

Niagara Poverty Reduction Network

Wednesday, July 22, 2020

9:00 am to 10:30 am

Virtual Meeting

In Attendance: Jennifer Gauthier, Aidan Johnson, Ashley Chiarello, Erin Walters, Joan Wiley, Marnie Lambie, Tamara Coleman-Lawrie, Sandra Lampman, Ryan Hilimoniuk, Mary Wiley, Marc Todd, Laura Martin, Jon Braithwaite, Daniella Liebrechts-Hamilton, Krista Butters, Michael Mondloch, Glen Walker, Melenie Wessel, Thomas Coyne, Olivia Siebert, Natalie Chaumont, Jennifer Spear, Cassie Ogunniyi, Becky Western-MacFadyen, Mishka Balsom, Claudia Calabro, Lori Kleinsmith, Jennifer Pugsley, Leslie Bellingham, Ursula Hudson, Cheryl Kincaid, Christopher Walsh, Dave Wyllie, Sharlene Volpatti, Vicki Doidge, Valerie Leitch, Terri Bruce, Sarah Fraser, Sally Herod, Maya Mercier, Laryssa Smith, Kim O'Rourke, Gracia Janes, Greg Shupe, Angela Brown, Anne Watters, Rachel Gillmore

1. Welcome, Mindfulness Minute & Land Acknowledgement

- Minutes from May 27, 2020 and Agenda approved

2. Strategic Planning Update: Jennifer Spear, CleanSlate Strategies

- Process of Strategic Planning
 - Will be reaching out to membership and other community stakeholders with survey
 - With information from Survey, and Coordinating Committee focus groups, we will develop first draft of strategic plan
 - Process designed to allow input from a large group of people. The small group that makes up the Strategic Planning Steering Committee is there only to analyze the data that comes in
 - This plan will help promote decision making processes for NPRN
- Question: Would the survey be done with people who have lived experience?
This will happen through community members but we unfortunately don't have the resources to do extensive focus groups as a separate data collection process
- If you have more questions, please reach out to [Rachel](#)

3. Niagara Prosperity Initiative Evaluation Research Project Update: Chris Walsh, Brock University

- Evaluation has entered writing stage – primary data collection phase has been completed
- COVID-19 has caused some disruptions to timelines, but still planning to be finished by December, with report released in January
- Trying to pack as much data into report as possible, so that they can create some broad strokes suggestions for poverty reduction in Niagara, tweaks to the NPI project, and for the report to be widely useful for community organizations across the region
- Happy to have community input – any interest in providing input, please contact Chris
- Planning to write strategy section in September, and start community consultations in October and November
 - Planning to connect with NPRN to have feedback on report before it is released
- For more information, visit: <https://brocku.ca/npi-evaluation/>
- Any questions or comments, please contact [Chris Walsh](#) – cwalsh3@brocku.ca

4. Community Update 1 – Health Equity During COVID-19: Cassie Ogunniyi, Niagara Region Public Health

- Have put together call center to have questions answered, and for people to access testing as needed while testing centers were setup; also created dedicated phone line for primary care providers, translators available, expanded office hours, new website and chat function
- Two main assessment centers opened, but South Niagara was not as well served by this. Worked with primary care provider in Fort Erie to set up testing centers there. Also set up site in Welland
- Set up at home testing via EMS for people who cannot leave their homes for testing (e.g. people needing to go into long term care). Have completed 500 assessments total
- Have worked with all levels of government to advocate for better conditions and safety for PSWs
- Have worked with homeless shelters – setting up staffing and isolation shelters for people staying in shelter, also to help provide medical staff
- Have worked more recently with migrant agricultural workers
 - Provided translation services – if you are looking for help with this, please contact [Cassie](#)
 - Quest Community Health Centre has expanded coverage to provide more healthcare supports to workers
 - Approximately 250 farms, with 4000 workers are being served, and Quest has provided care for about 500 of those workers in past years – Quest has received additional funding to provide increase access for migrant workers
 - Have set up stakeholder group to help provide culturally sensitive supports (e.g. legal needs, spirituality, and other advocacy opportunities)
- Family health team provided prenatal and postnatal support for vulnerable people – currently have waiting list for this due to nurses being redeployed in pandemic
- Continued to provide sexual health information, testing, and vaccinations
- Mental health team has continued – have moved virtually, but still providing some in person supports
- Analyzing Ontario Marginalization data- COVID impacting people who are living in poverty, and for marginalized groups – early data shows similar outcomes for Niagara
- Chat Question: How do people access the EMS/at home COVID testing?
Call into the call center and you will be provided with instruction
- Chat Question: is there data that relates income source (e.g. ODSP and OW) to COVID rates?
Not that we are aware of, but would be interesting!

5. Coordinating Committee Update

- Request for the Regional Council to officially lobby the official government to instate basic income pilot projects, and that Niagara is a great community for this
- See NPRN's Letter to Council here: https://12e537f2-590e-b160-f334-1b0438a32212.filesusr.com/ugd/8ea78d_e1a6414e4376491b93fcb704555aba41.pdf
- There is interest in convening a Basic Income Priority Table. If you would like to join or **lead** this table, please connect with [Rachel](#)

6. Priority Table Updates

- Health Equity
 - Originally working toward advocating to provide PPE etc. as pandemic started
 - Now are highlighting underpinning issues related to long term care, and to collect data related to what long term care in Niagara looks like
 - Especially interest in how LTC relates to income and accessibility to quality care

- Also looking at pandemic fallout regarding mental health, including advocacy related to affordability of mental health supports
- Affordable Housing
 - Early COVID advocacy related to tenant support and protection, especially with changes to Landlord Tenant board due to Bill 1184
 - Bill 184 has been made into law and is retroactive to March 17
 - Affordable Housing raised concern to political representatives, especially related to imbalances of power and access to justice
 - If you are interested in doing work regarding advocacy related to Affordable Housing, please reach out to Rachel or Ashley
- Business Engagement
 - Developing ways to promote living wage businesses
 - Researching and connecting with current business groups, working to provide resources to business relating to COVID-19
 - Still focusing heavily on living wage and its benefits
- Government Relations & Advocacy
 - Advocacy work has been completed at Coordinating Committee level, including: calls for continued rent moratoriums due to COVID-19; Tenant rights in context of Bill 184; Considerations on Basic Income into NPRN advocacy
 - Hoping to reengage people in this work, beginning in September
 - Asking membership to reach out to [Ryan](#) or [Rachel](#) with stories of what is happening on the ground, and major issues that are presenting as related to poverty reduction
- Marketing
 - Updating website
 - Continue to work on social media graphics and posts, as related to poverty issues and how we might advocate for change
 - Working on updating NPRN brochure and speakers bureau
- Social Assistance
 - Intake is not up, due to collection of Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (CERB)
 - Employment services have been privatized, and people are reporting mixed experiences. This will be a major focus of the group, especially as CERB ends
 - Income reporting rules apply to how CERB is treated – thus people will not be able to access Ontario Works (OW) the last month of their CERB payment (E.g. get CERB in August, but wouldn't qualify for OW in September due to CERB being counted as income)
 - Letters have been sent to OW clients to remind them of this, and ask them to plan carefully with funds
 - October will be first month where we first see people who no longer qualify for CERB and will have to apply for OW. Anticipating large intake influx at that time
- Work and Wages
 - This table does not meet at regular intervals, but instead focuses on annual recalculation of living wage, and liaising with Ontario Living Wage Network
 - Niagara Community Legal Clinic and Inspire Clean as newest certifications, but have seen less interest during pandemic
 - No new calculation will happen for 2020, due to pandemic

7. Community Update 2 – Niagara Community Legal Clinic: Aidan Johnson, Niagara Community Legal Clinic

- Evictions have been implemented during pandemic only in extraordinary circumstances, however moratorium is about to be lifted
- Bill 184, *Protecting Tenants and Strengthening Community Housing Act*
 - Sweeping bill: modifies *Building Code*, absorbs Ontario Mortgage and Housing Corp. into the Crown, amends social housing policy and makes it easier for landlords to evict tenants under the *Residential Tenancies Act*
 - One good thing, it disincentivizes re-evictions, and higher fines for landlords who evict in bad faith
 - Concerns: landlords will be willing to pay fine to go through with bad faith evictions, permits payment agreements through unspecified mediation processes
 - Worried that coercive conversations will be pitched as ‘alternative mediation process’
 - These adjustments circumvent the landlord tenant board
 - Also, if a tenant does not upkeep repayment agreement, tenants can be coerced into signing repayment agreements that disallow a return to the landlord tenant board for another round of mediation
 - Watering down of tenant rights, and legal clinic is bracing itself for what landlord tenant boards will be like
- As you encounter people who could use the help of legal clinic, please ensure you refer people to legal clinic
- Chat: Is bill 184 retroactively applied?
No. If entered into agreement before 184 that is your agreement
- Chat: Does anyone have voting numbers for Bill 184?
No.

8. Question & Chat Box Follow Up:

- Given that the utility relief program (NEEF) has been retroactively shifted to biennial access, those who received support in 2019 will be ineligible this year. Are you aware of discretionary funds that will be available for those who will be impacted?
 - No answer at this time

9. Adjournment

Next Meetings: Wednesday, September 16, 2020	9-10:30 a.m.	<i>online</i>
Wednesday, November 25, 2020	9-10:30 a.m.	<i>online</i>