

Wide gap between haves and have-nots in region

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significant number of new immigrants.

He said surveys of immigrants indicate that while past concerns centred on career and governmental issues, they're now indicating problems closer to home. "This time, for the first year, basic necessities was one of the things that showed up," Mr. Glover said.

Fewer employment opportunities, exacerbated by a reluctance among Canadian employers to recognize foreign qualifications, along with a tight housing market and rising costs, are combining to create a tough climate for new arrivals, he said.

"They come with maybe \$10,000 to \$15,000 in their pocket," Mr. Glover said. "They're not destitute, but it's gone in three months."

Although York Region remains as the GTA municipality with the highest average household income, there is a widening gap between the haves and have-nots, said Elizabeth Wagle, director of family and children's services with York Region's community services and housing department.

"(Immigrants) come with maybe \$10,000 to \$15,000 in their pocket. They're not destitute, but it's gone in three months."

She produced statistics that show in 1996, York Region was home to approximately 22,300 households with an income less than \$30,000; of that number, some 80-per-cent were below Statistics Canada's Low Income Cut-Off (LICO), popularly referred to as the poverty line.

By 1999, the number of households living on less than \$30,000 annually had climbed to 40,000.

Households below the LICO level are spending more than 55-per-cent of their income on necessities such as shelter, food and clothing.

As of June 3, there were 4,838 households on waiting lists for affordable housing in York Region, 2,388 of them families with children.

In addition, emergency shelters in the region are filled to capacity and seeing an increasing number of families — among them families with working parents — among their clientele.

"People tend to think of York Region as a very rich region and it is, at some levels," Ms Wagle said. "But the polarization of salaries is happening here."

"There's a growing number of low-income families emerging."

There is great concern for children caught in the web of poverty; their social and physical development can be hampered by living in households in which the stresses of poverty are prevalent, Ms Wagle said.

"There's a real impact on child development," she said. "It creates anxiety for children; it's not the best environment for children to be in."

If there is a consensus among agency workers and regional officials, it is that governments must do more to bridge the service gaps that are encountered by the impoverished.

That means money, but governments, particularly the Conservative regime at Queen's Park, have embarked on campaigns of social spending cuts, not enhancement.

York Region has adopted programs for families and children and put up the money to fund them, Ms Wagle said.

However, the municipality continues to receive less than 60-per-cent of the

provincial average for social spending; in short, provincial payments have not kept pace with the rapid rate of growth experienced in the region.

Among the regional initiatives that have been launched in response to the increasing demand on services is the creation of the Human Services Planning Coalition, a think-tank comprised of government and social agency representatives. Its goal is to ensure the provision of services to all segments of society, said Susan Taylor, director of human services planning with the region. "Human services planning is about equity and access, about leveling

the playing field for everyone, especially those who are at risk," Ms Taylor said.

"When gaps in service occur in one area, the consequences are often felt in another area. This report on poverty just proves our point."

Mr. Glover said municipalities and agencies must lobby federal and provincial politicians to make sure the issue of child poverty is not swept aside and ignored. "I think it's up to agencies and individuals to at least tell our provincial members and our federal members these are our concerns," he said.

"Whether there's political will to act is another question."



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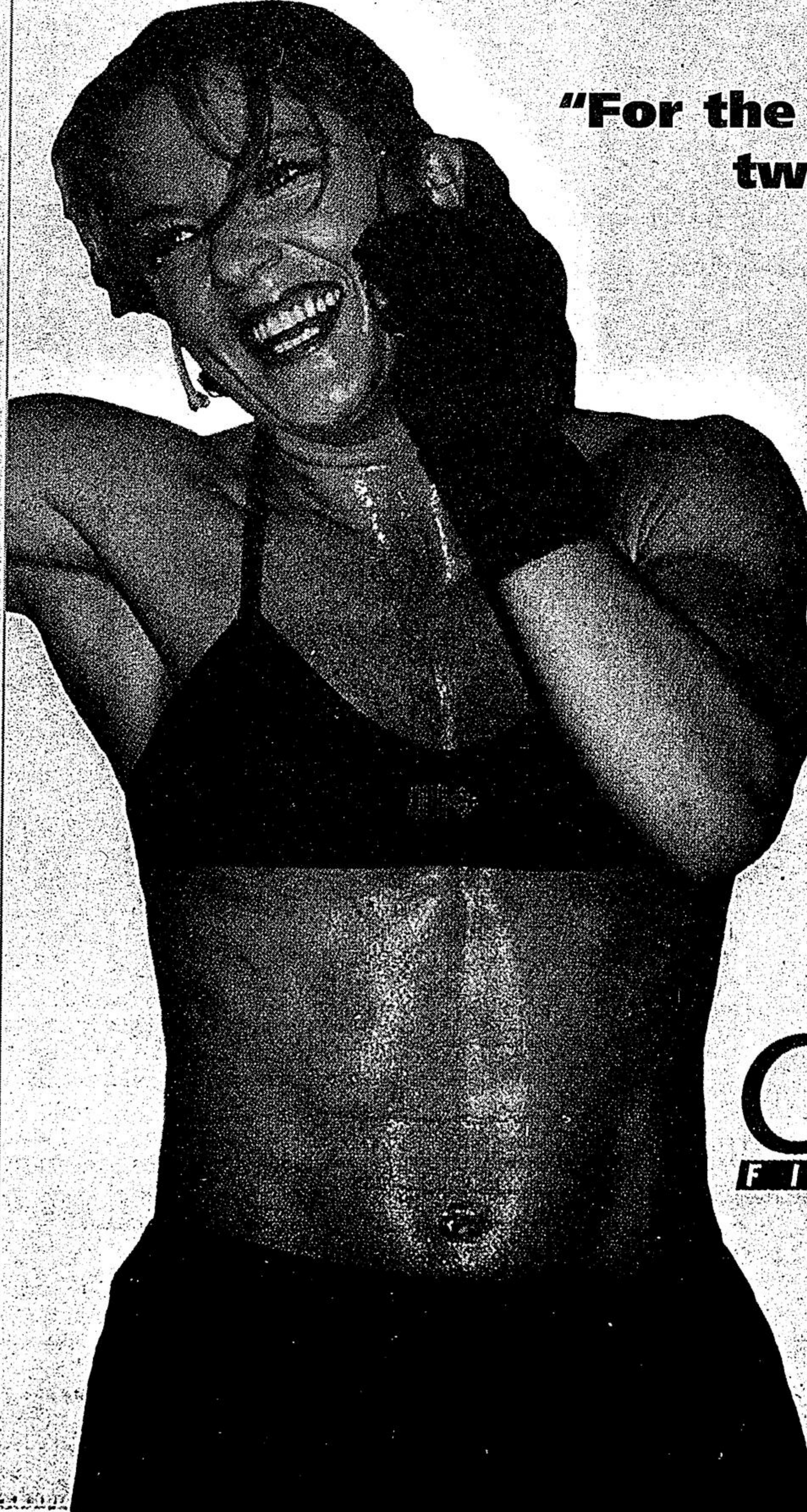
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