

Poverty:

A Tale of Hardship

A Report on Poverty in Peel



Raj is 9 years old. He lives with his mother, aunt, grandparents and two other children. Seema, Raj's mother, was involved in a motor vehicle accident prior to Raj's birth. Raj and his family of five live on a fixed monthly income, which Raj's mother receives as a result of her accident. This income does not enable Raj's family to pay their rent and buy enough basic necessities for the month.

Prepared by Peel Provincial Poverty Reduction Committee

Peel Presentation to Provincial Cabinet Committee on Poverty in Ontario

Introduction

Poverty is a serious problem in Peel. In 2006, 15% of Peel's population or 167,000 people were living below the Low Income Cut-off, up from 11.5% or 115,000 in 2001. We are very concerned because this growth is among our most vulnerable citizens: recent immigrants, single parents, racialized communities, unattached seniors, especially women, and families with young children.

The **Peel Provincial Poverty Strategy Committee** has been formed in response to this growing problem. It is comprised of a diverse number of agencies, grassroots organizations, stakeholders as well as municipal and local governments committed to reducing poverty in the region. Our local and community role is important to preventing increased poverty and to supporting those living in poverty. However, poverty cannot be effectively addressed at the municipal and community level without provincial action to address the broader fundamental issues of income support, employment, training and education, child care, housing and effective social and community health supports.

The **Peel Provincial Poverty Strategy Committee** supports the Campaign 2000 call to action: we must help families with children get out and stay out of poverty. We encourage the government to dialogue with us, the many people living in poverty and the agencies and coalitions that speak to this issue to ensure a clear understanding of how poverty affects people, especially those most vulnerable. The strategy cannot be a one size fits all model and the only way to ensure this is to hear from all communities.

The short and long-term economic and social costs of not addressing poverty immediately are enormous. Poverty is a major contributor to poor health, abuse, and violence. It is in everyone's best interest to provide all families and individuals with the opportunity and supports needed to live fulfilling and contributing lives and feel connected to their community's social, political and civic life.

Key Messages - We Are in This Together

The **Peel Provincial Poverty Strategy Committee** supports the recommendations of Campaign 2000 and urges the provincial government to create a plan that addresses good jobs at living wages, a strong income support program, access to early learning and child care, access to affordable housing and access to education, training and life-long learning.

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1. A provincial plan to address poverty must be a comprehensive multi-year coordinated plan with a significant financial investment and enough flexibility to allow regions to adapt initiatives based on unique circumstances.
2. As documented in John Stapleton's 2007 report: *Why is it so Tough to Get Ahead*, a coordinated comprehensive model should require all relevant ministries and orders of government to work together to eliminate the disincentives and barriers that are preventing people from becoming self-reliant.
3. Peel's rapid population growth is primarily due to immigrant and racialized communities who are most vulnerable to poverty. This rapid population growth combined with inadequate funding for social services means Peel's ability to break the cycle of poverty and provide for its population is seriously at risk.

Recommendations

The **Peel Provincial Poverty Strategy Committee** calls upon the provincial government to undertake the following:

- i. Provide adequate resources for a comprehensive and phased implementation of the recommendations of Campaign 2000.
- ii. Set **measurable targets and timelines** with the aim of achieving a 25% reduction in the child poverty rate within 5 years.
- iii. Address the continuing **shortfall of funding for social services to Peel**, currently \$298 million, and other growth communities in order to increase accessibility to important services and programs.
- iv. Support **local communities and municipalities** to ensure a co-ordinated range of services and programs are available for all vulnerable and marginalized persons.
- v. Create a **social purpose enterprise strategy** as one of the cornerstones of the poverty reduction plan as it promotes local community initiatives.
- vi. Invest in initiatives and strategies that ensure the equitable and social integration of **immigrants and racialized communities**.

Our Population

According to the 2006 Census, the population in Peel is 1,159,405, up 17% over 2001 which represents 8.7% of Ontario's population. Nearly 1 in 10 Ontarians live in Peel.

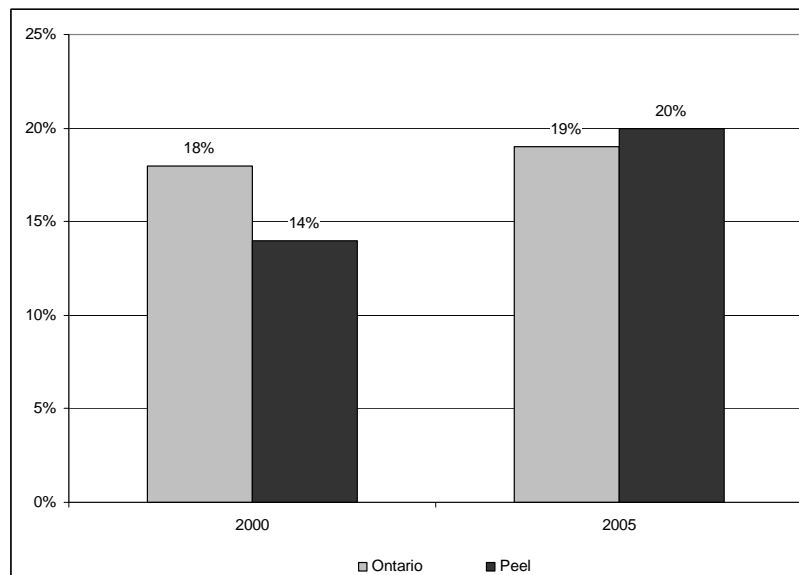
- In 2006, racialized communities accounted for 50% of Peel's population.

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- Peel has the second highest volume of new immigrants in the country, second only to Toronto. Immigrants make up 49% of Peel's population and this population is growing at a faster rate than the Canadian-born population.
- Peel's population is young: in 2006, Peel had the lowest median population in the GTA (35.6 years) and Peel's population of children age 0 – 6 grew by 9%.

The Face of Poverty in Peel

- In 2006, 15% of Peel's population lived below the Low Income Cut-off (LICO) up from 11.5% in 2001. This means 167,000 people in Peel are living in poverty.
 - The 2005 *Strategic Review of Poverty in Peel* identified that the growth in poverty within the Region is occurring in the fastest growing groups within the Region.
 - Several population groups in Peel are at high risk of long-term poverty. These groups have significantly higher rates of low income than the average and make up a disproportionate percentage of the low income population. These vulnerable groups include:
 - Racialized communities
 - Recent immigrants
 - Single parents
 - Unattached seniors, especially women
 - Persons with disabilities
 - Families with young children
- Between 2000 and 2005 the percentage of Peel children age 0 to 5 in low-income grew from 14% to 20%, higher than both the national and provincial rates of 19%.



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Peel's Limited Capacity to Address Poverty: Rapid Growth & Funding Shortfall

In Peel, the rapid growth in population and the rise of people living in poverty has led to an increased need for our already overtaxed services. PriceWaterhouse Coopers reported in September 2007 that the funding gap for the 905 GTA social services is \$708 million dollars. This means limited access to a whole range of necessary social supports including child care, children's mental health services, developmental services, neighbourhood services and others.

Regional, municipal and local governments as well as service providers are concerned that the ongoing provincial funding shortfall means we do not and will not have the capacity to help people move out of poverty now or in the future.

Building Community Capacity

In spite of the stretched resources and limited capacity, the human services in Peel have provided high quality service to the citizens of Peel. They have developed many best practice approaches, especially in the area of collaboration in order to maximize the impact of their services. In recent years, a number of collaborative initiatives at the municipal and community level have been developed to address the needs of Peel residents in a comprehensive way. Examples of some of these initiatives are:

211

211 is an integrated telephone and web-based system providing callers/users with one-stop information and referral to local community, social, health and related government programs and services. Since its launch in December 2007, 3,690 calls have been made to the service.

Families First

Through the Families First Project, undertaken by the Region of Peel Human Services Department, Ontario Works clients are provided with several supports including social support, counselling, health interventions, access to recreation and/or child care. The project has demonstrated that many Ontario Works clients are experiencing serious mental health problems and physical health challenges.

Peel Newcomer Strategy Group

The Peel Newcomer Strategy Group is comprised of key stakeholders that came together because of a growing recognition that there was a need to develop a coordinated newcomer/immigrant services strategy. The vision for a coordinated service strategy is to develop a client -focused service model. As such, a key strategy in the development of the community plan will be to seek input directly from

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newcomers/immigrants, employers, service providers, funders and other community partners.

Peel Youth Violence Prevention Initiative

The Peel Youth Violence Prevention Initiative was created out of the Peel Youth Violence Prevention Forum held in 2006. The Committee decided that the information and perspectives revealed at the forum would become the foundation of a cohesive, community-based strategy specific to Peel. The Peel Youth Violence Committee represents one of the largest community anti-violence initiatives in Ontario involving youth, social, ethnic and religious groups as well as municipal government, police and school boards.

Social Purpose Enterprise

United Way of Peel Region through its poverty reduction work is providing funding to three social purpose enterprises. Social Purpose Enterprises (SPEs) are revenue generating businesses operated by a not-for-profit organization that provide meaningful employment for individuals who have difficulty finding and keeping employment, such as newcomers, people with disabilities, substance users, homeless and at-risk of homelessness populations. United Way is working on developing this strategy through its Social Purpose Enterprise Enabling Group which is comprised of funders from all three levels of government.

Success by 6 Peel

Success By 6 Peel is a collaborative of more than 60 partners in business, labour, education, recreation, health, social services and government that are working together to ensure that every child in Peel thrives. It has developed several innovative collaborative strategies to support vulnerable parents and neighbourhoods and is co-ordinating plans to reduce the 26% of children who are not ready to learn when they enter school. These efforts build on the creative and hugely successful but overloaded efforts of the Ontario Early Years centres and neighbourhood hubs created by the Peel District School Board to promote early learning.

Neighbourhood Development

To build upon the work of the few but vital Neighbourhood Centres in Peel and the grass roots efforts of organizations including Boys and Girls Club, CMHA Peel and St. Leonard's House for example, United Way Peel Region has provided funding for six projects that support strengthening neighbourhoods. The goal of the neighbourhood development program is to engage residents and local stakeholders in creating community based solutions to local issues and challenges.

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Conclusion

We applaud the provincial government's commitment to addressing poverty in a comprehensive way. Fundamental changes to income support, housing, child care, employment and training and social support strategies are necessary at a provincial level. Support for local initiatives and co-ordination of services and programs are also required. Concurrent financial investments in provincial and local strategies are crucial to helping families get out and stay out of poverty and will have a positive effect in Peel and Ontario.

The Peel Provincial Poverty Strategy Committee looks forward to working with the province to reduce the depth of poverty for residents in Peel.

Appendix

Peel Provincial Poverty Strategy Committee Members

905 Interfaith Coalition
Brampton-Mississauga District Labour Council
Caledon Community Services
Canadian Mental Health Association Peel
City of Brampton
City of Mississauga
Councillor Allan Thompson, Region of Peel
Fair Share Peel
Interim Place
Peel Children's Aid
Peel Children's Centre
Peel District School Board
Peel Newcomer Strategy Group
Peel Poverty Action Group
Peel Senior Link
Region of Peel
Social Planning Council of Peel
Success by 6 Peel
Town of Caledon
United Way Peel Region