

## SAINT JOHN BUSINESS COMMUNITY ANTI-POVERTY INITIATIVE (BCAPI)

The Saint John *Business Community Anti-Poverty Initiative* (BCAPI) is a self-funded coalition of 100+ local business leaders and professionals who are working together with people living in poverty to accelerate their journey out of poverty by helping to remove or reduce the roadblocks.

BCAPI was founded in 1997, by Bill Gale, a retired Royal Bank VP for New Brunswick. The organization strives to be a “catalyst”, working to involve all sectors within the community in a common vision of quality of life for all and in focused action to reduce the level of poverty in Saint John. Mobilizing the business community from within, BCAPI uses the resources, talents, discipline and influence of business community members, partnered with the expertise and experience of the community, to address this critical community issue.

The Mission of BCAPI states:

*By working together with people living in poverty, community organizations and government, we are dedicated to reducing the number of people who live in poverty in Greater Saint John.*

The following represents an overview of the BCAPI Working Groups and some examples of their work:

1. Single Parent Family - In 2000, BCAPI engaged Deloitte to undertake a Poverty Study to help the group focus on activities that were likely to be most effective in preventing and eliminating poverty. The Study also helped BCAPI gain a comprehensive knowledge of the extent of poverty in Saint John. BCAPI learned that the majority of people living in poverty in the City of Saint John are members of single parent families, including a total of 6000 parents and their children. *One in three children in the City of Saint John live in poverty.* As a result of the Study, single parents and their children are now the primary focus of BCAPI actions as we strive to break the cycle of poverty.

Armed with the “evidence”, the Single Parent Family Working Group has taken the primary lead in moving the recommendations of the Study forward and uniting the activities of the Working Groups to:

- Help children who live in poverty to succeed in school and break the poverty cycle;
- Enhance youth programs that prevent teen pregnancy and improve well-being;
- Develop services and supports that enable teen parents to continue their education;
- Help single parents to get into the workforce and off social assistance.

2. Youth Poverty Working Group – The Youth Poverty Working Group is partnering with other community leaders to establish a Resource Center for Youth, better known as the TRC Project. This Center will bring the community’s resources and services together under one roof to provide “one stop shopping” for youth, their parents and service providers in

the areas of career and work readiness, recreation, community involvement, health and self-development.

3. Housing – The Housing Working Group partnered with the local First Steps Housing Project Committee to establish a residence for young homeless pregnant youth. The residence accommodates 12 mothers and their infants, and began accepting the first residents in May 2002. The Housing Working Group is now focused on facilitating the development of a housing strategy for Saint John and the development of 100 new affordable housing units.

4. Education to Employment - The Education to Employment Working Group has been successful in supporting the operations of CASP's (Community Academic Services Programs), a GED preparation program, has created jobs for people living in poverty, partnered to hold 2 very successful Job Fairs and many other activities related to employment and training. Currently the Working Group is examining ways to address the barriers, experienced by teens and young adults, to staying in school.

5. Communications and Public Awareness – The Communications Working Group has been a support and resource to BCAPI, enhancing communications through the BCAPI newsletter "*Work in Progress*". This Group will continue to define and develop the communication tools required by BCAPI to carry out its work, including a strategy to increase our community's awareness regarding the effects of poverty and how it can be reduced.

6. Vibrant Communities Leadership Roundtable – In 2002, Saint John was one of 14 communities, invited to participate in *Vibrant Communities*, a Pan-Canadian Poverty Reduction Initiative, led by the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, Caledon Institute of Social Policy and Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement. BCAPI agreed to be the local sponsoring organization and convened a Roundtable of local leaders - from business, government, non-profit organizations and people living in poverty - to oversee the project. The Roundtable involved the community in developing a Poverty Reduction Strategy for Saint John that adopted the Vibrant Communities strategies of: comprehensive thinking and action, community asset building, multi-sectoral collaboration and community learning and change. The Strategy is complete and the Roundtable expects to formally launch the Strategy in the Fall of 2004.

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The work of BCAPI has been recognized by the following awards:

2001 - Peter F. Drucker Award for Innovation in Canadian Non-Profit Organizations

2002 – New Brunswick Business Crime Prevention Excellence Award

2003 – Imagine's "Spirit of Partnership" Award

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Bill Gale – Co-Chair  
Tel: 506-672-1010

Gary Lawson – Co-Chair  
Tel: 506-633-3737

Monica Chaperlin – Coordinator  
Tel: 506-633-5588  
chaperlin.monica@jdirving.com