



ESIA – Work and Education for IA Clients

Standing Committee on Community Services
February 7, 2017

Presentation Outline

1. ESIA Program Overview

- Goals and Budget

2. Wages from Employment

- Why we do it and how it works

3. Employment Supports & Educational Programs

- Eligibility and financial supports

4. Post-Secondary Programming

- Overview and recent changes

1. ESIA Program Overview

Employment Support & Income Assistance (ESIA) Program

PURPOSE: The ESIA program provides assistance to persons in need and supports their movement toward self-sufficiency.

HOW WE HELP:

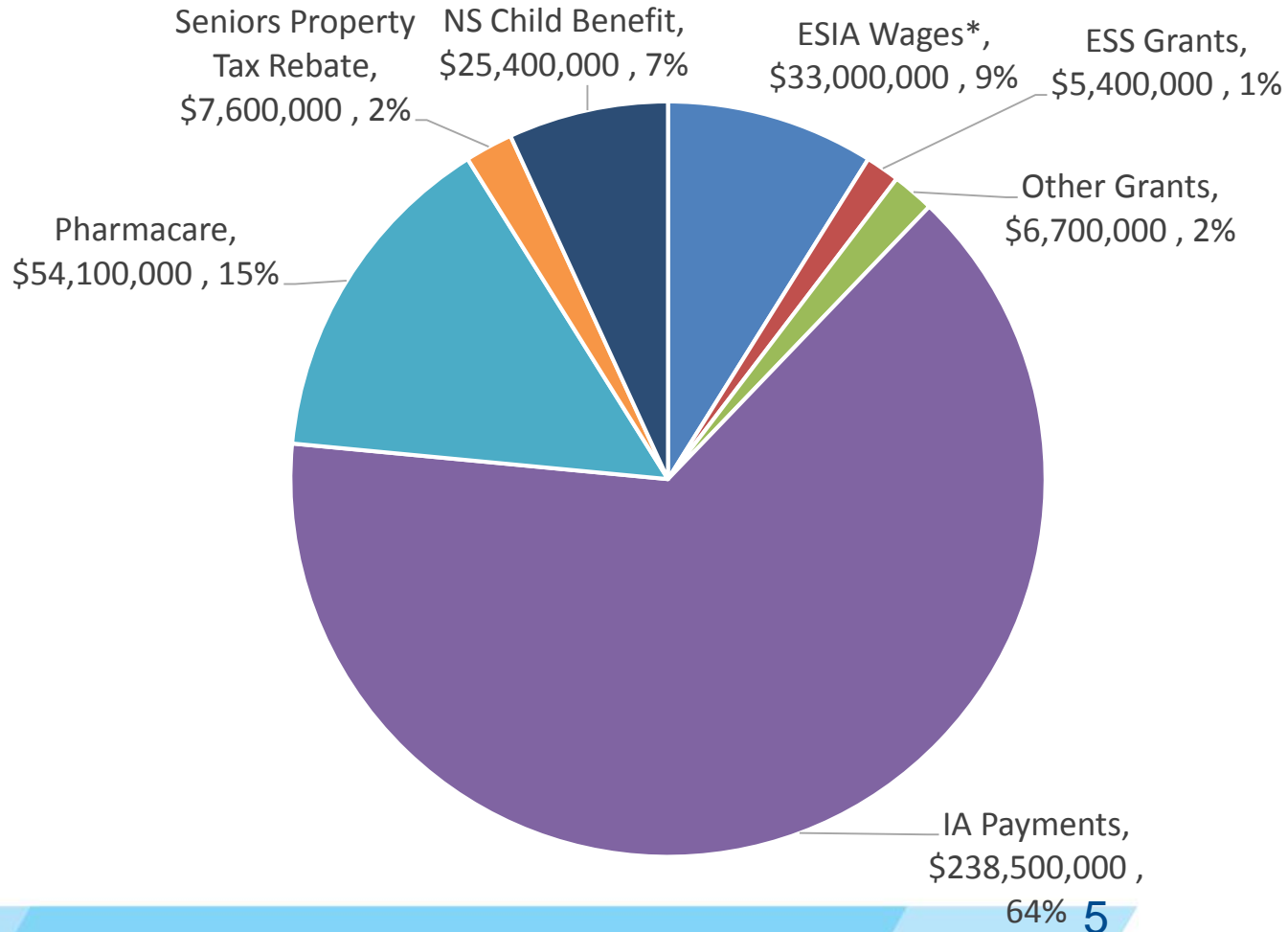
- Food, clothing, shelter and special needs
- Access to employment supports
- Access to community supports

GOALS:

- Independence
- Inclusion in Community
- Self-Sufficiency

ESIA Program Overview

2015-16 Operating Budget Actuals



2. Wages from Employment

The Wage Exemption Policy

WHAT IS IT?

- The Wage Exemption Policy exempts wages earned through employment for ESIA clients.

WHY DO WE HAVE IT?

- The goal is to encourage those who are ready and able to enter the labour market to move permanently into employment.
- Approximately 2,800 clients report wage income from employment =

Over \$1,620,000 in wages

The Wage Exemption Policy

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Depending on a client's employment type, a portion of wages are exempt from the IA eligibility calculation. The remaining earnings are used to reduce the amount of IA paid by DCS.

1. For clients with 'regular wages':

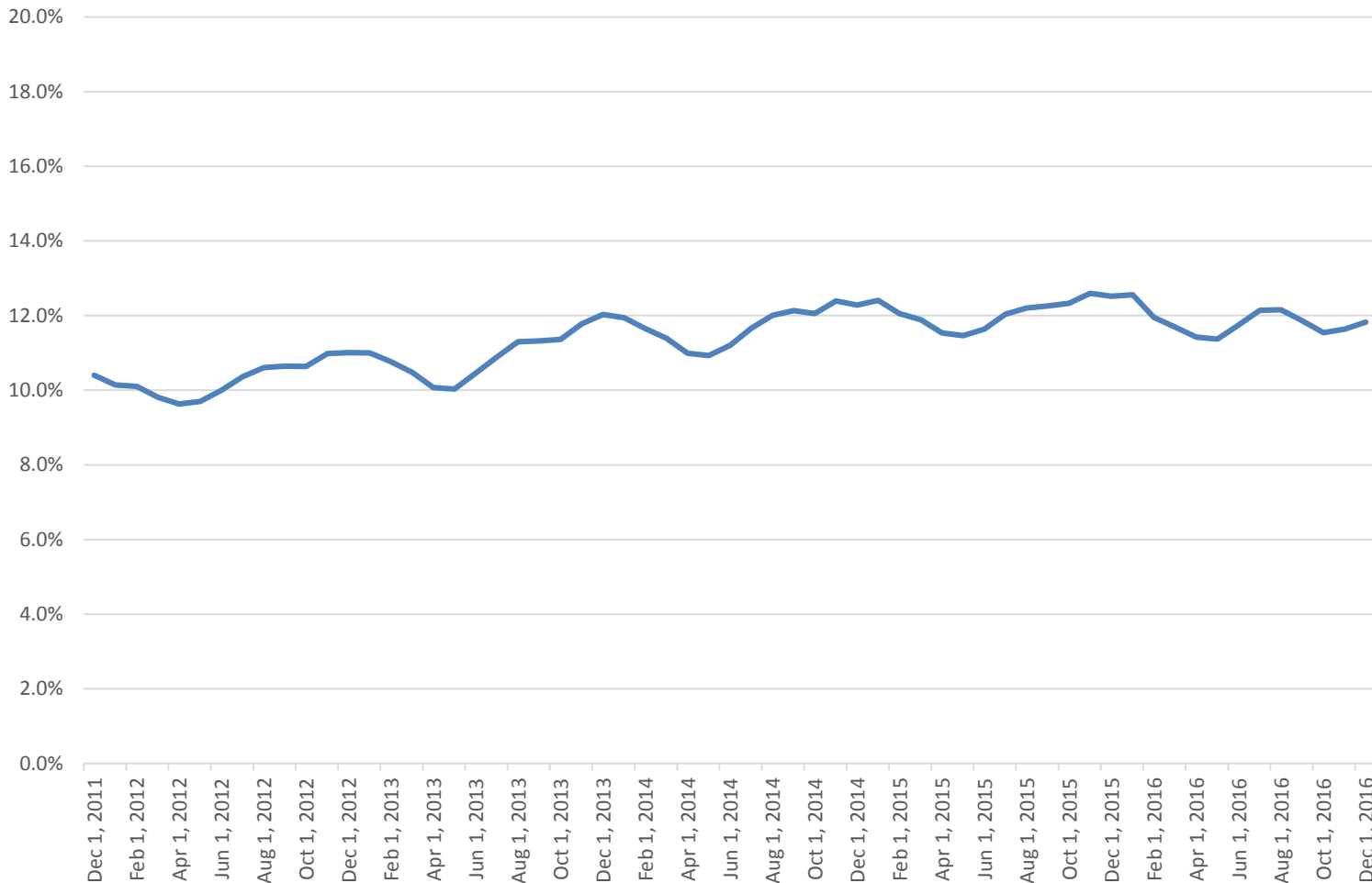
- The first \$150 earned is retained, then 30% of the remaining net wages per month.

2. For clients with 'supported employment' wages:

- The first \$300 earned is retained, then 30% of the remaining net wages per month.

Wage Exemption:

% of Clients with Earnings from Employment



3. Employment Supports & Educational Programming

Employment Supports Services (ESS) Overview

- The ESS Division of ESIA provides services and supports to help clients find and maintain employment.
- Clients must have an approved Employment Action Plan that may provide supports for:
 - Job Search Assistance
 - Essential Skills Development
 - Job Development
 - Transitional Job Support
 - Skills Development Training

Employment Supports Services (ESS) Overview

Clients are expected to actively participate in their employment plan and may be found ineligible for failing to comply.

Employment Action Plans:

- Are developed between a Caseworker and a client to determine what supports are needed to meet a client's employment goals.

Education Plans:

- If it is determined that further education is required to meet the employment goals, an Education Plan is developed.

Eligibility for Educational Programming

- *All clients and/or spouses are required to have an approved Education Plan to participate in educational programming.*
- **Eligibility:**
 - In receipt of assistance for at least 6 months prior to attending post-secondary
 - Available for work when not involved in the educational program
 - EI Reach Back Eligibility (EI claim in the last 60 months)
- **Clients may be eligible for:**
 - *Academic Upgrading:* High School Diploma, GED
 - *Literacy Upgrading*
 - *Educate to Work:* NSCC Core or Customized Programming, Private Career Colleges
 - *Career Seek:* University
 - *Continuing Education Courses*
 - *Skills Development Program (LAE)*

Financial Supports

- **ESIA provides:**
 - Educational costs (e.g. tuition, books)
 - Transportation
 - Childcare
 - Employability related needs (e.g. supplies, work-related clothing)

4. Post-Secondary Programming Overview

Post-Secondary Background

- Enrolments and completion rates have been declining.
- ESS made significant changes in 2016 to reverse this trend.

PROGRAM	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016/17
Career Seek	16	7	3	4	4	10
Educate to Work	321	267	292	290	150	197

- ESS undertook an internal review to identify:
 - Program gaps
 - Client barriers
 - Possible enhancements to address gaps and barriers

Review Findings: Completion Rates

ETW:

- 33% of those in a 2-year program completed the program (2013-15)
- 48% of graduates exit ESIA in 12 months

Career Seek:

- ~46% complete their degree
- ~58% of graduates exit ESIA in 12 months
- Student Loans provide better financial support than IA

Review Findings: External Impacts

Caseload Changes:

- Reduction in caseload numbers overall
- Increasing case complexity with numerous barriers

Population Trends:

- Colleges instead of universities

Educational Funding:

- Other sources (LAE – EI, Student Assistance) allowing independence of ESIA

Post-Secondary Programming

Educate to Work

LAE funds tuition for NSCC or private career college for ESIA clients

Client remains on ESIA for duration of program

DCS pays books, special needs, childcare and transportation

Career Seek

Allows client to remain on ESIA while enrolled in university

Client must access student loans for some education related costs.

Post-Secondary Enhancements

Announced Fall 2016



EDUCATE TO WORK DEPENDENTS

- Expand for ESIA dependents
 - 50% tuition support
- 100% books, health & dental, student fees



CAREER SEEK

- One year tuition
- Student fees
- Home internet/data plan
- Childcare and transport
- Campus Incidentals

Minimization of Barriers to Post-Secondary

Internal Improvements

- Increased caseworker supports to students
- Implemented working group with NSCC to improve outcomes
- Increased access to Post-Secondary Wage Subsidies
- Improved Job Development services to graduates

ESIA Transformation

Transformation is:

- Making sure our investments have the most effective, efficient and meaningful impact on client's lives.
- Making sure our caseworkers have the tools they need to support their clients.
- Looking at how we can work preventatively with youth-at risk to diminish reliance on ESIA.

Questions?

Good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to return to Standing Committee – this time to talk about employment and educational supports through the ESIA program.

We know education and employment are key to breaking the cycle of poverty for many people. That's why we are exploring ways to strengthen the supports we provide people on Income Assistance and have improved some of our programs.

As many of you know, at the Department of Community Services, we provide assistance to our most vulnerable citizens.

The ESIA program offers financial support for basic needs including food, clothing and housing for people who can't meet those needs themselves. It can also include supports to help people engage in the work force and access post-secondary education. Our goals include helping people achieve independence- either through employment, training and education - and to help everyone we work with to be active and included in their community.

As we mentioned in our last appearance, our Department has been undergoing a significant transformation and redesign of our programs to make sure they are as effective and efficient as they can be.

We want three things:

- a system that makes it easy for Nova Scotians to find the services they need;
- services that support clients goals they have for themselves and their family;
- and a system that achieves better results for Nova Scotians.

To get this, we needed to look at our programs and services from the perspective of the people who use them. And that's exactly what we have been doing.

We've already made some changes within ESIA. We've simplified some processes for clients, developed a client friendly and easy to understand document that will help people understand available supports and services, improved access to caseworkers through a phone service line and simplified the language we use in our correspondence to clients, making it easier for them to read and understand the information coming from the department. We are also working on streamlining the ESIA medical form.

We've also given ESS caseworkers the ability to make certain child care and transportation payments. This means clients can go directly to their ESS caseworker for quick ad hoc payments.

Finally, our Minister recently announced enhancements to two of our Post-Secondary programs. These include the expansion of the Educate to Work Program to provide some financial and case management support to dependents of the ESIA program, so they can attend Community College. We have also expanded the Career Seek Program to include special needs like tuition support for the first year of study, a child care and transportation supplement, an incidental allowance to support campus integration, and support for internet access to assist with their studies.

A single parent can't go to class if they don't have childcare. They can't participate in things like group projects if it means having an unbudgeted meal on campus.

The changes to these programs also reflect our Department's commitment to finding innovative solutions to work preventatively to address intergenerational dependence on ESIA. And it's our hope that expanding educational supports to dependents of ESIA clients, will help break down barriers to education and disrupt the cycle of poverty.

We know there's more work to be done and that the people we serve need to be at the heart of the process. Our ESIA transformation is happening with the help, advice and feedback of our ESIA clients and stakeholders. So far, we've engaged over 180 clients in meaningful discussions in multiple First Voice focus group sessions, and received valuable feedback from them.

We recently held a second round of ESIA Stakeholder engagement sessions across the province to inform participants of the progress we have made to date through ESIA Transformation and to gain further feedback on topics including special needs. Sessions were held in October and November of last fall, with over 130 people representing organizations and advocacy groups from across the province.

We will create a program that is administratively simple, transparent, sustainable, streamlined and, most importantly, empowering. It will be fair and easily understood by clients and stakeholders.

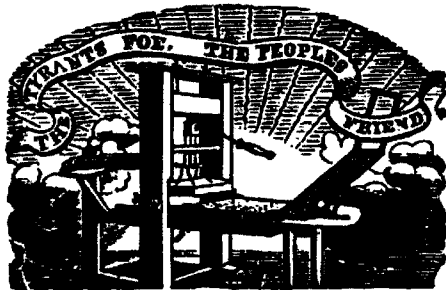
Changing the ESIA program overall will take some time. Community Services will continue meeting with interested individuals and groups over the coming months.

Friday, 13 January

2017

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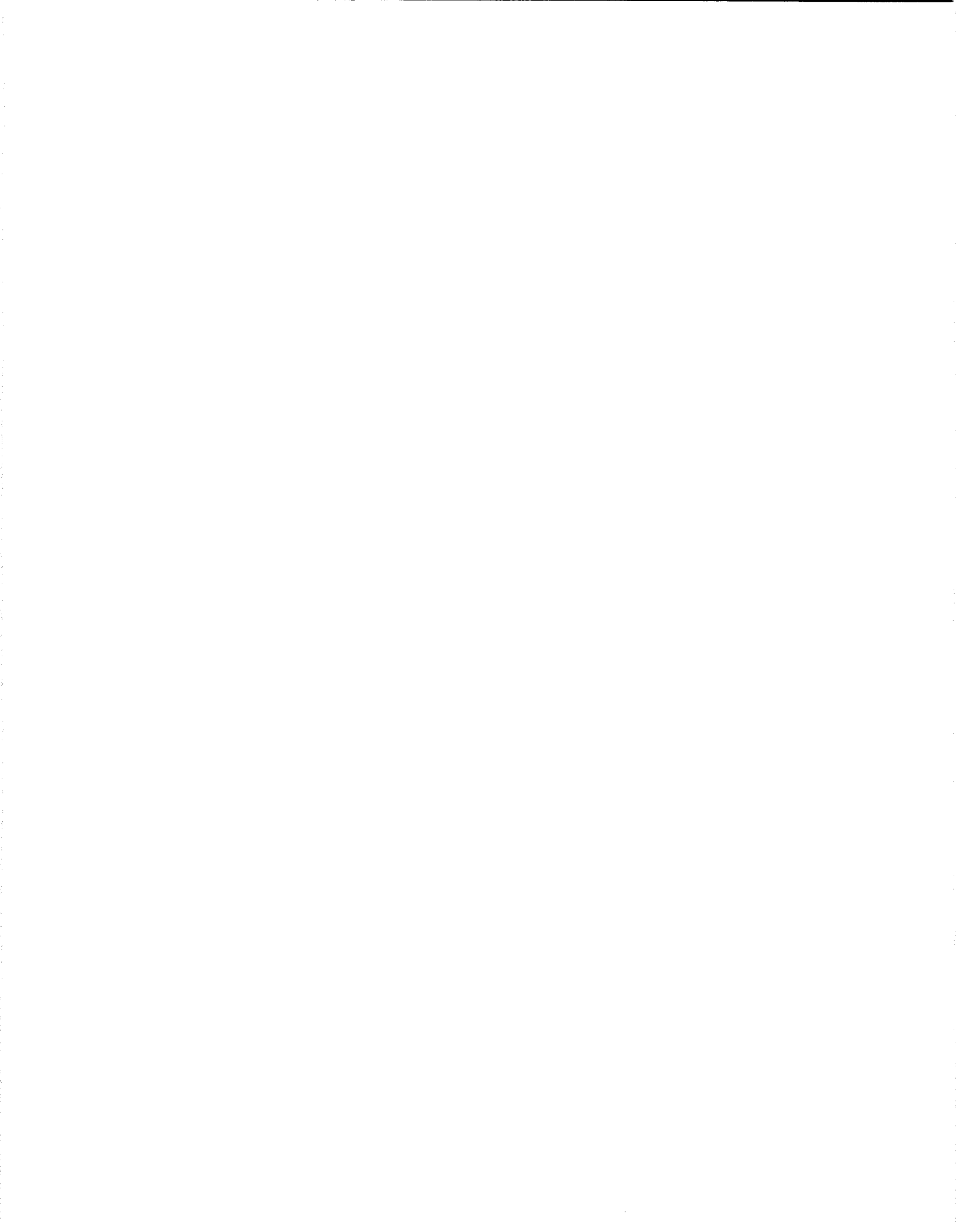
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Judge tells NS Human Rights Commission to reconsider special needs decision

By [Robert Devet \(https://nsadvocate.org/author/robertdevet/\)](https://nsadvocate.org/author/robertdevet/) - January 11, 2017

 [1 \(https://nsadvocate.org/2017/01/11/judge-tells-ns-human-rights-commission-to-reconsider-special-needs-decision/#comments\)](https://nsadvocate.org/2017/01/11/judge-tells-ns-human-rights-commission-to-reconsider-special-needs-decision/#comments)



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KJIPUKTUK (Halifax) – Today a judge offered a glimmer of hope to income assistance recipients who live with disabilities and rely on an allowance from Community Services to pay for their dietary needs.

A group of five people who require special diets, joined by the *North End Community Health Centre*, saw their original efforts to take Community Services to a human rights tribunal squashed by the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission (NSHRC).

In their quest for such a tribunal the group had argued that their special needs allowances have not kept up with ever rising costs, and that was discriminatory.

A NSHRC investigator recommended that a tribunal occur, but nonetheless the NSHRC Board of



Commissioners decided against it, and dismissed the complaint without even holding a hearing.

Today Nova Scotia Supreme Court Justice James Chipman found that decision not justified and ordered NSHRC to reconsider.

“That’s all we want, a hearing”

The judge’s decision is not quite a victory, though. The NSHRC could simply decide that after proper reconsideration there still was no need for a tribunal.

But at least there is still a glimmer of hope, says Vince Calderhead, a senior staff lawyer at [Nova Scotia Legal Aid \(https://www.nslegalaid.ca/\)](https://www.nslegalaid.ca/).

“I am very pleased that the complaint is still alive and optimistic that when the decision is reconsidered the Human Rights Commission will grant us a hearing. That’s all we want, a hearing,” Calderhead says.

Calderhead was equally pleased that the judge suggested that a new investigation should not be required. During the court case the Human Rights Commission had said that’s what it would do if it lost the case.

“For us that’s a huge relief. A new investigation would mean a delay of at least six months. Given that none of the parties had expressed any reservations about the previous investigation there was absolutely no need for that,” Calderhead tells the Nova Scotia Advocate.

What is a special needs allowance?

Special needs allowances are provided by the Department of Community Services to help people pay for special diets, among other things.

The five people who are lodging complaints have different dietary needs, but they all live with physical disabilities.

Their submission to the court states that from 1996 to the present, the Province has increased the basic personal allowance for adults by 91%, (from \$144 to \$275 per month).

Yet during the same time period special diet allowances did not increase at all, despite increases in their costs.

That’s not fair to people with disabilities, and what’s more, it’s discriminatory, the group says.

What the judge decided is potentially very important for people on welfare who get a special diet allowance.

If the case proceeds to a tribunal, and *if* that tribunal decides that discrimination plays a part, then Community Services will likely have to raise these special diet allowances, possibly by up to 91%.

Time will tell. We will keep you posted.

See also: [Welfare recipients take NS Human Rights Commission to court](#)



[\(https://nsadvocate.org/2016/12/13/welfare-recipient-take-ns-human-rights-commission-to-court/\)](https://nsadvocate.org/2016/12/13/welfare-recipient-take-ns-human-rights-commission-to-court/)

Updated to reflect the actual increase of the basic personal allowance for adults, 91%, not 77%.

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One Comment

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**Michael R
Murphy**

You have to wonder about the "Human Rights Commission". This is not the first antiprogressive decision they have made. Who's side are they on? Has it been stacked with the usual right wing government hangers-on who make Nova Scotia such a shitty place to live? Thank God the courts seem to have some sense of decency!

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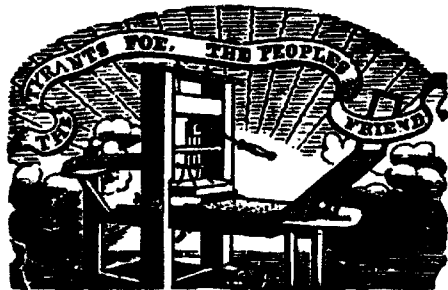


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Lives on Welfare. Emma's story, a tragedy of errors

By [Robert Devet](https://nsadvocate.org/author/robertdevet/) - January 12, 2017

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KJIPUKTUK (Halifax) – In this installment of Lives on Welfare (<https://nsadvocate.org/tag/lives-on-welfare/>) we meet Emma (not her real name), a 45-years old woman on social assistance.

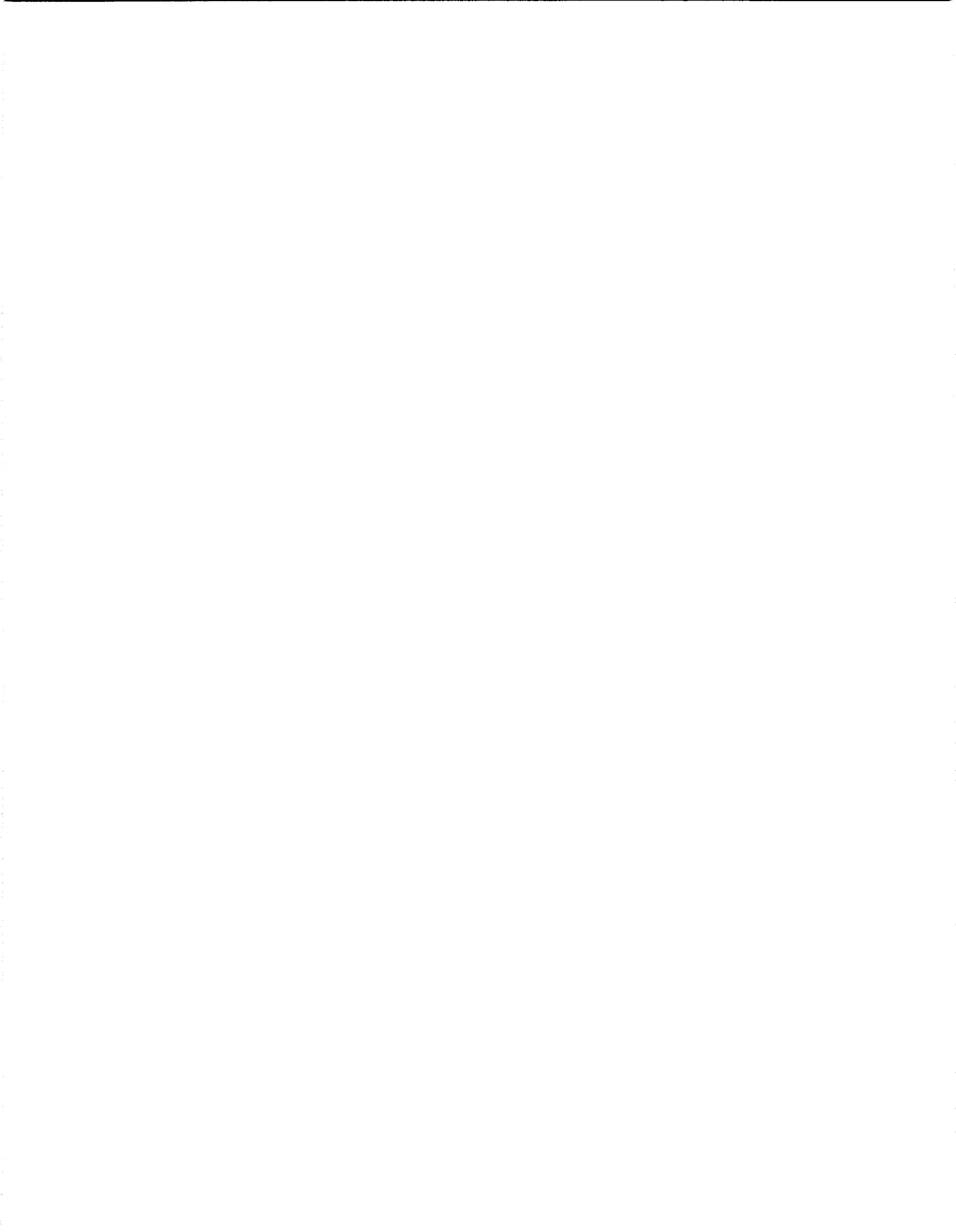
Emma left a homeless shelter and moved into a basement apartment in October of last year. She lives with fibromyalgia, a disorder characterized by widespread musculoskeletal pain accompanied by fatigue.

Emma also has been diagnosed with arthritis in both her ankles, rotator cuff injuries in her shoulders, and a degenerative disease in several vertebrae.

Fair to say Emma lives with a lot of intense pain. Emma's doctor believes she would benefit from a chiropractic mattress, box spring and frame. Community Services told her doctor to write a note on Emma's behalf.

That's where Emma's story starts.





I have been waiting for that bed since October 28, when I moved into my own place. I am sleeping in a little kid's bed, it's really a bunk bed that's meant for a 60-pound kid, not for an adult. Here it is almost three months later.

The ordeal began when my social worker faxed my doctor what she had had to write in order for me to get a chiropractic bed. My doctor did that, faxed them the note. Then they told her that they wanted a more in depth letter, which my doctor also provided.

She wrote this lovely letter, a two page letter. The letter Community Services asked her to provide. But they're not approving it because now they're saying I need an occupational therapist to write that letter!

Even my doctor is pissed off now. Not at me, she's pissed off at them. She says I took your file home on the long Remembrance Day weekend, and I worked on it at home, because I had to go back 19 years.

By the way, apparently the charge for writing this letter is \$20, and Community Services will not pay for it.

The week before Christmas the MLA office sent the documentation to Community Services to appeal their decision. But my caseworker just filed it, and didn't put it through the appeal process.

So after 30 days we go what's happened? The worker said, oops, sorry. Now the appeal will be extended because they made a mistake.

That happens a lot.

For instance, I lost a lot of weight in the summer when I was in a homeless shelter and I didn't eat well because of my gluten allergy. My doctor prescribed Boost nutritional drinks. At the end of December I didn't hear from my drugstore, and when I checked they said we don't have your purchase order.

My caseworker said that it was not sent through because she was on vacation. Now I still don't have my Boost. The little bit of weight I gained, I pretty well lost it again.

What I can't believe is the time that's being wasted. Lately, as soon as I need to deal with them I start having anxiety attacks. I can't deal with them because my anxiety goes through the roof. So now I deal with my MLA.

I like to stand up for myself, and I can't let this go. It's eating me up.

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3 Comments



denise budd

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I to am s victim of this system,,,they are just awfull. I'm do sorry you have to deal with this



denise budd

[Reply](#) ([http://2017/01/12/lives-on-welfare-emmas-story-a-tragedy-of-errors/#comment-1050#comment-1050](#))

I am as well a victim of this trap ,,they suck what little bit of self respect you have left right out of you ... I'm really so sorry your dealing with this.



K. Siwl

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Fact is the system is designed in such a way to avoid paying out costs of anything over and above, in order to get what you want they will make you jump through more hoops than a trained lion at a circus. Of course we don't make lions do this any longer because it is now considered inhumane. Guess what you have now taken the place of the lion meanwhile your lords and masters sit back and have a drink while they relish in the fact of these events that go on daily. Saving them money to ensure they still have their budgets. This will continue until they are faced with a decision, their budget or the budget of community services, guess what's going to take a back seat? You will find its happend in other countries and it will happen here in due time. Fact is they are only required to provide basic and in some cases special basic which includes burial costs. That's all anyone will ever get, and they should in the opinion of the majority consider themselves lucky to get that. Push for change, but remember the ones who make the ultimate decisions are not the politicians, its the voting population of the province they are the ones who need to see your plight as long as communy services keeps you in basic mode your off the streets and out of the public eye. Out of sight out of mind!

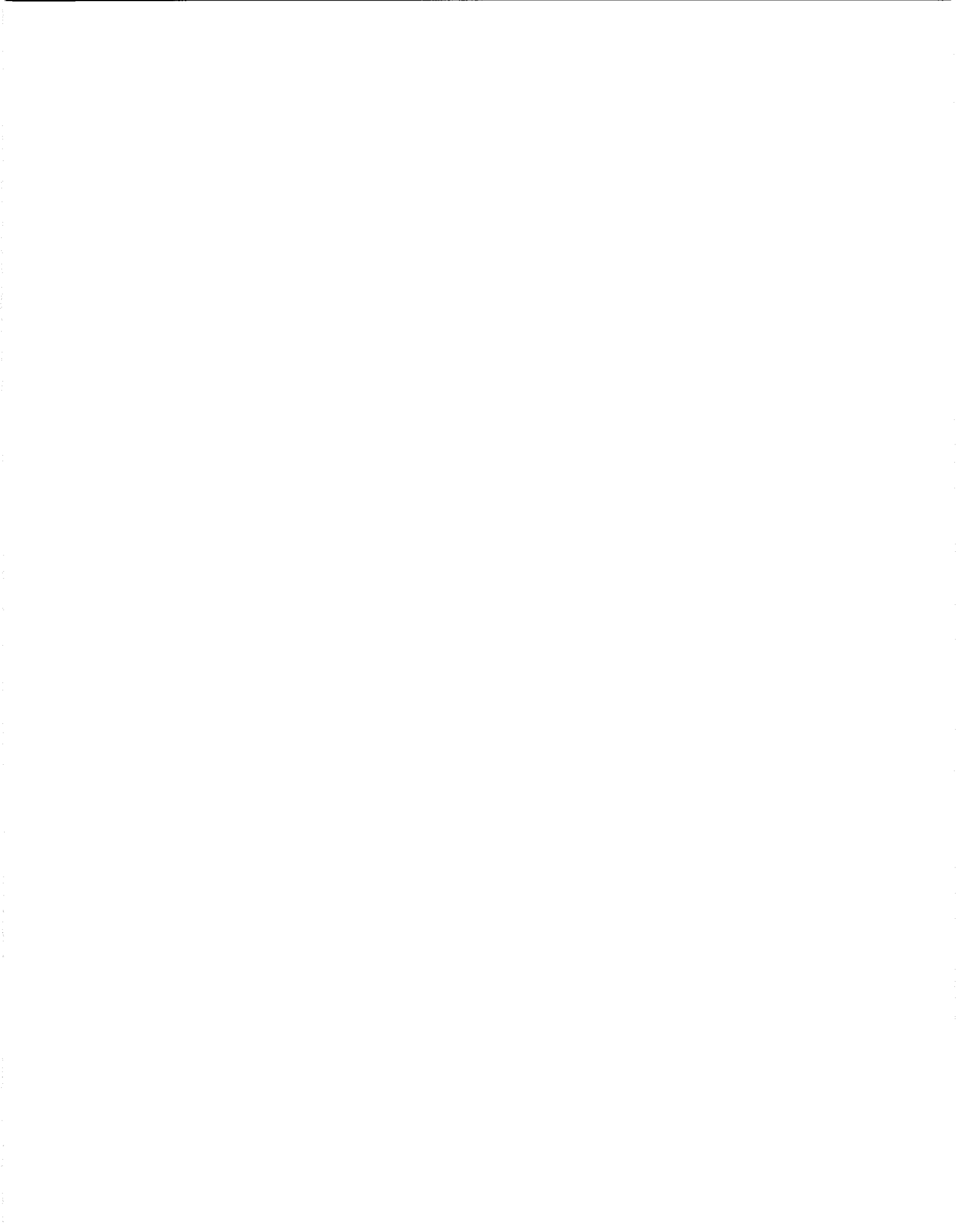
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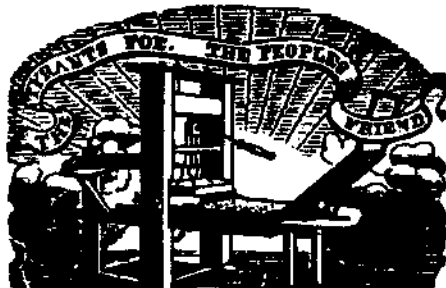


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Kendall Worth: Let's smash the obstacles to community living

By [Kendall Worth \(https://nsadvocate.org/author/kendall-worth/\)](https://nsadvocate.org/author/kendall-worth/) - January 18, 2017

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KJIPUKTUK (Halifax) – Everyone, no matter whether you are a person who lives with a disability or not, deserves a place to belong. Everyone deserves a community of good friends.

Recently Robert Devet of the *Nova Scotia Advocate* posted a weekend video titled *The Inclusion Project* (<https://nsadvocate.org/2016/12/17/weekend-video-the-inclusion-project/>). It sends a strong message why everybody should be included in the community. Anyway I recommend watching the video. I ask my readers to click on the link and enjoy.

Tammy Parker, the person in this video, is a real example of a person with a disability with good independent living skills as well as excellent social skills.

Author Kendall Worth, who lives with several invisible disabilities. Photo Robert Devet

This video shows first-hand evidence that persons with a disability of any type can live independently. This video sends a strong message that persons with disabilities should not be stigmatised.

It was me watching this video that has inspired me to write this article.

Community inclusion for persons with disabilities is something I have been passionate about for a long time. As for the person in this video, Tammy Parker grew up having cerebral palsy. Nonetheless she lived her life independently, had her own apartment, ran her own business, and people in her community got to know her well and accepted her for who she was.

I myself have a great deal of respect for this person. When she passed away, it was great loss to her community. She brought a lot to her community.

However community inclusion of persons with disabilities takes more than just getting rid of disability stigma. It also takes the government to offer better living allowance amounts and creating better policies.

I mean policies that are different and better than the current policies. It should be about creating ways to get them out of poverty, and protecting them from having to live in poverty as well. It is also about supports for persons with disabilities being available in the community.

One thing I will say is that during my years of being involved in advocating to end poverty I have talked to many persons with disabilities who told me that they are not happy about feeling condemned to live that way.

They shared with me that they feel that way because of the limited allowances that they receive living on income assistance. Better living allowances are needed all around.

This is why I hope the minister of Community Services is paying attention to this article.

Community inclusion means being a part of their communities, Teaching others in their communities to accept them, living independently, participating in community/social activities. It means living life to its fullest, and for those who can – gaining employment, at least part time, or doing volunteer work.

Perhaps this is where creating a college or university level course to teach people who do not have disabilities in the community about disabilities related studies would be beneficial.

If more opportunity for persons with disabilities to live independently, then places like Quest and other institutions which my Nova Scotia Advocate editor Robert Devet has talked about in some of his past articles would not even be needed in the first place.

People with disabilities often do not have access to public spaces because of physical barriers. However this problem could be fixed with proper equipment in place such as grab bars installed in bathrooms, wheelchair ramps, and access to walking support equipment such as crutches.

Inclusion should also include improving the health of persons with disabilities. Most persons who live with disabilities can achieve living healthy lives as long as the right supports are in place for them. But there should be guidance to help them understand what their rights are.

Community inclusion should also include the opportunity to engage in social activities, using public resources such as transportation and libraries, moving about within communities, receiving adequate health care, having relationships, enjoying other day-to-day activities, and for those who can achieve getting out of poverty - get out of poverty.

Keep in mind that not all persons with disabilities have the ability or capacity to hold down full time employment. Some cannot work at all.


Inclusion also means that the community has to understand that there is a difference between visible and invisible disabilities. What I have, impulse control and learning disability, those disabilities are invisible.


People who live with disabilities bring a lot to the table. We should not exclude them from being a part of the day-to-day lives in their communities.


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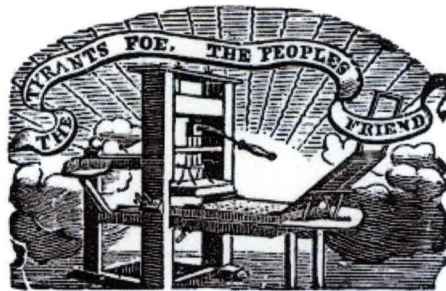
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Kendall Worth on welfare transformation consultation: First voices not heard

By [Kendall Worth \(https://nsadvocate.org/author/kendall-worth/\)](https://nsadvocate.org/author/kendall-worth/) - February 1, 2017

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KJIPUKTUK (Halifax) – The presentation about the proposed welfare transformation that Community Services put on line [here](http://novascotia.ca/coms/transformation/docs/ESIAStakeholderEngagementRound2.pdf) (<http://novascotia.ca/coms/transformation/docs/ESIAStakeholderEngagementRound2.pdf>) make me think things might get better, but that there are also lots of reason to be concerned.

This here is the really important thing.

Kendall Worth. Photo Halifax Media Co-op

Something that is talked about on page 20 of this presentation is financial support. The whole presentation talks about wanting to improve the system, however nowhere does it say that new money is going to be invested in the system to increase allowances.

This is concerning because there really does need to be a major increase in allowances for people to be

able to live.

Not my first voice, and not the first voices that I know

The first thing I found concerning and strongly feel needs to be addressed is what was talked about on page 18. This is where Community Services reports on what it learned from its so called *First Voice consultation* sessions. Also included on this page are the results of the survey that social assistance clients completed online.

From what I hear in my day-to-day life, it seem to me that the real opinions of first voice people themselves differ from those results mentioned on the slides.

Keep in mind that a lot of first voice people (at least those I know of) were scared to attend these first voice sessions. Many didn't have access to the survey due to this survey being online. Income assistance clients cannot afford to have internet at home.

Anyway getting back to page 18 of the presentation and why this page is of concern.

Clients got depressed and gave up

70% indicated they know where to access info

This surprised me, because from my personal experience of being on income assistance plus knowing the experiences of others, clients get frustrated with accessing information. Clients I personally talk to tell me that they got depressed and gave up. Also I know, plus have heard from others, that caseworkers themselves sometimes do not want to provide information on resources.

60% agreed that the department requests the same information often

This is true, and it has to stop. One thing that people in the community I talk to say is that caseworkers have got to stop acting like they are medical professionals, especially when it comes to approving special diets. I have also heard the same from doctors.

There is nothing in the presentation that talks if this is even going to be addressed.

Caseworkers often part of the problem

75% of clients said that they are comfortable talking to their caseworkers

To me personally, and to other income assistance clients I talk to in the community, this 75% number is a major concern plus surprising.

It is my belief that the reason why the number is so high is because these clients are not paying attention to actual facts of a caseworker's job. Also that 75% who said "they are comfortable talking to their caseworkers" makes clients such as myself who have had negative experiences with caseworkers worry that issues we have had are not going to get resolved through transformation.

When it comes to the actual job of their caseworkers, clients who said they are comfortable are not paying attention to the bad policies of social assistance and the fact that caseworkers have to follow these policies.

Also from the experience of me and others is that some if not most of individual caseworkers display negative attitudes towards their clients.

The current system requires clients to have a good relationship with a caseworker. Otherwise receiving your benefits could be affected. This is felt to be a human rights violation for have no choice but to live life with a caseworker in the mix.

Perhaps it is possible that those who said they feel comfortable really do not feel comfortable and were just scared to say it.

Referrals? What referrals?

26% said they have been referred to a service provider within their community

This surprised me because I personally have never heard of a caseworker referring their clients to an outside service provider. I know I was once referred to a service provider for something, however, this referral did not happen through my caseworker.

75% indicated they were not involved with Employment Services

Ok, this factor did not surprise me. From my experience caseworkers have a habit of not even telling their clients about this service. The clients I know who are involved with Employment Services had to find out about that through sources other than their caseworkers and the department as in a whole.

As a matter of fact they do not tend to tell their clients about *any* services that are available to them. I personally have also heard of clients who did use Employment services and ended up dropping out. These clients dropped out because Employment Services was doing nothing for them.

Client friendly document? Where?

Mentioned on page 25 of this presentation it says "we developed a client friendly and easy to understand document that will help our clients understand available supports and services".

Well, I will say as a client myself, I have never seen a copy of this document. A big question here is why is the department keeping this document a secret?

Anyway, all we can do is hope for a better system. The PowerPoint presentation is posted [here](http://novascotia.ca/coms/transformation/docs/ESIStakeholderEngagementRound2.pdf) (<http://novascotia.ca/coms/transformation/docs/ESIStakeholderEngagementRound2.pdf>). Feel free to have a look at it.

See also:

[People on welfare talk back to Community Services. First Voices become One Voice](https://nsadvocate.org/2016/03/31/people-on-welfare-talk-back-to-community-services-first-voices-become-one-voice/)
(<https://nsadvocate.org/2016/03/31/people-on-welfare-talk-back-to-community-services-first-voices-become-one-voice/>)


[Group upset about Community Services Welfare Transformation](https://nsadvocate.org/2016/12/16/group-upset-about-community-services-welfare-transformation/)
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