

Province announces assistance increases

By Sarah Sobanski

The province is increasing social assistance funding and minimum wage for Ontarians.

Rates for Ontario Works, the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), minimum wage, and funding through the Assistance for Children with Severe Disabilities program, will increase over the fall season.

The new rates will see an additional \$25 for single adults receiving Ontario Works per month, and an additional increase of 1.5 per cent for families in October. Parents who receive income through the Assistance for Children with Severe Disabilities program will also see a 1.5 per cent increase. Those receiving ODSP saw a 1.5 per cent increase in September.

North Hastings Community Trust program co-ordinator Jane Kali argued the funding increases still fall short.

"This is not enough of an increase? not near what people need to live," said Kali. "We have not recovered from the Mike Harris cuts."

As of Oct. 1, minimum wage increased from \$11.25 to \$11.40. On an average workweek that works out to an extra \$6 a week or \$312 a year not including holiday variances. Increases are determined by 2014 legislation that links minimum wage to Ontario's Consumer Price Index.

More than 900,000 Ontarians are supported by social assistance. This is the third year in a row that minimum wage has increased, the 10th increase since 2003. As for Ontario Works, rates have increased 12 out of the last 13 years.

Since 2003, social assistance rates have increased by 20 per cent or more for both single individual and families supported by Ontario Works, and for single individuals supported by ODSP.

The province suggested conversations with its Income Security Reform Working Group led to the social assistance increases. The group was introduced late last June to consult on reducing province-wide poverty. According to the province, the group is working to create a roadmap for an income security system based on fairness, adequacy and simplicity.