

## WHAT WE HAVE HEARD DURING KITCHEN TABLE TALKS

These are the things people need for a healthy life, and should be provided by public services:

HEALTHY FOOD

HEALTHCARE

HOUSING

SAFETY & JUSTICE

SOCIAL SAFETY NET

CLOTHING



PARKS

RECREATION

TRANSPORTATION

PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE

Still, all of these things depend on income.



# Kitchen Table Talks on Poverty and Public Spending, 2011

In 2011, at the time when the consultations on the Social Assistance Reform were going across Ontario, the Social Planning Council of Kitchener-Waterloo organized Kitchen Table Talks with community members, many of whom would not likely attend formal public meetings. The talks focused on poverty and public spending, taxation and public services.

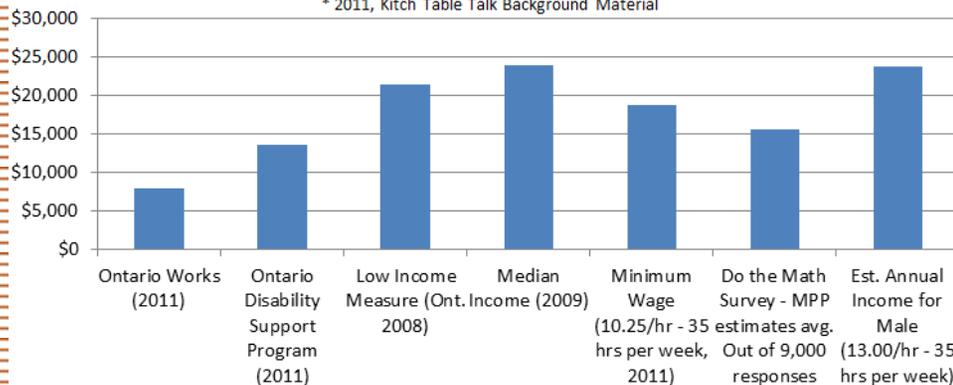
These informal get-togethers raised questions about the importance of public services and if investment in poverty elimination benefits the society as a whole. It was particularly important to talk about the role of government in collecting and spending tax dollars. The issues seemed big, and even more complex when unpacked, but nevertheless, all considered poverty elimination as a priority for sustainable communities and government actions.

**“We need sustainable social services that outlive governments.”**

We found out that many were unaware of the extent to which people were poor in Waterloo Region. Participants told us that not a lot of people cared enough because they did not know. However, most were aware of the growing income inequality, and many saw as a result of the current tax system. The political views expressed by participants varied, as their economic status. This was evident in the estimates they gave about what someone needed to earn to live a healthy life, which ranged from \$22 000 to \$60 000 and more

## Annual Income Levels - Single Individual

\* 2011, Kitch Table Talk Background Material



People had many concerns about the level of taxation and how the taxes were actually spent. Tax cuts to corporations were not seen as giving much in return. It was expected that government and corporations each play a role in income redistribution. It was a common point that taxes contribute to the social and economic equality

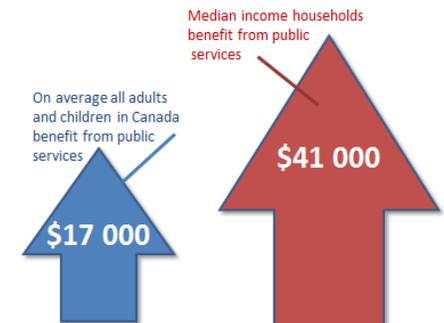
When describing why it is great living in Canada, the participants would name all the great common goods, such as freedom and safety, public health and education, and quality of life depending on public infrastructure, such as clear air and water, roads and parks, electricity and sewage. Those were all the things that people valued and said everyone has the right to enjoy.

On the other hand, it was clear that as much as we would benefit from public services, those among us who had higher income would benefit even more. Where people lived would determine their access to nature, clean air or transportation, even how they benefit from public services.

**“Taxes are the way we care for each other.”**

It was agreed that we need responsible government and “wise investment in important things” In our local communities, we should have greater say in conversations about how public dollars are being collected and how they are being spent. “Ordinary” people know what is important.

**CANADA'S QUIET BARGAIN**  
The benefits of public spending  
Hugh Mackenzie and Richard Shillington, 2009



*“The actual infrastructure of a city/town/street is really important to allow anyone to go about their day to day business, whatever they want to do. Everything is a complex system built by our governments and we need that to be strong, to support us day by day.”*