
The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction
Sector Engagement Session Report

The Centre for Community Study (CCS) is a Hamilton-based, not-for-profit organization focused on the research, development, and implementation of public policy.

The Centre contributes to sound decision-making through targeted research and communication strategies which facilitate dialogue between municipalities, their citizens, and senior levels of government.

For more information, please visit our website at www.communitystudy.ca or contact:

Centre for Community Study
200 James St. S
Suite 300
Hamilton, Ontario
L8P 3A9
Tel: 905.528.5607

Email: info@communitystudy.ca

Table of Contents

	Page
1.0 Background	1
2.0 Methodology	2
3.0 Findings	3
3.1 Priorities	3
3.2 Sector Strengths and Limitations	5
3.3 Solutions and Strategies	6
3.3.1 Children, Youth and Families	7
3.3.2 Education and Skills Development	8
3.3.3 Affordable Housing	9
3.3.4 Living Wage and Employment Supports	9
3.3.5 Community Development	10
3.4 Key Messages	10
4.0 Analysis	11
4.1 Communication	11
4.2 Change	12
4.3 Capacity	13
5.0 Conclusion	14
6.0 Appendix A	15

1.0 Background

In an effort to tackle one of Hamilton's greatest challenges, individuals from all parts of the community have come together in a collaboration to eliminate poverty in our city through the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction (HRPR). The HRPR is currently in the development stage of its community plan to reduce and eliminate poverty. One component of the development stage was a community engagement process with different groups representing four main sectors in Hamilton (business, government, non-profit / voluntary agencies, and individuals affected by poverty). Through these engagement meetings, the HRPR facilitated a discussion to share ideas, and to become informed about possible solutions and strategies for reducing poverty in Hamilton.

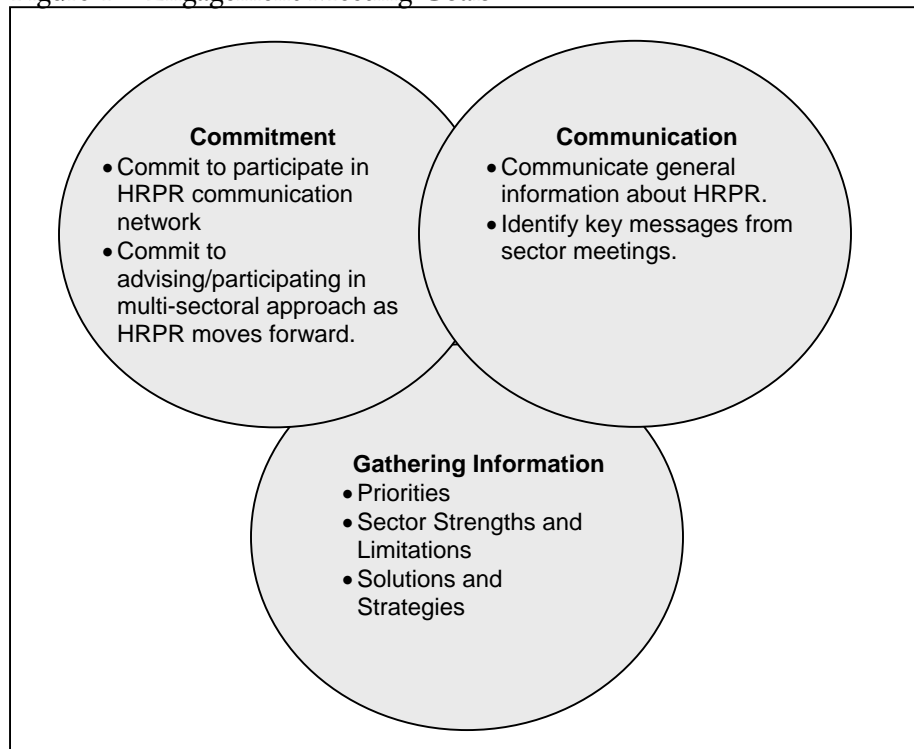
The Centre for Community Study (CCS) has been working with the HRPR to assist with the facilitation of the sessions and to compile the information that resulted. The information gathered from these meetings contributes to other ongoing efforts of the HRPR and its staff to determine key areas of focus for the community plan. The engagement sessions were valuable in affirming some existing knowledge, but also in clarifying where there are links that can be formed between different sectors around certain ideas and solutions for poverty reduction.

This report synthesizes the data presented throughout the sessions. The first section of the paper will explain the methodology used in structuring how information was gathered in the engagement meetings. This is followed by a review of key findings from the sessions and an analysis that expands on certain key themes that arose in the sessions. Finally, the report concludes with some points to consider as the Roundtable moves forward in developing the community action plan.

2.0 Methodology

The planning of the engagement process began with establishing goals for the session meetings. Three interrelated goals were established; communicating to a broader segment of the population, gathering information about poverty reduction from meeting participants, and seeking a commitment for continued involvement in the Roundtable's process (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 – Engagement Meeting Goals



In an attempt to fulfill these three goals, the HRPR team designed four general theme areas that the questions for the sessions would follow. The meetings tended to be structured in two ways, for the larger groups, the sessions were more structured, following a pattern of questions. For small groups, sessions were less structured and flowed more as a discussion around the general themes. There was consistency in both types of sessions, but the questions for each session were tailored for each group. The four thematic areas were as follows;

1. Priorities – the primary areas for focus/action to reduce poverty in Hamilton.
2. Sector Strengths and Limitations – the strengths and limitations of each of the four sectors (business, government, non-profit/voluntary sector, and individuals affected by poverty).
3. Solutions and Strategies – past, current and future programs, policies and initiatives that have been or can be successful in reducing poverty in Hamilton.
4. Key Messages – the messages that session participants wanted to communicate back to the Roundtable and to the broader Hamilton community about poverty reduction.

3.0 Findings

Between October 14th, 2005 and November 30th, 2005, the HRPR hosted 11 sector engagement sessions. The groups included early childhood educators, business leaders, teachers, housing advocates, clergy, youth, individuals living with low income, Rotarians, academic researchers, and advocates for fair income supports. For a full list of sessions and number of participants please see Appendix A.

The engagement sessions were a valuable exercise for the Roundtable. They succeeded in fulfilling the three main goals outlined above. In particular, the sessions allowed the Roundtable staff to share information about the HRPR to a larger segment of the Hamilton community, while gathering important input about what priorities areas should be focused on as the Roundtable moves forward. The sessions were also useful in measuring what level of community interest would exist in participating in the Roundtable's efforts in the future. Overall, most of the participants from these sessions were interested in keeping informed of the progress of the Roundtable, and many were also interested in participating in future, multi-sectoral sessions.

The results of the sessions are outlined below. They have been organized into the four main question areas that were detailed in the methodology.

3.1 Priorities

The first thematic area of questions was focused on priorities. Raising the issue of priorities with the session participants was viewed as a way of gauging the relevance of what the Roundtable has already learnt through the Community Consultation Report¹, and determining if there were more specific areas for attention. Similar to the Community Consultation Report, the focus of the priorities questions relied on the three flagships established in the City of Hamilton Social Vision², in particular, children, youth and families, education and skills development, and affordable housing. The sessions held with individuals from Food, Shelter and Housing Advisory Committee and the Best Start Network provided the most detailed directions regarding priorities. In other sessions, groups provided more general direction to the Roundtable.

In a review of responses from all sessions, there were a number of issues that were raised several times. They are as follows;

- **Supporting Children, Youth and Families** – Many groups, including the Best Start Network, Food, Shelter and Housing Advisory Committee (FSHAC), teachers, clergy, Rotarians and members of the Campaign for Adequate Welfare and Disability Benefits (CAWDB) identified the issues facing children in poverty as specifically challenging. In addition, there was recognition that it was not just children and youth that should be the

¹ Summary of Community Consultations and Key Recommendations. Draft 1.1, October 2005. Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction

² Torjman, Sherri, Eric Leviten-Reid, Paul Heisler. September 2002. *A Social Vision for the New City of Hamilton*. Caledon Institute of Social Policy.
<http://www.vision2020.hamilton.ca/SDS/Docs/SocialDevelopmentFrameworkReport.pdf>

focus, but that parents were also in need of supports, whether in terms of access to parenting courses, or other supports such as literacy training or affordable child care that would assist them in finding and keeping employment. There was also a call for more research on the impacts of poverty on children.

- **Education and Skills Development** – The issue of education and skills development was raised by a number of groups, including the Industry-Education Council (IEC), youth, the Low-Income Advisory Committee (LIAC), teachers, and Rotarians. The view was that both education and skills development are pathways out of poverty. In the context of education, the focus was primarily on children and youth, while skills development was focused on youth and adults.
- **Affordable Housing** – The Food, Shelter and Housing Advisory Committee (FSHAC) felt that this should be the number one priority for the Roundtable. Other groups, including the Best Start Network, identified the need to focus on affordable housing as it provides a family with the basic start from which other important links to moving away from poverty can be established. If a family is able to afford appropriate housing then there could be adequate food on the table and clothing for all members of the family. With the certainty of a permanent home, the family is more able to seek out and take advantage of supports within their local community, such as childcare, after-school programs, or ESL courses etc.
- **Living Wage** – Establishing a living wage was an issue raised numerous times by representatives from business, teachers, clergy, individuals affected by poverty and the Best Start Network. Teachers commented on the need to change the definition of “living wage” to reflect the realities of the current cost of living. The Best Start Network addressed this as a priority in relation to a family’s ability to meet basic needs such as food, shelter, heat and clothing. The business representatives commented that it is important to encourage the broader business community in Hamilton to provide adequate wages for employees, but they also recognized that this was a political decision and that for any change to succeed it had to be applied at a national, not just a local level.
- **Other Priorities** – Other priorities that were raised in the sessions by individual groups include, the need to address the rates of social assistance in the Province; the need to include particular issues facing new Canadians into planning processes; the need for coordination and communication of existing programs and policies; need to focus on policy not just program changes; need to include health issues (i.e. nutrition) as a component of priorities.

3.2 Sector Strengths & Limitations

The necessary solutions for the reduction and eventual elimination of poverty are not simple, nor are they immediate, and no single group in society is able to produce a result on their own. Rather, progress on this, and many other challenging issues that face society, can only be solved through a real effort to bring together a variety of sectors in the community to build a *civil society*.³ The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction is building on this idea of civil society by reaching out to four sectors in the community: business, government, non-profit/voluntary organizations, and individuals affected by poverty. As these were the four representative groups with whom the HRPR staff met in the engagement sessions, the second series of questions focused on identifying the strengths and limitations of each sector. The aim was to gather a broad cross section of ideas about where one group's strength could supplement another's limitation, to identify areas where partnerships could be built, and where additional work is needed to ensure that long-term, sustainable partnerships could be built in the community. Table 1 below identifies a number of the key strengths and limitations that were articulated by session participants.

Table 1 – Sector Strengths and Limitations

Sector	Strength	Limitation
Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Resources · Manpower · Provides employment · Organization Skills/ Capacities · Access (int'l contacts, gov't) · Political Clout · Technical Knowledge · Ability to mobilize quickly · Apprenticeships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Lack of awareness of poverty · Poor public image · Market driven/ constraints · Lack of investment in training · Lack of community focus · Different context · Competing interests for philanthropic efforts · Change in Hamilton business landscape · branch-plant, foreign-owned businesses
Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Resources · Responsibility · Authority/ Leadership · Access (int'l contacts, other gov't) · Program and Policy Development and Implementation · Ability to raise public awareness through their communication networks · Able to look at the bigger picture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Politics/ red tape / silos · Fragmentation · Lack of integration · Change of mandate · Lack of single focus · Risk-aversion · Lack of consultation · Lack of community focus · Lower levels of gov't do not have the same resources as senior gov'ts. · Inaccessible, non-responsive · Gov't responds to mainstream perception rather than real needs.

³ Eleventh Annual Johns Hopkins International Philanthropy Fellows Conference, July 1999. *Building Civil Society: A Guide to Action*. Bangalore, India.

Sector	Strength	Limitation
Non-profit/voluntary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Commitment to common good · Responsiveness · Credibility · Knowledge/ experience · Integration of services · Mobilization capacity · Diversity · Innovativeness · Transparency · Leverage · NFPs have business knowledge · Creative and entrepreneurial 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Resources (sustainability) · No common/clear message · Spread too thin · Lack of evaluation · Competitiveness and fragmentation · Limited ability to engage politically · Invisibility · Perceived ineffectiveness · Lack of research capability · Expectation that they fundraise – takes away from service provision mandate · Burn-out
Individuals affected by poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Knowledge/ experience · Hope and ability to cope · Desire for change · Resilience · Diversity · Humanizing the issue – a face for the issue. · Numbers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Lack of power · Stigmatization · Limited opportunity · Capacity to be a part of the process · Lack of access · Varied circumstances · Lack of understanding on how to lobby the system · Lack of organization - Competing priorities

3.3 Solutions & Strategies

Building on the priorities and strengths and limitations segments of the engagement sessions, participants were then asked to think about possible solutions and strategies for the reduction of poverty. The participants were encouraged to consider programs and services, as well as policy changes that may assist in reducing poverty in Hamilton. Emphasis was placed on finding ideas that were focused on reduction rather than alleviation, and solutions that are multi-sectoral that would address the strengths and limitations of the different sectors in society. Additionally, the HRPR staff was interested in those ideas that were comprehensive and holistic, long-term and able to incorporate learning and change. There were many suggestions about programs, policies and initiatives that have worked in the past, are currently working, as well as areas where there needs to be additional focus in the future. A number of the suggestions are outlined below. They are organized under the key priority areas of children, youth and families, education and skills development, affordable housing, living wage and employment supports, and an additional section dealing with community development.

3.3.1 Children, Youth and Families

Participants from all the engagement sessions provided numerous examples of programs, policies and initiatives that are currently working in Hamilton. These examples are important, as their success can be studied in greater detail to determine whether certain characteristics can be emulated elsewhere, or if there is a possibility of expanding the existing service. In the context of children, youth and families, the following programs/initiatives were mentioned;

- **Neighbour to Neighbour Centre (N2N)** – The Neighbour to Neighbour Centre provides numerous services to support families in low income, from a food bank, to literacy training, tutoring for students, a jobs bank, and many others. N2N is a good example of a more comprehensive program, one that addresses ways to alleviate the immediate challenges with poverty, but also provides services to lead families to a better circumstance.
- **Grace Haven and St. Martin’s Manor programs for teen mothers** – These programs provide supports for teen mothers in terms of help for the mothers with skills development, one stop for supports and services, addition counselling, and information about promoting healthy babies. They are reliant on a committed volunteer base, and there is involvement from the health sector, the Board of Education, and they are linked with the Ontario Early Years Centres.
- **The Resource Association for Teens (RAFT)** – The program is aimed at youth at risk, there is an emergency shelter, counselling support, as well as connecting youth to services, assistance with resumes, and job finding help.
- **Living Rock Ministries** – Focused on assisting at risk youth in downtown Hamilton, the program offers emergency shelter, youth volunteering, and a work to earn program.
- **St. Joseph’s Immigrant Centre for Women** - The Centre provides essential services including labour market training and support, language and driving instruction, educational funding, and health services for refugee and immigrant women and their families.
- **Expansion of the Ontario Early Years program**
- Other programs that were mentioned include, **City Kids, Wrap Around, and Hamilton Partners in Nutrition.**

In addition to existing programs and initiatives, participants provided information about areas where more attention needs to be paid, as well as ideas about where new programs should be developed. The following is a list of ideas:

- **Equal Opportunity Project** - whereby children and youth affected by poverty are provided with alternative examples of how to live or what else is available to them.
- **Parenting Supports** – Teachers and Rotarians both mentioned the need for parent advocates and the need for a broader range of parenting courses.
- **Keeping Families Together** - Social services workers present at the FSHAC session felt it is important to keep families together as family is a great support system.
- **Food** - Members of the CAWDB group highlighted the point that access to adequate levels of food is essential for children, as “they need to eat to learn.”

3.3.2 Education and Skills Development

Education and Skills Development were important priorities highlighted throughout the engagement sessions. It should be noted that there was often a strong link drawn between education and skills development and the success of children, youth and families to be able to move out of poverty. This supports the emphasis on more comprehensive initiatives, as exemplified by those programs mentioned earlier under children, youth and families. Many of these provide skills and employment assistance, tutoring etc. Some of the specific programs related to education and skills development mentioned in sessions were;

- **Threshold School of Building** – This program offers training in the home building trades, both to the general public, and job training with a focus on “ready to work” students. Additionally, Threshold is a key partner, with the City of Hamilton, the Hamilton Home Builders Association, Scotia Bank and the Realtors Association of Hamilton and Burlington in the Home Ownership Affordability Program (HOAP). HOAP engages Threshold students and volunteers in the renovation of neglected inner-city homes into decent and affordable homes for lower income families. Threshold bridges a number of priority areas, in particular skills development and affordable housing.
- **Breakfast for Learning** program at Sir John A Macdonald High School.
- **Yonge St. Mission (Toronto) Computer literacy for youth** – A particular program for youth living in low income is offered at the Yonge St. Mission in Toronto. The youth are registered in computer literacy courses. Once they have completed a certain level of course work they are provided with their own computer equipment. The Mission has partnered with businesses and other groups in the community to provide equipment and training expertise.

Beyond existing programs, there were a number of ideas and comments made related to the directions that should be pursued for education and skills development. They are as follows:

- **Social Workers in Schools** - Teachers commented that one key resource that they have lost in recent years due to budgetary restrictions is social workers in schools. The benefit of having a dedicated social worker in schools was to provide teachers with the support of a professional to identify students in need of assistance, or advise teachers about services and programs available for students and their families in the community.
- **Increased Testing for Learning Disabilities** - There needs to be an increase in the testing for learning disabilities, to be able to identify students who need help early on so that they can get a head start on finding the tools necessary to learn effectively.
- **Addressing Challenges of New Curriculum** - There is a need for additional supports for assisting students with the new curriculum, whether through tutoring or after-school study clubs.
- **ESL** - Due to increases in funding becoming available from upper levels of government, there should be additional focus placed on enhancing English as a second language training (ESL).

- **Mentoring Programs** – Many commented that more mentoring programs for school age children and youth would provide them with insight into the diversity of opportunities available to them. This was raised by Rotarians, early childhood educators, and members of CAWDB. The latter suggested that perhaps the Industry Education Council could help with coordination of this.
- **Focus of Education System** - Members of the CAWDB raised the issue that the focus of the educational system is currently aimed at middle-income residents. The needs of low-income residents should be incorporated into planning etc., specifically as it relates to the high cost of educational supplies and technology (computers).

3.3.3 Affordable Housing

There were only two mentions of programs directly related to affordable housing. These were the Threshold School of Building, as described above, and Habitat for Humanity. Both of these programs demonstrate the value of bringing together partners from across the community, including business, government, non-profit organizations, volunteers, and individuals affected by poverty to work together for a tangible solution. Also mentioned above, affordable housing is a key priority to provide stability for those affected by poverty.

3.3.4 Living Wage and Employment Supports

In the context of the issue of ensuring a living wage, a number of solutions and strategies were suggested by different groups. While the business community stated that the living wage issue would require policy change at political levels, there were a number of examples of programs and initiatives that are in place in the community or suggested that can assist those in low income. These include;

- Providing subsidized bus passes for those with low income.
- Reforming the banking system to allow those in low income to move away from reliance on money lender with high interest rates and user fees.
- Workforce integration
- Educate employers about the benefits of offering employment to those with disabilities.
- Improve flexibility of social assistance rules to allow people to move reasonably into the workforce.
- Model of the Working Centre in Kitchener – The Working Centre is a facility that offers a diversity of programs from access to computers, technology and training, to affordable housing, a community kitchen, and job search resources. Also, it has established a program that supports and encourages alternative work options, including resources for those establishing small and home based businesses.
- Establishing a parallel economic system (barter system, local exchange and trading systems) to ensure that OW/ODSP recipients are not penalized for performing piece-meal work.

3.3.5 Community Development

Throughout most of the engagement sessions there was a clear statement from the different groups that there needs to be a concerted effort to re-engage a sense of community in Hamilton. This theme was prevalent in a number of examples explained below. Interestingly, a number of groups identified the same segments of society that should be engaged in this effort, including faith communities, successful diverse neighbourhoods, and aboriginal elders.

The types of programs and initiatives that were brought forward ranged from establishing a one-stop shop for services in Hamilton, to examples of direct services that were successful but no longer operate such as the Community & Neighbourhood Supports Services Program (CNSSP) and the ecumenical downtown ministry. Additionally, examples of grassroots community advocacy and supports were mentioned, such as the Disability Action Networking Group (DANG). DANG is focused on connecting people with available community supports and educating and advocating the broader community on key issues. McMaster's Departments of Geography and Applied Sciences are working in partnership with DANG on a project specific to the Hamilton community.

There were a number of suggested areas for attention. The Clergy articulated the need for a better way to coordinate and communicate between faith groups in Hamilton. One area where this coordination is required is in connecting volunteers to community activities, and ensuring that the volunteer energy is spread across numerous efforts rather than focused at just one project.

3.4 Key Messages

The final question asked of sector engagement session participants was to identify key messages that they wanted to have communicated back to members of the Roundtable. A number of groups raised similar messages, all of which are outlined below:

- The Best Start Network (BSN) and teachers both felt that there should be special focus on children.
- BSN, teachers and clergy emphasized the need for sustained implementation and clear action following this consultation process.
- Rotarians, teachers and business representatives articulated the need to better communicate the face of poverty, particularly to the business community.
- The Food, Shelter and Housing Advisory Committee (FSHAC), the Low Income Advisory Committee (LIAC), and Rotarians felt that poverty needs to be addressed as an issue of investment in improving prosperity, not a problem to be solved.
- The Industry-Education Council highlighted the need for a focus on comprehensive programs and initiatives for poverty reduction.
- Youth stated emphatically that education was critically important for people to move out of poverty.
- FSHAC and CAWDB emphasized that people need to have sense of belonging and community.

4.0 Analysis

There was substantial information gathered from the engagement sessions dealing with finding solutions and strategies for reducing and eliminating poverty in Hamilton. From all the varied comments and ideas gathered, three general themes emerged that should be addressed as a community plan for poverty reduction is devised. These are communication, approach, and capacity.

4.1 Communication

The theme of communication was spread throughout the engagement process in different forms. There was a call for greater levels of communication about poverty in Hamilton, and for an effort to establish communication between different sectors of the community as to what their level of involvement can or should be in the context of poverty reduction. Additionally, there was a stated need for better communication between social service workers and their clients, and more communication about what services are available. These issues related to communication are contributing to a lack of engagement on the part of the broader community, an inability of different sectors to know where and what they can contribute to be part of the solutions to poverty reduction, and a lack of clarity about what is currently working and available in Hamilton to support those affected by poverty. The HRPR will need to address the different facets of the issues around communication to be able to engage the broader community, across sectors, to participate in poverty reduction efforts. Examples of how to address these issues include:

- **The Hamilton Spectator** – The newspaper’s commitment to The Poverty Project, both from the corporate and editorial levels is a crucial step in addressing the lack of awareness about poverty in the city. The editorial focus can provide a better understanding of the “face of poverty” to the broader Hamilton community, while the corporate commitment demonstrates an example of an important business in the community that is acting as an early adopter in engaging in poverty reduction efforts.
- **Disseminating Research** – The meeting held with a cross section of academic researchers from Hamilton’s three post-secondary institutions resulted in a commitment to building a research network with the capacity to draw on the diverse group of academics that came together at the meeting. The HRPR should encourage the development of this network and work to bring forward research that is relevant to the focus of the poverty reduction initiative.
- **Multi-sectoral Partnerships** – The focus on multi-sectoral partnerships is important to emphasize. Having representatives from different sectors working together opens channels of communication between sectors and allows for additional relationships to emerge. One example of an area for an immediate partnership was identified in the sessions relating to mentoring programs. The IEC commented that there are numerous programs, scholarships and apprenticeships that go unused annually, and other groups, like the CAWDB and the LIAC expressed the need for information about programs that are available or establishing new ones. The HRPR could act as an intermediary to link these two groups to establish an early connection so that information about programs becomes available to those who can use them, while the IEC and their members can receive feedback about what is working or not.

4.2 Approach

The engagement sessions also produced an interesting conversation about what type of approach the community should take to tackle poverty. One perspective was to focus on an issue-specific city-wide approach, or alternatively addressing poverty reduction efforts with a more comprehensive perspective but at the neighbourhood level. Another important approach that needs to be considered is whether the issues that surround poverty should be engaged solely from a social policy position, or if it is appropriate to frame it as an economic development issue as well. There was a sense that the current approach is not necessarily the most effective and a new way of pursuing solutions should be sought. Specific examples of approaches that should be explored include:

- **A Family Approach** – One way to incorporate many of the concerns about different segments of the Hamilton population affected by poverty is to take a family approach to poverty reduction. This would allow future efforts to be more holistic, aimed at children, youth, parents and seniors. Additionally, initiatives under this approach could be focused in specific neighbourhoods and assist in building community, which is another very important point that was raised throughout the sessions.
- **A Neighbourhood Approach** – Methods that encourage a neighbourhood approach to poverty should be explored. This approach would look at issues of poverty on a neighbourhood to neighbourhood basis that would be responsive to different needs and supports in these specific communities. The Neighbour to Neighbour Centre is an example of a successful program that takes a comprehensive approach to poverty reduction, and its focus is to serve a specific community on Hamilton Mountain. Another example of a comprehensive approach to poverty reduction within a neighbourhood space is found at the Wesley Centre at 155 Queen St. N. where there are programs for children and youth from 0-18, as well as additional supports for parents. In this instance direct links exist with the local elementary school and the dwellings in the immediate area.
- **Economic Development Approach** – One of the central concerns raised in discussions about bridging between sectors was how to frame the issues of poverty to the business community in a manner that would demonstrate its impact on their success. One way of addressing this would be for the HRPR to undertake an analysis of the economic impacts of poverty, and to match the challenges facing business in Hamilton with possible solutions from groups most affected by poverty. For example, as there is a demonstrated labour shortage in Hamilton and a good percentage of individuals reliant on social assistance are job ready, the HRPR could establish a mechanism to make the necessary links to match employers with the necessary employees.
- **Creative Alternative Approach** – In order to address some of the barriers that are faced by those in poverty that are beyond the control of the immediate community, seeking creative alternative approaches should be employed. For example, there is a “Catch-22” facing many residents receiving income supports whereby they are financial penalized for seeking piece-meal work. In order to address this issue, changes need to be made to provincial legislation. However, one option to overcome this locally could be to establish a local exchange/employment and trading system (LETS) which is essentially a moneyless

barter system. LETS have been established in communities in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan and New Zealand. The HRPR may wish to explore this option in more detail.

- **An Inclusive Approach** - In planning an approach to poverty reduction, inclusiveness should be considered for any effort to be sustainable and long-term. In particular, if programs and initiatives can welcome different socio-economic and other groups in the community then a first step is taken in building personal connections. One example of this is the Threshold School of Building. Threshold's programs are aimed at anyone in the city who would like to learn about home repair or train in the home building trades, but there are also specific programs aimed at individuals living with low income. An inclusive approach such as this has many benefits, such as reducing the stigma surrounding poverty, and ensuring economic sustainability for a program because it is accessed by a larger segment of the population.

4.3 Capacity

One of the key benefits of the engagement process was that it illustrated that there are issues surrounding community capacity that need to be addressed. This includes the fact that there is currently an inequity in the city with respect to responsibility for poverty reduction. The non-profit/voluntary sector is over-burdened with its current commitment to issues around poverty, while other sectors are not engaged to their capacity. Further, there are resources that were once employed to help with poverty, but are no longer available. Finally, those programs that are successful offer a great model that could be emulated elsewhere. Those who use them, administer them and fund them are a valuable resource of knowledge that should be utilized to advise on how best to emulate or replicate these successes in other parts of the city. Some examples of opportunities to improve the use of community capacity include:

- **Building Networks Within Sectors** – This was a very interesting point that was raised in a number of sessions, particularly among academic researchers and Rotarians. Involvement with the HRPR initiative around poverty reduction allows these groups a focused reason to build their own networks. University researchers saw this as a way to coordinate across individual departments and across institutions. For Rotarians, this presented an opportunity to engage dialogue between different clubs and to other service clubs. For the HRPR, there is an excellent opportunity presented in this to act as a catalyst for building a model for community connections that can be applied in other sectors and to other initiatives in the future.
- **Re-engaging Faith Communities** – Faith communities have traditionally played a very important role in providing assistance to individuals affected by poverty. Over time, as the system of social supports has become more secularized, a disconnect has developed between faith communities, their efforts, and other groups in society (government and non-profit organizations). Additionally, there was also a call from faith groups themselves to see greater coordination of their efforts in the community. The HRPR can play a vital role in re-engaging faith communities in solutions for poverty reduction, while again, acting as a neutral host for different faith communities to come together to share information about their ongoing efforts.
- **Engage Business in New Ways** – The business community in Hamilton is shifting, as the economic base of the city shifts. One of the central roles that business has played in past efforts has been to provide funding to specific programs or organizations. Business

has much more to offer in a longer-term holistic approach to poverty reduction than just money. Namely the capacity for apprenticeships, volunteer time from employees, and advice on business planning. Additional research needs to be conducted in this area, particularly in terms of getting a clearer understanding of Hamilton's business community, their current community involvement, and what challenges face these businesses from which opportunities for partnerships may emerge.

5.0 Conclusions

The engagement sessions were an important part of the HRPR development phase. They have allowed the HRPR to both begin to inform a broader community about the issues around poverty in Hamilton, and to gather knowledge about how best to engage multiple sectors in finding tangible and long-term solutions to reducing poverty in the city. It is important to note that these sessions were only the start of the conversation for the HRPR. As the plan develops, the HRPR will continue discussions with the broader Hamilton community. The sessions were very good at engaging people in a frank discussion about poverty, and many participants indicated their interest in continuing to be informed about the HRPR, and in particular many felt that their involvement would become more active once a direction is chosen and a plan is in place.

Although the engagement sessions provided the HRPR with a significant amount of information about poverty issues and possible reduction solutions, one central limitation of this process related to time. Due to a limited number of weeks, from September to November, the HRPR could only meet with a limited number of groups in the community. Those 11 groups that did participate represent a good cross section of the four sectors in the community, but additional groups need to be consulted as the process continues. This is important to expand and continue the valuable dialogue that was begun in these engagement sessions.

From this standpoint, the information gathered in this report can assist. For instance, the findings demonstrate that there is a strong desire from participants to see the next steps of the Roundtable focus on solutions that can assist children, youth and families move out of poverty. In doing this, there needs to be a concerted effort to address other factors such as affordable housing and a living wage, as these are not divorced from the successes of families to move into a more prosperous and stable circumstance.

Additionally, the sessions have provided the HRPR with information about certain issues that should be addressed in the community plan. Three general themes were identified in this report, specifically that the community plan will need to provide directions on improving communication about poverty and supports in the community, that the HRPR should consider a variety of approaches in order to build effective and long-term solutions, and finally, the HRPR can begin to find ways to harness the untapped capacity in Hamilton.

The results of the engagement sessions have indicated that there is a real desire across a number of sectors to embark on a sustained and practical effort to reduce poverty in Hamilton. The capacity within the population clearly exists, and the HRPR is an excellent mechanism to engage it.

Appendix A

The following table details the schedule of engagement sessions that were held and the number of participants at each session.

Meeting Date	Group	Number of Participants
October 14, 2005	Best Start Network	24
October 17, 2005	Meeting of Business Representatives (HCF)	7
October 25, 2005	Teachers Meeting - Neighbour to Neighbour Centre	13
November 11, 2005	Industry-Education Council Executive Committee	7
November 17, 2005	Food, Shelter and Housing Advisory Committee	17
November 22, 2005	Low Income Advisory Committee	11
November 23, 2005	Clergy Breakfast – Neighbour to Neighbour Centre	32
November 24, 2005	Youth Advisory Council (HCF)	10
November 25, 2005	University Researchers	13
November 28, 2005	Rotary Clubs of Hamilton	6
November 30, 2005	Campaign for Adequate Welfare and Disability Benefits	17