

# OPINION

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**Winner  
2005 and 2007**  
Canadian Journalism  
Foundation  
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a division of Metroland Media Group Ltd.



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# Poverty: We must fight on

If you've ever tried to move a large boulder out of the dirt or a stump out of the ground, you know there's that encouraging moment when you feel it shift, ever so slightly. It doesn't mean the hard work is over, but it does signal that the struggle just might pay off.

That's the hopeful feeling that a wide cross-section of Hamiltonians should have after Statistics Canada reported that there are about 6,000 fewer people living in poverty in Hamilton than in 2001.

It's not enough to signal victory in Hamilton's radically rethought anti-poverty efforts, but it is certainly a glimmer of success.

Some mild caution needs to be applied to the Statistics Canada numbers, because the methodology for arriving at them has changed. But some analysts were expecting the numbers to rise because of the changes, so it is encouraging to see movement in the right direction.

No matter how you quantify and qualify, the numbers are good news, and send a strong message that Hamilton's anti-poverty efforts – which cross myriad sectors and communities – should stay the course. Hamilton now has a tested template in place for community collaboration, one so bold it prompts inquiries from other cities.

The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction was convened in 2005 by the City of Hamilton and Hamilton Community Foundation; it consisted of representatives from communities, agencies, organizations and businesses. By mid-2006 the round table had outlined an ambitious, full-frontal attack on the root causes of poverty in a strategic report called Making Hamilton the Best Place to Raise a Child: A Change Framework for Poverty Reduction. It was frankly visionary, always long-term, and never a matter of quick fixes.

What resulted, in its simplest form, was a breaking down of the "silos" in which agencies often worked, despite their best intentions, in isolation from each other. There has been a widespread "buy-in" by partners and stakeholders, resulting in a true community collaboration to meet poverty head-on with street-level efforts.

This time last year, a report showed close to 30 continuing initiatives and partnerships. There are now school and community-association initiatives across Hamilton's most at-need neighbourhoods, as well as the From Here to the Bay Initiative, the Port Authority's partnership with the United Way to put \$300,000 from port industries into their neighbourhoods. The Jobs Prosperity Collaborative (formerly the Hamilton Civic Coalition) has refired interest and momentum.

Yes, there are still almost 90,000 people still living in poverty in Hamilton. But 6,000 fewer is undeniably significant. We must use that glimmer of success to keep doing the bold, courageous things.

This is not (paraphrasing Winston Churchill) the end of the struggle against poverty; not even the beginning of the end. But it just might be the end of the beginning.

*Robert Howard*