

Niagara Poverty Reduction Network (NPRN)
Wednesday, September 25, 2019
9am-11:30am, Niagara Catholic District School Board, Father Burns Room

Present: Glen Walker (Chair), Melenie Neamtz (Vice-Chair), Aidan Johnson, Brandon Agnew, Suzanne Veenstra, Natalie Chaumont, Deb Oglivie, Ron Walker, Krista Butters, Jackie Winger, Ryan Hilimoniuk, Marnie Lambie, Shideh Houshmandi, Melanie Wessel, Cassie Ogunniyi, Becky MacFadyen, Valerie Leitch, Pam Swick Janjac, Candice Stewart, Mary Wiley, Leslie Bellingham, Olivia Siebert, Jennifer Gauthier, Ashley Chiarello, Lori Kleinsmith, Michael Mondlock, Greg Shupe, Erin Walters, David Wyllie, Rachel Gillmore

Item	Discussion
Welcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The meeting minutes for May 29, 2019, were approved as written • The agenda was approved as written • Introductions around the table
Coordinating Committee Update	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current bank account holds \$5,158.67 • Reminder to complete membership renewal if you haven't already – NPRN has no membership fee, but donations to NPRN and the work of the Network are welcome • Recruitment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ We are looking for a Lead for the Social Assistance Table <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ You do not need to participate in the larger table, if you wanted to participate in a particular Priority Table instead ○ Members at Large roles are being added to the Coordinating Committee – Members at Large are not required to take lead of a Priority Table (as other Coordinating Committee members are), but to help support the work of NPRN and connect back to what is happening in the community • Voting in New Coordinating Committee Roles, 2020-2022 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ All roles acclaimed, as there was no competition <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Melenie Neamtz, Chair ▪ Aidan Johnson, Vice-Chair ▪ Brandon Agnew, Member at Large
Presentation	<p>Upcoming Federal Election: Ryan Hilimoniuk, Lead, Government Relations & Advocacy Priority Table</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus of group on upcoming election, after which they will be switching focus to ongoing consultation and advocacy with local elected officials • Social Media Survey Campaign – gathered feedback from people with lived experience of core issues related to poverty, helping to ensure the priority table has a focus that aligns with people's experience • An election toolkit and policy paper will be sent to NPRN members after today's meeting • Strategic role of nonprofits is to help facilitate civic engagement and provide information to those that we serve and provide support with accessing a ballot and election site (ID, vouching, transportation) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Encouraging people we work with and serve to understand their place in voting, and provide information regarding opinions around policies (e.g. helping people to use http://votecompass.com/)

- Elections Canada materials will also be sent out and can be printed and hung within your offices (e.g. Voter’s Checklist; Having ID; list of candidates running; when and where to vote)
- Roundtable Discussion regarding Elections
 - Barriers facing newcomers especially, include a lack of comfort with the democratic system (sometimes based on previous experience of corrupt governments), language barriers, etc. How do we make sure we include newcomers?
 - Suggestion that we include information from Folk Arts and Multicultural Centres/look to these organizations for resources
 - There are Elections Canada materials available in many languages, and presentations can be made by Elections Canada representatives if requested
 - Recognition that not all newcomers are eligible to vote, so there is information sharing needed for that issues as well
 - There is the possibility of using community and religious networks that are used frequently by newcomers to share information
 - Regarding those experiencing homelessness, there is often a feeling of being “let down” by the government
 - Difficult to engage in a conversation about being proactive due to the stress of the realities of living in poverty – hard to look at political fight when there is just a fight to survive – message we can share is that ‘if we sit and do nothing, then nothing will change’
 - This population tends to feel invisible and discarded so how do we encourage the thinking that “why would I vote if I’m not even a part of society”
 - Barriers to those living with low income, also include difficulty to leave work to vote
 - Elections Canada has all available information regarding any parties running and their platforms – worth us encouraging our community/clients to look for information beyond what the media provides
 - Vouching system – more information on Elections Canada, but can only vouch for one person that lives within your same voting station. ([CLICK HERE](#): found under “Policy Requirements - *How does an elector prove identity and residence?* – Option 3”
 - Age Friendly Network of Niagara put together candidates brief that is available online [HERE](#)
 - Difficulty to find non-partisan rides to polling station
 - If partisan rides are the only way to get people to polling station, it is still worth considering – especially with guidance from staff etc.
 - For people without ID, medical bracelets can count
 - Encourage connections with actual elected officials, e.g. monthly conversations happening in Queenston Community Group
 - Quest had drop-in information about how to access voting, as well as computers available to research platforms and policy – were able to engage quite a number of people engage and follow through
 - Also offered bus passes for polling
 - Had this set up in the Quest waiting room, to encourage engaging with elections
 - Suggestion other organizations might be able to do something similar
 - Suggestion that as we move forward we continue to think about barriers that exist for people and connect with NPRN about what we can do about it
 - Hoping to encourage NPRN members to act as liaisons with people, and to start conversations happening – just start somewhere, and every person engaged counts

<p>Presentation</p>	<p>Benefits, Credits, Services Presentation: Pearl Toy, Outreach Officer, Canadian Revenue Agency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child Benefit – Has been discussed that Ontario portion will be cut under the Ford government – this benefit is available for people who are non-status residents who need payment to help with child expenses (this is the only benefit available for non-status residents) • Applying for Disability Tax Credit (DTC) – important emphasis that the form needs to be filled out by a medical practitioner – it is the medical practitioner portion that is most important as the eligibility for the credit is based on the effects that an impairment has on a person, not on the medical condition itself <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If it costs the person applying to have a medical practitioner fill this form, that cost can be counted as a medical expense on their taxes ○ Not encouraged to put this in with tax returns – can take 16-18 weeks to process, and will delay the taxes being fully assessed thus a delay to all transfers and payments ○ After it is reviewed, a letter of determination will be sent with a date this is approved for (can be no end date, where no re-application is necessary); if end date, a letter will be sent reminding of re-application needed ○ More information can be requested of the medical practitioner ○ If there ever is a letter sent asking for more information, it is very important information be sent – if letter isn't answered, there will be no continued review or approval of DTC ○ DTC can be transferred to someone else, but the person that can receive the transfer needs to ask for a tax adjustment themselves ○ A copy of the application should be retained, for future reference. If the application is not approved, an objection can be filed (a more formal process). If still not approved, they can go to tax court. There is a 90 day time frame from the receipt of the disapproval letter. ○ If a condition changes, more information can be provided to CRA and an application can be reviewed ○ Key that an applicant and medical professional take time to fill out 'mandatory sections' to provide enough information – more information can be found HERE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There are also payment calculators you can use that are pretty accurate ○ Children can apply – the applicant of the parent claiming it (may be worth the parent who is the higher earner applying, but credit can be divided between parents) • Child Disability Benefit <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Can be transferred, can be used on own tax information, but after 18 they will not be eligible ○ If a child has been approved for CDB without end date, the benefit will continue as an adult benefit; if there is an end date, the child will have to reapply • GST/HST <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Newcomers have to apply, otherwise it is automatically assessed on your taxes ○ With common law or married partners, only one person per family will receive this • Working Income Tax Benefit <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Must fill out Schedule 6 (this will calculate amount of payment) ○ Can apply to receive 50% of their WITB in advance payments (separate form) ○ If they are also eligible for the disability tax credit, they may get a disability supplement
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Name of this payment is being changed to Working Tax Credit – at this point, you won't have to fill out Schedule 6 unless you have exempt status ● Calculator – Canada.ca/child-family-benefits-calculator ● Some companies are promoting that they can apply for the disability tax credit, but take portion – worth being wary of costs and what will be taken (can be % of all tax credits, including previous years adjustments) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Canadian government never endorses any company ● Remind clients that personal information needs to be kept up to date – especially address – if returned mail comes back, all payments will stop until information is updated ● Encourage that direct deposit is signed up for, can be set up online (My Account; My CRA) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ My account is set up through Service Canada – can see some information about their taxes ● You don't need a bank account to cash government accounts –all banks have to cash cheques up to \$150 ● Please contact the Outreach Program at the CRA for any additional information – Canada.ca/outreach-program ● Community Volunteer Income Tax Program <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ CRA partners with organizations to have volunteers do free tax returns for free for individuals with modest incomes and a simple tax situation ○ This serve runs all year round, with more clinics in tax season (Feb-Apr) ○ Can find locations of clinics at Canada.ca/taxes-help ○ If you'd like to become a participating organization, please contact Canada.ca/taxes-volunteer <p>If you would like more information about any tax credits and benefits, please contact Pearl Toy, Outreach Officer, at OUTREACH.ON.ST-CATHARINES@CRA-ARC.GC.CA</p>
<p>Task Group Updates</p>	<p>Affordable Housing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Next meeting, Friday Oct 4th at Hope Center ● Looking at rent stability – informing renters, and how NPRN can play a role in this <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Looking to work with the Region, Legal Clinic, and library system to provide workshops or information booths that provide information around rights as a renter, and what is available through the Region's affordable housing programs ○ Hoping this will help foster community conversations ● Also working with Government Relations group to raise the issue of core housing need to elected officials ● If you are interested in participating in this, please contact Rachel at info@wipeoutpoverty.ca or attend the next meeting <p>Business Engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Focusing on organizing Living Wage Employer event – recognizing Niagara LW employers and a guest that may be interested ● Have recently created a linked in page ● If you are interested in participating, please connect with Rachel or Melenie <p>Government Relations & Advocacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● See presentation above

Health Equity

- Have been supporting a local research group from McMaster called HEART project that looked into people with lived experience of homelessness and their experience of the health care system
- Out of this project saw recommendation was to provide more support, especially peer support
- Received various funding, including Ontario Trillium Foundation
- Funds are being used to create team of peer support workers that can provide direct ED support (general support, as well as advocating and system navigation, and connection with different community agencies) and Project Coordinator (in process of recruiting this position, after which will support peer support workers)
- Research component has been approved for the pilot project, and Steering Committee is in place – Steering Committee will take over the work that Health Equity has been done
- Work is starting in October in Niagara Falls, then rolling out to Welland, and possibly St. Catharines
- Also doing some work around the Mobile Health Screening bus as provincial funding has been cut – some work has been done for media campaign that will help share information about these cuts and the importance of keeping this program active
- We are now open to new tasks/projects, if you have ideas please or would like to attend the group, reach out to Rachel

Marketing & Communications

- Group met this week, working on developing social media awareness – group will be doing media posts related to particular days (e.g. National Housing Day, National Living Wage Week, etc.)
 - Will be relating poverty back to these particular themes
- Also starting to put together brochure for NPRN, based on updated Terms of Reference and Orientation documents we already have
- Looking into NPRN membership and membership expansion – have letter going out to a significant number of organizations that represent broader sectors
- Meeting again Oct. 21, at Positive Living

SARNN Fall Forum/Social Assistance

- Social Assistance Meeting will be scheduled shortly
- If you are interested, please connect with Rachel

Wages & Work

- Updating annual cost of living/living wage calculations – these are currently under review by the Ontario Living Wage Network
- Will be publicly released during Living Wage Week in November, 2019
- Reaching a milestone today, certifying 26th living wage employer with a total of +1000 employees now living wage employed in Niagara
- This table doesn't meet regularly, and instead on as needed basis as the foundation of the work has been laid at this point
- If you are interested in supporting living wage employers for your events, etc. you can see the Niagara list [HERE](#) and the Ontario list [HERE](#)
- Since May, have been engaged with a few municipalities – has been a bit complicated for some municipalities to bump up contract positions

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Have needed to see buy-in from staff and staff reporters to provide information to councils ● Please try to share living wage information shared through the wipe out poverty social media accounts <p><i>If you have someone in your organization that could contribute to the Tables, please feel free to link them to Rachel, even if they do not regularly attend the larger NPRN Roundtable meeting</i></p>
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Nov. 7th, PJ Shopping Party will be held at Seaway Mall, Welland– opportunity to gather pajamas for people in need <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Can connect with Pam Swick Janjac if you want more information ● Sept 30th is last day low income people who have been victims of violent crime can apply for Criminal Compensation Board <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ This compensation board has been cut by Ford government and will no longer exist ● Seniors Dental Care Program will be rolling out across province in early November <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Eligibility – 65+, income cut off is \$19,300 (single), \$32,300 (couple) – is below poverty line, but is in line with eligibility of Ontario Drug Benefit <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Proof by income tax through online application ▪ If they do not have income tax, there is a vouching system that can be accessed ○ Quest Community Health Centre and Niagara College will be sites, as they have the full equipment necessary (preventative and restorative clinic) ○ Program will not be delivered in private dental offices – there will be outreach navigator roles to help assist in accessing these services ○ More information will be provided at November meeting, when program will be running ● Regional Council passed joining Coalition of Inclusive Communities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ More information should come out ○ Looking to create diversity and inclusion action plan
Reminders	<p>Please mark your calendar for the next meetings: 9:00-11:30 a.m. @NCDSB Offices 427 Rice Rd. Welland</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Wednesday, November 27, 2019 ● Wednesday, January 22, 2020 (location TBD) ● Wednesday, March 25, 2020 ● Wednesday, May 27, 2020 ● Wednesday, September 23, 2020 ● Wednesday, November 25, 2020 <p>Transportation assistance available upon request: Contact Rachel Gillmore for more information, info@wipeoutpoverty.ca</p>