
2024

Bruce Grey Poverty Task Force Annual Report



**BRUCE GREY
POVERTY
TASK FORCE**
Our Voice is Power

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This report was prepared by Jill Umbach, Coordinator, Bruce Grey Poverty Task Force on the work of the Poverty Task Force in 2024.

The report reflects the advocacy, public awareness, cross-sector collaboration, knowledge sharing and interagency coordination of 92+ social service organizations to meet our communities' basic needs and to address systemic poverty.

The Poverty Task Force is grateful for the continued support of the Grey County, Bruce County and the United Way of Bruce Grey in the work that we do and for the leadership and ongoing partnership to address poverty in Bruce and Grey Counties.

Poverty is a systemic issue that impacts every aspect of society and cannot be solved without collective action.

Advocacy, Bridging and Collaboration are the basic ABCs that guide the work of the Bruce Grey Poverty Task Force. Bringing together 92+ non-profit, government, health and research organizations over the past 12 years has proven that **our voices do have power**.

Our collaborations have been data driven with our local experiences featured at Poverty Task Force monthly meetings and shared with 23 local, provincial and national planning tables, most notably in 2024 with Grey Bruce Community Safety & Well-Being Plan, RentSafe Ontario and the Tamarack Institute.

In 2024, we expanded our data collection and analysis of the Grey Bruce Community Volunteer Income Tax Program. Featuring the work of the Bruce County Public Library and The Meeting Place Tobermory in our report *Reducing Poverty Through Volunteers: the impact of CVITP in Grey Bruce*, the 2 organizations combined brought \$2 million dollars back into Bruce County households.

We are in a housing crisis with chronic homelessness and social housing waitlists increasing for both Counties. Our Housing Community of Practice has created a safe space for housing outreach workers to support each other, raising complex cases and engaging with housing services to find solutions. In 2024, the RentSafe Owen Sound Collaborative released our *Owen Sound Landlord-Tenant Survey* resulting in a motion to form a City of Owen Sound Rental Housing Task Force.

Food insecurity has worsened in Bruce Grey, with household rates rising to 18.3% in 2023. 30.7% of children are living in food insecure households. Food insecurity is a symptom of broader economic issues like inadequate income, unaffordable housing and rising living costs. In 2024, we launched a public awareness campaign *"Income Solutions to Food Insecurity"* to educate policy makers and the public on the unsustainable load carried by charities to feed people without seeing a change in food security and to advocate for income solutions such as increased social assistance rates.

INTRODUCTION

PTF 2024 GOALS

The Poverty Task Force Goals for 2024 were based on the collaborative work identified by our Action Groups.

Goal: build resiliency, hold space and promote collaboration with partners.

- Create safe spaces for meaningful exchange to build resiliency, hold space and build collaboration for solutions.
- Contribute to collective action for GB CVITP Network FILE Project, RentSafe Tenant-Landlord Survey engagement, Living Wage campaign, GB Good Food Box and Financial Inclusion Study.

Goal: increase the number of government partners leading on poverty reduction.

- Contribute to social plans that integrate poverty as a central theme such as the Community Safety and Well-Being Plan, Vital Signs Report 2024, etc.
- Ensure formal representation/annual funding from Bruce County and Grey County.
- Formal representation of lower-tier municipalities – assigned representatives and PTF minutes are submitted to Council packages.

Goal: develop a sustainable funding strategy for all elements of the Poverty Task Force

- Develop strategy for PTF collective work to be funded.
- Develop new model and funding strategy for Community Voices.

Goal: increase public education and awareness on homelessness, harm reduction approaches, food security, hunger, etc. to reduce stigma

- Participate in public messaging, education, awareness and forums as content expert.
- Create “income solutions addressing food insecurity” awareness campaign around the release of the Nutritious Food Basket.

Goal: increase engagement of people with lived/living experience

- Ensure diversity, equity and inclusion is a central strategy to the work we do.
- Support the Giiwe Sharing Circle model and identify opportunities to improve Indigenous relationships.
- Partner with programs such as “Making Your Way” to develop a new Community Voices group.

Housing Security

The deepening homelessness and opioid crisis has been on every agenda and will continue to be so as rates of poverty and homelessness increase. In 2024, affordable and supportive housing has been advocated for in every statement coming from the Poverty Task Force at national, provincial and local policy advocacy opportunities such as the Ontario budget consultations with the Ministry of Finance.

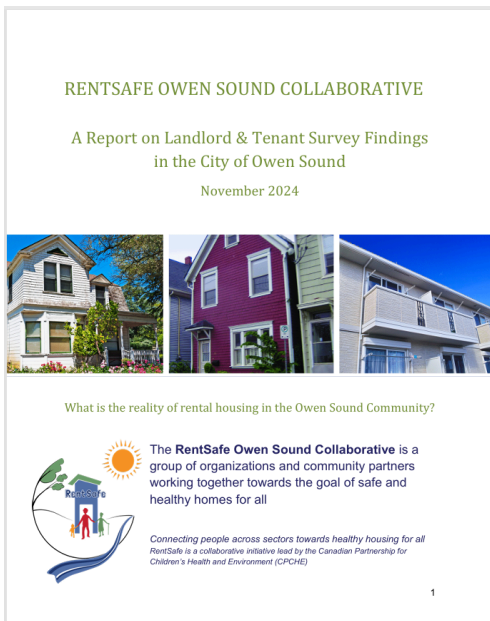
Members of the Housing Community of Practice (CoP) may think that they are constantly “holding the line” or “trying to keep people from dying”, but their work has not gone unnoticed. The Poverty Task Force recognizes all partners who are on the frontlines saving lives, feeding the hungry and keeping people housed. The Housing CoP met weekly throughout the year (50 weeks) to address immediate housing needs of individuals. ODSP case workers as well as financial advisors have broadened the table and the engagement with housing directors deepens partnerships and cross-sector collaboration to tackle issues holistically.

Giiwe Sharing Circles led by M’Wikwedong Indigenous Friendship Program’s Housing program was supported by the Poverty Task Force for 6 years. In March 2024, the last Giiwe Circle was hosted by the Friendship Centre. Funding will be directed to emergency housing. Recognizing that the impact of colonization and generational trauma has lowered the levels of trust of Indigenous people to engage with “the system”, Indigenous housing workers at the Housing CoP continue to advocate the need for more equitable access to programs and services.

In 2024, we released the RentSafe Owen Sound Collaborative’s *Landlord-Tenant Survey* findings at the Healthy Communities Partnership table, the Poverty Task Force table, the Corporate Services Committee and to the Strategic Planning Committee of the City of Owen Sound.

36 landlords responsible for 800 rental units (estimated to be 40% of the rental market) and 545 Owen Sound tenants responded. A good representation of Indigenous and Newcomers provided their lived experience. The City of Owen Sound received the report and a motion was passed to form a Rental Housing Task Force.

We welcome you to read the findings and recommendations in the full report. <https://povertytaskforce.com/publications/>



Food Security

Food insecurity is more than hunger. Households who struggle to pay for food also struggle to pay for the other costs of living, like housing, utilities, medications and transportation. Presenting food charity as a solution to food insecurity is misinformation that reduces support for real solutions. Food charity cannot be expected to fix an income problem.

We launched our “Income Solutions to Food Insecurity” awareness campaign with the release of the *Monitoring Food Affordability in Grey Bruce* by the Grey Bruce Public Health. This report formed the basis for a series of social media blog posts, media interviews and invitations to speak to community groups across Bruce and Grey Counties, including in Kincardine and Port Elgin, as well as at various planning tables such as the GB Community Safety & Well-Being Plan.



We welcome you to read the full report and go to our website to find the full series of social media posts at: <https://povertytaskforce.com/food-security/income-solutions-to-food-insecurity/>



The Food Security Action Group meets monthly to bring together community food programs to exchange knowledge, technical expertise and share resources. For example, the Poverty Task Force made connections and supported collaboration with The Bridge on Main Street/Kincardine Food Bank and the Grey Bruce Food Share program resulting in the formation of a new food rescue program in Kincardine.

The Poverty Task Force supports the collection of data posted on the Food Bruce Grey Dashboard to monitor food hunger response in Grey Bruce. Data is collected from community meal programs, food banks, Grey Bruce Community Garden Network (produce donated to meal programs/food banks), food rescue including the Grey Bruce Food Share and the Grey Bruce Good Food Box. This Dashboard is available to the public and is used by community food programs and municipal councilors to create reports specific to their area of service to generate policy discussions.

<https://www.foodbrucegrey.com>

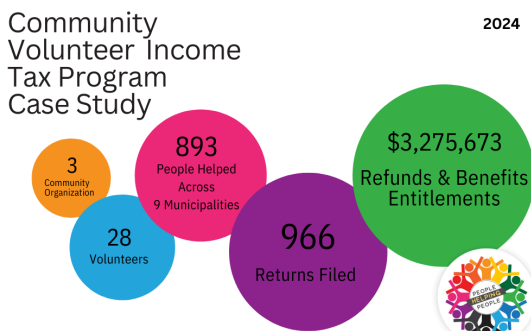
Income Security

In addition to the “Income Solutions to Food Insecurity” awareness campaign the Poverty Task Force in partnership with the United Way of Bruce Grey and the Ontario Living Wage Network calculated and released the 2024 Grey Bruce Living Wage. At \$23.05/hr it is the second highest rate in Ontario and reflects a 1.3% increase from the 2023 rate of \$22.75.

In 2024, our Income & Employment Security Action Group partners, including the Four County Labour Planning Market Board, engaged with employers on the value of retaining employees by paying a living wage and educating job seekers. <https://povertytaskforce.com/living-wage/>



The living wage is based on the actual costs of living in Grey Bruce, including housing, food, childcare and transportation. The media release highlighted challenges with a lack of overall childcare spaces, the goal of \$10/day getting close to \$22/day for all and long waitlists (1,254 children in Bruce County and 2,129 in Grey County (December 2023)). The waitlist is impacted by a shortage of Early Childhood Educators, many of whom are not being paid a living wage and an increase in local child care demands.



In 2024, the Poverty Task Force and Bruce County Public Library hosted the Annual Gathering of the Grey Bruce Community Volunteer Income Tax Program (CVITP) Network in Walkerton. The results of the case studies and the gathering with CVITP organizations, representatives from MP Alex Ruff's office and the CRA were released in the report *Reducing Poverty Through Volunteers: the impact of CVITP in Grey Bruce*. Evidence proving CVITP's role as an essential poverty reduction strategy.

1. This data is as of 25 June 2024, as reported by Bruce County Public Library, The Meeting Place CVITP and South East Grey Community Health Centre
2. Refund and benefit entitlement amounts are from federal and provincial benefits administered through the CRA.
The amounts apply to current and prior-year income tax and benefit returns filed through the CVITP from 3 March to June 25th, 2024.
3. All data has been rounded.

Two CVITP organizations in Bruce County combined brought \$2 million dollars back into Bruce County households. The Poverty Task Force supported the recruitment of 14 volunteers, however, due to delays in CRA registration many were too late to participate in the 2023 Tax Season and have been contact again for 2024 Tax Season in 2025. Read how we are building collaboration for income solutions and recommendations in the full report here: <https://povertytaskforce.com/income-security/doing-more-to-increase-income-or-why-you-should-file-your-income-tax/>

Health Equity & Community Voices

The Poverty Task Force support initiatives to collect and generate local Grey Bruce data to inform our collective work. The voices of people with lived experience and their stories are critical to the work of the Poverty Task Force. Collecting data helps us tell our stories better.

The Poverty Task Force Coordinator is the co-chair of BGDISC (Bruce Grey Data and Information Sharing Collaborative) - our Bruce Grey open data portal. The Collaborative mobilizes community decision-makers, including the Corporation of Bruce County, to share vital local rural data to better inform regional programming, policies, funding and social services to support prosperity, sustainability and the well-being of the community. In 2024, we engaged with the Rural Ontario Institute and the Grey Bruce Community Safety and Well-Being Plan on ways to access more local data and create interactive dashboards. <https://www.bgdisc.ca/>

The Poverty Task Force Coordinator sits on the Vital Signs Advisory Committee and the Data Working Group. The Community Foundation Grey Bruce's Vital Signs Reports focus on the status of Bruce Grey against the UN Sustainable Development Goals. In 2024, we identified priority sectors such as poverty, and began to collect local data and stories for the report. The data sets shall be uploaded to BGDISC. The Vital Signs Report 2024 has moved to a release date in 2025.

The Community Voices group did not meet in 2024. However, former members participated in Poverty Task Force meetings, the RentSafe Owen Sound Collaborative Landlord-Tenant Survey and Tamarack Institute's Financial Inclusion Project. The Project is a partnership with Toronto-Dominion (TD) Bank and a multi-sector Working Group to identify solutions to increase the financial inclusion of the "working poor". This work highlights unique levers for-profit businesses have for reducing poverty. <https://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/multimedia/webinar-businesses-reducing-poverty>

The Bruce Grey Poverty Task Force successfully obtained funding from the Grey Bruce Ontario Health Team (OHT) to fund a part-time peer support facilitator and the formation of a new group of Community Voices members to attend regular group meetings and engage with the Poverty Task Force in 2025.

Health equity issues are a priority for the Poverty Task Force. During the pandemic our Health Equity Action Group members were focused on COVID response. In 2025, we shall be refreshing the group in partnership with the Grey Bruce Ontario Health Team and its partners. The Grey Bruce Public Health and Poverty Task Force Coordinator will take leadership roles as co-chairs with admin support from the GB OHT, reporting to the GB OHT and the Poverty Task Force.

SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT IN 2024

The Poverty Task Force (PTF) maintains a list of 92+ member organizations with a contact list of 330 people. Representatives from 23 planning tables/working groups either participated in various PTF action groups, communities of practice and/or Poverty Task Force meetings or the PTF Coordinator participated in their meetings and/or strategic planning exercises. In 2024, the PTF participated in 5 meetings of the Community Safety & Well-Being Plan as an Action Table.

We provided 1 Bridges Out of Poverty workshop with 20 organizations in Saugeen Shores (Southampton) and moderated 3 Anti-Human Trafficking public information sessions (Kincardine, Port Elgin and Owen Sound.)

Our minutes are circulated to members and key elements included in our Community Updates. Our minutes are included in the City of Owen Sound's Consent Agenda.

In 2024, we released 12 community updates and press releases. We have 1,400 Facebook followers, 1,266 website subscribers and 670 Twitter followers. We were in the news speaking on income tax filing, CVITP volunteer recruitment, income solutions to food security, living wage and poverty strategies for rural communities.

PTF FINANCIAL REPORT 2024

In 2024, funding went towards:

- Wages & Benefits of a full-time Planning Network Coordinator
- PTF admin costs
- PTF website design & maintenance/CVITP URL purchases
- Tamarack membership
- Grey Bruce CVITP Network and RentSafe OS Collaborative research

Bruce County (\$20,000). Grey County (\$20,000) and the United Way of Bruce Grey (\$50,249.60) provided the remaining core operational funding for an annual operating budget of \$93,998.83. Note: this total now includes contributions by employer.

In addition, Community Foundation Grey Bruce funded the GB CVITP FILE Project (\$3,000) study. The CRA/CVITP program reimbursed costs previously paid for by the Poverty Task Force for the Owen Sound CVITP organization (\$644.86).

Bruce Grey Poverty Task Force

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COLLECTIVE IMPACT FRAMEWORK



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Our collective impact efforts seek to inform policies and support upstream interventions to address poverty-related community issues. Together we have a common agenda, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication and backbone infrastructure.

January 2025

Collective Action

The Poverty Task Force is made up of 90+ organizations that work across priority sectors to reinforce activities that contribute to reducing poverty.

Evidence-informed/best practices

We draw upon local and national best practices; examine and test them in Grey Bruce context.

Data Driven

We collect local data on social determinants of health, including housing/homelessness, food insecurity, employment and income.

HOUSING SECURITY

Engage with City of Owen Sound on recommendations from Rentsafe Tenant-Landlord Survey and formation of Rental Housing Task Force.

Create safe spaces for meaningful exchange to build resiliency, hold space and build collaboration for solutions.

COMMUNITY VOICES

Develop election education awareness material and advocacy oriented website.

Start up new Community Voices group and ensure they are actively engaged with PTF and GB Ontario Health Team.

Increase municipality leadership engagement as Action Table of the Community Safety & Well-Being Plan Grey Bruce.

FOOD SECURITY

Promote income solutions to food insecurity awareness campaign as part of federal and provincial election education.

Contribute to the governance, sustainability and promotion of the Grey Bruce Good Food Box.

INCOME SECURITY

Support volunteer recruitment and promotion of the Grey Bruce Community Volunteer Income Tax Program in partnership with CVITP Network partners.

Contribute to Grey Bruce Living Wage calculation and employer certification to reduce precarious employment.

DATA

Contribute to participatory data collection and analysis on poverty-related issues such as living wage, CVITP dollar value, housing, precarious work, etc.

Contribute poverty related data to Grey Bruce open-data portal BGDISC and Vital Signs 2025.

HEALTH EQUITY

Start up new Health Equity Action Group in partnership with GB Ontario Health Team.

Contribute to addressing health equity issues from a poverty lens with GB Ontario Health Team partners.

TRUTH & RECONCILIATION CALL TO ACTIONS

We shall build better relations . The following OFIFC principles will guide our work:

- Build trust and relations through Indigenous partner engagement
- Respect Indigenous culture and spiritualities as a foundation for Indigenous identity.
- Understand and respect Indigenous leadership; respond to Indigenous-led community priorities
- Collaborate and co-develop programs with Indigenous communities
- Respect Indigenous Diversity - no pan-Indigenous programming
- Ensure equity for all Indigenous people including women, Two Spirit, Indigi-queer and LGBTQQIA+