



POVERTY

GUELPH & WELLINGTON TASK FORCE FOR

ELIMINATION

The Guelph & Wellington Task Force for Poverty Elimination's

REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY

May 2011

www.gwpoverty.ca

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The Guelph & Wellington Task Force for Poverty Elimination thanks the City of Guelph, County of Wellington and United Way of Guelph & Wellington for their funding support. Additional thanks to the Meridian Credit Union and anonymous donors for their financial support of special projects and actions.

The Poverty Task Force (PTF) would also like to thank The Research Shop for their contributions in 2010/2011. Special thanks to Linda Hawkins, Trish Altass and Amanda Peters for their dedication and support.

Thank you to the following people for your assistance with this report: Andrew Seagram (Upper Grand District School Board), Barb McPhee (Community Voices), Bethany Wagler-Mantle (United Way of Guelph & Wellington), Brenda Doner (Guelph-Wellington Food Round Table), Heather Kepran (United Way of Guelph & Wellington), Jane Londerville (Wellington-Guelph Housing Committee), June Hofland (City of Guelph), Karen Armstrong (Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health), Randalin Ellery (United Way of Guelph & Wellington), Sonia Singh-Waraich (Guelph-Wellington Food Round Table) Terry O'Connor (Guelph & District Labour Council), Trish Altass (University of Guelph).

And finally, a special thank you to all of those who contribute their time, energy and passion to efforts to eliminate poverty in our community.

"Overcoming poverty is not a task of charity, it is an act of justice. Like Slavery and Apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings. Sometimes it falls on a generation to be great. YOU can be that great generation. Let your greatness blossom."

-Nelson Mandela

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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We live in a challenging time of serious social, political, and economic turbulence. Though overall wealth is growing, the gap between the rich and the poor is widening. Two years after the first meeting of the Guelph & Wellington Task Force for Poverty Elimination, poverty continues to be a significant burden for people in the City of Guelph and Wellington County.

Many communities and neighbourhoods in Guelph and Wellington County show signs of distress as the result of poverty. Many people and families are unemployed and/or underemployed without a chance of finding financially viable work. Mental health issues due to poverty such as depression and addiction cause further strains on families. The increased stress can lead to a rise in domestic violence, abuse and a diminished capacity to learn. Many people living in poverty have limited access to vocational training and social services, such as therapists, access to doctors/medical system and affordable housing. Poverty is an injustice.

Despite their lack of economic wealth, these same neighbourhoods and communities are rich in human capacity and social potential. In order to get out of poverty people need to live with dignity and respect. What is needed is education, economic opportunities, access to social services, a compassionate culture and a political voice. In light of what can appear to be insurmountable challenges of getting out of poverty people need to see a socio/political system that inspires them and assures them that the future will get better. People need to see their lives get better.

More than ever, the work we do to create pathways out of poverty is critical in fostering a healthy and vibrant community. The Poverty Task Force (PTF) is working towards this goal. Our mission is to eliminate, not reduce, poverty in Guelph-Wellington by supporting, coordinating and inspiring sustainable change and supporting the building of individual resilience through collective action.

As we look back on this year, we are proud of what the PTF has achieved. The hundreds of people involved with the PTF are making progress by utilizing and building networks, sharing information, building awareness, expanding organizational capacities and creating real change by addressing and removing barriers that create or maintain poverty for people in our community.

We hope that you will join our efforts and celebrate the accomplishments made by our community. We are confident that together we can break the cycle of poverty.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that appears to read "Hofland".

June Hofland

A handwritten signature in cursive script that appears to read "Seagram".

Andrew Seagram

MESSAGE FROM THE CO-CHAIRS

ABOUT THE PTF

Vision:

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

Mission:

Our community CARES. Together we:

- **Collaborate**
 - Acting in partnership to further knowledge and understanding on issues related to poverty.
- **Act**
 - Using innovative approaches to make meaningful change happen for individuals and families when they need it most.
- **Recognize**
 - Seeking to respectfully recognize, understand and give voice to the experiences of those living with the effects of poverty.
- **Engage**
 - Meaningfully engaging members of the community to develop a sense of shared accountability and belonging where all members work collectively to realize future possibilities.
- **Shift attitudes**
 - Working together to shift attitudes towards 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.

Co-chairs:

- June Hofland, City Councillor, City of Guelph*
- Andrew Seagram, Coordinator, Community Use of Schools Program, Upper Grand District School Board*

Members:

- Andrea Roberts, Director, Child & Family Health, Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health
- Beth Leith, Community Member, Mount Forest
- Brenda McGinnis, Constituency Assistant, Liz Sandals MPP
- Byron Sheldrick, Associate Professor and Chair, Department of Political Science, University of Guelph
- Debbie Bentley-Lauzon, Executive Director, Wyndham House
- Erin Harvey, Service Director, Family & Children's Services of Guelph and Wellington County*
- Evelyn Herron, Community Member, Waverley Neighbourhood Group*
- Frank Valeriote, Member of Parliament, Guelph
- George Kelly, Co-chair, Guelph & Wellington Coalition for Social Justice
- Heather Burke, Housing Director, County of Wellington*
- Jane Londerville, Chair, Wellington Guelph Housing Committee
- Jean Innes, County Councillor, County of Wellington
- Rev. John Borthwick, Minister, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church
- Karen Armstrong, Regional Coordinator, Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph in motion, Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health
- Ken Dardano, Executive Director, United Way of Guelph & Wellington*
- Linda Benallick, Superintendent, Upper Grand District School Board
- Linda Busuttil, Board of Trustees, Upper Grand District School Board
- Liz Sandals, Member of Provincial Parliament, Guelph
- Lloyd Bowers, Community Health Program Manager, Guelph Community Health Centre
- Lloyd Longfield, President & CAO, Guelph Chamber of Commerce
- Lorna Schwartzenruber, Program Director, Onward Willow Better Beginnings, Better Futures
- Michael Chong, Member of Parliament, Wellington-Halton Hills
- Paul Clarkson, Community Member
- Ron MacKinnon, Executive Director, Community Resource Centre
- Roya Rabbani, Executive Director, Immigrant Services – Guelph Wellington*
- Sonia Singh-Waraich, Community Development Coordinator, Family & Children's Services of Guelph & Wellington County
- Sly Castaldi, Executive Director, Women in Crisis
- Terry O'Connor, Treasurer, Guelph and District Labour Council
- Tina Brophy, Community Member, Onward Willow Better Beginnings, Better Futures
- Trish Altass, PhD Candidate, University of Guelph

Staff:

- Randalin Ellery, Coordinator, Guelph & Wellington Task Force for Poverty Elimination

* Members of the Steering Committee

WHO WE ARE

ACCESS TO RECREATION

2010 Success Story: Local Shoe Drive

In late 2008/2009, the Guelph Community Health Centre (GCHC) noticed that clients who were referred to walking groups or fitness programs often lacked appropriate footwear to participate in these activities. The GCHC started collecting and distributing athletic shoes to their clients to meet this need. Around the same time, *in motion* Guelph identified their focus as increasing access to recreation and expressed interest in expanding the GCHC program to help meet the need for athletic shoes across the city.

Representatives from *in motion* created a working group with members that included the GCHC, the University of Guelph, a community development worker from a neighbourhood group, and a community volunteer. This group focused on working out the logistics of expanding the shoe program. They worked with the larger *in motion* Guelph group to gather the support of more local partners.

in motion held the shoe drive during *in motion* week in October 2010 and collected shoes at four drop-off sites – GCHC, YMCA, UoG Athletics and UoG Health and Performance Centre. In addition to shoes donated at the drop-off sites, Applied Biomechanics, Running Works, and Meridian Credit Union donated shoes.

In total 200 pairs of shoes were collected – 30 children's pairs and 170 adult pairs.



All of the children's shoes were donated to Onward Willow, and were distributed quickly to children who were lacking appropriate indoor footwear as the winter season approached. Staff at Onward Willow identified that kids living in low-income families usually wear the same footwear all day, and when they start wearing winter boots, this becomes a problem.

The 170 pairs of adult shoes were divided between three neighbourhood groups. These groups all have existing clothing cupboards, making distribution of the shoes easy to integrate into current space and programming. The shoes were available for anyone, not just clients or residents of the neighbourhood group.

The response to this first shoe drive was very positive. With a constant need for more shoes, particularly for children, this program is expected to continue.



"If no-cost recreation was proactively arranged for a majority of Ontario Works families, significant savings would result from increased economic independence and exits from welfare rolls."

- Mark Totten, *The Health, Social and Economic Benefits of Increasing Access to Recreation for Low-Income Families.*

WDG *in motion*
Communities *in motion* Guelph
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Dufferin-Guelph *in motion*
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2011 Key Activities: Access to Recreation

Need:

Last year Guelph *in motion*, with the help of community partners, collected over 200 pairs of running shoes. While the response to the program was very positive, a need for more children's shoes has been consistently expressed.

Response:

Guelph *in motion* aims to remove barriers to physical activity by increasing access to free athletic shoes for people facing economic hardships. Several workplaces, including Hematite Manufacturing, the City of Guelph and Tim Horton's Distribution Centre, have offered to host shoe drives to try to meet the demand for additional children's athletic shoes.



Need:

Local research indicates that those facing economic hardships are frustrated over the limited recreational activities and resources available for families (The Community Researcher Project, 2010).

Response:

Guelph *in motion* is working to remove financial barriers to physical activity by supporting the work of The Guelph & Wellington County Children's Subsidy Task Force.

Need:

In a recent report, Parks and Recreation Ontario identified the need for a policy framework to "galvanize communities, the private sector and all levels of government, based on a shared vision for affordable recreation." (Affordable Access to Recreation for Ontarians: Policy Framework, 2010: 4).

Response:

Guelph *in motion* is hosting a Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph regional workshop in October 2011, facilitated by Parks and Recreation Ontario, to explore how the region can increase affordable access to recreation opportunities.

"...it costs to do anything with your children out here, like to go anywhere it costs. It costs to go to the pool. It costs to take them to...programs and stuff like that. There should be more available free for your children."

- Community member
(The Community Research Project,
2010)



GOING FORWARD: 2011

FOOD SECURITY

2010 Success Story: Community Gardens

In 2009 the Guelph-Wellington Food Round Table (GWFRT) began to bring together a network to support the growth of a thriving, accessible food system. One of the first working groups the GWFRT established was the Community Gardens Network (CGN) which aimed to advocate for, develop, and sustain community gardens on public and private lands in Guelph-Wellington. While the need for community gardens had been identified for many years, particularly among those who do not have access to their own land to grow food, the CGN was the first to respond to the need and achieve an outcome.

In October 2009 the CGN made a proposal asking the City of Guelph for support in principal for community gardens on public land. The proposal was well received and, after being receiving input from a number of departments at the City, it was agreed that the City of Guelph would support the establishment of four community gardens and provide some limited resources (i.e. water, continued engagement) as part of a 2 year pilot project.



In spring 2010 two community gardens were established on school board property (Stephanie Drive & Brant Avenue) and two were set up on city property (Peter Misersky Park & Norm Jary Park). The community gardens are primarily run by volunteers from the neighbourhood groups in these areas.

An evaluation of the community gardens in February 2011 reported that those involved with the gardens had a very positive experience. Community members noted that they enjoyed the additional exercise and

activity provided to them by the garden, as well as the food it produced and the opportunity to meet others.

The four original gardens established in 2010 will continue to run this year, although many have grown in size. The City of Guelph has offered to provide additional resources, including wood chip mulch, lending water barrels, promotion, and providing the first tilling of the garden. Additional gardens in at least three new locations are being discussed.



"We have a garden, which involves the children. It teaches about healthy eating, natural working with the earth and we haven't harvested anything yet, but we look forward to it, and the garden is linking us to many different other projects, and we're having native leaders, native elders come and teach us a little about that stuff."

- Community member
(The Community Research Project,
2010)

Guelph-Wellington Food
Round Table
www.gwfrt.com
info@gwfrt.com

2011 Key Activities: Food Security

Need:

The Community Researcher Project identified that community members face many challenges when trying to access adequate emergency food assistance. Additional research was conducted by the Social Planning Department of the United Way and The Research Shop with local emergency food providers. This research found that many emergency food programs did not have enough food, especially nutritious food, to meet the demands in their communities.



Response:

In 2011, the Food Access Working Group (FAWG) of the GWFRT is developing a plan for improving regional emergency food distribution in Guelph and Wellington County. They are also collaborating on their second community-wide food drive to support smaller food pantries and cupboards. The FAWG is also working to improve access to information about local emergency food programs through developing and distributing an emergency food access guide in a format that meets the needs of people living in poverty.

Need:

Focus group participants in the Community Researcher project and PTF Research Profiles on food security identified building capacity in growing and preparing food as a way to reduce food insecurity.

Response:

The FAWG is developing and distributing a manual to help groups form and run collective kitchens. Additionally, new community gardens in Guelph are burgeoning and existing community gardens are expanding.

Need:

Food charters are being crafted in cities and regions all over Canada, and many are being adopted or endorsed by municipal governments. The GWFRT identified a need for a local charter to guide policy and action in our region.

Response:

The Policy Working Group worked with many partners to develop the Guelph Wellington Food Charter. In 2011, the Policy Working Group is using the Guelph Wellington Food Charter to inspire and guide change in the food system.

Every year Public Health finds out what it costs for a person to eat healthy food in Wellington and Dufferin counties. In 2010 it was determined that the weekly cost for a family of four is \$170.73.

- WDG Public Health
(September 2009)



GOING FORWARD: 2011

INCOME SECURITY

2010 Success Story: Affordable Transit

When the Community Researcher Report was presented to the Guelph & Wellington Task Force for Poverty Elimination, many took note of the challenges related to transportation that were expressed by focus group participants. While those in the County face additional transportation challenges without access to public transit, participants from the City noted that they also face challenges due to a lack of *affordable* public transit. The Income Security Action Group (ISAG) paid special notice to the research findings that indicated a connection between a lack of affordable and dependable transit and income security.

"If I didn't get a lift into work Sunday nights, I had to take a cab and I'm a single mom making this money...the community can't afford vehicles and need the transit system, you know?"

- Community Member
(The Community Researcher Project, 2010)



In early 2011 the City of Guelph budget process provided an opportunity for the Guelph & Wellington Task Force for Poverty Elimination to address the challenges people living in poverty in Guelph face as the result of a lack of access to affordable public transit. ISAG took the lead and requested additional research on affordable transit pass programs in other Canadian cities from The Research

Shop at the University of Guelph. The results of the research informed the advocacy position of the Poverty Task Force and ISAG. Public delegates from the PTF and ISAG presented to City Council and called for the City not to increase bus fares, to re-introduce bus service on statutory holidays and to work with the PTF to develop an affordable transit pass program. City Councillors voted to freeze current rates, maintain 20-minute service throughout the summer and run buses on five statutory holidays. In addition, the City vowed to work with the PTF to develop an affordable transit pass program. The PTF, including members of ISAG, will have its first meeting with City of Guelph staff in late spring 2011 to discuss next steps.



"People with low incomes and relatively low levels of automobile access are transit's best customers, and improving transit service will improve employment access for these workers."

- Martin Wachs
(Can Transportation Strategies Help Meet the Welfare Challenge?, 1997)

Terry O'Connor
Chair, Income Security Action Group
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2011 Key Activities: Income Security

Need:

The Community Researcher Report highlighted the frustrations of community members facing economic hardships that impact their ability to access public transit. They noted that they were negatively impacted by limited bus service during certain hours and the cancellation of buses on Sundays in August 2010.



Response:

The Income Security Action Group continues to advocate for an affordable transit pass program in the City of Guelph in an effort to reduce transportation barriers to employment. Working with the City of Guelph Community & Social Services Department, they are taking concrete steps towards achieving this.

Need:

The Community Researcher Report noted that people felt a lack of available information about services or knowledge of how to find information was limiting their access to services and programs. Many of the focus group participants brought up challenges they face in attempting to navigate a complicated system of supports and services.

"The money that you get on [Ontario Works] is clearly not enough. No human being can survive month-to-month on that. You can't survive without going to the food bank or food shelf. It's a ridiculous thing, it's inhuman."

Response:

The Income Security Action Group is seeking to increase access to information about income security for community members. In 2011, this group is planning to develop and host peer-to-peer training opportunities to put information about income security supports and services in the hands of community leaders.

Need:

Focus group participants from the Community Researcher Project shared several barriers to income security that they face. These included insufficient financial support from social assistance, confusion surrounding eligibility requirements for income support programs, and difficulty finding employment due to lack of resources.

Response:

In an effort to increase income security in Guelph & Wellington, the Income Security Action Group is advocating for system changes to ensure the voices of those facing economic hardship in our community are heard.

- Community member
(The Community Research Project,
2010)



GOING FORWARD: 2011

HOUSING SECURITY

2010 Success Story: Youth Housing Forum

Based on the opening of the at-risk youth emergency shelter and discussion at the Wellington Guelph Housing Committee, it was decided that an annual housing forum should focus on housing problems of at-risk youth. Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), the County of Wellington, the City of Guelph, and the University of Guelph partnered with the Housing Committee to bring two presentations to the Forum – Youth Opportunities Unlimited (<http://www.you.on.ca>) from London and Peel Youth Village (<http://www.peelregion.ca/housing/peelbuilds/centres/peelyouth.htm>) of Brampton. Each organization brought a youth to speak about how they had benefited from the service, as well as someone to talk about the service model. After these two speakers, Wyndham House and Doors Open discussed local youth service initiatives in Guelph & Wellington. The audience then broke into smaller groups to discuss how the initiatives heard about in the sessions might be applied locally.



Approximately 40 representatives of service providers attended, as well as students in the Service Learning in Housing course at the University of Guelph. CMHC funded travel for the speakers as well as arranging for notification of the press regarding the event. All local newspapers were in attendance as

well as Rogers TV, and there was considerable coverage of the event.

"I was very impressed with the youth participants. In particular the one young woman who got up to speak via a 'mini-poetry slam.' I left the day with thoughts of the hope and resiliency that those participants brought into the forum. It caused me to re-focus on why we were all there – to discuss housing issues not just from a systems perspective, but from a human perspective."

I think that everyone there from Wyndham House also very much appreciated hearing about what other communities are doing to meet the needs and challenges they face."

- Debbie Bentley-Lauzon, Executive Director
Wyndham House



"Unaffordable and inadequate housing, even for those who are currently able to meet their needs and aspirations, can contribute to poverty, and to a spiral that include losing jobs, dropping out of school, and being unable to sustain families."

- In From the Margins: A Call to Action on Poverty, Housing and Homelessness, 2009: 12.

In 2010, 770 individual clients used shelters in Guelph and Wellington County. The average age of a client was 31 years old.

- Wellington County Social Services, 2011

Wellington Guelph Housing Committee
Jane Londerville, Chair
jlonderv@uoguelph.ca

2011 Key Activities: Housing Security

Need:

Access to housing is a critical determinant for living a healthy life; lack of access to safe, affordable, and secure housing increases the likelihood of being affected by many health problems (Mikkonen & Raphael, 2010). In the Guelph Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) 41.2% of tenant households spend 30% or more of their income on rent (Statistics Canada, 2006).



Response:

The Housing Committee is planning a celebration of World Habitat Day (October 3, 2011) to publicize issues related to the need for affordable secure housing. World Habitat Day was first celebrated in 1986 and is a UN sanctioned event; each year has a different theme – this year's theme is cities and climate change.

Need:

Two-thirds of affordable units are in the private rental sector and include older apartments and apartment suites in homes. This suggests that the private sector plays an important role in contributing to a stock of housing that, over time, has remained or become affordable (Pomeroy, 2001).

Response:

The Housing Committee, with the support of the Canadian Mortgage & Housing Corporation, will host another forum this year with the planned emphasis on integrating private sector solutions into the affordable housing toolbox.

Need:

The Community Researcher Report highlighted the difficulties people living in poverty faced in gaining information about and understanding eligibility requirements to apply for affordable housing.

Response:

The Housing Committee plans to produce a guide outlining housing resources throughout the Guelph & Wellington County. This document will help service providers in guiding clients to proper resources to assist with maintaining or finding affordable housing.

"We owned our house [but] ended up having to move and find a new residence to rent and how do you get references? We had a mortgage, we didn't have a rental unit, so we had no references, we had nothing basically... What kind of references would you like? Do you want to talk to the mortgage I can't pay?"

- Community member
(The Community Research Project,
2010)



GOING FORWARD: 2011

2010 Accomplishment: Municipal Poverty Briefings

Members of the Guelph & Wellington Task Force for Poverty Elimination, along with community members, recognized that the PTF had a role to play in raising the profile of poverty issues during the municipal elections. The Policy Working Group took the lead on this initiative and partnered with the Social Planning Department at the United Way of Guelph & Wellington. Together it was decided to adopt a cooperative approach to encourage all candidates to become involved. This was done by developing and presenting poverty briefings that provided an opportunity for municipal candidates to learn about poverty issues in our community, as well as the role municipalities can play in eliminating poverty.



The poverty briefings were presented twice – once in Guelph and once in Arthur. In total, 19 candidates attending the event in Guelph and 25 attended in Arthur. Statistics and information about poverty in Guelph and Wellington County were presented and community researchers involved

with The Community Researcher Project shared information about the lived experience of poverty. In addition, ideas about how municipal governments and community members can have an impact on poverty reduction were also shared.

The candidates that attended the briefings reported that they found the briefings to be informative and useful and noted that they would use the information to guide future decisions. For some participants it was the first time they heard these were issues in their community and the briefings resulted in dialogue about change with other community leaders outside of the event.



policy

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2011 Key Activities: Policy

1. **Host Election Events.** The Policy Working Group will host events leading up to the Federal and Provincial elections. These events include community forums, voter workshops, and candidate debates.
2. **Develop a Policy Framework.** A policy framework is a set of principles and long-term goals that form the basis of making guidelines and decisions, and give overall direction to planning and development. A PTF policy framework will assist the PTF in tackling system changes and advocating for long-term solutions to poverty.
3. **Inform Policy Recommendations.** The Policy Working Group will work with the Research, Learning & Evaluation Working Group to inform policy recommendations for all PTF research reports.
4. **Advocacy Training.** Members of the Policy Working Group will participate in advocacy training opportunities to better understand policy environments to do effective policy analysis and advocacy.



"The Committee recommends that federal and provincial governments, acting internally, bilaterally and/or multilaterally, review current policies and programs and new initiatives in the context of eliminating and avoiding both gaps and duplication, through a whole-of-government approach to poverty, housing and homelessness issues."

- In From the Margins: A Call to Action on Poverty, Housing and Homelessness, 2009: 169.

"Municipal governments are closest to their communities and have tools to respond to the needs of communities."

- Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy, 2009: 41.

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policy

GOING FORWARD: 2011

RESEARCH, LEARNING & EVALUATION

2010 Accomplishment: The Community Researcher Project

In the fall of 2009, the Research, Learning and Evaluation (RLE) Working Group identified the need to find out more about the lived experience of poverty in Guelph and Wellington. To accomplish this, the RLE working group in collaboration with the Research Shop at the University of Guelph, undertook a community-based research project. Community-based research involves a collaborative approach in which all participants are active contributors to the research process. For this project, community members with lived experience of poverty were trained as community researchers in order to identify gaps in services and programs and issues with accessing services and programs for those living in poverty.

Eleven community members attended a two-day training in April 2010, during which they learned about a variety of research methods. They then used this information to select an optimal research strategy for exploring economic hardship in this community. Through the spring and summer of 2010, the community researchers contributed in each stage of the research, from deciding to conduct focus groups, designing a focus group guide, facilitating the focus groups and analysing the results.



In collaboration with members of the community researcher team, the project co-ordinator then compiled a written report presented to the Guelph and Wellington Task Force for Poverty Elimination and released to the community in September 2010. Through the stories and experiences shared by focus group participants, the report identified positive aspects, areas for improvement and gaps in current services and programs, as well as common challenges faced within services and programs. This report has helped guide the actions and focus of the Poverty Task Force and is being used by other community organizations to make positive changes within the community. Through poverty briefings and community presentations, the community researcher team has been able to increase awareness of poverty-related issues in Guelph and Wellington County. This was not research conducted for a community, but with and by a community, highlighting the lived experiences, strengths and challenges of those facing economic hardship in the Guelph and Wellington County area.



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2011 Key Activities: Research, Learning & Evaluation

1. **Rapid Response Research:** Graduate student interns from the Research Shop at the University of Guelph in collaboration with the Task Force co-ordinator and the RLE group chair will conduct literature reviews and research to support the working and action groups of the PTF.
2. **Research Profiles:** The RLE group will continue to create research profiles highlighting important issues and topics to assist, inform and support the working and action groups of the PTF. These reports are also available to the community through the PTF website.
3. **New Community Researcher Project:** Community members have been trained in Photo Voice Research Methods and will be conducting research in order to explore how people live healthy, well and strong in Guelph and Wellington.
4. **Calculate and Monitor Poverty Measures:** The RLE group in collaboration with Public Health have obtained the Low Income Measures (LIM) for our community and will continue to monitor the LIM and Low Income Cut Off (LICO) as new census data becomes available.
5. **Support use of the Deprivation Index:** The RLE group will work with other poverty reduction groups and organizations to advocate for the use of a deprivation index as an important tool to better understand the qualitative and quantitative aspects of poverty. A deprivation index is a list of items or activities considered necessary to have an adequate standard of living, but those who are poor are unlikely to be able to afford.



"Using income levels [to measure poverty] means we have not been able to research the relationship between income and poverty, taking into account factors such as assets, help from family, real housing costs and so on, none of which may be reflected in income levels alone."

- Tamarack,
An Institute for Community Engagement

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GOING FORWARD: 2011

COMMUNITY VOICES

From the very beginning, the Guelph & Wellington Task Force for Poverty Elimination recognized that people with lived experience of poverty are critical members of poverty reduction initiatives. While some members of the Poverty Task Force self-identify as living in poverty, the PTF recognized the need to broaden their awareness and gain a meaningful understanding of how the experience of poverty impacts on people's lives. At the same time focus-group participants involved with The Community Researcher Project acknowledged the need for an informal group to continue sharing information and to strengthen social support networks.



Modeled after Awareness of Low Income Voices, a network of people who have or are presently living at or below the poverty level in the Waterloo Region, Community Voices held their first meeting in Guelph in late 2010. The purpose of this group is to organize around key issues that impact the lives of its members and to share information and act collectively to ensure members voices are heard.

In early 2011, members of Community Voices met in different neighbourhoods to discuss the impacts of potential changes to bus fares and schedules in the city, and later to identify key questions to ask candidates during the federal election. Representatives from the group spoke to city council during the budget process and asked questions during federal candidate debates. In addition, the information from Community Voices meetings was shared with the Poverty Task Force to inform decisions and guide next steps.



"Living in poverty most of my life, I have not really had the opportunity until now to really make a difference and have my voice heard. Issues that I have never addressed because I felt that it would not make a difference as my voice would not be heard are now issues that I am not afraid to challenge knowing that I have other people in the same situation to support me. Community Voices is a wonderful supportive group of caring citizens who just want to have the same quality of life as everyone else."

-Member of Community Voices

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