

Meeting with Ken Dryden

On 04 September, 2009, I had the honor of meeting with Ken Dryden, MP and National Outreach Advisor, Working Families & Poverty, and a small group of community organization representatives to discuss the issue of poverty and, as indicated in his letter of invitation: "why we, any party, any level of government, haven't done better; and how we can do better in the future".

Roundtable discussions have been held with the MP across the country concentrating on solutions, rather than obstacles. We had lively discussion about early intervention in particular, which Mr. Dryden reported was his first roundtable discussion on that suggestion. The premise is that money invested in early intervention – on our children – can better able us to break the cycle of poverty. Money invested in resources for prenatal, postnatal and early childhood services can prevent more costly intervention later on in life – i.e. children's treatment, foster care, hospitalization, young offender facilities, etc etc.

We also made Mr. Dryden aware of the hard to serve population in our area, i.e. those dealing with major barriers to employment and education - particularly those dealing with major drug addiction - and the lack of local resources.

Mr. Dryden, although not preparing a formal report on the outcome of his discussions across the country, will use the information to advocate and seek solutions to overcome poverty.

Interestingly, Shelley Shute, Ontario Works Manager provided me with some local information showing that, in 2007, it cost an average of \$722.63/month to feed a family of four – an increase of 25% since 1998. During that same time period, the minimum wage increased only 13% and social assistance rates by 5% which, as Shelley pointed out, does not match the growing cost of nutritious foods for a family. Based upon a family of four with two adults earning minimum wage (less than \$33,000 per year), that family would need to spend approximately 26% of their income on food!

In terms of rent, a two-bedroom place in our area begins at approximately \$550 per month plus utilities (these rents are hard to find), with rents climbing to \$600 - \$750/month plus utilities. Given that the monthly shelter maximums, which include heat and shelter costs, under Ontario Works effective 01 August, 2009 for a "benefit unit" of two is \$560 or a "benefit unit" of 6+ is \$738, it is not difficult to see how many families find themselves in a position where they may be threatened with eviction or heat and utility shut-offs as a result of not being able to afford to pay their entire monthly shelter costs.

As we shared with Mr. Dryden, we need to intervene early with children and families; we need to ensure affordable housing in our communities; and we need to guarantee that social assistance and emergency funds can meet the needs of basic shelter, food and warmth.

Quality Assurance

The Management Team members are currently working together and with their respective teams to develop and ensure implementation of quality assurance practices across our service continuum. It is critical that we continually strive to connect with those we serve and improve services in efficient and effective ways. Joanne Spence, our Personnel & Policy Officer, has been invited to present "where we are" and "where we are headed" with quality assurance at the November Board Meeting.

Human Resources

The following Human Resource activity has taken place since last reported:

Name	Title	Status	Start/Effective Date
Sheila Skyberg	Paramedic	resignation	24 June/09

Sandi Groulx	Paramedic	replacement PFT	10 August/09
Dianne Lampi	RRDSSAB Housing Mgr	resignation	12 August/09
Jon Neurinski	Maintenance II	casual	20 August/09
Judy Karpinen	Customer Service Rep	casual	8 Sept/09
Heather Johnson	Customer Service Rep	casual	8 Sept/09
Ron Patrick	Maintenance II	casual	11 Sept/09
Steve Hands	Maintenance II	casual	11 Sept/09

Welcome to Mike Ford, the new member representing the Township of Alberton and a sad farewell to Barb Cournoyer, the outgoing representative from Alberton. Barb served as our Children's Services Committee Chair and worked hard to ensure that children's services were available to families throughout the Rainy River District. She will be deeply missed and we wish her well! Take care, Barb.

Respectfully Submitted,
/d Dittaro