

[Business Leaders Have a Million-Dollar Idea to Help Children and Families](#)

Jan 26, 2018 by [Cherise Letson](#)



From left to right: Dave Veale, Wayne Chamberlain, Stephen Foster, Kevin Belyea, Rosalyn Mcfate-Hyslop and Blair Hyslop. Image: Cherise Letson/Huddle.

SAINT JOHN – A group of businesses in Southwestern New Brunswick has a million-dollar idea to help improve the lives of the region’s children and families.

[The Million Dollar Pledge](#) aims to have at least 10 local businesses commit \$10,000 a year for 10 years, which adds up to \$1 million or more. [The United Way Saint John, Kings & Charlotte](#) will help them figure out how and where to invest the funds. The United Way works with charities and organizations on how to address pressing social issues like child poverty, violence against children, and low workforce participation.

Seven local businesses have pledged a total of \$700,000 so far: [Hemmings House Pictures](#), [InteliSys](#), [Mrs. Dunster’s](#), [Spartan Systems](#), [Teed Saunders Doyle](#) and [Vision Coaching](#).

The initiative was launched by Blair Hyslop, co-owner of Mrs. Dunster’s, and Dave Veale, founder and owner of Vision Coaching.

“Nobody is proud of the statistics in the community around child poverty, around violence against girls, around literacy,” said Hyslop. “There’s a high level of awareness out there with small business owners in particular who really want to give and help solve the problem but they don’t know how.”

It’s not just about providing much-needed funds, says Hyslop. They will also lend their expertise and time to the causes they support.

“The idea is to get the businesses together, let’s not worry about the ‘how.’ Let’s lean into the United Way in terms of their vetting process and due diligence around making sure we get a good return on that investment,” said Hyslop. “Then our focus as businesses can be on how we can engage our employees, our customers and ourselves in helping to solve the problems in our own backyard.”

Veale says what makes The Million Dollar Pledge different from other forms of corporate giving is that it gives businesses an active role in where the money goes, as well as seeing the direct impact their donations are having.

“The thing that’s resonating with people is it’s not just an ask,” said Veale. “You are pledging \$10,000 a year, but I think what’s appealing to a lot of business owners is that you get a seat at the table in terms of having a conversation about where that money is invested. You get to see the outcomes these agencies are having and we get to invest the money where we think it’s going to have the biggest social impact and return on investment in that context.

“It’s not just looking for you to write a cheque. We want you to engage in the conversations that we’re having. We want you to help see what agencies are doing in the community. We want to support the ones with the best outcomes. There’s a lot of agencies doing a lot of great work and if they had a little bit more support, they’d be able to replicate those outcomes.”

Wendy McDermott, executive director of United Way Saint John, Kings & Charlotte, says the initiative will not only bring new funds to the charities they support but new ideas and insight and how they can do more.

“What got people more excited was, ‘how can we as business leaders think about how to scale a program that’s really effective and helps 20 women right now? How do we scale that and help 100?’” said McDermott.

“How do we bring some of those business ideas into the non-profits and help them achieve what may not be what they’re best at because they’re best at helping people. That’s what I think is what’s going to be really fun and exciting.”