

Chapter 5: Increase and Integrate Strategies across Sectors

Overview

Providing a sustainable path out of poverty will require a comprehensive and multi-sectorial approach. Evidence-based social interventions are not only succeeding in poverty elimination strategies but are also generating greater social returns via **increased income levels** and improved **health and mental health** outcomes. This chapter will also discuss strategies to **address affordable housing**, as well as **social mobility and transit equity**. It will also heighten the important role **education** can play in the fight against poverty and how to increase **community and social inclusion** in our community.

Strategically Increase Income Levels

In Chapter 2, it was discussed that what works for one group of people will not necessarily work for another group. For example, many people in receipt of Ontario Works or Ontario Disability require customized additional supports to help them obtain and maintain employment; however, we must also address the very real issue that not all jobs are immediate and/or are ongoing pathways out of poverty. Many jobs are low paying, part-time, temporary, provide few if any workplace benefits and have little or no job security.

Living Wage

A living wage is not the same as a minimum wage, which is the provincially mandated legal minimum wage that all employers must pay. The living wage sets a higher standard – it reflects what earners in a family need to be paid hourly based on the actual costs of living and being included in a specific community. The living wage is calculated at the hourly rate at which a household can meet its basic needs – once government transfers have been added to the family’s income (i.e., Canada Child Benefit) and deductions have been subtracted (i.e., income tax and employment insurance premiums). Included in the calculation are food, shelter, clothing, transportation, communication, childcare, private health insurance for prescription drugs and dental coverage, and items that allow for fuller participation in society, such as birthday gifts, family leisure outings, retirement, and post-secondary savings for their children.

The Cycle of Low Paying Jobs and Poverty

A living wage enables working families to have a sufficient income that covers reasonable costs, promotes social inclusion, ensures that families are not under significant financial duress and can be used as a vehicle to promote the benefits of social programs such as child care and recreation funds.

In the case of people that are considered **working poor**, they have jobs, but due to the low-paying nature of the jobs, continue to remain trapped in the cycle of poverty as there is not enough income for all their expenses.

Ontario Works (OW) participants who exit the OW program for employment often find themselves in the same cycle of low-paying jobs and are often set up in a pattern where they enter and exit the social assistance support programs numerous times. The implementation of a living wage in this county would act as an incentive for those currently on social assistance to exit assistance. Furthermore, it would ensure that residents do not have to prioritize one basic need such as food, shelter, electricity and medical supplies over another.

In addition to the numerous benefits to employees, a Living Wage also has a profound impact on local employers. Living wage employers have described it as a never-ending return of investment as well as it being a prerequisite to building an engaged staff. Living Wage Canada has a fact sheet listing the benefits to a living wage as follows:

- Decreased employee turnover, plus savings on staff hires and training.
- Improved job performance, productivity and service delivery, plus lower rates of absenteeism.
- Benefits to the broader economy by stimulating consumer spending.
- Demonstration of greater corporate social responsibility, plus an increase in public recognition.

Implementing a living wage in Oxford County parallels the vision of the [Future Oxford Community Sustainability Plan](#) and will help our community reach its objective of building a thriving local economy. Chapter 6 will discuss in more detail the mechanisms required to implement a living wage in our county.

Universal Basic Income (UBI)

A basic income would ensure more people have more money to spend. More money to spend would benefit local businesses, as people who earn lower incomes inevitably need to spend almost all of their money and tend to do so locally for the things that they need. It would ensure that everyone, including the poor, can live with dignity. A basic income would also be a huge step towards eliminating poverty as it would allow people to afford the basic necessities of life (shelter, food, clothing, etc.). Commonly, a basic income guarantee ensures everyone earns an income that is sufficient enough to meet basic needs and live with dignity, regardless of work status. It involves a regular, reliable distribution of money from government to people to help ensure total income can meet common, basic needs.

Currently in Ontario there are basic income pilot projects being held in Hamilton, Brantford, Brant County, Lindsay and Thunder Bay to test whether a basic income can better support vulnerable workers, improve health and education outcomes for people on low incomes, and help ensure that everyone shares in Ontario's economic growth. The province has successfully completed the enrollment phase of the three-year pilot projects and early reports are indicating that pilot participants are feeling less stress and anxiety about paying their bills, enjoying a better life overall. The next stage of the pilot will start to examine how a basic income might help expand opportunities and job prospects.

Key Point

Next steps should include continued advocacy in support of basic income and living wage as well as increases to social assistance rates. This will help ensure the province continues to work in partnership with the municipalities via financial mechanisms to assist those currently living in poverty. Chapter 6 discusses the importance of ensuring individuals and families are accessing all the government supports they are entitled to.

Address Affordable Housing

Research has shown safe, accessible and affordable housing supports individuals and families out of poverty. Stable shelter is the first “building block” that enables people to *shift* focus to support positive development within other important *quality of life* areas such as income, education, health, transportation, employment and safety. A one-size-fits-all approach to address affordable housing is non-existent. Oxford County developed a [Shelter Continuum](#) as part of the [Oxford County Shelter Plan](#) as a resource pathway that highlights the community’s shelter needs and identifies key stakeholders. The Continuum focuses on the idea that people can move to improved shelter choices rather than forever remaining in their current situation. The Shelter Plan is updated annually with emphasis on improving the shelter options for residents of Oxford County.

Oxford County is not excluded from the affordable housing crisis. Statistics provided by Canada Mortgage Housing Corporation confirm low vacancy rates in Oxford County, at 2.6% and the average market rent at \$908 per month. A rise in the social housing waitlist - which hovers around 1,500 recorded applicants and rising shelter costs reinforces the urgency for more affordable housing options. The other reality impacting the affordability of housing are the rates for people in receipt of Ontario Works (OW) or the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). The monthly OW cheque for a single person in Ontario is \$721 per month. \$384 of this amount is intended to pay for the total cost of shelter. A single person in receipt of ODSP receives \$1,151, with \$489 of this amount to be dedicated to the total costs of shelter. The average market rent coupled with the availability of shelter and the amount provided to an individual living on social assistance for rent does not add up and can lead people into greater depths of poverty. While a movement for basic income is prevalent, a similar movement to increase the current rates for social assistance cannot be ignored if we wish to allow people greater access to housing and to build a life free of poverty.

Oxford County council has been progressive in assisting with this issue and has endorsed a “**Housing First**” model of service in addition to endorsing a surplus lands policy which dedicates the proceeds of surplus lands to the building of housing. Council recognizes that safe, affordable housing is one of the key criteria people require in order to exit poverty. It should also be noted that Bridge and Rent Supplement programs are available to assist people with the cost of their rent on a monthly basis, via county funds, and it is imperative that these funds continue to assist people in entering into or moving through the housing continuum.

According to the Canada Mortgage Housing Corporation, a household is considered to be in core housing need if housing “falls below at least one of the adequacy, affordability or suitability standards and would have to spend 30% or more of its total before tax income to pay the median rent of alternative local housing that is acceptable (meaning that it meets all three housing standards).”

Oxford County has completed the Community Index of Well Being survey and has noted that one of the goals is that the number of people living in core housing has their housing need reduced and the number of homeless people becomes zero.

Key Point

It should be noted there continues to be a need for supportive housing for a variety of factors included but not limited to illness, addiction, trauma, long-term poverty and abandonment by family. Continued funding must remain available to house those most vulnerable in our community on an ongoing basis.

Emergency Shelter

Shelter is a basic human right and provides the foundation for all other aspects of life. While a shelter stay is not ideal, it is a temporary necessity for those lacking stable housing. While municipal, federal and provincial funding is being provided to build more affordable housing in Oxford County, the reality is the need for housing outweighs the pace of affordable housing builds, resulting in homelessness in our community.

In April of 2018 the Inn of Woodstock (formerly known as the Inn Out of the Cold) announced that their program will be extended for all months of the year, not just the winter months. As Coordinator Darryl Watson has indicated “homelessness is not a seasonal issue,” therefore the need to shelter people year-round is a necessity. For the past 13 years the homeless shelter has operated from November until April between the hours of 7:00 pm and 7:30 am. Operation Sharing, in partnership with Oxford County, made the decision to continue operating the shelter year-round in order to combat homelessness in Oxford County. The cost of extending the shelter’s operations will be covered by the one hundred per cent provincially funded Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative. While the shelter is currently a necessity, it is imperative that the community work together to try to find stable and affordable housing for individuals, while helping people maintain their housing once they find it.

Other programs are available to address the housing needs of individuals funded through the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative, monitored and operationalized by Oxford County’s Human Services. These additional programs include - but are not limited to the Salvation Army’s Emergency Family Shelter, some emergency night stays at hotels facilitated by the Salvation Army Woodstock and Tillsonburg location, housing with related supports for those in need of support with their activities of daily living in a group home environment, last month’s rent and prevention of utility disconnection and eviction facilitated through Human Services and emergency beds for abused women

through Domestic Assault Services of Oxford (DASO). Funds are also used in a variety of ways to try to both house and maintain housing for people in this community.

Youth Homeless Strategy

It is important to address the root cause of youth homelessness as it impacts future employment opportunities, quality of life and ensures that youth are active contributing members of both their community and society. United Way of Kingston, Frontenac, Lennox and Addington (KFL&A) sought input from the young people in their community which provided them with insight into root causes such as family conflict, addictions and mental health as well as education and unemployment.

United Way KFL&A then worked collectively with their community partners to develop a youth plan that focused on prevention, providing timely intervention and building a sustainable network of supportive resources. Their Youth Homelessness 2018 summary reported that in 2014, one in three shelter residents were between the ages of 15 and 24. As a result of community-wide efforts, today this number declined to one in 12. Their vision is that by 2020 80% of youths who enter the homelessness system in KFL&A will be housed within 30 days.

Key Priorities

A community response strategy needs to be explored to better support and/or address the housing shortage. An effective, innovative, collaborative approach is needed to address insecure and precarious housing. Various levels of government, community partners, stakeholders and the private sector need to align to achieve this goal. While noted above, there are programs available to try to assist people with their housing challenges, but it is equally important that all agencies work together and make themselves collectively aware of what is available and always be mindful of the future when developing intervention strategies.

In an environment when securing safe, affordable housing is a very challenging undertaking, the maintenance of that housing becomes critically important. It is necessary to explore a preventative strategy to “wrap-around” social supports needed to stabilize and maintain housing to avert homelessness. Using collaborative approaches that have been successful in other communities, such as Kingston’s youth homeless plan, would be an efficient and effective way to begin implementing proven strategies to address homelessness.

As noted, the high demand for housing currently outweighs the supply of housing. For this reason, alternatives must be examined to increase opportunities as quickly as possible. One of the alternative ways of increasing housing options may be through secondary suites. In 2018, Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) defines them as follows:

A secondary suite is a private, self-contained unit within an existing dwelling. Secondary suites are also called second units, accessory apartments, granny flats, in-law suites and basement apartments (since many are found in basements). A secondary suite has its own bathroom, kitchen, living and sleeping areas but can share a number of features with the rest of the house. Shared facilities may include a yard, parking area, laundry and storage space, and sometimes a hallway.

CMHC is working to promote the idea of developing a marketing strategy to highlight the buildings of secondary suites in the construction of new or existing homes. This may result in more rental housing and allow homeowners to earn income from units. Not only are secondary suites a source of affordable rental units, but they can also provide the needed extra income to first-time homebuyers for whom that additional income makes housing affordable in high-cost areas. For older households who no longer need a large house, the addition of a suite can generate needed income and security, as well as allow them to continue to live in their neighbourhoods and age in place. Secondary suites also provide another avenue for people to move through the housing continuum.

Planning for Housing Needs

In an attempt to increase the supply of affordable housing units and promote a range of housing types and tenure forms, planning staff are able to rely on a number of policies identified in the County Official Plan. It is a priority of the housing policies contained in the Official Plan to provide a variety of housing options for low and moderate income households and those with special needs. Opportunities for the development of housing types to meet the needs of low and moderate income households are provided through initiatives such as residential infill and intensification and where appropriate, the reduction of municipal infrastructure requirements and lot area standards in addition to the provision of bonus zoning.

Residential infill and intensification include introducing new units to existing buildings, creating lots from underutilized tracts of lands and encouraging redevelopment that in turn provides a variety of housing types. By promoting various forms of housing including apartment and secondary units, single detached, semi-detached, townhouse and converted dwellings, municipalities can work to provide an appropriate range and mix of housing types to meet the needs of current and future residents.

Other housing policies seek to maintain an appropriate supply of rental affordable housing that is suitably maintained and adequate for habitation by encouraging the creation of housing opportunities that may result in a mix of tenure forms, such as ownership, rental and co-operative.

In support of these initiatives a number of municipalities in Oxford County promote the creation of new residential dwelling units in the downtown cores through a Community Improvement Plan (CIP) that offers either a grant or loan to property owners. The Residential Conversion Program is intended to provide a form of funding from the municipality to encourage property owners to create one or more new residential dwelling units within or near the downtown cores through rehabilitation, renovation or addition to an existing building. Residential conversions in the downtown have multiple benefits to both municipalities and residents of the area. More residential units in the downtown increases investment in local businesses in the area and the conversion of units provides more affordable living options that are close to local amenities and transit options.

Addressing Health, Mental Health and Addictions

Poverty is a health issue. Health equity should be seen as a priority for all citizens. The Wellesley Institute has provided extensive research that indicates people with lower education and income levels, who are unemployed or in low-paying jobs, have poorer health than those who are better off financially. In their submission to the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy they concluded the following: **“There is a well-established gradient of health in which people who are in the lowest income group have worse health than people who are even just one step further up the income ladder.”** All across the country, public health professionals are actively involved in poverty reduction efforts in order to improve population-level health outcomes. Many individuals in our community who are struggling with poverty require additional supports such as mental health counselling or access to substance abuse programs before they can begin to address any other challenges or barriers that they may be facing. Strengthening and integrating mental health and addictions services would make it easier and more efficient for individuals to access services.

Locally

Oxford County Community Health Centre (OCCHC) is an organization which employs community champions who have recognized the need for wrap-around, person-centred service delivery processes that model a Health Links philosophy of care. The Health Links approach introduces new and improved ways to integrate care delivery for the people of Ontario who live with complex chronic illness, social determinant of health considerations and/or high-cost conditions. The Health Links approach introduces new and improved ways to integrate care delivery for the people of Ontario who live with complex chronic illness, social determinants of health considerations and/or high-cost conditions. The Health Links philosophy of care centres around a process called Coordinated Care Planning. Coordinated Care Planning (CCP) is for people who would benefit most from coordinated support from multiple health and social service providers. A standardized tool is used to ensure the right information is ascertained from the client allowing each person to benefit from patient centred goal setting and care planning. The ultimate goal is to build a support plan that allows for the individual to be successful in their goals while being supported by their team. The path for zero poverty in Oxford County could mirror this ideology where people living in poverty could determine their goals for life outside of poverty while being supported by their team.

Oxford County Public Health did a report entitled *Access to Mental Health Services in Oxford County* in April 2017 that outlined 3 recommendations specific to Oxford County:

1. Ensure that accurate service information is readily available across multiple platforms.
2. Create supportive social environments to talk openly about mental health concerns.
3. Explore innovative approaches to service delivery to improve equitable access to services regardless of where people live.

Provincially

Ontario's comprehensive mental health and addictions strategy, *Open Minds, Healthy Minds*, has 4 goals that align well with the Oxford County Zero Poverty Plan recommendations and strategies:

1. Improve mental health and well-being for all Ontarians with coordinated high quality programs.
2. Create healthy, resilient, inclusive communities that reduce stigma and include housing and employment supports.
3. Identify mental health and addictions problems early and provide intervention; build school-based capacity and strengthen family health care.
4. Provide timely, high quality, integrated, person directed health and other human services.

Evidence-based practices are gaining increased exposure in the mental health arena. Many communities are adopting proven programs and developing their own to include outcome-based data. Continuing to move forward with the recommendations of the Public Health report and strengthening and integrating mental health and addictions will ensure that resources are readily available and accessible for all citizens of Oxford County. Continued education surrounding mental health and addictions will help reduce stigma and discrimination. Next steps should include working with the local school boards in order to build capacity and develop health promotion infrastructure specific to our area. The last section in this chapter will speak more directly regarding innovative ways to establish increased levels of education in our county.

Health also impacts one's ability to find and maintain employment. The Oxford Workforce Development Partnership (OWDP) has completed an Employer One survey obtaining a variety of labour market information and employee data. The OWDP also works continuously with employers to try to fill the gap between available jobs and filling those jobs with reliable, healthy individuals. Increasingly, the County is facing a labour shortage, as there are more jobs than people to fill them. Of those jobs that become filled, they quickly become vacant, as eight out of ten times a job is filled, the incumbent leaves right away for a variety of reasons (Employer One survey data). It has been stated to employers that one of the reasons people have left is their health- both mental and physical. A recommendation has been put forth through the committee to get baseline data to get a better idea of why this is happening so that the labour market can improve for both employers and employees, as both are integral to building a vibrant economy and assisting people in getting out of poverty.

Another contributing factor to poor health may be the lack of physicians and access to specialists in Oxford County. The waitlist is long for the doctor at the Oxford County Community Health Centre and often the acceptance of new names to the list is closed. There are a number of individuals who receive Ontario Works who should be in receipt of Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), but due to the lack of a doctor, the required medical examination does not get completed and therefore the application remains incomplete. There is now the provision of a Registered Nurse (RN) being able to complete the medical examinations, but the uptick to this allowance has been slow.

Key Action

Further work needs to be done to address the critical lack of physicians in Oxford County and other medical personnel in Oxford County. A lack of physicians also contributes to undiagnosed and untreated medical and mental health conditions which impact a person's circumstance with being able to secure and maintain employment, training or educational opportunities which impact their mobility to move away from poverty. There is also an immediate need to develop an efficient, accessible, streamlined pathway between the many individuals who require ODSP and the Registered Nurses who are willing to complete the application.

Address Community and Social Exclusion

According to the World Bank, social inclusion is the process of improving the terms for individuals and groups to take part in society and the process of improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of people, disadvantaged on the basis of their identity, to take part in society. It is a priority in Oxford County to manifest an environment where all individuals feel socially included. This section looks at additional programming or activities that could help address community and social exclusion in Oxford County.

Key Point

To eliminate poverty in our community we must begin to look at the systemic changes that need to occur in order to advance our understanding of the critical issues surrounding poverty. The Mowatt Centre has gathered research evidence in its report *What Works? Proven approaches to alleviating poverty* that firmly indicates customizable programming, that targets the unique needs of individuals and can be highly effective in alleviating poverty – even more so when programming is attached to foundational supports such as income security, transportation, childcare and housing. Combining foundational supports with needs-based programming addresses that factors linked to poverty can and do impact individual outcomes in different ways and are key to breaking the cycle of poverty.

Circles™

The implementation of the Circles program in Oxford County would benefit those on Ontario Works and/or living on a low income who are facing multiple barriers and are ready to begin the transition out of poverty. The program is designed to help people become financially self-sufficient, find good jobs and break the cycle of poverty. Circles provides an innovative, community-focused support system to help low-income individuals become more independent by developing personal plans and bringing together community volunteers to help implement those plans. Circles communities help to promote community inclusion by using [Bridges Out of Poverty](#) concepts and [Getting Ahead in a Just-Getting-By World](#) classes.

The Circles program is a community-based initiative that creates relationships across economic boundaries by partnering volunteers and community leaders who have attended ***Bridges Out of Poverty*** training with low-income individuals or families that have attended the ***Getting Ahead program***.

Circles is based on a supportive relationship comprised of a **Circle Leader** (an individual/family working to get out of poverty who has completed the **Getting Ahead** workshop) and two to four community Allies (middle class volunteers who have completed a **Bridges Out of Poverty** workshop) who are willing to befriend the individual/family and support their way out of poverty. For people who are stuck in poverty, wrapping informal supports around them (that includes healthy role models, as opposed to agency supports alone) gives them additional resources to help lift themselves out of poverty and also helps them feel more connected and included in the broader community.

The aims of Circles are to:

- Provide emotional and practical support
- Assist with complex issues and problem solving
- Build the “social capital” of people living in poverty
- Show the community the very real barriers of living in poverty
- Walk with people in poverty to support life change

The Circles approach has been used in over 100 communities and districts in the US and Canada and has been extremely successful in lifting individuals and families out of poverty permanently.

Local Getting Ahead Initiative

In 2017, the Oxford County Community Health Centre (OCCHC) received Trillium Grant funding to host a **Bridges Out of Poverty** event and four Getting Ahead workshops. Bridges out of Poverty is a framework designed to educate individuals from middle or upper class on what it means to live in poverty. **Getting Ahead** workshops are designed to help people “bridge” their way out of poverty so that they may become self-sufficient. The goal of the workshops is to empower people and support them as they examine their attitudes toward change, identify the barriers that keep them in poverty and create a personal plan to achieve their goals. The workshops will also provide an in-depth opportunity to learn more about what poverty looks like in Oxford County. The Getting Ahead program has a high success rate, with many graduates completing school and/or securing full time employment.

OCCHC held a successful Bridges out of Poverty event in November of 2017 that was attended by over 100 community members. By attending this workshop, service providers got a better idea of what it is like for people who are living in poverty and to learn to look through a different lens. In partnership with the United Way of Oxford and Oxford County Human Services, a Getting Ahead pilot is scheduled to run for 10 sessions in Woodstock in May and June of 2018. Each session will last approximately 3 hours and will start with an introductory activity and be followed up with a ‘kitchen table’ style conversation. Childcare and transportation will be provided as needed for the participants. Since the participants will be helping the community understand the challenges of poverty, each individual will receive a \$50 food card for each session. The initial pilot is designed to be a learning experience for everyone and upon completion of the pilot, necessary adjustments will be made prior to the workshops fanning out to the remainder of the county. Next steps will include a proposal for Circles funding in order to implement the Circles program in Oxford County.

Ontario Works Community Placements

Reintroducing the Community Placement component for Ontario Works participants in Oxford County is another strategy that will help promote inclusion. A community placement is an unpaid community activity with a sponsoring agency. Sponsoring agencies include community-based groups, non-profit organizations and public sector organizations.

The purpose of the placement is to allow participants to build employment networks, gain valuable experience and develop or enhance employment-related skills to help them move into the paid labour force. Community Placements also provides an opportunity to identify projects/placements that will benefit the local community. Many agencies and communities have an ongoing wish list of special projects.

The following Program Principles are recommended guidelines to ensure that all Community Placements meet specific criteria:

- Add value to the local community and to the participant's self-esteem, employment networks and skill-set.
- Promote the dignity of work by focusing on high quality experiences for participants.

Families First

Families First is a pilot program launched in late 2000 at Ontario Works in Peel. Based on previous research by Dr. Gina Brown, the Families First project is a unique study. This program provides intensive needs-based case management supports to sole support parents and their children through a collaborative partnership between Human Services and Public Health in Peel.

Supports include:

- Recreation for children
- Employment Services and supports
- Public Health Nurse supports
- Subsidized childcare

Families First participants experience many barriers to employment and are very limited in their level of participation in the community due to the degree of challenges experienced, such a, poor emotional and psychological health. Families First participants experience improved social, physical and mental health, functionality, independence and a reduced reliance on social and health services.

- Family First participants are 1.3 times more likely to exit social assistance compared to other sole support parents on Ontario Works over a 24-month period

Key Priorities

Oxford County must work in partnership to offer enhanced wrap-around supports to existing programs in order to create widespread change and to address the inter-related causes of poverty. Implementing evidence-based, proven programs such as Circles and/or Families First, along with building our own local evidence based programs, will be key to helping lead people out of poverty and addressing community and social exclusion. Next steps should include strategies to increase democratic engagement for all residents of Oxford County as well as a Future Oxford panel series which would include topics on **service access and coordination, transportation, housing stability** as well as **livable incomes**. A panel series will help to generate bold ideas which will set the stage for the next phase of the Zero Poverty Oxford Plan. Engaging the youth is also a key component to any generational plan and it is imperative that youth are engaged prior to implementation to ensure their voice is heard. More youth networking strategies are included in Chapter 10.

Childcare

The Ministry of Education currently funds, provides licenses and establishes guidelines throughout the Province of Ontario for the child care system. The Ministry has established their goal to ensure all children and families have access to a range of high-quality, inclusive and affordable early years and child care programs and services that are child-and-family-centred and contribute to children's learning, development and well-being. Child care is seen as a necessity for families to fully participate in the activities of work, training or educational pursuits. The Ministry has realized that attention to child care and early learning makes good economic sense.

Access and affordability are linked. Across the Province the cost of licensed child care has become a barrier to access. Infant care is particularly expensive, preventing many families from even trying to find licensed care, which can impact access to workforce and educational opportunities. The rates for child care throughout Oxford County vary depending on the centre and the age grouping and time required, at this time the rates range from \$34.00 per day to as high as \$59 per day. For those with challenges paying the full market rates, Oxford County facilitates a child care subsidy program for those who are eligible and who are participating in work, training or education or those with children with special needs and require child care. Oxford is fortunate that each person who is deemed eligible for subsidy through a Ministry designed eligibility application process, is able to access that subsidy as there is not a waitlist at this time.

Oxford County currently has 1138 licenced operating child care spaces, these spaces include 40 infant, 117 toddler, 329 preschool, 181 full day kindergarten and 472 school age spaces (this is a blend of spaces for children ages 44 months to 13 years old broken into the categories of kindergarten, primary/junior and junior school age). The majority of licensed centre-based child care spaces are located in Woodstock (57% of all spaces). The other areas with the higher percentages of spaces are Tillsonburg (16%) and Ingersoll (13.0%) with the rest of the spaces (13.58), located throughout the rest of the County. It should be noted that the licenced capacity is available for all of the age groupings in the different child care centres throughout the County, so if the demand is there and the centres are able to find qualified staff, the spaces would easily be increased.

One of the major challenges in the child care system is the lack of Early Childhood Educators. The number of people becoming trained in that profession is not keeping up with the demand and those who are trained are finding employment within the school system rather than the childcare system.

The most recent Oxford Child Care Plan established the fact that looking out to the 2040s, the child population is projected to remain fairly constant in Oxford County. As a percentage of the overall Oxford County population, the 0 to 14 year old grouping is expected to decrease from 17.6% of the total population in 2011 to 15.1% of the total population in 2041. Therefore it is essential that the system become as robust as possible to fulfil the current need.

While any family who is eligible for subsidy is able to access that financial assistance, it does not necessarily equate to available child care close to their home and work in the timeframe it is required. As noted, Oxford County has many manufacturing jobs which often means shift work. Oxford County does not have a licensed child care centre that is available to parents working shifts into the evening and overnight or throughout the weekend. In order for participation in all of life's employment and educational pursuits, it is imperative to have access when it is needed and where it is needed.

With new funding, Oxford County in partnership with the Thames Valley District School Board, will be adding 10 infant and 24 Preschool spaces at Algonquin Public School in Woodstock and at Harrisfield Public School in Ingersoll, there will be an addition of 10 infant, 15 toddler and 24 preschool aged child care spaces. While these increases will help with some of the pressure of the child care system, there is still a demand for more. Another measure to try to assist with the child care demands are centres investigating extending available hours, this will hopefully increase choice and access for families. The recommendation should move forward to ensure access is available to all as needed and to continue to build spaces until the various needs are met. Child care is one of the mechanisms required to allow individuals to work and train and improve their access to a life outside of poverty.

Transit Equity

Everyone in the community benefits when all residents have equal access to all available municipal services regardless of their income. Many low-income individuals require help to access basic essential services such as transit. When transportation in a community is affordable and accessible to all, it allows all citizens to participate fully. A 'public' transit system needs to be affordable for low-income individuals who are likely to need the system the most.

People living on a low income use transit to get to and from grocery stores, medical appointments, employment, day care providers and to participate in recreational or otherwise 'free' services such as those available at art galleries and libraries. Many cities in Canada provide subsidized transit passes for low-income individuals. Locally, there is a misconception that all participants on Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program are provided with transit passes via County funds, but this is not accurate. Providing subsidized transit passes to our residents would allow for a more equal and inclusive county, open opportunities for employment and allow families to travel together. Communities across Oxford County are coming together to ensure transit equity for all their residents.

Locally

The recent announcement of an Intra-County, Intra Community transportation hub, financially supported by the Ministry of Transportation, should greatly assist community members to have an affordable method of transportation to meet individual needs. This 1.4 Million grant will allow the community to have greater connectedness than ever before.

The transportation hub will connect 5 municipalities in Oxford County including Tillsonburg, South West Oxford, Norwich, Ingersoll and Woodstock. It will also connect Tillsonburg with surrounding communities of Delmar, Brownsville, Mount Elgin, Ostrander, Otterville, Langton, Courtland, Delhi, Bayham, Straffordville, Vienna and Port Burwell. It will create a transportation network between the Counties of Norfolk, Oxford and Elgin and will link to at least one major centre of London. This is incredible news for all community members who have been limited to opportunities due to a lack of transportation. The operations of this system will definitely enhance lives and build equity in opportunity.

Nationally

The city of Calgary was one of the first cities in Canada to provide a low income monthly transit pass as a result of an initiative called **Fair Fares**, which set a precedent for transportation reform across the country. Calgary offers a subsidized pass at a 50% reduction from the regular fare. The City of Edmonton quickly followed suit and they offer a low income subsidized monthly transit pass for \$35. Recently, the City of Winnipeg has urged the mayor to follow in the footsteps of Calgary and Edmonton and provide a subsidized transit pass for low income residents.

In January of 2018, a new income-related transit program became effective in London, Ontario for residents 18 years and older. They offer subsidized transit passes to low income residents at approximately a 36% reduction to the regular fare.

As part of the *TO Prosperity: Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy*, the City of Toronto has made transit free for children 12 and under. In April of 2018 they announced their transit discount called **Fair Fare Pass** which allows low-income residents a \$1 discount off a single fare adult ride and a \$30.75 discount off a monthly adult pass.

Innisfil Transit

In Canada's first ridesharing and transit partnership, the Town of Innisfil and Uber have come together to bring on-demand, affordable and safe transportation to their community. In 2015, the residents of Innisfil were looking for a transit system that could service all members of the community. They considered options for fixed-route bus services, but Council ultimately determined it would be too costly and too limited. From there, Uber and the Town of Innisfil worked together to develop Innisfil Transit, an on-demand, shared transportation option powered by Uber, offering flat rates to residents that are subsidized by the town. The average wait time for the service is under nine minutes and it is available 24/7. The town has estimated they are saving \$8 million yearly using Uber as an alternative to public transit.

Key Priorities

Next steps should include a partnership with the City of Woodstock to explore the creation of a low-income transit subsidy pass for residents, based on practices and eligibility rules currently being used by other Canadian cities. Exploring transit solutions utilized by other communities would also be a beneficial and efficient step.

Social Mobility

Mobility from poverty can mean different things to different people and poverty is a multi-dimensional phenomenon with no singular cause. We know that poverty is not just about having insufficient income to meet basic needs but is also about the deprivation of basic social rights and limited access to essential **community supports** including recreation and education.

Custom-designed city programming which offers one single application for subsidized supports has transformed the way the City of Calgary helps resident's access services. The **Fair Entry** program allows residents to apply for multiple programs with one application, with eligibility based on income levels. This includes recreational fee assistance, a no-cost spay and neuter program for pets, a **senior's** services home maintenance program, a property tax assistance program and a sliding scale for transit passes. The City of Medicine Hat also utilizes a Fair Entry program to access their community supports.

While some of these things are available in Oxford County, there is not one application for all of the services offered across the county. A recommendation would be to have all of the potential subsidies for all forms of social inclusion available at one virtual place through one application accessible from multiple points. The other recommendation would be to ensure all community partners and agencies are aware and keep-up-to-date on everything that is available to assist people, so they do not have to navigate from one place to the next looking for answers.

Through the Social Assistance Modernization project, announcements have been made regarding "Improvements in Social Assistance, 2018" as part of the first phase of the multi-year Income Security Reform Plan. Effective August 2018, one improvement is that all family members will be listed on the monthly Statement of Assistance which will allow everyone in the family to efficiently receive community supports such as housing subsidies, food bank hampers as well as subsidized transit passes and recreation. This top-down effort from the Province to transform social assistance will help ease eligibility requirements for local supports and allow residents to seamlessly access services.

Education

Jumpstart to Higher Education

The Jumpstart to Higher Education program is an early intervention program that targets grade 7 and 8 students in the Waterloo Region. It focuses on elementary schools in neighbourhoods where there is a significantly higher proportion of families who are at social or economic risk. The primary goal of the program is to **jumpstart** the conversation about post-secondary education and discuss the various

pathways of education – apprenticeship, college and university, including how to fund their journey. A second goal of the program is to educate teachers about current post-secondary pathways and funding opportunities. Teachers are active participants in the program and are provided with informational materials to incorporate the topics discussed in class assignments, and to continue the conversation throughout the school year. Parents are also brought into the conversation, particularly those who did not attend post-secondary school, in order to make them feel more comfortable with their children's prospects.

The Jumpstart to Higher Education program was created with four main objectives:

1. Help students and families understand how a postsecondary education can be achieved
2. Provide information for students and families regarding the streams they choose for high school
3. Provide information about available funding for postsecondary education
4. Demystify postsecondary education by providing students with financial need an opportunity to experience a university setting through the Wilfrid Laurier JUMP program

One of the goals of The Future Oxford Community Sustainability Plan is **“a knowledgeable and equitable Oxford”** and a corresponding target is to increase the number of residents with post-secondary education.

In 2017, roughly one third (225,000) of Ontario's full-time students received free tuition, an additional 400,000 students received reduced tuition, and the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) reported a 10% (50,000 students) increase in applicants. To help accommodate students planning ahead for college and university, applications for the 2018-2019 school were opened four months earlier than normal this year. The OSAP website has also been redesigned to be much more user-friendly and applicants are presented with an estimate of potential funding immediately after applying. With the province working on strategies to help eliminate financial barriers for students and families who wish to access post-secondary education, the time has never been better for our community to introduce strategies and programs designed to increase the number of residents with post-secondary education.

Key Priorities

A partnership with Fanshawe College, which has a pre-existing transfer arrangement with Western University, coupled with the local school boards would enable the promotion of higher education via a program similar to the Jumpstart program in Waterloo.

Key Points

Education and experience help drive power. If we do not provide the next generation the opportunities to survive in the modern world, the potential depths of poverty may prevail. It is recommended to continue this most valuable partnership to explore more options for future generations. In creating a pathway to exit poverty, the promotion of higher education will also help increase intergenerational mobility.

Within Oxford County, there is a partnership with Community Employment Services and the Board of Education. It appears there is a desire by the Board to talk locally about career exploration related to what is currently offered in school and what would assist in making career and guidance more applicable to today's world. Some of the suggestions made to date appear to mirror some of the programming available in Waterloo Region. The Oxford Workforce Development Partnership has suggested that an increase to the number and variety of cooperative learning/working opportunities be explored. It has also been noted that experiential, practical learning platforms need to exist for young students to see what is available in the work world. The Workforce Development Partnership has also recommended that students have the opportunity to tour workplaces across the network of jobs and careers. Once a variety of methods for touring is explored (with or without parents), the exploration of qualifications for these occupations can be discussed with students so that it brings realistic pathways to students rather than being streamed strictly on the basis of academics. It has also been noted that guidance options should be available earlier in a child's academic journey rather than in grade 11 or 12 or perhaps not at all. Expanded experiential learning opportunities will assist in exploring career pathways and thus in the elimination of poverty.

Additionally, the variety of education programs and upgrading opportunities need to continue to ensure those who may not have graduated from high school still have the opportunity to do so, and it is the myriad of educational opportunities available in Oxford that will allow that to happen. It is vital, however, that all service providers are aware of what is available, including social and financial supports, to help people be successful in their goals. Currently, Literacy Link Southwestern Ontario is putting together a "roadmap" which easily assists service providers to refer individuals to what may be the best fit for them.

It should also be noted that employers are starting to loosen up some of their requirements for potential employees due to the labour shortage. With this change, people who declared themselves to be out of the job market due to their education, may still be very much employable. Years ago, the cutoff for application for many manufacturing/general labour positions was a grade twelve diploma and a clean record. Employers are now accepting applications from people who will come to work and are able and willing to learn. It is of paramount importance that those currently delivering Ontario Works, educate themselves to the realities of the local labour market in order to help those who they serve. There are a number of ways to become aware of this information, including the Work in Oxford website which posts available jobs as well as those previously filled and the required skills. The promotion of the current economic reality with those in need may assist more people in obtaining jobs and increase their mobility.