



Students Elissa Marques and Laina Ostermann and teacher Kevin Lopuck from the Comp brought a youth perspective to the Vital Signs town hall.

Diverse crowd engaged, positive and passionate at Vital Signs town hall meeting

It's the early stages in the development of the Selkirk & District Community Foundation's second Vital Signs report, but a town hall meeting held Oct. 5 indicates the community is once again ready to have its pulse checked.

David Thorne, Chair of the SDCF and Co-Chair of the Vital Signs Committee along with fellow board member Brandon Sutherland, said the 110 people who came out to Memorial Hall that Saturday were engaged, enthusiastic and committed to putting in the hard work necessary to complete the report.

"The town hall was successful," Thorne said, noting during the original Vital Signs' town hall held in 2016, 70 people came out.

“It was a lot bigger group than last time, so we were quite happy with that. And it was a very diverse group. I think we’re on the right path.”

Facilitator Shirley Muir led the meeting, and asked attendees their thoughts on what improvements the communities of Selkirk, St. Andrews and St. Clements need to be the best they can be.

For Sutherland, the participation level was impressive and the day overall even more so.

“It’s not I think, it’s I know the day was remarkable,” Sutherland said.

“It was an extremely diverse group of people from our community and it was really neat to hear the great ideas to connect the people of the Tri S area. My biggest take away was that a lot of the positive ideas, the positive changes that people want to see are going to connect the people of St. Clements, St. Andrews and Selkirk on a much more in-touch point of view.

“There was a lot of conversation on a regional bus system, there was a lot of conversation on a regional support group where people can connect an issue with a not-for-profit that already does that. That was a really positive take away for me, the great ideas about connecting people.”

Thorne said the highly engaged group did their part to make the Vital Signs report a true reflection of the area.

“Understanding the strengths and challenges in the Selkirk, St. Andrews and St. Clements catchment area is the key to informed philanthropy and civic engagement. It is the goal of the Selkirk & District Community Foundation’s Vital Signs 2.0 report to collect the data, hear the voices of lived experience and listen to the experts doing the heavy lifting on the ground,” Thorne said.

“By sharing this important information, we hope to provide our community with a lens to see what is working in our area, and what needs some attention.”

Sandra Ross, Community Coordinator with United For Literacy in Manitoba, participated in the town hall, and like Thorne and Sutherland, liked the wide representation in the room.

“This was my first time participating in a Vital Signs meeting. I was impressed with the diversity of the participants and their passion for our community,” Ross said.

“I was able to hear about the important work of organizations and the unique needs of both the city and rural communities. I think this is an important process in helping to identify gaps in our community and the priority areas in need of action.”

Sutherland said the level of engagement was off the charts and you could feel how passionate people were about bettering their community.

“When there was a larger issue that was brought to the table, say a homeless shelter for example, something that’s missing in our community, there was a round of applause from people,” he said.

“Everyone was feeling and thinking the same thing, how much better, how much more resourceful our community could be if we filled in some of these blanks and some of these gaps. That just showed the sense of positivity in the room.

“It was not a day of bashing what is going on or what hasn’t been done, it was a very positive aura in that room, about ‘hey we are good right now but these are some ideas on how we can be great.’”

Kevin Lopuck, Teacher and Social Studies Department Head at the Lord Selkirk Regional Comprehensive Secondary School brought students Elissa Marques and Laina Ostermann with him to the town hall.

"As my adoptive community, I am continually impressed by the dedication of the citizens of Selkirk and district to work towards the betterment of the community. As the community continues to grow, it is important that healthy dialogue remains at the core of that growth," Lopuck said.

“As a social studies teacher, it is my priority to engage my students in sometimes challenging, but meaningful discussions about the type of community we want to live in, and I am so happy to see the Selkirk and district community continually engage in that practice.”

Ostermann said it was important to bring a youth perspective to the town hall.

“We felt that youth are underrepresented at these events, and we wanted to help change that. It is important for all generations to get together to communicate and understand each other,” she said.

Marques agreed.

“Events like these are important so the needs and ambitions of the community can be adjusted and met for everyone,” she said.

For Thorne, their presence is vital to making the report complete and the committee will do more to make sure that generation has its say.

“I think it’s important to capture all people within the catchment area and it’s not just whoever’s comfortable to speak. We definitely want to hear from the youth, so we’re lining up smaller groups within the Lord Selkirk School Division, and the PASS (Promoting Aboriginal Student Success) program,” Thorne said.

Beyond that, he said the committee will endeavour to meet with any group that prefers to participate in a more private way.

“I think it’s important to give everybody a voice. The whole Vital Signs committee, right from the get-go, identified that as a priority and something that we didn’t really do last Vital Signs,” Thorne said.

“We’re looking at meeting with several different groups one-on-one and in very small settings.”