

# IT STARTS WITH A SEED

COMMUNITY FOOD ACTION PROGRAM



2012 – 2013

In 2012–13, the Community Food Action Program helped sow the seeds for community gardens, community-run kitchens and other grassroots initiatives across the province. This new grant program for New Brunswick communities provided 38 grants for projects — including moose meat canning, safe food handling and an innovative food box program — designed to increase access to healthy food, enhance food skills and help ensure food-secure communities across N.B.

With a particular focus on creating food security for young people, seniors, those living in poverty and persons with disabilities, this program, from the Department of Healthy and Inclusive Communities, supports grassroots solutions that:

- Increase access to healthy food through teaching food and cooking skills and/or increase access to nutritious foods and fresh produce;
- Increase food knowledge and skills by providing learning opportunities in nutrition, cooking skills, growing food, learning about locally grown foods and/or food systems; and,
- Increase community capacity to address local food security, which helps individuals and communities recognize strengths, develop new skills and resources, and work collaboratively.

This 2012–13 annual report highlights some of the many Community Food Action Program projects that have united communities and continue to make New Brunswick stronger and healthier.

**In 2012–13, the Community Food Action Program supported 46 projects in New Brunswick communities.**

**For more information on the Community Food Action Program, visit [www.gnb.ca/wellness](http://www.gnb.ca/wellness)**

# FEATURED COMMUNITY FOOD PROJECTS 2012–2013







## LITTLE GREEN THUMBS & CALEDONIA GROWING GARDEN

### DAWSON SETTLEMENT

The children from Hillsborough Elementary School began their Community Food Action project a few days before school let out for the summer of 2012, planting potatoes, pumpkins, and other vegetables on Lisa Brown's Dawson Settlement farm.

"We thought the way to affect change is to target children," says Brown, who helped create the student gardening group at Hillsborough. When the elementary students returned that fall to harvest their vegetables, it was obvious that word of the fun project had spread. "We expected about 10 kids, instead, they had 40," she says.



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The children used their vegetables to make and serve a "harvest lunch" to their entire school. They gathered at Farmer Brown's Greenhouse one October afternoon to chow down on six different kinds of soups with homemade rolls and a choice of apple, pumpkin or pear tarts for dessert. The students grew the pumpkins, while the apples and pears came from nearby trees.

There are a lot of kids with difficult home lives, and teaching them that they can feed themselves is empowering, Brown says. "We're trying to foster the idea that you can stay here in our community and grow food. You don't have to get a job away."

The children have also planted and grown cucumbers at a senior's home, while older students at Caledonia Regional High School, also in Hillsborough, are in the midst of creating a fruit and vegetable garden on the school grounds. The grant has helped buy kid-sized shovels, rakes, hand trowels and other garden tools for both schools.

The children's enthusiasm for the homegrown food was evident at the harvest lunch as the young gardeners eagerly served meals to their friends. "They were proud of the fact that they had grown everything, and had made the soup," Brown says. "They really enjoyed making something to feed their friends." ¶



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Little Green Thumbs & Caledonia Growing Garden,  
Dawson Settlement







## PABINEAU FIRST NATION COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTRE

### PABINEAU FIRST NATION

In January 2013, a dozen residents of the Pabineau First Nation gathered in the local health centre amid cases of Mason jars and a freezer full of moose meat.

The residents of the small Mi'kmaq community near Bathurst had come together for the health centre's first Community Food Action seminar, a hands-on session teaching canning and preservation skills.

The grant helped fund a supply of Mason jars and a new freezer, which was then filled with moose meat donated by the chief and council. The group's first canning session saw 12 participants learn how to preserve moose meat on a typical kitchen stove. It was such a success that other canning sessions were quickly booked.

"Eventually every household who's interested in doing it will know how to bottle the meat," says Lauramae Sewell of the Community Health Centre. "It's not complicated. If you hunt your meat, your meat is free: All you need to do is buy Mason jars."

The grant has helped empower residents, Sewell says, while giving the community centre the financial flexibility to pass out food baskets over Christmas and assist elderly and low-income families.

"It's such a wonderful thing to be able to put that help into the community," Sewell says. "Winter in the Maritimes can be hard; a lot people are down and out and could use an extra hand." ¶



SUBMITTED PHOTO



## LORNE MIDDLE SCHOOL COMMUNITY FARMING PROJECT

### SAINT JOHN

A vacant lot in the heart of one of Saint John's most challenged neighbourhoods is getting a new lease on life, thanks to the Community Food Action Program. The plot of land adjacent to Lorne Middle School will soon be home to six, four-by-12-foot raised beds tended by the students and community members.

Given the location of the garden, raised beds were a must, volunteer Derrick Mitchell says.

"We did soil testing, and the results were off the charts," says Mitchell, whose day job is as a terrestrial ecologist at his environmental company, Boreal Environmental Inc. The soil in the vacant lot was rife with lead and other heavy metals; a testament to the number of buildings that have burned and fallen in the old Saint John neighbourhood, Mitchell says.


The project has mobilized students at Lorne Middle School, whose teachers are beginning to work the construction of the garden into their educational

curriculum, whether it's composting (science), planting space and area (math) or computer design skills (using free software to plot out the new garden). Most recently, students have learned how to start seeds inside for the garden, using light boxes, small spaces that provide a consistent light and heat for seedlings.

Organizers hope reclaiming this vacant space as a garden will serve as proof-of-concept for small-scale urban farming in Saint John while teaching students about a balanced diet, the concepts of sustainability and self-reliance in food production.

"We plan on involving the students in as many ways as possible," Mitchell says. "We want the kids to own this." ¶





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Lorne Middle School Community Farming Project,  
Saint John





## KINGS COUNTY FAMILY RESOURCE CENTRE

### SUSSEX

At the Kings County Family Resource Centre, a series of back to basics courses have helped families learn about eating well on a budget. But it's not only nutrition that's on the syllabus. At one class, a provincial health inspector taught parents about bacteria, cooking temperature and safe storage and handling for food.

"It's scary to see how quickly bacteria can grow in the kitchen," says director Stephanie Ness, who coordinates the non-profit public health agency.

Participants learned a variety of methods to protect their families from food-borne illnesses, from using multiple cutting surfaces to making the frozen-food aisle the last stop on a shopping trip. Each person took home a food thermometer; a small gift that makes a big impact on the household, Ness says.

"When you don't have very much money, this is the kind of thing you generally don't buy," Ness says. "One mother told me, 'The thermometer makes me feel so much better about my cooking. It takes the guessing away.'"

The Kings County Family Resource Centre serves at-risk families in the Sussex area. Many of its clients struggle with financial hardship, making it important for such courses to teach how individuals can eat well on a budget.

As its next project, the resource centre is working with a dietitian to create a booklet of recipes and cost-saving tips, most of which have been submitted by its members. The crowd-sourced book is a great way to boost community interest and participation, Ness says.

"This isn't something we're forcing on them," she adds. "It's much more comforting when it comes from your friends." ¶



## SALVATION ARMY CENTRE OF HOPE KITCHEN

### SAINT JOHN

When Jennifer Beckett asked the residents of a Saint John shelter what they thought of when they heard “fruits and vegetables,” nearly all men said the same thing: “expensive.”

“Fruits and vegetables have never been part of their life,” says Beckett, support services coordinator for the Salvation Army Centre of Hope. The men’s shelter is made up of a 40-bed special care home and a 27-bed emergency hospital. Beckett says it’s nearly always full.

Many of the men, participants in the first Centre of Hope Kitchen project, thought they couldn’t afford vegetables so never considered buying them.

With funding from the Community Food Action Program, Beckett (also a Red Seal-certified chef) created a course comprised of five units: fruit, vegetables, meats and seafoods, food safety and budgeting.

Participants learned how to buy the healthiest food available while working within their limited social assistance budget; how to identify spoilage in meats, fruits and vegetables; how to recreate their favourite fast food meals at home; and much more.

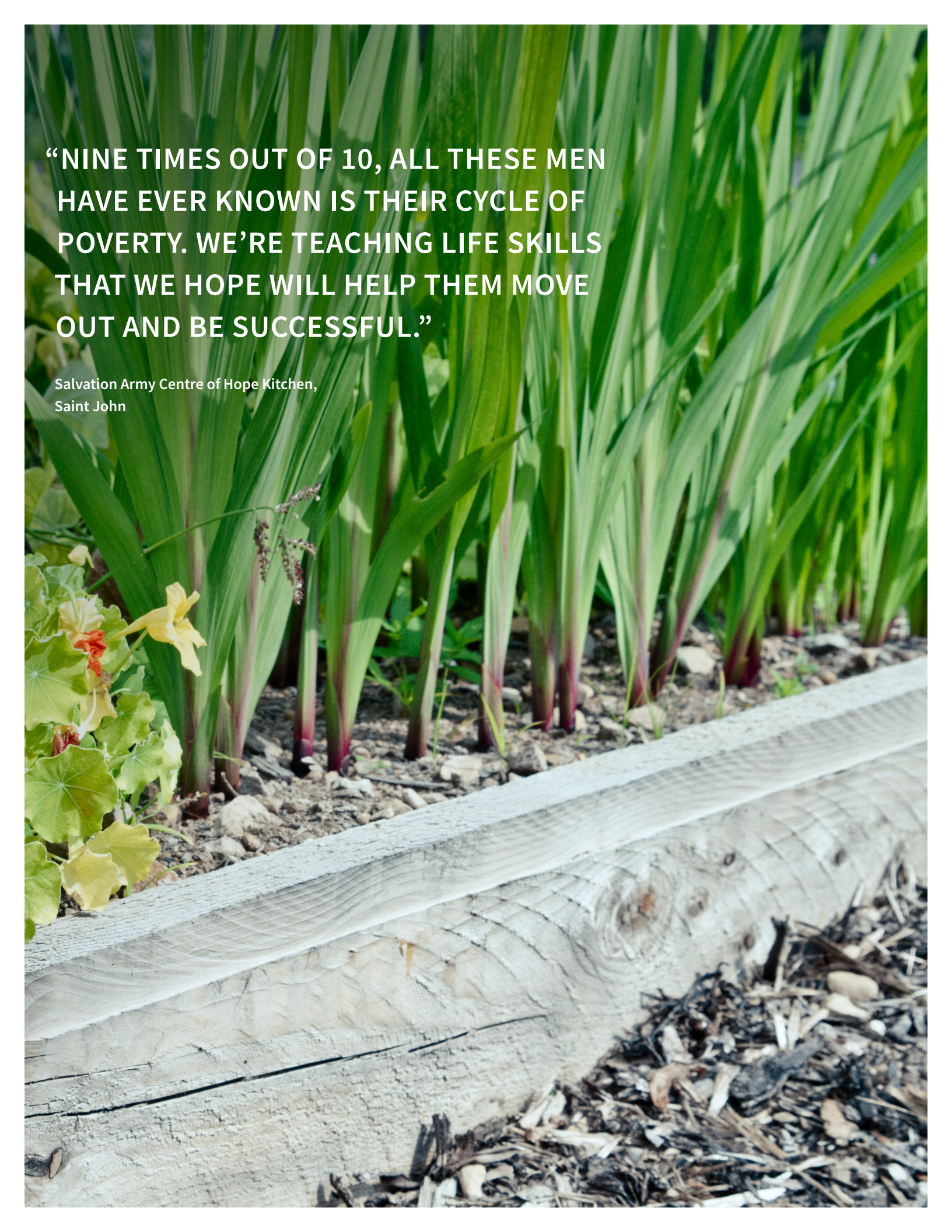
“A lot of it is stuff most of us take for granted,” Beckett says. “Nine times out of 10, all these men have ever known is their cycle of poverty.” Some have never learned the skills to cook food or care for themselves. They end up in the shelter after a broken marriage.

“After a while they’ll get out on their own, but some end up in the shelter again because they’ve never been given the right support,” she says. “We’re teaching life skills that we hope will help them move out and be successful.”

Beckett’s first class had 10 graduates; each received a certificate they can use to apply for a job in the food service industry. For their final project, the men cooked a five-course meal for shelter residents and staff, with dishes such as Boston clam chowder, stuffed portobello mushrooms, and salad greens harvested from the shelter’s community garden.

Their pride and enthusiasm was so evident that Beckett already has a waiting list for her next course. “There were at least 20 guys who thought (the course) was stupid, but when they heard what the other guys got out of it, they came up and wanted to try it too.” ¶



A photograph of a garden bed. In the foreground, a thick, light-colored wooden plank serves as a border for a raised bed. Inside the bed, there are several tall, green, sword-shaped leaves, likely from iris plants. To the left, there are some yellow and orange flowers and green foliage. The ground around the border is covered with dark mulch and some dry leaves.

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Salvation Army Centre of Hope Kitchen,  
Saint John





## SACKVILLE FRESH FOR LESS

### SACKVILLE

A food box program that brings fresh fruit and vegetables to low-income families in Sackville has grown by leaps and bounds since its launch in October 2012.

For \$15 per month, participants in the Sackville Fresh for Less program receive a monthly box of basic fresh food — potatoes, carrots, onions, apples, oranges and bananas — along with a few surprise additions, such as lettuce, broccoli, peaches or pears.

The program was created by the Sackville Food Group and is run out of the Tantramar Family Resource Centre. It is funded in part by the Community Food Action Program grant.

For low-income families, seniors and individuals, food budgets are the first to get cut when times are tight, says program coordinator Raeghann Lister. Buying in bulk gives participants greater access to fruits and vegetables than they could afford on their own.

“Our goal is to increase people’s capacity to eat better,” she says. “The more participation we have, the more food I can order.”

The Sackville Fresh for Less program launched with 12 families in October and grew to 39 boxes by April. Members are able to give input, ensuring families aren’t taking home produce they won’t use.

“Their kids are so happy,” Lister says. “One of the girls said it’s like Christmas when she takes the box home, everybody’s so excited about it.” ¶





## COOKING WITH ABILITY

### FREDERICTON

When Ability New Brunswick canvassed its clients for new programs and services the organization could offer, the answer came back loud and clear.

“People wanted to learn more about food and cooking, but they were tired of being preached at,” says executive director Haley Flaro. “They wanted something hands-on.”

With help from the Community Food Action Program, Ability New Brunswick created the Cooking with Ability seminars and held sessions in Moncton and Fredericton in May 2012.

“Whether you’re born with a disability that might compromise function, or have a spinal-cord injury or arthritis, you need to look at different ways of doing things,” Flaro says.

“Using a can opener, holding a pot or using a knife on a cutting board might not be safe and may be difficult to do. We’re looking at ways to maximize people’s abilities to their full potential.”

It’s little surprise, then, that a session on adapted devices proved to be most popular. These included cutting boards that only require one hand to use, button-operated salad spinners, weighted utensils to counteract shaking hands and one-touch can openers.

Participants who have recently lost mobility wanted to re-learn cooking skills but have been relying on caregivers and friends who may not be aware of adapted devices, Flaro says. Thanks the CFAP grant, Ability New Brunswick now has a library of kitchen tools it can show off in upcoming seminars.

A surprise hit was learning how to decorate a dinner table on a dime. Participants learned how to put together a \$5 table setting from dollar store items. “It gives people a sense of pride that they can put together a meal for a family member,” Flaro says.

Ability New Brunswick now hopes to secure funding in order to formalize its curriculum and roll out the program across the province. ¶



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**Department of Healthy  
and Inclusive Communities**

Place 2000, 250 King St.  
PO Box 6000  
Fredericton, NB E3B 5H1

Phone: (506) 453-2909  
Fax: (506) 453-6668  
Email: [hic-csi@gnb.ca](mailto:hic-csi@gnb.ca)

[www.gnb.ca/DHIC](http://www.gnb.ca/DHIC)

Stories by Sean Sullivan | Made by Elm City  
Design by The Details  
Photography by Photo 506

