



# **2012** Report to the Community

**!** **POVERTY**  
GUELPH & WELLINGTON TASK FORCE FOR  
**!** **ELIMINATION**

## • Impact

/ɪmˈpækt/

*noun.*

The effect or impression of one thing on another.

In the past year, we have been inundated with research and media reports highlighting what many of us already know – poverty and income inequality continue to rise in Canada, in Ontario, and in our local community. Recent findings show that Canada has one of the highest proportions of low-wage workers (20.5%) in the OECD and that more than 1 in 4 lower income Canadians have skipped meals as a result of limited finances. In Ontario, research shows that social assistance and disability benefits are lower today in real dollars now, than they were a generation ago, the last time the government recognized the need to fundamentally review these programs.

A new report concludes that over the last generation, Ontario experienced the largest increase in income inequality in any province in Canada. This despite extensive research and a growing body of evidence in Canada and around the world that growing income inequality is the single greatest predictor of diminished health outcomes regardless of income.

These findings are reflected in our community. Emergency food service providers are finding it increasingly difficult to meet user needs. The vacancy rate (1%) is among the lowest of any urban area in Canada and well below what housing experts consider to be the minimum for a healthy rental market (3%). The need for recreation subsidies continues to increase, and social assistance caseloads remain high. Our community is clearly not immune to the patterns of increased poverty and income inequality that challenge the rest of our province and country.

Yet despite these challenges, the Guelph & Wellington Task Force for Poverty Elimination has worked with our community to have a positive impact on the lives of those struggling to make ends. In the past year, we worked with the City of Guelph to develop an affordable transit pass program so people living with a low-income can get to work, visit friends and enjoy the community. We worked with the University of Guelph's Research Shop to do a comprehensive research project aimed at developing a shared vision for improving emergency food services in Guelph & Wellington. We brought our community together to give voice to the concerns and challenges faced around social assistance. We ensured that poverty was an election issue by hosting voter workshops and all-candidate debates and distributing a voter's guide – all focused on poverty issues that mattered for our community. The Poverty Task Force worked together for change. *We are having an impact.*

As we move forward, we will focus on deepening our impact in our efforts to eliminate poverty in Guelph & Wellington. We'll move our community vision around emergency food services into action. We'll work with community partners to help create a housing and homelessness strategy. We'll open up a community conversation about a living wage. We will do this while at the same time, championing and giving voice to those living in poverty. We will, without a doubt, continue to have an impact. We encourage everyone living in our community to join us in this effort.

We are proud to present this annual report to the community and to share the strategies and initiatives that have led to positive impacts in Guelph & Wellington as part of the Poverty Task Force. We are encouraged and inspired by the commitment our members, our partners and our supporters have shown this past year and we look forward to making change and a positive impact as we move forward.



David Thornley  
Co-Chair



Andrew Seagram  
Co-Chair



# Membership

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## Co-Chairs

- Andrew Seagram, Coordinator – Community Use of Schools Program, Upper Grand District School Board
- David Thornley, Executive Director, Guelph Community Health Centre

## Members

- Andrea Roberts, Director – Child & Family Health, Wellington Dufferin Guelph Public Health
- Beth Leith, Community Member – Mount Forest
- Brenda Doner, Senior Community Services Planner, United Way Guelph Wellington Dufferin
- Brenda McGinnis, Constituency Assistant, Liz Sandals, MPP
- David Kruse, General Manager, Guelph Mercury
- Debbie Bentley-Lauzon, Executive Director, Wyndham House
- Erin Harvey, Service Director, Family & Children's Services of Guelph & Wellington County
- Evelyn Herron, Community Member, Guelph
- Frank Valeriotte, Member of Parliament, Guelph
- Gail Hoekstra, Executive Director, Welcome In Drop In
- George Kelly, Chair, Guelph-Wellington Coalition for Social Justice
- Heather Burke, Director – Housing, County of Wellington Social Services
- Jane Londerville, Past Chair, Wellington-Guelph Housing Committee
- Jean Innes, Councillor, County of Wellington
- Jessie Baynham, Executive Director, Guelph Neighbourhood Support Coalition
- June Hofland, Councillor, City of Guelph
- Karen Armstrong, Coordinator – WDG *in motion*, Wellington Dufferin Guelph Public Health
- Kate Bishop, Supervisor – Community Engagement, City of Guelph
- Ken Dardano, Executive Director, United Way Guelph Wellington Dufferin
- Lisa Needham, Public Health Nutritionist, Wellington Dufferin Guelph Public Health
- Liz Sandals, Member of Provincial Parliament, Guelph
- Lorna Schwartzentruber, Project Director, Onward Willow Better Futures Better Beginnings
- Michael Chong, Member of Parliament, Wellington Halton-Hills
- Ralph Blackman, Rector, St. George's Anglican Church
- Ron MacKinnon, Executive Director, Community Resource Centre
- Roya Rabanni, Executive Director, Immigrant Services Guelph-Wellington
- Sly Castaldi, Executive Director, Guelph-Wellington Women in Crisis
- Stuart Beumer, Director – Ontario Works, County of Wellington Social Services
- Terry O'Connor, Vice-President, Guelph & District Labour Council
- Tina Brophay, Community Member – Guelph
- Trish Altass, PhD Candidate, University of Guelph/The Research Shop

## Staff

- Randalin Ellery, Coordinator
- Maris Lush, Assistant Coordinator



# Vision

Poverty will be eliminated in Guelph-Wellington by supporting, coordinating, and inspiring sustainable change and by building individual resilience through collective action.

# Mission

Our community CARES. Together we:

**Collaborate** by acting in partnership to further knowledge and understanding of issues related to poverty.

**Act** by using innovative approaches to make meaningful change happen for individuals and families when they need it most.

**Recognize** by seeking to respectfully acknowledge, understand, and give voice to the experiences of those living with the effects of poverty.

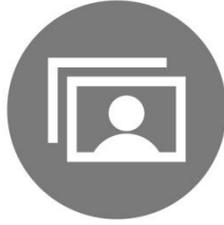
**Engage** by meaningfully involving members of the community in order to develop a sense of shared accountability and belonging where all members work collectively to realize future possibilities.

**Shift attitudes** by working together to change outlooks and understandings of poverty at the local, provincial, and national levels to generate sustainable, pattern-breaking change.



# Strategic Directions

- Build purposeful partnerships with key community stakeholders and networks and work together to eliminate poverty.
- Support actions to meet the short- and long-term needs of people facing economic hardships in our community.
- Enhance solution-based research, knowledge development and information sharing on poverty related issues.
- Champion and give voice to the need for required resources and system changes for both those in poverty and service providers.
- Create opportunities for community members to become involved in poverty elimination efforts.
- Increase public awareness and understanding of the issues and consequences associated with poverty in Guelph and Wellington.



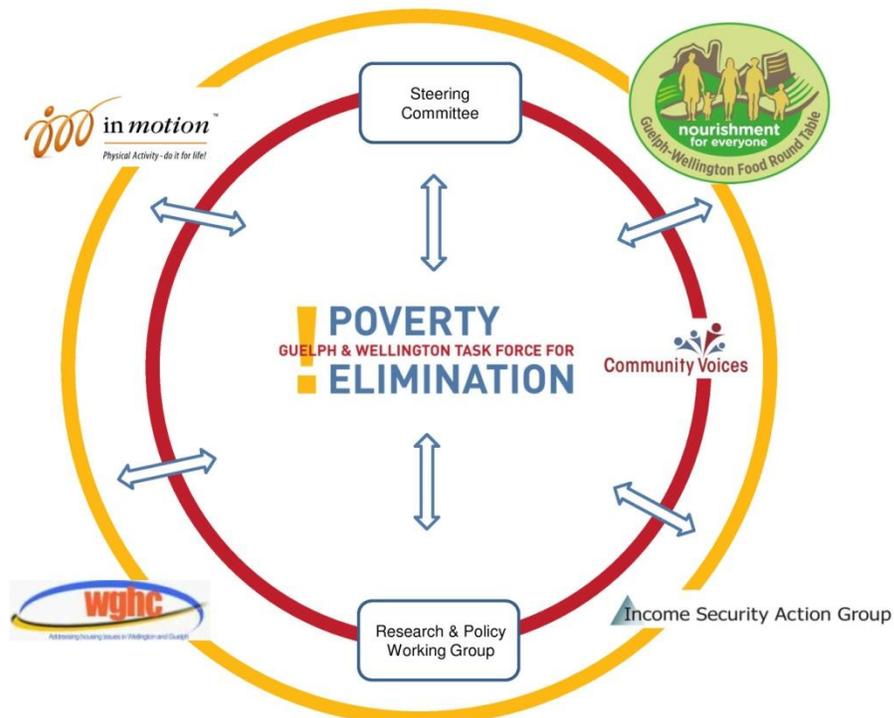
# Our Framework

The Poverty Task Force is built on a framework that aims to promote dialogue, information sharing, and collaboration. Our framework supports three types of groups – action groups (shown on the outer circle), working groups (shown on the inner circle), and ad-hoc groups (not shown).

**Action Groups** – These are issue-focused collaborative groups that have a pulse on what is happening locally, provincially, and nationally regarding food security, housing security, income security, and access to affordable recreation. All are public groups and encourage membership from all different sectors of our community.

**Working Groups** – These are collaborative tables that provide support to the general Poverty Task Force (PTF) and the Action Groups. These groups include the Steering Committee, the Research & Policy Working Group, and Community Voices.

**Ad-Hoc Groups** – Not every issue that arises fits with one of our Action or Working Groups and some require an expanded response. In such cases, the PTF will strike an ad-hoc group that will come together to work on specific task and will dissolve after the task is completed.





# Food Security

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## We Believe:

The vision of the Food Access Working Group, a sub-group of the Guelph-Wellington Food Round Table, is that everyone in Guelph and Wellington should have access to culturally acceptable, safe and nutritious foods to meet their dietary needs; in a manner that maintains human dignity.

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## What We Know:

<b>5907</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>POOR HEALTH</b>
The number of individuals assisted by food banks in Guelph & Wellington in 2011	Increase in food prices from 2008 – 2012	Individuals in food insufficient households are more likely to report chronic health conditions, to have significantly lower intakes of important vitamins, and be at risk of being overweight or obese.

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## What We Did About It:

- Developed and distributed over 1000 Food Access Guides
  - Collected 6755 lbs. of food for local food pantries
  - Received endorsement from Guelph City Council for the Guelph-Wellington Food Charter
  - Developed Community Gardens Best Practice Toolkit
  - Developed Collective Kitchens Manual
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## What We Aim to Achieve:

- Work collaboratively to identify and address barriers to accessing emergency food services for clients
  - Gather community input on a vision for a community food hub for Guelph and Wellington
  - Expand the Food Access Guide to include Wellington and Dufferin Counties
  - Maintain support for existing and new gardens and gardeners
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## The Bigger Change We'd Like to See:

Our community is taking steps toward creating a vision of a community food centre that will address issues surrounding food, health, and poverty in a holistic way, with a wide range of programming that could include community gardens, kitchens, nutrition (and other) education, and more. Ultimately, as policies change, emergency food services become obsolete within the context of a more equitable food system.

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[www.gwfrt.com](http://www.gwfrt.com)



[www.gwpoverity.ca](http://www.gwpoverity.ca)

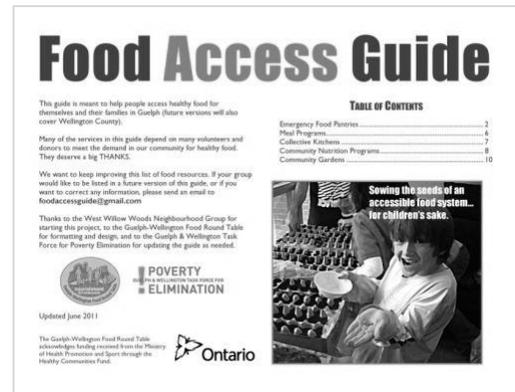
## FOOD ACCESS GUIDE

Building on previous guides created by West Willow Woods Neighbourhood Group and Wellington Dufferin Guelph Public Health, the Food Access Working Group, in partnership with the Poverty Task Force, developed a comprehensive guide to food access services and programs in Guelph.

The 2011 Food Access Guide includes information about emergency food pantries, including eligibility information, services provided, and the bus routes. The guide also includes information about meal programs, collective kitchens, student nutrition programs, and community gardens. Over 1000 hard copies of the guide were distributed to community members and service providers. Electronic versions were available on a number of community service websites.

The Food Access Guide has received extremely positive feedback from community members, service providers, neighbourhood groups and emergency food service providers, and is frequently used as a “go to” resource for anyone looking to access food supports in Guelph.

Future versions of the Food Access Guide will be expanded to include information about emergency food services and supports in Wellington County and Dufferin County.



### What we heard:

Community members reported that they (Community Researcher Project, 2010):

- Didn't know all the places they could access emergency food
- Were unsure of eligibility requirements
- Had problems with using public transportation to access emergency food

### What we did:

The PTF supported the Food Access Working Group of the Guelph-Wellington Food Roundtable to create a Food Access Guide.

### What we're hearing now:

*“Now that I have the food access guide, I know where I can go and what I need to bring with me. Now I don't have to waste time applying for things I'm not eligible for or showing up with the wrong ID.”*  
(Community Member).



# Housing Security

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**We Believe:**

The Wellington-Guelph Housing Committee values housing that offers choice, security, affordability, and adequate shelter within communities that foster and support a sense of belonging and acceptance.

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**What We Know:****\$634**

The maximum shelter allowance for a family of 3 on Ontario Works.

**\$889**

The average rent for a two bedroom apartment in the Guelph area.

**1261**

The number of active households on the waiting list for affordable housing in Wellington (including Guelph) in 2011.

**FOOD****INSECURITY**

When rents are unaffordable, it is difficult to cover other necessities such as food, thereby contributing directly to food insecurity.

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**What We Did About It:**

- Provided three families with a one-time "Housing Benefit"
  - Provided valuable input into the Community Plan for the Homelessness Partnering Strategy
  - Started to develop a local Housing Access Guide
  - Held an event for World Habitat Day, with a focus on energy poverty
- 

**What We Aim to Achieve:**

- Develop and release a local Housing Access Guide
  - Support a local Housing Forum with the University of Guelph and the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation
  - Continue to advocate for policy change, including a national housing strategy and a provincial housing benefit
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**The Bigger Change We'd Like to See:**

All families living in Guelph & Wellington deserve access to affordable and stable housing without forgoing other necessities. The Wellington-Guelph Housing Committee and the Poverty Task Force will continue to advocate for increased shelter allowances for those on social assistance, a provincial Housing Benefit for all low-income households, and ultimately, a National Housing Strategy that will address homelessness, invest in not-for-profit housing, and meet the housing needs of vulnerable and marginalized populations.

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## LOCAL HOUSING BENEFIT

In early 2012, members of the Wellington-Guelph Housing Committee had an opportunity to learn about a proposed Ontario Housing Benefit – a strategic and practical idea that would effectively help low-income Ontarians pay the rent and move out of poverty. The proposal has been put forward by a coalition that includes both private sector and front-line agencies across Ontario. The goal of the Housing Benefit is to increase housing affordability and reduce homelessness and food bank dependency by providing assistance to low-income tenants to help them meet their rent payment.

The proposal suggests that a provincial Housing Benefit would cost the province \$240 million annually and provide an average monthly benefit of about \$100 to nearly 200,000 low-income tenants. The cost of not acting is much higher. Poverty costs Ontario an estimated \$38 billion a year.

The Wellington-Guelph Housing Committee decided to act locally and provided a one-time Housing Benefit of \$250 to three families in Guelph and Wellington that were struggling to make ends meet and had reached out to a local agency for support.

The recipients noted that the local Housing Benefit significantly decreased worry and stress about being able to pay rent. This benefit enabled them to purchase food for their family and pay their bills on time.

The Wellington-Guelph Housing Committee will be building on the research they've received and learned from the experiences of the recipients to join the efforts of others across the province in advocating for an Ontario Housing Benefit.

**POVERTY**  
GUELPH & WELLINGTON TASK FORCE FOR  
**ELIMINATION**

RESEARCH PROFILE  
February 2012  
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### AN ONTARIO HOUSING BENEFIT

**AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN ONTARIO**  
Securing access to affordable and stable housing without forgoing other necessities has become increasingly challenging for low-income Ontarians. The following statistics, released by the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association (ONPHA) in their report, *Where's Home: The Need for Affordable Rental Housing in Ontario*, demonstrate this point.

- Waiting lists for assisted housing are long and have swelled to over 152,000 Ontario households since last year.
- Affordable housing production remains a small fraction of what is required to meet housing need (estimated at requiring 10,000 new units per year over the next decade).
- Between 1990 and 2008, average rents in Ontario for one- and two-bedroom apartments in private rental units increased by twice the increase in median tenant incomes and well above the overall rate of inflation (CPI).
- In 2008, 281,000 or a fifth of all households living in rental housing in Ontario were paying 50% of their income on rent.

**AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN GUELPH & WELLINGTON**  
According to the ONPHA 2011 waiting list survey, 1,261 households were on the waiting list for financially assisted housing in Guelph and Wellington<sup>1</sup>. Of the total, 24% were seniors, 37% were non-senior singles, and 39% were families<sup>2</sup>. The following are the average wait times for housing for different groups<sup>3</sup>:

- Seniors: 3 – 8 years
- Singles: 3 – 8 years
- Families: 2 – 4 years



**WHAT IS A HOUSING BENEFIT?**  
The Housing Benefit Working Group, led by the Daily Bread Food Bank, is a coalition of private sector and front-line agencies advocating for an Ontario Housing Benefit. This benefit would involve a monthly payment designed to help low income tenants cover their housing expenses. The payment would be given directly to tenants receiving social assistance, as well as low-income working families and individuals<sup>4</sup>. For social assistance recipients, the housing benefit would cover 75% of the difference between their shelter allowance and the actual rent cost. For working families and individuals, the housing benefit would cover 75% of the gap between their actual rent and 30% of their

1

### What we heard:

Community members reported that they (Community Researcher Project, 2010):

- Find it extremely challenging to find and maintain affordable housing
- Cannot afford market rent while on social assistance

### What we did:

The PTF, the Research Shop, and the Wellington-Guelph Housing Committee worked together to research a proposed Ontario Housing Benefit and provided a Local Housing Benefit to three families in need.

### What we're hearing now:

*"Leaving our home is one of my worst financial fears [and] giving it up would mean giving up a lot of pride and hope that my children will not be growing up with the stigma of poverty. Thank you for choosing me and my family to receive [the benefit]."* (Recipient of Local Housing Benefit)



# Access to Affordable Recreation

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## We Believe:

Guelph *in motion*, in partnership with the Poverty Task Force, believes that everyone in Guelph & Wellington should have access to a diverse range of affordable recreational opportunities within their respective neighbourhoods and communities.

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## What We Know:

**42%**

The percent of Guelph & Wellington residents that report being inactive.

Approx. **750**

The number of children funded through the Children's Foundation Grants to support enrichment activities like sports, arts and summer camp for children who would otherwise be unable to participate.

## BARRIERS

Many children and youth living in poverty face barriers that restrict access to quality recreation and physical activity opportunities. These barriers include lack of transportation, family support, awareness, safe places to play, childcare and inadequate or no facilities in the community.

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## What We Did About It:

- Hosted a community forum with key stakeholders to consider possible ways to address social and economic barriers to accessing recreational opportunities in Guelph & Wellington
  - Continued the athletic shoe drive to provide athletic footwear to community members who expressed a desire to participate in organized recreational activities, but currently lack the appropriate footwear to participate.
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## What We Aim to Achieve:

- Develop and distribute a directory of local no- or low-cost recreation programs and supports
  - Continue to support the annual athletic footwear drive
  - Conduct research on the overall condition of parks in Guelph in order to better understand what equipment is available and the general condition of the park.
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## The Bigger Change We'd Like to See:

The PTF, in partnership with Guelph *in motion* and other community stakeholders, strives to create a community where everyone has access to affordable recreation so that they can enjoy the health and social benefits of physical activity and, ultimately, improve their overall wellbeing.

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[www.wdginmotion.ca](http://www.wdginmotion.ca)



[www.gwpoverity.ca](http://www.gwpoverity.ca)

# AFFORDABLE ACCESS TO RECREATION POLICY FORUM

In October 2011 **Guelph in motion** held a local forum to discuss affordable access to recreation in our community. The goal of the forum was to determine the best way to increase recreational opportunities and resources to benefit those affected by barriers to accessing recreation opportunities.

Ahead of the workshop, **Guelph in motion** commissioned the Research Shop at the University of Guelph to survey local service providers to establish a baseline of existing policies, procedures and programs in the Guelph-Wellington area. The results showed that 1) there is a lack of formal policies to support affordable access to recreation across organizations, including government, 2) many of the programs support child and youth involvement in recreation, fewer support adults, 3) some non-governmental organizations do have formal or informal procedures and programs for dealing with financial need and 4) local governments are leaders in supporting initiatives that remove barriers for low income individuals and families.

Forty members of the community representing municipalities, healthcare, for profit and not-for-profit organizations involved in offering recreation programs attended the forum that was facilitated by Parks and Recreation Ontario (PRO).

Participants had an opportunity to discuss the challenges as well as opportunities that exist with respect to future policy directions for affordable access to recreation in Wellington County and the City of Guelph.

As a next step, **Guelph in motion** is working on a directory of free and low-cost recreation opportunities for Guelph & Wellington. The Access to Recreation Directory is expected to be released to the community in the fall of 2012.

**Why Don't People Participate?**  
BARRIERS TO RECREATION & PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

**Economics**

- Program fees are too high
- Equipment and clothing, especially for sports and physical activities, is too costly

**Transportation**

- Low-income individuals and families may not own vehicles.
- Parents may not let children participate in activities that require transportation if they cannot share in driving or pay for gas.
- Low-income individuals or families may not have money for public transportation.

**Programming**

- Some adults prefer drop-in or loosely organized activities, particularly for shift workers or those who work on-call.
- People affected by poverty may not feel comfortable participating with wealthier participants.

**Processes and structures**

- Low-income community members are often not involved in decision-making or planning.
- Information on free assistance opportunities is often difficult to find, as there is fear that activities will be closed.
- Opportunities are not tailored to low-income adults (initiatives are often aimed at increasing physical activity among children, youth and older adults).

**Local government recreation departments**

- Often assist only those who ask for help – many people affected by poverty are too proud to ask.
- Often ask people to prove that they need help – a humiliating experience.
- Often do not work with other service providers that are treated by low-income individuals and families.

**Individual and family perceptions, attitudes and knowledge**

Individuals and families affected by poverty may:

- not know how to access physical activity or feel unwelcome
- not be familiar with recreation settings
- have low self-esteem or lack social support to get involved
- lack childcare
- feel isolated and not wanted by the community
- lack time due to work (particularly shift work) and family commitments
- experience existing chronic diseases, mental illness, physical pains and related health concerns

The information is adapted from Canadian Parks and Recreation Association (CPRA) "Get There 4" Barriers to Recreation: Everybody gets to play! Community Mobilization Tool Kit © 2010, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.

## What we heard:

Community members reported that they (Community Researcher Project, 2010):

- Were frustrated over the limited activities and resources available for families

## What we did:

Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph *in motion* organized a forum among community and municipal service providers to discuss affordable recreation policies with Parks and Recreation Ontario.

## What we're hearing now:

*"The forum was a great opportunity to connect with other service providers and policy makers and learn about what is happening in our community with affordable access to recreation. I'm looking forward to having the directory – it's really going to help my clients know what's available."* Eric Pool, Wyndham House Aftercare Coordinator



# Income Security

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## We Believe:

The Income Security Action Group believes that all families and individuals in Guelph & Wellington should have access to an income that enables them to live in good health and with dignity.

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## What We Know:

**1,874**  
The average monthly caseload for Ontario Works in Guelph & Wellington in 2011.

**11.5%**  
The percentage of private households in Guelph & Wellington living below the Low Income Measure (after tax).

## POOR HEALTH

Researchers who have examined the relationship between income and a wide variety of indicators of health status have found that the health of people with lower incomes is invariably worse than that of people with higher incomes.

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## What We Did About It:

- Collected feedback from the community through online surveys, community conversations, and focus groups for the Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario
  - Called attention to the need for an affordable transit pass program in the City of Guelph
  - Engaged in discussions with policy makers and government officials about Guaranteed Annual Income and a Living Wage
- 

## What We Aim to Achieve:

- Hosting a series of workshops for front-line social service workers and community volunteers aimed at building capacity and knowledge around services in Guelph & Wellington to better direct and assist their clients.
  - Working together with other community partners to support the Living Wage calculation and to promote the findings to push for deeper socio-economic change.
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## The Bigger Change We'd Like to See:

Income support is fundamental to addressing poverty in the community as it allows people to make life and family decisions that will increase their wellbeing. The Income Security Action Group and the Poverty Task Force will continue to advocate for stable and adequate income support programs, including a Guaranteed Annual Income, for our community's most vulnerable.

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## SOCIAL ASSISTANCE REVIEW

The Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario is tasked with carrying out a comprehensive review and providing the government with specific recommendations and a concrete action plan for reforming the social assistance system.

In June 2011, the Commission released *Discussion Paper 1: Issues and Ideas* and requested feedback from stakeholders and communities. The Poverty Task Force provided local community members an opportunity to discuss the paper and offer feedback by completing an online survey or attending a community forum. Over 65 surveys were completed online and approximately 100 people participated in the community forum.

In February 2012, the Commission released *Discussion Paper 2: Approaches for Reform* and once again reached out to stakeholders and communities for feedback. The PTF provided community members with an online survey and hosted 10 focus groups in Guelph and Wellington with different groups and organizations.

Input from the community from online surveys, the community forum, and focus groups were collected, analyzed and submitted to the Commission on half of the Guelph & Wellington community. Both of these submissions can be found online, along with more information about the review, at <http://www.socialassistancereview.ca>

The final recommendations from the Commission are expected to be released to the public in September 2012.



### What we heard:

Community members reported that they (Community Researcher Project, 2010):

- Are not able to meet their basic needs on social assistance
- Have had negative experiences with front-line workers from income support programs
- Are frustrated and confused by the rules with social assistance programs

### What we did:

The Poverty Task Force invited social assistance recipients, front-line workers, agencies, organizations and the general public to provide input into the provincial review of social assistance.

### What we're hearing

#### now:

*"I've been on social assistance a long time. I probably know the system better than some of the caseworkers! But this [community forum] is the first time anyone has ever asked me for my opinion and ideas. I just want to say thank you."* (Community Member)



# Community Voices

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## We Believe:

Members of Community Voices, along with the Poverty Task Force, believe that their voices and experience have social, political, and cultural value, and can help community to create more inclusive and informed poverty elimination strategies and programs.

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## What We Know:

### LIVED EXPERIENCE REQUIRED

Policies developed from a middle class mindset for people who have their basic needs met are not necessarily effective for people experiencing poverty.

The voices of people who have experienced poverty are traditionally missing from planning and program and policy development process.

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## What We Did About It:

- Received training from Elections Ontario and hosted a series of Voter Information Sessions with neighbourhood groups
- Provided a public delegation to the City of Guelph to address the need for an affordable transit pass program
- Offered input for the Poverty Task Force submissions to the Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario
- Provided keynote speakers at the Social Assistance Review Community Forum

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## What We Aim to Achieve:

- Improve the individual capacity of group members in order to strengthen our voice and presence in the community
- Strengthen our knowledge-sharing partnerships with similar groups in Waterloo and Hamilton
- Continue to act as an advisory group for the PTF

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## The Bigger Change We'd Like to See:

Poverty can often act as a barrier for people who wish to advocate for change as financial resources and specific professional skillsets are necessary for policy planning and public-decision making processes. Access to the appropriate networks and social systems of communication may also prevent low-income individuals from influencing public decision-making. It is therefore, the long-term goal of Community Voices to develop and foster the capacity and confidence of group members so they are able to better voice their opinions and experiences while advocating for marginalized and stigmatized members of Guelph and Wellington.

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[www.gwpoverty.ca](http://www.gwpoverty.ca)

## KEYNOTE SPEAKERS:

## SOCIAL ASSISTANCE REVIEW

## COMMUNITY FORUM

Members of Community Voices recognize the importance of having their voices heard and building bridges with others in our community to break down stigma and discrimination. The following quote from Vibrant Communities Storytelling Guide resonates deeply with members of Community Voices:

*“Changing the nature of the conversation about poverty – moving away from stigmatizing it and learning to understand it – is the critical starting point for communities focusing on poverty reduction. When you get more people to speak about poverty, people learn things they didn’t know about its nature and impact.”*

Inspired to share their stories, members of Community Voices participated in a training session with Heather Kepran, Communications Manager at United Way Guelph Wellington Dufferin. Over the next few months, they took what they learned from that session and worked together to co-create stories based on their experiences with poverty.

In the fall 2011, two members of Community Voices had the opportunity to share their stories as keynote speakers at the Social Assistance Review Community Forum, hosted by the Poverty Task Force.

Tina Brophay and Marta Inglis shared their personal stories of struggling with poverty in front of a crowd of more than 100 people. Their stories had a deep impact on the people in the room and helped set the context for the discussion throughout the day.

For Brophay and Inglis, the experience, while nerve-wracking, was a positive one. Sharing their stories and experiences with social assistance provided them an opportunity to be heard and to be part of the conversation.



Martha Inglis & Tina Brophay,  
Members of Community Voices

**“Stand before the  
people you fear and  
speak your mind –  
even if your voice  
shakes.”**



# Research & Policy

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## We Believe:

The Research & Policy Working Group believes their work will contribute to poverty elimination in Guelph & Wellington by ensuring the community is aware of current and emerging trends, conducting and supporting action-oriented research, communicating key policy developments and their potential impacts, and communicating opportunities for advocacy.

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## What We Know:

## THE FACTS

8.7%

The percent of individuals living below the Low Income Cut Off in Guelph & Wellington in 2006 (census).

54%

The increase in the monthly Ontario Works caseload for Guelph & Wellington from 2008 – 2011.

2-9

The number of years a household will be placed on the waiting list for subsidized housing, depending on location and unit size requested.

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## What We Did About It:

With the support of the Institute for Community Engaged Scholarship/the Research Shop at the University of Guelph:

- Conducted a comprehensive research project on the emergency food service system in Guelph-Wellington
  - Provided research reports to support the Poverty Task Force Action Groups on topics such as Guaranteed Annual Income, the proposed Ontario Housing Benefit, barriers to affordable recreation, and the impact of public transit fees on low income community members.
  - Hosted all-candidate debates during the provincial and federal election, as well as distributed a voter's guide focused on poverty-related issues.
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## What We Aim to Achieve:

- Continue to conduct research that supports the activities of the PTF and its Action Groups
  - Provide learning opportunities for the PTF and then general community through research profiles and community conversations
  - Develop emergency food service eligibility guidelines to share with service providers
  - Develop a policy framework for the PTF
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## **RAPID RESPONSE INTERNS**

The Research Shop at the University of Guelph supports a group of graduate students who link with community organizations and collaborations, including the Poverty Task Force, through research and knowledge mobilization activities. In 2011-2012, the PTF worked with a number of interns to conduct “rapid response” research. This research provided the PTF and its Action Groups with quick turnaround to research questions to enable members to move from talk to action. The following is a synopsis of some of the reports completed in the past year:

### **Cost of Poverty** (Jane Robson, 2011)

This report reviews the cost of poverty as it relates to health care, crime, intergenerational poverty and loss of productivity. It also looks at the different policies and programs in Canada that are currently attempting to alleviate the costs of poverty in these areas.

### **Living Wage** (Maria Cabal Garcia, 2011)

This report looks at how a living wage is calculated, using examples from Metro Vancouver and Toronto, and explores some of the advantages and barriers that a living wage creates for employers, employees, families and individuals. The report was requested and received by the Income Security Action Group.

### **Guaranteed Annual Income** (Wanzirai Muruvi, 2011)

This report looks at Guaranteed Annual Income (GAI), a concept that has dominated social security reform dialogue in Canada since the 1960s. The report reviews two models of GAI, the negative income tax model and the universal demogrant model, and considers the benefits and downfalls of each. The report was requested and received by the Income Security Action Group.

### **Ontario Housing Benefit: A Proposal for Low-Income Ontarians** (Maria Cabal Garcia, 2012)

This research profile provides an overview of the proposed Ontario Housing Benefit – a monthly payment specifically designed to help low-income tenants cover their housing expenses. The report was requested and received by the Wellington-Guelph Housing Committee.

### **Emergency Food: Expiration & Best Before Dates** (Rachel Lau, Randalin Ellery, 2012)

Expiration and best before dates can present a number of challenges for emergency food providers and their clients. This research profile outlines the key challenges for food banks and pantries and provides information for clients about what food is ok to eat, how food can be made to last longer and when food should be thrown away. This research profile was distributed to emergency food providers in Guelph & Wellington to share with clients.

**All research reports are available online: [www.gwpoverty.ca](http://www.gwpoverty.ca)**

# EMERGENCY FOOD SERVICES

## RESEARCH

Challenges related to accessing emergency food services have been repeatedly identified by community members and members of the Poverty Task Force. After a series of meetings on the subject of food security and food assistance programs in Guelph & Wellington, the PTF and the Food Access Working Group decided that a first step in developing a proposal to improve the existing emergency food services system would be to conduct research on the subject.

The United Way Guelph Wellington Dufferin took on the first phase of the research plan and the Institute for Community Engaged Scholarship/Research Shop was engaged to carry out the remaining phases of the research.

The final report, released in late 2011 by the Institute for Community Engaged Scholarship/Research Shop, identified key strengths and weaknesses of the emergency food distribution system in Guelph & Wellington, analyzed best practices that have proven effective at increasing food security in other communities, and identified strategies for the development of food system initiatives designed to improve food security in our community.

Upon reviewing the report, members of the PTF concluded that there was a need to identify concrete recommendations emerging from the report in order to move forward. As a result, an ad-hoc committee of community stakeholders was brought together to review the report and identify recommendations. The recommendations were endorsed by the PTF members and will be implemented in 2012-2013.

**The Institute for Community Engaged Scholarship/Research Shop final report and the Recommendations Report can be found online at [www.gwpoverty.ca](http://www.gwpoverty.ca).**

## What we heard:

Community members reported that they (Community Researcher Project, 2010):

- Viewed the eligibility requirements to receive emergency food from some providers as unreasonable
- Experienced stigma and emotional distress as the result of interacting with front-line emergency food service workers
- Were concerned about the lack of fresh fruit and vegetables and dairy they received from emergency food services

## What we did:

The PTF, along with other community stakeholders, worked with the Institute for Community Engaged Scholarship/the Research Shop to conduct a comprehensive research project on the emergency food service system in Guelph-Wellington.

## What's next:

The PTF has developed a set of recommendations based on the findings of the emergency food services report. The recommendations focus on decreasing stigma, developing consensus around eligibility criteria, and supporting our community to build a vision of a community food hub. These recommendations will be implemented in 2012-2013.

## VOTER GUIDE & ALL-CANDIDATE DEBATES

The last federal election took place in the spring 2011, and the provincial election was held just months later in the early fall 2011. In an effort to ensure that voters were informed about poverty and poverty-related issues and that they are on the agenda of our politicians, the Policy Working Group of the PTF developed and distributed a Voter's Guides and hosted all-candidate debates.

The Voter's Guides included information about how voters could participate in the election, background information, including local statistics, about poverty issues, and sample questions for election candidates.

The all-candidates debates were held at the Italian Canadian Club and the general public was invited to attend. Both debates were well-attended and received good media coverage.



## POLICIES IN POVERTY FORUM

On May 24, 2011 the Poverty Task Force hosted an opportunity for community members to hear from three leading experts on poverty-related policy issues in Ontario – Peter Clutterbuck, Research &



Community Planning Coordinator with the Social Planning Network of Ontario, Mark Woodnutt, Community Engagement Coordinator at The Stop Community Food Centre, and Brice Balmer, Director of the Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition.

After the speakers panel, community members had an opportunity to discuss and identify priorities for poverty reduction. These priorities helped the PTF action groups to begin building a policy framework, a tool to help share information and build community understanding of policies in poverty, and to guide the work of the PTF Action Groups.



# Affordable Transit

In early 2011, after research on the impact on transit fees on low-income community members was presented to City Council by the PTF, the City of Guelph committed to work with the PTF to develop an affordable transit pass program. Over the course of the year, a PTF ad-hoc transit committee worked with City of Guelph Community & Social Services staff to create the Affordable Bus Pass Pilot Program (ABPPP). The two-year pilot program was approved by Council in late 2011.

The ABPPP is designed to help low-income community members get around Guelph using public transit and connect them with the community. Passes are available to Guelph residents (youth, seniors and adults), with an income below the Low-Income Cut-Off (LICO) at a rate of 50% of the regular bus pass.

The ABPPP began in July 2012 and the initial response has been very positive. Here are a few comments that have been received transit users:

*"It has allowed me to return to work. I was a personal support worker travelling to clients homes but I couldn't afford the full price of a bus pass and I needed the bus to get around to my clients."*

*"Before this program was available to me I had a very restricted life. My disability cheque does not provide enough for me to pay regular fare too often. I couldn't get to my appointments, get groceries or so my friends easily or often. I now have a better life."*

*"This is so important to me. I sometimes tell the customer service clerk that it is like Christmas for me. It makes all the difference in how I spend my days and get about. Not having to calculate how much money it takes for a ticket, takes away a daily stress that was so depressing."*

## What we heard:

Community members reported that they (Community Researcher Project, 2010):

- Couldn't afford the cost of public transit
- Were frustrated by the lack of service on certain holidays
- Weren't clear about eligibility criteria for discounted passes

## What we did:

The PTF worked with the City of Guelph to develop the Affordable Bus Pass Pilot Program. The pass is available for low-income residents of Guelph at a cost of 50% of a regularly priced pass.

## What we're hearing

### now:

*"[The Affordable Transit Pass] is so important to me. It's like Christmas for me. It makes all the difference in how I spend my days and get about. Not having to calculate how much money it takes for a ticket, takes away a daily stress that was so depressing."* (Community Member)



# Do the Math

In the fall 2011, the Poverty Task Force joined groups across the province to Put Food in the Budget – a campaign to increase the social assistance food allowance. As part of their efforts, the PTF hosted a “Do the Math Challenge” to put the current food allowance into perspective. Ten high-profile community members were asked to live exclusively on a food diet for three – five days and share their daily experiences on a blog ([www.gwdothmath.ca](http://www.gwdothmath.ca)) and at a Town Hall Meeting.

Participants from Guelph & Wellington included a farmer, a minister, a chef, two teachers, a



reporter, UoG students, the PTF Co-Chair, and the Medical Officer of Health.

Participants struggled with the impact that the Challenge had on their physical and mental health and the lack of choice that their food hamper diet offered. Many of the participants

acknowledged their food skills and knowledge of nutrition and meal planning as the key to being able to complete the challenge. Despite only being on the hamper for a few days, some of the challengers experienced feelings of stigma and embarrassment as a result of their food hamper diet. Finally, many of the challengers commented on the difficulties they experienced due to a lack of fresh produce and struggled with the perceived quality of the food provided in their hampers.

The Challenge received considerable media coverage, including a front-page feature and an editorial in the Guelph Mercury, coverage on local radio, and a feature with some of the participants on Inside Guelph on Rogers TV.

Daily updates from the Do the Math blog were sent to a mailing list of approximately 300 people and the website received over 4000 hits over the course of the Challenge week. The Town Hall wrap up event, co-sponsored by the Guelph-Wellington Food Round Table, was attended by approximately 70 community members.



# Get Involved

The Poverty Task Force strives to create a culture that recognizes poverty elimination as a community responsibility in which everyone has a role to play. We encourage community members to get involved by:

**1. Join a PTF Working or Action Group**

All of the PTF Working and Action Groups are open to the general public and new members are always welcomed. Email [gwpoverity@gmail.com](mailto:gwpoverity@gmail.com) if you're interested in joining.

**2. Visit the PTF website and sign-up for the PTF e-newsletter**

The PTF website is updated regularly with local research, upcoming events, information about programs and services, and updates on policy changes and their impacts. You can visit the PTF website at [www.gwpoverity.ca](http://www.gwpoverity.ca) and sign-up for our e-newsletter.

**3. Let's meet!**

The PTF is always interested in meeting with new groups and organizations in our community to share information and learn about what is happening in the community. If you are interested in having someone from the PTF attend a meeting or provide a presentation, email [gwpoverity@gmail.com](mailto:gwpoverity@gmail.com).



# Thank You

The Guelph & Wellington Task Force for Poverty Elimination would like to thank the City of Guelph, County of Wellington, and United Way Guelph Wellington Dufferin for their generous financial support.

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Thank you to Randalin Ellery and Maris Lush for their work on this report.

**Finally – a special thank you to all those who contribute their time, energy, and passion toward efforts to eliminate poverty in our community.**

