

## Social Justice Grant Making – February 16, 2006

### The Hamilton Experience – Tackling Poverty by Building a Vibrant Community

Carolyn, it's a pleasure to have you with us today. Can you start by just telling us a little bit about yourself and your background, and how you came to get involved with the Hamilton Community Foundation?

*I was in the health care field for 20 years. I held a variety of positions - an RN, a bedside practitioner; I worked in mental health, education, research, administration. I worked in hospitals, taught at community colleges and a university, and ran the Victorian Order of Nurses in Halton Region. There came a point where I got restless and began to seek out new opportunities, and I came to the realization that it was time for me to do something other than health care.*

*It was at this time that I was approached about a position with the Hamilton Community Foundation. I didn't know much about community foundations at the time, but when I started to learn about them, I became very excited by this opportunity. The Hamilton Community Foundation at the time was just \$10 million dollars, and staff consisted of myself, an assistant, a part-time grant maker and a finance consultant. It was very well positioned, though, to take the next step in its organizational development.*

Would you tell us a bit more about the Hamilton Community Foundation and its work?

*The Hamilton Community Foundation serves a population of about 500,000 in a recently amalgamated city. A recent challenge for the community has been a number of manufacturing companies exiting the city due to Asian competition. Consequently, the city is very much in transition.*

*The Hamilton Community Foundation, like all other community foundations, has three major roles – a grant maker, a fund developer, and a community leader. As a grant maker, we distribute approximately \$5 million from a number of donor-advised funds and unrestricted funds. As mentioned, we have dedicated the majority of the foundation's unrestricted fund to the alleviation, prevention, and reduction of poverty. This is a commitment of \$3 million over four years, and we are now going into the third year of that. All sectors contribute to the poverty challenge.*

*In addition, we have established an Environmental Grantmaking Program, with terrific help from the McConnell Family Foundation, that involves a focus on citizen engagement, youth, and building the capacity of the sector. We also have a Youth in Philanthropy Program and a Neighbourhood Program that provides a combination of small grants and technical assistance to residents in four of our most marginalized neighbourhoods. We have implemented an evaluation framework this year with the help of an external consultant, Dr. Arnold Love, with a focus on accountability and ongoing learning.*

*Perhaps the most exciting thing for us right now is our partnership with the City of Hamilton. Last February, we convened a Roundtable of private, public, and voluntary sector representatives focused on developing a community plan to prevent and reduce poverty. In fact, the Poverty Roundtable just launched its website last week at [www.hamiltonpoverty.ca](http://www.hamiltonpoverty.ca).*

Can you share your journey, and the journey of the Hamilton Community Foundation, with regards to social justice grant making?

*The process for us has been a real evolution. It began with the question of effectiveness. Community foundations do grant making to all sectors, which sometimes results in us being “a mile wide and an inch deep” – so we really couldn’t determine our effectiveness. Tim Brodhead gave some advice to community foundations at a regional meeting; he said, “Look in your community for those areas that need leadership – look at the fit and consider stepping up to the plate.” We started looking at a strategic focus for the Hamilton Community Foundation and at aligning our programs around that. We worked with a consultant, did a lot of stakeholder interviews, and also did an internal audit of our grant making. We began to narrow our focus and consider a number of options. Our Neighbourhood Program emerged from this process – it was our first major social justice initiative.*

*Simultaneous to looking at our own grant making, I joined the Transatlantic Community Foundation Network. I was very inspired by my colleagues from some of the post-Communist countries, who had little or no assets but very great passion and determination to build their communities.*

*At this point, I had been with the Hamilton Community Foundation for seven years. I began to research why community foundations have been slow to take up social justice. The key questions for me were, “Are we going to continue to exist to build more food banks, more shelters, do more alleviation? What will our, and what will MY PERSONAL contribution be to the community?” I wrote a paper that I presented to the Board and key donors, and we began a dialogue around social justice.*

How is this work being lived out at the Hamilton Community Foundation?

*Currently, our Neighborhood Program is in its third of five years, with an evaluation that is just being completed. We are going into the third year of our Tackling Poverty Together program and have spent approximately \$1.8 million on 39 grants to 33 organizations. Final reports and interim reports have been analyzed, with the assistance of Dr. Arnold Love, with a focus on accountability and ongoing learning. We have convened the grantees on two occasions, focusing on their evaluation capacity and results to date.*

*Our participation in Vibrant Communities really prepared us for the next step, as co-convenor of the multi-sector Roundtable. The leadership of Joe-Anne Priel and her team*

*at the City of Hamilton has been invaluable, as has the Vibrant Communities framework and coaching.*

What are some of the major challenges you have faced in this work, and how have you been addressing them?

*It has been challenging to develop a framework that recognizes the important roles of learning and knowledge, partnership, collaboration, evaluation and leadership. The process has not been a smooth one – some Board members thought that social justice isn't our role, that this sounded too much like advocacy and policy. People became more comfortable when we started talking about moving from alleviation to focusing on the root causes of poverty. We changed some language, and we use the term "social justice" and its descriptions selectively.*

*There has also been a challenge in that, with our tightened focus, some community members have felt that they are being left out. There has been a perception that we are going "left wing" – we have had to help the community to understand our shift in focus and what it means. It has been essential to reinforce why we are doing this.*

*Poverty is such a complex issue. It requires us to build our partners' capacity and to do a lot of convening. We are really taking issues to a systems level. When you start delving into the complexity of poverty, you then cannot continue the quick fixes.*

This is such hard work, with so many challenges. What makes it worth it?

*There is a huge sense of satisfaction in knowing that we have taken on one of the toughest challenges in the community, and that we are using all of our potential as a community foundation in collaboration with exceptional partners and new networks. There is a great sense of excitement about what might be possible. It is worth the risk, and worth the work.*

Carolyn, thanks for this conversation and for sharing your wonderful expertise with us. You've helped us all to develop a better understanding of how the principles of social justice grant making can be put into action at the community level.

### **Question and Answer Period**

Question: Have any changes taken place in municipal policy in Hamilton as a result of the City's participation in the Roundtable for Poverty Reduction?

*Answer: There have been several changes. Hamilton is one of only a very few municipalities starting to move the programs currently funded by NCB onto a tax levy in order to keep these programs in place. A Fair Fee policy is being developed, and the economic development strategy is being blended into one document with the social development strategy. There have not been any huge policy changes yet, but the thinking is definitely starting to change.*

Question: Can you elaborate on idea that economic development is no longer looked at independently, but as an overall part of community development through blending in the social aspect?

*Answer: It hasn't been an easy job, but discussions are taking place about child care, about housing, about jobs – realizing that these things are as much a part of economic development as is attracting business. Some ROI papers have been done to build knowledge around some of these things. At last week's presentation to the Committee of the Whole, speakers challenged some of the budget decisions that are being made, saying you can't spend four hours listening to this and not understand that if, for instance, you increase transit fees, you are making life much more difficult for a certain segment of the community.*

Question: How are corporations that have funding programs jumping on the bandwagon?

*Answer: A new clothing business is moving into town and became aware of our Roundtable. They have made a proposal that for every ten outfits sold, one will be contributed to someone who can't afford proper clothing. We have a banker on our committee who does extremely innovative work with immigrants. We have two successful entrepreneurs on our committee who are looking at forming a public – private partnership for affordable housing. So we are seeing a lot of interest from business. We also would like to explore a potential partnership with the School of Business.*

Question: Is the University participating as an institution?

*Answer: Yes. When started this, we went to the University president, Dr. Peter George, and asked for his support. His response was, "What do you need?" So they signed on, and we now have representatives from Redeemer University, McMaster, and the community college.*

Question: How can people living in poverty best be integrated into the decision making structure?

*Answer: In our Neighbourhood Program, we have a very talented community development worker who is literally on the streets of the four neighbourhoods, taking the approach of working with local citizens to identify issues and areas they want to improve in their own neighbourhoods. So we don't tend to go through the formal organizations in these neighbourhoods, but rather to work directly with citizens. We try to give them the technical assistance they need, and we have small grants avail to help them implement their ideas. We just evaluated this initiative with Dr. Love and produced a summary of the experience – the citizens speaking about how their involvement has made a difference. A lot of work has been needed to develop trust and positive relationships, but there has been great local leadership development and these neighbourhoods have a real sense of pride in their accomplishments.*

*Our Roundtable has a Low-Income Advisory Committee, who have helped us to test the reliability and validity of our ideas. This Friday, they will join us at a workshop to develop the framework of our community plan. Once the community plan is formed, we will be looking at governance and how we can really involve those affected by the issues. We want to move from consultation to complete involvement.*

Question: As a funder taking a on a leadership role in something this big, how do you balance this initiative with the other work you need to do?

*Answer: We are struggling with that right now. There is a certain naïveté when you go into this work – on one level, we know about the complexity and difficulties, but it is not until you get into it that you really realize how big it is. We are committed to resourcing this initiative and bringing in full-time staff with senior executive experience. Once we get that in place, I think some of the pressure will be eased. Strategically, we are definitely going to have to move the Foundation forward on some of the other critical issues in our community, and that has to happen simultaneously with this.*

Question: Do you have a plan for how you will work with other funders to do this work more comprehensively?

*Answer: One of our lead staff has been instrumental in the Funders Network in Hamilton. That group has been meeting over the past few months to look how we can strategically align some of our funding. We are concerned about our leadership in the voluntary sector, and sustainability, so they have been working hard to look at how we as funders can come together to support our leadership. This will be broader than those charities focusing on poverty. One thing we haven't addressed yet is the whole strategy around funding the poverty initiative. We do have DeFasco and two private individuals helping to fund the work of the Roundtable at this time. We will need to put together a fund development strategy to take this work forward in the next four years.*

Question: Are there Funders Networks in many communities?

*Answer: A good number of community foundations participate in, convene, or co-convene these networks. They are not everywhere, but they are quite common.*

Question: How are you balancing the interests of the wide range of stakeholders involved?

*Answer: We realize if we are going to keep people engaged, we will have to be able to accommodate those people who need to see short-term results as well as those who are interested in longer-term things and in education and engagement. Part of the thinking is to look at a continuum of progress and what results we can achieve along the way.*

Question: Can you elaborate about the method that you used to evaluate your neighbourhood work?

*Answer: Dr. Arnold Love and Betty Muggah published an article in the Harvard Evaluation Exchange on the democratic approach to evaluation in this project. We did a series of interviews with citizens in the target neighbourhoods, and had a cameraman along who took photos. Hours of script were developed, and Dr. Love and our team went through all of that and pulled out the voices and words of those citizens. We then worked with a company to pull the whole thing together with pictures and words. We presented it at a neighbourhood celebration – it was extraordinary for those people to see themselves up on screen with their words. We are using this piece to communicate with a number of stakeholder groups. It is a very powerful approach to evaluation.*



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