

## **The Ontario Social Assistance Review Response**

### **from Oak Centre ODSP Group**

#### **Why are the Commissioners not hearing clearly expressed community voices for significant rate increases?**

You asked us to respond to Issues and Ideas, and we did. We need the \$100 Healthy Food supplement, to have the nutrition needed to deal with living a healthy life from day to day, with fresh fruit and produce. We are responding as a disabled group of individuals who need to have this addition to our income. We need this Healthy Food Supplement to have a balance in our health. If we were to begin to work the number of hours that we may be able to contribute to the work place we need the balance in our health to keep our medical issues in balance. Lack of proper nutrition gives worsens and emotional and physical impairments and once we are out of a balance it takes a long period of time to regain our medical balance to be able to function at our best. To deal with the stresses of working we need to have our medical balance to be able to function in any work place. Many of us have episodic disabilities and the lack of nutrition brings on the episodes more often. When many of us have tried to work we ended up in the hospital as we had imbalance, did not know and understand our own abilities and limitations to work. Working, the stress and the lack of proper diet made us sick. We want to be able to contribute but we also need to keep the medical balance we need to function daily to care for ourselves or be in a work place for even a few hours a week or day. The majority of us will never be able to work in full time regular employment, but two or three of us could fill one position in a work place.

We are concerned about what the commissioner heard as little or no attention to our issues seems to be in the Discussion Paper: 2. There was not concern that we needed proper food, transportation, a supportive work place with adequate accommodation and employment supports. We need a job coach who can work with us to keep us health and within our limitations. We often think we can do more and then we are sick. We are not able to keep this balance ourselves and an assessment of what each one of can do will be needed and followed to keep us functioning at a healthy level. The employer will need to be understanding and they are not even educated to understand how we can work and contribute. Without this education employers will not likely ever give us the opportunity to work in their work place. We will need sheltered workshops to begin to acquire healthy working balances and skills that employers in regular work places will require. We would need to be paid fair wages and we are open to a training wage but when the skill is acquired we want regular wages. We want to be valued like any other employee and this is determined by the rate of pay. The entire community and labour market will require education before this could ever begin it if is to be successful. The negative comments of others is often the action that

facilitates the loss of medical balance and this could last for hours, days or weeks. We see that all of this will be costly but this preparation of employers and community needs to take place first and the sheltered workshops for training need to be established.

**Why do the Commissioners continue to pit the interests of social assistance recipients against those of the working poor in their discussion on “an appropriate benefit structure”?**

All low income persons are the “deserving poor” whether they are working or on public assistance. We are all the “deserving poor” of Ontario. Our families and children are “deserving”. We need an appropriate benefit structure with the proper supports provided through the Ontario Drug Benefits program that we are now given. We support the benefits of OW being given to all low income workers but not at the expense of taking away and altering the programs being delivered currently to those supported by OW and ODSP. All low income people need their medications, the vision care and teeth care to be able to function well in the work place. The stigma to being supported by public assistance needs to be stopped. There are no sufficient jobs available and other in the community look down on the unemployed or persons support by public assistance when there are not enough jobs, but the people in this position are bullied and punished for the mistakes of our government and our society. This must stop and we need to share responsibility for making the system work by starting with fair taxing for all and also obtaining the corporate taxes owed and to stop the exemptions. If the companies leave Ontario then we need to open this work place and obtain our own contracts. The workers could be assisted to own and operate co-operatively the company with the assistance of the government. Companies would not be so anxious to leave if they knew they would then have more competition for the work they do. We need to employ and keep employed the citizens of Ontario.

We are willing to be involved with a participation agreement system if we are willing and able to work. This should not be used to punish those willing to be part of this program. It is unwise to push disabled persons to work if they are not interested in doing this. When there are no jobs then why would any push be made with the exception to assist those who want to be able to get some type of work to supplement their ODSP or to find a job that they can do and end their dependency on ODSP. The employment supports and accommodation will always likely be needed in most of the work places for a disabled person to work. Mr. Drummond needs to attend a few Social Benefits Tribunal appeal hearing to see why the individuals are not able to function sufficiently to work in a structured regular work place. Why they may be able to work a couple of hours but are not able to work in gainful employment.

We are therefore asking you for new work places that accommodate and provide sheltered work to help us build our skills so we can find a specific job we can fill once we are trained and can function at a level any employer would be happy to

have in their workplace. We want and need this type of assistance. We would need gainful employment. We who are interested in adding to the productive employment of Ontario believe there are answers to help us have a better life and adequacy of income. Fair taxing and fair corporate taxing could be a place to begin. Instead of arguing over the poverty guideline or LIM perhaps we need to have discussions about a “greed line” to say when too much money to have as wages or as income is “too much”.

We see from the discussions and discriminatory remarks of Drummond. The Drummond Report advises the government that all public assistance individuals and families need to be pushed into deep poverty. Most of us are disabled due to accident or poor health and this is not our fault but we are treated as if we caused this problem in our life. Many of us were born with our medical and physical impairments that worsened until we were not longer able to work, or we were never able to work. This could happen to anyone, or one of our family members. We want to be kept part of the main stream of life and not pushed down the government has often done to those living in the poverty class. Create jobs and this class can change its’ statistics.

Building and maintaining sheltered work places would make work and give both able bodied and disabled persons opportunities to work. Each community will need many of these environments and the agencies that are already working to us, who understand us, would be the best employers. The non-profits and then life can change for we who are disabled and for Ontario. We can manufacture more of our own products that are “Canadian made”.

The vision of the Drummond Report is deep poverty and this will mean more sick persons, more theft and crime, more need for policing, more medications, more doctor and hospital care, more new problems for each community that will only increase all these issues and make a bigger problem as a spin off to increased poverty. When individuals in other countries are dissatisfied with the decisions for their government they rise up in civil disobedience. This issue is at a saturation point if there is further austerity. Job creation is the only answer and shared responsibility by fair taxing. Our monthly public assistance cannot be stretched farther as it is stretched thin trying to meet our daily needs. Most of our costs are for housing and these costs keep rising. If rent controls were put in place then the Landlords stop doing repairs. We are always the persons who loose in these situations.

### **Why do the Commissioners reinforce the myth that social assistance recipients need incentives to work?**

Recipients don’t need incentives to work. We need proper environments, accommodation, employment supports and sheltered work places to find employment tasks we can perform. We need assessment, training and the

opportunities to fit into various work places. We need to work as teams of individuals to fill one position. We do believe we can do this but we need a trainer who would work with a team to keep the position full and functioning as the employer needs to have at all times. Disabled persons are often not able to do this without having another person to step in who also knows the job. These are the options we need to be able to contribute within our own abilities and capacities.

We need to be the workers filling the needs of Canadian consumers and have less off shore products. We need light duty jobs do create products that could light to move around and easily made without heavy lifting and too much repetitive movement. The work place has to have many different tasks to use to train and it also has to have a variety so that a person can learn many small tasks and more around so that are not further impaired by range of motions issues. The work place would need to be ergonomically engineered. Canadians purchase off shore products as they are cheaper but if the only product of a particular type was the one made by the disabled industry then this is what would be purchased. Many pocket books are stretched and not only of those on public assistance. It is time for the Ontario government to lead the way in a different type of thinking and work places to allow for more people in Ontario to have jobs. These work places should only hire those on public assistance. There are many persons qualified to run all the levels of a corporation and industry that are currently supported by Ontario Works or Ontario Disability Support Program. We have read the statistics of the education levels of those supported by OW/ODSP. This is the only way that the numbers of disabled persons will be hired. The market place needs these changes and then we can contribute. Once it is seen that disabled persons can do quality work and perform as teams to fill a full-time position regular employers will be open to risk and try to be part of the employing of those who are disabled. The WSIB issue is a constant that employer have to deal with when they think about hiring a disabled person and we see this as a blockage and barrier to hiring disable persons.

**Why do the Commissioners re-open the question of which income poverty measure should be used in social assistance reform?**

The LIM was decided and why is there any discussion about any changes of this recently decided level. It is already agreed and legislated. Also the increases to the minimum wage have been decided and must be given. We cannot roll this back. Employers will need to find other ways to meet their needs to pay these rates. Create more work would be a good aspect and to expand the business being performed. This answers need to come from the market place and not be down loaded on the low income person trying to just be self-sufficient.

## **Why will the commissioners not champion the needs of Ontario's most vulnerable in the face of austerity and retrenchment?**

We completed the Issues and Ideas and believed that the province cared about the plight of the poor. Now we see that the proposal of Drummond has taken precedent and the real report did not materialize; the What We Heard report. What has taken precedent is not Poverty Reduction but Deficit Reduction. This is an unfair way to use the many individuals and agencies who gave of their time to answer the questionnaire. The harness that has come for the reporting is unfair and we question any validity any of the report that has been given as this does not address the questions in Issue and Ideas. Why have the most vulnerable persons in Ontario been abused in this fashion. It is difficult to bear this treatment daily but not this is a blatant harsh unfair tactic.

This entire tactic has been to attach Ontario Disability Support Program recipients as there was very little in the discussion of what changes needed to be made to the Ontario Works program. This was the plan from the start as we see this result of the reporting on Issue and Ideas.

Our final response is that the ODSP recipients should not be in any worse off financial or service position as a result of these changes the Commissioners propose. We submit that before any structural changes are made to ODSP, there must be clear proposals with the details and an opportunity to again enter into the discussion. This discussion and all discussions regarding any of these changes being discussed need a genuine consultation process that much more actively involves people with lived experience. We know what will work and how this needs to be considered and how this will likely be of benefit to us and to others in Ontario. Your ridiculous ideology of "balancing" adequacy with fairness for low income workers is an abuse to those Ontarians who have to live a disabled life and we endorse the positions taken by Poverty Free Ontario, ISAC and many others who understand the real issues of being a disabled person in Ontario.