

# Trying for normal when the wheel comes off

The Hamilton Social Audit – April 22, 2010



# ***Trying for Normal, When the Wheel Came Off***

**THE HAMILTON SOCIAL AUDIT  
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## **Introduction**

This report is the result of a day spent listening deeply to and reflecting upon the stories told by remarkable people with lived experience of poverty who came forward to be a part of the Hamilton Social Audit on April 22, 2010.

From the stories of their personal experiences and private problems, attempts were made to identify themes for change and improvement in our communities' response to those experiencing poverty amongst us. It is imperative that those who are directly affected by poverty participate in its eradication.

No one who told their story chose to be living in poverty. So many spoke of just wanting 'normal' and one witness' story about the wheel coming off her shopping cart had an impact that we could never have anticipated. A \$40 expense to replace it so that she could take her groceries on the bus was like climbing a mountain.

Just about everyone described a situation where "the wheel came off" - an abusive relationship, the death of a loved one, a diagnosis of a severe mental illness, a motor vehicle accident, a marriage breakdown, a failed business...that triggered a spiral into poverty.

But the focus of their stories was not so much on the daily deprivation they experienced as about having hope and courage to overcome their situations and the importance of volunteering or working for agencies that assisted them in order to give back and help others worse off or not as strong. By coming forward and telling their stories they wanted to be part of the solution and we must learn from their lived experience.

## **What is the Social Audit**

A Social Audit provides a social assessment of the impact of government policy on groups of people. Like an environmental or financial audit, a Social Audit provides an opportunity to identify trends and themes.

In the winter and spring of 2010, the Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition (ISARC) led a Social Audit process for the purpose of assessing current government policies on social assistance and the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy.

Social Audits were carried out in 30 communities across the province.

In Hamilton, the community based group 25 in 5 Hamilton Network for Poverty Reduction, on behalf of ISARC, took the lead in organizing the Hamilton Social Audit. The results from Hamilton have been submitted to ISARC and the provincial findings will be compiled and posted on the ISARC website ([www.isarc.ca](http://www.isarc.ca)) and gathered into a book for publication in the fall of 2010.

The Hamilton Social Audit is part of the growing effort to eliminate poverty in Ontario and Canada. People on the margins were heard and their voices and ideas will significantly contribute to that goal. When the results of the 2010 ISARC Social Audit are published, all Members of the Provincial Parliament and Members of Parliament in Ontario will receive a copy and the results of the audit and the final report should contribute to legislative solutions to end poverty.

### **The Social Audit Process in Hamilton**

It was important to those charged with the organization of the Hamilton Social Audit day that the perspectives of those with lived experience of poverty from across the City were included. To that end, two hearing sites in the City were chosen.

To create a welcoming and safe environment that allowed for privacy and respected the dignity of those who came forward to tell their stories, the hearings were in private. Witnesses were given fifteen minutes each to share their experiences. The structure of each of their testimony was similar:

What is your experience of poverty?

What is the impact on you?

What is working and helpful for you?

What is not working?

If you could make changes that would improve the system, what would they be?

Volunteers from 25 in 5 Hamilton provided support to the Rapporteurs and witnesses by serving as Faciliators and Reporters.

The role of the Faciliators was to accompany the witness through the process offering support and asking questions when needed to assist the witnesses.

The Reporters had the role of capturing the witness testimony. This was done in writing. There was no audio or visual record created. The written report anonymized the testimony.

Witnesses registered in advance of the audit day. Outreach was done through community and social service agencies. The diversity of those who live in poverty in Hamilton was reflected in those who participated.

While some of the witnesses were in receipt of Ontario Works financial assistance, others were in receipt of Ontario Disability Support Program income supports, and others relied on employment income, child support, the Ontario Child Benefit and Child Tax Benefits, retirement benefits and pensions or a combination of payments from these sources.

Those charged with the duty of listening to the witnesses and writing their reflection of the day had the role of Rapporteur. Theirs was an active listening role, where the listener is not only paying attention to what is heard but also to what the story evoked within them. Each responded with a willingness to serve and the gift of their time, experience and insights. We are pleased to share their reflections with you.

## **1. Reflection by Gary Warner**

The Social Audit Hearings offered a glimpse into the human face of poverty. We heard from a fairly representative cross-section of the demographic experiencing poverty – single mothers, seniors, young adults, people with physical or mental disabilities, racialized people, immigrants, the unemployed or under-employed.

As I listened again in my mind to their testimonies, I could not help recalling the words of the Australian aboriginal academic and artist, Lilla Watson, as she addressed a group of social workers who had come to investigate the needs of her village: “If you have come to help me you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.” It is easy, even for well-intentioned people, indeed especially for well-intentioned people, when dealing with issues of poverty, to fall into the trap of paternalism and objectification of people living in poverty. How often are anti-poverty strategies, policies and consultative bodies established without direct and meaningful participation by people living in poverty, without serious consideration of the impact of policies on their lives, without a genuine understanding of their experience and of the challenges and options available to them? Programs such as the “Do the Math” campaign, which draw attention to people’s lived experience of having to prioritize between paying the rent, paying heating or other bills, buying food to feed themselves or their children, and buying clothes for the winter or for the start of school, are effective communication strategies. Doing the math properly would have led to a better understanding of the real

impact of the cancellation of the Back-to-school and Winter Clothing allowances provided through Ontario Works (OW) and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP).

Food banks have become part of the normal social infrastructure. The recent 'Code Red' series in the Hamilton Spectator drew attention to the depth of poverty, especially in parts of the downtown core of the city. One commentator described this situation as economic apartheid. The result is a 21 year gap between the average life expectancy of someone living in the poorer section of the city and someone living in the more affluent suburbs. The following analysis of the global disparities that the Canadian RC Bishops made in **Do Justice** is applicable within the Canadian context:

*"[T]he problems of development are primarily ethical questions pertaining to choices of social goals and human values... One quarter of the world's population ... continue to control and consume three quarters of this planet's finite resources and services... There is nothing inevitable about the realities of being rich and poor in the world today... The gap is the product of our own making as men (people) of history. We have the responsibility of choosing the kind of social order we want to develop as a human family. The development gap is no less than a critical problem of injustice for (hu)mankind."*

The people who presented their stories in the course of the social audit did not voluntarily choose to live in the state of deprivation brought on by poverty. This condition is very different from the vow of poverty made as a religious commitment or the voluntary simplicity embraced as an ethical life choice. Circumstances such as long-term unemployment, devastating personal crises, the onset of mental illness, physical or developmental disability are not a matter of voluntary choice. They expressed vividly how people caught in the poverty trap have a hard time extricating themselves from the meshes of isolation, powerlessness, vulnerability and income insecurity. Poverty is stressful – a 'full-time job', as someone put it. One gentleman presented his personal experience – by no means unique to him - of an unscrupulous landlord who preyed upon low income people. One person admitted to attempting suicide and at least one other mentioned considering it. Some witnesses spoke of having to face an impersonal, sometimes dehumanizing and hostile bureaucracy, of experiencing 'identity theft' by being stripped of any right to privacy or normalcy. People are battered by such experiences but those who came forward to present their stories had a keen sense of their own agency. Many experienced the sense of self-worth they found, for example through volunteering, as transformative. I was very impressed by the resourcefulness and the resilience that many exhibited. There was one woman in particular who, it seems to me, under different circumstances could well have been an Ontario Government Minister of Social Services. Another woman is writing a book, drawing on her experience of mental health issues. One former recipient of services she received while living in

poverty has now become herself a service provider employed by that same agency.

The premise for anti-poverty work must therefore be that poverty is unacceptable precisely because it is the result of a social order that we have collectively chosen - a social order that in effect accepts economic apartheid as normal. Economic apartheid can in part be combated by policies of economic integration that avoid both ghettoization and gentrification. Such policies are also applicable to other social spheres, including the housing and education sectors. The example of educational integration in Raleigh, North Carolina, documented in Gerald Grant's *Hope and despair in an American city: Why there are no bad schools in Raleigh* is instructive in this regard. But above all it requires a more fundamental rethinking of a social order that allows galloping income gaps and the sidelining of a significant percentage of the population caught in the poverty trap.

It is also important to understand that this is not only an ethical issue but also one that affects the well-being of the whole community. As researchers Hertzman and Siddiqi point out, "Those societies that produce the least inequality in health and human development across the social economic spectrum also have the highest average levels of health and development." The elimination of poverty needs to be framed not as an act of generosity or charity but as essential for our collective well-being. By this measure even the 25 in 5 Campaign is a modest objective, albeit an achievable starting point. We must continue to advocate strenuously for policies that have as their objective the wellbeing of the whole community and the elimination of economic insecurity.

Submitted by Gary Warner, Rapporteur.

## **2. Reflection by Carol Wood**

We heard many voices and many different perspectives, but a climate of fear was the underlying common denominator. There was fear about losing benefits, fear about finding food for themselves and their children, and fear about getting medicine or getting to the doctor. The individuals were articulate as they recounted various losses – from the loss of status and the ability to be independent – to the loss of self-esteem and the ability to provide winter boots for their child. All of the people we met dispelled the ill informed perception that people who live in poverty are lazy. Many of them had been deeply wounded by this harsh, overarching stereotype.

We met individuals whose dreams and hopes have been taken from them by untimely accidents, serious mental and physical illnesses, and by the shrinking availability of manufacturing jobs. To suddenly be unemployed or unemployable

is indeed a scary prospect, but even scarier is the treatment that many had experienced through various agencies.

Some had been yelled at, or over medicated, or intimidated by multiple forms and the withholding of information. Many were worn down by having to ask over and over again for assistance, and to justify their need. There were the impersonal and repeated requests for information – through automated answering services and computer generated letters. Everyone was unanimous in affirming that housing is the number one priority. But, on an income of \$530 per month, and a modest rent of \$350, how can a single adult afford food, transportation and basic necessities? The answer is: they can't! It is impossible, and we have thousands of citizens seeking to do the impossible everyday, and it is taking a toll on people's mental and physical health. Many have carefully orchestrated a plan, such as paying \$10 a month to eat supper at Salvation Army from April to October, and participating in the Out of the Cold program in the winter months. Everyone knew the schedule for food banks and everyone knew the disappointment of waiting in a line for 2 hours and being told there was no food, or no food that could be eaten if they were lactose intolerant or diabetic.

Individuals reflected on the tough choices they had to make- paying a bill every other month in order to avoid suspension of hydro or telephone service. The stress of "robbing Peter to pay Paul" shows up in deeply furrowed brows, in a stilted gait, and in an inability to sit due to intense pain. As a society, our approach of charity, rather than justice is slowly killing people and robbing them of their basic human rights.

While we did hear appreciation for many programs such as Wesley, Good Shepherd, Salvation Army and others, the overall impression of Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support is that it needs reform. A fundamental need within the system is RESPECT for others. Knowing how hard it is for the majority of people to admit that they need help, we need to make the process less intimidating and less intrusive. Each person has a right to privacy. Surely, if basic information is collected once, it can be accessed by a support worker. The repeated reminder that a person is on social assistance needs to be minimized and certainly not broadcast, as in the case of a physically challenged person waiting for a cab in front of the hospital and the driver yelling: ODSP?

We can do better than this, and we must do better than this. Individuals who can work, but who can't work full time due to health issues, must be assisted in finding work and not lose their drug card or housing support.

We need to find ways to change the climate of fear so that people will ask questions and share information. The notion that everything will be taken away discourages individuals from seeking the special diet allowance, or inquiring about breakfast programs for their children.

One person said that poverty is a full time job. If we have created a system that requires this much effort to navigate, imagine what our community might look like if these efforts are redirected into employment and volunteering?

We need to turn our focus from monitoring and setting limits to listening, empowering and seeking justice for all citizens. Yes, resources are limited, but we have created a system that encourages individual to minimize their potential and to stifle creativity. Most of all, our current approach has squelched hope – particularly for younger people. How do we expect a single mother to get out of poverty if we don't provide child care and support a return to school?

The loss of manufacturing jobs in Hamilton in the past 15 years has made a lasting negative impact on the local economy, but more importantly, it has crippled 20% of our citizens in ways that most people can't imagine. One person said, "I don't want to be rich, I just want to be stable." At a bare minimum, "stable" means adequate shelter, food and access to public transportation. At a bare minimum, "stable" means that you can feed your children and provide a winter jacket and boots. At a bare minimum, "stable" means that a disabled senior citizen is provided the medication they need without a dispensing fee and delivery charge.

One individual who was so worried about her rising pharmacy charges and the loss of the special diet benefit said in anguish: "just shoot me now!" Despair and lack of hope is a real and debilitating outcome of our current system. We must find ways to support individuals to be independent where they can be. We must find ways to assist and care for those who are not able to advocate for themselves.

Submitted by Carol Wood, Rapporteur

### **3. Reflection by Michael Patterson**

A week or so after I had spent an entire day listening to the heart wrenching stories of people who were, in many cases, victims of a system that seems broken, I encountered former Premier Mike Harris at a luggage claim carousel at the airport. We stood virtually shoulder to shoulder as we waited for our baggage for an unusually long period of time. As the minutes ticked on, I could feel my pulse rate rising as I reflected on how this man and his 'Common Sense Revolution' of the mid-1990's was probably directly attributable to the pain and anguish of the people that I had just encountered a few days earlier.

I wanted to ask him if he truly appreciated the implications of his policies; was there ever a human face associated with his government's course of action of "making people accountable"? Did he have any idea of what the repercussions were for thousands of hardworking but very unlucky Ontarians? In that moment, I

was reminded of a song that my fourteen year old daughter had introduced me to in which there is a line “Dear Mr. President, what do you feel when you see the homeless in the street? How do you sleep when the rest of us cry? What do you feel when you look in the mirror?” But then again, we put him there; we all bear responsibility.

Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbour as yourself?  
Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

These are questions that I have asked of others many times as part of the rite of baptism. My participation in the social audit as a Rapporteur requires that now I must again ask them of myself as one of those who shares responsibility for the ongoing deprivation experienced by so many resulting from government policies of the 90's. Before the opportunity to hear directly the stories of those with lived experience did I truly appreciate the implications of the policies and consider the human faces? Did I strive for justice for those oppressed by the system created and sustained by those who overtly supported it and those who did so through indifference or inaction? I have to look in the mirror too.

Did I go into the day of the audit with expectations regarding what I would hear that were impacted by internalized stereotypes, shared by so many, of those living in poverty as people responsible for their situations due to character flaws, laziness or a sense of entitlement? I know that too often our society ‘pathologizes’ issues as being personal trouble resulting from poor choices or inherent weaknesses of character instead of acknowledging and responding to the structural source of these troubles.

It has been said that the first act of justice is to hear the cries of the oppressed. It was not too long into the day before I saw parts of myself and parts of my story in the experience of the witnesses and it was then that the true listening and commitment to strive for justice began.

I cannot help but think about what it must have taken for the people who came to speak to us that day. The courage they must have summoned to sit before a group of strangers and give account of the struggles they face every day of their lives while risking yet again being treated as “less than”, or the “other”. To give voice to the challenges they face within a system that demeans, diminishes and humiliates at every turn must have been excruciating. However, it seemed that without exception these people appreciated the opportunity to offer themselves in a manner that might serve to correct a system that has become unwieldy and oppressive.

Under the current system a life that respects the dignity of those who need to rely upon it is impossible under the circumstances all described. One witness described her incredulity at being congratulated on qualifying for ODSP where

she felt that her dignity was squandered. Another spoke of the need for more respect and her desire that she not be treated like a second class citizen, or treated by people as if she was “something at the end of their shoe that they need to scrape off”. Yet another witness described that his involvement with the system violates his privacy and he feels that he’s “treated like not a human being, but a number or an animal.”

In exchange for this debasement, people on social assistance receive a totally inadequate allowance. No one who spoke had any expectation of being able to meet their basic needs of food and shelter from incomes based on social assistance or basic public pensions. The reality of far too many was that “food is at the bottom of the list”. A healthy diet is unthinkable on the income left after the cost of shelter erodes it. One mother described the challenges of feeding her fourteen year old son when "some months there is hardly anything left after paying the bills". Asked what was in her fridge and cupboards that day she responded: "Kraft Dinner as they are just a cheap staple; today some baloney, no milk in fridge" Her son likes cereal for breakfast but she doesn't have any; there is no breakfast program at his school, nor a lunch program.

A system cannot be “just” when charity is necessary to fill the ever broadening gap between society’s determination of an adequate level of assistance for shelter and food for the most vulnerable members of our communities and what is actually needed. I learned that “poverty is a full time job” that requires a full time commitment to navigate the system and create a network of supports of food banks and meal programs to just get by. This reliance on charity on an ongoing basis is problematic when the social and voluntary sector is itself under strain due to the demands on it and its constant search for resources to meet the emergency and humanitarian needs of those who seek their help.

As harmful as the deprivation that results solely from poverty, when it intersects with other grounds of vulnerability such as disability, the impact of the social exclusion and the destructive effect on dignity and self-respect is profound. There was the man in his late 60’s who felt it necessary to reassure us that there had not been problems of unemployment in his past but still in his retirement he is now living in poverty. All he wants to do is to be able to pay his bills and not incur debt. The stress he and his wife experience because they are unable to do that has to be exacerbating their medical situations. There was the young woman who also shared with us that she had “dreams and aspirations” that did not count on a life long battle with depression. And sadly, the man who confessed he lied about his situation so he could feel better about himself to his friends. Friends, who, he felt, eventually blew him off, triggering a suicide attempt.

We have a shared common responsibility to advocate and engage in radical hospitality of all members of our society; to welcome the stranger, cloth the naked and feed the hungry. These responsibilities are not an option and we as individuals, as people of faith coming together as Church and corporately as

citizens, must be made aware that as the least of our society is treated, so is the touchstone of how our society will be judged. The fact that there are those among us who live in such conditions and are pushed to the margins, is a blight on us all and a reflection of the just how far we have to go.

We must act to not betray the hope of the woman who explained, "I'm a very positive person and I won't give up. Life is a struggle but we can't give up." If we act with those who came forward to tell their stories and with the courage they displayed by doing so, we can go far.

Submitted by Michael Patterson, Rapporteur

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

On June 2, 2010 participants in the Hamilton Social Audit joined a provincial gathering of faith leaders and participants from 20 of the 30 communities where local social audit were held to share and discuss the initial findings of the community hearings on poverty.

Members of 25 in 5 Hamilton endorse the Resolution to Eliminate Poverty passed unanimously by the 130 participants in the forum that day.

### **Resolution to Eliminate Poverty in Ontario**

- Whereas as faith communities, we affirm the principle of dignity of life for all and the means to sustain that dignity;
- Whereas we have heard many desperate stories of terrible poverty from across the province and the resulting loss of human dignity;
- Whereas we have heard how those who live in poverty are very fearful for their own future and the future of their children;
- Whereas there exist many regulatory barriers that prevent individuals and families from accessing the full benefits and services of social assistance as well as medical, dental, and housing benefits;

Therefore, the members of the ISARC Provincial Social Audit Forum demand that the government and legislature restore the resilience and hope of those living in poverty by:

- Implementing the five principles for a new nutritional supplement for all people on social assistance as spelled out by the 25 in 5 Network for Poverty Reduction, the ODSP Action Coalition and the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario. This nutritional supplement must be understood as a benefit above the Special Diet, not its replacement.
- Implementing substantial increases in social assistance.
- Releasing immediately the Social Assistance Review Advisory Council Report and the Ontario Affordable Housing Strategy, promised for Spring 2010. The

housing strategy should include safe and decent affordable housing which is integrated with other housing and has units for diverse populations in Ontario.

- Ensuring that this Spring's long term affordable housing strategy provides protection and maintenance for existing social housing and includes an immediate commitment to create new affordable housing.
- Introducing an Ontario Housing Benefit with sufficient funding in the next budget.
- Reviewing the Minimum Wage and adjusting it to a Living Wage, which is currently \$15/ hour in Ontario. There should be annual Cost of Living increases.
- Addressing provincial employment equity both within government and in the private sector.
- Eliminating the "Stupid Rules" within the provincial social assistance systems, using input from those most affected by these rules: recipients of Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program. These have been collected by the Income Security Advocacy Centre and the 25 in 5 Network.

Having committed to a poverty reduction strategy, the provincial government must take bold and transformative action to turn social assistance into a program that enables those in need to flourish, participate and be fully included in our communities.

In addition the members of 25 in 5 Hamilton call upon the Provincial Government to **immediately**:

- implement a \$100/month Healthy Food Supplement for those on Social Assistance;
- stop clawing back part of the Ontario Child Benefit from parents who receive social assistance.

Further, it is recommended that that the Government of Ontario establish a rational, evidence-based, process for setting social assistance rates such as that suggested in Bill 235, "An Act to Establish the Ontario Social Assistance Rates Board" (introduced in the 38<sup>th</sup> sitting of the legislature). Rates should be set according to an analysis of a liveable income.

By coming forward and telling their stories, the witnesses wanted to be part of the solution and we must learn from their lived experience. We have heard them and now as community we must act to require a response by the provincial government to the need for change.

## Appendix 1 - What we heard

### ISARC Social Audit-Participants' stories

1. Woman, aged 56: She utilizes the services in the community and finds that the Wesley Centre helps a lot. She is on Ontario Works. The rent and bills etc. are difficult with being on social assistance. She lost her job in Brantford, moved to Hamilton. She found little jobs but was unsuccessful and these jobs (call centres) were frustrating, and the money wasn't very good. She went to a program with Ontario Works where she learned what it would be like to be something like a Personal Support Worker (PSW). She now wants to do that but at 56 years old, going back to school is difficult and scary. When working at the call centres, she couldn't be on Ontario Works. After her savings ran out, she needed to find accommodations within her means which was difficult because the cost of living is so high. Wesley Centre is now her general practitioner, and she eats there because she doesn't have enough money to buy food. She has been diagnosed with depression because of the loss of her job and being on the system. Ontario Works/PSW program did not assist in finding employment after the program ended. She is now living with someone who receives ODSP, so they can afford more. "Food is at the bottom of the list" because all housing accommodations take up the most of her income. What's worked with being involved in the system is being able to go and eat at centres and being able to see a physician. The program with Ontario Works has created a desire to want to go to school again. What hasn't worked with being involved with the system is trying to find a job; it's extremely difficult. The changes within the system that she's notices are that addictions are on the rise, and that work is much harder to find now-a-days. Employment agencies are now going to shelters to look for workers; knowing that they don't have to pay a high wage. Also, churches are helping lots.

2. Male, aged mid-fifties: Life crashed for this gentleman Getting into the system occurred because his marriage broke up, his business failed, his kids left and he became a substance abuser. Then he found the Wesley Centre which has helped. What has worked with being involved in the system is that with his substance use, he found help at the Wesley Centre. Then he began living with 4 others at a rooming house. After many tries, he started working as a janitor at the Wesley Centre. What happened for him to change was his meeting with "Father Tom" who then lifted his spirit. What really broke him was his child becoming a crack-head. Now, he lives in subsidized housing, which took years to happen. As soon as he turned 55, it was a lot easier because he was at that age where there are more places available to seniors. He slowly got better and has been on the up ever since. In the past, he owned and operated his own business for 15 years, and always had money. He was psychologically unprepared for poverty and that's why he states he turned into a drunk. If the service was nonexistent, he doesn't know what would have happened. Various problems he sees in the system are the fact that no one knows what services are

out there - even if they are there, they're not marketed well. Another he sees is the fact that the services are often not accessible.

3. Male-aged late sixties: This person is on a pension. His first job in Canada was in a hospital; later, he worked in a factory. There were not many problem periods of unemployment. He never lived in poverty, but now he is along with his wife. After paying the bills, the money is gone. Both he and his wife are diabetic, and they do not have a good drug plan. His wife has been sick with diabetes for 27 yrs, and he has had diabetes for 3 years. They get assistance with their blood tests, and there's a company that helps with the insulin machine. What's helpful with being in the system is not too much. What hasn't worked for them is the fact that car insurance is too high, and now he can no longer drive. His quality of life has depreciated. When he was working and making an income he was happy, and now, "Since I'm not working, I cannot afford the basics, and can't eat healthy because it's too expensive". His problem is financial, and at his age no one will hire him. What he would really like to be able to do is pay his bills and not incur debt. This is so stressful for him and his wife. He's a month behind in rent. He has 2 children that live in subsidized housing. He was living in a building where the rent was too high-now he's working through a program.

4. Female-aged early/mid twenties: She had her first child at age 16, and was on OW at 18; things were bad. Her parents kicked her out at 14, She was couch surfing for a bit, couldn't go to school because of the children. "How can I go to school and even do well if I have nowhere to live?" Now food banks are helping, but financially, she's doing quite poorly. There is something that does help when being on the system. On Mondays and Thursdays there's a program called Leap that helps with child-care. Also, people drop off donations so she relies on that as well. There's also a bus-pass program which is helpful, but she can never really feel like she's secure with any finances. She is now also pregnant, so that makes things even tougher. She has more barriers with this and she wanted to go to school (university) with OSAP but now sees this as completely unattainable. She volunteers and she can't find full-time work. No one will hire a pregnant young woman she states. "I'll want to put the kids into a program, something like swimming lessons, but they all cost money, so I can't because I can't afford it."

5. Male-late fifties: This gentleman was the primary caregiver of his parents who both had Parkinson's and lived until their 90's. His father loved to go to the grocery store every day. S took care of both parents and did everything for them for a long time. He would take them shopping daily until they could no longer walk. He did this for many years, and neglected himself, but he loved his parents and watched them deteriorate. His mother developed dementia, and she finally went to a home. He knew that his mother was developing dementia when he noticed that his she would get ready at 3 a.m. to go to the grocery store; he

couldn't sleep, and he couldn't do it anymore. He became depressed when his family passed away. His father left him money and the parents' place, but the money ran out because he couldn't get a job (he was 50) and no one would hire him. He lost a lot of his friends, became even more depressed, and started lying to his friends in order to make himself feel better, but his friends eventually blew him off. He tried to commit suicide (he collected his heart pills which slow down the heart-he wanted his heart to stop-all he got was a good sleep) and upon failing once, he grabbed an exactor knife and cut his throat, let himself bleed out, and woke up because the blood was clotting his throat. After 2 failed attempts, he decided to run to the neighbors have them call the ambulance to take him to the hospital because he knew he needed help and wanted help. He received help via St. Joseph's Hospital for his depression and suicide attempts, and now is feeling better about himself. This all transpired due to the fact that he had lost everything financially, his family and friends. He lived at the YMCA and various other centers, and then moved into an illegal Rooming House where the property owners took advantage of him and others in his position. It was an awful place, and they were living in unsafe conditions. The rooming house didn't have any heat at times, and it was dirty with cockroaches and only one working electrical circuit. He was on OW, and now since he has sold his house he will have money in order to survive. He has two sons, 30 and 35, and would like to see them more often, but right now he's enjoying the fact that he has peace without being harassed for living in a rooming house due to the fact that he's had a low income. He doesn't know what's next, he wants to work but the opportunities are limited due to his age. "Maybe deliver pizza", he said "[because] I'm old, but not dead."

6. Female mid thirties-"Kelly" has been on ODSP for 10 years, and was diagnosed with depression at age 14. At 29 years old, her boyfriend died and Kelly dropped down to 82 lbs. She applied for ODSP, was turned down. The second time she applied, she was "congratulated" for being on ODSP where she felt her dignity was squandered. She felt that she was "less-than", and that the general population feels that those that are on ODSP are worthless. When Kelly is depressed, she gets sick and loses more weight. She has never been told of her rights and what she is allotted on ODSP. Even when her mother loaned her 100 dollars, ODSP said that they would charge her with fraud for not claiming it even though it was a birthday gift. Society doesn't view people who are on ODSP as people with a disability like they do for people who have cancer. "I had dreams and aspirations, I never wanted to be on ODSP-; I have my SSW diploma and wanted to do things. I would rather be working and having a career; depression is a fight, a constant fight, and it's not something I'm proud of. I worked at Canadian Mental Health, and met the man {that died} and then moved to Hamilton. I have moved 16 times in the past 15 years, and since I met Neil, things have been good; however now we're in a Rooming House that is illegal, and fighting with the landlord who treats us like crap. I find that tax payers believe that [ODSP/OW works recipients] are "leeches to society". Kelly finds that the system is difficult to be a part of, however finds that her strength comes from her "sarcastic sense of humor", her schooling and her parents and other

supports. Kelly has been to many psychiatrists over the years, from the age of 11 years when she had a cousin pass away. Kelly's depression is getting worse, and now she is going to see a doctor in St. Joes; however, her GP is in Burlington and traveling is difficult without a car. There are days when she feels like ending it, but she really doesn't want to, because there are great things about life-so she keeps taking her meds and knows her body and when there's an issue.

7. J is a gentleman in his early 50's. He heard about the Social Audit at the Housing Help Centre on Napier Street in Hamilton and came because he thought he might learn something and could represent his peers in poverty.

Both J's parents died in the early 80's when he was 26. He was afraid to seek help because he feared being institutionalized. He even thought his own family would institutionalize him. He did end up in St. Joseph's Hospital for three weeks but then went to a boarding house. The first boarding house did not work out, but in 1989 J moved to another boarding home, the Home for Special Care where he has lived ever since, and which, he says, is "a beautiful place". This boarding home screens people who enter; they help them with their problems. There is an on-site social worker and a psychiatrist nearby at First Place whom he can see on short notice. He receives \$128 per month to spend as he likes, but he would prefer to have tickets for hockey games, movies and shows bought for him. J enjoys walking and swimming.

J feels that some things could be better in the system. He believes it would be a good idea to pay the rent and buy the groceries for those on Social Assistance; recipients, then, could not use their money for drugs or alcohol. Social workers will teach people how to cook and do housework, but then the people don't get enough money to buy food. He believes there are some bad boarding houses out there, and they need to have more homes like the one he is in. J worries that there aren't enough places for seniors in the future. He thinks it is wrong that benefits differ from province to province and asks how anyone can live on \$575 per month. He worries, too, about what will happen to older workers, pensions and employees of companies going out of business. J. asks why, with all this money in something like the lottery system, we don't give money to the man in poverty who has a wife and kids or to the person who is disabled.

J believes the "shock of loss" may last forever. When his parents died, he had no support system and was terrified of being institutionalized. When asked what he thought was so bad about institutions he spoke about a loss of freedom and "not being able to go for a walk" when he felt like it.

8. K was diagnosed with schizophrenia at the age of 22. He believes there are many services available in Hamilton to help people but finds that, while ODSP provides a liveable income, OW does not. K now works part-time for the Good Shepherd Labour Pool and, in return, his rent is subsidized (he has his

hydro paid for). During the month K survives by visiting the food bank and buying a Salvation Army meal ticket for \$10. During the winter, instead of buying the Salvation Army meal ticket, K eats at the Out of the Cold churches where, he says they offer good, home-cooked meals.

K is a member of the Residential Care Housing Coalition which meets at the Housing Help Centre. This coalition fights for more money for residents and for more security and privacy in their residences. He tells of one residence where they were "six packed in one room like sardines". It took K nine or ten years to get his housing with Good Shepherd.

K is pleased with his housing now; it offers privacy. He is also very happy with his GP, whom he claims is "the best in Hamilton". He is also pleased that he has always known where to go for help, and that he has a job which gives him self-esteem. K tells us that only about 3% of the mentally ill have any job experience. If K could change anything in the system, it would be to remove the stigma around mental illness. He believes facilities should not use restraints or over-medicate people. He also says that sometimes people just get "dumped" in boarding houses and the neighbours there object. K says there are some pretty bright people with mental illness. K, himself is fluent in English and Polish and has studied Latin. Born in Germany, he has lived in New York, travelled out west and plans a trip to the East Coast this summer. A "rich lady friend" pays for his travel. K comments, "It's nice to have people help you out."

K sees other problems in the system. He thinks that if people are able to work full time, there should be incentives such as continuing to pay benefits, to encourage them to do so. As things stand, many people work "under the table" because, if they declare their earnings, they lose half their assistance. "People have to cheat to get ahead."

9. PM is a single mother. Her daughter is now 25 and out on her own and off P's cheque. P is deaf in one ear from being a 'premie'. She dropped out of high school as she had literacy problems, she was unable to read or write large words. By grade 10 she had grade 7 reading skills. She uses a walker and has been on ODSP for 19 years. She grew in a "privileged home where I was well looked after". Her parents were both professionals. "I had everything under the sun".

She married an abusive man and divorced. He at least looked after their daughter. But that and "going on the cheque" meant that she fell from her parents' grace, especially her dad's. Her daughter R lives on Hamilton Mountain and is self-employed and doing well enough that she has six different investments, she is like a mini Donald Trump, but "she refuses to share any of the wealth with me".

After the death of her parents, she received nothing because her parents willed their wealth to the grandchildren because P and her siblings had fought each other. "My dad said that the grandchildren deserve it more and it's better as you kids are fighting among yourselves and I want you to stop it".

Her dad knew she was on the cheque but gave her minimum help as "I was non-existent at the end because of my life on a government cheque – I didn't succeed like my others siblings did".

She went to hairdressing school about the time she divorced her husband but did not get a job due to her attitude. She would tell them that she was not a Molly Maid when they told her to wash peoples' hair.

Her health worsened with a bad back. Her dad fast tracked her into disability by pulling strings. Her dad remembered that his father did the system and was on social assistance for a short while.

She got joint custody of her daughter and made sure that she "had good food, not food bank stuff". She shared her back and forth with her ex; they shared common goals that she get a good education as he was a good father even though he was abusive to her. She is proud of her daughter.

When her daughter was with her she got \$900 plus but now she gets \$700. "All politicians are the same. They should all be ashamed of themselves. I don't care what party they are even if they are the party for the Pope. I don't say I am any better than anybody else but again, no disrespect; we are not the 3<sup>rd</sup> world. I saw 3<sup>rd</sup> world poverty on TV as a child and now I see it here. Why do they hold that standard for the Canadians? This is not the 3<sup>rd</sup> world."

The government should give more money on their cheques. "Your children are your future. Schools should give breakfast and lunch programs free of charge so they have nutrition for their brains and other organs to succeed. If they get a job in the future, that's a bonus". There should be money for their books. Her ex covered the cost of school photos, field trips as she didn't want to ask her dad for these funds. Her dad would say "You're on the government cheque now, ask them for money!" Under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, education is a right not a privilege. Those who can't afford it should still have that right.

"We should get more than 1% cost of living index on cheques right across the board – at least 5% or more to restore the balance. "while government jet sets here and there for everything I never got to see the Vancouver Olympics like the PM did. And now we have the damned HST this July. I am unsure of the impact even though the explanation is pending." She sees more chaos and living hell from it.

The system is making politicians rich as they can get a cheque while they are kicking our ass. P is bugging them. When the Premier was in Hamilton on the

campaign bus she told him how to make the cheque better but he just got back on the bus. "All politicians make promises at election time and then their memory goes". P's 25 in 5 group reminds politicians and "It's now 2010 and come 2013 I wonder how my cheque will be".

10. P is a 60 year old woman. She uses a walker, is on ODSP and going through bankruptcy. She uses DARTS to get around. She appealed her ODSP three times. A doctor helped her the last time via their MPP. This was done on a Saturday in order to take the information to Queens Park. Before ODSP she worked for a Bishop in Toronto and returned to Hamilton at the suggestion of a priest friend. "The system is broken to the point of being shattered."

Six years ago in October 2004 she suffered multiple losses of family and friends. The health system failed her and several of her relations who had the same diagnosis.

The pharmacy charges her \$20/week for a medication which helps with her MS. A \$5 delivery charge starts May 15 and she cannot afford it. Her GP charges \$90/year for a single person. She lost \$84/month in special diet allowance for her glucose and lactose intolerance and her psoriasis of the toes comes with stress. She never had stress as a child. She takes Oxycontin 4 times a day.

She can't see what works in the system right now. "I sat in my apartment and went bankrupt in November and I had my appointment for it today". There is a 0-6 year wait list to move when put on ODSP. "I was ashamed to move where I am. I am in ODSP". She was questioned by authorities about her possessions, bankruptcy where they asked her stuff like 'Do you have a boat'. "I wouldn't be here if I did have one".

She is thankful for a 60<sup>th</sup> birthday party given by her friends. She received cash but they docked those cash gifts from my next cheque. "Thank God the party was potluck".

Friends gave her an old old computer then they bought her a lap top. Disability wants to know about this possession. "Get rid of lite internet and then you can afford ODSP. But it is a lifeline for reaching out to people – I have out of town friends and also phone them for help".

Her pain and depression affects her sleep and finds herself falling asleep during the day.

Changes she would make to the system include civil servants not wearing scruffy clothes. "One day I was in the ODSP office and I wondered is this Dress Down Friday? They said they were told from higher ups to dress down in order to feel less intimidating to us but government people should dress respectfully. Government workers have unions and benefits and jobs and they think they will never lose". She wants more respect instead of being treated like a second class

citizen. She would like to see people in the Disability office care more and have more compassion and not treat people as if they are something at the end of their shoe that they need to scrape off.

ODSP staff keep changing and in the medical offices when she is sitting in there "I wish there was more confidentiality as they think that if you are disabled you must be deaf.

The steroids she takes make her very hungry and she eats bread like there is no tomorrow. Her clothes are either 15 years old or gifted from friends with the odd bargain from Value Village. Her health causes her size to fluctuate between sizes 6-14.

Now she must get rid of the computer she just got. "I said to the pharmacist to shoot me and get it over with'.

"Upper and lower Hamilton people hate each other and guess where most of the poor live?" She has moved twice and she has twice been mugged. The last time a kid knocked her off her walker and took her wallet.

More money on assistance would definitely help. Her rent is \$620/mth with is geared for income. She put her name on the list in 1991 and got the place in 2004. "When you pay for a cab you're even treated differently because they greet you with "ODSP?". That is what the cabbie yells out when he picks me up at the hospital".

People in housing have to lie to you. "Access to housing" people are helpful, though. Rent geared to income forms: "People are afraid to come forward and complain as they fear they will get discontinued compared to those who rip off the system'.

She has two pairs of shoes from nuns in Arizona. She traced the outline of her feet. These are orthotics. She never knew she could get orthotics in Ontario paid for. "They don't want to hear from those who complain but if you don't get up you don't eat. Helping Hands is useless. They are welfare people trained to become personal care workers. "I can't clean your toes because they are kind of low". "We shouldn't have to get to this point, all I am doing now is eating breakfast... my parents would be turning in their graves if they saw this. The system is shattered and broke and many lives are taken with it. Mike Harris said that someone on ODSP should live 30% below the poverty line and where are we now"

11. Male-aged 60-Source of income, OW. Was in the manufacturing industry-obtained his tool and dye papers in hopes of permanent employment but stated that the "trade screwed us out of work". Moved from the GTA to Hamilton because he couldn't afford rent-it was too much-and knew an old friend in

Hamilton so moved here to stay with the friend. Found menial jobs however they paid too little and obtained a contract job from Jan to April but was not renewed. By middle of April, he had exhausted all funds, thus applied for Ontario Works while still searching for full-time work. He feels like he's lost "all rights and my privacy" so "I didn't want to do this." His self-esteem is really low. He also "ended up with" another person that he had met while on social assistance and "shelter, food and water are the basics in his need for survival and it's quite frustrating". He now lives in a rooming house. He has no money and eats at the Good Shepherd. He is frustrated, he didn't sleep last night. When he calls about his rent, he gets a long-automated answering machine at OW and by the time he gets through, he's even more frustrated. He states again that his privacy is violated and feels that he's treated like not a human being, but a number or an animal and doesn't understand why workers at OW can't respond via email.

12. Female-aged 55: On ODSP. Couldn't get to the conference in time, but really wanted to share her experiences with poverty and especially the food banks. She has seen that people are in line at the food banks, and then go across the street, trade in the bread, and the store owner then sells it. She has witnessed this on several occasions and feels that someone should know about it. Also, her rent is too high, she can't go anywhere because she's afraid to go outside, and her building is infested with bedbugs. Now, she has to replace all her clothes because even though she didn't have bedbugs, "[they] sprayed my clothes, my mattress, everything! Everything smells like chemicals, and it almost killed my dog." She is really glad that she can go to the store now and get fresh fruit and veggies [with the honorarium] because "they don't give that out at the food bank".

13. SC is a 25 year old graduate student at McMaster University. She wants to be an entertainment lawyer doing contracts for entertainers, but needs to find funds for the LSAT fees let alone the cost of law school tuition.

Her and her mom's activism changed the rules regarding university students earning money for tuition. Before the change, children of ODSP recipients who worked part time jobs, like at McDonalds, etc. would see their parents ODSP cheque getting reduced if they lived with their parents.

Her mother was a teacher before her sister was born. When she was about 4 years old her family went on welfare. When she was in high school her mom went on ODSP.

She went to inner city schools, with about 10 people in class, generally she knew she was poor and knew not to ask for things; eg. A classmate made \$20 /week allowance and she was getting 10 cents—this classmate would buy her candies and she could not repay such favors; "I couldn't do those basic things so I knew I was poor, but I wasn't upset, I took it for granted". Her mom got her lessons at the Rec Centre and ballet lessons by working out deals with the ballet teacher.

She never asked to go on school trips “I accepted this but I was busy with lessons and mom focused on us for school, therefore I was an A Student”. What motivated her academically was competition with her elder sister who also got straight A’s— Her sister eventually got out of the system or “off the cheque” with employment in Vancouver.

When she was in high school, “I would have to go to the library to use the internet while the classmates were at home”

While at university she worked at part time jobs from age 16 to earn the \$5000/year tuition; she refused to go on OSAP. “Most people (in such jobs) earned minimum wage which was then \$8/hr but \$6 of that would be clawed off my mother’s cheque so I became \$2.00” “therefore if I wanted to go out with friends it was not covered by my mum’s cheque”.

While in university she hung out with former high school friends but had little time to hang out because of studying and jobs. Jobs were things like concession stands, usher. Now she has her degrees and still works at the movie theatre in Jackson Square and does some peer mentoring. She is involved with the Campaign for Adequate Welfare. She is one of two staff members in a peer to peer mentoring program.

How to put the system in the right direction? Don’t penalize children of people who are “on the cheque”. “Those finishing university are not employed right away and they are being taken off the cheque and the parents are charged \$200 for them living in their own house” – yet it is cheaper for these grads to live at home than to strike out as “on the cheque” living elsewhere. “As soon as you’re of high school you are expected to live on your own with your own welfare cheque even though it is cheaper to live as a boarder at home rather than on my own” .

Her motivation to work hard is her competition with her older sister and “I just want to have what everybody else has”. “Mom fought for most of the change in university herself, she was inspirational “. “I guess I want to make myself better. Being rich is not important to me but I want to have stability and have the ordinary things”.

Currently she is balancing four part time jobs which amazes her friends who have only one job.

14. R-M– mum of SC – Mc Master graduate and an ex-French immersion teacher.

R-M grew up with a single mom who was from Newfoundland. R-M's mom pushed her to get through school. She remembers the family humiliation of Hamilton welfare agents checking their home for clothing, furniture. The stigma of being a single mom caused her to lie that she was really a "widow".

She had a fear of eviction growing up. As children they had to be quiet as they

lived in poor neighbourhoods, although she never really thought of herself as "poor" growing up "I was not super-aware that I was deprived as nobody in the neighbourhood was flashing their stuff." They had to move around Hamilton. There was no money for a moving truck> Mom and children moved their goods from home to home in plastic bags on foot.

In telling her story R-M -quotes Elizabeth Barrett Browning "I have not lived in vain". She chose to teach French immersion but she had to marry to get into university to have financial assistance that would not be provided by her step-father who said, "You are not my kid!"

She was run over by a car on James St. early in her teaching career. This changed her life. She did not have enough "bankable hours for a nice, cushy disability from the teachers". So she fell into her mom's old cycle. But remembers that her mom had a plan for her and she accomplished it so she did the same with her children (three). She watched what her kids were doing so that history wouldn't again repeat itself.

When asked if the system worked, R-M replied that she one daughter out of the system, with good job in BC and is engaged to be married in Vancouver;

R-M's mom helped her find a "reasonable house" so that they wouldn't have to move about.

The Hamilton school board doesn't cover bus fare to children whom she enrolled in French immersion in another part of town, so R-M walked a lot so they'd get the fare; she'd lie about bus fare for herself and the kids when necessary.

"As soon as S turned 18, she was expected to look for work" based on ODSP rules and the system docked money from R-M's cheque because of the earnings. It was a struggle to allow S to stay at home when she went to university rather than have her move out to another location which would have cost her more. S had part time jobs.

It was a personal struggle of staying afloat while S went to university. "If S would go out to a movie with her friends (using her own, earned money) I'd feel resentful. Those on the cheque are not encouraged to go to school so I decided to speak out.....it's a counter-productive policy." "They are not helping people go to school"

"Standing in line (at agency) you see people who don't have hope. Poverty is a full time job. People are stuck, downtrodden and without hope."

When asked if she has hope, she responded "I got things changed once". "When on Assistance you want some semblance of a normal life without any stress, you want to be able to afford ordinary things."

There are so many food bank rules, 2 hour wait at Good Shepherd Centre and if you are at the end of the queue you are out as only 50 people are allowed in.

She can't afford to attend her daughter's wedding in Vancouver. "Everybody else is allowed to go to their daughters wedding." And church benevolent funds refuse help with airfare or dress money because "that is not an emergency" She still has a credit card, no one told the company that she is not teaching any more. She used it to book flight to Vancouver.

15. U is a single mum with 14 year old son and is on O.W. She has been married for 16 years but she moved from Toronto to Hamilton when her husband was deported to Guyana when their son was 4. She used to work at a hotel and a few factories when she was in Toronto. Hamilton was to be a new start but she's on OW. She receives \$937/mth for herself and son. Most of it goes to rent, hydro and phone and "I don't have much left after that".

The graduation of her son from his middle school was an important event. To pay for shoes for her son she got help from her friend but she used all of her June money for her son's graduation suit. It was important that he dress up like everyone else for the event. He couldn't go on the GR 8 BUS TRIP – "No money and you know how kids feel perfectly left out". She has a good relationship with her son but now he is a teen and thus he is not as close to her as he used to be.

She volunteers in community work as she enjoys doing it and sees the struggles of others. U is involved with 25 in 5, the OW Advisory Committee, and several other advocacy groups and is also on a committee at her son's school, Urban Core and she helps with a diabetic program even though she's not diabetic. She went with others to the Special Diet protest in Toronto this year.

Having money for a food budget with a growing son is hard and "some months there is hardly anything left after paying the bills".

About change to the system, U says there needs to be a living wage so no one has to rely upon food banks with expired and thrown out food. Sometimes the food is no good or else the food bank is empty. You do not get the food you need like meat and vegetables. Her son gets meat twice a week if they are lucky. The government should not cut Special Diet Program as she sees all of the problems that result from it.

The main staple in U's house today? "Kraft Dinner as they are just a cheap staple, today some baloney, no milk in fridge". Her son likes cereal but she doesn't have any; there is no breakfast program at his school Cathedral High, nor a lunch program.

U's hope? "I'm a very positive person and I won't give up. Life is a struggle but we can't give up"

16. K and L came in together. K is a Social Service Provider for Special Needs, and L is a Social Service Worker Student and past client. K. works at Ancaster Community Services which is a charitable institution that delivers many services such as Meals on Wheels, counseling, home support, addictions counseling etc to Ancaster residents. K is concerned because, although Ancaster is perceived to be an affluent community, it has the fastest growing poverty rate locally and, because of its perceived wealth, it is often rejected for grants on which it depends for survival.

There are many social problems in Ancaster, which has become very diverse, especially since the Meadowlands has been added as a neighbourhood. There are many kids whose parents aren't around to monitor their activities; there is a large population of seniors who cannot afford to stay in their homes and who have little access to transportation. In the Meadowlands, there are many Muslims and Armenians who may have four families living in one house.

K offered a description of Ancaster Community Services. It was established in 1969 by the Ancaster Ministerial Association. Today, it has only four staff, three of whom are part-time and depends on volunteers. It shares the website, Inform Hamilton. There is a very dynamic board which is community oriented and .has just finished a Strategic Plan for the next five years. Ancaster Community Services runs several programs such as a Seniors Program and a Culture and Recreation Program; it wants to offer forums on changing communities in the future.

17. L is a single mother of three who had to leave her home in a hurry. Her children were 3, 8 and 11 when she left. She needed housing but could not afford the rent. Because she had banked \$500 of OCB for her children, she was refused Ontario Works; she had to give the \$500 to her parents. K helped her when she left. She was lucky enough to get housing in Dundas on priority status. This improved her self-esteem, and she decided then to see what she could do to "beat this system and make it work for me." For a year, L lived on very little. She knew that, "I had to come out of it on my own", and so she went to OSAP so she could return to school, which she has just finished. She is graduating as a Social Service Worker.

If she could, L would change the system of housing, the stigma of the 'single-mother', and the fact that working is not possible without losing much of what you earn if you are on assistance. She realized how easy things had been before and said that once you are on assistance, doors are not open for you, and everything has a "rippling effect". If a kid rips his jeans, it is a big problem. Each month, L would pay one bill and leave the others because she just did not

have enough money. She said, "You can't put a monetary value on psychological strain."

L was asked what gave her hope. She said, "Everybody needs hope. I did it for them. I did it for my kids. They don't want to be embarrassed."

L found she had to recreate her community and that she lost friends when she left. She misses the church, but feels she wants to give back. "I had to go and volunteer." L says her kids wanted normality. As far as housing goes, L says 50% will stay where they are and 50% are using it as a stepping stone out of the situation. She was very careful to watch who her kids were hanging out with, but even so, her six year old got into trouble because he watched others as they broke a window.

K comes back into the conversation at the end. She says we need to get these stories in the media. She mentions the stigma associated with the North End. She has just moved from Ancaster to a home down near the harbour and hears much questioning of her decision.

## **Appendix 2 – The Hamilton Social Audit Support Team**

Deirdre Pike  
Susan Muma  
Sue Pratt  
Anna Ochnik  
Diane Baltaz  
Marissa Scotto Di Luzio  
Colleen Sym