

INFLUENCING HEALTHY PUBLIC POLICY

FOR

PREGNANT AND PARENTING YOUNG WOMEN

FINAL REPORT

Submitted to Public Health Agency of Canada

Business Community Anti-Poverty Initiative
Saint John, New Brunswick
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FOREWORD

The Business Community Anti-Poverty Initiative (BCAPI) extends its appreciation to the many individuals and organizations who worked together on this project to improve supports for pregnant and parenting young women.

The participation of pregnant and parenting young mothers has been integral to clarifying the issues and helping to identify specific actions. Thank you for being so willing to share your stories.

Without the financial support from the Public Health Agency of Canada, our community would not have had the opportunity to further our efforts to assist young mothers in very concrete ways.

Special thanks to the partners who worked closely with BAPI in guiding the project - First Steps, the Greater Saint John Teen Pregnancy Committee and Vibrant Communities Saint John.

Last, but not least are the thanks to the individuals who worked on various aspects of this project - Carole Dilworth with Evaluation Designs Ltd; Cathy Wright and Colleen Gratton Gick (social work intern) with Vibrant Communities and evaluation consultant, Cony Brienza.

Readers are encouraged to review two related documents referenced in this report: [Literature Review – Poverty, Homelessness and Teen Pregnancy](#), and [Closing the Gaps: Ensuring Pregnant and Parenting Young Women Succeed](#), both of which can be accessed by going to the Saint John section of the Vibrant Communities Canada website at <http://tamarackcommunity.ca/g2s28.html#keydocs>.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. CHALLENGE FACING SAINT JOHN

Efforts of the Saint John community have contributed to significantly improving supports for pregnant and parenting young mothers and increasing pregnancy prevention programs. However, statistics show that while the number of births to teen mothers, 15 to 19 years of age, has decreased in surrounding communities and provincially, it has increased in the Saint John County. According to New Brunswick Vital Statistics, between 2001 and 2004 the Saint John County experienced an increase from 12.9% to 19.6%.

Recent statistics for 2005 from the Atlantic Health Sciences Corporation report some reduction in births to teen mothers in the city of Saint John in 2005; while this is encouraging it is a trend that requires careful monitoring.

Research shows that teen pregnancy may set the mother and her child on a trajectory that leads to a future life of poverty and long-term dependency. Young single mothers and their children make up the largest group of persons living in poverty in Saint John. Just over 60% of lone-parent families in Saint John live below the Low Income Cut-Off (LICO).

The community of Saint John truly believes that investing resources in young mothers today will ensure the healthy development of their children, providing a stronger start for the future.

2. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

In the fall of 2005, the Business Community Anti-Poverty Initiative (BCAPI) received \$25,000 from the Public Health Agency of Canada for a project that would continue to build a comprehensive community strategy to support pregnant and parenting young women in Saint John. The target group focused specifically on young women aged 24 and under.

The objectives of this collaborative project follow:

- Document ways the Saint John Community has influenced the development of policies and practices for pregnant and parenting young women.
- Identify concerns and challenges facing pregnant and parenting young women
- Bring groups together to champion policy and program changes.

BCAPI involved the following partners in this initiative: First Steps, Vibrant Communities Saint John and the Greater Saint John Teen Pregnancy Committee. In addition, young mothers, community organizations, and government departments played an integral role in completing the work.

3. KEY COMPONENTS OF THE PROJECT

Review of literature was conducted to provide a comprehensive overview of the studies, reports and best practices on the topics of teen pregnancy, poverty, homelessness, effects of teen parenting and poverty on child development and the societal and financial costs of “doing nothing”.

Established alternative school for young mothers knowing the correlation between a young mother’s ability to move out of poverty and their level of education. The alternative school was established to provide young mothers with the opportunity to complete their high school education in a supportive environment that considered their need for childcare. The required supports were identified through an examination of identified barriers and best practices.

Provided discussion paper on supports and challenges, **Closing the Gaps: Ensuring Pregnant Teens and Young Women Succeed.** This is the first comprehensive document describing challenges, opportunities, and past successes in improving supports for pregnant and parenting young mothers in Saint John. The report was developed from focus groups of pregnant and parenting young mothers, interviews with community organizations and government departments, along with highlights from the literature review, local reports and statistics.

Hosted community dialogues to move from concerns to priorities to action by bringing together young mothers, community organizations, government services, family physicians and businesses in two dialogues designed to examine issues, identify required changes in policy and/or practice and develop action plans to initiate the required changes. Services represented in the dialogues included a range from pre-natal care to parenting supports to schools, daycares, public health nursing, and financial assistance. The opportunity to come together encouraged stronger working relationships and increased knowledge of existing resources. It is evident that the dialogues strengthened the momentum for action.

Established working committees on childcare options and mentoring that involve government and community organizations. The committees began

actively working during the project on specific issues related to childcare options and mentoring supports using the Hosted Dialogues to receive guidance for future steps in the action plan.

Developed action plans to address the following five identified gaps:

➤ **Gap: Availability of quality and affordable childcare is blocking young parents from continuing their education**

- All of Saint John's 39 licensed childcare spaces for children aged 15 months and under are filled¹.
- The gap between the actual costs and FCS* allotment for licensed childcare and babysitting prevents young mothers from pursuing high school completion, training or employment.
- The complexity, lack of clarity and understanding of FCS childcare policies, confuses, frustrates and isolates the young mother who is trying to continue her education or employment.

➤ **Action Plans**

- BCAPI to facilitate discussions with the Provincial Government
- FCS to issue a directive clarifying their childcare policies including reimbursement for babysitting and licensed childcare.
- The Community Day Care Homes Committee to promote Community Child Care Homes licensed by FCS.
- The Parent and Early Learning and Childcare Centre Committee to work on the development of a Centre for low-income neighbourhoods.
- Community Day Care Homes Committee to examine feasibility of a Pilot Project Partnership for a childcare centre in high school
- YMCA-YWCA with local and provincial partners, to advocate for federal and provincial government funds for the development and enhancement of licensed childcare centres.

*NB Department of Family and Community Services

¹ One of the daycares, the Garderie Au Bourgeonnet which has six spaces for children under 15 months, requires that at least one parent is bilingual.

Gap: High School completion is hindered by isolation from supportive environments, misunderstanding of academic options and lack of childcare.

- The school and community isolate young moms. In the current environment, young moms are expected to break the isolation, initiate coordination of the scattered resources available and establish connection to limited supports in the school and community. School Based Services Teams designed for bridging between special need students and available supports do not systematically include working with pregnant and parenting students.
- Options to assist with academics are extremely limited. Consideration is needed for part-time attendance, home-based tutorial services, home-studying and use of parenthood experience for contribution to academic credit.
- Lack of childcare supports has been described above.

➤ **Action Plans**

- School District 8 to explore option of night school.
- BCAPI and First Steps to monitor the short-term impacts of the alternative classroom and plan for its sustainability and growth.
- VON Healthy Baby and Me and Sexual Health Nurses to promote options for pre-natal classes at the high schools.
- Harbourview High School Guidance Department and Early Intervention Saint John to explore the possibilities of support group for young mothers and their children. FCS and Sexual Health Centre to offer assistance.

➤ **Gap: Mentoring supports can address isolation of young mothers and their children**

- Young mothers and their children are often isolated in the community. The programs and services offered by various agencies help to break this isolation but once young mothers complete their programs, resources are not available for continued guidance and support. Mentors can help lessen the current gaps in support and provide young mothers with a listening support, exposure to new experiences and skills, such as budgeting, childcare, communication, and networking to develop the required support systems.

➤ **Action Plan**

- Continue to develop and implement a mentoring program

- **Gap: It is difficult for pregnant and parenting young mothers to understand the scope and depth of available services in our community**
 - We have a fragmented system with lots of information that could be better coordinated and better utilized to support pregnant and parenting young mothers. New people coming into the system are not aware of the array of services nor do they have the advantage of strong relationships in the community to assist them in their search for services.
 - Acquiring the necessary information is difficult due to lack of knowledge of existing resources, overlapping requirements for assessments, referral processes and waiting periods, all of which result in gaps.
 - Services need to act as bridges connecting young women to other supports in the community, ensuring that the connections are strengthened.
- **Action Plan**
 - The Greater Saint John Teen Pregnancy Committee, Human Development Council and Public Health to develop an information tool of services dealing with pregnancy, prevention and parenting supports.
- **Gap: While teen pregnancy is increasing in Saint John, prevention efforts are hampered by lack of resources.**
 - While the number of births to teens has decreased in Region 2 (Sussex to St. Stephen). this is not the case for Saint John County, which includes the City of Saint John and surrounding villages from St. Martins to Lepreau. Both the number and percentage of births to teens have increased! In 2001, in Saint John County, 12.9% of births were to teen moms. In 2004, it was 19.6%.
 - The prevention work of the Greater Saint John Teen Pregnancy Committee (GSJTPC) and the Resource Centre for Youth has been hampered by funding and resource issues.
- **Action Plan**
 - Pat McGill, Chair of the Greater Saint John Teen Pregnancy Committee will bring together young mothers, community organizations and government departments to focus on prevention efforts.

The body of the document provides a brief summary of the challenges with each of the identified gaps, the successes already experienced, actions to address the gap and the organizations and partnerships that will champion the changes.

INFLUENCING HEALTHY PUBLIC POLICY FOR PREGNANT AND PARENTING YOUNG WOMEN

FINAL REPORT FOR PUBLIC HEALTH AGENCY OF CANADA

1. CHALLENGE FACING SAINT JOHN

Efforts of the Saint John community over the last number of years have contributed to significantly improving supports for pregnant and parenting young mothers and increasing pregnancy prevention programs. Statistics show that the number of births to teen mothers, 15 to 19 years of age, has decreased in surrounding communities and provincially; however it has increased in the Saint John County. According to New Brunswick Vital Statistics, between 2001 and 2004 Saint John County has experienced an increase from 12.9% to 19.6%.

Recent statistics for 2005 from the Atlantic Health Sciences Corporation report some reduction in births to teen mothers in the city of Saint John in 2005; while this is encouraging it is a trend that requires careful monitoring.

The risks of pregnancy in young women cross two generations simultaneously: that of the young mother and of her child. For the mother, pregnancy at an early age may mean leaving home, dropping out of school, social isolation, poor health and little or no access to prenatal care. For the child, it may mean low birth weight and other health and emotional conditions brought on by the mother's poor socio-economic condition.

Research shows that teen pregnancy may set the mother and her child on a trajectory that leads to a future life of poverty and long-term dependency.² Young single mothers and their children make up the single largest group of persons living in poverty in Saint John, above the provincial average.³ Just over 60% of lone-parent families in Saint John live below the Statistics Canada Low Income Cut-Off (LICO), a measurement of low income and poverty line.

According to client information from FCS in 2004, only 25% of parenting youth, aged 21 years and under had completed high school. Lack of high

² First Steps Proposal to Minister of Family and Community Services, Province of New Brunswick, February 2006.

³ 2001 Census, Statistics Canada; Peacock, K., (2005), Poverty and Plenty: A statistical snapshot of the quality of life in Greater Saint John, Vibrant Communities Saint John, Saint John Human Development Council and the Industrial City in Transition Community University Research Alliance Project.

school completion, for a young mother, is a strong guarantee of a life of poverty for mother and her child and if she doesn't get her high school right away, it is very difficult to do so in the future.

The community of Saint John truly believes that investing resources in young mothers today will ensure the healthy development of their children, providing them with a stronger start for their future.

2. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND INTENDED OUTCOMES

In the fall of 2005, the Business Community Anti-Poverty Initiative (BCAPI) received \$25,000 from the Public Health Agency of Canada for a collaborative project, **Developing Healthy Public Policies for Pregnant and Parenting Young Mothers**. The overall goal was to provide a momentum for a comprehensive community strategy to support pregnant and parenting young women in Saint John. The target group focused specifically on young women who are 24 and under.

The objectives of this collaborative project were as follows:

- Document ways that the Saint John Community has influenced the development of responsive policies and practices for pregnant and parenting young women.
- Identify the concerns and challenges facing pregnant and parenting young women and
- Bring groups together to champion policy and program changes.

Approach used to include the target population

Pregnant and parenting young mothers were integral to both clarifying the issues and developing an action plan. Focus groups of pregnant and parenting young mothers helped to understand the challenges and issues facing the target population and also what supports and opportunities made a difference to their quality of life. Young mothers were also involved in the two community dialogues organized to identify and develop an action plan.

Approach used to manage and monitor the project

The project was guided primarily by the input of a management committee with representation from community organizations, government departments and the business community. Many other agencies and organizations guided various aspects of the project. All partners contributed to the development of recommendations and actions to better support pregnant and parenting young mothers.

The key components of the project were as follows:

- Literature Review
- Establishment of an Alternative School
- Discussion paper, **Closing the Gaps: Ensuring Pregnant and Parenting Young Women Succeed**
- Two Policy Dialogues
- Working Committees on Childcare Options and Mentoring
- Development of An Action Plan

PARTNERSHIPS

BCAPI involved key partners in guiding the work of this initiative: First Steps a safe and supportive transitional home established in 2002 for homeless pregnant and/or parenting young women; Vibrant Communities Saint John, a multisectoral initiative to develop and implement a poverty reduction strategy; and the Greater Saint John Teen Pregnancy Committee, a network of agencies and government departments promoting both preventative and supportive initiatives for pregnant and parenting teens. Many others – young mothers, community organizations, and government departments - also played an integral role in identifying and championing changes to supports for young mothers and their children.

LITERATURE REVIEW

First Steps had a literature review completed which provided a comprehensive overview of the studies, reports and best practices on the topics of teen pregnancy, poverty, homelessness, effects of teen parenting and poverty on child development and the societal and financial costs of “doing nothing”.

A clear distinction was made that most single parents are caring and committed, but it is the characteristics such as low income, low educational levels, inadequate housing, depression, and lack of social supports that often lead to long term negative implications for both mother and child.

The literature review reinforced the urgency of having young mothers remain in school and finish high school because the longer they are out of school, the harder it is to go back. There is also a strong correlation between a lack of high school completion and a life of poverty for a young single parent and their children.

The review also challenged our community to understand that young mothers can't be expected to go back to school unless there is quality and affordable childcare. In fact a Canadian study by McMaster University of single mother families on income assistance indicated that the most effective and cost effective intervention was simply providing childcare and recreational services.

The report, Literature Review – Poverty, Homelessness and Teen Pregnancy, can be accessed by going to the Saint John section of the Vibrant Communities Canada website at <http://tamarackcommunity.ca/g2s28.html#keydocs>.

ESTABLISHMENT OF AN ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL FOR YOUNG MOTHERS

The strong correlation between a young mother's ability to move out of poverty and their level of education prompted the BCAPI to explore ways to enable young mothers to complete their high school. Many pregnant and parenting young mothers experience significant challenges within the regular school system and need a program that offers a small student/teacher ratio, independent study, day care options for the children, transportation assistance and a supportive environment that understands the demands of parenting and school. BCAPI led a partnership of business leaders, First Steps and the Greater Saint John Teen Pregnancy to examine the need of young mothers dropping out of school and best practices.

Their findings facilitated the development of a business plan and the recruitment of partners to pilot an alternative high school at the First Steps residence. Planning involved meetings with different government departments at both the local and provincial levels, resulting in a pilot alternative school which opened its doors in February 2006 for seven young moms.

School District 8 provided computers, hired the teacher and ensured that students could graduate with a high school diploma, associated with one of the high schools. Funding for the teacher was received from J.D. Irving and the provincial department of Post Secondary Education and Training.

Another related and significant challenge to overcome was meeting the childcare needs of mothers going to school. Currently there are no openings in licensed childcare centres for children under two years of age in Saint John, so First Steps agreed to apply to government to become a community daycare home. A community daycare home, licensed by FCS, is a small business, where an individual can operate a daycare facility in their residence. There are guidelines for the number of children allowed, based on their ages. This meant that First Steps could hire an individual to look after the children of three students who were unable to access childcare solutions.

At the time of writing of this report, the first semester of the pilot school was nearing completion and it was expected that six of the seven students would successfully complete their semester and one would graduate. BCAPI, First Steps and the management committee will undertake an evaluation of the pilot project and plan the steps for sustainability and growth of the Alternative School.

DISCUSSION PAPER ON SUPPORTS AND CHALLENGES

Closing the Gaps: Ensuring Pregnant Teens and Young Women

Succeed, a discussion paper, was developed gathering information from focus groups of pregnant and parenting young mothers, interviews with community organizations and government departments, along with highlights from the literature review on teen pregnancy and poverty and the impacts on child development, and local services, reports and statistics. The report is the first comprehensive document describing challenges, opportunities, and past successes in improving supports for pregnant and parenting young mothers.

Different drafts of the report were reviewed at the community dialogues, with the goal of ensuring a comprehensive and accurate document.

The discussion paper, in its draft form, was widely distributed in the community. The report, now completed, will continue to be distributed through many networks, serving as an awareness tool and a guide for community action.

POLICY DIALOGUES

Moving from concerns to priorities to action is no easy task, yet this was the agenda of two community dialogues organized to bring together representatives of young mothers, community organizations, government services, family

physicians and businesses. There were a total of 39 participants, many of whom attended both dialogues. A complete array of services were represented at the dialogues from pre-natal care to parenting supports and including schools, daycares, public health nurses, and financial services.

The knowledge and commitment of participants, together with the Discussion Paper documenting supports and challenges, provided the necessary foundation to move forward in identifying an action plan. In addition, the opportunity to come together encouraged stronger working relationships and increased knowledge of existing resources.

It is evident that the dialogues have strengthened the momentum for action as individuals involved with the dialogues have been calling for reports from the priority areas; others have indicated they want to work on specific projects for the fall. Overall there is an inspired momentum to keep working for change.

WORKING COMMITTEES

In addition to the development of the Alternative School, three committees involving government and community organizations began actively working during the project on specific issues related to childcare options and mentoring supports. One of the committees, Mentoring Supports, was established as a result of interviews for the discussion paper. The Policy Dialogues were an opportunity for these committees to share their work and receive guidance on future steps.

ACTION PLAN

The Saint John community has made a commitment to champion the following five key areas to better support pregnant and parenting young women:

- Quality and affordable childcare supports: *availability of quality and affordable childcare is blocking young parents from continuing their education*
- Opportunities to complete high school: *High school completion is hindered by isolation from supportive environments, misunderstanding of academic options and lack of childcare*
- Mentoring supports for young mothers: *Mentors can address isolation of young mothers and their children*
- Information tool for service providers and young mothers: *It is difficult for pregnant and parenting young mothers to understand the scope and depth of available services in our community*

- Enhancing prevention initiatives: *While teen pregnancy is increasing in Saint John, prevention efforts are hampered by lack of resources*

The following information provides a brief summary of the challenges with each of the five priorities, the successes already experienced, proposed actions for the future and the organizations and partnerships who will champion the changes.

I. QUALITY AND AFFORDABLE CHILDCARE SUPPORTS:

GAP: Availability of quality and affordable childcare is blocking young parents from continuing their education

Lack of affordable and quality childcare is blocking young parents from completing high school and/or furthering their education, training and/or employment. Saint John has a limited number of spaces in licensed childcare centres for children under two and all 39 spaces for children aged 15 months and under are filled. A cursory look at the situation revealed a number of young mothers – at First Steps, Saint John High and Woodlawn School - not able to return to school due to lack of childcare options.

Affordable childcare is also a challenge. For parenting young mothers on income assistance, FCS pays \$25 a day (\$125 a week) to a licensed childcare centre, which is less than the going rates of most daycares who charge up to \$150/week. Alternative Child Care support is available (\$18.75/day) from FCS but only for parent(s) who are not receiving income assistance and whose income is below a certain level (less than the maximum level as per the Day Care Contribution Schedule). The Alternative Child Care program assists parents who do not have reasonable access to a licensed day care facility, either because of distance, hours of operation or availability of space.

The third area of concern is the lack of clarity of childcare policies of FCS. A policy of FCS was also clarified – that the higher childcare rate of \$25/day can be applied to a qualifying parent attending any high school level course full-time and as well as young mothers attending school half days so that travel and homework time can be covered.

The Community Day Care Homes Committee, a partnership of, BCAPI, FCS, Vibrant Communities, First Steps and the YMCA-YWCA was developed to explore options to address the immediate need of childcare options for young mothers at First Steps and the broader need for more childcare opportunities in

the community, particularly for children under two. While the licensed childcare home program is legislated in New Brunswick there are very few operators and both parents and the public are unaware of this program and its benefits.

The Early Learning Centre Committee is a partnership of BCAPI, Early Intervention Saint John, Family Resource Centre, Urban Parents Group; FCS, YMCA-YWCA, Understanding Early Years Project, and others. It was formed to prepare a business plan for the development of an early learning centre in a low income neighbourhood in Saint John. The centre would promote opportunities, services and supports for parents and their children, including parenting resources, pre-school programs and childcare services.

COMMITMENT TO ACTION AND LEAD ORGANIZATIONS

- BCAPI will be asked to facilitate discussions with the Provincial Government concerning the childcare crisis in Saint John, particularly as it affects young single parents with children under two years of age and to request the childcare reimbursement rate be raised to reflect real costs for licensed and unlicensed childcare.
- FCS will issue a directive that clarifies their childcare policies – reimbursement of licensed childcare at \$25/day and babysitting at \$2/hour. This will be circulated to public health nurses, guidance counselors, FCS case workers and other service providers.
- The Community Day Care Homes Committee will work on promoting the development of the Community Day Care Home program, licensed by FCS.
- The Parent and Early Learning and Childcare Centre Committee will continue to work on the development of a Centre in a low income neighbourhood.
- Community Day Care Homes Committee will examine feasibility of a Pilot Project Partnership to develop a childcare centre in a local high school that would be accessible to parents attending high school, teachers, and the surrounding businesses and neighbourhood.
- YMCA-YWCA, with their local and provincial partners, will continue to advocate for federal and provincial government funds for the development of licensed childcare centres, and increased wages and training for childcare workers.

II. OPPORTUNITIES TO COMPLETE HIGH SCHOOL

GAP: High school completion is hindered by isolation from supportive environments, misunderstanding of academic options and lack of childcare

There are limited resources or protocols in schools to break the isolation and provide the bridging supports needed for pregnant and parenting young mothers. Ultimately, it is the young mother who is called upon to coordinate the options for themselves in school and in the community, placing an impossible task in front of her. All schools have a School Based Services Team which could be encouraged to automatically consider pregnant and parenting young mothers and serve as a bridging support to options in the school and services in the community.

The discussion paper and dialogues indicated that there is a need for greater awareness of options to assist with high school completion including attending part-time, receiving tutorial services at home, or studying at home but working directly with school teachers for a period of time. In addition, ensuring availability of academic credit courses such as the Family Living course or Childcare Course which offer a direct relevance to a young parent or supporting participation in the Heart to Heart program of Early Intervention Saint John, which results in a partial credit, will encourage a young mother to remain in school.

Although some of the young mothers who were interviewed had accessed private babysitters or licensed childcare or a family member who could babysit, the lack of childcare supports is still a significant concern, as described earlier.

COMMITMENT TO ACTION AND LEAD ORGANIZATIONS

- School District 8, under the leadership of Susan Holmes, Head of Guidance, will explore the establishment of a Night School. Evenings may also make it easier to find childcare. The night school could provide one teacher for all subjects. It could target grades nine and ten, but not exclusively, and include other students besides pregnant and parenting young mothers.
- BCAPI and First Steps will continue to monitor the short-term impacts of the alternative classroom at First Steps and, in cooperation with other

- partners and pending the evaluation results, pursue plans for its sustainability and growth.
- VON Healthy Baby and Me and Sexual Health Nurses will promote options for pre-natal classes at the high schools.
 - The Guidance Department at Harbourview High School will explore with Early Intervention Saint John the possibilities of a nurturing support group for young mothers and their children. Staff from FCS and Sexual Health Centre will assist in its development.

III. MENTORING SUPPORTS FOR YOUNG MOTHERS

GAP: Mentors can address isolation of young mothers and their children

Young mothers vary in their family, financial and support networks; some have supportive relationships with their own families and others are on their own. Many organizations expressed concern about young mothers and their children being isolated in the community; a concern expressed by young mothers themselves.

A committee of three community organizations, First Steps, Family Resource Centre and Early Intervention Saint John, formed to identify and develop an action plan to provide mentoring supports for young mothers. The three organizations share a common target of young single mothers. They find that once young mothers complete programs associated with each agency there is little time or resources to offer continuing guidance and support.

Mentors can help to lessen the current gaps in support. Mentors can also provide young mothers with a listening support, exposure to new experiences, skill development in areas such as budgeting, childcare, and communication, and help with developing their own support network in the community.

The pilot mentoring initiative will involve 15 mentors paired with young mothers, all of whom will be volunteers.

COMMITMENT TO ACTION AND LEAD ORGANIZATIONS

- Three agencies, Early Intervention, Family Resource Centre, and First Steps, will continue to work on the operationalizing of a mentoring program. They will gather information from other community groups

who have offered their resources and learnings from similar kinds of programs. The partnership was recently successful in securing \$4,000 from the Greater Saint John Community Foundation to assist with the new initiative and additional sources of money will be sought to coordinate and evaluate the pilot initiative.

IV. INFORMATION TOOL FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS AND YOUNG MOTHERS

GAP: It is difficult for pregnant and parenting young mothers to understand the scope and depth of available services in our community

There is a rich array of government and community supports for pregnant and parenting young mothers and many services work well together and make referrals to one another. However connections can be missed because of the lack of knowledge of existing resources, the overlapping requirements for assessments, referral processes, and waiting periods, all of which can result in the young mother losing connections to needed supports. Ultimately, it is the young mother who is called upon to coordinate the services, placing an impossible task in front of her.

There is a strong sense that we have a fragmented system that could be better coordinated and better utilized to support pregnant and parenting young mothers. The dialogues raised the need for services to act as bridges connecting young women to other supports in the community and ensuring that the connections were strengthened.

There are knowledgeable sources of information in our community. There are different forms of information available through the Human Development Council, including the Human Services Directory, the on-line database of services, their INFO-line which also has a 1-800 number, and their various pamphlets/brochures, including the most recent one, the pocket size brochure for youth, entitled Surviving the Streets. In addition, Public Health has developed a flow chart for services providers on the path of services available to the pregnant young mother. First Steps has developed a binder of information on community resources to guide their staff in helping their residents and other young mothers in the community.

However, individuals working in the human service sector change over time and new people coming in are not aware of the array of services nor have the advantage of strong relationships in the community to assist them in their search for services. Schools spoke of the challenges of knowing what services exist in the community.

COMMITMENT TO ACTION AND LEAD ORGANIZATIONS

The Greater Saint John Teen Pregnancy Committee will work with the Human Development Council and Public Health to develop an information tool of services dealing with pregnancy, prevention and parenting supports. They will work to ensure that services are accessible for both the young parent and the service provider. They will explore modifying the pocket size guide, Surviving the Streets, to cover services for both pregnant and parenting young parents. They will also look at ways to encourage service providers to better understand what is available in the community and to strengthen their role as bridges for young mothers in accessing services.

V. ENHANCING PREVENTION INITIATIVES

GAP: While teen pregnancy is increasing in Saint John, prevention efforts are hampered by lack of resources

While the number of births to teens has been decreasing in Region 2 (Sussex to St. Stephen), this is not the case for the Saint John County, which includes the City of Saint John and surrounding villages of St. Martins to Lepreau. The statistics show that both the number and percentage of births to teens have increased in our county between 2001 and 2004. In 2004, Saint John County had 19.6% of teen births in the province as compared to 12.9% in 2001.

The Greater Saint John Teen Pregnancy Committee (GSJTPC) is a coalition of government and community services. Its goals are to: prevent teen pregnancy; educate teens and the community about the issues; and support pregnant teens, young moms and their babies. Preventative programs have been established as a result of the Coalition's work.

The following programs, championed by the GSJTPC, are coordinated by The Resource Centre for Youth (TRC). Baby Think It Over is for middle and high school students to experience the challenge of caring for dolls simulated to

exhibit real life characteristics. This program was very popular with the schools, but unfortunately has been on hold for the past year, due to funding challenges. Roses, Rubbers and Rainbows is three “straight talk” workshops for high school students on Relationships, Safe Sex and Homosexuality. The demand from schools for this program has been overwhelming, surpassing the allocated resources of The Resource Centre for Youth (TRC).

Other concerns to consider in prevention include placing more emphasis on targeting young men, another possible role for the Resource Centre for Youth. It was also felt that clear messages targeted at youth and promoted widely and publicly is also an important action to consider.

COMMITMENT TO ACTION AND LEAD ORGANIZATIONS

Young mothers, community organizations and government departments will meet again to focus on prevention efforts. Pat McGill, Chair of the Greater Saint John Teen Pregnancy Committee agreed to take responsibility to coordinate this initiative.

3. EVALUATION

a. What was evaluated?

The evaluation included the outcomes of the project, the process that was used to achieve the outcomes and the participant perspective on the productivity and effectiveness of process used by the coordinator/facilitator for the project.

b. How was it evaluated?

1. Comparison between outcomes achieved and outcomes planned
2. Interviews with a random sample of participants
3. Third-party review of the process to achieve the outcomes

c. Did the project achieve intended outcomes?

This project exceeded the anticipated outcomes. There was an expectation that all would understand the issues and challenges of pregnant and parenting young women. The project has exceeded this by developing an energized group of individuals throughout the community who are committed to the issue and going beyond the scope of the project to enact the plans identified in the project. There is recognition

that actual change in policy or practice was unlikely in the time constraints of the project, however, the action plans, network of people engaged in the issues and personal commitment to continue to achieve the changes continues beyond the life of the project.

The following points are indicators identified to measure the success of this project:

- A large group in diverse organizations understand and agree on the key issues
- Leaders have been identified and actions have been defined
- Progress has already been made on alternative education solutions, mentoring, information tools and documenting of information to be used in advocating with government
- The individuals and organizations working with pregnant and parenting young women are more knowledgeable about the services and supports available
- The information provided to the participants was well researched and accurate
- The dialogue is continuing with diverse groups without being called together by a project coordinator/facilitator

d. What worked well in this project?

- The grant allowed the required funding for leadership to bring together a large, diverse group of people from a wide variety of agencies, committees, services and young mothers to address the issue of pregnant and parenting young women
- The leadership with the project captured the personal commitment of people involved through the community dialogues and resulting action plans. The success is credited to the strengthened partnerships developed in the course of the community dialogue, sparking their enthusiasm, dedication and imaginative approach.
- The process was very inclusive, considering the input of pregnant and parenting teens. The focus groups allowed for young women who may be feeling vulnerable in their situation to speak honestly and openly about the barriers they were experiencing. There was abundant opportunity to be involved in the community dialogues, completion of the discussion paper and determination of the action plans.
- Because many groups are looking for a change in the policy and practices, there is a willingness to provide leadership to the effort.

- Participant involvement in the progressive thought used to develop the discussion paper through the community dialogues kept a high level of engagement throughout the project. This approach also kept all participants knowledgeable of all the issues and challenges and helped galvanize the groups around the action plans. The progressive thought process empowered the participants.

e. What was learned?

- Funding for a project on policy change needs to be a longer term [three-year] commitment. There was just enough money to get started, but the success of this effort will be in the progress and completion of the action plans. Concern was expressed that the action plans and cohesiveness of the group are dependent on good will and intent. Funding for the required leadership is no longer available to maintain the momentum and connectedness of the group around this issue.
- The community dialogues should be structured in a manner that encourages people to work with multiple sectors rather than remaining within their traditional working group of community, government or school. Causing people to work outside their traditional silo may have provided a different set of solutions for consideration.
- Policy makers do not understand this issue. Many in government roles do not comprehend the gap between the intent of a government program and the effective delivery to the people requiring the support. When participating in collaborative processes in the future, representatives of policy and schools should be disbursed throughout the various teams to gain a better understanding of the issues, challenges and potential solutions.
- The process was populated with enough of the right people to create momentum for moving forward. There is a strong belief that as the effort moves into action, more people will be engaged and there will be more momentum.
- The information provided in the final documents is the right information and in the right format to engage provincial policy makers in the dialogue.
- The approach and quick action on establishing the Alternative School established a bias to action and gave us a model for proceeding. This model can be used to remove other barriers.
- It is difficult to find the right person in government agencies to participate in the exercise. Why this is so is not certain. That

- government often sees itself as administering programs rather than solving problems may be part of the issue.
- The input and insight of the young mothers through the focus groups and dialogues were very beneficial and essential to understanding the issues and challenges. How the target population is represented in the community dialogue needs to be examined. The participation of individuals was very helpful, but it is not realistic for young mothers to participate in the community dialogue as a representative of the entire target audience of pregnant and parenting young women.

f. How were the evaluation results used (or how will they be used)?

The discussion paper has already been selectively distributed to committees of Vibrant Communities and the Business Community Anti-Poverty Initiative. Due to the wide participation in the development and thinking represented in the paper, there is already evidence of how the paper is helping to solidify the priorities and clarify the collective thinking of groups who contribute to the solutions. Participants have a very clear understanding and are articulating the problem and solutions with greater confidence.

As the information and commitment spread through various community and provincial organizations, community leaders will be speaking from the same page. The information will become known to various teams and committees due to participation by some of their membership causing more people to gravitate to a common understanding of the issues and contributing to the solutions.

The process and the paper serve many communities involved in learning about poverty reductions strategies. **“Closing the Gaps: Ensuring Pregnant and Parenting Young Women Succeed”** will be posted on the Canadian website for Vibrant Communities for review by many communities across Canada. The insights, action plans and lessons from this experience will be readily available as they develop their local strategies.

The efforts to change provincial policy will be greatly enhanced as the discussion paper is clear about the gaps in Saint John and what needs to be done to close those gaps. The credibility of the research, involvement of local leaders and collective understanding of what needs to be done

are clearly articulated for leaders in the provincial government, creating a state of readiness for action in policy change.

We expect that the learnings from this project will be helpful to the Public Health Agency of Canada as they move forward with their efforts regarding pregnant and parenting young women, but also in their effort to better understand what is required to change public health policy.

Acknowledgement of the importance of funding for initiating change is important and more is required to follow through to ensure the changes are made.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This research project, funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada, has accomplished two main purposes. The first was to strengthen the work of existing efforts to better support pregnant and parenting young women. The second was to start new initiatives, thereby enlarging the number of individuals and organizations with a vested interest in bringing about changes to supports for pregnant and parenting young women.

The overall goal of the project was to build a stronger community momentum with a specific action plan. The different components of the project – literature review, discussion paper, dialogues, and working committees - have enabled the community to agree on five key priorities and provided individuals and organizations who will champion needed changes.

The fact that there is something being done to help young moms get through school and help them so they don't have to worry about poverty just makes me want to push on and stay in school and get to where I would like to be.
Young Mom

There is an urgency for action in our community. The increasing trend of births to teen mothers is worrisome despite a decrease in the past year. Furthermore, there are limited opportunities to access childcare and other resources to complete high school, the first step in the journey to avoid a life of poverty.

The Saint John community has made a commitment to champion the following five key areas to better support pregnant and parenting young women:

- Quality and affordable childcare supports: *availability of quality and affordable childcare is blocking young parents from continuing their education*
- Opportunities to complete high school: *High school completion is hindered by isolation from supportive environments, misunderstanding of academic options and lack of childcare*
- Mentoring supports for young mothers: *Mentors can address isolation of young mothers and their children*
- Information tool for service providers and young mothers: *It is difficult for pregnant and parenting young mothers to understand the scope and depth of available services in our community*
- Enhancing prevention initiatives: *While teen pregnancy is increasing in Saint John, prevention efforts are hampered by lack of resources*

Young mothers experienced some immediate benefits during the project through:

- establishment of the pilot Alternative School for Young Mothers at First Steps and the continued momentum for its sustainability;
- increase in childcare options for three young mothers, through application of First Steps to become a Community Day Care Home;
- support from the Greater Saint John Community Foundation to contribute to piloting a joint mentoring initiative;
- many partnerships formed to address specific priorities and
- increased momentum to better understand and support pregnant and parenting young mothers.

With assistance from the Public Health Agency of Canada, our community has been able to better define and articulate the challenges and commit to an action plan to increase the likelihood that pregnant and parenting young mothers and their children will avoid a life of poverty.

