building wellbeing and prosperity together

TAKING ACTION ON POVERTY

a conference • Truro • Nova Scotia   October 26 to 28 • 2010

POST-CONFERENCE REPORT

Prepared by:

Health Promotion Clearinghouse

Health Promotion
Clearinghouse

NOVA SCOTIA

**Health Promotion and Protection
Labour and Workforce Development
Economic and Rural Development
Community Services**

FEDERATION OF LABOUR NOVA SCOTIA

Nova Scotia Co-operative Council
MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN NOVA SCOTIA COMMUNITIES

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I. Introduction

BACKGROUND AND GOALS

The **"Building Wellbeing and Prosperity Together: Taking Action on Poverty in Nova Scotia"** conference took place in Truro, Nova Scotia, October 26–28, 2010 and was attended by over 260 participants. It was hosted by the Health Promotion Clearinghouse (HPC), planned and carried out by a diverse multi-sectoral steering committee and working groups, and funded by government, community organizations and the private sector.

The Canadian and international evidence on the links between socioeconomic status and health has grown rapidly over the past 10-15 years. There is strong and widespread consensus that income and social status are critical determinants of health and wellbeing across populations.[1] In Nova Scotia, as in the rest of Canada, the lower people are in the socioeconomic hierarchy, the higher their risk of developing chronic diseases, and the shorter their life expectancy.[2,3,4,5]

Income interacts with other determinants such as gender, race/ethnicity, and age, among others, to create differences in life experiences and differences in health status. Inequalities in early childhood experiences, education, employment and working conditions, food security, housing, and social inclusion manifest in health disparities across the income spectrum. In Nova Scotia, poverty disproportionately affects Aboriginal people, persons with disabilities, African Nova Scotians, and women, particularly single mothers and women over 65 years of age.[6]

Poverty is the result of a range of root causes and their interactions. Tackling poverty and the policies that influence it requires new and innovative approaches that engage the many stakeholders involved in addressing the social and economic forces that create and maintain poverty. The conference was intended to bring together some of these stakeholders to share strategies, stories, challenges and lessons related to addressing poverty in Nova Scotia.

The conference goals were to:

- improve our understanding about the costs of poverty – human, social and economic;
- share ideas about how we can reduce poverty;
- learn about barriers to reducing poverty and how we can overcome them;
- learn more about how we can reduce poverty by working together – as governments, businesses, nonprofit organizations and community groups – with those living in poverty; and
- develop our ability as a community to be involved and active in reducing poverty.

THE ORGANIZING TEAM

Organizing a multi-sectoral conference in itself contributes towards achieving conference objectives. Based on the Vibrant Communities Model, the steering committee and working groups that planned and implemented the conference were made up of representatives from the four targeted sectors – (1) Non-profit/voluntary; (2) Government; (3) Business; and (4) Persons living in poverty.

The first meeting of the Steering Committee took place in late March 2010. Over the course of the next seven months, the committee met 12 times. A Conference Coordinator was hired at the end of April, and five Working Groups were formed: Venue, Program, Outreach, Media Relations, and Finance/Fundraising. The Outreach and Media Relations groups often met jointly to ensure consistent and inclusive approaches to conference communication and promotion. Working groups were instrumental in proceeding with the planning process in between meetings of the full Steering Committee. The conference program is included as Appendix A.

Members of the Organizing Team included representatives from: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives - Nova Scotia; Community Advocates Network; Community Coalition to End Poverty; Community Links; Face of Poverty Consultation; Feed Nova Scotia; Feminists for Just & Equitable Public Policy; Halifax Community Health Board; Halifax Humanities 101; Halifax Regional Municipality; Health Promotion Clearinghouse; Nova Scotia Co-operative Council; North End Community Health Centre; Nova Scotia Association of Black Social Workers; Nova Scotia Association of Social Workers; Nova Scotia Departments of Community Services, Health Promotion and Protection, and Labour and Workforce Development; Nova Scotia Disabled Persons Commission; Nova Scotia Federation of Labour; and Women's Centres Connect.

Organizing the conference was a collaborative endeavour that provided opportunities for mutual learning, problem solving and collective decision-making. The commitment to a shared enterprise, increased understanding of each other's perspectives and constraints, and getting to know each other better allowed the Steering Committee and Working Groups to overcome their differences and mount a successful conference.

PRINCIPLES FOR WORKING TOGETHER

Four main principles guided the planning and implementation of the conference: (1) Inclusion; (2) Social Justice; (3) Collaboration; and (4) Action.

1. Inclusion

Anticipating 200 conference participants, the Steering Committee set targets for 50 participants living on a low income, 50 participants from corporate, government and institutional sectors and 100 participants from the non-profit sector, students and individuals. Participation of low income participants was fully subsidized (transportation, accommodations and meals). Subsidies for services such as child, elder or attendant care were also provided to reduce barriers to participation.

A concerted effort was made to ensure participation from across Nova Scotia. The selection of Truro as the conference location was based on its geographic centrality. The venue was chosen over its competition largely because of its greater accessibility for people with mobility problems.

To encourage public participation and awareness, two conference events were open to the general public: (1) The opening night session featuring a panel of individuals living in poverty and a presentation by Senator Art Eggleton, and (2) Liz Weaver's presentation "Communities Can Reduce Poverty: Five Stories Prove It's True" on the Tamarack Institute Vibrant Communities project on the second night. Pre-conference promotion included public screenings of two Canadian poverty-related films, "Poor No More" and "Four Feet Up", dealing with the issues of the working poor and child poverty, respectively.

The conference exceeded its target for self-identified low-income participation. Sixty individuals self-identified as low income upon registration. Fifty seven percent of all registrants lived within the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM), and 43% lived in other regions of the province. Although not an exact representation of the province's population—HRM accounts for 40% of Nova Scotia's population— these figures do highlight the geographical inclusiveness of the conference.

Substantial effort, including a special breakfast for business people with Gerry Pond, former CEO of NBTel as guest speaker, was devoted to attracting the business community. Despite these efforts, a shortcoming of the conference was participation from the business community (4% based on the evaluation forms). Suggested 'next steps' at the conclusion of the conference clearly identified the need to bring the business community to the table in future discussion and action to address poverty.

The working poor were also inadequately represented at the conference. Holding it in the middle of the work week may have been a significant barrier to their participation.

2. Social Justice

The conference content and format was based on the values of social justice, human rights and social and economic inclusion. Three components of the conference were specifically designed to support a values-based perspective on poverty:

1. The conference opened with a panel of individuals living in poverty moderated by Rita Shelton Deverell, Nancy's Chair in Women Studies at Mount Saint Vincent University.
2. Ed Broadbent, the first President of the International Centre for Human Rights and International Development and Honorary Director of Canada Without Poverty gave a keynote address.
3. A panel was held on the social and economic costs of poverty, highlighting three groups that are particularly vulnerable to living in poverty—women, aboriginal people, and people with disabilities and African Nova Scotians.

3. Collaboration

A key focus of the conference was building greater capacity in communities and in the province to bring all economic and social sectors together to address poverty in a more collaborative and effective way. Liz Weaver, Lead Coach of the Vibrant Communities Canada Team from Tamarack - An Institute for Community Engagement, facilitated two discussions on collaboration with conference participants.

Tamarack has had substantial success with its Vibrant Communities initiative, whose local community-driven efforts have resulted in reducing poverty in 12 communities across Canada. Vibrant Communities began in 2002 and is based on establishing strong collaborative multi-sector community-based projects to address poverty in the community.

Liz Weaver's first presentation "Communities Can Reduce Poverty: Five Stories Prove It's True" illustrated success stories from five Canadian communities (Surrey and Victoria, BC; Edmonton, AB; and Hamilton, ON) and the rural community of Tupelo, Mississippi, USA. Her second presentation "Faster Alone, Farther Together" included a presentation, an interactive exercise, and table discussions on the benefits and challenges of collaboration.

4. Action

A main theme in conference planning and implementation was that it is not enough to understand and discuss poverty. Action is needed. The conference included a 'next steps' session to generate ideas for action on addressing poverty in Nova Scotia.

These ideas were further discussed by participants in sessions corresponding to regions within the province (Cape Breton, Northern Nova Scotia, Annapolis Valley to Yarmouth, South Shore and Southwest Nova Scotia, Dartmouth and Halifax). A separate group had a province-wide focus.

At the end of the session participants placed dots beside the ideas or activities written on flip chart paper to which they would be prepared to contribute time and energy. The flip chart papers were then displayed in the plenary meeting room and everyone was asked to walk around and to add comments or indicate their interest in being involved.

CONFERENCE PROGRAM AT A GLANCE

An overview of the agenda for the 2.5-day conference is provided below. The full conference program is included as Appendix A.

Tuesday, October 26 (Open to the Public)

- Opening Ceremonies
- First Voice Panel, interviewed by Rita Shelton Deverell: "*Living in Poverty in Nova Scotia*"
- The Hon. Art Eggleton – "*We Can't Afford Poverty Anymore*"
- Reception

Wednesday, October 27

Morning

- Greetings and Opening Remarks
- The Hon. Ed Broadbent – "*Out With The New Barbarism: Combating Poverty And Inequality*"
- Dr. Christine Saulnier (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives–NS) – "*The Cost of Poverty in Nova Scotia*" – followed by a panel discussion from the perspectives of groups particularly vulnerable to poverty
- Table Discussions

Afternoon

- Local Success Stories and Challenges: Eight presentations and discussions
- Lessons Learned from Different Jurisdictions: Panel discussion from the perspectives of non-governmental, business, and government

Evening (Open to the Public)

- Liz Weaver, Vibrant Communities "*Communities Can Reduce Poverty – Five Stories Prove It's True: Creating Vibrant Communities*"
- Screening of films "*Poor No More*" and "*Four Feet Up*"

Thursday, October 28

Morning

- Liz Weaver, Vibrant Communities Presentation and Workshop on Collaboration "Faster Alone, Farther Together"
- "Next Steps" Sessions – Facilitated regional discussions on next steps for taking action on poverty in Nova Scotia

Afternoon

- Motivational Speaker – Robert Wright
- Flip Chart Gallery Walkabout
- Closing plenary

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TAKING ACTION ON POVERTY
a conference • Truro • Nova Scotia   October 26 to 28 • 2010

Holiday Inn Hotel and Conference Centre
437 Prince Street
Truro, Nova Scotia

Tuesday October 26	6:30 pm to 9:30 pm
Wednesday October 27	8:30 am to 8:30 pm
Thursday October 28	8:30 am to 3:30 pm

our vision
Everyone brings his or her own experiences and knowledge to share. We are committed to learning from each other. It's a chance to learn, share and offer suggestions to reduce poverty for the benefit of all Nova Scotians.

CONFERENCE WEBSITE

Videos of most of the sessions are available through the Taking Action on Poverty Conference website at http:/hpclearinghouse.net/ blogs/ endingpovertyns/pages/home.aspx. The website also includes other documentation, such as:

- The text of Senator Art Eggleton's presentation, "We Can't Afford Poverty Anymore";

- The text of The Honourable Ed Broadbent's keynote address, "Out With the New Barbarism: Combatting Poverty and Inequality";

- The Senate Committee's report "In from the Margins: A Call to Action on Poverty, Housing and Homelessness";

- A link to the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives-Nova Scotia "Cost of Poverty in Nova Scotia" report;

- More information about Wilkinson and Pickett's 2009 book titled "The Spirit Level: Why Equal Societies Almost Always do Better";

- A link to Newfoundland and Labrador's 2009 Poverty Reduction Strategy Progress Report;

- Links to the videos "Poor No More" and "Four Feet Up";

- Regional Group "Next Steps" Session Summaries; and

- Notes from the "Local Success Stories and Challenges" Panel Presentations and Discussions.

II. Voices and Issues

OPENING CEREMONIES AND REMARKS

Charla Williams, the conference moderator, introduced Elder Doug Knockwood of the Shubenacadie First Nation. Elder Knockwood opened the conference with a Mi'kmaq prayer and a smudging ceremony. Greetings were then provided by: Mayor Bill Mills (Town of Truro); the Honourable Denise Peterson-Rafuse (Minister of Community Services); The Honourable Marilyn More (Minister of Labour and Workforce Development); and Jeanne Fay (Co-Chair of the Conference Steering Committee).

Charla Williams

L to R: Hon. Denise Peterson-Rafuse, Hon. Marilyn More, Mayor Bill Mills, Charla Williams & Jeanne Fay

FIRST VOICE PANEL

The panel was moderated by *Rita Shelton Deverell* (Nancy's Chair in Women's Studies at Mount Saint Vincent University) and featured three people with direct experience of living in poverty in Nova Scotia. Their stories told of difficult life experiences that led to poverty—disability, injury, loss of a job, and escaping an abusive relationship. They told of frustration, anger and hard-won accomplishments in caring for themselves and their families. Fear, loss of dignity and loss of choice were part of the experience for each of them in their relationships with the social assistance system, in realizing the inadequacy of welfare allowances, and their difficulties with housing. They also offered some solutions to poverty, summarized below.

- *Laura Smith* contradicted the commonly-held view that poverty is complex. For her, poverty is, in fact, simple – it is about insufficient means and societal values. The complex part is overcoming prejudices, changing human behaviour and generating political will. She emphasized that poverty is simple to fix "if you can look it squarely in the eye and say 'my value system does not include a person living like that' (e.g. without food, adequate shelter, etc.)."

- *Kimberly Bush* suggested that shelter allowances be reviewed and more affordable housing made available. She felt that a considerable burden would be removed from people on social assistance if the government negotiated and paid rent to landlords directly, rather than providing an inadequate shelter allowance. She also emphasized the importance of education in her journey out of poverty.

- *Wayne MacNaughton* reminded everyone that housing and food allowances have not kept pace with the cost of living and that the Consumer Price Index does not adequately reflect the real costs for food and shelter for people on social assistance. He also noted that the punishing claw back of wages for people on social assistance taking temporary jobs was a tremendous barrier to self sufficiency.

> *"When you are on social assistance, you are forced to beg and … you are forced to feel second class."*
>
> — **Wayne MacNaughton**
>
> *"The only way that I could see anything getting any better for me and my children was education."*
>
> — **Kimberly Bush**
>
> *"I fell very hard into the social safety net… Any semblance of self worth that I had garnered for myself had to be liquidated before I was given a penny. The grace of my career, my life, was disintegrating before my eyes."*
>
> — **Laura Smith**

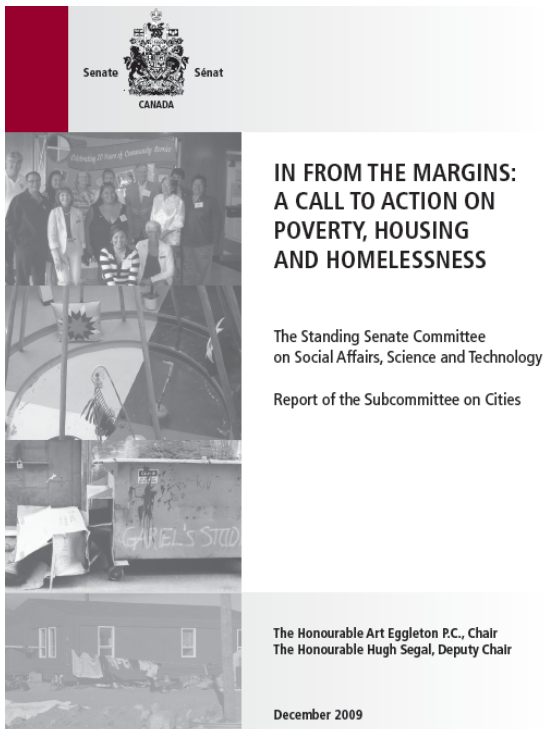**L to R: Wayne MacNaughton, Rita Shelton Deverell, Kimberly Bush and Laura Smith**

"WE CAN'T AFFORD POVERTY ANYMORE"

Senator Art Eggleton delivered a presentation based upon the Senate Committee's report *In From the Margins: A Call for Action on Poverty, Housing and Homelessness*. The Committee held 35 hearings, hosted five roundtables and visited 20 agencies in nine cities across Canada. They heard nearly 200 witnesses, some living in poverty and/or homeless themselves, others working for community agencies or serving as policy analysts in universities and voluntary organizations. He stated, "What we heard was appalling. We found that a staggering one in 10 Canadians lives in poverty."

The Senator described the economic costs of poverty, quoting a recent study that concluded that poverty in Canada costs over $30 billion annually, more than half of the current federal deficit. The Canadian Chamber of Commerce forecasts that, as our population ages and the growth in the working age population slows, we are going to face significant labour shortages. The population groups that are living in or vulnerable to poverty are needed to fill jobs and pay taxes in the future.

Senator Art Eggleton

IN FROM THE MARGINS:
A CALL TO ACTION ON
POVERTY, HOUSING
AND HOMELESSNESS

The Standing Senate Committee
on Social Affairs, Science and Technology

Report of the Subcommittee on Cities

The Honourable Art Eggleton P.C., Chair
The Honourable Hugh Segal, Deputy Chair

December 2009

"For these people—our fellow citizens— every day is a battle with insufficient income, unaffordable housing, inadequate clothing and unsatisfactory nutrition."

"One witness who has experienced poverty expressed it this way: 'Poverty steals from your soul leaving you with little or no hope. It robs you of all that can be good in life. It leaves you isolated, lonely and hungry. Every day is a struggle.'"

"We all understand the moral arguments against poverty. The jarring juxtaposition of suffering and want in a land of plenty…What I don't think most people realize is the economic cost of poverty. How it is costing each and every one of us - forcing up our tax bills, depressing the economy, increasing health care bills and breeding alienation and crime."

"A recent study estimates that poverty costs this country about $7.5 billion every year in health care costs alone and between $8 and $13 billion in lost productivity."

"Imagine what eliminating poverty would mean to our fiscal situation! To our ability to pay for education, innovation, public transit, affordable housing and health care."

"Underlying our report is a simple, common sense premise: that social programs should lift people out of poverty, not keep them there; and that it is time to give people the tools they need to lift themselves into a better life."

"Poverty is not benign. It affects us all. It costs us all. We spend a lot of money and don't get the results we should. Overall we don't need to spend more money, we need to spend smarter, more efficiently and effectively."

– Senator Art Eggleton

"OUT WITH THE NEW BARBARISM: COMBATING POVERTY AND INEQUALITY"

The **Honourable Ed Broadbent** began by characterizing poverty and the growth in inequality as "the most serious issue of our time." In his view, "Canadians are living through the most serious economic crisis since the 1930s."

Mr. Broadbent stated that the post-war combination of political, civil, social and economic rights aimed at citizens' equality are best illustrated in Canada by the 1982 Charter of Rights and Freedoms. He observed that "long before the crash in the global economy two years ago this month, Canada and many other Western democracies had undergone a major ideological and material reversal." Increased poverty and inequality are consequences of these broad economic and social forces.

A book by two leading British epidemiologists, Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, called *The Spirit Level* was used to illustrate the society-wide positive social consequences of greater equality. As stated by Mr. Broadbent, their work demonstrates that unequal societies are not only unfair, they are dysfunctional. They promote more isolation, social estrangement, and negative health outcomes than societies that are more equal.
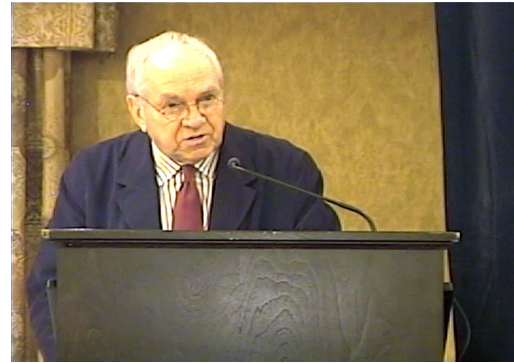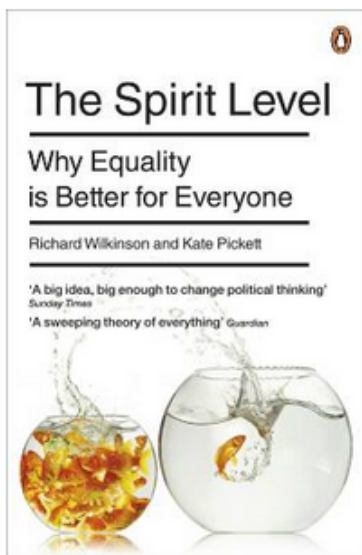
The Honourable Ed Broadbent

"The scale of the increase in inequality in Canada beginning in the 1990s is immense. 70% of Canadian households have a smaller share [of the national income] now than they had at the end of the 1990s."

"We now have more than 55 billionaires and thousands of multimillionaires. But the vast majority of Canadians have actually seen a downward shift… More than three million Canadians live in poverty."

"People like to be inspired, but before they vote they need to be persuaded… Democratic citizens will support serious change when they are convinced by evidence that those promising it can make it work."

"Research has shown that more equal nations like Sweden, Norway, and Denmark, are better off in almost every way. Their citizens are healthier, live longer, have fewer teenage pregnancies, are more law abiding, participate more in civic projects and are more trusting of their neighbours."

"We have known for a long time that poverty and inequality are bad for those directly affected by it—the unemployed, poor kids, anxious seniors, over-burdened middle-class families. But as I have said, we now also know that inequality harms us all."

– The Honourable Ed Broadbent

THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC COSTS OF POVERTY IN NOVA SCOTIA

Dr. Christine Saulnier from the Nova Scotia office of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA-NS) presented on the shared economic burden of poverty in Nova Scotia and the business case for reducing and ultimately eliminating poverty in the province. CCPA-NS estimates the total economic costs of poverty in Nova Scotia at $1.5 to $2.2 billion per year or 5–7% of Nova Scotia's GDP in 2008.

Dr. Saulnier also referred to the work of Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett and their book "The Spirit Level" (available through the related Equality Trust website www.equality trust.org.uk). She called for investment in preventative measures such as literacy programs and improved education outcomes. She also called for greater economic democracy through employee ownership, union membership and cooperative enterprises.

A panel responded to the CCPA-NS report and presented additional perspectives on the costs of poverty in Nova Scotia. The panel consisted of Lucille Harper (Antigonish Women's Resource Centre), Claredon Robicheau (Nova Scotia League for Equal Opportunities) and Cheryl Maloney (President, Nova Scotia Native Women's Association). The panellists talked about the social costs of poverty from the perspective of women, people with disabilities and Aboriginal people.

> *"When we help those in need, we make Nova Scotia a better place to live for everyone."*
>
> **– Dr. Christine Saulnier**
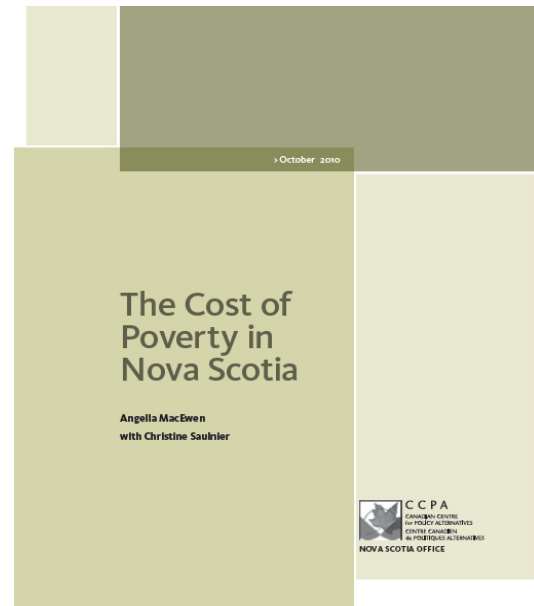
Lucille Harper focused her presentation on the concept of wealth. She explained that wealth is not created by individuals but on the foundation of prior knowledge, the work of others, and resources. It is "common wealth." Together we have created it and continue to create it. However, our common wealth is in the hands of a few people at the top of the economic hierarchy.

In Nova Scotia, the gender gap for people living in poverty is above the national average. Typically, our economic analysis does not include unpaid labour and the fact that most caring, nurturing and sharing work is done by women. Despite being the life blood of our communities, this work is undervalued.

Ms. Harper went on to talk about the high level of entrenched poverty, the lack of sustainable jobs, and the need for affordable public transportation in rural communities. She spoke of the underemployment of women in rural Nova Scotia, and called for a Guaranteed Liveable Income based on a more equitable distribution of our "common wealth."

Cheryl Maloney spoke about aboriginal women in Nova Scotia, "women that can do anything with nothing." Despite their resourcefulness, the biggest problem women have in First Nations communities is the lack of transportation to get to jobs or to health facilities. She focused on violence to families within First Nations, starting with the bounty Europeans placed on the Mi'kmaq, and including the impacts of residential schools. Ms. Maloney explained that today's violence is marked by missing and murdered women, and by suicide.

Ms. Maloney talked about her experience as President of the Nova Scotia Native Women's Association, and highlighted the lack of support for aboriginal women and families. She emphasized the need for allies and conference participants to reach out to aboriginal communities. There are so many issues, so many voices that need to be heard—women in courthouses and jails, missing and murdered women who cannot speak for themselves.

Claredon Robicheau began by describing the population of persons with disabilities in Nova Scotia. He indicated that there are 198,000 persons with various disabilities in the province. Twenty percent of all disabilities are invisible.

Persons with disabilities are twice as likely to live in poverty, not only because of lower incomes, but also due to the high cost of technical aids. Referring to the province's aging population, he emphasized that disabilities increase dramatically with age.

M. Robicheau illustrated the benefits of investing in persons with disabilities through his own personal story. In 1974, he was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis and received $18,000 from Service Canada to attend university. He estimates that he has since paid $240,000 in income tax, $1 million in other taxes, and has volunteered in the community for almost two decades.

M. Robicheau also spoke about the strategy being developed by 15 organizations across the province to provide self-determination, the right to work, dignity, and universal access to technical aids so persons with disabilities can continue to contribute to their communities and families.

Quotes from panellists pictured above

"We are a small province, we know each other, we see each other, and we can change it."

– Lucille Harper

"Reach out to [First Nations] communities. We need to partner."

– Cheryl Maloney

"Our motto [League for Equal Opportunities] is 'Nothing about us, without us'. It is about a life with dignity. There are so many falling through the cracks."

– Claredon Robicheau

III. Lessons and Solutions

LOCAL SUCCESS STORIES AND CHALLENGES

Conference participants were given a choice of eight breakout sessions focused on local success stories and challenges. Highlights from these sessions are in the table below. Summary notes from the breakout sessions are posted on the conference website.

Topic and Panellists	Successes and Challenges
1. Affordable Housing **(Moderator: Paul O'Hara, North End Community Health Centre)** ▪ Katherine Reed (formerly of Antigonish Affordable Housing Society) ▪ Jeremy Jackson (Killam Properties) ▪ Capp Larsen (Out of the Cold Shelter) ▪ John Hartling (Community Action on Homelessness)	▪ Governments must invest substantially in affordable housing development and the community development that goes with it. We have been building affordable housing in Canada for about 60 years now, and there are all kinds of best practices to look to. The development and decision-making around affordable housing has to include the people who will be living in it to ensure it fits their needs. Diversity is healthy—there must be a mix of people living in the housing to avoid stigmatization. ▪ Killam subsidizes supportive housing for mental health clients in collaboration with Capital District Health Authority. There are now 81 units supporting 91 individuals through the collaboration of five landlords with three agencies. ▪ The Out of the Cold Shelter was established as a community-based volunteer initiative in response to the closing of the Pendleton Place to provide a shelter for those who could not access other shelters. It is now in its third year of operation. However dealing with this emergency situation has taken people's energy away from advocating for longer term solutions. The Nova Scotia Common Front for Housing was formed to provide a vehicle for advocacy. The downloading of social services like the Out of the Cold Shelter has impacted workers in the non-profit sector with greater work loads and poorer working conditions. Workers in many small organizations are low paid and are often women. ▪ Community Action on Homelessness (CAH) has been engaging the business community in projects and advocacy that is helping to provide adequate housing and supportive programs in the short term (using resources from the federal Homeless Partnership Strategy) while working with others to advocate for proper long-term housing solutions. With proper social support and a solid secure place to live people can flourish, maintain employment or go back to school. ▪ Collaboration was seen as an important aspect of solutions to affordable housing but it needs to be strategic and recognize the competing interests of various parties.
2. Early Childhood Development, Childcare and Family Support **(Moderator: Stella Lord, Community Coalition to End Poverty)** ▪ Tami Cushing (Bridgewater Family Resource Centre) ▪ Dawn MacFarlane (Wee Care Development Centre) ▪ Tanis Crosby (YWCA)	▪ The Bridgewater Family Resource Centre, developed in 1991 creates a home-like environment and a sense of family. Keeping an open door policy to provide stability to the families is stressed and they try to ensure that those served never leave worse than when they came in. Child development and parental support are the basis for their work and programs are participant driven. The greatest challenge they face is addressing the emotional impact of poverty on families and children in rural environments where lack of accessible transportation, lack of affordable housing, social isolation, and family labelling are not uncommon. A related challenge is countering prevailing assumptions about what mothers 'need' (e.g., budgeting; cooking lessons; charity) and an educational system that incorporates middle class values. Two innovative programs that try to address these are an outreach program for teachers and parents to meet in a safe environment and a Golden K program where volunteers read to children. ▪ The WEE Care Centre began focusing on children with special needs in the 1970s. The Centre now also serves the families of special needs children. The centre cooperates with other community services including the IWK and provides some services on site such as physiotherapy, speech therapy and communications (Braille) and helps families in crisis by searching for other resources. Staff work with parents to help them prepare special needs children to enter the school system. The Centre is working towards establishing a respite service, but this has not yet been funded. Ideally, they would like to develop a 'hub model' so that services for families with special needs children can be better coordinated. Programs such as those offered through Wee Care are fairly unique and access is limited outside of HRM.

Topic and Panellists	Successes and Challenges
	▪ The YWCA is a feminist organization that seeks to break down barriers for women by linking social justice to programs and services. Due to the multiple issues affecting low income women, high quality accessible and developmental childcare is just one of several programs the YWCA operates. Others include supportive housing and violence prevention initiatives. Early learning and child care is crucial to preventing poverty because it helps women to remain employed. This also helps the economy. In the longer term, child development through early learning also provides a basis for greater economic returns for children. However, good child-care does not come cheaply and the childcare sector faces numerous challenges with regard to funding. ▪ Canada ranks 20th amongst OECD countries in investment in early learning and care and within Canada Nova Scotia ranks 4th for childcare spaces. Due to lack of investment, wages for ECE workers are very low (between $11.00 and $15.00 an hour) and child-care workers are themselves at risk of poverty and homelessness. For example, $13 an hour is required to rent a bachelor apartment and $15 an hour a one-bedroom apartment. Low wages also affect recruitment and retention of child care workers. Some challenges also present opportunities: one is for more direct service intervention through the development of a hub model. This would take a multi-service approach, helping to connect childcare with other community services for families and children. However, the sector is seriously constrained by limited funding and despite best the efforts of providers, a fully developed integrated hub model of child-care and family support has not emerged. ▪ Limited access to services for aboriginal families and new immigrants are also problems that need to be addressed. Aboriginal families fall through the cracks due to federal and provincial jurisdictional issues. Governments don't want to take responsibility. There was a plea for service delivery agencies to reach out to aboriginal communities. Developing ways to welcome and include immigrants and greater inclusion in child care and social services programs generally is important as these can break social isolation and facilitate workforce participation. Services should be expanded into communities where there is a need (including rural and First Nations communities). There is also a need for more integrated approaches.
3. Education and Literacy **(Moderator: Stephanie Hunter, FemJEPP)** ▪ Mary Lu Redden (Halifax Humanities) ▪ Andrea Manthorne (Colchester Adult Learning Association) ▪ Kevin Young (Pathways) ▪ Jayne Geldart and Lani Poce (Immigrant Settlement and Integration Service)	▪ Education is one of the ways to break the poverty cycle, but not everyone can thrive in the traditional educational environment. Halifax Humanities 101 offers the riches of a humanities education to low income individuals in a supportive community of people who love to read, have fun, and know the joy of intellectual engagement. The North End Halifax course now has over 50 actively engaged students and over 60 graduates. The 8-month program offers subsidies for childcare, books, bus tickets, tickets to operas and plays, etc. They do not measure outcomes in terms of economic value. Helping people re-engage intellectually is the measure of success. ▪ The Colchester Adult Learning Association is a non-profit organization that believes education is the starting point for ending poverty. The Colchester Adult Learning program is for individuals who have not finished high school or for graduates who need further assistance. It helps with ABCs through to GED preparation. It includes useful information about topics such as nutrition, healthy lifestyles, etc. The program exists in Great Village, Shubenacadie, Tatamagouche, Truro and Debert.

Topic and Panellists	Successes and Challenges
	▪ Pathways to Education Program was founded in Regent Park in Toronto where they saw the high school dropout rate fall from 56% to 12%, and the enrolment in post secondary education rise from 20% to 80%. It involves mentoring with teachers, tutors, post-secondary institutions, and potential future employers. The research has shown that for every $5 spent on the program, there is a $25 return on savings from health and justice costs. Enrolment begins in grade 9 and $1000 goes into a post-secondary education trust fund for every year a student succeeds in high school. The program is responsive, collaborative, innovative, and supported by various sectors of the community. The Pathways program was started in Spryfield in September 2010. They currently have 44 participants and a target of reaching 200. ▪ Immigrant Settlement and Integration Service (ISIS) provides a range of services and programs to immigrants and refugees. Approx. 2400 immigrants and refugees enter Nova Scotia each year, with refugees having the most challenges. ISIS clients experience literacy barriers in English as well as in their native language. They also have special mental and physical health needs, and are in debt. The resettlement assistance program (RAP) provides $800/month for the first year only. After that, the majority turn to social assistance because they have not had enough time to learn the language skills required to get a decent job. Most must choose between having a job and feeding family or improving their English. Without language skills, they cannot move beyond a "survivor" job. A higher level of English allows access to job skills development. ISIS offers seven levels of English classes through its LINC program (Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada). Classes are available during the day and evenings. Online services are available. ▪ There are various challenges related to education and literacy programs. There is a need to understand that education is of major importance in breaking the poverty cycle. Funding educational programs provides a huge return on investment. However, governments tend to be interested in short-term outcomes rather than in the longer-term commitments required to enhance education. Other challenges include convincing some people that illiteracy still exists, and getting the word out about education and literacy programs to those most in need (e.g. you cannot rely on flyers/posters). Also, due to the stigma associated with illiteracy, people need safe and supportive environments to seek the help they need.
4. Employment Development **(Moderator: Colleen Nix, Department of Labour and Workforce Development)** ▪ Joe Brown (One Journey: Work and Learn Program) ▪ Meghan Farrell (NS Co-operative Council) ▪ Doreen Parsons (Women's Economic Equality Society) ▪ Lech Krzywonos (Nova Scotia Community College)	▪ One Journey: Work and Learn Program is an innovative partnership between government and industry funded though the Strategic Training and Transition Fund, a two-year increase in federal funding to the Canada-Nova Scotia Labour Market Agreement. The program works with industries and community groups to address skilled labour shortages in such fields as flooring, trucking and continuing care. Since lack of essential skills is a barrier to participants' employment, One Journey begins by providing customized essential skills training based upon individuals skill sets—e.g. reading, money math, oral communication, computer training, scheduling, etc. Employers are active on the project team and indicate what they need in terms of current and future employees and the training required. All participants who successfully complete the program are guaranteed employment and the outcomes have been positive—e.g. in 2009 there were more than 85 graduates. ▪ Known for its compassion and sincerity, the co-operative sector has unique employment opportunities to help prevent poverty and promote prosperity. Target 100 is a new initiative developed by the Nova Scotia Co-operative Council, in partnership with the Nova Scotia Department of Community Services (DCS). It is designed to help the co-operative sector

Topic and Panellists	Successes and Challenges
	meet its human resource needs, while contributing to poverty reduction in Nova Scotia. Based on the values in which the co-operative sector operates, Target 100 is founded on the principles of collaboration, coordination, and responsibility. It focuses on those living in, or in danger of falling into poverty. Its vision is to recruit, train, and hire 100 clients or potential clients of DCS into Co-operatives and Credit Unions over the next 5 years. ▪ Women Unlimited is an innovative, women-centered program with the strategic goal to assist diverse, unemployed women prepare for, obtain and maintain employment in the trades and technology fields in Nova Scotia. This program, co-sponsored by two community-based women's organizations — the Women's Economic Equality (WEE) Society and the Hypatia Association — embodies the principles of community development and cross-sectoral collaboration. Through a complex partnership with industry, unions, governments, educational institutions and community, Women Unlimited demonstrates what can be accomplished when resources and commitments are combined to achieve a common goal: to address the systemic barriers diverse women face and to support their successful transition and retention into the trades and technology labour force. Since 2006, 221 women have participated in Women Unlimited. ▪ LINK is a two year program offered at several Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC) campuses. It is a combination of the Adult Learning Program (ALP) and Continuing Care Assistant (CCA). This program serves learners who traditionally were denied entrance to a CCA program due to missing the pre-requisite high school diploma. In LINK, learners work on both programs simultaneously, and upon completion graduate with both, their high school diploma, and a certificate in Continuing Care. The program is free of tuition for the learners. 32 students graduated from the pilot group, and all are currently employed in their chosen field. Field reports indicate these graduates are among some of the best new grads, and they all passed their provincial exams. In many circumstances those who did not successfully complete LINK transitioned to ALP, and have continued working towards their high school diploma. A second cohort is currently in underway at NSCC's Truro and Annapolis Valley Campuses with a completion target of Spring 2012.
5. Health, Active Living and Food Security **(Moderator: Julianne Acker-Verney, Feed Nova Scotia)** ▪ Dr. Patricia Williams (Mount Saint Vincent University) ▪ Jane Maloney (North End Community Health Centre) ▪ Sherri Costa (Independent Living Resource Centre)	▪ The Atlantic provinces have the worst rates of food insecurity in Canada. Lone parents making minimum wage are most at risk for food insecurity. Studies show that people who make more money buy better food. Income assistance rates are insufficient to support healthy eating. Progress is being made but much more needs to be done. ▪ Food banks should be a resource to help you get to the next pay check, not a place to buy all your groceries every month. ▪ The North End Community Health Centre (NECHC) enabled the establishment of a community garden, run by the community for the community. Half the garden is for families and seniors and half is for youth. The youth grow herbs to make salad dressing (labelled "Hope Blooms") which they sell at the farmer's market every weekend. They learn business skills and develop an understanding of how hard work pays off as well as the benefits surrounding a healthy diet and active lifestyle. ▪ One research study suggested that social isolation is a health risk factor comparable to smoking a half pack of cigarettes a day. It's as unhealthy as alcoholism and obesity. Stronger communities build stronger relationships which can improve health.

Topic and Panellists	Successes and Challenges
6. Income Security **(Moderator: Shawna Hoyte, Dalhousie Legal Aid)** ▪ Jackie Thornhill (first voice) ▪ Jeanne Fay (Women's Centres Connect) ▪ June Bruce Weir (first voice) ▪ Arlene MacDonald (Pictou County Women's Centre)	▪ While meaningful employment with adequate compensation is important for all citizens, it is also necessary to have adequate Social Assistance for those who are unable to work. ▪ Many persons with disabilities cannot compete in the regular labour market so they find it difficult to supplement inadequate social assistance benefits. There is no disability benefit in Canada that is not tied to working (e.g. CCP, EI). A national disability benefit would remove people from the social assistance rolls. ▪ Canada is facing a workforce crisis in the skilled trades that could be addressed by bringing women living in poverty into the workforce. One barrier to women entering the workforce is adequate childcare. The Connections program offers childcare and transportation. It addresses self- esteem and employability skills. Its success is shown in that 70% of women who take the program go on to further education or employment. ▪ The child tax credit, when it was first introduced, came in two lump sums– one in December and the balance in March-April after income tax filing. Federal legislation protected this credit from being counted as income for province social assistance purposes. When it became the Canada Child Tax Benefit, it started coming monthly and was no longer protected from provincial assistance. At first it was deducted dollar for dollar or clawed back. The province decided to stop clawing it back, and eliminated the personal allowance for children from social assistance budgets. It then created an income-tested children's benefit available to all low income families. ▪ A Guaranteed Liveable Income (GLI) for all Canadians would eliminate poverty. A basic income would empower people and is a key to gender equity. People would not have to work part-time hours or in unsafe conditions, contributing to a more stable economy and community. ▪ A major challenge to GLI is the politics of exclusion and the belief that people on social assistance have a defective work ethic. This type of "poor bashing" needs to be addressed publicly.
7. Transportation **(Moderator: Barbara Carthew, Community Links)** ▪ Sheila Hoeg (Community Links) ▪ Jennifer Pawley (Ecology Action Centre) ▪ Debbie Williams (Kings Transit) ▪ Claredon Robicheau (Nova Scotia League for Equal Opportunities)	▪ Individuals often do not have enough money to pay for transportation. Transportation for social reasons is needed for a person's wellbeing but not provided by social assistance. Transportation also affects one's ability to secure a job. ▪ Economic development depends on transportation. Society values the ownership of a car to the detriment of an affordable public transportation system that covers a wider area and has a regular schedule. ▪ A volunteer drive program in Pictou Country where there is no bus service program provides 100 clients with transportation for groceries and appointments. This helps seniors stay in their own homes. The use of school buses on evenings and weekends was suggested to increase access. ▪ It is a struggle to get affordable transportation especially needed by seniors and young families. Municipalities have difficulty contributing because they are strapped for funds and often give priority to infrastructure. Community-based non-profit transportation has been established in the District of Clare and has been replicated in 11 other communities in Nova Scotia.

Topic and Panellists	Successes and Challenges
	▪ Dependency on cars for transportation has many negative effects. It is leading to "out-migration" from rural communities. Seniors and young families who have traditionally thrived in rural communities are moving to urban centres to access medical services, banking and shopping. This out-migration is eroding the spirit, health and balance of rural communities. It is leading to faster urban growth and, for rural areas, a shrinking tax base and declining stability. ▪ The environmental impact of dependency on cars is huge, primarily in terms of carbon emissions and increased dependency on oil and gas. Further impact is evident in the ever increasing costs of road maintenance. The impact on health is also negative. Increased sedentary lifestyles are resulting in an increased incidence of cardiac and respiratory conditions and diabetes. Further, heavy traffic on local roads is a deterrent to physical activities such as walking, bicycling and running.
8. Working Conditions **(Moderator: Uli vom Hagen, Department of Community Services)** ▪ Bill Grant (Nova Scotia Department of Labour) ▪ Joan Jessome (Nova Scotia Government Employees Union) ▪ Janet Sutherland (Kohltech)	▪ Nova Scotia is still a low wage economy in comparison to much of Canada. Higher wages encourage productivity and encourage employers to invest in their employees by improving labour skills which is important for the future labour shortage anticipated for Nova Scotia. ▪ Many Canadian workers are one illness/paycheck away from poverty. When they lose a job, they lose their identity. Unions are addressing issues such as increasing the minimum wage, mental health and literacy. Belonging to a union is an important anti-poverty measure. ▪ Many small businesses say it is unfair to put the onus on them to deal with poverty issues when the government should deal with this through taxation assistance. Minimum wage rates are only one small part of the poverty picture but they do impact the income of people living in poverty. ▪ Kohltech offers three levels of free leadership training to its employees which they attend on their own time (124 graduates to date). They also provide work-place education to improve reading, writing, and math skills. There have been 9 graduates in this second program, with some having gone on to their GEDs.

PANEL ON LESSONS LEARNED FROM DIFFERENT JURISDICTIONS

The panel on lessons learned from poverty-related initiatives from different jurisdictions was composed of speakers with perspectives from three sectors: non-governmental, business and government.

Gail Nyberg, from the Daily Bread Food Bank in Toronto, spoke from the perspective of the non-governmental sector. Gail told the conference that in the 2006 election the Ontario Liberal party promised a poverty reduction strategy that would be entrenched in law. The strategy eventually resulted in a comprehensive review of all services and tax credits. The review found the tax system to be much less punitive than the social assistance system, and recommended that social assistance system be dismantled in favour of a system focusing on income security. As it is, "living in poverty is a full-time job."

Ms. Nyberg's advice included engaging with government — *"You cannot do this kind of reform by the us and them";* paying attention to the sustainability of proposed reforms; actively engaging business —*"bring in the economists"*; and, seeking a high level of inclusiveness to avoid backlash —"*Don't leave anyone out*."

"If Rob Ford (the new Mayor of Toronto) can have 3000 Torontonians on the phone to talk about his campaign and answer questions, why can't we as community groups use technology to re-engage people to inform them and to change minds and hearts."
– Gail Nyberg

Monica Chaperlin, of the Business Community Anti-Poverty Initiative (BCAPI) in Saint John, New Brunswick spoke from the perspective of the business sector. She spoke on how the business community in Saint John has been organizing since 1997 to address poverty. Over time, these programs have focused on the improvement of policies and programs for low income children, youth and young families so that "no child in the future will suffer lifelong poverty." Lessons learned in this initiative included:

1. Poverty reduction is about changing community thinking and action on poverty. Business leaders are good at leading change. They are entrepreneurial and they have the power of persuasion. Business leaders like to solve problems, big problems, and they like to create new approaches. Poverty is a big problem and new approaches are needed.

2. Business leaders want to understand everything they can about a problem before they act. Research, analysis and planning are important actions. Then they like to test the market with a small project and build from there. Business leaders don't like failure, so they work quietly until they have something to talk about that works! And then they really talk and persuade others to buy-in.

3. Business leaders must know their customers – in this case, people who live in poverty. The customer is the reason for good service and community profit or gain. Service providers are like the employees doing the grunt work. Business leaders are hard task masters and expect the best from everyone.

4. Business leaders will invest time and money in things they really believe are going to make a difference. They need to be at the table from the beginning.

5. BCAPI works because Saint John has a poverty reduction plan with specific targets. The community needed to develop its own poverty reduction plan, measure progress, and take ownership of both the problem and the solutions. By community, BCAPI means businesses, governments, non-profits, and people living in poverty working together.

Lynn Vivian-Book, Assistant Deputy Minister of Income, Employment and Youth Services with the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, spoke from the perspective of the government sector's engagement in reducing poverty. The current focus on poverty reduction was initiated in 2003 when there was a single sentence pertaining to poverty reduction in Danny Williams' election platform. Through an intentional collaborative approach, there are now 12 ministries involved in the provincial poverty reduction committee.

Ministers receive a full orientation when they join the committee to ensure they take a broad perspective rather than a narrow individual departmental point of view. Newfoundland and Labrador is in year six of the strategy, and has been through five budget cycles. The strategy has a separate budget process. There is currently $134 million worth of initiatives related to poverty reduction, alleviation and prevention.

The 2006-2010 action plan for poverty reduction in Newfoundland and Labrador comprised five goals: access and awareness of government services; strengthening the social safety net; improved earnings; childhood development; and, education. In consultation with the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, they are now working on their second action plan for 2011-14. The province conducts consultations for the Poverty Reduction Strategy every two years.

The 2009 Progress Report had 15 indicators to measure results. The report concluded that all available measures of low-income showed positive trends and substantial progress towards meeting the goal of becoming the province with the lowest poverty levels in Canada. The data indicated that, among other successes: there were 30,000 fewer people living in low-income in Newfoundland and Labrador in 2007 than in 2003; only two provinces had lower poverty levels, as measured by the 2007 LICO data; the depth of low-income had declined and was the lowest in Canada; the Income Support caseload had decreased substantially; and the province had documented improved educational outcomes. The full Progress Report is available at http://www.hrle.gov.nl.ca/hrle/poverty/index.html.

"Poverty in Saint John has been reduced: 27% in 1996; 21% a decade later; 15% by 2016. Poverty reduction has become a Saint John priority. Engagement of Saint John's business leadership is very high."
– Monica Chaperlin

"The key message I want to deliver here… is that the book has not been written. The important part here is to be on the journey and working together. It doesn't really matter how the issue rises and how the action starts. The important piece is to start on that journey."
– Lynn Vivian-Book

Brenda Murray is Director of Policy, Planning and Research, with the Policy and Information Division of the Nova Scotia Department of Community Services. She shared the podium with Lynn Hartwell, Executive Director of the Skills and Learning Branch of the Nova Scotia Department of Labour and Workforce Development.

Ms. Murray talked about the consultations conducted when developing Nova Scotia's Poverty Reduction Strategy. The number one issue identified during the consultations was that people did not know how to access government services. The inventory conducted during the consultations identified 70 different programs offered by government departments for persons living on a low income in Nova Scotia.

Ms. Murray pointed to the complexity of poverty being related to the hundreds of rules and regulations in place to manage the administration of welfare. She also suggested that although we—in government, the activist community, and/or service organizations—think we know the issue best, it is those with lived experience who know poverty best.

Lynn Hartwell began by sharing two success stories—introduction of the Affordable Living Tax Credit and the Poverty Reduction Tax Credit. Both credits began in July 2010 and are intended to reduce the impact of changes in Nova Scotia's tax system on individuals and families living in deep poverty.

Ms. Hartwell commented on the different language used by different government departments in talking about poverty, noting that it is all about social inclusion and poverty reduction, and suggesting that a common language within government would be a step in the right direction.

Turning to her experience with the development of the Poverty Reduction Strategy, Ms. Hartwell noted some of the challenges in the consultation process. The committee received 1400 comments, approximately one-third from people supportive of addressing poverty, one-third from persons living in poverty, and one-

third from people angry that they were being asked about poverty. While she was certain that this last group did not represent the views of the majority of Nova Scotians, it did suggest a need to reach outside of the room to engage the wider community. "We [the people in this room] are the choir," she stated, concluding, "The move forward needs to start here and get bigger."

"The system has become so big, so cumbersome, so fragmented. It's really hard to know exactly what is going on, who's doing what and what impact it is having."
– Brenda Murray

"We don't have the luxury of not being able to have those conversations with one another; we don't have the luxury of not opening the doors to more voices and more people to be involved in the conversation."
– Lynn Hartwell

WORKING TOGETHER FOR POVERTY REDUCTION

The conference included two sessions led by *Liz Weaver* from the Tamarack Institute. The Tamarack Institute has been the catalyst for the Vibrant Communities initiative which has been active in 13 communities across Canada. Collaboration is a hallmark of Vibrant Communities initiatives. Vibrant Communities has been recently evaluated, revealing 164 poverty reducing initiatives completed or in progress, 1,080 people playing strong roles in poverty reduction (including 573 people living in poverty), and 35 significant changes to government policy related to poverty reduction.

Ms. Weaver gave a public presentation on the second evening of the conference called "Communities Can Reduce Poverty: Five Stories Prove it's True." The stories described successes and lessons learned in four Canadian cities and a rural community in the USA.

On the third day of the conference, Ms. Weaver led participants in a workshop and discussion on collaboration. She raised the question "Why collaborate?" and provided five main reasons for doing so: 1. because you share a concern; 2. to pool power; 3. to add diversity; 4. to overcome gridlock; and 5. to increase your ability to deal with complex problems and issues.

Ms. Weaver contrasted traditional and collaborative leadership, and explained that collaboration is about broad participation, building relationships, systems thinking, empathy and distributed leadership. Some of the keys to successful collaboration include overcoming mistrust, using open and participatory processes, being able to see 'the big picture', and watching for windows of opportunity for building relationships and taking action.

She also noted that collaboration is not without its challenges, among them: power differences between collaborators, lack of a larger vision, hidden agendas, apathy, difficulty in identifying the 'real problem', and the tendency to try to avoid risk.

The figure below provides additional information from Ms. Weaver's slides (included on the conference website) about the keys to successful collaboration and the challenges of collaboration.

Keys to Successful Collaboration

- Good Timing
- Strong Stakeholder Group
- Broad-based Involvement
- Overcoming Mistrust
- Clear Need
- Credibility
- Open process
- Commitment/involvement of high-level, visible leaders
- Support or acquiescence of "established" authorities
- Strong leaders of the process
- A shift to broader concerns
- Interim success

What Makes Collaboration Difficult

- Many people with the power to say "NO," yet no one person or group has power to act alone
- Lack of trust
- Hidden agendas
- No larger vision
- Lack of credibility to provide leadership
- Not willing to take on leadership role
- Apathy
- Avoidance of risk
- Fear of being attacked
- Problems are complex and interdependent
- Don't know what the "real" problem is
- Information about problem distorts understanding of problem(s)

>> Chrislip and Larson

"If you bring the appropriate people together in constructive ways with good information, they will create authentic visions and strategies for addressing the shared concerns of the organizations and community."
— Liz Weaver

INSPIRATION FROM ROBERT WRIGHT

Robert Wright delivered a powerful motivational presentation during the last day's lunchtime session. His task, as he described, was "to help to create a moment in which all you have seen and heard thus far can crystallize and be transformed into a searing, burning motivation." To get juices flowing, he began by reading excerpts from a James Baldwin essay— "Fifth Avenue, Uptown"— about Harlem which was first published in Esquire Magazine in 1960. The full text is available at www.esquire.com/features/fifth-avenue-uptown

The key message in the essay, according to Mr. Wright, is that poverty is expensive, living in poverty is expensive, and allowing poverty to continue is expensive. He pointed to the famous quote on poverty from the Baldwin essay — *"Anyone who has ever struggled with poverty knows how extremely expensive it is to be poor."* He continued with the next few lines of Baldwin's message, including *"And if one is a member of a captive population, economically speaking, one's feet have simply been placed on the treadmill forever. One is victimized economically in a thousand ways."*

Mr. Wright suggested that a good start for programmatic answers to poverty was to implement the recommendations of the Senate Committee's report "In from the Margins." He pointed particularly to three recommendations that hold the spirit of ideas fundamental to the eradication of poverty—focusing on the eradication and not reduction of poverty; making sure people have liveable incomes; and recognizing that poverty is a violation of human rights.

Referring again to Baldwin's essay, Mr. Wright stated that the presence in society of poverty represents a social and moral bankruptcy. The social and economic revolution needed to eradicate poverty is absolutely essential for establishing a sustainable nation. Society today is not sustainable for anyone and requires a radical (i.e. fundamental) solution.
He asked "Where does the political will for this solution come from?" "It comes from you", he

said, "the people in this room. Those who seek elected office without being willing to speak about poverty and its solutions, who don't understand the complexity and structural nature of poverty, should not be elected to the office they seek."

In closing, Mr. Wright challenged participants to be willing to support what comes from the changes that will be necessary. He hoped that upon leaving the conference, participants would be "different people, doing different things and hoping for a different reality."

"Poverty is personal, poverty is structural and poverty is political. We have many of the programmatic answers to poverty... If you wanted to get a really good start on changing the nature of poverty in Canada, you couldn't go to a better place—certainly not a more convenient place—than a Senate Standing Committee report."

"How do we take children out of poverty while leaving their parents in it?"

"We need to recognize the intersections of poverty, poverty and gender, poverty and race, poverty and First Nations."

– Robert Wright

IV. Next Steps

Facilitated breakout groups for discussing 'next steps' for taking action on poverty in Nova Scotia were held on the final day of the conference. These sessions were organized regionally so that people could 'connect' before they left the conference. Four 'regional' groups—Cape Breton, Northern Nova Scotia, Annapolis Valley to Yarmouth, South Shore and Southwest Nova Scotia, Dartmouth and Halifax— and one 'provincial' group convened. Due to its size, the Halifax group was further subdivided into smaller groups. The discussion of next steps was guided by three questions:

1. What activity has sparked your imagination from your experience at this conference that you would like to commit some time and energy to after the conference?
2. Keeping in mind the workshop on collaboration this morning, what do you think would be the best approach to move this activity forward?
3. Who else or what organizations need to be persuaded to be involved to better ensure the success of the activity?

At the beginning of the session, 96 individual actions plans were completed containing one or more ideas or activities to which conference participants were willing to direct their time and energy. These ideas were subsequently shared and discussed within the group. All groups had very productive discussions, resulting in ideas like a provincial mechanism for networking, regional coalitions, and building new relationships and strengthening existing ones by reaching out to organizations such as community health boards, libraries, school boards, family resource centres, women's centres, post-secondary institutions, Chambers of Commerce, and municipalities.

Discussions identified key barriers to taking action on poverty including inadequate enabling structures, lack of public awareness and political will, ineffective policies, and complex and confusing ways of accessing existing benefits and services. Suggestions for overcoming the barriers were identified and are summarized below.

SUMMMARY OF SUGGESTIONS FOR NEXT STEPS

Suggested next steps are detailed below under four main themes: (1) increase public awareness and political will; (2) focus on policy change and government initiatives; (3) develop enabling mechanisms and structures for addressing poverty; and (4) enhance community-based resources for people living in poverty.

Most of the ideas came up in several groups, although a few came up in only one group but have potential for broader application. Ideas that were locally focused are documented in the reports from the regional groups which can be found on the conference website at http://hpclearinghouse.net/ blogs/endingpovertyns/pages/home.aspx.

1. Increase Public Awareness and Political Will

Five main suggestions emerged under this theme, as described below. One group emphasized the need for creativity in increasing public awareness and political will. The use of various art forms—e.g. photography, stories, life experiences, music, and poetry—was also suggested to increase awareness of poverty and its root causes.

a. Dispel poverty myths.

There is widespread belief that public opinion and pressure is necessary to move public policy in the direction of addressing poverty. To this end, participants suggested that a social marketing campaign should be launched in the province to heighten awareness about the social causes and consequences of poverty and to dispel the myths about poverty and people who live in poverty. The campaign needs to be based on a better understanding of the general public's attitudes and perceptions of poverty to be effective. Several approaches were suggested (e.g. working with media, holding town hall meetings, and conducting workshops).

"We need to understand how Nova Scotians actually see this issue [Why are people poor? What does poverty mean?] Until we understand this we can't get them engaged."

– Conference participant

b. Build awareness about the social and economic costs of poverty among the middle class and business sector.

Many participants agreed on the need to reach out to the middle class/business sector. To more effectively engage these sectors, a change in language was suggested. Rather than talking about poverty, for example, using terms like "mutual prosperity" or "opportunities for change" are more likely to bring these sectors on side. A socially conscious market-based approach is needed to engage the business community. Specific activities to reach out to the middle class/business community included:

▪ Special events to communicate concepts, evidence and language;
▪ Regional costs of poverty studies;
▪ Presentations to Chambers of Commence by non-profit groups; and,
▪ Non-profit organizations joining their local Chambers of Commerce.

"Commitment from the middle class and business community is needed to make poverty a 'voteable' issue."
– Conference participant

c. Emphasize that human rights and equality benefit everyone.

Ed Broadbent's keynote address resonated with many conference participants. He stated that the increased level of poverty and inequality is the result of changes in policy and political climate in Canada in the 1990s. He also highlighted that poverty is a human rights issue, and that addressing poverty benefits everyone **–** "More equal societies are not simply more stable and just, they are also healthier in virtually every respect for everyone in them."

These statements raised questions about our current provincial and national values and the need for clarification. Are public funds being spent on what we value? How can we nurture or return to a political discourse that values social justice and equity? Are people willing to pay more taxes if the money goes to making people and communities more resilient, more productive, and more healthy?

"We need to eliminate the idea that poverty has to exist and [convey] that we would do incredibly well without it."
– Conference participant

d. Monitor and advocate at provincial and federal levels.

Participants suggested that more effort is needed to monitor the activities and discussion/debate of the Provincial Legislature and Legislative Committees. Although several groups already attend and internally report on this, the dissemination of reports is not wide enough to support effective lobbying with MLAs by citizens and other groups.

It was also recommended that the federal scene not be ignored. In particular, it was suggested that MPs be lobbied to support the implementation of the recommendations from the Senate Committee's report "In from the Margins: A Call for Action on Poverty, Housing and Homelessness."[1]

e. Engage municipal government in addressing poverty.

The importance of engaging municipalities in tackling poverty has already been shown in Nova Scotia. A community asset inventory in Wolfville (Vital Signs project), for example, led to the Community Foundation's decision to make its first community investment in addressing poverty. Conference participants suggested that this approach may be useful in other municipalities. One group suggested that people should not be afraid to run for municipal office themselves.

Conference organizers were aware of the importance of engaging municipalities in the "Taking Action on Poverty" conference. Unfortunately, participation by municipal staff and politicians was limited by the schedule overlap with the annual meeting of the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities. However, Truro Mayor Bob Mills' greetings to the conference and the financial support to the conference by three municipalities suggest an openness to entering into poverty-related conversations with local and provincial stakeholders.

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[1] Since the conference, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities has released its report "Federal Poverty Reduction Plan: Working In Partnership Towards Reducing Poverty In Canada." This report contains further recommendations for federal action on poverty.

2. Focus on Policy Change and Government Initiatives

A variety of suggestions emerged related to the theme of policy change and government initiatives.

a. Resolve jurisdictional confusion around Aboriginal peoples' access to services.

b. Conduct a public review of the Residential Tenancies Act with a focus on housing standards (i.e. more effective means of dealing with "slum landlords") and rent control.

c. Conduct a public review of the Employment Support and Income Assistance program, focusing on claw backs, assets, and adequacy of shelter and personal allowances. The review should explore how to provide for needs of low income persons while maintaining their dignity. The advice of Gail Nyberg in her presentation to expand the review to an income security review should be considered and could include the exploration of a Guaranteed Liveable Income.

d. Develop a provincial Affordable Housing Strategy.

e. Conduct a Labour Standards Review to explore how to encourage employers to improve their employment policies.

f. Develop a provincial Transportation Strategy.

g. Explore sustainable job creation particularly the development of social enterprises.

h. Establish poverty reduction performance measures and monitor levels of poverty across the province as a way to assess the effectiveness of the Poverty Reduction Strategy.

i. Review Education Policy to better ensure inclusivity and a level playing field for children from poor families.

j. Establish an ombudsman and/or a formalized non-governmental grievance body for the appeal of income assistance complaints.

3. Develop enabling mechanisms and structures for addressing poverty.

Concrete mechanisms and structures are needed to address poverty. Suggestions included:

a. Establish a provincial mechanism to discuss and disseminate success stories, and to contribute to the definition of more concrete outcomes, timelines and guidelines for the provincial Poverty Reduction Strategy. This mechanism should engage stakeholders and provide one place where information is accessible (e.g. a website).

b. Establish more regional coalitions. Groups from the Annapolis Valley and Cape Breton left the conference with this intention. The Cape Breton group has already had their first meeting.

c. Establishing Rural Community Development Councils was suggested by the group from northern Nova Scotia. These councils should focus on improving quality of life, an idea consistent with the suggestion to change the language to engage the middle class and business sectors, as mentioned above. They could also be effective vehicles for engaging the municipal level of government.

4. Enhance community-based resources for people living in poverty.

a. Initiate and continue work at the community and neighbourhood level:

- Establish Community Advocate Centres in every town and networks in every community.

- Establish local "system" navigators to assist with poverty-related programs and services (e.g. social assistance, employment, etc.). One group suggested the possibility of peer navigators.

- Establish mentorship programs for low-income individuals/families in communities similar to those that are established for new Canadians and refugees.

b. Disseminate the Welfare Rights Handbook developed by Dalhousie Legal Aid more widely.

c. Conduct courses and training for both income assistance clients and service providers concerning clients' rights, available programs, and maintaining respect.

d. Establish or better promote (where they already exist) community-based volunteer services to maximize access to government benefits through taxes.

e. Establish a website, one source of information about services available to people living in poverty.

f. Expand roles of existing structures to include poverty reduction (e.g. Community Health Boards, libraries, school boards, family resource centres, women's centres, post-secondary institutions).

V. Measuring Success

This section provides a summary of evaluation outcomes from the conference in terms of two main factors—participant satisfaction and the achievement of conference objectives. The results are based on responses to the evaluation surveys completed by participants at the end of each of the two days of the conference.

The survey consisted of a combination of closed and open-ended questions designed to collect information regarding: (1) Demographics (e.g. direct experience living in poverty, employment status, focus of work, geographic scope); (2) Participant satisfaction with various aspects of the conference (e.g. registration and subsidy handling process, presentations and sessions, facilities); as well as (3) Self-reported impact on knowledge, motivation and intentions.

DEMOGRAPHICS

A total of 132 participants completed the evaluation survey at the end of the first day. The diversity and inclusiveness of the conference is supported by responses to the demographic questions.

- More than one-half of respondents self-identified as currently living in poverty (24%) or having done so in the past (31%). One-third (32%) reported being unemployed, 20% working part-time, and 48% full-time.

- Respondents worked/volunteered within a diversity of sectors, most commonly: funded non-profit organization (47%), unfunded non-profit or community group (34%), government department or agency (14%), and DHA/Public Health office (11%).

- Their interest in poverty stemmed from various perspectives, most commonly as a community volunteer (44%), practitioner (39%), policy-maker (18%), and/or researcher (17%).

- Responses to the question "What is the main focus of your work" were also varied, the most common being: anti-poverty (26%), health promotion (23%), and housing/shelter (20%). A substantial proportion of participants were focused on issues not traditionally associated with anti-poverty work (e.g. injury prevention, housing, literacy, early childhood education).

PARTICPANT SATISFACTION

Five-point ratings scales, ranging from 1 *(Very Dissatisfied)* to 5 *(Very Satisfied)* and 1 *(Poor)* to 5 *(Excellent)* were used to assess participant satisfaction with various aspects of the conference.

The majority of participants reported high levels of satisfaction overall, with the registration and subsidy handling process, the conference sessions, and the conference facilities. Highlights of the satisfaction ratings include:

- The majority rated the conference as either *Good* (46%) or *Excellent* (35%). Lower ratings were given by relatively few respondents—*Average* (6%), *Fair* (11%) and *Poor* (2%).

- Close to 90% reported being *Satisfied* (52%) or *Very Satisfied* (37%) with the overall conference process, moderation and facilitation.

- Most were *Satisfied* or *Very Satisfied* (86%) with the conference registration process.

- Almost all self-identified low income participants were either *Very Satisfied* (65%) or *Satisfied* (29%) with the handling of conference subsidies.

- All sessions received generally positive ratings (average ratings of 3.8 – 4.8 on the 5-point scale). Strongest ratings were provided for the sessions by: The Hon. Ed Broadbent (4.8); Robert Wright (4.7); and the First Voice Panellists (4.7).

- The vast majority were either *Satisfied* or *Very Satisfied* with the conference facilities— Meeting Rooms (92%); Audiovisual Services (90%); Accommodations (75%); and Food (85%).

ACHIEVEMENT OF OBJECTIVES

Evaluation results are presented below in relation to each of the five conference objectives.

1. **Improve Our Understanding about the Human, Social And Economic Costs Of Poverty**

Several program components were aimed specifically at increasing understanding about the costs of poverty, e.g., The First Voice Panel; Senator Art Eggleton's presentation based on the Senate Committee's *In from the Margins* report; the presentation and panel discussion on the Cost of Poverty in Nova Scotia; and the Honourable Ed Broadbent's keynote address.

Participants were asked to indicate on a 5-point scale, ranging from *Not at* All to *A Lot*, the extent to which their knowledge in the following areas had increased as a result of the conference:

- The human, economic and social costs of poverty (Day 1)
- Poverty as a human rights issue (Day 1)
- Costs of poverty (Day 2)

Increases in knowledge were reported by almost all participants on all three items. Overall, between 90% and 97% of respondents reported some increase in knowledge, with 71% % and 57% and 67% reporting knowledge increases in the range of *Quite a Bit* to *A Lo*t in each of the three area respectively – human, economic and social costs; poverty as a human rights issue; and costs of poverty.

2. Share Ideas about How We Can Reduce Poverty

Ideas about reducing poverty were shared throughout the conference through presentations, panel discussions, workshops, break-out group discussions, and informal networking. Specific examples of solutions offered came from, among others, the first voice panellists; the Senate Committee's report, *In from the Margins*; the panel discussions on local success stories and challenges; presentations on lessons learned from various jurisdictions; and the next steps break-out sessions.

Four main questions were asked to assess self-reported increases in knowledge related to ideas for reducing poverty. Using a 5-point rating scale, participants were asked to indicate to what extent, if any, their knowledge in the following areas had increased:

- The topic of the break-out session they attended on local success stories and challenges (Day 1)
- Initiatives to reduce poverty in Nova Scotia (Day 1)
- Initiatives to reduce poverty in other parts of Canada (Day 1)
- Ideas about reducing poverty (Day 2)

Responses to these questions indicate the conference's success in meeting this second objective. Overall, between 92% and 97% of respondents reported some increase in knowledge in the above areas. The majority (50%–60%) reported increases in the range of *Quite a Bit* to *A Lot*. While a few participants reported that their knowledge had increased *Not at All* on these items, a significant proportion (19%– 37%) said that their knowledge had increased *A Little Bit*. Comments

on the evaluation forms suggested that this group was mainly comprised of individuals with a long history in the field of poverty reduction.

3. Learn About Barriers Involved in Reducing Poverty and How We Can Overcome Them

Barriers to reducing poverty were evident in almost all presentations and discussions. In some instances, the main focus on barriers was balanced by ideas and solutions on how to overcome them.

The ideas that arose in the next steps break-out sessions identified key barriers to reducing poverty, including: lack of public awareness and political will; ineffective policies and initiatives; inadequate enabling mechanisms and structures; and the need for enhancing community-based resources for people living in poverty. In each of these areas, ways of overcoming the barriers were identified.

Evidence for the conference's success in meeting this objective can be found in participants' increased knowledge in this area. More than 90% of participants reported that their knowledge about the barriers to addressing poverty and how to overcome them had increased to some extent as a result of the conference. Almost two-thirds of respondents indicated that their knowledge in this area had increased *Quite a Bit* (44%) or *A Lot* (19%).

4. Learn More about How We Can Reduce Poverty By Working Together – As Governments, Businesses, Nonprofit Organizations And Community Groups – With Those Living In Poverty

The conference program included two main sessions aimed at enhancing knowledge and capacity around collaboration. These were the sessions facilitated by Liz Weaver from the Tamarack Institute—(1) "C*ommunities Can Reduce Poverty: Five Stories Prove It's True: Creating Vibrant Communities"* and (2) *"Faster Alone, Farther Together",* a presentation/ workshop on the benefits and challenges of collaboration.

Support for meeting this objective can be found in participants' responses to the evaluation question asking them to what extent they had learned about reducing poverty by working together. In total, 96% of respondents indicated that they had learned *A Little* through to *A Lot* on the topic. The majority of participants (69%) reported having learned *Quite a Bit* (39%) or *A Lot* (30%).

This assessment is supported qualitatively by the number of initiatives identified in the next step breakouts that include building new relationships and strengthening existing ones: a provincial mechanism, three regional coalitions, and reaching out to existing organizations including health boards, libraries, school boards, family resource centres, women's centres, post-secondary institutions, Chambers of Commerce and municipalities.

5. Develop Our Ability as a Community to be Involved and Active In Reducing Poverty.

The ultimate purpose of the conference was to build capacity for taking action on poverty. It is not enough to understand and discuss poverty. Action is needed, and the conference program was geared toward this objective.

While the true impact on community action and involvement in reducing poverty can only be assessed in the future, there are some clear indicators supporting this objective. The Steering Committee, for example, is aware of initiatives stemming from the conference in two regions to establish coalitions to develop action plans to address poverty in their communities.

On the evaluation form, participants were asked to what extent the conference had an impact on their motivation/intentions to take action on poverty by: (1) Connecting with others to work together to reduce poverty; and (2) Using information from the conference in their work.

Responses were overwhelmingly positive. All but two participants reported an impact on their motivation/intentions to connect with others and to use information from the conference in their work. Further, a strong majority of participants reported a relatively strong impact.

Overall, 85% said the conference impacted their motivation/intentions to connect with others to reduce poverty *A Lot* (36%) or *Quite a Bit* (49%). Similarly, more than three-quarters said they intended to use information from the conference in their work —*A Lot* (34%) or *Quite a Bit* (43%).

Participants were also asked whether they were committed to doing anything about poverty after the conference. In total, 94% said that they were committed and 6% were not sure. While we cannot assume that their commitment is solely a function of the conference—many were definitely committed before the conference— some participants were clearly motivated as a result of their attendance.

A 6-month follow up to more clearly assess the action-oriented outcomes of the conference will be conducted.

"I was committed before [but now] have a 'shot in the arm' to continue work."

"As I am newly involved in this issue, I am grateful for the opportunity to attend this conference. I have learned a lot and look forward to furthering my knowledge which will turn into a useful tool to help in my community."

"I was very impressed with the moderator, the speakers, and the whole event's organization. The opportunity to speak to others about concrete goals and actions to take forward from here was great!"

– Conference participants

VI. Concluding Thoughts

Charla Williams provided a recap of the main conference themes, based on her own involvement and the debriefing she had with the conference note takers. "The themes are very clear," she began. "Number one is that poverty has got to go. There is just no need for it. It is unacceptable." The second theme she emphasized is the need to raise the level of public awareness and to put a human face on the issue of poverty. "We need to get every Nova Scotian to be aware of the issues relating to poverty. We need people to understand there are differences in how poverty affects people. We need to get everybody doing something to eliminate—not to reduce—but to eliminate poverty." Other observations included:

- Getting the general public involved will also get the government involved. Elected officials will not work on poverty unless supported by voters. We need to speak to all levels of government–municipal, provincial and federal–and let them know that we need to eliminate poverty.

- The general public needs to understand that we have the ability in this province to meet everybody's basic food, shelter and clothing needs.

- The language associated with poverty is aggressive, not empowering (e.g. "the war on poverty"), and does not engage everyone. We need to find terms to convey that everyone is responsible for doing something about poverty.

- Some people ignore the issue of poverty because they see it as a problem that is too big and unsolvable. We need to send the message that eliminating poverty is manageable.

- Having no idea of the reality of people's lives, society commonly stereotypes people living in poverty as lazy, not willing to work, drug addicts, etc. We need to dispel the myths surrounding poverty.

- A living wage is a requirement. People who are able to work must earn enough to survive. Minimum wage in this economy is not enough.

- There are many poverty-related services/ programs that people do not know exist or how to access. System "navigators" could help people living in poverty learn about and access available services/programs.

In closing, Ms. Williams referred to the comments provided by the note takers when asked to use a word or phrase that, for them, captured the essence of the conference. Comments included:

- Empowerment;
- Increasing awareness at all levels;
- Equal partnerships and inclusiveness;
- Increased sense of urgency – we don't have time to wait;
- Re-energizing – those doing poverty-related work are feeling re-energized;
- Action – let's stop the talk and get busy; and,
- Communication and collaboration – working together for change; and a true belief that it is possible to make that change.

> *"In my personal opinion, this is amazing… that those who have attended this conference have come to those conclusions. Not everybody thought that we could get here. This is a small step. The longest journey begins with a single step so, as some in my community would say, 'Let's get to stepping'."*
>
> **– Charla Williams**

Notes

[1] Public Health Agency of Canada (2009). *What makes Canadians healthy or unhealthy?* Retrieved 20 Feb. 2011 from http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ph-sp/determinants/determinants-eng.php#income

[2] Hayward K. & Coleman, R. (2003). *The tides of change: addressing inequity and chronic disease in Atlantic Canada.* Halifax: Health Canada. Retrieved 20 Feb. 2011 from http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/canada/regions/ atlantic/Publications/ Tides_of_change/tides_change_2003_e.pdf

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[5] Raphael, D. (2008). Introduction to the social determinants of health. In D. Raphael (Ed.), *Social Determinants of Health: Canadian Perspectives*. (2nd ed., pp. 2-19). Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press.

[6] Saulnier, C. (2009). The Causes and Consequences of Poverty: Understanding Divisions and Disparities in Social and Economic Development in Nova Scotia. Social Development Report Series. Ottawa: Canadian Council on Social Development. Retrieved 20 Feb. 2011 from http://www.ccsd.ca/Reports/NS_Report_FINAL.pdf

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