



# Breaking the Cycle

## Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy

# Chair's Message

The creation of this strategy has been an extraordinary experience.

It has given me the opportunity to meet amazing people from across the province; people working hard to improve the lives of those in poverty; people living in poverty who have hope that we can do better.

To all who contributed to the development of this strategy, thank you. Thank you for your advice, your observations, your stories, your passion and your commitment. I hope you see your ideas reflected in this document.

Thank you to Premier Dalton McGuinty, for making the reduction of poverty a priority for our government, and for giving me the opportunity to play a part in this great endeavour.

Thank you to the members of the Cabinet Committee on Poverty Reduction for embracing this responsibility and for your unflagging determination to address this challenge.

This has been a great undertaking but the hard work is ahead of us.

We have put in place a strategy that will move us in the right direction. But only if all of us, including other levels of government, work together toward this shared goal.

The release of this strategy is the next step forward. It will continue to move us on our way to achieving the vision of a province where every person has the opportunity to realize his or her full potential, and contribute to and participate in a prosperous and healthy Ontario.

We have much work to do to get there, but together we will get there.



---

Deb Matthews  
Chair, Cabinet Committee on Poverty Reduction  
Minister of Children and Youth Services  
Minister Responsible for Women's Issues

# Table of Contents

Executive Summary	<b>1</b>
Introduction	<b>4</b>
Chapter 1: Stronger, Healthier Kids and Families	<b>7</b>
Chapter 2: Stronger, Healthier Communities	<b>19</b>
Chapter 3: Opportunity for All	<b>21</b>
Chapter 4: Smarter Government	<b>29</b>
Chapter 5: Measuring Our Progress	<b>34</b>
Chapter 6: Moving Forward	<b>39</b>
Chapter 7: The Federal Role	<b>40</b>
Chapter 8: The Municipal Role	<b>41</b>
Chapter 9: All Hands on Deck	<b>42</b>

# Executive Summary

We can break the cycle of poverty. That's the conviction that sits at the heart of Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy.

We all agree that the moral imperative for reducing poverty is clear: children should have the opportunity to succeed in life, and people facing challenges should be given the tools they need to get ahead.

We have another equally compelling rationale for reducing poverty: it's the smart thing to do for our economy. An educated, healthy and employable workforce is critical to the economic future of this province.

That's why we've developed a long-term poverty reduction plan that will focus first on giving children and their families the support they need to achieve their full potential.

It's a plan that marks a bold new direction. It sets an aggressive target – reducing the number of children living in poverty by 25 per cent over 5 years.

It's also the next logical step in the Ontario we have been building together for the past five years.

Signature investments in our education system mean that tens of thousands more kids are now staying in school each year instead of dropping out before graduation. This plan will set more kids on the ladder of opportunity so they can reach for success at school and beyond.

This plan is about believing in the potential of people living in poverty. It's about giving families the resources and the tools to succeed so that our economy grows strong today and for generations to come. It's about believing that if we create more opportunity, we'll create more prosperity for everyone.

It is going to take a lot of hard work. And it's going to take all of us: citizens, governments, the business community, and the non-profit sector working together.

But Ontario now has a plan to get there. Working together, we can break the cycle of poverty.



## Targets and Measures

The strategy sets a target of reducing the number of children living in poverty by 25 per cent over the next 5 years. That means that while all low-income families will see the benefits of this strategy, our target will be to move 90,000 kids out of poverty.

The target is being set on Statistics Canada’s Low Income Measure, which is calculated as 50 per cent of median income – for a single mom with two kids living in Toronto, that’s about \$27,000 in 2008.

Ontario can’t do this alone – meeting this target depends on having a willing partner in the federal government and a growing economy.

We know that poverty is about more than just income. The government will also track and publicly report on a series of measures designed to steer policy-making in the right direction over the long-term. These measures cover key areas such as school readiness, educational attainment, health care and housing.

## The Ontario Child Benefit

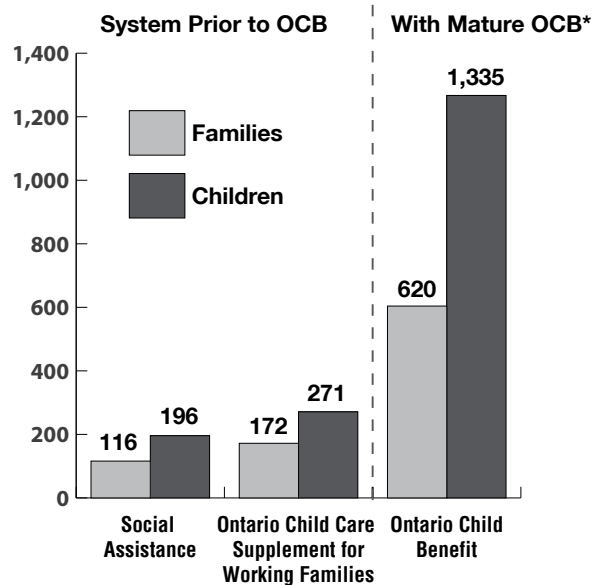
The strategy includes an increase to the Ontario Child Benefit (OCB) that would provide 1.3 million children in low-income families with up to \$1,310 annually. When fully implemented, the enhanced OCB will represent a total investment of \$1.3 billion per year.

The Ontario Child Benefit gives low income families the financial support that they need to provide essentials like food and shelter for their children. The OCB helps build a stronger economy by making it easier for parents to leave social assistance for work.

**Chart 1**

### Number of Recipient Families with Children by Income Security Program

Number of Families and Children (000s)



\*Illustrates proposed enhancement of the Ontario Child Benefit (OCB) to \$1,310 per child annually at maturity. At this level, the OCB fully replaces the Ontario Child Care Supplement (OCCS).

**Note:** Social assistance excludes Temporary Care Assistance and Assistance to Children with Severe Disabilities.

Source: Ontario Ministry of Finance

## Education and Early Learning

The best poverty reduction strategy is a strong, publicly funded education system.

Ontario has made significant investments in education over the past five years that are already paying off. Since 2003, Grades 3 and 6 student results have improved by nearly 10 percentage points, and the graduation rate in Ontario has increased from 68 per cent to 75 per cent.

This strategy builds on our success. There's more help for at-risk kids in school, more recreation programs for high-needs neighbourhoods, and more supports for parents to get involved in their kids' education. Highlights include:

- > Tripling the number of Parenting and Family Literacy Centres to a total of 300 across the province; and
- > Investing in an After School Program to give kids activities after school.

The strategy also includes the implementation of full-day learning for four- and five-year-olds, with part of the initial focus on low-income neighbourhoods. In addition to improving readiness for success in Grade 1 and beyond, this initiative will free up important early learning resources to help more parents access additional quality child care and learning opportunities for their children.

## Building Stronger Communities

Building stronger and safer communities is one of the best ways to help low-income families enjoy a better quality of life. This strategy includes a series of initiatives designed to foster positive local initiatives. Highlights include:

- > Investing in a Community Opportunities Fund to give local leaders support to co-ordinate community revitalization projects;
- > Increasing funding for the Youth Opportunities Strategy to give kids in priority neighbourhoods more access to jobs and training;
- > Funding the Provincial Rent Bank Program to provide temporary financial assistance to people facing possible eviction; and

- > Introducing legislation relating to temporary help agencies and hiring new employment standards officers to help employees get the money they earn.

## Smarter Government

As part of this plan, we will undertake a review of social assistance with the goal of removing barriers and increasing opportunity – with a particular focus on people trying to move into employment from social assistance. The review will seek to better align social assistance and other key programs and initiatives and better communicate program rules to achieve the aims of increasing opportunity for the individual.

People living in poverty often require multiple forms of government assistance. We will undertake to look at our programs with a person-centred approach in order to give us an improved understanding of how to better align our programs so they address the issues of those they are designed to help. This work will begin in early 2009.

The strategy will also establish a Social Policy Institute that will focus on evidence-based social policy development and the evaluation of social policy interventions.

## A Long-Term Commitment

Tackling poverty is about making the economy stronger over the long term. That's why the government plans to introduce legislation in spring 2009 that would, if passed, solidify Ontario's commitment to poverty reduction. The government intends to table legislation that would include requirements to measure and publicly report on the progress being made in implementing the strategy.

## All Hands on Deck

Breaking the cycle of poverty requires the collective effort of all levels of government, the private and non-profit sectors and citizens across this province. It is going to be particularly important for the federal government to come to the table as a willing partner.

# Introduction

This is a Poverty Reduction Strategy that, for the first time in Ontario's history, sets out a target for reducing poverty in the province. It's a strategy that seeks to improve opportunities for people who are too often denied them. It challenges government to focus resources where they will have the greatest impact and calls on all Ontarians to be part of making Ontario a place where every person has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Our power is in our people. However, when too many people live in poverty, we all suffer because our province is leaving untapped potential on the sidelines. We have set out to reduce poverty in Ontario because our province can't afford to lose this human potential. Settling for the status quo – continuing to do what we're already doing – costs all of us.

The Poverty Reduction Strategy recognizes that the best way to combat poverty is to break the intergenerational cycle that makes poverty such an insidious problem. Consequently, the strategy focuses first on Ontario's children. It builds on the historic introduction of the Ontario Child Benefit, which will provide support to 1.3 million children in low-income families. This strategy also builds on the province's foundational investments in education to help kids living in poverty stay in school, so they can acquire the tools and knowledge necessary to thrive and succeed, and break the cycle of poverty.

The strategy sets a target to reduce the number of kids living in poverty by 25 per cent over the next 5 years. The initiatives in the strategy will improve the standard of living for all children living in poverty, and will lift 90,000 children out of poverty. It is an ambitious and bold target, but one that can be achieved if everyone does their part.

This strategy outlines the initiatives Ontario will undertake to meet this target. However, we cannot meet this goal without a strong federal partner and a growing economy. The federal government has a large role to play in income supports and therefore we are looking to the federal government to take some specific steps.

Similarly, we are looking to municipal governments, as well as community partners and all Ontarians to take the steps required to achieve this target.



This plan will help make the government more effective in the fight against poverty. We will focus on the real needs of real people. The strategy calls for a more seamless integration of programs so people living in poverty can more easily access the services they need. It also calls for a review of program rules that support people's efforts to find opportunity and leave poverty behind for good.

This is a plan that acknowledges that improvements can be made to the province's current approach to poverty, and moves to address them. It is informed by the clear understanding that any serious poverty reduction strategy must transcend four-year government mandates and span decades, if not generations. It must be specific enough to accomplish short-term goals, and flexible enough to remain effective through changing circumstances over the long term.

## Making the Case for Action

The moral imperative to reduce poverty is a clear one. We all agree that children should have the opportunity to succeed in life, and that people facing challenges should be supported. These notions lie at the heart of what it means to be a strong, caring society, and would in and of themselves constitute a sufficient rationale for this Poverty Reduction Strategy.

However, we have another equally compelling rationale for reducing poverty. As a society, we can't afford it. An educated, healthy and employable workforce is critical to the economic future of this province. Our economy is changing before our eyes and we need everyone to be ready to contribute to our future prosperity. Economists agree that investments in reducing poverty would close the prosperity gap, benefiting individual Ontarians and their families, but also Ontario as a whole.

A strategy that better enables people to avoid or overcome the pitfalls of poverty can give them greater stability and opportunities to achieve their potential. And by doing that, we can reduce Ontario's prosperity gap – which in turn can boost the economy.

And in a global economy, where Ontario is competing with the rest of the world, we have to have well trained, well educated and highly productive workers to sustain our advantage.

Our approach to reducing poverty is broad and comprehensive. But we also know that certain people are at a higher risk of poverty. Women, racialized communities, newcomers, people with disabilities, and Aboriginal peoples among others, experience poverty in relatively greater numbers, and for often complex reasons. The unique needs of these groups require tailored solutions and we know that we need to continue to view the issue of poverty from these perspectives going forward.

We must also begin to recognize the enormous costs of poverty. Poverty costs this province in more than just lost potential. It costs us in our health care system, our justice system, our child protection system, and social assistance system. It costs our economy and our society as a whole suffers.

## Did you know?

A group of leading economic and public policy experts recently released the first ever analysis of poverty's economic impact on Ontario. The report is called 'The Cost of Poverty', and was sponsored by the Ontario Association of Food Banks.

Key findings included:

- > The total cost of poverty in Ontario is equal to 5.5 to 6.6 per cent of Ontario's GDP.
- > The federal and provincial governments are losing \$10.4 to \$13.1 billion per year due to poverty in Ontario.
- > In real terms, poverty costs every Ontario household between \$2,299 and \$2,895 per year.
- > If child poverty were eliminated in Ontario, the additional income tax revenue for Ontario would be between \$1.3 billion and \$1.6 billion annually.

## Vision

Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy is guided by the vision of a province where every person has the opportunity to achieve his or her full potential, and contribute to and participate in a prosperous and healthy Ontario.

## Core Principles

Ten key principles will guide the implementation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy:

- > **Kids First:** Kids are our highest priority. By helping kids living in poverty get what they need to succeed, especially at school, the cycle of poverty can be broken.
- > **Kids Live in Families:** Families play the most important role in their child's success. Reducing child poverty and breaking the cycle of poverty can be achieved only with the support and engagement of families.
- > **Community:** We recognize that there is tremendous potential in each community, and that a successful strategy must capitalize on that strength. Strong, healthy communities are an integral component of a poverty reduction strategy.
- > **Unleashing Potential:** There is incredible untapped potential in Ontario's population. We need to put that potential to work by building supports and eliminating barriers to full participation in our economy and our society.



- > **Diversity:** We need to respect and respond to the diversity of poverty. We know that certain people are at higher risk of poverty. They include new Ontarians, single moms, people with disabilities, Aboriginal peoples and racialized groups.
- > **Respect:** All people in Ontario deserve to be treated with respect and dignity.
- > **Engagement:** All Ontarians, especially people living in poverty, must be engaged in poverty reduction.
- > **Determination:** It will take determination, time and hard work to do what needs to be done.
- > **Cooperation:** We all have a role to play in reducing poverty. We need to work together to build strong, healthy kids, families and communities.
- > **Effectiveness:** Scarce tax dollars must be spent in the most effective way possible. We need to support the research that will guide our investment decisions, and respond to their findings.

## Listening to Ontarians

Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy is rooted in the province's communities – the places where people live, work and play, the places where some of them live in poverty, and the places where solutions to poverty can be found.

We put a call out to Ontarians to have their voices heard on what steps we should take to reduce poverty in Ontario. Ontarians responded in an overwhelming way through our website, participation in 14 roundtable sessions across the province, letters, meetings and phone conversations. Community organizations answered the call, holding many of their own consultations across the province. Dozens of Members of Provincial Parliament from all parties held town hall meetings in their communities. We heard from thousands of people – frontline service providers, community members, and, most importantly, people who are living in poverty.

The feedback from this engagement was as extensive as it was useful. Every meeting, every discussion and every idea expressed was valuable. This strategy reflects what we heard.

The engagement of low-income Ontarians proved valuable for reasons far beyond the ideas generated. Many people living in poverty told us that this was the first time they had ever been asked for their advice or heard by government.

The launch of the strategy marks the next step in our ongoing conversation with Ontarians about poverty reduction. We have set ambitious goals and ongoing conversation is the best way to know what is working and what is not. By continuing to engage Ontarians, we will also continue to invite people living in poverty to participate in our shared effort to reduce poverty in Ontario.

## Learning from Other Jurisdictions

This strategy is a made-in-Ontario plan, but one informed by successful approaches from around the world. Provinces such as Quebec and Newfoundland and Labrador, other jurisdictions, including New York City, and countries such as the United Kingdom and Ireland have all implemented strategies that aim to make a decisive impact on poverty. In creating this strategy, Ontario consulted, studied and learned from them all.

## Moving Forward

Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy represents the very best thinking that exists on how to reduce poverty. There are no quick fixes and no miracle cures. Its success will be incremental but it will be measurable, and over time it will be dramatic. If we can break the cycle of poverty, we will reduce the number of children living in poverty who grow up to be adults living in poverty, and everyone in Ontario will benefit.

The Poverty Reduction Strategy is a comprehensive plan, combining significant short-, medium- and long-term investments and innovative new programs and initiatives. It establishes a clear goal – where the province does its part, in partnership with the federal government – to reduce child poverty by 25 per cent over 5 years while improving the quality of life for all children living in poverty. It focuses on the way government supports low income Ontarians, with an eye to improving the services that are offered to people living in poverty. And it commits to measuring and reviewing the progress that is being made. Ontario is setting itself on a road to become a leading jurisdiction in the fight against poverty.

# Chapter 1: Stronger, Healthier Kids and Families

The research is clear. Children who grow up in poverty are at a higher risk of living in poverty when they're adults. They're less likely to graduate from high school and less likely to go on to post-secondary education. They're more likely to rely on social assistance as adults and more likely to have children before they are able to support them.

Member of Parliament Ken Dryden defines poverty as “a pregnant mother just a little less healthy, her newborn baby just a little underweight, a little less developed. A young child growing up just a little more sick a little more often, away from school just a few more days than other kids – just a little behind. Poverty is every day running a 100-metre race as if all the other kids are at the starting line – and they're 10 metres behind. Poverty is that ‘just a little’ that isn't ‘just a little’ at all”.

This strategy is rooted in the understanding that, with the right combination of initiatives, kids who are finding themselves “just a little bit” behind can catch up and cross the finish line with the rest of their classmates. That they can go on to excel in school, get good jobs and become contributing members of society. That the intergenerational cycle of poverty can be broken.

Children living in poverty have the potential and the desire to succeed. What they are often lacking is the opportunity to fulfill their potential.

This strategy makes, as its highest priority, the breaking of that cycle, by providing targeted actions to help kids growing up in poverty in Ontario have the opportunities they need to succeed.

## What All Kids Need

We all know what children need to be successful and, parents spend much of their time making sure their kids get what they need to succeed. They do whatever they need to do to make sure their kids are healthy, happy and successful at school. At every stage of a child's life, parents are there with them, helping them along the way.

Even before their child is born, mothers want a safe and healthy pregnancy so that their newborn gets the best start possible.

In the early years, parents want their children to learn and grow. That's why they look for connections with other new parents and their children. That's why they seek out high quality child care and safe places for their kids to play.



Once they're at school, parents want a place where their children can learn and thrive, with extra help available if their child needs it and a place where parents have an opportunity to be engaged in their child's progress.

They know that good jobs require a good education. That's why parents want their kids to graduate from high school and go on to further training, college or university.

They know that if their child is to succeed in school, he or she needs to be healthy, both physically and mentally and fed healthy and nutritious food.

They know that kids need the opportunity to build their strengths and test their skills, by being engaged and active in community and after-school activities.

Parents know that community matters. That's why they want their neighbourhoods to be safe and friendly.

Parents know that good, stable housing allows a child to put down roots in their neighbourhood and their school.

They know that the mentoring provided by a coach, teacher, or another adult can help keep their kids on the right track.

And parents know the value of summer jobs so their kids get the experience they need to prepare to enter the world of work.

These ingredients to a child's success are what parents of all backgrounds and income levels strive to provide. But when a family lives in poverty, these determinants of success are sometimes impossible to provide, despite their best efforts. Too many children lack access to the resources they need to be supported in schools, lack access to safe places to play and learn, lack access to mentors on which to model behaviour, and generally lack the opportunity to be at their best. Too many parents lack access to services in their community, either because they don't exist, they aren't aware of them or because they can't get to them.

It is our collective responsibility to break the cycle of poverty by strengthening the ability of families to meet the needs of their children and by strengthening the ability of communities to meet the needs of their families.

This strategy is about stronger and healthier kids and their families, living in stronger and healthier communities.

## The Early Years – Getting off to the Best Start

The research is clear – investing in the early years will give us the highest possible return on our investment. The evidence in the area of human development, including the work of Dr. Fraser Mustard and the Honourable Margaret McCain, demonstrates how important it is that our children get off to the very best start possible. When kids get the right kinds of experiences at an early age, they arrive at school ready to learn, and are more likely to keep up with their schoolwork throughout their education.

That's why, in 2004, we launched **Best Start**, a comprehensive set of programs that focus on healthy development and early learning and child care to help kids to learn by the time they start Grade 1.

But, despite the work that has been done, kids living in poverty are still less likely to arrive at school ready to learn than other kids – already, just a little behind. And that means they're less likely to be successful in school. If we're going to break the cycle of poverty, making sure they arrive at school ready to learn is a high priority.

### A Healthy Start

The **Healthy Babies Healthy Children** program is committed to giving kids the best possible start in life. It provides screening for pregnant women and every new baby and mother. It is a preventative early identification and intervention program that provides supports to families with children from the prenatal period up to age six. The Healthy Babies Healthy Children program is delivered through the 36 Public Health Units.

To stay healthy, kids can rely on our free **vaccination programs** to prevent serious illnesses. Prior to 2004, parents struggling to make ends meet had to make the very difficult decision as to whether or not to spend more than \$600 on vaccination against meningitis, pneumonia and chicken pox for their children. They no longer have to make that choice, as these vaccinations are now offered free of charge to all Ontario children.

In 2007, the government introduced a free **immunization program** for Grade 8 girls to protect them against the most common kinds of human papillomavirus (HPV), a virus that can lead to cervical cancer. This saves parents over \$500 compared to purchasing the vaccine.

The province provides free **influenza immunizations** to all people over the age of six months who live, work and attend school in Ontario. This helps to reduce lost work time for parents due to their or their child's illness, and to reduce the burden on the health care system.

It's important to identify any long-term health challenges that a child may face as early as possible, so kids can get the treatment they need as soon as possible. Ontario is leading the way with our **Newborn Screening Program**. The program screens every baby born in Ontario – 141,000 screens were performed in the first year of the expanded program. With screening for 28 disorders, including a screen for Cystic Fibrosis and several blood disorders, this initiative is making great strides in the early detection and management of health disorders in children.

Ontario has also taken the important step of providing early intervention services for children who need additional supports to realize their potential. The **Blind-Low Vision, Pre-School Speech and Language, Infant Development and Infant Hearing programs** help make available critical early identification, intervention and education services for families and children.

### **Community-based Child and Parent Learning**

A good education starts long before kids go to school. That's why it's important that there are places where kids can play and learn and interact with other children. And places where parents can interact with other parents, and learn about parenting and resources available in their neighbourhoods.

**Ontario Early Years Centres (OEYCs)** are a community resource that provide children, parents and caregivers the chance to learn together. The programs include early learning, literacy and outreach programs.

**Parenting and Family Literacy Centres (PFLCs)** are located in schools where children may face educational and social challenges. The centres help prepare children and their families for the transition to kindergarten by helping children build language and numbers skills, encouraging families to engage in children's learning, familiarizing children and families with school routines, and linking families with resources for special needs, health and other services.

Because they're located in schools, families and children become comfortable with schools, and come to see

them as safe and supportive places. And because PFLCs bring parents and children together with others in their neighbourhood, they serve to break the isolation that so often is associated with poverty.

In 2007, Ontario made a new investment to support 89 PFLCs.

## **What's New:**

As part of the Poverty Reduction Strategy, we will more than triple the number of Parenting and Family Literacy Centres to 300.

## **Early Learning and Child Care**

Our continued progress in improving the capacity for children to learn depends on their healthy development during their early years. Through the **Best Start** initiative, we have greatly expanded child care in Ontario. We have created more than 22,000 **licensed child care** spaces, and thousands more parents are receiving **fee subsidies** so they can go to work, knowing that their children are safe and learning. In 2008, we invested an additional \$23 million in financial assistance to help approximately 3,000 more children benefit from licensed child care.

### **Full Day Learning**

Our next step is the implementation of **full day learning for four- and five-year-olds**. Extensive research shows that kids in high quality full-day learning programs do better in school, and that excellent early learning programs reduce inequalities among children. Full day learning for four- and five-year-olds will build on Best Start to promote a seamless system of early learning which will help children succeed at lifelong learning, with better outcomes and greater resilience.

In order to implement full-day learning in the best way possible, the Premier appointed Dr. Charles Pascal as Ontario's Early Learning Advisor. Dr. Pascal has spent the last several months visiting locations around the province, meeting with and hearing from thousands of parents and educators, hosting roundtables and learning about best practices in Ontario and other jurisdictions, all with the goal of developing the best implementation strategy for full-day learning. His report is expected in the spring of 2009.

Based on his consultations to date, Dr. Pascal has advised

that he understands that all day learning should meet the needs of children in all income levels, while adapting to meet the needs of low income families. Dr. Pascal will advise the government on the best way to ensure that part of the first phase of implementation gives priority to children in low-income neighbourhoods.

In addition to improving readiness for success in Grade 1 and beyond, this initiative will free up important early learning resources to help more parents access additional quality child care and learning opportunities for their children.

### What's New:

The government will be implementing full-day learning for four- and five-year olds. Part of the first phase of implementation will be focused on low-income neighbourhoods.

## The School Years: Success in School, Success in Life

Every school day, some two million Ontario children gather to learn, with and from one another, in this province's publicly-funded schools. In obvious ways, they are acquiring the basic skills they need to succeed in a competitive, knowledge-driven world. In less obvious ways, they are learning how to think, how to behave, and how to become productive and successful members of a society. They are being guided and supported through a time of enormous challenge and change.

The poverty cycle will not be broken until all Ontario children are given the opportunity to go, stay and thrive in school. A good education levels the playing field, ensuring that each and every child has the opportunity to live up to his or her potential. Ask any parent what their child needs most in order to succeed, and they will tell you it's a good education.

Since 2003, the Ontario government has made education a top priority. Annual funding for education will reach \$19 billion in 2008-09, an increase of 29 per cent over 2002-03. These investments are significant not only for the increases they represent but also for the very specific way in which they have been focused on improving student achievement,

and increasing students' chances for success. It is this commitment to excellence for all that makes the government's efforts in education the foundation for Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy, and the most effective tool in breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty.

### Student Nutrition

Kids learn better when they've got food in their stomach. Our **Student Nutrition Program** responds to that reality. By providing healthy breakfasts, snacks, and lunches at many of our schools, kids are better able to concentrate, and get the most out of – and put the most into – their school day. The program is made possible through volunteers and community partnerships.

In our first mandate, we doubled our investment in the Student Nutrition Program.

As a down payment to the Poverty Reduction Strategy, we re-doubled our investment in the Student Nutrition Program, with a new investment of \$32 million over three years, beginning in 2008.

This investment will support the creation of approximately 700 new breakfast programs and the expansion of 300 existing programs in communities with the highest need.

### Healthy Schools

In order for kids to be successful at school, they need to be healthy and ready to learn. Our **Healthy Schools Strategy** promotes better student health and makes schools healthier places for our kids to learn. All elementary school children participate in 20 minutes of physical activity every school day and we have dropped trans fat from food sold in schools, making sure that students have access to healthier food.

### After-School Activities

Getting students more engaged in school also means having healthy opportunities outside of school. This can include recreation programs, mentorship opportunities and community supports.

As part of its battle to break the cycle of poverty, Ontario is looking to improve the health of children while teaching them to make healthy choices in a safe and fun environment after school. Extensive research in the field of improving the health of children has informed the development of the **After School Program**. The hours from 3:30 pm to 6:30 pm are seen by many experts as being the best time to reach children and youth, and the timing has the added advantage of giving children, often with few other choices, something healthy, educational and safe to do after school. This program will provide kids with an opportunity to build self esteem, develop new skills, and form attachments with peers and mentors.

## What's New:

As part of the Poverty Reduction Strategy, we will invest \$10 million annually in an After School Program that will support children in high needs neighbourhoods with new after-school programming and new initiatives focused on physical activity and wellness.

The first phase of this program has already begun in 237 YMCA/Boys & Girls Clubs and the program will be expanded to include other communities.

### Dental Care

A child's oral health is important to their overall health. Studies have shown that individuals with low incomes have tooth decay rates and treatment needs that are as much as three times higher than people at higher income levels.

Currently, the **Children in Need of Treatment (CINOT)** program provides emergency/essential dental care free-of-charge to children in low-income families from birth to age 13 years.

Children in Need of Treatment will be expanded to include children up to age 18. In addition, the government will work with Public Health Units to build community capacity to deliver prevention and treatment services for low-income Ontarians.

As a down payment to the Poverty Reduction Strategy, we announced in Budget 2008 that we will invest \$45 million annually to provide dental care for low-income Ontarians.

### Mental Health

In order for any child to do their best, their physical health is important, but their mental health is equally vital. The evidence shows that there is a strong correlation between mental illness and poverty.

The 2008 Budget announced an \$80 million investment over three years for a **Mental Health and Addictions Strategy**. A component of this strategy will include coordinated crisis response programs, peer support, enhanced referral to services, early psychosis intervention and enhanced eating disorder programs. Also, the addictions component will include youth residential treatment programs, school-based programs, peer support and outreach to shelters and drop-ins.

## What's New:

As part of the Poverty Reduction Strategy, a portion of the Mental Health and Addictions Strategy will target low-income youth who have severe mental illness and/or substance addictions.

### Better Learning, Higher Achievement

Some students need additional support to achieve success. That is why the government's **Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat (LNS)** continues to support schools through the **Ontario Focused Intervention Partnership (OFIP)**. LNS Student Achievement Officers work with principals and teachers analysing student work and relevant data, planning instructional strategies for student success and focussing on interventions for students who are not making progress.

We have also invested in **Student Success Teams**. Every high school in Ontario has a team, comprised of the school principal, a Student Success teacher and a guidance counsellor. Together, they identify students who are struggling

and support them with the help they need. They also work with school staff, students, parents and the community to help more students get the credits they need to graduate from high school.

Some schools and neighbourhoods in Ontario, for a variety of reasons, also need a little extra help to meet their students' needs. The **Learning Opportunities Grant** is used by school boards for a variety of programs, such as remedial reading, breakfast and lunch programs, tutors, mentoring, adapted curriculum, summer school, literacy and numeracy programs and homework clubs, to give that extra help that students sometimes need to achieve their potential.

## What's New:

As part of the Poverty Reduction Strategy, a portion of the Learning Opportunities Grant funding will be more focused on helping low-income students who need it most.

## Safer Schools

A safe and positive learning environment is essential for student success. Our goals are safer schools and discipline that works. The recent amendments to the safe schools provisions of the Education Act more effectively combine discipline with opportunities for students to continue their education. The amendments include strong consequences for students who act inappropriately, but also programs for those students to earn their way back into the classroom and complete their education. In addition, the **Safe Schools Action Team** has been re-engaged to find ways to prevent inappropriate behaviours in school such as sexual harassment, homophobia and gender-based violence. The government has also announced funding for **Urban and Priority High Schools** facing challenges that arise from their neighbourhood and community settings, including poverty, criminal/gang activity and lack of community resources.

## Access to School Activities

Too often in our consultations, we heard about how children living in poverty are unable to participate in class activities such as pizza days and class trips. We heard how this makes them uncomfortable at school and among their peers and that sometimes the arrangements that are made to include students are not sensitive to their circumstances.

## What's New:

Through the Poverty Reduction Strategy, we are encouraging school boards to ensure that all students can participate in class activities, not just those who can afford it. We are asking them to review their policies on school activities to ensure that students living in poverty are able to participate in class activities in a way that is sensitive to their circumstances.

## Engaging Parents

The support and engagement of parents in their child's education is a very strong predictor of a child's success at school. If education is important to parents, it will be important to their children.

As noted earlier, Parenting and Family Literacy Centres promote attachment to and comfort with schools even before the child is enrolled. This applies to both parent and child.

Many parents want to take an active role in their children's education, but for a variety of reasons, find it difficult to know how to become engaged in their child's education. That's why, in 2006, the province created a **Parent Engagement Office** to facilitate parent participation in the school system. The abc123 website, [ontario.ca/abc123](http://ontario.ca/abc123), gives parents tips in 13 languages on how to help their children in reading, writing and math.

**The Parents Reaching Out Grants** are available to school councils, parent organizations, school boards, non-profit organizations and post-secondary institutions working in partnership. They engage parents who may experience challenges to involvement in their children's education due to language barriers, recent immigration, poverty, lack of familiarity with Ontario's education system, or other factors.

## What's New:

As part of the Poverty Reduction Strategy, a portion of the Parents Reaching Out Grants' funding will be re-focused to better help parents in higher-need areas participate in their child's education.

## Better Opportunities for Youth

The **Youth Opportunities Strategy (YOS)** was launched in 2006. It is a comprehensive blend of programs designed to give kids in priority neighbourhoods the opportunity to be successful in life. The strategy is designed to help kids overcome economic disadvantages and reach their potential by supporting them as they gain confidence, learn new skills and work constructively within their communities. This program provides jobs, training, and outreach for young people.

The YOS includes a Summer Job Program, a Youth in Policing Initiative, a Youth Outreach Worker Program and YouthConnect.ca, a website just for young people where they can find programs and resources they need to help them succeed.

### What's New:

As part of the Poverty Reduction Strategy, funding for the Youth Opportunities Strategy will more than double to over \$22 million annually. This will allow for both the expansion of the program in existing communities, and expansion to other priority communities.

## Preparing for College, University, Training and Work

Research has shown that getting a good start to a child's education is important, but their transitions to youth, high school and beyond are also key. We all want our youth to have equal access to the best opportunities available, whether it's post-secondary education, training or employment.

Through the **Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP)**, the Ontario government provides needs-based assistance to students who do not have the resources to finance their post-secondary studies. Eligible students can receive loan funding for tuition, compulsory fees, books, supplies, equipment and living costs, as well as non-repayable bursaries and grants targeted toward specific costs and/or specific student populations.

Our **Student Access Guarantee (SAG)** helps qualified Ontario students in need to access resources to help to pay for their tuition, books and mandatory fees through a combination of government and institutional aid programs.

The Ontario government has tripled the number of **non-repayable grants** available to students, with one in four, or approximately 120,000 students, receiving non-repayable grants annually. Some of the targeted grants include the **Ontario Student Opportunity Grant**, which limits repayable student loan debt to \$7,000 per year and **Access Grants** for students from low- to middle-income families, which helps to cover tuition fees to a maximum of \$3,000 per year. Further, the **Ontario First Generation Bursary**, the **Bursary for Students with Disabilities**, and the **Ontario Access Grants for Crown Wards** are targeted toward students who are underrepresented in post-secondary studies and face multiple barriers to attending college or university.

The Ontario government is investing \$2 billion over three years in our **Skills to Jobs Action Plan** to advance Ontario's competitive edge in skills and post-secondary education and to help workers train for new careers.

As part of this plan we will invest \$970 million to build and improve places where students learn. This funding will support the purchase of up-to-date equipment and new construction and renovation projects in our colleges and universities ensuring that students have adequate equipment and facilities to learn. As well, we will invest \$560 million to expand and improve **training and apprenticeship programs** across the province. These projects will help students develop the skills they need to succeed in high-demand occupations in the future.

## Targeted Programs for Youth at High Risk of Poverty

### Crown Wards Success Strategy

Children and youth in the care of Ontario's Children's Aid Societies have an abundance of untapped potential. They have overcome challenges that most of us could never imagine over a lifetime.

As they grow up, Crown Wards are at tremendous risk of falling into poverty. As these kids move from foster home to foster home, school to school, they are three times more likely to drop out of high school than other kids. We believe in these kids and we know that with the right support and opportunity, their potential is unlimited.



Helping Crown Wards succeed is central to breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty.

Already, we have taken a number of steps to better support Crown Wards in their pursuit of educational opportunity and a better life.

Grants to help cover tuition costs for up to four years of study to a maximum of \$3,000 each year are available to current and former Crown Wards pursuing a post-secondary education. We've also made it easier for Crown Wards to apply to college or university by covering their base application fee. To further assist Crown Wards with the costs of post-secondary education, beginning this year, up to \$3,500 of bursaries and scholarships for Crown Wards from Children's Aid Societies and Children's Aid Society Foundations, as well as some community organizations and agencies will be exempt from income in OSAP.

We introduced **Crown Ward Educational Championship Teams** in four communities across the province. These teams bring together representatives from school boards, post-secondary institutions, Children's Aid Societies and employment services to encourage Crown Wards in high school to think about post-secondary education and training opportunities, while informing them of the supports that are available to them to make it happen.

Ontario schools are offering expanded programs to help meet students' individual learning styles and interests, which will better prepare them for graduation and beyond. Crown Wards have been identified as a target group and are encouraged to participate in Student Success programs like the **Dual Credit program**.

We are exploring opportunities to support the coordination of services among District School Boards and Children's Aid Societies.

We also know that kids do better in the long run when they have a permanent, loving home. That's why we are transforming our child protection system to promote adoption and other forms of permanent care. This year we formed an Expert Panel on Infertility and Adoption that will provide advice to the government on improving Ontario's adoption system so that more children can become part of families more quickly.

## What's New:

As part of the Poverty Reduction Strategy, we will further enhance our Crown Wards success strategy with the goal of improving educational outcomes and smoothing their transition to adulthood. We will invest \$19 million more annually to support these kids as they leave care and make the transition to independence.

We will also be working closely with the child protection sector to raise the high school graduation rate among Crown Wards, ensuring they benefit from the range of available programs supporting this vulnerable group.

We are also making the equivalent of the Ontario Child Benefit available to children and youth in the care of the state. These young people will have access to a fund which will cover the cost of extracurricular activities, like music lessons or sports fees, tutoring or other activities that benefit their development. Older youth in care will learn money management skills through a bank account savings program worth more than \$3,300 for a child when they leave care, once fully implemented.

For youth who are participating in post-secondary studies, these savings will not be considered income in the OSAP assessment. In addition, RESPs established by Children's Aid Societies for Crown Wards using Universal Child Care Benefits will be exempt as income in the OSAP assessment.

In July 2008, the federal government began providing Universal Child Care Benefits to Children's Aid Societies for each child in care under the age of six. Effective April 2008, the government of Ontario began requiring the Children's Aid Societies to use these funds to establish **RESPs**. These RESPs will be exempt as income in the OSAP assessment for Crown Wards participating in post-secondary studies.

## Focus on Aboriginal Youth

Aboriginal youth are the fastest growing segment of the Canadian population. In Ontario, more than 50 per cent of the Aboriginal population is under the age of 27, and we are committed to helping these individuals reach their full potential.

### What's New:

As the new Poverty Reduction Strategy initiatives are developed, a key consideration will be the development of culturally sensitive programs in communities with Aboriginal populations.

We know that urban Aboriginal youth face a number of unique challenges. That's why we increased funding by \$4 million for the **Akwe:go and Wasa Nabin Urban Aboriginal Children's Programs**. **Akwe:go** programs provide at-risk urban Aboriginal children, aged 7 to 12, and their families with culturally appropriate, community-based supports they need to make healthy positive choices.

The new **Wasa-Nabin Program** assists urban Aboriginal youth between the ages of 12 and 18 in strengthening their sense of identity and connection to their culture, so they are able to draw upon traditional values and teaching to create strong and healthy relationships within their community.

Both of these programs are supported through the **Indian Friendship Centres** across the province. Together, these programs will go far to address some of the challenges faced by our Aboriginal youth.

The **Aboriginal Youth Work Exchange** provides work placements for Aboriginal youth. These placements focus on resource management projects, job skills readiness training and personal development training. Each participant remains with the program over three consecutive summers, supporting consistency and long-term skill development.

We have also remained committed to our **Aboriginal Healing and Wellness Strategy**, which offers programs and initiatives to improve the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health and wellness of Aboriginal peoples in Ontario. This program is a unique governance model partnering the Ontario government with Aboriginal organizations and First Nations to reduce family violence and improve health through Aboriginal designed, delivered and managed services.

The Aboriginal Healing and Wellness Strategy, which is guided by a five-year agreement, is in force until March 31, 2009, and may continue with the agreement of all parties. We will continue to work closely with our Aboriginal partners to determine the best approach for continuing successful Aboriginal healing and wellness programs.

These programs are a good start, but more work needs to be done. Some of the crosscutting components of this strategy will have a positive impact on Aboriginal youth, including the proposed **enhancement of the Ontario Child Benefit, expansion of the Student Nutrition Program and Full Day Learning for four- and five-year-olds**.

**The After School Program** will be developed in high needs neighbourhoods, including those with Aboriginal populations, and initiatives that focus on physical activity and wellness will be culturally sensitive. **Parenting and Family Literacy Centres** will be established in some high needs areas with significant Aboriginal populations and the centres will respond to educational and social challenges with culturally appropriate programming and materials. Opportunities to establish **Community Hubs** in high needs areas with significant Aboriginal populations will also be explored.

The **Youth Opportunities Strategy** will expand into new communities to help kids overcome economic disadvantages and reach their potential. The strategy supports young people as they gain confidence, new skills and work constructively within their communities. Communities with high Aboriginal populations will receive this benefit and will be supported in a culturally sensitive manner.

## Asset Building

Through our consultations we heard a great deal about the need for families to build and maintain their assets. The Poverty Reduction Strategy will include an **Asset Building Initiative**.

In the 2008 Budget, the government announced plans to establish an Asset Building Initiative. We will work with partners to develop this initiative.

## The Ontario Child Benefit

Expanding opportunities for children and families is an important investment in Ontario's future. All families want their children to have the best possible start in life if they are to seize opportunities for success. Families want the support

that they deserve to secure their most basic needs and be equipped to participate in Ontario's economic prosperity.

The government recognizes the importance of investments in helping children and families. The goals of these investments are clear – to provide more assistance to more children and help families make the transition from social assistance to employment.

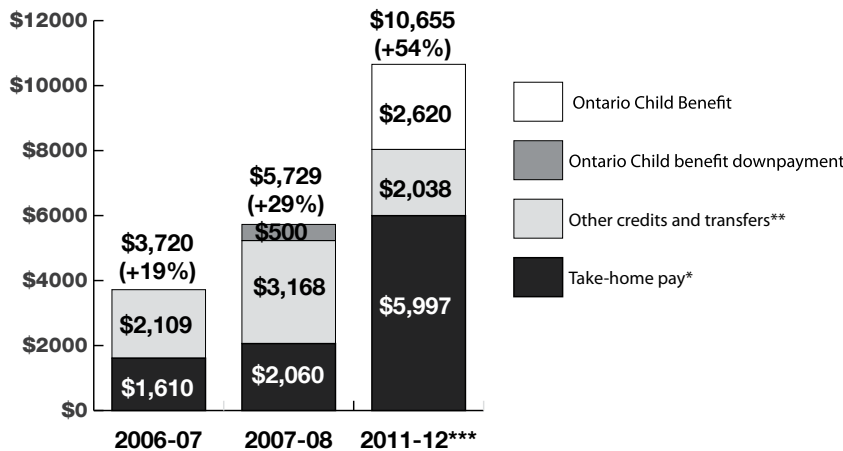
## What's New:

The Poverty Reduction Strategy will increase the Ontario Child Benefit (OCB) to up to \$1,310 per child per year. This will provide support for 1.3 million children in low-income families. When fully implemented, the enhanced OCB will represent a total investment of about \$1.3 billion per year.

**Chart 2**

### Supporting Low-Income Working Families

Single Parent with Two Children Ages 5 and 7 Working Full-time at Minimum Wage  
Change in Annualized Income Since 2003-04



\*Assumes legislated and scheduled minimum wage (net of taxes).

\*\*Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCTB) base benefit, National Child Benefit Supplement (NCBS), Universal Child Care Benefit, Goods and Services Tax (GST) credit, Ontario Property and Sales Tax Credits, Working Income Tax Benefit (WITB) and Ontario Child Care Supplement for Working Families.

\*\*\* Includes proposed enhancement of the Ontario Child Benefit to \$1,310 per child annually at maturity. **Note:** CCTB, NCBS, GST credit and WITB are assumed to be indexed at approximately 2.5 per cent in 2009 and two per cent annually thereafter. Case example is illustrative, assumptions to derive future tax and transfer parameters have been made. Further, taxes and transfers are annualized and based on in-year income.

Numbers may not add due to rounding.

Source: Ontario Ministry of Finance

In 2007, the Ontario government fundamentally changed how benefits for children in low-income families are provided.

At maturity, the Ontario Child Benefit will help about 1.3 million children annually by providing benefits to all low-income families with children, regardless of the source of their income. It also helps parents receiving social assistance make the transition to work because they continue to receive children's benefits after beginning employment.

When the Ontario Child Benefit reaches maturity, the total income of a single parent with two children under age 13 working full-time at minimum wage would be 54 per cent higher than it was in 2003 (See Chart 2).

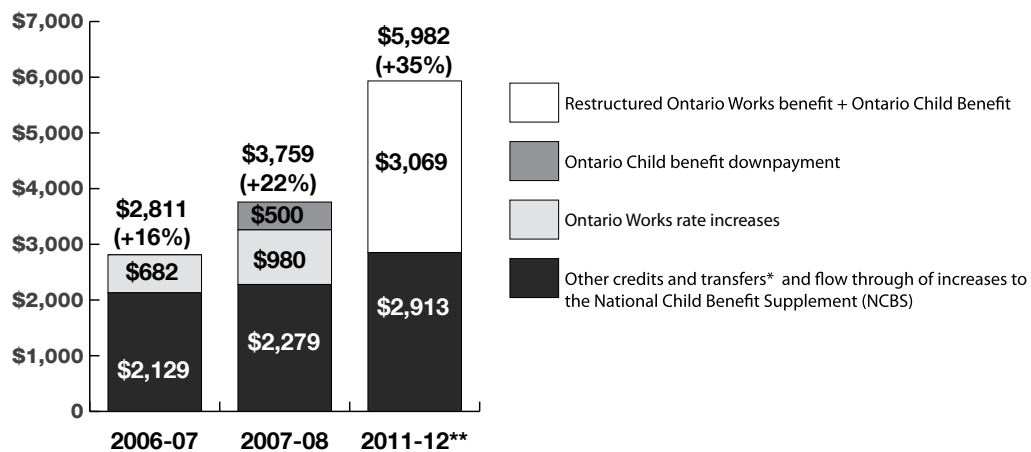
When the Ontario Child Benefit reaches maturity, the total income of a single parent receiving Ontario Works benefits with two children under age 13 would be over 35 per cent higher than it was in 2003 (See Chart 3).



**Chart 3**

### Supporting Families on Social Assistance

Single Parent with Two Children Ages 5 and 7 on Ontario Works  
Change in Annualized Income Since 2003–04



\*Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCTB) base benefit, Universal Child Care Benefit, Goods and Service Tax (GST) credit, and Ontario Property and Sales Tax Credits.

\*\*Includes proposed enhancement of the Ontario Child Benefit to \$1,310 per child annually at maturity.

**Note:** CCTB, NCBS and GST credit are assumed to be indexed at approximately 2.5 per cent in 2009 and two per cent annually thereafter. Case example is illustrative, assumptions to derive future tax and transfer parameters have been made. Further, taxes and transfers are annualized and based on in-year income.

Numbers may not add due to rounding.

**Source:** Ontario Ministry of Finance

## Success Stories

### **The Youth Services Bureau of Ottawa**

The bureau serves young people aged 12 and older, and focuses on kids with difficulties that affect their physical and/or emotional well-being and development. The bureau provides a full range of services to help troubled young people learn independence and self-sufficiency. Emergency shelter and transitional housing is provided where each person has a door that locks and a space of their own. Services are provided in partnership with kids, to ensure their voices have a positive impact.

[www.ysb.on.ca](http://www.ysb.on.ca)

### **Youth Emergency Shelter of Peterborough**

As well as providing shelter and homelessness supports to young people, the Youth Emergency Shelter of Peterborough offers a number of programs to increase their potential. The Shelter connects youth with community partners to directly benefit the community. It offers essential training in workplace safety, first-aid and valuable construction skills. It also offers a work skills development program targeted to at-risk youths aged 16-24. Seventy-five per cent of participants either return to school or find meaningful employment opportunities. [www.yes-shelter.org](http://www.yes-shelter.org)

### **Covenant House – Toronto**

Covenant House provides 24 hour crisis care to kids in trouble. The largest shelter for homeless youth in Canada, Covenant House also has a wide range of services under one roof, including education, counselling, health care and employment assistance. Since opening its doors in 1982, Covenant House has offered opportunity and hope to more than 70,000 young people.

[www.covenanthouse.org](http://www.covenanthouse.org)

### **Pathways to Education**

In 2001, Toronto Regent Park Community Health Centre created Pathways to Education, a program designed to lower the dropout rate, help young people from lower-income families succeed in high school and continue on to obtain a post-secondary education. The program has academic support, social support through mentors, financial incentives encouraging completion of high school and to support the move to post-secondary education, and an advocacy role to help parents and students better connect with teachers, school administrators and community agencies.

Pathways to Education has had extraordinary success. Dropout rates in the neighbourhood have gone from 56 per cent to 10 per cent, increasing the proportion of young people attending post-secondary education from 20 per cent to 80 per cent. In November 2007, the Ontario Government made an additional \$19 million investment to expand the program to Kitchener, Rexdale, Lawrence Heights and Ottawa.

[www.pathwaystoeducation.ca](http://www.pathwaystoeducation.ca)

# Chapter 2: Stronger, Healthier Communities

If there was one thing that was clear at every consultation, in every town hall, at every public meeting, and in every community across Ontario, it was the capacity that communities naturally possess to effectively serve the needs of their members. This capacity comes from the proximity they have to the issues and challenges facing their community. Ideas and partnerships and connections are more easily developed at the community level. There's an inherent willingness to "help your neighbour." And communities, both social and geographic, have a shared interest in everyone being at their best.

And just as we know that strong kids need good schools and strong parents – strong parents and families need the support of engaged, dynamic and thriving communities in order to be at their best.

There are numerous examples of how communities across Ontario have come together. They have effectively broken down existing barriers and gotten down to work on their own. For example, the Hamilton Roundtable on Poverty Reduction made a collective decision to make Hamilton "the best place to raise a child."

Research in other jurisdictions has shown that involving people in the revitalization of their own neighbourhoods should be a critical component of any poverty reduction strategy. Strong communities can be an extremely positive influence on the health and economic prospects of the people who live in them and inviting people to take responsibility for the strength of their own communities can only increase their social cohesion and mobility.

## What's New:

The Poverty Reduction Strategy will invest \$5 million annually in a Community Opportunities Fund to encourage neighbourhood revitalization through partnerships between local business, governments, volunteers, community agencies and most importantly, local residents.



**The Community Opportunities Fund** will provide community-based leaders with funding to enable better coordination, collaboration and innovation at the community level, driving towards shared goals and improved outcomes. The scope could be city-wide or focused on a single neighbourhood. The driving principle will be collaboration, community engagement and improved outcomes for community members.

Throughout the consultation for the strategy, we heard a consistent message about the location of services. Participants told us that services were dispersed and hard to access, which in itself became an added challenge to an already frustrating set of circumstances. Community hubs have the capacity to act both as the physical co-location of services, but also as that one, well-known place, where people can go to get services, meet people, or give back to their community.

The existing **Community Use of Schools** program helps students, parents and members of the community to be more active in a safe and healthy environment. The government provides funding to school boards so they can make school space more affordable for use after hours. Both indoor and outdoor school space is available to not-for-profit community groups at reduced rates. The Ontario government is investing \$33 million in the Community Use of Schools program for 2008-09, a significant increase over the previous year's investment, making it more affordable for youth, seniors and adults to use local schools for their meetings, practices and other activities. The program and its funding is expected to continue to grow over the next few years, reaching \$66 million by 2011-12, including providing free after-hours access to about 500 schools in communities that need it most.

The **Focus on Youth** partnership between the Ontario government, school boards and local community agencies provides summer programming for students in urban, high needs neighbourhoods. In 2008, it supported youth in Hamilton, Ottawa and Toronto.

## What's New:

The Poverty Reduction Strategy will invest \$7 million annually in the development of a Community Hub Program. The Program will focus on using schools as hubs that respond to community needs related to poverty reduction and student achievement.

## Success Stories

### Threshold School of Building – Hamilton

Hamilton's Threshold School of Building is a non-profit organization dedicated to practical and sustainable community development in the Hamilton area. Threshold focuses on trades skills training for at-risk youth along with life skills mentoring. The aim is to improve the employability of young people by giving them the skills necessary to succeed in the construction industry. [www.thresholdschool.ca](http://www.thresholdschool.ca)

### Vibrant Communities

Vibrant Communities is a community-driven effort to reduce poverty in Canada by creating partnerships that make use of our most valuable assets: people, organizations, businesses and governments. It is a unique approach to poverty reduction that allows communities to learn from, and help, one another. Vibrant Communities links communities right across Canada in a collective effort to test the most effective ways of reducing poverty at the grassroots level. [www.tamarackcommunity.ca](http://www.tamarackcommunity.ca)

The community hubs would focus on children and their education, but at full implementation would bring together a range of community partners to better coordinate social and educational support services so that they meet the needs of those who are using them. This community-driven approach will provide selected communities, in areas of concentrated disadvantage, with resources to identify and provide the social and educational supports that their children need in order to successfully reach their full learning potential.

This is consistent with what we heard during consultations about the need for shared responsibility, community action and wrap-around services. It furthers the concept of schools as community hubs. In many communities, schools will be the appropriate location for this kind of hub. They are public buildings, they are based in communities and they are places that are familiar and comfortable for all community members. In some communities, where the school is not that natural centre, the community hub could be placed in other places, like a community centre or other familiar location.

# Chapter 3: Opportunity for All

While the Poverty Reduction Strategy has as its highest priority breaking the cycle of poverty by investing in opportunities for children, we are committed to reducing poverty and enhancing opportunities for all Ontarians.

All people in poverty have one thing in common – a lack of opportunity. However, the circumstances that led them to this point are very different. The barriers to success for a single mom can be quite different than those faced by a recent immigrant. The challenges of a homeless person are much different than the challenges of a senior living in poverty.

## Good Jobs

We all know that we are living in challenging economic times. Our economy is changing and the employment opportunities that exist for individuals are changing. These changes mean that some people may find themselves needing to upgrade their skills or retrain and transition into new fields of work.

Especially during tough times people need guidance and support to access the services that will best suit their needs. **Employment Ontario (EO)**, our integrated employment and training network, provides employment support and assistance for individuals to access training, education, skills and employment opportunities to achieve their employment goals.

In addition to these services, the Ontario government is committed to providing an immediate, comprehensive response to large-scale layoffs or plant closures. This comprehensive response is the **Rapid Re-employment and Training Service (RRTS)**. RRTS connects affected individuals with the relevant and appropriate EO services as quickly as possible to help them regain employment. This response is always adapted to meet the unique circumstances of each situation and community.

Training programs include both short-term and long-term training options. The **Ontario Skills Development Program** provides individuals who want short-term training to get back to work as quickly as possible. Building on our existing Employment Ontario network, we are investing \$2 billion over three years in our **Skills to Jobs Action Plan. Second Career**, which was announced as part of the Skills to Job Action Plan, is already helping a number of unemployed laid-off workers through a long-term training plan that launches them into high skills careers in growing sectors of the economy.

We also recognize that enhancing access to apprenticeship is essential to building the skilled workforce Ontario needs to compete in today's economy. We have made a number of enhancements to our apprenticeship programs to support increased access for youth and at-risk groups. Additionally, we have and will continue to enhance our apprenticeship system, and to provide targeted funding to our colleges and other apprenticeship training deliverers to support these students.





We have also created a number of incentives for employers to hire apprentices including:

- > Creating the **Apprenticeship Training Tax Credit** to encourage employers to hire apprentices in industrial, construction, motive power and certain service trades; and
- > Supporting out of school youth by expanding academic upgrading options and instituting an **Apprenticeship Scholarship and Employer Signing Bonus**.

Through our strategy, more people currently living in poverty will get the skills and tools they need to find work. However, if we are to be truly successful at reducing poverty, that work must pay.

That's why our government has made consistent incremental increases to Ontario's **minimum wage**. In 2003, the general minimum wage stood at \$6.85 per hour. Today, it is \$8.75 – a 28 per cent increase. We have already announced our plan to increase the minimum wage to \$10.25 by 2010. We will continue to make progress as we have since 2003.

It's also important that when people are working, they are doing so in secure environments, where employees are treated with dignity and respect. That requires strong **employment standards** that employers follow carefully. As in many jurisdictions, employment standards in Ontario are not always followed as closely as they should be. This can result in workers losing money owed to them, such as overtime, vacation pay and termination pay. The result can mean hardship for workers and their families, with particularly serious consequences for those Ontarians already facing challenges.

## What's New:

As part of the Poverty Reduction Strategy, we will invest an additional \$10 million annually to hire new employment standards officers, improve *Employment Standards Act* compliance and reduce the backlog of claims.

These officers will be able to conduct investigations and workplace inspections, more effectively enforcing standards so that vulnerable workers will receive the money they are owed. This money can take the form of basic pay, overtime pay, vacation pay and termination pay. Improving compliance also helps vulnerable workers receive job-protected leave to help them manage family emergencies and other responsibilities.

It is estimated that this initiative will gradually increase the number of inspections and will bring recoveries up to \$17.4 million annually from non-compliant employers, while reducing the backlog of investigations.

Many Ontarians who work through temporary help agencies are vulnerable workers. They have little employment security and typically have low incomes compared to permanent workers. In addition, they may have difficulty accessing their employment standards rights. Employment standards should reflect the realities of the workplace and help temporary help agency employees to be treated fairly compared to permanent or “regular” employees.

## What's New:

As part of the Poverty Reduction Strategy, the government will propose legislation related to temporary help agencies to create a better balance and remove barriers to sustainable employment.

This initiative will seek a balance of rights and obligations for workers and agencies, leading to more sustainable and less precarious employment situations for workers.

## Stable, Affordable Housing

If people living in poverty are going to find opportunity, they may need assistance in finding a safe and stable place to live.

In the past four years, the **Provincial Rent Bank Program** has prevented more than 15,500 evictions. That's 15,500 families who have been able to stay in their homes, and not suffer the often cyclical nature of moving to a new neighbourhood, developing new relationships and making that difficult adjustment.

### What's New:

As part of the Poverty Reduction Strategy, we will stabilize funding for the Provincial Rent Bank Program with a dedicated commitment of \$5 million per year.

Affordable housing is something that we know is extremely important for ensuring the stability and well-being of Ontario's families. All parents would like to be able to raise their kids in a good neighbourhood, with good schools, good community centres and places for their children to play and learn. Our government has made affordable housing a priority. Since 2003, the government has funded approximately 35,000 housing allowances and provided funding for the development and/or refurbishment of 22,000 affordable housing units in Ontario.

### Did you know?

In 2009, the Ontario government will roll out a new 10-year, \$60 billion infrastructure plan, which is expected to embrace a variety of bold new initiatives, including social housing.

As a down payment to the Poverty Reduction Strategy, the 2008 Budget committed to expanding the OSIFA loan eligibility to include private and public non-profit sector housing providers. They are able to access up to \$500 million in loans to support necessary investments in social housing infrastructure, both capital repairs and new affordable housing projects. Also, the 2008 Budget committed \$100 million for social housing providers to repair existing social housing including cost-saving energy upgrades.

But there is more to do. Much like the development of this Poverty Reduction Strategy, we will work closely with our partners to develop a **long-term affordable housing strategy**.

Also, affordable housing is an area that requires all levels of government to work together. It's critical that the federal government continues to play an active role in the provision of affordable housing, and that all three levels of government work collaboratively on this important issue.



## Success Stories

### Regent Park Revitalization

Home to 7,500 people, Regent Park is Canada's largest and oldest publicly funded community. It is in the midst of a massive revitalization project, with deteriorating buildings and public spaces being transformed into a healthy, mixed-income and sustainable community. When the project is completed, the new Regent Park will be a mixed residential community for 12,500 people in 5,115 units. Revitalization will replace all 2,083 existing units of social housing and will contribute at least 700 additional affordable housing units. [www.regentparkplan.ca](http://www.regentparkplan.ca)

### The City of Toronto – Tower Renewal

The city is working towards enabling vast areas of Toronto to become vibrant and “complete communities”. The city will be helping currently excluded areas throughout Toronto become ecologically, socially, culturally and economically sustainable communities.

As well as striving to achieve significant environmental efficiencies, the city aims to create complete communities within apartment neighbourhoods. This could transform currently excluded areas into community hubs. Community services, gathering and recreation space, new retail, entrepreneurial opportunities and housing could all be integrated on-site to benefit the resident community and city at large.

This kind of community revitalization links directly to the Poverty Reduction Strategy and the province's Places to Grow plan. It is a great example of how – with collective effort – we can create a place where every person has the opportunity to achieve his or her full potential, and contribute to and participate in a prosperous, healthy, and just Ontario. [www.towerrenewal.ca](http://www.towerrenewal.ca)

### Habitat for Humanity Canada

Habitat for Humanity Canada is a non-profit, charitable organization whose mission is to mobilize volunteers and community partners in building affordable housing and promoting homeownership as a means to breaking the cycle of poverty. Habitat for Humanity Canada, through its 72 local affiliate chapters, helps low-income families build and buy quality affordable homes through a no-interest, no-profit mortgage with payments set at less than 30 per cent of gross income. This tangible solution not only increases the stock of available housing, it enables low-income families to build assets, reduce their dependence on other forms of social assistance and break the cycle of poverty. [www.habitat.ca](http://www.habitat.ca)

## Key Groups

Ontario needs everyone to have the tools and opportunity to succeed, and that means ensuring that the programs and services designed to help low-income Ontarians meet the needs that exist. One size does not fit all. The needs of new Ontarians might be radically different from those of single mothers or homeless persons. They might share a lack of money. But the circumstances that led them there, and the tools that will help them get out, are quite different.

The Poverty Reduction Strategy has identified a number of key groups that will require very specific and tailored types of support.

### New Ontarians

Ontario welcomes about half of all immigrants to Canada, and immigration is vital to Ontario's future. Newcomers play a key role economically, socially and culturally in making the province strong and prosperous. We need them to have every opportunity to thrive and succeed. The fact is that immigrants also face many challenges – cultural, linguistic and frequently economic. Recent immigrants are better educated than the average Ontarian and yet face higher levels of unemployment and underemployment. The Poverty Reduction Strategy recognizes that there is much that needs to be done to help new Ontarians from falling into poverty, and to ease the circumstances of those who already have.

Ontario already provides a range of programs to help newcomers settle, build their careers, further their education and become a vital part of the community. Currently, Ontario invests \$188 million in settlement and language training programs and negotiated the first **Canada-Ontario Immigration Agreement (COIA)**, which provides an additional \$920 million in federal spending on language training and settlement services over five years. Ontario's efforts to address the barriers to immigrant economic success include settlement and language training, employment support, foreign credential recognition and bridge training. These programs aim to help newcomers gain meaningful employment and integrate successfully, thereby lifting them out of poverty.

New Ontarians often face the economic challenge of finding employment appropriate to their training and experience. Employment Ontario connects new Ontarians looking for work for through **Job Connect, Employment Assistance Services** and other programs. We provide service descriptions and assistance online and over the phone in 25 languages as well as support to cover training needs, credential recognition and literacy and basic skills. Funding is also provided to community-based not-for-profit organizations across Ontario to support new immigrants in achieving their potential through the **Newcomer Settlement Program**. The government also supports **English/French-as-a-Second Language (ESL/FSL)** programs for students and language training programs for adults.

The **Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act, 2006** is the first legislation of its kind in Canada. The act requires Ontario regulators to have a timely, fair and open registration process. **Bridge Training projects** have assisted internationally-trained nurses, pharmacists, teachers, laboratory technicians and skilled trades people, among others, to become licensed and able to work in their field in Ontario. The government also supports the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC) and other regional initiatives in mentoring new immigrants and helping them find meaningful employment.

While these initiatives do much to support our low-income newcomers and prevent these families from falling into poverty, there is still more to do. The Poverty Reduction Strategy supports immigrants in several ways. The **Ontario Child Benefit** is being enhanced to provide up to \$1,310 per year per child at maturity.

Meanwhile, **Full Day Learning for four- and five-year-olds** will help children to learn and develop and the **After School Program** will encourage children to participate in fun physical activities and learn the importance of good nutrition.

## People with Disabilities

There are currently a variety of social assistance, employment, post-secondary and housing programs available to assist people with disabilities. These include the **Ontario Disability Support Program** and the **Ontario Bursary for Students with Disabilities** which provides funding for services and equipment required to participate in post-secondary studies.

Through the **Accessibility Fund for Students with Disabilities**, our government also provides funding to colleges and universities to help post-secondary students with disabilities to receive individualized services and have access to assistive technologies. Other programs include funding for rent supplement contracts with private/non-profit landlords to set aside units for clients needing mental health supports.

The government has also made changes to the Ontario Disability Support Program to remove barriers that were keeping people with disabilities from employment, and provide more supports to help people find and keep jobs. These changes included the following:

- > The creation of a new \$100 Work-Related Expenses Benefit for each eligible adult family member who is working;
- > An increase to the Employment Start-Up Benefit from \$253 to \$500 and extended it to cover expenses for additional employment-related activities such as job searches;
- > We increased the amount recipients can claim for informal child care from \$390 to \$600 per month and extended it to cover expenses for additional employment-related activities, such as job searches, boosting a valuable support for working families;
- > We increased the maximum deduction for disability-related work expenses from \$140 to \$300 per month; and
- > We created a new Employment Transition Benefit of \$500 for recipients exiting the program with employment, training or business income, available once in a 12-month period per benefit unit.

Under **the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005** (AODA), external standards development

committees will develop standards to permit accessibility for people with a disability in the areas of:

- > Customer Service;
- > Transportation;
- > Information and Communications;
- > Built Environment; and
- > Employment.

Because of the accessibility requirements of these standards, people with a disability will find more opportunities to increase their incomes. With increased access to job opportunities, transportation, housing, greater entry to education and training people with a disability will become more integrated into everyday society.

Under the Poverty Reduction Strategy, some funding from the government's Mental Health and Addictions Strategy will be re-profiled to provide a direct component for low-income youth and adults with severe mental illness and/or substance addictions.

Finally, the proposed plan to help social assistance recipients access or contribute to the federal **Registered Disability Savings Plan** for children with disabilities will also be helpful in assisting future generations of adults with disabilities.

## Women

Breaking the cycle of poverty cannot be achieved if the dedication, resourcefulness and talent of Ontario women remain untapped.

Violence can trap women in poverty and poverty can trap women in abusive relationships. The government's **Domestic Violence Action Plan** continues to provide supports and services to assist abused women make the transition to a life free from abuse. The initial funding commitment to the Domestic Violence Action Plan was \$66 million over four years. The government has since surpassed that commitment with an \$87 million investment of new funds. We spend \$208 million annually in Violence against Women initiatives across ministries. The government understands how violence limits opportunities. That's why since 2003, we have increased funding to community-based services for abused women by 40 per cent.

An innovative pilot project called the **Domestic Violence Employment Training Pilot Project**, a component of the government's Domestic Violence Action Plan, has proved to be a successful approach for assisting abused women gain skills, training and other supports to move towards economic independence. To date, the government has invested \$4.8 million in this program. The government recognizes that more must be done. A Domestic Violence Advisory Council has been charged with the task of advising the government by March 2009, on how to improve the current system of supports and services for abused women and their children.

Under the **Social Housing Reform Act, 2000** (SHRA), the Special Priority Policy (SPP) provides priority access to rent geared to income housing for victims of abuse. Service managers are required to place eligible special priority applicants at the top of the social housing waiting list.

We continue to support the **Women in Skilled Trades** and **Information Technology Training for Women** to help low-income women who are unemployed or underemployed find jobs in well-paying careers in growing areas of the economy. Our \$355 million **Second Career Strategy** is serving 47 per cent women.

Women are at a greater risk of working in precarious work environments. Women who belong to one or more disadvantaged groups face even greater risks. This means that more women will benefit from our additional \$10 million annual investment as part of the Poverty Reduction Strategy to hire new employment standard officers and to improve *Employment Standards Act* compliance and reduce backlog.

As well, we know that the majority of single-parent households are led by women, and many of these households live in poverty, or are at risk of poverty. The strategy helps address additional challenges these families may face through initiatives such as the **Ontario Child Benefit**, **Full-Day Learning for four- and-five-year-olds** and **Parenting and Family Literacy Centres**.

## **Aboriginal Peoples**

The distinct nature of Aboriginal poverty poses unique challenges for Aboriginal peoples, and the government of Ontario has developed a number of initiatives that focus on improving the quality of life for Aboriginal Ontarians. These initiatives support the healthy development of Aboriginal children and youth in ways that respect cultural backgrounds and traditions. These initiatives include such programs as the **Urban Aboriginal Education Pilot Project**, **Ontario Aboriginal Community Justice Programs**, **Community Recreation Activator Pilot Program**, and **The Chiefs of Ontario First Nations Public Health Project**. First Nation communities have also been able to determine their own priorities for poverty alleviation through gaming revenue-sharing agreements. Individual First Nations use their revenue distributions for a variety of initiatives that pertain to community development, health, education, economic development or cultural development. While these programs do much to support Aboriginal Ontarians, the Poverty Reduction Strategy will extend supports in communities with Aboriginal populations under such programs as **Parenting and Family Literacy Centres**, the **Community Hubs Program**, the **After School Program**, and the **Youth Opportunities Strategy**.

## Seniors

While progress has been made to ensure seniors do not fall into poverty, only 3 per cent of the population 65 years and older is living in poverty – we know there is more to do.

In the 2008 Budget, we announced support to help lower-income seniors offset their property taxes:

- > \$1 billion over five years for a new **Senior Homeowners' Property Tax Grant** of up to \$500 a year by 2010 for seniors with low and moderate incomes who own their homes; and
- > \$16 million over four years to enhance the **Ontario Property and Sales Tax Credits** program to help senior couples receiving the guaranteed minimum level of income from governments obtain the full benefit of these credits this year.

The government provides other supports for seniors including the **Ontario Drug Benefit Program, Long Term Care Homes** and the **Guaranteed Annual Income System (GAINS)**. The Poverty Reduction Strategy will also provide support through the **stabilization of rent bank funding**, the **long-term affordable housing strategy** and the **Community Opportunity Fund** initiative.

## Homeless

Our homeless population is the most visible face of poverty in our communities and is often in great need. Homeless people frequently suffer from poor health, and the correlation between homelessness and mental health problems is strong.

In 2007-08, the province spent over \$170 million on **homelessness initiatives including funding for shelter beds at emergency shelters, domiciliary hostels, the Consolidated Homelessness Prevention Program** and the **Emergency Energy Fund**.

Through the **Consolidated Homelessness Prevention Program (CHPP)**, provincially-funded homelessness prevention programs assist individuals and families who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness (including those who are chronically hard-to-house).

The CHPP supports the development of a seamless program of support services to connect individuals and families to community resources and assist households experiencing or at risk of homelessness to find and maintain stable housing.

**Domiciliary hostels** offer permanent accommodation and some supports to daily living for people with special needs such as persons with mental illness, substance abuse problems, developmental disabilities and the frail elderly.

As part of the 2006 Budget, funding for domiciliary hostels was increased by \$7 million.

**Emergency hostel services** provide for board, lodging and personal needs to homeless adults, families and youth, on a short-term and infrequent basis.

# Chapter 4: Smarter Government

Currently, the Ontario government spends billions on programs related to poverty reduction in the province. Whether it's educational support for at-risk groups, employment supports, the Ontario Child Benefit, or programs for homeless people, we are already spending significant amounts of money on poverty reduction.

One of the questions we asked Ontarians on our consultation was: "How can we be smarter about the money we already spend?" We got lots of good advice, and we're prepared to act on it.

We heard many positive things about many programs, but we also heard how confusing it was to access – or even be aware of – these programs.

We also heard that the confusing nature of the programs made it difficult for those wanting to volunteer or contribute financially to know where best to do this.

People living in poverty often need to access a number of different supports and programs. For example, a single mom might need to access Ontario Works, subsidized child care, employment supports and housing. Her child might need access to recreation programs.

But we found that programs sometimes operate in isolation from each other, with little regard for how they could, or should, work together to support someone needing help.

It's time to put the needs and aspirations of people in poverty at the forefront and ensure that every tax dollar we invest is spent where it will make a real difference, and that we put in place systems that support the transition out of poverty.

## Social Assistance Review

The government of Ontario has a number of programs that support low-income people. From social assistance to housing support to employment programs, or others, our programs are designed to help people when other options are unavailable.

Our programs do not operate independently and there is sometimes overlap across programs and across ministries. For example, rules about Ontario Works interact with the rules for Rent Geared to Income Housing, and the rules for OSAP interact with the rules for ODSP.





On the whole, these programs provide valuable support for people, whether in the area of affordable housing, income supports, going back to school or seeking employment. Generally, the programs improve opportunities for people, and for many, they are just the thing they need to get through a challenging transition.

We acknowledge that the rules of these programs are complex, and that, especially when an individual is accessing more than one program, the rules can at times inhibit the transition to independence. Whether this is because of difficult to understand rules, or programs that inadvertently work against each other – for example, making it difficult to go to school while on social assistance – these unintended consequences lead us to the conclusion that a review of social assistance is needed.

We need to make sure that the programs meet their objective to support people during the time that they need help and to support those who are able in the transition to economic independence. That transition may require education and skills development, or it may involve building attachment to the labour force through part-time employment or self-employment.

We will also continue to build on the progress we have made since 2003 to improve the incomes of those Ontarians in low-income, including those on social assistance.

## What's New:

We will undertake a review of social assistance with the goal of removing barriers and increasing opportunity – with a particular focus on people trying to move into employment from social assistance. The review will seek to better align social assistance and other key programs and initiatives, better communicate program rules and ensure that programs as a collective work to achieve the aims of increasing opportunity for the individual.

## What We Have Already Done – Rule Changes

The government has been working since 2003 to restore integrity to Ontario's social assistance system. The government has introduced improvements to Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program to help recipients and their families move into the workforce and break the cycle of intergenerational poverty. Some of the key improvements that have been made include:

- > Social assistance recipients keep more of what they earn through a straight exemption rate of 50 per cent on employment and training income;
- > Drug, dental and vision care benefits have been extended to cover people leaving social assistance for employment. This helps eliminate a common disincentive to job-searching while on social assistance;
- > Improved employment benefits of up to \$500 to help offset costs, such as transportation, related to getting started in a new job;
- > The maximum deduction for informal child care costs has been increased from \$390 to \$600 per month per child to provide another child care option for working parents;
- > Inadequate access to transportation is a key barrier to employment for some social assistance recipients. If people cannot get to work, they cannot work. The government has increased the maximum limit on the value of a primary motor vehicle under Ontario Works from \$5,000 to \$10,000. Additional vehicles required to maintain employment or participation in employment assistance activities are also exempt up to a value of \$10,000 under Ontario Works. ODSP recipients do not have a maximum limit on the value of a primary vehicle. Additional vehicles required to maintain employment are exempt up to a value of \$15,000 under ODSP;
- > Caseworkers, recipients and community groups told the government that some people on Ontario Works were reluctant to take a job because of the "Quit/Fire rule". This rule stated that if recipients quit their job or were fired, they could lose financial support for three or six months. The government eliminated this barrier to employment by removing this rule; and
- > The federal Working Income Tax Benefit (WITB), the Universal Child Care Benefit (UCCB) and National Child Benefit Supplement (NCBS) and the provincial Ontario Child Benefit (OCB) payments are passed through to all eligible social assistance recipients without penalty.

Other changes have also been made to encourage young people to finish high school and save for future education:

- > Exempting as income and assets the earnings of dependent adults who are in high school full-time to allow them to save and plan for future education costs; and
- > Exempting as assets Registered Education Savings Plans (RESPs).

Much has been accomplished through these changes, but we know that more needs to be done. We want to help provide Ontarians the tools and opportunities they need to reach their full potential.

### Immediate Rule Changes

There are three social assistance rules that will be changed immediately to support the goal of breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty. The first change removes a barrier to post-secondary education faced by social assistance recipients.

#### What's New:

As part of the Poverty Reduction Strategy, we will fully exempt as income the earnings of persons on social assistance who are participating in post-secondary education.

The second rule change extends child care supports to low-income families to support their transition from social assistance to work.

#### What's New:

We will extend the Up-Front Child Care Benefit to participants who may require support to maintain their participation in employment and employment assistance activities. This change will also benefit young parents participating in the Learning, Earning and Parenting (LEAP) program under Ontario Works.

The third rule change will extend the time period that social assistance applicants and recipients have to request an internal review by staff of an appealable decision regarding their assistance.

#### What's New:

We will extend the time period to request an internal review from 10 days to 30 days.

### Person-Centred Approach

People living in poverty often require multiple forms of supports, either from government, agencies or other community groups. In most cases, these programs work extremely well to support people.

During the consultations, we heard from those who were concerned that our programs and services are sometimes delivered through silos and that this makes accessing supports difficult for the people who need them.

Research has shown that using a person-centred approach to program implementation would enable more efficient and targeted programming and facilitate better client outcomes. We need a better understanding of the interaction of programs across government, how we can break down silos, remove barriers, overlap and inconsistencies, and where possible, make changes so that desired outcomes are being achieved.

#### What's New:

We will undertake to look at our programs with a person-centred approach in order to give us an improved understanding of how to better align our programs so they address the issues of those they are designed to help. This work will begin in early 2009.

### Social Policy Institute

The battle against poverty requires more than a desire to help and a willingness to invest. As noted above, it is often less a question of how *much* you spend than how *well* you spend.

If Ontario is to bring poverty rates down over the long term, the province must continually be looking for new and innovative ways of improving both the province's economic and social advantage. We must weigh the costs of programs against the benefits of programs, both in the short and longer terms.

## What's New:

As part of the Poverty Reduction Strategy, the government will create an independent Social Policy Institute.

Highlights of the Institute's activities will include:

- > Evaluating social policy, including economic evaluation;
- > Identifying best practices in other jurisdictions for use in Ontario; and
- > Working with international experts to develop innovation roadmaps for Ontario in specific areas of competitive strength, social policy and economic importance.

## Social Innovation

We know that to be successful in reducing poverty in the province, we will have to pursue innovative and creative ways of doing things. The solution will require more than government interventions. Government will play a key role, but this role will need to be rounded out by support and collaboration with other partners.

### Success Stories

**Social Capital Partners** invests in social enterprises that employ populations outside the economic mainstream in Canada in order to improve their social outcomes and financial self-sufficiency. Social Capital Partners also focus on recent immigrants to Canada who have displayed entrepreneurial and management capabilities before arriving in Canada. SCP invests in new immigrants that are perceived to lack the requisite skills, credit history, networks or access to capital that would allow them to succeed in Canada.

[www.socialcapitalpartners.ca](http://www.socialcapitalpartners.ca)

## Procurement

As we have learned, low-income Ontarians have an abundance of talent, drive and capacity – but sometimes barriers are put in place, or the opportunity is denied to develop this talent. Social Enterprises are a unique business model capitalizing on the skill of low-income Ontarians. Numerous examples in Ontario of this model are in place,

where vulnerable people are hired to work in companies or organizations, giving them a job, new skills and meaningful connections in their community.

## What's New:

As part of the Poverty Reduction Strategy, by the end of 2009, the government will develop and implement a Sustainable Procurement Strategy. This strategy will include social procurement factors, including social enterprises. Pilot projects will be launched at the Ministry of Children and Youth Services for local courier and printing services needs.

## Social Innovation Generation (SiG)

As part of our government's ongoing collaboration with MaRS, we have invested \$6 million over four years to support Social Innovation Generation (SiG). SiG links the McDonnell Family Foundation with MaRS, the University of Waterloo and the BC-based PLAN Institute to look at what connections must be made to transform an idea into a positive outcome for society – and how that process can be both supported and accelerated.

## What's New:

As part of our Poverty Reduction Strategy, the government will further encourage social investment, innovation and collaboration.

We will:

- > Develop a website that will profile social businesses and provide details on the social, ethical and environmental benefits they generate;
- > Conduct a feasibility study on the potential of creating a Social Investment Exchange based in Toronto, in partnership with the Toronto Stock Exchange and the Ontario Association of Food Banks; and
- > In partnership with SiG, we will explore the community interest company (CIC) model being pursued in the UK and determine if it is appropriate and feasible in Ontario.

As a down payment to the Poverty Reduction Strategy, we committed \$20 million to develop a Social Venture Capital Fund that will find innovative solutions to difficult social problems and improve social outcomes by:

- > Providing emerging, innovative social ventures with funding to attract private investments or develop private sector partnerships, and operate in a sustainable manner; and
- > Developing new, successful strategies for investing in Ontario-focused social ventures in order to help increase the level of institutional, private and corporate investment.

## Success Stories

### 211:

211 is a free, non-emergency information and referral telephone service for community, social, health and related government services such as food banks, homeless shelters, nursing homes, employment centres and children's services.

In 2006, the government began supporting the United Way and its partners who operate the system with \$4.4 million to support start-up costs and website development.

The government announced in the 2008 Budget an investment of more than \$13 million over four years to expand the 211 system. From 2012 onwards, the government will provide annualized funding of \$4 million to maintain the 211 service.

211 helps a wide range of Ontarians to easily access the services they need. 211 improves customer service and makes it easier for Ontarians to reach diverse services such as connecting to affordable housing programs and shelters, re-training programs and support for families in crisis. [www.211toronto.ca](http://www.211toronto.ca)

### Bridges Ventures

**Bridges Ventures** in the United Kingdom is a privately owned asset fund management company. It invests in business ventures in the most deprived parts of the UK and/or social businesses that commit to – for example:

- > Employing out of work people;
- > Under-employed women; and
- > Investing in businesses with strong social benefits in sectors such as healthcare, education and the environment.

Bridges Ventures has made equity investments in 24 businesses employing 700 people, almost 200 of whom came out of unemployment. [www.bridgesventures.com](http://www.bridgesventures.com)

# Chapter 5: Measuring Our Progress

Experience in other areas of government has shown that the first thing to do when you want to improve something is to measure it. The government's approach in areas like health care wait times or providing services for birth certificates and licences have shown that when you start measuring outcomes, services and programs improve. And if they don't – it informs decision making about how to make that happen.

Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy will apply the same approach. Reducing poverty and improving opportunity, while complicated, is something that we can measure. Experience in other jurisdictions like the United Kingdom and New Zealand shows that it is not enough to build a plan around a series of initiatives – you have to measure your progress, report on your progress, and adjust where necessary down the road.

A central component of this strategy is a target towards which to drive, and a series of indicators against which to measure our progress. The target and indicators outlined below will make Ontario an international leader in measuring success in poverty reduction.

## **“25 in 5” – A Bold But Achievable Target**

The target for Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy – consistent with the strategy's initial focus on children – is to reduce the number of kids living in poverty by 25 per cent over the next 5 years. This strategy will improve the standard of living for all children and families living in poverty across the province, and will lift 90,000 Ontario children out of poverty.

## **What's New:**

**The Poverty Reduction Strategy commits to reducing the number of children living in poverty by 25 per cent over 5 years.**

This target is bold, but achievable, and will have benefits for all Ontarians.

This target shows bold leadership in the fight against poverty in Ontario. As a government, as communities, and as individuals, Ontario will do its part to meet this goal. But we cannot do it alone. The federal government must play a significant role, through the various levers it has at its disposal, in achieving the target. Meeting this target will also depend on a growing economy. Specifically, we are asking the federal government to work with us by taking the following actions:

1. Double the amount of the Working Income Tax Benefit, a refundable tax credit available to low-income individuals or families, to \$2,000 a year per family.
2. Increase the National Child Benefit Supplement by \$1,200 per child.



## The Indicators

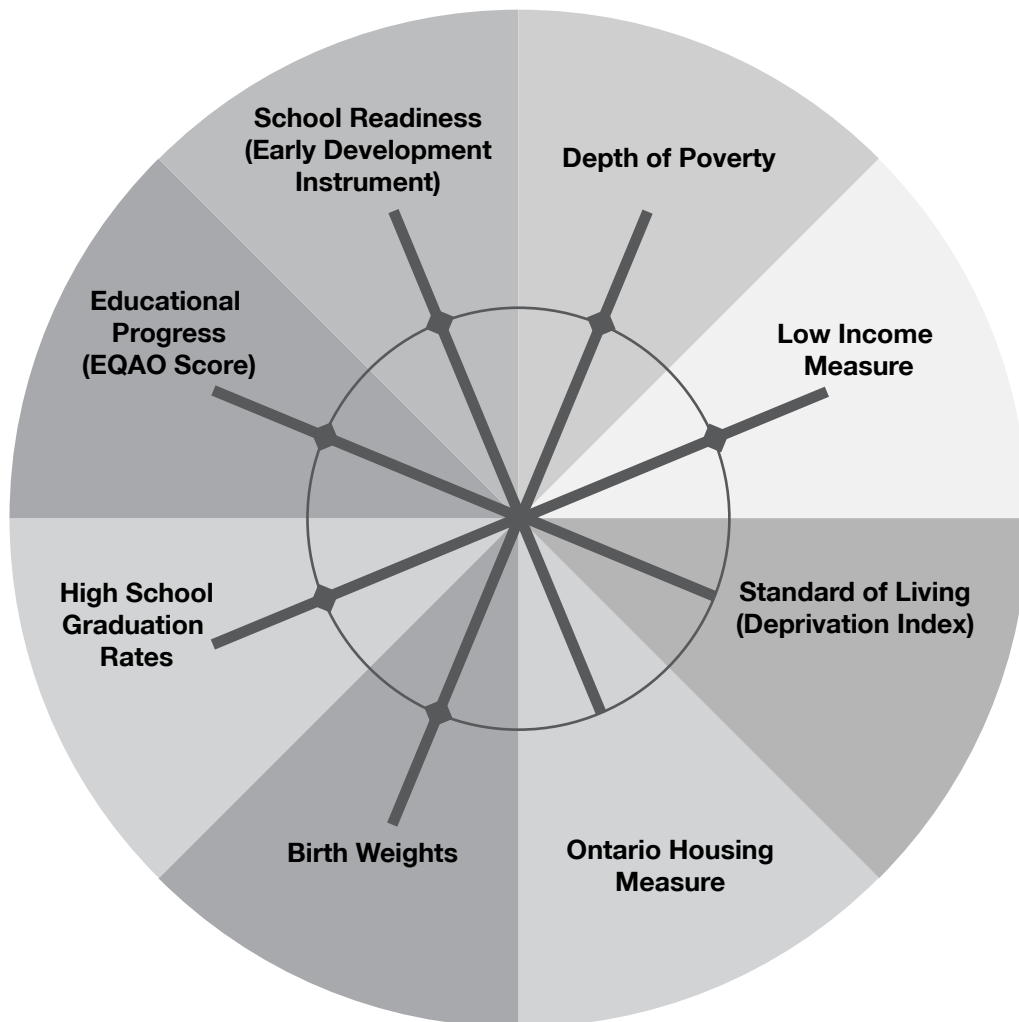
A long-term plan to reduce poverty requires a comprehensive set of indicators against which to measure our progress. In the short-term, the strategy will focus on putting money in families' pockets, making work pay and changing the way that government works. Progress on these initiatives is easier to measure – it's either happening, or it's not.

Breaking the cycle of poverty, by its very nature, is a long-term goal requiring a thoughtful, comprehensive plan, and measuring progress on this requires a broad, multi-pronged approach. This is why we have chosen a set of eight indicators against which to measure our progress, which, when measured together, will show whether or not we are moving closer to the goal of breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty.

We know that the best tool for breaking the cycle is education. This is why we are making significant investments in this area – and why we will measure our progress in ensuring that kids are ready to learn, able to learn and graduating. In addition, our remaining indicators will reflect the other key components influencing the capacity for kids to reach their potential – adequate housing, good health and sufficient incomes for their families. Taken together, these measures will paint a clear picture of how Ontario is doing at breaking the cycle. It will show where progress is being made, and point out where more work is needed.



## Child and Youth Opportunity Wheel



Note: The Ontario Housing Measure and the Standard of Living indicators are under development and therefore do not yet have a baseline.

The approach shown in the diagram – the Child and Youth Opportunity Wheel – presents a simple and accessible visual presentation of where the province finds itself at any given time in the future, in terms of its progress on the eight indicators. As the availability and quality of indicators and other measurement tools increases, new indicators can be added to the wheel, improving its comprehensiveness and reliability.

These indicators will measure how the strategy is working. The inside circle is where we are right now for each of the indicators on the wheel. It represents our ‘baseline data’.

The spokes going out from the centre will measure our progress each year. Where a spoke extends past the inner circle, this means outcomes have improved. The further from the circle, the larger the improvement. Where a spoke falls inside the circle, outcomes have deteriorated.

These spokes are just an illustration for now. Next year we will have new data so we can compare and see how we’ve done.

### **Measure #1: School Readiness**

**Indicator:** Early Development Instrument

**Description:** A population-measure of children's readiness-to-learn at school based on a representative sample of children from across the province. Administered in Senior Kindergarten, it measures children's readiness to learn at school in five domains: physical health and well being; social competence; emotional maturity; language and cognitive development; and general knowledge and communication skills.

**Rationale:** Research demonstrates that a child's readiness to learn at age five is a predictor of future ability in school.

**Baseline:** For 2003-2006, 72.7% of children showed no vulnerabilities in any of the five key areas of readiness-to-learn at school.

---

### **Measure #2: Educational Progress**

**Indicator:** EQAO Score

**Description:** The score is based on a provincial assessment of student achievement against curriculum expectations. The indicator will reflect the overall scores on the Grade 6 reading, writing and math assessments.

**Rationale:** Success and improvement in these scores will reflect better student achievement results in elementary schools and contribute to improved future educational outcomes.

**Baseline:** For the 2007-08 assessment year, 65% of Grade 6 students are at or above the provincial standard on EQAO Assessments.

---

### **Measure #3: High School Graduation Rates**

**Indicator:** Graduation Rates

**Description:** Represents the percentage of high school students who have earned an Ontario Secondary School Diploma, in each graduating year. Ontario's graduation rate measures the percentage of students who graduated within five years after having started Grade 9 together.

**Rationale:** High school graduation is an important predictor of a student's future earning power and ability to succeed in college or university.

**Baseline:** For the 2006-07 year, the high school graduation rate in Ontario was 75%.

---

### **Measure #4: Birth Weights**

**Indicator:** Healthy Birth Weights

**Description:** The percentage of newborns born at a healthy weight for their gestational age.

**Rationale:** Research indicates that babies born to low-income families more often have below normal birth weights, which can put them at a higher risk for poor future health outcomes.

**Baseline:** 80% of Ontario-born babies were born at a healthy weight from 2004-2006.



**Measure #5: Depth of Poverty**

**Indicator:** Low Income Measure (40%)

**Description:** The percentage of children under 18 living in a family with an income less than 40% of the median adjusted family income in 2008.

**Rationale:** This indicator describes the number of people living in deep poverty.

**Baseline:** 9.2% of children live in families with incomes below this level in 2005.\*  
90.8% of children live in families with incomes above this level in 2005.\*

---

**Measure #6: Low Income Measure**

**Indicator:** Low Income Measure (50%)

**Description:** The percentage of children under 18 living in a family with an income less than 50% of the median adjusted family income.

**Rationale:** This indicator describes the number of people living below a measure of income.

**Baseline:** 12.3% of children live in families with incomes below this level in 2005.\*  
87.7% of children live in families with incomes above this level in 2005.\*

---

**Measure #7: Ontario Housing Measure**

**Indicator:** Housing Measure

**Description:** This indicator is currently under development. When completed, it will measure the percentage of Ontarians with access to stable and affordable housing.

**Rationale:** Access to adequate, stable, affordable housing is pivotal to a child's emotional and mental well being and contributes significantly to their ability to achieve academic goals.

**Baseline:** As a new measure, no baseline data currently exists.

---

**Measure #8: Standard of Living**

**Indicator:** Deprivation Index

**Description:** This indicator would determine the number of households in the province with access to an acceptable standard of living. The measure identifies a household as "lacking necessities" if one or more of a list of items is involuntarily absent from the household. This indicator is currently under development in partnership with the Daily Bread Food Bank and Statistics Canada.

**Rationale:** This goes a step further than traditional income measures. It measures the daily reality of living in poverty. It includes the basic needs an average family would have, as well as other components, including social inclusion and participation. It will position Ontario as a leader in measuring poverty, similar to the Deprivation Index used in Ireland.

**Baseline:** As a new indicator, no baseline data currently exists.

\* Data based on available statistics provided by Statistics Canada

# Chapter 6: Moving Forward

## Legislation

The Ontario government is serious about its commitment to reducing poverty. That is why we intend to introduce legislation in spring 2009 to enshrine our ongoing commitment to a long-term strategy. If passed by the Legislative Assembly, this would be another way in which Ontario would be a leader in poverty reduction.

The government intends to propose legislation that would formalize our commitment to measuring and publicly reporting on progress and to the ongoing engagement of stakeholders and the public.

## Annual Reporting

Every year we will report back to Ontarians on the indicators of opportunity.

As initiatives are implemented, they will have a direct impact on the specific indicators chosen to measure improvements for people living in poverty. As a result, the public and the government can assess progress on an ongoing basis.

Annual reports will enable us to accurately reflect on what we have achieved, what works or what doesn't work, and how we can move forward to help Ontarians better fulfill their potential.

## Ongoing Dialogue

We remain committed to continuing to engage people living in poverty, experts and organizations. Hearing their advice is essential in building both a successful strategy that is relevant to real needs, and stronger communities that can make a difference in peoples' lives.

We will build on the success of our 14 roundtables held across the province by further engaging with people in their communities at the halfway point of the five year target to make sure the plan is on track.

## Implementation

A Cabinet-level committee will be tasked with implementing the Poverty Reduction Strategy and will be supported by a dedicated secretariat.

This team will seek advice from external experts and will be responsible for overseeing:

- > Implementation decisions;
- > Annual reporting on progress; and
- > Ongoing consultations with key stakeholders and the public.



# Chapter 7: The Federal Role

We are calling on the federal government to increase their support to the NCBS and WITB programs. We are also calling on them to:

1. Address the shortcomings of the Employment Insurance (EI) program to better meet the needs of Ontario workers who are making the transition to expanding areas of the economy. In 2007, average EI regular benefits per unemployed person were about \$5,120 in Ontario and \$9,750 in the other provinces – a difference of \$4,630 per unemployed person. Across Ontario, this shortfall in EI benefits amounted to \$2.1 billion in 2007.

We also continue to ask the federal government to supplement EI support for unemployed workers in the manufacturing sector by providing them with targeted training resources. Ontario workers were short-changed by a total of \$478 million in 2007 in the training and other employment support provided through EI.

2. Enter into a renewed Early Learning and Child Care Agreement with the provinces to permit the expansion and improvement of high quality child care. In spite of the cancellation of the original agreement, Ontario has made substantial progress by supporting the creation of 22,000 new child care spaces.

3. Deliver on their commitment to continue the 2005 Affordable Housing Program (to sunset in 2010) providing federal, provincial and municipal funds of over \$776 million to generate approximately 22,000 affordable housing units in Ontario.
4. Join provinces and First Nations, Métis and Inuit in committing to a sustained ten-year effort to close the gap in quality of life between Aboriginal peoples and other Canadians as originally promised in the Kelowna accord. This effort would be focussed in the following areas as set out in the Accord: education, off-reserve housing, economic opportunities and health.
5. Establish equality in education funding for students on-reserve.

## What's New:

We are calling on the federal government to host a summit that would bring together governments, the private sector, the non-profit sector and unions to discuss Employment Insurance modernization and how the program could be changed to better address the needs of the population and economy in terms of poverty and productivity.



# Chapter 8: The Municipal Role

We are not, however, simply looking to Ottawa. Just as we all have a stake in reducing poverty, we all have a responsibility to play our part.

Municipal governments are closest to their communities and have tools to respond to the needs of communities. We are asking them to show leadership by putting their resources toward poverty reduction.

Based on our consultations, there are two areas where we think municipalities have an opportunity to make an important contribution: transportation and recreation. In community after community, lack of access to public transportation was a significant issue we heard about from people living in poverty; people simply could not afford to take the bus. That means that they are unable to apply for jobs or access resources that are there for them and their children. Some municipalities, like North Bay and Niagara, have shown leadership in this area. We encourage municipalities to look to other jurisdictions for best practices.

Another very common theme from our consultations was the difficulty people had accessing resources and services, given that different resources were located so far apart from each other. We frequently heard of the value of co-locating services close to where people live. We're asking municipal governments to work with us to explore the creation of service hubs that offer a range of supports in accessible locations.

The Provincial-Municipal Fiscal Service Delivery Report (PMFSDR) announced that we are committed to moving to upload all social assistance benefits and court security costs from municipalities. As a final result of the PMFSDR, the province is taking back responsibility for funding not only the Ontario Drug Benefit (ODB) and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), but also Ontario Works (OW) benefits as well as court security. By 2018, when the uploads of the ODB, ODSP and OW benefits are fully implemented, municipalities province-wide will receive \$1.5 billion more in annual benefits than they received in March 2007. This funding would be available to address other municipal priorities.



If we have learned one thing through the process of creating this strategy, it is the tremendous value of community engagement. The experience of many successful municipalities has shown us that a great deal of energy and passion exists at the community level – it just needs to be ignited.

Several communities across the province have demonstrated tremendous leadership by mobilizing all sectors in the community around the common cause of reducing poverty in their community. Sometimes these tables have been initiated by the municipal government, and in other places they have been initiated by the United Way, the Community Foundation, or other organizations prepared to play a leadership role.

What all the successful tables have in common is that they have invited a full range of community members to be involved in the reduction of poverty. Business leaders have engaged with community agencies, activists and local governments to coordinate local efforts to reduce poverty. Many communities have already made tangible progress in the fight against poverty. We are challenging all communities to come together to reduce poverty in their community. The Community Opportunities Fund will help support this important work.

# Chapter 9: All Hands on Deck

Everyone has a role to play in reducing poverty. We are calling on our business community to play a role in poverty reduction. One way to do that is by offering employment experience to people living in poverty. We need our businesses to hire youth at risk, people with disabilities, Aboriginal peoples and immigrants seeking the opportunity to put their skills to work. Some employers have done exactly this because they realize that the business potential that exists in these groups is untapped.

We are also asking businesses and other non-government organizations to engage in their communities – to sit at the table and to help develop local solutions.

We need all Ontarians playing their part in realizing the vision of this strategy. Of creating a place where every person has the opportunity to achieve his or her full potential and contribute to and participate in a prosperous healthy and just Ontario.

We are asking you to play your part. The possibilities are endless. If you can read, you can teach someone else to read. If you are a caring adult, you can mentor a child. If you are involved in an organization, think about how you might open it up to people in poverty.

Over the past year, we have heard many heart-warming stories about how individuals are doing their part to reduce poverty. We have heard from children who are asking their friends to bring a present for a child living in poverty to their birthday party instead of bringing a present for the birthday girl or boy. We have heard from parents who make sure that every student in their child's classroom has the chance to participate in special events. These people serve as an inspiration to all of us.

Everyone has a valuable role to play, and that includes you. Sometimes, it doesn't matter where you start. If we all do our part, we will achieve our goal.

