

2012-2015 Three-Year Action Plan

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CO-CHAIRS MESSAGE

We are pleased to present the first ever community poverty reduction strategy for Peel region. This three-year strategy represents a culmination of several years of dialogue, collaboration, advocacy and consultation among members of our community and multiple stakeholders including elected representatives from the provincial, regional and municipal governments.

From its inception, a key component of the work of the Peel Poverty Reduction Strategy Committee (PPRSC) has been education and awareness on poverty in Peel. This work will continue for the PPRSC through the speaker series, editorials and community dialogues that bring people from all walks of life together to increase understanding and find solutions to reduce and eliminate poverty.

We recognize that much has been done and continues to be done to address poverty in Peel. It is our hope that this strategy helps increase collaboration and engagement and puts a targeted focus on a complex issue. Reducing, mitigating the effects and eliminating poverty require long-term solutions.

As part of the development of this plan, we reviewed the work of collaboratives, organizations and networks to determine what priorities were being addressed. This environmental scan resulted in the identification of five key issues we can impact by collectively focusing our efforts: economic opportunities; income security; affordable and accessible transportation; food security; and safe and affordable housing. A key aspect to achieving long lasting change on these five issues, especially during these challenging economic times, will be through increased engagement from a greater number of stakeholders and residents in Peel. We know that change is possible and invite you to join with us in these efforts.

We want to recognize and give a special thank you to our partners for their sustained commitment to this important issue. Thank you for ensuring that the voices of those who are often ignored, are heard. We look forward to the next steps in this journey.

Sincerely,

ellatte

Shelley White CEO, United Way of Peel Region



grenard



Janet Menard Commissioner, Human Services Region of Peel



I. Introduction

Peel is a prosperous region. Higher than average household incomes, rapid growth, continuous development and an increasing number of corporate head offices make Peel region an attractive place to live, work and raise a family. Beneath the prosperity however are increasing challenges, particularly around income disparity and an increasing percentage of Peel residents who are experiencing poverty. Even during times of economic growth, Peel's low-income population has continued to rise. Many studies have documented the short and long-term economic and social costs associated with poverty and the detrimental effects on the health and well-being of individuals and families, which can negatively impact the whole community.

The 2006 census indicated that 15% of Peel's population, or 167,000 residents, were living below the Low Income Cut-Off (LICO), an increase from 11.5% in 2001. Between 2000 and 2005, the percentage of Peel children age 0 to 5 living in low-income, rose from 14% to 20%, higher than both the national and provincial rates of 19%.ⁱ According to the Region of Peel's 2005 *Strategic Review of Poverty in Peel,* a large percentage of people living below the LICO are comprised of the most vulnerable population groups:

- Racialized communities
- Recent immigrants
- Single parents
- Unattached seniors, especially women
- · Persons with disabilities
- Families with young children

'People suffering from cancer are viewed with compassion as victims of circumstance, with the courage to survive. Similarly, people experiencing poverty are often not the cause of their affliction – ill health, injury or job loss can happen to anyone.'

Catherine Soplet,
 Peel Poverty Action Group (PPAG)

A. Who We Are

In 2008, two drivers were responsible for the creation of the Peel Poverty Reduction Strategy Committee (PPRSC):

- a) The announcement by the Province of Ontario that they would develop a provincial poverty reduction strategy;
- b) A local commitment to further the work begun with the 2005 Poverty in Peel research.

This multi-stakeholder committee is comprised of representatives from various collaborative networks, staff and municipally elected officials, people with lived experience and poverty advocates. The Committee is co-chaired by the CEO of United Way of Peel Region and the Commissioner of Human Services at the Region of Peel.

Advocacy

June 2008

Peel community participates in provincial consultation on poverty reduction with Ontario Health Minister Deb Matthews.

March 2009

Regional Council sends letter to Premier McGuinty to convene a formal committee that includes key senior officials from the provincial government, the Region of Peel, and community stakeholders.

September 2009

Co-Chair Janet Menard, Commissioner of Human Services, Region of Peel and Regional Chair Emil Kolb meet with Minister Matthews to present a proposal on community hubs developed by the PPRSC.

Education/Awareness

March 2010

Hosted first speaker series on the Ontario Deprivation Index, featuring Michael Mendelson of the Caledon Institute for Social Policy and Michael Oliphant from the Daily Bread Food Bank.

November 2010

Hosted second speaker series on the Social Assistance Review, Advisory Council recommendations featuring Pedro Barata of the Atkinson Foundation, John Stapleton from the Open Policy Ontario and Mary Marrone of the Income Security Advocacy Centre.

November 2010

Regional Chair Emil Kolb declared addressing child poverty a priority in Peel.







March 2011

Peel participated in the 'Do the Math Challenge' http://dothemathpeelregion.wordpress.com

Spring 2011

Ads on poverty in the spring/summer editions of City of Mississauga and City of Brampton Parks and Recreation guides.



May 2011

Edna Toth, Chair of Peel Poverty Action Group and Member of the Peel Poverty Reduction Strategy Committee is awarded Mississauga's Citizen of the Year for her commitment to raising awareness about poverty and homelessness in Peel.

August 2011

Hosted a series of community and stakeholder consultations on social assistance attended by Francis Lankin, Commissioner for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario.

Research

January 2010

Data working group established to provide detailed data on poverty and replicate the eight provincial indicators.

April 2011

Report to Regional Council providing update on provincial poverty strategy and local indicators.

To date, the PPRSC has:

- Played an important role in raising awareness about poverty in Peel among stakeholders and residents;
- Ensured Peel's voice on poverty, social assistance and housing is heard at the provincial level;
- Facilitated networking and support of provincial campaigns such as *Put Food in the Budget and Poverty Free Ontario*;
- Ensured Regional Council continues to place a priority on addressing poverty and advocating to other levels of government for investments in key issues that mitigate the effects of poverty on families and individuals.

B. Strategic Connections

PPRSC's work has and will continue to align with a number of stakeholders and partners:

- Province of Ontario's poverty reduction strategy *Breaking the Cycle*, whose goal is to reduce child poverty by 25% in five years;
- Region of Peel's vision that Peel is a safe, healthy, prosperous, sustainable and inclusive community that protects its quality of life;
- United Way of Peel Region's Investment Strategy From Poverty to Possibility;
- Vibrant Communities Canada Cities Reducing Poverty, a national multi-year initiative with a vision that participating communities, all provinces and the federal government will develop aligned poverty reduction strategies that will see one million people less poor;
- Peel's *Community of Practice for Collaboration*, a local initiative that aims to continue the dialogue around meaningful change to quality of life in Peel;
- Poverty and Employment Precarity in Southern Ontario (PEPSO), a research study that looks at how unstable, poorly paid employment affects families and communities in different communities in Southern Ontario;
- *Poverty Free Ontario*, an initiative of the Social Planning Network of Ontario whose mission is to eliminate divided communities in which large numbers of adults and children live in chronic states of material hardship, poor health and social exclusion.



22% of taxes (\$180 million) supports three low income programs in Peel: Ontario Works, Children's Services and Social Housing (2010).





C. What is Poverty?

In 2010, we surveyed members and supporters of the Peel Poverty Reduction Strategy Committee and asked them to define poverty and identify supports that individuals and families need to thrive. Respondents defined poverty in the following way:

Peel individuals and families experiencing poverty struggle because of limited access to income, supports and resources. Poverty is about income, but also about the inability for individuals and families to live independently, focus on wellness and be involved in community life.

Survey respondents defined a thriving community as one that has:

- · Access to safe and affordable housing
- · Educational and life-long learning opportunities
- · Elimination of systemic barriers
- A community free from violence
- · Elimination of social exclusion a safe, caring, supportive community
- Quality healthcare
- · Social supports including mental and physical health
- Affordable childcare
- Economic opportunities
- Progressive income security programs
- · Affordable, accessible transportation
- · Affordable, high quality food

12,853 on the wait list for subsidized housing. (December 2010) Peel has the longest wait time in Ontario.





D. Why does Peel Region Need a Plan?

Eliminating poverty is not only the right and moral thing to do but it also makes economic sense. Poverty is costly for tax payers and businesses and contributes to lost productivity, insufficient pool of skilled workers and higher costs related to social and health services. Addressing poverty is an investment.

Peel can do this! The region has a long history of collective action. There are more than 15 collaboratives in Peel and countless partnerships between the public and non-profit sectors. This strategy builds on a strong foundation of collaboration, interventions and supports already in place that reduce the impact of poverty on Peel individuals and families.

Since the Region of Peel's 2005 Strategic Review of Poverty in Peel, several initiatives such as the Peel Newcomer Strategy Group (PNSG) and the Peel Children and Youth Initiative (PCYI) have been created to ensure Peel residents are supported and systems improved. In addition, important investments in housing and social services have been made by all levels of government:

- In 2012, Queen's Park announced it will allocate 11.5% of its new funding to Peel's child and youth mental health agencies allowing Peel to serve an additional estimated 2,400 children and youth annually.ⁱⁱ
- The Government of Canada, Government of Ontario and Region of Peel, will be building more than 700 affordable housing units between 2011 and 2014.ⁱⁱⁱ

While efforts in Peel are resulting in positive changes, challenges do remain:

- Peel's population increases by approximately 27,000 people each year;^{iv}
- Funding for programs such as social services still does not reflect the current population growth in Peel and other 905 area communities, which results in extensive wait lists;^v
- Annually, the Region of Peel spends 31% of its total property tax supported operating budget (\$414 million), and 22% of the net property tax supported budget (\$180 million) on three programs supporting low income families in Peel: Ontario Works, Children's Services and Social Housing;^{vi}
- In 2009, it cost Peel residents earning minimum wage 6.8% of their monthly income to purchase a transit pass.^{vii}



Change takes deliberate effort and time. The PPRSC is another brick in the foundation that is creating long-term meaningful change. It aligns with many of the existing collaborative strategies and addresses those issues that require more focused efforts.

"... someone like myself who is looking to live in a drug and alcohol free house while on Ontario Works it's quite impossible to find clean and safe living conditions. So I'll mention this urgent issue again, that people like myself have zero option to find a clean and sober place to live and quite frankly I am personally at my wits end when it comes to this critical issue, as I am forced to live in an unhealthy environment, which seems rather unfair to me."

- Regeneration Participant



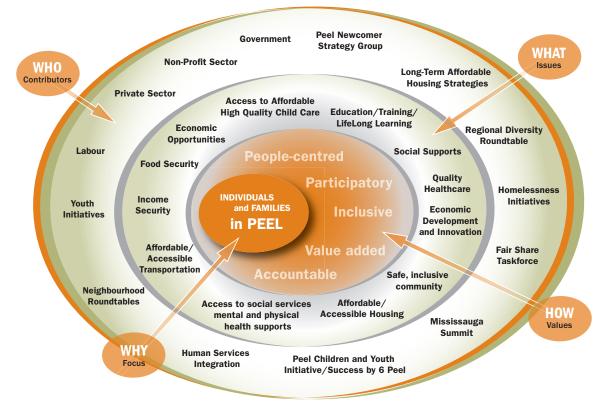
II. THE STRATEGY

A. Process to Development

In 2010, the PPRSC began a series of discussions trying to identify how poverty affects individuals and families, what supports are needed and who must be at the table in order for real change to occur.

A sub-committee was formed to develop a framework for a poverty reduction strategy and determine next steps for the committee. This process included surveying organizations in Peel, a SWOT analysis, review of several poverty reduction roundtables in Windsor, Hamilton, Waterloo and Ottawa, a review of the current collaborative tables and initiatives in Peel that address poverty directly or indirectly and a community engagement process. Over 200 people from Brampton, Caledon and Mississauga provided feedback on the issues and proposed actions.

Through this process, the PPRSC identified those issues which it felt required focused attention, greater advocacy, awareness and action.



INFORMING OUR STRATEGY

The PPRSC reviewed which issues related to poverty were addressed by collaborative initiatives and/or specific sectors.



'I found it especially empowering to have a voice within the community, and also appreciated the experience of group brainstorming. Knowing that Peel region is working on the issues that are a concern to me and fellow community members is very enlightening. Looking forward to learning and being a part of more discussions.'

- 2012 Poverty Strategy Focus Group Participant

B. Our Values

- **PEOPLE-CENTRED** individuals and families are at the centre of our work. We will ensure that all voices are heard and included in any decisions.
- PARTICIPATORY we acknowledge that residents and private, public, and non-profit sectors have a role to play; we work collaboratively with all stakeholders to achieve positive sustainable results for the community. Our commitment is long-term.
- INCLUSIVE we will raise awareness about how poverty affects individuals and groups differently, advocate for policies that address systemic barriers, accessibility and inequities.
- VALUE ADDED We will build on the work and experiences of networks, collaboratives, organizations, and people with lived experience.
- ACCOUNTABLE We are accountable to the community to ensure our efforts result in positive changes.

C. Vision Statement

Peel region is a liveable community for all individuals and families.

D. Mission Statement

To create a Peel community where everyone works together to build a poverty free future.

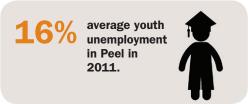


E. Objectives

The PPRSC recognizes that poverty is complex and requires sustained intentional efforts by multiple players. After identifying our role, our potential for impact and ability to track progress over time, we selected five issues and identified outcomes, specific actions and the indicators that will be implemented and monitored to determine the success of this three-year strategy.

These five issues are:

- 1. Economic Opportunities
- 2. Income Security
- 3. Affordable and Accessible Transportation
- 4. Food Security
- 5. Safe and Affordable Housing



ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

CONTEXT:

In 2011, the total population in Peel region increased to 1.3 million persons. 40.5% of the workforce is employed in manufacturing, retail trade, transportation and warehousing, or wholesale trade. According to the Peel Data Centre, Peel's business sector showed a decline in June 2009 but has bounced back since then; however, Peel's unemployment rate remained elevated at 8.5%. In addition, Peel's youth unemployment rate remained elevated at 16%.^{viii} Certain segments of the population experience higher rates of poverty. For example, in 2006, 33% of new immigrants, 9% of working families and 20% of racialized people lived below the Low Income Cut-Off (LICO).^{ix}

OBJECTIVE:

A stronger regional economy that provides adequate wages and progressive employment opportunities for Peel residents.

OUTCOMES:

- · Increased employment opportunities for people at risk of or living in poverty.
- · Increased and adequate training opportunities for people at risk of or living in poverty.

ACTIONS:

- Increase awareness about the impact of unstable poorly paid (precarious) employment on Peel residents and the community.
- Annually recognize a Peel based company (small business and corporation) that is a champion for social issues and has illustrated a commitment to its employees, residents and community.

PROVINCIAL INDICATORS:

- ·Low Income Measure (LIM)
- Depth of poverty
- $\cdot \text{High school graduation rates}$

PEEL POPULATION INDICATORS:

- Families in Peel living below LIM (after tax). Unemployment rates for population 15 years and over in Peel.
- Individuals in Peel living below LICO.
- Families living below LICO.



Wait lists are extensive in Peel due to high demand and insufficient funding for programs such as mental health services and other social services.



INCOME SECURITY

CONTEXT:

Income security is broadly defined as those programs and initiatives that result in residents having greater income as a result of subsidies, income programs or tax benefits. In Canada, income security programs are administered by provincial and federal governments. This has created numerous challenges for people needing to access one or more of the programs.

OBJECTIVE:

A progressive, seamless coordinated system that ensures Peel residents are income secure.

OUTCOMES:

- ·Increased awareness of income supports by people and community agencies supporting clients.
- Increased awareness of and access to income supports by people at risk of or living in poverty.

ACTIONS:

- Develop a guide that helps people experiencing poverty and those supporting them to understand the benefits, requirements and eligibility of all income security programs.
- Advocate for new or improved initiatives that address income security gaps for families and individuals experiencing low-income.
- · Develop an initiative that increases financial literacy.
- Develop and/or expand initiatives that connect families and individuals experiencing low-income with tax credits and programs for which they are eligible.

PROVINCIAL INDICATORS:

- · Low Income Measure (LIM)
- Standard of living
- · Depth of poverty

PEEL POPULATION INDICATORS:

• Families in Peel living below LIM (after tax).

PROMISING LOCAL PRACTICE: Enrolled By Six, A Peel Children and Youth Initiative

• Enrolled By Six: Peel Post Secondary Strategy is a community impact strategy to enrol every eligible child in Peel region in the Canada Learning Bond – Registered Education Savings Plan for post secondary tuition before the age of six.

AFFORDABLE/ACCESSIBLE TRANSPORTATION

CONTEXT:

Increasingly, transit has become a focus of local governments and significant attempts are being made by Metrolinx, a provincial agency, Mississauga Transit and Brampton Transit to address issues related to accessibility and increased service. During the 2011 Peel public consultations on social assistance, residents expressed frustration about the rising cost of public transportation and in the case of Caledon, a lack of transit. Many noted that the costs and availability of routes prevent them from getting to and from employment opportunities, appointments and other essential activities such as grocery shopping and visits to food banks.

OBJECTIVE:

A more connected, accessible and affordable transportation system in Peel.

OUTCOMES:

Increased number of residents experiencing poverty being able to purchase transit passes.
Increased access to employment, essential services and basic needs.

ACTIONS:

- Create an affordable transit program in Mississauga and/or Brampton by 2015.
- Create partnerships with local grocers to create a free or discounted pick-up and drop-off program.

PROVINCIAL INDICATORS:

Standard of living

PEEL POPULATION INDICATORS:

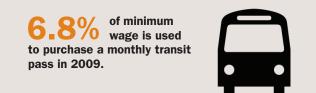
· Cost of a monthly transit pass expressed as a percentage of minimum wage monthly salary in Peel.

PROMISING LOCAL PRACTICE: Caledon Community Services Transportation Service (CCS)

• CCS's door-to-door accessible transportation service available seven days a week for Caledon seniors and people with disabilities who are unable to drive themselves.

PROMISING LOCAL PRACTICE: Bramalea Community Health Centre (CHC) and the City of Brampton have partnered on a new and exciting adventure:

 "Script to Fit" is a program available to all Bramalea CHC and Diabetes clients who are ready to take control of their physical exercise. Health care providers write 'prescriptions' to clients who are interested in becoming active, in turn that prescription gets them a free one month pass at five City of Brampton recreation centres located in the Bramalea area.





FOOD SECURITY

CONTEXT:

Food security means different things to different people, but it is defined as "ensuring that all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life."^x The average weekly cost of basic healthy eating for a family of four in Peel region increased by 10.6% between 2009 and 2011 according to the annual Nutritious Food Basket Survey.^{xi} Food is a right but many families living in poverty have to choose between food and other necessities such as rent.

OBJECTIVE:

A food system that meets the needs of all Peel residents.

OUTCOMES:

- ·Improved policies that result in a more food secure community.
- · More accurate local data on emergency food need and food security in Peel.
- · Increased capacity of food programs to meet the community's need.
- Increased capacity and diversity of food security programs that go beyond the provision of food.

ACTIONS:

- · Create a Peel food charter that articulates Peel's commitment to creating a food secure community.
- Increase the number of food programs in neighbourhoods.
- Gain consensus on a set of measurement tools that can be identified or developed and implemented to effectively measure food security.
- · Promote partnerships and programs that support rural-urban food links.

PROVINCIAL INDICATORS:

Standard of living

PEEL POPULATION INDICATORS:

• Percentage of households experiencing food insecurity in the last 12 months.

PROMISING LOCAL PRACTICE: Mississauga Farmer's Market

• The Mississauga Central Lions Club hosts an annual farmer's market. On Sundays, farmers donate surplus produce to local food banks including Eden Community Food Bank and Mount Zion Food Bank.

PROMISING LOCAL PRACTICE: EcoSource's The Garden of the Valley

• The Garden of the Valley in Mississauga Valley Park was established in 2006 and was the first community garden created on public park land in Mississauga. The garden was created through a partnership between EcoSource, the City of Mississauga and Evergreen. The garden contains both members-based plots for rent to residents as well as habitat garden spaces and community learning plots where local youth assist with growing vegetables for food banks and shelters in the area. Due to its popularity, the garden has grown tremendously, more than doubling in size from just 20 plots in 2006 to 44 plots in 2012.



SAFE AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

CONTEXT:

As of December 2011, the wait list for subsidized housing in Peel was 12,853 households, the longest waiting period for subsidized housing in Ontario. In 2011, the Region of Peel served over 14,000 households in emergency hostels, shelters for victims of family violence and transitional housing.^{xii}

OBJECTIVE:

A sufficient supply of safe and affordable housing in Peel region.

OUTCOMES:

Increased support and investment in affordable housing.

ACTIONS:

- Support ongoing advocacy efforts to federal, provincial and municipal governments aimed at increasing the supply of affordable housing.
- Raise awareness of residents and the community about the need for affordable and safe housing.
- Provide input into the Region of Peel's long-term affordable housing strategy.

PROVINCIAL INDICATORS:

Housing Index

PEEL POPULATION INDICATORS:

- Expenditure on housing as a percentage of income for households wherein any member has selfrated activity limitations in Peel.
- ·Percentage of waitlisted families placed into subsidised housing in Peel.

PROMISING LOCAL PRACTICE:

• The Royal Canadian Legion Branch 609, with funding from the Government of Canada, the Government of Ontario, and the Region of Peel is building a 200-unit, 25-storey housing development located in Brampton. Once completed in 2013, it will feature one-bedroom to three-bedroom units to meet the needs of seniors and families as well as space that is designated to be used for a wide variety of community programs.



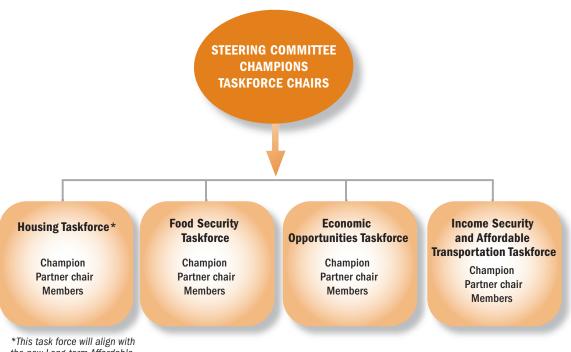
III. IMPLEMENTATION RECOMMENDATIONS

The PPRSC is committed to immediate action on the implementation of this three-year strategy. Over the course of 2012 and 2013, we will work with partners to develop detailed action and work plans to transition to a new model as outlined by the proposed Governance Structure.

A. Governance Structure

In order to move immediately to implementation of this strategy, the PPRSC is revising its structure to include sectors and stakeholders that are underrepresented. A key measure of success for the Committee's next phase will be to:

- secure high-profile champions for each issue;
- secure chairs for each of the taskforces;
- recruit and engage those sectors, stakeholders and individuals with first-hand experience that are important to the process and committed to change.



*This task force will align with the new Long-term Affordable Housing Strategy Working Groups

B. Tactics

Since 2008, the PPRSC has identified and implemented several tactics to create awareness, advocate and track changes to income and other measures of poverty. The following will be used to not only address the issues but also ensure poverty remains on the political, social and economic radar.

'if people don't think poverty is a person's fault they will respond differently.'

- 2012 Poverty Strategy Focus Group Participant

Awareness

- In conjunction with partners, the PPRSC will host community conversations in neighbourhoods, to increase awareness about the impact of poverty on individuals and families and identify resident-led solutions;
- Host quarterly speaker series featuring experts, geared to a wider audience of service providers, the business community, networks, and other stakeholders;
- Provide regular editorials in local publications on poverty in Peel.
- www.povertyinpeel.ca

Advocacy

- Provide annual updates to Regional Councillors on progress of poverty reduction in Peel and Ontario;
- Engage City, Town and Regional Councillors in ongoing dialogue on poverty and its impact on residents;
- Advocate for federal, provincial and regional/municipal policies that improve systems and create opportunities and more inclusive communities.

Collaboration

- Through participation in Tamarack's *Cities Reducing Poverty* initiative, share learning and information with other communities across Canada engaged in poverty reduction initiatives; develop a coordinated national strategy to advocate for investments in systems change and programs and services that move people out of poverty and prevent people from ending up in poverty;
- Work with local collaborative tables on common issues that impact poverty.

Monitoring and Reporting

- Publish an annual report card or fact sheet on poverty in Peel;
- Report on local progress of the eight provincial poverty reduction indicators.



IV. ENDNOTES

- Peel Data Centre Bulletin Census Income, Earnings & Shelter Costs (2006). http://www.peelregion.ca/planning/bulletins/2006/2006-census-income-earn-shelt-costs.pdf
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