

VIBRANT COMMUNITIES SAINT JOHN

Education to Employment Pathways Out of Poverty



Working Paper
September 2006
Report of the Education to
Employment Working Group

Foreword

An educated workforce is a key to the growth of Saint John and to reducing poverty in our community.

This report, completed through the efforts of Vibrant Communities Saint John's Education to Employment Working Group lays out the challenges faced by, and the opportunities available to, individuals on low income with low levels of education. It is a starting point to better define, to understand, and to recommend those changes required to help people obtain the educational tools needed to move out of poverty.

There is an urgent need for action in our community. Specific policies and practices are recommended as critical to enhancing the journey of individuals out of poverty. We hope that this report will serve as a vehicle for a continuing dialogue among community organizations, government departments, employers, policy makers and individuals living in poverty.

On behalf of the Education to Employment Working Group, we wish to express our appreciation to the 100 plus individuals who shared their experiences and contributed ideas in order to ensure the relevancy of this report - staff from community organizations, government departments, business and trade organizations and individuals living in poverty.

Special thanks go to Vibrant Communities staff, particularly Cathy Wright for the research and writing of this report, and to Michelle Porter for her editorial assistance.

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Education to Employment: Pathways Out of Poverty

Executive Summary

A. Introduction

The community of Saint John faces a significant challenge as it works to keep its economy growing and to attract new businesses: too few employees have the education and experience employers seek. In fact, too many prospective workers have not completed high school. More than a startling statistic, this fact has significant repercussions for our economy.

Thousands of people with low levels of education live in some of Saint John's poorest areas, struggling to find adequate employment and make ends meet. Yet, they don't have to live this way. These workers could – given proper support and training – fill much of the region's growing labour force demand¹.

Under the leadership of VCSJ's Education to Employment Working Group, this report lays out the challenges and opportunities faced by individuals on low income with low levels of education, and recommends policies and practices which can be followed to ensure those individuals' success.

The experiences of close to 100 individuals - individuals living in poverty, community organizations, government departments, and business and trades organizations have guided the findings in this report².

B. What do we know about people with low levels of education living in Saint John?

Many are young. In Saint John, there are 3,294 people between the ages of 20 and 34 without a high school diploma.

¹ Poverty and Plenty, Vibrant Communities Saint John, 2005

² The number of individuals living in poverty is guided by the Low-Income Cut off Measure (LICO) of Statistics Canada, accepted by many sociologists to be Canada's poverty line. For example, the LICO (before tax) for a single parent and one child in an area with a population between 30,000 and 99,999 is \$22,139.

They are isolated. Most live away from the rest of the community, clustering in neighbourhoods with high levels of poverty.

The majority have been or will be on income assistance. Recent statistics show that over half of the individuals on income assistance do not have a high school education.

Their children will likely be under-educated too. A parent's lack of education frequently acts as a deterrent to his/her child's success in school.

Education is their ticket out of poverty. Most employers require at least a high school level of education before hiring. Better paid work requires more.

They face significant barriers to education. Tuition, transportation costs, childcare, lack of confidence, lack of support and isolation are barriers that are often too large to surmount without significant assistance and support.

C. Very few people in Saint John with low levels of education are enrolled in educational programs.

It is key to the growth of Saint John that this group has access to educational opportunities: Saint John employers need a workforce with higher levels of education and higher levels of education can increase an individual's chances of moving out of poverty.

Although Saint John has an array of community and college based programs that can help learners achieve various educational goals - from improving literacy skills to obtaining a high school diploma or its equivalent- only 430 of the thousands with low levels of education living in poverty in Saint John are participating in educational programs.

How can the community of Saint John help ensure success for these people?

This report seeks to answer that question.

D. Barriers to achieving higher levels of education include:

- *Isolation.* Since few professionals live in neighbourhoods with high poverty rates, few examples of success and/or role models are evident.
- *Fear.* For many, learning is associated with past experiences of failing.
- *Time.* It can take two years to obtain a GED³, which may qualify the learner only for minimum wage jobs.
- *Childcare.* Accessible and affordable childcare is not readily available.
- *Transportation.* Affordable and accessible transportation is not available.
- *Tuition.* Loans for education/training beyond high school present a drain on any post-educational income and may be very difficult to pay back
- *Job-related skills training is absent.* Even after obtaining a GED, a learner may not have the skills employers are seeking.

E. Recommendations of the report

Develop an Education to Employment Strategy for Individuals living in Poverty. Place the emphasis on single parents and unattached youth between the ages of 19 and 34 who are living on income assistance. This will help break the cycle of low education levels for the next generation and better position individuals to benefit from the increasing number of employment opportunities in our community.

An Education to Employment Strategy needs to involve the whole community - individuals living in poverty, community organizations, government departments and businesses. Never before has there been a better opportunity for social *and* economic development beneficial to both individuals and employers as well as to the community at large.

Five key directions have been identified:

- **Improve recruitment and retention in literacy, GED, and upgrading programs.** Increase the capacity of organizations to support learners in addressing their barriers, and include an employment skills component in programs.
- **Increase supports for post-secondary training.** Promote ways to ensure that post-secondary training is affordable and accessible.

³ GED or General Education Development diploma is accepted as equivalent to a high school diploma.

- **Strengthen transitional and ongoing supports to employment.** Provide a continuum of support to assist individuals in preparing for, finding and, keeping employment.
- **Position the strategy at the neighbourhood level.** Promote increased accessibility to programs and services.
- **Break the cycle of high-school drop-outs.** Champion increased resources to build on best practices that encourage children and youth to stay in school.

Commitment to an Education to Employment Strategy: This report should serve as an alarm. The Saint John community must work together to understand and address the challenges facing individuals with low levels of education. VCSJ's Education to Employment Committee will work with the community to:

- ***Share Results of the Report:*** Encourage those with an interest in creating a ready, willing and educated workforce to assist in addressing the issues raised.
- ***Take a Neighbourhood Approach:*** Position the strategy in a neighbourhood, one with a high concentration of poverty, and work closely with residents and other partners.
- ***Ensure Readiness for Employment:*** Bring forth a model program that provides for transitional and ongoing supports that help individuals to prepare for, find, and keep employment.

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List of Abbreviations and Terms

ABC Canada Literacy Foundation is a joint national initiative of business, labour, education and government, supporting the development of an educated and adaptable workforce through fostering a lifelong learning culture.

Basic Education Programs refers to the range of educational programs for adults along the continuum to high school completion and includes Community Adult Learning Programs, General Educational Development (GED), and Academic Upgrading.

CALP (Community Adult Learning Programs) refers to community based programs which offer training from grade levels 1 to 9 as well as GED preparation. These programs were previously named as CASP (Community Academic Services Programs).

CMA refers to Census Metropolitan Area; Saint John CMA refers to the urban centre and suburbs.

EI: Employment Insurance

Essential Skills: Nine skill areas identified by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada: reading text, document use, writing, numeracy, oral communication, thinking skills, working with others, computer use, and continuous learning.

FCS: New Brunswick Department of Family and Community Services. FCS hires Case Managers to work with individuals on income assistance to provide financial services, crisis counseling, and guidance in developing a career development case plan.

GED: the General Education Development diploma is recognized as meeting high school graduation requirements for the purpose of employment and further education. GED tests measure knowledge in five different areas: language arts and writing; social studies; science; language arts and reading; and mathematics. One must be 19 years of age to write GED tests.

Literacy: The ability to read and write and to understand and use information.

NBCC: New Brunswick Community College

PLAR: Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition. A tool which identifies and validates a person's skills and knowledge through formal and informal study, work and life experience, and applies this to standards for training or job skills. Provincial government staff will be trained in this process to assist their work with individuals.

DPET: New Brunswick Department of Post Secondary Education and Training (DPET), formerly Training and Employment Development (TED). Employment Counselors are hired by DPET to provide individual guidance and counseling related to training and employment.

TSD: Training and Skills Development, a program of DPET, which provides individuals with financial assistance to acquire the required training. It is available for individuals with an active or recent EI claim.

1. PURPOSE

In February of 2005, Saint John launched a three-year poverty reduction strategy. Vibrant Communities Saint John was established to bring together the skills, knowledge, resources and efforts of the business community, three levels of government, community organizations, churches and individuals living in poverty. The goal is to help 2000 individuals or 800 households move forward in the journey out of poverty. Efforts are underway to better define and to understand poverty traps, to determine new courses of action, and to strengthen partnerships in order to champion key policy and program improvements.

Key to the poverty reduction strategy is providing access to literacy programs, GED training and upgrading opportunities which help individuals begin the journey out of poverty. The Education to Employment Working Group⁴ was established by Vibrant Communities Saint John to guide work in this area.

A higher level of education increases one's chances of moving out of poverty. Without a high school education, individuals and families are often trapped in high poverty neighbourhoods.

The 14 member multisectoral Working Group represents federal and provincial governments, community agencies, businesses, and individuals living in poverty. Members agreed that it was vital to first understand the issues surrounding continuing education and employment needs. A better understanding of the barriers faced by individuals living in poverty with low levels of education was needed. As well, opportunities already present needed to be noted and further refined.

The purpose of this report is as follows:

- to describe the opportunities and supports that help individuals make the transition to further education and employment
- to describe the challenges and barriers facing individuals and
- to identify recommendations and to champion action by stakeholders in the community

⁴ See Appendix A for list of members in the Education to Employment Working Group

2. LINKING POVERTY TO EDUCATION

Figure 1: The Cumulative Advantages of Higher Education in the Saint John CMA
(Source: 2001 Census)

Education Level	Average Earnings	Cumulative Increase	Earnings Differential After 10 years
less than high school	\$ 18,366.00	0.0%	\$ -
high school/some PSE	\$ 22,199.00	20.9%	\$ 38,330.00
Trades Certificate	\$ 32,945.00	79.4%	\$ 145,790.00
College Diploma	\$ 30,850.00	68.0%	\$ 124,840.00
University Degree	\$ 45,651.00	148.6%	\$ 272,850.00

Studies, reports and experience emphasize a direct relationship between one's level of education and income – **a higher level of education increases an individual's chances of moving out of poverty.** Research also shows that a parent's lack of education frequently acts as a deterrent to his/her children's success in school, which means that the **cycle of poverty will likely continue in the next generation.**

3. METHODOLOGY

In order to paint as accurate a picture as possible, this report draws upon the experiences of individuals living in poverty as well as individuals in the human service sector who provide education, employment and support services. The report is also guided by current statistics, studies, and best practices.

Over 100 individuals ⁵ provided input for this report – current and past learners, instructors, facilitators, community agencies, staff from Family and Community Services (FCS) including case managers, staff from Post Secondary Education and Training (DPEIT) including employment counselors, staff from New Brunswick Community College (NBCC), members of the Trades community, Enterprise Saint John, and members of the Education to Employment Working Group.

⁵ See Appendix B for list of groups

A series of questions were developed by the Working Group for individuals living in poverty, for community organizations, and for government departments. These were further modified and adapted to individual interviews and focus groups (see Appendix B and C).

Individuals living in poverty were asked about their experience with educational programs including goals, barriers, and supports. Community organizations and government departments were asked about their services, related challenges and opportunities, and suggestions for improvement. Three focus groups were held, two with learners from Saint John Learning Exchange and John Howard Society and one with Community Adult Learning Program (CALP)⁶ instructors/facilitators. Anonymity was assured for all and individuals living in poverty signed consent forms.

4. LEARNING FROM STATISTICS

Greater Saint John (GSJ) appears to be undergoing an employment renaissance. Both employment and total labour force numbers are reaching new heights. This bodes well for the future; however, certain individuals and neighbourhoods are at risk of being left out of a robust job market⁷.

48% of residents over the age of 19 in Crescent Valley are without a high school education.
- Source: 2001 Census Statistics Canada

Our community has a significant number of individuals without a high school level of education; many are young people living in neighborhoods with high levels of poverty.

According to the 2001 census statistics, slightly more than 3,294 individuals, or 14% in GSJ, between the ages of 20 and 34 lack a high school education. The Saint John Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) appears to be failing its young at a much higher rate than other New Brunswick communities⁸ (11.8% in Moncton and 8.9% in Fredericton). Even more disconcerting is that the most recent data shows all three cities are doing poorly. Between 2000 and 2004, Saint John had a total of 1500 dropouts compared to 1642 in Moncton and 1197 in Fredericton.

⁶ CALP programs were previously known as Community Academic Services Programs (CASP).

⁷ Poverty and Plenty: A Statistical Snapshot of the Quality of Life in Greater Saint John, Vibrant Communities Saint John, October 2005 (P&P)

⁸ Ibid

Roughly 30 percent of Saint Johners living in poverty are housed in **neighborhoods of very high poverty** – Census areas where more than 40 percent of the local population fall below the poverty line. These neighbourhoods have few services, limited educational or recreational opportunities and a fragmented sense of community. The proportion of adults without high school education exceeds the proportion of adults with some form of post-secondary credential. The stigma attached to such neighbourhoods adds to the hopelessness experienced by residents.

These neighbourhoods of very high poverty are home to a little more than 1 in 5 of the region's workers, most of whom are working in the manufacturing and food and beverage industry. Few professionals and skilled tradespeople live in these neighbourhoods.

The majority of individuals on income assistance have not completed high school. According to information from FCS (fall of 2005) fifty-three percent (53%) of individuals aged 19 and over who are part of the active caseload on income assistance (2,817 individuals) have not completed high school.

A recent study by ABC Canada shows that people are not attending upgrading programs for three main reasons: individuals are concerned about money and want to be working; they think they operate at a higher level than they do; and they are anxious about going back to school⁹.

5. THE CHALLENGE OF LIVING IN POVERTY

Poverty is overwhelming and multifaceted

Poor quality and unaffordable housing, inadequate diet, health challenges, limited transportation and education levels which make well-paid jobs inaccessible all contribute to a sense of entrapment and the belief that opportunities for improvement are non-existent. The ongoing stress of trying to meet basic needs with too few resources requires unusual courage and resourcefulness.

"The stress of living in poverty can be described as piling the books associated with each challenge into a bag and then carrying the loaded bag around on your back".
- CALP facilitator

⁹ Why aren't they calling? Nonparticipation in Literacy and Upgrading Programs: A National Study. ABC Canada Literacy Foundation 2002

Many individuals also have difficult relationship issues, lack of family supports, lack of access to affordable child care options, behavioural issues with their children, addiction issues, lack of confidence and fear of change.

Single parents and their children have special needs

Single parents face an array of challenges: they must make decisions alone, handle jobs or training, and address the needs and problems of their children while dealing with absent, and sometimes abusive, partners. The vast majority of single parents often live in neighbourhoods that are homogeneously poor. The cost, flexibility and accessibility of quality childcare are urgent concerns.

“Single mothers spoke about their need for flexible hours of licensed child care, since entry level, service sector, call centre and retail jobs require shift workers”.
Focus Group of Single Mothers conducted by VCSJ on childcare challenges

Individuals living in poverty often experience hopelessness. Some individuals who were interviewed had dropped out of programs for family reasons and were currently on “nerve pills” and anti-depressants. One learner, a single person, was encouraged to attend Youth Choices (counseling and education program for youth) by her sister, a young single parent also without a high school education, and living in a low-income neighborhood with three children. The single parent felt her situation would not change but wanted more for her sister who is currently attending Youth Choices.

“What keeps me going is seeing their eyes come off the floor (as learners gain self-confidence) because they are getting the skills they need and in a place where people want them to succeed”.
- Staff at Saint John Learning Exchange.

Interviewees who had previously dropped out of programs felt trapped by the fear of failing in school and the knowledge that although they want to work, they can't get a job without a high school education.

When interviewed, members of the human service sector repeatedly expressed concerns about the lack of confidence individuals living in poverty have in their own abilities and skills. A very limited experience with success hampers the ability of individuals living in poverty to set goals and see them through. Case managers from FCS were concerned that many of their clients have a fear of failure and of change.

This fear of failure and of change is reinforced by an example of a vulnerable North End neighbourhood where residents fear leaving their community and the entitlement to a subsidized housing unit, even for situations where employment and financial circumstances may improve. The survey of residents

in Crescent Valley, a low income neighbourhood in the North End of Saint John, indicated that only 22% of respondents would move out of Crescent Valley if they had the choice¹⁰. Thus, neighbourhoods that are homogeneously poor tend to further isolate individuals from the rest of the community.

The assets of individuals are too often overlooked. While many of the interviewees (current, past or potential learners) reported a range of work experiences, there was little recognition of the skill and knowledge gained from such experiences. The tremendous courage and myriad of survival skills demonstrated every day by individuals and families on low income are rarely acknowledged by the community or by the individuals themselves.

The following example illustrates what can happen when a motivated individual is supported by community learning programs. A single mother had been repeatedly encouraged by her case manager to go back to school. When a family crisis occurred, she finally took her case worker's advice. Today she has successfully completed her GED through the Learning Exchange and chairs a provincial organization of learners. She has presented at meetings with federal cabinet ministers and is currently participating in a work experience placement through the Work Ability program of DPET.

6. EDUCATIONAL OPTIONS

Maximizing our community's assets

As previously indicated, education is closely linked to income. Most employers expect individuals to have at least high school equivalency. According to the most recent labour force survey of the Saint John Board of Trade, finding qualified workers is one of the most significant issues challenging local businesses.

"The Learning Exchange is great. The staff make us feel very comfortable and welcomed. They give their all to us. This really keeps us motivated and positive. Everything opens new doors. Just need to know what door to open".
- Focus Group of Learners

Our community has an array of services and supports related to employment and education provided by community organizations, and government departments.

FCS's mandate is to develop and to implement initiatives that prepare clients for education, training and employment. DPET's mandate is to ensure that

¹⁰ In 2006 VCSJ worked with residents in Crescent Valley to conduct a survey of their concerns and challenges and to recommend changes to address these issues.

appropriate programming is in place to address training and employment barriers. As part of their mandates, both departments offer services directly to individuals as well as through third party delivery contracts with different community agencies. Many of the community organizations described in the report receive funding from one or both provincial departments, as well as from other sources.

The path toward education differs from learner to learner, but obtaining a high school education as an adult is almost always confusing and time consuming

Individuals wanting to obtain their high school education have different options depending on their level of academic performance and whether their goals are for further education/training or employment.

"I am always planting seeds of ideas as relationships develop with my clients".
- Case Manager, FCS

Individuals can go to a CALP, a GED program, or academic upgrading. Anyone wanting to enroll in post secondary education/training will need their GED and possibly academic upgrading, depending on the criteria for admission. The Community College offers GED as well as academic upgrading, while community organizations offer CALP and GED preparation.

Individuals can attend a program without a referral or be referred by their case managers, employment counselors or others in the community. Individuals often find out about programs through other agencies and their own networks. In the focus groups with learners, more than 50% of individuals indicated that they heard about their program through friends or family.

"After I finished the Self-Esteem Course for Women (offered at St. Joseph's Community Health Centre), my daughter said: "Mom what are you going to do next. I like to see you get out of bed each day - you seem so vibrant".
Single Parent

Prior to starting any program, individuals are assessed to determine which program is most appropriate to their needs. Case managers from FCS and employment counselors from DPET usually refer individuals to the North End Centre of NBCC for assessment to determine their level of functioning and appropriate options. Individuals can also be assessed through individual CALP programs.

Some programs are free and others charge a fee. Both FCS and DPET cover program costs for clients, depending on the individual's case plan. Case plans are developed together by the client and case manager and guide an individual's course of action in meeting educational, employment or other personal goals.

1. Community Adult Learning Programs (CALP)

Individuals assessed with lower to middle levels of academic achievement, between grade levels three and nine can attend a CALP program. The focus is on reading, writing and numeracy skills, up to and including GED preparation. In September of this year, it is expected that a more structured curriculum will be introduced that incorporates both essential skills and employment preparation.

- CALP Programs:**
- Carleton Community Centre
 - Coverdale Centre for Women
 - John Howard Society
 - North End Community Centre
 - Saint John Learning Exchange
 - St. John the Baptist School
 - YM-YWCA
 - Youth Choices

From September 2005 to June 2006, 222 students attended CALP programs (this includes individuals who dropped out during the year). Eight organizations offer CALP programs at various locations throughout the City, although none are offered in East Saint John. These programs operate out of community centres, schools and community organizations. Some organizations offer more than one CALP program, usually with 16 individuals in each program. One of these organizations, the John Howard Society, offers a CALP program for adults (primarily individuals who have had trouble with the law) and a second program for youth under the age of 18, assisting them in the transition back to regular high school. Recent reductions in funding resulted in the loss of a support worker for this program and, although the teacher still continues, the number of weeks has been reduced.

“The drop-out rate for CALP is higher because the process is longer depending on their academic assessment”.

- Case Manager, FCS

CALP programs are free. Individuals can attend only for half-days, with a maximum of five half-days a week. There is flexibility to attend fewer hours if necessary. Evening classes, two nights a week, are offered at the Learning Exchange for individuals working at the lower grade levels.

Not all students go with the goal of getting their GED; some individuals want only to improve their reading, writing and numeracy skills. Most students recognize that getting a GED is a requirement for employment.

The community based programs have longer waiting lists and, more significantly, lower success rates. This is linked to a number of factors concerning both the individual and the program. An individual’s level of academic performance is a factor. Personal issues such as childcare, family relationships, and support networks are factors, too. Individuals operating at a lower level of academic performance have more challenges in making progress

and usually do not complete their GED. Those at the middle level often experience a time consuming and frustrating route, frequently taking up to two years to successfully complete their GED. Individuals who enter at the higher levels can complete their GED in a shorter period of time, less than 24 weeks.

Most recent statistics show that in the Saint John and Sussex CALP programs 37% of learners were under the age of 24 and 46% were between the ages of 25 and 44. It is unclear how many individuals are on a waiting list but the Learning Exchange, for example, has a waiting list of 42 individuals.

"Each year I refer 7-10 individuals and about 50% drop out. Approximately two individuals complete their GED each year, but this is usually after two years of study".
- Case Manager, FCS

The drop out rate is disconcerting: 33% (or 137) dropped out of CALP programs in Saint John between 2002 and 2003. Of those who dropped out, 17.5% left for employment reasons while 25% were listed with an unknown reason for leaving¹¹. Other reasons ranged across the spectrum from family, personal, childcare, to lack of progress.¹² Recent statistics from one agency reported that 50 individuals had dropped out in the past year.

The Learning Exchange and Coverdale Centre for Women offer CALP programs in the summer to prevent the regression that can occur when students have a long break in attendance. The recent reorganization of CALP programs has resulted in a lack of funding for summer programs, the loss of which has negative implications for learners and staff.

2. Moving towards A GED

Next, an individual may decide to work towards writing their GED. GED tests knowledge in five different areas: language arts and writing, social studies, science, reading, and mathematics. It can be a stepping stone to employment because most employers require a high school certificate or GED. The GED can also qualify a learner for academic upgrading. In academic upgrading an individual can take required courses such as math or biology to qualify for post-secondary training

"I think we should act on these specific recommendations:
Remove the \$40 fee for writing the GED;
Move the GED testing to an accessible location;
- Recognize the significance of obtaining the GED through a ceremony".
- Learner who was interviewed

¹¹ Community Academic Services Program: A Statistical Profile, Literacy New Brunswick Inc, 2004

¹² Ibid

programs offered at the different public and private training institutions. Achieving a GED also improves an individual's self-confidence.

A GED course can be accessed in a number of ways:

- Continuing with the CALP program - no charge
- Attending the nine week, full-time GED preparation program at the North End Centre of NBCC at a cost of \$250. The cost may be covered by DPET depending on case/employment plan. Intake and assessment occur four times a year (September, November, February, and April).
122 students participated last year
- Attending a 14 week GED night school program (one night a week) offered at NBCC main campus. Cost is \$149.50. **40 students participated last year¹³.**
- Participating in the BEST program (Basic Education and Skills Training Program) offered at the Learning Exchange. It is a full-time program providing self-development skills, pre-employment skills, as well as GED preparation. No charge. A small waiting list currently exists. **51 students participated last year.**
- Attending a one-evening-a-week program at the Learning Exchange for individuals who are working during the day and are almost ready to write the GED. No charge.
- Completing the GED preparatory program on-line, often through Community Access Centres. In 2005/06, approximately 100 individuals were enrolled throughout the Province. The cost is \$580, which can be covered by DPET depending on the case/employment plan.
- Independent Study. An individual may purchase the GED book and write the test when ready. The cost of the book is \$20.

There is a \$40 application fee to write the GED test. This cost may be covered by the individual or, depending on eligibility, by FCS or DPET.

Successfully writing a GED is a challenge for many. According to information from DPET, in the past four years, less than 50% of all individuals writing the GED (from community college and community based programs) were successful in Saint John. Forty-seven percent of all learners in CALP programs wrote their GED, and only 20% were successful. At the NBCC North End Centre, over a five-year period, the success rate for students writing their GED after the nine-week course was much higher, at 78%.

¹³ In the fall of 2006, the course split into two, one focusing on math and the other on reading and writing, at a cost of \$79.80 for each course.

Subjects causing the most difficulty are math and language arts/writing and to a lesser degree social studies. Social studies is difficult because of the background knowledge and high level of critical analysis required.

The environment surrounding the GED exam can be challenging. For individuals in community based programs, the GED testing occurs on a Friday night and all day Saturday at NBCC on Grandview Avenue.

Transportation costs must be covered by the learners and many use taxis because of the exam schedule. Individuals in the North End Centre nine-week GED preparation program take the tests on site at the Centre and during the week. The cost of having students write on-site is the \$200 salary of a supervisor plus travel costs, which is covered by NBCC. However, the cost is not affordable for community organizations.

Case managers reported that two or three individuals on their caseload achieve their GED each year and most people write at least twice.

A process is in place at the North End Centre where an individual is required to sign a form releasing results to instructors as well as to the individual. This facilitates follow-up encouragement from instructors for students who need to try again. No such mechanism is in place for community organizations and a recent inquiry to DPET in Fredericton revealed that this was not possible.

In addition, community based programs operate at minimal and often unstable levels of funding. They have limited access to program resources, student counselors, and professional development opportunities. Community based programs offer more flexibility in instructor qualifications but, as a result, offer lower salary levels.

3. Academic Upgrading

The GED is not enough for entrance into many programs at NBCC or University because grade 11 or 12 math, English or biology is usually required. Individuals with a high school certificate or a GED can access these courses at the North End Centre at a cost of \$135 per course. For individuals on income assistance or EI, fees can be covered by DPET, depending on the case plan. Individuals can be assessed at any time of the year, but there are two intakes: September and February. 215 students enrolled in the past year.

Between 2002 and 2004, 31% of students attending the North End Centre were referred by FCS and 41% by DPET; 26% attended at their own cost. The attrition rate was low, at approximately 13%. It is interesting to note that

currently, only a small percentage (18%) of students who are attending programs at the North End Centre are single parents.

7. MOVING BEYOND HIGH SCHOOL

What are the issues

Many past and current learners enrolled in community programs expressed a desire to work. In the focus groups, learners talked about wanting step-by-step support and counseling in order to better understand their options and set realistic goals for further training. They talked about receiving support during the job search, while job shadowing and in the first months after finding work. These and other initiatives would strengthen their attachment to the workforce.

Some of the lessons learned from the welfare to work programs in the United States and, to a lesser extent, in Canada indicate that the most successful programs provide a balanced mix of services, including job search, education and training, child care and transportation support, and post-employment follow-up¹⁴.

A number of interviewees, including case managers, talked about the value of a two-to-three-week employment preparation program which would be accessible to everyone regardless of education level.

The need for an employment preparation program was underscored during interviews with three private sector employment agencies when it was affirmed that while employment opportunities were available for individuals with a GED (indeed, a GED spoke well of an applicant's motivation and commitment to learning), agencies found that individuals with a GED were unprepared for interviews – in their dress, attitude, and level of confidence.

"I told them I took the GED course but I didn't say I passed it. They hired me and I hope to take the next GED testing and get all my subjects before they find out".
- Single Person

Often, finding work with a GED does not lift someone out of poverty. While obtaining a GED usually means that individuals are more employable, the jobs offered are often low wage jobs. A brief survey of 19 employers in the service and retail sectors conducted in 2005, which asked about wages, benefits and

¹⁴ Success Features of Welfare-to-Work Initiatives, Ellen Battle, Caledon Institute of Social Policy, unpublished background research paper, 1999

educational requirements, revealed that individuals face significant challenges finding jobs with adequate wages, enough hours, benefits and the potential for advancement.

As referred to earlier, there is a direct link between level of education and earnings. This link serves to emphasize the importance of post-secondary education and training, which is out of the reach financially for many in our community, and even more so for individuals living in poverty.

Preparation for Employment

The employment assistance that is available is primarily individual-based, lacking a real skill-building component.

Employment counselors (DPEI) offer career and employment counseling, usually working with individuals with prior or current attachment to the labour force. Individuals on income assistance receive similar supports from case managers and career consultants as part of their case plan. Through a federal-provincial government partnership, a job centre with a job bank and a computer based program assisting with job searches is located at government offices in 1 Agar Place. Information can also be accessed through the internet through www.jobbank.gc.ca.

FCS offers a portfolio course twice a year, three hours a week for ten weeks. This is a small-group program to help individuals identify what skills are transferable from life experiences. It helps individuals prepare resumes and plan for next steps, such as going back to school or moving into an employment/return to work program.

Youth Choices and the Community Access Centre at St. Joseph's Community Health Centre provide job boards which list employment opportunities. Fusion Saint John, a networking group of young Saint John residents, is currently piloting a small mentoring program for young adults between the ages of 18 and 20 with a high school education (or GED) who are seeking employment or post-secondary training. Dress for Success is a new program, involving volunteers in providing clothing, job-related coaching and other supports to assist women in achieving personal success and self-sufficiency.

The Association for Community Living assists individuals with intellectual disabilities in finding employment. They also work with individuals with other, and often multiple, barriers to employment through a program funded by

DPET. Individuals are referred by FCS and DPET. The Association for Community Living offers four services:

- pre-employment services: looking at issues such as social and life skills that are needed as well as access to transportation and childcare;
- employment services: identifying appropriate jobs, resume preparation, interview techniques and assistance with getting a job;
- post-employment services: involving follow-up with employee and employer over the subsequent three months; and
- developing possible employment opportunities through approaches to employers.

Other community organizations receive funding from DPET to offer employment related services to specific target groups. Options Outreach provides one-on-one employment counseling for individuals with disabilities and assists them in finding and maintaining a job. The agency also works with employers, encouraging local businesses to hire individuals with disabilities. The John Howard Society provides a pre-employment skills program for offenders and those at risk of offending who have little or no job experience. It also provides employment counseling and job placement for job-ready offender clients. PRUDE offers employment assistance to visible minorities and assists private and public sector employers in their employment equity programs.

Opportunities for Training

Post-secondary training can be accessed through the public sector, such as NBCC and University of New Brunswick Saint John, or private sector training institutions, such as Academy of Learning, Compu College, Academy of Hair Design, and Carpenters Training Centre of New Brunswick. Public and private institutions can waive entrance requirements such as high school certification if appropriate. At times, identical courses are offered at both private and public institutions, but with different tuition costs and entrance requirements.

Community programs provide skills training, such as computer training, at the YMCA-YWCA and the Community Access Centres. Passport to Employment is a six-week course which prepares individuals for employment in the retail and hospitality industry. It targets parents on income assistance whose last child is about to leave home.

The Career Centre at Simonds High School and the Work Room at Kennebecasis Valley High School help people explore career options. Started three years ago, these centres provide a wealth of information about careers,

training and employment opportunities, all of which can be accessed on your own or with the help of a staff person. The centres are accessible during the day to high school students and the public; the Work Room has evening hours.

All members of the public can access career and employment counseling offered by DPET by meeting individually with an employment counselor. Case managers also offer similar services to their clients. Both departments encourage individuals to do research related to their area of career interest.

Work Experience

Employment programs such as the Work Ability Program help individuals gain valuable work experience and build skills. Individuals on income assistance can access these programs through their case manager and others can through an employment counselor.

Financial Supports for CALP, GED, Upgrading

Childcare, transportation and tuition supports differ for individuals depending on whether they receive income assistance or are EI eligible.

Income Assistance: Case managers with FCS can assist individuals on income assistance with childcare and transportation costs when they are attending a high school level program - CALP, GED, BEST and Upgrading. Childcare is covered up to \$25/day per child in a licensed childcare facility. An hourly rate of \$2/hour is provided for private babysitting for the first child and \$2.50 if more than one, although grandparents are not reimbursed for babysitting.

"I receive income assistance and attend a private school full-time. I have a student loan which is expected to cover my childcare and transportation costs. I have four children, fortunately only one is not in school. This child is 14 months so I have a private babysitter who also provides after school care. I find it very difficult to make ends meet but I don't want to quit".

Single Parent who was interviewed

EI Eligible and qualifying for TSD: Individuals who are EI eligible and attending CALP programs will not receive financial support under TSD for childcare and transportation, although they will continue to receive EI. In this situation the individual may receive assistance from FCS. If they were attending the GED or the Upgrading program through NBCC, then they would be eligible to receive childcare and transportation supports under TSD. These supports have fewer restrictions than income assistance; for example, childcare reimbursement is still \$25/day but individuals are able to spend it in whatever way they feel best meets their needs.

Financial Supports for Post Secondary Training

Individuals on income assistance and those with an EI attachment receive some financial support to go on to post secondary training from either FCS or DPET. However, **crucial financial supports such as childcare, transportation, and assistance with post-secondary tuition differ depending on the program and the sponsoring department.**

Individuals on income assistance can continue to receive cost of living assistance and their health card as part of their case plan, while attending post-secondary training. They do not receive assistance with tuition, childcare and transportation. When an individual's case plan includes participation in an employment experience program, they may be able to work enough weeks to qualify for additional financial supports under the TSD program.

DPET will assist individuals who currently receive EI or who have received EI benefits in the last three years with financial assistance (through TSD) for retraining. The TSD program could include continuation of EI benefits or a living allowance once EI benefits are exhausted, childcare and transportation costs, up to 50% of the tuition costs, plus other costs associated with the training. There is a maximum monthly childcare sum of \$535 (\$125/week, \$25/day) for the first child. As previously mentioned, individuals are able to spend the sum in whatever way they feel best meets their needs, including private daycare, licensed day care, or babysitting by family members.

An individual under the TSD receives a minimum monthly transportation subsidy of \$86/month, compared to \$60 a month for bus pass from FCS. Mileage reimbursement appears to be comparable.

However, according to a recent study from the TD Bank, close to one in two unemployed Saint Johners do not qualify for EI benefits¹⁵.

Whether on income assistance or EI eligible, an individual will need other financial supports, usually in the form of a student loan, to cover costs for post-secondary training. However an individual on income assistance must assume the burden of a larger student loan to cover tuition plus childcare and transportation. FCS may provide further assistance to their clients but only in an emergency situation.

¹⁵ From Welfare to Work in Ontario: Still the Road Less Travelled, TD Bank Financial Group, Toronto, 2005

It is encouraging to note the recent announcement by the provincial government of a new scholarship program for individuals who enter non-traditional training programs.

Figure 2 uses a table to contrast the similarities and differences in supports available for a single parent on income assistance as compared to a single parent eligible for EI and thus the TSD program. The table follows the path from CALP, GED, and Upgrading to Post-Secondary Training.

Figure 2: Comparative supports for individuals on income assistance or who are EI eligible (September 2006)

	CALP, GED and Upgrading Childcare support	CALP, GED, Upgrading Transportation supports	Post Secondary Tuition plus materials	Post Secondary Childcare supports	Post Secondary Transportation Supports	Health Card
Single Parent continues to receive income assistance	-\$25/day in licensed day care or -\$2/hour if babysitter but grandparents not permitted	\$60/month for bus pass or .20 cents a km	Individual applies for Student Loan.	Individual applies for Student Loan. FCS may assist in emergency situations.	Individual applies for Student Loan. FCS may assist in emergency situations.	Yes
Single Parent who is EI eligible receives entitled benefits	If attending GED and Upgrading through NBCC, \$25/day and can be used for licensed childcare or babysitting by family or others If attending CALP, then no assistance provided, but they may qualify for supports through FCS	If attending GED and Upgrading through NBCC, \$86/month or .15 cents a km If attending CALP, then no assistance provided, but they may qualify for supports through FCS	Up to 50% of tuition, plus assistance with other materials	\$25/day which can be used for any childcare arrangement	-\$86/month or .15 cents a km	No

Further Challenges

Childcare and Transportation

There is considerable concern, particularly among mothers living in poverty, about how to access consistent, affordable, and flexible quality care for their children. Those who were interviewed were consistently concerned about finding qualified caregivers, saying they would never leave their children “with just anyone”. Some did not trust day care centres (some had never experienced daycares) and preferred to use informal exchange arrangements with family or neighbours.

Licensed childcare centres charge up to \$150/week, particularly for children under two years of age, compared to \$125 provided by FCS and DPET. In addition, there are currently no available licensed childcare spaces in Saint John for children under 15 months of age (as of April 2006). Furthermore, while FCS reimburses \$2/hour for babysitters, actual rates average closer to \$5/hour.

“The daycare charges more than the Department will pay. But it was the only daycare available to take my child who is under 2 years of age. So I am going to school everyday until 2:30. That way the money from the Department will cover the time my child is in daycare”.

Single Parent in CALP program

Community agencies and government departments reinforced these concerns, frequently citing unreliable childcare, lack of backup plans and no openings in licensed childcare centres as reasons for dropping out of programs. In addition, Closing the Gap: Ensuring Pregnant and Parenting Young Women Succeed documents childcare concerns as frequent deterrents to young mothers completing high school¹⁶.

Bus passes are provided by FCS and transportation allowances by DPET. In the fall of 2004, FCS conducted a Client Barrier study, interviewing 2,295 individuals on income assistance throughout the province, 338 of whom were living in the Saint John region. The Client Barrier Study indicated that transportation would be a barrier to going to school or work for about 60% of those interviewed, although a similarly high percentage was not aware of the transportation allowances available from FCS.

¹⁶ Published by Business Community Anti-Poverty Initiative, 2006, Saint John. This report can be accessed at <http://tamarackcommunity.ca/g2s28.html#keydocs>.

Transportation can be a barrier for an individual, depending on accessibility and affordability; Saint John has the highest cost of bus fare relative to the minimum wage of any city in Atlantic Canada¹⁷.

Accessing loans

In the Client Barrier Study, individuals were asked if they expected any difficulties in getting a loan and just over 70% of interviewees in Saint John indicated that it would be a serious or somewhat serious problem.

Case managers and staff in community programs expressed concern with training institutions that accept a student without a GED, citing examples where an individual on income assistance obtained a student loan and then was unable to complete the program because they lacked the basic skills. The student loan was then defaulted, which restricts an individual's chances of assistance with training in the future. **In these situations, the individual often makes the decision to go back to school without consulting their case manager** for advice on the plan or to see if they could participate in a work experience program first, which may qualify them for assistance with post-secondary training.

"Neither my husband nor I finished high school. We have a young daughter and receive income assistance. Along with others, I enrolled in an on-line computer technician course. I received a student loan for \$10,000 and was progressing well. Six months into the course the training institution in Saint John was charged with fraud. I owe the student loan, have nothing to show, my equipment was confiscated, and I have severely restricted my chances for further loans. The matter is still pending settlement in court".

Interviewee

Past Investments

It is interesting to note that in the mid to late 90's individuals on income assistance were attending post-secondary training with their tuition costs covered (except for university) through the New Brunswick Works program which was a six year/three intake demonstration project managed by a combination of federal and provincial funding.

¹⁷ Poverty and Plenty

8. RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

Interviews with past and current learners and members of the service sector describe the significant challenge faced in encouraging individuals to return to school and to remain in a program until completion. As described earlier, many factors, such as childcare, lack of personal supports, and limited confidence in their own abilities, can interfere with an individual's journey through education, training and employment. Individuals who start back to school and then drop-out do so for many of the above mentioned reasons but also because the process of achieving a GED can be difficult, time consuming and frustrating. In addition, minimal information is available on what happens to individuals when they leave a program.

The challenge for government and community services is to identify additional ways of informing individuals of the available opportunities and most importantly to encourage increased participation as well as retention when individuals go back to school.

Individuals on income assistance are assigned to a case manager with FCS who assists in the development of a career development case plan. All clients are encouraged to formulate a case plan, outlining activities that will lead to self-sufficiency. In addition to case planning, case managers also work with individuals to provide financial services, respond to crisis situations, offer guidance and referral, and provide follow-up when possible.

Case managers are limited in the time they can spend with an individual or family, with an average caseload of 190 cases¹⁸ (where families are involved, one case involves the whole family unit). All clients can access their case manager. Case managers provide more intensive services to a smaller number of individuals at any given point in time. They work

"I am 21 years old with a young daughter and receiving income assistance. I didn't know that Family and Community Services could help work out alternatives for childcare and transportation or that the \$40 GED fee could be covered. I recently failed my two of the five GED tests and no one called from the community agency to see how I did. I will probably go back to school, but maybe just a month before writing the next GED tests, that will be plenty of time to prepare. Maybe I will go to work but I know that I need my GED first".

Interview with Single Parent

¹⁸ Some case managers are responsible for 700 cases, but with no direct personal contact and providing only Basic Income Support services due to clients' physical, emotional or mental health challenges and lack of readiness to move to self-sufficiency.

intensively with individuals on their caseload who are ready to follow through on plans for personal development, education, or employment related goals. As the client moves forward in their plans the case manager is able to concentrate their attention on other individuals.

Depending on an individual's case plan they may be referred to a Career Consultant with FCS and/or an employment counselor with DPET. This assistance provides guidance in thinking about one's career and in making plans for further training or employment that are appropriate to the skills and interests of the individual.

Programs such as Youth Choices and the North End Centre of NBCC have access to individual counselors who can better support individuals as they struggle with family, financial and other challenges. In the case of Youth Choices, individuals are also followed up for a period of time.

Most community agencies are limited in their follow-up ability, due to a lack of resources. For the purposes of this report, it was difficult to recruit individuals who had dropped out of programs because agencies did not have the time to follow-up. It can also be difficult to locate individuals who may have moved.

Interesting is the example previously mentioned, where individuals sign a waiver so results return to the instructor as well as to themselves, which facilitates the appropriate follow-up and encouragement. This waiver is offered with the 9-week GED preparation course offered at NBCC North End Centre.

A best practice exists with the Self-Esteem Program for Women offered at St. Joseph's Community Health Centre where mentoring is offered to individuals following the six weeks of instruction and support. Individuals are encouraged to contact the program facilitator; however, the facilitator also initiates contact and spends time with each individual. This additional feature is extremely beneficial to participants, particularly as many are pursuing educational or employment goals.

The Client Barrier Study cited earlier showed that a significant percentage of individuals on income assistance (56%) are unsure of what they would like to do. Strengthening the capacity of government and community services to together guide and encourage individuals would be beneficial.

9. NEW DIRECTIONS

Policy Statement of the Provincial Government

Lifelong Learning: Quality Adult Learning Opportunities is a ten year plan released by the Province of New Brunswick in December, 2005¹⁹. It describes a number of priorities which include the following:

- Acknowledge, recognize and value adult learners' prior learning and experience (through Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition - PLAR),
- Better match skills training with employment opportunities,
- Increase opportunities through workplace essential skills training, and
- Establish **Adult Learning Centres** so that information, guidance, and online learning tools, for example, are easier to locate and to use. The Province will pilot four adult learning centres in the near future; Saint John could be an ideal site for one, and particularly in a high-poverty neighbourhood.

Pilot Projects under Development

Passerelles d'accès (Pathways to Success) is a partnership with DPET and NBCC-Chaleur Region. It is a pilot project serving 36 people over a period of three years, ending in June 2006. The project reduces the amount of time a client spends in academic upgrading by concentrating on what students need, thus facilitating the next step to a post-secondary training program or a return to the workforce. It is a 'fast track' approach that helps people re-enter the workforce sooner. The approach uses prior learning assessment tools (PLAR) and an essential employability skills curriculum as a stepping stone to employment and possible further training. It includes an on-the-job practicum. In addition, Passerelles is currently piloting with three people, who do not have grade 12, but are doing the essential skills and then continuing into an apprenticeship program.

In Saint John, DPET is pursuing funding to establish a research project for a community-based program in Saint John. It will offer, in partnership with the Saint John Learning Exchange, a combination of academic skills, essential skills training, employment action planning and job placement with intensive support and tracking. This initiative, if successful, will be beneficial to our community,

¹⁹ Lifelong Learning: Quality Adult Learning Opportunities, Province of New Brunswick, November, 2005

...serving as a catalyst to improve ways for adults to learn, to train and to become more prepared for the labour market.

Customized Training: Learning from Other Communities

Customized training is one method of facilitating labour market entry and re-entry. Under customized training, a designated organization (non-profit or profit) works with local employers to identify the training needs for certain targeted jobs. Opportunities for Employment in Winnipeg and Learning Enrichment Foundation in Toronto are two examples of organizations that provide short-term, intensive training that prepares individuals for specific target jobs. The employers are ‘partners’ in these kinds of initiatives and use the organization as a hiring ‘window’ because it already has pre-screened and trained prospective workers.

A job developer meets with local employers to discuss possible openings or to find jobs that were not advertised. Sometimes they uncover work opportunities that employers themselves had not explicitly classified as ‘discrete jobs’, but nonetheless were recognized later as work that needed to be done. The job developer identifies the program participants most appropriate to fill the positions and also helps participants to seek positions on their own.

Another component besides the training is the ongoing support to help new recruits stay in their jobs; this form of post-employment follow-up has been identified as crucial.

Working with Employers - Training for the Trades

Part of the information gathering for this report included meetings with Enterprise Saint John, the Saint John Construction Association and staff at the Carpenter Training Centre. The purpose was to explore opportunities for meaningful employment in the trades and to identify training needs. It was suggested that a transitional step

A short questionnaire circulated to nine construction companies indicated that many companies hire through Employment Agencies. As a result, VCSJ coordinated a partnership with an Employment Agency, Advantage Personnel, and two community agencies, John Howard Society and Coverdale Centre for Women, working with individuals seeking employment. At the time of writing this report seven individuals had been working steadily (for more than five weeks) and others were being hired; and two are currently working full-time. Through a partnership with a taxi company and the Employment Agency, an individual called to work can charge the taxi fare to the Employment Agency who will then deduct it from their pay. This way transportation is not a barrier in responding to calls for work.

This small initiative illustrates possibilities for targeted employment by working directly with employment agencies, employers and community agencies.

into the construction/trades field would be as a flagger. Here individuals can learn about the industry and see if they are interested in exploring next steps. Flaggers are needed wherever there is work going on related to water, sewer and roadwork.

Specific training is required for flaggers, including Traffic control, Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMS), Safety Orientation and first aid training (although this is optional). Altogether, this training would take 2 to 3 days. This training could be provided through a partnership with John Howard Society and the Learning Exchange which both have qualified trainers. FCS would help individuals cover the costs of this training if it was part of a case plan.

Transportation Assistance for Further Education

For many students, transportation costs can be a significant barrier to returning to school, particularly in situations where there is no assistance. Both St. Mary's University and St. Thomas University worked with their local transit authorities to provide affordable transportation for students. The agreement resulted in an extra amount (\$75 for St. Thomas students) being added to students' fees in exchange for a free bus pass for the school year.

Initial discussions in Saint John indicate that Saint John Transit is interested in exploring the idea; the next step will be to work with the educational institutions. If this could be organized, it would mean that Saint John could be the first community in Atlantic Canada where students attending both private and public post-secondary institutions would have access to affordable transportation.

Working at the Neighbourhood Level

VCSJ has been working in the high-poverty neighbourhood of Crescent Valley. In early January, trained residents conducted a survey of the 388 households. The survey which covered concerns and hopes for many quality of life issues including Education, Training and Work, was completed by 54% of the households. This information will help guide VCSJ's Education to Employment Working Group in addressing some of the challenges identified by the residents.

10. CONCERNS WITH YOUTH

A key challenge for our community is to address youth drop out rates. We need to increase supports to children and youth struggling with school. Information from both the census data and from community programs indicates a significant number of youth under 25 lack a high school level of education. Statistics from the CASP programs²⁰ for the period of October 2002-December 2003 reported that 37.9% of students in Saint John were under the age of 24. Statistics from the North End Centre of NBCC show that between September 2002 and September 2004, 48% of students were between 18 and 26.

Our community can celebrate the number of groups and partnerships who are working to better support children and youth in school but the efforts need to be both sustained and expanded.

First Steps, a residential and supportive living environment for pregnant and parenting teens and young single mothers, is partnering with the Business Community Anti-Poverty Initiative (BCAPI) to pilot an alternative school at First Steps for young women who have not completed high school. A partnership between First Steps, BCAPI, DPET, JD Irving and School District 8 made it possible to begin the alternative school in February of 2006.

The PALS for Prince Charles initiative in Saint John matches children from an inner city elementary school with employees from JD Irving and Irving Oil, providing in-school mentors, additional volunteers, and financial resources. A similar partnership has developed between St. John the Baptist School and Irving Oil. Most recently a similar partnership has been initiated between the Atlantic Health Sciences Corporation and Hazen White St. Francis School.

A partnership between School District 8, the Carpenters' Training Centre and DPET provides a 16 week Construction Awareness program for high school students in grade 11. Students attend the program for half-days and are in school the other half. The program can count towards an individual's apprenticeship if so desired. Results show a marked improvement in the performance of participating high school students. The success plus the waiting list illustrates the need for similar initiatives.

²⁰ [The Community Academic Services Program: A Statistical Profile](#)

The Investing in Children and Youth Working Group of Vibrant Communities Saint John is identifying ways to improve the likelihood that children and youth who live in poverty will complete their education and be well equipped for adulthood and economic self-sufficiency. One action, the Children's Health Task Force, is headed by the Medical District Health Officer and the Vice-President of UNBSJ with a focus on children between the ages of 6 and 12. Their findings and recommendations will be released in the fall of 2006.

It is encouraging to note that the Province's report, Lifelong Learning: the Quality Learning Agenda, emphasizes the need for technical-vocational courses for youth, together with improved guidance programs, career counseling and post-secondary information for parents and youth.

11. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSIONS

This report is only a starting point, intended to promote a dialogue in the community. The following conclusions summarize the major findings of this report:

I. Challenge of going back to school limits individuals returning

VCSJ's report, Poverty and Plenty shows the cumulative income advantages of higher education, which is most pronounced when compared to the low incomes associated with high school non-completion. However, a disconcerting number of individuals in our community lack a high school level of education, including a significant number of individuals receiving income assistance. The challenges associated with going back to school can be confusing to individuals and service providers as they struggle to understand the different options along the continuum of literacy, CALP, GED, Academic Upgrading and Post-Secondary Education.

Financial concerns, the desire to go to work, and the fear of failure frequently trap individuals in poverty, preventing them from recognizing the need to complete the GED. Educational programs with a strong employment focus,

delivered in a low income neighborhood, would likely encourage more individuals to participate.

A major challenge for individuals who have already decided to obtain their GED is the limited options for accessible and affordable childcare in Saint John. The lack of affordable and quality childcare was emphasized by both single mothers and service providers.

Thus, compared to the numbers who could benefit from going back to school, the participation rate is significantly low.

II. Achieving a GED is viewed as a solution but one that is difficult to achieve

For many individuals, achieving a GED is the first step, yet the path can be very time consuming. Success is limited: there is less than a 50% success rate. Only individuals who are assessed as candidates for a nine week GED program (offered through NBCC) - meaning that they are operating at a higher academic level - are able to move quickly through this phase.

Community-based programs offering GED have longer waiting lists and, more significantly, lower success rates. This is related to the personal challenges facing learners, but particularly to the challenges associated with starting at a lower academic level. In addition, community based programs experience more instability with funding issues and lack key resources such as counselors on staff.

Individuals in community programs write the GED tests under more stressful conditions than their peers at Community College. Community College students write during the week and in their North End classroom as compared to writing on the weekend and at the Grandview Avenue campus of NBCC.

Retention is an issue. Many individuals return to school but do not complete their program or goal. Limited government and community resources, and mechanisms for tracking, make it very difficult to reach out to individuals dropping out of a program or to follow those who are successful. Thus there is no comprehensive assessment of results.

Some form of a graduation ceremony would be valuable in reinforcing the value of the GED while at the same time encouraging others.

III. Differences in financial supports for skills development and training

Further training beyond high school contributes significantly to someone's chances of moving out of poverty. Individuals who currently receive employment insurance or have received benefits within the past three years may qualify for financial support toward training beyond high school. Under the TSD program, this may include assistance with tuition, materials, childcare and transportation costs. Usually an individual will need a student loan to make up the difference. This makes the option of further training significantly more affordable for some.

Individuals whose only source of income is income assistance do not receive the same level of financial support for further training beyond high school as someone eligible for EI. Although they can continue to receive income assistance and their health card, they must bear the burden of a larger student loan to cover tuition plus childcare and transportation. However, if an individual on income assistance has a case plan that includes participation in an employment experience program, they may be able to work enough weeks to qualify for financial supports under the TSD program.

IV. Disconnect between employers' needs and potential labour force

Although a number of services are available, individuals who have completed their GED are often unsure of next steps. Both learners and service providers expressed the need for specific guidance for individuals who do not understand their options or best choices for further training or employment.

Stronger employment preparation and work experience components are needed. Funding is being sought for a research pilot program through a partnership between DPET and the Learning Exchange to offer a combination of academic skills, essential skills training, employment action planning and job placement with intensive support and tracking.

Individuals want to work and employers are looking for workers. According to the most recent labour force survey conducted by the Saint John Board of Trade, finding qualified workers is one of the most significant issues challenging local businesses. With a declining unemployment rate, skills shortages are already hampering growth in some areas of the local economy. Most employers with entry level positions require high school completion, regardless of the job. Some employers offer wages hovering around minimum wage, frequently without benefits, only part-time hours and limited

opportunities for advancement - a situation offering few financial advantages to those on income assistance.

There are a number of best practices which strengthen the connection between the individual, educational program and employer. Some companies have hiring practices that include individuals with limited experience. Other communities have involved employers through customized training - working with employers in a specific field to identify and to address the training needs of a potential employee with the understanding that it could lead to an employment opportunity for the individual. A concerted effort to build connections between community agencies and employers is paramount.

V. There are too many individuals under 24 in basic education programs

School Districts, governments, community organizations, businesses and trades organizations are working together to offer programs that strengthen learning opportunities from pre-kindergarten through high school. More alternatives are needed, evidenced by the waiting list and the fact that the Saint John area still produces a higher number than the provincial average of young adults without high school certification.

VI: New ways of working together will be paramount

The Saint John community is focused on a strong labour force and related to this is the desire to reduce the number of individuals living in poverty. Strengthening existing partnerships and identifying new ways of working together can build the momentum needed to better position Saint John and its citizens for the future. A number of new directions will make a difference, including: more involvement of employers; working at the neighbourhood level; addressing policy barriers; and increasing collaborative efforts among government and community organizations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Develop An Education to Employment Strategy. There is an urgent need for Saint John to develop an **Education to Employment Strategy** for individuals living in poverty.

Place the emphasis on single parents and unattached youth living on income assistance who are between the ages of 19 and 34. This will have a significant impact on breaking the cycle of low education levels for the next generation and better position individuals to benefit from the increasing number of employment opportunities in our community.

An Education to Employment Strategy needs to involve the whole community - individuals living in poverty, community organizations, government departments and businesses. The following **five key directions** are starting points for an Education to Employment Strategy. They provide for an array of actions that could make a difference in the lives of individuals living in poverty.

- **Improve recruitment and retention in literacy, GED, and upgrading programs**
 - Promote ways to encourage adults to go back to school and celebrate those who are successful in accomplishing their educational goals.
 - Increase the capacity of organizations and government to encourage and guide learners through individual barriers.
 - Ensure that community-based programs have the resources to improve upon the current rate of individuals achieving their GED.
 - Integrate into programs a stronger link to employment preparation

- **Increase supports for post-secondary training**
 - Promote ways to ensure that post-secondary training is affordable and accessible.
 - Encourage individuals on income assistance to work with their case manager to benefit from existing employment programs which can also increase eligibility for assistance with post-secondary education.
 - Ensure that childcare is affordable and accessible for single parents going back to school.

- Increase availability of bursaries for individuals on low income; for example, work with the newly announced bursary program being offered by the NBCC Foundation and scholarships for non-traditional training programs.
 - Support interest of Saint John City Transit to work with post-secondary institutions and students.
- **Strengthen transitional supports and ongoing supports to employment**
- Provide a continuum of support to assist individuals in preparing for, finding and, keeping employment.
 - Strengthen the curriculum of programs to include bridging component to further training and employment.
 - Promote opportunities for targeted employment by working directly with employers, educators, community organizations, and individuals with limited work experience and skills.
 - Support action on the disincentive inherent in low wage work.
- **Position the strategy at the neighbourhood level.**
- Promote an understanding of the range of options for high school completion as well as the strengths and challenges associated with going back to school.
 - Work with Crescent Valley Residents and the survey results to identify and to implement actions pertaining to the education, training and employment issues and aspirations of residents.
 - Investigate the feasibility of piloting an adult learning centre in the neighborhood with DPET, part of the Province's recently announced Lifelong Learning Plan.
- **Break the cycle of high school drop-outs.**
- Champion increased resources to build on best practices supporting children and youth to stay in school.
 - Research best practices in Saint John and elsewhere that better support youth at risk, including the Construction Awareness Program of District 8, Woodlawn School, the Alternative School at First Steps, and Cooperative Education Programs for all youth starting in grade 10 (the Ontario model).

Commitment to an Education to Employment Strategy: This report sounds an alarm. It is urgent that the Saint John community address the challenges facing individuals with low levels of education. VCSJ's Education to Employment Working Group will work with the community to:

- ***Share Results of the Report:*** Encourage those with an interest in creating a ready, willing and educated workforce to assist in addressing the issues raised.
- ***Take a Neighbourhood Approach:*** Position the strategy in a neighbourhood, one with a high concentration of poverty, and work closely with residents and other partners.
- ***Ensure Readiness for Employment:*** Bring forth a model program that provides for transitional and ongoing supports to help individuals to prepare for, to find, and to keep employment.

This report is a starting point to better define, understand, and articulate the challenges to, and the opportunities available in, helping people acquire the educational tools they need to move out of poverty. Never before has there been a better opportunity for social *and* economic development beneficial to both individuals and employers as well as to the community at large.

Appendix A:

Members of Education to Employment Working Group

June Albert, New Brunswick Department of Family & Community Services
Peggy Bonnell, Community
Gary Foster, Academy of Hair Design, Co-Chair and Member of VCSJ
Leadership Roundtable
Christina Fowler, Saint John Learning Exchange
Danny Jardine, Supported Employment and Housing, Atlantic Health Sciences Corporation
Barbara Kierstead-Shanks, New Brunswick Department of Post Secondary Education and Training
Carl Killen, St. Malachy's High School
Dale Knox, Tabufile, Enterprise Saint John and Member of VCSJ Leadership Roundtable
Ross MacKenzie, John Howard Society
Katie McCutcheon, Community (learner at Saint John Learning Exchange)
Carolyn Stephenson, Service Canada, Co-Chair and Member of VCSJ Leadership Roundtable
Sherry Vitale, Community (and learner at Saint John Learning Exchange)
Cathy Wright, Social Planner, VCSJ

Former Members

Victoria Daley, Community, former learner at Saint John Learning Exchange
Mary Doiron, Community
Paul Northrup, Community, former learner at Saint John Learning Exchange
Shilow VanWart, Fusion, Clientlogic
Brenda Wright, (formerly of Saint John Learning Exchange and past Co-Chair)

Appendix B:

Questions/Probes to Guide Interviews with Service Providers

What are the challenges in helping someone in their journey out of poverty?

- Where do you refer people?
- Lack of resources? Are you faced with waiting lists?

What works best in encouraging people to go back to school?

What are the challenges/barriers that individuals face in going back to school, in remaining in programs and in moving to the next steps?

- finding childcare
- support and encouragement
- seeing the end in sight
- keeping them from dropping out of programs

Who is your program for? What works best for individuals in your program? Is there a waiting list?

How do individuals benefit from basic education programs?

Referral Process

- What is the process to get into CALP program or to the programs offered at the North End Centre of NBCC?
- When do other agencies such as employment counselors with Post Secondary Education and Training get involved?

Follow-up

- How involved are you in follow-up while someone is attending a program
- What happens when someone is finished a basic education program?
- What kind of follow-up resources/approaches would work best?

What suggestions do you have to improve the situation?

Who else do you think I should talk to?

- Workers, Other agencies
- Individuals who are on income assistance

Appendix C: Questions/Probes to Guide Interviews with Individuals

Individuals with different experiences were interviewed: those who were currently in CALP and academic upgrading programs or had dropped out or who successfully completed their program. Individuals with no experience with CALP or academic upgrading were also interviewed.

Questions for the one on one interviews and focus groups were drawn from the following:

What is your experience with educational programs?

What were you doing before you started in this program?

What brought you to the program? What are your reasons for coming to this program?

What other programs have you been involved with?

Was there a waiting list?

What would you like to be doing in the future and what would help you get there?

What kinds of challenges are you experiencing in working towards your goals/your plans?

What or who is assisting or supporting you in your path to education and/or employment? What keeps you going?

What would be helpful to you? What suggestions do you have?

Appendix D:

List of Interviewees

Individuals in or out of school (*Referred by*)

- Academy of Hair Design (4)
- Community Access Centre, Community Health Centre (4)
- Family Literacy Program in North End (2)
- John Howard Society (7)
- Learning Exchange (14)
- North End Centre (3)
- Self Esteem for Women (2)
- Youth Choices (2)
- Other (3)

Provincial Government

- Family & Community Services;
 - Case Managers, Career Consultant and Supervisors (8)
- Post Secondary Education and Training
 - Employment Counselors, Supervisor, (3)
- New Brunswick Community College
 - Instructors, Department Head (4)
- Department of Education
 - Supervisors, Career Consultant (3)

Private Sector

- Passport to Employment (2)
- Saint John Construction Association (1)
- Carpenters' Centre (2)
- Enterprise Saint John (3)
- Employment Agencies (3)

Community Agencies

- CALP Instructors and Coordinator (8)
- Staff at Youth Choices (5)
- Learning Exchange (4)
- Association for Community Living (1)
- Coverdale Centre for Women (2)
- YMCA-YWCA (1)
- Organizations outside of Saint John (3)

Working Group Members (not included above) (7)

Appendix E: Reference Documents

- **Census Statistics Canada for 2001**, Government of Canada
- **The Community Academic Services Program: A Statistical Profile** (based on data from CASPs commencing between January 2002 and December 2003 – **from Learner Registry**), by Literacy New Brunswick Inc. 2004
- **The Community Academic Services Program a Historical Perspective**, by Literacy New Brunswick, 2004
- **Connections Create Vibrant Communities, Annual Reflection Report**, Vibrant Communities Saint John, 2005
- **Final Report Comprehensive Training Needs Assessment for Literacy in New Brunswick** (submitted to Provincial Partners for Literacy), by Landal Inc., 2002
- **Poverty and Plenty A Statistical Snapshot of the Quality of Life in Greater Saint John**, Vibrant Communities Saint John, 2005
- **Reintegrating the Unemployed Through Customized Training**, Sherri Torjman, Caledon Institute for Social Policy, June 1999
- **Saint John Workforce Survey**, Prepared by Saint John Board of Trade Business/Education Partnership with the Provincial Dept. of Training & Employment Development and Enterprise SJ, May 2005
- **Success Features of Welfare-to-Work Initiatives**, Ellen Battle, Caledon Institute of Social Policy, unpublished background research paper, 1999
- **Vibrant Communities Saint John: Dismantling the Poverty Traps**, Caledon Institute of Social Policy, March 2006

Appendix F:

Crescent Valley Survey

Questions Related to Training, Education and Work

- 1) What is your education level:
 - a) Graduated college or university ()
 - b) Some college or university ()
 - c) High school graduation ()
 - d) GED (General Education Development) ()
 - e) Upgrading () Specify: _____
 - f) Grade 10 or 11 ()
 - g) Grade 9 ()
 - h) Other (): _____

- 2) If you dropped out of public school at any time, please describe your reasons:-

- 3) Are you currently a part-time or full-time student in any program of learning?
 - a) Yes ()
 - b) No () If No, go directly to Question 5

- 4) What is your program of study?
 - a) CASP (Community Academic Services Program) or CALP (Community Adult Learning Centre) ()
 - b) GED (General Educational Development) ()
 - c) Community college () Specify program/location: _____
 - d) Private training institution () Specify program/location: _____
 - e) University () Specify program/location: _____
 - f) Online program/home study () Specify: _____
 - g) Other () Specify: _____

- 5) Have you been a student in the past 5 years?
 - a) Yes ()
 - No () If No, go directly to Question 7

- 6) If you answered yes to Question 5, did you complete your program of study?
 - a) Yes ()
 - b) No () Explain why not: _____

- 7) Are you interested in taking further education or training:
- a) Yes () Specify program of study: _____
 - b) No ()
- 8) Are you interested in other learning opportunities such as personal growth and development courses or workshops? Specify: _____
- 9) If you would like to return to a formal program of education or training, which of the following supports would help you start AND finish your education or training program?
- a) More information on what is available ()
 - b) Career counseling ()
 - c) Better understanding of how training links to jobs and rates of pay ()
 - d) Transportation ()
 - e) Day care or other affordable quality child care options ()
 - f) After-school programs for children ()
 - g) Financial assistance ()
 - h) Time and quiet to study ()
 - i) Improved self-confidence ()
 - j) Support from family and friends ()
 - k) Mentoring support () Specify: _____
 - l) Other () Specify: _____
- 10) What are your suggestions for improving access to training and employment for people living in Crescent Valley?
- _____
- _____

Work

- 1) Do you work outside the home for pay?
- a) Yes () Specify kind of work: _____
 - b) No ()
- 2) If yes, what is your location of work?
- a) In the neighbourhood ()
 - b) In Saint John ()
 - c) Outside Saint John ()

- 3) Do you work inside your home for pay?
- a) Yes () Specify kind of work: _____
 - b) No ()
- 4) Do you do volunteer work in the community?
- (a) Yes () Specify kind of work: _____
 - (b) No ()
- 5) Which of the following barriers affect your ability to work?
- a) Lack of skills or experience ()
 - b) Transportation ()
 - c) Affordable quality child care ()
 - d) After school programs for children ()
 - e) Health and/or disability issues ()
 - f) Lack of suitable work clothing ()
 - g) No work available in your field ()
 - h) Temporarily laid off ()
 - i) Need help finding work ():
 - i. How to job hunt ()
 - ii. Writing a resume ()
 - iii. Preparing for interviews ()
 - iv. Other () Specify: _____
- 6) Is there a type of paid work you would prefer to be doing?
- (a) Yes () Specify kind of work: _____
 - (b) No () If No, go directly to Question 7
- 7) Identify the supports that would help you get the work you want:
- a) Information ()
 - b) Transportation ()
 - c) Training/education ()
 - d) Affordable quality child care ()
 - e) More self-confidence ()
 - f) Family support ()
 - g) Health care ()
 - h) Mentoring () Specify: _____
 - i) Other () Specify: _____