



Vibrant Communities

Saint John

Connections Create Vibrant Communities

Date: July 2005
330 Wentworth Street
P.O. Box 6201
Saint John, N.B.
E2L 4R6
(506) 693-4422

The stories of individuals and families living in poverty help us understand the burden carried by many in our community. Vibrant Communities SJ is a unique opportunity to document these stories, to ask questions that have never been asked before, to look more closely at the roles of community, government and business in poverty reduction, and to champion changes that will help people in their journey out of poverty.

Engaging our community

Vibrant Communities connects the skills, resources and networks to develop long lasting solutions to poverty reduction. Over 70 individuals are now engaged, representing business, government, community agencies and individuals living in poverty. Our focus is maturing, as we better understand the issues facing children and youth living in poverty, adults lacking high school education and individuals and families living in inadequate and unaffordable housing. Talking with individuals and groups locally, and engaging in dialogue with our Pan-Canadian partners help us to explore innovative practices that could complement our current efforts.

Vibrant Communities SJ invites you to contribute stories to help our community better understand poverty.

Investing in Children and Youth

Part of Vibrant Communities SJ's role is to strengthen existing community efforts. The Investing in Children and Youth Working Group is making progress in a number of areas:

- In partnership with the Early Childhood Development Coalition an application was submitted for federal funding related to "Understanding the Early Years". If successful, this opportunity will measure every child's readiness for school and help the community to understand and lead needed improvements.
- An inventory of current programs serving children and youth living in poverty is underway.
- A Task Force on Children's Health is being established in partnership with St. Joseph's Community Health Centre;
- Check our first story [Community Action in Saint John: Making a Difference in the Lives of Young People](#), accessed at <http://www.caledoninst.org> (May 2005)

The realities of looking after an infant (Baby Think it Over) lead many students to say that they will be more careful to practice safe sex. Excerpt from the story, [Community Action in Saint John: Making a Difference in the Lives of Young People](#)

Education to Employment

We are identifying the opportunities and challenges for individuals to participate in literacy, upgrading and GED (General Educational Development – high school equivalency) programs, using focus groups and interviews with learners and program staff.

- 11,000 adults in Greater Saint John do not have a high school diploma; 3293 are between the ages of 20 and 34 and 4,223 are between 35 and 44.
- Many learners want their GED so that they can move out of minimum wage jobs.
- Most minimum wage jobs require a high school education or the equivalent.
- There are significant challenges for non-profit organizations that offer literacy, upgrading and GED programs and this undermines their ability to provide comprehensive services.

Safe and Affordable Housing

After successfully lobbying the federal government to dedicate CMHC personnel (Don Connolly) to housing issues in Saint John, the Housing Working Group is developing ways to build an affordable housing momentum. Its efforts include:

- Raising awareness about RRAP and other government programs designed to increase the supply of affordable housing. Two information sessions, hosted by Mayor McFarlane and Councillor McGuire drew close to a hundred interested individuals.
- Examining new ways to maintain warm apartments. The concept of fuel poverty has never been fully debated in New Brunswick, and Vibrant Communities Saint John has received intervenor status at the Public Utilities Board in order to raise public awareness about fuel poverty, and develop local ways in which we can produce warm apartments for Saint Johners living in poverty.
- The Saint John CMA had a record number of construction permits issued in late Spring, but outside of the Southern Peninsula, little construction/renovation has taken place in the city's more vulnerable neighbourhoods. The housing working group is exploring ways in which it can stimulate construction in these neighbourhoods.

Quick Stats:

- # on waiting list for Subsidized housing in Saint John in Feb/05: 872
- Ratio of City landlords deemed problem landlords: 1 in 10 (Source: Telegraph Journal)
- Amount that CMHC will provide landlords under RRAP to renovate and improve older rental stock: \$24,000/unit.
- # of successful RRAP applicants in SJ in 2004: 10

Other Initiatives of Vibrant Communities

Advocacy & Mentoring: Consultation with a cross-section of concerned participants who are themselves engaged in various advocacy and mentoring roles has informed the need for an innovative pilot to be launched in the fall of 2005 based on a community education model. Peer groups will be supported to act as arteries feeding vital information and recommendations from the "frontlines" of poverty to policy makers and other partners engaged in social development. Vibrant Community Saint John also supports the incubation and implementation of community-led projects that involve mentoring and advocacy.

Promoting the Vibrant Communities opportunity: A presentation to Common Council in February publicly launched Vibrant Communities SJ. We continue to make presentations to others including the Regional Mayors, Community Health Centre, and the Canadian Social Welfare Policy Conference in Fredericton. If you would like a presentation, please see our contact information below.

Measuring our impact: Through the efforts of a Research and Evaluation Committee, Vibrant Communities SJ is exploring quality of life indicators that will help us track our progress over the next three years.

People, Programs, Policies: Poverty reduction involves changes in people, programs and policies. Vibrant Communities SJ is exploring two key policy areas, one of which is concerned with ensuring the consistency of policies to complement the wage exemption policy of Family and Community Services which offers individuals the ability to make \$300 per month through employment without penalty to their income assistance payments. The second draws attention to the difficulties incurred by individuals living in poverty with the current and proposed fuel costs and to encourage more humane consideration from both the private and public sectors.

Learning as we go: Pan-Canadian telelearning forums (*please let us know if you are interested in participating*) provide an opportunity to learn more about other initiatives across the country. During a recent telelearning forum, City Centre Education Project, a partnership of seven downtown schools in Edmonton was profiled, describing how they combined their resources and strategies to provide better supports to families, improvements in achievement for children and greater community involvement. This was an inspiration to all of us in Saint John, including our education partners.

Vibrant Communities Saint John Leadership Roundtable

Chair:

Tom Gribbons, RBC Dominion Securities

Members:

Donna Beaton, Family and Community Services

Keith D'Bell, UNBSJ, Co-chair of Research and Evaluation Committee

Brian Dunstan, Deloitte, Co-chair of Investing in Children and Youth Working Group

Gary Foster, Academy of Hair Design, Co-chair of Education to Employment Working Group

Bill Gale, Co-Chair, BCIPI

Darryl Goyetche, Saint John Board of Trade, Co-chair of Learning and Communications Committee

Randy Hatfield, Human Development Council, Co-chair of Research and Evaluation Committee

Trevor Holder, Member of the Legislature for Saint John Portland

Gregor Hope, retired businessperson, Chair of Housing Working Group

Lyn King, Urban Core Support Network

Dale Knox, Tabufile Atlantic; Chair of Enterprise Saint John

Mayor Norm McFarlane, City of Saint John

Anne Marie McGrath, retired educator, Co-chair of Investing in Children and Youth Working Group

Councilor Peter McGuire, City of Saint John

Brenda Murphy, Urban Core Support Network

Terri Ann Richards, Community

Narinder Singh, Saint John Non-Profit Housing

Donnie Snook, Saint John Inner City Youth Ministry

Bob Stranach, National Crime Prevention Program

Jim Woods, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada

Pat Woods, City of Saint John

Brenda Wright, Saint John Learning Exchange, Co-chair of Education to Employment Working Group

Paul Zed, Member of Parliament for Saint John

Staff:

Monica Chaperlin, Coordinator, BCIPI, 633-5588, chaperlin.monica@jdirving.com

Kurt Peacock, Research and Evaluation Coordinator, 693-4420, kurtpeacock.vibrantsj@nb.aibn.com

Gail Taylor, Community Coach, 693-4428, gailtaylor.vibrantsj@nb.aibn.com

Cathy Wright, Social Planner, 693-4424, cathywright.vibrantsj@nb.aibn.com

Contact us at:

Vibrant Communities SJ

330 Wentworth Street

P.O. Box 6201

Saint John, NB E2L 4R6

info.vibrantsj@nb.aibn.com or 693-4422

Check out the wealth of information at Vibrant Communities Canada website at

www.vibrantcommunities.ca



Click here to visit the Tamarack website for more engaging content! www.tamarackcommunity.ca