

# MAKING AN IMPACT

## *Through HCF Grants*

### **Addressing Environmental Issues in North Hamilton**

North Hamilton may have more than its fair share of industry, sewage treatment facilities, expressways, and old city dumps, but the neighbourhood is home to about 9000 residents and has been for generations. Family ties are strong and neighbourhood pride is legendary. Environment Hamilton is helping area residents to better understand environmental issues and their environmental rights, and to advocate for improvements.

While residents of north Hamilton are most directly affected, the whole city benefits from their success in improving air quality and waste management.

With funding from the Tackling Poverty Together initiative of Hamilton Community Foundation, residents have been attending community workshops and public forums to address such vital quality of life issues as air quality, soot, public transit, and household energy conservation. The goal is community engagement in environmental stewardship.

Environment Hamilton's North Hamilton Project has demonstrated some significant successes to date:

- To protect Hamilton's air quality, residents achieved mandatory smoke stack testing on a major local biodiesel manufacturing facility (BIOX) and finally won compensation for damage the plant demolition did to their homes
- Students at Woodward Avenue Elementary are working to minimize waste, conserve energy and "green" their school. Environment Hamilton (EH) took the older students to tour the landfill and the compost and recycling depots. They reported back to a whole school assembly. EH canvassed local businesses for donations to buy each student and staff member a "litterless lunch" kit. A newsletter was sent home with recipes and cost saving ideas for juice and snacks. The lunch program and other improvements have reduced the school's waste from 90 bags per month to just four. And the benefits have spilled over to home: students say their home garbage is reduced too, parents are pleased the kids are eating healthier, and families with two or more children are reporting savings of more than \$100 per month
- Some 3,200 energy conservation kits were distributed to North End households: the kits included four compact fluorescent light bulbs, insulating pipe wrap, a low-flow showerhead, and water spigots for kitchen and bathroom sinks. The kits save each home an average of \$150 in energy costs each year – and 1,600 tonnes of greenhouse gases
- Group training was held on the Ontario Environmental Bill of Rights
- Door-knocking at 8,300 homes north of Cannon Street gathered information from 3,215 surveys on transit use and electricity conservation. The transit information has been presented to the City, and the HSR has promised a new north/south bus route through the Keith neighbourhood. It will serve Hamilton General Hospital, the Eva Rothwell Centre (former Robert Land School site), VON headquarters, employers and several schools.

### *How HCF is Helping*

- *Consistent with its value of collaboration HCF is stressing citizen engagement in its approach to environmental issues.*
- *Grantmaking centers around youth engagement, neighbourhood engagement, and strengthening the capacity of the environmental organizations in Hamilton.*
- *Environment Hamilton's work with North End residents has been supported by three Tackling Poverty Together grants from the Community Fund.*
- *HCF has also supported Environment Hamilton through its POET Neighbourhood environmental granting stream, for action around climate change.*
- *HCF is also taking advantage of Environment Hamilton's expertise: the Foundation turned to EH to draft a framework for tracking environmental trends.*

- Two neighbourhood festivals were organized to promote environmental issues. The festivals raised awareness of wastewater management and Green Cart/Blue Box programs, helped bring the neighbourhoods together, and supported citizen engagement. They also raised over \$1,000 for park improvement.
- After black soot fell on the North End last summer, companies encouraged residents to report fallout from local smokestacks. But with more than 100 smokestacks in the area, it's almost impossible to identify which stack is which. The north end's resident "Soot Group" is pushing for companies to clearly label their stacks to make accountability easier. (One company has done so.) They also achieved compensation for residents affected by the soot fallout.

Environment Hamilton has partnered with Hamilton Street Railway, Horizon Utilities, Hamilton Naturalists' Club, Union Gas, City of Hamilton, BIAs, local resident associations and other environmental groups in these initiatives. The resident groups have forged new relationships with local, federal and provincial politicians, Ministry bureaucrats, Business Improvement Areas, local industry leaders, and the media.

#### What Are North Hamilton's Environmental Challenges?

- North Hamilton is home to most of Hamilton's heavy manufacturing facilities. More than 100 smokestacks dot the skyline
- Water and air quality practices in north Hamilton affect the whole city – but local residents are often the ones who must challenge environmentally dangerous practices. Residents have limited resources and research shows that low-income neighbourhoods often have difficulty obtaining equal access to regulatory bodies, beautification programs, and enforcement of property standards and bylaws.
- Responsibility for environmental issues is scattered among federal, provincial and municipal legislation and regulations – a difficult web to untangle

#### ***Who Wins with the EH North Hamilton Project***

- *Children and families address nutrition and poverty through litterless lunches*
- *Children and families learn about environmental stewardship*
- *Local residents learn their rights and take more control of their neighbourhood's environmental quality*
- *Neighbourhood cohesion is strengthened*