

VITAL SIGNS 2009 SURVEY READY FOR GRADERS

By

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The Greater Saint John Community Foundation

For seven days this week, you can learn something new about our community and have your say on how Greater Saint John is doing without leaving home. You can express your opinions and be a “community grader” by completing The Greater Saint John Community Foundation’s Vital Signs® survey and rating 10 quality of life areas. 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. In an effort to involve youth, the Foundation’s Facebook fans and Twitter followers are being invited to participate. As well, local municipalities will post it on their websites.

Vital Signs® 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, using data compiled from many national, provincial and local sources.

The survey is posted on the Community Foundation’s web-site, www.saint-john-foundation.nb.ca or by going directly to: http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=YuF0ljepi4shMi3BY_2fGucA_3d_3d

Between July 30 and August 7, participants can grade selected data in 10 key areas for inclusion in the 2009 Report: Gap between Rich and Poor, Safety, Health, Learning, Housing, Getting Started, Arts and Culture, Environment, Work, and Belonging & Leadership. Forty questions comprise the survey, which contains data highlights from the full report, due this fall. Participants can give their input based on a one to five “Star” grading for each data set. It includes diverse information, for example: food bank usage, air quality and youth employment statistics, housing starts, number of nursing home beds, high school completion rates and voter turnout. Last year, the first year the survey was used, over three hundred respondents took part.

Reliable sources, using the best statistics available, 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.

Preliminary indications are both encouraging and disheartening in such sectors as health where the number of practicing physicians, per 100,000 population, has increased but rates of lung cancer are elevated. Food bank usage is declining but still distressingly high, particularly for children. Our air quality ratings (IQUA) are reported as good, with exceedances of SO₂ (sulphur dioxide), from the New Brunswick standard, down. Educational attainment has shown continuing improvements, bringing us up to Canadian rates but UNBSJ enrollments are trending lower. Given the strong economic picture in our community, it’s no surprise that rental vacancy rates are low and MLS average residential prices and non-residential building permits are on the increase. Crime severity, a new measure, puts Greater Saint John at high levels.

On October 6, 2009 the Greater Saint John Community Foundation will release Greater Saint John's Vital Signs, 2008, our community's fourth annual report card. It will incorporate the results of the survey, along with a wealth of data on each of the ten quality of life indicators, tips for how individuals can get involved to improve our grades, as well as local "good news" stories. 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 over \$12,000, as a public service to highlight issues of local importance, and as a planning tool for many sectors of the community. It engaged the Saint John Human Development Council to assist in compiling the research on economic and social data, which is being shared with the City of Saint John's Vision 2015 process and in the development and implementation of their Integrated Community Sustainability Plan. It was presented to Saint John area foundations and charities which provide funding to local causes last month at a Funders' Forum organized by the Community Foundation. The Foundation's Grants Committee will use it to guide their fall granting program.

The Greater Saint John Community Foundation is the only participating NB Community Foundation and part of a national effort, Vital Signs®, 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. Learn more about your community and be a part of the Vital Signs survey and final October report.



Photo:

Members of the Greater Saint John Community Foundation's Vital Signs Committee including Sara Mudge and Dr. Greg Marquis (pictured) have prepared a quality of life survey, Vital Signs 2009. Community members are invited to help "grade" Greater Saint John's Report Card before August 7.

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