

# RETHINK POVERTY

SUMMARY OF NOVEMBER 14, 2024 EVENT



## **POVERTY REDUCTION TASK GROUP (PRTG)** **WHO WE ARE**

PRTG works to address the basic needs of community members by focusing on information sharing and collaboration on programs, services, events, initiatives and strategies (including advocacy) to end poverty.

The Poverty Reduction Task Group (PRTG) is part of the Child, Youth and Family Services Coalition of Simcoe County (Coalition).

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# TRACY'S STORY

WRITTEN BY TRACY NICKLES

I have lived in Bracebridge, Muskoka my entire life. I grew up in a middle-class family. I had a great childhood. I was Miss Bracebridge, a sunshine girl, an Ontario scholar. I attended Carleton University working towards a double degree. I do not drink, I do not do drugs, I own my own home. I have an amazing family. I live in poverty. I so dislike that word and the negativity that comes with it.

I got married right after university and had two amazing sons. Throughout my 20-year marriage I found myself at times living in poverty. Living pay-cheque to pay-cheque trying to make ends meet.

We had purchased a house with a gift of a down payment from my father-in-law. It was so important to have a house that our two boys could grow up in. It was a small two-bedroom cottage close to family. It was ours and we had grand plans for it. Unfortunately, I found myself in a very abusive marriage. For the next 17 years I tried and tried, But after one extreme night I escaped through my bedroom window and went to the woman's shelter.

Time to start building my new life. It was hard but I did it. Having to step foot in the court office for the first time in my life was terrifying. Before this, I had never even had a parking ticket. Thankfully I had a lot of help from family, friends and local agencies. Within a few years after my marriage ended, I was living the dream! I had a cute little house, two amazing teenagers, a full-time job that I loved.

***I had financial stability for the first time in my adult life, I was able to go to the grocery store without having to have keep a running total before I got to the cash register.***

I had become a strong independent woman. It brought me such joy that my children could go on class trips, wear nice clothes and enjoy all that a middle-class life offers. I received a promotion at work. I was well respected and sought out by others in the company. I was able to have family and friends stop in, host dinners and birthday parties. I bought my first car, and yes it was red, with a sunroof and heated leather seats. I was able to host a fund raiser that raised over \$20,000 for the local woman's shelter I stayed at. All my dreams were coming true. The sky was the limit!

***Everything changed in the blink of an eye.***

August 2018, I found myself at the age of forty-seven lying in a hospital bed in intensive care being told that I had a massive stroke. I went from bubbly, positive, outgoing, take over the world, unstoppable me, to a woman defeated, unable to work, with left side paralysis, impaired speech and short-term memory difficulties.

My only job now was to stay alive. But how was I going to care for my children? How was I going to feed them? How was I going to be able to keep a roof over their head? So many questions. I had worked so hard, I had come so far, this was so unfair. The fear set in, the tears, the panic.

***I did not want to lose everything that I had worked so hard to achieve.***



# TRACY'S STORY

Once I was released from the hospital, I was able to return home with the support of my family. I started intensive daily rehab therapy. Occupational therapy, speech therapy, and physical therapy. During this time, I was also diagnosed with severe rheumatoid arthritis. Trying my absolute best to take care of myself and my boys. I applied for disability benefits through my work, I also applied for Canada Pension Plan disability. So much paperwork to complete, it was impossible to do with a brain injury. I had to rely on others to step in and help me complete it.

## ***Asking for help from others made me feel helpless and vulnerable.***

Thankfully, I was approved, but this only gave me half of the income I had been making working fulltime. I had to find the money to keep a roof over my children's head.

Once again did it!! Such a simple statement but this time it was not as easy. I figured it out, I kept a roof over our heads. We learned to live simply and on a tight budget. I exhausted what little savings I had and withdrew my pension. I had remortgaged the house and used the equity I had built through all my hard work to give my children the best life I could. I had to supplement my income with my line of credit. Robbing Peter to pay Paul was a necessity to survive. I raised two sons now on their own.

As I reflect back, at why I worked so hard to keep this house, when it could have been easier to simply walk away, I realized that I did not want to be judged by others. In my mind it was not a choice. I did not want to be a failure. I did not want to be a bad mom. I did not want my boys to grow up in social housing. I am embarrassed to say that I thought that we were better than that. I did not want us to experience the social stigma of poverty and everything that comes with it.

So now I sit alone, as an empty nester. Most of my long-term disability income goes to pay my mortgage, after that comes medication costs, leaving me little money for groceries. I now frequent the food banks and other generous organizations, my heart and body fueled by their generosity.

We all have our own stories, each one important. This is mine. I never imagined living in fear of being homeless, living in poverty. I never thought I would live this way; I have worked hard my whole life. I attended university. I was an active contributing member of society.

## ***This is far from the fairy tale dream that I had growing up.***

***A note from the ReThink Poverty Committee:*** *By incorporating the voices, concerns, and barriers of People with Lived and Living Experience (PWLLE) this reduces stigmas, barriers and helps form an understanding of the daily realities of poverty and social isolation. We strongly encourage the community to actively listen to and uplift the voices that come from within our own community.*

# THE POVERTY PUZZLE



**POVERTY IS NOT A CHOICE AND EXISTS ON A CONTINUUM, AFFECTING PEOPLE IN DIFFERENT WAYS. IT IMPACTS BASIC SURVIVAL, LIMITS OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH, AND HINDERS PARTICIPATION IN SOCIETY.**

For many individuals and families, the daily struggle to meet basic needs leads to prolonged stress, reduced social mobility, and intergenerational poverty. Locally, 8.3% of Simcoe Muskoka residents and 11.5% of Grey Bruce residents live with low income.

Certain groups face a disproportionate burden of poverty. Unattached individuals, racialized groups, First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples, and female-led one-parent families are more likely than other demographics, both now and historically, to experience poverty. These groups often encounter additional barriers that hinder their ability to escape poverty, such as systemic oppression, lack of access to opportunities, and ongoing discrimination.

**POVERTY IS NOT JUST ABOUT INCOME—IT ALSO INVOLVES SYSTEMIC BARRIERS SUCH AS DISCRIMINATION, LIMITED ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND HEALTHCARE, AND INCREASED EXPOSURE TO THE IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE.**

While federal and provincial strategies provide frameworks to address poverty, significant gaps remain, often leaving municipalities to fill these voids. Effective poverty reduction requires not only targeted actions but also a deeper understanding of the structural drivers behind poverty. Social, economic, cultural, and political systems shape how resources, opportunities, and power are distributed. Addressing these drivers is essential to achieving meaningful progress.

Municipalities play a **key** role in developing sustainable, locally tailored solutions that meet immediate needs while addressing systemic issues, promoting equity, and fostering long-term community resilience. Reducing poverty effectively demands a collaborative, multi-sector approach that brings all levels of government and interest holders together.

# RETHINK POVERTY RESULTS

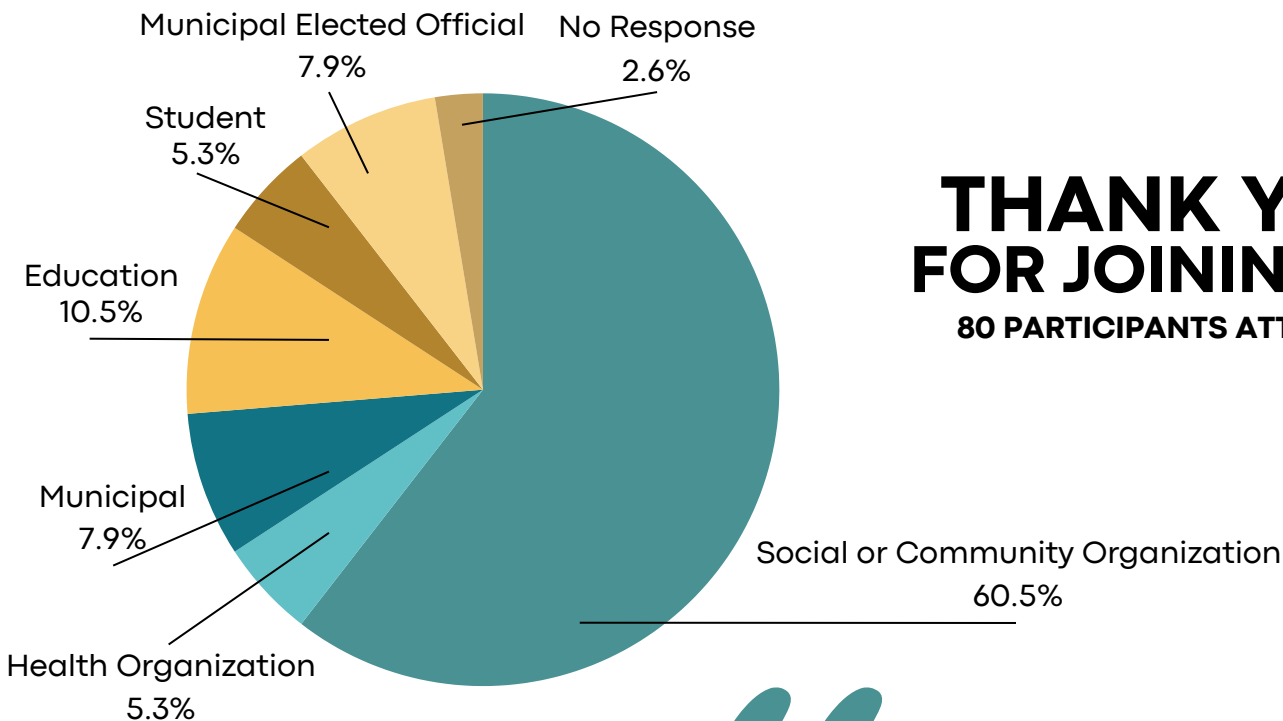


“

I appreciated the broad spectrum of perspectives in the room, and specially the first hand account Tracy shared. Stories like hers go a long way toward eliminating the stigma.

It would have also been beneficial to have more youthful perspectives as young people today are facing barriers we older folk would have difficulty imagining let alone relating to. Overall, it was a valuable event and there's room to grow. I especially loved the opportunities to collaborate with fellow community members and am interested in what the rollup of all the ideas generated and gathered today will inspire.”

- Anonymous Participant

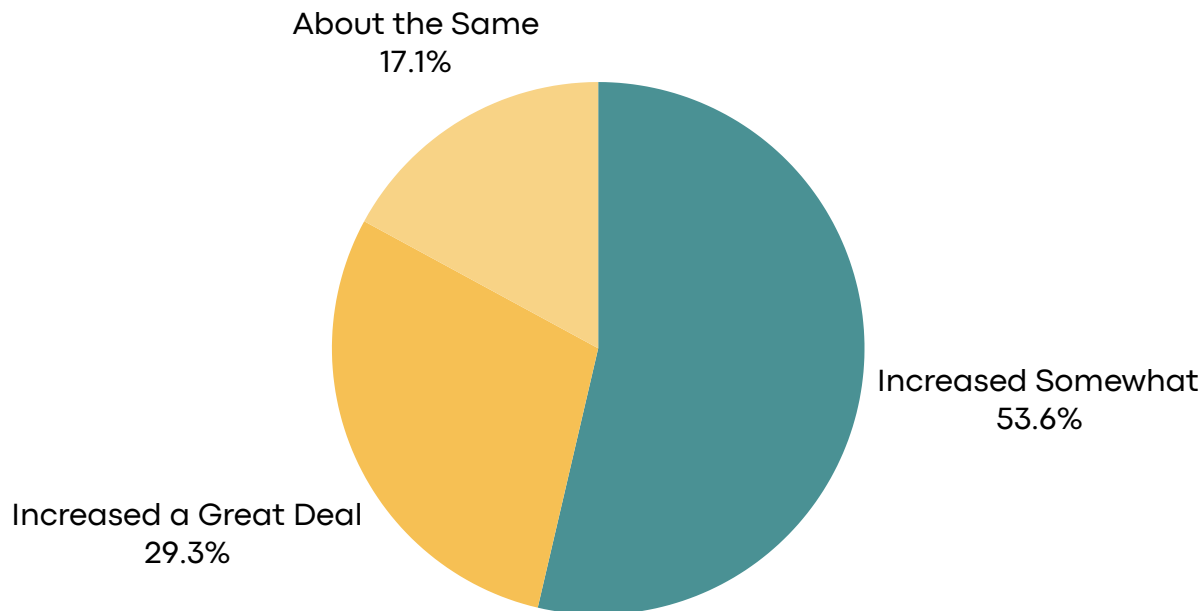


**THANK YOU FOR JOINING US**  
80 PARTICIPANTS ATTENDED

“

“Keep the ball rolling, it's great work!”  
- Anonymous Participant

# AFTER ATTENDING THIS EVENT, HOW HAS YOUR LEVEL OF KNOWLEDGE CHANGED REGARDING THE CHALLENGES FACED BY THOSE LIVING IN POVERTY?



## YOUR LOCAL DATA



### COUNTY OF SIMCOE DATA PORTAL

The County of Simcoe Data Portal provides interactive maps and spatial data related to housing and homelessness, children services, and 2021 census to assist with planning and decision-making in the county.

Click [here](#)

### HEALTH STATS SIMCOE MUSKOKA

Interactive dashboards and resources detailing the health status of local communities, covering various health topics, demographics, and geographies.

Click [here](#)

### HEALTH STATS GREY BRUCE

Comprehensive data on the health and well-being of residents in Bruce and Grey counties, organized by specific health topics and population characteristics.

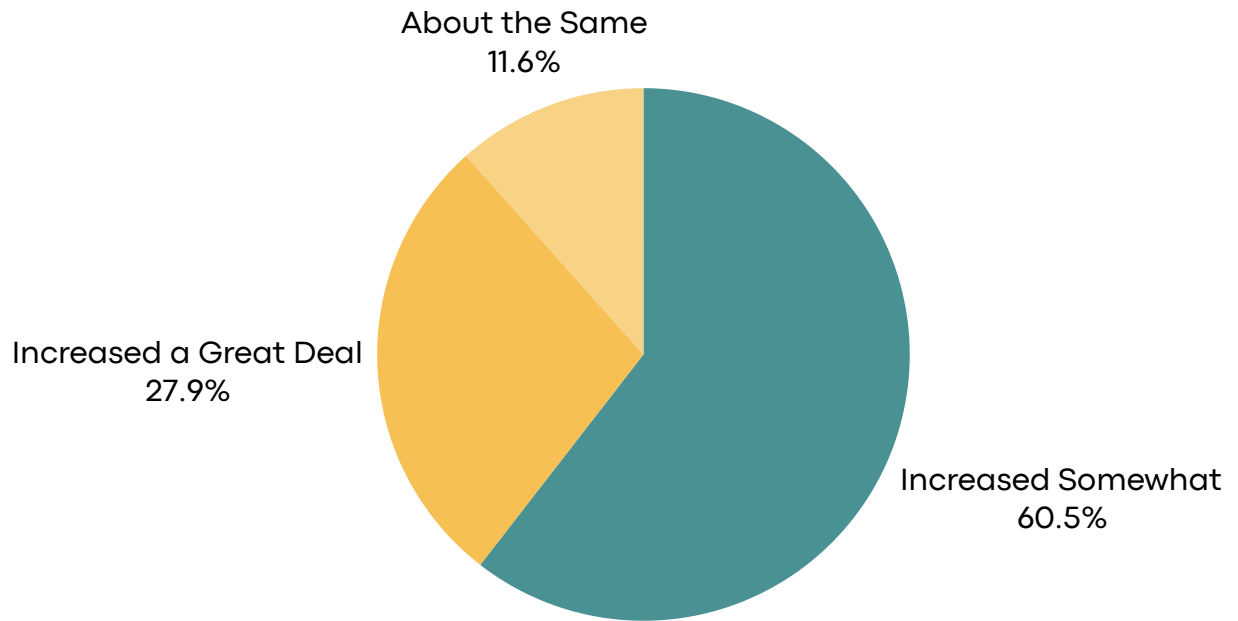
Click [here](#)

### FUTURE OF BELONGING

A community initiative aimed at boosting community wellness and delving deeper into the future of connectedness within our communities

Click [here](#)

# AFTER ATTENDING THIS EVENT, HOW HAS YOUR LEVEL OF KNOWLEDGE CHANGED REGARDING WHAT IS CURRENTLY BEING DONE TO ADDRESS POVERTY IN OUR COMMUNITIES?



## YOUR LOCAL POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGIES



**RESILIENT ORILLIA: TOWARD  
A POVERTY REDUCTION  
STRATEGY ORILLIA POVERTY  
REDUCTION ACTION PLAN**

Click [here](#)

**WASAGA BEACH: POVERTY  
REDUCTION ROUNDTABLE  
REPORT TO COUNCIL**

Click [here](#)

**MIDLAND 2024 HOPE,  
HOUSING AND HEALTH  
EVENT**

Click [here](#)

# TALK TO ACTION

FACILITATED BY NICOLE NORRIS, FROM GEORGIAN COLLEGE SOCIAL INNOVATION.

*The Headlines of the Future* activity invited participants to look forward into



## THE QUESTION:

What headlines would we see in the future that show we tackled the challenges we're seeing today in our communities?

The headlines provided examples of creative and innovative solutions and partnerships. There were **146** headlines!

Here are examples:

- STUDENTS PARTICIPATING IN ARTS UP BY 30%!
- AFFORDABLE HOUSING WAITING LIST IS AT ZERO!
- MULTI GENERATIONAL HOUSING IS RELIEVING PRESSURE ON THE ELDERLY AND CHILDCARE!
- UNEMPLOYMENT IN SIMCOE COUNTY IS AT AN END!
- COMMUNITY RUN FARMS REDUCE STRESS FOR LOW INCOME FAMILIES!
- SIMCOE COUNTY FAMILY DOCTORS NEED PATIENTS!

KEY THEME SELECTED	# OF TABLES
HOUSING	6
MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS	6
FOOD AND HOUSEHOLD	2
WAGES AND INCOME	2
INTERSECTIONALITY	1

- COMMUNITY GARDENS ARE PRODUCING ENOUGH HEALTHY FOOD TO FEED ALL COMMUNITY MEMBERS IN NEED!
- NATIONAL PARKS AND CONSERVATION AREAS FREE FOR ALL TO ENJOY! STUDIES SHOW RESPECT FOR AND INTERACTION WITH NATURE BOOSTS MENTAL HEALTH.

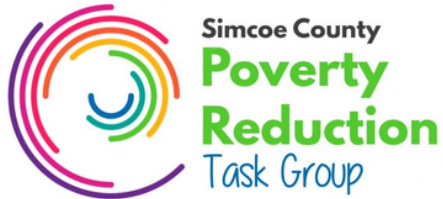


# RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

STAY TUNED FOR THE 2025 RETHINK POVERTY EVENT DATE!



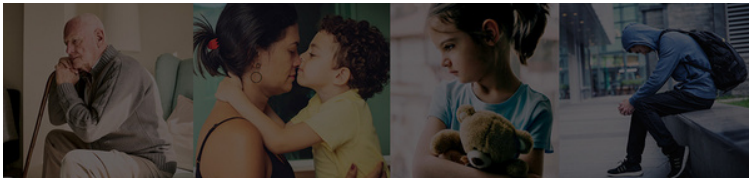
SIMCOE COUNTY POVERTY  
REDUCTION TASK GROUP



COMMUNITY SUPPORT SERVICES



HOUSEHOLD FOOD INSECURITY / AFFORDABILITY



FREE TAX CLINIC



People  
helping  
people

SHARING ACTION TEAM



BRUCE GREY POVERTY TASKFORCE  
'NOTHING SAYS "LOVE" LIKE  
ENDING POVERTY'



BRUCE GREY  
POVERTY  
TASK FORCE  
Our Voice is Power

TRACY NICKLES RESOURCES

A banner for "Nickles & Cents" resources. It features a light blue background with a QR code on the right. On the left, there are two Canadian coins (a nickel and a cent). The text "Nickles & Cents" is written in a large, elegant font. Below the QR code, there is a small image of a lake with trees and a dock. In the center, there is a white oval containing the text "Muskoka Resources Here is a list of resources available to low income residents of Muskoka to help lower your expenses."/>

**Nickles & Cents**

Muskoka Resources  
Here is a list of resources available to  
low income residents of Muskoka to  
help lower your expenses.

## CHILD YOUTH & FAMILY SERVICES COALITION OF SIMCOE COUNTY

The Simcoe County Coalition is a network of over forty local organizations that provide services to children, youth, and their families in Simcoe County. Collective impact takes cooperation, collaboration, and trust, and the Coalition provides opportunities to maximize the capacity, effectiveness, and cultural uniqueness across the community. The Coalition is focused on collective action, system change, and being data-driven to strengthen and support our community.



**STAY CONNECTED TO THE COALITION BY VISITING THE WEBSITE AND SIGNING UP TO THE WEEKLY NEWSLETTER [HERE](https://simcoecountycoalition.ca/)**  
**[HTTPS://SIMCOECOUNTYCOALITION.CA/](https://simcoecountycoalition.ca/)**

### RETHINK POVERTY PLANNING COMMITTEE

#### **Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit**

Christine Bushey  
Kelly MacLeod  
Charlotte Knegt

#### **United Way Simcoe Muskoka**

Rebekah Vaughan  
Kelsey Nicholls  
Rosi Martin

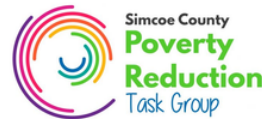
#### **Simcoe Muskoka SkillForce**

Nancy West

#### **Child Youth & Family Services Coalition of Simcoe County**

Irena Pozgaj-Jones

### RETHINK POVERTY 2024 PARTNERS AND SPONSORS



**Moving From Talk to Action...**