

For Information

DATE: April 13, 2010

REPORT TITLE: **PROVINCIAL POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY UPDATE**

FROM: Janet Menard, Commissioner of Human Services

OBJECTIVE

This report responds to staff's commitment to Council to provide an annual update on the Province's poverty reduction strategy, including their report card, as well as the work of the Peel Poverty Reduction Strategy Committee.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- In December 2009, the Province released its annual report card on the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy. The Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy, "*Breaking the Cycle*", was created in 2009 to ensure a comprehensive approach to poverty reduction in Ontario.
- The strategy identifies eight indicators that will be used to measure reduction in the number of children living in poverty.
- The Peel Poverty Reduction Strategy Committee (PPRSC), a multi-stakeholder network co-chaired by the Region of Peel and United Way Peel Region, is playing an important role in creating awareness about poverty in Peel and ensuring Peel's voice is heard at provincial decision-making tables. The committee is currently developing a regional strategy to reduce poverty in Peel that includes an awareness and engagement campaign aimed at getting Peel residents involved in solutions to fighting poverty.
- The Peel Poverty Reduction Strategy Committee, the Region of Peel and the Fair Share Task Force have been actively engaged in advocating for provincial Community Hubs funding for a high need neighbourhood in both Mississauga and Brampton.

DISCUSSION**1. Poverty Reduction in Ontario – An Update on Progress Made**

In 2009, the Province of Ontario passed Bill 152, an Act Respecting a Long-Term Strategy to Reduce Poverty in Ontario, which sets into law the creation of mandatory targets every five years, annual reporting of progress and regular community consultation prior to developing strategies. The provincial strategy, "*Breaking the Cycle*", focuses on reducing the rate of child poverty in Ontario by 25 per cent or 90,000 children in five years and investing an initial \$1.4 billion in poverty reduction initiatives. Staff committed to Council the provision of annual updates on the progress of this strategy both locally and at the Provincial level.

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The Province selected the following indicators to measure its progress in reducing child poverty:

- a) Early Development Instrument (EDI)
- b) Education Quality & Accountability Office (EQAO)
- c) Depth of Poverty
- d) Low Income Measure (LIM)
- e) High School Graduation Rates
- f) Birth Weights
- g) Ontario Housing Measure
- h) Ontario Deprivation Index

Although the Province is using 2008 as the baseline year in which to assess its progress toward reducing the child poverty by 25 per cent, a number of the selected indicators will not have information available immediately.

Key Changes and Initiatives in Year One

a) Accelerating the Ontario Child Benefit

As of July 2009, the government increased the child benefit to a maximum of \$1,100 annually per child, almost doubling the previous benefit. The goal is to increase it to a maximum of \$1,310 annually per child within five years.

b) Full Day Learning

The province has moved ahead with its goal of implementing full-day learning for four and five-year olds. As of September 2010, 600 schools will begin providing full-day learning provincially including 35 schools in Peel.

c) Tax Reform

The province reduced Ontario's lowest personal income tax rate from 6.05 per cent to 5.05 per cent, created a new sales tax credit of up to \$260 per adult and child per year, as well as provided some property tax relief to low and middle income families and individuals.

d) Other Initiatives

In 2009, the province provided \$38.5 million to 150 schools across the province for the Community Use of Schools Initiative. This initiative allows schools to remain open after hours in order that service providers can deliver relevant programming to children and youth. Peel schools were not included in the Community Use of Schools Initiative and the Fair Share Taskforce has taken the lead in working with the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MYCS) to understand the reasons and ensure funding is provided in the future.

Investments were made in the Low-Income Dental Program which will begin delivering prevention and treatments services to children in 2010. The Student Nutrition Program is being expanded over three years to ensure more children received a healthy breakfast or snack in the morning. The After School Initiative, aimed at providing children from low income families with access to recreation and life skills, was also expanded in 2009 to provide an additional 10,700 spaces. Additionally social assistance costs were increased by a 2% cost of living adjustment.

e) Next Steps

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The province has also indicated it is creating an action plan to support community hubs across the province as a strategy to address poverty. The Region of Peel and its partners continue to push for investments in community hubs in Peel Region and have provided information on two specific Peel communities to Minister Laurel Broten, Minister of Children and Youth Services and her predecessor Deb Matthews for consideration for provincial investment.

As well, in the coming year, it is expected that the Provincial Affordable Long Term Housing Strategy review and the social assistance review will be completed and a plan will be laid out to address the critical shortage of affordable housing as well as inadequate social assistance rates and outdated rules. The Region of Peel along with other stakeholders in Peel are actively participating in each process.

2. Poverty in Peel

In 2005, a Strategic Review of Poverty in Peel, revealed that poverty was on the increase and that a number of growing segments of the community were at increased risk of slipping into poverty. These groups included newcomers, visible minorities, single seniors (women), single parents and families with young children. Because a high percentage of Peel's population at that time, were not born in Canada and crossed all of the "at risk" segments and new federal funding through COIA (Canadian Ontario Immigration Agreement) was available, the Peel Newcomers Strategy Group (PNSG) was formed in collaboration with the United Way. Since then, Peel has seen a significant increase in funding for newcomer settlement and integration services and PNSG was funded to conduct analysis, consultation and recommend a comprehensive plan to respond to Peel's unique challenges. That plan is complete and will be submitted to the Ministry of Citizenship & Immigration for consideration. It will also be the subject of a future report to Regional Council.

Despite the work of the PNSG and the broader Peel community, on February 26, 2009, the Peel Children's Aid Society presented startling evidence that child poverty, particularly in racialized communities in Peel and the GTA, has become an urgent issue. As a result of that presentation, Regional Council requested annual updates on the provincial and regional efforts to reduce child poverty. In addition, Regional Council resolved to ask the Office of the Premier for an audience to discuss the issue of child poverty (Resolutions 2009-179 and 2009-180).

As follow-up actions to these resolutions, senior staff and the Regional Chair met with the Minister of Children and Youth Services to improve the understanding of Poverty in Peel and our goals to support the Premier regarding actions to address child poverty in Peel, consistent with the "*Breaking the Cycle*" report.

The Peel Poverty Reduction Strategy Committee was formed to facilitate a Peel response to provincial poverty consultations and to respond to the growing problem of poverty in Peel. Co-chaired by the Region of Peel and the United Way Peel Region, it is comprised of a diverse number of agencies, grassroots organizations and stakeholders, as well as regional and local governments, including Councilor Allan Thompson, committed to reducing poverty in the region. Both PNSG & PPRSC work closely together.

The committee supports the provincial target of reducing poverty by 25 per cent in five years, and is working collaboratively with all related stakeholders and networks to coordinate efforts and address the root causes of poverty. The committee has built

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alliances with several provincial networks including the Housing Network of Ontario, 25 in 5 Poverty Reduction Network, Colour of Poverty and Campaign 2000.

To date, the committee has produced two reports, *"Poverty in Peel, A Tale of Hardship"* and *"A Shaky Foundation: Peel's Housing Dilemma"*, and submitted comments on Bill 152, an Act respecting a long-term strategy to reduce poverty in Ontario, prior to being proclaimed into law. (Both these reports are referenced in the FCM Quality of Life Report (also on this agenda) entitled *"Mending Canada's Frayed Social Safety Net: the Role of Municipal Governments"*.)

The regional poverty strategy is also addressing food insecurity through the Food Distribution in Peel Network whose work involves finding a collective solution to increasing the quality and quantity of nutritious food; and is collaborating with the Ontario Task Force on Access to Recreation, the City of Mississauga and City of Brampton's access to recreation initiatives.

3. Community Hubs

As noted, Human Services Stakeholders in Peel support the provincial direction regarding community investment in high needs neighbourhoods in Peel. This is based on evidence that this approach is effective at breaking the cycle of poverty.

In 2005, the City of Toronto Council adopted a Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy to strengthen priority neighbourhoods through targeted investment. The strategy contained the following elements:

- a) Designating 13 identified neighbourhoods as having priority for infrastructure investment;
- b) Establishing a neighbourhoods investment board to guide implementation and expanding Neighbourhood Action processes at the local level;
- c) Using appropriate monitoring tools to identify existing infrastructure gaps and determine which neighbourhoods will be most in need of future investment.

As part of this initiative, in February 2010, the governments of Canada and Ontario along with the City of Toronto and the United Way Toronto announced the creation of two multi-service hubs in the Rexdale and Jane and Finch communities. The investments total \$8.19 million in infrastructure funding and will provide access to comprehensive programs and services in communities that have traditionally been underfunded and underserved. The governments of Canada and Ontario are each providing \$2.73 million, the City of Toronto is providing \$1 million and the United Way Toronto and other partners are providing the remaining costs.

In the Provincial poverty reduction strategy, the Province committed to investing \$7 million annually in the development of a Community Hub Program that will focus on using schools as hubs that respond to community needs related to poverty reduction and student achievement. In addition, the strategy also committed to investing \$5 million annually in a Community Opportunities Fund to encourage neighbourhood revitalization through partnerships between local business, governments, volunteers, community agencies and most importantly, local residents. The Region of Peel and community partners have been actively advocating for a portion of these provincial dollars to establish community hubs in two high need neighbourhoods in Peel (Brampton & Mississauga).

The United Way Peel Region and the Region of Peel have begun the process of creating detailed profiles of several neighborhoods in Peel Region using the mapping work done

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through the Peel Data Centre on services disseminate areas (SDA's) to better understand the assets, challenges and residents in these communities. This information is being used to inform both organizations' investment decisions. In Peel, the analysis of poverty by neighbourhood indicates there are many concentrations of low income that are as yet smaller in scale than those in Toronto. To support this process in Peel and enhance the existing neighbourhood capacity initiatives, further investments based on the neighbourhood profiles are necessary.

This concept is also being considered by the Mississauga Summit, through the Human Services working group, as a potential "Big Idea".

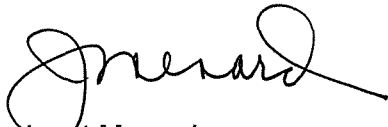
4. Proposed Direction

To support this ongoing work staff will:

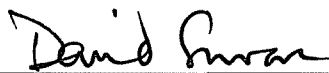
- Convene a neighbourhood initiatives table to build upon the initiatives already in place and create a coordinated strategy
- Continue, in partnership with the United Way Peel Region, dialogue and awareness raising with the Provincial and Federal Governments to seek their investment in community service hubs in Peel
- Continue to update Council annually on provincial progress on poverty reduction

CONCLUSION

The Province has made some significant commitments and investments in the year since the launch of the poverty reduction strategy. The Region of Peel and the Peel Poverty Reduction Strategy Committee have been engaged in developing a parallel local response. A key component will be neighbourhood based capacity building and hubs, which will be planned around cost shared partnerships at all levels of government and community organizations for implementation in 2011.



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