

**Taking on the poverty cause**  
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What a season for mega-bucks. From schemes to drop \$238 million on a hockey team, to visions of a \$17-billion Golden Horseshoe transit fix, the month of June has been awash in news about big dreams and aggressive strategies, with price tags so high that the dollar figures start to become meaningless abstracts.

Duly numbed by such titanic sums, it's too easy to become complacent about a wonderful gift that will improve many lives and prospects in Hamilton's poorest neighbourhood. After all, in an environment where the job of philanthropy is too easily left to the well-known rich guys -- high-tech billionaires or fast-food tycoons -- where does an individual million-dollar donation fit into the bigger picture?

It fits right into the very heart of what defines, and matters to, a community.

This week's announcement that a local couple is giving \$1 million to improve early childhood development in the Beasley neighbourhood has a precious significance.

Yes, it will create new programs and opportunities at the Beasley Community Centre. The donation will get children better prepared for kindergarten, helping them learn to read and write. It will provide a speech, hearing, vision and dental clinic for kids who have never known one. And the money means more local residents, especially newcomers to Canada, will learn to make good, affordable meals that will sustain the health of young families who represent the future of our city.

But this week's donation also reinforces the sense that more and more people in Hamilton understand that attacking the causes of poverty -- especially childhood poverty -- is a core civic duty for every one of us.

The couple that anonymously contributed this money didn't do it for the fame. All we know is that they are retired educators who read that the federal government's cancelled child care plan meant Hamilton would lose 1,400 planned child care spaces. They saw a need in their midst, and could afford to invest in it. They directed that their money be spent on early childhood development.

This city is no stranger to need; 20 per cent of our residents live at or below the poverty line. Each year the mayor goes to Queen's Park to explain why we need millions more dollars to shelter and support residents who cannot pay for basic requirements that so many take for granted.

Not many of us can donate a million dollars, but many do volunteer to serve school breakfasts or spend time with youth groups who need leadership and role models. This is a city where hundreds of residents, business and community leaders, social agency staff and activists have pooled their passions and energy into the extraordinary Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction.

In a flawed world, surely these kinds of homegrown efforts indicate a proud community that cares for its own, and takes on the hard slogging which is the price of a better future.