



Report on The Task Force for Poverty Elimination **“Success Stories” Project**

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Summary of Research Goals and Methods

The goal of this research project was to gather success stories from representatives of the working/action groups of the Guelph-Wellington Taskforce for Poverty Elimination. Data collection was initiated on October 19, 2010, and was completed on December 16, 2010. Based on a list of contacts provided by the Poverty Taskforce, each representative was contacted via email and asked to provide dates and times in order to schedule interviews. The representatives were also informed of the researchers' positions with the Research Shop of the Institute for Community Engaged Scholarship, at the University of Guelph, as well as their roles in the collection of success stories on behalf of the Poverty Taskforce.

During the interviews, the representatives were asked five questions covering a range of topics including the need that their group addresses in the community and their group's successes since becoming part of the Poverty Taskforce. Representatives were also asked about future trajectories and goals in their efforts to alleviate elements of poverty in collaboration with the Poverty Taskforce. Once the interview process was completed, each representative's responses were returned to them through email, in order to confirm that the information captured during the interviews was accurate, and therefore, representative of their working/action group.

Summary of Key Data

Response Rate:

In total, eight interviews were conducted involving the co-chair and representatives from the nine working/action groups of the Poverty Elimination Taskforce.

Key Deliverables:

- a) Eight interview responses presented in a culminating Word document;
- b) A Word document solely containing the interview questions that were used in the data collection process of the project;
- c) A report that outlines the methodologies used in the project, summarizes the major themes that arose from the responses, and provides suggestions for the continued collection of this data in the future.

Summary of Major Themes

Stated briefly, approximately seven major themes emerged from the working/action group interviews. In terms of the most important aspects and successes of the Poverty Taskforce, *Information Sharing, Utilizing and Building Networks, and Mobilizing Resources*, were expressed most often. In terms of common activities and initiatives among the groups, there was repeated acknowledgement of *Defining Poverty, Addressing and Removing Barriers, and Building Awareness*. Additionally, in terms of future directions, groups are focused on *Expanding Organizational Capacities*, such as increasing the number and scope of projects and developing new relationships.

Information Sharing

When asked about the key accomplishments over the past year, almost every representative mentioned the role that the sharing information among various community actors has played in their accomplishments. The terms used to describe this important aspect were “collaboration”, “cultivating relationships,” “sharing knowledge,” “learning” and “cooperation.” Based on the responses, it appears that Information Sharing is perhaps the single most valuable and important activity that occurs when the various working/action groups are brought together. Most importantly, it enables the groups to achieve their goals.

Utilizing and Building Networks

Similarly, the sharing of contacts is another important aspect of the Poverty Taskforce. More specifically, many representatives mentioned that the Taskforce provides a space for people to bring their existing contacts to the group, to share them, and then to develop and build upon valuable networks. For example, respondents mentioned meetings with community leaders, politicians and agencies, collaboration with the University of Guelph and student researchers, as well as obtaining tips for best practice from various programs within and outside of Guelph-Wellington County.

Mobilizing Resources

Another important aspect and success of the Poverty Taskforce is its ability to mobilize resources for the various activities and initiatives of the working/action groups. Resources such as communications materials, funding, personnel to help

with submitting funding applications, and the organizational power of the steering committee, were all mentioned as extremely important and helpful for each of working/action groups.

Defining Poverty

Although the working/action groups are focused on what the Taskforce has determined to be important aspects of what “poverty” includes, the groups have some things in common. First, each group expressed a commitment to the idea that there is a need, though challenging, to define poverty in a way that makes sense for the community. For example, many representatives used the phrases “poverty takes on many forms” or “faces” that “look different” depending on where you are. From this we see that the representatives from the various groups share a definition of poverty that is both dynamic and flexible, yet also grounded in the work their group does. For example, poverty comes to be defined as an issue of “wealth and resources” or “housing” or of “access to food.”

Addressing and Removing Barriers

Another common theme among the groups involves activities designed to address and remove barriers. Based on the responses, it appears that “barriers” are understood as anything that creates or maintains poverty, tend to be structural and affect people in very real ways. For example, during the interviews, many group representatives made reference to initiatives designed to help people access resources and services they may not have previously been aware of. Notably, information sharing among working/action groups and people living in poverty was regarded as a means to improving the accessibility of services within communities, in the short and long term. In addition, representatives highlighted their groups’ roles as advocates, such as speaking on behalf of those living in poverty at various municipal meetings, as an important step in addressing and removing barriers.

Building Awareness

Each working/action group also strives to create awareness of the Taskforce generally, and what its particular group is trying to do specifically. Many respondents explained that there is still a strong need to build awareness on many levels, i.e. at the individual, community, City, municipal, provincial and federal.

Expanding Organizational Capacities

Finally, moving forward, it appears that most groups are focused on continuing with the momentum that they felt picked up over the last year, and in particular, are looking to expand their organizational capacities. These capacities include developing “new community groups,” “new initiatives” and “directives,” “building infrastructure,” expanding current programs, implementing policies and fundraising.

Recommendations for Future Research:

To continually update the Success Stories of the Poverty Taskforce, we recommend that the questions used in the first round of data collection continue to be used in future collection rounds. This will promote consistency and allow for the comparison of responses from previous data collection rounds. Future data can be collected by emailing the questions to the representatives of the working/action groups, i.e. in the form of a survey, to which representatives can respond via email. Email communication may be more efficient and allow for more flexibility given the various demands of working/action representatives. Also, email communication may enhance the depth and breadth of information gathered as it would provide each representative with the opportunity to consult other group members or resources when preparing their responses.