

..... something left over at the end of the month.

Report from the Community Poverty Reduction Strategy Forum

held on June 25, 2008

at Christ Church Cathedral, Ottawa.

Prepared by the Ottawa Poverty Reduction Network

for the Ontario Cabinet Committee on Poverty Reduction

chaired by the Hon. Deb Matthews.

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Executive Summary

The Ottawa Poverty Reduction Network is a group of community organizations and anti-poverty advocates that came together in early 2008 to support the participation of low income individuals in the development of Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS). We have participated in virtually every PRS-related event in Ottawa in the last six months, all of which have been primarily oriented to community agencies and, in a few cases, have also included low income individuals.

We believe poverty is a community issue and its solutions will only be found by involving the whole community. With this in mind, we organized a community forum on June 25th, 2008 and invited a broad cross-section of the community to participate in a learning and sharing exercise. Four expert speakers gave participants a grounding in Ottawa's poverty reality and in the successes other communities have had in reducing poverty. Participants then discussed, in groups of 6 - 12 people, four questions designed to identify how poverty affects them, what community solutions are possible, what they are prepared to do personally and what they would like governments to do.

There were trained notetakers at each table and their notes were combined and sorted into themes. The area most talked about at every table was adequate income whether from employment, social assistance or pensions. The second big topic was citizen engagement and public awareness followed by employment, food and education. Regardless of which sectors were represented at the table, the results were remarkably similar. This is consistent with the other consultations around poverty held in the city in the last 5 years. We have attached the recommendations section of three reports - the Basic Needs report from 2004; the Peoples Hearing report from 2005 and the Rethinking Poverty Forum report from 2007. All of these reports highlight, as did our Forum, the need for an adequate income and basic supports as the best way to reduce poverty.

Our recommendations are divided into those directed to the provincial, municipal and federal governments as well as to the community. Some are directed at more than one of the four areas because of multiple jurisdictions but also because people want government to work in a more coordinated way with each other and with the community. There are 67 provincial recommendations which we are forwarding now to the provincial Cabinet Committee that is looking at a Poverty Reduction. We will be meeting with municipal politicians and officials to deliver those recommendations and will be sending the community recommendations to participants and to other organizations in the coming months.

The provincial government needs to take immediate measures to increase the resources available to people to meet their basic needs. Many of our recommendations have timelines in them because we understand the funds may not be available to do everything yesterday but funds are available to do something today. The Strategy must also have targets and timelines with clear measurable goals so that people can hope something will happen and believe it when it does.

All levels of government and the community need to develop a common vision and combat the individualism in society. This needs to be the issue where we come together and build a better community where we all work together.

The Poverty Reduction Strategy has to be based not on income but on the right of the individual to have medicine, food, education, clothes, housing, recreation, etc. It must recognize that poverty is a reality and that we can do something about it. As a community, we have hope that we can change things.

We need political leadership at both the provincial and municipal level to take the vision and develop it into concrete and measurable actions which will reduce poverty according to established targets over the next three, five and ten years.

In order for a Poverty Reduction Strategy to be successful, it has to involve not just government but the community as well. Since poverty costs every segment of society, the whole spectrum must be implicated in its solution at all points, i.e. not the 'usual suspects'. This means that people have to be involved in the design and implementation of the Strategy and not just in a superficial way. This dialogue has to continue at the provincial, municipal and community level and involve people from as many sectors as possible.

The city should develop a concrete Poverty Reduction Strategy which will operate in concert with the provincial one. It would have targets and timelines based on local conditions and be developed in collaboration with the community.

Both the province and the city should look at work done in other jurisdictions, both in Canada and Europe, to find examples of best practices. Many of them have had strategies in place for a number of years. They can also be looked to for ways to involve citizens in a pro-active way at all stages of the process.

The Strategy has to provide hope to children & youth so they can see a way out of poverty. It has to provide tangible supports to help them achieve an education including adequate food and shelter, and provide supports to their parents and community so they can help them achieve their potential.

While there will be costs associated with implementing a Poverty Reduction Strategy, there will be accompanying savings, some of which will begin to be realized very soon. For example, families that are properly housed and fed will have less need to access the health system and their children will have better success in school. Accessible recreation programs will similarly reduce immediate and long-term health costs. Supporting the integration of foreign-trained professionals, particularly in the health field, into the labour market will provide better access to medical care and other professional services for all Ontarians, improving the economic and physical health of the province.

As long as some parts of society benefit from poverty, there will always be poverty. We need to re-order society so that we can provide enough to allow those in poverty to live a life of dignity with self-esteem.

Our title comes from a comment by a participant : "It hurts when you can't do what you need to do and have something left over at the end of the month." In the capital city of a rich country like Canada, everyone should have something left over at the end of the month.

Where did OPRN come from?

The Income Security Advocacy Centre (ISAC) and Campaign 2000 (C2000) has received funding for a two year project that will help low income people be part of developing the province's Poverty Reduction Strategy. They have identified six Toronto-based groups and five groups in other centres across Ontario to partner with them through the project. The lead organization for the Ottawa piece of the project is the Child & Youth Health Network of Eastern Ontario (CYHNEO) which is housed at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO). The first section of the project was a series of workshops titled "Ending Poverty in Ontario" which is being delivered at all the project sites by ISAC and C2000 staff with the support of local organizers.

CYHNEO invited community groups and anti-poverty advocates to a meeting on April 9th to present the project and gauge the interest in participating in the provincial initiative. Over 25 people turned out and most committed to work with the project. The project funding was limited and the group wanted to offer the workshop to many communities so that our linguistic, cultural and geographic diversity could be served. To this end, the group organized one English and one French workshop as well as a train-the-trainer workshop which prepared the 30 participants to deliver the workshop to their communities.

On April 14th, several members of our group went to Toronto to participate in a training workshop for the project as part of the 25-in-5 community forum. They also had the opportunity to meet people involved in some of the other sites. On May 7th & 8th, five of our group participated in a consultation organized by the Social Planning Network of Ontario (SPNO) which culminated in a dialogue with Deb Matthews, chair of the Cabinet Committee overseeing the Poverty Reduction Strategy. The following day, several of us participated in her consultation with the Ottawa community.

That same day, we held our Train-the-Trainer workshop with the help of ISAC and C2000 staff. On May 10th, there were 35 people registered for the English workshop with more on the waiting list. Tatum Wilson, a senior member of Deb Matthews staff, met with the group for about an hour at the end of the day to hear their concerns. Because of this, the group met again on the afternoon of June 13th to complete the workshop. The francophone workshop was held in the morning of June 13th and some of the participants in that group joined the anglophone group in the afternoon. (A follow-up meeting for all workshop participants will be held in mid-August.)

After the events of May 7th to 10th, the organizing group (still without a name) met to evaluate the PRS activities in Ottawa to that point. Members of our group were committed at that stage to participating in the consultations to be held by local Liberal MPP's in late June and July. We were aware that the government had set a deadline for input at the end of July which left a very small window for any further activities. It was apparent that the planned events were narrow in focus and not inclusive of huge segments of the community. We decided to organize a cross-sectoral consultation to be held in the last week of June.

Members of the Network participated in consultations held by Yasir Naqvi & Dalton McGuinty on June 26th; Madeleine Meilleur & Phil McNeely on June 27th, Michael Prue on July 21st and Jim Watson on July 24th. We are also continuing to work with our partners on the provincial project.

Why a cross-sectoral community forum.

We were involved in virtually every Poverty Reduction Strategy event in Ottawa either as participants, organizers or advisors and it became clear to us that the focus was primarily on the low income community and the agencies and organizations that work with them. While we strongly support the inclusion of those sectors in the consultation process, we feel equally strongly that poverty is not a problem of the poor but rather a community problem and the ideas and commitments necessary to develop the solutions to end poverty must come from the whole community. The continued poverty of some of our neighbours costs the entire community both economically and socially. We also believe that the solutions must involve all levels of government alongside the community.

To this end, we approached the mayor and members of city council to seek their support and involve them in the process. We met with the mayor early on and discussed our plans with him. We wrote to all members of council and the seven MPP's whose ridings include part of Ottawa inviting them to the consultation and asking for

financial support. We decided not to include the federal level because of the time constraints and the concern that, in spreading our efforts too broadly, we might lose the focus on the provincial Strategy at a time when that door is open. We received financial and other supports from the mayor and six members of council but nothing from the MPP's (although one sent a staff member to the event).

We named our group the Ottawa Poverty Reduction Network (OPRN) to reflect our intention to approach poverty reduction from a locally-based Ottawa perspective and also to acknowledge the coming together of agencies and individuals to pool resources and ensure that all the voices of our community are heard.

How was the Forum organized?

The OPRN created four committees on May 26th - Agenda, Logistics, Outreach and Follow-up - each of which met frequently during the month between then and the forum on June 25th. One member of OPRN coordinated the various committees and the Network meetings.

The outreach committee identified the sectors of the community we wanted to include and then developed lists of individuals to invite. It was decided to have an invitation-only event so that we could assure a balance between sectors. Enough low income people were invited to ensure that there was at least one at each table. Each invitee received a telephone call followed, in most cases, by a written or e-mailed letter of invitation. The following sectors were invited: aboriginal, business, community agencies, education, environment, faith communities, francophones, health, housing, immigrants, low income, multicultural, people with disabilities, politicians (MPP's, City Councillors, Mayor), rural, seniors, women, and youth. In addition, several people from national and international organizations like Make Poverty History were invited.

Due to the short time to organize the forum and the timing (first week of holidays for French school, last week of English school, AGM season, etc.), we were not able to achieve the numbers we had originally planned for. Over 65 people participated with a fairly balanced representation from most of the invited sectors. Two tables held their discussions in French. The only group which did not participate was the aboriginal community who were involved in a three-day event within their community. The mayor and councillors were unable to attend because Council was meeting but they sent staff members to participate.

The logistics committee prepared the budget, organized the venue, arranged for refreshments and did fundraising.

The agenda committee developed the format for the evening, prepared the discussion questions and organized speakers and MC's. We were fortunate to get Adrian Harewood of CBC Radio and Ginette Gratton of Rogers TV as our MC's. The evening opened with four speakers, each an expert in their field, who gave background information about poverty in Ottawa and reduction strategies in other places.

Gilles Séguin, social policy researcher, spoke first about the poverty reduction strategies that are in place in other jurisdictions, highlighting the Canadian ones in Québec and Newfoundland. The purpose of this was to show people that substantive change is not only possible but has been done here in Canada and in other places like Ireland, England and New Zealand. He was followed by Ron Caza, outgoing president of the Regroupement des gens d'affaires (RGA), who talked about the economic and lost-opportunity costs of poverty to the community from a business perspective. This illustrated that poverty is not just a poor people/social service community problem but affects everyone. Caroline Andrew, professor at the University of Ottawa with an expertise in community and local government, then spoke about poverty in Ottawa using the situation of the immigrant community as an illustration. This gave a face to poverty in our own community and some background for the folks who may not be involved in these issues on a daily basis. Our last speaker was Moe Garahan, executive director of Just Food, who used the example of how the community has participated in solutions to the food security issues in Ottawa to show how strategies can be developed in concert with the larger communities with immediate as well as mid- and long-term impacts. She also touched on the importance of goals with measurable and visible targets and achievements

People were invited to go to www.canadiansocialresearch.net, a site Gilles maintains, for more information and links to strategies in place in other countries. Participants were provided at registration with a kit from the National Council on Welfare containing information on developing a federal poverty reduction strategy as well as poverty statistics for Canada.

Following the speakers, the participants held discussions at their tables with a notetaker. Rather than using the consultation questions put forward by the province, we developed four questions that we felt would be more effective in eliciting solid recommendations to take to the city and the province. The questions were:

1. Please tell us two ways that poverty affects you personally.
2. What can be done in the community to deal with these problems?
3. What can you contribute to bringing change?
4. What ideas / targets can we give a) the city to support a city-wide strategy and b) the province to support the provincial poverty reduction strategy?

What's next?

The OPRN follow-up committee compiled the notes to form the basis of recommendations to all three levels of government and the community. They also designed and drafted the final report which includes a narrative section with participants' comments, the recommendations and, as Appendices, recommendations from previous exercises in poverty consultations in Ottawa along with our resource list and a list of our sponsors and supporters.

At our July meeting, the Network decided to continue working on the municipal/provincial level for the development of poverty reduction strategies. We will also continue to support the provincial *Ending Poverty in Ontario* project in collaboration with ISAC and C2000. The follow-up committee will prepare recommendations for the OPRN August meeting for next steps to carry the process forward. Once the final plans have been approved by the Network, the committee will oversee the presentation of the recommendations to the city and community.

The OPRN membership includes representatives from the Coalition of Community Health & Resource Centres, Entraide budgétaire, Pinecrest-Queensway Community Health Centre, Lebanese & Arab Community Services, Social Planning Council, Nepean Community Resource Centre Satellite, Child & Youth Health Network of Eastern Ontario, Canadian Mental Health Association, the Childrens Hospital of Eastern Ontario, National Anti-Poverty Organization, the Poverty Issues Advisory Committee, as well as a number of community anti-poverty activists.

Introduction to Narrative:

We, the Ottawa Poverty Reduction Network (OPRN), are providing you, the Province of Ontario, with this important 'Narrative' because we feel that the exact words of the people who attended our June 25th, 2008 discussion evening need to be heard as spoken.

The premise of that evening was to have regular citizens who are not usually asked to participate in this type of consultation come, explain some of their concerns and give us their opinions.

Reading the participant's actual words will help put a 'face on poverty'.

We, the OPRN, believe that it is very necessary and important to bring these issues to you, the Provincial Government of Ontario, from a local/community level where we know a strong foundation can be constructed to start reducing poverty to a more manageable and realistic level before it gets too large and out of control.

Definition of Poverty:

Poverty is the situation/circumstance whereby persons on low-income, either through inadequately paid employment or under-funded social support programs, are unable to provide themselves and/or family with even the 'basic needs'.

'Basic Needs', as defined by the Poverty Issues Advisory Committee (PIAC) for the City of Ottawa (January 2004) are those components which permit people on low-income to have a 'minimum standard' of living (not just existence). These components permit low-income people to live with dignity, to have a sense of personal safety and belonging, to participate and feel included in civic life and to maintain a healthy active lifestyle.

Poverty Issues Advisory Committee (PIAC)

PIAC was formed in September 2001 during the re-configuration of the new amalgamated City of Ottawa. PIAC is comprised of volunteer citizens who mostly have either personally lived in financial hardship or actual poverty. From its inception, the main core of volunteers have remained on PIAC, devoting their time, energy and many hours of dedicated work to fulfill PIAC's mandate to Ottawa. Its mandate is to provide advice to Ottawa City Council through its standing committees and departments on issues that impact and address poverty in the City.

In April 2003, in keeping with the principles of '*Ottawa 20/20*', there was acknowledgement that the City was committed to ensuring all of its residents have "access to the basics". PIAC maintained at that time that the City and other levels of government did not have a comprehensive definition of what constitutes 'basic needs'.

To that end, PIAC presented a report called 'Basic Needs' (January 2004) to the City. This report was wholeheartedly adopted by the Health, Recreation and Social Services Standing Committee (February 2004) and also by City Council (March 2004). Included in that report was Document I, a detailed list comprising the components that PIAC deemed necessary to maintain a minimum standard of living with dignity and health. This list is attached as Appendix 2 of this report.

Question #1 – 2 ways that poverty affects you - participants' responses:

- Affects me in work life – helping people to move from OW to ODSP and it is very difficult. Living on OW is appalling (OW is ½ the amount of ODSP).
- History of Social Assistance in families, hard for kids to see a way out. Kids come after school and haven't eaten all day.
- From work perception – non-profit housing (60% subsidized, 40% not). There is a feeling that affordable housing will solve poverty – but it doesn't. It is about income security – need minimum level of income for everyone.
- Affects me personally – single mom with a good government job, but day care costs were through the roof, fees for being late were \$5.00/minute. I had to make a choice for a less preferred daycare because it was more affordable but it didn't work, wasn't acceptable. So I have to choose another one, more expensive.
- I was middle class with a handicap child, went from being very comfortable to subsidized Ottawa Housing. It was a major culture shock. Lack of opportunity, not a lot of choices for children, difficult to get help for medication for my diabetic child. It is a vicious cycle – a struggle for food, a low-paying job, a struggle with assistance for my daughter. I wanted to go to the courts and fight for her rights.

- I never knew anything else than poverty, but a sense of community – lived in Foster Farm. We could maintain culture and religion. We shared food. People got involved.
- I grew up on welfare and it really affected my self-esteem. I have low self-esteem now as an adult.
- Poverty affects the schools.
- Drop out rates mostly poor children = poor family and no expectation of graduation – attitudes need to change in Ottawa schools – teachers and administration needs to change their attitudes, low expectations of children from poor backgrounds. It affects boys more than females in many ways.
- Frustrated to see educated and capable persons unable to find work/employment. Problems to find jobs in education background. Problems of being too anxious. People in poverty who are well educated, but not able to find jobs.
- I had to go on EI to get employment support. It's the double-edged sword. I had to get into a losing cycle of leaving a job, going on EI, to get training.
- There's not much access to healthy food.
- No easy access to the government.
- Issue of seniors – how to access services if you cannot afford the transportation especially in the rural areas - \$40.00 to medical appointment. The City has not noticed these access problems of the poor seniors of the rural areas.
- One person on ODSP says she experiences poverty everyday because you don't get enough to live on. It's tiring and humiliating to have to fight to survive and the services available aren't always enough. (She went to the Food Bank and got rotten food).
- Poverty can destroy your spirit if you're not strong or a fighter. It's hard to have a positive image or self-esteem when you are in poverty.
- I have problems of seasonal employment on ODSP because you have to give back 50% - so you don't make enough money and I have no incentive to work.
- It affects me personally when I see poverty every day when I walk down the street of Ottawa. The closeness of poverty in my own life –scary- we're all just one step away from it. (There but for the Grace of God).

Recommendations

The following are the recommendations that pertain to the provincial government. The group made recommendations for the municipal and federal governments as well as for the community which can be found in the table at Appendix 1. It is important to read these since, in some cases, they are interconnected with the provincial ones. For example, recommendation 6 refers to priority funding to school boards building new schools in conjunction with municipal facilities. There is a corresponding recommendation to the municipality to build multi-use facilities that would, for example, co-locate a library with a school.

Introduction

All levels of government and the community need to develop a common vision and combat the individualism in society. This needs to be the issue where we come together and build a better community where we all work together.

The Poverty Reduction Strategy has to be based not on income but on the right of the individual to have food, shelter, medical care, education, recreation, etc. It must recognize that poverty is a reality and that we can do something about it. As a community, we have hope that we can change things.

We need political leadership at both the provincial and municipal level to take the vision and develop it into concrete and measurable actions which will reduce poverty according to established targets over the next three, five and ten years.

In order for a Poverty Reduction Strategy to be successful, it has to involve not just government but the community as well. Since poverty costs every segment of society, the whole spectrum must be implicated in its solution at all points, i.e. not the 'usual suspects'. This means that people have to be involved in the design and implementation of the Strategy and not just in a superficial way. This dialogue has to continue at the provincial, municipal and community level and involve people from as many sectors as possible.

The city of Ottawa should develop a concrete Poverty Reduction Strategy which will operate in concert with the provincial one. It would have targets and timelines based on local conditions and be developed in collaboration with the community.

Both the province and the city should look at work done in other jurisdictions, both in Canada and Europe, to find examples of best practices. Many of them have had strategies in place for a number of years. They can also be looked to for ways to involve citizens in a pro-active way at all stages of the process.

The Strategy has to provide hope to children & youth so they can see a way out of poverty. It has to provide tangible supports to help them achieve an education including adequate food and shelter, and provide supports to their parents and community so they can help them achieve their potential.

While there will be costs associated with implementing a Poverty Reduction Strategy, there will be accompanying savings, some of which will begin to be realized very soon. For example, families that are properly housed and fed will have less need to access the health system and their children will have better success in school. Accessible recreation programs will similarly reduce immediate and long-term health costs. Supporting the integration of foreign-trained professionals, particularly in the health field, into the labour market will provide better access to medical care and other professional services for all Ontarians, improving the economic and physical health of the province.

As long as some parts of society benefit from poverty, there will always be poverty. We need to re-order society so that we can provide enough to allow those in poverty to live a life of dignity with self-esteem.

The province should develop a comprehensive definition of poverty for both provincial and municipal purposes which focuses on inclusion and recognizes a basic standard of living.

Recommendations

First Nations:

1. Respect the Aboriginal community and, in consultation with them, develop specific poverty reduction strategies to meet their particular needs.

Child care:

2. Increase subsidized child care spaces by population growth plus 5% per year for the next 10 years.
3. Adjust the means test for subsidized spaces to ensure that child care is accessible and affordable.

4. Ensure flexible childcare is available 24/7 to families working outside of 9-to-5

Citizen Engagement:

5. Special efforts need to be made to involve the disabled communities.

Coordination:

6. Provide funds to develop community cooperatives for childcare, recreation, etc.
7. Give funding priority to school projects that are multi-use collaborations with the municipality.
8. Coordinate development of the Strategy involving all three levels of government.
9. Connect the Physical Activity Strategy and the Nutrition Strategy from the Province with the Anti Poverty Strategy.

Education:

10. Implement more community service options in secondary school as a type of coop education and during school hours.
11. Increase grant portion of OSAP to reduce student debt.
12. Abolish all fees and program charges in public schools at the elementary and secondary level effective immediately.
13. To improve academic outcomes, provide additional resources, staff and supports to individual schools based on their numbers of low income students.
14. Require all school staff to participate in awareness training about poverty and its effects on children and their families.
15. Increase the resources to prevent school drop-outs and double the current targets.

Employment/Training:

16. Make receipt of social assistance (SA) an employment equity category.
17. Give students from SA families preference for summer jobs.
18. Increase employment supports for disabled job seekers.
19. Improve labour legislation to better protect workers and improve working conditions.
20. Increase job opportunities and, in particular, full-time rather than part time jobs.
21. Provide more funding to support self-employment through agencies such as the Ottawa Community Loan Fund to allow more people to create their own employment.
22. Reduce barriers to employment by increasing supports to immigrants and new Canadians, i.e. recognition of credentials, access to education, etc.
23. Fund free Second Language training to low income residents to increase their employability.

Food:

24. The Municipal Act should be amended to require community green spaces and community gardens in all new developments.
25. Schools should receive grants to establish community gardens on school grounds.
26. The Ministry of Agriculture should provide funding to community groups to develop community gardens.
27. Add food security education programs to the elementary school curriculum.
28. Provide free milk or milk substitute at lunch to all elementary school children.
29. Re-examine the special diet program to ensure OW/ODSP recipients are receiving the supports they need.

French Services:

30. Services and programs, whether government or community, must be provided in French so that francophones and those with French as a second language can receive appropriate service.

Funding:

31. Government funding is often restricted to short-term projects. Funding for Poverty Reduction Strategy programs/projects must be long-term (3+ years) to be meaningful and allow long-term planning.
32. Programs need to be sustainable and operated with paid staff.

Health:

33. Increase funding for community dental clinics by 15% each year for ten years.
34. Make basic dental an insured service under OHIP by adding children 0-12 in 2009, youth 13-24 in 2010, low income seniors in 2011, low income adults in 2012, all seniors in 2013 and all Ontarians in 2014.
35. Extend the Ontario Drug Benefit program to cover all low income children by 2010 and all low income residents by 2012
36. Increase the spaces in Ontario medical schools by 20% per year for the next 5 years.
37. Offer tuition fee rebates for doctors entering family practice in Ontario.

Housing:

38. Provide funding, in collaboration with the federal government, to build 500 units of RGI social housing in Ottawa each year for the next ten years.

Immigration/Employment:

39. Fund free Second Language training to immigrants to increase their employability.

Income:

40. Replace the Disability Assessment Unit (DAU) with a new system of disability assessment that provides faster service to ODSP applicants and results in fewer ODSP grants achieved through appeals. It would be cheaper and more humane to do it right the first time.
41. Provide one-time money in 2009 to municipalities to assess their caseloads and assist eligible OW clients to move to ODSP.
42. Develop a two-year pilot project starting January 2009 to fund medical professionals in the Community Health Centres to complete medical forms for ODSP applicants who do not have a regular doctor.
43. Reduce red-tape and regulations for OW/ODSP.
44. Make the system more supportive and less restrictive/punitive.
45. For the first three months of employment, do not deduct anything from earnings of OW/ODSP recipients. This exemption should be available once every two years.
46. In addition to mandatory deductions and childcare expenses, allow an exemption of \$100 plus \$25 per additional family member per month.
47. Starting in January 2009, increase retained earnings amounts by 20% per year until the combination of net earned income and social assistance benefits reaches the LICO levels.
48. Develop, in consultation with the community, a Guaranteed Income program for Ontario to be instituted in 2010.
49. Revisit the Ontario Child Benefit. It should be more generous and paid to every low income child in Ontario regardless of the parent's income source.
50. Pay the full \$122 NCBS clawback for every child in a family that receives social assistance.
51. Increase minimum wage by \$0.50 every six months until it reaches \$12 per hour and then increase it every six months by the cost of living index for Ontario.
52. Raise the rates of social assistance by 10% per year until they reach the LICO levels.
53. Increase the shelter allocation to reflect the real cost of housing in the recipient's community.

Information:

54. Provide a plain language version of the rules and regulations for social programs so people can easily understand what they are eligible for.

Legal:

55. Increase funding and broaden eligibility for legal aid services, both certificate and clinic.

56. Amend the means test to the LICO level.

57. Increase the range of services available.

58. Provide funding for two years for a legal worker to be located in each OW office and attached to the local legal clinic to help with appeals of ODSP refusals.

Rural transportation:

59. Provide funding for pilot projects for on-demand rural transportation networks using cars and small vans that would take residents, particularly seniors and low income people, to appointments and shopping at a reasonable cost.

Sensitization/Public Awareness:

60. Stop the blame game - adopt a no-blame approach and move on with the policies you need to develop to respond to poverty.

61. Develop an awareness campaign for:

A. politicians;

B. the general public;

C. staff;

D. low income people

that will educate them about the extent of poverty in Ontario; what it is like to live in poverty; who is poor; solutions to poverty; the social & economic costs to society of poverty; etc.

62. Develop elementary level curriculum units to teach children about poverty. Involve community members in its development and delivery.

Transit:

63. The province should provide a subsidy of \$10 per month to the city for each low income community bus pass. Anyone who receives the GST rebate should be eligible.

Uploading:

64. The financing of basic public health, housing, income supports, child care and social services should be uploaded from the municipal to the provincial government at a rate of 20% per year for 5 years. Delivery and administration of the programs should remain at the municipal level. The municipality should be required to reinvest a minimum of 50% of the cumulative savings in community-based services in the same areas.

65. Ontario's large cities should have the same powers as Toronto to raise money through methods other than property taxes including income taxes.

Youth:

66. Reallocate funding to community-based programs for ages 0 to 6 to low income children.

67. Mentoring programs should be set up to provide supports to low-income youth.

Appendix 1
 Recommendation Chart.

This chart includes the recommendations to all levels of government and to the community grouped by theme. Our report to each level of government will include the recommendations specific to them in the body of the report as well as this Appendix. It is important to read the chart since, in a number of cases, the recommendations are interdependent. For example, a municipal recommendation to provide a particular service may correspond to a provincial recommendation to fund the service.

Introduction	
<p>All levels of government and the community need to develop a common vision and combat the individualism in society. This needs to be the issue where we come together and build a better community where we all work together.</p> <p>The Poverty Reduction Strategy has to be based not on income but on the right of the individual to have medicine, food, education, clothes, housing, recreation, etc. It must recognize that poverty is a reality and that we <u>can</u> do something about it. AS a community, we have hope that we can change things.</p> <p>We need political leadership at both the provincial and municipal level to take the vision and develop it into concrete and measurable actions which will reduce poverty according to established targets over the next three, five and ten years.</p> <p>In order for a Poverty Reduction Strategy to be successful, it has to involve not just government but the community as well. Since poverty costs every segment of society, the whole spectrum must be implicated in its solution at all points, i.e. not the 'usual suspects'. This means that people have to be involved in the design and implementation of the Strategy and not just in a superficial way. This dialogue has to continue at the provincial, municipal and community level and involve people from as many sectors as possible.</p> <p>The city should develop a concrete Poverty Reduction Strategy which will operate in concert with the provincial one. It would have targets and timelines based on local conditions and be developed in collaboration with the community.</p> <p>Both the province and the city should look at work done in other jurisdictions, both in Canada and Europe, to find examples of best practices. Many of them have had strategies in place for a number of years. They can also be looked to for ways to involve citizens in a pro-active way at all stages of the process.</p> <p>The Strategy has to provide hope to children & youth so they can see a way out of poverty. It has to provide tangible supports to help them achieve an education including adequate food and shelter, and provide supports to their parents and community so they can help them achieve their potential.</p> <p>While there will be costs associated with implementing a Poverty Reduction Strategy, there will be accompanying savings, some of which will begin to be realized very soon. For example, families that are properly housed and fed will have less need to access the health system and their children will have better success in school. Accessible recreation programs will similarly reduce immediate and long-term health costs. Supporting the integration of foreign-trained professionals, particularly in the health field, into the labour market will provide better access to medical care and other professional services for all Ontarians, improving the economic and physical health of the province.</p> <p>As long as some parts of society benefit from poverty, there will always be poverty. We need to re-order society so that we can provide enough to allow those in poverty to live a life of dignity with self-esteem.</p>	
Recommendation - provincial	Recommendation - municipal
<p>The province should develop a comprehensive definition of poverty for both provincial and municipal purposes which focuses on inclusion and recognizes a basic standard of living.</p>	<p>The city should ask PIAC to update its Basic Needs Report including the definition of poverty for the city. It should be defined broadly to include economic, cultural and social factors.</p>

Rec's - provincial	Rec's - municipal	Rec's - federal	Rec's - community
First Nations			
Respect the Aboriginal community and, in consultation with them, develop specific poverty reduction strategies to meet their particular needs.	Respect the Aboriginal community and, in consultation with them, develop specific poverty reduction strategies to meet their particular needs.		
Child care			
Increase subsidized child care spaces by population growth plus 5% per year for the next 10 years.	Increase subsidized child care spaces by population growth plus 5% per year for the next 10 years.	Develop a National child care strategy that includes federal funding of 25% of the cost of all subsidized spaces increasing to 50% over the next 5 years.	Lobby the federal government to develop a national strategy for child care.
Adjust the means test for subsidized spaces to ensure that child care is accessible and affordable.	Adjust the means test for subsidized spaces to ensure that child care is accessible and affordable.		
Ensure flexible childcare is available 24/7 to families working outside of 9-to-5	Ensure flexible childcare is available 24/7 to families working outside of 9-to-5		
Citizen and community engagement			
			Work with all three levels of government to develop and implement the Strategies at all levels.
Special efforts need to be made to involve the disabled communities.	Special efforts need to be made to involve the disabled communities.		Community needs to develop a strong, united voice and demand more, pushing the Government to act.
	<p>Include a poverty lens in the work of all city advisory committees (AC's).</p> <p>Circulate the issues discussed at PIAC to the other AC's.</p> <p>Listen to AC's and act on their recommendations.</p> <p>Lobby federal and provincial governments to contribute their share financially.</p>		Support and participate in the Poverty Issues Advisory Committee (PIAC), other city advisory committees and the City for All Women Initiative (CAWI).

			Keep councillors informed of the issues that affect the low income community. Follow the issues to see how they vote.
			Elect politicians who will implement social change.
			Participate in all the discussions around a Poverty Reduction Strategy and in the work to make it operational.
	Involve private sector in our discussions.		Involve private sector in our discussions.
Coordination			
	Fund and provide supports to community cooperative		Set up cooperative to coordinate service requests and develop partnerships.
Provide funds to develop community cooperatives for childcare, recreation, etc.	Support development of community cooperatives for childcare, recreation, etc.		Develop community cooperatives for childcare, recreation, etc.
Give funding priority to school projects that are multi-use collaborations with the municipality.	Build multi-use facilities in collaboration with school boards, i.e. school, library, indoor & outdoor recreation facilities, daycare, meeting space, summer programs, etc.		
Coordinate development of the Strategy involving all three levels of government			
Connect the Physical Activity Strategy and the Nutrition Strategy from the Province with the Anti Poverty Strategy			
Education			
Implement more community service options in secondary school as a type of coop education and during school hours.			
Increase grant portion of OSAP to reduce student debt.			

Abolish all fees and program charges in public schools at the elementary and secondary level effective immediately.			
To improve academic outcomes, provide additional resources, staff and supports to individual schools based on their numbers of low income students.			
Require <u>all</u> school staff to participate in awareness training about poverty and its effects on children and their families.	Work with community agencies like the Social Planning Council to provide information on poverty in Ottawa to local school boards.		
Increase the resources to prevent school drop-outs and double the current targets.			
Employment and training			
Make receipt of social assistance an employment equity category.	Make receipt of social assistance an employment equity category for city jobs.		
	Offer training and apprenticeships to SA recipients and their families to prepare them to compete for city jobs.		
Give students from SA families preference for summer jobs.	Give students from SA families preference for summer and part-time jobs.		
Increase employment supports for disabled job seekers.			
Improve labour legislation to better protect workers and improve working conditions.			
Increase job opportunities and, in particular, full-time rather than part time jobs.			

Provide more funding to support self-employment through agencies such as the Ottawa Community Loan Fund to allow more people to create their own employment.	Increase the funding to self-employment supports such as the Ottawa Community Loan Fund to allow more people to create their own employment.		
Reduce barriers to employment by increasing supports to immigrants and new Canadians, i.e. recognition of credentials, access to education, etc.			
Fund free Second Language training to low income residents to increase their employability.	Provide free Second Language training through the Employment Resource Centres to low income residents to increase their employability.		
Food			
The Municipal Act should be amended to require community green spaces and community gardens in all new developments.	The city should provide incentives either through reduced development fees or property taxes to developers who incorporate roof gardens and other green features in their properties. In addition, property owners who make green amendments to their property should receive reductions in their property taxes.		Community members should develop and maintain community gardens in their neighbourhoods.
Schools should receive grants to establish community gardens on school grounds.			
The Ministry of Agriculture should provide funding to community groups to develop community gardens.	Funding should be provided to Just Food to double the number of community gardens each year for the next five years and to provide education programs in the community and in the schools.		

Add food security education programs to the elementary school curriculum.			
Provide free milk or milk substitute at lunch to all elementary school children.			Extend Good Food Box program to more community locations.
	Provide space, start-up funds and admin supports to new farmers markets selling local produce.		
	Increase funding to Just Food to coordinate food security programs in the city.		
Re-examine the special diet program to ensure OW/ODSP recipients are receiving the supports they need.			
French services			
Services and programs, whether government or community, must be provided in French so that francophones and those with French as a second language can receive appropriate service.	Services and programs, whether government or community, must be provided in French so that francophones and those with French as a second language can receive appropriate service.		
Funding			
Government funding is often restricted to short-term projects. Funding for Poverty Reduction Strategy programs/projects must be long-term (3+ years) to be meaningful and allow long-term planning.	Government funding is often restricted to short-term projects. Funding for Poverty Reduction Strategy programs/projects must be long-term (3+ years) to be meaningful and allow long-term planning.		
Programs need to be sustainable and operated with paid staff.	Programs need to be sustainable and operated with paid staff.		
Health			
Increase funding for community dental clinics by 15% each year for ten years.	Increase community dental clinics by one location per year for the next 10 years.		

Make basic dental an insured service under OHIP by adding children 0-12 in 2009, youth 13-24 in 2010, low income seniors in 2011, low income adults in 2012, all seniors in 2013 and all Ontarians in 2014.			
Extend the Ontario Drug Benefit program to cover all low income children by 2010 and all low income residents by 2012		Develop a national pharmacare program to cover all low income children by 2010 and all low income residents by 2012	
Increase the spaces in Ontario medical schools by 20% per year for the next 5 years.			
Offer tuition fee rebates for doctors entering family practice in Ontario.			
Housing			
Provide funding, in collaboration with the federal government, to build 500 units of RGI social housing in Ottawa each year for the next ten years.	Provide supports, which could include land, development fee remission, advice, etc., to non-profits to build 500 units of RGI social housing in Ottawa each year for the next ten years.	Provide funding, in collaboration with the provincial government, to build 500 units of RGI social housing in Ottawa each year for the next ten years.	
	Provide 10% per year property tax remission for ten years to private developers who include RGI housing units in their developments.		
	Ensure that social housing is integrated in the neighbourhood.		
	Support programs like HomeShare that offer alternatives to seniors.		

Immigration			
			Provide mentorship for immigrants. Create networks and linkages to create access to opportunities – the community can take leadership.
Fund free Second Language training to immigrants to increase their employability.	Provide free Second Language training through the Employment Resource Centres to immigrants to increase their employability.	Fund free language training for all immigrants including spouses and children for 5 years after arriving in Canada.	
		Provide more accurate information to prospective immigrants who have only one official language about the bilingual requirements of the job market.	
Income			
	Provide funding to establish barter network in Ottawa.		Develop barter network in Ottawa.
Replace the Disability Assessment Unit (DAU) with a new system of disability assessment that provides faster service to ODSP applicants and results in fewer ODSP grants achieved through appeals. It would be cheaper and more humane to do it right the first time.			
Provide one-time money in 2009 to municipalities to assess their caseloads and assist eligible OW clients to move to ODSP.	Develop a program to assess OW clients and assist those eligible to move to ODSP. This program could be funded initially with the savings generated by the uploading of ODSP to the province.		

Develop a two-year pilot project starting January 2009 to fund medical professionals in the Community Health Centres to complete medical forms for ODSP applicants who do not have a regular doctor.			
Reduce red-tape and regulations for OW/ODSP.			
Make the system more supportive and less restrictive/punitive.			
For the first three months of employment, do not deduct anything from earnings of OW/ODSP recipients. This exemption should be available once every two years.			
In addition to mandatory deductions and childcare expenses, allow an exemption of \$100 plus \$25 per additional family member per month.			
Starting in January 2009, increase OW/ODSP retained earnings amounts by 20% per year until the combination of net earned income and social assistance benefits reaches the LICO levels.			
Develop, in consultation with the community, a Guaranteed Income program for Ontario to be instituted in 2010.			
Revisit the Ontario Child Benefit. It should be more generous and paid to every low income child in Ontario regardless of the parent's income source.			

Pay the full \$122 NCBS clawback for every child in a family that receives social assistance.			
Increase minimum wage by \$0.25 every three months until it reaches \$12 per hour and then increase it every six months by the cost of living index for Ontario.			
Raise the rates of social assistance by 10% per year until they reach the LICO levels.			
Increase the shelter allocation to reflect the real cost of housing in the recipient's community.			
Information			
Provide a plain language version of the rules and regulations for social programs so people can easily understand what they are eligible for.	Provide a plain language version of the rules and regulations for social programs so people can easily understand what they are eligible for.		
Legal			
Increase funding and broaden eligibility for legal aid services, both certificate and clinic			
Amend the means test to the LICO level.			
Increase the range of services available.			
Provide funding for two years for a legal worker to be located in each OW office and attached to the local legal clinic to help with appeals of ODSP refusals.	Provide space and supports for two years for a legal worker to be located in each OW office and attached to the local legal clinic to help with appeals of ODSP refusals.		
Outcomes			
	Adequately fund crime prevention programs and focus them on solutions rather than pushing people out of neighbourhoods.		

Recreation			
	Provide basic recreation programs at no cost to low income residents to a value of \$150 per year per child.	Replace the current recreation tax credit with a \$500 per child recreation grant or voucher to all low income children.	
Rural			
			Do further consultations with rural communities.
Rural transport			
Provide funding for pilot projects for on-demand rural transportation networks using cars and small vans that would take residents, particularly seniors and low income people, to appointments and shopping at a reasonable cost.	Develop an on-demand rural transportation network using cars and small vans that would take residents, particularly seniors and low income people, to appointments and shopping at a reasonable cost.		
	Develop rural bus routes linked to existing city routes for employment.		
Sensitization / Public Awareness			
Stop the blame game - adopt a no-blame approach and move on with the policies you need to develop to respond to poverty.	Stop the blame game - adopt a no-blame approach and move on with the policies you need to develop to respond to poverty.	Stop the blame game - adopt a no-blame approach and move on with the policies you need to develop to respond to poverty.	Stop the blame game - adopt a no-blame approach and move on with the policies you need to develop to respond to poverty.
Develop an awareness campaign for A) politicians; B) the general public; C) staff; D) low income people that will educate them about the extent of poverty in Ontario; what it is like to live in poverty; who is poor; solutions to poverty; the social & economic costs to society of poverty; etc.	Develop an awareness campaign for A) politicians; B) the general public; C) staff; D) low income people that will educate them about the extent of poverty in Ottawa & Ontario; what it is like to live in poverty; who is poor; solutions to poverty; the social & economic costs to society of poverty; etc.	Develop an awareness campaign for A) politicians; B) the general public; C) staff; D) low income people that will educate them about the extent of poverty in Ottawa and Canada; what it is like to live in poverty; who is poor; solutions to poverty; the social & economic costs to society of poverty; etc.	Develop an awareness campaign for A) politicians; B) the public; C) staff; D) low income people to educate them about the extent of poverty in Ottawa, Ontario & Canada; what it is like to live in poverty; who is poor; solutions to poverty; the social & economic costs to society of poverty; etc.

Develop elementary level curriculum units to teach children about poverty. Involve community members in its development and delivery.			Collaborate with schools to deliver lessons on poverty.
			Organize ongoing events to educate the community about poverty i.e. public for a; live for a month on OW or ODSP so you know what it's like; have people spend a day with a storytelling poor person so that they can see the reality of the situation.
			Organize ongoing events to educate low income people about their rights and what programs & services are available to them.
			Speak out about poverty; advocate for change. Support others to do the same.
Transit			
The community bus pass should be available to all low income residents including those working at low wage jobs.			
	Bus tickets should be provided free of charge to Community Resource Centres and front-line agencies for clients to access community programs, medical appointments and education or employment programs.		

Uploading			
The financing of basic public health, housing, income supports, child care and social services should be uploaded from the municipal to the provincial government at a rate of 20% per year for 5 years. Delivery and administration of the programs should remain at the municipal level. The municipality should be required to reinvest a minimum of 50% of the cumulative savings in community-based services in the same areas.	When uploading occurs, a minimum of 50% of the savings should be redirected to enhancing health and social services with an emphasis on services for low income residents.		
Ontario's large cities should have the same powers as Toronto to raise money through methods other than property taxes including income taxes.			
Youth			
Reallocate funding to community-based programs for ages 0 to 6 to low income children.	Reallocate funding to community-based programs for ages 0 to 6 to low income children.		
Mentoring programs should be set up to provide supports to low-income youth.			

DEFINITION OF BASIC NEEDS

Shelter:

- Sufficient affordable, adequate and accessible when required (e.g. for using wheelchairs, walkers etc.)
- dwelling and contents insurance

Food:

- healthy balanced meals (e.g. fruit and vegetables, grains, dairy, meat, and alternatives) in necessary amounts to maintain well being
- seasonally available foods, especially locally produced when possible
- culturally appropriate
- school lunches (e.g. pizza days) and milk programs

Household Operations

Utilities:

- telephone, hydro, gas, oil
- All utilities based on current rates.

Cleaning Supplies:

- for floors, walls, windows, carpets, bathroom, dishes and laundry
- brooms, mops etc.

Household Linen:

- towels, face cloths, dish cloths
- adequate bedding for all seasons

General:

- Furniture, appliances, cooking ware, light bulbs, fuses, batteries, candles, emergency supplies
- gardening supplies where needed
- contingency fund for emergency repairs
- radio & T.V. for survival information

Personal Care:

- hair dressing or barber shop services
- hygienic supplies
- soap, shampoo, toothpaste, deodorant, feminine products, diapers (as required for infants or adults), shaving supplies, tissues, cosmetics, toothbrush, toilet paper

Health Care:

- over the counter drugs (e.g. pain relievers, decongestants, antihistamines, antacids, cough and cold remedies)
- prescribed medication as required
- complete eye care needs
- pain relievers
- proper dental care (e.g. cleaning and filling *as required*)

- vitamin and mineral supplements as required
- quality foot care
- sunscreen
- bug repellent
- housekeeping services for frail, elderly and disabled

Clothing:

- business attire (if needed)
- underwear, pants, shirts, PJs
- school clothing (e.g. two pairs of shoes for children)
- footwear to meet all needs and all seasons
- mitts, scarves
- appropriate clothing for all occasions

Mental Health:

- access to mental health workers as needed
- access to adequate and appropriate supports for people living with a mental illness in shelters and housing communities
- supports for family and friends who are living with a mental illness
- support and education pertaining to mental illness

Transportation:

- access to public transportation
- sufficient means for each family member to take public transportation;
- the ability to take taxi when the situation demands it for those whose needs are not served by public transportation (e.g. safety, emergencies etc.)
- bicycle and other environmental forms of transportation
- appropriate transportation for the disabled at all times
- car insurance, gas, licensing and plate fees as needed
- car, bicycle, wheelchair and scooter maintenance as needed

Recreation:

- opportunities for age-appropriate social interaction
- sports and games for healthy, active living

Intellectual Stimulation:

- books, movies, theatre,
- access to computers and internet
- use of toy lending library and bookmobiles

Education:

- home schooling
- ongoing cost-free schooling (Junior Kindergarten to high-school, college and or university)
- appropriate and adequate support for special needs children and adults
- opportunities for life-long learning
- language training ESL/FSL
- Long distance training (e.g. by correspondence, etc.)

Childcare:

- affordable and accessible childcare
- access to 24 hour services and emergency back-up
- \$ for field trips and related costs

- toys, games for social and educational development

Miscellaneous:

- money for postage and gifts
- funds for replacement costs (e.g. lost bus pass, SIN or health cards etc.)
- monetary contributions to community-based activities (e.g. contribution to mosque, church or giving money to a non-profit organization)
- pets for emotional needs, social support and security

The Poverty Crisis 2005

Report on the Peoples' Hearings II
Held December 2004 to April 2005

Report Released April 2005

Poverty Issues Advisory Committee
With the assistance of the Social Planning Council of Ottawa

A. Introduction

In late 2004 the Poverty Issues Advisory Committee (PIAC) of the City of Ottawa undertook a consultation with low income residents in Ottawa called “The Listening Forums: People’s Hearings II”. The purpose of the consultation was to

- Identify the most pressing problems of people living in poverty
- Ask people living in poverty to identify solutions to their problems
- Consult with people living in poverty on the draft priorities of the City of Ottawa’s Community and Protective Services, and
- Bring forward recommendations to the City on the Community and Protective Services Draft Priorities and other issues, which reflected the input received from Ottawa residents living in poverty.

The project followed on the very successful People’s Hearings process which was held from 1998 – 2000. In that process, low income residents provided extensive feedback on their most pressing issues and proposed actions to address their challenges. This process led to the Public Participation Program, the Poverty Issues Advisory Committee, the Ottawa Action on Poverty, as well as many initiatives in the City and the community.

Subsequent to the Peoples’ Hearings, throughout the Ottawa 20/20 Planning Process, the City confirmed its’ commitment to create an inclusive city in which all residents share in the City’s economic prosperity. However, with almost 24,000 families and over 11,700 seniors living below the poverty line in Ottawa at the time of the last census¹, and the income gap in the City continuing to increase even in times of economic growth, there was a pressing need for a clear strategy to address this serious problem.

The People’s Hearings II (The Listening Forums) of 2005 provides an update of the reality faced by Ottawa residents living in poverty and recommended actions to address today’s challenges. With the City’s Community and Protective Services developing a set of draft priorities to guide the department’s work over the next three to five years, there was a strategic opportunity to gather feedback and implement effective strategies to address poverty, based on the input from low income individuals.

This report is an overview of the feedback provided within “The Listening Forums: People’s Hearings II” including extensive consultation on the draft Community and Protective Services priorities. The information is based on three methods of consultation:

- input from 78 participants in three public forums, specifically Dec. 2 / 04 at Lakeside Gardens, Dec. 9 / 04 at Orleans United Church, and Dec. 11 at McNabb Community Centre. Participants attended in response to general public outreach and represented a broad cross section of low income people,. They participated in full-group and small-group discussions. These public forums were called “The Listening Forums”.
- feedback from 60 people in a series of nine focus groups held January to April 2005. The following population groups were consulted in the focus groups:
 - Immigrants
 - Rural residents
 - Seniors
 - Single parents
 - People with disabilities
 - Women
 - Francophones
 - Low income working people
 - Youth
- Responses to a survey developed by the Poverty Issues Advisory Committee. Low income individuals participating in the Listening Forums and focus groups were asked to complete the survey to provide additional feedback. 95 participants filled out the survey. (Please see Appendices B and C.)

An effort was made to include participation from low income Aboriginal residents in Ottawa, but this did not happen. This is a gap in the consultation process and in the findings of this report, as Ottawa’s Aboriginal residents experience disproportionately high rates of poverty and homelessness. Further, their experiences of poverty and their needs are distinct.

¹ Social Planning Council of Ottawa. Incomes in Ottawa: Sources, Levels, and Adequacy 1995 – 2000. Ottawa: SPCO, December 2003, pg.16.

Funding for the initiative was generously provided by the City of Ottawa. The Social Planning Council of Ottawa assisted the Poverty Issues Advisory Committee in the consultation process and in the preparation of this report.

B. Common Issues

There was a remarkable degree of common ground expressed by participants with respect to the difficulties they face while living on a low income. The following are common issues identified through the forums, focus groups and survey responses.

a) Inadequate Income to Meet Basic Needs

I can't afford luxuries like food and transportation.

Survey respondent

Overwhelmingly, the most common problem identified by participants was not having enough income to meet their basic needs. Whether working full-time, part-time or receiving government transfer payments, the majority of participants identified they could not afford housing costs, adequate food, clothing, transportation and health costs.

Government transfer payments (including social assistance, seniors pensions, disability pensions or employment insurance) are not adequate to meet the increasing cost of living. Most participants with children who receive social assistance payments identified the deduction of the National Child Benefit supplement as a policy which made it harder for them to meet their children's needs.

While getting a job used to be a way out of poverty, in today's economy many jobs do not provide enough income to keep people out of poverty. Working people identified low wages, not having enough hours of work or layoffs as a major difficulty. Participants in the Listening Forums, the focus groups and the survey were in strong support of all levels of government increasing access to stable jobs as a major poverty reduction initiative, so long as those jobs were at livable wages which would allow them to meet the real costs of living in Ottawa.

We go without many things that are considered every day normal things to others

Survey respondent

i) Access to Safe, Affordable Housing

Overwhelmingly, participants were concerned with the shortage of safe, clean and affordable housing. Many participants reported paying more than 50% of their annual income on housing and utilities. Some senior participants shared how they have had to live in housing complexes or apartment building where they often felt their personal security was at risk, because the rent was subsidized. Parents shared stories of the poorly maintained rental units where they live with their children. Individuals with disabilities reported having to cope with inappropriate housing in which the design did not meet their physical needs, as few fully accessible units are available. Immigrants reported how many large families have no choice but to live in small over-crowded apartments as large apartments are too expensive. Rural residents identified that low income rural residents often live in housing which is in extremely poor repair and may be without heat.

Many participants identified in the discussion groups and on the survey that they did not have the means to pay for heat, hydro or other utilities. This is a growing concern as utility costs increase on the one hand, and are removed from the services included in many rental arrangements on the other hand. This problem was identified by urban and rural low income residents. Additionally, rural residents not served by Ottawa Hydro were concerned that they seemed to be bearing a disproportionate percentage of the hydro debt, in relation to their urban counterparts. Participants identified a need for the City and the Province to intervene to provide some assistance with rising utility costs.

ii) Access to Adequate and Nutritious Food

Participants reported having to sacrifice in order to pay for their housing and utilities, often foregoing on adequate and nutritious food and snacks for themselves or even their children. Parents reported going without food near the end of the month so their children could eat. They shared a variety of strategies for meeting their food needs, as well as their frustration in not being able to afford healthy food choices, particularly fruits, vegetables and protein. As other living costs continue to go up and low incomes stay the same, low income residents must rely more and more on community organizations, school feeding programs and charities such as the food banks to provide basic food.

Fresh fruits and vegetables are the hardest to get. I just can't afford them, and I'm diabetic so I need them. If the government could assist social agencies to have more fresh food it would be great. They are just too dear for us to buy.

Focus group participant

You get your groceries once a month and by the end of the month the fridge is empty. But the kids eat three times a day, every day. And you can't buy fruit for the whole month. From the food banks you get the same macaroni and cheese. You can't feed your kids "mac and cheese" all the time.

Focus group participant

I must use my credit card in order to pay for my groceries. Eventually it catches up to you.

Focus group participant

iii) Access to Transportation

Access to free or subsidized transportation is a huge need. It is essential for people looking for or keeping work. As well, we can't access what is available because we can't afford to get to it.

Listening Forum Participant

Please, if you only make one recommendation, please recommend a subsidized bus pass.

Listening Forum Participant

The need for more affordable transportation was an issue shared by all participants. Most participants were certain that if transportation were more affordable it would result in lower costs in many other areas of the City budget, as low income people could more effectively deal with many of their own issues. Lack of transportation affects all low income residents and their ability to access the workforce, maintain good health, and be included in activities and community life. For all participants it is primarily an affordability issue. For some, particularly people with disabilities and senior residents, it is also an issue of accessibility and reliability. The high cost of public transportation and Para Transpo often results in residents, especially those living in rural areas, foregoing other basic needs in order to access transportation.

iv) Access to Suitable Clothing and the Means to Do Laundry

Participants identified the difficulty of getting appropriate clothes and of having the resources to keep them clean. Of particular concern were the challenges of keeping growing children appropriately clothed through different seasons, and having clothes suitable for job interviews or work.

Francophones from ethnic minority groups brought up the need for information on Canadian culture for new immigrants upon arrival in the country. For example, many are not aware of what is appropriate attire for the seasons, and this may affect how they present themselves at job interviews, how they take care of their children, and how they are perceived by others.

When you go to buy a winter jacket, you don't know which material is warm enough... and when you send your kids to school you don't know that you are expected to pack daily treats and snacks in their lunches.

For many people, particularly people who were homeless or in rooming houses, access to laundry facilities continues to be a challenge.

v) Access to Health Care, Health Services and Resources for Healthy Lifestyles

A major theme was the negative impact which poverty was having on the health of low income residents. They have difficulty getting safe housing in good repair or nutritious food.

They cannot afford over-the-counter medications, and some prescription medications are not covered even if they have a drug plan (for example, some allergy medicines). Seniors and people with disabilities shared added concerns of more costly health needs which they had no money to address. Many aids to daily living which they need are not available through government programs like the Assistive Devices Program.

Dental health and access to dental services were also identified as being a serious concern. The majority of individuals who participated in the forums and focus groups shared their concern with the fact that the subsidized dental services do not do preventive work, only emergency extractions. This is a serious issue for individuals who must try to remain healthy and try to access the job market with teeth that are in poor condition. It is also a concern for parents who would like to ensure proper dental health for their children.

I used to have perfect teeth. I brush my teeth and take care of them, but when I got pregnant I got cavities. The only thing they will do is pull your teeth but I would like to keep my teeth. It would be nice at least to go once a year to get my teeth cleaned and have a check-up. Because we are single mothers and poor we shouldn't be made to suffer the loss of our teeth. We should be able to eat.

Focus group participant

Stress was a huge issue for people, leading often to depression or other mental health difficulties. Participants shared how difficult it is to cope when they "come up short every month", always have to tell their children that they can't have things that other children have, worry about arrears and unpaid bills, and struggle to put food on the table for their children.

It's a very nice country but the stress is killing us.

Focus group participant

b) Social Inclusion

i) Access to recreation and cultural activities

It's quality of life as well as being able to be alive. We talk a lot about inclusion and participation. Are you able to be involved in your community or are you left out because you can't afford to participate in things?

Focus Group Participant

For the majority of participants, recreation and cultural activities were considered a luxury. Recreational activities are often the first thing to get cut when individuals try to make ends meet. Many shared they cannot even participate in free activities organized by community centres as they may not have access to transportation. For individuals with disabilities, physical access to a building continues to be a challenge and an obstacle to full participation in activities.

ii) Community Participation and Discriminatory Attitudes

In general, participants were frustrated at the increasing number and level of user fees for community services.

Every time there is a user fee put on or increased, you exclude low income people.

Listening Forum participant

Many participants expressed a concern over the removal or restriction of public amenities (e.g. water fountains, benches for sitting, washrooms, etc.) in community areas. This is particularly an issue for people who experience homelessness, seniors, and other low income people using the downtown core. Many shared the feeling of being treated as unworthy, mistrusted, and lacking intelligence.

Many individuals feel stigmatized with the social assistance process and having to share a great deal of private information with a government worker. This is particularly the case with immigrant participants who shared that they will not go and apply for assistance because the process is very invasive and it is not in their culture or way of doing things to reveal much personal information. Others shared stories of receiving poor service from their income assistance case workers; such as workers not returning phone calls, being offensive, regularly losing documents, or denying them benefits to which the individual was entitled.

When you apply for subsidy or help it is very invasive. In any situation where you are getting money from the government you have to deal with self-esteem. You have to balance if you want to give up your self-esteem or not.

Focus group participant

What's different for immigrant women is the cultural shame to apply for welfare.

Focus group participant

There's a stigma being in housing. People treat you differently if they know you live there.

Focus group participant

c) Access to information

Inadequate knowledge of City services and how to access those services was mentioned in many groups. Rural groups reported this as an important issue since their client service centre is only open one day a week. Participants were frustrated at being directed to consult the internet to find the needed information, as many low income residents do not have a computer or internet access. Further, rural residents may not easily access library computers due to distance. Many of the senior participants were not aware of potential financial assistance through Essential Health and Social Services. Participants in many groups were unaware of the subsidy available for recreational activities. Immigrants and new Canadians, who have language barriers also found it very difficult to access information on City services and have their needs understood.

I lost everything and went to the shelter. I should have been able to get Community Start-up Benefits but the worker said, "We are not an insurance company". I have never seen the sheet on what people are entitled to.

Focus group participant

The workers won't tell you what you are entitled to. You have to find out yourself and ask. And even then they may say no. And you have to go back again and again to try to get it. The system shouldn't work like that.

Focus group participant

Is there a strategy behind the strategy? How does the City plan to reach the immigrants, families, etc.? Right now it is not easy for them to have access to the City and not easy for them to know what's there.

Focus Group Participant

E. Recommendations

Based on the input received in The Peoples' Hearings II, the following recommendations are made to bring the draft Community and Protective Services priorities closer in line with the reality and needs of low income residents. Further, they are consistent with the direction in the Ottawa 20/20 planning process, which recognizes that preventive approaches to social issues are normally more cost effective than other strategies.

The recommendations flow from the input received from low income residents. The fourteen recommendations are listed in the order which broadly reflects the highest concerns identified by participants in the Peoples' Hearings II, beginning with an unequivocal focus on meeting basic needs. The details under each recommendation are not listed in any particular order of priority.

1) Add a priority called “Meet Basic Needs and Reduce the Impact of Poverty”

- a) Increase social assistance rates at least to 1995 levels
- b) Re-imburse families the amount of the National Child Benefit supplement which is deducted from their social assistance cheque
- c) Increase opportunities for work at livable wages, i.e. wages adequate to support oneself and one's family
- d) Maintain and enhance the Essential Health and Social Services Program
- e) Put in place a plan of action to improve access by low income residents to adequate nutritious food, particularly fruits, vegetables and protein
- f) Support community organizations which assist residents to meet basic needs including access to housing, food, clothing, laundry facilities and transportation
- g) Enhance and maintain preventive and maintenance dental care for families and individuals, and specifically re-instate such care for adults
- h) Put in place a plan of action to increase access by low income residents to health services including community mental health supports (including preventative services), access to tests, over-the-counter medications, aids to daily living (such as grab bars in washrooms), and access to health practitioners

2) Include “Improve Access to Information” as part of the Community and Protective Services Priorities

- a) Improve access to information on social assistance entitlements including community start-up benefits, special diet allowances, etc.
- b) Improve access to information on recreation programs and subsidies
- c) Facilitate better information on services for seniors (from all levels of government)
- d) Improve access to information on available dental and health services
- e) Create an outreach plan through the agencies to reach harder to reach populations
- f) Increase the ability of the City to provide information by phone, rather than internet
- g) Increase the availability of information in alternative formats

3) Completely re-focus the priority “Community Capacity to End and Prevent Homelessness” on creating affordable housing and providing concrete supports for eviction prevention

- a) Build more affordable housing
- b) Prioritize strategies and actions which leverage or provide capital and operating funds for organizations to create affordable housing including supportive housing and housing accessible to people with disabilities.
- c) Develop an affordable housing strategy specifically for rural areas including
 - i) A plan to create affordable housing for individuals and families, including for seniors
 - ii) Community and Protective Services and the Poverty Issues Advisory Committee work with other departments in the City, particularly the Planning Department, to allow severance of lots from farm properties to create affordable housing for family members.
- d) Maintain and increase support services to help tenants keep their housing, including rent supports such as the rent bank and supports to assist people with psychiatric or developmental disabilities to keep their housing
- e) Community and Protective Services and the Poverty Issues Advisory Committee develop a comprehensive response to energy assistance for low income residents
- f) Enforce property standards in rental housing. Increase resources for maintenance in Ottawa's social housing stock
- g) Improve conditions within the shelters including ventilation, issues of crowding, personal safety, security of possessions and storage, and frequency of moves between shelters
- h) Improve access to the Community Start-Up Benefit
- i) Advocate for increased incomes
- j) Include in the Community Planning Strategy an action plan to ensure the needs of homeless people are accommodated in downtown areas.

- 4) **Work with the Transportation Department and relevant Advisory Committees to enhance access to public transportation as a key implementation strategy of the Community and Protective Services priorities**
 - a) Create a subsidized bus pass for low income residents, comparable to the seniors bus pass
 - b) Provide an education program designed to enhance staff sensitivity to the needs of seniors and people with disabilities using the transit system
 - c) Provide an education program designed to improve the public's sensitivity to the needs of seniors and people with disabilities using the transit system
 - d) Assess impact of service levels and policies on people with disabilities and seniors
 - e) Work with rural representatives to improve access to transportation for low income residents in rural areas, including but not limited to a reduction of the cost of Para Transpo trips to and from rural areas for health related appointments
 - f) Promote OC Transpo's Family Pass Day

- 5) **Focus the "Working City" Priority on Access to Employment at Livable Wages**
 - a) In addition to the target groups identified in this priority, add "women" and "people with disabilities" as target groups
 - b) Enhance services to create a distinct link for individuals between their training and specific jobs available in the community
 - c) Create a more flexible training infrastructure to respond to changes in the economy (such as the collapse of an economic sector), in program silos (to serve people who fall between the cracks including working poor), and in individual circumstances (such as a poor aptitude for a particular course)
 - d) Create additional supports for meeting basic needs for people working at low wage jobs
 - e) Include an action plan to increase employment opportunities in rural areas for adults and youth, including
 - i) Work with rural representatives to identify and remedy harmonized by-laws which are negatively impacting job creation and farming incomes in rural areas
 - ii) Allocate increased resources for the Rural Economic Development Strategy
 - f) Support community economic development initiatives (including support for small business development) that would improve the economic situation of people marginalized from the workforce including recent immigrants, individuals with disabilities, women, youth, rural residents and people who are not literate
 - g) Increase access to free or low cost community based English and French language training for unilingual residents and immigrants, in recognition of the importance of bilingualism in getting a job
 - h) Maintain and enhance supports for the recognition of foreign credentials, including fast-tracking people with credentials which fill current skill shortages (such as medical professionals and scientists)
 - i) Undertake a community education initiative to reduce discriminatory attitudes in the workplace against people with disabilities and immigrants
 - j) Implement increased access to subsidized childcare as an integral part of this strategy, including access to childcare for sick children
 - k) Create a program of flexible financial and personal supports to meet a variety of small contingencies for people seeking work or trying to maintain work (such as payment of a licensing fee)
 - l) Co-ordinate implementation of this priority with the Talent Plan, the Economic Development Plan and the Rural Economic Development Plan
 - m) Confirm in the priority that the City supports the right of parents to choose to stay home to raise their children or to work outside the home
 - n) Monitor and address the impact of implementation of this initiative on the other priorities, especially the Children's Agenda and the Community Capacity Building On Homelessness Agenda and ensure that it does not result in a deterioration in quality of life for low income participants

- 6) **Change "The Children's Agenda" to "The Families' Agenda"**
 - a) Create an action plan to provide families with the means to meet the basic needs of their family (food, housing, clothing health and dental care and transportation) whether they choose to stay at home to raise their children or to work outside the home
 - b) Recognize in this priority the legitimate right of parents to choose to stay at home to raise their children or to work outside the home
 - c) Prioritize increasing the availability of subsidized, licensed childcare spaces, including
 - i) Set targets to increase the number of subsidies and subsidized spaces

- ii) Create more childcare spaces for children under 2
- iii) Support licensed childcare and include a plan to ensure safety standards are met by childcare providers
- iv) Establish policies to enable more flexibility in childcare hours and access to subsidies, to reflect the realities of today's workforce and rural life
- v) Create more affordable respite / occasional childcare for appointments and interviews
- vi) Meet the pressing need for Francophone childcare spaces
- vii) Increase the availability of culturally appropriate childcare related to the demographics of the City
- viii) Expand childcare subsidies to include children up to age 12
- d) Include more programs for children over 6 and their families including after school programs, homework clubs and affordable or free recreation
- e) Include more programs for teens and their families including after school programs, homework clubs and affordable or free recreation
- f) Maintain and enhance free community and social supports for teens and their families, including mental health supports and suicide prevention
- g) Include a targeted action plan to accommodate the distinct needs of rural families, which recognizes the challenge of travelling to activities
- h) The City advocate to senior levels of government for improved policies and incomes for parents who choose to stay at home to raise their children as well as parents who choose to work outside the home

7) Increase the focus on access to recreation services and facilities in the Physical Activity Strategy

- a) Include in this priority an action plan to increase access to and use of recreation programs and facilities, including
 - i) More accessible recreation for people with disabilities and seniors
 - ii) Supports for transportation to enable participation
 - iii) Supports for childcare so parents with young children can participate in recreation
 - iv) Development of partnerships with other recreation stakeholders in the City including school boards and private recreation facilities
 - v) A targeted action plan to increase access to recreation in rural areas, using strategies suited to rural areas, including enabling local residents to make space available for recreation if they wish (e.g. a field for soccer)
- b) Maintain and enhance subsidies for recreation services, including
 - i) Better advertising about recreation subsidies including the possibility of 100% subsidy
 - ii) Community Protective Services, the Poverty Issues Advisory Committee and the Health, Recreation and Social Services Committee investigate alternate subsidy structures to identify possible improvements to Ottawa's subsidy system (such as an "All Facilities" pass or paying the fee over a period of time)
 - iii) Increase portability of recreation subsidies
- c) Community and Protective Services work with the Real Property and Asset Management Branch to increase accessibility of City recreation facilities

8) Focus on concrete supports to meet core needs within the Successful Aging Strategy

- a) Add an action plan to provide seniors with the means to meet their basic needs, specifically
 - i) Access to nutritious food appropriate to their age, health and dietary needs
 - ii) Access to safe, affordable housing including increased support services to help senior tenants keep appropriate housing
 - iii) Access to suitable clothing including such things as elastic stockings, orthopaedic supports, incontinence supplies
 - iv) Access to health and dental care including denture care
 - v) Affordable, accessible transportation
 - vi) Better access to aids to daily living such as grab bars in the bathroom
- b) Maintain and increase support to community agencies who assist seniors to meet basic needs and to stay in their own homes, including homecare, friendly visiting etc.
- c) Increase the supply of affordable housing for seniors in rural and urban areas
- d) Develop an action plan to support successful aging in rural areas, including strategies to support seniors to continue to live in their own community
- e) Develop an action plan to address the distinct needs of immigrant seniors
- f) Improve safety and security in subsidized seniors housing

- g) Increase access to information by working more effectively with community organizations to reach seniors
 - h) Increase supports for essential home repairs for low income senior homeowners, including better information about the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program.
- 9) Work with community organizations and representatives to engage Aboriginal residents in the development and implementation of the Community and Protective Services priorities, in recognition of the disproportionate rates of Aboriginal poverty and homelessness.**
- 10) Implement Structures Which Enable Meaningful Community Participation in Community Planning**
- a) Create a participation strategy to involve low income people in community planning processes, including in social housing neighbourhoods
 - b) Particularly in downtown areas, create community plans which include the needs of homeless residents, including
 - i) Ensuring public amenities in public spaces, such as park benches, drinking fountains etc.
 - ii) Developing inclusive strategies which recognize the rights of people who are homeless to be in public and community spaces
 - c) Ensure that community plans have been assessed in relation to their impact on marginalized groups, including low income residents and people with disabilities
 - d) Work with rural representatives to create a planning process for rural areas which addresses the distinct nature of rural communities, including resource allocation models which do not rely on population numbers / density
 - e) Include a community education strategy to increase inclusive approaches and address discriminatory attitudes in community planning, including increasing understanding of the reality of living in poverty
 - f) Recognize voluntary sector organizations which support local residents as a key element in any community plan
- 11) Include in the Cultural Investment Strategy increased access to cultural opportunities for low income residents²**
- a) Create an action plan to enable low income residents to participate in cultural activities, including
 - i) Implement a subsidy process to enable low income residents to participate in cultural activities
 - ii) Community and Protective Services encourage private enterprises to make their cultural services available (e.g. dance schools, free tickets from the NAC, etc.) at a subsidized or free rate and publicize these opportunities through the City
 - iii) Improve access to information about free / subsidized opportunities to participate in cultural activities
 - b) Community and Protective Services work with the Real Property and Asset Management Branch to increase accessibility of City cultural facilities
 - c) Maximize use of existing infrastructure in rural areas, by allowing community cultural groups to use the facilities
 - d) Provide funding directly to local artists / cultural workers
- 12) Work through Community Agencies to implement the “Literate and Learning Community” Priority**
- a) Ensure availability of literacy programs in French, in recognition of the historically higher levels of illiteracy in the French community
 - b) Increase access to free or low cost community based English and French language training for unilingual residents and immigrants, in recognition of the importance of bilingualism in getting a job (also listed under “A Working City”)
 - c) Provide free after-school learning supports to children and youth (e.g. homework clubs, one-on-one help, etc.)
 - d) Maintain and enhance community programs which support computer literacy and access to computers
 - e) Expand mobile library services in rural areas
 - f) Work with community organizations and other levels of government to address gaps in the availability of ESL and FSL courses, and to increase opportunities for advanced ESL and FSL including courses for targeted technical knowledge

² The Draft Priorities in relation to culture deal with culture in the sense of arts, culture and heritage.

- 13) Ensure the Priorities are adequately resourced, and the implementation and impact are measured and monitored**
- a) In recognition that preventive strategies are more cost effective than remedial strategies, allocate adequate resources to the priorities in order that they can be effectively implemented
 - b) Establish measurable indicators for each priority
 - c) Establish an annual review of the implementation and impact of these priorities to ensure the strategy improves the living conditions and quality of life of low income residents
 - d) Co-ordinate with other City departments, the Ottawa 20/20 plans, the Municipal Accessibility Plan and the annual budget process to address overlapping issues, to maximize effectiveness, and to ensure consistency of direction
- 14) Incorporate into the Emergency Plan a recognition that comprehensive coverage of the needs of low income residents is different from the needs of the general population, in many emergency situations**

Recommendations from the Rethinking Poverty Forum

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

RETHINKING POVERTY

Ottawa Community Forum on Poverty

September 27, 2007

SUMMARY:

The Forum on Poverty “RETHINKING POVERTY” was organized by the Community Developers from the Coalition of Community Health and Resource Centres, with funds from the city of Ottawa. It consisted of a series of workshops and group discussions as well as kiosks presentations on a variety of topics central to poverty eradication, including the root causes of poverty and effective measures to address them. Workshop presenters included representatives from social services agencies, grass roots organizations, academia, civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders in particular people living in poverty. Forum participants included staff from social services agencies, members of the community, academics and the media. The event was to be as inclusive as possible: the Coalition as well as other partner agencies and organizations were encouraged to promote the participation of people living in poverty.

Goals

The Forum aimed to achieve one major objective: the importance of a continued commitment from the community to poverty eradication. The main goals were to raise awareness about poverty issues; encourage people who live on low-income to engage in action to fight poverty; provide common ground where experience can be shared, and identify next steps in the fight against poverty.

The first plenary session included a general introduction and presentation from the Coalition of Community Health and Resources Centres, followed by presentation by Josephine Grey, a social and human rights activist. Her presentation generated a very animated question and answer period that opened the dialogue and set the tone for the rest of the day.

The various workshops taking place after the opening session were all oriented towards providing participants with practical tools and knowledge to fight poverty, understand its dynamics and promote dialogue among participants; the final aim was to generate a commitment to identify next steps towards the eradication of poverty in Ottawa, and specific tasks to follow up on. The workshops addressed issues pertaining to the various social groups, including youth, the elderly, persons with disabilities and indigenous peoples. Since poverty is both an economic and a social problem, it affects both individuals and the community.

Participating Organizations

The Coalition of Community Health and Resources Centres partnered with community members and community organizations through the Advisory Committee (see annex for list of Advisory Members). In particular, the Coalition benefited from the cooperation from the City of Ottawa, CAWI (City for all Women Initiative) and Family Services Ottawa.

Workshops / Kiosks

The Forum offered 14 workshops on different topics (advocacy, food security, microcredit, ODSP, among others); 25 information kiosks from agencies and grass roots organizations (Service Canada, Make Poverty History, CAWI, GAFC), and opportunities to network, share information and have group discussions.

Attendance

Overall, the Forum was very well attended (200 people registered). Participants included Councillors, front line workers, youth, immigrants, aboriginals, students, ODSP and OW recipients, as well as community members from Ottawa and surrounding areas. Because of space constraints, we had to refuse close to 100 people who wanted to register at the last minute. Space will be an important consideration for future planning, as we would have liked to accommodate all requests.

Location

Although the Nepean Sportsplex was a good venue for the forum, some participants travelling by bus would have preferred a more centralized location for this event. This is something to consider for future events.

RECOMMENDATIONS :

Forum participants were consulted on what actions should be taken to reduce the level of poverty in Ottawa in the next two years. This document highlights the main recommendations from the Anglophone and Francophone groups. More detailed notes from the discussion groups are included in this report.

Income and Employment

- Raise the minimum wage, OW/ODSP amounts to allow people to live above the poverty line
- End clawback of the National Child Benefit and of CPP dollars for people on ODPS
- Provide supports for people to go back to work
- Work to recognize skills and credentials of Newcomers
- Pressure Provincial and Federal governments to end downloading social programs to the city without proper funding.

Housing

- Make needed repairs and maintenance to existing social housing stock
- Increase available rent-geared-to-income housing and subsidies for individuals, families and seniors
- Provide better protection for tenants
- Offer more supports to people who are homeless due to mental health issues

Awareness of Poverty Issues

- Build better awareness of poverty in Ottawa in mainstream population. Poverty is everybody's problem
- Use modern means to reach people – web sites, video, media, You Tube, Facebook etc.
- Improve coordination and solidarity between community groups; connect with the University students who are fighting tuition hikes to the fight against poverty.
- Take advantage of living in National Capital area to access Federal Politicians and advocate for social justice
- Better inform low-income community on available resources

Community Advocacy

- Support the Poverty Issues Advisory Committee (PIAC) so that people on low-income can have a voice at City Hall. Continue building on what has been done in the past
- Support local initiatives proposed by communities; engage people on low-income in sharing skills and working together to improve conditions
- Look beyond income levels to celebrate the important contributions of all citizens
- Support each other and make our voices heard

Forum Steering Committee Co-chairs:

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