

VALENTINES FOR DWIGHT DUNCAN - VOTING WITH YOUR HEART!!

Across Ontario this week, many communities are voting with their Hearts – Valentines Hearts that is. As part of the cross provincial Put Food in the Budget Campaign, thousands of community members are showing their support for the implementation of the \$100/month Healthy Food Supplement for all adults on social assistance. The recipient of these Valentines is Ontario's Finance Minister Dwight Duncan who will be delivering his 2011 budget in the weeks to come. In this act of solidarity, we are imploring Minister Duncan to "Have a Heart" and to make a difference in the lives of individuals on social assistance who are among the most vulnerable of our citizens.

Since the province announced its Poverty Reduction Strategy in December 2008, different measures have been introduced but nothing to speak of in term of the dire poverty being experienced by adults on social assistance in this province. In 1995, social assistance rates were cut 21.6% and since that time a combination of miniscule increases of 1% here and 1% there along with the steady increase in cost of living over 16 years, has amounted to rates that reflect 40% less income or purchasing power for individuals today than they had pre-1995. Just to point out how antiquated the rates really are, a single person on Ontario Works will receive \$592/month while the Low-Income Cut-off, or poverty line for a single person, is approximately \$1,500/month. People on social assistance are actually so far below the poverty line that paying rent and eating food is out of the question. Any wonder that food bank use is on the rise and the number of homeless and chronically under housed continues to increase?

"While \$100 Healthy Food Supplement will not eradicate poverty by any stretch of the imagination, we believe it could be the first humanitarian step to address the immediate need of individuals in our community who are going without food either to pay the rent or to feed their children." Yvonne Kelly, Chair of the Do the Math Working Group. The next step is setting rates that reflect the true cost of living. The province is currently engaging in an 18 month review of the entire social assistance system but while this process unfolds, we maintain that people cannot wait any longer.

It is also not an option for Charity to replace Income. While food banks and meal programs across York Region and the province, are trying to hold their own against the barrage of need that they encounter every day, it is simply naïve and unrealistic to think that volunteers and donations can continue to make up the difference where public policy falls short. Adequate rates of social assistance and unemployment insurance, good jobs, fair employment standards, a living wage that reflects the true cost of living, instead of the minimum or poverty wage that we currently have, along with affordable housing, are the policy directions that will make it possible for people to live with health and dignity, and reach their potential in this province.

This week, voices across Ontario have made themselves heard in Valentines poems such as this one:

"Dwight Duncan, don't fudge it – Put Food in the Budget." People across the province have voted with their heart and continue to send a clear message to the Finance Minister.

Municipalities across Ontario are also joining the campaign's momentum as they recognize the cost to their communities, when the health and well-being of all their citizens is not safeguarded. York Region Council recently accepted and endorsed the York Region Social Audit and its recommendation - one being the implementation of the \$100 Healthy Food Supplement. We are also joined by the Health and Social Services Committee of the Regional Municipality of Durham, Social Services Administration Board of the District of Parry Sound, the Town of

Wainfleet and the City of Hamilton, all of which passed motions to call on the provincial government to add a \$100 HFS.

For more information about the Put Food in the Budget campaign or Valentines for Dwight Duncan, please visit www.putfoodinthebudget.ca or contact the Do the Math Working Group in York Region at 905-967-0428 ext 205.