

# Opinions Needed on VitalSigns®

*By Jane Barry, The Greater Saint John Community Foundation*

Community consultation is valued by those who govern the Greater Saint John Community Foundation. They take the expenditure of funds and resources to heart and want to get the best possible use of the charitable dollars donors have made available to them. Keeping administrative costs low is also dear to their hearts. They are proud to keep them at about 1.5% of the value of their endowment funds. For the sixth consecutive year they have approved the **VitalSigns®** project, which involves research and production of a report on Greater Saint John's quality of life. When the fifth Report was released last October, a call went out for feedback on who reads **VitalSigns®**, finds it useful, interesting or good value for our charitable dollars. So now it's time to invite your input, not on any of the statistics but just if you ever heard of it, read it online or had a copy. The survey is very short (5 questions) and should take no more than two minutes to complete by going to [www.surveymonkey.com/s/B29NJR5](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/B29NJR5).

If other community agencies were producing such a report it is unlikely the Community Foundation would duplicate efforts. But no other such report is being compiled. The Telegraph Journal has reported on it extensively, helping spread awareness. If you haven't seen any of the last five years of **VitalSigns®** reports, they can be viewed online at [www.saint-john-foundation.nb.ca](http://www.saint-john-foundation.nb.ca). The survey is also posted on the Community Foundation's web-site and will be available until March 8. You can learn something new about our community and have your say without leaving home. The Community Foundation is utilizing information technology as a handy tool to engage the community. If you don't have your own computer and connection to the internet, there are many public access centres available or you can contact the Foundation office for a paper copy.

**VitalSigns®** is an annual community check-up conducted by more than a dozen community foundations across Canada that measures the vitality of our cities, identifies significant trends, and assigns grades in at least ten areas critical to quality of life. They are: Gap between Rich and Poor, Safety, Health, Learning, Housing, Getting Started, Arts and Culture, Environment, Work, and Belonging and Leadership. They include diverse information, for example: food bank usage, practicing physicians, per 100,000 population, educational attainment, crime severity, air quality, youth employment statistics, housing starts, number of nursing home beds, high school completion rates and voter turnout.

**VitalSigns®** data is compiled from many national, provincial and local sources. They include Statistics Canada, census information, the Canadian Institute of Health Information, Health Region 2, Canadian Council on Learning, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, Province of New Brunswick, City of Saint John, Environment Canada, Fundy Region Solid Waste Commission and Elections Canada.

On October 4, 2011 the Greater Saint John Community Foundation will release Greater Saint John's **VitalSigns®** 2011, our community's sixth annual report card. The "snapshot" will contain a wealth of data on each of the ten quality of life indicators, fast facts and stories on how the Foundation supports local charities to make a difference. The aim is to ensure that the October report has fairly, comprehensively and accurately described our community.

The foundation funds this project, with a budget of about \$15,000, as a public service to highlight issues of local importance, and as a planning tool for many sectors of the community. It engages the Saint John Human Development Council to assist in compiling the research on economic and social data. It can be presented to Saint John area groups by making a request to the Foundation. The Foundation's Grants Committee uses it to guide their annual spring granting program.

The Greater Saint John Community Foundation is the only participating NB Community Foundation and part of a national effort, **VitalSigns®** based on a project of the Toronto Community Foundation, started in 2001, which is coordinated nationally by Community Foundations of Canada. **Vital Signs®** has been lauded as a valuable measurement tool for community groups, leaders, businesses and researchers.



The public is invited to familiarize themselves with an annual quality of life report called VitalSigns<sup>®</sup>, funded by the Greater Saint John Community Foundation. It is seeking input until March 8 on its merits, using a short survey, shown being completed by Hilary Branch and Shirin Zare as Stephanie Bogle looks on.



*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 [sjfoundation@nb.aibn.com](mailto:sjfoundation@nb.aibn.com). To view other Community Profiles go to [www.saint-john-foundation.nb.ca](http://www.saint-john-foundation.nb.ca)*