

experiencing homelessness 2012

in saint john and new brunswick

experiencing homelessness



Human Development Council

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The Saint John portion of the report card was prepared by Kathryn Asher, Researcher with the Human Development Council, on behalf of the Greater Saint John Homelessness Steering Committee.

The Human Development Council is a social planning council that co-ordinates and promotes social development in Greater Saint John. The Greater Saint John Homelessness Steering Committee is a committee of community organizations and government departments that work with the homeless population and those at risk of becoming homeless. The committee seeks collaborative solutions to homelessness, and creates public awareness about issues around homelessness and housing.

The New Brunswick section of the report was prepared by:

- Pauline Armstrong, Community Homelessness Network Inc. (Bathurst)
- Kathryn Asher, Greater Saint John Homelessness Steering Committee
- Sue Calhoun, Greater Moncton Homelessness Steering Committee
- Tim Ross, The Fredericton Community Action Group on Homelessness

Copies of the report are available from

Human Development Council
47 Charlotte Street, 3rd Floor City Market
PO Box 6125, Station A
Saint John, New Brunswick E2L 4R6
Tel: 506.634.1673
Fax: 506.636.8543
info@sjhdc.ca
www.sjhdc.ca (under *Products & Services*)



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table of contents

saint john report card

The Numbers	p. 1
A retrospective: Doing God's Work	p. 2
Youth House	p. 3
National Housing Week	p. 4
HPS Funding	p. 4
Out of the Cold	p. 5
STAR Network	p. 6
Women's Working Group	p. 6
Housing & Homelessness Stories	p. 7
HIFIS	p. 7

new brunswick report card

Introduction	p. 8
Minimum Wage	p. 9
Social Assistance Reform	p. 10
Affordable Housing	p. 11
Community Highlights	p. 12

the numbers

Shelter in Saint John CMA	2010	2011
Individuals who stayed in an emergency shelter (#)	156*	272
Men (#)	93*	193
Women (#)	63	79
Emergency shelter beds (#)	52	67
Men (#)	42	57
Women (#)	10	10
Emergency domestic violence beds for women & children (#)	23	23

Note: The supply of shelter beds for males increased by 15 beds in 2011 with the opening of the Out of the Cold men's shelter, which operated between January and April.

** Because of underreporting in the 2010 emergency shelter data for males, these numbers should be used with caution.*

CMA stands for Census Metropolitan Area

Housing in Saint John CMA	2010	2011
Provincially subsidized housing units (#)	2,137	2,133
Owned by the province (#)	1,287	1,280
Private units (rent supplement) (#)	850	853
Individuals on wait list for provincially subsidized housing units (#)	1,708	1,415
New units in the Affordable Rental Housing Program (#)	67	30
Transitional housing units (#)	44	44
Second stage housing units (#)	14	14
Market rental vacancy rate (%)	5.1	5.9
Average rent for a 2-bedroom apartment (\$)	645	670

Social Assistance in Saint John CMA	2010	2011
Individuals on social assistance (#)	6,710	6,934

Sources available upon request

These numbers don't tell the whole story—too many residents lack safe, affordable housing.

Waiting lists for subsidized housing are too long and the projected increase in supply is insufficient. The recent federal provincial Affordable Housing Agreement will add only 170 units province-wide in the next two years. Another cause for concern is the state of existing social housing in the province. The Auditor General's latest report devoted a chapter to social housing and the outlook is bleak. An action plan is called for immediately.

doing god's work

By Mark Leger

In my two years as steering committee coordinator, a couple of scenes stand out in my mind. The first one took place at the Outflow centre on Waterloo St., shortly after I started my job in January, 2010. I had come by to help serve meals, but when I arrived they had enough volunteers so I sat down to chat with some of the guys. The room was packed with people at small tables engaged in animated conversations. Someone was playing guitar on a couch against the wall; a pair was playing chess amid the chatter and the music.

It was like a coffee house; passersby might not have known it was actually a weekly dinner for homeless Saint Johners and others in need of a meal and fellowship. At the end of the evening, I apologized to Outflow coordinator Jayme Hall for not helping out. He said that wasn't true; my contribution was talking with the guys. The fellowship is as important as the food, he said.

The Outflow centre on Waterloo has since closed but the organization still serves meals several times a week in area churches and outdoors in King's Square. That night on Waterloo St. gave me an early glimpse into the work of area churches in the homelessness sector; over the course of two years, I would come to truly appreciate their enormous impact. Area churches were involved in the launch of the Out of the Cold shelter for homeless men at Grace Presbyterian Church. The Anglican Church is a driving force behind the planned transition house for homeless and at-risk youth. Last year, area churches took part in *Common Ground*, a conference about the ways they could get further involved in poverty reduction work.

It took me time to get used to the faith community's extensive involvements. I believe in the separation of church and state, and I was honestly a bit worried about their engagement in this work. Did they see this as merely an opportunity to preach their faith, I wondered. It didn't take long to dispel these concerns. They were focused on getting the job done—the *work* of God, not the *Word* of the God, so to speak. "Ready. Fire. Aim." is a favourite saying of Hall's; he uses this to express his desire to serve, and not to spend too much time talking about how to serve.

The same spirit guided the group that started Out of the Cold. They met for the first time in the fall of 2010, and the doors opened at the beginning of January, 2011. The work was done entirely by church volunteers; in the year since it opened, it has become a community-wide project with volunteers and contributions of food and money coming from outside the faith community as well.

That brings me to the second scene that sticks in my mind. The Out of the Cold shelter has a friendly, collegial atmosphere. Volunteers and the men who spend the night there share insights and stories about their lives. They talk about politics, religion and other issues of shared concern. The men may face personal challenges that caused them to become homeless: addictions; mental and physical health issues; family breakdown; joblessness. But the volunteers soon discover the men care about the same things they do, and these personal connections create the kind of fellowship that exists at Outflow.

I'm a volunteer at Out of the Cold and have been involved in many late-night discussions over tea and hot soup. One night after the men had gone to bed, I was in the church lobby chatting with one of the volunteers. He pointed to a print of a painting of Christ on the wall. "He was homeless when he was first born. I always remembers that," he told me. This shapes how he thinks about his obligation to be involved in this work.

Amen to that.

Mark Leger was the steering committee coordinator from January 2010 to February 2012.

youth house



The past year has seen some solid progress on the Saint John Youth House, a 10-bedroom transitional housing facility for youth 16 to 24 years of age that is being established in response to the identified need of addressing youth homelessness in southern New Brunswick.

The Province of New Brunswick recently provided \$50,000 in funding to hire a coordinator, Colin McDonald, to move the project forward. The endeavour is also being championed by a board of directors representing various community interests.

There are currently an estimated 100 homeless and at-risk youth in need of transitional housing in the Saint John area. To address this, Youth House will provide an emergency housing program as part of a youth-serving continuum in collaboration with The Resource Centre for Youth (TRC), which has case management and day-support programs, and The ONE L.I.F.E. program, which offers longer-term housing and education supports. The youth serving continuum will also include the services of other community resources—such as adolescent mental health and Ridgewood addiction services—to create a comprehensive program that provides homeless youth with every opportunity to leave street life and become stable and productive members of the community.

Youth House is not intended to be a standalone entity—it will be a central piece missing from the continuum of youth services for homeless and at-risk youth. For some youth, the facility will be the first point of entry into a long-term service delivery model to support them through a difficult time in their lives. Youth who enter the house are expected to stay for up to 90 days with the potential for an additional 90-day stay while they work towards establishing a place in society for themselves.

The next phase of the project will see the kick-off of the capital campaign in the spring, along with an announcement of the project's name and location.



national housing week

The Greater Saint John Homelessness Steering Committee organized a series of events during National Housing Week in November.

This year marked the fourth run of the Tin Can Challenge. Students from five area high schools—Harbour View High School, Rothesay High School, Rothesay Netherwood School, Saint John High School, and the winning school St. Malachy's Memorial High School—came together at the Marco Polo Cruise Terminal armed with thousands of canned food products to donate to local food banks, but not before competing in a sculpture-building contest.

The Homelessness Education Learning Party (H.E.L.P.) brought students together in the morning to learn about homelessness and discuss what they can do to help in their schools. In the afternoon, the youth went into the community to do service projects, where they learned first-hand what it means to be homeless in Saint John.

A 30th anniversary party for Housing Alternatives was held at the Church of St. Andrew and St. David where nearly 100 people came out to celebrate the organization's contributions to non-profit and cooperative housing in the city, and its champion for all these years, Kit Hickey.

hps funding

By Randy Hatfield

The Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) is a community-based program that relies on communities to determine their own needs and to develop appropriate projects to address homelessness. The HPS took effect on April 1, 2007, with annual funding of \$134.8 million for two years, and replaced the National Homelessness Initiative, which ran from 1999 to 2007. The Government of Canada has renewed the HPS at the current funding level of \$134.8 million per year, from April 2011 to March 2014.

Over the years, a number of Saint John's non-profit groups have used funds from HPS and its predecessor to work on homelessness issues. They include First Steps, ONE Change, The Resource Centre for Youth (TRC), and Coverdale Centre for Women. We urge the federal government to renew and strengthen the HPS prior to the expiration of funding in 2014. Tell your Member of Parliament that housing and homelessness is a national issue and that the renewal of HPS should be a priority.

out of the cold



By Fern Bennett

Between early January and early March 2012, thirty-one different men accessed the Out of the Cold emergency men's shelter, equaling 144 night stays. Some of the men stay one night, others for an extended period; a few men are repeats from last year. We have an average of two guests per evening. Some nights the shelter closed due to no guests arriving before 11 pm, with five being our highest number of guests per evening.

A tremendous caring fleet of over sixty volunteers has blessed us. Volunteer commitment goes from one shift per month, bi-monthly, weekly, bi-weekly, and sometimes more as volunteers offer to serve as backup. Shifts are 8 pm to midnight, midnight to 8 am, and 8 pm to 8 am. I'm overwhelmed with gratitude that so many have stepped up to God's calling.

Lois Merritt, of Fresh Start, continues to assist the men with their next steps. Between her efficiency and changes at the Salvation Army, we thought we may close Out of the Cold before our March 31st end date; however, we have new faces accessing the shelter and the Salvation Army continues to have evenings where it is filled to capacity.

Thus far, we served over 144 evening meals. Extra meals went to men who returned after moving on so they could access food and companionship. We also serve a breakfast of oatmeal and/or toast, and a packed lunch. Early in the season, we were able to distribute Tim Hortons cards, which were a blessing on weekends when no other service was open for the men to be welcomed indoors.

The men we serve have varied stories. Some are passing through Saint John, others suffer from mental health issues and/or addictions, and some experience job losses and/or broken relationships. All have been grateful to Grace Presbyterian Church (home to the shelter) and its volunteers for providing shelter from the cold, and for our kind respectful treatment.

We are planning a gathering March 31st at 7 pm at the Grace for all volunteers, supporters, and guests (the men) to celebrate that we did something, and to brainstorm on our next steps.

star network

The STAR Network—modelled after Fredericton’s supportive housing initiative the SUN Network—got off the ground in Saint John in 2011. The network is a collaborative group of service providers that work with homeless individuals/those at risk of homelessness by offering wrap-around services to help them move from shelters and unsafe housing into safe and affordable housing. Community agencies and the Department of Social Development have come together to help transition clients to independent living by arranging for: housing, furniture and other household items, moving services, and assistance around addictions, education, employment, financial literacy, meal preparation, mental health, and many other needs that arise.

According to research, clients transitioning from homelessness into their own homes are most likely to fail within the first 18 months. So the network’s goal is to not only make initial arrangements for its clients, but to offer them ongoing support through a mentorship program to stack the odds in their favour.

The network is in the process of placing its first client, a young woman who has shown tremendous resilience in leaving a life of violence behind. She has already secured employment and will shortly be moving into her own apartment. She is becoming increasingly self-sufficient and is working hard to rebuild the pieces of her life that have come undone.

women’s working group

Over the past year, the Greater Saint John Homelessness Steering Committee convened a working group on women’s homelessness to analyze and address the gaps in services for homeless and at-risk women. The first order of business was to undertake a review of current programs and services to get a sense of what is available and what may be missing. To do this, the Women’s Working Group surveyed 48 organizations and initiatives that serve the target group in the Greater Saint John area—with some as far away as St. Stephen and Sussex—by providing assistance around: addictions and mental health, counselling, education and skills development, employment, housing, etc. A total of 41 surveys were completed (a response rate of 85%) which touched on:

- capacity/wait list
- cost of services
- demographics of clientele, their needs, and issues
- gaps in services for women
- hours of operation
- mission and mandate
- plans for expansion
- referrals and community partners
- services offered
- staff and volunteer capacity, their roles, and experience

The initial offering from this study will be an information guide to the 40-some resources available in the community for homeless/at-risk women, which will be circulated to interested parties and key stakeholders, and will be followed up with a more in-depth analysis.

housing & homelessness stories



In the last year, the Human Development Council and its community partners produced several videos on homelessness and housing issues. We focused on the lived experiences of the people in transition houses, and mixed income and affordable housing. Melissa took us on a tour of First Steps, a transition house for pregnant and parenting teens and young women. We also spoke with two residents of the Abbey, the new mixed income housing development in Uptown Saint John.

Hemmings House produced a video on youth homelessness in the community. You can find these videos, and more on the Human Development Council website: sjhdc.ca.

hifis

By Chris Hopkins

HIFIS is the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System. It is a standalone software that is used by emergency shelters, violence against women transition houses, and service providers to track clients accessing the shelter system. HIFIS has the capability to track intake, develop a comprehensive client profile, and provide one-click reports for funders and government officials.

In Saint John, Coverdale Centre for Women, Salvation Army, Hestia House, and the Out of the Cold shelter are all regular users of HIFIS. The Human Development Council started administering HIFIS in October 2010. Since that time, we have been able to train shelter providers in Saint John and around the province to use HIFIS with the goal of producing an accurate reporting tool for shelters that eliminates duplication for the user. As the users continue to grow and use HIFIS, we are able to provide a good picture of homelessness in Saint John and New Brunswick. Our hope is that we can use the information in HIFIS to help reduce the level of homelessness in New Brunswick as well as provide an essential tool for service providers for day-to-day operations.

Experiencing Homelessness 2012

in new brunswick

Minimum Wage	p. 9
Social Assistance Reform	p. 10
Affordable Housing	p. 11
Community Highlights	p. 12

This is the fourth Report Card on Homelessness in New Brunswick. Using 2011 data, it presents a profile of homelessness in the province and, in particular, in the four designated communities under the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (Bathurst, Fredericton, Moncton, and Saint John). The Community Homelessness Network Inc. (Bathurst), the Fredericton Community Action Group on Homelessness, the Greater Moncton Homelessness Steering Committee and the Greater Saint John Homelessness Steering Committee have come together to create this publication. These organizations represent and work with agencies throughout the province that work with homeless people and those at risk of becoming homeless. See page 11 for contact information.

NB Transition Houses in 2011

- 13 transition houses in NB
- 22,509 bed nights
- average monthly number of women using transition homes was 60
- the average monthly number of children was 40

Shelter in NB	2010	2011
Number of people who stayed in a shelter (unique individuals)*	1,420	1,296
Number of times shelter beds were used*	n/a	29,285
Youth and children in care (March) <i>* Miramichi Salvation Army shelter not included</i>	751	675

Housing in NB	2010	2011
Provincially subsidized housing units	13,346	13,600
Individuals on wait list for provincially subsidized housing units	4,905	5,050
Second stage housing units	34	34
Market rental vacancy	4.5	4.8
Market rental average rent	668	687
Individuals in core housing need (2006 Census)		29,400

Income in NB	2010	2011
Individuals on NB social assistance (December)	40,396	40,813
NB social assistance rate for a single person (on TAP)	\$537	\$537
Minimum wage (December)	\$9.00	\$9.50
Individuals receiving the Guaranteed Income Supplement (for low income seniors) (November)	55,452	56,090
Individuals receiving Canada Pension Plan Disability (November)	14,194	14,298
EI claimants (November)	32,890	33,780

Food Security in NB	2010	2011
Individuals assisted by food banks (March)	18,517	18,539
Food banks	58	59
Consumer Price Index for food in NB	126.9	132.8

Sources available upon request.

minimum wage

Some of you have probably heard about the debate on minimum wage that has been taking place during the last six months! On the one hand, the increase in minimum wage will help those persons who are working at minimum wage to pay their monthly bills. On the other hand, small businesses, who may already be struggling to stay open, will see an increase in their operating budgets.

What should we do to help the economy and also help small businesses in New Brunswick to minimize the effects? Even though it is only 50 cents per hour, to some people, such as a single parent with two children, it's a difference of \$10 to \$20 a week, which is \$40 to \$80 a

month. This will help that parent to pay for the hydro bill or buy milk for their children's breakfast cereal each morning.

Small businesses will have to adjust their budgets and, for many, they will have to cut hours of their employees to make their budgets work.

So who is winning?!!

As we go to press, the government has just announced that it intends to increase the minimum wage by 50 cents on April 1, and has decided against introducing a two-tier minimum wage.

The Benefits of Raising the Minimum Wage

Some critics characterize minimum wage policy as strictly an antipoverty measure and dismiss the minimum wage as a "blunt instrument for dealing with poverty." This study, by contrast, sets minimum wage policy in its appropriate context as labour market regulation. It argues that the minimum wage is a reflection of the value our society places on work.

While a decent minimum wage would help alleviate poverty, it cannot be expected to eliminate poverty. Minimum wage policy is but one tool in a toolbox of policy options which, taken as a whole, can go a long way to addressing Canada's persistent poverty problem.

This study finds many positive effects of a higher minimum wage, including:

- Increasing the minimum wage benefits all low-wage workers. It helps those who earn between the current minimum wage and the new higher minimum wage. And it helps those who are paid close to the level of the new minimum wage.
- Employers will also benefit from less turnover and easier recruitment. Workers can easily be lured away from employers that provide low pay. The negative consequences of high turnover include added staffing and training costs, administrative costs, operational disruption, lost productivity, and low morale.
- A higher minimum wage can increase the independence and self-sufficiency of teens and youth – enabling young adults to leave home, and helping to reduce post-secondary education debt loads.
- Finally, increasing the total wage bill for those at the bottom end of the labour market can also lead to positive health outcomes. The broader trend is that poverty increases illness and health costs.

Taken from "Bringing the Minimum Wage Above the Poverty Line," March 2007

social assistance reform

A work in progress?

Despite reassurances that things are on track with the Social Assistance reform plan outlined in the Poverty Reduction Strategy, there seems to be little new to report on this front for 2011, aside from meetings and discussions.

Of the proposed Social Assistance reforms (shown at right), the only thing we know for sure is that the vision and dental care plan for children in low-income families did not happen in April of 2011.

The March 2011 progress report of the Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation noted: *“A great deal of planning and research is underway on reforming the social assistance system to move from a rules based to an outcome based system. These changes, when fully implemented, will represent a much called-for change to a system that has been said to prevent many New Brunswickers from moving off social assistance and becoming self-reliant.”*

The next progress report of the ESIC is slated for March 2013. Conversations with people involved in this progress confirmed that meetings have taken place, and that any proposed changes will follow normal government procedures (i.e., approval by Policies and Priorities Committee, Board of Management etc.). Nothing will be announced before that happens. And yes, the process is being overshadowed by concern about the province’s financial state. *“It’s on everyone’s mind,”* said one spokesperson.

Social Assistance Reform objectives over five years:

- i. Move from rules based to outcome based system;
- ii. Move from passive assistance to employment orientation;
- iii. Move from focus on income poverty to social and economic inclusion;
- iv. Restructure and increase social assistance rates including a new regime more appropriate for persons with disabilities;
- v. Significant overhaul of household income policy;
- vi. Introduction of vision and dental care for children in low-income families by April 1, 2011;
- vii. Provide more opportunities to keep earned income as individuals transition to work;
- viii. Reform wage exemptions to include a working income supplement;
- ix. Raise allowable asset exemption;
- x. Link benefits such as child care, home heating and health to household income to the extent possible.

affordable housing

In November 2011, the federal and provincial governments signed a new cost shared housing agreement that will stay in effect until March 31, 2014. The objective of this agreement is to improve the living conditions of households in need by improving access to affordable housing that is sound, suitable, and sustainable.

The agreement will see an investment of nearly \$47 million—\$23.4 million from both levels of government—which will be earmarked for the construction of new affordable rental housing units and the renovation of existing housing. The federal allocation to the province is based on provincial/territorial population and core housing need data (affordability, accessibility, and adequacy).

The bulk of New Brunswick's contribution will go towards rent supplements to ensure newly constructed units remain affordable to low income households (over 20 years). The federal share of the agreement will go towards capital undertakings: the rehabilitation and new construction of affordable housing, including: 1) \$7 million for new construction (the Affordable Rental Housing Program), which will provide for 170 new units (at \$40,000 each) for the entire province; and 2) \$16 million for renovations (Homeowner and Rental Renovation Programs), the majority of which will go towards major repairs for low income homeowners.

New Brunswick outlined its commitment to increase affordable housing in its strategy *Hope is a Home*, although the province is very dependent on federal funding to realize this initiative. The agreement's framework gives New Brunswick the ability to design and deliver affordable housing initiatives based on the province's specific needs. However, because Canada does not have a national housing strategy, this agreement does not ensure a strategic response to the housing needs of Canadians as a whole.

community contacts

Community Homelessness Network Inc. (Bathurst)

Pauline Armstrong: 506.545.0805, parmstrong@nb.aibn.com

The Fredericton Community Action Group on Homelessness

Tim Ross: 506.444.8199, coordinator@cagh.ca

Greater Moncton Homelessness Steering Committee

Sue Calhoun: 506.877.2343, scalhoun@nbnet.nb.ca

Greater Saint John Homelessness Steering Committee

Kathryn Asher at 506-636-8549, kathryn@sjhdc.ca

community highlights

• Bathurst •

The Emergency Homeless Shelter is now in its second year of operation and has seen a slight increase of individuals using the shelter, with about 60% of the clients being youth aged 16-21 staying at the shelter. This being said, we are currently working on a plan to assist the youth so they will have a more stable lifestyle allowing them to get the proper education and life skills so they can look forward to a future of self-sufficiency.

The Bathurst Youth Centre has been applying for grants and working on proposals to try to get a Youth Transitional House in the Chaleur Region. In 2011, we were successful when we were awarded \$5000 from Eva's Initiative for a home for the youth. Winning this award has inspired us to continue our work for the youth to break the cycle of homelessness – one person at a time.

With the support of the communities and the continuation of our many fundraising initiatives, the Community Homeless Network, in collaboration with the Bathurst Youth Centre, will continue to offer services to the homeless population in order to assist them in becoming self-sufficient.

• Fredericton •

The trends are encouraging as the number of individuals staying at the Fredericton Homeless Shelters Inc. has fallen for the fourth year in a row, showing signs that strong partnerships toward a "Housing First" approach can make a huge difference. The numbers are telling: in 2008 there were 432 unique individuals who stayed at the Fredericton Homeless Shelters; in 2011 that number dropped to 298.

Increased investment in affordable housing, particularly the opening of a new 12 unit supportive, affordable housing development by the John Howard Society are already demonstrating a return on investment through a dramatic reduction in acute health care costs. Investing in healthy, safe, affordable housing means healthier, safer and more inclusive communities.

The work needs to continue, as indicators are suggesting serious housing vulnerability in the City of Fredericton with over 4000 households living in affordable rental housing. As the Wellesley Institute has stated, housing vulnerability is like an iceberg. The biggest part of the problem is often hidden from view.

community highlights

• Greater Moncton •

At Home/Chez Soi project is making a difference

As of the end of 2011, the At Home/Chez Soi project in Greater Moncton and rural areas of southeastern New Brunswick is showing a 93% success rate. A project of the Mental Health Commission of Canada, At Home Chez Soi is part of a national multi-city study for people who have been chronically homeless or “precariously housed,” and have mental health problems. The program is based on “Housing First,” which means that clients are provided housing, and then helped to deal with whatever issues they have. To date, 114 of the 123 (93%) participants receiving Housing First were successfully housed. This has had a tremendous impact in Greater Moncton, not only helping some of our most vulnerable

citizens but also freeing up space on waiting lists so that those still struggling with homelessness can more readily find help.

Other fronts are not as positive. Emergency shelter use is up this year, in part because the waiting time to get an appointment with Social Assistance was longer because of government staff cuts. In Moncton, we know that the number of people using the emergency shelters is only the “tip of the iceberg,” that there are many more “hidden homeless,” including significant women and youth. Our challenge in the coming year is to find a methodology for reliably being able to measure such “couch surfers,” in order to have a better handle on “how we’re really doing” in our efforts to end and prevent homelessness in Greater Moncton.

• Greater Saint John •

The Saint John community saw both ups and downs in its work on the homelessness file. Some of the promising endeavours include:

- Saint John Youth House - a proposed 10-bed transitional housing facility for youth 16 to 24 years of age - made significant headway in 2011. The project received an initial investment of \$50,000 from the provincial government for phase 1 of the undertaking (development of the project). The next phase will see the kick-off of the capital campaign in the spring.
- The STAR Network, modelled after Fredericton’s SUN Network, got off the ground in 2011. The network is a multi-sectoral group of service providers that work with homeless individuals/those at risk of homelessness by offering wrap-around services to help them move from shelters and unsafe housing into safe and affordable housing. The network is currently in the process of placing its first client.
- In the fall of 2011, the Church of Saint Andrew and Saint David opened the Abbey, a 96-unit housing complex in the city’s South End. It is a mixed income development that offers 1, 2 and 3 bedroom apartments as well as street-level townhouse units. More than half of the apartments (55) are available as affordable housing units (rent geared to income), while the remaining 41 are available at market rents.