

Community Foundation Hosts “Funders’ Forum”

There’s documented evidence that Greater Saint John has some of the most generous people in the country. For a community our size we give individually, corporately and as charitable groups and foundations at very high levels. These groups know one another but only infrequently get together to “compare notes” so to speak. The Greater Saint John Community Foundation invited Greater Saint John area foundations, funders and fundraisers/donors, to the degree possible, to a unique meeting last week for a roundtable discussion on Greater Saint John granting, funding and fundraising priorities in 2009. Collectively, it is a powerful force for good.

A conservative estimate, based on data filed through the mandatory annual Charities Returns of the Canada Revenue Agency, puts dollars granted to local charitable causes from foundations and registered charities at well over \$7.8Million in 2007 and still counting for the 2008 fiscal year. This would not include grants from corporate and service club gifts, universities, those contributed by non-profit groups who are not registered charities and Provincial and Federal levels of government. Neither would this include municipalities like the City of Saint John, which annually funds multiple charities. Their 2009 budget contains proposed expenditures of \$931,190 for social development service support. This year they are supporting the Ability Advisory Committee, Cherry Brook Zoo, the Human Development Council, PRO Kids, Hospice, Key Industries, Boys and Girls Club, UNBSJ and the list goes on. On a more modest level, Rothesay does likewise. Another fundraiser not reflected in CRA returns are events like last week’s Canadian Cancer Society Relay for Life which in Greater Saint John alone raised \$212,000 and the upcoming St. Joe’s Dragon Boat Festival.

The “Funders’ Forum” included local funders who donate to both broadly based and targeted community causes such as youth, healthcare, sports, seniors, and the arts. Attendees received a preview of some statistical data which will be available for the Community Foundation’s upcoming Vital Signs Report 2009 on Greater Saint John’s quality of life. Learning more from data such as Saint John’s spending on the arts and culture, voter turnout, employment rates, energy sales, building permit values, surgery wait lists population/migration, income spent on shelter, educational attainment, crime severity can help identify community priorities they may fund. It informs the community and provides background and guidance on ten quality of life areas to better focus on local needs.

“At a time when charitable groups are urgently in need of support and the economic climate is creating hardship and restraint on endowment earnings, it’s timely to come together and discuss areas of mutual interest” said Cheryl Robertson, Chair of the Community Foundation. “Public-spirited groups and individuals are contributing generously to many causes in Greater Saint John. We think they are interested in directing resources to the areas where it seems needs are greatest” she added. “We are very fortunate to have, a number of public and private foundations, registered charities, generous corporate donors and thousands of community minded donors who may find Vital Signs useful” she concluded.

The Greater Saint John Community Foundation will be releasing an online survey on “Greater Saint John’s Vital Signs®” in August, with an invitation to the participants of the “Funders Forum” and the public to “grade” our community’s quality of life. They will be asked to grade selected data in 10 key areas, critical to our quality of life, for inclusion in the fall 2009 Report: Gap between Rich and Poor, Safety, Health, Learning, Housing, Getting Started, Arts and Culture, Environment, Work, and Belonging & Leadership. Last year over 300 responded to the survey and were tabulated to form the report’s grading component, a measure of local progress.

Community foundations in 16 Canadian communities, including Saint John, will release their annual Vital Signs report cards, aimed at measuring the vitality of their communities, simultaneously on Tuesday October 6, 2009. The aim of Greater Saint John's fourth annual report card is to ensure that it fairly, comprehensively and accurately describes our community using the best information available from reliable sources. A new feature this year will be online links to data and research from many national, provincial and local sources such as Statistics Canada.

Vital Signs is available in hard copy from 2006, '07 and '08 and on the Community Foundation website, www.saint-john-foundation.nb.ca . This is the fourth year the Foundation has produced the quality of life snapshot as a public service. It undertakes costs associated with it for the benefit of the community.



The Greater Saint John Community Foundation invited many Greater Saint John area foundations, funders and fundraisers/donors, to discuss granting, funding and fundraising priorities in 2009 and preview its upcoming fourth annual Vital Signs Report. From left are Blair MacDonald, chair of the New Brunswick Children's Foundation, Cheryl Robertson, Community Foundation chair, Sara Mudge, board secretary, and Hal Killam, chair of the Sheila Hugh Mackay Foundation.

Community Profile is a weekly column highlighting community causes and work done by non-profit organizations in the Greater Saint John area. It is contributed by Jane Barry, executive director of The Greater Saint John Community Foundation. Contact the foundation at 506-672-8880. To view other Community Profiles go to www.saint-john-foundation.nb.ca