



Making Poverty Everyone's Business

Mark Chamberlain: Keynote Speaker



Mark Chamberlain presented an inspiring and informative speech on poverty to an audience of more than 200 at Pathway to Potential's "Making Poverty Everyone's Business Event" on January 19th. He began by noting that 1 in 9 people in Canada live in poverty, a figure that has remained relatively unchanged over the last 40 years. Mark then challenged the stereotype that those who live in poverty are lazy, and emphasized that poverty can affect anyone: seniors, children, people with mental illness, people with disabilities and people who just have bad luck. Mark spoke about the government and the general public's belief that the cost of reducing poverty is too high. He cited a recent study by the Ontario Association of Food Banks, which estimated that poverty costs the provincial and federal governments in Canada \$30 billion annually.

He argued that our conversations about poverty need to change. For example, we must have conversations about the benefits of increased wages, with the most significant being a healthier workforce and less turnover. A living wage would allow employees the ability to participate in society and afford housing. People who live in poverty are not as healthy. Citing the "Code Red" study recently conducted in Hamilton, Mark noted that someone who lives in the downtown Hamilton area on average will die 21 years earlier than someone who lives in a more affluent area. Such findings highlight the need to focus on the social determinants of health, and recognize that more equitable societies are healthier societies. Mark noted that, while certain aspects of poverty are complex, others are not: if a child isn't fed, they are hungry, if they are hungry they go to school and have a hard time learning, if they have a hard time learning they are less likely to graduate, if they do not graduate they are more likely to use the health care and justice system. The really simple solution is to make sure that children are fed. School programs should be comprehensive in providing children with nutritious food, and that no child should leave school hungry. Mark also spoke about the government's goal to reduce poverty by 25% in 5 years. He shared that he did not understand how this



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goal was acceptable, and showed great concern for the other children who will still be living in poverty.

Mark concluded by emphasizing that poverty is not about charity; it is about investment and it is about health. What we do to reduce poverty leads to health and prosperity for society as a whole. The key to change is not to wait, but rather to think each day about what can be done to reduce poverty and take action. We all have different tools, and it is about working together as a community to put them together.