

People off welfare, but more working poor

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By PAUL MITCHISON
Special to The Champion

More people are off welfare, but more are living in poverty.

Those two facts seem contradictory, but statistical evidence shows it's true — more people in Halton are working, but at the same time more are living below the poverty line.

There have been 81 per cent fewer people on Halton Region's welfare rolls over the past five years, according to a provincial government press release touting the success of its work-for-welfare programs.

However, at almost the same time, the Halton Social Planning Council released its latest poverty report, 'The Hidden Faces of Poverty', which addressed the growing gap between the rich and poor.

It discusses how difficult it is to pay the rent while holding a low-paying job, and presents the last available statistics, which show the number of poor families climbed 52 per cent in five years — from 4,590 in 1991 to 7,140 in 1996.

Joey Edwardh, executive director of the Halton Social Planning Council and Volunteer Centre, said the new report shows just how vulnerable everyone is to poverty and how many people are having difficulty making ends meet even when the economy seems strong.

"We're seeing a new historical moment," she said. "Usually when employment rates go up and welfare rates go down, we begin to believe people are well on their way to individual and family successes.

"And what we're seeing is a growing working poor, people just struggling above the poverty line — and that's not healthy for our community."

The poverty report cites Statistics Canada information from 1999 showing the low income cut-off for a two-person family in Halton was \$19,809, or \$28,985 for a family of four.

That's based on a family having to spend more than 56 per cent of income on food, shelter and clothing.

In Halton that same family of four, if trying to survive on social assistance, would receive a maximum of \$14,568.

Ms Edwardh said the new poverty report

tries to put a face on poverty, rather than rely on cold statistics. It tells specific stories, some concerning people spending most of their income on shelter and on waiting lists for subsidized housing.

"It could be any of us," she said. "It just takes a change in circumstance or a shift in opportunities... there's a divorce and suddenly there's a woman and small children without resources."

Meanwhile, a news release from the Ministry of Community and Social

Services places Halton Region second-best in Ontario among 47 areas listed, in terms of cutting its welfare caseload.

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In Selected Area's

HHS' ConnectCARE program provides help at the touch of a button



Halton Healthcare

HHS' ConnectCARE program provides help at the touch of a button

For over 10 years, Halton Healthcare Services' ConnectCARE program (formerly known as the Home Emergency Lifeline Programme), has been providing "help at the touch of a button" for those living in Halton with a chronic medical or physical condition. The service is particularly beneficial for older adults who live alone as it provides quick access to help in emergency situations.

"For many older adults, the program provides an increased sense of security while continuing to live in their own home, and complements other home care services in order to prevent or delay institutional care," says Margaret Robichaud, ConnectCARE Coordinator. "Our clients and their loved ones know that help is never out of reach, day or night, which gives them all peace of mind."

According to Statistics Canada, every year approximately one third of seniors living in the community will experience a fall. Older adults have the highest rate for falls

over any other age group resulting in the longest hospital stays. Older adults also have a greater risk of injury due to falls, which can lead to other chronic medical problems that may compromise an independent lifestyle.

"Just the fear of falling may have a negative affect on their self-esteem," Margaret continues. "They begin to see themselves as frail, less competent and more dependent."

If a fall occurs in the home, the telephone is often out of reach, and if an injury is sustained, delayed medical treatment increases the risk of complications.

The ConnectCARE service means help is never out of reach. A portable alarm

button, worn on the wrist or as a pendant, connects the client with the hospital's trained monitoring staff through a two-way speaker unit installed on the client's existing telephone line. Even if the client is unable to communicate, all relevant personal information is immediately available to the staff who then dispatches either a designated contact person or Emergency Services to provide assistance.

"We provide a service that allows our clients to continue to live independently in the community," says Margaret, "and independent living means increased quality of life."

ConnectCARE is the only hospital owned and operated emergency personal response service in the region. Since its inception, the program has provided life saving support for thousands of individuals living in the Halton area.

For more information, please call ConnectCARE at 905-338-4357.

Written by Rebecca Stoneman Public Relations Associate at Halton Healthcare Services.

