

**Mohawk College President's Partnership Dinner  
Thursday, May 23, 2019  
Liuna Station, Hamilton, ON**

Wasn't Sarah's story inspiring? It takes courage to make a big change in your life. Sarah took the opportunity to get a college education and you can see the hope it has given her.

We have seen a lot of inspiring people featured in the videos we have viewed this evening. I am proud Mohawk College can be associated with such generosity, community spirit and personal courage.

City School is an example of exactly what community colleges should be doing; reaching out into the community, to people like Sarah, preparing them to go into the world, to contribute to society, to make a difference.

When we give people access to our college, we open up a world of opportunities. We give them something that can't be taken away from them – an education – and we give them hope. That is what community colleges should do.

Sarah's story is much like many other stories I have seen in my life. It's always inspiring. It never gets old. It's the reason I'm in the education sector today.

For more than 15 years, I have been fortunate to volunteer in international development with World Vision. They work with the poorest and most vulnerable people around the world. As the world moves forward, World Vision works to ensure that every child can experience life in all its fullness.

I've taken part in field projects on 4 continents. Based on those trips, I know without a doubt that the most powerful tool World Vision has to combat poverty is education; helping young people stay in school for as long as possible.

In the communities that we work in, if girls are not in school, they are often married young and become mothers at a very young age. Their options in life are limited. If boys drop out of school, they may become farmhands or even sold into child labour. In all cases, children's opportunities disappear and the learning curve of their young lives quickly plateaus.

But when they stay in school, I have seen young women develop skills, secure loans and operate small businesses. They became community leaders while supporting their families. And I have seen young men leave subsistence farming behind to work as civil servants, teachers and even doctors. Education offers them opportunities and it gives them hope.

When World Vision establishes a school and hires a teacher, that school improves the community in lasting ways, with often little more than a blackboard and some desks, some papers and pencils. I have seen classrooms holding 40 or 50 kids. With one teacher. And I have seen 40 more kids outside, hanging around the windows.

They can't get in because there aren't enough seats but they want to learn. So, they stick their heads in the windows and listen to everything the teacher says. That school gives them the opportunity for a brighter future. Education gives them hope for something more. Education provides them with options. And with hope.

It's inspiring to see. I think of those moments every day.

I felt the same way when I arrived at Mohawk College and saw the early results of our access strategy. Of course, the lack of infrastructure and deep poverty is much different in Hamilton than it is in developing countries. But the impact of education is the same the world over.

Over the last 3 years, City School has provided people with new opportunities, and new hope. And this year, we will see a number of City School graduates cross the stage of convocation.

THAT is a community college at work. Education is a powerful tool. It is transformational and the impact is generational. When parents earn a college or university diploma, their children are more likely to follow in their footsteps. We have seen that, too. Parents are the most powerful role models for their children. I know Sarah's journey has inspired her children.

City School succeeds for a reason – it breaks down barriers to make college accessible.

Travelling up the mountain was a barrier – so we brought the classrooms to the community.

The cost of education was a problem – so we offered a college credit for free.

Bus fare was an issue – we provided that.

Child care was a challenge – we helped with that.

If people want to enter our college through City School, we do all we can to help them get their first college credit. And if they want to continue to further education or get a job, we can help them find a pathway that will work for them.

We know City School helps people find a positive pathway. Our researchers tell us that students who complete a City School course are more confident in their abilities to continue studying, and many have started the educational pathway toward a diploma or certificate.

We also know that employers need workers. Working on the Mayor's Blue Ribbon Task Force on Workforce Development, we identified a sizeable need for workers of all skill levels – mostly skilled and semi-skilled, and some unskilled. City School and Mohawk College offer an effective model for them, too.

Mohawk partners with nearly 2,000 employers each year. Some are here tonight – thank you for your support – and some are already partners with the City School program. Those relationships are part of what makes City School a success.

We have done a lot with City School. But we haven't done enough. Not yet. People are still being left behind as our city moves forward.

I am sure you are all aware of The Hamilton Spectator's Code Red series – their award-winning coverage 10 years ago detailed the social challenges we face in Hamilton.

Too many of our neighbours, people not far from us right now, face some stark realities ...lower life expectancy, greater number of emergency room visits, poorer health outcomes, greater instances of mental illness and lower household income.

When The Spec recently revisited those neighbourhoods, things were largely unchanged. In some cases, they were actually worse.

This is not right. This keeps me up at night. These individuals are part of our community. And Mohawk is a community college. We are inclusive and accessible. More has to be done. This evening, I can tell you that Mohawk College is going to do more.

And we are starting now.

We are going to use a solution that I know works – education.

And we are going to use a model that we have proven works – City School.

With a 5-year plan, called Challenge 2025, we intend to build on the success of the City School model and Mohawk's extensive partnerships in the Hamilton area. We are convinced we can and must to do more, and be more, for the people in our community.

To guide the process, we have gathered a taskforce of 15 key partners and community leaders, people who share our commitment and belief that education and training can lead to generational change and community prosperity. We met this afternoon.

Many of you will know Bill Young. He is one of this city's most tireless community builders and social innovators and a member of the Order of Canada. Bill will co-chair our taskforce and work alongside a truly special group of community leaders. I am grateful to both Bill for his leadership and our taskforce for their commitment to this initiative.

The taskforce will spend the next 5 months exploring how Mohawk can increase its impact for more people. They will give us recommendations with bold challenges on how Mohawk can do more, including aggressive targets on what we must achieve to succeed. And, by this Fall, we will have a plan in place. And we will be ready to act.

While we wait for the recommendations of the taskforce, there is already one part of the plan that we know we need. It relates to a story I mentioned earlier. When I visit those World Vision projects around the world, there is another critical part to a schools' success. In every case, the community gets involved.

They may haul sand and water to make the mortar. They might lay the clay bricks to construct the building. The community builds that school and the community benefits from the education the students receive.

With Challenge 2025, we will have a good map for success. With the help of our taskforce, we will chart the right course. But we can't get there alone.

Here is my commitment. I am going to do all I can at Mohawk to make a positive impact for Hamilton's future. And I can guarantee you there will be more success stories and more courageous graduates.

And, with your support, partnership and commitment, we can do a great deal more. We don't need anyone to haul sand and water. And we likely don't need any new bricks. But we do need people to stand with us because there is going to be some heavy lifting to do.

Working together, my hope is that the next time The Spectator revisits its Code Red results, we will see real improvement in those neighbourhoods that need us most. And we will see the reason for that improvement: a strong, vibrant citizenship working together for generational change. And a community college true to its mission.

Tonight, I want to share this plan with you and the reasons behind it. And, just as important, I want to invite you to join us in this effort. Tonight, I want to ask you to help us make our community college accessible to more Hamiltonians than ever before. And help us give more people than ever before a new opportunity. And a new hope for a brighter future.