

# Making Kenora HOME

COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS  
FOR HOMELESSNESS

## HOMELESS IN KENORA

### Volume VII

### Working and Still Poor

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Northwestern  
Health Unit

[www.nwhu.on.ca](http://www.nwhu.on.ca)

*Week of Action February 9-15, 2014*

# HOMELESS IN KENORA: Working And Still Poor



Vol. VII

*Real Stories From Those Working On The  
Economic Edges Of Our Community*

Making Kenora HOME  
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The stories contained within this volume have been shared by citizens who are economically marginalized and have struggled to secure affordable, adequate and appropriate housing. The dream of upward mobility through work remains beyond of the grasp of those who are working low paying or part-time jobs. We appreciate the honesty and generosity with which they have opened their lives to us.

*The Editor*

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minded that if I was a single parent, I wouldn't have to keep cycling through the system. It seems that our society doesn't support marriage very well.

We end up relying on the small benefits that trickle into our hands like the child tax benefits. It shouldn't be this hard.

In Dauphin, Manitoba they did an experiment where every citizen was given a guaranteed minimum income. It was amazing. Because people had less fear there was less stress. The whole community benefitted in many different ways. Why can't we do that across our country? We know it works. We know social assistance doesn't work. Let's do what works.

### Shelter in Kenora

- **28.6% of the city's population are residential tenants**
- **43.5% of these tenants are spending more than 30% of their income on shelter**
- **7.5% of tenant households are not suitably sheltered according to the National Occupancy Standards**
- **11.3% of rental units are in need of major repair**
- **71.4% of the city's homes are owned and 11.9% of these homes need major repairs**
- **11.7% of homeowners spend more than 30% of their income on shelter**



**Statistics Canada  
National Housing Survey 2011**

## Working And Still Poor

### Kenora's Disparity

- **11.5% of Kenora's population are living below poverty line**
- **25.7% of children under the age of 6 in Kenora are living below poverty line (40% higher than Ontario's rate)**
- **43.5% have incomes less than \$27,814**
- **19% have incomes less than \$12,025**

**Statistics Canada  
National Housing Survey 2011**

*Jennifer*

I wanted to get off welfare so badly, I dreamt about it. Getting a job meant I could make a living and more importantly I could make a future for myself and my son. It's what kept me going through all the embarrassment of the welfare trap.



I finally got a job. It was so exciting. My son was just as excited. Everything lay

ahead of me. That was seven years ago. It hasn't turned out as we hoped.



I make \$11.25 an hour. That's more than minimum wage but I never get full time hours. I average 20 hours weekly-more in the summer and around holidays, less in the winter months. That means I gross about \$225.00 a week. After deductions, I take

home about \$190.00. That means my monthly income for myself and my disabled son is \$760.00.

Because I am no longer on welfare, my rent subsidy changed. There is a base amount for those on social assistance. When you work, they calculate the amount based on your gross wage. I know that I am lucky to have affordable housing but it still is very hard. My gas bill reaches about \$200.00 a month in the winter.



Then there's groceries. I am pretty thrifty and keep food costs to \$450.00. That's not bad for two people. To go to work, when I can catch a bus it costs me \$4.00 for a shift. Walking is not an option. A taxi when there are no buses available is \$13.00 one way. That comes out of my food budget. I have no telephone.



Going back on welfare is not an acceptable option for me but sometimes I wonder if my pride is hurting my son. I

dreamed of working but it was not what I thought it could be. I wish I

## Suzanne



NWHU just put out the healthy food basket information. We are a family of four and it does take a thousand a month to feed us. People look at us and think we should have more than we have. It's as if we have somehow squandered our income. I can tell you that there is no waste in our household. Every time the health unit puts out the basket cost, I hope that people are actually listening. They need to know that it is not that something is wrong with us, there is something wrong with our society.

You can't live on just one income anymore. My husband has a good skill but his employment is seasonal. When he works, the money is good but the taxes are insane. When he doesn't work, it's worse. Because they have increased how many EI hours are required, he doesn't qualify for benefits when he is out of work. He feels inadequate as a provider and this creates tension in the family.



I have a disability. I cannot contribute to the household income. If I didn't have a husband with an income, I would be eligible for ODSP. When he doesn't work, I could be eligible for rapid reinstatement but the process to prove that he can't bring home an income is a pile of paperwork. There is always something missing when you complete the forms and by the time you meet their criteria, you don't need the money anymore. I keep getting re-

## Vulnerable Workers and Precarious Work

“The nature of employment is evolving and the standard employment relationship based on full-time, continuous employment, where the worker has access to good wages and benefits, is no longer the predominant form of employment, to the extent it ever was. Today more work is precarious, with less job security, few if any benefits and minimal control over working conditions. Precarious work may be contract, part-time, self-employment or temporary work.... Precarious work has an impact on areas of vulnerable workers’ lives other than employment itself. This work leads to a greater risk of injury and illness, stress and challenges to accessing entitlements to health care. It may affect family relationships and degree of community engagement.”

**Final Report**

**December 2012**

**Law Commission of Ontario**



could find a way out of this maze.

With no money I can't relocate to an area with more employment and better public transit. I now understand how hard my mother worked to keep us together when I was young. She gave me a good example and I try to live by her example.

## Kenora's Jobscape

- 10.9% are unemployed
- 58% are employed
- 51.3% of the employed are only working part time or seasonally
- 24% of the employed are working in retail, restaurants and accommodation industries which are amongst the lowest paying industries
- 16% is the deficit between a minimum wage earner's income and the poverty line as of July 2014
- 39% higher average wage paid to males than females
- 0.5% of the employed use public transportation to get to work compared to 14% provincially
- 32% is the gap in the median income between an aboriginal and non-aboriginal person



**Statistics Canada**

**National Housing Survey 2013**

## John & Mary

My husband and I are hardworking people. We've always taken whatever work we can find. The wages are low and the hours are never enough. We have two



sons who are in school. Low income is

hard enough. I could tell you about juggling the costs of our rent, hydro, food, clothing and transportation but

that's common enough. What people don't realize is what the cost of public education is to families.

It's not just about keeping them clothed and clean and presentable. Kids get teased over every thing. They know the difference between Walmart knock offs and the styling brands. This is hard enough for a parent to deal with.

Our issue is over the extra charges. They are small but come at us every day. At the start of the school year there are the program charges-swim lessons, art supplies, the second set of shoes for each, gym shorts, swim suits, winter clothing. This year I even tried Kijiji for a proper parka. It took months to get one I could afford.

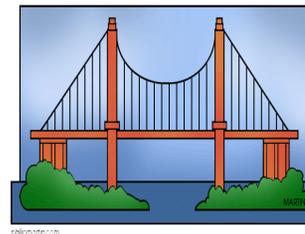
There's school outings-Festival du Voyageur begins at \$25.00 and that won't include spending money. There's an end of the year trip that they are planning. I don't even know what that will cost.

Fundraising is so stressful. It seems that every time they empty their packsacks there's another catalogue or lunch sale. A couple of bucks here and there adds up fast..



## Jose

Getting a job in Kenora was really hard so I had to go to LEAP and they made me do resumes and they asked me what I was interested in. I told them I was interested in Culinary arts and doing orders so they called a place and set me up with an appointment with the manager. He then asked me when I was available to work and I told them anytime. Anyways he put me on the next day for three days a week then five days a week. At the time, I was residing at Luby's and every morning I woke up and went upstairs to drink a case of beer with my friend which he ended up getting a job in Fort Frances. So every morning I was half cut working. One day my other boss realized I was in the bad and layed me off. So every day I realized I was in the bad. I got kicked out of Luby's so I was on the street where I drank everything. Alcohol is a bad disease. So that's it.

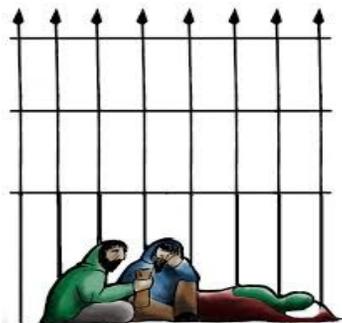


## Bob

I've been in Kenora 15 years. I was on the streets of Kenora city. When it rained I went under the bridge of Husky the Musky until it stopped raining and night becomes daylight. Some days I had to collect beer bottles to have money. Sometimes I got money from people I know from my reserve. Twice a month my aunt will come into town and she feed me in restaurant and gave me forty dollars money so I could have breakfast the next day morning. It was hard I was tired ALL the time, mostly hungry and truly wanted to drink water. Most restaurants cannot allow to have water so I used to get drinking water from gas stations and laundry mats.

## Charlie

I had a job when I was younger in my early twenties. I worked every day to help support my siblings, so I had to drop out of high school. Then I hurt my back so I couldn't work as I used to. I was living in Shoal Lake with my late uncle, and he passed on. I never went back, too much memories. That was three years ago, and I've been on the streets ever since. I was on welfare and was residing at the Fellowship Centre, then I got cut off welfare. I just turned 52 on January 29, 2014 so now I just get by on my wits.



## Frank



The most intimidating part of finding employment in this town is the 'interviewing part'. I don't know what I do so wrong to not get the job. I think I need more experience in a lot of areas, the other part is the stereotyping done on young people as myself (native). I'm taking the proper steps in my education area to be more educated (maybe I'm not educated enough? I have my high school), is it my appearance? The way I present myself? Yeah I've struggled with PAST addictions and had a baby girl (who is the reason I keep striving forward) but I got over it. I stopped the drugs, drinks, etc. I've just had enough of my old ways and want a new life for me and my daughter. There are not enough jobs available in this town. If there weren't such prejudice people who are hiring for jobs, maybe quite a few people would have employment.

## All Children in Canada Receive An Education

*"In Canada, the government provides an education for every child free of charge. Public education is paid for through taxes and is administered by the provinces and territories in cooperation with local school boards".*

**Government of Canada  
Immigration Website**



**FREEeducation**

## Esmeralda

My husband and I were both working. The wages weren't great but we were making it-scraping at times-but making it. Four kids eat up a budget pretty quick. Rent was always hardest and the places that we could afford were not great. Our fifth child tipped our careful balance.

My husband was working fulltime at \$11.00 an hour doing shift work which meant he grossed \$1500.00. After deductions he had about \$1200.00. I was lucky because I had gotten enough hours in to qualify for EI and got \$500.00 a month. Our rent was \$700.00 without utili-

ties. Utilities drove it up by another \$300.00 in shelter expenses. We had to have transportation in order to get my husband to work. Food was not in our budget. I had to hit every food bank and friend in town.



It was humiliating. It was a daily struggle. To add pressure to the pot, our student loans came due and the government seized any benefits that we were due. Just near the end of my maternity benefits, EI realized that they made a miscalculation and told me that I had to repay \$900.00! It was a blow.

We were desperate. It's amazing what you consider doing. One of our family workers advised me to claim that I was a victim of violence. I refused to lie. People who get

housing this way don't realize how this affects the children. Years later, they will hear rumours about their parents. I even considered taking my baby and living in a tent in the middle of home until I got a home. I thought that this might speed up the wait list but someone told me that Children's Aid would probably take the baby because I was homeless.

I pushed back to get working but it was a minimum wage, shift work job. Because our shifts never meshed, child care costs took what I earned. The first break got we got was getting subsidized housing. It's been a long trek back. We were finally able to repay those who had helped us out.

I work at helping to get others on their feet but people need to understand that it is a longer journey than anyone realizes. It's



more than just getting a job. It's getting a livable income. It's getting affordable housing. It's getting furnishings. It's getting access to transportation. People need support along the way. If you don't give them support during this time, it crashes. If you want change for people, it takes commitment.

*The slide into unemployment often starts with precarious work and escalates with injuries, addictions and mental illness.*

## *Joe's Job Rules*

### How to Maintain a Job

The first thing to maintaining a job would be to find a job that you love doing. And when you do find that job, to keep it would be to show up every day. On time all the time unless there is an emergency of some kind. And to go into your job with an open mind about changes to your work. Always be a team player even if you don't agree on some things about certain policies. Be honest, trustworthy, and have respect for your customers.

### Ways of Losing a Job

To not show up on time, and it goes on for a long time. Showing up to work drunk or hung over all the time. Being dishonest to your boss, customers, fellow employees, perhaps language, harassment, and stealing from the company.

