

Fighting Hunger and Poverty On A Few Fronts...

Put Food in the Budget Campaign

Since last year on National Hunger Awareness Day, YRFN has been involved in a number of key initiatives to address hunger and poverty in the Region and beyond. When our last newsletter went out in the Fall, we reported on the activities of our **Do the Math Working Group in York Region** that came together in June 2009.

In the past year, the Do the Math Working Group has arranged and carried out visits with all of the MPPs in York Region. Our accomplishments in York Region, in terms of creating public and political awareness around the issue of inadequate social assistance rates, has had important impact at the provincial campaign level where the statements of several of our MPPs have been highlighted in favour of the Healthy Food Supplement. Here is what some of our MPPs had to say when we met with them over the past few months:

"I would be supportive of increasing the monthly benefits to a level that would allow people to afford food and shelter." **Frank Klees, PC MPP for Newmarket Aurora.**

"Given it has been demonstrated that \$215 is the amount required to eat healthily by the Healthy Food Basket research, there has to be a way to make this available to everyone." **Dr. Helena Jackzek, Liberal MPP for Oak Ridges-Markham, and former Medical Officer of Health for York Region.**

"People who are victims of poverty through no fault of their own are at the short end of the stick in Ontario and we are not doing enough." **Peter Shurman, PC MPP for Thornhill.**

"The real issue overall is the resources that individuals and families require to meet all their basic necessities, not just healthy food. It is important to communicate to the majority of the working public that the quality of society and their own lives will improve if we improve the conditions of the most vulnerable among us." **Greg Sorbara, Liberal MPP for Vaughan and former Finance Minister.**

Thanks to everyone who worked on this campaign and to those who took the survey at www.putfoodinthebudget.ca

and submitted their findings. **Please visit the site and Do the Math if you haven't already done so.** We continue in this work and welcome your input and participation.



The ISARC Social Audit

The Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition (ISARC) Social Audits have been happening across Ontario since 1986.

Until now, York Region has not participated in the Social Audit, but this year was a different story. Members of the Do the Math Working Group and the Poverty Action Coalition for Change (PACC) group were very much interested in York Region being chosen as one of the Ontario communities in which the Social Audit would take place. Discussions to this effect had taken place but the question had not been put to ISARC directly. That is until one December day in Hamilton at a provincial meeting of the Put Food in the Budget Campaign (PFIB) which several of us from York Region attended. Mark Sussman, an active member of PACC, approached Bruce Balmer from ISARC and invited ISARC to hold the first-ever Social Audit in our region. The invitation was accepted and as a result, we began planning for the Social Audit in January 2010. While other communities, many of whom had done the audits before, were well underway in terms of planning, we were just beginning our process in the early weeks of January. The task seemed enormous (3 months to plan) but not impossible given the amount of enthusiasm that we were about to experience as an energetic, optimistic, and hard working group of people came together from across the region to form the **Social Audit Planning Table for York Region**. Thanks to PACC as the host for the Audit, and Mark in particular for asking the important question, we moved forward and held a very successful Social Audit on April 20.

Continued on next page

Hunger in the Midst of Prosperity

A Lunch and Learn Round Table Discussion (with updates on the Put Food in the Budget Campaign, the ISARC Social Audit, and information on the health implications of a poor diet) in honour of

NATIONAL HUNGER AWARENESS DAY

Tuesday, June 1st, 2010

11:30 am to 1:30 pm

510 Penrose St., Newmarket, ON

Please RSVP to kima@yrfn.ca by May 25th

A little bit about ISARC...

The Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition (ISARC) is a provincial network of faith groups working together for greater social justice. ISARC was born out of the hope that together a coalition of faith groups could contribute to new public policies based upon greater justice and dignity for Ontarians marginalized by poverty. ISARC brings together representatives and members of faith groups to discuss the root causes of poverty, addressing issues of hunger and homelessness in Ontario. ISARC meets and works with leaders from all political parties to support and develop legislation that will provide help to those most in need. The findings and stories from each local audit is compiled into the provincial audit, a comprehensive publication that reflects the voices of low-income people across Ontario. It is then used as an advocacy and education tool to mobilize communities and influence policy.

The Results...

We were extremely fortunate to have three very well respected individuals serve as Rapporteurs for the Social Audit Day. The Rapporteurs were present and listened when individuals shared their experiences; their reflections on what they heard that day become an important part of the final report. John Rogers, former mayor of Georgina and member of YR Council, as well as Past Chair of the United Way of YR; Daisy Wai, a successful business woman who is involved in numerous community initiatives and serves on several community boards; and Charles Beer, who spent 23 years serving in the Ontario government in numerous capacities, including as Minister of Community and Social Services, and is a current member of a number of boards related to health and education.

Our goal had been to hear the stories of 24 individuals at two locations in the north and south ends of the region - one in Richmond Hill and one in Newmarket. On the day of the Audit, we heard the stories of 23 individuals and we were limited only

by time as more people came out to talk about their experiences in poverty. We also made provision at the Newmarket location for individuals to videotape their statements in private, and 11 people chose that option.

Our focus groups were very well attended. 11 Councillors and one Mayor attended the Politicians Focus Group which was facilitated by Danieli Zanotti, CEO of United Way York Region. We had 24 people express interest in the Focus Group for Front-Line and Agency Workers, so we held 2 focus groups.

Our dinner at the end of the day was an opportunity for organizers of the event, rapporteurs, recorders, facilitators and convenors, along with several participants, to reflect back on the day, how it impacted on them, and what we each learned from the experience. Over 20 people came together to share a meal and express their thoughts and feelings. It was a moving experience for those involved and an important part of the ISARC process of taking collective action and responsibility.

To quote from ISARC: "When anyone is hungry while others have too much to eat, when anyone has no shelter while others live in luxury, or when anyone lives in poverty while others enjoy affluence, justice is not present. Where justice is not present, the quality of all of our lives and communities disappears. ISARC believes that justice is the mutual responsibility of individuals, communities, and government working together for a better future."

The Report of our Local Social Audit Experience in York Region is currently being prepared by Tom Pearson and Yvonne Kelly, as Co-Convenors for the 2010 Audit. It will be made available when it is complete and will be utilized to mobilize and advocate for change at the local and provincial levels for timely, humane and necessary measures that reflect social justice for all.

For more information or to get involved in the Put Food in the Budget Campaign or the ISARC Social Audit in YR, please contact Yvonne at (905)967-0428 ext. 205.

Too Much, Too Little, or Just Right?

Gardeners know that there are four essential factors required for plants to thrive: water, air, sun and soil. And too much or too little of any one of these factors can have a devastating effect on the growth of the plant. Looking back to last summer, the excessive amount of rainfall literally put a damper on the growing season. There was little we could do as the skies opened up and released a record amount of rainfall. Going hand in hand with the excessive rain was the less than adequate amount of sunlight available to energize the plants.



Despite the shortcomings that the weather bestowed upon us last year, there were many gardeners who refused to relinquish their hopes for a bountiful season. They concentrated their efforts on the one factor in which they still had some level of control; the soil.

Reflecting back over the years, it never seems to fail that the most productive garden plots at the community garden are those plots where the gardener has taken the time to amend the soil. Some gardeners spread a fresh layer of compost over their plots. Others have brought in their own topsoil and manure, while others added coffee grounds and fruit and vegetable scraps from home. And probably the cheapest, easiest and most effective way that gardeners have improved the quality of the soil was to disperse mulched leaves over the garden in the fall.

These amendment strategies all aim to do one thing; add nutrients to the soil. Even the sunlight deprived and water saturated plants of last season were better equipped to withstand the elements when the essential nutrients in the soil were available to be absorbed through the plant roots.

If the predictions for this upcoming season come to pass, it will be a summer filled with a lot of sunshine and little rain. The sunshine gardeners welcome. The drought can be managed by spending a little more time in the garden watering the thirsty plants. As for the soil, taking the time to add amendments this summer will help guarantee the bountiful harvest that every gardener anticipates.

Food For Thought

Our report, *Hunger in the Midst of Prosperity 2009*, states that York Region food bank use increased 27% between 2008 and 2009. Although media reports state that the recession is over, the number of people accessing food banks continues to grow.

A recent report called ***Social Determinants of Health: the Canadian Facts*** by Juha Mikkonen and Dennis Raphael talks about the impact of living and working conditions on health. Our health care system does an excellent job of treating people equitably, but the continuing life circumstances that contribute to poor health remain. The report identifies 14 social determinants of health: Aboriginal status, gender, disability, housing, early life, income and income distribution, education, race, employment and working conditions, social exclusion, food insecurity, social safety net, health services, unemployment and job security. It states "Each of these social determinants of health has been shown to have strong effects upon the health of Canadians. Their effects are actually much stronger than the ones associated with behaviours such as diet, physical activity, and even tobacco and excessive alcohol use."

We know that people access food banks because they don't have enough resources to meet their basic needs. We are well into the third decade of the food bank movement, and they are effective as a stop gap measure – but their continued existence is a sign of policy failure. Healthy food is a key building block to overall health and we will all benefit in the long run from policies that ensure that social disparities are reduced.

On June 1st, at our second Lunch and Learn event to mark National Hunger Awareness Day, we are going to explore the connections between poverty, health, food security and prosperity. Moving beyond the charity model to achieving social justice makes economic sense and ensuring that everyone has access to healthy and sustainable food is a key part of the journey.

FOOD: Between Field and Plate

A Community Food Panel Discussion: From the Perspective of a Farmer, Dietitian and Retailer

and

YRFN Annual General Meeting

Thursday, June 10, 2010 at 6:30 p.m.

510 Penrose St., Newmarket

Come join our discussion about how food connects health, the environment, the economy and community.

RSVP to Kim by June 2: kima@yrfn.ca or
905-967-0428 ext. 201

York Region Food Network is Making the Connection

York Region Food Network (YRFN) is connecting the Chinese and South Asian communities with local food producers by developing two culturally-specific Guides to Fresh Food. These new guides will highlight the growers and suppliers of local ethnic food, giving residents the opportunity to become better informed about the many ethnic food options that are grown in and around our region.

“We are fortunate to be living in one of the most fertile agricultural zones in the world, giving our farmers the flexibility to grow a wide range of specialty crops” said Joan Stonehocker, Executive Director of York Region Food Network. “When people select culturally-specific foods grown locally, rather than imported foods, they strengthen the regional economy and benefit from eating more nutritious foods”.



The guides will be available free to York Region residents, and will provide easy-to-read, community-based listings of retailers, farmers markets and on-farm operations that provide locally-grown produce for the Chinese and South Asian communities. “It’s a win-win situation - newcomers to our region can purchase fresh, nutritious food grown locally, meanwhile securing Ontario’s greenbelt future, by increasing the demand for local farm fresh produce”, says Doctor Helen Poon, Community Mission Specialist for the Chinese

Community, Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario. Dr. Poon is an active participant on the Steering Committee for this project.

Join us for the launch of the

Cultural Food Guide

June 25th, 2010 at 11:30 am

at

Whittamore’s Farm Market

8100 Steeles Avenue East, Markham

Please RSVP to kima@yrfn.ca by June 18th, 2010

Join York Region Food Network’s Fundraising Campaign

I support YRFN’s work to improve access to affordable, nutritious food for all people of York Region.

I have enclosed my donation of: \$20 \$50 \$100 Other

Please make cheques payable to York Region Food Network.

YRFN will issue a charitable tax receipt for all donations over \$20.

Name: _____

Address: _____

To donate by credit card, visit our website at www.yrfn.ca and click on the link to CanadaHelps.org, a secure website where you can make a tax deductible credit card donation to YRFN.

Your privacy is important to us, and we are committed to protecting and safeguarding your personal information. We do not rent, sell or trademark our mailing list, but rather use it to keep you informed of York Region Food Network’s activities, services and programs. Please contact our office to update your information or to be removed from the mailing list.

510 Penrose Street, Newmarket, ON L3Y 1A2

Phone: 905-967-0428 • Toll-free: 1-866-454-YRFN (9736) • Fax: 905-967-0097

4moreinfo@yrfn.ca • www.yrfn.ca