

ONTARIO GOVERNMENT CONTINUES TO CLAW BACK SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

When they were elected in 2007 on a Poverty Reduction Platform, the Ontario government promised to stop clawing back the National Child Benefit Supplement (NCBS) from social assistance recipients, and to “take children off welfare” by introducing an Ontario Child Benefit (OCB) for all low income families with Children.

The public generally does not realize that much of the OCB is “clawed back” from families on social assistance; the latter have benefitted very little from the \$92 per month benefit that is now being given to other low income families with children.

In July 2008, low income families with children began to receive \$50 per month (\$600 per year); those on social assistance, however, lost the “Back to School” and “Winter Clothing” allowances, which were worth \$245 per year for children 13+ (slightly less for younger children.)

In July 2009, the OCB was increased to \$92, but most of this was clawed back from families on OW of ODSP social assistance by reducing the Basic Needs portion of the parents’ benefits. Worst hit by this clawback were parents with one child aged 13 and over; these families are now receiving only \$1 per month more than they received last year.

The poorest families in the province are those on social assistance: the drastic cuts to social assistance by the Harris Conservatives has never been replaced. With inflation, it is generally recognized that the buying power of social assistance allowances is about 40% less than it was prior to the 1995 cuts.

A spokesperson for the Ministry of Child & Youth Services, Jeff O’Grady, told a group of OW and ODSP recipients on Dec. 14, 2009 that the 2009 cuts were a policy decision - to “lower the welfare wall,” ie. to motivate parents to give up social assistance and become employed.

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Poverty Watch needs your input!

Please send your articles, pictures, and ideas to:
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TUESDAY
APRIL
6

**SENATOR ART EGGLETON IS
COMING TO HAMILTON!**

Join us to learn more about his
latest report:

**In From the Margins: A Call to Action on
Poverty, Housing and Homelessness**

Location To Be Announced

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He did not respond to the groups' countering statement that many parents, especially those with disabilities, may be unable to find appropriate employment.

Even though children have reportedly been "taken off social assistance" in Ontario, their food is provided by their parents. Without meaningful increase in their incomes, parents must continue to rely on food banks, and cannot afford to provide meals that meet the standards of Canada's Food Rules.

The former Minister of Children & Youth made an enthusiastic announcement about the 2009 increase in the OCB, as accelerating/doubling the promised increase - this led all low income families to expect a meaningful increase. By clawing back most of the increase from parents receiving social assistance, we are telling them and their children, "you don't deserve this."

Submitted by Sally Palmer

Figures provided by the Hamilton office of ODSP to a meeting of the OW/ODSP Operations Advisory Committee, September 15, 2009.

WEBSITES OF INTEREST



25in5 Hamilton
25in5 Ontario
Poverty Watch Ontario
Do the Math
SPRC of Hamilton
Poverty Blog
Hamilton Literary Council
Heart & Stroke—Spark

<http://www.25in5hamilton.ca>
<http://www.25in5.ca>
<http://www.povertywatchontario.ca>
<http://dothemath.thestop.org>
<http://www.sprc.hamilton.on.ca>
<http://www.poverty.thespec.com>
<http://www.hamiltonreads.ca>
<http://www.heartandstroke.ca/spark>

THE 2015 PAN AM/PARAPAN GAMES ARE COMING

The 2015 Pan Am/Parapan Games will have an impact on Hamilton. History tells us it won't be a positive one for those living in poverty.

But the games are coming whether we like it or not. Vancouver's Inner City Inclusive Community Housing Table developed "goals, action plans, and outcomes" in order to create lasting benefits from the Vancouver Olympics. Let's take a look at what they've done. There may be something to learn.

For example, Vancouver advocates worked to protect existing housing and address security of tenure. They articulated the need for temporary housing options for those visiting/working at the Games so that people already housed won't be put on the streets. They also wanted already established targets for new housing guaranteed. My sense is that it hasn't worked but I imagine we won't know for a while.

While the only planned Pan Am housing for athletes is in Toronto there will likely be impacts on housing stock and tenants in Hamilton leading up to 2015.

Cost Overruns

Another area of concern is cost over runs - a given with multi-event games. Security in Vancouver is already three or four times in excess of the original budgeted figures.

Facility costs are almost always over budget. Just last month Citizens at City Hall (CATCH) alerted the public to the fact that the Pan Am Stadium costs are already escalating - and we don't even have a location yet.

Accessibility Issues

About 2000 athletes will be participating in the Parapan Games which follow shortly after the Pan Ams. It would be embarrassing if participants and visitors face accessibility barriers. Does this situation present opportunities for advocates to develop and demand a more accessible Hamilton?

Long Term Community Benefits

Although most games haven't provided significant lasting benefits in host communities there is research that demonstrates that at least one multi event games (2002 Commonwealth Games in Manchester U.K.) produced ongoing economic benefits for that city. Could it work here?

Keep this in mind: there will be 3-4 times as many athletes coming here in 2015 than to February's Winter Olympics. We need to find ways to make this event work for the whole community.

Submitted by Bob Wood

Bob Wood is a Community Development Coordinator for McQuesten Legal and Community Services.

The Pan Am Games will take place from July 15 to July 26, 2015 in Toronto.

HAMILTON HOSTS DO THE MATH EVENT

December 4, 2009, marked the 1st anniversary of the Ontario government's poverty reduction strategy day and over 100 people gathered together to hear a report on the "Do the Math" campaign. Advocates came from Hamilton, Toronto, North Bay, Sarnia, Windsor, Belleville and other Ontario communities to share success, challenges, and network to find new ways to stay energized in tackling poverty.

Participants were touched through the speaking of Dr. Chris Mackey, Hamilton's Associate Medical Officer of Health, who gave the clear message "Good Health Begins with Good Food". Michael Patterson, Archdeacon of the Anglican Diocese of Niagara, illustrated the intolerable conditions so many Ontarians live in and reminded us of our duty to eliminate such tragedy. Bonnie Risser of North Bay, reminded us of the indignity people face having to depend on food banks and begging for food. Other speakers such as Darren Nesbit of Sarnia, Tom Pearson, a social activist and single father from Newmarket, Jesse Phillips from Bellville, and Danielle Yaholnitsky from North Bay, shared their experiences of living on social assistance and powerful action they have taken in their campaigns for adequate rates. Jonah Schein of The Stop reported on the 3,000 respondents to the on-line Do the Math survey from across Ontario, which showed an average of \$1,460 was required to meet monthly basic necessities compared to only \$572 and \$1,020 provided on OW and ODSP respectively.

The local 25 in 5 Hamilton group was represented through the words of Deirdre Pike who highlighted

the powerful work the group had accomplished through meeting with their local M.P.P.'s and reported back on the results.

Marv Friesen and Susan Muma, co-chairs of the local Do the Math campaign, spoke about the government's Social Assistance Review, highlighting the need for rates to be set according to the real cost of living for the long-term. The participants broke into small groups for some brainstorming and upon reconvening as a large group the message was clear – the fight to put food in the budget needs to continue!

A special thank you to the many people who volunteered for the day through planning, preparing and baking. Without your efforts the day would not have been possible.

Melanie Pollard is a Mohawk College placement student at the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton



CROSS-COMMUNITY ADVOCATES FOR FOOD SUPPLEMENT CALL FOR POVERTY-FREE ONTARIO

Ninety advocates from communities north, south, east and west across Ontario, about half people living on low incomes, convened in Hamilton on Friday, December 4, 2009 to mark the first anniversary of the Ontario Government's Poverty Reduction Strategy.

While all assembled were pleased that the Government had made a commitment to reducing children's poverty by 25% in five years, they strongly urged the development and implementation of a comprehensive plan to create a poverty-free Ontario.

The focus of the day was on the Put Food in the Budget Campaign, advocating for the introduction of a \$100 a

month Healthy Food Supplement for all adults on Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Supports program. Jointly sponsored by 25 in 5 Hamilton, the Social Planning Network of Ontario (SPNO) and The Stop Community Food Centre, the day-long session combined a series of public statements by anti-poverty activists with lived experience of poverty and their supporters with an afternoon of strategy discussion on the next steps in the PFIB campaign.

Three clear and compelling messages were delivered:

Good health begins with good food. Dr. Chris Mackey, Hamilton's Associate Medical Officer of Health, drew the clear links in the research between the negative health consequences and poor nutrition resulting from the inability to purchase good food. Darren Nesbit of Sarnia reviewed his struggle to live on \$80 a month for groceries after paying his rent.

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No one in Ontario should go hungry. The Venerable Michael Patterson, Archdeacon of the Anglican Diocese of Niagara, asserted that the existence of hunger among so many Ontarians is an intolerable moral condition that the Healthy Food Supplement would begin to address.

No one in Ontario should have to beg for their food. Bonnie Risser of North Bay talked of the indignity of relying on charity and food banks to get through the month when the money runs out.

Peter Clutterbuck, Social Planning Network of Ontario

*To view the complete article and videos from the event,
visit <http://www.spno.ca/>*



Which tomorrow shall we choose?

Say YES to Spark Together for Healthy Kids at
heartandstroke.ca/spark

SPARK TOGETHER FOR HEALTHY KIDS™

The Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario is challenging all Ontarians to tackle child obesity. The Spark Together for Healthy Kids™ campaign is a social movement, calling for collective action toward public policies that encourage and enable children to be physically active and have access to healthy food.

It's not hard to see that poor nutrition and inactivity are threatening the health and well-being of children. The rate of overweight/obesity among Ontario students has tripled over the past 25 years. Twenty-eight percent of Ontarians aged 2-17 years are overweight or obese. This puts them at higher risk of developing heart disease, high blood pressure and type 2 diabetes. We can stop this trend, but we must start now.

The Social Planning Network of Ontario has become a partner with the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario, to support our common goals for increased access to healthy food.

The success of the Spark Together for Healthy Kids campaign depends on broad involvement and change at many levels. The future of healthy, active children will thrive with your involvement! Add your voice! Visit www.heartandstroke.ca/spark. Sign the Spark Promise to Our Children and vote for one of six policy priorities in the online poll. Encourage partnerships, organizations and businesses to get involved.

*For more info in Hamilton, Halton, Niagara, and Brantford
contact*

Sue Tuner, Community Mission Specialist

What is the 25in5 Hamilton Network for Poverty Reduction?

25 in 5 Hamilton developed out of the Income Security Working Group. The ISWG hosted a speaker's event that included Marvyn Novick and Peter Clutterbuck from the Provincial 25 in 5 Network, promoting the need for a poverty reduction strategy would reduce poverty in Ontario by 25% in 5 years. Following the presentation, the participants expressed a desire to have follow-up meetings on these issues and continue to connect to the provincial network.

Members of 25 in 5 include people with a lived experience of poverty; staff of various social service organizations, associations and legal clinics; individual community members; students; academics; faith community members; and provincial riding association members.

Our local 25 in 5 Hamilton supports the campaigns and efforts of the provincial 25 in 5 Network, including the "Do the Math" and the Ontario Housing Network.

Visit our website: www.25in5hamilton.ca



JOIN 25in5 HAMILTON!

We meet on the 2nd Thursday each month at Myler Hall, 225 James St. N. in Hamilton.

If you'd like to join in, please contact
Deirdre Pike, Chair at dpike@sprc.hamilton.on.ca or
Susan Muma, Secretary at susanmuma@hotmail.com

JOIN THE CAMPAIGN FOR ADEQUATE WELFARE AND DISABILITY BENEFITS (CAWDB)

Meets on the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays every month from
1:00 to 3:00 PM