

TACKLING POVERTY in HAMILTON *We can do it!*

March 15, 2006

Community Update

City Hall Presentations “Put Face on Poverty”

Living in poverty can mean feeling worthless in a society that prizes material success, focusing on basic survival instead of participating in community life, and feeling defeated when city bus fares are increased.

These were some of the challenges of living below the poverty line, shared with Hamilton’s city council at a February 10 Committee of the Whole meeting – a special session that involved almost four hours of presentations about the impact of the city’s poverty challenge and how the community is mobilizing to do something about it.

“There is a groundswell of support, interest and commitment that has never been tapped before in this community and now there is no turning back,” Carolyn Milne, president and CEO of Hamilton Community Foundation, and co-convener of the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, told councillors.

Council members paid close attention as representatives of the roundtable and others from a variety of sectors were joined by individuals living with low incomes to put a face on poverty in Hamilton. Almost 30 presentations were made.

“This was a day when we put a face on poverty in this city,” said Joe-Anne Priel, co-convener and general manager of Community Services for the City of Hamilton, following the presentations.

The day included an announcement of the roundtable’s decision to emphasize the prevention and reduction of poverty in children and youth in its forthcoming community plan.

Progress Report From the Roundtable

Exploring “Critical Points of Investment”

The four-year community plan to prevent and reduce poverty is taking shape. Within the framework of focusing on children and youth, the roundtable 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; building skills through education, activity, recreation and employment; helping people build financial assets, and developing strong and vibrant neighbourhoods.

“These are investment opportunities - not just financial investments but also community investments in new ways of working together,” says Mark Chamberlain, chair of the roundtable. “In March the roundtable is inviting input from community people who are experts in areas relevant to the points of investment. It’s the second phase of our community engagement.”

The next roundtable meeting will be held April 7. The community plan is expected to be launched in late spring.

Advertising for Permanent Staff

The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction is building a staff team that will be responsible for implementing the four-year community plan. A recruitment plan is under development, with advertisements for a project director to be placed in local media by the end of March.

Hamilton Community Foundation will continue to house roundtable staff at its offices on King Street West.

Mayor Lauds Poverty Progress at Conference

The work of the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction was praised by Mayor Larry Di Ianni in his remarks at the Power Conference on February 24.

The conference is held annually to identify and vote for ideas aimed at improving the city. The top idea selected at last year’s conference was to address Hamilton’s poverty challenge.

The mayor spoke of the formation of the roundtable, a joint initiative between Hamilton Community Foundation and the City of Hamilton, as a key step in combating “the curse of poverty in our midst.”

The mayor also spoke of other municipal efforts relating to poverty prevention and reduction, such as creating affordable housing, expanding recreational programs for seniors and pre-school children, establishing a career development centre, and the ongoing negotiation with the Government of Ontario for adequate social service funding. “We must remain committed to the task at hand. We can’t do this alone – each and every one of us must be part of the solution.”

News and Resources

Looking for more information about the *Tackling Poverty in Hamilton* initiative? Don’t forget that we now have a web site: www.hamiltonpoverty.ca. You’ll find current news as well as background information and resources.

Hamilton’s poverty initiative is now featured on the Tamarack Institute/Vibrant Communities web site. Check out www.tamarackcommunity.ca and click on Vibrant Communities.

The 2005 Ontario Report Card on Child Poverty reveals some sobering statistics on the number of children and youth living in poverty in our province, including the fact that the child poverty rate is stalled at 16 per cent despite strong economic growth. The average low income family is living about \$10,000 below the poverty line, and poverty rates for children in aboriginal, visible minority, and immigrant families are at least twice the average Ontario rate. An initiative called Campaign 2000 is calling on the provincial government to commit to an Ontario Action Plan for Children. For more information, go to our www.hamiltonpoverty.ca web site and click on the link for Campaign 2000.

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