

TACKLING POVERTY in HAMILTON *We can do it!*

Friday, February 10, 2006

For Immediate Release

NOTE TO MEDIA:

The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction is making a presentation this morning to the City of Hamilton's Committee of the Whole, followed by public delegations about poverty in Hamilton. The meeting takes place at City Hall from 9:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Anti-Poverty Initiative to Focus on Prevention in Children and Youth

An ambitious four-year community plan to tackle poverty in Hamilton will begin with a focus on preventing poverty in children and youth.

"The research and consultation we've carried out over the past few months suggest that a preventative approach for young people is a good place to start," says Carolyn Milne, president and CEO of Hamilton Community Foundation and co-convenor of the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction. "Poverty issues are very complex; we believe beginning with this focus will give the best outcomes."

Co-convenor Joe-Anne Priel, general manager, Community Services at the City of Hamilton, says the roundtable has found widespread community concern about Hamilton's poverty level – the highest in Ontario – and widespread support for an initiative aimed at reducing and preventing poverty.

"We're finding that people really understand that the city's poverty rate directly affects everyone's quality of life, and that it has long-term implications for health care needs, economic development and our overall prosperity."

Over the past few months, the roundtable has developed a better understanding of the complexity of poverty issues in the community. As a result, the four-year community plan, with strategies to reduce and prevent poverty, is now expected by late spring 2006 rather than by the end of January 2006, as originally anticipated.

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Co-convenors:



The plan's emphasis on children and youth will include other target groups with higher-than-average incidences of poverty: visible minorities, people with disabilities, aboriginal people and recent immigrants.

Young people in Hamilton are even more likely to live in poverty than adults: approximately one in four, or 25,000 youth under 18 years of age, live below the poverty line. The depth of family poverty is profound: 42 per cent of lone-parent poor families and 38 per cent of couple-led poor families are surviving on less than half the Low Income Cut-Off (LICO). For a lone-parent family with one child, this is an annual income of about \$10,000 before taxes.

Consultation documents from the last five years, as well as a series of community engagement sessions held by the roundtable in fall 2005, have consistently highlighted the needs of children and youth.

"Beginning with this focus allows us to look at the root causes of poverty, and identify changes and strategies that will make a long-term difference," Ms. Priel says.

"As a community, we've said Hamilton's poverty rate of 20 per cent is unacceptable," says Mark Chamberlain, chair of the roundtable. "We're taking a collaborative approach because no one sector can solve the poverty problem on its own. This is the first time in Hamilton's history that we're joining forces as a community to tackle poverty."

The *Tackling Poverty in Hamilton* initiative began in spring 2005 with the formation of the roundtable, a multi-sector collaboration with representation from business, education, government and agencies. Research, community consultation and engagement took place in summer and fall, and a Low Income Advisory Committee was formed to provide input to the roundtable. A web site, www.hamiltonpoverty.ca, has been established and a Community Update newsletter launched to provide progress reports.

Funding to support the planning phase has been provided by Hamilton Community Foundation and the City of Hamilton, along with donations from private sector members of the roundtable: Dofasco, Pictorvision and Turkstra Lumber.

-30-

For more information, please contact Carolyn Milne, co-convener, Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, and president and CEO, Hamilton Community Foundation, at 905-523-5600, or c.milne@hcf.on.ca.

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BACKGROUND

Tackling Poverty in Hamilton

Poverty Facts

- Hamilton has one of Ontario's highest levels of poverty.
- According to Statistics Canada, 95,370, or almost 20 per cent of Hamilton residents are living on incomes below the poverty line – enough people to fill Copps Coliseum five times.
- Approximately 25 per cent of Hamilton's young people up to 18 years of age live in poverty.
- From 1990 to 2000, the wealthiest 40 per cent of Hamilton's population experienced an increase in their average incomes, while the poorest 60 per cent had an overall decrease in theirs.
- More than 15,000 people in Hamilton visit food banks every month.
- The definition of poverty is directly linked to income, but it goes beyond that. Living in poverty is also linked to lack of opportunities and choices.
- In the short term, poverty means having to make tough decisions such as paying the rent versus buying food.
- In the long term, poverty is associated with health problems and a lower life expectancy.

Progress of Initiative

- Throughout the fall, eleven engagement sessions were held with groups representing various sectors in Hamilton. Roundtable representatives also met with groups and individuals, including politicians and community leaders.
- Research was conducted into the size and scope of Hamilton's poverty challenge and a number of educational documents were produced (Project Overview, Quick Facts, Learning from Previous Community Consultations and Investing in Social Development).
- A Low Income Advisory Committee was formed, providing a forum for individuals affected by poverty to provide input to the roundtable.
- The Hamilton Spectator, whose editor-in-chief is a member of the roundtable, committed to making poverty a priority area for news coverage and commentary over three years.
- A public/private partnership for a social housing project has been formed, led by two roundtable members.
- An academic research network to support the initiative has come together with membership from Mohawk College, McMaster University and Redeemer University College.