

# **Building a New Legacy:**

Increasing Prosperity  
for Niagara Residents  
by Improving the Quality  
of Neighbourhood Life.

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# Building a new legacy: Increasing prosperity for Niagara residents by improving the quality of neighbourhood life

## Executive summary

In 1989, the federal government recognized implicitly the obvious paradox that a growing number of children lived in poverty within a nation as rich as Canada. At the time, the parliamentarians made a promise to Canadian children to end poverty by the year 2000. Sadly, roughly the same number of children who lived in poverty in 1989 live in poverty today. In Canada, “both inequality and poverty rates have increased rapidly in the past 10 years, now reaching levels above the OECD average.”<sup>1</sup>

However, the recent economic downturn, which began in Fall 2008, may have influenced the way poverty is perceived in the mainstream. Questions about what can and should be done to protect Canadians’ health and well-being became more urgent to more people.

The lack of progress is not for want of good ideas or research about strategies that are effective. Mostly, action is stymied by value-driven debates and core beliefs about who is poor, why they are poor and what, if anything, should be done. In the absence of federal leadership, local communities have decided that something must be done. In communities, poverty transforms from a philosophical conversation into a disturbing reality with long term detrimental impacts on the health of adults and life prospects for children. Within the Niagara region, efforts to address poverty were initiated in 2006 and the nature of those efforts subsequently informed by a report commissioned by Niagara Region entitled *Legacy of Poverty? Addressing Cycles of Poverty and the Impact on Child Health in Niagara Region*<sup>2</sup>. Action was built on the report’s four recommendations: address poverty through advocacy; provide

*In the absence of federal leadership, local communities have decided that something must be done. In communities, poverty transforms from a philosophical conversation into a disturbing reality with long term detrimental impacts on the health of adults and life prospects for children.*

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<sup>1</sup> Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2008), **Growing Unequal? : Income Distribution and Poverty in OECD Countries**

[www.oecd.org/els/social/inequality](http://www.oecd.org/els/social/inequality)

<sup>2</sup> Arai, S. (2007). *Legacy of Poverty? Addressing Cycles of Poverty and the Impact on Child Health in Niagara Region*.

<http://www.niagararegion.ca/living/saeo/reports/pdf/PovertyReport.pdf>

appropriate and flexible supports which address the broader determinants of health for adults living in poverty; mitigate the negative effects of low-income on children and youth through programs and services, and; monitor progress. Niagara's approach to poverty reduction included local creative adaptation around the imperative to increase prosperity for people living in neighbourhoods in need of attention. This vision was the first step toward building a new legacy for children living in poverty.

The local landscape has shifted greatly since 2006 and the Niagara community has galvanized its commitment to reducing poverty in several ways. This report outlines only part of the local response to poverty, namely the strategies and activities associated with the Niagara Region Prosperity Initiative.

This report is organized around the four recommendations from the *Legacy of Poverty* report, which remain pillars for local action. In this report, each of them have been updated with the addition of relevant data and information about implementation activities and advice from key stakeholders about next steps.<sup>3</sup> These next steps are summarized here:

**Recommendation 1: Address poverty through advocacy.**

*Larger systemic issues remain intact (housing, transportation).*

Continued and sustained attention must be given to the obvious but tenacious barriers to prosperity, which include unemployment, underemployment, and the role of supportive services like transportation, education, training, and child care.

*Lack of resources is discouraging full collaboration which would benefit neighbourhoods.* As identified by Niagara stakeholders themselves, competition among and a lack of trust between local service organizations can discourage collaboration which further marginalizes people living in distressed neighbourhoods. The current reality of scarce resources among non-profit and community groups is a serious impediment to collaboration intended by the Niagara Prosperity Initiatives Advisory Committee.

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<sup>3</sup> Theoretical sampling was used to select informants to gather perspectives on the funding decisions, the neighbourhood approach, service delivery, and general reflections. In total, eight semi-structured interviews were carried out from May 3 to June 16, 2010.

**Recommendation 2: Provide appropriate and flexible supports which address the broader determinants of health for adults living in poverty.**

*Economic development initiatives need to be part of neighbourhood prosperity work.* While it has promising potential for impact, the neighbourhood focus on employment and training opportunities may unintentionally reinforce victim blaming by concentrating efforts at the individual rather than the systems level.

*Business leaders are a critical element of success for labour force development.* Job development, retention, training, better wages and access to financial supports for working people requires orchestration between these imperatives and broader policy and economic development strategies. Business champions are necessary to ensure that poverty reduction becomes a sustainable practice.

*Tackling poverty requires plans and actions that ensure decent, adequate housing.* Niagara's waiting list for affordable housing continues to grow. Work toward a national housing strategy remains an unaddressed priority.

*Stigma and a culture of meritocracy continue to be barriers to action and engagement.* Many studies have documented the negative and oppressive experiences of service users accessing programs intended to provide support and assistance. A concerted effort is necessary to make poverty reduction an urgent issue for all of Niagara's citizens. This task can be facilitated through the media by disseminating information about poverty reduction strategies undertaken by stakeholders across the region.

*Meaningful engagement of people living in poverty must receive special attention.* This may mean door to door canvassing in neighbourhoods in need of attention as a way to gather information about enhancing opportunities for social inclusion and emancipation. Improving the social determinants of health for adults living in poverty includes access to services and supports for employment, training and civic engagement.

**Recommendation 3: Mitigate the negative effects of low-income on children and youth through programs and services.**

*Niagara Region developed the Neighbourhood Profiles with the intention of providing a baseline to guide discussions about conditions in neighbourhoods, including barriers and assets. This tool has the potential to further mobilize and engage neighbourhoods to collectively develop strategies for mitigating the negative effects of low-income on children and youth.*

*The people who benefit from the services and programs may not be aware of their connection to projects such as Niagara's Prosperity Initiatives. This idea was expressed not as concern regarding kudos or marketing but rather as evidence that work needs to be enhanced to meaningfully engage people with lived experiences of poverty. This process of engagement is not token or mechanical but rather is seen as instrumental in rekindling lost hope or addressing isolation and stigma.*

*Appropriate responses to local dimensions of poverty need to be flexible. This flexibility emerges as tension about the appropriateness of funding agencies to deliver programs across the region as opposed to funding local agencies to deliver programs within their municipality. An opportunity for this assessment and discussion is on the horizon resulting from the implementation of full day learning for junior and senior kindergarten children.*

*Service providers struggle with the need to measure outcomes and provide service. From the service provider's perspective, the urgency of poverty relies on a process of learning by doing. However, monitoring activities and processes is also recognized as important in understanding results and impacts. A pragmatic approach to building knowledge includes reflections on the practice, the process, and the people.*

**Recommendation 4: Monitor progress.**

*Sustainable commitments are built by generating community ideas and involvement.* A driver for the prosperity initiatives is to increase capacity at the individual and neighbourhood levels.

Further development and use of participatory action research methods should be explored as a way to address the tension identified by key informants. Special attention must be focused on cultivating local leaders and enhancing their skills in order to foster collective local action geared toward transforming the distressing circumstances of poverty.

*Quantitative data tells us what people do; it doesn't tell us why.* A comprehensive approach to data analysis and program evaluation must include diverse vantage points and perspectives. Qualitative research methods should be incorporated into the data collection process in order to produce knowledge that is accessible and insightful for practitioners, service providers, and service users.

## Building a new legacy in Niagara's neighbourhoods

### Introduction

About 3.5 per cent of Ontario's total population, or 427,421 people, live in 74 neighbourhoods within Niagara's 12 municipalities. Even before the effects of the recent recession spread across the province and the country, Niagara began to pay attention to the discrepancies between the prosperity envisioned for its citizens and the daily struggle of residents living in poverty.

In 2006, Niagara Region Community Services presented a report to Regional Council that outlined the disjuncture between the federal government's commitment to end child poverty in 1989 and local indications that poverty continued to negatively impact the health and well-being of adults and children. The report compiled local, provincial, and national data on economic security, health, safety, access to developmental opportunities and positive parenting. This work triggered Niagara Regional Council's commitment to deeper understanding and focused action toward reducing poverty in Niagara.

### Understanding poverty

Many countries participating in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) have examined and responded to the contradiction between a nation's economic prosperity and its internal poverty rates. Anti-poverty strategies across the globe include practical responses to urgent problems and longer term approaches aimed at preventing poverty. Action plans include "improving the situation of people experiencing the deprivation of severe and persistent poverty; reducing overall poverty rates; reducing risk of poverty among those with highest rates; and reducing large inequality gaps between rich and poor."<sup>4</sup>

*Approximately 20 years ago, the Canadian government committed to end child poverty. At the time, approximately 1 in 20 Canadian children lived in poverty. Today, approximately 1 in 20 Canadian children live in poverty.*

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<sup>4</sup> National Council of Welfare (2007). *Solving Poverty: Four Cornerstones of a Workable National Strategy for Canada*. Available at: <http://www.ncw.gc.ca/1.3bd.2t.1ils@-eng.jsp?lid=30>

## Introduction

Approximately 20 years ago, the Canadian government committed to end child poverty. At the time, approximately 1 in 20 Canadian children lived in poverty. Today, approximately 1 in 20 Canadian children live in poverty.

During this period, federal policies, funding and programs originally intended to mitigate the risk of unemployment and loss of income have been seriously retrenched. Federal funding and governance in domains such as social housing, unemployment, and social assistance dramatically shifted. When compared to other OECD countries, Canada spends less on cash benefits, such as unemployment and family benefits thereby weakening the impact of taxes and transfers; income inequality is not effectively addressed via these policy tools.<sup>5</sup>

Canada's gap in income inequality and unaltered poverty rates are above the average rate of other OECD countries.<sup>6</sup> What does this tell us? It tells us that poverty may be perceived as either too expensive to fix, not important enough to address or so complex that it requires a marshalling of both innovation and commitment. When examining the social determinants of health, there is a link between longevity and neighbourhoods; life spans for individuals living in distressed neighbourhoods is significantly shorter than residents living in prosperous neighbourhoods.<sup>7, 8</sup> This dynamic of poverty resembles the detrimental health impact of other social problems like smoking and obesity and yet there is a marked difference in the urgency of policy attention toward eliminating poverty in Canada.

*Among developed nations, Canada has a greater gap in income inequality.*

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<sup>5</sup> Federation of Canadian Municipalities (2010). *Mending Canada's frayed social safety net: The role of municipal governments*. Quality of Life in Canadian Communities. Theme Report #6. Available at:

[http://www.fcm.ca/Documents/reports/Mending\\_Canadas\\_Frayed\\_Social\\_Safety\\_Net\\_The\\_role\\_of\\_municipal\\_governments\\_EN.pdf](http://www.fcm.ca/Documents/reports/Mending_Canadas_Frayed_Social_Safety_Net_The_role_of_municipal_governments_EN.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty (2010). *Code Red*. Available at: [www.hamiltonpoverty.ca](http://www.hamiltonpoverty.ca)

<sup>8</sup> Mikkonen, J. and Raphael, D. (2010). *The Social Determinants of Health: The Canadian Facts*. Toronto: York University School of Health Policy and Management.

This lag is not for want of ideas or understanding. Across Canada, many organizations have been working for some time to increase knowledge in order to generate strategies to address poverty and insecurity.

For example:<sup>9</sup>

- Calls for a national childcare system date back to post WWII policy work. It is one of the most recommended and studied policy options and yet on this issue, Canada remains a laggard behind other countries.
- The Vibrant Communities Initiative has been working with communities across Canada to build experience and knowledge about how communities can work together to move people out of poverty. This initiative developed as a result of local efforts in Kitchener-Waterloo in 1996.
- The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples reported in 1996 that specific historic circumstances have influenced the highest poverty rates in Canada experienced among First Nations, Inuit, and Métis.
- The TD Financial Group outlined the impact of a disjointed income transfer system in 2005 urging for improvements that would mean bringing marginalized individuals back into economic mainstream.
- The Task Force for Modernizing Income Security for Working Age Adults (MISWAA) produced a report in 2006 which outlined several strategies developed with input from leaders representing business, labour, women, diversity, faith, economic and social justice groups. The creation of a separate benefit for children receiving social assistance was one of these recommendations.
- In 2006, the Caledon Institute of Social Policy provided a vision for improving Canada's social infrastructures.

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<sup>9</sup> National Council of Welfare, 2007. *Solving Poverty*.

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- In 2007, the Government of Ontario committed to a poverty reduction strategy with targets and measures to ensure “opportunity that is accessible to all.”<sup>10</sup> The 25-in-5 Network for Poverty Reduction organized in response to this commitment.
- It is a multi-sectoral network comprised of more than 100 provincial and Toronto-based organizations and individuals working to reduce poverty in Ontario by 25 per cent in 5 years and 50 per cent in 10 years. This group has held several public consultations resulting in three main proposed strategies to reduce poverty. These are livable incomes, equity and inclusion, and sustainable employment.
- Led by Art Eggleton and Hugh Segal, the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology worked for two years to prepare its report of the Subcommittee on Cities, “In From the Margins: A Call To Action On Poverty, Housing and Homelessness” dated December 2009. The Committee identified many areas where current government policies and programs require revision and provided recommendations to the federal government based on the demonstrated success of place based and rights based approaches to poverty reduction.
- In January 2010, the National Council of Welfare compiled a comprehensive 34-page bibliography outlining Canadian, American, and International studies focused on the cost of poverty<sup>11</sup>. Resources detail the costs of poverty in relation to policy, housing, education, health, and early child development.

*When asked what would make the difference in reducing poverty, Canadians identified as priorities a guaranteed livable income, affordable housing, childcare, education and training (National Council of Welfare page 13).*

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<sup>10</sup> Government of Ontario (2007). *Speech from the Throne*.

<sup>11</sup> National Council of Welfare (2010). *The Cost of Poverty and the Value of Investment: Can we afford to solve poverty? Can we afford not to?* Publication available at: <http://ncwcnbes.net/en/research/costofpoverty-coutdelapauvrete.html>

- In its Quality of Life Theme Report #6 released in March 2010, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities outlined the role that municipalities have taken on in response to Canada's retrenched social policies. The report summarizes the impact of the "frayed social safety net" in several key areas, including housing, transit, childcare, and recreation.

This work continues to inform and inspire local action intended toward reducing or eliminating poverty. However, local strategies have limited impact as the intersecting factors of poverty remain stubbornly unaltered. In the absence of a federal framework, Canadian communities have led the way by navigating through the varied definitions, measures, and potential responses to the conditions and experiences of poverty.

## Definitions

As social policy is driven by values, how a problem is defined delineates the possibilities for its solution. If the root cause is identified as an individual deficit, then solutions will focus on remedies for the individual. If however, root causes are understood as systemic and intersecting, solutions in turn will be multifaceted. Poverty has been examined from many varied and contested perspectives, producing various theories that try to explain the causes of poverty. These can be summarized into five broad themes<sup>12</sup>:

1. "Individual causes or deficiencies
2. Cultural belief systems that support subcultures in poverty
3. Political-economic distortions
4. Geographic disparities
5. Cumulative and circumstantial origins<sup>13</sup>"

*Mark, who is living in poverty in Parkdale, Toronto, says that poverty is not complex: "It's about working for less than minimum wage after the temporary employment agency, cheque-cashing company and government take their cut out of a full day's work" (Voices video).*

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<sup>12</sup> Bradshaw, T. K. (2007). Theories of Poverty and Anti-Poverty Programs in Community Development. *Community Development*, 38, 7-25.

<sup>13</sup> Montgomery County Family and Children First Council (2007). *On Community, Outcomes, Indicators and Strategies. Progress Report*. p56.

Policy and programs are shaped in response to the problem's diagnosis. Furthermore, relatively stable policy trajectories can indicate that society has in some way accepted the moral assumptions behind a distributional system.<sup>14</sup>

Not only can policy be an expression of what society considers to be important, it also reveals what it considers to be threatening to what is valued.

In the social policy arena, poverty is often defined as complex and deep rooted. Its complexity is comprised of various "intersecting and cumulative drivers -- from global economic trends, to local pay levels, from shifting labour markets to racism and other forms of social exclusion."<sup>15</sup> It is "linked to a complex and interconnected set of decisions – public policy decisions, private institutional and/or market decisions, and decisions made by individual citizens in their roles as homeowners/renters, consumers, employees and so forth."<sup>16</sup> The dynamic of these variables is constantly changing and as a result, the impact and experiences of poverty vary from person to person and place to place. Consequently, approaches focused on single remedies or strategies may be ineffective at reducing the levels and severity of poverty. Stakeholders from all sectors need to be engaged in the policy and practice of poverty reduction.

The impacts of poverty are either deprivation based, as in a lack of income, power, and access or based primarily in concepts of citizenry and rights. In this report, both of these approaches were used to describe the conditions of living in poverty in Niagara. Where possible, local indicators or proxies were used to convey local experiences, however, data gaps still exist. An example is comprehensive information about the use of local food banks.

*Tackling poverty requires that we recognize and respect the multi-dimensional aspects of poverty and its impacts, assuring that purpose and intent are constantly adjusting policy and practice accordingly.*

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<sup>14</sup> Doyal, L. and Gough, I. (1991). "A Theory of Human Need." New York: Guilford Press.

<sup>15</sup> Gardner, B., Lalani, N, and Plamadeala, C. (2010). *Comprehensive Community Initiatives: Lessons Learned, Potential and Opportunities Moving Forward*. Wellesley Institute. p.3 Available at: <http://www.wellesleyinstitute.com/blog/social-innovation-blog/comprehensive-community-initiatives-lessons-learned-potential-and-opportunities-moving-forward>

<sup>16</sup> Montgomery County, 2007.

As well, there is a time lag in most of the data available and so the picture presented for many of the measures reflects the story before the most recent economic downturn which began in the fall of 2008.

## Measures

The lived experience of people who live in poverty is difficult to convey and so proxies for the experience are used to communicate its impact. These measures reflect society's definition of wellness as connected to economic dimensions, such as income or social aspects, like cohesion. Measures can focus on positive provision or existence of variables. For example, the participation rates of voters or the proportion of the population with adequate income; conversely, the absence of variables is also highlighted in experiences of racism or the percentage of families living in inadequate housing. These aspects are important framing mechanisms for action including the development of social policy. An example of this occurred in the shift of poverty among seniors once it was recognized as a priority for Canadian social policy interventions in the late 70s.

However, caution is necessary when using any proxy to highlight experiences of poverty as it can mask the systemic, intense, and pervasive isolation and marginalization resulting from poverty. And so, conversations about poverty must recognize and respect the multi-dimensional aspects of poverty and its impacts assuring that purpose and intent are constantly adjusting policy and practice accordingly.

Although Canada has not established a formal poverty line, there are common tools that are used to measure poverty.

*One in five Canadians lived in poverty for at least one year between 2002 and 2007. This means that at some point between 2002 and 2007, 4.9 million Canadians lived in poverty (National Council of Welfare 2009).*

Four of the most commonly used methods are:<sup>17</sup>

### **Low-Income Cut Off (LICO)**

This measure was introduced in 1968 using 1961 Census data. It defines the proportion of the population that is worse off than the average household by analyzing expenditures on basic necessities.

A household that falls below the income cut off devotes 20 per cent or more than the average household would spend on basic necessities. This measure is most commonly used in Canada and is also used in this report when referring to households living in poverty.

### **Low-income Measure (LIM)**

The LIM was introduced in 1988, but presented in 1991 after Statistics Canada completed a review of low-income methods. It measures the proportion of Canadian families that have an after-tax annual income which is less than 50 per cent of the median Canadian income.

### **Market Basket Measure (MBM)**

As part of the intent to measure national child benefits, this measure was introduced in 2003 and developed to be used in conjunction with LICO and LIM. It resulted from consultations held by Human Resources and Development Canada with federal, provincial, and territorial groups. The cost of food, clothing/footwear, shelter, transportation and other household needs is included in this basket. The proportion of Canadian households whose income falls short of the cost of purchasing these items is defined as a low-income household.

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<sup>17</sup> Low, H (2008). *A General Overview of Income Measures: The Pros & Pitfalls of Poverty Measures*. 25 in 5 Network for Poverty Reduction. Available at: [www.25in5.ca/Poverty%20Measures\\_Harvey%20Low.ppt](http://www.25in5.ca/Poverty%20Measures_Harvey%20Low.ppt)

## Deprivation Index

A Deprivation Index is a list of necessities (items or activities) that are considered basic in relation to the standard of living in specific social and economic contexts. The “index is intended to distinguish the poor from the non-poor”<sup>18</sup> and includes dimensions of poverty, like exclusion, typically not captured when looking at income alone.

## Responses

Governments around the world have incorporated these measures into official anti-poverty strategies.

The focus of any strategy is linked to how the problem of poverty is understood or articulated. Social cohesion refers to a citizen or rights-based approach to poverty reduction through strategies intended to foster social inclusion or to fight discrimination.

Program and policy integration strategies recognize that often programs and services intended to assist people living in poverty may unintentionally act as barriers to prosperity. Participatory engagement is a key approach to many initiatives that build upon the notion that meaningful engagement contributes to sustainable and meaningful outcomes. Some of these and other common themes and strategies which span across countries and cultures have been summarized and outlined in the following chart:

*The Deprivation Index evolved from a unique partnership between Statistics Canada, the Government of Ontario, a community organization, and a policy think tank. The Ontario Material Deprivation Survey was conducted during the spring of 2009 and is used as the baseline for Ontario's poverty reduction report card. In the 2010 report card, the Province reported that in 2008, 12.5 per cent of Ontario children were lacking two or more basic necessities.*

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<sup>18</sup> Matern, R. Mendelson, M. and Oliphant, M. (2009). *Developing a Deprivation Index: The Research Process*. Daily Bread Food Bank and the Caledon Institute of Social Policy.

Introduction

Place	Strategy Details							
	Target Population or focus	Social Cohesion & Equality	Program and Policy Integration	Participatory Engagement	Housing	Income + Employment	Health Supports	Education & child development
European Union		✓	✓	✓				
Sweden	Seniors (the best place to grow old)	✓	✓			✓	✓	
United Kingdom	Lone parents, people with disabilities, minorities and older workers		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Ireland	Children	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
New Zealand	Children and Aboriginal	✓	✓	✓				
Quebec	Citizen engagement	✓		✓				
Newfoundland and Labrador	Coordination across government	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓
New Brunswick			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Nova Scotia	Children		✓	✓		✓		✓
Ontario	Children	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Hamilton	Children	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
Niagara	Neighbourhoods	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

## Niagara's Response

Niagara's collaborative approach to poverty reduction began in 2002 with the inception of Opportunities Niagara. This initiative was inspired by the work of Opportunities 2000 in Kitchener-Waterloo. Considered a trail builder community, Niagara began to mobilize cross sectoral work to address not only the urgent needs of individuals and families living in poverty, but also to facilitate comprehensive and collaborative strategies intended to attack the systemic underpinnings of poverty. Opportunities Niagara set the stage for local action.

In 2006, Niagara Regional Council directed Community Services and Public Health staff to provide a framework for understanding and action to tackle poverty in Niagara.

In 2007, Niagara Region Community Services and Public Health staff worked with Dr. Susan Arai and Rishia Burke to gather local information about poverty. The approach was focused on the generational impacts of poverty on child development and the negative impacts on the social determinants of health for adults.

The frameworks used to examine poverty and formulate recommendations in the report *A Legacy of Poverty? Addressing cycles of poverty and the impact on child health in Niagara Region*<sup>19</sup> were community impact, impact on the social determinants of health, experiences of powerlessness and social exclusion, and measures of poverty. Although the portion of families living below the Low-Income Cut Off (LICO) were lower in Niagara than Ontario, the report highlighted the implications of poverty as negatively impacting the social determinants of health for adults and the healthy development of children. Regional Council's endorsement of the *Legacy of Poverty* report acted as another catalyst for local learning and focused action.

*The Legacy of Poverty report provided local context and framed poverty as having four key elements: community impacts, impacts on the social determinants of health, experiences of powerlessness and social exclusion and measures of poverty.*

*The report provided four key recommendations:*

- *reduce poverty through advocacy*
- *ensure appropriate and flexible supports which address the broader determinants of health for adults living in poverty*
- *mitigate the negative effects of low-income on children and youth through programs and services*
- *monitor progress*

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<sup>19</sup> Arai, S. (2007). *Legacy of Poverty? Addressing Cycles of Poverty and the Impact on Child Health in Niagara Region*. Available at: [www.niagararegion.ca](http://www.niagararegion.ca)

## Principles and Pillars

Niagara's vision to increase prosperity for families living in poverty was in response to the four pillar recommendations in the *Legacy of Poverty* report.

These were to reduce poverty through advocacy; ensure appropriate and flexible supports which address the broader determinants of health for adults living in poverty; mitigate the negative effects of low-income on children and youth through programs and services and monitor progress.

*Targets are understood as a tool for action that sets a goal; the target can be a number or a vision.*

Because of Opportunities Niagara's prior work, Niagara Region was able to continue to use community development principles when implementing the four *Legacy of Poverty* recommendations.

A key component of community focused poverty reduction strategies includes comprehensive collaborative initiatives which bring together stakeholders from across sectors to target poverty in local places, including neighbourhoods. Community wide plans to reduce poverty builds on previous work and learning, connects existing poverty reduction efforts, and establishes goals and outcomes. When reviewing successful approaches, seven important elements emerge. These ingredients can be found in the principles that guided Niagara's Prosperity Initiatives and are:

*Local stakeholders recommended that poverty reduction must be community led.*

- a clear vision is developed and connected to strategies
- analysis of assets, gaps and needs starts at the community level
- action builds on existing synergies and naturally occurring opportunities
- incorporates an action-reflection-action cycle
- builds neighbourhood capacity by involving people in the process
- matches the pace of strategies with neighbourhood resources and capacity
- orchestrates action across sectors and strategies<sup>20, 21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Gardner, B., Lalani, N, and Plamadeala, C. (2010). Comprehensive Community Initiatives

<sup>21</sup> Kubisch, A.C., Auspos, P., Brown, P., and Dewar, T. (2010). Community Change Initiatives from 1990-2010: Accomplishments and Implications for Future Work. *Community Investments*. 22(1).

Although some communities have set a numeric target (e.g. 25 per cent reduction in 5 years) Niagara has not set a numeric target because this notion does not appear in the list of critical factors that contribute to successful comprehensive community initiatives.

Rather, a target is understood as a tool for action that sets a goal.<sup>22</sup> The goal can be articulated as a vision and as a plan to engage stakeholders to work across sectors and as a way to draw attention to gaps in resources. Setting this type of goal can mitigate against getting mired in the debate about definitions and measures, and recognizing the moral underpinnings that poverty, for any portion of our population, is unacceptable.

Besides philosophical debates, lack of resources can contribute to the lag between a commitment to act and implementation of strategies. In February 2008, the *Legacy of Poverty* report was summarized and presented to Niagara Regional Council. Niagara Region Community Services also sought approval to go the next step and explore how the report's recommendations could be implemented. The request to Council was positioned as taking advantage of an upcoming window of opportunity to annually reinvest \$1.5 million available because of social assistance restructuring. Restructuring was comprised of two major changes: municipalities would no longer be required to share in the costs of the Ontario Disability Support Program and the province would fund a new Ontario Child Benefit (OCB) which integrated the children's portion of benefits previously included with Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Programs entitlements. Seeing this as an open window to redirect savings into local poverty reduction initiatives, Niagara Regional Council decided to reinvest cost savings totaling \$1.5 million.

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<sup>22</sup> Levin-Epstein, J. and Lyons, W. (2009). "Target Practice: Lessons for Poverty Reduction." Centre for Law and Social Policy. Available at: <http://www.clasp.org/admin/site/publications/files/0453.pdf>

Local stakeholders recommended that poverty reduction must be community led. In order to facilitate this focus, Niagara Region contracted with a local agency, the Business Education Council (BEC) to act as the secretariat and convener for the initiative. The first task was to build a coalition of people interested in guiding the Region's actions and investments in poverty reduction.

In early 2009, stakeholders attended a community meeting where the Niagara Prosperity Initiatives Advisory Committee (NPIAC) was formed.

Recognizing that access to good housing, schools, useful contacts, and other benefits is "largely influenced by the community in which one is born, raised and currently resides"<sup>23</sup> Niagara Region used the principles and pillars to enhance local action by defining the spatial dimensions of poverty. The Neighbourhood Mapping Tool<sup>24</sup> acted as a catalyst for conversations about assets and barriers in each of the 74 local communities. It also highlighted that individuals and families living in poverty tend to live close to each other; poverty is concentrated in places and in segments of the population.

The principle of a neighbourhood approach is built on community development theory which espouses grassroots mobilization and engagement aimed at building a comprehensive approach to reducing poverty. Underlying these values is the goal of building and facilitating significant and sustainable impacts. The indicators used in the Mapping Tool not only were intended to paint a picture of the neighbourhood's level of distress, but more importantly to highlight the resources that could be marshaled for change. This approach recognizes the multidimensional contributors to poverty and its converse, prosperity.

*In Niagara, many collaborative community initiatives focused on increasing prosperity have grown.*

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<sup>23</sup> Montgomery County, 2007.

<sup>24</sup> Niagara Neighbourhood Mapping Tool. (2008). Available at: <http://www.becon.org/images/pdf/Niagara%20Region%20Mapping%202009-06-17.pdf>

Working to create prosperous neighbourhoods includes “leveraging assets and building on existing strengths as a way to address the challenges of high poverty neighbourhoods.”<sup>25</sup> Analysis of each neighbourhood was conducted against baseline measures of the municipality in which it is nested rather than the Niagara Region as a whole. Using this type of comparison highlights the continuum of distress rather than setting up dichotomous thinking that poverty is either present or absent. This tool was used to identify neighbourhoods in need of attention that include troubling conditions associated with poverty like poor health, low educational attainment, and disturbing outcomes for child development. It also guided the investment of Regional Council’s annual allotment of \$1.5 million.

In Niagara, many collaborative community initiatives focused on increasing prosperity have grown. It is not possible to include all of this important work here. The focus of this report is the work that originates from the Niagara Region’s response to the *Legacy of Poverty* report. The following sections of this report detail the Niagara Prosperity Initiative. Each of the report’s original recommendations have been updated with an overview of current information, local activities that have occurred since 2007 and key informant responses regarding next steps.

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<sup>25</sup> Montgomery County, 2007.

## Reduce poverty through advocacy

### Overview

Advocacy can be an effective strategy to change policy and their supporting belief systems. Many organizations and researchers have documented how the intersecting impacts of current policies and programs can bind people to poverty. In particular, disjointed approaches can unintentionally contribute to and reinforce marginalization and exclusion.

In a survey of Canadians regarding poverty reduction conducted by the National Council of Welfare, respondents overwhelmingly stated that “fighting poverty should be a higher government priority and that federal leadership is needed in developing an anti-poverty strategy. Respondents also stated that in order to assure stability, a commitment to reducing poverty, the vision, and its intended goals, must become government priorities. Better coordination across governments<sup>26</sup> was also seen as critically important. The survey also concluded that the current range of income security programs and services were important but not working as well as they should.<sup>27</sup> The momentum of concern urging a federal response toward reducing poverty has been growing provincially and locally. The recent Senate report, *In from the Margins*,<sup>28</sup> advocates for the federal government to lead the design and positive symbiotic function of income security programs.

*Recommendations in the Legacy of Poverty report included:*

- *strengthen advocacy for healthy public policy*
- *establish a Niagara-wide transportation system*
- *create ways to ensure the lived*

### Local activities

The Legacy of Poverty report outlines local advocacy activities as three imperatives: local mobilization, policy reform and inter municipal transportation. In response to these recommendations, Niagara Region worked with stakeholders to advocate by developing new, enhancing, and nurturing existing cross-sectoral local partnerships intended to increase prosperity in a coordinated and purposeful way.

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<sup>26</sup> National Council of Welfare, 2007. *Solving Poverty*.

<sup>27</sup> National Council of Welfare, 2007. *Solving Poverty*.

<sup>28</sup> The Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology (2009). *In From The Margins: A Call to Action on Poverty, Housing and Homelessness*. Available at: <http://www.parl.gc.ca/40/2/parlbus/commbus/senate/com-e/citi-e/rep-e/rep02dec09-e.pdf>

In 2008, in response to the *Legacy of Poverty* report, Niagara Regional Council worked with local stakeholders to develop an action plan. From this planning session emerged a commitment to seven strategies which addressed the urgent need of individuals and families living in poverty. At this session, the Region and stakeholders recognized that working together to increase prosperity requires a leading body. Opportunities Niagara was selected as the logical agency to undertake this work. Later that year, because Opportunities Niagara closed, the Region worked with stakeholders to call together a community of service providers to gather their advice on how to proceed. At this session, the Region was advised to select an agency, not directly mandated to serve individuals living in poverty, but convene existing and future community based efforts toward increasing prosperity. The Business Education Council was selected as the convening agency tasked with building collaborative approaches and facilitating the associated administrative tasks.

The primary goal was to establish and support a steering body comprised of individuals and organizations working to decrease poverty. Consequently, the Niagara Prosperity Initiatives Advisory Committee (NPIAC) was established. This committee is intended to be flexible and has maintained an open and fluid membership. The collectively developed and adopted mission is: collaboration between private, voluntary and public sectors to leverage existing resources and to develop new resources to address poverty at the neighbourhood level across Niagara. The goals to achieve this mission are:

1. Guide and direct investment on identified initiatives to alleviate poverty in all neighbourhoods across region
2. Advocate for change that will reduce and prevent poverty in communities
3. Develop and enhance collaborative relationships between stakeholders
4. Engage people living in poverty in meaningful ways to ensure that investments reflect need and accrued tangible, measurable improvements to those residents

The committee provided a regional structure to guide local investments and intended results. The committee has met 15 times to date. It has focused primarily on investing Regional Council's annual commitment of \$1.5 million in neighbourhoods in need of attention. As well, the NPIAC worked together to directly advocate for social assistance recipients to receive an additional \$100 food supplement from the province.

On January 27, 2010, NPIAC also decided to advocate for improved local public transportation. A letter from the NPIAC was sent to Niagara Regional Councillors in support of, and seeking endorsement of a regional transit service. The letter stated that in order to increase prosperity, Niagara residents must have access to services, education, and employment opportunities throughout the region. An affordable, reliable, and regular inter-municipal transit system was seen as a critical component needed to remove barriers, and assist residents with access to the larger community.

*More information about the progress made on the Legacy of Poverty report recommendation about advocacy can be found in the Measure our Progress section of this report.*

### **Now what?**

The following themes and recommendations related to advocacy emerged from key informant interviews<sup>29</sup> regarding the Niagara Prosperity Initiatives:

*Larger systemic issues remain intact (housing, transportation).* Continued and sustained attention must be given to the obvious, but tenacious barriers to prosperity which include unemployment, underemployment, and the role of supportive services like transportation, education, training, and child care. These policy areas are outside of local jurisdiction and so discussion with provincial and federal governments is imperative to making structural changes.

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<sup>29</sup> A small theoretical sample was selected to gather information from key informants and used to develop next steps regarding funding decisions, neighbourhood approach, service delivery, and general feedback regarding the Niagara Region's response to the "Legacy of Poverty" report recommendations.

*Reduce poverty through advocacy*

*Competition for resources is discouraging full collaboration which would benefit neighbourhoods.* Effective comprehensive community initiatives include multifaceted efforts that build personal networks, increase participation in community programs, and facilitate trusting and caring connections between people. As identified by Niagara stakeholders themselves, competition among and a lack of trust between local service organizations can discourage collaboration, further marginalizing people living in distressed neighbourhoods.

The current reality of scarce resources among non-profit and community groups is a serious impediment to the work of increasing prosperity. Advocacy should include a focus on increasing overall investments in Niagara in corresponding areas of priority identified at the neighbourhood level.

## Appropriate and flexible supports which address the broader determinants of health for adults

### Overview

“Canada spends less on cash benefits such as unemployment benefits and family benefits than most Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries. Partly as a result, taxes and transfers do not reduce inequality by as much as in many other countries. Furthermore, their effect on inequality has been declining over time.”<sup>30</sup>

Income inequality is strongly linked to the quality of social life as a primary determinant of health.<sup>31</sup> Income inequality is understood as the gap between high and low-income earners. This growing gap is a concern as the poor get poorer. The average low-income two parent family would need an additional \$9,400 a year just to bring their income *up to the poverty line*.<sup>32</sup> Female lone parent families would need an additional \$9,600 per year.<sup>33</sup> In 2007, for every dollar in the poorest 10 per cent of Canadian households, households in the highest tenth of the population had almost 12 times more. Since the federal government committed to end child poverty in 1989, the average income of the wealthiest families increased by 33 per cent over the past 18 years compared with only a 16 per cent increase in the poorest households.<sup>34</sup>

Despite periods of strong economic performance over the last 25 years, Canada’s poverty rates have not substantially changed. As a result, our social safety net has been criticized as “sticky enough to entrap but not strong enough to support”.<sup>35</sup>

Legacy of Poverty *report recommendations included:*

- *increase supports which enable people to stay in the workplace*
- *increase access to social supports*
- *facilitate volunteer opportunities*

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<sup>30</sup> Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2008), **Growing Unequal? : Income Distribution and Poverty in OECD Countries**

[www.oecd.org/els/social/inequality](http://www.oecd.org/els/social/inequality)

<sup>31</sup> Wilkinson, R. G. (1996). *Unhealthy Societies: The afflictions of inequality*. London: Routledge.

<sup>32</sup> LICO before tax used as the poverty line.

<sup>33</sup> Campaign 2000 (2009). 2009 Report Card on Child and Family Poverty in Canada 1989-2009. Available at:

<http://www.campaign2000.ca/reportCards/national/2009EnglishC2000NationalReportCard.pdf>

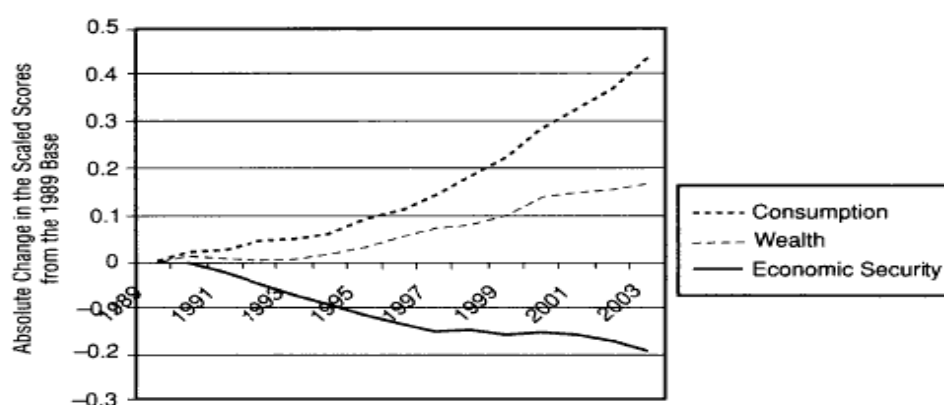
<sup>34</sup> Campaign 2000 (2009). 2009 Report Card on Child and Family Poverty in Canada 1989-2009. Available at: <http://www.campaign2000.ca>

<sup>35</sup> The Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology (2009). *In From The Margins: A Call to Action on Poverty, Housing and Homelessness*. P6.

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Policy frameworks, rationales and regulations intended to buffer Canadians from life's risks are formulated and operate independently and so are experienced as separate, siloed and often contradicting. Banting<sup>36</sup> highlighted the decline in economic security that has occurred over the last 15 years as evidenced by a reduction in income transfers geared to support Canadians hit by unemployment, illness or becoming a single parent.

Trend in Economic Security, 1989–2003



37

In 2007, about 3 million Canadians lived in poverty<sup>38</sup>. This represents 9.2 per cent of the population living in the ten provinces compared with 10.5 per cent in 2006; the 2007 rate is the lowest rate of low-income ever captured by Statistics Canada.

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Available at: <http://www.parl.gc.ca/40/2/parlbus/commbus/senate/com-e/citi-e/rep-e/rep02dec09-e.pdf>

<sup>36</sup> Banting, K. (2005). Do We Know Where We Are Going? The New Social Policy in Canada. *Canadian Public Policy*, 31(4), 421-429.

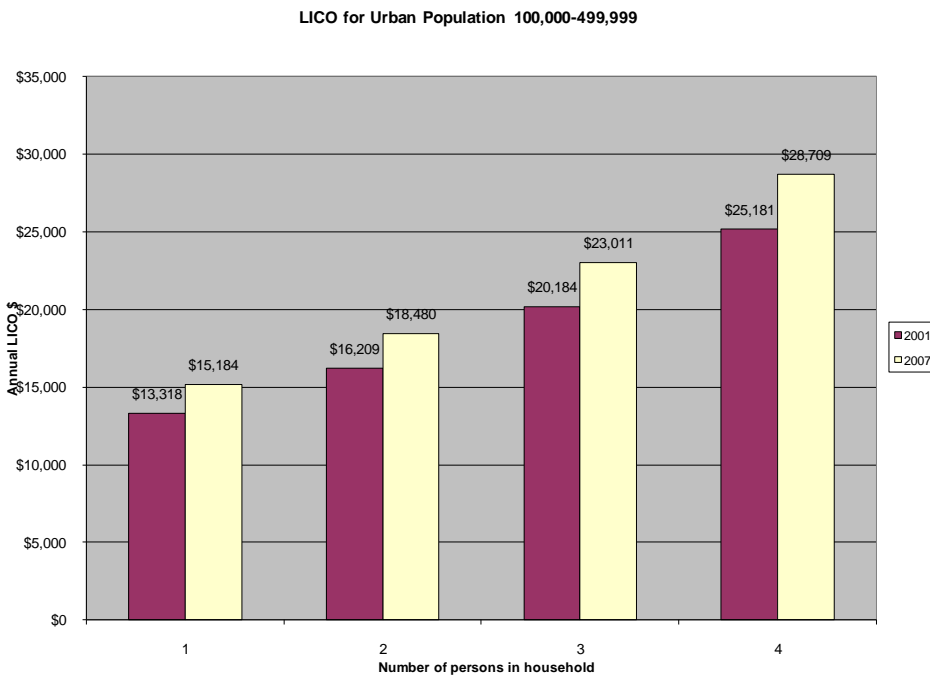
<sup>37</sup> Banting, K. (2005). Do We Know Where We Are Going? The New Social Policy in Canada. *Canadian Public Policy*, 31(4), 421-429.

<sup>38</sup> Statistics Canada (2007). *Income in Canada*. Available at: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/75-202-x/75-202-x2007000-eng.pdf>

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Over the six year period 2002-2007, one in five Canadians experienced low-income for at least one year.<sup>39</sup> About 40 per cent of the people living in poverty remained in poverty for one year, 21 per cent for two years.<sup>40</sup> However, approximately 11 per cent or 529,000 people remained poor for all six years.<sup>41</sup>

The LICO for Niagara changed from 2001 to 2006 as follows:



*In Niagara, the percentage of households living below LICO decreased slightly from 12.7 per cent in 2001 to 12 per cent in 2006.*

42

Based on 2006 census data, approximately 14.7 per cent<sup>43</sup> of Ontarians were living below the after tax LICO up from 14.3 per cent<sup>44</sup> in 2001. In Niagara, the percentage of households<sup>45</sup> living in poverty decreased slightly from 12.7 per cent in 2001 to

<sup>39</sup> Statistics Canada, 2007. *Income in Canada*.

<sup>40</sup> Statistics Canada, 2007. *Income in Canada*.

<sup>41</sup> Statistics Canada, 2007. *Income in Canada*.

<sup>42</sup> National Council of Welfare, Spring 2006.

<sup>43</sup> Statistics Canada (2007). 2006 Census Data, *Community Profiles*. Available at: <http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2006/dp-pd/prof/92-591/index.cfm?Lang=E>

<sup>44</sup> National Council of Welfare. Spring 2006.

<sup>45</sup> Statistics Canada defines the incidence of low-income as the proportion of economic families or unattached individuals aged 15 and older below the low-income cut off. Available at: [www.statscan.ca](http://www.statscan.ca)

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12 per cent in 2006, but varied greatly across the region and across family composition.<sup>46</sup> The local impact of the recent economic downturn on these figures is yet unavailable. However, recessions have generally had a long term negative and intensifying impact for low-income Canadians. Niagara began to experience a higher than provincial unemployment rate in the second quarter of 2008.<sup>47</sup> Job loss has continued at a steady rate in the manufacturing and goods-producing sectors.<sup>48</sup>

These broader economic conditions tend to amplify systemic mechanisms that either enhance or hinder prosperity. Based on trend analysis, it is estimated that during this downturn, the Canadian poverty rate increased from 9.2 per cent in 2007 to 11.7 per cent in 2009.<sup>49</sup> This increase means that from 2007 to 2009 potentially 160,000 more children fell into poverty moving about 797,000 Canadian children below the poverty line.

Canadian families struggled as the economy faltered and between September 2008 and September 2009.<sup>50</sup> Unable to make ends meet, the number of Canadians using food banks increased by 18 per cent representing the “the largest year-over-year increase on record.”<sup>51</sup>

Between the third quarter of 2008 and 2009, the average debt per Canadian household grew by 5.7 per cent.<sup>52</sup> During the same period, the number of bankruptcies rose by 36.4 per cent.<sup>53</sup>

*During the economic downturn, the poverty rate increased from 9.2 per cent in 2007 to 11.7 per cent in 2009. This increase means that from 2007 to 2009 potentially 160,000 more children fell into poverty, moving about 797,000 Canadian children below the poverty line.*

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<sup>46</sup> Before tax LICO was used here to allow a comparison with 2001 data. After tax LICO for the Region is 8.4% and for Ontario is 11.1%.

<sup>47</sup> April-June 2008 Unemployment in Niagara 7.1% compared to Ontario’s rate of 6.5%

<sup>48</sup> Niagara Workforce Planning Board – Change in Employment by Industry Cluster. January 2009

<sup>49</sup> Pasma, C. (2010). *Bearing the Brunt: How the 2008-2009 Recession Created Poverty for Canadian Families*. Citizens for Public Justice. at:

<http://www.cpj.ca/en/content/bearing-brunt>

<sup>50</sup> Pasma, C. (2010). *Bearing the Brunt: How the 2008-2009 Recession Created Poverty for Canadian Families*. Citizens for Public Justice. Available at: [www.cpj.ca](http://www.cpj.ca)

<sup>51</sup> Pasma, C. (2010). *Bearing the Brunt: How the 2008-2009 Recession Created Poverty for Canadian Families*. Citizens for Public Justice. Available at: [www.cpj.ca](http://www.cpj.ca)

<sup>52</sup> Pasma, C. (2010). *Bearing the Brunt: How the 2008-2009 Recession Created Poverty for Canadian Families*. Citizens for Public Justice. Available at: [www.cpj.ca](http://www.cpj.ca)

<sup>53</sup> Pasma, C. (2010). *Bearing the Brunt: How the 2008-2009 Recession Created Poverty for Canadian Families*. Citizens for Public Justice. Available at: [www.cpj.ca](http://www.cpj.ca)

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## **Training and Employment**

It is anticipated that in the next decade, 70 per cent of all new jobs will need a trade certificate, college diploma or university degree. In Canada, undergraduate tuition fees have risen 34 per cent since 1995, while some professional programs have risen by much more.<sup>54</sup>

Formal training and education is a key support in helping low wage earners prepare for positions that require higher skills. When compared with average OECD investments in training programs for adults, Canada spends a smaller portion of our gross domestic product (GDP) leaving training primarily as the employer's responsibility.<sup>55</sup> This gap can advantage workers with already high levels of training and access to education further disadvantaging low wage and precariously employed workers with low levels of training.

*In 2001, 21.8 per cent of Niagara's population had not completed high school compared with 23.9 per cent in 2006 – a 2.1 per cent increase.*

About 26 per cent of Canadians aged 25-54 years old who were not high school graduates lived in poverty for at least one year between 2002 and 2007 compared with 18 per cent who had completed high school.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Campaign 2000 (2009). *2009 Report Card on Child and Family Poverty in Canada 1989-2009*. Available at: <http://www.campaign2000.ca/reportCards/national/2009EnglishC2000NationalReportCard.pdf>

<sup>55</sup> Banting, K. (2005). *Do We Know Where We Are Going?*

<sup>56</sup> Statistics Canada, 2007. *Income in Canada*.

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Among Canadians aged 25-54 years old, a university degree reduced the incidence of living in poverty for at least a year during the six year period to 11 per cent.<sup>57</sup> The significant impact of education on reducing the risk of poverty continues across age groups and for seniors with a high school diploma or less, about 13 per cent lived in low income at some point between 2002 and 2007.<sup>58</sup> This compares with only 5 per cent of seniors with a university degree.<sup>59</sup>

When compared with the rest of Ontario, more of Niagara's working age population has completed high school.<sup>60</sup> Across Niagara, the portion of the population without a high school diploma varies from 19.5 per cent in West Lincoln to 6.9 per cent in Pelham. An indication of the impact of this outcome is Niagara's overrepresentation in the lower two literacy levels, and corresponding underrepresentation in the highest literacy level.<sup>61</sup> Over 59 per cent of adults in Niagara do not meet provincial literacy expectations compared with 40 per cent of adults in Ontario.<sup>62</sup>

Low educational attainment or inadequate training can increase low wage earners vulnerability to labour market shifts. During this recession, low wage earners were the most likely to lose their jobs, however the portion of precarious jobs increased during this period.

*In 2001 Niagara's unemployment rate was 5.8 per cent. In 2006, Niagara's unemployment rate increased to 6.0 per cent.*

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<sup>57</sup> Statistics Canada, 2007. *Income in Canada*.

<sup>58</sup> Statistics Canada, 2007. *Income in Canada*.

<sup>59</sup> Statistics Canada, 2007. *Income in Canada*.

<sup>60</sup> Statistics Canada, 2007. 2006 Canadian Census Data. *Community Profiles, Education Attainment % of Age Demographic with a High School Certificate or Equivalent*.

<sup>61</sup> Early Years Niagara (2009). *Niagara Children's Charter Enacted*. Available at: <http://www.earlyyearsniagara.org/assets/Uploads/Pdfs/Reports/NiagaraChildrensCharterEnactedweb6.pdf>

<sup>62</sup> Niagara Best Start Network (2008). *Integrated Community Plan 2007-08*. Available at: <http://www.earlyyearsniagara.org/assets/Uploads/Pdfs/Ministry-Reports/2007-2008/NiagaraBestStartNetworkIntegratedCommunityPlanForWeb-02-01-08.pdf>

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Approximately 1 in 4 workers earning \$10 or less lost their jobs and full-time permanent jobs were replaced with part-time temporary work.<sup>63</sup>

Even with the rise in unemployment across the country, only 51 per cent of workers were able to access Employment Insurance<sup>64</sup> as compared with the 80 per cent coverage rate for workers in 1990.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, changes to eligibility rules tend to reinforce gender bias as more male than female workers qualify for EI benefits.<sup>66</sup> Unemployed workers receiving EI were most likely living in poverty unless there was another earner in the household. Average benefit levels have been reduced to 55 per cent of earnings down from 75 per cent in 1990.<sup>67</sup>

*From August 2008 to August 2009, Niagara experienced a 71.1 per cent increase in employment insurance beneficiaries.*

In 2005, the unemployment rate across Niagara's neighbourhoods ranged from 7.4 per cent in Port Colborne to 3.5 per cent in Lincoln. However, Niagara's economy began to show signs of distress before the rest of the country. Recently, the Region's unemployment rate not only exceeded the national rate but also the City of Hamilton's. In 2008, unemployment in Hamilton was 6 per cent compared with 7.8 per cent in Niagara; in 2009 unemployment in Hamilton was 8.4 per cent compared with 10.1 per cent in Niagara.<sup>68</sup> From August 2008 to August 2009, Niagara experienced a 71.1 per cent increase in EI beneficiaries rising from 6,060 to 10,370.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Pasma, C. (2010). *Bearing the Brunt: How the 2008-2009 Recession Created Poverty for Canadian Families*. Citizens for Public Justice. Available at: [www.cpj.ca](http://www.cpj.ca)

<sup>64</sup> Pasma, C. (2010). *Bearing the Brunt: How the 2008-2009 Recession Created Poverty for Canadian Families*. Citizens for Public Justice. Available at: [www.cpj.ca](http://www.cpj.ca)

<sup>65</sup> Campaign 2000, (2009). *2009 Report Card on Child and Family Poverty in Ontario: From Promise to Reality-Recession Proofing Ontario Families*. Available at: <http://www.campaign2000.ca/Ontario/reportcards/2009OntarioReportCardEnglish.pdf>

<sup>66</sup> Campaign 2000, 2009. *2009 Report Card on Child and Family Poverty in Ontario*.

<sup>67</sup> Campaign 2000, 2009. *2009 Report Card on Child and Family Poverty in Ontario*.

<sup>68</sup> Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2010.

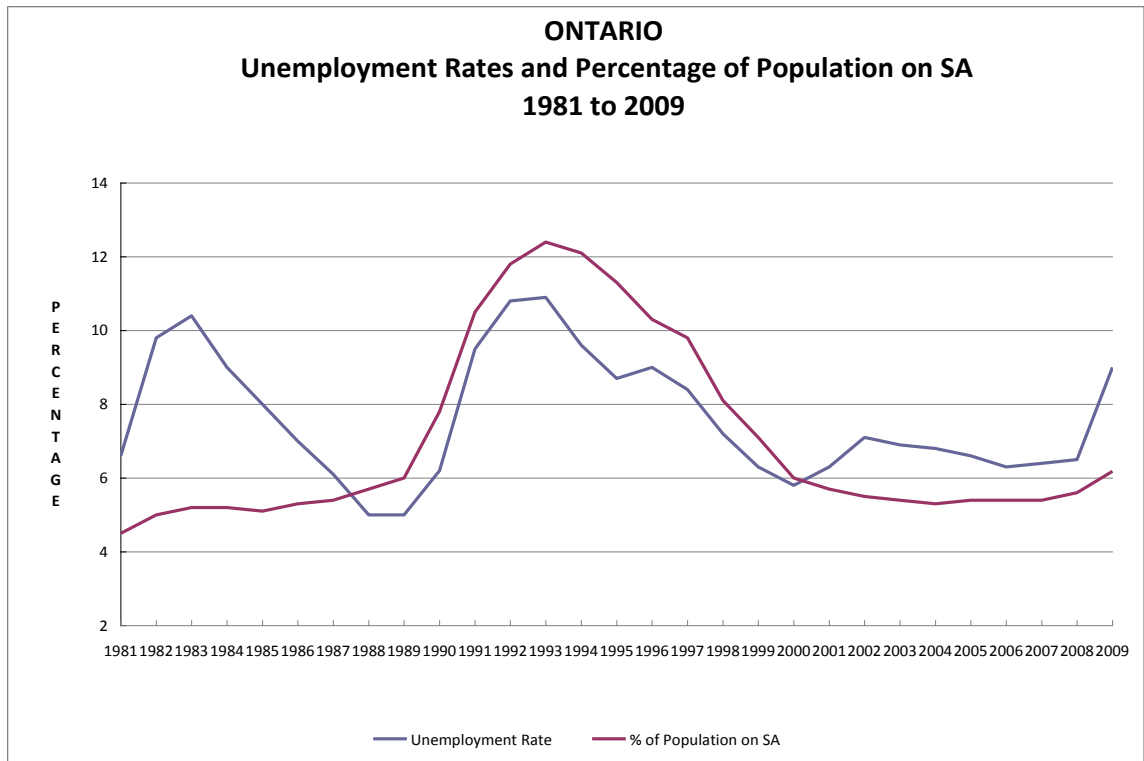
<sup>69</sup> Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2010.

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	Canada	Hamilton	Niagara
2008	6.3%	6%	7.8%
2009	8.6%	8.4%	10.1%

70

According to current estimates, 500,000 Canadian workers have exhausted their EI benefits and are still unable to find new work.<sup>71</sup> As a result, many are forced to apply for social assistance. Over the last 20 years, social assistance rates have tended to mirror overall economic trends.<sup>72</sup>



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<sup>70</sup> Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2010.

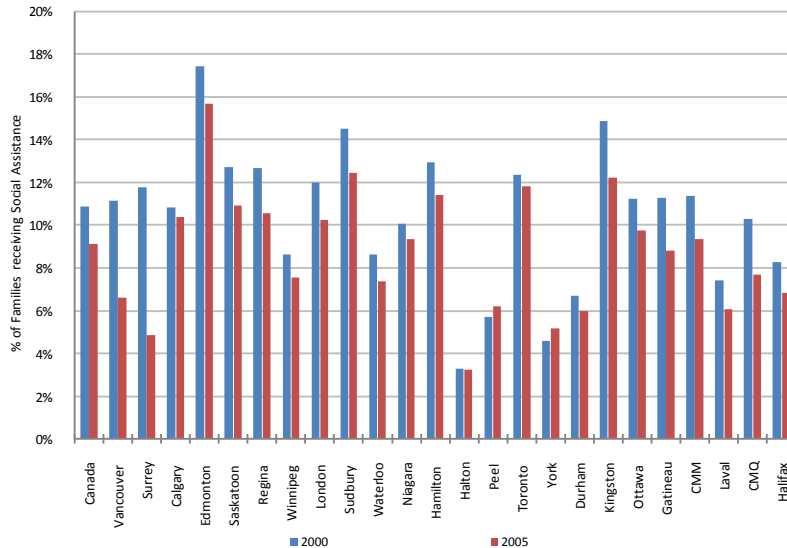
<sup>71</sup> Pasma, C. (2010). *Bearing the Brunt: How the 2008-2009 Recession Created Poverty for Canadian Families*. Citizens for Public Justice. Available at: [www.cpj.ca](http://www.cpj.ca)

<sup>72</sup> Stapelton, J. (2010) "Poverty Reduction at the Crossroads: Where Do We Go From Here?" May 16, 2010 presentation, Hamilton, Ontario.

<sup>73</sup> Stapelton, J. (2010) "Poverty Reduction at the Crossroads: Where Do We Go From Here?" May 16, 2010 presentation, Hamilton, Ontario.

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During the economic growth period from 2000 to 2005, most social assistance rates declined across the country.



The number of Niagara families receiving social assistance decreased by 0.7 per cent between 2000 and 2005. The number of Ontario Works cases in Niagara increased by 40 per cent from October 2008 to May 2011.

74

As detailed in the chart below, Niagara Region experienced similar trends and the percentage of total families receiving social assistance dropped from 10 per cent in 2000 to 9.3 per cent in 2005.<sup>75</sup>

Canadian Families Receiving Social Assistance				Niagara Families Receiving Social Assistance			
2000		2005		2000		2005	
% of families	# of families	% of families	# of families	% of families	# of families	% of families	# of families
10.9%	1,444,550	9.1%	1,276,020	10%	18,460	9.3%	17,630

76

Although fewer families were reliant on social assistance, a shrinking job market and loose safety net shifted this trend.

<sup>74</sup> Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2010.

<sup>75</sup> Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2010.

<sup>76</sup> Niagara Region Community Services, (2009). Available at: <http://www.niagararegion.ca/living/saeo/reports/pdf/COM%2015-2009%20Increased%20Demand%20for%20Social%20Assistance-Additional%20Staff%20Required.pdf>

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The portion of Niagara's families receiving EI rose from 12.9 per cent in 2000 to 14.5 per cent in 2005.<sup>77</sup>

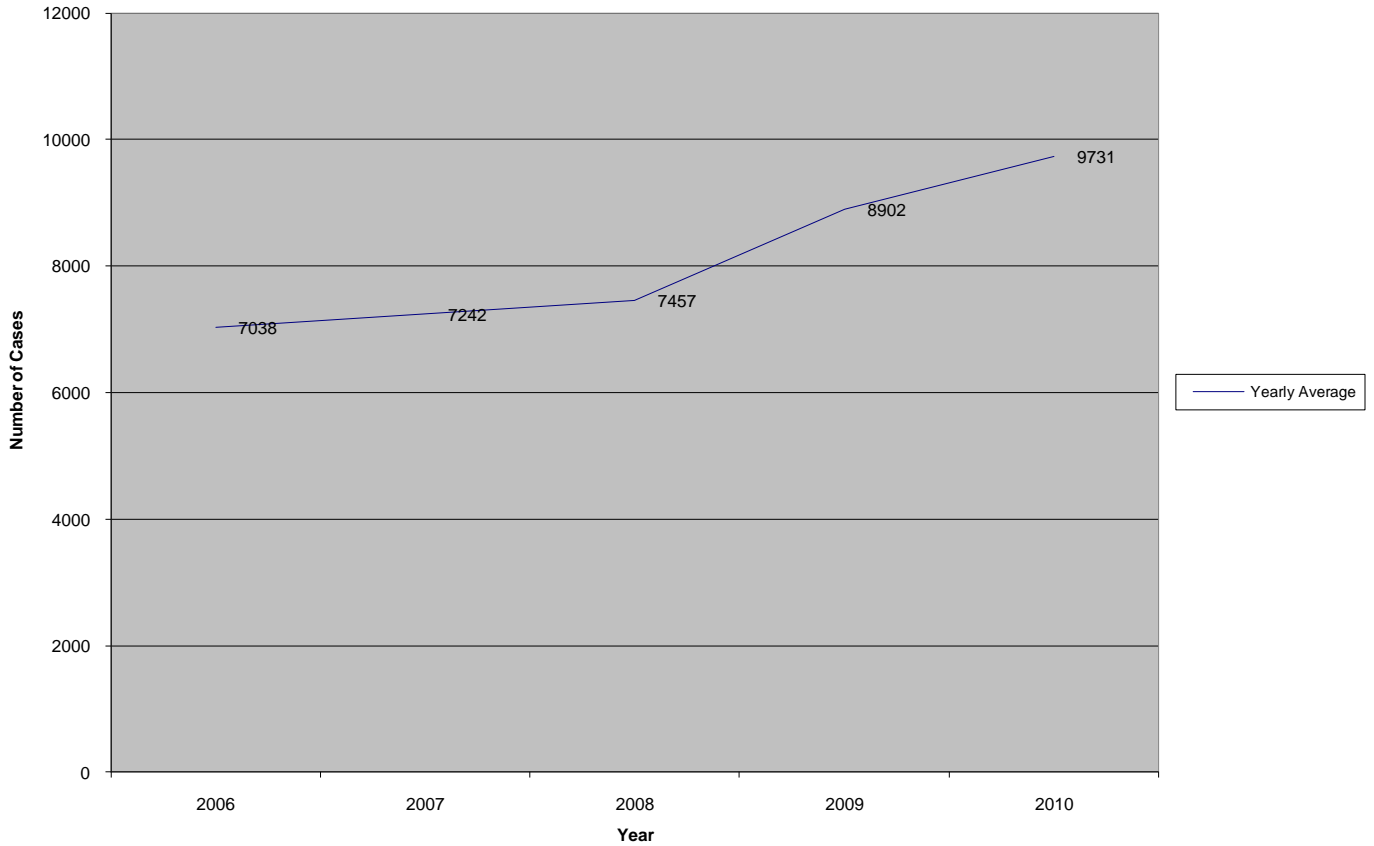
Since 2005, Niagara lost approximately 7,000 jobs or experienced a 23 per cent employment decline in the manufacturing sector.<sup>78</sup> As EI benefits were exhausted, the corresponding trend was an increase in social assistance cases beginning in 2006.

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<sup>77</sup> Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2010.

<sup>78</sup> Niagara Region Community Services. (2009)

Yearly Average Number of Cases



79

Many researchers have documented the inadequacy of social assistance rates. Individuals and families relying on social assistance do not have enough income to cover the cost of healthy food and decent shelter. This gap can further isolate and marginalize people increasing their vulnerability to the negative effects of poverty like exploitation and illness.

This gap widened over time and in 2000, social assistance covered approximately 55.6 per cent of basic needs compared to 50.9 per cent in 2005.<sup>80</sup>

In Canada, the beneficial impact of work as a mitigating force against poverty was found to be more significant than in other OECD countries. “While 2/3 of Canadians living in households where no one works are poor, the presence of one working person

*A study using the Market Basket Measure of poverty in 2007 estimated that 31 per cent of families were considered working poor families and 43 per cent of children lived in working poor households (National Council of Welfare, Poverty Profile 2007).*

<sup>79</sup> Niagara Region Community Services, 2010.

<sup>80</sup> Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2010.

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lessens the poverty rate to 21 per cent, while the presence of two or more persons lessens it much further to only four per cent.”<sup>81</sup>

In Ontario, the minimum wage increased from \$6.85 in 2001 to \$10.25 in 2010 benefiting low wage workers. However, a troubling feature of contemporary economic conditions is the number of working people who don't earn enough money to lift them out of poverty. The working poor are defined as households<sup>82</sup> who receive less than half their income from government transfers and whose income is below the after-tax Low-Income Measure (LIM). In 2005, 1,004,680 or 7.2 per cent of Canadian families were defined as "working poor".<sup>83</sup> In 2007, 194,000 Canadian families living in poverty reported having at least 49-52 weeks of work, the equivalent of a full year of work.<sup>84</sup>

Among single working poor individuals, about 28 per cent worked full-time, with full year earnings on average of \$10,400<sup>85</sup>. In Niagara, approximately 1/3 of employed Ontario Works participants find seasonal and/or part-time work, but this type of employment has not typically provided enough income for independence from social assistance.<sup>86</sup> A single person would need to earn approximately \$11.43 per hour to exit from OW, if there was no other household income such as family support.

Niagara families continue to earn less than Ontario's average family. In 2006, median income for all census families was \$64,965 compared to Ontario's median of \$69,156.<sup>87</sup> This is up slightly from 2001 when the median income was \$56,787 in Niagara compared to \$61,024 in Ontario. While slightly less than

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<sup>81</sup> Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2010, p 17

<sup>82</sup> Households are defined as economic families (couple families, lone-parent families and non-family persons). Government transfers include: Employment Insurance, Old Age Security, Net Federal Supplements, Canada and Quebec Pension Plan, Canada Child Tax Benefit, Goods and Services Tax Credit, Harmonized Sales Tax Credit, Workers' Compensation, Social Assistance, Provincial Refundable Tax Credits and Family Benefits.

<sup>83</sup> Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2010

<sup>84</sup> National Council of Welfare, 2007. *Solving Poverty*.

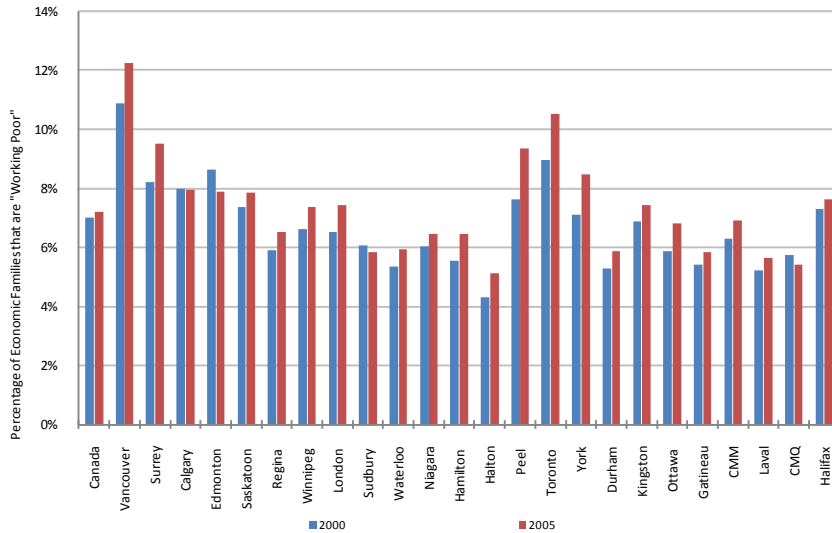
<sup>85</sup> National Council of Welfare, 2007. *Solving Poverty*.

<sup>86</sup> Early Years Niagara, 2009.

<sup>87</sup> Statistics Canada, 2006 Community Profiles. Available at:  
<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2006/dp-pd/prof/92-591/index.cfm?Lang=E>

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the national average, Niagara’s local trend of working poor families mirrors that of most large cities.



Although Niagara’s median income continues to fall short of the provincial average, it increased by 13 per cent from 2001 to 2006 compared with a 12 per cent increase for Ontario.

88

The portion of Niagara families considered working poor increased from 5.8 per cent in 1990 to 6.5 per cent in 2005<sup>89</sup>. Details are as follows:

Year	Number of Niagara Families	Percentage of Niagara Families
1990	9,560	5.8%
1995	8,080	4.6%
2001	11,080	6%
2005	12,200	6.5%

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Living in poverty affects individuals in different ways and research acknowledges that some groups experience persistent and deeper levels of poverty.<sup>91</sup> Some segments of the population are at a higher risk of living in poverty.

<sup>88</sup> Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2010.

<sup>89</sup> Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2010.

<sup>90</sup> Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2010.

<sup>91</sup> Statistics Canada (2009). *Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics*. Available at:

<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/cgi-bin/imdb/p2SV.pl?Function=getSurvey&SDDS=3889&lang=en&db=imdb&adm=8&dis=2>

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Women, immigrants, people with disabilities and Aboriginal people are more likely to be marginalized; that is they are more likely to be “systematically excluded from meaningful participation in economic, social, political, cultural, and other forms of human activity in their communities and thus are denied the opportunity to fulfill themselves as human beings.”<sup>92</sup> Racism, violence, and exploitation galvanize exclusion creating the right conditions for poverty to take a firm and lasting hold. Poverty is especially effective at depriving these groups of “rights and freedoms that others have.”<sup>93</sup>

## **Women**

Researchers and advocates have identified the feminization of poverty as a concern because women are at higher risk of deep and sustained poverty. Women working full-time throughout the year earned just 71 per cent of the average wages earned by men and were more likely to be in low wage work in 2007.<sup>94</sup> More single, working age women (35.1 per cent) compared with men (29.7 per cent) lived in poverty and had incomes that were respectively on average 58 per cent to 55 per cent of the LICO.<sup>95</sup> In 2008, 35 per cent of all jobs were classified as non-standard; they were either part-time, temporary, contract or self-employment work. In 2008, 4 out of 10 women, in contrast to 3 out of 10 men, were in non-standard work.<sup>96</sup> Women tend to be over-represented in this type of precarious service sector work, reinforcing not only the “sex-segmented”<sup>97</sup> but also the “dual labor market”<sup>98</sup> which traps vulnerable groups to compete at the lower end of the labour market.

*The percentage of lone parent families in Niagara grew by 1.2 per cent from 2001 to 2006. In 2006, 38 per cent of all LICO families were female-headed, lone parent families.*

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<sup>92</sup> The Donald Gow Lecture (April 24, 2009). *Segal Speech*.

<sup>93</sup> Young, I. M. (1990). *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. NJ: Princeton University Press. P54

<sup>94</sup> Campaign 2000 (2009). *2009 Report Card on Child and Family Poverty in Canada 1989-2009*.

<sup>95</sup> National Council of Welfare, 2007. *Solving Poverty*.

<sup>96</sup> Campaign 2000, 2009. *2009 Report Card on Child and Family Poverty in Canada 1989-2009*.

<sup>97</sup> Fraser, N. (1989). *Unruly Practices. Power, Discourse and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. P 146

<sup>98</sup> Fraser, N., 1989.

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Of particular concern is the portion of female headed households with children under 12 years old living in poverty. The risk of poverty is 4 times higher for children in female lone parent families than for children in two parent families.<sup>99</sup> Among the working poor, 23.6 per cent of lone female-headed households and 10.8 per cent of lone male-headed households lived in poverty.<sup>100</sup>

Across Canada, poverty rates for female lone parent families had dropped to a record low from 311,000 families in 1996 to 135,000 families in 2007.<sup>101</sup> A decreasing trend in Niagara mirrors the national trend. In Niagara, 20,200 families or 16.37 per cent are headed by lone parents. Of these, approximately 16,205, or 80 per cent, are female-headed. Although fewer of these households were below LICO, the incidence remains alarmingly high even when compared with the overall portion of households living in poverty.

*In 2006, 24.3 per cent of Niagara's LICO families were Aboriginal families. This represents a 0.9 per cent decrease since 2001. However, employment rates for Aboriginal families rose by 2.3 per cent between 2001 and 2006.*

	<b>Year</b>	<b>All LICO Households</b>	<b>Lone Female Headed LICO Households</b>
Canada	2001	16.2%	48%
	2006	15.3%	42.5%
Niagara	2001	12.7%	45.7%
	2006	12%	38%

<sup>102</sup>

## **Aboriginal People**

Three percent of Canadians identify as Aboriginal. In 2006, the portion of Aboriginal people living in Niagara increased slightly from 5,115 in 2001 to 6,930 representing approximately 1.7 per cent of the total population<sup>103</sup>.

<sup>99</sup> Campaign 2000, 2009. *2009 Report Card on Child and Family Poverty in Ontario*.

<sup>100</sup> National Council of Welfare, 2007. *Solving Poverty*.

<sup>101</sup> National Council of Welfare, 2007. *Solving Poverty*.

<sup>102</sup> Statistics Canada, 2006 Community Profiles. Available at:

<http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2006/dp-pd/prof/92-591/index.cfm?Lang=E>

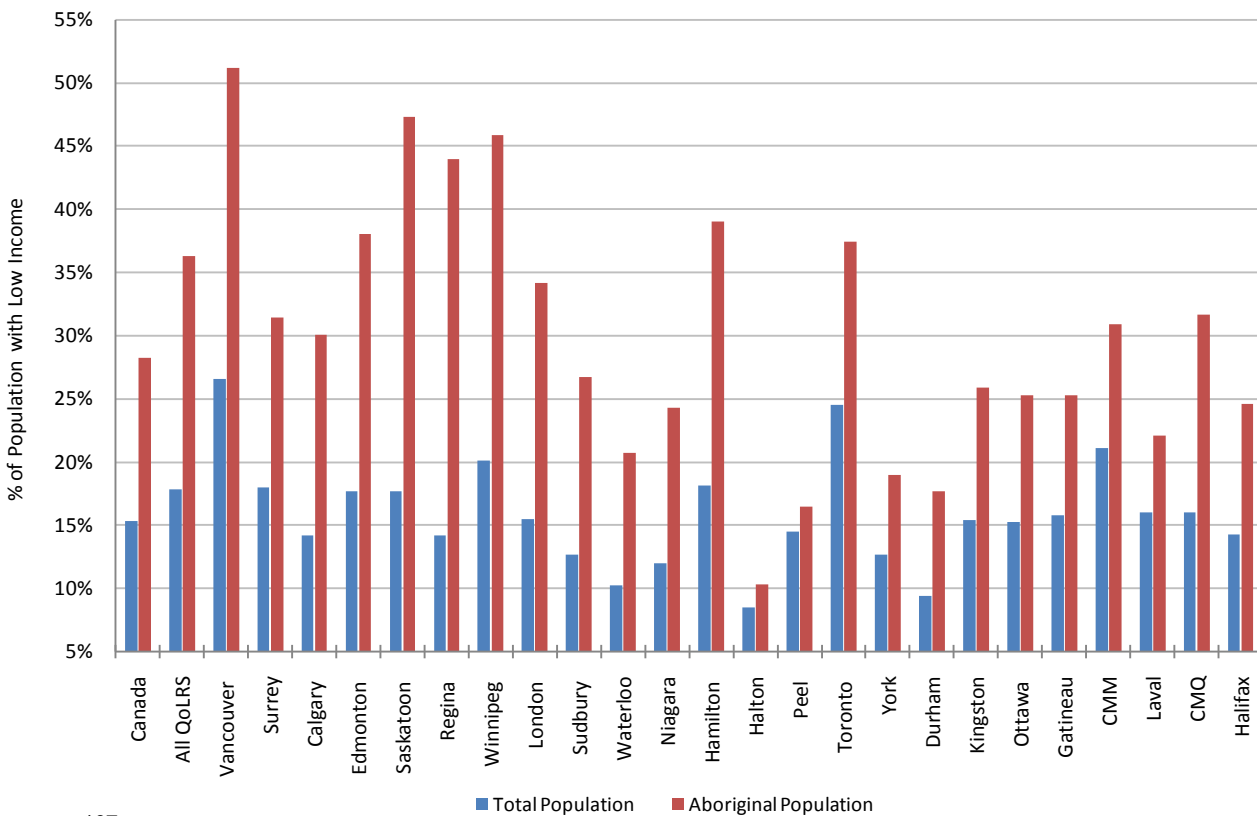
<sup>103</sup> Federation of Canadian Municipalities

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Numerous studies have identified Aboriginal people’s experience of systematic discrimination as “pervasive and endemic.”<sup>104</sup> Comparatively speaking Aboriginal people have a higher proportion of the population living in poverty.<sup>105</sup> Details regarding LICO and unemployment among Aboriginal people are as follows:

	Canada				Niagara			
	% LICO		% Unemployment		% LICO		% Unemployment	
	Total Population	Aboriginal Population	Total Population	Aboriginal Population	Total Population	Aboriginal Population	Total Population	Aboriginal Population
2001	16.2%	34.2%	7.4%	19.1%	12.7%	25.2%	5.8%	9.8%
2006	15.3%	28.2%	6.6%	14.8%	12%	24.3%	6.1%	12.1%

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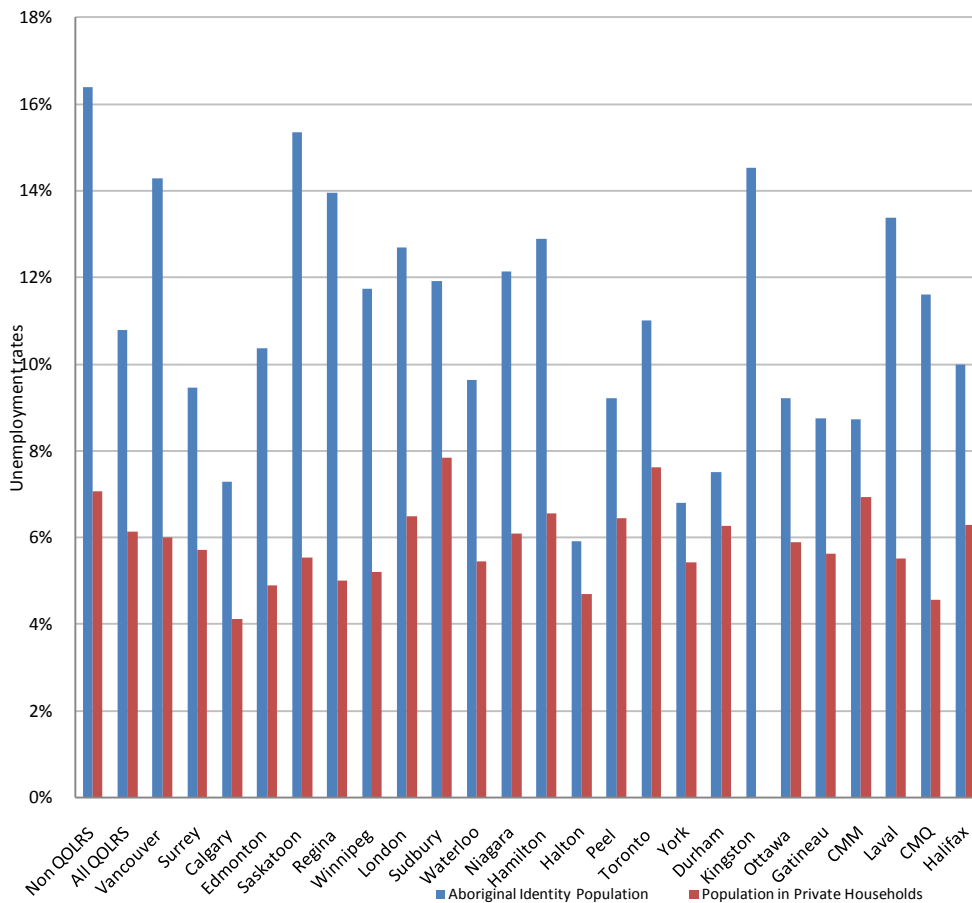
107

<sup>104</sup> National Council of Welfare. (2007) *First nations, Métis and Inuit Children and Youth: Time to Act.*

<sup>105</sup> National Council of Welfare, 2007. *Time to Act.*

<sup>106</sup> Statistics Canada, 2006 Community Profiles. Available at: [www12.statcan.gc.ca](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca)

<sup>107</sup> Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2010.



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## People experiencing mental illness

Poverty and mental illness can share an iterative relationship: people suffering from mental illness are often living in poverty and people living in poverty are often, consequently, suffering from a mental illness. Stigma or discrimination against people with a mental illness can create barriers to employment and education. As well, the urgency of health concerns often overshadows attention to employment or education.<sup>109</sup>

<sup>108</sup> Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2010.

<sup>109</sup> Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario (2007). *Backgrounder: Poverty and Mental Illness*. Available at: <http://www.ontario.cmha.ca/backgrounders.asp?cID=25341>

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This can substantially lower income levels, decrease accessibility to essential resources such as adequate housing and other basic needs ultimately leading to poverty.<sup>110</sup>

The experience of poverty creates accessibility barriers as well. Those living in poverty cannot access adequate resources, which often creates high levels of stress, as well as physical and emotional strain contributing to depression, anxiety, and other mental illnesses.<sup>111</sup> The stress and strain experienced by families living in poverty can also affect the mental health of children as constant distress and struggle negatively affects their emotional and behavioral health.<sup>112</sup>

According to the Canadian Mental Health Association, one in five Ontarians within a given year experience mental illness. In Ontario, 275,317 people with a serious mental illness are unemployed.<sup>113</sup> Approximately 35 per cent of ODSP clients have a mental illness.<sup>114</sup>

*In 2006, 18.7 per cent of Niagara's LICO families were those with disabilities. In 2006, 12.1 per cent of people with disabilities were unemployed.*

## **People with disabilities**

In Ontario, 21 per cent of persons with disabilities live in poverty.<sup>115</sup> People with disabilities are also more at risk of poverty. Stigma often limits access to employment and working people with disabilities tend to earn less.<sup>116</sup> About one in five people with a disability work for low pay<sup>117</sup>. Often, ill health is a barrier to education.<sup>118</sup> These factors mean that people with disabilities are three times more likely to be poor than the general population and more likely to be receiving social assistance.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario, 2007.

<sup>111</sup> Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario, 2007.

<sup>112</sup> Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario (2008). *Policy Position: Strategies for Reducing Poverty in Ontario*. Available at:

[http://www.ontario.cmha.ca/policy\\_positions.asp?cID=25635](http://www.ontario.cmha.ca/policy_positions.asp?cID=25635)

<sup>113</sup> Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario, 2007.

<sup>114</sup> Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services, 2006.

<sup>115</sup> Canadian Council on Social Development, Urban Poverty Data

<sup>116</sup> Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario, 2007.

<sup>117</sup> Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario, 2007.

<sup>118</sup> Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario, 2007.

<sup>119</sup> Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario, 2007.

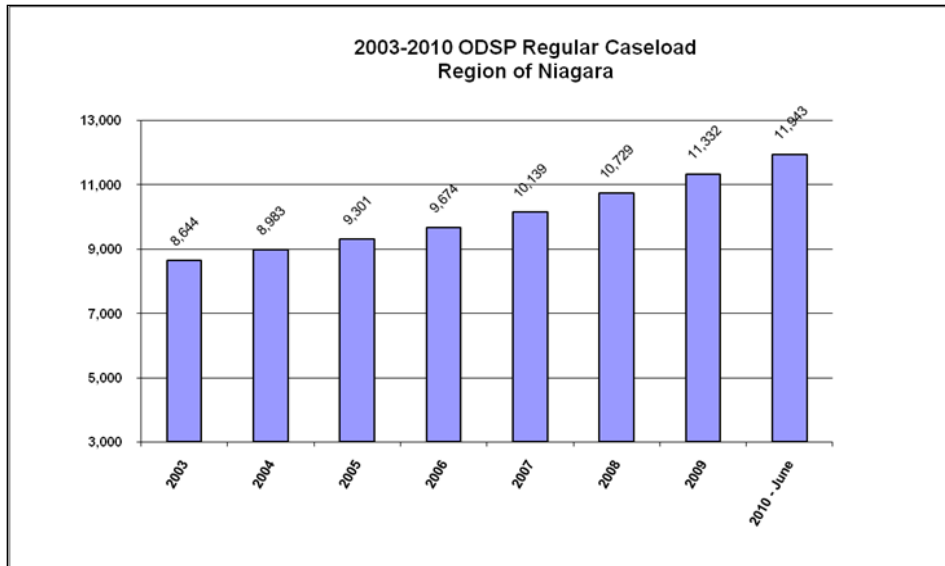
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Furthermore, disability-related expenses, such as the cost of medication, services, and other aides are not factored into the calculation of LICO.<sup>120</sup>

	Canada				Niagara			
	% LICO		% Unemployment		% LICO		% Unemployment	
	Total Population	People with Disabilities	Total Population	People with Disabilities	Total Population	People with Disabilities	Total Population	People with Disabilities
2001	16.2%	23.4%	n/a	n/a	12.7%	18.7%	n/a	n/a
2006	15.3%	21.6%	6.6%	14.8%	12%	17%	6.1%	12.1%

<sup>121</sup>

In Niagara, the portion of the population receiving Ontario Disability Support Program benefits continues to increase annually. In the month of June 2010, 4 per cent of Niagara’s total population was relying on ODSP. In the same month, only 3 per cent of Ontario’s population was relying on ODSP.<sup>122</sup> Therefore, when compared with the rest of Ontario, Niagara has a greater proportion of the total population relying on ODSP. The average caseload size has increased by approximately 28 per cent from 8,644 in 2003 to an average of 11,943 in 2010.<sup>123</sup>



*In Niagara, the number of individuals receiving ODSP support increased by 1,385 between 2003 and 2008.*

<sup>120</sup> Council of Canadians with Disabilities (2009). *As a Matter of Fact: Poverty and Disability in Canada*. Available at: <http://www.ccdonline.ca/en/socialpolicy/poverty-citizenship/poverty-disability-canada>

<sup>121</sup> Statistics Canada, 2006 Community Profiles.

<sup>122</sup> MCSS Caseload Statistics June 2010

<sup>123</sup> Niagara Region Community Services, 2010.

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## People who are New Immigrants

Niagara Region has seen the number of newcomers increase from 1,229 in 1998 to an average of over 5,000 per year since 2000.<sup>124</sup> Between January and June 2008, 2,443 newcomers entered Canada through Fort Erie. Among the newcomers were 428 children under the age of 10.<sup>125</sup>

Children in families who moved from overseas to Ontario in the past five years represent one in every two immigrant children living in poverty.<sup>126</sup> “Immigrant households who have been in Canada for five years or less experience low-incomes at a proportion two to four times greater than that of non-immigrant households.”<sup>127</sup> While some large cities across Canada saw a decrease in the percentage of recent immigrants living in poverty, Niagara is among those municipalities that saw an increase.

*People who are new immigrants are two to four times more likely to live in poverty.*

*In 1976, about 29 per cent of seniors lived in poverty. By 2007, that rate had declined to a record low of 4.8 per cent.*

LICO	Canada		Niagara	
	Recent Immigrants	Total Population	Recent Immigrants	Total Population
2001	42.7%	21.9%	32.4%	12.7%
2006	41.8%	22%	37.8%	12%

<sup>128</sup>

Unemployment among recent immigrants was also higher than non-immigrant populations. Across Canada, in 2006, the unemployment rate among new immigrants was 10.5 per cent as compared with 6.6 per cent for non-immigrant households. In Niagara, unemployment for the general population was 6.1 per cent compared with 9.5 per cent among recent immigrants.<sup>129</sup> It is estimated that unemployed newcomers comprise 12 per cent of Niagara’s social assistance caseload.<sup>130</sup>

<sup>124</sup> Early Years Niagara, 2009.

<sup>125</sup> Early Years Niagara, 2009.

<sup>126</sup> Campaign 2000, 2009. *2009 Report Card on Child and Family Poverty in Ontario*.

<sup>127</sup> Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2010.

<sup>128</sup> Statistics Canada, 2006 Community Profiles.

<sup>129</sup> Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2010.

<sup>130</sup> Early Years Niagara, 2009.

## **Seniors**

In 1976, approximately 29 per cent of people aged 65 and older were poor. After concerted and sustained policy attention, this rate continued to steadily decrease in the years that followed and in 2007 hit a record low of 4.8 per cent.<sup>131</sup> Niagara continues to outpace other large cities across the country regarding the portion of seniors that make up the total population.<sup>132</sup> However, Niagara mirrored the national trend as the portion of seniors with below LICO incomes dropped from 12.6 per cent in 2001 to 9.1 per cent in 2006.<sup>133</sup> However, within this population, Canadian women aged 65 and older living alone continue to be at higher risk of living in poverty with a 16 per cent incidence of low-income.<sup>134</sup>

*The portion of seniors below LICO incomes dropped from 12.6 per cent in 2001 to 9.1 per cent in 2006.*

## **Engagement and Civic Participation**

Poverty ensures that oppression is manifested as marginalization, exploitation, violence, and powerlessness which in essence deprive individuals of their rights as citizens. It is difficult to find proxies that convey citizen engagement as there are inherent limitations in existing measures for active democracy such as voter participation rates or volunteerism. Many other daily practices reflect how people living in poverty actively participate in building better communities, but these are yet to be officially recognized.

*In Niagara, voter participation increased by 1.9 per cent between 2000 and 2006.*

Human rights are linked to citizenship which is not just a status, but also a practice.<sup>135</sup> It involves exercising autonomy and self determination in meeting our needs. Citizenship can also be defined as authentic social participation.<sup>136</sup> Most studies regarding poverty focus on the presence of antisocial or dysfunctional behaviours rather than the absence of pro-social

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<sup>131</sup> National Council of Welfare, 2007. *Solving Poverty*.

<sup>132</sup> Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2010.

<sup>133</sup> Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2010.

<sup>134</sup> Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2010.

<sup>135</sup> Lister, R. (2000) *Inclusion/Exclusion: the Janus Face of Citizenship. Towards a Gendered Political Economy*. Cook, J, Roberts, J and Wylen G. (Eds) Sheffield: University of Sheffield.

<sup>136</sup> Lister, R., 2000, *Inclusion/Exclusion*

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behaviors.<sup>137</sup> Civic engagement and an effective sense of agency can be seen in pro-social activities like voting and volunteerism. Mechanisms that facilitate pro-social behaviour include media and transportation.

## **Voter Participation**

In the 2006 federal election, 65.6 per cent of eligible Niagara residents voted compared with 66.6 per cent in Ontario and 64.7 per cent nationally.<sup>138</sup> Low voter turnout implies that the democratic system may not be reflecting the interests of all citizens. Voter turnout tends to be lowest among youth, those with lower educational attainment, and those in lower income brackets.<sup>139</sup> The federal voter participation data for Niagara Region, Ontario, and Canada in 1997, 2000, 2004 and 2006 are as follows:

<b>Year</b>	<b>Niagara region</b>	<b>Ontario</b>	<b>Canada</b>
<b>1997</b>	64.4%	65.6%	67.0%
<b>2000</b>	64.0%	58.0%	61.2%
<b>2004</b>	59.9%	61.8%	60.9%
<b>2006</b>	65.9%	66.6%	64.7%

## **Volunteerism**

According to Niagara's Children's Charter Enacted, a report which analyzed Niagara's volunteerism, the numbers of local volunteers is declining.

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<sup>137</sup> Lichter, D. et al. (2002) "Helping Others? The Effects of Childhood Poverty and Family Instability on Prosocial Behavior." *Youth & Society*. 34(1): 89-119

<sup>138</sup> Elections Canada (2008). Available at: <http://www.elections.ca/home.asp>

<sup>139</sup> Conference Board of Canada. (2008) "How Canada Performs: A Report Card on Canada." Available at: <http://www.conferenceboard.ca/hcp/default.aspx>

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	<b>Niagara region</b>		<b>All QOLRS<sup>140</sup></b>	
	<b>1997</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>2000</b>
Proportion of volunteers	34.8%	29.3%	31.2%	26.9%
Proportion of non-volunteers	65.2%	70.7%	68.8%	73.1%
Estimated number of volunteers	124,688	102,259	2,742,452	2,455,872
Estimated number of non-volunteers	233,320	246,588	6,057,793	6,687,476

As well, there are fewer parents participating as volunteers in their children’s schools. “Although 95 per cent of parents agreed that there were opportunities to participate at the school, less than half reported volunteering in the classroom or school more than once or twice and nearly one-quarter reported never doing so. Two of the most common issues that inhibit parental participation in children's school activities are the times in which the activities occur and lack of childcare for siblings.”<sup>141</sup>

### **Newspaper Circulation**

Local newspapers may be an important communication and engagement media for communities. The chart below details the circulation rates for local newspapers in Niagara’s 12 municipalities.

<sup>140</sup> Quality of Life Reporting System, Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2010.

<sup>141</sup> Early Years Niagara, 2009.

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Municipality Population	Population	LICO Figure	Newspaper	Average Circulation	% of Municipality Population
St. Catharines	131,989	10.5	St. Catharines Standard (daily)	23,556	17.8%
Fort Erie	29,925	Fort Erie: 7.5%	Fort Erie Times (community weekly)	12,266	41.0%
Port Colborne	18,599	Port Colborne: 8.8%	InPort News (community weekly)	11,666	62.7%
Niagara on the Lake	14,587	N-O-T-L: 4.1%	Niagara Advance (NOTL) (community weekly)	7,516	51.5%
Niagara Falls	82,184	Niagara Falls: 9.6%	Niagara Falls Review (daily)	18,486 (avg. circulation for week)	22.5%
Thorold	18,224	Thorold: 7.0%	Niagara News (Thorold) (community weekly)	7,440	40.8%
Pelham	16,155	Pelham: 3.2%	Pelham News (community weekly)	7,407	45.8%
Welland	50,331	Welland: 10.2%	Welland Tribune (daily)	16,126 (average circulation for week)	32.0%
Grimsby Lincoln West Lincoln	23,937 21,822 13,167	Grimsby: 5.6% Lincoln: 3.8% West Lincoln: 3.0%	West Niagara News (2X weekly)	20,662 (includes Grimsby, Lincoln and West Lincoln)	35.1%

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## Transportation

Another often cited barrier to employment and civic engagement is the absence of a public transit system that easily connects commuters across the Niagara Region. It is a recognized component of social infrastructure especially in the context of people living in low-income households. In Niagara, the portion of workers using public transit to commute to work has increased from 1.9 per cent in 2001 to 2.4 per cent in 2006.<sup>143</sup>

*The portion of commuters using public transit in Niagara increased from 1.9 per cent in 2001 to 2.4 per cent in 2006.*

<sup>142</sup> QMI Sales (2009). Circulation List. Available at: <http://www.qmisales.ca/newspaper-sun-media/circulation/circulation-list.html>

<sup>143</sup> Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2010.

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Compared with commuters across the country, Niagara has a slightly higher ratio of drivers and about half the ratio of public transit users.<sup>144</sup> As illustrated in the chart below, when comparing commuter incomes, higher income earners consistently commute as drivers whereas low-income commuters rely on public transit.<sup>145</sup> The lowest income earners most often commuted as passengers in privately owned vehicles.<sup>146</sup>

Type of Transit	Average Income Canada	Average Income Niagara
Private vehicle	\$ 46,179	\$ 40,205
Public Transit	\$ 34,566	\$ 17,358
Walk	\$ 28,203	\$ 22,494
Bike	\$ 36,566	\$ 25,927
Passenger in private vehicle	\$ 26,337	\$ 16,708

<sup>147</sup>

There have been some positive gains in Niagara as public transit has become more affordable to commuters. In 2001, a full-time worker earning minimum wage would have spent approximately 6.7 per cent of monthly earnings on a transit pass compared to 4.2 per cent of earnings for a monthly pass in 2009.<sup>148</sup>

### **Recycling participation**

Another pro-social activity is participation in recycling programs. Across Niagara, participation rates increased from 57 per cent in 2004 to 58 per cent in 2007.<sup>149</sup>

<sup>144</sup> Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2010.

<sup>145</sup> Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2010.

<sup>146</sup> Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2010.

<sup>147</sup> Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2010.

<sup>148</sup> Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2010.

<sup>149</sup> Niagara Region (2009). 2009-2010 Niagara Region Blue Box Program. Integrated Community Planning and Public Works Committee. WDO participation rate is defined as the percentage of households on a curbside collection route who set out recyclables at least once in a consecutive four-week period. Figures based on the methodology of the 2006 stewardship Ontario waste audits, which were conducted over a two-week period, four separate times during the year.

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A comparison to neighbouring municipalities is detailed in the chart below:

### Niagara Region Blue Box Program

<b>Municipality</b>	<b>2008 Marketed Tonnes</b>	<b>2008 Residue Tonnes</b>	<b>Residue %</b>
Durham	50,360	1,756	3.4%
Niagara	38,106	1,637	4.1%
Halton	42,376	3,234	7.1%
Toronto	166,678	33,974	16.9%
<b>Average Residue Rate % (including Toronto)</b>			<b>7.8%</b>
<b>Average Residue Rate % (excluding Toronto)</b>			<b>4.9%</b>

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### Local activities

The *Legacy of Poverty* report outlines action to improve the social determinants of health for adults as:

- economic development to create jobs in communities
- increase access to education and labour force through education supports (skill development programs), employment supports enabling people to keep working (counseling/treatment), good wages, healthy working conditions and improved access to health benefits
- local housing strategy to address the regions homeless
- diversity training for staff to understand the experiences of poverty and oppression
- increased access to social supports
- broaden focus of poverty initiatives beyond employment to include other ways to contribute to community

When looking at the links among the social determinants of health, “there are good reasons for thinking that psychosocial pathways are most important. What it means is that the quality of the social life of a society is one of the most powerful determinants of health and that this in turn is, very closely

<sup>150</sup> The term marketed refers to the reuse of the product in some manner, where as the term residue indicates that the product was not able to be reused.

related to the degree of income inequality.”<sup>151</sup> These links make psychosocial relationships as important to quality of life as they are to health. Adults living in poverty are more likely to experience illness and chronic health problems. Consequently, improving health includes improving access to social and income supports. In Niagara, the Prosperity Initiatives worked to improve individual and household assets as a strategy toward increased prosperity. These assets fell into personal, physical, social, human, and financial domains. An overview of programs and services geared toward increasing these assets is as follows:

- In 2008, the Niagara Prosperity Initiatives were guided by the seven strategies outlined at the June 2008 Regional Council Planning session. These investments were intended to respond to the urgent needs of families living in poverty by providing increased food, emergency and transportation supports as well as reducing the cost of food, shelter, and necessities.
- In 2009, the Niagara Neighbourhood Mapping tool was used to guide investments in neighbourhoods in need of attention. This approach responded to the urgent needs of adults and children. There were 34 projects delivered by 20 agencies in neighbourhoods in need of attention across the region. Approximately 50 per cent of the investment was geared toward addressing the social determinants of health for adults and 47 per cent of the investment geared toward mitigating the negative effects of low-income on children and youth.
- In 2010, an analysis of agencies’ response to the Niagara Prosperity Initiative Request for Proposals revealed a trend where agencies identified seven neighbourhoods as priorities for attention. Building on community development principles, animators worked in each neighbourhood to encourage local leadership and engagement. Investment in these community identified neighbourhoods has created opportunities for greater collaboration among agencies. delivering similar programs. Agencies meet to share their learning thereby contributing to more comprehensive and coordinated approaches.

*Outcomes achieved in response to addressing the social determinants of health for adults living in poverty are further detailed in the Monitor our Progress section of this report.*

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<sup>151</sup> Wilkinson, R.G. (1996). *Unhealthy Societies: The afflictions of inequality*. London: Routledge. P 4-5

## **Now what?**

The following themes and recommendations related to addressing the social determinants of health for adults emerged from key informant interviews<sup>152</sup> regarding the Niagara Prosperity Initiatives:

*Economic development initiatives need to be part of neighbourhood prosperity work.* In Niagara, the labour market has mirrored national trends and shifted dramatically creating more opportunities for low wage earnings in precarious work. While it has promising potential for impact, the neighbourhood focus on employment and training opportunities may unintentionally reinforce victim blaming by concentrating efforts at the individual rather than the systems level.

*Business leaders are a critical element of success for labour force development.* Job development, retention, training, better wages, and access to financial supports for working people requires orchestration between these imperatives with broader policy and economic development strategies. Business champions are necessary to ensure that poverty reduction becomes a sustainable practice.

*Tackling poverty requires plans and actions that ensure decent, adequate housing.* Niagara's waiting list for affordable housing continues to grow. While the province recently announced a provincial affordable housing strategy, work toward a national housing strategy remains an unaddressed priority.

*Stigma and a culture of meritocracy continue to be barriers to action and engagement.* Many studies have documented the negative and oppressive experiences of service users accessing programs intended to provide support and assistance.

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<sup>152</sup> A small theoretical sample was selected to gather information from key informants and used to develop next steps regarding funding decisions, neighbourhood approach, service delivery, and general feedback regarding the Niagara Region's response to the "Legacy of Poverty" report recommendations.

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Daily practice should be informed by service user feedback and designed to ensure that supports are delivered in a seamless way to individuals and families. Furthermore, a concerted effort is necessary to make poverty reduction an urgent issue for all of Niagara's citizens. This task can be facilitated through the media and by disseminating news about the progress and process of poverty reduction undertaken by stakeholders across the region.

*Meaningful engagement of people living in poverty must receive special attention.* "Through collective action people can transform circumstances that oppress them."<sup>153</sup> This may mean door to door canvassing in neighbourhoods in need of attention as a way to engage residents in enhancing opportunities for social inclusion and emancipation. Improving the social determinants of health for adults living in poverty includes access to services and supports for employment, training and civic engagement. Policies intended to support and train workers often make it difficult for the working poor to access or maintain benefits. It is also important to educate low wage earners about supports that can raise their household income while at the same time improving access and availability of these work supports.

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<sup>153</sup> Kemmis, S. and McTaggart, R. (2003). "Participatory Action Research." In Denzin, N and Lincoln, Y (eds) *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry* (second edition). Thousand Island, CA: Sage Publications. P. 336-396.

## Mitigate the negative effects of low-income on children and youth through programs and services

### Overview

The connection between healthy children and a family's economic security has been documented by many researchers.<sup>154</sup> Socially and economically disadvantaged children typically go "from rags to rags."<sup>155</sup> "Children in poverty or at risk of poverty are more likely to experience a range of negative outcomes: low academic achievement, health problems, early pregnancy, homelessness, lower high school graduation rates and poor employment outcomes."<sup>156</sup>

Despite its relative wealth, Canada's child poverty rate is higher than the average of its peer nations.<sup>157</sup> Since 1991, child poverty rates have fluctuated reaching an apex in 1996 when 18 per cent of children between the ages of 0-12 lived in poverty<sup>158</sup>. The number of Canadian children who were poor for at least one year from 2002 to 2007 was 1.4 million, or 23 per cent of all children.<sup>159</sup> Approximately eight per cent of those children remained in poverty for the full six years<sup>160</sup>.

About 637,000 children under 18 years of age lived in low-income families in 2007.<sup>161</sup> About 246,000 of these children lived in female lone-parent families, representing almost 40 per cent of all children in poverty.<sup>162</sup> In 2006, one-third of children living in female lone-parent families were poor.<sup>163</sup> This figure has steadily declined from the peak in 1996 when 56 per cent of children in female lone-parent families were poor.

Legacy of Poverty report recommendations included:

- decrease the cost of essential supports and services
- coordination and access to parenting resources
- support for childcare and the early learning system
- recognize varying degrees of needs across the 12 municipalities

*The number of Canadian children who were poor for at least one year from 2002 to 2007 was 1.4 million, or 23 per cent of all children.*

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<sup>154</sup> Montgomery County, 2006.

<sup>155</sup> Corcoran 1995 as cited in Lichter, D. et al. (2002) "Helping Others? The Effects of Childhood Poverty and Family Instability on Prosocial Behavior." *Youth & Society*. 34(1): 91

<sup>156</sup> Montgomery County, 2006.

<sup>157</sup> Campaign 2000 (2009). 2009 Report Card on Child and Family Poverty in Canada.

<sup>158</sup> National Council of Welfare, 2007. *Solving Poverty*.

<sup>159</sup> National Council of Welfare, 2007. *Solving Poverty*.

<sup>160</sup> National Council of Welfare, 2007. *Solving Poverty*.

<sup>161</sup> Statistics Canada, 2007. *Income in Canada*.

<sup>162</sup> Statistics Canada, 2007. *Income in Canada*.

<sup>163</sup> Statistics Canada, 2007. *Income in Canada*.

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In comparison, the portion of children living in low-income two-parent families decreased from 11.6 per cent in 1996 to 6.5 per cent in 2007.<sup>164</sup>

As noted with adults, some groups of children are at a much higher risk of poverty. For example, 33 per cent of immigrant children and 26 per cent of visible minorities live in poverty.<sup>165</sup> Among this group, the highest poverty rates were seen for Korean (48 per cent) Arab (43 per cent) and Black (36 per cent) children.<sup>166</sup> Approximately 28 per cent of Aboriginal children live in poverty.<sup>167</sup>

*Across Canada, after tax income increased on average 4.8 per cent for families living in poverty.*

In December 2008, the Province of Ontario released its poverty reduction strategy entitled “Breaking the Cycle.”<sup>168</sup> This report outlines several initiatives intended to reduce the number of children living in poverty in Ontario by 25 per cent over the next five years. In 2009, the provincial budget committed resources to one of these strategies and increased the Ontario Child Benefit (OCB) from \$500 to \$1,100 per child annually. Broader policy initiatives and investments geared toward increasing a family’s income have the potential for significant beneficial impacts.

In Niagara, the portion of low-income families decreased from 12.7 per cent in 2001 to 12 per cent in 2006.<sup>169</sup> If using the after tax LICO, the portion of low-income Niagara households decreased from 9.4 per cent (11,015 families) in 2001 to 8.7 per cent (10,695) in 2006.<sup>170</sup> This trend may be attributed to an increase in after tax income for families in the lowest income quintile. Across Canada, from 2006 to 2007, after-tax income increased on average 4.8 per cent for families living in poverty.<sup>171</sup>

<sup>164</sup> Statistics Canada, 2007. *Income in Canada*.

<sup>165</sup> National Council of Welfare, 2007. *Solving Poverty*.

<sup>166</sup> National Council of Welfare, 2007. *Solving Poverty*.

<sup>167</sup> National Council of Welfare, 2007. *Solving Poverty*.

<sup>168</sup> Citizens for Public Justice (2008). *Breaking the Cycle: Ontario’s Poverty Reduction Strategy*.

[http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/growingstronger/index.aspx/english/pdf/Ontario%27s\\_Poverty\\_Report\\_EN.pdf](http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/growingstronger/index.aspx/english/pdf/Ontario%27s_Poverty_Report_EN.pdf)

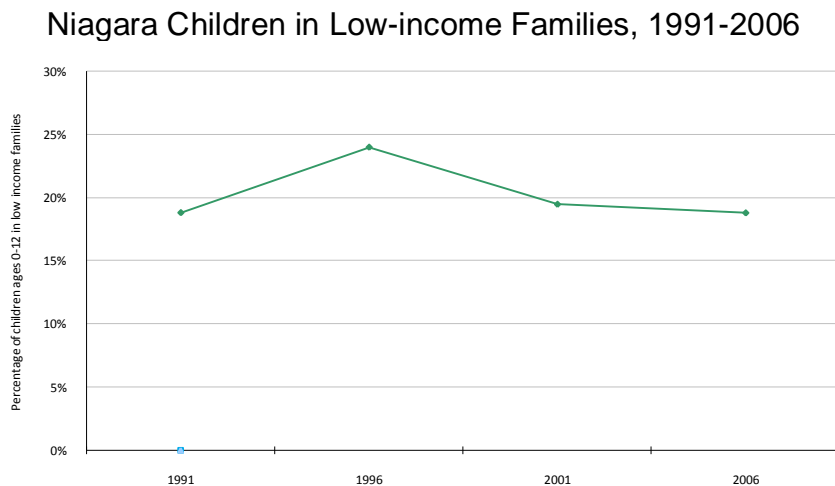
<sup>169</sup> Statistics Canada (2001) (2006). Census Data, *Community Profiles*.

<sup>170</sup> Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2010.

<sup>171</sup> Statistics Canada, 2007. *Income in Canada*.

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In 2007, around 525,000 Canadian families were below the low-income cut-off (LICO) after taxes, representing 5.8 per cent of all families, comparable with a 7.0 per cent rate observed in 2006. This rate was also the lowest rate of low-income for families ever measured by Statistics Canada. However, a large gap in earnings remains for low-income families who would have to earn, on average, an additional \$9,400 annually to climb just above the LICO.<sup>172</sup>



*In 2009, using the Ontario Deprivation Index, 12.5 per cent of Ontario's children were living in poverty.*

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It is important to recognize that even though these families moved slightly above the LICO, this does not necessarily mean that they are no longer poor. They may still be defined as poor if a different measure of poverty, like the Deprivation Index, were used. The Province of Ontario's first progress report regarding its poverty reduction strategy introduced this new poverty measure to North America. The Ontario Deprivation Index determines the number and percentage of Ontario families and children with access to an acceptable standard of living. The measure identifies that a family is living in poverty if it is not able to afford two or more items out of a list of ten.

<sup>172</sup> Campaign 2000. (2009). 2009 Report Card on Child and Family Poverty in Canada 1989-2009.

<sup>173</sup> Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2010.

In the first year of using this measure, 2009, 12.5 per cent of Ontario children were lacking two or more items.<sup>174</sup>

The portion of Niagara's population that are children/youth (aged 0-19) is less than that of Ontario and has declined since the last census. In 2001, Niagara residents aged 0-19 comprised 25 per cent of the population compared to 26 per cent of Ontario. In 2006, 24 per cent of Niagara's population was between the ages of 0-19 compared to 25 per cent in Ontario.<sup>175</sup>

The portion of children living in LICO households in Niagara dropped slightly from 15.6 per cent in 2001 to 15 per cent in 2006.<sup>176</sup> This portion is less than the provincial average of 18 per cent. However, the depth of poverty among Niagara's children is greater than that of Ontario's children. Comparatively speaking, a larger number of Niagara's children live in families who rely on social assistance.<sup>177</sup> When compared to the rest of Ontario, Niagara has more children, aged 0-6, in families receiving Ontario Works, 5.1 per cent and 5.6 per cent respectively. This means that a monthly average of 6,222 of Niagara's children live in families receiving OW. About 50 per cent of these children are between the ages of 0-6, 30 per cent between the ages of 7-12 and 20 per cent between the ages of 13-17.<sup>178</sup> As well, Niagara children are more than twice as likely to live in families receiving Ontario Disability Support Program benefits, 3.0 per cent and 1.4 per cent respectively.<sup>179</sup> This represents an average of 2,524 children each month the majority of who are between the ages of 13-17 (42 per cent), followed by 7-12 year olds (32 per cent) and lastly 0-6 year olds (26 per cent).<sup>180</sup>

*When Canadians responded to a survey regarding anti-poverty strategies, the most recommended measure was based on the actual cost of necessities. "This indicates that Canadians are both practical and fair and that they think that people should have enough to cover basic necessities" (National Council of Welfare, page 12).*

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<sup>174</sup> Province of Ontario. (2010) "The First Year: Achievements and Success Indicators." Available at:

[www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/growingstronger/report/2009/firstyear.aspx](http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/growingstronger/report/2009/firstyear.aspx)

<sup>175</sup> Statistics Canada (2001) (2006). Census Data, *Community Profiles*.

<sup>176</sup> Before tax LICO was used to allow comparison between 2001 and 2006 data.

<sup>177</sup> Early Years Niagara, 2009.

<sup>178</sup> Niagara Region Community Services (Jan-April 2010). *Benefit Unit Summary Report*.

<sup>179</sup> Niagara Best Start Network, 2008.

<sup>180</sup> Niagara Region Community Services, 2010 (year to date).

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## **Housing**

Canada is the only industrialized country without a national affordable housing strategy.<sup>181</sup> Although the provincial government announced a provincial framework in 2011, federal leadership would provide both incentives and imperatives for action. The financial situation of many Canadian families is a delicate house of cards when an alarming one in four households spend more than 30 per cent of their income on housing.

The recent downturn in the economy stretched already tight household resources as average rents increased by 2.3 per cent across the country.<sup>182</sup> The number of households “unable to afford shelter that meets adequacy, suitability, and affordability norms”<sup>183</sup> rose during the early 1990s and has remained at about 1.5 million households since 1995. In 2006, this represented almost 13 per cent of Canadian households.<sup>184</sup> The trend over time nationally has been mirrored in Niagara. In 2006, 19,280<sup>185</sup> households in Niagara were considered in core housing need.

*Half of Niagara's families may be experiencing housing affordability problems.*

<b>Year</b>	<b>Canada</b>	<b>Niagara</b>
1991	13.6%	10.5%
1996	15.6%	14.1%
2001	13.7%	12.5%
2006	12.7%	11.8%

<sup>181</sup> Campaign 2000, 2009. *2009 Report Card on Child and Family Poverty in Canada 1989-2009*.

<sup>182</sup> The core inflation rate for food price comparison is 0.3% and for average rent for a 2 bedroom apartment is 0.1% taken from Pasma, C., 2010.

<sup>183</sup> CMHC (2009). Sited in Federation of Canadian Municipalities.

<sup>184</sup> Campaign 2000, 2009. *2009 Report Card on Child and Family Poverty in Canada 1989-2009*.

<sup>185</sup> Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2010.

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The portion of Niagara households that spend more than 30 per cent of their income on rent varies from 50.1 per cent in Port Colborne to 26.9 per cent in Pelham. Overall, 45.5 per cent of families who rent in Niagara spend 30 per cent or more of their disposable income on rent; 51 per cent of families in the Niagara region spend 30 per cent or more of their disposable income on rent or housing costs. This indicates that half of Niagara's families may be experiencing housing affordability problems.<sup>186</sup>

Lack of affordability may mean that families are moving more often in search of housing that is more appropriate. About 14 per cent of senior kindergarten students in Niagara moved two to four times in the last five years. Mobility rates of families with a senior kindergarten aged child shows a concerning trend indicating that the more often children moved in the past five years, the less they were developmentally ready to learn at school.<sup>187</sup> More details are as follows:<sup>188</sup>

<b>Number of Times Moved</b>	<b>% of Niagara Kindergarten Students</b>
Never	50.1%
1 time	33.5%
2-4 Times	14%
>5	1.1%
<1 Missing	1.3%

<sup>189</sup>

As well, high housing costs leaves little money for food; about 87 per cent of food bank users lived in rental housing.

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<sup>186</sup> Early Years Niagara, 2009.

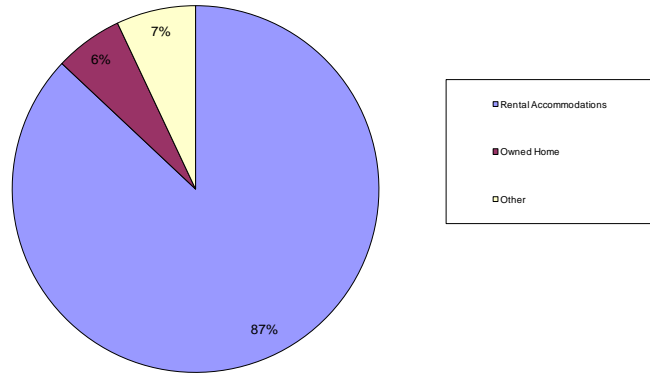
<sup>187</sup> Early Years Niagara, 2009.

<sup>188</sup> Early Years Niagara, 2009.

<sup>189</sup> Early Years Niagara, 2009.

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2009 Food Bank Usage by Accommodation Type



*The percentage of families spending over 30 per cent of income on housing expenses has increased by 5.4 per cent between 2001 and 2006.*

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Subsidized housing remains a critical element in preventing low-income households from becoming homeless. The need for this support is urgent as evidenced by the Niagara Regional Housing wait list. In 2006, the ratio of households waiting to be housed to the number of subsidized units in Niagara was 1.75:1. There were 4,264 households on the waitlist for a total of 7,472 subsidized units in the Region. Of these 21.6 per cent or 920 households were placed in subsidized housing.<sup>191</sup> The time households spent waiting for a unit ranges from a maximum of 55 months to a minimum of 2 months.<sup>192</sup> The average wait times in Niagara for affordable housing is longer than in many other communities across Ontario.<sup>193</sup>

<sup>190</sup> Food Banks Canada, 2009. *Hunger Facts*. Available at: [www.foodbankscanada.ca](http://www.foodbankscanada.ca) and Food Banks Canada (2008). *Annual Report*. Available at: [www.foodbankscanada.ca/documents/2008AnnualReportEng.pdf](http://www.foodbankscanada.ca/documents/2008AnnualReportEng.pdf)

<sup>191</sup> Federation of Canadian Municipalities

<sup>192</sup> Federation of Canadian Municipalities

<sup>193</sup> Early Years (2009). Niagara Children's Charter Enacted.

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### Niagara Regional Housing applicant wait times, in years for each rental unit size (by number of bedrooms)

Municipality	1 BED ROOM	2 BED ROOM	3 BED ROOM	4 BED ROOM	5 BED ROOM
Fort Erie	2	1.5	1.75	1	N/A
Crystal Beach	6.5	1	1	2.5	N/A
Grimsby	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Lincoln	2.75	1.75	4	N/A	N/A
(Beamsville)					
Niagara Falls	4.5	1.5	4	N/A	N/A
Niagara-on-the-Lake	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Pelham	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Port Colborne	8	1	1.75	2	N/A
St. Catharines	6.25	3	3	2.75	2.75
Thorold	N/A	7	3.75	N/A	N/A
Wainfleet	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Welland	7.75	2.25	1.75	1.5	2.5
West Lincoln (Smithville)	N/A	2	1	N/A	N/A <sup>194</sup>

### Food insecurity

In Niagara, 37 per cent of residents are overweight and 17 per cent are considered obese.<sup>195</sup> When comparing gender, a much higher percentage of adult males have a Body Mass Index (BMI) in the overweight category in Niagara, than adult females (48 per cent versus 30 per cent respectively).<sup>196</sup> Access to healthy food is a critical factor in maintaining a healthy body weight.

Since 2008, the number of Canadians using food banks has increased by 18 per cent; this is the largest year-over-year increase on record.<sup>197</sup>

*Between 2005 and 2009 there was an increase of 26 households in Niagara utilizing food banks. In 2006, 3,391 children used a food bank in Niagara.*

<sup>194</sup> N/A indicates that the information is not available.

<sup>195</sup> Early Years Niagara, 2009.

<sup>196</sup> Early Years Niagara, 2009.

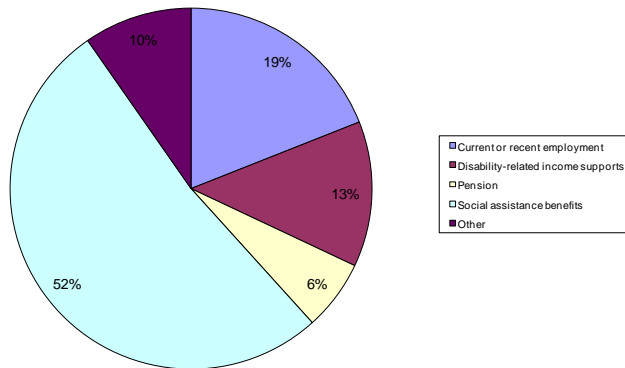
<sup>197</sup> Pasma, 2010, *Bearing the Brunt*

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Between 1989 and 2008 the number of children in Canada relying on food banks grew from 151,200 to 260,600. Children are disproportionately represented as food bank clients; while Canadians younger than 18 years old make up 22 per cent of Canada's population, they represented 37 per cent of food bank users in 2008.<sup>198</sup> The number of children having to rely on Ontario food banks each month increased from 97,390 in 2000, to 118,160 in 2008.<sup>199</sup> This is a 20 per cent increase over eight years.<sup>200</sup>

*A Senate hearing witness who interviews single mothers across Canada spoke of an interview she held with one woman, who, when asked what she might want most, responded, "What I would want most is a fridge with food in it all of the time."*

2009 Canadian Food Bank Usage by Income Source



*Since 2008, 18 per cent more Canadians have had to turn to food banks; this is the largest year over year increase on record.*

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<sup>198</sup> Campaign 2000, 2009. *2009 Report Card on Child and Family Poverty in Canada 1989-2009*.

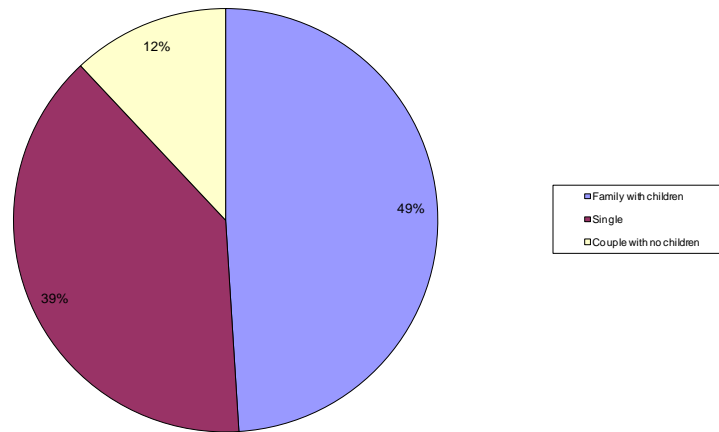
<sup>199</sup> Food Banks Canada (2009).

<sup>200</sup> Campaign 2000 (2008). *2008 Report Card, Now More than Ever Ontario Needs a Strong Poverty Reduction Strategy*. Available at:

<http://www.campaign2000.ca/reportCards/provincial/Ontario/2008OntarioChildandFamilyPovertyReportCard.pdf>

<sup>201</sup> Food Banks Canada, 2009.

2009 Canadian Food Bank Users by Family Type



*The largest portion of people accessing food banks are families with children, comprising 49 per cent of food bank users.*

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Between the years 2005 and 2006, food bank usage in Niagara Region has remained fairly stable. In 2005 and 2006, just over 4,000 households used the 13 local food banks across Niagara.<sup>203</sup>

*The average Niagara family spends about 9.7 per cent of their income to buy healthy food; a minimum wage earner supporting a family would need to spend about 31 per cent of their income on food; and a family in receipt of Ontario Works, would need to spend about 36 per cent of their income for healthy food.*

<b>Food bank usage (Niagara Region)</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>
Number of visits	9,357	9,037
Number of households using food banks	4,021	4,047
Number of children using the food banks	3,421	3,391

<sup>204</sup>

In 2009, food prices increased at a far greater rate than inflation, jumping 4.9 per cent compared with the core inflation rate of 0.3 per cent. The price of 13 basic dietary staples increased more than 10 per cent between December 2007 and December 2009. The cost of baby food increased more than 20 per cent.<sup>205</sup>

Using the Nutritious Food Basket (NFB) estimates, a Niagara family of four (same composition as the NFB reference family) with a minimum wage earner would need to spend 31 per cent

<sup>202</sup> Food Banks Canada, 2009.

<sup>203</sup> Early Years Niagara, 2009.

<sup>204</sup> Early Years Niagara, 2009.

<sup>205</sup> Canadian Council on Social Development, 2010.

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of their earnings on food. The same family, if receiving OW would need to spend 36 per cent of their income on food, whereas the average Niagara households would need to dedicate only 9.7 per cent of their income to buy the same basket of food. As access to healthy food becomes further out of reach for low-income households, the negative and long term impacts of poverty are exacerbated.<sup>206</sup>

Like food banks, school nutrition programs can be seen as a response to this urgent need. In Ontario, approximately 400,000 elementary and secondary school students participate in more than 3,000 breakfast, lunch, and snack programs.<sup>207</sup> Niagara has a long history of school nutrition programs which provide nutritious breakfast/snacks and or lunches to over 8,000 elementary school students in 67 elementary schools annually across Niagara.

**Table 1.4: School nutrition programs by municipality**

Inadequate nutrition impacts children’s physical and social development. As outlined in the chart below, on average, 10.26 per cent of senior kindergarten students in Niagara scored as developmentally vulnerable on the Early Development Instrument. Generally, these children had inadequate energy levels to concentrate on school activities, were ill prepared for the day at school (tired, late, hungry), less developed gross and fine motor skills, and lacked motor coordination.<sup>208</sup>

**Number of SK students who scored in each level of readiness in the Physical Health & Well-Being domain in Niagara**

Percentile Boundary	Level of Readiness	YEAR		
		2002	2005	2008
At or below the 10th percentile	Vulnerable	394 (11.7%)	316 (9.97%)	364 (10.01%)
The lowest 10%				
At or above the 75th percentile	Excellent	1939 (57.6%)	1198 (37.8%)	1344 (36.96%)
The highest 25%				
Total number of children with valid EDI		3364	3170	3636

<sup>206</sup> Niagara Region Public Health (2010). *Nutritious Food Basket Report*.

<sup>207</sup> Early Years Niagara, 2009.

<sup>208</sup> Early Years Niagara, 2009.

<sup>209</sup> Early Years Niagara, 2009.

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The National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth found that significant differences in readiness to learn emerged from socio-economic factors. Although the education system can somewhat close this gap, these differences in school participation persist and children from families in the bottom income quartile are half as likely to attend university when compared with children from families in the top income quartile.<sup>210</sup> When compared with other OECD countries, approximately half of Canadian youth do not complete post secondary education leaving them more vulnerable to shifts in the new economy.<sup>211</sup>

### **Children's health**

According to the National Clearinghouse on Family Violence, more than 1 million Canadian children have witnessed violence in their own homes.<sup>212</sup> According to the Niagara Regional Police Services 2006 Annual Report<sup>213</sup>, police responded to 3,695 domestic violence calls involving intimate partners for crisis intervention. Of these, 719 resulted in criminal charges being laid ranging from murder, attempted murder, criminal harassment/stalking, forcible confinement and assault with a weapon.<sup>214</sup> Niagara Regional Police Services estimate that children were witness in 50 per cent of all domestic calls.<sup>215</sup> There is concern that without supportive interventions, children who witness violence at home may be more likely to be perpetrators of violence or victims themselves.<sup>216</sup>

*According to the Niagara Regional Police Service, children were witness in 50 per cent of domestic calls in 2006.*

Niagara's preschool mental health and developmental children's service agencies are too stretched to respond to the number of

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<sup>210</sup> Banting, K. (2005). Do We Know Where We Are Going?

<sup>211</sup> Banting, K. (2005). Do We Know Where We Are Going?

<sup>212</sup> Public Health Agency of Canada, 2007.

<sup>213</sup> Niagara Regional Police Services (2006). *Niagara Regional Police Service Annual Report*. Available at: <http://www.nrps.com/report/>

<sup>214</sup> Early Years Niagara, 2009.

<sup>215</sup> Early Years Niagara, 2009.

<sup>216</sup> Public Health Agency of Canada, 2007.

requests for service. Between April 2007 and March 2008, 28 per cent of referrals completed by Contact Niagara for children 0-6 years of age were waitlisted.<sup>217</sup> The number of senior kindergarten students whose developmental readiness to learn at school was rated as vulnerable in the social competence domain increased slightly from 2002; the number of students whose developmental readiness to learn at school rated as excellent in this domain decreased.

**Number of SK students who scored in each level of readiness in the Social Competence domain in Niagara**

Percentile Boundary	Level of Readiness	YEAR		
		2002	2005	2008
At or below the 10th percentile The lowest 10%	Vulnerable	382	317	396
At or above the 75th percentile The highest 25%	Excellent	773	698	710
Total number of children with valid EDI 218		3364	3170	3636

About seven per cent of births in the Niagara Region in 2008 were preterm.<sup>219</sup> Nearly six per cent of newborns had a low birth weight. These trends remained steady over the three preceding years. Across the region, the percentage of newborns at risk of developmental difficulties based on the Parkyn Postpartum Screening tool is approximately 18 per cent and has also held over three years.<sup>220</sup> The exception is in Fort Erie where the percentage has increased five per cent since 2006.<sup>221</sup>

*Between 2001 and 2006, the number of children 0-12 years of age that were served in licensed child care centres fell by two per cent.*

The majority of emergency room visits by children between the ages of birth to 6 years old is due to falls. The length of hospital stays is also the longest for children in this category.<sup>222</sup> Childhood injuries of this type can often be attributed to the

<sup>217</sup> Early Years Niagara, 2009.

<sup>218</sup> Early Years Niagara, 2009.

<sup>219</sup> Early Years Niagara, 2009.

<sup>220</sup> Early Years Niagara, 2009.

<sup>221</sup> Early Years Niagara, 2009.

<sup>222</sup> Early Years Niagara, 2009.

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disrepair or unsafe conditions of play areas in low-income neighbourhoods. Also of note, since 2004, dental health of children living in Niagara has deteriorated by 17 per cent.<sup>223</sup>

## **Childcare and early childhood development**

In social policy domains, childcare has been recognized as a critical investment with the potential for high returns in both economic and social terms. In terms of supporting women's participation in the labour force, it is crucial. Across Canada, there has been an increase in the number of female lone parents with earned income. About 6 in 10 female lone-parent families had earnings in 1996. By 2006, it had increased to 8 in 10.<sup>224</sup>

Childcare remains an integral response to early childcare development. Despite policy shifts around the globe highlighting the need for upfront investment in youth through early childhood education, "Canadian governments have been laggards in developing appropriate policy responses."<sup>225</sup> Canada ranked last among 25 OECD nations on benchmarks achieved for early childhood education and care services.<sup>226</sup>

In 2008, 4,571 children were able to access child care services through fee subsidy. Of those children, 57.3 per cent were living in working poor households. A further 22.3 per cent of the children had parents receiving OW.<sup>227</sup>

The following table outlines the trend in Niagara Region's Children's Services. The declining ratio indicates that more

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<sup>223</sup> Early Years Niagara, 2009.

<sup>224</sup> National Council of Welfare (2009). *Poverty Profile*. Available at: <http://www.ncwcnbes.net/en/research/poverty-pauvrete.html>

<sup>225</sup> Banting, K. (2005). Do We Know Where We Are Going?

<sup>226</sup> Campaign 2000 (2009). 2009 Report Card on Child and Family Poverty in Canada.

<sup>227</sup> Early Years Niagara, 2009.

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children were able to access child care services.<sup>228</sup> In contrast to other large cities, Niagara was able to maintain its level of service to low-income families as indicated by the unchanged ratio of LICO children to the number of subsidized spaces.<sup>229</sup>

	<b>2001</b>	<b>2006</b>
% 0-12 yr old served in licensed childcare	10.3%	8.3%
# of children 0-12 yrs old in families	61,315	57,095
# of children in childcare	5,977	6,870
# of subsidized spaces	4,197	4,080
# of LICO children between 0-12 years old	9,760	9,320
Ratio of LICO children to # of subsidized spaces	2.3	2.3
# of LICO children under 15 years old	11,505	11,260

Since 2008, the number of working poor families served by children’s services has increased by 23%<sup>231</sup>. These families comprise approximately 86% of Children’s Services clients.

Of the additional 285 spaces which have been added through Best Start, the majority, (over 75 per cent or 221.6 spaces) increased capacity for JK/SK and just over 63 new spaces were for children birth to four years of age.<sup>232</sup>

Niagara’s grade 3 and grade 6 student literacy levels are greater than the provincial average.<sup>233</sup> Children’s literacy and educational attainment are “more strongly associated with their parents’ level of education than their parents’ income and this relationship seems to be getting stronger over time.”

*Niagara’s Grade 3 and Grade 6 student literacy levels are greater than the provincial average.*

<sup>228</sup> Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2010.

<sup>229</sup> Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2010.

<sup>230</sup> Early Years Niagara, 2009.

<sup>231</sup> Children’s Services – July 2011

<sup>232</sup> Niagara Best Start Network, 2008.

<sup>233</sup> Early Years Niagara, 2009.

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Strengthening the connection between parents and children's literacy is important for both adults and children. Research indicates that during economic downturns, public resources like libraries become a more important source to meet education and employment needs. This trend has borne out in Niagara as per capita use of libraries remained relatively stable from 8.8 per cent in 2001<sup>234</sup> to 8.1 per cent in 2008.<sup>235</sup> More information about how Niagara communities use libraries is as follows:<sup>236</sup>

Library Data 2008

Municipality	# Active Cards	% Change from 2007 Data	Titles Held (Reference-English Language)	Titles Held (Reference-French Language)	Volunteers (Part Time- # of People)	# of Public access workstations	Workstations with Internet Access	Typical Week: # of People using Library Workstations	# Programs Held Annually	Annual Program Attendance
St. Catharines	76,208	- 14.9%	15,428	0	0	74	40	1,359	1,035	15,894
Niagara Falls	40,819	-0.2%	16,502	27	204	63	33	1,547	1,393	24,948
Welland	16,114	-11.1%	4,303	162	25	42	26	1,069	434	5,521
Fort Erie	24,447	+6.3%	882	0	39	35	26	648	243	8,839
Grimsby	19,066	+5.9%	558	0	1	22	15	361	411	6,199
Lincoln	11,112	+11.0%	570	1	0	14	14	347	278	4,174
Pelham	9,847	+5.5%	938	0	133	14	8	336	488	7,618
Port Colborne	9,225	-10.0%	2,015	1	10	14	12	278	237	3,420
Thorold	5,266	-7.7%	2,194	0	10	21	12	215	160	2,219
Niagara-On-The-Lake	7,182	+10.7%	1,957	0	11	25	25	159	164	2,794
Wainfleet	2,202	-18.9%	1,212	1	0	8	7	71	216	2,742
West Lincoln	6,893	+8.1%	117	4	6	17	15	178	212	2,365

<sup>237</sup>

<sup>234</sup> Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2010.

<sup>235</sup> Ontario Ministry of Tourism and Culture. Pre-publication 2008 Ontario Public Library Statistics, June 2010. 2008 Ontario Public Library Statistics were provided to Niagara Region Community Services prior to being final and may be subject to further revisions before they are published by the Ministry.

<sup>236</sup> Ontario Ministry of Tourism and Culture. Pre-publication 2008 Ontario Public Library Statistics, June 2010. 2008 Ontario Public Library Statistics were provided to Niagara Region Community Services prior to being final and may be subject to further revisions before they are published by the Ministry.

<sup>237</sup> Ontario Ministry of Tourism and Culture. Pre-publication 2008 Ontario Public Library Statistics, June 2010. 2008 Ontario Public Library Statistics were provided to Niagara Region Community Services prior to being final and may be subject to further revisions before they are published by the Ministry.

As with adults, children living in poverty are more likely to experience exclusion and marginalization. This experience is difficult to measure directly however a proxy measurement is children's participation in sports.

Statistics Canada reported that families with a minimum household income of \$80,000 were twice as likely to participate in sports as those families with a household income of less than \$30,000.<sup>238</sup> The National Longitudinal Study of Children and Youth (1994-1999) reported that children from families in the lowest income quartile were three times more likely never to have participated in organized sports compared to families in the highest quartile.<sup>239</sup>

According to a special report by the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute (1999), 75 per cent of children from high income families participated in organized sports at least weekly, compared to 25 per cent of children from low-income families. When the sports and physical activities are unorganized, 82 per cent of children from high income families, and 65 per cent of children from low-income families participated at least weekly.<sup>240</sup>

Living in poverty may mean that children have fewer opportunities to participate in organized activities and therefore miss out on the social and health benefits that come with this participation.

Locally, children who otherwise would not be able to participate in activities are assisted via the ProKids initiative. This partnership among Niagara Region, the YMCA of Niagara and about 200 community organizations provides subsidies to low-income children to participate in a recreational or cultural activity of their choice. The initiative has had a significant impact increasing the number of children participating in recreation activities from 716 in 2001 to 2,014 in 2008.<sup>241</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> Early Years Niagara, 2009.

<sup>239</sup> Early Years Niagara, 2009.

<sup>240</sup> Early Years Niagara, 2009.

<sup>241</sup> Niagara Region Community Services, 2009.

*Mitigate the negative effects of low-income on children and youth through programs and services*

In eight years time, 11,180 increased opportunities for inclusion have been created for low-income children through ProKids.

<b>Year</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>
Number of Children <sup>242</sup>	716	812	1,311	1,260	1,575	1,797	1,695	2,014

### **Local activities**

The *Legacy of Poverty* report outlined the following imperatives intended to mitigate the negative effects of low-income on children and youth through programs and services:

- 3a) decrease cost of support and services
- 3b) increased access to parenting resources
- 3c) affordable/equitable child care
- 3d) recognize varying degree of need in the 12 regional municipalities

In 2008, four of the seven strategies resulting from Regional Council’s Business Planning session with stakeholders focused directly on responding to the urgent needs of children living in poverty. These were: breakfast programs, supports for parents, back to school/winter clothing and bus passes for low-income youth. The remaining initiatives, grocery cards for sole support parents, Good Food Box and the Emergency Energy Fund, supported families.

In 2009, the Niagara Prosperity Initiative resulted in increased personal assets for low-income children and families in the domain of inner resources, physical assets in the domains of transportation and dependent care supports, and human assets in the health and education domains.

The Niagara Region worked with the BEC to facilitate 11 community conversation sessions across the region from September 8 to October 22, 2009 to provide an opportunity for people living in poverty to be involved and to influence neighbourhood capacity building. Over 400 people had the

*Further details regarding the outcomes achieved in mitigating the negative impacts of low-income for children and youth through programs and services can be found in the “Monitor our Progress” section of this report.*

<sup>242</sup> Niagara Region Community Services, 2009.

*Mitigate the negative effects of low-income on children and youth through programs and services*

opportunity to voice their ideas. The input provided from these sessions was incorporated into the approval criteria for the 2010 Request for Proposals.

In 2010, Niagara Region used social auditing practices to capture the experiences of poverty and assess the impact of the 2009 Prosperity Projects on the well-being of individuals and neighbourhoods. Approximately 70 per cent of supports were directed at mitigating the negative impacts of poverty on low-income children and youth through services and programs. Thirty-four projects were delivered by 20 agencies across Niagara providing 11,920 units of service to individuals in low-income households as follows:

<b>Supports Provided Across Niagara</b>	<b>Units of Service</b>	<b>%</b>
Bus Passes	780	6.5%
Food Vouchers	891	7.5%
Good Food Box & Community Garden	311	2.6%
Back to School and Winter Clothing	5,922	49.7%
Summer and After School Programs	2,409	20.2%
Other (child visitation packages, evaluation, laundry vouchers, etc.)	1,607	13.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>11,920</b>	<b>100%</b>

<sup>243</sup>

## **Now what?**

The following themes and recommendations related to mitigating the negative effects of poverty for children and youth emerged from key informant interviews<sup>244</sup> regarding the Niagara Prosperity Initiatives:

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<sup>243</sup> Niagara Region Community Services, 2010.

<sup>244</sup> A small theoretical sample was selected to gather information from key informants and used to develop next steps regarding funding decisions, neighbourhood approach, service delivery, and general feedback regarding the Niagara Region's response to the "Legacy of Poverty" report recommendations.

*Mitigate the negative effects of low-income on children and youth through programs and services*

*Niagara Region developed the Neighbourhood Mapping Tool as a baseline used to guide discussions about conditions in neighbourhoods, including barriers and assets.* The profiles have been used to steer funding for programs and services in neighbourhoods in need of attention. This tool has the potential to further catalyze analysis, focus mobilization, and engagement with families to collectively develop strategies regarding access and appropriateness of community assets that can mitigate the negative effects of low-income on children and youth. Examples of this type of work include using neighbourhood maps to identify family friendly places, and safe/unsafe areas of the neighbourhood.

*The people who benefit from the programs may not be aware of the program's connection to Prosperity Initiatives.* This idea was expressed not as concern regarding kudos or marketing, but rather as evidence that work needs to be enhanced to meaningfully engage people with lived experiences of poverty. This process of engagement is not token or mechanical, but rather is seen as instrumental in rekindling lost hope or addressing isolation and stigma.

*Appropriate responses to local dimensions of poverty need to be flexible.* The depth and breadth of poverty varies from population groups across neighbourhoods in Niagara. Assets, including existing services and programs, also vary within these neighbourhoods. A tension that emerged with the 2010 Prosperity funding is the appropriateness of funding agencies to deliver programs across the region as opposed to funding local agencies to deliver programs within a municipality. This tension should be explored taking into consideration the costs and benefits of regional structures, their capacity and appropriateness in responding to the intent of the Niagara Prosperity Initiatives, local culture and needs. An opportunity for this assessment and discussion is on the horizon as a result of the provincial government's announcement regarding full day learning for junior and senior kindergarten students.

## Monitor our progress

### Overview

Social investments geared toward building human capital require long time horizons. Social and personal transformation is a process that takes time.<sup>245</sup> The process needs a mix of approaches that will take some time to get right. The reconnaissance, intervention, and evaluation cycles<sup>246</sup> within action oriented approaches to community collaboration create opportunities for ongoing learning and real time responsiveness to the shifting dynamic, experiences and impact of poverty.

Although built on best practices that emerge from community development and mobilization in other social policy arenas, the practice of poverty reduction rests on shifting ground. This context requires a long term vision and approach, including an understanding that knowledge is being created as responses are implemented. Activities focused on improving the social and health aspects of individual lives, like education and childcare, involves investment now with the understanding that returns will come in the future. "Even the most effective community building and institutional changes will take years to show an effect."<sup>247</sup>

Critical to building an understanding of what works is a constant focus on the complexity of poverty. Increasing prosperity by responding to people's lived experiences includes, but also moves beyond traditional counting of how many access what service into acting with the best information we have available at this given time. This approach involves moving toward a goal, paying attention to the signs and keeping focused on the horizon.

*The Legacy of Poverty recommendation addressed was to develop an approach to assessing indicators of poverty and social inclusion.*

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<sup>245</sup> Whitmore, E. (2001). "People Listened to What We had to Say": Reflections on an Emancipatory Qualitative Evaluation. In I. Shaw and N. Gould (Eds.), *Qualitative Research in Social Work*. (p83-99). London: Sage Publications.

<sup>246</sup> Melrose, M. (2001). "Maximizing the Rigor of Action Research: Why Would You Want To? How Could You?" *Field Methods*. 13(2):160-180.

<sup>247</sup> Gardner, B., Lalani, N, and Plamaduala, C. (2010). *Comprehensive Community Initiatives*

Because poverty is defined as complex, its eradication may seem too daunting a goal. The stubborn levels of poverty across Canada over the last 25 years tells us that business as usual will not work. Data and experience show that “privilege and opportunity are not evenly distributed and efforts to reduce poverty must acknowledge that place matters and that neighbourhoods count.”<sup>248</sup>

Niagara’s approach to poverty reduction included local creative adaptation around the non-negotiable imperative of increasing prosperity for people living in neighbourhoods in need of attention. Knowledge about poverty’s impacts and effects continues to encourage local conversations; sustaining these discussions and taking action is what transforms possibilities into realities.

The *Legacy of Poverty* (2007) report contained approximately 200 indicators or proxies for poverty. Of these, 22 told a Niagara specific story. Because of community mobilization toward poverty reduction activities, the landscape has shifted and provided many more opportunities to gather information to describe the local conditions and experiences of poverty. However, as noted in the introduction, many gaps in data continue to exist; important pieces of the puzzle remain unavailable as information is not available at the local level. Appendix A provides a summarized comparison between the data used in the *Legacy of Poverty* report and the information currently available and included in this report. Tracking this data responds to the fourth pillar recommendation in the *Legacy of Poverty* report, Monitor our Progress. The federal government’s decision to end the long form Census has implications for Niagara’s ability to compare year over year data in many key areas.

Increasing knowledge about the experiences and impacts of poverty is intended to improve practice and better match the intent and design of interventions with outcomes and outputs. Asking questions about program efficacy and efficiency can also involve service users and providers in decision making thereby enhancing transparency and reciprocal accountability.

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<sup>248</sup> Montgomery County, 2007.

## Local response

The *Legacy of Poverty* report detailed the need to monitor progress that included a region-wide approach to assessing data indicators of poverty and social inclusion.

A comprehensive poverty reduction strategy is concerned with and integrates income and social capital investments. The Niagara Prosperity Initiatives have enhanced immediate responses to the urgent needs of people living in poverty in Niagara. As of July 2009, a total of \$2,038,358 has been reinvested into communities in need throughout Niagara. This approach has resulted in three scaled interventions: “enhancing community capacity for poverty reduction, improvements in individual and household assets, and changes in systems and policies.”<sup>249</sup> Details are as follows:

Scale of Intervention <sup>250</sup>	Scope of Intervention	
Enhancing Community Capacity for Poverty Reduction	Convening Capacity	Specialized local infrastructure to facilitate and support multisectoral collaboration for poverty reduction established. The Convening Body is the Business Education Council
	Multisectoral Leadership	NPIAC is comprised of Individuals and organizations from four key sectors: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business: 3 Members, 4.2%</li> <li>• Government: 14 Members, 19.7%</li> <li>• Nonprofit: 53 Members, 74.6%</li> <li>• Lived experience (low-income): 1 Member, 1.4%</li> <li>• Multisectoral governance structure = Niagara Prosperity Initiatives Advisory Committee.</li> </ul>
	Collaboration	Diverse partners combining their energy, knowledge and resources to reduce poverty Types of Involvement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Core (governance/funding): 15</li> <li>• Participation/projects: 35</li> <li>• Connected (occasional): N/A</li> <li>• Multi-partner poverty reduction strategy: N/A</li> </ul>

<sup>249</sup> Vibrant Communities (November, 2008). Basic Outcome Tracking.

<sup>250</sup> Vibrant Communities (November, 2008). Basic Outcome Tracking.

Scale of Intervention <sup>250</sup>	Scope of Intervention	
	Community Awareness	<p>Increased profile of poverty as an issue of local concern, and appreciation of its causes and possible solutions.</p> <p>Mechanisms in use:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BEC websites</li> <li>• Reports Disseminated – Annual Youth Employment guide ‘Pursuits’,</li> <li>• Media Coverage – Number of Stories: 12</li> <li>• Community Conversations – 11 session – 400 participants</li> </ul>
Improvements in Individual and Household Assets	Individuals/Households benefiting from poverty reduction strategies	15,754
	Personal Assets	Inner Assets – 1,006
	Physical Assets	Emergency Supports - 172 Food - 595 Transportation 714 Dependent Care – 9,880
	Social Assets	Networks – 4 Group Membership - 2 Places to Volunteer - 37
	Human Assets	Life Skills - 678 Education – 1,007 Employment Skills - 998
Financial Assets	Reduced debt/costs - 99	
Changes in Systems and Policies	Public Policy	<p>Government policies, programs and procedures related to poverty reduction:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working with external partners in collaboration regarding social assistance food benefit and local municipal transit.</li> <li>• Working with external partners by linking with other communities like Hamilton to learn from their poverty reduction strategies.</li> </ul>
		<p>Policy Process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multi-pronged community-based policy processes</li> <li>• Multisectoral policy working groups</li> <li>• Lived experience captured in policy discussions and engagement</li> </ul>
		<p>Substantive Policies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Municipal: Advocacy focused</li> <li>• Provincial: Advocacy focused</li> </ul>

Scale of Intervention <sup>250</sup>	Scope of Intervention	
Service and Support Systems		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Federal: N/A</li> </ul>
		Programs, services and other supports intended to assist people living in poverty.
		<p>Inclusive Decision-Making - decisions regarding funding is made by a committee of community representatives comprised of other social planners, funders, government representatives, person with lived experience and business.</p> <p>System Design and Operation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Development and use of Neighbourhood Mapping Tool to understand the concerns and assets in 74 neighbourhoods across Niagara.</li> <li>Community conversations regarding barriers and assets in each community.</li> </ul>
Material Resources		Funding and other material resources used to undertake poverty reduction efforts - \$ 2,028,833
		Funding Process – based on neighbourhoods in need of attention
		<p>Levels and Use of Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advocacy – 2010: 12.7%</li> <li>Addressing the social determinants of health for adults: 2009: 42.4%, 2010: 13.6%</li> <li>Mitigating the negative effects of low-income on children/youth: 2008: 100%, 2009: 53.9%, 2010: 73.7%</li> <li>Monitoring our Progress: 2009: 3.7%</li> </ul>
Community Level Assets		<p>Community Resources that benefit different individuals and households in poverty over time:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community Garden</li> <li>Child care and early learning resources</li> <li>Nutrition Programs in Schools</li> <li>Good Food Box</li> <li>Umbrella Transitional Supports</li> <li>Niagara Neighbourhood Initiative Coalition</li> <li>Centralized evaluation of Niagara Prosperity Initiatives</li> </ul>

## Now what?

The following themes and recommendations related to monitoring emerged from key informant interviews<sup>251</sup> regarding the Niagara Prosperity Initiatives:

*There is a tension between measuring outcomes and providing service.* Key informants expressed the importance of responding to the urgency of poverty and therefore relying on a process of learning by doing. There was also concern expressed about the time required to collect information given that service providers' resources are stretched. However, informants also recognized the need to monitor activities and processes in order to understand their impacts and to use this information to improve design and approaches. A pragmatic knowledge base includes reflections on the practice, the process, and the people.

*Sustainable commitments are built by generating community ideas and involvement.* A driver for the Prosperity Initiatives is to increase capacity at the individual and neighbourhood levels; further development and use of participatory action research methods should be explored as a way to address the concern identified by key informants. This method of collecting information and monitoring outcomes engages people in a "collaborative process of social transformation in which they learn from, and change the way they engage in, the process of transformation."<sup>252</sup> It has the potential to benefit individuals directly and communities indirectly.<sup>253</sup> As well, research conducted in this way strengthens the individuals' commitment to the process and the outcomes. Special attention must be focused on cultivating local leaders and enhancing their skills in

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<sup>251</sup> A small theoretical sample was selected to gather information from key informants and used to develop next steps regarding funding decisions, neighbourhood approach, service delivery, and general feedback regarding the Niagara Region's response to the "Legacy of Poverty" report recommendations.

<sup>252</sup> Kemmis, S. and McTaggart, R. (2003). "Participatory Action Research." In Denzin, N and Lincoln, Y (eds) *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry* (second edition). Thousand Island, CA: Sage Publications. P. 336-396.

<sup>253</sup> Whitmore, E. (2001). "People Listened to What We had to Say": Reflections on an Emancipatory Qualitative Evaluation. In I. Shaw and N. Gould (Eds.), *Qualitative Research in Social Work*. (p83-99). London: Sage Publications.

order to foster collective local action geared toward transforming the distressing circumstances of poverty. For this work to be successful, the community must be better off at the end of the process having more knowledge about their reality and the tools necessary to change it.

*Quantitative data tells us what people do; it doesn't tell us why.* A comprehensive approach to data analysis and program evaluation must include diverse vantage points and perspectives. The process of collecting information and trying to understand what is going on can in itself be a “facilitative trigger and catalyst”<sup>254</sup> to transformative action. Evaluation needs to be designed to determine results for this place at this time.<sup>255</sup> Qualitative research methods should be incorporated into the data collection process in order to produce knowledge that is accessible and has high educative value for practitioners, service providers, and service users.

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<sup>254</sup> Melrose, M. (2001). “Maximizing the Rigor of Action Research: Why Would You Want To? How Could You?” *Field Methods*. 13(2):160-180.

<sup>255</sup> House, E. (2008). “Qualitative Evaluation and Changing Social Policy.” P623-640 in N. Denzin and Y. Lincoln (eds.) *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

## Appendix A: Key Indicators, 2001-2006

Indicator	2001	2006	Change
% of LICO families in Niagara	12.7%	12%	↓ 0.7%
% of LICO families that are female headed lone parent	45.7%	38%	↓ 7.7%
% of lone parent families	15.2%	16.4%	↑ 1.2%
% of female headed lone parent households	12.5%	13.1%	↑ 0.6%
% LICO families that are Aboriginal	25.2%	24.3%	↓ 0.9%
% Unemployment for Niagara	5.8%	6.1%	↑ 0.3%
% Unemployment for Aboriginal Peoples in Niagara	9.8%	12.1%	↑ 2.3%
% of LICO that are People with Disabilities	18.7%	17%	↓ 1.7%
% Unemployment for People with Disabilities	N/A	12.1%	N/A
% of Recent Immigrants in Niagara	32.4%	37.8%	↑ 5.4
% of Seniors below the LICO	12.6%	9.1%	↓ 3.5%
% of Families in Niagara considered working poor <sup>256</sup>	(2001) 6%	(2005) 6.5%	↑ 0.5%
Median income	56,787	64,965	↑ \$8,178
% without high school	21.8%	23.9%	↑ 2.1%
% in core housing need	12.5%	11.8%	↓ 0.7%
% spending over 30% of income on housing expenses <sup>257</sup>	45.6%	45.5%	↓ 0.1%
# Households using food banks <sup>258</sup>	(2005) 4,021	4,047	↑ 26
# Children using food banks <sup>259</sup>	(2005) 3,421	3,391	↓ 30
% of children 0-12 years old served in licensed child care centers <sup>260</sup>	10.3%	8.3%	↓ 2%
# of LICO children between 0-12 years old <sup>261</sup>	9,760	9,320	↓ 440
Ratio of LICO children to # of subsidized spaces <sup>262</sup>	2.3	2.3	0

<sup>256</sup> Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2010.

<sup>257</sup> Legacy of Poverty Report, 2007 and Neighbourhood Profiles

<sup>258</sup> Early Years Niagara, 2009.

<sup>259</sup> Early Years Niagara, 2009

<sup>260</sup> Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2010.

<sup>261</sup> Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2010.

<sup>262</sup> Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2010.

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>Change</b>
% reporting contact with health professional regarding mental health within the last year <sup>263</sup>	(2003) 6.5%	(2005) 6.1%	↓ 0.4%
% of Voter Participation <sup>264</sup>	(2000) 64%	65.9%	↑ 1.9%
% of population using Public Transit	1.9%	2.4%	↑ 0.5%
# Individuals on Ontario Disability Support Program	(2003) 9,344	(2008) 10,729	↑ 1,385
# Ontario Works Cases	(2003) 6,737	(2008) 7,457	↑ 720
% of Basic Needs Social Assistance Covered	(2000) 55.6%	(2005) 50.9%	↓ 4.7%
% of families in Niagara Receiving Social Assistance <sup>265</sup>	(2000) 10%	(2005) 9.3%	↓ 0.7%

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<sup>263</sup> Statistics Canada: CANSIM Table 105-0263

<sup>264</sup> Elections Canada (2008). Available at: <http://www.elections.ca/home.asp>

<sup>265</sup> Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2010.

<sup>266</sup> Statistics Canada (2001) (2006). Census Data, *Community Profiles*.