



Monday, September 28, 2015

An Open Letter Re: Mayor's Advisory Panel on Poverty

OFFICE
OF MAYOR
MATT BROWN

Dear Londoners,

Since announcing this advisory panel on poverty I have been discussing with, and listening to, many individuals from our community. I have heard and appreciated the feedback and, upon reflection, I have concluded that the poverty panel will be stronger if important perspectives like diversity and equity are augmented.

This is why, I have added two individuals to the panel membership. Please join me in welcoming Vanessa Ambtman-Smith and Dharshi Lacey as members of the Mayor's Advisory Panel on Poverty.

Vanessa Ambtman-Smith holds the position of Aboriginal Health Lead with the South West Local Health Integration Network and Dharshi Lacey holds the position of Diversity Program Manager with Pillar Nonprofit Network. Both of these individuals have extensive experience applying both an equity lens and a diversity lens to policy and programming as well as training others on how to appropriately apply these perspectives to their work.

I thank everyone from our community who provided feedback and I am confident that this panel is now very well positioned to achieve their mandate. I am looking forward to the recommendations that will come from their comprehensive engagement with the many stakeholders from our community involved in this critical issue.

This Advisory Panel is about city building— just as the London Plan, the Downtown Plan, Shift or the Back to the River projects are – this is about building a better city for all Londoners. Poverty persists in London. Over 17% of people living in households in London and Middlesex are living in poverty. Provincially, the average is 15%.

Today, almost 13% of people living in London and Middlesex households are receiving social assistance. This number has increased by almost 10,000 people since 2006, and of these 10,000 people, 1000 are children.

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Regardless of the measure used, London has more children, youth and families living in poverty compared to the provincial average.

Our time to act is now and in order to build a better, more resilient and healthier community for all Londoners, we need to work together and address the issues related to poverty head on.

It is time to move forward. It is time to come together and support our panel members and their important work. By working together, I know we will more effectively address how we fill gaps, remove barriers and help end the cycle of poverty for future generations of Londoners.

Thank you,

Mayor Matt Brown

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Attached Appendix:

Appendix A -New Panel Member Biographies
Appendix B - List of Panel Members
Appendix C- Summary of Panel objectives

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Appendix A:

Biographies

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Vanessa Ambtman-Smith:

Vanessa currently holds the position of Aboriginal Health Lead for the South West Local Health Integration Network (LHIN), where she is responsible for working collaboratively with Aboriginal partners and other service providers to build positive working relationships and identify strategies to achieve positive outcomes for Indigenous peoples (First Nations, Inuit, Métis) living in the South West LHIN area. Vanessa is also the Chair for the Provincial Aboriginal LHIN Network.

From 2009-14, Vanessa worked as the Community Engagement Consultant and Aboriginal Health Lead for the Toronto LHIN, where she focused much of her work on advancing health equity for vulnerable and hard to reach individuals within our community. Vanessa has also held a number of positions with Aboriginal Agencies such as the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres (OFIFC) in Toronto and the De dwa da dehs nye>s Aboriginal Health Centre in Hamilton.

Vanessa self identifies as a Cree Métis Indigenous woman. Her expertise in the areas of health equity, Indigenous peoples, healthcare policy, along with her perspectives on poverty as a person with lived experience, will provide a critical lens to the work of the Mayor's Advisory Panel on Poverty.

Vanessa holds a B.A. in Native Studies, with a major in Psychology from the University of Trent in Peterborough, Ontario.

Dharshi Lacey:

Currently holds the position of Diversity Program Manager with the Pillar Nonprofit Network in London, Ontario, where she engages with the nonprofit sector and community partners to collaboratively work towards building capacity in the areas of diversity and inclusivity.

Prior to her role at Pillar, Dharshi worked at the London Inter-Community Health Centre (LIHC) as the Team Lead for Ethno-Cultural Programs. In this role she implemented a

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successful strategy to recruit and retain internationally educated immigrant professionals.

Dharshi Lacey:

Dharshi is a Certified Inter-Cultural Competency Trainer for the Cross Cultural Learner Centre. She has worked as a Diversity Consultant for Pillar Nonprofit Network, assisting the Pillar Board as well as other nonprofit boards to assess their organizations, cultural competency and develop action plans to develop more inclusive practices within their board recruitment, board policy, strategic planning and Executive Director accountabilities. She has sat on multiple nonprofit boards herself and currently sits as past Chair of the Board of Violence Against Women Services, Elgin County. Dharshi immigrated to Canada from Sri Lanka, and has over 20 years experience working in the London community in the nonprofit sector. Dharshi holds a B.A. in Business and Economics.

Dharshi’s diversity expertise and training as well as her experience as a newcomer to Canada, will provide a critical lens for the Mayor’s Advisory Panel on Poverty when engaging with stakeholders as well as developing the recommendations to ensure they have been examined through the diversity lens.

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Appendix B:

Mayor's Advisory Panel on Poverty Membership

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Panel membership is comprised of community leaders with expertise in, and commitment to, addressing poverty and equity in London:

- Co-Chair Maureen Cassidy, Deputy Mayor, City of London
- Co-Chair Dr. Christopher Mackie, Medical Officer of Health and Chief Executive Officer, Middlesex-London Health Unit
- Vanessa Ambtman-Smith, Aboriginal Health Lead, South West Local Health Integration Network
- Dr. Helene Berman, Professor and Associate Dean (Research), Faculty of Health Sciences, Western University, Centre for Research on Health Equity and Social Inclusion
- Dharshi Lacey, Diversity Program Manager, Pillar Nonprofit Network
- Andrew Lockie, Chief Executive Officer, United Way London & Middlesex
- Dr. Abe Oudshoorn, Assistant Professor, Arthur Labatt Family School of Nursing, Western University; Chair, London Homeless Coalition
- Glen Pearson, Co-Director, London Food Bank; Board Member, London Poverty Research Centre

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Appendix C:

Summary of the Mayor's Advisory Panel on Poverty

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PURPOSE:

The purpose of the Mayor's Advisory Panel on Poverty is to develop recommendations on how to better coordinate our collective efforts to address poverty and equity more effectively in London.

OBJECTIVES:

- 1. Develop a shared understanding of how to address poverty and equity effectively in London**
 - Draw on group expertise and existing literature to develop a working definition of poverty and "Theory of Change" on how to address poverty in London more effectively
- 2. Map efforts currently underway to address poverty and equity in London**
 - Review document outlining active poverty-focused strategies and initiatives in London
 - Work with the Panel's organizations, contacts and stakeholders to supplement document with any additional strategies or initiatives
- 3. Identify gaps and areas requiring significant action**
 - Map the "Theory of Change" to the active initiatives, identify gaps and areas requiring significant action
 - Gaps and areas requiring significant action may be programmatic, but should also focus on systemic, strategic approaches, such as service coordination
- 4. Engage local stakeholders in dialogue on gaps and approaches to address poverty and equity**
 - Identify whether additional stakeholder engagement is needed to inform the development of Panel recommendations
 - Identify who should be engaged and how (e.g. broad-based vs. targeted)
 - Meet with stakeholders to gather information needed to inform Panel recommendations

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- 5. Develop a set of recommendations to better coordinate our collective efforts to address issues related to poverty more effectively throughout London and the areas requiring significant action**
- Confirm approach to developing recommendations
 - Develop, review, and revise recommendations in iterative dialogue with Panel members
 - Present recommendations to Mayor in March 2016

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