



## **Moving to a Poverty Free Ontario**

The Social Planning Network of Ontario (SPNO) plans to launch an initiative to build cross-community support for a Poverty Free Ontario by the end of this decade.

Social planning councils have a long history since the 1930s of advocating for low income people, whether welfare recipients or working poor. In recent years, the SPNO and its organizational members have assumed a lead role in urging the Ontario Government to adopt a poverty reduction strategy for Ontario. Specifically,

- In the summer-fall of 2007, SPNO mobilized cross-community support for poverty reduction in Ontario and released a report on “Ontario as the Child Poverty Centre of Canada”, which prompted Premier McGuinty prior to the October 2007 election to commit to the development of a poverty reduction strategy within one year of his Government’s re-election.
- SPNO strengthened its cross-community mobilization on poverty reduction by developing a Policy Framework and Blueprint for Poverty Reduction and by conducting two tours of the province visiting 30 communities prior to the release of the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy in December 2008.
- Since 2009, working with community leadership in Toronto and across the province, SPNO has focused on the Put Food in the Budget Campaign (PFIB), promoting the adoption of a benefit increase of \$100 a month Healthy Food Supplement for all adults on OW and ODSP as the first step towards adequacy in benefit levels to enable all Ontarians to live with health and dignity.
- Partnering with The Stop Community Food Centre and guided by the PFIB Steering Committee, the SPNO has provided organizing and field support for the use of the on-line Do the Math survey tool (9,000 completed) and has engaged 20 communities across the province in the Do the Math Challenge.

### **2011 Provincial Election Year**

The Ontario Government’s current commitment to poverty reduction focusing on a 25% reduction in child poverty ends in 2013. Since 2011 is a provincial election year, now is the time to begin a public discussion about where Government action needs to go to move from a partial and measured commitment to reducing child poverty to a full commitment to the eradication of all poverty in Ontario by the year 2020.

In May 2010, the SPNO leadership set policy development and cross-community mobilization for a poverty-free Ontario as a major provincial and community level priority for SPNO and its local and regional organizational members in 2011.

## **Mission**

An Ontario free of poverty will be reflected in healthy, inclusive communities with a place of dignity for everyone and the essential conditions of well-being for all.

The mission of Poverty Free Ontario is to eliminate divided communities in which large numbers of adults and children live in chronic states of material hardship, poor health and social exclusion.

## **Securing a Legacy Commitment**

2017 will be the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Canada as a country and Ontario as a province. Poverty Free Ontario will ask the political leadership of all parties in the 2011 provincial election to commit publicly to a **“legacy commitment”** for the Sesquicentennial. That legacy commitment would be for the provincial government of whatever political stripe to have adopted and implemented a comprehensive plan by 2017 resulting in the eradication of poverty in Ontario by 2020. This plan should move beyond poverty reduction targets set by the current Government for children in 2013 to bring *all* children and adults out of poverty by the year 2020.

## **PFO Strategy for 2011**

### **A. A Policy Agenda for a Poverty Free Ontario**

A new Policy Agenda for a Poverty Free Ontario would build on SPNO's policy development work in 2008. Essentially, policy proposals will be developed and advanced in three key areas for the eradication of poverty in Ontario:

- (1) End Deep Poverty: Upgrade Social Assistance
- (2) End Working Poverty: Assure Basic Living Wages
- (3) Protect Food Money: Phase in a Full Housing Benefit

The Policy Agenda would link the strategy for eradication of poverty with a good quality of life for all Ontarians in order to build public and political support. It must demonstrate that the interests of the poor and the broad middle class are indivisible.

### **B. Critical Milestones**

Simultaneously with the framing and promotion of a Policy Agenda for a Poverty Free Ontario, ***there are specific actions and resource allocations that can and must be taken now and over the next year*** or more to kick-start a longer term commitment to eradicating poverty. These actions constitute Critical Milestones that would:

- a) address immediate hardships that people are experiencing now (i.e. the HFS);
- b) identify key decision dates for the implementation of poverty eradication measures to achieve the goal by 2020; and
- c) demonstrate serious political commitment to poverty elimination beyond the perpetual future promises that have prevailed to date.

The Put Food in the Budget Campaign advocating for a \$100/month Healthy Food Supplement for all adults on social assistance is an immediately doable action. This measure could be implemented as part of the Government's commitment to Social Assistance Review, which at the moment is focusing on long-term overhaul of the income security system rather than action possible immediately using the existing social assistance system.

Proposing specific measures for ensuring income adequacy beyond the first step of the HFS, Poverty Free Ontario would constitute an important policy development link to the immediate social assistance increase that the PFIB campaign is advocating.