

PROGRAM ON THE BASIC INCOME GUARANTEE / AKA THE BIG PUSH

The following article appeared in *90/be|weekly* and was one of three media reports of a public meeting on “**The Basic Income Guarantee**” held jointly by the St. Catharines & District Council of Women and the Niagara Poverty Reduction Network. Over 85 people attended, including politicians, academics, public health nurses, students, front-line agencies, community groups and the general public. It was published ahead of the meeting, but captures the spirit and content of the evening.

Gracia Janes Social Justice Convenor St. Catharines & District Council of Women



The following article is by David DeRocco and can be found in *90/be|weekly*. Click on this link: [Basic Income Guarantee: Can It End Poverty In Niagara](#)

Is ending poverty in Niagara as simple as guaranteeing everyone a basic income? That’s the concept that was presented on Wednesday, January 13th at a public forum being held in St. Catharines, Ontario.

All the glitz and glamour of its shiny casino industry, its rolling vineyards and its international reputation as a tourism destination can’t hide the hidden truth about Niagara: the region is suffering from the ill effects of a fragile Canadian economy and a significant loss of its manufacturing industry. With unemployment rates hovering around eight percent and the percentage of people on welfare climbing, poverty in the region is becoming a serious social issue. The St. Catharines and District Council of Women and the Niagara Poverty Reduction Network believe that ending poverty is within our means, and a basic income guarantee is part of the answer.

To explain what a “basic income guarantee” would mean to the region, the anti-poverty organizers behind the event invited interested Niagara residents to attend a free public forum featuring Dr. Lisa Simon, Associate Medical Officer of Health for the Muskoka Simcoe Public Health Unit. Dr. Simon agreed that in a country as rich as Canada, many people don’t fully understand what poverty is.

“There are many definitions of poverty, but a nice one is from Quebec’s Bill 111,” she explained. “It defines poverty as ‘the condition of a human being who is deprived of the resources, means, choices and power necessary to acquire and maintain economic self-sufficiency and participation in society.’”

At the forum, Dr. Simon discussed the concept of a “basic income guarantee,” a program that achieved good results when initially piloted in Dauphin and Winnipeg back in the ‘70s. What differentiates the concept from other social assistance programs for low income and unemployed people is the fact it’s distributed unconditionally.

“Basic income involves a regular, reliable, distribution of money from government to people to help ensure total income sufficient to meet common basic needs,” said Dr. Simon. “It can be distributed on a universal basis, or using the income tax system on an income-tested basis. It is different from other social assistance programs because it is unconditional. One doesn’t have to be looking for work; the only criteria is income level. It likely presents less of a barrier for returning to the workforce, and most proposals are more generous than current social assistance rates. It really treats a basic income level as a right, along with the rights of health

care and education, for example. Because of all these factors, it has also been shown to be less stigmatizing than social assistance, which is very important.”

The forum was hosted in part to help drive awareness of the correlation between poverty and health, a growing concern in Niagara according to event organizers who recognize how massive job losses have affected the region.

“I know that since 2008 or even earlier we have lost a lot of jobs, as companies such as Atlas Steel have gone out of business and GM downsized drastically, going from over 13,000 workers in 1979 to about 2,500 at most now,” said Gracia Janes, Convenor of Social Justice St. Catharines & District Council of Women. *“Our number of welfare cases has escalated by over 42%, and the numbers of people visiting food banks has risen dramatically.”*

Janes said that people living below the poverty line struggle to get proper nutrition despite the availability of food banks and their best efforts to distribute healthy foods.

“There is the idea out there that people can just go each week to a food bank or two,” she said. “However, they can only go to one food bank once a month except in emergencies. Despite considerable efforts to improve the donated food’s nutritional value at the food banks, healthy food is still mainly an unaffordable luxury for many. This is definitely not healthy for a person with a pre-existing health issue, such as diabetes.”

Organizers of the event say momentum for a basic guaranteed income is growing and could become an effective tool in the preventing poverty. As for who she would like to see attending, Dr. Simon says the night is really a public information session for anyone who would like to see poverty in Canada eradicated through more effective distribution of dollars.

“Really anyone interested in learning more about the connection between poverty and health, the potential role for a basic income, and local advocacy opportunities on this issue,” she said. To learn more about a basic income guarantee, join the St. Catharines and District Council of Women and the Niagara Poverty Reduction Network on Wednesday January 13, 2016 at 7:30pm at the St. Catharines Centennial Library, 54 Church St., for an informative presentation.

PS: On February 5th, 2016, the following announcement was made by the Chair of the Niagara Poverty Reduction Network, which was the co-sponsor of our St. Catharines & District Council of Women event.

David DeRocco, ⁹⁰/be|weekly, Niagara Entertainment Listings

FLASH ! Robert Rainer Basic Income Advocate, Perth Ontario February 25th 2016

Breaking news from Ontario today: the Ontario government has made a budget commitment to undertake a basic income pilot project. This represents a breakthrough for the cause of basic income in Canada - formal, explicit recognition by a senior government (in this case the government of Ontario) that basic income has merit and ought to be thoroughly explored. The commitment comes following many expressions of support from within Ontario for basic income, perhaps most notably from within the health sector (and kudos to those health professionals who have led on this). See what [Robert Rainier’s article](#) and [other experts](#) say. The specific budget text focusing on basic income is as follows:

"In the *2015 Budget*, Ontario introduced a consultation on social assistance rate restructuring. Through ongoing discussions, there emerged a clear consensus on the need to move policy considerations beyond social assistance rates to include aspects of the broader income security system.



"As a result, this year, the government will continue to engage with delivery partners, clients and sector advocates to chart the path to comprehensive reform that effectively reduces poverty, supports people in their efforts to participate in the economy, and provides human services in a way that makes sense to the people who need them. This process will look across government and at the broader income security landscape to ensure that various existing and future programs work together to help Ontarians. The government will also engage with First Nation, Inuit and Metis communities to ensure that the path forward recognizes unique challenges on and off-reserve and helps all Ontarians live a better life.

One area of research that will inform the path to comprehensive reform will be the evaluation of a Basic Income pilot. The pilot project will test a growing view at home and abroad that a basic income could build on the success of minimum wage policies and increases in child benefits by providing more consistent and predictable support in the context of today's dynamic labour market. The pilot would also test whether a basic income would provide a more efficient way of delivering income support, strengthen the attachment to the labour force, and achieve savings in other areas, such as health care and housing supports. The government will work with communities, researchers and other stakeholders in 2016 to determine how best to design and implement a Basic Income pilot."

Gracia Janes, Social Justice Convenor, St. Catharines & District Council of Women