



United Way
Peterborough & District

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – July 19, 2024

United Way Peterborough & District hosts Community Symposium on Healthy Incomes

PETERBOROUGH, ON (July 19, 2024): On Thursday, July 18th, 100 community members gathered at the McDonnell Street Community Centre for the *Community Symposium on Healthy Incomes*. This day-long event was designed and hosted by United Way Peterborough & District in response to community calls for action against poverty.

United Way Peterborough & District staff Elisha Rubacha (Community Impact Officer) and Betsy Farrar (Director of Community Impact) were inspired to develop this event as means of furthering the conversations around poverty that were started earlier this year with the release of United Way's report *The Gap: Income (In)Adequacy Report 2024*. In addition, United Way Peterborough & District has been urged by the community to take a lead in anti-poverty work, as heard through consultation processes such as their strategic planning process and the Community Safety and Well-Being Plan.

"It is a critical time to talk about poverty in a community that feels the impacts of it more than ever. Locally, we often talk about pressing issues like the housing market, unemployment rate, and prevalence of mental health conditions as individual crises faced by our community," stated Jim Russell, Chief Executive Officer of United Way Peterborough and District. "We need to recognize these issues as symptoms of the broader issue of income inequality and its impact on health. Reducing the impacts of poverty and resolving the systems that cause income inequality requires cross-sectoral collaboration, which we hope begins here today," Russell added as he opened the event.

Income inequality results in negative health outcomes that not only affect the individuals experiencing poverty, but also their communities. As such, United Way Peterborough & District consulted with Peterborough Public Health for the planning and execution of the event. Peterborough Public Health staff from a variety of disciplines delivered presentations throughout the day, beginning with a keynote from Dr. Thomas Piggott, Medical Officer of Health and CEO of Peterborough Public Health.

"All roads to health lead through income," stated Dr. Piggott. Dr. Piggott described the relationship between income and health using a variety of examples from not only medical research but also from the real-life stories of individuals in our community. "At its core, poverty is resource scarcity," Dr. Piggott shared as he described how lack of access to resources has direct impacts on the prevalence of various health conditions.



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The event continued with two panel presentations and two engagement activities, before concluding with a third engagement activity that kick-started United Way Peterborough & District's community consultation to understand the need for and potential methods of developing an anti-poverty coalition.

The first panel, titled *Impacts of Low Incomes on Health* featured speakers from a range of health disciplines. The panelists addressed questions related to the impacts of poverty on health, potential solutions to these health issues, as well as the relationship between income, dignity, and health. "Resources are not always distributed in a way that's most impactful," described Tracy Graham, Director of Programs and Services at Canadian Mental Health Association of Haliburton, Kawartha, and Pine Ridge.

The second panel, titled *Improving Incomes*, featured perspectives from a local business owner who pays a living wage, the labour movement, and Basic Income Peterborough Network. "We removed tipping as ensuring that employees take home enough money to support themselves should be the responsibility of the employer, not the patron," stated Andrew MacGregor, owner of Dreams of Beans.

The event concluded with a brainstorming session where participants worked together to develop ideas for local solutions and anti-poverty strategies. The event kicked off a larger community consultation that United Way Peterborough & District is facilitating this year, with a goal of identifying gaps in local anti-poverty work and opportunities to develop new solutions. Later this summer, United Way Peterborough & District will begin conducting surveys, interviews, and focus groups in an effort to collectively develop a community-wide anti-poverty strategy. The results of this consultation process, including the content generated during yesterday's event, will be published in a report later this year.

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