

SIRCH named first certified 'Living wage employer' in Bancroft area

By Nate Smelle

According to Meriam-Webster Dictionary, a 'living wage' is defined as: 'a subsistence wage; a wage sufficient to provide the necessities and comforts essential to an acceptable standard of living. With the COVID-19 pandemic exposing how financially insecure many people and families are in Ontario, some employers are stepping up to make sure their workers are at least earning a 'living wage.' While the concept of a living wage was first noted in the works of Greek philosophers Plato and his student Aristotle, more and more people every day are starting to question whether the compensation they receive from their employer for their time and energy are fair in terms of the rising cost of living. Having proactively responded to this broadening societal awareness, SIRCH Community Services recently became the first certified living wage employer in Bancroft and Haliburton. 'There are now over 550 certified living wage employers in the province,' said the Ontario Living Wage Network's communications coordinator Craig Pickthorne. 'Adding new employers in communities like Bancroft and Haliburton is important because we know issues of affordability and inflation deeply affect smaller communities. That's why it's so important that anchor employers like SIRCH Community Services lead by example and pay at least a living wage.' In order to be granted this honour by the Ontario Living Wage Network, a certified employer in the Bancroft and Haliburton areas must pay all full-time, part-time, contract, and seasonal workers at least \$19.05 per hour. Servicing both communities and the connecting area, SIRCH conducts dozens of programs focused on workplace training, resources, and social enterprises that create resilience, and building confidence, and connections. They also operate two retail stores and a non-profit bistro. 'While staff in retail and food services are traditionally paid low wages, we felt that philosophically we could not tackle poverty and food insecurity unless we are truly walking the walk by ensuring our employees are not making less than the living wage for this area,' says SIRCH's executive director Gena Robertson. OLWN calculates a living wage to show how much a worker must earn per hour in order 'to make ends meet and enjoy modest participation in civic and cultural community.' Factoring in 'real local expenses' such as shelter costs, childcare, transportation, and food, the network's calculations also take into consideration any applicable government taxes, transfers, and benefits. Acknowledging that families who work for low wages often face impossible choices such as whether to buy food, heat the house, feed the children or pay the rent, Robertson highlighted how paying a living wage allows individuals and families to cover household essentials as well as occasional emergencies or unexpected expenses. 'From a business perspective, paying a living wage can reduce employee turnover, absenteeism, and retraining costs,' added Robertson. 'It can also improve performance and productivity, and lower staff turnover rates.' Although it might be a challenge for employers to pay more for labour, Robertson said paying a living wage will help a businesses employees 'remain in the county, remain in your employ, and feed their families. It's one of the best local economic development strategies we can employ.' For more information, including calculation documentation, coverage map, and certified employer directory: ontariolivingwage.ca.