



Battling Oxford County poverty



Eric Schmiedl
Oxford Insight

Operation Sharing will be heading up an Oxford County poverty reduction effort following a public town hall meeting and subsequent brainstorming session with community leaders and led by renowned researcher Dr. Lynn McIntyre.

"This (poverty reduction effort) is now owned by you," McIntyre told

community leaders at the session at its conclusion, and Operation Sharing Executive Director Stephen Giuliano took up the charge.

"It (the effort) needs its own identity," Giuliano said.

The late September brainstorming session at College Avenue United Church – which included about 30 municipal politicians, clergy, civic and social services leaders – led to a collective declaration to pinpoint the aim of the strategy. The declaration is as follows:

"Reducing poverty in Oxford County is the right thing to do. Through leadership, innovation and transformed relationships, by working to eliminate poverty, Oxford County will achieve health, wellbeing and prosperity gains, and be a stronger community for all."

In the previous night's town hall meeting, for which McIntyre was keynote speaker, the researcher said food relief efforts like food

banks aren't the answer. Instead, she pointed to a guaranteed annual income of \$16,850 to make things better for those in poverty and the overall community as a whole.

"We need a basic income program. We need it tomorrow," said Paul Beaton, one of the panellists for the evening, held at Unifor Local 636 hall. Beaton is director of human services for the County of Oxford.

Lack of access to food is due to lack of financial resources, McIntyre said. Problems ranging from



Dr. Lynn McIntyre

increased asthma to depression and suicide ideation result from that lack, she added.

"This is a huge problem," affecting millions of Canadians, she said. One in six Canadian children live in households with food insecurity and their health suffers more as they grow older.

"Those (poverty) results match up with very, very poor health outcomes.

"It's about stress causing health problems."

Food insecurity is "toxic" and is very expensive to society as a whole, McIntyre said. In areas where finances to the poor were hiked, food insecurity went down, she added.

"Food insecurity is one of the preventables. This is an unnecessary stress."

Various levels of government could work together to fight food insecurity.

And no study has shown food insecurity has been reduced by a food program, she said.

"This is an income problem, not a food problem."

As for Oxford County, it has a lot to build on in terms of poverty reduction, McIntyre said.

"I think all members of Oxford County deserve dignity," said panellist Vanessa Giuliano. She is formerly with the Salvation Army in Woodstock and now works with Operation Sharing.

Panellist and researcher Dr. Tracy Smith-Carrier said the problem is a lack of financial resources. She suggested if the money being put into poverty programs now could be given to the people who need it, the problem could be solved.

BRIEFS

Christmas Place

WOODSTOCK – The Christmas Place, where inexpensive gifts will be available, will run again at College Avenue United Church.

To make donations, call Kathy Gilverson at 519-533-7493. Donations of new gifts for the Christmas Place, can start coming into the church (at the corner of Peel and Wilson streets, please use the Peel Street entrance) on weekdays starting Nov. 20 from 9 a.m.-4 p.m.

Parents and grandparents can shop from 9 a.m.-8 p.m. on Dec. 6-7 while the kids shopping day (for ages three-16) is 9 a.m.-noon on Dec. 9.

This is by invitation only. For more information, call 519-539-3361.

Coats for Kids/Adults

WOODSTOCK – Various free winter clothing items for children and adults will be available at this year's program, held at College Avenue United

Church.

The program will go on Nov. 17 from 9 a.m.-5 p.m. and 6-8 p.m. and on Nov. 18 from 8 a.m.-noon.

Food for Friends

OXFORD COUNTY - Please remember to continue to give generously your 25 cents each time you shop at local supporting grocery stores in Woodstock and Ingersoll year round.

By donating your quarter at the

till, you provide dignity for those less fortunate. Food for Friends is now being considered as an alternative to the food bank system internationally.

Inn Out of the Cold

WOODSTOCK – The homeless shelter opens Nov. 12 at Old St. Paul's Anglican Church. It is open from 7 p.m. to 7:30 a.m. seven days a week.

A meal at night and a modest breakfast will be provided.

Support for Operation Sharing

Financial donations for Operation Sharing can be forwarded to its treasurer at P.O. Box 20081, Woodstock, Ontario, N4S 8X8.

Operation Sharing is at College Avenue United Church at 22 Wilson St. Open Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 9 a.m. to noon (otherwise by appointment only for early afternoons on Mondays and Wednesdays). Phone 519-539-3361. Chaplain/Director Stephen Giuliano can be reached at 519-281-6077.

Operation Sharing's website is www.operationsharing.com. Oxford Insight is an Operation Sharing publication and intended to speak to issues faced by Oxford County's impoverished.