 Conclusion

Following the major highs and lows of the 1920s to the 1950s, Canada entered another era of “nation-building” characterized by interventionist and Keynesian public policy approaches. In BC, the goal was accomplished through a model of industrial resource development, resulting in a 25-to-30-year period of rapid economic and community growth to build the natural resource economy and to increase the provincial population. This era of development continued until the 1980s when economic and political restructuring stimulated intense economic fluctuations and downloaded senior government responsibility for public services and infrastructure to the municipal level. Since then, service infrastructure has aged, the original workforce is retiring, and many youth and young families have migrated out of these communities. Rural youth are pushed from their communities due to a lack of economic diversification, few opportunities for post-secondary education, and quality of life factors, such as social and recreational opportunities. However, feelings of belonging and attachment mitigate this pattern of out-migration as youth with a strong sense of place are the most likely to return. To facilitate community connection, rural community development must engage local youth and focus on building their human capital.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

The issues of rural community change and youth migration are complex, therefore, this research required flexible and adaptable methodologies. My research was grounded in qualitative and community-based research (CBR) methodologies with an exploratory case study design and employed a mixed methods research (MMR) approach. The nature of this research aligns with qualitative and CBR methodologies because it is interested in lived experiences, connects academic interests with community interests, and produced useful results grounded in local knowledge. The case study and MMR design allowed me to capture youth experiences and perspectives alongside sociodemographic and economic data for Tumbler Ridge (see Chapter 4 for case study details). By including a greater breadth and diversity of data, MMR provides a greater depth of understanding. Channeling this MMR through a case study approach enabled the research results to be detailed and context-specific, providing both a deep understanding of youth perspectives in Tumbler Ridge and a nuanced understanding of the broader topics of rural youth experiences and migration planning. Each of these methodologies informed the research methods, including a content analysis of community documents and plans, a review of Statistics Canada and BC Stats data, key informant interviews with community stakeholders, and focus groups with local youth.

3.1 Qualitative Research

Hay and Cope (2021) describe qualitative research as research focusing on real-world, empirical data and deeper insights on relationships, connections, processes, and theories through researcher interpretation. Qualitative research epistemologies are often rooted in critical theory perspectives and value human experiences, perspectives, emotions, relationships, differences, and cultural practices (Hay & Cope, 2021). By its nature, qualitative research is flexible, cutting

across disciplines and subject matter to include a complex and interconnected family of terms, concepts, and assumptions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2021). From a Geography discipline perspective, qualitative research is concerned with the human production of place, and how people and place shape and are shaped by each other.

While quantitative research is concerned with numerical and statistical data which shows the extent of a phenomenon and correlations between forces, there are always gaps and outliers leaving room for deeper understanding. Qualitative research methodologies can fill these gaps; however, Hay and Cope (2021) warn against describing qualitative research as simply a counter to quantitative research because it asks fundamentally different questions. Instead of the quantitative approach of measuring and analyzing relationships between variables, qualitative research emphasizes processes and meanings that cannot be measured in terms of quantity or frequency (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Further, qualitative research typically functions under the paradigm that reality is socially constructed and that there are multiple truths. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) argue that qualitative research is a “situated activity that locates the observer in the world,” (p.3) encouraging an interpretive and naturalistic research approach.

A qualitative approach lends itself well to case study research (Creswell, 2014) allowing me to focus on the relationships between youth and place, processes of community change, and connections to youth migration decisions. Despite my use of mixed methods, this research is still primarily qualitative as I drew upon the real-world experiences and stories of Tumbler Ridge youth to develop deeper insights on relationships, connections, processes, and theories through my own interpretation. Careful attention to rigour, trustworthiness, and objectivity was necessary as qualitative research required personal interpretation and ‘meaning making’ of data (Creswell, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Additionally, qualitative research is designed to be *intensive*

rather than *extensive*, so some aspects of the study may be case-specific while others are generalizable and transferable.

3.2 Community-Based Research

This research was grounded in a CBR methodology which connects academic interests with community interests (Kindon, 2021). CBR is rooted in participatory action research (PAR) (Halseth *et al.*, 2016), a combination of participatory research (PR), with its epistemology grounded in local struggles and knowledge, and action research (AR), which informs change through testing theory (Kindon, 2021). Halseth *et al.* (2016) explain that PAR and CBR seek to create change through research rather than simply studying events; in this way, CBR is more than a methodology, it is a form of activism (Breitbart, 2016). Traditional research approaches stress the objectivity of the researcher, but CBR advocates that community connections enhance reliability by grounding the research in local context and generating findings that are more useful to the community (Halseth *et al.*, 2016). Further, CBR is informed and shaped by the context of place and motivated by place-based development which prioritizes the assets and aspirations of the community as a focus for the development process of the research and its outcomes. The goal of CBR is to collaboratively produce new knowledge that can support change in communities.

Kindon (2010) emphasizes the three critical elements of PAR as participation, co-learning, and collective action. Rather than informing community development through rigid theoretically informed academic perspectives, CBR allowed this research to value local knowledge through community participation and the meaningful integration of local knowledge. As Halseth *et al.* (2016) explain, “those who experience phenomena are well positioned to understand it and by virtue, contribute to theory” (p.30). Integrating local knowledge through CBR increased both the relevance of my research to Tumbler Ridge and the likelihood that

results are implemented. Participation and co-learning throughout the data collection and analysis phases of research enabled the co-creation of knowledge which leads to more informed local decision-making and more equitable and sustainable research outcomes.

Kindon (2021) states that participatory research techniques must be accompanied by more in-depth social research methods to ensure rigour. Halseth *et al.* (2016) add that participatory research requires a deep understanding and inclusion of the social and cultural context of the places they study to ensure rigour, validity, and to contribute to meaningful community change. Moreover, as Denzin and Lincoln (2011) state, “all research has political implications. There is no value-free science” (p.5), so while the non-neutral stance of CBR may be critiqued as a weakness, I argue that no mode of human inquiry is objective.

While my research is not true PAR due to the need to balance expectations and time, I was committed to participation, collaboration, and the usability of research results. My research focus and potential research outcomes were discussed with local stakeholders prior to formal data collection. This engagement continued throughout the project with processes of participant-checking following data collection and analysis, and the co-mobilization of research results.

3.3 Case Study Research

With its focus on Tumbler Ridge, this research adopts a case study approach. While there is no one agreed upon definition for case study research, Yin (2014) has developed a twofold definition: 1) an empirical inquiry that explores a phenomenon in depth and within its real-world context; 2) an inquiry that copes with many more variables of interest than data points, relies on multiple sources of evidence and the need to triangulate data, and benefits from prior theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis (p.16-17). Therefore, case study research is an

all-encompassing methodology that can be integrated with many other methodologies and employ a variety of research methods.

The strength of case study research is its ability to provide detailed and context-specific data to generate a place-based explanation and insights for further research. Implementing a case study research approach began prior to fieldwork with a review of the academic and community literature on Tumbler Ridge and rural youth issues (Yin, 1994). While internal validity was determined through analyzing causal relationships, external validity was dependent upon the document analysis of academic literature and community documents, and its generalizability and replicability to other cases (Yin, 1994).

Case study research is challenged by a perceived lack of rigour and generalizability due to its focus on one specific case (Yin, 2014). However, Baxter (2021) argues that ‘good’ case studies “are so richly described (theorized) that one generally finds it quite easy to draw parallels with contexts outside the case” (p.112). If the case study is designed appropriately, the analysis is attentive to both concrete and abstract concepts, and systematic procedures are followed (Baxter, 2021; Yin, 2012), case studies can provide both a deep understanding of a case and a nuanced understanding of a broader topic. The case study selection process is described in section 4.1.

3.4 Mixed Methods Research

This research employed a MMR approach. According to Plano Clark and Ivankova (2017), MMR indicates the process of integrating quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis to understand a research problem. MMR not only requires the use of multiple methods of data collection and analysis, but the mixing or integration of multiple methods throughout the entire research process, from developing research questions to drawing conclusions (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). While definitions of MMR in the literature vary,

I use the definition presented by Creswell *et al.* (2011, p.218) as cited in Plano Clark and Ivankova (2017), “mixed methods research comprises a participant-centered, culturally grounded set of techniques that employ, in tandem, methodologically rigorous quantitative and qualitative approaches in an integrated, theory driven manner” (p.15).

Rather than focused on theory, MMR is a concrete and practical approach to research (Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2017) that provided greater breadth and depth of understanding. MMR also heightened the validity of the research through increasing methodological triangulation by gleaning the best of each research approach while simultaneously offsetting their weaknesses (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). Moreover, Halseth *et al.* (2016) state that utilizing mixed methods of data collection in CBR captures a wider range of experiences and facilitates “broader, inclusive, and long-term engagement” (p.221).

An argument against the use of MMR is presented by Plano Clark and Johnson (2017) who state that triangulating quantitative and qualitative data is not a viable option due to inherent differences in the types of data. Additionally, Schoonenboom and Johnson (2017) present the argument that quantitative and qualitative methods can never study the same phenomenon because each is backed by fundamentally different assumptions. My research is rooted in qualitative methodology and the assumption that there are multiple socially constructed realities. However, I also see value in the quantitative measurement and analysis of social phenomena to illustrate specific areas of importance, such as the economy (see section 4.3) and demography (see section 4.4) of Tumbler Ridge. MMR adds to the value of both forms of data rather than diminishing it.

3.5 Researcher Positionality

Trustworthiness is increased through transparent and reflexive qualitative research, requiring the researcher to acknowledge and confront bias rather than strive for objectivity. As much of the feminist, postcolonial, and post-Marxist literature asserts, all knowledge is produced in specific circumstances which shape it in some way; therefore, knowledge must be situated through examinations of positionality (Rose, 1997) and critical reflexivity (Catungal & Dowling, 2021). Further, Soedirgo and Glas (2020) assert that researcher positionality cannot be reduced to demographic characteristics because it is inherently contextual, as well as informed by our experiences, political stances, and other aspects of our “social biography” (p.528). While much of the literature focuses on the importance of positionality or critiques of positionality statements, there is little direction on how to effectively address researcher positionality throughout the research process. Nevertheless, I will ensure careful consideration of my intersectional positionality as the researcher.

I am a 25-year-old white woman and fourth generation Canadian born and raised in BC and am currently pursuing a master’s degree. Each of these aspects of my identity potentially contribute to power imbalances with participants in Tumbler Ridge. As a young adult, I am close in age to the senior high school students I was engaging with, but I am not their peer. Additionally, my gender may have influenced the comfort levels of youth who engaged with me, with potentially higher comfort levels for female youth and lower levels for male youth. My educational level may have also contributed to asymmetrical power relations and intimidation with some participants, particularly interviewees who may not have post-secondary education. I anticipate that my education level, age, and gender will not be intimidating to the high school teachers and staff, rather the power imbalance may be reversed as asymmetrical power relations

also exist when research participants hold positions of influence in comparison to the researcher (Dowling, 2005).

My life experiences also contribute to my positionality and will impact my research. I was born and raised in Abbotsford, BC and migrated to Prince George, BC when I was twenty years old. Therefore, I recently made the migration decision that I discussed with senior high school students in Tumbler Ridge, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of their migration planning processes. However, this relatability may also contribute to the misinterpretation of their perspectives because I may assume that they are like me. Addressing the impacts of my positionality on the research requires ongoing critical reflexivity through acknowledging biases and maintaining an open mind during fieldwork. England (1994) also recommends adopting a supplicant position when the researcher's positionality is intimidating to participants, described as the explicit acknowledgement by the researcher of their "unequivocal acceptance that the knowledge of the person being researched (at least regarding the particular questions being asked) is greater than that of the researcher" (p.82). Adopting this position will aid in addressing the impacts of my positionality.

3.5.1 Insider/Outsider Status of the Researcher

Power relations between the researcher and participants can also depend on the insider/outsider status of the researcher which is directly related to their positionality and the extent to which positionality serves as a barrier or bridge to the research depends on this insider or outsider status (O'Connor, 2004). An insider is similar to and accepted by the participants while an outsider is less similar and may not be accepted by participants (Acker, 2000). Advantages of being an insider include greater ease in establishing rapport with participants and a greater reliability in data interpretation because of shared knowledge. However, O'Connor

(2004) also warns that insider status also necessitates caution because it can diminish the researcher's interpretive ability by making presumptions rather than clarifying participants' contributions. Outsider status can also be advantageous because participants may articulate concepts more clearly to an outsider because they do not assume pre-existing knowledge and an outsider is less likely to miss nuances of everyday life in an unfamiliar setting (Acker, 2000; Dowling, 2000).

I am an outsider in this research because I am not a youth living in Tumbler Ridge; however, I am also an insider as a young person who made the migration decision to leave her hometown. My personal experiences of leaving my urban hometown to move to a smaller city in northern BC provided my initial interest in youth migration decisions. As a result, this research was born out of dual insider and outsider northern and rural identity, and a desire to understand what matters to youth in rural and small-town places. My insider status as a young resident of northern BC is contested because I am not a resident of Tumbler Ridge, and I have never been a resident of a remote resource town. Similarly, my insider status as a relatively recent high school graduate is contested because I did not graduate from Tumbler Ridge Secondary School. Moreover, as someone interested in the future of rural youth, I had some level of insider status with the community members I interviewed. The duality of my positionality as both an insider and outsider in this research is important as it impacted the research and required ongoing reflexivity and acknowledgement.

3.6 Research Methods

Data collection began with a review of the academic literature on the themes of community change, rural service provision, community development, resident recruitment and retention, and rural youth sense of place. A review of municipal plans, community newspapers,

and quantitative demographic, economic, and labour data from Statistics Canada and BC Stats provided important community context. Key informant interviews were conducted with organizations that provide programs, services, supports, or employment to youth in Tumbler Ridge. Focus groups were conducted with Tumbler Ridge youth between the ages of 15 and 19. All research, including primary and secondary methods, were reviewed by UNBC's Research Ethics Board (file # 6009548; see Appendix 1.1 and 1.2).

3.6.1 Observations and Field Notes

Community observations and field notes served as informal research methods to build an in-depth understanding of Tumbler Ridge and its residents. While the data generated through community observation and fieldnotes was not formally analyzed, it was critical to gain and maintain contextual knowledge and allowed me to reflexively examine my observations. Halseth *et al.* (2016) assert that active participation in community events, such as community dinners, helps to gather additional perspectives and enhance the reliability of the research. During my time in Tumbler Ridge, I attended the Spring Registration event at the Community Centre in May 2024, participated in the Geopark Fishing Derby in June 2024, attended the Canada Day celebrations at the Community Centre in July 2024, and attended the Tumbler Ridge Fall Fair in September 2024. Observation is an active choice that includes immersion in community events and active listening in order to “become attuned to what matters in a particular time, place, and social setting” (Kearns, 2005, p.202). Community observations and informal conversations with residents increased my contextual understanding of the community and visibility as a researcher and allowed me to better understand the place-specific experiences shared by research participants.

An important product of community observation was the recording of field notes. According to Phillippi and Lauderdale (2018), field notes are essential to rigorous qualitative research to enhance data, provide context for analysis, and improve the depth of qualitative findings. Field notes taken during or immediately after the interview and focus group processes were also used to add important nonverbal content into transcripts. Field notes provided a detailed record of my experiences while conducting fieldwork and encouraged me to be reflexive about myself and my research while in the field.

3.6.2 Community Visits

I made initial community visits to Tumbler Ridge in April and May 2024 prior to formal data collection to familiarize myself with the community and introduce myself to potential participants and other community stakeholders. These initial community visits were vital to both gain contextual knowledge of the community and to develop relationships with community stakeholders. My first visit to Tumbler Ridge was from April 8th to 11th, 2024 to familiarize myself with the community and hold informal meetings with interested community stakeholders. During these four days, I met with senior staff at the Geopark, Public Library, Community Centre, Youth Centre, and the District of Tumbler Ridge's Economic Development Office. I also attended the Community Centre's Spring Registration Event on April 10th and interacted with many volunteer organizations, including the Lions Club, Community Gardens Society, Public Library, Youth Soccer, and Mental Health Support Group in addition to Community Centre staff. My second visit to Tumbler Ridge was from May 13th to 15th, 2024 to build on the connections that I had made in my previous visit and to develop new relationships in the community. During these three days, I met with the Museum Foundation of Tumbler Ridge, the Fire Hall, and the Youth Centre.

Formal data collection began during my stay in Tumbler Ridge from June 10th to July 3rd, 2024, during which interviews with staff of community organizations and SD 59 were conducted. During this time, I rented a room from a local Tumbler Ridge resident whose family has lived in the area since before the town was created, allowing me to immerse myself in the community and gain greater local knowledge. Additional visits to the community were made on July 16th and 24th, 2024 to conduct focus groups with youth. I returned to Tumbler Ridge after the start of the new school year, from September 8th to 13th, 2024, to conduct the final youth focus groups and interview education providers at Tumbler Ridge Secondary School (TRSS). During this fall visit, I rented a room from another Tumbler Ridge resident, making additional community connections.

Research results were checked by interested participants over Zoom between February 24th and 26th, 2025. I invited all interview and focus group participants to meet and discuss the research results to ensure that the findings resonated with them and reflected their perspectives. My final visit to Tumbler Ridge was from May 20th to 23rd to disseminate the final results and recommendations for the community. I developed a community report with the key findings and recommendations for the District, service providers, and TRSS. The report was shared with all research participants, Town Council, and any other interested community members. I presented at the Town Council meeting on May 20th and held a public presentation on May 22nd. Copies of the thesis will also be donated to Town Hall and the Library.

3.7 Primary Data Collection

3.7.1 Key Informant Interviews

Key informant interviews comprised the primary method of data collection with participants outside of local youth. Key informant interviews are advantageous because of their

ability to provide nuanced and detailed explanations of community change and youth issues. I employed semi-structured interviews, which have some degree of predetermined order to the questions and topics but are also conversational and flexible (Dunn, 2021; Longhurst, 2010). The interview questions were content-focused and dealt with topics and issues based on the literature to be important and relevant but also allowed for open responses to discover what was relevant to the interviewee about the topics and issues discussed (see Appendix 2.3 and 2.4).

Babbie (2013) defines an informant as someone who is well-versed in the social phenomenon being studied and is willing to share what they know about it. In this research, ‘key informants’ included the staff of community organizations in Tumbler Ridge that provide programs, services, or employment to local youth, as well as teachers and staff at TRSS, and SD 59 administration. A total of 19 interviews with 21 participants were conducted in June, July, and September 2024 (Table 3.1). Due to the small size of Tumbler Ridge’s institutions and organizations, all relevant decision-makers and providers were invited to participate (26 total invitations). While not all those who were invited participated, all relevant sectors are represented in the data. Participants ranged in age from 25 to 56, with four men and 17 women¹, and 17 of the interviewees were parents at the time of their interview². Interviews lasted between 45 minutes and two hours and were conducted in-person at a location in Tumbler Ridge determined by each participant.

¹ The gender of participants was assumed by the researcher. It was not a specific question in the interviews.

² The parental status of participants was asked by the researcher.

Table 3.1*Interview Participants by Sector*

Sector	Total Number of Participants
Local government	5
Recreational service providers	3
Community service providers	5
Youth service providers	2
Education administration	2
Education providers	4
Total	21

The strength of key informant interviews is their detailed and exploratory nature to collect a diversity of individual meanings, opinions, and experiences and investigate complex motivations and perspectives (Dunn, 2021). Interviews can also show respect for and empower interviewees through using personal experiences, perspectives, and meanings to inform research findings. Key informant interviewees can push these benefits even further as their knowledge or expertise on a particular topic can offer a deeper understanding and explanation of issues (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

Key informant interviews required critical reflexivity due to the differential power dynamics in play. A good rapport was established with many interviewees prior to the interview through informal meetings to increase comfort and level of understanding. As recommended by Dunn (2021), a ‘warm-up’ period before the formal interview began was also created to allow the interviewee and I to connect and settle in prior to official data collection. Key informant interviews can be criticized for generating biased findings if interviewees are not carefully selected, and if too few interviewees are included, the validity of findings may be further affected. These potential issues were addressed through a broad sampling of community organizations and the inclusion of more than one interviewee from most organizations. Key

informant interviews are one of few ways to gain detailed knowledge from those on the ‘inside’ of a community issue.

3.7.2 Focus Groups

This research utilized focus groups with youth between the ages of 15 and 19 as the primary data collection method to explore youth migration in Tumbler Ridge. Focus groups are defined as a small group of research participants discussing a topic or issue defined by a researcher (Cameron, 2021). The job of the researcher is to facilitate the conversation and keep the group on-topic, but otherwise is non-directive, allowing participants to explore and discuss the subject as they please (Longhurst, 2010). Focus groups were exploratory rather than descriptive to gather information and collect insights the issue of rural youth migration (Babbie, 2013).

Interaction between participants is a key part of focus groups, stimulating a synergistic effect that can generate far more information than other oral research methods, including aspects of the topic not anticipated by the researcher (Babbie, 2013). Additionally, participants are likely to be more candid among others who have had similar experiences. Focus groups also provide opportunities for participants to explore different points of view and reconsider their own ideas, potentially transforming knowledges and understandings (Cameron, 2021). Employing a group oral research method is important because youth issues do not exist in a vacuum, and the relationships between people and place are the basis of this research.

Two focus groups were conducted in July 2024 and two more were conducted in September 2024. Focus group participants were between the ages of 15 and 19 and resided in Tumbler Ridge at the time of the focus group (Table 4.2). The first focus group took place at the

Tumbler Ridge Youth Centre and the rest took place in a meeting room at the Tumbler Ridge Community Centre. A dinner of pizza, chips, fruit, and juice was provided for each focus group.

Table 3.2

Focus Group Participants

Focus Group Demographics	Total Number of Participants
Men	6
Women	7
Total	13
15 years	3
16 years	5
17 years	2
18 years	1
19 years	2
Total	13

The literature discusses the importance of the size of the focus groups as too few participants limits discussion, and too many restricts full participation (Cameron, 2021). Focus groups were capped at 8 participants. The composition of the focus group is another point of consideration as discussions of sensitive or controversial topics may arise and confidentiality cannot be guaranteed (Longhurst, 2010). To address this confidentiality issue, I discussed the issue of ‘over-disclosing’ with participants. This confidentiality issue can also contribute to generating data of questionable merit as it is difficult to discern when participants are speaking honestly or are being influenced to speak or stay silent on contentious topics. I addressed these potential limitations by discussing them with participants before the focus group and providing the option for individual or small group interviews for youth.

3.7.3 Participant Sampling

All interview and focus group participants were recruited through non-probability and purposive sampling techniques as participants with specific characteristics and experiences were

required for this research (Babbie, 2013; Yegidis *et al.*, 1999). Focus group participants were recruited through criterion sampling (Stratford & Bradshaw, 2021) of Tumbler Ridge youth between the ages 15 and 19 years. Posters were displayed around the community, including at the Community Centre, Library, Youth Centre, grocery store, and coffee shop (see Appendix 3.1). The same poster was also posted in community Facebook groups. This sample is non-representative of all youth in Tumbler Ridge or youth in other rural communities

Similarly, criterion sampling was used to recruit community members that are important in the context of rural youth for key informant interviews. These key informants included the staff of community organizations in Tumbler Ridge that provide programs, services, or employment to local youth, as well as teachers and staff at TRSS, and SD 59 administration. Sampling criteria for these participants included engagement in education, services, programming, or employment for Tumbler Ridge youth. I also asked participants to suggest other potential participants based on these criteria to ensure a representative and inclusive sample, which generated three of the 21 interviewees. Snowball sampling was beneficial because it provided an immediate platform for building rapport with the potential participant through our shared contact (O'Connor, 2004). However, caution was exercised as snowball sampling tends to reproduce 'like' participants and information. Due to the small population of Tumbler Ridge, I believe a robust and diverse sample of individuals that engage with local youth was generated.

3.8 Secondary Data Collection

To support my mixed methods case study, a range of secondary data collection methods were employed. A content analysis of community documents and plans was conducted as well as a review of select sociodemographic and economic data from Statistics Canada and BC Stats to provide important contextual information. These documents and data were also used to

triangulate the qualitative data gathered through key informant interviews and youth focus groups. Including quantitative and other secondary data was important for this research to understand how the statistics and community reports compared to individual's experiences and perceptions.

3.8.1 Community Documents

To ground this research, community documents and the academic literature were reviewed. CBR demands both historic and contemporary knowledge (Halseth *et al.*, 2016). Not only does this knowledge give the researcher important contextual information about the community, reviewing local context enables the researcher to ask better questions, demonstrates good preparation and capacity, ensures that the researcher does not waste people's time, and builds a positive reputation in the community (Halseth *et al.*, 2016). Community documents included municipal plans and reports, external reports, books, and articles from the local newspaper, *Tumbler RidgeLines*. The community documents that were reviewed are presented in Table 3.3. Careful attention to the perspectives from which these documents were written was critical to prevent unintentionally biased research. The value of these community literatures is immense, from getting to know the community and learning about past projects and events to identifying potential participants.

Table 3.3*Community Documents Reviewed*

Municipal Reports	Municipal Plans
Tumbler Ridge Visitor and Relocation Guide (2022-2023 & 2023-2024)	Tumbler Ridge Official Community Plan (2023)
Community Centre Youth Survey (2023)	District of Tumbler Ridge Design Guidelines (2022)
District of Tumbler Ridge Annual Report (2022 & 2023)	Tumbler Ridge Tourism Strategy (2020)
District of Tumbler Ridge Statement of Financial Information (2022)	Tumbler Ridge Investment Readiness and Economic Development Plan (2018-2020)
Tumbler Ridge Housing Needs Assessment (2021)	Tumbler Ridge Sustainability Plan (2014)
A Guide to Moving to Tumbler Ridge (2018 & 2019)	

3.8.2 Quantitative Data

Quantitative community data was also collected to understand the issues of community change and youth recruitment and retention. This quantitative data included demographic and economic data from Statistics Canada and BC Stats, as demonstrated in Chapter 4. Collecting this data contributed to my contextual and historical community knowledge, enabled me to provide a richer description of place characteristics, and helps demonstrate the merit of this research. As White (2010) warned, I remained critical when using secondary quantitative data because the information was collected by someone else, for another purpose, and may have been manipulated. ‘Big data’ such as that produced by Statistics Canada also has significant limitations for rural places such as Tumbler Ridge due to the small population size. Specifically, data is suppressed to ensure anonymity and Census data is only presented in five-year snapshots. Nevertheless, the population data available through Statistics Canada and BC Stats provided a perspective on community change and youth retention that I would have been unable to generate myself. When utilized alongside the qualitative data, this demographic data helps create a more

holistic understanding of community change and youth recruitment and retention in Tumbler Ridge.

3.9 Data Management

During focus groups and key informant interviews, data was audio recorded with participant consent. This audio data was then uploaded to an encrypted online storage program (UNBC's Microsoft OneDrive). Following this file transfer, the files were deleted from the audio recorder. The audio files were transcribed and manually verified for accuracy, and both versions of each file (audio and transcribed) are stored on UNBC's Microsoft OneDrive. All participants consented to an audio recording. Interview and focus group transcripts were then uploaded to NVivo for analysis. To ensure confidentiality, the raw data will be destroyed two years after the completion of this thesis (September 2027), including the paper shredding, deletion of data stored on hard-drives, and destruction of audio recordings.

3.10 Data Analysis

The first step of data analysis was to transcribe all the interview and focus group audio recordings into verbatim written texts, these were done within one week of completion of the interviews and focus groups. Transcribing allowed me to immerse myself in the data and develop deeper comprehension of the material (Vanover, 2022). Following the transcription of interview and focus group recordings into a written text, I created separate documents for each interview and focus group summarizing the main themes and points. These documents were 'checked' by participants to ensure that I understood their perspective and gave them the opportunity to add or retract any information. Following the participant checking, I read and re-read the transcripts and summary documents to gain a deep understanding of what participants discussed and made notes of my initial reflections.

After familiarizing myself with the large body of data, I began content analysis of the primary data through coding, a process of thoughtful data reduction by coalescing the data into categories by common themes and patterns (Richards, 2022). All interview, focus group, and written data was analyzed through content analysis techniques, specifically, latent content analysis. Through content analysis, researchers “analyze relatively unstructured data in view of the meanings, symbolic qualities, and expressive contents they have and of the communicative roles they play in the lives of the data’s sources” (Krippendorff, 2018, p.51). Latent content analysis identified the underlying, implied, or inferred meaning of participant responses rather than only what was explicitly stated. Data was not changed during the process of content analysis, allowing the process to be repeated and checked for consistency (Babbie, 2004). The first round of coding was deductive to ensure the research questions were answered and following rounds were inductive to edit the list of codes and build nuance. All data analysis was conducted using the NVivo software.

I began by coding the interview data; the first round was inductive as I organized the data into nuanced and detailed codes with the intention of bringing them together into broader categories later (Richards, 2022). However, I struggled to organize these detailed codes into cohesive categories and themes that answered the research questions. This first round was documented but then deleted. The second round of coding was deductive; interview data was organized into categories with descriptive codes based on alignment with the three research questions. Subsequent rounds of coding were inductive to describe the interview data, make meaning, develop detailed codes and themes, and identify representative data to support the findings (Bingham & Witowsky, 2022). Two rounds of inductive coding were conducted on the interview data. The focus group data was then analyzed with one round of deductive coding

followed by three rounds of inductive coding. Interview and focus group data was kept separate to facilitate comparison between adult and youth perspectives. The codebooks from each round of analysis are included in Appendices 4 and 5.

Qualitative content analysis depends on my personal interpretation of the themes which stems from my values, theoretical orientations, and personal experiences with the subject (Richards, 2022). As a result, themes did not emerge from the data, my critical thinking made meaning from the data. Understanding this role, I exercised critical reflexivity throughout the analysis process and kept a record of all coding decisions, including of code criteria and the rationale behind choosing to delete, combine, or divide codes. A limitation of my analysis is that it was only conducted by one person, making the analysis potentially biased (Cope, 2021). , To overcome this challenge, participants reviewed their engagement summary notes, I maintained a codebook that tracked categories and criteria, and multiple rounds of analysis were conducted.

3.11 Methodological Trustworthiness

For research to be trustworthy, it must be rigorous, valid, replicable, and reliable, however, traditional definitions of trustworthy research do not necessarily align with qualitative research (Golafshani, 2003). Quantitative measures of trustworthiness are often not compatible with qualitative research because qualitative data is personal and context-specific. Therefore, the trustworthiness of my research must be measured with different metrics. Hay and Cope (2021) argue that the trustworthiness of qualitative research requires attention to ethics, the establishment and continued monitoring rigorous practices, acknowledgement of biases, and the maintenance of transparency.

3.11.1 Ethics

To ensure ethical research, I completed the ‘Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans’ training (see Appendix 1). Additionally, all research activities followed UNBC’s Research Ethics Board requirements. Ethical conduct was further informed by the CBR methodology, which required my attention to positionality and power relations throughout the research process, participant-checking of data, and approval of results from the community (Halseth *et al.*, 2016). I also ensured informed and ongoing consent of research participants by providing full, open, and detailed information about the nature of the research and requiring that participants voluntarily agree to participate (Christians, 2011). Privacy and confidentiality of participants was safeguarded through careful data storage and ensured anonymity. Ethical considerations contributed to the trustworthiness of this research through its critical role in building and maintaining trust with research participants and the broader community (Hay, 2010).

3.11.2 Rigour

Rigour refers to the quality and consistency of the research process, including data collection, analysis, and results. Stratford and Bradshaw (2021) assert that rigorous qualitative research must establish strategies for ensuring accuracy, credibility, and trustworthiness early and apply them throughout the research process. The research was carefully documented through field notes which were referred to for clarification throughout the analysis and synthesis processes. All interview summaries and initial research results were checked by participants. Methodological triangulation, and the triangulation of data sources, also increased rigour through the mixed methods case study design.

3.11.3 Triangulation

Triangulation refers to the use of diverse information sources and methods in research and helps to ensure research trustworthiness by increasing the confirmability and dependability of results (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Hay & Cope, 2021). MMR lends itself well to triangulation because it requires the interpretation and integration of multiple sources of data. There are four major types of triangulation, as stated by Stratford and Bradshaw (2021), including sources, methods, investigators, and theories. Due to the nature of this research as a graduate thesis, I cannot triangulate research investigators, however, the data analysis was checked by my supervisor, committee, and community collaborators. I triangulated research sources, methods, and theories. My sources of data included a variety of academic and community documents, Statistics Canada and BC Stats demographic data, and focus group and interview data from a diverse selection of community stakeholders. Additionally, I employed rigorous triangulation through multiple strategies of inquiry, including case study and CBR methodologies, and qualitative content analysis.

3.11.4 Validity

Golafshani (2003) describes validity as whether the research measured what it was intended to and if the means of measurement were accurate. Much like rigour, triangulation of data sources and research methods increases research validity, achieved through the research design as a mixed methods case study grounded in CBR. Guion *et al.* (2011) caution against attempting to arrive at consistency across data because inconsistencies may provide an “opportunity to uncover deeper meaning in the data” (p.1) rather than weakening the evidence. Due to the qualitative nature of this research, the researcher was the primary tool of data collection, analysis, and conclusions. The validity of research is affected by the researcher’s

perception of validity in their study (Golafshani, 2003), and therefore, validity was an ongoing discussion in the research process. Participant checking and reviews by my supervisory committee also contributed to greater validity in this research.

3.11.5 Reliability

Research reliability refers to the extent to which findings are true and certain, which Guion *et al.* (2011) describe as findings that are supported by evidence and accurately reflect the situation being researched. Replicability and consistency of this research is difficult due to its qualitative and place-based nature, but transparency in the research process through detailed recording of all steps was used to increase over reliability. Transparency was achieved through careful documentation of all data collection and analysis, and explicit references to data sources (Yin, 2009). Participant checking of the interview data and of initial findings also increased the reliability of this research (Halseth *et al.*, 2016; Stratford & Bradshaw, 2021).

3.12 Conclusion

This research is a mixed methods case study that draws primarily on key informant interviews and focus groups to explore the experiences and migration planning of Tumbler Ridge youth. A total of 19 interviews with 21 participants and four focus groups with 13 participants were conducted between June and September 2024. Interview and focus group data was analyzed using latent content analysis with deductive and inductive coding. Secondary data collection included a review of Statistics Canada and BC Stats sociodemographic and economic data as well as various community documents. Exploring individual experiences and perceptions of youth issues alongside quantitative descriptions of community change allowed insight into rural youth issues and the impacts on youth migration planning. Steps were taken throughout the entire research process to ensure rigour, validity, and increase reliability of the research.

Chapter 4: The District of Tumbler Ridge

My research explores issues of rural community change and youth migration planning through a mixed methods case study of Tumbler Ridge, BC. A description of the history, geography, demography, and economy of Tumbler Ridge is necessary to provide a foundation for the study of youth experiences and migration planning. The historical development of Tumbler Ridge and its changes over time, are presented with a specific focus on population and demographic change.

4.1 Case Study Selection

Tumbler Ridge was selected as the case study community following a document search of all communities in northern BC with at least 1,500 residents to ensure an adequate number of youth residents. Community documents, such as Official Community Plans, were searched for their mention of youth, young people, or resident recruitment and/or retention. Based on this search criteria, 14 communities were identified as potential case studies. This number was narrowed down based on the level of detail surrounding their discussion of resident recruitment and retention needs. I contacted three potential case study communities (the City of Quesnel, the District of Kitimat, and the District of Tumbler Ridge); the District of Tumbler Ridge (the District) expressed interest and a desire to collaborate. Additionally, the District had expressed specific interest in local youth recruitment and retention in their Official Community Plan (District of Tumbler Ridge, 2023), Investment Readiness and Economic Development Plan (District of Tumbler Ridge, 2018), and Tourism Strategy (District of Tumbler Ridge, 2020).

4.2 Context and History

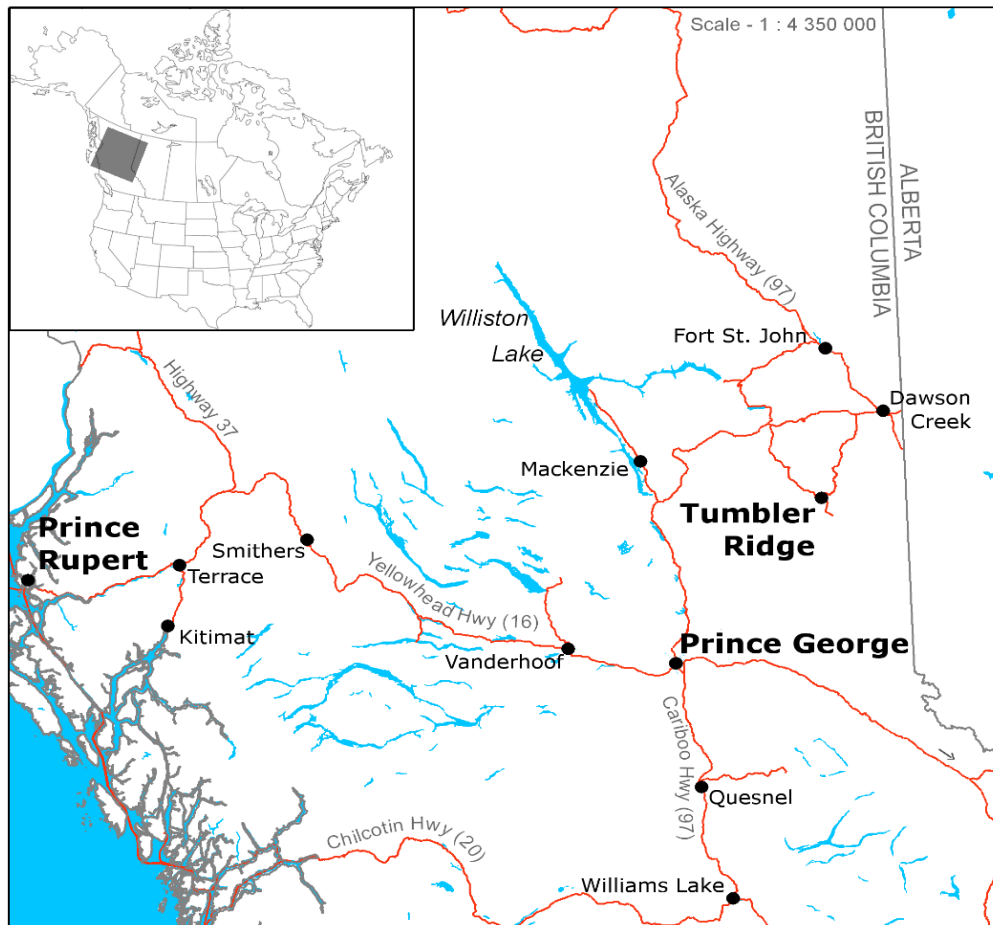
Tumbler Ridge is a remote instant town located on the eastern foothills of the Rocky Mountains on the traditional territories of the Kelly Lake Cree First Nation, Kelly Lake Metis

Settlement Society, McLeod Lake Indian Band, Saulteau First Nation, and West Moberly First Nation (see Figure 4.1). Tumbler Ridge is one of seven communities and four electoral districts in the Peace River Regional District³ and BC's newest resource town, incorporated in 1981 and officially opened in 1986 to retain a local coal mining workforce (Halseth & Sullivan, 2002). Located 120 km southwest of Dawson Creek and 92 km southeast of Chetwynd, Tumbler Ridge is politically linked to BC but functionally linked to Alberta with Grande Prairie being the closest urban centre (Gill, 2002). The location of metallurgical coal reserves around what is now Tumbler Ridge was well-known, but when combined with high global prices and demand for metallurgical coal in the 1970s, more than 15 coal claims from national and multi-national firms were staked in the area (Halseth & Sullivan, 2003/2004). Out of this scramble, two mines proceeded, Quintette (operated by Denison Mines) and Bullmoose (operated by Teck), leading to the creation of a new resource town. The development of Tumbler Ridge followed the post-Second World War development strategy of public investment to facilitate the private export of 'staples' resources (Gill, 2002).

³ Regional districts are a federation composed of municipalities, electoral areas, and treaty First Nations which each have representation on the regional district board (Government of BC, 2025)

Figure 4.1

Map Showing the Location of Tumbler Ridge



Map Credit. Kyle Kusch.

Tumbler Ridge was the last instant town to be incorporated in BC under Letters Patent which granted legal establishment of the town as part of this provincial resource development plan (Gill, 1991; Halseth & Sullivan, 2002). In 1981, representatives of Denison Mines, Teck Corporation, the Government of BC, and the Japanese Steel Industry signed the Northeast Coal Development agreement for Tumbler Ridge to proceed (District of Tumbler Ridge, 2024). The mining companies committed to the delivery of the Japanese coal contract while the provincial government assumed responsibility for the community planning and infrastructure, and funding was provided by the federal and provincial governments as well as future property taxes (Jackson

& Illsley, 2006). A persistent problem with earlier resource towns was the high levels of population turnover. Recognizing that married men would stay longer than single men, the townsite was carefully planned with extensive effort paid to the design, layout, and servicing of the town to attract families (Gill, 1991; Gill, 2002).

Five main social design principles underlay the design of Tumbler Ridge: commitment, challenge, self-reliance, choice, and participation to achieve three goals: high social cohesion, low labour turnover, and high residential satisfaction (Gill, 2002; Jackson & Illsley, 2006). The focus on creating an environment to retain the workforce of Tumbler Ridge followed in the footsteps of Kitimat, a resource town on BC's northwest coast developed in the 1950s to support aluminum smelting. Kitimat was the first resource town in BC to be developed by the planner, Clarence Stein, whose 'new town' planning models were inspired by the European 'garden city' movement (Halseth & Sullivan, 2003/2004). The three design principles that guided Kitimat's development were:

- 1) use site planning to separate land uses, this meant grouping uses such as residential and commercial, and separating uses such as industrial from residential;
- 2) use neighbourhood design to create function housing areas, this meant designing for the target population of young families with small children and included elementary schools, ample parks and playgrounds, and neighbourhood walkways separated from roads;
- 3) use economic principles to ensure built-in diversity, this meant adding other industries and economic sectors to avoid the pitfalls of single-industry dependence (Halseth & Sullivan, 2003/2004, p.20).

demonstration of community resilience were the well-established local community networks and bonds. Despite the three issues of not being located on a through highway, little economic diversification, and retail leakage to neighbouring towns, Tumbler Ridge was able to draw upon its social cohesion and social capital to secure funding for healthcare and education from the provincial government, sell the company-owned houses to create a local property tax base, and support new economic development initiatives.

A unique opportunity for tourism development was presented with the discovery of dinosaur tracks by two local children, Mark Turner and Daniel Helm, in 2000 (Helm, 2004; Tumbler Ridge UNESCO Global Geopark, 2024). The Tumbler Ridge Museum Foundation and the Peace Region Palaeontology Research Centre collaborated to develop a broader tourism strategy around the discovery, securing UNESCO Global Geopark status in 2014 and developing a palaeontology research centre in Tumbler Ridge. Additionally, Tumbler Ridge is now home to one of BC's largest wind turbine farms and has a booming outdoor tourism industry with amenities from snowmobile trails and wilderness adventure tours to arts and culture experiences. The original purpose of the townsite for retaining a local mining workforce has shifted, but the townsite planning with its excellent amenities have created a culture that continues today.

4.3 Economy and Employment

The economy of Tumbler Ridge is still characterized by the volatile boom-bust pattern of resource-dependent places, despite their economic diversification efforts. The Quintette Mine, operated by Denison Mines, and the Bullmoose Mine, operated by Teck Corporation, sent their first shipment of coal to the Japanese steel market in 1983 (Halseth & Sullivan, 2002). In 1991, Teck Corporation assumed management of the Quintette Mine as well, laying off many local workers (Halseth & Sullivan, 2002). Following the closures of the Quintette and Bullmoose

Mines in 2000 and 2003 respectively, coal prices picked up again in 2004, prompting Western Canadian Coal to develop the Dillon Mine, the Brule Mine, and the Wolverine Mine (Halseth *et al.*, 2017). In 2010, these mines were acquired by Walter Energy, but world coal prices dropped the following year, prompting the closure of the mines in 2014, and laying off nearly 700 people (Halseth *et al.*, 2017). Since then, Conuma Resources has become the most active company in the area, acquiring the Brule and Wolverine Mines in 2016 and the Quintette Mine in 2023 (Conuma Resources, 2024). The Brule Mine is currently operational, closure of the Wolverine Mine began in April 2024 (Ernst, May 2024), and work is currently in progress to bring the Quintette Mine back into operation (Conuma Resources, 2024).

Local diversification efforts are challenging the resource-based economy of Tumbler Ridge, although coal mining persists. Year-round tourism is a focus of local economic development efforts, with all-terrain vehicle and snowmobile trails supplementing summer hiking (Invest Tumbler Ridge, 2024d). Two key tourism companies currently operate in the community (Invest Tumbler Ridge, 2024d), Wild River Adventure Tours, offering jet boat tours and outdoor equipment rentals (Wild River Adventure Tours, 2024), and Ridge Rotors, offering helicopter tours (Ridge Rotors, 2024). The star of Tumbler Ridge's tourism industry, however, is the dinosaur tracks and fossil beds, situated within 8,478 km² of international geological significance with 34 accessible geosites across 21 destination areas (Invest Tumbler Ridge, 2024e). Since achieving UNESCO Global Geopark status in 2014, local tourism has grown by almost 700% (Invest Tumbler Ridge, 2024d). Additionally, the Economic Development Office also markets Tumbler Ridge as a destination for meetings, incentive tourism, conferences, and exhibitions (Invest Tumbler Ridge, 2024b). Tumbler Ridge's emerging conferencing sector is connected to tourism with unique local experiences, including riverboat trips and dinosaur track

tours, marketed alongside the Trend Mountain Conference Centre and golf course venues (Invest Tumbler Ridge, 2024b). Recently hosted events included the Northeast BC Coal and Energy Forum, the Community Forest Association of BC, the BC Ornithologists Association, and the Tumbler Ridge Medical Conference.

Beyond tourism, Tumbler Ridge has also developed some of BC's largest wind turbine farms, including the Meikle Wind Farm operated by Pattern Energy and the Quality Wind Project operated by Capital Power (Invest Tumbler Ridge, 2024c). The District's Economic and Community Development Office has also expressed interest in developing their local forest and liquefied natural gas (LNG) sectors (Invest Tumbler Ridge, 2024c). The document, *Forestry in Tumbler Ridge!* (District of Tumbler Ridge, 2022) states that the forestry sector in Tumbler Ridge is underrepresented but has the potential for many sub-sector businesses, manufacturing opportunities, and employment possibilities. The Tumbler Ridge Community Forest received a harvest volume expansion in 2017 and advertises opportunities in recreation and wildlife and watershed management (District of Tumbler Ridge, 2022). The Northern BC LNG pipeline approval is also highlighted on the District's Economic Development Office website, stating that this project "will provide enormous additional economic and employment opportunities for Tumbler Ridge" (Invest Tumbler Ridge, 2024c). While these diversification efforts likely contributed to the increased population stability in recent years, tourism, forestry, and LNG are all cyclical industries like coal mining.

Alongside a desire to attract development in specific industries, the Economic Development Office also markets targeted resident recruitment. Medical and alternative health care workers have their own page on the Economic Development website (Invest Tumbler Ridge, 2024a), including a description of the Tumbler Ridge Community Health Centre and

testimonials from current and past local healthcare professionals. Virtual workers are also specifically sought after according to the Economic Development Office website (Invest Tumbler Ridge, 2024f) that highlights the low cost of living, small-town lifestyle, and outdoor recreation opportunities afforded by a remote working lifestyle in Tumbler Ridge. Planned upgrades and expansions to the fibre optic network are also described on the website, a necessity to attract remote workers. These efforts illustrate that the District is trying to economically diversify, including into other cyclical sectors as well as those that are less volatile.

Despite diversification efforts, the volatile but persistent coal mining legacy of Tumbler Ridge continues to dominate the local economy with a significant proportion of the local population employed in mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction (see Table 4.1). The second largest employment sector in Tumbler Ridge is retail trade. Local employment in tourism, which was interpreted as the ‘accommodation, food, and other services’ sector in the Canadian Census, is significant when compared to the Peace River Regional District. When employment trends are compared over time however, the picture is less clear. The tourism economy in Tumbler Ridge has fluctuated significantly over time, with levels of employment in the accommodation, food, and services industry in 2021 lower than 1991 levels, and 3.4% lower than in 2016 (see Table 4.1), while the COVID-19 pandemic also likely impacted this decline. However, the percentage of the population employed in the industry does not necessarily reflect the economic health of the industry. Nevertheless, these statistics are important when discussing resident recruitment and retention because employment opportunities and stability are a pertinent aspect of migration planning.

Table 4.1*Select Economic Characteristics 1991, 2016, and 2021*

Employment Industry	1991 Census			2016 Census			2021 Census		
	TR %	PPRD %	BC %	TR %	PPRD %	BC %	TR %	PPRD %	BC %
Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction	59.7	11.1	1.1	14.0	10.7	1.0	36.5	6.2	0.9
Accommodation, food, and other services	10.5	12.6	15.4	11.5	12.7	12.9	8.1	3.7	11.1
Retail trade	7.5	11.3	12.7	5.5	10.2	11.4	10.5	10.4	11.3
Labour force participation rate	78.2	74.4	67.6	64.1	72.8	63.9	65.3	70.4	63.3
Average full-time employment income	N/D	N/D	N/D	\$73,109	\$75,303	\$64,625	\$98,000	\$81,900	\$77,700

Sources. Statistics Canada (1991, 2016, 2021)

The average employment income in Tumbler Ridge in 2021 was significantly higher than both the regional and provincial average (see Table 4.1), potentially challenging economic diversification efforts as sectors outside of mining are likely lower paying. This assertion is supported when compared to 2016 which shows employment in mining, quarrying, and oil and gas as half as much, and the average employment income as less than the regional average. These economic trends are relevant to this research because they illustrate an economy with high average incomes, but one that is not diversifying in any meaningful way. Moreover, these high-paying jobs are reserved to specific industries and employers, and few of these opportunities are available to local high school students and recent graduates.

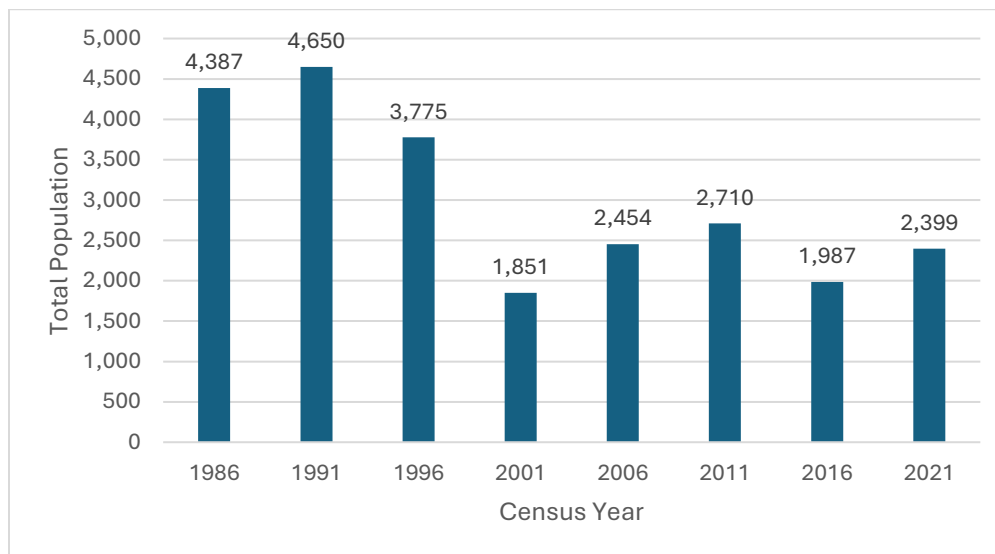
4.4 Demography

The 2021 Census reports the population of Tumbler Ridge as 2,399. To update this number because this research takes place between census years, BC Stats estimates the 2023 population of Tumbler Ridge as 2,613. Figure 4.3 illustrates the fluctuations in the total population of Tumbler Ridge since the first census in 1986. The total population of Tumbler Ridge was at its highest in 1991, one decade after the town's creation, credited primarily to the

booming coal economy. The total population reached it lowest in 2001 following the closure of the Quintette Mine the year before. The population began to increase again in 2006, following the development of the Dillon, Brule, and Wolverine Mines. All three of these mines were closed in 2014, the impacts of which are reflected in the decrease in total population in 2016. However, according to BC Stats, the total population of Tumbler Ridge has grown every year since 2016, likely reflecting increased economic stability.

Figure 4.3

Tumbler Ridge Total Population from 1986 to 2021

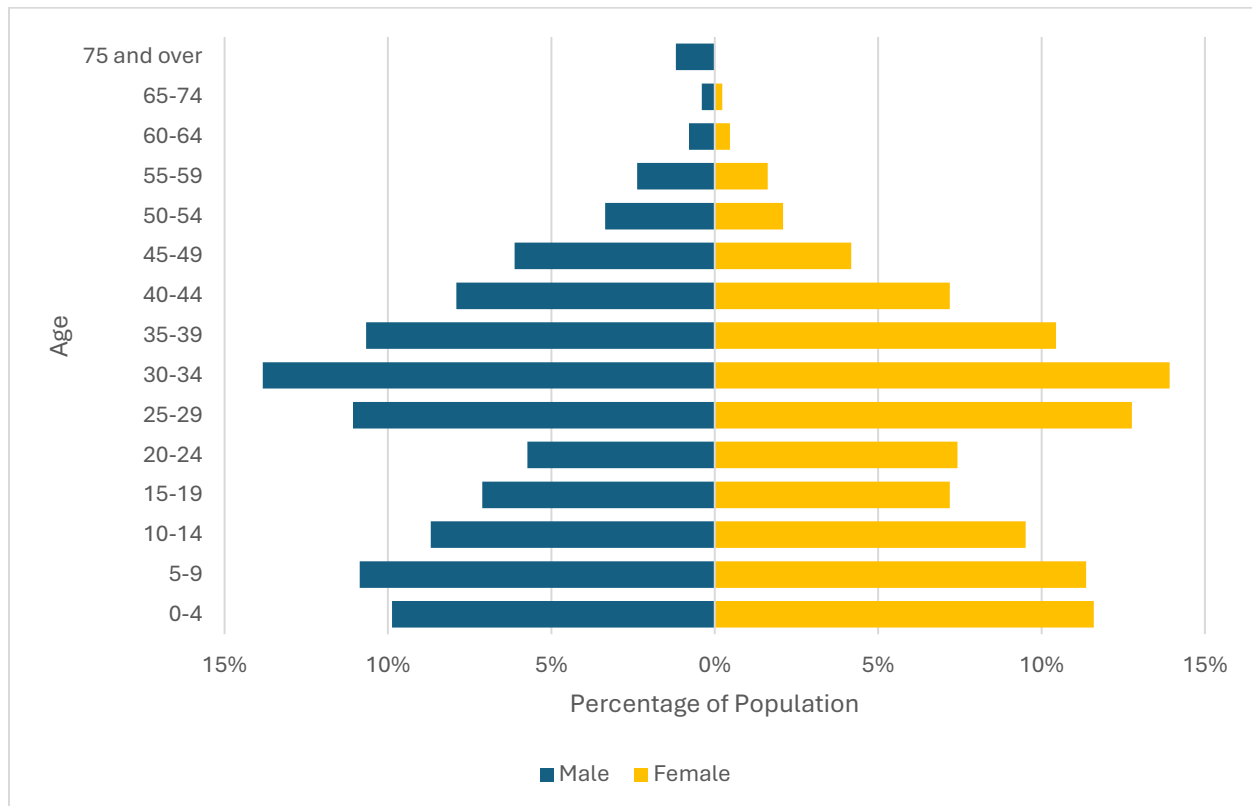


Source. Statistics Canada (1986, 1991, 1996, 2001, 2006, 2011, 2016, 2021)

In addition to changes in the total population, there have been changes to the demographic structure of the population. Figure 4.4 demonstrates the population demographics of Tumbler Ridge in 1991. The working age population made up the majority of the total population followed by children, demonstrating a population of mainly young working families. This population distribution reflects a pattern that is typical of a booming resource town.

Figure 4.4

Tumbler Ridge 1991 Population Pyramid



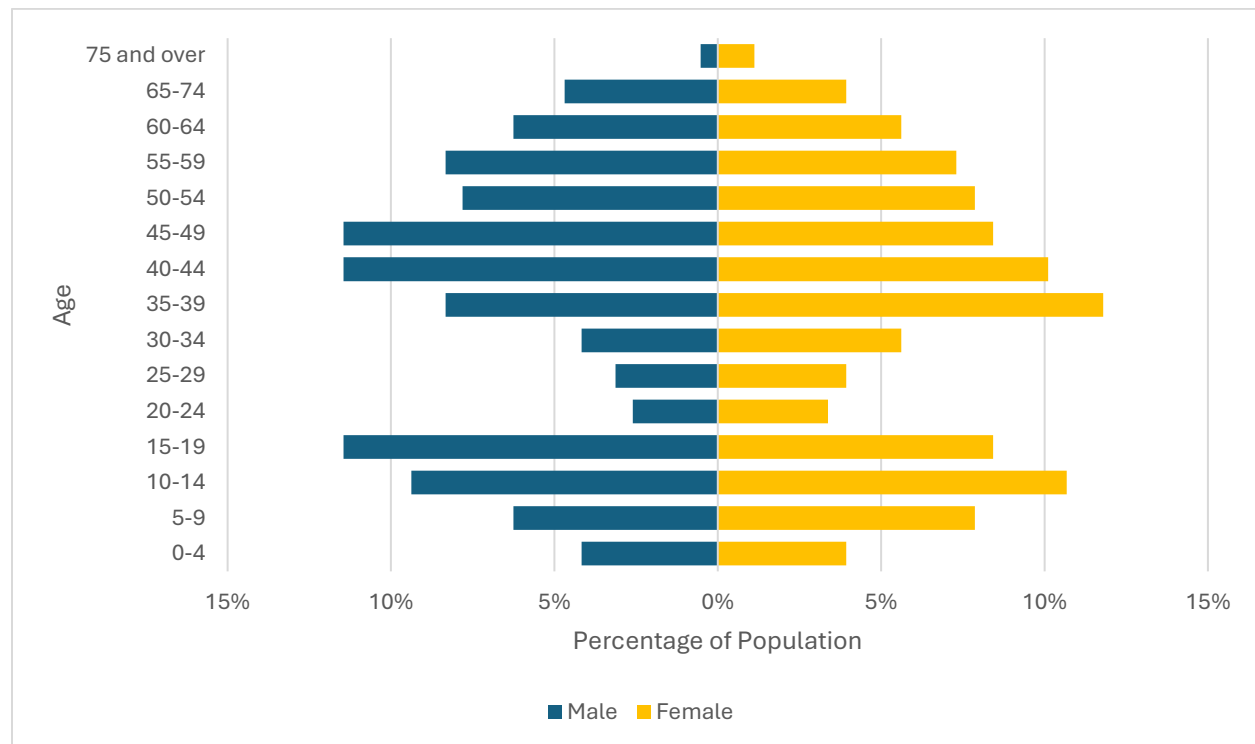
Source. Statistics Canada (1991)

The population demographics of Tumbler Ridge in 2001 illustrate the impacts of the Quintette Mine closure in 2000 beyond the decrease in population (see Figure 4.5). Two changes are clear. First, there was a decline in young working age people from 20 to 39 years. The largest decline was in the 30 to 34 age category which made up 8% of the total population in 2001 (see Figure 4.5) compared to almost 14% in 1991 (see Figure 4.4). Change also occurred in the youngest age groups with a decline in the number of residents between zero and nine years, demonstrating a transition from a town of young families to an older population. These changes likely reflect the out-migration of young working families due to the Quintette Mine closure. Secondly, there was a population increase in retirement aged and senior residents from 55 to 75 years and over, likely reflecting that the original workforce has aged in place. The increase in

seniors may also indicate an in-migration of retirees and seniors, potentially because of the low cost of living in Tumbler Ridge at the time due to the declining coal mining industry.

Figure 4.5

Tumbler Ridge 2001 Population Pyramid

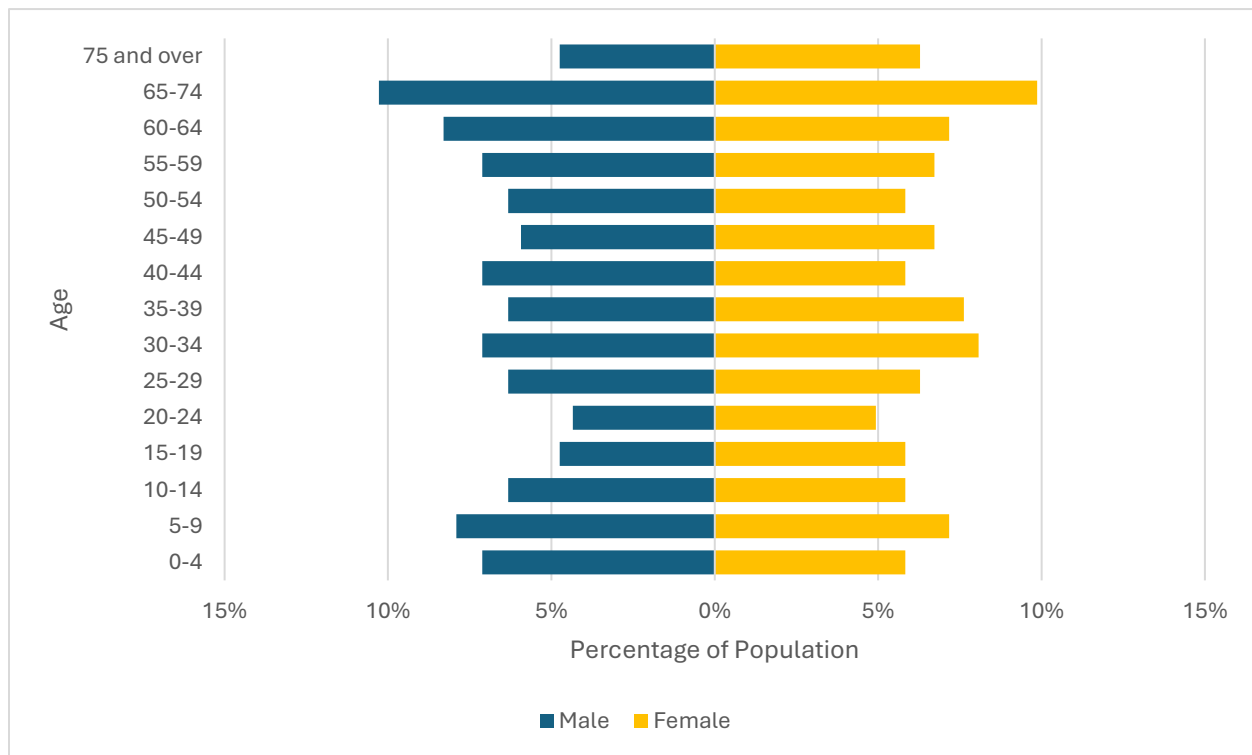


Source. Statistics Canada (2001)

The 2021 population pyramid of Tumbler Ridge illustrates an aging resource community (see Figure 4.6). The largest portion of the population being retirement age and senior residents between 60 and 74 years and the smallest portion of the population being teens and young adults between 15 and 24 years. Comparing the 2021 population pyramid with 2001 illustrates continued out-migration of teens and young adults, a small amount of in-migration of young working families, and a workforce that has continued to age in place. The total population has increased since 2001 but has never rebounded to the pre-closure levels in 1991. This population distribution reflects an aging resource town that lacks meaningful economic diversification to attract young professionals and families.

Figure 4.6

Tumbler Ridge 2021 Population Pyramid



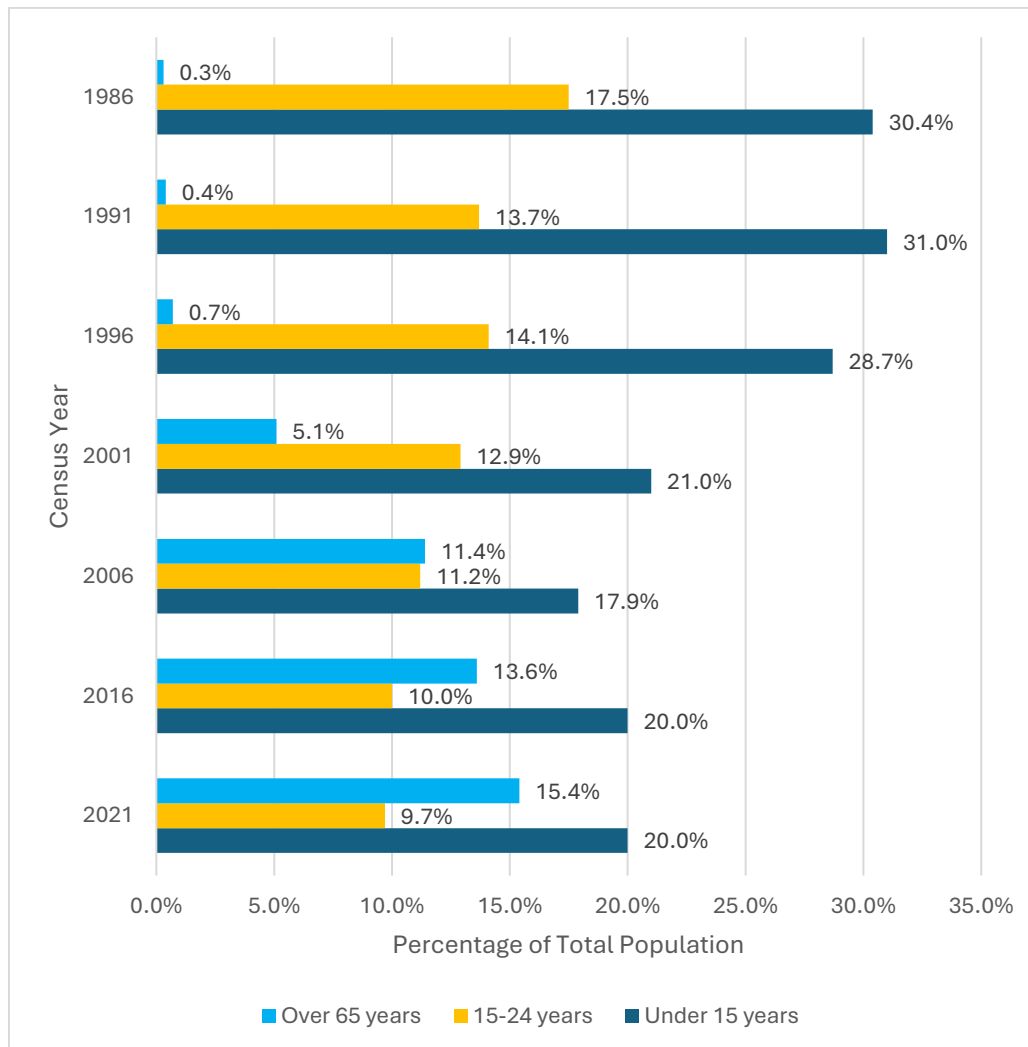
Source. Statistics Canada (2021)

The aging of the original workforce and out-migration of young people is also evident through further examination of the age distribution of Tumbler Ridge since 1986 (see Figure 4.7). While the percentage of the population over the age of 65 has grown substantially, the percentage of the population between the ages of 15 and 24 has slowly decreased. This population distribution reflects the impacts of economic and political restructuring on resource towns. Economic restructuring contributed to layoffs and closures, altered employment patterns, and introduced intense fluctuations in the natural resource industries. At the same time, political restructuring downloaded senior government responsibilities for public services and infrastructure onto the municipality without increasing jurisdiction or fiscal resources. The result is aging service infrastructure, a retiring workforce, and the out-migration of young people

without compensatory in-migration of other young people, all of which are demonstrated in Tumbler Ridge. However, the percentage of the population under the age of 15 appears to have levelled out around 20% since 2001, suggesting a relatively stable population of young families.

Figure 4.7

Age Distribution of Tumbler Ridge 1986 to 2021



Source. Statistics Canada (1986, 1991, 1996, 2001, 2006, 2011, 2016, 2021)

Pertinent to the discussion of youth migration planning is an understanding of local levels of education attainment, as many youth leave to pursue post-secondary education. The percentage of the population aged 15 years and over with any level of education has steadily

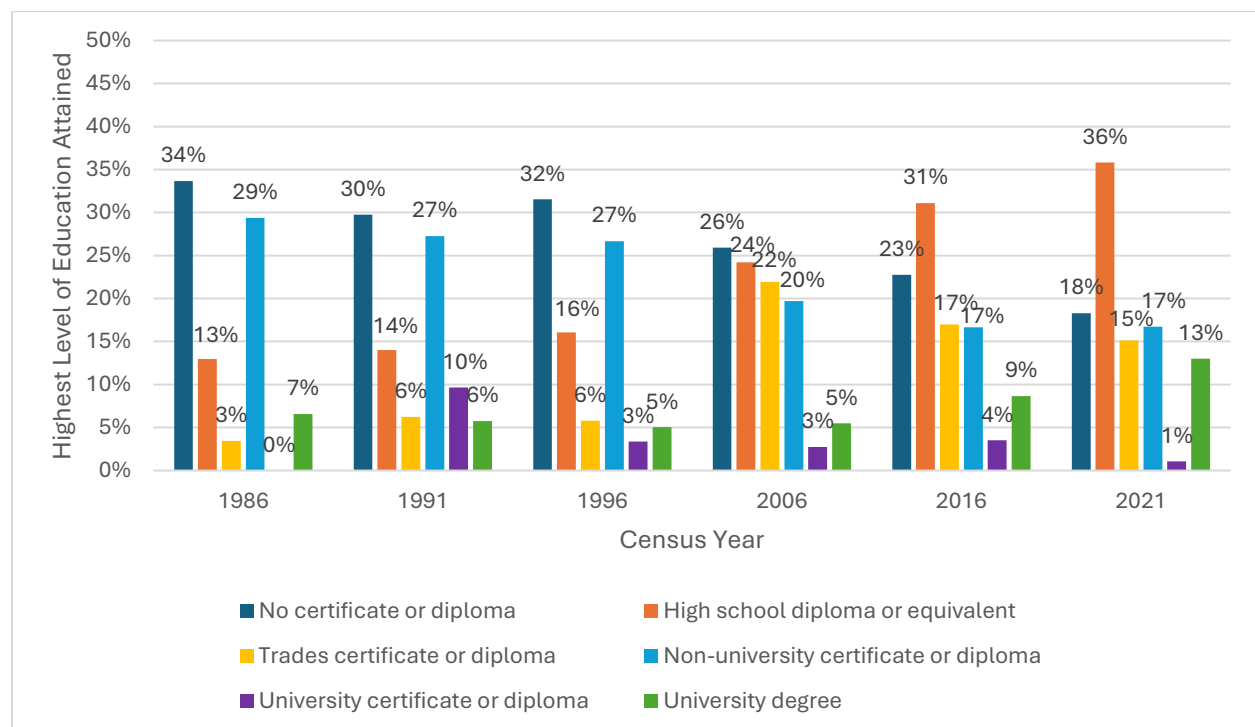
increased from 1986 to 2021 in Tumbler Ridge, demonstrated by the decrease in the percentage of the population with no certificate or diploma, from 34% in 1986 to 18% in 2021 (see Figure 4.8). The percentage of the BC population with no certificate or diploma followed a similar pattern, dropping from 41% in 1986 to 13% in 2021 (see Figure 4.9). The Tumbler Ridge data also shows an increase in the percentage of the population with a high school diploma as their highest level of education attained, from 13% in 1986 to 36% in 2021. Again, the percentage of the BC population with a high school diploma as their highest level of education attained followed a similar pattern, increased from 12% in 1986 to 29% in 2021.

The median levels of educational attainment in Tumbler Ridge do not follow a clear pattern, and do not clearly correspond with employment statistics. The percentage of the Tumbler Ridge population with a university degree has fluctuated over time, from 7% in 1986 to 5% in 2006 and 13% in 2021 (see Figure 4.8). In contrast, the percentage of the BC population with a university degree has steadily increased from 9% in 1986 to 29% in 2021 (see Figure 4.9). Comparatively, Tumbler Ridge attracts fewer university-educated residents than the provincial average. The percentage of the Tumbler Ridge population with a trades certificate or diploma was between 3 and 6% until it peaked in 2006 at 22%; the percentage has now fallen to 15% in 2021. It is impossible to know if the same residents have gained higher levels of education or if residents with these levels of education have migrated out of Tumbler Ridge overtime. The BC population followed a similar pattern from 3 to 4% until it peaked at 11% in 2006 and then fell to 8% in 2021. However, the percentage of Tumbler Ridge residents with a trades certificate or diploma is still above provincial averages, illustrating the importance of trades to the local economy. However, levels of educational attainment do not necessarily correspond to employment industries as the percentage of Tumbler Ridge residents employed in mining,

quarrying, and oil and gas more than doubled from 2016 to 2021 (see Table 4.1), but the percentage of the population with a trades certificate or diploma remained the same (see Figure 4.8). Despite the push for post-secondary education in Tumbler Ridge, especially in trades, it is difficult to see a clear connection between local education and employment. Nevertheless, the educational attainment of the Tumbler Ridge population has increased overall, demonstrating an increasing ability to attract educated professionals.

Figure 4.8

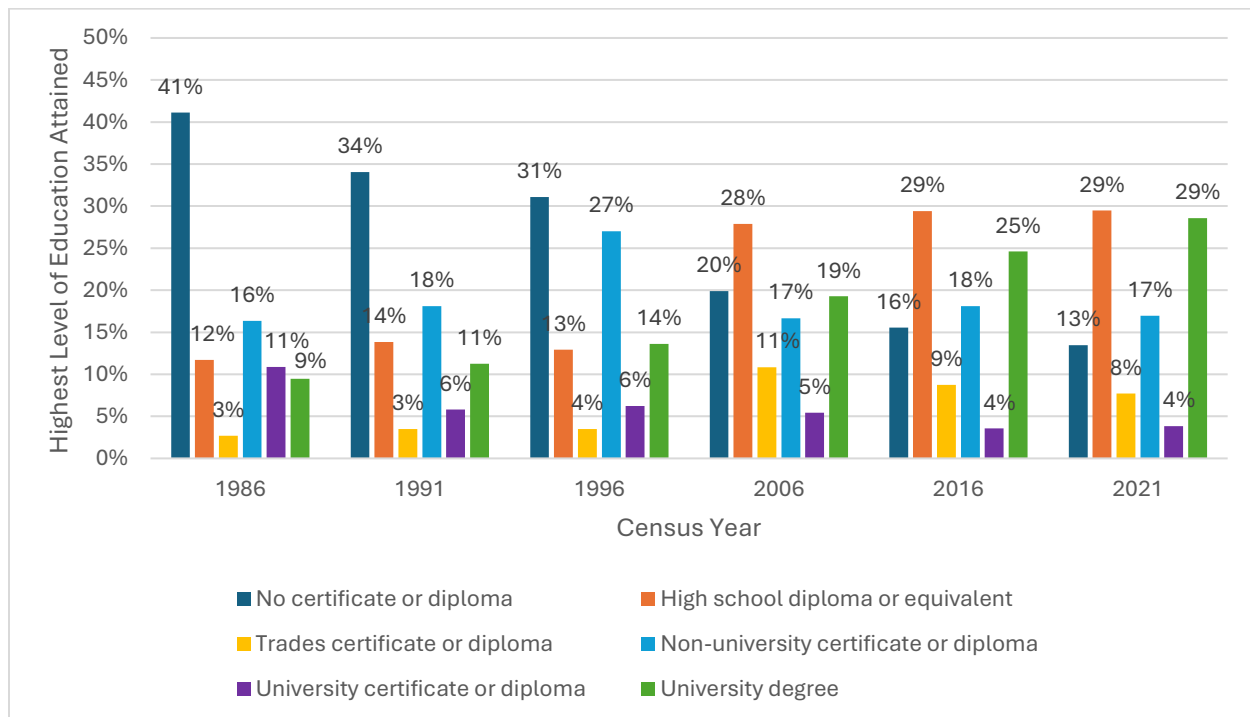
Highest Level of Education Attained in Tumbler Ridge for the Population Aged 15 Years and Over, 1986 to 2021



Source. Statistics Canada (1986, 1991, 1996, 2006, 2016, 2021)

Figure 4.9

Highest Level of Education Attained in BC for the Population Aged 15 Years and Over, 1986 to 2021



Source. Statistics Canada (1986, 1991, 1996, 2006, 2016, 2021)

The population and demography of Tumbler Ridge has fluctuated since the town's creation. The patterns of an aging workforce and the out-migration of high school graduates familiar to rural communities across Canada (Stalker & Phyne, 2014; McLay & Foster, 2023; Ryser *et al.*, 2012) are also present in Tumbler Ridge. However, the story of resident recruitment and retention in Tumbler Ridge is complicated, with an exodus of youth and young adults between the ages of 15 and 24 and the in-migration of adults between the ages of 25 and 39, alongside an increase in educational attainment. Therefore, Tumbler Ridge is attracting young families and educated professionals while failing to retain its youth.

4.5 Conclusion

Tumbler Ridge was created to support a local coal mining workforce to fulfill a provincial development strategy. Despite its industrial beginnings, Tumbler Ridge has survived the turmoil of its mining economy. Strong social capital and cohesion have bonded residents together, illustrating the positive impact of community planning that focuses on recreation, low labour turnover, and residential satisfaction. However, the focus on supporting a coal mining workforce and subsequent lack of planning for economic diversity has impacted the recruitment and retention of youth and young professionals and families. As such, this research explored the experiences of local youth, and their migration plans to help inform future community development in Tumbler Ridge.

Chapter 5: Results

This chapter presents the research findings from my fieldwork and is divided into five main sections. The first section presents the results of the community document review on youth recruitment and retention initiatives in Tumbler Ridge. Interview and focus group findings⁴ are then presented to explore the topic of migration planning among senior high school students. As my research involved current Tumbler Ridge youth, the findings connect to issues of local youth retention or their potential return to the community later in life. While the academic and gray literature describe both recruitment and retention topics, my sample provides a focus upon retention. These findings are reviewed across the main themes of education, employment, community, and sense of place. Each research question is addressed through these themes.

5.1 Resident Recruitment and Retention Initiatives

Resident recruitment and retention are pressing issues in many rural communities with concerns of an aging workforce and the out-migration of youth and young families (Halseth & Ryser, 2018; McQuillan & Laszlo, 2022; Ryser *et al.*, 2012). This topic is discussed by the District of Tumbler Ridge in multiple municipal plans and commissioned reports, including from as early as 2001 following the first major loss of population due to mine closures.

5.1.1 Current Initiatives

The District of Tumbler Ridge has indicated an interest in resident recruitment and retention in multiple municipal documents, including the *Official Community Plan* (District of Tumbler Ridge, 2023) and *Tourism Strategy* (District of Tumbler Ridge, 2020). The District's interest in better understanding youth in the context of resident recruitment and retention is discussed in the *Investment Readiness and Economic Development Plan* (District of Tumbler

⁴ 'I' or 'FG' followed by the participant number are used to differentiate quotes from interview and focus group participants. Examples include '(I5)' or '(FG23)'.

Ridge, 2018). The plan recognizes that their young workforce “is looking for areas to live where [they] can combine recreation, important services, and affordable residential and available amenities” (p.7), illustrating their holistic approach to economic development and attention to young people. Further recommendations include making Tumbler Ridge “an attractive place to live” (Strategy 5.0) and to “Track Youth Leaving Town” (Strategy 5.2) (p.18). These strategies describe the challenge of youth out-migration while also recognizing that youth leaving their home community has many benefits, including “experiencing ideas and cultures that increase perspective and can lead to product or service improvement” (District of Tumbler Ridge, 2018, p. 43). Specifically, the District expressed a desire for an ‘exit survey’ of local youth upon their high school graduation,

The survey can include questions asking if they are staying the community, why they are leaving the community, will they come back to the community and what would entice them to return. The survey could ask youth to rank specific topics including quality of life, amenities, job opportunities, etc. The survey should end with an ask for contact information (i.e. email) to allow the District to keep in touch with the individual and provide ongoing information on the community (District of Tumbler Ridge, 2018, p. 43).

According to the District’s Economic and Community Development Office, the exit survey was never implemented and concerns around youth out-migration are less severe now than when the plan was developed in 2018. As one local government interviewee expressed,

this was when the mines had closed, and I think there was a lot more worry about people not coming back... I think there’s less worry overall now. I don’t know, it just popped into my head that I wonder how many parents, if their kids decided to leave, if the parents would decide to leave to be closer, so that could have been part of this as well (I5).

While there are many discussions of youth in relation to other development priorities throughout the *Investment Readiness and Economic Development Plan*, “Strategy 5.2: Track Youth Leaving Town” (District of Tumbler Ridge, 2018) is the only strategy that specifically addresses youth issues. For example, under the section, “Tumbler Ridge has a workforce for the future” (p.54), suggestions include the development of curriculum for training that can be delivered to local high school students. These initiatives attempt to link youth to training for local employment following high school graduation. These goals have been achieved through experiential learning, work experience opportunities, and dual credit programs at Tumbler Ridge Secondary School (TRSS). These initiatives were developed through collaborations between the District, TRSS, Northern Lights College, and Tumbler Ridge businesses and institutions to empower local youth as well as build social cohesion and community capacity.

According to my meeting with the District’s Community and Economic Development Office in April 2024, the District’s involvement with local youth includes operating the Community Centre, providing operational funding for the Youth Centre, financially supporting the TRSS Conuma Challenge Go-Kart Race (Government of BC, 2023), and offering summer student jobs (28 positions in 2024). The District does not have any documents, or plans to develop new documents, focused on youth or resident recruitment and retention (personal communication, August 12th, 2024). Multiple factors contribute to the District’s hesitancy to develop a resident recruitment plan, most notably, the limited housing stock and lack of high-speed Internet combined with the high number of transient workers due to the re-starting of the Quintette Mine. A local government interviewee explained,

right now, we don't have any specific plans out. Right now is kind of a weird time because the town is so full, but it's always something that I want to have on all of our projects. Even if we're promoting tourism, we're also promoting our community as a good place to live (I5).

The District's document, *A Guide to Moving to Tumbler Ridge* (2018) markets the lifestyle, amenities, and quality of life in Tumbler Ridge alongside opportunities for economic development in technology, retail, resource development, and tourism. Under "Youth & Education," the guide describes the local public school system, childcare options, and Community Centre offerings for youth. The section also highlights Northern Lights College, the skateboard and bike parks, as well as the surrounding landscape for outdoor recreation opportunities. The updated 2019 version highlights opportunities for children and young adults (p.14) but appears to have less focus on teens. A formal guide has not been created since 2019, instead the District's tourism website, *Visit Tumbler Ridge* has a webpage titled, "Moving to Tumbler Ridge" (Visit Tumbler Ridge, 2024) and includes the same information from 2019.

Finally, the *Tumbler Ridge Global Geopark 2022-2023 Visitor & Relocation Guide* describes the Youth Centre as an amenity for local youth. Post-secondary courses at Northern Lights College are the only amenity highlighted for young adults in Tumbler Ridge and 'teens' are not mentioned in the guide. Instead, a section titled "10 Fun Things To Do With Kids" features amenities including the golf course, swimming pool, skateboard park, and fishing lakes and rivers, all of which could also be marketed toward teens. Resident recruitment is discussed once in the guide where it states a desire to attract "more health care providers, including but not limited to dentists, more nurses, counsellors, and paramedics, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, chiropractors, and naturopaths" (p.65). Neither the Geopark or the Museum currently

has documents or plans to develop documents related specifically to local youth (personal communication, August 12th, 2024).

5.1.2 Past Initiatives

Past attention to resident recruitment and retention by the District of Tumbler Ridge is illustrated by the *Tumbler Ridge Community Transition Survey 2001: Report on Perceptions of Community, Services, and Programming Needs* by Halseth and Ryser (2002), developed directly after the Quintette Mine closure. Socioeconomic profiles of the town are presented in addition to identification of program and activity needs for the Community Centre and other local service providers. According to surveyed residents and property owners, youth and teen activities were a key concern for the community. The report finds that new residents were more likely to be satisfied with opportunities for youth than long-term residents (p.13). “Youth boredom” (p.18) was also identified as an issue. More teen and youth programs were one of the key recommendations to improve local programming, including the development of a Youth Centre, which has since been created. The report also recommended a youth mentor program and a youth drug and alcohol program. A lack of entertainment options and employment opportunities for youth were also identified in the report. Based on formal and informal conversations with community stakeholders, these issues are still prevalent in Tumbler Ridge, and neither a youth mentor program or youth drug and alcohol program were created.

Halseth and Ryser (2002) also developed a list of local clubs and organizations for youth and children, these include: Beavers, Busy Bee, Cadets, Child Care Centre Organization, Cubs, Day Care Board, Gymnastics, Kids’ Club, Minor Hockey, PAC group, Rangers, School Board, Tumbler Ridge Youth Soccer, Youth Board, and Youth Group. Many of these youth initiatives exist today and others have been added. Recommendations for needed clubs and organizations

for youth and children included: 4-H, Brownies, Cadets, Scouts, Duke of Edinburgh Award for Young Canadians Challenge, Girl Guides, Kids' Club, Motor-Cross, Paintball, Pathfinders, Sparks, Venturers, Youth Centre, ballet, figure skating, youth development services, as well as Big Brothers/Big Sisters. Many of the recommendations from the report have been met, including the development of an ATV Club, horseback riding, Chamber of Commerce, Arts Council, drama program, snowmobile club, and Youth Centre, demonstrating a local commitment to youth-focused community development.

The *Tumbler Ridge Sustainability Plan: Strategies for Resilience* (Morris *et al.*, 2014), provides a vision for the future and plan to achieve this vision. One strategy directly addresses youth and falls under the Citizen Engagement goal that “residents of all ages are informed and involved in the civic institutions, organizations, and events that contribute to the sustainability, quality of life and well-being of Tumbler Ridge” (Morris *et al.*, 2014, p.40). The strategy is to “work with youth in the community to build awareness and appreciation of and involvement in the volunteer sector” (Morris *et al.*, 2014, p.47). Building numbers and capacity in the volunteer sector through youth involvement is a key part of this strategy, also providing benefits to youth including encouraging a sense of responsibility and development of social skills. Included in this strategy is the suggestion to reach out to local youth to inquire about volunteer opportunities that they may be interested in. Specific tactics to achieve this strategy were: conducting a dialogue with high school students to identify volunteering opportunities that would interest them, maintaining and building on successful youth volunteer initiatives (e.g., grade 5/6 iPad instruction to seniors), re-establishing the position of Youth Council Member on District Council, and allowing volunteering as a means of satisfying work credit requirements in the high school curriculum. According to my interviews and informal meetings with community

stakeholders in 2024, volunteering is a part of the TRSS graduation requirements, in addition to work experience, beginning in grade 10. There was also a Youth Council Member in 2015 to 2016 but youth interest in this position fluctuates with different teen cohorts (personal communication, June 26th, 2024).

Another youth-focused goal is “a diversity of education, training, and lifelong learning opportunities to equip our children and our adults with the skills they need to succeed in the future” (Morris *et al.*, 2014, p.20). Strategies under this goal include aligning local training with the needs of local employers and matching opportunities in the local economy to encourage linkages. This initiative is being met in Tumbler Ridge through dual credit and work experience opportunities at TRSS. The goal of sports and recreation is to develop infrastructure, services, and supports to enhance people’s involvement in sports and recreation activities and includes strategies such as programs that respond to the needs of residents. This initiative is being addressed through the Community Centre’s Youth Survey from 2023 which provided direction to 2024 recreation development. The goal for arts and culture is a vibrant arts community and range of services to support people’s involvement and the strategies mirror those for sports and recreation. Current arts and culture initiatives for youth include the drop-in craft program hosted by the Community Centre, the Tumbler Ridge Young Peoples Drama, and the Rocky Mountain Dance Company. According to the Community Centre’s Youth Survey from 2023, there appears to be interest from high school students in increasing these activities.

5.2 Education

The topic of education was explored at the secondary school level as this contributes to youth experiences of Tumbler Ridge, and at the post-secondary level as this informs migration planning. This section explores the education goals of youth, community education supports, and challenges around education. Education was linked to the out-migration of youth and identified as a push factor of Tumbler Ridge.

5.2.1 Education Goals and Plans

Perspectives on youth education goals and plans were mixed among participants. For youth participants, personal education goals directly correlated to their employment goals. Some youth shared the specific institutions that they were aiming for, but most discussed education as a stepping stone to their future employment goals.

Interviewees often discussed youth education goals as industry-focused, illustrating the dominant community perspective that most local youth pursue trades. Many interviewees linked these industry-focused education goals with youth exposure to trades-focused experiential learning, work experience, and dual credit opportunities available at TRSS. For example, one community service provider shared, “there's a huge focus on [trades], kind of a push, and they do that through partnerships with Northern Lights College because it's affiliated, by location, it's affiliated to our high school. So, the information is very easy to get there” (I14). Some interviewees shared that summer job opportunities also influenced the education goals of youth. However, youth did not discuss these influences on their education goals, education goals were instead presented as ‘dream jobs’ based on personal interest, fulfillment, or potential for high incomes.

The most prominent educational goal pattern among youth was the normalization of pursuing post-secondary education. Even if youth were not settled on a specific direction, they knew they would be attending post-secondary. As one youth shared, “I definitely do want to go to university or college, I just don't know what I want to do” (FG30). Youth were assertive in their discussions about attending post-secondary, and often expressed excitement at the opportunity, reflecting genuine interest rather than feelings of being forced. Most interviewees also shared the perspective that post-secondary pursuits were normal following high school graduation. According to an education provider, at least five youth from the 2023 TRSS grad class are in post-secondary and at least half of the 2024 graduating class will be attending post-secondary following graduation. Another interviewee reflected on their own TRSS grad class from multiple years ago, sharing that “like 90% went on to post-secondary ... I think there was only maybe two people that didn't go to post-secondary, that just went straight to the workforce” (I6).

Some service providers shared that youth education goals were gendered with males assumed to pursue trades and females assumed to pursue service industries and higher levels of education. However, education providers did not share this perspective. Instead, interviewees in education tended to link education goals with socioeconomic status, peer influences, and youth’s beliefs in their own academic abilities. For example, an education provider shared,

it really depends on peer groups, like the one coming up right now, a lot of the boys are looking at university. Or a lot of the ones that are thinking about trades are starting to think about the capability of being able to do university (I20).

Another education provider stressed the role of socioeconomics and parental influence, definitely socioeconomics ... kids that have gotten out before, kids who whose parents have put time, effort, and energy into making sure they have life experiences, that has more of a play, I think, than gender. ... whether they're going off to university or into trades, I think it's the parents who almost, like, prepped them (I21).

While all the youth participants interested in pursuing industrial trades were male, interest in medical fields, social services, and technology were mixed between genders. Youth did not specifically discuss the impact of gender on their education goals.

5.2.2 Education Linked to Migration

Due to the lack of post-secondary opportunities available in Tumbler Ridge, participants normalize leaving the community to pursue post-secondary. Most interviewees believed that youth should leave Tumbler Ridge to attend post-secondary, citing increased opportunities and important life experiences outside of the community. When youth were asked, nearly all connected migration to their education goals. However, some youth did share migration plans with the purpose of living in that location rather than suiting the location to their preferred employment. All youth participants plan to leave Tumbler Ridge, although two plan to return in less than 10 years. There was no pattern in the geographic direction of migration goals, however, most youth discussed a preference for small communities in northern BC or Alberta, though not as small as Tumbler Ridge. Interviewees discussed the migration goals of youth similarly, with most interviewees connecting youth migration goals with their education and employment goals rather than lifestyle preferences or cost of living.

Despite the connections made between youth out-migration and the pursuit of post-secondary education, many interviewees expressed that having post-secondary opportunities in

Tumbler Ridge was either unimportant or not feasible. Only local government interviewees shared some negative perceptions of the lack of local post-secondary education. As one local government interviewee shared,

post-secondary education is going to be a big one because that's one of the main reasons a lot of people leave. And once they're gone, at some point they make that decision if they're going to come back or not, for all different reasons, could be housing, whatever field they pursued, if there's that availability here, maybe they move somewhere else and fall in love, who knows. I think definitely post-secondary education is huge" (I3).

When youth participants were asked if they would stay and do their post-secondary education in Tumbler Ridge if their desired program was available, the majority said yes.

A few youth, service providers, and local government interviewees commented on the need for local post-secondary opportunities due to the financial inaccessibility of leaving Tumbler Ridge for some young people. As one youth participant shared,

I think it would be nice for people who don't have the funds to move elsewhere, because people whose parents aren't in the mine, or people who have multiple siblings and only one parent in the mine, it's really hard for them to be able to afford to go to school elsewhere or even be able to move out elsewhere. ... I think it would be nice for people with lower income to be able to have the opportunity to go to university or to get post-secondary education without having to move somewhere else and spend all those funds (FG23).

If youth cannot afford to migrate out of Tumbler Ridge, there are few post-secondary options, however, online education could provide a solution for rural and remote communities. For online education to be a real solution in Tumbler Ridge however, better Internet and communication

technology is required. Despite the normalization of post-secondary education following high school graduation and the lack of local opportunities, few participants believed that developing local post-secondary opportunities was necessary for youth retention.

5.2.3 Community Education Support

5.2.3a Experiential Learning

Experiential learning is a strength of many courses at TRSS in addition to two unique opportunities, the Fish Farm and Go-Kart courses. The Fish Farm has been offered as a senior science credit for grades 10 to 12 since 2013 where students raise goldfish. The class is organized like a company, with students fulfilling different roles from public relations and security to health and animal care (Ernst, 2021). Students are responsible for designing and maintaining the tanks as well as the care of growing goldfish, learning biology, engineering, art and design, business management, and other skills.

The Go-Kart course was based off the Fish Farm and first offered as a part of the grade 9 curriculum in 2017. Similar to the Fish Farm, students are assigned to teams that fit their courses and interests. Representatives from local businesses assist with business models and planning, and parents and local tradespeople, including the District's mechanics, mentor students in the construction of the go-karts. Students purchase go-kart kits, a motor, and parts with their funding, and utilize metal from the local transfer station to build the go-karts; they also travel to the Northern Lights College campus in Dawson Creek for a day to learn welding (Olsen, 2019). The go-kart program culminates with a race at the end of May with awards for the fastest time and the team that demonstrates the strongest teamwork (Olsen, 2019). The go-kart project was put on pause during the COVID-19 pandemic but re-started in 2023 for grade 11 and 12 students with a push from local businesses (personal communication, July 3rd, 2024).

The benefits of experiential learning opportunities at TRSS are not only increased student engagement, but also greater preparation for life after high school. As one interviewee explained, after that first year that program ran, seven of those students went on to the dual credit, completed, and are still within their trades. So, a big takeaway I had from that, it's better the earlier we start and let them try (I17).

The value of experiential learning in high school is that it gives students the opportunity to exercise different skills and has helped students decide their career paths. While these opportunities are usually focused on trades, experiential opportunities have been presented in other classes. A TRSS teacher was able to send five students to the BC Youth Parliament in Victoria because they displayed an interest in politics and social government.

Student experience is also a priority of School District 59 (SD 59) who started the Student Voice program in 2022 to better understand student experiences, perspectives, and expectations. The program recruits students from each high school in SD 59 to create their own environmental scan process and assess each school across the district based on the criteria they developed (School District 59, 2024). The accomplishments and future plans of the Student Voice program are explained in SD 59's Strategic Plan for 2024 to 2028 (School District 59, 2024). In the second year of the program, the Student Voice team completed an additional environmental scan in which students from kindergarten through grade 12 were interviewed, representing approximately 10% of the total student population (School District 59, 2024, p.1). The Student Voice student team presented their findings to the SD 59 Board of Education for the 2023 to 2024 school year and the Board was receptive and willing to resource solutions to the issues presented by the student team (personal communication, July 2nd, 2024). According to the

Strategic Plan (School District 59, 2024), the Student Voice program will be expanded to include elementary school students and facilitate the creation of Strategic and Operational plans.

5.3.2b Work Experience and Dual Credit

Connection between education and employment is a priority in Tumbler Ridge, illustrated by dual credit opportunities and work experience requirements at TRSS. Work experience is a graduation requirement for students in BC, and in Tumbler Ridge it is made possible through community collaborations. TRSS has relationships with local businesses and institutions to hold work experience placements, including at Industrial Metal Works and the Tumbler Ridge Health Centre. In addition to fulfilling graduation requirements, these work experience placements provide an opportunity for students to trial potential careers and speak with professionals in that field. Students at TRSS are often connected with work experience opportunities through the high school's Career Coordinator, who plays a critical role in bridging local industry needs with youth entering the workforce. As explained by one interviewee,

it's a way to go out and try on your career, see if you like it. How do you know, right? It's either going to affirm that it's something you love or you're going to hate it, now you've got time to shift. ... So, that then became my drive with all of the companies in town, what do you have to give them the opportunity? Everybody talks about these kids are our future, well, they're here now, our future is in front of us. Like, if you want to talk about changing your future, this is how you do it (I17).

Work experience opportunities are also facilitated through the District of Tumbler Ridge. District work experience placements include the mechanics in Public Works to gain automotive and heavy-duty mechanic experience, and the pool as lifeguards. If students are interested in lifeguarding, the District subsidizes their first aid and life guarding courses. A new work

experience opportunity was developed in 2022 for two students, a Refrigeration Safety Course, with an instructor provided by the District. The students achieved certification as well as work experience to support their path to becoming power engineers (personal communication, June 17th, 2024). The work experience placements help address skills gaps and seasonal labour shortages, and because employment with the District is unionized, students who have worked for the District previously get priority for later employment opportunities.

Dual credit opportunities at TRSS provide another avenue for youth to try out potential careers. At TRSS, dual credit opportunities are facilitated through the Northern Opportunities program, developed in 2012 as a partnership between the School Districts of Fort Nelson, Peace River North, Peace River South (which includes Tumbler Ridge), Chalo First Nation School, Northern Lights College, and various industry partners (Enbridge, 2024). Through Northern Opportunities, grade 11 and 12 students in northeastern BC can gain credits towards their high school requirements as well as a post-secondary academic course, vocational program, trade, or apprenticeship (Northern Lights College, 2024). Tuition fees are covered by the high school and accommodation expenses are subsidized by SD 59 because students are required to commute to the Northern Lights College campus in Dawson Creek or Fort St John (personal communication, July 2nd, 2024). The Career Coordinator position at TRSS was created in conjunction with the dual credit program to get students signed up as apprentices and then into the dual credit program (personal communication, July 3rd, 2024). However, the Career Coordinator at TRSS offered additional career counseling services and was an important person for many youth participants.

The dual credit program has some challenges. Because the Tumbler Ridge campus of Northern Lights College does not offer any trades programs, students are required to relocate to Dawson Creek or Fort St John from Monday to Friday for the school year. While service

providers and local government spoke highly of the dual credit program, interviewees in education were less enthusiastic. For example, one education provider shared,

it's very specific kids that can be successful with dual credit out here because they have to go into Dawson Creek or into Fort St John to do it. And they're babies, only 17, sometimes 16, depending on what their birthday is, and they're going off and doing post-secondary level education. ... they're doing difficult stuff, especially when you have kids that might be delayed academically, and then those kids want to get out of school a year early, and that's how they sell it to the kids is you're going to get out a year early, but are you going to be successful on this path, right? ... And then you're living on your own too. And the kids that do it tend to be a little less mature as well. And so, it really has to be the right kid to do it. And there has been some success cases, but there also has been some not so successful cases (I20).

Another challenge concerning some interviewees was the lack of exposure to career paths outside of trades. While dual credit programs look different across BC, the focus in northern BC is on industrial trades (personal communication, July 2nd, 2024). Despite its challenges, the dual credit opportunities available to students at TRSS are an important mechanism for community support of local youth.

5.2.4 Education as a Push Factor

When asked to discuss the push factors of Tumbler Ridge for young people, most participants identified education. Perceptions of important issues related to education differed between groups with youth and local government identifying the local public education system while service and education providers identified the lack of local post-secondary education opportunities. This discrepancy may be explained by personal experiences as youth were

currently attending or had recently graduated from the public education system. In contrast, few service providers had attended high school in Tumbler Ridge and were more interested in post-secondary opportunities for youth.

Youth discussed specific issues related to secondary school education, including the lack of qualified teachers and not feeling prepared for life after high school. Youth participants who had begun their post-secondary education also shared these struggles, explaining that they did not feel adequately prepared for their courses. For example, one youth shared,

it was crazy for my profs to be like, ‘oh yeah, as you've already learned in high school’ and then I'm sitting over there like, ‘what? I was supposed to know this already?’. I'm staring at it, and I've never seen anything like it before. And I was so confused, the amount of catch up you have to do is crazy (FG23).

Nearly all local government and service providers who had children, or personally knew other local youth that had attended university, described that they were unable to be successful. Youth discussed the local public education system as a push factor for raising future families. Youth were motivated to move to other communities to access a better education experience for their children. For example, one youth expressed,

that's what drives me away. I don't want anyone to go through this school system because, like, going out into the world, I'm scared because I don't feel prepared. ... we're really not set up, so I will not raise anyone here (FG25).

Much like healthcare, education was discussed by some youth and service providers as a trade-off for other positive aspects of Tumbler Ridge, typically the natural environment. However, most youth were not willing to sacrifice what they believed to be a better education for their children for the positive aspects of Tumbler Ridge.

5.3 Employment

Employment opportunities are often identified as a primary driver of rural youth migration (Avis, 2013; Looker, 2021). The employment goals of youth and their perceptions of local employment opportunities are discussed in this section as well as community employment support. A nuanced theme of youth attitudes towards employment is also included.

5.3.1 *Employment Goals and Plans*

Service and education providers tended to categorize youth into three broad categories when discussing their employment goals and plans: those leaving to attend post-secondary, those staying local to pursue trades, and those unsure of their next steps who often stay in Tumbler Ridge. While no participants directly stated that youth who stay to work at the mines were stigmatized, the language surrounding these discussions left evidence. As one education provider shared,

for students who sometimes struggle with the academics, there is still that belief, ‘the mines are open, I can get a good paying job at the mine’, but that lends itself to these two competing dichotomies of almost living in the past in this boom and bust model that was more of the ‘80s to the ‘90s, as opposed to, I’m going to go out, I’m going to get training, I’m going to find what I like to do. Down the road, there might be an opportunity to come back to Tumbler Ridge to do that, but there might not be (I15).

Staying in Tumbler Ridge to work at the mines was often equated by interviewees as not knowing what else to do, a default decision without sufficient planning. In contrast, interviewees in local government tended to share that many youth planned to pursue post-secondary educations that aligned with employment opportunities in the mines or for the District.

When asked about their employment goals, almost all youth participants shared plans requiring post-secondary education. Goals ranged from industry trades to technology development to medical fields. No youth participants expressed a desire to work in the mining industry, for the District, or to stay in Tumbler Ridge to work following high school graduation.

Interviewees shared that youth employment goals are typically trades-focused, likely influenced by the context of Tumbler Ridge as a northern resource town. As one service provider shared,

especially being an industry focused community, there's a lot of talk when it comes to trades. In the last group of scholarship applications that I saw come through for the one of the bursaries that puts out of seven, I think six of them are going to trades (I14).

Other interviewees explained that the lack of exposure to industries outside of trades may influence the trade-focused goals of local youth.

Youth participants did not demonstrate this strong interest in industrial trades, only 33% shared goals related to industrial trades employment. Additionally, 33% were interested in a medical field, 16% were interested in technology, 8% were interested in social services, and 8% were interested in the arts. Of the youth interested in industrial trades, most planned to stay in northern BC or northern Alberta while the other employment interest categories were not correlated to a consistent geographic area. However, the youth sample size was small and non-representative, therefore, their perspectives do not disprove the perspectives of interviewees.

5.3.2 Youth Attitudes Towards Employment

Many interviewees discussed youth attitudes towards employment when asked their perceptions of youth employment goals and plans. The first theme was the ‘money-driven’ attitudes of many youth. Some interviewees perceived monetary motivation as gendered, with

male youth more driven by employment with high income potential. However, an interviewee in education explained that gender is no longer playing a strong role in the attitudes of youth towards high incomes, they shared,

money is a big thing with rising costs in the past couple years, I think that even girls are looking at trades, especially in grade 12, when they start working and they realize how expensive things are. They're changing their minds to doing shorter programs and to get higher paying jobs, unless they're very passionate about what they want to do (I20).

Youth did not explicitly state a desire to earn a high income as part of their employment goals, however, youth did share desires to earn high levels of certification and work for 'big companies'. With the youth not interested in mining employment, they are forced to leave Tumbler Ridge to pursue other high-earning industries. As one youth explained,

I know we talked about the mines a lot, but I don't know if there's anywhere else to work, other from like those Meikle Wind or Capital Power, where you could work and make a lot of money to live comfortably because other than that, it's just, like, the grocery store, restaurants, and stuff around town (FG22).

A second theme that emerged from interviewee's discussions around youth attitudes was that employment needs to be fulfilling. While high incomes are important, service providers shared that the long-term employment goals of youth are more dependent upon personal fulfillment. One youth service provider shared,

I think part of the issue is that sort of post-COVID, there's been a bit of a moving away from jobs that people don't see as satisfying, that don't enlighten their soul. So, you know, I was talking to the folks in the hardware store and finding people to work there is

always like twisting arms because you'll get a teen who comes in there, works for six months, and leaves, goes on to do other stuff (I11).

While youth did not articulate this theme in the same way as interviewees, they shared their 'dream jobs' and expressed desires to gain high levels of education or certification. Additionally, youth who were interested in medical fields were the most likely to express their goal as an aspect of fulfillment. As one youth shared,

I think it's important to bring stuff back to the north and to have more people in rural communities, not specifically Tumbler Ridge, but rural in general, and like, keep small-towns afloat (FG23).

5.3.3 Community Employment Support

5.3.3a Summer Employment

High school students and recent graduates have a number of summer student positions available to them in Tumbler Ridge. In 2024, the Fire Hall had one summer student, the Library had one, the Museum had two, the Geopark had four, and the District had 28 (however, not all of the District's summer positions were reserved for youth). The District's summer employment included positions in Public Works, at the golf course, as lifeguards and summer camp leaders at the Community Centre, and two specialized positions with the District's mechanics. Conuma Resources also offered summer student positions in 2024 for various roles at the Wolverine, Brule, Willow Creek, and Quintette Mines (although they did not give details of these opportunities). Summer student employment did not generate significant discussion with youth participants, but all youth participants expressed satisfaction with the availability and quality of local summer employment.

Summer employment can provide a community connection for youth who migrate out of Tumbler Ridge to pursue post-secondary education. As one service provider expressed, there's limited employment for youth, so it's hard to it's hard for us as a community to retain those youth in transition. So, they're 18, 19, they're starting their first journeys, I think a lot of people will go out and they'll come back for summers because they have that summer employment, so they have that connection (I10).

These connections are often well-established as most organizations that routinely hire summer students were targeting high school students who could return every summer, including after graduation.

Despite the benefits of summer jobs for youth, many service providers also discussed the ongoing challenges of providing summer jobs for youth in Tumbler Ridge. Challenges related to fluctuating expectations for federal funding, the rising cost of the minimum wage, and competition with the District were commonly cited. For example, one community service provider discussed the federal summer jobs grants,

funding for [summer students] have been less and less and less in the last like, four years. So, it's a real challenge to bring in students now because they cost money now, right? Like, they [the Canadian government] give you like \$7.25 an hour and that's not minimum wage. So, they only give you about half, and so, it's costing the organizations more money to have them, so they're losing out. We're losing out on jobs for students because it is becoming more of a financial burden than a blessing (I10).

Longer funding cycles and fully subsidized wages are required for community organizations to continue providing meaningful summer job opportunities in Tumbler Ridge.

5.3.3b Part-Time Employment

Most participants were less enthusiastic about part-time employment opportunities for youth. Interviewees shared that part-time employment was very limited due to the small size of the community. As one service provider shared,

I was able to get an after-school job really easily because I lived in a large center. Here, not so much. There's only limited employers for that age group. And I remember at that age being like, I want to buy a car, I want to start stocking away money for school, and that's harder for kids here because there are limited opportunities (I16).

Other considerations presented by interviewees included the high cost of the minimum wage, meaning a reduction of part-time employment opportunities. At the same time, interviewees shared that youth were generally disinterested in minimum wage jobs. For example, one interviewee shared,

I don't want to be the guys who's like, 'oh the kids today, they just are so entitled', and I know so many kids who are solid, reliable, hard working, but at the same time, not really interested in stocking shelves because 'give it another four months and I'm working at the mine' (I11).

Some interviewees were concerned for youth who may not gain work experience through part-time positions and as a result, may struggle to secure employment in more competitive job markets outside of Tumbler Ridge.

The youth perspective on part-time employment was mixed. Some youth echoed the same concerns presented by interviewees, but others had part-time employment positions and did not believe securing them was difficult. Some youth also discussed informal work opportunities in Tumbler Ridge, including babysitting, dog walking, and yard work. Overall, while some youth

acknowledged the limited opportunities for part-time employment, they generally agreed that part-time employment was available to those who wanted it.

5.3.4 Perceptions of Local Employment Opportunity

In addition to specific youth employment goals and plans, participants were also asked about employment opportunities and gaps in Tumbler Ridge. Responses among interviewees varied widely. Interviewees from communities smaller than Tumbler Ridge and interviewees in senior employment positions (usually in local government) were more likely to perceive good local employment opportunities than interviewees in entry level jobs. As one interviewee in local government shared,

the perspective I've seen when I'm talking to a few younger people is that like, opportunity is kind of a perception. So, maybe shifting that narrative a little bit on the stereotype of small-town opportunity. If their spouse works here, they can work remotely, there's a lot of remote options, or a lot of people are doing a lot more work for themselves, like house cleaning or pet sitting, a lot of entrepreneurs. Real things are happening (I13).

However, this perception was contradicted by other interviewees who recognized the inaccessibility of remote work due to poor Internet and communication infrastructure. Youth also discussed the lack of Internet and communication technology as a push factor; however, the issue was discussed in the context of amenities rather than employment.

Local government interviewees expressed that the economic diversification of Tumbler Ridge is providing better employment opportunities for youth. As one interviewee noted, one of the things that I think we can do better to attract and retain youth is the diversification that we're working on right now. You know, historically people might just

think, 'well, if I come back here, I can work at the mine', but there's so much opportunity for tourism businesses, and hopefully technology one day, to support young business owners (I5).

Additionally, a few participants discussed employment opportunities in Tumbler Ridge as a pull factor due to the ability to enter many positions with lower qualifications than are required in bigger centres with more competitive job markets.

None of these perspectives were shared by youth participants. Instead, youth identified local employment as a pull factor for their families but expressed personal discontent with the lack of economic diversification. While nearly all youth cited the coal mines as the primary pull factor of Tumbler Ridge for their families, no youth participants expressed interest in working in mining, often citing unstable employment as the primary reason for their lack of interest. As one youth shared,

my dad came up here for the work at the mines. It's a good income and it's small town, so. It's not stable though, we've moved away twice for a bit because the mines shut down. And when the mines shut down, this place becomes empty, basically, because there's not enough to bring people here (FG31).

Most youth explained that they could not pursue their employment goals in Tumbler Ridge because their field did not relate to mining, and other industries available locally were not large enough to provide room for advancement. While the mining industry was not explicitly stigmatized by youth participants, their lack of interest in the industry and negative perceptions of the local economy does indicate some stigmatization. However, youth interested in other resource industry trades did not express the same concerns or stigmatization. For example, one

youth shared, “I would rather just work on a gas plant, like, an oil rig or something like that, rather than working at a coal mine” (FG24).

5.4 Community

Quality of life factors, including services and social and recreational opportunities, influence youth migration planning (Eacott & Sonn, 2006; MacMichael, 2015). Housing and healthcare were identified as important aspects of resident retention and are discussed in this section. The careful planning of Tumbler Ridge, including its focus on recreation, is also reflected in this section.

5.4.1 Housing

Low cost of living was identified by interviewees as a pull factor of Tumbler Ridge for young people, almost always in the context of affordable housing. However, there was a consensus among interviewees that the affordability of housing had decreased in recent years and would not be as significant of a pull factor for young people as it had been for many of the interviewees themselves. As one community service provider shared,

five years ago, it was a lot cheaper to live here. A lot of people that I grew up with through high school are still here because they got lucky enough where they bought a house when it was cheaper, rent was cheaper, and now they're in higher up positions, and they have stayed, and they can actually afford to be here (I7).

While interviewees noted that purchasing a home in Tumbler Ridge is affordable, the types and number of houses are very limited and many of the houses are outdated. More important to recent high school graduates is the rental market, which due to the limited housing stock and the booming coal mining industry, is expensive and competitive. As one education provider expressed,

for the young ones, housing right now and where the market is at is a struggle. We're very limited, especially, of course, as industry increases, supply and demand. As people realize the demand for rentals are there with industry, they do put those prices up to coordinate with them, so it is a struggle for them to have accommodations (I17).

The Quintette Mine was in the process of re-opening during this data collection, a stage which requires more workers than when the mine is operational, meaning an influx of contractors. This influx of well-paid renters strains the local rental market, making it difficult for youth to secure rentals.

Youth were aware of the poor housing market conditions and regarded the lack of housing availability as one of their primary push factors. Like some interviewees, youth participants often drew connections between the booming mining economy and lack of housing availability:

the housing crisis right now is based on all of the mines. Like, the miners and the mine companies are buying all the houses, they are buying all the hotel rooms to put up people in. So, if the mines shut down, all of those are going to be empty, but there's nobody coming in, there's no room for anybody coming in that will possibly stay here because it's just being taken up by miners who are going to leave if the mine shuts down, or when the mine shuts down (FG23).

Some youth pushed this perspective further and blamed the unstable nature of the mining economy on the lack of housing stock. As one youth shared,

I feel like no one wants to invest in this town, like build new houses and develop new areas, because if the mine shut down, that's it, it's going to become a ghost town. Like, no one wants to risk that (FG24).

Housing is particularly important because commuting to Tumbler Ridge from neighbouring communities is not a viable long-term option. The closest towns are Chetwynd (96 kms away) and Dawson Creek (118 kms away), but the roads to access Tumbler Ridge have little to no street lighting and quickly changing weather conditions, exacerbating the issue of commuting distance. Youth and interviewees across all sectors identified the lack of housing availability and affordability in Tumbler Ridge as a push factor.

5.4.2 Services

5.4.2a Healthcare

Healthcare was a point of division between interviewees and youth participants as interviewees generally regarded healthcare services in Tumbler Ridge positively while youth were more dissatisfied. The lack of specialized or emergency services were discussed by interviewees as a push factor, but most interviewees explained that they were aware of this gap when they chose to live in a small remote community in northern BC.

Tumbler Ridge does not have robust mental health services, according to my review of community documents and interviews with key informants. However, there are some services available. Community Bridge's Community Youth Justice Services is located in Dawson Creek (and Fort St. John) with the purpose to enhance the safety of the community by supporting local youth involved in the criminal justice system through programs and activities to increase local connections and promote emotional and physical wellbeing (Community Bridge, 2024). The program is open to youth between the ages of 12 and 20 years old who live in Fort St. John, Dawson Creek, Hudson's Hope, Chetwynd, Tumbler Ridge, and surrounding First Nations communities. Services include mentoring, role modeling, advocacy, support for life transitions, life and social skills building, connecting youth with counseling and addictions support,

supporting restorative justice and reparative conditions of court orders, mentoring and assistance with educational/career goals, and connecting youth with community supports. The program is assisted by the BC Ministry of Children and Family Development.

A provincially defined Child and Youth Mental Health (CYMH) intake clinic is located in Tumbler Ridge with the option for youth (aged 13 and older) to attend the clinic with or without their parent or caregiver (Government of BC, 2024a). However, the Tumbler Ridge clinic is located within TRSS, so youth must be students to access this service. Through interviews with key informants in education, I learned that there is no permanent CYMH counselor at TRSS, instead a satellite service model is used with a counselor coming to Tumbler Ridge once or twice per month, making it difficult for youth to access regular services. To fill this gap, a teacher-counselor at TRSS offers emotional support, coping mechanisms, and academic counseling in addition to teaching, and students can be virtually connected with counselors in the region (personal communication, September 12th, 2024). The Mental Health and Substance Use community program at the Tumbler Ridge Health Centre offers youth addictions counseling (Northern Health, 2024) as well as a family support worker connected with the Ministry of Children and Family Development (personal communication, July 2nd, 2024). TRSS is attempting to fill service gaps with their teacher-counselor position and connections to remote counselors. Youth in Tumbler Ridge are forced to cope with service gaps that make accessing mental health support difficult.

The most prominent healthcare concern for all interviewees was the lack of mental health support, which was cited as a primary push factor for youth, young people, and families with teenage children. The lack of youth mental healthcare also reflects the challenges of recruiting and retaining qualified professionals. In addition to the inaccessibility of mental health services,

community and youth service providers discussed youth mental health as a pressing issue that they have seen worsen in recent years. Many of these interviewees cited increased bullying and shaming among youth due to the prevalence of social media. As one community service provider explained,

I think the youth have less mental health resiliency, not that they're a softer generation, but I think that people are just getting worse. There's the bullying that goes on, all of the online stuff, the shaming, they wear so much more than what we did. There's a certain amount of pressure that comes from being one screw up away from it affecting your entire life because once it gets put on social media, it stays with you forever, right? We never had that. So, I think mental health support, I think it could be more robust when it comes to that, I think there's a lot of kids that are struggling (I10).

Mental health services did not generate significant discussion among youth participants, instead, they were concerned with insufficient emergency healthcare services. General discontentment and feelings of not being cared for were common among youth. As one youth shared,

if you come in with an emergency, they'll help you but create a bigger problem, so you have to go somewhere else to get it fixed ... and nothing happens to them, the doctors never changed. So, never again. If I ever have an emergency, I will drive out an hour. I will never step foot in there, if it's my life on the line, never, never, never. I don't trust them (FG28).

When asked if the healthcare coverage in Tumbler Ridge influenced their migration planning, youth responses were mixed. Most youth shared that it would not significantly impact their

migration decisions because while poor healthcare was identified as a push factor, good healthcare was not identified as a pull factor.

5.4.2b Filling Service Gaps

As is common in many rural and small-town places, community organizations fill service gaps through additional programming and volunteer efforts (Gibson & Barrett, 2018; Ryser & Halseth, 2014). The Tumbler Ridge Public Library regularly brings in Service Canada and Service BC representatives to assist residents with various needs. The Library has hosted various emergency preparedness information sessions, and a free snack program for youth during times of economic downturn (personal communication, July 2nd, 2024). The elementary and high school in Tumbler Ridge both provide food for students through the provincial Feeding Futures fund, so youth do not have to go without (personal communication, July 2nd, 2024).

The Tumbler Ridge Lions Club also plays a predominant service role in the community, particularly around health care support and support for youth organizations including the minor sports associations and summer reading program. The Tumbler Ridge Youth Services Society (TRYSS), which directs and operates the Youth Centre, is also run by a board of volunteers. Community supports are utilized by youth, especially those who leave and return. As one education provider shared,

What I know of kids who've come back is, they didn't know how to cope outside of Tumbler. There wasn't the ability to access it. So as much as they say they don't like Tumbler, they do know it's a place to go and like, someone will be there to help them when they get back. So, for all their ragging on Tumbler, they do take advantage of its services (I21).

Overall, community organizations, local volunteers, and TRSS have stepped up to serve local youth as best as they can.

5.4.3 Recreation

5.4.3a Infrastructure

Due to the social design principles of its townsite planning (see Figure 4.2), the Tumbler Ridge community has excellent amenities for residents, including youth. Youth-focused infrastructure includes the Toboggan Hill, Skateboard Park, ball diamonds, and Pump Track. Other infrastructure utilized by youth includes the golf course, Nordic Ski Trails, Mountain Bike Park, playgrounds, and the Community Centre. When asked what infrastructure they utilized most in the community, youth shared a range, including the weight room, golf course, playgrounds, pool, basketball courts, and Youth Centre. The hockey and curling arenas were highly regarded by youth, with one sharing that, “it's the best arena and ice and facility in this area, in my opinion. Like, it's really, really nice, and they put, like, a lot of work into it” (I23).

5.4.3b Community Centre Programs

The Community Centre is a hub for local youth with a host of facilities including, the Library, aquatic centre, arena and curling rink, weight room, indoor playground, multipurpose rooms, Youth Centre, and restaurant. The Community Centre provides a variety of recreation opportunities for youth through structured and unstructured programs, special events, and educational courses (see Tables 5.1 and 5.2). However, the Spring 2024 programming included adult, children, and early years programs, demonstrating a gap for teens. In addition to the weight room, aquatic centre, and ice arenas, youth can utilize squash and racquetball courts and multipurpose rooms for various drop-in programming (Visit Tumbler Ridge, 2024). The same building also hosts the Art Gallery and local Sports Hall of Fame (Visit Tumbler Ridge, 2024).

Table 5.1*List of Community Centre Youth Programs and Special Events, Spring 2024*

Drop-In	Programs	Events	Courses
Pickleball	Floor curling (adult)	Spring registration	Babysitting
Basketball	Line dancing (adult)	Free skate	Stay Safe
Volleyball	CARDS (card game) (adult)	TR Junior Idol	
Soccer	Slo pitch (adult)		
Racquetball	Yoga (adult)		
Rock pit gym	Fibre arts crafts (adult)		
Disc golf	After school drop-in (ages 6-18)		

Table 5.2*List of Community Centre Youth Programs and Special Events, Summer 2024*

Drop-In	Programs	Events	Courses
Pickleball	Floor curling (adult)	Free golf (ages 6-18)	Lifeguard training
Racquetball	Line dancing (adult)	Canada Day Celebration	
Rock pit gym	CARDS (card game) (adult)	Picnic in the Park	
Disc golf	Slo pitch (adult)	Free swim	
	Fibre arts crafts (adult)		
	Hydrobikes (no age)		
	Aquafit (no age)		
	Swim lessons (no age)		

In October 2023, the Town Council requested District staff to engage with youth to determine what activities they would like to have available in Tumbler Ridge. In response, Community Centre staff conducted a survey for TRSS students that ran through October and November 2023 asking students questions such as what types of programs and activities they preferred, times of days that worked best, and additions to the Community Centre that they would like to see (Bento, 2023). The survey received 63 responses from students between the ages of 13 and 18 (Bento, 2023).

Some of the survey responses have since been addressed (including installing a slide for the pool) and some responses were things that the community already offers (such as an all-ages drama club, video games, and a concession), indicating a disconnect in program marketing. In response to the survey, TRYSS has assembled a Youth Council to help direct youth recreation planning for the Community Centre and event planning for the Youth Centre, the Library has implemented Teen Craft Days in addition to the Teen Summer Reading Club, and the Community Centre began offering a pre-gym program for youth not currently utilizing the weight room to be introduced to the facility and learn about body weight workouts (personal communication, July 31st, 2024). Community Centre Directors also committed to continued collaboration between facility staff and TRYSS to develop new youth programming and encourage youth participation (personal communication, July 31st, 2024).

Despite these efforts, youth participants still felt that the majority of programs were directed to younger age groups. For example, one youth shared,

they don't really put out a lot for this age range. Like, pretty much as soon as you hit 16, there's like, nothing ... that's when everybody starts going elsewhere for stuff, doing more outdoor recreation than anything super structured because there just isn't anything that they put out (FG23).

When asked what types of programs they felt were missing, most youth responded with organized sports teams, although they acknowledged that many sporting activities were already offered. The disconnect between what is offered and what youth are requesting seems to be related to the age of users. Youth do not want to attend programs where children are present, but many youth were also hesitant to attend adult programs. As one youth shared,

a lot of my friends try and get me to go, but I feel uncomfortable because there's a lot of adults, and because I didn't go at the start so then I wasn't really comfortable, and then it's just basically just all adults, so I was like, 'no, I'm not doing that' (FG28).

The selection of programs was less of a concern for youth than the age group of attendees, with most youth stating that they would attend programs if other teens they knew were also attending. Youth engagement is, therefore, difficult in a community with such a small population of teens.

5.4.3c The Library

The Tumbler Ridge Public Library, located within the Community Centre, hosts children, teen, and adult programs, including the Teen Summer Reading Club, in addition to traditional library services of book loaning, printing, and computer access. Drop-in teen programs for the summer and fall 2024 seasons include drop-in Virtual Reality, a video game system, and drop-in *Magic the Gathering* (a trading card game) each once per week (Tumbler Ridge Community Centre, 2024b; Tumbler Ridge Community Centre, 2024c). The Library has also hosted resumé workshops and interview skills training for youth in collaboration with TRSS, as well as food literacy workshops that taught teens how to cook basic meals (personal communication, June 25th, 2024). While much of the library programming is directed to children, teens and young adults are still important users and programs are constantly being developed and adapted.

Some youth participants engage with the library regularly and praised its collection and youth programming. However, youth generally agreed that the programs were geared towards younger users as many participants had attended the programs, including the Teen Summer Reading Club, when they were younger, but it no longer appealed to them as older teens.

5.4.3d The Youth Centre

The Community Centre also hosts the Youth Centre, a drop-in facility for youth from grades five to 12 operated by the Coordinator and directed by the volunteer board, TRYSS. The Youth Centre provides various unstructured activities, including a rock-climbing wall, foosball, pool, and ping-pong tables, board games, video games, couches, and a concession. The Youth Centre operates 25.5 hours per week with afternoon hours for grades five and up and evening hours for grades seven and up (personal communication, June 29th, 2024). The Youth Centre also hosts special events such as movie screenings and youth dances. Unlike the Community Centre, the Youth Centre was designed to be a safe space for youth to gather rather than to provide structured programming.

Despite the value of the Youth Centre as a safe space for youth, there is tension with the District who believes that the Centre should be doing more to provide for local youth. This conflict was openly discussed by local government interviewees as well as various community and youth service providers. For example, one local government interviewee shared,

we have a Teen Centre, but I don't think it's utilized very well. I think it's sort of been the same program being offered for years and years and years. ... They need more input from the people of that age that are doing these things. So, I think it would be good for the community to kind of like hand it over [to the youth] and be like, 'hey, what are your interests? What do you want to do?' (I6).

This perspective was shared by Town Council who did not grant the usual three-year funding cycle to the Youth Centre in 2024, instead offering one year of operational funding with the expectation for services to increase. However, when interviewees in local government were

asked what they would like to see from the Youth Centre, many struggled to articulate a response.

According to youth service providers who regularly engage with youth, youth request an unstructured, drop-in space to hang out with their friends, “the big thing that they seem to be looking for is just a chance to decompress and hang out and visit with friends. And so, not the not the big grand events” (I11). Rather than recreational programming, the Youth Centre provides a safe ‘home base’ for youth to meet with their friends, use the washroom, and buy affordable snacks from the concession while out in the community. Youth participants agreed with this sentiment, with some participants expressing their regular use of the Youth Centre and describing it as “always fun” (FG26). However, other youth did not see the Youth Centre as an important youth space for them, preferring community locations that were less supervised.

5.4.3d Community Programs, Clubs, and Events

Outside of District-sponsored youth programs, Tumbler Ridge also has the Young People’s Drama, Junior Canadian Rangers, Tumbler Ridge Youth Soccer League, Tumbler Ridge Minor Hockey Association, Tumbler Ridge Figure Skating Club, Northern Rockies Karate Dojo, and the Rocky Mountain Dance Company. There are several other local clubs that also include youth, including the Grizzly Valley Saddle Club, Grizzly Valley ATV Club, Ridge Riders Snowmobile Club, and the Tumbler Ridge Curling Club. Outside of regular recreational programs for youth, the *2023 Tumbler Ridge Annual Report* highlights numbers of community events that were hosted (District of Tumbler Ridge, 2023, p.21). Many of these events were catered to local youth, including Winter Carnival Week, Tumbler Ridge Junior Idol, Take a Kid to the Golf Course, the Pumpkin Patch, the BC U18 Women’s Hockey Tournament, as well as monthly free skate and swim nights, and four Youth Black Light Bingo Nights.

Tumbler Ridge also had a Youth Councillor on the Town Council in 2015 to 2016 after a teen approached the mayor requesting involvement. While no Youth Councillor positions have been filled since, the opportunity is available for youth who are motivated to pursue it. The Youth Centre established the Youth Council in the summer of 2024 to help direct activities and encourage greater youth involvement (personal communication, September 11th, 2024).

Youth participants generally spoke highly of community events while also identifying that community events for youth typically target young teens. For example, one youth shared, they just don't know what to plan for the teenagers. They'll plan, like dances and the movie nights, it's more directed to the kids, because they don't think the teenagers are going to go to the dance or anything. ... the movies have kind of died down a bit, it's mostly little kids that go anyways. The black light dance was for grades four, five, and six, a bunch of those kids showed up, but we don't really get much of our age group (FG26).

When asked if they would attend a black light dance or movie night geared towards teens, nearly all youth participants responded positively. Youth expressed that if the events were specifically catered to older teens and younger ages were not allowed, they would attend more recreation and social events. Many suggestions were made by youth for community developments and events to better engage them, but the consensus is best summarized by one youth who stated, "not really anything specific, but I think anything new that came here would probably be alright" (FG22).

5.4.4 Community Planning, Amenities, and Remoteness

Interviewees and youth participants discussed the planning of Tumbler Ridge as a pull factor for youth. The walkability of the community was appreciated by youth participants as it facilitated access to friends' houses, recreation opportunities, and other amenities. Youth also

identified the integration of green spaces in the community design as an important aspect. Green spaces provided attractive youth recreation opportunities outside of designated infrastructure as well as more privacy. The other aspect of community planning discussed by interviewees and youth were the recreation amenities, with the most important to youth participants being the arenas, golf course, weight room, skate park, Pump Track, and Library. Most of these recreation amenities are in the Community Centre, demonstrating the importance of the community facility to youth experiences in Tumbler Ridge.

While community planning and recreation amenities were identified as a pull factor by interviewees and youth, the remoteness and lack of amenities in Tumbler Ridge was identified as the most significant push factor. In the context of youth and young people, amenities were typically described by interviewees as places for social interaction and recreation, including clubs and theatres. Interviewees discussed positive recreation amenities for children and young families but identified a gap for young adults. As one community service provider expressed, “there’s no real bar here to go dancing. We don’t have that college scene here, so there’s little reason for people in that age group who are interested in those things [to stay here]” (I1). Youth participants were less interested in ‘nightlife’, instead articulating a desire for group recreational activities, such as a bowling alley, arcade, dance classes, and organized sports with higher age limits.

The lack of social amenities in Tumbler Ridge was typically discussed by interviewees as a trade-off for other values, usually outdoor recreation opportunities. While adult and youth participants who identified with the outdoor recreation culture of Tumbler Ridge were willing to trade social amenities, participants interested in other cultural activities were pushed from the community. As one service provider shared,

for very culturally-inclined [young people] who want to go to concerts or to theatre, like for us, we still plan those things but they are big excursions, like ‘ok, let’s do a weekend in Grande Prairie and we’re gonna go to the theatre’, and it’s great because it makes them more memorable but that easy access to ... culture and music and all of that stuff that’s really important to certain demographics, it was to me, doesn’t exist here (I1).

Many service providers and youth compared the amenities available in Tumbler Ridge to those available in larger centres in their discussions of remoteness, but local government interviewees were less likely to share this perspective. Instead, one local government interviewee expressed that they “think it is all about perspective. Everybody sees that the cities offer so much more, but once you're actually living there, you don't take advantage of it the same way you expect that you're going to” (I13).

5.5 Sense of Place

A growing body of literature has identified the impact of sense of place on the migration planning of rural youth (Bernsen *et al.*, 2022; Choi & Kramer, 2024; Stough-Hunter & Lekies, 2020). This section discusses the social, cultural, and experiential aspects of the Tumbler Ridge community that influence youth, including the small-town lifestyle, natural environment, community culture, and influence of childhood experiences.

5.5.1 Small-Town Lifestyle and Social Connections

The small-town lifestyle was the most significant pull factor of Tumbler Ridge for interviewees and youth participants alike. The close-knit feel and sense of community among residents were commonly cited reasons by interviewees for living in and loving Tumbler Ridge. This sentiment was also commonly described by interviewees as a lack of anonymity, which is ironically also a significant push factor for young people. These perspectives were shared by

youth, with every youth participant who was raised in Tumbler Ridge expressing that they enjoyed their childhood in the community. One youth shared, “it was a really good spot to grow up” (FG22) and another added, “I love small-town life, ... and I think Tumbler Ridge specifically is really unique with how community-oriented it is, how friendly everybody is, and how open the community is” (FG23). This sense of community was particularly important for young people who may be struggling with mental health according to interviewees, a previously identified issue in Tumbler Ridge. While youth participants did not discuss mental health, they did share feelings of being cared for by the community.

Interviewees and youth participants discussed the sense of safety in Tumbler Ridge as a pull factor for youth. This sense of safety was often linked to a sense of freedom for youth who were afforded independence as a product of perceived community safety. As one service provider who grew up in Tumbler Ridge shared,

that was the best part about growing up in a small-town. You're not restricted, you're free to go and go explore because it's just small and everybody knows everybody. So, it's a kind of raise-everybody's-children kind of atmosphere that goes on when you live in a small community (I4).

The small-town lifestyle of Tumbler Ridge was identified by all participants as the most significant pull factor for young people. Sense of community, friendliness, and safety were identified as pertinent aspects of this theme. The alignment of this perspective among all groups demonstrates its significance to the discussion of resident retention.

While the small-town lifestyle fostered positive social connections, participants also identified a lack of anonymity and other negative social dynamics. Interviewees who grew up in

Tumbler Ridge or other small-towns identified the lack of anonymity as a push factor for youth. As one youth service provider stated,

I didn't grow up in Tumbler Ridge, but in [my small-town], it was like it was a fishbowl. You're living in a fishbowl. Everybody knows you. Everybody knows your parents, anything you do gets back to them. You feel like you can't move (I12).

Many interviewees also discussed how the reputations you build as a child or youth stay with you in a small-town, making it difficult for youth to grow and change. This challenge was described by an education provider who stated that:

one of the reasons kids probably want to leave is, once you have a name, it's really hard to live in small-towns. And I think that's an area where, if I was a kid in Tumbler Ridge, I would want to see some work done. How do you make sure they're going to be functioning members of society if you shame them for making small, little errors. ... how do you live in a small-town once you have a name for being a shithead? (I21).

While gender did not influence sense of belonging for interview or focus group participants, some interviewees shared that sexual orientation and being a visible minority may. As one education stakeholder shared,

I don't know that we have a lot of open queer relationships in our community. ... So, I think there's still a lot of work to be done, but I think that's worldwide. ... I still know kids in our community who aren't out to their parents. So, there's still that stigma (I9).

Diverse identities were generally discussed by interviewees to be more accepted in urban centres than in rural communities, including Tumbler Ridge. A small number of youth expressed similar sentiments, although the topic was not a main topic of discussion, perhaps because of the personal identities of youth participants or because of the taboo nature of the topic.

Service providers also identified the lack of anonymity as an important issue for youth accessing services that may be stigmatizing, such as mental health support. As one community service provider shared,

it's just a vicious cycle. If the kids see you going to see the school counselor, guess what's happening? As soon as you come back out, all the gossip has spread because you went to the school counselor. So yeah, that's hard, and it's even worse in a small-town (I14).

An interviewee in education shared concerns around lack of anonymity when accessing some health products, such as contraception.

These issues were not discussed by youth, although that may be because these issues are stigmatized and can be awkward to discuss, especially in a focus group setting, but other social dynamics were identified as a push factor for some. Youth who did not grow up in Tumbler Ridge often expressed feelings of social isolation and difficulty making friends. Other youth shared challenges with bullying and exclusion at the high school, noting that,

when it comes to friendships in high school, it's tough because you only have so many to choose from ... it's very stressful because people are pretty mean ... if you grew up here, you know how it is, you know how to deal with it, but if you didn't, if you're new, you're an outsider (FG30).

The small-town lifestyle of Tumbler Ridge was also linked to family connections for many interviewees. Interviewees expressed that Tumbler Ridge fosters family connections through a variety of avenues, including opportunities for outdoor recreation as a family. Fostering family connections does have an impact on retaining young people, as one service provider shared,

we spent all our time outside as a family. So yeah, having that at your disposal is what kind of brought me back here. And then obviously family, friends, the whole kind of support system that goes with it (I4).

Family connections were a pull factor for some interviewees, however, for adults raised in Tumbler Ridge, this pull factor was only described after leaving the community. Only two youth participants discussed family connections, and only one identified it as a reason to return to Tumbler Ridge. Family connections may not have been an important pull factor for youth participants because many of them still lived with their families, but its importance may grow as youth age.

5.5.3 Natural Environment and Outdoor Recreation

Closely connected to the small-town lifestyle of Tumbler Ridge is the natural environment in and around the community and its opportunities for outdoor recreation. This sentiment was often the first response from interviewees when asked about the pull factors of Tumbler Ridge. Opportunities to participate in outdoor recreation and appreciation of the natural environment were commonly linked to personal identity, with many participants noting that they shared an innate sense of belonging in the natural environment. As one interviewee shared, “for me, I'm small-town. I can adapt, I'm sure, wherever I go but I love it here” (I17). Another interviewee shared a similar sentiment in relation to local youth,

some of them, like the amount they get to go out on ATVs and go dirt biking and go quadding, they have a playground out there where they just get to be reckless, dangerous boys. They love it so much, and I think that if you're not into that kind of thing, it makes it easier to leave. But those kids are going to be looking into going to Northern Lights College and then coming back to live here. That's the reality, that's their values (I20).

Like the interviewees, opportunities for outdoor recreation were often the first pull factor identified by youth. Many shared specific environmental features and outdoor activities that were important to them, such as, “the forest is your backyard” (FG33) and “the rivers are good hang out spots” (FG32). Some youth expressed a deep connection to the natural environment, including the trade-off of other amenities. As one youth shared,

for me personally, I'm putting the community, the hiking, the outdoors, and like, being near my waterfalls, and my family, over the healthcare stuff because I can go get healthcare anywhere, but I can't live in another place like this (FG23).

Most youth were considering the natural environment or outdoor recreation in their migration plans, although some youth did not, despite identifying it as a pull factor of Tumbler Ridge.

5.5.5 Community Culture

5.5.5a Intangible Youth Support

In addition to the tangible ways Tumbler Ridge supports local youth, many participants also discussed intangible support. Interviewees often described the local culture as supportive of youth and shared stories of individuals in the community who make a difference in the lives of youth. This culture of support is critical in building a sense of belonging and pertains to the issue of retaining youth in rural communities. However, the culture of Tumbler Ridge is multi-faceted, and some cultural norms are harmful to local youth, including declining volunteerism, the prevalence of substances, and a lack of diverse representation. For example, one local government interviewee shared,

It [the local culture] is a double-edged sword. You will find some incredibly kind and positive kids here, but like most cultures, also a lot of at-risk youth making poor choices. It's tough to engage them and have a good impact on redirecting behaviours or encouraging them to try new things (I18).

Youth were particularly concerned with substance use in the community, an issue that few interviewees discussed. It is unclear if interviewees were unaware of the prevalence of substance use or were uncomfortable discussing the topic.

A few interviewees also discussed the polarization of the community and difficulty for some youth to 'find their place'. While participants discussed how supportive Tumbler Ridge is of outdoor recreation and family life, if youth's identities do not align with this picture, they may struggle. As one service provider shared,

the general culture of Tumbler Ridge is becoming really polarized, like we had those anti-library protests a couple years ago, we had the anti-pride protest last summer. ... because we're so small, people you see at that protest that are your friend's parents, it's your aunt, it's your boss. You're going to know the people in that crowd where you might not if you're in Vancouver. That's harder. ... I remember seeing that and going, 'I can never come back here, I need to get out of this town forever' ... it's easier to be like, 'I'm leaving'. It's very hard to look at a place and go, 'oh, I want to stay here and do the hard work and try and make changes for people that might leave anyway because it's too scary to be here' (I19).

Despite the cultural challenges that some residents face in Tumbler Ridge, nearly all interviewees and youth participants spoke positively about the local culture. Youth shared that they felt supported and cared for by members of the community, evidenced by high community

engagement in social events, such as the Fall Fair and Christmas Market. Tumbler Ridge also has high engagement in volunteerism, despite recent declines in many other rural communities (Ryser *et al.*, 2012). Building from this culture, interviewees shared how the community comes together in times of need, such as opening the Community Centre for residents to sleep in during a multi-day power outage one winter (I19).

The supportive culture of Tumbler Ridge specifically relating to youth was discussed by interviewees through the community coming together. Education providers shared the willingness of local businesses and institutions to participate in teaching at TRSS or provide donations and expertise for various projects. Local government providers shared how most of the sports teams are run by parent volunteers. Service providers shared that every child in Tumbler Ridge receives a present from Santa on Christmas through a Geopark initiative, and when a group of youth developed their own clothing brand, they sold out at a local market.

5.5.5b The Inevitability of Youth Out-Migration

When discussing the migration goals and plans of youth, many interviewees normalized youth out-migration from Tumbler Ridge following high school graduation. Local government did not identify significant patterns of youth out-migration, but service and education providers did and described it as inevitable. Few push factors for this out-migration were discussed, it was just assumed that youth would leave. For example, a youth service provider shared,

doesn't every kid from a small-town, I don't even think it matters if they're from a small-town or a big one, 'I'm graduating and getting the hell out of here', right? It's that, I want to assert my independence, I want to be away from my parents, I want to be away from my family, I want to go to the other side of the country to go to university, or whatever (I12).

The belief that youth out-migration was inevitable seemed to override the push and pull factors identified by interviewees. Instead, these factors were believed to encourage youth to return rather than to keep them in the community following high school graduation.

The youth perspective aligned with this culture of out-migration as ‘inevitable’. Although youth articulated specific reasons, they also expressed out-migration as an inevitable next step of life. For example, one youth shared,

I love the town, and I'll always love the town. I can't wait to leave, but it was a great place to grow up, and I really do appreciate it, but I'm ready for change now. It's just where I'm at (FG22).

Additionally, youth generally shared the perspective that young people raised in small-towns should experience living elsewhere. While the reasons and desired locations for their out-migration differed, nearly all youth participants expressed an inevitable need to leave Tumbler Ridge following high school graduation.

5.5.5c Desire of (and for) Youth to Return

Despite the perceived inevitability of youth out-migration, interviewees expressed a strong desire for youth to return to Tumbler Ridge. Most interviewees encouraged youth to leave Tumbler Ridge following high school graduation to pursue ‘bigger opportunities’ with the desire to bring those experienced young people back later. As one community service provider shared,

I really like when I see them succeed in those bigger centers, and I think it's really important that they do take those jobs in bigger centers and see how things are done in other places. We are a very insular community and the more that people can go out and see how things are done in other places and then bring that back, just enriches our community here (I1).

Interviewees generally felt strongly that youth would return to Tumbler Ridge out of a genuine desire to work and raise families in the community. Interestingly, no interviewees discussed a desire or need to attract youth from other communities to Tumbler Ridge, they only discussed the return of local youth. This culture of returning young people was not lost on the youth participants. As one youth shared,

I don't really think there's anything that Tumbler Ridge can do to bring people back. I think it's more that if you've lived here your whole life, you're going to come back. That's how it is. Like a lot of the adults that live here, they've lived here their whole lives, or most of their lives, and they came back. And I think that's because they're used to the small-town, and then when they go out to the big city, it's like, 'okay, whoa, I don't know any of this', so I think that's more it (FG30).

Youth were asked if there is anything that Tumbler Ridge could do to attract them back and most participants responded quickly and negatively to the question. While many of the youth participants normalized out-migration following high school graduation, they had difficulty articulating anything that Tumbler Ridge could do to attract them back. They cited a lack of local employment opportunities and social amenities as reasons for leaving. Additionally, a few participants alluded to the importance of a youth sense of belonging. While youth who expressed strong connections to the natural environment and outdoor recreation were the most likely to share an interest in returning. Youth who were more interested in organized sports or the arts shared a strong interest in migrating to urban centres. One interviewee was more explicit in their discussion of sense of belonging, sharing that “the ones that I'm thinking about are, like, gay or neurodivergent teenagers. So, it's very like, I'll go somewhere where this is totally fine and normal and there's not going to be any people that suck” (I19). While the amenities and

employment opportunities in Tumbler Ridge play a role in youth migration decisions, so does culture in shaping young people's sense of belonging.

5.5.5d External Influences on Youth's Goals

Youth migration decisions are not made in a vacuum, and understanding the nuanced pressures that influence youth employment, education, and migration goals is critical to understanding rural youth retention. Education providers shared that youth employment and education goals are greatly influenced by peers, families, and community culture. Interviewees shared that goals have trended towards trades in recent years, influenced by the booming mining industry as well as other institutions. As one education provider shared,

it's very influenced. There is definitely a big trade push, and there's just a big trade push being in Tumbler Ridge, right? Because our businesses want us to push trades because they want people, and our schools, like Northern Lights College, they want us to push trades because we need red seals⁵ (I20).

Equally influential for youth is the local mining culture. As a service provider who grew up in Tumbler Ridge shared,

employment was a huge one, especially growing up. Like, summer jobs or career aspirations like, 'oh, I'm going to be, you know, creating my own business', it wasn't really focused on. It was just kind of a small-town mining community with, you know, you go into the mines and do all those things. So that kind of altered my perspective of, you know, leaving and not coming back. ... The [mining] culture is definitely strong (I4).

The influence of the local mining culture also manifests in the ways youth in Tumbler Ridge are exposed to specific occupations and industries, and not others. The influence of the local mining

⁵ The Red Seal Program sets common standards for skilled tradespeople in Canada including apprenticeship training and trade certifications (Red Seal, 2025).

culture can also have the opposite effect on youth, as no youth participants expressed a desire to work in mining. Additionally, youth with very different employment goals than the options they see in Tumbler Ridge may not feel represented in their community, driving more out-migration.

5.5.5e Ambition Linked to Out-Migration

Interviewees often connected the out-migration of youth from Tumbler Ridge to ambition. While this theme was not prompted in the interview or focus group guide, and interviewees rarely addressed the theme directly, it was alluded to in many interviews with service and education providers. The consensus was that ambitious youth will leave Tumbler Ridge, often to pursue post-secondary education, and that youth who stay, and often to work in the coal mines, are less ambitious. For example, one service provider commented, “anybody that's got any type of ambition wants to leave Tumbler Ridge, right? I think that they get that, and they want to go into post-secondary education” (I14). A few interviewees addressed the stigmatization of youth who do not have migration goals of leaving the community, including an education provider who said, “I think there probably is [a stigma], I think there is – that you haven't done anything with your life, and the concept that if we do something with our life, we have to do it somewhere else” (I21). However, the stereotyping of leavers as ambitious and stayers as unambitious is further complicated in Tumbler Ridge with discussions of returning youth, which was expected and often praised.

Interviewees who described youth leavers as ambitious also tended to connect staying away from Tumbler Ridge with success. This finding is connected to youth feeling unprepared for life after high school, as youth who returned to Tumbler Ridge before completing their original education goals were stigmatized. Reasons for returning to Tumbler Ridge were often presented as an inability to succeed in other communities. As one education provider shared,

I can't teach every kid how to read a bus schedule, but like, that's where I see the difference, kids who are going to be successful in the world or not. That's a big one, 'how do I navigate a world that doesn't exist where I grew up?' ... like, how do you use a subway system? What is a streetcar system? If you don't know what that stuff is, you're going to get bounced back to your home community pretty quick because that is scary ... that kind of stuff is probably what keeps kids from getting bounced back and having that high 'return to sender' (I21).

This quote demonstrates two key points, first, that a lack of comfortability with urban life pushes youth back to Tumbler Ridge, and second, that youth who return to Tumbler Ridge were 'bounced back' by outside forces or because of fear.

The stigmatization of stayers was less prevalent among youth with few participants commenting on other youth who have stayed or left Tumbler Ridge. However, all youth participants planned to leave Tumbler Ridge following high school graduation and only one youth in each focus group expressed a desire to return. Reasons for these migration goals were often linked to the lack of economic diversification and disinterest in working in coal mining. When youth were asked if they believed that youth who stayed in Tumbler Ridge or worked in the coal mines were stigmatized, most did not have an answer. However, one youth did share,

I think that's true, because there's a few people that I know, but I feel like it's more the people who fall into the bad things. Like, who skip school and smoke weed, not saying that's necessarily a bad thing, but who do it too much to the point where they skip school and throw their life away. I feel like it's more of those people, and they never really go out of town to go do anything. But I don't think that's just like a small-town thing, I feel

like that's anywhere... people who do leave town and go study somewhere, yeah, I'd say they're like, more successful (FG30).

Due to the negative perception of the local mining industry among youth and their migration goals of leaving Tumbler Ridge, it can be assumed that youth who stay in Tumbler Ridge are stigmatized as less ambitious. However, this connection was clearer to service and education providers than to youth.

5.5.4 The Influence of Childhood Experiences on Migration Decisions

An unexpected finding was the influence of childhood experiences on the migration decisions of interviewees. While employment opportunities and cost of living were often listed as the primary drivers when directly asked, most interviewees also described their connection to Tumbler Ridge in relation to childhood experiences. These experiences related to the natural environment, small-town lifestyle, and outdoor recreation opportunities. As one local government interviewee shared,

I did my first two years of college in the town I grew up in and then you couldn't finish your degree there, so I left. But I liked the small-town feel of knowing everybody, the little bit of safety feeling, the nature. They were all draws for me (I13).

Many interviewees remarked how Tumbler Ridge reminded them of the communities that they grew up in or associated aspects of positive childhood experiences. These sentiments were expressed by most interviewees with children who wanted their children to grow up in Tumbler Ridge to experience similar things to what they enjoyed in their childhood. Similarly, some interviewees had grown up in or around large urban centres and disliked their experiences, encouraging them to seek out small-town living. For example, a service provider expressed,

I grew up just outside of [a large urban centre], so I had access to pretty much everything. I didn't really particularly like living there as a teenager. It was a hard-core hockey town, all the boys played rep hockey, and I just didn't have anything to do with it, they were all partying on weekends, and I just wasn't interested. I was career-focused already at that young age and it just didn't have anything for me (I1).

This quote illustrates the importance of a sense of belonging in how childhood experiences shape migrations decisions.

Youth participants expressed many of the same sentiments. For youth who grew up in Tumbler Ridge, some expressed a desire to return, typically to raise families in the small-town lifestyle, and others were interested in other small communities. These youth cited their own positive childhood experiences in Tumbler Ridge as the pull factor for their eventual return or their desire to live in another small-town. For example, one youth shared,

I loved growing up here, and I want to raise a family here because I think that my childhood was amazing. And I do think that kids that grew up here should leave here and, like, see other places and go out and explore ... but I think that being raised here was really awesome for me as a kid, and so I want to raise my kids here (FG23).

For youth who had moved to Tumbler Ridge in the last five years, most expressed a desire to return to their hometowns or to move where other family lived. For example, one youth shared, "I want to buy the house my great grandfather used to own because that house holds a lot of memories" (FG31). When asked about their migration planning, many youth expressed a desire to move to places that held positive childhood memories, even if these were not Tumbler Ridge.

Chapter 6: Discussion

My research explored senior high school students' experiences of being a young person in Tumbler Ridge and how those experiences contributed to future migration decisions. This Discussion chapter is divided into sections based on meta-themes determined in the latent content analysis that connect to the literature: youth sense of belonging in migration planning (section 6.1), youth readiness (section 6.2), and rural youth retention (section 6.3). Each of the research questions are discussed through these meta-themes, including the push and pull factors of Tumbler Ridge, aspects of community support, and youth goals. Supportive youth-related recommendations for Tumbler Ridge and other rural communities in BC are also provided.

6.1 Youth Sense of Place in Migration Planning

The connection between youth's migration plans and their education and employment goals is well established in the literature, and the youth in Tumbler Ridge were no exception. When youth were asked where they wanted to migrate and why, nearly all participants named the municipality in which they planned to attend post-secondary, and many named a second municipality in which they planned to begin their careers. Interestingly, none of youth's education, employment, or migration plans were gendered, despite gender being a prominent theme in the rural youth migration literature (McLaughlin, 2014; McLay & Foster, 2023; Robichaud, 2014). On the surface, youth migration planning appears to simply be a product of education and employment goals, but a critical examination of these goals revealed an interesting pattern. Youth who displayed a strong sense of place to Tumbler Ridge either planned to return to Tumbler Ridge following post-secondary graduation or planned to move to similar communities (e.g., rural and/ or northern) while youth who displayed weak sense of place to Tumbler Ridge planned to move further away to less similar communities (e.g., urban and/ or

southern). Level of place connection among youth was assessed through my interpretation of focus group discussions on topics including sense of belonging, identity, community satisfaction, and place attachment. Unlike the literature (e.g., Donkersloot, 2011; Glendinning *et al.*, 2003), youth's sense of belonging in Tumbler Ridge was not higher among young men than young women. The education, employment, and migration goals of youth in Tumbler Ridge reveal an important connection between youth's sense of place and the desire to stay rural. Therefore, I argue that youth fit their employment and education goals within their geographic and cultural preferences (sense of place) rather than fitting their sense of place into their employment and education goals.

The literature on rural youth migration planning is robust with a multitude of priorities discussed and debated. Many scholars argue that education and employment opportunities, or perceptions of opportunities, outweigh sense of place or quality of life factors in youth migration planning (Avis, 2013; Demi *et al.*, 2009; Stalker & Phyne, 2014; Looker, 2021; MacMichael *et al.*, 2015). However, a growing body of literature supports that sense of place actually plays a more significant role (Choi & Kramer, 2024; Liu, 2015; Sowl *et al.*, 2022; Stough-Hunter & Lekies, 2020). This discrepancy may illustrate a cultural shift in the priorities of young people or a difference in the way research questions are asked and analyzed. Eacott and Sonn (2006) recognize the importance of education and employment in youth migration planning but argue that other sociocultural factors can “provide insight into opportunities for initiatives aimed at maintaining the viability of rural communities” (p.200). Similarly, McLay and Foster (2023) argue that even employment migration cannot be reduced to macroeconomic conditions or job availability as economic priorities are often intertwined with quality of life priorities. My findings echo this literature as the community's remoteness and lack of amenities were identified

as the primary push factor for youth, rather than a lack of employment opportunities. While education and employment opportunities were important to youth and may initiate the desire to migrate, sense of place was the driver of residential aspirations and significantly influenced youth's plans to return to Tumbler Ridge, stay rural, or move south/ urban.

It is well understood that place connections begin early in life, so if place attachment and sense of belonging is critical for youth retention then youth community engagement should be encouraged from a young age and supported through adolescence (Foster & Main, 2018; McLaughlin *et al.*, 2014; Theodori & Theodori, 2015). These assertions relate to a finding from interviews, that childhood experiences inform migration decisions. Many interviewees cited their enjoyment of growing up in a small-town or spending time with their family and friends outdoors as key reasons for returning or migrating to Tumbler Ridge, often because they wanted the same experiences for their children. Casey (2021) and Porter (2022) reported similar findings with participants explaining their reasons for living and raising their families rurally through their own childhood experiences. It can then be posited that youth with a strong place attachment to other rural communities would consider migrating to Tumbler Ridge, an assumption confirmed by many key informant interviewees who had moved from other small-towns in Canada. Therefore, community development that focuses on supporting youth place attachment and sense of belonging is both a youth retention and recruitment strategy.

Engaging youth in their community to foster place attachment and sense of belonging can be facilitated through inclusion in community planning and development (Robichaud, 2014). As Theodori and Theodori (2015) assert, young people are too often overlooked in community development, "yet rural communities striving to maintain population must see youth as partners in community development, offering young citizens the opportunity to be engaged, active

participants in community matters” (p.388). Recommendations from the literature include the development of a Youth Council to provide a youth perspective on local decision-making. A Youth Councillor position was developed in 2015 to 2016 for a high school student who offered a youth perspective to City Council. Unfortunately, there was no interest in taking the position over at the end of the term, and it has not been offered to any youth since. I recommend the formal re-development of a Youth Councillor (or Youth Council), with opportunities to engage with the community on local issues, as a method of engaging youth in community development and fostering sense of place. There is potential to collaborate with TRSS on this initiative as the relationship is well established. The Youth Centre reinstated their Youth Steering Committee in 2024 which is made up of a number of youths who direct the activities, plan events, and decide how fundraised money is spent. Perhaps the Youth Centre’s Steering Committee could serve as a model for other community organizations, including Town Council.

6.1.1 Youth Education Goals

The pursuit of post-secondary education following high school graduation was normalized for youth in Tumbler Ridge. Nearly all youth participants expressed a desire to attend a post-secondary institution, reflecting an established pattern for TRSS graduates according to many interviewees. This normalization of post-secondary education is not common among other rural communities in the literature, instead, rural youth often have less educational aspirations and attainments than urban youth (Andres & Looker, 2001; Gabriel, 2006; Theodori & Theodori, 2015). This difference may be partially explained by the affluence of many Tumbler Ridge residents, evidenced by average employment incomes above provincial averages, as well as the experiential learning, dual credit, and work experience opportunities at TRSS. Additionally,

there may be a temporal difference as most of the literature on rural youth education aspirations were published ten or more years ago.

The out-migration of high-competence rural youth to pursue education goals and lack of in-migration of other educated young people is a prominent theme in the literature, often described as the ‘brain drain’ phenomenon (Agger *et al.*, 2018; Bernsen *et al.*, 2022; Demi *et al.*, 2009). This perspective was shared by many interviewees who associated youth out-migration with ‘ambition’, since out-migration from Tumbler Ridge is required to attend a post-secondary institution. This cultural association of out-migration and ambition is also found in the literature; McLaughlin (2014) explains that leaving the home community to attend a post-secondary institution is seen as a sign of success for the youth, the high school, and the community.

For youth in Tumbler Ridge, not only is staying in the community stigmatized, but so is returning within a certain timeframe or without completing post-secondary education under the assumption that they ‘failed’ at whatever they left to accomplish. However, returning to Tumbler Ridge later in life, usually after completing post-secondary education, is not stigmatized; youth returning is encouraged, celebrated, and even expected by the community. This scale of stigmatization and expectation differs from much of the literature on rural youth migration which simplifies out-migration as a decision in the best interest of rural youth (Schafft, 2016) or explores the stigmatization of youth who stay (Donkersloot, 2011; Eacott & Sonn, 2006; Pedersen & Gram, 2018; Robichaud, 2014). This difference between the literature and Tumbler Ridge may be explained by the poor socioeconomic conditions in many rural communities experiencing youth out-migration which are not occurring in Tumbler Ridge, such as industry or school closures. A culture that normalizes post-secondary education and stigmatizes those who

stay pushes youth out of Tumbler Ridge, but this is complicated by expectations that youth will return and contribute.

6.1.2 Youth Employment Goals

The literature discusses economic opportunities as one of the most significant influences on the migration planning of rural youth (Liu, 2015; Robichaud, 2014; Theodori & Theodori, 2015). McLay and Foster (2023) add that migration “is a subjective process that is influenced as much by perceptions and discourses that link success with big cities as by actual job opportunities” (p.24). Indeed, few youth in Tumbler Ridge had reviewed job postings or inquired about potential employment opportunities in their desired communities, instead it was assumed that other communities, with greater economic diversification than Tumbler Ridge, will have youth’s desired employment opportunities. However, youth did not actually discuss a lack of economic opportunity in Tumbler Ridge, instead they sought different types of employment that they believed was not available in their community. Unlike the literature, most youth did not associate successful jobs with urban locations, instead high-paying ‘good’ jobs were often associated with skilled trades in northern BC and Alberta.

Rather than a pattern of rural-to-urban migration in pursuit of greater education and employment opportunities, youth prioritized lifestyle factors alongside their desired employment. This finding demonstrates that youth perspectives on employment have changed over time, while ‘good’, high-paying jobs are still important, so is being fulfilled. This theme is present in recent literature, for example, Bernsen *et al.* (2022) did not find economic opportunities to be a significant predictor of youth migration aspirations, concluding that “policies are often developed to recruit young workers to rural locales, but without fostering attachments, simple economic incentives are not likely to succeed” (p.578). In my research, employment was not the

primary push factor for Tumbler Ridge youth, it was remoteness and lack of amenities. Therefore, resident recruitment and retention strategies targeting youth and young families should focus on lifestyle and quality of life factors rather than simply economic opportunities (MacMichael *et al.*, 2015).

6.2 Youth Readiness

While all youth participants planned to pursue post-secondary education, TRSS students and graduates expressed feelings of unpreparedness for this transition. Youth cited high rates of teacher turnover, the lack of qualified teachers, and restricted course offerings at TRSS, as well as the removal of standardized testing from the BC curriculum, as reasons for their lack of preparedness. Local government and service providers echoed these concerns, and some shared stories of their children or other local youth who had not been successful in post-secondary pursuits. Unfortunately, there is almost no contemporary literature on student readiness in the northern BC context. Most of the literature is from the rural US and focuses on the low socioeconomic status, marginalization, and poverty present in many small, rural schools. As a result, the literature links rural students' lack of readiness with under-resourced, low performing schools and low levels of post-secondary aspirations (Bouck, 2004; Corley, 2018; Morton *et al.*, 2018).

Some experiences shared by youth in Tumbler Ridge do connect to elements of the literature, including limited course offerings and challenges with distance learning. Anderson and Chang (2011) and Saw and Agger (2021) explored the accessibility of math and STEM courses, respectively, in American high schools and found that rural schools had lower teaching capacity and offered less advanced placement (AP) courses. Similarly, Gagnon and Mattingly (2016) found that rural American high schools struggle to promote AP courses due to teaching

constraints and a lack of sufficiently prepared students. At TRSS, most courses are only offered once per year or every other year due to teaching constraints, setting students back a year if they fail a course or if they have to choose between a limited set of classes offered in any given year. One education provider shared that some students would rather drop out than take a course again the next year with a younger cohort of students. Elective courses are also restricted at TRSS due to the small teaching staff. To cope with these teaching constraints, TRSS facilitates distance learning for some courses and students. While this model can fill gaps, education providers and youth had mixed feelings about its effectiveness due to the lack of personalized support. Mulcahy and Barbour (2010) discuss similar issues with distance learning in Newfoundland and Labrador, finding that students avoided taking difficult courses remotely. A few youth in Tumbler Ridge have transitioned their high school learning to be fully remote, but levels of success vary.

According to youth participants, the most significant challenge to their academic readiness was the high rates of teacher turnover and lack of qualified teachers at TRSS. This issue is not new to Tumbler Ridge, according to Gill (1991) who states,

the high level of teacher turnover, with two years being an average length of stay, was mentioned as a problem because of the resulting lack of continuity. This is often associated with concern about teacher competence as many teachers are newly qualified and come north to gain experience (p.192).

Youth felt strongly that inexperienced teachers did not provide the quality of education required to succeed in post-secondary, and education providers stressed the importance of building rapport and trust with students over time. A study of rural BC high schools by Nielsen and Nashon (2007) tells a similar story of teacher stability being significantly linked to student

success and yet also reported high rates of teacher turnover and the hiring of inexperienced teaching staff. Nevertheless, youth expressed feelings of trust and support with their longstanding teachers, peers, and community, an important piece of readiness (Knox, 2023). Challenges with teacher recruitment and retention at TRSS reflect broader structural barriers that have existed for decades, evidenced by Nielsen and Nashon's (2007) study and Gill's (1991) report. SD 59 administration shared that about one quarter (20 to 30%) of their teaching staff are unqualified teachers working under Letters of Permission. The provincial government has recognized the teacher shortage and is investing \$12.5 million over 2024 to 2026 for teacher recruitment and training initiatives through the StrongerBC Future Ready Action Plan (Government of BC, 2024b), but education providers and administrators are not confident in current provincial initiatives. Incentives are needed to attract and retain teachers in rural and northern communities.

As a result of these feelings of unpreparedness, many youth shared a desire to raise their children elsewhere, despite their connections to Tumbler Ridge. Youth's experiences of high school education contributing to migration and family planning was not explored in the literature, instead research tends to focus on post-secondary aspirations rather than high school experiences. This connection between youth educational experiences and migration planning is important because it illustrates that place attachment alone is insufficient with education as an example of a push factor that can override place attachment. Pedersen and Gram (2018) explore the complexities of youth place attachment and share that,

thoughts of the local places are hereby representations of future possibilities and constraints ... although some interviewees actually have an urge to stay or return because of strong feelings of place attachment, they find it impossible, due to a lack of services and amenities (p.629).

Youth readiness has many implications for community development and has emerged as an important topic area with little research in the northern BC context.

6.3 Rural Youth Retention

6.3.1 Fostering Youth's Connections to Community

According to the literature, the most significant aspect of youth-focused community development is education and employment support. The prevalence of this topic is likely attributed to the overrepresentation of education and employment opportunities in the rural youth migration literature. Many scholars recommend building connections between schools and local businesses, organizations, and institutions to encourage students to pursue employment opportunities in their home community (Foster & Main, 2018; Stalker & Phyne, 2014; Robichaud, 2014; Schafft, 2016; Theodori & Theodori, 2015). Specifically, Avis (2013) recommends promoting summer and co-op employment opportunities and connecting high school students directly with employers.

Tumbler Ridge provides exceptional examples of school-community partnerships through experiential learning, work experience, and dual credit opportunities. For example, the Go-Kart program facilitates collaborations between TRSS, the District, Northern Lights College, and multiple local businesses (see section 5.2.3a and 5.2.3b). In addition to experiential learning and work experience opportunities which introduce students to potential career paths and facilitate connections with local professionals, the dual credit program through TRSS and Northern Lights

College allows students to gain post-secondary credits in their desired field. Outside of TRSS, the community also provides a multitude of summer student employment opportunities, including with the District, Community Centre, golf course, Fire Hall, Geopark, Museum, Library, and Conuma Resources (see section 5.3.3a). Partnerships between rural high schools and local institutions increase the amount of relevant, accurate information that schools transmit, broaden student access to post-secondary and employment preparation, and increase the social capital of youth (Morton *et al.*, 2018).

The community development literature also discusses the role of social and recreational planning to support youth engagement and empowerment in rural communities. Tumbler Ridge is excelling in these areas through a variety of community facilities, programs, and partnerships. Youth participants spoke highly of the recreation infrastructure in the community, including the facilities located in the town, such as the Community Centre and golf course, as well as surrounding trail networks. A variety of structured and unstructured youth programs are also facilitated by the Community Centre, Library, Youth Centre, and a variety of civic organizations, contributing to diverse youth engagement. Ryser *et al.* (2012) discuss the value of structured social and recreational activities for youth as “opportunities to develop positive social and mentoring networks that can build confidence, provide a broader range of supports, and limit their exposure to negative behaviours as they become older” (p.201). Recreational and social opportunities foster youth well-being and encourage community involvement (Foster & Main, 2018; Liu, 2015) which play an important role in building a sense of belonging.

The planning of Tumbler Ridge also contributes to youth well-being as it was designed to facilitate recreational and social opportunities for young people. During the planning of Tumbler Ridge, there was recognition of the association between stability and married workers, so

investments were made in recreation and community facilities, social services, and residential satisfaction (Gill 1991, 2002; Illsley *et al.*, 2010). These efforts are still appreciated by youth who cited the walkability of Tumbler Ridge and its green spaces as pertinent youth features. Social infrastructure such as these provide spaces that foster interaction and a sense of belonging among youth (Ryser *et al.*, 2012), which Tumbler Ridge demonstrates in abundance.

Some scholars also discuss the less tangible aspects of youth-focused community development, including building place attachment and a sense of belonging. In the rural community development literature, youth sense of place is often discussed alongside the natural environment, outdoor recreation, and small-town lifestyle (Casey, 2021; Foster & Main, 2018; Robichaud, 2014). McLaughlin *et al.* (2014) found that a clean and accessible natural environment and opportunities for outdoor recreation increased the likelihood that rural youth aspired to stay in, or near, their community. Tumbler Ridge has invested in robust outdoor recreation development with a variety of infrastructure in the community (e.g., basketball courts, golf course, Pump Track) and surrounding area (e.g., Mountain Bike Park, cross-country ski trails) as well as through the Tumbler Ridge Outdoor Recreation Association (TRORA), a new partnership between the District's Economic Development Office and four key outdoor recreation civic organizations. The promotion of the natural environment is particularly supported in Tumbler Ridge given the local area's UNESCO Global Geopark status. All youth participants discussed an appreciation of the natural environment, often in relation to outdoor recreation opportunities but also its scenic qualities.

The effectiveness of promoting the natural environment, small-town lifestyle, and outdoor recreation to local youth may be mixed. MacBride (2014) explored youth out-migration in rural Nova Scotia and found that similar childhood experiences were perceived differently by

youth – while the community may fit the ‘rural idyll’ imaginary for some youth, it is the ‘rural dull’ for others. Current development efforts in Tumbler Ridge typically focus on the natural environment or outdoor recreation (e.g., the Geopark, coal mining, hiking, snowmobiling). This community identity was important to many participants, evidenced by the small-town lifestyle and natural environment being identified as the primary pull factor of Tumbler Ridge. Youth interested in the rural lifestyle and its opportunities for outdoor recreation demonstrated strong sense of place, but youth with different priorities or interests did not express the same. Youth-focused community development is challenging because youth are not one homogeneous group, and some interests are easier to engage in rural communities than others. A weak sense of place was shared by youth who expressed interest in the arts and/or technology, areas where Tumbler Ridge currently falls short.

The District, Museum, and Geopark do not have any youth strategies or plans. Local government interviewees explained that while no initiatives were designed specifically for youth, all community development plans are designed to support all age groups, including youth. However, the planning needs of youth do not necessarily align with those of children or adults. Additionally, the youth cohort itself is diverse with different social and recreational desires between younger and older teens, further complicating service and program delivery.

Anderson (2015) argues that all places are separated and ordered for certain groups, either designed for children, designed for adults, or assumed to be used by adults and families, but few spaces are designed for youth. Instead, youth are liminal beings that exist on the margins of the community and are often out of place. The feeling of being ‘out of place’ in the community was shared by youth participants of all ages. All youth who had grown up in Tumbler Ridge discussed feelings of meaningful community engagement throughout their

childhood that ended around 14 years old. The youngest youth participants (aged 15) still felt engaged by the Youth Centre and community events, but they shared the same sentiment of being left out of the youth programs at the Community Centre and Library. When reviewing the recreational programs offered by the Community Centre, Youth Centre, Library, and other civic organizations, all offerings can be categorized into children's or adult's programs with almost no youth representation. However, it is important to consider the limited resources and capacity of the program providers in Tumbler Ridge as well as the small pool of youth, making teen-specific program delivery difficult.

To facilitate further youth program development, especially in currently underserved areas such as arts and technology, the capacity and resources of youth organizations need to be increased. For example, the Youth Centre is operated by the Coordinator for 25 hours per week with no other staff to facilitate the planning, marketing, and execution of youth activities. This story is common among other rural service providers. Partnerships with the Community Centre, the District, and other civic organizations need to be fostered to generate greater resources, capacity, and volunteers of all organizations. Attracting residents with interests in currently underserved areas may also improve the sense of place of some youth.

There is an interesting conflict in youth recreation planning where organizations express difficulty engaging youth and assume that youth become less interested in community programs and structured activities around age 14. Rather than a lack of interest, youth shared that they often do not feel comfortable attending programs designed for adults and often avoid those that are open to children. Developing recreational programs specifically for youth may decrease their feelings of being 'out of place' in the community and contribute to a stronger sense of belonging. Youth expressed a desire for social and recreational planning that was explicitly teen-focused,

including minimum and maximum age restrictions, less supervision, and events held in ‘third spaces’. For example, many youth shared stories of attending Community Centre movie nights as children and expressed that they still had a desire to attend, especially given the lack of a movie theatre in Tumbler Ridge, but that current movie nights are geared to younger audiences.

Showing movies with higher age ratings, and providing a robust concession, would encourage older youth to attend. Youth shared many positive memories associated with the Youth Centre and Community Centre events as well as sentiments that these have changed over the years, so organizations could capitalize on nostalgia alongside the development of new programs to keep youth engaged throughout their formative teen years.

6.3.2 Economic and Community Development Gaps

While childhood experiences, place attachment, and sense of place are important aspects of youth migration planning, youth also discussed housing and service provision. Housing was discussed by youth participants as a barrier to staying in or returning to Tumbler Ridge. The affordability of purchasing a house was recognized by participants, and affordable housing was listed as a strength in the Tumbler Ridge Economic Development Plan (District of Tumbler Ridge, 2018). However, many participants discussed the rental market as both scarce and expensive, a pertinent issue for youth. Additionally, participants complained about the lack of diversity in the housing market with few options outside of single detached homes. These issues were addressed in Tumbler Ridge’s OCP (District of Tumbler Ridge, 2023) which states that there is a shortage of affordable rental housing and a need to increase housing diversity.

What the OCP and Economic Development Plan do not address are the housing pressures incurred by the temporary contractors of Conuma Resources, an increased pressure felt since 2023 with the re-start and expansion of the Quintette Mine. According to participants, this influx

has greatly impacted rental housing availability and affordability, a pressure I also experienced when trying to find accommodation during my fieldwork. The most recent Housing Needs Assessment was completed in December 2024 and is not yet publicly available, but a presentation of the results to City Council revealed that 109 new units are needed in the next five years to accommodate population growth estimates (Ernst, 2025). However, this assessment uses the provincial methodology and does not consider place-specific changes, including the potential opening of a new coal mine (Ernst, 2025). The current housing stock and rental market do not support the retention of youth looking to move out of their family's homes or the recruitment of other young people to the community.

Youth interested in technology, recreationally or as a career, expressed their concerns about Tumbler Ridge's information and communication technology (ICT), specifically, the lack high-speed internet and poor cellular reception. Interviewees echoed these concerns in relation to economic development due to the inability to promote e-commerce or recruit and retain remote workers without sufficient ICT. The rise of remote work following the COVID-19 pandemic has played an important role in rural resident recruitment and retention in some areas of Canada (Breen & Robinson, 2021). Visible migration of urban populations into rural Ontario (School of Environmental Design and Rural Development, 2023) and net migration gain in Atlantic Canada in 2020 and 2021 (McLay & Foster, 2023) have both been linked to remote work opportunities. This shift could provide an economic development opportunity for Tumbler Ridge if sufficient investments in ICT are made. Additionally, Kelly (2013) discusses the importance of building digital capacity in rural Canada to support technology-based employment for youth, something youth did not feel was currently available. The Tumbler Ridge Economic Development Plan expresses an interest in recruiting remote workers and includes an action plan for investing in

‘broadband Internet connectivity’ (District of Tumbler Ridge, 2018, p.48). The OCP reflects these efforts with Policy 6.2.20 that states the District will “continue the effort to improve the local high-speed internet” (District of Tumbler Ridge, 2020, p.86). Local government interviewees shared that the District has approached Telus requesting Fibre Optic installation, but that progress has been slow, despite installation in Dawson Creek and Chetwynd.

While the rural charm of Tumbler Ridge is an important community characteristic, it must be balanced with engagement in modern technology if the community wants to retain youth and young professionals. Improvements to the ICT could also facilitate further economic diversification, a push factor identified by youth who, despite recognizing the contributions of wind energy and the Geopark, view the District and Conuma Resources as the only opportunities for ‘good’ local jobs. Tumbler Ridge is not unique in its struggle for high-speed internet, evidenced by the *Waiting to Connect* report (Council of Canadian Academies, 2021) which states that,

rural and remote communities in Canada have identified limited access to fast, reliable internet as their main barrier to achieving economic growth and have stated that the lack of connectivity restricts their ability to retain youth, attract new talent, develop or expand existing businesses, train workers, and adopt new technologies (p.xxi).

Despite this knowledge, adoption of better ICT is challenging for Tumbler Ridge due to its low population density and large distance from other communities, making it unappealing to telecommunications providers. Kelly and Hynes (2018) call for the provincial and federal governments to recognize this market failure in rural communities and provide increased financial support and capacity for alternative models of service delivery.

Finally, there is currently no resident recruitment plan for Tumbler Ridge and no plans to develop one. When asked about this decision, local government interviewees shared that the community is not in a position to recruit new residents due to the large number of temporary contractors living in the community. However, interviewees from numerous community institutions discussed staffing shortages and issues related to bringing in qualified workers. Due to the small local population, specialized jobs often require successful candidates to relocate to Tumbler Ridge, but some interviewees shared that potential workers had turned down job offers due to an inability to find housing. Despite these shortages and the presence of contractors in the community, there does not appear to be an effort to shift these temporary workers into permanent residents. There is a need to recruit working professionals in Tumbler Ridge. Local government interviewees did express that housing diversity, rental affordability, and the lack of high-speed internet were all barriers that need to be addressed before a meaningful recruitment plan could be developed.

6.4 Conclusion

Sense of place is a key factor in the migration planning of rural youth. Education and employment goals initiated the desire for youth to migrate, but sense of place influenced their residential aspirations, including the desire to return to Tumbler Ridge, stay northern/rural, or move to an urban centre. However, development that fosters youth sense of place must be combined with meaningful efforts to improve youth readiness for post-secondary education. Moreover, community development that improves rental housing accessibility and affordability and ICT is needed for youth retention. Tumbler Ridge demonstrates excellent community planning to support youth sense of place, rooted in the social design principles, connection between local education and employment, and the promotion of the natural environment and

outdoor recreation. While interview and focus group participants described a culture of youth support during their formative years, this local culture also pushes out youth by linking out-migration with ambition and stigmatizing youth who stay or return too early. Improvements could also be made to engage and empower youth with interests outside of the traditional resource town lifestyle, including arts and technology. Development in these areas could also contribute to general resident recruitment and retention and economic diversity.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Following the socioeconomic changes beginning in the 1980s, rural and small-town places across Canada have experienced trends of youth out-migration. Better education and employment opportunities in urban centres are often cited as the reason for youth migration from rural communities, but recent research, including this thesis, suggests a more complex story. Youth's sense of place to their home communities significantly contributes to their migration planning, including the decision to stay rural. Through a case study of Tumbler Ridge, BC, this thesis explored youth migration planning and its implications for community development.

7.1 Research Questions

Three main questions guided this research. First, what are the push/ pull factors of Tumbler Ridge for youth and young people? Understanding the local perspectives on push and pull factors suggests what the community is doing well and what gaps exist for local youth. In order of significance, the pull factors of Tumbler Ridge for youth and young people are small-town lifestyle and family connections, natural environment and outdoor recreation, amenities and community planning, (high-paying) employment, and low cost of living. These findings reflect that cultural, environmental, and community factors pull youth to Tumbler Ridge rather than economic factors, reflecting the importance of sense of place in youth migration planning. This importance is further illustrated by interviewees who described their childhood experiences as a primary motivator for their decision to return or migrate to Tumbler Ridge. The push factors of Tumbler Ridge for youth and young people are remoteness and lack of amenities, education, employment (lack of economic diversification), housing, healthcare, and social dynamics and lack of anonymity. A special mention must be made on the education push factor as the available courses and curriculum in Tumbler Ridge may not prepare youth to be successful with post-

secondary pursuits. While the perceived lack of education and employment opportunities in Tumbler Ridge do push out youth, these factors were less significant than the push of community's remoteness and lack of amenities, reflecting the importance of lifestyle and quality of life for youth retention.

The second question asked, what are the education, employment, and migration goals of youth in Tumbler Ridge? Post-secondary education was normalized by youth and many interviewees. All youth participants expressed interest in post-secondary education and, therefore, leaving Tumbler Ridge due to the lack of local post-secondary institutions. As a result, youth migration plans were closely linked to their education and employment goals. However, as youth discussed their migration plans and residential aspirations, lifestyle and quality of life factors became more significant. An interesting pattern emerged where youth who demonstrated a strong sense of place in Tumbler Ridge planned to stay northern and/or rural, while youth with a weak sense of place tended to desire urban and/or southern communities. Interestingly, there was no gendered pattern in youth's education, employment, or migration goals nor in their sense of belonging in Tumbler Ridge, demonstrating a shift in rural sense of place.

The final question asked, how is Tumbler Ridge supporting local youth (or not)? Community support of youth in Tumbler Ridge was organized into four main categories, education, employment, community, and sense of place. Educational support includes the experiential learning, work experience, and dual credit opportunities at TRSS. However, high rates of teacher turnover, inexperienced teachers, and restricted course offerings strain youth education support. Youth employment opportunities include part-time employment and summer student positions at many community institutions; however, these do not necessarily translate to career opportunities for young adults. Factors of community support include resident-focused

community planning, diverse recreation facilities and programs, and civic organizations that fill service gaps. Unsupportive community factors include an expensive rental market with little availability and low accessibility to emergency healthcare. Finally, supportive sense of place factors include the natural environment, outdoor recreation opportunities, the small-town lifestyle and social connections, and an intangible community culture of youth support. However, local culture also pushes youth out by linking ambition with out-migration and seeing this out-migration as inevitable, while also desiring youth to return later in life. There is an interesting dichotomy in the local culture where youth who stay or return too quickly are stigmatized and labeled as ‘unsuccessful’ while youth who choose to return after a certain temporal threshold are celebrated. Overall, youth in Tumbler Ridge are supported by the community in numerous and diverse ways, contributing to feelings of belonging while also facing pressures to leave the community.

The first two research questions provided guidance through this exploratory study and generated baseline knowledge on youth experiences and migration goals. However, the real story of migration planning emerged through the third research question. While understanding the push/pull factors of Tumbler Ridge is helpful for community planning, youth identified push factors that did not necessarily translate to pull factors in their desired locations. When asked about their migration goals, youth cited employment and education opportunities. However, the pertinence of quality of life factors became clear through discussions of how Tumbler Ridge supports local youth. Place attachment and sense of belonging emerged as significant themes when youth discussed their childhood experiences, and if they wanted to foster or change these experiences and the identity that they had constructed in Tumbler Ridge. The migration planning

of rural youth considers multiple complex factors, but most relate back to either a sense of belonging with the familiar or a yearning for the foreign and strange.

7.2 Lessons Learned

This research demonstrated that sense of place is important in the migration planning of rural youth, including the decision to stay northern and rural or not. Economic opportunities are often assumed to be the most significant factor in youth migration planning (e.g., Demi *et al.*, 2009; Looker, 2021), but my findings speak to differences in youth's priorities. While education and employment were the drivers of youth out-migration, quality of life and sense of place were the most significant factors in determining where youth planned to migrate and why. There is little literature on rural youth experiences or migration planning from northern BC or resource towns, demonstrating gaps in our understanding. My research adds to the literature the importance of sense of place on the migration planning of rural youth and its implications for community development. My research contributes by broadening the dialogue on what rural youth are seeking in their communities.

The lessons learned from this research include the importance of engaging youth early in life to build a strong sense of place and continuing to support youth engagement and empowerment through the teen years. Rather than a pattern of rural-to-urban migration in search of better opportunities, the migration goals of youth reflected lifestyle priorities and their sense of place to Tumbler Ridge. Therefore, community development that focuses on supporting youth sense of place is both a youth retention and recruitment strategy. These strategies must prioritize lifestyle and quality of life factors rather than simply employment and education opportunities.

7.2.1 Recommendations

Recommendations for Tumbler Ridge and other rural BC communities:

1. Children and adult recreational programming is well established in Tumbler Ridge but lack teen-specific planning and some local youth expressed feeling ‘out of place’ as a result. While it is pertinent to consider the limited capacity and resources of civic organizations, youth expressed a desire for social and recreational planning that was explicitly teen-focused, including minimum and maximum age restrictions, less supervision, and events held in ‘third spaces’. Developing teen-specific programming led by teen input may increase teen engagement in community events, thus fostering a deeper sense of place.
2. Outdoor and other physical recreation opportunities are plentiful for Tumbler Ridge youth, but youth with other recreation interests, especially arts and technology, felt less engaged by the community. To facilitate further youth program development in these underserved areas, the capacity and resources of youth organizations need to be increased. Partnerships with the District, the Community Centre, and civic organizations need to be fostered to generate greater resources, capacity, and volunteers of all organizations.
3. There is currently no resident recruitment plan and local government interviewees shared that the community is not in a position to recruit new residents due to the large number of temporary contractors living in the community. However, staffing shortages at numerous community institutions, especially at TRSS, illustrate the need to recruit young professionals and working families. Developing a resident recruitment plan provides a

clear and focused path forward for long-term community development, including potentially shifting temporary workers to permanent residents.

4. Developing a youth representative position(s) for local institutions and organizations, specifically, a Youth Councillor position on Town Council, provides opportunities for youth to engage with the community and foster a local sense of place. These positions are empowering as youth can bring their own concerns and ideas forward from a position of power. In Tumbler Ridge, the local high school could act as a collaborating partner for a Youth Councillor position as a relationship between TRSS and the District is well established and could contribute to required high school volunteer credits.
5. Housing was identified as an issue for both youth retention and resident recruitment. The lack of availability and affordability of the rental housing market challenges youth's ability to move out of their family's home and stay in the community. Purchasing a home is more affordable, but the age and lack of diversity outside of single family homes provides challenges for young people, especially single professionals, looking to purchase in Tumbler Ridge. The influx of temporary contract workers for the coal mines further strains local housing availability and affordability. Additional areas need to be zoned as residential and developments should include mixed housing, especially multi-family housing, to cope with local need.

Recommendations for the Government of BC:

1. Tumbler Ridge youth expressed feeling unprepared for post-secondary due to challenges at TRSS. High rates of teacher turnover, the lack of qualified teachers, and restricted course offerings at TRSS, as well as the removal of standardized testing from the BC curriculum were cited as reasons for their lack of preparedness. Local stakeholders,

including education providers and SD 59 administration, echoed many of these concerns. While many of these issues are not unique to northeastern BC, there is a need to recruit and retain qualified teachers in rural BC. More education programs, financial incentive to teach in rural BC, and increased support and resources in rural schools may help address these issues.

2. The poor ICT in Tumbler Ridge, specifically, the lack high-speed internet and poor cellular reception, impacts youth retention and resident recruitment. Despite high-speed Internet installation in both Chetwynd and Dawson Creek, Tumbler Ridge remains without. The inability to promote e-commerce or recruit and retain remote workers without sufficient ICT impacts economic development, especially in the post-COVID era. ICT upgrades are outside of the District's jurisdiction and service providers are not filling this gap, so there is a need for government intervention.

7.2.2 Transferability

Youth recruitment and retention is an important issue for rural communities with a long history of academic literature in this area. This thesis explored a single case study of rural youth retention, but the implications of this research are more broad. Tumbler Ridge is a remote northern community with a local economy based in natural resource extraction – characteristics that describe much of rural Canada. The commonality of themes from this research with the literature, as well as contributions that extend beyond the literature, also have wider applicability.

With respect to themes from the research, Tumbler Ridge youth did confirm the importance of education and employment opportunities, natural concerns for young people on the verge of making their first major life decisions after high school. However, the key contribution of this research, that youth's sense of place plays a critical role in their migration

planning, has value for other rural and small-town places across Canada, as noted in the opportunities for future research (section 7.3). Attention to building and maintaining local youth's sense of place contributes to youth retention in rural communities.

7.3 Opportunities for Future Research

This research was the first to explore youth issues in Tumbler Ridge and many interesting topics emerged alongside the story of migration planning. Rural youth experiences are dynamic and complex, providing opportunities for longitudinal and comparative studies as well as in-depth case studies. Specifically, differences between the research and the literature suggest this is an important topic for future research. Potential themes for future research include:

1. All youth in this research planned to leave Tumbler Ridge following high school graduation, although a few planned to return. However, these youth represent a small sample of the youth in Tumbler Ridge. Future research with a larger and more diverse sample of youth in Tumbler Ridge may be able to explore more diverse migration plans, including those of youth who want to stay in the community. The assertion that place attachment and sense of belonging significantly influence these plans could be tested.
2. This research explored the migration planning of rural youth on the verge of making the decision to stay in or leave their hometown. This age group provides important insight on the migration planning process and expectations, but planning does not necessarily translate to decisions. A longitudinal study that explores youth migration plans before they graduate high school and then in five-year increments could explore what factors influence the actual migration of rural youth compared to their plans. This research could also explore how push and pull factors of their home communities change over the life course.

3. While all youth participants planned to pursue post-secondary education, youth also expressed feelings of unpreparedness for this transition. Unlike other rural communities in the literature, the pursuit of post-secondary education following high school graduation was normalized for youth in Tumbler Ridge. Local culture also linked ambition with out-migration while also expecting youth to return later in life. Youth readiness has many implications for community development and youth retention, and little research has been conducted in the northern BC context.
4. Tumbler Ridge youth provided insight on being a young person in Tumbler Ridge and on their migration planning, both of which informed this research on rural youth retention. However, Tumbler Ridge youth could not speak to issues of ‘recruitment’. Future research could explore youth recruitment to rural communities by asking urban youth what community factors might recruit them to Tumbler Ridge or other rural communities.
5. Much of the Canadian youth migration literature focuses on Atlantic Canada with many young people travelling west for employment opportunities. There is a current gap in our understanding of rural youth migration in western Canada, and resource towns generally. Future research on rural youth migration in BC, Alberta, and Saskatchewan could provide a more robust understanding of youth migration patterns and provide further insights for community development.
6. Youth’s place attachment and sense of belonging were important aspects of their migration planning. However, some youth literature has explored how youth’s identity shifts over time, especially after leaving their home community. Future research could explore how these shifts in identity and sense of belonging impact migration, especially for youth who planned to return to their home community.

7.4 Closing

Migration planning for Tumbler Ridge youth was less about potential economic opportunities and more about sense of place and lifestyle desires. While education and employment opportunities may drive youth out-migration, lifestyle and quality of life factors determined residential aspirations. Youth who demonstrated a strong sense of place planned to return to Tumbler Ridge or move to other northern and/or rural communities while youth who demonstrated a weak sense of place planned to move to southern and/or urban centres. Community engagement supports youth sense of place, demonstrating the pertinence of including youth in community development initiatives. The engagement and empowerment of local youth can attract other young people, building more inclusive and resilient rural communities.

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Appendix 1: Research Ethics

1.1 Research Ethics Board Project Approval



June 19, 2024

Miss Jessica Froese & Dr. Greg Halseth
c/o University of Northern British Columbia
Faculty of Environment\Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences

Dear Miss Froese & Dr. Halseth,

File No: 6009548

Project Title: Exploring the Migration Decisions of Rural Youth: A Case Study of Tumbler Ridge, BC

Approval Date: June 19, 2024

Expiry Date: June 18, 2025

Thank you for submitting the above-noted proposal to the Research Ethics Board ("REB"). Your project has been approved.

We are pleased to issue approval for a period of twelve months from the date of this letter. To continue your proposed research beyond June 18, 2025, you must submit an Annual Renewal and Study Progress form at least one month prior to that date. If your research has been completed before the form is due, please submit a Study Closure form in order to close the REB file.

Throughout the duration of this REB approval, all requests for amendments and renewals, or reporting of unanticipated problems, must be submitted to the REB via the Research Portal.

Please refer to the Chair Bulletins found on the REB webpage for updates on in-person interactions with participants during the COVID-19 pandemic.

If you have any questions or encounter any problems when working in the Research Portal, please contact the REB by email to reb@unbc.ca.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read 'Neil Hanlon', is written over a light blue rectangular background.

Dr. Neil Hanlon, Chair,
Research Ethics Board

1.2 Research Ethics Board Amendment Approval



July 04, 2024

Miss. Jessica Froese & Dr. Greg Halseth
c/o University of Northern British Columbia
Faculty of Environment\Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences

Dear Miss. Froese & Dr. Halseth,

File No: 6009548

Project Title: Exploring the Migration Decisions of Rural Youth: A Case Study of Tumbler Ridge, BC

Approval Date: July 04, 2024

Expiry Date: June 18, 2025

Thank you for submitting a request for amendments to your protocol to the Research Ethics Board ("REB").

The amendments have been approved until the date as provided in the latest approval for this project (i.e., June 18, 2025). To continue your proposed research beyond that date, you must submit an Annual Renewal and Study Progress form at least one month prior to that date. If your research has been completed, please submit a Study Closure form in order to close the REB file.

Throughout the duration of this REB approval, all requests for amendments and renewals, or reporting of unanticipated problems, must be submitted to the REB via the Research Portal.

Please refer to the Chair Bulletins found on the REB webpage for updates on in-person interactions with participants during the COVID-19 pandemic.

If you have any questions or encounter any problems when working in the Research Portal, please contact the REB by email to reb@unbc.ca.

Good luck with continuation of your research.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. Isobel Hartley', is written over a light blue circular stamp.

M. Isobel Hartley, Research Ethics Officer
Research Ethics Board

1.3 Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans Certificate



1.4 Letter of Permission: School District 59



School District No.59 (Peace River South)

University of Northern British Columbia
Research and Ethics Board

Dear UNBC Research and Ethics Board,

I am writing to express School District 59's support in principle for UNBC's proposed research project at Tumbler Ridge Secondary School (TRSS). Normally when universities do research connected with our district, before we agree, we want to know it has gone by the ethics board. This process seems reversed, so I wanted to express that while we have agreed to moving forward with it, we still have some concerns.

First due to the small sample size we want to make sure that privacy and confidentiality are honoured for staff and students due to the small cohort size. As well, participation of staff and students will be voluntary. I just want to be transparent that we cannot make staff and students participate. I did address these concerns with Jessica Froese when we conducted our Zoom meeting on Wednesday, May 1, 2024.

We would also request that School District 59 be given the opportunity to review the report before it is released to ensure the privacy of our students, teachers and other staff.

We are looking forward to this endeavor and trust UNBC to uphold all ethical standards.

Sincerely,

Christy Fennell
Superintendent/CEO
School District 59

*11600-7th Street,
Dawson Creek, B.C. V1G 4R8
Phone: (250) 782-8571 Fax: (250) 782-3204
www.sd59.bc.ca*

1.5 Letter of Permission: District of Tumbler Ridge



Dear Members of the UNBC Research Ethics Board,

I am writing to express my full support for Jessica Froese, a dedicated UNBC student researching the desire for youth migration data as outlined in our Economic Development Plan for 2018-2020. As the Director of Economic and Community Development for the District of Tumbler Ridge, I am pleased to endorse this important study, which aligns closely with our community's aspirations and challenges.

Tumbler Ridge has experienced numerous economic boom and bust cycles over the years. Yet, it remains a community in transition, striving to diversify its economic base beyond solely relying on one industry. Understanding the trends in youth retention and migration is crucial as we navigate this transition and seek to create a more sustainable and prosperous future for our residents.

Jessica's research has the potential to provide valuable insights into the factors influencing youth migration patterns in our region. By uncovering young people's motivations and preferences when deciding where to live and work, we can better tailor our economic development strategies to meet their needs and aspirations. This, in turn, will contribute to the long-term vitality and resilience of Tumbler Ridge as we continue to evolve and adapt to changing economic realities.

Jessica's unwavering commitment to conducting her research ethically and responsibly is commendable. I have full confidence in her ability to adhere to the highest ethical standards throughout the research process, ensuring that the rights and well-being of all participants are not just considered but respected and protected.

The District grants permission for Jessica Froese to utilize the Town Hall, Community Centre, and Public Library in Tumbler Ridge for the purposes of her research. These facilities will provide suitable venues for conducting interviews, surveys, and other data collection activities as needed.

In conclusion, I urge the UNBC Research Ethics Board to support Jessica Froese's research endeavours and grant the necessary approvals for her study on the desire for youth migration data. This study's findings will benefit our community and contribute to the broader understanding of youth migration trends in resource-dependent regions.

Thank you for considering this letter of support. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require further information or assistance.

Sincerely,

Jessie Olsen
Director of Economic and Community Development
District of Tumbler Ridge

Appendix 2: Interview Materials

2.1 Information and Consent Form for Community Organizations



Exploring the Migration Decisions of Rural Youth: A Case Study of Tumbler Ridge, BC Information and Consent Form for Community Organizations

Researcher

Jessica Froese, Graduate Student, Natural Resources and Environmental Studies
University of Northern British Columbia
3333 University Way, Prince George, BC, V2N 4Z9
Cell: (604) 309-9344
Email: jfroese@unbc.ca

Research Supervisor

Greg Halseth, Professor, Geography Program
Canada Research Chair in Rural and Small Town Studies
Co-Director, Community Development Institute at UNBC
University of Northern British Columbia
3333 University Way, Prince George, BC, V2N 4Z9
Tel: (250) 960-5826
Email: greg.halseth@unbc.ca

This research is part of the thesis and academic requirements for the Master of Arts degree in Natural Resources and Environmental Studies at UNBC.

Purpose

Rural and small-town places across Canada face challenges with social, economic, cultural, and environmental changes. One crucial topic is youth out-migration and the need to attract and retain young people. This research explores the education, service, and employment opportunities for youth in Tumbler Ridge alongside the perspectives and experiences of youth. The purpose is to explore senior high school students' feelings about staying, leaving, or returning to the community following high school graduation. This can help inform community planning.

To understand the education, service, and employment opportunities available for youth in Tumbler Ridge, I would like to invite you to be part of this research.

The criteria for the selection of interview participants are as follows:

- Resident of Tumbler Ridge
- Currently providing a program, service, or employment to local youth

Voluntary Participation

Participation in the interview is entirely voluntary and, as such, you may choose not to participate. You may also choose not to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable, and you have the right to end their participation in the interview at any time and have all the information you provided withdrawn from the study and destroyed. The interview will be audio recorded, and a summary of key themes will be created. This summary of key interview themes will be sent to you through an encrypted, password protected file, and you will have two weeks to provide any edits or corrections back to me. The interview should take about one hour to complete.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

The names of participants will not be used in any reporting, nor will any information which may be used to identify individuals. All electronic data will be managed, encrypted, and securely stored on password protected computers and will be accessible only to the research team. The research team includes Jessica Froese and Greg Halseth, both at UNBC. The information will be kept for two years following the completion of the master's thesis, until September 2027. After this date, shredding and file erasure will destroy all information related to the interview.

Potential Risks and Benefits

This project has been assessed by our university research ethics process. The research team does not consider there to be any risks to participation. The participants will be educational, service, or employment providers for youth in Tumbler Ridge with knowledge of local youth issues. The questions are about the educational, service, or employment opportunities provided and your thoughts and experiences in this role. We hope that by participating, you will have the chance to share your experiences and provide input related to youth recruitment and retention in Tumbler Ridge.

Research Results

One of the products of this research will be a master's thesis which will be publicly accessible through the UNBC Library. A second product of this research will be a summary report of results which will be reviewed by School District 59 to ensure the privacy of TRSS students, teachers, and staff before being provided to participants via email. The results from this research will also be published in academic research journals and shared at academic conferences.

Questions

In case of any questions that may arise from this research, please feel free to contact Jessica Froese in the Natural Resources and Environmental Studies Program at jfroese@unbc.ca or Greg Halseth in the Geography Program at greg.halseth@unbc.ca.

Complaints

Any complaints about this project should be directed to the UNBC Office of Research at (250) 960-6735 or by email at reb@unbc.ca.

I have read the above description of the study, and I understand the conditions of my participation. My signature indicates that I agree to participate in this research.

Name (please print)	Signature	Date
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Researcher Name	Signature	Date
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2.2 Interview Guide for Community Organizations

Exploring Youth Migration Decisions: A Case Study of Tumbler Ridge, BC

Interview Guide for Community Organizations

Participant name: _____

Contact information: _____

Date: _____

Interview Time:

Start: _____ Finish: _____

Notes:

Preamble:

Rural and small-town places across Canada have been undergoing rapid sociodemographic and economic changes since the early 1980s. These changes are the product of the 1980s recession and shift toward neoliberal public policies. Since then, service infrastructure has aged, the original workforce is retiring, and many youth and young families have migrated out of these communities. The changing resource economy combined with an unsuitable service infrastructure has changed the nature of rural and small-town places and for the young people seeking employment and quality of life within them. In the context of changing rural communities, youth out-migration has long been identified as a pressing issue. The focus of this research is exploring senior high school students' feelings about staying, leaving, or returning to their community following high school graduation. Specific research questions are: 1) What aspects of community are most important to youth in Tumbler Ridge? 2) What are the future education and employment goals of youth in Tumbler Ridge? 3) How is Tumbler Ridge supporting local youth (or not)?

Intro Discussion

Can you introduce yourself and tell me about your role?

Tell me about your organization.

How long have you lived in Tumbler Ridge?

Section A: Youth Involvement in [Name of Organization]

How does your organization currently involve local youth?

What are past initiatives to involve local youth?

Are there any other youth initiatives planned for the future?

What has the response been from youth towards your programs/ services/ employment?

Has youth response changed over time?

What kind of local, provincial, or federal support do you receive for your youth programs/ service/ employment?

What are the goals of your programs/ services/ employment for local youth?

Are there any additional or unexpected benefits?

Have your programs/ services/ employment impacted any other groups in the community?

What are the challenges to engaging youth in your programs/ services / employment?

How has your organization coped with these challenges?

Are any of your programs/ services/ employment opportunities underutilized by youth?

If yes, why do you think that may be?

Can you tell me about any collaborations that your organization has with TRSS or other community organizations?

Section B: Post-High School Plans of Youth

What local post-secondary education is available for high school graduates in Tumbler Ridge?
For example, through Northern Light College, remote learning, trades programs, etc.

Have youth shared their post-high school graduation migration plans with you? What are they?

Have you noticed any patterns or changes in these migration plans between different youth or over time?

Have youth shared their post-high school graduation education or employment goals with you? What are they?

Are these goals accessible in Tumbler Ridge?

Have you noticed any patterns or changes in these goals between different youth or over time?

Section C: Perception of Youth Experiences of Tumbler Ridge

What about Tumbler Ridge do you think is positive for local youth? Why?

What about Tumbler Ridge do you think is negative for local youth? Why?

Are there any program or service gaps for youth in Tumbler Ridge?

Are there any educational gaps for youth in Tumbler Ridge?

Are there any employment gaps for youth in Tumbler Ridge?

Section D: Closing

Is there anything else you would like to add that I haven't asked you about?

2.3 Information and Consent Form for Teachers



Exploring the Migration Decisions of Rural Youth: A Case Study of Tumbler Ridge, BC Information and Consent Form for Teachers

Researcher

Jessica Froese, Graduate Student, Natural Resources and Environmental Studies
University of Northern British Columbia
3333 University Way, Prince George, BC, V2N 4Z9
Cell: (604) 309-9344
Email: jfroese@unbc.ca

Research Supervisor

Greg Halseth, Professor, Geography Program
Canada Research Chair in Rural and Small Town Studies
Co-Director, Community Development Institute at UNBC
University of Northern British Columbia
3333 University Way, Prince George, BC, V2N 4Z9
Tel: (250) 960-5826
Email: greg.halseth@unbc.ca

This research is part of the thesis and academic requirements for the Master of Arts degree in Natural Resources and Environmental Studies at UNBC.

Purpose

Rural and small-town places across Canada face challenges with social, economic, cultural, and environmental changes. One crucial topic is youth out-migration and the need to attract and retain young people. This research explores the education, service, and employment opportunities for youth in Tumbler Ridge alongside the perspectives and experiences of youth. The purpose is to explore senior high school students' feelings about staying, leaving, or returning to the community following high school graduation. This can help inform community planning.

To understand the education, service, and employment opportunities available for youth in Tumbler Ridge, I would like to invite you to be part of this research.

The criteria for the selection of interview participants are as follows:

- Current resident of Tumbler Ridge
- Current teacher or staff member of Tumbler Ridge Secondary School

Voluntary Participation

Participation in the interview is entirely voluntary and, as such, you may choose not to participate. You may also choose not to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable, and you have the right to end their participation in the interview at any time and have all the information you provided withdrawn from the study and destroyed. The interview will be audio recorded, and a summary of key themes will be created. This summary of key interview themes will be sent to you through an encrypted, password protected file, and you will have two weeks to provide any edits or corrections back to me. The interview should take about one hour to complete.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

The names of participants will not be used in any reporting, nor will any information which may be used to identify individuals. All electronic data will be managed, encrypted, and securely stored on password protected computers and will be accessible only to the research team. The research team includes Jessica Froese and Greg Halseth, both at UNBC. The information will be kept for two years following the completion of the master's thesis, until September 2027. After this date, shredding and file erasure will destroy all information related to the interview.

Potential Risks and Benefits

This project has been assessed by our university research ethics process. The research team does not consider there to be any risks to participation. The participants will be educational, service, or employment providers for youth in Tumbler Ridge with knowledge of local youth issues. The questions are about the educational, service, or employment opportunities provided and your thoughts and experiences in this role. We hope that by participating, you will have the chance to share your experiences and provide input related to youth retention and recruitment in Tumbler Ridge.

Research Results

One of the products of this research will be a master's thesis which will be publicly accessible through the UNBC Library. A second product of this research will be a summary report of results which will be reviewed by School District 59 to ensure the privacy of TRSS students, teachers, and staff before being provided to participants via email. The results from this research will also be published in academic research journals and shared at academic conferences.

Questions

In case of any questions that may arise from this research, please feel free to contact Jessica Froese in the Natural Resources and Environmental Studies Program at jfroese@unbc.ca or Greg Halseth in the Geography Program at greg.halseth@unbc.ca.

Complaints

Any complaints about this project should be directed to the UNBC Office of Research at (250) 960-6735 or by email at reb@unbc.ca.

I have read the above description of the study, and I understand the conditions of my participation. My signature indicates that I agree to participate in this research.

Name (please print)	Signature	Date
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Researcher Name	Signature	Date
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2.4 Interview Guide for Teachers

Exploring Youth Migration Decisions: A Case Study of Tumbler Ridge, BC

Interview Guide for Teachers

Participant name: _____

Contact information: _____

Date: _____

Interview Time:

Start: _____ Finish: _____

Notes:

Preamble:

Rural and small-town places across Canada have been undergoing rapid sociodemographic and economic changes since the early 1980s. These changes are the product of the 1980s recession and shift toward neoliberal public policies. Since then, service infrastructure has aged, the original workforce is retiring, and many youth and young families have migrated out of these communities. The changing resource economy combined with an unsuitable service infrastructure has changed the nature of rural and small-town places and for the young people seeking employment and quality of life within them. In the context of changing rural communities, youth out-migration has long been identified as a pressing issue. The focus of this research is exploring senior high school students' feelings about staying, leaving, or returning to their community following high school graduation. Specific research questions are: 1) What aspects of community are most important to youth in Tumbler Ridge? 2) What are the future education and employment goals of youth in Tumbler Ridge? 3) How is Tumbler Ridge supporting local youth (or not)?

Intro Discussion

Can you introduce yourself and tell me about your role as a teacher?

How long have you lived in Tumbler Ridge?

How long have you been teaching at TRSS?

What subject(s) and grade(s) do you currently teach?

What subject(s) and grade(s) have you taught?

Section A: Opportunities at TRSS

Tell me about the experiential learning available to students at TRSS.

Do you think that students are satisfied with the courses available at TRSS?

Are there any classes TRSS is unable to provide for students?

Have students requested other programming at TRSS?

Does TRSS collaborate with any local organizations? How?

How does TRSS prepare senior students for life after high school graduation?

Are there any specific employment or post-secondary preparations available for students?

Section B: Post-High School Plans of Students

What local post-secondary education is available for high school graduates in Tumbler Ridge?
For example, through Northern Light College, remote learning, trades programs, etc.

Do you encourage local post-secondary education for your students? Post-secondary education in northern BC? Why or why not?

Have students shared their post-high school graduation migration plans with you? What are they?

Have you noticed any patterns or changes in these migration plans between different classes or over time?

Have students shared their post-high school graduation education or employment goals with you? What are they?

Are these goals accessible in Tumbler Ridge?

Have you noticed any patterns or changes in these goals between different classes or over time?

Section C: Perception of Youth Experiences of Tumbler Ridge

What about Tumbler Ridge do you think is positive for local youth? Why?

What about Tumbler Ridge do you think is negative for local youth? Why?

Are there any program or service gaps for youth in Tumbler Ridge?

Are there any educational gaps for youth in Tumbler Ridge?

Are there any employment gaps for youth in Tumbler Ridge?

Section D: Closing

Is there anything else you would like to add that I haven't asked you about?

Appendix 3: Focus Group Materials

3.1 Recruitment Poster

The poster has a blue background. In the top left corner is the UNBC logo with the text 'UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA'. In the top right corner is a stylized sunburst graphic with purple and orange rays. The main title is in large, bold, white and pink letters. The text is centered and reads: 'PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH ON YOUTH RETENTION IN TUMBLER RIDGE'. Below this, there are two paragraphs of white text. The first paragraph says: 'Jessica Froese is a UNBC master's student looking for volunteers to take part in a study about youth retention in Tumbler Ridge.' The second paragraph says: 'As a participant, you would be asked to share your experiences in a focus group about living in Tumbler Ridge and your plans following high school graduation! Your participation is entirely voluntary and will take approximately two hours. By participating, you will also help inform future community planning!'. Below the second paragraph is a pink and purple starburst shape containing white text: 'If you are between 15 and 19 years old and want to share your perspective... Email Jessica Froese at jfroese@unbc.ca'. In the bottom left corner, there is pink text: 'Focus Groups will be held at the Community Centre!'. In the bottom right corner, there is a white ticket-shaped graphic with a scalloped edge containing the text 'FOOD & DRINKS PROVIDED'.

UNBC UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH ON YOUTH RETENTION IN TUMBLER RIDGE

Jessica Froese is a UNBC master's student looking for volunteers to take part in a study about youth retention in Tumbler Ridge.

As a participant, you would be asked to share your experiences in a focus group about living in Tumbler Ridge and your plans following high school graduation! Your participation is entirely voluntary and will take approximately two hours. By participating, you will also help inform future community planning!

If you are between 15 and 19 years old and want to share your perspective...
Email Jessica Froese at jfroese@unbc.ca

Focus Groups will be held at the Community Centre!

FOOD & DRINKS PROVIDED

3.2 Information and Consent Form for Youth



Exploring the Migration Decisions of Rural Youth: A Case Study of Tumbler Ridge, BC

Researcher

Jessica Froese, Graduate Student, Natural Resources and Environmental Studies
University of Northern British Columbia
3333 University Way, Prince George, BC, Canada, V2N 4Z9
Cell: (604) 309-9344
Email: jfroese@unbc.ca

Research Supervisor

Greg Halseth, Professor, Geography Program
Canada Research Chair in Rural and Small Town Studies
Co-Director, Community Development Institute at UNBC
University of Northern British Columbia
3333 University Way, Prince George, BC, Canada, V2N 4Z9
Tel: (250) 960-5826
Email: greg.halseth@unbc.ca

This research is part of the thesis and academic requirements for the Master of Arts degree in Natural Resources and Environmental Studies at UNBC.

Purpose

Rural and small-town places across Canada face challenges with social, economic, cultural, and environmental changes. One crucial topic is youth out-migration and the need to attract and retain young people. This research explores the education, services, and employment opportunities for youth in Tumbler Ridge alongside the perspectives of local senior high school students. The focus of this research is exploring senior high school students' feelings about staying, leaving, or returning to the community following high school graduation. This can help inform community planning.

To understand youth experiences of living in Tumbler Ridge and post-high school graduation migration plans, I would like to invite you to be part of this research.

The criteria for the selection of focus group participants are as follows:

- Current grade 11 or 12 student at Tumbler Ridge Secondary School (TRSS)

How Participants Were Chosen

Focus group participants were introduced through teachers at TRSS following the permission of the Principal and School District #59. Focus group participants were selected for their potential to provide information on their experiences as youth in Tumbler Ridge and their migration plans following high school graduation. As these focus groups will take place during class time, the size and composition of the focus group will reflect the size and composition of the high school class.

Voluntary Participation

Participation in the focus group is entirely voluntary and, as such, you may choose not to participate. Participants may also choose not to answer any questions that make them uncomfortable, and they have the right to end their participation in the focus group at any time. Unfortunately, I will not be distinguishing which participant says what, so once you have participated in the focus group, your comments cannot be withdrawn. The focus groups will be audio recorded, and a summary of key themes will be created. This summary of key themes will be sent to you through an encrypted, password protected file, and you will have two weeks to provide any edits or corrections back to me. The focus groups should take about two hours to complete.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

The names of participants will not be used in any reporting, nor will any information which may be used to identify individuals. All information related to this focus group will be held in strict confidence by the research team. As this research involves a focus group, we encourage participants not to discuss focus group content with people outside of the group; however, we cannot control what participants do with the information discussed. All electronic data will be managed, encrypted, and securely stored on password protected computers and will be accessible only to the research team. The research team is Jessica Froese and Greg Halseth, both at UNBC. The information will be kept for two years following the completion of the master's thesis, until September 2027. After this date, shredding and file erasure will destroy all information related to the focus group.

Potential Risks and Benefits

This project has been assessed by our university research ethics process. The research team does not consider there to be any risks to participation. The focus group participants will be senior high school students (grade 11 and 12) at TRSS. The questions are about your experiences as a young person in Tumbler Ridge and your post-high school graduation migration plans. We hope

that by participating, you will have the chance to share your experiences and provide input related to youth experiences in Tumbler Ridge.

Research Results

One of the products of this research will be a master's thesis which will be publicly accessible through the UNBC Library. A second product of this research will be a summary report of results which will be reviewed by School District 59 to ensure the privacy of TRSS students, teachers, and staff before being provided to participants via email. The results from this research will also be published in academic research journals and shared at academic conferences.

Questions

In case of any questions that may arise from this research, please feel free to contact Jessica Froese in the Natural Resources and Environmental Studies Program at jfroese@unbc.ca or Greg Halseth in the Geography Program at greg.halseth@unbc.ca.

Complaints

Any complaints about this project should be directed to the UNBC Office of Research at (250) 960-6735 or by email at reb@unbc.ca.

I have read the above description of the study, and I understand the conditions of my participation. My signature indicates that I agree to participate in this research.

Name (please print)	Signature	Date
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Researcher Name	Signature	Date
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3.3 Focus Group Guide

Exploring Youth Migration Decisions: A Case Study of Tumbler Ridge, BC

Focus Group Guide for Students

Teacher name: _____

Course name: _____

Student names: _____

Teacher contact information: _____

Date: _____

Focus Group Time:

Start: _____

Finish: _____

Notes:

Introductory Discussion

What is it like to live in Tumbler Ridge?

What do you like about living in Tumbler Ridge? Why?

What do you dislike about living in Tumbler Ridge? Why?

Are your parents/ guardians from Tumbler Ridge?

Why do your parents/ guardians live in Tumbler Ridge?

If you have older siblings, are they in Tumbler Ridge? Why or why not?

What aspects of community are most important to you? Why?

Tumbler Ridge Experiences

What community infrastructure for youth do you like to use? Why?

For example, the skate park, the Community Centre, the Youth Centre, the Library, etc.

What community infrastructure for youth do you not use? Why?

For example, the skate park, the Community Centre, the Youth Centre, the Library, etc.

What places in or around Tumbler Ridge are the most important to you? Why?

Do you participate in any local youth programs? Why or why not?

For example, sports teams, fitness programs, arts programs at the Community Centre, Library reading programs, etc.

What youth infrastructure, programs, or services do you wish were available in Tumbler Ridge?

Migration Plans

Do you plan to stay in Tumbler Ridge after graduating high school?

For those staying, what is keeping you in Tumbler Ridge?

For those leaving, what is driving you away?

What would attract you back?

Do you plan to pursue post-secondary education?

If yes, are these plans accessible in Tumbler Ridge? Northern BC?

What are your employment goals after high school graduation?

Are these goals accessible in Tumbler Ridge? Northern BC?

Closing

In terms of returning young people to Tumbler Ridge, or recruiting young people to Tumbler Ridge, are there other topics we have not yet discussed that you feel are important?