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**Subject:** Niagara Prosperity Initiative 2020 Update

**Report to:** Public Health and Social Services Committee

**Report date:** Tuesday, June 16, 2020

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## Recommendations

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

## Key Facts

- Since 2008 (COM 53-2008) Regional Council has authorized staff to invest \$1.5 million annually towards Niagara Prosperity Initiatives (NPI).
- NPI focuses on neighbourhood-based interventions to help build capacity and improve the quality of life for residents living in poverty.
- This report provides information on NPI projects approved in 2020.
- Twenty projects within the three priority areas of need; housing, health and employment, were approved for funding.
- Service impacts and outcomes anticipated include:
  - 6,215 people served
  - 201 jobs created and filled by people who live in poverty
  - \$47,997 in revenue generated from social enterprise projects.

## Financial Considerations

Between 2008 and 2019, Niagara Region has provided \$1.5 million in annual funding to the Niagara Prosperity Initiative. Of this amount, \$150,000 is allocated each year to the Convener (Niagara Community Foundation) and Secretariat (United Way Niagara) functions to support administration and stakeholder engagement associated with this initiative. For 2020, responding to a number of critical budget pressures, Council approved a one-year \$250,000 reduction of the funding for NPI, with \$1.25 million allocated for 2020 NPI projects. Additionally, United Way Niagara reported \$104,130 in unspent funding (including interest) from 2019 projects, resulting in a total project allocation of \$1,204,130 in 2020.

## Analysis

NPI focuses on neighbourhood based interventions and development to increase prosperity for Niagara residents living in poverty. The goals of NPI are as follows:

- To guide and direct investments on identified initiatives to alleviate poverty in neighborhoods across Niagara;
- To advocate for change that will reduce and prevent poverty in the community;
- To develop and enhance collaborative relationships between stakeholders; and
- To engage people living in poverty in meaningful ways to ensure that investments reflect need.

Three priority areas of need were used for the 2020 RFP process:

1. **Housing** (outreach, homelessness prevention, enhancing accessibility and improved stability);
2. **Health** (mental health, addictions, emotional health and wellbeing for children, dental needs for adults and sustainable access to healthy food);
3. **Employment** (social enterprises and working with Niagara's businesses to create secure jobs that pay a living wage).

The 2020 RFP was issued February 3<sup>rd</sup> and closed February 28, 2020. Forty-four applications, with a total funding request of \$5,028,686 were received. Of the 35 agencies that requested funding, twelve had never received NPI funding in the past.

Niagara Region approves funding applications based on the recommendations of an independent Review Committee. Review committee members for 2020 included two Regional Councillors (B. Greenwood, L. Villella); one employee from Niagara's non-profit sector; two Niagara Region employees (Children's Services and Public Health); one Brock University employee; and four members of the public.

The criteria for assessment matched the proposal criteria and scoring, as well as a list of review considerations, which were used to assist in deciding if the proposal was recommended or not recommended.

Assessors reviewed each of their assigned proposals independently, and then the group discussed funding recommendations. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, discussions took place electronically over two half-day meetings in April 2020.

Consideration of the current urgent needs of Niagara residents living in poverty, as a result of COVID-19, was incorporated into the final approval process.

United Way Niagara finalized contracts based on these recommendations and a list of the approved projects by neighbourhood is attached as Appendix 1.

Twenty projects were approved totaling \$1,204,130 in funding. Below is a distribution summary of investments within the three priority areas. Ten projects are under Housing, seven projects are under Health and three projects are under Employment.

Types of Projects	\$	%	# of Projects
Housing – Outreach	\$184,647	15%	2
Housing – Improved Stability	\$186,149	15%	5
Housing – Homelessness Prevention	\$175,974	15%	3
Health – Mental Health Outreach	\$278,211	23%	3
Health – Healthy Food	\$81,732	7%	3
Health – Dental Needs for Adults	\$139,586	12%	1
Employment – Social Enterprises	\$157,831	13%	3
	<b>\$1,204,130</b>		<b>20</b>

NPI projects can be funded for one or two years. In 2020, all 20 projects will be funded for one year with contracts ending May 31, 2021.

In addition to the existing contract requirements, agencies have been advised that in the event they are unable to execute a project in full or in part, Niagara Region will recover unspent funds as soon as possible to ensure dollars can be redirected to other urgent areas of need as result of COVID-19.

## **Research Study**

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

Brock University has been working on updating a report outlining the state of poverty in Niagara along with recommendations for NPI design and delivery. One of the recommendations being implemented for the 2020 funded projects is the implementation of a modified project evaluation practice, informed by the latest research, on measuring poverty and poverty reduction. The changes are expected to make reporting less cumbersome for service providers and less intrusive for service users while increasing the value, validity and reliability of the project outcome data that is collected.

In response to COVID-19, community consultations planned for the summer and fall may need to be completed in a different setting or modality. There has also been a temporary closure of the Statistics Canada Research Data Centre at McMaster University, which has delayed access to datasets. Brock is committed to adjusting the work plan as required and expects to complete the full report on schedule in early 2021.

## **Alternatives Reviewed**

Not applicable.

## **Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities**

Healthy and Vibrant Community. Foster a high quality of life through safe, inclusive neighbourhoods and delivery of quality, affordable and accessible human services.

## **Other Pertinent Reports**

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

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

COM 04-2019 Niagara Prosperity Initiative Update and Request for Review Committee Members

COM 2-2020 Niagara Prosperity Initiative Update

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

**Appendices**

Appendix 1            List of approved 2020 NPI projects and agencies

## Appendix 1– 2020 Niagara Prosperity Initiatives

### Regional

Agency	Project Name	Project Description	Funding Stream	Contract
Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA)	Mental Health & Addictions Coach Project	CMHA Niagara and Community Addiction Services Niagara are collaborating with YWCA Niagara shelters to employ full-time Mental Health & Addiction Coaches. The Coaches support individuals in YWCA shelters who are experiencing mental health and addiction issues that interfere with their ability to find and maintain housing and employment, and help them develop a connection to their community.	Health – Mental Health Outreach	\$118,905
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 \$1000.	Health - Dental	\$139,586
Gateway Residential & Community Support Services	Niagara Outreach Worker	This project will enhance “Assertive Street Outreach” services throughout the Niagara Region with the addition of a “Dual Diagnosis Outreach Specialist” which will enhance current service delivery and will include additional week-end coverage.	Housing - Outreach	\$112,845
Heartland Forest Nature Experience	Employ-Ability Skills for Adults with Disabilities	This project will continue offering structured and goal-oriented work experience programs for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Working with local businesses and community partners these programs will help to develop individual’s employ-ability skills through centre and community based positions and social enterprise positions.	Employment – Social Enterprise	\$48,895
Quest Community	Peer Support in the ED for	Peer Support Workers with lived experience will provide nonclinical and referral assistance to homeless individuals. Positive peer support	Health – Mental	\$91,694

Agency	Project Name	Project Description	Funding Stream	Contract
Health Centre	People Experiencing Homelessness	interactions is expected to reduce social isolation and exclusion, increase referrals to community resources and help counteract negative perceptions of the healthcare system.	Health Outreach	
RAFT	Fresh Paint	This social enterprise project provides at-risk youth opportunities to work with experienced contractors to complete unit turnover preparation for Niagara Regional Housing. This requires youth to clean, repair, and paint units. Youth will be paid competitive wages and gain employment experience/training, while working with Youth Reconnect to ensure healthy life decisions and support to remain housed and connected to their community.	Employment – Social Enterprise	\$67,496

### St. Catharines

Agency	Project Name	Project Description	Funding Stream	Contract
Community Care St. Catharines and Thorold	Community Housing Workers	Funding for two Housing Workers that will serve the vulnerable, low-income population through daily walk-ins or at weekly community drop-in sessions. These workers will develop and explore different types of housing supports such as roommate matching, to ultimately maximize efficiencies in the limited housing stock.	Homelessness - Prevention	\$39,165
Links for Greener Learning	The Good Food Box Plus Pop-Up Markets	The Good Food Box project aims to increase the use of fresh food in daily meals. Our priority is to reach communities with barriers to accessing fresh and affordable produce by providing low cost and high value monthly fresh produce boxes to households. Pop-up markets will be implemented in food deserts in partnership with Niagara Public Health.	Health – Food	\$8,804

Agency	Project Name	Project Description	Funding Stream	Contract
Links for Greener Learning	Garden Makers Program	Funding will be used to scale up the 'From Our Garden' social enterprise and skills training program into other municipalities. This project provides socially marginalized people an opportunity to gain practical skills and training through community gardening.	Employment – Social Enterprise	\$10,360
Gillian's Place	Second-Stage Housing and Support Program	Funding for seven affordable transitional housing units in downtown St. Catharines for women and children escaping violence. Women and their children experiencing poverty will receive a full spectrum of wrap-around case-management and group life-skills support programming while residing in these units as they transition from violence to independence.	Housing – Improved Stability	\$46,290
Start Me Up Niagara	The Niagara Rooming House Project	Assisting landlords and tenants with practical support to ensure issues that negatively impact tenancy in single room occupancy dwellings are addressed. By supporting individuals with complex needs and/or mental health concerns, the goal is to reduce evictions and maintain the availability of single room occupancy dwellings as part of housing stock.	Homelessness - Prevention	\$62,645
Start Me Up Niagara	Income Matters	Income Matters helps people experiencing poverty and homelessness improve their financial situation by providing help for them to access finances, budgeting, tax filing, and applications to eligible benefits and credits. This is increasingly critical as government shifts to modernizing to digital systems, creating additional barriers for some people.	Housing – Improved Stability	\$14,050
Westview Christian Fellowship	Westview Centre4Women	Westview Centre4Women opens doors and reduces isolation for women living in poverty through workshops, mentoring, compassion and advocacy. Services include hot meals, pantry access, laundry services, literacy classes, education, employment / housing support, haircuts, hygiene, free clothing, income tax classes, field trips and many other services.	Housing - Outreach	\$71,802



**Welland**

<b>Agency</b>	<b>Project Name</b>	<b>Project Description</b>	<b>Funding Stream</b>	<b>Contract</b>
Cyber-Seniors: Connecting Generations	Cyber-Seniors Building Self-Reliance	This project will provide low income seniors with access to technology and Wi-Fi within their place of residence and teach them how to acquire information, resources and social supports that lead to greater self-reliance and improved housing stability.	Housing – Improved Stability	\$14,893
The Hope Centre	Return 2 Hope Counselling Program	This project will offer free, high quality counselling service to individuals without access to affordable mental health services. Group and individual counseling sessions will be offered by a registered psychotherapist and is essential to successfully facilitating growth and change to reduce the impact of past trauma and other root causes of homelessness.	Health – Mental Health Outreach	\$67,612
Links for Greener Learning	The Good Food Box Plus Pop-Up Markets	The Good Food Box project aims to increase the use of fresh food in daily meals. Our priority is to reach communities with barriers to accessing fresh and affordable produce by providing low cost and high value monthly fresh produce boxes to households. Pop-up markets will be implemented in food deserts in partnership with Niagara Public Health.	Health – Food	\$8,804
Links for Greener Learning	Garden Makers Program	Funding will be used to scale up the 'From Our Garden' social enterprise and skills training program into other municipalities. This project provides socially marginalized people an opportunity to gain practical skills and training through community gardening.	Employment – Social Enterprise	\$10,360
Open Arms Mission	Service Hours Expansion	This funding will extend service hours for the Welland foodbank in the afternoon to decrease barriers to access healthy food.	Health - Food	\$7,319
Welland Heritage Council and Multicultural Centre	Housing Coordinator	This project will fund a Housing Coordinator position to serve newcomers in the community, and will provide shelter intake support, facilitate the transition of clients into permanent housing, promote self-reliance, and educate newcomers about housing and renting in Canada.	Housing – Improved Stability	\$41,615

### Niagara Falls

Agency	Project Name	Project Description	Funding Stream	Contract
Cyber-Seniors: Connecting Generations	Cyber-Seniors Building Self-Reliance	This project will provide low income seniors with access to technology and Wi-Fi within their place of residence and teach them how to acquire information, resources and social supports that lead to greater self-reliance and improved housing stability.	Housing – Improved Stability	\$14,893
Links for Greener Learning	The Good Food Box Plus Pop-Up Markets	The Good Food Box project aims to increase the use of fresh food in daily meals. Our priority is to reach communities with barriers to accessing fresh and affordable produce by providing low cost and high value monthly fresh produce boxes to households. Pop-up markets will be implemented in food deserts in partnership with Niagara Public Health.	Health – Food	\$8,804
Links for Greener Learning	Garden Makers Program	Funding will be used to scale up the 'From Our Garden' social enterprise and skills training program into other municipalities. This project provides socially marginalized people an opportunity to gain practical skills and training through community gardening.	Employment – Social Enterprise	\$10,360
Project SHARE of Niagara Falls Inc.	Growing Food Security	This project will provide workshops and events on planting, growing, preparing and preserving produce. Individuals will gain skills that will increase their food security, improve their access to fresh organic produce; and develop healthier eating habits. Funding will be used to double the size of the urban farm at Westlane Secondary allowing a 50% increase in fresh produce.	Health – Food	\$14,270
Project SHARE of Niagara Falls Inc.	Child and Youth Support Program	This project will provide essential supports including diapers and wipes, formula, healthy snacks for children, new running shoes and school supplies and Christmas gifts for teenagers for families living below the low income measure in Niagara Falls.	Housing – Improved Stability	\$25,465

**Port Colborne**

<b>Agency</b>	<b>Project Name</b>	<b>Project Description</b>	<b>Funding Stream</b>	<b>Contract</b>
Links for Greener Learning	The Good Food Box Plus Pop-Up Markets	The Good Food Box project aims to increase the use of fresh food in daily meals. Our priority is to reach communities with barriers to accessing fresh and affordable produce by providing low cost and high value monthly fresh produce boxes to households. Pop-up markets will be implemented in food deserts in partnership with Niagara Public Health.	Health – Food	\$8,804

**Fort Erie**

<b>Agency</b>	<b>Project Name</b>	<b>Project Description</b>	<b>Funding Stream</b>	<b>Contract</b>
Links for Greener Learning	The Good Food Box Plus Pop-Up Markets	The Good Food Box project aims to increase the use of fresh food in daily meals. Our priority is to reach communities with barriers to accessing fresh and affordable produce by providing low cost and high value monthly fresh produce boxes to households. Pop-up markets will be implemented in food deserts in partnership with Niagara Public Health.	Health – Food	\$8,804

**Thorold**

<b>Agency</b>	<b>Project Name</b>	<b>Project Description</b>	<b>Funding Stream</b>	<b>Contract</b>
Community Care St. Catharines and Thorold	Community Housing Workers	Funding for two Housing Workers that will serve the vulnerable, low-income population through daily walk-ins or at weekly community drop-in sessions. These workers will develop and explore different types of housing supports such as roommate matching, to ultimately maximize efficiencies in the limited housing stock.	Homelessness - Prevention	\$39,164
Start Me Up Niagara	Income Matters	Income Matters helps people experiencing poverty and homelessness improve their financial situation by providing help for them to access finances, budgeting, tax filing, and applications to eligible benefits and credits. This is increasingly critical as government shifts to modernizing to digital systems, creating additional barriers for some people.	Housing – Improved Stability	\$14,050

**Grimsby**

<b>Agency</b>	<b>Project Name</b>	<b>Project Description</b>	<b>Funding Stream</b>	<b>Contract</b>
Cyber-Seniors: Connecting Generations	Cyber-Seniors Building Self-Reliance	This project will provide low income seniors with access to technology and Wi-Fi within their place of residence and teach them how to acquire information, resources and social supports that lead to greater self-reliance and improved housing stability.	Housing – Improved Stability	\$14,893
Grimsby Benevolent Fund	Rental Assistance Service	The Rental Assistance Service provides eligible, low-income households with assistance to help with monthly rent payments in the private market. The program provides one-time rent assistance for people facing eviction and subsidy for people paying more than 30% of their total income on rent.	Homelessness - Prevention	\$35,000

**Lincoln**

<b>Agency</b>	<b>Project Name</b>	<b>Project Description</b>	<b>Funding Stream</b>	<b>Contract</b>
Links for Greener Learning	Garden Makers Program	Funding will be used to scale up the 'From Our Garden' social enterprise and skills training program into other municipalities. This project provides socially marginalized people an opportunity to gain practical skills and training through community gardening.	Employment – Social Enterprise	\$10,360

**Wainfleet**

<b>Agency</b>	<b>Project Name</b>	<b>Project Description</b>	<b>Funding Stream</b>	<b>Contract</b>
Open Arms Mission	Service Hours Expansion	This funding will extend service hours for the Welland foodbank in the afternoon to decrease barriers to access healthy food.	Health - Food	\$7,319

**West Lincoln**

<b>Agency</b>	<b>Project Name</b>	<b>Project Description</b>	<b>Funding Stream</b>	<b>Contract</b>
Links for Greener Learning	The Good Food Box Plus Pop-Up Markets	The Good Food Box project aims to increase the use of fresh food in daily meals. Our priority is to reach communities with barriers to accessing fresh and affordable produce by providing low cost and high value monthly fresh produce boxes to households. Pop-up markets will be implemented in food deserts in partnership with Niagara Public Health.	Health – Food	\$8,804