

TACKLING POVERTY in HAMILTON *We can do it!*

March 15, 2006

MEDIA UPDATE

Poverty Process Identifies Critical Points for Investment

The four-year community plan to prevent and reduce poverty in Hamilton is taking shape.

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.

“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.

Throughout March, the roundtable is entering into the second phase of its community engagement and inviting input from people who are experts in areas relevant to the points of investment. “We are building the template of the community plan by identifying with these people the desired outcomes that strategic investments would give us,” Mr. Chamberlain says. The plan is expected to be launched in late spring with implementation to follow over the next four years.

A staff team responsible for implementing the community plan is now being recruited. Ads for a project director will be placed in local media by late March.

The *Tackling Poverty in Hamilton* initiative began in spring 2005 with the formation of the roundtable, a multi-sector collaboration with representation from business, education, government and agencies. Research, community consultation and engagement took place in summer and fall, and a Low Income Advisory Committee was formed to provide input to the roundtable. A web site, www.hamiltonpoverty.ca, has been established and a Community Update newsletter launched to provide progress reports.

-more-

Funding to support the planning phase has been provided by Hamilton Community Foundation and the City of Hamilton, along with donations from private sector members of the roundtable: Dofasco, Pictorvision and Turkstra Lumber.

-30-

For more information, please contact Carolyn Milne, co-convener, Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, and president and CEO, Hamilton Community Foundation, at 905-523-5600, or c.milne@hcf.on.ca.

Joe-Anne Priel, co-convener, Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, and general manager, Community Services, City of Hamilton, 905-546-2424, ext. 4839.

Backgrounder attached. For more information please go to www.hamiltonpoverty.ca.

BACKGROUND

Tackling Poverty in Hamilton

Poverty Facts

- Hamilton has one of Ontario's highest levels of poverty.
- According to Statistics Canada, 95,370, or almost 20 per cent of Hamilton residents are living on incomes below the poverty line – enough people to fill Copps Coliseum five times.
- Approximately 25 per cent of Hamilton's young people up to 18 years of age live in poverty.
- From 1990 to 2000, the wealthiest 40 per cent of Hamilton's population experienced an increase in their average incomes, while the poorest 60 per cent had an overall decrease in theirs.
- More than 15,000 people in Hamilton visit food banks every month.
- The definition of poverty is directly linked to income, but it goes beyond that. Living in poverty is also linked to lack of opportunities and choices.
- In the short term, poverty means having to make tough decisions such as paying the rent versus buying food.
- In the long term, poverty is associated with health problems and a lower life expectancy.

Progress of Initiative

- Throughout the fall, eleven engagement sessions were held with groups representing various sectors in Hamilton. Roundtable representatives also met with groups and individuals, including politicians and community leaders.
- Research was conducted into the size and scope of Hamilton's poverty challenge and a number of educational documents were produced (Project Overview, Quick Facts, Learning from Previous Community Consultations and Investing in Social Development).
- A Low Income Advisory Committee was formed, providing a forum for individuals affected by poverty to provide input to the roundtable.
- The Hamilton Spectator, whose editor-in-chief is a member of the roundtable, committed to making poverty a priority area for news coverage and commentary over three years.
- A public/private partnership for a social housing project has been formed, led by two roundtable members.
- An academic research network to support the initiative has come together with membership from Mohawk College, McMaster University and Redeemer University College.
- In February, the roundtable announced that the initial focus of the four-year community plan would be on the prevention and reduction of poverty in children and youth.