



## CASE STUDY | SHIFTING FROM NEEDS TO ASSETS IN NEW BRUNSWICK

New Brunswick's study highlights the benefits of a systemic shift from a needs-based framework to a strengths-focused, asset-based approach to poverty reduction. When governments align with, and resource, communities to identify the unique strengths and aspirations that exist in each unique community, building capacity to support the gaps, it creates a stronger foundation from which to foster prosperity for all.

### INTRODUCTION

New Brunswick is Canada's largest Maritime province by area; boasts a population of 760,000; and is Canada's only officially bilingual province, with 30% of residents identifying French as a first language.<sup>i</sup> It is known for its laid-back and friendly culture, strong sense of community, lush natural spaces, and large fishing and agricultural industries. With only three urban centres (Moncton, Saint John, Fredericton)<sup>ii</sup>, it is also amongst Canada's highest rural non-farm populations.<sup>iii</sup>

Despite the attraction of the coastal landscape and friendly vibes, the province struggles with low income, deep poverty and social isolation. Committed to supporting everyone to take part in the province's prosperity, the New Brunswick poverty reduction strategy aims, "to foster economic and social inclusion of all New Brunswickers and reduce poverty through increased community capacity and collaboration of all four sector partners."

#### Key Points

- **Aligning provincial and local strategies and resources to reduce poverty creates a more effective system.**
- **The shift in focus from deficits to assets has been key in New Brunswick's success in poverty reduction outcomes and sustainability.**
- **ABCD is a promising approach for rural and small town communities.**

At its core, the initiative recognizes that “poverty” is more complex than a lack of income – it is also about active participation – and aims to weave a more integrated social fabric as the foundation for addressing the overwhelming sense of “*never having enough*”.<sup>iv</sup>

“**The capacity building of citizens and their communities is the driving force behind the achievement of these projects. The plan was designed so that everyone can make a direct and tangible contribution with respect to improving their own situation.**”

Léo-Paul Pinet, *Overcoming Poverty Together*, 2014

## THE COST OF POVERTY IN NEW BRUNSWICK

New Brunswickers earn less. Of Canada’s 13 provinces and territories, New Brunswick currently boasts the lowest median income in the country, particularly amongst unattached individuals. Half of all singles report incomes of less than \$20,000 per year.<sup>v</sup> Lone-parent families are the most at-risk demographic of living in poverty in New Brunswick, especially those that are female-led. Nearly half of all single mothers live in poverty, putting those children at a rate five times more likely to live in poverty than dual-couple families, and totalling one-third of all New Brunswickers living in poverty.<sup>vi</sup> The province’s child poverty rate is currently 1 in 5 (28,510),<sup>vii</sup> with Saint John reporting the second-highest child poverty rate of Canada’s larger urban areas.

New Brunswickers are getting older. Not only is the Echo-Boom generation missing in this province, they have lower levels of immigration, low fertility rates, declining births, and outward migration to other provinces.<sup>viii</sup>

What is missing from the population-level data is the experience of health and social poverty. Poverty in rural Canada, in large part due to infrastructure, tends to be more hidden and an isolating experience for individuals and families than in urban areas.<sup>ix</sup> For an aging population living in a largely rural and small town landscape, the accessibility to social situations that provide a sense of belonging with others becomes increasingly challenging; as does keeping up positive health activities, such as travelling for medical appointments, buying fresh nutritious food, and going to the pharmacy. Overall, it is estimated that poverty costs New Brunswick \$2 Billion per year.<sup>x</sup>

## NEW BRUNSWICK’S ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL INCLUSION PLAN

New Brunswick was the sixth Canadian province to adopt a poverty reduction strategy in 2008, and the first to introduce poverty reduction legislation. The Economic and Social Inclusion Act (2010) established financial resources, a system of accountability, and incorporated the overseeing body as a Crown Corporation – [The Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation](#) (ESIC)

– stipulating that all sectors must be involved in developing, adopting, implementing, and evaluating the poverty reduction plan.<sup>xi</sup> Much of the strength and sustainability of the initiative comes from this Act, which guarantees the initiative is non-partisan. It is able to withstand shifts in political parties; and provides time and space to develop trusting working relationships and strategic planning that builds to impact, to learn lessons from successes and failures, and to correct-course where needed to achieve long-term goals.

“ **The purpose of the plan is to build a favorable environment that creates a culture shift which empowers communities and stakeholders to maximize the use of local and regional assets, to reduce poverty and to improve the quality of life of New Brunswickers.** ”

Government of New Brunswick, 2018

By law, the strategy must be reviewed and renewed every five years with citizens.<sup>xii</sup> It continues to change and evolve as the definition of poverty shifts and new approaches to poverty reduction are discovered. Now at the end of the second iteration of the [Overcoming Poverty Together Plan](#) (2009-2014 and 2014-2019), the province continues to work toward the goal of reducing income poverty by 25% and deep income poverty by 50%. To achieve this goal, 28 priorities for action have been identified under 4 broad pillars of: community empowerment, social inclusion, economic inclusion, and learning.

Further setting New Brunswick’s strategy apart as an innovative model, is the formal connection with the communities and responsiveness to local conditions. There are 12 regions (Community Inclusion Networks [CINs]), which together comprise the entire province. Each CIN has a mandate to adopt their own interpretation of the objectives and 28 priority areas with residents, including developing a local strategy and collaboratively implementing the plan with community members. This approach allows flexibility for the broader strategy to support regional differences in political, economic, social, geographic and demographic differences. Further, the 12 communities coordinating local efforts were selected based on existing credibility in the community and each came with the benefit of established governance structures.<sup>xiii</sup>

#### New Brunswick’s 12 Community Inclusion Networks (CINs)

1. Westmorland-Albert Counties
2. Saint John and Sussex
3. Fredericton
4. North West Community Inclusion Network
5. Restigouche County
6. Chaleur
7. Northumberland
8. Charlotte County
9. Central New Brunswick
10. Carleton-Victoria Counties
11. Kent County
12. Acadian Peninsula

Explore the boundaries of each CIN on the interactive map:  
[http://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/esic/community\\_inclusionnetwork.html](http://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/esic/community_inclusionnetwork.html)

## SHIFTING NEEDS TO ASSETS AT A SYSTEMS AND POLICY LEVEL

Asset-based community development (ABCD) is a new approach to community building that starts with what's *strong*, rather than what's *wrong*. Instead of beginning with an analysis of community deficits and seeking to solve problems by employing outside agency programs and services, the process begins with the community. Residents are brought together to themselves identify what they want to see in their community; map the strengths that already exist – the talents, passions, physical assets, infrastructure – contained within each individual, association, and institution; and then determine how they can make change and where support is desired.

This approach is community-empowering, whereby communities take control of their situation, determine the solutions to local challenges, and build capacity in the community. The positive psychology approach is 2-3 times more effective than the deficit approach<sup>xiv</sup>, shifting focus to hope rather than helplessness. The ABCD approach is also more sustainable, developing infrastructure and social capital within the community, keeping investments internal<sup>xv</sup>.

### WHY NEW BRUNSWICK'S SHIFT FROM NEEDS TO ASSETS?

Participants made clear, at New Brunswick's Final Forum on poverty in 2009, that the local CINs must be built based on a community capacity building approach, and be driven by all four sectors working *together* to 'overcome poverty.' The Forum set the stage for ESIC's first major poverty reduction objective, solving the question: How do we change the narrative that our province currently believes about itself?

Answer: Focus on what you *have* - which after you look again - is plenty!

The province made intentional efforts to change how the community thought about themselves and what they had to work with. Rather than deficits, the conversations were shifted to building strengths stronger - strong enough to overcome the gaps - and empowering people to ask better questions and to act from a place of confidence, a deep sense of possibility and hope.

How the 12 CINs would take shape in real communities was still unclear until a session in late 2010 with John McKnight, [ABCD Institute](#) Founder and Co-Director, which changed everything. John helped clarify that setting communities up for success required helping citizens gain a new perspective on their own local assets - focusing on and reflecting their strengths back to them.

### EIGHT TOUCHSTONES OF ABCD – IMPLEMENTING SYSTEMS AND POLICY CHANGE

The eight touchstones are the tenets that separate the ABCD approach from other community development practices. As [described by Cormac Russell](#), Faculty Member at the ABCD Institute, they are not necessarily standardized, static, or consecutive steps, but can be used as a framework for working alongside the community in a complex way. New Brunswick intentionally actioned each of these touchstones, from the beginning, in their poverty reduction efforts:

1. **Finding a community building team** – The sought-after community-level partners were those who had a dream for their place and shared in the spirit of the *Overcoming Poverty*

*Together* plan. The groups were financially supported to hire a coordinator in their community who had existing networks - either formal or informal. This was an intentional move away from governments coming to the 'rescue', towards supporting residents to create a better community themselves.

2. **Recruiting a Community Animator** – Finding the right person was key. The job requirements for a Coordinator/Animator/Connector included applicants being outgoing and positive, being able to connect across multiple disciplines and being able to cater messaging to multiple audiences.
3. **Hosting Community Conversations** – Community Conversations were a powerful tool in the process and harnessed the energy of people realizing their own dream. As soon as communities were provided a way to contribute and participate, they did: they shared their dreams, then their passions and finally their proposed actions.
4. **Engaging community groups and organizations** – CINs acted as a conduit, both for ESIC to access community networks, as well as for local members to advance their own mandates by finding common ground with the *Overcoming Poverty Together* initiative.
5. **Building connections and social interactions** – To enable action, matching funds were established that now support partners with the initial investment in their local ideas for reducing poverty. These small grants have enabled some amazing outcomes.
6. **Visioning and planning** – *The Overcoming Poverty Together* plan was developed to continually evolve over time. The structure that supports ongoing changes are annual ESIC planning meetings and three face-to-face Board Meetings and CIN gatherings each year.
7. **Implementing change** – Change is slow, but trust, patience and faith go a long way. By investing early in people who have the best of their community in mind, there have been rare disappointments amongst the 450+ projects that have taken place to date. While not all projects have turned out the way they were originally envisioned, they have always turned into the project the community required.
8. **Fostering celebration** – Highlighting the stories, the projects, the people that comprise *Overcoming Poverty Together*, and providing constant appreciation for their efforts, have been key factors in the success of the projects, the CINs and the plan itself.

## GETTING TO IMPACT

### Figures Indicating New Brunswick is Fostering Local Economic and Social Inclusion:<sup>xvi</sup>

- **5,500** residents in Saint John's five priority neighbourhoods receive six editions of the community-based *good* newspaper each year.
- **17,500** Francophone students from K-12 took part in 560 entrepreneurial and technology projects in Kent County, learning skills for becoming initiators, directors and managers of meaningful projects, and simultaneously fulfilling a need in the community.

- **3,866** children and youth over seven years of age participated in a wide variety of programs and activities offered across Charlotte County to build literacy, numeracy and social capacities. Most students of the summer camps not only prevented the summer slide, but actually increased their literacy levels.
- **400** low-income students across 15 schools in Fredericton receive lunch and snacks each school day, prepared and delivered by volunteers, as well as backpacks with non-perishable food for after school and the weekends, thanks to donations from grocery stores and local businesses.
- **1,500** people are part of a bulk food buying club in which members pool their money to take advantage of bulk price breaks. Now operating throughout the province with 100 volunteers contributing 300 hours per month, they are increasing food security by providing more access to affordable fruit and vegetables.
- **\$185,024,541.64** in benefits was accessed by low-income families taking part in the make tax time pay volunteer tax clinic from 2011-2016. Since the partnership began, 22,671 people have filed their income tax, which is a 62% increase.
- **362** Social Development clients were supported to do on-the-job placement training to address unique needs such as confidence, skills and work experience required to re-enter the workforce. Within its first year, 63% of participants that completed program transitioned to full-time employment immediately and 7% were employed part-time.
- **1,600** Social Assistance clients have taken part in *Pre-Employability Services Modules*, assisting participants to gain a greater awareness and acquisition of life and employability skills - such as empowerment, motivation, and self-discovery.
- **7,000** drives have been offered through dial-a-ride services in the Acadian Peninsula to those who have transportation challenges - to get to the hospital, medical clinics, grocery stores, and pharmacies.
- **17** community transportation services are now operating or in development in New Brunswick, an increase of 15 organizations from 2009 to 2017, providing transportation to residents that is available, accessible and affordable.
- **50** Fredericton and area non-profit agencies came together to explore ideas of mutual connection and potential collaboration to better align community organizations and volunteers. They identified 12 different areas where efficiencies could be increased and



services enhanced, and in February 2018 the [Fredericton Volunteering Matching website](#) was launched by four core partners as a tool for poverty reduction and social inclusion.

- **\$1M** has been raised to build eight micro-houses in Fredericton in 2018, designed under a housing-first approach, to house chronically and episodically homeless people transitioning from the shelter system into a permanently supported house.<sup>xvii</sup>

## COMMUNITY INCLUSION NETWORK #8 IN-ACTION: CHARLOTTE COUNTY

Taking a deeper dive into New Brunswick's 12 CINs, this section demonstrates how the 28 priority areas are actioned at a local level to reduce poverty, by sharing the story of Community Inclusion Network #8: Charlotte County.

Charlotte County is a rural area in Southwest New Brunswick. It is made up of a number of mainland communities - Saint Stephen, Saint George, Saint Andrews, Blacks Harbour, Beaver Harbour and three island communities – Deer Island, Grand Manan and Campobello. It is characterized by its coastal nature and relies largely on fishing, aquaculture, tourism and manufacturing for industry.<sup>xviii</sup> The poverty profile is similar to the provincial profile – with a high rate of single parent families and children living on low-income (women in particular), and a slightly higher rate of child poverty (1 in 4).

### CHARLOTTE COUNTY'S STRATEGY

The voice of the people has always been the heart and soul of Vibrant Communities Charlotte County (VCCC). Every two years, VCCC's list of poverty reduction priorities are shaped directly by local residents and community groups, as well as determining how and when initiatives happen. In 2011, when the collaborative was first developed, VCCC held 7 consultations including more than 75 residents, who met across 4 regions, including 1 session conducted via teleconference<sup>xix</sup>. These conversations brought to light what was most important to people, which then informed VCCC's first roadmap for supporting communities to achieve their goals.

To keep in tune with the communities, VCCC gets involved wherever there is local energy, innovation and movement; and in 2014 and 2016, hosted more conversations to [update their poverty reduction priorities](#).

VCCC recognizes that the more initiatives are owned and managed by communities themselves, the more successful they are. VCCC's strategy and role in community is to *inform, inspire and build capacity for change* in Charlotte County. This strategy was formalized in consultation with both local and national partners and keeps ABCD at the centre of their mission.

### THE ABCD APPROACH IN A RURAL CONTEXT

ABCD is considered especially important in Charlotte County's rural context. While rural communities easily feel like an afterthought or seem to lack the same opportunities as their urban counterparts, often it is because of the focus on searching for outside influences that will make a difference for the home community.

The ABCD lens challenges this perspective and changes the narrative, empowering communities to look at themselves as their own solution. Many rural communities can readily incorporate ABCD because they already innately understand the power of community and know their neighbours. Charlotte County has many examples of communities coming together - whether it be to support a family in need, lending a hand during a time of tragedy, or for celebration. Because of the complimentary nature of the rural environment, ABCD has enabled Charlotte County residents to see their 'ruralness' as one of their biggest assets, rather than one of their biggest challenges.

## LOCAL STORIES OF IMPACT

**Business Bootcamp** – When residents of St. Stephen gathered to look at ways to help the local economy and bring more jobs to the area, the initial solution was to find a big company to make a home in the area to generate more employment. After more discussion, this group recognized that one of St. Stephen's main assets were their many entrepreneurs. This realization changed the conversation from focusing on big companies to focusing on strengthening and growing local entrepreneurship.

A couple of local entrepreneurs, Jeremy Barham and Mike Temple of Volution, developed what has become [Business Bootcamp](#). This 10-week program is developed specifically to target entrepreneurs in a rural context. Successful local business men and woman volunteer their time for 10 weeks to mentor budding entrepreneurs. The program trains participants in money management, marketing, advertisement, and developing a business plan. In two years, 50 entrepreneurs have been mentored and created a better business model.

As a result, local business has been amplified in St. Stephen including, among many others, music and art tuition, a sound technician, an electrical contractor, a coffee shop, a restaurant, and the only bra maker east of Montreal. Business Bootcamp has increased recognition of the importance to support and celebrate local businesses.

**Milltown Elementary School** – Milltown Elementary School is a high-priority area that knows no limits. Their challenges have become their greatest assets. This school, in partnership with the local Boys and Girls Club, developed what is known as *Super Duper Fun Fun Fun Camp*. Each day, the kids do one hour of literacy and one hour of numeracy. The rest of the day is filled with fun activities and a field trip on Friday. This past summer was the eighth time they have offered the camp, and they have amazing results to show: 100% of the students either maintained or improved their literacy level, 83% improved the literacy level, and 69% improved their numeracy level - some as much as a 44% improvement.

Over the years, as Milltown Elementary developed the *Super Duper Fun Fun Fun Camp*, they began to see the bigger picture includes families and the community. Rather than addressing childrens' education in a silo, they recognized that for a child to succeed, the family and community of that child need to be supported as well. Milltown Elementary now has programs that educate parents through workshops and courses, the school has opened a preschool and daycare to provide parents with affordable childcare options, and they work with partners to provide transportation. Milltown Elementary has become a place of support to families and a



centre for the whole community. With each step the school takes, it is looking at its next challenge as its next opportunity.

On the heels of Milltown Elementary's success, other Charlotte County schools are beginning to move towards this type of wrap around school model.

## LOCAL CHALLENGES

**Significance** – There is a difficulty to not feel overwhelmed by a sense of smallness in the midst of big social and economic challenges. Despite being full of passion, tackling such multifaceted issues in an isolated rural community, can be overwhelming in comparison to seeing other larger initiatives elsewhere with more resources. Regular in-person meetings with other local leaders, who are connected to community development, have been helpful in creating an informal leadership support system and act as a reminder that the best resources are people in the community.

**Geography** – Although small in population, Charlotte County covers four communities and three islands. To be connected to and earn trust in each community – some of which are separated by a few hours – there must be a representation from the different regions on the Board and at events. However, distance and geography pose significant barriers in equally integrating all communities.

**Recognition** – As a leader of an ABCD initiative, the better you get at the job, the less recognition you receive. The more that initiatives are led by partners and communities themselves, the better the outcomes for everyone. At the same time, it can be hard to let go of control. It takes a strong leader and organization to embrace their role as an empowering influence for others, rather than doing the work themselves. It is a process everyone is learning, but in all transparency, is hard at times to let go.



**ABCD cannot be one *part* of what our organizations do - it needs to be woven into our DNA. ABCD must be reflected in how we talk, how we strategize, how we hire, and integral to our overall mission. In order to fully embrace ABCD, organizations and leaders need to be flexible, and not just focus on how we can impact our communities, but allow our communities to impact us and what we do.**



Joy Benson Green, Coordinator, Vibrant Communities Charlotte County

## READ MORE

- [Progress Report - Overcoming Poverty Together, 2014-2019](#) (2018)
- [Overcoming Poverty Together: The New Brunswick Social and Economic Inclusion Plan 2014-2019](#)
- [Overcoming Poverty Together: The New Brunswick Social and Economic Inclusion Plan 2009-2014](#)
- [Community Inclusion Networks](#)
- [Charlotte County Poverty Reduction Strategy 2016-2018](#)
- [Asset-Based Community Development Canada: Resources](#)

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<sup>i</sup> Canadavisa.com. “About New Brunswick”. (2018) <https://www.canadavisa.com/about-new-brunswick.html>

<sup>ii</sup> Samuel LeBreton and André Leclerc. “Poverty in New Brunswick”. Published by the Government of New Brunswick. (2006) <http://frontnb.ca/Document/Debut/PovertyinNewBrunswick.pdf>

<sup>iii</sup> Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick. “New Brunswick at the Dawn of a New Century”. (ND) <https://www.gnb.ca/legis/business/committees/previous/reports-e/demog/Facts-e.asp>

<sup>iv</sup> Government of New Brunswick. “Summary Report Phase II: The Roundtable - Developing a Poverty Reduction Plan for New Brunswick” (2009) <http://www2.gnb.ca/content/dam/gnb/Departments/esic/pdf/SummaryReportOptionsDocument.pdf>

<sup>v</sup> Government of New Brunswick. “Overcoming Poverty Together: The New Brunswick Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation”. (2009) <http://www2.gnb.ca/content/dam/gnb/Departments/esic/pdf/Booklet-e.pdf>

<sup>vi</sup> Canada Without Poverty. “New Brunswick Poverty Progress Profile”. (2016) <https://www.cwp-csp.ca/resources/sites/default/files/resources/New%20Brunswick-%20PPP%202016.pdf>

<sup>vii</sup> Natalia Hicks and Randy Hatfield. “The Face of Child Poverty: 2017 New Brunswick Child Poverty Report Card”. Published by the Human Development Council. (2017) [https://campaign2000.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/2017NewBrunswick\\_ChildPovertyReportCard\\_Nov21-1.pdf](https://campaign2000.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/2017NewBrunswick_ChildPovertyReportCard_Nov21-1.pdf)

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