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Halton anti-poverty group forming to deal with needs of Region's poor

By **KAREN SMITH**

Special to The Independent/Free Press

A Halton organization is forming an anti-poverty group to address the needs of the region's poor, estimated to be one in 17 families.

The Halton Social Planning Council will hold the first meeting of the Anti-Poverty Coalition in September, said Lynne Calderbank of the council.

One in 17 Halton families with children were reported as poor in 1991, according to the latest figures available from Statistics Canada. The poverty line in Halton is drawn at supporting a family of four with an income of less than \$24,622.

"Halton is perceived as a wealthy region, and in many ways is, with some of the highest average family and individual income levels in Ontario," Calderbank said. "But this wealth is not evenly distributed."

In 1991, one in five lone parent families and about 6,200 children were considered poor in Statistics Canada.

More recent statistics indicate

the situation is getting worse. About 7,050 Halton families received social assistance in April — 132 per cent increase from 1989 — and an average of 1,200 families per month sought help from one of Halton's 11 food banks.

"With the recent recession, more families and single people have become aware of financial insecurity in their lives," Calderbank said. "More people have been touched by the harsh realities of unemployment and changes in the workplace."

With recently announced social assistance cutbacks and the cancellation of non-profit housing projects, the council fears life may get even tougher for the poor.

A report on the situation for poor people in Halton was recently completed by the council following a seven-month study. The findings in *The Faces We Don't See* will be released to the media in a couple of weeks, Calderbank said.

"This brings together some disturbing pictures of low income

and poverty in Halton," she said.

The coalition's main objectives will be to provide a voice for the region's poor and take action to deal with poverty issues. It will aim to address such concerns as affordable housing, child care and food banks.

Other bones of contention will include unemployment, social assistance and social service-related issues.

"If any of these areas affect your life, then you should think about becoming involved (in the coalition)," Calderbank said.

She said the council is asking anyone interested in the cause to join the coalition. The poor, themselves, are particularly welcome. "They know the issues better anyone."

"We would also like to invite any interested businesses to make contributions or to be involved in sponsoring the coalition."

For more information, contact Calderbank at the Halton Social Planning Council, 632-1975 or 878-0955.

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