

COMMUNITY FOUNDATION RELEASES SIXTH ANNUAL CHECKUP

Saint John, NB The Greater Saint John Community Foundation is releasing, "Greater Saint John's Vital Signs® 2011" today, its sixth report on the quality of life in Greater Saint John. Along with twenty-two community foundations across Canada, they measure the vitality of our cities, identify significant trends, and assign grades in areas critical to quality of life. With census data and other statistical information not produced annually, Vital Signs reports on diverse and informative data from many reliable national, provincial and local sources. The group is concerned with recent changes announced for how census information is collected.

"Greater Saint John's Vital Signs" displays economic, social and population data, in ten broad categories or Indicators: Housing & Transportation, Work, Belonging & Leadership, Safety, Health & Wellness, Getting Started, Environment, Learning, Arts & 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.

The Community Foundation is adding a new feature this year which will highlight trends observed over the last six years of annual reports. Doug MacDonald, C.A., Community Foundation Vice-Chair and Chair of the Vital Signs Committee, stated "We asked The Saint John Human Development Council (HDC) to help us analyze emerging trends, whether positive or negative to present in this year's report". Although each annual report contains a wide variety of data not necessarily replicated annually, trends both up and down are reported for periods covering about a decade of data in selected cases in each of the ten indicator areas where there has been consistent reporting."

The Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) continues to face demographic challenges, particularly an aging population and a slow growth rate but slightly more people live in Greater Saint John than reported in 2010. Net immigration numbers were up this year offering some encouragement. Employment is higher from June 2010-June 2011 than in the previous 12 months although the local economy of the CMA was not immune from global impacts and youth unemployment is increasing. On the positive side, composting rates for kitchen waste puts Greater Saint John among the best in the land. Poverty rates for both children and seniors is trending lower, year over year. However, there are great challenges when it comes to personal health as it relates to obesity and smoking, where we lead the nation. In spite of encouraging drops in violent crime, it and poverty remain elevated when compared to provincial and national figures. In the charitable giving sector, fewer people are making larger donations year over year. Household spending on arts-related and cultural events is holding relatively steadily as is the proportion of the population attaining post-secondary educational credentials. The rental vacancy rate for apartments is dropping in recent reports but has been fluctuating while housing in general remains relatively affordable. The completion of several new major projects, some based on rent geared to income is welcome news in a market where much of the housing stock is old and needing upgrading.

The foundation funds the \$15,000 project as a public service to highlight issues of local importance, and as a community planning tool for community groups, leaders, businesses and researchers. No other community group is producing such a report. To ensure this effort is a good use of precious resources, Doug MacDonald is inviting 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." An online poll

was conducted and opened for public participation in spring 2011. Almost 200 responded with over 70% stating they found it a "very valuable and useful" or "valuable and useful" report. The same proportion responded that it was "very good value" or "good value" for the resources spent by the Foundation to research and prepare the Vital Signs Reports each year.

The HDC helps research and prepare the report guided by the Community Foundation's Vital Signs Committee comprised of Kathryn Asher, Jane Barry, Andrew Beckett, Joe Harriman, Randy Hatfield, Greg Marquis, Sara Mudge and Heather Quinn, in addition to Doug MacDonald.

Community Foundations of Canada is releasing Canada's Vital Signs, a national report measuring the vitality of our communities and our country. Greater Saint John's Vital Signs report will be launched at their office, 76 Princess St. at 10am, October 4. All are welcome.

The Greater Saint John Community Foundation serves as a trustee for charitable, educational and cultural purposes. It administers funds given by the public-spirited individuals for the benefit of the people of this area. Established in 1976, the Foundation's assets stand at approximately \$8.6 Million.

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"Grants of \$5.4 Million to over 275 Saint John area charities for youth, seniors, social services, health, education, heritage, the arts and the environment since 1976"

For further information contact:

The Greater Saint John Community Foundation

Doug MacDonald, C.A., Vital Signs Committee Chairman, 634-2850

Clare Northcott, Executive Director, P.O. Box 20061, Brunswick Sq., Saint John, N.B. E2L 5B2

Street address: Business Resource Centre, 76 Princess St., Saint John, NB

tel. 506-672-8880 e-mail sjfoundation@nb.aibn.com

Vital Signs® reports can be viewed or downloaded at www.vitalsignscanada.ca,
www.saint-john-foundation.nb.ca, or www.sjhdc.ca