

MOTION TO SUPPORT PUT FOOD IN THE BUDGET
Councillor Desmarais, February 14, 2011

Whereas arbitrarily setting rates does not ensure that people receive adequate incomes to meet the basic necessities of life; and

Whereas inadequate benefit levels lead to monthly cycles of chronic hunger among recipients creating health consequences with both personal and economic costs to us all; and

Whereas it is important that there be accountability for providing or failing to provide adequate income supports for people who must be on social assistance; and

Whereas the basics of food and shelter are out of reach on current assistance levels, forcing people who are on assistance to make impossible choices between paying rent and buying food; and

Whereas the purchasing power of social assistance benefits is now 60% of what it was 15 years ago, when social assistance levels for individuals was reduced by 22% and the cost of nutritious eating has continued to increase every year since then; and

Whereas the increasing number of people relying on social assistance and food banks has grown as a result of the current economic crisis; and

Whereas the existence of widespread food insecurity and chronic illness related to poor nutrition is the result of public policy choices, not the responsibility of people living on inadequate incomes;

NOW THEREFORE THE COUNCIL OF THE CORPORATION OF THE CITY OF PORT COLBORNE RESOLVES AS FOLLOWS:

1. That the City of Port Colborne supports a clear and transparent process to set social assistance rates - rates that are set on the real cost of living a healthy, dignified life in Ontario; and
2. That the City of Port Colborne calls on the government of Ontario to immediately introduce a \$100.00 per month Healthy Food Supplement for all adults on social assistance as a first step toward meeting basic needs; and
3. That a copy of this resolution be forwarded to the Premier of Ontario, The Minister of Community and Social Services and area municipalities.

Do the Math

This survey compares your total estimated monthly costs to the income of people on social assistance or working at minimum wage.

Do the Math was developed by The Stop Community Food Centre for the campaign to gather information and inform the public of the shortfall in monthly income that prevents people from being able to eat healthy and to meet the cost of living.

It is important that individuals and groups across Ontario take the Do The Math Survey communicate the outcomes to their Members of Provincial Parliament (MPPs).

So far Do the Math has shown the critical need for the immediate introduction of a \$100 a month Healthy Food Supplement for people who need it.

DO THE MATH SURVEY

Instructions:

Does a single person on social assistance receive enough income to live with health and dignity?

Do the Math will help you determine how much you think one needs to live frugally, but in dignity and in reasonable health in Ontario. Expenses are divided into sections such as housing, transportation, health, etc. Prices for things vary on where you are living. Feel free to browse through your community paper to see how much things cost in your neighbourhood when filling out the survey.

Do the Math will take approximately 8 minutes to complete.

Housing-Related Costs

Rent (including utilities) - Choose one of the following:

- Bachelor Apartment
 - One Bedroom Apartment
 - Shared Accommodation
 - Subsidized Housing
- Telephone, Internet

\$

\$

Other Housing-Related:

These expenses include replacing or repairing furniture, purchasing electronics such as an alarm clock, radio, DVD player, etc.

Transportation Costs

Public Transit

\$

Vehicle, Insurance, Gas

\$

Other Transportation:

These expenses can include purchase of a wheelchair or bicycle and its repair and maintenance. It could also be occasional taxi rides, as well as gas money for ride shares.

\$

Health Costs

Vitamins

\$

Medications including dispensing fees

\$

Other Health Care:

These expenses can include dental, vision and complementary alternative health care.

\$

Clothing and Personal Hygiene

Personal care	\$ <input type="text"/>
Clothing and shoes	\$ <input type="text"/>
Other Cleaning Costs: <input type="text"/>	\$ <input type="text"/>

These expenses can include coin-operated laundromat, dish soap, all purpose cleaner, etc.

Entertainment & Recreation

User fees for the gym or classes at the local community centre	\$ <input type="text"/>
Gifts for a social event (i.e. Birthdays, holidays, baby showers, etc)	\$ <input type="text"/>
Alcohol	\$ <input type="text"/>
Other Entertainment Costs: <input type="text"/>	\$ <input type="text"/>

These expenses can include video rentals, seeing a movie, going to a show/concert, etc.

Miscellaneous

Books, other reading materials, library fines	\$ <input type="text"/>
Pet food and expenses	\$ <input type="text"/>

Banking fees, faxing and postage costs

\$

Emergency Expenses

\$

Interest on credit cards, line of credit, loans, etc.

\$

Other Miscellaneous Costs:

\$

These expenses can include anything other than food expenses that is not covered by this survey.

Food

Groceries

Please ensure to include food from all four food groups

- Vegetables and fruit
- Grain products, such as bread, cereals, granola bars
 - Milk and alternatives
 - Meat and alternatives

\$

Beverages or meals at a café or restaurant

\$

Snacks or prepared foods purchased at a convenience store or on the road

\$

Total ----- \$

DOES IT ADD UP?

Let's go over some quick statistics.

Monthly income for a single person on Ontario Works:

\$585

Monthly income for a single person on Ontario Disability Benefits:

\$1,042

Monthly before-tax income for a person earning minimum wage (35 hrs/week):

\$1,555

SURVEY RESULTS

By your estimate, you have indicated that a single person requires \$_____ to cover the cost of housing, transportation, health-related costs, clothing and personal hygiene, entertainment and recreation, and miscellaneous expenses.

This means that you have:

- \$_____ left to spend on food if you're a single person on Ontario Works
- \$_____ left to spend on food if you are receiving ODSP
- \$_____ left to spend on food if you are making minimum wage (35h/week).

Next Steps

If you don't think that social assistance rates add up to a life of health and dignity, [Make Your Voice Heard!](#)

STEP 2: MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD!

Put Food in the Budget!

Send a copy of the following pre-written letter below to Premier Dalton McGuinty. Or, if you prefer, write your own message directly to the Hon. Madeleine Meilleur (Minister of Social Services), the Hon. Laurel Broten (Chair of the Cabinet Committee on Poverty Reduction) or to Premier Dalton McGuinty through his website.

Premier McGuinty:
(Cc. Hon. Madeleine Meilleur, Hon. Laurel Broten)

I did the math. I know that current social assistance rates do not add up to a life of health and dignity. Even the basics of food and shelter are out of reach.

I ask you to immediately introduce a \$100/month Healthy Food Supplement for all adults on social assistance as a first step towards meeting basic needs.

But that's just the first step. There needs to be a clear and transparent process for setting social assistance rates - rates that are based on the real costs of living a healthy, dignified life in Ontario.

I urge you to Do the Math too!

Sincerely,

Dispelling the Welfare Myths

1. The poor do not want to work.

The fact is most poor people do work. 78% of people in Niagara who live in poverty work full time and have a median income of \$23,400. If we look at the people who are dependent on welfare:

- 23% are deferred from participating in employment search activities due to awaiting a disability pension, are temporarily unable to work due to illness, or are caregivers to a family member with a severe illness or disability. Many people who are deferred continue to do other activities such as improving their skills through education or training, or volunteer placements in the community.
- 27% are single moms and caring for young children
- Overall, 52% of the people dependant on welfare are children (notice this has gone up 10% from 2007 Legacy of Poverty Report below)

2. The welfare system is rife with cheating and fraud.

A study conducted by a national auditing firm estimated fraud to be in the range of 3% of the Ontario welfare budget. We have reason to believe that this estimate can be generally applied to other parts of the country. On the other hand there are estimates that income tax fraud is in the order of 20%.

3. Poor families are poor because they have too many kids or they have more kids to get a higher cheque and not work.

Only 15% of families on assistance have 3 or more children. This means 85% of those on assistance have 2 or less children. That is comparable to the regional average of 1.1 child per family unit.

4. Poverty is the failure of the individual.

Massive increases in the unemployment rate have not resulted from personal inadequacy. Ontario has an unemployment rate of 8.1%. People have lost their jobs – people who have been gainfully employed all their lives. Most people are on welfare because they experienced a personal crisis that was really beyond their control.

5. Welfare rates are too generous.

All welfare rates are well below the poverty line. The highest rates are still 20% below; the lowest are 76% below the poverty line. For example, a single person on social assistance receives \$592 per month for a yearly income of \$7,109.