

Experience Hunger



N.B. Common Front for Social Justice, Inc.
www.frontnb.ca

Background

The N.B. Common Front for Social Justice Inc. (CFSJ), created in 1997, is an incorporated non-profit organization regrouping 24 organizations associated with social, labour and religious groups, as well as close to 300 individual members. Its mission is to work for more justice, better social policies and greater solidarity within society, especially with those living in poverty.

The number of New Brunswickers relying on social assistance is on the rise¹. Since the 2008 economic crisis, there has been an increase of 2,100 citizens having to rely on social assistance to live. On April 1st 2011, there were 25,000 households, representing 41,197 individuals that depended on social assistance. N.B.'s social assistance rates are appallingly low. The majority of the recipients (76%) fall into the "Transitional Assistance Program". These, if they are single, only get \$537 per month. This barely brings them up to 40% of the poverty line. Many are out of food for a good part of the month so they go to food banks or eat at soup kitchens.

Why are social assistance rates kept so low? One important reason is that many Canadians, including New Brunswickers, have misconceptions about social assistance recipients. A recent report based a sample of 1,025 Canadians² states that about 50% of the population feel that a family of four could get by on \$10,000 - \$30,000 per year or less. Approximately half of all Canadians feel that if poor people really wanted to work, they can always find a job. Nearly 40% believe that people who live in poverty "still have it pretty good". About one in four feels that people are poor because they are lazy and have lower moral values. With such prevalent prejudices, it is no wonder that the public is not prepared to support the decisions of governments to raise social assistance rates.

In 2010, the CFSJ conducted a New Brunswick (N.B.) food cost survey based on Health Canada's methodology³. Analysis of the data showed that for a family of four, the monthly food cost was close to \$800. For a single mom with a child, it was approximately \$400 and for a single individual, it was over \$260. Evidence-based data is therefore available to show that social assistance rates are much too low to allow these people to eat properly. But myths and prejudices regarding social welfare recipients retard all improvements in social assistance rates. Such a political decision is bad for the economy of N.B. since the cost of poverty was estimated at 189 million dollars in 2008⁴.

¹ Murat, P. May 13, 2011. Le nombre d'assistés sociaux est en hausse. Acadie Nouvelle, p. 6.

² The Salvation Army. 2011. The Dignity Project; debunking myths about poverty in Canada.

³ [www.frontnb.ca. Documents](http://www.frontnb.ca/Documents) 2010. Impact of food price increases on low-income New Brunswickers.

⁴ Saulnier, C., Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, N.S. Office. 2010. Fast Facts: Cost of poverty in N.B.