Oxford County

Growing stronger together

Zero Poverty Plan

June 2018

FutureOxford

Prepared by

ZeroPovertyOxford

Preface

On November 22, 2017 Oxford County Council passed a resolution committing to zero poverty in Oxford County, an achievement to be mapped out through the development of a community-led Zero Poverty Oxford Plan. With the adoption of the report, the CAO, along with the directors of Human Services, Public Health and Community Planning, in collaboration with community partners across various sectors (municipal, health, social, education, business and others), committed to work together to develop a strategy to ultimately eliminate poverty in Oxford County. Such a commitment is similar in nature to the visionary goals of 100% Renewable Energy and Zero Waste initiatives, which all contribute to the *Future Oxford Community Sustainability Plan*.

Community Declaration

Eliminating poverty in Oxford County is the responsibility of the whole community. It will take the collective efforts of all sectors to address the long-term root causes of poverty. The poverty reduction declaration arose from the Poverty Reduction Town Hall sessions sponsored by Operation Sharing on September 26 and 27, 2017.

> **"Poverty reduction in Oxford County is achievable and will strengthen well-being for all. It's the right thing to do. Through leadership, innovation, and the transformation of relationships, in working to eliminate poverty, Oxford County will deliver improved health and well-being for all residents and enhance community prosperity."**

Implications

Eliminating poverty in Oxford County is an essential component to improving the quality of life and wellbeing for all current and future generations. The social determinants of health influence the health of populations and include income and social status, housing, social support networks, education, employment/working conditions, social environments, healthy child development and the environment.

Eradicating poverty is an achievable action that supports Oxford's growing commitment to the *Future Oxford Community Sustainability Plan* and the intention to bring greater community well-being for all. In the fall of 2015, County Council adopted the Future Oxford Community Sustainability Plan and recognized that "*addressing poverty in our community is a key element to community vitality.*"

Role of Zero Poverty Oxford

The Zero Poverty Action Committee is a steering group of community partners established to oversee the development, and direct the implementation, of the Zero Poverty strategy. This committee identified the eight key areas of the plan element (Table 1), which prioritize the strategies that have been embedded into the *Zero Poverty Oxford Plan*. All of these elements are essential to eliminating poverty in Oxford and are part of a new understanding and vision towards poverty reduction. The Zero Poverty Oxford Support Team, made up of County employees, was established to put the ideas of the Zero Poverty Action Committee into a structured plan/framework, to be molded by the steering group, and eventually become a living, breathing document that is referred to for generations to come.

The plan has been designed to be a living document as the transformational nature of the challenge demands a **concurrent "plan development – plan implementation" approach.** Clear goals and a comprehensive strategy are essential for community capacity building and are fundamental steps along the road to progress.

Defining and Understanding Poverty

It is important to acknowledge that a national standard for defining and measuring poverty in Canada does not exist. However, it is widely acknowledged that low income is the key contributor to living in poverty, as the root issue is the inability to afford the basic necessities of life (shelter, food, clothing, etc.). What is not as well understood is that across Canada an estimated **70% of those living in poverty are "working poor."** These individuals are working one or more jobs and are unable to adequately support basic needs.

Social exclusion is a key factor contributing to the existence of poverty, and an obstacle to eliminating poverty. Also, a key factor and obstacle to elimination is the degree of personal/family poverty experienced. There are also well-established relationships between socio-economic status, health and well-being to consider in defining poverty.

- **Absolute poverty** was defined by the United Nations after the World Summit on Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995 as "a condition characterized by severe deprivation of basic human needs, including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education and information. It depends not only on income but also on access to services." The concept of absolute poverty is not concerned with broader quality of life issues or with the overall level of inequality in society.

- **Relative poverty** is often defined as a lack of resources to achieve a standard of living that allows people to play roles, participate in relationships, and live a life that is deemed normative of the society to which they belong. Relative income is often considered the easiest way to measure the level of poverty in an individual area as criteria will change with economic growth.

Absolute poverty refers to a minimum level of essential resources or income that is needed for one to survive. A major drawback to this definition, however, is that it is a static measure and does not account

for how poverty differs over time as societal wealth changes. Conversely, relative poverty refers to the minimum amount of income needed in order for one to maintain an average standard of living and it is typically measured as the proportion of society's average or median income during a particular point in time. This definition also has its drawbacks, as it suggests that even as societal wealth rises, a proportion of a population will always be poor.

An additional limitation to both definitions is that income is indirectly used as the only measure of poverty. It is widely understood that poverty consists of multiple dimensions. For example, in addition to income, poverty also consists of social exclusion, food insecurity, housing and homelessness, employment, education, health, mobility and equality of opportunity, among other dimensions.

An important initial step for this plan is to define poverty in a manner in which encompasses the various dimensions detailed above. Defining poverty during the initial stages, will provide project members with the requisite information to establish goals, objectives, baselines, targets, indicators and milestones. In other words, defining poverty will enable project members to ensure that activities are aligned with all aspects of the *Zero Poverty Plan*.

Poverty in Oxford: Low Income as a Health Concern

The November 2017 *Oxford Community Health Report* summarized the following statistics. Oxford County has a lower per cent of people living with low income in comparison to Ontario (10. 8% vs 14. 4% respectively). Specific Oxford County estimates include:

- 11,835 (10%) residents are living with low income
- 3,260 (27%) are children under the age of 17
- 4,270 (4%) residents live on an income too low to cover basic needs

Of Oxford's 11,835 low income residents, the 4,270 residents with incomes unable to meet basic needs comprises an estimated:

- 4 out of every 10 low income residents
- 1,140 children under 17 years of age
- 425 children under 5 years of age
- 2,620 residents 18 years and older are "working poor" (61% of low-income adults)

Navigating this document

The 2018 *Zero Poverty Oxford Plan* provides a strategically detailed plan for Oxford County to move towards the successful elimination of poverty, as good intentions and government support alone will not sustain a long-term commitment to zero poverty. This plan was developed as both a policy and reporting document modeled from the 100 RE Building Blocks plan structure. Like the Kassel Criteria before it, the 100 RE Building Blocks process is fully applicable to the development of any long term strategic initiative and when properly utilized can provide guidance for policy makers, governments and community champions to develop their own initiative roadmap. The goal is to create a living document that can serve as an interactive tool box for stakeholder implementation and monitoring.

Emphasis in this first draft was placed on promoting transformation and stakeholder engagement in working towards zero poverty as well as integration of several zero poverty strategies across sectors. Eliminating poverty in Oxford County is without a doubt a long term vision, completely consistent with the *Future Oxford Community Sustainability Plan*. Using both a lens of near and far vision, this plan is focused on reducing and eventually eliminating poverty in Oxford County as opposed to alleviating the hardships of living in poverty. As a result, solutions are complex; require the cooperation and commitment of multiple stakeholders; and, the efforts of all levels of governments and individual citizens of our community alike.

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Chapter 1: Activate Local Resource Potential

Overview

A community wishing to embark on an initiative to eliminate poverty, such as a Zero Poverty Initiative, should **perform preliminary assessments** to understand the local context within which they are operating, so that any ensuing framework or policy is tailored to the needs and assets of the local population. It is also helpful to **mobilize local resources** to leverage the knowledge and expertise of partners and stakeholders to **identify opportunities for supports and assistance** that can aid the Zero Poverty Initiative.

Perform Preliminary Assessments

Performing preliminary assessments are important initial steps to planning a zero poverty initiative. These are carried out to understand the current poverty context within Oxford County and to establish relevant baselines (i.e., those that stem from agreed upon outcomes and indicators) that can be used to monitor, measure and evaluate progress and maintain accountability throughout the initiative.

A situational assessment is a form of a preliminary assessment that can be conducted to better understand a population of interest and inform planning decisions. The assessment highlights trends and issues that may affect the implementation of a program or service and identifies the wants, needs as well as assets of a particular population of interest. The situational assessment for the zero poverty initiative has included gathering relevant poverty data, calculating a living wage for Oxford County, the synthesizing of current evidence and the completion of a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) to understand the initiative's internal strengths and weaknesses, its opportunities for growth and external threats to project planning.

Key Point

Review identified outcomes, indicators and baselines, so that the plan can be established and move forward to mobilization.

Mobilize Local Resources

Cross-sector collaboration is an important step towards effective poverty elimination. This form of collaboration leverages the knowledge, expertise and resources that partners across different sectors and stakeholder groups (e.g., business, government, non-profit and community members - including those who have experienced poverty) possess and uses their varied strengths to work towards the common goal of eliminating poverty in Oxford County.

Collective impact is a cross-sector collaboration approach used for community change. It uses a framework consisting of five key elements – determine a common agenda, develop a shared measurement system, employ mutually reinforcing activities, engage in continuous communication and provide a backbone support[1(p.19)] – to address complex challenges such as poverty. Collaborators structure their initiatives around these key elements to enhance the well-being of area residents by advocating for system and policy changes.

Key Point

Continue to identify and contact potential collaborators from various sectors and encourage continued participation in steering committee work.

Identify Opportunities for Support and Assistance

It is important that collaborators explore existing or future initiatives relating to poverty reduction or elimination that may be occurring for residents of Oxford County. A scan of local, provincial and federal programs and services may identify potential supports for the zero poverty initiative. Additional resources and supports may also be available through organizations whose missions are to build capacity in poverty elimination.

Key Point

Continue to explore opportunities for support via existing or future anti-poverty initiatives and reach out to organizations whose missions are to build capacity in poverty elimination.

Chapter 2: Develop the Zero Poverty Blueprint

Overview

The first draft of the Zero Poverty Oxford Plan will not **define the Zero Poverty Target** but will look at the overall picture of poverty in Oxford County. The Zero Poverty Blueprint utilizes common elements and tools that will help mold a future **Zero Poverty Scenario and also estimates the economic, community and environmental benefits** of eliminating poverty in our County**.**

Define the Zero Poverty Target

Poverty can be classified as

- **Short-term:** typically less than five years in duration and resulting from a specific event such as job loss or death **within the family**
- **Chronic:** typically longer than 10 years and often due to multidimensional factors
- **Intergenerational Poverty in Oxford:** generational links to poverty through multidimensional and cyclical factors

However, we choose to classify or define poverty, it is important to recognize that poverty includes the inability to advance economically over the long-term. For some, that can mean living pay cheque to pay cheque with no ability to save for retirement, emergencies or post-secondary education for their children. A submission to the Federal Poverty Reduction Strategy by the Wellesley Institute states that for Canadians to truly thrive, they need enough resources to create a stable financial foundation and invest in their future. Besides income, other dimensions of poverty include: housing and homelessness; jobs, training and the workplace, higher education, health, and mobility and equality of opportunity. Looking at income levels of people living in poverty and the basic necessities of life (shelter, food, clothing, etc.) only paints a partial picture of poverty in Oxford County. To fully comprehend how poverty affects residents of Oxford County we need to understand that social exclusion, a feeling of not belonging to the community, is also a key factor contributing to the existence of poverty.

In recognizing the extent of the poverty issue, we must also not ignore, that there are well established relationships between socioeconomic status, health and well-being to consider. We must also address that the lack of literacy or language barriers, low levels of education, disabilities or illness, mental health, addictions**,** and abuse and child care costs are additional barriers that many of the individuals in our community face. It is important to acknowledge that poverty does not have a one-size-fits-all solution and what works to help one group of people living in poverty will not necessarily be the same formula used for another group. Continuing ongoing input from those with lived experience will help navigate this process.

Model a Zero Poverty Scenario

Residents of Oxford County should have the opportunity to succeed and overcome the various barriers and/or challenges they may encounter. The Zero Poverty Oxford Plan aims to provide those living in poverty with the tools they need to overcome barriers and enhance their wellbeing and will also serve to improve our understanding of what a zero poverty scenario can look like.

> **"Poverty is hunger. Poverty is lack of shelter. Poverty is being sick and not being able to see a doctor. Poverty is not having access to school and not knowing how to read. Poverty is not having a job, is fear for the future, living one day at a time."**
> **– The World Bank Organization**

It is known that certain segments of the population are at a higher risk of experiencing poverty: lone-parent households, immigrants, seniors and people living with disabilities and addictions. Customizing approaches to each of these groups and implementing evidence based practices will strengthen resource distribution and generate improved social returns.

The Zero Poverty Oxford Blueprint will help identify and address the systemic factors and root causes that produce the complex situations of those living in poverty by using an adaptive model of response. An adaptive model of response uses a lens to "zoom in" and obtain insight into the causes and the manifestation of the poverty in our county and then uses a lens to "zoom out" to identify and address systemic factors.

Key Points

Organizations that provide resources to those living in low income, should have trained system navigators to help individuals and families navigate the various support systems. This will ensure participants receive all the internal and external resources available to them in an efficient manner. Providing continued wrap around support for those moving out of poverty (and staying out of poverty) is an essential next step in a comprehensive poverty elimination strategy.

Continuing to foster collaborative partnerships will help develop common agendas and enable the systemic changes that must occur to eliminate poverty in Oxford County. Better-connected community networks can result in a more effective and efficient poverty-fighting system.

Eventual coordination between all agencies who provide "wrap-around" services to those experiencing complex issues, to develop one master care plan for these individuals. This will minimize duplication and maximize resources within organizations.

Blueprint Tools

- Needs-based assessment tools to identify immediate barriers so services can be matched to individuals both quickly and efficiently.

- System navigators to link between support agencies to provide tailored individual needs based package of services designed to help individuals overcome multiple challenges and access all available resources.

- Ongoing wrap-around support.

- Integration of service as much as possible so individuals are not expected to repeat their story again and again.

- Access is a basic requirement to many of the programs and strategies, without access changes become increasingly challenging. Access may refer to services and resources.

- Information sharing and knowledge exchange, the success of breaking down poverty in the community is dependent on all service agencies making themselves aware of what is available to assist those most impacted by poverty.

Using comprehensive thinking and action, the *Zero Poverty Oxford Plan* will include key milestones, measurable targets, realistic timelines and pragmatic recommendations for action that will systematically eliminate poverty in Oxford County.

A greater focus on the needs of clients via a service-transformation strategy will help impact the effectiveness of resources in Oxford County. Delivering services collaboratively and based on a rigorous needs assessment will encourage staff to work across organizational boundaries and inspire new approaches and ways of thinking. Wrap-around, person-focused service delivery has shown to be more effective than traditional program delivery, for individuals with complex needs, as well as those individuals who are closer to economic self-sufficiency. Using the *Future Oxford Community Sustainability Plan* will help ensure that both local issues and global issues are being blended together to improve quality of life for Oxford's current and future generations.

Key components of the Zero Poverty Oxford Plan will include pragmatic actions that address:

- Need for adequate supply of affordable housing options
- Need for access to services that are free from income related barriers
- Need for transportation options that enhance community accessibility
- Need for a safe and supportive community
- Opportunity for, at minimum, living wages for all citizens

All eight of the identified plan elements (Table 1) will be embedded into a strategy designed to allow all residents of Oxford County to have sufficient and economic resources to live with the dignity and choices that support full participation in society.

Table 1. Elements of the Zero Poverty Plan

PLAN ELEMENT	OVERVIEW
Housing	It is clear that meeting core housing need is fundamental to addressing poverty
Income	Basic income and living wage are fundamental needs
Understanding	No one choses poverty, rather it occurs often due to the complex circumstances of life. Many living in poverty are the "working poor" and their families
Belonging	Social exclusion is a key factor in the elimination of poverty and the elimination of poverty is a factor contributing to social isolation
Political action	Advocacy and action from all levels of government will be critical to success
Shift	Altering perceptions, acceptance and a relentless desire to affect positive and sustainable outcomes will be required
Dialogue	Open and advanced conversation and discussion about why poverty exists and how to address it will be necessary
Change	Doing the same things that have been done will not stop the cycle of poverty. Transformational change, from solutions that address the symptoms of poverty to pragmatic solutions that eliminate poverty will be required

Economic, Community and Environmental Benefits - Future Oxford

Poverty comes at a cost to those who endure it and also to the communities where people living in poverty reside. Eliminating poverty is the smart and responsible thing to do for our economy. The town hall sessions sponsored by Operation Sharing on September 26 and 27, 2017, brought together community members from all key sectors and resulted in a transformational, shared community vision to eliminate poverty. It was agreed that the economic and social vitality of the community contributes to residents' health and longevity, and embracing a long-term process of learning and change, rather than simply undertaking a series of specific interventions, was considered a best practice approach that aligns with the *Future Oxford Community Sustainability Plan.* An educated, healthy, thriving, and employable Oxford is essential to a strong economy and connects to the overall vision of the *Future Oxford Sustainability Plan*: **A vibrant, prosperous, and responsible Oxford for all.**

Economic and Community Benefits

The elimination of poverty will see a decrease in costs associated with health care and social services and is considered a form of upstream crime prevention. There will also be increased spending on goods and services on a local level as well as increased charitable contributions as studies show that people living on a low income tend to spend most of their money in their own community and also donate at a higher level-- which continues when they move into higher income brackets. People who are not living in poverty experience an increased life expectancy, better physical and mental health, and less anxiety.

Education

Children who are not living in poverty are more likely to complete high school and attend a post-secondary institution, thus reinforcing their feelings of belonging and inclusion and well as strengthening the overall community. One of the objectives of the *Future Oxford Community Sustainability Plan* is to: *Ensure access to affordable education for all ages and to increase the number of residents with post-secondary education.*

Education is a powerful resource that protects against poverty. There is strong correlation between low levels of education and low wage employment. Providing post-secondary education as well as skills training will not only address the shortage of skilled labor but will also move a significant number of residents out of poverty.

Environmental Benefits

In a first for Oxford County, 34 affordable rental units are set to be built to a Passive House standard by Indwell Community Homes on Blossom Park Road. This multi-residential development will adhere to the most rigorous voluntary standard for energy efficiency and is expected to be completed by early 2019. The 34 affordable rental units are designed for individuals who require support services in order to remain in stable housing. Buildings are heated "passively," making efficient use of the sun, internal heat sources and heat recovery, resulting in energy costs that are reduced considerably relative to conventional energy costs.

Passive House

Buildings achieving a Passive House standard require as little as 10 per cent of the energy used by typical buildings, offering significant energy savings and reduced emissions. Improvements to building construction are critical as Oxford works to achieve 100% renewable energy by 2050. Further, by providing housing that meets passive house standards, the County and developers are ensuring that the long-term affordability of a rental unit remains as energy costs are a fraction of the cost.

Blossom Park is a demonstration project designed to influence future housing development and to meet goals outlined in the *Future Oxford Community Sustainability Plan* by moving away from fossil fuels, supporting industries that undertake green construction and encouraging renewable energy. To encourage energy efficiency and long-term affordability of housing, when providing funds to introduce affordable housing units in multi-residential developments, the County has begun to require that new affordable housing projects meet Passive House standards. Generally, affordable housing funding is granted to developers to ensure that units remain affordable for a period of 25 years. Once the 25-year period has passed, the owner of the building may rent the units out at market rate. By encouraging developers to construct buildings that meet passive house standards, the units will continue to provide a more affordable housing option than units that use conventional energy sources beyond the 25-year period.

In addition to funding that can be offered to developers willing to provide affordable housing units that meet passive house standards, the Oxford County Official Plan has policies that support bonus zoning in exchange for innovative and environmentally sensitive development which incorporates and protects environmental features and promotes energy conservation. Under the provisions of the Planning Act, particularly around intensification, a municipality may permit increases to the height and density limits applicable to a proposed development that will result in a benefit to the greater public.

Poverty alleviation and environmental protection are global issues that have a lot in common but are often treated different. Successful sustainable development includes making linkages between the two issues and innovative thinking such as the Blossom Park Indwell Project will help Oxford County successfully eliminate poverty while maintaining our renewable energy goals. As a community we must ask ourselves how we can cultivate a market of demand for passive house structures to become the norm in housing in our community.

Key Actions

Continuing community-wide education will increase awareness and generate understanding about the root causes of poverty.

Further defining the zero poverty target(s) in Oxford will help navigate essential next steps.

Chapter 3: Formalize Aims and Functions

Overview

Formalization refers to **identifying targets and milestones**, **defining comprehensive legal and regulatory frameworks** and **establishing a relevant institutionalized body** to oversee the initiative.

Identify Targets and Milestones

Targets indicate whether success has been achieved within a given objective. It is necessary to establish targets (once baseline data has been collected) that are measurable, time bound and relevant to the desired zero poverty initiative outcomes. To determine whether targets are reached, previously established indicators are used. Hence, it is important to establish outcomes, indicators and targets in the early stages of planning so that all facets of the initiative align.

Milestones signify key elements or stages during the course of an initiative. They are important components of a planning process because in addition to identifying significant events, they also help to chart a path forward towards the initiative's objectives.

Key Point

Identification of targets and specific milestones during the early stages of planning will allow the committee to assess if the recommendations are appropriate and making a difference in the lives of those impacted by poverty.

Define Comprehensive Legal and Regulatory Frameworks

A policy framework for poverty elimination should encompass a human rights-based approach. **Human rights** – rights that are equally inherent to all people regardless of who they are or where they are from – are legislated internationally, federally and provincially. However, a human rights approach to poverty elimination uses international human rights standards and tenets as a basis for instituting anti-poverty plans and policies.[2]

Fundamentally, this approach acknowledges the right to protect those living in poverty and promotes transparency, accountability and empowerment by encouraging and embracing participation of those who are poor in the development of anti-poverty plans.[3] According to this approach, any such plans to reduce poverty should include mention of human rights, express goals and objectives in the human rights context and ensure project members are trained in human rights standards.[2]

Key Point

Adopt a human rights-based approach as a policy framework to tackle poverty in Oxford County.

Establish a Relevant Institutionalized Body

Tackling poverty in Oxford County will require collaboration from many different sectors and stakeholder groups. As such, the Zero Poverty Action Committee has been established to oversee the development and direct the implementation of the Zero Poverty Oxford Plan. The Committee will be responsible for providing strategic oversight and ensure that a coordinated approach is taken to support the goals and the objectives of the initiative.

A defining feature of the collective impact approach is that a formal body or a backbone organization is established to coordinate the various facets and stakeholders involved in the initiative. The six functions of a backbone organization include: advancing the overall vision and strategy, establishing shared measurement, aligning activities and resources, building public will, advancing policy and securing resources and funding.[4]

Key Point

The Zero Poverty Action Committee will continue to serve as the backbone organization to oversee and mold the implementation of the recommendations of the Zero Poverty Oxford Plan.

Chapter 4: Promote Transformation

Overview

Increasing community engagement to allow for multiple perspectives, including those with lived experience, will encourage a broader **understanding of human behaviour** as it relates to those living in poverty and allow our community to work together to break down existing barriers. Assets-based community development focuses on our community strengths and is a necessary step to create stronger links between support agencies and **existing systems and environments.** It is intended to encourage the development of a tailored package of services that will allow individuals to overcome the multiple challenges that are associated with poverty, one step at a time. Chapter 4 builds on the principle of embracing a long-term process of learning and change. It additionally serves to outline the Zero Poverty Oxford Plan commitment amongst the diverse group of local stakeholders involved and **identify any opportunities to support transformational change.** This chapter also serves as a beginning compilation of the existing structural assets in the community such as organizations and groups. This list will continue to be updated and expanded upon each draft of the plan.

Key Points

Local offices that have embraced multi-sectoral collaboration, integration and wrap-around supports must be identified as **community champions** and be encouraged to lead by example. Shifting to a person-centred approach – one that is flexible and easy to navigate – can better align our local programs to address the issues of those they are designed to help. The intent of this chapter is to determine what is possible versus what is wrong and establish what makes us healthy versus what makes us poor.

Human Behaviours and Understandings

Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy identifies that communities naturally possess the capacity to effectively serve the needs of their members, and that community capacity building is one of the most effective ways to initiate the process of making change and begin the process of breaking down barriers. It is well recognized that ideas and partnerships are more easily developed at a community level and that communities can efficiently and effectively narrow down issues and challenges specific to their area. Strong communities have a positive influence, a shared interest in both health and economy and have the natural ability to influence social cohesion and mobility - as there is typically an accepted built-in willingness to "help your neighbour."

The Wellesley Institute's Submission to the Federal Poverty Strategy suggests that community programs targeted at vulnerable groups can strengthen peoples' connections to their community. Investing in vital community infrastructure, such as libraries, recreation centres, community health

centres and childcare facilities, and enabling them to deliver essential supports such as life skills training and recreational activities which will allow people to engage meaningfully with their neighbours and continue to build their capacities.

To make progress on complex social situations it is best to embrace an adaptive model of response rather than a more traditional model. Using an adaptive model approach allows for meaningful engagement with Oxford's key stakeholders, including those with lived experience, in all aspects of the development and implementation stages of the Zero Poverty Oxford Plan.

The Zero Poverty Oxford Plan has been designed to be an intentional framework that engages people with lived experience - in an ongoing nature to ensure an authentic strategy and to promote inclusion in our county. The Social Planning Council Oxford report in 2014 entitled "How are Oxford County residents REALLY doing" identified that there has been very little change since the 2008 Social Report that indicated some residents of our community feel isolated. In addition, the 2014 report explored democratic engagement and decision making and identified some of our residents did not feel they had a voice. The Zero Poverty Oxford Plan recognizes the importance of actively involving those living in poverty to have a better understanding of the barriers they face and to build both stronger community as well as relationships. **The mobilization of the recommendations and themes presented in this document will not be executed without receiving feedback from those living in poverty.**

Existing Systems and Environments within Oxford County

Key Point

Integration of various environments in our county will help avoid duplication and will allow for a more seamless service delivery.

Operating Partnerships

Community partnerships have been the success of many strategic initiatives in Oxford County. The mutual respect for each organization and the willingness to "pitch in and help" either out of necessity or genuine desire to find the greater good, has never been an issue in this community. This community wants to improve the quality of life for its citizens and have learned that working in collaboration certainly beats silo building and isolation. The membership of the steering committee for zero poverty is proof that working together can help to move initiatives forward.

This section refers to any person, group, or business that may be affected by, or participate in, the process of a transition to zero poverty. Listed organizations, groups and communities are examples only and not intended as an all-inclusive representation. This list will be updated on an ongoing basis.

Stakeholders are referenced in several sections of this plan; however, this chapter is designed to identify any and all parties who may have a stake in the process, and outcomes, of our transition. The partnerships to help move recommendations forward will be critical to the success of obtaining zero poverty. It is imperative that there is an accurate awareness of what services are available to assist

people living in poverty. Constant communication between all stakeholders and service providers along with an appropriate referral system is essential. For this reason, we ask that community organizations reading this plan, who would like to be included, contact the Zero Poverty Support Team at Oxford County.

Municipalities within Oxford

Oxford County is comprised of eight municipalities in total, with the upper tier Oxford County encapsulating all municipalities who lie within its boundaries. Oxford County is represented by the heads of council and other elected officials.

The eight municipalities that form Oxford County proper include five rural, primarily agriculture - based economies and three urban centres. All eight municipalities support a transition to zero poverty and continue to work together to develop a comprehensive Zero Poverty Oxford Plan.

Municipalities Outside of Oxford

Municipalities outside of Oxford essentially refer to upper or single tier governments within close proximity to Oxford. Middlesex, Elgin, Waterloo Region, Norfolk, Perth and Brant share a common border with Oxford; however other municipalities across Ontario are considered stakeholders and partners (in as much as they are inclined) in the quest for a zero poverty future. To ensure a concentrated networking effort with other key municipalities that are working on poverty solutions, Oxford has established a close working relationships with Tamarack's Vibrant Communities.

First Nations

First Nations communities are an important part of our national identity and the distinct nature of Aboriginal poverty poses unique challenges. Although Oxford does not have the benefit of a formal First Nations presence, we will reach to those in our community in the hope that they share in our journey to zero poverty and that we benefit from their traditional and spiritual perspective. The newly formed Indigenous Committee for Child Care in Oxford County will be contacted to receive their specific viewpoints with respect to poverty in Oxford County - viewed through their lens for themselves, their families and children.

Chambers of Commerce and Business Associations

Oxford County has the good fortune of having a very vibrant and engaged business community. We will continue to work closely with our local businesses, chambers and business associations, and value the important role they play within the community. Business and industry participation is a critical part of Oxford's economic and community success and an implementation of a living wage in Oxford will require their support. Additionally, Oxford County is fortunate to be in a position where there are many jobs for residents. The downside is many of these jobs remain unfilled due to a labour shortage. A primary action item with respect to chambers of commerce and business is to bridge that gap, which will definitely assist in the zero poverty plan.

Agricultural Groups

Oxford County is an agricultural hub. We have among the most fertile lands in Ontario, enjoy a significant share of the daily output, and appreciate the spirit of innovation inherent in the farming community. Local farmers have shown a willingness to donate left over produce surplus from the Woodstock's Farmers Market held every Saturday, and simply require the organization and the tools to get this surplus to the local food bank. Food security is integral for all residents residing in Oxford County and is one of the keys to alleviating poverty.

Educational Institutions

Educational institutions play a critical role in both public engagement and knowledge. The role of education in poverty eradication, in close co-operation with other social sectors, is crucial. We will revitalize ongoing partnerships with this sector in pursuit of meaningful and effective training forums around Oxford County. Educational linkages are also vital in having successful breakfast programs and other community based programs necessary to support all children and most specifically those living in poverty. The Ministry of Education in conjunction with the Human Services department also plays a key role in funding and system planning child care spaces in Oxford County. If child care is not available for citizens to work, be trained and or educated, the cycle of poverty will be difficult to break.

Zero Poverty Stakeholder Groups in Oxford County

Canada Mental Health Association Oxford (CMHA)

The Canadian Mental Health Association Oxford is a community organization committed to building inclusive, healthy communities. CMHA Oxford is one organization in a group of agencies and individuals working in partnerships. The Oxford County Mental Health & Addictions Network identifies and plans for county mental health services and resources. It is important for all of us to be aware of these partnerships. Efficient and appropriate service planning and provision involves the co-operation, flexibility and commitment of many people. Mental health challenges impact one in five Canadians (CMHA 2018). Healthy individuals mean healthier communities and help to alleviate poverty for many.

Community Employment Services (CES)

A one-stop centre for employment services, job seekers, employers, newcomers, students and youth, CES has delivered federal, provincial and municipal employment and training programs in our community since 1994. CES has been an early **community champion** in recognizing the value of harnessing community assets, creating opportunities and providing innovative solutions. With locations in Woodstock, Ingersoll, Norwich, Plattsville, Princeton, Tavistock and Thamesford, CES embraces their role in Oxford County and is a perfect example of the power of community collaboration. CES strives to link both private sector and community sectors together in order to provide a variety of integrated government and community services to residents of Oxford County. Partners include Employment Ontario, Oxford County, Ontario's Youth Employment Network, Oxford Workforce Development Partnership and the provincial and federal government.

CES provides front line service for many programs, one of which is a resource centre which is often filled with people living in poverty. This organization is vital in assisting those living in poverty and helping to recognize meaningful ways to assist in the development and action of the Zero Poverty Oxford Plan.

Domestic Abuse Services Oxford (DASO)

Domestic Abuse Services Oxford is committed to ending the cycle of domestic abuse and helping families make the transition to lives free from violence and abuse. A safe, comfortable space for women and their children impacted by domestic abuse and/or homelessness at a 21-bed high-security shelter located in Woodstock, serving all of Oxford County. Programs and services include a 24-hour crisis/help line, psycho-educational support groups, sexual assault counselling, community outreach and violence education and prevention. All services are free of charge, confidential and accessible.

EarlyON

EarlyON Child and Family Centres provide opportunities for children from birth to 6 years of age to participate in play and inquiry-based programs, and support parents and caregivers in their roles. The centres offer a safe and welcoming environment with qualified professionals and quality programs. Families and caregivers will be able to find support, advice, make personal connections and access a network of resources.

Elgin Oxford Legal Clinics

The Elgin Oxford Legal Clinic (EOLC) opened its doors in 2002 to provide poverty law services to low-income residents of Elgin and Oxford Counties. Services provided by the clinic include traditional casework, summary advice, public legal education, law reform, and a wide range of community development activities. The clinic staff consists of both community legal workers and lawyers. The EOLC offer services from the main office located in St. Thomas and the satellite offices located in Woodstock, Tillsonburg, Aylmer, Ingersoll, and West Lorne. The clinic can assist with any of the following: landlord-tenant matters, Ontario Works and Ontario Disability assistance, Canada Pension Plan, Legal Aid Ontario, representation before courts or tribunals, summary legal advice, and referrals to other agencies who can help. All services provided by the clinic are free. However the clinic must sometimes pay others for things required to represent a client: for example, doctor's reports and court filing fees. Where the client can afford it, EOLC may ask that a client pay the clinic back for these expenses.

Fee Assistance in Recreation (FAIR) – City of Woodstock

The FAIR program assists City of Woodstock's residents on a low income with the opportunities to participate in recreation and leisure activities provided by the city. To qualify, applicants must live in the City of Woodstock and have a family income that falls below the Low Income Cut-Off (LICO) for their family service. For families that qualify, a credit is placed on the City Recreation CLASS account, and can be used for recreational city programs for a period of up to one year. A new application is required each year.

Key Point

Recreational subsidies are available throughout Oxford County to increase mobility and reduce social isolation. Providers of recreation must be conversant with one another and pro-active in sourcing all funding opportunities that are available for low-income people, to ensure the subsidies are reaching as many families as possible to assist with the costs of recreation.

Habitat for Humanity Heartland Ontario

Habitat for Humanity is a non-profit, non-denominational housing organization that builds simple, decent, affordable homes for low-income families. ReStores are owned and operated by Habitat for Humanity Heartland Ontario and are stocked with new and gently used renovation supplies which are donated by homeowners and businesses. One hundred per cent of the ReStores revenues support the administrative costs of Habitat for Humanity Heartland Ontario. The Woodstock ReStore opened in 2013.

Key Point

Habitat for Humanity helps people with low income change their lives. As noted many times throughout this plan, safe and affordable housing is the key building block to a life outside of poverty.

Ingamo Homes

Ingamo Homes is a transitional program with housing that supports women and their children to turn their lives around. Ingamo assists with developing individual safety plans, providing information, support and advocacy, system navigation and providing parenting support as well as children's activities and programs.

Literacy Link South Central

Literacy Link South Central is a literacy information and referral network servicing the 6 counties of Oxford, Elgin, Middlesex, Brant, Haldimand and Norfolk. This agency refers people to literacy programs, increases awareness of the important role of literacy in everyone's life, develops resources for literacy programs as well as provides training for literacy program staff. As mentioned, education and literacy are key skills to allow people to participate fully in employment, training and educational pursuits. Literacy Link and the service providers throughout Oxford County assist with this goal.

Operation Sharing

Operation Sharing is a community outreach program working in partnerships with local groups to provide services for people and families in need. Operation Sharing believes that there are local solutions to solvable programs. They focus attention on bringing the people of the community into relationships with each other. Its activities are designed to break down the barriers caused by labelling through opportunities for all members of the community to participate in the life of a community. They

provide support for families trying to get out of poverty, Creative Concept Training for those who work with people who live in poverty, secular and non-secular crisis counseling, advocacy service and the Cynthia Anne Centre for Addictions program for people 16 and older.

Families and individuals in need of emergency food assistance receive a specially designed food card in pre-determined denominations as an alternative or supplement to the food bank. Individuals can use these cards to do their grocery shopping at any of the participating grocery stores in Woodstock and Ingersoll. Funding for this program is through the donation of quarters by the public at the grocery stores. This method of providing food assistance is vital for those with special diets or serious health issues. Meeting Place Coordinators oversee the food card distribution.

Operation Sharing Seasonal Services

- The Inn of Woodstock (formerly known as the Inn Out of the Cold) is a year round homeless shelter for homeless males and females 16 years or older, 7pm to 7:30 am located at Old St. Paul's Anglican church
- Christmas Place Store
- Christmas Day Event
- Knapsacks for Kids offers free school supplies for children in need

Bullwinkle's

A buffet-style eatery lunch program as well as a gathering place every Tuesday and Thursday from 11:45-1:30. A joint creation of the Moose Family Centre, Salvation Army, and Operation Sharing, the café features a "pay what you can" sliding scale between 50 cents and $7. The program also doubles as a culinary and hospitality teaching program for residents of Oxford County interested in boosting their culinary skills and adding skills to their resume. Bullwinkle's is a **community champion** that emphasizes inclusion and ensures dignity for those who need help finding a warm meal. Similar work is done at and by STICH Supper Club in Ingersoll, the Adelaide Soup Kitchen in Woodstock, and at other locations throughout Oxford County.

Oxford Coalition for Social Justice

For over two decades, the Oxford Coalition for Social Justice (OCSJ) has been dedicated to improving the social justice and the quality of life for residents of Oxford County through advocacy, education and action on health, education, environmental and aboriginal rights, fair wages, human rights, peace and safe and sustainable food issues. OCSJ are passionate advocates who strongly believe that food waste and hunger should not exist, and support the Ontario Health Coalition's battle to save public health from privatization.

Oxford County Community Health Centre (OCCHC)

The OCCHC employs interdisciplinary teams of health care providers such as nurse practitioners, social workers, dietitians, health promoters and physicians. The OCCHC team members work collaboratively to provide primary care, health promotion and community development programs and services to priority populations.

The Oxford County Community Health Centre (OCCHC) is a **community champion** that has recognized the need for wrap-around, person-centered care and model a Health Links philosophy of care. The Health Links approach introduces new and improved ways to integrate care delivery for the people of Ontario who live with complex chronic illness, social determinants of health considerations and/or high cost conditions. The Health Links philosophy of care centres around a process called Coordinated Care Planning. Coordinated Care Planning (CCP) brings all the people a person needs for their care together in one meeting. The CCP is based on the person's needs as well as their goals.

Oxford County Human Services Department

The Human Services Department provides financial support, information and referral services to ensure all residents of Oxford County live the best quality of life possible. Human Services takes an integrated approach to helping clients. The focus is one client, one file, one client service worker. Human Services facilitates the financial assistance programs of Ontario Works benefits, child care subsidy and rent geared to income housing. It also provides discretionary benefits, recreation subsidies, Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative funds as well as many rent supplement programs for housing.

The Human Services professional team considers many different factors when assisting a client. The Quality of Life indicators are assessed for each person to ensure everyone is assisted in a holistic way. The indicators include income, education, health, transportation, employment, safety/legal, and shelter. Every person who walks through the door is considered eligible for service. If someone is not eligible for financial assistance, they will not leave without assistance of some kind and a referral to services where the individual will be helped. The overall goal is to provide great service while helping clients enhance their quality of life and contribute to their community.

Oxford County Community Planning Department

The Community Planning Department of Oxford County involves reviewing development proposals and using planning tools to help balance social and economic interests while preserving and protecting the natural assets of our community. The Community Planning Office is responsible for providing a full range of land use planning services on behalf of the County and the eight area municipalities that comprise the County.

The services provided by the office include: developing and maintaining the Official Plan and Area Municipal Zoning By-laws; responding to development inquiries; providing pre-consultation and development review services for all Planning Act applications; undertaking growth forecasts and maintaining growth land inventories; acquiring and maintaining various planning related data sets and statistics; developing mapping and other planning related resource materials. The office also assists the area municipalities in undertaking various planning related projects and programs, such as the development of Community Improvement Plans and Urban Design guidelines. The Community Planning Department is integral in promoting policies that allow for a variety of housing to be built in Oxford County that is safe and affordable and developed in a timely manner.

Oxford-Elgin Child and Youth Centre (OECYC)

A child's mental health organization providing services to the community from offices based in Woodstock, Ingersoll and Tillsonburg. CMHA is working with OECYC in the provision of the 24-hour

children's emergency response system. Staff from OECYC are also involved in the Community Mental Health Education Committee. Mental health agencies for all ages assist with greater overall health and lead to greater participation in community.

Oxford Workforce Development Partnership – Work in Oxford

The Oxford Workforce Development Partnership supports the community around issues of common concern by assuming a leadership role in helping in the identification and validation process of local labour market needs, issues, gaps, trends and opportunities. Most importantly, they engage local partners in a community-driven process to find solutions that contribute to the improvement of local labour market conditions in Oxford County.

The Situation Table

The Oxford County Situation Table was formed in May 2014. The Situation Table is a forum and framework for collaboration among human service providers. The table mobilizes existing resources to help individuals /families rapidly reduce acutely elevated risk. The roundtable meets weekly to identify situations, determine which agency will take the lead and which agencies will support the intervention. Their vision is collaborative, caring innovation for community safety and well-being. Partners around the table include Oxford County Public Health and Human Services, Woodstock Police Department, Canada Mental Health Association, Woodstock Probation Services, Youth Justice Services, Addiction Services of Thames Valley, Children's Aid Society of Oxford County, Domestic Abuse Services Oxford, Home & Community, South West LHIN, Oxford Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) Team, Oxford County Community Health Centre, Oxford Elgin Child & Youth Centre, Oxford Health Link, Oxford County Paramedic Services, Oxford Provincial Police Oxford Detachment, Thames Valley District School Board, Victim Assistance Services and Mental Health.

Social Planning Council of Oxford (SPCO)

The SPCO is an organization that uses research, evidence and community building to address poverty and marginalization throughout Oxford County. The SPCO's vision is "well-being for every resident of Oxford County" and the organization continues to move forward with the goal of bringing people together to actively participate in social development. The SPCO propels important social inequalities into the general public's view through education and dissemination. Food security, living wage, lack of adequate transportation, housing and childcare and public engagement are important areas for the SPCO. Their work in mobilizing community will help with the zero poverty movement.

Southwestern Public Health Department (formerly known as Oxford County Public Health)

The Southwestern Public Health Department (formerly known as Oxford County Public Health) is charged with the responsibility of ensuring the people who live in the community are healthy and safe. The Southwestern Public Health offers programs, clinics and classes that promote healthy lifestyles that aim to prevent illness and disease in the community. Programs are offered to keep people of all ages and places throughout the community healthy and offer anything from pregnancy and prenatal

programs, nutrition and non-smoking initiatives to environmental services, weather bulletins and ensuring our food and water are safe for consumption. Through programs in prevention and protection, Public Health works to keep the people in Oxford's communities healthy and safe.

South West Local Health Integrated Network (LHIN)

The role of Local Health Integration Networks (LHIN's) is to plan, integrate and fund local health care as well as deliver and coordinate home and community care. The South West LHIN covers an area from Lake Erie to the Bruce Peninsula and it home to almost one million people. The South West LHIN ensures that local people help to identify health care priorities and solutions based on local needs, wants, circumstances and expectation.

United Way Oxford

For over 50 years, United Way Oxford has been working to improve lives. Having evolved from their roots as a 'fundraiser' to a community convener, United Way mobilizes partners – business, labour, service providers, community leaders and residents – helping to create opportunities for a better life for everyone in our community and is considered an early community champion. United Way Oxford inspires people to come together and to make a lasting difference. Through community conversations, the United Way is working to achieve meaningful, long-term improvements to quality of life by addressing not only the symptoms of the problems, but also the root causes. The established relationships with the greater community - including many labour unions - help to fight the inequalities in the community and focus support to areas of need, including assisting those living in poverty, to move forward.

United Way Strong Communities Programs

Oxford County walk-in counseling & self-help supports with Canadian Mental Health Association

Accessible walk-in counselling and peer support. In collaboration with other walk-in counselling services, this initiative helps to ensure that individuals of all ages, have timely, local, relationship-based, accessible services available as well as opportunities to have safe and welcoming spaces.

This service provides incredible support for people by people with lived experience. The volunteer base helps people navigate through systems they have been through themselves. The feedback provided by this service will be vital to the Zero Poverty Oxford Plan.

Adult Mediation with Community Options for Justice

Resolution for justice issues. Designed to address a gap, this program uses volunteers   to assist with conflict resolution and restorative justice. Identified adults, victims and community members come together to repair harm, rebuild relationships and gain a better understanding of the root causes of minor crime while holding the individual accountable. It equips clients with the skills, tools and guidance for a brighter future.

Therapeutic Horseback Riding with Jabez Therapy Ranch

Therapeutic horseback program for youth. The Therapeutic and Equine Assisted Psychotherapy program provides alternate support to children and youth dealing with, or at risk of, mental health challenges by helping clients experiment with horseback riding.

T:GO Transportation with Community Living Tillsonburg

T:GO Call-N-Ride is a five-year-pilot community bus providing low-cost rides within Tillsonburg. A collaborative community service to support all residents with an affordable means to get around for work, medical appointments, community programs, events, shopping and to meet up with friends. T:GO operates on set schedules and flexible routes offering a reliable, adjustable service to residents of Tillsonburg.

This service helps people get to work and access services they would otherwise not be able to. This allows for many social inclusion opportunities and makes the trip to work more affordable and advantageous, allowing people to get ahead through an increase in income. T:GO Call-N-Ride is a **community champion.**

United Way Poverty to Possibility Programs

Oxford Resident Support with Indwell Harvey Woods Lofts

Resident support for improved health and well-being. This program offers affordable housing to those with a disability and/or limited income. It ensures residents have access to supports for health and well-being, employment and community engagement.

Oxford Oral Health Access Initiative with Oxford Community Health Centre

Develop initiatives for oral health access. Oral health care is vital to health, self-esteem and employment readiness and is often not available for the most vulnerable. This program works to create community awareness and to develop supports to obtain resources. Oral health is considered a significant determinant of health and for obtaining and maintaining employment. Many hospital visits and missed days of work can be avoided through optimal oral health.

Oxford Street Outreach Program with Oxford Community Health Centre (Collaborative)

Homeless support through outreach and belongingness. An intervention program aimed at helping individuals experiencing chronic and persistent homelessness, or at risk of homelessness while creating clearer system access and coordination. This service works very closely with those most

vulnerable in this community. The wrap-around service provision and housing-first approach assists people to live a life outside of poverty.

United Way All That Kids Can Be Programs

Mentoring, Recreation and Social Cadet Program with Navy League & Sea Cadets

Social program with skills training. Programming ensures that children and youth have the opportunity to experience physical fitness, life-skill development, mentorship and belonging.

Education, Leadership, Recreation & Social Programs with Fusion Youth Activity and Technology Centre

Recreation and social opportunities through activity and technology. Programs that build knowledge and skills, positive relationships, a sense of belonging and increased self-esteem and resiliency offer variety to youth (ages 12-18) with an asset-based approach that ensures they receive the tools required to make a healthy transition into adulthood.

Oxford Student Nutrition Program with Ontario Student Nutrition Program

Student nutrition for school success. This inclusive school-based program ensures that children and youth in our community can attend school nourished and ready to learn.

Youth, Community and Site-based Mentoring Programs with Big Brothers Big Sisters Ingersoll, Tillsonburg & Area and Big Brothers Big Sisters Woodstock and District

Mentoring to build resiliency and empower youth. Programs work to empower children to reach their full potential by building resiliency and self-esteem through positive relationships.

Youth Horse Guided Learning Program with Community Options for Justice

Horse guided learning for at-risk youth. A unique intervention with a proven track record, this program is designed for youth at risk of further conflict with the law. It is targeted to youth facing significant barriers. It helps identify personal strengths, conquers limitations and increases self-respect.

Women's Employment Resource Centre (WERC)

For 20 years, the Women's Employment Resource Centre has been a sanctuary of support. WERC provides free employment service assistance to all women of Oxford County. Their 12-week Workplace Skills Development Program (WSDP) offers training in industrial sewing, effective communication, discovering career options, job search assistance and instruction in assertively interacting and handling

criticism. This program can be taken for the full 12 weeks or divided into modules for those who are only interested in certain topics.

Woodstock Moose Lodge 1329

At the core of the Moose organization is the saying "a burden heavy to one is borne lightly by many" and this core belief is what makes them unique in the local communities and charitable cities that they support. Since the early years, this fraternal organization has rapidly expanded to include valuable service to its communities. The Woodstock Moose Lodge in partnership with the Salvation Army and Operation Sharing opened Bullwinkle's at their Woodstock location. Bullwinkle's is a café open on Tuesday and Thursday's that features a "pay what you can" sliding scale between 50 cents and $7 and is designed to promote inclusiveness within the community while offering low income meals.

Youth Justice Services – Oxford-Elgin Child & Youth Centre

Youth Justice is a service provided though Oxford-Elgin Child & Youth Centre. The focus is to address issues and highlight supports to young persons with mental health and/or behavioral needs who are in the youth justice system. Young persons served are age 12-17 at the time of offense who have been found guilty and are currently on probation, conditional supervision or community supervision orders and have assessed mental health needs. Individual and family counselling is available.

4-H

The 4-H Club is a program offering youth between the ages of 9 and 21 the opportunity to make new friends and share new experiences, learn and try out new skills at local, regional and provincial level. In the process, youth learn skills for life (cooking, sewing, crafts and creativity), agriculture (livestock, machinery, and farm safety), the environment and conservation. Individuals also learn leadership and judging skills. All of this work is done by local volunteers who are screened and trained to ensure the very best experience for members. Each club must have two screened and trained volunteers minimum. There are clubs to teach life skills that are located in Brooksdale, Burgessville, Oxford Centre, Embro, Hickson, Tavistock, Mt. Elgin, and Thamesford as well as countywide. While these skills may seem rural in nature they provide life skills for all, assist with social inclusion and may assist with poverty reduction.

Key Point

That each partner review their missions and values with respect to what could be done specifically with people living in poverty. All of the above services play a significant role and share in the common belief that helping individuals achieve their best life and fullest potential will assist in the zero poverty goal.

Identify Opportunities and Support Transformational Change

Increasing the level of awareness among citizens through education and awareness campaigns is an important next step in promoting transformation in Oxford County. Celebrating our **community champions** and using these organizations as living role models will increase the level of engagement amongst stakeholders in our community and promote sustainable social change. It is also essential to raise the level of awareness among citizens in Oxford County through education and awareness campaigns and to continue to increase community engagement and capacity-building that will to promote transformation. Celebrating our strengths and our local champions will harness our community assets, reinforce local resources and cultivate continuing communication. Continuing conversations and discussion about why poverty exists and how to examine it will be necessary next steps to alter perceptions and stigma surrounding poverty and to move towards transformational change and pragmatic solutions that will eliminate poverty in Oxford County.

Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy aims to create a province where every person has the opportunity to achieve his or her full potential. An important part of the Zero Poverty Oxford Plan is removing barriers and increasing opportunities for those who are living on a low income. People living in poverty often require multiple forms of government support as well as help from a variety of local services and programs. As a result, there is an identified need for assistance to further individual pathways of support throughout the wider services system, to ensure an ease of navigation. This can be done via service hubs, integration of departments within organizations as well as through service navigation. Oxford County took the lead in Ontario by bravely committing to a zero poverty future; however, our success will be built on the leadership and commitment of the public. The role of the Zero Poverty Oxford Action Committee is to lead by example, to inspire, to remove doubt and to eliminate barriers. However, the real change will begin only when individuals, groups and business owners engage and lead on their own terms.

Key Priorities

Better-connected community networks can result in a more effective and efficient poverty-fighting system. Continuing community-wide education will increase awareness and generate understanding about the root causes of poverty. Organizations that provide resources to those living on a low income should have trained system navigators to help individuals and families alike navigate the various support systems. This will ensure participants receive all the internal and external resources available to them in an efficient manner. Providing this continued wrap-around support for those moving out of poverty (and staying out of poverty) is an essential next step in a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy.

Key Action

It will be critical to hear from the individuals living in poverty to know what is working from their perspective. Strategies derived from service providers who work with people living in poverty daily inspire many of the recommendations in this plan. The difference is ensuring interpretations by service providers matches what people living in poverty feel and experience. The adage "nothing about us

without us" will be a dominant theme in making lasting changes as the desire is to get continual advice, guidance and feedback to ensure good work is being done and that poverty is reduced in this community. This work will be the key to transformational change.

Chapter 5: Increase and Integrate Strategies across Sectors

Overview

Providing a sustainable path out of poverty will require a comprehensive and multi-sectorial approach. Evidence-based social interventions are not only succeeding in poverty elimination strategies but are also generating greater social returns via **increased income levels** and improved **health and mental health** outcomes. This chapter will also discuss strategies to **address affordable housing**, as well as **social mobility and transit equity.** It will also heighten the important role **education** can play in the fight against poverty and how to increase **community and social inclusion** in our community.

Strategically Increase Income Levels

In Chapter 2, it was discussed that what works for one group of people will not necessarily work for another group. For example, many people in receipt of Ontario Works or Ontario Disability require customized additional supports to help them obtain and maintain employment; however, we must also address the very real issue that not all jobs are immediate and/or are ongoing pathways out of poverty. Many jobs are low paying, part-time, temporary, provide few if any workplace benefits and have little or no job security.

Living Wage

A living wage is not the same as a minimum wage, which is the provincially mandated legal minimum wage that all employers must pay. The living wage sets a higher standard – it reflects what earners in a family need to be paid hourly based on the actual costs of living and being included in a specific community. The living wage is calculated at the hourly rate at which a household can meet its basic needs – once government transfers have been added to the family's income (i.e., Canada Child Benefit) and deductions have been subtracted (i.e., income tax and employment insurance premiums). Included in the calculation are food, shelter, clothing, transportation, communication, childcare, private health insurance for prescription drugs and dental coverage, and items that allow for fuller participation in society, such as birthday gifts, family leisure outings, retirement, and post-secondary savings for their children.

The Cycle of Low Paying Jobs and Poverty

A living wage enables working families to have a sufficient income that covers reasonable costs, promotes social inclusion, ensures that families are not under significant financial duress and can be used as a vehicle to promote the benefits of social programs such as child care and recreation funds.

In the case of people that are considered **working poor**, they have jobs, but due to the low-paying nature of the jobs, continue to remain trapped in the cycle of poverty as there is not enough income for all their expenses.

Ontario Works (OW) participants who exit the OW program for employment often find themselves in the same cycle of low-paying jobs and are often set up in a pattern where they enter and exit the social assistance support programs numerous times. The implementation of a living wage in this county would act as an incentive for those currently on social assistance to exit assistance. Furthermore, it would ensure that residents do not have to prioritize one basic need such as food, shelter, electricity and medical supplies over another.

In addition to the numerous benefits to employees, a Living Wage also has a profound impact on local employers. Living wage employers have described it as a never-ending return of investment as well as it being a prerequisite to building an engaged staff. Living Wage Canada has a fact sheet listing the benefits to a living wage as follows:

- Decreased employee turnover, plus savings on staff hires and training.
- Improved job performance, productivity and service delivery, plus lower rates of absenteeism.
- Benefits to the broader economy by stimulating consumer spending.
- Demonstration of greater corporate social responsibility, plus an increase in public recognition.

Implementing a living wage in Oxford County parallels the vision of the Future Oxford Community Sustainability Plan and will help our community reach its objective of building a thriving local economy. Chapter 6 will discuss in more detail the mechanisms required to implement a living wage in our county.

Universal Basic Income (UBI)

A basic income would ensure more people have more money to spend. More money to spend would benefit local businesses, as people who earn lower incomes inevitably need to spend almost all of their money and tend to do so locally for the things that they need. It would ensure that everyone, including the poor, can live with dignity. A basic income would also be a huge step towards eliminating poverty as it would allow people to afford the basic necessities of life (shelter, food, clothing, etc.). Commonly, a basic income guarantee ensures everyone earns an income that is sufficient enough to meet basic needs and live with dignity, regardless of work status. It involves a regular, reliable distribution of money from government to people to help ensure total income can meet common, basic needs.

Currently in Ontario there are basic income pilot projects being held in Hamilton, Brantford, Brant County, Lindsay and Thunder Bay to test whether a basic income can better support vulnerable workers, improve health and education outcomes for people on low incomes, and help ensure that everyone shares in Ontario's economic growth. The province has successfully completed the enrollment phase of the three-year pilot projects and early reports are indicating that pilot participants are feeling less stress and anxiety about paying their bills, enjoying a better life overall. The next stage of the pilot will start to examine how a basic income might help expand opportunities and job prospects.

Key Point

Next steps should include continued advocacy in support of basic income and living wage as well as increases to social assistance rates. This will help ensure the province continues to work in partnership with the municipalities via financial mechanisms to assist those currently living in poverty. Chapter 6 discusses the importance of ensuring individuals and families are accessing all the government supports they are entitled to.

Address Affordable Housing

Research has shown safe, accessible and affordable housing supports individuals and families out of poverty. Stable shelter is the first "building block" that enables people to *shift* focus to support positive development within other important *quality of life* areas such as income, education, health, transportation, employment and safety. A one-size-fits-all approach to address affordable housing is non-existent. Oxford County developed a Shelter Continuum as part of the Oxford County Shelter Plan as a resource pathway that highlights the community's shelter needs and identifies key stakeholders. The Continuum focuses on the idea that people can move to improved shelter choices rather than forever remaining in their current situation. The Shelter Plan is updated annually with emphasis on improving the shelter options for residents of Oxford County.

Oxford County is not excluded from the affordable housing crisis. Statistics provided by Canada Mortgage Housing Corporation confirm low vacancy rates in Oxford County, at 2.6% and the average market rent at $908 per month. A rise in the social housing waitlist - which hovers around 1,500 recorded applicants and rising shelter costs reinforces the urgency for more affordable housing options. The other reality impacting the affordability of housing are the rates for people in receipt of Ontario Works (OW) or the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). The monthly OW cheque for a single person in Ontario is $721 per month. $384 of this amount is intended to pay for the total cost of shelter. A single person in receipt of ODSP receives $1,151, with $489 of this amount to be dedicated to the total costs of shelter. The average market rent coupled with the availability of shelter and the amount provided to an individual living on social assistance for rent does not add up and can lead people into greater depths of poverty. While a movement for basic income is prevalent, a similar movement to increase the current rates for social assistance cannot be ignored if we wish to allow people greater access to housing and to build a life free of poverty.

Oxford County council has been progressive in assisting with this issue and has endorsed a "**Housing First"** model of service in addition to endorsing a surplus lands policy which dedicates the proceeds of surplus lands to the building of housing. Council recognizes that safe, affordable housing is one of the key criteria people require in order to exit poverty. It should also be noted that Bridge and Rent Supplement programs are available to assist people with the cost of their rent on a monthly basis, via county funds, and it is imperative that these funds continue to assist people in entering into or moving through the housing continuum.

Oxford County has completed the Community Index of Well Being survey and has noted that one of the goals is that the number of people living in core housing has their housing need reduced and the number of homeless people becomes zero.

Key Point

It should be noted there continues to be a need for supportive housing for a variety of factors included but not limited to illness, addiction, trauma, long-term poverty and abandonment by family. Continued funding must remain available to house those most vulnerable in our community on an ongoing basis.

Emergency Shelter

Shelter is a basic human right and provides the foundation for all other aspects of life. While a shelter stay is not ideal, it is a temporary necessity for those lacking stable housing. While municipal, federal and provincial funding is being provided to build more affordable housing in Oxford County, the reality is the need for housing outweighs the pace of affordable housing builds, resulting in homelessness in our community.

In April of 2018 the Inn of Woodstock (formerly known as the Inn Out of the Cold) announced that their program will be extended for all months of the year, not just the winter months. As Coordinator Darryl Watson has indicated "homelessness is not a seasonal issue," therefore the need to shelter people year-round is a necessity. For the past 13 years the homeless shelter has operated from November until April between the hours of 7:00 pm and 7:30 am. Operation Sharing, in partnership with Oxford County, made the decision to continue operating the shelter year-round in order to combat homelessness in Oxford County. The cost of extending the shelter's operations will be covered by the one hundred per cent provincially funded Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative. While the shelter is currently a necessity, it is imperative that the community work together to try to find stable and affordable housing for individuals, while helping people maintain their housing once they find it.

Other programs are available to address the housing needs of individuals funded through the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative, monitored and operationalized by Oxford County's Human Services. These additional programs include - but are not limited to the Salvation Army's Emergency Family Shelter, some emergency night stays at hotels facilitated by the Salvation Army Woodstock and Tillsonburg location, housing with related supports for those in need of support with their activities of daily living in a group home environment, last month's rent and prevention of utility disconnection and eviction facilitated through Human Services and emergency beds for abused women

through Domestic Assault Services of Oxford (DASO). Funds are also used in a variety of ways to try to both house and maintain housing for people in this community.

Youth Homeless Strategy

It is important to address the root cause of youth homelessness as it impacts future employment opportunities, quality of life and ensures that youth are active contributing members of both their community and society. United Way of Kingston, Frontenac, Lennox and Addington (KFL&A) sought input from the young people in their community which provided them with insight into root causes such as family conflict, addictions and mental health as well as education and unemployment.

United Way KFL&A then worked collectively with their community partners to develop a youth plan that focused on prevention, providing timely intervention and building a sustainable network of supportive resources. Their Youth Homelessness 2018 summary reported that in 2014, one in three shelter residents were between the ages of 15 and 24. As a result of community-wide efforts, today this number declined to one in 12. Their vision is that by 2020 80% of youths who enter the homelessness system in KFL&A will be housed within 30 days.

Key Priorities

A community response strategy needs to be explored to better support and/or address the housing shortage. An effective, innovative, collaborative approach is needed to address insecure and precarious housing. Various levels of government, community partners, stakeholders and the private sector need to align to achieve this goal. While noted above, there are programs available to try to assist people with their housing challenges, but it is equally important that all agencies work together and make themselves collectively aware of what is available and always be mindful of the future when developing intervention strategies.

In an environment when securing safe, affordable housing is a very challenging undertaking, the maintenance of that housing becomes critically important. It is necessary to explore a preventative strategy to "wrap-around" social supports needed to stabilize and maintain housing to avert homelessness. Using collaborative approaches that have been successful in other communities, such as Kingston's youth homeless plan, would be an efficient and effective way to begin implementing proven strategies to address homelessness**.**

As noted, the high demand for housing currently outweighs the supply of housing. For this reason, alternatives must be examined to increase opportunities as quickly as possible. One of the alternative ways of increasing housing options may be through secondary suites. In 2018, Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) defines them as follows:

> *A secondary suite is a private, self-contained unit within an existing dwelling. Secondary suites are also called second units, accessory apartments, granny flats, in-law suites and basement apartments (since many are found in basements). A secondary suite has its own bathroom, kitchen, living and sleeping areas but can share a number of features with the rest of the house. Shared facilities may include a yard, parking area, laundry and storage space, and sometimes a hallway.*

CMHC is working to promote the idea of developing a marketing strategy to highlight the buildings of secondary suites in the construction of new or existing homes. This may result in more rental housing and allow homeowners to earn income from units. Not only are secondary suites a source of affordable rental units, but they can also provide the needed extra income to first-time homebuyers for whom that additional income makes housing affordable in high-cost areas. For older households who no longer need a large house, the addition of a suite can generate needed income and security, as well as allow them to continue to live in their neighbourhoods and age in place. Secondary suites also provide another avenue for people to move through the housing continuum.

Planning for Housing Needs

In an attempt to increase the supply of affordable housing units and promote a range of housing types and tenure forms, planning staff are able to rely on a number of policies identified in the County Official Plan. It is a priority of the housing policies contained in the Official Plan to provide a variety of housing options for low and moderate income households and those with special needs. Opportunities for the development of housing types to meet the needs of low and moderate income households are provided through initiatives such as residential infill and intensification and where appropriate, the reduction of municipal infrastructure requirements and lot area standards in addition to the provision of bonus zoning.

Residential infill and intensification include introducing new units to existing buildings, creating lots from underutilized tracts of lands and encouraging redevelopment that in turn provides a variety of housing types. By promoting various forms of housing including apartment and secondary units, single detached, semi-detached, townhouse and converted dwellings, municipalities can work to provide an appropriate range and mix of housing types to meet the needs of current and future residents.

Other housing policies seek to maintain an appropriate supply of rental affordable housing that is suitably maintained and adequate for habitation by encouraging the creation of housing opportunities that may result in a mix of tenure forms, such as ownership, rental and co-operative.

In support of these initiatives a number of municipalities in Oxford County promote the creation of new residential dwelling units in the downtown cores through a Community Improvement Plan (CIP) that offers either a grant or loan to property owners. The Residential Conversion Program is intended to provide a form of funding from the municipality to encourage property owners to create one or more new residential dwelling units within or near the downtown cores through rehabilitation, renovation or addition to an existing building. Residential conversions in the downtown have multiple benefits to both municipalities and residents of the area. More residential units in the downtown increases investment in local businesses in the area and the conversion of units provides more affordable living options that are close to local amenities and transit options.

Addressing Health, Mental Health and Addictions

Poverty is a health issue. Health equity should be seen as a priority for all citizens. The Wellesley Institute has provided extensive research that indicates people with lower education and income levels, who are unemployed or in low-paying jobs, have poorer health than those who are better off financially. In their submission to the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy they concluded the following**: "There is a well-established gradient of health in which people who are in the lowest income group have worse health than people who are even just one step further up the income ladder."** All across the country, public health professionals are actively involved in poverty reduction efforts in order to improve population-level health outcomes. Many individuals in our community who are struggling with poverty require additional supports such as mental health counselling or access to substance abuse programs before they can begin to address any other challenges or barriers that they may be facing. Strengthening and integrating mental health and addictions services would make it easier and more efficient for individuals to access services.

Locally

Oxford County Community Health Centre (OCCHC) is an organization which employs community champions who have recognized the need for wrap-around, person-centred service delivery processes that model a Health Links philosophy of care. The Health Links approach introduces new and improved ways to integrate care delivery for the people of Ontario who live with complex chronic illness, social determinant of health considerations and/or high-cost conditions. The Health Links approach introduces new and improved ways to integrate care delivery for the people of Ontario who live with complex chronic illness, social determinants of health considerations and/or high-cost conditions. The Health Links philosophy of care centres around a process called Coordinated Care Planning. Coordinated Care Planning (CCP) is for people who would benefit most from coordinated support from multiple health and social service providers. A standardized tool is used to ensure the right information is ascertained from the client allowing each person to benefit from patient centred goal setting and care planning. The ultimate goal is to build a support plan that allows for the individual to be successful in their goals while being supported by their team. The path for zero poverty in Oxford County could mirror this ideology where people living in poverty could determine their goals for life outside of poverty while being supported by their team.

Oxford County Public Health did a report entitled *Access to Mental Health Services in Oxford County* in April 2017 that outlined 3 recommendations specific to Oxford County:

1. Ensure that accurate service information is readily available across multiple platforms.

2. Create supportive social environments to talk openly about mental health concerns.

3. Explore innovative approaches to service delivery to improve equitable access to services regardless of where people live.

Provincially

Ontario's comprehensive mental health and addictions strategy, *Open Minds, Healthy Minds,* has 4 goals that align well with the Oxford County Zero Poverty Plan recommendations and strategies:

1. Improve mental health and well-being for all Ontarians with coordinated high quality programs.

2. Create healthy, resilient, inclusive communities that reduce stigma and include housing and employment supports.

3. Identify mental health and addictions problems early and provide intervention; build school-based capacity and strengthen family health care.

4. Provide timely, high quality, integrated, person directed health and other human services.

Evidence-based practices are gaining increased exposure in the mental health arena. Many communities are adopting proven programs and developing their own to include outcome-based data. Continuing to move forward with the recommendations of the Public Health report and strengthening and integrating mental health and addictions will ensure that resources are readily available and accessible for all citizens of Oxford County. Continued education surrounding mental health and addictions will help reduce stigma and discrimination. Next steps should include working with the local school boards in order to build capacity and develop health promotion infrastructure specific to our area. The last section in this chapter will speak more directly regarding innovative ways to establish increased levels of education in our county.

Health also impacts one's ability to find and maintain employment. The Oxford Workforce Development Partnership (OWDP) has completed an Employer One survey obtaining a variety of labour market information and employee data. The OWDP also works continuously with employers to try to fill the gap between available jobs and filling those jobs with reliable, healthy individuals. Increasingly, the County is facing a labour shortage, as there are more jobs than people to fill them. Of those jobs that become filled, they quickly become vacant, as eight out of ten times a job is filled, the incumbent leaves right away for a variety of reasons (Employer One survey data). It has been stated to employers that one of the reasons people have left is their health- both mental and physical. A recommendation has been put forth through the committee to get baseline data to get a better idea of why this is happening so that the labour market can improve for both employers and employees, as both are integral to building a vibrant economy and assisting people in getting out of poverty.

Another contributing factor to poor health may be the lack of physicians and access to specialists in Oxford County. The waitlist is long for the doctor at the Oxford County Community Health Centre and often the acceptance of new names to the list is closed. There are a number of individuals who receive Ontario Works who should be in receipt of Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), but due to the lack of a doctor, the required medical examination does not get completed and therefore the application remains incomplete. There is now the provision of a Registered Nurse (RN) being able to complete the medical examinations, but the uptick to this allowance has been slow.

Key Action

Further work needs to be done to address the critical lack of physicians in Oxford County and other medical personnel in Oxford County. A lack of physicians also contributes to undiagnosed and untreated medical and mental health conditions which impact a person's circumstance with being able to secure and maintain employment, training or educational opportunities which impact their mobility to move away from poverty. There is also an immediate need to develop an efficient, accessible, streamlined pathway between the many individuals who require ODSP and the Registered Nurses who are willing to complete the application.

Address Community and Social Exclusion

According to the World Bank, social inclusion is the process of improving the terms for individuals and groups to take part in society and the process of improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of people, disadvantaged on the basis of their identity, to take part in society. It is a priority in Oxford County to manifest an environment where all individuals feel socially included. This section looks at additional programming or activities that could help address community and social exclusion in Oxford County.

Key Point

To eliminate poverty in our community we must begin to look at the systemic changes that need to occur in order to advance our understanding of the critical issues surrounding poverty. The Mowatt Centre has gathered research evidence in its report *What Works? Proven approaches to alleviating poverty* that firmly indicates customizable programming, that targets the unique needs of individuals and can be highly effective in alleviating poverty – even more so when programming is attached to foundational supports such as income security, transportation, childcare and housing. Combining foundational supports with needs-based programming addresses that factors linked to poverty can and do impact individual outcomes in different ways and are key to breaking the cycle of poverty.

Circles™

The implementation of the Circles program in Oxford County would benefit those on Ontario Works and/or living on a low income who are facing multiple barriers and are ready to begin the transition out of poverty. The program is designed to help people become financially self-sufficient, find good jobs and break the cycle of poverty. Circles provides an innovative, community-focused support system to help low-income individuals become more independent by developing personal plans and bringing together community volunteers to help implement those plans. Circles communities help to promote community inclusion by using Bridges Out of Poverty concepts and Getting Ahead in a Just-Getting-By World classes.

The Circles program is a community-based initiative that creates relationships across economic boundaries by partnering volunteers and community leaders who have attended ***Bridges Out of Poverty*** training with low-income individuals or families that have attended the ***Getting Ahead program.***

Circles is based on a supportive relationship comprised of a **Circle Leader** (an individual/family working to get out of poverty who has completed the **Getting Ahead** workshop) and two to four community Allies (middle class volunteers who have completed **a Bridges Out of Poverty** workshop) who are willing to befriend the individual/family and support their way out of poverty. For people who are stuck in poverty, wrapping informal supports around them (that includes healthy role models, as opposed to agency supports alone) gives them additional resources to help lift themselves out of poverty and also helps them feel more connected and included in the broader community.

The aims of Circles are to:

- Provide emotional and practical support
- Assist with complex issues and problem solving
- Build the "social capital" of people living in poverty
- Show the community the very real barriers of living in poverty
- Walk with people in poverty to support life change

The Circles approach has been used in over 100 communities and districts in the US and Canada and has been extremely successful in lifting individuals and families out of poverty permanently.

Local Getting Ahead Initiative

In 2017, the Oxford County Community Health Centre (OCCHC) received Trillium Grant funding to host a *Bridges Out of Poverty* event and four Getting Ahead workshops. Bridges out of Poverty is a framework designed to educate individuals from middle or upper class on what it means to live in poverty. *Getting Ahead* workshops are designed to help people "bridge" their way out of poverty so that they may become self-sufficient. The goal of the workshops is to empower people and support them as they examine their attitudes toward change, identify the barriers that keep them in poverty and create a personal plan to achieve their goals. The workshops will also provide an in-depth opportunity to learn more about what poverty looks like in Oxford County. The Getting Ahead program has a high success rate, with many graduates completing school and/or securing full time employment.

OCCHC held a successful Bridges out of Poverty event in November of 2017 that was attended by over 100 community members. By attending this workshop, service providers got a better idea of what it is like for people who are living in poverty and to learn to look through a different lens. In partnership with the United Way of Oxford and Oxford County Human Services, a Getting Ahead pilot is scheduled to run for 10 sessions in Woodstock in May and June of 2018. Each session will last approximately 3 hours and will start with an introductory activity and be followed up with a 'kitchen table' style conversation. Childcare and transportation will be provided as needed for the participants. Since the participants will be helping the community understand the challenges of poverty, each individual will receive a $50 food card for each session. The initial pilot is designed to be a learning experience for everyone and upon completion of the pilot, necessary adjustments will be made prior to the workshops fanning out to the remainder of the county. Next steps will include a proposal for Circles funding in order to implement the Circles program in Oxford County.

Ontario Works Community Placements

Reintroducing the Community Placement component for Ontario Works participants in Oxford County is another strategy that will help promote inclusion. A community placement is an unpaid community activity with a sponsoring agency. Sponsoring agencies include community-based groups, non-profit organizations and public sector organizations.

The purpose of the placement is to allow participants to build employment networks, gain valuable experience and develop or enhance employment-related skills to help them move into the paid labour force. Community Placements also provides an opportunity to identify projects/placements that will benefit the local community. Many agencies and communities have an ongoing wish list of special projects.

The following Program Principles are recommended guidelines to ensure that all Community Placements meet specific criteria:

- Add value to the local community and to the participant's self-esteem, employment networks and skill-set.
- Promote the dignity of work by focusing on high quality experiences for participants.

Families First

Families First is a pilot program launched in late 2000 at Ontario Works in Peel. Based on previous research by Dr. Gina Brown, the Families First project is a unique study. This program provides intensive needs-based case management supports to sole support parents and their children through a collaborative partnership between Human Services and Public Health in Peel.

Supports include:

- Recreation for children
- Employment Services and supports
- Public Health Nurse supports
- Subsidized childcare

Families First participants experience many barriers to employment and are very limited in their level of participation in the community due to the degree of challenges experienced, such a, poor emotional and psychological health. Families First participants experience improved social, physical and mental health, functionality, independence and a reduced reliance on social and health services.

- Family First participants are 1.3 times more likely to exit social assistance compared to other sole support parents on Ontario Works over a 24-month period

Key Priorities

Oxford County must work in partnership to offer enhanced wrap-around supports to existing programs in order to create widespread change and to address the inter-related causes of poverty. Implementing evidence-based, proven programs such as Circles and/or Families First, along with building our own local evidence based programs, will be key to helping lead people out of poverty and addressing community and social exclusion. Next steps should include strategies to increase democratic engagement for all residents of Oxford County as well as a Future Oxford panel series which would include topics on **service access and coordination**, **transportation**, **housing stability** as well as **livable incomes**. A panel series will help to generate bold ideas which will set the stage for the next phase of the Zero Poverty Oxford Plan. Engaging the youth is also a key component to any generational plan and it is imperative that youth are engaged prior to implementation to ensure their voice is heard. More youth networking strategies are included in Chapter 10.

Childcare

The Ministry of Education currently funds, provides licenses and establishes guidelines throughout the Province of Ontario for the child care system. The Ministry has established their goal to ensure all children and families have access to a range of high-quality, inclusive and affordable early years and child care programs and services that are child-and-family-centred and contribute to children's learning, development and well-being. Child care is seen as a necessity for families to fully participate in the activities of work, training or educational pursuits. The Ministry has realized that attention to child care and early learning makes good economic sense.

Access and affordability are linked. Across the Province the cost of licensed child care has become a barrier to access. Infant care is particularly expensive, preventing many families from even trying to find licensed care, which can impact access to workforce and educational opportunities. The rates for child care throughout Oxford County vary depending on the centre and the age grouping and time required, at this time the rates range from $34.00 per day to as high as $59 per day. For those with challenges paying the full market rates, Oxford County facilitates a child care subsidy program for those who are eligible and who are participating in work, training or education or those with children with special needs and require child care. Oxford is fortunate that each person who is deemed eligible for subsidy through a Ministry designed eligibility application process, is able to access that subsidy as there is not a waitlist at this time.

Oxford County currently has 1138 licenced operating child care spaces, these spaces include 40 infant, 117 toddler, 329 preschool, 181 full day kindergarten and 472 school age spaces (this is a blend of spaces for children ages 44 months to 13 years old broken into the categories of kindergarten, primary/junior and junior school age). The majority of licensed centre-based child care spaces are located in Woodstock (57% of all spaces). The other areas with the higher percentages of spaces are Tillsonburg (16%) and Ingersoll (13.0%) with the rest of the spaces (13.58), located throughout the rest of the County. It should be noted that the licenced capacity is available for all of the age groupings in the different child care centres throughout the County, so if the demand is there and the centres are able to find qualified staff, the spaces would easily be increased.

One of the major challenges in the child care system is the lack of Early Childhood Educators. The number of people becoming trained in that profession is not keeping up with the demand and those who are trained are finding employment within the school system rather than the childcare system.

The most recent Oxford Child Care Plan established the fact that looking out to the 2040s, the child population is projected to remain fairly constant in Oxford County. As a percentage of the overall Oxford County population, the 0 to 14 year old grouping is expected to decrease from 17.6% of the total population in 2011 to 15.1% of the total population in 2041. Therefore it is essential that the system become as robust as possible to fulfil the current need.

While any family who is eligible for subsidy is able to access that financial assistance, it does not necessarily equate to available child care close to their home and work in the timeframe it is required. As noted, Oxford County has many manufacturing jobs which often means shift work. Oxford County does not have a licensed child care centre that is available to parents working shifts into the evening and overnight or throughout the weekend. In order for participation in all of life's employment and educational pursuits, it is imperative to have access when it is needed and where it is needed.

With new funding, Oxford County in partnership with the Thames Valley District School Board, will be adding 10 infant and 24 Preschool spaces at Algonquin Public School in Woodstock and at Harrisfield Public School in Ingersoll, there will be an addition of 10 infant, 15 toddler and 24 preschool aged child care spaces. While these increases will help with some of the pressure of the child care system, there is still a demand for more. Another measure to try to assist with the child care demands are centres investigating extending available hours, this will hopefully increase choice and access for families. The recommendation should move forward to ensure access is available to all as needed and to continue to build spaces until the various needs are met. Child care is one of the mechanisms required to allow individuals to work and train and improve their access to a life outside of poverty.

Transit Equity

Everyone in the community benefits when all residents have equal access to all available municipal services regardless of their income. Many low-income individuals require help to access basic essential services such as transit. When transportation in a community is affordable and accessible to all, it allows all citizens to participate fully. A 'public' transit system needs to be affordable for low-income individuals who are likely to need the system the most.

People living on a low income use transit to get to and from grocery stores, medical appointments, employment, day care providers and to participate in recreational or otherwise 'free' services such as those available at art galleries and libraries. Many cities in Canada provide subsidized transit passes for low-income individuals. Locally, there is a misconception that all participants on Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program are provided with transit passes via County funds, but this is not accurate. Providing subsidized transit passes to our residents would allow for a more equal and inclusive county, open opportunities for employment and allow families to travel together. Communities across Oxford County are coming together to ensure transit equity for all their residents.

Locally

The recent announcement of an Intra-County, Intra Community transportation hub, financially supported by the Ministry of Transportation, should greatly assist community members to have an affordable method of transportation to meet individual needs. This 1.4 Million grant will allow the community to have greater connectedness than ever before.

The transportation hub will connect 5 municipalities in Oxford County including Tillsonburg, South West Oxford, Norwich, Ingersoll and Woodstock. It will also connect Tillsonburg with surrounding communities of Delmar, Brownsville, Mount Elgin, Ostrander, Otterville, Langton, Courtland, Delhi, Bayham, Straffordville, Vienna and Port Burwell. It will create a transportation network between the Counties of Norfolk, Oxford and Elgin and will link to at least one major centre of London. This is incredible news for all community members who have been limited to opportunities due to a lack of transportation. The operations of this system will definitely enhance lives and build equity in opportunity.

Nationally

The city of Calgary was one of the first cities in Canada to provide a low income monthly transit pass as a result of an initiative called *Fair Fares,* which set a precedent for transportation reform across the country. Calgary offers a subsidized pass at a 50% reduction from the regular fare. The City of Edmonton quickly followed suit and they offer a low income subsidized monthly transit pass for $35. Recently, the City of Winnipeg has urged the mayor to follow in the footsteps of Calgary and Edmonton and provide a subsidized transit pass for low income residents.

In January of 2018, a new income-related transit program became effective in London, Ontario for residents 18 years and older. They offer subsidized transit passes to low income residents at approximately a 36% reduction to the regular fare.

As part of the *TO Prosperity: Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy, the City of Toronto* has made transit free for children 12 and under. In April of 2018 they announced their transit discount called **Fair Fare Pass** which allows low-income residents a $1 discount off a single fare adult ride and a $30.75 discount off a monthly adult pass.

Innisfil Transit

In Canada's first ridesharing and transit partnership, the Town of Innisfil and Uber have come together to bring on-demand, affordable and safe transportation to their community. In 2015, the residents of Innisfil were looking for a transit system that could service all members of the community. They considered options for fixed-route bus services, but Council ultimately determined it would be too costly and too limited. From there, Uber and the Town of Innisfil worked together to develop Innisfil Transit, an on-demand, shared transportation option powered by Uber, offering flat rates to residents that are subsidized by the town. The average wait time for the service is under nine minutes and it is available 24/7. The town has estimated they are saving $8 million yearly using Uber as an alternative to public transit.

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Key Priorities

Next steps should include a partnership with the City of Woodstock to explore the creation of a low-income transit subsidy pass for residents, based on practices and eligibility rules currently being used by other Canadian cities. Exploring transit solutions utilized by other communities would also be a beneficial and efficient step.

Social Mobility

Mobility from poverty can mean different things to different people and poverty is a multi-dimensional phenomenon with no singular cause. We know that poverty is not just about having insufficient income to meet basic needs but is also about the deprivation of basic social rights and limited access to essential **community supports** including recreation and education.

Custom-designed city programming which offers one single application for subsidized supports has transformed the way the City of Calgary helps resident's access services. The *Fair Entry* program allows residents to apply for multiple programs with one application, with eligibility based on income levels. This includes recreational fee assistance, a no-cost spay and neuter program for pets, a **senior's** services home maintenance program, a property tax assistance program and a sliding scale for transit passes. The City of Medicine Hat also utilizes a Fair Entry program to access their community supports.

While some of these things are available in Oxford County, there is not one application for all of the services offered across the county. A recommendation would be to have all of the potential subsidies for all forms of social inclusion available at one virtual place through one application accessible from multiple points. The other recommendation would be to ensure all community partners and agencies are aware and keep-up-to-date on everything that is available to assist people, so they do not have to navigate from one place to the next looking for answers.

Through the Social Assistance Modernization project, announcements have been made regarding "Improvements in Social Assistance, 2018" as part of the first phase of the multi-year Income Security Reform Plan. Effective August 2018, one improvement is that all family members will be listed on the monthly Statement of Assistance which will allow everyone in the family to efficiently receive community supports such as housing subsidies, food bank hampers as well as subsidized transit passes and recreation. This top-down effort from the Province to transform social assistance will help ease eligibility requirements for local supports and allow residents to seamlessly access services.

Education

Jumpstart to Higher Education

The Jumpstart to Higher Education program is an early intervention program that targets grade 7 and 8 students in the Waterloo Region. It focuses on elementary schools in neighbourhoods where there is a significantly higher proportion of families who are at social or economic risk. The primary goal of the program is to **jumpstart** the conversation about post-secondary education and discuss the various

pathways of education – apprenticeship, college and university, including how to fund their journey. A second goal of the program is to educate teachers about current post-secondary pathways and funding opportunities. Teachers are active participants in the program and are provided with informational materials to incorporate the topics discussed in class assignments, and to continue the conversation throughout the school year. Parents are also brought into the conversation, particularly those who did not attend post-secondary school, in order to make them feel more comfortable with their children's prospects.

The Jumpstart to Higher Education program was created with four main objectives:

1. Help students and families understand how a postsecondary education can be achieved
2. Provide information for students and families regarding the streams they choose for high school
3. Provide information about available funding for postsecondary education
4. Demystify postsecondary education by providing students with financial need an opportunity to experience a university setting through the Wilfrid Laurier JUMP program

One of the goals of The Future Oxford Community Sustainability Plan is *"a knowledgeable and equitable Oxford"* and a corresponding target is to increase the number of residents with post-secondary education.

In 2017, roughly one third (225,000) of Ontario's full-time students received free tuition, an additional 400,000 students received reduced tuition, and the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) reported a 10% (50,000 students) increase in applicants. To help accommodate students planning ahead for college and university, applications for the 2018-2019 school were opened four months earlier than normal this year. The OSAP website has also been redesigned to be much more user-friendly and applicants are presented with an estimate of potential funding immediately after applying. With the province working on strategies to help eliminate financial barriers for students and families who wish to access post-secondary education, the time has never been better for our community to introduce strategies and programs designed to increase the number of residents with post-secondary education.

Key Priorities

A partnership with Fanshawe College, which has a pre-existing transfer arrangement with Western University, coupled with the local school boards would enable the promotion of higher education via a program similar to the Jumpstart program in Waterloo.

Key Points

Education and experience help drive power. If we do not provide the next generation the opportunities to survive in the modern world, the potential depths of poverty may prevail. It is recommended to continue this most valuable partnership to explore more options for future generations. In creating a pathway to exit poverty, the promotion of higher education will also help increase intergenerational mobility.

Within Oxford County, there is a partnership with Community Employment Services and the Board of Education. It appears there is a desire by the Board to talk locally about career exploration related to what is currently offered in school and what would assist in making career and guidance more applicable to today's world. Some of the suggestions made to date appear to mirror some of the programming available in Waterloo Region. The Oxford Workforce Development Partnership has suggested that an increase to the number and variety of cooperative learning/working opportunities be explored. It has also been noted that experiential, practical learning platforms need to exist for young students to see what is available in the work world. The Workforce Development Partnership has also recommended that students have the opportunity to tour workplaces across the network of jobs and careers. Once a variety of methods for touring is explored (with or without parents), the exploration of qualifications for these occupations can be discussed with students so that it brings realistic pathways to students rather than being streamed strictly on the basis of academics. It has also been noted that guidance options should be available earlier in a child's academic journey rather than in grade 11 or 12 or perhaps not at all. Expanded experiential learning opportunities will assist in exploring career pathways and thus in the elimination of poverty.

Additionally, the variety of education programs and upgrading opportunities need to continue to ensure those who may not have graduated from high school still have the opportunity to do so, and it is the myriad of educational opportunities available in Oxford that will allow that to happen. It is vital, however, that all service providers are aware of what is available, including social and financial supports, to help people be successful in their goals. Currently, Literacy Link Southwestern Ontario is putting together a "roadmap" which easily assists service providers to refer individuals to what may be the best fit for them.

It should also be noted that employers are starting to loosen up some of their requirements for potential employees due to the labour shortage. With this change, people who declared themselves to be out of the job market due to their education, may still be very much employable. Years ago, the cutoff for application for many manufacturing/general labour positions was a grade twelve diploma and a clean record. Employers are now accepting applications from people who will come to work and are able and willing to learn. It is of paramount importance that those currently delivering Ontario Works, educate themselves to the realities of the local labour market in order to help those who they serve. There are a number of ways to become aware of this information, including the Work in Oxford website which posts available jobs as well as those previously filled and the required skills. The promotion of the current economic reality with those in need may assist more people in obtaining jobs and increase their mobility.

Chapter 6: Identify Financial Resources

Overview

While income is not the only indicator of poverty, it certainly is paramount. A life with a very low income, with no anticipated growth, leads to a life of poverty. For this reason, it is imperative to look at ways to **introduce innovative and alternative financial mechanisms** in order to increase the amount of money going into the hands of those living in poverty. **Implementing new mechanisms** will ensure the success of some of the suggestions provided in Chapter 5. **Establishing long-term support schemes** ensures that the mechanism implemented will have longevity through the years.

Introduce Innovative and Alternative Financing Mechanisms

Key Point

For the first draft of the Zero Poverty Oxford Plan, emphasis is placed on the first two Prosper interventions listed below, particularly on ensuring that all low-income residents have access to free income tax filing in order to receive government benefit programs they are eligible for.

Financial empowerment

Prosper Canada defines financial empowerment as a new approach to poverty reduction that focuses on improving the financial security of low-income people. Financial empowerment is an evidence-driven set of interventions that have proven successful at eliminating systemic barriers to the full financial inclusion of low-income people. It provides enabling supports that focus on helping low income people participate and feel included in our financial system while investing in their future.

The financial empowerment approach focuses on community-level strategies that include five types of interventions that effectively help low income households grow their incomes, improve their credit scores, manage savings and debt levels and build wealth through education, employment, entrepreneurship and improved housing:

1. Financial information, education and counselling
2. Help accessing income-boosting benefits and tax credits
3. Safe and affordable financial products and services
4. Access to savings and asset-building opportunities
5. Consumer awareness and protection

> **"Financial empowerment has already produced compelling evidence that the innovative strategies being used nationwide to improve residents' financial stability have this 'super vitamin' effect when inserted into traditional social services."**
> **- New York City Office of Financial Empowerment, 2015**

Canada Learning Bond

Currently, more than 1.4 million children in low-and modest-income families are missing out on significant federal education funding because they do not have a Registered Education Savings Plan (RESP). The Canada Learning Bond (CLB) is money that the government of Canada deposits directly into a child's RESP. Children born January 1, 2004 or after can get up to $2000 from the CLB when a RESP is opened with a $0 deposit. Those that are not eligible for a CLB have access to the Canada Education Savings Grant which is based on a sliding scale and has a lifetime maximum of $7,200 per child.

The Halton Poverty Roundtable formed the **Smart Start** collaborative campaign in 2013 around a common goal to increase graduation rates for youth in Halton. The goals of the campaign were to help eligible Halton families register their children for the Canada Learning Bond and to ensure every child in Halton had the opportunity to access post-secondary education. In the five years since the start of the program, there has been a 96% increase in CLB registration.

Key Priorities

Further development should include education surrounding Canada Learning Bonds and a strategy similar to the Halton Poverty Roundtable campaign.

Development and facilitation of fact sheets and education sessions should occur with all service providers to ensure all organizations are familiar with the wide variety of services available in Oxford County and that accurate and factual information is being given to all individuals in need.

Growth of a micro loans program should be explored as an alternative to pay-day loans and/or predatory lenders

Key Actions

The goals and anticipated outcomes of the *Prosper Canada* program would tremendously help people living in poverty. Even if the entire program could not be actioned, it is critically important that individuals living in poverty access basic financial programs that are available to them. Oxford County Human Services sees many people who are not accessing the financial resources that would be available to them if they completed their income tax returns. (e.g., Trillium benefit; GST) Many people do not have identification to access resources and/or the financial means to access income tax

services, to obtain identification or to obtain child or spousal support. It is imperative that somewhere in the Human Services budget that money be dedicated to improving this access, as it truly is money well spent to assist the individuals in a long-term way. One strategy could be to purchase several CRA returns through professional tax preparation businesses for low-income individuals. Agencies could also purchase tax preparation programs and train staff for simple returns. It should be noted, there are some volunteer tax preparers, but there are times when the returns are more complicated than what the volunteers want to complete.

Implement new Mechanisms to Internalize External Influences

Living Wage campaign for working poor

A living wage campaign is a necessary next step in order to increase the community's understanding of what a living wage is, and to shift how our community thinks about wages. If we want to decrease the number of "working poor" families and connect the implications of low-wage work in Oxford County, we must organize an effective living wage campaign to be implemented in stages.

If the living wage is endorsed, the logical next step would be a localized campaign for Oxford County. If decided to move forward with this campaign, strategies and fact sheets could be obtained through Tamarack and the Social Planning Council of Oxford.

Provincial external influences

The entire model of social assistance is being modernized to benefit the clients in receipt of assistance. Previous asset levels have been and will continue to be increased, with the notion of family-helping-family reinforced by the gift allowances. This equates to someone being able to help an individual with their bills monthly and the person in receipt of assistance not having to have that counted as income. The income thresholds will also increase so that people can make and keep more money before it is deducted from their monthly assistance cheque. While it has been noted that an increase in social assistance rates is an obvious way of assisting people in moving out of poverty, these changes will assist people in the more immediate future until the rates are increased in a more significant way.

It has also been noted that the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative is vital to keeping individuals' utilities on and preventing evictions from occurring due to non-payment of rent. Also, the fund provides support for emergency bed funding and supportive funding which assists the most vulnerable people in the community. It is crucial that County Council advocate for the continuation of this fund to help people reduce the depths of poverty

Establish Stable, Long-term Support Schemes

Local support suggestions

The discretionary fund available to the Human Services department needs to be fully utilized to assist people in accessing these basic funds that are not clawed back by any other assistance programs.

Other items to be purchased through the discretionary benefits budget could include improved access to dental care and dentures and medications and assistive devices not covered through other social assistance channels. Enhanced and refreshed training of staff needs to be completed to allow for these purchases to assist with exiting poverty.

There are many initiatives in Oxford County currently available to assist individuals living in poverty. There are pilot projects funded to assist people with housing stability, dental care services and a variety of financial rent supplement programs available through a variety of agencies. These programs are assisting individuals in many life changing ways but are also time limited with short term funding. It is imperative that these programs are critically assessed to see if they should be somehow funded for permanency in light of the positive change they are providing to many individuals.

Housing Strategies

Resources are currently being earmarked to assist with affordable housing builds as well as renovations of existing social housing. It is paramount that structures that have been around for many years are maintained and remain safe for the tenants, but more housing still needs to be built.

The Oxford County Human Services Department is very dedicated to accessing as much as possible to renovate and build housing and it has been encouraged by funders to "stack funding", a process whereby the municipality uses various pots of money to stretch the dollars and build more to meet the need. It is recommended that Oxford County Council continue to endorse the sale of surplus lands as well as the directing of the funds to housing as it can then be stacked with other capital funds to build as much as possible. The supply needs to keep with the demand. Once this is equalized, the foundational life stabilizer of housing will allow individuals greater access to mobility.

Procurement

Purchasing power can be leveraged to build social capital and create positive social outcomes in our community. A successful living wage campaign can lock in a long-term policy that includes living wage as a factor in consideration in the tendering process. Many public sector employers have taken a variety of approaches to inserting living wage and fair wage practices into contract notices when services are put out for tender.

Social procurement works on the idea that taxpayer funded projects and contracts should also enhance social value in our communities. Building in specific pieces for bids can enhance workplace development for disadvantaged populations in the community. A growing number of governments and institutions have introduced or reformed their procurement and infrastructure policies to include social and economic value considerations. Social procurement will require a shift in mindset by leaders and institutions, the next step could be the design and implementation of a social procurement policy that provides employment opportunities to previously homeless, recently housed individuals who are facing barriers to employment.

Community benefits

To maximize local economic and social benefits, municipalities are adopting social procurement policies and implementing community benefit. Ontario is ensuring that local communities benefit from infrastructure development before, during and after construction, helping to support economic growth and new job opportunities for people across the province. Community Benefits is an initiative in which the social and economic needs of a community are more closely linked to infrastructure investments and could include workforce development, social procurement and/or supplementary benefits identified by the community such as the creation of space for more physical public assets (e.g. child care facilities, a park) or design features to reduce noise pollution. The province is moving forward with community benefit projects which will employ a range of options designed to bolster local communities during the development of major new public infrastructure, including employment and training opportunities, environmental protections, poverty reduction measures and small business supports.

Chapter 7: Support Inclusion

Overview

In order to transition to zero poverty in Oxford County it will require structural shifts on how employment, income and social supports are distributed and used, this process will require **accountability and transparency** in all decision making.[5,6] It will require a responsive and adaptive approach to a rapidly changing world and economy.[6] The complete transformation to zero poverty is not merely substituting one social support for another - it needs to be an inclusive and democratic process. [5] The community needs to become engaged and see the benefits associated with the recommendations derived from the Zero Poverty Oxford Plan, **inclusive communication and outreach** is essential.. There are a wide range of zero poverty initiatives that are needed to impact individuals and the community such as housing, income, food security, social inclusion, social support, community development, access to services and health care, education, transportation, employment and recreation.[1] Impacting systems and policies to improve wellbeing is a key element of an effective strategy.[7] As previously mentioned in Section 1, the Collective Impact framework is an approach towards community change that includes five key areas: developing a common agenda, using shared measurements to understand progress, building on mutually reinforcing activities, engaging in continuous communications, and providing a backbone to move the work forward.[7] Poverty is multi-faceted issue interwoven together with many far-reaching impacts and causes .[6] It is essential to have a **diversified poverty transition** and activate as many community members as possible to adopt the process as their own. The ultimate goal as Oxford County transitions towards zero poverty is an equitable, inclusive and fair society and the plan aims to **safeguard a social just transition**.[5]

Ensure Accountability and Transparency

Political and stakeholder accountability along with building trust within the community is essential to raising and maintaining public engagement. Underpinning values and principles of the collective impact approach include transparency and accountability.[4] Accountability and transparency are important when considering staff and hiring, funding allocation, building political will and communicating and advancing the policy agenda.[4] Accountability helps ensure that the best interest of the community are in mind. Mechanisms to ensure accountability and transparency help legitimize political, stakeholder and community commitment.[5] The Oxford County situation table -where a large group of community partners meet weekly to provide immediate wrap-around services to individuals and families who are at extreme risk and slipping through the cracks - is a great example where high levels of accountability and transparency has harnessed trust to ensure effective collaboration to mitigate risk for those most vulnerable in Oxford County.

Key Actions

Develop appropriate tools that ensure accountability that allow people to see if the suggestions are making a difference. For example, a testimony could be provided by an individual that gives a transparent description of how well something is or is not working.

Promote Inclusive Communication and Outreach

Strategic communication is more than disseminating information to people to inform them about the zero poverty initiative. It is the active engagement of community perspectives to help the formulation of policy, and to ensure that the mechanisms are in place for ongoing communication between stakeholders and community. Consultations with the community both promote awareness and increase engagement in the process. It is important to inform citizens about how they can be involved throughout the development process.5

Key Actions

Develop an inclusive consultation process that involves stakeholders, community members and people with lived experience. Consideration should be given to communications to ensure ease of comprehension.

Empower a Diversified Poverty Transition

There are a diversity of needs and contributing factors that lead to poverty.8 No one single approach will address all needs.1 Community consultations are important for informing and guiding the direction of the zero poverty initiative. Measures needed to support those in generational poverty verses those in situational poverty are different, as are the measures required for supporting the working poor verses those receiving social assistance. An inclusive zero poverty strategy includes inclusive policy framework and long term investment and considers local needs while looking upstream to address the way social supports are distributed and advocating for new policies.1,5 An inclusive process will *strengthen cooperation and collective impact.4*

Key Actions

Explore opportunities for community members, those with lived experience and other sectors to become part of the move towards zero poverty.

Safeguard a Socially Just Transition

Working towards zero poverty will require a broad approach that considers many different population groups within our community. The most vulnerable members of the community must be part of the innovation and transformation process.5 In order to ensure that this initiative benefits the greatest number of people, community engagement, accountability and transparency is vital.5 Policies should protect vulnerable populations without excluding others. Proportionate universalism is an approach that aims to achieve equity in service delivery and policy development.

"Proportionate universalism recognizes that, across the health gradient, programs, services and policies must include a range of responses to address different levels of disadvantage within the population, as opposed to solely targeting the least disadvantaged groups".9

Key Actions

To ensure a socially just transition, future drafts of the plan will focus on strategies to work within these vulnerable populations.

> **"Proportionate universalism recognizes that, across the health gradient, programs, services and policies must include a range of responses to address different levels of disadvantage within the population, as opposed to solely targeting the least disadvantaged groups."9**

Chapter 8: Nurture Vertical and Horizontal Cooperation and Integration

Overview

Chapter 8 addresses the collaborative effort required to achieve zero poverty.[5] Zero poverty cannot be achieved by a single stakeholder or sector, rather it requires collective partnership and ownership from stakeholders from all sectors, people with lived experience and all levels of government.[5,7] Over time, these collaborations should be institutionalized.[5] Institutional processes require significant effort and human resources and take time to evolve. However, they will work to ensure the effectiveness and appropriate implementation of the Zero Poverty Oxford Plan targets.[5,10] Additionally, institutionalization will help to formalize and support the coordination across all levels of government.[5] The two main types of collaboration that will be addressed in this section include a) **vertical cooperation** and b) **horizontal cooperation**.[5]

Further Vertical Cooperation

Vertical cooperation needs to consider how international, national and regional and local levels can build partnerships and increase coordination to ensure there is policy coherence and integration.[5]

The United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (ASD) acknowledges that eradicating poverty is the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development.[11] The 2030 ASD's primary priority is to "End poverty in all its forms everywhere."[11] There are seven associated targets with the goal to eradicate poverty which will require addressing the root causes and challenges of poverty through coordinated and well-integrated strategies at all level.

Nationally, the "Employment and Social Development Canada" launched a Canada-wide consultation process in February 2017 regarding a Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy.[6] Community consultations are intended to inform the next steps of the Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy's development, and will inform funding, resources and policies as it pertains to poverty reduction in Canada. Inadequate income to meet basic needs, precarious employment, physical and mental illness, housing, inequality, access to services and government programs and lack of measurable targets are among the many concerns of Canadians.[6] On November 22, 2017, in response to a comprehensive consultation process that included all levels of government, all sectors and community members, the Government of Canada announced the National Housing Strategy.[6]

According to the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy Annual Report 2017, there are many strides the Ontario government is making to reduce poverty.[12] The Canada Child Benefit which is delivered in partnership with the Ontario Child benefit will now be indexed to the cost of living Furthermore, the province launched the Renewed Early Years Child Care Policy Framework, which aims to increase access to early years licensed childcare and before and after school programs, as well increase

affordability and subsidy for childcare and establish an early years workforce strategy/ Ontario is also investing $55 million over three years to expand youth development programs, while OHIP is completely covered for all children and youth up to age 24. Additionally, The Fare Workplace Better Jobs Act was passed in Nov 2017, minimum wage was increased to $14/hr in January 2018 and the Ontario Basic Income pilot is underway.12

These are few of the highlights of the intentional step the Ontario government has taken towards poverty reduction in the last couple of years.

On November 22, 2017, Oxford County Council committed to achieving zero poverty in Oxford County.13 This framework highlights the good work already being done within Oxford County in the aim to reduce poverty while highlighting opportunities and next steps as the County moves towards their goal of zero poverty.

Key Actions

In order to achieve zero poverty, developing constructive dialogue, strengthening alliances and aligning policies across different levels of government is recommended.[5] Now is a timely opportunity to align Oxford's initiative with the provincial and national strategy and to advocate for appropriate federal and provincial support, programming and finances to strengthen the movement of individuals and families out of poverty.[5]

Cultivate Horizontal Cooperation

When initializing the zero poverty initiative, it is important to ensure the broadest coalition of stakeholders are included in the process.5 Some of the key stakeholders to consider are: local government and administrators, city managers, indigenous population, business sector, community groups and not-for-profits, public sector, research bodies, people with lived experience and the community at large.5 The earlier the stakeholders are engaged in the process, the easier it is to mitigate barriers. Furthermore, the process of collaboration should be institutionalized.5

In 2015, County Council adopted the Future Oxford Community Sustainability Plan. This plan recognized that addressing poverty in our community is fundamental to enhanced community well-being and vitality.13 The dialogue around poverty continued over the following years, leading to a town hall focused on poverty reduction hosted by Operation Sharing. This town hall was also an opportunity for key stakeholders and leaders to draft a declaration on poverty elimination in Oxford County. On November 22, 2017, the Oxford County committed to achieving zero poverty.[13] Since then, the Zero Poverty Action Committee was established as well as a poverty support team to aid in the development of the Zero Poverty Framework.

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Key Actions

Broader range engagement of city and county officials, community members, business sector, researchers and people with lived experience is required to support and strengthen the strategy. The more diverse the community participation, the more engaged, far-reaching and reliable the strategy will be.5 A primary recommendation is to develop a community engagement strategy.

Chapter 9: Promote Knowledge Generation and Capacity Building

Overview

The process of **generating and disseminating knowledge** and **making data accessible** between knowledge generators and knowledge users is essential to turning knowledge into action. **Capacity building and skill development** among stakeholders, local government and others are also vital elements that will help carry this initiative forward.

Generate and Disseminate Specific Knowledge

Generating and disseminating knowledge are facets of an interactive process known as knowledge translation: the process of creating, disseminating, exchanging and applying knowledge in an ethically-sound manner through interactions between knowledge generators and knowledge users.[14]

The zero poverty initiative is committed to involving various stakeholders to tackle poverty in Oxford County. In doing so, this initiative acknowledges the need to combine different forms of knowledge – such as scientific, practice-based and experiential knowledge to help make decisions and implement best practice.

Additionally, throughout the zero poverty initiative, various strategies will be used to disseminate information to inform relevant parties about specific knowledge gathered.

Key Point

Combine different forms of knowledge and use various strategies to disseminate specific information to relevant audiences.

Make Knowledge and Data Accessible

The knowledge and data generated from this initiative may benefit individuals, professionals and organizations who have an interest in eliminating poverty in other regions. Therefore, it is important to make the information generated from this initiative easily accessible because it advances the body of knowledge in the area of poverty elimination and provides a stepping stone to those who are working towards a similar objective.

From a local perspective, making knowledge and data available provides an impetus for collaboration between those involved in the Zero Poverty Oxford Plan (knowledge generators) and other interested stakeholders (knowledge users). This form of collaboration is referred to as knowledge exchange and occurs when interaction between both groups results in mutual learning, which subsequently is reflected in the decision-making process.

Making knowledge and data accessible, via the reporting of findings from activities completed, also improves transparency and holds the Zero Poverty Steering Committee accountable to produce its intended results.

Lastly, leveraging existing community spaces or information hubs, such as libraries, can be a conduit to help those living in poverty obtain information about common issues or navigating the local health and social systems.

Key Point

Ensure that knowledge and data is easily accessible for audiences.

Promote Capacity Building and Training

Successful anti-poverty initiatives will require knowledge and skill development among stakeholders and local government. To support this, capacity building activities can be implemented to enhance the skills of those wishing to support the zero poverty initiative's objectives.

Training for service providers could entail cultural sensitivity training, as well as ways to seek more effective integration and synergy across organizations to strengthen service delivery to eliminate poverty. For example, activities could focus on alleviating barriers for people living in poverty who are unable to navigate the programs and services that are available across the County.

For those living in poverty, training could include skill development and opportunities that support people in their efforts to achieve employment and income security. It is important, however, that activities are tailored contextually to respond to the learning needs of the local population.

Increasing the political capacity of local government to adopt and implement evidence-driven policies is an also important facet to eliminating poverty.

Key Point

Ensure diverse capacity building and skill development initiatives are available for stakeholders, including local government.

Chapter 10: Engage in Networks

Overview

Exchanging experiences and know-how with other local governments and civil society groups can enable huge returns, therefore it is important for Oxford County to **form and engage in local and regional level networks. Participating in national and international networks** will serve to support and foster constructive knowledge exchange as well as cooperation.

Oxford County considers itself allies and partners both locally and around the world and will continue to work with national and international networks. We will share best practices, progress and accomplishments with our networking community to ensure progress towards elimination of poverty continues at a rapid pace.

Form and Engage in Local and Regional Networks

Oxford County Poverty Groups

Chapter 4 of this plan highlights the depth of both public and private sector commitment that is evident in Oxford County. This cross-sectional and diverse group of volunteer committees and assorted agencies will provide significant support as we establish a broader network outside of Oxford County, the province of Ontario and Canada. The below lists are a more encompassing look at our regional, national and international networks.

Cities Reducing Poverty – Vibrant Communities Canada

Cities Reducing Poverty is a collective impact movement aimed at reducing poverty for 1 million Canadians through the efforts of local multi-sector roundtables and the alignment of poverty reduction strategies at the municipal, provincial and federal levels.

Launched in 2002 by Tamarack, the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation and Caledon Institute of Social Policy, Vibrant Communities Canada originally invited 13 cities to build multi-sector leadership roundtables with the goal of reducing poverty. Between 2002 and 2012, this group of Vibrant Communities trail builders undertook an action-learning experiment to see if a place-based approach could move the needle on poverty. The results were significant, with a number of cities reporting a 10% reduction in poverty impacting the lives of 202,931 low income Canadians.

Building on this success of these 13 cities, a movement has emerged with more than 50 additional cities joining the network. While the poverty reduction effort is customized to the local context, these cross-sector community leaders have been working on poverty reduction strategies such as increasing access to affordable transit, living wage campaigns, increasing access to affordable housing, focusing on priority neighborhoods, and advocating for evidence-based social assistance.

Community Health Links

Community Health Links are part of Ontario's plan to transform the health care system. Community Health Links provide coordinated, efficient and effective care to patients with complex needs. Five per cent of patients account for two-thirds of health care costs and are most often patients with multiple complex conditions. Providers design a care plan for each patient and work together to ensure they receive the care they need. In Ontario, there are currently 82 approved Health Links across 14 Local Health Integrated Networks.

The Mowat Centre

The Mowat Centre is an independent public policy think tank and Ontario's non-partisan, evidence-based voice on public policy. They undertake collaborative, applied policy research, propose innovative research-driven recommendations and engage in public dialogue on Canada's most important national issues. The Mowat Centre seeks to inform and revitalize Canada's public policy agenda from the Ontario perspective. Their research focuses on the federal policy frameworks and strategies that will most strongly affect Ontarian's prosperity and quality of life in the next century.

Tamarack Institute

Founded in 2001, the Tamarack Institute develops and supports learning communities to help   people collaborate and to co-generate knowledge to solve complex community challenges. Tamarack offers the latest thinking, resources and interactive online practices to help leaders and practitioners grow their knowledge, expand their networks and inspire innovation and collaboration. In addition to Vibrant Communities, Tamarack sponsors two other Learning Communities that host extensive resources and publications:

- ***Communities Collaborating for Impact*** is a learning community for collaborative leaders and innovators utilizing a multi-sector approach to solve complex community challenges.

- ***Deepening Community*** is a learning community focused on becoming a national space for ongoing dialogue and networking to foster people's engagement within their local neighbourhoods, working together with institutions and policy-makers to address common aspirations that improve community life.

Wellesley Institute

The Wellesley Institute is a registered non-profit charity that works in research and policy to improve health and health equity in the GTA through action on the social determinants of health. Topics for advancing urban health include housing, building health communities, economic inequality, and health equity.

Youth for Oxford

This is a group of Oxford County youth working together to make change and to better serve their communities. With roots established in Tillsonburg, the group is hoping to spread out into the rest of Oxford County. Aimed at youth between the ages of 13-29, this group is looking to give back to their communities by helping others both inside and outside of the group. This is not only to benefit the members' own generation but the generations preceding and proceeding them.

The group's first event took place in April of 2018, where the group held a "Partici-clean" at Tillsonburg's Participark in which members cleaned up a local park. In May of 2018, they will be hosting a "Survive the Night" event which focuses on the realities of youth homelessness. Participants will be staying overnight outside with only a blanket and a small meal to simulate homelessness. The event will be followed by a fundraiser for the Canadian Youth Homelessness Initiative in June. Future initiatives include food and supply drives, social activities and awareness events. The group, in its early stages, has partnered with the Tillsonburg and Area Optimist Club, the Salvation Army, Tim Horton's and the Tillsonburg Multi-Service Centre and is well on its way to becoming a community champion.

Key Point

Engaging with groups such as **Youth for Oxford** will be key to making sustainable change in our community. Next steps with this group could include the promotion of a youth contest asking for ideas on how to eliminate poverty in our county. The creation of the hashtag **#OYAP** (Oxford Youth Against Poverty) should start to be generated on social media and within the youth networks.

Participate in National and International Networks

Canada Without Poverty

Canada Without Poverty is a federally incorporated, non-partisan, not-for-profit and charitable organization dedicated to the elimination of poverty in Canada. Since their inception in 1971, they have always been governed by people with direct, personal experience of living in poverty, whether in childhood or as adults. This lived experience informs and helps to guide their work. Acting from a belief that poverty is a violation of human rights and that poverty elimination is a human rights obligation, their work includes raising awareness about poverty, participating in research to generate new knowledge about poverty, and striving to demonstrate the connection between poverty and human rights.

Community Foundations of Canada

Community Foundations is a Canadian movement for community vitality together with 191 community foundations across the country. They are connected by a national network to help Canadians invest in building strong and resilient places to live, work and play. Vital Signs is a national program led by community foundations and coordinated by Community Foundations of

Canada that leverages local knowledge to measure the vitality of our communities and support action towards improving our collective quality of life.

Federation of Canadian Municipalities

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) is the national voice for Canada's local governments and works on behalf of its members to increase sustainability and to enhance the quality of life of citizens. FCM programs address green initiatives, affordable housing, climate protection, partnering with First Nations communities and women in government. The FCM feels strongly that local government is the key to improving the quality of life in both Canada and abroad

Food Secure Canada

Food Secure Canada is a Canadian alliance of organizations and individuals working together to advance food security and food sovereignty through three interlocking goals: zero hunger, healthy and safe food and sustainable food systems. Their website includes links to policy and advocacy, members, networks and research.

Harwood Institute

The Harwood Institute for Public Innovation teaches, coaches and inspires people and organizations to solve pressing problems and change how communities work together. Harwood aims to strengthen communities, through a network of trained professionals who have the skills, tools and support to make change. Founded in 1988, the institute partners with some of the world's largest nonprofits and their tools and frameworks have spread across to the U.S. and beyond.

Homeless Hub

The Homeless Hub is a web-based research library and information centre representing an innovative step forward in the use of technology to enhance knowledge mobilization. Building on the success of the Canadian Conference on Homelessness (2005), The Homeless Hub was created to address the need for a single place to find homelessness information from across Canada.

Living Wage Canada

Communities across Canada are responding to the increasingly high levels of low wages and poverty. They are advocating that families should earn an income sufficient for them to pay for the basic necessities of life, so they can live with dignity and participate as active citizens in our society. They are advocating for a living wage. Living Wage Canada is a site/portal to facilitate learning and information-sharing among communities to help build a national living wage movement. It includes details about the Canadian Living Wage Framework which provides a consistent living wage definition, calculation methodology and strategy for recognizing corporate and community leaders who commit to pass a living wage policy.

Maytree

Maytree is a private Canadian charitable foundation that has been dedicated to creating solutions to poverty since it was founded in 1982. Maytree listens to the voices of communities and then works with governments at all levels to help create equality and prosperity. Maytree collaborates with civil society organizations, policy advisors, employers and major institutions to build stronger, vital communities. Maytree is committed to advancing systemic solutions to poverty and strengthening civic communities. They believe that the most enduring way to fix the systems that create poverty is to have economic and social rights safeguarded for all people living in Canada. Maytree's *Stories of Change*, highlight what organizations and individuals are doing to reduce poverty and strengthen their communities, as well as how and why they do they do the work that they do.

McConnell Foundation

The McConnell Foundation is a private Canadian foundation that develops and applies innovative approaches to social, cultural, economic and environmental challenges. They do this by providing grants and investments, capacity building, convening and co-creation with grantees, partners and the public. They envision a Canada in which the economy and social systems advance the well-being of all people, and in which the natural environment is stewarded for future generations. Their mission is to engage Canadians in building a society that is inclusive, reconciled, sustainable and resilient and that advances progress towards the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

The Poverty Alliance

The Poverty Alliance was formally established in 1992, growing out of an informal network of groups and individuals active since the mid 1980's. This group acts as the anti-poverty network in Scotland, working with voluntary organizations, policy makers and politicians at Scottish, UK and European levels. Their vision is a sustainable Scotland based on social and economic justice, with dignity for all, where poverty and inequalities are not tolerated and are challenged.

Prosper Canada

Founded in 1986, Prosper Canada is a national charity dedicated to expanding economic opportunity for Canadians living in poverty through program and policy innovation. Prosper Canada is Canada's leading national champion of financial empowerment. They work with governments, businesses, and community groups to develop and promote financial policies, programs and resources that transform lives and foster the prosperity of all Canadians.

Canada Learning Bond - **Smartsaver.org**

The Canada Learning Bond (CLB) is a federal program that provides up to $2000 to Registered Education Saving Plan (RESP) accounts for children of low-income parents, improving their families' opportunities for post-secondary education. In partnership with BMO, Meridian, RBC, Scotiabank, TD and Vancity, all usual bank fees and minimum contributions are waived to ensure lower income families

can open RESP's and access the CLB. The SmartSAVER.org websites provides interactive learning resources for both parents and community organizers to promote and encourage access to the Canada Learning Bond, a RESP and other education funding opportunities.

What Works Centres UK

The What Works Network was created in 2013 to ensure that the best available evidence on "what works" is available to people who make decisions surrounding public services. Five years later, there are ten centres in the UK, where policymakers, public servants and the wider public can access the best available knowledge about what works.

Key Priorities

All over our country, communities are working collaboratively to develop local approaches to eradicate poverty. This is happening in an unparalleled manner and at a rapid pace. The Tamarack Institute has identified that more than 175 cities in Canada have, or are developing, community plans that are designed to engage governments, business, not-for-profits and citizens with lived/living experiences of poverty to work together to implement strategies to eliminate poverty. This is clearly a unique moment in history in which cities, provinces, and the federal government are all uniting with independent, yet interconnected, poverty reduction strategies. This moment must be capitalized upon and networking should be both thoughtful and deliberate.

From an international perspective, pooling of expertise will create new knowledge and generate innovation and sharing, providing outcomes that will benefit everyone with a vested interest. We can look to other countries to see the success that they have had with living wage and basic income strategies and share successful measurements amongst ourselves.

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