

**Poverty File Up-Date to  
Ontario Council Legislative Committee  
September 27, 2008**

**By Linda Hall, CFUW Hamilton  
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## **Background**

Anti-Poverty Advocacy has been particularly active this year and especially this past summer.

During the provincial election, less than a year ago, Premier McGuinty promised to have a poverty-reduction strategy and targets to measure the government's progress in place by the end of this year – December 2008.

Reducing child poverty was a key focus of the Speech from the Throne in November.

The Premier followed up by appointing Deb Matthews, Minister of Children and Youth Services to lead a new anti-poverty cabinet committee.

The composition of the cabinet committee was very encouraging – all the key Ministers were a part of it – Community and Social Services, Finance, Health, Education, Colleges and Universities, Municipal Affairs and Housing, Citizenship and Immigration and the Attorney General.

The government recognized that fighting poverty had to be a multi-sector approach involving all departments and resources.

Last spring 1000 Ontarians participated in by invitation-only consultations with Deb Matthews, Children's Minister and chair of the cabinet committee.

Over the summer several thousand others attended more than 50 public gatherings across the province to discuss the poverty reduction strategy.

And a government website called "Growing Stronger Together" was setup, with 6 key questions. It invited written responses from individuals, community groups and provincial organizations. By the end of July, about 600 submissions had been made.

In mid-July, I sat down with Teri Shaw and Myra Willis to draft a response to these 6 questions on behalf of Ontario Council.

We cited 18 separate CFUW Policy Statements to support the comments and suggestions we made, including resolutions for:

Early Learning and Child Care, Education, Post-Secondary Availability, Apprenticeship and Skilled Trades, Employment Equity, Housing, Homelessness and Poverty, Homeless Youth, Income Equity for Ontario's Children, and Violence Prevention.

Our Key messages were:

1. There have been a **plethora of reports and consultations** with organizations and people who have experience, expertise and knowledge.

**There must be action** – the political will, strong leadership from the government, a buy-in from all sectors, and the funds to make it happen.

2. **Poverty is about individuals** who do not have sufficient resources to support and their families.

They need --- access to strong and supportive communities, healthy food, housing, liveable incomes, pay equity, access to quality childhood development programs, affordable recreation and sports programs, health and dental care, grants and low cost loans for post-secondary education, apprenticeship training, support for youths-at-risk, just to name a few.

3. We identified **vulnerable populations** that have high levels of poverty --- women alone with children, Aboriginal peoples, racialized minorities, people with disabilities, recent immigrants, victims of violence, seniors, psychiatric survivors, homeless youth, adults and families.
4. We cited **many programs already in existence** across the province that make a difference in the daily lives of children, youth and their families who are living in poverty.

And, we emphasized that **communities need long term and sustainable funding** for program support and for community-based research and evaluation in order to assess the value of these programs.

5. We offered **suggestions for integrating the roles we all play** – individuals, not for profits, the private sector, volunteers and all levels of government to increase opportunities for Ontarians living in poverty.
6. And we offered an **extensive list of concrete indicators of progress** in key areas of concern.

A copy of that “position paper” is posted on Ontario Council’s website.

[http://www.cfuwontcouncil.ca/POVERTY%20REDUCTION%20STRATEGY-%20Brief,%20for%20web%20July%2031,%202008\\_d..pdf](http://www.cfuwontcouncil.ca/POVERTY%20REDUCTION%20STRATEGY-%20Brief,%20for%20web%20July%2031,%202008_d..pdf)

## Moving Forward

The focus for Ontario Council’s January meeting will be on Poverty. Jacquie Maund from Campaign 2000 has already been confirmed as a morning speaker and the planning committee will be contacting Deb Matthews to ask her or a spokesperson from her committee to join us as well. It would be interesting to get an update on the progress of the government’s Poverty Reduction Strategy.

I checked the government's website last night and there has been no update since May 12.

Mr. McGuinty has been quoted in the papers recently saying that the government remains committed to coming up with a plan, but with the recent economic downturn, government will not be able to move as quickly as it intended.

Deb Matthews was quoted in the Toronto Star, Wednesday saying, "We're as committed as ever." She said that there's a sense of urgency that she feels, that our members feel, that the premier feels.

She noted that the Liberals were elected on a platform, which included not running a deficit, but some improvements would be immediate regardless of the economy. "Not everything we need to do costs money," she said, referring to the complicated network of rules governing social services that can end up penalizing the poor.

Poverty advocates and groups such as Campaign 2000 are encouraging the public to keep the pressure on the government to follow through on their election promise. They want a poverty-reduction target of at least 25 per cent in five years and 50 per cent in 10 " for everyone, not just children.

There have also be a number of newspaper articles and letters to the editor this week responding to the Premier's statement

Here's a short but effective one I came across on Wednesday, Sept. 24, 2008 in the Toronto Star.....

*Re: Poverty slips on McGuinty's agenda*

*Dalton McGuinty has stated, "In government, we have to act Responsibly in the same way that our families do. If finances Get tight in our homes, families make adjustments and they Focus on their priorities."*

*The 1.3 million Ontarians who are living in poverty have a very Short priority list: food to eat and a roof over their heads. What Priorities do we as a province have that are more important than food and shelter for its people?*

*Poverty needs to remain at the top of our government's "priority" list.*

*Bev. McDowell, Cambridge, Ont.*

### **What Can We Do?**

During the week of Monday, October 13 - Friday, 17, 2008, the 25 in 5 Campaign will be promoting a week of action on poverty reduction across the province because the next few months will be critical as the Ontario government designs its anti-poverty strategy.

- We can call or write to our your local MPPs
- Or plan to attend community events e.g., the 25 in 5 rally in Toronto on the evening of October 17, 2008

With the approaching Federal election community groups are making plans for public meetings and debates to get the poverty issue onto the Federal agenda. A poll taken in late August by Angus Reid found that poverty ranks #4 in the minds of voters.

- We can attend all-candidates meetings in our ridings
- Ask our local candidate what actions he/she will take to reduce child and family poverty in our riding:
- Is your party willing to adopt specific targets and timelines to reduce poverty?

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1. families receive and keep the full Canada Child Tax Benefit? (\$5100)
  2. a system of high quality Early Childhood Education?
  3. a National Housing/homelessness strategy? Homelessness Partnership Initiative is due to expire this year.
  4. sustaining employment and liveable incomes?
  5. eligibility for Employment Insurance?
  6. improve economic conditions for new immigrants?
  7. poverty reduction strategies for Aboriginal peoples?
  8. guaranteed income system for people with disabilities?
  9. skills up-grading, improve access to post-secondary education

### I'd like to Share Some Things We Have Done in Hamilton...

1. CFUW, Hamilton has signed on as a supporting member of the 25 in 5 Campaign.
2. In the spring, members of our Advocacy and Action committee visited the four local MPPs. With these visits, our approach was to offer ourselves as a resource and provided information about the goals of the 25 in 5 Campaign:
  - ensuring sustaining employment, so that people who work don't live in poverty;
  - reforming social assistance, so that people who can't work get the support they need; and
  - providing for strong community supports, to give opportunity and inclusion to all. ]
3. Through one of the Liberal MPPs, we received an invitation to the Hamilton Round Table on Poverty Reduction. Later the chair-person of this broad-based coordinating body accepted an invitation from our advocacy and action committee to come to one of our meetings and share their goals and the work they have been doing in our community.

4. We are currently exploring the possibility of two of our CFUW members joining the policy committee of this community organization.
5. On July 14<sup>th</sup> three members attended one of the 50 public problem-solving meetings on poverty along with other community groups and politicians from all 3 levels of government.
6. We also have informal connections with members of McMaster's social work dept. It was that group that approached us with an issue I would like to share with you today.

### **Clawback of part-time students' earnings**

Marilyn Hill, our CFUW Hamilton president has sent a copy of a letter to our four local MPPs, and as the contact person, I have already had an unsolicited phone call from one of their assistants asking more questions about this issue and promising to send copies of the letter to his education critic.

We also asked our general membership to write individual letters.

When we contacted the managing editor of our newspaper The Hamilton Spectator, he offered us space on the forum page to bring this issue to the attention of the general public.

I brought in 25 copies of the letter, if you are interested in pursuing this issue. You can also send me an email if you would like on-line copies of the letter.

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Poverty Issues