

Step up poverty battle, protesters tell government

BY JOE FANTAUZZI
Staff Writer

Caroline was just a toddler when her father died.

Killed while working on a hydro line, Caroline said her mom was left alone with two young daughters. Her 19-year-old mother suffered a nervous break-down and was hospitalized at Whitby Psychiatric Hospital, where she was sterilized, Caroline said.

"I know what it's like to grow up in child poverty," she said.

Although she's self-employed as a caricature artist, she has problems with her teeth. It hurts to bite down sometimes, she said.

Caroline, a York Region resident who didn't want her full name used, cannot afford to have those problems fixed.

She consulted a dental school and was told her problem was too complicated for work to be done, she said.

"Income shouldn't keep you from having good health," she said.

Caroline made her story public Wednesday during a gathering at Fairy Lake in Newmarket organized by Poverty Action For Change Coalition's York Region branch.

Wednesday was this year's

International Day For The Eradication of Poverty, an event first recognized by the United Nations in 1993.

"I think dental care should be treated like OHIP," she said. "People are not poor because of their own fault; it doesn't take much to be a write off. Society has written off poor people."

Good employment is a major barrier standing in the way of eroding poverty, according to Caroline.

"People need to have better opportunities," she said. "Today, you have to beg for minimum wage jobs."

Stacie Reid and Adam Morier, both 17, heard about the poverty rally through friends.

Stacie said she hopes awareness of poverty in York Region will be raised following the gathering.

More can be done for those in poverty, Adam said.

"Can we help them right now and make their lives better? I think so," he said.

The business community should be more open with its hiring practices, Aurora resident Miloslav Prikryl said.

"People in business should not think profit is everything," he said. "It is not just to give somebody money, but self-confidence. I'm sure 200 bucks doesn't mean much to

a company but it means a lot to a person."

Social services are also important, but should not be paid for at the local level, he said.

What that leads to is if the region hikes its property tax rate, residents — regardless of their income — pay the

increase.

Newly re-elected Newmarket-Aurora MPP Frank Klees also addressed the rally.

Mr. Klees has called for municipal, provincial and federal representatives as well as the private sector to develop a poverty reduction

strategy for the region.

Mr. Klees has committed to taking an active role in such a group.

"Poverty is too often discussed and reported on at the 30,000 foot level, where we can make claims of progress without admitting we are failing real people on the

ground," Mr. Klees said.

"It is clear people are falling through the social safety nets; and we have a responsibility to identify how we can help people overcome barriers in their lives that are keeping them from enjoying the basics most take for granted."

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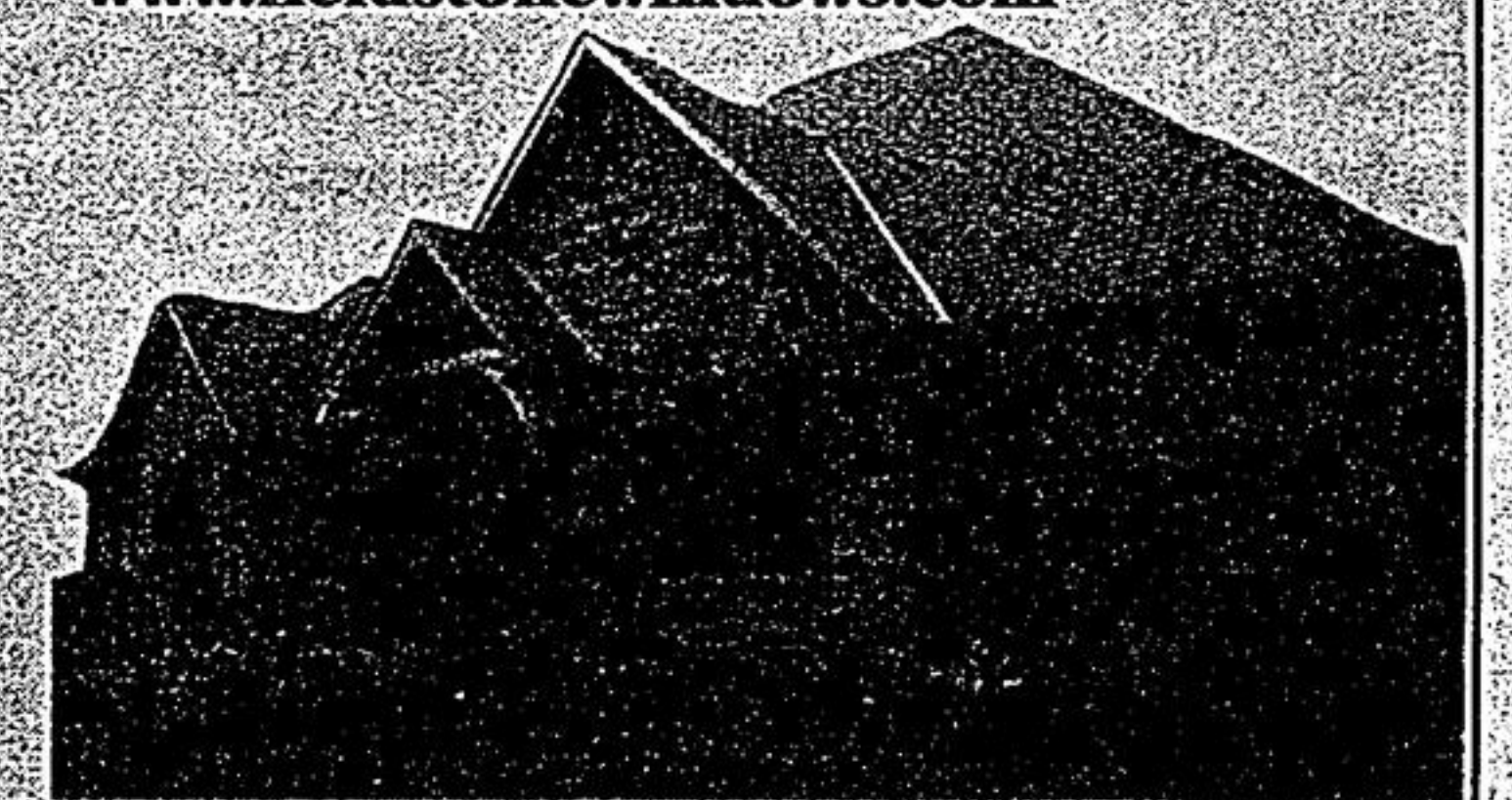
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