



# Around *the* Block

Issue 71 June / July 2020 - Special Edition: COVID-19 Response

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## Heroes everywhere: Saint John's awesome response to COVID-19

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This is a story of awesomeness. It's the story of how the non-profits who serve Saint John's priority neighbourhoods and our most vulnerable fellow citizens stood up to be counted during COVID-19.

Much has been written about the courage of the front-line healthcare workers, the grocery store clerks and sanitation workers, the lab techs and farmers and truckers - and rightly so. Collectively, they kept us alive. There have been only two deaths in New Brunswick at time of writing.

But the non-profit sector is largely unsung. Their story is one of innovation and quick pivoting, creativity and compassion and frustration, and their voice deserves to be heard. This special issue of *Around the Block* offers them that opportunity, electronically from June 22nd with printed copies to follow by early July.

Over a period of three months, I interviewed thirty people so they would not have to stop their critical work to write an article for *ATB*, and to capture their COVID journey while it was happening so we would have a historical record of our community's response. I was daily astounded by their perseverance, expertise, good humour, and caring. Thanks to them for their generosity with their time; the great stories could have filled these pages ten times over. A few were able to submit stories, and these are credited; the rest are interviews. All remaining uncredited writing is the editor's.

Thanks as always to our sponsors (below) and to our advertisers for this special issue.

Mr Rogers said, "When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, 'Look for the helpers.'" The news in the spring of 2020 was scarier than most of us have ever known it. Here are the helpers. Take them out of the equation in Saint John and the plight of our priority neighbourhoods would look very bleak indeed. With their help, we are getting through COVID-19 better than anywhere.

On the right and throughout are many of their faces. As you read, you will hear their voices. It has been a privilege to listen to them tell their stories in their own words.

## There are heroes everywhere



SAINT JOHN



## The faces of our response: awesome community partners



The Loan Fund team in COVID mode: positive, collaborative, and on Zoom! (Photo: Loan Fund)



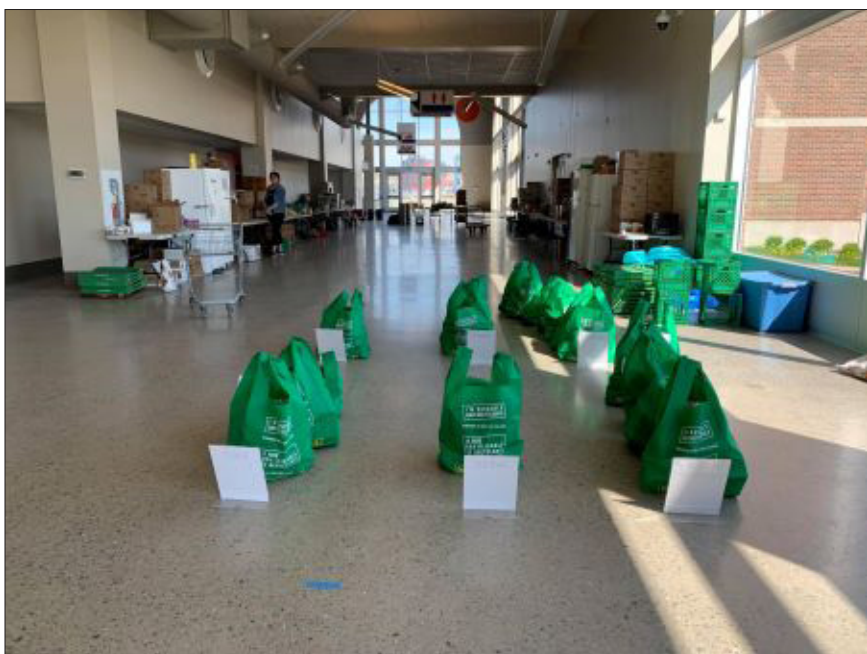
Safety, seriousness, and smiles!

Clockwise from top left:

Lily McNulty dishing up mac and cheese with tomatoes with Charlene Good and Dianne Daigle in the background (Photo: Romero House); Jasmine Chandra (Pennies and Sparrows) at the Diamond Jubilee Cruise Terminal (Photo: Greater Saint John Emergency Food Program); Bethany Reinhart keeping things sanitized at the Atlantic Coastal Action Program (ACAP) office (Photo: Abi Reinhart); and Kendra Gautreau at the YMCA bagging up care packages for seniors with a smile in her eyes (Photo: Saint John Y)



## Greater Saint John Emergency Food Program



*Food packs organized and ready to go at the Diamond Jubilee Cruise Terminal (Photo: GSJEFP)*

*The Greater Saint John Emergency Food Program (GSJEFP) is a group of community partners that was created earlier this year in response to increased demand for vital food security assistance within our community due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic fallout that closely followed the outbreak. From contact with the Program through interviews and as a co-organizer of Civic Tech Saint John, I had the opportunity to see true grassroots community agility in action!*

### Samantha (Sam) Wentzell, Horizon Health, and Erin Rideout, Inner City Youth Ministry: Building the track as the train was barrelling down

**First days - Erin:** March 13th when schools announced that they were closing for a two-week stretch I messaged Christine Roy, the principal of Saint John the Baptist School. Normally Inner City Youth Ministry runs a lunch program during the school year, not just at SJBKE but also at Centennial and Hazen White-Saint Francis. With schools closing, we knew that there'd be a gap, so I thought, we've got to do something. I linked in the other schools and PULSE, to brainstorm how to get lunches out. Monday (March 16th) we prepared 550 lunches for Crescent Valley, the old North and South Ends. It didn't go quite as we thought; people weren't aware of the programming but also they weren't able to leave their homes to get the food because of the state of emergency, so we had to shift our game plan. Also, we were not going to be able to continue to use the school kitchen with schools closed, so we shifted to doing delivery on the Tuesday (March 17th). That's when Sam and others came on and we shifted to a miniature version of what the Greater Saint John Emergency Food Program is now. So Plan B was actually a lot better than Plan A!

**Sam:** Because of my involvement with PULSE and Erin in other programs, I was invited to that first meeting Tuesday morning, to discuss how we could shift operations, and that's when we had the roundtable discussion that maybe pantry-style emergency food banks would be good, and then raised the question of the barriers - that people don't want to come out, so how do we mobilize volunteers? That was Tuesday at 9 a.m. and by Tuesday at 10 a.m. we were packing and tracking food packs. And I think that speaks to the ability of these kinds of responses happening at grassroots level - to be really nimble and change to meet our residents' needs.

**Erin:** There was even wheeling fridges from the schools! We did a week at PULSE and then we realized the space wasn't conducive to social distancing. And to grow wasn't possible in that space - more and more people were signing up for a delivery pack. That's when I connected with Andrew Glidden, pastor at the Vineyard Church who is on the PULSE board, so we got the Vineyard space and moved. Then

Dustin [Leclerc, Carleton Community Centre] was really instrumental in the move to the Port. We were hopeful about the Food Depot Alimentaire [Moncton] coming on board and being able to order in mass quantities. And that wouldn't have been possible at the Vineyard. It eventually worked out that we could use the whole bottom floor of the Diamond Jubilee Cruise Terminal - the perfect solution for us. It had a drive-in access door we could bring pallets into, bright light and lots of space for social distancing, and we could grow our capacity and have our people be safer.

**Community - Erin:** Obviously when people are reaching out for food support there's unease; there was fear and nervousness, but also relief that there are organizations supporting them. And that it can be brought to them - that's the huge thing. But also I'm seeing a newfound pride in New Brunswick's ability to do this well, and that's been exciting! I've had conversations with people who say that this is really hard, I've not done this [asked for help] before. All I can do is assure them that there is no shame, that everyone needs help sometimes, and these are unique times. There are all sorts of reasons why someone might need help and they're all valid.

**Challenges - Erin:** Having so many people at the table and it being so collaborative has been the greatest joy and also anything new can be challenging, because we all come knowing our own neighbourhoods and having experience in different backgrounds.

**Sam:** I think the biggest thing was we were trying to come together very quickly to build a solution to an immediate emerging need with a lot of unknowns. We were building the train track as the train was barrelling down! Things changed daily. So there was ongoing change management to make sure that we kept really at the centre of what we're doing: our mission to serve those in need with food insecurity - as well as foster that great relationship with the partners.

**Learnings - Sam:** We certainly learned lots from this process about the gaps that exist in our community around food insecurity and ways we can influence and help support systematic change within the community to better meet the needs of people living in Saint John. But also just the way that this has come together in collaboration. One of the opportunities moving forward for all of these organizations is to stay connected, how we've learned about each other's operations and what visibility in that collaboration will do to further improve programs and service delivery to all of our clients.

**Next steps - Sam:** Credit to Erin and the team - the operation is a well-oiled machine now. It's excellent to see how smoothly that runs even when there are slight changes, whether different food or different deliveries. We are able to be really quick and nimble in responding to those. I think the biggest thing is what the transition is looking like, as the provincial government releases restrictions.

*(continued on next page)*



*Boys and Girls Club Drivers packed and ready to deliver food packs to households around the city (Photo: GSJEFP)*

# Greater Saint John Emergency Food Program

(continued from previous page)

**Sam:** How is that going to impact our operation and our transition back into supporting other community partners that are looking at long-term solutions for food insecurity? There’s a real consensus around the table of our leadership team and our partners to make sure that there’s a legacy of this program and all the hard work. We certainly see those agencies like food banks and food pantries that are already operating locally recognizing some of the learnings and the gaps that this crisis has highlighted. How do we all work together as a team so it doesn’t just fall on those that have normally done food programming? How do we all work as a community to make sure this collaboration continues to support those changes?

Given the sheer number of donors/funders/contributors, we wouldn’t be able to name them all and wouldn’t want to name some and not others. We just thank all funders, corporate and personal donors for the support!

## Food Program clients share their response

*“Boy, you guys are spoiling a chocoholic. In today’s bag, I got choc covered granola bars. Thank you for all you do in providing food during this time.”* Christa Richards, a resident from the Waterloo Village Neighbourhood

*“This program has been a huge help in keeping basic food items in our home during this time. I’ve noticed food prices have gone up and my money does not last as long as it used to! Having kids home all the time makes for more snacks needed! I had no idea my kids loved to eat and so much! This program helped me have enough food so that I wasn’t saying no to food when my kids wanted toast, fruits and cereal!!”* Trish Nickerson, single grandparent who lives in the Waterloo Village Neighbourhood

*“The program has helped providing fresh fruits and vegetables to my kids that are home. It also provides easy-to-make meal solutions for the family as well.”*  
Betty Rogers Sheehan, Lepreau

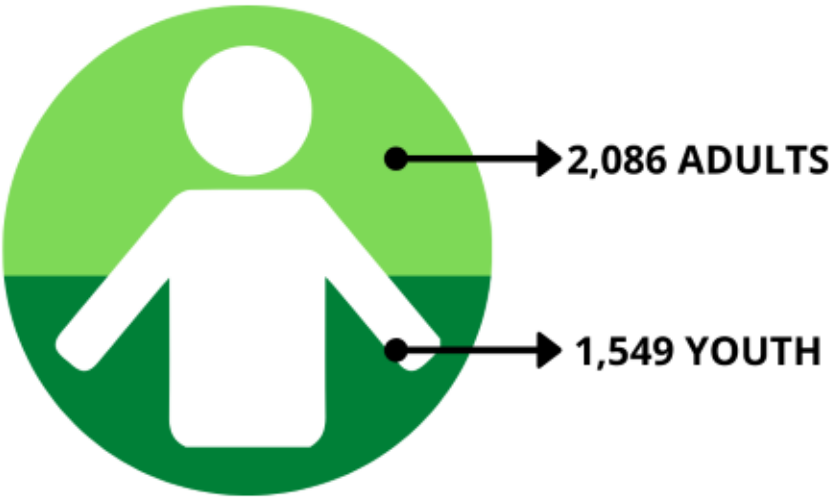
## Civic Tech Saint John helps Food Program Partners

Civic Tech Saint John is a group of passionate volunteers who help identify and implement potential solutions to community challenges, using technology for social good and increasing citizen participation in the civic fabric. Civic Tech has undertaken a project with the GSJEFP to source and implement a technical solution to automate the manual processes currently in use by the program, including a client database and supply chain system. Civic Tech volunteers have technical and project management expertise that the community partners do not. This marriage of volunteered tech expertise and community need is the heart of the Civic Tech movement across Canada and around the world. Civic Tech in conjunction with the business leadership of the Food Program has sourced an innovative and smart solution for our community – one that will have uses beyond the pandemic in addressing Saint John’s ongoing food security issues. The commercial product is called Link2Feed. The Food Program leadership is using funding given to the Program for the set-up fees and two years’ use of the tool. Working with the Human Development Council, making the Link2Feed platform available to all food service providers in Saint John will be a legacy of the GSJEFP. Civic Tech co-organizer Ben McHarg: “Initial deployment, training, and onboarding of the first clients will be managed through Civic Tech volunteers, to get the first few organizations on board.” Volunteer Project Manager Mike Long adds, “An automated solution needs to exist for not only the Emergency Food Program but also for all of the food banks and agencies within our Saint John region.”

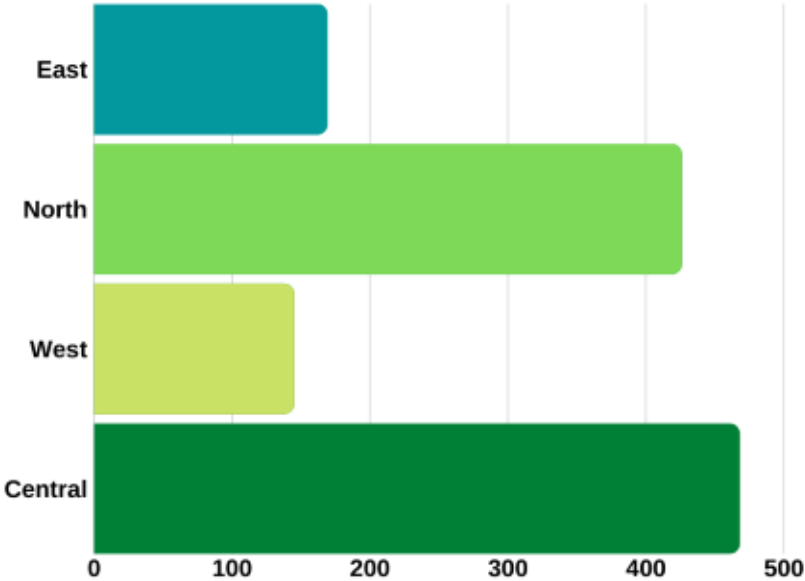
# Having so many people at the table and it being so collaborative has been the greatest joy

(See thoughts from some community partners in the Food Program on pages 4-5.)

To date, **3,635** individuals have benefitted from the Emergency Food Program.



To date, **1208** households have been delivered to.



Our minimum standard provides 10 meal portions. This means, to date, we have provided **36,350** meals to people in need during the COVID-19 crisis.



Statistics as of June 15th, 2020 (GSJEFP)



## Waterloo Village: Penni Eisenhauer - Food security



Penni Eisenhauer at GSJEFP at the Port (Photo: Anne Driscoll)

Penni Eisenhauer of the Waterloo Village Neighbourhood Association started partnering on the Food Program in early days.

The main goal in the beginning was to just serve the gap for the schools, for the breakfast and lunch programs, but then we started to do food orders. We moved from the Vineyard Church [to the Port]; we have better public safety and storage here. The food depot comes here and we take what we need, and it flows off to some other organizations - Romero House, Nick Nicolle Centre, Outflow. It has probably been my best experience of collaboration - with seven different organizations. This is true collective impact work: we're not just talking it, we're actually talking and walking it at the same time. The money has flowed in and people's agendas are pulled into one. There's no territorial stuff going on. It's actually quite positive!

There are higher level conversations in regards to what food security and food delivery are going to look like post-COVID. I think about 60% of the food bank clients come through our program, and so that has helped food banks because they don't have the volunteer capacity. I think our next phase is to talk about transition and what that collaboration might look like with neighbourhoods and food banks, and work on the strategy together around food security and how it's delivered. The WV Neighborhood Association and PULSE would work with the Community Food Basket, John Buchanan and his group, and talk about what that looks like. I think that singles with no dependants, seniors, and people with disabilities are under-served. I think up in Saint Stephen the food bank does it differently; they actually give gift cards out and people go to the grocery store and provide a receipt that they actually spent the money there. It could be a neat opportunity; I would like to pilot something with food security around gift cards. It could be empowering. Why can't we allow people to go buy the food that they actually want to eat? A lot of people like to give to things that are emergencies, but...

**Wouldn't this be lovely: if these types of resources were dedicated to food security all the time?**

## Carleton Community Centre - Zoom scores a win, but it's not human



The CCC staff at the Carleton (Photo: CCC)

Dustin LeClerc, Executive Director of the Carleton Community Centre, (CCC) sheds some light on a key turning point in the GSJEFP.

I can't even begin to count the number of minutes I've spent on Zoom in the last month. A huge chunk of our emergency food program came out of a breakout room on Zoom! We were participating in the Food for All NB call; that's a province-wide food conversation. They had breakout rooms in the Zoom call, in which I had never been involved. In my breakout room was Chantal from the Food Depot in Moncton, which is essentially a food distribution hub for the province for all food banks, and we actually got on that distribution list! We are now working with them through the food bank network to get a supply of food, which has given us a lot of purchasing power, and donated goods. It was a huge win and it was because of having that really neat breakout room platform that we were able to strategize a bit closer. It's really cool.

The Carleton is one of the key partners in the Greater Saint John Emergency Food program; that's where I am right now. We're down at the Port, we have scaled up. We're down in the Diamond Jubilee [cruise terminal]. We're using the main hall for packing and then we have the garage for the freight shipping I was just talking about from the Food Depot. We're getting pallets and pallets of food - that's actually a forklift starting up behind me to get a pallet of food! [A sound ATB has never heard before during an interview!]

We spoke with Kate Worden who runs CCC's cheerleading program.

We took two cheerleading travel teams to Florida at the beginning of March! So we actually landed on the Monday that New Brunswick had said basically do not travel, but we were already there, so we spent a week in Florida trying to keep up with the updates at home. We weren't sure if we were coming home or if we could get through! We arrived back on March 15th.

In regards to the cheer program we have had virtual practice; we tried to keep our volunteer coaching staff connected to the kids, who went from practicing three hours a week (we were mid-competition season) to absolutely nothing. So we were hoping to keep their bodies engaged with stretches and conditioning via online practice using Zoom. It's not the same atmosphere; you don't feel as connected, of course, as you're just looking at the screen. The greatest challenge over the last couple of months has definitely been human connections. All of the volunteer coaches are hugely missing the kids and wanting to be back in the building. I know it's been difficult for them. The excitement, I guess, of operational plans and yellow phases are starting to come around full circle; people have offered to help in any way possible to get where we need to be, in order to reopen.

**I think we're coming to a point where everyone's realized that we need each other**



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## The ATB interview revisited: Mary LeSage - A level playing field



Mary at the Port  
  
(Photo:  
Penni  
Eisenhauer)

ATB interviewed Mary LeSage of PULSE in 2019; this year we caught up with her twice working on the food program, to find out what was happening and what she was learning from it.

**Early May:** A lot of people are anxious simply because we still you don't know what next week is, you don't know what tomorrow's like, and you can't plan very well. But as long as we take care of our mental health and take care of each other it should be OK! There were people who had not had to ask for help in the past, parents who lost their income; they just were trying to figure out how to make their way. We were just one step in many steps that they had to take. We told them that we were here for them and we weren't going anywhere, and that we were there as long as they needed us. People see our name [PULSE] attached to it, so they say, we know who that is so that's OK, we trust them and we know that they're looking out for us.

**Later in May:** People are feeling more hopeful. I think how fast the federal and provincial governments came out with support, like the Red Cross \$900, made people feel pretty good. The numbers have dropped and the mood has improved even more. Erin takes the majority of phone calls and she was saying, "I don't even have to ask people their names. I know from the voice who it is." You have that weekly connection and then you start to learn the voices and you know their stories and you're there cheering them along.

**Collaboration:** With all of the organizations put together [on the Food Program] it's just been spectacular. As a rule, we're already working pretty well together as it is; this just proves that we can do it and that there's collaboration. If we need it, we can do it. I'm hopeful. Small, medium, and large businesses have pulled together, whether it's giving us money or moving fridges or buying us packs of bags so we can pack groceries. There are too many to name! The most rewarding thing has been the partnership - it was just a matter of hours after we went into the state of emergency that we all pulled together and started working together. Often, we don't do that in ordinary times, but these are extraordinary times. I am happy to say we came through.

**Learning:** If there is anything this time has taught us it's that a basic income would be a good thing for our residents of Saint John and the province.

I'd like to think society would be a little bit different if we were all on the same playing level

## Crescent Valley Resource Centre (CRVC): Anne Driscoll - The need doesn't go away



Olivia Clancy and Anne Driscoll at the Port (Photo: CRVC)  
CRVC's Olivia Clancy, Justin Shepard, and Executive Director Anne Driscoll all worked at the Food Program. ATB spoke with Anne.

One of the things that we're excited about is the collaboration. We're involved with the Carleton, ONE Change and Waterloo Village. It's been a great opportunity for us as organisations to bounce ideas off each other; while we're packing groceries, we're discussing the program. We've shared experiences of what's happening in each other's neighbourhoods and we talk about how things might look when we move on to the next stage. In our conversations around food security, there seems to be a lot of support for families but not for the older adults, adults living alone. We worry that they may be the folks who are falling through the cracks, who maybe never used a food bank, but hear about all the services out there and don't know how to access them or don't have the ability to access them. So we chatted about: what are the food security resources, where are the meals, where are the food programs, and how people can access them.

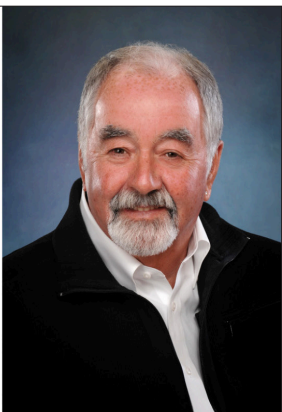
The partners, CCC and PULSE and Horizon and the Inner City Youth Ministry, pulled together really quickly to fill a gap, and the other partners in the priority neighbourhoods jumped in and said, "We're now not doing our regular programming, so we can certainly help!" The Boys and Girls Club utilizing their drivers to deliver the groceries to residents, it's amazing. The outpouring of support from the corporate sector is just stunning. The Port of Saint John providing that space, the Jubilee cruise ship terminal, for this program is definitely a positive. Not a day goes by when I'm there helping to pack groceries that someone doesn't come up with donations. The worry becomes what will things look like for the neighbourhoods in a year or two, financially. So many donations have poured in from the corporate sector to these emergency programs, but the neighbourhood issues are not going to go away. Small neighbourhood organizations are still going to need the support from business, and the government support that they have received all along, so it is a concern - the money might be really tight.

The neighbourhood issues are not going to go away

Gerry Lowe  
MLA Saint John Harbour

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## ONE Change



*Child's Catering provides a meal every Tuesday for ONE Change. One Tuesday they added a message for the community.(Photo: ONE Change)*

*While the other four priority neighbourhoods worked at the Food Program, ONE Change took a different approach, offering take-out meals from the Nick Nicolle Centre. In fact they benefited as a recipient of some food from the Program as well as from many other donors.*

## Christa Petts

We've got amazing volunteers here every day supporting each other and making sure that we're taking care of the community. Some of our staff are working at home on different things, helping us out with donations. We've been planning each week's meals and breakfasts, and making sure that we are helping people as much as we can without having anybody in the building - addressing some concerns on the phone, passing on resources, trying to support other members of the community and partners that are doing the same thing. It's really just been people coming together!

For the meals, it's a small staff here. We have Mickey Verner from Rivercross - and they've been fabulous, they've also been supporting the community with donations. Chelsea, who is one of our program leads - a job coach - has been cooking meals. Another volunteer has been here almost every day, just helping out whenever she can. We're reaching out to people and getting people to help support us so we can keep doing this. A big one is the Greater Saint John Emergency Food Program; the Moncton food bank has been helping everybody; and our North End food bank has been fabulous. Even some of the schools and daycares have given food to help support us.

A lot of people really miss the programs, just coming in and getting a coffee and saying Hi. They want to be here, but they completely understand, and they're upbeat. They're just trying to get through the day today like us, and they are so appreciative of everything we do. For breakfast we can see 40-80 people and sometimes even higher. For lunch there can be 100-200 just for one meal. It depends on the time of the month. [See Evelyn McNulty's similar comment, p 18.]

*Meaning whether the assistance check or the child benefit is out?*  
Yes. Other people have been supportive - Child's Catering, Domino's Pizza. Chuck's Smart Choice Variety actually provided a meal for us, he brought us pizza for the community. Once everybody found out what we were doing, they started helping us the best way they can.

**The Honourable Trevor Holder**  
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Friday: Closed



## Jill Richards-Cook

Some people are very anxious, living at home for a long time not leaving the house, no structure, no focus. They came here [to Nick Nicolle], they did fantastic, and now suddenly this thing has hit and we're trying to keep them all mentally healthy. I check in with them on a regular basis and try to go through their work plans. We're just trying to pivot. Because we can't run summer programs, we are trying to planting marigold seeds right now and have activities to go. "Summer camp in a box" is what we're calling it. Barry Ogden from Marigolds on Main generously donated seeds, seed trays, and soil. One of our camp activities will be decorating pots, planting seeds, and some of these flowers will go to them in a six-pack of marigolds already blooming. We give them that ownership, that stewardship, and then we are going to get them to grow other things on their kitchen window. The idea is to give kids things to do.

With Brilliant Labs we are going to be doing some tech STEAM projects [Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math] with them. One of the components was to learn to do social media things, so they know how to put together videos. Show us what you're doing and we'll do a video of how you can do it, or here are some of the things in your kit that you could use. The idea is to get them to send stuff back to us so that we can edit it all together, and say hey, this is what your friends are doing, so they can have that connection back to the community and to the people that they know and love here at the Nick Nicolle - Chelsea and some of our tech mentors. The plan for the activity kits is to have enough in the box for about 40 activities to get us through five days a week for eight weeks.

As for the Tech Mentors, we have some fantastic young men and women who are working on Civic Tech. It's just one thing that we can do right. It's a good cause. and some of our tech mentors are going to be trying to assist in any way that they can, and learn.

*Below: Jonathan Driscoll preparing to hand out breakfast at Nick Nicolle (Photo: ONE Change)*



## Anglin Drive is Alive!

**By T. Roy**

T'was the week after March break and all through the land,  
People were getting sick from a spittle-coughed hand.  
The world was in panic, shelter in place.  
Go out only for good reason, stand apart in six-foot-wide space.  
The community silenced, the doors were closed tight.  
Not a noise for miles, not a neighbour in sight.  
The laughter of children, as they played in our park.  
Now a mere memory, that pulled deep at our hearts.  
Would life as we knew it, go back to what was?  
Could a greeting go unmasked with a smile and hug?  
Some rules finally lifted, a breath of fresh air.  
Bubble families to join with, they were chosen with care.  
The people emerged; the doors opened wide.  
They smiled and sang out, "Anglin Drive is alive!"



## I (Heart) My Saint John Campaign



The campaign sign at King's Square  
(Photos: John Wong and Jessica Bradley)

**By John Wong, Brilliant Labs**

Inspired by the I (heart) My Saint John design and its #WeAreAllInThisTogether message seen around the city and on social media, an anonymous supporter initiated the I (heart) My Saint John fundraising campaign. The goal was to rally the community to help support people experiencing hardship in Saint John during the COVID-19 pandemic, in collaboration with the United Way's Atlantic Compassion Fund COVID-19 Response. With public health measures being made in response to the pandemic, people in Saint John who are already vulnerable are facing major disruptions and new risks – and many are in crisis.

Alexya Heelis of the United Way: “There are lots people in Saint John continuing to struggle with basic needs such as food security and safe housing, along with needs for mental health and social supports due to COVID-19. United Way is happy to be part of the “I (heart) My Saint John” fundraising campaign to show #locallove and #Compassion4Community ... and we are incredibly thankful to our anonymous supporter for initiating the I (heart) My Saint John campaign!” For the first 100 donations of \$100 or more, donors receive an I (heart) My Saint John sign made possible by the anonymous supporter to place on the lawn or in the window as a symbol of their support, and to inspire others to also give. All donations will go towards local Saint John organizations supporting individuals and families who need it most. To make an online donation and receive your sign, go to the United Way Saint John website at [unitedwaysaintjohn.com](https://unitedwaysaintjohn.com) and click onto the I (heart) My Saint John sign at the top of the page.

(Photo below: Lola Boyles and her sign)



## Parent Child Assistance Program (PCAP)

By the PCAP team

Some positives for our clients during COVID-19 have been:

- Relationships with partners to help meet needs – Olsen’s for grocery delivery, Jean Coutu for essentials and medications and the Saint John Loan Fund for virtual training.
- Through the groceries, our clients were educated on food security, healthy options, and recipes to make the food last.
- The Saint John Loan Fund’s Money Matters taught about budgeting. It was via Zoom and it was great to see the consistent participation. Many have been coordinating sessions with Darlene for future one-on-one education.

For our team:

- We were able to stay connected to each other, as a whole team, with daily Zoom calls.
- Participation in Professional Development – motivational interview training sessions via Zoom and Brain Story Online training.
- Made connections with pharmacies and additional community partners on advocacy for harm reduction, medical care and counselling for our clients.



#golong

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### Bee Me Kidz



Bee Me Kidz fresh food box  
(Photo: Bee Me Kidz)

By Kerri Brooks, Bee Me Kidz

In March, Bee Me Kidz had to suspend their free Saturday family program and halt the teaching and volunteering in four partnering schools due to COVID-19. However, not long after, they re-shaped their program to positively meet the needs of Bee Me Kidz families and many more families in Saint John! They partnered with a local farmer and delivered fresh food boxes to families' doorstep free of charge.

To date, Bee Me Kidz has provided over 1,700 food boxes to over 7400 individuals. It's been amaZZZing to see the smiles from our community families!

We might not know what the new normal will be just yet, but we are confident that Bee Me Kidz will BEE back to support our families to "be the best me they can bee" in the upcoming weeks, months and years!

BEE sure to stay up to date with Bee Me Kidz by following us on our Facebook page, "Bee Me Kidz" and register for our upcoming summer programs as we have limited spaces available.

### Saint John the Baptist/King Edward School Update



Some friendly graffiti some students put on one of our boxes  
(Photo: Ben Gillcris)

By Ben Gillcris, Community Schools Coordinator

Coronavirus introduced an element of uncertainty into our world that has challenged both work and home life as never before. Schools are no exception - social places by nature, their work and culture are predicated on the inclusiveness of community. Taken in these terms, the pandemic is the event of our generation, one that has challenged everyone in new and unusual ways.

Work at SJBKE School cycled very quickly in March as the School District and Government responded to the evolving situation. We moved very quickly from normal school days into a situation where students and families were home and our programming ground to a halt.

It is a credit to our partners and staff that the movement from normal to lockdown was achieved with those relationships intact, and the desire to help families in our priority neighbourhoods remains. To these ends, many of our friends in the community have taken up the task to ensure that the most vulnerable among us continue to have access to food and services. Our partners remain committed to this goal, and if there is any take-away to be gleaned from those first, terrifying moments, it is how quickly people stepped up to the plate in order to accommodate an unprecedented circumstance. That commitment remains and its evolution into the "new normal" will be the task of the coming year and beyond. Our unofficial motto at SJBKE comes from our "Parents as Partners" program - "Better Together." To be split so completely from our students and families was, perhaps, the most traumatic event our staff has ever had to face, and they've met the challenge with professionalism and grace - from online linking to students through organizing supply pick-ups through remote "check-ins." These are people who have families and concerns of their own, yet, have never lost sight of who we are and what we do; the connection remains entwined in a very special way that will rise above and beyond this terrible moment.

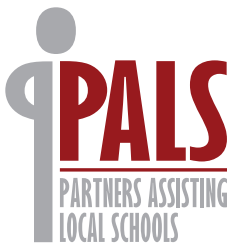
As I look at the coming months through the uncertainty that remains, I realize that much of what I've known in my work will change, perhaps permanently, after this moment. Yet this instant in time helps me to see so much of a general good in the hearts and minds of our partners, our staff, and the general community. I cannot yet say what the new world will actually look like, or getting down to practical matters how that will work in a school setting, accommodating partners, volunteers and so on. I am reassured in knowing that those relationships will continue, even if their mechanics are entirely new.

That is the gift of our wonderful community - resilient and ready for what comes, whether we know it or not!



### Partnering from Kindergarten to Grade 12 and Beyond

- Partnerships
- Volunteering
- Mentoring
- Role Models
- Coaching
- Focus on Literacy
- Having Fun
- Tutoring
- Breakfast/Lunch Programs
- New Opportunities
- After School Programs
- Career Exploration
- Making a Difference



Deborah Fisher  
fisher.deborah@jdirving.com  
  
Susan Tipper  
tipper.susan@jdirving.com

We ALL have something to offer!



## Teen Resource Centre

*Some things can't wait, pandemic or no pandemic. Food is one. Another is keeping clients engaged, not losing them - a common theme in these interviews. For TRC it was critical; their youth need the calm TRC gives. With their hands "virtually outstretched" TRC missed only one day of engagement at the start of the COVID lockdown!*

### Letti Eastwood, Drop-In Coordinator

**Early Days:** Well, it's been quite a ride and it changes every week! I run the after school drop-in program and I was the first person to go online. We used Facebook and Facebook Live before anything else because many of our youth and parents already communicate with TRC staff that way. For over a decade most staff have had TRC accounts; my Facebook is LettiTRC. Not all of our kids have their own computer; if they do, they might not have a phone number. That was something we learned long ago, so we just flew right into what worked. The last day that we had students in the building was Friday March 13th, and I think our first live [chat] was on Tuesday!

**Connecting:** If you're watching at the time you can comment and everyone else can see the comments including the person making the video, if they are able to look at the screen. We staff partnered in groups. [A colleague] would be my camera person; if I was doing something and couldn't look at the screen myself, she would say, "Sally said you should try pink for the paint colour" or whatever. Then we would post those videos online and people could see them after. We also tried to integrate some contests into them, just little things to keep people connected. We participated in the Hearts in the Window campaign together - we did a large part on one of our main windows so it can be seen from the street - and then we challenged kids to do their own version and to get photos and then we would do a judging and give away a gift card for the winner. That was within the first two weeks. We knew that we had to be immediate; a lot of our youth consider us part of their family and their support system, a calming influence in their life. We wanted to maintain that connection especially at the beginning. It was scary, it was confusing; the question of will seniors get their graduation started to arise. There were just a lot of tense emotions.

**Collaboration:** Meanwhile my colleagues were working behind scenes at breakneck pace on how to address the technology gap that some of our students are going to have, how we were going to address mental health issues that might be intensified by this situation. Are some of our clients going to be struggling foodwise quickly? How can you meet this need not in person? They were building new data sheets so we could keep new information that we might not have had to keep before. We have over 150 high school students connected with the TRC and Pathways program and we're working [as of early May] on an online tutoring program to help



Smiling TRC staff on Zoom  
(Photo: Letti Eastwood)

support them in their schoolwork. There is also a fairly large newcomer community; socialization is a big part of learning English and many of our young people are the lead on speaking English in their families. How you learn something is to be around people who can challenge your abilities and a lot of our youth no longer have someone around challenging them to speak English and helping improve their skills. Structured activities include a photography group that meets online on Mondays with a challenge each week; we're very lucky - we have three very talented photographers on staff! So the first few weeks we were keeping our hands virtually outstretched so that our youth could keep connected, and now we're moving into a more structured environment plus a lot of our youth are now getting a more structured environment from their schoolwork.

**Clients:** We have some fantastic youth - they're energetic, in school teams and clubs and in their community and they're physically active. There's been some incredible wisdom come out of our youth. I had a co-worker tell me she met one of our youth who works in a grocery store, now under very stressful conditions, and the youth said, "Everybody's really struggling right now and if that means someone loses it at me at the grocery store, I don't need to make their life any worse. It's not about me." This is a 17-year-old kid! A lot of our youth are really showing their character and it's really positive. They're bored, like most of us, but they are also stepping up like most people, too.

**Learnings:** When we built the online tutoring, we built it so that we can continue it. If it is a successful and well-used tool then why take it away? I think it's also challenging our youth to do things that they might not have the courage or confidence to do. I talked to a young man this week from Somalia and in one afternoon we learned how to do Zoom, how to create a PDF, how to attach something to an email - and we did it all on videoconferencing! He was applying for a job. Normally [in person] someone on staff or a teacher or another student would probably have just done it for him, but because he didn't have that luxury, he learned a lot that day! He's heading out to NBCC next year. He'll definitely feel more confident in that environment now.

**Saint John Energy** **LAUNDRY ENERGY SAVING TIPS**

- Make sure your dryer's vent hood is working correctly to prevent cold air from entering the home
- Clean your dryer's lint filter before every load for efficiency and safety
- Use cold water to wash your laundry where possible and don't over dry clothes. Only use your washer when you have a full load

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## Saint John Learning Exchange (SJLE)

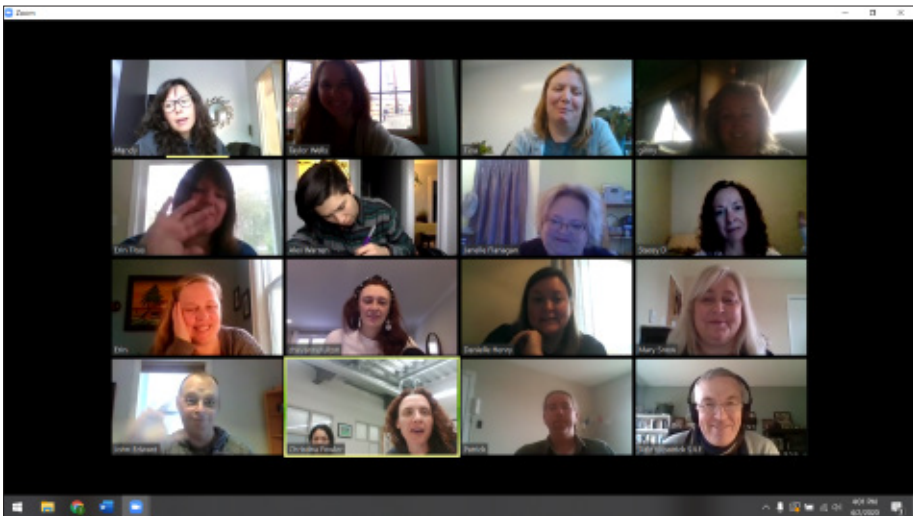
*The Learning Exchange staff talk about learners - not students. Learning is a lifelong goal. SJLE pivoted quickly to engage learners in new ways, not lose them on the journey to self-set goals. SJLE also runs two social enterprises. When COVID hit, Mandy Burke-Evans was fierce in her concern for her employees, and even fiercer in her resolve to find a way to help them. Christina's leadership is infectious!*

### Christina Fowler, Executive Director

**First days:** Our very large team has worked really hard to flip to a virtual model in a very short amount of time because we had zero notice to be able to do it. And obviously the Learning Exchange's model is built on face to face. It's built on building confidence and trust in a dynamic group setting. So it's hard to work from home. We've worked super hard to pivot. One of the things we found is that there are gaps with our clients with technology. Immediately we did a survey of our learners. Sixty responded to say this is what I have, this is what I don't have. I've been working with a group in the community to get some technology into the hands of our clients so that they can continue to build momentum, whether it's through working still towards their GED, their adult high school diploma, or employment.

It's not an easy task to flip to a virtual model; I think that it's very hard on people not being able to see each other face-to face. We flipped our incentives more to a mental health model. We're looking at mental health and wellness, so people set a goal of going for a walk every day or three times a week or connecting with their family - grassroots basic things. We're always going to be there to help people to set and achieve their educational and employment goals but we're also focusing on people staying well - learners and the team. I say to my team members, you are doing everything you can with what we have and I'm really proud of how we've been able to flip and continue what we've set out to do, in a very different format. Within one to two weeks we flipped to the learners being on Google Hangouts; each facilitator has a Facebook page; we've done booklets for the learners to work through projects. We flipped from writing checks to people for incentives to doing e-transfers. We're trying to minimize contact. If people truly still want to keep engaging and moving forward, we're here to do that.

I was actually doing a podcast talking about the social enterprises [Stone Soup and Voila Cleaning] and then it hit me that we had to close or had to pivot in our business model within the social enterprises. 90% of those of the staff in our businesses are from our learners. We've spent so much time building this wrap-around model that is so effective and makes such an impact; you don't want to see any of your work lost and you want the momentum to continue. But right now, it is hard because there is no end date, no date to plan towards. I keep saying to team members who call me and feel like they're not doing enough, "You're doing what you can. You need to take care of yourself, continue to support people and we will come through this. How you feel today - it's OK. You just wake up and you try again the next day." We just want to see all that we've created continue so that will be part of our sector response.



The Learning Exchange staff in April 2020. Christina is bottom row, second from left (Photo: SJLE)



Christina Fowler, freedom seeker and risk taker (Photo: SJLE)

**May - Reopening:** I'm actually in the office which I love, I'm so excited! We've done it in a staggered way; half the staff is back on Mondays and Tuesdays, the other half Wednesdays and Thursdays. Friday people can book coming in or work from home over the next couple of weeks. We'll just stagger it so people can get used to the flow of the building. We're just being slow and methodical about it because we've had three months to adapt and now, we're asking people to go back to work in a different way. Then we need to figure out getting our learners back, which is the most important thing to us. I think what will happen is we will do one-on-one meetings with those who would be transitioning to employment and need coaching. We've been doing that virtually, but we can do a hybrid version of virtual and face to face. In the next couple of weeks, we will open up the classrooms but will limit the numbers. We're not quite sure what it will look like but we all know that we'll need to limit the number of seats and have hand sanitizer. But the learners have all said, "Can we just come back and separate ourselves and just be in the space?" A lot of people's lives can be chaotic so they love coming here because it's calm and safe. So we want to get those who need to come back, and want to come back, here safely.

**Learnings:** The bigger thing that I think of is bigger systems change. We're even thinking of perhaps gamifying our classroom - virtual inclusion or perhaps you have an avatar and you have levels. Some people may be comfortable with an avatar virtually, while other people are in class. I think what we've learned is you can do hybrid classrooms and some of the learners actually respond better to that, so that's a big change for me as a leader. I always used to just think we have to have ten butts in seats, that makes that robust class - and it does. However, I think the new world is changing that and saying, there can be different mediums of classrooms!

Now we are thinking about how we help our learners – even the most resilient can have multiple barriers - actually compete in this market that postsecondary grads might have a hard time finding work in. We're really trying to help our learners find that competitive edge. One of the things about being a non-profit is that we have the ability to pivot and to think large and think how to change systems. That's the most important thing: to make it work for the learners. (Continued next page)

I say to staff, "You need to take care of yourself, continue to support people and we will come through this. How you feel today - it's OK. You just wake up and you try again the next day"





# Saint John Learning Exchange

(Continued from previous page)

**Erin MacKenney, Learning Exchange Coordinator**

I help with all of our intakes: I meet with the new or prospective learners to help come up with their pathway through the organization. We have a number of different programs - we have GED, an adult high school diploma program for youth, employment programming, Workplace Essential Skills (WESLinks), transition-to-work service and a soft skills workshop. I help navigate. I also help with all of the reporting.

We've started doing virtual intakes. Someone was working full-time through this crisis and I was able to do an intake with him after he got home in the evening. Previously I would have to do anything on nights when we had evening classes, only Tuesdays or Wednesdays, limited to a certain window of time, when the classes are in session. But I was just able to log on, he was there, and we had a great conversation. Now he is on our wait list. It depends on the program but we are trying to move more people off the wait list. What we're doing right now is we are overfilling the classes; usually we would max out at say, 12 students in a classroom; well, now we might have 16 registered and working remotely. But when we get back to face-to-face service delivery - which we're all hoping for sooner than later - not everyone will have a physical space in the classroom right away. But we're hoping we will be able to help some people achieve their high school credits and perhaps graduate or achieve some of their GED tests - at least be prepared and ready to go in and write them as soon as the testing centres open back up. So people are still building momentum. The facilitators are working with more people than they usually would. We also have not exited any of learners who don't have access to technology. That's a big piece of what we need right now to be able to deliver service to the learners. Those who don't have Internet or computers, or aren't comfortable perhaps using technology, they have not exited from programming, and we're doing our best to stay in touch with them by phone. Once we can deliver face to face our priority is to get them in and re-engaged.

One colleague has a few learners who really struggle with technology: they figured out how to video chat and she has a small whiteboard at home, so she's been teaching lessons on the whiteboard via video chat. It's been very much like what would happen in the classroom but there's just a screen between them now. It's also opened our eyes, though, to those people who really need face-to-face instruction.

We've applied for funding to provide laptops to learners who are engaged, who are trying and who are struggling. We received a generous donation from the business community of a few laptops and those are going to learners in one of our programs. We applied to the United Way as well as the Community Foundation, I believe. We did get the grant from the United Way but now the thing is we can provide laptops, but now it's Internet access! So one of the things that the Learning Exchange has started doing is offering data top-up to the learners.

*What's keeping you up at night?*

We're waiting for the Province to say what's going to happen with GED testing. A number of learners are ready to move forward but the government isn't moving as quickly as they are, and as we've been able to do. We've started writing advocacy letters; we have some learners on a pathway to postsecondary. But not having that GED or that adult diploma is going to block them from entrance.

**We're small, we're nimble, we were able to adapt relatively quickly, and it's pretty amazing that we've been able to flip our service delivery within a couple of weeks!**

**Mandy Burke-Evans, Social Enterprise Director**

We [Stone Soup Cafe and Voila Cleaning] are social enterprises and the journey to get there has been quite substantial. It's not a three-week journey; it's been years. We were making decisions in the morning and changing those decisions in the afternoon based on the amount of information that was coming up and not just to protect the businesses but to protect the staff - we have people who go into people's homes [to clean] and most of the time people who can afford residential cleaning do travel. But then at the same time we have essential cleaning we can't stop; we clean all the ambulance stations in southern New Brunswick. We clean some of the non-profit housing. So the conversation starts to shift to, are we putting our staff at risk? And what does that look like? Some of the employees who were moms sent their children to their parents' house because they were losing childcare. And their parents were hearing about the lockdown and saying, "You can't come get your kids. You can't go back and forth, you'll put me at risk." So in order for them to continue working, they were choosing not to be with their children.

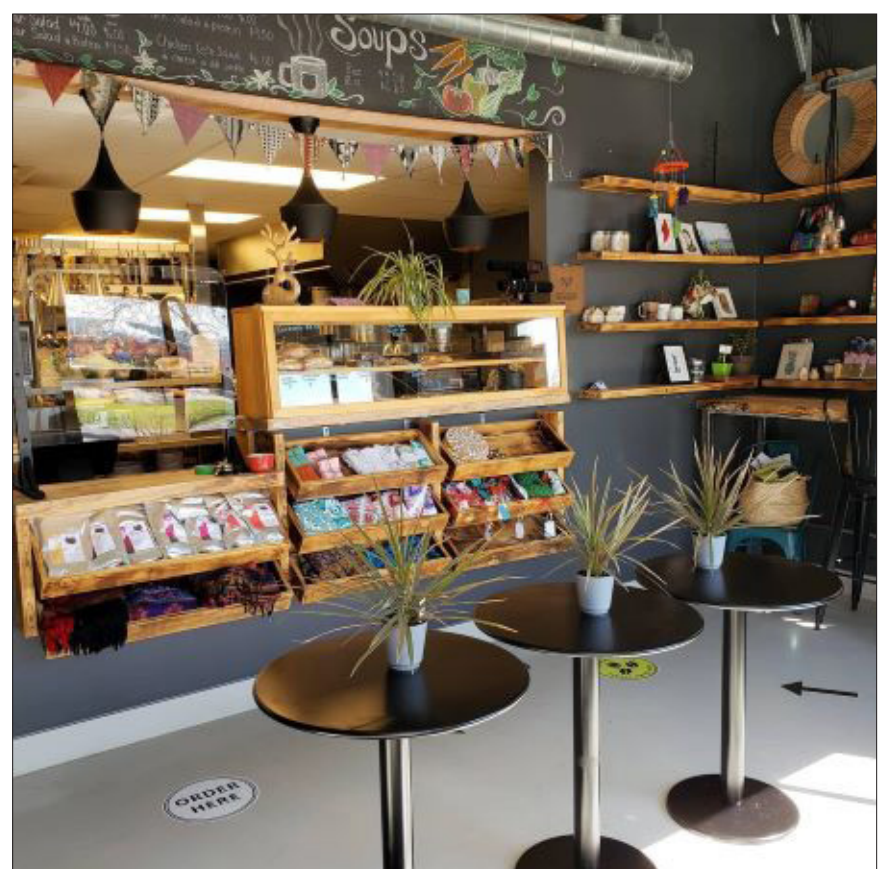
We did get a good contract for the cafe through the Canadian Red Cross - we've been doing meals for the shelters seven days a week. So we've been providing to the men's and the women's shelters through this, which has been a blessing because not all of our staff qualify for the CERB [Canada Emergency Response Benefit]. And even if they did, they were worried about what would happen when they came off the CERB. Would they still have their medical card? Would they still have access to the same supports that they did prior?

**In order to continue working, they were choosing not to be with their children**

I would have to say honestly the biggest struggle in my position and with my staff is, I'm used to planning and I'm used to being able to provide answers and solutions. And I have nothing. When you're so close to your employees and you know so much, they are your family. The last five years, the team have dedicated a lot of time and effort into getting those businesses so they are self-sustainable. I don't know what the transition is going to look like. Are people going to want cleaning services? Am I going to have work for people to come back to? Is it going to be enough hours? We've been very fortunate that we've had a lot of support going through this. One individual who's been fabulous reaches out every couple of weeks - checks in and doesn't have to - and they definitely have the expertise to guide us.

*Editor's note (June): Stone Soup is up and running again at the Hub!*

*The reopened Stone Soup Cafe with plexiglass shield (Photo: SJLE)*





## Saint John Community Loan Fund

*At first glance the word that comes to mind about the Loan Fund team is “passionate,” but once you listen to them speaking in depth, you realize that there is a syllable missing from that word. In their actions and in the words that they choose to express them, it is obvious that this group of people is profoundly **compassionate** as well. Whether it is Darlene talking about helping stand people up again who have fallen down for the first time and need reassurance because they have never had to ask for help before; or Seth saying that at the beginning of COVID he first had to check that the tenants and borrowers were all right; or Diane talking about the human connections her Enterprising Women make in the hallways and stairwell that will need a special focus to replicate online - there is an emotional intelligence and a genuine empathy at the heart of this team.*

*And their quick pivoting at the onset of the COVID-19 lockdown is a testament to their innovation and creativity. This is a story of good planning, tireless advocacy, and hard work allied to courage unto fearlessness, when a moment in history came at just the wrong time for the Loan Fund’s carefully laid plans. It’s as though they said to COVID-19: “No. This is **our** time. We have to go for it. We have to get out there and do it!” And they’re doing it. As of June 19th, they had resumed accepting loan applications, and enough borrower businesses had reopened to allow loan payments to resume as well.*

*Because the Loan Fund built and operates the Social Enterprise Hub, we followed their story particularly closely week to week. Here are snapshots of the Loan Fund’s COVID-19 journey, in their own words.*

\*\*

### Seth Asimakos, General Manager and Co-Founder

*The Loan Fund works in three main areas: financing microenterprises and social enterprises; training, especially in financial literacy and women’s business start-ups; and social purpose real estate. When we started our regular conversations with General Manager Seth Asimakos during COVID-19, only he and Darlene Jones, plus a couple of people from the Human Development Council and Stone Soup Café were in the otherwise empty Social Enterprise Hub.*

**Background:** In 2019 the Saint John Community Loan Fund celebrated its 20th anniversary. In an interview with *ATB* at that time, Seth spoke of working to increase the amount of money in the Loan Fund to have greater impact in the community and across the region. “If we don’t think big, if we are not visionary, we won’t change things. There is always a huge challenge convincing funders, investors, that doing things with triple bottom lines makes sense. If we’re building real estate to hire a social enterprise to work with us on that, even though it might take longer, it trains young people along the way. There’s a lot of stuff happening there at once. At the end of the day we create a building that houses people at an affordable rate but we are also helping individuals gain skills and establish purpose in life... as soon as you create a purpose in life and you are given the opportunity to go after it, little bits at a time, that’s when we actually change the tides.”

COVID-19 hit just as the Loan Fund was getting ready to soar.

#### April

*You guys are obviously busy, from following you on the Web and Facebook. You even have a couple of analysts coming on board!*

**Early days:** When COVID hit, right away we had to talk with all our borrowers and make sure that they were all right; we basically paused all those payments. And we had to talk to our Hub tenants to make sure everybody was all right, and most are, except the social enterprises [see Saint John Learning Exchange interviews, p. 11] so we had to pause those rents. A lot of that happened last month [March 2020] - just making sure everybody was OK. Nothing really stopped! There’s a lot around the financing piece that’s just going to keep going. The only thing that we couldn’t do was actually start construction on the three-unit behind us [on Prince Edward Street]. We started the online version of Enterprising Women six months



Darlene Jones and Abigail Reinhart (Photo: Loan Fund)

earlier than anticipated; COVID made us look at it earlier. So Diane’s out there frantically building that and testing it. There’s a lot of learning quickly for a lot of organisations, if they’re doing any kind of training or support work, to move from face to face to online. There are some issues related to individuals not having up-to-date technology or the Internet, people being in rural versus urban, but online delivery will hopefully help us become more efficient and effective and reach more people - plus reduced carbon in the atmosphere from driving everywhere. So, there are some real positives that hopefully we will retain. Basically that’s it: there were some things that we were going to be doing anyway - the scaling piece; there was some stuff that we had to do, the mitigation pieces around loan payments and renters; and then things that were moved up earlier like Diane’s online work. Darlene [Jones, Money Matter\$ Coordinator] and I discussed that we should be online doing something. So she’s learning to deliver something online which is great; we can learn how to get more people there. That’s another thing that wouldn’t have happened without this pressure to do so - to do things we’ve always wanted to do, for years.

**Having a great team helps:** You have to have the right staff. Diane just jumped right in! And Abi [Reinhart] may have to deliver the youth entrepreneurship program differently; she’s very creative. People have to have no fear and realize that it isn’t going to be perfect. Just go out and do it and change it as you go. I’m glad I’ve put together a team that really reaches beyond their grasp. It is scary sometimes but you always have to push yourself to get things done.

**Scaling up:** A lot of stuff was in the works - that’s the beauty of it. We’ve been working hard to have things happen. Hopefully we are able to keep them going while we are self-isolating. The thing is, this was a scaling year, so we’ve been preparing for a real push on the loan pool side. Justin [Sweeney] hasn’t stopped a second, because we want to build the model for sustainability. So, our timeline might shift a bit but we’re very active. He was able to recruit two students from the Social Innovation Academy to help with that process as well. They’re going to be doing very specific research that feeds into the plans for each of the portfolios. They’re both from the Ivey School of Business. Stanley will work on the housing piece and Danilla will focus more on the microfinance and social enterprise best practices. We are also part of a national social finance accelerator with eight other leading organizations which will provide a great sounding board for us. And we recently brought in a couple of significant investments from foundations which we had been working on for about a year. So, things are headed in the right direction. *(continued on next page)*

**People have to have no fear and realize that it isn’t going to be perfect. Just go out and do it and change it as you go. I’m glad I’ve put together a team that really reaches beyond their grasp**



(Saint John Community Loan Fund, continued from previous page)

Early May

**Ways forward during COVID:** One way is to invest heavily in affordable housing and social enterprise related to housing. Real estate is definitely one that is probably doable, because you're going to be able to build things that are latent and needed, and as long as we enable individuals that need it to have a subsidized portion of the rent, then you have your revenue for that type of initiative. The other piece is to get behind social enterprise or entrepreneurs that are filling a gap in the market that is specific to what we're dealing with right now [COVID] or businesses that can work in this current environment – for example, landscaping is one where you don't really touch people. Or it could be an individual seller that's doing masks.

**Being ready:** We've got consultants to do very specific work within these 12 months because if the national social finance fund is going to be brought forward earlier, we want to be in line and be ready to go. I hope by October we will have the financial model put together and we probably will have done another real estate deal. I think our experience of doing real estate deals that are basically on our doorstep is a very good plan forward. Hopefully before Christmas we're ready to really launch the new era for ourselves. I attribute a lot to Justin putting the pieces in place, for sure, and also the board and I have very clear strategic priorities. I think we're headed in the right direction. We're quite agile and we do seize opportunities as they come. I hope we can really add value here.

**There is lot to reopening:** Darlene and I have been working together on identifying the specifics when people come to our door whether Stone Soup or the main entry, that they'll see that those COVID Protocol questions in a diagrammatic format about the caution that they have to take, washing hands, social distancing, etc. We'll put six-foot dots throughout the building so that's just a reminder that when you're talking to somebody in the hall, to step back to six feet. And there will be arrows coming up the main stairs and going down the back stairs; there's only one direction going upstairs because there's just not room for people to pass each other and remain six feet apart. And then on the elevator, one person only when they ride it, and hand sanitizer at the front door. We will be opening to the public June 1st. The big issue here [at the Hub] is more about the classes, and Stone Soup obviously won't have sit-down meals, but it will be open to pass through traffic. Looking ahead to summer and youth entrepreneurship: to date we've been mainly working with 12-15-year-olds, introducing them to the idea of enterprise and letting them develop something that seems like an enterprise, has a start and finish. It doesn't have to generate a huge amount of income, obviously, but it goes through the stages of start-up, marketing, managing money that's coming in, and so on. When we started it was social enterprise initially; it shifted over into a basic enterprise development model. I guess it was laziness.

[LOL] Laziness is not a word one would associate with you and your team.

We certainly have a lot going on, and everybody is pushing each other on the staff, for sure. I think if we could pull ourselves out of this somehow and create a better way of doing things, it'll be great!



Hard at work improving the Hub (Photo: Loan Fund)

Mid-May:

*What are you proudest of in what your team has done during COVID?*  
Just really continuing to work hard. This time can be stressful, it can be unnerving. They were able to pivot into a different method of working and whether it was at home, or developing an online presence for the delivery of the service, nothing really stopped. And also just reaching out to our clients directly, especially the borrowers, making sure that they didn't have to worry. Everybody really found a way to get things done. And I don't know that you can ask for anything better than that.

*That's kind of living your creed about the innovative culture, isn't it?*  
Right. And there's still a lot to do. We've got a first prototype of our online capability but there's a lot of room to improve, so that we can develop our platform even more. We don't want to lose that ability now that we've gone in that direction. With Enterprising Women especially it's how will we offer an online option so we can reach more people across the province? Will we have a local presence face to face?

**What's next:** It's more about the long term and how it affects our ability to raise money and hit the vision that we want. As we scale on the investment side, a large portion of our lending in the future will be related to housing and real estate development, because the need is so great. We've been pushing for this for 14 years, and now people have arrived, the federal government has arrived, after years and years of advocacy. Social housing is going to be required. I think the government is going to come out of this understanding that they have to invest more in that area, and who knows, there may be a whole scale rethink of the long term care provider area; there might be some innovations coming out of that that will require investments. So, I hope this will help people think bigger of what can be done. I think more non-profits are going to think about developing housing and their own commercial space, which I've always said is great model: four units plus your office, and you've got a building! And you might provide the four units to clients of yours. The John Howard Society has done it in Fredericton, Coverdale ... those type of models make sense. They don't have to be huge projects; there are just many of them and then there's more sustainability in those organizations. **As long as we're building, and we are creating more opportunities, then I feel fulfilled in that journey. Someone said to me recently, wow, you are a 20-year overnight success!**



Seth at the reopened Hub (Photo: Loan Fund)





Darlene Jones on the Hub roof (Photo: Loan Fund)  
(Saint John Community Loan Fund, continued from p 13)

In the very early days of the lockdown, Darlene started doing daily live videos from the Hub, offering tips on money management during the crisis and explaining government benefits as the news changed from one day and week to the next.

Darlene Jones, Money Matter\$ Coordinator

**First days:** The Hub was locked. The thought of being at home in the 300-square-foot apartment for a lockdown was not a good idea, so I came back to the building on the 23rd and I’ve been coming every day since, which has been the best thing for my own mental health.

**Clients:** We have a volunteer tax clinic. I’m not allowed to take taxes to my volunteers at this point, but I’ve been able to do them here at the Hub. Some people called me in a full-fledged anxiety attack because they didn’t get their taxes done on time, and just helping them cope with it has been positive for me as well. I talked to a gentleman who said, “You’re the first person I’ve talked to about anything relevant to moving ahead in my life for a couple of months.” So, I have had some really good experiences with clients.

**Pivoting - the videos:** That came about just because I’m the financial literacy coordinator. The best thing that I could do was to be on top of what’s happening with response from the government. You want to assure people that they can keep going forward even through a pandemic. I’ve had a lot of really good feedback. The people who have reached out to me look a little bit different from the people I’ve worked with before, so now: how do I pivot to include them? Because we are facing such a downturn in our economy, we have a whole new group of people who’ve never been here [to the Loan Fund] before. When you work with people who perhaps have been on social assistance for a little bit of time, you have your rhythm, but when you’re working with people who are falling backwards, how do we pivot to help them stand upright a little bit and say, “Listen, let’s keep moving forward and keep going?” I’m probably on average receiving about 35 views a day, which we think is super fantastic. I have been receiving three or four phone calls a day which I think is a very positive number, because people don’t call financial planners! We are like the lonely Maytag repairman. I’m perfectly proud that our government actually responded as fast as they did. Within three weeks of people being put off work under the state of emergency we were getting money into people’s hands. I’m very proud of that.

**Challenges:** The greatest challenge is not being able to see people. And just people being fearful of what’s going on.

**Learnings:** Definitely the online portion!! All of a sudden everybody’s online and getting very familiar with Zoom and Facebook live and Facebook in general. Going forward I see that as a really good opportunity. A lot of times people call you too late - they’ve already melted – so it’s going to be a really good opportunity for me to say, “Let’s get on Zoom, let me see your face.” Mental health is desperately affected by financial hardship; now I can do this instantly, not say, “You can come in next week,” and then they have to worry about a bus schedule or when their husband’s home or something.

That’s not the way it’s going to be anymore. We can just get on Zoom and we can do it!



Diane Snelgrove and friends at the Hub (Photo: Loan Fund)  
A business owner herself in Sussex, Diane teaches Enterprising Women at the Loan Fund. It’s a 90-hour training program dedicated to women who want to start or grow a business.

Diane Snelgrove, Enterprise Development Officer

**First days:** We at the Loan Fund own physical space, buildings and apartments; we also bring programs and we have loans - we have multiple positions in the community. So at the beginning it was just take a breath, make sure you have the right information, and collaborate with the other people in your ecosystem. Safety was first, and then communication. We did have great clear communication from our leadership and our board but there was also good daily communication from the Premier’s office. I think that helped everybody get on the same page.

**Pivoting - online training:** In the spring we were going to start courses in three different communities with 10-12 women in each. We put a notice out to everybody who had applied and said we were switching to online. The first night my computer crashed! Of the 14 women, I would say half had never used face-to-face conversation on a computer, so I had been practicing with them the week before. I was literally on my cell phone while they were getting online, talking them through it and just baby steps - and they were awesome and they did it. So here I am thinking “I’ve got this,” when it crashes! I got emails and phone calls and everything is blowing up because they’re all trying to get online and then after 15 minutes I had to shut everything down - all the PowerPoints and my video went away, everything was down. So then you have to ramp it back up again with a cool face and say “This is why it was called an introductory night!”

100% I think there’s still absolute value for in-classroom modules, in-class training, because of human connection. There’s a synergy and a wonderful connection that women make while they are chatting - when you take a break and go to the bathroom, it’s in the hallway on the way back, it’s getting out of the car and coming up the stairs together to the classroom. That’s one thing to be very aware of as a coach; I’m trying to foster that. The technology is working now, the class has been delivered for four weeks and now I’m starting the one-on-one training outside of the sessions. Now that everybody is comfortable and has some momentum behind them, that is the missing ingredient.

I’m going to have to figure out ways to create the intimacy, the trust, the collaboration that I achieve in the classroom through this vehicle of teaching



## Homelessness during COVID-19

*Nationally recognized for their leadership in reducing homelessness using a By Names List, the Saint John Human Development Council participated with key partners in an immediate response to the special perils facing the homeless during the State of Emergency.*

### Cathy Boyce, Affordable Housing Specialist

**First days:** It was pretty pretty immediate; committees developed around, what will we do if COVID-19 enters the shelter system. Obviously living in a shelter, social distancing is a concern. Eventually the shelters were able to move, Outflow shelter to the Boys and Girls Club and Coverdale to Bayside Middle School. On top of that a committee was developed to discuss issues around particularly vulnerable people in staying in the shelter and the need to isolate them away from the shelter should COVID come. There was an effort to coordinate moving people to a hotel if they were flagged. We developed a partnership with Public Health and they've been really great, going into the shelters and doing assessments and testing. They flagged people who are particularly vulnerable - someone who has a history of pneumonia or an underlying bronchial issue for example. Through our process we were able to designate five rooms at the Days Inn; we moved four people there that were flagged as being in need of isolation. Recap has been highlighting the needs of these people and Housing Alternatives has been providing daily support, delivering meals prepared by Ethel and Mary's as well as doing daily check-ins.

**Collaboration:** COVID-19 has highlighted some of the gaps in the system that we already knew, but it pronounced some of those ones, particularly around housing. People wouldn't have to be isolated from shelters into hotel rooms if they had their own housing to live in. With everyone at the table it was really beneficial and we were able to work towards solutions quickly. At the beginning there was more of an emergency focus; we wanted to make sure that people were isolated that needed to be isolated, the shelters were in a good state, that they had enough personal protective equipment (PPE) to be able to take care of people and that the staff were safe as well as the clients. The Province was involved in helping the shelters to transfer from their permanent locations to the temporary locations to allow for social distancing and to minimize the risk of transmission. They also assisted with the provision of PPE to the shelters. Now we're shifting back towards a housing-first approach, looking back towards the processes that we've developed around coordinated access and making sure that everyone who is homeless gets on our By Names List. That way they are able to be prioritized for housing. In April we moved three people into their own housing and we're looking to move two into housing in early June. We also collaborated with NB Housing to provide seven people access to permanent housing during the pandemic. Two of those individuals were seniors who were assessed by health professionals and determined to be vulnerable to contracting COVID. It was really nice to see that even in a state of emergency, we were still able to make those moves happen.

**What's next:** We've talked about two things: we are looking to do a sort of a housing blitz to just move forward and to house as many folks as we can; and second, I would say that our continued collaboration with our health partners would be beneficial all around.

**People wouldn't have to be isolated from shelters into hotel rooms if they had their own housing to live in**

Key partners: Outflow Ministry, Coverdale Centre for Women, Fresh Start, Human Development Council, Housing Alternatives, Safe Harbour House, Social Development, Horizon Health Network, Recap, Parent Child Assistance Program, New Brunswick Association for Community Living, Teen Resource Centre, Veteran's Affairs, Federal Corrections, Ethel and Mary's, Community Landlords, John Howard Society

## Coverdale



*Coverdale at Bayside Middle School (Photo: Coverdale)*

**By Chanelle Morgan, Coverdale**

Coverdale Emergency Shelter for Women has gone through many changes due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We moved into the gym at Bayside Middle School to enable physical distancing for the women accessing shelter services. We're so grateful to them for hosting us! We were able to place the cots around the perimeter with lots of space between them. Our staff, volunteers, and our women rallied to help transport and get things set up in the new location. Everyone was feeling positive about the change, even though it was not without its challenges. With help from our community partner agencies, we adapted quickly. Many of these changes will carry on with us into the future, post-pandemic, such as physical distancing practices and use of masks for new coughs.

We have since moved on to the Community Centre at 344 Somerset Street. This second move was a bit more challenging as we had much more to bring with us. But once again, our staff came together and loaded up their cars! We also had help from members of the Red Cross and Social Development and a couple of volunteers.

There were a few difficulties faced by our women due to the state of emergency that, while experienced by the greater community as well, were felt quite strongly by the homeless population in particular. Many experienced loneliness and expressed that the most difficult part for them during the SOE was being isolated from their families and community they regularly meet with. Another challenge mentioned was trying to look for housing. One difficulty that was met by community agency collaboration was access to health care. A nurse from the RECAP Clinic team regularly visited our shelter to evaluate the health



*Essential workers! (Photo: Coverdale)*

The response from the community has been fantastic each time we've asked for donations. Thank you. We'd like to extend thanks to Darcy and his colleagues at Bayside for coming in every day to help with the cleaning, to Red Cross for cots, and to the Commissionaires who provided security.



Fresh Start

Melanie Vautour, Executive Director

*Mel Vautour has a memorable laugh, and you hear it often. Good humour is a necessity in her line of work. Listening to Mel, you understand that love is more useful as a verb than as a noun: it's something you **do**. It is going onto the streets at night in a pandemic to feed people who have no other way to get anything to eat or drink. That's love.*

**First days:** As we operate a drop-in centre for homeless and for women and men involved in street work, the first few days we were really focused on how to prevent an outbreak with our vulnerable populations, help with hand-washing and physical distancing. So we still had drop-in but we minimized the number of people who could be in the office (typically we have 25 a day plus regular intakes). We set up hand-wash stations and had staff going behind every person who came in, cleaning immediately. And second, trying to educate them that we were their biggest risk to contract this. That was before we had the closures.

**Lockdown:** Before the daycares even closed we had a plan in place around how we would work from home. When they closed, we immediately put the signs up on the doors and windows and started working remotely, and partnered with Avenue B next door to still provide housing-lists emergency response. They remained open with some reduced hours throughout the entire lockdown because harm reduction is an essential service. We continued our street outreach - harm reduction and snack and drinks supply - during the lockdown, overnight and on weekends when a lot of other places were closed. A lot of the clients were afraid. They recognized that because they have typical histories of chronic illness, they could get really, really sick from this virus. They really struggled because they're so dependent on agencies for day-to-day survival. "Can I go two days without stopping in for food versus every day?" Of course lack of services and supplies and food leads to more impaired health, which leads to risk, so they took it very seriously.

**Challenges:** Our biggest concern was that we would come out of COVID with a pandemic of Hep C and HIV infection or sepsis from the reusing of needles. We were really concerned for the welfare and ongoing health of the clients. It really came down to Avenue B, ourselves and Recap to make sure harm reduction was still available on the street, which we did. Corporate donations brought food in or contributed money to make sure we could keep going. We missed out on two spring fundraising events so the added support was definitely worthwhile! The community has so stepped up for this challenge and I was so impressed. I keep saying to Randy [Hatfield, HDC] how do we keep this going? If we can provide enough food to feed everyone in the city during an economic crisis, we should be able to do it every day. It is amazing the companies and people who stepped up. I would just challenge them that the need in the community will continue after COVID.

Our biggest concern was that we would come out of COVID with a pandemic of Hep C and HIV



Front are Emily Ingersoll and Tiffany Achilles, support staff. Back, left to right are: Brenda Anthony, Street Outreach volunteer; Kristen O'Hanley, Housing Support Worker; Melanie Vautour, Executive Director; and Nancy Savoie, Street Outreach staff. (Photo: Fresh Start)

Harm reduction is an essential service.

We continued our street outreach - harm reduction and snack and drinks supply - during the lockdown, overnight and on weekends when a lot of other places were closed

Also, because primarily we are a housing and homelessness prevention agency, the biggest challenge was the provincial "no eviction" order. We talked to the tenants, to say, "You actually can still be evicted; please don't do anything to get evicted before June 1st because there's nowhere to house you." We checked in with landlords, just to make sure that they felt supported. That was the biggest impact for us: the inability to effectively house and rehome people during the lockdown.

**Learnings:** Realizing the resiliency of the clients. I think, with the stereotypical picture of a homeless person, a lot of times we forget that even though they may be struggling and be very vulnerable, they are survivors. Going forward we're really going to focus on building independence for clients, helping them build those skills for themselves. Also realizing that in a lot of cases we have to go out to them, so just reaffirming that we need to have a street presence whether it's for harm reduction, whether it's for food, if it's for medicine: I think for us it's really looking at how can we incorporate the mobility into all of our services. I think overall as a sector we build ourselves on this patriarchal kind of framework - here's the office, the hierarchy, the client, here is what we do - and we build a square and are trying to fit circles inside of it!

I had one client - I've worked with her for a long time on the street - and she came running towards me to hug me. And I said, "No, no, no, you have to stay away!" She threw my arm aside and came in and hugged me and she said "I would rather get sick and die than not hug you, and see that you're OK." We become family for our clients because in a lot of cases we are the only family they have. They have broken those ties or there's so much damage from substance use, we fill that void. So you can imagine being told you're not allowed to see your mom. We ourselves struggled with it, with parents down the road and in hospitals, and this group was able to pretty much do the same thing with no roof over their head! It is amazing the resiliency of people to survive.

If we can provide enough food to feed everyone in the city during an economic crisis, we should be able to do it every day... the need in the community will continue after COVID



Nancy Savoie and Brenda Anthony otherwise known as Nanc and Lovey - street outreach extraordinaires! (Photo: Fresh Start)



## Avenue B: Diane Kerns Harm Reduction Program Coordinator

*The other aspect of love in action is empathy: seeing through the other person's eyes. What must it be like during a pandemic not to be able to find a bathroom? Diane knows from experience that we need not only empathy but open ears as we plan **with**, not for, those who live on the street to find solutions **with** them.*

**First days:** We did not close. We are considered an essential service, and we would have seen a serious health crisis happen when COVID sinks back into our memories: HIV, Hepatitis C, and sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections. We would have had a disaster on our hands. One of our big first steps was protective equipment for our staff; the office staff went home. I run the Harm Reduction Program so two of our peer health navigators and I stayed to run our needle distribution program. We have been appreciative of their commitment to being here at their own risk. We normally have about 30-35 unique individuals in a day, 250 unique individuals in a month and our average is around 500-600 visits per month. In the first couple of weeks there was a 30% reduction in the number of visitors - but we also reduced our hours and we went from being open five days to three days a week; we remained open when pretty much everything else was closed.

**Lockdown:** We encouraged people to take more supplies than they thought they needed and to take supplies for anybody so that people who were afraid to go out would have supplies. We also enhanced our partnership with Recap and Fresh Start. We knew the pharmacy would remain open (usually they only provide supplies when we are closed), but I contacted them and said we would really love it if they could give supplies to anybody who asked, with no limits. We would provide them with whatever supplies they needed to maintain that, and we're still doing that. We substantially increased the amount of supplies that we gave to two partners to share with people and reduced the number of places that our clients had to go to get what they needed.

**Clients:** At the beginning I think they were feeling pretty deserted, and people were hungry. We had a large increase in donations of food items that were prepackaged that we were able to hand out to people. But people said, "If I went to the soup kitchen and I had a meal, and if there was enough, I might be able to get a second helping or leftovers to take with me. Now I just go to the window and I get my brown bag." They used to be able to go into Fresh Start or the Salvation Army and get coffee and a muffin. I don't think people realize how much some people rely on that to get their sustenance for the day. I was out emptying needle boxes and I needed to use the washroom, and there was nothing open! You couldn't get into the hospital or the Community Health Centre or the mall. The bathroom facilities were all closed. It looked like a ghost town the first few weeks. Our clients felt very alone at that point.



Donnie Chute and Rick Doucette, Peer Outreach Workers  
(Photo: Avenue B)

## Being homeless or addicted to a substance doesn't permit you to go home, doesn't permit you maintain two metres' social distance. Where are you supposed to wash your hands?

**Challenges:** I think trying to keep ourselves safe and share information with our clients on how to keep themselves safe, when their main concern was how they could sustain themselves at that time! Being homeless or addicted to a substance doesn't permit you to go home, doesn't permit you maintain two metres' social distance. Where are you supposed to wash your hands? Our challenges might have been a little different than what others might have been thinking about. How do you even get information to clients? It's only by word of mouth, on the street - there's no radio or television, and at best someone with a phone could connect to Wi-Fi. We had situations where people spread misinformation on the street. To correct some of that was a big challenge. We're living proof that going home to lock our doors has worked for us, but I think there wasn't a lot of consideration in providing information and support on how we connect with some of the most vulnerable and at-risk in our community.

**Community:** I think our community has just been absolutely tremendous and stepped up to the plate. We have had a lady who has been making soup at home and bringing it here once a week. Another fellow made submarine sandwiches with top-of-the-line deli meats; he provided a sandwich with chips and cookies all pre-packaged. He and a couple of friends now bring us 25 packaged meals a week so we can hand them to someone on the street. We've had a multitude of people bringing us granola bars, fruit snacks and drinking boxes. The food bank gave us some extra items that we were running out of, and Fresh Start shared some of their supplies with us. People and places have stepped up and provided us with the tools we need to support people, including some financial help - nothing huge, but every \$25 helps!

**Learnings:** I think we learn new things everyday from the people that we serve and most of what I know comes from them. The biggest learning may be that our clients are not considered in our formulation of a plan and that we need to find a way to make that happen. We've been making that case for a long time; that's why we have peer helpers. They are the best people to transmit information and gather information that people are hesitant to share. When we make plans in our community, it's critical that we ask our clients, what is the best thing we could do now to make this right? Across the country our housing crisis is a disaster. We need to look at some new ways of being creative and resourceful and come up with solutions. You can't just tell people to go home when hundreds of people don't have a home. And you shouldn't just put information on a website assuming that our people can access it - they might not have a laptop or Internet access or houses! Things need to happen a bit differently. If you don't understand the life, you can't possibly come up with a solution.

The biggest learning may be that our clients are not considered in our formulation of a plan ...  
If you don't understand the life, you can't possibly come up with a solution





## Romero House

*Imagine the fatigue. Nine people doing the work previously shared by 120, at first seven days a week, to make sure the hungry got fed. Nine people going to Romero House and then home and nowhere else, so they wouldn't make **anyone else** sick. If there is such a thing as secular sainthood, this is it. Yet the thing I remember about talking with Evelyn McNulty is the laughter. To hear her talk with candour about systemic injustice in one breath and laugh about newfound takeout skills with the next is an experience I will treasure.*

### Evelyn McNulty, Executive Director

(April 23rd)

**The journey:** My mother [Carolyn] started Romero House in 1982. Almost 25 years ago she asked me to come and set up a computer system for Romero House. I've been here ever since. It started on Union Street in a tiny hole in the wall. It was supposed to be just a little stopgap until the economy picked up, but unfortunately, on the heels of the opening Dr Roberts and Centracare closed, the slump didn't really go away, and 38 years later, we're still here.

**COVID-19's impact:** People are often shocked at how many meals we actually do. [See *below*.] With COVID-19 what's happened is what would normally be a busy day for us is now almost every day. Normally when people have money they don't come. It's an urban myth that people use services that they don't need - that's absolutely not true. Normally we would have a dip on child tax day, a little less on pension day. But a busy day is pushing 400 - and that's every day now.

**Challenges:** We are funded solely by free will donations and so all the food we serve and the money that we use to pay the four full-time staff as well as keep the lights on, keep all the freezers running, is donated by the community and has been for 38 years. We've never been government-funded. We just have different groups in the city donating, and we have the Ritchie's food drive that's been going on for 13 or 14 years. They fill a big transport truck for us. Our food resource right now that we have on hand is way, way, way lower than it ever is at this time of year, but it's because of the output of how much food we're putting out the window. There are nine of us altogether that were in the building seven days a week for six weeks from March 17th. Now (April 23rd) eight of them are off two days a week and I am off one day a week. We're rotating around and that's how we're surviving.

**Commitment:** When we started it was kind of like we're on a cruise ship together and there's no way off the ship. We're in here for the long haul. We have a take-out window and I think it's the safest in the city. People come to the window and they stay six feet away, they place the order, we open the little window, put the order on the shelf, close the window, and then they come get it. There's absolutely no contact at all. We were planning in February because we knew it was coming.

**Community:** There are definitely new faces. For the first week or so most of the conversations I had with people out the window were simply not to worry; no matter what, somebody would be here making sure that they had something to eat. A lot of people are having mental health problems. This place is really important to a lot of people who are lonely, live in rooming houses. A major part of their socialization is coming in here. The meals are important, of course, but for me it's the other part that's been driving me. People need to feel valued. If you don't feel that you're valued, then you have nothing. In our society, we don't value people who are different. We don't value people living in poverty, or there wouldn't be poverty. If we valued the problem, the problem would be fixed.

**We don't value people living in poverty, or there wouldn't be poverty. If we valued the problem, the problem would be fixed**



*The face of COVID-19 in Saint John: Evelyn at the takeout window (Photo: Romero House)*

We are notorious as a society in my opinion that we don't really help anybody succeed. We don't say, you need \$800, here's \$800, now what can we do to rectify the situation that you're in so we don't have to keep giving you \$800. Instead we'll give you \$650 and then be all aghast that you go to two different food banks. Well, if the food bank can only provide you with three days of food, what are you supposed to do? We set people up for failure. Right now with COVID-19, everybody is investing in everybody. We could have done that ten years ago and eradicated poverty!

**May 19th - What's next:** We will be serving meals out the window for a while. We're here to serve people who have difficulty fitting into the round hole. This is week nine with literally nine people doing what 120 people used to do, and we haven't killed each other yet [*loud laughter*]. And I can put on my resume that I now know how to make hamburgers for 400 people [*more laughter*]. It sounds facetious, but: this is just what we do. We're missing the people. We're missing the human part. I haven't gone anywhere; nobody in here has. That was part of our commitment - that we would go here and go to hell home. We all do that because we're trying not to be sick. It's important to us that the people are fed - otherwise we wouldn't be here for years and years and years - so it's definitely our mission. I really don't know anyone else who would do this! Romero House has passed 2,000,000 meals. It's horrible really - a huge political statement that 38 years later we're still running this. It was supposed to be a temporary thing; now we're an institution.

#### Romero House by the numbers

- We closed our dining room and served out the window starting on March 17th
- From March 17th to June 1st (11 weeks) we served 21,218 meals
- In April 2019 we served 6,746 meals
- In April 2020 we served 8,333 meals (a 24% increase)
- In 2019 we served 82,402 meals
- Romero House began operation in 1982 and from 1982-2019 we served 2,273,835 meals
- There have been nine of us here "manning the fort" since we have "gone out the window"



## Helping Seniors - Saint John Y and the Department of Social Development

*In addition to the support for seniors, the Saint John Y reached out by personal phone calls to all 700 Child Care families, checked in on 3,000+ newcomer clients, and connected with members to ensure that they were safe, offer support and help to navigate the system for what was available. And offered free virtual YMCA programming anytime, anywhere! Extraordinary!!*

**By Kristen Wheaton Clayton, Saint John Y**

The YMCA of Greater Saint John has been hit hard due to COVID-19, losing over 80% of revenue since the closure of 19 locations on March 16th, 2020 which meant the layoff of over 260 of front line and program staff.

Despite this, the Y is still found ways to offer support to the community, through virtual physical and mental wellness videos free to the public and personal wellness calls and deliveries to our most vulnerable members and maintaining 100% of our newcomer connection services through virtual means to support clients.

The YMCA of Greater Saint John has been committed to building Strong Communities for over 165 years; the Y has helped Canadians through recessions, depressions and disasters and is helping today throughout the pandemic.

Staff and volunteers put together 650 care packages with a mixture of items to deliver to vulnerable seniors from Sussex to St George. Each package included a resource guide for assistance around food, mental health support and transportation, as well as other items that we hope help them feel cared for during this pandemic.



Y-M-C-A! Left to right: Kendra Gautreau, Katie Pierce, Chris Squires and Melanie Burns take a little break from making the packages for seniors (Photo: Saint John Y)

## Debbie McLeod, Social Development

**Challenges:** Everything I do is to get people out and about in the community. It has been hard doing the reverse: trying to get people to stay home and not to socialize and not to continue doing all the great things that they're used to doing! Especially our seniors have found that challenging because a lot of them are isolated and alone. They just really thrive off everything that our buildings offer to them, so it was very hard for them at first to understand the importance of really staying to themselves and not allowing visitors into the complexes.

**Community:** Most seniors have adjusted quite well and they're being very thoughtful to other people by calling their friends on a daily basis and helping out. There are a couple who do some running for people so that's been very helpful.

**Collaboration:** I'm working with United Way and we're making sure that all the seniors know what resources are in the community. For example, the Y has a home delivery program that is free, so all of our seniors have received all of that information of where to go if they need emergency food or if they need to talk to somebody or if they need their food delivered to them. Meals on Wheels are offering free food for seniors or for people that just can't get out and they're hungry. The other project that we're working on now is a little care package with the Y with funding from the United Way: a flyer with all of the resources to put in the fridge, a homemade mask, some little fun thing and some staples for their home. That way we will be able to will be able to check in on the seniors when we're delivering them, just to see if everybody is OK.

**Learnings:** It's the physical connections that are just so important! It's the impact we make in people's lives through the hugs and the visits. I am very much a hugger. Technology is great but it will never replace the human contact with others so to continue always showing your love to people is so important!



The Saint John Exhibition Association Directors and Fall Fair Committee are disappointed to report that due to the COVID-19 pandemic and to ensure the safety of our staff and patrons, **the 2020 Saint John Exhibition has been paused until 2021.**

Plans are already underway to celebrate the "Best 5 Days of Summer" at the Saint John Ex, August 31-September 4, 2021.

Exhibitors—We are working on the 2021 handbook now, but ,until it is ready please use last year's exhibitor's handbook, you can also look at it on our website [www.exhibitionparksj.com](http://www.exhibitionparksj.com).

**Stay safe and thank you for your support!**



## CRVC Staff's experience of COVID-19



The Growing Place's shout-out to Pride Month (Photo: CRVC)

**By Olivia Clancy, Food Security Coordinator, Crescent Valley Resource Centre (CRVC)**

- 1) At the beginning, we were generally confused about what we were going to do next, and we were concerned for residents. Did they have the right information to stay safe? We were also wondering how we were going to be able to remain connected to the residents while working from home.
- 2) It took us about a week to adjust. We stopped all programs and reduced our hours the first week, and after the state of emergency was announced we started working from home.
- 3) Crescent Valley residents have been feeling frustrated with the limitations and the isolation, but we've heard they are happy we were still here for them.
- 4) The greatest challenge has been to adapt to the new routine and to maintain distance with residents while still giving them support.
- 5) We have learned that connection is very important, but you can get a lot done virtually when required. Also people who work in community and very flexible and adaptable!



## Newcomers Centre



Centre staff (left to right): Nitin Srivastava, Emily MacMackin, Lina Gharbiya (Photo: Newcomers Centre)

### Emily MacMackin, Communications Specialist

**First days:** We closed our office on March 17th. People were still flying into Saint John and we had other clients who had been living in Saint John coming in; for our staff it created an unsafe environment so the decision was made to work from home. It took us about two days to get everybody set up. We had our first Zoom meeting three days after we started working from home. We purchased Zoom like everybody else in the world. We have two English groups and three French groups that have been on Zoom every week. It was really an easy transition for us because everybody was so motivated to get the programs online. When the state of emergency was announced then things in the settlement sector definitely started to change. We are working with the New Brunswick Multicultural Council on different task forces (communications, case management, youth, mental health).

**Clients:** Our clientele shifted from the regular newcomers to the most vulnerable ones. We've been checking on recently arrived newcomers in quarantine, giving them advice on what they can do. One newcomer started volunteering with us during the 14-day quarantine; now she's running an interactive workshop in French! Being a newcomer in any situation is difficult; if you add isolation on top of it - ! Some are still struggling to understand, asking us to meet in person even though we keep on telling them we can't, that it has to take place online. There are some people feeling defeated. Some people have a dream to move to Canada that is really intense so they are pretty disappointed about the time that they arrived here, that they have had to self-isolate, everything was closed, they can't get to know the community the same way other newcomers are able to. There are people who seize the opportunity that they are presented with and turn it into something and then there are people who are frustrated. Some people come from cultures where they just don't trust the media and the corrupt government, so they arrive here and they're not listening to the government.

**Challenges:** Getting people in impoverished areas of the City online to engage in our programs was definitely a challenge. We're working with a population that is harder to get online than some others. The school system has been giving out computers and tablets to families that don't have access so their children can learn remotely, but some newcomers are saying no. We have to help the newcomers learn that it's OK accept help. In this situation [COVID-19] the impact is everywhere and it's affecting everybody in different ways and it's across the entire population, so in different ways it's definitely been a humbling time for everybody.

**Learnings:** Working from home and talking to people online is something that we will definitely be bringing with us into the new normal, 100%. All of the touchless methods and the online methods are going to come with us and stay. This has definitely put me in the situation where I need to connect with people more!



# The ATB Interview revisited: Councillor David Hickey

There is an extremely stark contrast between those that have and those that have not, especially now and as that number rises. Certainly we're fortunate that the federal government offered support quickly, but what [COVID-19] has done is make those who are already living in vulnerable situations even more so. The biggest thing for me - not so much from a City Council perspective because it's not really something that would ever be within our jurisdiction - but more so from a humanitarian and a larger political perspective is the need for a Universal Basic Income. And it just seems so clear to me, our need to make sure that those who are most vulnerable are supported consistently. And that's what a Universal Basic Income does.

There are obviously people like us in our community, and the people you're talking to, who are fighting for folks living in poverty; we understand the need *socially*. What [COVID] presents is the *economic and financial* need for a Universal Basic Income. We nowhere near understanding where the corner is in rounding the impact of COVID-19 economically. When we're talking with lawmakers and changemakers in particular, the bulk of that argument needs to be an economic one, because we all understand the social impact.

*We have to show the 'Return on Investment' to such people.*

Exactly! Imagine the work we wouldn't have had to do had that been our backstop! We wouldn't need a CERB, programs for students, specific employer-based programs and benefits for individuals living below the poverty line. The Universal Basic Income would be the backstop. It would save significantly and allow your economy to rebound quite profoundly.

And with a Universal Basic Income, you really do lessen our burden as a City Council. If you install it, your policing costs will go down, without a doubt. Spinoffs from dealing with poverty in our community will go down, absolutely they will. People will be more independent, they'll be more likely to join the workforce and play active contributing roles in both society and the economy. It means that folks are going to be both better off, but also able to have more profound and universal impacts on things.

# We understand the need *socially*. What [COVID] presents is the *economic* need for a universal basic income



David at the first virtual City Council meeting (Photo: David Hickey)

*How has COVID-19 impacted affordable housing and food security?*

Certainly negatively. What we're seeing is that COVID-19 has an exponential impact on people of lower socioeconomic bubbles in the community. The city can't uphold our commitment to open playgrounds, for example, or to be able to continue regular service at any level of government. More often than not, the folks who use those services are low-income. Beyond that [COVID-19] makes it more challenging to get to grocery stores, to get to work, to find work. All of those seemingly easy tasks, aren't, because of restrictions on transportation or any restriction in place from COVID-19. We are starting to have the conversation about what life after COVID means; the impact on the vulnerable in the community has to be a key part of it. What we're seeing now are trends towards continued increase in cost of living on the Central Peninsula which means that the large majority of low-income folks that live in the neighbourhood – for whom I will continue to advocate - won't be able to afford to live there anymore.

*Specifically what has COVID-19 taught you about what's non-negotiable for Ward 3 now?*

Transit, housing, and a lot of our recreation programs are non-negotiable. When we make cuts to our services, those impact low-income folks at a far higher rate than they impact anyone else in the community and that's because they use those services more than anyone else, whether that's police, community policing or parks and recreation. Folks depend on them not just as pleasures but for their continued livelihood - after-school childcare programs and things like that, and COVID-19 has limited those significantly.

*What would you like to see happen in next year to two years about mixed-income or affordable housing? What practical steps can we as a community take that we aren't doing?*

Right now, it's my view that it's too cheap to own vacant lots in the South End; the valuations of these lots on average is \$7000, so when property taxes are only \$200 a year on them, the incentive to either sell or develop them is very low. Another problem is that our incentives to develop affordable housing aren't enough anyway; the payoff isn't there for folks, and it doesn't make sense for a lot of them when the market demand is for high-end housing. But the reality is that if we want to maintain the dynamic of the neighbourhood, we need to make sure that it is increasingly attractive to invest in affordable housing.

*What learning will you take back to the new normal?*  
We're hoping that community organizations do step up and lend a hand to us, because we need it. What we're going to do is challenge our organized sports and community members. We're all in this together. To say, "I'm going to mow the ball field and put the lines down and make sure that that schedule gets sent out, so that the kids in my neighbourhood can continue to play ball or soccer."

That's a mentality that I hope we can continue!

Questions about our services? Call anytime or visit us at [www.BrenansFH.com](http://www.BrenansFH.com)

## It's traditional...

There are many traditions surrounding funerals. The oldest have been with us for centuries, the newest; they're being created every day. It's our tradition to do everything we can to ensure that each family that turns to us gets the service they expect, the respect they deserve, choices that suit their budget and everything they need to find meaning for today and hope for tomorrow.



Sharlene MacDonald	Gary Smith	Lethe Kerr	Karen Belyea	Kate Lavhey	Doug Ells	Patrick Olsen
1461 Manawagonish Road 634-7425	111 Paradise Row 634-7424	152 Pettingill Road 849-2119				



## The Salvation Army update

By Major Tracy Goyak, The Salvation Army

[at April 20th] - The Salvation Army in Saint John, New Brunswick has partnered with Outflow, Saint John's men's homeless shelter, to provide meals for residents using the emergency disaster services vehicle. We feed between 75 and 100 people each night.

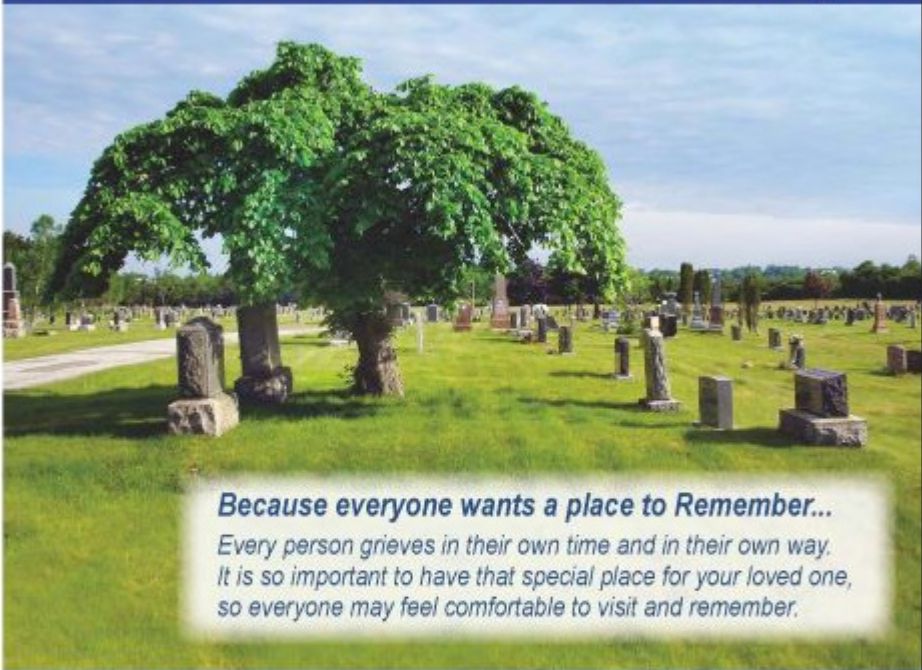
From Sunday through Thursday evenings, shelter residents line up six feet apart in the parking lot and are handed a meal through the truck window. We are also distributing meals to anyone outside the shelter who comes up to the vehicle and asks for support. Currently, we are serving up to 500 meals each week. It's two organizations coming together to meet community needs. During a time of social distancing, we can still work closely together.

The Salvation Army is also serving the community through its personal care item distribution. Each Wednesday from 12-3 p.m. (while the food bank is distributing), we are serving individuals one at a time through our front door while closely observing the social distancing procedures that have been put into place. We are offering items such as toilet paper, deodorant, razors, soap, shampoo, ladies' feminine products, coffee, bread, cream, sugar, and of course, a friendly smile and words of comfort and encouragement during these challenging days.



Front row: Major Tracy Goyak (The Salvation Army), Jayme Hall (Outflow). Back row (left to right): Mary Doiron, Rob England, Al Sweet (The Salvation Army) and Philip Appleby (Outflow). (Photo: The Salvation Army)

## Cedar Hill - Greenwood Cemetery



Because everyone wants a place to Remember...  
Every person grieves in their own time and in their own way.  
It is so important to have that special place for your loved one,  
so everyone may feel comfortable to visit and remember.

Traditional & Cremation choices available at Cedar Hill Extension and Greenwood Cemetery  
- Please contact our office: 9 am - 4:30 pm weekdays to discuss -  
650 Manawagonish Rd. Saint John, NB – 672-4309

## How BBBS of Saint John is responding to COVID-19



Mentor Links' virtual Costume Party for kids awaiting a Big Brother or Big Sister (Photo: BBBS)

By Rhoda Welshman, Big Brothers Big Sisters

Despite it all, we're having a lot of fun!!! Big Brothers Big Sisters of Saint John is committed to maintaining and supporting vital mentoring relationships. These relationships are critical to the success, mental health, and well-being of our young people. For many of our families, social isolation has caused increased anxiety, stress, fear and worry. We are making every effort to keep our families and volunteers engaged. We are all in this together and we are #BiggerTogether! Since moving our mentoring programs to virtual platforms, we have had great success, finding creative ways to embed our Theory of Change into the new work and challenges we face. Adaptability and innovation have never been more important!

Here's some of what we've been up to:

- Delivering School Supplies for at-home learning to families in need, proudly donated by Staples Rothesay.
- Published an Isolation Survival Guide with hundreds of ideas, activities and websites to explore.
- Our Mentoring Coordinators are supporting their matches by ensuring they have the supplies and technology to stay connected.
- Bigs & Littles are sending letters, homemade cards, supplies for activities to one another, staying in touch over the phone and/or video calls. In some cases, making TikTok videos together!
- Mentor Links, a group mentoring program for the kids on our waitlist, have been hosting weekly Zoom calls including Talent Shows, Virtual Road Trips, Costume Parties [see photo above] and Show & Tell.
- Go Girls! continues to have regular meetings where Mentors are promoting healthy, active lifestyles with virtual activities and discussions that align.

Hesitant at first, we have discovered so many positive outcomes in launching our programs online. Doing so has removed the transportation barrier for many of our families and it's given some of our "quieter" youth a louder voice and safe space to share their feelings and experiences. Having this as an option going forward also means – no more canceled programs due to snow days! Although we have lost contact with a few of our families, we are confident that we will be able to support them by offering technology and internet services, thanks to recent emergency funding received from the United Way.

For up-to-date information, events and campaigns please follow us on Facebook, Instagram or Twitter or visit [www.BigBrothersBigSisters.ca/SaintJohn](http://www.BigBrothersBigSisters.ca/SaintJohn)



# Joint statement on anti-Black racism

By *HDC*

The Human Development Council sits on the Steering Committee for Campaign 2000, which has been tracking rates of child poverty in Canada for over 30 years. Campaign 2000 and Family Services Toronto released a joint statement denouncing all forms of anti-Black racism, colonialism and white supremacy.

As organizations working directly in the areas of mental health and poverty eradication, we know that Black and Indigenous communities have much worse health outcomes and exponentially higher rates of poverty than white Canadians, and that this is both a result of and a strategy to maintain systemic oppression.

We have a responsibility to ensure that our work in these areas contributes to ending anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism, which cannot be done without critical self-reflection, education, and dialogue..

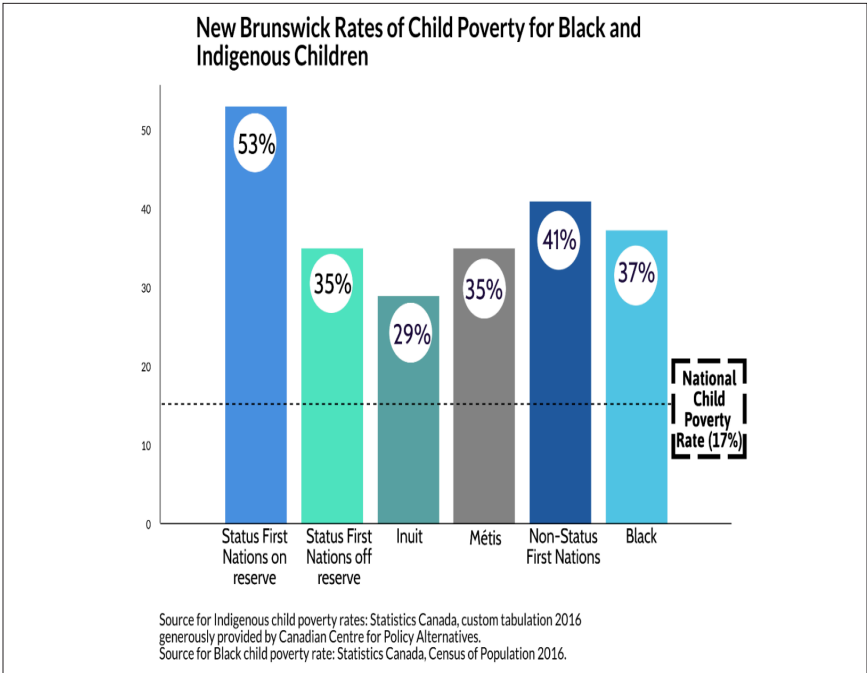


Image: Family Service Toronto and Campaign 2000



# Around The Block Team (Issue 71)

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# Women's Empowerment Network

One of the essential tools for community partners in the very first days of lockdown (March 2020) was a daily update from the Women's Empowerment Network (WEN) called What is in Your Community to Help. In late March, every day at 9 a.m., one could go and check on the latest available resources for clients, from food packs to event postponements, hot meals to phone appointments for people in recovery, office closures to shelters staying open. Given how many thousands of people are reached by the community partners, this information was vital in a time of anxiety when planning more than a day or two ahead seemed next to impossible for many.

Three cheers for all the partners and especially for WEN!





**Black Lives Matter!**  
**Saint John, Sunday June 14th, 2020**

*By Matthew C Martin, Organizer, Saint John Black Lives Matter Movement*

Sunday was unlike anything we could have imagined; to see Saint John come out and step up against racism was truly breathtaking. We are still not sure of the exact number but we have heard it's the largest gathering for a cause in Saint John in the last 25 years and had an estimated attendance of 3000+ people! For those who couldn't attend, our speakers were: Kathy Young, Nasiyr McGill, Joanna Killen, Dr Tim Christie, Clyde Wray, Neil Clements, Marcus Marcial, Joel Macpherson and Shauna Cole. You can also find the full filmed event on our Facebook page:

Saint John Black Lives Matter Movement. Here you can also see what we have planned next and how you can get involved!  
*Bottom: The movement in King's Square (Photo: Doug McLean). Clockwise from top centre: Ayana Savoie (Photo: Heidi Curtis) and photos by Holly Richards of Hollyshustlephotos (2); a supporter of SJBLM; Judith Gallant; and Dougie Walsh. With thanks!*

