

OPINION



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Sun-Tribune

SATURDAY FORUM

People living in poverty don't want to be there

In 2012, I attended a meeting at Premier Kathleen Wynne's office and I picked up a copy of the commission for the review of social assistance in Ontario.

I was excited to learn the province was looking at ways to improve the social assistance system so people can transition from poverty and into work more easily.

Brighter Prospects: Transforming Social Assistance in Ontario makes 108 recommendations to accomplish this.

I have been a social worker and educator for 25 years, working primarily with low-income people in Toronto.

I have learned people who live in poverty do not want to live in poverty. They want to work, support their families and make a contribution to community.

Often, the social assistance system traps people into poverty without the proper supports and policies to assist them transition out of it.

A large percentage of people who end up on Ontario Works remain on it because the system does not allow them to get ahead.

The other thing I have observed is people on Ontario Works are not able to make ends meet.

The benefit levels are unacceptably low. An adult on social assistance receives \$606 a month and lives \$11,320 below the poverty line for a single individual.

On average, an adult in Ontario requires a monthly income of \$1,450 for the basic necessities of life, according to Poverty Free Ontario; Social Planning Council of Ontario.

While working with families on social assistance, the most frequent comment I hear is, "We can't even cover basic needs".

This benefit level undermines



Lori Yaccato

a person's capacity to find work and transition out of poverty because all of his energy and resources go into finding ways to meet basic needs.

If the province wants to help people move from poverty and into meaningful employment, the most significant thing it can do is provide adequate benefit rates — that means \$1,450.

When a person knows his basic needs are met, he has the confidence, motivation and resources to look for new employment and education.

An adequate benefit rate will allow people to live in dignity and transition out of poverty.

European countries, such as Denmark, Netherlands and Sweden, with strong and competitive economies, have public assistance systems that keep people out of poverty.

Ontario can do this as well. We just need the political will, vision and moral conviction.

This report is a real opportunity for our government and all groups working on poverty reduction.

I hope Ms Wynne implements reform in this critical area.

This would be one of the most important ways to empower people to transition into work.

Lori Yaccato works with Quantum Educational Services.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Town staff made Ribfest work easy

I am writing to you only a few days now after the conclusion of the first annual Stouffville Country Ribfest to express my sincere thanks and gratitude to the Town staff and to the wonderful people of Whitchurch-Stouffville.

When I first approached the town and met with Anna Rose, the downtown coordinator, I was impressed with the care and co-operation I received immediately.

My subsequent meetings put me in touch with town staffers Rob Raycroft, Mike Richardson, Bruce Hatt and Janet Ruhl and I knew then the task of putting together this event would be both successful and enjoyable.

I have had the opportunity of working with a variety of organizations and municipalities in the past and I must admit I have not had such a pleasurable time as I did in Stouffville.

From the very beginning to the end, the collaboration was simply outstanding and to the hard-working leisure services staff who laboured throughout the weekend to ensure the grounds were kept pristine, I offer my heart felt thanks.

We live in very difficult times nowadays and it has been a refreshing experience to partner with such wonderful individuals as I have last weekend.

What a great opportunity it was to work with everyone and I look forward to next year's event.

STEVE HARRISON
CHAIRPERSON
STOUFFVILLE COUNTRY
RIBFEST

Residents told council

Re: \$1M homes big with buyers, July 27.

Councillor Phil Bannon's comments regarding residents' lack of response to the Geranium development on Ballantrae's Lakeshore Road were rather patronizing.

The article states "when the plan was first proposed, area residents expressed concern ... but at last week's council meeting, the proposed plan was approved by councillors without a peep from the public gallery".

I was one among many who spoke at the town meeting last November, expressing misgivings about the subdivision that will cram large homes on smaller lots, which will then require rezoning the land parcel from its existing rural design-

nation. We pointed out the major problems Ballantrae had experienced with flooding and water issues — also still unresolved — and the potential harmful impact of new septic systems. We also lamented the increasing pressure on wildlife corridors and quality of life.

In answer to the question about lack of protest now, I can only answer for myself. Perhaps it's because I had already appeared at council and spoken at length. Perhaps because I had already submitted a thoroughly researched, five-page brief.

Perhaps because I thought I had already presented my concerns and had nothing new to add. Perhaps because the meeting was held in the middle of July, when I, like many residents, was on vacation, ensuring a low turnout.

Perhaps mostly because in the very same mailing that I received notice of the July meeting, also in my mailbox was a glossy brochure from Geranium announcing the "18 Manor Homes coming soon to Ballantrae".

It's hard to protest something that is a fait accompli. And this certainly lessens my faith in the public review process.

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