



## **Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction: Policy Brief Towards a poverty reduction strategy for Ontario**

The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction believes that the Province of Ontario needs a broad poverty reduction strategy to address the unacceptable levels of poverty in the province. As the City of Hamilton currently has the highest incidence of urban poverty in the province, we believe local candidates running in the provincial election are in a unique and influential position to champion the proposal for a ‘made in Ontario’ comprehensive poverty reduction strategy.

Over the past few years, several other provincial governments have moved towards creating poverty reduction strategies by adopting specific policy goals, establishing financial commitments and setting out benchmarks for implementing change to reduce poverty in their jurisdictions. In Newfoundland, New Brunswick and Quebec, governments have focused on poverty reduction initiatives to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty.

Several European jurisdictions have been extremely successful in reducing levels of poverty through comprehensive, coordinated strategies. In what came to be dubbed as “the Irish miracle”, poverty in Ireland was slashed to “6.8 per cent from the daunting 15 per cent that lived beneath the line of destitution 10 years ago”<sup>1</sup>.

Importantly, each poverty reduction initiative recognizes the importance of breaking down the systemic (or bureaucratic) barriers that exist within or between governments by developing a synchronized approach to dealing with poverty. Like the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction’s process of ‘breaking down silos’, a successful poverty reduction strategy must engage both community and government and strive towards a widespread commitment or ‘buy-in’.

Many families are trapped in poverty because of policy and systemic failures. Reducing poverty means removing barriers that keep families from achieving self-sufficiency<sup>2</sup>.

All successful poverty reduction agendas have indicated that focused government and community leadership is essential towards meeting success. The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction would respectfully urge the Government of Ontario to:

- 1) **Establish an Inter-Ministerial Secretariat on Poverty Reduction.** The Secretariat should draw on the expertise of its different ministries, and be directly accountable to the Premier and Minister of Finance. Over the last few years there have been several successful initiatives of this kind; for example, the Democratic Renewal Secretariat and the Ontario Growth Secretariat. A Poverty Reduction Secretariat will establish political accountability for the issue of poverty, build bridges between different government departments that relate to poverty (e.g. Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services, Ministry of Community and Social Services, Ministry of Education, or the Ministry of Health), and be able to implement the wide range of solutions needed to combat conditions of poverty across Ontario.

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<sup>1</sup> Toronto Star “The Irish miracle, April 7, 2007

<sup>2</sup> “Business Community Anti-Poverty Initiative” Saint John.

- 2) **Establish a multi-sector Provincial Panel on Poverty Reduction.** One of the major findings of the Hamilton Roundtable on Poverty Reduction is that, while government has a major role to play in reducing poverty, all sectors – business, community, people living in low income, and government need to take responsibility and be involved in the long term solutions.
- 3) **Develop measurable targets and timelines to reduce poverty.** The ability to monitor progress or lack of progress is a crucial factor to evaluate success in reducing poverty. An example of targets and timelines include Campaign 2000's call for a 25% reduction in the child poverty rate (based on the Low Income Cut Off) by 2012. Other targets should include reductions in the rates of low income for different sub-populations – Aboriginal people, single mothers, recent immigrants, or visible minorities. Once established, the Poverty Reduction Strategy should include annual progress reports toward the targets.
- 4) **Invest the resources and create the necessary policies to reduce and prevent poverty.** The Hamilton Roundtable on Poverty Reduction has identified five key areas of investment in the lives of children, youth and their families living in poverty:
  - Quality early learning and child care
  - Skills through education, activity, and recreation
  - Targeted skills development (Post – secondary)
  - Employment
  - Asset Building and Wealth Creation

These critical points of investment are built on foundational community supports that require investment and policy direction by all levels of government, particularly the Provincial Government. Without these foundational supports, children are unable to move through the five critical points of investment. The foundational community supports require both investment by the Provincial Government and the development of policies to support their sustainability.

The foundational community supports are:

- Civic engagement and broad social inclusion
- Universal access to health care supports that focus on prevention, early intervention and mental health
- Strong education institutions
- A solid economy producing quality employment and a living wage
- Affordable housing opportunities in neighbourhoods across the city
- Accessible, reliable, and affordable transportation
- Accessible amenities at the neighbourhood level
- Adequate and responsive income security programs
- Institutional and community behavior that values that participation and contributions of youth.

The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction looks forward to working with the Province of Ontario to reduce poverty and social exclusion in our communities. We recognize that the issue of poverty will not be solved quickly or simply, but we would encourage the Province to take these important first steps immediately. We believe that ignoring the issues of poverty and social exclusion impacts the ability to achieve prosperity for all citizens in Ontario.

**It is time for leadership and action.**



## The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction

The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction was born out of concern for our community's poverty challenge. It came together in May 2005 to understand Hamilton's high poverty levels, focus the community's attention on poverty, and begin to find solutions. Since then, we have consulted widely in the community, reviewed findings from local consultations on poverty related issues, explored best practices here and elsewhere, and received advice from experts in approach to poverty and community action.

Hamilton is a community at the crossroads. 20% of our people are living in poverty. We know that tackling poverty is a key to both our economic development and our social development. In February 2006 the Roundtable announced a poverty reduction strategy focused on children and youth: making Hamilton the best Place to Raise a Child: A Change Framework. We took this initial focus for a number of reasons:

- It reflects the voice of the community
- It targets a significant poverty demographic and encompasses other poverty "hotspots"
- It is grounded in best practices
- It supports Hamilton's strategic vision
- Children are the future of our City

The Roundtable is one piece of the framework – in its role as convenor and facilitator the Roundtable will help to drive the change process – but it will take everyone in Hamilton working together to really make an impact on poverty. The Roundtable believes that by taking a systems approach and working together with a focus on children and youth, our community can reduce poverty and make Hamilton *The Best Place to Raise a Child*.

For more information about the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction visit:  
<http://www.hamiltonpoverty.ca>

The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction  
% The Hamilton Community Foundation  
120 King St. W., Suite 700, Hamilton, Ontario, L8P 4V2  
Tel: (905) 523-5600 Fax: (905) 523-0741



The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction is co-convened by the Hamilton Community Foundation and the City of Hamilton

## **Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction – Membership**

Judith Bishop	Trustee, Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board
Darlene Burkett	Citizen Member
Marcel Castura	Director of Education, Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board
Mark Chamberlain	President & CEO PictorVision; Past-Chair, Hamilton Community Foundation Board of Directors
Tom Cooper	Community Development Coordinator, McQuesten Legal & Community Services
John Dolbec	Chief Executive Officer, Hamilton Chamber of Commerce
Howard Elliott	Executive Editor, The Hamilton Spectator
Bill Gair	Manager, Corporate Communication, Dofasco
Dr. Lindsey George	Head of Service, Mental Health Rehabilitation Service, Centre for Mountain Health Services, St. Joseph's Healthcare
Peter Hutton	Chair, Hamilton Social Justice Coalition
Don Jaffray	Executive Director, Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton
Paul Johnson	Executive Director, Wesley Urban Ministries
Mary Lee	Member, Campaign for Adequate Welfare and Disability Benefits
Sandy Leyland	Citizen Member
Yvonne Maracle	Citizen Member
Councillor Brian McHattie	Hamilton City Council
Bill Medeiros	Citizen Member
Carolyn Milne	President and Chief Executive Officer, Hamilton Community Foundation
Brian Mullan	Chief of Police, City of Hamilton
Joe-Anne Priel	General Manager, Public Health and Community Services, City of Hamilton
Dr. Elizabeth Richardson	Medical Officer of Health, City of Hamilton
Ines Rios	Executive Director, St. Joseph Immigrant Women's Centre
Dr. Leila Ryan	Clinical Professor, School of Nursing, Mc Master University
Dr. Christopher Spence	Director of Education, Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board
Darrel Skidmore	Chief Executive Officer, United Way of Hamilton, Burlington
Judy Travis	Executive Director, Hamilton Training Advisory Board
Carl Turkstra	President, Turkstra Lumber
Neil Turner	Citizen Member
Steve Varey	Vice-President, Hamilton & Niagara District, Scotiabank
Gary Warner	McMaster University (Retired)
Madina Wasuge	Executive Director, Hamilton's Centre for Civic Inclusion

### **Liaison Representatives**

Rick Beauchamp Regional Director (Acting), Ministry of Community and Social Services

### **Project Staff**

Liz Weaver Director, Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction  
Marg Kowalski Manager, Community Engagement, Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction

### **Staff Representatives from Convening Organizations**

Sheree Meredith Vice President, Grants and Community Initiatives, Hamilton Community Foundation  
Jane Soldera Director, Social Development and Early Childhood Services, City of Hamilton