

# Stable Jobs = Stable Communities

“If we work together to fix the window, we get a clearer view”

Photo Voice Project 2015



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## POVERTY AND EMPLOYMENT PRECARITY IN SOUTHERN ONTARIO (PEPSO)

### *Case Study # 5:*

### *Impact of High Levels of Precarity on Urban Neighbourhood Economies and Particular Populations*



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The report presents key findings on Case Study # 5: *Impact of High Levels of Precarity on Urban Neighbourhood Economies and Particular Populations*. This case study seeks to understand the changing nature of urban social and economic terrain subject to precarious employment and how precarity impacts particular identifiable populations. As well, this case study looks at what resources are available to workers experiencing precarity in different neighbourhoods and whether the impact of precarity on communities varies by type of neighbourhood.

The study focuses on five low and middle-income neighbourhoods in three urban centres; two in Toronto, two in Peel Region and one Hamilton. The PEPSO Case Study #5 research is led by Ryerson University in collaboration with the Region of Peel, the United Way of Peel Region, Community Social Planning Council of Toronto and the Social Planning and Research Council of Greater Hamilton. Selected study areas include Riverdale in Greater Hamilton; Cooksville (low-income) in Mississauga and Springdale (middle-income) in Brampton in Peel Region; Downtown East and Weston Mount Dennis in Toronto. This report is based on data collected in these study areas.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study required participants to respond to the following three key research questions to document their experience and concerns related to precarious employment:

1. *How does precarious employment affect (good or bad) your livelihood and your neighbourhood?*
2. *What changes have you noticed in your neighborhood as a result of precarious employment in the neighbourhoods?*
3. *What resources are available in your neighbourhood for people experiencing precarious conditions (i.e. food banks, employment counseling, community services and clinics)?*



## KEY FINDINGS

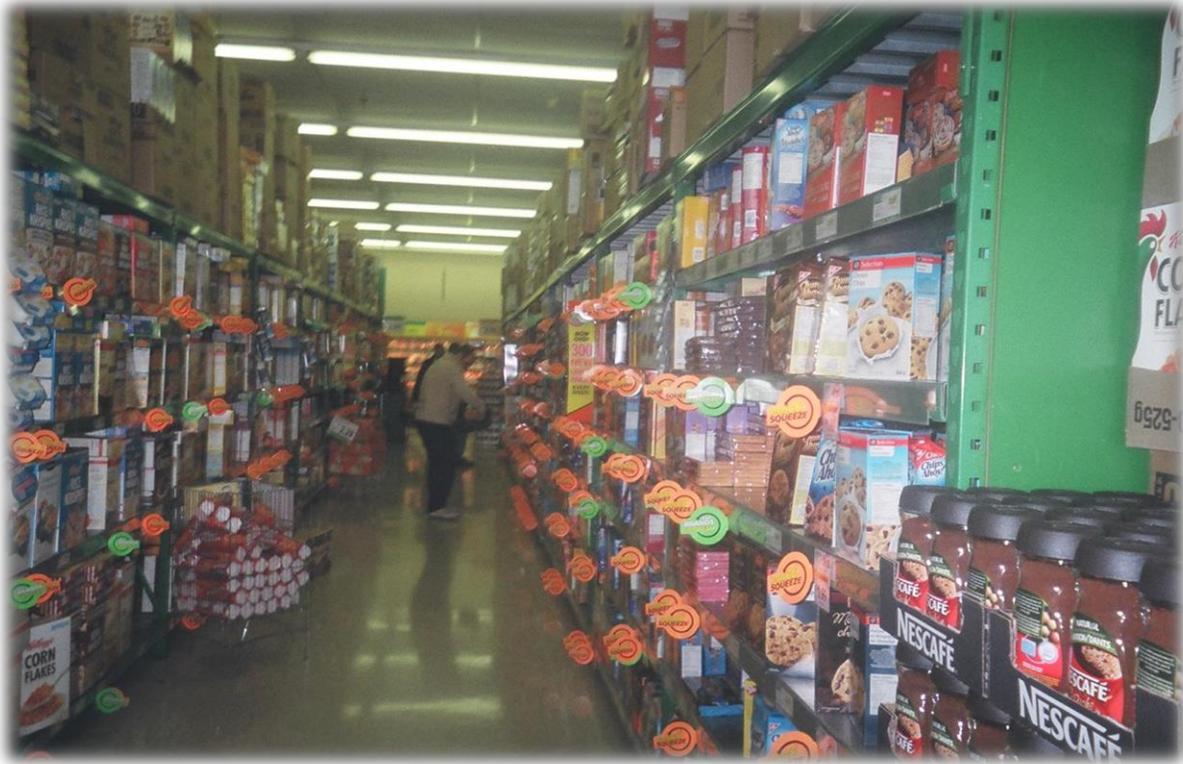
Consistent with the findings in the PEPSO Survey Report: *Its More than Poverty: Employment Precarity and Household Well-being*<sup>1</sup>, the findings in this report indicate the concern by residents of the sample neighbourhoods regarding the growing levels of precarious employment and the impact of precarity on livelihoods. This is expressed in various forms showing how their lives have changed through challenges related to the following:

- Uneven labour market access and employment security
- Reliance on Temp Agencies and related adverse experiences
- Uneven work schedules, long hours and erratic shifts
- Income inequality and widening gap between rich and poor
- Vulnerability to rising cost of living and income insecurity
- Declining health status and levels of stress and frustration
- Food insecurity and resort to Food Banks
- Limited access to affordable and adequate housing in a relatively good condition
- Gentrification and its impact on affordability of housing
- Changing neighbourhood economy
- Heightened risks to community safety
- Degraded neighbourhoods, homes left often unkept
- Housing stress
- Abandoned Canadian dreams, particularly for immigrants
- Pressures on family life and violence against women
- Lack of child care, recreational facilities and tough child rearing environment
- Inability to participate in community or collective activities
- Increased reliance on community and social services
- Municipal services making a difference

<sup>1</sup> Lewchuk, Lafleche, Dyson, Goldring, Meisner, Procyk, Rosen, Shields, Viducis and Vrankulj (2013)



The research shows that, in all three regions, precarious employment structures new forms and conditions of work. It is associated with limited housing choices, inadequate and unaffordable housing and the rise in poorly maintained and unhygienic rental housing that compromises family health and imposes security risks. These have a direct impact on the quality of life for those dealing with precarious employment. There is a proliferation of Pay Day lenders as economic stresses lead to greater reliance on credit. In fact, a number of community researchers observed that Payday lenders were fighting for space with employment agencies.



The business environment has been impacted both by broader forces restructuring the Canadian economy but also by the loss of local demand as middle income jobs have been lost with the loss of manufacturing jobs in places such as Weston-Mount Dennis and Hamilton. In some of the neighbourhoods in all three regions, businesses have closed and moved out while others that are not as economically vibrant and provide fewer jobs opportunities, with less pay have moved in instead. In Toronto and Peel, participants discussed the option of moving out of the city to look for work as increasingly common in the neighbourhoods, while in Hamilton, participants identified long commutes to Toronto seeking employment.

Governments have been slow to act to respond to their developments, whether it is to regulate precarious forms of employment that have taken the place of standard employment relationships, support workers who are precariously employed or focus program responses on the new entrants into the local economies. Wages have lagged and so have working conditions. The distress in the neighbourhoods is consistent with the increase in low income documented in a number of other studies, especially among vulnerable groups such as women, immigrants, racialized and LGBTQ populations.<sup>2</sup> Participants were aware of some government and non-governmental sector activity though in Peel region such as the Rent Supplement Program, Accessible Transportation, the Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and the United Way of Peel New Investment Strategy focus on individuals vulnerable to poverty

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<sup>2</sup> Block and Galabuzi, *Canada's Colour Coded Labour Market: The Gap for Racialized Workers*. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2011.

## COMMUNITY RESOURCES

The research documented varied resources from neighbourhood to neighbourhood and also raises some questions about the adequacy of some of these services and the need to address social and physical infrastructure gaps in the intermediate term. The research also identified ways in which neighbourhoods can leverage their resources to mitigate the impact of precariousness in employment and livelihoods. Residents rely on a range of existing community services to maintain a foothold on their lives and households in these communities. These community assets include:

Social and recreational programs	Food banks	Employment services - both non-profit and temporary agencies	The public health care system – hospitals, community health centres, walk-in-clinics
Municipal and community services	Public housing	Social (income) assistance	Public Transportation



## INTRODUCTION: PRECARIOUS EMPLOYMENT IN SOUTHERN ONTARIO

The inspiration for this project grew out of the United Way of Toronto's 2007 report, *Losing Ground, The Persistent Growth of Family Poverty in Canada's Largest City*. The report documented the growth of household poverty in Toronto and its association with precarious employment. The report's key research findings indicated that the median income of Toronto families was static in the 2002-2005 periods.

Precarious employment has been the focus of a number of recent reports by Organizations and community agencies including the Toronto Training Board 2009, Workers Action Centre 2007, Access Alliance Community Health Centre 2011, Law Commission of Ontario (2012). These reports have identified the prevalence of precarious employment. Regions such as Hamilton and Peel have also conducted similar studies with similar findings. A key dimension to the concerns identified in the studies was that an increase in economic insecurity associated with the spread of precarious employment may have adverse implications for the livelihoods as well as the well-being of families and the sustainability of communities. New immigrants in Ontario's large urban centres and other racialized members seem particularly vulnerable to precarious employment relationships which impact their ability to integrate and become fully included in their communities.

In 2008, concerned that employment precarity was aggravating many of the social problems facing Toronto, the United Way of Toronto took the initiative to convene a group of researchers and community advocates to discuss the issue. This led to the formation of a consortium led by McMaster University and the United Way of Toronto which successfully applied for a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Community-University Research Alliance (CURA) grant. The CURA consisted of various community organizations, municipalities and universities. The CURA embarked on a research project entitled: *Poverty and Employment Precarity in Southern Ontario (PEPSO)* covering the Greater Toronto Area and Hamilton. The PEPSO CURA research project includes six case studies and a population-based survey of households in key Southern Ontario urban centres. They are informed by the understanding that employment trends have changed from permanent full-time employment towards precarious employment, making it even harder for people to find stable permanent full-time jobs and lead stable lives. In 2013, the PEPSO CURA published its first report titled: *Its More than Poverty: Employment Precarity and Household Well Being*. The report's conclusions clearly show that precarious employment is on the rise in Southern Ontario. Among other things, it called for key stakeholders to ensure that jobs were a pathway to income and employment security, supporting human capital development and enhancing social and community supports for families and communities. A similar report in 2015, *The Precarity Penalty: The Impact of employment Precarity on Individuals, Households and Communities – and what to do about it*. It affirmed many of the same conclusions, indicating that the condition of precarity was persisting if not growing.

## PEPSO CURA RESEARCH QUESTIONS

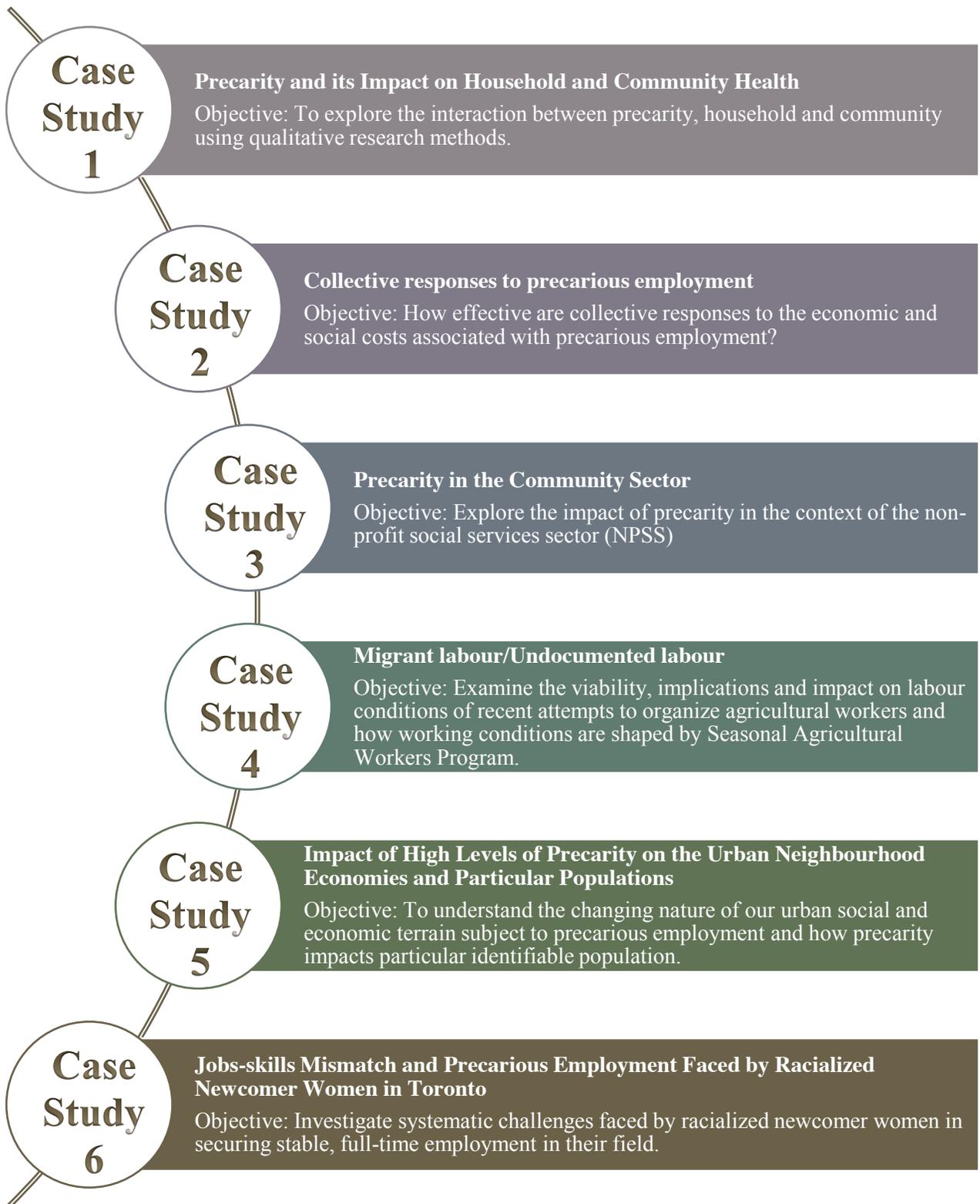
The PEPSO CURA project was established to address the following key questions relating to precarious employment:

- *What is the prevalence of precarious employment in particular groups in our communities?*
- *What are its health implications?*
- *How is the increase in economic uncertainty affecting households, their role in raising children and their capacity to support individuals without permanent employment?*
- *What is happening in our communities and their capacity to support those in poverty?*

## POVERTY AND EMPLOYMENT PRECARIETY IN SOUTHERN ONTARIO RESEARCH PROJECT CASE STUDIES

The PEPSO project involved the following case studies, as well as a population survey of precarious employment in Southern Ontario.





## THE IMPACT OF HIGH LEVELS OF PRECARIETY ON URBAN NEIGHBOURHOOD ECONOMIES AND PARTICULAR POPULATIONS

This report presents key findings on Case Study # 5: *Impact of High Levels of Precarity on Urban Neighbourhood Economies and Particular Populations*. This case study seeks to understand the changing nature of urban social and economic terrain subject to precarious employment and how precarity impacts particular identifiable populations. As well, this case study looks at what resources are available to workers experiencing precarity in different neighbourhoods and whether the impact of precarity on communities varies by type of neighbourhood.

The study focuses on five low and middle-income neighbourhoods in three urban centres; two in Toronto, two in Peel Region and one Hamilton. The PEPSO Case Study #5 research is led by Ryerson University in collaboration with the Region of Peel, the United Way of Peel Region, Community Social Planning Council of Toronto and the Social Planning and Research Council of Greater Hamilton. Selected study areas include Riverdale in Greater Hamilton; Cooksville (low-income) in Mississauga and Springdale (middle-income) in Brampton in Peel Region; Downtown East and Weston Mount Dennis in Toronto. This report is based on data collected in these study areas.

### AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The study sought to better understand how precarious employment was changing the nature of the urban social and economic terrain in select neighbourhoods and how precarity impacted particular identifiable populations. It also sought to explore the connection between the experiences of precarity and the capacity of neighborhoods to respond to it. Finally it sought to examine the relationship between changing patterns of employment, people and the social and economic activities of neighbourhoods.

The study focused on five low and middle-income neighbourhoods in three urban centres; two in Toronto, two in Peel Region and one Hamilton. This PEPSO Case Study research was led by Ryerson University in collaboration with the Region of Peel, the United Way of Peel Region, Community Social Planning Council of Toronto and the Social Planning and Research Council of Greater Hamilton. Selected study areas include Riverdale in Greater Hamilton; Cooksville (low-income) in Mississauga and Springdale (middle-income) in Brampton in Peel Region; Downtown East and Weston Mount Dennis in Toronto. This report is based on qualitative data collected in these study areas. Data was collected using the photovoice methodology from fifty-one (51) research participants, aged 24 – 64 years old who had lived in the selected study areas for a minimum of one year and had been precariously employed in the past year.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study uses qualitative data to explore how precarity impacts livelihoods and neighbourhoods in Peel. The objectives of Case Study # 5 are threefold:

- *To better understand how precarious employment is changing the nature of the urban social and economic terrain in select Southern Ontario neighbourhoods and communities and how it is impacting particular identifiable populations.*
- *To explore the connection between the experiences of precarity and the capacity of neighborhoods to respond to it.*
- *To explore the relationship between changing patterns of employment, people and the social and economic activities of neighbourhoods.*

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study required participants to respond to the following three key research questions to document their experience and concerns related to precarious employment:

1. *How does precarious employment affect (good or bad) your livelihood and your neighbourhood?*
2. *What changes have you noticed in your neighborhood as a result of precarious employment in the neighbourhoods?*
3. *What resources are available in your neighbourhood for people experiencing precarious conditions (i.e. food banks, employment counseling, community services and clinics)?*

When analysing the data, it was discovered that the responses provided by participants for research questions one and two were very similar. As a result, for key themes analysis and report writing purposes, it was decided to collapse research questions one and two. While question three remained unchanged, key themes for this report were analysed based on the following two questions:

1. *How does precarious employment affect your livelihood and neighbourhood, and what are the changes in your neighbourhood as a result of high levels of precarity?*
2. *What resources are available in your neighbourhood for people experiencing precarious conditions (i.e. food banks, employment counseling, community services and clinic)?*

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Qualitative data for this report was collected using the photovoice methodology. Fifty-one (51) research participants, aged 24 – 64 years old who lived in the selected study areas for a minimum of one year and had been precariously employed in the past year took part in the research. Each was asked to select three images per question and prepare a caption explaining the image and the selection. These images and captions were collected and analyzed by the research team.

## WHY PHOTOVOICE?

*Image 1: A former photo voice research participant*

Photovoice asks participants to take photographs to capture issues that are important to them and tell a story about these issues and their importance.<sup>3</sup>

The Photovoice research method positions participants as community researchers. This technique empowers participants from the onset of the project. Participants are trained to use cameras and storytelling to express their experiences and concerns. It enables people to record and reflect their own strengths and concerns, as well as the strengths and concerns of their community.



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## ADVANTAGES

Photovoice offers participants the opportunity to take part in a collaborative research process. It allows them to exert power in the decisions and policies that impact their lives and also brings social issues to the attention of policymakers and program developers by presenting images that cannot be denied.

Photography is fun and photographs can say a thousand words. Photographs can also provide an alternative view on a given social or physical environment and how these issues impact participants. Telling stories about photographs allows individuals to reflect and voice their concerns and experiences.

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## LIMITATIONS

There are also some limitations to this methodology. Time constraints might be an issue as participants are usually required to commit to the research for a long period. Weather conditions

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<sup>3</sup> For the definition, advantages and limitations of photovoice methodology see: CURA PEPSO: Case Study #5. (Winter 2012) Sharing Your Experiences through Photovoice: A practical Guide.

might not be ideal for outdoor photographs and it might also be challenging for participants to express pictures in words. Participants may not be able to select the ideal images to express their sentiments for a variety of reasons.

Along with participants and photographs, some training and support was provided in terms of writing comments to capture the meaning of the photographs.

## ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT

This is a **summary** of three distinct reports from the three regions with the select neighbourhoods identified. *Greater Hamilton, Peel Region and City of Toronto*. The report is organized in a manner that allows the readers to take away a broad overview of the research findings from the three regions, but also be able to review for each region's findings that are presented discretely to facilitate the use of those findings by community members, advocates, service providers and authorities in each of the Municipalities.

The report provides vignettes by image and narratives, of the lives of community members dealing with precarious employment on a daily basis. They are navigating its impacts on their everyday lives and neighbourhoods and engaging a variety of survival strategies, aided by some of the existing resources in the neighbourhoods. Principally though, it is their resilience that we celebrate in this story and the nuggets of insight we offer into the condition and its complexity and contradictions represent the wisdom they shared with the research team.

While the dominant experience is one from low income neighbourhoods, we were able to document some of the experiences of people living in a middle income neighbourhood as well (Springdale, Region of Peel). It is similar in many ways but also indicates a tension between new freehold housing and the many incidences of loss of stable employment or contract, temporary and part time work that generates significant pressures on mortgages. It also raises questions about the gaps in social infrastructure, with issues such as transportation being a constant top of mind, particularly given the rise in gas prices.

## DEFINITION OF PRECARIOUS EMPLOYMENT

**Precarious Employment** is employment that lacks benefits and security. It is characterized by increased insecurity in employment, reduced entitlement to ongoing employment, limited control over work schedules, low pay, limited benefits and fewer opportunities for career advancement. It often involves unusual job contracts, temporary positions, fairly poor working conditions and high risks of health hazards.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> For clarity and easy communication with research participants, the following definition was used: Precarious employment is employment that lacks benefits and security regardless of sector, income level and education.

## OVERVIEW OF THE KEY FINDINGS

The research shows that precarious employment structures new forms and conditions of work. It is associated with limited housing choices, inadequate and unaffordable housing and the rise in poorly maintained and unhygienic rental housing that compromises family health and imposes security risks. These have a direct impact on the quality of life for those dealing with precarious employment. There is a proliferation of PayDay lenders as economic stresses lead to greater reliance on credit. A number of participants observed that Payday lenders were fighting for space with employment agencies. In some of the neighbourhoods, businesses have closed and moved out while others, giving way to new ones with fewer jobs. Governments have been slow to regulate precarious forms of employment as well as focus on the new entrants into the local economies. Wages have lagged and working conditions have deteriorated. Gentrification was identified as a key feature of neighbourhood change in at least two regions. It imposes a high cost of living on low income community members though it may introduce new employment opportunities. It shifts the neighbourhood configuration and has implications as such displacement for activities such as the sex trade. In one neighbourhood, there has been a rise in new subdivision development. However, it comes with limited community services and transportation is a major concern because of the distances from job sites. Food insecurity is identified as one of the primary concerns of those dealing with precarious employment. It is connected to the income insecurity arising from unstable work. Many participants indicated that food should be a human right because it is integral to people's daily lives and should not be subject to market, price and convenience. While many people have resorted to Food Banks to meet their nutritional needs, they are often not able to get fresh, healthy food.



## KEY FINDINGS

Consistent with the findings in the PEPSO Survey Report: *Its More than Poverty: Employment Precarity and Household Well-being*<sup>5</sup>, the findings in this report indicate the concern by residents of the sample neighbourhoods regarding the growing levels of precarious employment and the impact of precarity on livelihoods. This is expressed in various forms showing how their lives have changed through challenges related to the following:

- Uneven labour market access and employment security
- Reliance on Temp Agencies and related adverse experiences
- Uneven work schedules, long hours and erratic shifts
- Income inequality and widening gap between rich and poor
- Vulnerability to rising cost of living and income insecurity
- Declining health status and levels of stress and frustration
- Food insecurity and resort to Food Banks
- Limited access to affordable and adequate housing in a relatively good condition
- Gentrification and its impact on affordability of housing
- Changing neighbourhood economy
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- Degraded neighbourhoods, homes left often unkept
- Housing stress
- Abandoned Canadian dreams, particularly for immigrants
- Pressures on family life and violence against women
- Lack of child care, recreational facilities and tough child rearing environment
- Inability to participate in community or collective activities
- Increased reliance on community and social services
- Municipal services making a difference

The research shows that, in all three regions, precarious employment structures new forms and conditions of work. It is associated with limited housing choices, inadequate and unaffordable housing and the rise in poorly maintained and unhygienic rental housing that compromises family health and imposes security risks. These have a direct impact on the quality of life for those dealing with precarious employment. There is a proliferation of Pay Day lenders as economic stresses lead to greater reliance on credit. In fact, a number of community researchers observed that Payday lenders were fighting for space with employment agencies.

There is a sense of vulnerability, alienation and marginalization that pervades the experiences of precarious employment in the neighbourhoods. This draws from the instability that precarious employment creates in livelihoods and economic endeavours, not to mention its impact on civic activities. Residents in these neighbourhoods are using a variety of strategies to cope, including seeking multiple jobs through Temp Agencies, relying on Food banks, and some moving to other provinces to start new lives. Many look to policy and decision makers at the different levels of

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<sup>5</sup> Lewchuk, Lafleche, Dyson, Goldring, Meisner, Procyk, Rosen, Shields, Viducis and Vrankulj (2013)

government to undertake the necessary regulatory measures to protect them from the vagaries of precarious work and its effects on their communities. Their lives literally depend on action by the government, and community and business leaders.

The business environment has been impacted both by broader forces restructuring the Canadian economy but also by the loss of local demand as middle income jobs have been lost with the loss of manufacturing jobs in places such as Weston-Mount Dennis and Hamilton. In some of the neighbourhoods in all three regions, businesses have closed and moved out while others that are not as economically vibrant and provide fewer jobs opportunities, with less pay have moved in instead. In Toronto and Peel, participants discussed the option of moving out of the city to look for work as increasingly common in the neighbourhoods, while in Hamilton, participants identified long commutes to Toronto seeking employment.

Governments have been slow to act to respond to these developments, whether it is to regulate precarious forms of employment that have taken the place of standard employment relationships, support workers who are precariously employed or focus program responses on the new entrants into the local economies. Wages have lagged and so have working conditions. The distress in the neighbourhoods is consistent with the increase in low income documented in a number of other studies, especially among vulnerable groups such as women, immigrants, racialized and LGBTQ populations.<sup>6</sup> Participants were aware of some government and non-governmental sector activity though in Peel region such as the Rent Supplement Program, Accessible Transportation, the Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and the United Way of Peel New Investment Strategy focus on individuals vulnerable to poverty.

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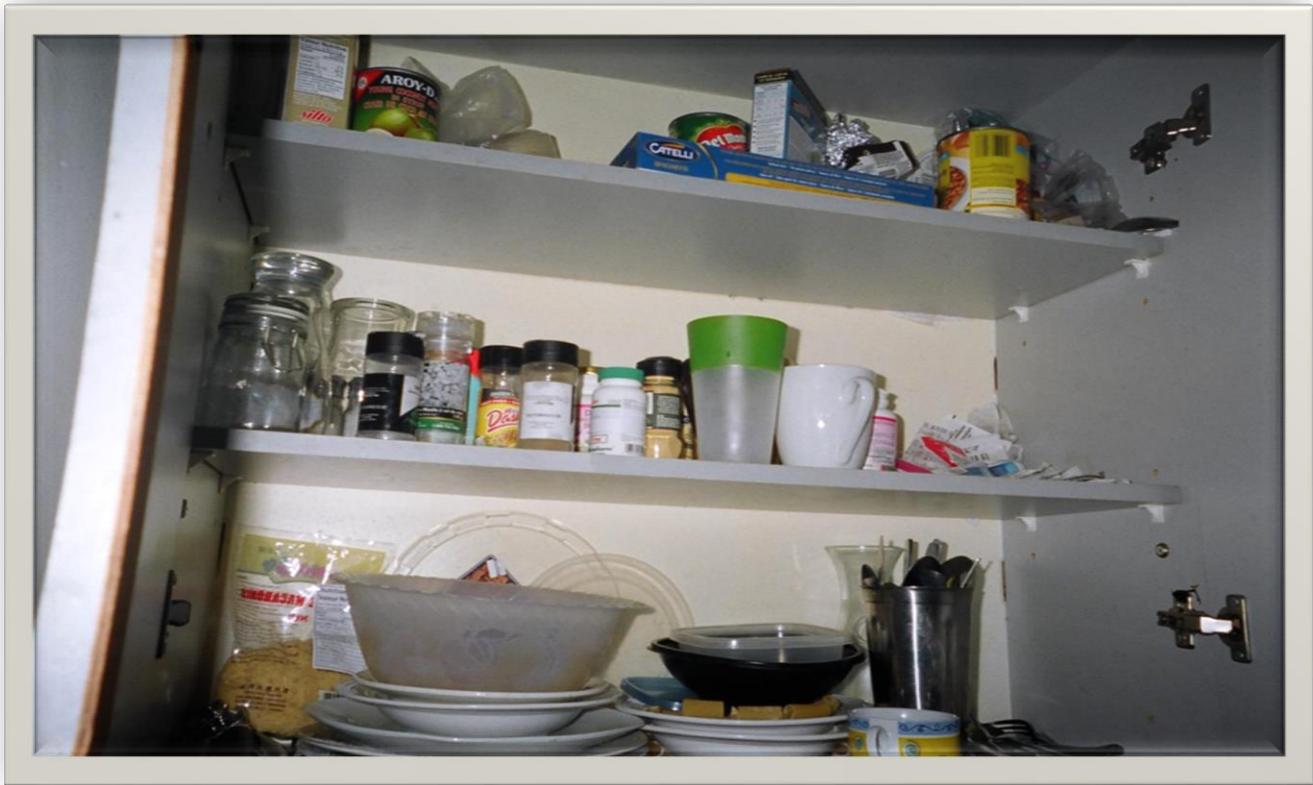
<sup>6</sup> Block and Galabuzi, *Canada's Colour Coded Labour Market: The Gap for Racialized Workers*. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2011.

Gentrification was identified as a key feature of neighbourhood change by participants in Toronto and Peel region. It imposes high cost of living on low-income community members though it may introduce new employment opportunities. It changes neighbourhood configuration and participants indicated that it has implications for such activities such as the sex work in Downtown East in Toronto and access to community services in Cooksville, Peel.

In the Springdale neighbourhood in Peel region, there has been a rise in new subdivision development. However, the fact that it comes with limited community services and inadequate transportation is a major concern because of the long distance to and from job search sites.

Participants reported growing stresses in family life and inadequate Family and Child Care supports even as they seek to balance the demands of labour market flexibility – having to be available for shifts at various hours of the day for work obtained through Temp Agencies while also meeting the responsibility for child care. Participants in Toronto and Peel neighbourhoods discussed the decline in time families spend together or on the playground with the children. Some participants in Peel expressed concerns about spousal violence arising from the strain of income insecurity and the specter of family dysfunctional.





Food insecurity is identified as one of the primary concerns of those dealing with precarious employment and its connection to the income insecurity arising from unstable work is documented in multiple participant submissions. The sense of many of the participants is that food should be a right because it is integral to people’s daily lives and should not simply be subject to the forces of market, price and convenience. Many people have resorted to Food Banks to meet their nutritional needs although often they are not able to get fresh, healthy food.

**Community resources**

Nevertheless, the research also identifies ways in which neighbourhoods can leverage their resources to mitigate the impact of precariousness in employment and livelihoods. Residents rely on a range of existing community services to maintain a foothold on their lives and households in these communities. These community assets include:

Social and recreational programs	Food banks	Employment services - both non-profit and temporary agencies	The public health care system – hospitals, community health centres, walk-in-clinics
Municipal and community services	Public housing	Social (income) assistance	Public Transportation

The research documents varied resources from neighbourhood to neighbourhood and also raises some questions about the adequacy of some of these services and the need to address social and physical infrastructure gaps in the intermediate term. Chief among these are such needs as childcare provided to fit the variable work schedules and shifts, and accessible and reliable public transit to facilitate travel to and from work sites increasingly at longer distances. It also calls for long-term solutions that would involve addressing precarious employment more effectively through legislative action, strengthening local economies, and dealing with the practices of employers who are the conduits of these conditions of precarity in the labour market. Policy level action would include strengthening employment standards enforcement, improving minimum wage laws, community collective action on Living wage campaigns for by-laws/ordinances at the municipal level, Adopt 'not-a precarious employer' designation, Employment equity legislation and the prospects for Unionization for precarious workers.



## DISSEMINATION OF FINDINGS: PROJECT EXHIBITS

The project was able to exhibit the images from the photo-voice research on a number of occasions in neighbourhoods in the three regions.

- Greater Hamilton – July 2012 @ **Dominic Agostino Riverdale Community Centre** -
- Region of Peel – October 24 2012 @ **Sheridan College**
- **Weston Mt. Dennis** – February 27 2013 @ **Jane Street Hub** 1541 Jane and Lawrence
- Region of Peel – **Peel Art Gallery Museum and Archives (PAMA)** September - October 2013 @ 9 Wellington Street East, Brampton

The most significant of the exhibits was the one developed by the Peel Art Gallery and Museum & Archives (PAMA) and shown from September 15 to October 27. Titled **Stable Jobs + Stable Communities**, this was a successful public dissemination event using the research findings and an opportunity to popularly explore the experience and implications of precarious employment and precarity in livelihoods. Over a six week period, it allowed residents to view and discuss the vignettes, comment on them and also contact their elected representatives with demands for action. A number of the panels from the exhibit have become a form of traveling exhibit and have been used liberally by both community partners and staff at the region of Peel. Plans are in the works to create a digital version of the exhibit and possible to create a traveling version.

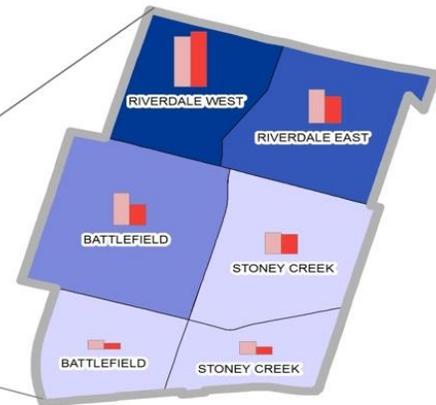
The project team has determined that the exhibition of the photo-voice images is an important part of disseminating the findings and is animating community discussions about the issues raised by the research. Where possible, some of the community researchers have been invited to discuss their contributions on panels and in forums.

The Photo-voice research was an important source of direction as we embarked on Phase II of the project that involved semi-structured interviews with key informants, including community members experiencing precarious employment, service providers and small and medium size business owners. Building on the data collected through photo-voice, the objective was to better understand the impact on precarious employment on livelihoods, the resources available to mitigate its impacts, and the impact on the local business landscape.

A *special thank you* to the community researchers without whom this work would not have been possible. These women and men, working with our site coordinators, were able to paint a rich and complex picture which brought into sharp focus the experience of living with precarious employment in Toronto, Peel and Greater Hamilton.

## GREATER HAMILTON (RIVERDALE)

### Poverty and Employment Precarity in Southern Ontario: Hamilton case study area



#### Legend

- Hamilton Case Study Boundaries
- Former municipalities within the City of Hamilton
- Escarpment

- Number of full-time and part-time workers**
- 860
  - Number of full-time, full-year workers
  - Number of part-time or part-year workers

- % who identify with a visible minority group**
- 0% - 5%
  - 6% - 10%
  - 11% - 30%
  - 31% - 45%

Hamilton case study area boundaries: between Centennial Parkway and Gray's Road, from the escarpment to Barton. Includes Riverdale West, Riverdale East, Battlefield and Stoney Creek planning units. This area was chosen based on the PEPSO precarious employment index used in Toronto, which includes % working part-time, unemployment rate, % visible minorities, % recent immigrants and median household income. For Hamilton, the index was adjusted to include % with Aboriginal ancestry, since the Aboriginal ancestry population is more significant in Hamilton than Toronto (2.7% of population in Hamilton, compared to 1.1% in Toronto). The case study area was chosen because it had a mix of high and low precarious employment neighbourhoods. The total population of this case study area was about 19,000 in 2006, with 37% of the population residing in Riverdale West. Riverdale West is the neighbourhood with the highest employment rate across Hamilton using the PEPSO index (both adjusted with Aboriginal ancestry and without).

Map prepared by:

### 1. How does Precarious Employment affect your livelihood and neighbourhood and what are the changes in your neighbourhoods as a result of high levels of precarity?

#### APPEARANCE OF NEIGHBOURHOOD/HOUSING

The majority of responses spoke to the profound impact of precarious employment on the appearance of their neighbourhood and housing in the area. Some of the comments were directed at the individuals impacted by precarious employment and others suggested that precarious employment was to blame for leaving people in situations where they couldn't adequately care for their surroundings due to lack of money or time or both. Some participants expressed concern about the garbage in the area while others noted that their neighbourhood has become more rundown and less appealing. Some participants reported that due to precarious work, people are forced to move from place to place in order to improve their income security.



*In this picture garbage everywhere, this area should be the cleanest area in this neighborhood, because this is our kid's school. It supposes to be a safe and free from any environment pollutions. This situation exists because precarious work keeps people without any time to keep their neighborhood clean and a good place to live in.*

#### LABOUR MARKET/EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

Fully one third of all photos and stories answering the question about the impact of precarious employment on neighbourhoods and livelihoods dealt with the labour market, employment services and job security. The participants reported that precarious jobs with low wages and inconsistent hours had a negative impact on their neighbourhoods and livelihoods. They were particularly concerned about the loss of jobs previously located in the neighbourhood even if those jobs were precarious

One of researchers summarized the individual comments of many other participants in her photo and story related to the labour market.

*We see a place where people can find employment. People have to line up at 5:00 am in the hopes of working that day and earning some money to make it through the day...There are not enough good full-time jobs in the area... The jobs that are offered here are hard manual work that pays minimum wage. People are getting used and when they are no longer needed they are just tossed away; there is no sense of job security...These types of job resources do not help people find permanent full-time employment; in fact it just leaves them in the same precarious situation as before. Maybe even worse off especially if the*



*employee gets injured on the job and is not able to work anymore. “*

The losses of jobs previously located in the neighbourhood were noticed by many even if those jobs had been seen as precarious when they existed.



*“The closing of the Wal-Mart at Eastgate Square late last year left a large empty store...the new Wal-Mart is in a more remote area not in a mall like before and is a distance. The jobs that were once here are now gone and unemployed people are waiting for these new stores to open to get a job.”*

*“One of the effects of Precarious Employment is that sometimes you will take any job you can get to pay the bills, even if it means earning a few cents per flyer (14-18 cents) doing it. This takes a lot of time in exchange for not a lot of return for your efforts. Spending a few hours putting the flyers together – turning your home into what looks like a paper processing plant, then lugging hundreds of flyers around, no matter what the weather. Why would someone risk slipping on ice, getting soaked in the rain, all to earn a few dollars to put towards the necessities of life?”*



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## COLLECTIVE EFFICACY

Many of the participants identified a loss of collective efficacy - the ability to work together in a community to create social change. Participants noted the importance of working together in order to create change. Many participants attributed the loss of civic engagement to people working long hours and on uneven schedules. They described this as diminishing a sense of community. This in turn makes them care less about their environment, leading to unappealing neighbourhoods. It was also noted that there were others who needed to take responsibility in this collective work. Participants also noted that many parents have to work long hours and do not have the time to go out and play with their children.



*Some community researchers noted that in order to increase income security many parents have to work long hours and do not have the time to go out and play with their children. "These essentials are good jobs; we should not be worried about providing food for our children. We should spend time with them playing at this playground instead of working multiple part-time jobs."*

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## SURVIVAL STRATEGIES

Participants indicated in their stories that residents have had to resort to a variety of survival strategies because of precarious work, while other have chosen to move from the province to another to find work. Most however, have taken to working temporary jobs as a survival strategy. Some participants reported that due to precarious work some people are forced to move from place to place in order to increase their income security.

*“I have Social Service Worker Diploma and I think this is my strength and I am not giving up. I searched and found good opportunities in other province so I decided to move from here.”*



## COMMUNITY SAFETY

Several participants used their photos and stories to express their concerns of feeling unsafe where they live. A number of them noted that their housing is not well-maintained or barred up to decrease chances of break-ins. They described what they saw as a connection between theft and lack of stable employment and income. Some others have barred windows to keep safe, as community safety has become a concern.



*“All the windows are barred up to prevent people from breaking in. When I'm in this area and see this apartment I instantly feel unsafe and I'm sure others in this community feel the same way... People break into homes because they don't have money to buy the things they want or need. They don't have money because they are working for companies that pay minimum wage. Minimum wage is not enough money to live*

*comfortably so the only choice they have is to quit working and go on welfare which isn't enough either, or they break into people's homes and steal their stuff.”*

## COST OF LIVING, STRESS AND OTHER HEALTH CONCERNS

According to several participants, precarious employment has led to the high cost of living in the community. Many participants referred to looking through the weekly flyers in order to increase food options. A few participants noted that precarious employment led to health impacts such as stress and Frustration. Participants also expressed concern about problems related to transportation.



*“We usually go through the flyer to find out where the best prices are that week.” The participant later states that people “have no choice but to shop around for cheaper food and other essentials that these flyers advertise.”*

*She continues, “If individuals had full-time jobs they would not have to resort to these tactics, this situation of searching for better deals would become obsolete. At the moment we need to make sure we are getting the best deals so we can live within our budget, we have to make sure we are getting all the flyers weekly. This is one method to survive in our harsh economical environment.”*

## **2. What resources are available in your neighbourhood for people experiencing precarious conditions (i.e. food banks, employment counseling, community services and clinics)?**

The research identifies ways neighbourhoods can leverage their resources to mitigate the impact of precariousness in employment and livelihoods. Residents rely on a range of existing community services to maintain a foothold on their lives and households in these communities.

These community assets include:

- Social and recreational programs
- Food banks
- Employment services - both non-profit and temporary agencies
- The public health care system – hospitals, community health centres, walk-in-clinics;
- Municipal and community services
- Public housing
- Social (income) assistance
- Public Transportation

A participant took a photo of the many recreational offerings at the Dominic Agostino Riverdale Community Centre. She sees many opportunities for her daughter through this centre. Many of the participants noted the access to health clinics through their photos and stories.



*“The walk-in clinics are a very good thing for the community because most people are having a difficult time finding family doctors and these are ways to get necessary medical attention when needed.”*

*“I truly believe this positive resource outlet will assist my daughter into becoming a success in her future and not allow living in poverty to be an excuse for her.”*

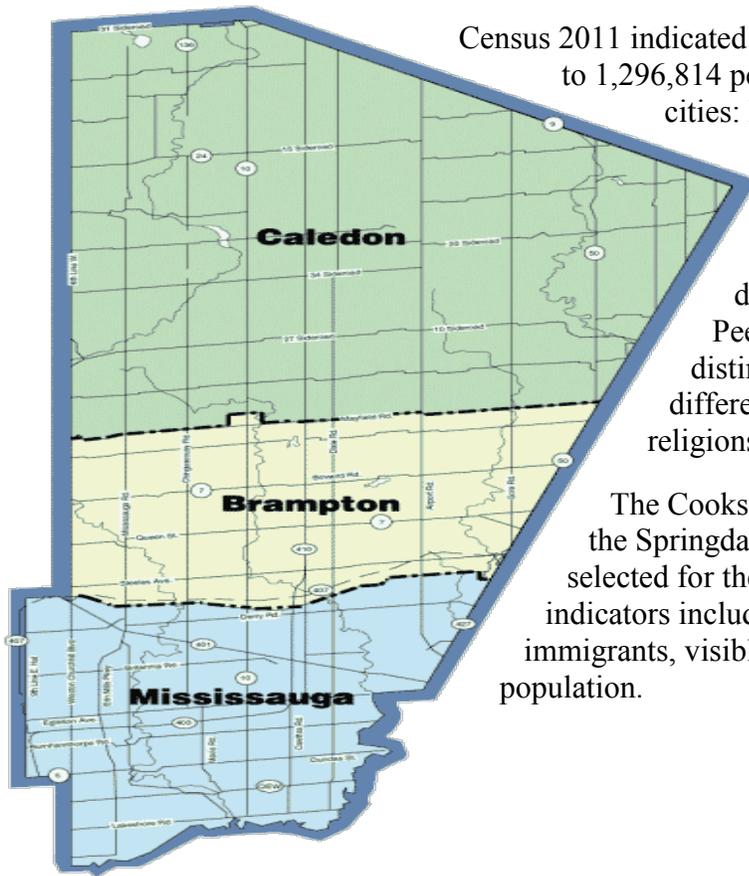
*Despite the reality that the research area has a high proportion of immigrants and almost two-thirds of the community researchers were newcomers to Canada, only one participant noted the high number of immigrants in her community and the resource available to assist. “This community has the high volume of immigrants and St. Joseph Women Immigrant Center provides Settlement services to newcomers.”*

*Although there were a number of positive resources identified, there were also barriers to accessing these same resources such as a lack of transportation. “I found it very difficult to find resources close to my home. Even this resource is not within walking distance and would require a bus ride or drive.”*



The report raises questions about the adequacy of some of these services and the need to address social infrastructure gaps in the intermediate term. It also calls for long-term solutions that would involve addressing precarious employment more effectively through legislative action, strengthening local economies, and dealing with the practices of employers who are the conduits of these conditions of precarity in the labour market. Policy level action would include strengthening employment standards enforcement, improving minimum wage laws, community collective action on Living wage campaigns for by-laws/ordinances at the municipal level, Adopt ‘not-a precarious employer’ designation, Employment equity legislation and the prospects for Unionization for precarious workers.

## PEEL REGION



Census 2011 indicated an increase in Peel's population by 11.8% to 1,296,814 people. Population growth break down by cities: Mississauga grew by 6.7%, Brampton by 20.8% and Caledon by 4.2%.

Mississauga accounted for 55% of Peel's population, Brampton 40.4% and Caledon 4.6%. Based on 2006 census data, immigrants made up over 49% of Peel's population. Peel is home to over 93 distinct ethnic groups and residents speak 60 different languages and practice a variety of religions.<sup>7</sup>

The Cooksville neighbourhood in Mississauga and the Springdale neighbourhood in Brampton were selected for the study based on a set of social economic indicators including: median income, LICOs, recent immigrants, visible minority and percentage of part-time population.

## MISSISSAUGA (COOKSVILLE - LOW-INCOME NEIGHBOURHOOD)

### 1. How does Precarious Employment affect your livelihood and neighbourhood and what are the changes in your neighbourhoods as a result of high levels of precarity

#### COMMUNITY SAFETY

Participants indicated that the community is unsafe due to increasing crimes and a lack of building security. Some participants note that residents feel they are forced into criminal activities for survival.

<sup>7</sup> Mohanty and Alves 2004



*“There are frequent acts of crime and threat to the safety of people living in this area. Managements and business are taking safety precautions by installing security cameras in and around their property to ensure the well-being of others and prevent further crimes from occurring. My building alone has got about 72 surveillance cameras. The numbers speak for themselves. Insecurity and safety is a real issue in this area because people do not have jobs in the area. Even with the security cameras, people no longer feel secure and safe. It is very difficult*

*especially for kids who have to play outside.”*

#### STRESS AND OTHER HEALTH RELATED CONCERNS

Some participants report challenges paying for dental and other health-related costs. Some participants suggested that more people smoke and drink. Others reported seeing a lot of garbage in the streets. Residents feel that due to precarity, they are forced to live in poorly-managed buildings, thereby risking their health and lives.

*“Mississauga is a well-planned, kept and maintained city. But exceptions to these feelings are in almost all areas of this neighbourhood. In this, I have chosen the bad attitude of people in regards to garbage disposal. If nobody is looking, some people are prone to throw waste wherever they feel like. May be these shows their protest against insecure jobs? In the photo, we can see carelessly thrown garbage accumulated in the corner of a fence; people are frustrated and show their irritation by behaving irrationally. This careless handling of things spoils the beauty and environment necessitating extra work and work force”*



## HOUSING

A number of participants indicated that the cost of housing continues to rise in this area because of gentrification. Also, they noted that the construction of expensive condos close to the study area has pushed rent up, making it even more challenging for working-class residents to afford rent. Several participants expressed the need for more affordable and adequate housing.



*“Talking about living in the western world can be better! This is the balcony to the apartment I am subletting. Quite justifying with someone experiencing employment precarity, quite justifying looking at the fact that there is less cash to secure a rental facility at a little bit cleaner environment: good flooring, no bird droppings and good management to renovate or clean its environment. Just the environment is a second torture for somebody who has acquired education to a high level but still the rents keep rising and rising. This makes me come to the reasoning and to now see what pushes people to certain actions: drug trafficking and smoking, rubbery etc, just for a change and ameliorate on life’s condition. I can’t help but think that at some point in time one has to at least be able to lead a good life. Am not sure it is just my apartment because I have created some friends within same neighborhood and we speak the same language. Job insecurity is a bad thing as it automatically identifies you to a certain group or class or people and environment and my thought process has drifted to belong to and match certain characteristics*

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## LABOUR MARKET/ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT

Participants see equitable access to the labour market as associated with good jobs and good living. They note that the lack of Canadian experience hinders highly-educated residents from accessing employment. Some participants also indicated that the income they earn hardly pays for their basic needs. Participants feel they are forced to rely on provincial programs for support due to increasing challenges securing stable jobs, despite high levels of education.

### **2. What resources are available in your neighbourhood for people experiencing precarious employment?**

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## COMMUNITY SERVICES/SOCIAL SERVICES

Some participants acknowledge the availability of community services in the area such as the Indian Rainbow Community Services. However, some individuals explained how cultural stigma can prevent access to available resources for some residents.

Even though resources are available for those experiencing precarity, participants report that inability to afford increasing bus fare prevents access to these resources.



*In the photo, it shows a place for services for new immigrants. We can consider this as a resource for new immigrants who come to Canada hoping for a better living. The picture also shows the India rainbow community services for new immigrants. These agencies provide various services for newly landed immigrants. They basically help new people to get adapted to the society by upgrading their English proficiency, mentoring their mindset, preparing them for interviews, preparation of resumes in the Canadian format and most importantly building networks. With such services, new immigrants get groomed and become merged into the society. With these community services around, the employment scarcity or insecure jobs can be overcome*

## HEALTH

Participants report that many healthcare services are available in the area, however, a lack of resources to afford these services prevents access. They maintain that despite free consultation, several residents still experience difficulties paying for drugs and other health-related costs. Some community researchers report that job insecurity, low income and a lack of employer- provided drug and dental coverage prevents access to health care in various ways.



## LABOUR MARKET AND EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

Participants indicate that there are many employment counseling services and temporary agencies available in the area. Community researchers, however, note that temporary agencies lack jobs and are unreliable. Several participants report challenges finding stable and well-paying jobs. Community members depend on income support from the government and other sources to make ends meet. The cost of living is high and so is transportation. There is some access to services through publicly supported community Centres, YMCA and such. Food banks also help fill the gap from time to time. However, all these do not fully compensate for the preferred option of a secure job with a living wage and a life of dignity.



*Employment agencies lots of them, many of them will take your information and not give you a job, and then sell your information and if you do receive a job from them (agency) they pay you half the wages. That is totally unfair, why someone should go out and work and pay agency half of what they should receive. I say its slavery in a subtly way. All these agencies are holding back people from receiving the wages and benefit they deserve, I say we should done away with employment agencies and allow the individuals to go out and find the employment they want. There should not be a third party involved”.*

## SPRINGDALE (BRAMPTON – MIDDLE INCOME)

### 1. How does precarious employment affect your livelihood and neighbourhood and what are the changes in your neighbourhood as a result of high levels of precarity?

#### COST OF LIVING/INCOME INSECURITY

The Springdale neighbourhood is middle income, but participants indicate that it also harbours hidden poverty and real hardships related to income insecurity. They report daily struggles to feed their families and pay monthly bills due to rising prices and a lack of adequate income. Income insecurity creates stains in family and relationship, and in some cases also leads to partner abuse. Participants indicate that residents experiencing precarious employment seek a variety of options for food and financial security, including relying on the government for support, accessing food banks, scanning shop flyers for cheap bargains and using different addresses for vehicle registration to reduce cost.



*“Changes due to the precarious situation has a down side and an upside. Photo number one shows the upside of the situation. People with high end salaries or earnings go*

*for big houses in rich areas. They also opt for luxurious cars. It will show in their way of living also, like big lavish outings in weekends, children studying in private schools where they have to pay monthly tuition fees, shopping lavishly, entreating friends with costly foods and alcohol drinks, and wearing expensive clothes. The down side is that, due to high precarity, people are barely making ends meet. People in the neighbourhood are more concerned about food and housing. Owning a car, taking children out for recreational activities is luxury these days.”*



*“Contrary to the popular belief that everyone who lives in this area lives in a big house, I believe that ‘hidden’ poverty is masked in our community although there are many housing development springing up on farmlands around the neighbourhood - from the outside it looks as if residents all have well-paying jobs but the reality is that many of these single family dwellings are increasingly occupied by multiple families in order to spread the burden of the associated costs of home ownership. Basement apartments (Legal or otherwise) are also increasing as those who have been able to buy a home are looking for alternatives solutions to supplement their household income and others are seeking more affordable housing options. People are working long or shifts or have multiple jobs often leaving early in the morning and not returning until late night. My child, amongst others I see around, is now a latch-key child. There is very little interaction between neighbours – you hardly see each other, even at weekends. As I walk around my neighbourhood, I am seeing more damaged, unrepaired cars, which leads me to believe that the owners may not have enough money to repair or replace them.”*

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#### CHILDREN/CHILDCARE

Several participants report difficulties meeting school-related costs and paying for extra-curricular activities for their children due to a lack of funds. In a middle income neighbourhood, this is a key source of alienation.. Parents’ inability to afford healthy snacks affects childrens’ performance at school. Parents also increasingly find it difficult to pay for extra-curricular activities, resulting in program cancellations. Some parents report difficulties spending valuable time with their children due to the precarious nature of their jobs Several participants suggested that children are

increasingly engaged in criminal activities due to a lack of opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activities.

*“Precarious employment affects the children whose parents are either looking for a job or working part time due to*

*precariousness.*

*Parents find it hard to fulfill basic needs of their children such as healthy snack or lunch for school. As a*

*result these children lack the*

*energy to be as good as other students who enjoy a*

*good breakfast at home and healthy snack and lunch for school. Parents are not*

*able to register their children for extra-curricular activities after school that are available in the community. It affects my neighbourhood because there are usually not many registrants available to run a program due to insufficient enrolment which leads to limiting the opportunities for other kids who are looking for these activities.”*



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## HOUSING

Participants report housing affordability as a major issue. Many said residents struggle to pay their mortgages, property tax, home and car insurances. Participants indicate that residents increasingly share accommodation and rent their basements to spread out costs. Other residents, however, moved out of the selected area due to their inability to afford the rising cost of housing.

*“A picture of a beautiful house surrounded by dark background reflecting the insight story. A newly constructed neighbourhood, with beautiful houses from the view point of an outsider. Unable to see beyond the four walls of these houses, people live in darkness and the neighbourhood is still highly rated as “RICH”. The realities behind those doors are extreme poverty and hardship due to high levels of precarious employment. Residents struggle every month to pay their mortgages, home and car insurances,*



*property tax and other bills. There is instability due to insecurity in income. We can't plan anything for the short or long term. We came to Canada with big dreams hoping for a better life. We started working from low and worked hard to high in terms of position, pay and lifestyle then started again from scratch and work even harder to make end needs after losing my job. Precarious employment has also led to a sting of family issues. We had to relocate. The kids cannot concentrate on their education due to moving, unable to participate in extracurricular activities due to lack of funds. We have seen many of this neighbourhood kids engage in criminal activities such as buying cheap gas from a dealer to resale, cashing cheques for a stranger and selling stolen items just for few dollars. Family issues, relationship stress, split... the environment at home is not peaceful as before. To raise some money to support my family, I thought of renting out my basement but this is also impossible because of lack of money to renovate it. Considered illegal in some part of the City, I do not want to get myself into any trouble with the authorities”*

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## LABOUR MARKET AND EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

Participants indicate that jobs gained through Temp agencies are unstable and pay minimum wage. Participants describe their jobs as unstable, without predictability or paid holidays. Some community researchers report that a lack of access to a computer, internet and transportation prevents access to employment.

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## TRANSPORTATION

Participants report that transportation availability, accessibility and affordability are major concerns. Residents increasingly rely on public transportation to access employment. Participants suggest that some supports should be provided to those looking for employment.



*“Precarious work affects my livelihood in a bad way. Someone who is unemployed must rely on public transportation to get to and from job interviews. But the cost on the bus is getting too expensive at \$3.25 and increasing. How can someone like me afford to go to job interviews if it cost \$7 every time? Where am I supposed to get the money to pay for it, if I have no money coming in? Prices should be lower and more reasonable to afford.”*

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## ABANDONED CANADIAN DREAM

Participants reported that many immigrants have given up their ‘Canadian dream’ because of the inability to secure permanent employment that pays them sufficiently to live in an urban area with a high cost of living. Work is difficult to find. When available, it is insecure and cannot promise long term security in terms of residency. It does not pay enough to live off of and it cannot be relied upon to raise a family. The relocation has implications for community building and for the city and region as well. Communities require a degree of residential stability in order to plan for services as well and ensure that community life is vibrant.



*“I am forced to move from this area because I cannot afford to live here. I have no money for gas or to buy cars for my children to go to the go station so they may take the Bus to the University. We cannot afford to send our children to school in an expensive city, like Toronto. With a temporary job, we do not have any holidays and we are reluctant to even ask fearing that our employer may fire us. Our family can never spend quality time together and it is very difficult to monitor what our children are up to. Although we are covered by OHIP, the cost of our medication is still a burden we have to face. We go to the doctor but we cannot afford to buy the prescribed medication because we have no benefits, no insurance. What is the point of going to the doctor if I remain sick? I require tensors for my arm and pills for the pain, but of course cannot afford to purchase this. Some people go on EI and have the relief of knowing that they will receive money tomorrow, that they are somewhat financially secure. Everyone is trying to take advantage of EI and welfare, this is stressful for the government and the economy overall.”*

**2. What resources are available in your neighbourhood for people experiencing precarious employment (i.e. food banks, employment counselling, community services, clinics)?**



The value of community services is acknowledged by the participants as the availability of services makes it easier for those in precarious employment to access them. Yet, several participants indicate that tight budgets, a lack of resources to pay for program fees and increasing bus fare limit access to services. Some participants think that the area is underserved. They suggest that bringing services and programs closer, and making them more affordable will increase accessibility.

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COMMUNITY SERVICES

Participants identified a number of key resources in the neighbourhood that community members dealing with precarious employment can access. A multi-service centre represents an effective way of access to services. However, several participants report that the community services available in the area are not adequate. Some expressed concern about the pay-per-service model that makes services too expensive for community members.



## FOOD BANKS

Participants indicated that there are no food banks available in the area. Residents access food bank services in other areas. Participants think that there is a need for more food banks in the selected area due to increasing demand.



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## HOUSING

There is a tension between the proliferation of freehold housing in the area and the growth of the ranks of precariously employed. Building houses creates jobs and some of the housing provides rental space, although most of it is family housing. For home-owners, precarious employment means a real struggle to keep up with mortgage payments and property taxes.



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## LABOUR MARKET AND EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

Participants experience difficulties accessing employment services due to poor transportation options and lack of resources. Many indicated that Temp Agencies are the most direct way of acquiring employment although they have their drawbacks. People have no control over their schedules or shifts and often they have to wait by the phone every morning to get work.

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## TRANSPORTATION

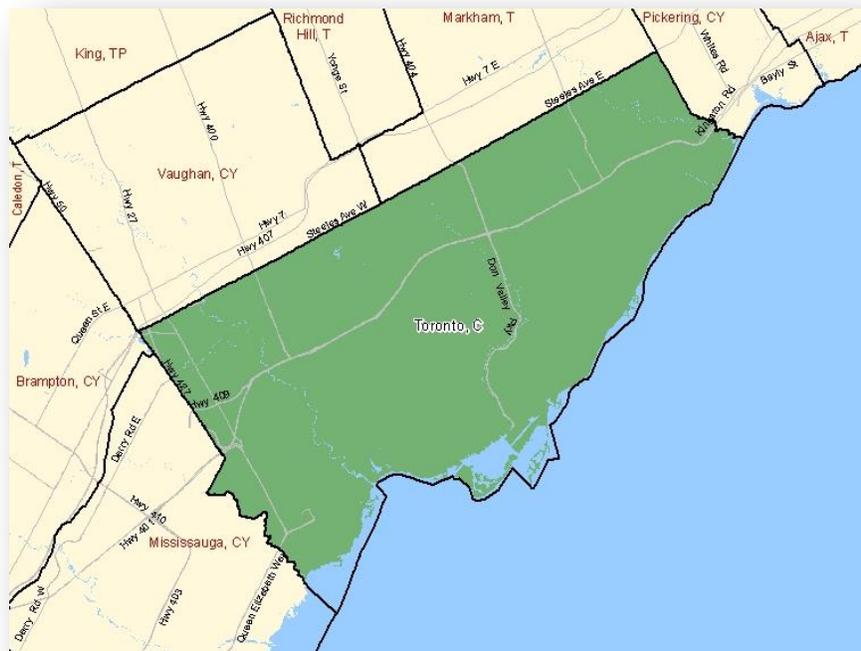
While acknowledging the importance of transit services where they exist, participants indicate that there are limited services available for those precariously employed. Where available, public transit is of real benefit but it is not adequate. A lack of resources to afford increasing transportation costs might prevent access to free community programs.

## CITY OF TORONTO

The Greater Toronto Area (GTA) contains 18.1% of Canada's population and consists of the City of Toronto and the following four surrounding regions: (Peel, Durham, Halton, and York). The City of Toronto is the largest region and holds 46.8% of residents in the GTA. The population of Toronto is 2,615,060 and its residents are found in the following 5 boroughs: North York, East York, Scarborough, Etobicoke, and York (Toronto).

Based on 2006 census data, immigrants make up over 50% of Toronto's population. Toronto is considered one of the most multicultural cities in the world, is home to over 200 distinct ethnic groups and residents speak over 140 different languages and practice a variety of religions.<sup>8</sup>

Poverty is a serious problem in Toronto. Growth in poverty is evident amongst Toronto's most vulnerable residents: Aboriginals, recent immigrants, racialized communities, LGBTQ Youth and transgendered people, single parents, unattached seniors (especially women), and families with children. As of 2011, nearly a quarter (23.1% or 604,047) of Toronto's population lives below the Low Income Cut-Off (LICO).<sup>9</sup>



<sup>8</sup> City of Toronto Fact Sheet- Release of the 2006 Census on Ethnic Origin and Visible Minorities: [http://www.toronto.ca/demographics/pdf/2006\\_ethnic\\_origin\\_visible\\_minorities\\_bacgrounder.pdf](http://www.toronto.ca/demographics/pdf/2006_ethnic_origin_visible_minorities_bacgrounder.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> City of Toronto Fact Sheet- Poverty, Housing and Homelessness in Toronto: <http://www.toronto.ca/affordablehousing/pdf/poverty-factsheet.pdf>

## TORONTO DOWNTOWN EAST

The questions generated comments that provide strong evidence about the experience of precarious employment and the need to focus efforts on providing healthy food, making those provisions a matter of citizenship and not affordability, and ensuring that services such as food banks and childcare accommodate the irregular hours that those precariously employed juggle. They spoke to the importance of a broad number of social services in responding to a complex set of social and economic needs that require constant and vigilant monitoring. Housing is an ongoing concern, especially in a city like Toronto with astronomical property values that push those on lower incomes further and further to the periphery. Children play a vital role in the future of the city and the research demonstrates the lack of consistent investment in children and youth.

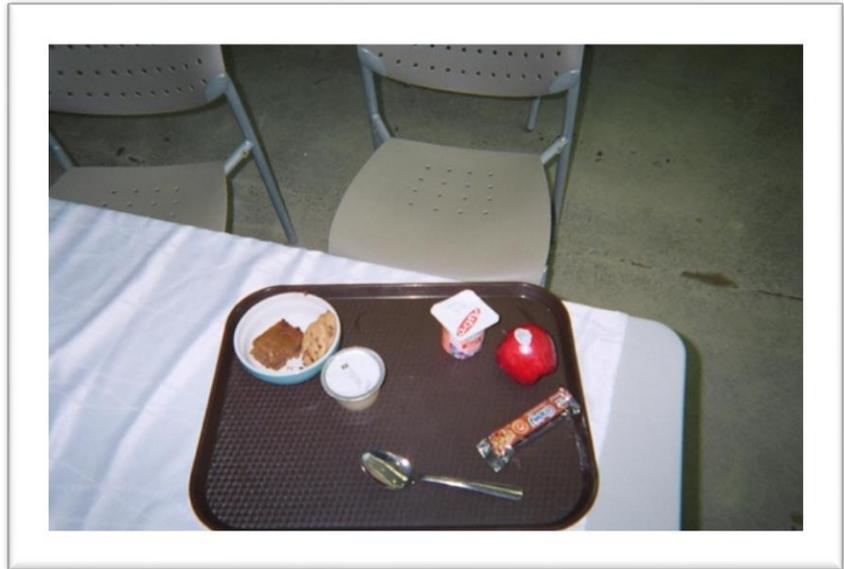


**1. How does precarious employment affect (good or bad) your livelihood? What changes have you unnoticed in your neighbourhood as a result of precarious employment?**

## FOOD SECURITY

Food was mentioned more frequently than any other issue. Underpinning the theme of food is an overlap with social services that needs to be noted.

*“The changes that I have noticed in my neighbourhood are more drop-ins. When someone doesn’t eat well, they can be sparked easily. Doesn’t matter what you say or do, people need food. [...] When the city changed the structure of Regent Park, it put in new drop-ins. But there’s no food. The meals are very small. The food is expired. You must get to the food fast, because if you miss the timeslot, you’re done.*



*You must then wait until the next shift. If you missed the last call, your day is done”*

Participants indicated that the issue of food is one of the primary concerns of people experiencing employment precarity. Fresh, healthy food is not always available and accessing food banks is difficult for those working irregular, just-in-time, part-time jobs. The multiple demands of finding healthy food at food banks, working and looking for more stable employment combine in ways that structure unachievable goals. Making more charitable food bags available does not solve the problem of inadequate employment options.



*“Most often I can’t get there when the food bank is open or I have to miss a day of work to go to only receive unhealthy or expired food. [...] I use the food bank every month and I find it helpful to offset what I can’t afford at the grocery store or risk shoplifting”*

Because of the decreased support for drop-ins and food banks, some have eeked out small plots of land for ad hoc community gardens. While this is encouraging from the perspective of community engagement, as one participant notes, it also signals desperation.

*“There’s an unused piece of yard and dirt. They decided to plant some seeds and grow their own fruits and vegetables. Obviously money is tight and seeds are cheap... ..but the fact that neighbours feel they need to do this is a sign of the lack of money to buy these items.”*



Food is integral to people’s very existence and should not be subject the market, price or convenience. Rather, governments should focus on the accessibility and provision of adequate amounts of healthy food on an ongoing, sustainable basis. Many participants indicated that the right to food security is a basic right of citizenship.

## SOCIAL SERVICES

Newly unemployed participants immediately sought social services for re-training to broaden their appeal in the job market. Despite these time consuming efforts, they are not always fruitful. People become more and more disheartened the longer they remain attached to employment precarity. Participants indicated that while unions are imperative for establishing good jobs and protecting workers, in a limited job market they can be perceived as a barrier for those without unionized experience.

Training Centres provide both practical resources to help with job hunting as well as optimism needed to maintain hope in a tight job market. Some noted that even though training centres were not necessarily a ticket to a job, the services kept them active in their job search and up-to-date with employer expectations.

Social service centres such as the Afro-Canadian Cultural Centre in Weston Mt. Dennis and the Action Centre in Regent Park helps with basic skills such as literacy. For those dealing with addictions finding steady employment and social acceptance can be particularly difficult.

*"Suddenly I found myself unemployed but I remained optimistic that I would find a job within a month. After sending several resume[s] I started to lose hope .... [...] I visited the Centre for Education and Training and got help from the experts in preparing my resume. [...] The Centre for Education*

*and Training provides access to computers and high speed internet, photocopier and fax machines at no cost. Although I have not found a full time job, I still have the access to the resource centre."*



## SOCIAL HEALTH

While physical and mental health issues can be a concern for those precariously employed, social health was also identified as a concern that effects public space. Participants indicated that without employment, days can be long and spending hours in public spaces is not uncommon. One participant blames litter on people without jobs or homes. While this may be an dubious accusation, it nonetheless is a comment about the relationship between the use of public space and the lack of employment opportunities and places for people to go when unemployed.



*“We can see a garden with garbage that has been left here by homeless (who do not have a job) that go over there to smoke and drink.”*

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## HOUSING

Many of the participants reported on the low standard of housing. Some participants were aware that the Association for Community Organizing and Reform Now, Canada (ACORN, Canada) is especially active in the Weston-Mt Dennis area and has launched a Toronto campaign for landlord licensing to ensure that housing standards are regulated, monitored and penalized for non-compliance.

*“You end up in poverty with slum landlords and bugs and mice, and almost uninhabitable places with mice coming through the walls and under the doors and sometimes rats and baby mice. It is very unsanitary. I had to sleep on my lounging chair for a whole year because the bugs and mice primarily go around the outsides of a room, not so much in the centre. When they do spray for bugs, it isn’t a very good job or not very often”*



*“The Coalition for Poverty got me my first apartment, the second apartment was advertised in the rental magazine and the third one in the papers. All with mice coming under doors and cockroaches, and sometimes bedbugs. Outrageous! This should never happen!”*

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## CHILDREN’S WELL-BEING

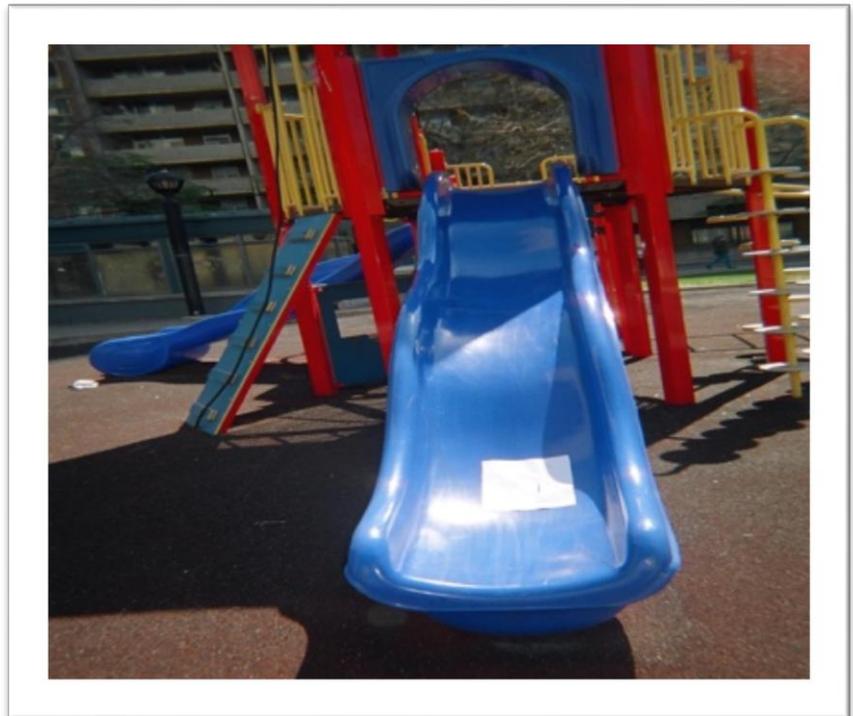
Participants observed that precarious employment has a trickle-down affect from parents and guardians to children. Programs such as music were once viewed as critically important to child development. In today’s economy, income security makes affordable access difficult to what has become “frivolous extras”. If a child must wait 2-3 years to be accepted in a subsidized music program, they may lose the opportunity, or the interest, altogether.



*“This is the Dixon Hall Music School for kids who cannot afford the cost of private piano lessons. The children have to fill out an application and waiting times are 2-3 years. When it’s time to call for availability, the cost of the lesson for low-income families is as low as \$5 per lesson.”*

The issue of intergenerational effects of precarity are difficult for people to measure. However, participants said it is of the utmost importance to attend to these issues. With funding to children’s programs being cut, such as the Music program in Regent Park, there are worries that with increasing employment precarity, fundraising will no longer make up the deficit.

*“Over the years, I have noticed that there are fewer children in the playground area. I was told by some parents that they are more worried looking for a job or working two part-time jobs in order to cover their families’ basics needs. I ask to myself, will all these children have the opportunity to go to college or university? Will they get a secure job? That is why I took a picture of the playground with a question mark written on a blank paper”*



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## HEALTH

Participants indicated that both physical and mental health were additional factors of concern for those precariously employed. One participant alluded to what she said was a direct relationship between mental and physical health and precarious employment. This complex relationship is well documented in other research.<sup>10</sup>

*“I now no longer see the bright tomorrow. Anxiety has caused my blood pressure to rise to a dangerous levels and for the first time I take two medications to control it. I am so preoccupied*



*with expenses that I am constantly juggling my finance in my mind that sleep doesn't come easily. I have visited the Health Centre many times thinking that I was having a heart attack which turned out to spasms, caused by anxiety. If one looks around out community one will see a number of health services and drug stores and the lack of meaningful employment in this community”*

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## EROSION OF SERVICES

Participants gave accounts of the relationship between precarity and increased need for social services and how this relationship affected both young and old. Services to assist people to retrain are imperative for those seeking employment.

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<sup>10</sup> Wayne Lewchuk, Marlea Clarke & Alice De Wolff (2011) Working Without Commitments: The Health Effects of Precarious Employment



*“The government only sees buildings. They don’t see the people. They are only thinking about their own jobs, not other people’s jobs – they don’t have any work [for us]. When the city changed the structure of Regent Park, it put new drop-ins.”*

*“Unfortunately this centre [that offers art classes to youth] always struggles financially*

*because there is no [longer any] government funding. There have been changes to funding recently. Children pay geared to the income their families have. [...] Over 75 children were deprived of the program due to lack of funds.”*

#### NEIGHBOURHOOD CHANGE/GENTRIFICATION

One other issue that participants noted is that of the relationship between the space where these neighbourhoods are located and the social projects of revitalization. There are changes in the neighbourhoods that are notable due to gentrification and living in neighbourhoods marked by the City of Toronto as ‘priority areas’ or more recently ‘Neighbourhood Improvement Areas’ (NIA) has both positive and negative effects. On one hand, it provides new, much needed services and community infrastructure, on the other hand, it stigmatizes community members as unproductive and unemployable.

*“The starting price of the [new condos in Regent Park] is \$200,000 and up. This means that people on a fixed income or working poor can’t afford to live in these new condos.”*



Participants are aware that responding to a neighbourhood in need of revitalizing addresses one set of concerns that focus on bricks and mortar, safety and improved services. Another set of concerns arises from the effects of gentrification, such as rising property values, more policing, noise control and limiting informal social gathering on street corners that disrupt the normal rhythms of the community.

*“We are getting evicted because we live in prime real estate and they are tearing down this building to provide condos and a mall to this community”*



## **2. What Resources are available in your neighbourhood for people experiencing precarious conditions (i.e. food banks, employment counselling, community services, clinics, etc.)?**

There is a long list of amenities and services offered in Regent Park/St. Jamestown. For example one participant refers to places to do laundry, have meals and get food bank items, and a women’s centre. There are also places to make use of computers, fax machines, scan photos, and printer and copier services (Ralph Thornton). Others commented on a variety of available amenities and services including the roles that churches, community centres and libraries in the local neighbourhood.

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### **BASIC AMENITIES**

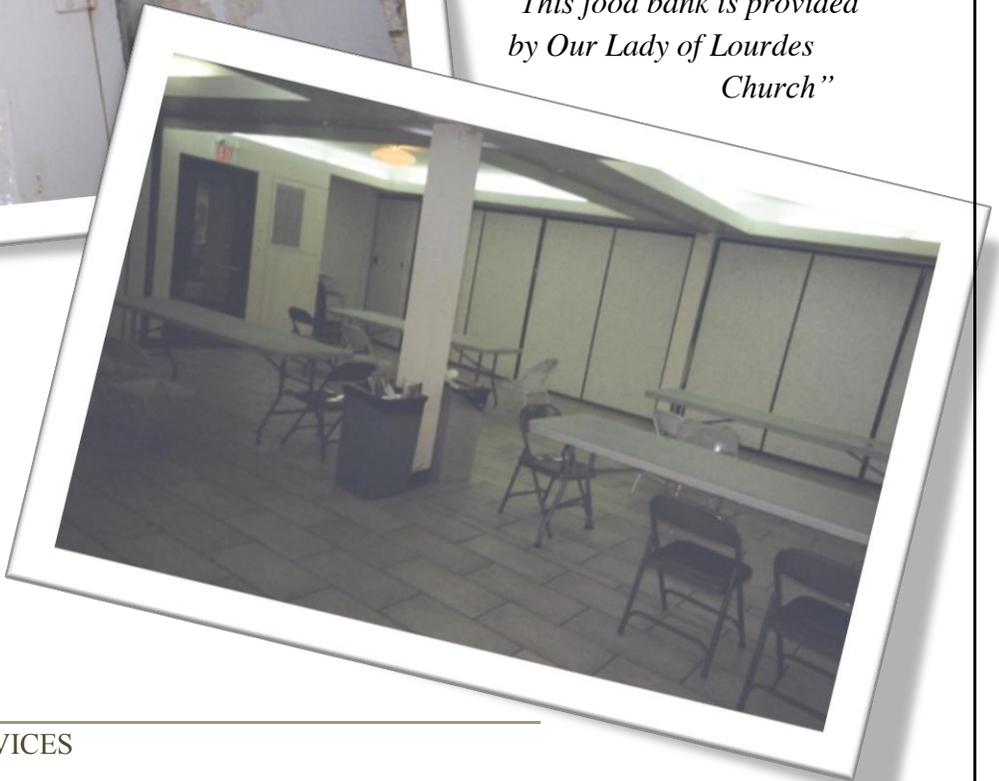
The amenities provided by Community Centres and Churches complement and overlap with those provided by government-funded social services. The participants made it clear that often churches and grass roots community organizing often services more directly related to the needs of people precariously employed.



*“The Catholic Church [Our Lady of Lourdes] has always been the anchor for my family and [...] when my parents face adversities they turned to the church”*

*“This food bank is provided by Our Lady of Lourdes Church”*

*“I went to Our Lady of Lourdes Church on Wednesday nights a lot for a meal and sometimes took home food or a food bank item or more if there were less people.”*



## SOCIAL AND SUPPORT SERVICES

There are other service providers that are important to note. These relate to employment training and job search, among other things. They also provide other life skills supports.

*“[At the] Christian Community Centre they offer many programs for anyone who needs them. The majority are newcomers, but anyone is welcome. There are food programs, emergency food banks, after school programs, language classes and drop-ins to name a few. Feeling like you belong is vital for any neighbourhood’s sense of community and growth”*





*"The Dixon Hall provides cooking, dancing, and sewing classes for seniors in the community. For most of the women, this allows them to be occupied during the day with activities they could afford and enjoy very much. The cost of the programs is \$5 per*

*year. But during the summer time, it is off due to lack of funding. These programs are important for the community and need more funds to stay open."*

In these two neighbourhood catchment areas there is a significant population that deal with drug addictions to go with precarious employment. There is also a population involved in sex work, yet another highly precarious occupation.



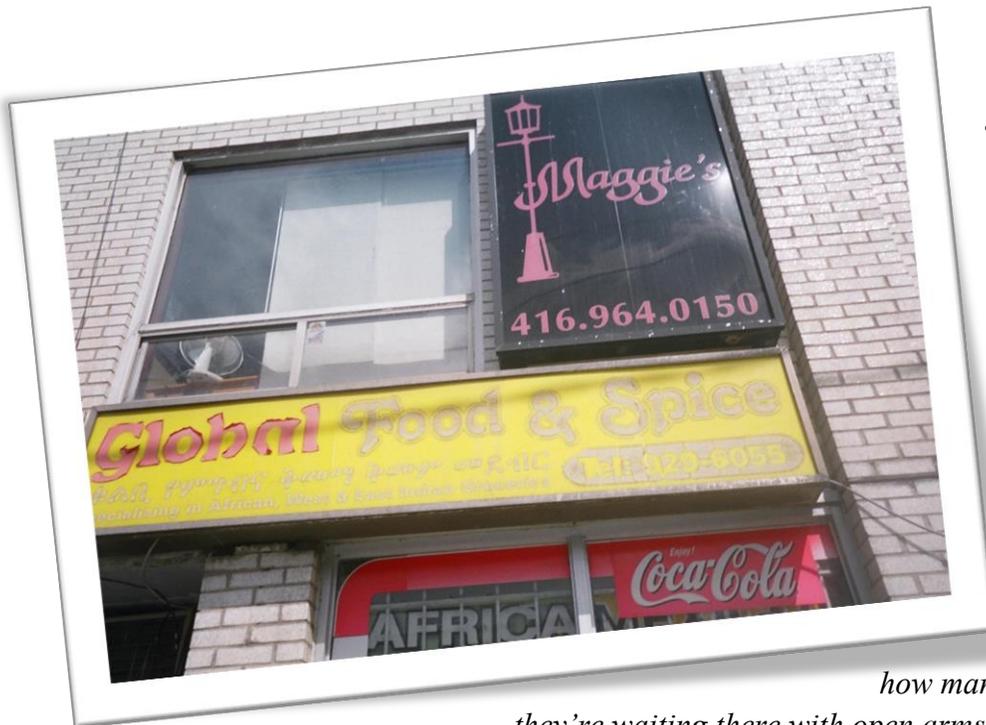
*"This house was originally called the Shopping Bag Lady. [...] The women that work there are not judgmental... and I feel very accepted there. [...] It has lunch, showers, and a food bank. Without these services in the community, I would not have enough food and sometimes shelter."*

*“This is the Regent Park Employment Services centre. It has a small business portal, to us, this is a joke. The people at the centre are doing a good job – they are doing their best, but what can they do when someone can’t read and write and didn’t tell them? Many times I have to go there myself to let them know that someone cannot read and write. I work with the people to help with their reading and writing. I know how to work with the people. They don’t want to go to classes with an instructor they don’t trust. They drop out soon after starting and are back in the same spot they started. People from the community should be educating people living in Regent Park because they already know each other. They bring people from outside to work with people in Regent Park. This is a problem because they don’t know the people. Outsiders also come to take advantage of the youth. They think they’re dummies. They give them drugs to sell and they do it because they need money. The other day, someone asked me about WWII. I went to Chinatown to buy a documentary for them to watch, but I can’t keep doing that by myself. I’m broke but I love the people. I stay there for the people. My heart is in Regent Park.”*



*“At the Regent Park Employment Services centre, they do counselling, help with resumes, and call contracts. This is very helpful but contractors don’t give you work if you’re not unionized. You can’t be unionized unless you work, and unions don’t take workers from Regent Park. The centre also offers services to open a small business. Can people in Regent Park really open a small business? Would I be in Regent Park if I could open a small business? This service is few new immigrants with money. They can afford the rent. People with no education or money can’t go anywhere. This serves people who already have money and that can afford rent in full. The buildings are being divided by normal people on floors one to eight and rich people on floors nine to twelve. It’s not right. They should mix up the people not separate them. The rich people are there to save money so they can buy a house. We have the poor and the money-savers.”*

*“There are so many resources in my neighbourhood for people experiencing precarious employment conditions or needing other services. There is the Health Bus that used to give out vitamins, but now they don’t. They still give out socks and toiletries etc. You can find this bus at free meals or in front of health clinics or places with free meals at various dates and times.”*



*“Maggie’s is a safe place for sex trade workers and also a safe place for girls to do their drugs. I used their services long before I worked for them. Ever since I’ve been kicking around the Regent Park block, I’ve been using Maggie’s resources. No matter how rough you are, or*

*how many days you’ve been up, they’re waiting there with open arms and hearts to offer a safe, clean space to do your drugs or just get away from it all. I don’t know where I would be without them. They just need to be open more.”*

## WESTON MOUNT DENNIS (WEST TORONTO)

Weston-Mt. Dennis has not had as much state intervention over the years as Regent Park and St. Jamestown. It is a neighbourhood in need of revitalization according to government criteria that designates it an NIA. Many local residents agree with this assessment. In Weston-Mt Dennis seven local residents participated in the project, five women and two men. While there is some overlap with the narratives that sprung from the Photovoice in Regent Park/St Jamestown, there is a different quality to this section's stories. There was more explicit reference to the ways in which race and racism plays a role in employment precarity. There is also specific reference to the class shifts that take place as a result of employment precarity. One other significant factor in this set of stories is the tension between keeping one's hope alive at the same time these hopes are battered by loss of dignity and confronting adversity.



**1. How does precarious employment affect (good or bad) your livelihood? What changes have you unnoticed in your neighbourhood as a result of precarious employment?**

Neighbourhood changes reflect the social and economic

conditions of the people who populate the areas. There are systemic conditions that limit the number and types of jobs available, and so people cannot stitch together enough adequate work hours to support themselves, money is taken out of circulation leaving businesses vulnerable to low patronage and ultimately the integrity of the neighbourhood suffers.

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### CHANGES IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

There have been major changes in the neighbourhood economy, from one where there were major established manufacturing plants as employers, such as Kodak Industries, to more of a service

based economy catering to lower incomes such as No Frills supermarkets and Dollar Stores. These changes have come with more precarious conditions and types of work.

*"I chose "Abandoned Beer Store" for this question. [...] The businesses that used to have full-time permanent employment are moving out or have already moved out of the neighbourhood. They are being replaced with lower end dollar stores and/or thrift second hand stores such as No Frills, Dollarama, and The Salvation Army Thrift Store."*



#### COMMUNITY SAFETY, YOUTH

The participants pointed to increased violence and criminal activity in the neighbourhood as a result of precarity.

*"As a result of precarious employment, all night many barber shops, hair salons that do double duty in providing multiple side*



*lines such as music CDs sales, and jewellery, and fashion parlours for manicures and false nails, false hair and clothing sales have opened up to provide services to people in the local area. Prostitutes hang out on the corners... Panhandlers and petty drug dealers who have moved into the area receive hand outs or accost residents of all ages..."*

One participant alluded to the root causes of substance abuse and violence in the neighbourhood as precarious employment. He argued that there are a lot of people around during the day who are not working and they end up engaged in anti-social activities.



*"I chose a picture of a restaurant sign with a dress code because it represents the kind of gangster attitude young people take when they feel abandoned by the system and need to create their own culture in rebellion against the norm."*

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#### CLASS, SOCIAL POWER AND DISCRIMINATION

Participants were painfully aware of the effects of social marginalization on their employment prospects and how it creates precarity. Race, racism and ethnocentricity were reported as factors affecting the possibility of finding secure employment. The community researchers were often witness to statements indicating loss of dignity, the effects of discrimination and the erosion of class status.



*”This is a middle class family selling contents of home. They have lived in Weston over 20 years. They were very angry, [...] and no longer feel they are middle class. “What middle class?” the homeowner replied. In desperation, expensive items were sold for less. I took advantage of the goodies by buying bait spar for myself. Since the family has to downgrade their lifestyle, the bigger question is now, Where are they going to move to?” “I have lived in Canada since 1974 and have received a Canadian education, and I will never be “from here”.*

*“Precarious work has taught me that there is nothing guaranteed in life – today you might have a good job, a car and a house with everything you love in it, but one day you can lose everything because you have lost one thing in your life “a job.”*

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## RESILIENCE

The participants discussed how resilience is essential to dealing with precarity. While they indicated their capacity to remain positive, they were also aware of the systemic structures that eroded their resilience. Resiliency is a double-edged sword, it has the capacity to lift people’s spirits at the same time it hardens them in ways that are often imperceptible to themselves and others.



*”Precarious work affects me in good and bad ways in my livelihood. [...] precarious work has taught me to save money ... I have learned to use resources in the community to save more money for rainy days. For example, now I use a bicycle everywhere to save money on public transit, which saves me approximately \$100 each month and, at the same time, I get my exercise and save on a gym membership. The negative way precarious work has affected me is that not having a stable job that is fulltime*

*makes me worry a lot about how I’m going to pay off my student loan, eat, and pay rent; or what if I get sick without having any benefits, what’s going to happen to me?”*

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## HOPE AND DIGNITY

While getting a job has its benefits, if it is a “just-in-time” job, people are not able to plan their lives or look for more secure employment opportunities. Being hired on the pretence of secure employment only to discover that the job was temporary because it was a “fill-in” for someone away temporarily, contributes to loss of dignity. The experience of precarity is complex.



*“Graffiti Mural Through a Fence best depicts precarity because ..[t]he fence is precarious employment, although the faces in the mural are mostly all smiling and seem happy, I believe that precarious employment has programmed people to smile even though they are not feeling happy with their lives.”*

## 2. What resources are available in your neighbourhood for people experiencing precarious conditions?

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### COMMUNITY SERVICES

There are a number of services in the Toronto west area that provide health services, employment, counselling, seniors’ case management, and post-settlement services for newcomers, children and youth, people with disabilities and families. Working hard without being able to provide the necessities of life for your family can be distressing and community services provide a bit hope for those in a situation of precarity.

The Jane Street Hub is closest to my home and it houses more than one resource. The Jane Street Hub is home to: **Unison Health and Community Service**, which provides health care, preventative health services, counselling, seniors’ case management and newcomer support; **COSTI**, which provides an Employment Resource Centre, a variety of employment services and counselling, settlement and post settlement services for newcomers, students, youth

and people with disabilities; **Macaulay Child Development Centre**, which runs an Early Years Centre to provide children 0-6 and their parents (or caregivers) with parent-child and parent education programs; **Midaynta Community Services**, which provides settlement services and family support for newcomers, especially for the Somali community; **North York Community House (NYCH)**, which provides a range of women's programming with child-minding in several languages; **Yorktown Child and Family Centre**, which offers counselling, youth programs and parenting programs. There are also other community programs such as Zumba Dance Fitness classes and community kitchens depending on whether you fit certain criteria.



*“Holding a job posting at the Jane St Hub because it is a very skinny folder easily looked through in 3minutes. Jane St Hub is an employment centre ...It is definitely good for low-income people. Looking for work is exhausting and costs money if you want to go downtown to look for work and it is very discouraging. As a teenager I was able to find jobs in no time, and now as a grownup I can't even get a menial job”*

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## DEBT

One participant highlighted that looking for employment after school meant she found herself entering employment precarity instead. Her story raises the issue of debt and precarious employment.

*“I feel sometimes that someone like me (young, single, somewhat educated) does not fall into any priority group and I have felt very abandoned and discriminated by the system. I have gone to drop-in centres and other resource centres and felt that because I was young and without a visible disability addiction, that I was judged and people presumed I should be working or in school. What people don't know is that I fell into a huge debt due to the high cost of post-secondary education and due to poverty, homelessness, depression and stress was unable to continue my education.”*

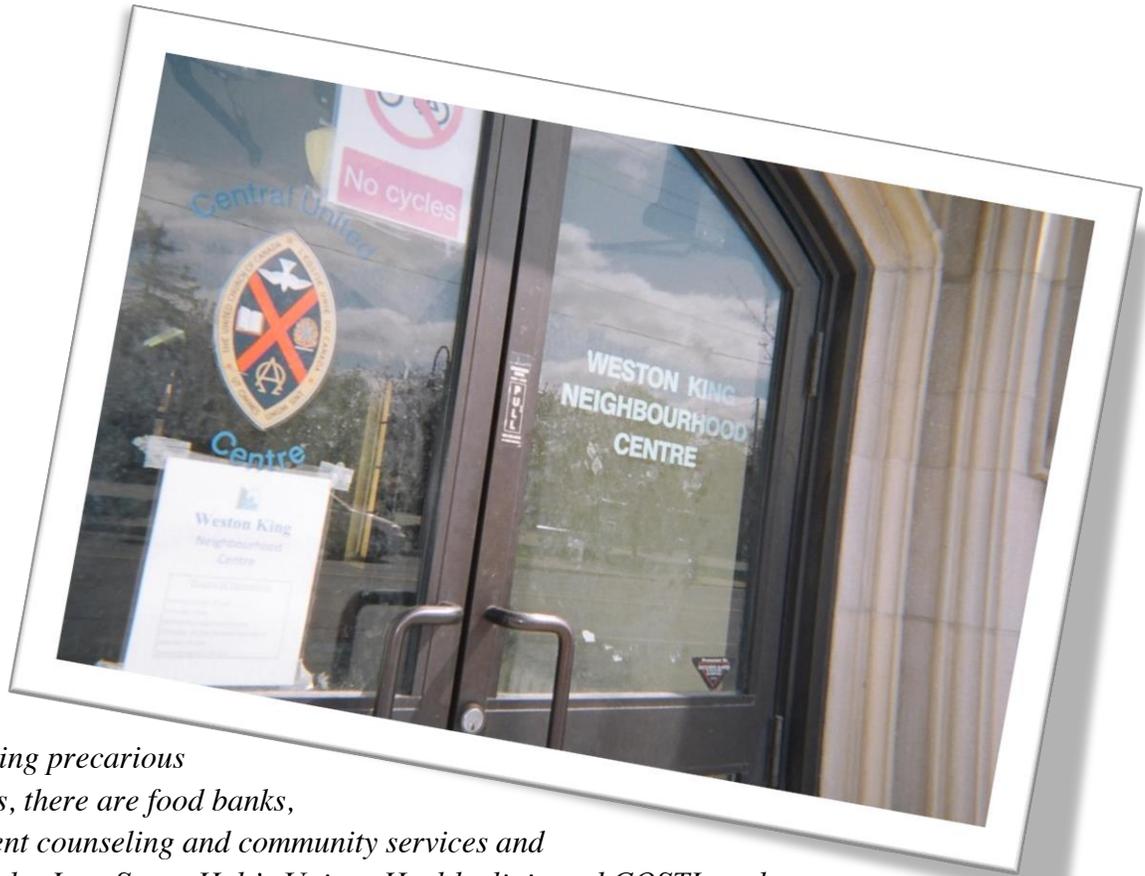
The neighbourhood is disproportionately immigrant in its population compositions and the character of the neighbour and its challenges reflect that. Not only is there a higher proportion of the neighbourhood population that is dealing with precarious employment than in most other Toronto neighbourhoods, but the challenges immigrants face in the labour market are reflected in those high numbers of precariously employed and low incomes. There are also issues of immigrant settlement and integration, family functioning and parenting challenges that are affected by the experience of precarious employment and instability in neighbourhood life arising from it.

*“Ontario’s large immigrant population continues to grow (23% increase from the last census report). Does it make sense that funding cuts are happening now? Walking the neighbourhood, I have observed several settlement agencies closed, few foreign banks open, and lack of staff. Elderly people are overwhelmed with families coming for good! And support?”*



*“I was really encouraged despite the vast need for so much, as I visited an organization that believes in collective work and responsibility - Ujima. It is filling a niche for fathers to step up and support their families. Many of the fathers who visited Ujima were young men in their late teens and twenties. The environment was very solid and positive, with role modelling, teaching, cooking, and reading.”*

Local community agencies have been forced to step into the breach to support people in precarious employment. The services range from employment counselling services, to health care services, to family support services to food banks. The local faith communities play a key role in community support as do government funded not for profit community agencies.



*For people experiencing precarious conditions, there are food banks, employment counseling and community services and clinics in the Jane Street Hub's Unison Health clinic and COSTI, at the Career Foundation, at the health clinic in Shopper's Drug Mart, and food banks at Frontlines, the United Church, and the Salvation Army. I have used the Career Foundation resources since October 2010 when my Ryerson University contract ended. I also receive food handouts from my next door neighbour, and when I do my volunteer work I am compensated with a slice of pizza or chicken wings and a glass of pop. I have been made to feel like I know nothing."*

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The changing nature of employment in the past decade from permanent full-time to precarious employment is evident in both study areas and has a significant impact on livelihoods and neighbourhoods in various ways. The research data indicates that precarious employment affects people's ability to support their families and integrate effectively. It affects the ability of residents to make choices around where to live and how to move, thereby impacting health and putting pressure on regional programs.

The key findings in this report highlight the major issues to be considered in the development of policies and strategies to address the issue of precarious employment and the negative impacts on livelihoods and neighbourhoods. The key findings and suggestions also form the basis of the preliminary recommendations outlined in this report. These preliminary recommendations will be further informed and developed based on the findings from the second phase of the research.

- 1 •Policy level action on employment standards enforcement/Minimum wage
- 2 •Living wage campaigns for by-laws/ordinances at the municipal level
- 3 •Adopt 'not-a precarious employer' designation
- 4 •Employment equity legislation
- 5 •Unionization for precarious workers
- 6 •Advocate for more training for job developers to utilize best practices to increase engagement employment partnerships for precariously employed individuals.
- 7 •Advocate for an increase in apprenticeship, professional bridging, and on-the-job learning programs in all sectors including "soft-skills" training.
- 8 •Support the recommendations of the Social Assistance Review to develop a plan to review and address the issues of labour market that results in low pay and precarious employment.
- 9 •Provide an accessible and timely process for reviewing and granting professional licenses to overcome barriers and employment disparities faced by internationally trained professionals in regulated professions.
- 10 •Reform the Employment Insurance program to meet the needs of the growing precariously employed people including reducing eligibility requirements, extending benefits period, and improved access to the Second Career grant.