

Niagara Poverty Reduction Network (NPRN)

Wednesday, May 27, 2020

9am-11:30am, Virtual via Zoom

In Attendance:

Jennifer Gauthier, Aidan Johnson, Ashley Chiarello, Ashley Pollock, Becky Western-Macfayden, Bernie Slepko, Brandon Agnew, Carole Wallwork, Catherine Livingston, Chris Clarke, Claudia Calabro, Dave Wyllie, Eden Ewert, Erin Walters, Glen Walker, Jennifer Rockingham, Jennifer Sinclair, Joan Christensen, JoAnne Krick, Josiah Piatt, Julie Gregory, Kate Alexander, Kim O'Rourke, Krista Butters, Laryssa Smith, Laura Martin, Marc Todd, Marnie, Maurice, Maya Mercier, Melanie Wessel, Michael Mondloch, Missy, Natalie Chaumont, Ron Walker, Ryan Hilimoniuk, Sandra Lampman, Sarah Pritula, Shideh Houshmandi, Spencer Wyllie, Suzanne Veenstra, Tamara Coleman-Lawrie, Thomas Coyne, Ursula Hudson, Vicki Doidge, Sharlene Volpatti, Zainab Awad, Emily Kovacs, Laura Juras, Karen Fraser

Item	Discussion
Welcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The meeting minutes for January 22, 2020 were approved as written • The agenda was approved as written • Introductions, Mindfulness Minute, Land Acknowledgement
Coordinating Committee Update	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current bank account holds \$4,467.11 • 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 • As part of our work, we need further engagement on our Priority Tables from our Roundtable members, if you have questions or are interested in an issue, please talk to Rachel <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If there is an area of interest that you think you would be able to help with, we are happy to have conversations with your organization/community leaders whenever there is a good fit • New Coordinating Committee Role <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Vicki Doidge, Lead of the Social Assistance Priority Table • Strategic Planning Update – NPRN received a \$4000 Community Grant from the Niagara Community Foundation to complete strategic planning for the network. The Coordinating Committee has also approved a \$1000 addition to this overall budget. A quick note, this additional \$1000 has not yet been removed from our accounts, thus our current bank account balance does not reflect the deduction. • The Marketing & Coordinating Committee has been working to rebrand and update our current website. Stay tuned for more information, but the change in color on the Agenda (yellow logo to purple logo) is a sneak peek!
Updates from NPRN Priority Tables <i>Please see slides for full information</i>	Affordable Housing: Ashley Chiarello, Lead <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Renting in Niagara Info Sessions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Two sessions postponed due to COVID – will be rescheduled when possible ○ Intended to reach tenants and those supporting them to increase awareness of tenant's rights and responsibilities ○ Please see slide deck for common themes that came from sessions • Housing Stability & Recent Advocacy

- We are focusing on work related to housing stability and advocacy for renters during COVID, and acknowledge the trying times ahead once evictions are possible/Landlord Tenant Board hearings begin again
- We are trying to work towards building an understanding of what people are experiencing related to housing during COVID – please forward stories or information you may have about issues you are seeing in your work to [Ashley](#), Lead of Affordable Housing

Business Engagement: Kim O'Rourke, Lead

- Please see slides

Government Relations & Advocacy: Ryan Hilimoniuk, Lead

- Primarily focused on development and submission to the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy
- Coordinating Committee government advocacy has been focused on the gaps of the Canadian Emergency Relief Benefit (CERB) and rent moratoriums during the pandemic

Health Equity: Erin Walters, Lead

- COVID-19 has further highlighted issues in Long Term Care facilities
- Health Equity has connected with the Ontario Health Coalition (OHC), a provincial advocacy group, regarding advocacy for changes to Long Term Care
- NPRN has signed on to a letter from OHC that calls for a public inquiry into Long Term Care
- If you would like more information, or for your organization to also sign on, please connect with [Rachel](#) for more information
- Health Equity has also engaged in advocacy regarding increased dispensing fees during the pandemic, as pharmacies are required to dispense only one month's worth of medication at a time. This has put strain on budgets for people living on a low income

Marketing & Communications: Tamara Coleman-Lawrie, Lead

- Please see slides

Social Assistance: Vicki Doidge, Lead

- Next meeting to be held on June 18th, 1:30-2:30pm. Please connect with [Rachel](#) if you are not signed up to the group, but would like to attend
- Slides presented provide some information from Social Assistance at Niagara Region, with updates to Social Assistance during COVID-19
- The first meeting of this table was held in January, and focused largely on transitions happening to Employment Ontario under the Ford Government
- Currently, the table is more focused on issues related to COVID-19, as employment services changes have been paused
- FYI: Social Assistance offices are all closed to the public, but appoints are occurring via telephone, and people are able to connect with staff as usual
- In general, the Region is seeing Social Assistance intake rates decline, as people are applying for CERB over OW

Wages & Work: Lori Kleinsmith, Lead

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This priority table works to annually determine our local living wage in accordance with procedures from the Ontario Living Wage Network – currently our living wage is at \$18.12/hour • Locally, we are working to connect with businesses that have become Living Wage Certified, present certificates, and prepare media releases on behalf of NPRN to announce the certification to the community • New certification presentations will be happening shortly – a local cleaning company and the Niagara Community Legal Clinic to be announced • We are currently at ~38 living wage employers in Niagara <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>
<p>Community Updates</p>	<p>Niagara Community Legal Clinic: <i>Aidan Johnson, Executive Director, Niagara Community Legal Clinic</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Please refer people currently experiencing evictions to the Legal Clinic • There is a general anticipation of chaos when the Landlord and Tenant Board opens up post-COVID. There was a bottleneck of services prior to the pandemic, but we are anticipating this will become much works post-COVID as complaints from tenants and landlords continue to add up • For the 3rd month in a row, NPRN is releasing a media release for a moratorium on rent, to advocate for people struggling to currently pay rent due to COVID. <p>COVID-19 Emergency Community Support Fund – United Way Niagara & Niagara Community Foundation: <i>Tamara Coleman-Lawrie, Director, Community Impact, United Way & Joanne Krick, Manager of Community Initiatives, Niagara Community Foundation</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fund provides financial support to charities and other qualified candidates adapting their frontline services to support vulnerable Canadians during the pandemic • The Red Cross is also funding, and in some cases, may be a better fit to your needs as a funder, please refer to the infographic in slide deck to help you determine who best to apply through, or click HERE to view online via Canadian Red Cross • Please reach out to Tamara and/or JoAnne if you have questions and they can help advise who the best fit is to apply for <p>OCASI/Atkinson Emergency Fund: <i>Emily Kovacs, Executive Director, Niagara Folk Arts Multicultural Centre</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purpose of the fund is to provide emergency relief to people with precarious immigration status who cannot work legally in Canada, and have no financial support • With funding released from Atkinson Foundation, have already gone through most of funding. Will be working with Atkinson Foundation to pursue more funding – have issued \$250-400/person and have worked with 35+ people • Have worked with other agencies locally to help direct people in need to the fund • Please connect with Zainab Awad from Niagara Folk Arts Multicultural Centre if you have a referral for someone that may qualify for this fund
<p>Questions & Chat Box Follow Up</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upcoming changes due to employment services for Niagara-Hamilton contract moving to Fedcap Inc. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Fedcap has begun to take over contracts ○ Cannot make changes to system until September

- Things have been delayed during pandemic
- Expecting significant changes, but happening slowly during COVID
- Reports that some people receiving social assistance are accessing CERB easily, and others are not.
 - Can call discretionary team directly rather than go directly through workers
 - If worker is telling someone they aren't qualified, connect with discretionary team
 - OW clients can contact the Discretionary Team to request at 905-641-9960 ext. 6072 or by registering at <https://owbenefits.niagararegion.ca> and submit their application online
- Question about non-medical mask availability
 - Some businesses are requiring patrons to be masked – is there access locally to masks for low income people?
 - Positive Living has approached their volunteers to see if they can make some masks to be distributed to their clients – this may be an option for other agencies/organizations that have access to volunteer support
 - Positive Living also has extra face shields and goggles – please connect with [Glen Walker](#) to access these
 - Can connect with [Kim O'Rourke](#) from Niagara Folk Arts Multicultural Centre for resource material regarding companies/individuals donating masks
 - Connect with [CareMongering-Niagara on Facebook](#)
- Announcement that [Elementary Teacher's Federation of Ontario \(ETFO\) – Niagara Local](#) will be donating \$1000 to NPRN
- [Ontario Campaign 2000](#), is part of the broader national [Campaign 2000](#), and is working to eliminate child and family poverty
 - A lot of the material presented today relates heavily to this work – especially that related to gaps in CERB and for people who do not have access to tax system
 - [Claudia Calabro](#) with Campaign 2000 is happy to connect with anyone who would like to think of how to work on a broader/provincial scale
- Lived Experience Action Network (LEAN)
 - Invitation to participate in LEAN meetings. If you are interested, please connect with [Brandon Agnew](#).
 - Group speaks around how poverty impacts life for those living in it
- \$15 and Fairness Campaign
 - May 21st national action around paid sick days – Federal government is now working with provinces to create 10 paid sick days for all workers
 - June 19th, national campaign advocating for workers on the periphery (e.g. non-status workers)
- Folk Arts in partnership with YMCA, Niagara Workforce Planning, and Welland Heritage Council
 - Working on initiative to fast track internationally educated health professionals (people awaiting accreditation in Canada) – this group is facing barriers to enter into their field of work
 - Working on a policy level to advocate for more support and pathways to accreditation (e.g. bursaries to individuals and to hosting agencies)
 - Are seeing some traction at a political and policy level
 - In Niagara, have approx. 74 individuals that fit this criteria – ready and willing to support Niagara, but awaiting accreditation

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ If you have anyone that fits this criteria (i.e. received accreditation outside of Canada and want to enter the health field in Canada) connect with Niagara Folk Arts Multicultural Centre or other listed partners for more information● Upcoming webinar with Niagara Suicide Prevention Coalition<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ June 11th – Please register HERE
Reminders	<p>Please mark your calendar for the next <i>virtual</i> meetings: 9:00-10:30 a.m.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Wednesday, July 16, 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> <p>If you are looking for information about NPRN, please make sure to visit our website! www.wipeoutpoverty.ca</p> <p>As well, please be sure to follow us on social media for the most up to date information! Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/NiagaraPovertyReductionNetwork Twitter: https://twitter.com/wipeoutpoverty</p>