

WEEK OF ACTION AGAINST POVERTY

2015 Report

This year's Week of Action (WAAP) seemed less visible than other years but simmered actively below the surface. Activities spread out beyond the week to accommodate related fundraisers. There was significantly less reporting of actions for the purpose of a community count. The events that emerged indicate that significant fundraising and volunteering were undertaken. Between all of the events that we are aware of, there was an approximate value of \$30,000.00 in charitable donations made overall.

Keynote Event

The launch of the Kenora Substance Abuse & Mental Health Tsk Force (KSAMHTF)—Housing Pillar's *Build Kenora Strong* campaign was the week's lead event. A march supporting affordable housing was led by Mayor Dave Canfield and Inspector Dave Lucas with approximately 50 community members including city councillors, business leaders, services staff, students and the homeless themselves. The cross strata representation was excellent. Media coverage was strong and the event was front page news.

The campaign includes ongoing toque sales and an *Out In The Cold* supper (Feb.27) with entertainment under the tent. Because funding affordable housing will take place over a span of time, more events will be scheduled as developed. Initial participation and donations were good as the community rises to the task of building forward. The toques are available for \$20 at multiple local businesses. Toque Tuesdays are sponsored by rotating businesses who offer treats for those who wear their toques on the designated days. The Lake-FM 105 has generously offered no cost promotion of these events. The Out In The Cold event had a modest return but generated good awareness of the campaign. Those who attended despite the cold temperatures reported that the event was fun as well as meaningful. Entertainment included log carving, singers, Circus Kids and open skating. Making Kenora Home permitted excerpts from Homeless in Kenora booklets to be used in the event's promotional booklet. Although story telling had been planned for the event, it was cancelled due to time constraints and sparse audiences who needed to keep moving to stay warm.

Annual Activities

The *Red Ribbon* campaign by People First continued for the seventh year. Members of the group met at the legal clinic to assemble the ribbons and distributed the 22 boxes around the community. Although the ribbons do not seem to be in wide usage during Week of Action, People First members take a great deal of pride in this project and it is an empowering experience for those persons who are generally low-income themselves.

Prayers from the Pulpit appears to have been undertaken widely although the individual congregations and prayer groups did not report their actions for an official count.

The *Homeless In Kenora* book launch took place at the Kenora Public Library on February 10 at 7 p.m. **Retirement Realities** focused on the housing challenges faced by our aging population. Cold and blustery weather deterred attendance but an interesting discussion took place that included persons with lived experience who had sought out the warmth of the venue. A task list was created to facilitate preparing for this specific event in future years.

Wear Red was taken up in few locations around town including the banks, the Northwestern Health Unit and St. Louis School. Again the lack of reporting impedes an actual count.

The annual *Poverty Challenge (Walk In My Shoes)* was freshened this year by refocusing on our youth. Three participants (Rayleh Hanson-Munn, Elyssa Woodbeck and Riah Motlong) from St. Thomas Aquinas High School lived on the Ontario Works single person benefit for five days. Instead of blogging, the students handed out personal challenge cards to other students throughout the Week of Action Against Poverty. The girls stimulated conversations about poverty with their peers. The media interviewed the participants who presented their experiences with thoughtful commentary.

The *Pancake Breakfast* hosted at Jubilee Church by the Kenora Federal NDP was held on February 14. Attendance was good (85) and the event was enjoyed by the patrons.

Community Projects

Kenora Food Action Symposium organized by Seeds for Change Food Security Network and HC Link was held at the Northwestern Health Unit on February 12. Forty five participants discussed and planned strategic paths to ensuring local food security for all community members.

Seniors Speak Out was a project of the Kenora Senior's Coalition. Guided discussions about age friendly community deficits took place amongst local seniors in locations of their own choosing. Twenty-five kits were distributed. The data will be collated and a report issued to City Council and the community.

In addition to *St. Louis School's* wearing of red, students collected socks, mitts and cash to *benefit* the Fellowship Centre. *King George School* drew student attention to homelessness through the grade 3 *contribution of art work* to decorate the Out in the Cold event.

All local *financial institutions* again collaborated to post information on WAAP and distributing red ribbons. Several of the banks and credit union also had staff actions undertaken to help local charities dealing with a variety of poverty issues. Staff did not report activities for inclusion into the community count. A local law office also requested information on action opportunities but also chose to undertake their action privately.

The *Hot Meal Challenge* was another activity that seems to have been taken up with more vigour than it has been reported. MKH provided a meal at Helping Hands on February 9. The roast pork dinner was appreciated and switch up in volunteers was refreshing for both Helping Hands and the patrons. Two others reported taking on meal responsibilities at the Fellowship on February 18 & 21 (First Presbyterian, a private family). Two other groups (NWHU, KACL) are also planning their participation. These five challenge meals are valued at approximately \$1,000.00. Local food security providers reported an increase in donations and volunteerism during WAAP and the following week but did not track the triggers for the actions nor the value. The intent of the challenge was to support those groups who are already organized to meet local hunger needs while introducing more volunteers into local anti-poverty work. It was a success.

The *Northwest Health Unit* showed their "red" in support of taking action against poverty and took action through a *soup fundraiser* and *outdoor clothing drive*.

A foster parent with Anishinaabe Abinoojii Family Services launched the *comfort bag* project. Recognizing that many of the chronically homeless have histories of foster care that have diminished their sense of self, this woman has set a goal of providing young children with a comfort bag when they are brought into care. Within that packsack will be a special blanket, a cup and a toy that will be theirs to keep regardless of placement after intake. She hopes that this will contribute to building the child's sense of permanence within a disruptive world. The first ten bags are being prepared for distribution now. Each bag has an estimated \$20.00 value so the initial ten bags are contributing \$200.00 into the lives of impoverished children.

The *Arts Hub* (KACL) held an interesting *lunch & learn* on February 10. A Ted Talk presentation by Bono inspired the audience to recognize that although there remains much work done to alleviate poverty, much has been done recently. A lively discussion began and was reluctantly ended as the participants were drawn back into their scheduled commitments.

First Presbyterian Church increased their continuing monthly donation to the *Fellowship Centre* (commitment made during previous WAAP) to weekly during the month of February.

Beaver Brae's civics class played the "*Last Straw*" which is a poverty educative game. The class will be following up with creating their own life game later in the semester. It will be interesting to see what they produce.

Related Events

From the Stage to the Streets was a fundraiser sponsored by First Baptist Church and Trylight Theatre on January 24. The Fellowship Centre received \$1500 from the proceeds. The success of this evening featuring local performers has inspired the group to make the event an annual commitment.

Kenora participated in the national *Coldest Night of the Year* walk on February 21. Proceeds (\$15,000.00) have been divided between the Fellowship Centre and Jubilee Church.

The Kenora Substance Abuse and Mental Health Task Force (*KSAMHTF*) — Housing Pillar held an outdoor fundraiser for an *affordable housing build* on Friday

27 at the Whitecap Pavilion. Attendance was limited by the extreme cold but those who attended, dug into their bowls of chilli and stew and enjoyed the entertainment were satisfied. Confederation College's community development students assisted in the event. Fourteen thousand came in as revenue to the event.

Commentary

With regards to reduced visibility, in previous years awareness activities and one time charitable activities were more prominent. This year's events were multilayered and scattered. For example, Seniors Speak Out, involved multiple small discussion groups around the community with results that will not be released for several months. Related events were promoted without reference to WAAP. This is an indicator of the success of previous work by Making Kenora Home. Anti-poverty work is being taken on and developed by others who were not previously involved in the movement. This integration strengthens the community support network.

Many of those who stepped up to take on a single project in the past are now volunteering regularly to support local anti-poverty work. This meets one of the week's objectives but over time, there will be fewer and fewer who are not engaged regularly resulting in single activities taking place during WAAP. It is this same increase in engagement that seems to have diminished interest in reporting participation during WAAP to a third party. Motivation to do anti-poverty work is internalizing within the community.

The business community was and remains very involved in the Build Kenora Strong campaign for affordable housing. From the Stage to the Streets was made possible by the volunteerism of the arts community. Both local high schools committed to awareness projects for their students. Given the support obtained from both school boards, we had hoped that the participation of local educators would increase this year. School involvement remained typical of past years which was disappointing. Participation by service agencies in WAAP has decreased over time. The City was very supportive of the Out In The Cold fundraiser held at the Harbourfront.