

Wollaston joins poverty roundtable



Lee Maidlow, social justice advocate and resident of Wollaston Township, and Wollaston Township Councillor Lynn Kruger have been appointed to attend Poverty Roundtable meetings on behalf of the municipality following a presentation to council by Maidlow at the Jan 26 regular meeting. JIM EADIE Special to This Week

By Jim Eadie

"I don't come very often to these meetings," said local resident and social justice advocate Lee Maidlow to the most recent Wollaston Township council meeting on Jan 26, "but I will when a voice is needed for people, or the environment." Maidlow came to ask council for their support to have a council member and a resident designated to participate in the "Poverty Roundtable", a relatively new initiative for Hastings County, which is funded in part by United Way of Quinte. She noted that political will was necessary to address this serious problem, especially in North Hastings, and specifically Wollaston Township. "It is a well-known fact that the No. 1 determinate of health is an individual's social status and wealth," she said. "Thirty-seven per cent of the population of Wollaston Township live below the income poverty line. We need to do the best we can do to support these people who have no voice."

Maidlow has past experience with a successful similar project in Wellington County, and offered to bring that wisdom, as well as her own lived experience with poverty, to the table for the township. Councillor Lynn Kruger has volunteered to represent council at the meetings.

"I am all in favour of what you and Lynn want to do," Deputy Reeve Marilyn Brickles told Maidlow. "There are a lot of people suffering out there" with the cost of food, hydro, fuel, a lot of people are not eating well. We support the food bank here, but I am glad someone from the community wants to go. This is only going to get worse."

Council agreed to have both women attend the roundtable meetings, and also agreed to cover the cost.

"From my experience in Wellington County, it is hard work, but it's going to work. Probably the worst thing is to be poor. And it could be anybody," said Brickles.

"It will be very interesting to hear back about what is happening at the next council meeting," said Councillor Bob Ireland.

"We need to create a space where people are not afraid to talk and don't feel judged, and safe ways that people can tell their stories, so that people who can help and advocate are informed," Maidlow later said. "Every case is unique, and sometimes people don't say the right thing. People with little money live in panic mode; they're always having to put out fires. Wollaston Township has already shown political will, and that is huge?"

"And it is hard for them to speak on their own behalf," agreed Kruger. "Let's be the community that helps each other."

JoAnne Lewis is the partnership developer for the Hastings and Prince Edward Poverty Roundtable, which has been quietly meeting since 2013 with the goal of finding out what can be done better, smarter, and differently. The group is presently at the point of

reaching out into communities to consult with people living in poverty, as well as opening the circle to businesses, government, the social service sector and the community in general to participation and conversation. The four priorities of the group's work will be housing and homelessness, food security, transportation, and employment and income security.

"It is fabulous news, and it's very exciting to have the participation of Wollaston Township," said Lewis. "We have to empower people to be a little more like Lee (Maidlow).

Jane Kali, program coordinator for North Hastings Community Trust, is a member of the roundtable. "We have a great deal of experience to offer to the consultation process," she said. "We do that every day here - that is what we do."

Lewis noted that there is expected to be a significant announcement in the next few weeks from the roundtable group. Their next meeting is to be held in Belleville on Mar 30, and meetings are open to the public.

Further information can be obtained at www.povertyroundtablehpe.ca