

BUILDING A POVERTY ACTION PLAN TOGETHER

WHAT WE HEARD SO FAR
JUNE 2019

A PLAN BUILT
BY THE COMMUNITY,
FOR THE COMMUNITY



INTRODUCTION

Poverty is often defined as simply a lack of income. The Chatham-Kent Poverty Roundtable has, to date, defined poverty by the Low-Income Measure-After Tax: a measurement of poverty based solely on median income levels across Canada. **However, poverty is much more than just low income.** Poverty is survival. Poverty is painful. Poverty is isolation, stress, and worry. Poverty is powerlessness and hopelessness. Poverty is barriers and obstacles, financially, socially, and emotionally. Poverty is overwhelming.

1 in 6 people in Chatham-Kent live in poverty. To us and many others in our community, this is not acceptable, especially in a caring, innovative, economically strong, and collaborative community like Chatham-Kent. That's why The Chatham-Kent Prosperity Roundtable is working with you and our community to build a community poverty action plan to eliminate poverty in Chatham-Kent.

This report is an update on what we have heard so far, while also inspiring you and our community to continue sharing thoughts, ideas, and wisdoms of the causes, impacts, and solutions to poverty in Chatham-Kent. We are spending six months travelling across our community to listen, learn, and build the community poverty action plan together;

Only together can we start moving the needle on poverty in Chatham-Kent.

BACKGROUND

The Chatham-Kent Prosperity Roundtable spent the past year engaging a growing number of people in our community to understand what is needed to eliminate poverty in Chatham-Kent. We realized that our community has the resources, assets, and strengths to eliminate poverty, including a vibrant service sector, a ton of people who care, and new plans emerging to tackle the impacts of poverty. With only 83% of our population not living in poverty, it's only a matter of time before we eliminate poverty in Chatham-Kent. We decided it was time to create an action plan to drive our collective work ahead and reach zero poverty.

We know a plan to eliminate poverty can only be successful if it is built by the experts – our community. **We needed to listen, learn, and build alongside our community.** We began with the Big Gathering on Poverty Reduction. Over 100 change makers in business, non-profit, government, and people who will benefit most if we are successful came together over a day and a half to discuss the causes, impacts, and solutions to poverty in Chatham-Kent.

We asked participants to answer the questions

- **What is happening now regarding poverty in Chatham-Kent?**
- **What is the change you want to see?**
- **What can we do together?**

to identify and prioritize solutions to eliminate poverty in our community.

A lot of great thoughts and ideas were shared during our time together. However, we are just getting started! We need to continue to hear from you and our entire community to make this plan as successful as possible. Review the report, and join us to share your thoughts, ideas, and wisdoms, and be part of a plan that will change how our community tackle the complex challenge of poverty.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

What we heard so far:

Poverty was described as overwhelming, ever-changing, complex, stressful, isolating, hopelessness, barriers and obstacles, powerlessness, trauma, struggle, stigmatizing, loss of dignity, more visible, and embarrassing.

Poverty can be caused by any one or a mixture of the following:

- A lack of affordable, accessible, decent, and supportive housing
- Inadequate transit system, especially for those outside Chatham
- Unaffordable food options
- Stigma, discrimination, and a lack of awareness
- Isolation and disconnection from the community
- A breakdown of the family unit
- Mental health challenges and/or addictions
- A rising cost of living that outpaces income
- Insufficient income supports
- Generational poverty
- Trauma and abuse
- Involvement with criminal justice system
- Illness and disability

The causes of poverty are complex and connected to each other. However, it is the impacts of poverty that work to keep people stuck in a downward cycle. Poverty impacts physical and mental health; strains local resources and services; leads to social exclusion, feelings of worthlessness, and disconnection; and crushes resiliency, dreams, and hopes. These impacts leave people with little opportunity to exit the cycle.

What will make a difference:

- Stable, strong, and safe families, neighbourhoods, and communities
- Community programs focused on bringing people together
- Safe spaces to meet, build relationships, and supports networks
- Coordinated services for rapid access
- Support to navigate available community resources and services
- Affordable, accessible, and decent housing options
- Access to affordable food
- Supports to access education and employment opportunities
- Participating fully in change work and our community

POVERTY IN CHATHAM-KENT: THE NUMBERS

1 in 6 people in Chatham-Kent live in poverty



1 in 5 children (0-17) in Chatham-Kent live in poverty



27,600 individuals have either no high school or only a high school diploma or certificate, with a median income of \$16,452

1,360 household are on the waitlist for space in a licensed childcare facility

62 individuals are chronically homeless (6+ months) in Chatham-Kent every month

910 households are on the waitlist for public housing (April 2019) – that is a 4+ year wait, especially for single individuals

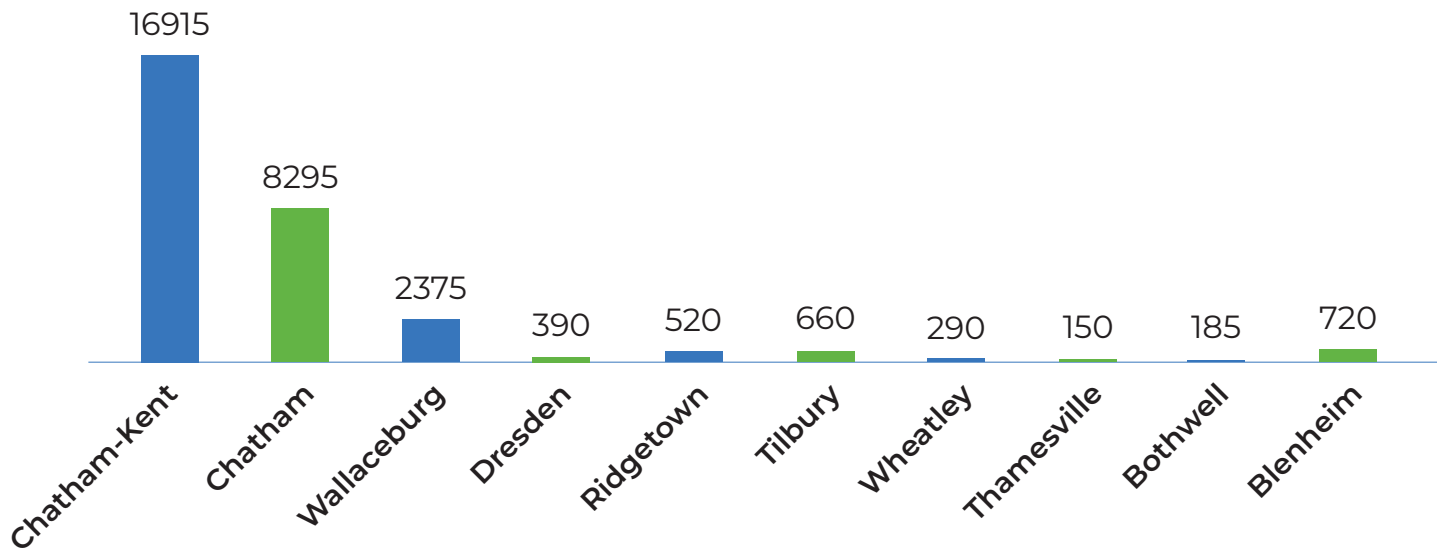


It takes **2.5 hours** on average to complete the inter-urban route, compared with **30 minutes** on the urban routes – route times are usually longer, especially on inter urban routes

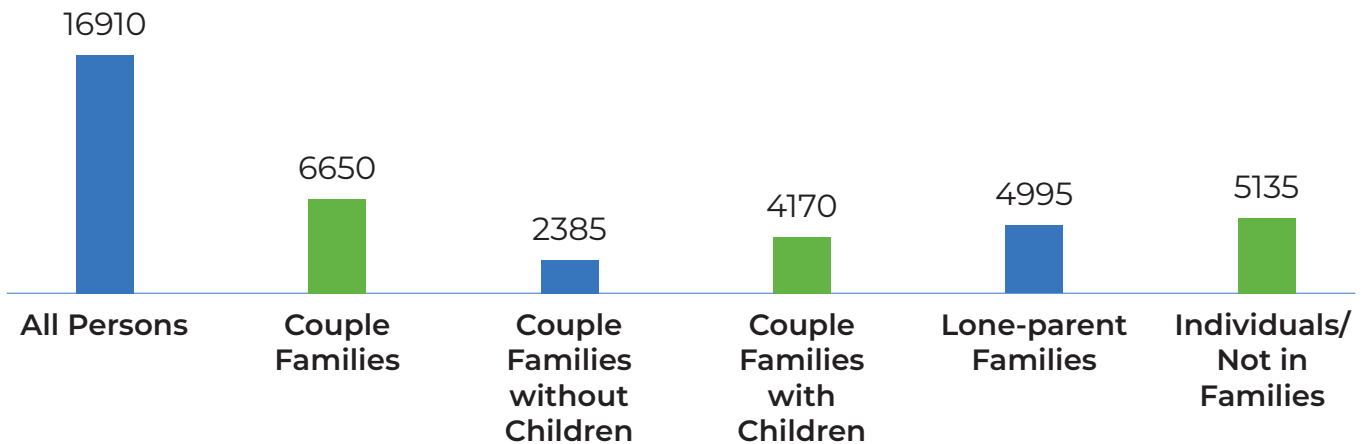
4481 individuals on average access Ontario Disability Support Program monthly – nearly double the number of people accessing Ontario Works

28.4% of households are facing a core housing need, spending more than 30% of their income on rent and utilities

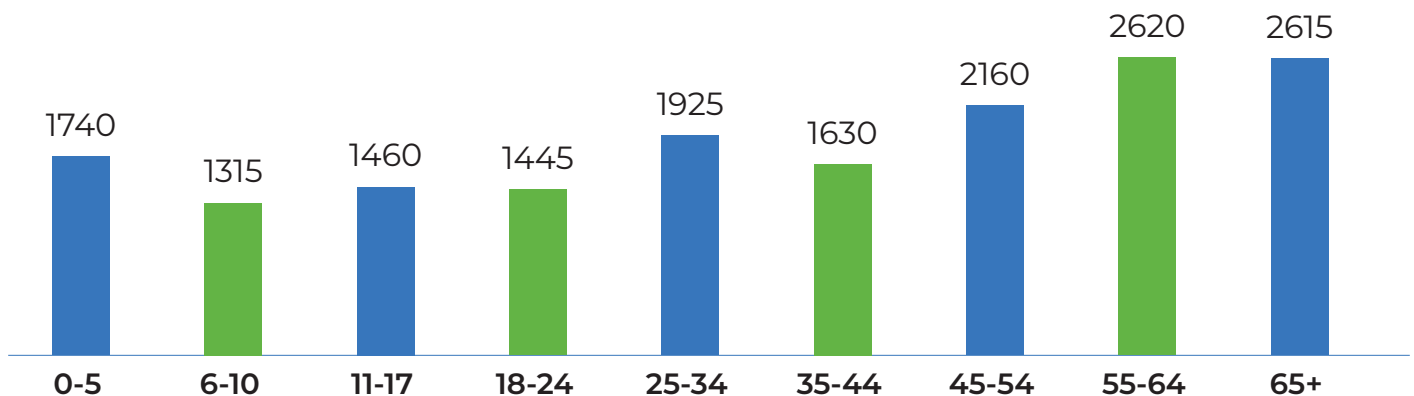
NUMBER OF PERSONS IN LOW-INCOME, 2015



NUMBER OF PERSONS IN LOW-INCOME BY FAMILY TYPE, 2015



NUMBER OF PERSONS IN LOW-INCOME BY AGE, 2015



All information contained on page 5 is from 'Statistics Canada. 2017. Census Profile. 2016 Census. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2016001. Ottawa. Released November 29, 2017.' or 'Canada Pension Plan. 2019. Government of Canada.'



*“We are a
small community,
but together
we can make
BIG CHANGES.”*

- Big Gathering participant

POVERTY IN CHATHAM-KENT: A COLLECTIVE UNDERSTANDING

We learned a lot about the causes, impacts, and solutions of poverty at the Big Gathering on Poverty Reduction. Below are just some of the many thoughts and wisdoms shared with us so far.

TRANSIT

Wait times, accessibility, and travel times prevent many from accessing housing, employment, education, and services, especially for those living outside Chatham. Moreover, it was felt that buses are not suitable to meet the needs of disabled riders (e.g. narrow aisles), and challenges exist with pick-up locations and busses not stopping for riders.

Ideas shared so far: carpool registry; a ‘transit uber’; and more subsidized transit options.

HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

We are seeing an increase in average rent and cost of housing, a decrease in vacancies and affordable housing options, and an increase of people being added to the housing waitlist with the Municipality. Moreover, some available housing options are not adequate, with repairs needed for decent living conditions, and services are facing an increasingly tougher time finding affordable housing for all who need it.

Homelessness is also a growing concern in our community. Homelessness has become more visible, especially in downtown Chatham. However, we also know there is a considerable amount of invisible homelessness (eg. couch surfing) in our community. This is compounded by current services struggling to meet demand, and scarce post-housing supports to help high-needs individuals stay housed.

Ideas share so far: increase temporary shelters for youth to support respite from unsafe environments; increase home-based supports to teach life skills, especially for newly-housed individuals; a program to support mediation between tenants and landlords to prevent evictions; tiny homes; homeshare programs; multi-purpose buildings; and incentives for private builders.

SENSE OF BELONGING AND CONNECTIONS

Isolation and disconnection are major causes of poverty in Chatham-Kent. Stable, strong, and safe families, neighbourhoods, and communities, along with a sense of belonging, are necessary for people to feel like they are cared about and included – a requirement for eliminating poverty in our community.

Ideas shared so far: increase drop-in centres and safe places; community hubs to access services, with livable spaces and community spaces for gathering



*“How do we
maintain our
**culture, language,
and identity** while
we solve poverty?”*

*- Big Gathering participant,
regarding Indigenous peoples
and communities*

FOOD

People have had positive experiences with the local food banks and community meals, and recognize current projects focused on increasing access to affordable food. However, some food banks can be judgemental when accessing services, preventing people from reaching out in times of need. Moreover, some food programs are staffed by volunteers, creating challenges with service coordination and burn-out.

Ideas shared so far: community cooking classes; grocery delivery services for isolated and immobile community members; a good food box to provide fruits and vegetables at a reduced price; increase awareness of foodrescue.ca to rescue and repurpose food; increase community gardens; and a fruit/vegetable truck to travel between communities to sell fresh produce at a subsidized rate

DISCRIMINATION TOWARDS INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND COMMUNITIES

There is a growing awareness for the need to work alongside Indigenous peoples and communities on reconciliation. However, stigma and discrimination are still present in our community. Indigenous peoples feel 'looked down on', judged, and misunderstood. Moreover, people expressed concern that non-Indigenous organizations tend to 'take over' and provide answers to Indigenous communities without respecting their ways of life, history, culture, and knowledge. These behaviours stop many Indigenous peoples from accessing services, employment, education, and other opportunities for fear of racism, stigma, and discrimination.

With 795 First Nations (38.6%) and 335 Métis (21.9%) people living in poverty in our community, the need to respectfully listen, learn, and partner are essential first steps in eliminating poverty in Indigenous communities.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND AWARENESS

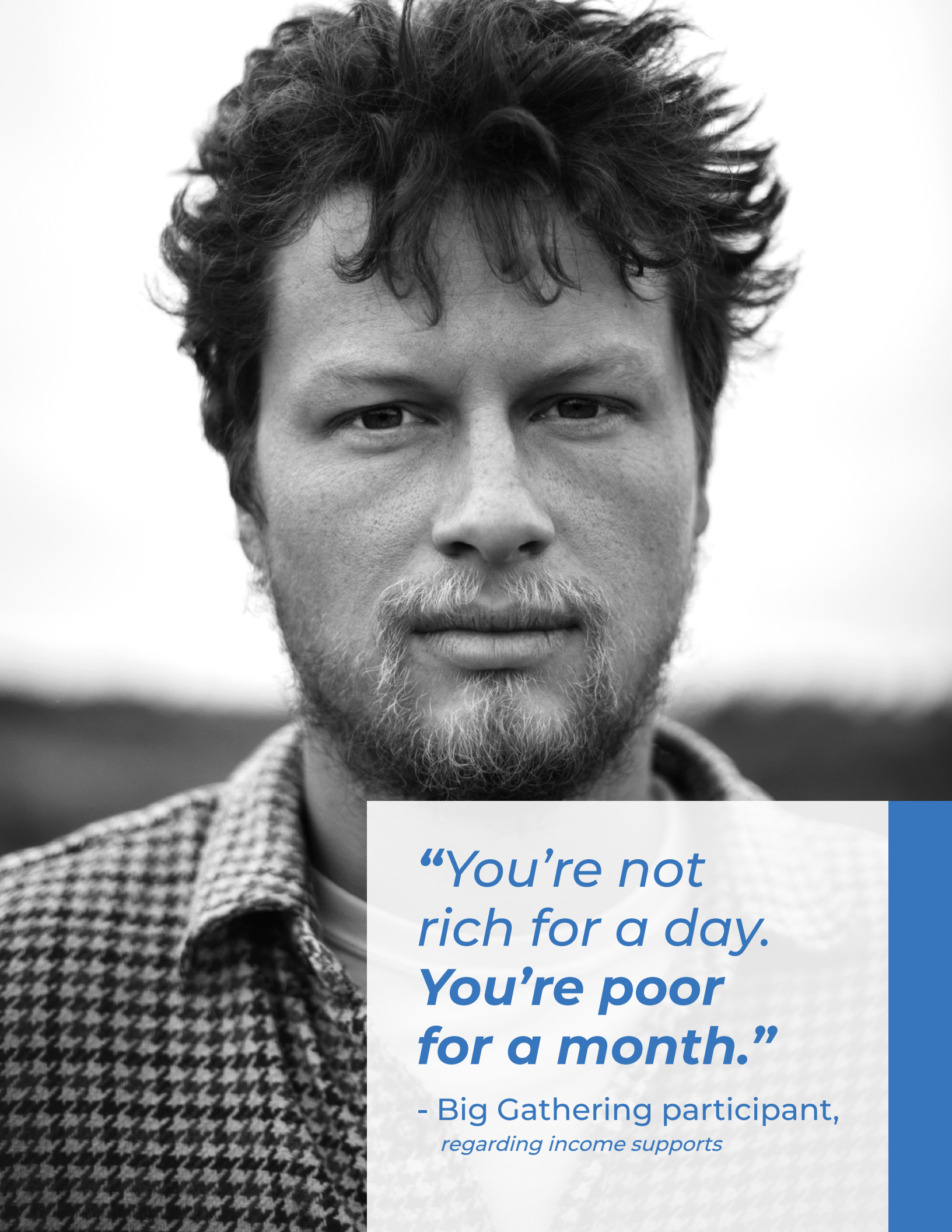
Community members, with and without lived experience of poverty, feel disconnected from current poverty-related work in our community. Community members felt that while work was occurring, it was done behind closed doors. This leads to service duplication by community groups and a lack of understanding of available supports and services. We need to include community members in this poverty action plan for our work ahead to be successful.

Ideas shared so far: networking opportunities to learn about work occurring; public events to share stories and build relationships; bias and trauma trainings for community; awareness projects to change attitudes on poverty.

STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION

Stigma and discrimination can stop people from accessing or continuing supports and services, and engaging in the community. This is especially true for groups traditionally marginalized, including Indigenous peoples, people with disabilities, LGBTQ2S, and youth. Tolerance, awareness of the realities of poverty, and dignified supports were mentioned as necessary to make progress on poverty elimination in Chatham-Kent.

Ideas shared so far: Indigenous liaisons for services; Indigenous Friendship Centre, increased mental health and self-esteem supports for youth; a list of identified safe spaces for LGBTQ2S individuals; gatherings and events to reduce loneliness and isolation among seniors; and a newcomer buddy program for welcoming and inclusion.



***“You’re not
rich for a day.
You’re poor
for a month.”***

*- Big Gathering participant,
regarding income supports*

FAMILIES

The breakdown of the family unit can be a traumatic incident, and lead to financial and emotional pressures for both parents and children. There is a need to better support families, especially single-parent families, as these pressures are immediate and can push families deeper into poverty overnight. Moreover, children can suffer significantly, reducing their chances of exiting poverty. Many discussions focused on helping families stay intact to prevent these pressures for parents and children.

Ideas shared so far: mentorship programs for families for peer support; family-focused public events supporting families; circles programs to support all family members in thriving; wrap-around services for struggling families; and mentorship programs for men.

INCOME SUPPORTS AND WORKING POOR

Current income support levels are far below the cost of living in Chatham-Kent. This is especially true for single people and single-parent households. Extreme low-income forces people into survival mode, where all energy is focused on just surviving for the day. This prevents people from even beginning to thrive and exit the cycle of poverty.

Many in our community are gainfully employed, yet still have trouble making ends meet: The ALICE group. This group is employed, yet has limited assets and are constrained by their incomes - they have enough income to be above the poverty but not enough to be financially secure and maintain a stable household budget.

When funds run short, cash-strapped households are forced to make impossible decisions. While there are many causes of poverty, insufficient income is by far one of the hardest to overcome.

MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTIONS

Not everyone living in poverty is living with mental health concerns and/or addictions. However, with these challenges on the rise in our community, we are also seeing a comparable rise among people living in poverty. Many factors are working against people living with mental health and/or addictions, including current work not addressing the root causes of these challenges and a lack of harm-reduction services in Chatham-Kent.

Many are quietly struggling with mental health challenges in our community, including the agricultural community. Due to the social environment, these individuals and families struggle in isolation, brought on by financial and housing insecurity.

Ideas shared so far: detox centre; increase needle exchanges; stabilization spaces; increase public resources to find help; education about harm-reduction approach; social workers partner with police to respond to mental health- and addiction-related calls; and more supports available for police when supporting high-risk individuals and families.

SERVICE NAVIGATION, COORDINATION, AND AWARENESS

There is a need for service coordination to support rapid access to services and increase intensive individual supports for the most vulnerable. Peer navigators – trained individuals with lived experience of poverty – were also mentioned to help people living in poverty understand, access, and navigate services best suited for them.

Ideas shared so far: increased awareness of 211; a resource booklet with all resources and services listed with information; seeing-is-believing tours and open-door events to share available services; increase outreach and home-based services; mobile services to travel between communities; and community hubs to centralize services.

YOUTH

While supports exist for youth, hardships in accessing services and not being aware of where to turn for support stops youth from addressing their challenges. A lack of youth addiction services, trauma-informed services, and support for youth peer groups contribute to these challenges.

Ideas shared so far: support informal youth groups to grow peer-to-peer learning experiences; accessible and appropriate youth mental health and addiction services; leaders in all sectors trauma-informed to best support youth; mentorship programs with leaders to build self-esteem and learn employable skills; and life skills training in schools

CHILDCARE

Subsidized childcare has helped many single parents and families in Chatham-Kent. However, we do not have enough childcare spaces to meet the need. This reduces the ability for parents, especially single parents, to access education and employment opportunities. The need to find innovative childcare delivery models was mentioned.

Ideas shared so far: expand childcare in schools to support parent accessing education; diversify staff at childcare facilities to increase spaces; extend hours of after-school programs; and create childcare services for children struggling with mental health and behavioural challenges to best support their needs.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Education has shown to be a critical path to exiting poverty, as it opens more opportunities for employment. However, major barriers exist when trying to access education, including transportation, cost of living, and debts. Without a higher level of education, finding higher paying jobs in skilled trades and other areas becomes increasingly difficult. Other barriers exist to accessing employment, including criminal history, severe mental health challenges and/or addictions, transportation, childcare, personal health, among others.

Ideas shared so far: partnerships between school boards and businesses to grow skills and prepare youth for current and future local job market, such as a hydroponic centre; support peer-to-peer tutoring and support groups at schools; skilled-trades mentorships with business leaders to build self-esteem and expose youth to various job paths; employ people on farms with same supports given to temporary foreign workers; employers donate 2-hr of staff time/week for 1 time projects; increased training programs through employers with certification; skills match programs to match skills instead of education level and experience.



PARTNERSHIPS NEEDED FOR SUCCESS

These are some of the partnerships that are important to achieve a poverty-free Chatham-Kent. We know there are many partnerships needed to make this plan successful – who should be added?

Business Sector

Non-profits

Municipal of Chatham-Kent

Provincial Government

Federal Government

Schools Boards

Universities/Colleges

Youth

Seniors

Indigenous communities

Community members

Families

Neighbourhood groups

Civic organizations

Agricultural community

Walpole Island First Nation

Eelünaapéewi Lahkéewiit

Delaware Nation

Caldwell First Nation



ACTING NOW FOR A POVERTY-FREE CHATHAM-KENT

At The Big Gathering, we asked participants to identify and prioritize concrete projects under six categories to start achieving impact now. Below are the top ideas, in order of priority, we are looking to start right away.



NEIGHBOURHOODS

A community advocate, who has lived experience, to share info about available services, help navigate services, and connect people with the right services for them.

EDUCATION AND LEARNING

Educate professionals, in all sectors, about trauma and trauma-informed approaches to reduce stigma, increase compassion, and increase skills among leaders to better support fellow community members struggling.

INCOME AND EMPLOYMENT

A rideshare program to increase affordable transit options to access employment, education, housing, and community engagement

HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

Add poverty to the CK2035 Plan as a focus area to ensure the Municipal council and administration prioritize funding for poverty-related projects, including housing and homelessness initiatives.

FOOD ACCESS AND AFFORDABILITY

A Community Resource Card to access all services requiring income statements, such as food banks and transit passes, to increase dignity among people living in poverty.

OUT-OF-THE-BOX IDEAS

Start a Homeshare Program to increase availability of affordable housing options in our community.

IN CONCLUSION

These ideas are just the beginning, and only represent a few of the many ideas shared so far. We are still learning from you and our community about what is happening now regarding poverty, changes needed, and solutions to achieve a poverty-free Chatham-Kent.

We believe our community has the answers to the complex challenges of poverty. This is why we ask that you join us over the next six months to share your thoughts, ideas, and wisdoms on these questions. We want to make sure this plan is informed and built by you and our community to have impact at every step of the plan.

We will also be spending the next six months implementing some of the action-now ideas listed on the previous page before the launch of the CK Poverty Action Plan in February 2020 to start moving the needle on poverty right now.

VISIT

www.prosperityroundtable.com

to keep an eye out for news of our engagement events.

VISIT

<http://bit.ly/ck-poverty-plan>

to share your thoughts, ideas, and wisdoms now!

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