

Putting People First in Waterloo Region:

A Comprehensive Community Initiative for Poverty
Prevention & Reduction

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PREAMBLE

Waterloo Region has the distinction of being the birthplace of the Vibrant Communities concept. Between 1997 and 2000, a Millennium project known as Opportunities 2000 (OP2000) gave community partners the chance to try out a new way of addressing poverty issues – a comprehensive approach based on the power of combined thought and action. As Paul Born, Mark Cabaj and Louise Kearney moved on to consolidate their OP2000 learnings into a framework for Vibrant Communities, Opportunities underwent a year-long organizational shift.

Renamed Opportunities Waterloo Region (Opportunities) in 2002, incorporating in January 2003 and gaining charitable status in April 2004, the revitalized, evolving initiative has built a solid relationship base and moved into many new areas of activity. It developed a new aspiration (included in this document) and began to develop multi-sector, collaborative project initiatives; research possible focus areas based on community input; and/or publish evaluation documents, including:

- 1.) Guaranteed Income Supplement Initiative (Collaborating to Reduce Poverty Among Seniors in Waterloo Region, 2003 found at http://www.owr.ca/oldfiles/GIS%20Report%20op2000_gis.pdf)
- 2.) Sustainable Livelihood Approach pilot project (Putting People First: Exploring the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach in Waterloo Region, 2004 found at <http://www.owr.ca/oldfiles/Putting%20People%20First%20Final%20Report.pdf>)
- 3.) Evaluation of the Community Action Team, Community Engagement and the Medicine Wheel, 2004 found at <http://www.owr.ca/oldfiles/Medicine%20Wheel%20Complete.pdf>)
- 4.) Living Wage Campaign (initiated in 2003, continued after 2004).
- 5.) Increasing Employment Opportunities for people facing challenges to employment - Social Purchasing Portal initiated in 2005
- 6.) Youth poverty prevention (Youth Education for Success) – implemented in January, 2005 and continues today; Access to Recreation for ALL Youth initiated in 2007 (final report of mapping process - Access to Recreation for ALL Youth in Waterloo Region: An Environmental Scan of Recreation and Leisure Opportunities for Youth, 2008 found at http://www.owr.ca/ARRAY_FINAL.pdf)
- 7.) Addressing food security through Community Gardens and piloting neighbourhood markets 2007
- 8.) Addressing policy 2007/2008

We ignited community action and leadership and continue to engage the community with renewed momentum!

In 2008, in preparation for becoming a Vibrant Communities Trail Builder, Opportunities' leaders came together to re-affirm their vision for reducing & preventing poverty in Waterloo Region, and to develop a comprehensive community plan to guide the work until 2011. A planning group was formed with representation from the Leadership Roundtable, ALIV(e), Board of Directors, and staff. The plan includes recommendations and feedback gleaned from the community. Opportunities plays the convener role for this comprehensive community initiative.

We are mindful of the initiatives that we ignite, develop and facilitate, keeping in mind the Sustainable Livelihood Approach and its five-asset pentagon. We're grateful for the opportunity to articulate the work we are doing, and plan to do, through the process of becoming a Vibrant Communities Canada Trail Builder.

Why we use the Sustainable Livelihood Approach?

In 2002, the Leadership Roundtable of Opportunities Waterloo Region (Opportunities) adopted a model known as the *Sustainable Livelihood Approach* (SLA) in its pursuit of the reduction and prevention of poverty in the Region of Waterloo. A commitment was made to share the concept with the community. Since then, Opportunities has endeavoured to incorporate the SLA in its own work and increase community awareness of the approach.

In 2003, Opportunities piloted a one year project to explore the use of the SLA in an urban setting. One of the key outcomes of the project was the increased perception of personal empowerment expressed by many participants in the final feedback. Frequently participants stated that "it helped them to view their lives differently." They began to examine their own lives through the lens of strengths and assets (MacKeigan, 2004).

Opportunities Waterloo Region continued to employ the SLA principles and framework as its model for thinking about, discussing and advocating for poverty prevention and reduction. We realize that this approach is extremely complex and we will continue our exploration of it over the next three years.

We by no means consider ourselves experts in the SLA. One of the findings from the 2003 SLA pilot project was that the more we learned about it, the more we realized what we didn't know! However, because of our existing knowledge base, we will be better able to utilize the approach in our planning and implementation stages. We plan to advance the learning and deepen our understanding of the complexities of the SLA and comprehensive solutions, all in a collaborative setting. We will advance our ability to apply the model as we learn from it. We hope then to compile our findings as a reference for other communities and to learn and share results with Vibrant Communities Canada.

What is the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach as we define it?

The SLA provides us with a way to think and talk about the complexities of poverty. This helps us to act in a comprehensive way to develop effective approaches to these complexities (including viewing and planning actions at the individual, family, household levels). Viewed from a holistic asset-based perspective, it provides us with principles for conducting these activities that act as a guide to ensure that integrity is maintained.

The SLA framework includes the Asset Pentagon, which represents five asset areas. These are the areas in which a person's strengths and assets can help them to lead a full and healthy life. The five asset areas are Human, Social, Physical, Personal, and Financial. Strengths must be increased or built in each of these asset areas for a sustainable livelihood to be achieved and maintained, although not necessarily all at once. Also, change in one asset will likely impact one or more other asset areas. For example, the value of recreation can be seen in human, social and personal asset areas.

When the pentagon is used at the individual level, the person decides on assets s/he'd like to increase or build in all five areas. When we used the asset pentagon at the community level, gaps were identified from various sources and elements were selected that fit into all of the five asset areas.

For further details on the SLA, see Appendix IV.

LOCAL CONTEXT: Poverty in the Midst of Prosperity

The Region of Waterloo is composed of two layers of government, regional and municipal. Three cities and four townships are included in the Region, and each has separate municipal governments. There are the Cities of Cambridge, Kitchener and Waterloo, plus the Townships of North Dumfries, Wellesley, Wilmot, and Woolwich. The population of Waterloo Region is 478,121 (Statistics Canada, 2008). When post-secondary students are included, this population swells to 507,000 (Region of Waterloo, n.d.).

Poverty and Prosperity

The Region of Waterloo is a successful area, with a booming IT sector. World-renowned companies such as RIM are based here, along with significant academic contributions from two universities and a college. These are University of Waterloo, Wilfrid Laurier University, and Conestoga College. The median income, at \$29,449 is higher than the provincial or federal equivalents (\$27,258 and \$25,615 respectively) (Statistics Canada, 2008). The manufacturing sector is a significant force in the Region, as the largest employer. This sector employs 22% of the employed population, or over 60,000 workers (Statistics Canada, 2008).

In spite of this prosperity, 10.2% of the population, or about 50,000 people, live in poverty (as defined by the LICO) (Statistics Canada, 2008). With regard to the manufacturing sector, the heavy reliance on this sector for employment raises substantial concerns with the decline of the manufacturing sector in Canada and Ontario in general. Furthermore, this prosperity contributes to the gap between the rich and poor. The average income of the richest decile is 18.6 times that of the average income of the poorest decile (Kitchener and Waterloo Community Foundation & Cambridge & North Dumfries Community Foundation, 2007). Using data from the Urban Poverty Consortium of Waterloo Region (2000), the average earnings of Canadian poor families is 5 times less than the average earning of all Canadian families. In the Region of Waterloo, the average poor family earnings are 7 times less than the regional average. The average earnings of poor Canadian individuals is 4 times less than the average of all Canadian individuals, while the average poor individual in Waterloo Region earned 5 times less than the average individual in the Region. Income inequality in the Region of Waterloo is worse than the Canadian average.

Opportunities Waterloo Region has worked for several years on a living wage campaign. We have calculated a very modest hourly living wage in our region to be \$13.62 (Opportunities Waterloo Region, 2007). Almost one third of our employed population makes less than this wage. Many, 7%, do not even reach an equivalent wage of \$8.00/hr (ibid.). When calculated as a yearly salary, a living wage is \$28,333. This compares to a LICO of \$18,260 (Statistics Canada, 2007).

Table 1– Wage Comparison between Minimum Wage, LICO, and Living Wage

Wage Comparison for a Single Person in Waterloo Region	Based on 40 hours per week for 52 weeks per year	
	Annual Salary	Hourly Salary
Current Minimum Wage	\$18,200	\$8.75
Poverty Line (LICO)	\$18,260	\$8.78
Estimated, modest Living Wage average for the tri-cities (2007)	\$23,333	\$13.62

As shown in Table 1, the current minimum wage of \$8.75/hr falls short of the wage required to reach the LICO working full-year, full-time by three cents per hour. These statistics highlight the existence of the working poor in our region. The employment rate of all individuals 15 years and older is 67.6% (Statistics Canada, 2008), leaving the other third of the population in even more dire circumstances.

Regional Government Involvement in Poverty Issues

Waterloo Region is fortunate to have a progressive regional government. A representative from each of Public Health and Social Services sit on Opportunities’ Leadership Roundtable. The Region maintains a poverty focus in much of its work and the following is but a few examples of their many contributions. They are currently conducting research into the implementation of a living wage policy. They include poverty considerations in many of their research papers, including those on the social determinants of health, food security, and housing and homelessness. Moreover, the regional government focuses on collaboration, and conducts community consultations prior to making decisions. They are a strong, collaborative partner in poverty prevention and reduction endeavours.

Community Involvement in Poverty Issues

Many networks and groups exist in the region tackling a variety of social service issues. Their focus areas cover broad topics including children, crime prevention, literacy, employment, homelessness, food security, immigration, and religion. Some have a broad focus that covers a variety of issues.

No coordinated effort to address poverty prevention and reduction currently exists among these networks, organizations and groups. Each is at a different level of involvement with poverty issues, covering the spectrum from a strong focus, to a sub-focus as related to their target population, to no involvement at all. As well, varying levels of collaboration between the networks and groups exist. Although the networks tend to work in silos, significant cross-over in attendance at meetings occurs. This points to high potential for further collaboration.

DEFINITION OF POVERTY, REDUCTION, AND PREVENTION

On turning to the issue of a pertinent definition of poverty, we looked at a wide variety of established views, some simple and others more complex. We decided that a comprehensive, holistic definition was more in tune with many of the underlying beliefs and guiding principles of this community, and aligns well with the Sustainable Livelihoods and Vibrant Communities approaches.

We have chosen then to define poverty from the individual's or family's needs set in the necessary framework of the existing community: **Poverty occurs when individuals and families lack, firstly, financial and other resources to maintain a sustainable standard of living, and secondly, resources that provide for participation in community life.** We included "financial" separate from "other resources" to emphasize that poverty is a lot about a lack of economic resources. However, we know that all asset areas need to be strengthened or created in a person's life (although not necessarily all at once) in order to develop and sustain a livelihood. A sustainable standard of living is a level of income which allows for all the needs to be met in maintaining dignity, safety, well-being and participation in the life of the community. Community life is the wide range of activities and involvement that an inclusive and civil society can provide.

A SLA notion is that all five asset areas need to move forward in an individual's life in order to achieve and maintain a sustainable livelihood. In keeping with this notion, we define **poverty reduction** not only as the activities undertaken to move individuals and families out of poverty, but also those activities that provide opportunities for people to take a step forward towards a sustainable livelihood in one or more of the five asset areas. **Poverty prevention** is the activities undertaken to support people to either break the cycle of poverty or not enter it at all in the same fashion.

For further details on the rationale for choosing this definition of poverty, see Appendix I.

ASPIRATION

Opportunities Waterloo Region's mission is to ignite community action and leadership to create bold solutions that reduce and prevent poverty through collaboration, advocacy and education. It seeks to build on existing assets and thereby increase the community's capacity to do more while sustaining work already under way. Opportunities acts as a regional convener – a community connector and support organization. It facilitates poverty prevention and reduction efforts by providing opportunities for the community to generate ideas and take action.

Opportunities Waterloo Region will assume three key roles – network facilitator, policy research and communications strategy lead, and project management. It is important to note that Opportunities staff see project management as an interim activity only. Opportunities may choose to launch and manage new initiatives, but by also acting as a community support organization, its members seek to turn over emerging projects to existing or newly-created groups as soon as the work can be managed effectively.

Our current aspiration offers many opportunities for comprehensive, holistic solutions towards increasing and building assets in all five areas of the SLA's asset pentagon.

A Community of Opportunity! *We have a vision of a caring community with social and economic well-being for all where...*

- *people care about each other;*
- *children are cherished;*
- *diversity is valued;*
- *food, housing and health care are secure and affordable;*
- *employment is meaningful and adequately compensated;*
- *education and training are available life long;*
- *opportunities for participation in community life are accessible and abundant.*

It takes an entire community to make this vision a reality. Residents, businesses, and voluntary and public sector organizations create innovative opportunities and solutions.

We all have a part to play.

This aspiration was developed as the vision of Opportunities in 2001. It was created by the Leadership Roundtable, as a part of a series of community consultations. The vision was suggested by the community, and sent back to the community for feedback before being finalized. During the consultations, several suggestions arose.

The vision should:

- Be action oriented;
- Include individuals and families
- Include education and capacity building
- Involve many sectors
- Include advocacy
- Be challenging and lofty
- Be based on what we (as a larger collective) have learned

The vision was created at that time based on these recommendations. Only minor modifications have been made for its inclusion in this plan, including the addition of "training" and the clarification of "opportunities" as relating to community life. This vision has guided Opportunities' work for the past seven years, and will continue to do so as this plan is designed and implemented. Goals and strategies will change based on the current socio-political context, but the aspiration will remain constant.

OUR APPROACH

Igniting Community Action - Creating Bold Solutions!

Blending Sustainable Livelihoods with Vibrant Communities

Philosophy:

The January 2008, the Community Conversations Series revealed a distinct concern about social inclusion and human rights that we address with this primary principle:

Policy development and implementation, at all levels of government and community organizations, should adopt a framework for ensuring that the values of social inclusion, dignity and integrity of the individual are at the heart of policy development.

Principles:

Drawing from the January 2008 Community Conversations discussions, we reviewed the guiding principles that were recommended by community participants (Opportunities Waterloo Region, 2008a) and discovered that they are embedded in the Sustainable Livelihood Approach principles. Therefore, we have strengthened our commitment to the SLA and adopted a specific set of SLA principles developed by the U.K. Department for International Development's core SLA principles (Ashley & Carney, 1999, p. 7), as outlined below. When listing them, we explain how we are, and will continue to endeavour to integrate this complex set of principles into our practice as we understand them today. We are aware that there is great depth in each of them. Our goal will be to explore and deepen our understanding of these principles over time and evolve the efforts as a result of this.

Poverty-focused development activity should be:

1. **People-centered:** sustainable poverty elimination will be achieved only if external support focuses on what matters to people, understands the differences between groups of people and works with them in a way that is congruent with their current livelihood strategies, social environment and ability to adapt.
 - Voices of the low income sector were, and are, represented on the Leadership Roundtable (LRT). In 2007, we initiated the development of the ALIV(e) group, Awareness of Low-Income Voices. Three representatives of the ALIV(e) group are represented on the LRT. Action is being taken to increase the number of members in ALIV(e) with activities that are meant to strengthen the voices of the low-income sector. We are currently recruiting representation of the low-income sector on our Board of Directors (we currently have one representative).
 - An analysis of the policies that negatively impact people's lives will be done by first going to people living on low-incomes using a policy lens and asking them what is working and what is standing in their way of moving forward in their lives.
2. **Dynamic:** external support must recognize the dynamic nature of livelihood strategies, respond flexibly to changes in people's situations, and develop longer-term commitments
 - This is extremely challenging. We relate this principle to the goal we have to increase employment opportunities for people facing challenges through the Social Purchasing Portal. We need to keep our eye on external shocks and stresses (i.e. trends) that impact the

changes we're trying to make in peoples' lives. The knowledge of our other partners through the breadth of our network (Waterloo-Wellington Training & Adjustment Board, research partners for the education sector, Region of Waterloo, Social Planning Councils, Kitchener-Waterloo Community Foundation's 'Vital Signs', etc.), which will be of great benefit as we move forward. Flexibility is the key; and the ability to evaluate impact and see the chain of events will be important here. Sometimes it will take a resiliency to adjust initiatives according to the changing climate. For example, the Social Purchasing Portal's (SPP) main purpose is to provide employment opportunities for people who face significant challenges to employment. The SPP works closely with, and is a part of, the local employment network. Driven by a major funder, Ministry of Training, Colleges & Universities, the employment service sector is currently undergoing a complete re-design in our Region. The Social Purchasing Portal is exploring and presenting some innovative ideas on how it can be an increased value within the new system.

3. **Responsive and participatory:** poor people themselves must be key actors in identifying and addressing livelihood priorities. Outsiders need processes that enable them to listen and respond to the poor.
 - In 2007, we conducted focus groups and a survey with people living on low-incomes. The outcomes of this research, plus the voices heard at the Community Conversations Series supports some of the initiatives in this plan. Another example is the advocacy that took place regarding the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy. ALIV(e) group members were encouraged to, and did, attend the local consultations. We will increase these voices over the coming years and work in partnership with other groups/networks to encourage "outsiders" to listen and respond.
 - We will be alert for opportunities to initiate the SLA tools for individuals that were developed in the 2003 SLA initiative. One such tool was a self-assessment form that participants filled out prior to, and at the end of, taking part in the project. It was categorized by the five asset areas. People listed their strengths in each area and discovered which ones they wanted to increase or build. One of the key, exciting findings of this project was many participants commented on how it helped them view their lives differently (from an asset-based perspective) (MacKeigan, 2004).

4. **Multi-level:** poverty elimination is an enormous challenge that will only be overcome by working at multiple levels, ensuring that micro-level activity informs the development of policy and an effective enabling environment, and that macro-level institutions and policies support people to build upon their own strengths.
 - The budding relationship with the 'Friends of the Federal Family' staff is one such example of how our micro-level policy research, through a partnership with Opportunities and Wilfrid Laurier's University's Community Research in Action (CRA) team, can inform other macro-level institutions on what is important to people and what policies are impacting peoples lives from all levels of government. We will be learning from each other on how we can better connect the micro and macro levels. For further information on these endeavours, see Appendix V.
 - We will continue to stress the importance of influencing policies that promote the agenda of low-income citizens and encourage and support ALIV(e) group members to participate in political events/forums. We plan to increase involvement of the ALIV(e) group as their membership expands.

5. **Conducted in partnership:** with both the public and private sector
 - Embedded in the Vibrant Communities model is the demand to engage multi-sectors of the community. We know it takes all of us working together to achieve sustainable change. Opportunities continues to strive for multi-sector engagement. Our partners and members are listed later in this report. We will be evolving and increasing these efforts as we go forward with help from our increased resources, momentum, experience, knowledge and current partnerships.

6. **Sustainable:** there are four key dimensions to sustainability – economic, institutional, social and environmental sustainability. All are important – a balance must be found between them.
 - *Economic sustainability* occurs when a level of economic security can be maintained over time. The living wage initiative is how we are endeavouring to achieve this result. In our policy work, advocating to increase the amount of money in social assistance payments and indexing these to inflation is another way we are working towards sustainable economic security.
 - *Institutional sustainability* occurs when existing structures and processes have the capability to continue their tasks over the long term. One example of tackling this dimension is demonstrated in our goal to increase the strength and capacity of local community systems (networks, groups, organizations) by finding ways that we can work better together.
 - *Environmental sustainability* – the Community Garden and Neighbourhood Market initiatives are efforts to not only increase food security, but also lessen the use of gasoline and oil used to transport food to us from other parts of the country.
 - *Social sustainability* is reached “...when social exclusion is minimized and social equity maximized ...” (DFID, 1999, 1.4). We strive to achieve this goal, particularly through our efforts to create a paradigm shift of attitudes towards people living in poverty.

All our strategies will be facilitated in such a way as to increase the best possible chances of sustainability on as many of these dimensions as possible. For example, the environment will be impacted in a positive way by increasing the capacity and numbers of community gardens and access to local, fresh food through neighbourhood markets, and evolving processes that are meant to be sustainable, while advocating and achieving policy changes that will help gardens thrive.

Vibrant Communities Approach

Our main approach is to integrate the SLA principles with Opportunities Waterloo Region’s experience and Vibrant Communities methodology for the purpose of addressing the root causes of poverty in a comprehensive, community-based initiative. To this end, we will embark on building and enhancing community capacity, increasing and enhancing partnerships (groups, organizations, and networks), and furthering policy advocacy which meets the needs of both individuals and families. As well, we hope to learn in depth the efficacy of the SL/VC Approach and its potential impact in a community setting and to share those findings with the immediate community along with sharing and learning with Vibrant Communities.

The Vibrant Communities (VC) Approach blends nicely with the SL approach. Opportunities Waterloo Region is eager and poised to return to its rightful place as a convener of a comprehensive community initiative. We are moving quickly to effectively perform this function by incorporating the heart of the VC approach as follows:

1. Multi-sector collaboration: Opportunities 2000 led the way in multi-sector, collaborative efforts in this Region. The community learned the value of this type of involvement. We know that we cannot do it alone, and that by involving various sectors, we increase the chances of sustainable successes. As per the VC approach, we involve the four sectors (non-profits, people, business, and government). However, we highly value the collaboration with the education and faith sectors, viewing these two sectors as important and valuable. As Vibrant Communities are aware, engaging (and maintaining) business sector involvement is the biggest challenge, but one that we need to address in order to increase this asset. We address this hurdle in more detail under the “Community Engagement” section.

We will continue to pave the way for increased and enhanced collaborative partnerships.

2. Comprehensive thinking and action have various meanings for us:

- After the OP2000 phase, Opportunities’ leaders decided to turn its energies towards facilitating the development of specific initiatives laid out in its 2001-2004 strategic plan. Until now, we were the initial lead organization of most of the projects until we engaged the community partner that emerged as the project developed. Now, we look forward to engaging community partners who will take the lead right from the beginning to develop multiple initiatives!
- We want to address poverty reduction in multiple areas at multiple levels. We aim to: increase/build the assets for individuals and families through our community partnership initiatives. Those partnerships will not only be realized by neighbourhood/community projects (i.e. increasing financial assets by increasing employment opportunities for people facing challenges to employment – Social Purchasing Portal), but also by community partnerships that increase change through strategies to address policy (i.e. living wage initiative) and systems change (i.e. affordable transportation). Increasing the strength of the Community Garden Council and increasing the number of community gardens, ensures sustainability of the Council ensuring sustainability of the gardens. Increasing access to community gardens for low-income earners increase the opportunity for food security at low cost (given that there is affordable transportation to the garden) and also increasing the strength of the community. Policies play out here, too.
- As was explained earlier in the Regional Context section, we have many networks collaborating on many issues (housing, literacy, child care, children and youth). The comprehensiveness and complexity also lies in facilitating the development of a horizontal community system of networks, partnering with the networks, and engaging them to take on (if they’re not already) a piece of poverty prevention and reduction work related to their mandate. For example, the Alliance for Children & Youth may become the leadership partner on child poverty.
- For Opportunities Waterloo Region, poverty prevention is another important component of our comprehensive approach.
- Finally, shifting societal attitudes towards people living in poverty is at the centre of it all. Shift attitudes and right actions will follow. This one target area is a comprehensive solution in and of itself. This endeavour will have multiple sectors, multiple partners,

multiple strategies—a comprehensiveness of its own. We believe that shifting attitudes and eliminating stigmatization will result in deep and durable change.

3. **Community asset building:** The nature of our strategies speaks to the actions we are taking to build and increase community assets. We want to build on existing assets and increase community strength, not duplicate and not do it all ourselves. The goals we have to enhance community systems speaks to this (i.e. increasing capacity of the community garden network, enhancing and increasing communication and partnering between the existing community networks, supporting them to take on a poverty agenda related to their mandate).
4. **Community learning and change:** With limited resources up until now, Opportunities has shared learning and participated in learning events whenever it could. Now, we are ready and able to increase our participation, not only in the number of learning and sharing opportunities in Vibrant Communities Canada, but also in the number of partners who participate in them. The Learning, Sharing and Change section below will outline specific learning goals we will strive to attain. Additionally, we have the resources and commitment to develop and implement an evaluation process.
5. **Poverty prevention and reduction:** Opportunities is deeply committed to its mission to poverty reduction, however, we believe prevention of poverty is also important and needs attention. A past example is the ‘Youth Education for Success’ initiative. Access to Recreation for ALL Youth is a current focus area. Much evidence exists that participation in recreation has positive outcomes. The prevention focus is unique to the VC Network, bringing opportunities for great learning.

We aim to strengthen the local capacity. We want to increase and build the human asset area of individuals and community by developing leadership abilities of both; and we want to increase and enhance social assets of individuals and community through increased and enhanced partnerships and collaboration throughout the region, provincially and nationally.

We will continue to work toward increasing and building individual, family and community assets by working comprehensively across all five asset areas, either by such activities as initiating community leadership to fill a new gap, or by strengthening what already exists.

TACKLING ROOT CAUSES OF POVERTY

Our understanding is that the root causes of poverty are found in reluctance to listen to **voices of the low-income sector, social policies, community and government systems, and embedded attitudes** towards people living in poverty in our society. Impacts need to be made in all these areas in order to create deep and durable change.

Thus, Opportunities will work toward the following:

- 1) **Voices of those with lived low-income experience are heard and valued in policies, systems, and society.**

2) Social policies that:

- a) aim at eliminating and preventing poverty, rather than at alleviating poverty
- b) are focused on overcoming the structural roots of poverty and creating the social conditions to eliminate and prevent poverty, rather than on the circumstances of individuals
- c) ensure that working people are not in poverty

3) Systems

- a) Design and delivery of government policy through programs that:
 - i) result in incentives without barriers to exiting poverty
 - ii) guarantee that people on income support programs can support themselves and their families
 - iii) act with each other (avoid tangled policies as per John Stapleton (2007))
 - iv) embody a collaborative approach within and across all government agencies
- b) Effective community networks & partnerships
- c) Access to community resources, including, but not limited to:
 - i) positive youth development for low-income youth
 - ii) low-income sector awareness of existing resources
 - iii) affordable transportation
 - iv) food security
- d) Availability of sustainable employment opportunities for people facing significant challenges to employment

4) Societal attitudes that:

- a) recognize that individual factors do not account for poverty in our society
- b) value people on low-incomes and their contributions in the community
- c) see the connection between an equitable society and a healthy economy
- d) are free of discrimination of any kind

Improvements in all of the above areas are both necessary and achievable over time, and will be addressed in our goals and initiatives.

While thinking in terms of root causes, our collaboration highlighted that we were purposefully not including personal attributions as root causes of poverty. It is unreasonable and inadequate to hold an individual accountable for events, quality of employment, lack of community resources, or social, cultural, physical, or geographic disadvantage upon which s/he may have no influence. Countries with enlightened and responsible socio-economic policy have proved that personal attributes have little impact on the condition of poverty. Those countries which have established pertinent social policies such as Canada with seniors, Sweden with single-parent families, Denmark with the concept of “flexicurity” have shown how a well founded and well managed economic support program is instrumental in raising an individual or family out of poverty. At the same time, individuals are not passive agents in their lives. Though people’s choices are often severely limited by circumstances past or present, or by oppressive or discriminatory social structures, we recognize that people deserve, want, and should have a sense of agency in their lives.

For further details of, and examples for, this rationale, see Appendix II.

STRATEGIES

The overall goal is to reduce and prevent poverty by increasing and building opportunities and assets necessary for low-income individuals and families to move towards sustainable livelihoods, through social policy and systems change, and through the eradication of the stigmatization that permeates our society towards people who live on low-incomes. At the same time, we will be working with Vibrant Communities Canada to further the learning through evaluation and sharing of learning, not only regarding specific initiatives, but about the value of working comprehensively as a Vibrant Community to reduce poverty.

Overall SL/VC Strategies:

1. Strengthen existing partnerships and build new ones (individuals, organizations, networks, groups) – locally, provincially, nationally
2. Facilitate multi-sector collaborative planning and action
3. Increase awareness of poverty issues and solutions across the Region and beyond
4. Increase the already growing momentum and interest around poverty prevention and reduction solutions
5. Provide opportunities for people living on low-incomes to take leadership
6. Increase community awareness of the Sustainable Livelihoods/Vibrant Communities approach
7. Explore the use of the SLA in a variety of settings
8. Increase the number of partners/people attending V.C. learning events
9. Increase participation in relevant V.C. Communities of Practice (i.e. evaluation, living wage)
10. Increase business sector engagement
11. Evaluation of initiatives and V.C. process
12. Strengthen partnerships with Vibrant Communities Ontario Network (Hamilton, Niagara, and other communities interested in working with the V.C. approach)

Strategic Focus Areas

- 1) Include the voices of those with lived low-income experience in policies, systems, and society
- 2) Advocate for social policy change at all levels of government
- 3) Systems change:
 - a) Research policies that are working and not working and why
 - b) Build partnerships between, and increase collaboration with, local networks
 - c) Increase capacity of local community systems
 - i) Develop positive youth development strategies – a poverty prevention focus
 - (1) Increase access to recreation for all youth
 - (2) Increase the potential for youth to graduate from high school (Youth Education for Success)
 - ii) Increase access to information of existing community assets for the low-income sector
 - iii) Increase access to affordable transportation
 - iv) Increase food security
 - (1) Increase capacity to grow local food

- (2) Build new assets that make local food accessible
- d) Increase sustainable employment opportunities for people experiencing challenges to employment
 - i) Social Purchasing Portal
 - ii) Explore the use of the SLA as an employment assessment tool
- 4) Create a paradigm shift in societal attitudes towards people living in poverty

Signs of Progress

Evaluation is a challenge to all social service work, and particularly for comprehensive community initiatives. While Opportunities appreciates the need to track our progress in order to learn from both our successes and mistakes, we have been hesitant to limiting ourselves to a definition of success based on numbers of people affected, partly due to our history of Opportunities 2000 (moving 2000 people out of poverty by the year 2000). As the McConnell foundation explains, defining impact by growth alone is both limiting and self-defeating (Pearson, 2006). Even while enumerating the overall and initiative-specific indicators and targets, we acknowledge that the complexity of a comprehensive poverty reduction community plan such as this dictates that we not plan every detail (Pearson, 2006).

That having been said, Opportunities greatly values learning. Having a strong evaluation plan incorporated into this work will be invaluable to determine our impact, to learn from initiatives with limited success, and to have support to repeat and enhance our successes. We strive to have the level of information required to share our knowledge with others within and outside of our community. This includes setting targets, tracking indicators, and reaching for a qualitative understanding of the impact we are having. Because it has been made clear to us that the numbers of individuals, families, households are for those affected by the initiative (not necessarily moved out of poverty), we include estimated numbers for the purposes of this proposal.

Potential Impact

- Influencing a policy change for folks on Ontario Works has the potential of affecting 6,000 cases on Ontario Works for a total of 13,875 people (2007 statistic) per year.

- Influencing a policy change for folks on Ontario Disability Support Program would impact 5,460 cases for a total of 7,636 (2007 Statistic) per year.

- At the time of submission of this community plan, we were unable to discover how many people access employment service providers in one year. We will strive to discover what the number is, because there is a possibility to affect everyone that goes through the employment service providers' services.

We understand the need for targets to which we aspire, and will be addressing this aspect in the near future.

Our indicators focus mostly on the number, type, and sector of the partnerships developed, on the number of events held and participants attending, and on the number of people affected by our

initiatives. The numbers that have been assigned are approximate, and we intend to modify our expectations as the work unfolds. The indicators and targets are dependent upon the stage of the initiative. Developmental evaluation is more appropriate for initiatives in their beginning stages to allow creativity to remain (Pearson, 2006). Therefore, some initiatives included in this plan have few indicators associated with them at this time, because the initiatives are in the early stages of development. In the same vein, many initiatives do not have targets defined for future years because these will be dependent on the development in the first year.

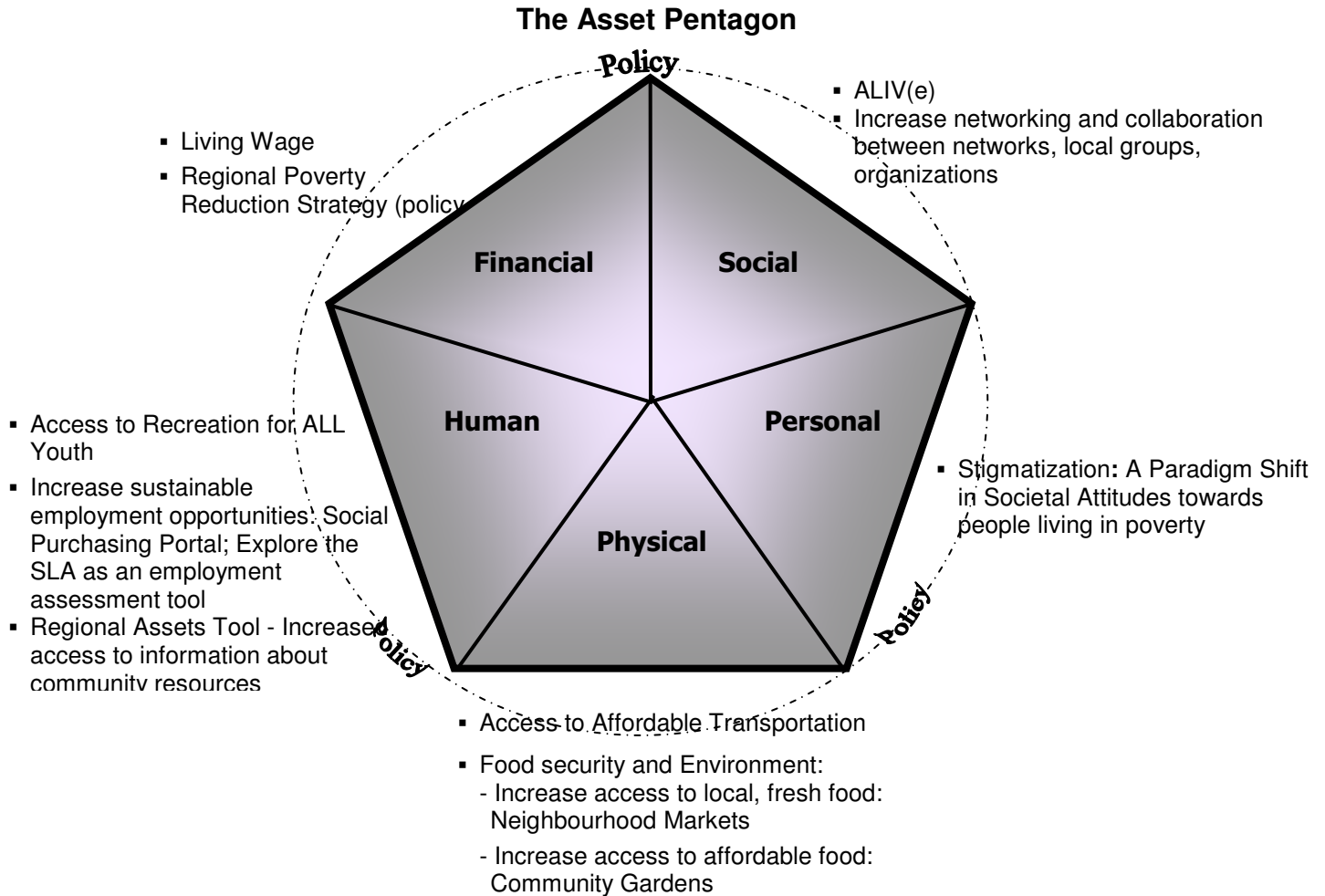
The initiative-specific targets and indicators are included in the tables in the following section. Overall indicators common to all initiatives are listed here to avoid duplication. These include:

- # people benefited and in what ways
- # partnerships sustained (local, provincial, national)
- # new partnerships (local, provincial, national)
- # partners from each sector (local, provincial, and national, if applicable)
- # contributors from each sector
- # contacts made (business, government, non-profit, education, faith, individuals)

INITIATIVES

Overview:

The policy dimension of our work is represented by the dotted circle that surrounds the pentagon. The SLA framework in Appendix IV depicts how the policy work ties in and impacts the pentagon.



The initiatives were selected for a variety of reasons, one of which is that they fill a gap in the current community situation. They were brought to light and reinforced in numerous ways, through the LRT, Board, staff, community conversations feedback, ALIV(e), other community partners, and through surveys and focus groups of the low-income sector. They fulfill many of the selection criteria outlined in Tamarack’s document ‘Making an Impact’ (2004).

The initiatives are laid out for the next three years. However, poverty is a complex issue. Opportunities does not expect that the work will be completed within this time frame. Advocating and supporting poverty prevention and reduction efforts will be a long term journey, of which the next three years will be important next steps.

The following tables provide a) greater detail about the focus areas, b) the changes we hope to see in the systems and policies underlying poverty, and c) the changes in the community’s capability and willingness to prevent and/or reduce poverty.

The Details:

1) Increasing the Voices of the Low-Income Sector

ALIV(e): Awareness of Low-Income Voices

2) Social Policy change

3) Systems change

- a) Community Research in Action Partnership
- b) Communication and Advocacy Strategy
- c) Increase capacity of local community systems:
 - i) Develop youth poverty prevention strategies:
 - Access to Recreation for ALL Youth
 - ii) Regional Assets Tool
 - iii) Affordable Transportation
 - iv) Increase food security:
 - (1) Community Gardens
 - (2) Neighbourhood Markets
- d) Increase employment opportunities for people experiencing challenges to employment
 - i) Social Purchasing Portal
 - ii) Exploring the SLA as an employment assessment tool

4) Shifting Attitudes

**1) INCREASING THE VOICES OF THE LOW-INCOME SECTOR
ALIV(E): Awareness of Low-Income Voices**

Description	We want voices of those with lived low-income experience to be heard and valued in policies, systems, and society. Awareness of Low-Income Voices, ALIV(e), is a group of people with lived experience on low-incomes initiated, facilitated and supported by Opportunities to provide suggestions/ideas for action or feedback on current (or possible new) focus areas to the Leadership Roundtable (LRT) of Opportunities Waterloo Region. ALIV(e) currently has five committed, active members and wishes to increase its numbers.
Asset Area(s)	Social. Group members in the human and personal asset areas. For example, members may choose to develop their skills and abilities (i.e. leadership and presentation skills (human) that can lead to an increase in self-confidence and self-esteem. The work of ALIV(e) has potential to impact all asset areas of the low-income sector by their presence and voice related to policy and systems change through advocacy and suggestions brought to the community and LRT tables.
Rationale	The LRT recognized the need for participation of community members experienced with poverty or low-income to contribute their wisdom to the work of the organization.

Change	Increased opportunities for those with lived low-income experience to be informed and make an impact in their own lives and the lives of others experiencing poverty, policy, systems, and society.
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to increase ALIV(e)'s awareness, and by extension the awareness of their communities, on local, provincial, and national initiatives in the prevention and reduction of poverty - to include ALIV(e) contributions in Opportunities' current and future initiatives - to maintain and/or increase low-income membership in ALIV(e), the LRT and Opportunities' Board of Directors - to have ALIV(e) functioning as a self-sufficient entity, with Opportunities' support
Contributors	ALIV(e); LRT, Board of Directors; Community Outreach Workers Potential: media partners, Community centres/neighbourhoods
Outcomes	<p>Year 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 5 ALIV(e) group presentations in home neighbourhoods co-facilitated by ALIV(e) members - 3 representatives from the low-income sector on LRT - 2 representatives from the low-income sector on Board - Strategies begin to be developed for increasing their voices to policy and community - ALIV(e) group plans future directions - 15 members <p>Year 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 15 members in regional ALIV(e) group; 3 representatives on LRT; 2 representatives on Board - Communication strategies developed and begin to be implemented - Other future directions developed and begin to be implemented - 2 Neighbourhood ALIV(e) groups emerge and have representation in the Regional ALIV(e); 15 members in neighbourhood groups <p>Year 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 25 members in Regional ALIV(e) group, 3 representatives on LRT; 2 representatives on Board - Regional ALIV(e) group is a strong, collaborative group with a sustainability plan in place - Communication strategies implemented - Future directions developed and implementation continues - 3 Neighbourhood ALIV(e) groups emerge and have representation in the Regional ALIV(e); 25 members in neighbourhood ALIV(e) groups
Current work	- ALIV(e) has been meeting regularly since summer of 2007. Terms of reference have been completed. Representatives from ALIV(e) have been included in the working group that wrote and reviewed this community plan. Two ALIV(e) members sit on the LRT. The ALIV(e) group will approach neighbourhoods to inform them about ALIV(e) and recruit new members.
Planned Strategies	<p>Year 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A BSW practicum placement student at Opportunities will contact ALIV(e) members, outreach workers at community centres, and other social service providers to recruit new ALIV(e) members. She will also help to support ALIV(e), focusing on developing and refining goals, and co-facilitating neighbourhood meetings with ALIV(e) co-facilitators to increase ALIV(e) membership, inform the community on poverty prevention and reduction actions and progress, and to encourage people to vote whenever elections arise - facilitate ALIV(e) discussions on the planning of communication and other strategies the group wishes to develop - create a media bureau – a group of volunteers that can be relied upon to supply

information and real life experiences to media contacts that may be preparing stories about poverty

Year 2

- to be developed (tbd) – will be based on Year 1 outcomes

Year 3

- to be developed (tbd) – will be based on Year 2 outcomes

2) SOCIAL POLICY CHANGE

Description	<p>The aim is to address policy issues from various entry points. Currently, three focus areas exist:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Regional Poverty Reduction Strategy: The Regional Government will be asked to develop and implement a poverty reduction strategy containing recommendations recently compiled from Community Conversations feedback, including ALIV(e), LRT, Board, Staff and from information gleaned from focus groups and surveys. A second set of recommendations will be made in Year 2 (after the policy research has been completed – see Systems change for details on this)b) Living Wage Campaign: The Living Wage has been a focus area of Opportunities since 2002/3. We will continue to advocate to Regional Council to implement a living wage policy and increase awareness of a Waterloo Region living wage and the business benefits of paying a living wage.c) Advocacy – on all levels of government
Asset Areas	<p>Potential to impact all asset areas, however the financial asset area is strong here</p>
Rationale	<p>The Leadership Roundtable realized that only by changing policies at all levels of government, will we have the desired results in the reduction and prevention of poverty at the community level. Over this past year, Opportunities’ focus turned to social policy. The Community Conversations series was an important tool we used to engage community dialogue on these issues. We had record high attendance that pointed out to us that the community is very interested in addressing this root cause of poverty at this time. We accumulated many policy recommendations from the attendees. Also, there are increased opportunities to work with other local, provincial and federal groups who are acting on a similar agenda. Additionally, the provincial government’s commitment to develop a poverty reduction strategy for Ontario further inspired us. Moreover, welfare programs such as Ontario Works do not provide an income above the low-income cut off, guaranteeing poverty for its recipients.</p>
Change	<p>Policy change at all levels that aim at reducing and preventing poverty</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) As per the LRT’s central position statement: <i>“That the local community and government at all levels (federal, provincial and local) adopt a poverty reduction plan with set targets, timelines, a dedicated budget and ongoing monitoring”</i>b) living wage policies are adopted by municipal governments (indexed to inflation)c) an increased number of organizations (private sector, and non-profits) voluntarily adopt and implement living wage policiesd) the regional community (people, organizations, networks, groups) has increased awareness of poverty issues and progress on changes that are occurring at all government levels and are involved in policy change efforts.e) the regional community has increased capacity to monitor and respond to policy issues

- Objectives** **Year 1**
- a) complete recommendations and request that the Region of Waterloo adopt a poverty prevention and reduction strategy containing the recommendations
 - continue to advocate for the recommendations to be included in the provincial poverty reduction strategy
 - encourage the federal government to develop and implement a national poverty reduction strategy
 - research and identify policies (all levels of government) to target possible impact
 - b) advocate for Region of Waterloo municipal government to adopt a living wage policy
 - c) educate and inform the general public on the benefits of paying a living wage and what that is for our Region
 - d) develop and implement a communication strategy to inform the broader community of policy related issues and progress
 - e) increase capacity of the regional community to advocate for and monitor policy issues

Year 2 – tbd from Year 1 outcomes

Year 3 - tbd from Year 2 outcomes

Formal

Partnerships WLU Community Research in Action

Contributors City Café and Bakery; Region of Waterloo staff (public health and social services)
Potential: -local regional networks; groups; organizations (i.e. Canadian Mental Health Association); Social Planning Councils; municipal: tri-cities/townships; Waterloo Regional Labour Council; businesses who pay a living wage
 Provincial: V.C. Ontario Network; Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition (ISARC); 25 in 5, Mennonite Central Committee of Ontario
 National: Vibrant Communities Canada, Friends of the Federal Family; National Anti-Poverty Organization (informal living wage network)

Outcomes **Year 1**

- policy research completed
- potential community contributors approached and involvement in policy work decided
- recommendations for Regional government to develop and implement a poverty reduction strategy presented to Regional Council

Year 2

- Regional government develops and implements a poverty reduction strategy; recommendations from Year 1 presentation included
- Regional government implements a living wage policy
- # of people impacted by the living wage policy
- Strategies for policy impacts are developed
- Estimated tri-cities living wage for a single person updated

Year 2 & 3 (Year 1 outcomes will allow us to better estimate the quantitative outcomes.)

Indicators we will likely track:

- # of policy recommendations made (all levels) and through what means
- # policies impacted/changed/under review; # people impacted by these policies and by how much
- # of Community Conversation Series events held on policy
- # and type of communications (shared strategy, media, enews, etc)

Years 1, 2 & 3

- # of contacts/updates shared with the Friends of the Federal Family staff providing an update on place-based policy activities to date

- # businesses discovered that already pay a living wage in certain sectors (i.e. service sector);
 - # businesses that implement a living wage; # of employees impacted
 - statistics generated by the region as staff research the possibility of implementing a Living Wage strategy
- Current work**
- estimated urban living wage for the tri-cities completed 2007
 - increased awareness to 5,000 business on best human resource practices for business, which highlighted a local service business that pays a living wage
 - presentations/delegations to Regional Council to increase awareness on the benefits of a living wage and support for the Regional staff recommendations to further research the impact of implementing a living wage policy for the Region
 - LRT developed central position statement (see Policy Change category above for details)
 - educated and increased community awareness on policy issues via the 2007-2008 Community Conversations Series
 - Opportunities and ALIV(e) group participated in the provincial poverty reduction strategy consultations
 - increased the strength of the '25 in 5' recommendations for a provincial poverty reduction strategy by co-sponsoring a local event with the two Social Planning Councils

Planned Strategies

Year 1

- update estimated tri-cities living wage for a single person
- 1st set of recommendations presented to regional council that includes the request that they implement a regional poverty reduction strategy as set out in the LRT central position statement
- Increase awareness of what it costs to sustain a livelihood in Waterloo Region (continue to educate, and increase awareness on the estimated urban living wage for the tri-cities)
- Locate and highlight businesses that pay a living wage
- Coordinate/facilitate the networks to develop an advocacy/communications strategy for the policies impacting low-income folks that are related to their network mandate (see below – Communications and Advocacy strategy - for details)
- Continue with applicable Year 1 strategies

Year 2

- local research through the CRA partnership is completed and further recommendations for all levels of government are developed
- 2nd set of recommendations (based on the CRA partnership project) presented to regional council that includes a request that the Region implement the recommendations
- Share policy recommendations with the Social Planning Councils so that they can approach the tri-cities and townships and support these efforts
- strategy developed to ensure all municipal governments are encouraged to implement a poverty reduction strategy
- Continue with relevant Year 1 strategies
- Tbd depending on Year 1 outcomes

Year 3

- Continue with applicable Year 1 strategies
- Tbd depending on year 2 outcomes

3) SYSTEMS CHANGE

a) Community Research In Action Partnership

Description A unique partnership has been formed between Wilfrid Laurier University's

Community Research in Action (CRA) and Opportunities Waterloo Region. This partnership will involve research to identify and analyze policies that affect poverty in Waterloo Region by talking directly to people with low incomes. This ties in closely with focus area 2: Social Policies. The rationale explains why we placed it under Systems Change.

Asset Areas	Potential to impact all asset areas.
Rationale	The current welfare system includes disincentives and tangled policies. An example of this is that claw backs result when an individual or family receives more than one type of benefit. The many programs available are difficult to access because they operate independently of one another, with no central access point. Vast improvements could be made in the lives of social assistance recipients if programs worked in support of one another, if the transition to paid employment could be supported, and if the support levels were raised.
Change	Multiple levels are working together to ensure integrity of programs based on equity and ease of delivery, with vertical and horizontal collaboration at all levels.
Objectives	To advocate for increased access - “one program, one place” - to eliminate barriers, disincentives and duplication
Formal Partnerships	Wilfrid Laurier University (WLU) Community Research in Action Team (CRA)
Contributors	ALIV(e); Regional government staff Potential: -community partners/contributors (Outreach Workers, community centres, non-profit agencies from across the Region; John Stapleton – consultant; networks and groups; Social Planning Councils
Outcomes	Year 1: - research completed to determine which policies are negatively impacting the lives of those with low-incomes and how are they tangled Year 2: - final research report with recommendations completed - strategies to address the findings/recommendations completed and implementation begins - other strategies tbd depending on Year 1 outcomes - more new partners/contributors engaged Year 3: - tbd pending outcomes of Year 2
Current work	- CRA and Opportunities Terms of Reference completed - Draft proposal for the policy research completed - Opportunities and CRA met and plan to start collecting data as soon as ethics approval has been given by WLU (estimated start date: late October)
Planned Strategies	Year 1 - WLU partnership project - researching policy via John Stapleton’s approach (2007), using focus groups, document review, and key informant interviews - engage community partners (i.e. outreach workers and community centres) for focus groups - recommendations for policy change developed - strategies begin to be developed Year 2 - strategies to address completed - Bring these research findings to the attention of the local community and policy makers in local, provincial and federal government and report back to community

- Evaluate the findings and decide what policies we can impact and by which contributor (group/network/sector/organization)
- Year 3** - tbd pending outcomes of Year 2

b) Communication and Advocacy Strategy

Description	We want to increase the effectiveness of community networks. Opportunities is currently approaching the networks to determine what this might look like, asking “how can we work better together” on poverty issues? A joint communication strategy for poverty reduction is the first step. Should this develop, groups and organizations with a poverty focus will be approached next.
Asset Areas	Potential to impact all asset areas, especially the community’s social assets. The human asset area will be impacted via the strategy which will increase knowledge of poverty issues. This may also impact the personal asset area regarding shift in societal attitudes.
Rationale	In the Community Conversations in May 2007, the importance of community connectedness and collaboration to reduce and prevent poverty was raised several times in discussion groups. Participants stated that we need a common vision, that we need to find new ways to be heard, and that we need to demonstrate unanimity in our message.
Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - local networks informed of each other’s poverty reduction and prevention efforts and collaborating together on these - local networks strengthened by increased and enhanced partnerships - local community aware of progress with Community Plan and progress within government - more business and low-income sector involvement, including LRT and Board - local networks, groups and organizations develop a common voice
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To increase community collaboration and capacity building - To have a shared communication strategy related to advocacy around poverty prevention and reduction, directed toward local policy makers and media
Contributors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Local networks, groups, organizations <p>Potential:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Year 1: Alliance for Children & Youth; Community Safety & Crime Prevention Council; Literacy Network; Child Care Network; Local Health Integration Network; Waterloo Region Immigrant Employment Network; Homelessness & Housing Umbrella Group); Waterloo Region Active Living Network, Regional government - Year 2 Local groups and organizations (i.e. Regional government, Social Planning Councils, Canadian Mental Health Association) - Year 3 tbd
Outcomes	<p>Year 1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - networks’ common communication strategy under development - funding secured to implement strategy - 7 networks participate in the development of a common communications strategy - Engagement of groups and organizations begins <p>Year 2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - funding for communications strategy secured - # of networks that participate in the common communications strategy - # of networks that develop a separate communications strategy - # of groups that participate in a common communications strategy

- # of groups that develop a separate communications strategy
- mechanism for sharing information is in place
- communication pieces widely distributed
- increase in media coverage; tone of media coverage (strengths focus vs poverty focus)

Year 3: tbd based on Year 2 outcomes

Current work

The first introductory meeting took place in September with a group of networks that are interested in developing a joint communication strategy. Networks that were unable to attend are being informed of the outcome of that meeting. A second meeting to determine the specifics of the communication strategy will be arranged.

Planned Strategies

Year 1:

- Engage the networks and explore the possibilities of a joint communication strategy for increasing awareness and poverty prevention and reduction advocacy
- If interest is achieved, begin to facilitate the development of a common communication strategy

Year 2:

- Identify and engage groups who have a poverty agenda to gauge their interest in a similar communication tool
- Other strategies tbd pending year 1 and year 2 outcomes

Year 3:

- Determine if a gap in poverty prevention or reduction advocacy exists, and if so, facilitate the building of the asset necessary to fill this gap

c) Capacity of Local Systems

i) Positive Youth Development Strategy (poverty prevention)

Description

1. Access to Recreation for ALL Youth Access to Recreation for ALL Youth is a project focussed on identifying and eliminating barriers to recreation for youth, especially low-income youth. This initiative is meant to deepen the research completed in Phase I; develop recommendations based on the research findings and take action.

Asset Areas

Potential to impact all asset areas. We chose to ‘house’ this initiative in the Human asset area, knowing that it is also high in the social and personal areas, too.

Rationale

Among the root causes--and consequences--of poverty is a shortfall in opportunities for low-income young people (6-17) to build skills, self-esteem, and civic engagement through participation in sports, arts, hobbies, and a range of positive activities that are routinely accessible to most other children and youth. Such engagement reduces school drop-out rates, a key to preventing poverty. Barriers include financial resources, the stigma associated with subsidized programs, diverse cultural norms, inadequate transportation and lack of information.

Change

- All children and youth in the Region (urban and rural) have access and a choice of quality recreation and leisure activities both in school and during out-of-school time.
- Municipal, regional and school board policies and procedures have been designed so as to:
 - a) provide registration procedures that are user-friendly and non-stigmatizing
 - b) increase the number and variety of no-fee and low-fee quality activities
 - c) involve youth in identifying, initiating/ leading their preferred activities
 - d) ensure that lack of transportation is no longer a barrier
 - e) take cultural differences into account in program planning
- Secure funding ensures that after-school weekend and summer programs are

	widely available at schools and community centres in all regional neighbourhoods
	- Barriers to access to recreation for youth in rural areas (such as lack of transportation) are recognized and removed
Objectives	Maximize access to recreation for all youth in Waterloo Region
Contributors	Past involvement and future potential: Tri-cities and Townships representation
	- other recreation stakeholders (YMCA, schools, Waterloo Regional Labour Council
	- lead organization(s)
Outcomes	- Year 1: Funding received to hire a project developer to pursue the goals/strategies outlined above by firming up partnerships, convening stakeholders, including neighbourhood and youth representation, and assisting working groups in defining and implementing their objectives in the proposals
	- Year 2 & 3 outcomes tbd after proposals have been written and pending Year 1 outcomes
Current work	- Phase I: A research project on mapping the recreation resources across the Waterloo Region community completed. Some recommendations were made as a result of this work. The resulting report was published in October 2008.
	- Phase II: Acting upon a recommendation from the report, an on-line recreation directory was created to increase access to recreation information (www.playscapewr.ca).
	- Engagement of recreations stakeholders was initiated in Phase I and continues currently.
Planned Strategies	Phase III:
	Year 1
	- engage regional lead organization(s), stakeholders and multi-sectors (particularly business, education, government) to form collaborations for Phase III
	- with collaborative, complete and submit funding proposals in order to follow through on recommendations already developed and insights learned from earlier phases
	- secure host for Playscape Waterloo Region
	- engage as many recreation stakeholders as possible, updating them on current activities and progress
	Year 2: tbd pending Year 1 outcomes
	Year 3: tbd pending Year 2 outcomes

ii. Regional Assets Tool - A Resource for the Low-Income Sector

Description	This tool will improve access to community resources by increasing low-income sector awareness of existing resources.
Asset Areas	Potential to impact all asset areas, especially physical and human assets.
Rationale	The ALIV(e) group recommended the development of a regional resource tool that will list resources for low-income folks and that will include a way for people to add resources they want to share. They noted there was a need to increase awareness of these assets, particularly for those resources that are less likely to be discovered (i.e. An eye glasses business offers a deal on glasses for people living on low-incomes.)
Change	All residents living on low-income have access to information about community resources
Objectives	Increase awareness and knowledge of resources that exist in the Regional community

Contributors	ALIV(e); tbd
Outcomes	The resource/communications tool is developed and implemented and is accessible and widely used. Year 1: Multi- sector collaborative developed; Strategy developed; Year 2: Funding secured - # of people accessing tool - # and type of resources being added
Current work	ALIV(e) flagged this project as an important need. It is in the formative stage.
Planned Strategies	Year 1 - ALIV(e) leads this project - strike a multi-sector working group - begin plan for tool, including how people will find out about it (marketing and promotion strategy) Year 2 - secure funding for tool and the elements of the communication strategy - develop and test pilot - implement on-line tool - implement communication strategy (marketing and promotions plan for increasing awareness of the tool) Year 3 - sustainability plan developed and implemented - tbd pending Year 2 outcomes

iii) Affordable Transportation

Description	We want to improve access to community resources, including affordable transportation.
Asset Areas	We chose the physical assets area as ‘home’. Certainly, the financial asset area is also impacted.
Rationale	Affordable transportation was identified as a major barrier in Opportunities’ research on youth recreation. The Region and GRT have identified affordable transit as important.
Change Objectives	Transportation is affordable and accessible for all rural and urban citizens To advocate and partner in affordable transportation in Waterloo Region
Lead	Region of Waterloo
Contributors	Potential: Grand River Transit, Region of Waterloo, Social Planning Councils, ALIV(e) representative; reps from networks; research partners; Opportunities Waterloo Region
Outcomes	- consultations with stakeholders completed - affordable transportation strategies developed and implemented - Transit user statistics generated by the Region will provide the number of low-income individuals who may benefit from this initiative
Current work	In Spring 2008, the Region of Waterloo conducted a community survey. They will be continuing with this project
Planned Strategies	- Work with the Region and others to make public transit more affordable for low-income individuals, families, youth

iv) Food Security

Description	1. Community Gardens: Community Gardens are shared spaces where community members come together to grow food. There are currently 39 community gardens
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in Waterloo Region. The majority are volunteer run. This initiative is part of the Diggable Communities Collaborative.

Asset Areas	Potential to impact all asset areas, especially physical, human, and social assets.
Rationale	Community gardens provide low-cost access to healthy, locally grown food. They reduce dependency on food from other areas of the world, thereby helping to increase individual as well as national food security, and helping to improve the regional and global environmental health by reducing the distance food travels, increasing biodiversity, and improving air and water quality. They bring together community and create a platform for discussion of issues in the community. They can provide skills training for volunteer garden coordinators, improve health through healthy food and exercise, make neighbourhoods safer by reclaiming the space and provide a sense of belonging.
Change	A vibrant, strong, sustainable community garden network throughout Waterloo Region
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Increase the number of Community Gardens- Increase the capacity of the Community Garden system (council, garden coordinators, gardens) to ensure their sustainability into the future- Increase awareness of and access to community gardens that people on low-incomes can access for fresh, low-cost produce- establishing more partnerships with other community groups- development of policy in support of existing and new community gardens- increased communication and engagement of the community garden network
Formal Partners	Community Garden Council; Region of Waterloo Public Health
Contributors	39+ community garden coordinators across the Region, gardeners Potential: business sponsors; community centres – to be engaged

Land/Insurance: Chandler Mowat Community Centre; The City of Kitchener; Courtland-Shelley Community Centre; Doon-Pioneer Park Community Centre; Seventhday Adventurist Church; Forest Hill United Church; Mount Hope/Breithaupt Park Neighbourhood Association; The Working Centre; Kingsdale Neighbourhood Association; Laurier Students' Public Interest Research Group; Waterloo Public Interest Research Group; St. James Rosemount United Church; Reformation Lutheran Church; Trinity Village Care Centre; The Paulander Community Group in partnership with Victoria Park Community Homes and Waterloo Region Housing; Cherry Park Neighbourhood Association; Beaver Creek Housing Co-op; Brighton Yards Housing Co-op; Christ Lutheran Church; Andy Copp – Private Citizen; Mount Zion Lutheran Church; Community Ministry of St. Mark's Lutheran Church; the Food Bank of Waterloo Region; Regal Financial Planners; Sunnyside Community Association; St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church; University of Waterloo; Avenue Road Baptist Church; Fiddlesticks Neighbourhood Association; Popcorn House Community Centre; Maranatha Christian Reformed Church; Canadian Organic Growers; Living Waters Community Church; Trinity Lutheran Church; Woolwich Community Services; Woolwich Township

Sponsors: Clemmer Industries; City of Cambridge; KW Community Foundation; Home Depot; Waterloo Environmental Studies Endowment Fund; Ernst R S Landscaping & Trucking Ltd.; City of Kitchener; Ontario Seed; Waterloo Hydro; Randy Adams Trucking (reduced rates); Region of Waterloo (compost bins, rain

water barrels, compost, staff & admin support); Hydro Companies - Cambridge & North Dumfries, Kitchener, Waterloo

Time: Kitchener Master Gardeners; Ernst R S Landscaping & Trucking Ltd

Outcomes

Years 1,2

- Increase number of community gardens; increase number of gardeners
- Increase number of Community Garden Council members
- Increased number of volunteers recruited
- Provide training sessions to garden council and coordinators
- Increased capacity and sustainability: annual sponsorships secured
- Feedback from coordinators, volunteers, and gardeners

Year 1

- 5 new gardens developed
- 10 volunteers recruited
- Training sessions: 1 for Council; 2 start-up workshops; 2 tours

Year 2

- 10 new gardens developed
- 2 new Council members
- 5 new community partners
- Training sessions: 2 for Council; 2 for coordinators; 3 peer-to-peer newsletters

Current work

The community garden 18-month project has already started through Trillium funding. A Community Garden Capacity Builder has been hired. An asset and needs assessment was completed. She has begun to recruit volunteers, investigate funding, compose a how-to for garden coordinators, and is assisting the council in defining roles and objectives. The project ends December 2009.

Planned Strategies

- research garden policies of the tri-cities and townships
- research and inform garden coordinators and council members about successful sponsorship methods
- enhanced how-to manuals for gardeners
- promotion and marketing activities
- volunteer recruitment
- assist council to define roles and objectives
- develop and implement sustainability plan
- investigate options for establishing a garden association in order to learn more about the demographics of current gardeners

2. Neighbourhood Markets

Description

Neighbourhood markets provide a place for local farmers to sell their produce, and for community members to buy healthy locally-grown food. The markets have been located in areas where there is no access to food within walking distance. They are located at accessible community locations such as hospitals and community centres. Public Health is the project lead, Opportunities is the administrative lead.

Asset Areas

Potential to impact all asset areas, especially physical, human, and social assets.

Rationale

Neighbourhood markets provide access to healthy, locally grown food. They reduce dependency on food from other areas of the world, thereby helping to increase individual as well as national food security, and helping to improve the regional and global environmental health by reducing the distance food travels, increasing biodiversity, and improving air and water quality. They bring together community and create a platform for discussion of issues in the community. They can provide skills training for volunteer market coordinators and sellers, improve

	health through access to healthy food, make neighbourhoods safer by reclaiming the space and provide a sense of belonging. They also contribute to the overall environmental health of the Regional community.
Change	Vibrant, strong, sustainable neighbourhood markets in place in neighbourhoods throughout the Waterloo Region community, especially those with the least amount of access to grocery stores and fresh, local produce.
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The creation of sustainable neighbourhood markets through an integrated delivery system - Increase awareness of and access to neighbourhood markets where people on low-incomes can access fresh, local produce without spending money on transportation
Formal Partnership	Region of Waterloo Public Health; local neighbourhood market leads, St. Mary's Hospital
Contributors	Two Preston Downtown business sponsors; City of Cambridge, Cambridge Farmers' Market; City of Kitchener
Outcomes	- Tbd
Current work	Phase 1 (2007 season) consisted of two markets pilots (Mill-Courtland Community Centre and St. Mary's Hospital), including funding and evaluation. Phase 2 (2008 season) consisted of five market pilots (Mill- Courtland Community Centre, St. Mary's, Centerville-Chicopee, Preston Heights, and Preston Downtown), including securing funding. Evaluation is being done currently. The next steps are to be determined.
Planned Strategies	<p>Year 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Evaluation of Summer 2008 markets completed - Planning for Summer 2009 begins, but depends on 2008 evaluation and recommendations - Partners identified; collaboration develops - Funding proposals developed for Phase 3 - Other outcomes for Year 1 dependent on the success of the above strategies - Neighbourhoods that want to host a market again will be encouraged to take on more responsibility, while at the same time less support is given – begin the letting go process, keeping the necessary support going until the market is self-sustaining. The potential to facilitate the development of new neighbourhood markets will be explored. <p>Year 2 – tbd pending outcomes in Year 1</p> <p>Year 3 – tbd pending outcomes in Year 2</p>

d) Increase sustainable employment opportunities for people experiencing challenges to employment

i) Social Purchasing Portal

Description	The Waterloo Region Social Purchasing Portal (SPP) is a network for socially-conscious businesses and organizations which collaborate for the purpose of business growth and employment generation, which results in a healthier and wealthier community.
Asset Areas	Potential to impact all asset areas, with a focus on financial, human, and personal assets.
Rationale	Some people face barriers to employment. It has been shown through the Social Purchasing Portal (SPP) model (started in BC) that community cooperation between businesses as purchasers and suppliers, employment agencies, and individuals with challenges to employment can both provide meaningful employment to these

	individuals, and also support local businesses and communities.
Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - more people who face barriers to employment achieve sustainable employment jobs - Social Purchasing Portal becomes the hub for promoting corporate social responsibility and best human resource practices for business - Many businesses are purchasing from the SPP supplier businesses - SPP is the neutral body that strengthens the employment service provider network thereby creating more <u>sustainable</u> employment opportunities
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To increase organizations that implement human resource practices that enhance the employee's livelihoods (i.e. flexibility, benefits, child care on site) - To increase businesses that hire people facing barriers to employment - To provide further incentives to supplier businesses to hire people who face challenges - To encourage more organizations to implement human resource best practices that enhance the employee's livelihoods (i.e. flexibility, benefits, child care on site) - To encourage businesses to implement social responsibility practices
Formal Partners	<p>Steering committee: Co-leads: Waterloo-Wellington Training & Adjustment Board and Opportunities Government sector - Region of Waterloo Social Services, Employment & Income Support; Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities: Employment Ontario; Ontario Disability Support Program-Employment Supports, Ministry of Community and Social Services Non-Profit sector - Lutherwood Employment Services Business sector - C3 Group</p>
Portal Partners	<p>Artals Laser Engraving; Bingemans; C3 Group; Corrigan & Associates Insurance Brokers; DB Entertainment; Delta Kitchener-Waterloo; Denison Print; Denmark Displays and Exhibits; Eco-Café; Grand Designs; Homes by Watson; JTO Courier; Lewis Media; Lutherwood; Morsel's Café; Norris Bakery; Opportunities Waterloo Region; Patron Services & Associates; Penske Trucks; PowerVac; Profit Accounting Support and Service; Ready2Grow Associates; Waterloo-Wellington Training and Adjustment Board; Wings of Paradise'; Amy Awnings and Signs; Amy Custom Welding; Artals Laser Engraving; Automation Supply Inc.; Benabec Architectural Products; Bingemans; Brittles 'n More; Cartridge World Kitchener; Corporate Express; WorldWare's EATOILS™; Golden Triangle Printing; Hearts and Flowers at Westmount; Jamieson Car and Truck Rental; Just Fix It; The Morning Glory Café & Bakery; Rem web solutions; Steamatic; Systems Plus</p> <p>Employment Service Providers: Cambridge Career Connections; Lutherwood; The Working Centre; Employment & Income Support; Small Steps to Success; Working for Work</p>
Outcomes	<p>Host found. Indicators to track:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - # jobs posted through SPP; # interviews through SPP - # people find employment through the portal (goal: 18 in Year 1) - # business suppliers (new + existing); # business purchasers (new + existing) - Maintain at least 40 businesses as inactive members are replaced - \$ revenue (estimated) for suppliers (transactions) - # of events held; # hits on website - # marketing materials distributed
Current	The SPP ignited interest in Waterloo Region though a Community Conversations

work Series event in January 2005. A series of steps and visionary funders supported the initial development, reaching the implementation stage by August 2006 thanks to Ontario Trillium Foundation's three-year funding. Approximately 40 businesses are currently involved as purchasers or suppliers, with 6 employment agencies. The manager of the SPP is currently focusing on recruiting new businesses and improving the commitment of current businesses to hire through the SPP. Relationship building is a key activity of the SPP.

Planned Strategies

Year 1

- Continue implementation the Social Purchasing Portal project, entering its last year of 3-year Trillium funding
- Plan and implement SPP innovations in light of the changing structure of the employment service sector; find new funding sources; determine lead/co-leads organization
- Create a new website and marketing materials
- Participate in business events such as tradeshow to recruit new businesses and increase community awareness of the SPP
- find a host for the SPP, facilitate the development of a governance structure
- complete a sustainability plan
- increase business suppliers and purchasers
- develop and implement a plan to promote corporate social responsibility
- engage new businesses

Year 2 - contingent on Year 1 outcomes

Year 3 - contingent on Year 2 outcomes

ii) Exploring the SLA as an employment assessment tool

Description	The employment service provider sector is currently undergoing a major re-design. We would like to explore possibilities for the potential of implementing the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach in the assessment process.
Asset Areas	Potential to impact all asset areas as defined by the person.
Rationale	We know it takes more than training to get a job. Retaining the job is the ultimate goal and this can require other assets in an individual's life to be strengthened. The use of the SLA in the assessment process has the potential to help achieve this outcome.
Change	- more people achieve sustainable employment and a sustainable livelihood
Objectives	Employment Service Providers adopt an assessment tool that aims at the whole individual.
Contributors	Potential: employment service providers; government; other potential involvement to be determined
Outcomes	Year 1: Explore the possibilities of developing and using an SLA based employment assessment tool. If positive, develop the assessment tool Year 2: Dependent upon Year 1 Potential Outcomes: - # of employment service providers participate in the pilot - # of participants Year 3: Dependent upon Year 2 – Potential Outcomes: # of employment service providers take part

Current work	- # of participants This is a newly developed idea that has yet to be explored, but holds much potential.
Planned Strategies	Year 1 - engage stakeholders and explore the possibilities of using the SLA in assessments - hold information sessions with stakeholders - gauge interest; engage stakeholders in exploring the possibilities; processes and tool design Year 2 – contingent on Year 1 outcomes – refine tool, processes - ongoing Year 3 - contingent on Year 2 outcomes

4.) SHIFTING SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Shifting Societal Attitudes Together

Description	We want to shift societal attitudes towards people living in poverty so that the best possible chance for deep and durable changes to policies and programs can occur. Locally, we will find Opportunities to work on this, such as through the network/group/organization communication strategy (3.b).
Asset Areas	Potential to impact all asset areas, but particularly for: The individual's personal asset – so that s/he can live with increased dignity and respect; an inner freedom to access supports for low income needs when necessary For policy changes that could impact any of the asset areas
Rationale	The Leadership Roundtable noted that societal attitudes should be addressed in some fashion in all the work that Opportunities does.
Change	- All levels of government desire to change policies that reflect the shift in attitudes - governments articulate the values that underlie the policies they're developing - people living in poverty have an increased awareness of how stigmatization impacts their lives - people on low-incomes have dignity, respect - public attitudes are shifted
Objectives	- develop a strong, national network and work together to shift attitudes - develop and implement a long-term, comprehensive, multi-pronged plan to shift attitudes - develop a local communications strategy to begin to shift attitudes - recommend that the federal government develop a commission with a goal to eradicate the stigmatization of people who live on low-incomes (as they did with mental health commission)
Contributors	National networks: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives; Canadian Community Economic Development Network; Centre for Community Based Research; Vibrant Communities (Community Services Council Newfoundland & Labrador; Hamilton Roundtable on Poverty Reduction; Vibrant Surrey; Opportunities Niagara); National Council of Welfare; Community Foundations of Canada; Eastern Health Authority; National Anti Poverty Organization; Eva's Phoenix; Human Resources, Labour & Employment, Newfoundland & Labrador; Kairos; Mennonite Central Committee; New Economy Development Group; United Ways (Calgary; Fraser Valley, Kitchener-Waterloo); Nova Scotia Association of Social Workers; Poverty Reduction Coalition; Public Interest Alberta; Quarry Integrated Solutions
Outcomes	- funding received and secured for various aspects of the plan; amount of funding (plan development; plan implementation) - Increased number of national partners - Local communication strategy completed

- Current work**
 - Convenor role and tasks are shared by the national network
 - Opportunities initiated a national conversation in spring, 2007 and we are the convening body for the national Shifting Societal Attitudes Together coalition. Four meetings have taken place. In summer, 2008, \$8,000.00 has been received from the United Way of Kitchener-Waterloo to create a planning framework based on the four meetings and to facilitate national meetings to further develop the plan. The beginnings of a research task group have been developed.
- Planned Strategies**
 - Year 1:**
 - a national, comprehensive, multi-faceted, long term national plan developed; working groups are established
 - recommendations made to all levels of government to address this issue (see ‘Putting People First’ regional and community poverty prevention and reduction strategy document for a recommendation on this)
 - 1 local event held
 - Year 2:**
 - national plan completed
 - presentations made to municipal governments
 - increased awareness of governments on this issue
 - other strategies tbd pending Year 1 outcomes
 - Year 3:**
 - plan continues to be implemented
 - local interest builds to support implementation
 - other strategies tbd pending Year 1 outcomes

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The numbers of partners and contributors are growing weekly. Here is a recent count that represents involvement at all levels (LRT, Board, ALIV(e), Community Conversations; etc.)

By Level of Participation:

Contributors	103
Partners	57
Potential	27

By Sector:

Business	52
Education	2
Faith	14
Government	25
Non-Profit	48
Other	23
General	23

Multi-sector Involvement: We have good and growing involvement from the non-profit, government, education, and low-income sectors. The business sector continues to be the most challenging sector to involve. We've had more success engaging businesses in initiatives where there is more action-oriented work with tangible outcomes. However, it's been difficult to find the right business representative on the LRT. Now that we are attaining the necessary financial resources, increasing our staff capacity, and having a comprehensive community plan of action, there's increased potential of engaging business for the LRT position. After the Peer Input Process, we added a Learning goal and a key activity under "Learning, Sharing and Change" section.

The Community Conversations Series – a key tool of engagement

Opportunities Waterloo Region's mission is to ignite community action and leadership to create bold solutions that reduce and prevent poverty through collaboration, advocacy and education. The Community Conversation Series (CCS) is one of the engagement tools we use to help us fulfill this mandate. It not only provides an opportunity for community engagement; showcasing the work being done in the community; and gauging community interest in potential solutions; it also offers a chance to learn about current issues, research and innovative solutions to poverty. It is a platform from which to speak and engage as many people in as many sectors as we can.

The Community Conversations Series, entering its 7th season, has inspired other communities, such as Hamilton and Niagara, to hold similar events.

The goal has always been for the meetings to have value for the participants—a true give and take experience. To this end, each speaking engagement is followed by table discussions and/or includes a time for questions/answers. This gives everyone a chance to explore how the topic affects their work and/or life, and to learn and share some new solutions and perspectives with new people.

Record numbers attended the 2007-2008 Community Conversations Series, many of which were consultation processes on policy issues. Total attendance at events was 482, compared to a range of 267 to 390 for the previous five series. Participation in the series also shows multi-sector involvement, with:

- 49% non-profit,
- 20% government,
- 11% business,
- 6% education,
- 3% faith (only measured in the last three years), and
- 11% other,

as averaged over the six series to date. Please see Appendix III for more detailed statistics for the attendance at the Community Conversation Series.

CURRENT HUMAN RESOURCE CAPACITY

Opportunities Waterloo Region operates on three levels. A Leadership Roundtable (LRT) acts as forum for discussing and defining local poverty issues, identifying potential strategies for addressing them and acting as the creative nucleus around which the initiative revolves. A Board of Directors is the fiduciary agent and paid staff members are charged with acting on the advice of the LRT and Board.

Leadership Roundtable currently has 18 members comprised of leaders from Regional government (Public Health and Social Services), funders/participants, education, non-profit organizations, business, low-income sector, social planning council, community individual, and Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. We are eager to increase representation from the business community. We expect the LRT to grow as the community plan gets implemented and more partners are engaged. A small group of LRT, board and staff members have been meeting over the summer to develop this plan, then bringing it back to the whole LRT and Board for their feedback.

Members

Mike Schuster, Co-chair, Regional Municipality of Waterloo
Ron Dowhaniuk, Co-chair, United Way of Cambridge & North Dumfries
Elaine Young, Community Representative
Frank Mowatt, Community Representative
Greg DeGroot-Maggetti, Mennonite Central Committee Ontario
Heather Montgomery, United Way of Kitchener-Waterloo
Jane Breithaupt, Community Representative
Joe Mancini, The Working Centre
Dr. Kelly Anthony, Health Studies Faculty, University of Waterloo
Linda Terry, Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries
Martin Reeves, Community Representative
Mary Joe Freire, Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities
Rose Mailloux, Price Waterhouse Coopers
Rosemary Smith, K-W Community Foundation
Theresa Schumilas, Region of Waterloo - Public Health
Tracey Robertson, The Ontario Trillium Foundation
Wendi Campbell, Food Bank of Waterloo Region

Board of Directors has seven members representing non-profit, business, education, low-income sector, financial, faith, and legal. The Board is deeply committed to this initiative.

Brice Balmer, Chair, Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition
Alessandra Pioreschi, Vice-chair, Miller Thomson LLP
Matthew Betik, Secretary-Treasurer, KPMG LLP
Judith Chopra, McMaster University
Sally Lerner, University of Waterloo
John Payne, Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario – Waterloo Region
Terri-Lynn Langdon, Community Representative

ALIV(e) group has been meeting for one year, developed a terms of reference and is collaborating together. It currently has five active participants, and at least three new potential members and the group has a goal to increase its numbers during Year 1. They have actions they want to take. They have participated in many events to ensure their voices are heard (i.e. provincial consultations, LRT, Community Conversations Series). Three members are LRT members as well.

Core Staff: For the last four years, there has been two staff – the Executive Director and an Administrative Assistant. Recently, we added one more position – Executive Assistant. We also have a contract bookkeeper and a contract Community Conversations Coordinator. We will be seeking funds to hire a core Project Developer for the initiative.

Project Staff: We have a Social Purchasing Portal Manager and a Community Garden Capacity Builder on staff.

Other Resources:

Wilfrid Laurier University's Community Research in Action (CRA) team will provide:

- seven PhD students giving 4 hours per week from Sept. – May, with the possibility of co-op placements in the summer, 2009 to continue the work
- two MSW students

Student Practicum Placements: two Renison students from Sept – May, 2009, 3 days per week. One student will be working with the ALIV(e) group and the other will be working with the CRA team and will help out with the community garden policy research.

Job Creation Project Partnerships (JCP) with Employment Ontario: We currently have two participants who are working with us full-time for eight more months. They are coordinating special events. One participant is performing a marketing and promotion role with the Social Purchasing Portal. The JCP is an excellent resource that can be ongoing through re-applying for new project assistance. We will continue to access this program as needed.

Masters of Business Administration Students donate 40 hours of service to non-profit organizations. Opportunities has benefited from this program over the years and will continue to request this resource when appropriate

Opportunities organizers are now reviewing various strategies for deepening the involvement of its business contacts, particularly as potential members of its Leadership Roundtable. To date, business contacts have provided assistance in program operations, but Opportunities hopes to harness the energy and influence of key business leaders who will champion poverty reduction and attract others to the work. Toughening economic times require a concerted community effort to built vitality and the voice of business can lend a particular strength and credibility to the effort.

LEARNING, SHARING AND CHANGE

This Learning Plan is the starting point of our commitment under the agreement with Vibrant Communities Canada and acts as a guide to focus efforts on building an action and learning community based on the Opportunities Waterloo Region initiative. The “**activities**” will assist with shaping existing activities and disseminating results. The “**learning**” includes increased knowledge and insight gained through Opportunities’ efforts to reduce and prevent poverty in the Region. The “**community**” represents a range of networks that begins with the Leadership Roundtable, extends through the circles of influence of its members, and includes the broader community networks and organizations.

This learning plan details how Opportunities’ staff, the Leadership Roundtable and additional partners will be involved in the development of a local action and learning community that helps Opportunities Waterloo Region and the CCI achieve its goals.

Learning Goals:

- Facilitate a community of learning in support of Opportunities’ goals
- Facilitate dialogue that could ignite community action and leadership
- Increase knowledge regarding alternative solutions/strategies that relate to Opportunities’ strategic focus areas, but not excluding other areas of community interest
- Influence change in policy, practice and beliefs at the individual, organizational and systemic level
- Share learning with Vibrant Communities Canada

Key Activities will be:

1. An evaluation of the comprehensive community initiative in partnership with Vibrant Communities Canada and Caledon Institute of Social Policy
2. Embedding evaluation plans in each project plan
3. Facilitating the development of a “‘data warehouse’ that is a database of reports/resources we use to inform the work of *Opportunities Waterloo Region*, which we can then share with the community.
4. Assisting with the dissemination of what we have learned in creative and diverse ways.
5. Creating opportunities for local community members to participate in discussions that inform the strategic focus areas
6. Creating opportunities for local community members to participate in the national Vibrant Communities tele-learning sessions and community of practice calls that are identified as priority learning opportunities in Waterloo Region
7. Focusing learning on how to engage the business sector

Key Activity 1: Develop an overall 3-year evaluation plan.

Actions: a) Complete the evaluation and required reporting to Vibrant Communities Canada. b) Work with Caledon to complete case stories. c) Disseminate learning.

Key Activity 2: Evaluation plan embedded into each project plan to document and share learning.

Actions: a) Evaluation/reporting will be completed for each initiative as required. b) Disseminate learnings.

Key Activity 3: Help facilitate the development of a comprehensive list of resources that we use to inform the work of *Opportunities Waterloo Region*, which we can then share with the community.

Actions: Create an internet presence and promote the Opportunities web-site, which includes web-pages dedicated to learning resources, including linking to the Vibrant Communities 'Learning Centre' web-page.

The 'data warehouse' web-pages include:

- local learning publications
- reports used to inform our work
- resources that provide statistical information about the Region of Waterloo and other relevant data
- links to other sites relevant to the work of Opportunities
- links to community partners and contributors

Key Activity 4: Assist with the dissemination of learning in creative and diverse ways.

Actions:

- a) Include a section in the newsletter or e-news that covers any issues, progress, successes that as we initiate the strategies.
- b) Increase the circulation of the national newsletter by ensuring all Leadership Roundtable, Board and initiative team members, as well as tele-learning session participants are invited to relevant events.
- c) A facilitated reflection of the collaborative success of Opportunities Waterloo Region in the context of Vibrant Communities
- d) Use the Community Conversation Series as a venue for sharing learning and updating the community
- e) Host the Canada School of Public Service's Direxions tour each year

Key Activity 5: Create opportunities for local community members to participate in discussions that inform Opportunities of local issues. Provide opportunities for community learning (education and awareness) on innovative solutions to poverty. Provide the venue for igniting community action and leadership when strategically required to do so.

Actions:

- a) With the LRT, plan each bi-monthly *Community Conversations* Series events
- b) Produce 5 events per year from May - March.

Key Activity 6: Create opportunities for local community members to participate in the national Vibrant Communities tele-learning sessions that are identified as priority learning opportunities in Waterloo Region.

- a) Opportunities currently hosts the events
- b) Determine which LRT members would be interested in hosting tele-learning sessions
- c) Provide more than one location in the Region for participation. If group participation is not possible, encourage the option of listening from individual offices
- d) Upon receiving the information on upcoming tele-learning sessions from Tamarack:
 - Announce upcoming sessions at the Board, ALIV(e) and Leadership Roundtable meetings
 - determine who will host the specific event
 - determine what community group (s) would find the topic relevant to their work and invite
 - Target the community networks/people related to the topic
- e) Include Vibrant tele-learning session information at the 'Community of Opportunities' display table at the Community Conversations events.

Key Activity 7: Target specific early learning on engaging the business sector.

- a) review Vibrant Communities resources on how to engage the business sector
- b) participate in tele-learning and other sessions related to this goal
- c) Follow – up on suggested ideas following the Peer Input Process for this community plan

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Appendix I

Rationale – Definition of Poverty

Overall, poverty is a complex problem requiring complex solutions, and we chose a definition reflect that.

After reviewing a number of definitions of poverty (from Ireland, U.K., and V.C. St. John's), we found the Vibrant Communities St. John's definition and rationale to be the most in line with our local thinking.. They write:

“Rather than exhaust energy and interest in pursuit of a perfect definition, we have opted instead for a basic working definition which reflects a widely shared sense among partners about what constitutes poverty and poverty reduction. In this view, poverty is a situation where individuals and families lack the resources needed to maintain a decent standard of living and participate fully in the life of the community; poverty reduction is the process of overcoming this situation. “(Community Action Plan for Poverty Reduction (2008-2012), 2008)

We liked the simplicity of this definition, and its recognition that poverty is about more than money. We agree that poverty is complex, and is about more than financial resources, at the same time we wanted to emphasize economic resources. This definition promotes a comprehensive and holistic view (fitting with the SLA and VC Approaches). It includes individuals and families, which is important for being inclusive. In addition, this definition conveys the social exclusion that results from poverty; a condition that we plan to address. For these reasons, we have adopted a very similar definition to the one above. Poverty occurs when individuals and families lack, firstly, financial and other resources to maintain a sustainable standard of living, and secondly, resources that provide for participation in community life.

We made a few small changes to the St. John's definition. Firstly, we changed “lacking the resources” to “lacking financial and other resources.” We removed “the” because we did not want to imply that all resources are lacking. We added “financial” because of the realities of living in a market-based economy. Financial assets are a critical part of poverty, and some of our strategies focus in this area. We added “and other” to include all areas of the Asset Pentagon, which are Human Assets, Social Assets, Physical Assets, Personal Assets, and Financial Assets. Secondly, we changed “decent standard of living” to “sustainable standard of living” to incorporate the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach upon which we have based our plan. Thirdly, we removed “fully” from “participate fully” because we did not want to imply that participation in the community was necessary, or that a certain level of participation was deemed more appropriate than another. We wanted to allow for individual and family choice in the level of participation.

When we say “other resources” in our definition of poverty, we are referring to resources in all five asset areas. We do not want to restrict our definition to a lack of financial resources. We take a holistic view that poverty is a lack of many types of resources, of which financial is only one. When we say “sustainable standard of living,” we are setting ourselves the goal of helping individuals and families to develop strengths in all asset areas. Only those interventions which aim at a variety of asset areas will be effective in poverty reduction. Financial interventions alone are insufficient for moving families and individuals out of poverty. All asset areas must be addressed in order to move to a sustainable livelihood (MacKeigan, 2004). When we refer to “participation in community life,” we are highlighting social assets, as well as human and

personal assets, and its relationship to poverty.

Opportunities Waterloo Region prepared a report “Putting People First: A Poverty Reduction Strategy for Waterloo Region – Talking Points on Focus Areas” (2008b). This document was compiled with input from the Community Conversation Series participants, the ALIV(e) group, and the Opportunities Leadership Roundtable, staff and Board. In this document, the definition of poverty from Quebec was taken as a working definition. Poverty is “the condition of a human being who is deprived of the resources, means, choices and power necessary to acquire and maintain economic self-sufficiency or to facilitate integration and participation in society” (pg. 3). The report goes on to explain that a definition of poverty must go beyond specific levels of income, considering the purchasing power of the income, deprivation indicators and the ability for social inclusion. The definition chosen for this plan satisfies these requirements. This reveals a consistency and continuity between our previous and current work.

Appendix II

Root Causes

We do not include personal attributions as a root cause.

We use the following examples to explain why we are not focusing on the individual:

- One group that experiences higher levels of poverty in Canada is single-parent families, especially those led by women. In Canada, in 2003, 38 percent of single-mother families live in poverty, 12.6 percent of single-father families, and 8.4 percent of all families (Townson, 2005). Looking at these statistics alone, it might be tempting to say that a root cause of poverty is living in a single-parent home. However, a comparison with other countries shows that this need not be the case. According to Unicef (2007), in Sweden, for example, 16.8 percent of children live in single-parent families. The percentage of children living in poverty (defined as households making less than 50 percent of the median income) is 3.6. In Canada, by comparison, 14.6 percent of children live in single-parent homes, where 13.6 percent of children live in poverty (pp. 42-43). It can be seen from these numbers, therefore, that single-parenthood alone is not a root cause of poverty, but that systemic and other factors can greatly alleviate the negative financial impacts of certain family configurations.

- Seniors in Canada, as a group, have been susceptible to poverty. In 1980, 21 percent of seniors lived with low incomes (National Advisory Council on Aging, 2005, p. 8). Through a variety of government programs, such as CPP, OAS, and GIS, the low income level was lowered by 2003 to 7 percent. This decrease shows that poverty levels are able to be significantly improved when systems and social policies change.

- Immigrants have higher levels of poverty than other Canadians. When looking at their characteristics, it becomes apparent that this is not because of personal attributes.

Compared to other Canadians living in poverty, low-income recent immigrants were more likely to: be in the core working-age population (to be aged between 30 and 44); live in the large urban areas of Toronto or Vancouver; be a member of a visible minority group; have a university degree; and do not have any work-limiting disabilities ... [and also to] be members of a working poor family (Fleury, 2007, Section 7.1)

An important distinction is between personal and social responsibility. Both of these need to be recognized, but not confused. It is possible for an individual to have personal responsibility, taking action such as upgrading education or performing a job search. However, social responsibility is lacking in cases where jobs found are not a living wage, or education is not valued because of stigmatization. Furthermore, when accidents happen to individuals, such as injury, poverty should not be the result. This is a failure of social responsibility.

Appendix III

Community Conversations

Opportunities Waterloo Region’s mission is to ignite community action and leadership to create bold solutions that reduce and prevent poverty through collaboration, advocacy and education. The *Community Conversations Series* is one of the tools we use to help us fulfill this mandate. It not only provides an opportunity for multi-sector community engagement, but also offers a chance to network, learn about current issues, relevant research and innovative solutions to poverty that can ignite community action.

The *Community Conversations Series*, entering its 7th season, showcases the work being done in the community. It is a platform from which to speak and engage as many people as we can.

The goal has always been for the meetings to have value for the participants--a true give and take experience. To this end, each speaking engagement is followed by table discussions and/or includes a time for questions/answers. This gives everyone a chance to explore how the topic affects their work and/or life, and to learn and share with new people some new solutions and perspectives.

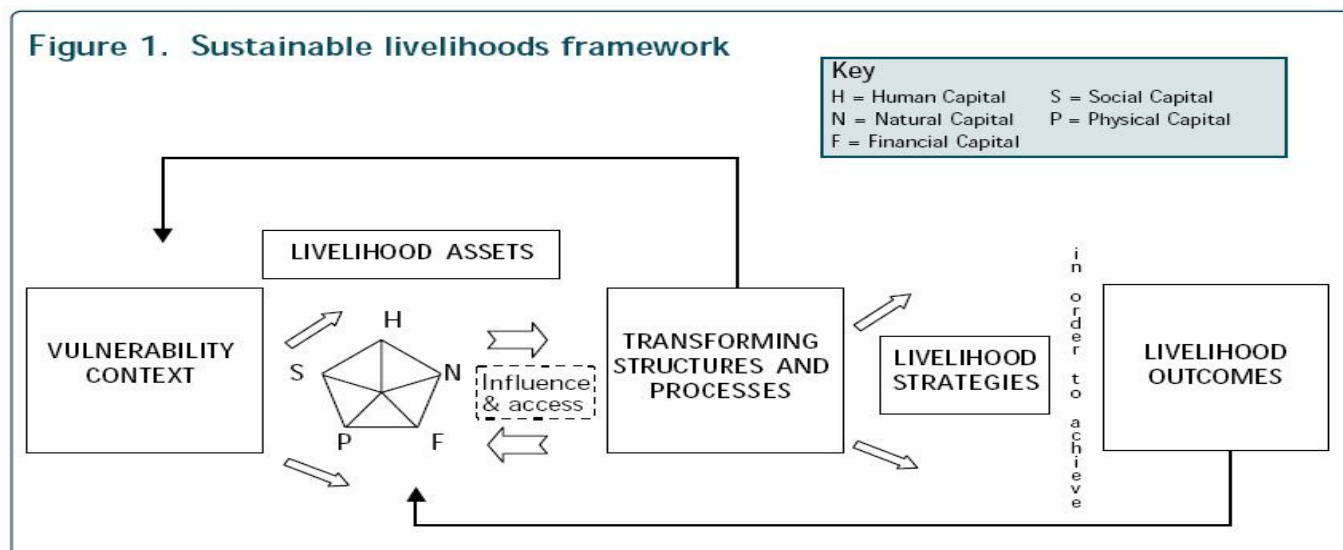
SECTOR ATTENDANCE	Year							
<i>Sector</i>	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	Grand Total	Percentage
Business	36	85	46	35	24	20	246	11%
Education	20	14	11	15	33	45	138	6%
Faith				3	15	39	57	3%
Government	96	70	43	53	70	105	437	20%
Non-Profit	154	118	158	237	178	199	1044	48%
Other	23	43	9	47	40	74	236	11%
Grand Total	329	330	267	390	360	482	2158	

LOCATION ATTENDANCE	Year							
<i>Location</i>	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	Grand Total	Percentage
Cambridge	32	17	36	75	67	87	314	15%
Kitchener	109	112	87	197	156	195	856	40%
Other	47	86	59	28	45	76	341	16%
Townships				15	6	9	30	1%
Waterloo	140	114	85	72	86	115	612	28%
Grand Total	328	329	267	387	360	482	2153	

Appendix IV

The Sustainable Livelihood Approach

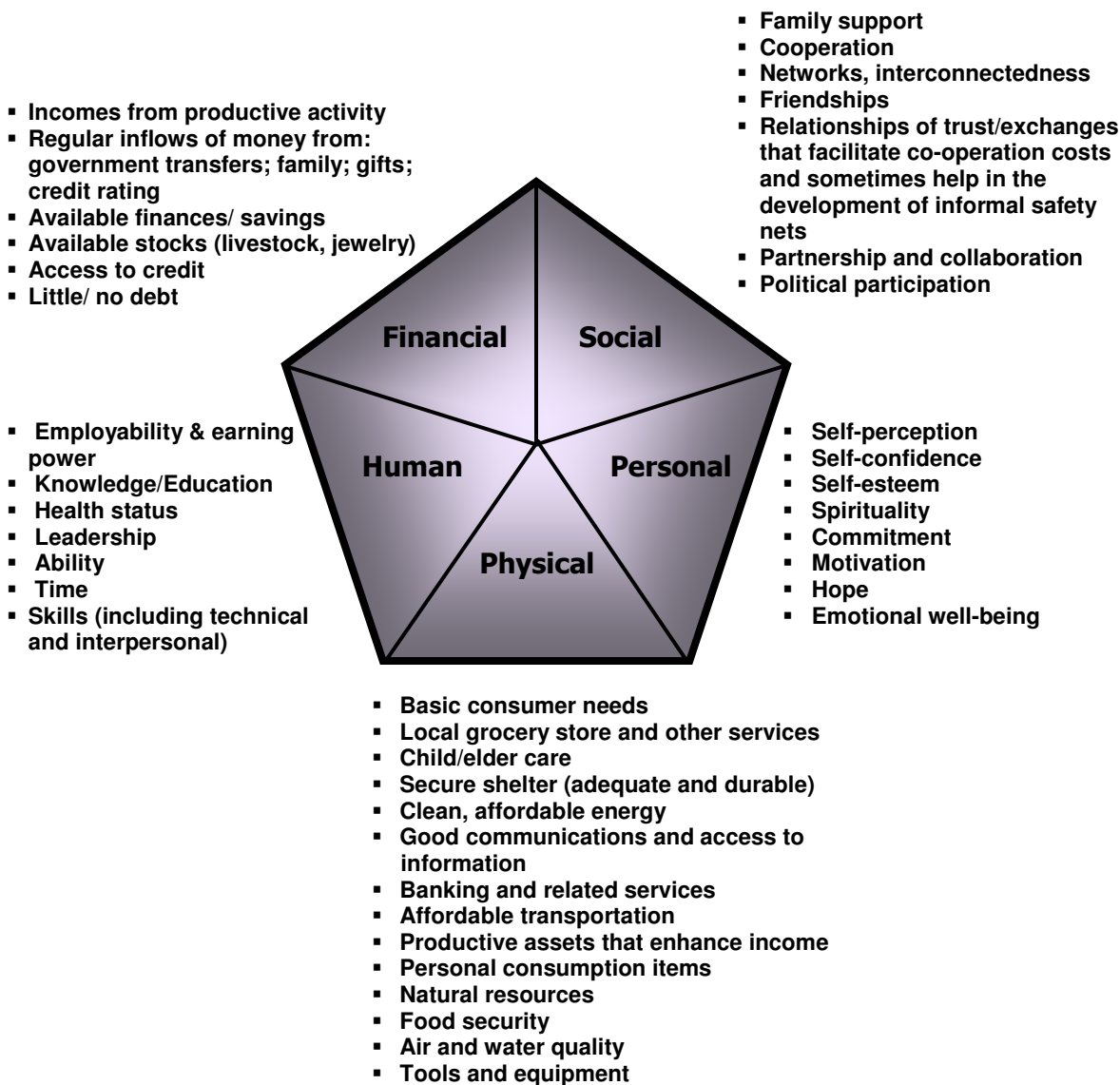
The SLA provides us with a way to think and talk about the complexities of poverty that in turn, helps us to act in a comprehensive way to address sustainable solutions to these complexities (including viewing and planning actions at the individual, family, household levels). Viewed from a holistic asset-based perspective, it provides us with principles for conducting these activities that act as a guide to ensure that integrity is maintained. The complexities of poverty as addressed by the SLA is demonstrated in the diagram below (Department for International Development, 1999, 1.1).



It's flexible in application, but it doesn't compromise its principles. It puts people at the centre of development. Also, "... the stress is on understanding and facilitating the link through from the micro to the macro, rather than working only at community level." (Ashley & Carney, 1999).

As you can see in the above diagram, the SLA asset pentagon is only one component of the overall framework. The Department for International Development's (DFID) design included social, financial, human, physical and natural asset areas. An urban Canadian adaptation of the pentagon arose from the work produced by the Women and Economic Development Consortium. A group called Eko Nomos researched and wrote a report called 'Women in Transition Out of Poverty' (Women and Economic Development Consortium, 2001). In their version the personal asset area replaces the natural asset area. The natural asset categories appear to be incorporated into the physical asset area. It's this Canadian version of the pentagon that Opportunities adopted. Based on participant feedback during the SLA 2003 local project, we added more categories (Time, hope, commitment, food security and little/no debt).

The Asset Pentagon



Human assets are “the skills, knowledge, abilities and capabilities that aid in the development of the other asset areas.” Social assets are “the benefits that come through relationships with people and institutions.” Physical assets are the “actual physical things that people own, control, or have access to.” Personal assets are “intangible assets; the inner resources of an individual.” Finally, financial assets are “income, credit, [and] investments” (MacKeigan, 2004).

Appendix V

Glossary

Community Research in Action (CRA)

Community Research in Action is a group of Masters and PhD Social Work students at Wilfrid Laurier University. Their goal is to identify and analyze policies that affect poverty in Waterloo Region through research based on talking directly to people with low incomes. Toward this goal, they are forming partnerships with local community organizations that can assist in putting the CRA in touch with interview subjects. Opportunities Waterloo Research is their first partner.

Friends of the Federal Family

The Friends of the Federal Family is a group of federal officials who meet informally and voluntarily to research and discuss place-based policy, and determine the optimum federal role. The Friends of the Federal Family met with Opportunities Waterloo Region as part of their research into what various communities are doing in place-based policy.