

TACKLING POVERTY in HAMILTON *We can do it!*

June 29, 2006

Community Update

Making Hamilton the “Best Place to Raise a Child”

The goal of making Hamilton the best place to raise a child was both embraced, and began to be defined, by community representatives at a high-energy four-hour session on Friday, June 23.

The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction presented the report “*Making Hamilton the Best Place to Raise a Child: A Change Framework for Poverty Reduction*,” the summary of a year’s worth of research and community engagement. The report will serve as the vision and strategic direction for the development of a community-wide action plan.

“Today is a milestone session where we will coordinate ideas, take a community initiative and introduce the beginning of the action phase,” said Mark Chamberlain, chair, Hamilton Roundtable on Poverty Reduction, in addressing the 170 attendees.

“Over the next six months, an action plan with specific strategies will be developed to reduce and prevent poverty in children and youth,” Mark said. “The action plan will be based on the activities and results that the community will identify.”

As part of Friday’s agenda, small group discussions were held to elaborate on the Change Framework’s critical points of investment for children and youth:

- Quality early learning and parenting
- Skills through education, activity and recreation
- Targeted skills development (post secondary)
- Employment

Liz Weaver, newly appointed director of the roundtable used the example of “rippling water” to describe what lies ahead for the action phase of the initiative, now that the “best place to raise a child” aspiration has been identified. “Once we drop this vision into the water, we will begin to see other changes ripple out,” Liz said. “By December we will have a four-year action plan developed for our community.”

Liz said one of the strengths of Friday’s session was the scope of participants in attendance, including the business, education, research and government sectors, and people living in poverty. “It was a very diverse group, but the exciting thing was solid support for the vision - focusing on the root causes of poverty to make Hamilton the ‘best place to raise a child.’”

More than 120 out of 170 participants said yes to future involvement and participation in the community initiative to make Hamilton the best place to raise a child.

Remarks from Friday's Community Session:

- "We're trying to do things better, maybe different." – Mark Chamberlain, roundtable chair
- "We need to take care of the old and the young, and create opportunities for everyone in between." – Dr. Gary Warner, McMaster University, quoting Ron Foxcroft, Hamilton businessman
- "Aspiration does something to the spirit and something to the heart." – Paul Johnson, outgoing roundtable director
- "There's something special going on here." – Brian McHattie, Ward One Councillor, City of Hamilton
- "We will see Hamilton become one of the strongest and most prosperous cities in the country." – Paul Johnson, outgoing roundtable director

Evaluation Comments from Community Session Participants:

Great opportunity to see where everyone's coming from. It was interesting that the majority of focus for solutions was on systems rather than individuals. 'Provide this' 'help them do that' – we should focus on why these people need our help in the first place and make it so they don't.

After reading the document and participating in some group discussions, I will be networking and spreading the message ~ Making Hamilton the best place to Raise a Child. Awareness is strong and the message needs to be continued.

We will all benefit from a more deliberate and focused approach to tackling poverty.

Thank you for a fascinating opportunity to hear others on this most urgent issue 'child poverty' but let's not forget the child lives in a family who is struggling to provide for the child.

Progress Report from the Roundtable

- Also during last Friday's community session, Liz Weaver was welcomed as the new roundtable director. Mark Chamberlain said farewell and best of luck to outgoing director, Paul Johnson, who has returned to his role as executive director at Wesley Urban Ministries.
- A report on the June 23rd community session will be available on the website in late July 2006.

News and Resources

Looking for more information about the *Tackling Poverty in Hamilton* initiative? Check out our web site: www.hamiltonpoverty.ca. You'll find current news as well as background information and resources. Most recently, the "*Making Hamilton the Best Place to Raise a Child: A Change Framework for Poverty Reduction*," has been posted under the "PROGRESS" section.

We welcome your questions and comments. Please contact Liz Weaver, director, at 905-523-5600, or lizweaver@hcf.on.ca.