



## Heating costs force family to do without

Amanda Persico

Published on Dec 04, 2008

In one classroom of 30 students in York Region, three can't afford to go on the class bowling trip.

"My boy stays back from school outings. And he cries," Mary (not her real name), a single mother in Newmarket, said.

"I tell him there's nothing wrong with him. We just can't afford it. To tell him all the time there's no money breaks my heart."

One in 10 children in York Region live in poverty, according to a new York Children's Aid Society report.

For Mary, living in poverty as a single mother is a daily struggle. And the choice between paying for hydro and food is becoming more difficult as winter comes.

"When the winter comes, I fear it," she said. "I'm scared to turn on the heat because my hydro will go up. How can I keep going, paying for hydro, rent and food?"

Living in poverty is always difficult, but in the past six months, the level of difficulty has gone up significantly, said Tom Pearson, president of Poverty Action for Change Coalition.

The cost of living has increased, but welfare has only seen a 2-percent increase, he said. This leaves very little money left over after payments for basic living expenses.

Mary's seven-year-old son is one of about 141,000 children living in poverty in the GTA. The pair lives on a month-to-month basis, with only the bare necessities.

She has a TV with rabbit ears and no Internet.

"Basic cable and Internet are luxuries," she said. "Research and looking things up on the Internet, my son doesn't get that option."

The single mother set up four spare change tins around her home, one for her son's school outings, one for entertainment, one for clothing and one for her son.

"The tins are for something extra, going to dinner or a movie or a new toy," she said. "(My son) is even learning to put money in the tin to save. If there's

enough money in the tin, we can go out for dinner.”

Even though Mary opted for equal billing for her hydro, she still pays about \$300 a month and has had to find other ways to cut back; food was one of them.

“I can only buy basic foods, bread and milk. If chicken’s on sale, I can get chicken,” she said.

“I can’t afford a decent roast to feed my family.”

There are close to 50,000 people in York Region living off food banks and that number could double over the next year, Mr. Pearson said.

“It’s most common for parents living on low wages or welfare to go all day without eating in order to make sure their children can,” he said.

— with files from Natalie Berchem