

October 1997

BILL 142: SHOULD WE BE CONCERNED?

BY GLORIA DESANTIS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

YES! Everyone in Ontario should be concerned about the Social Assistance Reform Act (Bill 142) because it allows the government to institute fundamental changes in the values which most of us espouse regarding treatment of vulnerable people in our communities. For the non-profit sector serving these vulnerable people, this will mean an even greater burden on already challenged resources.

The values which are threatened by this new legislation are numerous. There is a shift away from seeing poverty as a societal problem toward viewing it as an individual problem. There is a shift away from the enabling role the government should play in supporting disadvantaged people in our communities toward primarily, a policing role. There is a shift away from mutual responsibility between communities and its people toward individual responsibility and self reliance. There is change in defining who among the poor are deserving and who are not. There is a reduction in rights to appeal processes for social assistance recipients regarding decisions made against them by the system.



This new Act is expected to come into effect on January 1, 1998. Bill 142 was first introduced into the legislature on June 12, 1997. It will replace the current General Welfare Assistance Act and Family Benefits Act with the Ontario Works Act which will provide assistance to the unemployed, single mothers, elderly people, and people with temporary illnesses or disabilities and the Ontario Disability Support Plan Act intended for people with longer term disabilities. Some highlights of the potential impacts of this new legislation on people are described here.

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- Government clarifications have suggested that single mothers whose youngest child has reached the age of six years and is attending school full-time, must engage in Ontario Works employment activities on a full-time basis. Failure to comply could result in loss of benefits. However, some studies have shown that most single mothers applying for assistance have experienced family violence thus making sleep at night troublesome as well as concentration at work difficult.
- Women could be held responsible for the overpayments made to their ex-spouses. For example, an abused woman who leaves her husband could be required to repay an overpayment even if she had no control over their finances and hence, did not know about the overpayment.
- People will not be considered employees in their Ontario Works placements and therefore will not be protected by workplace legislation although some municipalities have developed anti-harassment procedures, etc.
- Through Bill 142, the social assistance system will look more like a loan program. Social assistance applicants may be required - as a condition of receiving government financial assistance - to reimburse the system for any assistance they received after they obtain employment. At this rate, people will have difficulty ever pulling themselves out of poverty.

CONTINUED ON

SPC Grand Re-opening: November 27, 1997



WOW!, it's been a busy summer! Not only have we been working on the 1997 Services Inventory and completing a final phase of the Youth Action Project, but we've also moved to a new location, AND hired an exciting new Executive Director: The Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries is very pleased to welcome Gloria DeSantis to our team! We hope you will join us for our Grand Re-Opening festivities. Please see attached flyer.



SO WHERE DID WE MOVE TO?

Our new office is located above the Dickson Arena (lots of parking!) and our address is:
30 Parkhill Road, West Phone: 623-1713
Cambridge, Ontario, N1S 1C9

SO WHO'S THE NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AT THE SOCIAL PLANNING COUNCIL?

My name is Gloria DeSantis. I graduated from the University of Waterloo with a Master's degree in Regional Planning and Resource Development. I also have undergraduate degrees in Psychology and Urban Geography. I have lived in Cambridge since 1988.

I come to the Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries with 11 years of community-based, social planning experience. These experiences have helped me to perfect skills in the following areas:

- community based research including both qualitative and quantitative methodologies
- community development
- organization development
- community indicators and trend analysis
- assisting community groups with their developmental work
- public policy analysis

DID YOU KNOW?

The Executive Director of the Social Planning Council is available to assist community groups, funders and government departments with:

- ◆ developing inclusive public participation strategies
- ◆ designing and implementing community based research projects
- ◆ finding useful data for program planning purposes
- ◆ creating workable community development plans
- ◆ analyzing social policies
- ◆ summarizing community trends
- ◆ running workshops, seminars and conferences

My work over the years has focused on the following topics: self help; diverse racial and cultural communities; adult mental health; poverty; housing; street youth; women's issues and urban development issues in city core areas.

I am very excited about the opportunity to live and work in my own community. I am looking forward to working with you toward meaningful social change in Cambridge and North Dumfries. Please call me if you think I may be of assistance to you and your group.

Gloria DeSantis

MOBILITY CAMBRIDGE UPDATE...

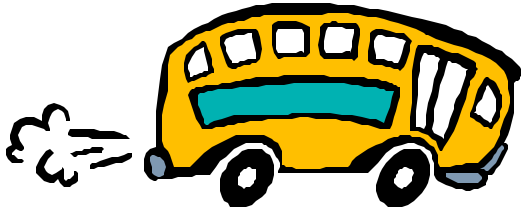
The Community Transportation Action Plan, known as **Mobility Cambridge**, is generating some exciting ideas for specialized transportation alternatives in our area. The main goal of this research and planning process is “to enhance and co-ordinate community transportation resources to ensure that existing and future specialized services remain available to the citizens of Cambridge and North Dumfries”. The research and planning process is also encouraging community people to work together to resolve some of their transportation issues.

A Steering Committee is guiding the research and planning work. To date, an inventory of existing specialized transportation services has been created, surveys have been completed, and public workshops have been held to gather public input as well as service provider input.

The Mobility Cambridge project has now moved into a developmental stage. That is, a committee is systematically evaluating alternative service delivery methods which were identified in the earlier research stages. The three alternatives identified are

- create and distribute a printed resource document of specialized transportation services,
- establish a central resource centre, and
- improve cross boundary transportation between cities as well as between the rural area and cities.

The committee will draft recommendations on a project(s) designed to improve the delivery of specialized transportation services in Cambridge and North Dumfries based on these three alternatives. This draft will then be taken to stakeholders for feedback.



Hopefully, the final phase of Mobility Cambridge (01/98 to 09/98) will see the implementation of a recommended project(s). This project(s) will be considered as a “demonstration project” under the sponsorship of Community Transportation Action Plan (CTAP).

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- A disabled recipient could have an “informal trustee” appointed by the municipal social assistance administrator without going through the Substitute Decisions Act, with no clear lines of accountability for this “informal trustee”, and with no safe guards for potential conflict of interest situations (e.g., if the “informal trustee” is the disabled recipient’s service provider or landlord).
- Under the current Family Benefits Act, a senior citizen who is 65 years or older and not eligible for a pension under the Old Age Security Act is guaranteed assistance. Under Bill 142, no seniors will have their financial assistance guaranteed.
- Under Bill 142, sponsored immigrants “in need” residing in Ontario may no longer be guaranteed financial assistance as when the Canada Assistance Plan existed pre-1996. As well, under current rules, sponsored immigrants who apply for welfare automatically lose a minimum of \$100 from their allowances.

There are still many unanswered questions about Bill 142 because the government has reserved power to make regulations and issue policy directives when necessary. **As we are seeing from the current outcry surrounding Bill 160, such unilateral decision making is unacceptable to the greater public.**

Public hearings of Bill 142 were held in September and October 1997 in Toronto, Niagara Falls, London, North Bay and Ottawa. If you have concerns and/or suggestions about this impending legislation, please call Gerry Martiniuk, Provincial Member of Parliament, at 623-5852 (Cambridge). If you and/or your group are interested in more details about this legislation, please call our SPC office office at 623-1713.

(The author gratefully acknowledges the material provided by the Ontario Social Safety Network series to write this article.)

reflections...

Many thanks to all who were in attendance at the FAREWELL SALUTE TO RUTH THOMPSON on September 24. In the five years Ruth has been a part of the Social Planning Council, great strides have been made to establish our place in the community as a significant and vital organization. As a result of these efforts, an important foundation has been laid from which we can launch into the next five years as a new and challenging phase awaits us!

where has yap gone?

The Youth Action Program, affectionately known as YAP, has had a successful two year run through our Social Planning Council. Among its many significant achievements, aside from changed lives, are a Youth Forum attended by more than 80 youth city-wide, and two important surveys conducted by youth, one on Transit, and one on Youth Issues. Plans are currently underway to establish a Cambridge Youth Council with the City in an effort to continue these successes and acknowledge the important role of Youth in our community. For more information, phone Helen at 740-6881, ext. 4652.

Meet the Newcomers

Noreen Applebee - currently employed at the Allan Reuter Senior Centre as the program assistant for the Golden Opportunities Day Program, Noreen's interest in social issues led her to join our board. Noreen and her husband live in Cambridge with their two teenagers; she is already active on a number of committees with our Social Planning Council, including co-chairing the 10th Anniversary Committee!

Doug Cater - a lifetime resident of Cambridge, Doug is a self employed consultant to manufacturing organization supporting process improvement initiatives. Doug is currently completing his MBA at Wilfred Laurier University. His 20 years of business experience and desire for greater community involvement will be a tremendous asset to our board!

Regis Coladipietro - has lived in Cambridge for more than 15 years with her husband, four children and a menagerie of pets. Regis is a Peer Resource Coordinator with the Independent Living Centre of Waterloo Region and is dedicated to the independent living philosophy for people with disabilities. As well as an active volunteer with youth and recreational groups and an avid motorcyclist, Regis has already dedicated numerous hours to our Social Planning Council's Mobility Cambridge Project!

Chris Doherty - Recruited to our Board through YAP, we are pleased to

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