



What is Vital Signs?

Vital Signs is an annual check-up conducted by Community Foundations across the country (CF) to measure the vitality of communities across Canada. It gathers and publishes data on significant social and economic trends and assigns grades in areas critical to quality of life.

The annual Vital Signs reports promote awareness of community issues and are used by communities for social planning, by citizens and philanthropists to identify community needs and strengths, and by community foundations to inform their grant making and leadership activities.

Youth Vital Signs in Greater Saint John

The Vital Signs Committee for our Community Foundation produced Vital Signs reports in the past. In the 2012/13 fiscal a decision was made to focus on youth. A committee comprised of Board members, community members and Saint John youth led this work.

In December of 2012, over 4385 students ages 13-18 (75% of students from this age group) were surveyed to provide the CF with information about life in the Saint John Region and their thoughts on eight indicator areas.

Youth Vital Signs (YVS) – A look back at 2012

The 2012 focus areas and corresponding grades:

Health & Wellness	C
Belonging & Community	C
Employment & Education	C
Arts & Recreation	C+
Homelessness & Poverty	D
Crime & Safety	C-
Transportation	C
Environment	C-

The most important indicators from the 2012 Vital Signs report were:

- Employment & Education
- Homelessness & Poverty

The 5 Most Selected Priorities Overall in 2012 were:

Options for free meals: **46%**
(Homelessness & Poverty)

More employment opportunities for teens: **52%**
(Employment & Education)

Creation of a youth shelter: **44%**
(Homelessness & Poverty)

Stricter rules for industrial pollution: **41%**
(Environment)

More community clean ups: **43%**
(Environment)

The December 2012 findings were launched in the Spring of 2013 and were disseminated to all schools that participated.

Moving forward from 2012:

In the fall of 2015 the YVS Committee was re-established to re-visit the data.

The YVS Committee and Board of Directors of the Community Foundation were particularly interested to find if any significant changes had transpired since 2012 and how granting should be aligned to reflect the 2016 data.

In the summer of 2016, a series of focus groups were organized to re-engage youth and do a 'deeper dive' with the 2012 findings.

Youth were gathered through a variety of community groups – Teen Resource Centre, KV Oasis, Boys & Girls Club, YMCA, and the Nick Nicolle Community Centre. Overall there were 32 youth, with a 50/50 ratio of male/female mix.

Employment/Education & Training/Schools

Here's what we asked:

- Describe a quality summer job.
- What types of opportunities would you look for? How would you look for these opportunities? Tell us why finding work might be a challenge?
- How difficult is it to graduate from high school? Tell us more about your reasons. What types of things need to change to make graduation something for everyone?
- What types of education are available in the Saint John region after high school? How do you feel about these institutions?
- Would you say your dream job is available in Saint John? Tell us more about your reasons for saying this.
- Tell us why Saint John would be a place to live and build a career.

Here's what we heard:

- University kids tend to get the good quality summer jobs first
- Tough dealing with the perception "Why hire a teenager"
- Teachers aren't concerned about hearing different solutions, just looking for the answers they've taught
- Transition to high school from middle school is difficult - from no homework to lots of homework and more independence
- Don't hear enough about University / Colleges early enough - typically not until Grade 11 or Grade 12
- Perception that a 4 year program at UNBSJ is less of an education than UNB Fredericton
- Will only return to Saint John after post secondary because of family
- Opportunities for doctors and child care in Saint John, but not as many for criminology, neurology, etc



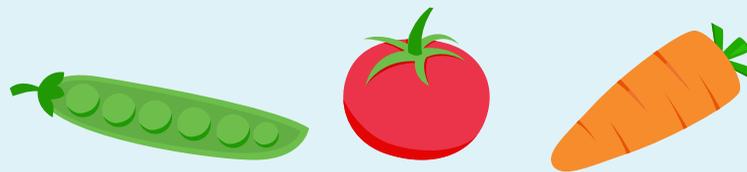
Health & Wellness/Bullying Prevention, Education & Awareness

Here's what we asked:

- Describe health and wellness and what it means to you? Tell me more about this.
- How easy is it to participate in organized sports or recreation activities in Saint John? Why?
- What are some ways to get more students involved?

Here's what we heard:

- Garden and eat your own produce
- Need better transportation / bus routes
- Not many recreational leagues (pick up leagues) available - all organized and expensive



Belonging & Community

Here's what we asked:

- What does it mean to "engage the youth voice"?
- Describe volunteering.
- What are the opportunities to volunteer that are available to students?
 - What are some challenges of volunteering?
 - How would you look for opportunities to volunteer?
- Describe "belonging".
 - What would you say about how easy it is to feel like you belong in the Saint John community?
 - How does someone get integrated into a new community?
 - What types of things need to change to make it easier to belong?
- Recently municipal elections were held in our region.
 - How were students engaged in the municipal elections? Were they interested in the process and outcomes? Why?
 - Describe any opportunities you've had to take part in the civic process (i.e. Did some classes do mock elections? Were there discussions on the process? Etc?)

Here's what we heard:

- Youth are asked opinions but don't see any change after discussions
- Need more awareness through social media / through schools about what opportunities are available in the community
- Willing to volunteer, just need to be asked or made aware of opportunities
- The city is beautiful, but there are people that make you want to move
- More information sessions / opportunities to meet others going to the same high school before arriving there (better, smoother transition from Grade 8 to Grade 9)

Homelessness & Poverty

Here's what we asked:

- What are some challenges facing the Saint John region to help prevent poverty and homelessness?
- As individuals, what could we be doing to break the cycle of poverty?
- Describe some options that are available within the Saint John region for free meals or shelters.

Here's what we heard:

- Spending money on the wrong things
- Safe Harbour closed due to lack of funding was not acceptable
- Need more initiatives and more awareness in the schools
- When buildings are left empty it creates low morale in the community



Environment

Here's what we asked:

- Describe an ideal Saint John environment.
 - How do you feel our environment can be impacted by you?
 - How would you build awareness of the opportunities for individuals to impact our environment?

Here's what we heard:

- Clean, need more community clean ups
- Need to change the perceptions around youth and neighborhoods like the North End
- Access for communities to do their own things - clean ups, parks, etc.
- There are a lot of green spaces and parks but they aren't being used.



Focus Group Results:

Filtering through all the data from the Focus Groups, there were five major themes that were found to highlight what youth had to say:

1. Awareness

It was identified that those connected to a resource (Teen Resource Centre, Boys & Girls Club, etc.) would hear of opportunities happening within that resource. Youth discussed the need to build awareness through finding ways for all resources that connect with youth for sharing information. Schools and youth-centered organizations do not "share", "like", or filter through the social media accounts of each other.



2. Promote “Youth” as a Brand

Many of the participants had much to say and some great ideas. Promoting Youth as a brand is about engaging them and welcoming them at a variety of tables to learn, contribute and take ownership within their community.

3. Feedback Loop

Youth overwhelmingly expressed frustration with being asked their opinion but not seeing anything change. A discussion took place in one group regarding the possibility of having a Youth Council, whereby the Mayors and Council for the various municipalities could be mentors and provide opportunities for youth to be engaged and filter the information back to other peer groups.

4. Homeless Shelters

This was a hot topic that was identified and discussed at all Focus Groups. Youth were very aware of the closure of Safe Harbour and felt strongly that it was needed in the community. More assisted living apartments and affordable housing was identified as a need in the community.

5. Respect for the Individual

Youth discussed at great length the perception that teenagers are ‘bad’ and volunteer opportunities whereby they were not welcomed as warmly as the adults. Additionally, the issue of bullying and access to assistance / education for mental health issues were prevalent throughout all Focus Group sessions.

The voice of youth provided the 5 focus group findings above. The findings are in their own words.

These 5 focus group findings then informed 4 Strategic Themes to be considered by the Community Foundation and community stakeholders as a result of this work going forward:

1. **Connection** – connecting youth to each other and to opportunities within the community
2. **Leadership** – building leadership in our youth
3. **Voice** – projects to engage youth when and where youth see a need
4. **Transition** – assist in the transition to high school, post secondary education or employment

What’s Next for the Community Foundation and Youth Vital Signs?

- Launching a targeted grant cycle, focused on youth-led projects in early 2017
- Disseminating the 2016 findings and recommendations to youth serving organization and community stakeholders
- Supporting youth voice in the long term through youth representation on our Grant Making Committee
- Incorporating the strategic themes to guide and inform ongoing granting of the Foundation
- Working with strategic partners (youth serving organizations, Living SJ) to advocate for youth in Greater Saint John





THE COMMUNITY
FOUNDATION

building a greater saint john

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