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The Halton Poverty Roundtable met at the Acton Library Monday to discuss poverty in Halton Hills. From left, are participants Joe Vanderbeck, Joy Anderson, Sheldon Wolfson, Ancilla Ho-Young, David Goodings, and Halton Hills Mayor Rick Bonnette. There were 25 in attendance. *Submitted photo*



Poverty Roundtable meets in Acton

By ANNE SWARBRICK
*Director of Community Development
Halton Poverty Roundtable*

The 25-member Halton Poverty Roundtable met recently at the Acton Public Library.

The Roundtable brings people together from business, government, non-profit organizations, and includes people with experience living below the poverty line. Together, they work to help reduce poverty in our communities. Across Halton Region, 8.5% of residents live below the poverty line.

"The Roundtable held our meeting in Acton on Monday to learn more about the particular challenges facing people in Acton and Georgetown and about the communities' efforts to help", said co-chair Marc Hamel. "It was very helpful to hear Cathy Gerrow, from the local Links2Care office, share details of the challenges faced by Halton Hills residents struggling to make ends meet on low-incomes, and inspiring to learn more of the roles played by local volunteers."

The lack of affordable housing was described by Gerrow as a huge local challenge that sometimes leads people to move away. She described how the loss of the support of family and friends, however, often has them needing to move back, which can be a vicious circle.

She pointed to the lack of public transit that goes north and south, which leads to obstacles and excessive costs for people

on low-incomes without cars, who, for example, must find a way to get to medical appointments in Oakville.

Gerrow described Halton Hills as one of the best organized JumpStart chapters spearheaded by Canadian Tire, and helped 119 kids to participate in sport and recreation programs last year. The importance is evidenced by how many parents tell her that they "can't believe the change in their kids since participating" although they "couldn't afford it before."

More than 200 volunteers provide a range of support through Links2Care: from helping with phone calls for those who have difficulty speaking on their own behalf to assisting with the form completion needed to access critical services such as CPP Disability, child tax credits, Guaranteed Income Supplements for seniors. Gerrow described how mental health and literacy issues are often the biggest roadblocks to getting assistance.

The Roundtable also heard from Halton Hills Mayor Rick Bonnette and Regional Councillor Clark Somerville, who is Chair of Halton Region's Health and Social Services Committee.

The Roundtable's current initiatives include: organizing a Social Services Summit on April 4 to obtain community feedback to relay to the Ontario government's Social Assistance Review; working on a range of initiatives to encourage improved means of addressing housing needs in Halton and pointing to the need for improved public transit throughout Halton.

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