

Submission
by working group of the London Housing Advisory Committee
in response to Mayor's Advisory Panel on Poverty

Date of Meeting: October 26, 2015 (9:00 – 10:30 a.m.)
Location: Committee Meeting Room #2, City Hall
Present: Deb Peckham, Siu Ming Kwok, Nadine Reeves, John Peaire,
Betsy Odegaard, Angela Galloway

Summary of the Meeting:

The following is a summary of the comments and feedback by the working group to the four questions presented by the Mayor's Advisory Panel on Poverty to the London Housing Advisory Committee at the October 2015 meeting.

1. How do you define poverty? How does this definition shape your work?

There is no official measure of poverty in Canada. Instead Statistics Canada uses a Low-Income Cut-Off (LICO), which is based on half the national median income. Additionally, the government uses a Market Basket Measure, which looks at low income based on the cost of a specific basket of goods and services. The working group also discussed the definition of relative poverty and objective poverty and comments are listed below in point form.

- Inability to pay housing costs, feed family & meet basic needs.
- Lack of choice for food, where to live, and having stable housing.
- Needs should be safe, comfortable, reasonable in terms of housing, food, transportation, and clothing, etc.
- Lack of access to benefits society has to offer; there is a lack of opportunity.
- Poverty is complex and is individual.

2. What are the primary root causes of poverty?

The working group found that this question is too complex and general. And it is in many ways overlapping with the question 3 which also ask the root causes of poverty in London. Nonetheless, the group thought the root causes include a combination of overall economic and employment situation both globally and domestically, poor economic and social policies of different orders of government in Canada, mismatch of the human capacities and rises of knowledge economy, and the lack of political will to address this problem by the Canadian government. Other specific comments and feedback are listed in the following:

- Precarious employment: the lack of secure and reasonable pay jobs
- Inadequate Ontario Works rates: benefits of the social assistance program in Ontario are provided in a rate below the poverty definition in Canada.

- Using minimum wage instead of providing a living wage (the current living wage is estimated to be around \$15.99 in Ontario)
- Systemic barriers for immigrants with foreign credential, e.g. gatekeeping
- Government Policies and Funding Priorities
- Barriers to education – lack of opportunities, inadequate financial assistance, and poor guidance to children from low income family.
- Weak economy, especially the shrinking of manufacturing industries in Southern Ontario.
- Social service system is hard to navigate especially for those who do not have the skills, knowledge, or access to internet.
- Poor health - lack of discretionary benefits (e.g. dental, medications, vision).
- Generational/Cyclical poverty
- Governments lack the vision and will to address the problems of mental health, addictions, and challenges faced by people with disabilities.
- Income Inequality (wealth gap/distribution) in this country and urban vs rural communities.
- Disengagement from community to address the local economic and social problems.
- The poverty reduction strategy of the government is always in the model of Crisis Management rather than focusing on early intervention & prevention.

3. What drives poverty in London?

London is a university town and consequently depends much on the public investments on its economy. The economic conditions of London getting worse over the last several decades with the shrinking of manufacturing sector in Southwestern Ontario. That results in a two-tier economy in London. The economy which is still relying on the public resources (e.g., University of Western Ontario, Fanshawe College, and London Health Sciences Centre, etc.) is thriving. Nonetheless, the private sector suffered heavily with the disappearing of manufacturing industries in the city and surrounding areas. In other words, knowledge based economy of London is still intact and all other high-paying blue-collars jobs are disappearing in the city. So the question would be how to address the issues, especially the unemployment and poverty, as a result of this by-polarization of two economies in this city. Other feedback listed below:

- Lack of safe & affordable housing
- Deep cuts to services for the marginalized populations in the city
- Inadequate and costly transportation – city sprawl, transit system
- Domestic violence
- Lack of quality & affordable childcare
- Stigma, isolation & social exclusion of being in poverty
- Criminal Records – judiciary system, employment requirements
- Limited access to technology
- Inadequate mental health supports
- Unemployment issues especially for those who do not have post-secondary education. In addition, only 40% of working population qualify for Employment Insurance.
- Food costs are rising faster than cost of living.
- Trauma, crisis, loss, stress

4. Can you provide the Panel with a key resource that grounds the work you do in poverty?

The working group discussed a number of reports, research centre and program in and outside the city as the resource for the Panel.

- Housing First - <http://www.housingfirsttoolkit.ca/>
- London Community Housing Strategy
- London Community Plan on Homelessness
- Age Friendly London Action Plan
- City of London, Parks & Recreation Strategic Master Plan
- ReThink London & The London Plan
- City Lab <http://www.citylab.com/>
- *Poverty in Canada: Implications for Health and Quality of Life* by Dennis Raphael
- Bridges out of Poverty
- London Poverty Research Centre (at Kings) <http://povertyresearch.ca/>
- Best Start Health Nexus Santé
- Mincome (Basic Income Guarantee)