



*Connections Create
Vibrant Communities*

PEOPLE, PRACTICE AND POLICY

PATHWAYS OUT OF POVERTY

ANNUAL REFLECTION REPORT

December 1, 2005

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I. POVERTY IN SAINT JOHN

Like all urban centres in Canada, Saint John has a significant poverty challenge. Saint John stands out, however, as a community that is ready to face its poverty challenge, and embrace a poverty reduction strategy that will transform all of its neighbourhoods. Vibrant Communities Saint John is the appropriate vehicle for the community's poverty reduction strategy, given that it is comprehensive, multi-sectoral, and embraced by the entire community. The transformation begins at the neighbourhood level, and is anchored in the idea of Erminie Cohen, Patron of Vibrant Communities Saint John: *Connections Create Vibrant Communities*.

Poverty in Saint John can be linked to national challenges found in other cities. Inadequate housing stock, limited economic opportunity for low-income households, and few supports for vulnerable children and youth are just some of the issues facing Saint Johners living in poverty. Other economic and demographic factors add to the local challenge, however. The Saint John CMA has the highest incidence of lone-parent poverty in Canada, suggesting that the face of poverty locally is more often than not young and female. The Saint John CMA also has a number of vulnerable neighbourhoods with a high concentration of low-income households; this concentration has an adverse effect on the health and well-being of the entire community.

While the challenge of poverty is significant, the readiness to change is also substantial. Saint John is a caring community and the value of collaboration is firmly ingrained, evidenced by the number of coalitions, networks, and partnerships that are active within and across sectors. Saint John is also renowned for its innovative approaches to community issues. The Vibrant Communities initiative is just one of the more recent examples of the local capacity for dynamic partnerships. Implementing a poverty reduction strategy is off to a strong start in this first year. Our community is well positioned to take the learnings of our first year and focus local investments toward strengthening a collaborative environment for action and neighbourhood renewal.

Learning about Poverty: What the First Year Has Shown

The research and production of a thorough baseline statistical report¹ on poverty in the City of Saint John in relation to the Saint John CMA will allow us to focus our efforts on vulnerable neighbourhoods, where we know single parent women predominate. In terms of housing, Saint John is strikingly a city of renters in a province of owners. We also know that the lack of high school completion correlates highly in vulnerable neighbourhoods with single parent women.

Vibrant Communities Saint John has also used qualitative research instruments such as in-depth interviews, focus groups, feedback

Learning about Poverty in Saint John

Several key themes are emerging:

1. Poverty is overwhelming and multifaceted
2. Single parents and their children have special needs
3. Attitudes are powerful determinants of isolation and change
4. High poverty neighbourhoods are vulnerable neighbourhoods
5. Belonging means awareness and access to community-wide supports

¹ **Poverty and Plenty: A Statistical Snapshot of the Quality of Life in Greater Saint John.** This report was developed through partnerships with Vibrant Communities Saint John, Human Development Council, and UNBSJ's Community University Research Alliance.

meetings, and survey design to enhance our knowledge and understanding of poverty. This research has been designed to capture the voices and viewpoints of those who are most expert on the experience of poverty – the poor themselves, who have too often been marginalized and silenced.

In qualitative interviews, the individuals consulted were involved in programs such as academic upgrading and other educational venues as well as personal development (e.g. self-esteem for women); they were mothers of children using various care services ranging from the informal to licensed child care centres; and they were the “working poor” who were often employed in themselves in the day care centres serving low income users.

We have also sought to capture the perspectives of community, government, and business – stakeholders in policy formulation and the provision of services and programs appropriate to the needs of low-income people.

As a comprehensive analysis of this rich body of research progresses, several key themes have emerged that will be suggestive in our planning and evaluation for Year Two:

1) Poverty is Overwhelming & Multifaceted

Modern life is notoriously stressful for everyone, but poverty inflicts a state of perpetual crisis that is difficult to imagine for those who have been more fortunate. Because meeting fundamental needs for oneself and for families poses a constant threat, unusual courage and resourcefulness are required merely to survive.

For Saint John's most vulnerable residents, housing is all too often either not affordable (i.e. rents comprise 30% or more of income before taxes), or in such a state of dilapidation that security and health are at risk. A diet that includes milk for children and fresh fruits and vegetables is most often partially possible at best, and food competes with other necessities such as medication for priority. For the one in three Saint Johners living in poverty who are housed in neighbourhoods of very high poverty, there are further difficulties, i.e. the transportation needed to access services elsewhere in the larger community that range from healthcare to shopping and child care.

People in poverty struggle with the limited or low-end employment opportunities that correlate with incomplete education. The remedy of upgrading and post-secondary programs must of course be matched, sooner or later, with funding for tuition, books, child care, and transportation.

All of these challenges can contribute to a sense of entrapment that erodes health and gets passed along to the next generation as a grim message of scarce opportunity.

The compound nature of problems presented by poverty can also mean that opportunities can't be seized or completed. Consider the case of the woman who was taking upgrading and quit because life at home was so stressful and demoralizing with an abusive partner and a child acting out.

In such a context, every fresh crisis can make the house of cards seem to fall; pressure is already at a high set-point so the impact of further stress is exponential and can be experienced as overwhelming. If it is a wonder that anybody survives such conditions, consider how incredibly strong and competent one must be to do so.

2) The Special Needs of Single Parents & their Children

Single parents are particularly challenged as they try to navigate the system to improve their lot. They must make decisions alone, handle jobs or training, and stay present to the needs and problems of their children while dealing with absent fathers and, sometimes, abusive partners.

Single mothers talk about their need for flexible hours of child care, since entry level, service sector, call centre and retail jobs require shift workers.

There is considerable concern among mothers in poverty over how to access consistent, affordable, flexible quality care for their children. Those who were interviewed were consistently concerned about finding qualified caregivers, saying they would never leave their children “with just anyone”. They were aware of daycare centre reputations (reliably or not), and particularly sensitive to the enormous responsibility and low pay of licensed daycare workers and how their conditions of work would impact on the care they could provide. Some did not trust day care centres at all and preferred to use informal exchange arrangements with family or neighbours.

There is some amount of confusion over criteria for child care subsidy entitlement to Income Assistance recipients; furthermore, while Family and Community Services (FCS) will subsidize the cost of child care services for working and training parents, many day care centres charge a top-up fee to users which is not affordable for low income families.

Additionally, getting care for children who are 20-24 months or younger in the day care system is a major challenge since required staff ratios for infants challenge the precarious viability of many Centres. Transporting children to day cares may be covered in some cases but mothers were unclear about eligibility and suggested that workers have wide discretion in such matters.

From the perspective of child care workers, the key issue is how to get parents more involved. Sometimes there are literacy issues, so notices sent home can't be read, but in general the feeling was that “child care can break the cycle [of poverty] but only if the parent's involved”.

Overwhelmingly, single mothers talked about their need for flexible hours of child care, since entry level, service sector, call centre, and retail jobs require shift workers. There are no flex-hour licensed child care centres in Saint John.

20% of families in the City of Saint John are headed by single parent women and poverty among single parents has hovered stubbornly around the 60% range over the past two decades.

3) Attitudes are powerful determinants of isolation and change

Twenty per cent of families in the City of Saint John are headed by single parent women and poverty among single parents has hovered stubbornly around the 60% range over the past two decades. Many of these single parent families live in neighbourhoods that are homogeneously poor. This fact tends to further isolate low-income people from the rest of the community, sharply reinforcing despair for some and determination for others – qualities that often co-exist uneasily in poverty.

30% of Saint Johners living in poverty are housed in neighbourhoods of very high poverty

The implications of isolation from the larger community are something we need to understand better. We do know from research that it affects and is affected by stereotyping, self-esteem, and attitudes of optimism and hope, and their opposite. It is a powerful force of alienation and

separation from the community-at-large that gets played out in a variety of ways. For instance, since a North End drug store upgraded and eliminated its bill-paying counter, residents in Crescent Valley and the Old North End have nowhere to pay bills by foot. But there are other ways in which residents are slighted and made to feel they must stay in their place, e.g. taxi drivers might make random slurs when they find out a passenger is going to “the courts”, so a resident of Crescent Valley will ask to be let out somewhere along Somerset to avoid this form of verbal put-down. But even when it can be side-stepped, the awareness is ever-present that if you’re poor, you must brace yourself against the many forms of discrimination that can come any time you venture out into the larger community.

4) High poverty neighbourhoods are vulnerable neighbourhoods

High density poverty neighbourhoods in Saint John might be seen as “frozen in time” – sites with next to no services, high levels of transfer payments and public housing, few educational or recreational opportunities, and a fragmentary sense of neighbourhood.

Roughly 30% percent of Saint Johners living in poverty are housed in neighbourhoods of very high poverty – census areas where over 40% percent of the local population falls below the poverty line. This level of concentration of poverty is well above that found in most Canadian cities.

The sense of separateness and stigma attached to such neighbourhoods adds to the sense of hopelessness that residents experience. People feel unsafe, levels of suspicion are high, and sometimes neighbours don’t know one another. Mothers may keep themselves and their children in their own yards, or even indoors, adding to a sense of insecurity and aloneness. When children reach a certain age, there is little to do so youth turn to criminal activities. Sometimes need drives such activity, too, and kids are “lost” to peer pressure that models activity outside the law as a way to get ahead and get an identity.

5) Belonging: awareness & access to community-wide supports

Our community has a rich array of services and supports. We are fortunate to have a strong commitment from community agencies, churches, and government departments to encourage and support people in poverty to improve the quality of their lives. For example, learners in basic education programs often describe how the support of their instructors and animators has contributed to a growing sense of self-confidence and hope.

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However, many services are challenged by high demand and funding constraints or cutbacks, and very often potential users don’t understand how services fit together or how to find an appropriate point of entry. One teenaged mother discovered by dint of sheer determination and desperation that Early Intervention would help her with part-time child care between completing an upgrading program at New Brunswick Community College (NBCC) and waiting to be offered a place in the Human Services program (at NBCC). This young woman lives on her own in the South End without benefit of significant family support, harassed by her child’s father when he does provide rare relief care, and struggling to ensure that her child gets what he needs as she valiantly attempts to access the training she needs to become self-sufficient. She named lack of information as one of the most demoralizing problems for her.

In the realm of education and training, the path for an individual who lacks high school education and wants to upgrade their education for employment purposes can be confusing, time-consuming, and frustrating. There are a variety of options for those who want their high school equivalency, for instance, depending on past levels of academic performance and goals for the future. Some upgrading programs are free while others have a cost, but subsidies are tied to specific criteria that many people do not meet – and assistance is variable from one government department to another. Crucial supports such as child care, transportation, and assistance with post-secondary tuition differ depending on the program and sponsoring department.

II. THEORY OF CHANGE

Definition and Context

According to statistics, Saint John – like a number of other urban communities – suffers from a significant number of households living in poverty. Using two widely accepted measurements of poverty – Low Income Cut-Off (LICO) and the Market Basket Measure (MBM) – the poverty line for a family of four in Saint John is between \$22,233 (MBM) and \$24,585 (LICO) before taxes. The actual poverty rate hovers around an unacceptable rate of 24.5% for the City of Saint John.

A snapshot of typical low-income household in Saint John would depict a single parent and her children living in a neglected neighbourhood and lacking the money, supports, and networks that pave the way to opportunity – the very resources considered normal for middle class families. The image might reflect exhaustion, frustration, shame, mistrust, fear, and anger that everything which constitutes full inclusion in a community – a living wage job, good health, achievement, safety, and hope – are not in sight. These are the women and children of Saint John who are trapped in poverty.

Research and historical data suggest that the children in these “snapshots” are all too likely to repeat the pattern of their family’s life struggles. It is what they know and learn from their families, neighbours, classmates and friends, and from the larger community in which their neighbourhoods exist. It is not these families who want such a life; the larger community – sometimes inadvertently – maintains the poverty barriers through norms and attitudes, neglect and omission, misguided strategies that are charity based rather than empowering and inclusive.

Persisting high levels of poverty affect the self-esteem of an entire community. Business suffers because it is harder to attract investment opportunities to the community, and an already under-resourced non-profit sector staggers under the demand for service provision. The public is demoralized. This is the rationale for engaging all sectors of the community in finding collaborative and creative solutions to poverty reduction.

Through a series of consultations with the community at large, Vibrant Communities Saint John has defined poverty as: *the social and economic vulnerability caused to individuals and households by lack of resources needed for dignity, self-sufficiency, and well-being.* The counterpart of this definition is: *the demoralizing social and economic impacts of persistent poverty on every sector of the community.*

Key Factors of Poverty

Not all determinants of poverty are universal, but the common baseline linking communities and nations is the stark absence of economic opportunities and appropriate supports for those who are socially disenfranchised. No community can exist in isolation from the larger economic structures and historical impacts that influence multi-dimensional issues like poverty, which means that some things are outside local control; however, successful approaches to poverty require a close-up understanding that is positioned within a larger-picture context.

Some of the factors that particularly influence poverty rates in Saint John are:

- (1) The female face of poverty and its implications for children: Because children are attached to households, and single parent households in poverty are overwhelmingly headed by women, a gender analysis will make sense of how structural factors work together to keep women and children in poverty – e.g. the wage gap and a female ghetto part-time job sector; lack of affordable and accessible child care; and the devastating impacts of domestic violence.
- (2) A gender lens will also highlight the particular challenges of adolescent boys in high-density poverty neighbourhoods. If girls in these communities might tend toward teenaged pregnancy, we know that boys at critical stages of development in neighbourhoods where recreational activities are in short supply and male role models are lacking complain bitterly of boredom. The existence of gangs (whether run from outside or inside) is a magnet for male youth, and crime can all too easily become a way of life.
- (3) High-density poverty neighbourhoods in the City of Saint John are socially isolated pockets of discouragement, despair, and neglect. A recent statistical report produced by Vibrant Communities Saint John reveals a sharp contrast between low-income residents in the City of Saint John and middle income earners in the suburbs. Implications for revenue are significant since people pay taxes where they live. Critical services for low-income households are in chronic need of infusion (e.g. affordable transit).
- (4) Misunderstandings exist in the larger community concerning the structural nature of poverty. If poverty is attributed to individual lack of effort, for instance, it will be impossible to address the range of interlocking social and economic barriers that keep people poverty-trapped. Public awareness is therefore critical to building a community of respect, inclusion, and support.

Strategies for Systemic Change and Capacity-Building

- 1) Research strategies must continue to reflect a good balance of quantitative/statistical data and analysis with a range of qualitative research tools that are tailored to capture the lived experience of those in poverty. Participatory methods of information-gathering are especially appropriate, involving the active exchange of ideas and roles between researchers and people in poverty to lay the groundwork for community action plans.
- 2) Acknowledge and address the impacts of stereotyping and stigma on those who live in poverty by educating ourselves, our partners, and the broader public on how attitudes of blame keep us from seeing the tremendous resources of courage and survival skills practiced every day by low income individuals, families, and neighbourhoods.

- 3) Because poverty is a set of complex conditions and interactions among individuals, organizations, and systems, strategies must be based on genuine collaboration with government, business, the faith community, community-based organizations, and people in poverty. We need to learn more about how to successfully communicate across these sectors, perspectives, and interest groups in order to enhance understanding and achieve ever more meaningful partnerships.
- 4) Neighbourhood-based solutions will be our best chance at tackling the complexity of poverty while providing the kinds of support needed by community residents as they become empowered to form their own coalitions and take a leading part in discussion and action.
- 5) Using an asset-building model ensures that research, action, and collaboration will result in social and economic investments in neighbourhoods and households of poverty. The challenge is to employ resources thoughtfully to respond to issues targeted by those in poverty and championed by stakeholders and partners in the larger community.
- 6) Build in analysis and evaluation components to all our work in order to archive and track process, progress, and outcomes. Also encourage story-telling on the part of those who live in poverty.
- 7) Remain open to learning through tele-forums, research, conferences, and on the ground. Communicate what we are doing and learning through innovative forums and media to build our community knowledge base and further engage collaborators.

III. GOALS FOR VIBRANT COMMUNITIES SAINT JOHN

Long term sustainable poverty reduction means breaking the cycle of poverty, by targeting efforts that will change prospects and opportunities for the upcoming generation. Saint John has set a 3 year goal of assisting 2,000 individuals or 800 households in their journey out of poverty. In addition, we have set a 10 year goal of assisting 5,700 individuals, reducing the level of poverty for the City of Saint John from 24% to the national average of 16%. The emphasis is on the City core where we find the greatest contrast between poverty and plenty.

The targets are ambitious and Vibrant Communities is but one player in contributing to our community's goal. Together, through better defining and understanding the poverty traps, determining new courses of action, and strengthening partnerships, our community will make a difference in the lives of individuals living in poverty.

Goals for Saint John
 - Long term poverty reduction by breaking the cycle of poverty - targeting efforts that will impact on opportunities for the next generation.
 - Assisting 2,000 individuals or 800 households in their journey out of poverty by 2008.
 - Better defining the poverty traps, determining new actions, and strengthening collaborations.

Through our three year poverty reduction strategy, Vibrant Communities will help our community understand – and champion changes to -- the attitudes, policies and practices that prevent people from moving forward in their journey out of poverty. Six key elements guide our poverty reduction strategy:

1. **Engage the community leadership** in a network committed to achieve our poverty reduction goal.
2. **Help people move forward in their journey out of poverty** through advocacy and different forms of mentoring.
3. **Strengthen the collective capacity of the community** to invest in children and youth, ensure access to education leading to sustainable employment, and promote safe and affordable housing and neighbourhoods.
4. **Research and evaluate our impact** by assessing what works and documenting the key learnings.
5. **Communicate our community's learnings and progress** both internally to our network and externally to the community.
6. **Champion continuous engagement, learning and improvement** in poverty reduction efforts in our community.

IV. MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Under a year into our poverty reduction strategy and the momentum of Vibrant Communities has produced tangible results and a strong foundation for actions in the upcoming year. The following highlights our major accomplishments under the six elements:

a) Engage Community Leadership

Vibrant Communities represents a growing and committed team of leaders from all walks of life: individuals living in poverty, churches, community agencies, three levels of government, business and trade organizations. Over 80 individuals (see Appendix A) are directly involved in the Leadership Roundtable and the various committees and working groups. Many others contribute interest and support and are actively involved in complementary poverty reduction efforts in the community.

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| Tom Gribbons, Chair of VCSJ, was recently part of Team Saint John series of meetings with Federal Cabinet Ministers in Ottawa; VCSJ led the discussions with social policy Cabinet Ministers. |
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In a few short months, Vibrant Communities has emerged as a compelling advocate for social inclusion in the community. The implementation of a poverty reduction strategy led by Vibrant Communities Saint John has influenced True Growth, the economic and community development strategy for Saint John. Saint John's Member of Parliament recently organized a Team Saint John series of meetings with federal cabinet ministers; Vibrant Communities' growing relevance in the community was made apparent when our Chair was invited to travel with Team Saint John as the sole representative of the community's social sector.

The growing number of community leaders concerned with poverty creates a ripple effect. It heightens the profile of poverty which in turn brings greater attention to the issue as illustrated by the City's focus on social programs. Greater attention leverages additional resources, as evidenced by the recent announcement of \$25,000 from the Province to support work in the high poverty neighbourhood of Crescent Valley. In turn greater interest and dialogue is promoted among the public at large.

b) Help people move forward in their journey out of poverty through advocacy and mentoring

The review of best practices in advocacy and mentoring design, as well as frontline research in high density poverty neighbourhoods in Saint John, reinforce the value and relevance of consulting with people in poverty.

Some of the highlights of this work are as follows:

- A flexible advocacy and mentoring model has been developed and funded for testing in key high density poverty neighbourhoods early in 2006.
- Links have been forged with evolving community leaders and residents in the Old North End through ONE Change and participation in the Charrette, as well as focus groups, interviews, documentary film footage, and phone follow-up in Crescent Valley.
- Neighbourhoods will be supported by Advocacy and Mentoring Committee to target gaps in their community development expertise in order to develop strong and inclusive core leadership groups.
- An inventory of organizations and individuals who wish to volunteer skills and time is underway.
- Specific overtures to communities of low income people will be made through community feedback meetings to determine how people want to be involved in structures of Vibrant Communities Saint John. This will ensure that representation on committees is not merely uneasy tokenism.
- Through an outreach partnership with NBCC, residents in three neighbourhoods will be offered facilitation training.

c) Enhance the collective capacity of the community

Vibrant Communities is a unique opportunity to strengthen the capacity of our community to assist individuals living in poverty. The first year of the poverty reduction strategy has focused on defining and documenting the challenges and barriers and exploring new opportunities for collaboration with the community. These efforts have been guided

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| 79 individuals are actively participating in some aspect of VCSJ: | | |
| | <u>3 Year Target</u> | <u>Current (Year One)</u> |
| <i>Businesses:</i> | 16 | 20 |
| <i>People Living in Poverty:</i> | 16 | 6 |
| <i>Governments</i> | 20 | 28 * |
| <i>Non-Profit/Community</i> | <u>20</u> | <u>25 **</u> |
| | 72 | 79 |
| * Municipal (7), Provincial (15), Federal (6) | | |
| ** Non Profit (13), Churches (4), University (4), Community (4) | | |

by the significant time and energy committed by our working groups and committees. Together we have laid a strong foundation for year two actions; we have also brought ideas to fruition.

This groundwork has enabled our community to establish concrete initiatives, such as the Task Force on Children's Health. Also the federal government approval of an Understanding the Early Years (UEY) project provides an opportunity to better understand every SJ child's readiness for kindergarten, and to engage neighbourhoods and schools in addressing issues revealed by the research findings.

The momentum for affordable housing is a catalyst for action, and includes the dedication of a Saint John based staff position from Canada Mortgage and Housing. A number of other initiatives are in various stages of development, well supported by the community, including an early learning and childcare centre in an inner city neighbourhood and a research project led by the New Brunswick Department of Training and Employment Development with academic, employment counseling, and on the job training components.

d) Research and Evaluate

A key component of our strategy for substantially reducing poverty is to develop a research program that will support significant policy changes. In this regard, VCSJ has been greatly assisted by its Research and Evaluation Committee.

Indeed, every committee of VCSJ, coordinated by staff, has used research to further their agenda, however. The Investing In Children and Youth committee supported efforts to successfully apply for a major federal study, Understanding the Early Years. This \$380,000 study will help the community ensure that children from every Saint John neighbourhood have the readiness to learn. A major series of articles on child care in the Telegraph Journal was influenced by extensive research and consultation conducted by VCSJ staff. The Education to Employment Committee conducted a major qualitative study on the barriers to education and employment opportunities for low-income Saint Johners. This study will help the committee advocate for the removal of existing barriers to education and employment.

The Research and Evaluation Committee released a major report in October highlighting the challenge of poverty in Saint John (See Appendix B). *Poverty and Plenty* is over 50 pages in length, and has helped expand the discussion of poverty in Saint John. The Committee is preparing more reports for the new year; topics being addressed include the challenging economics of a lone-parent family in Saint John, and measurements related to health, education, and crime in the city's most vulnerable neighbourhoods.

Major Accomplishments include:

- VCSJ's Poverty Reduction Strategy has influenced Saint John's True Growth
- 80 Individuals are directly involved in guiding the work of VCSJ
- Voices of people living in poverty are being heard in the media, in forums, in reports and on film.
- VCSJ has formal intervention status with the Public Utilities Board, bringing a significant profile to the issue of fuel poverty.
- 100 units of new affordable housing has been announced for Saint John
- Major federal funding has been announced for study to ensure every child is ready for school
- Two new bursaries have been established to help youth in poverty attain further training
- **Poverty and Plenty** – a new report to highlight the challenge of poverty in our community
- A synergy of effort exists in our community to better address poverty

e) Communicate our Community's Learnings and Progress

Since its launch, Vibrant Communities Saint John has utilized the media and public forums to spread awareness about the myriad of issues related to poverty. We have simultaneously raised the profile of poverty in our community, while promoting the numerous dedicated groups that are working to reduce poverty throughout the city.

A formal presentation was made to Common Council early in 2005, outlining the rationale for a local poverty reduction strategy. In the Spring, we met with the regional mayors' True Growth roundtable to further highlight the challenge of poverty in Saint John.

Throughout the year we have also given presentations to various groups on the structure and purpose of Vibrant Communities Saint John. The Telegraph Journal (the provincial daily) has been another vehicle for educating the public; two opinion pieces authored by VCSJ staff appeared in the Telegraph over the summer. Other methods of communication are actively being cultivated; quarterly updates are sent to our listserv of email contacts which currently has over 300 names, and a brochure was recently completed .

The intervenor status of Vibrant Communities Saint John at the electricity rate hearings (see Appendix C) of the Public Utility Board has brought a lot of media attention with several articles appearing in the Telegraph Journal. Interviews on the subject have been given to the following outlets: CBC Radio One, Global TV, Rogers News, CFBC Radio and K-100 Radio.

In October, Vibrant Communities Saint John launched its first major report, *Poverty and Plenty*. The report was released during a Vibrant Dialogue, attended by 120 people (See Appendix D). Significant media coverage followed, including two television news segments (CBC and Global), two articles in the Telegraph, and over a half-dozen radio interviews.

f) Champion Change

Social change doesn't come easily. It takes critical thinking and planning, dedicated action and a mobilized community. Thanks to our partners and community contributors, this community has much to celebrate this year.

Involving People Living in Poverty

- An exciting mentoring process has been developed that will actively involve people living in poverty in VCSJ work and, at the same time, provide new opportunities.
- The voices of people living in poverty are being heard on radio and television and in newspapers, in forums and board rooms and are being documented in reports and on film.

Planning for Children

- The Saint John Early Childhood Development Coalition has secured a major Federal government grant to measure every child's readiness to learn and to mobilize community improvements.
- As a result of an exploratory meeting with provincial senior policy staff, the development of a model *Parent and Early Childhood Learning and Care Centre* in an inner city neighbourhood is receiving favourable consideration by the Province of NB.

Affordable Housing

- 101 units of affordable housing have been announced for Saint John.

Neighbourhood Involvement

- 2 inner city neighbourhoods have organized for revitalization and new resources have emerged from governments, businesses and community organizations to help with initial plans and activities.
- Fuel poverty is being grappled with by energy corporations and government agencies while an impoverished neighbourhood has declared war and has vowed to caulk all the windows and doors of their houses before winter sets in.

Children in School

- Two large businesses, JD Irving and Irving Oil, have adopted two inner city schools, providing in-school mentors, additional volunteers, and financial resources (PALS program). The matching of a third business with a third inner city school is in the planning stages.
- The principals of the inner city schools have formed an action committee, inspired by the Edmonton Inner City School model presented at a Vibrant Communities tele-learning forum.

Working with Youth

- The Resource Centre for Youth (TRC) has realized its target, close to \$2 million dollars pledged for a facility, thanks to the tri-partnership agreement of the Saint John Rotary Club, the Province of N.B and the Government of Canada.
- Two new bursaries were established to help youth in poverty afford post-secondary education. The Margaret-Ann Blaney bursary was launched by First Steps Housing and the ONE Change (Old North End) bursary was launched by Aliant and UNBSJ.
- A well-known local family established a new fund to help teens and young adults who live in poverty to move forward in their life. They publicly challenged others in the community to contribute in a similar fashion.

Parents in School

- First Steps Housing has partnered with BCAPI to pilot an in-house alternative classroom for pregnant and parenting teens who have not completed high school. School District 8 and the N.B. Dept. of Training and Employment Development are working with the team to help resource the classroom.

Moving into Work

- Fusion, a dynamic local organization of young adults helping to lead change in SJ, has piloted a mentoring program for teens to help them pursue their dreams beyond high school.
- The Saint John Board of Trade is leading the development of "Dress for Success", a best practice mentoring program that equips women who have limited resources with the tools they need for employment.

Raising the Profile

- The report, *Poverty and Plenty, A Statistical Snapshot of Quality of Life in Saint John*, is stimulating discussion in the community.
- VCSJ was granted intervenor status with the NB Public Utilities Board and was supported in its arguments for consideration of the impact of proposed NB Power rate increases on households who live in poverty.
- The Vibrant Communities Saint John poverty reduction strategy is gaining momentum and strength and invitations to other leadership tables.

V. KEY LESSONS LEARNED

The Need To Maintain Focus. Poverty in Saint John is complex, and limited resources call for any poverty reduction strategy to focus on those initiatives that will produce the greatest amount of change. This need for focus has reinforced the rationale for continued research: understanding how neighbourhood location, gender, family status and age can influence the challenge of poverty in Saint John and can facilitate both social and economic investments.

The Importance of Creating Connections. Although VCSJ is managed through a series of structured committees, informal contacts have helped develop meaningful additions to the community's broader strategy of poverty reduction. And these encounters can serve as a catalyst for launching specific campaigns: a chance encounter at a mortgage sale has led to a series of meetings concerning an affordable housing project on a city block suffering from urban blight; the experience of a South End family facing utility disconnection, combined with the concerns of Romero House about families facing a harsh winter, has led to VCSJ championing solutions to energy poverty in front of the PUB. As VCSJ becomes more active in the community, these connections can help produce a myriad of ideas that can complement the community's poverty reduction strategy. In this sense, connections not only create a more vibrant community – they allow the poverty reduction strategy to remain innovative and fresh.

The Challenge of Navigating Between the Sectors. Because VCSJ is comprised of individuals living in poverty and representatives from business, government, and the social sector, a divergence of ideas about the issues is not uncommon. While everyone at the table agrees that poverty needs to be substantially reduced, there is not always agreement as to which initiatives should be undertaken to achieve poverty reduction.

To avoid being co-opted as the voice of any one member of the VCSJ community, staff spend a great deal of time consulting with committee members in order to ensure that VCSJ policy proposals, initiatives, and statements have the broadest support possible.

VI. PLANS FOR 2006: KEY THEMES

The following key themes are based on our learnings in 2005. They will play an integral role in guiding the work of Vibrant Communities Saint John in 2006. As the working groups and committees continue to develop and implement their strategies, these themes will help to ensure that our efforts are contributing to a comprehensive and responsive poverty reduction strategy. It will also help us reach our goal of assisting 2,000 individuals or 800 households in their journey out of poverty.

Value the Expertise of Individuals living in poverty: Our work to date has benefited from the voices and viewpoints of individuals living in poverty. We are particularly aware of the additional challenges faced by single parents living in poverty. We need to ensure that their voices

continue to be heard, but more importantly that they are integrally involved in the development of changes and solutions recommended in our poverty reduction strategy.

Position our Strategy in Neighbourhoods: Our research clearly documents that high poverty neighbourhoods are vulnerable neighbourhoods and 30% of Saint Johners living in poverty are housed in these neighbourhoods. Positioning our strategies in these neighbourhoods – enabling residents to take a lead part and providing families with opportunities and support and hope for their future – will be paramount to breaking the cycle of poverty.

Communicate More Widely and Creatively: VCSJ is documenting our learnings and championing changes that will make a difference to the lives of individuals living in poverty. We need to share our learnings with the broader community so that they too can become involved in breaking down stereotypes and building a more inclusive community. Traditional and non-traditional methods will be used, building on our many partnerships. From statistical data to personal stories, our learnings will be promoted in a wide variety of ways including the network of True Growth, film, and editorials.

Champion Policy Improvements: Our first year has been rich in hearing about policy and program barriers and possible solutions, from all sectors - community agencies, churches, government departments, businesses and individuals living in poverty. Our second year will promote dialogue among these groups to focus on specific issues arising from our research and actions, and recommending changes. These dialogues will further our work related to the target areas of children and youth and their parents, education to employment, and safe and affordable housing.

Create an environment conducive to evaluation: Evaluation implies stepping back and seeing what difference our community is making to the lives of individuals and families living in poverty. Reflecting on our work will involve setting indicators for how well we are doing, tracking progress towards meeting our goal of assisting 2000 individuals in their journey out of poverty and assisting community groups and organizations in developing tools to examine their impact in the community.

VIII. Vibrant Communities Household Targets

Vibrant Communities Household Targets : Education to Employment

| Initiative | Brief Description | # of (possible) Participants | Target Group | Intervention | Convenor Role | Immediate Results |
|---|---|--------------------------------|---|---|----------------------------|---|
| Ensure accessible and appropriate opportunities for individuals to obtain the literacy, GED and upgrading programs needed in making the transition to further education or employment | 500 youth & adults will benefit from new and improved opportunities to their needed education to employment supports | 100 individuals over two years | SJ individuals living in poverty without a high school education | Proposal under development for research project delivering academic, employment support and job placement components | Supporter | None to date as proposal is under development, through the leadership of provincial department of Training & Employment Development |
| | Greater emphasis and more collaborative approaches to providing the necessary followup supports | 80 individuals over two years | Initially single parent families | Approach will be developed based on recommendations from Working Group's review of report describing barriers, challenges and opportunities | Brokering and Promotion | Still to be developed |
| | Building on collaboration with SJ Construction Association and Enterprise SJ, flaggers program is established to introduce individuals to the construction industry | 50 individuals over two years | Still to be determined. Initially suggested a gender specific program for women | Groundwork still being done, with employers, community and private training organizations, and referring agencies | Coordination and supporter | Still being explored |

Vibrant Communities Household Targets : Safe and Affordable Housing

| Initiative | Brief Description | # of Participants | Target Group | Intervention | Convenor Role | Immediate Results |
|---|---|---|---------------------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|---|
| A Warm Apartments Campaign | Tackle Energy Poverty through PUB intervention; ongoing discussion with SJ Energy | Close to 500 households are disconnected due to arrears in SJ | SJ renters living in poverty | <p>Public policy change: the utility has been asked to consider ways to combat energy poverty</p> <p>Public Education: Through media interviews, raised awareness of how poor rate design and lack of efficiency measures compound the challenge</p> | <p>Advocacy</p> <p>Coordination</p> | <p>Energy Poverty is discussed for the first time as part of a utility rate hearing</p> <p>ONE Change Neighbourhood group planning a Winds Of Change weatherization program</p> |
| Annual Goal of 100 New Affordable Units | Encourage new investment in affordable housing, through government partnerships with business, community groups | Close to 800 families are on affordable housing waiting lists | Single parent families, single adults | <p>Lobbied successfully for dedicated CMHC personnel</p> <p>Working with 3 levels of government on neighbourhood-specific strategies</p> | <p>Advocacy</p> <p>Co-ordination</p> | <p>Helped develop housing conference for Old North End</p> <p>Influenced public mood that helped produce 100 new units</p> |

Vibrant Communities Household Targets : Children and Youth

| Initiative | Brief Description | # of Participants | Target Group | Intervention | Convenor Role | Immediate Results |
|--|--|--|--|--|---|--|
| Parent and Early Childhood Learning and Care Centre | A model neighbourhood-based, multi-service, early intervention program for young families offering childcare, preschool and parenting programs and supports. | Current: 0 families (under development) Projected: 300 families | Young families, primarily single parent, living in an inner city neighbourhood with a high concentration of poverty. | Creation of a new institution + direct delivery of programs/services | Project conceptualization, development, marketing | Non at this time. Model is under development |
| Expansion of PALS Model | A local business adopts an inner city school to add resources to enrich the learning experiences for students. Volunteer and financial resources are specific to the needs of the school and capacities of the business and other community partners. The program must include an in-school mentoring program that matches employees with students. The employee is able to use company time to meet weekly with the child | Current: 300 elementary students (2 schools) Projected: 300 additional elementary students (2 additional schools) | Students attending inner city schools with high concentrations of poverty | Institutional change, direct delivery of program. | Documentation of the PALS model and Social marketing | The first PALS program (JD Irving and Prince Charles School) has increased its resource base this year, adding after-school activities and tutoring for students and graduates of the school. A second PALS program began in the Fall of 2005. Irving Oil adopted St. John the Baptist-King Edward School. |
| Expansion of The Resource Centre for Youth (TRC) Model | Coordinate and expand after-school activities and resources for vulnerable teenagers that build essential skills for healthy adulthood, encourage and support academic achievement, and contribute to community improvements. | Current: 80 teens Projected: 200 teens | Teens excluded from normal after-school opportunities because of cost & stigma; teens living in high poverty | Institutional change, direct delivery of program/service | Documentation of model; social marketing; brokering and coordination if required. | Almost \$2 million in capital funds has been pledged this year to expand the TRC facility to enable more teens to participate, more services to co-locate |

| | | | | | | |
|--|---|--|--|------------------|--|--|
| | | | neighbourhoods. | | | and more programs to be developed. The TRC has assisted the Old North End neighborhood in organizing new teen activities and attracting increased participation. |
| Sustainability and Growth of Other Successful Programs and Services for Children and Teens | There are many other model programs operating in the community that are successfully improving the quality of life for children and youth who live in poverty. Many of these programs are small in scope and their continued viability is at risk because they must depend on year to year grants and contributions to exist. VCSJ has a role in helping to promote the benefits of these programs and encouraging a shift in government and community spending that will help to sustain and grow these important investments in our children and youth. | Current: 1000 children and youth Projected: 1200 children and youth | Children and teens and young families who live in poverty continue to have access to "social investment" programs offered by organizations such as the Family Resource Centre, SJ Early Intervention Inc, PRO-Kids, Boys and Girls Club, YW-YMCA, First Steps, Family Plus Life Solutions, local schools and churches and gov't departments. | Public Education | Social marketing, brokering, and coordination if required. | None to date. Information is being gathered and analyzed. |