

Community Conversation on Poverty Reduction Monday, July 14, 2008 ~ Report Summary

*'I sat with a lady tonight and by 6:45 we both knew we'd agree on nothing.
By 8:45, we'd agreed on quite a bit! The joys of conversation, the joys of crossing silos!'*

Report Overview

On Monday, July 14, 2008, the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction and Hamilton-area Members of Provincial Parliament convened a Community Conversation on Poverty Reduction. Attended by more than 200 community members representing business, government, voluntary sector and citizens, this report details the conversation, presentations and key themes generated from table discussions. This report will be shared with the local community through the HRPR website (www.hamiltonpoverty.ca) and distributed to Hamilton-area Members of Provincial Parliament, the Cabinet Committee on Poverty Reduction for the Government of Ontario and to members of the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction.

Community Presentation Themes

Youth Engagement and Action In Hamilton: Youth want to take action on creating community solutions on issues like poverty. Youth need to be included at planning tables with groups. Youth engagement must be a critical component of a poverty reduction strategy.

Hamilton's Centre for Civic Inclusion: The visible minority and new immigrant community is impacted more deeply by poverty and that this is called the racialization of poverty. A poverty reductions strategy must create legislation to remove the barriers to accreditation and employment. It was also noted that the Employment Standards Act needs to be revised to better support temporary and insecure employment positions providing them with more protection in the work place.

Residential Care Facility Tenants: An increase in the personal needs allowance for a residential care tenant is needed. The current allowance is not sufficient to provide for even the most basic needs and is set against a rising cost of living. An inventory of basic needs was taken and a minimum of \$180 per month is estimated.

Hamilton Injured Workers Group: In 2007-08 a cost of living adjustment was included in payments to injured workers and the Hamilton group advocates for continuing cost of living adjustments which reflect real increasing costs faced by injured workers. Many injured workers are never fully compensated following an injury and as a result are required to live in conditions of poverty.

Ontario Child Benefit Committee: The Ontario Child Benefit is a new program which has changed benefits for low income families including the withdrawal of separate payments for a back to school and winter clothing allowance – these are now included in the OCB. Additional funding to support the return of the back to school and winter clothing allowances for families on social assistance.

Aboriginal Issues: More than 44% of the Aboriginal community lives below the low income cut-off and 20% are considered to be homeless. An Ontario Poverty Strategy must focus on those groups most deeply impacted. .

Table Conversations focusing on a Poverty Reduction Strategy for Ontario

- *What ideas could be incorporated into existing government supports that would increase opportunities for children and their families living in poverty?*

Policies and Individuals: Funding based on the complexity of needs of individuals living with low or limited incomes, policies should be flexible and be respectful of the individual's dignity and policies should be audited with a focus on decreasing the barriers in policies which keep people in poverty

Social Assistance Benefits: Social assistance rates should reflect the real housing, food, transportation and personal costs faced by individuals and families and social assistance policies should not be a barrier for families to succeed

Investing in Children and Youth: Early childhood investments and access to child care are critical investments

Education: School systems require additional investments so that all children can participate equally – pizza days, school trips, school pictures, student placements and co-operative education, etc

Youth: Education is a bridge to prosperity for children and youth - Skills and education = employment opportunities = improved earning potential = reduced poverty = prosperity for our community

Employment Supports: Broader action and legislations is needed to change thinking from minimum wage to living wage and enhanced and proactive training supports for low-wage workers to level the playing field in accessing the changing work force needs, transportation – reduce transit costs

Health: Access to health services focused on low income neighbourhoods would increase the health outcomes for families

Integration and Access to Services: Mapping of all existing government and private agencies to streamline policy decision, recognizing that local issues require a local solution and the creation of flexible, accountable and integrated systems

New Immigrants: Increased supports for new immigrants while they search for work, and developing policies and strategies which recognize credentials of foreign trained professional and enhance workforce integration

Housing: Housing programs – co-ops, hostels to homes, etc – need to be extended and increased , and restrictions in access to social housing decreased, budget management programs for social housing tenants

Neighbourhoods/Community: Recognition of the importance of neighbourhoods as community hubs and the role that community outreach workers/support workers play in neighbourhoods in connecting people to programs at the neighbourhood level

- ***What actions and measures do you think will best show progress in improving opportunity for Ontarians living in poverty?***

The participants in the Hamilton conversation on poverty reduction identified a wide variety of measure which can be grouped under the following themes: collaboration and integration of programs and services, community engagement – particularly low income engagement, access to programs for children, education levels and results, new immigrants employment, policy change, increase in income levels and financial stability, workforce participation, access to health and improvement in quality of life, and affordable housing.

Next Steps

The results of the Hamilton community conversation on poverty reduction will be shared with Hamilton-area Members of Provincial Parliament and members of the Cabinet Committee on Poverty Reduction. The report will be posted on the www.hamiltonpoverty.ca website and distributed to participants. The information generated through the community conversation will inform the work and direction of the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction.

For the complete **Community Conversation on Poverty Reduction Report** visit www.hamiltonpoverty.ca or contact the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction ~ 905-523-5600 ext 222