

Community Development Halton

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Halton Too Has Poverty

Burlington, July 5, 2011

Community Development Halton and Poverty Free Halton, at the invitation of the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, met with Frances Lankin and Munir Sheikh, Commissioners of the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario. Halton and its municipalities rarely receive visits from commissions appointed to investigate social issues. As John Versluis, co-chair of Poverty Free Halton commented: “poverty in Halton is often hidden, buried under the veneer of affluence and well-being.” He continued emphasizing that “the gap between the annual income of a family of four on social assistance and that of the median Halton family income is \$5,793 per month or approximately \$69,230 per year. These people live in different worlds, making bridges of compassion and understanding difficult to build.”

Rishia Burke and Jen Gerrard of Community Development Halton told the Commissioners that they, and others from their research team, had crossed the Region talking with people living in poverty. The many stories of people painfully showed that the basic necessities of life such as food shelter, recreation, opportunity to belong to their community were outside of the reach of those in poverty and especially those on social assistance who live in ‘deep poverty’.” Rishia Burke added: “mental health was always an underlying theme during community conversations. Poor people live under tremendous stress. They do not have enough money to live and face choices between housing or food. Every day they face the stresses of surviving.” Jen Gerrard told the Commissioners that

For Immediate Release
July 5, 2011

programs and services should respect the dignity of people. They should not feel “less” as a result of asking for assistance to meet basic needs.”

As the conversation moved on to social assistance reform, Dr. Joey Edwardh of Community Development Halton, pointed out that the dialogue and, ultimately, the recommendations for change must be evidence-based. She observed: “Today, there is no evidence-based process for determining social assistance rates and as a result the benefits have no relation to the cost of living in a community”. The Commissioners thanked the delegation for their thoughtful and insightful presentation.

For more information, contact:

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