

REGION OF OTTAWA-CARLETON  
RÉGION D'OTTAWA-CARLETON

REPORT  
RAPPORT

Our File/N/Réf.                    03-07-00-0127  
Your File/V/Réf.

DATE                                10 October 2000

TO/DEST.                         Community Services Committee

FROM/EXP.                        Committee Co-ordinator

SUBJECT/OBJET                 **WORKING TOGETHER: A COMMUNITY EVALUATION OF  
THE TASK FORCE ON POVERTY**

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### **REPORT RECOMMENDATION**

**That the Community Services Committee receive this report for information.**

### **BACKGROUND**

Representatives from the Sandy Hill Community Health Centre have requested that the Committee receive a presentation on the above-noted subject.

The Executive Summary and the Recommendations from the Report of the Interim Committee of the Task Force on Poverty, dated September 2000, are attached. The full report has been issued separately.

*M. J. Beauregard*

# I Executive Summary

*It serves as a model for how citizens and government can work together and how much can be accomplished when information and ideas are fully shared.*

The Task Force on Poverty was established to bring together people living on low-income and staff of the Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton to seek solutions to poverty. In this evaluation, it was found that 92% of the participants believed it was successful or very successful in achieving this mandate. Those who said it was less than successful said they did not rate it higher because its success depends upon the extent to which the recommendations are implemented in the future. All participants believed the process should be replicated through other initiatives. Drawing upon the learnings from this process, this evaluation puts forth recommendations for the establishment of the standing Advisory Committee on Poverty.

Much of the success of this 18 month initiative was attributed to the process itself, as it provided an opportunity for the low-income community to work alongside Regional staff and learn from each other. Since the Task Force on Poverty grew out of the People's Hearings / Audiences populaires, where people living on low-income spoke about their reality, it was grounded in the community. By appointing senior level staff, the Region showed its commitment to the process. After overcoming some initial cultural barriers, community and Regional staff members worked effectively together, as they recognised and drew upon each other's expertise.

The work of the Task Force on Poverty was strengthened when effective dialogue was maintained between the Task Force members and the communities or Regional departments they represented. In most cases, community members were able to dialogue with local cluster groups that developed with the People's Hearings / Audiences populaires or with local community organizations. When this kind of dialogue was not possible, community members found it more difficult to represent the interests of their community. Regional staff readily shared information with community members about related issues arising in their departments, but sometimes lacked an effective vehicle for communicating back to their departments what was being discussed in the Task Force. Maintaining and strengthening this on-going dialogue and accountability will be essential for the success of the Advisory Committee on Poverty and any future initiatives.

There were several factors that affected community members' ability to participate fully in the process. Community Developers from the Community Health and Resource Centres played a critical role by providing practical and moral support to community members. An orientation process was essential, and a more thorough orientation for both community and regional staff members would be important in future initiatives. Additional measures need to be taken to ensure that full participation of francophones, new Canadians or people with disabilities is encouraged.

The impact of the Task Force on Poverty was felt on many levels. Concrete recommendations were developed in the areas of income security, housing, community programs, education, child care, essential services, food security and public participation. The Task Force on Poverty contributed to other Regional initiatives, such as Partners for Jobs and the Millennium Learning Centres. With the establishment of a Public Participation Position and the Advisory Committee on Poverty as proposed by the Task Force, the new City of Ottawa will be able to maintain this collaborative way of working with the low-income community.

On a community level, the Task Force on Poverty had a ripple effect. For community members it was an opportunity to develop a variety of leadership skills which can be taken back to their communities. As people living on low-income attended Regional Council meetings to support the work of the Task Force, they learned how government functions and the role they can play as citizens. In the community, some organizations were created or strengthened by the work of the Task Force on Poverty. New working relations between community organizations were developed as well. However, large segments of the community were not aware of the work of the Task Force. In future initiatives, the implementation of a media and communications strategy could strengthen the community impact.

While many of the impacts can only be measured over the long-term, the most immediate and visible impact was the impact on the individual participants. Both community and Regional staff members spoke about their participation with great enthusiasm. Many community members came to realize the contribution that they and other low-income citizens can make to the community.

*Because I am not just a social assistance recipient. I am a living human being willing to share energy, thoughts and perceptions. I can help to improve my community.*

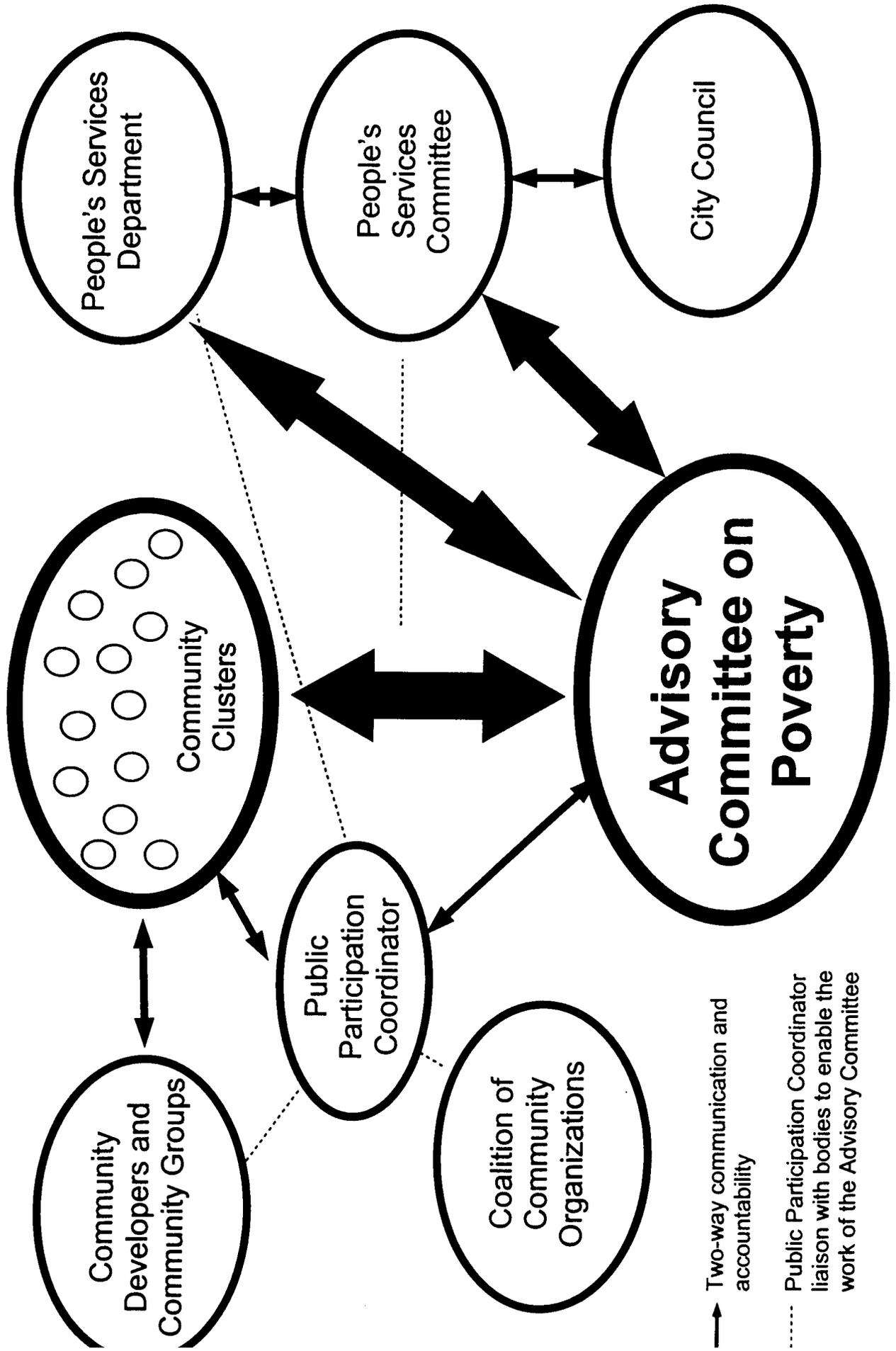
Regional staff members reported they felt better prepared to address poverty issues after listening to real life experiences and working side by side with people living in poverty. The Advisory Committee can be an on-going vehicle where more citizens and staff can learn from, and contribute to, this way of working together.

At the same time, many respondents cautioned that, in order to reduce poverty, it is important that the community make their views known through a variety of vehicles. The Advisory Committee on Poverty would be one important vehicle, but not the only one.

This collaborative model of problem-solving is one that may be utilized in other areas of municipal policy and programme development. Other cities have expressed interest in learning from this model of citizen participation. The pitfalls and lessons learned discussed in this evaluation lay the ground work for creating an even more effective process. As one respondent stated:

*It was a remarkable experience in participatory democracy that bears repeating in our new city and other cities as well.*

# Advisory Committee on Poverty



## **II Recommendations**

- 1) That the Regional Council of Ottawa-Carleton and the Council of the new City of Ottawa utilise the expertise of Ottawa's low-income community in identifying initiatives, programmes and policies that will reduce poverty.
- 2) That the Community Services Committee of the Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton authorise the Social Services Department to facilitate the establishment of the Standing Advisory Committee on Poverty as previously recommended by the Task Force on Poverty and approved by Regional Council.
- 3) That in the Fall of 2000, the Public Participation Coordinator, in conjunction with the Social Services Department and Community Health and Resource Centres, lay the necessary groundwork so that the Advisory Committee on Poverty can start operations in the beginning of 2001.

### **Mandate**

- 4) That the Standing Advisory Committee on Poverty advise the People's Services Committee as to the impact of the new City services on the lives of people living in poverty. That an on-going partnership between the municipal government and Ottawa's low-income community facilitate collaborative problem solving, recognises the expertise of people who live in poverty and depends upon two-way communication with low-income communities across Ottawa.
- 5) That the Advisory Committee monitor effective implementation of the recommendations put forth by the Task Force on Poverty and identify ways of addressing emerging issues so as to reduce poverty in the new City.
- 6) That the Advisory Committee on Poverty prioritise issues to be addressed in a given year and that Municipal staff be required to present new policies to the Advisory Committee for review when they are considered to have an impact on these poverty issues.

### **Composition**

- 7) That twenty-two voting members will come from the community and will be persons living on low-income. That non-voting members include Senior level staff members and one City Councillor. The City Councillor would act as liaison between the Advisory Committee and People's Services Committee.
- 8) That 20 community members be selected by community clusters and serve two-year rotating terms so as to facilitate continuity and a breadth of community input. In the first

year, ten members be selected from the previous Task Force on Poverty and hold a one-year term. Ten other community members would be selected to hold a two-year term. In January 2002, 10 new member would be selected to hold a two-year term.

9) That two at-large community members be selected from a sector of the population deemed to be under-represented by the Advisory Committee. They may relate to the community cluster nearest to where they live or may form a cluster within a citywide, sector-specific organisation.

10) That sub-committees be comprised of community members from the Advisory Committee, individuals from community clusters, front-line City staff and representatives from organisations with expertise in an area being covered. This may include, but is not limited to, community policing, transportation, planning, community economic development, school boards and the business community. When possible, Community Developers would sit on sub-committees to provide support and information to community members.

11) That the Public Participation Coordinator facilitate the work of the Advisory Committee so as to enable members to participate effectively. He or she will arrange meetings, provide information and support to community members, assist community members in preparing to give presentations and facilitate greater understanding between community members and the Region.

## **Establishing the Advisory Committee**

12) That the Public Participation Coordinator work in conjunction with the Social Services Department and, in the new City, the People's Services Department, to provide the necessary support to establish the Advisory Committee.

13) That the General Manager of the Social Services Department assign a Senior level staff person who will work with the Public Participation Coordinator to provide the necessary support for the establishment and maintenance of the Advisory Committee before the end of 2000. This would include providing information, developing a budget and ensuring effective representation of the new City and other bodies on the Advisory Committee. The assigned staff person would facilitate the appointment of Senior level City staff, and, in response to requests from the Advisory Committee, would facilitate the appointment of sub-committee members, including front-line staff and representatives from other city-wide bodies with expertise in areas being covered.

14) That the Coalition of Community Health and Resource Centres (Executive Directors' Group) authorise time in the work plan of Community Developers to facilitate and maintain community clusters in the form that is most appropriate for each part of the city.

15) That Community Developers from the Community Health and Resource Centres work in concert with other local organisations to facilitate and maintain community

clusters.

16) That, in the fall of 2000, the Public Participation Coordinator, Interim Committee and Community Health and Resource Centres work in concert with other organisations, to define and initiate the development and renewal of community clusters that cover all parts of the new City, including rural areas. Community clusters should be comprised of community members of the Advisory Committee, other people living on low-income and organisations addressing poverty issues in a given part of the city. At least one cluster should be francophone.

17) That Community Clusters be encouraged to seek members who are representative of diverse groups living in poverty in Ottawa (new Canadians, visible minorities, seniors, single mothers, youth, people with disabilities, aboriginal people and francophones).

18) That the Public Participation Coordinator and Interim Committee dialogue with the appropriate organisations to identify mechanisms for enabling new Canadians and visible minorities to participate fully on the Advisory Committee.

19) That the Public Participation Coordinator oversee the production and distribution of a two-page summary of this evaluation report which can be used to inform the community of the results of the Task Force on Poverty.

20) That, in the fall of 2000, the Social Planning Council of Ottawa-Carleton, Interim Committee and Public Participation Coordinator facilitate the formation of a Coalition of Organisations to keep the wider community informed and prepared to support the work of the Advisory Committee.

## **Structure**

21) That the Advisory Committee meet every 6 to 8 weeks and report regularly to the People's Services Committee.

22) That two community members be appointed as Co-Chairs of the Advisory Committee. The Public Participation Coordinator, with the support of the Senior level staff person from the People's Services Department, should ensure the provision of orientation and access to decision-makers so as to enable the Co-Chairs to work effectively.

23) That sub-committees be established to focus on particular issues. The number of sub-committees should be limited to coincide with resources available, so as to avoid having Advisory Committee members sit on more than two sub-committees. Community members representing the same community cluster should be encouraged to distribute themselves among the committees.

## **Selection of Members**

24) That all members of the Advisory Committee be selected or appointed in January, 2001.

25) That in recruiting community and Regional staff representatives, Community Developers and the People's Services Department provide a job description and explanation of supports so that potential members are aware of the roles and responsibilities involved. The job description should provide a statement noting that the Advisory Committee is in a process of development and the responsibilities may be subject to change over time.

26) That in the selection of community members, Community Developers encourage the communities to take into account the participation of francophones and New Canadians on the Advisory Committee is essential to its effectiveness. However, the working language will be English, so members need to be able to have a working comprehension of both written and spoken English.

## **Orientation**

27) That the Public Participation Coordinator design an orientation for members of the Advisory Committee that would include initial sessions as well as an on-going process of education and clarification. Orientation sessions should include community members sensitising city staff members to realities of poverty and city staff members orienting community members to government operations. Training should include small group facilitation, consensus decision making, committee process, language guidelines and icebreakers. On-going orientation should include clarification of group process guidelines and informal opportunities for members to get to know one another.

28) That the Public Participation Coordinator provide co-chairs with orientation and coaching in the facilitation of large group processes and government operations.

## **Communication Flow**

29) That the job descriptions of community and City staff members emphasise their role in maintaining two-way communication between themselves and their community or department on issues to be covered by the Advisory Committee.

30) That the job description for community members state they are to represent the concerns and ideas of the community from which they have been selected.

31) That the Public Participation Coordinator assist in this two-way communication by preparing brief summaries on issues being discussed at the Advisory Committee that members can distribute in the community or city departments in the form of handouts, web pages, newsletters or bulletins.

32) That Community Developers or designated staff from other agencies provide on-going support to the community members in their cluster by arranging opportunities for them to meet with the community, assisting in the preparation of presentations and being a sounding board.

33) That the assigned Senior staff person from the People's Services Department ensure mechanisms be established so that issues raised at the Advisory Committee are discussed and considered in the respective departments.

34) That Regional staff provide regular information which would include, but not be limited to, the legislative agenda. Regional staff keep committee members advised as to time frames for completing documents and members of the Advisory Committee strive to work within those time frames.

35) That Community Developers from the Community Health and Resource Centres work in concert with other community organisations to facilitate the development of People's Hearings / Audiences populaires or smaller forums focusing on a particular issue or sector. Special attention should be made to include all sectors of the low-income community, including youth, seniors, New Canadians, aboriginal people, people with disabilities and the homeless. In order to ensure that people can attend, planning different schedules (work\school), childcare and transportation needs, language, accessibility and cultural differences must be take into account.

36) That community clusters and supporting organisations document the stories shared at hearings, so as to provide up-to-date information to the Advisory Committee and to be able to produce another report similar to the People First document. The Public Participation Coordinator would provide guidelines for story collection. Community clusters would extract key issues and suggested solutions from the testimonies so as to assist the Advisory Committee in setting priorities and developing recommendations. Those issues which cannot be addressed immediately will remain documented for future consideration.

37) That in the Fall of 2001, community clusters sponsor hearings across the city to provide an update as to the implementation of recommendations from the Task Force on Poverty and to invite community feedback as to their effectiveness.

38) That each community cluster relate to one of the four hubs of services (south, east, west and downtown), so as to liaise with the People's Services Department staff in their part of the city.

39) That the Public Participation Coordinator and Co-chairs of the Advisory Committee be in dialogue with City Councillors as to issues arising on which the community needs to express their views.

40) That the Public Participation Coordinator design and implement a communication strategy to keep the wider community and the Coalition of Organisations informed about issues being addressed on the Advisory Committee. News releases should be vetted

through the Advisory Committee and Coalition of Organisations.

## **Process**

- 41) That the Public Participation Coordinator ensure that group process guidelines are established and reviewed at the beginning of each meeting of the Advisory Committee and its sub-committees.
- 42) That the budget for the Advisory Committee include supports for community members: bus passes; childcare costs for Advisory Committee and sub-committee meetings; and, an honorarium for each Advisory Committee meeting attended. That special considerations be made to enable members from rural areas to attend meetings.
- 43) That English be the language in which meetings of the Advisory Committee will be conducted and minutes will be taken. Francophones should be able choose to speak in French in a meeting and a bilingual member should be available to translate. Co-chairs will take time in meetings to ensure that everyone understands what has been said given that English will not be the first language for everyone.
- 44) That in establishing sub-committees, one sub-committee be identified that will be conduct business and take minutes in French. One bilingual sub-committee may be established as well. Members of the French sub-committee will bring their minutes in French to the Advisory Committee and verbally present them in English.
- 45) That public documents and official documents of the Advisory Committee (terms of reference, job description, etc.) be available in both official languages with quality and timely translation.
- 46) That meetings of the Advisory Committee be organised so as to provide informal opportunities for developing an on-going working relationship between community and staff members.
- 47) That, once members are selected to the Advisory Committee, the Public Participation Coordinator enquire as to any physical limitations that could limit member's participation. Measures should be taken to ensure that people with physical disabilities are not excluded from participating in meetings

## **Other Initiatives**

- 48) That the Council of the new City of Ottawa consider other areas of policy development that would benefit from this participatory model of collaborative problem solving.
- 49) That, in order to guarantee the participation of low-income people on other

committees established by the City, supports be provided such as childcare, transportation and honorariums. Given that such committees would draw from a wider population, it would be important to establish mechanisms for providing the supports that do not stigmatise low-income people.

50) That the Coalition of Organizations and community clusters seek a variety of means for making their views known to municipal, provincial and federal politicians.