

North Bay and Area Social Planning Council

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MEDIA RELEASE

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Social Audit Reveals Our Community is Hurting

What is it like to live in poverty? What is it like not to have enough money to pay for food and rent? What are the barriers that keep people in poverty? What changes are needed to break the cycle of poverty?

People living in North Bay helped answer these questions as they spoke out regarding their lived experiences of poverty during several Hearings held across North Bay by the North Bay and Area Social Planning Council and the Poverty Reduction Working Group of Nipissing on Tuesday and Wednesday this week.

One parent described the types of choices her family is forced to make while struggling on a low income, "For instance, if my husband and I want our kids to eat healthy, I have to give up my heart medication, stomach medication and migraine medication and I do it because our kids come first." Dozens of similar stories of sacrifice were disclosed over the course of the two days.

Another individual receiving disability support due to mental health challenges expressed how living on a low income has affected his self-worth, "I have to pretend that I'm middle class to get respect. My dignity is gone because of the way I've been treated." As he pointed to Main Street he added, "You see all those people out there who are low income? They hang their heads. They become invisible to the rest of the community. We don't belong in our own community."

Living in poverty is not just restricted to persons who are recipients of Ontario Works or of the Ontario Disability Support Program. People working hard in low paying jobs are also falling into poverty. "Serving people with two to three jobs is not uncommon now, it's the norm" reported one local social worker. Other service providers revealed that they have seen a sharp increase in demand by North Bay citizens who have suffered job loss, run out of Employment Insurance, or who work one or more low wage jobs. Many have never accessed support services in the past.

The group of helping professionals and volunteers attending the hearings also expressed a common frustration around funding pressures and explained they are always “expected to do more with less”. These same caregivers acknowledged the need for changes at the policy level, the need to work together, and the proven effectiveness of planning tables to address community needs holistically.

In May 2010, participants from these Hearings along with participants of other provincial Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition (ISARC) Hearings being held across the province will gather at Queen’s Park to share their lived experiences of poverty and ideas for system change with Members of the Provincial Parliament. The local Social Audit Team and ISARC hope that these stories will encourage the Ontario government to strengthen its efforts to eliminate poverty.

Today, the local Social Audit Team is watching carefully to see the level to which issues related to poverty (i.e. income support, healthcare, education, childcare, employment) will be addressed in the Ontario Budget.

The Social Audit is being sponsored by ISARC and is supported by religious leaders and other citizens from our area and across the province. Since 1986, ISARC has provided a means for faith communities to work together for social justice and to contribute to new public policies based on greater justice and dignity for Ontarians marginalized by poverty.

Media are invited to speak with the Volunteers of the Social Audit:

March 25, 2010 at 9:30am at the North Bay Public Library (Board Room)

For further information, please contact:

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