

Ottawa's Poverty Reduction Strategy



Poverty Affects Us All:
A Community Approach to Poverty Reduction

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Executive Summary	4
2. Introduction	8
3. Background	10
Social Determinants of Health	11
School Attendance and School Success	12
Crime Prevention	12
Poverty and Exclusion	13
Who is more likely to live in poverty?	13
Definition of Inclusion and Exclusion	16
Civic Participation and the Voice of People Living in Poverty	16
4. Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy	17
5. Ottawa's Poverty Reduction Strategy	18
Vision	20
Principles	20
Strategic Priorities	20
Key Project Areas	21
5.1 Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) Community Application	22
5.2 Essential Health & Social Supports and Home Support	27
5.3 Access to City Services	29
5.4 Access to Recreation	30
5.5 Income, Employment & Skills	34
5.6 Immigrants & Racialized Groups	39
5.7 Homelessness & Housing	41
5.8 Rural Communities	44
5.9 Public Awareness and Promoting Poverty Reduction	46
5.10 Living Wage	49
5.11 Reinvestment in Social Infrastructure	54
5.12 Extension Poverty Reduction Strategy Phase II	55
6. Linking the Poverty Reduction Strategy & the Community Development Framework	57
7. Implementation and Measurement of Success	59
8. Summary of Recommendations	61
9. Sources	63
10. Annex Material	
Annex 1 Planning Framework	65
Annex 2 Summary of Consultations	66

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The Social Planning Council of Ottawa partnered with the City of Ottawa to plan and deliver two community consultation sessions.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Poverty in our city affects us all. The City of Ottawa has a responsibility for and a leadership role in poverty reduction. As the nation's capital, the City of Ottawa is in a unique position to be a role model in breaking down the myths about poverty and taking action to reduce it. While the entire community has a responsibility to reduce poverty, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Phase I focuses on the role of the City together with community partners. It calls for the reinvestment of future savings in social infrastructure¹ and poverty reduction in order to sustain a healthy, inclusive and safe city where all people can reach their full potential. As well, it calls for a multi-phase approach to poverty reduction. For the longer term, the Steering Committee envisions the responsibility for poverty reduction expanding more broadly to the community at large.

Age, gender, immigration to Canada, disability, lone-parent status, Aboriginal or being a member of a racialized (visible minority) group, and lack of a high school diploma correlate to a person's probability of living in poverty and impact a person's ability to earn a living wage. The real gap that has emerged between social assistance benefit rates relative to the actual costs of goods and services has not been adequately addressed. The minimum wage remains below a "living wage". Due to major economic restructuring, many working poor individuals have employment situations such as part-time, temporary and contract work that may be precarious. People on low-income in Ottawa report that there are people in our community experiencing hunger, isolation, deteriorating states of health (e.g. uncontrolled diabetes), often living in substandard housing and housing that is not affordable².

In November 2008, the Province released the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy with a goal of reducing child poverty by 25% in five years, thereby removing 90,000 children from poverty. The Province uses senior government policy levers such as increasing the minimum wage and accelerating increases to the Ontario Child Benefit program, as well as flowing funding to communities for community use of schools, affordable housing and housing with supports.

The Ottawa Poverty Reduction Network brought their report *...something left over at the end of the month* to the Community and Protective Services Committee in November 2008 and to City Council in December 2008. On December 10, 2008, City Council approved the development of a Poverty Reduction Strategy, in consultation with the community, and working with community partners, to be developed in time to influence the 2010 budget.

The intent of the Ottawa Poverty Reduction Strategy is to call on the City to take a leadership role in poverty reduction and investment in social infrastructure. The Strategy demonstrates that bringing different sectors together to act locally and collaboratively on agreed upon priorities is an effective way to identify concrete actions to reduce poverty locally. Participants in the community consultations told us there are people in our community who cannot afford to

¹ Social infrastructure ensures community and social services are adequate, inclusive and responsive to the specific needs of neighbourhoods and groups.

² Most people on low income, whether working poor or in receipt of social assistance, are renting in the private market.

buy food when they need it, people who are without access to public transportation for themselves or their children, people who live in rental housing in a state of disrepair or housing that is not affordable, and people who feel excluded from participation in community life.

The Ottawa Poverty Reduction Strategy represents a first step in a collaborative effort to bring a high profile to poverty reduction in our community and take concrete actions at the municipal and community level. The Ottawa Poverty Reduction Strategy is unique because it builds on the increasing participation of people on low-income in our community in initiatives to make their voices heard, and includes low-income leaders at the planning table together with representatives from community organizations, including funders, the Inuit community, Immigrant community, Aboriginal community, and the education sector, City staff and Councillor, and the private sector.

The Poverty Reduction Steering Committee Phase I was established in May 2009. The Committee was co-chaired by the City and the Community Foundation of Ottawa. The Committee included broad community representation including:

- People with lived experience of poverty representing the Poverty Reduction Network and the Poverty Issues Advisory Committee;
- Immigrant sector;
- Inuit community;
- Business sector;
- Ottawa Carleton District School Board;
- Coalition of Health and Resource Centres, including representation of the rural perspective;
- Social Planning Council;
- United Way;
- Ministry of Community and Social Services;
- Community Foundation of Ottawa;
- Councillor Bédard;
- City of Ottawa Community and Social Services staff.

The Poverty Reduction Strategy Steering Committee formulated a vision, principles, 3 strategic priorities and 16 recommendations based on the key messages heard in forums and initiatives where individuals and families on low-income, advocates, and representatives from community agencies made their voices heard.

During the implementation phase (Phase II) beginning in 2010, measures will be developed and progress will be tracked on the priorities and recommendations.

The City partnered with the Social Planning Council of Ottawa to plan and deliver two targeted Poverty Reduction Strategy community consultation sessions held on September 18th and September 21st. A total of 118 people participated in the targeted sessions. Approximately 50% of participants were people on low income, and approximately 20% were Francophone.

The investment required to implement the 16 recommendations is \$3.5M. For 2010 the funding will come from new or existing one time provincial funding within the Community and Social Services Department. Each recommendation summarizes the financial impact in 2010, as well as potential impact in future years based on outcomes, recommendations stemming from the initiatives and direction from Council.

Strategic Priorities and Recommendations

Strategy One: A service system working to the benefit of the people in need

1. Develop an expanded community Ontario Disability Support Program application process, based on the model described in this report.
2. Streamline the needs assessment to Essential Health and Social Supports and Home Support Services for people in need.
3. Improve access to City services by establishing a single point of application for multiple City services of importance to people on low income, and by ensuring 311 (for City services) and 211(for City and community services) have the capacity to provide information on a full range of services from the perspective of people on low income.

Strategy Two: Building a community of inclusion and belonging

4. Increase access to recreation for people on low-income.
5. Develop a community planning table to bring together school boards, the Parks, Recreation and Culture Department, Children's Services, Crime Prevention Ottawa and community agencies to develop solutions to jointly create, program and coordinate increased community use of schools.
6. Advocate that the Province increase social assistance rates utilizing a standardized market basket measure approach that reflects current living standards and annual cost of living adjustments, and remove systemic barriers across Ministries that have unintended effects of keeping people in poverty.
7. Increase employment supports and opportunities for vulnerable persons in Ottawa.
8. Integrate immigrants and newcomers into the City of Ottawa's workforce to become a model of employment, and increase diversity in the City's workforce; and implement an equality framework and an equity lens across City departments.
9. Advocate for increased investments in homelessness prevention initiatives, social and affordable housing and housing with supports.

10. Increase awareness of the availability of the Retrofit program, to help people in rural areas reduce energy costs.
11. Identify a rural community as a priority neighbourhood in the next phase of the Community Development Framework.

Strategy Three: Breaking down the myths about poverty and promoting poverty reduction.

12. Develop a community strategy to increase public awareness of poverty issues and promote local actions to reduce poverty.
13. Collaborate with community funders to identify opportunities to focus on poverty reduction within funding priorities.
14. Develop options for a living wage policy at the City and a consultation plan and report to Community and Protective Services Committee in the spring of 2010.
15. Develop a policy framework to reinvest savings from the upload of social assistance benefits into social infrastructure and poverty reduction to ensure a balance of investment in the Triple Bottom Line.
16. Extend the Poverty Reduction Strategy to future phases to address other poverty issues.

2. INTRODUCTION

Poverty in our city affects us all. The City of Ottawa has a responsibility for and a leadership role in poverty reduction. As the nation's capital, the City of Ottawa is in a unique position to be a role model in breaking down the myths about poverty and taking action to reduce it. While the entire community has a responsibility to reduce poverty, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Phase I focuses on the role of the City together with community partners. It calls for the reinvestment of future savings in social infrastructure³ and poverty reduction in order to sustain a healthy, inclusive and safe city where all people can reach their full potential. As well, it calls for a multi-phase approach to poverty reduction. For the longer term, the Steering Committee envisions the responsibility for poverty reduction expanding more broadly to the community at large.

The Poverty Reduction Strategy Phase I built on the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy released in November 2008. It is intended to focus primarily on awareness about poverty in our community as well as targeted efforts on several concrete, local actions that can be achieved and measured within a two-year timeframe.

The Strategy is a community initiative that complements existing activities in the community. The proposed plan builds on the increasing participation of people on low income in our community in initiatives to make their voices heard. The strategy sets out a vision, principles, 3 strategic priorities and 16 recommendations. During the implementation phase (Phase II) beginning in 2010, measures will be developed and progress will be tracked on the priorities and recommendations.

The development of this plan started by drawing on the recommendations from previous consultations and initiatives, including:

- The People's Hearings (1997)
- The Task Force on Poverty (1998 – 2000)
- The work of the Poverty Issues Advisory Committee (PIAC)
- The report by PIAC called Basic Needs (2004)
- The People's Hearings II (2005)
- Re-thinking Poverty 1 (2007)
- Creation of the Ottawa Poverty Reduction Network (2008) and the recommendations from its' forum June 25, 2008 report called... *something left over at the end of the month*
- Re-thinking Poverty II (2009)

The Strategy is intended to create a synergy, linking the idea that we can act locally to reduce poverty to other similar economic, health and community development strategies. Collaborative community efforts are the engines that create the conditions for individual residents to participate in these strategies. For example, the Strategy calls for collaborative

³ Social infrastructure ensures community and social services are adequate, inclusive and responsive to the specific needs of neighbourhoods and groups.

community efforts to jointly develop community hubs to increase the community use of schools, strengthening the connection of families and children to education, their communities, and their neighbours. “Act locally” strategies make an impact, notwithstanding macro-economic issues or other larger forces seemingly beyond our control.

The Vision

The Poverty Reduction Strategy brought together different sectors of the community to develop a shared vision of poverty reduction, linking current and emerging initiatives to this vision, in order to recognize the strengths of the community we have and to take action to move ever closer to the community we need.

The overarching vision of the Ottawa Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) is

All residents of Ottawa living in dignity and health, in a community that fosters participation and inclusion for all.

To talk about dignity is to talk about a new definition of basic needs, acceptance of cultural differences, and respect for all people. To talk about health is to talk about the social determinants of health – socio-economic conditions that influence the health of individuals and communities.

To talk about inclusion is, in part, to talk about who is more likely to be poor in our community; and to talk about participation is to talk about citizen engagement in community life.

To talk about all of these elements is to ask ourselves: Does it matter? Is there a benefit to the community as a whole when everyone has an opportunity to meet their full potential?

The answer is that poverty affects us all. We must concern ourselves with the consequences if we fail as a city to invest in social infrastructure. Investment in social infrastructure is essential if we wish to live in a community where people are healthy and public health care costs are manageable, and where people feel safe to leave their homes and move freely about their city and neighbourhoods. As well, children who are able to stay in school and reach their full potential will be better equipped to contribute to the community and to Ottawa’s economic prosperity.

One of the priorities of the City’s Strategic Plan 2007 – 2010 is a “Sustainable, Healthy and Active City”. Other priorities focus on transportation, transit, infrastructure, solid waste and environment, and planning and growth management.

The Poverty Reduction Strategy takes the position that helping residents to reach their full potential is the foundation of a healthy, sustainable active community and continuing economic prosperity. The community coming together to find local solutions based on collaboration, cooperation and opportunities for partnerships is the most effective way to create change at the local level. This creates the underlying conditions for success. These underlying conditions

include access to basic needs so that all residents can live in dignity, safety and health; inclusion; and participation and civic engagement.

We promote the idea that sustainability includes the notion of resiliency. By this we mean a community where people can overcome adversity, newcomers can start afresh in a new country and people can transition, with supports, from social assistance to work.

We promote the idea that a healthy community should include understanding and improving the social determinants of health.

And we promote the idea that economic prosperity should be linked to the notion of all residents meeting their full potential.

But most of all we promote people coming together with a positive energy and confidence that we can act locally to reduce poverty in our community. That creating the conditions of inclusion, participation and access to basic needs for all residents will have an impact on reducing poverty. That the City has a leadership role to play as a provider of a wide range of services that is important for people dealing with poverty. And that reducing poverty is a pre-existing condition to achieving a healthy, active, sustainable and economically prosperous community.

3. BACKGROUND

Municipalities provide a wide range of services that are important for people dealing with poverty. These include:

- Ontario Works program planning and delivery
- Employment Support Programs (Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Programs) program planning and delivery
- Homelessness prevention initiatives, affordable and social housing, housing with supports and subsidies. Donation of land for affordable housing; inclusionary housing policies
- Long Term Care Homes and subsidies
- Public Health
- Community Funding
- Libraries
- Recreation, culture and subsidies
- Childcare Services and subsidies
- Dental care and Dental Clinics
- Transportation Services (public transportation and transportation subsidies)
- In-kind services for social projects, including waiving of fees, municipal staff time etc.
- Social and health supports
- Community development

Poverty issues disproportionately impact women and children, people with disabilities, newcomers and racialized groups, Aboriginal peoples and rural communities. The Poverty

Reduction Steering Committee supports the argument that a balanced approach is required and that municipalities have a responsibility to ensure “soft services” have equal importance around the municipal table. In its unique position, being closer to the community than other levels of government, municipalities have a leadership role to play in several areas of poverty reduction⁴:

- To dispel myths about poverty and to plan for poverty reduction in partnership with the community, provincial, federal and private sectors;
- To invest in social infrastructure, ensuring community services are adequate, inclusive, and responsive to the specific needs of neighbourhoods and groups;
- To ensure a balanced approach whereby hard and soft services have an equal place at the municipal table, and the links between the two are explicitly embraced e.g. that economic prosperity and poverty reduction are linked; that crime prevention and poverty reduction are linked; and that transit and accessibility to transit are linked.

Social Determinants of Health

Social determinants of health are the socio-economic conditions that influence the health of individuals, communities and jurisdictions as a whole.

The joint report of the Wellesley Institute and University of Toronto and the Social Planning Council of Ontario, *Sick and Tired: the Compromised Health of Social Assistance Recipients and the Working Poor in Ontario* 2009 states that social assistance recipients in Ontario live in grinding poverty, and the working poor group are also struggling. The report presents the findings of their study on the health status of social assistance recipients and the working poor. The working poor group has a median annual income of \$21,000 as well as low rates of insurance coverage for prescription drugs and other extended health care. The study notes that the number of working poor is rising due to the major restructuring of labour markets – in 2009, 37% of jobs in Canada are part-time, temporary or self-employed positions. Employment standards laws in Ontario are based on a system that responds to complaints, rather than a system that actively monitors compliance. Together these factors result in working poor people often having precarious employment situations.

The study concludes that half (50%) of the social assistance recipients group and 17% of the working poor group were in food insecure households. People do not have food security when access to food is limited or uncertain because food is not affordable, income is low, transport is lacking, and/or choice is inadequate (i.e. special diets).

The study further concludes that the social assistance recipients group had significantly higher rates of poor health and chronic conditions on 38 out of 39 health measures compared to the non-poor and 37 of 39 health measures compared to the working poor. The working poor group also had higher rates of diabetes, heart disease, chronic bronchitis and other chronic conditions than the non-poor.

⁴ Ibid.

The study took into account (held constant) the effects of demographic, educational, employment, and health behaviour factors and disability status. Household income and/or being in receipt of social assistance continued to be significantly associated with 6 out of 8 chronic condition categories, and 15 of 21 specific chronic conditions.

For the large numbers of people struggling with ill health, poverty further undermines their ability to cope with health problems and to improve their health. This is likely to result in increased costs to the health care system and entrenchment of people in a state of poverty.

School Attendance and School Success

The Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario, in its submission to the Provincial Poverty Reduction Strategy consultation⁵, states that school success is essential for the successful transition to adulthood, and that children and youth living in poverty are more likely than children from higher income families to have poor school attendance and to drop out of school.

School fees for agendas, workbooks, science supplies, craft materials, and curriculum activities create hardships for families living on low-incomes. Participation in extra-curricular activities such as pizza days and school pictures is out of reach for many children from families living on low income. Children and youth whose parents cannot afford such fees and activities face social exclusion, stress and embarrassment, as they are differentiated from their peers and unable to participate equally in their school environment. It is more difficult for children to succeed at school when they don't have access to appropriate school supplies, resource materials, activities, learning supports including homework assistance, and timely educational interventions⁶.

It is also more difficult for children to succeed at school when they live in households that are food insecure and in households with significantly higher rates of poor health, both factors found to be related to the social assistance recipients group and the working poor group in the Wellesley study cited above. Children who are able to stay in school and reach their full potential will be better equipped to break the cycle of poverty and contribute to the community and Ottawa's economic prosperity. The socio-economic determinants of health must be addressed to help children break the cycle.

Crime Prevention

Crime Prevention Ottawa's 2009 submission to the City's Recreation Master Plan consultation makes the link between poverty reduction and crime prevention.

Growing up poor in Ottawa is very expensive – we all pay the costs when vulnerable residents are excluded from community life. We all pay the price when at-risk youth can't take part in quality recreation programs. Crime goes up and

⁵ Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario, in its submission to the Provincial Poverty Reduction Strategy consultation, *Reducing Poor Health Outcomes for Children and Youth*, 2008.

⁶ Ibid.

people get sick. Divisions are created between the rich and the poor, between mainstream and minority cultural groups. Lives are wasted because young people can't achieve their full potential. – Dr. Mark Totten⁷

The Institute for the Prevention of Crime at the University of Ottawa states that “socio-economic disadvantage is often seen as a risk factor for delinquency but the effects of low income and other types of disadvantage can be offset... Social cohesion helps lower crime rates even in low-income neighbourhoods”. It cautions: “Economic disparity is a risk factor that is growing in some Canadian communities with the potential for increasing numbers of Canadians to suffer social exclusion.”

Poverty and Exclusion

Who is More Likely to Live in Poverty?

Age, gender, immigration to Canada, disability, lone-parent status, being a member of a racialized (visible minority) group or Aboriginal peoples, and lack of a high school diploma correlate to a person's probability of living in poverty and impact a person's ability to earn a living wage. Lack of affordable, accessible and quality child care is a barrier to employment and education for families on low income, especially sole-support female-led households. Many women raising their children alone, seniors, people with disabilities, aboriginal people, newcomers, racialized groups and the working poor struggle to make ends meet.

Ottawa's Vital Signs

The Community Foundation of Ottawa/Fondation communautaire d'Ottawa is a public, non-profit organization that connects people who care with causes that matter, enabling generous citizens to enhance the quality of life for all. The Community Foundation provides leadership by bringing people from all sectors together to identify and address issues proactively. The Foundation produces annually Ottawa's Vital Signs report, a check up on Ottawa's quality of life. As an objective body, the Community Foundation provides statistics and information for use by members of the public who are encouraged to raise the issues presented in the report to the level of debate and public discourse. The following are key highlights from the Ottawa Vital Signs 2009 and 2008 reports⁸:

1. In 2006, the overall poverty rate in Ottawa, based on the Low Income Measure (LIM), an indicator of relative poverty, was 18.6%;
2. Between 2000 and 2005, female-headed lone-parent families in Ottawa continued to experience a higher poverty rate at 31.3% than other family types, including male-headed lone-parent families (17%) and two-parent families (7.4%);
3. In 2006, 20% of children in Ottawa lived in poverty, based on the Low Income Measure;

⁷ Crime Prevention Ottawa Submission to the City of Ottawa Recreation Master Plan Consultation, *Improving Access to Recreation for Vulnerable Citizens in Ottawa*, 2009.

⁸ Data were used from the most recent Statistics Canada Census (2006).

4. Approximately one in eight seniors (65 and over) lived below the Low Income Measure in 2006 (Ottawa-Gatineau CMA).
5. Food banks in Ottawa report a 9% increase in visits from March 2007 to March 2009. From March 2008 to March 2009, an average of 43,800 people per month requested assistance from Ottawa Food Bank agencies⁹
6. Between 2008 and 2009, 17% of people requesting assistance from Ottawa food bank agencies were employed.
7. In 2009, one in five people with disabilities in Ottawa live in poverty.

Community and Social Services Department

The Community and Social Services Department provides social assistance, employment supports, subsidized child care and other services to eligible households. The following highlights key indicators of need for social services in our community.

Ontario Disability Support Program

- In 2009, the average monthly Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) caseload in Ottawa is 20,843 benefit units, comprising an average monthly total of 31,447 benefit unit members; and
- For the past nine years, the Ontario Disability Support Program caseload has been increasing by an average of 3% in Ottawa.

Ontario Works

- In 2009, the average monthly Ontario Works caseload in Ottawa is 14,738 benefit units, comprising an average monthly total of 28,112 benefit unit members;
- From January to September 2009, the Ontario Works caseload rose approximately 5%
- Almost half of new applicants to Ontario Works in Ottawa are people not born in Canada.

Housing and Shelter Services

- As of the end of 2008, there were 9,692 households on the waiting list for social housing. The average wait time is about 5-8 years. Most individuals on low income live in private market housing;
- In 2009, 6,650 individuals (projected) used emergency shelter beds in Ottawa. The average length of stay in 2009 is 64 nights per client (projected), up from 51 nights per client in 2008, indicating that clients are staying longer in the shelter system; and
- According to the 2006 Census, the proportion of renter households in Ottawa spending 30% or more of their income on shelter costs (rent, electricity, heat, municipal services) was 42.4%. The percentage of owner households spending more than 30% of their income on shelter costs was 15.1%.

⁹ People are limited to one request for assistance from the Food Bank per month.

Child Care

- There are a total of 7,373 children waiting for licensed child care in Ottawa– 2,272 are waiting for a subsidized space and 5,101 for a full fee space.

While the costs of basic necessities have steadily increased, governments have not increased sufficiently the minimum wage and income support programs to keep pace with the actual costs of food, shelter, clothing and transportation. Major economic restructuring means that many working poor have temporary, part-time or contract employment that may be precarious and/or without benefits.

In 2009, individuals and families receiving Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Program (ODSP) benefits are struggling to make ends meet on similar or less income than people receiving social assistance 14 years ago¹⁰. For example, a sole support parent with two children on OW must make ends meet on \$943 monthly in 2009, compared to \$1,386 in 1995; a single person with a disability on ODSP receives \$1020 monthly in 2009, only slightly higher than the \$930 received in 1995.

In terms of current living standards and actual costs of good and services, social assistance rates lag behind to the degree that people on social assistance are living in deep poverty. For example, in 2009, the average rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Ottawa is \$995, ranging from \$1,019 in the highest rent area of the City to \$729 in the lowest rent area. A parent with two children under 12 on Ontario Works must pay for rent, food and all other needs for her family on \$943 a month. The average waiting period on the list to get into subsidized housing in Ottawa is 5-8 years¹¹. Most people on social assistance in Ottawa live in private market housing.

When individuals and families have rent costs that exceed the shelter allowance portion of Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program (e.g. \$607 shelter allowance for single parent with two children on OW), they must choose between buying food and paying the rent.

Between 2008 and 2009, 22% of people using Ottawa food banks indicate that their primary source of income was Ontario Disability Support Program, and 46% indicated that Ontario Works was their primary source of income¹². Seventeen percent (17%) indicated their primary source of income was employment.

¹⁰ 2009 figures shown include Ontario Child Benefits for families with children.

¹¹ Seniors have shorter waits, and some groups are assigned a priority under provincial legislation (victims of abuse) or through local policy (urgent safety, urgent medical, homeless).

¹² Community Foundation of Ottawa, *Ottawa's Vital Signs* 2009

Definition of Inclusion and Exclusion

The concept of social inclusion and exclusion is discussed throughout this report. The report uses the following definition of social inclusion and exclusion¹³:

Social inclusion assures each citizen that he or she will be provided with the opportunity to fully participate in realizing aspirations. Social inclusion relies on active civic participation to identify the barriers to access and to ensure that people have a collective sense of belonging to their society.

Social exclusion is a dynamic, complex and multi-dimensional process as a result of which certain groups find themselves on the margins of society. This is demonstrated by outcomes of lower economic and social status, combined with a lack of power to change these outcomes. Exclusion is a process and an outcome. It is experienced at both the individual and community level.

Civic Participation and the Voice of People on Low Income

The call for an Ottawa Poverty Reduction Strategy has its genesis not only in the Provincial Strategy but also in the “bottom-up” grassroots work of the local community. Over the past ten years, Ottawa has seen an increasing level of participation of low-income individuals voicing their lived experience and influencing policy at the municipal and provincial level.

In 1998, the People’s Hearings was held and a summary report was brought to Committee and Council at the City of Ottawa. Subsequently, Council directed staff to undertake a Task Force on Poverty bringing together people living on low-income and municipal staff, with support from community developers based in Community Health and Resource Centres (CHRC’s), to address poverty issues. The Task Force produced many positive results, such as increased access to bus passes for people on social assistance looking for employment and funding for a community-based Anti-poverty Community Coordinator¹⁴. The Task Force also proposed the idea of an ongoing committee to advise City Council on poverty issues. This led to the formation of the Poverty Issues Advisory Committee (PIAC) as part of the post-amalgamation municipal governance structure.

In 2004, PIAC developed a report called Basic Needs ACS2004-CCV-POI-0003 in response to the increasing level of hardship experienced by low-income people. The report identified the basic components required to permit people to live with dignity, to have a sense of personal safety and income adequacy, to participate and feel included in civic life, and to maintain a healthy, active lifestyle.

¹³ Social Planning Council of Ottawa, *Mixed Blessings and Missed Opportunities: the Intercase Study on Inclusion and Exclusion of Ottawa’s Visible and Ethnic Minority Residents*, 2008.

¹⁴ The Anti Poverty Community Coordinator encourages participation of people living on low income in discussions related to poverty, increasing opportunities to influence policies and service delivery. Plays key role of community resource person in issues related to poverty reduction through increased community participation.

In 2008, the Ottawa Poverty Reduction Strategy Network (OPRN) came together to support the participation of low-income individuals in the development of Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy. The OPRN, a group of community organizations and anti-poverty advocates, organized a community forum on June 25, 2008 and prepared a report, entitled *... something left over at the end of the month*, for the Ontario Cabinet Committee on Poverty Reduction.

In addition to organizing the June 25, 2008 community forum to ensure that many voices were heard, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Network drew on the work of PIAC, including the Basic Needs report and the report from the Peoples' Hearings II (April 2005) as well as the Rethinking Poverty Forum report (2007), to inform their recommendations. *... something left over at the end of the month* recognizes that meaningful poverty reduction has to include not only income but also individuals' access to housing, medicine, food, education, clothes, and recreation. It also recognized the need for citizen engagement and the need to raise public awareness about poverty issues through public education efforts.

The Poverty Reduction Steering Committee includes four community representatives from the Poverty Issues Advisory Committee and the Ottawa Poverty Reduction Network. Of the 118 people who participated in the targeted Poverty Reduction Consultation sessions held in September 2009, approximately half were people on low income. Findings from the Ottawa Poverty Reduction Network's consultation forum on poverty (June 2009) were shared with the Steering Committee.

New voices have been added to the discourse on poverty reduction in Ottawa. Safe People Project Participants provided a written submission to the Steering Committee. Poverty Elimination Mental Health Advocates (PEMHA) participated in the consultation sessions and prepared a written submission to the Steering Committee.

4. ONTARIO'S POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY

In November 2008, the Province released the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy with a goal of reducing child poverty by 25% in five years, thereby removing 90,000 children from poverty. The Province uses senior government policy levers such as increasing the minimum wage and accelerating increases to the Ontario Child Benefit program, as well as flowing funding to communities for community use of schools, affordable housing and housing with supports.

The provincial government states: "It is about believing in the potential of people living in poverty. Children should have the opportunity to succeed in life. Families facing challenges deserve the chance to get ahead." www.ontario.ca/breakingthecycle

The provincial strategy calls on the federal government to increase its investment in programs such as the Working Income Tax Benefit and the National Child Benefit, and it calls on municipalities and communities to bring people together to build on the Provincial strategy through community/municipal projects at the local level.

Some of the proposed new investments highlighted in the Provincial plan include the following:

- An additional \$230 million annual increase to the Ontario Child Benefit;
- \$5 million to establish a Community Opportunities Fund for poverty-reduction initiatives tailored to local needs;
- \$5 million to annualize rent bank funding;
- \$3 million to implement social assistance rule changes
- Increasing the minimum wage;
- Extension of the Children in Need of Treatment (CINOT) dental program to children age 13 to 18;
- Offering full-day learning for four and five year olds;
- Enhancing programs for at-risk children and youth at school;
- Supporting more recreation programs in high need neighbourhoods; and
- Providing more supports for parents to get involved in their children's education.

The Province has stated that the success of the Provincial Strategy will be measured by results, with a strong focus on school success. The Province is developing indicators to track school success (e.g. readiness to learn at age 6, standard test scores, graduation rates), healthy birth rates, housing-related indicators and others.

5. OTTAWA'S POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY (PRS)

The Poverty Reduction Steering Committee was established in May 2009. The Committee was co-chaired by the City and the Community Foundation of Ottawa. The Committee included broad community representation including:

- People with lived experience of poverty representing the Poverty Reduction Network and the Poverty Issues Advisory Committee;
- Immigrant sector;
- Inuit community;
- Business sector;
- Ottawa Carleton District School Board;
- Coalition of Health and Resource Centres, including representation of the rural perspective;
- Social Planning Council;
- United Way;
- Ministry of Community and Social Services;
- Community Foundation of Ottawa;
- Councillor Bédard, City of Ottawa;
- City of Ottawa Community and Social Services staff.

Ottawa's Poverty Reduction Strategy is an action plan that sets out a vision, principles, 3 strategic priorities and 16 specific recommendations for action.

As was heard in the September 2009 consultation sessions, there are people in our community who cannot afford to buy food when they need it, people who are without access to public transportation for themselves or their children, and people who live in rental housing in a state of disrepair or housing that is not affordable, and people who feel excluded from participation in community life.

The intent of the Poverty Reduction Strategy is to call on the City to take a leadership role in poverty reduction and investment in social infrastructure, and to demonstrate that bringing different sectors together to act locally and collaboratively on agreed upon priorities is an effective way to identify concrete actions to reduce poverty locally. The Poverty Reduction Strategy represents a first step in a collaborative effort to bring a high profile to poverty reduction in our community and take concrete actions at the municipal and community level.

Ottawa's Poverty Reduction Strategy builds on efforts to create a community approach to solving local issues, including participation of people living in poverty at the planning table together with community organizations, funders, and other sectors such as the Inuit community, Immigrant, education and the private sector.

The Poverty Reduction Steering Committee formulated the vision and strategic priorities based on the key messages heard in forums and initiatives where individuals and families on low-income, advocates, and representatives from community agencies made their voices heard. These initiatives include the People's Hearings and People's Hearings II, Re-thinking Poverty I and II, the Task Force on Poverty, Poverty Issues Advisory Committee and the Ottawa Poverty Reduction Network. As well, the Colour of Poverty forum held in 2009 challenged the community to consider how racialization impacts the demographic of poverty.

The following definition of basic needs as defined by the Poverty Issues Advisory Committee guided the strategy:

Poverty is the situation/circumstance whereby persons on low-income... are unable to provide themselves and/or family with even the "basic needs". "Basic Needs"... are those components which permit people on low-income to have... not just an existence. These components permit low-income people to live with dignity, to have sense of personal safety and belonging, to participate and feel included in civic life and to maintain a healthy lifestyle. *PIAC, 2004*

The Poverty Reduction Strategy links this definition of basic needs to poverty reduction initiatives:

The [Poverty Reduction] Strategy has to provide hope to children and youth so they can see their way out of poverty. It has to provide tangible supports to help them achieve an education including adequate food and shelter, and provide supports to their parents and community so they can help them achieve their potential.

OPRN, June 2008

The target group for the Ottawa Poverty Reduction Strategy comprises individuals, families and children on low income.

Consultation

The City partnered with the Social Planning Council of Ottawa to plan and deliver two targeted Poverty Reduction Strategy community consultation sessions held on September 18th and September 21st. A total of 118 people participated in the targeted sessions. Approximately 50% of participants were people on low income, and approximately 20% were Francophone. A summary of the findings is included in Annex 2.

Vision

The Poverty Reduction Strategy vision is:

All residents of Ottawa living in dignity and health, in a community that fosters participation and inclusion for all.

Principles

The Poverty Reduction Strategy is built on the following principles:

- All residents of Ottawa must be able to meet their basic needs, including living in dignity, safety and health, feeling included and having access to a range of opportunities to participate in community life;
- The City has a leadership role to play in poverty reduction and social infrastructure investment;
- The voices of people on low income need to be included in community initiatives;
- The community coming together to find local solutions based on collaboration, cooperation and opportunities for partnerships is the most effective way to create change at the local level;
- Local solutions must be responsive to the full diversity of the community, including gender, age, ability, urban/rural, newcomer and racialized status; and
- Efforts to raise public awareness as well as concrete actions contribute to poverty reduction.

Strategic Priorities

The Poverty Reduction Strategy includes the following priorities:

1. A service system working to the benefit of people in need;
2. Building a community of inclusion and belonging; and
3. Breaking down myths about poverty and promoting poverty reduction.

Key Project Areas

Under the vision, principles, and strategic priorities, the Steering Committee identified 10 key project areas for further research and analysis. While there are many needs to be addressed, the Steering Committee's goal was to identify several "do-able" actions, to advocate, and to provide a voice of support to complementary initiatives e.g. the City Housing Strategy, the Immigration Ottawa Initiative and the Recreation Master Plan. The Poverty Reduction Strategy Phase 1 is intended to demonstrate that by coming together in a common vision, using common language, and in concert with other initiatives, the community can take effective steps at a local level to reduce poverty.

The Steering Committee acknowledges that the key project areas are not an exhaustive list of poverty issues that need to be addressed. The Committee is in agreement that broad poverty reduction in our community requires a multi-phase, multi-year approach involving and engaging an ever-increasing number of residents of Ottawa. In the view of the Steering Committee, Phase I of the Ottawa Poverty Reduction Strategy represents a beginning, not an end point, for poverty reduction in Ottawa.

Criteria for Project Selection

The Steering Committee used the following criteria to select Phase I project areas for research and analysis:

- Within local control;
- Concrete action;
- Can be accomplished within one or two years; and
- Fits with the current fiscal environment.

The Steering Committee also identified several areas to advocate to the Province for further systemic changes.

The key Project Areas are:

1. Improving access to Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) benefits for people with disabilities on low income;
2. Improving access to City services for people on low income;
3. Streamlining Essential Health and Social Supports and Home Support Services' needs assessment for people in need;
4. Improving access to recreation for people on low income;
5. Developing approaches to address rural poverty that meet the particular needs of rural communities;
6. Developing targeted solutions to address the complex and unique needs of immigrants and racialized groups;
7. Exploring the feasibility of implementing a Living Wage policy within the City of Ottawa;

8. Advocating for adequate social assistance benefits and removing systemic barriers across Ministries; promoting additional employment supports and skills development programs for vulnerable persons;
9. Advocating for increased homelessness prevention initiatives, increased access to social and affordable housing and housing with supports; and
10. Raising public awareness of poverty issues, and promoting poverty reduction and City investment in social infrastructure.

Recommendations and Implementation

The Steering Committee developed 16 recommendations within these project areas, focusing primarily on concrete actions within local control that could be accomplished within a one – two year timeframe. In the current fiscal environment, the Committee looked for creative ways to accomplish progress without creating additional budget pressures.

The report also identifies whether or not recommendations can be implemented within two years (short term) or whether implementation would likely occur over a longer timeframe (long term) and identifies the level of government/community that would need to be involved in implementation.

During the implementation phase (Phase II), measures will be developed and progress will be tracked and reported on the priorities and recommendations.

Strategic Priority 1:

A Service System working to the benefit of people in need

By: Identifying and addressing gaps and barriers in the social and/or community health service systems.

5.1 Project Area: Improving access to Ontario Disability Support Program

ODSP Community Application Process

Recommendation 1

Develop and implement an expanded community Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) application process, based on the model described in this report.

[What is needed is]... a new system of disability assessment that provides faster service to ODSP applicants and results in fewer ODSP grants achieved through appeals. It would be cheaper and more humane to do it right the first time.”
OPRN, June 2008

Discussion

This project area focused on developing a community model to improve access to Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) benefits on first application for people with major mental health and cognitive issues and other disabilities. To be eligible for the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), individuals must have a recurring or continuous physical or mental disability, or a combination, that is expected to last one or more years, verified by a person with appropriate qualifications according to the condition involved.

The application process for ODSP is complex and time-consuming. Some individuals who could benefit from ODSP give up, others do not even attempt the application process due to its complexity, and many who are turned down on first application go through a lengthy appeal process to be subsequently granted ODSP benefits.

The need for a community model is supported by the following key facts:

- The Provincial approval rate granting ODSP benefits on first application is 50-55%;
- In 2008, as a result of referrals made by City of Ottawa staff, a total of 1,453 cases (66%) were granted disability status by the Provincial Disability Adjudication Tribunal (DAU).
- Many individuals who would benefit from ODSP do not have a family doctor and have limited access to primary health care providers, particularly those with specialized knowledge of the ODSP application process;
- As a result of difficulties they face in applying for and securing ODSP, some individuals who would benefit from ODSP are without any source of income, or rely on Ontario Works (OW), a program which provides lower benefits;
- Applicants may apply to OW for money to live on in the meantime. Individuals receive lower benefits from OW than from ODSP. The current OW benefit rate for a single person is \$572 monthly compared to \$1,020 for a single person on ODSP monthly. This results in the following annual income impacts:
 - Maximum annual ODSP Benefits for a single person: \$12,240
 - Maximum annual OW Benefits for a single person: \$6,864
 - Annual difference between maximum OW and maximum ODSP income for a single person: \$5,400
- The Provincial Disability Adjudication Tribunal indicates that more complete medical information on the application form would be an important step in increasing the number of successful grants on first application.

Application Support Worker (ASW) Program

Since October 2005, a designated Application Support Worker (ASW) based in Centre 454, a non-profit community organization, has been funded by the City to test out the implications of an ASW intensive case management approach with marginalized persons on an outreach basis.

The ASW provides intensive support to individuals with serious mental health issues, cognitive impairments and other complex issues who are having significant difficulties navigating the system to apply for and secure ODSP. The ASW works in partnership with a number of organizations, including Ontario Works and ODSP staff. The following service results are shown over the duration of the project with incomplete data for the current year¹⁵:

- Rate of applications approved and granted, including appeals, 79%, with an expectation that the rate of grants to applications will rise to 82 – 85% in 2009;
- Significant reduction in the average length of time from intake to submission of the complete package to the Disability Adjudication Unit from 147 days (Year 1) to 83 days (Year3) due to increased collaboration among community resources needed to gather and access essential information; and
- Over a period of 44 months, 181 individuals with very challenging issues were able to successfully access ODSP benefits at an average service cost of approximately \$1,026 each. This will result in increased benefits of a minimum of \$4,800 per person annually to meet their basic needs, which also contributes to the economy of the City. In 2010, ODSP benefits are cost shared 90% by the Province and 10% by the City and will be covered 100% by the Province in 2011 as a result of the uploading of social assistance costs from municipalities to the Province.

The following profile of users of the service is summarized below:

- Fifty nine percent (59%) of clients were in receipt of regular OW benefits and 22% had incomes from a shelter-managed Personal Needs Allowance (PNA), which is funded by OW. Three percent of clients had no income at all.
- Almost sixty percent (60%) of clients still in the process for preparing their ODSP application were without a doctor and thus unable to have the medical component of the ODSP application completed.
- Ninety percent (90%) of project clients were estimated to be experiencing housing insecurity. One-third of clients were homeless (on the street, living with friends or family, or in shelters) when they connected with the ASW. Another 4% were staying in detox, harm reduction, hospital programs.
- Approximately 50% of clients have serious mental health problems, about 30% have both a mental health and a physical disability and approximately 20% have a physical disability.

¹⁵Anglican Social Services – Centre 454, in partnership with Canadian Mental Health Association, Ottawa Branch, July 2009.

ODSP Community Application Model

The objective of the proposed expanded ODSP Community Application Model is to increase the percentage of grants for ODSP approved at first application, and to support individuals who could not otherwise engage in the application process because of its complexity. As well, individuals who are going through the application process and have no current source of income will be referred to the Ontario Works program for financial assistance.

The model (see Figure 1) brings together community partners such as community social service agencies, community health and resource centres, legal clinics, the City of Ottawa, the Ministry of Community and Social Services, and the Local Health Integration Network (LHIN). Discussions are in progress with the LHIN to propose increased access to primary health care through Community Health and Resource Centres for the target population of the ODSP Community Application initiative.

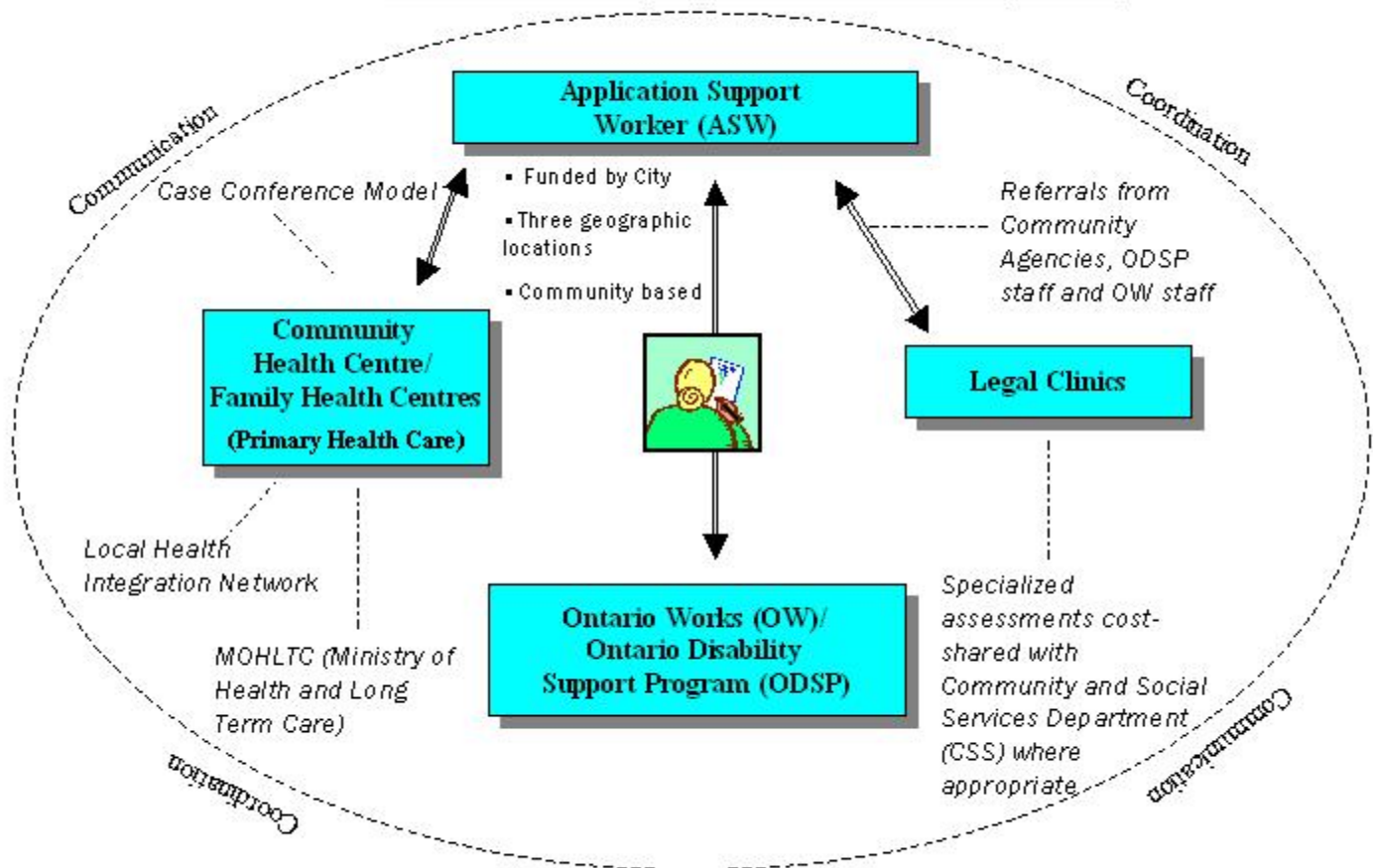
The ODSP Community Application model includes the following key components:

- Incorporation of best practises of Centre 454's Application Support Worker (ASW) project in overall model;
- Addition of two community referral partners;
- Location of two of the community referral partners outside the downtown core;
- Identification of roles and increased information-sharing and coordination among a range of community partners;
- Increased access to appropriate primary health care for individuals applying for ODSP; and
- Tracking and reporting e.g. number of individuals moved from OW to ODSP (specific measures to be identified in implementation phase).

Members of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Steering Committee are meeting with the Local Health Integration Network to discuss a proposal to expand access to primary health care to this vulnerable population.

The following visual summarizes how the components of the ODSP Community Application Model relate to each other.

ODSP Community Application Partnership Model



Financial Impact

A total allocation of \$200,000 in one-time Provincial funding has been identified from the Community and Social Services budget for the three community referral partners. Depending on the success of the program, this will become a base budget pressure for future years, beginning in 2011.

5.2 Project Area: Streamlining Access to Essential Health and Social Supports (EHSS: 100% City) and Home Support Services

Recommendation 2

Streamline the needs assessment, including asset levels, for Essential Health and Social Supports (EHSS: 100% City) and Home Support Services for people in need.

Discussion

This project area focused on streamlining the needs assessment to enhance access to Essential Health and Social Supports and Home Support Services for people in need.

On June 1, 2009, Councillor Cullen brought a report *Essential Health and Social Support (EHSS) and Home Help Asset Limits*, ACS2009, to Community and Protective Services Committee. The report calls on the City of Ottawa to increase access to the EHSS and Home Support Services (formerly Home Help) programs by raising asset limits from \$5,000 to \$10,000 for non-cash assets only. Subsequently, CPS Committee approved the following:

That Community & Protective Services Committee recommend to City Council that the asset limit for Essential Health & Social Support (EHSS) and Home Help Programs be increased from \$5,000 to \$10,000 for non-cash items effective January 2010, and that the resulting increase in expenditures be tabled as part of the 2010 budget deliberations.

The item was referred directly to the Poverty Reduction Strategy to study the feasibility and propose recommendations before being considered by City Council. This provided an opportunity for staff to review the overall process for how people apply and qualify for Essential Health and Social Supports and Home Support Services to create a streamlined process to ensure the program is reaching the individuals in need it is intended to help.

Treatment of Assets

The rationale for asset testing is to ensure that people who receive benefits are in true need and to promote fairness in social programs. For the last 60 years, needs-tested programs have recognized that a reasonable “cushion” or liquid asset exemption is a necessary eligibility rule. A reasonable exemption ensures that people are not pushed into deeper poverty or crisis, e.g. through liquidation of assets that stabilize their lives, allow some capacity to meet contingencies, or allow them to move toward self-reliance.¹⁶

¹⁶ Stapleton, John, *Why don't we want the poor to own anything?* 2009 Metcalf Foundation

Essential Health and Social Supports and Home Support Services Programs

The City's 100% Essential Health and Social Supports program supports eligible low-income residents with the purchase of items or services such as vision care, prosthetic devices, dental care, diabetic supplies, essential hearing aids, mobility devices, incontinent supplies, bathroom aids, respiratory supplies, essential appliances and funerals and burials. Many EHSS applicants have one-time requirements, others have ongoing needs. Of those individuals with ongoing health related needs, approximately 70% are seniors.

The Essential Health and Social Supports program is approved by City Council. The existing Essential Health and Social Supports program budget is \$1,463,000 annually (100% municipal). The current ongoing caseload is 798 benefit units (ongoing clients only). The average monthly number of new intakes across four Social Services Centres is 75 new applications (ongoing as well as one time items like funerals and glasses).

The Home Help and Home Management Services have been integrated since 2006. The combined program is called Home Support Services. It provides home management counselling and homemaking services to eligible clients. The homemaking services component of the program purchases home help services from both non-profit and for-profit organizations for eligible residents by providing support to independent living arrangements and enabling residents to participate in the life of their community. The majority of clients receiving homemaking services are on a fixed income pension such as Old Age Security and the Ontario Disability Support Program. The total budget for the purchased homemaking services component is \$2.3 million (2009). The total number of clients receiving purchased homemaking services is 1,083.

Eligibility for both Essential Health and Social Supports and Home Support Services is based on a needs test that considers assets, income and allowable expenses. The asset limit initially was \$3,000 for a single person. In 2006, City Council increased the asset limit to \$5,000 for a single person to match the ODSP asset limits. The maximum asset level for families is up to \$11,000, depending on family size.

Scope of Review

The Community and Social Services Department has formed an internal working group to review the program and ensure it is reaching people it is intended to reach including seniors in need. The working group is undertaking a review of cases to continue to investigate the impact of allowable assets and a different approach to determining financial eligibility moving to an income measure, similar to the Child Care eligibility process, rather than a means test. Measures for tracking and reporting on the impact of proposed changes will be identified in the implementation phase.

Financial Impact

Currently, there are no additional 2010 financial impacts identified with this recommendation. However, any changes to the needs testing approach will be monitored and any pressures that

cannot be managed within the existing budgets will be brought to Committee/Council during the year or identified as part of the 2011 budget process.

5.3 Project Area: Improving access to City services

Recommendation 3

Improve access to City services by establishing a single point of application for multiple City services of importance to people on low income, and by ensuring 311 (for City services) and 211 (for City and community services) have the capacity to provide information on a full range of services from the perspective of people on low income.

Discussion

The Poverty Reduction Strategy supports that the City continue to seek opportunities to expand the number of City services that can be accessed through a single point of application.

311 and 211 Information and Referral Service

211 is an information and referral service that connects callers to a full range of non-emergency social, health, community and government services. 211 service was officially launched in Ottawa in September 2008. As of September 2009, the service is available 24 hours per day, seven days a week. 211 is supported by the United Way/Centraide Ottawa, the City of Ottawa, the Province of Ontario, and Citizenship and Immigration Ottawa.

211 is an anonymous phone service. Some of the top reasons for calling include housing-related enquiries, health services and assistance with basic needs, as well as seasonal or situational inquiries such as Christmas support programs and calls related to the winter 2008-2009 transit strike. A large majority of users reported in a post-call survey that they would use the service again.

The City's 311 service connects residents with its "one-stop" Contact Centre, providing answers to residents on City services ranging from recreation to marriage licenses to recycling.

Feedback from the Poverty Reduction Strategy consultation sessions indicated the need to have a single entry point for information on the full range of City and community services available to people on low income. The Poverty Reduction Strategy recommends that Ottawa's 211 partners and the City (311 service) ensure that the telephone services have the capacity to respond to this particular need.

Financial Impact

There are no additional financial impacts identified with this recommendation.

"When you apply for subsidy or help it is very invasive. In any situation where you are getting money from the government you have to deal with self-esteem."
People's Hearings II,
April 2005

Strategic Priority 2:

Building a community of inclusion and belonging

By: Promoting and enhancing access to recreation, housing, employment, education and other opportunities for all residents, with particular attention to the needs of low-income households.

5.4 Project Area: Improving Access to Recreation for People on Low Income

Recommendation 4

Increase access to recreation for people on low income.

Recommendation 5

Develop a planning table to bring together school boards, the Parks, Recreation, and Culture Department, Children's Services, Crime Prevention Ottawa and community agencies to develop solutions to jointly create, program and coordinate increased community use of schools.

Discussion

Everybody Gets to Play

Research shows that recreation is an effective and economical way to improve the lives of families on low income. Access to recreation is a matter of equity and inclusion. According to the *Everybody Gets to Play* (Ontario Supplement), produced by the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association, in order to address the needs of children, the needs of female-led sole support families must be addressed. "We need to hear the voices of low-income parents and children, and engage whole families to increase their opportunities for recreation".

The community benefits as a whole when people on low-income have a full range of opportunities to participate and be included in community life, and specifically have access to recreation. Helping residents to reach their full potential is the foundation of a healthy, sustainable community and continuing economic prosperity.

The Poverty Reduction Strategy takes a strong position that including people on low-income in recreation activities is an appropriate use of property tax subsidies. This position acknowledges the benefit to the whole community when all residents have opportunities to participate in recreation.

The Poverty Reduction Strategy supports the development of self-serve, "you just go", no-fee, culturally-sensitive recreation opportunities in neighbourhood parks; the development of a collaborative community planning table to increase the community use of schools; the re-energization of neighbourhood facilities in the inner city; and increased access for children on

low income to both registered programs and organized sports, including taking innovative approaches to increase access as well as continuing the recreation fee subsidy program.

Community Hubs

The Province of Ontario is providing funding to school boards to increase the community use of schools. For example, at the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, eleven (11) priority neighbourhood schools and 1 rural school have been identified for creation of community hubs. Increasing the community use of schools will strengthen the connection of families and children to education, their communities, and their neighbours.

The Steering Committee has identified a need for a planning table to bring together school boards, the Parks and Recreation, Children's Services, Crime Prevention Ottawa and community agencies to find a way to jointly to create, program and coordinate community hubs. There are various ways that partners could contribute e.g. space, transportation, sharing information, outreach and/or programming.



Immigrant and Racialized Groups

The needs of immigrant and racialized groups may be different than for the general population and this lens needs to be applied to policies, programs and approaches to increasing access to recreation. A range of models should be employed to ensure that no one is falling through the cracks.

Aboriginal Peoples

The Aboriginal community and service providers emphasize cultural healing and providing opportunities for Aboriginal youth growing up in Ottawa to be grounded in their culture. The City working in partnership with the Aboriginal agencies and community provides opportunities to develop recreation policies and services that are culturally sensitive and contribute to this healing.

Current Initiatives to Increase Access to Recreation

The City is involved in a number of programs and initiatives to increase access to recreation.

- Through its Recreation Subsidy Program, the City provides financial assistance to residents who provide evidence of financial need (based on LICO) to participate in parks, recreation and cultural programs provided by the Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Services

Department¹⁷. Fee assistance clients are expected to pay a minimum of 25% of the cost of a program or activity, with the exception of people receiving Ontario Disability Support Program benefits. The Area Manager can waive this fee. Individuals have a limit of \$165 per person fee assistance annually; however, parents can transfer their allotment to their children.

- A one-year grant of \$70,000 from the Ontario Health and Health Promotion Ministry enabled the start up of Community Sports Clubs in 10 different Ottawa communities. The neighbourhood approach meant there was no requirement for means-testing to determine eligibility. The program served 160 kids and provided leadership and mentoring as well as instruction in sports.
- The Canadian Tire Jump Start Program provides \$80,000 annually to the City for recreation equipment, transportation and programs focused on high needs neighbourhoods.

An internal Access to Recreation staff working group is in the process of identifying priority neighbourhoods as well as developing a staff survey for recreation facilities to create an “as-is” picture. The working group will be formulating recommendations to increase access to recreation for people on low income, within the context of the Recreation Master Plan policy framework.

Collaboration with Crime Prevention Ottawa

The Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Department is collaborating with Crime Prevention Ottawa, for example, exploring how recreation programs can be developed to help prevent youth from getting involved in crime. A joint Data Working Group identified: high needs neighbourhoods and mapping assets, City delivered programs and community partner delivered programs.

Recreation Master Plan

Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Department, has undertaken an extensive planning process to create a Recreation Master Plan. The purpose of the plan is to create a policy framework for the delivery of parks and recreation services. Three (3) White Papers were developed for consultation on a range of issues, including an Accessibility White Paper. The consultation process was held over the 2009 summer months and its findings will be reported later this year.

PRS Recommendations to Master Plan Consultation – Accessibility White Paper

The Poverty Reduction Strategy Steering Committee submitted the following specific recommendations to the Master Plan consultation process to move the Master Plan forward in

¹⁷ Fee assistance program is only available in City operated community and recreation centres.

improving access to recreation for people on low-income and measuring success of improvements to accessibility:

1. *Develop self-serve, “you just go”, recreation opportunities focusing on wading pools, splash pads and neighbourhood parks.* Organize short-term, no-fee programs in the parks where both adults and their kids can go, involve people in activities, make parks an inviting, welcoming and engaging “place to go”.
2. *Develop a planning table* including Parks and Recreation, school boards, Children’s Services and community agencies to collaborate, joint programming, break down silos and maximize the use of facilities. Develop opportunities to leverage funding flowing from the province for the creation of community “hubs.”
3. *Re-invigorate neighbourhood facilities in the inner city.* Currently, new growth and development is focused in newer communities, funded by development charges. A re-development approach is need for aging facilities serving an increasingly dense population in the inner city and older, inner suburbs.
4. *Ensure children on low income have access to both registered programs such as after-school, skating, swimming and summer camps and organized sports by:*
 - Targeting priority neighbourhoods to offer skill-learning organized sports opportunities where children and youth do not have to pay fees, they can “just go”;
 - Working with community agencies from the immigrant sector to develop opportunities to meet specific needs of immigrant and racialized communities;
 - Breaking down barriers such as lack of transportation by working with community partners so that children and youth on low-income from various parts of the city can participate in organized sports;



- Designating a certain percentage of time at recreation facilities that must be reserved for use by programs for children and youth from families on low income;
- Contractually requiring sports leagues that are renting recreation facilities for children and youth’s organized sports to ensure a certain percentage of participants are kids from families on low income;

- Sharing capacity by offering unfilled spots in registered programs to children and youth on low income on a no-fee basis;
- Working collaboratively with community agencies to identify children and youth who are interested in participating in registered programs and organized sports but who are experiencing barriers to participation.

Financial Impact

Any additional financial impacts will be identified through the upcoming reports from the Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Department

5.5 Project Area: Income, Employment Supports and Skills Development

Market Basket Approach to Increase Social Assistance Rates and Removal of Systemic Barriers across Ministries

Recommendation 6

Advocate that the Province increase social assistance rates utilizing a standardized market basket measure approach that reflects current living standards and annual cost of living adjustments, and remove systemic barriers across Ministries that have unintended effects of keeping people in poverty.

Discussion

While the costs of basic necessities have steadily increased, governments have not increased the minimum wage and income support programs to keep pace with the actual costs of food, shelter, clothing and transportation. The lost ground resulting from a period of more than a decade of cut and/or frozen rates has not been made up, despite some recent cost of living increases, and the introduction of the Ontario Child Benefit which is integrated with Ontario Works (OW). People on low-income in Ottawa report that people in our community are experiencing hunger, isolation, deteriorating states of health (e.g. uncontrolled diabetes), often living in substandard housing and housing that is not affordable.

“I can’t afford luxuries like food and transportation.” People’s Hearings II 2005

The real gap that has emerged between social assistance benefit rates relative to the actual costs of goods and services has not been adequately addressed. The minimum wage remains below a “living wage”.¹⁸ In 1995 Ontario Works (OW) rates were cut by 21.6% and were frozen for another 11 years. The Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) was frozen for 13 years. Similarly, the minimum wage was frozen for almost nine years. Since then, increases have been made to adjust for cost of living. For example,

¹⁸ More details on the living wage appear in the section under Strategic Priority 3 in this report.

Ontario’s minimum wage rate was increased by \$1.30 per hour between 2005 and 2008¹⁹. Ontario Works benefits were increased for the first time since 1995 with the announcement of a 3% increase in 2005 with annual increases of 2% in subsequent years. Nevertheless, the significant gap remains as the base benefits on which the recent increases have been calculated are inadequate.

Most people on low income, whether working poor or in receipt of social assistance, are renting in the private market. The wait period for social housing is 5-8 years, except for seniors and priority placements (e.g. people who are homeless; victims of abuse). The proportion of renter households in Ottawa spending 30% or more of their income on shelter costs (rent, electricity, heat, municipal services) was 42.4%.

It is important to note that people receiving subsidized housing as well as social assistance, do not necessarily have more money in their pocket to purchase food and other necessities. The maximum amount for shelter is based on the number of members in a benefit unit. The shelter amount issued is the actual verified cost of shelter paid by the client, up to the maximum amount for shelter

Table 1. Comparison of Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Benefit Rates²⁰: 1995 and 2009

Ontario Works (OW)	1995	2009
Single	\$663	\$572
Parent with two children 0-12 years	\$1,386	\$943
Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)		
Single	\$930	\$1020
Parent with two children 0-12 years	\$1,589	\$1484

Table 1 indicates that people on OW and ODSP are struggling to make ends meet on social assistance rates today or years ago.

¹⁹ Ministry of Labour, n.d.

²⁰ Maximum rates used for this analysis

Table 2. 2009 Social Assistance Rates²¹: Basic Allowance and Shelter Allowance

	Basic Allowance \$	Shelter Allowance Maximum \$	Total \$	Average market rent 1 bedroom	Average market rent 2 bedroom
Ontario Works (OW)					
Single	\$216	\$356	\$572	\$817	
Parent with two children 0-12 years	\$336	\$607	\$943		\$995
Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)					
Single	\$566	\$454	\$1020	\$817	
Parent with two children 0-12 years	\$709	\$775	\$1484		\$995

Table 2 demonstrates how OW and ODSP benefits separate housing costs and the cost of other necessities as well as the gap between rental costs and social assistance benefits.

In 2009, the average rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Ottawa in 2009 is \$995, ranging from \$1,019 in the highest rent area of the City to \$729 in the lowest rent area. A parent with two children under 12 on Ontario Works must meet her family’s needs for rent, food and all other necessities on \$943 a month. In reality, this means households on Ontario Works have limited ability to afford rental accommodations.

“[I] experience poverty everyday because [I] don’t get enough to live on [on ODSP]. It’s tiring and humiliating to have to fight to survive.” OPRN, 2008

Similarly, the average rent for bachelor and one-bedroom apartments in Ottawa ranges from 65% to 80% of ODSP benefits for a single person. In reality, this means that apartments in the private sector are not affordable for ODSP recipients.

When individuals and families have rent and utility costs in excess of the maximum shelter allowance, they must choose between buying food and paying the rent.

The price of groceries in Ontario continues to rise at a rate well beyond inflation (4 per cent versus 0.8 per cent). Between August 2008 and August 2009, the cost of food has risen substantially. Examples of the change in the cost of common food items during this period include²²:

²¹ Maximum allowance used for this analysis

²² Ontario Association of Food Banks, *In the Midst of the Storm: The Impact of the Economic Downturn for Ontario’s Food Banks in 2009*

- Milk 11%
- Potatoes 56.2%
- Peanut butter 13.6%
- Pasta 16.1%
- Ground beef 20%
- Bread 13.1%
- Bananas 37.2%

Market Basket Measure

The Market Basket Measure (MBM) is based on average household expenditures and is calculated by costing a basket of goods and services – including food, shelter, clothing and transportation – in several communities. Thresholds are then determined to represent the level of income needed by households to cover the costs of these basic goods and services.

The Poverty Reduction Strategy advocates that the Province of Ontario adjust social assistance rates based on a Market Basket Measure reflecting the actual costs of basic necessities and to adjust this amount annually in accordance with the cost of living.

Elimination of Systemic Barriers Across Ministries

The Poverty Reduction Strategy calls on the Province to remove systemic barriers to breaking the cycle of poverty. The Metcalf Foundation report, *Why is it so tough to get ahead?* (2007) states:

There is one set of federal and provincial government ministries and departments involved in income security (including social assistance), a second set involved in higher education, a third involved in housing and settlement of immigrants, and a fourth in providing and billing for services. Generally government departments are responsible for programs and policies within their own areas. This has resulted in creating barriers for people to transition out of poverty. Families become at risk of losing their shelter and young people are forced into independence at 18 discouraging them from further schooling and putting them at risk for homelessness.

Pre-Employment Supports for Vulnerable Persons

Recommendation 7

Increase employment supports and opportunities for vulnerable persons in Ottawa.

Discussion

Since 1998, the City of Ottawa has been in the business of providing employment services and programs to individuals on Ontario Works

“Increase employment supports for disabled job seekers...make receipt of social assistance an employment equity category for city jobs.”
OPRN 2008

and to the spouses and dependants of people receiving Ontario Disability Support Program benefits. Programs focus on helping clients prepare for, find and keep employment and include job development and placements, employment and computer workshops, job specific skills training, access to 5 employment resources areas and job retention services. The investments in employment have led to many residents securing and maintaining employment, improving their quality of life, increasing self-reliance, boosting the local economy and reducing social assistance costs. In 2008, 2,327 OW clients per month had employment income and were earning on average \$765. 21 monthly, 3,411 clients terminated OW for reasons of employment, one of the highest exit rates in Ontario and the Employment Resource Centres provided support to over 100,000 individuals.

The Province has recently announced that they will provide \$3.3M to the City to develop and implement the Enhanced Employment Services for Vulnerable Persons (ESS). This funding is time-limited, one-time 100% Provincial to provide enhanced services that prepare and support vulnerable persons on social assistance for labour market success with the funds being allocated for 2009 to mid 2011.



Vulnerable persons include social assistance recipients with disabilities, those who have mental health and substance abuse issues, youth at risk (16-30 years of age), older workers, Aboriginal persons, newcomers to Canada, persons fleeing domestic abuse and persons who are homeless. The department's EES plan includes 11 projects that will provide services for persons on social assistance with no or marginal attachment to the labour market who are also experiencing multiple barriers to employment.

- The enhanced services for vulnerable persons will build on the successes of the City and be in addition to the range of services provided under the Ontario Works Employment Assistance program.

The projects will support vulnerable clients with preparing for employment, while others will benefit from direct employment placement/support or training. The specific project outcomes will be monitored and evaluated, with recommendations for the sustainability of key initiatives going forth in 2011 as enhancements to existing programs.

Financial Impact

The City will receive \$3.3 million in new Provincial funding for the Enhanced Employment Services for Vulnerable Persons over the period 2010 to 2011. Based on the success of the programs, the recommendations from staff and the direction from Council, there may be future base budget pressures identified.

5.6 Project Area: Addressing the complex and unique needs of Immigrants and Racialized Groups

Recommendation 8

Integrate immigrants and newcomers into the City of Ottawa's workforce to become a model of employment and increase diversity in the City's workforce; and implement an equality framework and an equity lens across City departments.

“In Ottawa, over half of the children living in poverty are members of a visible minority.”
Rethinking Poverty II: Immigrant Perspective
April 2009.

Discussion

Despite high levels of education, immigrants in Ottawa, particularly newcomers, tend to experience higher levels of unemployment and underemployment than non-immigrants thus they are disproportionately affected by poverty. According to Statistics Canada (Labour Force Survey) the unemployment rate in Ottawa in 2008 was 4.9%. The unemployment rate for foreign-born population in Ottawa was 7.2% and for newcomers (those arriving in the past 5 years) the unemployment rate was 13.5%²³. This results in social exclusion, e.g. segregation into poor neighbourhoods, inadequate housing, public health issues, and lack of representation and diminished civic and political participation.

At the same time, as the second most important destination of immigrants in Ontario, Ottawa benefits from the everyday contributions to the local economy and increasing education and talent levels of the local workforce that immigrants bring.

The Toronto-based Colour of Poverty group held a forum in Ottawa in 2009 to highlight that the experiences of racialized communities are key to understanding disparity and social exclusion in Ontario. In other words, ethno-racial identities are not “neutral” in our society when we look at social inclusion and exclusion. Racialized groups are far more likely to live in poverty than non-racialized groups. In Ottawa, 40% of visible minority children and youth live in poverty, representing over half of all children living in poverty. The Colour of Poverty group works to ensure this aspect of poverty is part of the public discourse.

The City must take a leadership role to promote the full inclusion of immigrants and racialized groups in our community to the benefit of the whole community by working toward building a healthy, open and welcoming community for all.

In 2005, Council approved the creation of the Immigration Ottawa Initiative (IOI), through which the City of Ottawa built solid relationships with immigrant serving agencies and partners, developed a web-based Immigration Portal to raise awareness within the community about immigrating to Ottawa, and developed, with community partners, an action plan to enhance social inclusion and economic integration of immigrants within Ottawa.

²³ Ibid

In 2009, the City of Ottawa received \$143,000 to enhance the City's Immigration Portal and an additional \$20,000 to advertise the Portal.

In 2009, the Ottawa Local Immigration Partnership was successful in securing almost \$400,000 from the Federal Government for the Immigrants Social Inclusion and Economic Strategy to move forward with action plans for increasing the social and economic inclusion of immigrants in Ottawa. The City of Ottawa is an active partner in this initiative.

“Belonging comes about through inclusion. The goal of creating a sense of belonging needs to be supported by all levels of government. Opportunities must be made available...allowing immigrants and those affected by poverty...to not feel isolated in their own communities...Employment plays a large role in creating a sense of belonging”. Rethinking Poverty II: Immigrant Perspectives April 2009

Key goals of the Immigrants Social Inclusion and Economic Strategy include:

- Reduction in rates of low income among recent immigrants;
- Strengthened organizational capacity within the settlement sector through the creation of the strategy;
- Increased access to the labour market and improved hiring practices for Ottawa employers, which includes the private, public and non-profit sectors; and
- Enhanced employer access to the incoming talent pool.

Since 2005, the IOI has transitioned from a project to becoming an operational activity in the City's day-to day business. The Organizational Development and Performance Department (ODP), on behalf of the Corporation, has assumed responsibility for the coordination of IOI related initiatives working with other City Departments and Branches and key community stakeholders.

The Local Agencies Serving Immigrants (LASI) Coalition of Ottawa has identified what the City can specifically do to play a leadership role. LASI calls for the increased integration of immigrants in the City's workforce, implementation of an equality framework and equity lens in city planning, promotion of the strategic economic benefits of a diverse population, and meeting the social services needs of immigrants in our community.

The Poverty Reduction Strategy recommends the City of Ottawa become a leader and role model by increasing diversity in the City's workforce and implementing an equality framework and an equity lens across City departments.

Financial Impacts

There are no additional financial impacts identified with this recommendation.

5.7 Project Area: Homelessness, Affordable Housing and Housing with Supports

Recommendation 8

Advocate for increased investment in homelessness prevention initiatives, social and affordable housing and housing with support programs.

Discussion

Adequate, affordable housing, housing with supports, homelessness initiatives, and housing in good repair are key areas where complementary initiatives exist to which the Poverty Reduction Strategy adds a voice of support and advocates for increased investment.

The City's Housing Branch administers the portfolio of Social Housing that was developed under federal and provincial programs and downloaded to the City in 2001 and 2002. The total number of social housing (rent-geared-to-income) units currently within this portfolio is 18,666. The City also holds agreements with private landlords for approximately 1,475 rent supplement units, for a total of 20,141 units, and administers below Market Rent (BMR) housing units created since 2000 with shared Federal/Provincial/City funding under the Action Ottawa Program.

Different parts of the City and the community are working together to leverage the federal, provincial and municipal funding currently available under a range of funding programs in the most effective way, for homelessness initiatives; social housing; affordable housing and for housing with supports. The funding programs include the federal/provincial Extended Affordable Housing Program (AHP) funded through the Economic Stimulus Plan; the federal Homelessness Partnership Initiative (HPI); the Provincial/City Consolidated Homelessness Prevention Program (CHPP); and the City Supports in Social Housing Initiative (SSH).

Local Planning Initiatives

There are several initiatives involved in advocacy, policy, planning and implementation to promote homelessness prevention, increased development of affordable housing and housing with supports. These include:

1. City Housing Strategy Steering Committee: *City Housing Strategy*;
2. Leadership Table on Homelessness: *Destination Home: Ending Homelessness in Ottawa, Our Vision, Our Plan*;
3. Homelessness Community Capacity Steering Committee: *Community Action Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness 2009 – 2014 (CAP)*; and
4. Alliance to End Homelessness – annual Report Card on Homelessness.

Extended Affordable Housing Program (AHP)

Under the Economic Stimulus Plan in Ontario, a combined federal-provincial \$1.2 billion has been committed for new social and affordable housing programs. Municipalities have been asked by the Province to forward for consideration project proposals that are construction-ready within the next two years, including: new rental, home repair, new-build homeownership, projects targeted to seniors and persons with disabilities, and retrofit projects.



These components fall under either the Social Housing Repair and Retrofit Program (SSHRP) or under an extension of the Canada-Ontario Affordable Housing Program (AHP) that provides capital funding. Province-wide, the AHP will consist of \$540 million for new affordable housing units with dedicated funding for low-income seniors (\$307.76 million) and persons with disabilities (\$57.7 million). Several recent initiatives include:

- The Shepherds of Good Hope²⁴ has been awarded \$6 million of AHP funding for a project at 1053-1057 Merivale Road. This project will provide permanent housing with supports to 55 long-term emergency shelter users who have complex mental health and addictions issues. Domiciliary Hostel funding will be provided for 45 of the units.
- A project to redevelop a City-owned building at 245-247 Crichton Street has been allocated \$720,000 under the AHP to provide a minimum of six permanent rental affordable housing units for families moving from emergency shelters. Ottawa Community Housing will manage this building.
- Cornerstone is developing 42 units of permanent supportive housing for homeless women including seniors, who have mental health and addictions issues. Federal Homelessness Partnership Initiative (HPI) capital funding of \$2.1 million and Provincial/Federal Affordable Housing Program funding of \$6.3 million has been approved for this project.

In 2004, the City of Ottawa established a target of 500 affordable housing units per year over the next ten years based on the funding participation of federal and provincial governments. The Action Ottawa Program refers to these units that would be built to meet its annual target for affordable housing²⁵. The City has been actively participating in funding opportunities for affordable housing at federal and provincial government levels.

²⁴ Shepherds of Good Hope is working in partnership with Ottawa Inner City Health and the Canadian Mental Health Association – Ottawa.

²⁵ Affordable housing is defined as rental housing (monthly rent) up to the 30th percentile of household income and ownership housing (dwelling price carrying costs) up to the 40th percentile of household income.

Under the monitoring component of the City Housing Strategy, the City is tracking and reporting on the progress toward the target of 500 affordable units per year under Action Ottawa. In order for the City to achieve these targets, the Federal and Provincial governments need to be actively involved in funding sustainable housing programs. The recent influx of infrastructure funding helps only in a modest way toward meeting the target.

Housing staff are currently evaluating proposals received under an Action Ottawa Request for Proposals. Successful projects have been recommended to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing for AHP funding. Projects will be construction-ready, to create affordable housing that meets the rental and supportive housing components of the AHP.

Continuum of Housing and Support Services

As the Service System Manager for Homelessness and Housing for Ottawa, the City oversees a continuum of housing and support services. It uses the available funding to provide a range of supports for people living on the street, in emergency shelters, in community-based affordable housing²⁶, and in private market housing. The support services include street outreach, drop – in programs, housing search and stabilization, and housing loss prevention. As well, the City and the community work together to build our community’s capacity to respond to homelessness by facilitating agency collaboration, research, staff training, planning, and advocacy.

The current investment for housing and homelessness prevention services includes the following:

- Street Outreach and drop-in programs: ensuring safety, and providing life-skills coaching, housing search, and referrals: \$5.6 million;
- Housing Search and Stabilization: providing housing assistance; referrals to community resources; and physical, mental, and addictions health services, both on-site in shelters and community-based, \$2.2 million;
- Housing Loss Prevention: life skills coaching; housing support; help with rent arrears; physical and mental health and addictions support; supports to employment and training, legal services and advocacy, both on-site in shelters and community-based: \$5.3 million;
- Supports in Social Housing: The City has approved \$1 million of ongoing City funding to help 100 chronically homeless people with mental illness and addictions to have successful tenancies in social housing operated by Ottawa Community Housing and Centretown Citizens (Ottawa) Limited. The chronically homeless clients to be supported by 6 agencies will include people with concurrent disorders, former offenders who have multiple issues, and people with chronic addictions, and mental and physical health conditions. An evaluation will be completed to identify the impacts of this investment and to build a business case for further investments in housing and supports;
- Domiciliary Hostel Program: The City purchases residential domiciliary hostel care from 28 organizations (26 are privately operated and 2 are non profits) on behalf of approximately

²⁶ Includes transitional housing, supportive housing, social housing and private market housing, including Rent Geared to Income (RGI) and 150 Rooming Houses.

900 residents who need assistance with meals, personal care and support. This program is cost shared between the Province (80%) and the City (20%).

Winter Warmth and Rent Bank

In consultations, one major theme that emerged was the difficulties many people on low income face with respect to energy costs and rent, including issues related to security deposits required for utilities.

The Winter Warmth Program provides funding to low-income families and singles who are having difficulty paying their Hydro One/Hydro Ottawa and/or Enbridge Gas bills. Up to \$450.00 may be provided once per year, per family. Residents can apply for Winter Warmth through Community Health Centres, Housing Help, Entraide Budgétaire or directly through the Salvation Army. This program is funded 100% by Enbridge Gas, Hydro One and Hydro Ottawa and administered by the Salvation Army Ottawa Booth Centre.

The Rent Bank Program provides services and supports to families and singles with low incomes who are at risk of losing their housing due to rental arrears. Applicants can receive a maximum of approximately 2 months rental arrears once every 2 years. The Rent Bank Program is funded 100% by the Province. The goal is to prevent homelessness, which is disruptive to families and individuals and costly to the provincial and municipal governments.

City Council has authorized the Community and Social Services Department to receive \$368,402 annual Provincial funding to permanently operate the Rent Bank Program as a grant program. The Community and Social Services Department has an agreement with the Salvation Army to administer the Rent Bank in compliance with Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) requirements.

Financial Impacts

There are no additional financial impacts identified for 2010 however there may be additional financial pressures identified in Housing as part of the 2011 budget.

5.8 Project Area: Developing Approaches to Reduce Rural Poverty that Meet the Needs of Rural Communities

Retrofit Program

Recommendation 10

Increase awareness of the availability of the Retrofit program, as well as programs to assist people on low income to participate, to help people in rural areas reduce energy costs.

Discussion

This project area focused on bringing attention to the need to learn and develop non-traditional ways to build the capacity of rural communities to reduce poverty. Key components include adapting a community development, geographic neighbourhood approach to the unique needs of rural communities; and, improving access to information on government and community programs to rural communities. The issues of domestic abuse and transportation in rural areas were flagged for consideration in a potential future phase of the Poverty Reduction Strategy.



As a pilot project, community partners will work together to promote the availability of a retrofit program to reduce heating costs to rural communities.

For those with gas heating, there is a program through Enbridge that includes the assessment and the retrofit at no cost to the low-income household. In Ottawa it is administered and implemented through the Envirocentre. The

program is part of a requirement that Enbridge must meet as part of the license that grants them the right to provide services in the Province. The program has been under-used across the Province, for a variety of reasons, but community consultations have indicated a significant issue is inadequate public education around the program. A significant factor in this under-use is that households have concerns about the program because they believe there is a “hidden catch”. More effective public education about the program to low-income households, to assure people that it is a legitimate program mandated by the government (through the conditions of licensing) could be helpful in increasing take-up.

Financial Impacts

There are no additional financial impacts associated with this recommendation.

Rural Area Community Development Approach

Recommendation 11

Identify a rural community as a priority neighbourhood in the next phase of the Community Development Framework.

Discussion

The Community Development Framework has established an ongoing community development framework including a system of Tables²⁷ to address community needs in marginalized and vulnerable neighbourhoods and to foster building the skills of residents to identify and resolve issues in their own communities. The Community Development Framework approach is promoting community ownership of problem identification, assessment of strengths and weaknesses, building collaboration and solving particular issues at the level of local neighbourhoods.

In the Community Development Framework initiative, there is a future plan to look at the process for involving rural residents and developing a strategy for a rural neighbourhood. A representative from the Poverty Reduction Strategy sits on the Municipal Services Table, and will, as appropriate, promote the identification of a rural community as a priority neighbourhood in the next phase of the Community Development Framework

Financial Impact

There are no additional financial impacts associated with this recommendation.

Strategic Direction 3:

Breaking down the myths about poverty and promoting poverty reduction

By: Raising public awareness of poverty issues in our community and building an ongoing commitment to investing in social infrastructure and poverty reduction.

5.9 Project Area: Raising Public Awareness of Poverty Issues and Promoting Poverty Reduction

Community Strategy to Raise Awareness of Poverty Issues

Recommendation 12

Develop a community strategy to increase public awareness of poverty issues and promote local actions to reduce poverty.

Discussion

The Ottawa Poverty Reduction Network report ...something left over at the end of the month, 2008, highlighted the need for the

“Stop the blame game...Develop an awareness campaign...about the extent of poverty...what it is like to live in poverty; who is poor; solutions to poverty; the social and economic costs to society of poverty” OPRN 2008

²⁷ Leadership Table, Knowledge Transfer Table, Resource (Funders) Table; and Municipal Services Table

community to be proactive in raising public awareness of poverty issues, citing a range of options from an awareness campaign “to educate politicians, the public, staff and people on low income about the extent of poverty... what it is like to live in poverty, who is poor... solutions... and costs to society of poverty” to involving community members in organizing events, speaking out about poverty, challenge campaigns (e.g. ask people/politicians to try living on social assistance level of income for a month) and educating others about poverty.

Participants in the Poverty Reduction Strategy consultations, September 2009, indicated significant support to the recommendation for a community strategy to raise awareness of poverty issues. Participants proposed suggestions ranging from a focus on orienting a public campaign toward those who do not currently understand the importance of poverty reduction, including decision-makers and employers, to a public education campaign designed to reduce discrimination and stigma against low income residents, focusing on sensitization and addressing myths and stereotypes.

Financial Impact

The Department will identify \$30,000, one-time, within the existing budget to address communication requirements in 2010. Additional communication requirements may be identified as a financial pressure in 2011.

Community Funding

Recommendation 13

Collaborate with local community funders (Community Foundation, United Way, and City of Ottawa) to identify poverty reduction within funding priorities.

Discussion

The Poverty Reduction Strategy recommends that local funders identify poverty reduction within their funding priorities.

United Way

The United Way/Centraide Ottawa’s Annual Report states that the United Way focuses its work in six impact areas. By bringing people together from all parts of the community to identify, develop and provide solutions to community issues, the United Way ensures that donations go where they are needed the most and where they will have the greatest impact.

In 2009 investments were made in each of six impact areas:

- Children and youth; seniors
- Individual and families in need and crisis

- People with disabilities
- New Canadians and immigrants
- Agency, neighbourhood and community capacity

The United Way is also investing in a special initiative focused on the aboriginal community in Ottawa.

Community Foundation

The Community Foundation of Ottawa/Fondation Communautaire d'Ottawa's 2008 Annual Report states that through its grantmaking programs, the Community Foundation of Ottawa is committed to seeding, nurturing, supporting and strengthening our community. Grants are made in support of social services, animal welfare, arts and culture, community economic development, education, environment and health, primarily within, but not limited to, the Ottawa region.

The Community Grants program derives its funds from the earnings of an endowment that is invested. Due to the effect of poor market returns on the investment portfolio, the Foundation will not be in the position to accept applications for the 2009 competitive grants program. During this period of transition, the Community Foundation of Ottawa is working on the realignment of its grantmaking priorities with a new strategic plan, and will therefore be dedicating significant time to the planning and communication of changes to its Community and Strategic Impact Grants programs, including the provision of detailed grant guidelines.

City of Ottawa

In 2009, Community and Protective Services has an approved budget of \$542,000 to administer the Community Project Funding Program. The City of Ottawa's 2009 community funding priorities are:

- Increase neighbourhood capacity to enact positive and sustainable change;
- Promote the healthy development of and the development of competences in children and youth 0-18;
- Increase participation of seniors in physical activity and community life;
- Support inclusion of people on low-income, at risk, isolated or otherwise marginalized and promote quality of life for the full diversity of citizens; and
- Promote conditions of equality on the basis of race, ethnicity, income, gender, official language and ability.

Financial Impact

There are no additional financial impacts associated with this recommendation.

5.10 Project Area: Living Wage

Recommendation 14

Develop options for a living wage policy at the City and a consultation plan and report to Community and Protective Services Committee in the spring of 2010.

Discussion

At the Community and Protective Services Committee meeting on June 1, 2009, Councillor Alex Cullen presented a report entitled “Ottawa Living Wage Policy” to the Committee. The disposition (from Disposition 43) is as follows:

6. OTTAWA LIVING WAGE POLICY
POLITIQUE SUR LE SALAIRE MINIMUM VITAL À OTTAWA
ACS2009-CCS-CPS-0015 CITY WIDE / À L'ÉCHELLE DE LA VILLE
-
- That the above-noted item be referred to the Poverty Reduction Strategy Committee to be incorporated in their report to Community and Protective Services Committee in October 2009.
CARRIED

That Community & Protective Services Committee direct staff to develop an Ottawa Living Wage policy that will:

1. Pay City of Ottawa employees a minimum wage of \$13.25 an hour (without benefits)
2. Require contractors doing business with the City and companies receiving economic development grants from the City to pay their employees a minimum of \$13.25 an hour (without benefits), to be reported to Community and Protective Services Committee by October 2009.

REFERRED

The principle behind the Living Wage Policy is that “any individual working fulltime earn enough to meet their basic needs and be able to build some savings for the future” (ACORN). This means a wage sufficient to meet the poverty level cut-off as defined by the Statistics Canada Low Income Cut-Offs, adjusted for population size.

In order to assess the potential policy implications, staff conducted preliminary research and summarized the status of various municipal initiatives related to living wage or fair wage policies.

City of Toronto

The City of Toronto has a Fair Wage Policy; City of Toronto By-law 591-2003, most recently amended by By-law 1140-2007, Chapter 67 of the Toronto Municipal Policy (the “Policy”). The Policy is lengthy and detailed.

The link to the Policy in the Toronto Municipal Code is as follows:
http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/municode/1184_067.pdf

The Policy consists of three Schedules. Schedule A is entitled “Fair Wage Policy”, Schedule B is entitled “Labour Trades Contractual Obligations in the Construction Industry” and Schedule C is entitled “Fair Wage Schedule, 2003-2004”.

The key aspects of the City of Toronto’s Fair Wage Policy are as follows:

- Purpose - The Policy has as a central principle the prohibition of the City doing business with contractors, sub-contractors and suppliers who discriminate against their workers.
- Intent - The intent of the Policy is to produce stable labour relations with minimal disruption, to compromise between the wage differentials of organized and unorganized labour, to create a level playing field in competitions for City work, to protect the public and to enhance the reputation of the City for ethical and fair business dealings.
- Application - The fair wage rates in Policy do not apply to small businesses, typically those with owner-operators, or partnerships, or principals of companies as long as they undertake the work themselves.
- Establishment of rates - Establishing fair wage rates and schedules are intended to minimize potential conflicts between organized and unorganized labour in the tendering and awarding of City contracts.
- Duties of the Manager, Fair Wage Office - To review and approve all necessary contractors and sub-contractors as part of the City’s purchasing approval process for (i) compliance with the Fair Wage Policy, and (ii) compliance with the Labour Trades Contractual Obligations in the Construction Industry.

City of Calgary

The Calgary Foundation provided Vibrant Communities Calgary with three years of funding (\$15,000 per year) in August 2006 to engage the private sector in the Living Wage initiative. Earlier in 2009, the City of Calgary decided not to proceed further with the Living Wage initiative; however, in the summer of 2009, Calgary’s City Council renewed discussion about implementing a living wage policy.

Region of Waterloo

In 2007 the Region of Waterloo, Regional Council directed staff to provide an assessment of the impact of implementing a Living Wage policy, staff brought back 2 reports in the summer and fall of 2008. In the spring of 2009, staff brought forward a report with options suitable for the Region of Waterloo e.g. options introducing a living wage as a preferred or a mandatory element for contract services. Council approved the options in principle for consultation. The

next step was a community consultation on these options over the summer of 2009 and a report back to Regional Council. The Region of Waterloo is considering a living wage policy for contracted for-profit services such as landscaping, janitorial, and food services.

In the U.S.A.

- Over one hundred and forty (140) cities in the U.S. have a living wage policy²⁸. Living wages tend to be in the \$9.00 to \$12.00 range. Some cities have application thresholds that vary widely by city, as little as \$10,000 to as much as \$100,000, to give two examples. Some cities also have exemptions e.g. employees working less than 1,000 hours per year; or employers with less than 10 employees; or workers under age 30; to give three examples.
- Examining the Evidence: *The Impact of the Los Angeles Living Wage Ordinance on Workers and Business*, 2005, a study by Fairris, Runsten, Briones, and Goodheart, University of California, included the following findings:
 1. Most affected firms adapted to the living wage without eliminating jobs. Employment reductions amounted to one percent of all affected jobs, or an estimated 112 jobs;
 2. The L.A. Living Wage Ordinance affects primarily poor and low-income families. On average, affected workers have been in the labour force for 19 years, and 86 percent work fulltime; and
 3. The average mandatory pay increase was 20%, or \$2,600 per year.

City of Ottawa

The City currently does not have a living or fair wage policy.

The following areas were considered on a preliminary basis: scope (which employees would be impacted by a living wage policy), financial impact, municipal obligations to labour trades, jurisdiction and policy development.

Scope and Financial Impact

There are no full-time employees at the City who would be affected by a living wage policy. While some summer student employees and part-time employees in Recreation and Culture could potentially be affected, they are out of scope for the purposes of this analysis since they do not meet the threshold established for full-time weekly hours (30 – 40), which was the criteria used to set the LICO rates. Therefore the financial impact was developed based on an assessment of four contracted service areas most impacted: landscaping and grounds keeping; custodial and janitorial services; security services; and canteen and cafeteria services.

²⁸The American experience is not strictly comparable to the Canadian situation (e.g. Canada's health care program has no equivalent in the U.S.).

In Ottawa, the following assumptions were used to undertake the financial analysis: at the time of the financial impact research, ACORN estimated that based on a 35 hour work week, the hourly wage needed to generate \$21,666 (the Statistics Canada Low Income Cut Off (LICO) for a single person for a city the size of Ottawa) would be \$13.25 an hour without benefits and \$11.90 if benefits are included (allowing for \$1.25 premium for costs of benefits). This amount would rise as the LICO is adjusted to reflect inflation (cost of living).

Financial Services provided an estimate as largely a "best guess" scenario based on the City's contractual experience in 2008, as well as knowledge of the commodities and wage structures.

Table 3. Preliminary Estimate of a Living Wage Financial Impact

A	B	C	D	E	F
Landscaping Grounds Keeping	\$ 3M	67%	\$ 2M	20%	\$ 400k
Custodial Janitorial Services	\$ 3.3M	80%	\$ 2.64M	30%	\$ 792K
Security Guard Services	\$ 2.6M	85%	\$ 2.21M	10%	\$ 221k
Cafeteria Canteen Services	\$ 200k revenue	n/a	High labour component	20%	\$ 40K
<i>Estimated total annual cost to City</i>					\$ 1.453,000

Column designations:

A = Scope of external, “for profit”, contracted services

B = Annual contract value at City, based on 2008 delegated authority

C = % of contract value estimated to be labour cost

D = Amount of contract value estimated to be labour cost

E = Estimated % increase in labour cost as a result of Living Wage Initiative

F = Estimated Cost of Living Wage Initiative to the City annually

Table 3 indicates that based on the above assumptions the financial impact for the four selected contracted services would be \$1.45 M.

Municipal Obligations to Labour Trades

The City has no discretion in setting wage rates or in using union labour for certain trades performing work for the City. This is by virtue of the Province-wide collective agreements that are applicable to trades in the industrial, commercial and institutional (ICI) and residential sectors and other negotiated collective agreements in other sectors of the construction industry.

Labour Relations staff will be consulted for a list of the current Province-wide collective agreements to which the City of Ottawa is bound with respect to the industrial, commercial and institutional sectors of the construction industry.

Jurisdiction

The City Solicitor's Office provided the following legal position on jurisdictional issues related to a living wage policy.

As part of the City's purchasing approval process, staff asked Legal Services if the City can adopt a policy that imposes upon contractors and sub-contractors engaged in work for the City of Ottawa the payment of a wage that is above the minimum wage that is prescribed by the provincial Employment Standards Act, 2000. Legal Services has advised that as long as the Province-wide collective agreements with respect to the industrial, commercial and institutional sectors of the construction industry are respected, the City may adopt a policy that imposes upon contractors and sub-contractors engaged in work for the City of Ottawa the payment of a wage that is above the minimum wage that is prescribed the under the Employment Standards Act, 2000.

Section 23 of the *Employment Standards Act, 2000* provides that an employer shall pay employees at least the prescribed minimum wage. There is no requirement to pay an amount above the minimum amount or any ceiling on maximum amounts to pay employees. Ontario Regulation 285/01 under the *Employment Standards Act, 2000* prescribes the minimum wage.

The current minimum wage is \$9.50 an hour [pursuant to subsection 5. (1.2) O. Reg. 285/01 under the *Employment Standards Act, 2000*] and will increase to \$10.25 an hour on March 31, 2010 [pursuant to subsection 5. (1.3) O. Reg. 285/01 under the *Employment Standards Act, 2000*]

Policy Development

ACORN has provided information and raised awareness about the benefits of a living wage policy in our community; however, there is currently no consensus across all sectors of the community that the City should play a leadership role by implementing a living wage policy. For example, local media have reflected a range of opinions on this issue. The Business Advisory Committee stressed the need to give the business sector a chance to respond before a policy is approved.

This report provides information on the scope, estimated financial impact, municipal obligations to labour trades and jurisdiction related to a living wage policy, and seeks approval in principle from Community and Protective Services Committee for staff to develop a number of potential options for a living wage policy and a consultation plan to be brought forward to Community Services Committee in the spring.

Financial Impacts

There are no additional financial impacts associated with this recommendation at this time. Depending on the direction of Council in 2010, there may be financial implications identified in the 2011 budget.

5.11 Project Area: Reinvestment in Social Infrastructure

Recommendation 15

Develop a policy framework for the reinvestment of savings from the upload of social assistance benefits into social infrastructure and poverty reduction to ensure a balance of investment in the Triple Bottom Line.

Discussion

The Poverty Reduction Strategy recommends that the City develop a policy framework for the reinvestment of savings from the upload of social assistance benefits into social infrastructure and poverty reduction to ensure a balance of investment in the Triple Bottom Line that includes social infrastructure, physical infrastructure and economic development.

The uploading of the “Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)”-began in 2008 and will result in approximately \$55 M in savings to the City over a five year period. Additionally, beginning in 2010 and ending in 2018, as part of the Provincial-Municipal Fiscal and Service Delivery Review (PMFSDR), the Province will begin uploading the Municipal costs of Ontario Works benefits (income and employment assistance). The-savings will be about \$30 M over this nine year period. The Poverty Reduction Strategy identifies the need to reinvest savings into social infrastructure and poverty reduction to ensure the sustainability of quality of life for all residents of Ottawa.

Participants in the community consultation strongly supported this recommendation, with an additional sense that, without it, the rest of the plan could not be effective. Some participants felt this recommendation held the City accountable in a concrete way.

The City’s current Strategic Plan commits to a Triple Bottom Line approach; however, the City’s Fiscal Framework over-rides the Strategic Plan with a focus on physical infrastructure and transit. While the Poverty Reduction Steering Committee agrees with uploading of these costs, the Committee notes that the City will continue to have a role in poverty reduction and social infrastructure. The Steering Committee recommends the development of a policy framework for reinvestment in social infrastructure.

The Poverty Reduction Strategy Steering Committee supports the argument that a balanced approach is required and that municipalities have a responsibility to ensure “soft services” have equal importance around the municipal table. These soft services affect people living on low-income on an everyday basis and impact the quality of life of our community as a whole. In its

unique position of being closer to the community than other levels of government, municipalities have a leadership role to play in several areas of poverty reduction²⁹:

- To dispel myths about poverty and to plan for poverty reduction in partnership with the community, provincial, federal and private sectors;
- To invest in social infrastructure, ensuring community services are adequate, inclusive, and responsive to the specific needs of neighbourhoods and groups;
- To ensure a balanced approach whereby hard and soft services have an equal place at the municipal table and the links between the two are made explicit e.g. that economic prosperity and poverty reduction are linked; that crime intervention and poverty reduction are linked, and that transit and accessibility to transit are linked.

In the words of the Rural Poverty Action Committee, municipalities “are richer and more effective” when they address poverty and work with partners to stop the cycle of poverty and rural decline.”

Poverty issues disproportionately impact women and children, people with disabilities, newcomers and racialized groups, Aboriginal peoples and rural communities. The issue of a balanced approach to reinvestment is, in itself, an issue of social inclusion as well as an issue of quality of life for Ottawa residents as a whole.

Financial Impacts

There are no additional financial impacts associated with this recommendation in 2010 but there may be financial impacts in 2011 depending on the direction of Council in 2010 regarding the policy report on the reinvestment of upload savings.

5.12 Project Area: Extension of Poverty Reduction Strategy - Phase II

“The Forum aimed to achieve one major objective: the importance of a continued commitment from the community to poverty eradication” Rethinking Poverty 2007

Recommendation 16

Extend the Poverty Reduction Strategy to future phases to address other poverty issues.

Discussion

The Poverty Reduction Strategy Phase I focused on 10 key project areas while recognizing that Phase I could not address all poverty reduction issues. The Steering Committee identifies a need for a multi-year, multi-phase process to work on additional issues as well as develop performance measures and report on progress. For example, in the September 2009 community and staff consultations on the Poverty Reduction

²⁹ Purdon, Colleen, May Tettero, Pam Hanington, and Dr. Susan Turner. **Counting Women In: A toolkit for Rural Action on Poverty.** 2009

Strategy, a range of additional issues were identified that need to be addressed, including but not limited to:

- Transit - access to affordable transit; rural areas access to transportation;
- Childcare – access to adequate, affordable, quality child care;
- Food security;
- Connection between affordability of an adequate diet and the incidence and management of diabetes and other chronic diseases;
- Domestic abuse in rural areas; and
- Energy costs and issues related to security deposits for utilities.

Among consultation participants, there was strong support for this recommendation. Participants felt that it was “self-evident” that poverty reduction requires concerted and ongoing efforts.

A multi-phase, multi-year strategy would provide increased opportunities to address additional issues, build further linkages to the community development framework, expand community involvement in poverty reduction, including the private sector, and measure the success of key projects.

Phase II of the Poverty Reduction Strategy will develop implementation plans and develop measures and mechanisms for monitoring and reporting on initiatives identified in Phase I. In some cases, the Poverty Reduction Strategy will be the primary reporting mechanism; in other cases Phase II will link to the progress reporting of related initiatives focused on specific areas e.g. City Housing Strategy, Recreation Master Plan, and Immigrant Ottawa Initiative. Work on Phase II of the Strategy will commence in 2010.

An extension of the Poverty Reduction Strategy process would mean that Phase II would include an implementation component and a policy development component, and that different members may make up the two separate, but linked, groups working on these components.

Financial Impact

There are no additional financial impacts associated with this recommendation however there may be additional financial pressures related to staff resources which would be identified in the 2011 budget.

I live in poverty. My biggest problem is transportation. For ParaTranspo, you pay tickets on top of the community stipend [community bus pass]. They are not thinking about the needs of people to get around, e.g. doctor's appointment, going to get food, and if you have kids – school. Ottawa Poverty Reduction Strategy community consultation sessions, September 2009

6. LINKING THE POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY AND THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

Poverty is a complex problem and is best tackled through a variety of interventions. These interventions include public policy measures, and actions carried out in place – in neighbourhoods, towns and cities. “Place” is important because of the impact of local service delivery, community design and social infrastructure upon physical health and emotional well-being.

Local convening bodies help create the governing structure and comprehensive framework for poverty reduction efforts in place. In Ottawa, two new structures, Poverty Reduction Strategy (multi-phased) and one Community Development Framework (ongoing), create opportunities to act locally to reduce poverty, thereby improving quality of life for all residents.

Poverty Reduction Strategy

Community Poverty Reduction Steering Committee was developed to set priorities and identify key projects to reduce poverty. The Steering Committee focused on acting locally and considered citywide and neighbourhood strategies, and strategies targeting specific vulnerable groups. In turn, these strategies will improve quality of life for the population of Ottawa as a whole.

The Poverty Reduction Strategy is unique in that it draws on the grassroots community work and increasing participation of people on low-income that has been fostered over the past 10 years in Ottawa. The City has played a role in supporting this work, from the establishment of the Task Force on Poverty in 1998 to the funding of a community-based Anti-Poverty Community Co-ordinator to the post-amalgamation establishment of the Poverty Issues Advisory Committee to the active participation of representatives from poverty networks as members of the Poverty Reduction Steering Committee.

The Steering Committee has included a recommendation in the Strategy to build on the success of Phase I by extending the Poverty Reduction Strategy initiative into future phases to address issues which have not been included in Phase I and to develop additional local solutions.

Community Development Framework

The Community Development Framework (CDF) approach, while targeting marginalized and vulnerable neighbourhoods with identified needs, does not identify poverty as a focus per se, as the goal is for residents to identify priorities and solve problems. There is however opportunity for neighbourhoods to identify problems and resolve issues that may include poverty reduction.

The Community Development Framework is unique in creating an ongoing governing structure that is not related to a single project, but to a new way of working in neighbourhoods. The Community Development Framework has established a model that brings various sectors of the community together to address resident-identified priorities in marginalized and vulnerable

neighbourhoods³⁰ and to foster building the skills and strengths of residents to identify and resolve issues in their own communities. The model includes various tables working together with grassroots neighbourhood action committees, such as a Leadership Table, a Knowledge Transfer Table, a Resource (Funders) Table, a Community Table and a Municipal Services Table. The four neighbourhoods chosen for the first phase of the Community Development Framework are:

- Bayshore;
- Carlington;
- Overbrook-McArthur; and
- West Centretown

The ongoing Community Development Framework governance structure supports the community development model being used in present and future identified neighbourhoods. The CDF represents a new approach over the long run that increases the skills of residents to take community ownership of problems, issues and solutions at the level of geographic neighbourhoods.

Opportunities to Work Collaboratively

The Poverty Reduction Strategy and the Community Development Framework create opportunities to work collaboratively. For example, the establishment of a planning table to develop programming for the community use of schools can be linked to community development within specific geographic neighbourhoods. Another example is the proposed community application process for the Ontario Disability Support Program including geographic location of support workers in areas where the need is high. Again, links could be developed to specific neighbourhoods.

A member of the Poverty Reduction Strategy sits on the Municipal Services Table to facilitate collaborative efforts. Discussion and preliminary research is underway with a view to developing an inventory of City services that contribute to poverty reduction.

In the Community Development Framework initiative, there is a future plan to look at the process for involving rural residents and developing a strategy for a rural neighbourhood. The Poverty Reduction Strategy promotes the identification of a rural community as a priority in the next phase of the Community Development Framework, in consultation with the Municipal Services Table.

³⁰ based on Community Development Framework criteria

7. IMPLEMENTATION AND MEASUREMENT OF SUCCESS

The Steering Committee developed 16 recommendations within key project areas, focusing primarily on concrete actions within local control that could be accomplished within a one – two year timeframe. During the implementation phase (Phase II), measures will be developed and progress will be tracked and reported on the priorities and recommendations.

The following matrix presents a preliminary analysis of whether or not recommendations are likely to be fully implemented in the short or long term and which level of government would need to be involved.

Preliminary Implementation Analysis

Recommendation	Community	City	Provincial	Federal
Short Term				
ODSP Community Application	x	x	x	
Access to EHSS and Home Supports		x		
Single application		x		
211 - information	x	x		
Access to recreation	x	x		
Community hubs	x	x	x	
Employment - vulnerable persons	x	x	x	
City workplace diversity		x		
Equity/equality framework		x		
Rural – increase awareness of retrofit	x	x		
Rural – CDF priority neighbourhood	x	x		
Funding priorities	x	x		
Long Term				
Social assistance rates		Advocacy	x	x
Ministry barriers		Advocacy	x	
Homelessness, housing and supports	x	x	x	x
Public awareness community strategy	x	x		
Living wage		x		
Social reinvestment policy framework		x		
PRS extension	x	x		

8. SUMMARY OF POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY

The Vision

The Poverty Reduction Strategy vision is:

All residents of Ottawa living in dignity and health, in a community that fosters participation and inclusion for all.

Strategic priorities and Recommendations

Strategy One: A service system working to the benefit of the people in need

1. Develop an expanded community Ontario Disability Support Program application process, based on the model described in this report.
2. Streamline the needs assessment to Essential Health and Social Supports and Home Support Services for people in need.
3. Improve access to City services by establishing a single point of application for multiple City services of importance to people on low income, and by ensuring 311 (for City services) and 211(for City and community services) have the capacity to provide information on a full range of services from the perspective of people on low income.

Strategy Two: Building a community of inclusion and belonging

4. Increase access to recreation for people on low-income.
5. Develop a community planning table to bring together school boards, the Parks, Recreation and Culture Department, Children's Services, Crime Prevention Ottawa and community agencies to develop solutions to jointly create, program and coordinate increased community use of schools.
6. Advocate that the Province increase social assistance rates utilizing a standardized market basket measure approach that reflects current living standards and annual cost of living adjustments, and to remove systemic barriers across Ministries that have unintended effects of keeping people in poverty.
7. Increase employment supports and opportunities for vulnerable persons in Ottawa.
8. Integrate immigrants and newcomers into the City of Ottawa's workforce to become a model of employment, increase diversity in the City's workforce; and implement an equality framework and an equity lens across City departments.

Poverty Affects Us All: A Community Approach to Poverty Reduction

9. Advocate for increased investments in homelessness prevention initiatives; social and affordable housing and housing with supports.
10. Increase awareness of the availability of the Retrofit program, to help people in rural areas reduce energy costs.
11. Identify a rural community as a priority neighbourhood in the next phase of the Community Development Framework.

Strategy Three: Breaking down the myths about poverty and promoting poverty reduction.

12. Develop a community strategy to increase public awareness of poverty issues and promote local actions to reduce poverty.
13. Collaborate with community funders to identify opportunities to focus on poverty reduction within funding priorities.
14. Develop options for a living wage policy at the City and a consultation plan and report to Community and Protective Services Committee in the spring of 2010.
15. Develop a policy framework to reinvest savings from the upload of social assistance benefits into social infrastructure and poverty reduction to ensure a balance of investment in the Triple Bottom Line.
16. Extend the Poverty Reduction Strategy to future phases to address other poverty issues.

9. SOURCES

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Ottawa. 2009

Community Poverty Reduction Framework
5 Year Strategy

Children, Families, Individuals		
6 Key Services	Service Focus	Poverty Reduction Lens
Healthy Lifestyles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthy Birth Weights • Nutrition • Food Security • Dental Care • Mental Health and Addiction Services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Identify target groups, needs and gaps.</i> • <i>What are the opportunities?</i> • <i>What is the role of the City?</i> • <i>What is the role of the Community?</i> • <i>How do specific strategies support low-income children to reach their full potential?</i> • <i>How do specific strategies help adults achieve adequate housing, access to employment and find supports to meet basic needs?</i> • <i>What funding is available (federal, provincial, municipal, community)?</i>
Education and Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child Care • Early Learning Programs • Literacy • Homework clubs, after school clubs 	
Participation in Community Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to affordable recreation and culture • Access to affordable transportation • Neighbourhood hubs 	
Public Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise public awareness • Information and Communication • Citizen Engagement and Participation • Promotion of Poverty Reduction 	
Income and Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remove barriers to employment • Training, employment programs and job retention • Advocacy for adequate income 	
Affordable Housing and Housing Supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevent and end homelessness • Access to affordable housing • Enhanced supports to housing 	

Provincial Poverty Reduction Strategy

Council Direction

Community Capacity

Poverty Reduction Network

PIAC Basic Needs



Consultation Feedback on the Draft Poverty Reduction Strategy

Summary of Community Consultations held
September 18 and 21, 2009

Prepared by the Social Planning Council of Ottawa
For the Poverty Reduction Strategy Steering Committee
and the City of Ottawa

October 1, 2009

Introduction

On September 18 and 21, 2009, two public consultations were held on the Draft Poverty Reduction Strategy. The objectives of the consultation process were:

- a) To share with the community the process, vision, principles, recommendations and next steps for the Poverty Reduction Strategy;
- b) To get feedback on the recommendations and their expected impact, including
 - how important the initiatives were for participants and their anticipated impact
 - any modifications to the recommendations which could make them more effective (particularly focusing on the implementation)
 - gathering ideas for the public education campaign
- c) To get limited feedback on what was missing or what could be included in a follow-up.

118 people participated in the consultation, from a cross-section of the community. Participants included a significant number of low income residents, staff from voluntary sector agencies, and representatives from the faith, education and business sectors. There was good representation from Francophones, visible minority residents, people with disabilities, immigrants, people experiencing homelessness and different age groups (with the exception of youth). The Aboriginal communities were under-represented. There were not many participants from rural areas, which is reflected in the commentary. Those who attended shared their perspectives through facilitated small group discussions of no more than 9 participants each. Three of the discussion groups were Francophone and one was bilingual.

This report provides a summary of the comments of participants in relation to the Draft Poverty Reduction Strategy. Direct quotes are identified by italics throughout.

Overview / General Reaction

There was considerable support for the Draft Poverty Reduction Strategy as a very good direction to start. In particular, many participants identified the importance of the City recognizing that many aspects of poverty can be addressed locally. They felt it was very important that the City was assuming a leadership role in local poverty reduction and in advocating to the Province on critical policies within the Province's jurisdiction.

It's very positive to see the City take a leadership role in poverty reduction, and they are well positioned for that. Make sure that is clear in the principles.

A significant number of participants appreciated that the plan was comprehensive in identifying and addressing multiple aspects of poverty. The plan reflects many concerns which the community has put forward in previous consultations and which community organizations and residents see as on-going problems. Some felt it was inclusive with respect to different groups in the community experiencing poverty

The diversity of all the problems seem to be contained in the report.

Many participants were pleased that the Plan reflects working at many levels – from grassroots communities up to the level of Provincial policy. They felt it was very positive that it encourages citizens, organizations and the City to work together on the issue, along with the two senior levels of

government. There was significant encouragement to work with other municipalities on key elements of the Plan.

There was significant support for the Plan trying to accomplish concrete actions which were realistic in the short term. It was a very positive starting point which could be built upon with on-going community and Council commitment.

I like that they are trying to do short term and realistic actions.

Conversely, there was significant concern that the Strategy was too large and complex to garner adequate support on the one hand or to be implemented effectively on the other.

There are quite a few recommendations and I definitely think everything is admirable, but going forth with a few smaller ideas would be more effective. Set milestones and move from that.

Many suggested either re-grouping the recommendations to be more manageable or prioritizing the actions. Participants suggested a range of criteria which could influence how the recommendations could be prioritized, including

- Distinguishing short term and longer term implementation
 - How quickly results could be achieved and concretely demonstrated
 - How easily the recommendations could be put in place
- Separating process recommendations which could be implemented immediately versus new policy issues which would require a yes/no decision by elected representatives

Some did not support the idea of prioritizing, fearing this would lead to a lack of action on others, to the detriment of the overall focus on poverty reduction.

One participant recommended focussing only on social and community services, specifically expanding existing services and implementing evidence-based interventions.

There were very major concerns with respect to implementation.

[The plan] is a good starting point, but the devil is in the details. This is a complex plan to implement.

Many felt the action strategies needed to be expanded through clear objectives, targets, benchmarks (especially community driven benchmarks), an implementation strategy and identification of who would be responsible, with regular reporting back to the community. Some expressed concern that community partnership would need to improve for the plan to work.

More fundamentally, there was significant concern that the Plan would not be implemented. Some were concerned that the community would not be able to unite behind the project. In particular, with no budget attached (subject to the recommendation with respect to the upload savings), there would not be the means to implement the plan. Many participants expressed frustration that the City already has many existing plans which are not on track. Of highest concern was the lack of substantial progress on the City's affordable housing targets, as this is directly related to poverty reduction.

We already have targets like affordable housing and the 20/20 plan. Why are we not working on those? We are already way behind. It is important to not only create targets, but also work towards existing ones.

The direction and the recommendations reflect the fact that there were many previous consultations and the recommendations were not implemented. Many of these things have been brought up before and they haven't moved forward.

I'm tired of talking about the same thing – I need them to get back to us and say “we've dealt with 2 or 3 points. We need government to take responsibility for some of these issues. We need them to actually make things happen.

Finally, despite strong general support for the direction, there was significant concern that the plan does not propose anything concrete to address core issues of concern for low income residents, particularly a strategy to meet basic needs for food, shelter, clothing and transportation. There was concern that the Advisory Committee and decision makers were out of touch with the critical situations in which people were living, and that the plan might result in a lot of money going to community stakeholders with no positive outcomes for low income people. Many low income individuals did not “see themselves” reflected in the Plan, for example, immigrants, people on Ontario Works who do not have a disability, working mothers, low income students. Many participants felt the lack of concrete actions to increase incomes of low income individuals and support them to meet basic needs was a major weakness of the plan.

Basic needs have to be met : clothing, food, adequate housing and transportation.

Don't spend money on a new strategy. Spend funds on programs that benefit the poor. A new strategy legitimizes the bureaucracy.

Focus on housing, employment, education. For me it's to put money in the pocket of people.

Why isn't there a target to reduce poverty based on annual income?

Priorities

Participants were asked which recommendation would have the most impact on poverty. The opinions were very diverse. However, those consistently and strongly supported as likely to have the most impact were:

- 1 (ODSP application program)
- 2 (Streamline application and needs assessment for EHSS and Home Support Services)
- 3 (Increase access to recreation)
- 7 (Employment supports, provided more detail was added)
- 8 (Housing)
- 14 (Investment of unspent savings into poverty reduction), and
- 15 (Extend into future phases).

In particular, recommendations 1, 7, 8, 14 and 15 received the strongest endorsement.

There was strong support for the following recommendations:

- 5 (Request the Province to increase social assistance rates)
- 6 (Request the Province to eliminate inconsistent policies across Ministries)
- 11 (Increase public awareness), and
- 13 (Develop options for a living wage policy at the City).

However, there were also significant concerns about prioritizing these actions – primarily based on concerns about effectiveness (i.e. whether the Province could be influenced, the value of public awareness, etc.) These issues are explored more below.

The following recommendations did not garner much discussion or significant support:

- 4 (Increased community use of schools)
- 9 (Increase awareness among rural residents of the Retrofit program)
- 10 (Promote identification of a rural community in the Community Development Framework)
- 12 (Collaborate with community funder to look for opportunities)

To some degree, this reflects the under-representation of rural residents in the process.

The strengths and weaknesses of the various strategies, along with suggestions for implementation, are identified below.

Comments With Respect to the Individual Recommendations

Strategy 1: A service system working to the benefit of the people in need

1. Work with community partners to develop and implement a community Ontario Disability Support Program application process, based on the model described in this report.

There was very significant support for this recommendation. It was identified as very concrete, achievable in the short term, based on a successful model, and would have a direct impact on the income levels of those affected. Part of the plan should be to identify the outreach strategy to reach people with disabilities who would benefit.

A caveat was that the success of this action depends on the ODSP system, which is beyond the City's control. As well, many living in poverty would not be helped by this recommendation at all, including the working poor and low income individuals without a disability.

2. Implement changes to Essential Health and Social Supports/Home Support Services to streamline the application process and needs assessment to Essential Health and Social Supports and Home Support Services for people in need.

There was significant support for this recommendation, which was understood as an expansion of the program, which would help address some of the significant difficulties in accessing health and dental supports. As well, participants felt it was very concrete and would be of direct assistance to working poor individuals and families.

Strategy 2: Building a community of inclusion and belonging

3. Develop a plan to increase access to recreation for people on low-income.

There was significant support for this recommendation. Many participants saw access to recreation as an important strategy to prevent significant health issues for people of all ages. As well, recreation was seen as a means to develop positive social skills and abilities among young people, and was felt to be closely linked to a crime prevention strategy. Participants identified that momentum already exists,

in terms of significant community support and existing processes (including the Recreation Master Plan, Crime Prevention Ottawa, Early Years Initiative, etc.).

Participants identified that this recommendation is closely related to recommendation 4, with respect to community use of schools. For example, it was identified that sports leagues which serve low income individuals need more access to space.

In addition, it was recommended that the action could incorporate a strategy to increase access to recreation within the school system itself, as the cost of participating in school-based recreation was resulting in exclusion of low income children and youth.

Some parents cannot afford for their children to participate in school activities and trips – although it is supposed to be a public system. We need a strategy to ensure inclusion.

It was recommended that particular attention be paid to the recreation needs of seniors, immigrants, new immigrants and rural residents – all of whom face distinct access barriers. As well, some participants recommended an easier and more respectful subsidy application process and an expansion of after school programs for children and youth.

Several participants identified the important role of community organizations in the implementation of this recommendation. Not-for-profit recreation services could advise the City on alternatives and opportunities for providing high quality, affordable recreation in the City.

A minority of participants felt that recreation was not a priority. There was one suggestion that year end dollars in the recreation budget should be allocated to other areas of poverty reduction.

4. Support the development of a community planning table to bring together school boards, the Parks, Recreation and Culture Department, Children’s Services, Crime Prevention Ottawa and community agencies to develop solutions to jointly create, program and coordinate increased community use of schools.

There was less support expressed for this recommendation by participants. As stated, some participants felt this recommendation was important with respect to increasing access to recreation and to space for recreation, but it would be important to clarify what the communities would be using the schools for. Expansion of childcare was suggested as an appropriate use.

Another participant felt this would be a very important recommendation if the planning table was open and actively involved community members (e.g. parents from the schools etc.) rather than representatives of the organizations identified.

A few participants were sceptical that this would be successful or did not agree with establishing an additional planning table.

We don’t need another planning table.

5. Request the Province to annually increase social assistance rates utilizing a market basket measure that reflects the cost of living.

There was very strong support that this recommendation would have the most significant impact on reducing poverty and on the lives of many low income residents.

Increasing the income will have the most impact for improving the situation of low income residents. This is the most important.

It was seen as strongly related to access to adequate, nutritious food, which is directly related to income levels. Many recommended including in the recommendation advocacy with respect to increasing the special diet and clothing allowances, as well as dental and health care.

It was noted that this recommendation would have no impact on many low income individuals, including many of the working poor. However, it would have a significant impact on those within the OW or ODSP systems, including some of the unemployed working poor.

There were several suggestions on how to implement this recommendation. Public education strategies targeted at the MPPs and the general public, to make them understand the challenge of living on OW and ODSP were seen as important. As well, the City was strongly encouraged to work with other municipalities, in order to strengthen the advocacy for rate increases.

Although this recommendation was consistently identified among those which would have the most impact on poverty, there were also a significant number of participants who felt this recommendation had little chance of success and therefore, would have little impact, at least within the short term time-frame of the poverty reduction strategy. Some felt it would be better to focus efforts on actions which were within the City's control. The concerns, however, rested at the level of prioritization. There was consistent support for the City to take a lead advocacy position in relation to this issue.

The community doesn't easily have control of federal and provincial priorities, but all the same, we need local activism on this.

You can advise the province but how effective is it? Will they listen and respond? We don't want a poverty reduction strategy that just passes on responsibility.

6. Request the Province to eliminate inconsistent policies across Ministries that create systemic barriers for people on low income (e.g. assessment of income, assets, bursaries) that affect access to education, affordable housing etc.

While many participants identified the problem of inconsistent policies, there were differing opinions on the importance of this recommendation in a local poverty reduction strategy.

Many felt these inconsistent policies were a critical barrier, as they block people from improving their own situation. Several participants identified that the primary factors to get out of poverty were education, employment and affordable housing. Therefore, the poverty reduction strategy should prioritize addressing inconsistent policies that impact these three areas.

The programs work against each other. It's so terrible to try to get out of poverty.

On the other hand, many participants had the same concern as with recommendation 5, specifically, that there was only a small chance of success, and therefore, efforts should be focused on other recommendations over which there was more local control.

7. Seek out new and emerging initiatives to increase employment supports and opportunities for the full diversity of people in Ottawa.

While there was high support in principle for this recommendation, most participants wanted much more specific recommendations with respect to employment.

This recommendation is weak and passive. There is a need for employment programs to be developed.

Specific recommendations for employment supports included:

- Improvement to the employment supports through OW and ODSP and greater transparency of what already exists;
- Bridging programs for immigrants, to get them into quality jobs quickly;
- Targeted supports for people with disabilities, including priority hiring of students with disabilities for campus based employment at the universities;
- More job shadowing opportunities for people who face barriers in the labour market;
- Job retention programs offering practical interventions to help people retain jobs.

There was very significant support for a concrete employment strategy focused on the barriers faced by immigrants.

In addition, a significant number of participants recommended a job creation function be included in the plan, in addition to the employment supports. Specific suggestions included:

- development of more “stable” jobs;
- an employment strategy tied to voluntary sector agencies, in which job placement opportunities are created within the services for those using the services;
- development of internships by OW within the labour market;
- support for small business development among groups facing barriers in the labour market (especially immigrants);
- increased support for social enterprise development.

There needs to be funding in place for job creation.

Some participants raised a concern that employment supports and job creation initiatives often are short term and make it difficult for people to get stable long-term employment. Problems can include the inability for workers to switch programs at the end of a contract or the inability to create long term jobs. There was encouragement for this to be addressed within the implementation of the recommendation.

Finally, several participants suggesting including advocacy to the Province with respect to increasing the minimum wage, or bringing in a living wage across the Province.

8. Play a leadership role with community partners and federal and provincial governments to increase the supply of affordable housing, supportive housing and housing with supports.

There was very high support for a strong focus on safe, affordable housing, with this recommendation consistently identified among those which would have the most impact.

This recommendation is the most important. The supply of affordable housing has the potential of the most impact for the working poor and those on assistance.

Several participants highlighted that there was momentum around this, with different City departments were working with the voluntary sector to make improvements.

There was some discussion about the terminology in the recommendation, with some suggesting including the terms “safe” or “appropriate”.

Recommendations for implementation included the City building more social and supportive housing, the City providing money to non-profit agencies with a proven track record of meeting housing needs, and the City requiring private developers to include a portion of affordable housing in all new developments. One participant recommended that affordable housing should be based on sustainable development models and be eco-friendly.

Many participants identified the enforcement of property standards as an important part of this strategy. Many people live in affordable housing but the condition is very poor. A notable number of participants recommended including in the PRS a strategy for effective enforcement of property standards and recommended that funding be allocated for this. There were concerns with substantial disrepair in both private market and public housing.

We are ghettoizing low income people in substandard places with mould, cockroaches and poor repair. If you were paying \$1,000 rent it would be fixed in a matter of days. We need to change the policies about social housing and repairs.

There was also interest in more help for tenants to be able to enforce their rights with respect to housing repairs, and for consequences for landlords who do not maintain adequate standards. As well, many participants supported a system of licensing for rental accommodation, as another strategy to improve the conditions of the housing stock.

Some participants recommended some or all of the reinvestment money (recommendation 14) be used for the implementation of this housing recommendation.

Although there was significant support for this recommendation, there was also substantial cynicism that the current plans with respect to housing and homelessness have not been meeting targets. As identified above, several participants wanted to see this PRS plan clarify how the existing housing targets would be met.

9. Work with community partners to increase awareness of the availability of the Retrofit program to help people in rural areas reduce energy costs.

There was limited comment on this recommendation, and it did not rank highly in the overall priorities of participants. There was a lack of understanding that this program was available for tenants as well as homeowners. Some commented that it would only help a small number of people, as the population is lower in the rural areas. Related to this, some questioned why rural residents were prioritized in this recommendation, rather than all residents. One participant felt it belonged in an environmental plan but not the Poverty Reduction Plan.

A small number of participants felt an energy reduction program, including public education, was very important. They noted that financial help with insulation, new windows and other energy saving retrofits would be very helpful for low income households.

I know a lot of people who have a house but they do not have heat in the winter because they cannot afford it. Include insulation and replacement windows in the Retrofit program.

Several participants highlighted the significant difficulty for low income people to pay utility bills, and recommended the expansion of programs which help with utility payments.

10. Promote the identification of a rural community as a priority neighbourhood in the next phase of the Community Development Framework, in consultation with the Municipal Services Table.

There was very little comment with respect to this recommendation. One participant recommended expanding the Community Development Framework (CDF) pilot to all neighbourhoods across the City. Some participants living within the neighbourhoods already prioritized within the CDF shared that they had no knowledge of the CDF in their neighbourhood.

A small number of participants recommended there be more focus on rural poverty, and particularly access to service and to affordable rural transportation. Access to affordable rural transportation was seen as a key issue, which increased isolation, reduced access to services and resulted in a higher vulnerability of domestic violence. Although participants did not identify the CDF as a means to address inadequate access to transportation and services, these issues could potentially be considered within the CDF.

Strategy 3: Breaking down the myths about poverty and promoting poverty reduction.

11. Develop a community strategy to increase public awareness of poverty issues and promote local actions to reduce poverty.

Overall, there was very significant support for this recommendation. Participants identified different goals for such a strategy.

Many participants felt it was among the most important, as implementation of the rest of the plan was dependent on developing strong public support through a public awareness campaign. To this end, these participants recommended a public awareness campaign should be oriented toward those who do not currently understand the importance of poverty reduction, those in decision making positions (particularly councillors) and employers who could create additional jobs or hire low income individuals. Specific suggestions for the messaging included:

- Put the issue in economic terms, such as the savings created by reduction of poverty;
If you can show someone that they are saving money by helping you, they are going to help you.
- Some felt highlighting personal stories and highlighting the impact on real people was the most compelling way to gain support. Others were uncomfortable with this approach or felt it was not as effective as economic arguments;

- Explain poverty in terms of the social determinants of health or the link with community safety;
- Others suggesting highlighting “good things” that are happening with modest investments, such as effective services, individuals overcoming barriers, employers creating quality jobs for low income individuals etc.

The public needs to be aware of the social cost of poverty (criminality, social disruption, de-facing of spaces). We need a blended approach to public awareness - social, economic and environmental returns.

Other participants were less concerned with garnering support for the poverty reduction strategy per se, but very interested in a public education campaign designed to reduce discrimination and stigma against low income residents. Such a campaign would focus on sensitization and addressing myths and stereotypes. The schools were identified as an important place to focus at least part of such a campaign.

Public awareness campaigns need to improve conditions and quality of life for people living in poverty through supportive actions and activities from members of mainstream communities.

A small number of participants were more interested in awareness raising among low income individuals of services and opportunities for them. They felt a broad public education campaign to promote the services and supports available to individuals, combined with some messages to build the confidence and self-esteem of low income individuals, would be important.

The public is already well informed regarding poverty but there needs to be more awareness about the services offered.

Irrespective of the message, it was felt that the mainstream media was an important vehicle for getting the message out broadly to the public. Some felt “community champions” should be solicited to help (i.e. high profile individuals in the community). One participant suggested more widespread use of “The Poverty Game” as a useful strategy for educating those who had not personally experienced poverty.

Conversely, a significant minority of participants did not support this recommendation. Some felt the public was saturated with information about poverty and homelessness, and that this did not lead to positive change. Several were concerned that public education has no immediate benefit to low income residents, and therefore diluted the plan. In particular, some had concerns about resources being spent on actions which did not directly benefit low income individuals and result in concrete improvements to their quality of life.

The public has already reached a saturation point in awareness of the situation. It is crucial to focus on putting in place funding and policies. We need to implement concrete actions.

It's great to have public awareness, but what's the call to action afterwards?

12. Collaborate with community funders to look for opportunities to prioritize poverty reduction initiatives.

There was limited support expressed for this recommendation. A few participants supported the concept of community funders taking on a small number of joint projects and implementing them with a cost / benefit analysis. Most who commented on this recommendation were not optimistic about the

prospects for impact. A minority felt that there is poor collaboration in the community or that collaborative projects don't really work effectively.

Collaboration is a nice idea, but it doesn't really work.

A small number of participants suggested using existing campaigns, particularly United Way, to broaden the base of supporters for poverty reduction in addition to the amount of donations. A few participants were supportive of this recommendation incorporating a collaboration with the private sector on poverty reduction, particularly with respect to creation of affordable housing and quality employment.

13. Develop options for a living wage policy at the City and a consultation plan and report to Community and Protective Services Committee in the spring of 2010.

There was significant support for implementing a living wage policy. Many participants felt this was very concrete, and would get money into the pockets of low income individuals.

A living wage is most inspiring and will have the most impact on reducing poverty.

I would like the city to ensure contracts that are given to contractors that pay their workers fairly at \$13.50. I pay taxes, as we all do, and I get upset knowing that \$9.50 doesn't cut it.

Many participants felt this was the recommendation which most directly benefited working poor residents. However, an additional problem for working poor residents is the difficulty finding full time work. This was identified as an issue which could be addressed under the employment recommendation.

While there was significant concern about the situation of working poor individuals, there was some concern that only a small percentage of low income individuals would benefit from this recommendation and that it would be hard to enforce. Some suggested it would benefit more people if a living wage were implemented across the Province, but this would require considerable advocacy.

A minority of participants did not support the living wage strategy or felt it should not be a high priority because it might attract opposition to the overall Poverty Reduction Strategy. Some feared it would result in a loss of existing jobs.

14. Develop a policy framework to reinvest savings from the upload of social assistance benefits into social infrastructure and poverty reduction.

There was very strong support for this recommendation, and a sense that without it, the rest of the plan could not be effective. Some participants felt this recommendation held the City accountable in a concrete way. It was felt that the Poverty Reduction Strategy should highlight that this approach was consistent with the City's policy with respect to a triple bottom line. It was recommended that the action include specifics of how the money would be spent and a process for accountability. Most recommended the savings be spent on this plan, with particular emphasis on the need for funding for the recommendations with respect to housing, recreation, employment creations and the ODSP application initiative. One participant suggested that part of the funds go toward a city-wide tenants association.

Some participants recommended the community should get organized now to work with their councillors to ensure this recommendation is implemented.

15. Extend the Poverty Reduction Strategy initiative into future phases to address outstanding issues identified by the community and develop additional solutions.

There was strong support for this recommendation. Participants significantly felt this was self-evident, as poverty reduction requires concerted and on-going effort. There was some interest in finding a way to ensure that commitment to a Poverty Reduction Strategy would extend beyond the mandate of the current council.

The support for this recommendation was closely linked to strong support for clear benchmarks, targets, dedicated resources and accountability structures. Several participants suggested a process of annual reports to the community on concrete progress.

We need a long term strategy with short term goals, tied to evaluation which is made into a communication piece.

Missing Elements and Recommendations for Phase 2

Participants were asked what was missing from the plan or what should be included in follow-up phases. There were 12 broad recommendations or themes which emerged. These are listed below, in order by the number of times each was raised:

a) Put in place free or subsidized public transportation

A significant number of participants recommended a strategy to create free or subsidized transportation for low income residents. Transportation was identified as a central barrier which affects the potential success of many of the other recommendations including access to employment and recreation.

Transportation – if you have it, it will solve many problems. We need reduced fares in 2010 as part of this plan.

I live in poverty. My biggest problem is transportation. For ParaTranspo, you pay tickets on top of the community stipend [community bus pass]. They are not thinking about the needs of people to get around, e.g. doctor's appointment, going to get food, and if you have kids – school.

A range of different approaches were suggested, including:

- reduced fare passes for all low income individuals
- subsidized family passes (rather than charging for each individual)
- lower fares for everyone
- eliminating fares and supporting the system through taxes, as with the library system

In addition, some participants felt there was a need for more public education with respect to transportation supports which already exist, including support through OW, ODSP and the current

community pass. Some expressed concern that OW and ODSP seemed to be cutting back on access to bus passes, and recommended expanding that access.

b) Include a strategy to address the distinct challenges faced by particular groups, particularly immigrants, seniors, Aboriginal residents, people with disabilities, individuals with mental health concerns, LGBT residents and women (especially women with children).

Several participants raised the importance of integrating into the plan a strategy to address the particular challenges faced by specific population groups, including issues of access to services such as language barriers.

There's no talk about programming for First Nations. The plan is a very broad spectrum but it needs to be more specific to certain groups.

Especially regarding newcomers to Ottawa – a lot of people are having difficulty establishing themselves. There is a strong need for support from the community for these newly re-located individuals.

There's nothing about seniors in the recommendations and there are so many who are living in very tough times. It seems like they have been forgotten.

Many people with mental health problems end up on the street because there aren't enough supports. This can't be allowed.

A few participants felt the plan should not specifically address particular groups, but would be more effective if it remained universal. One participant was concerned about creating a focus on immigrants, given a tendency for all immigrants to be incorrectly characterized as low income.

c) Develop and implement a concrete strategy for food security and access to nutritious food

Many participants identified an immediate and critical need for better access to adequate, nutritious food, as many cannot afford appropriate food. Inadequate access to food was tied directly to a range of health problems.

Above all, we can't forget about food. Without a proper diet it's difficult to deal with anything else.

Some specific recommendations for implementation included:

- developing a universal school meal program, as exists in some other countries;
- creating a food supplement so people could buy what they need (\$100 per month suggested)
- working with the food banks to increase the quantity and quality of food people receive (more fresh vegetables and fruits), including increasing government funding for this;
- improving access to community kitchens.

d) Support better access to health services

Participants identified that many low income residents have difficulty accessing appropriate medical care, including alternate health therapies. There was particular concern about the situation of people with mental health challenges.

Specific recommendations included

- Expanding the drug card program to include over the counter medications;
- ODSP covering the cost of supportive, preventive or alternate therapies (including exercise);
- Increasing prevention programs, including those focused on mental health;
- Providing cell phones for low income individuals with high risk health needs or with particular disabilities where isolation is a potential health risk;
- Advocating to the Province for increased primary care services, especially doctors accepting new patients.

e) Include a strategy to improve access to what already exists

Access to information is a key part of this recommendation. Many participants shared that community members do not necessarily know what is available to them (e.g. what employment supports exist or that library services are free to the public). While 211 may help, some felt there was also a need for additional strategies to increase access to information, including making it part of the public education strategy. One participant recommended a central hub where people could access all services.

One group suggested the first strategic direction (“A service system working to the benefit of the people in need) should have a third action focussed on simplifying and streamlining processes for all service providers and users of services. A single application process for all services was one suggestion to improve access to services.

In addition, the culture of service provision was identified by a few participants as a barrier to accessing existing services. All City support services should be focused on helping clients in the easiest most efficient manner and staff should be respectful of those using the services. One person suggested creating an ombudsman for access to services

Be transparent about supports that are available rather than the client having to find out about them from a third party

The multitude of different programs and supports in the city and the different ways of applying to them makes it difficult, even impossible, for many.

f) Develop a plan to engage the grassroots more in the strategy, including increased opportunities for volunteer engagement

Several participants highlighted the importance of ensuring opportunities for citizens to participate in the plan in various ways. They suggested developing on-going opportunities for people to participate in decision making and implementation of the plan. Involvement should include all sectors of the community including the business sector. Some felt it was difficult to find out what was happening at committee meetings, and that there was a need for more transparency and real consultation. As well, some shared there were untapped volunteer resources in the community which could be mobilized to address poverty.

There was a recommendation to more effectively incorporate and support self-help and self-advocacy initiatives.

One participant recommended funding ACORN to be responsible for the implementation of the poverty reduction strategy. This would ensure low income residents were actively involved.

g) Expand programs to help low income individuals with utility payments

There is a growing challenge for low income residents to meet their utility payments or pay the deposit to get utilities connected or re-established. While there are some assistance programs available, some participants shared that these need to be expanded.

h) Improve access to childcare

A few participants highlighted the difficulty for parents to access quality, affordable childcare. This creates a significant barrier to getting employment or upgrading education. *A group that seems to carry more than their fair load are single mothers. There are various reasons some of them cannot work. Childcare is missing.*

i) Expand affordable rural transportation options

A small number of participants identified a need for more affordable transportation options in the rural areas. Among other impacts, this would increase access by rural residents to existing services in the City.

j) Include a strategy re drug abuse

A small number of participants felt it was important to recognize the link between poverty and drug use and recommended including a strategy to address drug abuse.

k) Improve education outcomes for elementary and secondary students and support better access to post-secondary education.

Education was seen as an important strategy to reduce poverty. Some participants recommended expanding homework clubs, access to tutors and other supports to school success. As well, there was concern with the high cost of post-secondary education, and the growing debt load of many students. A few participants suggested creating a program to help low income students cover the cost of their schooling at the elementary and secondary level (school fees) as well as for post-secondary education.

l) Within the City's budget process, prioritize people not hard services.

A small number of participants recommended focusing the budget process on human services first, rather than what they felt was the current process, of addressing hard services first. *The reason they "don't have any money" is that they have allocated it elsewhere. Make poverty reduction a principle the city uses for the budget process.*

Finally, there was strong support for Phase 2 of the PRS to include clear accountability processes, using quantitative and qualitative measures. Participants recommended regular updates to the community which would identify progress and monitor income equality.

