

## **Partners to End Poverty – 2015 Report**

Partners to End Poverty is an initiative led by the Northeast Regional Intersectoral Committee and supported by intersectoral partners of the RIC, non-profit organizations, faith communities, and business. Our vision is poverty free communities in northeast Saskatchewan. Our mission is to create conditions to enable all people in northeast Saskatchewan to actively participate in economic and social life and enjoy a livelihood that will sustain well-being.

We believe that poverty is not inevitable and everyone is better off if we address poverty, but a strategic and coordinated effort is required. Ending poverty is complex and requires a holistic, multifaceted approach. Goals of Partners to End Poverty are: to increase awareness of poverty and approaches to end poverty, to build partnerships, and to work with communities to address priority areas. Participant input at the Partnering to End Poverty forum, in Tisdale on October 16, 2014, identified four priority areas: **housing, transportation, literacy, and inclusion.**

Our 2015 Poverty Busters and other projects were designed to address these priority areas.

### **Poverty Buster #1 – Income Tax Help**

Partners to End Poverty organized this Poverty Buster initiative with several community organizations to help provide free income tax preparation for low-income people in the northeast. Income tax preparation clinics provided a free service in Melfort, Nipawin, and Tisdale, enabling families and individuals to benefit from government income supports that flow from filing income tax. A total of approximately 500 returns were completed at the three locations, which saved low-income individuals and families \$30,000. With the completion of an income tax return, individuals also gained access to such government programs as the Universal Child Care Benefit, Child Tax Credit, GST returns, and Guaranteed Income Supplement, making the impact for families in the region quite substantial.

### **Poverty Buster #2 – Food Security: Gardens/ Edible Landscape**

A container box gardening project at Reynolds Central School in Melfort was developed to encourage students to learn how to grow their own food, enhance gardening skills, and raise awareness about food security in our region. The idea began with inspiration from the Marguerite Riel Centre, who also have a community garden and have had success with the container box model of gardening, and the Reynolds students were led by outreach worker Naomi Lang. Community partners contributed their special skills and resources to build and fill six wooden container gardens, which were then used to grow a variety of vegetables. This Poverty Buster came together through the cooperation of Melfort businesses and individual helpers who supported the project with time, supplies, ideas, and hard work.

Food security was addressed in Nipawin when an edible landscaping project was begun in July that will see the planting of fruit trees throughout the town for the next several years. Service clubs and community organizations took the lead in purchasing and planting fruit trees on city property, and so far eleven apple trees have been planted at the Lion's Park, outside Irene Manley Pool, and at Central Park School. We are also working on bringing this Poverty Buster to Tisdale. Investments in edible landscapes are minimal when compared to the many benefits. This project will allow children and families to freely access fresh fruit in the local parks, and the trees also enhance the beauty and variety of the landscape.

### **Poverty Buster #3 – Literacy: Back to School**

Operation Fill-a-Backpack was aimed at assisting parents of school age children, as well as building awareness of financial barriers and barriers to literacy in northeast communities. A total of 86 backpacks filled with school supplies were distributed to children in need in Melfort, Nipawin, and Tisdale. Church members, businesses, and individuals were generous in donations of cash and supplies, but the supply could not quite meet the demand. Families who received backpacks were very thankful and expressed their appreciation for the support, but we also learned of the difficulty in purchasing school supplies along with other back to school costs, particularly for families with more than one school age child. In order to develop a systems approach, Partners to End Poverty requested that the North East School Division review the school supply list and make adjustments to alleviate financial pressure on the families. Although this Poverty Buster was a tremendous success in helping families, it also helped to illustrate the great need here in the northeast.

### **Poverty Buster #4 – Chew On This!**

Partners to End Poverty joined the national movement of communities calling for an anti-poverty plan to end poverty and hunger for the almost 900,000 people in Canada who use food banks each month and the millions of others struggling to get by. Fifty-five groups in fifty communities across Canada participated in 'Chew On This!' in 2015. Volunteers from our partner organizations handed out 'Chew On This!' lunch bags, containing an apple and bannock, information about poverty, movie passes, and direction to Dignity For All's national anti-poverty plan online. At Cumberland College, in addition to providing lunch bags, Learner Services Advisors conducted workshops on the electoral system emphasizing that everyone can have a voice and challenging issues of poverty by exercising their right to vote. We received excellent support from our partners on this project, and were able to distribute a total of 430 'Chew On This!' packages at our six locations.

**Other projects:** PEP has also been involved in other projects to address housing and inclusion.

Fire Safety – KidsFirst Nipawin and the Nipawin Fire Department have partnered to establish a fire safety project, based on a program implemented in Regina. KidsFirst home visitors provided a curriculum developed by KidsFirst Regina to educate families about fire safety and prevention, and the fire department worked with KidsFirst families around the primary safety areas of working smoke alarms, safe storage of fire starting materials, and home fire escape plans. KidsFirst purchased the new smoke alarms, while the fire department contributed their time and expertise. Throughout the summer fire volunteers met with kids and families in fun and friendly interactions which increased trust and built relationships. This has led to home inspections, smoke alarm installations, and eventually to safer homes.

Tenant Rights and Responsibilities – Housing was also addressed through Cumberland College at a PLEA: Tenant Rights and Responsibilities session on October 28. Patrick McKenna spoke, on behalf of the Public Legal Education Association, about the rights and responsibilities of both renters and landlords. This Lunch and Learn took place at Cumberland College in Tisdale, and was teleconferenced to the Melfort and Nipawin campuses. The 40 people who attended included members of both the tenant and landlord camps, and their mutual exposure led to a beneficial familiarity. Workshops such as this one are necessary due to the very significant relationship between housing and poverty.

Treaties – The essential area of inclusion was addressed by PEP coordinator Allyson Stevenson this summer at the Melfort Exhibition. Allyson contacted the Office of the Treaty Commissioner to borrow materials, and she set up a table to educate community members and people at the fair on the topic of treaties and our shared history. Partners to End Poverty also partnered with the Marguerite Riel Centre on this project, to help put forth the inclusive message that, “We are all treaty people.”

Share the Warmth – This project was led by North East Outreach and Support Services, who partnered with PEP, the Melfort Mustangs, and SaskEnergy. NEOSS set up a table at the Northern Lights Palace and gave out free snacks and hot drinks to anyone who brought a blanket to donate at Melfort Mustangs games in November. We received 50 donations and NEOSS was generous enough to give 40 of the blankets to PEP to distribute among our partner organizations. We then travelled the northeast and divided the blankets between Red Earth, Shoal Lake, Cumberland House, and the Nipawin Oasis.

## **Upcoming projects**

Three main areas of focus to begin 2016 will be:

1. The continuation of last year's projects, beginning with a repetition of our success in income tax help.
2. Preparation for the RIC Forum being held on April 14, in response to Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommendations and in order to improve relationships between aboriginal and non-aboriginal communities.
3. Arranging visits to First Nations communities for Conversation Cafes, to build relationships and capacity, and to grow these partnerships. This may also have the added benefit of garnering support and building enthusiasm for the RIC Forum.

It is imperative that we continue to work with various partners who include the wisdom of First Nations and Metis perspectives.

Partners to End Poverty are excited to continue our work throughout the coming year. Thank you to all of our partners.

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