

Community's Vital Signs Mark Fifth Year

By Jane Barry, The Greater Saint John Community Foundation

Knowing the strong and weak points of one's community helps keep all of us informed, involved and hopefully committed to action, support and kudos, as the case may be. It's easy to stay within our own comfort zone of neighbourhood, family and friends but critical to be aware of the big picture, trends and planning for the future, regardless of our age, status, education, gender, income or role in life. We owe it to ourselves.

Thus, the Greater Saint John Community Foundation embarked on an annual series of report cards five years ago called Vital Signs. If another organization or government produced such a report it would have gladly stepped aside but the Community Foundation is about improving our quality of life so it's a good "fit" and appropriate project. It helps identify needs and priorities across Greater Saint John for private citizens, researchers, leaders at all levels, business, government and community and also assists in guiding the Foundation's grant-making. It releases "Greater Saint John's 2010 Vital Signs®" tomorrow, its fifth unique report on the quality of life in Greater Saint John.

Vital Signs® is an annual community check-up, part of a national effort conducted by fifteen community foundations across Canada this year. It measures the vitality of our cities, identifies significant trends, and assigns grades in at least ten areas or indicators, critical to quality of life. Data is compiled from many reliable, public national, provincial and local sources. The data, including Statistics Canada census information, is critical to this report.

To ensure this effort is a good use of precious resources, Cheryl M.G. Robertson, Community Foundation Chair, is asking our community to "give us your comments on its merits and how it might change or be improved as we work together to make Greater Saint John a better place to call home." The foundation funds the \$15,000 project as a public service to highlight issues of local importance, and as a community planning tool. The Saint John Human Development Council helps research and prepare the report.

Economic and social data in ten broad categories include: Housing & Transportation, Work, Belonging & Leadership, Safety, Health & Wellness, Getting Started, Environment, Learning, Arts and Culture and the Gap Between Rich and Poor. The aim is to ensure that the report has fairly, comprehensively and accurately described our community using the best data available.

"This year we are including how the Foundation is helping through their granting and what an ordinary citizen can do to get involved" states Sara Mudge, the Chair of the Community Foundation's Vital Signs Committee. "We are pleased to have had community representatives, Dr. Greg Marquis and Philip Reeves, also serve on our committee" she concluded.

The Community Foundation conducted an August online survey on "Greater Saint John's Vital Signs®", to seek out community opinions using data highlights from the full report. 332 respondents gave their input into a "Star" grading for various data sets, included in this year's "report card".

With census data and other statistical information not produced annually, Vital Signs reports on diverse and informative data from many reliable sources. As Saint John celebrates its 225th and Rothesay its 150th anniversaries in 2010, it is a banner year for Arts & Culture locally. The Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) continues to face demographic challenges—particularly an aging population and a slow growth rate. Net immigration numbers added close to 400 people to the population base in 2007 with 2009 population estimates at 126,600. The economy of the CMA was not immune from the overall global recession. Current labour market data points to a decline in the seasonally adjusted employment level over the previous year, although the decline is lower than provincial or national rates. Other global trends like climate change are affecting our region. The mean temperature has increased; winters are getting colder while summers are getting warmer.

An examination of selected lifestyle choices and behaviours shows that obesity and smoking rates are declining slightly. In the City of Saint John the Composite Learning Index increased in 2010. A growing percentage of the population over 15 possesses post secondary credentials. A smaller proportion of the CMA's population lived in poverty (using the Low Income Measure) in 2007. Housing in the area remained relatively affordable, although housing starts showed a drop of more than 20% between 2008 and 2009. 87% of residents used a vehicle as their primary mode of transportation to work.

This project of Community Foundations of Canada, who are preparing a national report and whose members number over 160 community foundations, is being launched in fifteen Canadian communities tomorrow: Greater Saint John, NB; Lunenburg Co., NS; The Foundation of Greater Montreal, Kingston and Area, ON; Ottawa, ON; Toronto, ON; Hamilton, ON; Waterloo Region, ON; London, ON; Sudbury, ON; Calgary, AB; Red Deer, AB; Medicine Hat, AB; Vancouver, BC; and Victoria, BC. Vital Signs® reports can be viewed or downloaded at www.vitalsignscanada.ca www.saint-john-foundation.nb.ca www.humandevlopmentcouncil.nb.ca Greater Saint John's Vital Signs 2010 Report will be launched at the Foundation office, 40 King St. at 10am, October 5, all are welcome.



Photo: The Greater Saint John Community Foundation releases their fifth community quality of life "report card", Greater Saint John's Vital Signs 2010 tomorrow. Taking the "pulse of the community" are some committee members: Sara Mudge, Cheryl Robertson and Kathryn Asher.
(Photo by Matthew Sherwood/Telegraph-Journal)



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. To view Vital Signs or other Community Profiles go to www.saint-john-foundation.nb.ca