

## HOW ABOUT A REAL SOCIAL SAFETY NET?

By Diane McHardy Schmidt

A few weeks ago I was listening to an interview on CBC Radio of a single woman who lives on welfare on the Downtown East Side. The interview was inspired by Premier Gordon Campbell's announcement in late October that the next provincial budget will include an increase to the welfare shelter allowances. According to the media there has been no increase in the shelter allowance since 1994 (Vancouver Sun Oct 28).

The woman being interviewed explained that it is difficult to find a room in her neighbourhood, not exactly a high rent district, for under \$350 per month. Her place costs her more than \$400 per month. (\$350 per month may get you a room in a 'single occupancy hotel', probably with shared bathroom facilities. If you are looking for something cleaner, safer, larger you will pay more.) Paying more than \$325 per month for rent means supplementing the shelter allowance with money from the already questionably adequate 'income assistance support' payments.

Listening to the voices on the radio I was overcome with shame. I knew these figures. I knew that our welfare system does not provide enough money to cover the basic costs of living in Vancouver. I knew that without the various food banks and meal programmes, including our own Community Meal at St. Mary's, many people on income assistance in Vancouver and probably throughout the Lower Mainland would be starving.

My shame was for never putting pen to paper to tell my MLA - the Premier - that I think this is an unacceptable situation. I need to tell my MLA that I want my government to provide income assistance that covers basic costs wherever one lives in the province.

The *intention* to increase the shelter rates has been announced. The *actual increases* probably will not be announced until the 2007 budget is presented in the Legislature. It is not clear if the 'income assistance support' payments will be increased also. Our opinions can make a difference if we tell our elected representatives.

Do you have an opinion on this matter? Please write your MLA and the Premier. Write a letter directly to:

The Hon. Claude Richmond, Minister of Employment and Income Assistance, Room 133, Parliament Buildings, Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

Phone: 250 387-7750  
Fax: 250 387-7292  
Toll-free: 1-866-387-3952

Or email him at [Claude.Richmond.MLA@leg.bc.ca](mailto:Claude.Richmond.MLA@leg.bc.ca)

If you would like more information please read Jon Kesselman's article "A whole \$6! Every day!" on the Issues and Ideas page in the Vancouver Sun, Friday Oct 27 and visit the following websites, which will of course provide you with more links:

[www.raisetherates.org](http://www.raisetherates.org)

[www.strategicthoughts.com/record2006/hungry/html](http://www.strategicthoughts.com/record2006/hungry/html)

Could you live on \$6 a day?



Latte & scone: \$6

Single 'employable' adults on welfare receive \$510/month [\$325 for shelter and \$185 for all other living expenses, which amounts to about \$6 a day].

## RAISE THE RATES

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[www.raisetherates.org](http://www.raisetherates.org) / 604-729-2380