



*Vibrant Communities
Saint John
2006 Evaluation*

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Purpose



Vibrant Communities Saint John is just about to complete its second year (2006) as a Trailbuilder community. The purpose of this evaluation is to inform Vibrant Communities' stakeholders as they prepare their activities and approach for the upcoming year. On December 5th, 2006 the annual reflection session will be held to take stock of what has been learned and achieved, and to make the adjustments required in the overall design and delivery of the initiative going forward.

The primary intent of this document is to outline where progress has been made, and to surface key issues and questions. This report reflects what the community of Vibrant Communities stakeholders has identified as areas for clarification and re-focusing so that they can move forward and identify their 2007 priorities.

A Note about Attribution

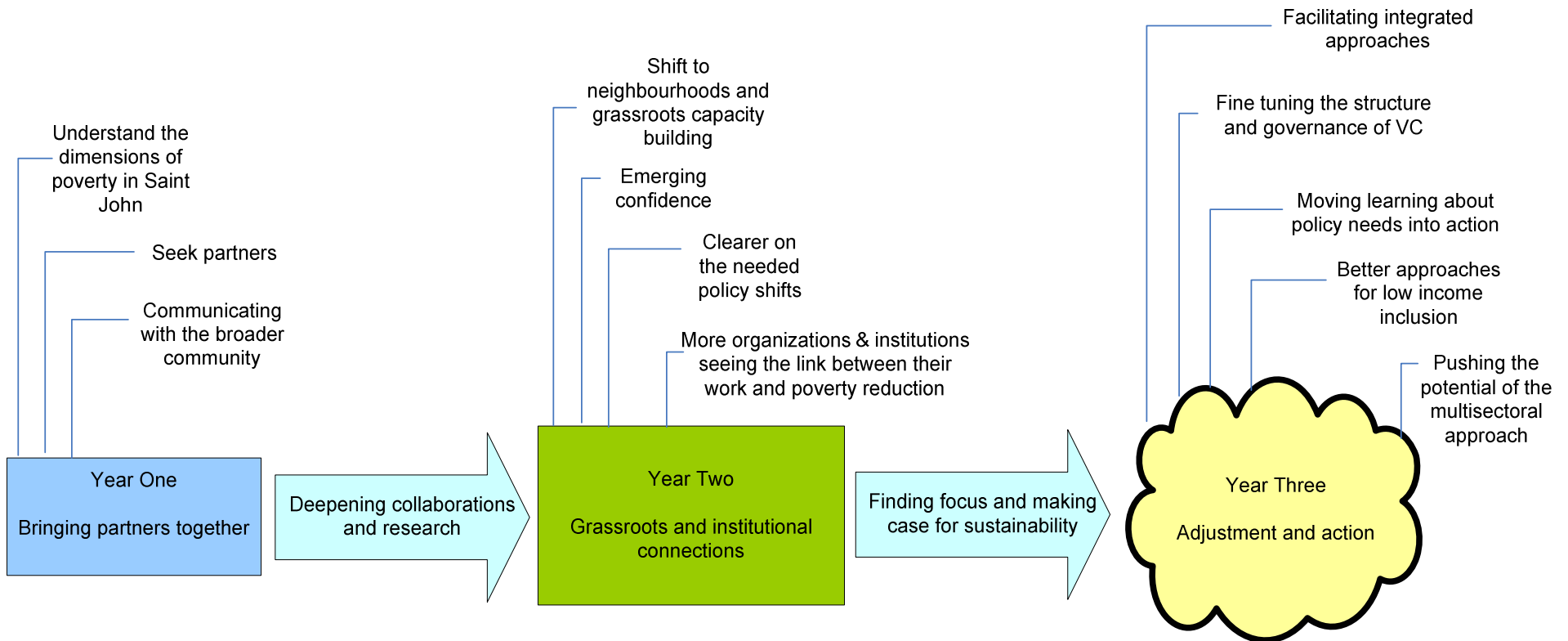
Vibrant Communities differs from organizations whose primary mandate is to deliver a particular program or set of programs. Its role is to convene partners, to inform decisions with research, and to help a system of poverty reduction agents to collectively learn about and improve the work of poverty reduction.

As a result, there are many ‘blurry lines’ in the work. In almost all of the initiatives outlined in this report, community partners – which include social service agencies, faith communities, government departments, local businesses, and individuals – play a vital role. Often the community partner is a primary source of resources and leadership to the particular project. From an outside perspective, it is ‘their’ initiative. At the same time, there is a Vibrant Communities connection and contribution. There are many nuances which this report cannot perfectly disentangle which can leave an impression of ‘taking credit.’ It is important to note that this is not the intent, and that the purpose of this report is to capture what Vibrant Communities is connected to, what is being learned in the community about poverty and how to reduce it, and what is the role of Vibrant Communities as a catalyst for change.



Overview of Themes

The themes highlighted in the report are represented in the diagram below.



Context

In the public domain, poverty is commonly misunderstood. There are common myths that the situation of poverty is a function of someone's individual character. Vibrant Communities is about changing that interpretation. The work of poverty reduction is about the art of the possible – working to overcome deeply rooted barriers to support individuals and families in realizing their fullest potential. It is work that is 'ambidextrous.' On one hand it requires effective programmatic responses at a grassroots level while on the other hand pushing for broad changes to policy and cultural attitudes.

There are several contexts vital to situating the current work of Vibrant Communities Saint John. The first is that it is part of a National initiative. Vibrant Communities is a movement that is, at its heart, about experimenting with new solutions to poverty reduction, building new forms of relationship across sectors, and sharing learning between communities. The second is the emerging economic changes in Saint John. There are growing signs that Saint John is moving into an economic development boom. With changes in the dynamics of labour demands and housing markets, what are the implications of these changes for the work of poverty reduction? How can Vibrant Communities Saint John help ensure that all sectors of the community, but particularly those living in poverty, benefit from this economic development? The third is that there is changing dynamics globally about the role and nature of civil society engagement and that the framing of issues is increasingly seen in the context of other issues. Poverty, health and crime all share common determinants and so progress in each of these fields is increasingly understood within the context of the others. Lastly, there are evolving dynamics in the role of municipalities in Canada. There is pressure for finding new ways to resource municipalities in order to support increasing expectations of what municipalities should do as certain supports from other levels of government decrease.

Progress & Changes

The 2005 report *Poverty and Plenty* highlighted the influences of poverty and identified Saint John's most vulnerable populations. The groundwork had been laid for community leadership and advocacy on poverty in Saint John. On many fronts, 2006 has been a year working within the community to begin putting this research into action, and of doing more specified research (on key areas & issues identified), while engaging with the community and creating partnerships to:

- build awareness at the community level;
- foster existing/ongoing ground level change & programming;
- develop strategies that address the specific needs of vulnerable neighborhoods and populations in the city; and
- build momentum and support on the policy front.

Some key areas and populations where change has taken place as a result of Vibrant Communities efforts in 2006, and where progress toward the three year poverty reduction targets have taken place, are highlighted below. It is important to consider here that there is an immense amount of crossover between these populations, and the effects are not isolated. As pointed out in the 2005 *Poverty and Plenty* report, poverty is multi-faceted, and most people living in poverty face barriers in many, if not all, of these areas.

Summary of People Affected

As Vibrant Communities has expanded its partnerships in 2006, the number of people benefiting from collaborative initiatives has been steadily growing. This year VCSJ has documented approximately 1000 people living in poverty in the community who have been involved with programming and benefited from the initiatives. As both policy changes and programs under development get up and running it is projected that more than 16,000 people in need should benefit from the new coordinated approach to poverty in Saint John. The depth and durability of this benefit varies from intervention to intervention. For example, for the 6000 households affected by energy policy the benefit is that there is an increased degree of security in winter, and



that the impact of a rate increase has been reduced. To contrast, of the 15 people who benefited directly from the employment to education initiatives some have moved into more permanent employment. The impacts from each of these examples are important, but each has a different quality of scale, depth and durability.

The goal of Vibrant Communities Saint John is to have reduced the number of people living in poverty in Saint John to the national average. This means that not only must 6,000 people benefit, but that there is a compound effect whereby over 6,000 lives are improved to the degree that they are no longer living in poverty.¹

Action area	Number directly benefiting in 2006	Projected Benefit (as programs expand)
Employment	15 people directly benefiting	100+ people
Housing Needs and Energy Poverty	226 households (452 people) directly benefiting	6000 households (12,000 people) affected by policy change
Children, Youth and Young Families	510 children, teens, young parents benefiting	1400 will benefit as ELC, PALS, TRC and First Steps programs expand
Vulnerable Communities	95 individuals engaged in neighbourhood initiatives	3000 in 2 vulnerable communities where VCSJ is actively involved
Totals	Approx. 1072 individuals have received a direct benefit	16,500 individuals have/will benefit in some way

People facing employment barriers in Saint John

Vibrant Communities research on education and employment found that much of the undereducated population in Saint John is young (between 20 and 34 years of age), and that many are concentrated and isolated within Saint John’s vulnerable communities². These

¹ Reducing poverty from the current 24.5% to 16.2 % which is the national average means 6,000 people will have left poverty.



individuals are often on income assistance, with education being the major barrier to moving out of poverty and into gainful employment. However, they face significant barriers in gaining access to and completing educational programs (e.g.: information on existing programs, childcare access and cost, transportation, tuition costs for post-secondary training, and barriers of self-confidence). In addition, alternative programs are needed for individuals who do not have their GED, but instead would benefit from short term targeted training leading to employment. In response to these realities VCSJ's approach has been to both provide policy and programming recommendations for removing education and employment barriers, and to foster the growth of existing programs which currently address these barriers in the community. Some key examples of this year's progress include:

- **Report is being distributed broadly** and accompanied by presentations to specific groups to champion action on the recommendations. Community Partners are using the report to promote further action on improving retention rates and conditions for writing GED, increasing pre-employment supports, and championing financial supports for post-secondary training.
- **Taking a neighbourhood approach through the Crescent Valley Education to Employment Project:** This project is a partnership involving residents and community partners to assist individuals in identifying and overcoming barriers to meeting their education, training and employment goals. The input gathered in the survey by the Crescent Valley Survey Action Team and the Speak Out recently held in Crescent Valley provides a starting point for identifying the challenges and solutions.
- **Holistic training opportunities that test new approaches for fast tracking individuals to employment:**
 - VC has been supporting a pilot program, (*Pathways to Success*) of the Learning Exchange in partnership with NB Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour. It provides adults with essential skills training, and pre and post employment supports, leading to employment or further training. Ten (10) participants to date and approximately 100 adults will be accommodated as the program expands. By providing community members with a more targeted program and supports, vulnerable individuals who already face many barriers are less likely to fall through, or get stuck in, the gaps in the system
 - In a coordination role, VCSJ initiated a project with an employment agency and two community agencies, John Howard Society and Coverdale Centre for Women, to match needs and opportunities for people facing employment barriers. A

² See *Education to Employment: Pathways out of Poverty*. This research report was conducted by Vibrant Communities Saint John in 2006. The information was generated from the experiences of nearly 100 individuals from the community (including individuals living in poverty, as well as community organizations and decision makers).



group of individuals whose criminal records pose a major employment barrier were trained as flaggers and employed through a local employment agency. To date 15 individuals were trained and employed, two of which are currently employed full-time. Guided by experience to date and research on best practices, VCSJ will explore the interest of employers and other partners in initiatives that promote employer specific short term training to individuals, accompanied by job placement and follow-up supports.

People facing housing and energy poverty

In 2006 VCSJ has developed and presented its research on housing to three levels of government, drawing attention to the specific needs of low income individuals and families in Saint John. Two key issues which have been highlighted in VCSJ's research on the housing front have received growing attention and momentum this year. The first is the major shortage of affordable housing in the city (there are nearly 800 families on housing waitlists); and the second is the pervasive and growing problem of energy poverty (6000 families live in poverty, and close to 500 households in Saint John are disconnected annually because people are unable to make ends meet and keep their energy bill from going into arrears). In both of these areas, significant progress has been made in 2006:

- **Energy poverty advocacy: (50, 000 NB households, 6000 in SJ affected)** an estimated \$1 million has been saved for low income homes in the city (roughly 6000 households) because of VCSJ's energy poverty advocacy activities. Also as a result of VCSJ's advocacy for a change in policy, people living in poverty all over the province have seen the risk of having their power supply cut in mid-winter considerably reduced.
- **Neighborhoods take a proactive approach:** O.N.E. Change, a local neighbourhood group, has developed a program to help community members reduce their heating costs through a Winds of Change program. Vibrant Communities has been instrumental in helping to obtain funding to weatherize 60 homes in the north end (30 have been completed to date), and some of its members have participated in its implementation.
- **Affordable housing development gains momentum:** The Province of New Brunswick has approved 196 units to date for the Saint John area (with \$8.2 million in provincial funds). Saint John has also received 90% of the province's Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program funding (\$1 million).



- **Coordination on the housing needs of individuals has improved:** Housing organizations and related government agencies have noticed improved communication between each other because of the intermediary work of VCSJ, and as a result they are better able to match people in need with housing opportunities as they arise.

Vulnerable children, youth and young families

As highlighted in the 2005 report, the statistics tell us that 20% of Saint John families are single parent³ households, and 60 % of them live in poverty. Therefore a need has been identified to foster programs and policies that target not only children and youth, but young parents and pregnant teens as well. A significant amount of research has been conducted and information gathered on the children and young parenting front in 2006. Through a survey of existing programs and services, VCSJ has laid the groundwork for supporting the growth and sustainability of comprehensive social investment programs aimed at children, teens, parents, and families. A Children's Health Task Force has been formed to examine the needs of school-aged children who live in poverty and to recommend priority actions for improvement. An active partnership between two local groups (the Business Community Anti-Poverty Initiative and the Saint John Teen Pregnancy Committee) and VCSJ has also produced a research report and policy recommendations on the needs of young and single parents. Some concrete program development and expansion that has emerged on this front in 2006 will have a direct effect on children youth and parents in Saint John. These include:

- **Provision of comprehensive Early Childhood programs for young families:** The Early Childhood Learning Centre which was proposed in 2005 is now in a business planning phase. This neighbourhood based multi-service early intervention centre will combine childcare, early educational, and parenting support programs, and offer services to 300 area families. The Early Childhood Development Coalition is continuing a 2.5 year study to measure every child's readiness for kindergarten and help the community develop strategies for improvement (funded from VC's application to the federal "Understanding the Early Years" Program).
- **Expansion of comprehensive school-based programs for children:** The *PALS (Partners Assisting Local Schools) program*, championed by J.D. Irving and School District 8, has expanded to four schools. Business and community partners augment school resources to ensure essential supports are in place for successful school completion. Positive outcomes in terms of improved self

³ Single parent households are primarily single mothers.



esteem and academic performance are being reported. With the expansion of this program, nearly 1000 inner city children stand to benefit.

- **Expansion of comprehensive community-based services for teens:** A newly expanded Teen Resource Centre (TRC) is slated to open spring 2007. This centre will enable existing services to co-locate and will expand teen access to services, programs and supports that address their health, education to employment, recreation and self-development needs. The TRC is also expanding its services to vulnerable neighborhoods supported by VCSJ. This expansion should accommodate 80 more youth each year.
- **Alternative High School Program for Pregnant and Parenting Young Women:** First Steps Housing has partnered with BCAPI, School District 8 and the Province of NB (PSETL) to establish an alternative classroom for teen mothers. Nine (9) students are enrolled this year. The program is supported by a newly licensed Community Daycare Home at First Steps that cares for 3 infants while their moms are in school. In addition, a community mentoring program is being piloted for young parents
- **Youth voices are being heard:** Youth from vulnerable neighbourhoods have been involved in neighbourhood planning and actions that have helped to clarify youth needs and to address issues that are important to them and their future. Youth participation is now recognized as an essential poverty reduction strategy. The formation of neighbourhood youth councils is in the planning stages for 2007

Saint John's vulnerable neighbourhoods

Vibrant Communities Research⁴ has highlighted that poverty in Saint John is concentrated in several isolated and vulnerable urban neighbourhoods, where at a rate of 40% or higher, poverty exists at twice the rate of the rest of the city, and three times that of the province as a whole. People in these neighbourhoods face confounding barriers to moving out of poverty, such as housing, access to services, isolation, and stigma, to name only a few. Accordingly, Vibrant Communities has moved to adopt a neighbourhood level approach to addressing poverty and enhancing residents' capacity to address it. As well as working to establish neighbourhood-based groups in the vulnerable neighbourhoods of Crescent Valley and the South End, VCSJ has worked with existing groups in two additional neighbourhoods, starting with research and engagement, and helped to make significant progress over the past year. Highlights of direct action follow:

⁴ See VCSJ Report *Poverty and Plenty* (2005)



- **Community-led consultation and research:** Vibrant Communities led the coordination of a community survey in the public housing neighbourhood of Crescent Valley. The survey was conducted by residents trained specifically in confidentiality and related protocols to go door-to-door. Because residents were involved from the design stages through survey implementation and beyond, the initiative realized a stunning result of 54% completion rates. The data includes information and ideas on the priorities and needs of people in the neighbourhood. Some of the critical outcomes from this initiative include:
 - *Youth engagement:* 32 youth from Crescent Valley participated in 4 focus groups to highlight their issues and ideas for change.
 - *Community leadership:* 10 residents were trained and employed as survey facilitators and have continued to meet as the Survey Action Team (SAT), assuming a team leadership approach that connects them incrementally within their own neighbourhoods and beyond to members of the larger community of Vibrant Communities and partners, and the City of Saint John.
 - *Engagement with leaders:* The Survey Action Team has served as a core group to make presentations of survey data to a variety of audiences, including a large Report Back to the community.
 - *Momentum for change:* Subsequent to the survey Report Back and an announcement by the provincial government of funding for neighbourhood improvements that include Community Policing and renovation of a Community Resource Centre, the Survey Action Team participated with a larger group of residents to prepare and present a community SpeakOut. The neighbourhood responded by indicating location and usage preferences for the Community Resource Centre as well as prioritizing short- and longer-term components of an Action Plan.
 - *Engendering a sense of community:* Among the more surprising results from the survey was the discovery that most residents would prefer to stay and work together to improve their community, rather than leave.

- **Peer Mentoring & Advocacy Pilot Initiated in South End.** The Advocacy and Mentoring Working Group led research and reflection on a spectrum of mentoring models which could be resourcefully applied at a neighbourhood level in the vulnerable neighbourhood of the South End.
 - *Community leadership.* Over regular meetings hosted by the A&M Working Group, “Soup at Six” begins with a community supper. Childcare onsite is provided for the meeting portion of the evening. The South End Area Community Action Team (SEA-CATs) appoints its own communications committee, takes turns at facilitating meetings and setting the agenda, and works closely with VCSJ Community Coach and the A&M Working Group to build capacity.

- *Neighbourhood networking.* Members of SEA-CATs meet with representatives of the Crescent Valley Survey Action Team to prepare and rehearse a break-out presentation and workshop for a national conference of community health centres in Saint John. This is the beginning of a mutually empowering cross-connection initiative that the A&M Working Group will highlight for Year Three as “neighbourhood networking”, to build capacities, counter isolation, and share resources among vulnerable neighbourhoods.
- *Breaking down barriers.* Because A&M is a hands-on working group, some of the structural barriers are broken down every time SEA-CATs meets for “Soup at Six”. The two groups working together will develop a strategic action and vision plan for 2007 that will lead to SEA-CATs making its own presentations and writing letters as supported advocacy and working together with SJ Community Police and other relevant partners to improve the quality of life in the South End.

Engaging with the wider community:

- In 2005, O.N.E. Change led a “charrette” (a neighbourhood improvement conference), that was resourced by C.M.H.C. and others, that involved local citizens and services and community leaders in determining priorities and possible actions for change. This year, some of the identified priorities have already been accomplished and more are in the development stages

Changes in the Community and Institutional Response to Poverty

Within the wider community, two significant trends have emerged out of the work of Vibrant Communities this year. First, the profile of poverty in Saint John has been increased, with the depth and multiplicity of causes being brought into the light. Second, more community institutions are making a link between their work and poverty reduction. A few examples of this emerging trend are highlighted here:

- Policy makers and business leasers are interacting directly with community members to talk about ways to make change happen in their neighbourhoods.
- The City of Saint John has indicated a keen interest in working with vulnerable neighbourhood-based residents to improve their quality of life through consultation on relevant portfolios and municipal services such as policing, recreation, infrastructure, and transportation.



- Health providers and other service and program delivery agencies are poised to work closely to meet needs identified through the Crescent Valley Survey in accessible, appropriate delivery modes.
- Business leaders, provincial government and the local school district have partnered with a community organization (First Steps) to create an alternative high school classroom which accommodates the needs of young mothers and their children and allows them to complete their education.
- Government partners are seeking a new kind of dialogue with each other that will cross the traditional borders of different departments and levels of government.
- Non-profit housing corporations, business leaders, and government staff and a municipal councilor (BCAPI/VCSJ Housing Working Group) have worked together to develop a housing strategy, engaging and consulting with municipal and provincial decision makers. The coordination has helped to increase access to housing funding, and to shape the use of these resources.

Policy Impacts

In 2006, three new policies have been enacted at the provincial level, influenced, in part, from the work of Vibrant Communities Saint John and partners. VCSJ's intervention in the Public Utilities Board (PUB) hearings on behalf of those living with energy poverty has made two significant changes: First, NB Power has officially recognized energy as an essential service, resulting in a new provincial government regulation that bans mid-winter disconnections. Second, the PUB hearing resulted in a rate increase cap of 8% (compared to a proposed 13%). A third provincial policy change, influenced by the City of Saint John and local housing partners, will benefit those living in rental properties. A new by-law will soon be enacted that allows for the fining of landlords for housing violations without necessitating the court process. VCSJ is continuing to advocate for change on the policy front, with a second PUB hearing intervention scheduled for December 2006 that seeks to gain customer service improvements that recognizes household income and thus ability to pay.

How have dollars been directed?

Vibrant Communities Saint John partners have been instrumental in generating over ten million dollars in funding for multiple community projects. Some areas where funding leverage has been most productive are housing and neighbourhood engagement, and young families. In particular, VCSJ partners have succeeded in drawing government attention (and thereby an increased share of public dollars) to the poverty situation in Saint John at national and provincial levels.



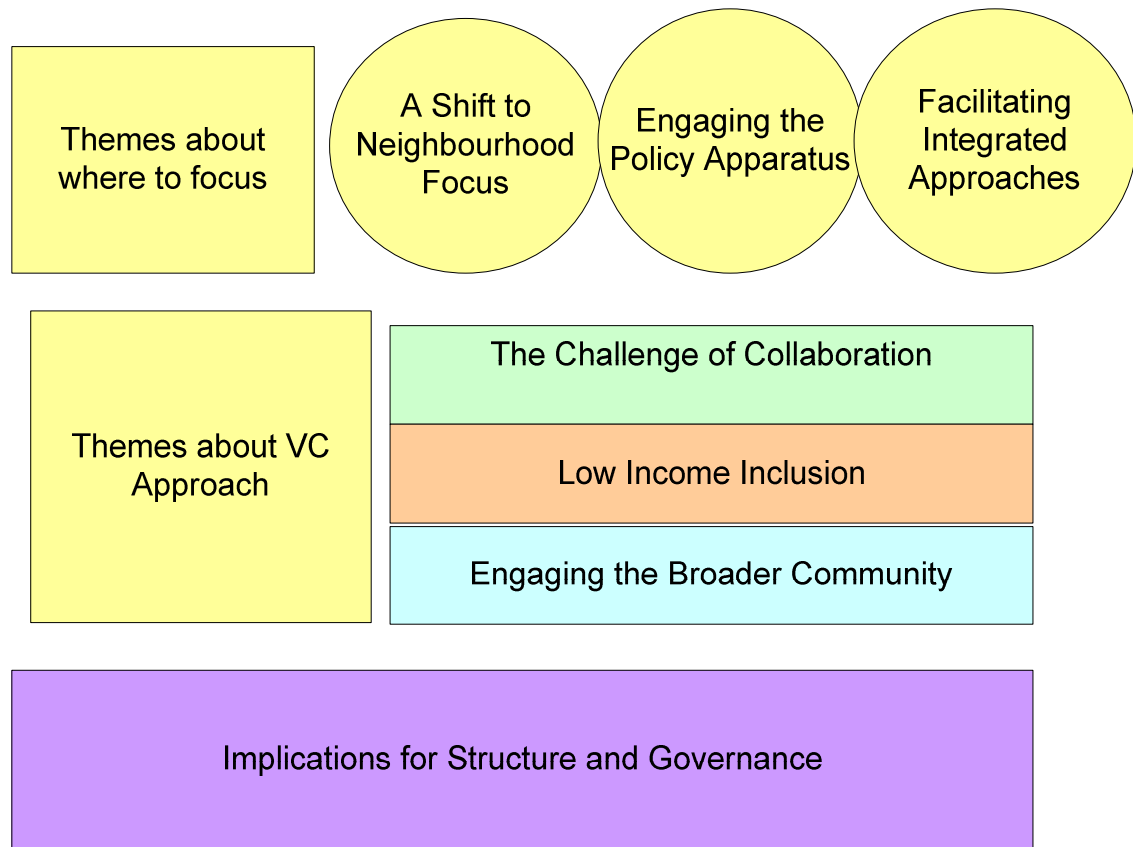
Funding Source	Amount	Initiative
Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation	\$10, 000	Crescent Valley Community Development & Survey
Province of N.B. (FCS)	\$25, 000	Crescent Valley Community Development & Survey
Public Health Agency of Canada	\$25, 000	BCAPI Study on High School Completion for Pregnant & Parenting Teens
New Brunswick Environmental Trust Fund	\$5000	Winds of Change Weatherization Program
KAIROS social justice/poverty reduction program	\$3000	Neighbourhood Development Program
Greater Saint John Community Foundation/Muriel McQueen Fergusson Foundation	\$5000	Mentoring Initiative for Young Mothers
Social Development Canada (UEY)	\$380, 000 / 3 yrs	Continued from 2005: Kindergarten Readiness Study
Province of New Brunswick (MLA Trevor Holder)	\$500, 000	Exterior repairs to Crescent Valley housing units & conversion of a building to a community centre; community police officer for 3 years.
NB Government	\$1,000,000	Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program
NB Government	\$8,200,000	Affordable Housing Funds

Vibrant Communities core funding is supported by the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation (\$100,000), Crime Prevention (\$75,000), the Province of New Brunswick (\$25,000) and the Sisters of Charity (\$15,000, 2007 funding).

There are also many in-kind supports which contribute to Vibrant Communities. Tabufile provides office space (valued at \$12,000) and BCAPI contributes Coordinator's time (valued at \$10,000). Many community organizations, businesses and government departments contribute staff resources to provide support to various working groups and their activities. There are many organizations and businesses that have provided meeting space and other resources to support meetings.



Key Themes & Lessons



A Shift to Neighbourhood Focus

There is a very strong consensus that the neighbourhood work is absolutely vital for moving forward with the Vibrant Communities agenda. It is consistently seen to be a place where there is high potential for tangible and sustainable change. There is a lot of momentum, particularly in Crescent Valley. People are talking more about what they can do in their community and there is an emerging sense of ownership over community well being. At the same time, it is at a fragile moment. While confidence is higher, and skills advanced, the VCSJ coach is still a critical enabler of this effort.

The experience of Crescent Valley and South End has provided many important insights about working for poverty reduction. There is a need to identify leaders, provide skills, facilitate change from within and connect to outside resources that can help. Each neighbourhood has different priorities and requires a distinct strategy. When poverty challenges are defined in terms of a particular neighbourhood, the responses and strategies can better reflect local realities.

Through Vibrant Communities and the important work taking place in two other neighbourhoods - ONE Change in the North End and The Village in Uptown SJ - the profile of vulnerable neighbourhoods and their issues has been raised significantly in this community. As local people are mobilized and see a way forward, the larger community is better able to rally with them.

Vibrant Communities is an important testing ground for neighbourhood work. It is a place where ideas can incubate and be explored. With current resource levels, Vibrant Communities has only been active in two neighbourhoods. Therefore, it is vital that this work take place while being tuned into what is working and not working so that it can more easily be transferred to other organizations who want to engage in supporting neighbourhood work.

Engaging the Policy Apparatus

The importance of policy change is another area of high interest for Vibrant Communities stakeholders. The interest centers primarily on the scale and durability of change that is possible only at a policy level. The emphasis to date has been on developing sound research which is an essential platform for a policy change process. There is an eagerness to begin to move this into more action.

One of the policy areas where Vibrant Communities has been most active to date is in a public intervener process on energy rate increases. Some valuable lessons have come from this experience. Staff support and leadership are seen to be crucial ingredients. There is an intensity of time required to do the necessary research and documentation which would be very difficult to take on as a volunteer. It also demonstrates how pursuing the hard policy impacts, for example, winter cut-offs and rate capping, can be a catalyst for other things. The warm apartments program emerged in response to some of the learning that the intervener process generated. Also, the public nature of this process generated broader awareness about the realities of housing and heating for people in poverty. It is an example of how Vibrant Communities has helped expand the view and ways of addressing poverty by exposing key decision makers to the fact that the decisions they make have a direct affect on people.

Many of the working groups have identified that they are ready to move on specific policy targets. There is a need to more explicitly articulate what these are, to consult with people living in poverty on these targets, and begin to formulate strategies for pursuing these shifts. There are some important lessons that have emerged on how to do this: involving policy makers in the analysis, and making the link between social equity and economic prosperity. The welfare wall⁵ is seen as a valuable framework for articulating policy priorities. Childcare and transportation were policy targets that received consistent mention and are a possible focus for the policy change effort. A key indicator for Vibrant Communities to watch for is the shifting of resource flows within the government.

There is more to learn about connecting the very local and specific efforts in neighbourhoods to the policy level, and vice versa. There is a need to learn how to link up these kinds of neighbourhood situations with the broader policy environment. For example, there is a neighbourhood-directed response needed when there are young mothers who need better accessibility, affordability and quality of daycare so they can go to school or get work. This very local situation also aligns with the broader policy issues on childcare.

The Challenge of Collaboration

A vital ingredient in the Vibrant Communities effort has been convening partners from different sectors and working to enable a new way of working together. There is a fundamentally different component of the Vibrant Communities work from other poverty reduction efforts in trying to develop local leadership that is multi-sectoral and inclusive.

⁵ The welfare wall is a term used to describe the barriers which make it economically undesirable to exit social support systems. For example, the loss of benefits and the need for childcare may result in a reduction to a person's financial position by returning to work.



Many of the Vibrant Communities Canada trailbuilders are experiencing transitions in leadership which are putting pressure on the multi-sectoral collaborations. Often it's easy to pull people together in the first place, but more challenging to keep momentum sustained over time. This is somewhat different in Saint John. Although there is a measure of burn out that is being experienced, there is a 'stick-to-it-ness' in the leaders involved at various levels.

For Vibrant Communities Saint John the issue is less about the question, "how do we help collaborations to be sustainable," and is more about figuring out how to move collaborations to the next level. This is an area where some progress has been made – different sectors have come together on a common goal and the way that many players interact with each other has evolved through the Vibrant Communities experience. This is an asset in the community that was not there before. The learning about other sectors has started; yet, there are boundaries in collaborating which are difficult to cross. There are challenges of different perceptions, assumptions, and patterns of how to approach an issue. Problems are still consistently framed in terms of what other sectors need to change, and when difficult situations arise there can be a react and retreat response. This is very natural in the difficult process of collaborating and there is opportunity to get better at pushing the dynamics while keeping people at the table. It is these kinds of changes that have transformative potential - how to get better protocols for engagement across sectors?

Another challenge is attribution and recognition within a collaboration - sharing the profile of projects with the implementing organizations. One dynamic is that, when you are in the catalyst role in a community, there is a function of helping things get started, or adding value to the good work being carried out by other organizations. It is important to give credit, but there is also a need to profile what Vibrant Communities is doing. How do we better manage these tensions?

Facilitating integrated approaches

Related to collaboration is the role of integrating delivery of programs and services both within government and the social sector. For many, the silos of government departments and the 'maze' of organizations who deliver services are a major barrier. It is a challenge for people who are trying to access support to make sense of 'the system' and to appropriately access the services that they need. Respective departments and organizations may have great programs, but when there is limited communication, the product of each is seen to be less effective. The challenge is not to merge the existing initiatives or negate them, but make them more accessible, more linked, and to get better at identifying what is working.



In Saint John, there is some momentum building on the integration issue. There is an emerging sense that government partners are beginning to forge better linkages with each other and that there is a desire to find further opportunities for interacting. There is emerging interest for a government table where candid interaction between civil servants from different departments and government levels can take place. Vibrant Communities can play a catalyst role by simply providing a rationale for the players to convene. The kind of intervention that Vibrant Communities can have can be very strategic. It can help a department to frame its work within the context of poverty reduction. This has the potential to shift perspective, and hopefully resource inputs to more comprehensive solutions. Vibrant Communities complements many of the integrated service delivery and ‘wraparound’ models that are taking shape in some departments.

Within social service agencies, there are lessons from the work to date which highlight the importance of relationship building. Although there is an emphasis on results, there is a recognition that relationships are vital to seeding results. For example, there are stronger connections between people working in housing that have resulted from interaction in the housing working group. As a result, there is an increase in ‘back-channel’ communications where customized solutions that demand some flexibility or creativity can be identified and implemented. What it takes is organizations knowing, and trusting one another so these kinds of communications can be done.

The action initiatives of the Children and Youth working group seem to have generated valuable lessons for working towards improved integration. While the initial role of the Working Group was to gather information about what was happening, through a survey and the formation of a Children’s Health Task Force, the process generated awareness and stronger connection among organizations and impetus for change.

Engaging the Broader Community

There is a diversity of perspective on where to situate the broader community engagement piece of Vibrant Communities. For many, the emphasis needs to be on communicating the complexities of poverty and the importance of integrated solutions for tackling it. What is more difficult to situate is the need for communicating about Vibrant Communities itself. Is it critical for Vibrant Communities to be broadly recognized and understood in the community? Or is it only necessary that the key stakeholders who are involved in poverty work have that awareness and understanding? The perception is that there is a fairly limited awareness of Vibrant Communities from the outside, and that there is some confusion between VCSJ and BCAP.



There is a general belief that public understanding is a step in building will for change. The particular challenge for communications is that it seems to be outside of the expertise set of the existing committees and staff roles, and so to pursue this will require additional resources and focus.

There seems to be some clues about how to communicate within the neighbourhood work. It is perhaps its more action oriented nature, or that the stories which are generated are more tangible and grounded, but there is a different quality to the ability to communicate about work at this level.

Low-income inclusion

There is interest in including low-income residents as partners in the process of designing solutions. This is an area many Vibrant Communities trailbuilders have struggled with. The common approach has been to have a poverty perspective at the table in working groups as well as the leadership roundtable. This has not been the most effective way of engaging this voice. Some working groups have not been able to include people who are living in poverty, and for others who have, there is an interest to find better ways of integrating this important perspective. For people living in poverty, there are fears that they may do or say something that can lead to a loss of some support they have in their life. For many, there is a high feeling of vulnerability and as a consequence a high degree of trust-building required to have involvement from people.

What this suggests is a different kind of interaction. The lessons from the neighbourhood work hold high potential for this. The meetings in the South End involve social interaction around food, provide childcare, and are held in an easy to access and familiar location. When the survey team from Crescent Valley delivered a presentation on their research to the Crescent Valley planning committee this enabled a different kind of interaction with a working group. The presenters earned respect and provided credible and valued perspective. There is concern, however, that there is a general expectation that it is the responsibility of people living in poverty to educate the rest of the public. While their voice is an important one, and they bring a powerful perspective to understanding what it means to poverty, it is the responsibility of everyone to share in this education mandate.

Within the theme of low income inclusion is a question: How to politically empower the marginalized? Often the poor are not on the political radar because of voting patterns and the ability to voice concerns. There is a high degree of interest from the municipality for citizen engagement. How can VCSJ support this by enabling a level of involvement that gives power to marginalized individuals and communities?

Structure and Governance

As the Vibrant Communities initiative progresses in Saint John, there are some emerging questions about how to evolve its structure and governance. There is some question as to whether the Leadership Roundtable (LRT) has been fully utilized. The nature of the workflow to date is highly decentralized. The working groups set an agenda within a particular framework and report on that work to the LRT. What this enabled in the early years was broad experimentation and ability for the initiative to adjust. The shift to neighbourhoods came as a result of the research which highlighted the disproportionate incidence of poverty in vulnerable neighbourhoods. It is also the result of the Advocacy and Mentoring working group developing a deeper understanding of what it means to provide mentoring support in a way that is more respectful and sustainable. A 1-1 mentoring program requires a high degree of resources and does not sustain beyond the duration of those resources. By building capacity in neighbourhoods to advocate for change and to support one another, there is more resilient model that can take root.

The workflow of Vibrant Communities, and the role of the LRT, has precluded the development of a platform whereby different sectors can call each other to account. There is increasing pressure to find focus in Vibrant Communities but it appears that the decision making mechanisms for doing so are not yet developed. Is it appropriate to position LRT as an advisory body on poverty to the provincial government?

Part of the challenge is that the available time people have to participate at the Leadership Roundtable is limited. Given the depth of the issues and the comprehensiveness of the approach there is an intensity of involvement which is, by nature, inefficient. The result is that the LRT meetings become a data dump rather than a deeper exploration of critical issues. Is there a need for different configuration of the LRT so that those participating can do so as part of their professional mandate, rather than as a volunteer commitment, and thereby commit more time to the process? What are the implications of this for business and community members whose voice at this table is also important?

Another challenge for the Vibrant Communities structure is the integration of the different issue areas. Working groups expressed concern that they find it difficult to stay abreast of what others are doing and are challenged in cross communication. This is mirrored at a staff level where it is challenging to stay in the loop with each other given the intensity of what is being worked on. As Vibrant Communities develops, the coordination of all the different elements of the work becomes increasingly difficult. Vibrant Communities seems to have taken on more projects than was originally anticipated. Coordination is seen to be very critical, and at the same time it is recognized to be highly resource intensive in that it takes large amounts of staff time. Is a result of Vibrant Communities growth is that it begins to mirror internally some of the integration challenges of government and social service agencies?

Moving forward it is worth considering different roles for the working groups. For example, the children and youth initiatives have shown excellent leadership in identifying needs and solutions. Now that this work is done, is it appropriate to now re-frame the work from the perspective of neighbourhoods and policy?

Questions for Moving Forward

Sustainability

There are questions about sustainability for Vibrant Communities Saint John and the various poverty reduction efforts that it is involved with. Sustainability is a complex term and it appears that there are multiple interpretations of what it means. The diagram below maps out how sustainability is defined at different levels:



There are uncertainties about the matching funds for 2007. Government Partners at both the Provincial and Federal levels are rethinking their priorities and have indicated more interest in concrete and targeted projects that will meet their priorities. This raises some immediate challenges for resourcing the Vibrant Communities infrastructure and support. There is a shift in

thinking that there is now a need to consider local sources for supporting Vibrant Communities. This is seen to be a challenge because local capacity is not strong, and to tap into local sources there is a sense that the reach of those who understand what Vibrant Communities is must expand. Is there enough local buy in and reciprocity that seeking more funds locally would be supported by community partners?

There are two overarching questions that VCSJ is faced with currently:

- 1) *What are our areas of focus?*
- 2) *How do we restructure the resources to align with that focus?*

There is a need for discussion about alternative ways to lead and support poverty reduction work in communities and if there is a better way that Vibrant Communities partners can transition to in the future. Is there a need for an arms length municipal structure that can fulfill the convening and research roles that Vibrant Communities currently plays? Can a better resourced HDC take on more with respect to the integration of delivery issues?

These are difficult decisions which Vibrant Communities faces. There is pressure to become more action oriented. There is a risk that this pressure is interpreted as a call to do more projects. Vibrant Communities does not have the capacity to take on more at a programmatic level. There is also pressure to focus, and this can get interpreted as a need to come to a full stop on some elements of the work. The reality is that it is impossible to fully stop any of this work – much of the work has its own momentum. The decisions are more one of proportion, relationship, and balance. The following tables outline several questions for consideration:

How does the neighbourhood work continue?

As community capacity grows the nature of the coaching and support may evolve. How does Vibrant Communities position for these transitions? There is momentum, but it is at a fragile stage, how can VC keep this momentum?

How do we push the envelope in getting better at working across sectors?

What are the processes which stimulate this? How to do this while maintaining the integrity of relationships?

How does VC support the appetite for government learning?

There is limited capacity for taking on more things; however, is there a significant opportunity in the desire of government partners to find a space to interact with each other. How does VC support this in a way that does not require intense resources?

What supports are needed to move the policy agenda?

Policy change requires a long term view. How does progress get measured and communicated when the benefits may be downstream? What research is required to support this work going forward? What sorts of expertise is needed for this work?

What is the role of research and evaluation going forward?

To date the research has been self directed (for example, Poverty and Plenty served to raise a general profile of the issue). Is it now time for a more responsive approach to research which has a flow of research coming from the ground up? Can more deliberate links between grassroots capacity building and broader policy change be made? And what is the role of research in this?

The first two years emphasized research over evaluation. Is there a need now for more balance – maintaining the appropriate research supports but also getting better at harvesting and sharing learning about what is working and not working and why?

Where do the difficult decisions about focus get made?

Can this be a function for the Leadership Roundtable? Does it then need to have a different role? When new initiatives and ideas are introduced to Vibrant Communities, how does Vibrant Communities respond so that enables this to happen, without draining existing Vibrant Communities resources?

Appendices



Appendix A: Evaluation Tables

VCSJ Progress 2006: Education to Employment						
Initiative	Action	Target Group	VCSJ Role	Results		
				Collaboration & Capacity Building	Organizational & Systemic Shifts	Household Targets (policy impacts, \$, individuals)
Gathering information on the challenges faced by, and the opportunities available to, individuals on low income with low levels of education.	100 individuals provided input including: individuals living in poverty, community organizations, government departments, and business and trades organizations. Report: "Education to Employment: Pathways Out of Poverty" was completed and is being circulated.	Individuals living in poverty with low levels of education	Convenor Researcher Communicator Champion	Guided by a multisectoral working group, the report identified challenges and opportunities for individuals with low levels of education and recommendations for action. Report being distributed broadly and presentations being made to specific groups to champion recommendations. Partners using the report to promote further action on: improving retention rates and conditions for writing GED, increased pre-employment supports, and financial supports for post-secondary training.	Anticipated: Greater emphasis on and more collaborative approaches to removing barriers for youth and adults to achieving their education, training and employment goals. Barriers include lack of confidence, childcare, transportation, information, follow-up supports, and readiness for employment training.	Anticipated outcomes: - Increased resources to enable more people to successfully complete literacy and GED programs. - Increased resources to prepare individuals to enter the workforce. - Reduced costs for individuals attending post-secondary training. # of Households: Yet to be determined
Taking a neighbourhood approach through Crescent Valley Education to Employment Project	Partnering with residents in Crescent Valley and community partners to assist individuals in identifying and overcoming barriers to meeting their education, training and employment goals.	Young adults and single parents on income assistance, some of whom do not have high school education.	Convenor Researcher Communicator Champion	- Formation of advisory committee of community partners. - Links established with residents through Crescent Valley Survey Action Team and Speak Out (community meeting). Anticipated: - Residents involved in identifying their education, training & employment goals. - Increased connections between individuals on low income and community and government programs. - Learnings applied to other low income neighbourhoods	Anticipated: - Increased resources for working on education to employment initiatives at the neighbourhood level - Increased collaborative partnerships at the neighbourhood level to address barriers: childcare, transportation, lack of information, etc.	Anticipated Outcomes: - Policies, programs and resources reduce barriers to education, training and employment opportunities. - Increased participation of residents in education, training and employment programs and services # of Households/participants: Yet to be determined

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<p>Supporting training initiatives that test new approaches to fast tracking individuals to employment</p>	<p>1. Partnership developed with Employment agency to recruit and hire individuals, to work in the construction and industrial sectors.</p> <p>2. <i>Pathways to Success</i> pilot program established by the Learning Exchange, providing adults with skills and supports leading to employment or training. Includes: essential skills training, GED training, pre-employment and on the job training and follow-up. NB Dept. of Post Secondary Education, Training and Labour is applying for funding from Federal Government to expand the program.</p> <p>3. Explore interest of employers and other partners in initiatives that promote employer specific short- term training to individuals, accompanied by job placement and followup supports.</p>	<p>Individuals living in poverty with limited work experience, some of whom have not completed GED.</p>	<p>Shared collaborator (with John Howard Society & Coverdale Centre for Women); Communicator; Champion</p> <p>Communicator Champion</p> <p>Convener Researcher Communicator Champion</p>	<p>Partnership resulted in flaggers training being offered to more individuals.</p> <p>Transportation concerns addressed through partnership with taxi company and employment agency.</p> <p>Planned: New partnerships developed with community organizations, employers and government.</p>	<p>Increased support for hiring individuals with criminal record.</p> <p>Understanding of potential for partnering relationships between employers, employment agencies and service organizations.</p> <p>Anticipated: Holistic training models developed & promoted.</p>	<p># of Households/participants: - 9 individuals received short-term employment experience, of which 2 are working full-time.</p> <p># of Households/participants - Current: 10 participants started in November. - Anticipated: 100+ as program expands</p> <p># of Households/participants: Yet to be determined</p>
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VCSJ Progress 2006: Children and Youth

Initiative	Action	Target Group	VCSJ Role	Results		
				Collaboration & Capacity Building	Organizational & Systemic Shifts	Household Outcomes (policy impacts,\$, individuals)
Early Learning Centre Demonstration Project	Engage community partners in the development of a 'model' multi-service, early childhood learning and care centre that is neighbourhood-based for parents and their children 0 to 5 years. Service providers will collaborate with parents, the neighbourhood and the neighbourhood school to provide appropriate childcare, preschool and parenting programs and supports in a "vulnerable" neighbourhood in Saint John.	Young families, (primarily single parent) living in a Saint John neighbourhood with a high concentration of poverty.	Convenor: Researcher Communicator Coach Champion	Project development committee has been established involving community, government and business partners. Conceptual plan completed. Business plan under development. Seeking funding partners.	Anticipated: Integration of early childhood services at a neighbourhood level. Income is not a barrier to participation. Shared governance by service providers, neighbourhood and parents.	Anticipated outcomes: - Increased access to comprehensive early childhood services for parents & children living in a vulnerable neighbourhood. - Increased readiness for school. Increased capacity for academic achievement and school completion. - Increased parenting stability in the home. - Increased motivation for parent to pursue other life opportunities. # of Households: 300 families in 1 neighbourhood.
Children's Health Task Force	Local leaders with diverse backgrounds have been appointed to a Task Force mandated to recommend one to three actions that the community can undertake to improve the health and wellbeing of children 5 to 12 years of age who live in poverty.	Children 5 to 12 years of age who live in poverty	Shared Convenor role with St. Joseph's Community Health Centre Researcher Communicator Coach Champion	Formation of Task Force and support team. Decision-making framework and process determined. Identification of the issues and solutions from literature reviews, key informants, sharing expertise. Determination of priorities. Planned: Determination of 3 primary recommendations and action plans. Report. Communication of findings and recommendations to stakeholders.	Anticipated: Sustainability and growth of services and interventions that are already in place, in Saint John, and that appear to be improving outcomes for children in poverty. Increased participation by all sectors in targeting and growing resources in most effective ways to level the playing field of opportunity for children in poverty.	Anticipated outcomes: Improved academic achievement, nutrition and fitness for children 5 to 12 years who live in poverty in Saint John. # of Households: Yet to be Determined
Inventory of Services in SJ that are accessible to children and youth who live in poverty.	Development of a survey tool; interviews with service providers; compilation of survey results; and summary report.	Children and Youth who live in poverty in Saint John	Convenor: Researcher Communicator Coach	Surveys completed for 36 service providers and 46 programs. Information analyzed. Identification of key challenges for children in poverty and service providers.	Anticipated: Transportation solutions that will enable children and youth to access opportunities outside of their neighbourhood. Sustainability and growth of fragile services that appear to be making	Anticipated Outcomes: Yet to be determined



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					positive impacts on child/youth development needs. Effective evaluation tools to measure program impacts/outcomes for children.	# of Households: Yet to be Determined
Influencing Healthy Public Policy for Pregnant and Parenting Young Women	Investigation of barriers to high school completion for Pregnant and Parenting Teens and development of a community action plans to reduce key barriers. Lead Group: BCIPI	Pregnant and parenting teens and young adults who are not in school or have not completed high school.	Collaborative Partner: Researcher Communicator Coach Champion	Collaborative Leadership involving BCIPI, Greater Saint John Teen Pregnancy Committee, First Steps and VCSJ. Participation of 20 community partners, including young moms, in the study and in developing the community action plan. Report : <i>Influencing Health Policy for Pregnant and Parenting Young Women</i> . Championing of recommended action plans by specific community partners.	Alternative high school classroom established at First Steps, specifically for parenting young women as a result of collaborative partnerships involving BCIPI, First Steps, School District and Provincial Dept of Post Secondary Education, Training, and Labour. Agreement by 4 partners to develop mentoring program and progress being made in developing and piloting initiative. Community Day Care Home established at First Steps.	\$25,000 contribution from Public Health Agency of Canada to investigate policy barriers for pregnant & parenting teens and develop community action plan. \$30,000 contribution by JD Irving & \$30,000 contribution by Province (Dept. of Post Secondary Education, Training, and Labour) for First Steps Alternative High School and Day Care (2006):
Influencing Healthy Public Policy for Pregnant and Parenting Young Women	Investigation of barriers to high school completion for Pregnant and Parenting Teens and development of a community action plans to reduce key barriers. Lead Group: BCIPI				Anticipated: Increased # of licensed childcare spaces for infants. Increased flexibility in high school programs to enable participation by young parents. Sustainable mentoring program for young parents.	# of Households: - 9 young parents have returned to high school - 1 has graduated - 3 new infant childcare spaces. \$5,000 contribution by Greater Saint John Community Foundation and Muriel McQueen Fergusson Foundation to establish mentoring program for young moms.
Understanding the Early Years (UEY) Research and Community Action Project	Securing of major research project to enable Saint John to measure every child's readiness for school and develop a community action plan to address result areas that require improvement. Lead Groups: Family Plus, School District 8 and Saint John Early Childhood Development Coalition	Children 0 to 5 years	Collaborative Partner: Researcher (Prepared funding proposal) Communicator	Strengthened partnerships within Early Childhood Development Coalition. Media articles were generated to publicly communicate early childhood needs for Saint John households living in poverty.	Inspired initiation of Early Learning Centre Demonstration Project	\$380,000 received from HRSDC (UEY) for 3 year study which is now being implemented. # of Households: Yet To be Determined



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<p>Communicating "best practice" programs that provide collaborative and comprehensive services for children and teens.</p>	<p>PALS Program Lead Groups: School District 8 and JD Irving, Irving Oil, Aliant, Atlantic Health Sciences Corporation</p> <p>The Resource Centre for Youth (TRC) Lead Groups: BCAPI and St. Joseph's Community Health Centre</p>	<p>Children who attend schools in neighbourhoods with high concentrations of poverty.</p> <p>Teens at risk</p>	<p>Collaborative Partner: Champion</p>	<p>Increased awareness of the value of collaborative and comprehensive supports for children and teens who are at risk of not completing school</p> <p>Increased partnerships to expand "best practice" programs.</p>	<p>Expansion of programs.</p>	<p>Growth in the number of children who area benefiting from PALS programs.</p> <p>TRC achieved \$1.8 million dollar capital commitment shared by community, provincial and federal governments) to develop larger facility.</p> <p># of Households: 600 children and teens</p>
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VCSJ Progress 2006: Crescent Valley Neighbourhood Change

Initiative	Action	Target Group	VCSJ Role	Results		
				Collaboration & Capacity Building	Organizational & Systemic Shifts	Household Targets (policy impacts,\$, individuals)
Develop & implement community survey in Crescent Valley (CV)	Engage CV residents in design and decision-making re survey	Interested residents of CV	Convenor Researcher Communicator Coach Champion	Decision to use survey as leverage for initial community development in CV is endorsed by members of multi-sectoral CV Planning Committee (government at 3 levels, politicians, business, community based agencies); residents are also engaged – at first separate from CV Planning Committee.	Governance and inclusiveness are on the table for discussion; community development best practices research guides decision-making	# of Households/Participants: - 10 residents attend an early community meeting with area MLA and VCSJ community coach to respond to concept of community survey - 11 residents attend a 3-hour focus group to determine design and facilitation strategy for community survey
Attract funding to resource survey	Survey is completed with input from residents & experts			CV Planning Committee is strengthened as provincial & federal government partners make funding commitments to CV	Buy-in creates new stakeholders in Crescent Valley	MLA Trevor Holder announces \$25,000 funding from Province of NB; CHMC follows with \$10,000 contribution. Resourcing means outcomes can be realistically effected and the neighbourhood positively affected in terms of engagement.
Facilitate training and coordination of survey	Survey training provided to 12 residents; 3-member resource team assembled to guide process of survey facilitation; survey is delivered to every household	Adult residents in 388 households		Family & Community Services provides unit in CV to use for survey coordination & meetings; neighbourhood-based team leadership is significantly advanced		12 residents directly engaged in survey facilitation
Implement survey	54% or 209 households respond to survey	CV residents			CV Survey Action Team (SAT) is born and shifts the balance of power in neighbourhood development	54% of households (209 adults) respond to extensive survey requiring commitment of 45-60 minutes each
Engage youth	4 Focus Groups are held with younger and older teens in Crescent Valley	CV youth	Coach-communicator; researcher; champion; convenor	Awareness of change issues articulated by CV residents who participate in survey		# of Households/participants: 32 youth engaged in 4 focus groups
Track survey results				Next generation of CV residents are brought on board community development process		
Develop	Service Canada provides data input of all survey results; UNBSJ sociology professor conducts					VCSJ partners in government and higher education provide expertise as in-kind contribution



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<p>capacity of Survey Action Team; Make presentations of survey results</p> <p>Attract further funding for change projects in CV</p>	<p>analysis of survey data</p> <p>Regular meetings to enhance ability to work as team and learn to build consensus in decision making and prioritizing/planning; Empower residents to analyze and articulate survey results</p> <p>Province of NB announces \$1/2 million in housing infrastructure + money for community police in CV + renovation of 4-unit housing to serve as community centre</p>	<p>Core group + several audiences, i.e.: Task Force on Children's Health; CV Planning Committee; other resident participants; Common Council of Saint John; Community Health Centre</p> <p>Potentially every resident of Crescent Valley</p>		<p>Capacity and collaboration building with neighbourhood significantly advanced: Capacity of SAT members to understand their neighbourhood and report survey results grows incrementally with each presentation;</p> <p>Neighbourhood meetings expand to include many more residents. Trust is enhanced between residents and Province; other partners such as SJ City Police brought on board; sense of isolation in neighbourhood further reduced as capacity increased.</p>	<p>Reach of initiative is deepened and extended through stakeholder growth</p> <p>Capacity building in process with several sectors – health and city government are particularly enhanced.</p>	<p># of Households/participants: 20+ residents attend community meetings</p> <p>Combined presentations reach at least 100 residents of CV plus another 100 partners (as well as a television audience for Common Council).</p>
<p>Plan event to develop specific feedback on location & usage of community centre for FCS; capture planning priorities & vision to inform neighbourhood change strategic plan</p>	<p>Prepare & present innovative SpeakOut in Crescent Valley for resident participation and partner support</p>	<p>Residents of CV + VCSJ partners + FCS</p>	<p>Collaborative partner with Family & Community Services</p>	<p>Survey Action Team + Residents interact during 6 preparatory meetings with service providers and other partners to prepare booths on Housing; Crime & Safety; Services & Supports; Community Centre; Education, Training & Work; Youth; Working Together</p>	<p>Relationship between Province and residents shifts; Relationship between SAT and other interested residents shifts SAT expands in working groups to prepare SpeakOut; Partners such as area day care centre + SJ Leisure Services commit to working side by side with residents, forging relationships of trust; Many others contribute in-kind resources for SpeakOut including City of Saint John Leisure Services provision of gym at Somerset Community Centre for venue.</p>	<p>Anticipated: Implications for policy shifts vis-à-vis great neighbourhood autonomy</p> <p># of Households/participants: - approximately 60 residents, including youth, attend SpeakOut, despite heavy rain, - 25 VCSJ leadership and partners provide support as engaged observers</p> <p>Province of NB provided with consensus for location & usage of renovated Community Resource Centre</p>



VCSJ Progress 2006: South End Neighbourhood Change

Initiative	Action	Target Group	VCSJ Role	Results		
				Collaboration & Capacity Building	Organizational & Systemic Shifts	Household Targets (policy impacts,\$, individuals)
Provide resources to initiate and sustain a neighbourhood-based advocacy & mentoring group in vulnerable neighbourhood of South End of Saint John	Advocacy & Mentoring (A&M) Committee researches models and best practices for peer mentoring, group advocacy, and "technical assistance"; Apply for funding from KAIROS	Interested residents from diverse neighbourhood of South End	Convenor Researcher Communicator Coach Champion	A & M Committee collaboration brings together representatives from: low income, faith communities, community-based services/programs (including the Urban Core Support Network, a founding member of the Leadership Round Table).	Inclusiveness and capacity-building empowerment models guide pilot program proposal and strengthen of A&M Committee itself .	KAIROS awards \$3000 to fund first phase of South End pilot program run by A&M Committee.
Host community meeting to test model on residents of S. End and get feedback on poverty-related issues for group action.	Supper & meeting -- <i>Meet & Potatoes</i> – hosted at S. End church; A&M do skit to communicate styles of community-based advocacy & mentoring.	Diverse residents of S. End (demographics indicate range from home-owner to low income)		S. End residents, A&M Committee members set standard for on-the-ground involvement that breaks down barriers through sharing meals and power in horizontally structured meeting spaces.	New stakeholders in S. End are added to the VCSJ partnership.	# of Households/participants: - 85 residents attend & gain awareness of VCSJ as poverty reduction initiative and specifically the goals and values of A&M led community-based action - 35 participate in break-out groups to identify priority issues.
Host continuing meetings and support capacity of group to be self-determining and speak for their neighbourhood.	Regular meetings at Centenary Queen Square United Church storefront are initiated – <i>Soup at Six</i> – with commitment of ongoing support by A&M Committee and church; commitment made to work on crime prevention & neighbourhood safety, and safe & affordable housing.	Diverse residents of S. End		Trust and relationship-building at community level brings A&M into group peer mentoring relationship with residents. SEA-CATs community group is formed: Saint John Area Community Action Team	Community partners engaged: Police, Block Parents, and SJ Non-Profit Housing representatives accept invitation to speak at meetings; group determines to forge ongoing links to all organizations.	# of Households/participants: - Approx. 20 residents attend meetings plus 10-12 children - 10 residents attend an early community meeting with area MLA and VCSJ community coach to respond to concept of community survey.
	Resident representatives of SEA-	SEA-CATs members	Coach-communicator; researcher; champion;	Neighbourhoods collaborate on issues and gain strength from	VCSJ & Community Health Centre forge working relationship through cooperative work on the CACHCA	# of Households/participants: - 8 members from 2 community groups work together to prepare for presentation/workshop and discover



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Build capacity of SEA-CATs to network with other vulnerable neighbourhoods	CATs spend two meetings with reps of Crescent Valley-Survey Action Team to develop joint presentation and workshop for break-out group at CACHCA conference (national community health centres).		convenor	understanding that they are not alone; Delegates to national conference share capacity-building strategies and projects from their regions.	conference.	strength in numbers; - 25 delegates to CACHCA attend break-out group in S. End.
A&M develops unique capacity-building project concept and submits for funding with target of low income residents in 4 vulnerable neighbourhoods A&M supports Strategic Planning and Visioning for SEA-CATs	Potential funders continuing to be sought; A&M plans to continue to adapt and circulate until funded. Anticipated: Project would involve VCSJ partners in government and business, as well as other funders, in an innovative day-long culmination to a 3-day conference to resource residents to identify, research, articulate, and pitch poverty reduction projects to partners. First meeting set up to begin the process of developing a realistic Community Plan for the South End Anticipated: SEA-CATs canvass other South-End based groups and services to create local collaborations and formulate an inventory.	South End, Crescent Valley, Village, Lower West, and ONE Change residents Residents + members of other South End groups		Anticipated: Capacity of residents would be concretely enhanced. Anticipated: Collaboration within neighbourhood will be greatly enhanced; Capacity building occurs through more refined planning process and consensus building occurs as choices are made and vision created.	Anticipated: Potential for shifting balance of power to neighbourhoods is considerable. Anticipated: VCSJ will be impacted as neighbourhood groups gain autonomy and direction; City will be engaged as harbour front development unfolds and groups such as SEA-CATs make presentations on matters of neighbourhood importance.	# of Households/participants: (Anticipated) - Has the potential to affect many (possibly hundreds) of vulnerable neighbourhood residents, plus collaborative partners # of Households / participant groups: - Members of SEA-CATs plus South Central Citizen's Council, Inner City Youth Ministry, neighbourhood churches, and other organizations



VCSJ Progress 2006: Safe and Affordable Housing

Initiative	Action	Target Group	VCSJ Role	Results		
				Collaboration & Capacity Building	Organizational & Systemic Shifts	Household Outcomes (policy impacts, individuals, \$)
A Warm Apartments Campaign	<p>Saint John Energy has been asked to consider ways to combat energy poverty.</p> <p>VCSJ participates on behalf of people living with energy poverty as an intervener at Public Utilities Board hearings. Also continued plans to: advocate for a more humane power disconnection and payment policies at next hearing (Dec 5th 2006)</p> <p>Plans to: work with new regulator office to ensure that energy poverty is a consideration in planning.</p> <p>Public Education: Through media interviews, raised awareness of how poor rate design and lack of efficiency measures compound the challenge</p> <p>Assisted with ONE Change Neighbourhood group's "Winds Of Change" weatherization program: ensuring funding acquisition, and brokering partnerships.</p>	SJ renters living in poverty	<p>Champion</p> <p>Convenor</p> <p>Convenor</p> <p>Convenor</p> <p>Researcher Champion</p>	<p>Worked with families to provide testimony at PUB hearing on rate establishment</p> <p>Voices are being heard: - Local resident living in poverty speaks out on the affect of rate increases. - Local radio and TV media cover energy poverty in Saint John.</p> <p>Local proactive measures gain momentum: Neighbourhood group begins local <i>Winds Of Change</i> home weatherization program.</p>	<p>Energy Poverty is discussed for the first time as part of a utility rate hearing.</p> <p>NB Power officially recognizes power as an essential service New policy adopted prohibiting the disconnection of power in the winter months.</p> <p>Provincial government introduces residential heating tax rebate (for <i>all</i> residents): this change is pending under the new government.</p> <p>Power rate increase is capped at 8% (rather than proposed 13%).</p> <p>Partners and public becoming more aware of energy poverty in Saint John through media exposure & pub intervention.</p>	<p># of Households: Preventing up to 500 winter disconnections per year.</p> <p>All NB homes affected</p> <p># of Households: Approximately \$1 million saved for up to 6000 low-income households* in Saint John. (*based on approx. 23,000 individuals living in poverty in the Saint John CMA)</p> <p>\$5,000 in funding from Provincial Environmental Trust Fund for <i>Winds of Change</i> Program</p> <p># of Households: 30+ households took part home weatherization program (50-60 by end of 2006).</p>
Annual Goal of 100 New Affordable Units	<p>- Encourage new investment in affordable housing, through government partnerships with business, community groups:</p> <p>- Progress on the Development of a Municipal Housing Strategy:</p> <p>- Research on Saint John housing</p>	<p>Single parent families, single adults:</p> <p>(Nearly 800 families on housing waitlists)</p>	<p>Convenor</p> <p>Research Communication Champion</p>	<p>Housing conference brings together citizens from 3 vulnerable neighbourhoods (ONE Change initiative)</p> <p>Improved capacity to serve: Matching needs to services (within the local housing</p>	<p>Building horizontality on the housing front: key players (developers, municipality, citizens, housing organizations, province) are coming together to contribute to improvements.</p> <p>Provincial government commits to supporting transformation in the</p>	<p># of Households: 196 New housing units. (\$8.2 m)</p> <p>Saint John receives 90% of provincial housing rehabilitation (RRAP) funding. (\$1m).</p>



	<p>has been put into action by discussing with 3 levels of government on neighbourhood-specific strategies...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Nationally: Lobbied successfully for dedicated Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) personnel - Provincially: Presentation to local MLA - Municipally: Presentation to municipal staff. 			<p>organizations) has improved as a result of more direct connections (ie: between various departments and organizations, through VC).</p>	<p>area (total of \$9.2 m in funding for 2006).</p> <p>Momentum building at municipal level for supporting neighbourhood level housing initiatives. City is mobilizing to make a coordinated response to housing issues.</p> <p>New provincial by-law will allow for direct fines to be imposed on landlords who fail to upkeep units (rather than going through court process).</p> <p>CMHC locates personnel in Saint John.</p>	<p>Rental property owners will be held more accountable.</p> <p>Improved partnerships and direct federal government funding to Saint John for neighbourhood planning and housing improvements.</p>
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Appendix B: Consultation Methodology

Methodology

Jamie Gamble, Susan Taylor-Simpson, and Heather McTiernan conducted interviews with representatives of VC working groups, Vibrant Communities staff, government partners, and members of the action teams from Crescent Valley and the South End. In addition, Vibrant Communities documentation was reviewed. The resource and evaluation working group served as a sounding board for the development of this report.

Consultation Questions

Major questions for the consultation were as follows:

- *How is the work of VC influencing you as a leader in this work? How is the work of VC changing the way that your organization does its work?*
- *Has the VC experience led to a change in your perception, understanding of poverty? What are the key moments when this happened?*
- *In pursuing strategies for poverty reduction have there been any 'roads not taken'? Or poverty reduction strategies that were abandoned? If so, what were they? What informed that decision?*
- *What has changed in the community in the last year? Are the dynamics of poverty different? Are there changes to the community's capacity? Are there assets in the community that weren't there before?*
- *VCSJ has been successful on a number of different fronts, such as approaches to address housing conditions, in Crescent Valley and the South End Community Action Team, the education to employment initiative and child and youth programs. Recognizing that*



resources and manpower are limited, which of these areas do think holds the most promise in being able to make long-term, sustainable change in poverty reduction in Saint John.

- *As VCSJ prepares to enter the last year of its three-year strategic plan there is a lot of focus on sustainability of the efforts. VCSJ was established with an understanding that it would not tap into local funders if it meant a reduction of funding to existing programs. Has the time come to revisit that understanding? Is the community ready to look at how it can achieve its community goals by aligning collective resources?*
- *Do you see opportunities with the new provincial and federal governments to pursue funding and support of VCSJ's goals? How should VCSJ leverage those opportunities?*
- *How is your work integrated with the other working groups?*
- *What have you learned about overcoming barriers to participation of people who are living in poverty?*
- *Do you have any ideas of how to better communicate the role of VC and the complexities of reducing poverty?*
- *Given the changes we are discussing, are there changes to how VC is operates/is structured you would recommend? Are there other partners needed? Are there changes to the process which would facilitate progress?*
- *Similarly, are there changes to mission and goals? New initiatives required, or initiatives that need to be abandoned?*