

TACKLING POVERTY *in* HAMILTON *We can do it!*

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For Immediate Release

Poverty Roundtable Launches Poverty Reduction Plan

A community plan aimed at preventing and reducing poverty in Hamilton is being launched today by the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction (HRPR).

“These are our starting point strategies to tackle our city’s poverty problem, and to achieve our shared community vision of ‘Making Hamilton the Best Place to Raise a Child,’” says Mark Chamberlain, chair of the Roundtable.

Mr. Chamberlain says the strategies are matched to five critical points of investment as children progress through life: quality early learning and parenting; skills through education, activity and recreation; targeted skills development at the post-secondary level; employment; and asset building/wealth creation.

The community plan also identifies the ongoing role of the Roundtable, which was formed in May 2005 as a cross-sector group convened by the City of Hamilton and Hamilton Community Foundation. “The Roundtable will continue, and will focus on bringing public attention to the poverty problem, pulling groups together to develop solutions, monitoring our progress towards our shared vision, collaborating with partners, and leading the starting point strategies,” says Liz Weaver, director of the Roundtable.

The starting point strategies are:

- Developing early learning, childcare and parenting support “hubs” in low-income neighbourhoods, because there is a direct correlation between early child development and socioeconomic status. The Roundtable will work with Hamilton’s Best Start Network and other community partners to achieve this.

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- Improving access to after-school and out-of-school programs that build skills through education, activity and recreation, because access to high-quality programs is very limited for children in low-income neighbourhoods. The Roundtable will work with the School Age Solutions Network, the two school boards, and related service providers to promote access, identify where there are gaps, and align resources to fill those gaps.
- Helping to develop pre-employment and mentorship programs for at-risk youth, with the additional perspective of meeting Hamilton's needs for skilled labour and ability to attract new businesses. The Roundtable's partner will be a local network known as the Skills Development Flagship, which has designed a pre-employment support model for at-risk youth.
- Working with the Hamilton Immigrant Workforce Integration Network (HIWIN) to boost employment and training opportunities for recent immigrants, of which 50 per cent live in poverty.
- Supporting asset building and wealth creation – a key point in breaking the cycle of poverty. The Roundtable will work with a local network called the Affordable Housing Flagship, as well as the City of Hamilton, homebuilders, and others to look at how low-income families can build savings and assets, and achieve more stable housing.

The starting point strategies in the Roundtable's community plan will take place over the next four years. "Each strategy has its own set of desired outcomes so that we can measure our success," Ms. Weaver says. "The 'big picture' outcome that we want for Hamilton is to see a city that has learned to work together collectively rather than in our traditional silos. This collaboration will lead to innovation and systems change. Overall, with the reduction of poverty levels, we will become a more prosperous and viable city."

Ms. Weaver said there are many promising poverty reduction strategies that have already been initiated by community groups and organizations over the past year, and the Roundtable will continue to encourage and support these community solutions. "There is a wealth of energy and enthusiasm in Hamilton to address the poverty challenge, and a strong commitment to help make our city the best place to raise a child," she says.

Hamilton has one of the highest poverty rates in Ontario, with 20 per cent of residents living at or below the poverty line.

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Backgrounder attached.
For more information, please contact Liz Weaver, director, Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, 905-523-5600, ext. 44.

BACKGROUND

Role of the Roundtable

About the Roundtable:

- The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction will continue over the next four years as a multi-sector group convened by the City of Hamilton and Hamilton Community Foundation.
- The Roundtable will continue to be supported by Liz Weaver as director, and a small staff team located at Hamilton Community Foundation's office in downtown Hamilton.
- The Roundtable meets monthly.
- Information about poverty in Hamilton, the work of the Roundtable, and other anti-poverty community initiatives underway are available on the HRPR web site: www.hamiltonpoverty.ca.

The Roundtable's "macro" role will be to:

- Bring public attention to the challenges and impact of poverty in our city.
- Promote the involvement of youth in community planning and decision-making.
- Bring new funding and strategic investment to the table.
- Evaluate and monitor our community's progress towards the shared vision of 'Making Hamilton the Best Place to Raise a Child.'

Specifically, the Roundtable will:

- Engage the community in creating goals and solutions.
- Identify barriers that block progress.
- Bring together organizations and sectors to collaborate.
- Leverage and align resources to support change, and attract community investment.
- Facilitate the exchange of knowledge.
- Communicate about poverty and change strategies.
- Measure progress and report back.
- Provide administrative support to keep the initiative moving forward.
- Carry out the five specific strategies identified as the starting points for 'Making Hamilton the Best Place to Raise a Child.'

The complete *Starting Point Strategies* document can be found at www.hamiltonpoverty.ca.