



Vibrant COMMUNITIES

Saint John

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Neighbours helping neighbours

Momentum grows: 54% of Crescent Valley residents respond to survey

More than half of Crescent Valley residents are engaged in research focusing on their own neighbourhood. Fifty-four percent of residents filled out an extensive survey designed to help researchers better understand the neighbourhood and the high rates of enduring poverty. Supported by VCSJ Crescent Valley Planning Committee and staff lead Gail Taylor, the survey served the dual function of researching and engaging residents, in keeping with international community development best practices. With the help of UNBSJ, residents of the vulnerable neighbourhood were trained and hired to help conduct the 17-page survey door-to-door as part of a survey action team.

The team covered every one of nearly 400 households in the area and achieved an astonishing 54% success rate.

The Survey Action Team (SAT) built leadership capacity through regular supported meetings and presented survey and focus group results to varied audiences. The SAT has assumed a strong horizontal leadership role to guide the next steps in Crescent Valley. As a result of a presentation in July where over 80 residents and VCSJ partners attended, the SAT was invited to make a targeted presentation to the Saint John Common Council this fall. The Province of New Brunswick and Canada Mortgage and Housing provided funds to make the survey possible.



Members of Crescent Valley Survey Action Team with MLA Trevor Holder at preliminary presentation of survey results

When the province announced \$500,000 for community policing, exterior building improvements and the renovation of a new community centre, the Survey Action Team decided to organize a SpeakOut to canvass residents' priorities, including the location and use of a community centre. Today, residents and partners are hard at work developing creative interactive booths for the SpeakOut slated for November 9th.

Survey highlights:

- 65% want to stay in Crescent Valley and help create change.
- 85% believe that working together is the way to go!
- Crime and safety are key issues: bullying, physical assaults, and domestic abuse are key issues.
- Residents seek a cooperative, respectful partnership with both City Police and local schools.
- The area needs more green spaces, better garbage control, housing improvements, street upgrading, crosswalks and sidewalks.
- Recreational programs are urgently needed for all ages: teens and children are a priority.
- Barriers to employment include health and disability issues, transportation, childcare, accessible training and a lack of skills.
- Isolation and stigma make integration with larger community difficult.
- The community needs to communicate better, meeting and working and socializing together are needed.
- Partnerships with all sectors of community are welcome as momentum for change gathers force.

Neighbourhood development key to plan's second year

VCSJ's Goal: Assist 2000 individuals or 800 households move out of poverty through a three year poverty reduction strategy.

Year One 2005 – 2006

- Strategy launched involving business community, three levels of government, community organizations and individuals living in poverty.
- Documented challenges, traps and opportunities in housing, education and employment, children and youth, and high poverty neighbourhoods.

Year Two 2006 – 2007

- Champion change with community partners
- Engage more people who are living in poverty
- Guide the efforts of residents from Crescent Valley and South End

New partnerships are forming. VCSJ grew from 80 individuals to 120, representing close to 60 organizations. We formed a partnership with the Saint John Police focusing on neighbourhood development and safety. We formed another partnership with UNBSJ to develop an evaluation framework for all our activities.

Partnership will help improve supports to young mothers

Saint John County has an annual birth rate of 33 births per 1,000 teenagers. That's twice the rate of the province of New Brunswick as a whole.

The Business Community Anti-Poverty Initiative received funds from the Public Health Agency of Canada and partnered with VCSJ on a project to identify and address barriers that prevent pregnant and parenting youth from completing high school. Five key priorities were identified by the community which were matched with a lead organization and individual to champion change:

There are five key priorities

- Find alternative solutions for teen mothers who want to remain in school;
- Provide affordable and flexible childcare, particularly for children under two years of age;

- Create a mentoring program for young mothers and their children;
- Increased emphasis on the prevention of teen pregnancy; and
- Improve access to information about services assisting pregnant and parenting young mothers.

Three recent reports will assist in better understanding the issues:

- *Literature Review – Poverty, Homelessness and Teen Pregnancy*
- *Influencing Healthy Public Policy for Pregnancy and Parenting Young Women: the Final Report*
- *Closing the Gaps: Ensuring Pregnancy and Parenting Young Women Succeed*

These reports can be accessed through the Saint John section of Vibrant Communities Canada's website at: <http://tamarackcommunity.ca/g2s28.html#keydocs>.

Report champions education

A new report, Education to Employment: Pathways out of Poverty, outlines the challenges and opportunities faced by individuals with low levels of education as they attempt to improve their education and find employment. The report advocates change not only for the benefit of individuals with low levels of education, but for the city's economic health. The report concludes that individuals with low levels of education have the potential to fill much of the region's growing labour force demand.

Guided by VCSJ's Education to Employment Working Group, the report is based on interviews with individuals living in poverty, instructors, facilitators, community agencies, government departments, businesses and trade organizations.

The report can be accessed through the Saint John section of Vibrant Community Canada's website at <http://tamarackcommunity.ca/g2s28.html#keydocs>.

The story of poverty

1. Too many of our youngest citizens are in danger of falling into poverty

Despite recent economic gains, Saint John, Fredericton and Moncton, are witnessing high incidences of high school dropout and birth to teenage parents. Between 2000 and 2004, the City of Saint John had 1500 students drop out. In addition, one out of five babies born to teenage mothers in New Brunswick is born in the Saint John County (2004).

2. Shelter costs can still take up over ½ of annual earnings from entry-level workers

In 2004, a two-bedroom apartment in Saint John at a rent of \$520 monthly (\$6,240 annually) took more than 50% of the earnings from a full time job at minimum wage with an annual salary of \$10,850.

3. Transportation is expensive

An adult bus fare in Saint John costs \$2.25, while a child's fare (ages 6 to 14) costs \$2. The adult fare is 13% more than the cost of a child's fare. Contrast this with Toronto, where an adult fare of \$2.75 is almost 300% more than the cost of a child's fare of 70 cents.

4. Child care is difficult to find

Saint John has only 2100 licensed childcare spaces, with less than 40 spaces reserved for children under 15 months of age. Comparatively, Moncton has approximately 3050 licensed childcare spaces and Fredericton has 2500. Space for children under two is a concern across the province.

SEA-CATs taking the lead in the South End

After eighty-five residents attended a South End Meet and Potatoes meeting in March, the SEA-CATS were born. Since then a core group of 15-20 residents has been meeting for Soup at Six at 3-week intervals at the Centenary-Queen Square United Church storefront deep in the South End with the aim of improving their neighbourhood.

This group named itself the South End Area Community Action Team, or SEA-CATs. The group has begun to act on issues related to affordable housing, crime and safety. Several speakers from Saint John City Police, Block Parents, and Saint John Non-Profit Housing have been asked to make presentations and engage in discussion with SEA-CATs. A successful spring clean up of

Rainbow Park saw a great turn-out with help from City Police.

Future actions include letter-writing, cooperation with City Police to establish a community police office in the South End, and hosting an event for existing South End groups to share and compare visions and identify common priorities for action.

The Advocacy and Mentoring Committee of VCSJ (staff lead Gail Taylor) has assisted residents in assuming a leadership role in running meetings, making decisions and setting priorities. A grant from KAIROS has covered a number of activities including childcare services for each meeting, provided through the efforts of Ariel Uhryniw at Centenary Queen Square United Church storefront.

Affordable housing in Saint John a provincial priority

Saint John's poorest are too often unable to find affordable housing. In recognition of this uncomfortable reality, the Province of New Brunswick has been providing the city with a larger share of its housing funds.

In addition, new funding opportunities are being examined and championed. A municipal housing strategy will look at a number of local ideas. It proposes to establish a community housing trust, a warm apartments campaign similar to what was initiated in the

Old North End (through ONE Change), and more emphasis on neighbourhood renewal.

KEEPING HOMES WARM VCSJ participated in the year-long Public Utilities Board Hearings. VCSJ helped to create a government cap of electricity rate increases which will have a positive effect on low-income households in Saint John.

The benefit overall to low income households will depend on what recommendations the provincial government and NB Power adopt.

Three ways to improve the health of children

If you could change three things to improve the health and well-being of children, what would they be? That's a question The Children's Health Task Force (launched by VCSJ in partnership with the St. Joseph's Community Health Centre in January 2006) has been asked to answer.

The task force will recommend and champion three actions that would improve the health and well-being of children aged 5 to 12 years of age who are living in poverty.

Chaired by Dr. Scott Giffin and Dr. Kathryn Hamer, the task force has been learning from the experts – parents, and professionals working in the areas of education, social services and economic development. Recommendations will be released later this fall.

Neighbourhoods learn from each other

Saint John is rich with a momentum of active neighbourhood groups.

This year, ONE Change (Old North End) is focusing its efforts in four key areas: youth development, housing, neighbourhood celebration and improvement of both the physical and social environments. In a presentation to Common Council, the Village Neighbourhood Association (Waterloo Region) outlined two goals: working to make their neighbourhood safe for residents and establishing a caring community that is clean, comfortable and family friendly. Neighbourhood networking activities and learning from each other will be a focus for VCSJ in year three.

Vibrant Communities learns from Canada-wide Initiative

Vibrant Communities Canada (VCC) links Saint John to initiatives, reports, and perspectives from across the country. Their website is an excellent source of information: www.vibrantcommunities.ca

VCC also provides opportunities to take part in regular telelearning events. The telelearning events run for one and a half hours and are open to members of the community. Upcoming telelearning events include:

- Movements for Change – Roots of Empathy, November 28 at 1:00 pm
- Living Wage Community of Practice Call, December 18 at 1:00 pm

All telelearning events are recorded and can be accessed online. Past events can be easily accessed and include features on Neighbourhood Revitalization, the Hamilton Community Foundation and Poverty, Policy Change from the Ground Up, and L'Arche Canada. Please contact VCSJ staff, Cathy Wright for more information (see coordinates at end).

“ Poverty is the social and economic vulnerability caused to individuals and households by a lack of resources needed for dignity, self-sufficiency and wellbeing. Ultimately, poverty means reduced opportunity to participate fully in the life of one's community. ”

Vibrant Communities Saint John:
Dismantling the Poverty Traps, 2006

Vibrant Communities Saint John

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Elizabeth Doucette, Crescent Valley Survey Action Team

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