

## OSSTF PRESENTATION NOVEMBER 29, 2010

I'd like to begin today with a bit of a history/overview of the PFIB Campaign at the provincial level and what we've been able to achieve at the local level in York Region.

I brought along a number of handouts that I will be referring to, for you to choose from and will leave them here for you to pick up on your way out.

I want to thank you for the opportunity to bring this information and campaign to you today and we appreciate why as the Human Rights Committee, you have an interest in our campaign which is essentially a campaign for social justice for the some of the most vulnerable individuals and families in our communities across Ontario.

So while the information is important, even more important is the ACTION that follows from that. I was encouraged by Les's invitation to Robin and I to come and talk about how you might be able to get involved in this effort. So I'd love to use this time to explore some of the ways your committee and membership could work with us to promote this campaign for more adequate incomes and increased food security.

### Handouts:

PFIB Background

Joint Statement following 2010 Budget – Health costs of Poverty

York Region Fact Sheet

Kristine's Article

Copies of ISARC

Hunger Report 2010

### OSSTF – What we Do?

**OSSTF/FESSO** is a strong, independent, socially active union that promotes and advances the cause of public education and the rights of students, educators and educational workers. While establishing working conditions for its members, **OSSTF/FESSO also works to build strong public services**, preserve academic freedom, prevent the privatization and commercialization of our educational institutions, ensure that students receive an education free of bias and discrimination **and provide an equitable opportunity for all students to succeed in a strong, well-funded public education system.**

### Communications and Political Action

The Communications and Political Action Department is responsible for **political issues such as equity and diversity, social justice, status of women, and international assistance.** The department oversees lobbying and communications with members and the media. It is also responsible for the publishing Update, a monthly newsletter for all members, and Education Forum, a periodical issued three times per year.

### Background to the PFIB Campaign and Healthy Food Supplement – A quick 2 year History

- PFIB Campaign grew out of the 25 in 5 Network aimed at reducing poverty by 25% in 5 years.
- December 2008: Province makes commitment to Poverty Reduction aimed mainly at children.
- January 2009 – Healthy Food Supplement is born – PFIB Campaign
- March 2009 Budget – No real measures to eradicate poverty or increase SA levels or include the HFS
- PFIB and HFS supported by ALPHA (Association of local Public Health Agencies) since its inception as well as by Social Planning Network of Ontario
- Also endorsed by the Ontario Public Health Association
- April 2009 – STOP Community Food Centre develops the Do the Math Survey Tool; approximately 9,000 people to date have completed the survey in Ontario
- April 2009 – MAY 2010: 40 MPPs visited across Ontario to have them complete the Do the Math Survey Tool; 7 are located in YR
- April 2010 – Eat the Math Challenge in Toronto
- October 4-8<sup>th</sup> – Do the Math Challenge in 18 communities across Ontario (over 1,000 people have now taken the Challenge – 12 in YR alone)

#### **Goals and asks of the PUT FOOD IN THE BUDGET Campaign:**

- Immediate implementation of the \$100/month Healthy Food Supplement for all adults on social assistance, as a down payment towards the necessary increases to bring social assistance into line with real costs of living.
- Establishing a transparent mechanism for the increase of rates that enables them to be indexed to the actual costs of living in Ontario. At present, a client on SA in Ontario receives \$585/month as opposed to pre-1995 when he/she would have received \$640. Their purchasing power in real terms is equivalent to that in 1967.
- Maintain the Special Diet allowance at the current funding levels as a place to start.

#### **Do the Math Survey – Complete the Exercise or go over it with people**

#### **Objectives of the PFIB Provincial Do the Math Challenge are:**

- Increase understanding of the experiences of people who rely on social Assistance
- Raise awareness that charity is not enough – that the experiences of people on social assistance is systemic not individual – and that policy change and social investments are required of the Ontario government.
- Translate public empathy into public action – for people to talk to their MPPs about supporting an immediate increase in social assistance of \$100 per month for every adult in Ontario on social assistance.

**Successes of the Provincial Challenge** – over 1,000 people have now done the Challenge and approximately 9,000 have completed the Survey.

#### **Next Step for PFIB:**

- Invite other campaigns and groups working to reduce poverty to join together in an act of solidarity in the coming months, to present a clear picture to the province of the critical mass that is mobilizing and

expecting a real commitment to reduce poverty in Ontario – holding the government accountable to its promise to reduce child poverty by 25% over five years.

- Continuing to seek provincial partners, groups, professional associations, corporate and union alliances that are willing to actively advocate with the government for the HFS and increased overall rates for SA, both ODSP and OW.
- One of the things this campaign has been very successful in doing is staying focussed on strategies that work and broadening our base of support around the province by including people from all sectors in the initiatives – Do the Math Survey and MPP advocacy as well as the Take the Math Challenge. We will continue to build on these successes and create a critical mass of people who are aware of the issues at stake, many of whom were likely not aware a few weeks or months ago.
- One example is the coordinated support that we have gained from the Health Sector at all levels, including numerous of professional and public associations and foundations focussed on disease prevention and awareness.
- It would be a logical next step to build more connections with the Education Sector and be able to make the case for income and food security from this vantage point.
- At the provincial level we are also working to gain more support from unions across the board given the social justice and human rights issues at play here.

#### **Highlights of YR work – MPP Visits, Strong Core Working Group, Participation in the ISARC Social Audit in April 2010 and The Challenge in October**

We visited all 7 MPPs, 4 of which completed the Do the Math Survey; all mpps concede that the rates are inadequate, especially when they consider that the cost of a Nutritious Food Basket for one person in York Region for one month was \$215 as per 2008 costs. It has been cited closer to \$250 across the board on average, for an individual at 2010 food costs.

**Here are the totals arrived at by the 4 MPPs, 3 PCS and 1 Lib and the comments they had to make:**

Look for PFIB publication from June 2010 Strategy Day

#### **Groups who Endorse or are members of the YR Do the Math Working Group**

Poverty Action Coalition for Change

York Region Food Network

Heart and Stroke Foundation

York Region Alliance to End Homelessness

Canadian Diabetes Foundation

Trinity United Church

St. John's Chrystendom Church

Social Planning Council of York Region

Georgina Food Pantry

Social Planning Network of Ontario

## **Participation in the First ISARC Social Audit in York Region in April 2010**

### **Comments of our Challengers after their Week on a food bank Diet**

#### **Debora Kelly, Editor in Chief with York Region Media Group**

I'm not pretending simply because I did a Food Bank Diet for five days I can know what it's like to not have enough. I continued to live in my nice house, drive my nice car and wear my nice clothes throughout the week, but my Food Bank Diet drove home how ridiculously inadequate social assistance rates are — it's simply impossible to eat a healthy diet. In a wealthy province such as ours, should healthy food be a luxury?

By the end of the diet, I was thinking about much more than food. Kristine, who lives this for real, opened my eyes not only to the need that exists in our community for affordable housing in safe communities and meaningful employment, but also about the need for more compassion and understanding in our communities.

#### **Robin Wardlaw, Minister Trinity United Church in Newmarket**

When I meet people coping with poverty who never thought they would, some of them say that they were fairly judgmental about poor people until it happened to them, and that they have now seen the light.

The Food Pantry couldn't handle it I realize, but in my fantasy, everyone does this exercise at some point in their life. Everyone walks 1.6 kilometres in other people's shoes for a week and gets in touch with the limits that poverty imposes, the feelings it creates. Perhaps then there would be justice in our society, instead of constant insistence on charity.

#### **Rabbi Martin Steinhouse - Am Echad Congregation**

The diet wasn't just about not having enough food. I experienced anger on the first day when I didn't have enough food. The experience was laden with emotions and stress — humiliation, shame, isolation, anger and anxiety. No

one could live on the amount of money that individuals receive on social assistance and the kind of diet that one is reduced to when forced to rely on the food bank.

### **Rachel Steinhouse**

The food bank diet is over. I have learned that there is a deep psychological feeling of helplessness that goes along with having to go to the food bank. The despair of not having enough food or money. It will take a change in the government and a willingness for people to share their fortunate circumstances.

### **Christine and Michael Way Skinner and Family of 5 Children**

We were given two litres of milk for the week. We typically drink four to six litres a day. This will be a challenge! Anna was surprised to learn that folks are permitted a visit to the food bank only once a month. She thought that any time you needed food, you could go and ask for food.

I think of my father -- he grew up in the Depression --- he was the youngest of 14 children -- eight of those children starved to death --- he panicked anytime we said we were hungry --he was disabled with 10 children -- I am #9 of that 10 ... He would wake us up in a PTSD panic and force us to eat...bread and tea....we were poor without any running water etc.... We were always forbidden to say we were hungry/starving... Take all that and squeeze it into this experience... "I am hungry..." they said (speaking of his own children during the week of the Challenge Diet) ***Michael Way Skinner, speaks about the trauma of just hearing the words, "I'm hungry".***

I currently have a pinched nerve in my neck. I had to have Beth load all the groceries into the back of my van. What if I had to take public transportation or walk with my groceries? We take for granted so many little conveniences in our lives, don't we? ***Christine Way-Skinner***

So we opened a package of soda crackers to supplement our meal for the second night in a row. One of our children said, "I need MEAT!! A big honkin' chunk of steak! Why don't we just cheat? Who would know? I think if I had to live on this diet for real, I would cheat." "Do you think that would be right?" we asked. "No," but I sure understand why someone would want to." Hopefully (and probably) our kids won't be in a position where they will have to make this decision.

If nothing else at all has come of our family's participation in this challenge, without a doubt, five children in Newmarket are far more grateful for the healthy, bountiful food that is placed before them every day.

## **Costs of Poverty and Linkages with Poor Health.**

The Costs of unchecked poverty in this province are noticeable to anyone who wants to see it; increased rates of chronic disease such as diabetes and heart disease are direct results of poor diet and health. Underlying the Social Determinants of Health, those factors which determine the health of a population, is income adequacy, the driving force behind food insecurity and poverty. This one health determinant is most critical because it determines and defines the prevalence of so many other factors that contribute to health such as access/lack of access to healthy food, social isolation or social involvement in one's community, and the access to adequate housing, just to name a few,

*Income is perhaps the most important social determinant of health. Level of income shapes overall living conditions, affects psychological functioning, and influences health-related behaviours such as quality of diet, extent of physical activity, tobacco use, and excessive alcohol use. In Canada, income determines the quality of other social determinants of health such as food security, housing, and other basic prerequisites of health. More equal income distribution has proven to be one of the best predictors of better overall health of a society.*

*p. 12 Social Det. Of Health – THE CANADIAN FACTS by Mikkonen and Raphael.*

*Food Security / Insecurity*

*THE CANADIAN FACTS - Social Determinants of Health pg. 26*

*Inadequate income underlies food insecurity – people are unable to have an adequate diet. Dietary deficiencies are more common among food insecure households and are associated with an increased risk of chronic disease and difficulties in managing these diseases Heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, and food allergies are more common in food insecure households even when factors such as age, sex, income and education are taken into account. Additional food insecurity produces stress and feelings of uncertainty that have health-threatening effects. Also, malnutrition during childhood has long-term effects on a child’s physiological and psychological development.*

***Poverty is Making Us Sick: An annual increase of \$1,000 in income to the poorest 20% of Canadians would lead to almost \$10,000 fewer chronic conditions and 6,600 fewer disability days every two weeks. This is a nutshell, could be achieved through the HFS at least for people on Social Assistance.***

### **OTHER RECENT REPORTS speaking to Hunger and food insecurity**

***Hunger Report 2010 – York Region***

***Hunger Count 2010 – Food Banks Canada***

***Hunger Inquiry – Toronto (recently released findings week of November 22<sup>nd</sup>)***

***ISARC Publication 2010 released on Wed Dec 1<sup>st</sup>***

### **COSTS AND INVESTMENTS**

**Cost of the HFS** - \$700 million this year due to higher numbers of adults on Social Assistance. It has been estimated that \$100 HFS for all adults on social assistance could be paid for if taxpayers paid only \$100 more this year to allow for everyone on SA to receive this moderate increase.

**Special Diet Allowance** - \$250 million to be cut and replaced by Nutritional Supplement; we await the province’s intentions on this but as it stands, it would seem that they will replace the Special Diet allowance with a new “Nutritional Supplement” and reduce the amount that they are going to spend on this to \$150 million down from \$250 million as they claim it is not sustainable.

*\$1,000 extra in the hands of individuals in the bottom 20% of the income scale would amount to almost 10,000 fewer chronic conditions and 6,600 fewer disability days every two weeks.*  
**POVERTY IS MAKING US SICK - Lightman and Mitchell**

## **Why this an issue for the OSSTF and the Human Rights Committee in particular?**

- **Because it is a matter of Equity and Social Justice and reflects key principles that your Union membership stands for.**
- **Because it is a matter of creating sound social and public policy that is inclusive, promotes equity and addresses barriers to disenfranchised groups in order to create a more level playing field.**
- **Because we know that households with children and dependents make up the majority of food insecure households and those utilizing food banks.**
- **Because poverty puts children and students at higher risk for compromised academic outcomes, poor health outcomes and other limitations such as decreased opportunities for physical activities, and recreation programs.** *“Increasing numbers of studies indicate that children in food insecure households are more likely to experience a whole range of behavioural, emotional, and academic problems than children living in food secure households”.* **The Canadian Facts – Mikkonen and Raphael.**
- **Because students and families suffer when poverty predisposes them to poor health and fewer opportunities, including ones for education and employment.** Several families through the ISARC report 2010, talked about their children not being able to take advantage of opportunities in school ie. Activities and courses that required additional fees that they could not afford. Transportation costs are another factor. Families reported keeping their kids home from school or choosing to homeschool, because of the peer pressure associated with wearing the RIGHT CLOTHES, another issue related to income.

- **Because other critical initiatives around Early Learning and the expected outcomes from these investments are compromised when public policy does not acknowledge or address the food and income security of a significant and growing number of students/families.** In reality, not addressing these disparities and inequities, could in fact set up a two-tier education system, for those who can and those who cannot take full advantage of the full range of educational opportunities available to them.

## **Why is this a matter of Social Justice and Equity?**

**Dr. David McKeown – A Matter of Social Justice and Equity states in an article in the STAR on March 18, 2009**

Late last year, the WHO issues a dramatic call to action on preventable health inequalities. A panel of eminent international health leaders, the Commission on Social Determinants of Health, outlined an “Ethical Imperative” for governments and civil society to address the injustices that cause health inequalities, both within and between countries.. According to the commission, “The unequal distribution of health-damaging experiences is not, in any sense, a “natural phenomenon but is the result of toxic combinations of poor social policies and programs, unfair economic arrangements, and bad politics.”

Across Ontario public health leaders are seeking to develop healthy public policies that address underlying causes of poor health. Income, housing, racism, education – these basic determinants of health require policy responses that start with the lived experiences of those who suffer the disadvantages of unequal health. Putting food in the budget is the right thing to do. It address the fundamental issue of human rights and dignity and promotes health while fighting poverty. These are goals shared by most Canadians and proclaimed by global health leaders.

## **ISARC and the Quest for Social Justice:**

**ISARC (Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition)** has a great deal to say about hunger and food insecurity in Ontario and the necessity of addressing these issues through sound public policy with an emphasis on adequate incomes. In its last provincial audit report, **Lives Still in the Balance**, released in 2007, in a chapter titled Food Insecurity: A symptom of Poverty and Inequality in Ontario, they had the following to offer on the subject:

“Charity, not social justice, has become the primary social policy to address food insecurity in Canada.” While food banks were introduced in the 1980’s as short-term emergency measures, they have taken hold permanently, in the absence of federal or provincial commitment to income or food security.

“In a province as wealthy as Ontario, there is no justification for allowing 1.5 million people to worry about where their next meal will come from, to rely on second-rate handouts from food banks, or plead with their family physician for a “prescription” for a healthy diet. In accordance with our international commitments to social justice and our understanding of the determinants of health, it is time to demand an end to the poverty that produces the degradation of humanity that we call food insecurity. All Ontarians deserve access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.”

#### **CALL TO ACTION FOR INDIVIDUALS AND GROUPS:**

- \* Complete the Survey, get others to complete the Survey and submit online results to Premier McGuinty, Minister Meiulleur and/or Laurel Broten.  
[www.putfoodinthebudget.ca](http://www.putfoodinthebudget.ca)
- \* Take the Do the Math Challenge
- \* Join with those who have endorsed the PFIB Campaign by endorsing the Local Do the Math Working group and work locally to gain support for increased SA rates;
- \* Work with us at a municipal level to request the Region’s support of the Healthy food Supplement and increased rates for social assistance as a poverty reduction strategy and a key way to meet the needs of **Vulnerable Populations** – the chosen priority for the Human Services Planning Board of YR.
- \* Write a letter to your MPP, expressing your concerns and requesting them to publicly support and champion the HFS.
- \* Ask Other Member organizations or groups you are part of to endorse the campaign and participate in the above mentioned ways, as one step in achieving social justice and equity for vulnerable populations in YR and across Ontario.

- \* Read the ISARC publications at the provincial and regional level in YR and share this with your elected municipal representatives, provincial MPPs and your MPP; ask them about their view on poverty reduction and cite Campaign 2000 and the fact that we are no further ahead on child poverty in Ontario than we were in 1987 when the Campaign began.
- \* Get involved with local efforts such as the Do the Math Working Group or ISARC to advocate with regional government (and the YR Human Services Planning Board) for a continued commitment to poverty reduction and the necessary funds to make that possible.
- \* Donate to the Campaign either at the local level or the provincial level. Items that we have difficulty funding include: Resource and print materials, coordinating/planning events/rallies (transportation, accommodations, food, etc.)
- \* Let others know that while there unfortunately remains a demand for emergency food provision, this is not the solution to the problem, only a stop gap measure. If you do choose to donate to a food bank, also go one step further and get involved in advocating for change at the policy level, that will reduce our reliance on inefficient, unjust and charitable efforts at addressing hunger.

#### **THE SPECIFIC ASK OF OSSTF NEWMARKET:**

- **WE, as in PFIB,** would like to build relationships with provincial leadership of all teachers' unions. So.....if your local contact could help us get a meeting with the provincial leadership that would be great.
- Your local contact might help by saying to your provincial leadership - 'we want to do the challenge and we want you to do it with us and thereby challenge other locals to join with us too'. Mike Balkwill, the provincial coordinator of the PFIB has indicated that he would be happy to go to a follow-up. Meeting with your local OSSTF people and/or provincial people.
- We don't have a formal endorsement mechanism - but promoting the DTM survey among their members is good and also to think about how to take it into the classroom.
- Last some union locals make \$ contributions to our campaign and we could use funding for all the work that needs to be done, including a critical mass gathering of campaigns/groups working for poverty reduction to present a consolidated message to the government about the need for adequate social assistance rates.

