Biographies for Mayor’s Advisory Panel on Poverty Members

Glen Pearson

In 1974, Glen traveled to London, Ontario and eventually joined the London Fire Department in 1976 as a professional firefighter in a career that lasted almost 30 years. He has been involved with numerous overseas development projects and started the London Food Bank in 1986. He has remained as volunteer director of the London Food Bank for 25 years, also serving as the chairperson of Ontario’s food banks for a three-year period and assisting in a number of feeding projects around the world.

On November 27, 2006 Glen became the Member of Parliament for London North Centre – a position he held for almost 5 years. During that time he was the Official Critic for International Cooperation in the shadow cabinet. Glen presently continues his work as the co-director of the London Food Bank and the executive director of Canadian Aid for Southern Sudan. He sits on the board of the London Community Foundation, and was co-chair of a special campaign to assist My Sisters Place.

Christopher Mackie

Dr. Mackie is a change agent, driving forward innovation in health programs and governance, as well as bringing leadership to difficult health issues like poverty and harm reduction. Since 2013, he has implemented an innovative priority setting and budgeting process that has already shifted more than $2 million of MLHU resources out of low-impact areas into programs that make the greatest difference. He also championed the implementation of cutting-edge harm-reduction programs including distribution of naloxone kits and safer inhalation kits, and is engaging community leaders and anchor institutions across the health and social services sector in a ground-breaking collaborative process to take action on poverty, mental health and addictions and the related broad health issues.

Dr. Mackie has published peer-reviewed papers and abstracts in areas including priority setting, organizational values, the precautionary principle, water fluoridation, Guillain-Barre Syndrome, hepatitis B vaccination and pandemic planning.

Andrew Lockie

Andrew is the CEO at United Way London & Middlesex. Immediately prior to working at United Way he worked for the YMCA of Western Ontario as Vice-President of Educational Services. Prior to that Andrew worked in a variety of roles at the Y including time in New Zealand at the YMCA of Christchurch. He is a strong advocate for collaboration and believes that to be effective, organizations must prioritize partnerships and work together strategically. To that end, he has led numerous successful community collaborations which have led to increased capacity to support those most vulnerable in our community.

Andrew grew up in Toronto and moved to London in 1997, where he lives with his wife Shawna and their two children, Ben and Madeline. He has a BA from McMaster University, and an MBA from the Richard Ivey School of Business at Western University.
He is a Sector Champion for Imagine Canada, co-chairs the Movement Advisory Council for United Way Centraide Canada, and sits on the United Way Centraide Canada Resource Development Task Force. He has served on United Way Canada’s Strategic Planning Task Force, spoken at a TEDx event, and is a guest lecturer at Fanshawe College and Western University at the Richard Ivey School of Business and King’s College. He chaired the Child and Youth Network Ending Poverty Committee, and co-leads the Community Health Collaborative.

Abe Oudshoorn

Abe Oudshoorn is a Registered Nurse, with a background in healthcare with people who are experiencing homelessness. His PhD in Nursing, with a focus in health promotion, explored client-provider relationships in community based care with people who are experiencing homelessness. Abe completed his PhD in 2011.

Abe is currently Assistant Professor and the Year 3 & 4 Lead at The Arthur Labatt Family School of Nursing, Western University. His teaching interests involve community health, mental health, global health, research methods/statistics, and advanced Nursing theory. His research interests include health promotion, critical ethnography, qualitative methods, participatory action research, poverty and health, homelessness, critical theory and mental health.

In 2010, Abe founded the London Homelessness Outreach Network. The group has since merged with the London Homeless Coalition, which Abe has Chaired since 2013. This coalition exists to advise, shape and coordinate community responses to homelessness and related needs to the London area.

Maureen Cassidy

Maureen Cassidy is currently serving her first term as London City Councillor, Ward 5 and Deputy Mayor. She is a Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal recipient for community service and the immediate past President of the Old Stoneybrook Community Association. Maureen’s parents grew up, attended school and were married in London at St. Peter’s Basilica before moving to Sarnia. Maureen is the twelfth of their fourteen children.

After graduating from the Western University with a Bachelor’s Degree in French, Maureen traveled extensively, working in various locales and occupations including eleven years as a Senior Account Executive with a Canadian health benefits company. In 2001, Maureen returned to London with her husband Scott where they live with their three children.

Dharshi Lacey

An immigrant from Sri Lanka, Dharshi Lacey holds a B.A. in Business and Economics. She has over 20 years’ experience working in the London community in the non-profit sector. Dharshi is a Certified Inter-Cultural Competency Trainer for the Cross Cultural Learner Centre. Previously, Dharshi was a Diversity Consultant assisting non-profit boards to assess their organizations, cultural competency and develop action plans to develop more inclusive practices within their board recruitment, board policy, strategic planning and Executive Director Accountabilities. She has sat on multiple non-profit boards herself and currently finished a 9-year term with the Board of Violence Against Women Services, Elgin County including a 3 year term as Board Chair.
Vanessa Ambtman-Smith

Vanessa currently holds the position of Aboriginal Health Lead for the South West Local Health Integration Network (LHIN), where she is responsible for working collaboratively with Aboriginal partners and other service providers to build positive working relationships and identify strategies to achieve positive outcomes for Indigenous peoples (First Nations, Inuit, Métis) living in the South West LHIN area. Vanessa is also the Chair for the Provincial Aboriginal LHIN Network.

From 2009-14, Vanessa worked as the Community Engagement Consultant and Aboriginal Health Lead for the Toronto LHIN, where she focused much of her work on advancing health equity for vulnerable and hard to reach individuals within our community. Vanessa has also held a number of positions with Aboriginal Agencies such as the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres (OFIFC) in Toronto and the De dwa da dehs nye>ss Aboriginal Health Centre in Hamilton.

Vanessa self identifies as a Cree Métis Indigenous woman. Her expertise in the areas of health equity, Indigenous peoples, healthcare policy, along with her perspectives on poverty as a person with lived experience, will provide a critical lens to the work of the Mayor’s Advisory Panel on Poverty. Vanessa holds a B.A. in Native Studies, with a major in Psychology from the University of Trent in Peterborough, Ontario

Helene Berman

Helene Berman, RN, PhD, is Professor, Arthur Labatt Family School of Nursing, and Associate Dean (Research) in the Faculty of Health Sciences at Western University. Her combined background in anthropology and nursing have influenced her work related to health and culture, and have been central themes in her research. Her program of research, funded by grants from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), and Status of Women Canada, has focused on the subtle and explicit forms of violence in the lives of girls and young women. In recent years, she has extended that work to include boys and young men and currently leads a CIHR Team Grant, Promoting Health through Collaborative Engagement with Youth: Overcoming, Resisting and Preventing Structural Violence (www.voicesagainstviolence.ca).

She presents her work nationally and internationally, publishes widely, and is Past President of the Nursing Network on Violence against Women International. With a lengthy history of community-based research, Dr. Berman has played a lead role in the establishment of the Centre for Research on Health Equity and Social Inclusion and currently serves as the Centre’s first Academic Director. She is lead editor of the recently published Faces of Violence in the Lives of Girls and is the recipient of the Nursing Network on Violence against Women International 2015 Excellence in Research Award.