

Experience Hunger



1. Background

The number of people in N.B. who depend on social assistance continues to rise. Since the 2008 economic crisis, 2,000 more people have required social assistance. In June 2011, 25,091 households representing more than 41,007 individuals were dependent on it. Sixty-three percent were single individuals, while 24% were part of one-parent families. It must be brought to notice that in New Brunswick, social assistance rates are among the lowest in all Canadian provinces.

According to a recent Canada-wide survey, prejudice against social assistance recipients is still quite prevalent. Approximately half the population believes that a family of four can meet its needs with a yearly income in the range of \$10,000 to \$30,000 a year. Nearly half the population believes that if poor people wanted to work, they could always find a job.

The Common Front for Social Justice (CFSJ) considers that reducing prejudice is imperative so that decision-makers may be persuaded of the importance of fighting against poverty, and has initiated the project to that end.

2. Project Aims and Objectives

The Common Front for Social Justice is fighting against the prejudice that it's possible to survive with the social assistance rates currently in effect. We have developed the project called "*Experience Hunger*" as a way to help put a stop to myths surrounding social assistance recipients.

The project has **three objectives**:

- a. To increase public empathy towards people struggling to survive on social assistance;
- b. To make the people of N.B. grasp the concept that charity is no longer sufficient and that reducing poverty requires a political solution, a government decision to increase social assistance rates, and
- c. To create enough public support to persuade our Members of the Legislative Assembly to:
 - 1) institute a food solidarity program that will provide \$50 to each household receiving social assistance, and
 - 2) increase social assistance rates to reach the average level in the other three Atlantic Provinces.

3. A two-part project

Fighting against myths by becoming dependant on a food bank for three days.

In Hopes of reducing the prejudices associated with those living in poverty, fifteen local personalities (list included), either individually or with their family, will agree to live for three days on the contents of food bags provided by a food bank. They will share their thoughts on the experience with their friends, their co-workers and the CFSJ. Their comments will be posted on our website at www.frontnb.ca. They will also speak about their experience and review our two demands with their MLAs.

We are very pleased to have their collaboration. It shows a clear commitment of solidarity with thousands of citizens who are living in hunger day in and day out.

We thank them for it

Organizing a Provincial Forum to take place next September

In order to further promote public awareness, the Common Front has scheduled a Provincial Forum on September 28, 2011, ***Poverty, Hunger and Poor Health – Let's put a stop to it!***

The one-day forum will take place in Moncton. Our goal is to show how poverty generates hunger, which in turn leads to poor health. More than forty thousand individuals and families in our midst are living under these conditions. This weighs heavily on our society in terms of health care costs and other social spending.

The Program is divided in two important parts: the first is conversations based on the question of hunger and a second one of formal presentations.

The first conversation, chaired by Dave MacDonald, CBC journalist, will be between four of the participants who committed themselves to the *"Experience Hunger"* project. They will exchange on their experiences and give their comments.

The second conversation, chaired by Martine Blanchard, journalist at Radio-Canada, will be between four citizens who are presently or have been living with hunger.

For the second part of the Program, Christine Saulnier, Director of the Canadian Center for Policy Alternatives-Nova Scotia, will address the social costs of poverty while Sister Auréa Cormier, a nutritionist specialist will show the links between hunger and health.

Finally, participants will discuss the best ways to make concrete and lasting changes to combat poverty.

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The Common Front for Social Justice is one of the largest democratic and popular organizations in New Brunswick, with close to 75,000 group and individual members. The Common Front brings together individuals as well as local, regional and provincial organizations to work towards the eradication of poverty.