
Subject: Niagara Prosperity Initiative 2021 Update

Report to: Public Health and Social Services Committee

Report date: Tuesday, July 13, 2021

Recommendations

1. That this report **BE RECEIVED** for information.

Key Facts

- The purpose of the report is to update committee on the 16 projects approved under the Niagara Prosperity Initiative (NPI) for June 2021 to August 2022.
- NPI focuses on neighbourhood-based interventions to help build capacity and improve the quality of life for residents living in poverty.
- Priorities for 2021 have been informed by impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and as such, funding was targeted to identify needs in the areas of housing, health and domestic violence.
- NPI is a 100% levy funded program with a 2021 annual budget of \$1.25 million.
- In 2021, Brock University completed a three-year research project to review the impact of the NPI program.
- A comprehensive review of the analysis and recommendations outlined in “Connecting the Pieces: An Evaluation of the Niagara Prosperity Initiative and Call for a Broader Poverty Reduction Strategy for Niagara” is underway.
- Staff will present the report and staff recommendations including an approach for the future of NPI and a Niagara Poverty Reduction Strategy to Public Health and Social Services Committee (PHSSC) in September 2021.

Financial Considerations

While considering Community Services’ operating budget, Council reviews the investment of NPI funding annually. Since 2008, Regional Council has typically invested \$1.5 million annually toward increasing prosperity for Niagara residents living in poverty. In both 2020 and 2021, the investment was reduced to \$1.25 million in order to mitigate budget pressures in other areas. Each year, \$150,000 of the budgeted amount is allocated to the Convener (Niagara Community Foundation) and Secretariat (United Way Niagara) functions to support administration and stakeholder engagement associated with this initiative. Additionally, United Way Niagara reported \$44,938 in

unspent funding (including interest) from previous projects, resulting in a total project allocation of \$1,144,938, excluding administration. The total program cost for 2021 is within the 2021 approved budget. This funding does not include other additional non-mandatory levy contributions that council directs to other poverty reduction/alleviation efforts such as investments in homelessness services housing and discretionary benefits for social assistance recipients.

Analysis

NPI focuses on neighbourhood-based interventions and development to increase prosperity for Niagara residents living in poverty.

For 2021, NPI committed to providing supports to help communities rebuild and recover from the devastating impacts of COVID-19. The pandemic has exacerbated and amplified many of the issues caused by poverty. United Way Niagara and Niagara Regional staff reviewed local data, reports and spoke with experts in the community to help determine which areas of need required additional funding as a result of the pandemic. As an outcome of this review, the 2021 NPI Request for Proposals (RFP) targeted needs in the areas of housing, health and domestic violence.

1. **Housing** (improving housing stability through neighbourhood connectedness, enhancing the existing street outreach system, improving the health and well-being of individuals experiencing homelessness and expanding services that enable people to find and retain a home).
2. **Health** (expand access to free, quality mental health and addictions services, increase access to virtual or in-person addictions treatment, reduce isolation, increase access to dental health care, address the impacts of trauma, promote healthy child development and expand coordination across food bank programs).
3. **Domestic Violence** (expand crisis-based services that provide counselling and safety planning for women experiencing intimate partner violence, increase access to early intervention and family violence programs, increase access to virtual or in-person group and one-on-one counselling for those healing from the effects of violence and abuse).

The 2021 RFP was issued March 1st and closed April 2nd. Thirty-seven applications from thirty different agencies, with a total funding request of \$4,206,285 were received.

Niagara Region approves funding applications based on the recommendations of an independent review committee. Review committee members for 2021 included three Regional Councillors (B. Greenwood, L. Ip, L. Villella); two Niagara Region employees (Children's Services and Public Health); and seven members of the public including individuals with lived experience in poverty. Assessors reviewed each of their assigned proposals independently followed by group discussion on funding recommendations in three half-day meetings held in May 2021.

The criteria for assessment matched the proposal criteria and a list of review considerations were used to decide if the proposal was recommended or not recommended. After discussing all proposals, the group completed their final approvals and corresponding proposed budget recommendations. United Way Niagara finalized contracts based on these recommendations and a list of the approved projects by municipality is attached as Appendix 1.

Within the three streams of funding, eight projects are under Health, six projects are under Housing and two projects are under Domestic Violence.

Types of Projects	\$	%	# of Projects
Health – Mental Health/Addictions, Dental, Food	\$592,576	52%	8
Housing – Access, Outreach, Stability	\$400,154	35%	6
Domestic Violence – Early Intervention	\$152,208	13%	2
Total	\$1,144,938	100%	16

All sixteen projects will be funded to a maximum of 15 months with contracts ending August 30, 2022. Agencies have been advised that if they are unable to execute the project fully as a result of COVID-19, Niagara Region will recover unspent funds as soon as possible to ensure they can be redirected to urgent needs.

NPI Review

In 2018, Niagara Region's Social Assistance & Employment Opportunities (SAEO) division obtained funding of \$476,763 from the province's Local Poverty Reduction Fund (LPRF) for a three-year research project.

SAEO contracted with Brock University to complete the research. Brock University completed their review of NPI and the executive summary of the “Connecting the Pieces: An Evaluation of the Niagara Prosperity Initiative and Call for a Broader Poverty Reduction Strategy for Niagara” report was presented to PHSSC in March 2021. Within the executive summary, Brock proposed five recommendations to enhance Niagara Region’s response to poverty; develop a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy, increase investment, offer longer term and more deliberate funding, enhance research and design services for social inclusion aligned with poverty reduction priorities.

To support Niagara Region’s future responses to poverty, SAEO staff are working with Clarico Group Inc. to use the results of the Brock study to:

- Gain an understanding of the Region’s broader investments in poverty reduction;
- Propose an approach for the implementation of a broader Poverty Reduction strategy that would consider the investments into poverty reduction; and
- Propose to Council a new approach for NPI investments in the context of a broader Poverty Reduction strategy

The report will be presented at the September 2021 PHSSC meeting with the intent to implement Council-approved recommendations for NPI in 2022.

Alternatives Reviewed

Not applicable.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

Investing funding and collaborative action in neighbourhoods in need supports Council’s strategic priority of Fostering an Environment for Economic Prosperity. Outcomes are realized by helping residents thrive through greater opportunities and relate to employment and improved community symptoms.

Other Pertinent Reports

COM 4 – 2021 Niagara Prosperity Initiative Review

COM 2 – 2021 Evaluation of 2108 Niagara Prosperity Initiatives Projects

COM 44-2011 Niagara Prosperity Initiative Update (Building a New Legacy: Building Prosperity by Improving the Quality of Neighbourhood Life)

COM 04-2008 A Legacy of Poverty Addressing Cycles of Poverty and the Impact on
Child Health in Niagara Region

Prepared by:

Lori Watson
Director
Community Services

Recommended by:

Adrienne Jugley, MSW, RSW, CHE
Commissioner
Community Services

Submitted by:

Ron Tripp, P.Eng.
Acting Chief Administrative Officer

This report was prepared in consultation with Marc Todd, Manager, Community Services.

Appendices

Appendix 1 List of approved 2021 NPI projects by agency & municipality

Appendix 1– 2021 Niagara Prosperity Initiatives

Regional

Agency	Project Name	Project Description	Funding Stream	Contract
Community Care St. Catharines and Thorold	Brushed Aside 2020	This program funds either the dental needs of individuals who are ineligible for publicly funded programs, or the unfunded portion of those who are eligible. Community Care is the lead agency working with five partners across Niagara. The maximum annual allotment per client is \$1,000.	Health - Dental	\$110,572
Gateway Residential & Community Support Services	Specialized Outreach – Niagara Assertive Street Outreach	This project will enhance the Niagara Assertive Street Outreach Team throughout the Niagara Region with the addition of two specialized outreach workers. The focus will be working with individuals living rough with a Dual Diagnosis and or Concurrent Disorder.	Housing - Outreach	\$72,214
Gillian's Place	Domestic Violence Response Initiative	This project is in collaboration with FACS Niagara and is designed to enhance services to families experiencing domestic violence who are also being served by child welfare.	Domestic Violence – Early Intervention	\$68,180
John Howard Society of Niagara	Navigating Harm Reduction Peer Outreach Program	This is a 10-week psychoeducational program designed to assist individuals who are struggling to maintain positive and pro-social relationships build practical skills to improve how they interact with others.	Domestic Violence – Early Intervention	\$84,028
Niagara Regional Native Centre	MNO Endayaan (The Good Home)	A project to enhance the Homeward Bound program by offering home supports that coincide with Indigenous pedagogies of holistic support.	Housing - Access/Find/Retain	\$78,500
Positive Living Niagara	Niagara Harm Reduction Peer Outreach Program	Peer workers will distribute harm reduction supplies and naloxone coupled with education to reduce infections, lower overdose rates and death.	Health - Mental Health / Addictions	\$42,988

Agency	Project Name	Project Description	Funding Stream	Contract
Project SHARE of Niagara Falls Inc.	Niagara Food Hub	This project will increase coordination among foodbanks to provide more essential food items like fresh protein to distribute to families who are living below the poverty line in Niagara.	Health- Food	\$28,996
Quest Community Health Centre	Niagara Homelessness Emergency Liaison & Peer Support	Individuals with lived experience of homelessness will provide counseling, assistance & referrals to community agencies to meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness who visit Emergency Departments (ED) in Niagara.	Health - Mental Health / Addictions	\$129,325
The RAFT	Landlords / Family Engagement	This project will further expand on the existing Landlord/Family Engagement program, initially a function of Youth Reconnect. Workers will help at risk youth acquire and/or maintain suitable market rent housing and family reunifications.	Housing - Access/Find/Retain	\$72,118

West Lincoln

Agency	Project Name	Project Description	Funding Stream	Contract
Links for Greener Learning	West Lincoln Community Care Housing Assistance	To provide housing cost relief to West Lincoln Community Care low income clients. This will help individuals meet their financial commitments, while providing the opportunity for goal setting and action plan development.	Housing - Access/ Find / Retain	\$45,000

St. Catharines

Agency	Project Name	Project Description	Funding Stream	Contract
Community Addiction Services of Niagara	Addiction Services in Women's Shelter Project	CASON will employ an Addiction Coach to work onsite with YWCA, Gillian's Place and Women's Place South Niagara participants who present addiction issues.	Health - Mental Health / Addictions	\$26,422

Agency	Project Name	Project Description	Funding Stream	Contract
YMCA of Niagara	YMCA Adventure Club	This is a program for children and families who are at-risk or in vulnerable situations and has been developed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.	Health- Child	\$25,000
Westview Christian Fellowship	Westview Centre4Women	This project provides services in the sphere of housing and health in the Queenston Street and surrounding areas to women and families, dealing with issues of homelessness, addiction, sex trade / human trafficking, LGBTQ discrimination, and any other barriers preventing safe housing.	Housing - Stability	\$92,658

Welland

Agency	Project Name	Project Description	Funding Stream	Contract
Community Addiction Services of Niagara	Addiction Services in Women's Shelter Project	CASON will employ an Addiction Coach to work onsite with YWCA, Gillian's Place and Women's Place South Niagara participants who present addiction issues.	Health - Mental Health / Addictions	\$26,421
The Hope Centre	Return 2 Hope Counselling Services	A team of registered psychotherapists will provide supports to vulnerable members of the community to address adverse childhood trauma such as physical, emotional or sexual abuse which have been exacerbated with pandemic related anxiety and restrictions.	Health- Mental Health / Addictions	\$93,600
Welland Heritage Council and Multicultural Centre	Housing Coordinator	This project will serve newcomer clients with safe, secure, and clean emergency shelter apartments. Opportunities will be offered for select clients in the shelter to assist the Housing Coordinator with shelter tasks to gain Canadian work experience.	Housing - Stability	\$39,665

Niagara Falls

Agency	Project Name	Project Description	Funding Stream	Contract
Community Addiction Services of Niagara	Addiction Services in Women's Shelter Project	CASON will employ an Addiction Coach to work onsite with YWCA, Gillian's Place and Women's Place South Niagara participants who present addiction issues.	Health - Mental Health / Addictions	\$26,421
YMCA of Niagara	YMCA Adventure Club	This is a program for children and families who are at-risk or in vulnerable situations and has been developed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.	Health- Child	\$25,000
Project SHARE of Niagara Falls Inc.	Dental Cleaning Program	This project will provide funding for dental cleaning for eligible adults who are living below the poverty line in Niagara Falls and without any dental coverage. This cleaning will increase their oral and overall health.	Health - Dental	\$57,830