



Case Study: Enhancing Accessibility in the Municipality of Cumberland

Stephanie Keilhack serves as the Community Engagement Coordinator for the Municipality of Cumberland, located on the northern border of Nova Scotia adjacent to New Brunswick. Her role focuses on improving the municipality's approach to equity and accessibility.

Challenges and Initiatives

Cumberland faces unique challenges due to its vast geographical area and relatively small, dispersed population. The main issue is the significant gap in transportation services, especially given the Human Rights Remedy, and the ongoing transition of people with disabilities from institutions to community-based living arrangements scheduled through 2027. The current transportation services are stretched thin, primarily focusing on medical appointments and not adequately supporting other essential daily activities.

Strategic Actions Implemented

The municipality has taken a proactive approach to address these challenges:

Transportation Overhaul: Cumberland aims to meet the increased demand expected from the Human Rights Remedy. This is a challenge!

Community Engagement: Stephanie conducted a listening tour, visiting local farmers markets and hosting community sessions to gather direct feedback from residents and better understand needs.

Built Environment: The municipality aims to maintain wide, well-paved streets with proper curb cuts and ensuring that public spaces like community centres are accessible. Residents love it when paving happens, and sidewalks account for the majority of constituent concerns.

Outcomes and Impact

Feedback from residents has been instrumental in shaping municipal policies and practices, ensuring they are more aligned with the community's needs.

Challenges Ahead

Despite these efforts, Cumberland faces ongoing challenges such as:

- Limited resources and workforce to implement and sustain the required services.
- The need for inter-municipal cooperation to ensure comprehensive service coverage.
- The anticipation of additional regulatory requirements as new standards for accessibility are introduced.

The case of Cumberland Municipality highlights the complexities of enhancing accessibility in rural settings. It showcases the necessity of community engagement and adaptive strategies to meet diverse needs, particularly in transportation and public infrastructure.

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