

OVERCOMING POVERTY TOGETHER

The New Brunswick Economic and Social Inclusion Plan

PREAMBLE:

Premier Shawn Graham launched a public engagement initiative to adopt a poverty reduction plan for New Brunswick in October 2008. A public engagement approach was adopted in recognition of the fact that successfully reducing poverty in New Brunswick is the shared responsibility of every citizen of New Brunswick: people living in poverty, the non-profit, business and government sectors together with individual citizens.

Three co-chairs were appointed by the Premier to oversee the public engagement initiative, Léo-Paul Pinet as a representative from the non-profit sector, Gerry Pond as a representative from the business sector and the Honourable Mary Schryer followed by the Honourable Kelly Lamrock as the representative from government.

The public engagement initiative was divided into three interconnected phases, a Public Dialogue Phase (wide public input), the Roundtable Phase (development of options to reduce poverty) and the Final Forum Phase (adoption of a poverty reduction plan).

During the Public Dialogue Phase over 2500 New Brunswickers contributed their passionate views and opinions on the causes of and solutions to poverty which were captured in the resulting document entitled "A Choir of Voices". The members of the Roundtable were inspired by the input from the Public Dialogues and the options they crafted for the final poverty reduction plan were derived directly from A Choir of Voices.

The presence at all stages of this undertaking of citizens who have experienced poverty shaped the final poverty reduction plan. This initiative was launched and successfully maintained as a non partisan exercise, given the nature and importance of the venture for the province.

The present plan is five years in duration but investments with longer term impact need also be made to maintain momentum. Accordingly, it is agreed that this plan will be renewed in five years.

Final Forum participants are in full agreement that the implementation of a poverty reduction plan for the province is the key driver for economic and social inclusion for all New Brunswickers.

The members of the Final Forum gathered in Saint John on November 12th and 13th, 2009 agree on the following essential elements of New Brunswick's first poverty reduction plan. They are committed to work towards achieving the vision, the global objective and the priority actions within the timeframe and through the governance model specified below.

THE PROVINCIAL PLAN

1. NAME:

OVERCOMING POVERTY TOGETHER : The New Brunswick Economic and Social Inclusion Plan

2. VISION:

Through the collaboration of governments, business and non profit sectors, people living in poverty and individual citizens, all men, women and children in New Brunswick shall have the necessary resources to meet their basic needs and to live with dignity, security and good health. Furthermore all New Brunswickers shall be included as full citizens through opportunities for employment, personal development and community engagement.

3. GLOBAL OBJECTIVE:

By 2015, New Brunswick will have reduced income poverty by 25% and deep income poverty by 50%, and will have made significant progress in achieving sustained economic and social inclusion.

4. DELIVERY AND ACCOUNTABILITY:

Final Forum members have agreed that the success of the poverty reduction initiative has its roots in the recognition that all citizens and sectors of society play a key role in the reduction of poverty. There is a commitment to continue this partnership in a governance model with the following components:

- i. Community Economic and Social Inclusion Networks established at the local level, composed of representatives of people living in poverty, non-profit, business and government sectors.
- ii. A Provincial Economic and Social Inclusion Board consisting of representatives of government (Ministers and Deputy Ministers), community, business and low-income persons and presided over by four co-chairs.
- iii. A secretariat providing coordinating and administrative support to the Board and community inclusion networks.

All administrative costs of the Board will be borne by the provincial government.

This governance model will be a mechanism for coordinated action and not a vehicle for the devolution of provincial government responsibilities.

A transition team made up of representative of all sectors will address outstanding issues such as terms of reference, accountability mechanisms and consistency with official language requirements.

5. PRIORITY ACTIONS

The business, non-profit and government sectors together with citizens today agree to implement together the following priority actions:

Opportunities for Being (meeting basic need)

(a) Reform Social Assistance as follows:

Immediate:

- i. elimination of the interim social assistance rate program (single employable people);
- ii. extend health card for persons exiting social assistance for up to 3 years until prescription drug program is introduced; and
- iii. the household income policy will only be applied to social assistance recipients who are in spousal relationships.

Over five years:

- i. move from rules based to outcome based system;
- ii. move from passive assistance to employment orientation;
- iii. move from focus on income poverty to social and economic inclusion;
- iv. restructure and increase social assistance rates including a new regime more appropriate for persons with disabilities;
- v. significant overhaul of household income policy,
- vi. introduction of vision and dental care for children in low-income families by April 1, 2011;
- vii. provide more opportunities to keep earned income as individuals transition to work;
- viii. reform wage exemptions to include a working income supplement;
- ix. raise allowable asset exemption; and

- x. link benefits such as child care, home heating and health to household income to the extent possible;
- (b) Mandate the Board of Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation to work together with stakeholders to determine the details of a prescription drug program for non-insured citizens with the goal of starting to phase in the program by April 2012;
- (c) Raise the minimum wage to the Atlantic average by September 1st, 2011 and adjust for inflation annually thereafter. Dialogue with stakeholders regarding the scheduling of increases;
- (d) Provide stable funding for homeless shelters within five years;
- (e) Include protections for roomers and boarders in the Residential Tenancies Act;
- (f) Provide funding for community transportation alternatives such as Dial-a-Ride; and
- (g) Develop and implement an integrated service delivery model focused on low-income people.

Opportunities for Becoming (life-long learning and skills acquisition)

- a) Invest in the early learning and child care sector to ensure that a minimum of 20% of infants and 50% of two to five year olds in the province may access a registered early learning space;
- b) Provide a literacy mentor, through collaboration with the business and non-profit sectors, to every student in grades one and two who is struggling to read, so that every child may graduate with adequate literacy and numeracy skills through the leadership of Elementary Literacy/Litteratie au primaire.
- c) Introduce an Early Learning and Child Care Act;
- d) The McCain Foundation will fund 5 additional integrated early learning sites.
- e) Advance the community school concept with a particular focus on literacy and numeracy, life skills, experiential learning, trades and cooperative education, and extra-curricular activities;
- f) Continue training teachers to expand educational program options to accommodate diverse learning styles; and

Opportunities for Belonging (community participation)

- a) Develop a comprehensive housing strategy that enables mixed income neighbourhoods, affordability, supported housing options and co-op housing;
- b) Explore the concept of social enterprise and community investment funds;
- c) Strengthen the ability of low-income people to enter the skilled work force through the provision of training, education and volunteer opportunities as part of the transition to work, as well as on the job training;
- d) Reduce barriers to continuing education, making it more accessible and affordable;
- e) Develop a strong public awareness campaign which is critical to the success of the poverty reduction strategy.

6. Indicators and Monitoring

Referred to the Board of the Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation.

7. Renewal of this Plan

This plan will be renewed in five years through a public engagement process.

8. Legislation

The vision, global objective, delivery structure, reporting requirements and renewal of this plan will be captured in legislation.

9. PARTICIPANTS IN THE FINAL FORUM – SAINT JOHN – NOV. 12 & 13

Premier Shawn Graham
Minister Kelly Lamrock, co-chair
Gerry Pond, co-chair
Léo-Paul Pinet, co-chair
Barbara Losier
Beverly Wilcox
Cathy Wright
Chief George H. Ginnish
Christyne Allain
David Alward
Debbie McInnis
Derek Oland
Minister Donald Arseneault
Eddy Campbell
Minister Ed Doherty
Eric Tusz-King
Fernand Arseneault
Ginette Arseneault
Minister Greg Byrne
Minister Hédard Albert
James Kenneth Irving
Jean Allain
Jean-Claude Savoie

Jennifer Melanson
Juanita Black
Judge Michael McKee
Krista Carr
Liette Holmes
Lisa Murphy
Lise Ouellette
Louis-Philippe Gauthier
Marilyn Trenholme Counsell
Mark Haines-Lacey
Minister Mary Schryer
Michael O'Brien
Monique Richard
Pam Coates
Peter Oram
Randy Hatfield
Roger Doiron
Roger Lessard
Minister Roland Haché
Sr. Auréa Cormier
Terry Malley
Tom Mann
Wendy Papadopoulos