

2016: Report to the Community

2017: Action Plan

GUELPH & WELLINGTON TASK FORCE FOR POVERTY ELIMINATION

Priority: Affordable Housing & Homelessness

What we knew:

- Approximately 359 individuals experienced homelessness on a single night in April 2015
- 28% of those individuals were experiencing absolute homelessness (unsheltered or in an emergency shelter)
- 20% of emergency shelter occupants accounted for 50% of the total nights used
- Wait time for a 1-bedroom unit in social housing was 2.4 years in 2015
- The private apartment vacancy rate for a 1-bedroom unit in 2015 was 1.3%
- 25% of renters in Guelph are in Core Housing Need (housing falls below at least one of the adequacy, affordability, or suitability standards)

What we did in 2016:

20,000 Homes Campaign

The PTF and the County of Wellington Social Services share a vision that everyone in Guelph-Wellington “can find and maintain an appropriate, safe, and affordable place to call home.” Encouraged by action taken in other communities to end homelessness, the Poverty Task Force and the County made a strategic decision to co-lead a local movement in support of the 20,000 Homes Campaign. The 20,000 Homes Campaign is “a national movement of communities working together to permanently house 20,000 of Canada’s most vulnerable by July 1, 2018. More information is available here: www.gw20khomes.ca

Leadership

In January 2016, the PTF and County brought together a Leadership Committee to guide the work of the local 20K Homes Campaign. Politicians, including the City of Guelph Mayor, County of Wellington Warden, MP-Guelph, and MPP-Guelph, as well Public Health’s Medical Officer of Health, OPP Detachment Commander, Guelph Police Chief, and many others, played an integral role in launching the campaign and bringing awareness to the issue of homelessness.

Registry Week

Registry Week took place from April 25th to April 27th, 2016 to gain an in-depth understanding of the needs and experiences of the homeless population. During this time, over 100 volunteers from our community administered a health and housing survey with those experiencing homelessness. The survey collected person-specific information to understand the level of vulnerability and acuity (or depth of need). The data collected helps prioritize and house the most vulnerable.

Community Debrief

At the end of Registry Week, community members including those that participated during Registry week, were welcomed to attend a Community Debrief. This event shared initial findings, as well as provided an opportunity for those experiencing homelessness to share their stories.

In July 2016, a final report from Registry Week was released and shared widely with the community.

What we know now:

- 295 individuals were experiencing homelessness during a 3-day period in April 2016
- 29% of those individuals were youth (16-24 years)
- 62% were experiencing chronic homelessness (6 months + in the past year)
- 57% of individuals scored “high acuity” (high depth of need)
- 29% were experiencing episodic homelessness (3 episodes or more in past year)
- 14 families with child dependents were found to be experiencing homelessness
- 76% of individuals experiencing homelessness reporting having physical health issues
- 25% of individuals were tri-morbid (physical health, mental health & substance use issues)

What we plan to do in 2017:

Guelph-Wellington 20,000 Homes Campaign

The PTF will continue to partner with the County to lead the 20,000 Homes Campaign and work toward meeting targets set out by the 20K Leadership Committee. In addition, the PTF will take a lead on monitoring trends, analyzing data, and providing reports to the community. Progress reports will be released in April and November 2017, and an annual report will be distributed in the summer.

In November 2016, the 20K Leadership Committee identified the following six month goals:

- Continue housing the most vulnerable individuals experiencing homelessness (identified as scoring ‘high’ using a Common Assessment Tool)
- Develop an active By-Name List
- Introduce a Coordinated Entry System
- Continue to advocate for an end to homelessness

Common Assessment Tool

A Common Assessment Tool is a standardized scoring system to assist communities in determining the appropriate level of intervention for families and individuals experiencing homelessness.

Coordinated Entry System

A Coordinated Entry System is a shared and standardized method for connecting people experiencing homelessness to the resources available in a community.

By-Name List

A By-Name List (BNL) provides a community with a real time, up-to-date list of people experiencing homelessness. A BNL helps facilitate efficient decisions around how best to refer individuals experiencing homelessness to housing resources.

Priority: Income Inequality

What we knew:

- 7.3% of the working-age population in Ontario are working poor individualsⁱ
- A family with two parents working full-time at a minimum wage still fall below the Low-Income Measure
- One-third of low income children are living in families where their parent(s) are working full-time, full yearⁱⁱ
- 1 in 3 jobs in Ontario is temporary, contract, part-time or self employedⁱⁱⁱ

What we did in 2016:

Guelph-Wellington Living Wage Campaign

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives defines a 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.”

In 2015, the PTF launched a Living Wage Employer Recognition Program with 11 early adopters. With the support of the Living Wage Advisory Committee, the PTF welcomed 11 NEW living wage employers in 2016. There are now 22 employers that have signed on to the Guelph-Wellington Living Wage Employer Recognition Program, representing 2250 employees making at least a living wage.

Guelph-Wellington Living Wage is \$16.50/hour

Living Wage Employer Recognition Event

On November 1st, 2016, the PTF hosted an annual Living Wage Employer Recognition event during National Living Wage Week. During this week, living wage campaigns from across the country partner to send a cohesive message to all Canadians about the importance of the living wage. The event recognized local employers that have committed to paying a living wage and hosted a keynote address from renowned economist, John Stapleton, on the working poor and the role employers can play to improve lives.

Living Wage Advisory Committee

The PTF continued to convene the Guelph-Wellington Living Wage Advisory Committee. The purpose of this committee is to assist and make recommendations to the PTF on matters relating to the Guelph & Wellington Living Wage Employer Recognition Program. The LWAC played a critical role in attracting local employers to the program by building relationships and championing the living wage.

What we know now:

- In 2011, The percentage of working poor individuals in Guelph was 4.2% and in Wellington it was 3.7%^{iv}
- The highest rates of working poor were found in Harriston (5.7%) and Mount Forest (4.9%)
- In Guelph, the highest rate of working poor was found in the core of the city

What we plan to do in 2017:

Guelph-Wellington Living Wage Campaign

The PTF will continue to lead the Guelph-Wellington Living Wage Campaign and the Guelph-Wellington Living Wage Employer Recognition Program. This work will continue to be informed by the Living Wage Employer Network (formerly the Living Wage Advisory Committee) and will partner with provincial and national living wage initiatives.

Updated Calculation

The PTF has committed to updating the living wage calculation for Guelph-Wellington bi-annually. In the fall of 2017, a new hourly rate will be introduced to the community and the PTF will work with existing living wage employers to make necessary adjustments.

Communications

The PTF will make a strategic shift in 2017 to focus on celebrating current living wage employers. This includes launching a new website (www.gwlivingwage.ca) and using social media to bring attention to the good work they do.

Ontario Living Wage Network

The Ontario Living Wage Network is a network of employers, employees, NGOs, non-profits, researchers, and proponents of decent work standards for all Ontario workers. The network champions and showcases living wage initiatives in Ontario.

In 2017, the PTF work will with the OLWN to develop a provincial Living Wage Employer Recognition Program. This would create consistency across the province for multi-location employers and bring great awareness to the living wage movement.

Recognition & Learning Events

In 2017, the PTF will host two events for current Guelph-Wellington Living Wage employers.

The Lunch & Learn event will be held in the spring. This is an opportunity for employers to learn about the living wage movement, provide feedback on the local campaign, and set direction for the coming year.

The annual Living Wage Employer Recognition event in November will welcome new employers to the living wage program and celebrate the progress of existing employers.

Priority: Food Insecurity

What we knew:

- Prevalence of food insecurity in Guelph in 2013-2014 was 13.2%^v
- 80% of survey respondents in Guelph-Wellington indicated that they had an ongoing need to access emergency food programs^{vi}
- 34% of survey respondents in Wellington County noted that stigma is the main barrier to accessing emergency food programs^{vii}
- Local research in 2013 recommended that partnerships be developed to increase the availability of fresh produce^{viii}

What we did in 2016:

In 2016, the Poverty Task Force put an emphasis on supporting initiatives in our community that are working to improve access to good food for those struggling with household food insecurity.

Position Statement

To help with strategic communications and advocacy efforts, the PTF developed a position statement on household food insecurity. The statement acknowledges the important role of emergency food programs in meeting the immediate needs of low-income community members. The statement asserts that a multi-pronged income-based response is needed to address the root causes of household food insecurity, which are financial constraints and financial vulnerability.

Market Bucks

The Market Bucks (MB) Pilot Project in 2015 allowed consumers to purchase products from farmers' market vendors using vouchers. MB were distributed to Ontario Works recipients in Wellington North through funding from the County of Wellington. In 2016, the PTF released an evaluation report of the pilot, which helped to secure funding for a second year of the program. During the summer 2016 season, the MB expanded to Harriston and Palmerston.

The Seed

The Seed is a community food project of the Guelph Community Health Centre. The Seed's mission is to use the power of food to build healthy communities and address the underlying issues of food insecurity and poverty in Guelph. There are three pillars to their work: Food Access, Food Literacy, and Outreach and Advocacy. The PTF plays a strategic role in supporting the efforts of The Seed.

The POD

The POD aims to increase access to fresh, healthy food for low-income community members in Guelph. The POD acquires fresh produce through bulk purchasing, gleaning and donations, stores it in a centralized storage facility, and then redistributes to charitable food providers. In 2016, the PTF conducted an evaluation of The POD assess the extent to which it is effective in improving access to fresh produce among those requiring emergency food provision in Guelph.

What we know now:

- The use of traditional charitable food assistance programs decreased 50% among Market Bucks recipients^{ix}
- The Market Bucks program increased access to healthier food for 100% of survey participants^x
- The POD increased the different types of fresh fruit and vegetables that charitable food assistance programs could provide to clients^{xi}
- Household food insecurity is caused by financial constraints and financial vulnerability^{xii}

What we plan to do in 2017:

Address Household Food Insecurity

The PTF will continue to champion the root causes of household food insecurity – financial constraints and financial vulnerability. As part of this work, the PTF will champion income-based responses to household food insecurity, including:

- Living Wage policies
- Increased social assistance rates
- Increased investment in subsidized, affordable and stable housing options
- A Basic Income Guarantee

The PTF will also continue to support innovative responses to household food insecurity, including those led by local charitable food assistance programs.

Eligibility Criteria

In 2013, the PTF introduced Guiding Principles for Emergency Food Service Eligibility Criteria. The PTF will continue to play a role in ensuring these principles are being implemented by charitable food assistance programs. The PTF will also advocate for improved access and experiences for those using services.

Food Charity → Food Justice

The PTF will support local charitable food assistance programs to evolve their services from a food charity model to a food justice model. The PTF will provide learning opportunities and support programs that are interested in making changes to the way they deliver their services.

Household Food Insecurity Event

To animate the PTF's position statement on household food insecurity, the PTF will host a community event in 2017. The event will be an opportunity to learn from leading academics on food insecurity research, and to dialogue about local action that can be taken.

Priority: Health Inequities

What we knew:

- 98.7% of expenditures for oral health services in Ontario are funded through third-party insurance or paid out of pocket^{xiii}
- 76% of local low-income survey respondents reported that they couldn't afford regular oral health care^{xiv}
- Local survey respondents age 65 years and older were more than twice as likely as other adults to report they had no dental benefits^{xv}
- 58% of local survey respondents indicated they have oral health needs that affect eating^{xvi}

What we did in 2016:

Ontario Oral Health Symposium

The PTF, Guelph-Wellington Oral Health Action Committee, and Ontario Oral Health Alliance partnered to host the Ontario Oral Health Symposium. Over 60 representatives from communities across Ontario met to share their concerns about the lack of affordable dental care and to call for faster provincial government action on the promise to extend public dental programs to low income adults.

What we knew:

- A screening tool can assist primary care providers to identify those living in poverty, but they don't always know which services to refer patients to^{xvii}
- A program to connect patients to a variety of community resources was identified as a need by local stakeholders^{xviii}

What we did in 2016:

Exploring a 'Health Leads' Model

The PTF convened partners to explore opportunities to connect low-income primary care patients with the resources they need to be healthy. The work was inspired by Health Leads, an American model that facilitates the treatment of underlying social and environmental causes of patients' health problems by working with doctors on "prescriptions" for things such as food, housing, or other resources. Patients then work with an onsite trained volunteer to access public benefits and community resources to fulfill these "prescriptions."^{xix}

The PTF supported a group of Masters of Public Health students at the University of Guelph to develop a local model. The Guelph Community Health Centre took the lead on implementing the model.

What we know now:

- 189 individuals experiencing homelessness in Guelph-Wellington used crisis services 355 times and interacted with police services 1022 times in a six-month period^{xx}
- 25% of those experiencing homelessness in Guelph-Wellington are “tri-morbid” – experiencing physical health, mental health, and substance use issues^{xxi}
- From July 2015-June 2016, 17-20% of Emergency Department visits at Guelph General Hospital were for a mental health issue were followed by another ED visit for the same issue within 30 days. In that same time frame, repeat ED visits for substance abuse ranged from 23-34% of all visits for this issue^{xxii}

What we plan to do in 2017:

Crisis Stabilization

The PTF will work with Toward Common Ground and the Wellington-Guelph Drug Strategy to respond to the lack of crisis stabilization services for people who are dealing with mental health or substance use crisis in our community.

Stakeholder Engagement & Action

A stakeholder engagement session will be hosted by the PTF, Drug Strategy, and Toward Common Ground in early 2017. The session will focus on defining the issue, exploring best practices, and identifying what is needed in our community. Following the engagement session, the PTF will continue to work with partners to move to action.

What we plan to do in 2017:

Oral Health Advocacy

The PTF will continue to support the work of the Guelph-Wellington Oral Health Action Committee (OHAC). This includes conducting advocacy with local Members of Provincial Parliament to make oral health coverage universal and available to all Ontarians. In addition, OHAC will support the advocacy efforts of the Ontario Oral Health Alliance and develop a local dental health intervention tool.

What we did in 2016:

Community Voices Engagement Strategy

The PTF is committed to including diverse voices of experience to inform and ground its work. Over time the PTF has strategically and purposely engaged those with lived experience in our community in several different ways (e.g. community consultations, focus groups, participation on action committees, etc.). To further increase the diversity of voices of lived experience, the PTF launched a Community Voices Engagement Strategy in 2016. This strategy focuses on meeting people where they're at, removing barriers for the most vulnerable, and developing opportunities for meaningful engagement.

Advance Your Voice

The PTF ran a six-week speaker's bureau training program for individuals experiencing homelessness. Graduates of the program had several opportunities to share their stories with a variety of audiences as part of the 20,000 Homes Campaign.

Ending Homelessness Consultations

The PTF engaged local individuals experiencing homelessness to inform national research led by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness on defining an "end to homelessness."

Big View Meetings

The PTF led two Big View meetings, hosted by Guelph-Wellington Circles. The meetings are intended to provide an opportunity to bring awareness to local poverty issues and inspire local action. The PTF led meetings on household food insecurity and homelessness.

What we plan to do in 2017:

Community Voices Engagement Strategy

The PTF will continue to implement its Community Voices Engagement Strategy in 2017. As opportunities arise, the PTF will ensure that the voices of lived experience are included and leveraged. This will include (but is not limited to):

- Speaking opportunities for Advance Your Voice Speakers Bureau members
- Speaking opportunities for Living Wage employees
- Ongoing engagement in all PTF Action Committees

What we did in 2016:

Research & Knowledge Mobilization

The purpose of the Research & Knowledge Mobilization Committee is to conduct solution-based research, enhance knowledge development, and support knowledge exchange on poverty-related issues. In 2016, the R&KMb Committee released the following reports:

- Guelph-Wellington Registry Week 2016
- Evaluation Report: Wellington-Guelph Housing Committee
- Evaluation Report: Market Bucks 2015 Pilot Program
- PTF Retrospective Evaluation
- Evaluation Report: Advance Your Voice
- Evaluation Report: Oral Health Action Committee
- Evaluation Report: The POD

The R&KMb Committee also provided support to an evaluation of Guelph-Wellington Circles as part of a project funded by Local Poverty Reduction Fund.

What we plan to do in 2017:

Working Poor Research

A primary project of the R&KMb Committee in 2017 will be a research study that examines the impact of employment earnings on overall health and wellbeing of those living in Guelph and Wellington. The research will look at how these impacts are experienced differently among the working poor when compared to the non-working poor.

20K Homes Reporting

The R&KMb Committee will play a key role in develop bi-annual progress reports on the 20,000 Homes Campaign. In addition, an annual report will be released that looks more in-depth at how homelessness is experienced locally and the progress the 20K Homes Campaign is making.

Circles Exit Interviews

Members of the R&KMb Committee will play a critical role in designing and conducting exit interviews for those leaving or graduating from the Guelph-Wellington Circles program. This is part of the broader evaluation being conducted as part of a project funded by the Local Poverty Reduction Fund.

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- ⁱ <http://metcalfoundation.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/WorkingPoorToronto2015Final.pdf>
- ⁱⁱ http://www.workersactioncentre.org/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/2006/03/pb_WorkingYetPoor_eng.pdf
- ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.workersactioncentre.org/issues/precarious-work/>
- ^{iv} DeDominicis, M., Garasia, S., and Neal, D. (April 2016). "The Working Poor: A Population Health Evaluation." University of Guelph. Guelph, ON.
- ^v <http://proof.utoronto.ca/resources/proof-annual-reports/annual-report-2014/>
- ^{vi} <http://www.gwpoverty.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/6.-Emergency-Food-Services-GW-April-2013.pdf>
- ^{vii} <http://www.gwpoverty.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/6.-Emergency-Food-Services-GW-April-2013.pdf>
- ^{viii} <http://www.gwpoverty.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/6.-Emergency-Food-Services-GW-April-2013.pdf>
- ^{ix} Ellery, R. (2016). "Evaluation Report: 2015 Market Bucks Pilot Project." Guelph & Wellington Task Force for Poverty Elimination. Guelph, ON.
- ^x Ellery, R. (2016). "Evaluation Report: 2015 Market Bucks Pilot Project." Guelph & Wellington Task Force for Poverty Elimination. Guelph, ON
- ^{xi} "Evaluation Report: The POD." (2016). Guelph & Wellington Task Force for Poverty Elimination. Guelph, ON.
- ^{xii} <http://www.gwpoverty.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Position-Statement-Household-Food-Insecurity.pdf>
- ^{xiii} <http://www.gwpoverty.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Final-Report-Oral-Health.pdf>
- ^{xiv} <http://www.gwpoverty.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Final-Report-Oral-Health.pdf>
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- ^{xvii} Brown, S., Corrin, T., Lopreiato, A., and Wallace, J. (2016). "HealthConnect Guelph: A Business Plan." University of Guelph. Guelph, ON.
- ^{xviii} Brown, S., Corrin, T., Lopreiato, A., and Wallace, J. (2016). "HealthConnect Guelph: A Business Plan." University of Guelph. Guelph, ON.
- ^{xix} https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Health_Leads
- ^{xx} <http://www.gw20khomes.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Guelph-Wellington-Registry-Week-2016.pdf>
- ^{xxi} <http://www.gwpoverty.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/20K-Homes-Progress-Report-April-2017.pdf>
- ^{xxii} Crisis Stabilization (2017). [Power Point Slides].