

Food scarcity 'unacceptable': report

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A national study released Tuesday stating that the number of Canadians reliant on food banks has risen 25 per cent since 2008 mirrors hunger issues in York Region, anti-poverty advocates said.

Too many Canadians are struggling just to put food on the table and food bank use continues to hover at record levels, according to HungerCount 2013, a survey by Food Banks Canada involving input from more than 4,000 food programs.

In a typical month, Canadian food banks help more than 833,000 people and nearly four in 10 of those are children, the report stated.

Each month, 80,000 Canadians are forced to ask for help from a food bank for the first time. Nearly 40,000 of those helped each month are seniors with incomes too meagre to afford enough food.

On in six households assisted by food banks has employment income, yet still can't make ends meet.

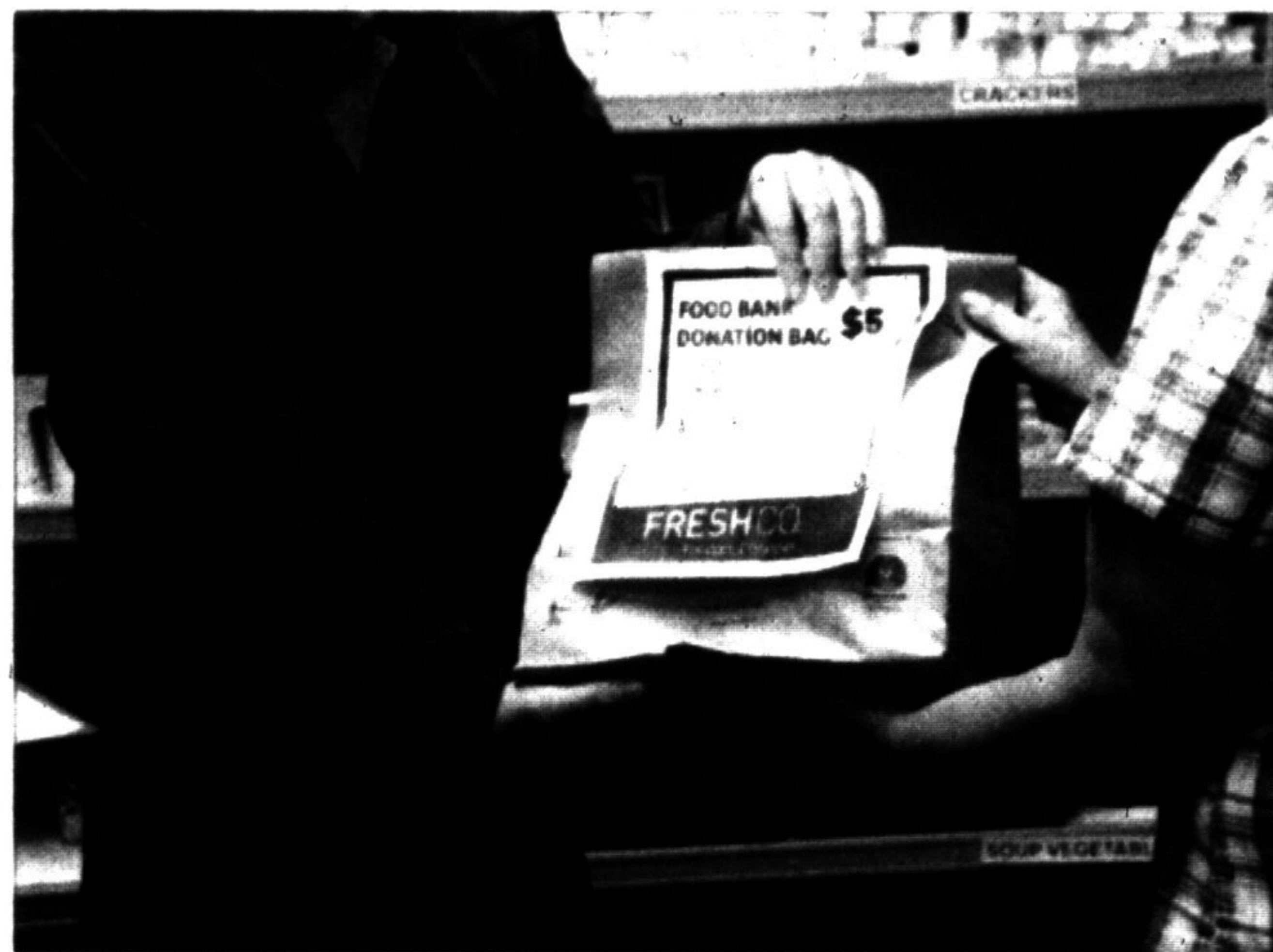
"Far too many people are looking into an empty fridge and won-

dering how they're going to feed themselves and their kids," Food Banks Canada executive director Katharine Schmidt said. "The inability to obtain enough food, when it is abundant all around us, is physically and psychologically scarring."

The national findings reflect the local status quo, York Region Food Network executive director Joan Stonehocker said. Statistics from eight reporting food banks in our nine municipalities parallel national numbers, she said. Regrettably, with 41 per cent of our food bank clients being children, the region is above the survey statistics and over the 35 per cent provincial figures. Between 2008 and 2010 alone, regional food bank visits rose 20 per cent.

Last year more than 52,800 people were fed in York Region. There's been a one per cent increase in food bank visits over last year, but there remains a disproportionate number of clients on social assistance, she said. Disturbing, too, is the fact 40 per cent of client households have at least one employed member.

Ms Stonehocker agreed with



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Statistics from eight reporting food banks in York's nine municipalities parallel national numbers in Tuesday's HungerCount 2013 survey.

Ms Schmidt's contention that food scarcity is simply unacceptable in a nation as prosperous as Canada, adding she is buoyed by HungerCount's recommendations that federal and provincial governments make real investments in policies that will reduce the need

for food banks.

The national survey provides policy recommendations similar to those in the network's Food for Change - From Charity to Dignity 2013 report.

HungerCount 2013 recommends increased access to afford-

able housing so that Canadians are not forced to choose between paying rent or buying food.

It asks for more robust investment in education and training for Canadians at risk of failing in the job market, so that people can become self-sufficient through employment. The report also suggests investment in local food solutions in the North, to help Northern Canadians build the capacity to feed themselves and a call to revolutionize social assistance, so people can build self-sufficiency instead of being trapped in poverty.

Affordable housing is imperative to preventing future hunger, Ms Stonehocker said, lauding York Region's draft 10-year housing plan. The report's recommended policy changes is where we need to go, she said.

"We've got to go up river and see what the problem is," she said. "We need to address the root issues. HungerCount 2013 addresses this clearly."

For information and access to the HungerCount 2013 report, visit foodbanksCanada.ca. For York Region Food Network information and how you can help, visit yrfn.ca

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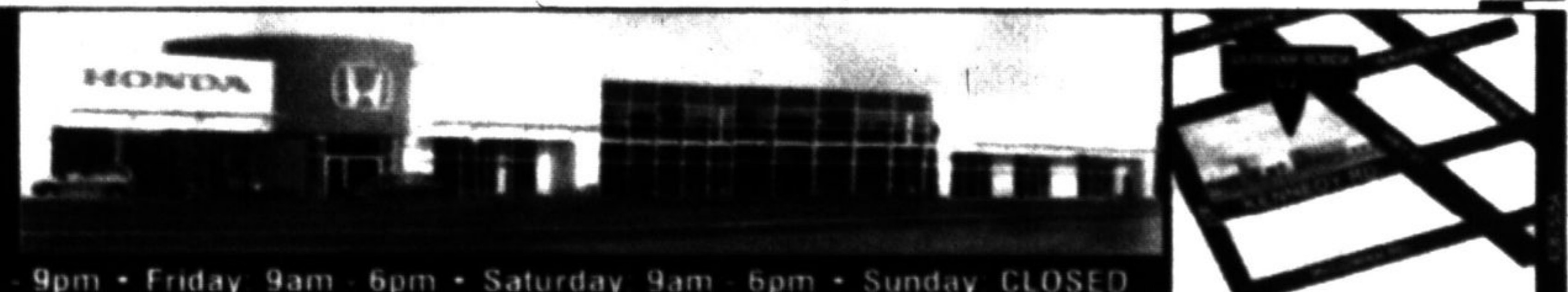
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