



COMMUNITIES

# Greater Saint John Poverty Reduction Strategy

New ways of working together to break the poverty cycle

October 2010

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Saint John is a caring community that demonstrates great commitment from individuals, community agencies, churches, businesses and governments to improve the quality of life for all citizens. We have a level of poverty that is unacceptable in our community and sustained effort and resources are required to truly reduce poverty. Vibrant Communities Saint John<sup>1</sup> was created in 2004 to support the development and implementation of a poverty reduction plan in Saint John. The global objective to reduce poverty in Saint John to the National average (15%) from 28%, at the time by 2015. A second objective to reduce the child poverty rate to single digits from 28% by 2020 was set in 2009.

The Vibrant Communities Saint John's Leadership Roundtable is the mechanism through which the Greater Saint John Poverty Reduction Strategy is stewarded. The Leadership Roundtable (see Appendix A for list of Leadership Roundtable members) has representatives from each of the five priority neighbourhoods, community organizations, the business community, and government. VCSJ does not provide direct services but has the mandate to weave together the numerous community and government efforts aimed at poverty reduction and community revitalization.

Vibrant Communities Saint John:

1. brings together community leaders to share, strategize, and champion a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy;
2. provides knowledge and data about poverty to inform community planning;
3. is a voice to government, business, and the community about poverty in Saint John; and
4. encourages coordination and collaboration among individuals living in poverty, community organizations, business and government.

A poverty reduction plan was drafted in 2005 with the objective of reaching 2000 families by 2008. This objective was surpassed by 50%; 3000 lives were affected. The plan was revised in late 2008.

Four strategy elements - neighbourhood revitalization, single parents, children and youth, and workforce participation - provide an opportunity for investment and action. While the elements are presented separately they are interconnected, demonstrating the need for a comprehensive and holistic approach. Descriptions of each element of the strategy are presented below.

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<sup>1</sup> Vibrant Communities Saint John is part of Vibrant Communities Canada, a pan-Canadian poverty reduction project funded by the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation in partnership with Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement. The key partners involved in forming Vibrant Communities Saint John were the Human Development Council, the Urban Core Support Network, the Business Community Anti-Poverty Initiative and the City of Saint John.

In order to achieve the actions set out by the strategy elements, VCSJ partners and staff build collaborative efforts and leadership capacity and advocate for policy improvements. Vibrant Communities Saint John has also dedicated resources to evaluating and monitoring progress towards poverty reduction. In addition, funds have been utilized to better understand our

## GREATER SAINT JOHN'S POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY

### NEW WAYS OF WORKING TOGETHER TO BREAK THE POVERTY CYCLE

#### Strategy Elements

##### Neighbourhood Revitalization

- \* Resident mobilization and training
- \* Housing Strategy
- \* Social, physical, and economic improvements
- \* Mixed Income Neighbourhoods

##### Single Parents

- Comprehensive programs and supports:
- \* Adequate and Affordable Housing Strategy
  - \* Childcare
  - \* School completion
  - \* Parenting
  - \* Health and Wellness

##### Children and Youth

- Level the playing field:
- \* Early Learning Centres
  - \* School Supports / Community Schools
  - \* Youth Programs / Engagement / Leadership
  - \* Coordination of Services

##### Workforce Participation

- \* Multiple Pathways and supports
- \* Remove barriers: childcare, transportation, health insurance, tuition
- \* Employer Leadership
- \* Living wage replaces minimum wage

#### How we do it!



community through local research (Poverty and Plenty, Youth at Risk) and promising practices from other jurisdictions have been explored with learnings applied to Saint John when appropriate.

#### Neighbourhood Revitalization

This strategy targets five neighbourhoods: Crescent Valley, the South End, the Lower West Side, the Old North End and the Village, each of which have high rates of poverty, ranging from 36 to over 60% of residents living in poverty. Our community describes these areas as priority neighbourhoods because of their high poverty rates, percentage of single parents, and their low

levels of education and labour force participation. Four of the five priority neighbourhoods experienced reduced poverty rates from 2001 to 2006.<sup>2</sup>

Research shows that moving residents from high poverty neighbourhoods does not result in long-term improved outcomes (e.g., education or employment)<sup>3</sup>. Rather, in Saint John our community proposes to reduce poverty rates by a multifaceted approach to address critical neighbourhood issues. We believe neighbourhood revitalization can be achieved if we have the following in place:

1. Resident mobilization and training
2. Housing strategy; mixed income neighbourhoods.
3. Improvements to social, physical, and economic infrastructure,

➤ **Resident Mobilization**

The community and all levels of government must work in concert to build neighbourhood leadership and capacity to drive neighbourhood improvements. Saint John's priority neighbourhoods are mobilizing and residents are increasingly involved. Residents are informing priorities and approaches, as well as attracting new services and resources to their neighbourhoods. Some specific strategies to build the capacity within neighbourhoods are:

**Neighbourhood Assistants**

The participation and input of people living in poverty are vital to the relevance and success of multi-sectoral poverty reduction initiatives. Getting people out to community events especially when they are struggling to meet family and job commitments and overcoming hopelessness can be a difficult task. However, attending an event can be the first step in building relationships with neighbours and learning about useful community-based programs and activities. It all starts with the right invitation. Vibrant Communities employs a resident from each priority neighbourhood to help engage the community from the inside.

**Neighbourhood Community Developer**

Vibrant Communities also employs a Neighbourhood Community Developer who works with neighbourhood groups and Neighbourhood Assistants to support resident engagement and cross neighbourhood sharing.

**Neighbourhood Staff and Groups**

Each of the priority neighbourhoods has at least one group of residents who come together to improve their neighbourhood. These include:

- Old North End - ONE Change
- Crescent Valley - Crescent Valley Resource Centre and Crescent Valley Community Tenants Association

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<sup>2</sup> For more details about priority neighbourhoods, refer to Poverty and Plenty (2005) and Poverty and Plenty II (2008) [www.sjhdc.ca](http://www.sjhdc.ca)

<sup>3</sup> Popkin, Levy and Buron (2009)

- South End - South Central Citizen's Council, PULSE (People United in the Lower South End), SEACAT (South End Area Community Action Team)
- Waterloo Village - The Village Association, Courtenay Bay Tenants Association, Stephen's Tower Tenants Association
- Lower West Side - Westside PACT (Police and Community Together)

Many programs and services are offered to residents through these neighbourhood groups. In addition, some neighbourhoods have staff whose roles differ based on the needs and funding source. For instance, ONE Change has staff who coordinate the neighbourhood and others who deliver programs to youth. Crescent Valley has a Resource Centre Coordinator who organizes programming for residents. The Lower West Side has a Wellness Liaison to organize programs in the new Market Place Wellness Centre.

### **Learn and Go**

Vibrant Communities Saint John and St. Joseph's Community Health Center with funding from Irving Oil Ltd. provide Learn and Go. For three years in a row, up to 40 residents from priority neighbourhoods attend leadership workshops to learn how to improve their neighbourhoods, work with a mentor on a particular project, and pitch their projects to potential partners. Leadership skills are enhanced and concrete solutions are found to better the lives of residents.

### **Power UP**

Power UP!, a program run by the Urban Core Support Network with funding from the Status of Women Canada, is a ten week intensive training program designed to enhance and develop leadership skills to help women living in high poverty neighbourhoods take their next decisive step, whether education, employment or another option. A mentorship component bringing together past participants with current participants was added in 2010.

### **Around the Block**

Around the Block is a free community newspaper, published every two months, which provides a forum for priority neighbourhoods to celebrate, communicate, and coordinate. This newspaper has one rule...only good news. Residents from the neighbourhoods write the stories, take the photos, participate in layout and design, and distribute 6000 copies door to door.

### **Saint John Votes**

A strategy to increase voter participation within priority neighbourhoods has been developed across many different organizations as a means to increase citizenship and voice. Barriers to voting and awareness of candidates and the process are being addressed in partnership with Elections NB.

### ➤ **Housing Strategy**

In two priority neighbourhoods, more than 90% of residents rent. Existing housing programs at federal, provincial, and municipal levels are underfunded and oversubscribed. *Affordable and*

*quality housing* are critical to revitalize a neighbourhood. Two multisectoral committees are working to address housing issues in Saint John.

### **BCAPI / VCSJ Housing Working Group**

The Housing Working Group is championing the development of a housing strategy for Saint John and helping Saint John to achieve at least 100 new affordable housing units annually (target has been achieved over the last 4 years). There are two non-profit development corporations who contribute significantly to the affordable housing stock; SJ Non Profit Housing and Housing Alternatives. Central to a strategy is the encouragement of mixed housing development as a means to reduce the geographic concentration of poverty.

### **Subcommittee on sub-standard housing**

This subcommittee has recently been reinitiated and is chaired by Housing Alternatives. The subcommittee is intended to develop strategies to protect renters and prospective buyers from substandard housing. This multi-sectoral committee is increasing awareness of rights, obligations and by-laws.

### **Crescent Valley Master Plan**

Revitalizing older neighbourhoods is a part of the province's housing strategy-*Hope is a Home*, a five-year plan to reduce poverty by making housing more affordable. The strategy recognizes the need to develop mixed income neighbourhoods, repair and renovate older housing stock, and build new units to keep up with the demand.

The Crescent Valley re-development opportunity will serve a mixed-income community that offers market-based rents, designating a number of units to be subsidized by the Department of Social Development. This initial stage will provide the following development opportunities:

1. a minimum of 60 units of multi-residential housing for seniors, of which 30 units will be designated as subsidized units;
2. a minimum of 56 units of family housing, of which 28 will be designated as subsidized units; and
3. 20 per cent of the subsidized units will be accessible to persons with a disability.

### **➤ Social, Physical and Economic improvements**

For many communities concrete improvements are required to provide quick wins and momentum for the neighbourhood and partners. Many partners are contributing to strengthening neighbourhoods from Community Policing to developing social enterprise. The following are a few examples:

**Neighbourhoods plans:** The City of Saint John provides planning funds to priority neighbourhoods to help them identify priorities and actions.

**Community Loan Fund:** The Saint John Community Loan Fund helps individuals create income, build assets, and attain greater self-reliance.

**Crescent Valley and NB Housing Pilot Recycling:** The Crescent Valley Resource Centre and the Department of Social Development have piloted a recycling program in Howard Court to address garbage issues raised by residents.

## Single Parents

### ➤ **Childcare/Parenting:**

**Early Learning Centre.** St. John the Baptist/King Edward School is home to one of four Early Childhood Centres in New Brunswick. The Early Learning Centre is a prime illustration of interagency cooperation, with the YMCA-YWCA administering childcare programs and other groups co-locating. Childcare, pre-school, parent programs and additional resources will be available in the fall of 2010.

**Child care.** Agencies who provide child care are increasingly working together to better meet the needs of families. Alternate models (e.g., home-based child care) are being explored.

**Family Resource Centre** supports families by providing family drop in sessions, parenting workshops and programs, young mothers support group, prenatal classes for teens, crafts for moms, community kitchen, resource lending library, and personal growth for families.

**Vibrant Women Mentoring Program** is a partnership between First Steps, Early Intervention, Vibrant Communities Saint John and Family Resource Centre pairing young moms with mentors.

### ➤ **School Completion**

**The Saint John Learning Exchange** provides training and education to adult learners from improving numeracy and literacy skills to GED to Essential Skills to homework help. Over 300 adult learners were assessed in the last year ready to participate in some form of learning.

**First Steps Housing Projects:** First Steps Housing Project Inc (First Steps) was developed in Saint John because of the high teen pregnancy rate and the lack of support facilities for young women and their babies. First Steps provides a supportive environment where young mothers can continue their education, further their personal development and gain the skills required to thrive as individuals and as parents. First Steps also administers a successful alternative high school program and a community daycare program.

**John Howard Society:** Offers and sponsors programs dealing with crime prevention, education, employment services, literacy training, and makes referrals to drug alcohol treatment programs and mental health resources among other supports to both adults and young people.

➤ **Health and Wellness**

**St. Joseph Community Health Centre:** Using the determinants of health and community development principles, the Community Health Centre's health care staff works with low-income individuals to promote health and facilitate access to essential services. The Community Health Centre also houses the Urban Core Support Network and Vibrant Communities Saint John. The Community Health Centre operates three satellite centres including the **Market Place Wellness Centre**. The Market Place Wellness Centre offers services and supports to benefit those living in the Lower West Side. Health and community services exist including: specimen collection, the food bank, a nurse practitioner, wound care, social development, and the Neighbourhood Assistant.

## Children and Youth

When children do not have access to opportunities they spend much time trying to catch up to their peers. In order to break the cycle of poverty, children require supports through key developmental stages of infancy, early childhood, mid childhood, and youth.

- **Early learning centres** provide early supports to children and their families. The objective is for children to become school ready.
- **School supports PALS / community schools.** Because poverty is concentrated in neighbourhoods and their elementary/middle schools, not all schools have the same resources. Yet schools in communities with complex needs require additional supports. Partners Assisting Local Schools (PALS), community schools and programs such as Early Literacy Friends provide needed additional resources to schools, supporting the success of children.
- **Youth Engagement and Leadership**

Youth living in poverty who experience limited academic success can build skills and confidence through after school programming designed to meet their unique needs. Programs with a youth engagement philosophy are intended to capture the imagination of youth, build on their assets, and provide experiences they may miss otherwise. The programs evolve to meet the changing needs of the particular youth being served. Building youth leadership is a central tenant to youth engagement. There are two examples of neighbourhood-based youth engagement programming in Saint John, in Crescent Valley and the Old North End. The following are examples of groups or programs that support children and youth in Saint John:

**The Resource Centre for Youth (TRC):** a multi-service, one-stop resource centre for teens, providing health services and programs, social and recreational activities,

education and employment counseling, and community development/volunteer experiences.

**O.N.E Change:** A group working to improve the quality of life in the Old North End. The group is comprised of residents, youth, building owners, school officials, community organizations, Member of the Legislature, and city officials. ONE Change was the first neighbourhood to adapt youth engagement principles to neighbourhood development and the results have been significant.

**Teen Vibe:** Teen Vibe engages youth in Crescent Valley in leadership opportunities that contribute to the well being of their neighbourhood.

**Boys and Girls Club:** The mission of all Boys and Girls Clubs in Canada is to provide a safe, supportive place where children and youth can experience new opportunities, overcome barriers, build positive relationships and develop confidence and skills for life.

**YMCA-YWCA:** A membership and volunteer association committed to excellence in serving the community through the development of spirit, mind and body.

University of New Brunswick- Saint John and Crescent Valley. The University of New Brunswick has 'adopted' Crescent Valley youth. Increasing interactions between university students and residents of the neighbouring priority neighbourhood has translated into visits to campus, participation in Summer camps, Back Yard Book Club, and student volunteers in Crescent Valley events.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Saint John provides direct service to children by matching adults and children in quality mentoring relationships. Staff screen volunteers and match them with a child having similar interests.

- **Coordination of services.** Youth organizations, with the support of VCSJ, have developed a youth serving agencies coalition to better meet the needs of families, build synergies and relationships, and share resources.

### Workforce Participation

Education and employment are key pathways out of poverty. There are many barriers in moving from poverty to meaningful and adequately paying jobs; yet few paths. Ensuring that individuals have the skills, are ready to work, and are connected to employers calls for coordinated efforts from employers, government departments, and community groups.

- **Multiple Pathways and supports**

Many individuals who have limited work experience lack the networks and confidence to break into the workforce. To that end, a number of strategies to introduce interested individuals to employers and services have been developed including:

**Catch the Wave to Work:** Enterprise SJ, Urban Core Support Network, Post-Secondary Education Training and Labour and VCSJ are partnering together with community and government services and employers to offer short workshops to connect people to their own assets, community resources and interests of employers.

**The Job Bus:** The Job Bus Tour involves a small group of job seekers participating in short on-site visits with employers to better understand the kinds of jobs that are available and criteria for employment. The Job Bus is organized by VCSJ and partners.

**Makin it Work Brochure:** An information brochure on education, training and employment services for adults and youth in Saint John.

**Workforce Preparation:** A new program is being developed by the Saint John Learning Exchange to help individuals with very low levels of education build their essential skills and next steps whether other programs or employment. This program is based on the experiences of Pathways to Possibilities, one of Canada's largest community based literacy programs.

➤ **Remove Barriers; childcare; transportation, health insurance, tuition**

Through the efforts of many in our community, the Provincial Poverty Reduction Plan has clearly heard about barriers to employment particularly the lack of affordable and flexible childcare and lack of coverage for prescription drugs and dental and vision care.

➤ **Employer Leadership**

**TIES 2 Work** facilitates a match between employers and potential employees through 12 weeks of job specific essential skills training by the Saint John Learning Exchange, resulting in employment at a minimum starting wage of \$10 per hour. TIES 2 Work is a partnership of government departments, community organizations, and employers.

➤ **Living Wage replaces minimum wage**

Minimum wage is scheduled to reach \$10/hour by September 2011.

### **New Brunswick Poverty Reduction Strategy**

Overcoming Poverty Together, the New Brunswick Poverty Reduction Plan was developed in 2009 through the engagement of governments, business, non-profit sectors, and people living in poverty. Central to the strategy is the belief that all men, women and children in New Brunswick shall have the necessary resources to meet their basic needs and to live with dignity, security and good health. Furthermore all New Brunswickers shall be included as full citizens through opportunities for employment, personal development and community engagement. The global objective of the plan is that by 2015, New Brunswick will have reduced income poverty by 25%

and deep income poverty by 50%, and will have made significant progress in achieving sustained economic and social inclusion.

Overcoming Poverty Together sets out priority actions from social assistance reform to enhanced early learning and citizen engagement. Perhaps most importantly, the strategy created a governance structure, Community Inclusion Networks, whereby communities become responsible to develop local solutions, based on local needs. The Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation and Board was established in the first part of 2010. Staff are anticipated by be hired in Fall 2010. For more information about the Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation go to <http://www.gnb.ca/0017/promos/0001/index-e.asp>

The Greater Saint John Poverty Reduction Strategy and the New Brunswick Economic and Social Inclusion plan share very similar philosophies, strategic actions, and anticipated outcomes. Both municipally and provincially we believe a reduction in poverty is necessary for the long-term social and economic sustainability of the community.

Vibrant Communities Saint John’s Leadership Roundtable has submitted a request to the Corporation to become Greater Saint John’s Community Inclusion Network. An analysis of the New Brunswick priorities and Saint John’s strategy reveals consistency in actions. Areas of consistency between the provincial and Saint John strategy are presented below.

Saint John	New Brunswick
Resident-led neighbourhood revitalization	full citizen’s participation through personal development and community engagement
Eliminate policy barriers to work	Changes to health card, economic unit policy changes
Housing strategy	Housing Strategy, changes to Residential Tenancies Act
Early Learning Centres	Early Learning Centres
Living Wage	Increases to minimum wage
Engage 4 sectors in leadership and execution	4 sectors- Community Inclusion Networks, Economic and Social Inclusion Board
Economic improvements- Social Enterprise	Social Enterprise
Transitional housing for youth	Stability for homeless shelters
Youth Engagement and leadership	School completion
School supports and community schools	Mentoring, expand community school concept

Poverty reduction goals in Saint John and New Brunswick cannot be achieved without significant changes to current systems. We have a lot of hard work, decisions, and conversations ahead as all sectors determine most effectively how to contribute to the reduction of poverty.

*One day our grandchildren will go to museums to see what poverty was like.*

Professor Dr. Muhammad Yunus

## Vibrant Communities Saint John Leadership Round Table

Fern Bennett	Make Poverty History
Juanita Black	Around the Block
Shilo Boucher	YMCA-YWCA
Sarah Brown	Fusion
Lisa Chamberlain	Village Neighbourhood Resident
Monica Chaperlin	Business Community Anti-Poverty Initiative
Debbie Cooper	Saint John Boys and Girls Club
Michel Coté	Association Régionale de la Communauté francophone-SJ
Ivan Court	Mayor- City of Saint John
Terri-Ann Cormier	Community Representative
Elaine Daley	Belyea, Colwell and Associates
Francine DiMambro	Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation
Sue Duffley	E3 Women's Leadership Forum/Irving Oil Ltd.
Penni Eisenhauer	Neighbourhood Organizer- East and Village
Mary LeSage	South End Representative
Craig Estabrooks	Member of Parliament Rodney Weston Office
Regena Farnsworth (Chair)	Dean Faculty of Business – UNB Saint John
Mary Eileen Flanagan	SJ Board of Police Commissioners
Debbie Godlewski	Public Health Services, Horizon Health Network
Randy Hatfield	Human Development Council
Elizabeth Jadoo	Greater Saint John Area United Way
Carl Killen	MLA SJ-Harbour- Southern Caucus
Lyn King	Community Representative
Grace Losier	Mayor, Grand Bay Westfield
Mark Leger	Community Member
Brian Marks	Social Development
Brenda Murphy	Urban Core Support Network
Kathy Craig	Saint John Board of Trade
Paul Ranson	Anglican Ministry
Sister Roma De Robertis	Sisters of Charity
Nancy Savoie	Resident- Crescent Valley
Donnie Snook	Inner City Youth Ministry
Susan Tipper	School District 8
Lois Vincent	Enterprise Saint John
Pat Woods	City of Saint John