



Tantramar COVID-19 Task Force

Press Release

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Tantramar community pulls together to support friends, neighbours during challenging times

Tantramar COVID-19 Task Force connecting residents with available support, resources

Community taking care of community. That has been how the Tantramar region has responded over the past few months as the uncertainty and anxiety of COVID-19 has taken over much of our daily lives.

A group of dedicated and community-minded volunteers, who have come together under the umbrella of the Tantramar COVID-19 Task Force (TCTF), have stepped up to identify critical needs and provide support for residents during these challenging times.

From food security efforts to mental health services to business assistance, the task force volunteers are working hard to ensure everyone has access to the support they need and to get the message out they are here to help.

“The task force has been instrumental in connecting individuals and organizations that have resources with those who are in need of resources, which has been our goal from the start,” said Carolle de Ste-Croix from Port Elgin, who is co-chairing the TCTF along with David McKellar of Westcock.

“By identifying resources and assets in our region, we have been able to provide current information on where to address issues related to food security and mental health services” she added.

The task force was initially established by Memramcook-Tantramar MLA Megan Mitton, the mayors of Dorchester, Port Elgin and Sackville, the Chief of Fort Folly First Nations, and also includes representation from the surrounding local service districts. De Ste-Croix points out this has allowed for a solid collaboration with all levels of government, and has also resulted in government representatives coming on board to provide support and their expertise to the TCTF.

McKellar believes the task force is also playing a key role in helping to put a Tantramar-wide infrastructure system in place that is likely to endure long after the coronavirus pandemic has died down.

The task force is broken up into several action groups, focusing on aspects such as business and the economy, mental and physical health, food security, financial and legal, youth and student services, and more.

Food Security

Shayne Mann, who is co-chairing the Food Security Action Group with Jessica Hughes, said his group has been collaborating with organizations and groups in the Tantramar area to identify the various levels of need in the local communities and to help ensure families and individuals are getting the access they need during the pandemic.

Mann said the region is fortunate to have knowledgeable and long standing groups, such as those who operate the food banks and the school breakfast programs, who quickly stepped up to respond to the changing and growing needs caused by COVID.

He said provincial organizations like Food For All NB have also kept the task force informed on food security matters at the provincial and national level so “we have access to up-to-date information about funding and programming to support our local efforts.”

And there are also new groups like Community Food Smart who are helping families stretch their dollar further by offering bulk food purchasing, as well as initiatives through the United Way that are helping some individuals gain access to pre-made meals.

“I am so heartened to see how groups have so quickly responded to the needs of people that they have identified as needing food or deliveries and how residents have supported these groups without even being asked,” said Mann. “We are fortunate to live in an area where people take care of each other just because it’s part of who they are.”

To ensure people are made aware of the available programs and services, the action committee has created a flyer to highlight services in the Tantramar region. This has not only helped people filter easier through the abundance of content, but has also offered a way to let people without internet access know about these supports.

Mann said working together to streamline services and coordinate regional efforts has allowed the group to identify needs that may have otherwise been missed. He said community members of all ages and all backgrounds have rallied together to find innovative solutions to both the short- and long-term food security issues residents are facing in these unprecedented times. He is hopeful when “we return to our new normal, we will not forget about what we've seen and what changes we still need to make.”

Tackling Mental Health Challenges

The Mental Health Action Group, led by Margaret Tusz-King and Pat Estabrooks, is a wide-ranging team of 17 mental health counsellors, teachers and service providers, as well as citizens from around the Tantramar region.

Their task from the get-go has been to identify mental health needs in the region, to summarize the various resources available, and to offer solutions for the issues identified.

Tusz-King said one key factor that has become noticeable throughout the past few weeks since this action group was established has been that any mental health needs or concerns that existed before the pandemic – such as issues relating to outcomes for at-risk youth, addiction, intimate partner violence, among others – have only been exacerbated or more exposed because of the current circumstances.

Estabrooks said the teachers and school counsellors have been the best sources for identifying the needs of students and families. Throughout the pandemic period, they have been providing counselling services, calling and connecting with students, and monitoring their well-being.

“It is remarkable that, even after a full week of dedicated service under difficult circumstances, they are still willing to contribute even more through the Mental Health Action Group,” said Estabrooks.

The action group is also concerned about senior citizens and other folks who may be living in isolation. Estabrooks said getting them the information and supports they need is a challenge but is one of the priorities of their group.

The well-being of Mount Allison University students and front-line workers, the safety of at-risk youth and families, and the longer-term implications of financial stresses are additional concerns.

A mental health resources flyer is in the works and will soon be distributed so residents will know more about the resources available locally.

“COVID-19 isolation is not pleasant. But when we see the number of volunteers we have, and their desire to keep people safe and well-looked after, we think we live in a wonderful part of New Brunswick,” said Estabrooks. “To each and every one of the volunteers, thank you.”

Youth support

The Youth and Students Action Group is one of the most recent committees to be established and has been meeting weekly to address youth-specific needs in the Tantramar region. While the group's focus has been primarily on job security, food security and mental health, it is prepared to tackle any other challenges that may arise.

“We sincerely hope that our efforts will give Tantramar’s youth and students some hope during these challenging times, and remind them that they’re being accounted for,” said Mount Allison student Hannah Ehler, who is co-leading the group with Tantramar Regional High School student Bergen Fraser.

Consisting of about 15 volunteers, the group knows the important role youth play in the area and are looking to support them, both in the short-and long-term. A needs assessment will be launched shortly and will be distributed to as many students and youth in the area as possible.

Potential projects could also include initiatives to connect high school and university students through art, offering resume-building and interview insights, and developing youth employment and volunteer opportunities.

“Our goal is to inform youth about the situation, but more importantly to give our youth hope and a sense of opportunity during this time,” said Fraser

For more information or to reach out to the Tantramar Covid-19 Task Force, check out the group's Facebook page, Instagram, email enquiry.tctf@gmail.com or phone (506) 501-8445 or (506) 939-4186.



Local MLA Megan Mitton, left, works with volunteers with the Tantramar Community Food Smart program during a recent packing day. PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

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