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- Long-Term Care Homes
& Services Part-Time
- Recreation Workers
Part-Time
- Unit B Part-Time

*Toronto Community
Housing Corporation*

June 30, 2015

Mayor John Tory, Chair
And Members of the Executive Committee
c/o Clerk's Office
10th floor, West Tower, City Hall
100 Queen Street West
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

Dear Mayor Tory and Members of the Executive Committee:

RE: EX7.2 TO Prosperity – Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy

On behalf of the Members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Local 79 who deliver services in communities across Toronto, often to Toronto's most vulnerable, I would like to discuss this very important undertaking by the City to reduce poverty.

The growing divide between those who have more and those who have less threatens the well-being of families and communities across the city. The statistics never fail to alarm: one in four children and one in five adults in Toronto live in poverty. Unless we tackle income inequality and the rising rates of poverty, the city and people who live here will not thrive.

By responding to this challenge with a bold effort to develop a comprehensive Poverty Reduction Strategy, City Council appears to be interested in changing direction and begin investing in positive measures to improve and stabilize income levels and ensure residents have access to needed services and supports.

I would also like to express my appreciation to those who have had the insight to know how important poverty reduction is to the health of the city, and to those who have been working so hard on a strategy to address poverty. City staff, particularly in Social Development, and City politicians, particularly Councillor and Deputy Mayor Pam McConnell – selected by the Mayor to develop and lead this Strategy – deserve our thanks.

**TO PROSPERITY: INTERIM POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY,
JUNE 2015**

The vision statement in the *Strategy* states: "We want to be renowned as a city where everyone has access to good jobs, adequate income, stable housing, affordable transportation, nutritious food and supportive services."

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MEMBERS
SINCE
1942**

We couldn't agree more. Good jobs, housing, transit, child care, inclusion, and supports are investments in people and in the health and well-being of Toronto communities.

The Report has many recommendations – and all of them have merit. But recommendations alone will not help one single resident – the political will, resources and commitment must be there in the fight to reduce poverty.

The Strategy must be about stability: stable jobs, stable incomes, and stable housing – something to build a future on.

Housing: The 90,000 thousand households on the wait list for social housing and the 16,000 shelter-users (in 2014) need help. A safe, healthy place to live is a basic human right.

Access to Services: There is an ever-expanding need for public services as the city grows and diversifies. Families need child care, before and after school care, recreation, health services and home care. There are 16,802 children on the waitlist for child care fee subsidies and only 19% of children aged 1 – 12 have access to licensed child care.

Transportation: Must be accessible, affordable and reliable.

Food access: Over a million visits to food banks per year in Toronto and the GTA. In the midst of so much wealth, no one should go hungry.

Quality Jobs & Living Wages: These are ways out of poverty for most people and families. The Strategy Recommendations #14 & #15 will make Toronto a true leader and poverty-fighter if it becomes a living wage employer and develops “a job quality assessment tool, and applies it to City jobs, city contractor jobs, and procurement processes.” It's all about stability.

LOCAL 79 MEMBERS SURVEY ON POVERTY REDUCTION

Local 79 has been heavily engaged on the issues of income inequality and poverty for some time with our ongoing support of United Way Toronto, work with community groups and being part of the initial Poverty Reduction consultation process. We also used this opportunity to survey our Members on income inequality and poverty in the City. We have distributed the Local 79 Members Survey on Poverty Reduction to the Executive Committee with the comments and insights of our Members who, as front-line workers, see poverty and what poverty does to people every day as they deliver services. Our Members are uniquely positioned to contribute to the City's ongoing efforts to develop a poverty reduction strategy.

On behalf of Local 79 Members, we call on the City to be a model employer and lead by example as it holds up quality jobs and living wages as a central pillar of a Poverty Reduction Strategy. Our Member Engagement Survey brought out this point: “not only do our members deliver services to people struggling with precarious work and underemployment ... many also experience precarity, scheduling problems, and the reality of falling further and further behind – even as employees of the City of Toronto.”

Some central themes emerged from the survey results.

1. Employment

Participants stressed that jobs need to be quality jobs and, as importantly, that the City has a role to play in promoting quality jobs.

2. Housing

This was the highest-rated concern related to poverty (followed by precarious employment, lower health outcomes and social isolation).

3. Access to City Services – Leadership, staffing, resources

A significant number of participants indicated that the staffing and resources they need to combat poverty are not in place.

4. Food Security

Respondents consistently included access to affordable, nutritious food (or lack of it) as part of Toronto's growing cost-of-living problem.

5. Transportation

Transportation concerns were included with other issues like cost-of-living, gentrification and affordable housing.

6. Additional themes emerged

Many respondents identified poor mental health, racism, language barriers and immigration obstacles as key issues related to poverty.

Having a stable job with a living wage is at the top of the priority list for reducing poverty. All Toronto residents need is to be able to access affordable housing, child care, transportation, health care and other supportive services. Not having enough money to put food on the table and pay the rent is no way to live.

The *TO PROSPERITY: INTERIM POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY June 2015* provides excellent direction for priorities and budgets in the section on Institutional Change:

“It will require a City government where budget decisions take into account short, medium, and long-term impacts on poverty. Where programs and services to residents are viewed as investments. Where measurements capture what really matters: the well-being of families and communities. Where every strategy is drafted in close collaboration with the people it affects most.” (Strategy, p. 37)

“Poverty-Sensitive Budgeting: Create a mechanism that encourages a decision-making environment in which the impact of budget choices on poverty is duly considered.” (Strategy, p. 38)

Local 79 has concerns about Poverty-Sensitive Budgeting when the budget process for 2016 is asking all Divisions and Agencies to find further “savings” of 2%, or in other words a 2% cut to services.

“Dedicated Revenues: Reducing poverty will require increased investments – by the city and by other governments and sectors. The City will explore options for dedicating stable revenues to address the root causes of poverty and invest in upstream interventions that lower costly downstream expenditures.” (Strategy, p. 39)

Investment and stability are the keys to fighting poverty.

Former City Manager Joe Pennachetti recognized that “city-building is no longer a question of efficiencies; it is about finding revenues to keep core services up to date with growing demand.” As he put it, “We need new tax revenues. We can’t survive any more just on property taxes” (*Metro News May 13, 2014*).

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives released a report in January 2015, *Toronto’s Taxing Questions: Options to Improve the City’s Revenue Health*, stating that Toronto is “sitting on more than \$600 million in untapped potential revenue.” CUPE National has also developed a municipal toolkit for fair funding for Canadian cities and towns.

<http://cupe.ca/building-better-communities-fair-funding-toolkit-canadas-cities-and-towns>

The City must find a way to create financial and social space in order to both address poverty proactively on one hand, and ensure it does not make other decisions that either fail to address or indeed exacerbate poverty on the other hand.

The time has come to begin seriously looking at new revenue tools for the city. CUPE Local 79 would be glad to be part of the discussion and an ongoing part of the consultation on poverty reduction.

Yours truly,



Tim Maguire
President

Local 79 Members Survey on Poverty Reduction



Developing a poverty reduction strategy

Members of Local 79 are often on the front-line of service delivery. Many of our members also live in Toronto. As people who proudly deliver a diverse range of services and as workers committed to 'Taking Care of Toronto', our members are uniquely positioned to contribute to the City's ongoing efforts to develop a poverty reduction strategy.

In April 2015, Local 79 distributed an electronic survey to our members. We had 268 responses, which compares favorably to the City's own online survey.

Their responses reflect what they experience as community members and in their workplace:

"When you see clients that have no hope that is a reflection of what poverty can do to a person. When you don't eat or have no stable place to sleep you cannot think clearly or have hope in what tomorrow may bring."

This document summarizes what our members are thinking and saying about income inequality, poverty and their own circumstances.

This last point is worth emphasizing, because not only do our members deliver services to people struggling with precarious work and underemployment... many also experience precarity, scheduling problems, and the reality of falling further and further behind – even as employees of the City of Toronto.



Our Survey: Who Responded?

The top responding Divisions were:

- PF&R: 64 (24.4%)
- TESS: 53 (20.2%)
- Public Health: 32 (12.2%)
- SSHA: 29 (11.1%)
- LTCHS: 18 (6.9%)
- Children's Services: 17 (6.5%)

Some work directly with people experiencing poverty.

"What I do for the city is I look after the most vulnerable people in our society, i.e. homeless people who have mental health and addiction issues."

"I work for various emergency and transitional shelters in the downtown core. I support the emotional, social, and basic care needs of the residents in the shelter. I work with caseworkers and housing workers, as well as medical staff to ensure continuity of care of residents in the shelter and in the community."

"I work on a mobile dental coach providing dental services to clients that would not normally be able to access care. These people are Toronto residents that are on Ontario Works and ODSP. This population are living under the poverty line. Dental disease is one of the causes for other health related illnesses. We are trying to help this population achieve a better overall health through our services."

Others merely see the connection between City services and an inclusive City:

"I do many things that are all aimed at making the city's documentary history (i.e. information about Toronto) available to anyone. I don't specifically provide services that are about alleviating poverty, but the Archives and its services are open (and should be accessible) to all."

"My job requires me to study traffic flow, as well as pedestrian flow at signalized intersections across the city. This gives me the opportunity to speak with and observe many communities in the GTA. Poverty is not something someone wishes upon themselves, it's like a cancer; untreated it grows. We as a society have an obligation to deal with our social needs. That means creating a city that welcomes good jobs, jobs that reflects the needs of the residents. It also means providing services that reflect those needs. Poverty may never be eliminated, but we must always work to reduce and control its effects on all of society."

Findings: Poverty and Income Inequality

- 89.6% agree that income inequality is having a significantly negative impact on their community.
- 90.7% agree that income inequality is having a significantly negative impact on Toronto as a city.

Responses show that the issues are deeply interconnected: cost of living and income inequality are two sides of the same coin.

“The increased cost of living for basic needs like housing, groceries make it difficult for families to make basic needs met. Even having a fairly stable income as a single earner is at times difficult without the second income of a partner. It’s quite challenging with the housing/ rental costs and basic costs.”

Some members recognize that gentrification – which is closely related to income inequality – means that Toronto is affordable for some, but excludes many by driving up costs.

“Condos, franchises, and upscale boutiques taking over the entire city, rents skyrocketing, and forces of gentrification displacing people from traditionally working class areas. We simply do not have equal access to the means for living a healthy and productive life.”

Employment is closely connected to the affordability of housing and the availability of transit.

“Housing prices are becoming increasingly less affordable to the average Canadian, which drives people further from the city centre. The only affordable housing can be large distances from a person’s community supports or employment opportunities - as the cost of living, inflation and the availability of stable permanent income decreases - those experiencing poverty will increase.”

The central route out of poverty identified by members is a quality job... and those are increasingly scarce.

“What I’ve noticed is that even with what people used to consider a ‘good wage and benefits’ is not enough to get me out of paycheck to paycheck...no savings.....no RRSPs.....no assets.....and I work for the City of Toronto in a decent job.”

Theme 1: Access to City Services – Programs and Focus

Our survey addressed access to City services issues across several questions.

Here are some findings:

95% agree that the gap between the rich and the poor has increased. However, only 55% agree that the City is currently providing important services to reduce poverty. 94% agreed that the City should be doing more.

Key areas identified in open-ended questions: housing, income support, quality jobs. Programs identified as useful:

- Free transit for children under 12
- Linking shelter programs to employment services
- Free programming is needed across the city – not just in priority neighbourhoods
- The Housing Allowance Program

“Programs for at-risk youth work. The city currently offers a wide variety of free or low-cost programs including youth counselling and support, childcare (afterschool programs and camps) and recreation (sports and the arts). This should continue and be expanded upon in priority neighbourhoods. Free city events and festivals (fully or partly funded by the city and the private sector) build community spirit and improve access to the arts, sport and children’s activities for low-income families. Our well-maintained parks, wading pools and playgrounds provide free access to nature, sport and play for low-income families.”

“I think the increase in affordable housing and the renovation of current facilities is amazing. Also the increase in the number of priority community centers is also helping to combat the issue... but I think they need to do a better job looking into the placement or which centers should be designated. Also increase the amount of centers in the west, and east ends of the city.”

As elsewhere, members drew direct connection between poverty and income inequality.

“I am not sure the city is trying to reduce poverty since they are not acting on the main reason for it: inequality of wealth.”

There was support for developing an anti-poverty strategy. It needs to include visible action, not just talk. It also needs to be well-integrated across Divisions.

Theme 1: Access to City Services – Leadership, staffing, resources

A number of members also called for the strategy to consciously consider the importance of leadership. This includes management, but also in the broader sense of bringing together management and employees to improve policies and practices.

A significant number of participants indicated that the staffing and resources they need to combat poverty are not in place:

- Gapping has made it more difficult to provide services (77.2%)
- Staffing levels have stayed the same, but demand for services has increased (80%)
- My workplace has sufficient equipment and resources (32.7%)

This has a toll on participants' ability to provide services:

"The clients that we see have mental health and drug addictions along with poverty that they are dealing with. This can lead to staff burn out due to the day to day issues that you have to deal with. I would like support or for it to be recognized what staff has to deal with when dealing with this population."

"Staff are having to do more work to cover for unfilled vacancies and as a result of being pulled in many directions, the time to dedicate to each person is diminished. They should fill vacancies and reduce the number of management positions. In some offices, supervisors are responsible for a mere 5-10 staff, while frontline staff are responsible for 100-150 clients."

Theme 2: Employment

Many participants pointed to the importance of employment supports for helping people escape poverty.

Participants stressed that these need to be quality jobs and, as importantly, that the City has a role to play in promoting quality jobs.

The City should (% agree):

- Develop and implement a job quality assessment tool (85.9%)
- Provide incentives for private quality jobs (85.7%)
- Develop a workers' advocate office (81.8%)
- Give preference to companies with a unionized workforce (79%)

For many, this means the City itself needs to be a model employer.

"If the government will not pay living wages and provide reasonable benefits why should any privately owned company!"

"I think the City needs to take the lead and commit to providing a fair wage and job security to their employees. I think they should call on businesses and corporations that receive incentives, special funding, low or no-interest loans for company growth, etc. to provide fair wage jobs to employees as a condition."

"Even though I have a decent gov't job, as a single person, it's very difficult to live in the City of Toronto. It seems the cost of life constantly goes up, but my pay does not go up, accordingly. I know this must be even more difficult for poor families, but I'm struggling as well. I'm also doing homestay with ILAC in order to keep up with bills, if not for that option, I'd be in crisis myself."

Theme 3: Food Security

72% recognized food security as a poverty-related issue in Toronto.

Open-ended responses consistently included access to affordable, nutritious food (or lack of it) as part of Toronto's growing cost-of-living problem.

Theme 4: Housing

84% recognized access to affordable housing as a key concern. In fact, this was the highest-rated concern related to poverty (followed by precarious employment, lower health outcomes, and social isolation).

Theme 5: Transportation

See comments elsewhere. Transportation was not generally singled out as a concern, but wrapped into other concerns about cost of living, gentrification, and affordable housing.

Additional themes: mental health, discrimination, barriers

Aside from housing and employment, a number of respondents identified poor mental health (including loneliness, exposure to abuse, lack of supports for addictions and mental illness, low self-esteem, hopelessness, depression, and shame) as well as racism, language barriers and obstacles related to immigration as key issues related to poverty.