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