

TACKLING POVERTY in HAMILTON *We can do it!*

June 21, 2006

MEDIA UPDATE

Poverty Action Plan to Make Hamilton “Best Place to Raise a Child”

Hamilton’s anti-poverty initiative is entering a new phase, with the launch of a comprehensive report that will serve as the vision and strategic direction for the development of a community-wide action plan. A full-time project director has also been hired.

A community session to both review the report, “*Making Hamilton the Best Place to Raise a Child: A Change Framework for Poverty Reduction*” and begin developing the action plan is set for Friday, June 23 from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at the Hamilton Convention Centre. Approximately 200 representatives from business, education, government, research, health, and the voluntary sector as well as persons living in poverty will be in attendance.

The Change Framework report outlines the work of the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction to date and the vision for a community-based approach to prevent and reduce poverty, with a focus on children and youth.

“We are at a very important milestone in the work of the roundtable,” says chair Mark Chamberlain. “Our Change Framework outlines our vision for Hamilton and the goal of making Hamilton the best place to raise a child. Over the next six months an action plan with specific strategies will be developed to reduce poverty in children and youth. That plan will be based on activities and results that the community will identify.

“We need to break down silos and approach the problem of poverty as a community, not as a single agency, organization or funding body,” Mr. Chamberlain said. “Friday’s session is our first step in defining, as a community, what it means to have Hamilton become the best place to raise a child.”

Mr. Chamberlain said the hiring of full-time project director Liz Weaver, former CEO of the YWCA, is a critical step in entering this new phase. “Liz has an incredible track record of bringing people together to effect positive community change. Our approach to reducing and preventing poverty is focused on the community taking ownership of the issue and Liz will be a key figure in making that happen over the next four years.”

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“This initiative is groundbreaking for us as a city, and I am very excited at the opportunity to provide leadership,” Liz Weaver says. “A lot has been accomplished so far, and the next six months will see us define, as a community, how we can make a sustainable difference in preventing and reducing poverty in children and youth. We’ll put the vision into action.”

Mr. Chamberlain praised the work of the former project director Paul Johnson, who was seconded from his post as executive director at Wesley Urban Ministries to lead the staff support team for the start-up phase of the initiative. “Paul did a very important job for us and we are grateful that he was able to stay with the project for the first year,” he said.

The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction was formed in May 2005 as a multi-sector collaboration with representation from business, education, government and agencies.

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For more information, please contact Liz Weaver, Project Director, Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, at 905-523-5600, extension 58, or lizweaver@hcf.on.ca.

Media are welcome to attend Friday’s session at the Convention Centre, or arrive at 12:30 for interviews following the session. Telephone interviews can also be arranged. Copies of the report, “Making Hamilton the Best Place to Raise a Child: A Change Framework for Poverty Reduction” are available on Friday, June 23.

Backgrounder attached. For additional information, please go to www.hamiltonpoverty.ca.

BACKGROUND

Tackling Poverty in Hamilton

Progress of Initiative

- The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction was established in May 2005. Since that time, a comprehensive research and community engagement was completed, leading to the decision that the initial focus of the four-year community plan would be on the prevention and reduction of poverty in children and youth.
- Within the framework of focusing on children and youth, the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction has identified what it calls “critical points of investment” that organizations and our community need to make to combat poverty from birth through adulthood. These include such things as ensuring universal access to high quality early learning and child care, the building of skills through education, providing access to activity and recreation, gaining employment, helping people to build financial assets, and developing strong and vibrant neighbourhoods.
- As the initiative progressed, it became apparent that a broader, community-wide collaboration was necessary to develop both a shared vision for Hamilton and an understanding of how to work “across silos” to achieve a sustainable difference. The collaborative approach is seen as fundamental to the development of the action plan and is captured in the “*Making Hamilton the Best Place to Raise a Child – A Change Framework for Poverty Reduction*” report.
- From June to December 2006, the roundtable will develop an action plan based on agreed-upon outcomes for each stage of investment in children and youth, a business plan outlining the long-term infrastructure requirements and cost of a “community support organization” to provide leadership for the change effort. An evaluation framework will also be developed.

Liz Weaver Biography

- Most recently, Liz Weaver served as CEO of the YWCA, an organization serving 60,000 members and clients annually.
- Prior to joining the YWCA, Liz provided leadership to Volunteer Hamilton, Bay Area Leadership and Volunteer Canada.
- She was awarded a Queen’s Jubilee Medal in 2002 for her leadership in the voluntary sector and in 2004 was awarded the Women in the Workplace Award from the City of Hamilton.

Poverty Facts

For facts and figures about poverty in Hamilton, please go to www.hamiltonpoverty.ca.