

SIA Impact Report



Social Planning Council
of Cambridge and North Dumfries

Social Issues Advisory Committee
of Cambridge

March 2003

BACKGROUND: The Social Issues Advisory (SIA) Committee of Cambridge tracks the pulse of our community. It provides a public forum for discussion of social service issues, unmet needs, and community capacities. Relevant information is then forwarded regularly to the City Council and the United Way. Recommendations are formulated on a case-by-case basis, depending on the nature of the social issues that are raised.

Purpose of the Report

The purpose of the following report is to provide information regarding the impact of the work of the Social Issues Advisory (SIA) Committee. The report captures feedback from community members who participated in the forums hosted by the SIA, and stakeholders who provided their views on the current process and future direction of the SIA.

The feedback attained has identified several key results. These results are summarized below.

Organizations currently use the information provided by the SIA for:

- Strategic planning and development
- Funding and proposal writing
- Justification for the expansion of budgets targeting identified groups
- Reference and statistical guidance
- Report writing purposes
- Establishing new projects and programs
- Developing subsequent community forums, presentations, and workshops
- Identifying current needs and trends in the community

The *Stakeholders Forum*, identified existing and emerging needs and trends in the City of Cambridge that are of priority and future interest to the SIA.

These needs and trends included:

- Family stress
- Youth
- Poverty
- Seniors
- Women's issues
- Services for new Canadians
- Education and advocacy issues

The following next steps were presented as the upcoming focus for the SIA:

- Increased participation by community members in SIA activities
- Enhanced planning, communication and follow-up of the process and recommendations of the SIA
- Taking on more of an advocacy role in the community

Impact Survey Findings – Section I

The Social Planning Council of Cambridge & North Dumfries issued a report in January 2002, entitled *Social Issues and Trends in Cambridge: A Preliminary Update*. What emerged from this document was the need to publicly address particular themes raised in the report, specifically poverty, volunteerism, and childcare. In the ensuing months, a number of forums took place to bring together community members to discuss the needs surrounding these issues. These forums included: the *Poverty & Basic Needs Forum* held March 2002, *Volunteerism Forum* in June 2002, *Childcare Forum* in June, followed by a *Stakeholders Forum* in November 2002.

As part of the evaluation of the SIA processes initiated by the Social Planning Council of Cambridge & North Dumfries, an impact survey was distributed to all of the forum participants and SIA stakeholders.

Coordinated & Published by:



Social Planning Council
of Cambridge & North Dumfries

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City
of Cambridge



United Way
of Cambridge & North Dumfries

The survey was intended to provide feedback on the usage of the *Social Issues & Trends in Cambridge: A Preliminary Update* report and to identify follow-up action that has taken place as a result of these forums. Survey respondents also provided overall comments about the outcomes of the Social Issues Advisory Committee.

Section One of this report discusses the results of the impact survey. Results indicate that the *Social Issues & Trends in Cambridge: A Preliminary Update* and the Forum papers have had wide-spread impact on individuals, social service providers, and organizations within the community. Section Two of the paper outlines the feedback from the stakeholders of the SIA regarding feedback on the SIA activities, identification of new and emerging social issues and priorities, and what the next steps of the SIA should be.

Actions Resulting from the Social Issues & Trends: A Preliminary Update Report

The first question on the impact survey asked participants to share how they have used the information provided by the *Social Issues & Trends in Cambridge: A Preliminary Update* report. A number of respondents shared that they currently use the information for strategic program planning and proposal writing purposes. Others indicated that they use the report as a reference document; as justification for initiating new projects; or as a means to identify trends and needs in the community.

Specific applications identified include:

- Planning for the literacy needs in Cambridge
- Cambridge Memorial Hospital is using the document as a reference throughout their service planning processes for 2002-2003, and targeting their programs on the up-to-date community information provided
- Applying the information in the justification for a new shelter and housing project
- Leading to the development of the Employment Support Expo to be held on March 20, 2003

- Utilizing the report as a resource document for the City's Cambridge Report Card

Forum Papers and Recommendations

The next question in the impact survey asked respondents to delineate the ways they have used the information from the Forum papers. Many indicated that they use the material provided for their own information and reference, and in the work and operation of their organization. Some have used the report in community presentations, funding proposals, report writing, or have passed it onto their clients for their reference. A few respondents specifically stated that they use the information provided at the *Volunteer Forum* to implement presented recommendations addressing the volunteer management of their organization.

Improvements to existing programs and new initiatives to services commenced as a result of these Forum papers include:

- Continuing efforts to be creative in providing opportunities for youth to volunteer in our organization; exploring methods to increase our flexibility regarding volunteers; requesting the Chamber and Volunteer Bureau to move ahead on the recommendations in the *Volunteer Forum* paper
- Distributed through the Cambridge Memorial Hospital to all programs to enhance present and future services
- A Coordinators Group has been formed to contact neighbourhood groups on the idea of on-site volunteer management and possible recruitment by Volunteer Cambridge
- The report identified a service need in the Business & Services plan of our organization. A new service has been proposed, to be implemented in April or May, targeting new Canadians, that provides an informal networking group to practice English skills in order to secure employment

Community Follow-Up on Forums

The survey then asked respondents to identify any follow-up actions they are aware of as a result of the forums and the recommendations of the SIA. A number of people cited specific actions in place as a result of the work of the SIA.

- The food bank is starting a group to address the needs of people with special needs; to identify the what supports and services are currently available
- More workshops on volunteerism have been offered
- Volunteer Cambridge is taking action on some recommendations as part of a funding application
- The creation of the Cambridge Report Card utilizes information provided by the SIA
- Child care information will be referred to in the system process of our organization

Summary

The overall comments regarding the impacts and outcomes of the SIA have been extremely positive. Adjectives used to describe the efforts of the SIA reports include: helpful, informative, useful, comprehensive, and user-friendly. A few comments offered are outlined below.

- “I am really glad it exists. I am working on identifying social policies of concern and in need of change. Without some form of advocacy for disempowered groups such as the disabled and the poor, I think I’d give up any shred of hope that there could ever be any change in present conditions which keep us oppressed”
- “The SIA committee is an important research-gathering and information sharing forum for residents in Cambridge”
- “I am delighted that there is a group addressing these important issues”
- “I think that its a great tool to discuss relevant social issues with a broad spectrum of people”

- “Opportunities for networking, education and developing partnerships are greatly enhanced through the forum process”
- “The SIA serves as a coordinating body for many social services for the Cambridge community. This should lead to more efficient and expedited social services”

The Stakeholders Forum – Section II

At the *Stakeholders Forum*, participants were divided into five groups to discuss the processes, follow-up procedures, new and emerging trends, priorities and next steps of the SIA.

Are Expectations Being Met

When asked if the SIA was meeting individuals’ expectations, the comments suggested that the information, research and reports the SIA has distributed are useful and that the public forums have elicited constructive participation from members in the community.

What can be Done Differently in the Future?

Stakeholders were asked to identify what could be done differently in the future. Responses were that they would like to increase and expand participation in the community in SIA events; generate new follow-up and implementation processes; employ more focus on the strengths and assets in the community; and improve the communication of information and process of the SIA to the public.

Effective Follow-Up of Activities of the SIA

Ideas were elicited to address how to effectively conduct the follow-up to SIA activities. Stakeholders felt the task forces, reports, and additional forums and workshops continue to take place, comprising those involved in the implementation of SIA generated recommendations. Others felt the need for increased participation, especially from those groups who were identified by the reports.

It was suggested that measurements be taken to evaluate the successes and outcomes of the SIA.

New and Emerging Social Issues & Priorities

In discussion regarding the new and emerging social issues and priorities, the following themes arose which will be the focus for the future actions of the SIA.

- Family stress (single parents, women, aging parents)
- Youth (hopelessness, stress, education - especially with the double cohort arriving at universities this coming school year)
- Poverty (the perception and stigma of poverty, women, seniors, the depth of poverty of the working poor)
- Seniors (poverty and transportation issues)
- Women's issues (family stress, poverty, addiction programs)
- Services for new Canadian
- Education and advocacy issues

Next Steps for the SIA

The stakeholders were then asked to discuss how the SIA can help address these existing and emerging needs and issues. The following themes surfaced: increased involvement in advocacy in the community; further research, information, and reports on identified needs; greater promotion of participation in SIA activities, specifically involving youth, decision-makers, and the business community; and an enhanced planning approach to communication and follow-up, including the systematic measurement of the successes and outcomes of the SIA.

This issue paper was compiled by Wendy Adema, Tracy Smith-Carrier, and Angela Pye, with input from the Cambridge Social Issues Advisory Committee and stakeholders. It is published and copyrighted by the Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries. Quotations from this paper may be used provided that proper and complete citations are included.

This issue paper is a summary of the discussions that occurred at the 2002 forums on poverty & basic needs, volunteerism, childcare, and stakeholders' forum in Cambridge.

The SIA is a committee of the Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries and is funded by the City of Cambridge and the United Way of Cambridge and North Dumfries.

The Social Planning Council has also published other research reports on topics such as:

- Poverty & Basic Needs Forum, & Childcare Forum Issue Papers
- Social Issues & Trends in Cambridge,
- Proposed Shelter & Housing Supports Best Practices,
- Disability Demographics,
- Poverty Demographics,
- Quality of Life in Waterloo Region,
- Human Services Sector Issues,
- Our Common Future visioning progress report

For more information about this paper or about other related research, please contact:

Social Planning Council of Cambridge & North Dumfries

24 Queen's Square, Cambridge, ON,
N1S 1H6

519-623-1713

info@socialplanningcouncil-cnd.org

<http://www.socialplanningcouncil-cnd.org>