

# WEEK OF ACTION AGAINST POVERTY 2013 REPORT

The sixth annual WAAP was the year that the event became entrenched in the community's psyche. The lack of call-ins to tally activity was troubling until word of mouth brought in reports of the vast and varied community response. Participants were more independent in their planning and execution of projects. The reward was in the event itself rather than in the reporting of the event. Making Kenora Home's reduced role in encouraging participation through recognition confirms the altruistic growth of the citizenry since the inaugural declared week. Unfortunately, this positive trend also meant that it was more difficult to monitor events for the purpose of outcome reporting. Ultimately the confirmable reports (37) that comprise this review do indicate that the week was successful in raising awareness, educating the community and fundraising for the benefit of antipoverty groups in Kenora.

Mayor and Council formally declared the Week of Action through *council resolution*. Political support was evidenced by the participation of municipal and provincial representatives in activities around the community. A readers' poll conducted by the Lake of the Woods Enterprise reported that 36% took part in an action during WAAP.

## Awareness Events

The *Red Ribbon Campaign* expanded further this year. Twelve volunteers prepared 1000 ribbons that were distributed to 30 sites (triple the previous year's site total). The supplies were donated and People First again took leadership in the project.

The *Wear Red Day* event garnered another 300 participants reporting donning red on February 14 to signify their solidarity with the Week of Action activities.

The *Flash Song* infused the week with a unified voice for change. Both radio stations (Q104, CJRL) aired the song simultaneously. The song, If I H A Hammer, was chosen because of its social justice theme and celebration of building. Donny B's outside speakers blasted the song down mainstreet along with 30 other confirmed public play sites including Canadian Tire, WalMart, the District Jail and multiple service agencies. Council chambers resounded with 42 voices led by

Mayor Canfield and 2 other councillors (Louis Roussin, Ron Lunny), members of the public and a contingent class from Lakewood school. Eleven other sites had live performers ranging from Ste. Marguerite Bourgeoys school with a cast of 225 singers to Birchwood Terrace with a nursing home residents performing with staff.

Art presentations raised awareness for two local groups. The Fellowship Centre hosted a show of Joan Grandbois's display that was themed "*Shelter From the Storm*". The Community Arts Hub created a *communal mural* to express their shared yearning for poverty reduction within the community.

*Prayers From the Pulpit* ensured that local congregations supported change through prayers and homilies. This event has always been a longstanding keynote activity for the local faith community and participation was reported anecdotally.

The Lakeside Baptist Seniors *valentine luncheon* featured a presentation by one of the Poverty Challenge participants and distribution of Making Kenora Home materials including the homelessness booklets. About 35 people were in attendance at this event.

The annual publication of the *Homeless in Kenora booklet* featured advice from marginalized citizens. Our MPP sent congratulations on the booklet's recognition of the capabilities of marginalized community members. The book launch hosted by Sallie Hunt was held at HoJoe's on February 14, 3-4 pm. The small gathering allowed guests to engage in a thoughtful discussion of the issues of homelessness in Kenora.

## Education

The *Walk in Our Shoes—Poverty Challenge* featured 9 bloggers including the first family to participate in the arduous experiential activity. Over 4000 hits were counted on the blogs. The event was well publicized and a full report is available through the project coordinator, Fay Clark. Highlights included recognition of systemic barriers to full community participation and the broadcast of the round table wrap up by the participants.

Local lawyer, Peter Kirby, presented "*Jailed for Poverty*" to law classes at both St. Thomas Aquinas High School and Beaver Brae Secondary School. His speech focused on his precedent work regarding incarceration for unpaid fines as a means of street clearance.

In conjunction with Making Kenora Home, the Northwest Health Unit presented a *movie*, "Poor No More", and discussion on Wednesday, February 13. It was attended by 9 including Councillor Louis Roussin.

Another discussion group, "*Parents Against Poverty*" met at Jubilee Church on Saturday, February 16 to support families who are struggling to minimize the impact of poverty on their children.

A staff member at Opportunities for Adults, took the initiative to *post poverty fact sheets* in her office to stimulate discussion on the reality of poverty during the week.

Shaw cable has taped a focus interview on the impact of homelessness upon a woman who is now resident at the shelter. This show will be *broadcast* over the local station for community viewing.

The *idea bank* was a new project and was not promoted well during the flurry of other events. Four ideas were presented for posting on our website.

## Donations

A Valentine's Cook and Craft session for low income families was cosponsored by the NWHU, Saakate House and Jubilee Church to share skills and send families home with a tasty *valentine's dinner*.

Pancakes always flip up during Week of Action. This year St. Thomas Aquinas High School donated *funds* raised at their Shrove Tuesday breakfast to local antipoverty work. The federal NDP membership also stepped up with a community brunch promoting awareness and a *bake sale* that benefitted the emergency shelter.

*Three complete meals* were donated to the Fellowship Centre were provided by separate organizations (Standard Insurance, Portage Youth Centre and BDO).

Calvary Pentecostal Church led a *food drive* to benefit Jubilee's community cupboard.

Warehouse One offered a jean trade-in discount and a *clothing drive* for Saakate House.

A pampering *makeover* was raffled off at the Minto Family Resource Centre for the benefit of a low-income mom. The prize package, consisting of a hair styling, clothing purchase and photo shoot, was donated by private individuals.

Young Ben Viinikka again led his class in a *cupcake sale* that raised \$1200 for the Fellowship Centre. Sales were organized through Pope John Paul II school and the Cornerstone Restaurant.

Youth also took the *stage* on February 13 at the Cornerstone venue. The cover charge collected by these musicians was also given to the Fellowship Centre. The music continued on Saturday, February 16 as the *Act Local Charity Concert* covered three venues (Shooters, Bijou, Cornerstone) simultaneously. Sixteen acts were coordinated across the community and funds were donated to the emergency shelter.

Dancers joined together in revelry at the Sweetheart Dance held to benefit both the KACL-Endowment Fund and the emergency shelter. The event was held on February 16 at the Legion.

BDO did an *Empty Wallet Wednesday* challenge for staff members who were encouraged to donate monies usually spent in the course of day to charity.

Making Kenora Home's contribution was the provision of 60 wrapped *valentine gifts* for patrons of the Fellowship Centre. Each gift contained a personal item and a message of encouragement. *Private donations* continued this theme with several individuals providing mittens and cash for future gift provisions.

To ensure that Making Kenora Home's tradition of gift giving continues, a local citizen volunteered to coordinate the *Bird House Project*. Both decorative and practical bird houses will be sold to fund the Christmas Sharing Circle.

## Media

Media was proactive in promoting and covering activities. There were 31 media hits noted between the Daily Miner News, Enterprise, CBC radio, Q104, CJRL and Shaw cable. The local radio stations were particularly active in their collaborative participation in the Flash Song event. Shaw cable stretched their coverage to film special features including the Walk in Our Shoes roundup and the profile of a homeless resident of the emergency shelter.

## Acknowledgements

Special handmade cards were sent to thank Q104, CJRL and Donny B for their broadcast of the Flash Song. Thank you letters were sent to other significant partners in Week of Action Activities including

Mayor & Council

People First

St.Thomas Aquinas High School

Lakewood School

Ben Viinikka

HoJoe Coffee & Books

Community Arts Hub

Beaver Brae Secondary School

Ecole Ste.Marguerite Bourgeoys

Mike Procyshyn

## Recommendations

Our goal for some time has been to reduce reliance on individual volunteers in overall management of Week of Action facilitation. When these volunteers had to reduce participation this year because of scheduling issues, others stepped forward and management was adequately maintained. This redistribution of responsibilities worked well and is reassuring for future planning. We need to continue ensuring that our volunteer base is strong and that our work is shared to prevent overloading on any individual.

The post Christmas rush for event planning does create stress and regret for those who cannot organize their activities in the short time available before the action week. We have struggled with this issue for years and need to find a way of priming our participants prior to January without taking away from other seasonal events.