

GUELPH & WELLINGTON TASK FORCE FOR POVERTY ELIMINATION

# 2014 REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY & ACTION PLAN 2015





# MESSAGE FROM THE PTF CO-CHAIRS

The Task Force for Poverty Elimination is embarking on its seventh year. We are in the second year of a three-year Strategic Plan. We've learned a lot over the past six years! We have found our way through a combination of learning as we go, as well as deliberate thinking about who we are, what we want to accomplish, where we will focus our efforts, and how we will work to affect meaningful change. Our Strategic Plan brings it all together and over the past year has served as an effective guide in decisions about where the PTF's presence as a partner, collaborator, leader or support would be most effective. We are proud of our achievements in 2014 and are pleased to share them in this report to the community.



**Stuart Beumer**  
PTF Co-chair

The PTF's vision to eliminate poverty in Guelph and Wellington is aspirational. We know that our vision requires relentless persistence and a long-term commitment as we take local action and advocate for system and policy change to address the root causes of poverty. We know that poverty is a very complex issue and that change requires commitments from all levels of government, alongside support from community stakeholders, business leaders, service providers, and the general public.

Vibrant Canada, an organization committed to helping communities address issues related to poverty, used the following quote in reflecting on its first 10 years together:

***You move faster alone, but you get farther together.***

Working collaboratively and including diverse voices, most importantly the voices of people with lived experience of poverty, takes time. The people who continue to give their time and come together as the Poverty Task Force want to make sure the conversation about poverty doesn't go away. They are individuals from across Guelph and Wellington who believe that everyone deserves to live in their community with dignity and in a way that allows for meaningful participation and inclusion. They are often individuals that continue to experience the daily struggles of living in poverty as well as the allies who walk alongside them.

As we contemplate the next year, words like "excited" or "anticipation" seem out of place. The effort to lift individuals, families and children out of poverty has moved much too slowly and, more frustratingly, sometimes in the wrong direction. In response, the Poverty Task Force has become a place where our community can voice their collective resolve for addressing the root causes of poverty and shine a light on policies and systems that perpetuate poverty. With a shared and informed voice, we will direct our message and efforts to the issues that matter most locally, while aligning with others across the province and country who agree that the status quo for people living in poverty is completely unacceptable.



**Sarah Haanstra,**  
PTF Co-chair

# MEMBER COMMITTEE



Comprised of a maximum of 40 members from different sectors in Guelph and Wellington, the PTF member committee advises the work of the PTF, provides linkages in the community, shares expertise, and works collaboratively to eliminate poverty.

## Co-chairs:

- Sarah Haanstra, Community Member
- Stuart Beumer, Director of Ontario Works, County of Wellington Social Services

## Member Committee:

- Andrea Roberts, Director, Family Health & Health Analytics, Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health
- Andrew Seagram, Coordinator, Community Use of Schools Program, Upper Grand District School Board
- Andrea Webber, Directing Coordinator of the Seed, Guelph Community Health Centre
- Barb McPhee, Community Member
- Beth Leith, Community Member
- Brenda McGinnis, Constituency Assistant, Hon. Liz Sandals (MPP Guelph, Minister of Education)
- Brendan Johnson, Executive Director, Guelph Neighbourhood Support Coalition
- David Thornley, Executive Director, Guelph Community Health Centre
- Debbie Bentley-Lauzon, Executive Director, Wyndham House
- Debra Nicolson-Elwell, Pastoral Team Leader, First Baptist Church
- Erin Harvey, Service Director, Family & Children's Services of Guelph & Wellington County
- Evelyn Herron, Community Member
- Frank Valeriotte, Member of Parliament, Guelph
- Gail Hoekstra, Executive Director, Welcome In Drop In
- George Kelly, Chair, Guelph-Wellington Coalition for Social Justice
- Jan Klotz, Community Coordinator, Sanguen Health Centre
- Jane Londerville, Community Member
- John Borthwick, Minister, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church
- June Hofland, Councillor, City of Guelph
- Karen Kamphuis, Executive Director, Lakeside HOPE House
- Kari Simpson, Executive Director, East Wellington Community Services
- Kate Bishop, Supervisor of Community Engagement, City of Guelph
- Lisa Needham, Public Health Nutritionist, Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health
- Liz Sandals, MPP Guelph, Minister of Education
- Lorri Sauve, Executive Director, Onward Willow Better Beginnings, Better Futures
- Meg Penstone, Manager of Credit and Debt Counselling, Family Counselling & Support Services of Guelph-Wellington
- Ron MacKinnon, Executive Director, Community Resource Centre
- Sarah Scanlon, Coordinator of Organizational Policy and Development, OPIRG Guelph
- Shakiba Shayani, Community Investment Manager, United Way Guelph Wellington Dufferin
- Sly Castaldi, Executive Director, Guelph-Wellington Women in Crisis
- Suzanne Swanton, Co-chair, Wellington-Guelph Housing Committee
- Terry O'Connor, Executive Board Member, Guelph and District Labour Council
- Tina Brophay, Community Member
- Warren Dodd, PhD Candidate, Department of Population Medicine, University of Guelph

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# VISION & MISSION

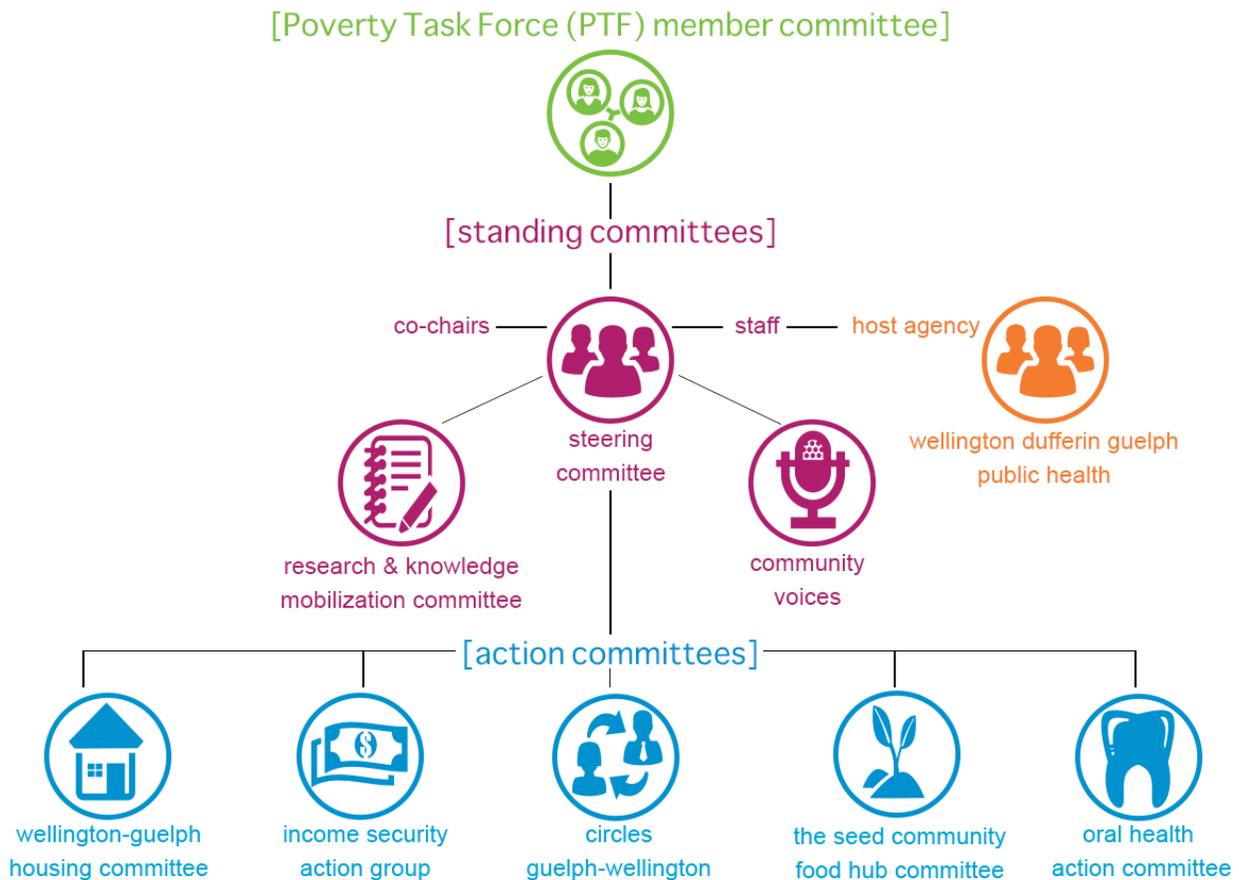


**Vision:** Poverty will be eliminated in Guelph and Wellington.

**Mission:** To work collaboratively, informed by diverse voices of experience, to take local action and advocate for system and policy change to address the root causes of poverty.

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# ORGANIZATIONAL FRAMEWORK



priority:

# INCOME INEQUALITY



GOAL

Everyone in Guelph and Wellington has the income, resources, and opportunities to fully participate in the community

## IN 2014, THE POVERTY TASK FORCE:



Co-hosted 3 living wage community conversations (see '2014 highlight' below).



Partnered with Family Counselling & Support Services for Guelph-Wellington to provide a full-day workshop on financial health and literacy. The workshop gave service providers the tools and information to help their clients navigate financial systems.



Advocated with others across Ontario for an increase to the provincial minimum wage, contributing to the decision to move to \$11/hour and index future increases to the cost of living.



Continued to advocate for social assistance reform, including the implementation of the final recommendations from the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario.

## what we know:



**10.6%** of individuals in Guelph and Wellington live **below the Low Income Measure** (after-tax).

The hourly **living wage** in Guelph and Wellington (the minimum wage in Ontario is \$11/hr.) **\$15.95**



64% of **Ontario Works caseloads** in Wellington County are singles; two thirds of which are male.



## 2014 highlight: LIVING WAGE COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

A living wage, which is calculated based on a modest budget, aims to support people working full-time to meet their basic living expenses in a specific community. The living wage for Guelph and Wellington is \$15.95 per hour. In 2014, the PTF and Income Security Action Group partnered with other organizations to host events focused on some of the main components of the living wage calculation, including food, health, and housing. The purpose of the events was to stir discussion, challenge thinking, and start our community on a path to becoming a living wage community. Over 150 community members attended the events.

# 2015 ACTION PLAN



Support the development of Guelph and Wellington as a living wage community by:

- Creating opportunities to increase community understanding and support
- Establishing a Living Wage Employer Recognition Program
- Identifying community champions with the creation of a Living Wage Advisory Committee



Work with others locally, provincially and nationally to advocate for:

- Social assistance reform in Ontario
- Guaranteed Annual Income
- National Poverty Reduction Strategy



Support Circles Guelph-Wellington to engage the community and provide energy and resources to the Circles Initiative.



“Without a good secure income, it is very hard to know day-to-day or month-to-month what money you will have to pay your bills. I find myself skating on thin ice. I’m very low income and have 5 children living in the

house. With no stability, your housing isn’t secure and neither is your source of food. You’re choosing between food or rent or utilities. Without any of these things your and your children’s mental health is at risk because you’re always looking for next options. Not having a secure income is when everything spirals out of control and when you’re a parent, you’re worrying about their health. To even attempt to flourish or have your children flourish you need stability. The job market isn’t great and ODSP and OW aren’t stable. You can be cut off anytime. Being involved with the PTF’s income security work has meant that I’ve been able to have a voice and so have my kids. The PTF connects people living in poverty with people who have the power to make decisions. Committees act as platforms and springboards for those of us with the experience who aren’t sure what to do or how to go about it. Being involved has helped me with my community advocacy and has supported people to get out there and be empowered by sharing their stories. It’s helping to end cycles that will last for generations.”

**- Martha Inglis, Community Member**

“Today, more than 1 in 5 Ontario workers work at insecure, often part-time employment. This precarious work is more likely to involve health and safety risk, cause significant stress due to job insecurity, and result in greater health consequences. Poverty also hurts families and communities. Without adequate incomes to meet basic needs, some members of society will continue to live lives of desperation, needless suffering and exclusion from the mainstream of community life. We can and must do better.

The PTF includes a combination of community stakeholders who understand the root causes of poverty and are committed to building a broad coalition to address them. This will require frank and open dialogue and solutions that are both practical and effective. Business and labour, health, education and community services, government and ecumenical leaders, neighbourhood leaders and residents groups ... as well as the voices of those with lived experience. As such, the PTF is well positioned to lead community conversations highlighting that the cost of perpetuating poverty is roughly double the cost of eliminating it.”

**- David Thornley, Executive Director, Guelph Community Health Centre**



priority:

# AFFORDABLE HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS



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Everyone in Guelph and Wellington can find and maintain an appropriate, safe and affordable place to call home.

## IN 2014, THE POVERTY TASK FORCE:



Completed a comprehensive *Guelph and Wellington Housing Access Guide*. The guide was distributed to service providers and community members, and is available online at [www.gwpoverty.ca](http://www.gwpoverty.ca).



Raised awareness and advocated for the implementation of an Ontario Housing Benefit among community members, service providers, key stakeholders, and provincial election candidates.



Co-hosted a community event, *Housing & the Living Wage: A Community Conversation*.



Provided input into *A 5-year Plan to Reduce Homelessness in Guelph Wellington (2014-2018)*, part of the *10-year Housing and Homelessness Plan for Guelph Wellington*

## what we know:



The **vacancy rate** in Guelph is **1.2 per cent**, the lowest in the province.

**6,700** households in Guelph **cannot afford suitable housing**



Approximately **1,300** households are on the **waiting list** for social housing in Guelph and Wellington



## 2014 highlight: ONTARIO HOUSING BENEFIT

An Ontario Housing Benefit (OHB) is a proposed policy change that calls for a monthly payment directly to low-income individuals and families to help close the gap between their household income and rent. The Wellington-Guelph Housing Committee (WGHC) identified the OHB as one part of a broader solution for addressing housing-related poverty and focused on raising awareness and advocating for its implementation in 2014. Members of the WGHC wrote blog posts and op-eds in the local newspaper to raise awareness, and developed fact sheets that were distributed to the public during the provincial election. The OHB was advocated for during community conversations for the renewal of the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy and during meetings with local Members of Provincial Parliament.

# 2015 ACTION PLAN



Provide input, monitor, and support the development and/or implementation of municipal housing strategies and plans, by:

- Reviewing and responding to the 2015 Report to the Community on the *5-year Plan to Reduce Homelessness in Guelph Wellington (2014-2018)*
- Participating in opportunities to inform the development of the City of Guelph Affordable Housing Strategy (including the Affordable Housing Reserve Fund policy)



Raise awareness about the need for supportive housing in Guelph and Wellington, by:

- Hosting an event on Supportive Housing & Innovative Funding Models



Work with others locally, provincially and nationally to advocate for:

- National Housing Strategy
- Ontario Housing Benefit



“The PTF’s work on housing is really important to me. I was homeless for three years and even though I’m a pretty well connected person, I had a hard time. A lot of the housing that is out there is disgusting and not a lot is being done to clean up and fix things. Many places are not accessible, even though people think they are. I went to look at an apartment and first it was difficult for me to get in because of the door and steps, but when I did, it was awful - you couldn’t stand up in the washroom and I was worried about mould on the walls. Someone will live there though, because that’s all they can afford. I ended up getting a place that I couldn’t afford and experienced depression because of it. The PTF’s work on housing has made me feel like finally someone is listening. Often people don’t know where to go or who to talk to, but by being involved in this work I have been able to help people understand the issue and find out what information they need. The PTF has really brought the issue to the forefront with efforts like op-eds and the living wage series on housing. Guelph isn’t that big and there are ways to make changes, so that people don’t have to struggle.”

**-Barb McPhee, Community Member**

“Currently, Guelph has the tightest vacancy rate in Ontario in the purpose-built rental market. This makes it very challenging if not impossible for low-income households to find and maintain housing they can afford. If households are spending 30% or more of their total income on their housing costs they are at greater risk of housing instability and homelessness with consequences to health. Last year, the PTF together with the Wellington Guelph Housing Committee, pressed for the implementation of an Ontario Housing Benefit (OHB), a benefit proposed to narrow the gap between housing income and rental costs for low-income households across Ontario. The PTF’s role in organizing a Housing & Living Wage Community Conversation (OHB focus) brought the discussion of the link between income security and housing security to the Guelph community. Public awareness and support is needed in order to generate the political will to invest in affordable housing and homelessness prevention programs. The series of community conversations hosted by the PTF last year was critical to building local support to address housing and other social determinants of health.”

**- Suzanne Swanton & Gary Roche, Co-chairs, Wellington Guelph Housing Committee**



priority:

# FOOD INSECURITY



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Everyone in Guelph and Wellington has access to affordable and healthy food in a dignified manner.

## IN 2014, THE POVERTY TASK FORCE:



Supported opportunities for community members and key stakeholders to inform the development of the Seed Community Food Hub.



Supported the implementation and evaluation of the Guiding Principles for Eligibility Criteria among emergency food providers.



Co-hosted a Bridges Out of Poverty workshop for emergency food providers.



Developed a data collection pilot project to determine how often emergency food services are being accessed in the community.

## what we know:

**\$209**

The monthly cost of a **Nutritious Food Basket** for a reference family of 4.

Food insecure individuals are more likely to report multiple **chronic health conditions**.



**16.4%** of Guelph households are **food insecure**.



## 2014 highlight: GROWING THE SEED COMMUNITY FOOD HUB

Since 2011, the University of Guelph's Research Shop has published two reports. Done in collaboration with the Poverty Task Force, the reports informed a set of recommendations for action that were endorsed by stakeholders throughout the community. Following up on these recommendations, a collaborative committee submitted an application to the Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF) to launch the Seed Community Food Hub. In addition to the research, the application was informed by two day-long planning events held in 2014. Both events were attended by 60-120 people, including city officials, citizens, service-providers, health units, funders, and business leaders. In November 2014, OTF awarded \$267,000 over 36 months to launch the Seed Community Food Hub Project to the Guelph Community Health Centre, as the lead organization of the initiative. This investment will support hiring staff, purchasing equipment and creating a community plan for the collection and distribution of healthy food. The project will result in increasing the quality and quantity of healthy food available to low-income families, improving the health and wellbeing of vulnerable citizens.

# 2015 ACTION PLAN

- ▶ Support collaborative initiatives in our community that aim to meet the short- and long-term needs of food insecure families and individuals, including the Seed Community Food Hub Committee and the Emergency Food Providers Network.
- ▶ Support the development of innovative solutions to food insecurity in Wellington County.
- ▶ Collect local data about how often emergency food services are being accessed in the community in partnership with local providers.
- ▶ Update the Food Access Guide as a resource tool for emergency food providers and users.



"Every month it's hard to make ends meet. I pay rent, expenses, and then there isn't always enough to buy food, let alone healthy food. It's so important to eat healthy to

be able to function, but people living in poverty need to hunt and gather. We have to use small food pantries everywhere around the city and they often don't have the capacity to offer fresh food. It all comes down to money - social assistance and minimum wage aren't enough and there are challenges and barriers to accessing some food providers. I'm grateful for the research the PTF has done on food security and for the awareness it brings to the issue. It's great that there are so many people sitting at the table with power to make change. It's because of the PTF's work and support that the Seed Community Food Hub has come about. It's a great project that I'm really excited for. I look forward to it finding a space and allowing people to access healthy food in a dignified way."

- **Tina Brophy, Community Member**

"Food security plays an integral role in promoting optimum health. All residents need access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. It is harder for people to be productive at work or other areas of their lives if they have poor nutritional intake.

The inability to access food can make it difficult to participate in many social activities that revolve around food, which can impact people's ability to fully participate in community life."

- **Lisa Needham, Public Health Nutritionist, Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health**



"The Seed Community Food Hub will offer a welcoming space for community members to come together to access healthy food, advocate for policies that target the root causes of poverty, build food skills and knowledge, and strengthen community.

While working towards this vision, The Seed is also working with the community to respond to their short-term needs while also addressing underlying issues related to food security with collaborative solutions. The Seed is a critical piece in supporting and strengthening the community and food work happening in Guelph and is a part of a long-term sustainable solution to food insecurity."

- **Andrea Webber, Coordinating Director, The Seed Community Food Hub**

priority:

# HEALTH INEQUITIES



GOAL

Everyone in Guelph and Wellington has access to affordable health services.

## IN 2014, THE POVERTY TASK FORCE:

-  Developed and administered an oral health survey to identify barriers faced by low-income community members in accessing oral health care. Over 400 surveys were collected.
-  Promoted a one-day free dental clinic, 'Dentistry with a Heart,' to low-income community members.
-  Advocated for health benefits (including oral health) for all low-income Ontarians during the provincial election. This included the development and distribution of fact sheets and an op-ed in the local newspaper.
-  Highlighted the work of the Oral Health Action Committee and the Poverty Task Force at the Ontario Oral Health Alliance Conference and the Ontario Community Health Centre Conference.

## what we know:



**76%** of low-income Guelph residents report **cost as a barrier to seeking routine dental care**

People with low earnings are **less likely to receive employer-provided dental insurance** than higher income earners.



## 2014 highlight: ORAL HEALTH SURVEY

In 2014 members of the Oral Health Action Committee developed a local Oral Health Survey to gain a better understanding of the barriers to accessing oral health care for low-income adults in Guelph and Wellington. The survey was developed in partnership with the PTF Research & Knowledge Mobilization Committee and administered through local social and health services, as well as online. A total of 400 surveys were collected in Guelph, which identified the oral health status of low-income Guelph residents, as well as the barriers they face in trying to access oral health care. The results of the survey will be published in 2015.

# 2015 ACTION PLAN

- Release the results of the oral health survey in a report examining the barriers faced by low-income community members in accessing oral health care in Guelph and Wellington.
- Co-host a community forum with the Oral Health Action Committee to release the final oral health report and explore how our community can work together to address oral health needs among low-income individuals.
- Work with others locally, provincially and nationally to advocate for:
  - A National Pharmacare Plan
  - Health benefits for all low-income Ontarians



“When it comes to oral health, it doesn’t matter if you’re young, middle aged or old, it’s a problem that many people suffer from. Having an oral health issue takes away your self-esteem and makes it difficult to enter the workforce.

You’re dealing with pain, you don’t want to smile or laugh, and you walk into places and they say they don’t want to help you. I was on disability and took my kids to the dentist from day one, but they were only covered to a certain age and then they were cut off. My daughter is older now and having so many problems with her teeth, but everything costs so much. Even if you have insurance coverage, you either use your coverage up quickly or it doesn’t cover enough to get what you need done. For younger kids there are lots of programs, which is wonderful, but there’s nothing out there for older people. That’s why I focus my advocacy on adults who don’t have proper coverage. The Oral Health Committee is working well and it’s been great to be involved. Members of the committee are compassionate and bring different skills and experience. I’m really impressed with the surveys and how we’ve been able to help people better understand why we’re doing them and what we’re asking for.”

**- Wanda Lucier, Community Member**

“Oral health is an integral part of overall health and has a significant impact on our quality of life and well-being. It is about more than just cavities and the absence of tooth-related pain. We now know that oral diseases are linked to health conditions, such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease. The Poverty Task Force has the ability to bring together different sectors in response to a community need, such as access to oral health care. WDG Public Health has staff resources, which help to support this work.

The Task Force has just completed an oral health survey of low-income adults living in Guelph. This research will help to inform a community response on the issue of access to dental care. The Task Force is also involved with advocacy efforts at the provincial level, which address the barriers to achieving oral health.”

**- Dr. Robert Hawkins, Dental Consultant,  
Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health**

ad-hoc committees:

# 2014 PROVINCIAL & MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS



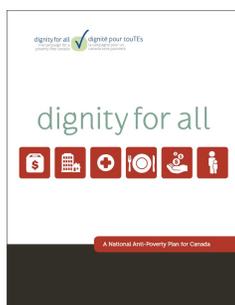
## PROVINCIAL ELECTION

-  Co-hosted all-candidates 'social justice & poverty' debate with the Guelph-Wellington Coalition for Social Justice. Supported all-candidates debate sponsored by Centre Wellington Social Justice Group.
-  Developed fact sheets on PTF priorities and distributed them online and during events to candidates and the general public.
-  Developed and distributed a document comparing party platforms on key issues related to poverty, as well as a Voter's Guide with information about local candidates, how, when, and where to vote, and websites to find additional information.
-  Published five op-eds in the Guelph Mercury on key issues.

## MUNICIPAL ELECTION

-  Members of the PTF wrote 3 op-eds in the Guelph Mercury (housing, food, and the role of municipal government in poverty elimination).
-  Developed 4 fact sheets on key issues and 3 video clips with members of the Advance Your Voice speakers bureau. Information was distributed to candidates and posted on the PTF website for the community.
-  Surveyed City of Guelph and County of Wellington candidates to determine their position on key poverty issues. Candidate responses were made available for the public on the PTF website and e-newsletter.
-  Supported community outreach and education focused on low-income community members about how to vote.

## 2015 ACTION PLAN: FEDERAL ELECTION



In February 2015, the Poverty Task Force endorsed the *National Anti-Poverty Plan for Canada*, published by Dignity for All, Canada Without Poverty, and Citizens for Public Justice. This report will inform local messaging and recommendations from the PTF leading up to the 2015 Federal Election. The PTF will once again focus on education and outreach to ensure that poverty is a critical election issue for candidates and voters.

The National Anti-Poverty Plan for Canada can be found online at [www.dignityforall.ca](http://www.dignityforall.ca)

standing committee

# RESEARCH & KNOWLEDGE MOBILIZATION



As a standing committee of the Poverty Task Force, the Research & Knowledge Mobilization Committee (R&Kmb) provides ongoing support and act as a resource to the PTF Member Committee and Action Committees.

The R&Kmb Committee conducts solution-based research, enhances knowledge development, and supports knowledge exchange on poverty related issues. The committee also develops and implements an evaluation framework that measures and reports on the impact of Poverty Task Force actions.



## 2014 highlight: RETROSPECTIVE EVALUATION

As part of the PTF strategic plan renewal, members identified the need to evaluate their work over the past five years. In an effort to focus the evaluation, a decision was made to do an in-depth retrospective evaluation on the strategic leadership of the PTF. The goal of this initiative was to answer the following questions: Has the strategic leadership of the PTF resulted in positive change for people living in poverty? Has the strategic leadership of the PTF resulted in stakeholders working together more effectively to eliminate poverty? During the latter part of 2014, the Research & Knowledge Mobilization Committee embarked on Phase 1 of the evaluation. An evaluation tool was developed and key informant interviews were completed. Phase 2 of the project will wrap up in 2015 and a full report is expected before the summer 2015.

## 2015 WORK PLAN



Update the Guelph and Wellington Living Wage calculation for 2015



Complete an evaluation of the Advance Your Voice speakers bureau



Support collection and reporting on the emergency food data collection project



Complete Phase 2 of the PTF retrospective evaluation



Develop and distribute local profiles on PTF priorities to support broader understanding of key issues in our community



Guide knowledge mobilization strategies based on the oral health report released by the Oral Health Action Committee

# CONNECT WITH US!



**Randalin Ellery**  
Coordinator  
1-800-265-7293 ext. 4359  
randalin@gwpoverty.ca



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



[@gwpoverty](https://twitter.com/gwpoverty)



**Dominica McPherson**  
Assistant Coordinator  
1-800-265-7293 ext. 4360  
dominica@gwpoverty.ca



[info@gwpoverty.ca](mailto:info@gwpoverty.ca)



**1-800-265-7293**  
**160 Chancellors Way**  
**Guelph ON N1G 0E1**

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