

Neighbourhoods seek own solutions

Some neighbourhoods have negative reputations. Sometimes the label is warranted, sometimes it isn't. Sometimes stereotypes persist long after their shelf life has expired, and that creates resentment.

There are two ways to respond to notoriety: defensively or constructively.

The defensive way is to deny there's a problem, circle the wagons and shoot the messenger. The constructive way is to acknowledge the problem, seek solutions and be open to help and advice from outsiders.

Spryfield is the latest troubled HRM community to turn to the constructive way. Crime and economic decline are Spryfield's perceived problems. But the value of a community amounts to more than the sum of its woes.

A United Way program called Action for Neighbourhood Change seeks ways to improve the perception and reality of Spryfield. With the help of a \$250,000 federal grant, the program gathered information from Spryfield residents about their community.

Some responses were defensive, and that's understandable. Few people, or communities, readily accept stigmatization.

But the responses did acknowledge the difficulties Spryfield faces. The people with whom program organizers spoke have progressed beyond denial.

Now, the program is inviting residents to develop a vision and plan for their community. With initiative from within and assistance from outside, Spryfield can turn itself around and leave the stereotypes behind.

It won't be easy. But it can be done.

Other HRM communities are taking the constructive path, though they are not part of Action for Neighbourhood Change.

Police and residents in the Gottingen Street area - often at odds with each other in the past - have met, searching for ways to replace confrontation with co-operation. As well, people in north-end Dartmouth have banded together to combat street crime and other difficulties.

Grassroots activism can accomplish a great deal. It deserves our support.