TO PROSPERITY:
INTERIM POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY

June 2015



TORONTO



I DREAM OF A TORONTO...

> "that looks for every opportunity to help people to get on their feet. A city that actively looks to remove barriers and enhance opportunities."

> "that listens, respects, and reflects the voices of individuals with lived experience of poverty. That values evidence-based decision making. That questions whether decisions will increase or decrease poverty and income inequality."

- Toronto residents

DEPUTY MAYOR PAM MCCONNELL



Dear Residents of Toronto,

It is with great pride that I submit to you TO Prosperity: Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy, and with it I call on you to be a partner in making Toronto prosperous for everyone.

While Toronto residents see a building boom and a thriving business centre, we also see one in four children living in poverty. We see one in five adults living in poverty. We see neighbours struggling in jobs that don't provide enough of a salary to pay rent and put food on the table. Our youth unemployment rate is 20%. That number skyrockets to 25% for Aboriginal youth and to 30% for black youth.

This inequality is simply unacceptable. Toronto can do better.

With this strategy, Toronto is responding. Together, we will address the issues, create solutions and drive systemic change. We are putting forward a vision rooted in concrete actions that will lead us towards a Toronto in 2035 that is truly equitable for all residents. The safety net will be strengthened to prevent people from falling into poverty and lifelines will be provided to those who have fallen into poverty.

I would like to thank the Community Advisory Committee of stakeholders from community agencies and organizations who have been working on these issues for their invaluable advice and support in the drafting of this strategy. I would also like to thank City staff under the leadership of Social Development, Finance & Administration and Toronto Employment & Social Services for their dedication and hard work on the development of this action plan and for all divisions for embracing this exercise with such enthusiasm.

Most importantly, I would like to thank the thousands of Torontonians who have experienced poverty in their lives for providing their expert advice throughout this process. I hope that this report reflects what you have told me that we can do to make your lives a little bit easier. I look forward to your continued engagement and feedback as we move from the interim strategy to the final strategy by the end of 2015.

This is the moment that Toronto chooses a different path forward. We can and will do this together.

Deputy Mayor Pam McConnell



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46%
OF RECENT IMMIGRANTS LIVE IN POVERTY

37%
OF FEMALE LONE PARENTS LIVE IN POVERTY

33%
OF PEOPLE IN RACIALIZED GROUPS LIVE IN POVERTY

30%
OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES LIVE IN POVERTY

INTRODUCTION

One in four children and one in five adults live in poverty in Toronto.

Fearing eviction, walking to save a token, always choosing the cheapest and least nutritious food, telling government agencies the same information over and over again, and worrying that the opportunities enjoyed by other children will be denied to yours. That's what life is like for too many of us.

It hasn't always been like this. Back in the '70s, one in 10 adults were poor, not one in five; two in three neighbourhoods were middle income, not one in three; the majority of people looking for work qualified for employment insurance, not the minority; income supports assisted us in times of need, not food banks.

Toronto remains a prosperous and vibrant city, a global leader across a range of indicators, including livability. While the city still works, it no longer works for many of us.



It used to be that education led to jobs, jobs led to stability, and social supports allowed us to get back on our feet if a crisis struck. That path is broken.

Good jobs are increasingly hard to find. Almost half of Greater Toronto Area workers have temporary, contract, part-time jobs with variable hours, little stability, and no benefits.

Education remains a smart long-term investment, but it offers no immediate guarantees: almost one in four college graduates are working low-wage jobs.

Employment Insurance is less accessible. Ontario Works rates lost more than half of their value in the last 20 years. Child care is increasingly unaffordable.

At the same time, life in Toronto is getting more expensive every day. Housing, transit, and healthy food are costly even to middle-income families with good jobs, never mind to people living on insecure low wages and eroding social supports.

The City of Toronto has been tackling these issues for many years. City strategies, programs, and services provide targeted supports to individuals, families, and neighbourhoods. Some of these initiatives are now best practices adopted by other cities.

We must continue to do the things that work, and do more of it.

But that is not enough. We must also try new strategies to ensure that the benefits of growth and prosperity are widely shared – so that everyone can live in dignity.

TO Prosperity sets a vision for our city, lays out objectives for our long-term fight against poverty, and proposes ways to act on it now.

an inclusive strategy

An effective strategy to address poverty cannot be drafted behind closed doors. It must be written where poverty is real with the people it hurts.

TO Prosperity is based on an inclusive and collaborative process. People in all four corners of the city shared their stories, visions, and solutions. Most significantly, residents with lived experience told us how to make this strategy a truly effective one.

101
COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

10
DAYS OF DIALOGUE

635
COMPLETED ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRES

While acknowledging the roles and responsibilities of other orders of government, this broad consultation process focused on what the City and its local partners can and should do to overcome growing poverty.

We can and should address people's immediate needs. It is unacceptable that in a city as prosperous as Toronto people cannot meet their basic needs for food, clothing, shelter, and transportation. For people living in poverty, the long term is too far off.

We can and should support people to transition out of poverty. Too many residents find themselves persistently vulnerable to poverty, frequently flowing in and out of it, with few prospects of achieving a better, more stable life.

We can and should change the systems that make people poor in the first place.

Residents spoke. We listened. Together we crafted this strategy.



IN PURSUIT OF ETERNAL COMFORT

This bus has seen much more than you could ever believe,
And word to Davis more Miles than one should ever achieve.
The young lady now runs because if she's to succeed
She has to make the 5:30, to most that's hella early.

But you gotta pay back Lady OSAP OSAP.
They just cut off her phone you didn't know that, know that.
Had to live, so her loans she would blow that, blow that.
Thinking about school, she wishes she didn't go back, go back.

After all she did it for the peace of mind,
now the piece of my
Employment would be the only way she gets hers,
Figured it would make life easy,
Figured it would make life breezy,
And she was only half right because now they shut off her heat
And she genuinely understands what it is like to live life breezy.

But what's a young girl to do?
Nobody ever came in
And changed a game over night.
So she continues to play,
In pursuit of eternal comfort
She continues to pray.

by Simon Yohannes



VISION

Toronto will: address the issues

create solutions

drive systemic change

By 2035, Toronto is a city with opportunities for all: a leader in the collective pursuit of justice, fairness and equity. 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.

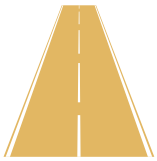
OBJECTIVES

TO Prosperity identifies three complementary, overarching objectives that inform efforts to build a prosperous and inclusive city:



address immediate needs

Growing numbers of Torontonians are living in poverty. The current social support system does not address many of their basic needs for housing, food, childcare, healthcare, and transportation. Actions that address immediate needs will focus on ensuring that essential services are well funded, co-ordinated, and meet the immediate needs of those living in poverty.



create pathways to prosperity

The increasingly high cost of living in Toronto, coupled with the scarcity of quality jobs, means that many Torontonians are persistently vulnerable to poverty, with limited prospects of achieving a more stable life. Actions that create pathways to prosperity will focus on improving the quality of jobs in the city, attracting investments to low-income areas, and ensuring that City programs and services are integrated, client-centered, and focused on early intervention.



drive systemic change

Torontonians do not choose to be poor: social, economic, and financial policies have led to the racialization, feminization and geographic concentration of poverty. People with disabilities, Aboriginal people, and newcomers are also overrepresented among the city's poor. Over time, these policy choices have made Toronto the most unequal city in Canada. The City and its partners can do things differently. Governments can make ongoing choices that reduce poverty. Actions that drive systemic change will focus on creating an accountable and participatory government wherein reducing poverty and inequality is an integral part of day-to-day business.

It takes a lot of work and commitment to build a prosperous and inclusive city. In some areas, the City of Toronto has the tools, resources, and authority to lead the way. In other areas, the City requires collaboration with other orders of government, the private sector, labour, and community organizations to counter poverty, promote inclusive economic growth, and ensure community development.



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HOUSING STABILITY

Stable housing enables people to build a future. Once established in a community, people can pursue what is important for them, whether it is education, employment, or services. Children can stay in the same school, learn the ins and outs of their local park, and grow up with friends who will support them for many years to come.

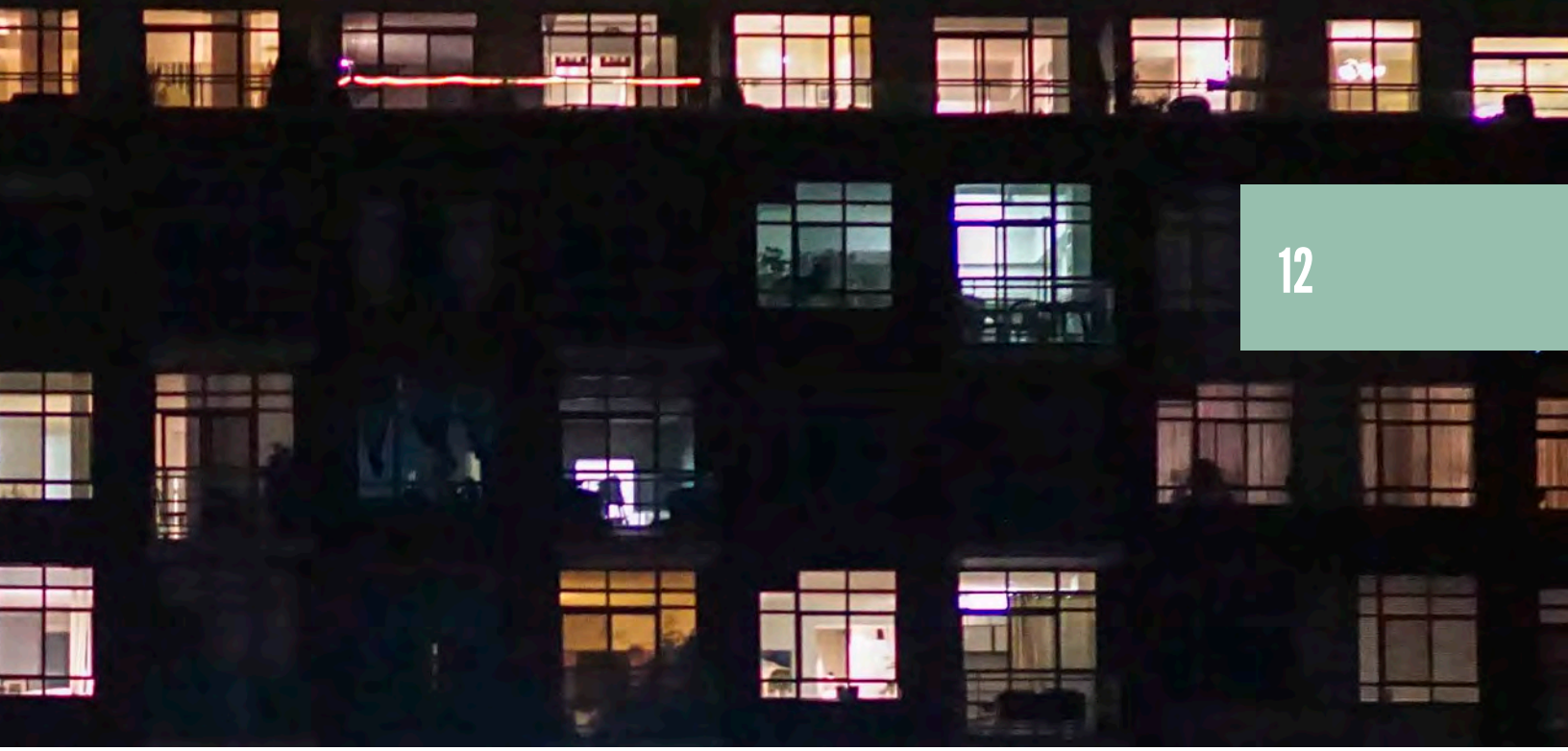
While Toronto is one of North America's fastest growing cities, with a booming private housing sector, there is a severe shortage of affordable housing.

Individuals and families with low income cannot afford safe, secure, and adequate housing without sacrificing basic needs such as food, clothing, and transportation. Aging rental units are often in a poor state of repair, which negatively impacts people's health and quality of life.

As market rents continue to rise, moving out of social housing becomes an unachievable dream. Fewer people moving out creates longer waiting lists. Shelter use stays high as people cannot move into social housing and there is a limited supply of transitional housing.

Toronto needs a lot more quality affordable housing.

Do we want to fund the high cost of homelessness (emergency shelters, hospitals, jails) or the lower cost of stable housing?



address immediate needs

1. RECOMMENDATION:

Improve the quality of all affordable rental housing, including private, public, non-profit, and co-operative housing.

ACTIONS:

1.1 Enhance investments in repairs to existing social housing

1.2 Strengthen the enforcement of minimum housing standards

1.3 Expand incentive programs for landlords to improve the quality and energy efficiency of their units

1.4 Increase support and uptake of building energy retrofitting programs that lower hydro costs in affordable housing units

90,000
HOUSEHOLDS ON THE SOCIAL HOUSING WAIT LIST

+16,000
PEOPLE USED SHELTERS IN 2014

1.5 Continue efforts to consult and develop an effective policy framework and enforcement strategy with respect to rooming houses



create pathways to prosperity

2. RECOMMENDATION:

Support individuals and families with low income in securing quality, stable housing.

ACTIONS:

2.1 Provide more housing allowances

2.2 Promote financial literacy and advocacy tools that help people to secure housing and achieve financial stability

2.3 Provide more financial and social support to individuals transitioning away from unstable or insecure housing, including those leaving institutions (hospitals, jails), youth leaving child welfare services and families with children fleeing abuse



drive systemic change

3. RECOMMENDATION:

Increase the availability of affordable housing in mixed income and inclusive, complete communities through investment and innovative policy strategies.

ACTIONS:

3.1 Update and expand the City's menu of funding and other incentives for the development of new affordable housing

3.2 Affirm affordable housing as a first priority community benefit for any development applications where contributions are proposed pursuant to Section 37 of the Planning Act

3.3 Continue to advocate for the legislative changes necessary to enable inclusionary zoning to facilitate the delivery of new affordable housing in private developments

3.4 Explore and consider options for incorporating affordable housing with existing or proposed public facility sites

3.5 Seek opportunities to provide affordable housing through development projects by the City and its agencies

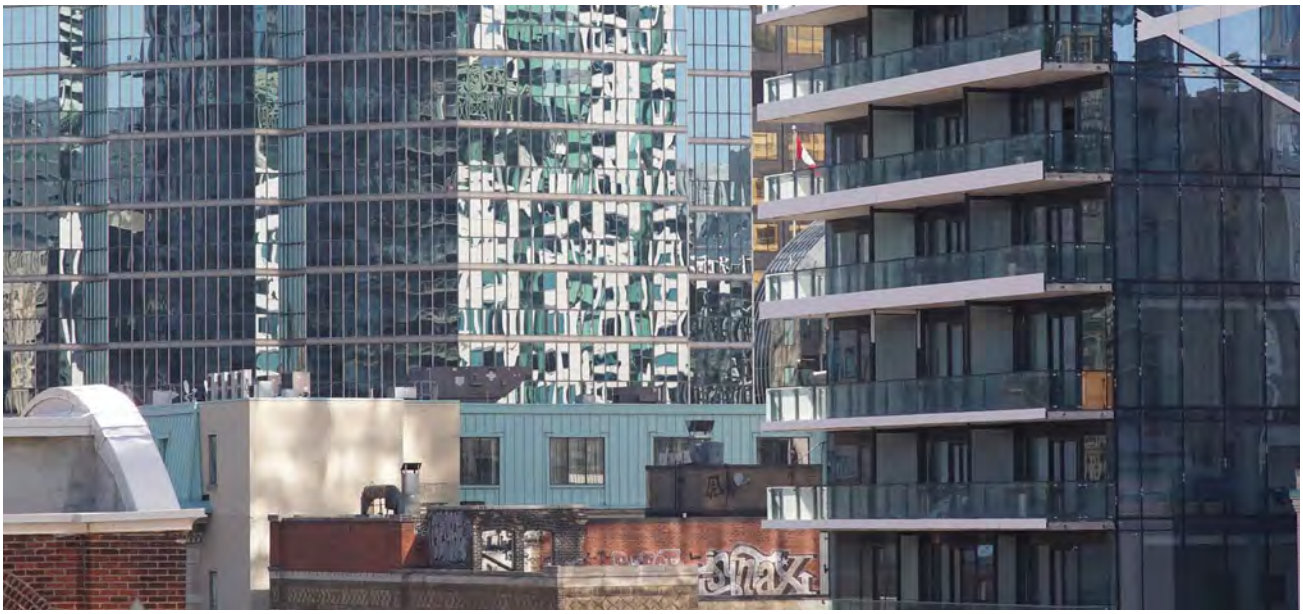
3.6 Provide surplus City land for affordable housing or dedicate a percentage of the net proceeds from the land sales

3.7 Provide financial incentives for the building and operation (when necessary) of affordable housing

3.8 Eliminate vacancy tax rebates

3.9 Develop strategies to maintain, sustain and leverage Toronto's social housing assets to provide affordable housing over the long term

3.10 Advocate for more flexible provincial funding rules to provide housing subsidy options that better meet local housing needs





Toronto was a pioneer in implementing a Housing First approach that is now standard practice across North America.

Toronto had one of the first Rent Banks in North America and in 2014 it helped 741 individuals and families stay housed.

The Homemakers and Nurses Services Program provides services such as light housekeeping, shopping and meal preparation to more than 2,600 low-income individuals who need assistance with daily living activities, to help them stay in their homes.

Toronto Renovates will provide $5 million for the repair of rooming houses in 2015/16.

To date, 655 affordable homes have been built on surplus City lands.

In 2014, through the implentation of the City's Official Plan Housing and Rental Protection policies, the construction of 140 affordable rental housing units was secured, in addition to the replacement of 157 units slated for demolition through the redevelopment process.

The Putting People First report launched a City commitment of $865 million over 10 years for Toronto Community Housing capital repairs. The Close the Housing Gap campaign, with 46 national, provincial and local organizations, endorsed its call for the federal and provincial governments to match the City's commitment.

what we're doing



HOUSING

Everyone values their home. It's your sanctuary, a safe space. You should be proud of your living situation, not embarrassed or feel burdened by the conditions you live in.

I personally live in a private building that looks great on the outside. However, as you walk inside you'll soon find out it's anything but nice. The elevators are always broken which makes it hard to get to work on time, not to mention how terrifying it is for my four-year-old daughter.

When I visit other communities, it's hard not to notice the difference. The grass is well kept, the paint is fresh and the buildings are well maintained. It makes me wonder why my building doesn't look like theirs. Is it because my community is usually on the news? Is it because nobody cares? Does that mean we don't deserve a healthy living environment?

It would be nice to see my community cherished like others I see. Maybe if the landlord or head office showed pride in their tenants living environment, the tenants would take better care of the building and feel happy to be residents.

Another issue I feel burdened by is the cost of living. Rent is extremely high even for a one bedroom. Not to mention the lack of space. It's worse if you are on Ontario Works or social assistance, your whole cheque goes towards your rent, and if you're lucky, maybe you're left with 100 dollars for the month - which isn't much for groceries and other bills.

It's a struggle month to month, one that you can never get used to.

by Khadiija Sayaadi

ACCESS TO SERVICES

Cities provide many vital services to their residents. These services must be provided in the right amount, so people's basic needs are met. They should be widely promoted, so everyone knows about them. They should be easy to access, so everyone can participate.

In Toronto, many City services make the lives of residents easier, safer, and more enjoyable. However, not all residents find the services they need when they need them. Waiting lists are common, and in some cases, unacceptably long. Services can also be difficult to navigate — with too many forms, calls, and visits required. In some neighbourhoods, services are not available at all.

The availability of services depends on budgets, but also on innovation. New ways of working help cities to provide residents more and better services.

Governments everywhere are looking at creative ways to improve services, using new technologies and new delivery models.

On both fronts, the City can do more to make services available, effective, and to meet existing and emerging needs.

Are we providing the services people need or the services easiest for us to provide?

address immediate needs

4. RECOMMENDATION:

Adopt an integrated service approach and ensure all staff and community partners have the tools to help people navigate the social service system.

ACTIONS:

4.1 Expand Digital Access and Literacy to ensure residents can effectively access programs and services online

4.2 Ensure user fees do not create barriers for low-income users

4.3 Develop non-monetary penalties that instill responsible use of resources but do not discourage low-income users from accessing services

4.4 Implement a new registration process for all City programs, not limited to recreation, that ensures the system is accessible, fair and equitable for low-income users

4.5 Promote health services to residents and clients of City programs and services

16,802
CHILDREN ON WAITLIST FOR CHILD-CARE FEE SUBSIDIES

19%
OF CHILDREN AGED 1 - 12 HAVE ACCESS TO LICENSED CHILD CARE

4.6 Create collaborative communication practices that ensure information is co-ordinated, consistent, accurate, and timely

4.7 Train staff and partners on the new collaborative communication and co-ordination practices and develop customer service standards based on the revised expectations



create pathways to prosperity

5. RECOMMENDATION:

Ensure all programming for children and youth is integrated, inclusive and responsive to current needs.

ACTIONS:

5.1 Leverage the resources provided by the Province by committing to a matching ratio that supports child-care fee subsides from the tax base

5.2 Ensure the existing equity model for child-care fee subsidies is nimble enough to match the subsidy allocation with child-care spaces available

5.3 Incubate flexible child-care models that align with the current labour market reality

5.4 Explore all opportunities to increase the number of licensed child-care spaces across the city

5.5 Provide a range of accessible, high-quality, out-of-school-time programs for children and youth in neighbourhoods across the city



drive systemic change

6. RECOMMENDATION:

Work across the health and social services sectors to create a seamless support system that takes into account the social determinants of health.

ACTIONS:

6.1 Plan with funded agencies as partners, recognizing they operate programs and services that are the foundation of Toronto's service system.

6.2 Stabilize funding for quality community-based programs

6.3 Review criteria for means-tested supports to ensure children have access to stable, quality programs

6.4 Align the intake and management of all means-tested services

6.5 Actively provide input to other orders of government on policies related to hospital care, home care, and corrections and mental health services, including discharge procedures

6.6 Expand dental care for low-income people

Baby has to eat.
Mama has to work.
Either way she has to find a way
to make it work.

Daddy's back home,
working oil and gas,
We see him every couple months,
if his work is fast.

But back to reality,
this city we live in.
Sometimes I ask my Mama what's
the real cost of living?

I'm 9 years old,
4th grade to be exact.
The soldier when daddy's gone,
I have to watch my Mama's back.

Sometimes I wish I were older
So I could watch my sister at home.
Mama wouldn't have to call in sick
just so we weren't alone.

See the daycares are pretty packed
Around the place we live
And the last thing Mama wants to do
is leave her kids
With a stranger or a babysitter far from
where we live.

Mentally, Mama goes through a lot: balancing her children, work and maintaining a family. It is not easy for her. I always wish she could get help with relieving stress and anxiety. When life gets rough, Mama needs someone to talk to. There are never any mental health services around our neighborhood, or at least none that I know of. When you don't have much, you are left to fend for yourself.

By Funmilola Lawson

34,963 children from 24,516 families received child-care fee subsides in 2014.

40,000 residents with low incomes had access to recreation programs through the Welcome Policy in 2013.

The Toronto Challenge is a 5k run and walk in which participating non-profit community agencies raise funds to support local senior programs and services.

Libraries have after-school clubs and youth hubs where school-aged children and youth can connect and learn in a safe and welcoming environment.

Toronto is promoting access to library services to children and teens in Neighbourhood Improvement Areas by forgiving fines and giving them a fresh start.

Libraries offer free Ready For Reading programs that develop early literacy skills in babies, toddlers and preschoolers. Attendance totalled 288,000 in 2014.

The Sun Life Financial Museum + Arts Pass (MAP), available through Library branches, allows families (2 adults & up to 5 children) to explore Toronto's 18 best museums and art galleries for free.

Public Health nurses and family home visitors make 45,000 home visits to vulnerable parents with young children each year.



what we're doing



OUR MOST PRECIOUS CURRENCY

Poverty is a result of a certain number of people simply having too much. This earth is infinitely abundant, and able to sustain its inhabitants. There are over 1,000 other different human tribes and societies that live in union with the resources around them. In understanding that you also have to give back. Our society simply takes too much to sustain, we don't see it, because we are in it, but upon taking oneself out of the way of living that he was born into, he begins to see the cost of sustaining this western way of life. In Toronto there are over 2.6 million people and with a good majority of them living paycheque to paycheque: one missed pay away from living on the streets.

We are resilient here, we are able to smile in the face of such adversity and simply learn to live with it, accepting it as 'the way it is'. We feel unable to create a big enough ripple effect to change it. Poverty is not just the lack of physical wealth; it's a mental state where a person believes they do not have the tools necessary to get them out of a situation that doesn't serve them. The physical manifestation of poverty (i.e people living on the streets) is a much deeper psychological issue inherent in most humans that live here.

An excerpt by Paul Ohonsi



TRANSPORTATION



36%
TTC FARE INCREASE IN THE LAST SIX YEARS



TRANSIT IN THE DOWNTOWN CORE IS THREE TIMES BETTER THAN IN THE INNER SUBURBS

How ‘public’ is our transit system if it is not reliable or affordable to those who most need to access it?

An affordable and reliable public transit system connects people to jobs, services, and civic life. It takes residents to opportunities and brings opportunities to neighbourhoods.

In Toronto, living downtown is extremely expensive. Low-income families and individuals are more likely to live in the inner suburbs, which are designed for cars.

Low-income people in these areas depend on transit to get to work. Jobs are often low-paying shift work with irregular schedules that don’t always match transit availability. High fares require people to spend a significant portion of their earnings on getting to and from work. Unreliable bus services require them to spend even more time commuting, or risk losing their jobs.

Low-income parents rely on transit to provide for their children. If they can’t afford monthly passes on the first day of the month, they use tokens for necessary errands such as picking up a child from daycare, visiting the doctor, and going to the store that sells fresh food. Fare costs add up quickly. Too soon in the month parents start making choices that they should not have to make.

To unite Toronto, public transit needs to be affordable and available for those who most need it.



address immediate needs

7. RECOMMENDATION:

Make transit more affordable.

ACTIONS:

7.1 Children 12 and under ride free

7.2 Ensure the roll-out of the new Presto Pass technology includes a fare-geared-to-income capacity

7.3 Consider new fare and service models for transit users who require accessibility assistance

create pathways to prosperity

8. RECOMMENDATION:

Improve services in the inner suburbs.

ACTIONS:

8.1 Evaluate a demand model that includes fare-geared-to-income criteria

8.2 Integrate seamlessly with the rest of the GTA transit system

8.3 Ensure the existing system is maintained and improved (do not cut services)

8.4 Restore previous service cuts that disproportionately impact the inner suburbs



ABUSE OF POWER

"I have no bus fare," Kevin said. Kalid only had bus fare for himself, but he spoke up. "I got you fam," and that was that. They were on their way.

"Your student cards are expired."

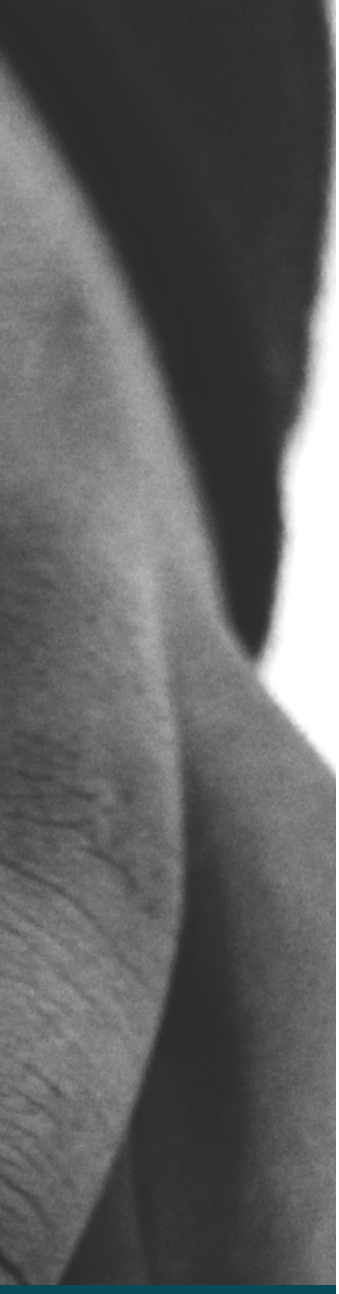
"It's summer, Kalid replied, "we don't get new ones 'til September when school starts." The driver said, "That's not my problem."

"So what are we supposed do?" Kalid asked.

"Get off the bus smart guy before I call the police." The driver was annoyed by this time. "We did nothing wrong, we're just trying to get to our basketball game," Kalid said.

The bus driver called the police and the boys got scared and tried to leave. The driver grabbed Kalid and as he struggled to get free, the cruiser pulled up behind the bus.

by Andrea (Drea) Walsh



drive systemic change

9. RECOMMENDATION:

Make decisions on services and capital planning that prioritize those most in need of services.

ACTIONS

9.1 Ensure that low-income people are not disproportionately affected when considering service reductions

9.2 Increase capital investment in the bus fleet to improve reliability

9.3. Develop a capital and service planning approach that focuses on building infrastructure improvements faster and meeting the immediate needs of the inner suburbs

9.4 Increase transit capacity when new high-density housing is built

what we're doing

Kids 12 and under now ride free on the TTC. This was the first big new City commitment to poverty reduction in 2015.

The TTC service cuts from 2011 are being restored.

When you pay for an annual transit pass, you only pay the cost of 11 months.

Transit passes are more affordable than tokens and can be claimed against income taxes.

The City has made tremendous investments to improve service reliability with the purchase of new streetcars, new subway trains and a new subway signalling system.



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FOOD ACCESS

In our incredibly diverse city, food helps to distinguish and unify us. Nutritious food, however prepared, is what makes our children healthy, adults vigorous, and our communities vibrant.

However, when knitting together a life with precarious work and low wages, nutritious food is hard to obtain. Low-income neighbourhoods often lack grocery stores with fresh produce. When quality food is available, chances are it is expensive. Food banks have limited, if any, fresh food. Setting up community gardens where people can grow fruits and vegetables is too complicated, with many forms to fill out.

Torontonians, especially in many low-income communities, need better access to affordable, nutritious food.

address immediate needs

10. RECOMMENDATION:

Find ways to ensure children and families have access to affordable, nutritious food.

ACTIONS:

10.1 Include healthy food as part of programming for children affected by poverty

10.2 Ensure people on income assistance can afford healthy food

10.3 Support food banks to improve the quality of their food stock, provide culturally specific food, and

In a wealthy city like Toronto, why do food deserts exist and many children lack enough food to meet their potential?



increase access and eligibility to food for people in need

create pathways to prosperity

11. RECOMMENDATION:

Support initiatives that bring nutritious food to low-income areas.

ACTIONS:

11.1 Develop mechanisms that make it easy and cost-effective for community agencies and schools to procure healthy food

11.2 Eliminate food deserts by providing incentives for food provision in all communities

11.3 Remove red tape and support small- and medium-scale retailers that sell healthy food

1,040,000
VISITS TO FOOD BANKS PER YEAR IN THE GTA

38%
INCREASE IN VISITS TO FOOD BANKS IN THE INNER SUBURBS SINCE 2008

AFFORDABLE FOOD

Poverty, to me, is a crime.

Poverty is an illness that needs to be abolished. Poverty, to me, is not being able to afford the necessities in life.

Poverty is not being able to focus in school most mornings because you haven't had a healthy breakfast. You are also starving at the lunch table. I remember those days like it was yesterday because it was quite literally yesterday. I was at lunch one time and had to pretend I was fasting while my friends chowed down on their sandwiches because of pride.

Poverty for me was watching my parent's struggle to put food on the table. My mother and father both work menial jobs to try and secure a better life for us. Poverty is eating fast food because there isn't a farmer's market anywhere close to where I live.

Poverty is violent.It kills like a bullet through the head, one shot and that's it. Poverty is eating chicken wings every single day until your days all become the same and you ask, "What are we having today, Mom?" Her reply, "Chicken wings".

Poverty is having low self-confidence because when you're walking through the halls at school and all the kids are making fun of you. Poverty is breaking down and crying in a little corner near the stairwell.

by Abdi Mohamed

11.4. Encourage local markets in public spaces, and open civic land and spaces to host food markets

11.5 Develop clear, consistent and concise communication on all rules, regulations and policies related to food production, sales and preparation

11.6 Support mechanisms to increase student nutrition programs in collaboration with school boards



drive systemic change

12. RECOMMENDATION:

Remove barriers that limit the opportunities for local food production and food skills development.

ACTIONS:

12.1 Remove barriers (zoning, licensing, planning) to maximize urban agriculture and food production on public and private space and land

12.2 Streamline and actively support processes to access public lands for community gardens

12.3 Create clear policies that support the development of community kitchens, outdoor bake ovens, community cooking classes and other food-oriented activities that support social cohesion and food access, and create economic opportunities

what we're doing

There are 40 farmers' markets in Toronto.

The City of Toronto supports Meals On Wheels by preparing 2,400 meals per week distributed from five sites.

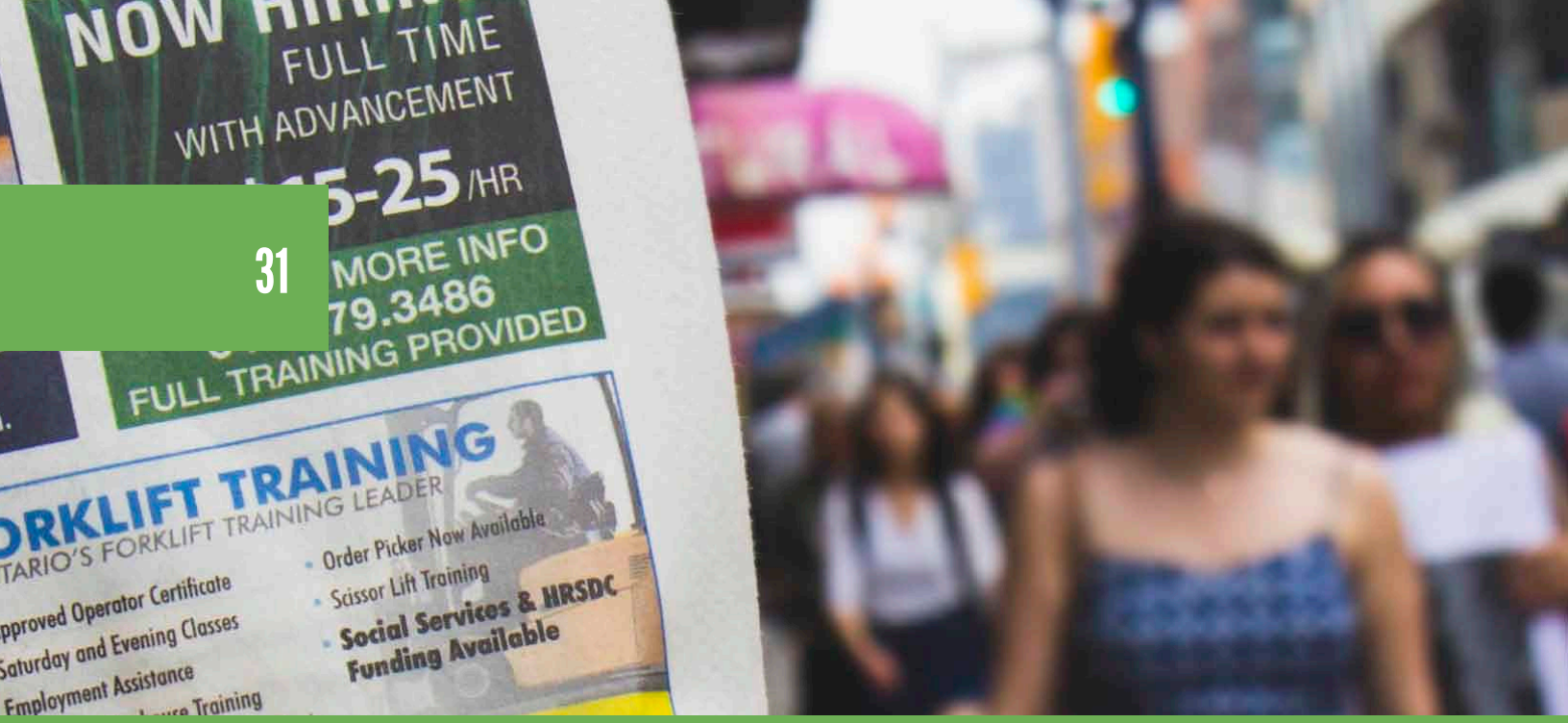
In 2014, the Youth Into Food Processing pilot provided training to 50 unemployed post-secondary graduates who acquired 16 food-related certificates and achieved a 75% permanent job placement record.

A new e-commerce platform (foodreach.ca) enables communities and agencies to combine their purchasing power and to buy wholesale nutritious food with on-demand delivery.

A new mobile market will sell high-quality fresh produce at affordable prices through a retrofitted TTC bus in communities underserved by supermarkets.

Toronto's Peer Nutrition program provides nutrition education in 25 different languages to 2,000 families with young children each year.

The City endorses GrowTO, an urban agriculture action plan that supports access to quality food through agricultural activities that are affordable, sustainable and educational by working with community agencies.



QUALITY JOBS & LIVING WAGES

A good job is the best path out of poverty. It provides the income and stability required to meet current needs and build a prosperous future. As Canada's major economic engine, Toronto attracts skilled workers from everywhere in the country and the world.

However, over the past 20 years, job quality in Toronto has increasingly declined, with full-time, well-paid jobs replaced by jobs with lower wages and few, if any, benefits. The disappearance of 'mid-level' jobs has made it harder to move up from entry level jobs.

The earnings of many residents do not keep up with the cost of living. In Toronto, the minimum wage does not cover basic necessities — it is far from being a living wage. For those unable to find work, income supports such as Employment Insurance and social assistance have been dramatically reduced, and many residents who need them are now ineligible.

Toronto cannot achieve its vision of being an equitable and inclusive city while so many residents are unable to find quality jobs. Moving forward, Toronto needs good jobs and adequate income supports.

How can a city be prosperous without quality jobs and living wages?



address immediate needs

13. RECOMMENDATION:

Advocate for adequate income supports and extend assistance for residents transitioning into secure employment.

ACTIONS:

13.1 Better promote income support programs with the goal of increasing uptake for people in need

13.2 Provide start-up funds for newcomers and people leaving mental health institutions, hospitals, homelessness and the criminal justice system

13.3 Expand access to health benefits, including dental services, to those transitioning off Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program into stable employment

13.4 Expand access to child care, by increasing subsidies and creating models that meet the needs of low-income people in non-traditional working arrangements

13.5 Remove barriers that limit employment opportunities for people with experience in the justice system



43%
OF WORKERS ARE PRECARIOUSLY EMPLOYED

20%
OF UNEMPLOYED TORONTO RESIDENTS QUALIFY FOR EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE



create pathways to prosperity

14. RECOMMENDATION:

Become a living wage employer and advocate to other employers.

ACTIONS:

14.1 Become a living wage employer and require City contractors to pay their workers a living wage

14.2 Champion the advantages of paying a living wage to all Toronto employers

14.3 Advocate for stronger employment standards that protect employees and are based on current labour market realities

14.4 Recognize the value of entry-level jobs for students

15. RECOMMENDATION:

Develop a job quality assessment tool.

ACTION:

15.1 Develop a job quality assessment tool, and apply it to City jobs, City contractor jobs, and procurement processes



drive systemic change

16. RECOMMENDATION:

Incent inclusive economic development throughout the city, particularly in areas of need, with an emphasis on strategies that leverage the City's economic power.

ACTIONS:

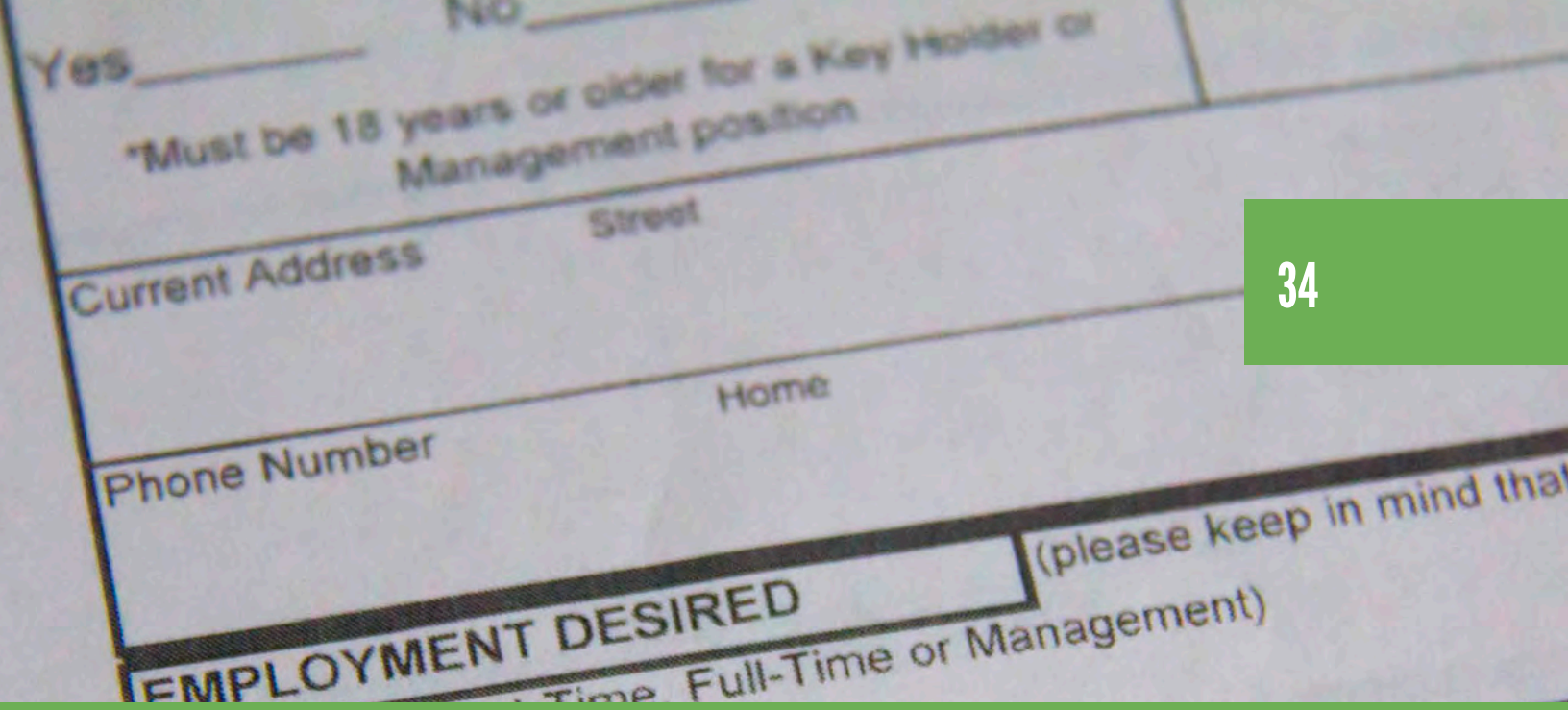
16.1 Design and implement a community benefits program for City purchasing and capital investments

16.2 Design and implement a City social procurement policy

16.3 Working with local anchor institutions, create local incubators that connect job seekers and start-up businesses with economic opportunities

16.4 Develop a community benefit program at Toronto Hydro and other City agencies

16.5 Support Business Improvement Areas and co-operatives in low-income areas in the city in order to enhance local business development



BANKRUPT DREAMS

Fortune's daughter's socks were shadowed with holes and I hated staring into them. But I couldn't avoid it either. Those shadow socks filled me with an emptiness I couldn't run away from. Her socks were yellow, due to the mere fact that nothing in our apartment stays white. Everything stains. Everything shades. Everything becomes dull.

I've still kept her photo. Fortune's photo. In my clock pendant that her old man gave me, years before I met her. He had an obsession with clocks. He didn't have sofas or chairs. Just a bed and tower clocks. He was one of the three people I knew with extraordinary abilities. He could look up at the sky, close his eyes and tell the exact time, down to the minute. His gift was passed to Fortune. She eventually learned to become obsessed with money like her father was with time.

The first time I met Fortune's old man I had three dollars left to my name. I was trying to find my mum. I just wanted to find her before someone from the neighbourhood did. Or the cops. She was addicted to heroin and running away. In high school, that's how I got into track. I was the fastest because when I ran, I wasn't running towards the finish line. I was running away. Away from the holes in my wallet. Away from my mum and her needles.

From across the street, I could see him take off his coat and leave it by her side. By the time I caught up, he had already began walking away.
Mum put the coat on and rested on the concrete in the fetal position. I called him back to say thank you. He shook my hand and with his other one gave me an envelope. Told me to take care of her. I didn't open the envelope 'til I got home. Five one hundred dollar bills. From a complete stranger. First thing I bought the next morning was groceries and clean socks.

by Faduma Mohamed



The City supports people moving from Ontario Works to work by offering extended health benefits for up to one year.

Toronto's banking sector is a key participant in the Partnership to Advance Youth Employment program and sector leaders are working to broaden the program's reach to other segments of the industry, such as insurance and asset servicing.

Libraries provide access to market research and business start-up advice through the Entrepreneur in Residence, Business Inc. and other branch programs and collections. Attendance topped 16,000 at business- and employment-related programs last year.

Libraries offer free computer, wireless and technology training at 100 branches across the city.

what we're doing

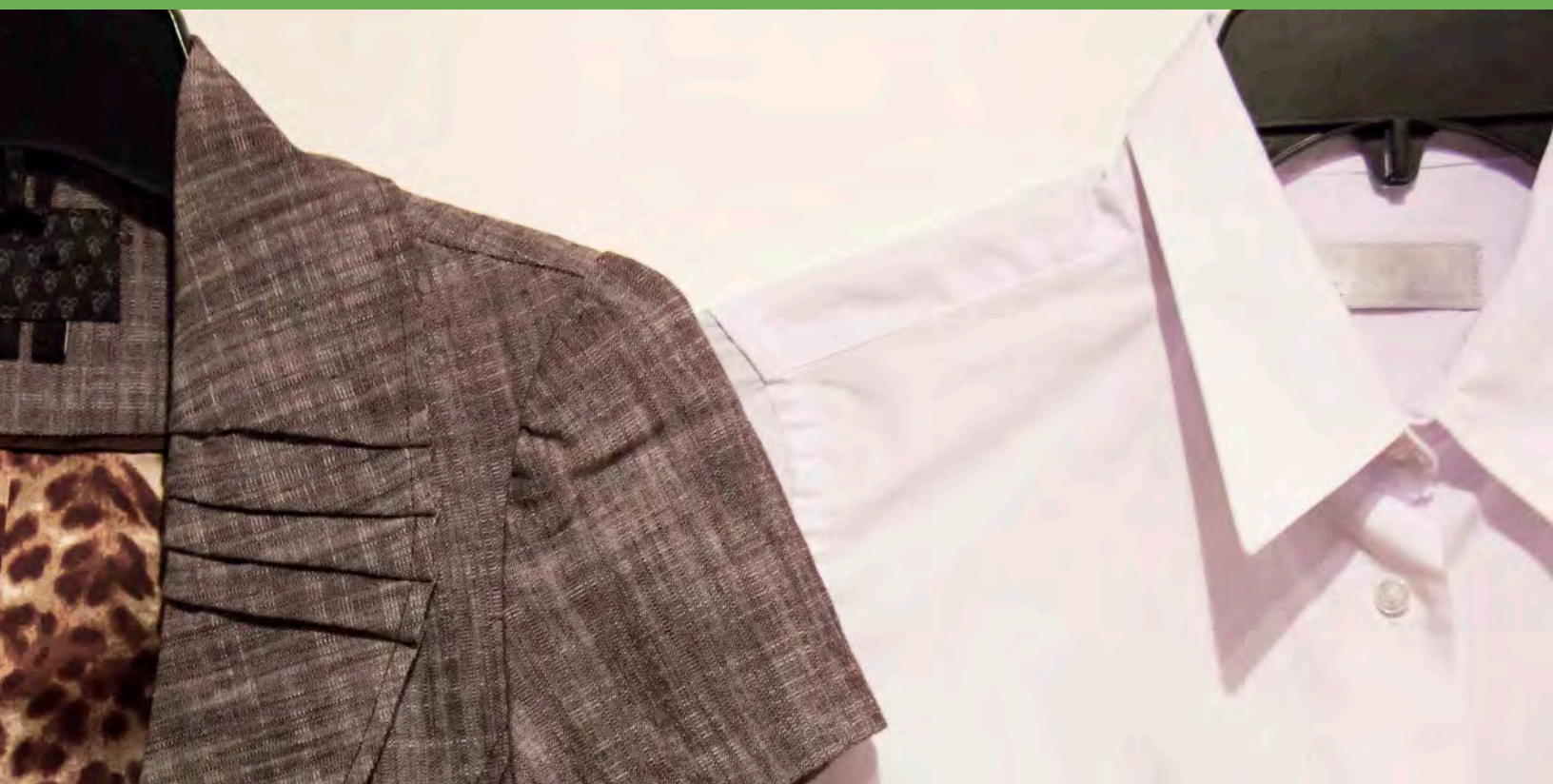
THE UNFAIR INTERVIEW

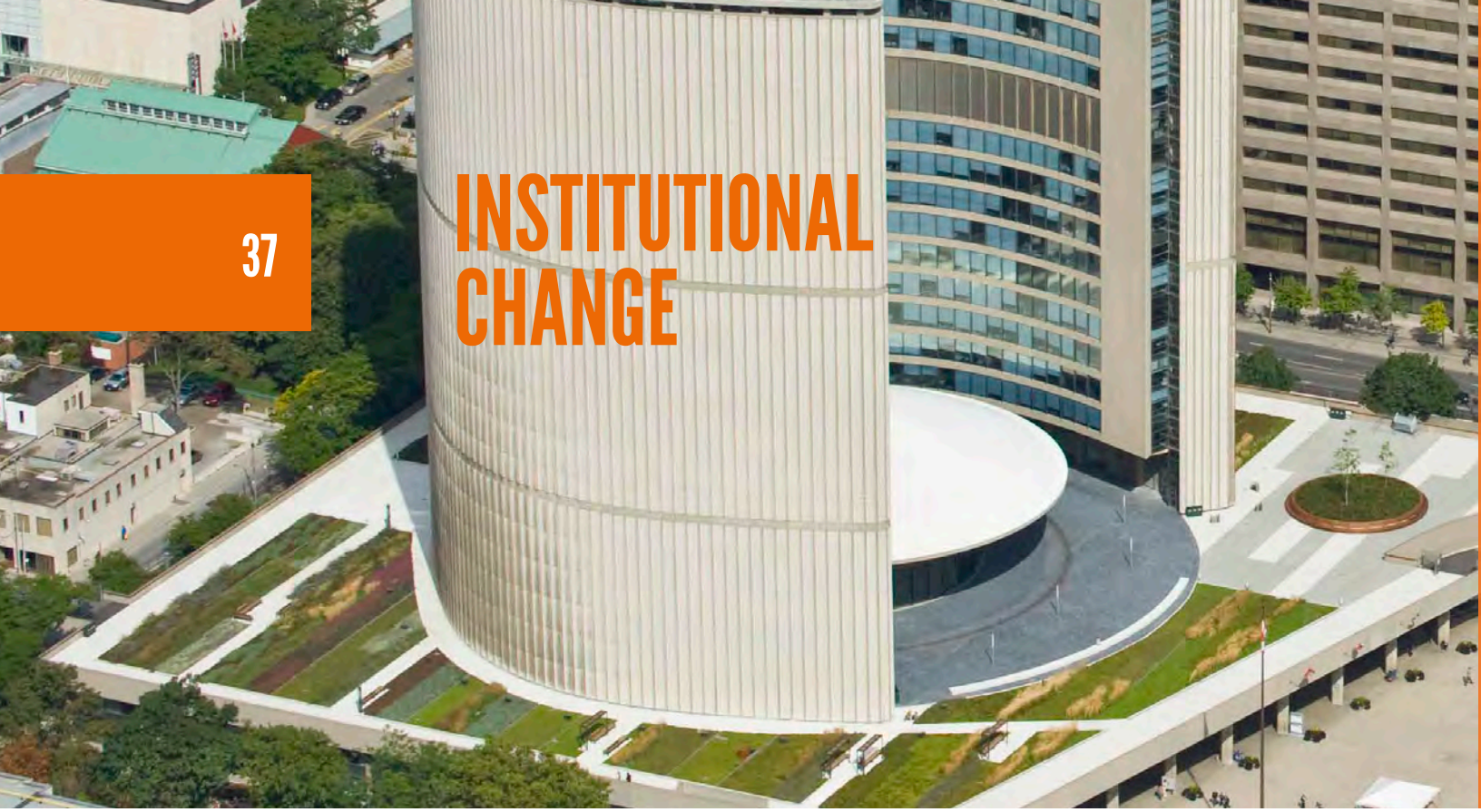
Calvin Dubson, a 25-year-old Hispanic man is getting ready for his job interview. Calvin applied to a clothing store that was looking to hire somebody that has experience as a supervisor. Calvin previously worked as a supervisor at a clothing store for two years until another company bought it out. Calvin has no criminal record and has a diploma in business management. The same day he handed in a resumé, he received a phone call from the manager, telling Calvin that he wants to meet him because he looks like the perfect match for the job.

As Calvin arrives to the store, he finds and approaches the manager. The manager says he's not interested in donations. Calvin says no, and explains that he is the man that applied for the supervisor position. The manager looks at Calvin with disgust and says, "You're Calvin Dubson?" Calvin says yes and puts his hand out to shake hands with the manager. The manager says he doesn't want to shake his hand because he's sick. The manager then says that he thought that Calvin was white. Calvin says, "No sir, my parents are from Ecuador but I was born in Canada." Before Calvin gets the chance to ask him a question, the manager quickly says that they are not hiring anybody at the moment.

Two days later, Calvin sees his Caucasian friend Harry at the mall. Calvin then asks what he's been up to. Harry says that he went for a job interview at a clothing store and he instantly got the job. Harry says that he was surprised that he got the job because he has no high school diploma and has a criminal record. Calvin ends the conversation and leaves the mall. Calvin then looks up at the sky and says, "Why isn't life fair?"

By Heavy Steve AKA Steven Rafael Gomez Salguero





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INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

Mobilizing an entire city to reduce and ultimately end poverty will take new ways of thinking and new ways of working.

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 the most.

Ending poverty needs an accountable and participatory government that recognizes that everyone has a part to play. Residents, community and business partners, labour, and other orders of government will need to devote time, energy, and resources to build a prosperous and inclusive Toronto.

The City of Toronto can, should, and will lead the way. The best way to lead is by example. We will act creatively to spur innovation. We will act boldly to do things differently. And we will act wisely to invest in what works.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

17. Oversight: Create a mechanism for designing, implementing, and evaluating poverty reduction and inclusive growth initiatives across

Why expect different results if we continue doing things the same way?

FROM TRINIDAD TO TORONTO

Growing up as a single child in a single parent home, my mom, like many moms, is my hero.

I was born in Canada, but I spent the first five years of my childhood growing up in Trinidad. When my mom's papers got settled, then we came to Canada. Not knowing much about the country, I just knew that it was a better living situation than what we had in Trinidad.

My journey in Toronto with my mom has been a great struggle. We have lived in 14 different homes: from sharing a two-bedroom apartment with my mom's friends to now renting a town house with my mom and her husband. My mom worked her way up the ranks to an executive assistant but when she got laid off, it has been really hard for her to find another job. No employer wants to pay her what her experience is actually worth. They'd much rather find a graduate student looking to pay back school tuition, willing to start at $12. At the end of the day, the time and effort that people put into their work was not valued.

An excerpt by René Dhinsa

the city, which also coordinates new efforts with existing City strategies, regional agendas, provincial strategies and federal priorities

18. Better Measuring & Monitoring of Needs & Outcomes: Ensure that measuring and monitoring is based on useful, meaningful and disaggregated data and not limited to the data currently collected. Ensure reporting and measuring considers both city- and neighbourhood-level outcomes

19. Poverty-Sensitive Budgeting: Create a mechanism that encourages a decision-making environment in which the impact of budget choices on poverty is duly considered

20. Community Wealth Creation: Leverage the economic power of the city to create jobs, support local businesses, and strengthen the economic resilience of neighbourhoods across the city.

21 Change Management & Staff Training: Changing a large organization takes time. Top-down directives do not create change. Ongoing staff training, leadership building and clear and consistent communication are some of the tools required to implement a change in operations, behaviours and outcomes. Commit to engage staff in the development of effective change management strategies

22. TO Prosperity Education Campaign: Create an awareness campaign to help all Torontonians understand the collective, long-term, detrimental effects of poverty in the city. Create effective communication mechanisms that provide people with easy access to services and information, including civic empowerment and social service support

23. Revamped Equity Lens: Include poverty-specific measures in the equity lens tool and strengthen its use in day-to-day planning and decision-making as an accountability tool in the City

24 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





POVERTY AND ITS EFFECTS

It hurts to say, but the facts are true. The effects of poverty are common and are most often interrelated; one problem hardly ever occurs alone. These effects can be felt at almost every level of society. Whether it's high crime rates or serious health conditions, poverty reaches just about very aspect of life.

Poor families don't have the access to highly nutritious foods. Even if they do have access to these foods, it's unlikely they'll be able to purchase them. Being on a small budget and not being able to afford good food leaves them more likely to purchase cheaper unhealthy alternative.

With the family lacking nutritious foods, it only means worse is to come. Our bodies' ability to fight off diseases decreases. Diseases are common among people living in poverty. Some can be minor, but more times they can be life-threatening. People living in poverty cannot afford appropriate medicines to treat or prevent illnesses.

Education is largely affected by poverty. Without an education, people are unlikely to find a paying job. This mean high unemployment rate, which impedes on a country from progressing.

It doesn't stop just there.

Poverty also has social effects. A lot of people living in poverty are homeless and living on the streets. When people are unemployed and homeless, social unrest can take over and lead to an increase in crime, which creates many problems within society. By improving poverty, health can be improved and economies can prosper.

Everyone can benefit if we all played a part and make decreasing poverty our main priority. Today!

by Kobe Akanni James





FINALIZING THE STRATEGY

TO Prosperity: Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy is a significant step in the fight against poverty in Toronto.

By reaching out and listening to people with lived experience of poverty — those who are struggling to make their lives and their children's lives better — we learned about what needs to be done right now and what needs to change over time to make Toronto equitable and poverty-free.

By closely collaborating with community partners who have long addressed poverty and its causes, we learned about their efforts, successes and frustrations.

By connecting with a broad range of experts, we learned about innovative ideas that work and bigger changes needed in our policies and services.

By leading conversations with City divisions and agencies, we learned about the tools that senior and front line staff need to effectively address poverty in their day-to-day work.

Combined, all of these conversations generated the shared knowledge and commitment on which this strategy is based, and began to build the foundation of trust and courage necessary to implement it.

Residents, partners, and City staff are calling for action. This strategy is a beginning.

As a starting point, Toronto City Council allocated $24.5 million to poverty reduction efforts in the 2015 budget.

In the coming months, City staff will continue to work with residents, community, labour and business partners to refine the strategy's actions. Together, we will develop timelines, determine financial implications and strategies and the first steps to implementation. We will determine the best measures to monitor and evaluate our collective progress on the strategy.

The result will be a final Poverty Reduction Strategy for City Council's consideration in fall 2015.

This is not a moment, this is a movement. Join us.

POVERTY

I wake up, every day. I am thankful to the most high for that, always. Today will be another day like yesterday, a struggle to get to my underpaying job - a struggle just to eat.

Looking out of my window I can see the police and other emergency vehicles. Not this script again not another young black man gunned down by other black young men or the cops.

I am tired of this. Every day I can feel the rope tightening around my neck. Waking up to no food and no money. It seems the harder I work, the poorer I get. The harder I work, the more bills I have to pay. Corporate CEO's own our government and no one but the poor seems to care. Now this.

I reach outside. It's a frenzy of crying family members. News reporters paint pictures of the poor as minorities who live as savages in modern society. The upper class eats it up and asks for seconds, even thirds.

They judge us as the worst, not giving a conscious thought to all the things we poor have given them: socially, culturally and even sexually. We live in a society that acts as though we are divergent from the norm, one that will force-feed their own image of how you should be.

All they do is come up with reasons why we act this way. Why we are in this position? They don't understand because they have disconnected from their humanity.

Despite everything, we poor have something they don't. The truth about what we are and who we are, all that we have given and all that we have taken. We are poor, yes, but we are rich in our hearts. Our pain is shared. So keep painting us as savages, continue to keep us down, judge us, kill us, for you are ignorant and cowardly. You will never change society.

Man, I'm hungry. Sucks to be poor.

by Mister Taylor



notice to readers

TO Prosperity: Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy was developed with creative contributions from Torontonians. These creative works are intended to help readers understand what it is like to live in poverty in Toronto.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Residents and partners made this strategy possible.

Thank you to the thousands of Torontonians for sharing their time, wisdom, commitment and stories.

Thank you to our community facilitators for leading meaningful and productive discussions in all four corners of the city.

Thank you to our community partners for leading community conversations that significantly increased the reach and scope of the engagement process.

Thank you to our civic leaders, community organizations, and researchers whose ongoing work has paved the way for this strategy.

Thank you to our Advisory Committee for the unremitting, honest, and invaluable support. Members of the Advisory Committee included:

Collette Murphy, Atkinson Foundation

Chris Holling, Toronto Region Board of Trade

Michael Polanyi, Children's Aid Society of Toronto

Michael Kerr, Colour of Poverty – Colour of Change

Richard Senechal , DUCA Credit Union

Joe Abbey-Colburn, Faith in the City

Sevaun Palvetzian, CivicAction Alliance

Sharon Simpson, Labour Council/ Labour Community Services

Anita Khanna, Family Service Toronto/ Campaign 2000

Winston Tinglin, Social Planning Toronto

Brad Cartan, Our Place Community of Hope

Grace-Edward Galabuzi, Ryerson University

John Campey, Ralph Thornton Centre

John Stapleton, Open Policy Ontario/Metcalf Foundation

Diane Dyson, Woodgreen/The Alliance for a Poverty Free Toronto

Simone Atungo, Toronto Community Housing

Rob Howarth, Toronto Neighbourhood Centres

Kara Santokie, Toronto Women's City Alliance

Pedro Barata, United Way Toronto

Pat Capponi, Voices From the Street

Leila Sarangi, Women's Habitat of Etobicoke

Mike Creek, Working for Change

Angie Draskovic, Young Street Mission

Idle Burale, Resident

Letecia Rose, Nia Centre for the Arts

We would also like to thank people who contributed their stories, poems and photography.

Nia Centre for the Arts is a Toronto-based not-for-profit organization that supports, showcases and promotes an appreciation of arts from across the African Diaspora. We create opportunities for young people to develop healthy identities and for communities to enhance their creative capacities.

Most of the photos throughout this document were taken by the following:

Gervais Nash
Candace Nyaomi
Leilah Dhoré
Anthony (Tony) Gebrehiwot
Farhia Jama

Nomanzland first and foremost is a family. We are raw and revolutionary. We rep the hood. Nomanzland is a collective that comes together to create theatre, poetry, music, and art that represents the struggle of marginalized and oppressed people all over the world. We are: Real Life. Real Drama. Real Theatre.

Mister Taylor
Andrea (Drea) Walsh
Khadiija Sayaadi
Abdi Mohamed
Funmilola (LolaBunz) Lawson
Kobe Akanni James
Heavy Steve AKA Steven Rafael Gomez Salguero

Reaching Intelligent Souls Everywhere (RISE); a multifaceted collective of Artists and Activists providing a welcoming and safe platform for the arts.

Faduma Mohamed
Paul Ohonsi
René Dhinsa
Simon Yohannes

Stories and poems were edited by Whitney French.

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