

REGION OF OTTAWA-CARLETON
RÉGION D'OTTAWA-CARLETON

REPORT
RAPPORT

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DATE 18 January 2000

TO/DEST. Co-ordinator
 Community Services Committee

FROM/EXP. Dick Stewart
 Social Services

SUBJECT/OBJET **FINAL REPORT OF THE TASK FORCE ON POVERTY**

DEPARTMENTAL RECOMMENDATION

That Community Services Committee recommend Council receive the Final Report of the Task Force on Poverty.

PURPOSE

This covering report requests Community Services Committee and Regional Council receive the final report of the Task Force on Poverty entitled People First: Removing Barriers Through Action (February 2000).

DISCUSSION

In the spring of 1997, the initial People First/Les gens d'abord (October 1997) report was presented to Regional Council. Subsequently, it was referred to Community Services Committee.

On April 16, 1998 Community Services Committee approved the following motion:

1. That a Task Force on Poverty be created in order to deal with implementing the recommendations from the People's Hearings on Poverty;
2. That membership on the Task Force include representation from RMOC departments and agencies including Social Services, Health, Planning and Development, OC Transpo and the

- Ottawa Economic Development Corporation, as well as up to 10 community representatives including the Alliance to End Homelessness, and;
3. That the Social Services Department co-ordinate this Task Force.

Subsequently, the Task Force on Poverty was formed bringing together elected representatives of communities of the poor and appointed delegates of Regional government to work together to find ways to improve the lives of people living in poverty. The work of the Task Force resulted in an interim report People First: Creating Hope Through Change, received by Community Services Committee July 1999, a report setting some priorities for the Region's 2000 budget, approved by Council December 1999, and the attached final report People First: Removing Barriers Through Action, which focuses on recommendations for timely and appropriate action.

The final report is the result of a unique process, and as such remains a community effort, although Social Services provided a coordinating role for the Task Force. It is in this capacity as coordinator that this request to receive the report comes forward.

*Approved by
Dick Stewart*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Task Force on Poverty represents a process unique in Canada. Under the Task Force, elected representatives of communities of the poor have come together with appointed delegates of Regional government to work together to find ways to improve the lives of people living in poverty. The Task Force was established in September 1998, chaired jointly by a community representative and a Regional representative (Social Services). People First: Creating Hope Through Change, the interim report of the Task Force on Poverty, was received by Community Services Committee in July 1999. People First: Removing Barriers Through Action (February 2000) presents the final report of the Task Force on Poverty.

Recent studies confirm the growing gap between rich and poor in Canada's cities, including the Region of Ottawa-Carleton. The initial People's First/Les gens d'abord report (1997) presented the stories of people living in poverty at a series of People's Hearings held across the Region which testified to the impact on the lives of the poor of this growing gap.

The Task Force on Poverty represents a community based approach to poverty reduction combining social and economic objectives. As defined by the Caledon Institute, a community based approach to poverty reduction is based on 4 key interventions: meeting basic needs, removing barriers, building skills and promoting economic development. The recommendations of the Task Force on Poverty encompass all four of these key interventions.

The Task Force has had a number of successes and impacts to date, for example, providing input to the Region's National Child Benefit Reinvestment Plan and Allocations Process, to OC Transpo on the establishment of individual day passes and Sunday family passes, to the Task Force on Employment "Partners for Jobs", helping the Rent Bank (Home Safe) program attract additional funds from the Region, and sparking the development of a Laundry Co-op through the Centretown Community Health and Resource Centre and Bronson Centre. Further details and examples of successes to date appear in the body of the report.

Origin of the Task Force on Poverty

The People's Hearings was a process developed by a group of community organizations to provide a forum for the voices of the poor. Testimony from the hearings was captured in a report entitled People First/ Les gens d'abord which was presented to Regional Council. Subsequently, Community Services Committee approved a motion that a Task Force on Poverty be struck, including community representatives and Regional staff to ensure the recommendations in People First became the basis for action.

Community representatives were elected from cluster groups of people living in poverty across the Region. Representatives continue to liaise with their cluster groups on an ongoing basis.

Several community developers from Community Health and Resource Centres attended the Task Force meetings as observers and provided a range of supports to the Task Force, for example, meeting spaces, child care, and organizational supports. The Region also provided a range of practical supports to the Task Force, for example by providing child care and transportation subsidies to support the participation of community members, and administrative and other resources to support the work of the Task Force.

The Task Force used the recommendations of the initial People First report as its starting point. Sub-committees were formed based on all topic areas as they appeared in People First. The sub-committees explored ways to move the broad recommendations appearing in that document to practical, action oriented recommendations for implementation. Each sub-committee drew on the experience and knowledge of Task Force members as well as the expertise of a range of people from other groups and organizations. Sub-committees then brought back their recommendations to the Task Force as a whole for discussion and approval.

Interim Report

The Task Force's interim report explained how the Task Force on Poverty emerged from the People's Hearings on Poverty and the process it undertook to move the recommendations appearing in People First/Les gens d'abord (October 1997) toward concrete actions. These recommendations were concerned with improving the lives of people living in poverty with respect to employment, transportation, telephone/hydro/gas, housing, social assistance, child care, education, community programs and public participation. The interim report also described some of the Task Force successes and impacts, and presented several key, practical recommendations for action.

Subsequently, the recommendations from the interim report were costed and prioritized to assist in the development of the Region's 2000 budget. \$1m was allocated in the Region's 2000 budget to priority items focusing on:

- providing coordination of public participation of people living in poverty;
- assisting people to make the transition to work and to maintain their employment and ensuring information about these benefits and services is more widely available; and
- printing and distributing information on choosing child care.

Final Report

The final report of the Task Force on Poverty:

1. Recapitulates the funding priorities identified by the Task Force on Poverty for which \$1m was approved by Regional Council from the 2000 budget on December 23, 1999.
2. Identifies those TFOP recommendations which do not require funding but require directives to Regional staff for action. Some of these recommendations appeared in the TFOP interim report, People First: Creating Hope Through Change.
3. Provides support for a number of recommendations which coincide with, and are more appropriately funded through, other initiatives, e.g. Partners for Jobs, or reallocation of National Child Benefit (NCB) savings. Some of these recommendations appeared in the TFOP interim report.
4. Identifies a vision for ongoing public participation of low-income people and identifies those TFOP recommendations which require lobbying efforts on the part of the Region together with the community. Some of these recommendations appeared in the TFOP interim report.

A **summary list of the recommendations** appear below by topic area, grouped under Action Items, Recommendations Related to Other Initiatives, Advocacy Recommendations, and Public Participation.

ACTION ITEMS

The recommendations appearing in this section require Community Services Committee and Council to direct Regional Staff to undertake the following actions and incorporate these actions into appropriate operational plans. These recommendations fall within the realm of the Region's normal business. They do not represent a request for funding.

Housing

Accessibility

- 1) **That the Region:**
 - a) **develop an inventory of accessible housing units throughout the region;**
 - b) **take into account the needs of the physically disabled should any new affordable housing units be constructed;**
 - c) **identify potential funding sources for modifying existing dwelling units (such as the Federal Residential Rehabilitation Program (RRAP) for the Disabled Program) and ensure that this information is available at the local level.**

Tenant Protection

- 2) **That the Region support public education activities to enhance tenants' knowledge of the Tenant Protection Act and monitor the number of evictions that are occurring in Ottawa-Carleton.**

Accessory Apartments (Secondary Suites)

- 3) **That the Region take an active role in:**
 - a) **ensuring all municipal zoning by-laws are amended to permit accessory apartments in areas where single family, semi-detached housing and duplexes are permitted;**
 - b) **ensuring consistent application of the by-laws; and**
 - c) **encouraging the creation of accessory apartments which are consistent with building codes.**

Affordable Housing Units

- 4) That the Region play an active role in preserving, maintaining and expanding the number of affordable housing units as the Region's mandate in social housing increases.

Telephone/Hydro/Gas

Necessary Services

5) That, as a first step, the Region work collaboratively with high level officials at Ottawa Hydro to:

- a) continue to work closely to prevent the cut-off of service whenever possible; *and*
- b) help ensure that appropriate orientation be given to hydro employees dealing with social assistance recipients and low income earners.

6) That the Region build on this first step by exploring ways to involve organizations providing telephone and gas services in similar collaborative efforts and orientations for staff; *and*

That the Region vigorously advocate to the relevant service companies to:

- a) exempt people living in poverty from 411 service fees;
- b) ensure access to 911 emergency services, 411 directory services and local calls (excluding "O" operator services) for all residents of Ottawa-Carleton; *and*
- c) introduce a sliding fee scale for monthly fees, hook-up fees, re-installations costs, security deposits etc. for essential telephone, hydro and gas services based on income and recognizing hardship.

7) That the Region maximize the use of direct payments to meet the requirement for a waiver of security deposits at the client's request.

8) That the Region maximize discretionary and mandatory benefits, including EHSS, to prevent the cut-off of essential hydro, gas and telephone services.

9) That the Region help ensure people living in poverty are aware that no security deposit is required for the installation of a telephone restricted to local calls only.

10) That the Region explore the feasibility of the Region acting as a guarantor for security deposits for social benefit recipients and low income earners in those cases where the security deposit requirement cannot be waived.

Share the Warmth

11) That the Region provide support to the Coalition of Community Health and Resource Centres in concerted efforts to recruit additional partners for the Share the Warmth program, with an emphasis on hydro companies.

Education

Communication with School Boards

12) That the Region play a role in facilitating constant communication between the school boards and social agencies which work with communities of the poor to ensure the communities are informed of opportunities to become involved on decision-making and on advisory committees (e.g. Kids at Risk, Project Visioning 2014) as well as other appropriate opportunities for involvement.

13) That the Region request school boards to inform the Community Health and Resource Centre in their area of upcoming changes that could influence special needs services, and therefore ensure greater transparency of the decision making process related to special needs.

14) That the Region ensure the distribution of the Task Force on Poverty Final Report to all four school boards with a covering letter highlighting the recommendations related to Education.

Directory of Scholarships

15) That the Region, through its participation on the Millennium Learning Centres Steering Committee, ensure a link for low-income people to a full range of on-line and printed information on scholarships and bursaries for students through the Millennium Learning Centres project.

Recreation

16) That individual subsidies provided by municipalities in the Region for recreational programs be converted to a Family subsidy so that unused portions of one family member's subsidy may be used by another family member.

17) That the Region take a leadership role in ensuring enhanced access to municipal recreation opportunities for people with low-incomes.

Food Security

Food Security

18) That Social Services initiate the joint development of a Regional food security policy in collaboration with Regional Environment and Transportation, Health, Planning and Development Approvals, community partners and community members which would address both social and economic needs, including but not restricted to:

- a) access to healthy food, locally grown;
- b) special awareness of those in the community with low incomes and strategies to increase their access to food;
- c) the development of more community gardens and community kitchens;
- d) local business and employment initiatives; *and*
- e) ecological and environmental concerns.

Food Banks and Food Centres

19) That the Region reprint its “End of the Month Cookbook” and distribute it at local food banks and food cupboard and other strategic locations.

20) That the Region encourage the central food bank and food centres to increase the amount of food given per visit.

21) That the Region explore ways to support volunteer development at the food centres in order to ensure food centres are open for more hours.

22) That the Region help launch and support a public awareness campaign to inform the public about what the food bank does and to encourage donations.

Child Care

23) That Regional staff follow-up upon receipt of the Children’s Aid Society response to the TFOP letter outlining its concerns with respect to issues of child protection, safety and security with the informal child care system.

Transportation

Access to Public Transportation

24) That the Region explore the interest in and feasibility of social agencies which have emergency ticket programs:

- a) receiving the same 20% discount as Social Services currently receives for those tickets which social agencies purchase for their emergency ticket programs; *and*
- b) becoming involved in the sale of single tickets for non-emergencies.

25) That once interest and feasibility have been established, OC Transpo develop an implementation plan.

26) That the Region continue to monitor and address the issue of access to public transportation for low income people.

Para Transpo

27) That the Para Transpo trip refusal rate should not exceed 1%.

RECOMMENDATIONS RELATED TO OTHER INITIATIVES

The recommendations in this section coincide with, and are more appropriately funded through, other initiatives, i.e. Partners for Jobs; reallocation of National Child Benefit savings; Funders' Working Group.

Partners for Jobs (Employment/Income Security)

28) For people living in poverty and seeking employment, that telephone services with private voice mail boxes equipped for receiving and retrieving messages be made available and equitably distributed across the region of Ottawa-Carleton, such as in community health and resource centres, community houses, etc., as recommended by the Pilot Project 2000 and the Employment Task Force (Partners for Jobs).

29) That a pilot project be initiated to establish Independent Development Accounts (IDA's), exempt from asset limits, in Ottawa-Carleton to enable low-income people to save for an education for themselves or their children, a house, a business or other approved purposes, and that a sponsoring

mechanism be developed to enable community donors to contribute to these accounts.

30) That the Region secure ongoing sources of operational funds for the Micro Investment Fund itself and assistance in securing capital for the Micro Investment Funds.

31) That the Region support the development of a pilot project of Millenium Learning Centres (formerly called Technology Learning Centres) to provide:

- a) local technology access points/learning centres through Community Resource and Health Centres;
- b) training, technology, materials and technological support in these centres;
- c) mentorship to community residents who seek advice, counsel and support in order to successfully participate in the economy;
- d) additional programs and services to be locally defined by each community.

32) That the Region explore through its participation on the Community Economic Development Network the interest in and feasibility of community based development of a range of employment development and training projects such as :

- a) the provision, collection of donations, re-conditioning and repair of washers and dryers for social assistance recipients and the working poor;
- b) repair of vehicles for social assistance recipients and the working poor; and
- c) co-operative places of employment (employment programs) for differently abled people who do not readily fit into the regular employment sector to be developed on a community based, self help, mentoring model, focusing on such endeavours as restaurants, crafts, baking, and catering (example: People First run by Ottawa West End Community Chaplaincy).

National Child Benefit System (Child Care)

33) That the Region provide resources (funds and staff) to prepare a project proposal to create a 24 hour child care service which would provide flexible child care arrangements, that Social Services lead this project in collaboration

with community partners, and that future savings from changes to the NCBS be allocated to plan and implement this project.

Funders' Working Group (211 Information Line)

34) That the Region support the development of a user friendly, plain language 211 information line for central access to a wide variety of social and health information. There should be access by means of a “menu” to receive the information in a choice of different languages.

ADVOCACY RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations in this section require vigorous lobbying of other levels of government on a range of issues which have been described in each of the People's First reports to date. The Task Force on Poverty urges the Region to enhance its internal capacity in intergovernmental affairs in order to complete this work

Employment/Income Security

35) That the Region in partnership with the community lobby the Province to increase social assistance rates for basic needs and shelter to reflect the actual costs of a nutritious diet and adequate housing and utilities.

36) That the Region in partnership with the community lobby the Province to increase asset limits and earnings before claw-back for both Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) given that the current limits act as a barrier to increasing social assistance recipients' economic self-sufficiency.

Child Care

37) That Regional Council advocate for more subsidized licensed child care in Ottawa-Carleton.

38) That Regional Council advocate more specifically for flexible licensed child care for evening and night time child care.

39) That the Region approve in principle that parents working night shifts have access to subsidized child care in the parent's home, and that Regional Council lobby the Province to allow in home licensed and subsidized night care for reasons other than a disability.

Telephone/Hydro/Gas

- 40) That the Region, community members and organizations lobby the Provincial government to create new funds to cover hydro and telephone basic fees, along with “basic needs” and “shelter”, as part of basic monthly social assistance rates.

Education

Special Needs

- 41) That the Region of Ottawa-Carleton, community organizations and the community lobby the provincial government to reinstate the subsidies for children with special needs to the level prior to the cuts.

Student Loans

- 42) That the Region of Ottawa-Carleton, community organizations and the community lobby the provincial government to:

- a) enable a person to continue to receive social assistance benefits, without deductions, during the period of study for an initial post-secondary degree;
- b) deem a student loan a loan, not income, for the purpose of determining eligibility for assistance.

Housing

Housing Affordability

- 43) That the Region advocate for the following shelter supplements to alleviate housing affordability problems:

- a) the province to increase the shelter component maximum for social assistance to equal 85 per cent of median market rent for each local housing market in each local housing market;
- b) the federal government to fund a shelter allowance program for working poor families and individuals living in private market rental units that would reduce the share of income that low income people spend on their housing costs to 30 per cent of income.

Homelessness

44) That Regional Council continue to apply pressure to the federal and provincial governments to do their part in addressing homelessness and housing affordability and accessibility problems.

Transportation

45) That the Region, community members and organizations lobby the Provincial Government to increase social assistance rates to cover basic transportation costs.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The recommendation in this section recognizes the need for monitoring the implementation of the Task Force recommendations as well as the ongoing need for identifying emerging issues.

46) That the Region initiate an interim organizing committee to develop a standing Advisory Committee and further develop the suggested framework for ongoing public participation of people with low-income .