

Statement by ANONYMOUS GROUP 1
October 1, 2018

We are a group of consumers/survivors of the mental health system, tenants or former tenants of boarding homes in the city of Toronto. We meet regularly to discuss and advocate improvements to the quality of life for our communities. We are surviving on ODSP. Boarders and Lodgers receive \$896 monthly to cover all needs.

At our last meeting we discussed what it is like to live with the income that we get.

“I am ready to throw up my hands in despair!” said one member. “People have no idea how hard it is to get by, to be able to have a normal life. They have no idea of the constraints we live under.”

Another member shared, “When a lightbulb burns out, it is stressful. Light bulbs are expensive.” A member responded, “I transfer my bulbs from socket to socket, and use just a little bit of light at a time.”

“You shouldn’t have to choose to put a roof over your head or buy food. Food is only adequate when supplemented by the food bank. We are juggling necessities, there is no disposable income.”

“If we had more money, we could buy our own hygiene supplies!” said one. “I know someone who buys used underwear from Value Village, used underwear.”

“I have to think about paying a bill or paying for a metropass.”

“These days things like a phone and transportation are necessities. You need to have a way of moving around. I share a metropass with my neighbour. Every night we argue about who is going to use it the next day.”

“If I had more money, I would have more security. When I don’t have money for the TTC, I walk, and walking in my neighbourhood at night... If I had more money I would have more safety.”

A member commented, “If we had more money we could eat healthy!” Another added, “We could take better care of our housing, we could go back to school.” One said, “We could save for a funeral.”

One member said, "I am probably getting a part-time job. I am thrilled, excited, and I am terrified. I just want to be completely off ODSP, the administration and the rules are so complicated."

Other members expressed concern that they not lose access to their benefits. Another member said, "I can't face all the paperwork if I earn a little money, it is so intimidating." For some of us, it seems the rules and paperwork are meant to keep us poor.

"Once, long ago," said a member, "I asked my worker if it would be possible to get \$30.00 so that I could buy a new pair of shoes at Payless. It was Christmas. She said, 'you need to cut your coat according to your cloth.' I couldn't get a pair of \$30 Payless shoes."

"At one time, I got \$84 for transportation. Then, that was cut to \$48, then I got nothing. There was no explanation, nothing."

Think about what it means to survive on what we live on. \$896 for a boarder/lodger to pay for room and board, transportation, all our personal needs in the city of Toronto.

Another commented, "I am so tired of trying to find ways to respond to the question 'what are you doing for the long weekend?' We can't do anything but stay at home."

Another member added, "The community that you have on social assistance is *not* the community that you have when you are not. Some of us don't have any friends that are not on ODSP because people don't understand we don't have any money."

One member put it this way, "If I had more money, I might have a social life, I might go out once in a while. I don't have an emotional life, I don't have a physical life. *No one* will date you... I just have to exist in my body the way it is."