

Survey to take a hard look at rural poverty

by Matthew Uhrig
Press staff

MOUNTAIN — Currently, the Inter-faith Social Assistance Reform Coalition (ISARC) is working toward assessing government policy's impact on poverty throughout the province.

With what they call a social audit, the ISARC will be aiming to find the benefits and limitations felt by those in the community who are living below the poverty line.

According to Pauline Pratt, executive director of the House of Lazarus, one in five children in Stormont, Dundas, and Glengarry (SD&G) live in poverty, while there has been a 23-per-

cent increase in the use of food banks in Dundas County within the last year, and 22 per cent of those who use the amenities are working poor families. As well, there has been a 24-per-cent

Social audit coming to Mountain

increase in the frequency of families who attend the food bank seven to 10 times a year.

With the social audit, the ISARC are looking for participants who reflect the diversity of people struggling with poverty, acting as a picture of the poverty issue within Ontario. Like an environmental or financial audit, the social audit aims to provide the oppor-

tunity to isolate trends and status of the target group.

As the process of the social audit advances, the ISARC will be hosting 20 hearings across the province, where people living in poverty will share their experiences and observations, as well as their vision of how Ontario could become a poverty-free province. Hearings are scheduled for urban and rural areas, as well as northern and Aboriginal communities.

Locally, a meeting is scheduled for Thurs., April 15 at the Mountain Community Centre. It is expected to get underway at 9:30 am.

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In 1998, the ISARC did a similar social audit, and found that many people living in poverty felt silenced by the nature of the political climate of the time and the criminalization of poverty. These hearings are held where persons with low incomes gather, creating a safe space to socialize, while decreasing stigma and providing participants with the freedom to speak, according to the ISARC.

During the local hearing, facilitators, rapporteurs, and recorders will be used. These are individuals who are willing to help identify people within their community who are living in poverty and

reach out and invite them to participate in the hearing.

The style of the hearing is modelled after the United Nations Human Rapporteur process, which aims to present an environment of safety to those affected, allowing them to feel at ease and more willing to speak on the issue.

As well, according to the ISARC, members of the media will not be permitted at any hearings to allow a comfortable environment for the participants and prevent publicized accounts of their struggles. Meetings will involve municipal politicians, MPs, and MPPs.

For more information or to be a part of the ISARC hearing, contact the House of Lazarus at 613-989-3830.