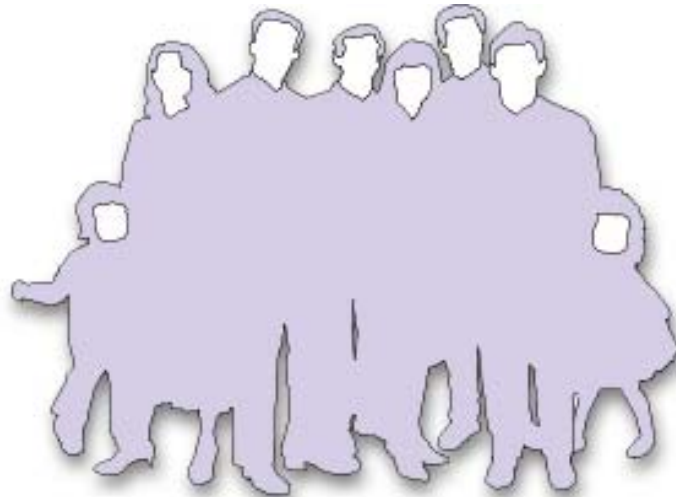


# The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction



## Leadership & Lessons 2005-2007

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



## Introduction

The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction (HRPR) is a community-wide effort to tackle the problem of poverty in Hamilton and promote prosperity for all Hamiltonians. A number of different aspects of the HRPR have been written about. This document, aimed at other organizations contemplating a comprehensive community change initiative, is about leadership and lessons—a response to the most common questions we field about the development of this initiative.

We begin with a bit of history and context, but move quickly to the role of HRPR leaders and early champions. We then turn to lessons learned, even at this relatively early stage of the HRPR's work. We highlight key insights throughout, and where we can, we reference other documents that contain more detail about various aspects of the HRPR. At the end, we list some of the books and resources that HRPR leaders have found useful and inspiring.

### 1: How the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction Developed

A number of threads in the Hamilton community came together to make conditions right for the birth of the HRPR.

Amalgamation had hit Hamilton, along with other regions in Ontario, and in 2002 the Community Services Department of the City of Hamilton commissioned the Caledon Institute on Social Policy to develop a social vision for the newly amalgamated City of Hamilton. The social vision document identified three priority areas— children and youth, skills development, and affordable housing. It envisioned the new City as “a safe, healthy and caring community, which fosters a sense of belonging and pride. It is a culturally rich and diverse community, which ensures that all citizens have access to opportunities and resources to meet their basic needs and promote active participation. It is a vibrant community, which promotes support for basic needs as well as inclusion and learning for all.”

Also in 2002, Hamilton Community Foundation, which has always provided grants to community organizations working with low-income clients, began working directly in low-income neighbourhoods. The foundation launched the *Growing Roots... Strengthening Neighbourhoods* program to support groups of residents with an idea of how to improve their neighbourhood. The foundation not only provided small grants, but also community development support. The program deepened the foundation's understanding of poverty in Hamilton and the powerful role of grassroots neighbourhood development.

In February 2004, with the lessons of *Growing Roots... Strengthening Neighbourhoods* beginning to take shape, and after much discussion about how to broadly address the alarmingly high levels of poverty in Hamilton, the Board of Directors of Hamilton Community Foundation decided to direct its \$3 million community fund granting to a focus on preventing and reducing poverty. The foundation made an initial four-year commitment to this priority and worked with community organizations to apply for funding that focused on poverty prevention and reduction strategies.

Later in 2004, the Social Planning and Research Council presented a report to Hamilton's City Council—the *Incomes and Poverty Report*—that detailed the impact of poverty on the City of Hamilton. Based on 2000 census data, the report identified that Hamilton has one of the highest urban poverty rates in Ontario and that one in four children under the age of 14 live in families below the low income cut off rate. The report caught the attention of City Council.

Joe-Anne Priel, Community Services Department General Manager, connected with her colleague, Carolyn Milne, CEO of Hamilton Community Foundation. Carolyn and Joe-Anne, with Mark Chamberlain, who was at that time the chair of the Board of Directors of Hamilton Community Foundation and a well-respected business entrepreneur, decided to convene the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction. A broad range of community leaders and decision makers representing all sectors, including corporate, government and non-profit were invited together in February 2005 with Mark Chamberlain as chair.

The outcome of the first meeting was a strong endorsement to move forward and develop a plan for action, innovation and collaboration to reduce poverty in Hamilton.



### Starting on the Right Foot

*“That first meeting was incredibly important,” says Carolyn Milne. “We had talked to Vibrant Communities for advice and Paul Born made a crucial suggestion. We were struggling with how to define poverty for the purpose of the meeting. He advised us to put the question to the group. So we did. We asked each person around the table to describe what poverty meant to him or her. As each person—most of them well-off and in positions of influence—as they described their definitions of poverty, we discovered that many of them had lived through periods of poverty earlier in their lives. It was an emotional sharing of perspectives that set the tone for the group. The work, though it would take place on a city-wide stage, was intensely felt and understood on the personal level.”*

## A Principle of Broad Representation from the Community

The seminal idea of the HRPR co-conveners was to bring all sectors of the community together to tackle poverty. They wanted business, government (both civil servants and politicians), the not-for-profit sector, educators, people living in poverty, neighbourhood activists, philanthropists, and other local leaders to engage together in finding solutions to this problem that the whole community shared. The co-conveners were convinced that social development and economic development are linked and that poverty must be addressed by all sectors working together.

### ✦ More detail:

- ***Caledon Institute on Social Policy, Shared Leadership—Collaborative Governance: Hamilton***

**Roundtable for Poverty Reduction (March 2007).** *This article gives more detail on how the HRPR came into being and the role each convening organization, and others, played in its development.*

- **Case Study: Tackling Poverty in Hamilton, produced by Community Foundations of Canada (May 2006).** *This case study describes how the work of Hamilton Community Foundation led up to the co-convening of HRPR and some of the early lessons learned by the foundation.*

## 2: Research and Engaging the Community

Early in 2005, the Roundtable seconded staff to help drive the collaborative process. The first director, Paul Johnson, was lent to the Roundtable from Wesley Urban Ministries, a much-respected agency with a long track record of work in Hamilton's core. A researcher, Mark Fraser, was seconded from the Social Planning and Research Council. Both worked with the Roundtable into 2006, and Paul continues as a Roundtable member. Kate Feightner also worked for the Roundtable in its formative stages, bringing municipal government experience.

Throughout 2005 and 2006, the Roundtable continued to compile data on the nature and extent of poverty in the city. Experts across the community were asked to comment on the data and make suggestions about strategies, best practices, approaches, etc. The Roundtable reviewed the experience of other communities, and examined best practices developed elsewhere. At the same time, HRPR continued the time-intensive process of consulting and engaging the broad community, assessing the appetite for collaborative work and change.

Eleven engagement sessions were held with groups in all sectors. The HRPR reached out to expert resources at this stage, working with Vibrant Communities and bringing Jay Connor (a guru on comprehensive community change and founder of the Collaboratory for Community Support in Michigan) to Hamilton for a series of community meetings. The response to these sessions was very encouraging.

At the same time, the HRPR worked to "raise the volume" on the issue of poverty in the community at large. In that, they had the invaluable support of *The Hamilton Spectator*, the community's daily paper. The Spectator's editor in chief was a member of the Roundtable and also served on Hamilton Community Foundation's Board of Directors. The Spectator committed to make poverty a priority area for news coverage and commentary—the first time the paper had ever identified a public policy focus.



### *Preparation Makes all the Difference*

*Looking back on what has allowed the HRPR to move forward, co-convenor Joe-Anne Priel highlights the idea of the "prepared mind" from the book *Getting to Maybe*. "All the preparation—the social vision, the neighbourhood development work, the community meetings and white papers—all that had prepared my mind so that when the door opened I was ready to vault through. Laying the groundwork, all the pre-work in the community, has been crucial to our progress."*

### 3: Creating a Plan

The leaders of HRPR were convinced that collaborative planning was essential to the success of any change effort the HRPR might engage in. They also believed that fundamental change was necessary in the way sectors and organizations worked together. The concepts were hard to describe. There was constant pressure to produce a plan.

The other constant pressure was to launch or support programs. But when the Roundtable leaders scanned the community, it was clear that many high-quality services existed for low-income residents. But those services and programs were fractured, short-term responses. The HRPR leaders believed that a fundamental shift in how the community did business—coordination rather than additional programs—was more likely to produce lasting change.

The Roundtable also believed that to “move the needle” on poverty, change would have to come from organizations and individuals throughout the community, not just from the Roundtable. It was not enough for the Roundtable to lay down a plan—parts of the plan, and the commitment to address poverty across sectors—needed to bubble up from the community. The vision needed to be a shared one.

Because of their commitment to collaboration, they presented their ideas at several community meetings, soliciting feedback and asking organizations and individuals to sign on to the change initiative.

Ultimately, in June 2006, the HRPR proposed a change framework that it hoped would galvanize the community and provide “on ramps” for everyone to join the effort. The document was called *Making Hamilton the Best Place to Raise a Child: A Change Framework for Poverty Reduction*.



#### Resisting the Push to Programs

Making broad-scale, comprehensive change is difficult. It demands a different way of thinking about poverty reduction, moving people from a focus on alleviation and programs to a root cause lens and policy-level, multi-sector change. “There is constant pressure to invest in programs, to jump to a solution for a segment of the population that desperately needs help,” says Liz Weaver, the HRPR Director. “It’s hard to resist that, but you have to, if you want to achieve systemic change.”

The HRPR Change Framework: Making Hamilton the Best Place to Raise a Child

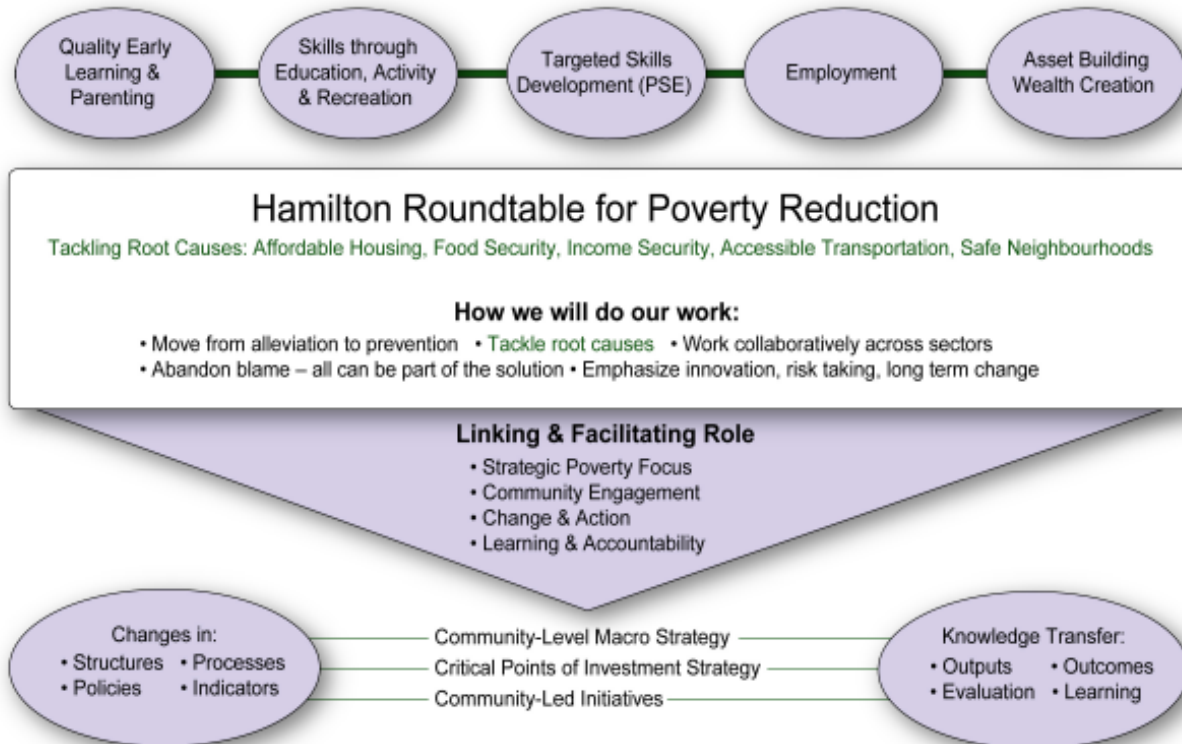
The change framework was both a presentation of the facts, an approach, and a call to action. It incorporated a number of elements:

- a set of principles about how to work collaboratively
- a set of “critical points of investment” that laid out the successful progression of a child from birth to adulthood, and the barriers that block low-income children along that progression
- a set of fundamental community supports, like transportation, income security, employment, etc. that must exist as a foundation for the healthy progression

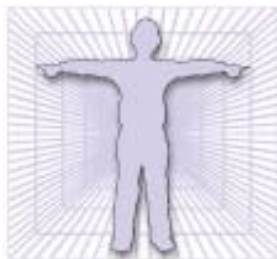
- a call for the community to work differently together—to look at the structural, policy, and process changes that needed to be made to move the community toward prosperity for all

The comprehensive nature of the document has helped to ground the ongoing work of the Roundtable.

## The Aspiration: Making Hamilton the Best Place to Raise a Child



Later, after more consultation with the community, the HRPR produced another document that outlined “Starting Point Strategies” and identified community partner agencies and organizations that had agreed to lead the work in each critical point of investment.



### Comprehensive Framework

“The framework is what makes this different from other change efforts across the country,” says Carolyn Milne. “It lays out our principles, the data on poverty, the progression for successful children and families, the foundational supports our community needs to provide, and the places for people to engage. It really expresses the comprehensive nature of our change initiative.”

#### ✦ More detail:

- *HRPR conceptualized much of its early work using the Phases for Poverty Reduction table from Vibrant Communities.*

- *HRPR's document Mapping the Progress of the Roundtable 2005-2007 contains more detail.*
- *Making Hamilton the Best Place to Raise a Child: A Change Framework for Poverty Reduction and the Starting Point Strategies documents lay out the HRPR's principles, conceptual framework, practical strategies, and some early successes.*

#### 4: The Crux of Change: Modeling a New Kind of Leadership

The HRPR's work has been based on concepts of collaboration and collaborative leadership. From the beginning, there was a deep understanding on the part of the co-conveners and the chair that no one organization or sector could find lasting solutions to poverty on its own. A new way of thinking and a new way of working together was needed.

The two co-conveners, the chair, the founding staff director and his successor all committed to modeling a new way of working and leading. "This began with a few concerned folks," says Mark Chamberlain. "Initially it was the City and the Foundation coming together and saying 'what we're doing now in Hamilton just isn't working the way it needs to, we're not making progress on poverty'. When you're faced with a difficult problem, it is broad discussion that leads you to answers. You keep adding people until you find the solution. I think of it in business terms. If I have a business problem, I'll call in the engineers. If they can't solve it, I ask Sales to join us. If that doesn't produce the answer, I call in Finance and so on. Make no mistake, collaborative leadership is still leadership—it's just different. In the HRPR case, it's about creating the space to have open, fair, non-judgemental discussions about a very difficult, complex, emotional problem. My role as chair is to protect that safe space and ensure that open process."

Co-convener Carolyn Milne calls it the need to "work horizontally. The traditional hierarchies aren't working," she says. "In this new approach, we're focusing on silo busting across tunnels of learning. That's the only way to find solutions to these complex challenges."

But what does "working horizontally" mean? Milne says it's about finding partners with complementary strengths. In the HRPR case, the City had the authority to make change and the influence to affect policy, as well as resources. The Foundation had the networks and the non-partisan positioning to bring in other sectors. They were complementary co-convening organizations.

"But the third point of the triangle is crucial too," adds Carolyn. "Our Chair, Mark Chamberlain, is well-known as a successful entrepreneur and an engineer. He was the face and voice of HRPR in the beginning as we reached out to the business sector. His credibility—and his very deep understanding of this approach and the issue of poverty—was the essential third point of the triangle with the City and the Foundation."

Liz Weaver says this highly-involved group of leaders is one key to HRPR's success. "The co-conveners and chair designed this initiative. They were the catalysts. They have a deep understanding of the approach and the issues."



### Fully Engaging People Living with Poverty

In the initial stage, a Low Income Advisory Committee was formed to capture the voice of people affected by poverty in their own lives. It soon became evident that an advisory role was not central enough and representatives from the committee were made full members of the Roundtable. “We had to overcome criticism and scepticism about the Roundtable on the part of poverty advocates in the community,” says Liz Weaver. “But I think we’ve gradually proven that our approach can bring change. The citizen representatives now see that Hamilton is doing something about poverty that isn’t happening in other cities. They’re proud to be part of it.”

Working from that base of co-convening organizations and a chair, the HRPR broadened its membership and sought expertise from an ever-widening circle. “You need the mix of people that can give you the full dimension of the issue,” says Mark, “and therefore the full dimension of the solution. You need a balance of skills and you need systems thinkers.”

The leaders have now recruited more than 40 people from all sectors. The role of members of the HRPR has evolved over time and now those systems thinkers, members of the Roundtable, are chairing HRPR committees and working groups that are pushing strategies adopted by the Roundtable and its partners forward. With the Starting Point Partners in each of the 5 Critical Points of Investment within the *Making Hamilton the Best Place to Raise a Child* framework, and the locally-led community solutions, there are over 700 individuals and organizations now involved in the change strategy. The model of collaborative leadership is taking hold.

### Declaring Principles

Early on, the HRPR established five core principles—cultural shifts—to guide its work (see below). One of the most important, in the context of this discussion on leadership, was the notion of a “no blame” table.

#### HRPR Cultural Shift Principles

1. Shift emphasis from alleviation to prevention
2. Think comprehensively and tackle root causes
3. Work collaboratively across sectors
4. Abandon blame and acknowledge we are all part of the problem and part of the solution
5. Emphasize innovation, risk taking and long-term change

“On a topic like poverty,” says co-convenor Joe-Anne Priel, “it’s all too easy to point fingers.... If only government would do X or business would do Y or people in poverty would do Z. It’s much harder to talk about how to find solutions together. From the beginning, the HRPR was a table where blame was not tolerated. That was a challenge for the Chair and for the rest of us—but I think it was one of the things that made the HRPR work, and continues to make it work. It allows all of us to move forward, not rehash disappointments from the past.”

## Staff Leaders

Staff leadership was crucial, too, in the beginning—and it remains crucial today. The HRPR’s current director, Liz Weaver, pays homage to the founding director, Paul Johnson. “Paul was seconded from Wesley Urban Ministries and laid the foundation of the HRPR,” Liz says. “He was a great choice to set the stage, because he is a respected voice on poverty in this community, with a solid track record in the not-for-profit sector. And he is a great speaker. He was able to communicate the idea of the Roundtable and the urgency of the issue very effectively. He really brought people on board with his enthusiasm and challenged them with his vision.”

The nature of leadership changes as an initiative moves forward. (Mark calls it “pure discovery all the time!”) Liz sees her role now as continuing to move the community forward, supporting those who want to lead or bring solutions to the table, evaluating how the Roundtable is impacting children and their families in their journey out of poverty, and ensuring that the community remains focused and committed to ‘Making Hamilton the Best Place to Raise a Child’.

“With an aspiration that reaches high and beyond the issue of poverty,” Liz says, “we are able to invite all parts of the community to get involved. But we also know that we’ll never achieve this aspiration if we continue to have 24% of kids under the age of 14 living in families with low and limited incomes. This compels us to act.”

“The HRPR is incredibly fortunate to have had two really skilled staff leaders so far,” says Carolyn Milne. “Paul and Liz have each brought their different skills to the task. And they have each brought their humanity and their vision too. This is challenging work, emotionally demanding and intellectually difficult. You need leaders who are willing to share power, be open to different ideas and approaches, work respectfully with everyone, and constantly communicate in a transparent way. It’s a tall order—but don’t settle for less.”

“I’ve held fast to my KUBA principle,” says Mark. “To empower people to act, lead them through the KUBA process: Knowledge, Understanding, Belief, Action. It works.”

## 5: Lessons Learned

from **Carolyn Milne**



1. Great partners are key: they must be willing to share the risk, the messiness and the flak. Find partners with complementary strengths and resources
2. Recognize that data/knowledge is a strategic asset: research your issue, know your facts, communicate the true nature of the problem to the community, to donors, your Board, and partners. Research papers can become the centrepiece for convening efforts

3. Create learning networks and find mentors, hire consultants with the expertise you need, use existing resources and networks (e.g., CFC's social justice resources, Vibrant Communities learning network)
4. Create a forum for honest, respectful dialogue. Make sure all perspectives are at the table, including people living the issues; take time to build the relationships
5. Resist the pressure to do projects; maintain focus on the bigger perspective
6. Articulate your theory of change, your principles, why you are taking the position you are, and places for other people/organizations to engage
7. Communication is a constant challenge. The issues are complex and you need to be committed to constant communication with stakeholders
8. Back office support gives the initiative "legs"; provide systems, resources, protocols
9. Lead horizontally, not hierarchically
10. Know when you need to begin letting go of control
11. In addition to partners, you need a champion, a community leader with credibility, who can be the face of the initiative and inspire the community
12. This work takes a deep commitment from Board and staff, and courage

from **Joe-Anne Priel**



1. The difficulty is not usually about the issue itself; the problem is usually the process.
2. Planning and strategy are keys to success. Preparation and laying the groundwork is crucial.
3. Taking the time to build relationships is invaluable
4. It's important to take time to learn and plan, but keep the momentum going as you do so.
5. Creating broad community awareness is critical
6. Government support (resources and people) is critical; develop and maintain relationships with both elected officials and staff
7. The willingness to think and step outside the box is a must
8. An organizational "home" for the initiative that can provide support, advice and direction, committed funding, and strong leadership give the effort a solid foundation for success
9. A shared, clear vision and the right people—those who can broadly influence their organizations and the public at large
10. Patience. Change is gradual and comes from building on strengths and successes

from **Liz Weaver**



1. Personalize the issue - have each collaborative partner share his/her understanding and experience with the issue that will be tackled by the collaboration—and find common ground.
2. Inform your collaborative efforts with as much data as you can get your hands on—look at previous community consultations, promising practices in your community and other communities, demographic data, etc. Use this information to learn and understand as much about the issue as you can.
3. Consult broadly in your community—find out who is doing what, what people are thinking, and where the gaps are—you don't want to reinvent something that has been done or someone else is doing.

4. Settle for the best...recruit the best partners you can, look for the best consultants if you engage them, identify the leaders in the best practice areas and connect with them.
5. Develop an aspiration. This is more than a vision; it is a statement that will motivate, engage, and inspire.
6. Develop a framework, or approach, you will follow. The framework for change will become critical as you move through the collaborative journey.
7. Develop some core operating principles that will govern your collaborative, and stick to them. We have a principle of 'no blame' that has been key to our work.
8. Identify and embed key touchstones, those rituals that you can build into the collaborative process that brings partners together and refocuses their efforts on the collaborative work each time you meet (e.g. restating the statistics on poverty and declaring that they are unacceptable).
9. Construct your collaborative effort to fit your community and the issue you are seeking to address. While you can learn best practices from others, you cannot take a cookie-cutter approach to collaboration. Not reflecting your community context will only lead to failure.
10. Identify the resources needed to drive the process forward. Create a space where these resources—human, financial and in-kind—can be accessed by partners.
11. Balance process, engagement and outcomes. There has to be enough of each to create momentum and direction.
12. Showcase the work and successes of community partners.
13. Model your commitment to community at all levels in your collaborative—find ways to engage leaders from all sectors into the work.

## 6: More on Concepts and Models

These are some of the books that HRPR leaders found useful and inspiring as they developed the concepts and strategies for the Roundtable's approach:

- ***Community Visions, Community Solutions: Grantmaking for Comprehensive Impact*** by Joseph A. Connor and Stephanie Kadel-Taras
- ***Getting to Maybe: How the World Is Changed*** by Frances Westley, Brenda Zimmerman, and Michael Quinn Patton
- ***Collaborative Leadership*** by David D. Chrislip and Carl E. Larson
- The work of Dr. Roz Lasker of the Center for the Advancement of Collaborative Strategies in Health, Division of Public Health, The New York Academy of Medicine. See ***Broadening Participation in Community Problem Solving: a Multidisciplinary Model to Support Collaborative Practice and Research*** published in the *Journal of Urban Health* in March 2003.
- ***Collaborative Governance: A Guide for Grantmakers*** from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation
- Tamarack, Vibrant Communities, and the Caledon Institute also provide lots of thought-provoking resources

## The Informants—Voices of Experience

This paper is based on interviews with key players:

Mark Chamberlain, Chair, Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction and CEO, Trivaris

Carolyn Milne, President & CEO, Hamilton Community Foundation

Joe-Anne Priel, General Manager, Community Services, City of Hamilton

Liz Weaver, Director, Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction

## Web Links

Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction: [www.hamiltonpoverty.ca](http://www.hamiltonpoverty.ca)

Caledon Institute on Social Policy: [www.caledoninst.org](http://www.caledoninst.org)

Community Foundations of Canada: [www.cfc-fcc.ca](http://www.cfc-fcc.ca)

Hamilton Community Foundation: [www.hcf.on.ca](http://www.hcf.on.ca)

City of Hamilton: [www.myhamilton.ca](http://www.myhamilton.ca)

Tamarack Community/Vibrant Communities: [www.tamarackcommunity.ca](http://www.tamarackcommunity.ca)

The Collaboratory for Community Support: [www.thecollaboratory.us](http://www.thecollaboratory.us)

The Hamilton Spectator – The Poverty Project: [www.thesspec.com](http://www.thesspec.com)

## Acknowledgements

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