

Those living in poverty in Halton often face barrier after barrier

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you work during a school holiday it's \$9.60 an hour. The minimum wage for liquor servers is \$8.90 an hour.

"Minimum wage is about survival and a living wage is about inclusion," said Hildebrandt, quoting a colleague in Toronto he felt best described a person's struggle with poverty.

Time and again, Hildebrandt said, he hears from residents juggling multiple jobs to support their family.

CDH has been developing research on what a living wage is for a person to feel included in the community.

It has also been knocking on people's doors to really understand the barriers those living in poverty face.

In 2011, CDH released a report called *Honouring the Voices of Marginalized Communities*, which surveyed nearly 600 people in Halton and shared the opinions of those barely getting by. Not having enough money was an issue for all respondents.

Not receiving enough from social assistance programs is problematic for many people accessing those services.

Transportation

Edwardh said the inability of residents, who cannot afford a vehicle, to get to jobs, community events and other important functions is a story she hears all too often.

The lack of a significant transit connec-

tion between the north and south of Halton is also a real problem.

"I heard a story from someone in Acton who had a specialist's appointment in Burlington. He had to take the GO from Acton to Georgetown and Toronto and then from Toronto to Burlington and then had to cab it from the GO station to the specialist," said Hildebrandt. "By the time they got to the specialist's office it had closed. That whole round trip cost \$80."

For low-income families, Burke said, bus tickets become precious things that are not to be expended on just any outing.

"They are looking for work, they are trying to get back to school. So you don't spend those bus tickets on something like going to a community dinner. That's a thrill," said Burke. "The community dinner would help them with food security and decrease their isolation, but they don't go."

Hildebrandt said the Red Cross does provide some volunteer driving services, but noted availability of volunteers can be an issue.



Volunteers Heather Leaver and Lori Koenen portion beans at the Fareshare Foodbank.

Nikki Wesley/Metroland Media Group

Housing

Between 300 and 700 assisted housing units are needed to address the housing gap that continues to widen.

According to Halton Region's 2011 *State of Housing Report*, which was presented to Regional Council earlier this year, another 700 to 1,500 affordable housing units are also needed to address the housing needs of the

Halton community.

Currently there are about 3,200 people on a waiting list for affordable housing here.

"There hasn't been very good affordable housing stock built in Halton in a decade, I'd say," said Hildebrandt.

With low vacancy rates in rental stock and the cost to rent so high, he continued, people are leaving the community.

Halton's overall vacancy rate was 1.1 per cent according to the 2011 *State of Housing Report*, which further stated a vacancy rate of at least three percent (three for every one hundred units) is considered necessary for adequate competition and real housing

options for rental accommodations.

Food

Food banks were created as a temporary solution to address food insecurity and poverty in communities, says Edwardh.

However they've become institutionalized in our communities as the number of people using these resources continues to grow, she continued.

For those living in poverty, food is a discretionary expense when they factor in rent and other expenses.

According to the Halton Region Health Department's results from the Nutritious Food Basket Survey it conducted last year, low-income families don't have enough income to meet all their financial responsibilities and as a result, the food budget may take a hit.

Families struggling to make ends meet can't afford the \$179.82 weekly in groceries it costs to feed healthy foods to a family of four. To that end, a poor diet can result leading to health problems and an increased risk of developing a chronic disease.

According to Halton Region's *The Price of Eating Well 2012*, low-income households are more likely to suffer from medical conditions that include heart disease, diabetes and high blood pressure.

Next week: Part Four of Poverty: A Special Report explores the solutions and where people can turn to for help.

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