

10am-11:00 am via Zoom

- **Welcome and Land Acknowledgement** – Caroline Araujo-Abbots

We acknowledge that the land we are meeting on is the traditional territory on the traditional territory of the Anishnaabek Nation. We acknowledge that we are Treaty People under Treaties 45 ½ and 72. These treaty agreements are still in place with obligations.

We give thanks to the Chippewas of Saugeen First Nation and the Chippewas of Neyaashinigmiing Unceded First Nation, collectively known as Saugeen Ojibway Nation and their ancestors as the traditional keepers of this land and water. We also recognize the traditional homeland of the Metis Nation.

Ziigwan translates to “it is spring” in Anishinaabemowin and marks the arrival of spring, a time of renewal, growth, and reflection. For many Indigenous Nations and communities, this season carries teachings about balance, responsibility to the land, and the cycles that sustain life. As the earth awakens, ziigwan invites us to reflect on our relationships with the land and one another and recommit to actions that support renewal, respect, and reconciliation.

- Download Waking Up Ojibwe’s free [Ziigwan Toolkit](#) to support language learners in building their vocabulary around the spring season
- [Ziigwan – Waking Up Ojibwe](#), [Waking Up Ojibwe – www.wakingupojibwe.ca](#)
- Check out these [Indigenous stories and poems](#) about spring

2026 Collective Impact Framework – Income Security

We reviewed the 2026 Collective Impact Framework with a focus on the work of income security.

Lead the Grey Bruce Community Volunteer Income Tax Program (CVITP) Network to promote free tax filing to increase income and access to support benefits of Grey Bruce residents. Manage GB CVITP Network volunteer recruitment in partnership with 211 and host one annual meeting. Host a series of Seniors Financial Literacy webinars with seniors’ community hubs and social workers.

Contribute to Grey Bruce Living Wage calculation in partnership with Ontario Living Wage Network and promote. Address precarious employment, promote universal, affordable daycare, deeply affordable housing and public transportation.

- **Discussion on actions of Income & Employment Security Action Group**

Community Volunteer Income Tax Program 2025 Impact and 2026 Updates – Francesca Dobbyn, United Way

Francesca presented comprehensive information about the CVITP program, its impact, and eligibility requirements.

- 17 registered organizations completed 3,368 tax returns in 2025, averaging \$3,100 per return for a total of \$10,440,800 returned to residents
- Program saved residents an estimated \$421,000 in tax preparation fees
- Approximately 41,400 people in Grey Bruce qualify for CVITP services, indicating significant room for growth
- Eligibility increased to \$40,000 for individuals and \$50,000 for couples, plus \$2,500 per dependent for 2026
- Program serves people with modest incomes and simple tax situations, not complex returns like final estate taxes or extensive self-employment income.

Benefits and Programs Requiring Tax Filing

- Federal benefits including the Canadian Groceries and Essentials Benefit (formerly GST/HST credit), Canada Child Benefit, Climate Action Incentive, Guaranteed Income Supplement, and Canada Disability Benefit. Provincial benefits including Ontario Trillium Benefit, Ontario Guaranteed Annual Income System, Ontario Senior Homeowner's Property Tax Grant, and Seniors Co-Payment Program.
- The Seniors Co-Payment Program waives the \$100 deductible for Ontario Drug Benefit and reduces per-prescription costs from \$4.11 to \$2.
- Tax filing is required for Canadian Dental Care Plan enrollment, Ontario Works/ODSP, RGI housing, RESPs, RDSPs, LEAP, and OESP.
- Shared example of using tax clinic system to simultaneously enroll people in the Ontario Electricity Support Program when it first launched.

CVITP Volunteer Recruitment and Clinic Operations

Discussion covered the volunteer recruitment process and various clinic models operating in the region.

- Volunteer registration occurs in the fall, requiring training, police checks, and CRA registration.
- CRA was late with volunteer registration in 2024/2025, causing some scrambling around available volunteers for clinics.
- Described three clinic models: drop-off (volunteers take packages home), scheduled appointments, and drop-in at locations like libraries
- Promoting both clinic access and volunteer recruitment through municipal channels happens at different times of the year. It's too late for volunteers for the current 2025 tax season but people are encouraged to express interest for future years.

Action: Recommendation to prepare information package about tax clinics and volunteer recruitment for distribution to municipal clerks.

Action: Send email to Sassan about volunteer task coordination and fan-out list.

Action: Attach tax clinic information to meeting minutes for broader distribution.

Automatic Tax Filing Discussion

Concerns about the upcoming automatic tax filing system from CRA.

- Automatic tax filing won't be available until 2027 for the 2026 tax year.

- Concerns about scams, noting everything seems like a scam these days with "click this link" messages.
- Barriers for people without internet, cell phones, or smartphones
- There is value in in-person interaction where people can ask questions and learn about other available programs
- The Poverty Task Force submitted a letter to our MPs and the Department of Finance Canada. <https://povertytaskforce.com/publications/>

Hanover CVITP Drop-In Services: Hanover has moved to drop-in service for CVITP. In-person appointments are full but volunteers will accept drop-offs. <https://hanoverlibrary.ca/>

Seniors Financial Literacy Program – Caroline Araujo-Abbotts, United Way

Caroline presented details about the upcoming series of financial literacy webinars for seniors featuring John Stapleton, Open Policy Ontario.

- John Stapleton worked 28 years in Ontario government income policy and now provides retirement planning presentations. Two presentations for social service workers were held two weeks prior with 26 participants learning how to support clients transitioning to senior incomes. Three public sessions across 11 locations in Grey and Bruce on May 8th, May 22nd, and June 5th.
- Topics: May 8th covers what seniors get (CPP, OAS, GIS, GAINS); May 22nd covers using the tax system advantageously; June 5th covers the "parallel universe" concept including why RRSPs can be detrimental for low-income seniors.
- Sessions will include food, transportation assistance, and facilitators to ask questions.
- Mainstream advice like taking CPP at 70 instead of 60 doesn't benefit seniors who will remain at the guaranteed income threshold regardless. Thank You to the Community Foundation for grant funding supporting the program. <https://unitedwayofbrucegrey.com/seniors/>

Fraud Prevention and Scam Awareness: Concerns about fraud targeting seniors, leading to broader discussion of prevention efforts.

- Recommend that financial literacy training should include sessions on avoiding phone and computer scams, noting they create urgency that causes panic and poor decisions. March is Fraud Prevention Awareness Month, and police services provide fraud prevention presentations.
- Hanover Library described quarterly tech talks covering online shopping safety, credit card protection, email security, and artificial intelligence, with fraud awareness integrated into all technology programs. Examples of romance scams and friendship scams where people build relationships then request money have happened locally. Francesca recounted intervening when a woman at a grocery store was buying gift cards to send overseas, and appreciating when Metro staff called a manager to verify her own bulk card purchases
- Banks should share more responsibility for losses when people are caught in sophisticated scams rather than placing all blame on victims.
- It is important to be willing to ask questions and intervene, while acknowledging some situations (like giving PIN numbers to neighbors) are user responsibility.

Advocacy/Policy Opportunities and Election Education

Rising Poverty and Food Insecurity – Francesca Dobbyn, United Way

Francesca presented data from Campaign 2000 and discussed increasing poverty in the region. [Take Action - Campaign 2000](#)

- Data indicates child poverty decreased during pandemic funding but has since increased.
- The Canada Child Benefit prevented 580,000 children from falling into poverty in 2023, but inflation is eroding its value.
- Food programs are overwhelmed with increasing demand.
- People are coming off EI and going onto Ontario Works who have never needed it before.
- The expected seasonal dip in Ontario Works recipients during summer tourism and agricultural work is no longer occurring.
- The Family Assist Market (FAM) program was built to reduce OSHARE demand but instead revealed more hungry people, with requests to expand to Hanover, Walkerton, and Kincardine that cannot be met due to capacity.

Campaign 2000's evidence-based pathways to end chronic poverty.

- Five key pathways: progressive taxation and wealth regulation; wages and income supports working together; meaningful Treaty and human rights implementation; localized and disaggregated data collection; and investment in publicly funded programs using universal design.
- The importance of accountability mechanisms for Indigenous treaties and truth and reconciliation. Need for self-determination rather than rescue approaches with First Nations.
- The \$1,000 earnings exemption for ODSP recipients as important provincial policy, while noting it doesn't extend to spouses.

Sewer and water policy changes: the United Way had a successful policy intervention with Saugeen Shores regarding sewer and water changes that could have affected provincial utility support program eligibility.

OSAP Funding Changes: discussion focused on provincial changes to OSAP funding and their implications for students and communities.

- OSAP funding will shift from 85% grants/15% loans to only 25% grants/75% loans starting fall 2026.
- 25% of Ontario Works recipients are between 18-39 years old, and 25% of cases are single parents (90% women).
- Education is the greatest way to poverty-proof youth, but barriers will make education accessible only to the wealthy. What research exists linking education funding to poverty outcomes and whether local data collection could support future advocacy? National and global research exists showing direct links between education and socioeconomic outcomes <https://opencanada.org/inequality-explained-hidden-gaps-canadas-education-system/>
- <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/poverty-reduction/background.html>
- Fewer students attending university leads to program reductions at local institutions, forcing students to travel to larger centers, increasing costs beyond tuition to include living expenses and transportation.

Action: Are there advocacy opportunities including the Poverty Task Force sending a letter of concern to MPPs and support protesting students.

Action: Follow up with Carol Merton regarding research on financial support for post-secondary education and outcomes for those on low and modest incomes. Provide local data information if available.

Poverty Task Force Updates

- The Poverty Task Force has confirmed funding for 2026 from both Bruce and Grey counties and continued support from United Way Bruce Grey. The 2025 annual report was sent to all municipalities and is available on the Poverty Task Force website.

Partner Updates

Police Campaign: Hate crimes, hate speech and hate motivated incidents have long-lasting impacts on a community. Education is important to understanding differences. Ask questions & be willing to listen. In any emergency situation, call 9-1-1. In nonemergency Hate Crime Reporting situations, call 2-1-1 for support. (See attached poster).

Information from Owen Sound Police about reporting hate crimes, noting they are judged more harshly under federal law with larger penalties. Obvious hate crimes should be reported to 911, while uncertain situations can be reported through 211. Hate incidents and crimes are occurring frequently in the community against vulnerable and identifiable groups based on faith, race, and sexual orientation. Local police services accept hate crime reports: Owen Sound Police, local OPP, Hanover, West Grey, and Saugeen Shores

Human Trafficking Awareness: Two spring events were held in Kincardine on March 4th and Walkerton on March 11th featuring speakers with lived experience and OPP human trafficking lead by Mel Barfoot. Upcoming online education series for short-term rental owners, maintenance workers, cleaners, and neighbors about deterring and identifying human trafficking. Resources are available on the Community Safety Well-being webpage with versions for each police service area. <https://greybrucecswbp.ca/resources/> The resources will help people recognize signs and know what to do if they suspect trafficking in short-term rentals

Banking Fee Changes: As of March 15th, banks can only charge a maximum of \$10 for NSF fees. Banks can only charge one NSF fee within a 48-hour period. If a transaction that sends an account into overdraft is less than \$10, no NSF fee can be charged. These changes are particularly significant for people living close to or on the overdraft line. <https://unitedwayofbrucegrey.com/financialfriday-big-news-about-non-sufficient-funds-nsf-fees/>

Affordable Housing in Grey Highlands (AHIGH): has made a successful bid on the former Markdale Hospital building. The group plans to convert the property into mixed-use affordable housing. The three leaders have personal experience with housing co-ops in Toronto and understand non-profit housing operations. Challenges including purchasing the property, asbestos remediation, demolition, and construction costs. The building is owned by the Ministry of Health (administered by Bright Shores) with a \$600,000 purchase price. The building is staying in public ownership rather than private development. The Institute of Georgian Bay is providing expertise on social financing for housing. <https://www.owensoundsuntimes.com/news/local-news/affordable-housing-non-profit-makes-offer-on-former-markdale-hospital>

Action: it was suggested that organizations advocate to MPP Vickers to have the Ministry gift the property.

Community Collaboration Example: Recent example of effective community partnership during the Owen Sound boil water advisory. Received water donations from Bruce Power and Ice River Springs during the boil water advisory. Francesca needed a truck with a forklift and contacted Owen Sound Home Hardware. Home Hardware picked up 7 skids of water, delivering 5 to OSHARE and 2 to the Salvation Army. Bringing together unlikely partners and resources creates amazing results.

Next PTF Meeting Date: April 17th, 2026, 10am-11am.

Collective Impact Framework

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.



1

Collective Action

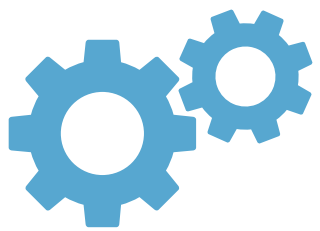
The Poverty Task Force is made up of 90+ organizations that work across priority sectors to reinforce activities that contribute to reducing poverty.



2

Principles

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



3

Build Better Relations

Be guided by the Truth & Reconciliation Call to Action and OFIFC principles to build better relations and systems.



4

Data Driven

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



5

Advocacy and Policy

Mobilize networks and government representatives to put poverty reduction – income, housing and food security; health equity, and justice at the top of their policy agendas.

2026 COLLECTIVE ACTION

Key Principles for all collective action shall have:

- A Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) lens embedded into all aspects
- Include all priority populations, whenever possible
- Support Indigenous-led initiatives
- A trauma- and violence-informed approach
- A cultural safety/anti-racism lens
- A harm reduction/substance use approach

Housing Security

Strengthen partnership with City of Owen Sound on data sharing/mapping/analysis on rental housing standards. Lead on promoting the adoption of stronger mould bylaws, Vital Services and renovations bylaws as recommended by Rentsafe OS Tenant-Landlord Survey and RentSafe Ontario/Ontario Public Health Association.

Contribute to RentSafe Ontario climate feasibility study on rental housing in rural communities as part of larger RentSafe Ontario study on building resiliency. Contribute to hosting one Climate Resilience Intersectoral Roundtable in 2026.

Raise awareness on income solutions to affordable and accessible housing.

Income Security

Lead the Grey Bruce Community Volunteer Income Tax Program (CVITP) Network to promote free tax filing to increase income and access to support benefits of Grey Bruce residents. Manage GB CVITP Network volunteer recruitment in partnership with 211 and host one annual meeting. Host a series of Seniors Financial Literacy webinars with seniors' community hubs and social workers.

Contribute to Grey Bruce Living Wage calculation in partnership with Ontario Living Wage Network and promote. Address precarious employment, promote universal, affordable daycare, deeply affordable housing and public transportation.

Food Security

Increase access to nutritious food by 1) contributing to the governance, sustainability and promotion of the Grey Bruce Good Food Box, 2) supporting community food hubs and 3) Grey Bruce Food Share/Food Rescue program expansion and 4) development of disaster management plans.

Strengthen food diversity in community food banks/meal programs.

Advocate for income solutions to food insecurity in municipal election education and public awareness campaign.

Health Equity

Lead new Health Equity Action Group with health sector stakeholders and identify evidence-based interventions to increase access and equitable health outcomes for equity-deserving populations (i.e. 2SLGBTQ+, newcomers, Black and Indigenous communities).

Manage BGDISC and ensure poverty-related/Social Determinants of Health data is available on this Grey Bruce open-data portal. Collection, analysis and use of data for decision-making and understanding health equity.

Contribute to data collection for Vital Signs Report to be released in 2026.

Community Voices

Ensure Community Voices group are active in 2026 and contributing lived experience to all PTF actions and advocacy.

Develop municipal election 2026 education campaign and advocacy.

Increase municipal-level engagement as Action Table of the Community Safety & Well-Being Plan Grey Bruce and provincial and national-level engagement as a member of Tamarack Institute, Campaign 2000 and Right to Food.

Community Volunteer Income Tax Program

FREE TAX CLINICS



If you have a modest income and a simple tax situation, a trained volunteer may be able to help you complete your Income Tax and Benefit Return - for free!

**Call 211 to find the nearest free clinic or
see the Grey Bruce 211 list at: freetaxclinics.ca**



Community Volunteer Income Tax Program

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- The Grey Bruce Community Volunteer Income Tax Program (CVITP) continues to be a critical tool in reducing poverty and strengthening income security across the region.
 - Free Income Tax clinics where volunteers complete and e-file returns for people with a modest income and a simple tax situation.
 - In 2025, eligibility was a modest income of \$35,000 for individuals, \$45,000 for couples, plus \$2,500 for each dependent. This has gone up \$5,000/person in 2026.
 - 17 CVITP registered organizations in Grey Bruce completed 3,368 tax returns (\$3,100 average x 3,368 = \$10, 440,800) in 2025.
 - **\$10,440,800** was returned to residents in Grey Bruce for the year ending 31 December 2025. (Using an average of \$3,100/tax return).
 - In addition to refunds and benefits, the program saved local residents an estimated **\$421,000** by providing free tax filing services — money that would otherwise have been spent on paid tax preparers.
 - Despite this impact, only a fraction of those eligible are currently accessing the program. In Grey Bruce, an estimated **41,400 people qualify** for CVITP services, highlighting both the scale of need and the opportunity for growth.

Community Volunteer Income Tax Program

Why we do it:

Refunds and benefits;

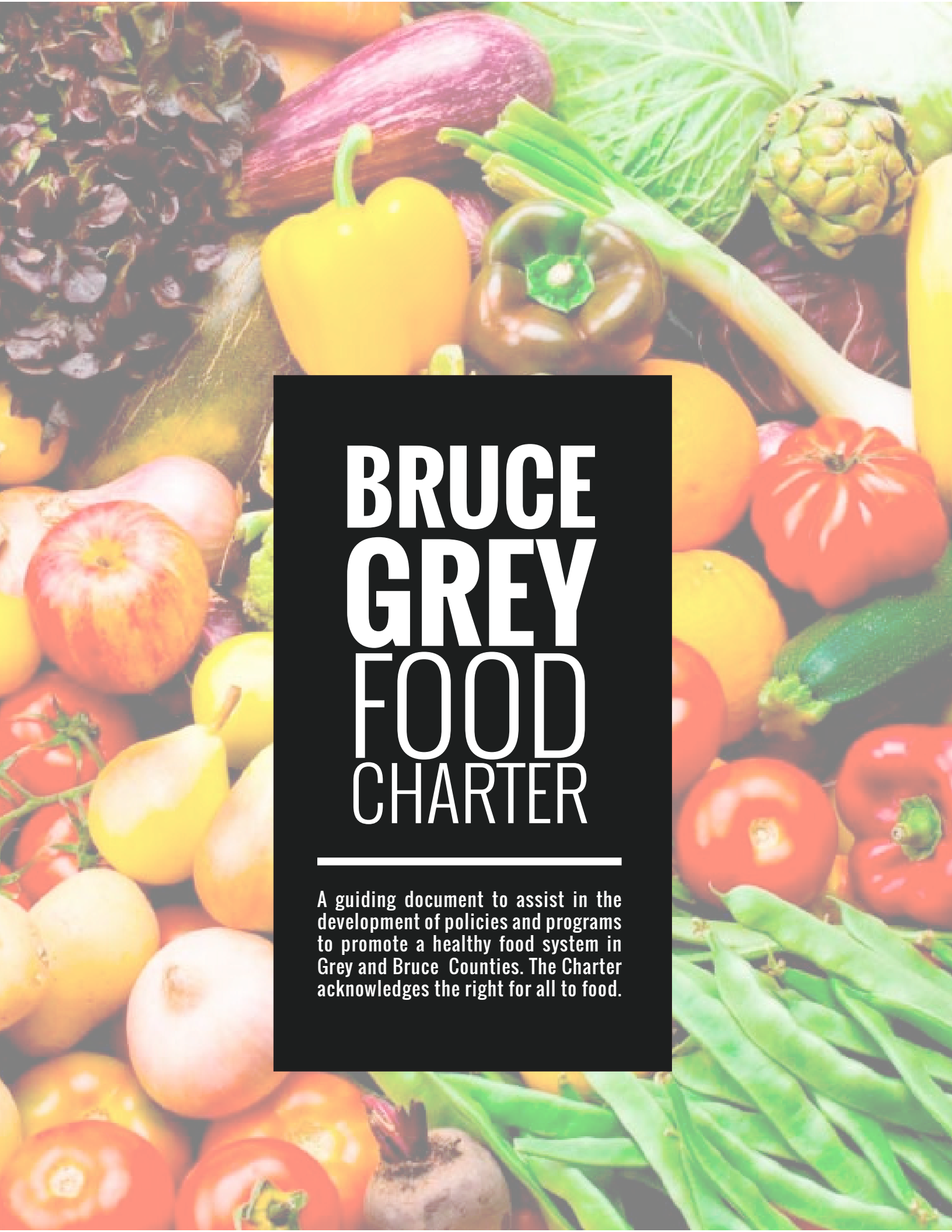
- GST/ HST credit (now CGEB in 2026)
 - Ontario Trillium Benefit
 - Canada Child Benefit
 - Ontario Senior Homeowner's Property Tax Grant
 - Climate Action Incentive (Carbon Tax rebate)*
 - Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS)
 - Ontario Guaranteed Annual Income System (GAINS)
 - Canada Disability Benefit**
-

Community Volunteer Income Tax Program

Why we do it:

Program eligibility:

- Canadian Dental Care Plan
 - Ontario Works /Ontario Disability Support Program
 - Registered Education Savings Plan – Canada Learning Bond
 - Registered Disability Savings Plan – Canada Disability Savings Bond and Canada Disability Savings Grant
 - Seniors Co-Payment Program
 - Trillium Drug Program
 - Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LEAP)
 - Ontario Electricity Support Program (OESP)
 - County Housing/RGI
-



BRUCE GREY FOOD CHARTER

A guiding document to assist in the development of policies and programs to promote a healthy food system in Grey and Bruce Counties. The Charter acknowledges the right for all to food.



THE CHARTER

In acknowledgement of the basic right to food, the Charter is a commitment to work together to build a vibrant, sustainable, food secure community. Based on community participation, a sustainable local food system will prioritize health, social justice, education, economic development, the environment, and culture.



BECAUSE WE VALUE
HEALTH
WE SUPPORT

- Public policy that recognizes food's contribution to physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional well-being
- Making food readily accessible for our rural and urban residents, including adequate transportation links, neighbourhoods that encourage walkable and bikeable access to healthy food
- Strategies to prevent and manage chronic diseases through access to affordable, healthy, safe, adequate, and culturally appropriate food
- Baby friendly policies that protect, promote, and support breastfeeding through informed decision making

BECAUSE WE VALUE
SOCIAL JUSTICE
WE SUPPORT

- Making sure everyone has access to healthy food
- A fair wage for the production of food, and a safe and respectful environment for all farmers and food workers
- Making land accessible for anyone interested in food production
- Income, education, employment, housing, and transportation policies and practices that support access to healthy, sustainable food



BECAUSE WE VALUE
CULTURE
WE SUPPORT

- Celebrating and promoting respect for and inclusion of traditional, cultural, and spiritual food diversity
- Enhancing the dignity and joy of growing, preparing, and eating food
- Strengthening links between rural and urban communities
- Opportunities for all community members to be included and to make connections through the experience and sharing food.

BECAUSE WE VALUE
EDUCATION
WE SUPPORT

- Food literacy initiatives that engage youth and students integrated in school curricula
- Programs that train current and future farmers, home gardeners, food producers, and others involved in the food value chain
- Integrating food literacy and community gardening into communities
- Developing community gardens at schools and other public settings
- Public education about the connections between our health, the environment, and our food choices
- Public awareness of the role of agriculture in our lives



BECAUSE WE VALUE
**SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT**
WE SUPPORT

- The production, processing, distribution, and consumption of local foods
- Promoting our region as a food, agricultural, and culinary destination
- Food and agricultural research that is innovative, sustainable, and includes alternative food systems
- Services that support local farms and the development of local food related programs and businesses
- Practices that recognize the detrimental impact of food transportation and strive to minimize environmental burden

BECAUSE WE VALUE
ENVIRONMENT
WE SUPPORT

- Farming practices that protect the watersheds and wildlife habitat
- Food production methods that sustain the natural environment in rural and urban settings
- Sustainable development of agriculture, water, land use policies and practices that support the production of healthy food



Bruce Grey
**POVERTY
TASK FORCE**

OUR VISION

REDUCE AND ELIMINATE POVERTY IN OUR
COMMUNITY

OUR PURPOSE

FACILITATE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS TO ADVOCATE
FOR POVERTY REDUCTON AND ELIMINATION

JOIN THE GREY BRUCE POVERTY TASK FORCE

The Bruce Grey Poverty Task Force focuses on building partnerships with key community stakeholders and networks: working together to eliminate poverty, enhancing our common understanding of poverty issues through solution-based research, knowledge development, and information sharing.

CONNECT

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HATE ^THE HATE

Hate crimes, hate incidents and hate-motivated crimes have long-lasting and serious side effects for society.



WHAT IS A HATE CRIME?

Hate Incident

Action or behavior motivated by hate against an identifiable group.



Hate Crime

Hate crimes are judged more harshly and results in larger penalties



Criminal Offence

An action violating federal law.



Will result in fines or imprisonment

REPORTING HATE CRIMES

9-1-1 in an emergency!

Report non-emergent hate crimes and incidents to OSPS 519.376.1234

Tips: Always call police from a safe location and try to stay calm. Presenting evidence (recordings, quotes, times, dates, etc.) helps police file offences.

