

North Hastings Community Trust ? looking at poverty

To the Editor,

A very big thank you to Jim Eadie for covering the Poverty Roundtable announcement of new funding to combat poverty in the County. We look forward in North Hastings to seeing this roll out.

I would like to expand upon the article with some of my own experience and learning. I was a teenage single mom in the '80s living in Sault Ste. Marie. At that time I received social assistance for myself and my daughter and I was allowed to continue in school. I was able to attend university while receiving government assistance ? which covered my basic needs. I could not have continued in school without government support. University saved my life. It is how I am here.

This kind of government support changed under Mike Harris and his Common Sense Revolution (1995-2002). Under Mike Harris, government assistance was cut by 21.6 per cent along with support programs, like allowances to return to school. It became more difficult to access government assistance and a culture of distrust and dislike of anyone needing supports was fostered ? we are still feeling the impact of this today.

Things have not improved under provincial Liberal leaders either. Dalton McGuinty and his Liberal government continued the devastation that the Tories did to social assistance. They raised social assistance three per cent, noting it hadn't increased for 11 years. However, a three per cent increase still amounted to a cut in real dollars. The Liberals have created the appearance of helping people on social assistance while enacting a hidden austerity program continued by our current Liberal government under Kathleen Wynne.

North Hastings is one of the poorest areas in the province. There are few employment opportunities that pay liveable wages and most employment is seasonal. People are forced to seek government assistance ? which is not enough to cover basic needs. This is a problem that affects all of us. Almost 60 per cent of our population is living with the devastating effects of poverty ? not enough money to house ourselves and feed our families.

At NHCT we hear the impacts of economic injustice daily from people who are not surviving well ? People who are bearing the burden of our broken systems and economic disparities.

However, we remain hopeful as we build relationships and engage with more and more community members wanting something better, wanting to make change.

We are committed to addressing the effects of poverty by working collaborately and creatively with our communities. We are committed to building a movement that makes healthy food accessible, sharing resources like wood, creating meaningful employment and ending the stigma and shame around poverty.

This spring we are hosting a visit by Put Food in The Budget ? a provincial anti-poverty group interested in hearing how we are doing. May 24 to 27 representatives will be visiting us to hear how we are affected by poverty. We will take this time to mobilize together to address poverty and make change. You are welcome to join us.

Please contact us at NHCT if you have any questions or are interested in joining our efforts to end poverty.

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