

ISARC

Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition

"Faith Communities In Action Against Poverty"

SOCIAL AUDIT 2010 A FAITH COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT OF THE STATUS OF POVERTY IN ONTARIO

Guidelines for Local Planning Committees, Facilitators, Rapporteurs,
and Recorders

www.isarc.ca



SOCIAL AUDIT 2010

A FAITH COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT OF THE STATUS OF POVERTY IN ONTARIO

Guidelines for Local Planning Committees, Facilitators, Rapporteurs, and Recorders

A Project of the Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition (ISARC)

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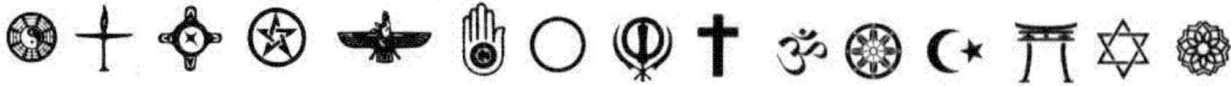
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I General Information

1. The **Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition (ISARC)** was formed in 1986, and was born out of the hope that together a coalition of faith groups could contribute to new public policies based on greater justice and dignity for Ontarians marginalized by poverty. ISARC's membership includes Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and Unitarians.
2. ISARC brings together representatives and members of faith groups to address public policies on issues of poverty, hunger, and homelessness in Ontario. In working to promote justice, ISARC hopes to inspire people of faith to respond to their neighbours in need through promoting social justice in concert with their acts of charity.
3. ISARC values:
 - Human Dignity:** *The right of all people and their communities to be treated with justice, love, compassion, and respect, and their responsibility to treat others likewise.*
 - Mutual Responsibility:** *The obligation of communities to care and share with their people, ensuring that basic needs are met.*
 - Social Equity:** *The right of all people to adequate access to basic resources, to full participation in the life and decision-making of their communities.*
 - Economic Equity:** *The right of all people and communities to adequate access to the resources necessary for full lives, including access to worthwhile work, fair employment considerations, and our communal responsibilities to use such resources responsibly.*
 - Fiscal Fairness:** *The right of all people, communities, and institutions to fair fiscal treatment and the responsibility of all to contribute fairly for the well-being of all.*
 - Ecological Sustainability:** *The obligation of communities to practise responsible stewardship of the earth and its environment, so that creation might be preserved for generations to come.*
4. ISARC meets and works with leaders from all political parties to support and develop legislation that will provide help to those most in need. ISARC hosts province-wide hearings, holds consultations and briefings, makes presentations to legislative committees, and develops publications and resources that give a voice to low income people. In 2010, ISARC will hold Social Audit Hearings across Ontario to gather the stories of people with lower incomes. These stories will be used as part of a Social Audit process to discern how the Ontario Government is addressing the needs of the most economically marginalized in the Province with its poverty reduction strategy: children, parents, disabled, working poor, new Canadians, and single adults.
5. To learn more about ISARC visit: www.isarc.ca



II Strengthening our Caring and Listening Hearts

1. The Social Audit becomes **an opportunity to engage local faith communities in prayer, study, and advocacy** in order to raise their consciousness on poverty issues in their communities.
2. Invitations to engage in prayer and study can be circulated for use in bulletins, newsletters, and websites.
3. Faith communities can be invited to pray for the following:
 - a. People sharing their stories of lived experiences of poverty;
 - b. Politicians to have open minds and a willingness to address poverty elimination;
 - c. People involved in the Social Audit, including local Planning Committees, Facilitators, Rapporteurs, and Recorders;
 - d. Social service workers, educators, and healthcare staff who witness the affects of poverty and work to alleviate its effects; and,
 - e. An end to poverty.
4. Faith communities and other groups can be invited to do their own study on issues of poverty in their own communities. This can include learning:
 - a. About local services; and,
 - b. Finding ways to support local poverty elimination efforts and gain an understanding of the larger systematic factors influencing poverty.
5. Prayer and study can also serve as a call to action. Faith communities can become involved in advocacy and become part of a call for greater justice and dignity for all citizens. Involvement in **advocacy is an example of faith in action**.

Various Scriptures support this action:

- For Jews: **"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you"** (Leviticus 19.17).
- For Muslims: **"No one of you is a believer until he desire for his brother what he desires for himself"** (Sumah).
- For Christians: **"Love your neighbour as yourself"** (Matthew 22.39).
- For Buddhists: **"Hurt not others, in ways that you yourself would find hurtful"** (Udana-Varga 5.18).
- For Unitarian Universalists: **"Affirm the worth and dignity of every person."**
- For Hindus: **"Behave with others as you would with yourself. Look upon all living beings as your bosom friend, for in all of them there resides one soul. All are part of that Universal Soul. A person who believes that all are his soul mates and loves them all alike never feels lonely. The divine qualities of forgiveness, compassion and service will make him loveable in the eyes of all. He will experience intense joy throughout his life"** (Yajur Veda 40 – 6).



III What is a Social Audit

1. A Social Audit provides a social assessment of the impact of government policy, including its benefits and limitations, on groups of people. Like an environmental or financial audit, a Social Audit provides an opportunity to isolate trends and status of the target group.
2. A Social Audit provides an accounting for the social actions and results of current government policy. **A Social Audit is a means for evaluating government policy and its implications for all residents.** A Social Audit provides a means by which accurate information can be disseminated and responsibility can be measured.
3. ISARC is implementing a Social Audit process for the purpose of assessing current government policies on social assistance and the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy. Particular emphasis will be placed on the impact of these policies on social assistance recipients receiving both Ontario Works or Ontario Disability Support Program benefits and the working poor. Consideration will be given to the role of the Ontario Child Benefit, Ontario Child Poverty Strategy, and the impact of the increase in minimum wage.

IV Objectives for the Social Audit

1. **To listen** to persons with lived experience of poverty. Participants should reflect the diversity of people who struggle with poverty and reflect an inclusive picture of poverty in Ontario. People who struggle with poverty have in the past been minimally consulted in the development of the Government's Ontario Child Poverty Reduction Strategy: *it is time for their voices to be heard.*
2. **To engage** faith groups, Social Planning Network of Ontario members, non-profit groups, and advocacy organizations to work together at the local level (city, regions, counties, neighbourhoods). Through their participation in local Hearings people active in providing charity can listen and hopefully be re-energized to continue their advocacy work towards poverty elimination.
3. **To engage** religious and civic leaders to listen, to become supportive of anti-poverty measures, and to speak of their support in other community settings.
4. **To increase** pressure on Members of the Provincial Parliament (MPPs) to make poverty elimination even more prominent in the current provincial government agenda and to have poverty elimination on the 2011 election platform for their parties.



V Process for the Social Audit

1. ISARC will conduct a **minimum of 20 Hearings** across Ontario where people with lived experiences of poverty will report their experiences and observations as well as share their vision of how Ontario could become a poverty-free province. Hearings will take place in urban centres, rural areas, northern communities, and Aboriginal communities.
2. During ISARC's 1998 Social Audit, many people living in poverty felt silenced by the prevailing political climate of the time and the criminalization of poverty. As a result, ISARC will use a modified United Nations Human Rapporteur process. Hearings will be held in locations where persons with low incomes gather. Creating a safe space to speak is an opportunity to decrease stigma and provide participants with the freedom to speak. These Hearings will not be publicized in the media, but are set up using local networks and services and take place at times when people are already gathering together. To further contribute to an environment of safety, members of the media **will not** be permitted at any Hearings.
3. Local faith and social justice groups will set up the Hearings and be trained to facilitate and record them. ISARC Staff and Steering Committee Members will also participate and support this process. Hearings will be conducted by trained Facilitators who will ask questions intended to solicit stories from those who are living in poverty. Rapporteurs will listen and record their thoughts and reactions to these stories and the Recorder(s) will capture the stories in detail. No recording devices will be used. Results from these Hearings will be posted on our website and gathered into a book for publication that will be circulated to politicians, religious leaders, and other key individuals in leadership positions across Ontario.

VI Content of the Social Audit Report

1. With the above background and specific objectives in mind, ISARC's Social Audit Report will be disseminated across the province and shall contain:
 - a. A testimony of peoples' lived experiences of poverty;
 - b. A picture of the effectiveness of current government policy towards poverty elimination;
 - c. A faith based analysis of the issues which impact poverty;
 - d. A faith based response to poverty elimination; and,
 - e. Faith Community policy proposals to end poverty in Ontario.



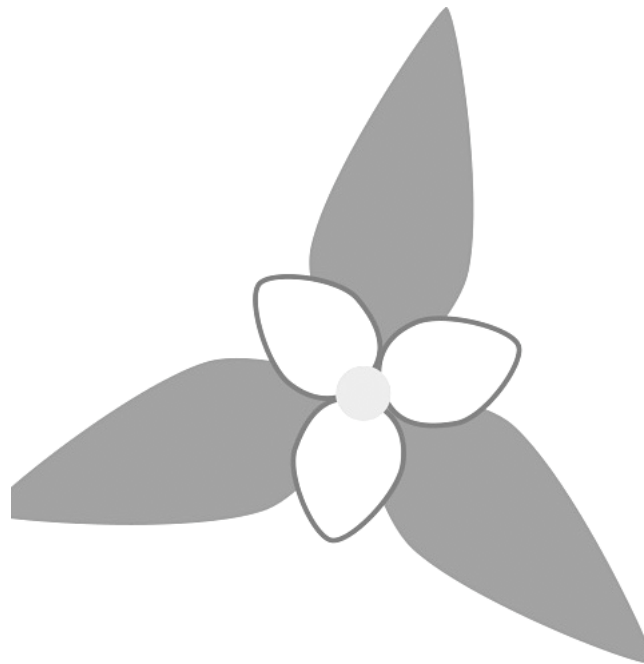
VII The Role of Convenors

1. The Convenor is the person(s) who **provides leadership** for the local Planning Committee. The Convenor also acts as the liaison between ISARC and the local Planning Committee.
2. Where possible, the Convenor shall be a member of ISARC or the Social Planning Network of Ontario (SPNO). Some local Planning Committees may be lead by co-Convenors representing these two organizations.
3. The Convenor should be someone who is **knowledgeable about issues of poverty** in their community and is knowledgeable about various local antipoverty and multi-faith groups. Leadership skills and an ability to work with people from diverse backgrounds is essential.
4. The Convenor is **responsible for bringing together people** to form a local Planning Committee. This Committee shall include in its membership people living in poverty, local poverty reduction groups, and religious leaders. Membership should reflect the diversity of the area and should be sensitive to issues of gender, ability, ethnicity, sexual orientation, colour, and health status.
5. When the local Planning Committee is not in session, the Convenor **functions as its spokesperson and its representative** in the community. The Convenor is also responsible for leading the delegation that meets with local politicians and scheduling the follow up meetings with local MPPs and MPs when the final report is released.
6. The Convenor will also see that all local Hearing materials including Rapporteur reports, Recorder reports, minutes and records from the local Planning Committee are gathered together and sent to ISARC shortly after Hearing is completed. This package should include records of contact with area educators, social service workers and healthcare providers, along with municipal government leaders and the media. Wherever possible, copies of local media coverage should be included. This should be completed within five working days of the conclusion of the Hearing. This allows ISARC to begin working on the final report and to post reports to the ISARC website. This will provide encouragement for other local Planning Committees as they conduct their Hearings.



VIII Selection of the Local Planning Committee

1. The success of the Social Audit in each community where Hearings take place is a direct result of the work of the local Planning Committee. Local Planning Committees shall be comprised of members from people living in poverty, local poverty reduction groups, religious leaders, and other interested community members. In addition, members of ISARC will be available to provide support and guidance. Each Planning Committee shall be lead by a Convenor or co-Convenors.
2. The local Planning Committee is **responsible for preparation, delivery, and follow-up for the Social Audit process** in their community. The local Planning Committee is also responsible for ensuring that the lived experiences of poverty reflect the diversity of people living in poverty in their area. This includes, but is not limited, to refugees, new Canadians, people of colour, single parents, former prison inmates, Aboriginal persons, low income workers, single persons, disabled persons, and persons with mental illness.





IX The Role of the Local Planning Committee

1. **To plan** for the Social Audit Hearing including setting a date, securing a location, and planning for child care for Hearing participants. Hearings will be located in an environment, which feels safe and comfortable for people with lived experience of poverty.
2. **To select** a Facilitator(s), Rapporteurs, and Recorders for their Hearing.
3. **To identify** people within their community living in poverty and reach out and invite them to participate in the Hearing. The Planning Committee will identify possible participants through their knowledge of local programs, services, and gathering points of people living in poverty within their community.
4. **To organize** an opportunity to meet with local social service workers, educators, and healthcare providers who work with people experiencing poverty.
5. **To facilitate** a meeting with local municipal politicians to gain their perspectives on poverty issues within their region and share information gathered at the local Hearing.
6. **To develop** and release materials for local media regarding the Hearing and provide follow-up reports once the Social Audit is completed.
7. **To schedule** a follow-up meeting with their MP and MPP to disseminate the findings from the local Hearings, highlighting areas of strength as well as concern, and advocating for local change to further eliminate poverty and its affects in their riding and across the province.
8. **To circulate** the final report to key decision makers, local politicians, religious leaders and participants from the local Hearing.



X The Role of Facilitators

1. The Facilitator is the person who **ensures the Hearing becomes a welcoming place** for those who will offer their lived experience of poverty and the impact of current government policy and practice.
2. The Facilitator should be **a person with empathy** and an understanding of the issues and circumstances in which witnesses find themselves. Central to the Facilitator role is the ability to allow and encourage full and free expression by witnesses.
3. The Facilitator should work toward **reflecting to the witnesses summaries of the key points of his/her testimony** for their approval. This reflection should include both the informational and emotional content of the witness testimony. The Facilitator is also responsible for the creation of a safe space from which witnesses can speak about their lived experiences of poverty.
4. As the Facilitator **works toward drawing out the impact of lived experiences** from witnesses, the Facilitator may also provide an opportunity for the witness to offer assessments of how their lived experiences of poverty could be different, what is working or not working within the current system of supports, and what changes could be made to improve their circumstances.
5. The Facilitator is also **responsible for expediting the sessions** with local **social service providers** and local **politicians** that will take place on the same day.
6. The Facilitator is **responsible for vetting and preparing any witnesses** who are willing to **speak with** members of the **media**.
7. **Training will be provided** for Facilitators prior to their taking up the role. The Facilitator role is primarily active on the day(s) of the Hearing(s) and during any local media events. The Facilitator may become a member of the delegation that follows up with politicians after the interim report is released. The Facilitator may also be called upon to assist with communications within the local Planning Committee.



XI The Role of Rapporteurs

1. A Rapporteur is the person who **listens to the witness stories and then prepares a report on his/her observations**. The Rapporteur lends integrity to the process of the Hearing through linking what is heard to the implications of what is heard and how it relates to the overall objectives for the Hearing.
2. Ideally, Rapporteurs are **formal or informal civic and religious leaders** who are open to learn more about the lived experiences of those in poverty. It is hoped that the role of the Rapporteur will move the individual to use their leadership positions to advocate for real change in systems which support/cause poverty.
3. The Rapporteur **listens without asking questions** except for the purpose of clarification. This is an active listening role where the listener is not only paying attention to what is heard but also to what the story evokes within.
4. The role of the Rapporteur is to **write a report, which integrates observations and impressions**. This summary should reflect and interpret how the stories heard reflect not only individual circumstances but also the structural realities of poverty. This report should be completed and submitted by the end of the Hearing day to the Convenor of the local Planning Committee. The Rapporteur is free to submit additional comments after further reflection no later than two days following the Hearing.
5. The role of the Rapporteur is **essential for ensuring accuracy along with the ethical and moral integrity of the final report**. Findings and recommendations from these reports will be used to focus the attention of decision makers on the emerging issues identified at the Hearings.
6. The role of the Rapporteur is **essential for the day of the Hearing**. The Rapporteur may also be included on the delegation that meets with local MPPs and MPs when the final report is released.



XII The Role of Recorders

1. The Recorder has the **important role of capturing witness testimony** at the Social Audit Hearings. As such, the role calls for **sound oral and written communications skills**. It is desirable to recruit a number of Recorders so that they may spell each other off at the Hearing. The Recorder is responsible for distribution of any materials authorized by the local Planning Committee for use at the local Hearing.
2. **Training will be provided** for Recorders prior to their taking up the role. The Recorder role is primarily active on the day(s) of the Hearing(s), during any local media events, and he/she may become a member of the delegation that follows up with politicians after the interim report is released.
3. The Recorder **maintains a contact list** of those participants who wish to be notified when the final report is released. The Recorder keeps the participants' list confidential and uses it only for the purpose of follow-up.
4. The Recorder is to **write a report, which summarizes witness testimony**. This report should be completed and submitted to the Convenor no latter than two days after the Hearing.



XIII Working with the Media

1. **Identify as many forms of media in your area as is possible.** This should include television, radio, print and electronic formats. Be sure to include religious print media and consider various other sources including labour or union newsletters. Obtain contact information for key people at each of these media sources and gather information about publication deadlines. At the end of the Social Audit, this will be helpful media contact information to pass on to ISARC for future media work.
2. Media attention **should be sought** at the following:
 - a. Formation of the local Planning Committee
 - b. Training for Facilitators and Recorders
 - c. Stories from people living in poverty
 - d. Meetings with local services providers and politicians
 - e. Local attendance at the Queen's Park Forum
 - f. Follow up meetings with MPPs and MPs
 - g. The release of the Social Audit Final Report

Media attention **will not be sought at Hearings** where people are sharing their lived experiences of poverty. Any members of the media who may be present will be asked to leave. Hearings need to be places of safety for participating witnesses.

3. Two to three days before an identified media opportunity, send an invitation (which includes details such as time and place) to the members of the media on your contact list. The invitation should include background information on the Social Audit and of the specific Audit event or stage of operation. This can also be accomplished as a letter to the editor or an editorial opinion piece, which should not exceed 500 to 700 words.
4. **Confidentiality and safety** for persons sharing their lived experiences is a **high priority**. The Social Audit Hearings involves Facilitators, Rapporteurs, and Recorders going to places where people living in poverty already gather. They are not invitation events. And the media **will not** be included at these Hearings. However, the media will be interested in interviewing any witness who would consent to such an opportunity. It is important that the local Planning Committee attempt to set up these opportunities wherever and whenever possible. **Willing witnesses should be vetted and prepared** by the Facilitator prior to any interviews taking place.
5. The local Planning Committee may also wish to prepare **written media releases**. These can be shared with the media if they attend an event or they can distributed afterwards. The media release should be well written, clear, and offer information rather than advocating any particular position. The information should include the five W's (who, what, where, when, why) and how. The release should be dated and also provide:
 - a. Release date for the information – when they may publish the information;
 - b. Who is releasing the information and what organizations are involved in the release / events; and,



- c. Contact information of the person authorizing the release and a way of obtaining more information or clarification of the information presented, particularly if the authorizing person and the author of the release are different.
6. It is also useful to provide the media with some **background information**. This can include poverty statistics for the area, highlights of current government strategies to address poverty, and local efforts to support people living in poverty.
7. Make sure the media release and any follow-up materials are available electronically. Most media now prefer electronic versus hard copies for printed matter.



XIV Meeting with Politicians

1. Meetings with politicians will take place at different times and for different purposes during the Social Audit.
 - a. The **first** meeting is with local municipal politicians to gather information regarding their perspective on poverty in their communities. This meeting should take place later in the day following the Hearing when lived experiences of poverty are gathered. Some of these stories can be used to demonstrate the realities of poverty in this specific municipality or community.
 - b. The **second** opportunity to meet is with Members of Provincial Parliament at a Queen's Park Forum. At this event some of the participants from local Hearings will have the opportunity to gather with others living in poverty across the province to share face to face their realities with the MPPs who serve them and their communities.
 - c. The **third** opportunity involves follow up meetings with MPPs and MPs once ISARC's Final Social Audit Report is released. This becomes an important opportunity to ask politicians to be accountable for continuing efforts to make poverty reduction part of their Party's platform. This is especially important, as a Provincial Election will be taking place in 2011.
2. Obtain the following information:
 - a. The members of the local municipal council
 - b. The sitting member of the government at both the provincial and federal levels
 - i. Who are the local riding contact persons?
 - ii. When is the MPP or MP in the riding office?
 - iii. Who are the officers of the local riding associations?
 - iv. What is the MPP's or MP's track record on poverty issues?
 - c. Who are the contenders / officers of the other political parties in the area along with their contact information?
3. **Set up a delegation** to visit the sitting members of government. The delegation should be prepared and focused, so as to avoid being drawn into taking political sides in a partisan manner. Remember that you are working with and for poor people and their exclusion from most political decision-making processes. This delegation could include the Convenor, persons living in poverty, a Rapporteur, and other members of the local Planning Committee. When forming this delegation, also consider:
 - a. Who will be the chair of the delegations?
 - b. What organizations does the delegation speak for / report to?
 - c. What is the history of these groups in the local community?
 - d. What is the contact information for the delegation and groups?
 - e. What material do you wish to present to the member? Remember to focus on concrete suggestions and recommendations that emerged at the Hearing(s).
 - f. When and how will the delegation report on the visit to the local Planning Committee and to ISARC?



4. **Prepare an agenda** for discussion that clearly demonstrates your delegation's knowledge of the issues both from your side as well as from the viewpoint of opponents. Be particularly prepared to present genuine and real political alternatives. Preparation should include the following:
 - a. What is the member's track record?
 - b. What may you praise him/her for achieving?
 - c. What critiques do you have?
 - d. What changes in position or solutions do you want to advocate?
 - e. What are you asking him/her to do for your cause and within what time line do you want to see a response?
 - f. To what political activities of the member are you looking to be included?
5. Carry out any visits as arranged, being sure to leave the door open for on-going exchanges and your role as a consultant for policy change.
6. Meet, formally or informally, as a delegation after the visit and determine your report and its timing, as well as your follow-up with the sitting member.
7. Make a point to visit using the same format with other political parties and contenders for the next election.



RESOURCES





Sample Bulletin Insert

This can also be downloaded at <http://isarc.ca/socialaudit2010.html>

ISARC

Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition

"Faith Communities In Action Against Poverty"

SOCIAL AUDIT 2010: A FAITH COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT OF THE STATUS OF POVERTY IN ONTARIO

The following statistics are from the "Do the Math" Campaign

- The average total amount needed to live each month was estimated at \$1,430 (compared to the \$572 current rate for OW recipients)
- 83% of those surveyed believe that a single person in Ontario needs more than \$1,020 to live each month (the current single month rate for ODSP)
- Average cost of monthly shelter was estimated at \$624 (compared to the \$349 provided for OW recipients and \$445 for ODSP recipients)
- The average cost of food each month for a single person was estimated at \$260 (compared to the Cost of the Nutritious Food Basket data provided by public health agencies that estimates the average monthly amount needed to purchase healthy food each month is \$209.55)
- 69% of respondents indicated that having Internet access was a necessary expense
- 57% of respondents earned over \$30,000 per year
- 14% of respondents are on OW or ODSP

*Results from an ongoing "Do the Math" survey. Check it out at www.dothemath.thestop.org/

Poverty is real in Ontario. *You can be part of the solution.* ISARC is holding a Social Audit to hear stories from people living in poverty about their experience. As members of the faith community, we invite you to join us in prayer for the upcoming events. Pray for the people who live in poverty, for the people holding the Audit, and for the politicians and leaders who will hear the stories.

For more information contact ISARC at www.isarc.ca

Interfaith Prayer:

Merciful and compassionate God, Your people and your planet call to you, for both are suffering. So many of your children cry out for shelter, food, and meaningful work. Make us partners, we pray, in your work of caring for all in need. So much of your Creation groans from the effects of poverty. Make us partners, we pray, in your work of healing the earth. Help us to create jobs that both honour the needs of your planet as well as those holy souls who have no work. Please give to those who lead a vision of the day when every person, created in your sacred image, has employment with a living wage. Give to us gathered here the courage to speak for those without voice, the strength to act on our convictions, the discernment to see the world as you want it to be, and the wisdom to respond together as persons of different faiths. In these moments with one another, may we feel your presence and together praise your holy name.

By Rabbi Steve Gutow, Rev. Larry Snyder,
Rev. Dr. Michael Kinnamon, and Dr. Sayyid Syeed.



Sample Social Audit Flyer

This can also be downloaded at <http://isarc.ca/socialaudit2010.html>



2010 Social Audit: A Faith Community Assessment of the Status of Poverty in Ontario

ISARC is mobilizing again to provide opportunities for the most vulnerable of our society to tell their stories of living in poverty. In 2010, Hearings will take place across Ontario as part of ISARC's Social Audit. This Social Audit seeks to communicate the social effects of the current Ontario government's policies and actions towards people living in poverty and our society as a whole.



Using a modified UN Rapporteur model, people with the lived experiences of poverty, whether they are single parents, disabled, working poor, people of colour, new immigrants, or single adults, will have an opportunity to share their stories and be heard. If we want to advocate for change to the current system, it is imperative that those people directly affected by government policy be given voice to how these policies are helping or hindering them in their struggles with poverty.

ISARC hopes to conduct Hearings right across the province in urban, rural, northern, and Aboriginal communities. These Hearings will take place where people living in poverty can safely come together. As people of faith your help is vital to getting the Social Audit off the ground. Do you have the skills to organize a local Planning Committee to coordinate with ISARC staff and to hold a Hearing in your community? Do you have skills as a Facilitator and are willing to conduct a Hearing allowing people who are often silenced find their voice? Do you know formal and informal leaders within your community who may do more if they knew the full story of what living in poverty truly means?



Ways to Help

1. Become a Convenor and organize a local Planning Committee.
2. Join a local Planning Committee to organize a Hearing in your community.
3. Facilitate a Hearing with people living in poverty so that they can tell their stories.
4. Recruit a Rapporteur, a dedicated listener, who may be moved by stories heard to mobilize their resources in the struggle to end poverty.
5. Become a Reporter and capture in writing the stories told.
6. Organize a delegation to meet with local politicians to share findings from the Hearings in their communities.
7. Write a media release to increase knowledge in your area about the issues of poverty.
8. Pray for those involved in the Social Audit that they may be good stewards of the stories they hear.
9. Share the findings from the Social Audit with your faith community and your neighbours.

Contact Us

If you are interested in assisting with the Social Audit in any way please contact any one of the following:

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Timeline

- November: Recruit Convenors
Local Planning Committees Formed
- December: Local Planning Committees Meet
Recruit Rapporteurs
- January: Training for Facilitators and Reporters
- February: Finalize dates/locations for local Hearings
- March & April: Hearings take place
- May: Interim Report Completed
Queen's Park Forum on Social Audit
- September: Final Social Audit Report Completed

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ISARC

Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition

"Faith Communities In Action Against Poverty"

Hearing Registration Form

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.

You are being asked to participate in this Hearing as part of ISARC's provincial Social Audit. Information, personal stories, and other remarks gathered today will be used to highlight issues of poverty and to lobby for further policy change to end poverty in Ontario.

This information may be used in ISARC publications and website, media releases and awareness raising materials such as newsletters, and in discussion with politicians at all levels of government. No identifying information will be used.

Information is being gathered by individuals working on ISARC's behalf. Information will be gathered by trained individuals acting as Recorders. No audio recording devices will be used.

- I agree to meet with members of the media.
- I agree to meet with members of government.
- I want to be contacted when the final report is released.

Name: _____ Phone Number: _____

Address: _____ Email: _____

Town: _____ Province: _____ Postal Code: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

ISARC – P.O. Box 25067- SDM, Kitchener, ON N2A 4A5

(519) 884-0710 ext 3927#

info@isarc.ca

www.isarc.ca



Sample Hearing Invite Flyer

ISARC

Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition

"Faith Communities In Action Against Poverty"

You are Invited to Participate

In A Faith Community Assessment of the Status of Poverty in Ontario

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 marginalised by poverty.

We are asking people experiencing poverty to come and share their stories and suggestions for change with us.

(DATE)
(LOCATION)

These stories will be used to highlight issues of poverty and your ideas for change used to advocate for policy change to end poverty in Ontario.

Your identity will be kept confidential but your story will be shared in ISARC publications and website, media releases and awareness raising materials such as newsletters, and in discussion with politicians at all levels of government.

Information will be gathered by trained individuals acting as recorders.
No audio recording devices will be used.

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Sample Invite Letter to Local Service Providers

[YOUR ADDRESS]

[DATE]

Dear [NAME],

The Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition (ISARC) Social Audit Planning Committee of [YOUR LOCATION] would like to invite you to an important meeting held at [LOCATION], [DATE] from [TIME].

The ISARC Social Audit Planning Committee of [YOUR LOCATION] is a network of people working together for greater social justice. Over the next few months we are asking people experiencing poverty to come and share their stories and suggestions for change with us. These stories will be used to highlight issues of poverty in our area and ideas for change used to advocate for policy change to end poverty in Ontario.

As knowledgeable Service Providers working in a your community, we are asking you to participate by sharing your insights and experiences working with those living in poverty in [TOWN/REGION] and by offering your ideas for positive structural change.

To learn more about ISARC who is sponsoring this provincial initiative visit their website at www.isarc.ca.

If you are interested and/or have further questions please contact [YOUR NAME] at [PHONE NUMBER] or by email to [EMAIL ADDRESS]

Most sincerely,

[YOUR NAME]



Sample Invite Letter to Local Municipal Politicians

[YOUR ADDRESS]

[DATE]

Dear [NAME],

The Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition (ISARC) Social Audit Planning Committee of [YOUR LOCATION] would like to invite you to an important meeting held at [LOCATION], [DATE] from [TIME].

ISARC is a provincial coalition representing faith communities in Ontario, working together to eliminate poverty. Currently an ISARC Social Audit on the status of poverty is being done in [TOWN/REGION]. This audit seeks to communicate the social effects of the current Ontario government's policies and actions towards people living in poverty and our society as a whole. We want to learn what is working and what is not.

We will also be meeting with local service providers for their insights and experiences working with those living in poverty and their ideas for positive structural change.

To learn more about ISARC who is sponsoring this provincial initiative visit their website at www.isarc.ca

For our audit to provide a comprehensive picture of poverty in [TOWN/REGION], we would also like to hear from you. How has your view of poverty changed in the last five years? What programs does your community/county have to fight/eliminate poverty? What changes would it take to break the cycle of poverty and what are the barriers to these changes?

Your insights will be added to the information and stories collected from the 25 to 30 communities across Ontario where the social audits are taking place.

If you are interested and/or have further questions please contact [YOUR NAME] at [PHONE NUMBER] or by email to [EMAIL ADDRESS]

Sincerely,

[YOUR NAME]



Sample Agenda for a Day of Hearings

- 8:30 Facilitators, Rapporteurs, and Recorders gather together to prepare for the day. This gathering could take place at a local place of worship and include prayers.
- 9:30 Hearing(s) takes place where people living in poverty share their stories. More than one Hearing may take place in different parts of the community if this is deemed necessary by the local Planning Committee to gain a larger appreciation of the lived experiences of poverty in their community. For example, there could be two or more teams conducting the Hearings; or one team may visit two locations during this time slot.
- 12:00 Facilitators, Rapporteurs, and Recorders meet for lunch and begin to make notes regarding their experiences.
- 1:30 Meeting with local social service providers, healthcare workers, and educators to gain their perspectives on present poverty reduction measures, what is working and what is not, and what they think can be done to alleviate poverty in their community.
- 3:30 Meeting with local municipal politicians to gain their perspectives on levels of poverty, local issues contributing to poverty, local responses to poverty, and what local government is doing to address these issues.
- 5:00 Team(s) meet in a central location to begin debriefing and start writing their reports.
- 6:00 Facilitators, Rapporteurs, and Recorders meet for dinner with members from the local Planning Committee to debrief from the day's sessions. Together a media release is prepared which discusses the purpose of the Hearing along with some findings. Reporters and Rapporteurs work to complete their written reports for the day.



Handout for Facilitators

What is a Facilitator?

A Facilitator is a person who creates the needed structure for a successful hearing. These functions are accomplished in the following manner:

1. The Facilitator prepares and plans for the hearing.

Where possible, the facilitator should familiarize themselves with the location and layout of the room where the hearing will take place prior to the hearing date.

Preparation for the hearing could include decisions on how chairs will be set up to aid in both the comfort of the witnesses but also allows for ease of conversation, listening, and recording. A circle is often used to create a sense of containment and equality amongst participants.

2. The Facilitator understands the components of a good meeting.

Introduction: (10 minutes)

- Facilitator introduces self, Rapporteurs and Recorders.
- Facilitator offers a brief explanation about the purpose of the hearing.
- Explains participation form and invites witnesses to complete it.
- Explains the role of the Rapporteurs and Recorders.
- Listens and shows respect when others are telling their stories.

Focusing the testimony: (60 to 70 minutes)

- The witnesses will likely respond more to an invitation to tell their story than a barrage of questions. Ask open ended questions such as:
 - How has your struggle on a low income changed in the past five years for better and for worse?
 - Tell us about your experience with social assistance or low wage jobs?
 - What changes would make to break the cycle of poverty in your life?
 - If you have children and youth in your family, how have they been affected by your low income?
 - How do housing, transportation, health care, child care, or other issues affect you (and your family)?
 - If you could make one change that would dramatically affect you (and your family), what would be most important to you?
- You will need to be aware of time. As much as we would like to give everyone as much time as they need to tell their story, it may be necessary to remind the witnesses that others want to speak.
- Ideally, as one witness shares their story, other witnesses will chime in and share their experiences and expand on what others are sharing.

...continued



Wrapping up the hearing: (10 minutes)

- Collects participation forms.
 - Thanks everyone for their participation.
3. Sessions with service providers, educators, and healthcare workers will follow a very similar format with the use of Rapporteurs and Recorders. Allow approximately one hour for these sessions. The need to ask open ended questions remains the same.
 - The following are some sample questions:
 - How has your work with people living on low incomes changed in the past five years? For better or for worse?
 - Tell us about your experiences with people receiving government assistance?
 - What changes would it take to break the cycle of poverty?
 - What are the barriers to making those changes?
 4. Meeting with the local politicians will also follow the same format.
 - Sample questions for these sessions could include:
 - How has your view of poverty changed in the last five years?
 - What programs does your community have to fight/eliminate poverty?
 - What changes would it take to break the cycle of poverty?
 - What are the barriers to making those changes?
 5. As with the Hearing sessions for people experiencing poverty, it is important to help service providers and local politicians feel comfortable. Their perspectives on poverty in their communities is also a valuable part of the social audit hearings.



Handout for Recorders

What is a Recorder?

A recorder has the important role of capturing witness testimony at the Social Audit Hearings.

1. Recorders should capture important information such as:
 - Date and time of sessions,
 - The number of witnesses and how many spoke,
 - Which group is represented, people in poverty, service providers or politicians.
2. Recorders should not include the following information:
 - Names or identifying details about the people sharing their stories.
3. It is useful to have several recorders for each session so that they can trade off the note taking responsibility. Testimony can be captured using a laptop or be handwritten. When using a computer, it may be helpful to back up notes onto a memory stick or thumb drive.
4. The goal is to capture the emotion and language of the story as well as a few important quotes. It is not necessary to capture the entire story verbatim. Use of abbreviations and short hand may be useful to get the story down, but please expand into full language in the final submission for ISARC, so that the testimony can be read without difficulty.
5. Indicate in some way when exact words of the storytellers have been captured. Use of quotation marks or italics can be helpful. While a verbatim is not expected, it is useful to capture important points from each story in a word for word format. It may be useful to use a different page for each storyteller. However if witness testimony is the result of group participation, please indicate each time a different witness is speaking. It is also helpful to include a reference to the initial question that was used as the invitation to speak.
6. Notes taken by recorders should be submitted no later than two days after the Hearing. Notes should be submitted in electronic format to the designated person for your local planning team, who will pass these on to ISARC.



Handout for Rapporteurs

What is a Rapporteur?

A Rapporteur is a person who listens and then reports his or her observations. These functions are accomplished in the following manner:

1. The Rapporteur listens with ears, eyes, heart and mind.

The role of the Rapporteur is to listen; not to reply. The Rapporteur listens with all senses to gain a full appreciation of the story being told. Listening is more than hearing the story with your ears. It is paying attention to the body language of the storyteller, paying attention to the emotions the story raises within you, and listening for what remains unspoken.

2. The Rapporteur is focussed.

The role of the Rapporteur is to remain focused on the storyteller. It is not always easy to tune out the distractions around you and the distractions from within yourself. The Rapporteur strives to remain focused on what is being said and not on how he or she wishes to respond. The focus is on the story being shared and its implications as they relate to the overall objectives for the Hearings.

3. The Rapporteur records and reports findings.

The role of the Rapporteur is to write a report which integrates observations and impressions from the stories heard. This summary should indicate how these stories relate to the objectives for the Hearings. Notes should be completed and submitted within two hours of the completion of the Hearing.

4. The Rapporteur ensures integrity of the final report.

The role of the Rapporteur is essential for ensuring accuracy along with ethical and moral integrity of the final report. Findings and recommendations from their reports will be used to focus attention of decision makers on the emerging issues, which will result from the Hearings.

Sources:

European Law Monitor. (2009). European Union parliament: What is a Rapporteur? Retrieved September 24, 2009 from <http://www.europeanlawmonitor.org/EU-Information/What-Is-Guide-to-Key-EU-Terms/EU-Parliament-What-Is-a-Rapporteur.html>

United Nations Economic and Social Council. (2007). Guidelines for chairpersons, speakers, panelists, Rapporteurs, drafters, delegates and observers. [Electronic Copy]. Retrieved September 28, 2009 from <http://www.uneca.org/codi/codi5/content/E-ECA-CODI-5-INF-5-EN.pdf>



Sample Media Release

Social Audit Hearing Captures Lived Experiences of Poverty

[Location: Date] What is it like to live in poverty? What is it like to not have enough to pay for food and rent? What is it like to have to resort to the local food bank? What is it like to tell your children you cannot afford to buy them new clothes? As part of a provincial Social Audit, people living in our area spoke out regarding their lived experiences of poverty at one of several province wide Hearings.

[Insert quote from one of the lived experiences of poverty shared at the local Hearing. Choose a quote, which reflects a unique aspect of poverty in your community. Do not reveal the name of the quote source unless permission has been granted. Just state that the quote comes from a Hearing participant using no name. This quote could also be from a Rapporteur, who is well known in the community. The quote should stimulate discussion among readers as well as alert media that this has been a significant experience in the community.]

Living in poverty is not just restricted to persons who are recipients of Ontario Works or of the Ontario Disability Support Program. People working hard in low paying jobs are also falling into poverty. As Ontario weathers the recession, more and more individuals and families are falling into poverty.

[Insert name of the Convenor for the local Planning Committee] says [insert quote regarding a finding from the local Hearing].

Social service providers and local politicians also revealed [information gathered from local meetings]

In May 2010, participants from this and other provincial Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition (ISARC) Hearings will gather at Queen's Park with others from across Ontario, to share their lived experiences of poverty with the Members of the Provincial Parliament. ISARC hopes that these stories will move the Ontario government to realize that more needs to be done to eliminate poverty across our province.

The Social Audit is being sponsored by ISARC and is supported by religious leaders and other citizens from our area and across the province. Since 1986, ISARC has provided a means for faith communities to work together for social justice and to contribute to new public policies based on greater justice and dignity for Ontarians marginalized by poverty.

For further information, please contact:

[Insert name and contact details for the Convenor of the local Planning Committee]



Sample Backgrounder to Accompany Media Release

Send this out with your media release to attract more attention.

ISARC History

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.

In 1986 the Ontario government appointed an independent Social Assistance Review Committee (SARC) to study, consult, and make recommendations on the future of welfare. ISARC's original mandate was to provide advice to that Committee.

Over the past decades, in concert with many other concerned groups, ISARC has advocated in support of SARC's original recommendations for an adequate, accessible, fair, and accountable social assistance system.

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. ISARC has hosted province-wide hearings, held consultations and briefings, made presentations to legislative committees, and developed publications and resources that give a voice to low-income people.

This central message, shared by religious communities throughout the world, inspires people of faith to respond to our neighbours in need.

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 our lives and communities disappears.

ISARC believes that justice is the mutual responsibility of individuals, communities, and government working together for a better future.

Contact:

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From Data to Report

Compiling the data from your local social audit

ISARC Social Audit 2010

Introduction:

After the hearings in a community, the convener gathers the data from the Reporters and the comments from the Rapporteurs. So much data! The data is emotional, powerful and the testimony of people who have rarely been heard. How does one begin to process this? In the Waterloo Region Social Audit, we had over 100 pages of data from the 19 different locations. So a filter is needed to sift through and organize all this information.

To make a local report, one is looking for significant themes that emerge from the stories and testimonies. After data is divided into themes, one searches for categories. Themes may be known – income security, lack of job opportunities, nutrition and hunger, affordable housing – but other themes may emerge. In Waterloo Region, four Conveners gathered to go through the reports, picking out themes and categories.

In the Waterloo Region audit, participants asked why there is poverty in such a rich region. They asked the question with stories and experiences that made this a theme. It is certainly tied to their lack of income security. Thus it could be a theme with a stronger emphasis or a category that is part of the income security theme.

“School expenses” emerged as a theme. School trips, special events, and meals like “hot dog days” were in previous audits. This year categories included athletic uniforms and fees for high school classes – gym and science were mentioned often. Students could not participate without paying the fees, even though some schools had special funds. Some high school students needed to take public transit even though the school was 5 km from home. The Conveners needed to decide if this was a category in the transportation or education theme.

Some themes and categories are difficult to describe. In Waterloo, we heard stories of resilience, stigmatization, lack of communication, lack of choice or the daily struggle to survive. These need to be reported as themes or categories, depending on the wisdom of the conveners who know the contexts of their communities.

Waterloo Region had a number of people with low incomes talk about “those people who abuse the system.” Conveners need to think deeply about these opinions. Do they belong with the struggle for self esteem of the people testifying? Should we report that people are abusing the system, even though this is very second hand information? One needs insight from others who are closer to the individuals who have testified. Since ISARC people are listeners, we couldn’t answer the question and did not put this information in our Social Audit.

Putting together themes and categories is like working a 1000 piece puzzle. It all fits together as a big picture. How does one describe this picture that communicates with the people who shared their experiences and observations? How will the people of the larger community read this



report? How do the stories from different locations fit together? Or are there significant differences between rural and urban OR between single adults and families that need to be highlighted by different themes and/or categories. At the end of the exercise, the Social Audit needs to tell the stories authentically.

These themes/ categories are then woven into a local report that can be distributed to people who participated in the audit as well as media. The local report is sent to ISARC where it will be compiled with other others for the provincial report.

The following are possible steps to simplify the process of data to report:

Step 1

Collect the data and notes from Reporters and Rapporteurs.

Step 2

Read through the data and begin to sense the themes and categories that are present. Then using sticky notes to write down themes or a high liner mark the printed data start to put themes together with the experiences and illustrations. One can also use index cards. With high liners, use different colours for different types of categories: poverty, affordable housing, nutrition, transportation, struggle to survive, resilience, jobs. In Waterloo Region, four Conveners went through the data to put it into themes and categories.

Step 3

Bring notes and quotes from each category together. Observe when categories are “full” with many examples, illustrations, stories, and opinions. A full category means that additional information keeps reporting the same phenomenon. Then choose best stories, experiences, quotes and summaries that illustrate the category. Set aside data which has few comments; these can be examined later. Contemplate the categories. What is the best way to state the essence of each category? Is it unemployment or is it the search for jobs? Is it high rents or the lack of affordable housing? How have the people stated their concern?

Step 4

Begin putting together, writing and editing paragraphs on the various categories. Include the stories, experiences and quotes from the people. Do the materials that have been left aside fit into the overall report in a significant way? Then include them!

Step 5

Contemplate how this material can be organized to respect the people who have attend the hearings as well as people from the larger community who do not understand the impact of poverty and isolation. In the Waterloo Region report, the material could have been written up as many individuals and groups complaining about “the system” and their own predicaments. But data also shows people with resilience, in search of jobs, and committed to community centres and neighbourhood programming. Can the organization of the data also point to people who are caught in the poverty cycle with too little information about the social assistance system and opportunities in the community? The Convener makes a choice about which will communicate better in the community? That data is also present and can change the tone of the report.



Step 6

Write and edit as a document for local participants, media, and government. Send the report to ISARC for the website and for the compilation of the ISARC provincial report.

The ISARC Social Audit will contain much data. The Conveners will be the filters and writers. Their task is done with deep respect for those whose testimonies have been collected.