

Your Voice in Guelph
Guelph TRIBUNE

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Guest Editorial Making Guelph a better place

In many ways, Guelph is a great city with committed people dedicated to ensuring we have a strong economy, good social and health services, educational opportunities, a healthy environment, and a vibrant arts and culture scene.

Yet, for many people in our community Guelph could be a better place. When not everyone in our community has the income, resources and opportunities to fully participate in the community; when 12.1% of Guelph's residents and 14.1% of children live in poverty, then Guelph could be a better place.

When the current minimum wage is not enough to ensure that full-time work is a pathway out of poverty; then Guelph could be better place.

When not everyone in our community has access to affordable and healthy food; when 7.3% of all households in Guelph Wellington are food insecure, then Guelph could be a better place. Judy Noonan, who currently lives in poverty, understands first-hand the impact of limited income on food choice and nutrition. "You know there's not much fresh food that I can buy with that amount of money (ODSP) . . . at the end of the month I'm left eating Kraft Dinner. I miss my fruits and vegetables."

When not everyone in our community has an appropriate, safe, affordable place to call home; when 45% of renter households cannot afford market rent; when average wait times for rent-geared-to-income housing range from over 1 to 4 years (depending on location), then Guelph could be a better place.

**Not everyone
has an
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When not everyone in our community has access to affordable health services; when only 40% of low income Ontarians have private dental insurance, then Guelph could be a better place.

Martha Inglis, a mother of five living in poverty, worries about the loss of dental care for her eldest son. "My oldest is 17, soon he will not have coverage at all for his teeth . . . I worry that he will be left without proper access to oral healthcare and because of this his health will begin to decline."

In addition to the ongoing stress and worry associated with the lack of access to basic needs, is the lack of dignity and respect that people living in poverty experience on a daily basis. Yet, many who live in poverty volunteer countless hours to make their communities a better place, juggle multiple part-time and/or contract jobs at once, and work hard just to make ends meet for themselves and their families. Simply put, Guelph would be a better place if everyone had enough income; affordable and safe housing; affordable and healthy food and affordable health services, or in other words, if poverty was eliminated.

Getting there is at the heart of the problem. How do we create a city where poverty is eliminated? The issues we are battling are complex. Solutions involve commitments from all levels of government, as well as community stakeholders, business leaders, service providers, and general public.

However, the starting point is simple. It is the realization that poverty is not inevitable, but rather, a result of ill-conceived public policy. As individuals and families living in Guelph we must recognize the important role we can play in pushing for change. Doing so requires that we explore and question how our own beliefs, as well as our current systems, policies and practices perpetuate poverty and stereotypes about poverty.

Research shows that eliminating poverty means better population health; cost savings to governments and taxpayers; increased prosperity; an expanded tax base; and improved health and education outcomes for children – essential for breaking the cycle of poverty.

In the end, making Guelph a better place requires a commitment from us all.

Sarah Haanstra and Stuart Beumer are co-chairs of the Guelph & Wellington Task Force for Poverty Elimination

EDITORIAL

Guelph TRIBUNE



Not sweetest of sentiments

Guelph lost a unique bird when Sue Richards died over the long weekend. Kind of fitting, actually, in that Guelph marked John Galt Day, the founder of this city.

Sue proudly wore the 'Guelph Factor' banner that some see as a negative. She took pride in the idea that this city is different, odd, eccentric, esoteric, and such. Just like Sue. Some embrace this idea, others see it as impeding progress.

I would call her more of an acquaintance rather than friend. I shudder to think we probably go back about three decades.

She died just down the street from me. She had Parkinson's. I watched it hack away at her vibrancy over the past few years. Fading like our elderly parents fade but gone at the relatively young age of 56.

Sandwiched between then and now, Sue called herself a social entrepreneur. That's a fancy way of saying she had lofty ideals, playing them out and pretty much not making a dime. There's been Art Jam, the Breast of Canada calendar and Blog Guelph among her ventures.

Her lasting legacy will likely be the Hillside Festival, where she was a player in its formative years, and Blog Guelph. It's a nifty

website featuring all things Guelph, lovely art work and photography and an interesting array of Sue's friends and interests.

Over the years, various campaigns for Sue have solicited Canadian Tire money to help with needed home renovations; there were calls for straight cash for medical reasons and then last Christmas some of her legion of friends were selling her Christmas cards.

Her hand-crafted Christmas cards espoused joy, happiness and such. There was a darker version that began with the letter F and ended with a K. It was brightly coloured, though, and showed she could laugh about her failing condition yet express it so succinctly.

Let's just say that is what most would say, or at least think, if stricken with Parkinson's – or other life-sapping diseases.

While this is about Sue, it is also about all others who are subjected to similar cruelties and loss. Her passage is not a lot different from others: surrounded and cared for by friends and family; coping mentally and physically; and ultimately staring death in the face.

Her not-very-Christmassy card pretty much sums it up, and her many friends are muttering the same after hearing about and mourning her death last weekend.

Guelph MATTERS



**Chris
CLARK**