A Message from Hamilton Community Foundation

L ast year, Hamilton’s Vital Signs pulled back the veil on a community making progress in some areas, but split by deep fault lines of inequality. Building on the work of the Hamilton Spectator’s Coda Red investigation into Hamilton’s neighbourhoods, Vital Signs traced a picture of “two cities that share the same urban boundary but little else.”

In the year since, we continue to make progress on the economy, but under the heading, but the underlying dichotomy between affluent and poor neighbourhoods persists.

There are encouraging signs of progress in our economy. Small business startups have increased significantly in 2011 over 2009 while bankruptcies are down 37%. The unemployment rate for the Hamilton-CMAs (which includes the 12 Census Divisions) has been lower than both the provincial and national averages for two years. Youth unemployment has fallen and is also lower than the provincial and national averages. And, in the city of Hamilton, 2010 was a record year for building permits, up from 802 million in 2009 to $81 billion, while the housing market remained steady.

But I view that this good news has reached deeper into some neighbourhoods than others. Child poverty continues to exceed 30% in several neighbourhoods, while the overall rate is 20%. Similarly, the Ontario Works caseload is the highest in a decade, climbing from under 10,000 in early 2008 to 14,110 in June 2011. The number of people using emergency shelters – 3,680 in 2010 – is similar to the previous two years.

In education, the high school non-completion rate continues to steadily improve over the past decade – from 27% in 2000 to 19.9% in 2010 – but again, as last year’s Vital Signs found, larger segments of the population continue to finish from zero in some neighbourhoods to over 65% in others.

Hamilton continues to integrate immigrants. The number of new residents receiving permanent resident visas to our city increased from 4,803 in 2010 to 5,776 in 2009. Almost 40% of recent immigrants to Hamilton have a university degree; double the rate of all working-age Hamiltonians. However, these numbers are still below the 45% rate for non-immigrants and a poverty rate over 50% – much higher than in any other Ontario City.

The central message that emerges from this year’s Vital Signs report is: we need to do more.

As citizens, we all need the commitment to build bridges that close the gap between our two urban solitudes. We need to work with policymakers and planners to better integrate our neighbourhoods and schools.

As a foundation, we’re looking beyond our ongoing focus on poverty reduction – to align more of our assets to strengthening Hamilton through programs like community investing, and our role as a catalyst for broad and deep changes in areas like education.

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What the Findings Show

A persistent sign of social danger. Hamilton’s economic recovery has been neither complete nor universal. The number of people receiving Ontario Works (social assistance) is at its highest level in over a decade and child poverty rates in some neighbourhoods continue to exceed 50%. The percentage of people working in jobs that don’t pay a living wage is higher than in most other communities, and both the number of people in utility arrears and those waiting for social housing has increased substantially over time.

How Hamilton grows and retains its people. The data shows trends that clearly present implications and considerations for urban and social planning. These include the high proportion of people who both live and work in Hamilton, the number of new Canadians arriving here and the set of skills they possess and are able to apply. The dichotomy of the housing market – with its increasing ownership costs and the stock of relatively affordable rental housing, as well as the mismatch between local and non-local supply to their neighbourhoods, all provide critical food for thought as citizens and leaders make decisions about how Hamiltonians should grow, develop, and re-invest itself in the coming years.

Implications for citizen participation. Hamiltonians are committed to making our city better. We see this in the higher-than-average rates of volunteerism and charitable donations. But the data shows once again that the city has great diversity between neighbourhoods, and between different groups of people. These chasms demand more active participation and action by all our citizens. Vital Signs found widely varying poverty rates between neighbourhoods, under representation of women and visible minorities in politics, and the increased risk of poverty and social exclusion for certain people in our community.

The central message that emerges from this year’s Vital Signs report is: we need to do more.

First, we need to do more to build strong, healthy communities that encourage civic participation and support our neighbours. We need to improve the prospects of our most impoverished families and our most vulnerable citizens. We need to work with policymakers and planners to better integrate our neighbourhoods and schools.

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Our library use continues to grow, and grants to Hamilton artists from national and provincial arts councils have increased by almost 50% over the past decade.

**Grants to the Arts**

Two of the major granting bodies for the arts sector are the Canada Council for the Arts and the Hamilton Arts Council. Over the last decade, grants to Hamilton artists from the Canada Council have increased by 44% to $950,157, up from $657,000 in 2001-2002. Grants from the Ontario Arts Council to Hamilton artists have increased by 59% to almost $1.2 million last year for both $770,000 in 2001-2004. These increases are similar to those in other cities. Hamilton receives between 2% and 3% of the total funding for Ontario from both granting organizations.

On the Web

- Number of heritage buildings and sites
- Number of artists and cultural workers

**Library Use**

Library use was continued to grow in 2010 with some 6.5 million items checked out, up 4% since 2009, and 35% since 2007. The number of monthly digital downloads hit 5,800 for the first time in July, growing 83% in 2009. Driven primarily by demand for e-books, this number is projected to reach 10,000 by January.

Environment

Water Consumption

Water consumption continued to decline in 2010, falling to 426 cubic metres per account in 2010 compared to 472 cubic metres per account in 2009. This continues the reduction over the 70 years since the early 1940s as households have become more efficient and the owner-occupier rate has declined, almost dropping 50% from 2009 to 2010, and 88% over the last ten years.

Water Diversion

In 2009, Hamiltonians diverted more waste from landfills. The amount diverted rose to 49% last year, similar to the provincial average of 44% in 2010, while the amount recycled remained at 23% compared to a 24% provincial average. The amount diverted rose to 49% last year, similar to the provincial average of 44% in 2010, while the amount recycled remained at 23% compared to a 24% provincial average.

Poverty Rates

The number of people below 50% of the median income for households in Hamilton. In Hamilton in 2009, 26% of children lived in families that were below the Low Income Measure, just above the 23% in 2006, and the 24% provincial average for 2009.

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Corporation's Affordability Index shows that Hamilton continues to be one of the most affordable cities in Ontario in which to rent. In 2010, the average rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Hamilton rose to $783 from $767 in 2009. The provincial average rent for a two-bedroom apartment increased to $895 from $872 in 2009.

In 2010, Hamilton's average house price increased 12% to $273,653. This is an increase of approximately 14% compared to the provincial average. Hamilton's average house price has increased over the last decade; in 2000, the average home was $145,192. Hamilton is down from 2005 when 4,613 arrived. Hamilton received a lower immigration rate than provincial and national averages. Among working-age recent immigrants 38% have at least one university degree, more than twice the rate for working-age Hamiltonians. However, they also have an unemployment rate of 9% similar to those of non-immigrants. Recent immigrants in Hamilton have a poverty rate of over 30% – higher than any other Ontario city.

In 2000, 4,613 permanent residents came to Hamilton. Although this represents an increase from last year's 3,774, the overall trend is down from 2005 when 4,013 arrived. Hamilton received a lower proportion of economic class immigrants (40% of all immigrants) than Hamilton (51%) and national (58%) averages. Among working-age recent immigrants 38% have at least one university degree, more than twice the rate for working-age Hamiltonians. However, they also have an unemployment rate of 9% similar to those of non-immigrants. Recent immigrants in Hamilton have a poverty rate of over 30% – higher than any other Ontario city.

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Hamilton's unemployment rate has been below provincial and national rates for over two years. Average earnings have increased for women, but have fallen for men. More Hamiltonians are working for less than a living wage.

Safety

Property Crime Rate

Last year, property crime rates fell by 5% in the Hamilton CMA to 3,417 per 100,000 people. The provincial crime rate was 7% national decline was 7%. Since 1994, Hamilton's property crime rate has declined 31.1%. The rate is lower than the national average, but higher than the provincial average.

Violent Crime Rate

Violent crime rates increased by 3% from last year to 1,129 violent crimes per 100,000 people in the Hamilton CMA. Provincial and national violent crime rates decreased over the last 2% and 3% respectively. In spite of Hamilton's 2010 increase, the violent crime rate has declined by 10% since 1994. Similar to the property crime rate, Hamilton's violent crime rate is lower than the national average, but higher than Ontario's average.

Unemployment Rate

The June 2011 seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for the Hamilton CMA was 5.9%, up from 5.4% in May, when it was the lowest rate in Canada. Over the past year, Hamilton's unemployment rate has been substantially below provincial and national average. Since 1994, Hamilton's property crime rate has declined 31.1%. The rate is lower than the national average, but higher than the provincial average.

Average Earnings

From 2000 to 2009, average individual earnings in the Hamilton CMA slightly when adjusted for inflation. Average earnings among groups fell at that time to $40,400 from $50,201, while average earnings grew to $35,280 from $32,800. There are similar to, but more pronounced than, provincial and national trends.

Living Wage

Hamilton's Social Planning and Research Council reports that, according to most recent data available (2006), there were 113,555 people in Hamilton working full-time, full-year, whose income was still below the poverty line. This was up from 83,100 in 2001. This group was the largest of the working populations — lower than Edmonton's, and higher than Toronto's (9%), but higher than Ottawa, London, and Waterloo. Ontario's average for those employed at less than a living wage was 5.5%, and the national average was 5.8%.

On the Web

• Police-reported hate crimes
• Child welfare caseloads
• Road and pedestrian safety

Methodology

Indicator Selection

The Vital Signs Advisory Committee comprises members of the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, the Evaluation and Learning Committee plus additional experts from the environment, business and economic, and arts and culture sectors. The indicators selected and prioritized by the committee build on those identified by 1999 to measure a wide range of socio-economic issues and provide a broad quality of life picture. They incorporate those identified by Community Foundations of Canada to be included as part of the national Vital Signs initiative. Progress was evaluated in three ways:

The indicator’s change over time, including changes from the data presented in last year’s report

• Its comparison to provincial and national averages

• The disparity present within the indicator — e.g. between different neighborhoods or between different groups of Hamiltonians.

References

Information was gathered with researchers from many local and national organizations and reviewed by Advisory Committee members and other external experts. Complete references, links to data sources and other information is available at www.hamiltonvitalsigns.ca.

Vital Signs is a community check-up conducted by community foundations across Canada that measure the vitality of our communities and identifies significant trends in a range of areas critical to quality of life. Vital Signs is co-ordinated nationally by Community Foundations of Canada.

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