

Group discusses life beneath the poverty line in North Hastings



By Nate Smelle

Members of the North Hastings Community Trust (NHCT) got together with both old friends and new at the Woodview Lane Community Centre on Saturday, May 30 to share stories of their struggles with poverty over a bowl of soup at the group's first free Stone Soup lunch. After finishing a bowl of wild leek and potato soup, the NHCT's chairman of the board Brad Culver told Bancroft This Week he was very excited to see so many people show up to enjoy a good meal and conversation together.

"It's always a good thing when people get together to talk over food," he said.

"You can feel the energy in the room here today. We are here to start building a better, more connected community and that's what we are doing. There are conversations happening around the tables, so people are sharing stuff that way too."

Looking around the room, everyone in attendance was engaged in conversation. There were a variety of five homemade soups prepared by NHCT board members and volunteers available at the party. The community has been very supportive of the new initiative with the Sirch Thrift Warehouse donating all of the dishes and Kawartha Dairy contributing the milk and butter.

Once most of the group had finished eating, NHCT program coordinator Jane Kali led them through an exercise to help define some common social and financial difficulties that people living in poverty face in North Hastings.

"Poverty affects everything," said Culver.

"If you start talking about food or you start talking about transportation it doesn't matter, as it touches it all."

Planning to make the free Stone Soup lunch a monthly event the NHCT hopes to build on each event, collecting stories from those who choose to participate. The idea is that if people on Ontario Works or disability, pensioners, people with low wage jobs share their stories they may assist others in breaking free from the cycle of poverty so many low income families become caught up in.

As a spiritual person and a Pastor, Culver is compelled by his faith to help others in need.

"My faith is important to me, but my faith is about more than belief it's about practice," said Culver.

"This is an important part of practice... putting feet to what I believe. Poverty to me is a justice issue. It causes a lot of despair which affects the spirit."

Transportation and healthcare costs like dental or eye appointments that are not covered by OHIP were identified as some of the main household costs putting pressure on low-income families.

"They have to pay out-of-pocket to go down to Peterborough or someplace to get treatment," he said.

"We have the TROUT but you still have to pay for that. It's not subsidized for the person who is taking it to get to an appointment out of town. I have friends who have an elderly mother who needs to travel down to the city once a month for medical care and she is paying out of her own pocket. So what does that do to the total of her fixed income??"