

Two Feet of Social Action Activity

Introduce participants to the Two Feet of Social Action with the drawing that illustrates that both charity and justice are needed to achieve social action. (see handout below)

Then select two or more of the attached scenarios for the participants to consider.

These are:

New immigrants

Health and wellness among youth

Affordable housing shortage

Childcare for young parents

Food security

Divide participants into groups of four people, and assign one scenario to each group. Each group should receive one copy of the scenario sheet and a blank sheet of paper upon which to write the results of their discussion. Give groups ten minutes to read the assigned scenario and brainstorm at least two solutions to the problem presented. One solution should be a “direct service” or charity solution. Participants should decide how they could meet the immediate needs of the individuals involved. The other solution should be a “social change” solution. Participants should decide how they could help to correct the problem in the community in the long term.

Ask volunteers to share their solutions, verbally and/or written on a white board or presentation board for the entire group to see. Are there any actions – direct service or social change – that the group would actually like to take on?

Two Feet of Social Action Scenarios

Cut the following scenarios and distribute one to each group. Some groups may work on the same scenario.

New Immigrants

Education programs can't meet the demand for ESL learning among the growing number of immigrants in our communities. For example, in Toronto, 91 per cent of elementary schools have students for whom English is a second language (9 per cent of students). But 34 per cent of those schools had no ESL teacher in 2007-08. Learning English is one of the keys to successful settlement. Evidence indicates that Toronto is not meeting the ESL needs of new immigrants. Furthermore, more than a third of food bank users are newcomers to Canada. Almost two in five immigrants in the skilled worker category and more than half of refugees become low-income within their first year in Canada, even though many immigrants arrive with savings. Lack of language and cultural literacy skills often prevent newcomers from finding good jobs. A big barrier is recognition of foreign credentials and work experience. Data shows the unemployment more than doubled in Toronto among 25 - 44-year-old newcomers with college or university credentials, from 7.8% in 2008, to 16.2% in 2009 (a 107% increase, compared to a 54% increase for those with the same education in the total population).

Health and Wellness Among Youth

Less than 15% of Ontario children are physically active (getting the recommended daily hour and a half of physical activity, half of which should come from active play). One in three children (aged 2 to 11) in Toronto is overweight or obese, and most are exposed to intense marketing of unhealthy food choices. Toronto high school students are much more likely than students in other Ontario regions to rate their health as poor (17.9% compared to the Ontario average of 14.5%); more of them are physically inactive, and almost one in seven spends 7 or more hours a day in front of a computer or TV screen. About one quarter (24.5%) reported being overweight or obese in 2009 (slightly below the provincial average). Barely more than a third of teenagers (aged 15 -17) were eating one daily meal at home with their parents in 2005 – a decline of more than 80% since 1992. Children are also suffering from shortened physical activity due to cuts in physical education programs and the huge popularity of computer games. As a result, more and more children spend time in front of the television, increasing the likelihood of obesity by 10-61%. A contributing factor is the loss of green space for parks and recreation, as well as the increasing numbers of children living in complex homes (apartments, condominiums) with little outdoor space. Canadians who participate in sport at a young age have an increased likelihood of maintaining a strong level of physical activity into their adult life, and by promoting a healthy lifestyle at an early age, healthy habits are formed. Part of forming healthy habits, however, also includes nutrition and food choice, which is crucial to maintaining a healthy weight. Leading an inactive life, poor nutrition and increased eating can lead to obesity which in turn is a strong risk factor in developing diabetes. In Canada, the average age of onset for diabetes has decreased from 59 in 1985 to 49 in 1995, and more and more children are suffering from the disease. Ontario currently spends almost \$5 billion annually on treatment of diabetes and related illnesses. Unchecked, the cost is expected to rise to \$7 billion by 2020, when an estimated one in four people in the province will either have diabetes or be pre-diabetic.

Affordable Housing Shortage

Housing affordability is one of the most fundamental issues, impacting the quality of life in the city. Toronto was the 5th least affordable housing market in Canada in the 2010 *Demographia International Housing Affordability Survey*, and ranked 215th least affordable of the 272 international locations surveyed. The average Toronto residence costs 4.62 times the median family income in 2008 compared to a ratio of 3.54 in 1995. The 2009 - 2011 period will likely see a drop in tenant incomes and worsening housing affordability, similar to the recession of the 1990s. In 2009, estimated incomes for a number of occupations and groups had already put affordable housing out of reach. Furthermore 8,000 new eligible households were added to the active waiting list for social housing in Toronto in 2009. The list of households waiting for housing grew by 15% to 60,197. The number of seniors on the total waiting list increased by 20% between 2005 and 2009. Finally, it is worth noting that 3,269 children stayed in Toronto's shelters in 2009, 550 more than the year before (a 20% increase). The numbers have been growing since 2005.

Childcare for Young Parents

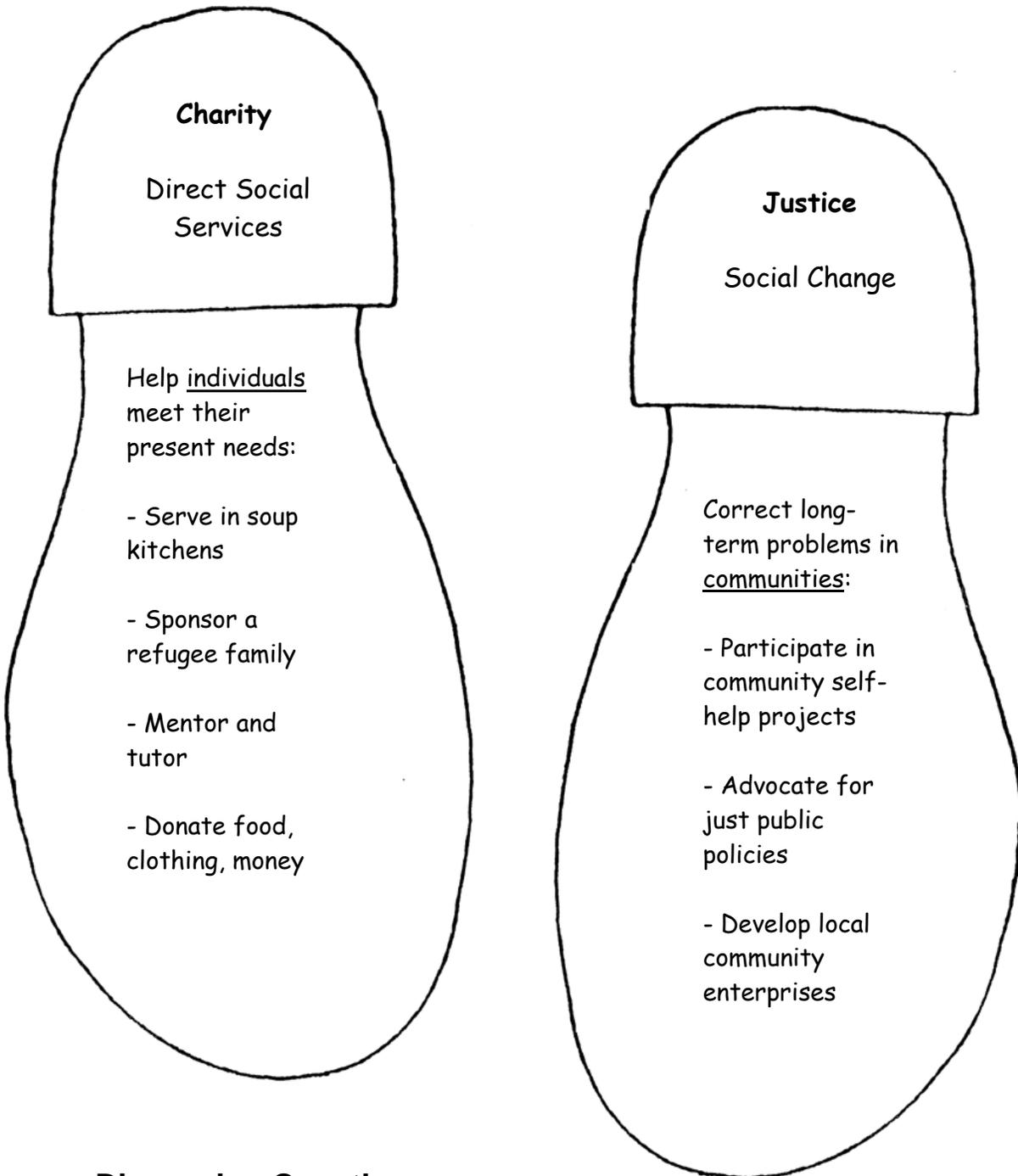
Childcare and a lack of transportation can be significant barriers to pregnant and parenting teens. In Toronto, 24,000 fee subsidies support less than one in three low-income children. The number of child care fee subsidies has not changed in two years. In June 2010, more than 17,800 children remained on the subsidy waiting list. Without child care, parents cannot work or continue school. Unfortunately, almost one quarter (23.4%) of children in female lone-parent families were living in poverty in 2008.

Food Security

One in ten Toronto households lives without food security. A household is food secure when every member has access to enough safe and nutritious food for a healthy life. Households struggling with their food budgets are more likely to be located in neighborhoods that do not have stores selling healthy foods or reliable transportation to access healthier options. Families often cope by visiting food banks and pantries, relying on less expensive processed foods (which are often higher in fat and lower in nutritional quality) and eating fewer fruits, vegetables and dairy products. Some facts to consider:

- Half of Toronto is a "food desert". One in two Torontonians lives more than 1 km from the nearest grocery store. Access to healthy food is linked to income, but also to proximity to a grocery store.
- 123,000 additional visits to food banks in Toronto pushed the total to almost a million visits between 2009 and 2010 (on top of a 9% increase in visits in the previous year).
- Almost half of new food bank visitors (46%) in the GTA came because of job loss or reduced work hours.
- 45% of food bank users are seriously ill or disabled.

The Two Feet of Social Action



Discussion Question:

Is one foot more important than the other?