

“Behind the Masks” - Testimonials from Those Marginalized by Income –

**Presentation of the Report on the
Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition (ISARC)
Social Audit in York Region on April 20, 2010**

**Community and Health Services Committee
January 19th 2010**

**Tom Pearson, Poverty Action for Change Coalition
Yvonne Kelly, York Region Food Network**

Acknowledging York Region Commitment to Poverty Reduction

- **Establishment of Human Services Planning Board**
- **Development of a Community and Health Services Departmental Multi-Year Plan that incorporates poverty reduction initiatives.**
- **In May 2010, Regional Council endorsed the Dignity for All Campaign**
- **Exploring options for a Transit Subsidy for low-income residents in York Region.**
- **Participation and demonstrated interest in York Region's first ISARC Social Audit**

ISARC

Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition

- **The Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition originated in Ontario in 1986**
- **The purpose of the ISARC Social Audit ?**
 - Community assessment of the status of poverty in Ontario
- **2010 marked the 4th and largest Social Audit ISARC has carried out in Ontario since 1988.**
 - This is the first time York Region was chosen to host a Social Audit.
 - York was one of 26 communities across Ontario that held social audits in 2010
- **What makes the ISARC Social Audit different ?**
 - Real stories, voices of people marginalized by inadequate income

York Region's Social Audit

April 20 2010

- The York Region Social Audit took place in two locations – Richmond Hill and Newmarket.
- 23 individuals shared their experiences of being marginalized by income.
- One Mayor, 4 regional councillors and 7 local councillors participated in the focus group for municipal politicians.
- 24 front line workers from social service agencies participated in 2 focus groups.
- 3 Rapporteurs - Charles Beer, John Rogers, Daisy Wai
- End of day – everyone shared a meal together and reflected on the day's events.

Significant Themes

1. Inadequate Income
2. Housing
3. Transportation
4. Community Programs and Services
5. Health

Notable Comments and Observations

- Themes of resiliency and the desire for independence, dignity and respect permeated the personal accounts.
- The limits and often misunderstood consequences of charity
- “It could happen to anyone if it could happen to me.” “Anyone can end up here.”
- While the cost of food was not cited as a risk factor, inadequate income and high costs of housing, forced many to go without food to pay the bills.
- People want and need hope.

Sense of Urgency

A sense of urgency was communicated throughout the audit process, the personal testimonies, and the focus groups.

Broader context for York Region's Social Audit

The York Region Social Audit findings are consistent:

- With themes and learning that has occurred in the 26 communities that participated in the 2010 ISARC Social Audit across Ontario.
- With multiple policy reports that stress income security as the core issue that *must* be addressed.

Next Steps

To continue building on York Region's commitment to Poverty Reduction, we respectfully request that the Committee and Council receive and endorse in principle, the York Region ISARC (Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition) Social Audit Report.

Recommendations

Core priorities in York Region Social Audit Report

Advocacy

Advocate for:

- Adequate Income with senior levels of government - e.g. For a \$100/month Healthy Food Supplement for all adults on social assistance.
- Adequate indexed social assistance rates that reflect the true cost of living.

Inclusivity and Dignity

- Create opportunities for people on low-income to contribute to community based planning and poverty reduction strategies.
- All organizations review their practices/policies and challenge themselves to provide the best service possible, while respecting the dignity and rights of the individuals they are serving.

Healthy Communities

- Utilize a *Healthy Communities Model premised on an understanding of the Social Determinants of Health*, in planning, service delivery and policy development.

Thank You

- Individuals and Groups who worked diligently to prepare for the Social Audit in York Region.
- Individual Participants who bravely shared their stories – we would not have had an Audit Report without you.
- Focus group participants, local elected officials and front line agency staff who shared your thoughts and insights with us.
- Our wonderful and skilled rapporteurs, facilitators and recorders who ensured that we were able to glean, capture and record the valuable information.
- Community and Health Services Committee Staff and Committee members who have demonstrated an interest in the audit, its report and findings.

In the words of ISARC, the purpose of a social audit is to inspire people of faith, governments and society in general, to respond collectively to our neighbors in need. Our challenge to each and everyone of you is to become inspired and to respond collectively. Thank you for your time today.