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Local News

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Niagarans asked to share stories of struggle

Social audit reform hearing in Welland Tuesday

Posted By MARYANNE FIRTH/Tribune Staff

Updated 1 hour ago

WELLAND — Low-income Niagarans are being asked to share their stories of struggle for the sake of social assistance reform.

The Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition is conducting a social audit of Ontario, visiting communities to collect information and first-hand accounts of people struggling to get by.

On Tuesday, ISARC will host a social audit hearing in Welland, one of more than 30 communities included in the project across the province.

"We need real people who walk the walk of the poverty struggle," said Mary Beth Anger Sheffield of Community Legal Services of Niagara.

For 32 years Sheffield has worked to help improve life on social assistance for low-income earners, to make their working experience better with the Ontario Works system.

The hearings, she said, are meant to gather real-life perspectives of people dealing with the system in an effort to improve it.

Information collected at Welland's hearing will be combined with that of other community hearings across the province to create a book documenting the struggles of low-income families and the need for social assistance reform in Ontario.

The book, expected to be completed by September, will be distributed to different levels of government and churches across the province, Sheffield said.

While a tool to promote change in the system, the book will also be used to educate the community and "break down welfare myths" that often leave low-income families fighting certain stigmas.

"It's no picnic being on public assistance. ... People want to find jobs, but there just aren't enough jobs out there," she said.

"People want to be contributing members of society for themselves, for their families."

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Harmonized Sales Tax Information and more @ Fort Erie Public Library

Do news reports and casual talk about the upcoming Harmonized Sales Tax worry you? If you need more information, the Fort Erie Public Library offers two different sessions for your assistance. On Wednesday, March 31 at the Centennial Branch, John Bartlett of Dunward, Jones Barkwell will offer his

Stamford Kiwanis

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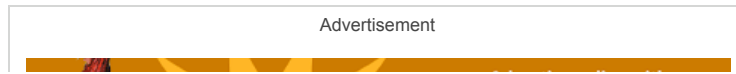
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Sheffield said the hearing offers people the chance to share their stories, their struggles and their suggestions for change.

Hearing words from someone who's actually experienced the difficulties first-hand makes the information that much more powerful, she said.

"It means something when people say 'this happened to me,' not 'this happened to my client.'"

Participants will speak in front of a small group of people — a few select recorders and two listeners who will each write their own report based on response to the stories told. In Welland, listeners will include Tribune city editor Joe Barkovich and Central United Church minister Rev. Chris Fickling.

"Just talk from the heart. No one will judge," Sheffield said, hoping to encourage people to participate.

"Risk nothing, having nothing. If you want to see change, you have to consider risking something or have nothing."

Sheffield said the government needs to see that the "social assistance system has let people down ... let people fall through the cracks. This is why we need food banks, clothing drives."

The hearing will take place on Tuesday, April 13, at All Peoples' United Church, 109 Chaffey St., beginning at 1 p.m.

A hearing will also be held that day in Port Colborne at the Port Cares Reach Out Centre, 61 Nickel St., from 9 a.m. to noon.

To participate in the Welland hearing, contact Sheffield at 905-735-1559. For Port Colborne, contact Mary Anne Feagan at 905-835-1914 or 905-834-3629 ext. 362.

For more information on Ontario's social audit, visit www.isarc.ca.

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"How to hear God" class

"Kundalini Yoga" Classes, Mondays 7-8:30pm, March 15 - May 3, Thorold

"Kundalini Yoga" classes: St. Catharines, Wednesdays 7:30-9:00pm, March 17-May 5

"Pet First Aid Course" May 8th from 9 - 4pm

"TAOIST TAI CHI SOCIETY - Beginner Classes at Fitch Street School"

"TAOIST TAI CHI SOCIETY - NEW CLASSES"

"What Every Babysitter Should Know" Course (Ages 10 - 14) - April 17th, 2010 from 9 - 4pm

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