

Highlights of Hamilton's Progress on Poverty Reduction September 9, 2008

Key Indicators of Community Change:

- The number of individuals living below the low-income cut off in Hamilton **decreased to 18.1%** from 20% according to Statistics Canada 2008 census release
- **900 Hamilton businesses, organizations, government departments, and educational/research institutions** are linked through HRPR. The result: new health services in low-income neighbourhoods, new early years, school-based and after school programs, mentoring supports for at-risk youth, employment for new immigrants, home ownership and affordable housing programs
- **2,253 backpacks** were filled with school supplies and given to low income students in September 2008 representing a community donation of \$225,000 to local school boards
- **Increased government investments** including focus on youth (\$765,000) delivered through the Hamilton school boards, renewal of YMCA and Hamilton Police Services summer employment program for youth at risk (\$878,000), increased funding for access to childcare (\$900,000); funding to boost economic planning and development (\$368,000); access to YMCA recreation programs for low-income children (\$93,000), funding for an innovative employment initiative HamiltonHires (\$192,487), housing allowance supports through ROOF program (\$4 million) and support to develop a Pathways to Education initiative in Hamilton through the North Hamilton Community Health Centre
- **Increased municipal investments** supporting low income residents including the Affordable Transit Pass Pilot Project, new bus service to Keith Neighbourhood residents, an investment of \$2 million to build a community centre in the Beasley neighbourhood and \$1 million to create affordable housing in the city core
- **Increased community support** including a 5 year, \$5 million commitment by the Hamilton Community Foundation (TPT II) building on a previous \$3.4 million investment with a focus on neighbourhood hubs, downtown renewal and broader strategies including policy and systems change, \$1.5 million investment by the United Way on poverty and \$1.3 million investment in neighbourhoods, \$400,000 investment by the J.W.McConnell Family Foundation and Vibrant Communities, HRPR Report to Community distributed to 150,000 Hamilton households through partnership with The Hamilton Spectator (in-kind value \$70,000)
- **Influencing the Ontario Poverty Strategy** has been a key focus of the Policy Working Group including three consultations and presentations to Minister Matthews, development of briefing notes and progress updates for the Cabinet Committee on Poverty Reduction and convening a community conversation on poverty reduction involving 200 local citizens

Enhancing Income and Family Supports:

- City of Hamilton launches the **Affordable Transit Pass Pilot Project** aimed at 1200 low-income working Hamiltonians in April 2008
- **19 free tax clinics** are held across the city to help low-income families, and especially seniors, complete their tax forms and receive their benefits, including Guaranteed Income Supplement by community partners including the Hamilton Council on Aging
- The City of Hamilton returns approximately **\$2 million in 2007 and \$1 million in 2006** to 6,500 low-income families through the municipal portion of the National Child Benefit

Engaging Neighbourhoods, Youth and Citizens:

- The Roundtable works collaboratively with low-income advocacy and community organizations across Hamilton **engaging 41,852 individuals and groups**
- Citizens, the Affordable Housing Flagship, United Way, Hamilton Community Foundation, City of Hamilton, HRPR and community partner to transform the Oriole Crescent and north end neighbourhoods
- The Hamilton Youth Voice Against Poverty and Youth Engagement and Action Hamilton are part of a growing network of engaged youth leading community change

Increasing and Aligning Community Investments:

- **10 new school partnerships** provide resources and enrich the learning experience for Hamilton students. The Hamilton Spectator, RBC, Hamilton Port Authority, United Way and port companies, City of Hamilton Police Service and Public Works, Evans Philp law firm and Mark's Work Warehouse lead the way
- Community funders including the City of Hamilton, United Way, and Hamilton Community Foundation target **\$5 million annually** to poverty reduction efforts
- The Hamilton Spectator continues its **three-year editorial commitment to poverty**, publishing more than 400 articles, editorials, and a 'No Excuses' blog since 2005

Integrating Programs and Solving Problems Collaboratively:

- HRPR partners with the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board and Hamilton's Centre for Civic Inclusion to host community sessions focused on understanding poverty and the racialization of poverty
- The Roundtable's leading-edge approach of engaging cross-sector partners for complex issues like poverty, economic development, job creation, and immigration attracts attention locally, nationally and internationally as a best practice model
- **Increased attention and focus on Hamilton** by all levels of government leading to increased investments in community initiatives supporting low income individuals and families such as Focus on Youth funding increasing access to summer camp programs for low income families

Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy

- HRPR calls for an Ontario poverty reduction strategy during the 2007 election and works with local and provincial organizations to frame the strategy
- Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy framework focuses on investments in children and youth
- 200 citizens and 5 Hamilton-area MPPs participate in the July 14, Community Conversation on Poverty Reduction with information submitted to the Government of Ontario Cabinet Committee on Poverty Reduction
- Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) presentation to Minister Deb Matthews highlights the Hamilton approach to poverty reduction and calls for the Ontario Poverty Strategy to 'Make Ontario the Best Place to Raise a Child'

Making Hamilton the Best Place to Raise a Child: Progress in the Five Critical Points of Investment in Children and Youth

The HRPR's change framework lays out five critical points of investment to ***make Hamilton the best place to raise a child***. Last year, we proposed Starting Point Strategies for each critical point. Here, are some highlights of our progress in each area.

Quality Early Learning and Parenting

With its Starting Point Partner, the Hamilton Best Start Network, the HRPR's current Starting Point Strategy is to support the development of **Neighbourhood Early Learning and Care Hubs** in all low-income neighbourhoods.

Measures of Success:

- United Way's "From Here to the Bay" initiative links private sector investment with the early years sector to expand and enhance Ontario Early Years Centre programming
- Hamilton Centre for Civic Inclusion launches pilot of an assessment tool for organizational capacity in the area of diversity and inclusion
- Twenty new childcare spaces are created for the Aboriginal community in partnership with Niwasa Head Start Pre-School; a new Early Years Centre is developed to support the Aboriginal community
- Information and support is given to 150 primary care providers, resulting in more use of developmental screening tools and links to early years programs
- Seven neighbourhood service provider teams (including public health nurses, occupational therapists, physical therapists, early childhood educators, resource teachers etc.) are developed and aligned with the Ontario Early Years Centre communities
- Speech and language education opportunities and communication team services are improved for children, parents and professionals
- City of Hamilton Public Health announces a Nurse-Family Partnership focused on low-income new mothers and children funded by the Catholic Children's Aid Society, Children's Aid Society, City of Hamilton Public Health Services, Community Child Abuse Council, Hamilton Community Foundation, McMaster Children's Hospital Research Institute, Ministry of Children and Youth Services, Nursing Secretariat of Ontario and Offord Centre for Child Studies
- New Parenting and Family Literacy Centres are integrated into the early years sector
- Hamilton Community Foundation invests \$1 million in the Beasley Neighbourhood to expand early learning and parenting programs

Skills through Education, Activity and Recreation

With its Starting Point Partner, School Age Solutions and the school boards in Hamilton, the HRPR's current Starting Point Strategy is to work with partners to **promote access** to existing **out-of-school programs**, **identify program gaps** in low-income neighbourhoods, and **align resources** to fill those gaps.

Measures of Success:

- New, creative partnerships link local schools and/or neighbourhood associations with other groups: Hamilton Spectator employees, RBC Foundation, Mohawk College, Rotary, the YMCA, Hamilton Police Service, City of Hamilton Public Works, Arts Hamilton, the Hamilton Public Library, Mark's Work Wearhouse, Evans Philp law firm, and many more
- School Age Solutions launches a mentoring program for before- and after-school programs to ensure that high quality programs exist across the community
- Kiwanis Club of Greater Hamilton contributes \$60,000 in funding to student success programs at both Sanford Avenue School and Hess Street School

- Both the public and Catholic school boards focus programs on students attending high-needs schools to level the playing field for all youth
- More than 100 local residents attend the Hamilton Public Library's family literacy nights at the Barton Branch, where authors visit, book characters appear in costume, and free books are given to children. The Siemens Power Generation plant partners with the library and a local school. Families are excited about reading; they see the library as a dynamic, safe place in their community
- The Ministry of Education announces \$765,000 for Hamilton schools in low-income neighbourhoods to give students summer program opportunities

Targeted Skills Development

With its Starting Point Partner, Skills Development Flagship, the HRPR's current Starting Point Strategy is to support a partnership to establish an **innovative skills development program for at-risk youth**.

Measures of Success:

- The Ministry of Children and Youth Services makes a three-year funding commitment in 2007 to Hamilton's at-risk youth through the Youth Opportunities Strategy and, in 2008, renews its commitment to summer employment programs for youth through the YMCA of Hamilton-Burlington and the Hamilton Police Service
- Youth Engagement and Action in Hamilton (YEAH) develops and trains more than 100 community organizations about how to engage youth effectively
- The Student Success: Tackling Poverty Together project, a partnership between the Industry Education Council, employers and the two district school boards is helping at-risk students stay in school and then find jobs. The program combines part-time employment and in-school work, both for credit. More than 40 students have already secured employment with 25 firms that have collectively invested \$85,000 in student wages.
- The Skills Development Flagship partners with Goodwill, The Amity Group to create an innovated model for a youth centre in the downtown core which will include a drop-in centre, mentoring program, and employment and education supports
- The North Hamilton Community Health Centre works with community partners to develop a Pathways to Education program which will help youth graduate from high school

Employment

With its Starting Point Partner, Hamilton Immigrant Workforce Integration Network, the HRPR's current Starting Point Strategy is to support the development of a multi-stakeholder table that focuses on **creating opportunities for meaningful employment** for new immigrants.

Measures of success:

- 32 local employers commit to hiring new immigrants through Hamilton Immigrant Workforce Integration Network
- Hamilton's Immigration Strategy Table, Human Services Planning Table, and Jobs Prosperity Collaborative came together to include a poverty reduction lens in their approaches
- Three bridging programs are now available through SISO (Settlement and Integration Services Organization) to connect internationally-trained professionals and trades people with employment, licensing, and training/upgrading opportunities
- A mentoring program for immigrants in the banking sector registers a 70% employment rate and is expanding into education, health care, and business start-up
- More than 160 employers have actively fulfilled their staffing needs through the specialized recruitment and placement services for newcomers at SISO
- A Workplace Development Toolkit is launched and implemented through a partnership between the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce, SISO, City of Hamilton and Hamilton's Centre for Civic

Inclusion. The same partnership brings the Global Experience @Work Program to Hamilton which provides free human resources consulting related to recruitment, hiring and workplace integration for foreign-trained professionals and trades

- The Hamilton Training Advisory Board engages the local community in identifying labour market trends, opportunities and priorities
- City of Hamilton received \$192,487 for the HamiltonHires project which will target employment opportunities and develop employment supports for Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support recipients to obtain employment with the City of Hamilton.

Asset Building and Wealth Creation

With its Starting Point Partner, the Affordable Housing Flagship, the HRPR's current Starting Point Strategy is to help low-income families **build savings and assets** which move them along the housing continuum (including social housing, rental housing and home ownership).

Measures of Success:

- In partnership with the federal and provincial governments, Hamilton receives down payment assistance for up to 245 low-income households; 30 agreements have already been signed
- In partnership with federal and provincial governments and the Canada-Ontario Affordable Housing Program, Hamilton will create 551 affordable housing units in Hamilton. This exceeds the Hamilton target (350 units) by 54%
- The City's Hostel to Homes Program has helped 80 people move from emergency shelters into longer term rental housing
- 38 families are preparing to move from social housing into home ownership with help from the Hamilton HomeStart Program, a creative partnership between CityHousing Hamilton and Scotiabank. The innovative program has become a model and best practice for other asset building initiatives for low-income families
- Through the Homeownership Affordability Program (HOAP), nine households now own their homes. The partners making this possible are: Realtors Association of Hamilton-Burlington, City of Hamilton, Threshold School of Building, and Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation
- The City of Hamilton creates 200 new housing allowances, making rents more affordable for tenants in Hamilton over the next 5 years for a total investment of almost \$2.4 million
- 691 tenant households will receive \$100/month housing allowance from the Province's ROOF program over the coming five years for a total investment of over \$4 million

Moving Forward from Poverty to Prosperity for Hamilton

Progress has been made on many fronts through the leadership of City Council in partnership with the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, but we cannot rest on our laurels. The global economic pressures including increasing energy costs and services costs will be identified as part of the 2008/2009 municipal budget process. For the citizens of Hamilton living on low or limited incomes, the pressures will be even greater. As the City of Hamilton begins budget deliberations, we hope they will consider investments which will help the most marginalized citizens in our community move forward toward prosperity.

The City of Hamilton's leadership around poverty reduction has been instrumental in leveraging investments from business, the community and other levels of government. The City of Hamilton has made important strides in addressing poverty. The creation of the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction and a renewed community effort to view this as investments in our future will help ensure that Hamilton becomes the best place to raise a child.

The Provincial government is finalizing its poverty reduction strategy, expected to be released by the end of the year and Hamilton will continue to play a critical role in informing the strategy with our progress. City Council has an instrumental role that it can play in leveraging investments in conjunction with the provincial strategy that address Hamilton's unique circumstances and needs.

Municipal Investments:

Investments in Early Learning and Childcare:

There is increased pressure for low-income families to access affordable childcare in Hamilton and a growing waiting list for childcare services. The City of Hamilton has contributed significantly to the Hamilton Best Start Network and a coordinated approach to early learning and childcare planning. Research and best practices show that investments in early learning programs pay dividends throughout the life of a child. Additional funds invested by the City of Hamilton in increasing access to early learning and parenting programs in low income neighbourhoods would increase the availability and access to low-income families.

Opportunities for children:

The recent report on the condition of Hamilton's recreation facilities forms a solid base in establishing the importance of recreational facilities to the community. Studies show that children who are able to **access recreational facilities** are healthier, learn better and have fewer interactions with the justice system. Unfortunately, for many of Hamilton's 22,000 children growing up in poverty, recreation remains an unaffordable and inaccessible luxury. Perhaps most affected are the children of families in receipt of social assistance who simply cannot afford the daily admission or 'yearly participation passes'. We would encourage council to support 'free' passes for all children of families in receipt of social assistance and children of families who fall below Canada's low income cut-off.

With the support of Hamilton City Council, Hamilton's Roundtable for Poverty Reduction is willing to take a leadership role in the development of a **social inclusion policy** for the proposed Pan Am Games bid. Vancouver has developed important social inclusion standards in 2010 Winter Olympic bid that will lead to enhancements for recreation opportunities that would minimize negative impacts of the Games for low income residents while at the same time maximizing opportunities (for employment, housing and neighbourhoods).

Affordable Transportation:

Affordable public transportation remains a significant burden for many families in Hamilton. While the City has made important investments in programs such as the 'affordable transit pass' for people who work, many families are not eligible and cannot access this important program for their children. Many youth are required to use the HSR at the \$63.00 monthly pass cost to commute to school and have been impacted by two fare increases in 2007. The Roundtable would encourage Council to consider the creation of **an affordable transit pass for children and youth living in low income families** to help offset the increasing financial burden of commuting to school.

Investing in Neighbourhoods:

Research tells us that place matters. Hamilton's neighbourhoods are important to its citizens and can be critical sites for building prosperous futures. The City of Hamilton should maximize progress on these fronts which would result in stronger, safer neighbourhoods and increase the quality of life for its citizens. The Hamilton Community Foundation has been investing in Hamilton's neighbourhoods for more than seven years and recently announced a five year, \$5 million commitment to neighbourhood development. The United Way of Burlington, Greater Hamilton has also focused on Hamilton's neighbourhoods as an investment priority. Increasingly, community organizations, citizen groups and individual citizens are focusing on programs and services which enhance the capacity of neighbourhoods and their citizens to collaborate and take initiative and leadership. The City of Hamilton should **invest in a coordinated approach to neighbourhood development** which could include neighbourhood community development workers, engaging citizen leaders and integration of service delivery with a neighbourhood focus.

Income and Employment supports:

25,000 residents of Hamilton work full time but nevertheless fall below Statistic Canada's low income cut-off. City Council should commit to a principle that any resident of the City who works full time should not live in poverty. The City can play a role in helping to move the markers by ensuring that its own employees and employees of contractors who deal with the City are paid a **'Living Wage'**. A Living Wage is recognized as a wage at which a person who works full time can earn an income sufficient to maintain a safe, healthy standard of living, meet basic needs and build some savings for the future. According to the Hamilton Living Wage Coalition, a single person living in a one-bedroom apartment needs to make \$12.38/hr to maintain housing, purchase a healthy food basket and other necessities. We would encourage the City to officially **adopt a living wage policy**, like many other municipalities across North America. We would further encourage the City to move further, by adopting a living wage policy 'requirements' into tenders and RFPs with contractors with which it deals for city contracts. Living wage benefits employers by limiting turnovers and improving productivity, it allows employees to maintain a higher standard of living and purchase more goods and services from local businesses and it benefits the community by increasing consumer purchasing power and growing the local property tax base.

Hamilton is one of the country's highest receiving points for new immigrants to Canada. Hamilton is home to many foreign professionals who are highly trained, but lack Canadian credentials. The lack of Canadian experience remains a monumental barrier for many in the Hamilton community. We would strongly encourage Council to take a leadership role on the issue through the development and support of the **Local Immigration Council** and advancement of this issue with the Jobs Prosperity Collaborative.

Affordable, accessible housing:

Housing is by far the single largest budget expense for families. Recent reports compiled by the City's Housing Department have shown that more than 17,000 families in Hamilton are paying more than half of their monthly incomes in rent. Although tenants pay municipal property taxes through rent, on average, renters pay a much greater percentage of their incomes into municipal services than do homeowners. At the same time, resources earmarked to assist tenants maintain affordable housing is relatively limited in Hamilton. **A continued investment towards enhancing opportunities for tenants to maintain and preserve affordable rental housing** is far more cost effective for the community as well as for individuals affected than dealing with homelessness once it becomes a reality. Over the past five years, all new, affordable housing investments have been supported by funding by all levels of government. This leveraging of investments has had a significant positive impact on Hamilton.

In March 2009, the federal government Homelessness Partnership Initiative is due to expire and this will have a dramatically negative impact on homelessness in Hamilton. We encourage you to consider working with partners including the Affordable Housing Flagship, Roundtable and service delivery partners to **advocate for continued investments in housing and homelessness**.

Some additional investments in affordable housing could include:

- expansion of rental subsidies/allowances for low income tenants to offset the high costs of housing
- an investment in education and outreach programs to Hamilton's tenants (including those who may have difficulties with the English language) to help them maintain affordable housing
- leverage a portion of the \$48 million recently announced by the provincial government into capital repairs for City-owned social housing (which currently is in need of a significant infusion of funds – while many low income tenants are living in unacceptable accommodations) which would support redevelopment and the revitalization of low income neighbourhoods. Hamilton is further in need of a massive infusion of capital investment to ensure that housing for persons with disabilities (or universal design) is incorporated to meet the current and future needs of low income residents.
- continue work on the hugely successful 'Hostels to Homes' program in conjunction with the Provincial Government which is moving people living in conditions of absolute homelessness into their own homes with supports

Moving toward Prosperity for all

The challenges facing Hamilton are great. But our capacities as a community to respond to these challenges, to view the opportunities that exist are greater. The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction recognizes the outstanding leadership shown by City Council. The impact of this leadership has leveraged a wide range of community investments.