

Niagara Poverty Reduction Network

Wednesday, January 31, 2024

9:15 am to 10:45 am

In-Person and Virtual Meeting

Niagara Falls Library

(8484 Victoria Ave. Niagara Falls, ON - [Library Address Information](#))

Zoom Meeting

Minutes - Draft



In Attendance: Helen Castonguay, Gracia Janes, Faith Lowe – Employment Help Centre, Lisa Gallant- Niagara Region, Donna Mills – Niagara Region Public Health, Sharlene Volpatti, JoAnne Krick – Niagara Community Foundation, Tasha - Gillian’s Place, Kate Hunter – ETFO Niagara OT, Dora Liptay – Community Cares West Niagara, David Angus – Alzheimer’s Society, Lori Kleinsmith- Bridges Community Health Centre, Dave Wyllie, Sarah Burch – Positive Living Niagara, Tori – Bethlehem Housing Support Services, Marc Todd – Niagara Region, Vicki Doidge – Niagara Community Legal Clinic, Aidan Johnson – Niagara Community Legal Clinic, Monica – Fort Erie Multicultural Centre, Beverly – Town of Fort Erie, Laura Martin – Niagara Falls Library, Ashley Chiarello – Bridges Community Health Centre, Jennifer Gauthier – Birchway Niagara

1. Welcome & Land Acknowledgement: Jennifer Gauthier

2. Coordinating Committee Update:

1. We are renewing memberships for 2024! The form was included with the distribution of the agenda. When completed please forward to [Helen](#). A copy of our membership form can also be found here ([2024 NPRN Membership Form](#)).

Are you participating in one of our Priority Tables? We are looking for more participation! If you are interested in joining a particular table, connect with [Jennifer Gauthier](#).

Vice Chair Position – The motion was put forward by Jennifer Gauthier to appoint Helen Castonguay as the Vice Chair of NPRN.

Seconded by: Aidan Johnson

All in favour

3. Updates from NPRN Priority Tables & Living Wage Update:

Affordable Housing – Ashley Chiarello - ashley.chiarello@bridgeschc.ca

Education:

- Tenant issues: connect information and education sessions with eviction prevention roles, focusing on rights-based issues (tenant rights), formal notices, renovations and reaching tenants or connect them with support sooner

Communication and Advocacy:

- based on the core housing needs study, the representation of housing needs by each community is clear and simple to understand how can we share this more broadly?

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Partners and interested parties to connect with: Niagara Community Legal Clinic, Niagara Community Land Trust, Niagara Peninsula Homes, Co-operative housing (board chair, contact), Niagara Region Poverty Reduction Strategy, Niagara Region Community Services: Housing Service, Homelessness Services, Social Assistance and Employment Opportunities

Trauma Informed Care:

After speaking with my manager, Amy Devereaux, she shared that the group of interested organizations across Niagara who received an initial training was convened by John Armstrong and continue to meet quarterly. If there is interest in promoting and advancing a trauma informed approach/perspective I would suggest connecting with John. It is my understanding that most organizations involved are undertaking their own trainings, policy reviews and practice changes to implement a trauma-informed lens.

Social Assistance – Vicki Doidge

- The committee has not scheduled a meeting and is currently looking for a new table lead. Vicki will reach out to a community member that has expressed interest in taking on this role

Health Equity – Sarah Burtch

- A student has reached out with interest in working on the living library project. Sarah will be connecting with them. This table is also looking for a new lead if there is anyone who is interested please contact Jennifer at jenniferg@birchway.ca

Marketing & Communications – Chandra Hardeen

- No report

4. Presentation – Jeffrey Sinclair, Niagara Region Homelessness Action Plan Advisor – Update on the Housing and Homelessness Action Plan and current status of the shelter system – see attached presentation provided by Jeffrey Sinclair

5. Presentation – Status of Niagara Poverty Reduction Strategy Marc Todd, *Manager, Social Assistance and Employment Opportunities, Niagara Region*

The report is 99% complete

We will be presenting it to the Committee of the Whole on March 7th at 6:30 p.m.

Committee of the Whole is a focused meeting where all members of council meet to discuss one particular issue in depth.

Some highlights of what we will be presenting:

- There are two Regional Councillors on the Poverty Reduction Steering Committee (Ip, Bateman)
- Information on the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on poverty – as per Statistics Canada the poverty rate for Niagara is at 10.4% as of 2021 – in 2016 it was 14.5% - the decrease was due to pandemic benefits provided by the Feds – raising ### people out of poverty. Now that these

benefits and the eviction moratorium is finished, and with increased inflation, low SA rates, poverty is most likely higher than before.

- An overview of the strategy development stages
 - Brock report and recommendations on NPI
 - Niagara Region Council approves development of a local poverty reduction strategy
 - 1000+ residents give input about an ideal future state, challenges, strengths and actions
 - 150+ Indigenous people give input about Indigenous prosperity
 - Staff review research to identify best practice to address poverty
 - Staff draft recommendations based on community input and best practice
 - 100+ content experts validate recommendations
 - Niagara Region staff indicate alignment with other Niagara Region plans
 - Steering Committee prioritize recommendations based on impact, effort, and community support
- The goal of Niagara's five-year Poverty Reduction Strategy is: **Working together to prevent and end poverty and increase well-being in Niagara.**
- The community identified **eight Areas of Focus** for the Niagara Poverty Reduction Strategy. Each Area of Focus includes one recommendation and a set of actions that address the issue of poverty within that area.

- The areas of focus are:
 - Indigenous Well-being
 - Housing
 - Income
 - Employment
 - Food Security
 - Early Child Development
 - Transportation
 - Mental Health and Addiction
- Attached to each of the eight recommendations is a work-plan document with 100 action
- These actions and the associated recommendations also include HOW to implement change; which include:
 - Service Access, Coordination and Capacity
 - Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
 - Leveraging Voices of Lived Expertise
 - Changing Mindsets
 - Advocacy
 - Funding
- We will use Collective Impact, an approach used around the world to address complex issues such as poverty, to guide implementation of Niagara's Poverty Reduction Strategy – and looking at how we can increase: Local capacity to implement community work, policies, and practices; Public support to end poverty
- The NPI funding ends October 2024 – the next NPI grant process will hopefully begin so that funding can be made in January 2025 – and will be based on the recommendations and actions listed in the plan.

6. Roundtable Discussion –

- Group discussion held focused on the following questions;
- What are the current issues/impacts of poverty within your organization, club, association, community? Are there any promising practices or supports being provided in your area?

Major Themes:

- Supports for Seniors are required, especially those managing cognitive issues. Increasingly facing food security, housing issues, increased mental health concerns. This will continue to be a growing concern as the senior population increases
- Gender-based violence survivors continue to face issues related to poverty, including accessing affordable housing, childcare and need to access community resources such as food banks
- Public Transit in rural areas continues to be an issue for those wanting to obtain employment and access resources
- Increase use of food banks
- Strain on housing in West Niagara as those from larger cities are migrating towards Niagara and increasing housing prices
- Affordable housing across Niagara
- Battling negative perceptions of response to support folks who are unhoused or living rough. Many donors believe resources are being wasted but need to communicate the challenges of maintaining belongings in these situations
- 20% increase in applications for Ontario works – 10% due to asylum seekers
- OW/ODSP rates have not increased since 2018 nor has the amount of resources allocated for program staff
- Legal clinic is managing landlord tenant board issues and also ODSP appeal
- Use of local libraries has increased by 41% including access to computers and wifi which indicates that many households are not able to afford access to the internet
- Need to implement supports and trauma-informed training for staff at all levels as they are experiencing increased demand for services and challenges. Having a network of trauma-informed agencies is beneficial to clients

Promising Practices

- Launch of situation tables across Niagara Region
- Service Canada outreach program is able to come to your organization and work directly with clients/community members to obtain SIN/CPP information, look at the online benefits finder and also partners with the CRA
You can contact me by email: colleen.hynes@servicecanada.gc.ca or 289-244-5061
- Benefits Finder: <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/finder.html>
- Community Care West Niagara is increasing its income threshold to \$1900/month so they can support more people in their program

7. Outstanding Items & Questions – none brought forward

8. Adjournment: 10:45pm

