To Advocate or Not to Advocate:

The Experiences of a Small Rural Charity and the Politics of Political Activity

A Major Research Paper

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

CCIC   Canadian Council for International Co-operation

CRA   Canada Revenue Agency

ITA   Income Tax Act

NHCT   North Hastings Community Trust

ODSP   Ontario Disability Supports Program

OW   Ontario Works

Clarification of Terms

The use of 'hydro' refers to electricity.

The use of "Hydro One" refers to the company.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Topic Introduction

Charitable organizations around the globe play critical roles in society from assisting vulnerable populations to addressing environmental issues. Charities and their front line workers have unique opportunities to engage with these populations and issues and respond to their needs, as well as help expose these issues to society at large. Charities in Canada in comparison to other countries around the world are restricted in their ability to engage in advocacy and political activities.

Literature suggests that these rules and laws which govern charitable activities and purposes are antiquated and restrictive, and are in serious need of modernization and reform. Research by scholars and advocates on the movement to modernize and reform these charitable laws, encourage charitable organizations across the country to challenge the current system. They encourage charitable organizations to advocate for their issues by finding ways to work inside and outside of the restrictive landscape. Charitable organizations however, are as diverse in scope and size as the scope and size of issues that effect citizens across the country. Not every charity participates in political advocacy. Literature suggests that there is a need for more research into what compels and (or) deters an organization from engaging in political advocacy.

This research will review current literature on the antiquated and restrictive laws governing charities across Canada, in the context of the needs of the 21st century, paying particular attention to charities in the poverty relief sector. This study will also examine the experiences of a small charitable organization addressing poverty in rural Ontario called North

Hastings Community Trust (NHCT), to better understand why charities engage or refrain from political activity in a restrictive bureaucratic landscape.

1.2 Organization of the Paper

This research paper is organized into three sections. The first one (Section 1 – 3) will introduce the research topic, review relevant literature, and present the methodological approach the study will take. The second section (Section 4) provides a profile of North Hastings and the community of Bancroft as well as background information about the work of North Hastings Community Trust (NHCT). Section three (Section 5 – 8) will present an analysis of the findings, provide a discussion, and recommendations for future research.

1.3 Problem Statement

Charitable organizations make an significant contribution to society by assisting vulnerable populations, promoting social justice, and bringing important issues into public debate in which society can respond to. Charitable organizations in Canada however, are restricted in their ability to engage in political activities and contribute to public discourse. In a review of the literature on charities purposes and activities, there is limited research on the factors which compel and (or) deter charities from engaging in political activity in this restrictive bureaucratic landscape.

1.4 Goal

The goal of this research is to contribute to the movement to modernize Canada's restrictive and antiquated charity laws by examining the experiences of a small charitable organization addressing impacts of poverty in rural Ontario, to better understand factors which compel or deter charities from engaging in political activity in a restrictive bureaucratic landscape, and creative approaches to advocacy.

1.5 Objectives

The objectives of this study are to:

1. To explore the role of charities in engaging with vulnerable populations

2. To determine key factors which compel and (or) deter charities from engaging in political activity

3. To explore creative approaches to advocacy

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Charitable organizations have a unique opportunity to engage with vulnerable populations and are often on the forefront witnessing issues that are pressing in our society. Charitable organizations in Canada in comparison to other countries around the world are restricted in their ability to advocate and bring these issues into public debate. Canadian charities may only dedicate on average 10% of their time and resources to nonpartisan political activity. With increasing inequality, sustainable and systemic solutions are needed and charities have the experience, knowledge, and expertise to educate the public and advocate for more long term change.

This literature review will discuss relevant literature pertaining to the laws and regulations which restrict charitable organizations in Canada from participating in political activity, and current criticism and debate. First, this review will examine the role of charities in the relief of poverty and the explore the current debate in Canada surrounding charities and advocacy. Secondly, it will outline the authoritative bodies and laws that govern charitable organizations' purposes and activities. The review will then explore the current movements to modernize and reform the laws and regulations, and examine the opportunities charities have to create change. Lastly, gaps in the literature as well as the significance of the research will be presented.

2.2 Charities and the Relief of Poverty

Charities have a unique opportunity to engage with populations in society that have historically been marginalized, left voiceless, and pushed out of public debate. They not only

play a key role in the lives of vulnerable populations by improving their wellbeing but they also

have the ability to address social injustices by exposing the "social welfare issues that affect

marginalized and poor groups, including civil rights, homelessness, child welfare, disability and

poverty" (Feldman, Strier & Koreh, 2017, p. 255). Mulé and DeSantis (2017) discuss that the

non-profit and charity sector, "is positioned closest to civil society and has the ability to bring

forth the very issues, needs and concerns directly from the frontline of communities" (Mulé &

DeSantis, 2017, pp. 311). Feldman et al. (2017) argue that non-profit and charitable

organizations fulfil two important social functions for marginalized people: "delivery of social

services, and advocacy for social rights" (Feldman et al., 2017, p. 255). In addition, charities

have the ability to encourage civic engagement in addressing these issues, through volunteers,

donors, and the individuals they work with and assist on a daily basis. The relationships that are

created between charities; their frontline workers and individuals who access their services is

valuable.

2.2.1 Delivery of Services

Charitable organizations were created in response to community issues or emergencies to

provide assistance that was meant to be short term (Wakefield, Fleming, Klassen & Skinner,

2012). Emergency food provision such as food banks for example, as discussed by Wakefield et

al (2012) emerged out of, "calamitous economic conditions: recession, job losses due to

economic restructuring, and cuts to social welfare [programs]" (Wakefield et al., 2012, p. 429).

Riches and Tarasuk (2014) argue that food charity has not been a short term solution, and that

instead it remains in high demand and has become the primary response to help those who are

food insecure. As food charity has become more entrenched in society it has allowed

governments to avoid their responsibility to ensure that everyone in society has access to food

provisions (Wakefield et al., 2012). With the rise of neoliberalism, the slash in government services, subsidies and social welfare, many types of charity have increasingly become the norm in society. This entrenchment of 'charity' and of food charity in society for example, has depoliticized hunger in Canada and made food charity, instead of public policy, the avenue to meet the needs of the poor and insecure populations (Riches & Tarasuk, 2014).

2.2.2 Advocacy for Social Justice

While there may always be a need to provide people with charity it is not however, a sustainable solution (Riches & Tarasuk, 2014). Charites are often interacting with the vulnerable and marginalized populations in which they exist to serve, on a daily basis (Feldman et al., 2017). With increasing economic inequality and a cuts to funding for the non-profit sector, charities across the poverty relief sector in Canada have used their limited advocacy ability to bring attention to the root causes of poverty. With an allowable 10% of time and resources to be spent on nonpartisan political activity charities have been revealing the plight of vulnerable and marginalized populations. In addition, they have been advocating for social justice and supporting the implementation of programs that would bring about more long term relief to poverty, such as raising minimum wage, increasing social assistance rates, and providing affordable housing (Wakefield et al., 2012). This advocacy work however, Wakefield et al (2012) argue, has for the most part been unsuccessful and charity remains as the default service for people being impacted by poverty.

Charitable organizations' allotted amount of time and resources to advocate and participate in political activity is not enough to pressure governments to create systemic change. As charity becomes more entrenched in society and governments reduce funding for services and for charities themselves, charities are being forced in to continually fill the void and a growing

need. Many charities are searching for different approaches because if they do not change what they are doing, they will continue to get the same outcome.

Mulé and DeSantis (2017) reveal that charitable organizations are doing a number of different activities that work inside these constraints. Some charities engage in advocacy and some do not. Some focus on looking for more sustainable long term solutions to the delivery of their charitable service.

Despite the need to help lobby the government to create systemic changes advocacy and political activity is not possible for charities to conduct at the level that it is needed. Also, it is not possible for all charities to engage in advocacy and political activity even within the 10%. This research will explore this further.

2.2.3 Engagement and Empowerment

Although there is an increasing dependence on charity, simply offering relief of poverty, scholars and charities argue, is no longer enough (Riches & Tarasuk, 2014). Like charitable organization, development agencies typically operated in a similar way, as the rescuer or provider for needy populations (Toomey, 2009). Toomey (2009) argues that while charity and provisions that help people in emergencies are needed, it can have a disempowering effect on people over time. Globally charitable organizations play this significant role in assisting marginalized and vulnerable because they interact with these populations on a daily basis (Feldman et al., 2017). Charities have been advocating for the rights and situations of vulnerable and marginalized populations for decades (Hashi, Langlois, & Serbanescu, 2012). But as the need is increasing, the funding is shrinking, and global inequality is on the rise, charitable organizations are not equipped in their current state to deal with the oncoming crises. Wakefield et al (2012) said that organizations are spending a significant amount of time and energy trying

to secure resources which is limiting their ability to function effectively. Wakefield et al (2012) discussed that while advocacy efforts by charities within their capacity struggled to create systemic change in Canada, many have turned to creating and developing more sustainable solutions to supporting vulnerable populations and engaging with them (Wakefield et al., 2010).

Charitable organizations and their front line workers are often pushed to the front line of some of the critical issues vulnerable and marginalized populations are dealing with. These individuals often fight alongside these issues and populations to resist oppression (Hashi et al., 2012). While assisting people in times of need and crisis is necessary, as Toomey (2009) said, this constant relief can have a disempowering effect. Toomey (2009) writes,"it's not about 'working on' people, but rather, about 'working with' them" (Toomey, 2009, p. 190). Wakefield et al (2012) says that engaging with vulnerable and marginalized populations in ways that focus on, "reframing the relationships between 'givers' and 'receivers' to reduce othering and build solidarity" (Wakefield et al, 2012, p. 445) is an important new piece to the way charities are operating. Toomey (2009) adds that, "'charity talks. Solidarity listens. Charity assumes it has all the answers. Solidarity learns. Charity can be *patron*izing. Solidarity is humble. Charity decides what its recipients need. Solidarity asks for input and participation from both sides'" (Toomey, 2009, p. 191). Charitable organizations have these opportunities when assisting people in need to engage with them in positive ways which empower them to be part of their own solutions. Gaventa and Barrett (2012) discuss engagement as a, "way of strengthening a sense of citizenship… [and a] broader sense of inclusion of previously marginalized groups within society and [has] the potential to increase social cohesion across groups (Gaventa & Barrett, 2012, p. 2406 – 2407). There are numerous and diverse opportunities for charities to engage with those that they assist on a daily basis. This will be explored at the end of this review in more detail.

2.3 Advocacy Debate

Systemic change is needed to address the dire issues in society which are impacting vulnerable populations across Canada. Advocacy efforts by charities are crucial to illustrate the need for systemic changes at the state level. However, according to DeSantis & Mulé (2017) advocacy has turned into a dirty concept in Canada. Charitable organizations and the Government of Canada have been at odds with one another for the past few decades, over what constitutes advocacy and how much advocacy charities should be able to conduct (DeSantis & Mulé, 2017). The Government of Canada defines advocacy as, "the act of speaking or of disseminating information intended to influence individual behavior or opinion, corporate contact, or public policy and law" (DeSantis & Mulé, 2017, p. 6). This definition takes on a negative connotation. To scholars, advocates and charitable organizations on the other hand, "advocacy consists of the intentional efforts… to change existing or proposed government policies and programs along with other organizations and/or with marginalized people" (DeSantis & Mulé, 2017, p. 6). Advocacy is about social justice; equity and the wellbeing of all of society, which encompasses the participation of organizations, volunteers, community members, and vulnerable populations. Charities, who are in their very nature designed to assist the needs of the public, have the ability to gain perspectives and knowledge from interacting with vulnerable and marginalized populations that can help address some of the pressing issues effecting society at large. While relief and charity will always be needed, these actions alone cannot begin to solve the systems which cause poverty. Exploring alternatives to relieve poverty in systemic and holistic ways which engages vulnerable populations in the solutions, is becoming necessary for the betterment of society. This cannot happen without engaging with the

government and creating pressure for policies and laws to be changed which reinforce the very structures in which cause poverty.

Feldman, Strier and Koreh (2017) discuss the impacts of neoliberalism on social welfare advocacy, arguing that neoliberalism has, "undermined the ability of nonprofits to engage in advocacy" (Feldman, Strier & Koreh, 2017, p. 254). Simultaneously, neoliberalism has "created conditions that induce these organizations to practice advocacy" (Feldman et al., 2017, p. 405). Increasing social injustice, inequality, and poverty among other things, has left non-profit organizations and charities in particular struggling to keep up with the need while over time having their funding and resources decrease (Mulé & DeSantis, 2017). Parachin (2016) reveals that charities and the government find themselves in natural conflict (Parachin, 2016). The state promotes charities and their programming as it often supplies goods and services that they would otherwise have to supply. Parachin (2010) states that, "the obviousness of the good of charity can wane, at least from the vantage of policymakers, when charities assume an advocacy role, especially where the positions being advocated are controversial or run contrary to those preferred by the government of the day" (Parachin, 2010, p. 1049). Governments need charities but are relying too heavily on their services to fill the void of what should be government policies. Charities argue that they cannot keep up with the role that has been put upon them however, they are restricted in their ability to voice their concerns and create change.

The sections below will discuss the difficult landscape charitable organizations in Canada are currently maneuvering to create systemic and sustainable change by examining the laws which govern the purposes and activities of charitable organizations.

2.4 Charity Laws and Advocacy in Canada

There are three authoritative or legal bodies which govern advocacy conducted by charities in Canada. These three governing entities are the *Income Tax Act*, common law and the *published guidelines of the Charities Directorate of the Canada Revenue Agency*. In order for an organization to gain charitable status and maintain it in Canada they must meet certain eligibility requirements, particularly concerning their purposes and activities.

First, the *Income Tax Act* (ITA) is used by the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) to determine the eligibility of an organization for charitable status. The ITA, "is a piece of federal legislation that establishes the regulatory regime through which charities register" (Hashi et al., 2012, p .3). The ITA allows charities, unlike strictly non-profit organizations, the benefit of being exempt from federal and provincial income tax. In addition, they are able to provide tax receipts for donors for received donations (Carter & Man, 2011). Under the ITA charities must prove that they are charitable in nature, meaning that they are created to achieve charitable objectives and devote substantially all of their resources to fulfilling these objectives (Government of Canada, 2013, Charitable purposes). 'Substantially all,' according to the CRA is equal to 90% (Kitching, 2006). Upon registering as a charity an, "organization's purposes must be clearly stated in its governing document, such as letters patent, articles of incorporation, trust, or constitution" (Government of Canada, 2013, Charitable purposes). An organization is not eligible for registration if their purposes and objective are not exclusively charitable (Government of Canada, 2013, Charitable purposes). To determine what is considered 'charitable' and what is not, the ITA relies on common law (Government of Canada, 2009).

Common law is not a piece of legislation but, "is the body of law developed by courts through legal decisions in various cases… [and these] past legal decisions set a precedent"

(Hashi et al., 2012, p. 3). In Canada, the definition of 'charitable' under common law was developed by the U.K. House of Lords in the 1981 decision of *Commissioners of Income Tax v. Pemsel* (Kitching, A. 2006; Tsao, D., Stoffman, Z., Lloyd-Smith, Georgia., & Mohomoud, K., 2015). The *Pemsel Case* was the accumulation of centuries of common law combined with the definition of 'charity' articulated in the *Statute of Elizabeth,* or what is also referred to as *Statute of Charitable Uses in 1601* (Tsao et al., 2015). Under *Pemsel* there are four categories for the definition of charitable: "relief of poverty, advancement of education, advancement of religion, or certain other purposes beneficial to the community in a way the law regards as charitable" (Government of Canada, 2013, Charitable purposes). This four category definition of what is 'charitable' has guided Commonwealth countries' charity laws for over a century (Tsao et al., 2015).

The Government of Canada and CRA provide examples of charitable purposes. To qualify under the 'relief of poverty' category a charity could be operating a food bank, operating a homeless shelter or providing other basic necessities of life (Government of Canada, 2013, Model Purposes). These purposes must also serve only those who are poor and services cannot go to those who are not deemed 'poor.'

Not every organization which registers as a charity is able to fall under the first three categories on *Pemsel* therefore, they must prove they can qualify under the fourth category; 'beneficial to the community.' Environmental organizations for example must qualify under this fourth category. These guidelines for what is deemed charitable do not include political activity. It has been argued that advocacy and political activities could help achieve objectives under the fourth category of the definition of charitable (purposes beneficial to the community) however, Canadian courts have refused to recognize this (Tsao et al., 2015).

While common law under *Pemsel* does not recognize or allow political activity by charities, "the ITA has modified the common law to permit registered charities to engage in some degree of political discourse" (Kitching, 2006, p. 3). Under the ITA Sections 192.1 (6.1) and (6.2) charitable organizations that devote the majority of their time and resources on charitable activities are allowed to engage in political activities, as long as they, "are "ancillary and incidental"" to the charity's objectives (Tsao et al., 2015, p. 12). The CRA publishes policy statements and guidelines with their interpretation of the ITA to expand on the allowable, prohibited, and limited activities charities are able to engage in.

The third body which regulates the activities and purposes of charities, in particular advocacy, is *the published guidelines of the Charities Directorate of the CRA* which are not laws, "but are authoritative guidelines on how the law is applied by the CRA" (Hashi et al., 2012, p. 3). These guidelines by the CRA have capped political activities of charities at 10%, on average of their annual resources (Tsao et al., 2015). There are some exceptions for smaller charities, for example if a charity earned less than $50,000 in revenue in the last year they can spend up to 20% however, organizations tend to stick to the 10% rule (Hashi et al., 2012). These guidelines outline three categories of advocacy; what is prohibited, considered political and considered charitable.

Prohibited activities for charities are illegal activities or partisan activities. Charities are prohibited from participating in partisan political activities which would mean supporting or opposing a political candidate or party, implicitly or explicitly, including the current government (Hashi et al., 2012). A charity can invite a political candidate to an event but they must invite all candidates. Charities cannot single out a particular government policy on an issue without stating all of the positions. In addition to partisan political activities, Charities cannot view their opinion

on any policy or participate in any activity that is not connected to their particular charitable purpose. It is argued however, that many organizations cross sectors and this rule is difficult to interpret and follow (Hashi et al., 2012). Even when a charity has an opinion on a particular policy, they must share the alternative opinion to demonstrate neutrality.

This demonstration of neutrality is particularly evident in the second category of advocacy which is charitable activities. Charitable activities are allowable activities in which the organization has essentially been created to conduct. Some of these activities may be viewed as advocacy and more than 10% are allowed, as long as they are not political in nature. Examples of these activities include public awareness campaigns or educational activities. Both of these activities focus on spreading knowledge and engaging the public. The line however, between charitable and political activities can become blurred therefore, charities must make sure that they are not expressing any bias so that the target audience can form their own opinions on the issues (Hashi et al., 2012).

The third category of advocacy is political activity. This is where the CRA allows charities to spend up to 10% on average of time and resources on political activity. If an organization is discovered to be in violation of their cap on political activity, they risk having their charitable status revoked. The CRA presumes this type of activity to be any activity that:

> explicitly communicates a call to political action; explicitly communicates to the public that a law, policy, or decision of any government domestic or foreign should be retained, opposed, or changed; explicitly indicates in its materials (internal and external) that the intention of the activity is to incite political action; or makes a gift to qualified donees if it can reasonably be considered the gift is intended for political activities (Tsao et al., 2015, p. 13-14).

Political activity, according to the CRA centres around a call to the public to take political action towards decisions made by the government. This call to action appears in the literature to be the

most contentious issue for charities and governments, in addition to the lack of clarity around what is deemed political and what is not.

2.5 Confusing and Ambiguous Rules

Charitable organizations are finding it difficult to determine what activity is deemed 'political' or 'charitable' (Tsao et al., 2015). According to DeSantis and Mulé (2017), "research shows that many non-profits are… confused and anxious about what is permitted" (DeSantis & Mulé, 2017, p. 14). These laws governing charities are ambiguous and difficult for charities to interpret because of the underlying case law (Tsao et al., 2015). Tsao (2015) explains an example of how these rules can be confusing and left up to interpretation:

> The CRA rules state that a public awareness campaign about a political issue related to the charities' work can be considered "charitable," if the campaign does not attempt to influence the public to lobby for changes in legislation. However, the rules state that explicit communication to the public that a law should be changed is considered "political," not charitable." In practice, the distinction between these two activities can be highly ambiguous and subject to different interpretations (Tsao et a., 2015, p. 14).

Without providing clear and concise rules charities are left confused and err on the side of caution as to not push the boundaries of the 10% cap, or they abandon political activities altogether (Tsao et al., 2015, p. 15). With the definition of what is and what is not charitable left up to common law, these rules are set to change at any given time as decisions are made in courts. In a review of the literature and the opinions of advocates and scholars, if real change is to be made it needs to be made in the legislature (Mulé & DeSantis, 2017; Tsao et al., 2015).

2.6 Antiquated Laws: Calls for Modernization and Reform

2.6.1 Antiquated Laws

In 1999, a report was released by the Panel on Accountability and Governance in the Voluntary Sector recommending that the Federal government collaborate with the voluntary sector and provinces to democratically establish a new definition of 'charitable' (Kitching, 2006). Following this consultation in 2002, a report was released, "entitled *Advocacy – The Sound of Citizen's Voices,* which found that the needs of today's charities do not fit with the Elizabethan concepts of charity and concluded that it would be necessary to broaden the scope of advocacy by charities" (Kitching, 2006, p. 9, original in italics). Under the *Statute of Elizabeth* or the *Charitable Uses Act, 1601*, which helped define 'charitable' under the *Pemsel Case* in 1891, there are a list of charitable examples in its preamble. Parachin (2017) argues that this source for the legal definition of 'charity' was not, even at the time, an appropriate method as it did not truly define 'charity' but gave examples of "charitable trusts [that] were being established" (Parachin, 2017, p. 37). Instead, at the time it was used to determine any abuses in the administration of charities (Parachin, 2017). This list, "includes not only the charitable staples of providing relief to the elderly, sick and impoverished, but also charitable activities dedicated to such things as the "Marriages of poore Maides" (Kitching, 2006, p. 2). In Vancouver, an organization seeking charitable status sought to provide free internet to the public. The Federal Court of Appeal only provided them charitable status on the grounds that in the *Statue of Elizabeth* the repair of infrastructure such as roads were considered charitable therefore, as a means of communication providing internet access to the public could be considered charitable (Kitching, 2006). Examples of this nature are antiquated and demonstrate just how restrictive and ambiguous the rules are.

Despite these outdated charitable purposes that help define charitable under common law, the Canadian courts still have to rely on using such examples to make decisions in cases in the twenty-first century. According to Kitching (2006) Canadian courts have ruled that, "they will only be willing to make incremental changes to the definition of charity [and it] is left to Parliament to make more comprehensive changes to the law" (Kitching, 2006, p. 9).

2.6.2 Comparison to Other Jurisdictions

In comparison to other countries Canada's laws which govern charities are restrictive and stifling. European countries provide tax breaks and full freedom for charities to advocate for legal changes. The Council of Europe specifically identifies that charitable organizations have a right to express their opinions: "the right to 'undertake research, education and advocacy on issues of public debate, regardless of whether the position is taken is in accord with government policy or requires a change in the law'" (Tsao et al., 2015, p. 29). Laws that govern charities in Australia and New Zealand are easily comparable to those in Canada because Australia and New Zealand as Commonwealth countries are both governed by the *Pemsel* definition of 'charitable.'

In 2010, during a case that was taken to the High Court in Australia, the Court ruled that "an organization should not be excluded from charitable status… solely because it [has] a main or dominant political purpose" (Tsao et al., 2015, p. 37) The Court found that political advocacy as a purpose fell in to fourth category of *Pemsel* and in 2014 New Zealand's High Court decided to also adopt political advocacy as a purpose in the fourth category (Tsao et al., 2015). Now charities in both Australia and New Zealand are able to conduct political activity with more ease and legitimacy.

Legal commentators on the matter have criticized the narrow approach of *Pemsel* and its application to modern charities arguing that, "the distinction between 'charity' and 'politics'

misconceives the true role of charity… advocacy and engagement with politics are better conceptualized as an essential, and perhaps the most effective method of achieving charitable purposes" (Tsao et al, 2010, p. 38). Tsao et al (2010) shares a testimony from the St. Vincent de Paul charity when presenting before the Australian Senate during the High Court's ruling on *Pemsel* in 2010.

> "We would see advocacy as absolutely non-negotiable. It is integral to our charitable purpose. This is not something we have invented in recent years; it goes to the heart of our founding. In Paris in 1833, our founder made it very explicit the principle that we were not simply to give assistance to the poor but to seek out and understand the structures that give rise to poverty and inequality, and to actively advocate to change those structures" (Tsao et al., 2015, p. 26)

By making a legislative change to the definition of charity under *Pemsel,* the High Courts in Australia and New Zealand have modernized the landscape which now allows for charities to use their knowledgeable voice, contribute to public discourse, and influence systemic change.

2.6.3 Harper Audits and Advocacy Chill

What was already a strenuous relationship between the Government of Canada and the charitable sector became even more tense under Stephen Harper's Conservative government. In 2006 many charitable organizations experienced significant funding cuts (Mulé & DeSantis, 2017). In the 2012 Federal budget, the Conservative government announced they would allocate $13.4 million dollars to the CRA to audit more than fifty charities due to their 'political activities' (Tsao et al., 2015) This action sent out what scholars and advocates describe as an 'advocacy chill' across the sector (Tsao et al., 2015). Although there was no direct proof, it was widely suspected that the Conservative government was using this audit to target and silence organizations who were critical and outspoken about some of the government's controversial

policies, particularly around environmental impacts (Tsao et al., 2015; Parachin, 2016, Mulé & DeSantis, 2017). According to Mulé and DeSantis (2017), the government views advocacy as, "uninvited involvement by non-profits and citizens" in policy making processes (Mulé & DeSantis, 2017, p. 5). This advocacy chill added additional stress to charities across the country who felt restricted with the fear of an audit alone. A feeling of, "extreme self-censorship" (Tsao et al., 2015) was felt across the sector during this time and the advocacy chill is still felt today.

2.6.4 Election Promises

During the 2015 Federal campaign the Liberal Party included policy changes for advocacy for charities. The platform included terminology such as, "modernize the rules," and, "that charities make important contributions to public debate and public policy," in addition to "a new legislative framework to strengthen the sector." (Parachin, 2016, p. 1056). In late 2016, the Minister of National Revenue announced that the government would engage in consultations with charities across Canada to examine the current regulations around advocacy and areas to change and improve.

Imagine Canada, which supports charities across the country to fulfil their mandates and the Canadian Council for International Co-operation (CCIC), a national coalition of charities and non-profits that work globally, were among other organizations, coalitions, and alliances in addition to scholars and advocates from across Canada who joined together to contribute to the Minister's consultations. They submitted letters, reports, and their own consultations explicitly calling on the new government to modernize and reform the current laws that govern political advocacy and charitable purposes (Imagine Canada, 2016; Canadian Council for International Co-operation, 2016). In their submission, Imagine Canada wrote, "it is difficult to comprehend how restricting the ability to speak out on important issues is in the best interests of society,

particularly when our organizations are constituted for and required to act in the public benefit"
(Imagine Canada, 2016, p. 3). Submissions from Imagine Canada, CCIC and thousands of other
charitable organizations, scholars, and advocates across Canada were submitted as part of CRA's
consultation (Ontario Nonprofit Network, 2017). Released in March of 2017, *The Report of the
Consultation Panel on the Political Activities of Charities* identified recommendations; revise
CRA policies which would allow charities to participate in public dialogue, amend the ITA by
removing any reference to 'political activity' to allow charities to engage with no limit in non-
partisan public policy dialogue and to modernize the legislative framework which governs
charitable activities and in turn adopt a list of charitable purpose which reflect modern social and
environmental issues (Government of Canada, 2017).

Charitable organizations across the country now await the Liberal government's next
move in hopes that these recommendations will be heard and introduced into Parliament soon.

2.7 Fear of Breaking the Rules

While there is a movement to modernize and reform the antiquated and restrictive laws
which govern charities in Canada, and the hope of legislative changes on the horizon, charities in
Canada are still however, bound and limited in their ability to create systemic changes through
political activities. Tsao et al. (2015) suggest that just the fear of being audited, or getting in
trouble, prevents charities form conducting even their 10% allotted time and resources on
political activity. DeSantis & Mulé (2017) wrote that charities' staff and volunteers do not have a
clear understanding of the rules and laws governing political activities. In addition, "evidence
from one study showed that 59 percent of the non-profit respondents indicated that they're
concern about potentially violating the rules is a fairly potent barrier to doing advocacy"
(DeSantis & Mulé, 2017, p. 17). With confusing and ambiguous laws that the general public, nor

charities can begin to fully understand, creates a huge barrier to charities involving themselves in their 10% allotment of political activity.

Mulé and DeSantis (2017) recognize that charities across the country have different capacities, and they understand the fear that charities might have about engaging in political activity and why they may continue to work only within the existing constraints. Mulé and DeSantis (2017) however, take issue with this statement as they feel that if charities are not challenging the constraints and finding ways to advocate and put pressure on the government about the constraints themselves, that nothing will change (Mulé & DeSantis, 2017). Feldman et al (2017) argues that neoliberalism has undermined the ability for charities to advocate while creating conditions in which they should advocate. Feldman et al (2017) and Mulé and DeSantis (2017) suggest that these confusing rules and lack of resources contribute to the lack of political activity conducted by charitable organizations. Both scholars suggest more research in this area is needed.

2.8 Creating Change and Emergence Theory

While the charitable sector is struggling to engage in the conversations that need to be had to create meaningful and systemic change, many in the sector are still willing to engage in the conversation that things need to change (Wakefield et al., 2012). Feldman et al (2017) argued that, "neoliberalism has simultaneously undermined the ability of nonprofits to engage in advocacy" but has also created the conditions in which charities need to address through advocacy (Feldman et al., 2017, p. 254). Wakefield et al (2012) suggest that this idea tends to disempower those working towards positive social change and, "fails to capture the nuanced character of emergent new relationships and practices" (Wakefield et al., 2012, p. 444). As discussed earlier in this literature review, charities have this unique opportunity to engage with

vulnerable and marginalized populations at a level that other parts of society are unable to do. Charities have the opportunity to not just work on behalf of vulnerable and marginalized populations but also work with them and build relationships which bring about new opportunities (Toomey, 2009).

Wakefield et al (2012) had suggested that engaging in ways that breakdown the stigma of poverty and the 'us' and 'them' mentality creates valuable relationships between charities and those that they assist. By bringing those who seek assistance into the larger conversation about systemic change and sustainable solutions, provides a voice to vulnerable populations but also insights and expertise to the issues, as they are the ones being effective by them every day. By working with vulnerable populations towards solutions, charities can not only be an advocate but the can also be an ally. An ally encompasses solidarity and, "a willingness to engage in collective effort to create and sustain a caring society" (Toomey. 2009, p. 191). Charities and those they serve can work collectively to create change. Toomey (2009) says that although an issue might appear to be only a local issue, it is probably also a global issue. Toomey (2009) discusses the important role that an advocate can play and how they have the power to, "bring local issues into the global arena for broader change" (Toomey, 2009, p. 192). It is through this relationship building with those in which charities serve as well as with other charities, that the power to rethink systems and the, "parameters of political agency" (Wakefield et al., 2012, p. 445) emerges.

The opportunity that Wakefield et al (2012) and Toomey (2009) suggest is that by charities working with the vulnerable populations in which they serve, they can in turn become stronger, more connected, and creative in their responses and approaches to issues. Neoliberalism often feels like an, "unstoppable regressive force" (Wakefield et al., 2012, p. 444)

however, it can be addressed in new and alternative ways. Charities across Canada have

demonstrated how they can effectively advocate for change by bringing the antiquated charity

laws to the attention of the government. Charitable organizations across Canada are engaging in

conversation about the need to modernize and reform the laws and regulations which govern

charitable organizations, their activities and purposes, because of the need to make more

systemic change for the issues in which they address. This movement alone has demonstrated not

only the importance of, but the power of change starting from the local level and working its way

upwards to influence change. Wheatley (2006) discusses the theory of Emergence which

emphasizes the power of relationships and creation of networks to address societal issues.

> "Emergence violates so many of our Western assumptions of how change happens that it often takes quite a while to understand it. In nature, change never happens as a result of top-down, pre-conceived strategic plans, or from the mandate of any single individual or boss. Change begins as local actions spring up simultaneously in many different areas. If these changes remain disconnected, nothing happens beyond each locale. However, when they become connected, local actions can emerge as a powerful system with influence at a more global or comprehensive level" (Wheatley, 2006, p. 8).

Charities are not only working with each other to change the rules that govern them, they are also

working with those whom they assist daily to bring critical societal issues to the forefront of

public discourse. The idea of Emergence is that change is a bottom up process. It will take

people coming together to realize their capacity and creating networks with others that will

create change, and eventually systems of influence (Wheatley, 2006). Elson (2017) says that

"collective civic action is one tool that appears to have the capacity to create a crack in

institutional armor" (Elson, P. R, 2017, xvii)

2.9 Gaps in the Literature

In an extensive review of the literature, it reveals a need to modernize and reform the charitable laws that govern Canadian charities' purposes and in particular their activities. An area that is in need of more research is understanding the factors that compel or deter charities from engaging in political activity in this current restrictive bureaucratic landscape. Feldman et al (2017) suggests more research is needed to understand, "why organizations choose to engage or refrain from engaging in advocacy, and in what ways these activities have (or have not) been beneficial for them" (Feldman et al., 2017, p. 261). Feldman et al (2017) and Mulé and DeStantis (2017) suggest that charities may not engage in political activity because of restrictive parameters and lack of funding however, both agree that charities are diverse in their nature and understanding their different constraints and motivations is important. Mulé and DeStantis (2017) commend charities for exploring creative and innovative approaches to engaging in advocacy within the constraints however, ultimately they take issue with the approach as they believe charities should be questioning and challenging the current system as a way to push for change. In addition to examining the factors that compel or deter charities from engaging in political activity, this research will also explore the creative approaches to advocacy, and if they work within the constraints or challenge them.

2.10 Significance of the Research

The results from this research will provide an illustration of the challenges that charitable organizations encounter when they seek social justice and what compels or deters them from engaging in political activity while maneuvering a restrictive landscape. This research will also contribute to the movement to modernize and reform Canada's charitable laws. In addition, small charitable organizations can use findings and recommendations from this study to analyze their

own work and consider strategies to work both inside and outside the constraints of the political

system.

3.0 Methodology

This section will discuss the methodological approach of this research by outlining the research design, conceptual framework, data collection and sampling techniques as well as the limitations of this study.

3.1 Research Design

Epistemologically, this research will be influenced by the concepts of social constructionism. This is the belief that knowledge is created through social interactions; between individuals and groups. Flick (2010) argues that, "the time of big narratives and theories is over, locally, temporally and situationally limited narratives are the up-to-date way to describe change and people's experience of such change" (Flick, 2010, p. 633). Flick emphasizes that qualitative methods, particularly in depth interviews, help capture, "an understanding of people's views of things and processes" (Flick, 2010, p. 632) and "the practices and interactions of everyday life" (Flick, 2010, p. 635).

3.2 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework that this study will be based on is the theory of Emergence outlined by Wheatley (2006). Emergence is the idea that change is created, "as networks of relationships form among people who discover they share a common cause and vision of what is possible" (Wheatley, 2006, p. 1). Emergence challenges the notion that change is made by top down strategic plans by stating that instead change begins with shared local actions. There is a life cycle to Emergence which starts with people coming together who share common concerns, thoughts, beliefs, and challenges to create networks. Through network creation individuals realize their combined capacity which leads to communities of practice and eventually systems of influence. Emergence is the idea that anything is possible.

For this study the framework was applied in multiple ways, first, through the key informant interviews with two individuals who have witnessed the growth and expansion of the organization over the past 3-5 years. Also, by focusing on the growth and development of the organization as it has grown its capacity through shared experiences and social networks.

3.3 Data Collection and Sampling Techniques

This study adopted an exploratory approach using predominantly qualitative data analysis. Two in depth, semi-structured, key informant interviews were conducted with NHCT senior members. In addition, a brief analysis of a qualitative community consultations was conducted. Lastly, the 2016 census data from Statistics Canada was analyzed to provide additional context to social, economic and demographic characteristics of the Bancroft/North Hastings area.

In regards to sampling, the key informant interviews were performed with individuals who have had a direct role in the day to day operations of NHCT and its shift in mandate, program development and advocacy work for the past 3-5 years.

3.4 Limitations of this Study

The most prominent limitations of this study were time and budget. While the findings of this research will not be generalizable, they will however shed light on the experiences of a small Canadian charitable organization maneuvering a restrictive bureaucratic landscape to assist with impacts of poverty and create sustainable change. Research was focused in the North Hastings area, which is the northern piece of Hastings County particularly the Bancroft area which is the centre of the region. Community consultations performed by NHCT, in which report information is reviewed in this study, were conducted in hamlet communities just outside of Bancroft; Maynooth and Coe Hill.

4.0 Profiles

4.1 Community of North Hastings

As a preamble to a discussion around NHCT's experiences, this section will provide geographical and economic context to the area in which NHCT addresses poverty.

North Hastings covers the northern part of Hastings County in Eastern Ontario, from north of Madoc to just south of Algonquin Park, and is the most under-resourced area in Hastings County. Bancroft is the largest town in the area, with a population of approximately 3,800, that consists of one high school (which is fed by North Hastings and parts of bordering counties) and one 9-bed hospital.
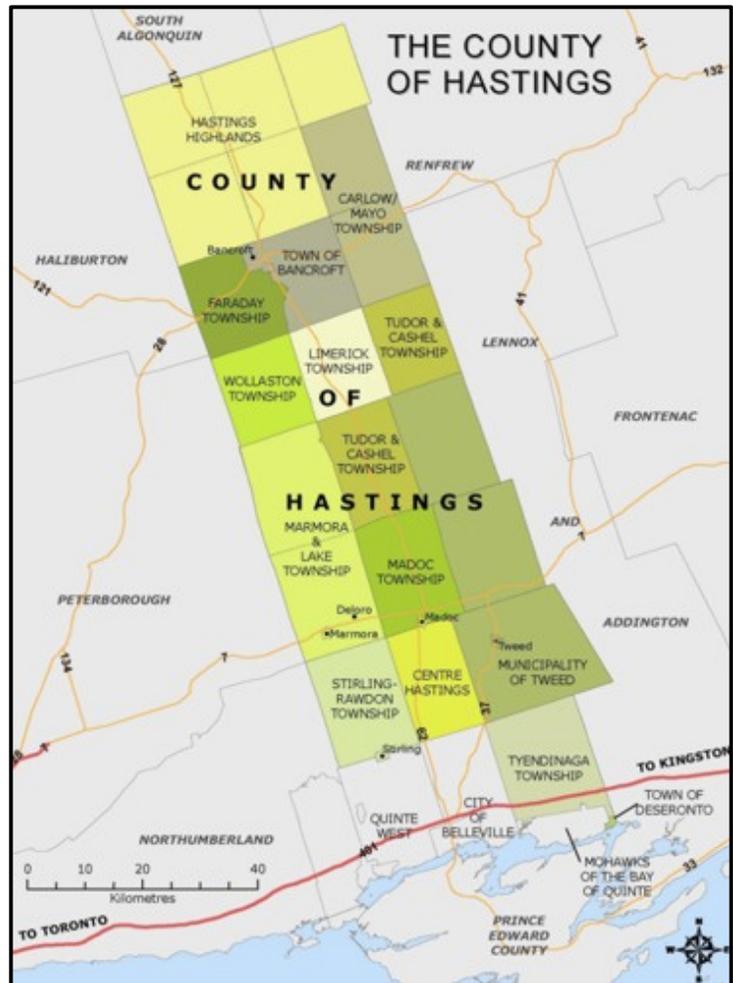
Figure A Retrieved from Hastings County website, http://www.hastingscounty.com/discover/about-our-county

Bancroft is most populated area on the North Hastings region, which serves as the main hub in the area, in which communities such as Maynooth and Coe Hill access regularly for services. In addition, there are multiple hamlet communities that feed into Bancroft. By examining the

statistics of Bancroft, it will provide some context to the work that NHCT does and provide a picture of the economic landscape.

According to the 2016 Canada Census Data, the median household income in Bancroft is a third lower than the provincial median, at $25, 000 annually versus $33, 500 for the province. Additional statistics demonstrate the imbalanced demographic, low income level rates and precariousness of employment.

- ❖ 27% of the population is between the age of 20 and 50, while 55% of the population is over the age of 55, in comparison to the 30% in Ontario

- ❖ Over a third of dwellings are occupied by renters and almost 58% of renters spend more than 30% of their total income on shelter costs

- ❖ The average cost of shelter (renting) is $836 in comparison to $1109 for Ontario

- ❖ Approximately half of the population report only a high school diploma or less

- ❖ Over 57% of the employed population are employed in part-time positions

- ❖ 40% of the population make under $19,000, which is below the poverty line in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2017).

4.2 North Hastings Community Trust (NHCT)

This section provides brief information on the services and programs that North Hastings Community Trust (NHCT) delivers in the North Hastings area. This section will also touch on recent community consultations conducted by NHCT in Bancroft, Maynooth and Coe Hill, which are communities located within the North Hastings area, to better understand the pressing issues in these communities and impacts on daily life.

4.2.1. About NHCT

North Hastings Community Trust (NHCT) is a charitable organization that has been addressing impacts of poverty in the North Hastings area since 2003, by providing emergency financial relief to individuals and families. In 2015, the organization shifted its mandate to include providing sustainable solutions to poverty and expanding their programming to encompass community based responses to impacts of poverty (North Hastings Community Trust, About Us). The organization has two part-time employees who assist with distributing financial relief, advocating for individuals, and overseeing programming.

NHCT provides emergency financial relief in the form of grocery cards, gas cards, assistance with utility bills and rent, among other needs. The organization has a limited budget to assist with this relief which is allotted each month by the County of Hastings. In addition to providing emergency financial relief, NHCT assists individuals and families by connecting them to other community resources and services, and by advocating for individuals when necessary.

NHCT has two major projects which include the community gardens called Harvest the North and Wood Share. Harvest the North started in 2015 as a collaborative community project to grow food and build a healthy community. It grew out of a need to address food insecurity and

social exclusion. By working with numerous community partners and individual community members over the past two years Harvest the North has grown from 10 raised garden beds to 23 garden beds spread out across the town of Bancroft. The project has had a number of positive effects on the community. NHCT says that the gardens have brought attention to local food insecurity and, "continue to bring people together from diverse backgrounds and life experiences, and has helped reduce both economic and social barriers to inclusion" (North Hastings Community Trust, Harvest the North).

The Wood Share project also grew out of a need that was visible in the community which was that people were not able to afford wood to heat their homes over the winter. In many rural areas, people rely on wood stoves or furnaces to heat their homes therefore, having access to and being able to afford wood is a huge barrier for people living in poverty. Wood Share, with the assistance of volunteers and community partners, supplies emergency free wood to those in need (North Hastings Community Trust, Wood Share).

4.2.2 Community Consultations

In September of 2016, NHCT conducted community consultations in Bancroft as well as in the communities of Maynooth and Coe Hill which are located within the North Hastings area. These consultations were conducted to gain a better perspective on the impacts of rural poverty in different corners of the wider North Hastings community. The pressing issues that arose from these consultations were hunger, isolation, transportation, mental health and inability to afford medical services, basic necessities, housing and utilities and in particular hydro (North Hastings Community Trust, 2016).

These findings produced an organizational report that identified key systemic changes that needed to be made to begin to solve the problems that residents of North Hastings are being faced with. These included raising social assistance rates, reducing hydro costs, increasing minimum wage, investing in rural transportation, raising corporate tax, and fund local community projects and programs (North Hastings Community Trust, 2016).

4.2.3 Advocacy

As a charitable organization, NHCT is limited in their ability to advocate and participate in political activities. They state that, "given this knowledge NHCT commits 10% of our work to advocacy. Many of us volunteer additional hours when required on particular initiatives" (North Hastings Community Trust, Advocacy). NHCT does engage in individual advocacy efforts, to assist those in need and provide educational material for the community on the impacts of poverty.

5.0 Findings from Key Informant Interviews

This section will present the findings that emerged from the key informant interviews. The key informant interviews were performed in October of 2017 with two individuals who identified as either staff or a member of the board of directors. They will be represented by codes R1 and R2, and their titles will remain anonymous.

5.1 Key Themes

Key informant interviews were conducted to better understand how charities engage with vulnerable populations, what compels or deters charities to engage in political activities, and to explore creative approaches to advocacy. The qualitative data was analyzed and 5 key themes emerged:

1. Precariousness & Stigma
2. Social Networks
3. Political Activity & Systemic Change
4. Under Resourced
5. Alternative & Creative Responses

The sections below will illustrate these key findings using quotes from the key informant interview respondents.

5.2 Theme 1: Precariousness and Stigma

This theme is a collection of the interview respondents' thoughts and perspectives on the impacts of poverty in the North Hastings area.

5.2.1 Precariousness

Both respondents identified that the two most pressing issues in North Hastings are that people are living precariously and cannot meet their basic needs. *"We're in a state of crisis."* –

R1 The respondents discussed the precarious situations that individuals in the North Hastings area are finding themselves in part due to its geographical and economic context. R2 described North Hastings as, *"being an isolated community, an hour and fifteen minutes from any major hub, [with] an economy that is predominantly based on tourism and is generally service based, precarious part time employment. People here don't' have a lot of money or options."* R2 continued to describe some of the difficult choices that people in the area have to make, *"either work multiple jobs with precarious part time hours that is totally unstable…without medical benefits or take the other choice and go on OW [Ontario Works] or ODSP [Ontario Disability Supports Program] to get the coverage that you need even though you may not be getting as much money."-R2.* The respondent suggests that neither choice is favorable and each scenario causes stress and uncertainty in the life of individuals and their families as they struggle to meet their basic needs. Not every individual or family is facing this exact situation but this situation is all too common in an isolated, seasonal, service based community, where the work is part-time and precarious.

Both respondents explained that individuals who call the organization for emergency assistance are struggling to meet their basic needs which include being able to afford food, rent, medical services, and utility bills which include heat, electricity (hydro), water and sewage. In addition, the community lacks services and support programs to assist people solving or managing their situations, or emergency situations such as a shelter. This state of precariousness, R2 explains is, *"not a very fun existence. You're living in fear all the time at work, living in fear of not paying your bills, living in fear of repossession, having your water shut off, your electricity shut off and not being able to feed your kids. It's not a very nice existence when you*

are just getting by all the time and you can never seem to get ahead." This state of crisis and

precarious living causes fear and shame.

Both respondents discussed the overwhelming need that exists to help people meet their

basic needs. NHCT can provide up to $500 per year to an individual/family however, the

organization is only provided $1700 per month from the County of Hastings to provide this

relief. Both respondents made reference to the growing number of calls per day. R2 said that,

"sometimes there 17 or more messages a day of people in crisis. We do not have the resources to

assist that at all. We just don't." R1 added that, *"you can't just call someone back and tell them*

we have no money to help them. You have to have a conversation and help them look for other

options. People are in crisis." Both respondents made reference to the increasing need of

individuals and families in the community of North Hastings and that NHCT is not equipped

financially or with human resources to meet the demand for emergency assistance.

5.2.2 Destigmatizing Poverty

Both key informant respondents identified the stigmatization of poverty as a major issue

in the North Hastings community. R2 describes, from experiences and interactions within the

wider community, the perception that people have of poverty:

> *"The idea still exists, that 'just pull up your boot straps, it will be fine,' without looking at*
> *the fact that a lot of these people have gone through massive trauma in their lives, they*
> *have social anxiety, they have mental health issues, and they have physical issues…*
> *Instead of relief of poverty, if that was changed to relief of people who have adversely*
> *been affected by market forces out of their control, all of the sudden it means something*
> *different." - R2*

The respondents discussed the importance of addressing ignorance and misinformation about people living in poverty, and how efforts to destigmatize poverty became a priority for the organization.

When individuals call NHCT for emergency relief, both respondents agreed that people were expressing feelings of shame and guilt for having to ask for help. For some people it is the first time they have to ask for help, or for others they are struggling with having to constantly look for help and feel embarrassed. R2 revealed that the organization recognized this level of shame and guilt that people were expressing in their words and tone of voice, and that they wanted to change that. They said, *"there really shouldn't be any shame in poverty. It is not your fault and you didn't put policies in place that have led you to the place that you are at. Changing that mind set is really one of the switches that we wanted to do."* In efforts to destigmatize poverty and reduce shame, amongst individuals who were seeking assistance, NHCT decided to make a change and truly start breaking down the wall between 'us' and 'them' or 'worker' and 'client,' typically an approach used in the social service industry. R2 explained that in 2015 the organization shifted their approach when providing emergency financial relief, *"before, we did everything over the phone, nothing was face to face."* There was the notion that meeting face to face to talk, R2 expands, *"would potentially reinforces stigma around poverty, if people were known to access emergency financial support. It was better that everything was kept quiet... we could function behind the scenes and do what we need to do."*

Prior to 2015, NHCT was operating strictly as a poverty relief organization, providing limited emergency financial assistance to those struggling with impacts of poverty, connecting over the phone and limiting face to face meetings. During this time of strictly conducting services over the phone R2 explains that, *"the intent was good but as things deteriorated and got*

worse and worse, it became abundantly obvious that there should be no shame associated with poverty." In 2015, the organization shifted its approach to more face to face meetings with people seeking assistance, attempting to break down the wall between 'us' and 'them' and started a conversation with individuals to begin to destigmatize poverty and reduce shame associated with asking for help. R1 explained, *"most agencies would talk about their 'clients' and there's a desk between them, and there is a relationship that 'I'm a worker and you are a client.'"* R1 continued to explain that, *"the thing that we are doing at NHCT now is not that. I'm a community member, you're a community member… I am really committed to finding solutions together. And you're not alone in this struggle and most of us are quite precarious. So let's work together."*

The respondents discussed that as this shift in delivering services occurred, it also influenced the organization to shift its Mission from strictly providing emergency relief of poverty to also working with the community to provide sustainable solutions to poverty. It also influenced a new Vision, which was to envision a community free of poverty and injustice. This shifting of the organization's Mission and Vision, the respondents explain, was meant to destigmatize poverty, start to break down the stereotypes and assumptions about people living in poverty, and look at more systemic causes of poverty and how they could collectively be addressed by the community at large.

The face to face approach the organization shifted to focused on having face to face conversations with individuals who were seeking emergency assistance. Through this interaction people's stories started to emerge. Individuals shared their stories of struggle and resilience, of feeling ashamed and alone and of helping others.

"We wanted to get rid of the idea that poverty equals shame… You need to come out, tell your story and not be afraid. Because oppression functions in cones of silence. If people are isolated and alone, they feel they are the only ones and they're definitely not the only ones, especially as we see the numbers rise and rise, there are more and more of them." - R2

The organization saw the need rise but also the need to shine the spotlight on these impacts of poverty and start addressing them on a larger scale.

Overall, the respondents felt that the North Hastings community is in a state of crisis with people unable to meet their basic needs and that there is also a lot of shame and guilt associated with asking for help. The respondents agreed that starting to bring these problems out into the open through conversations, and reassuring people that they were not alone in their struggles, started to destigmatize poverty amongst individuals and the wider community. It started to involve people in conversations about how to address the impacts of poverty collectively.

5.3 Theme 2: Social Networks

The key informant respondents shared that the most impactful result of having face to face interactions with people seeking assistance was that it started to bring people into a larger conversation about the challenges people were dealing with. As individuals became more comfortable talking and sharing their situations with NHCT, they started to have ideas about how to solve the issues they were facing, and help others. From establishing a free store to a co-operative car repair, these amazing ideas, R1 describes came from individuals who had come to NHCT because they were in an emergency and needed help.

> *"They couldn't meet their basic needs but they had fantastic solutions. I think that kind of openness to creativity and ideas coming from everywhere, and what we have been told are the most unlikely place, is incredible. There is a belief that people who are living poor and don't have their basic needs met certainly don't have the resources to figure out how to problem solve. We need to shift that because it's not true."* - R1

The respondents said that NHCT identified social isolation as one of the biggest issues in the community and impacts of poverty.

"One of the biggest debilitating pieces of poverty… you can't go for a coffee, you can't go for a beer, you can't have that social interaction…and you don't feel like saying 'I'd love to go for a coffee, can you buy it for me?' No body wants that! People want to be able to afford a coffee or a beer or to enjoy some of those things in life." – R2

The respondents agreed that the stigma and shame of poverty went hand in hand with isolation. People were not only struggling with impacts of poverty and feeling shame, and isolated because of it, they were feeling alone and powerless in their struggle. Both respondents touched on the importance of social connections and finding others who are sharing the same struggles or have similar ideas.

"This is where charity has power to interact with people. When we functioned previously in the dark, we didn't have the power to have conversations with people and talk about systemic issues. So by now having those face to faces, where you can talk about those issues, that person that is getting help from the charity can then go talk about it, they can start the conversation with others."

5.3.1 Community Gardens – Harvest the North

Both respondents discussed the social connections and networks that emerged from breaking cones of silence on poverty within the organization, and engaging with individuals face to face. Both respondents agreed that the face to face interactions versus strictly phone conversations, began to make people feel that they were part of something bigger, that they were not alone struggling with an issue but that there were other people out there who shared the same problems, and that they could be part of the solutions.

Food insecurity is one of the many needs that is constantly presented to the NHCT during conversations with individuals seeking assistance. In 2015 NHCT partnered with community

members and other agencies to create a community garden project called Harvest the North. The project relied solely on volunteers, for both labour and materials and placed garden beds in public spaces in Bancroft for community members to grow food, connect with one another, share meals, and contribute food to people in need.

> *"This 'feeling part of something' with NHCT, has resulted in numerous spins off pieces that have helped people. The community gardens are just one example. People who have been assisted by NHCT now come back and say 'how can I help you, you helped me, I want to help you.' This reciprocity that is occurring is phenomenal. It is one of the coolest things to watch, now it is connecting people, who are otherwise totally disconnected."*

People who the NHCT had assisted began volunteering their time, in addition to other community members who heard about the work that NHCT was doing to address poverty and reduce shame and stigma associated with poverty, got involved with the project. R1 expands on this saying, *"what we found with Harvest the North is that bringing people together to grow food did way more than grow food, it brought people into a network of community care and respect and has created really beautiful friendships and people committed to working together to make good things happen."*

Both respondents pointed out that the community gardens project brought people together in to a space of sharing, caring and purpose. It was created out of a need and then provided an avenue for people to connect, socialize, share their struggles, feel a part of a solution and discuss other issues and ideas. R2 explains that while working on the gardens people, *"were saying 'oh hey you have the same problem I have, I'm running into the same issues, I can't pay my hydro bill either and I can't get enough good food, what can we do about it?"* Conversations began amongst individuals who were involved in the community gardens around numerous issues and

impacts of poverty. The biggest topic of discussion that emerged was the high cost of hydro and frequent disconnections.

5.3.2 Gnomes for Justice and Equality

The respondents said that NHCT knew there was a growing concern over the affordability of hydro because many of the calls they were receiving at the time (and still receive) were for individuals or households which were unable to pay their large hydro bills, or were being disconnected until they could pay what they owed. In a rural community, where many people live on properties with wells, having their electricity disconnected also means losing access to their water supply. In addition, many homes were built with baseboard heaters or electric heat, which means people are losing their source of heat when being disconnected. The respondents shared stories of individuals, most of whom were living on fixed incomes, being overwhelmed with the increasing cost of hydro and unable to get a handle on reducing the cost, despite desperate measures. R2 shared*, "that listening to people talk and cry, they were blaming themselves 'why can't I save power, why can't I do that?' was awful. It's realizing that its not you, you're not alone, no body can pay, because it's ridiculously priced!"*

Many individuals who were involved with the community gardens were being effected by hydro costs and disconnections. Through social interaction and discussions through the community gardens, a group of community members emerged that wanted to organize and address the impacts of hydro. They called themselves the Gnomes for Justice and Equality. R1 discussed how this initiative came to be:

> *"The Gnomes came out of the community garden movement. It was a play on using political theatre and humour to draw attention to the situation with hydro. So the Gnomes were created at a specific time to respond to the crisis with hydro and the link to 'well we're harvesting our food but we can't plug in our freezer, we can't store our food because no one can afford their electrical bills' was ironic. People are being*

disconnected in our community, people who were working on the gardens were being disconnected – so it was a creative response to a crisis."

The shifting mission and approach of NHCT, the respondents reflected, brought the impacts of poverty out in the open and allowed those who were being impacted by poverty to play a part in the search and implementation of solutions to address it. The community gardens project flourished because of the need to address food insecurity but it did more than that. The garden project addressed social isolation and exclusion, and created social networks and other groups by involving people who were being impacted the most by poverty. Change, R1 says, *"in my experience doesn't take a lot, like it's not rocket science, its believing in each other, giving an opportunity to build relationships."* R2 concludes,

> *"in the end what we're seeing happen is that by having these face to faces with people and getting rid of that shame its now creating a platform to allow people to come out and start talking about these systemic issues on a level that charities are not allowed to do. Which is great, because that is where the change has to come from." – R2*

5.4 Theme 3: Political Activity & Systemic Change

This theme is a collection of the key informant respondent's experiences participating in political activity, the ten percent rule and views on systemic change.

5.4.1 Political Activity

NHCT, the respondents said, dedicates their allotted 10% of time on political activity. From writing reports, newspaper articles and holding community meetings among other activities, NHCT makes sure to address systemic issues while remaining non-partisan and not going above their cap. However, the respondents both reflected on the barriers to advocacy which will be explored in the sections below.

In the fall of 2015, in response to the hydro crisis, NHCT gathered the facts and held a press conference for the community to raise awareness about the impact of Hydro One rates and disconnections. This activity was within their 10% allotment of political activity.

Both respondents reflected on the emergence of the Gnomes for Justice and Equality out of the community garden project. The Gnomes began to organize, as a separate entity from NHCT, to draw attention to the rising costs of hydro, and specifically call upon the government to address the effect the rates were having on rural residents across North Hastings and the province. Action with the Gnomes was more 'political' activity than NHCT was allowed to be involved with, even within their allotted 10%. The Gnomes were not a charity or bound by any restrictions on political activity therefore, they were free to say and do anything political. Some individuals who were associated with NHCT, who were either staff, board members or volunteers, began to get involved in the Gnomes outside of their role at NHCT to address hydro crisis.

> *"Some of us had decided to be Gnomes, outside of NHCT, and not as part of NHCT for that exact reason, because of the way it's written, you can't essentially advocate, well you can but because the language is so ambiguous that if you do something that someone doesn't like it's so ambiguous they can nail you on pretty much anything." –R2*

NHCT was entirely aware, as a charitable organization, what they could and could not do when it came to advocacy and political activities. They were operating within the cap and remained nonpartisan. Both respondents agreed that charities should be allowed to do more. R2 said that, "*we as charities can advocate, but we can't go over that 10% cap and it's a huge disservice to public debate and in direct violation of our democratic rights. Remembering that a lot of the funding that we get comes from people who are funded by corporations, they don't want equality raised as an issue.*" However, during this crisis, members of NHCT, as members

of the community joined the Gnomes because they felt that the crisis with hydro needed immediate attention and the specific attention of the energy minister and the premier of Ontario.

In 2016, during the time of the hydro crisis, there were rallies and protests by the Gnomes and other community members both in Bancroft and at Queen's Park in Toronto, that involved what R2 called a, *"non violent joyous revolution."* R1 said reflected on the alternative approach that the Gnomes took to political activity, it used humour and political theatre to get attention. *"You're less likely to get hurt at a protest if you're dressed up like a Gnome and you're singing and dancing."* It was a creative response to a crisis to get the government's attention to address the impacts of Hydro One rates. In addition, there were newspaper articles profiling residents of North Hastings struggling with disconnections in the Toronto Star, CBC interviews, and local television stations covering rallies. Some of this work involved NHCT (within their cap), but was mostly taken on by the Gnomes. The rallies about hydro, R2 said, *"all of it got a lot of play, it really was one of the intricate pieces starting the whole hydro push and hydro movement across the province. Chex TV and Global News came out to the rally and were listening to people talk and cry. Talking about Hydro One got a lot of attention."*

The respondents shared that even though they were taking part in this political activity outside of their roles at NHCT, they were still called by their funders to discuss 'political activity.' R1 said *"it was too political, we were told [by our funders], the Gnomes was too political, even if we were wearing a different hat."* R1 expanded by saying,

> *NHCT responds to crisis of inequity and lack of resources, so hydro became a really big issue for NHCT. In the height of the hydro crisis, I got a call from a woman who required a breathing machine. Like these were actually life and death stories. So it makes sense I am at a press conference, I am speaking on behalf of the work we're doing at NHCT and I'm an advocate for people, and I'm trying to make systems change within my abilities, and then the next day I get on a bus, put on a Gnome hat and I go to Toronto to say something to the energy minister as a community member. That should just be in my mind*

– that should just be a creative response to a crisis. I'm with NHCT here and then I'm a community member going to Toronto to get the energy ministers attention."

Even though members of NHCT were strictly participating with Gnomes outside of their NHCT roles, R2 explains that their involvement was in full view of the public and they could see how it became confusing. Someone involved with NHCT was at the Hydro One ombudsman meeting as a member of NHCT then went outside to where the Gnomes were handing out information, singing and dancing, and put on a Gnome hat. Someone in the community took a picture and called NHCT's funders. R2 said that, *"we were spoken to by our funders about the actions that we did, that essentially, 'you haven't done anything wrong but you're walking a fine line, so you know, take that as you will.' I kind of took it as you should probably just not."* R1 expands to say that their funders said that, *"in a small community you need to be prepared for the optics."*

This interest from NHCT funders on the political actions of NHCT members on their own time, R1 said, *"revealed the extent of how controlled we are and how much control our funders and the [government] have and they felt that they were doing their job, that it was their job to reign us in and that we were too political. The Gnomes were seen as a threat."* The Gnomes were being political and not only calling out government's wrong doings but calling for action by the public. R2 explained that when they were called in to their funders office, *"that message is already sent before you ever even walk in. Does this mean we're going to lose our funding? Because that is always held over your head and you're trying to do good, but you hesitate a lot about that political activity."* R2 expanded by saying that, *"there needs to be voice that is non funded, there needs to be a voice that is not connected to any outside monies at all, if at all possible. Especially any monies that are connected with government or [corporations], all of*

that stuff comes with those stipulations, you can't say that, you can't criticize this. You don't bite the hand that feeds you seems to be the mentality."

Both interview respondents agreed that the laws that govern charities are confusing and restrictive. R1 said that even when you are being careful you don't realize how, *"we are really restricted by our funders and by legislation; that dictates what is political and what isn't… it's super vague, so it can be pulled out and used against you at any moment. You could lose your funding, you could lose your job, there's all sorts of implications."* R1 added that the issues are not going away despite being able to advocate within the allotted 10%, that's why NHCT members were compelled to do more on their own time. *The need, it grows and there are new things on the horizon to respond to that requires naming some political stuff. But that's where the Gnomes come in."* – R1

Both respondents said that NHCT advocated within the 10% as NHCT but anything outside that, they knew they had to be careful. They thought they were being clear, but R1 said that after the meeting on political activity with NHCT's funders, *"the members of NHCT got the message that they needed to protect themselves."* NHCT members, the respondents said, just made sure to make the distinction between the groups clearer for their funders and the community, but that members still participated in Gnome activities and NHCT still did what they were allowed to, in order to put pressure on Hydro One.

5.4.2 Systemic Changes

The respondents both felt that charities should have free license to be political and to bring important issues into public discourse. *"I think charities should have free power to speak out to try and make change, that should be our mandate."*- R1 After a few months, in the fall of 2016, Hydro One called NHCT and promised to reconnect anyone who had been disconnected

from hydro at any time. All the attention that was brought forward about hydro resulted in a small win for NHCT and the Gnomes, but the respondents said more needs to be done. Hydro One continues to disconnect people, the rates have not been scaled back enough, people are still in debt and load limiters prevent people from living comfortable and non disruptive lives. R1 explains,

> *"History has shown us that it is not the sad stories that make change, the people in power know the sad stories, that is not going to get them to flip the switch, what will get them to change is pressure. Every movement in history has put pressure on the powers that be and then change happens. Including hydro recently. It's not a radical thing to think this. We could go back in history and look at civil rights movement and feminist movements, change was not made – the powers at be did not hear our sad stories and think 'oh that poor woman, we need to make change for her.' No. The system isn't set up that way."*

R2 added that, "*it's creating networks of people, it's bringing people together who otherwise might feel isolated or feel ashamed that it is somehow their fault. That's where change begins.*" They expanded and supported what R1 said, that "*the only way governments decided to change their minds is if there are people in the streets, people who have decided to be non compliant with the system. Its about building a movement to say basically, you need to change this, it is not working.*" R1 said that with the hydro issue, "*it took a whole bunch of people rallying behind an issue. And I think with systemic changes that's what needs to happen.*"

Bringing attention to the hydro crisis through political activities, the respondents agreed, is what brought about change. R2 expressed that, *"We [the charity] can advocate but if people out there aren't speaking about what it is really like then its just going to fall on deaf ears, then the stereotypes about poverty and poor people continue. Charities will always have to be there, but charity without political activism that works to change the system, will do nothing."* Both respondents agreed that charities need to be able to engage in political activities to challenge the

conditions that cause poverty and inequality. Both respondents agreed that the charity model and the laws are in need of modernization. R1 believes that there needs to be a whole movement away from what is known as the charity model.

> *"If we can't challenge the conditions, we're not making any change. So the charity response is the band aid response, which is not make change, which keeps us all in our jobs and everything going tickety boo and you know people's lives continue to be in danger and people keep slipping through the cracks and experience the system as traumatizing because that's how it's set up, to keep us distanced. So we need a whole paradigm shift, where we're allowed to talk about the conditions that cause poverty."*

R2 added that this will be difficult because, *"once you start crossing that line it threatens all sorts of things, that's the difficult part, but that is the conversation we need to have."*

5.5 Theme 4: Under Resourced

When asked if they were fearful of being called back in by their funders, or potentially losing their funding for being 'too political', R1 responded, *"No. I don't think we have much to lose, I really do think we're in a time of crisis."* Both respondents felt that political activity was needed in order to bring about systemic changes, but R1 expressed, *"we need an overhaul. We need to find new ways of doing things. The biggest threat to the organization at this point is just not having the resources for staff."* Although there is an allowable amount of political activity NHCT can engage in, and that it is needed to bring about systemic change, NHCT is under resourced to engage fully in that political activity. R1 said, *"I'm careful enough to not put the agency in jeopardy. I know kind of what I should and shouldn't say, there are some really easy things that I will just not do and in terms of the percentage, we don't have money, so we don't spend money on political work, it's all done for free."* The respondents both agreed that they do not have the human resources or the financial resources to deal with the increasing need and crisis in North Hastings, effectively advocate and engage in political activity. Although the need

for advocacy and political activity is increasing, NHCT cannot respond in the way they would like to.

R2 expressed that NHCT is not the only charitable organization feeling constrained by human and financial resources when it comes fulfilling their mandate and serving the needs of their community.

> *"Look around our community, its fundraisers all the time, that's all you see happening is fundraisers. It seems like every other non-profit around, the needs are going through the roof and the funding is being pulled out from underneath you. We got a 10% cut this year alone. That does not help. We have been extremely clear, we showed our funders the numbers, how many phone calls we are getting per year, this is the amount of need. And one of the criticism that came back was that we need to learn how to stretch our dollar further. Did you not hear what we said? 17 calls in a day!" - R2*

NHCT is under resourced to serve the needs of the community, advocate and to find sustainable solutions. Although, shifting the organization to face to face interactions has been beneficial for a number of reasons, R2 explained, *"there is the high rate of burnout with face to face interaction, there is a lot of disclosure that occurs and it is not pretty. And it is very weighty hearing those stories day after day after day. 17 messages a day. We do not have the human or financial resources to assist that at all. We just don't."* NHCT does not have the human resources or financial resources to deal with the growing and desperate need of individuals and families in the community. Both respondents expressed this was a double edged sword. They do not have the financial resources to serve the need or hire staff, and they don't have human resources to deal with the need or even search for more financial resources. *"Its hard for us to step away and take the time to write the proposals when people are calling in crisis every day."* –R1

5.6 Theme 5: Alternative & Creative Responses

The two key informant respondents believe that systemic change needs to happen but cannot happen without pressuring political powers and calling upon the public to take action. R1 said, *"in so many ways the system is not working and we can't name that, we can't really talk about it, we need to in order to change things at a systemic level."* Both respondents talked about the bigger systemic issues, such as inequality, the effects of neoliberalism, and the lack of public discourse on the subject.

> *"The over arching picture I really think is that our economic and political system needs to change and it needs to be participatory, it needs to be collaborative and we need to start sharing the wealth. And I don't think that that should continue to be a radical, weird notion, as we have been shut down and called names for saying that. You know many of us have been saying that for years, so we actually really need a redistribution of wealth. The 1% now owns most of the planet and the economy that we are still in, you know upholds us and takes care of us is the same economy that has destroyed the planet, so that's a bigger picture and that is sometimes overwhelming to think that could change but I think those of us who are on the ground doing this work are thinking we could create a new system, you know, one that is of barter, that's of sharing, a responding collectively to issues in the community." – R1*

Both respondents shared that the lack of financial and human resource is effecting their ability to advocate for systemic changes and provide the relief the community needs.

> *"The way we are delivering emergency assistance is not sustainable, it's not possible for [us] to continue. Charities started as a community response to an issue and how did we get so far away from that? We've been taken over by a corporate mentality, where the investment is in 'us' and 'them.'" We've got to rethink it. So that we can have a collective community response." –R1*

A collective and shared community response, R1 and R1 explain are a way of passing the baton and preventing people from being burnt out.

I'd really much rather be part of creating new things, that's grassroots, you know, a circle of care. How do we switch from answering 21 calls of people in crisis to a shared community response? How can this be turned into something where we've got a whole lot of people answering these calls and helping so and so who is stuck in the bush, to have them someone check in and bring him food, or call, and do whatever but do that as a community, not as an agency driven project but as a community driven initiative where we all actually do really care about each other. –R1

While R2 agreed with R1 that this shared community response is needed, R2 said that the current shared response is in crisis mode. The same people are the ones helping over and over and that needs to be expanded to more community members and also agencies. While a network of people has been created, out of those who have come to the organization for assistance, those people are in crisis themselves and cannot always respond to other crises in the way they would like to. *"We need to have people set up to help, to have something set up where you can hand the baton off to someone else."* –R2

Both respondents envision a team of people, that are supported by the whole community to respond to the growing needs in the community and to also find more sustainable solutions to the issues, realizing that a shared community response has to be shared amongst many people. The respondents said that they are going to keep exploring alternative and creative solutions to dealing with poverty and finding sustainable solutions. R2 explains that just starting to operate out in the open as an agency has brought people together and connected them, as evident through the community gardens and Gnomes. They also said,that it has brought in more donations, which was almost non existent when they operated in the dark.

"People are hearing about us and they are seeing the work that we are doing and they want to support that. When you have someone come to you and say we want to give you $5000 every quarter because I see the work that you're doing and how important it is, that says a lot. That speaks for itself. It's that supportive piece, that you are not alone and you're not in this alone. And we'll help you and we'll connect you with other peer supports, we'll connect you with other social agencies that can assist you and help build

that network, that social network, that people can now help each other. Its amazing to watch." R2

The respondents said that NHCT is going to continuing to create networks, build community resilience, find more sustainable solutions, and partner with other groups and agencies, including the Gnomes and that the process is ever evolving. They are open to learning to adapting alternative and creative responses to issues as they come. "*We don't know what's going to happen. And this whole idea that you need to have this logic model and evidence based practice – that doesn't allow for things to emerge organically and you lose magic if you are going to have this really strict timeline about everything." R1*

6.0 Discussion

This section will tie in the literature and findings of this research. This section is

organized by the objectives that guided the research. The objectives are as follows:

1. To explore the role of charities in engaging with vulnerable populations

2. To determine key factors which compel and (or) deter charities from engaging in political

   activity

3. To explore creative approaches to advocacy

Objective 1:

To explore the role of charities in engaging with vulnerable populations

Charities have the opportunity to engage with people who are being impacted by poverty

and social injustice on a daily basis. Historically, charity has strictly meant the relief of poverty,

but as global inequality increases and more sustainable approaches and solutions are being

sought, charity is taking on a new role. The literature discusses charities' movement away from

charity that disempowers and promotes 'othering' or an 'us' and 'them' mentality. Charity has a

disempowering effect over time, particularly when it can only be directed towards people who

are already poor; it promotes the stigmatization of people impacted by poverty. Although

charities cannot serve those who are not already poor, they are instead, moving towards

solidarity with vulnerable populations involving them in creating more long term, sustainable

solutions, which includes the ability to advocate for systemic changes and destigmatizing

poverty.

The respondents discussed how at first NHCT was operating with limited face to face

interaction that was meant to reduce stigma but instead reinforced the stigma around poverty,

and perpetuated the shame and guilt that individuals were feeling when they asked for assistance. NHCT shifted their approach to more face to face interaction and conversations with individuals which involved assuring them they were not alone in their struggle. This face to face interaction, and the breakdown of 'us' and 'them' started to bring people into something bigger and make them feel 'a part of' instead of 'a part from'.

The respondents revealed how those who were accessing assistance had creative ideas for more long term solutions, from a free store to a co-operative car repair. This challenged the notion that poor people are helpless and do not have solutions to problems. NHCT engaged with these people around their ideas and fostered a sense of community. Out of a shared need came the community gardens, and those who had accessed services started to get involved. Emergence theory explains how people who share commonalities are brought together to create networks and in turn realize their capacities, and have the power to create a community of practice. This process is evident in the community gardens project. It was from here that hydro rates and disconnections were identified as a major issue that needed to collectively be addressed. From there the Gnomes for Social Justice was born.

When people were together growing food, sharing meals and involved in a space promoting equality and mutual respect, people formed a network to collectively address hydro rates. NHCT was what Toomey (2009) refers to as a 'catalyst', "which tend to work in indirect ways, as their role is to get the ball rolling, but not to undertake the reasonability of keeping it moving" (Toomey, 2009, p 189). 'Catalysts' can help people identify issues that are effecting themselves and their communities and enable "them to become empowered so that they [can] continue the process of resolving such issues on their own" (Toomey, 2009, p. 189). With

charities lacking the ability to politically advocate, relying on individuals to also advocate for themselves is an interesting area for further research.

The respondents felt that by engaging with those whom NHCT served face to face and promoting social inclusion and participation that it had a destigmatizing effect and brought people together to actively seek out solutions to impacts of poverty. Overall, charities have a unique opportunity to engage with vulnerable populations and can have an empowering effect, which can lead to creative approaches to community development, advocacy and solidarity.

Objective 2:

To determine key factors which compel and (or) deter charities from engaging in political activity

Charities in Canada are advocating the Federal Government to modernize and reform the rules and restrictions outlined by the ITA, CRA and common law, particularly the purposes and activities of charities, so that charities can advocate for systemic changes and bring these pressing societal issues into public debate. Canada's current laws and regulations prevent charities from dedicating more than 10% of time and resources to political activity. This scholars, advocates and charities argue, is a disservice to public discourse and actually contributes to the de-democratization of society (Mulé & DeSantis, 2017). The literature demonstrates how antiquated and ambiguous the laws and regulations are which govern charities purposes and activities.

As discovered in the literature review, more research needs to be conducted to determine what factors contribute to charities engaging in or refraining from engaging in political activity.

The literature suggests there are multiple factors that could contribute to the lack of engagement in political activities including fear of being reprimanded by authoritative bodies and lack of resources. This research attempted to contribute to the literature by exploring experiences and perspectives of those involved with NHCT. While the findings are not generalizable, they can provide insight into the key factors that compel or deter a small charity from engaging in political activity.

The respondents both agreed that advocacy and in particular political activities are needed to create systemic change. They believe that charities should have free license to advocate and that advocacy should be part of their mandate. The literature on this issue agrees with the respondent's views, and is the very core of the movement to modernize and reform the current laws and regulations. As scholars, advocates and charities have argued, charity without advocacy is inefficient and completely unreasonable. They are positioned closest to civil society and to the needs of the most vulnerable and marginalized, and should therefore have the power to provide a voice for those who have historically been left voiceless. The respondents felt compelled to stand up to social injustice and inequality by politically advocating and putting pressure on the government to make systemic change.

The findings revealed that NHCT was compelled to engage in political activity when the Hydro One rate increases and disconnects hit a crisis level; when there were actual life and death situations presenting themselves. NHCT has participated in political activity since the hydro crisis however, this was the first time they were actively engaged in political activity, which makes it an interesting event to study. At that time, they gathered the facts and held a press conference to raise awareness on the issue. NHCT worked within their 10% allotment of time and resources, recognizing that there was never going to be enough financial relief to even

mitigate the situation, and urgent systemic changes needed to be made. Simultaneously, the Gnomes were advocating and calling for political action to address the hydro crisis.

NHCT was not necessarily deterred from engaging in political activities during the hydro crisis however, they were made more aware of the stakes at risk when they were called into their funders' office to discuss political activities. Although NHCT was doing what they were allowed to do, their 10% nonpartisan political activity, and some members were participating with the Gnomes on their own time, the line between the two became blurry. This blurred line caught the eye of someone in the community who notified NHCT's funders. Their funders warned them, without distinctively telling them what to do and not do but instead telling them that they needed to be aware of the optics in a small community. They had not done any wrong, but that they should watch themselves, was how the respondents felt leaving the meeting. This, the respondents, said revealed how controlled they are as charities, that advocating for such a pressing issue was viewed as such a threat. This did not however, deter NHCT members at the time from continuing to do what they were doing for NHCT and hydro and the Gnomes and hydro. They ensured a clearer distinction between the two but continued to work together within their abilities to address the hydro crisis. They committed their 10%, remained nonpartisan, provided education for the community and advocated for individuals on a case by case basis.

What is currently deterring NHCT from engaging in political activity is their lack of financial and human resources. The respondents revealed that they do not have any money to spend on political activity, so they are not concerned about being audited in that regard because everything they are doing is being done for free. As for human resources, operating with two part-time staff, NHCT cannot afford to consistently and actively participate in advocacy that involves political activity. The respondents revealed that more than anything, their lack of

resources is by far their biggest barrier, to not only advocating but to serving the growing need in the North Hastings community. As pointed out in the literature, charities are increasingly facing funding cuts, and respondents revealed that NHCT also had a 10% funding cut this year alone.

Although the need is increasing, charities are becoming less and less equipped to deal the desperate need of people impacted by poverty. As the respondents explained, they are aware of the need to advocate and do it where they can but a lot of that is conducted for free, as the staff are part-time and the board members are volunteers and unpaid. The respondents felt that it was becoming a double edged sword. They felt compelled to advocate because there is a need for systemic change however, they cannot afford the resources. Without resources, they cannot increase their capacity in any drastic form. One of the respondents said that they cannot spend time writing grant proposals to increase their capacity when they are helping people in crisis all day.

Overall, what the findings reveal is that charities do not simply engage in political activity or do not engage. Sometimes they might engage while other times they may not. What these findings discovered was that for a small charity their lack of resources is the largest deterrent to engaging in political activity. While the rules are restrictive and ambiguous in regards to what is deemed political activity and what is not, those are not as restrictive as being under resourced. They do however feel compelled to advocate, and have proven they will advocate when faced with a crisis. For now, the respondents said, they are dealing with a constant crisis so they are managing but also looking for creative and alternative approaches to the work that they do.

Objective 3:

To explore creative approaches to advocacy

Literature which supports the movement to modernize and reform Canada's charitable laws encourages charities to continue to find creative and innovative approaches to advocacy. Mulé and DeSantis (2017) suggest that charities should not only work within the constraints but also challenge and question the system in order to create change so that charities can one day, "engage in advocacy work to the capacity needed to truly address their respective missions and mandates" (Mulé & DeSantis, 2017, p. 312). This statement has merit because keeping charities restricted also restricts charities from fulfilling their mandates and serving the needs of vulnerable and marginalized populations to the best of their ability. However, as revealed above, not all charities have the capacity to challenge the systems. Charities may have to result to working within the constraints.

The findings, reveal that NHCT, does not have the capacity to consistently and effectively engage in political activity despite feeling compelled to and recognizing the need for systemic change. They are however, exploring alternative and creative responses to advocacy and political activities.

As for political activity, NHCT strongly believes that pressure on the powers at be is crucial to create long term systemic change. NHCT is actively working together with other community member, agencies and continually engaging with those who access their services, to advocate for systemic change within their allotted 10%. NHCT is constrained by the current laws and regulations concerning charitable organizations and political activities, in addition to their lack of organizational resources. The findings revealed that by working together with the Gnomes they were able to create systemic changes. The Gnomes have the capacity to be political

and influence change because they are not a charity and restricted like NHCT is, they are not even a not for profit. They are what, the respondents said, needs to exist. They are an entity that is not connected to any external money therefore, they have no restrictions and have the freedom be political and influence change on their own terms. They are just a group of people, who recognized an issue in their community and chose to collectively address it. NHCT will continue to partner with the Gnomes where they can. As one of the respondents said, it is important to be able to pass the baton off to others to step into the ring and do what is necessary. As issues arise in the community that involve being political and putting pressure on the government to make immediate changes, the Gnomes can address them and continue their 'nonviolent joyous revolution.'

With limited staff, expansion of programs, the need for advocacy and the ongoing need to deliver emergency relief, NHCT must increase its capacity to best serve the situations in the North Hastings community. NHCT is trying to keep their head above water and is looking for new collective and shared responses to the ongoing crises. Engaging with Gnomes and passing the baton is just one of the alternative and creative approaches that NHCT is adopting to create change. NHCT truly envisions that through continuing to work with those who they assist, community groups, members and agencies that they can create a healthy community that responds to crises collectively. This shared community response team can be called upon to address the emergency needs of people in their community. The respondents suggested having this shared community response could help assist seniors in need of transportation, people who are rendered homeless in a community with no shelter, and other situations that could require the help of a community ally.

The shifting mission and approach of NHCT, the respondents reflected, brought the impacts of poverty out in the open and allowed those who were being impacted to play a part in the search and implementation of solutions. The community gardens project flourished because of the need to address food insecurity and it did more than that, it addressed social isolation and exclusion, and created social networks, including the Gnomes. Emergence, Wheatley (2006) says, "always results in a powerful system that has many more capacities than could ever be predicted by analyzing the individual parts" (Wheatley, 2006, p. 10) The respondents agreed that NHCT needs to continue to engage with those they serve and the wider community in collective responses because they are stronger together and can continue to imagine creative approaches to advocacy, political activity and social justice.

7.0 Recommendations

1. Charitable organizations in Canada should continue to pressure the Federal Government to fulfil their commitments to introduce a new legislative framework which would lift restrictions on charities ability to engage in political activities.

2. The Federal Government should follow the suggestions from the consultations and report conducted by the Minister of National Revenue to make legislative changes to the ITA and CRA guidelines which would allow for charities to engage in political activities and in turn contribute to public discourse.

3. Charities should continue to advocate within their abilities for more long term solutions to poverty, i.e. raising social assistance rates, tackling the housing crisis – providing more affordable housing, raising minimum wage across all provinces, etc.

4. Charitable organizations should continue to engage with vulnerable and marginalized populations in solidarity to explore more sustainable solutions to poverty.

5. The government should increase funding for charities to respond effectively to people in crisis as well as invest in local community driven projects.

6. Charities that engage with vulnerable and marginalized populations should continue to work towards destigmatizing poverty.

8.0 Conclusion

Charities play a crucial role in society because they engage with vulnerable and marginalized populations on a daily basis, promote social justice, and have the ability to bring pressing societal issues into public discourse. In Canada however, in comparison to other countries, charities are restricted from engaging more than 10% or organizational time and resources on political activity. Over the past ten years, charities' funding has been significantly reduced and the former Conservative government conducted an audit of about 60 charitable organizations because of their 'political activity'. This decrease in funding and 'advocacy chill' added to already outdated and ambiguous laws and regulations governing charities, has brought charities across the country calling for modernization and reform. The newly elected Liberal government included in their campaign promises in 2015 to review the use of the ITA, CRA and common law to govern charities and has promised a new legislative framework. However, two years has gone by, and charities have only been able to contribute to a national consultation on the matter. Canadian charities are therefore left, in the meantime, to continue to maneuver a restrictive landscape to address the growing needs.

This research explored the experiences of North Hastings Community Trust (NHCT), a small charitable organization addressing impacts of poverty in rural Ontario in order to better understand the factors which compel or deter charities from engaging in political activity in this restrictive bureaucratic landscape, in addition to creative approaches to advocacy. The results of this research revealed the important role that charities have in engaging with vulnerable populations to reduce stigma, create networks and social change. Charities are compelled to engage in political activities in times of crisis and because they recognize that political pressure is needed to create systemic change. Charities can also be deterred from engaging in political

activities due to the lack of resources, both financial and human. While the 10% rule is a constraint for charities to participate fully in political activity to create systemic change, in the case of NHCT it was the lack of organizational capacity which presented itself as the major deterrent to engaging in political activity.

Charities are exploring creative approaches to advocacy, working both within and outside the current constraints. NHCT suggested supporting, within their ability, entities which are not constrained in their ability to politically advocate, such as the Gnomes, and engage with the wider community to create a collective and shared response to crises.

Overall, it appears that charities recognize that political activities would allow for them to pressure the government to create systemic change however, until they are better equipped with financial and human resources, they must work within their constraints and continue engage with vulnerable populations and their communities at large to explore creative approaches to advocacy.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

"Charities and Advocacy: Striving for Sustainable Solutions"

Introduction

Thank you for speaking with me today. The goal of this research is to examine the experiences of charitable organizations and their front line workers, to better understand the institutional restrictions they are challenged by when it comes to political activities and advocacy, and how organizations are maneuvering themselves as agents of change to implement sustainable change in society and in the lives of vulnerable populations in which they serve.

Before we begin, I just want to remind you that your participation in this interview is completely

voluntary and you can choose to stop participating at any time. The following questions will be semi structured in nature and are used to invoke a conversation around your involvement with and understanding of the work that NHCT performs. If I ask you a question that you are not comfortable answering, please just let me know and we can skip it. Are you comfortable with me audio recording this conversation?

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Interview Guide (semi structured interview questions)

1) What do feel are the pressing issues in the North Hastings area?
2) How did you first hear about North Hastings Community Trust (NHCT)?
3) Tell me about your involvement with NHCT and their initiatives.
4) What were the circumstances that brought you to be involved with NHCT?
5) What are some of the initiatives that NHCT has organized?
6) What impacts of poverty do you see in this community?
7) How has your involvement with NHCT changed the way you view poverty in your community?
8) What do you feel your community needs to be healthy, inclusive and sustainable?
9) How is NHCT different in comparison to other organizations that you have known or be involved with in the past?
10) What is your understanding of how NHCT as a charity is limited to their participation in political advocacy?

11) In your opinion do you think charitable organizations should be able to advocate and participate in political activities? Explain.
12) Can you give examples of the work that NHCT has done and what has or has not changed because of it.
13) What are the largest obstacles to NHCT and their staff face in making a sustainable impact? Both internal and external obstacles.
14) Do you feel that NHCT has the resources it needs to be productive?
15) What other types of projects/programs/initiatives should be implemented? How should this happen?
16) In your opinion, how should people 'organize' themselves to create change?

Thank you for your participation. Lastly, if you are comfortable would you like to have your role/position and/or name used in the study?

If you have any questions about the research or the research team please contact Dr. Helen Hambly at hhambly@uoguelph.ca or (519) 824-4120 ext. 53408