

# MAKING AN IMPACT

## *Through HCF Community Leadership*

### **Tackling Poverty in Hamilton – Strategically**

Hamilton Community Foundation has been meeting this community's needs since 1954. As our city has grown and changed, so have its challenges. HCF is keeping pace with those changes.

We continue to fund across the spectrum (environment, the arts, recreation, health and human services etc.), and our donors continue to support their areas of particular interest. But HCF has also taken a strategic focus against poverty.

Why? Hamilton faces a severe challenge. More than 20 percent of our residents are living in poverty – one of the highest rates in Ontario. Children, aboriginal Canadians, new immigrants and other groups face even higher rates of poverty.

This is unacceptable in a city with Hamilton's resources and its tradition of caring. And it is a barrier to Hamilton's progress and prosperity.

*"By using its unique roles and assets – grants, convening, knowledge, expertise, influence – and collaborating effectively with others, Hamilton Community Foundation and our donors can have a real impact on poverty. Working as a community, we can build prosperity for all Hamiltonians." – Carolyn Milne, President & CEO*

#### *How HCF is Helping*

*Since 1954, Hamilton Community Foundation (HCF) has been receiving funds from generous citizens, investing those funds to generate income and making grants to support a wide range of local charities in arts and heritage, education, the environment, health and social services. HCF brings people together to create solutions to some of Hamilton's most pressing challenges, such as poverty, neighbourhood revitalization and environmental protection. It has total assets of more than \$126 million and, since 1954, has made grants to our community of more than \$45 million.*

### **A Multi-Layered Strategy**

Hamilton Community Foundation is tackling poverty in a multi-pronged approach. We have focused our discretionary granting on poverty reduction, prevention and alleviation; we have zeroed in on community development in specific high-need neighbourhoods; and we have co-convened a city-wide, comprehensive initiative on poverty reduction. We are using both our resources and our relationships to tackle poverty.

### **Building on Strengths**

Our approach in every strategy is to build on strength. Hamilton has resources, creativity, experience and heart. Those are powerful assets. In our grantmaking, we look for organizations with expertise and evidence that their approach is working. In neighbourhood development, we support residents who have a dream and the will to improve their community. Through our convening work, such as the Hamilton Roundtable on Poverty Reduction, we bring together leaders who have the resources and the power to make a difference. Prosperity is built on strength – and Hamilton's strength is legendary.

### **Strategy One: Focused Grantmaking**

In 2004, HCF became the first community foundation in Canada to commit the majority of its unrestricted Community Fund granting to poverty. HCF's Board of Directors made this bold decision after extensive research and discussion. The Tackling Poverty Together (TPT) initiative dedicated four years (2004-2007) of the Foundation's Community Fund grantmaking – at least \$3 million – to programs focusing on poverty prevention, reduction, and alleviation. To further sharpen that focus, we identified 12 pathways that help people out of poverty.

*Impact:*

Since 2004, HCF has granted \$3.4 million from the Community Fund and Field of Interest Funds under the TPT program. Ninety percent of TPT grants have been to poverty prevention and reduction strategies, 10% to alleviation. More than 9,000 individuals have directly benefited. The TPT program has also strengthened recipient organizations with technical support, for example, in program evaluation, and has helped them leverage valuable partnerships and additional financial support. The grants made through TPT align well with the new poverty reduction framework adopted by the Hamilton Roundtable on Poverty Reduction (see Strategy Three).

**Strategy Two: Focus on Neighbourhood and Local Leadership Development**

In 2002, HCF launched the *Growing Roots...Strengthening Neighbourhoods* program to develop the ability of local citizens and high-need neighbourhoods to help themselves. This small grants program was designed to offer both financial help and expertise to groups of residents who had an idea for improving their neighbourhood. Since 2002, over 80 grants have been made – but more importantly, community development resources, in the form of a full-time Neighbourhood Coordinator, part time Community Developers and other assistance, have helped build the skills and confidence of neighbourhood residents to take leadership and work for change.

*Impact:*

Through HCF's Neighbourhood Program, residents beautified blighted streets, created employment training for immigrant women, after-school programs for children, street festivals, and scores of other small-scale interventions that vastly improve the quality of life for local residents.

Because of these activities, neighbours say they talk to each other more, interact more positively with local schools and with police, feel safer in their streets, and are prouder of their neighbourhoods. They feel empowered to make changes. Leaders have developed.

The initiative has also been transformative for the Foundation. It has brought volunteers and staff into direct contact with residents of Hamilton's most challenged neighbourhoods and has sharpened the Foundation's understanding of poverty and the power of neighbourhood development. The process of building on strengths, nurturing local leaders, and facilitating grassroots change has hammered home the lesson that asset-based community development, while costly and time-consuming, works.

<i>Poverty in Hamilton</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Poverty rate: 20%</i><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- <i>For recent immigrants: 52%</i></li><li>- <i>For Aboriginals: 44%</i></li><li>- <i>For visible minorities: 37%</i></li><li>- <i>For people with disabilities: 30%</i></li></ul></li><li>• <i>Working a 40-hour week at minimum wage leaves you below the poverty line.</i></li><li>• <i>15,000 Hamiltonians use food banks every month.</i></li></ul>

**Strategy Three: Community Convening and the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction**

Even as we focus our grantmaking on poverty and invest deeply at the neighbourhood level, we are all too conscious that poverty is not an issue to be solved by one organization alone. Convening – bringing stakeholders together to discuss issues of common concern – is a powerful community foundation role, and one which HCF has played effectively on issues as varied as bullying, aboriginal youth, racism, and the sustainability of the arts.

We were invited to do so again, around poverty. As HCF was rolling out the TPT initiative, Joe-Anne Priel, General Manager of the City of Hamilton Public Health and Community Services Department, was expressing the City's deep concern over poverty and calling for action. She approached the Foundation and in February 2005, HCF and the City of Hamilton co-convened a roundtable to address the problem of poverty collectively and create a long-term plan.

The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction (HRPR) now involves dozens of the city's leading organizations and individuals from all sectors: business, education, social services, poverty advocates, people living in poverty, and government. Organizations and community leaders have rallied around the HRPR. *The Hamilton Spectator*, which recognized the need to raise the profile of poverty and spark community-wide discussion, declared poverty its "issue of choice" for three years – marking the first time in the newspaper's history that it has identified a public policy focus.

The HRPR has proposed a framework for poverty reduction that centers on "Making Hamilton the Best Place to Raise a Child." The framework identifies critical points during a child's development and the interconnected supports families need to progress successfully through those stages. It challenges the community to make these foundations for prosperity accessible to every child.

*Impact:*

A new way of working is taking hold, one that avoids blame and promotes shared goals. Hamilton is becoming more collaborative and innovative in finding and supporting the drivers of prosperity. The connection between social development and economic development is resonating. Many important partnerships have been born or strengthened by the HRPR. Policy changes have begun to remove barriers to prosperity. Reducing poverty and building prosperity is on the community's radar as never before.

### Evaluation and Learning

Throughout our focus on poverty, HCF has given thought and resources to evaluation and learning, both internally and with our grantees. Using outside consultants, we have evaluated our TPT and Neighbourhood programs. TPT grantees hone their skills in periodic evaluation workshops and report their program outcomes. Evaluation of the HRPR initiative is also examining outcomes: from the individual level through to the community level. Our approach to evaluation is both outcome-oriented and developmental – meaning that we use evaluation to adjust programs as we go along. Our evaluation results have been both positive and challenging, encouraging us to go forward and providing insight into how we can improve. We've made many course corrections as a result.

### Looking Ahead

Our experience with these three poverty reduction strategies has flagged important directions for the future. We know that partnership and collaboration is key, on every level from grassroots intervention to policy and legislative change. Increasingly, poverty is being concentrated in particular areas of the city; it is clear that supporting "neighbourhood hubs" in those areas – the shared spaces that communities need in order to thrive – is critically important. Investing in capacity building at the local level also pays dividends. As well, it is clear that HCF has an important role as a leader in the community, offering not only grants but also expertise, technical assistance, vision, and leadership more broadly.

These lessons are shaping our plans for the future.

- We will continue to provide leadership to HRPR and align with other key community initiatives.
- Our TPT granting and technical support program will sharpen the focus on two components: supporting neighbourhood hubs and networks, and tackling poverty reduction at the more systemic policy level.
- Our emphasis on evaluation will continue.

These refinements to our strategy will help HCF increase the impact of our work in building prosperity for all Hamiltonians.

(For more detail, see our granting guidelines at [www.hcf.on.ca](http://www.hcf.on.ca))

### *A Few Specific Outcomes of HCF's Multi-Faceted Poverty Strategy*

- ***\$3.4 million in grants to reduce poverty:***
  - *gave young parents job training and parenting workshops*
  - *gave treatment to mothers with addictions*
  - *gave North End children tutoring in math and literacy*
  - *gave poor children subsidies for recreation and sports programs*
  - *gave regular-paying jobs to adults with mental health challenges*
  - *gave leadership training and business opportunities to recently immigrated women from 15 nations*
  - *gave disabled people more access to Ontario Disability Support Program income*
  - *gave low-income families the opportunity to become homeowners*
- ***The Neighbourhood Program:***
  - *cleaned up a neighbourhood park, taking it away from drug dealers and returning it to kids and families*
  - *helped McMaster students mentor at-risk kids and help them with homework*
  - *created a community garden and shared the harvest*
- ***HCF's convening role and the HRPR helped Hamilton partnerships:***
  - *purchase a school and turn it into a neighbourhood centre*
  - *bring arts programming back into schools*
  - *develop a city-wide joint services delivery plan for early learning partners*
  - *return \$962,000 to 6,418 children – a portion of the National Child Benefit clawback*
  - *advocate for a poverty strategy at the provincial and federal level*

*There are hundreds of other examples!*