

York's leaders 'do the math'

By Chris Traber
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York Region community leaders will walk in the shoes of our poor for five days this week in the hope they'll talk up support for a provincial healthy food supplement, Poverty Action for Change Coalition chairperson Tom Pearson said.

Interfaith and community leaders will be joined by families in the Do The Math Challenge, part of the provincewide Put Food in the Budget campaign launching yesterday.

The goal is to have participants experience first-hand how difficult it is to stretch the \$585 maximum a single person on social assistance receives monthly.

Participants will pick up a food hamper, a typical food bank ration, a \$10 food voucher and an additional four food pantry items.

They will experience a low-budget diet for five days and will share their stories at Fairy Lake Park in Newmarket as part of International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, Oct. 17.

The \$100-a-month healthy food supplement would make a significant difference for York's marginalized residents, particularly when Ontario is phasing out an existing \$100 special diet supplement, Mr. Pearson said. "We want to show how the poor do it by relying on food banks and vouchers," he said. "Some don't and that's the shame of it all.

"It doesn't take a rocket scientist to tell us something is out of whack. The average apartment rent in the region is \$960. The maximum a single person gets is \$585."

Many at-risk residents are forced to share facilities, some of which are unsafe, as a result of the shortfall, Mr. Pearson said.

York Region Food Network co-ordinator Yvonne Kelly hopes the exercise garners support for those who can't eat healthy.

"The challenges people have on low income to access just the basics, like food, are not easy," she said.

"Impossible choices, we call it."

The week-long experiment follows a recently completed series of surveys by York Region MPPs. Politicians were asked to fill out a Do The Math questionnaire. The exercise highlights the difficulties of surviving on social assistance.

Newmarket-Aurora MPP Frank Klees' monthly tally was \$1,350. York-Simcoe MPP Julia Munro's total was \$1,042. Thornhill MPP Peter Shurman reported he'd need \$1,450 a month and Oak Ridges-Markham MPP Helena Jaczek's survey indicated she'd require \$1,324.

To maintain your health, home and dignity, a monthly minimum of \$1,400 is needed, Mr. Pearson said.



Frank Klees. The Aurora Newmarket MPP will join other community leaders to learn about poverty.