

# **Ontario's Poverty Reduction Plan Consultation**

*Submitted by*

***Renfrew County Child Poverty Action Network (CPAN)***

**July 10, 2008**

Renfrew County Child Poverty Action Network (CPAN) would like to commend the government for committing to take serious action to reduce poverty in Ontario. We also thank the government for this opportunity to give you our ideas and suggestions for your work.

## **Who We Are**

CPAN is a group of committed agencies, organizations and concerned citizens acting together to fight child poverty in the large rural County of Renfrew. We formed in 2000, with a mandate to increase the awareness of the extent and effects of child poverty in our communities, to take action both practically and politically to improve the lives and children and their families, and to promote a vision of a Renfrew County where all children belong. Since 2000, we have made many presentations to community groups and political leaders, developed public education materials, and provided advocacy and links to resources for many low income families and children. We have also assisted children with school supplies and shoes through our Backpack Plus Program, snowsuits, and funding to enable participation in recreational and cultural activities. Our Social Inclusion Projects include work on school fees and developing soccer programs in our isolated communities.

One in eight children lives in poverty in Renfrew County. This varies greatly between our many small communities, with deep pockets of poverty in the urban areas of Pembroke and Renfrew, and little poverty in the retirement and "suburban" communities nearer Ottawa or in the professional community of Deep River, with many in between. During the last recession, almost one in every two children under 6 years old was living in poverty in Pembroke. We cannot afford to let that happen again, and we are committed to working with you to ensure that it never does.

## **Consultations**

CPAN held four consultation sessions in the month of June. Believing that low income families need to be consulted about any poverty reduction plan, and knowing the barriers they face, we held meetings with low income families and their children in Renfrew, Killaloe and Pembroke. We also held a community meeting on June 27, inviting all members of the community, and received submissions by e-mail from CPAN members. In total, we spoke with

over 175 people from all walks of life. This report is a compilation of the notes from those meetings and from consultation with our members, using the Cabinet Committee on Poverty Reduction's consultation questions as a framework. The quotes included in the text are from the consultations.

***1. Given that our first priority is children and their families, how can we do a better job with existing resources to improve opportunities for children living in poverty?***

*"We need a coordinated plan to improve the determinants of health".*

CPAN recognizes that children are poor because their parents are poor; we cannot provide a better life for children without addressing the issues which affect their parents and their communities. Conversely, all decisions made which affect people also affect children, and the decision-making process must take the impact of children into account before making decisions.

Poverty reduction is about people, and any poverty reduction plan must be people-centred, not program-centred. It must start with a plan, coordinated throughout the levels of government and involving all ministries within governments. It also involves supporting communities to play their role in reducing poverty. It requires long-term thinking, and an understanding that investing in children and their families now will save money in the long term, through reduced health, criminal justice and social assistance costs.

**Changing social norms: exclusion**

*"People look down on people. It's such a degrading thing. Our families are just as good as high-class families".*

Poverty is not only about income. It is also about exclusion, about treating poor people as somehow "different" from other people, and less "deserving". Low-income people are excluded from participating in mainstream society by barriers related to their lack of income (for example fees, transportation to get there, clothes so they won't stand out, etc) but also because they feel stigmatized and unwelcome in many mainstream organizations and events. An effective poverty reduction strategy must address this psycho-social-spiritual issue as well as income issues. People suffering from low self-esteem, lack of self-confidence, depression, anxiety, discouragement and other mental health issues associated with deprivation and exclusion, cannot take advantage of any "opportunities" that well-meaning people may offer them. The government must take the lead in breaking down negative stereotypes and other barriers to the full inclusion of everyone in the life of our communities.

Participants in all our consultations voiced the concern about the "stigma" attached to people living in poverty. They suggested education and raising public awareness as ways to combat this perception of "otherness".

Educators need to be educated about the social determinants of health and poverty issues. Expectations that all children have access to a computer at home and especially the internet need to be challenged, and all children need to have access to all the tools required for learning, so that no child is left behind. Children should not be punished for their parents' social condition. Changing attitudes and social norms do not have to cost money, but they do require leadership.

Other examples raised by participants included:

- a boy who was centred out and embarrassed at school because he had to go to the office to get his "pill" regularly, because the ODB will not cover the slow-release version of the same medication
- the teenager who was told he wasn't being hired because of where he lived (a social housing complex)
- the person with a steady income from ODSP and a substantial down payment for a house who was denied a mortgage because of the source of his income

One of the other themes which emerged from our consultations was that of "choice". People can choose to live in simple, frugal ways without many material resources, often because they believe in an ecologically sustainable lifestyle or because they prefer to spend their time on activities other than making more money or some other reason. Other people are forced to live on a low income because they have no other choice, for any number of reasons: no jobs, lack of education, lack of child care, mental health issues often resulting from chaotic life histories beyond their control, limited intellectual or social abilities, and so on. The lack of choice is evident in almost every area of life – in where they live, what they feed their families, how they clothe their families, if and how they get around, whether they can leave an abusive partner, and of course where they get the money to live on and what they have to endure to get it. Low income participants told us they just needed a break sometimes: respite care for their children, a family vacation, being able to go places, to treat themselves and their families sometimes.

An effective poverty reduction plan must be built on respect for individuals and their needs. The voices of low income people affected by current and proposed programs must be solicited and taken into account in program design and implementation. Programs and services should be designed to empower people to make choices, to maximize self-determination. New and creative ways need to be found to include the excluded in our society, and government needs to take the lead in setting the climate for this to happen.

## **Housing**

The integration of low income housing into mixed income neighbourhoods was seen as key in promoting inclusion. Ghettoization simply creates pockets of families whose community problems can then be ignored by the

mainstream community because “that’s the way they are in social housing”. Parents also told us they were concerned about raising their children in neighbourhoods that were sometimes unsafe and where there were sometimes loud yelling and fights and other inappropriate behaviour.

The lack of compliance with maintenance standards in both private and social housing was a huge concern for low income tenants. The rental housing stock in Renfrew County is older than the Ontario average, and often in poor condition. Facilitating the enforcement of maintenance standards and, in social housing, routine inspection and repairs of vacated units before the next tenant moves are both important steps.

### **Unfair Rules**

*“You try to work to get ahead and it just sets you back again”.*

The government should do a comprehensive review of all social assistance rules and their interaction with each other and other provincial and federal programs, with the impact on the person affected at the centre of the review, not “program needs”. As Minister Matthews found in her 2004 report, many of the rules are unnecessarily punitive, and our participants certainly confirmed this. They were concerned about losing money, financial difficulties making the transition to employment, being asked to pay up front for work and medically-related expenses and submit receipts for repayment. For people living on an income far below the poverty line “pay upfront” means “take it out of your grocery money”.

Participants were also concerned about the invasive and “ridiculous” amount of information and documentation required to establish and maintain eligibility for assistance. We were also told that some workers were “just mean”, “they harass you” and that Ontario Works “should hire people with children, people with a heart”. The government needs to ensure that all programs are delivered respectfully and compassionately, and that workers receive appropriate training, have sufficient time to be client-focused and not just “paperwork-focused”, and greater flexibility in the system to be able to meet individual needs.

### **Sustainable employment**

We believe that sustainable employment must be the cornerstone of any poverty reduction strategy. Employment is how most people gain their sense of identity and understand their contribution to their communities. Renfrew County was devastated by free trade, and lost many high paying jobs during the transition to the current economy of low wage, precarious employment – over half of all workers in Renfrew County work in jobs that are less than full-year, full-time. Many are at minimum wage or just over. To support children and their families, the minimum wage must be raised so that a person working full-time, full-year can make a decent living. We support the

call for an increase to the minimum wage to \$11/hour by 2011 indexed to inflation.

There is a serious lack of decent employment opportunities in Renfrew County. Ontario must develop an employment strategy that takes into account the needs of both employers and workers. Employment standards and occupational health and safety rules must be updated to take into account the changing workplace and the vulnerability of workers, and then enforced effectively, so that low wage workers are not threatened with punishment or job loss for trying to enforcing their rights. In Canada, safe working conditions, decent employment standards and a living income were only brought about by unionization of the traditional industries. The government should enact rules to facilitate unionization in the retail, fast food and other sectors employing vulnerable workers.

### **Using resources more effectively**

There are current resources which could be connected more effectively to eliminate overlap, reduce money spent on “bricks and mortar” and administration, and thus free up money to be used on reducing poverty. Better use could be made of our already-existing libraries and school buildings, which could be used in the evening for adult night school and other activities. Increases in revenue from gas taxes resulting from higher prices can be used for social program and developing rural community transportation strategies.

### **Working with the federal government: the Child Benefit and EI**

An effective poverty reduction plan must include the federal government. While the introduction of the Ontario Child Benefit is an important first step, the provincial government should work with the federal government to provide a child benefit which covers the actual cost of raising a child, estimated by experts at \$5200 in current dollars.

Further, most workers in Renfrew County are not covered by Employment Insurance despite paying into it, because of changes in the eligibility rules in the 1990's and the changing nature of employment here. Even when workers are covered, it currently takes 7 weeks to get a cheque, which can be financially disastrous for low income families. The Ontario government needs to work with the federal government to effectively protect workers who lose their jobs and their families.

## ***2. What new ideas could we incorporate into our existing supports that would increase opportunities for children living in poverty?***

### **a. Sustaining employment**

CPAN believes that anyone working full-time, full-year should not be living in poverty, and that the provincial minimum wage should be set by that principle. This means increasing the minimum wage substantially, and indexing it to increases in the cost of living. Low income people spend all their money in the community, and so increases to the minimum wage results in more money in the community, and more jobs. The UK's Low Pay Commission, with business, labour and experts working together to set a livable minimum wage, found that the number of jobs increased despite increases to the minimum wage.

As noted above, a provincially led Good Jobs Strategy is also crucial to the health of our communities. New jobs created must be able to sustain workers, with decent wages, healthy working environments and benefits. Currently, low wage workers are often working several jobs at a time, trying to make a decent life for themselves and their families, and the result is more stress and less time with their families, and no time to participate as citizens in community life.

Providing health benefits, including drug, dental and vision care, to all low income people, including those whose only income is from working, would help make employment possible. It is also likely to save money in the long run as people are able to care for their health and prevent costly and avoidable diseases and conditions. The current Trillium Program requires paying up front and includes a deductible amount, both of which prevent low income people from accessing it when needed. While Ontario Works has an extended and transitional drug program, it requires that a person use up all their assets to be eligible despite having limited income, as well as subjecting them to the invasive process and stigmatization associated with Ontario Works, as noted above.

Sustaining employment also means increasing access to and enforcing employment standards, and updating the Employment Standards Act to take account of the increase in precarious employment. Workers in low wage jobs are often vulnerable to intimidation and harassment or loss of hours or the job itself if they try to enforce their legal rights.

Making child care accessible, affordable and available when parents need it is key in being able to sustain a family through employment.

## **b. Livable Incomes**

*"My son has to go to Ottawa for his autism. I have to pay \$5 for babysitting, \$60 for gas, \$10 for parking and then the meals for the person who drove us down. The (Assistance for Children with Severe Disabilities) disability check doesn't pay all this. Some things are not covered. I have to pay it, submit it, and hope I get it back."*

*"My daughters feel they don't have a future. There are four of them and they know there isn't enough money to send them to college."*

*"If they think we can live on \$600 a month then tell us how. Or get them to live on it themselves. I'm not being mean. It's just a reality check."*

Participants in our consultations struggled with what they believed a "livable income" might mean. A standard of "frugal comfort", where a family could be assured of meeting their basic needs, have enough to meet life's contingencies (e.g. the fridge breaks down, your child needs over-the-counter medication or a quick cab ride to the emergency room), and a little left over for "minor discretions" (taking the children out for ice cream cones occasionally) was proposed.

Minimum wage was never intended to support a family, and so a child benefit is crucial to assist low income families to raise their children. The National Child Benefit and the Ontario Child Benefit are a start, but fall short of the \$5200 per year (2008 dollars) experts tell us is what it costs to raise a child. Accordingly, the OCB should be increased as fast as possible, and the provincial government should work with the federal government to reach this level in the near future. It should also be indexed to inflation.

Benefit rates for both the Ontario Works and Ontario Disability programs are both well below the poverty line. Ontario Works benefit rates in particular are shamefully low, and have not yet even caught up with their pre-1995 level. Benefit rates need to be set to cover the actual cost of living. In modern life, and particularly in rural areas, a telephone is a necessity and needs to be included in calculating the actual cost of living; it is not a luxury, and parents should not have to take the cost of it out of food money. People need telephones in arranging employment and childcare, for medical and other emergencies, and so that their child's school can reach them in an emergency or other situation, and in staying connected with family and friends.

Benefit rates in both programs need to be increased and indexed to inflation. The rules for both programs also need to be reviewed, rationalized and simplified, as noted in Question 1. If benefits are going to be reduced by a portion of employment earnings, the process must be fair, well-understood

by recipients and not leave recipients worse off than they were before they started working.

Concerns about the transition to the Ontario Child Benefit were also raised by several low income participants. One person told us that she would “lose everything” with its implementation, as she would be over the income eligibility threshold and would lose her drug and dental benefits. All the low income participants and many service providers were concerned about the loss of the lump sum Back to School Allowance and the Winter Clothing Allowance. They told us they cannot possibly save enough money out of their limited increases to cover these expenses this year, and that receiving a lump sum benefit at the time of the expense was the best way to ensure it doesn’t get used to pay the many other bills which are pressing each month and prevent them from being able to save anything. We urge the government to reinstate the Back to School and Winter Clothing Allowances for people receiving social assistance, at least for this transitional year. The children of people on social assistance should not have to pay for the government’s decision to change how child benefits are delivered to families on social assistance.

The cost of transportation is a major barrier for low income people in Renfrew County, and with gas prices sky-rocketing, this will only get worse. There is no public transportation system anywhere in Renfrew County, and given the small town-rural nature of our county, people need to travel to get to work, access health care and other services, shop and take part in community life. Most low income families can’t afford cars, or if they do own them, they can’t afford to put gas in them or maintain them. Unless they are able-bodied and live close to services, they must rely on others to get wherever they have to go. Most community transportation services, when they do exist, are expensive and are only available for a limited group of people (seniors, people with disabilities) and for limited purposes. To work toward inclusion for all, Renfrew County’s transportation challenges must be addressed and transportation expenses should be included in the social assistance benefit rate, beyond just medical transportation expenses.

A number of participants also believe the government should step in to control skyrocketing gas prices.

### **c. Strong, supportive and inclusive community supports**

The government should invest in affordable housing immediately. This includes building new units and repairing older ones. There are waiting lists for Housing in Renfrew County as elsewhere, and much of the private market housing is seriously substandard. Because there are very limited alternatives in our communities, tenants are often reluctant to complain for fear of being evicted or having the building condemned. Affordable, decent, safe housing is critical to the well-being of families and children and should be a priority in an effective poverty reduction plan.



Many low income people in Renfrew County own their own homes. They are often older energy-inefficient homes. Developing “sustainability programs” including providing materials and tools would greatly benefit both low income home owners and the environment.

*“If the casinos can come to Pembroke to pick people up to take them to the casinos in Ottawa, surely we can figure out a way to get our kids to CHEO!”*

As noted above, transportation is a key challenge for Renfrew County residents, especially those living on a low income. We need to work with all levels of government and the community to develop a community transportation strategy for our small towns and rural areas. Suggestions from participants were revitalizing rail services, shuttles, bicycle lanes, electric bicycles, a web-based system to match drivers and those needing rides (with an appropriate “certification” system to ensure passenger and driver safety), and, for Pembroke, making the currently private bus system into a public system that would give the needs of citizens precedence over the need to make a profit. Working with Ottawa health providers and hospitals to schedule Renfrew County patients on certain days and then providing a bus or shuttle service to the Ottawa hospitals on those days was another suggestion.

*“To get my child to CHEO we have to get up at four am to catch the bus to Ottawa at five, we get there at seven and the appointment isn’t till eleven am. We then have to do it all again on the way home, it makes for a long day.”*

While we have a variety of opportunities for people on social assistance to upgrade their education and skills, we need more adult education opportunities for people who are working, to enable them to earn high school credits, learn computer skills, access information about resources, and have some social interaction.

Finally, Renfrew County badly needs programs for youth throughout the county. While there are a few good local programs, many communities have great difficulty in getting adequate funding to run effective programs and centres for low-income and other youth.

***3. We know that communities are best positioned to understand and respond to the local realities of poverty and opportunity. What is already working in your community to support children, youth and their families living in poverty to achieve their potential?***

Public schools are the foundational community institution for ensuring that all children have an equal and decent chance at life, and that all children are included in the community. Renfrew County has excellent schools and educators, but they lack the funding to ensure the inclusion of all children in

activities. Children of low income parents are often prevented from taking part in school trips, sports, hot dog and pizza days and many other activities. They also cannot afford the school supplies, footwear, agendas and activity fees that school boards now require parents to buy. Children of low income parents who do not have computers at home must wait in line to use school computers. The public education system needs to be properly funded so that all children have the same opportunities, and so that no child “stands out” because their parents are poor. Some participants suggested school uniforms, with financial assistance to buy them if necessary, would prevent children from sticking out because of clothing and footwear.

The School’s Cool program was cited by participants as an excellent program, and parents were very concerned about it losing funding. They recommend it be reinstated as soon as possible, as it is an effective preschool readiness program.

Renfrew County has a wide variety of good programs run by dedicated professionals and volunteers. Participants mentioned programs which provide subsidies for recreational activities and camps, including JumpStart and Sport Renfrew; practical support for food, children’s equipment, sports, transportation provided through NCB reinvestment funding; and breakfast clubs, community suppers, and food banks (although there were concerns about quality of food at some of them, and their limited service); community resource centres which provide free programs (including the traveling “Toy Bus”), places to meet, access to resources, emergency help, second hand clothing and where people feel welcome; Renfrew County Coalition Against Poverty which provides support, discussion groups, and information and self-advocacy for low income people; Arnprior NeighbourLink which provides advocacy and connects low income people with community resources through the churches, the Salvation Army, the Lions Club and other service clubs, and PC For Kids; the Boys and Girls Club, Army Cadets, and programs for youth including support groups to help youth at risk of dropping out of school; Ontario Early Years, early childhood screening programs, preschool programs, dental care for children (CINOT), services for abused women, the Women’s Sexual Assault Centre, Family and Children’s Services developmental services, speech and occupational therapy programs, Phoenix Centre for Children’s Mental Health for programs and respite care, and the community legal clinic; and local networks that link and coordinate local services, like Renfrew County Connections, as well as networks of service providers.

CPAN was mentioned by many participants as working well and being helpful. CPAN’s BackPack Program, providing vouchers for back packs school supplies and footwear to low income families (funded through the NCBS reinvestment fund) was particularly noted, as well as “Operation Snowsuit” and help provided to enable participation in recreation and cultural activities.

Renfrew County used the NCBS reinvestment funds very effectively to help children and their families in a wide variety of programs, including special needs funds for emergencies, practical assistance for families and children including transportation costs, diapers, and formula, collective kitchens, and CPAN's BackPack program. With the introduction of the Ontario Child Benefit, municipalities no longer have this designated fund. These programs worked, and should continue to be funded.

Unfortunately, many of the agencies and community groups feel they are at near-burnout. Agencies spend too much time chasing short-term grants, which often require a "new idea" in order to be funded. Long term financial insecurity and paperwork reduce the effectiveness of organizations which are running already-proven programs and drain morale. Annualized core funding at an adequate level, as well as funding for new programs, is key to strong community initiatives.

***4. We know that to be successful we must all work together. How can we better integrate the roles that we all play — individuals, not-for-profits, the private sector, volunteers and all levels of government — in increasing opportunity for Ontarians living in poverty?***

While it is true that all sectors have important roles to play, the provincial government has a special leadership role. Without strong provincial government leadership, a coordinated "strategy" is impossible.

Citizen engagement is also key to working together. People need to understand that poverty affects us all, and that we all have a role to play, as individuals, communities and governments, in ending poverty and exclusion. One participant suggested we develop a "Charter of Responsibilities" to exist next to our "Charter of Rights" as a way to remind ourselves that citizenship has both rights and responsibilities.

Other strategies to help us work together more effectively include:

- Strong local networks bringing people together
- Bringing low income people together for mutual support and empowerment and information, and including them in larger community discussions in a welcoming way
- Developing cohesive organizational links between social, educational and government agencies
- Better use of technology to communicate and integrate roles
- Community "one-stop shops" that can serve as a home base for all types of social organizations
- Enhancing support for 211ontario.ca and the Community Support Zone project

Making information accessible to low income people and enabling them to become “part of the loop” are also very important. The increasing “digital divide” between people with access to computers, and the skills to use them, and those who don’t must be addressed.

People, including service providers and low income people, lack information about resources available in communities, such as subsidies offered by individual groups to enable participation. With limited resources, groups are reluctant to make the availability of these subsidies publicly known, and thus act as “gatekeepers”. Unfortunately, parents who are not well-connected or who do not expect that help may be available (i.e. those who are used to being excluded, to living on the edge), will not ask about the possibility of a subsidy. Their children will simply not participate. Adequate public funding of community run activities to ensure that all children can participate is an important part of ensuring opportunities for all.

One participant suggested that municipalities need to have more control over community programs. However, others were concerned that municipalities have many competing concerns that mean that social programs are not given a high priority.

***5. We are focusing on children first, but we will develop a comprehensive, long-term poverty reduction strategy for all people living in poverty. What are the key long-term goals for improving opportunity with respect to groups other than children?***

Our goal in Ontario should be to reduce poverty by 25% in 5 years and 50% in 10 years. This is commensurate with goals set in other industrialized countries, and achievable. The ultimate goal is to eradicate poverty completely, as there is no reason why it should exist in a wealthy country like Canada.

The long term strategies to achieve this are similar to those proposed for children and families: sustaining employment, livable incomes, and strong local community supports.

Sustaining employment means more “good job” opportunities, a minimum wage that brings people working full-time above the poverty level, access to the opportunity to form unions, assistance for individuals attempting to become self-employed, and drug, dental and vision care benefits for all low-income Ontarians. It also means updating and enforcing employment standards and health and safety regulations so people are not forced into dangerous jobs.

Livable incomes means social assistance rates that reflect and cover the actual cost of living, that do not require that someone exhaust all their life savings before they become eligible for income assistance, and that do not punish them financially for working. The impact of the rising costs of gas,

fuel and electricity on people with disabilities, seniors, the working poor not on social assistance, as well as those receiving social assistance must be addressed. We need to look seriously at a Guaranteed Adequate Income system, at least for people with disabilities.

Strong community supports means increasing the amount of safe and affordable housing, effectively addressing our small-town-rural community transportation challenges, and providing ways for people to network.

We also know that there are groups in our community who are particularly vulnerable, and special programs and supports will need to be put in place for them to enable them to become full participants in our communities. In our communities, this includes people who have suffered physical and sexual abuse, victims of partner abuse, sole support parents, youth, those suffering from addictions, people with disabilities, seniors, aboriginal people and others.

*"We see in our everyday practice the effects of poverty on children. Parents minimize the use of preventative medicines (like asthma puffers) to save money, babies and teens don't have the recommended (but not government supplied) vaccines like Menjugate and Gardasil. Poor children don't participate in sports, dance class, etc. and often could really benefit from the activity, social interaction and self-esteem building that comes from such activities. We save medication samples and use them to treat our poor children, we advocate for them as best we can but in a rich country like Canada, to have our poor children not able to access medication, vaccines, and other, services (like physiotherapy, psychology, learning disability testing) is an embarrassment."*

*Dr. Judith Plante, Pembroke*

**6. We need to be able to measure our progress on poverty reduction. What measures do you think will best show our progress in improving opportunity for Ontarians living in poverty?**

Ontario must have a clear target and timetable of 25% reduction in poverty within 5 years and 50% reduction in 10 years and an ultimate goal of the eradication of poverty.

As the UN has declared, poverty is not just about deprivation; it is also about exclusion. Accordingly, a measure of the decrease of deprivation does not adequately measure success in poverty reduction. We support using a variety of income measures and strategic indicators to measure Ontario's progress in poverty reduction.

Canada already uses 3 different income measures: the Low Income Cut-off Point (LICO), the Low Income Measure (LIM), and the Market Basket Measure (MBM). All of these are useful. The LICO has been used for decades

by the government and policy analysts in Canada to show relative hardship, and is useful for comparisons across time in Canada. The LIM, which looks at median income, is used by the UK, the EU and the UN as their official income measure of poverty and exclusion, and is thus useful for international comparisons. Both these measures use the same data set, and given current technology there is no reason why we can't use both. The MBM looks at the cost of items agreed on by Canadians as necessary to take part in Canadian society. It is thus more easily understandable to all Ontarians.

Other indicators are also important in measuring progress. For example, the impact of building more affordable housing on poverty reduction is not captured in a strictly income measure. To compensate for this, the UK has developed an After-Tax After-Housing Costs measure, and Ontario could adopt this as well.

There are other strategic indicators which could help us measure progress suggested by participants in our consultations, in addition to LIM, LICO and MBM. Education measures include number of children, youth and adults in school full-time and part-time, number of high school graduates, literacy and numeracy rates. Health measures include, birth weights, obesity rates, better physical and mental health and a "sense of well-being" indicator. Unemployment rates, jobs created, wages and conditions of jobs created, number of recipients of EI and OW, food bank usage, affordable housing units built, waiting lists for housing, increase in number of children in organized sports and decrease in the need for subsidies to participate are also important indicators of an effective poverty reduction strategy.

### **The Voices of Children**

The voices of children living in poverty in Renfrew County do not easily fit into the Minister's consultation questions. We are including them here in Appendix 1 as we believe that their voices are also important in developing an effective poverty reduction strategy.

### **Conclusion**

Thank you for the opportunity to have the voices of Renfrew County heard in this historic process of developing a poverty reduction strategy. We look forward to consulting with you on the next stage of your work.

Submitted by:

Felicite Stairs and Lyn Smith for  
Renfrew County Child Poverty Action Network (CPAN)

## Appendix I

### Voices of Renfrew County Children and Youth

#### CPAN's poverty reduction strategy consultations (May-June 2008)

Over 60 children took part in our Children's Consultations in Renfrew and Pembroke, including toddlers, teens and many in between. The children's consultations were facilitated by children's mental health workers. They were held at the same time as the adult consultations but in different rooms. Children were encouraged to respond to the questions verbally and also with art. The questions were designed to connect children to the concept of money and its impact on their lives, including their emotional lives. The "Prime Minister of Canada" was chosen to represent "government" as we believed it was the most recognizable government position for younger children.

#### 1) What makes a family happy?

- Cheaper fees for fairs
- "Families need homes"
- Kids need toys like bicycles
- Relatives and friends being able to come over and visit
- Pets
- People with disabilities need things to assist them that don't cost a lot of money
- Electricity, heat, furniture, and air conditioning
- Clothes
- School
- Having jobs
- "They need dogs"
- Swings
- Animals
- "Hugs and kisses"
- "A Family"
- Presents and cards
- Friendship
- Safe places to play
- Food and water
- "Diapers for little kids"
- To get a wink
- Respect
- Being together
- Hugs and kisses
- "Having enough to eat"
- Loving each other
- Going to fairs
- Helping one another

**2) If you could go anywhere in the world with your family for a holiday, where would you go?**

- My cottage
- California
- Visit someone sick in the hospital
- Germany
- Visit relatives in Vancouver
- The zoo
- The beach
- France
- Mexico
- Niagara Falls
- Storyland
- Europe
- The park
- Australia
- Florida
- California
- Story Land
- Canada's Wonderland
- A restaurant
- China
- Relative's house
- British Columbia because it has lots of forestry
- L.A.
- Disney World

**3) If your family had lots of money, what would change or be different?**

- Different foods
- "We may have a lizard in the house"
- New furniture
- A splash pad
- New house
- More furniture
- A big kitchen and a table
- A computer
- Stuffed animals
- Pets
- We'd be able to help other people
- Would have a swimming pool
- Could give money to charity
- Could have a mansion



- Could have a private lake
- A flat screen plasma TV
- A horse
- A limousine
- Birds
- A hot tub
- A trampoline
- Everyone would have school stuff
- Get your own house
- Have a bigger house
- Spend the money on research for cancer and other diseases
- New kinds of food like fruit
- We would have a pet
- Sponsor the OSPCA
- Bank the money for university
- Help poor people to have food and a house
- New clothing
- Give the money to poverty for clothes and shelter
- Give the money to the government
- Have a job
- Buy Birthday presents

**4a) How do kids feel when they see someone have something they don't?**

- Sad
- "You feel angry cause your parents don't have the same kind of money that they do"
- Nervous
- "Happy for them, but sad for me"
- Embarrassed
- Mad
- Jealous
- They want to steal it
- Sad
- Angry
- It's not fair
- Frustrated

**4b) How might the kid that has a lot feel?**

- May show off
- "Happy he has something, but sad the other kid doesn't"
- May feel sorry for them
- Proud
- "Some might feel special that they have it and others don't"
- Show off

**4c) How might the parents feel about this?**

- Jealous
- Sad or scared
- Mixed up
- Ashamed
- Upset
- Guilty
- Embarrassed
- Sad

**5) If you could be the Prime Minister of Canada, what would you do or change to make all families happy?**

- "Every family would have a home"
- "More money"
- "Buy them toys and things for play"
- Supplies and money for school
- Money for medicine
- "I would donate money to all the people who don't have much money"
- Buy food and clothing
- Buy birthday presents for everyone
- "Shelter and warmth and clothes"
- "Working for \$10.00 an hour"
- Donate money to kids so they can go to school
- Make gas prices lower
- Stop animal abuse
- Give people more money
- Reduce poverty by giving out money
- Build houses for poor people
- No more smoking
- Make jobs easier
- Give children who don't have a home one
- Ban weapons
- Everyone has health insurance
- Want safe things
- Banish all the bad drugs
- More organ donations and blood
- Supply sports equipment
- Give money to kids so they can play sports
- Give people free cars
- Give Tim Hortons more money so more kids can go to camp
- Donate books to kids