



## Canada's Cities Reducing Poverty | Response to Federal Poverty Reduction Plan Report

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March 3, 2011

Ms. Candice Hoepfner, MP  
Chair, Standing Committee on Human Resources,  
Skills and Social Development and the  
Status of Persons with Disabilities

VIA Email:

Dear Ms. Hoepfner:

On behalf of Vibrant Communities Canada and our 12 partner communities, I am pleased to submit our collective response to the *Federal Poverty Reduction Plan: Working in Partnership towards Reducing Poverty in Canada* Report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

We commend the Standing Committee on this report and urge the adoption of the numerous recommendations in the report. In addition, we believe the Federal Government should commit to:

- Establish an Inter-Department Secretariat for Poverty Reduction efforts
- Establish a Multi-sector National Panel on Poverty Reduction
- Develop measurable indicators and timelines to reduce poverty
- Invest the appropriate Federal Government resources and review current policies with a poverty reduction lens
- Adopt a community, place-based lens to federal program investments focused at reducing poverty
- Ensure that program investments are flexible, sustainable and use integrated approaches for communities to leverage these investments in poverty reduction priorities

Since 2002, Vibrant Communities Canada has supported multi-sector, collaborative community efforts to reduce poverty in thirteen communities across the country. At the national level, we have provided a range of supports to these trail building communities including community coaching, the creation and support of a learning community, and evaluation.

During the past nine years, we have witnessed significant shifts across Canada focused on poverty reduction. Notable changes include the adoption by six provinces and three territories of poverty reduction and social inclusion strategies; the emergence of more than 40 multi-sector poverty roundtables in communities; and a renewed energy for tackling the complex problem of poverty.

**Collective Impact achieved Vibrant Communities 2002-2010  
November 2010 Results**

**Community Innovations:**

- 230 poverty reduction innovations are completed, under way or anticipated including affordable transit, housing, income supports, access to child care and education supports

**Community Will and Engagement:**

- 3,041 partners are engaged including 466 businesses and 717 voices of lived experience
- 22,581 organizations and individuals are connected partners in local poverty efforts
- 237 published reports, 2,701 media articles and interviews and 353 learning events focused on poverty

**Policy Change:**

- 40 substantive policy areas have been influenced by local community efforts

**People and Households Less Poor with Increased Assets:**

- 380,554 assets have been generated in 13 communities assisting 194,785 individuals and households

Please do not hesitate to contact me at Vibrant Communities Canada should you have any questions about this submission or accompanying brief.

Sincerely,



Liz Weaver  
Vibrant Communities Canada

***A Federal Poverty Reduction Plan:  
Working in Partnership Towards  
Reducing Poverty in Canada***

**Response to the Report and Call to Action**

Submitted by Vibrant Communities Canada  
February 2011

**Overview:**

Vibrant Communities Canada commends the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities for the recent report *A Federal Poverty Reduction Plan: Working in Partnership towards Reducing Poverty in Canada*.

Vibrant Communities Canada (VCC) is a pan-Canadian initiative through which 13 communities have experimented with new and innovative approaches to poverty reduction. These approaches emphasize collaboration across sectors, comprehensive thinking and action, building on community assets, and a long-term process of learning and change.

Launched in 2002, Vibrant Communities builds on learning generated by Opportunities 2000, an initiative, operating in the Kitchener-Waterloo region of Ontario in the mid-to-late 1990s, that showed how communities can expand their capacity for strategic poverty reduction work. VC was established through the partnership of three national sponsors – Tamarack – An Institute for Community Engagement, the Caledon Institute of Social Policy, and the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation – and a series of local communities across the country. As it evolved, VC gained the support of a number of other funding partners, including Maytree; Hamilton Community Foundation – The Young Fund; RBC Financial Group; Ontario Trillium Foundation; and Human Resources and Skills Development Canada.

**Focusing on Poverty CAN make a Difference:**

The extensive research, recommendations and public engagement in the Standing Committee's report process proves that poverty is a concern shared by government and citizens. Indeed, the costs of high levels of poverty in neighbourhoods, communities and First Nations are impinging on the prosperity of Canada.

The momentum for poverty reduction efforts in Canada is significant. At the city and regional level, communities across the country are convening multi-sector tables to address the impact of poverty and focus on poverty reduction strategies. Six provinces

and three territories have adopted or are in the process of developing poverty reduction, social inclusion and prosperity strategies. The provincial and territorial poverty strategies are showing significant investments and improvements in the lives of low-income citizens. Each of these provincial/territorial strategies acknowledges that they could achieve even more with Federal Government involvement and investment.

But this momentum clearly requires the leadership of the Federal Government. As the report details, the Federal Government plays a significant role in key areas including early childhood learning and education, income security (including child benefits, seniors benefits and Employment Insurance), employment and skills development, housing and supporting First Nations peoples.

Vibrant Communities Canada endorses the recommendations in the Report and urges action. In addition, we believe the Federal Government should commit to:

- Establish an Inter-Department Secretariat for Poverty Reduction efforts
- Establish a Multi-sector National Panel on Poverty Reduction
- Develop measurable indicators and timelines to reduce poverty
- Invest the appropriate Federal Government resources and review current policies with a poverty reduction lens
- Adopt a community, place-based lens to federal program investments focused at reducing poverty
- Ensure that program investments are flexible, sustainable and use integrated approaches for communities to leverage these investments in poverty reduction priorities

### **The Critical Role Communities can play in Poverty Reduction Efforts:**

While the Report acknowledged the critical role of provincial and territorial governments in poverty reduction efforts, the Report does little to acknowledge the role of cities and communities in changing the lives of citizens living in poverty. It is at the very local level where citizen change and impact occurs.

The Federal Government's Homelessness Partnering Strategy is an important example of the cooperation of governments, municipalities and community organizations to address the challenges faced by our homeless population.

It is in local communities where people find jobs, access services and housing supports, and connect with their neighbours. We would therefore recommend that the Federal Government ensure that poverty reduction efforts reach across federal, provincial and municipal boundaries. The Vibrant Communities Canada experience proves that when communities are engaged and focused on poverty reduction efforts, the impact can be powerful.

### **Final Thoughts:**

Vibrant Communities Canada recommends the adoption of the *Federal Poverty Reduction Plan: Working in Partnership towards Reducing Poverty in Canada* Report. The research and recommendations are important next steps in our collective efforts to increase the prosperity and economic inclusion of all citizens in Canada.

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### **Background on Vibrant Communities Canada:**

Vibrant Communities (VC) is a pan-Canadian initiative through which 13 communities have experimented with new and innovative approaches to poverty reduction. These approaches emphasize collaboration across sectors, comprehensive thinking and action, building on community assets, and a long-term process of learning and change.

Launched in 2002, Vibrant Communities builds on learning generated by Opportunities 2000, an initiative, operating in the Kitchener-Waterloo region of Ontario in the mid-to-late 1990s, that showed how communities can expand their capacity for strategic poverty reduction work. VC was established through the partnership of three national sponsors – Tamarack – An Institute for Community Engagement, the Caledon Institute of Social Policy, and the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation – and a series of local communities across the country. As it evolved, VC gained the support of a number of other funding partners, including the Maytree Foundation; the Hamilton Community Foundation – The Young Fund; RBC Financial Group; the Ontario Trillium Foundation; and Human Resources and Skills Development Canada.

The Trail Builder initiatives began by (a) establishing a new collaborative entity in the community to stimulate and support change based on VC principles and (b) developing a community plan including a specific poverty reduction target. Each initiative has received financial and coaching support and has participated in VC's national learning community. In combination, these measures were intended to strengthen a community's will and capacity to address poverty in a comprehensive and collaborative way.

Evaluation would have been a lot easier if the VC initiative had involved a tightly prescribed model, been based on a narrowly defined conception of poverty, and dealt with the efforts and results of a single organization. This was not the case. Rather, participating communities were free, indeed encouraged, to take up the VC principles in whatever ways were most appropriate given local conditions and priorities. As a result, there is considerable variation in the way Trail Builders designed their goals, structures, and strategies.

Moreover, VC employed a multidimensional conception of poverty. This notion of poverty recognizes that all people require a critical mass of personal, physical, social, human, and financial assets to meet their needs. And it identifies two basic types of strategies that can contribute to asset development:

- *Programmatic interventions* that directly help people build assets in these various areas
- *Systemic interventions* that seek to alter the policies and systems that shape people's life prospects

Given this conception, a very wide range of possible poverty reduction activities are conceivable – and, in fact, Trail Builder communities have pursued many different types of strategies. Finally, unlike more conventional poverty reduction programs, Trail Builder initiatives were not driven by a single organization but were multisectoral collaborations. Many different players contributed to the outcomes that were produced and their roles varied in nature, as did the specific contribution of the VC collaboratives themselves.

Notwithstanding the relatively complicated organizational terrain shaping these initiatives, Trail Builders achieved substantial results.

<b>Key Numbers in Vibrant Communities 2002-2010</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 322,698 poverty reducing benefits to 170,903 households in Canada</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 164 poverty reducing initiatives completed or in progress by local Trail Builders</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• \$19.5 million invested in local Trail Builder activity</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1690 organizations partnering in Trail Builder communities</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An additional 1080 individuals serving as partners including 573 people living in poverty</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 35 substantive government policy changes</li> </ul>

- A high number of individuals and households have benefited from poverty reduction efforts in the 13 Trail Builder communities. As of May 2010, 164 different initiatives have benefitted more than 170,000 households with outcomes across the different asset areas. Approximately 27,000 of these households have been part of more comprehensive initiatives – those that combine two or more supports like housing assistance and employment training. And 30,000 have experienced more substantive improvements to their life circumstance through a specific intervention. A practical – perhaps even conservative – estimate is that between 15,000 and 25,000 households have made a major transition to greater emotional, relational, and financial well being as a result of Trail Builders’ efforts.
- All Trail Builder communities employed a comprehensive lens when developing their poverty reduction plans. As a result of their work, communities are expanding the range of supports available, offering intensive and integrated supports to individuals through comprehensive initiatives, and responding strategically to community needs by addressing gaps to complement existing services.

- Trail Builders have in various ways found new mechanisms that facilitate multi-partner collaboration in delivery of programs and services. Several Trail Builder communities can now point to (a) the crucial role business plays when acting as a partner in the effort to reduce poverty and (b) the ways Trail Builder initiatives can influence the behaviour of local business. Trail Builders can also point to: (a) examples of system changes that make programs and services more flexible, responsive, and integrated and (b) greater strength and inclusivity in decision making, courtesy of improved collaboration.
- While Trail Builders have focused primarily on their local communities, they have also developed linkages into poverty reduction efforts at provincial and federal levels. In total, 37 strategies have been undertaken in which local initiatives are partnering with national or regional partners to address policy issues at these levels
- Changes in public policy have contributed substantially to the overall scale of results achieved by communities. Almost all of the Trail Builder communities that have generated a large number of benefits for low-income residents have been active and successful in realizing government policy change. Approximately 38% of the total number of household assets generated are the result of policy change efforts.

In addition to impacts, the evaluation examined the factors contributing to Trail Builder effectiveness. An extensive list of factors relevant to the work of Trail Builders was developed. Factors that were critical to the success of high-performing communities were teased out of the experience of local initiatives.

#### **Factors for Success**

- Vibrant Communities entity is firmly established in the community
- High degree of credibility and legitimacy
- Able to clearly articulate the purpose of their work and overall approach
- Strong convening organization
- Initiative does not have “competition” from other convening efforts in the community
- Leadership of the initiative includes all sectors
- The effort is able to attract influential members
- A high degree of resident mobilization is present in the work
- Group has high aspirations
- High use of research to inform the work

The Vibrant Communities approach manifests itself in different patterns. These patterns include the different ways policy intervention, citizen empowerment, and practical programmatic initiatives play out. In some cases the community works simultaneously across a range of issues at both a policy and program level, with the interplay between these levels achieving significant degrees of creative synergy.

Each pattern reflects the different contexts in which they emerge, the characteristics of the leadership, as well as participants' expectations about the scale and pace of poverty reduction they would like to see. Out of the range of Trail Builder experience we wind up with four observable patterns:

- **Transformational Change:** high aspirations driven by both systems interventions and program activity
- **Programmatic Push:** a focus on demonstrating the value of working together on tangible programmatic projects
- **Citizen Empowerment:** an emphasis on grassroots concerns and citizens' voices as a clear driver in shaping the work of formal organizations
- **Policy Advocacy:** a focus on changing the policies and practices of larger systems or organizations

The patterns have different:

- Characteristics, strengths, and weaknesses
- Prospects for resiliency and poverty reduction outcomes
- Conditions under which they thrive or wither

Being “effective” means something a little different for each pattern. The potential for large-scale outcomes is greater with the Transformational Change approach than any other, but special conditions are required for this approach to thrive.

Vibrant Communities Trail Builders experienced a great deal of variation in the nature and scale of the outcomes they achieved. Progress is made in one area while new challenges emerge in others. Solutions that work in one situation don't apply in another. The prototyping of a VC approach in the past nine years has generated many innovative strategies for poverty reduction that in turn have benefitted a high number of low-income Canadians.

Source: *Evaluating Vibrant Communities 2002-2010*

Jamie Gamble

[http://tamarackcommunity.ca/g2\\_VC\\_Evaluation.html](http://tamarackcommunity.ca/g2_VC_Evaluation.html)

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*This Brief has been developed in partnership with and endorsed by the following organizations:*

#### **Brief Endorsements – Vibrant Communities Canada**

Vibrant Communities Saint John, Saint John, New Brunswick –  
Endorsement from 33 members of Leadership Round Table

- Fern Bennett, Make Poverty History
- Shilo Boucher, Fusion-YMCA-YWCA
- Lisa Chamberlain, Village Neighbourhood
- Monica Chaperlin, Business Community Anti-Poverty Initiative
- Roberta Craft, Lower West Side Neighbourhood

- Cathy Craig, Saint John Board of Trade
- Debbie Cooper, Saint John Boys and Girls Club
- Ivan Court, Mayor- City of Saint John
- Terri-Ann Cormier, Community Representative
- Elaine Daley, Belyea, Colwell and Associates
- Francine DiMambro, Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation
- Penni Eisenhauer, South End Neighbourhood
- Craig Estabrooks, MP Rodney Weston's Office
- Regena Farnsworth (Chair), Dean Faculty of Business – UNB Saint John
- Mary Eileen Flanagan, SJ Board of Police Commissioners, Sherwood & Flanagan
- Debbie Godlewski, Public Health Services, Horizon Health Network
- Randy Hatfield, Human Development Council
- Gregor Hope, Business Community Anti-Poverty Initiative
- Elizabeth Jadoo, Greater Saint John Area United Way
- Carl Killen, MLA SJ Harbour Southern Caucus
- Grace Losier, Mayor Grand Bay Westfield
- Lyn King, Community Representative
- Mark Leger, Community Member
- Brian Marks, Social Development
- Brenda Murphy, Urban Core Support Network
- Paul Ranson, Anglican Ministry
- Sister Roma De Robertis, Sisters of Charity
- Nancy Savoie, Crescent Valley Neighbourhood
- Donnie Snook, Inner City Youth Ministry, Common Council
- Susan Tipper, School District 8
- Carolyn VanderVeen, Irving Oil Ltd
- Lois Vincent, Enterprise Saint John
- Pat Woods, City of Saint John

Winnipeg Poverty Reduction Council, Winnipeg, Manitoba:

Endorsement from 23 members of the Council on January 21, 2011

- Charles Loewen (Co-Chair), Former President & CEO, Loewen Windows
- Strini Reddy (Co-Chair), Volunteer (Education and non-profit background)
- Bill Balan, University of Winnipeg
- Jan Belanger, Community Affairs for Great-West Life, London Life and Canada Life
- Dr. Denis Bracken, University of Manitoba
- Jim Carr, Business Council of Manitoba
- Cindy Coker, SEED Winnipeg
- Grant Doak, Deputy Minister of Manitoba Family Services and Consumer Affairs
- Cynthia Foreman, Government of Canada, Manitoba Federal Council
- Stephanie Forsyth, President & CEO, Red River College
- Margo Goodhand, Winnipeg Free Press
- Heather Grant-Jury, UFCW Training Centre
- Wayne Helgason, Social Planning Council
- Edward Kennedy, The North West Company
- Crystal Laborero, Tribal Wi-Chi-Way-Win Capital Corporation
- Susan Lewis, United Way of Winnipeg

- Audrey McIlraith, Manitoba Family Services and Consumer Affairs
- David Northcott, Winnipeg Harvest
- Dr. Brian Postl, University of Manitoba (Faculty of Medicine)
- Kevin Rebeck, President of the Manitoba Federation of Labour in 2009
- Diane Roussin, Executive Director, Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre
- Clive Wightman, City of Winnipeg
- Arlene Wilgosh, Winnipeg Regional Health Authority

#### Community Roundtable Endorsements

- Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, Hamilton, Ontario
- Opportunities Waterloo Region, Waterloo, Ontario
- Trois-Rivières: ECOF, Trois Rivieres, Quebec
- Vibrant Abbotsford, Abbotsford, British Columbia
- Vibrant Communities Calgary, Calgary Alberta
- Vibrant Communities Edmonton, Edmonton, Alberta
- Vibrant Surrey, Surrey, British Columbia