

Roundtable gets \$334,000 to look at solutions to poverty



MPP Todd Smith with North Hastings representatives attending the Poverty Roundtable for Hastings and Prince Edward Counties from left, Todd Smith MPP; Lee Maidlow, Wollaston Township resident; Deb Jeffrey, North Hastings Sustainable Living Group; Brenda Pitz and Jane Kali, Bancroft Community Trust; and Bill Kilpatrick, Councillor Town of Bancroft.

By Jim Eadie

The Poverty Roundtable for Hastings and Prince Edward Counties has just been awarded a Trillium grant of \$334,000 over three years for their 'Creating Community' proposal. This aims to once and for all create a co-ordinated multi-sector action to reduce poverty, including in North Hastings.

'In the past, social service workers have debated this issue with all of the best intentions,' said Rev. Ed Bentley, roundtable member. 'We make all kinds of assumptions about what could be positive changes. But we need people with lived experience to become empowered - people who really know the challenges. We might be very surprised what is needed to change things.'

'A vast majority now say: We gotta have some action; we need to see results,' Bentley continued. 'Talking is not good enough anymore. We need to find out what works, and then make things happen.'

Bentley noted that the money would be spent over three years to hire a full time staff person to oversee the project, as well as to hire other staff as needed to conduct consultations in the 14 municipalities involved.

As the problem is multi-dimensional, the project also seeks to draw in other sectors that can form part of the solution, such as business, health care, housing, education, and various levels of government.

'Poverty is a darkness that we should all feel really badly about,' said Bentley. 'Hastings and Prince Edward Counties does not score too well. There is a lack of income security; as well, we cannot be proud of our high school graduation rate. Income security is the key social determinate of health, and that has implications for the health-care system. The charity model we have with food programs and food banks only helps people with their daily reality. It doesn't change that reality.'

The four objectives of the project are:

- * To give a voice to people with lived experience to take a leadership role
- * To engage with business and government who want to try new approaches
- * To engage with communities, and challenge stereotypical and false assumptions
- * To create a plan for the future

MPP Todd Smith took note of the delegation from North Hastings present at the meeting.

'I see a group here from North Hastings,' he said. 'I get a lot of calls from North Hastings. Things are expensive there - hydro, services, groceries. Keep up the good work there in North Hastings.'

People attending the meeting from North Hastings included Bancroft Councillor Bill Kilpatrick, Jane Kali and Brenda Pitz from Bancroft Community Trust, Lee Maidlow, a Wollaston Township resident, and Deb Jeffrey of North Hastings Sustainable Living

Group.

?It is always a good thing to consult with people living in poverty,? said Kali. ?I am here today because as a single mom, I was able to go to university. I am mindful that I stood beside the MPP whose party destroyed those social service supports for the people after me, and created a lot of dislike for poor people. There is a need to address those larger systemic issues ? minimum wage and other supports. I have been involved in working with poor people for many years, and they have been studied to death. I believe that poor people should be included in this project from the get-go. I am happy for this funding and have very high hopes ? some of the money will flow to poor people who can form part of the consultation process. Poor people really are tired of being poor.?

Maidlow also has lived the poverty experience, and is waiting to see how the project is rolled out. ?I would like to see what exactly was funded in their proposal,? she said, wondering if persons with lived experience would become paid participants in the process, or just consulted by it.