

2013 REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY



MESSAGE FROM THE CO-CHAIRS



In the last year, we took action to raise awareness and educate the public about the personal and community impacts and costs of persistent poverty. While we are committed to ongoing research and learning about our community's needs and strengths, this year we focused on using the research we had done to ensure that community members and elected officials gained a deeper understanding of the problems and challenges to be overcome and the concrete steps that can be taken to eliminate poverty.

Poverty has a real human and economic impact.

People who live in poverty face daily barriers and challenges to access healthy food, enough income to cover basic living costs, safe and secure housing and health-related supports and services (including dental care).

From an economic perspective, tackling poverty is not just the right thing to do it also makes sense. The cost of inaction and the costs associated with perpetuating poverty far exceed the resources it would take to eliminate it.

The actions taken by the PTF consider the human and economic impacts of and solutions to address poverty.

Our work on social assistance reform, both the living wage and raising the minimum wage, and the need to ensure people and families have monthly incomes sufficient to cover the costs of basic necessities such as food and shelter, matter profoundly on two levels: 1) they form the foundation of a caring, compassionate and inclusive society; and, 2) they provide people with the opportunity to create and sustain their own lives, and in the process dramatically reduce the need for a host of programs and services that grow in response to our failure to do so.

These findings are reflected in our community. Emergency food service providers are finding it increasingly difficult to meet user needs. The vacancy rate (1.9%)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%). 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 we struggle as a community to see the full cost of this neglect and often don't fully appreciate the price we pay for continued inaction.

¹ Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (Fall 2013). "Rental Market Report: Ontario Highlights." Available online: http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/odpub/esub/64507/64507_2013_B02.pdf

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 to focus effort in several key areas: food security, housing security, income security and health equity. We also supported people with lived experience to create the *Advance Your Voice Speakers' Bureau* so that the struggles of poverty can be described in real ways that connect with others. We are also pleased to report that the affordable bus pass pilot program has been a resounding success and that the City of Guelph has extended the program. We are hopeful that the principles behind the program related to access and connectivity can be extended to affordable culture and recreational opportunities in the future.

The Poverty Task Force works together for change. Change in conversations, change in understanding impact, change in how we act as a community to support caring, inclusion and well-being. 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. In the coming year, we'll move our community vision around food security into action. We'll work with community partners to help create a housing and homelessness strategy. We'll continue a community conversation about a living wage. 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.

In particular, we want to acknowledge the important role that people with lived experience in poverty have as active partners in all levels of the PTF. Their commitment to provide a strong and meaningful voice as PTF members is one of the key components in the PTF's success in identifying and responding to the issues that most affect people living in poverty in our community. We thank you for being willing to continually share your knowledge, expertise and experience with our community.

We look forward to continuing to work with all our partners to make change and have a positive impact we work toward our vision to eliminate poverty in Guelph & Wellington.

Sincerely,



David Thornley
PTF Co-Chair (2012-2014)



Sarah Haanstra
PTF Co-Chair (2013-2015)

FOOD SECURITY



GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Lack of transparent eligibility criteria has consistently been identified as a barrier to access for community members accessing emergency food services. This was confirmed in a 2013 research report by The Research Shop (in partnership with the Poverty Task Force), which noted, “individuals repeatedly stated that they found eligibility requirements to be confusing, inconsistent and unfair².”

In November 2012, the PTF brought together emergency food providers and introduced *Guiding Principles for Eligibility Criteria*. The hope was that local implementation of the principles would lead to clearer rules, more consistent approaches to eligibility and fairer access to emergency food services.

Beginning in January 2013, emergency food organizations began endorsing the principles. Over the course of the year, providers met as part of the Food Access Working Group to discuss how to implement each of the principles. The Poverty Task Force created an online toolkit³ that provided tools and resources for providers.

During the year, we saw emergency food providers make efforts to increase the transparency and consistency of their eligibility criteria. Providers reflected on how to improve their service to be more equitable and inclusive. Emergency food providers supported one another to make changes, sharing the challenges they experienced and how they overcame them.

In 2014, a full evaluation of the impact of the Guiding Principles for Eligibility Criteria will be completed.

² <http://www.theresearchshop.ca/sites/default/files/Using%20Emergency%20Food%20Services%20in%20Guelph-Wellington%20-%20FINAL.pdf>

³ <http://guidingprinciplestoolkit.blogspot.ca/>

HOUSING SECURITY



ONTARIO HOUSING BENEFIT

A combination of low vacancy rates and inadequate shelter allowances means that “choice” is often not part of the equation when trying to find a home in Guelph and Wellington. It also means that 40% of tenant households in our community are spending 30% or more of household total income on shelter costs⁴. Determined to find a solution, the Poverty Task Force worked alongside the Wellington-Guelph Housing Committee to advocate for the implementation of a proposed Ontario Housing Benefit.

The proposed Ontario Housing Benefit (OHB) is a monthly benefit for low-income tenants, based on a household’s rent and income. It would pay part of the gap between your rent and 30% of your income. On average it would pay about \$120/month for families, and \$100/month for singles. It would be paid directly to eligible tenants (not landlords), including low-income tenants who are working, and those receiving social assistance⁵.

The Wellington-Guelph Housing Committee (WGHC) explored the proposed OHB thoroughly, by working with The Research Shop to develop a research profile and learning directly from the authors of a key report that outlined what the OHB would look like in Ontario and how it could be applied⁶. A local policy briefing was developed and the WGHC gained official endorsement from several prominent community organizations and service providers.

The Poverty Task Force included the proposed OHB in advocacy efforts related to the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario and the 2013 Ontario Budget. Representatives from both the PTF and the WGHC met with MPP Liz Sandals to highlight housing issues and offer the proposed OHB as a solution.

The PTF and WGHC have committed to continuing to advocate for the OHB in 2014, while raising awareness about the need for such a benefit and working with other communities to ensure the OHB is on the public policy radar.

⁴ Statistics Canada. 2013. Wellington, CTY, Ontario (Code 3523) (table). National Household Survey (NHS) Profile. 2011 National Household Survey. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 99-004-XWE. Ottawa. Released September 11, 2013. <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E> (accessed January 24, 2014).

⁵ Housing Network of Ontario (2011). “Needed: An Ontario Housing Benefit.” Available from: <http://stableandaffordable.com/needed-an-ontario-housing-benefit/>

⁶ Pomeroy, S., Steele, M., Hoy, J., & Stapleton, J. (2008). “A Housing Benefit for Ontario.” Available from: http://www.dailybread.ca/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/Housing_Benefit_for_Ontario_Final.pdf

INCOME SECURITY



LIVING WAGE FOR GUELPH & WELLINGTON

Beginning in 2012, the Poverty Task Force (PTF) Income Security Action Group (ISAG) and PTF Research & Policy Working Group engaged with various partners to explore and develop a living wage for Guelph and Wellington. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives defines the living wage as “the hourly rate at which a household can meet its basic needs, once government transfers have been added to the family’s income (such as the Universal Child Care Benefit) and deductions have been subtracted (such as income taxes and Employment Insurance premiums)⁷.

In October 2013, the Poverty Task Force released *A Living Wage for Guelph and Wellington*, announcing that the living wage for Guelph & Wellington is \$15.95/hour. The living wage was calculated based on a modest, bare bones budget to meet the cost of living for three profiles – a family of four (2 adults, 2 children), a family of two (one adult, one child), and a single adult⁸.

By championing the living wage, our community can ensure that individuals and families working full-time can meet their basic living expenses, support the healthy development of their children, and allow them to fully participate in work, family life, and community activities. A second report, *A Call to Action*, was also released in 2013, which outlined how our community can champion a living wage. While paying a living wage is perhaps the most obvious way to support this, the report outlined how communities before us have demonstrated that there are other worthwhile opportunities to consider.

Releasing the calculation and call to action marks the beginning of the road to making Guelph and Wellington a living wage community. The PTF and ISAG is committed to continuing dialogue and encouraging action through a community conversation series in 2014, and through the development of a living wage employer recognition program to launch in 2015.

⁷ Ivanova, I. & Klein, S. (2013). “Working for a living wage: making paid work meet basic family needs in Metro Vancouver.” *Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives*. Retrieved from http://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/BC%20Office/2013/05/CCPA-BC_Living_Wage_Update_2013.pdf

⁸ Ellery, R. & Muruvi, W. (2013). “A living wage for Guelph & Wellington.” *Guelph & Wellington Task Force for Poverty Elimination*. Retrieved from www.gwpoverity.ca

ACCESS TO RECREATION



ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE RECREATION GUIDE

In 2013, the Poverty Task Force, with the support of *in motion* Guelph, developed an access to recreation guide. The purpose of the guide is to share information about free and low-cost recreational opportunities and subsidies available in Guelph and Wellington. Details about who offers the program and where it is located, a description of the program, who it is for, and whether there is a cost associated, are all included.

A number of hardcopies of the guides were distributed to community members and service providers, and the guide is also available electronically on the PTF website.

ORAL HEALTH



ORAL HEALTH ACTION COMMITTEE

Access to affordable oral health care has continually been identified as an issue in our community, as well as other places across the province. In particular, the issues associated with lack of oral health care were repeatedly acknowledged during community conversations associated with the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario. While the PTF advocated for access to affordable oral health care for all low-income Ontarians during the Review, PTF partners encouraged more action.

In June 2013, the Guelph & Wellington Task Force for Poverty Elimination approved a recommendation from Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health to convene a group of community stakeholders to form the Oral Health Action Committee (OHAC). A call for members was put out through the Poverty Task Force (PTF) network and the first OHAC meeting was held in September 2013. The mandate of the OHAC is to support local action and advocacy efforts to improve access to affordable oral health care.

FOOD SECURITY



THE SEED COMMUNITY FOOD HUB COMMITTEE

After three years of research and two reports outlining the challenges facing the Guelph and Wellington emergency food system, the PTF approved a set of recommendations in early 2013 based on a new vision for emergency food in Guelph and Wellington. While short-term recommendations were included in an effort to improve the current system, they were intentionally limited in order to direct energy and resources at a permanent and sustainable solution. Included in the long-term vision, is the establishment of a community food hub, modeled after Community Food Centres Canada, which would address issues surrounding food, health and poverty in a more holistic way, while offering a wide range of programming, such as community kitchens and gardens.

The PTF endorsed the recommendations and the ad-hoc committee that had developed them agreed to remain a permanent committee with the support of the PTF. They gave themselves the name 'The Seed Community Food Hub Committee.'

In an effort to gain community support for this new vision, The Seed provided presentations to key community stakeholders across Guelph and Wellington. The feedback received was overwhelmingly positive.

In late June, The Seed welcomed Nick Saul, author of *The Stop: How the Fight for Good Food Transformed a Community and Inspired a Movement*. Saul is also the former Executive Director of The Stop Community Food Centre in Toronto and the current President & CEO of Community Food Centres Canada. Saul's talk inspired the community, by challenging us to think of a new model that would not only improve access, but also health, community, and advocacy.

In 2014, The Seed and the PTF will move forward with a series of community consultation sessions aimed at moving us toward concrete next steps. An Action Plan is to be released by mid-2014.

INCOME SECURITY



REVIEW OF SOCIAL ASSISTANCE IN ONTARIO

The final recommendations for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario were made public in early 2013. After several years of consultations with communities across the province about a system that clearly is not working, it was no surprise that the final report from the Commission included over 100 recommendations. In an effort to ensure that the final report received attention and action from the provincial government, the Income Security Action Group (ISAG) and the PTF committed to a plan of advocacy.

Shortly after the final recommendations were released, the PTF, in partnership with the County of Wellington and ISAG, hosted a community forum to review and discuss the final recommendations and to inform advocacy efforts. Based on feedback received at the event, the PTF, ISAG, Wellington-Guelph Housing Committee, and Community Voices called on the provincial government to take action on six key priorities:

1. Increase the Basic Needs Allowance
2. Index OW and ODSP rates to keep up with inflation
3. Ensure that the proposed integration of OW and ODSP does not result in rate reductions or cuts to benefits
4. Introduce an earnings exemptions for social assistance recipients with work hours
5. Introduce an Ontario Housing Benefit
6. Immediately provide OW recipients with the same access to health benefits as those received by ODSP recipients

A postcard campaign was launched and signatures from an online petition were presented to MPP's in Guelph and Wellington. The messaging from our community aligned with others across the province and several improvements were made to social assistance as part of the 2013 Ontario Budget.

The final recommendations continue to inform the work of the PTF and were highlighted by members during the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy Renewal consultations. In 2014, the PTF and ISAG will remain persistent that the provincial government take action to improve the overall social assistance system.

COMMUNITY VOICES



ADVANCE YOUR VOICE SPEAKERS BUREAU

Community Voices advises the work of the PTF by providing insights and feedback based on their collective lived experience in poverty. In addition, members of Community Voices aim to increase public awareness and understanding of the issues and consequences related to poverty in Guelph & Wellington. In 2012, the PTF received a grant from the Guelph Community Foundation to develop the Advance Your Voice Speakers Bureau with the support of Community Voices.

Advance Your Voice (AYV) Speakers Bureau enables participants to put a human face to poverty in Guelph-Wellington. In order to represent the speaker's bureau, members were required to participate in a six-week workshop series held in the spring 2013 that provided participants with training in public speaking, social justice and community advocacy. All eight participants successfully completed the six-week workshop series, and committed to at least two speaking engagements within a year.

In 2013, members of AYV shared their stories with the following organizations:

- Guelph & Wellington Task Force for Poverty Elimination (PTF Member Committee meeting)
- County of Wellington, Ontario Works (Staff meeting)
- Wellington-Guelph Housing Committee (member meeting)
- City of Guelph Council (re: Affordable Bus Pass Pilot Program)
- Farm to Fork (Official launch)
- WDG Public Health Launch of Social Determinants of Health Report
- University of Guelph (Service Learning in Housing class)

The PTF and Community Voices are committed to continuing to support the AYV Speakers Bureau in 2014. To book a speaker, please contact info "at" gwpoverty.ca

RESEARCH



EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF THE ELIMINATION OF 'CSUMB' ON FURNITURE NEEDS IN GUELPH AND WELLINGTON

In 2013, the PTF, in partnership with The Research Shop, set out to do an exploratory research project to understand the impact of elimination of the Community Start-up and Maintenance Program (CSUMB), which was cut as part of the 2012 Ontario budget. In our community, it was particularly important to consider the impact on furniture needs, a specific area that was covered under CSUMB, but not under the new Housing Stability Program introduced in January 2013 by the County of Wellington.

Research was to focus on evaluating the current availability and distribution of no- and low-cost furniture and household goods in Guelph and Wellington. This included considering the challenges and opportunities within the current system, as well as an assessment of the need for a possible furniture bank. Two Research Shop interns, Meaghan Anderson and Jane Robson, completed this research, in part, with support from the PTF Research & Policy Working Group. The research included interviews with three “furniture providers” and eight “service providers.” The final report from the Research Shop was released in September 2013. In November 2013, the PTF completed further analysis of the interview transcripts with furniture and service providers, along with the findings and recommendations provided by Anderson and Robson. Based on this process, the PTF developed final recommendations included in this report and the final report will be released in early 2014.

Additional Research Projects released by the PTF in 2013:

- Using Emergency Food Services in Guelph-Wellington (The Research Shop)
- Recommendation Report: Using Emergency Food Services in Guelph-Wellington
- Living Wage Report
- Living Wage Series: A Call to Action

POLICY



The PTF is committed to influencing and advocating for policy and system changes. This often involves working with other organizations to align messaging and strengthen efforts, as well as working directly with key decision and policy-makers. The following is a snapshot of some of the ways that the PTF engaged in policy in 2013 at the local, provincial, and national levels.

LOCAL POLICY

County of Wellington: Community Reference Group – 10-year Housing & Homelessness Plan

In 2012/2013, the PTF was represented on the County of Wellington Community Reference Group (CRG) to provide guidance to County staff and consultants in the development and implementation of consultation approaches with the community. The CRG also had a role in validating certain information and members were asked to provide input throughout the process of developing the final plan. The County of Wellington released the 10-year Housing & Homelessness Plan in early 2014.

City of Guelph: Internal City of Guelph Work Group – Affordable Bus Pass Pilot Program

In 2012/2013, the PTF was represented on the Internal City of Guelph Work Group for the Affordable Bus Pass Pilot Program (ABPPP). The internal working group was tasked with implementing the new ABPPP, including developing applications, assessing challenges, outreach with potential users and service providers, and a comprehensive evaluation. The ABPPP was approved as a permanent program as part of the 2014 budget at the City of Guelph.

PROVINCIAL POLICY

Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy Renewal

In the 2013 it was announced that the province would be renewing the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy, originally introduced in 2008. The province provided several opportunities for people to have their say, including community consultations, an online

survey, and by providing written submissions. In August 2013, the PTF convened an Ad-hoc committee to develop an official submission from Guelph and Wellington. This involved reviewing key advocacy issues that were part of the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario, encouraging feedback from those with lived experience (via Community Voices and an online survey), and aligning messages with other organizations across the province.

The official PTF submission was forwarded to the provincial government in September 2013, and heavily informed discussion and feedback at a community consultation held by the province's Cabinet Committee on Poverty Reduction.

Minimum Wage Advisory Council

In 2013, the Ontario government appointed an advisory panel to give advice on the province's minimum wage. The advisory panel is examining Ontario's current approach to setting the minimum wage and will provide advice on how the province should determine changes to the minimum wage in the future. The advisory panel held regional consultation meetings across the province, including Guelph, in September, October, and November. A consultation paper was also released and individuals and organizations were encouraged to provide feedback on specific discussion questions.

In October 2013, the PTF convened an ad-hoc committee to review the consultation paper and provide an official submission to the advisory panel. The submission gives consideration to who is currently making a minimum wage in Ontario, highlights the link between poverty reduction, income inequality, and the minimum wage, and explores the differences between minimum wage and a living wage. The submission also provides answers to the discussion questions in the advisory panels consultation paper.

The advisory panel's final recommendations are to be released to the Ontario government in early 2014.

Poverty Free Ontario

Poverty Free Ontario (PFO) brings together organizations and initiatives from across the province, including the Poverty Task Force, in an effort to eliminate divided communities in which large numbers of adults and children live in chronic states of material hardship, poor health, and social exclusion. PFO has developed a policy agenda to end deep poverty, working poverty, and to protect food money.

PFO often pulls communities together to align messaging and actions directed at changing systems and policies that support their policy agenda. The PTF has been an active member of PFO and will continue to work with PFO and partners in 2014.

FEDERAL POLICY

Vibrant Communities Canada – Cities Reducing Poverty

Cities Reducing Poverty is an initiative that aims to connect together 100 Cities and Communities from all across Canada to reduce poverty for over one million Canadians.

- The **Vision** is to create Vibrant Canadian Communities by significantly reducing the human, social and economic cost of poverty.
- The **Mission** is to create a connected learning community of 100 Canadian cities with multi-sector roundtables addressing poverty reduction.
- Our **goal** is aligned poverty reduction strategies in cities, provinces and the federal government resulting in reduced poverty for 1 million Canadians.

The PTF has been an active participant in the Cities Reducing Poverty initiative. In 2013, the PTF was represented on the Policy Working Group, which aimed to provide communities with policy resources to align messaging and encourage action.

2014 STRATEGIC PLAN



The PTF Member Committee, which meets five times throughout the year, spent considerable time reflecting on their role in the community, evaluating their impact since convening in 2009, and determining their direction for the future. Members demonstrated considerable commitment to this process and were deeply engaged in all steps of the process. As a result, the PTF will release a comprehensive Strategic Plan in early 2014. This Strategic Plan will introduce new pathways for success, an improved organizational framework, and specific priorities and actions for the next three years.

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