

**Meeting Minutes**  
**Niagara Poverty Reduction Network**  
Wednesday, January 27, 2021  
9:00 am to 10:30 am  
**Virtual Meeting**

**In Attendance:** Aidan Johnson (Chair), Jennifer Gauthier (Vice-Chair), Brandon Agnew, Ashley Chiarello, Becky Western-Macfadyen, Carolyn Fish, Maya Mercier, Cheryl Kincaid, Dave Wyllie, Deanna Vilella, Erin Walters, Erin Graybiel, Glen Walker, Gracia Janes, Helen Castonguay, Holly Anderson, Janice, Joanne Gray, JoAnne Krick, Judy White, Kim O'Rourke, Laura Ciccone, Laura Martin, Lindsay Garofalo, Lori Kleinsmith, Marc Todd, Mary Wiley, Matthew Corbeil, Maxine Hutchings, Melissa Naso, Michael Mondloch, Natalie Chaumont, Natalie Vieno, Pam Sharp, Sandra, Sarah Burtch, Sharlene Volpatti, Tamara Coleman-Lawrie, Terri Bruce, Wendy Thompson, Ursula Hudson, Valerie Leitch, Melanie Mason, Christina Thomas, Daniella Liebrechts-Hamilton, Mark Newman, Claudia Calabro, Robert Walker, Rachel Gillmore

### 1. Welcome, Mindfulness Minute & Land Acknowledgement

- Minutes from November 25, 2020 and Agenda approved

### 2. Coordinating Committee Update

- Bank account: \$4,602.04
- **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: It's that time of year again! We are renewing memberships for the next two years (January 2021-December 2022). Watch your inbox – Rachel will be sending out a copy of the membership form to our subscribers. Please complete and return. For ease, feel free to provide a digital signature by typing your name in the signature section.
- 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](#).

### 3. Public Health COVID-Response Update

- January 22, Dr. Hirji presented a COVID summary for Niagara
  - You can access this presentation here - <https://www.youtube.com/embed/GpJDKwfkGY?rel=0&autoplay=1>
- There are 4 known variants as of one week ago – identified in UK, South Africa, Brazil, Denmark and California
  - There are 23 variant cases identified in Canada
  - There will be ramped up effort to track and identify variant cases
- Looks like Ontario lockdown order has had promising results, however Southern Ontario is still a hot spot
  - Niagara itself looks stable and testing is helpful
- School age (under 13, and 14-17) are contributing toward spread right now – important consideration re: decisions about our education system
- Vaccine rollout
  - Started in Ontario December 17
  - Niagara received vaccines on Jan 13; within 9 days we successfully vaccinated 100% of the 32 Long Term Care homes

- Dr. Hirji did recognize equity issues related to vaccine rollout
- Public Health has taken an active roll at provincial levels to note inequities, and that vaccines are distributed to the most in need people first
- For Niagara, prioritized populations may shift with any unforeseen circumstances or shifts in outbreaks
- Completing onsite data entry as part of vaccine

#### Questions:

- Is there any data about what portion of population are willing to receive the vaccine?
  - Dr. Hirji notes in his presentation to the Region that just looking at eligible residents in LTC home, assisted living and retirement homes, there is a high interest in receiving the vaccine
  - Data across general population isn't available
  - We have of course seen a lot of misinformation and denial during pandemic which will likely impact people's willingness
- Is there a conversation about how vaccines will get out to people who may not be able to get to clinics (e.g. people who are homeless)?
  - Task force includes Dr. Stobbe and Adrienne Jugley who both work with vulnerable and marginalized populations
  - Hopefully this representation will ensure people who are difficult to reach are considered in rollout plans
- How will tracking occur for people who receive the vaccine?
  - Database has been created to help navigate vaccination rollout, and collect Niagara specific data
  - A lot of people had a power of attorney in place in LTC homes, and there was a high percentage of people who chose to receive vaccines with enthusiasm

#### 4. NPRN Priority Tables

##### Affordable Housing

- Group continues to meet once monthly – fourth Tuesday of each month, 1-2pm
- Group is continuing working on tenant rights and responsibilities, particularly while there is an eviction pause, and after seeing changes to landlord and tenant board (decisions are being expedited)
- Looking at how to share accurate information out across network
- Looking at how to demonstrate housing crisis in Niagara through community experience and storytelling, while also using accurate data
  - E.g. looking at average market rent rates and that it is understated in the region
  - Looking at how this reality is experienced by people when trying to budget for food and childcare as well
- Point-in-Time (PiT) Count was only way of counting and understanding experience of homeless in Niagara before Niagara was Built for Zero community, next PiT Count occurring on Tuesday, March 23, 2021
  - Niagara is using the PiT Count as an opportunity to ensure the comprehensiveness of the Built for Zero by-name list of people experiencing homelessness
  - This year the count will be completed by agencies, rather than using volunteers, as a way to manage COVID
  - If you think your agency would like to participate, you can contact [Niagara's Assertive Street Outreach](#) team for more information

##### Business Engagement

- Meeting once monthly, third Thursday of each month from 3-4pm
- Continuing to work on developing Living Wage related materials to share with businesses/employers
- Outreaching to community partners, employers and business associations including different Chambers of Commerce) to present about the benefits of a living wage
- Working to develop an even for the next Living Wage Week – November 2021
- Have invited one Living Wage employer to join the table, and hoping that others will join us this year

##### Health Equity

- New Co-Chair – Sarah Burtch from Positive Living

- Group has been focusing on congregate living settings and assistive living homes
  - Working with affordable housing group to advocate regarding the supportive living bylaw, working to get the bylaw back on the radar and to have it passed in all municipalities
- Looking at developing webinar about rights of those living in these homes, and for a holistic approach that recognizes individual needs, traditions and perspectives of people residing in these homes
  - One audience for this would be caregivers and individuals in these homes
  - Other audience would be service providers
- Re: mental health and addictions
  - Looking for emerging trends, and for insights from the hospital emergency departments

#### Marketing & Communications

- Not meeting right now, but working on tasks individually
- Modernizing website, branding and content
- Have finalized new brochure
- Planning to wait for launch until after strategic planning
- If you would like to see different content on social media, please reach out to [Tamara](#) or [Rachel](#)

#### Social Assistance

- Meeting to be planned for February
- Having a conversation about Basic Income at next meeting, what work can be done, and developing a position statement on it for NPRN
- Social Assistance changes - Government beginning to launch changes under Fedcap, and changes to former Employment Ontario

#### Wages & Work

- Table has transitioned to an Advisory Committee, with Lori liaising between NPRN and Ontario Living Wage Network
- Have had 2 more employers sign on – Trusted Time Inc., and Robert Land Academy
- Preparing living wage certification recognition for 4 other employers
- City of St. Catharines is looking at becoming living wage employer
- We are local affiliate with OLWN, so best place to send people with questions is directly to <https://www.ontariolivingwage.ca/>

### 5. COVID-19 Discussion

#### ***\*Questions & Chat Box Follow Up are included below***

- Hoping that with the content generated by this conversation, we will be able to prepare a media release with information about how people in poverty are experiencing COVID-19
  - Credit Canada/Credit Counselling of Regional Niagara is reporting the top 3 trending topics: credit scores, where businesses can access support, and how people can cash RRSPs (potentially demonstrating people unable to access government support)
- Government Clawbacks
  - Seeing people who have received CERB and actually received overpayment thus are now receiving substantial clawbacks that limit their monthly income, reported by Positive Living and Bethlehem Housing and Support Services
  - Noticing trend that after clawbacks people don't have money to pay rent, and then their housing is being limited or becoming precarious
    - Working with Social Assistance to be creative and try to ensure housing portion of payment is kept intact
  - Family Service Toronto and Campaign 2000 are currently working on advocating for a national CERB repayment amnesty for people living on low incomes

- If you would like more information about this, or would like to talk about the impacts you are seeing of overpayment due to CERB ineligibility, please connect with Claudia, [claudiaca@familyservicetoronto.org](mailto:claudiaca@familyservicetoronto.org)
- Food Security
  - Seeing that people needing to access food resources is a challenge, and that food services are being tapped into by people that may not have typically used these services
  - NPRN does not have a Priority Table currently working on food security, but is liaising with the Niagara Food Security Network via Tamara.
    - If you would like more information about what the Niagara Food Security Network is doing or how to get involved, please connect with [Tamara](#)
- Access to Technology
  - Seeing people isolated and not able to access the technology they need
  - Difficulty with libraries being closed, and that people are unable to connect to Wi-Fi and thus access resources, services or social connections
  - Seeing similar issues within the justice system
    - John Howard seeing people unable to access services with justice system (court system has gone virtual) and clients are not able to connect in
  - Also seeing young people isolated within school system – people unable to access education
  - Niagara Regional Housing looking to advocate for access to affordable WiFi
    - Previously, mayors of various municipalities were asked to work with tech companies to offer low income residents access to affordable internet
    - Mayor Sendzik continuing advocacy on this issue
    - Now with isolated seniors, and with need for children to participate in school, it is an easier time to advocate for this
  - Seeing challenges with internet services having privacy, especially when children are home from school. This is a significant challenge for people who are living in families dealing with domestic violence
  - Seeing competency issues with technology – need to provide some training re: how to use the internet successfully
    - For seniors, there is training available via Cyber Seniors – [TECH CONNECT](#)
    - For Newcomers, Niagara Folk Arts Multicultural Centre has training for their ESL students to use their phones and computers for classes, and settlement services for Newcomers to access services they require during the pandemic
  - Niagara Community Legal Clinic
    - Has two technology rooms set up (one in Welland office, one in St. Catharines office) for people to use technology related to justice issues
    - With move toward moving the justice system online, there has not been adequate support for ensuring people can access what they need to ensure fair navigation of the justice system
    - Legal clinic arguing that there has to be a more coherent plan within justice system to ensure access for online hearings, otherwise it is a miscarriage of justice
    - Defend Disability just put out a letter about the erosion of the social justice tribunal - online hearings are a part of the problem - <https://defenddisability.files.wordpress.com/2021/01/dd-socialbenefittribunal-openletter-jan2021.pdf>
  - 211 is in the process of adding two questions to every caller - “do you have access to internet”, “are you comfortable using the internet”
  - Interesting article relating to this issue: <https://www.tv.org/article/is-the-landlord-and-tenant-boards-digital-first-approach-leaving-ontario-renters-behind>
- Job Loss
  - Community Care West Niagara (CCWN) witnessing uptake in people accessing services because of job loss
    - They are working on developing a survey for clients to gather further information about what is being experienced and what resources are needed. CCWN will share this when it becomes available
- Mental Health Struggles

- Seeing online access to mental health services online, but people are struggling to access technology
- Seeing group settings with online mental health outreach, and that people are not very comfortable in participating
- 211 reporting massive increase of number of callers in crisis
  - Mental health issues are presenting, with resistance to services
  - About 80% of people are calling highly agitated or upset
- Housing
  - Challenges for people to look for affordable housing with pandemic continuing, lockdowns, and stay at home orders
  - Affordable housing is often shared housing, which is also a challenge during COVID
  - Ontario Alliance to End Homelessness coalition, an outcrop of the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness continues to advocate on these issues - main organizer is Michelle Bilek, [michelle@caeh.ca](mailto:michelle@caeh.ca)
  - ACORN Canada continues to find new, effective ways to advocate for tenant rights and affordable, attainable housing in communities like ours. The great thing about their work is it is tenant-lead. <https://acorncanada.org/>
  - Regarding evictions –
    - Reports that there is an increase in landlords trying to wrongfully evict tenants, and tenants not knowing their rights/not realizing an eviction is unjust – the Affordable Housing Priority Table is working on this issue, and continues to see this brought forward by participants of the table
    - Premier Ford exercised 2-week moratorium on evictions, has been extended and is due to end February 9
    - Legal clinic looking at any way to prevent evictions and sheriff evoked evictions, and is advocating for continuation of moratorium on evictions
- Drug Use
  - Overdose Prevention and Education Network of Niagara (OPENN) released media release today - <https://niagaraknowledgeexchange.com/community-blog/disturbing-increase-in-opioid-overdoses-in-niagara/>
  - For 2019/2020, 309 people have died from suspected overdoses in Niagara, a 32% increase
  - Also have seen 25% increase in EMS calls, but recognize that 75% of people are not calling emergency when overdosing
  - Struggling in Niagara with use and overdose
    - Over 70+% of deaths were people by themselves
    - Trying to push information about the need for people to have a bubble and for someone in that bubble to have naloxone
  - If there are people that are in need of support for the loss of a loved one, connect with [Rachel](#) or [Talia Storm](#) at Positive Living for resources
  - Niagara hospice runs programs for people grieving as well
- Migrant Workers
  - Federal government reviewing migrant worker rights and health, especially in relation to housing
  - Legal Clinic doing work on this, specifically the need for higher standards for farmers, federal funding to flow toward this issue, and a need for a legal aid plan and housing rights
  - Legal clinic will continue to monitor health and determinants of health for these workers
- Community Education
  - Suggestion that with all of this work, there is also an important piece of getting general public outside and building empathy about poverty for people living in poverty

**Next meetings:**

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