



REPORT TO: Public Health and Social Services Committee

SUBJECT: Niagara Prosperity Initiative 2013 Update

RECOMMENDATION

That this report **BE RECEIVED** for information.

PURPOSE

To provide the annual update on the Niagara Prosperity Initiative. This report provides information on the following:

1. Newly funded NPI projects as of November 2013
2. 2011 Outcomes
3. Work completed by the Convener and Secretariat role, renewal of these contracts planned for 2014 (subject to operating budget approval)
4. Provincial Consultation on the Ontario Poverty Plan

BUSINESS IMPLICATIONS

This report links with Council Business Priority Goal 2, Healthy Community.

In September 2008 (COM 53-2008) Regional Council authorized staff to reinvest \$1.5 million in cost savings resulting from the implementation of the Ontario Child Benefit (OCB) toward increasing prosperity for Niagara families living in poverty. Investments in 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2013 were approved as part of Community Services Operating Budget. Community Services has included the \$1.5 million investment as part of its 2014 proposed Operating Budget. The Ministry of Community and Social Services expects municipalities to use OCB savings to maintain investments in programs that benefit social assistance recipients and their children.

REPORT

This report is organized under the following headings:

1. NPI Projects - Fall 2013 RFP
2. 2011 Impact of NPI Projects
3. Convener and Secretariat Update
4. Provincial Consultation on the Ontario Poverty Plan

1. NPI Projects - Fall 2013 RFP

BEC received 42 applications in February and 22 applications in September for a total of 64 applications in 2013. Total request for funding in 2013 was \$3,931,379.

COM 15-2013 provided details to Council regarding the projects approved after the February call for proposals. As noted in COM 15-2013, the full allotment was not invested leaving an amount to be invested later in 2013. An RFP for NPI projects was issued in September 2013. In total, approximately \$347,520 was available for allocation through this RFP issued September 2013: \$288,506 from the remaining 2013 NPI allocation (COM 15-2013) and \$59,014 in previously allocated funding for approved projects that was not spent.

Twenty-two proposals were received as a result of the September RFP. These were reviewed by a committee of nine individuals representing the community, elected officials, service agencies, and government. The review committee met in October and November. Each proposal was reviewed independently by two assessors. The criteria for assessment matched the proposal criteria. Assessors provided comments regarding whether they would “recommend this proposal because”; “this proposal would be stronger if the following changes were implemented”; and “I would not recommend this proposal because”. The group then met together to go over the comments and rate them as being “Very Weak”, “Average” or “Very Strong”. After all proposals were discussed the group made recommendations for funding to the BEC.

A total of 12 proposals from 12 agencies were approved. The total request was \$554,915. The Review Committee has made recommendations to reduce some of the proposed budgets and the BEC will finalize contracts to work within the amount available. Contracted amounts will be finalized beginning in November 2013.

A list of the approved projects by neighbourhood is provided in Appendix A to this report. Approved funding allocations sorted by municipalities are as follows:

NPI Projects Approved (November 2013)		% of Projects
Niagara Falls	2	17%
Grimsby	1	8%
St. Catharines	3	25%
Welland	4	33%
West Lincoln	1	8%
Regional	1	8%
Total	12	

2. 2011 Impact of NPI Projects

Including those approved in 2013, a total of 229 NPI projects have been funded through 65 different agencies in Niagara since the initiative began in 2008.

The review and evaluation of NPI projects has been reported for 2008, 2009, and 2010 (see chart below). This section of the report provides the review and evaluation for 2011.

NPI Year	Project Totals	Funding Start Date	Funding End Date	# of People Served	Evaluation
2008	13	September 2008	December 2009	3,436	Complete COM 12-2010
2009	35	July 2009	July 2010	17,290	Complete COM 12-2010
2010	36	April 2010	April 2011	18,607	Complete COM 41-2012
Sep-2010	22	September 2010	December 2011	8,699	Complete COM 41-2012

In 2011, funding totaled \$1,214,524 for 30 projects: nine were funded for one year (ending July 2012) and twenty-one projects were funded for two years (ending July 2013). A total of 7,147 individuals were served by these projects. A list of agencies, projects, project types, and the number of people served in 2011 is attached as Appendix B.

In 2011 priority was given to proposals that addressed the following recommendations from the report *“A Legacy of Poverty? Addressing Cycles of Poverty & The Impact on Child Health in Niagara Region”*:

2A – “We need economic development initiatives to ensure that people have access to fulltime employment in their own communities.”

2B – “Increase people’s access and attachment to education and the labour force through (a) education supports, skill development programs, (b) supports which enable people to stay in the workplace (e.g., counseling supports and treatment), (c) adequate wages, (d) healthy work conditions, and (e) improved access to health benefits.”

2F – “Broaden the focus of poverty initiatives beyond employment options to include other ways of contributing to community through volunteer work, involvement in community initiatives, and leisure opportunities. If the emphasis is on building positive skills for coping we may be successful in helping people to take steps toward being able to cope in the workplace.”

Although the majority of funding in 2011 went to Educational Programs for children/youth, there were programs to assist with Job Specific Skills that were not funded in 2010 and an increase in Life Skills Programs for Adults.

NPI Contracted Amounts by Project Type	2011	2010
Job Specific Skills	10.2%	0.0%
Community Gardens	5.6%	3.9%
Life Skills Programs for Adults	9.0%	4.1%
Access to Food (includes Grocery Cards, Food Bank, GFB)	2.9%	11.4%
Community Development	26.4%	28.5%
Educational Programs for children/youth (i.e. summer and after School Programs)	45.9%	44.7%
Direct Services (includes phone, Laundry, personal needs)	0.0%	0.1%
Transportation Initiatives	0.0%	7.0%
Research / Conference / Seminar	0.0%	0.2%

To better understand the improvements in the lives of individuals served by NPI projects, NPI has adopted the Sustainable Livelihoods measures used by Vibrant Communities as a tracking tool. Vibrant Communities is a Canada wide poverty reduction initiative that has come out of the Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement, in partnership with the Caledon Institute of Social Policy and the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation. Vibrant Communities' goal is to engage 100 Canadian cities by the year 2016 in collective impacts that improve the lives of Canadians living in poverty.

Sustainable Livelihoods measures improvement in terms of individual and household assets in five asset areas: personal, social, human, financial and physical. Assets refer to the resources, capacities and entitlements that individuals and households can draw upon in each of these five areas to meet their ongoing needs and aspirations. NPI aims to enhance household and individual assets in each of these areas as these assets are associated with pathways out of poverty. A detailed listing of the five asset areas is provided in Appendix C.

The method used for assessing outcomes in each of these asset areas is through participant testimonials. All NPI projects need to complete evaluations which include testimonials. Testimonials provide the qualitative information needed to see what type of impact a project has had for participants and are an appropriate method for evaluation of NPI projects because NPI is designed to have impacts on individuals, households and communities. A total of 295 testimonials were received in 2011. From the testimonials, improvements to individual and household assets were categorized into the five asset categories.

Based on the testimonials, 29% reported improvements in personal assets; 17% reported improvements in physical assets; 74% reported improvements in social assets; 40% reported improvements in human assets; and 12% of individuals reported improvements in financial assets.

The following are examples of testimonials for each asset:

Personal (Enhanced self-esteem and self-confidence) – *“I now have a backyard garden and have grown lots of fresh vegetables. I have learned that they are way fresher and taste better than food in the grocery store and I'm proud of my accomplishments. I've saved a lot of money too and eat way more vegetables than before.”*

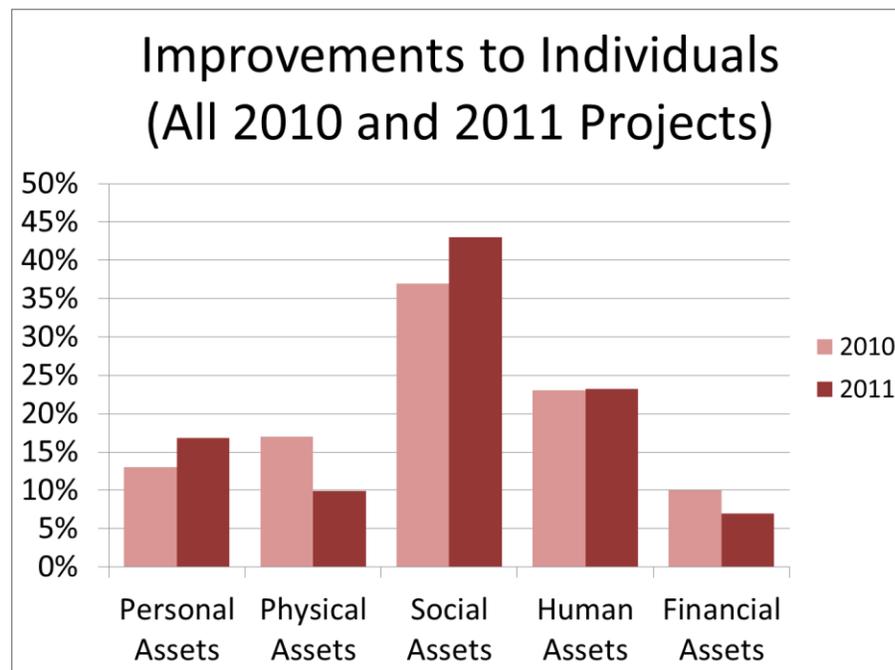
Physical (Secured protection from violence) – *“When I moved to the complex we were told about the Y House. This helped our decision to move here. My kids love it and they look forward for program every Wednesday and Thursday. It helps the kids stay out of trouble and it's something fun for them to do. The staff is great with the kids and provides them with a safe and friendly environment.”*

Social (Enhanced information network) – *“I saw the story in the newspaper about grocery stores in downtown St Catharines and I wanted to contribute to local community. It has been great to engage with local community and hopefully make a difference in raising the quality of life in downtown St Catharines. This was significant because it is hard to find active groups of concerned citizens in the downtown core that are actually doing anything to improve the situation.”*

Human (Enhanced life skills) – *“I have gained more understanding of legal issues and have less fear due to the things I learned. This is significant because I used to believe that the law was for law breakers. We have been given a way to continue learning, to be change makers.”*

Financial (Unemployed and attained a job; includes self-employment) – *“The most important change that happened within my life while participating in SOS was I am working for the first time in 12 years with a temporary part-time job. This change was important to me because it has helped me with my sense of self-esteem and given me a sense of accomplishment. SOS has helped me to develop the courage to try new things and step outside of my comfort zone. I learned a lot through the program, most especially improved self-esteem and self-assertiveness. I would recommend this program to any woman.”*

When comparing the individual and household assets of 2011 with 2010 projects, Social Assets remain the highest impact of NPI in people’s lives.



2013 marks a five year point for NPI. In June 2013 NPI received the Canadian Urban Institute’s national award for Urban Leadership Prosperity and Renewal. This award was presented to NPI for “creating an extensive initiative and investing long-term into programs to decrease poverty in the region that focus on inclusion.”¹

On September 26th, a planning meeting was held and all agencies, partners and review committee members involved with NPI since 2008 were invited. Fifty-five people attended to celebrate accomplishments to date and to provide feedback on moving forward. Staff are reviewing the feedback collected during the review (which is attached as Appendix D) and will use this information to inform the next RFP in 2014.

3. Convener and Secretariat Update

As reported in COM 44-2012, Community Services entered into contracts with the BEC and the Niagara Community Foundation (NCF) for secretariat and convener services respectively. Both organizations have satisfied contractual requirements, and contracts will be renewed to support the 2014 NPI program at the same funding levels as in 2013 (totaling \$150,000 or 10% of the approved \$1.5 million NPI available funding).

¹ <http://www.canurb.com/cui-news/cui-awards-recognize-urban-leaders-across-canada.html>

Staff are pleased with the support provided by both BEC and NCF in 2013. Some highlighted activities from the Secretariat so far in 2013 are:

- NPI RFP announcements, coordination of review committee, handle requests for additional information from applicants, as needed, for Review Committee to make fully informed recommendations
- Contract negotiations with 29 community agencies on 46 NPI funded projects
- Meeting space was arranged for over 64 meetings and more than 20 meetings at partner locations
- Niagara Poverty Reduction Network (NPRN) launch took place on May 22, 2013 at Welland Wellness Complex. The BEC worked in collaboration with the NPRN Communication committee and other partnerships (Chimpanzee, Business Link) to establish branding, committee name, tagline and website/communication tools for launch
- Trillium Foundation Grant received for a two year period to hire a program coordinator to build awareness and commitment in the private sector to support poverty reduction programs. Business support will include funding, mentorship, human resources, donated space, employment opportunities and sharing of best business practices beneficial to individuals and organizations addressing poverty in Niagara

Some highlighted activities from the Convener so far in 2013 are:

- Convene quarterly meetings with regional Community Health Centres (CHC) front line staff and Region Homeless/Shelter staff to share common resources and expertise
- Convene a Community Developer working group to connect and cross pollinate ideas among agencies that are involved in activities in various neighbourhoods across Niagara
- Sit on Quest CHC Dental Advisory Committee in support of a St. Catharines pilot program hygiene & preventative treatment plan
- Convene March to September NPI Garden network meetings and support the network by engaging business community support by seeking donations of seeds (Stokes) and plants (Martin farms)
- Work with FirstOntario Niagara micro credit facility cultivating new employment agencies that have greater potential to generate referrals
- Established a task group researching Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) changes with low income tax returns through the Community Volunteer Income Tax Program (CVIT); hosted a CVIT agency forum where Information Niagara (211) and representatives of CRA updated this community on the fundamentals of the CVIT and what local and CRA resources may be available to them should they be willing to start hosting clinics in their communities

4. Provincial Consultation on the Ontario Poverty Plan

In 2008 the Provincial government launched its “Breaking the Cycle: Ontario’s Poverty Reduction Strategy”, with a goal to reduce child poverty in Ontario by 25% in five years (lifting 90,000 children out of poverty). *The Poverty Reduction Act, 2009* requires the province to develop a new poverty reduction strategy every five years.

Now that the first five year plan is completed, the Province asked for input to help shape the next Poverty Reduction Strategy through online submissions or attendance at planned consultations. Government-led community consultations were held in early August into October. Through the actions of the Niagara Poverty Reduction Network (a Network that was created through support from NPI), a consultation meeting took place in Niagara on September 30th. The meeting was attended by a wide range of individuals representing agencies, government, and those living in poverty. One of the questions asked in the meeting was “when it comes to reducing poverty in Ontario, what would success look like 15 years from now?” Some of the responses provided by individuals who attended this meeting were:

- Jobs – increase minimum wage to a living wage
- Increase welfare rates – treat people with respect
- Housing – homes, not apartments
- End the austerity agenda
- Increased funding for special needs families
- End claw-backs
- Dental health – can’t get a job without teeth
- Fair taxes can help with income distribution
- Raise funding for non-profit organizations who use volunteers because they can’t afford to pay them

Consultations have concluded and further updates are pending. According to the Province, in the first three years of their strategy approximately 47,000 children and their families were raised out of poverty “despite a climate of global economic uncertainty”. Further details about the outcomes of the Province’s poverty reduction strategy can be found at their website [Breaking the Cycle - Home](#). Final numbers for 2011 are expected in a report to be released in December 2013.

Submitted by:

Approved by:

Katherine Chislett
Commissioner, Community Services

Harry Schlange
Chief Administrative Officer

- Appendix A List of approved November 2013 NPI projects and agencies
- Appendix B 2011 Project Outcomes
- Appendix C Assets Measures - Sustainable Livelihoods
- Appendix D Niagara Prosperity Initiative Celebration Event Feedback

This report was prepared by Sarah Pennisi, Director, Social Assistance and Employment Opportunities and Marc Todd, Manager, Social Assistance and Employment Opportunities

List of approved November 2013 NPI projects and agencies

Appendix A

**Niagara Falls
November 2013 Prosperity Initiatives**

Agency	Name of NPI Project	Description	Neighbourhood
Hannah House Maternity Home	Rock Solid	Rock Solid, is a 40-week life skills program that will enable young pregnant or parenting women under the age of 21 to advocate for themselves, educate themselves, and apply new skills to strengthen their employability.	Drummond / Victoria & Elgin
Project share	The Real Food Spot	Using our outdoor wood oven and community garden, this program will provide four "Real Food" cooking and garden programs; three international cooking workshops; a six week seniors "Grow, Cook and Share" club; market bucks pilot; and four Field to Table neighbourhood events.	Drummond / Victoria & Elgin

**Grimsby
November 2013 Prosperity Initiatives**

Agency	Name of NPI Project	Description	Neighbourhood
Niagara North Community Legal Assistance	Injured Worker Speaker School - FORT Youth Project	This program will offer injured workers an opportunity to share their stories, learn communication skills, break their isolation and learn to speak in public about the issues they face. Youth from the FORT will plan, prepare, and serve weekly meals to the injured workers. The youth will apply learned budgeting skills, food preparation, and work as a team.	Grimsby Downtown; Nelles; Grimsby Mountain

**St. Catharines
November 2013 Prosperity Initiatives**

Agency	Name of NPI Project	Description	Neighbourhood
Southridge Shelter	Life Skills - Food Preparation	This program will provide basic cooking instruction for individuals who have moved from an emergency shelter into an apartment. Topics will cover meal and grocery planning, food budgeting, and cooking techniques.	St. Catharines Downtown
The RAFT	Market Garden	This program is a social enterprise that combines education & community engagement. Participants will learn urban farming by producing and selling seeded garden socks. The program will address youth unemployment through job training.	Old Western Hill
Westview Christian	Women4Women Celebration Event	Neighbourhood evening events to share a meal, have entertainment, receive a gift, and enjoy friendship as a community family of women. Participants have learned about food preparation and kitchen safety and will be able to demonstrate their new skills at this event.	Queenston

**Welland
 November 2013 Prosperity Initiatives**

Agency	Name of NPI Project	Description	Neighbourhood
Faith Welland Outreach	Faith Welland Outreach - McLaughlin and LifeLabs Programming	Programming at McLaughlin Community House and Kids' and Pee Wee LifeLabs out of Plymouth School includes music, cooking, sewing, arts & crafts, woodworking, girl talk, and community gardens in the lowest income neighbourhoods of Welland.	Cordage; West Main
Welland Heritage Council & Multicultural Centre	Fitness & Finances Wellness	Fitness sessions- workshops to enhance participant knowledge about physical mental social -financial well-being. To build a positive community through education knowledge and social inclusion by increasing awareness of jobs training and financial literacy.	West Main; Market Square
Women's Place of South Niagara Inc.	Domestic Violence Community Development & Engagement	Delivery of Domestic Violence public education and a school based dating and healthy relationships intervention / prevention program to Youth in Grades 7-12 in Welland. Counseling will be available for victims of abuse and violence.	Market Square; West Main; Cordage; Eastside; Ontario Road / Dain City; Welland South
YMCA of Niagara	YMCA Youth Club	Youth Club is an after school program for children in grades 3-6. The focus is on health, wellness, nutrition, & physical activity. Program includes 3 yr. quantitative research to determine the impact on the physical & emotional health of the children.	Cordage

**West Lincoln
 November 2013 Prosperity Initiatives**

Agency	Name of NPI Project	Description	Neighbourhood
Niagara West Adult Learning Centre	Read - Learn - Grow	Recognizing that a parent is a child's first teacher, Read-Learn-Grow will provide parents who have low literacy skills with the tools and strategies needed to improve their own literacy while empowering them to help their children succeed in school.	Caistor; Gainsborough

**Regional
 November 2013 Prosperity Initiatives**

Agency	Name of NPI Project	Description	Neighbourhood
Niagara Connects	Rowing the Boat Together II: Agencies Connect for Client Success	This project will provide opportunities for leaders in Niagara to share best practice ideas and advance a person-centered service delivery approach across Niagara. Niagara Connects will build an online Bulletin Board for sharing of information and resources to strengthen inter-agency collaboration.	All neighbourhoods

Appendix B

2011 Project Outcomes

Agency	Project Title	Project Type	Number of People Served
Bethlehem Projects of Niagara	Skills of Success for Women	Life Skills Programs for Adults	41
Boys and Girls Club of Niagara	Fort Erie Community Engagement Project	Community Development	629
Climate Action Niagara	The Stokes/Goodwill Gardens	Community Gardens	154
Climate Action Niagara	Sprouting Roots Welland	Community Gardens	136
Community Legal Services of Niagara South	Volunteer Program - Community Legal Clinic	Job Specific Skills	108
Community Living Port Colborne-Wainfleet	It's All About the Kids	Educational Programs for children	201
District School Board of Niagara	Summer H.E.A.T. (Helping Everyone Achieve Together) Port Colborne	Educational Programs for children	73
District School Board of Niagara	Summer H.E.A.T. (Helping Everyone Achieve Together) Fort Erie	Educational Programs for children	69
District School Board of Niagara	Summer H.E.A.T. (Helping Everyone Achieve Together) Niagara Falls	Educational Programs for children	139
Faith Welland Outreach	2011 Program Enhancement	Educational Programs for children	712
Faith Welland Outreach	2011 to 2013 Program Delivery	Educational Programs for children	1171
Faith Welland Outreach	McLaughlin Community Gardens	Community Gardens	132
Fort Erie Multicultural Centre	Fort Erie North CAFÉ - Continued	Community Development	182
Gateway Residential & Community Support Services	Good Food Mobile Market	Access to Food (includes Grocery Cards, Food Bank, GFB)	128
John Howard Society of Niagara	IMPACT Fort Erie	Educational Programs for children	46
John Howard Society of Niagara	IMPACT Niagara Falls	Educational Programs for children	84
John Howard Society of Niagara	IMPACT St. Catharines	Educational Programs for children	428
Learning Disabilities Association of Niagara Region	Reading Rocks Junior	Educational Programs for children	35
Niagara Catholic District School Board	Neighbourhood Access Initiative - Tutoring and After-school	Educational Programs for children	395
Niagara North Community Legal Assistance	Injured Worker Speakers School	Life Skills Programs for Adults	30
Port Cares	Food Service Associate	Job Specific Skills	37
Project S.H.A.R.E of Niagara Falls Inc.	Garden Workshops	Community Gardens	267
Strategy to End Poverty (STEP) - Niagara	Cooperative Build - City Lands Bordered by Southworth, McLaughlin	Community Development	0
The Adult Literacy Council of Greater Fort Erie	Fort Erie North CAFÉ (Creating a Foundation for Excellence)	Community Development	159
RAFT	Neighbourhood Awakening - A Community Development Initiative- STC	Community Development	720

Agency	Project Title	Project Type	Number of People Served
RAFT	Neighbourhood Awakening - A Community Development Initiative- WELLAND	Community Development	424
United Way of St. Catharines & District	Rykert Youth Programs	Educational Programs for children	284
YMCA of Niagara	Community Y House	Educational Programs for children	136
Youth University	Neighbourhood Access Initiative - Tutoring and After-school Program	Educational Programs for children	209
YWCA Niagara Region	Women's Leadership Project	Life Skills Programs for Adults	18
Total			7,147

Appendix C

Assets Measures - Sustainable Livelihoods

<p>Personal Assets Inner resources such as self-esteem and self-confidence</p>	<p><i>Inner Resources</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased self-awareness • Enhanced self-esteem and self-confidence • Improved hope and motivation
<p>Physical Assets Basic material goods and services such as food, shelter, transportation and child care</p>	<p><i>Emergency Supports</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtained temporary shelter • Secured protection from violence • Prevented eviction or utility shut-off • Received emergency food assistance <p><i>Food</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased food security <p><i>Housing</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtained safe, affordable rental housing • Attained home ownership <p><i>Transportation</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtained access to reliable transportation • <i>Child and Dependent Care</i> • Obtained care for child or other dependent
<p>Social Assets Relationships and networks</p>	<p><i>Civic Participation</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low-income people are engaged in their community through regular participation in community groups and activities • Children and youth participate in activities that support their growth and development • Senior citizens participate in services that promote active, independent living <p><i>Networks</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced personal support network • Enhanced information network
<p>Human Assets Skills, knowledge, education and health</p>	<p><i>Health</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtained needed health services (medical, dental, mental health) <p><i>Life Skills</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced life skills <p><i>Financial Literacy</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased ability to manage income and accumulate assets <p><i>Education</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completed high school or high school equivalency • Completed post-secondary education program <p><i>Employment</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtained employment skills
<p>Financial Assets Income, savings and sources of financial security including government income security programs</p>	<p><i>Employment</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unemployed and attained a job (include self-employment) • Employed and obtained an increase in employment income • Achieved living wage employment and benefits (as defined by the local initiative) <p><i>Non-Employment Income</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased income from non-employment sources (for instance, by accessing benefits, tax credits, or subsidies) <p><i>Assets</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Built financial asset • Obtained capital asset (computer, car, home) <p>Financial health</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced costs • Reduced debt

Appendix D

Niagara Prosperity Initiative Celebration Event Feedback

September 26, 2013

Two questions were posed to the participants:

Question 1 If you had \$1.5M in annual investment to address poverty in Niagara, what would you do?

Question 2 From what you know about the Niagara Prosperity Initiative what would you...

- Continue?
- Start?
- Stop?

Prior to the conversation staff presented an outline of NPI's approach thus far:

- Use available data (poverty reports; mapping tool data)
- Listen to the community and use expert advice on how to address poverty – use the recommendations from the poverty reports
- Place the recommendations in a Request For Proposal (RFP) for the community to respond on how poverty will be addressed given funding
- Funding is allocated through a place-based approach – addressing poverty at the community / neighbourhood level
- Have an independent review committee decide on who receives funding
- Contract a secretariat to manage the NPI contracts
- Employ a Convener to assist in collaboration efforts in the community
- Short-term Project evaluation to provide outcome data for ongoing investment

NPI's overarching goals were outlined as:

- Direct investments to identified needs to alleviate poverty at the neighbourhood level
- Advocating for changes that will further reduce and prevent poverty in the community
- Relationships and collaborations are built between stakeholders
- Engage people living in poverty in meaningful ways to ensure that investments reflect needs

Some of the challenges and queries faced by NPI were presented to the group. The topics discussed included:

- How will the lack of reliable neighbourhood data through the 2011 National Household Survey impact on the Neighbourhood Mapping Tool?
- How will we address the inability to complete longitudinal research on the impacts of NPI projects on communities?
- What are the merits of a placed-based approach to poverty reduction vs. an issue based approach?
- Should we fund projects or programs, or both, and how will we address sustainability? For example, if instead of investing through projects, we were to just give the money to social assistance recipients and working poor, the \$1.5 M would add up to a yearly increase of \$67.92 per person – or \$5.66 monthly.

Even with these challenges, there was a strong consensus that NPI is a needed investment in the community. The group responded that the impact of NPI on the neighbourhoods and communities of Niagara have been substantial.

If you had \$1,500,000.00 in annual investment to address poverty in Niagara what would you do?

- Items for seniors on fixed income (OAS/GAINS) not covered through social services such as: last month's rent, moving costs, bed replacement due to bed bugs, costs for assistive devices that ADP (25%) does not cover.
- Stick with programs that have already demonstrated positive outcomes – don't penalize programs and services that are successful just to create something new.
- Better define sustainability or take it out of the equation – bottom line, proven successful programs just need the funding to be sustained – they are never really sustainable because all the resources are tapped into each year.
- Increased dollars for administration costs to support salaries for the ongoing programs/services.
- Increase sense of empowerment among people living in poverty in areas such as voting and attending community meetings
- Continuing to increase our Niagara-wide connectedness and using reliable, relevant data in decision-making.
- Transitional housing – in Welland the wait time is between 8-11 years. There is more housing for males.
- Social enterprise – downtown storefronts = enterprise, upstairs would be housing.
- \$500 000 = new innovative programs and \$1 000 000 effective program continuing (to ensure sustainability)
 - o Determine which programs could benefit from additional funding.
- Neighbourhood champions – leadership training to ensure sustainable actions when funding diminishes Employment – small business + private sector job creation
 - o Get people back to work
 - o Follow up with skills training to see employment outcome in 6 months, 1 year, 2 years...
 - o Provide hope
 - o Wage subsidies?
- Small Business: what's it going to take to keep you open and hire one more employee?
- Mentorship for small business from larger companies
- Advocating for what NIAGARA needs with/from larger organizations/companies to help our communities flourish (i.e. if head office is in Toronto are they aware of the unique needs of Niagara?)
- Breakfast programs that standardize in every school "Make it cool to eat at school"
- Advocacy for affordable housing – services
- Recommend long-term increase of the budget of social assistance and employment opportunities \$1.5 million rather than annual re-authorization of NPI by Regional Council
- Entertain long-term (5-year) funding (with annual review) dedicated to successful projects for a portion of the \$1.5 million, say \$500 000 with the remaining \$1 million similar to past practice
- Need for stability for demonstrated successful projects rather than only funding "new" ideas that may or may not work well
- Focus on prosperity by creating business through social enterprise
- Empower individuals with options to better themselves in tangible ways versus providing social services that keep people marginalized in a system
- Get Scandinavian (global acknowledgement) that capitalism's "trickle-down theory" does not work.
- Same process as NPI
 - o Local agencies know the needs in the community; they are most capable of developing programs to meet these needs
 - o Independent review committee

- Have preventative measures for children and youth (i.e. literacy programs, social skills programs, after school programs, life skills) to help stop the cycle of poverty.
- Life skills programs for adults and families (i.e. cooking, smart shopping)
- Educating adults, families and children
- Advocacy programs – make people more aware of poverty and the programs provided to help.
- I would like to see more funding go toward Job Training and Transportation a bit more. Helping people finding jobs and provide transportation to their jobs is probably the best impact. When people working making money they would be able to provide to their family and themselves.
- Job specific skills training \$1,091.00 per person. Seems to be the expensive investment per person but it will make the biggest impact. Maybe the 5 agencies that receive funding could work together to lower this cost.
- The approach of NPI has been very good
 - o Maybe map out agencies that provide the same type of program and service to work together under the same funding.
 - o Like to see success story/outcome of funding
 - o Look at cost per person and where it would make the most impact at a lower cost per person
 - o Funding to “access to food” and “assistance with shelter” are important but I look at them as a bandage solution. However, it is still important to help get people back on their feet.
- Training for adults (skills)
 - o Employment to increase income and self-sufficiency
 - o Parenting skills
 - o Coping/life skills
- Education/advocacy about the system and limitations/constraints put on people using assistance and are unable to build a savings account
- Adults have to be better empowered to make effective decisions at school, services etc. To help people navigate systems
 - o How to shop and avoid traps like rent to own furniture and payment loans.
- Break out of the cycle
 - o Focusing on helping the parents will impact the children’s lives by improving their environment and minimizing stress on the family
- Need a focus on empowering individuals and increasing their self-efficiency.
- Continue with the NPI-RFP initiative
- It is desirable to fund projects that will have long-term results. However, review committee need to be mindful about projects that have shown results because in the context of theory of change incremental improvements are part of the pathway to imploring people to personal, physical, social and financial assets. Not sure if the Niagara Region’s Economic Development Corporation has adequate funding to attract companies that will create jobs in Niagara – not just seasonal jobs – but manufacturing type jobs. Perhaps \$250,000 should be earmarked to see if that makes a difference.
- Community agencies working together can work more globally or regionally by coordinating services with each other to focus more on root causes of poverty and underlying issues.
- United way to disperse out
- Create 3 year projects in Niagara
- Continue to focus on the communities that require the most need – by assisting the agencies that are providing the supports to them.
- Have forums in the vulnerable communities to identify community need.
- Provide continual support or assist the agencies in planning on long term strategies.
- Focus on making the difference in the long term problems rather than creating a band aid for programs that run short term.
- Having piece go back into NPI projects to sustain.

- What are guidelines on project sustainability?
 - o How is it determined for 1 or 2 year projects?
 - o What defines sustainability projects?
- Continue to invest in programs that address
 - o Basic needs
 - o Educating child – via before/after school program (self-esteem, giving children or families to be successful in life) life skills.
- More focus on parental involvement in programming for child in school – get to root of problems is important
- More focus on how people can access grant programs across Niagara – accessibility and awareness
 - o Working as one rather than multiple communities across Niagara.
 - o Combining programs and make available across all of Niagara
- Collaboration:
 - o How do we as one NPI Project know what is happening across Niagara to leverage collaboration and grow a successful project
 - o Sharing ideas, best practices within projects of NPI.
- Instead of funding band aid solutions I would invest the \$1,500,000 into long term outcomes that is programs vs. projects, Economy etc. I would want to invest in a living wage increase to reduce poverty “where it begins”. Affordable housing, transitional housing instead of emergency basics. I don’t believe in funding short-term projects because it is only that short-term, as are the outcomes and impact on poverty. I do believe in education, teaching life skills where there are deficits in being able to live independently.
 - o To sum up:
 - o Life skills, living wage/employment, affordable/transitional housing
 - o Have advocacy programs that educate businesses around the importance around creating a living wage. Instead of giving a backpack, teach the families about budgeting, employment etc.
- Urge an assessment of what creates the conditions for prosperity vs. what alleviated poverty. Have found that these are very separate and divergent paths but keeping Einstein’s admonishment that no problem can be fixed by the same consciousness that created it.
- For the most part, I would continue to fund as NPI already does. I believe that many of the projects are having significant impact within Niagara. I would make some incremental changes to the way funding is directed.
- I am not sure how funding works but I would try to leverage the money to attract other funding i.e. region invests 15% which opens provincial funding for an additional 85%. Multiplier effect.
- May be a different pot of funding but worked with Housing First this past year. Solid results for the 11 we handled. Need more rent supplements or similar options so that people can secure housing with the money they have available. Operating this program with no funding for salaries and other costs is not sustainable. The impact is that some individuals will remain homeless or very precariously housed or may lose their housing because supports are withdrawn.

Adequacy of benefits for single recipients of OW who are 60% of poverty line should be addressed. It could be done through a housing allowance, a food card or rise in rates or ?. The rent supplements worked well in this regard. Another way could be providing people who volunteer with a monthly cash supplement... A cash training allowance.

- My first choices for my spending are housing/adequacy.

From what you know about the Niagara Prosperity Initiative what would you:

Continue?

- Focus on the most needy neighbourhoods. Do not start new groups. Try not to be political.
- Doing what we're doing
- Neighbourhood bases
- Encouraging community partnerships
- Convener and Secretariat roles – no change in personnel! (but need to plan for if there were)
- Educating agencies and connecting them
- Continue to include councilors on review committee.
- Yes, with a stronger focus in providing “poor health” programming. I believe that if we do not reverse or turn the curve on the obesity, type 2 diabetes, underground economy (cigarettes), impact on health will be a crisis in families – a huge impact on poverty.
- Access to food
- Programs for children
- The process (RFP) well done
- Social programs – develop more social events
- Access to food
- Educational
- Fitness programs for all ages
- Process of proposal works well
- Encouraging multi-agency collaboration to avoid redundancy
- Kick-off meeting for increased networking
- Mapping tool: other meaningful indicators; OW recipients
- 2 year funding
- Not submitting all receipts
- Both reactive/preventative programs
- Providing life skills programs to adults, families and children
- Programs for children to prevent future poverty (i.e. literacy programs, after school programs etc.)
 - o Make them easily accessible to the community
- Offer programs throughout the region
- Community conversations (with community members) to engage residents within a neighbourhood to take ownership of the programs to shift toward a sustainable approach
- Direct service programs (shift toward) → Community development → by increasing leadership (identify leaders within the community and providing opportunities for them to use and develop those skills).
- Continue NPI-RFP funds and process – strong process that ensures collaboration
- The program
- Continue to serve and monitor high need areas
- Mapping tool very resourceful – would like to see updates (7 years old). We use mapping tool for so many different things, it helps guide us and is a good resource.
- Strength of NPI – encourages collaboration and brings groups together
- Get together – going through application process – help with proposal and grants – very helpful important to have that guidance and communicating info session.
- Funding poverty projects/programs
- I would keep NPI doing the exact same things it already does. Even without changing a thing, I think NPI is impactful, refreshing, and globally innovative. I would certainly continue using the Vibrant Communities framework, and would advocate for all funders within Niagara to use it in some way.

Start?

- Fund successful projects so they continue to operate. Plant ideas inside existing programs
- Fostering partnerships – round tables, using applications to identify overlaps, gaps etc.
- Check in reports from all funded organizations to encourage resource sharing.
- 500 word box at end of report to add more info that wasn't included prior (that we feel is important)
- Providing updated data
- Results from neighbourhood questionnaires shared regularly with service providers in that neighbourhood.
- Online polling for community vote on / providing community forums to show neighbourhoods what's happening.
- Encourage agencies to bring participants and volunteers to NPI meetings.
- move towards issue-based but keeping with a neighbourhood focus for collaboration
- allow for community projects to continue beyond 1 and 2 years (especially when its working and has gained the trust of residents) If all the money hasn't been spent in the time period, can be extended beyond the contract.
- Start identifying best practices that can be replication (i.e. after-school programs)
- Evaluating the long term outcomes after the funding has stopped? Evaluating the sustainability 2,5,10 years down the road?
- More emphasis in root causes of poverty
 - o Don't give a man a fish, teach them how to fish! Life skills training and sustainable.
- Advocacy for more of affordable housing
- Allowing access outside the neighbourhood
- Internet access for children to do homework.
- Civic engagements
- Allow events to be held in other areas rather than area of study.
- Exit interview to learn from investment
- Learn from Trillium research re: non-qualitative
- Longer-term funding opportunities for demonstrated success
- Encourage neighbourhood cross-pollination of successful programming between the high poverty neighbourhoods (i.e. Betty Boyd's [FWO's] successful McLaughlin/Kids Life Laps programming initiative in Fort Erie North End with the expressed purpose of identifying local champions for replication of successes)
- Dedication of portion of funding (say \$100 000) for research and planning rather than just service providers.
- Longer, broader consultation process
- Provide support to help programs remain sustainable.
- Sustainability fund (smaller fund for sustaining very successful programs)
- Consider funding social enterprise initiatives. Not all the \$1,500,000, but a portion of it.
- Perhaps funding would be given to the Economic Development Corporation to bring real jobs to Niagara via attracting companies to establish businesses in Niagara – if determined that current funding is not adequate.
- Provide Niagara Poverty Reduction Network with \$10,000 in funding to have a facilitator to help create a 3-year strategic plan
- Be more flexible in terms of when looking at your target groups – not everything comes black and white when it comes to stats
- More administrative supports to run the programs that currently are being done by coordinators who aren't being compensated for the time spent on gathering the information.
- Looking at reporting systems from Trillium, Niagara Community Foundation, United Way or Branscombe and merge with the way they look for information. So all are on the same path

- Coordination of services
- How do you sustain poverty programs
- Create awareness – provide tools throughout to sustain projects after funding ends (teach us to sustain)
- Have someone sit with you and go through report process (even as courtesy for first year applicants – knowing Natalie is so busy).
- Proposal and application process can be overwhelming – have separate application for individual or smaller groups.
- Application and wording can be overwhelming for some and limit people submitting - sometimes questions are not always easy to understand
- RFP process – does it ever work the other way? Gaps identified and the NPI Calls groups to address – community consultation revisit, survey to identify gaps.
- If 2 NPI Projects address similar issues/gaps does NPI bring 2 groups together to collaborate and pool resources to be more effective for everyone
- Funding longer term programs
- Funding programs vs projects
- Start investing in capital projects and strategic plans
- I would shift funding to agencies from a hand-out model to an investment model, by starting with 1 project, and designating a larger portion of funds each following year to be used by agencies as seed money for investing in social enterprise solutions to build neighbourhood assets. With a model of investing in social enterprises, a proportion of dollars each year will produce revenue through the programming. Eventually, such programs could run on their own without funder support. It is likely that not all assets can be grown through social enterprise solutions, but earmarking some funding to social enterprises should incentivize more agencies to innovate and develop more financially sustainable programming, where able. Social enterprise projects that can grow assets while connecting clients with the private sector for job creation would be ideal.
- I would create a separate category of funding for new and innovative projects, so that they can be evaluated using a more appropriate criteria (developmental evaluation). By holding new and innovative projects to criteria designed for established projects, NPI is currently making the new projects look less impactful. This is creating misunderstandings with stakeholders about the value of many new/innovative projects and incentivizing agencies to stick with pre-established and in many cases outdated models of direct programming.
- I would set a small amount of resources aside to work with others (funders, agencies, citizens) to find a way to transfer more power and decision-making about available programming to neighbourhood community members, particularly those who are vulnerable. The power and decision-making in the not-for-profit sector in Niagara is still held primarily by everyone except those that the funded programs are designed to benefit. I believe that until we have empowered the neighbourhood residents, given them a voice, and then together with them grow the assets they want, Niagara will not end poverty.
- I would look at the assets that are being developed by NPI funded project on a neighbourhood by neighbourhood basis to see if the assets are being provided by an alternative source. If they are not, then I would (1) gather information from the residents of that neighbourhood to see if they would like the asset, and if so, then (2) talk with other funders to see if they would assist in funding a supply of that asset, and if so, then (3) put out a request for proposal for a solution, and use competitive bidding to award funding.
- I would use the NPI mapping tool to track changes to the vibrant community assets on a neighbourhood by neighbourhood basis. I would set it up to crowd-source data electronically from

funders, agencies, neighbourhood residents and others. I would use the digital data collection in a similar way to the way Niagara Connects collects data from the public through their website about the living in Niagara report, except that I would prioritize the opinions of neighbourhood residents over “experts”, and I would recommend 100% transparency about who any experts are.

Stop?

- Opening process too broadly (school boards, municipalities, hospitals).
- Funding funders
- Although we appreciate breakfast and the venue; it is not necessary – the funds can go to something else, another project or have the event in a community agency and have food programs and include participants.
- Nothing, doing well. Poverty is still a major issue.
- 10% testimonial requirement – we have hundreds of 10 year old and also need parent consent and teacher co-operation.
- Limiting location for workshops – hard to network
- Requirement for funding only “new programming”
- Exclusive qualitative evaluation of success
- Focus on poverty and shift focus to prosperity.
- Review the meeting process (takes place after funding approved)
 - o More helpful to have description and contact info for each program
- Review the information session
 - o Different information provided each year? Or just send out info?
- Measuring impact by the number of people serviced and focus more on the impact.
- Trying to fund projects that don't fit into their criteria – don't give projects money if the agencies can't provide the criteria that they are looking for
- Be more clear about their reporting process
- Look at the system of reporting and how it works – there seems to be some technical issues.
- Depth of reporting should be reviewed – modify as some agencies don't have capacity to complete. Incorporate other measures for reporting (i.e. pictures and #s serviced etc.).
- Evaluation process – yes important, groups have limited time/resources, make evaluation streamline/simpler. It almost limits agencies from submitting RFPs.
- Are there tools being used for evaluation already that are simpler and less time consuming?
- Testimonials – it is not measurable of impact/outcomes
- Using the mapping tool – it is limiting; there are families outside the identified neighbourhoods that need assistance as well.
- Stop funding funders – I believe it to be a conflict of interest (i.e. United Way).

Additional Notes

- The continue, start and stop are hard questions. The answer depends on what we as a community want to accomplish and what the other choices are for the funds. Very creative Idea. Long term positive impacts may not be evident.
- Start Me Up has benefitted from Prosperity Initiative funding and as a result the neighbourhood/residents have services that would not have been available. Will apply again if it continues.
- The level of involvement for people in neighbourhood has been high. Social and health benefits realized (new skills, improved nutrition, increased activity, improved access). Impact on neighbourhood as a whole difficult to measure. Obvious improvement from a point of view that when individuals do better the neighbourhood is strengthened.
- The impact on level of poverty for SMUN's projects from a strictly economic perspective is low. A few individuals secured employment, others moved from OW to ODSP & OA, some moved from no income to OW or earnings. The neighbourhood is still impoverished and the indicators for the immediate area around SMUN (Geneva to Eastchester) are much worse than the mapping shows for the whole Queenston neighbourhood.
- The development of partnerships has been amazing. This has leveraged both in kind and financial resources. Improves asset level of neighbourhood.
- Is the purpose of the NPI funding to address the **causes** or **effects** of poverty of both? Different approaches need to be taken, depending on what the purpose is. My personal perspective is that much of the past NPI work has been focused on the effects of poverty – hunger, social isolation/exclusion, etc. I would then suggest outlining the causes, the effects, and best practices for addressing in a community context (much of this has already been done in the Legacy of Poverty report, but I don't feel there has been enough emphasis on addressing the causes of poverty). I would also suggest that many more people who currently live in poverty – both the working poor and those receiving assistance – be asked to be included in this conversation. What agencies put forward for funding proposals and what those on the receiving end actually want and need may not always be matching. For example, how many of the working poor have time to attend a “learn to cook” class or to participate in a community garden? What most want are better working conditions, better pay, benefits, more affordable housing, more stable childcare arrangements, etc. Niagara needs to secure more investment from other levels of government in order to be able to address many of the “upstream” causes. This takes time, consistent advocacy work, and a clear message/ask.
- YES, continue NPI funding, but must create a better balance between addressing causes and effects of poverty and need to include more people with current lived experience in the process. How many people with lived experience have participated in the proposal review process?