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It is Living Wage Week.

Initiatives around the world in countries like New Zealand, the United Kingdom and even right here in Ontario are discussing Living Wage and its significance in our society.

As part of its ongoing work, the Niagara Poverty Reduction Network's (NPRN) Wages and Work Task Group has been involved in the calculation of the local Living Wage, as well as prompting discussions about this important benchmark and what it means to our community.

There is much confusion regarding the differences between Living Wage and the legislated Minimum Wage.

Minimum Wage is a standard set by the provincial government that employers must legally adhere to. It is based on a historic standard that gets adjusted based on the policies of the current Ontario government. It is an arbitrary and, some might say, inadequate number.

Living Wage, however, is not arbitrary but rather a mathematical calculation based on a template developed by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. First, a cost of living calculation is developed based on data from Statistics Canada and other credible sources for a family of two adults and two children. It includes basic needs like food, shelter, transportation and childcare which in fact total just over 70% of all costs. Also included are other expenses for community inclusion like cell phone and internet, recreation, school fees and personal care. The earnings needed to cover the actual cost of living for the family are then calculated to become the Living Wage.

In Niagara, the 2017 Living Wage is \$17.57 an hour. And this calculation DOES NOT include debt repayment, retirement savings or home ownership--both the cost of living and Living Wage documents for Niagara can be found at [wipeoutpoverty.ca](http://wipeoutpoverty.ca).

We are extremely pleased that the first certified Living Wage Employer in Niagara, Pre-Line Processing of Vineland Station, was recognized earlier this year and that several more employers have been certified. Pre-Line Processing owners Damin and Debra Starr say, "We believe an individual's productive contribution to our society should provide livability and no one should be working poor. By voluntarily committing to the living wage model and encouraging our peers by example, we set the stage for a more desirable economic environment where everyone can benefit. Since implementation, we have seen positive impacts in focus, workplace morale, overall productivity and a reduction in employee turnover." If you would like to learn more about becoming a certified Living Wage Employer in Ontario, go to [ontariolivingwage.ca](http://ontariolivingwage.ca)

It is quite clear that poverty reduction is a complex issue and there isn't a single solution. Wages are just one element to consider. NPRN is not suggesting that every employer pay \$17.57 an hour, but we are suggesting that the Living Wage is a fact-based, real number that illuminates and informs the poverty discussion. It will take all of us—business, government, individuals and all other sectors to work together to wipe out poverty in Ontario.

During Living Wage Week, let's have the dialogue at our dinner table; at the water cooler at work; at the gym with our friends; online with our social media contacts; with elected officials and anyone else who needs to hear the facts. We believe Ontarians have the right to meet their basic needs and participate fully in the community. Help us to encourage the conversation and start working towards this goal.

Glen Walker

Chair

Niagara Poverty Reduction Network