

Meeting Minutes
Niagara Poverty Reduction Network
Wednesday, November 25, 2020
9:00 am to 10:30 am
Virtual Meeting

In Attendance: Aidan Johnson (Chair), Jennifer Spear, Anne Watters, Antonio DeGiorgio, Ashley Chiarello, Becky Western-Macfadyen, Brad Gillap, Carolyn Fish, Cassie Ogunniyi, Catherine Livingstone, Daniella Liebrechts, Dave Wyllie, Deanna Vilella, Donna Woiceshyn, Erin Graybiel, Erin Walters, Glen Walker, Helen Castonguay, Jeffrey Sinclair, Jennifer Spear, JoAnne Krick, Judy White, Julie Gregory, Kim O'Rourke, Laura Martin, Lianne Wyatt, Lori Kleinsmith, Marc Todd, Mark Newman, Mary Wiley, Maurice Prindiville, M Feagan, Maxine Hutchings, Michael Mondloch, Melenie Wessel, Natalie Chaumont, Rachel Gillmore, Robert Walker, Sally Herod, Scott Neufeld, Shanza Khan, Sharlene Volpatti, Susan Mifsud, Tamara Coleman-Lawrie, Tasha Verkerk, Ursula Hudson, Valerie Leitch, Vicki Doidge,

1. Welcome, Mindfulness Minute & Land Acknowledgement

- Minutes from September 16, 2020 and Agenda approved

2. Coordinating Committee Update

Bank account: \$4,697.14

- NPRN's Vision and Mission
 - Vision:** All Niagara residents live above the poverty line
 - Mission:** Niagara residents, businesses and organizations working together to improve the quality of life in Niagara.
- REMINDER: Are you a signed member of NPRN? If you aren't, and you would like to become an official NPRN member, you can get a copy from [Rachel](#)
- Priority Table Recruitment & Other Opportunities to Get Involved – Are you a member of one of our Priority Tables? We are always looking for more membership in these groups. If you are interested or would like to learn more about a particular Table, please feel free to connect with any Coordinating Committee member or the Convener.
- Honorary Membership Dues - A reminder that if your organization has extra funds, you are always able to support NPRN by providing a volunteer membership due. That is how we've been able to maintain a bank balance. If you would like more information about this, connect with Rachel or Aidan.
- The Coordinating Committee is working towards developing a new strategic plan for NPRN. Currently, a small Steering Committee has been formed to help information gather before the Coordinating Committee can begin setting strategic directions.
- Next steps for strat planning are a survey consultation with our membership! This will provide us with as much community information as possible to help direct our next goals and priorities. Once data is collected, we will compile a plan of action alongside the Coordinating Committee, which will come to the Roundtable for approval. It is vital that we hear your voice! Please watch your inbox for the survey in early October, and take the time to complete it

3. NPRN Strategic Planning Process Update: Jennifer Spear, Clean Slate Strategies

- Had a good response to our survey – 20% of the list serve (~75 people)
- Only 11 people responded as not knowing who NPRN was; majority of responses were from people connected to the network
- Clear articulation that there are limited resources and NPRN has a limited capacity, so we need to focus in on key issues
- Coordinating Committee went over data, and have provided information to Strategic Planning Steering Committee to help outline the high level tactics and focus of the strategic plan
 - Once drafted, the strategic plan will be brought to the roundtable for approval

- After approved, the Coordinating Committee and each Priority Table will work to develop workplans/next steps for each table based on the overarching strategic plan

4. Priority Table Updates

Affordable Housing

- Meeting on 4th Tuesday of every month – if you'd like to join reach out to [Rachel](#)
- Looking at what affordable housing looks like in Niagara, who is experiencing it, and improving access to it
- Had focused on education series that was held at libraries in partnership with legal clinic – likely that in coming months we will do this again, especially considering changes to tenant rights and how to access supports
- Working with the Performing Arts Center and the group to decide how to get the information that came out of the Push-The Film screening and panel out to the larger community
 - 87 people joined live for the Push-The Film live panel on November 22, which was National Housing Day

Business Engagement

- Meeting the third Thursday of each month, 3-4pm – next meeting on December 17th
- In process of updating materials relating to the Living Wage, and developing on a virtual package that can be shared with partners
- Looking to have annual Living Wage event in November for Living Wage Week
- Looking to build relationships with job developers, and to invite more currently certified living wage employers to the table

Government Relations & Advocacy

- Table has been on hiatus during strategic planning period
- Previously this table has worked to encourage voters to make an informed decision during election season, and works to promote NPRN's reports, position statements, etc.

Health Equity

- Looking into long term care and quality of care concerns coming up due to lack of funding and staffing in long term care facilities
- Group has realigned to include other communal living situations (e.g. assisted living), and are looking to get a better sense of what these sites look like in Niagara
 - Looking into minimum standard of care campaigns and connecting with owners
- Mental Health and Addiction is a key topic, and many NPRN members concerned about this issue is clear through the strategic planning process
 - Looking into trends and patterns, and impacts of COVID

Marketing & Communications

- Still working on communications pieces – e.g. social media graphics and new website
- Have finalized brochure which will be available in an electronic format online
- Updating Speakers Bureau presentation, and hope to launch this project in the near future
- Will be working with Ashley and Affordable Housing table to help promote PUSH-The Film screening

Social Assistance

- Strong interest in focusing on advocacy re: Basic Income, and at looking at changes to OW/ODSP and digitization/digital access for recipients (e.g. My Benefits online requiring individuals to have access to technology to access their file and information)
- Planning to meet in end of January

Wages & Work

- Table is transitioning to an Advisory Committee, with a focus on releasing and updating the Cost of Living and Living Wage calculations and reports annually

- Living Wage updates:
 - Have had 5 new employers certified since last roundtable – now have certified 44 employers across Niagara
 - GFL Environmental Inc. received contract for waste management in Niagara
- Expecting higher numbers once COVID subsidies
- Seeing interest from City of St. Catharines to become living wage employer
- Living wage not being updates for 2020, but not slowing down Niagara applicants

5. Housing & Homelessness Action Plan Update: Jeffrey Sinclair, Homelessness Action Plan Advisory, Niagara Region, and Donna Woiceshyn, CEO, Niagara Regional Housing

- Worked with older adults, indigenous services and other key informant groups through community consultations while constructing this plan
- This is a strategic document for how communities at municipal and regional level to address/end homelessness and increase access to affordable housing
- Niagara Regional Housing is service manager for affordable housing
- Have been able to move ahead during COVID, and has pushed us for increased efficiency
- 4 goals in Action Plan :
- Goal 1:
 - Now have 4 agencies delivering outreach services in Region – 1 team that works across all municipalities and can be accessed through 211; Niagara Assertive Outreach Team
 - The Raft providing youth component, and City of St. Catharines providing 2 St. Catharines specific workers
 - REACH providing digital primary care for people in encampments
 - Have been mapping encampments to mobilize services and help those individuals
 - Have opened isolation shelter in March, providing space for those experiencing homelessness self-isolate if experiencing COVID symptoms
 - Housing focused shelter pilot, looking to move people with high needs out of shelter – this is part of the Bridge Housing project in Niagara Falls
 - Through the work of Built for Zero, as of November, have quality ByName list that lists all individuals experiencing homelessness (particularly those experiencing chronic homelessness of 6 months or more), helps provide specific care
 - Aiming by end of 2021 to have 20% reduction in homelessness
- Goal 2:
 - Working with team to provide eviction prevention for those in community housing
 - Niagara Renovates – helps people with disabilities and need to upgrade their unit to stay housed, can access renovations – also for older adults helping them to stay in their homes
 - Expansion of shelter diversion programs – looking to explore other options before people going to shelter – have seen 35% diversion of youth, and about 10% diversion of adults
- Goal 3:
 - Seeing many landlords leaving contracts after a tenant leaves, and moving the unit to market rent
 - Working to provide rent geared to income units for those that qualify, so as to keep the individual within their current unit and move them off the waitlist
 - COHB is paying RGI for people who qualify, and moving people off waitlist – this is largely graduating people out of the shelter system
 - Through these programs, we are seeing a surplus in rent supplements, but there is nowhere for people to move to, which points to the need for more medium market units for people to move into
 - New Official Plan to be completed next year
- Goal 4
 - Largely looking at increasing capacity through partnership building
 - E.g. looking at sharing data
 - Looking at moving NRH back under umbrella of Niagara Region

- Have been surprised by requests from private sector developers looking to be part of solution – working to ensure that policies and incentives support the private sector as well

6. Questions & Chat Box Follow Up:

- How does NRH address the inherent conflict between Eviction Prevention and being the landlord?
 - If NRH was going to evict someone, it would create issues on shelter side. NRH tries to work with tenants to have them continue their housing – most of time evictions are due to arrears, or not connecting back/completing paperwork
 - Try to work with tenants to maintain their housing, only look to evict especially with dangerous or bad behavior
 - Have additional 2 staff to support this to prevent evictions
- All these programs are great BUT are they actually shortening the waiting list in Niagara of 12 to 18 years
 - Economy controls waitlist, and unfortunately with current economy, the waitlist is growing
 - The programs are growing, and have been able to move people off waitlist, but at the same time the waitlist is growing
 - Rent Supplement works by having landlord come forward, and would go into agreement with tenant and landlord
 - Having difficult time finding units for this program, and being able to use rent subsidies due to the price of units (exceeds the max amount offered through the program)
- Re: homelessness. When/how will the process of accessing Niagara assertive street outreach via 211 go out to all Service Providers and the general public?
 - The service is currently available through 211 in public – have discussed via media and have seen some good coverage of work with encampments
- PUSH identified significant external factors that threaten affordable housing (e.g., monetization of housing). Who addresses this?
 - We know this isn't the responsibility of the Region, but how do we address this impact on our region
 - Needs to happen at provincial and federal level to stop investments via real estate, and to help better support the middle market
- NRH Rent supplement program is facing same struggle as current renters, landlords want to move them out to bring in new tenants at higher rent, there needs to be some advocacy or regulations on this
 - There are some measures being put in place from provincial government, but renovations are becoming increasingly problematic – tough market, seeing many rent suppliers in Niagara leaving for market units
 - Aware that even with subsidies provided, OW does not provide enough money to afford any units – an area of significant advocacy
 - We are seeing the same concern right across the board even for those on OAS/ CPP - no one can really afford the current rents
 - Agreement that this is a major issue – if this interests you, please consider joining our work at the Affordable Housing Table
- We are noticing the lack of access to technology is a disaster, even in terms of the Landlord Tenant Board. How do we break the digital divide and bring access to everyone?
 - This is an issue being flagged across Priority Tables, but especially at the Social Assistance Table
 - If you are working with people that are struggling to maintain housing due to lack of access to technology, work is being done by the John Howard Society, and various local libraries (e.g. Welland Public Library) to book private spaces so that people are able to attend online hearings
 - Connect with Deanna Villella from John Howard Society, or Daniella Liebrechts from Welland Public Library (dliebrechts@wellandlibrary.ca) for more information

Next meetings: Wednesday, January 27, 2021 9-10:30 a.m. *online*
Wednesday, March 24, 2021 9-10:30 a.m. *online*
Wednesday, May 26, 2021 9-10:30 a.m. *online*
Wednesday, September 22, 2021 9-10:30 a.m. *online*
Wednesday, November 24, 2021 9-10:30 a.m. *online*