

TACKLING POVERTY in HAMILTON *We can do it!*

February 10, 2006

Community Update

Welcome to the first issue of *Community Update*, a newsletter to be published over the next few months by the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction. *Community Update* will report on the progress of our city-wide initiative to prevent and reduce poverty in Hamilton, and to rally support for it.

We welcome your questions and comments. Please contact Paul Johnson, project director, at 905-523-5600, or p.johnson@hcf.on.ca.

Background

Tackling Poverty in Hamilton began in May 2005 when Hamilton Community Foundation (HCF) teamed up with the City of Hamilton to launch a community response to Hamilton's most pressing problem – its crushing poverty rate of 20 per cent. The roundtable - a group with community members and representatives from business, education, government and agencies – was formed and is co-chaired by representatives from the City of Hamilton and HCF.

What's Happening Now?

For the first time in Hamilton's history, people from across the community and from every sector are joining forces to tackle poverty. 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.

A Starting Point: Children and Youth

Research and consultation carried out by the roundtable suggests a good starting point for the community plan is to focus on preventing poverty in children and youth.

Young people in Hamilton are even more likely to live in poverty than adults: 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 in Hamilton 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.

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.

Within the overall goal of preventing and reducing poverty in Hamilton, a preventative focus for children and youth emphasizes tackling the root causes of poverty to help break the low-income cycle and make a long-term difference.

Web Site Launched

Looking for more information about Tackling Poverty in Hamilton? In addition to contacting project director Paul Johnson, you can go to www.hamiltonpoverty.ca. You'll find details on the planning process, who's involved, educational documents about poverty in Hamilton, media updates, this newsletter, and more. You can also send us your question or comments by e-mail.

The Plan Development Phase

The roundtable spent the summer and fall reviewing past research relating to poverty issues, conducting new research and engaging with the community to fully understand the impact of poverty and to identify possible solutions.

Hamilton linked with "Vibrant Communities," a national movement to reduce poverty in communities across Canada. Best practices used in other communities to reduce poverty were reviewed by the roundtable.

A number of "engagement sessions" were held with groups representing various community sectors in Hamilton. Community-wide support was committed to the *Tackling Poverty in Hamilton* initiative as a result of these sessions.

A Low Income Advisory Committee was created to provide a forum for people affected by poverty in their own lives to provide input to the roundtable and help develop strategies to prevent and reduce poverty.

Poverty Roundtable Members

- Marcel Castura, Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board
- Mark Chamberlain, HCF Board of Directors (Chair)
- Tom Cooper, McQuesten Legal & Community Services
- Renate Davidson, HCF Board of Directors
- John Dolbec, Hamilton Chamber of Commerce
- Bill Gair, Dofasco
- Dr. Lindsey George, St. Joseph's Healthcare
- Peter Hutton, Hamilton Social Justice Coalition
- Don Jaffray, Social Planning and Research Council
- Wayne Marston, Hamilton & District Labour Council (resigned January 2006)
- Brian McHattie, Ward One Councilor, City of Hamilton
- Carolyn Milne, Hamilton Community Foundation
- Brian Mullan, Hamilton Police Service
- Joe-Anne Priel, City of Hamilton
- Dr. Elizabeth Richardson, City of Hamilton
- Ines Rios, St. Joseph's Immigrant Women's Centre
- Dana Robbins, The Hamilton Spectator
- Dr. Leila Ryan, McMaster University
- Darrel Skidmore, United Way of Burlington and Greater Hamilton
- Dr. Chris Spence, Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board
- Carl Turkstra, Turkstra Lumber
- Steve Varey, Scotiabank
- Dr. Gary Warner, McMaster University
- Liz Weaver, YWCA