

**PEOPLE, PRACTICE AND POLICY**

**PATHWAYS OUT OF POVERTY**

**POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY FOR SAINT JOHN**

*July 30, 2004*

**Saint John Vibrant Communities Leadership Roundtable  
& the Business Community Anti-Poverty Initiative Inc.**

**Proposal Submission  
to  
Vibrant Communities Canada**

## A COMMUNITY OF SUPPORT

Thank you to the many partners who have made significant contributions to the development of our Poverty Reduction Strategy for Saint John:

**J.W. McConnell Family Foundation** for financial support

**RBC Dominion Securities Saint John:** For staff leadership in the Leadership Roundtable, for financial support, office space and a meeting room.

**Family and Community Services:** For in kind technical services for our Community planning session.

**The City of Saint John** for providing meeting space and lunch for the Leadership Roundtable meetings.

**The Business Community Anti-Poverty Initiative:** For countless hours in co-ordinating the Vibrant Communities effort as phase two convenor.

**JD Irving Ltd:** For in kind printing and meeting space for tele-conferences.

**The Glenn Carpenter Centre:** For hosting our community planning sessions.

**The Greater Saint John Community Foundation** for financial support

**Tamarack Institute, The Caledon Institute and Eko Nomos:** For extensive coaching and sustained encouragement.

**Human Development Council and the Urban Core Support Network** for their time and support in developing the strategy

**All members of the Leadership Roundtable** for their commitment, insight and hard work.

**The many individuals, agencies, government departments and businesses** who have participated through personal interviews and community forums.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

A Community of Support	2
Introduction	4
Five Core Operating Principles	9
Goals for Vibrant Communities Canada	9
Goals for Vibrant Communities Saint John	10
Three Areas Of Strategic Concentration	10
Theories Of Change	11
Strategies	12
Implementing The Strategies	13
√ Engage The Leadership	13
√ Help People Move Forward In Their Journey Out Of Poverty through Mentoring	15
√ Strengthen The Collective Capacity Of The Community	16
√ Measure Our Impact	17
√ Communicate Our Community's Learnings And Progress	19
√ Champion Continuous Engagement, Learning And Improvement	21
Moving Forward: Three Areas Of Concentration	22
Investing in Children and Youth	22
Education to Employment	24
Safe and Affordable Housing	25
Evaluation	27
Poverty Reduction Strategy Team	27
Budget	33
Appendices	
Appendix A: Members of the Leadership Roundtable	
Appendix B: National Supports	
Appendix C: Dialogue and Consultation: Phase One	
Appendix D: Dialogue and Consultation: Phase Two	
Appendix E: Poverty Mineshaft	
Appendix F: The Five Asset Building Blocks	
Appendix G: Business Community Anti-Poverty Initiative (Convening Agency)	

# PEOPLE, PRACTICE AND POLICY PATHWAYS OUT OF POVERTY A POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY FOR SAINT JOHN

*This document outlines a Poverty Reduction Strategy to reduce poverty through strategic interventions that will contribute to Saint John's economic and social health. The long-term results of the successful implementation of our strategy will make Saint John an even more attractive location for economic, health and social investment.*

## INTRODUCTION

Saint John is committed to being one of five Trail Builder Communities engaged in Vibrant Communities Canada. Vibrant Communities Canada is a national network of communities that is working to reduce poverty by creating partnerships that make use of our most valuable assets - people, organizations, businesses and government. This initiative is supported through the leadership and resources of the Tamarack Institute, The JW McConnell Family Foundation and the Caledon Institute for Social Policy<sup>1</sup>. The mission of Vibrant Communities Canada is to ***create and grow a movement of diverse leaders and communities from across Canada committed to exploring, challenging and testing ways to unleash the potential of communities to substantially reduce poverty and ensure a good quality of life for all of its citizens.***

Over the next three years, Saint John will implement and evaluate a comprehensive Poverty Reduction Strategy that incorporates new approaches and partnerships to reduce poverty and integrates broad communication of our successes, challenges and learnings. The Poverty Reduction Strategy sets a framework for developing comprehensive, collaborative efforts that reflect opportunity, need and impact. It is based on the priorities of our community determined by analysis of existing research and an extensive consultation process. The consultation process involved business, government, community based organizations<sup>2</sup>, faith based communities, labour and people who are living the experience of poverty. The work of Vibrant Communities will strengthen, support and align our community efforts.

## CONTEXT

Poverty is a complex issue that is broader than not having enough money to cover the basic necessities of food, clothing and shelter. It also means not having the social, human, physical, personal, as well as financial assets to access opportunities to participate fully in one's community.

Canada's future is extremely bright. We are recognized as one of the best countries within which to live. Saint John shares in that prosperity. In 2002 Saint John was ranked highest

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix B for more information on our national partners.

<sup>2</sup> Community organizations are also known as non-profit agencies and voluntary sector organizations.

for GDP growth in all Canadian metropolitan areas: a whopping 7.8% increase<sup>3</sup>. There is also an unprecedented high participation rate in the economy: 66.3%.

Yet Saint John and the country as a whole face a grave and serious poverty problem. We are experiencing widening disparities of wealth distribution, changing patterns in family life, and rising costs of basic goods. By the currently accepted measure LICO (Low-Income Cut-Off), 16.2% of Canadians live in poverty. By the same measure, the City of Saint John faces a staggering poverty rate of 24.5%<sup>4</sup>. We see a situation of poverty that is stubborn, complex and is passed from one generation to the next; moreover, we see a level of poverty that is unacceptable.

Our economy is in a state of significant transition, impacted by the globalization of markets and rapid technological change. Saint John, with its industrial roots, has developed a diversified economy that includes a healthy and sustainable mix of knowledge-based industries in health care and high tech, as well as advanced manufacturing and tourism. We are witnessing increasing demand for a more educated workforce yet many in our community are not able to meet this demand. This concern is reinforced by a recent survey of high school graduates which found that only 52% of Saint John graduates attended a post-secondary institution<sup>5</sup>.

Saint John is affected by the broader trend of out-migration where young people are relocating to the larger urban centres. This situation is exacerbated in the City of Saint John where we have out-migration into surrounding municipalities and a concentration of poverty in the city core. This reduces the tax base for the City at a time when more and more services are being downloaded to communities. The City of Saint John is experiencing increasing strain on its assets: meeting the need for suitable, affordable housing, providing resources for recreational opportunities, and accessing funding for community agencies. Despite the impact of poverty on one's health, quality of life, and ability to contribute, the issue of poverty remains peripheral to the political agenda as well as to our community as a whole.

Changes in the 1990's to the social policy agenda of all levels of government in areas such as social housing, employment insurance, and the Canada Assistance Plan, have exacerbated the situation of poverty. This significantly impacts government agencies and community organizations who are working for a better way of life for those living in poverty. Many non-profit organizations in our community have been drastically affected by diminished core funding from government while experiencing increasing demands for their programs and services. Budget decreases have had a similar effect on many government departments.

**Increasingly, communities are seeking new ways of doing things. Vibrant Communities is a response to that call. We passionately believe that local**

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<sup>3</sup> Enterprise Saint John, 2004

<sup>4</sup> 2001 Statistics Canada Census

<sup>5</sup> Survey of high school graduates who between September 2002 and May 2003 participated in post-secondary education, Enterprise Saint John 2004.

residents and organizations can significantly reduce poverty if we make five important cultural shifts on how we approach the issue:

1. Away from a culture that emphasizes alleviating the effects of poverty towards a culture that focuses on reducing poverty;
2. Away from a culture that promotes quick fixes to reduce poverty towards a culture that thinks comprehensively about poverty and strives to address its root causes;
3. Away from a culture of individual, isolated efforts towards a culture of multisectoral collaboration, weaving together skills, knowledge, resources and efforts;
4. Away from a culture of blaming different people and sectors for poverty, towards a culture that recognizes that everyone is part of the problem and everyone is part of the solution;
5. Away from a culture that emphasizes cautious, short-term responses to poverty towards one that emphasizes innovation, risk-taking and long-term change.

Vibrant Communities Saint John wants everyone in Greater Saint John to benefit from the current and future rewards of a robust economy and healthy community. It will help reduce the tax burden for social assistance programs, lessen health and public safety service needs, strengthen employment opportunities, and create more personal and household wealth for re-investment into the local economy.

We are encouraged by the local conditions that will enable our success. The community is mobilized around the Saint John Growth Strategy; numerous groups and coalitions are effectively working on pieces of the poverty puzzle; and there is multi-sector commitment to a Poverty Reduction Strategy for Saint John.

The initiation of a poverty reduction strategy began in 2002, when Saint John was one of 15 communities who accepted an invitation from Vibrant Communities Canada to participate in a competitive 3-stage funding process that would enable our community to develop and undertake a comprehensive poverty reduction plan. Vibrant Communities provided the resources to engage Saint John leaders in Phase One<sup>6</sup> of the process.

Phase One involved gauging the level of local interest in further exploring the national Vibrant Communities initiative. The results were clear. Eight focus groups involving people from diverse sectors gave full support for further community involvement as well as personal desire to participate. Vibrant Communities then provided Saint John with a

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<sup>6</sup> See Appendix C for more information on Phase One.

further contribution for Phase Two<sup>7</sup> - the development of a comprehensive plan to reduce poverty in Saint John.

Phase Two began with the formation of the G SJ Vibrant Communities Roundtable<sup>8</sup> - a leadership group representing the four sectors - government, business, community and people living in poverty. A consultant was engaged to assist the local roundtable in developing the poverty reduction plan. Funding enabled Saint John to re-engage the local community, and this time, to determine a viable poverty reduction goal and the key strategies to achieve it. The engagement of 37 key informants and two community forums (June 25, 2003 and June 2, 2004), involving 78 leaders from business, community, government and non-profit organizations helped the Roundtable determine the poverty reduction goals and the strategies to attain them.

The process of Vibrant Communities is about building community capacity to achieve shared community goals. The desired goals cannot be achieved by any one sector, but must involve capacity building among all sectors. This is the true essence of collaboration. The following table outlines various attributes by sector that will enable change in the Vibrant Communities initiative.

<p><b>Business: Influence and leverage</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• access to leadership</li> <li>• influence</li> <li>• access to capital and in-kind resources</li> <li>• drive for results and focus</li> </ul>	<p><b>People in Poverty: Grounding solutions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• interprets the realities</li> <li>• surfaces the contradictions</li> <li>• advises on the practical implications of a strategy</li> <li>• mobilizes passion and commitment</li> </ul>
<p><b>Organizations: Community Process</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• diversity of program offerings</li> <li>• on the ground experience</li> <li>• source of social innovation</li> <li>• understanding process brings engagement</li> </ul>	<p><b>Government: Serving the public</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• access to leadership</li> <li>• ultimately responsible for policy change</li> <li>• large delivery systems for services and programs</li> </ul>
<p>Vibrant Communities is the means to engage all sectors in a common purpose to reduce poverty.</p>	

Strengthening and continuing the development of a community however is no simple task. It is not something that can be simply laid out or formally mandated. Throughout the process of Vibrant Communities planning, tensions between sectors and perspectives have emerged on various issues. This is not only predictable but a necessary and fundamental aspect of collaboration. Vibrant Communities is about building capacity among the sectors towards a common community purpose of reducing poverty understanding. There is a demonstrated

<sup>7</sup> See Appendix D for more information on Phase Two

<sup>8</sup> See Appendix A for membership of the Leadership Roundtable

shared interest in the greater good of poverty reduction and a belief that by working together more is possible. Ultimately, this belief is the community's greatest asset.

## **FIVE CORE OPERATING PRINCIPLES**

Vibrant Communities Saint John is based on five core operating principles that are reflected throughout the Poverty Reduction Strategy - in our theories of change, our strategies and the approaches to the three areas of concentration. They are as follows:

1. We support a developmental approach that will engage local leaders from all sectors to build the capacity of our community to reduce poverty.
2. We are committed to identifying barriers to exiting poverty and addressing the factors (root causes) that cause poverty.
3. We believe in shared learning where research, innovative action and evaluation are communicated back to the community.
4. We focus on the strengths and assets of our community.
5. We are committed to ensuring our strategy reflects: comprehensive thinking and action, multi-sectoral collaboration, community asset building, and community learning and change.

## **GOALS FOR VIBRANT COMMUNITIES CANADA**

Vibrant Communities Canada has identified several targets for the work of the Pan-Canadian initiative. The five Trail Builder communities<sup>9</sup> will strengthen their capacity to reduce poverty, and as a result, assist a minimum of 5,000 low-income households to improve their circumstances by:

- Securing new or improved employment;
- Increasing personal and household incomes;
- Acquiring personal financial assets; or,
- Obtaining knowledge, skills and work experience that enhance employability.

In addition, their collective goal is to:

- Engage 250 non-profit organizations and government agencies, 100 low-income leaders and 100 businesses in those communities to join us in implementing poverty-reduction plans.

## **GOALS FOR VIBRANT COMMUNITIES SAINT JOHN**

Vibrant Communities Saint John has set two goals:

- a **10 Year "Vibrant Communities" Goal**: to reduce poverty in the City of Saint John from its current 24.5% to the national average of 16.2%<sup>10</sup> assisting **8,200 individuals**; and

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<sup>9</sup> To date, Victoria and the Niagara Region have moved to being Trail Builder Communities

<sup>10</sup> Source: Statistics Canada, 2001

- a **3 Year “Vibrant Communities” Goal** to assist **2000 individuals** (800 households) in continuing their journey out of poverty, through strategic interventions in the five asset areas of human, financial, social, personal, and physical. This will reduce the poverty rate by 3% (from 24% to 21%), but more importantly will prepare the foundation for achieving the **10 year goal**. Our **3 year goal** will also contribute to 16% of the national goal.

Vibrant Communities Saint John projects that its efforts will engage the leadership of:

- **40** Non-Profit organizations and Government agencies
- **16** Individuals who are living the experience of poverty and
- **16** Businesses

## THREE AREAS OF STRATEGIC CONCENTRATION

Our Poverty Reduction Strategy will focus on three areas of strategic concentration. These three areas were determined by the community to be the most significant in contributing to sustainable quality of life improvements:

1. **Investing in children and youth – comprehensive learning and leisure opportunities for families**
2. **Education to Employment – accessible and appropriate work readiness skill development leading to employment**
3. **Safe and Affordable housing for individuals and families**

These sustainable quality of life improvements will increase the assets of our community by “leveling the playing field”: by building the assets of children and youth living in poverty; increasing the personal and financial assets of parents; providing individuals and families with educational and employment opportunities; and reducing basic living expenses associated with housing.

## THEORIES OF CHANGE

Vibrant Communities Saint John believes that poverty affects all sectors of our society and requires a shared responsibility for action. Our poverty reduction strategy will be guided by six theories, each of which builds on the other. These theories will help us to better understand the **complexity** of poverty - its depth and breadth; and the **comprehensive changes** required - through interventions with people, practice (services and programs in the community) and policies. The six theories are as follows:

### *Depth*

- **Mineshaft Model**<sup>11</sup> recognizes that some individuals face more significant challenges and barriers to getting out of poverty and may require supports that are often more intensive and longer term.

### *Breadth*

- **Sustainable Livelihoods Framework and the Five Asset Building Blocks**<sup>12</sup> promotes an asset based approach to analyzing the situation of individuals living in poverty.

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<sup>11</sup> See Appendix E for a description of the Poverty Mineshaft

Identifying what individuals have and need in the five asset building blocks - financial, social, human, personal and physical - is vital to a successful transition out of poverty

### *People*

- **Behaviour Change** refers to the information, motivation and skills that individuals must have in order to acquire the five asset building blocks.

### *Practice*

- **Health Promotion Best Practices** enable individuals to take greater control over their well-being because services are accessible, comprehensive and effective. They are: available to all within a positive learning environment; cover the five asset building blocks (financial, social, human, personal and physical); promote shared responsibility by the individual, service, and the system; are sensitive to the needs of individuals; and operate with careful planning, realistic evaluation and responsiveness.

### *Policies*

- **Responsive Policies provide for a Basic Income Support System** - that provides an adequate income for people who are unable to work and for individuals who are working towards paid employment, including: *training allowances* to assist individuals with learning opportunities and skill development; and *transitional supports* for daycare, transportation and health insurance.<sup>13</sup>

### *Learning*

- **Community Learning is a prerequisite to "change"** - Ongoing investment in learning is the basis for human development and community well-being<sup>14</sup>. "Experience is a great teacher but only if you pay attention to it". The key to learning is active engagement with the information - what can be learned from a given effort. It involves a process that entails the exploration, discussion and implementation, all with a focus on continuing improvement.

## **STRATEGIES**

The following key strategies form the basis for Vibrant Communities of Saint John's method for **moving forward** on our **Poverty Reduction Strategy**. They will be applied to the three areas of concentration and implemented through a structure of Vibrant Communities Leadership Roundtable, Working Groups, Committees, community partnerships, and qualified staff. The strategies are as follows:

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<sup>12</sup> For more information on the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework see Appendix F or visit the website, [www.ekonomos.com](http://www.ekonomos.com).

<sup>13</sup> Information presented by Caledon Institute for Social Policy at a Working Conference on Strategies to ensure Economic Security for All Canadians, 2003.

<sup>14</sup> Drawn from Learning and Evaluation for Poverty Reduction, S. Torjman & E. Levitan-Reid, Caledon Institute of Social Policy, March 2004

1. **Engage the leadership** from all sectors into a robust network committed to achieving our common poverty reduction goals.
2. **Help people move forward in their journey out of poverty** through the encouragement and guidance of "mentors"<sup>15</sup>.
3. **Strengthen the collective capacity of the community** to reduce poverty
4. **Measure our impact** by evaluating what works and doesn't work and documenting the key advancements and learnings.
5. **Communicate our community's learnings and progress** both internally to Vibrant Communities network and externally to the community.
6. **Champion continuous engagement, learning and improvement** in poverty reduction efforts among all sectors of the community.

## IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGIES

### #1 ENGAGE THE LEADERSHIP

Success for the Vibrant Communities Initiative is based on the broad involvement of: individuals living in poverty who are facing challenges in the three areas of concentration; community agencies and government departments currently providing services in these areas; members of the faith, business and labour communities; and citizens at large.

**Saint John Vibrant Communities Leadership Roundtable** operates with a multi-sectoral membership and will continue to operate as a leader, guiding the poverty reduction strategy and its components. It will be responsible for analyzing the activities and results, communicating the learnings and championing change at the policy and practice levels. Individual members will lead different components of the Poverty Reduction Strategy. The Leadership Roundtable will report to the community as a whole.

**Engage the leadership**  
from all sectors into a robust network committed to our poverty reduction goals

**Accountability Structure:** The Business Community Anti-Poverty Initiative<sup>16</sup> (BCAPI) has agreed to continue to be the local convening and sponsoring organization. It will be accountable for all the legal, human resource, and financial responsibilities related to this initiative. The chair of the Leadership Roundtable will be appointed by the BCAPI and report to the BCAPI Cabinet<sup>17</sup>. A BCAPI Co-Chair and two additional business members will also be appointed to the Roundtable. BCAPI's coordinator will participate as a non-voting member of the Leadership Roundtable and will manage the Vibrant Communities staff. BCAPI will also continue to serve as the main communication link with Vibrant Communities Canada. The relationship with BCAPI will provide for accountability but also be the conduit for involving the business community in our poverty reduction strategy.

<sup>15</sup> Mentor from the Greek legend - the loyal friend and wise adviser

<sup>16</sup> See Appendix G for information on the Business Community Anti-Poverty Initiative

<sup>17</sup> The Cabinet consists of business and community leaders and guides the operation of BCAPI.

**Working Groups and Committees:** The three areas of concentration - Investing in Children and Youth, Education to Employment and Safe and Affordable Housing will be overseen by working groups, which are described later in the document. The following committees will guide the strategy along with the working groups: Mentoring Support, Learning and Communications, and Research and Evaluation.

Working Groups and committees will be represented on the Vibrant Communities Leadership Roundtable and will work with Vibrant Communities staff in the development, implementation, analyzing and evaluation of the poverty reduction strategy. Membership will be multi-sectoral and will be drawn from groups working and volunteering in these areas, and will involve individuals affected by the issues, and also interested community members from business, churches and labour who want to contribute their skills.

**Community Partners:** Working groups will have a larger network of "Community Partners", individuals and organizations interested in contributing to each area of concentration. It will be a priority to share the learnings with our community partners to build the momentum for change.

## **#2 HELP PEOPLE MOVE FORWARD IN THEIR JOURNEY OUT OF POVERTY THROUGH MENTORING**

Individuals living in poverty often "fall through the cracks" as they move from one service to another. Previous research indicates that often individuals living in poverty lack a support network<sup>18</sup>. The Vibrant Communities Initiative will connect, in a mentoring or coaching role, to support individuals experiencing barriers in their journey out of poverty and to support service providers in their role of connecting individuals to new opportunities. This means being prepared to connect individuals and service providers to supports in the community they may not be aware of, provide encouragement when challenges are being worked through, and advocate on their behalf when necessary. The mentoring role is three fold:

- Ensuring familiarity with existing services and that they are documented on the Community Services database of the Human Development Council as well as on other vital information sources used by government agencies and community organizations.
- Connecting with individuals who live in poverty through agency or self-referral and providing mentoring services on an individual and/or group basis.
- Documenting the experiences and reporting the common learnings of what is and isn't working in efforts to support people, improve service connections and reduce barriers to progress.

Help people move forward in their journey out of poverty through the encouragement and guidance of "mentors".

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<sup>18</sup> Identified as a concern through an initiative with Urban Core Support Network and Vibrant Communities Canada, culminating in the report Moving On, a Gender Based Analysis on Poverty Reduction in Saint John, focusing on men and women in education, training and employment programs.

Through partnerships with agencies, we will work with individuals living in poverty who are willing to be involved in the mentoring relationship as they are ready to move from one service to another. Mentoring will occur on a one on one basis and in small group sessions which will help facilitate additional supports among their peers and enrich their learnings.

In the first year staff will be working with:

- At risk teens/young adults referred to us through The Resource Centre for Youth Project network.
- Pregnant and parenting teens referred to us through the Greater Saint John Teen Pregnancy Committee network.
- Individuals leaving the literacy and upgrading programs
- Families in subsidized housing who are currently involved in non-profit and cooperative housing.

We will keep agencies and organizations informed of the successes and challenges experienced by individuals who are working to step out of poverty and will document the trends and communicate the stories of individuals and the experiences of service providers. The reports and stories will contribute to our learnings and help focus our common agenda for improvement and change.

The mentoring role is integral to our poverty reduction strategy, keeping us grounded in the actual experiences of individuals, providing information on trends, helping us measure our impact, and guiding how we communicate our learnings, address what is missing and champion needed changes. This will also ensure that individuals living in poverty are integral players to strengthening each area of concentration.

A Mentoring Support Committee will be established to guide the staff. Membership will include organizations with an interest or experience in providing follow-up coaching for their participants. The staff's responsibilities will include developing and conducting one-on-one and group processes for mutual support and learning, documentation, analysis and reporting, and follow-up on the experiences, progress and learnings.

As our understanding of this role grows, it is our plan to expand. The mentoring role will provide opportunities for others to become involved, through learning forums, internships, "stretching" of roles of service providers, secondments, recruitment of volunteer mentors and, possibly, coaching contracts with individuals who have lived the experience.

### **#3 STRENGTHEN THE COLLECTIVE CAPACITY OF THE COMMUNITY**

Saint John is very proud of its caring community - the work of non-profit and government agencies, their partnerships with one another and with other sectors of the community, particularly the business and religious communities and people who live in poverty. We are cognizant of the challenging environment for both non-profit and government agencies with limited funding and increasing needs<sup>19</sup>. Our involvement with the community in each area of concentration will acknowledge this challenging environment and at the same time provide

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<sup>19</sup> Most recently a number of agencies working with individuals living in poverty received substantial decreases in their funding from the Province of New Brunswick.

opportunities to examine how services are delivered, individually and collectively and how other sectors are involved or could become involved. Encouraging and helping our community to effect change will involve approaches that are:

- **Responsive:** assisting agencies in analyzing the impact of their practices and the gaps and the means to strengthen their approach, as well as, address sustainability challenges.
- **Knowledgeable:** Providing research expertise that gathers information on statistics, trends and best practices. The community will take full advantage of the relationship with Vibrant Communities Canada to learn from outside expertise.
- **Multi-sectoral:** Encouraging all sectors of the community to become involved in our poverty reduction strategy and promoting these experiences to the broader community.

The following situation in the area of **Investing in children and youth** illustrates how we can strengthen the knowledge capacity of our community. Through Vibrant Communities staff, we can research innovative approaches from communities offering Early Learning Centres and School Partnerships with businesses and community to strengthen child/youth/parent development. The Investing in Children and Youth Working Group could then explore opportunities for, and the mechanics of, offering similar services in our community. The Vibrant Communities Leadership Roundtable could then help to communicate and champion their findings and recommendations.

We can strengthen the knowledge capacity of agencies by researching innovative approaches from communities offering Early Learning Centres.

#### **#4 MEASURE OUR IMPACT**

Frequently, there is insufficient resources and expertise to evaluate and document our impact on helping people. As the Poverty Reduction Strategy unfolds, we will be measuring our impact in quantitative and qualitative ways - how many people are being affected in their journey out of poverty, and in what ways and through what means. We will incorporate the work of community agencies in assessing and documenting their impact on individuals living in poverty.

Measuring our impact will be an important "value added" component of our Poverty Reduction Strategy, analyzing what is and isn't working. It will involve many partners. We will encourage the whole community to become involved in helping us meet our Poverty Reduction Strategy goal by helping to identify and document their experiences and involvements in assisting individuals out of poverty. This will enable us to pool our community's learnings and progress.

First, we will determine a base-line of indicators:

- High level outcome indicators (such as teen pregnancy rates, crime rates; literacy levels)
- Impact indicators - quantitative and qualitative data on the poverty reduction journeys and progress of individuals and families; program/service evaluations; and findings within our three areas of concentrations - needs, assets, and priorities

- Process indicators on how we are building community capacity

These indicators must be easily understood by the community and supported by Vibrant Communities Canada. The Working Groups, Committees and staff will establish a tracking system to measure the progress within each indicator.

With our common goal, poverty reduction and capacity building indicators, and a tracking system, we will be able to demonstrate where and how we are assisting individuals in their journey out of poverty, what can be learnt from these experiences and where improvements can be made.

Information gathered within each of the three areas of concentration will also be integrated into the achievements, trends, and recommendations for the Vibrant Communities Roundtable and community.

The following description in the area of **Safe and Affordable housing for individuals and families** illustrates ways of measuring our impact. Indicators of success will be developed to measure ways that an individual's housing situation has improved, and will include: 1) no longer needing subsidized housing, and 2) an increased number of partners who are building/providing affordable housing.

Individuals and families living in non-profit and public housing will be connected to the "mentoring component" to support and document their next steps into private sector housing.

The Safe and Affordable Housing Working Group and staff will develop a profile on affordable housing to include the number of subsidized housing units compared to the demand, the experience of individuals moving beyond the need for

subsidized housing and the assessments of non-profit and private agencies in providing affordable housing units and other supports. Our tracking system will ensure we know how many people are moving forward in their journey out of poverty. All this information will be drawn together documenting progress, key learnings and recommendations for action, such as the priorities for an Affordable Housing Strategy. The information will then be presented to the Vibrant Communities Leadership Roundtable for guidance and strengthened leadership.

As an example, the community will better understand the impact of poor housing on individuals and families, resulting in new partners committed to action.

#### **#5 COMMUNICATE OUR COMMUNITY'S LEARNINGS AND PROGRESS**

The Poverty Reduction Strategy will encompass a great deal of information about our community - for example, how we are addressing the needs and challenges of individuals living in poverty and with what results, what are the gaps and why, and how are the different sectors of our community involved.

An accessible and integrated learning strategy will be developed, enabling our community to benefit from the information, and thus promoting greater understanding, analysis and reflection on the barriers and solutions to the issue of poverty. Becoming more of a learning community will in turn foster an environment for change.

Our learning strategy will entail many components, for the community as a whole, for our partner organizations, and for others outside of the community who are interested in being involved and following our progress. It will be important to ensure that our learning strategy reaches out to all sectors which in turn will promote cross fertilization of new thinking and resources.

#### ***Learning with the community as a whole***

Our intent is to help the community better understand the challenges of individuals living in poverty and the need for the community's involvement in contributing to solutions.

- **Promotion** - The Greater Saint John Growth Strategy and others have offered to be ambassadors for the Poverty Reduction Strategy and help in its promotion.
- **Celebrations** - work with the media to celebrate becoming one of the five Trail Building Communities in Canada. Also learn from the experiences of other Trail Building Communities re the kinds of annual events to celebrate our experiences, our successes and our learnings.
- **Media coverage** - work with the media to identify mechanisms to keep our progress in the public eye; an example could be one newspaper reporter assigned to the "Vibrant Communities beat".

#### ***Learning with our partners***

We want to assist existing services in our three areas of concentration and others to strengthen their capacity for effectiveness and sustainability.

- **Mentoring:** Learning from the experiences of individuals who are being mentored and from those who mentor and communicating through discussion and documentation.
- **Pan-Canadian:** Increased participation in the Pan-Canadian Learning Community (through coaching, teleconferences and regional and national forums) organized by Vibrant Communities Canada. With staff resources we will be able to promote broader local participation and benefit from sharing experiences and learning new approaches from across Canada.
- **Convening local meetings** and Think Tanks to reflect on specific issues related to the three areas of concentration.
- **Establishing Policy Dialogues**, bringing together multisectoral representation to discuss, learn and influence changes to policies, based on information of facts and stories.
- **Annual "Report Card"** will be developed and promoted both internally and externally, serving as benchmarks to demonstrate changes for people, practices and policies. This will bring alive the work of gathering and tracking information and statistics and of course be accompanied by our stories.

Ensuring a strong and "vibrant" learning community will be the focus of the Learning and Communication Committee who, with the help of staff, will develop and guide the overall learning strategy. This will help to foster a learning culture integrated into our everyday activities.

#### ***Communication Vehicles***

- **Change for Champions**<sup>20</sup>, an E-bulletin that becomes the trademark for our Poverty Reduction Strategy, relaying the stories of our experiences, successes, and changes. This will be dynamic, easily read and promoted broadly, through paper and electronic formats.
- **Biannual newsletter** with the assistance of the Human Development Council to more comprehensively tell our story, two times per year.
- **Internal Committees** formed within the larger organizations (i.e., school districts, regional health authority) to focus on poverty reduction, has been suggested, as one effective learning vehicle.
- **Website** for Vibrant Communities Saint John and links from other sites to the VCSJ address.

Overall, Vibrant Communities Saint John will inspire the community, attracting greater involvement and the building of knowledgeable leaders for the future. In addition, and as we gain confidence, Vibrant Communities SJ will seek to inspire others from outside our community to take on the poverty reduction challenge.

#### **#6 CHAMPION CONTINUOUS ENGAGEMENT, LEARNING AND IMPROVEMENT**

An important component of the Poverty Reduction Strategy will be learning what is working and what needs to change. The emphasis on people and practice will provide the evidence, analysis and support for more responsive policies and practices. Policy has usually been the prerogative of government, but there is a growing realization that communities can contribute in a meaningful way because of direct links to individuals and the issues.

The Vibrant Communities Leadership Roundtable will play a vital role in championing the recommendations gleaned from our progress and our learnings. Its multisectoral membership will provide a comprehensive approach in examining issues and challenges. This will position Vibrant Communities to identify priorities and champion needed changes on behalf of the community as a whole to agencies, governments, businesses and others.

Close working relationships between the Vibrant Communities Leadership Roundtable, Working Groups, Committees, and staff will be paramount. Creative mechanisms such as the establishment of policy dialogues, Think Tanks, pilot projects and documents such as the Report Card will be continually utilized and evaluated to ensure the most effective method of moving recommendations forward.

### **MOVING FORWARD: THREE AREAS OF CONCENTRATION**

Vibrant Communities has identified possible objectives, outcomes and first year focus for each area, based on our community's current knowledge of the issues. We have targeted the number of individuals and households who will benefit in moving forward on their journey out of poverty. The next step will

- |  |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Investing in Children and Youth</li> <li>2) Education to Employment</li> <li>3) Safe and Affordable Housing</li> </ol> |
|--|

<sup>20</sup> One possible name for a 'communique' that portrays the stories, our learnings and our prog

be for the Working Groups, Committees, and staff to clearly define priorities and strategies.

## **INVESTING IN CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

**Area: Investing in Children and Youth - comprehensive learning and leisure opportunities for families**

### **Objectives:**

- Accessible and quality child care and comprehensive learning opportunities for children up to the age of 5 and their parents.
- Parents with access to education, including life skills and parenting
- Increased recreational, life skills and cultural opportunities for children and youth
- Involvement of business and the community in schools in low income neighborhoods of the city.
- Integrated and collaborative community supports for teens and young adults in the areas of health, education, work readiness, recreation and citizenship

### **Desired Outcomes in three years**

- Enhanced access to quality child care for children 0-5 years, particularly those living in poverty.
- Implementation of a Saint John early childhood development strategy for children 0-5 years and their parents.
- More opportunities for children and youth living in poverty to participate in school and community life and learning, through the mobilization of community assets.
- 500 children, youth and parents will benefit from practice and policy interventions that include increased accessible, quality and affordable childcare services, recreational and cultural opportunities and partnerships of schools, businesses and the community.

<p><b>500</b> children, youth and parents will benefit in the area of Investing in Children and Youth</p>
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### **First Year Activities**

The focus for the first year will be to establish a Working Group that will guide staff in their work with community partners who are already actively working together to improve services. It will identify the assets, gaps and issues, and policy solutions in each of three areas:

- Early Childhood - 0 to 5 years of age - Identifying the policy gaps and barriers from the Childcare Study being conducted in the near future by the Early Childhood Coalition
- Children - 5 to 12 age group - Document the progress and challenges of Pro-Kids (organization that raises money to support the participation of low income children and youth in recreational and leisure activities) and PALS (business mentoring with children in school) to identify assets and gaps; and
- Teens - 12 to 19 - Follow the progress and policy challenges of the Resource Centre for Youth (TRC) Project. In addition staff will be mentoring at risk and pregnant and parenting teens referred by the TRC and Greater Saint John Teen Pregnancy

Committee networks. Documentation of their stories will also provide learnings on issues related to policy barriers.

This emphasis will enable our community to more clearly document the policy implications and issues related in Investing in Children and Youth. Staff will be responsible for coordinating meetings, research and analysis, including an inventory of assets and gaps, documentation, and identifying key learnings.

**Proposed Partners to involve**

Atlantic Health Sciences Corporation  
Big Brothers Big Sisters  
Boys and Girls Club  
Centenary Queen Square Day Care  
Children & Youth in Poverty Living with a Chronic Condition  
City of Saint John  
Community Health Centre  
Community Mental Health Services  
Dads Making a Difference  
Early Childhood Development Coalition  
(includes some of the groups already mentioned)  
Early Intervention Program  
Faith Community  
Family & Community Services  
Family Resource Centre

Family Plus Life Solutions  
First Steps Housing Project Inc  
Healthy Communities: Healthy Youth  
PRO Kids  
Public Health  
Public Safety  
Saint John YM-YWCA  
School Districts 8 (+ Samuel de Champlain)  
Single Parent Family Working Group of BCAPI  
The Resource Centre for Youth (TRC)  
Victorian Order of Nurses - Healthy Baby and Me

**EDUCATION TO EMPLOYMENT**

**Area: Accessible And Appropriate Work Readiness Skill Development Leading To Employment**

**Objectives:**

- Supported transition from income assistance to employment incorporating childcare, health insurance and transportation supports
- Flexible and achievable educational opportunities for youth and adults who lack a high school education
- Strengthened work readiness skills for youth and adults with limited employment experience
- Increased community economic development opportunities for individuals living in poverty.
- More opportunities for individuals receiving social assistance to increase personal assets without income loss.

**Desired Outcomes in three years:**

- A Saint John Learning to Employment Strategy has been defined and supported and implementation is underway.
- **500 youth and adults** will benefit from practice and policy interventions that improve mentoring services and linkages to new opportunities, increase access to upgrading, education and training, and increase employment opportunities for people living in poverty.

**500** youth and adults will benefit in the area of Accessible And Appropriate Work Readiness Skill Development Leading To Employment.

**First Year Focus**

An Education to Employment Working Group of front line staff and volunteers and people living in poverty will be established to oversee the initial work for this area of concentration. The focus will be on information gathering, through an inventory of assets and gaps of current programs and policies that aim to support individuals in improving their reading, writing and math skills and making the transition to further education or employment. This work will build on previous research in our community, and will identify priority issues and best-practice solutions. It will incorporate learnings from the mentoring role with adults moving from literacy and upgrading programs.

**Proposed Partners to Involve**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| Community Loan Fund                                  | New Brunswick Community College          |
| Coverdale Women's Centre                             | New Lease                                |
| Education and Employment Working Group of BCIPI      | Options Outreach                         |
| Enterprise Saint John & GSJ Economic Growth Strategy | Saint John Learning Exchange             |
| Family & Community Services                          | School District 6 & 8                    |
| Human Resources and Skill Development Canada (HRSD)  | Training and Employment Development      |
| John Howard Society                                  | University of New Brunswick - Saint John |
|  | Urban Core Support Network               |
|  | Women and Self-Esteem Program            |
|  | YM-YWCA                                  |

**SAFE AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING WORKING GROUP**

**Area: Safe and Affordable Housing For Individuals And Families**

**Objectives:**

- Examine best practices and the range of opportunities to provide affordable housing (i.e. financing, policy).
- Mobilize efforts to provide additional units of safe and affordable housing for individuals and families.
- Assist individuals in making the transition from non-profit and public housing to private sector housing or home ownership through learning opportunities and coaching supports.

**330 households or 1000 individuals** will benefit from affordable and safe housing.

**Desired Outcomes in three years:**

- A safe and affordable housing strategy has been defined and supported by the community and implementation is underway.

- **330 households (1000 individuals)** have been assisted through practice and policy interventions resulting in: increased # of affordable and safe housing units, increased # of households who no longer require subsidized housing and have made the transition to home ownership or the private rental market; decreased # of substandard houses in SJ.

**First Year of Focus**

Individuals and families living in non-profit and cooperative housing will be connected to the "mentoring component" to help address their priorities and needs as they continue in their poverty reduction journey. Assets, progress, barriers and gaps will be documented. Current housing groups will collaborate in efforts to ensure SJ receives its fair share of government funds for the development of affordable housing units and to initiate a community-driven process to develop and implement a safe and affordable housing strategy for Saint John

**Proposed Partners to Involve**

- Architects Association
- Business Development Bank
- Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp.
- City of Saint John
- Enterprise Saint John
- Faith Communities
- Family & Community Services
- Financial Institutions
- First Steps Housing Project Inc.
- Habitat for Humanity
- Housing Alternatives / Rehabitat Inc.
- Housing Working Group of BCAPI
- Human Development Council
- Human Resources & Skills Development Canada
- New Directions
- Public Safety
- Rentalsman's Office
- Romero House
- Saint John SCPI Homelessness Committee
- Saint John Apartment Owners' Association
- Saint John Community Loan Fund
- Saint John Non-Profit Housing
- Saint John Real Estate Board
- Second Stage Housing
- Sisters of Charity
- Substandard Housing Committee
- Urban Core Support Network

**EVALUATION**

Vibrant Communities Leadership Roundtable, Working Groups, Committees, and staff will develop and agree upon common indicators of quality of life improvements based on the action plans in the three areas. Indicators will also benefit from the input of individuals living in poverty. As mentioned earlier, a tracking system will be developed and utilized to identify these indicators of success and the progress towards the SJ Vibrant Communities Poverty Reduction goal of assisting 2000 individuals in continuing their journey out of poverty.

The following chart summarizes the number of people living in poverty who will benefit from our Vibrant Communities Poverty Reduction Strategy.

Area of Concentration	Children, Youth and Parents	Education to Employment	Safe and Affordable Housing	Total
Type of Intervention				
Coaching	50	100	300	450
Practice (services & programs)	400	300	600	1300
Policy	50	100	100	250
<b>Total</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>1000</b>	<b>2000</b>

Within the three years, our Poverty Reduction Strategy will benefit a total of 2000 individuals or 800 households in their journey out of poverty.

Eko Nomos will assist Saint John in preparing a logic model as the base evaluation framework for more detailed planning and implementation.

## POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY TEAM

It will be the team of staff who will take day-to-day responsibility for mobilizing and supporting our community to achieve our Vibrant Communities 3 year Goal of helping 2000 individuals or 800 households move forward on their journey out of poverty. Key staff functions have been identified that will contribute to meeting our goal:

- Coordination, Learning and Reporting with Vibrant Communities Canada
- Mobilizing and involving the sectors
  - Saint John Vibrant Poverty Reduction Leadership Roundtable
  - Investing in Children and Youth Working Group
  - Education to Employment Working Group
  - Safe and Affordable Housing Working Group
  - Learning and Communications Committee
  - Research and Evaluation Committee
  - Mentoring Support Committee
- Mentoring individuals living in poverty on their journey out of poverty
  - Developing and marketing the mentoring program
  - Working with At-Risk, Pregnant and Parenting Teens
  - Working with individuals in literacy and upgrading programs.
  - Working with individuals living in Non-Profit and Cooperative Housing
- Researching and documenting our assets, barriers and gaps
  - Documenting data, stories and trends from Mentoring Program
  - Investing in Children and Youth - identify program and policy assets, barriers and gaps
  - Gathering and documenting information on assets, barriers and gaps with literacy, upgrading and work readiness programs and services
  - Gathering and documenting information on safe and affordable housing assets, barriers, gaps

- Describing Poverty
  - Research and collection of poverty data/stats
  - Documenting and communicating trends and stories
- Describing poverty reduction - what's working and what's not
  - Developing indicators, evaluation tools, tracking results and progress
  - Analysis of findings/learnings
  - Reporting findings/learnings
  - Recommending solutions
- Championing solutions and improvements
  - Policy dialogues, think tanks, learning forums, meetings, presentations
- Communicating and Celebrating
  - Researching and writing stories
  - Developing, updating and disseminating information via website, newsletters, communiqués
  - Public and media relations
  - Developing and updating database of contacts
  - Annual celebratory event
- Financial accounting/administration

### **Required Skills**

- Individual and group mentoring (personal development)
- Journalism - research and write stories
- Computer skills including website development and databases
- Marketing and Communications
- Community Development
- Project Development and Coordination/Management
- Organizational/Business Planning
- Social Development Research, Planning and Evaluation

Each position will assume a lead role for one or more of the functions. A variety of functions will be integral to each position and the outcome of the Vibrant Communities Initiative, which is why the concept of the team is so paramount. The staff positions will be contract positions and either full-time or project-based depending on needs. The staff team will report to the Vibrant Communities Leadership Roundtable through the Coordinator of the BCAPI.

The primary staff positions/roles are as follows:

### **Community Coach**

This position will be responsible for the Coaching/Mentoring role of Vibrant Communities, guiding individuals living in poverty moving from one service to another, advocating to ensure they do not fall between the cracks and assisting service providers/organizations in enhancing their mentorship and linking skills. This position will strengthen linkages between people and practice - referral, service, and followup - through the continuous involvement of agencies and individuals who live in poverty and want out. It will help agencies look at what changes can be made as we learn from our experiences.

The Community Coach will document the experiences, successes and learnings, report trends and make recommendations for improvements. The Community Coach will also, in time, work to further improve and develop the mentoring service by recruiting, training and involving other coaches through such means as secondments/internships, volunteering, service "stretching" and contracting with individuals who have lived the experience.

***Job Description***

- Development and operationalizing of the Mentoring Initiative
- Engagement and mentoring with individuals living in poverty
- Mentoring service providers/agencies within the three areas of concentration
- Contributing to the Community Services database
- Communicating with the three Working Groups
- Information gathering, documentation, analysis and reporting
- Development and implementation of an expanded mentoring strategy

**Social Planner**

This position is responsible for coordinating the Vibrant communities Learning Agenda and in guiding and supporting the gathering of information, strategies and action plans for each of the three areas of concentration. This will involve working with the Community Coach in the identification of barriers and gaps and the ways they can be reduced; a practice focus - working with all sectors of the community to develop and implement actions in the three areas of concentration and working with agencies to strengthen their operations; and a policy focus - working with the Community Researcher and others to identify and address policy barriers.

***Job Description***

- Coordinates the Vibrant Communities Learning Agenda and Communication Plan
- Coordinates and supports the activities of the three Working Groups
- Seeks out resources to support the various components of the Poverty Reduction Strategy
- Prepares funding proposals, as needs and opportunities are identified

**Community Researcher**

This position will be integral to gathering information, developing indicators and tools and providing the analysis needed for evidence based assessments and recommendations in actions that will make a difference to the lives of people living in poverty. The community researcher will develop indicators and tools to track the progress of individuals moving forward in their journey out of poverty. The position will work with agencies to measure and document their impact. Work will include pulling together and describing what we know about poverty and our community's assets and gaps. This position will also explore information on best practices to guide our work.

***Job Description***

- Development of an evaluation framework for the Poverty Reduction Strategy, identification of indicators and development of tools to measure progress and results

- Providing guidance to agencies in assessing impact of current practices
- Providing guidance to the Mentoring program to ensure good information gathering, analysis and reporting.
- Gathering information (stats, best practices, assets, gaps) as required for the Leadership Roundtable, Working Groups and Committees, and preparing reports.
- Researching, gathering and reporting information needed for policy discussions
- Creating a community profile of poverty.
- Lead role in the development of a Poverty Reduction Report card
- Applying for research monies
- Supporting Leadership Roundtable and Working Groups and Committees in their analyses, setting priorities and making recommendations.

#### **Public Relations/Communications Consultant**

This position will gather information from all aspects of the initiative and write stories and summary reports, prepare communication tools and broadly disseminate information that will promote, among all four sectors, continuous learning, enhanced involvement and successes in our individual and collective efforts to reduce poverty within Greater Saint John.

#### ***Job Description***

- Reporting stories and journeys of people living in poverty
- Reporting the people, practices and policies that help to reduce poverty and how this is done.
- Reporting the progress of the community in contributing to the Poverty Reduction Strategy.
- Preparing communication tools and disseminating information

#### **Coordination role**

- Overall coordination of poverty reduction strategy, and activities of staff and Leadership Roundtable
- Responsible for overall accountability of staff.

The Coordinator of BCAPI will assume this responsibility. Vibrant Communities will fund 1/3 of this position.