

THE HELP AND LEGAL CENTRE OF NORTHUMBERLAND

Chair's Report by Beth Bellaire

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Each year as I sit down to write my report, I struggle with getting started. This time, to get the creative juices flowing, I read over past years' reports and saw there these recurring themes:

The Amount of Work Accomplished – It seems we never get used to the fact that our two agencies help make positive change in the lives of so many residents of Northumberland County. With the full array of programs offered, it is no wonder that our doors are sought by so many people: the young and old, singles and families, people who have lived here for generations and newcomers to Canada – they all know that if they come here, they will leave the better for it.

The Increase in Demand – The steady stream of people coming through our doors only seems to grow each year. From the statistics shared in the following pages, you can see that the demand for our services continues to expand. To address this with the same or fewer resources, our staff need to be smart and look for efficiencies and new approaches. They are using technology in more and more ways, but our clients still value the personal touch so they make sure that focus is there. When you call our agencies, we are proud to say that the voice you hear is that of a live person, ready and able to help.

The Challenge of Change – Our world is ever-changing, and so too are the conditions impacting our agencies. New governments, new ministries, new funding criteria: there is never room for relaxation in our field. This year, our legal centre is facing the possibility of significant change. The provincial government has cut legal-aid funding by 30% and they are in the

process of a major reassessment of legal aid services, including those of the clinic system. We are proud of our clinic: it is one of the most efficient clinics out there and it is a leader in the field of collaboration and sharing of resources. We hope these characteristics will be recognized and rewarded; we will do all we can to make sure our voice is heard.

The Dedication of Staff – Every member of our staff across both agencies is committed to the mission of the organization, and this shows in the energy and effort they put into each day's work. It seems cliché to say – as it's said every year – but I really appreciate how they are always willing to go above and beyond to meet the needs of our clientele.

The Value of Volunteers – Whether it's a tutor working with a newcomer to Canada, a person taking down financial information so a client can file their tax return, a student completing their placement as a receptionist, or a person helping with a fundraising event, our or-

ganization would not be able to accomplish so much if not for the volunteer. I'd like to thank all of these good people for the hours they donate to our cause. But I'd like to especially thank the community members who have agreed to serve on our Board. These people not only give their time, but they also bring new ideas and concerns to the board table. A standing item on our monthly agenda is "Emerging Community Issues." This is our built-in early-warning-signal of changing needs. It allows us to be proactive and ready to meet new challenges as they arise. Processes such as this point to the value of having an independent community board to provide the stewardship necessary in these turbulent times.

Changing times – recurring themes: through it all, The Help and Legal Centre of Northumberland continues to thrive and provide excellent service to our county. It is a privilege to be a part of it.

LEGAL CLINIC REPORT by Lois Cromarty, Executive Director

Approximately 9000 people - about 1 in 10 residents - live below the poverty line in Northumberland. We provide free legal services to them in housing, income security, disability programs, employment, worker's compensation and more.

Consequently, "access to justice" has practical meaning for our clients. The legal services we provide keep a roof over their heads and food on their table. In 2017-2018, our work put an estimated \$1.8Million in their hands.

The Province cut Legal Aid funding by 30% this year, despite the fact that

every dollar taken from legal aid results in a \$3-5 increase in government costs for homelessness, healthcare, family breakdown and incarceration, etc. In turn, LAO cut the budgets of legal clinics; some by an immediate 45%. While our budget reduction was manageable this year, next year is uncertain as further budget cuts are planned.

Besides budget cuts, the government's review of legal aid services could see the significant reduction - or total elimination - of the

legal clinic system. A central call-centre, self-help technology or "regional" legal clinics are being discussed as replacements to clinics like ours.

The legal help our clients need is NOT what a call-centre or self-help technology can provide. Those with disabilities or literacy issues can find it very difficult to cope with technology. They don't have money for cell phone minutes. They lack internet access. They live in rural

areas without transportation. They need in-person, local legal services who travel to them and who know community resources. That's what we do.

The community legal clinic system needs your support to preserve this essential service, for the well-being of our vulnerable neighbours.

Stop the Cuts:
www.stoplegalaidcuts.ca
Hashtag: #Justice4All

Social Work by Hannah Robins

While my responsibilities and tasks during my Masters of Social Work practicum at the NCLC have been diverse, they all have had the same fundamental goal: To support the well-being of low-income people living in Northumberland who require accessible legal assistance. The development of my practicum has been informed by the understanding that legal issues don't occur in a vacuum. The legal issues that those who seek help at the NCLC face are often contextualized by other challenging areas in their lives. My role as a Social Work student has been to look beyond the presenting legal concern

and to support both the areas that might be contributing to the development of the legal issue, as well as other areas of concern that might be worsening a person's well-being. This might look like providing resources to maximize income, advocating for a client's access to a service or organization, offering information and system navigation, making referrals to the appropriate agencies, or providing informal counselling support.

I believe that my time spent at the NCLC has been an invaluable learning experience. I have had the privilege of

independently practising the application of Social Work skills and theory while being guided and supported by my excellent supervisors. I have also had the opportunity to see first-hand how important the services provided by the NCLC are for so many people in Northumberland County. Having started my placement with limited knowledge about legal clinics in Ontario, I now feel that due to my time spent at the NCLC, I have gained insight and appreciation for the role that legal clinics play in upholding access to justice for the most vulnerable members of society.

While definitely challenging at times, I believe that my practicum has been exceptionally rewarding and important for my professional development and personal growth. I am grateful to have had the learning opportunities provided to me while at the NCLC, and I know that the awareness gained during my practicum experience will serve me well into my future career. I would highly recommend that anyone who is looking for a practicum site to consider the NCLC for their placement.

THE HELP CENTRE Patricia Orantes, Executive Director

2018-2019 was another busy and exciting year for The Help Centre. Programs in areas such as housing and income security; utility disconnection prevention; outreach; income-tax-return completion; adult literacy and ESL; and support for seniors are programs that have been developed to address the needs of the lower-income residents around the county and we continue to see a demand for all of them.

However, securing funds to deliver our diverse programs and services continues to be a big challenge year after year. Thanks to our Core Funder Northumberland United Way and additional funding from the Homelessness Partnership Strategy -Federal Government-, Northumberland County Community and Social Services, Cobourg Rotary Club, Kawartha Credit Union, Royal Canadian Legion - Port Hope, ACME Electric Ltd. and other generous private donors, The

Help Centre has been able to continue addressing the needs of our clients. Even when we had a tight budget last year, we were able to deliver our programs and services without any interruption.

We have seen an increase of residents trying to find a better and stable place to live. The number of clients in our housing program has had a meaningful growth between 2018/2019 and the scarce availability of affordable housing makes our job very difficult. The Help Centre has also been experiencing an increase in complex cases that require a great deal more time, advocacy and care.

Thanks to our Board of Director and our dedicated and committed staff and volunteers and the work they constantly do to assist and support our clients through non-judgemental listening, effective advocacy and proactive initiatives we were able to achieve the

following outcomes: 26 new learners were assisted in our English as a Second Language program; 87 new clients at risk of homelessness were assisted and 32 clients were successfully housed; 62 new seniors were supported and 223 units of service were provided through our Seniors' Service Program; 115 clients received grants to re-establish service or avert utility disconnections; 214 clients accessed our budgeting and post-bankruptcy program; over 450 one-on-one sessions were provided to our adult literacy clients and our tax volunteers prepared 2,034 tax returns bringing back to the community around \$5 million dollars.

Our job is not an easy one and our team regularly experiences challenges, yet they still arrive each day with enthusiasm and the willingness to make this community a better place to live.

Senior Service Help Program Amber Fennell, Senior Service Helper

According to Statistics Canada, Northumberland County has one of the largest per capita populations of seniors in Ontario. The population aged 65 and up is projected to increase by 94% by 2034, including a more than doubling of the number of residents aged 85 years and up (demographic profile for Northumberland County, taken from 2011 Census,



Statistics Canada).

One of the biggest issues facing low income people over 55 is isolation and lack of information about what resources are available. The cost of living is high, which is a huge disadvantage for lower-income senior residents in this area. Seniors who are vulnerable may be isolated or reclusive, have difficulty coping, and may

be without easily identified supports. They may also have complex physical and/or mental health problems, unsafe living conditions, elevated risk of eviction and limited to no financial means.

Through the supports and services provided by the Seniors Service Help Program, The Help Centre has been

able to assist the most vulnerable seniors in Northumberland County. Small interventions with encouragement, over time, can facilitate big improvements. Through our interventions, senior residents are able to become stable and access food, affordable housing or shelter, assistance in obtaining income security and mediation and advocacy with other community services.

Helping Vulnerable Workers in our Community by Sharee Bahduri

NCLC is pleased to continue helping precarious employed workers through the resolution of Wrongful Dismissal, Human Rights, Workplace Safety and Insurance Act (WSIA), Employment Standards Act, Employment Insurance, and Occupational Health and Safety Act issues. Precarious employment entails work that is part-time, on-call, agricultural/seasonal, temporary, or contract. This year we have seen an increase in requests for services by workers who have not only lost employment, but who are facing human rights issues within the workplace.

As workers continue to face challenging times there have been new legislative changes to the Employment Law world. The

Ontario Government introduced *Bill 47, Making Ontario Open for Business Act, 2018*. Changes to Ontario labour and employment legislation took effect on January 1, 2019.

Some of the notable changes are the following: workers will receive the following unpaid days: three days for sick leave (personal illness, injury or medical emergency); three days for family responsibility leave (illness, injury, medical emergency or other urgent matter concerning prescribed individuals); two days for bereavement leave (related to the death of prescribe individuals). Another debatable

change is that Employers may now also require employees to provide evidence for leaves, which includes providing a medical note. General minimum wage will continue to remain at \$14.00 per hour until October 1, 2020, and increases will be reassessed at that time to reflect inflation.

Through the Temporary Foreign Workers Program, employers in Northumberland County are able to fill temporary labour and skill shortages with temporary foreign workers. These workers are often uneducated about their rights in Canada, and accept unfavorable working conditions for fear of repatriation. This is

something the Legal Centre can assist with. In fact, in partnership with Horizons of Friendship, the Legal Centre has been involved in satellite clinics and monthly farm visits where we provide legal advice to migrant workers relating to Canadian Pension Plan, workers' rights, Employment Insurance etc.

Therefore, the goal at NCLC is not only provide better access to justice, but to continue helping workers become better informed of their basic legal rights.

LAW FOUNDATION FUNDING by Sarah Cooling

The Northumberland Community Legal Centre would like to thank the Law Foundation of Ontario, for funding Summer Internship Law Student, Ahmed Mohamed.

Ahmed is a 2nd year law student at Lakehead University, and we were thrilled to have him working with us this summer. Ahmed indicates that "As a summer law student at the Northumberland Community Legal Cen-

tre, I have been busy from the start, with new and exciting opportunities being presented to me each day. This clinic has provided me with a great work environment and an amazing culture among all of the NCLC staff, which has enhanced my learning experiences this summer."

We are grateful to the Law Foundation for

providing this opportunity to both law students and the Northumberland Community Legal Centre. This funding allows law students to increase their legal awareness of vulnerable residents in their communities, to prioritize access to justice and to develop the legal skills and

tools that will serve them throughout their career. Ahmed was able to draft various legal documents, memoranda and submissions while also accompanying and assisting the legal staff with their hearings. Good Luck Ahmed!



Affordable Housing Programs Debbie Woods, Housing Support Worker & Mirri Henshall, Landlord Liaison

This year, The Help Centre has had many changes within our Affordable Housing Program. We have a new Housing Support Worker, Debbie Wood, and a Landlord Liaison, Mirri Henshall.

The need for affordable housing is an ongoing growing issue in Northumberland County. We are seeing more people coming in that are sleeping in their vehicles, living in RV's, on the beach, couch surfing for a night or two at a friend's, and people discharged from hospitals. We also are seeing an increase in seniors in need of affordable housing. More and more people are requiring a rent supplement as rentals continue to grow in costs.

The good news is that there are two builds on the table for Cobourg. They include Trinity Place who will be adding additional units (27) and the county has received seed funding for the Elgin Street project that will add more single units. Habitat for Humanity also been approved for new builds and the Northumberland

County has donated a house to Habitat for Humanity. Applications are now open to residents of Northumberland County to apply for these new builds.

In addition, Transition House in Cobourg re-opened in late fall of 2018 with 22 beds; since their re-opening they are running at capacity on a nightly basis. Our Housing Support Worker has been busy with outreach.

Private landlords are also strategic partners in the work to help people quickly exit homelessness. Strong connections to landlords are even more important where affordable housing options are limited and it is crucial to create a strong strategy to engage local landlords to work together to address homelessness in our community.

Building and maintaining relationships with landlords can be disheartening, as there are many challenges that need to be overcome. However, this can be a great opportunity for our community where the

rental market is really tight with a low vacancy rate and a lack of affordable housing options.

If landlords are educated about homelessness, available resources and information, this will help to reduce misconceptions about social assistance programs and make participation in a partnership to house those who have experienced homelessness more palatable. Landlords who care about social issues and/or are familiar with homelessness, poverty, and other issues, are more likely to be open to renting to people who have been or are currently homeless.

With a program that is tailored to fostering healthy relationships with landlords, our clients have been able to access the hidden rental market. Since January 2019, we have been able to start building relationships with thirty-four local landlords, and have been able to have four clients successfully housed.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Board Changes by Sarah Cooling

The purpose of the CICB was to assess financial compensation for victims of violent crimes and family members of deceased victims of violent crimes and to fill essential gaps missed by our criminal and civil law justice systems, providing survivors of violence with access to a less intense and less re-

traumatizing justice process.

Unfortunately, one of the changes made by Doug Ford's PC government has been to replace the CICB's board of adjudicators with a bureaucratic "administrative" model to assess applicants.

The maximum claim for

pain and suffering is now capped at \$5,000; this is down from Victims previously being eligible for \$25,000 for pain and suffering.

As a Lawyer with over 15 years experience representing clients on CICB claims, I have found that this money makes a world of difference to our cli-

ents. It provides an important element of validation to clients. It allows a client to move forward with their lives despite living through horribly violent experiences. The new \$5,000 cap on pain and suffering trivializes the pain that these clients have been through as the victims and violent crimes and balances the budget on the most vulnerable members of society.

Peter Vance: Just the Facts on the LAO Cuts



On April 11, 2019, the Pro-

gressive Conservative government of Doug Ford tabled its first budget. The budget measures, dubbed by the Ford government as the *Protecting What Matters Most Act*, included a \$133 million cut to the provincial legal aid system. Further cuts will be phased over the next three years to bring the total reduction in funding for Legal Aid Ontario



(LAO) to \$164 million.

These cuts have meant a significant number of changes to the services available to low-income residents of Ontario. Further changes can be expected in the coming months as Legal Aid Ontario seeks to implement the \$164 million dollar cut to its operating budget.

Some of the things that will be affected include the community legal clinic system, of which the Northumberland Community Legal Clinic is a member. Legal clinics assist low-income people with issues affecting their housing, income and employment and these services will likely be reduced or done away with altogether as a result of the provincial cuts to the legal aid system.

The province has also directed LAO to discontinue funding immigration and refugee cases, arguing that those ser-

ices should be funded by the federal government. As an interim measure, the federal government has

approved one-time funding in the amount of \$25.7 million to cover the shortfall for the 2018-2019 fiscal period; however, the future of immigration and refugee legal services in Ontario remains uncertain beyond that funding period.

LAO is also responsible

for assisting low-income people to obtain representation by a lawyer through its Certificate Program. The certificate acts as a voucher that financially eligible people can use to hire a

lawyer to assist with serious criminal charges or serious family problems. As a result of the provincial cuts, certificates will no longer be available for most bail hearings and the number of hours that a certificate lawyer can work on a criminal or family law certificate has been reduced in many areas.

Many of the services provided by certificate lawyers will now be downloaded to LAO's Duty Counsel Services. Duty counsel are lawyers who provide legal assistance to low income people appearing

in family or criminal court who do not have a lawyer. These services, including services for people experiencing mental illness, will be limited as a result of the cuts.

In a July 18 interview with the *National Observer*, LAO Chief Executive Officer David Field was quoted as saying, "When you think about the magnitude of the reduction, there's no way that we could avoid impacting clients." Mr. Field was quoted further as saying, "You're grappling with the fact that anytime that we're making a decision that adversely affects our ability

to deliver services, clients that are marginalized will be affected. So it's not a great situation to be in."



“How to File at Small Claims Court” by Dawood Nasir

In our everyday lives, we often have disputes with other people or businesses. Most of the time these disputes are small and can be resolved through good communication.

When we cannot resolve our disputes through words, we may have to take someone to court.

The Small Claims Court deals with lawsuits involving disputes up to a maximum value of \$25,000 (not including interest or court costs).

A few examples of disputes that can result in a Small Claims lawsuit include:

- When your roofer does not install the roof properly and it needs to be redone and there is damage to your home
- When you stop paying your credit card bill
- When your employer fires you without giving you proper notice

The Court does not deal with criminal cases or family law cases.

The process of starting a claim is fairly straightforward. You fill out a form called a Plaintiff’s Claim (Form 7A) and file it at the local courthouse.

Generally, you have two years from when you first discovered the issue to file a claim. There is a fee for filing the claim, but this may be waived if you are a low-income person.

Once the claim has been filed, you generally have 6 months to serve it on the Defendant. There are specific rules for how the claim must be served.

If you have received a Plaintiff’s Claim (meaning you are the Defendant in a claim), then you must serve and file a Defence (Form 9A) within 20 days of being served with the claim. If you do not do this, the Plaintiff may be able to get judgment



against you without the need to go to trial.

Once the Defendant has served and filed their defence, the court will hold a Settlement Conference. This is a mandatory hearing where the parties are encouraged to settle their disputes without proceeding to trial.

If no settlement is reached at that time, the parties will likely be advised to proceed to trial. The plaintiff must ask the clerk to set a trial date within two years of filing the claim, or it could be dismissed.

At trial, both the Plaintiff and Defendant get to present their evidence, and question each other’s witnesses. The judge then makes a decision based on the evidence that both sides presented.

This is a very short and incomplete overview of the Small Claims Process. If you want to know more, or you are a low-income person who requires advice about Small Claims, please call the Northumberland Community Legal Centre at 905-373-4464 or 1-800-850-7882.

2020 Rent Increase Guideline

The Ontario government has announced that the annual Rent Increase Guideline, the maximum percentage by which a landlord can increase the rent for residential tenants without approval from the Landlord and Tenant Board, will be 2.2% for 2020. If you want to know more, or you are a low-income tenant who requires advice about your Landlord and Tenant Matters, please call the Northumberland Community Legal Centre at 905-373-4464 or 1-800-850-7882.



Justice and Health Project by Jasmine Singh

We are excited to announce the Justice and Health Pilot Project in the Northumberland region.

What is the Purpose of this Project?

The purpose of this project is to provide strategic and expert advice on the development of innovative partnerships between health care providers and Legal Centres. In particular, this project is designed to build awareness of the effect legal problems have on an individual's Social Determinants of Health. These partnerships will be used in turn to increase access to legal services for low income clients, reduce health disparities and improve

health outcomes.

What are Socio-Economic Determinants of Health?

Social determinants of health reflect the social factors and physical conditions of the environment in which people are born, live, learn, play, work, and age. Socio-Economic determinants of health have a direct impact on an individual's health and quality of life. Examples include but are not limited to:

- Poverty
- Availability of resources
- Exposure to crime and violence

- Safe and secure living conditions

How Access to Justice Can Improve Health Outcomes

Socio-economic factors can have a direct adverse impact on an individual's physical and mental wellbeing. Unresolved legal issues are major contributing factors to poor socio-economic status which in turn leads to deterioration in health. For example, poverty is linked to a number of health risks including fatigue, high stress levels, poor nutrition and lack of support. With

early intervention of legal assistance, benefits can be accessed to increase quality of life such as the instatement of social assistance. Overall, the Justice and Health Project is expected to prevent the escalation of legal problems and promote early intervention, resulting in the improved legal and medical well-being of patients. We encourage taking a holistic approach in medicine and speaking to your doctor about your personal concerns and quality of life.

New Sexual Harassment in the Workplace Project by Marisa Conlin

The Legal Centre is pleased to announce that the Department of Justice Canada has provided funding which will

allow us to provide services related to sexual harassment in the workplace.

We are working with seven other community legal clinics in Eastern

Ontario to develop educational materials and offer workshops about sexual harassment in the workplace. There will also be a staff person in each clinic to provide legal advice.

Our goal is for people to know their rights if they face

sexual harassment in the workplace and to understand their options for enforcing their rights.



These options could include a complaint under the *Employment Standards Act* or a Human Rights Complaint. If you would like us to offer a session to your group, school or work-

place, please feel free to contact us at 905-373-4464. We are willing to speak to any group that needs information about sexual harassment in the workplace, and we will be actively trying to reach individuals who are precariously employed and workers who may be at increased risk for sexual harassment in the workplace. We will be posting updates regarding the project on Facebook and Twitter. Please follow us for further details as this project progresses.

The Canada Labour Code defines sexual harassment as any conduct, comment, gesture, or contact of a sexual nature that is likely to cause offence or humiliation to any employee; or that might, on reasonable grounds, be perceived by that employee as placing a condition of a sexual nature on employment or on any opportunity for training or promotion.

Vote

The Canadian election is expected to take place on October 21, 2019.

The federal government makes decisions that affect your daily life on everything from health care and housing to jobs, security and climate change.

Please vote! There are a variety of options for voting. You can vote on election day or at an advance poll. You can vote at any

Elections Canada office during most days of the election period. You can also arrange to vote by mail.

In order to vote, you will need:

1. Photo ID with your address ; or
2. Two pieces of ID, with at least one of them showing your address; or
3. To declare your identity and address in writing and to bring someone who knows you and who has the

same polling station as you to vouch for you. That person has to have identification that includes a current address.

If you receive a Voter Information Card, it will give you information about where and how you can vote. If you don't receive one, you can still vote. You can register to vote beforehand or whenever you go to vote.

For more information, please go to www.elections.ca.

TBA	New Democratic Party	www.ndp.ca
Philip Lawrence	Conservative Party of Canada	www.conservative.ca
Kim Rudd	Liberal Party of Canada	www.liberal.ca
Jeff Wheeldon	Green Party of Canada	www.greenparty.ca
Frank Vaughan	People's Party of Canada	www.peoplespartyofcanada.ca

Partners-in-Learning Programs Nancy Blackler-Jenkins, Adult Literacy

The Help Centre's Partners-in-Learning programs, namely, Adult Literacy, English as a Second Language (ESL) and our newest program Job-Fit, each have witnessed their learners make many momentous strides this past year. Through these programs our fellow community members improve their learning skills so that they can participate fully in Northumberland County, whether it is through employment, volunteering or an act as humble as attending a doctor's appointment alone, while also creating friendships and belonging in the community.

Our adult literacy program, now in its fourth year, is one-to-one instruction in numeracy, reading and writing working with a trained volunteer tutor. We, together with the

learner and tutor, assist them to achieve their literacy goals. Goals may include employment, further education, filling in forms, getting a driver's license and/or independence.

Since its commencement three years ago, the ESL program has welcomed over ninety learners from across the globe. This non-judgmental and diverse English learning environment assists ESL learners in their listening, speaking, reading and writing goals.

A safe, open and understanding atmosphere aids participants in building confidence so they feel comfortable practicing English. Often

one of their learning goals is to be able to have a full conversation with an English speaker and with the support of our dedicated volunteer tutors and ongoing preparation in the classroom, this English goal is being achieved again and again.

The JobFit program, partnering with Northumberland County, assists people

with learning disabilities to enhance their em-



ployability and job-readiness skills. A small group setting allows each

participant to learn about their learning disability and the accommodations that may be needed on the job. The program's main focus is to concentrate on the learner's abilities and encourage their strengths. These three vital Partners-in-Learning programs work with the learners through small but significant changes while building learning relationships that are central to a good life in Northumberland County. Fundamentally, they establish reciprocal connections that are accomplished through goal setting, assurance and inclusion while fostering dignity.

Utility Arrears Assistance Programs/Outreach Karin Cummings, Sr. Program Coordinator

The Help Centre continues to be the intake agency for many provincial utility programs offered in Northumberland County. The ever increasing cost of maintaining our natural gas and electricity accounts has created a huge demand for change to the way we view our everyday lives. Off-peak pricing, which applies to electricity used between 7 p.m. and 7 a.m., has increased the most over the past decade. According to the Ontario Energy Board, off-peak consumption accounts for roughly 62 per cent of a residential customer's usage. It seems we are doing everything we can to keep our usage down but the costs keep going up.

Natural Gas on the other hand has seen a 52% drop in price for the

areas where natural gas heating is readily available but for rural areas like much of North-

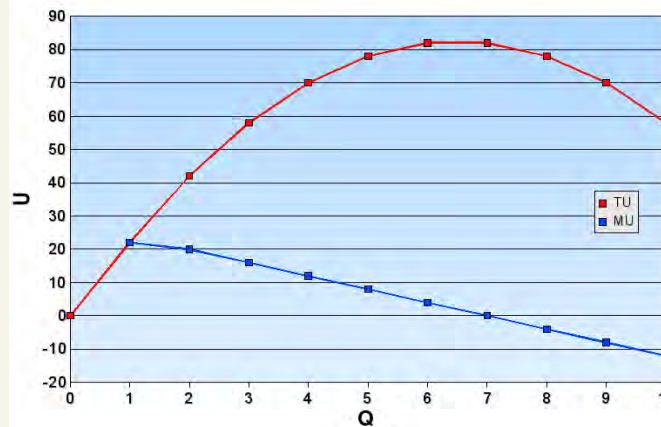
umberland, many have to rely on electric heat sources. Knowing the associated costs of keeping your family warm makes the winter something to dread. Through advocacy work by groups like the Ontario Energy Board – Financial Assistance Working Group and LIEN – Low Income Energy Network, both of which The Help Centre is an active participant, we have been

through the OESP, assisted those eligible to

receive a monthly credit on their electricity bill.

The Ontario Electricity Support Program which has been in place now since 2016, applies a monthly credit to electricity bills for those approved. Eligibility is based on the total household income and the number of people in the family. The Help Centre assists low income customers to apply to the program and since the inception of the program in 2016, a total of 678 Northumberland households are enjoying a reduction in their electricity bills. Currently, a total of 341,000 Ontarians are receiving this valuable credit. Although still a large part of the household budget, these reductions may make a big difference to a family's monthly expenses.

The Help Centre continues to offer assistance with a utility bill if there is a threat of disconnection. Every day a resident reaches out for help when they just can't keep their account up to date. As the intake agency for LEAP – Low Income Energy Assistance Program, we assist with completing LEAP grant applications, advocate with the utility to waive deposits, receive holds on any pending action, help to arrange longer term payment arrangements and facilitate the cancellation of third party contracts. These programs and all other Help Programs are also offered through our outreach program where we could meet at a convenient location, making it easier for the individual access our services throughout Northumberland County.



same period. That seems pretty positive for urban

able to help residents with emergencies and

Loss of the Transition Child Benefit by Jasmine Singh

Along with Ontario's Arts Council-funded Indigenous Culture Fund and The Compensation for Victims of Crime Act, the Transition Child Benefit will become a benefit of the past due to government cuts.

The Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services plans on eliminating the Transition Child Benefit as of November 1, 2019. This change will have a direct adverse impact on residents of Northumberland that are in receipt of ODSP and OW benefits. Currently the Transition Child Benefit gives parents who are waiting for Ontario & Canada Child Benefits up to \$230 per child per month. Many parents who are low-income rely solely on the Transition Child Benefit to pay for basic living

expenses for their children. This is a crucial benefit as it enables parents to pay for clothes, food and basic necessities for their children. This task becomes nearly impossible as many ODSP and OW recipients are not eligible for the Ontario Child Benefit (OCB) or who get only a partial OCB amount.

Furthermore, the loss of the Transition Child Benefit will have a disproportionate impact on a number of individuals including:

- Parents who have a new child and are waiting for their Ontario Child Benefit to kick in



- Parents who are waiting for their tax returns to be completed so that the Ontario Child Benefit can start to flow
- Parents who are being investigated by the Canada Revenue Agency for issues related to their child custody arrangements or income.

Overall, the loss of the Transition Child Benefit will have a devastating impact on parents and the emotional, physical, and mental well-being of their children.

These cuts are a direct attack on the most vulnerable in our society and we urge

the residents of Northumberland to reach out to their MPP and make informed political decisions.

Let us help with your taxes

For many years The Help Centre (THC) has actively participated in the **Community Volunteer Income Tax Program (CVITP)**. This program offers **FREE** income tax filing services for low-income residents in Northumberland. The Tax Season starts on March 1st of every year and runs intensively for 3 months (March to May), although we also assist clients with their taxes throughout the year. As of July 2019, our volunteers had prepared over 2,000 tax returns, returning over \$5 million in benefits and credits to our clients and the community.

If clients would like The Help Centre to assist with their taxes, please visit our office at 1005 Elgin Street West, Suite 301 to start the 2 step process. Make sure to bring the income slips and/or any other income related documents, as well as your medical, rent/property tax receipts, day-care receipts, tuition and education amounts and charitable donations. Only during Tax Season, clients who live in the rural areas are able to access our while-you-wait service at the outreach clinics in

Warkworth, Campbellford, Brighton, Port Hope and Colborne; as well as the Golden Plover, Legion Village, Streamway Villa and Halcyon Place only by appointments.

To be eligible for this program, clients must meet the following criteria: single person with income under than \$35,000, couples with income under than \$45,000; adding \$2,500 for additional person. According to the eligibility criteria from Canada Revenue Agency (CRA), THC is not able to assist individuals who

have self-employment or have employment expenses, have a business or rental income and expenses, have capital gains or losses, filed for bankruptcy and people who are completing a tax return for a deceased person.

This program also provides a great opportunity for volunteering. If you are interested in helping us to prepare taxes, please send an email to Patricia Orantes at: patricia@thehelpcentre.ca with your contact information and a brief description of your experience and knowledge.

Fundraising 2019 by Beth Bellaire

Once again, our fundraising committee has been busy this past year, raising much needed extra funds for the two agencies.

Our two signature events, Empty Bowls and The Golf Tournament, each celebrated their tenth year! Both have dedicated participants who generously return year after year to enjoy the events. We also have tremendous support from our local businesses, organizations, and unions who donate money and merchandise to help make these events the successes they always are. We would like to offer our sincere thanks to all of these people; without them, we could not manage.

In particular, we'd like to thank Rosewood Estates and its residents for donating their space, their chef and their staff. They make this event so special! We'd also like to thank the Shelter



another event to our roster: on October 20, at The Loft (201 Division Street, Cobourg), we will be screening a new documentary called *Town of Widows*. This film, co-produced by Bread and Roses



Valley Pines Golf Club for being so accommodating and helpful.

Of course, each year, we also hold a yard sale that raises some funds as well as serving as a wonderful marketing tool. A big thank you to Liz Greaves for allowing us to take over her yard –

and house – for the weekend. This year, we are adding



Creative Productions Inc. and the CBC, highlights the struggles of employees of GE in Peterborough as they try to get rightful compensation for their health issues due to asbestos exposure at work. Stay tuned – and check out Facebook – for more details!

