

# Legal Centre News

*Making a Difference in the Community Since 1989*

Volume 37

June 2008

## Free Workers' Rights Night Share your story ■ Learn your rights ■ Work for change ■

Workers in the Peterborough area will be able to learn about their rights on June 26, 2008 when the Peterborough Community Legal Centre and the Workers' Action Centre host a Workers' Rights Night from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. at St. Paul's Presbyterian Church.

"Our focus is to help workers learn the basics of employment law and how they can access help if they have a problem," said Melinda Rees, Executive Director at the Peterborough Community Legal Centre. "Many people in Peterborough do not know how get information about issues such as sick time, vacation pay, or what happens if they are laid off or fired. After the Workers' Rights Night, they will know all this and more."

The Legal Centre is hosting this event because it provides services in some areas

of employment law and receives complaints about employers who do not issue records of employment or who fire employees without cause.

This free event will include dinner, entertainment and kids' activities.

"People are welcome to come and bring their families," said Sonia Singh of the Workers' Action Centre.

"We know how difficult it can be to find childcare-it is a challenge for many working families. This event will be fun and educational."

Workers will also have the opportunity to share their own stories and to make suggestions for improving workers rights which will be shared with MPP Jeff Leal at a later date.

For more information, please contact the Legal Centre at 749-9355.

**"This event will be fun and educational."**

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## **Workers' Rights Night**

**June 26, 2008  
6:00 - 8:00 p.m.**

**St. Paul's Church  
(Corner of Murray and Water)**

***Free Food, Fun & Action***

# So you have a hearing at the Landlord Tenant Board

The Landlord and Tenant Board (LTB) is the administrative body that deals with residential landlord and tenant matters. In Peterborough the office for the Landlord and Tenant Board is located at 300 Water Street in the Ministry of Natural Resource building on the first floor.

The Legal Centre provides Tenant Duty Counsel Services at the Landlord and Tenant Board. Tenant Duty Counsel services may include: free legal advice to tenants, negotiated settlements, arguing motions and tenant assistance during mediation sessions with your landlord.

If you want help from Duty Counsel, you must ask for help the morning of your hearing, or contact the Legal Centre at 749-9355.

If you are a tenant and are taking your landlord to the Board or are being taken there by your landlord you need to follow a few simple rules:

- Always attend the hearing. If you do not go to the hearing the adjudicator will hear only the landlord's side of the story and will make a decision on that basis.
- Be at the hearing by 9:00 a.m. to sign in. If you arrive late, your application may be dismissed. If your landlord's application has been scheduled to be heard and you are late, the hearing will go ahead without you.
- Make sure that you bring to the hearing:
  - your application or your landlord's application;
  - any notices or letters you have received from your landlord;
  - all witnesses and any evidence that you plan to use;
  - copies of your lease or rental agreement;
  - copies of rent receipts or proof of rent payments;
  - inspection reports from the Health Unit, the Electrical Safety Authority, the Fire Services Department, or the Property Standards Department, or the Police Department;
  - any photographs. Make sure that you have actual photos as the Adjudicators are unlikely to look at pictures in DVD format or on your cell phone.

## Provincial Government Announcement on March 17, 2008

1. Dental Care Plan: The provincial government will invest \$135 million over three years in a dental care plan for low-income families. Public health units, community health centres, dentists and dental hygienists will provide prevention and treatment services.

2. The Student Nutrition Program: The program will be doubled with a three-year \$32-million investment to expand existing services. These programs currently provide healthy snacks and meals for 400,000 kids across Ontario.

3. Repairs to Affordable Housing: Another \$100 million will be provided this year to assist with repairs to about 4,000 affordable housing units. Ontario municipalities will also now be able to get up to \$500 million in low-cost loans from Ontario Strategic Infrastructure Financing Authority (OSIFA) to repair affordable housing.

## Last call for the ROOF Program

The ROOF program helps working tenants keep a roof over their heads

The Rental Opportunity for Ontario Families or R.O.O.F. program is a provincial program designed to assist low income, working tenants with rental costs.

The deadline to apply for ROOF benefits is June 30, 2008. In Peterborough, the Housing Resource Centre at 229 King Street has the applications and will mail the completed applications for tenants at no charge.

The ROOF program can pay

eligible tenants up to \$100.00 per month toward their monthly rental costs.

Eligible tenants must:

- NOT be in receipt of Social Assistance Benefits
- Be a resident of Ontario
- Be employed earning a minimum income of \$5,000.00 and an Adjusted family income of \$20,000.00 (this is the amount listed in line 236 of your income tax form less your Universal Child Tax Benefit.
- Have one or more dependent children under the age of 18 years

- Be paying more than 30% of your income on rent
- Have liquid assets less than \$10,000.00 (examples of liquid assets are cash, bank account balances, bonds, stocks etc)

If you or your family are eligible for this benefit you will receive up to \$100.00 per month for a maximum of 5 years.

Sadly, this benefit is not available to some of the neediest tenants; those in receipt of Social Assistance.

## Canada Pension Plan Disability Program Change to contribution rules

On March 3, 2008, an amendment to the *Canada Pension Plan* (CPP) legislation came into force that helps long-term contributors qualify for disability benefits.

### What has changed?

This amendment allows CPP disability applicants with 25 or more years of contributions to meet the contributory requirement of the CPP Disability program with valid contributions in three of the last six years instead of four of the

last six years. Applicants are required to meet the program's medical criteria to qualify for benefits.

This change applies to applications received on or after March 3, 2008.

### Overview of CPP Disability program

The role of the CPP disability program is to replace a portion of the earned income of CPP contributors who cannot work because of a severe and prolonged disability. A children's benefit is also

available.

To qualify, applicants must be under the age of 65, have made the required contributions to the CPP, and have a severe and prolonged physical or mental disability such that the applicant is incapable regularly of pursuing any substantially gainful occupation.

Call the Legal Centre for more information about how you might qualify for the CPP Disability program.

# Fire Inspection Reports Policy hurts the victims

The law in Ontario states that tenants of residential rental accommodations covered by the *Residential Tenancies Act* have a legal right to safe well-

maintained units. Tenants with maintenance and repair problems should request inspections by the appropriate agencies. Concerns about Building code violations should be directed to the Property Standards Department of City Hall (or your local township office).

Health concerns such as mould should be directed to the Peterborough County City Health Unit. Fire safety issues should be directed to the Fire Services Department.

These departments will inspect rental units or rental complexes free of charge. When an inspection is conducted, the inspector will send a letter to your landlord to notify them about repair and maintenance issues in the unit and to tell them to correct the problems. Tenants should obtain copies of these reports so that they are aware of the safety, health and maintenance issues. If you intend to take your land-

lord to the Landlord and Tenant Board you will need copies of these reports to help prove your case.

**Property Standards, the Health Unit and the Fire Department will inspect rental units or rental complexes free of charge.**

The availability of these reports is particularly important when it comes to fire safety issues. Unfortunately this is an area of great concern for tenants and the Legal Centre. The Fire Services Department refuses to provide reports to

tenants free of charge, unlike the Health Unit or Property Standards department who will furnish tenants with a copy of their reports upon request at no charge. To obtain a copy of an inspection report from the Fire Services Department tenants have two choices. They may file a Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (MFIPPA) request with the City of Peterborough at a cost of \$5.00 and a possible wait time of 30-days, or they may pay the

Fire Services Department a fee in the amount of \$30.00 and obtain the report sooner.

An MFIPPA request is not required for Fire Safety reports according to a ruling by the Privacy Commissioner and in the opinion of Peterborough's City Solicitor.

The Fire Services Department charges the \$30.00 fee on the basis that it is required to do so by a City of Peterborough By-law. The Legal Centre is currently working to have this by-law

**When an inspection is conducted, the inspector will send a letter to your landlord to notify them about repair and maintenance issues in the unit and to tell them to correct the problems.**

changed. This practice poses a risk for tenants who may not know what fire safety issues are present in their residential units or complexes. The requirement by Fire Services for a \$30.00 fee is prejudicial to tenants because the tenant is forced to pay for a report that has resulted from the landlord's fire safety violations. The fee requirement also bars some tenants from obtaining reports simply because they cannot afford to do so.

# Door to Door Sales - Your Rights

“You have to be extremely careful when you are dealing with salespeople at your door,” said Melinda Rees, Executive Director at the Peterborough Community Legal Centre. “Sometimes people feel pressured to sign up for products or services that they do not want because the salesperson pressures or intimidates them.”

The Ontario Consumer Protection Act give people some important protections when they buy at the door. Here are a few things you should know about door to door sales:

- You can cancel any contract you sign at your home within 10 days of signing it.
- If you buy a product or service that costs more than \$50, there must be a written contract.
- A contract must list:
  - o the name and address of the buyer
  - o the name and address of the seller
  - o a clear description of the product or service
  - o delivery date
  - o any delivery charges
  - o the date that the services is to occur and be completed;
  - o any other important details.
- If the contract does not have this information, you

can cancel the contract within one year of signing it, and the company must provide a full refund.

- If you cancel a contract in which you asked the company to provide the product or service within 10 days, they can deduct reasonable compensation from the refund.
- The final price cannot be more than 10% over the estimate listed in the contract unless you agree to it.
- A company should not lie to you or try to force you to sign a contract.
- If you want to cancel a contract, do it in writing and keep a copy. Do it in a way that you have proof of delivery (send it by fax and keep the transmittal confirmation, send it by

registered mail, etc.)

There are special rules for door to door energy contracts. For more information about hydro and gas contracts, see our September 2007 newsletter or contact the Legal Centre.

## Does it help to make a complaint?

Yes! If you feel you have been the victim of an unfair business practices, you should make a complaint. The company might be forced to give you a full refund, and they might have to pay a fine. In really extreme situations, they might face jail time.

For advice about how to cancel a contract or make a complaint, contact the Legal Centre at 749-9355.

## Tips for Dealing with Salespeople at Your Door

- Do not let a stranger into your home.
- Do not rush. Take some time to think about it before you agree to buy a product or service.
- Be very careful about giving out your bank account, credit card or other information.
- Do not provide personal information, including utility bills.
- Do not sign a contract at your door. Take it, read it over and make sure that you understand it. Get advice before signing a contract.
- Protect yourself! Ask the person to leave if you feel pressured or uncertain. It is okay to close your door on someone if you feel uncomfortable. If the person refuses to leave, call the police.

*The information in this article was summarized from the Ontario Ministry of Government Services website at <http://www.gov.on.ca/MGS/en/ConsProt/>*

# Open letter to the Minister of Energy

## **Re: Directive to Ontario Energy Board to Establish a Rate Affordability Program**

I am writing on behalf of the Peterborough Community Legal Centre (PCLC) to draw your attention to the recent decision of the Divisional Court in *ACTO et al and Ontario Energy Board*<sup>1</sup> and to request that you direct the Ontario Energy Board (OEB) to design and implement a utility rate affordability program to minimize the effects of rising energy costs on low-income Ontarians.

The PCLC is a community legal clinic funded by Legal Aid Ontario to provide poverty law services to low income residents of Peterborough City and County. As part of our practice, we provide a tenant duty counsel program at the Landlord Tenant Board (LTB). Most of the applications before the Board are requests for eviction due to rent arrears. When we speak to tenants at the LTB, we invariably find that they are in arrears because they have insufficient income to pay both their rent and utility bill.

Most of the affordable rental housing in Peterborough is electrically heated, resulting in an unsustainably high energy cost for low income households. This problem is compounded by the fact that these rental units tend to be poorly insulated, drafty and equipped with old and inefficient appliances. The amount of money required to pay the utility bill reduces the funds available for rent, food, clothing and other basic necessities. Tenants tell us that they have to choose between eating, heating and paying the rent. The disproportionate burden of energy cost to household income experienced by low income people is referred to as “energy poverty”.

There are a number of energy bill assistance programs available to low income people in Peterborough and across the province. These programs, which include the Peterborough Utility Services FUSE program (jointly administered with the Peterborough Housing Resource Centre) are very helpful but tend to be seasonal, can usually only be accessed once per eligible household per season and are insufficiently funded to meet the overwhelming demand. Eligibility for these programs is generally restricted to households facing disconnection. This means that in addition to the arrears, there are also expensive reconnection charges which have to be addressed before power is restored. Helpful as they are, these programs represent an ad hoc response to individual households facing imminent crisis and as such, are not an efficient or cost effective way to address a systemic problem that repeats itself over and over again.

Conservation is often touted as the best solution to rising energy costs. Obviously, conservation measures are part of a long term solution to address energy poverty. However, low income households cannot afford the cost of replacing inefficient energy and water consuming appliances. Further, tenants cannot address building envelope improvements such as upgraded heating systems, windows and insulation which are often needed to reduce the overall energy use of an individual rental unit. There are some programs in place to address the cost of conservation – but most of these programs are applicable to social housing complexes. There is a five to ten year wait for social housing in Peterborough. Consequently, most of our clients are not able to benefit from these programs as they are currently structured.

As low income households are the hardest hit during periods of rising energy costs, a province wide energy assistance plan must be a key component of any effective anti-poverty strategy. A

number of models have already been developed. For example, the Affordable Housing Action Committee (an advisory committee to the City of Peterborough) developed an energy assistance plan for low income households in 2004 as part of an initiative to address housing insecurity in Peterborough.<sup>2</sup> The main components of this plan include consumer protection, crisis prevention, transition assistance and emergency assistance measures. The Low Income Energy Network (LIEN) has also proposed a ratepayer funded Ontario Home Energy Affordability Program to the Ontario Energy Board which advocates that low-income energy consumers should not pay more than 6% of their total household income on energy.<sup>3</sup>

The central component of both plans is a rate affordability assistance program. A province wide rate affordability program would reduce the energy poverty of many low income households and would free up household income for other basic necessities. It would substantially reduce a major cause of housing insecurity. It would reduce the number of households requiring expensive crisis intervention to keep the power on. It would help to rationalize the existing patchwork of energy assistance programs by providing a systemic response to energy poverty. As such, a rate affordability program has to be part of an effective poverty reduction strategy. It is also important to note that rate assistance programs have been shown to be a good business practice for utilities. Such programs pay for themselves by reducing the administrative cost to utilities of managing bad debt.<sup>4</sup>

The OEB has historically taken the position that it does not have the jurisdiction under the *Ontario Energy Board Act* to set rates on anything other than a cost of service basis. Fortunately for low income families, the Divisional Court recently held (see above) that the Board must go beyond the basic cost of service calculation in setting rates to consider what is “just and reasonable” in the context of its statutory obligation to protect “the interests of consumers with respect to prices”. The Court held that “this could mean taking into account income levels in pricing to achieve the delivery of affordable energy to low income consumers on the basis that this meets the objective of protecting “the interests of consumers with respect to prices”.<sup>5</sup>

The Divisional Court decision removes a major road block to the implementation of energy assistance plans such as those noted above. However, although the Court ruled that the OEB has jurisdiction, it stopped short of ruling that the OEB must consider ability to pay in setting rates. This why the Legal Centre joins LIEN, the Advocacy Centre for Tenants of Ontario and the Income Security Advocacy Centre in calling on you, as the Minister of Energy, to direct the OEB to design a rate affordability program to minimize the effects of rising energy costs on low-income households.

Your government has shown a commendable interest in meaningful poverty reduction. I hope therefore that you will give this request serious consideration.

Notes:

1. [2008] O.J. No. 1970
2. See <http://www.peterborough.ca/Assets/Documents/AHAC/EnergyAssistancePlanLowIncomeHousingFinalVersion.pdf>.
3. See “A Ratepayer Funded Home Energy Affordability Program for Low Income Households” prepared for LIEN by Roger Colton, April 2006 <http://www.lowincomeenergy.ca/>
4. Ibid at page 37.
5. *ACTO et al and OEB*, supra, at page 11

# Ontario Government Announces Consultation on Temp Agency Work

Treated like second class workers - not getting public holiday pay or vacation pay, having to pay fees for work, and being denied access to permanent work. These are just some of the conditions facing temp agency workers who earn 40% less on average than permanent workers. On May 21, 2008 Labour Minister Brad Duguid released "A Consultation Paper on Work through Temporary Help Agencies." The government says it is "committed to ensuring that employees working through temporary help agencies are properly protected under the law." The government wants responses on some of the key issues facing temp agency workers, such as:

- Public holiday pay for temp agency workers
- Who is responsible when temp agency workers don't get their pay or other employment rights
- Barriers to permanent employment
- Fees charged to workers by agencies
- Ensuring workers get information about assignments.

The consultation is an opportunity to win significant gains for temp agency workers. For example, making

both the company and the agency responsible for employment standard violations would be a step toward recognizing that temp workers have two employers. This would enable workers to better enforce their rights. Equality between temp agency workers and permanent workers is a critical issue for temp agency workers. Prohibiting fees, eliminating other barriers to employment and ensuring temp workers get public holiday pay like everyone else would bring fairness that is long over due.

## What can you do?

1. Inform yourself.  
Go to the Ministry's website to find out more about the consultation: <http://www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/about/consultation/tempagencies/index.html>  
Check out the Workers Action Centre's brief, which will be available June 6th on their website ([www.workersactioncentre.org](http://www.workersactioncentre.org)) where you can also find the report "Working on the Edge".
2. Make a submission.  
Let the government know how temporary workers in your community need effective labour laws that are enforced.

Send your submission/comments to the Ontario Ministry of Labour by:

- fax (416.314-5855), Attention: Temporary Help Agency Employees Project
  - mail to Temporary Help Agency Employees Project  
400 University Avenue, 12th floor Toronto, Ontario, M7A 1T7
- e-mail  
[tempagencyempl@ontario.ca](mailto:tempagencyempl@ontario.ca)

The deadline for response is **July 7, 2008.**

## Too little too late-minimum wage rises to \$8.75 an hour

The minimum wage increased to \$8.75 per hour on March 31, 2008, which is too little too late for some.

Under current law, the minimum wage will not reach \$10.25 until 2010. New Democrat MPP Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale-High Park) thinks that the working poor should not have to wait. She has introduced a private members' bill to raise the minimum wage to \$10.25 now and \$11 an hour by 2011.

# Enforcing an order against your landlord

If you have a problem with your tenancy or your landlord you may make an application to the Landlord and Tenant Board. The Landlord and Tenant Board staff will schedule a hearing for you. After hearing the case, the Board Member will make a written decision. This decision is called an Order. The order will be mailed to you.

If you are successful at your hearing your landlord will be ordered to do certain things. For example, the Board may order your landlord to pay you compensation. If your landlord refuses to pay you what he has been ordered to

pay to you, you must take steps to enforce the order.

Enforcing your order means making your landlord do what he was ordered to do by the Landlord and Tenant Board (LTB) or Small Claims Court.

There are several ways to enforce an order. For example, you can garnish your landlord's wages, his bank account or possibly the rent he receives from other tenants. You can file a Writ of Seizure and Sale of Property or Land. Writs of Seizure and Sale of Land are registered on title by the Sheriff. If a Writ is registered on title

against your landlord's property he will not be able to re-mortgage the property or sell it until he pays you.

Enforcement of LTB or Small Claims Court orders is done at the Small Claims Court at 70 Simcoe Street, Peterborough. There is a cost for commencing enforcement proceedings that you will have to pay for up front but you may add the cost of enforcement to what the landlord already owes you.

If you need advice or assistance with the enforcement process call the Legal Centre.

# Is your tenancy covered by the *Residential Tenancies Act*? Know your rights.

It is important to know whether your tenancy is covered by the *Residential Tenancies Act (RTA)*.

If your tenancy is covered by the *RTA*, you are entitled to the rights and subject to the responsibilities contained in the *Act*. The Landlord and Tenant Board is the adjudicative body that deals

with tenancies that are subject to the *RTA*.

**Some landlords will attempt to get around the *RTA* by saying that they occasionally use the tenant's bathroom or kitchen.**

There are a number of living arrangements that will exempt you from protection under the *RTA*. One of the most common exemptions occurs when you are **required** to share a kitchen or bathroom with the landlord/owner or her immediate

family.

Some landlords will attempt to get around the *RTA* by saying that they occasionally use the tenant's bathroom or kitchen. This type of situation does not necessarily allow your landlord to avoid his obligations under the *Act*.

If you have any questions about the nature of your tenancy don't hesitate to call the Legal Centre for advice.

# Social housing tenants deserve the same rights as other residential tenants

The Legal Centre calls on the Jim Watson, Minister responsible for Municipal Affairs and Housing, to redress the urgent problem facing social housing tenants.

## **Background:**

The Legal Centre has been providing legal services to social housing tenants in the County of Peterborough since 1989. The combined effect of the Social Housing Reform Act (SHRA) and the Residential Tenancies Act (RTA) is that social housing tenants face significantly different treatment than do other residential tenants in the province. Social housing tenants can be evicted from their homes without an independent or meaningful right to appeal or review.

When a social housing landlord decides to revoke or reduce a rent subsidy, the family renting the unit will likely lose their home. This is because tenants who qualify for rental subsidies are low-income. Many receive reduced shelter allowances from Ontario Works or Ontario Disability because their rent is subsidized. The SHRA provides only for an internal review process, which means that the decision will likely be reviewed

by the staff person who sits at the desk next to the original decision-maker. There is no independent review body. The family will quickly fall behind in their rent and will face eviction at the Landlord and Tenant Board (LTB). However, the role of the Board is strictly constrained by the RTA, which stipulates that the Board cannot look behind the decision to revoke or reduce the subsidy.

The SHRA is the law that governs decisions made by social housing landlords in Ontario. Decisions made under the SHRA should be subject to an appeal to an independent body much like other comparable adverse decisions relating to eligibility for income supports such as Ontario Works and Ontario Disability. Not only are decisions by social housing landlords not subject to independent review, the internal review process is flawed. The Ministry has been consulting with stakeholders, including representatives from legal clinics, regarding changes to the SHRA regulations since 2006. In 2007 the regulations were amended to require social housing landlords to disclose to the tenant the information that led to

the decision. No further progress has been made on the issue of reviews of subsidy decisions.

The RTA is the new law that governs the relationship between residential tenants and landlords, and the Landlord and Tenant Board (LTB) is the adjudicative body that decides these disputes. When the provincial government said that it was going to change the residential tenancy law to provide real protection to tenants, tenant advocates asked that social housing tenants have the same rights under the law as other residential tenants. In other words, advocates said that the LTB should be able to look at a social housing landlord's claim for rent arrears, due to a change in subsidy, and decide whether or not the tenant should have to pay the rent claimed. However the government did exactly the opposite. The RTA stipulates that the LTB does not have jurisdiction to look behind the subsidy decisions.

## **The Problem:**

Social housing tenants have little recourse to challenge a decision to revoke or reduce a rent subsidy. Social housing tenants are treated differ-

ently than other residential tenants.

**Recommendations:**

1. Internal reviews should be heard by a person not connected with the social housing landlord who made the original decision.
2. Internal reviews should be conducted in person, tenants should be entitled to have representation at the hearing, and the internal review decision-maker should provide detailed written reasons for their decision.
3. A “housing first” principle should be enshrined in the internal review decision-making process. The internal review decision-maker should have discretion to make whatever decision is just and reasonable in the

circumstances in order to preserve the tenancy where it would not be unfair to do so, having regard to all the circumstances.

4. The SHRA or the RTA must be changed to ensure that an independent body, such as the Social Benefits Tribunal or the Landlord and Tenant Board, reviews the subsidy decision. Therefore, where the original decision is confirmed on internal review, the tenant should be able to:

- (a) appeal to an independent body, such as the Social Benefits Tribunal,
- OR
- (b) go before the Landlord and Tenant Board for a full determination of the eviction hearing, including a review of the subsidy decision.

## Federal and Provincial Ministers announce program aimed at homelessness in Ontario

On April 2, 2008 Monte Solberg, Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, and Madeleine Meilleur, Minister of Community and Social Services for Ontario, announced a federal-provincial Memorandum of Understanding on homelessness. Interestingly, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing is not a party to the agreement. The Memorandum of Understanding on homelessness creates a framework for the governments of Canada and Ontario to collaborate on research and data collection, as well as to explore options for horizontal pilot projects to help Ontario communities better understand and combat homelessness. The joint press release states that information sharing between the federal and provincial governments “will result in a more efficient use of public funds to help those who are in need”.

## Colour of Poverty Campaign

The Colour of Poverty campaign was initiated to raise awareness about the high levels of poverty in immigrant and racialized communities throughout Ontario.

The campaign has developed a series of ten fact sheets outlining the systemic ways in which racialized communities are forced to live in poverty as result of limited access to services such as health care and education, difficulties in obtaining employment, and problems with police and access to justice. There is also a short video in which members of racialized communities speak out about their personal struggles. To access the fact sheets visit [www.colourofpoverty.ca](http://www.colourofpoverty.ca).

On, April 8, 2008, there were two meetings in Peterborough for area residents and agencies to provide input into the goals of the campaign and identify issues related to racialization and poverty in Peterborough. The Campaign also hosted a “Countdown to a Poverty Reduction Plan” Conference in Toronto on April 14, 2008.

# Ontario Child Benefit - Fast Facts

Starting in July 2008, low-income families with dependant children for whom they receive the child tax benefit will receive the Ontario Child Benefit.

The Ontario Child Benefit will be added to the child tax benefits that you already receive on the 20<sup>th</sup> of each month.

If you are receiving Ontario Works or ODSP, there will be changes to your assistance:

- Starting July 31/August 1, you will not receive the basic needs allowance for the children in your benefit unit (the amount you receive for shelter will not change);
- You will no longer receive the Back to School Allowance or the Winter Clothing Allowance for your children from Ontario Works or

ODSP.

For most families, this should result in a very slight increase in income. If your total income is less as a result of your changes, talk to your worker. If the problem is not resolved, contact the Legal Centre for help.

In order to receive the Ontario Child Benefit, you must have filed your taxes for 2007. If you have not filed your taxes, you should do so right away.

It is not clear how these changes will affect families with joint custody agreements. If you have joint custody of your child/children, talk to your worker or call the Legal Centre.

## **Transition Child Benefit**

If you do not get the Ontario Child Benefit starting in

July, you may be eligible for the Transition Child Benefit from Ontario Works/ODSP. You will have to prove that you are trying to get the Ontario Child Benefit. If you receive the Ontario Child Benefit retroactively, you will have to repay any Transition Child Benefits that you received.

Many of the rules explaining how the new benefit will work have not been published yet.

If you are not getting the full amount of the Ontario Child Benefit, you may also be eligible for the Transition Child Benefit. Ask your worker for more information.

If you have questions about any changes to your assistance, contact the Legal Centre at 749-9355.

## Will more affordable housing flow from the provincial government's Poverty Reduction Strategy?

Not likely.

On March 28, 2008 staff from the Legal Centre, together with colleagues from clinics across the eastern region of Ontario, met with Jim Watson, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. He indicated that he plans to start an affordable housing strategy consultation this fall across the province. The consultation will be with all stakeholders, within the context of the Province's Poverty Reduction Strategy document.

However Minister Watson suggested that additional provincial funds were unlikely to flow given the state of the economy and given that more federal funding for affordable housing is not in sight.