

# Fighting Poverty

## Social Assistance – Basic Rates

### Situation

In September 2008, just before the implementation of the Poverty Reduction Plan, there were 38 986 citizens who depended on social assistance to survive. In September 2013, five years later, the province has 39 202 citizens who depend on social assistance to survive, an increase of 216 persons and this even if we had, for the last three years, a Poverty Reduction Plan in place.<sup>1</sup>

### Basic rates

It is a well-known fact that New Brunswick is the province least helpful to its citizens that experience poverty and must depend on social assistance. The province has not increased most of its basic rates of assistance since 2008, except for eliminating one category of recipients in 2010, the single employable, increasing their basic benefits from \$3,528 to \$6,444 per year. Currently, two increases are planned: a 4% increase in October 2013 and another 3% in April 2014.<sup>2</sup> However it is important to specify that these increases will not apply to single employable recipients. In fact, the province is restoring the single employable person category it had eliminated in 2010.

According to the report by the National Council of Welfare, Welfare Incomes in 2009, the Council's last complete report before it was abolished by Steven Harper's Federal Government in 2012, basic rates in New Brunswick were among the lowest of the majority of Canadian provinces. The numbers have undoubtedly changed since then, but when considering the gaps between categories and provinces, the big picture painted then still remains valid, in our estimation.

Comparing with the other Atlantic Provinces, it can be seen that assistance in our province is the lowest for the four categories identified by the National Council for Welfare. New Brunswick's basic assistance rate is the lowest (except for Nova Scotia for a lone parent with one child) among the four provinces.

## Welfare Incomes in 2009 - Basic Social Assistance <sup>3</sup>

	N. & L.	P.E.I.	N.S.	N.B.
<b>Single employable person</b>	\$8,085	\$6,661	\$6,114	\$3,538 *
<b>Person with disability</b>	\$8,085	\$8,812	\$8,934	\$7,416
<b>Lone parent with one child</b>	\$12,474	\$11,339	\$9,354	\$9,708
<b>Couple with two children</b>	\$12,999	\$16,436	\$12,468	\$10,896

\*The N.B. government raised this amount in 2010.

From these observations, it is clear that changes must be made in the income of thousands of citizens who depend on social assistance, to allow them to live in dignity.

While the province implemented a Poverty Reduction Plan in 2010, this made no difference in the incomes of social assistance beneficiaries. We are aware there will be two increases in the province's basic rates: a 4% raise in October 2013 and another 3% raise in April 2014, but we must absolutely do better if these citizens' basic needs are to be met.

### The CFSJ proposes that:

- the increases planned for October 2013 and April 2014 also apply to single persons with no employment barrier, and
- the basic rates be gradually increased to reach an income level that allows a person on social assistance to live in dignity.

*Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings.*

Nelson Mandela

**New Brunswick Common Front for Social Justice – [www.frontnb.ca](http://www.frontnb.ca)**



1 Information received, September 5, 2013, from the Department of Social Development.

2 [http://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/social\\_development/promos/social\\_assistancereform.html](http://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/social_development/promos/social_assistancereform.html)

3 National Council of Welfare Reports, Welfare Incomes, Winter 2012, Vol. 129