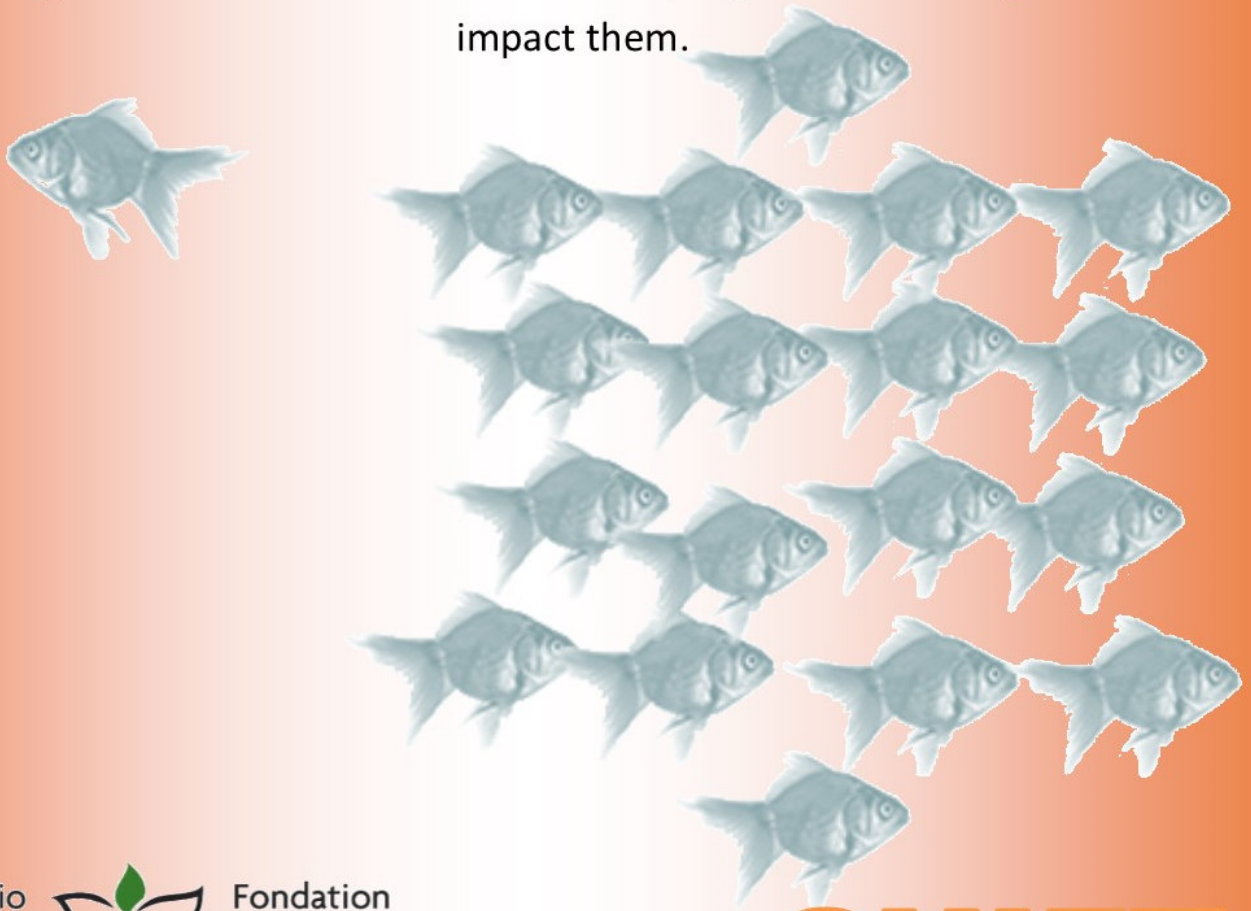# Poverty Roundtable
Hastings Prince Edward

Creating Community
A Tool for Engagement

A practical tool, born out of the SHIFT forum, for engaging people with experience of poverty in poverty reduction work and within organizational structures to influence programs and changes that impact them.

Ontario Trillium Foundation
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SHIFT
THE CONVERSATION FORUM

The Poverty Roundtable HPE

The Poverty Roundtable of HPE was formed in 2013 to look at whether there are things we could do, or do differently, to address the causes of poverty and to broaden our capacity to do so by working together. Individuals, organizations and businesses who agree with the mission and vision of the Roundtable are welcome to join and contribute.

Our vision is: a community where everyone experiences a standard of living which is sufficient for their physical, social, emotional, and spiritual well-being without compromise of dignity and self-respect.

Our mission is: to eliminate the causes of poverty in Hastings and Prince Edward counties by building the capacity of our community to work together to plan for and implement strategic, long term solutions that result in fair and equitable opportunities for all.
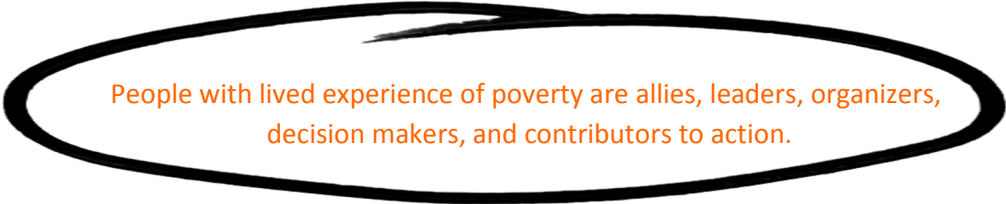
Definition of poverty:

People live in poverty when denied the income and resources that support individual choices regarding physical, social, emotional and spiritual needs and when these circumstances exclude them from fully participating in their communities.

Solutions begin with lived experience.

It is important to understand and recognize those who are making decisions and for whom the decisions are made; to know who is shaping poverty reduction work locally.

We recognize the democratic rights to engage and participate in decision making and in creating community. People must be included in the decisions that impact their lives and their communities.

People who know poverty best—from experience, are more often not involved in decision making processes, which limits their input, their power, and their participation in making the change they want.

People with lived experience of poverty are allies, leaders, organizers, decision makers, and contributors to action.

Creating the condition's within organizations, structures, movements that support the active and meaningful engagement of all community members is vital to poverty reduction work, to inclusion and to equity.

How this tool was created

In November of 2016, the Poverty Roundtable HPE hosted SHIFT, a forum that invited community together to listen, to experience, and to reflect on what could be possible if perspectives, approaches, and notions around advocacy and community building are shifted.

The 120 participants were invited, between presentations from four dynamic women who shared their stories of strength, poverty, challenges and advocacy, to discuss how they could build community, what it would mean to value experience and to have everyone at the table – engaged in anti-poverty work; how engaging people meaningfully could begin, and what areas and ways we could move forward. The findings of these conversations were captured, summarized and form the basis of this tool.

The presenters included

Pat Capponi: A member of the Order of Canada 2015, Pat is an author and an advocate for mental health issues and poverty issues in Canada. Founder of Voices From the Street, involving homeless individuals as leaders in the public education process, Pat is a member of the Consent and Capacity Board and co-chairs the Toronto Police Services Board sub-committee on mental health.

Lee Maidlow: A member of the Bancroft region Gnomes for Social Justice and an artist, Lee seeks to raise awareness of the hidden features of poverty and disconnection that occurs in rural communities sharing her personal experience, life stories and creative talents.

Tina Brophey: A member of the Guelph & Wellington Task Force for Poverty Elimination and recipient of the 2013 Mayor's award, Tina sits on the board of Onward Willow, a community working together to help keep their neighbourhood safe, children nourished, families strengthened and individuals supported.

Barb McPhee: With over 35 years devoted to the enhancement of quality of life for cross-cultural and poverty-stricken individuals, Barb has collaborated on and led many community initiatives with people in poverty at the centre of these initiatives.

How to use this tool

The Poverty Roundtable HPE developed this simple tool based upon discussions at the SHIFT forum. This tool is for groups to use to evaluate their organization's potential to implement changes and create opportunities for full engagement; engagement that goes beyond the traditional sharing of information to informing and creating change, contributing to decisions and policy and using lived experience to guide and shape programs and services.

People with lived experience are allies, leaders, organizers, decision makers, and contributors to action. To ensure our organizations benefit from the contributions of people with lived experience we challenge every organization to:

1. Create change through knowing each other – build relationships, be willing to be uncomfortable, value experience, and shift power.
2. Reduce barriers – identify what makes it hard to participate and do your best to remove/reduce those barriers, and
3. Build community – how can your organization foster community?

Use the ideas and suggestions captured from the SHIFT forum and, as a team of staff, board, and the people you support, answer each of the questions as they apply to your organization. Challenge each other to be open and honest, to work differently, respecting the resources you have and your mandate and begin a dialogue that allows you to shift the conversation from your current reality to one that embraces the realities and experiences of people with experience of poverty.

Relationships

1. Build Relationships · Change Begins Here

Addressing unequal power, disempowerment, disenfranchisement – is a beginning point in moving towards systemic change.

- • To centre power with people, individuals must be involved, heard and respected. Well-meaning people make decisions about other people without involving them. This can change.
- • Services and community organizations working with people in poverty, can begin to shift power back to people by asking what people want vs what they need.
- • Change mindsets from "a *me fixing you'* approach towards an approach centered on a person's desire for change, their independence and free will

Change usually begins with ourselves.

Valuing each other is a beginning place for change work, for anti-poverty work.

We must value everyone. Seeing each other as equals is an action that we can all take and it begins with recognizing our own bias and recognizing the value in each other.

- • Respect what people bring and give.
- • Do not impose one's own values on others
- • Remove judgements
- • Recognize that everyone you meet can teach you something
- • Listen

What actions do we need to take to create a culture where people feel/are valued?

Build relationships – overcome social classes and divisions

- Check in with ourselves and be kind, be kind to one another
- Recognize that it shakes bias to meet people where they are at – go to people both physically and emotionally
- Reconnecting/connecting with people, e.g. socially at lunch & dinner
- Making the first step to reach out to people on a casual & personal channel—just connecting as individuals
- It is so easy to be with like-minded individuals and we are naturally drawn to that—need to disrupt this
- Set aside pre-conceived notions or/and one way approaches and reach out, form new relationships.
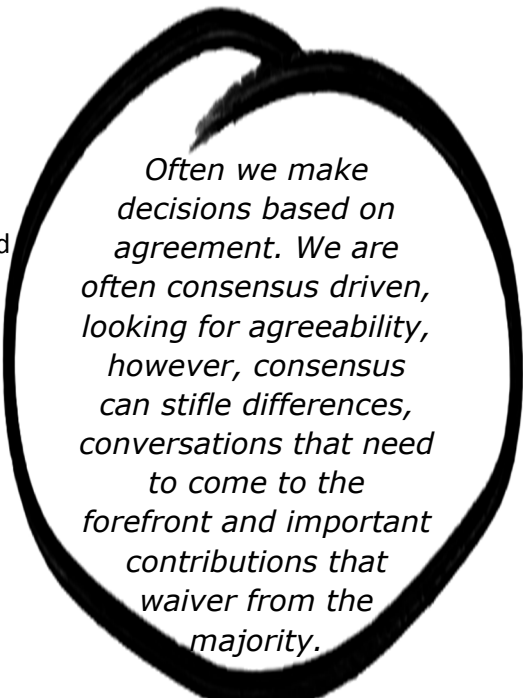
How can we intentionally build/improve relationships with everyone involved in our organization?

Get uncomfortable

- Move away from consensus and agreement so that difference can emerge.
- Call it what it is, call people out, and support each other's learning and change

Use creative approaches to educate and build awareness of poverty and to upend stigma-both in our communities, in ourselves and in our organizations.

- Take time to reflect
- Create safe space for people to tell their truth, disclose
- Bring everyone into uncomfortable places – people who have been disempowered and people who have been comfortable to go where they are unfamiliar
- Support those who struggle to have a voice –to speak out
- Use creativity to engage in public education
- Have forums run by individuals experiencing poverty
- Open up community forums

Often we make decisions based on agreement. We are often consensus driven, looking for agreeability, however, consensus can stifle differences, conversations that need to come to the forefront and important contributions that waiver from the majority.

How can we become comfortable with being uncomfortable? What needs to change so that everyone is comfortable sharing differing opinions, suggestions and/or stories?

Barriers

2. Reducing Barriers

Organizational Changes
Hire people with lived experience
Create a hiring policy that sets lived experience on par with paper credentials:

- Recognize formal credentials are equivalent in value to lived experience
- Recognize natural consequences build strength
- Be meaningful, not tokenistic
- Value expertise that comes from experience
- Hire people with experience in your agency
- Use flexible scheduling for individuals to be involved

Do we have opportunities within our organization where we can hire people with non-traditional qualifications to fill the role? If so, what do we need to do to initiate those opportunities?

Leadership opportunities

- Invite participation on board of directors
- Organize for rotating chairs
- cultivate an internal culture where leadership, as opposed to power, is valued. Encourage and develop leadership skills organization wide
- Create policy by and with people who will experience the change
- Include people impacted by decisions in decision making processes
- Recognize the role people have to play in the development of programming –
e.g. meeting needs and identifying candidates for programs.
- Share skills

How can we more intentionally engage people with lived experience in decision making and/or planning for organizational or program changes and direction?

- Put the word out
- Invite everyone and make it inviting
- Identify who's missing & who's not involved in the discussion & why
- Make meaningful connections with people

> How can we invite people in and make it comfortable for them to be here?

Remove Barriers to participation

- Pay people for their contributions
- Break down transportation barriers to participation, e.g. provide transportation
- Be attentive to restrictions around food, physical barriers, hard of hearing
- Consider time, schedule meetings when people can attend
- Make forums more inclusive—individuals could be intimated by crowds of service providers—create comfortable and welcoming spaces—remove barriers (e.g.—costs, transportation, dress code, use of jargon)
- Explore possibilities in making forums/meetings more inviting
- Create understanding that it doesn't cost that much to make accessibility better
- Consider the full geographic area served by the organization and ways to be inclusive

> What barriers are people experiencing with us and what do we need to do to remove those barriers?

Programs
Peer support, Peer models

- Look to peer models to change umbrella of programs
- Recognize the Peer Support role is a healing process
- Create Survivors' groups
- Create a Peer Advisory Group
- Create peer support programs and peer mentoring programs, e.g. More "non-clients" drop in to educate other non-clients, help people navigate the system.
- More specifically, peer support needs to be present and expanded in hospitals churches, organizations

How might we adopt a peer model within our organization? Where are the opportunities for us to engage peer-to-peer work within our programs?

Service Delivery

- Respect choice to engage in services
- Support empowerment by helping people to truly understand their rights, needs, and roles
- Clients have first and final say
- Ask people what they want, vs what they need
- Learn about recovery models, used in mental health, to use in social services
- Let urgency guide actions
- Share information in ODSP/OW offices as well as health centres, health units, employment agencies local hospitals, churches
- Continuous support – educate clients on programs and services available in their community
- Create relationships between workers and service users

How can we ensure that people are guiding their own supports while still meeting our mandates? How can we be better at asking rather than telling people what their plans or goals are?

Create Feedback loops to improve services, programs and approaches
Seek input in a variety of ways

- Hold focus groups
- Invite feedback and evaluations from service users, clients, visitors, participants
- Anonymous surveys—potentially creating a safe space for opinions
and suggestions
- Talk to people - understand where people are coming from
- Implement suggestions

How can we invite honest feedback about our organization? What commitments are we willing to make about how we will use that feedback?

Explore different approaches

- Reframe ways of thinking
- Embrace multiplicity and difference – no one model fits everyone
- Break down silos – work together and share information and resources
- Link policy makers to lived experience (e.g. by connecting policy makers with people who have experienced poverty, through deputations, through organizational policy by having people on the board who connect with lived experience, etc.)
- Create advisory councils: Bring people together with lived experience to play
an advisory role
- Look at how staff and volunteers are spending time and whether this aligns with a people-centric approach. Find ways to free up some administrative time, to spend more time with people who are utilizing services - to stay connected, grounded.
- Change approach – look to recovery models, a newer and effective approach to putting the client at the centre
- Adopt a "fail forward" approach – continue to learn and change

How can we be developmental in our approach to service delivery, including creating a culture of flexibility and innovation; developing an appetite for trial and error?

Base work in change, in rights, in social justice

- Work to change systems
- Expand social justice work
- Advocate for change. E.g. Housing First, Basic Income, Hydro rates.
- Connect policy makers with people with lived experience

What would be the outcome of implementing the above?

- Relieve survival stress
- People treated with dignity and respect
- Proper care provided
- Decision making is centered around the person
- Action on advocacy for agency and government changes
- Less stigma
- More opportunities for people to help and be helped
- Better place to live in

How can we intertwine our work that alleviates the effects of poverty with advocacy? How can we engage each other in advocating for systemic change?

Community

3. Build Community

Community care was identified at the SHIFT Forum as needing to take more of a precedence in our approaches for all, and for coming together, nurturing community and collectively working in community.

Community is often what we imagine it could be, when asked, what is community? It could be inclusive with a place for all for instance where we all know each other, it can also exclude and isolate depending on your place within it and the contexts of that community. Community incorporates many possible definitions, e.g it is place based community, where we live, our towns and our cities, or communities of shared interest such as faith communities, or special interests – clubs, etc. Often, when we think of community we think of place, of the community we live in. In imagining community as what we would like it to be we find both the differences in what we value as well as our shared values. Within imagining we often find answers to address what our communities both have and could be doing better in.

Community has common themes, which also provide an approach in collective work, to the inherent value in community building and community approaches in both our day to day lives, in our relationships, but also, potentially within our work.

Common Principles:

- Community is about relationships and reciprocity
- Community creates a sense of belonging
- People have a voice in community
- Trust grows with it
- There is neighbourliness, knowing one and other and looking out for each other
- Helping comes in many shapes, sizes, gestures and actions
- Crisis can bring people together to act together, and to help overcome crisis
- Sharing is part of community be it sharing food together, celebrating, gathering at festivals, sharing resources, spaces, time which also build community
- People come together for community, to organize for change, to fight and for improving community
- Community and community actions are often about being on par with each other
- That there is a difference in how communities care for each other between the rural and the urban. In cities services and community groups help, while in rural areas people know each other and help each other neighbour to neighbour.

However, starting from the places and contexts we are currently in reveals multiple opportunities to expand community.

Ideas for expanding community?

- Share information
- Invite people to come, to join and to participate
- Organize together
- Learn from each other
- Create and share more social spaces

• Create localized circles of support, from peer to peer, to collaborations,
to situation tables

A few specific examples include:
• Provide rideshare and other community organized supports
• Be creative, sing together
• Expand gatherings - community meals and festivals
• Spend time in neighbourhoods and celebrate neighbourhoods
(e.g. Porch Fest, Jane's Walk, Community Gardens, Wasailing)
• Take over streets, be in community spaces: Take back the night, lantern festival, zombie walk

How can we contribute, as an organization and individuals, to the creation of community – within our neighbourhoods, within our organization and within the broad community?

In many ways the focus on community, on defining what it is and how we expand it summarizes our collective discussions and our collective work. The need for greater and meaningful participation includes, substantially, acknowledging and valuing knowledge gained from lived experience, the rights of each other to participate or not, as well as the goal of improving lives, improving communities while recognizing this should be a place for multiple differences, and multiple constellations of community. As we share common and different values, we do not need for all of us to agree to go forward. The community section highlights that if we think of community then we recognize we are on par with each other and we move past divisions and create opportunities to build and expand a sense of community, a sense of unity.

Call to Action

We at _____ (name of organization) are committed to sharing the vision of the Poverty Roundtable HPE by creating the conditions within our organization, our structures to support the active and meaningful engagement of all community members as we work toward poverty reduction, inclusion and equity for all.

Based upon the information gleaned from our own reflections using the tool in the SHIFT the CONVERSATION document, and the resources we have available, we commit to the following:

	We commit to	How are we doing this?	When are we doing this?
	Build Relationships		
✓	Eg. Create opportunities that are safe for people to tell us what they want and need, and be open to hearing criticism of the current way we do business	Eg. By offering a lunch and learn model where we share a meal and hear from people about their ideas and suggestions regarding how we can do things differently	Weekly during October and November 2017
	Reduce Barriers		
✓	Eg. Value experience and hire people with non-traditional qualifications such as lived experience of poverty to work in our programs	Eg. Identifying appropriate opportunities internally and creating hiring policies	Eg. By September 2017
	Build Community		
✓	Eg. We will get to know our neighbours	Eg. We will host a neighbourhood bbq, inviting all our neighbouring businesses, organizations and people within our neighbourhood for simple fellowship, food and drink.	Twice over the summer months

The Tool for Engaging People with Lived Experience is built upon the findings and contributions of 120 participants of the SHIFT forum. It is co-authored by:

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