

Making Kenora HOME

## A WALK IN OTHER'S SHOES: POVERTY CHALLENGE

*Kenora, Ontario 2011*



The Options Committee of Making Kenora HOME proposed a challenge to a group of people of Kenora to live for five days with some of the challenges faced by people on social assistance. It took place during The Week of Action Against Poverty. The purpose of the challenge was to raise awareness and break barriers for those living in poverty. The event was based on the *Put Food in the Budget* and *Do the Math* initiatives.

The select group of 12 people were asked to live off \$35.00 for the entire five days. This included all food and drink, entertainment, some limitations of personal supplies and transportation costs.

Each participant was given a daily challenge card which revealed an additional challenge to be faced with. They were to complete the challenge before the days end.

The event was held Friday February 11<sup>th</sup> until Wednesday February 16<sup>th</sup> 2011.



[www.makingkenorahome.ca](http://www.makingkenorahome.ca)

#### Special Thanks To:

City of Kenora  
Kenora Fellowship Centre  
Local Media  
Northwest Community Legal Clinic  
Morning Star Centre

O.P.P.  
Karen Sinclair  
*Do the Math*  
Safeway  
All Participants

## Participants



**Shelley Bujold**

Television  
Producer  
Points North CJBN

*"In reality if I borrowed or asked for things I needed all the time, do you think I would get it all the time?"*



**Dave Cain**

Community  
Services Officer –  
O.P.P.

*"The worst part of the day was the fact that I decided I would stick to the food I had purchased so I was quite hungry until I returned home. I suppose I could have spent some of my \$5.49 but that seemed silly because I knew not what lay ahead."*



**Howard Hampton**

MPP Kenora Rainy  
River Riding

Although he is very busy at Queen's Park, Howard has been participating in the challenge. It has been reported that he was very excited to stumble upon a super deal on a large bag of pasta for \$1.00.



**Valentina Herbert**

Repatriation  
Worker

*"Well this is the 2nd day. I felt so empty today like my body was lighter from less junk and the extra foods."*



**Dan Jorgenson**

Retired Police  
Officer

*"It makes you think about the people who live a precarious existence every day, for real. I can buy anything I want in the grocery store. Lots of folks aren't sure where their next meal is coming from. It's sad that there isn't more balance in a country that has so much. To the middle class the sums that professional athletes earn seem obscene. To the poor the wealth of the middle class must seem obscene."*



**Thelma Wilkins-Page**

Bank Manager

*"One thing I've noticed is my lack of energy! Will have to see if that continues, could be a real detriment to those looking for work trying to get off Ontario Works, hard to be "on" in an interview with no energy!"*



Participants chat at the wrap up



Participants enjoyed a "soup kitchen" meal. Some made a contribution with their purchased food items.



The crowd speaks with the participants



Shaw TV featured a story on the event

Would I do this week again? Absolutely. I hope it achieved its goal of drawing awareness to the issue of how difficult it is to live well on an Ontario Works Allowance. It definitely made for some interesting conversations this week with co-workers, friends, and strangers! Where am I going to go with this now? Not sure yet - this week has been a lot to process. I am more fully appreciate a lot of the comforts of the life I am privilege to have. I don't have to worry about how much the grocery store bill will total, I don't have to worry about where I'll find the money to purchase a new toothbrush or dish soap, I can afford to go out for dinner, celebrate, have a car, and live in a comfortable apartment. Life is not so easy without those comforts. This week I was consumed with thought of wondering how I would manage to budget money, what I would eat, how I would meet my basic needs. With all those thoughts, how can I think of much else? What an eye-opening experience. Thanks to everyone who was involved in this challenge - to Fay for putting in all the hours of organizing. And to all the participants as well - congrats on stepping up to the challenge and seeing it through! It was inspiring to read all your blogs

And thanks to all who READ our blogs! The support and comments we heard were encouraging. Keep spreading the word. Change is possible!



Opening event at City Hall Council Chambers

## *Making Kenora HOME*



**Lauren Mandamin**

Student

*"The Minto Centre is a remarkable place. It also has a lil store upstairs in one of the rooms, to assist people with buying food at a decent price. Also seeing all the people that go through the Minto Centre is great"*



**Tabitha Marshall**

Registered Dietitian

*"To me community lives up to its name when people come together and support each other to stand when you otherwise couldn't stand on your own."*



**Adrienne Penner**

Registered Dietitian

*"Who is going to buy a bag of baby carrots for \$2 that'll give you maybe 200 calories, when you can buy two boxes of KD that'll provide you with like 4 full meals for the same price! Not as healthy, but makes sense when you're eating to stay alive."*



**Jada Puls**

X-ray Technician Student

*"Showering & going to the bathroom - you need soap, toilet paper, a towel to dry your hands, shampoo, plus the cost of water! - weird how going p- costs you money! Today I slept in - because you're not hungry when you're sleeping. Cuttin'er thin Jada!"*



**Allan Rundel**

Senior Pastor  
Lakeside Baptist Church

*[Allan speaks of attending church] If I had not shaved or showered in a few days because I could not afford soap or a razor would I feel welcome? Or, would I be embarrassed and just not go?*



**Kyra Strath**

College Student

*"As Ghandi once said, "There is enough in the world for everyone's need, but not for anyone's greed".*



### Day 5

I managed to succeed with my challenge card for the day - finding a toothbrush. I had a few minutes at lunch today so I shopped around Kenora for the best deal. I first went to Zellers - they had some for \$1.49. Then hopped over to No Frills - \$1.69 was the best deal I saw - BUT they were all sold out - perhaps the other challengers got there before me... I found one at the Bargain Shop for \$1!!! Not the quality I

am used to - but still a toothbrush nonetheless. Better than furry teeth and cavities - then I would end up paying to go to the dentist.

I decided to see if I could spend the rest of my money and I succeeded with \$0.21 to spare. Talk about cutting it close! I was a little nervous heading up to the cashier - hoping it had done the math correctly. Tonight I am going to a potluck with friends and am required to bring a dish to share. I decided to bring an apple crisp - so I bought 4 apples (\$2.52), some margarine (large tub of non-hydrogenated imperial for \$1.99 - great deal!), and crushed tomatoes for \$0.88 (not for the apple crisp but great deal!). Total = \$5.39

The crisp turned out great. I chopped my apples, put them in the bottom of a dish, sprinkled some cinnamon on top with a few Splenda packages. Then made crumbs with 1 cup of oats, 1/2 cup margarine, about 1/2 cup of brown sugar - mixed and added on top. It bakes for around 45 minutes - cheap, tasty, nutritious! Yum.

Well we made it to the end! And I have \$0.21 to spare. The challenge was definitely NOT easy, but I am so glad I did it. It took some serious planning, organization and creativity. It was a humbling, enlightening, and challenging experience.

Here were some thoughts from the week:

- Transportation - it was warm out during the challenge so it was a pleasure to walk outside! I only used my car once and that was for transporting bringing a baby highchair home from Wal-Mart (couldn't walk or take the bus with that). If it was cold outside it would have made it horrible to walk to and from work (especially if I didn't have the proper winter clothing). I found allotting more time for traveling was a challenge. Usually I leave with just enough time to get places - but I had to plan and leave well in advance or I would be late (including getting up a 1/2 hour earlier for work)!
- Exercise - during this week I did a free exercise video, walked the Rec Centre track, ran outside, and used my hand weights that I have at home. I gave up my Rec Centre membership for the week because I couldn't budget for it. It still seems strange to me how expensive it is to exercise at the gym here in Kenora. It should be more accessible to everyone - it will only have positive benefits.
- Food - as a dietitian this was my focus of the week because I wanted to see if the nutrition advice I give my clients is achievable on a limited income. My goals were to purchase foods from each of the food groups, eat as close to Canada's Food Guide as I could, limit processed foods, and eat a different meal every day. I did succeed - the limited variety of foods being the biggest challenge (you can only eat so much cabbage) - it just took a lot of planning, skill, and creativity. What helped me is that I have done a lot of research into cooking and grocery shopping on a budget in my work as a dietitian. I knew what foods would last me the week, what was the best buys, and how to shop properly. I also have the cooking skills (and equipment) to be able to create healthy, balanced meals daily. I recognize that many people on OW assistance do not necessarily have the cooking skills, the knowledge, or the cooking equipment that I have to create the meals I did. I did have fun being creative this week!
- Community - I learned that having a support system was very important for this challenge. Knowing some of the other challengers (and supportive friends) made it more manageable. I bartered and traded food items with friends. Planned potlucks to swap food. Met up and encouraged each other. We attended soup kitchens together. Doing this on your own is HARD. The reality of many people I see is they are doing it alone.

Supper tonight was a "creation" I might call it. Tasty though. I had a little casserole dish, put a piece of bread in the bottom, then a layer of cooked green beans, then 3 eggs beaten with milk and pepper, and topped with cheese. I baked it in the oven until it was puffy and the eggs were cooked. And I ate it with some green beans, carrots, and a glass of milk. It was filling! And my challenge for the day - the dish soap. I decided - soap is soap and am using my hand soap to wash my dishes. Now they smell a little like vanilla spice but could be worse! Now its back to work tomorrow - I have my lunch already packed! We will see what challenge tomorrow will bring.

#### Day 4

Challenge card of the day: "Someone stole your only shovel. A potential employer is coming to your house for an interview in 1 hour. Find a solution." Uh oh - coming to my house! That's a big deal. AND I slept in this morning! Thankfully I have a friend who lives 2 minutes away from me who has a shovel. I borrowed one from her. Thank goodness for friends! She is pretty trusting that I wouldn't lose or break the shovel. I'm going to keep it inside my house so no one steals this one before I get it back to her. Perhaps I'll shovel her sidewalk to say thanks! Breakfast - oatmeal cooked with an egg and a sliced banana. The egg gives the oatmeal more texture (which I like) and more protein (which keeps me full longer). The banana is just plain delicious and then I don't have to worry about adding sugar to it. I cooked it in milk as well so I covered all my food groups at my one meal.

Lunch - tuna with some vinegar (package from fast food restaurant) and pepper on toast. Some steamed cabbage, raw carrots, milk, and a banana. This time I will spread my food throughout the day so it lasts!

I'm walking to work again this morning. Although I am really missing the fact that I can't go to the rec centre after work. Why is it SO EXPENSIVE to go to the gym?? I mean there are free ways to exercise - but if you want treadmills or weights you have to pay to use them. You would think that the government would subsidize it - especially because that might be an upstream approach to dealing with our rising healthcare costs. Exercise = healthier people = less people accessing health care! I think I will take a walk around the track at the rec centre on my lunch hour today.

I wasn't able to attend any soup kitchens today due to my work schedule - but I WAS able to access free food. Where I work at Waasegiizhig Nanaandawe'Iyewigamig (Kenora Area Health Access Centre) we have an emergency food box where we store emergency food items like juice, crackers, nutritional supplements, fruit cups, granola bars, etc for when people come in for services and are really in need of some food. I was allowed to have a shake today which helped tied me over today. Thanks KAHAC!

As for my plans of walking at the rec centre at lunch - that didn't happen because - again of work scheduling. So I walked on over after work and did some laps - it wasn't too busy which was nice - even nicer was that it was free! Next time I will bring a friend to talk to.

I did do a little grocery shopping today. I stopped in at Safeway to purchase a few more items for today and tomorrow (it was just so convenient on the way home...). I bought three apples and 2 chocolate covered donuts (yes I am a dietitian but hey its Valentines Day and I'm human!). Cost me \$3.44 - so worth it, but expensive - I knew I shouldn't have gone to Safeway. This leaves me with \$6.73.

Supper tonight was barley (cooked like rice), 2 poached eggs, carrots and steamed cabbage. I heated up some milk and had that as well. Then I had a chocolate donut for dessert with my lovely friend Jada!



For my social activity this evening I am in the G Clef choir and we practise every Monday night. It is one of the really awesome low-cost community groups that you can join in Kenora. I did walk there and back today. It wasn't a problem going there - it was coming home later when you are tired, its dark, and the temperature has dropped. I appreciate my car for evening event

#### Rules of the Challenge

In an attempt to keep it as realistic as possible, we asked all participants to attempt not to spend anymore than \$35.00 over the entire five day period.

The monthly rate for Ontario Works as of December 2010 is \$592.00 for a single person. The maximum amount allowed for shelter is \$368 and maximum for basic needs is \$224 per month. The average single rental unit in Kenora is \$546.00 per month. The lowest possible monthly rent with utilities included is \$450.00 per month for a single room. This allows \$142.00 per month for other expenses such as food, clothing and personal supplies. This works out to \$4.73 per day or \$23.65 for 5 days.

#### Food

- All food and drink consumed during the five days must come from the \$35.00 budget – do not use pre-purchased supplies
  - An attempt to eat healthy must be made
  - Do not let friends or family purchase or supply meals
  - Coffee can be purchased for 50 cents per cup
- Participants are encouraged to attend the meal programs offered through non-profit agencies

#### Residence Related Costs

- Keep utility costs to a minimum (i.e. turn the heat down, shower every 2 days)
- Keep supply costs to a minimum (i.e. laundry, food storage, cleaning supplies)
- Participants are encouraged to spend a night at the Kenora Fellowship Centre

#### Personal Supplies

- Attempt to keep personal supply use to a minimum
- Prescription medications are exempt, but if you need to purchase an over the counter item, attempt to keep it within the \$35.00 budget
- If you do not have a certain personal hygiene item available, the purchase must come from the \$35 (i.e. If you run out of toothpaste)

#### Transportation

- Transportation for work, family commitments or other non-personal reasons will be allowed without penalty.
- Should a vehicle be used for a purpose other than listed above, a penalty of \$1.00 must be paid. Consider the costs of maintaining a vehicle; we would assume that if Ontario Works was your only source of income, you would not be able to cover those costs.
- Use of public transportation and/or your feet is encouraged.

#### Entertainment

- All entertainment and or sports costs must be included in the \$35.00.
- If you previously paid a membership to a club (i.e. Ski hill) you must pay the day-pass rate, unless you have arranged for payment by a social assistance group.
- Attempt to go to functions by utilizing free events or services

## Shelley Bujold



Television Producer, Points North on CJBN

*"I'm generally a positive person and try to see both sides of the story. I love talking to people, conveying news in the community, and going beyond the headlines to find out how people really feel about issues of the day. Being able to take a challenge like this one will be another way to get a feel for how others live and convey a part of the community."*

**Average weekly budget for "basic needs":** Food, sewer/water/hydro, heating, mortgage, Cable - around \$300

**Food Weakness:** chocolate and coffee

**Average Cost of Weakness:** I only eat chocolate as a treat so maybe \$5 a month? But coffee everyday is essential - work coffee is free and home coffee about \$10 a month for beans, going out for coffee about \$10-15 per month

**What would your typical daily menu look like?** Cereal or yogurt with granola (home made) for breakfast; 1-2 fruits/vegetable snacks for the day; soup/salad plus dinner leftovers for lunch or sandwich; meat/1-2 vegetable sides, maybe a starch like rice or sweet potato for dinner; maybe crackers and peanut butter or fruit for another snack. Water, coffee or herbal tea to drink (sometimes wine or beer and the odd pop). I mostly eat at home.

**Average cost of typical day's meals?** About \$5-10

**What do you anticipate being the most difficult in the challenge?** The coffee rule! Kidding, I can go without if I have to. Getting around outside of work hours - even asking for rides and paying for that will be a challenge. I'm involved in a number of things and I like to go to the gym in the winter, which will cut into the cost. I may not be able to go.

**Why did you decide to take the challenge?** Through the series I'll be producing through this challenge I hope to bring awareness to the poverty issue which plagues the Northwest and just about every community in Ontario. Unemployment is high and a lot of people who never anticipate it fall back on Ontario Works. Anyone can land in a tough situation and we need to think about it.

Tomorrow is the start of the Poverty Challenge and it was very interesting to hear everyone's views on what they expect and how they have been planning. I have shopped and spent \$24.13 for food and got a lot of healthy stuff - I'll add more tomorrow but I am hoping the \$10 or so dollars I have left will be enough to cover the challenges I may have.

### Day 1

OK - first day of the challenge. Honestly, a little sigh of relief after opening my first challenge card (as we get one each day, which may throw us off course).

"Out of dish soap. Find a solution."

Not that I think this is a good thing, but I have to go kite surfing in Dryden for work today and losing my mitts or being 'sick' or going without a jacket would be a lot more difficult to deal with. When I'm back home, I may scope out a deal on dish soap, I know sometimes you can get it for around a \$1. Maybe the Bargain shop? I'll check it out.

One of the issues I've been having yesterday and today is with my internet. It has been cutting in and out. Which is incredibly frustrating (especially when I have no idea how to fix it). I realize how much I rely on the internet when I can't access it! I use the internet not only for blogging this challenge, emails, Facebook, and work - but also for communicating with my family via Skype. Without this I feel very disconnected from them. Skype at least is free - while long-distance phone calls cost money. I can go to the library to use the internet...but I can't use Skype and it certainly is much less convenient than having internet while sitting on my couch at home! I'm off walking to Jubilee right away - which should take 20-25 minutes. Buses don't run on Sundays.

Today is the only opportunity I get to attend one of the free meals offered in our community. What I love about the meals offered in Kenora is that every day there is SOME meal to go to - whether it be at the Fellowship Centre, at Knox Agape Table, or at Jubilee Church. The community coordination is encouraging. At Jubilee - people are able to come for the meal at 1:00pm, but myself and a fellow challenger, Adrienne, decided to go for the church service before as well for the full experience. As a regular church attendee I wasn't too far out of my comfort zone, but it was still quite a different experience.

Jubilee Church in downtown Kenora is a ministry focussed on those people who need it most - the poor, the hungry, the street people, and those generally ignored by everyone else in society. The congregation was a whole mix of people from a variety of different walks of life. I'm sure each person there would have a very interesting story to tell. But what moved me the most at the service was the most amazing sense of community. To me community lives up to its name when people coming together and support each other to stand when you otherwise couldn't stand on your own. For me, this challenge is only 5 days long, for many of these people it is a reality that they might live their whole lives through. I can get by the next few days knowing the end is in sight - but it is the community and support that you have - the family, the friends, and for some people their spiritual beliefs that give them the hope, the courage, the strength to continue on their journey. I felt so privilege to be able to participate in the service today and be welcomed in to join in their worship.

Collection - during the service a collection of money was taken for the continued support of the services being offered at Jubilee. I thought about the tight budget that I was on, but also thought about how much I had at home. I have MORE than enough and there are others who need it more than I do. I gave 10% of my \$35.00 as my donation. It was so touching to see people at the service who have so little, still give at the collection, and give cheerfully.

Lunch was awesome!! There was so much food - and it was nutritious AND delicious! We had pasta with meatballs and some vegetables mixed together, a bun, and some juice or coffee. People even came around with little Valentine's Day cupcakes for everyone! So I did get to celebrate Valentine's Day after all. I could have had seconds, or even thirds if I wanted to - or even taken some home. Its great to see that there was more than enough food to feed everyone who came out for the meal. It was a great social opportunity too to meet new people, hear some stories, and also meet up with some of the other people who are also on the challenge and hear how they are doing.

After the ample lunch, for my daily exercise I went walking out in the beautiful warm weather with Jada (a fellow challenger), a few other good friends, and 4 lovely dogs! It turned into a lovely afternoon - however the snow did get a little wet in the warm temperature so our clothes got a little soggy. Thankfully we had a warm house to go back to, to warm up in.

One blessing from the afternoon - Jada fed me a snack! She is also on the limited \$35.00 but still managed to offer me some food when we were all hungry after our walk. It was a lovely taste of a tuna casserole and it just hit the spot. Thanks again Jada! I hope to return the favour before the week is up. We also did a little food swap to add a little variety into our diets. I got a little square of cheese and she got a banana in return. Awesome! It made dinner SO much better to have some cheese. I didn't want to buy a whole block of cheese so this was a great way of getting just enough for my meal.

for this. There were even veggies and dip which was a great way to get more vegetables into my system!

Thinking about it - potlucks are great ways to stretch food and get more variety into my diet. Creating a feast doesn't take much when everyone brings something small! And it creates a wonderful social environment around food. There are so many other factors the impacts our eating beside the actual food. To me atmosphere makes a huge difference. If I am eating with friends - I am happy and wouldn't mind as much if the meal was repeated, or bland, or boring.

I ended up making a gift for the shower. This costs less than buying something from Wal-Mart or Zellers - but also it shows that you care because you put the time, energy and love into the gift. I don't know why people don't make gifts more often - a personal touch really does make it special! See the picture of the sweet peas I made: Supper tonight will be small as I had enough to eat at the shower. Leftover soup is on the menu.

Tonight I am having a low-cost night as well. I am having a friend over and we are watching a movie (borrowed, not rented), eating my free popcorn and just enjoying each other's company. Who says you need to go out to have fun?

I had wanted to go to the lunch at the Fellowship Centre today - but the timing did not work out for me. I guess that is also a challenge - if you are not able to go to the free meals...too bad for you. Appointments, lack of transportation, bad weather, or whatever other barriers, can prevent you from getting to that meal that you really need.



### Day 3

My challenge today is this: "Out of dish soap. Find a solution." Well I do have some money left so perhaps I'll swing by a store on the way home from Jubilee lunch today and see if anything is within my budget... Other options considered: paper plates and plastic cutlery? But that is just too expensive and frankly just bad for the environment. I thought about asking my neighbours to spot me some soap...but I am too shy to go ask. I even tried hand soap...but that idea flopped too.

This morning I woke up to a cold apartment. I thought I would have a nice hot shower to warm up in. Guess what? My shower ran out of hot water! So I had a luke-warm shower instead...brrrrrrr. I didn't even plan that one!

For breakfast this morning I repeated my first meal - I had leftover barley, lentil and cabbage soup. Which sounds like an odd breakfast - but the barley soaked up all the liquid so it was kind of like oatmeal! Quite delicious. I had a big bowl of that and a nice steaming mug of tea. That should hold me until lunch at Jubilee. I feel like I am doing pretty well rationing my food and I am pretty sure I will have enough to last me through the week (and then some). Part of my advantages?

- I don't have a big appetite. I can eat three small meals/day and feel satisfied - I think of some of my friends who eat 3-4 times more than I do - they would have serious trouble on this budget.
- I am not overly physically active right now - in the spring/summer I am usually following a training schedule for running which gets me exercising a lot more than I am now. During this time my food intake doubles. Exercising a lot during this week doesn't seem too appealing because then I would feel more hungry!
- I have cooking skills - I can make a meal out of pretty much anything. I bought raw ingredients instead of already prepared foods - this lasts WAY longer and is cheaper in the long run.
- I don't mind eating vegetarian. I know some people who can't survive without their meat.

Road trips aren't the same without it. I knew coffee would be my ultimate weakness. An interesting day - no I did not get take out coffee - very tempting but did not do it! Instead travel mug with work coffee for the trip to Dryden. AND 50 cents left on the counter (since it's free at my workplace). Kite boarding/skiing went decently today - part of my packed lunch froze but still tasted great and kept me going most of the day. I got asked a few times if I could be bought lunch/coffee and said no. I also got invited out tonight but decided against it - maybe tomorrow I can do the hang out with a glass of water thing. I live quite close to downtown Kenora so getting to some of the 'hot spots' isn't an issue on foot. I might head out with a portable camera and talk to some folks to get some insight tomorrow.

### Day 3

I missed reporting yesterday. I got distracted when my husband nearly got stuck in a snowmobile north of here. As he warmed up I made him dinner - not out of my food budget - his own food which looked really good.

I have laid low this morning, my challenge card stated that I am sick, have a fever and must go out to try to find some medicine. Figured trying to get some rest was a good idea before heading out in the cold to walk to the drug store. I'll try to hit up a few different places to see if I can get a deal. I have around \$8 dollars left, so I should be able to do it - get some aspirin or Tylenol alternatives. BUT I don't want to spend the whole amount as I know there are three more days of challenges ahead. Thoughts going through my head: if I was sick with a fever I would probably not go out at all, rather I'd be a couch potato reading or watching movies. But since I can't afford Video On Demand that's not going to happen. Also, I usually keep some Ibuprofen, Tylenol, Echinacea or cold medicines at home just in case this happens so I don't have to go out. If I was limited on funds however, having back-up meds may not be a possibility.

I went on a mission to find out where I could get some Tylenol that I could afford. I walked everywhere even though I wasn't in the best mood to and it was a nice day. Actually really glad I got out for this, otherwise I may not have gone out really at all. OK - so I started at Shoppers' Drug Mart and Tylenol - between \$5-8 for about 60-80 pills, out of my budget. The small 20 pill bottle was still just over \$4. With \$8 dollars left I thought I could get a better deal. The thing that surprised me the most was the travel sized bottle of 10 pills was \$4.99 - it pays to buy bigger quantities that last longer - but for someone with not a lot of money you're almost forced to buy less valued quantities. Over to the mall I went and said hello to several of the homeless people I passed in the street. They smiled or said hi or nothing at all. I was thinking that even though it was a decent day out they still look cold. I would be.

Zellers Tylenol was better priced - \$3.50 for 20 pills (generic) and up for larger quantities. I went over to No Frills just to see if it would be any different - and for 20 pills it was \$2.99 (generic). So I went with the later and appreciated the \$5 left in my pocket. I ran into a friend at the mall who was helping her daughter sell cookies as a fundraiser - something I would normally support but couldn't. She offered to give me some Tylenol - which I never considered asking someone for because the card asks you to 'buy' it. I was glad though that I was able to buy something to relieve me of my flu-like symptoms for the challenge. In reality I really would not have wanted to leave the house.

One of the things I love to do when I'm sick is watch movies. But since I couldn't afford to rent I went to the library and picked up two for FREE. I still have quite a lot of food left, snacking is a bit of a problem as I didn't plan for that. Carrots and peanut butter go pretty well together for the record. And you can have too many apples in one day. I love them but should have diversified. If only I could.

**Day 4**

It was so warm today and for that I was glad. Today I was faced with the challenge of losing my mittens. I had nothing to keep my hands warm. But I definitely would not be able to buy them. I thought about the Salvation Army store but they are closed on Sunday's. I know there is a group of knitters in town who knit for this purpose - so no one has to go without being warm. I am going to try to interview them later this week. But I did not contact them today. I thought about the borrowing idea I got from a friend yesterday and I called my mother-in-law who gave me a pair and a bonus hat to keep me warm. It was dropped off on the way into town - so nice! This means - no cost! I still have \$5 bucks (maybe I'll join Dan for a beer at the end!)

In reality if I borrowed or asked for things I needed all the time, do you think I would get it all the time? Thelma, who's also doing this, made a comment about her husband eating some of her cereal and she said it's like a roommate taking from your reserves. In some ways I see this in the same way. I think people would get resentful after a while since they earned the items they purchased. It's not that people aren't generous - they are! - but taking all the time with no return may lead to no favours at all. I thanked her greatly and maybe I'll do something nice for her when I have the money in the future.

OK - food wise - I ate a toasted pita with peanut butter and an apple for breakfast. Half a can of beans for lunch with another apple (which was quite filling). For dinner - more spaghetti, but it's the last of what I made Friday (I got three dinners out of it). Because I was craving a bit of sugar I had a 'dessert' of carrots and peanut butter. I also had a coffee today from a work mate - I was in today to work on a project and she put 50 cents in the pot for coffee. I told her I wasn't supposed to get gifts but she wouldn't hear of it! Yay coffee!! I do plan to spend some time at the Fellowship centre and got to a lunch meal on Tuesday with my camera in hand. Hopefully a few people will chat with me. Maybe I'll bring some cards.

**Day 5**

I woke up a not looking forward to the same breakfast again but ate it and was happy after - a pita with peanut butter and an apple. Does two apples a day keep both the doctor and dentist away?

My challenge card was that I found \$2 on the street - lucky day! Since it's Monday I'm taking 50 cents out of there to have a coffee. Mmmm....I've been doing ok on this front, actually. My home counter has about a dollar sitting on it and work now too. So about \$2 dollars in coffee - no store bought coffee. So my total - minus known coffee allowances - is now at \$6.

On my way out this morning to go to work I noticed I had a flat tire. I actually had one yesterday too but didn't mention it since it filled up again with my trusty air compressor. Or rather the one I took from my husband's truck. I filled it up again today and hopefully it holds. I don't have any money to fix it. If I was actually on a very low income I'm pretty sure needing to fix a tire would put me on the fast track to no-cars-ville. Most people I'm sure wouldn't have one, but this would put the nail in the coffin, so to speak. (or the nail in the tire...).

My challenge card today is that I have a wound that is oozing - mmmm - and I have to find a way to get it under control. My tire was flat again this morning. It wouldn't fill. All I could do with my wound is wrap it in a clean remnant from an old t-shirt to help ease the leaking while trying to figure out how to change a tire. My dad taught me about 8 years ago how to do this - do you think I could remember? He's in Sudbury so calling him over is not an option. In my vague attempt at it - I managed to get the doughnut out and the jack with the tire iron next to the flat tire. I remembered that if you put it in the wrong place you can bend your car. Then I called my husband, who's on Coney Island wiring a cottage. He told me not to fuss with it and take his truck. His truck tires were all low - I took it - slowly - to the gas station to get some free air to fill it up on the way to work.

I missed two hours of work today - but I am working late, so I'll make it up. If this was my minimum wage job and I missed two hours say working at Wal-Mart, Tim's, McDonald's, the laundry mat, etc. - I would be out \$20.50 - enough for groceries for nearly a week. That would be really

practical, affordable, and because they are homemade they mean something! I found some yarn for \$1.50. Normally I would bake something for someone's birthday but I certainly did not have any flour or sugar! I hope she likes my dish cloths...

Food today went alright. The bread I used for my sandwich was stale because it was on clearance - tomorrow I'll toast the bread for my sandwich to make that a little better. I definitely missed my afternoon snack though. I am used to eating more frequently, but I am trying to limit myself to only eating at my three meals per day. I think the weekend will be even more challenging as I sit in my apartment with food around. Perhaps I'll have to hide my food away from myself so I don't munch on it.

Supper menu: barley, lentil and cabbage soup with toast, green beans, and milk. I boiled together my lentils and barley, then added cabbage and some carrots. It made for a rather hearty soup! And I have leftovers for tomorrow too. I am allowing myself to use pepper only as my seasoning. I ended up burning my toast black because I have my setting set for more hearty whole-grain breads - my flimsy white bread did not need long to toast...but I couldn't waste the bread so I scrapped off the black and ate it anyway. I felt pretty full after that meal! Although I've already had another piece of toast as a snack.

Exercise today. I did not go to the Rec Centre as I usually do - I couldn't afford a day pass. But I did walk to work both ways (20 minutes each way) and I went for a walk at lunch and did errands downtown (another 20 minutes). 60 minutes of free fast walking - pretty good! I wanted to go to the library afterlunch to see if I could borrow some exercise DVD's for free. Turns out I had a \$0.40 fine on my card from an overdue book! So I had to pay \$0.40 for my rental today. Darn. But the library is such a great resource for entertainment - books, movies, music, books on tape even! I'll definitely be going there more during this challenge.

**Day 2**

This morning I woke up late on purpose - because I wanted to eat breakfast late and I need to eat breakfast as soon as I get up! This morning's breakfast was delicious. I made French toast with 1 egg and a splash of milk, and cooked a banana in the pan with the toast! I don't have syrup so I dug a package of Splenda out of my purse (I'm a dietitian okay? I keep Splenda in my purse for such emergencies...) and sprinkled that on top to sweeten it. I ended up buying some herbal tea so I made a big mug of that to go with breakfast.

So far I haven't repeated any meals! And this meal was pretty balanced. We shall see how creative I can get with my cooking this week - French toast is a great way to use stale bread. My challenge card this morning is, "Every week you shovel the neighbour's drive. She paid you \$2.00. Don't forget to report your income. " Yes!!! \$2.00!!! I never thought I would be so excited to get \$2.00. Before I wouldn't think twice about spending that on tea at a coffee shop. But now I am thinking about all the practical things I can use it for. Perhaps I'll get a ride somewhere, or buy some peanut butter, or save it up for when I really need it at the end of the week. It makes me feel a little more secure! As for reporting it - I'm not sure how to do that - I'll have to look it up. Hopefully that doesn't decrease my OW allowance!

My biggest challenge today will be supplying food for the baby shower. Thankfully there was money pooled or I wouldn't be able to afford to host this shower (and we turned it into a potluck). I'm serving herbal tea, and a Jello and fruit cocktail dessert. Cost breakdown: box of herbal tea (by far the most expensive) \$3.29, no name Jello powder \$0.79, and great value fruit cocktail \$1.68. Thankfully I have the \$2.00 today that helps me out. I hope they enjoy my Jello dessert!

Budget remaining: \$12.92.

This afternoon was the big baby shower for my friend and I think it was a success! We certainly made it affordable. I hosted it at my apartment so I didn't have to worry about driving somewhere or walking and carrying the big gifts and food with me. After finding out we were doing the poverty challenge we created the party into a potluck - so everyone who came brought something to eat or drink which really does add up fast! I did eat at the potluck because I did contribute food - but I did purposefully miss lunch today in preparation

I tried choosing the deep coloured vegetables for the most "nutrition bang" for my buck. In the end I chose a bag of frozen green beans, a bag of fresh carrots, a head of cabbage, a 5 bananas. This probably will give me 4-5 servings of fruit and vegetables/day which is still less than what is recommended. The challenge I had with the fresh produce was that it was hard to estimate how much it will cost! I spent a while in front of the scale trying to figure out how much my cabbage and bananas would cost. Total cost of groceries: \$17.83

At the grocery check stand I was watching closely as each item was scanned and was nervous that I would be over my budget! It was a new feeling for me worrying about how much everything was going to total when I got to the check stand. I had kept a few items back just in case I was over my budget. I definitely brought my reusable bags - no way I was spending money on a disposable bag!

### Day 1

This morning I got up a bit earlier than normal because I knew I needed a bit of extra time to get ready. Breakfast this morning was oatmeal and I already feel the lack of variety of food! Usually I like adding other ingredients to my oatmeal like flax, blueberries, raisins, or cinnamon. And I usually cook it in milk. This morning I cooked it in

water and added a splash of milk. Then I ate it plain. Not necessarily the best tasting but it sure is filling.

Lunch is already packed. I hard-cooked two eggs yesterday. I am having an egg sandwich with two slices of bread, a cup of milk, and a banana (a balanced meal with foods from each food group!). I wasn't able to budget a snack for myself so this should be interesting! Usually I pack a few snacks because I am used to eating smaller meals more frequently. I think tomorrow I might plan on splitting my proteins up between my breakfast and lunch so that I feel a little more satisfied longer. I'm bringing lots of water with me today. Water free from the tap! I decided not to use my Brita filter this week - it's an expensive item that I don't need to use. I live about a 20 minute walk from work so there really is no excuse for me to drive there if I am physically able to walk. One problem I have already encountered with this is sometimes I am required to use my car for my work. This morning is one occasion. I had to ask my co-worker if he would have access to a car tomorrow instead. I could rent a car, which my work would cover, but how would I get to the car rental place in time?

Day one is almost over and already I am starting to feel stressed about my food! Will I have enough? What happens if I run out and I have no more money? What if one of my challenge cards puts me over my budget? I feel like I am being preoccupied with my food intake and this is making me even MORE hungry! Because I am being restricted - it makes me want to eat more. It also doesn't help that I am a dietitian and therefore talk about food all day long. This challenge is already raising a lot of awareness! I had quite a few great discussions with co-workers today about the issues surrounding low income. And I even had a few random discussions with people I didn't know - one person on the street who recognized me from the newspaper article and the other was a cashier at Wal-Mart! This issue is really hitting home for so many people in Kenora. And it is only day one!

My biggest challenge today was transportation. I already had to pay a \$1.00 penalty for a ride to Walmart. Myself and a friend are throwing a baby shower tomorrow (stay tuned for our affordable hosting...) and I had to pick up gifts and supplies from money that was pooled. As I was the designated buyer - I needed some way to get everything home. There was no way I was going to be able to walk or even take the bus. I've really never been without a car, so this was one educational experience for me. What would I have done if I didn't have a car or a friend to call? I saw someone getting out of a taxi in front of Wal-Mart - that would have been an expensive trip if I did have to resort to a taxi - a lot more than a dollar.

My challenge card of the day was, "It is your mother's birthday. Purchase her a gift." \$35/5 days AND I have to buy birthday gifts?! Yikes. I ended up deciding that I would make her a gift. Since I enjoy crocheting I decided to purchase some yarn and make some dish cloths and hot pads -

tough. Not to mention the cost of getting a tire fixed - no idea what that's going to set me back, anything with the car seems to cost money. Hopefully not too bad though.

Now I have to figure out how to actually take care of this wound of mine. It's coming through the t-shirt now. I think it happened when I threw my hub cap across my snow covered lawn in frustration this morning, but whatever - serves me right. I have to go find it now...

PS - I didn't actually throw my hub cap, my anger issues aren't that severe....

The wound situation was under control by mid-day. Rather than spend the \$6 that was left in my pocket I sought alternative methods. I called the doctor's office to see if I could get an appointment right away if I needed one, but the earliest was next day. The receptionist though was very helpful and sympathized with my situation. I asked if I could come in and get a band-aid and she wasn't sure if I could, but she would have booked me an appointment. She suggested I call Telehealth who could help me figure out if I needed some more serious help instead of just a band-aid. Otherwise I should go to the ER to get it fixed up. But since I had it mostly under control, on my way back from a shoot I stopped at the Fellowship Centre to see if they could help with some gauze and a band-aid - and they did. So helpful. Some of the staff have First Aid training and help quite a few people out.

I chatted with John, a man at the centre with a cast on, who said he had a broken wrist. He might have been intoxicated when he broke it falling down but he said it hurt a lot. And I guess it still hurt. But he got medical care and help from the Fellowship Centre. He was enjoying a cup of coffee. We had a laugh talking about getting back in fighting condition in no time!

Food - I was low on pita bread so it was apples and peanut butter for breakfast. For lunch I used my pita with spinach, chickpeas and a little cheese I still had left over. Also had some baby carrots. Dinner was right after shooting a fishing segment with Jeff Gustafson - who so generously lent me some great rubber boots to wade through the foot deep slush on the lake. It was an apple with some peanut butter and a handful of carrots. Everything else I would have had to make and it took too much time. I was hungry after the labour intense shoot but had no choice. Still hungry even though I ate another apple but too tired to make anything. The only meat I ate during this whole thing was a bit of sausage in my pasta sauce and I don't really miss it that much. I did however get some ingredients to make something for the wrap-up tomorrow with my last few bucks and took out a dollar for the ride. I still have \$1.50 left.

This is the end - back to comfort I suppose. Although I've been saying this through this whole thing I've had a home to stay, cookware, a job, a vehicle (even though I got a flat), warm clothes for the most part (even though I tried to limit the variety), computer access, etc. I didn't do everything I set out to do at the start of this as my work shoot schedule got really busy this week. But with everything I did, the challenge was always on my mind. My sister in Toronto hooked me up with this link - it's a good resource to help live a less excessive life, some environmentally sound alternatives that don't cost a lot and some info on money skills when you don't have a lot -

<http://www.stretcher.com/index.cfm>

I think being frugal is a good thing - less credit - less heartache - less bills you can't afford - and you don't have to owe anything to greedy corporations - personally I'm working towards that and through this I realized there are many things I can do without.

## Howard Hampton



### MPP for Kenora-Rainy River

Prior to serving as an elected Member and Party Leader, Howard Hampton worked as a labour lawyer for the Canadian Labour Congress and in private practice in Fort Frances. He also worked for the Blakeney government in Saskatchewan, and as a teacher in southern and northern Ontario.

As a lawyer, Howard focused on defending the rights of working people and getting management to play fair. He earned his law degree from the University of Ottawa, his Bachelor of Education degree from the University of Toronto and his Bachelor of Arts degree from Dartmouth College in New Hampshire.

A passionate hockey player and all-around sports enthusiast, Mr. Hampton is passionate about the importance of providing community activities for youth and quality public services for all.

Born in 1952, Howard is married to former Nickel Belt MPP, Shelley Martel. They have two children, a daughter, Sarah and a son, Jonathan.

**Why did you decide to take the challenge?** I am taking up the challenge because I think those of us who have adequate incomes need to know how difficult it is to survive on the meager "Ontario Works benefit" or the ODSP benefit.

*"As I expected, I lost 5 lbs. during the week, which is ok by me. What I think needs to be emphasized some how is if there are no unexpected challenges during a week (like getting sick or having to spend \$ on something besides food) you can "get enough to eat" on \$35/ week but in the long term it is not healthy and nutritional, and you put your health at risk, which makes it very difficult to position yourself to get job training or to find a job. Your focus becomes almost totally "how do I survive, get enough to eat, and pay the bills this week", and it is very difficult to think beyond that."*

"If you did this again in the near future, I wonder if it would not be a good idea to do it for say 2 weeks at a time."

"I think that would be a much more difficult challenge and would bring home just how tough it is for someone to look after their food and personal needs on \$35/ week, and just how short sighted for governments to force people into that kind of situation."

This is my first official blog to start off this challenge and I'm very anxious to start! I look forward to this challenge and I hope it is as eye opening for others as I am sure it will be for me. I hope it raises awareness and shines a light on the struggles that people face while living on a very fixed and limited income.

Personally I am most interested in the food security aspect of this challenge, because it has always been one of my passions. But also in my practice as a dietitian, I encounter people daily who are struggling with food insecurity. Food insecurity in Kenora means that even though food is readily available year round, it is not necessarily accessible to those with limited income.

Many people I talk to feel they can not afford to purchase fruits and vegetables because of the high cost of produce, especially at this time of the year. And many people would rather spend their money on things that will fill them up fast, like bread, pasta, and meat. Milk is also an issue, in addition to it being a fairly expensive staple, many people are lactose intolerant and might choose to purchase lactose-free milk which is almost twice the cost. For those who have limited food preparation skills - purchasing raw ingredients to make homemade meals can be a daunting task. Some people do not have functional kitchens and very limited cooking equipment - therefore cooking has to be simple. Therefore often instead of making homemade meals - often canned foods are purchased which is significantly more expensive per serving, and also usually higher in salt, fat and preservatives.

To grocery shop I went to Ted's No Frills. I decided I would limit myself to only shop at one store because I am not using a car this week, it is cold outside, and I did not want to make multiple trips to various stores! The thought of shopping around by foot seemed pretty daunting.

Grocery shopping took a long time because I didn't have a set list of what I would buy when I got there. I wanted to see what was on special and go from there. Being a registered dietitian, I wanted to focus on healthy eating. I wanted to get a variety of foods everyday. I did not want to repeat meals on the same day - so I tried to plan different meals for breakfast, lunch, and supper. I also planned to try and follow Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide as closely as I could, choosing the cheapest sources of food from each category. I also tried to avoid canned and processed products as much as possible. Overall my goal was to spend less than \$20.00 on food this week.

My strategy was to shop for my sources of protein first, because this is what I usually build my meals around. I know that eating meat alternatives are the most affordable sources of protein so I ended up purchasing dried red lentils, a carton of eggs, and plain canned tuna (no salt or oil added). I did not buy peanut butter because I wanted to try to get more variety in my meats and alternatives instead of focussing on just one kind. I also figured I would not eat though an entire jar in 5 days and it would be a waste of money for me.

Next I focussed on my grain products - I tried to buy whole grains but ended up buying enriched white bread instead as it was on clearance for \$0.50. What can you do with limited selection? I rationalized that I would be eating it with lentil soup which is high in fibre. For \$1.50 I also bought a bag of barley which is a great whole grain that works well in soup or as a side dish.

Milk products are very important to me as I really get little calcium otherwise, so I did purchase 2L of milk for the week. I usually drink 2-3 glasses/day so I will be cutting back a little on the milk this week. I was considering purchasing skim milk powder; however, the powder available was only in a large package selling for almost \$8.00 and I did not have the money up front for this, even though it would be MUCH cheaper per glass.

I shopped for vegetables and fruits last because I knew this would be the biggest challenge. Canada's Food Guide suggests eating a dark green and orange vegetables everyday and I took this challenge to heart. I also did not hesitate to shop for canned and frozen vegetables and fruit as they can be just as nutrition as fresh (and way cheaper this time of year).

## Tabitha Marshall



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### Registered Dietitian, Waasegiizhig Nanaandawe'Iyewigamig

*I am a new Kenora resident and have been working as a Diabetes Educator Dietitian at Waasegiizhig Nanaandawe'Iyewigamig (Kenora Area Health Access Centre) for the past six months. I regularly travel to the surrounding Aboriginal communities to provide accessible diabetes services to our clients. What I teach is based strongly on how to grocery shop and eat healthy on a budget. Personally I enjoy cooking and baking for family and friends as well as going to the Recreation Centre regularly.*

**Average weekly budget for "basic needs":** \$350.00 (rent included)

**Food Weakness:** non-seasonal fruits and vegetables and cheeses

**Average cost of weakness:** \$15/week

**What my typical daily menu looks like:**

Breakfast: smoothie of frozen fruit, yogurt, cereal, ground flax

Lunch: milk or yogurt, vegetables sticks, fruit, leftover meat and rice/pasta/potatoes from day before

Supper: brown rice or potatoes, frozen vegetables, lettuce salad, chicken breast, milk, fruit

**Average cost of typical daily meals:** \$10.00

**What do I anticipate being the most difficult in the challenge?** Cutting back on time spent at the Recreation Centre here in Kenora. I enjoy going to the gym after work or on the weekends. The cost to go to the gym might not be a priority to fit within my \$35.00 budget. Also cutting back on the non-seasonal fruit and vegetables! I tend to buy produce even when it is not on sale!

**Why did I decide to take this challenge?:** I decided to take the poverty challenge because I encounter food insecurity daily in my job. Most of my clients are faced with the challenges of trying to eat a healthful diet on an extremely limited income. I think it will be a valuable learning experience for me to face the same struggles and challenges personally. I hope this will also be an eye opening experience for myself and others that will raise awareness to some of the stress and difficulties that are the reality of so many people and families living on Ontario Works Assistance.

## Valentina Herbert



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### Anishinaabe Abinoojii Family Services, Repatriation Worker

*I am a Single Parent of four living children, who are young adults now and one left to the spirit world. I am also a Grandmother of 11 beautiful babies. I love to travel and meet new people.*

**Average Weekly Budget for "Basic Needs":**

Average weekly budget for basic needs is 500.00 for groceries, hygiene products, paper tissue, shampoo conditioner, bar soap, and so on 100.00

**Food Weakness:** My food weakness will be potato chips, takeout and restaurants.

**Cost of the Weakness:** \$75.00 biweekly

**What would your typical daily menu look like?** I have no daily menu set

**Average cost of typical day's meals?** My average daily cost of a meal is 20.00 dollars

**What do you anticipate being the most difficult in the challenge?** The difficulties I will experience in this challenge will be eating and personal hygiene salon products, vehicle access, telephone, cell phone and the internet.

**Why did you decide to take the challenge?** I was on social assistance during my children's growing years, the purposes are to help and assist the unfortunate. We need to pro-actively seek solutions; more resources are the key to be successful. View a point to the government that cutting monies to the unfortunate is not the

I visited the Salvation Army today to check what they have to offer, they have a food bank Tuesdays - Thursday from 10:00-11:20 am. this is where you can get food and hygiene products; tooth brushes, bar soap, maybe shampoo if needed. They also recommended to shop at no frills grocers they have a flyer of food items on sale where u buy at whole chicken for 4 dollars n that will feed a single person for a week. They also added not to sleep nor take any items from the fellowship center due to bedbugs.

#### Day 1

Today is my first day and its my birthday, great start as I don't have to spend any money on myself. The first challenge card says I have a fever n to buy medication. I called resources and found Kenora Fellowship Center offers fever reducers for free and I will walk in sickness to retrieve it. yes saved myself some cash. I went grocery shopping at The Bargain Shop and spent 13.06 on a can of spam , a box of soda crackers for snacks, 4 Mr noodles and a can of beef ravioli, 1 noodle per day for my lunch at work, a can of smoked ham pea soup.

#### Day 2

well this is the 2nd day, I felt so empty today like my body was lighter from less junk n the extra foods. I was very hungry n one of my coworkers offered a piece of bannock that took care of that. hmmm now I know why those people on the street walk around n look for something to eat out of a garbage can.

Wow! my second challenge card calls me a silly kitten n that I lost my mittens, so this morning I will walk to the salvation army for mittens n check out the food bank see what they have to offer.

I went n reviewed the rules n I broke one which was not to take any food from anyone, is this a penalty? if it is I will not take what's offered in the next three days.

#### Day 3

Wow! this is only my third day, yesterday I was dizzy, no energy, headaches n felt sick from hunger. I had to leave early from work. today at noon I met with the other challengers at the fellowship center, they have completed their challenge. wow the stories they have experienced. Today's challenge card contains a cut on my hand n its oozing, I have to purchase something to stop the infection however there is an aloe vera plant that I am going to try first, then the sap of a tree or a homemade remedy of carnation milk with bread that suck out infection. fellowship center is the best resource for me right now. its now 2:22 n feeling very tired...

#### Day 4

Good morning. Today would have been the fourth day but I have decided to stop the poverty challenge due to health reasons. it was fun and very challenging, yesterday was nice to meet all the other participants n hear their views n first hand experience of hunger, homelessness n having no funds for support. I will continue to support the people on the street by sharing what I have n make sure they r OK...I would like to thank all the participants, organizers n the fellowship center for this event...

I just opened my challenge card for the day, I need some Neosporin or something like that as I have a cut on my hand that's infected! If someone has a home remedy for this I would really appreciate it or looks like coffee is off the menu for the day. Kind of getting used to that in a bit of a "chip on my shoulder" way. Just saying....Well, trip to the library to access free internet and I have a couple of choices , vinegar or salt water. I don't have vinegar on hand as it wasn't on my shopping list, but I wonder if I could pick up a free pkg of vinegar at one of the fast food places? I do have salt, so clean the wound and soak in water as hot as I can stand it with a couple of table spoons of salt. (while I sip on my cup of java, yeah!) I do recall when Ralph's son Stephen had chicken pox with some nasty red ones, as they were enroute to Florida, the Doctor told him to take him into the ocean , and it worked! So I think it's a real possibility.

Have 12 grain bread and 2 eggs and one very thin slice of cheese for lunch. Had cereal, milk and yogurt for breakfast, planning on spaghetti for supper, just can't imagine it without parmesan, but don't have any, so we'll see!

#### Day 4

My challenge is getting shoes to wear to the interview. I only have running shoes. At first I thought, well, I would go in running shoes, and explain my situation! Then I thought, maybe not. If I get a job I am going to have to look presentable. Of course, if the job is manual labour I probably would be okay, but let's say the job is waitressing, or maybe secretarial type work. Then I definitely need to put my best foot forward, no pun intended!

So I am going to call the Thrift Shop and explain my situation, I hear if you have no money they will provide for limited needs, free of charge. I will share my good news of an interview, I might even be able to get some clothes if I need. I know appearance makes a first impression, then I just have to sell my abilities. The Thrift Shop was looking at putting a section together for just this purpose, I just am uncertain about the \$. Of course, I'm broke, just 1 day of challenge left and I spent my last money on a cup of coffee, it was so worth it. I was worried about my challenge card, so I'll be honest, I had coffee before opening my challenge card!

Okay, so it's 11:20AM and I can't wait til noon to eat. Very hungry, remember the story about the cereal, unaware husband eats wife's challenge cereal for lunch! Well, all out of cereal so breakfast was a little lean! Wondering how I will make it til 5PM before eating supper. I am going to be fantasizing about my rice/tomato/corn dish for sure! I do have a peach fruit cup so will savour that at about 2:30 PM and hopefully that will hold me.

Just got off the phone with the Thrift Store, had a great conversation with the lady who assured me the Captain absolutely has the ability to provide shoes, and whatever other clothing might help me prepare for my job interview at no cost! Some good news in the midst of my hunger crisis!

#### Day 5

Well, here it is, the final day! I had the last of my yogurt and a slice of my 12 grain bread with peanut butter. I'm at work and having my 1 cup of coffee. Just thinking over the past week and the conversations I've had and the experience itself. I must be honest, when I woke up this morning my first thought was, I wonder what goodies I'll have for supper, then immediately thought about all those people on Ontario Works waking up this morning to just another day of trying to stretch that dollar! It is quite a sobering FACT. One thing I will continue to do is advocate for those on OW and tell the story of my experience, in that way I will feel I am providing some support. I have learned some valuable lessons, like the Great Value peaches and cream canned kernel corn is every bit as good as Green Giant and half the price, I guess I was a bit of a snob shopping only brand names I felt would be better. It was the same in contents and calories, so no trade off there. Also the Red Sockeye Wild Salmon, Everyday Market from Shoppers, just as good as the Gold Seal and half the price, who would have known! Also same calories and salt etc. Looking forward to meeting with everyone at the Fellowship centre for lunch and hearing about all their experiences.

**Day 2**

Okay, I promise not to go on about coffee although as I'm writing this, I am enjoying a cup of java, black, no sugar in the budget, but it does taste good! got home last night and had a good dinner, cooked up some of the white/wild rice I had bought, actually cooked it all so I would have it on hand for the rest of the challenge! That with half a can of Stagg chili, actually pretty decent and not too bad for calories, salt and fat! It was on for \$1.97 (yeah Dan, that 97 cents at the back of every number makes keeping track hard, I agree). One fruit cup only preservative, ascorbic acid, so pretty good, and the total meal was \$2.00 a little less than half the days allotment.

When I walked in the door from work my husband said, was that Banana Nut Muslix yours for the challenge, yes, did you eat some, yes, WHAT! I have never been one not to share, but I can see now if I had a roommate, which is the only way I could afford to live with the Ontario Works budget for housing, I might keep my food under lock and key. I was a little miffed, but over it now!

My challenge card today was winning \$5 on a \$2 lotto ticket. So I net \$3, which I am supposed to report to Ontario Works, well I doubt that would happen, no matter how honest I think I am. I would convince myself that they don't need to know, after all, they aren't very generous and keep me on a deprivation budget so why would I call?? I would be able to justify that one so I could sleep tonight. And think of the coffee I can have for the balance of the challenge, six cups. Actually, I think I will buy a bag of apples, I hear from Shelly they are a pretty good deal and I think some fresh fruit would be great.

Just having some thoughts about my challenge for the day, having spent \$2 and winning \$5 so a profit of \$3. That might encourage me to want to buy more! So next "pay day" I might squander a few more of my valuable \$'s in hopes of winning more and then having more! You get my drift. I was pretty darn excited to have a windfall of \$3, almost an entire day's worth of food. Or a chance to go "out" for a coffee! I can see the temptation could be my demise, that hope for the "big win" might be the only hope I think I have! I have heard comments in the past "how can they afford to be buying these tickets when they are on assistance?" and I've thought yeah, how? I can certainly understand the motivation now! Sorry about the judgemental attitude in the past, not that it's necessarily a good idea, but I now understand!

**Day 3**

Back home last night at 6:30PM, so supper was on track with the challenge. Actually had an interesting time going to restaurants while in the City! First impression, boy a lot of people eat out, big families Mom, Dad and 3 or four kids under 10! How can they afford this. Second impression, how much food didn't get eaten! I am certainly becoming conscious of what's going on around me more than before with regards to FOOD! I did stick to the challenge as much as possible, forgoing my usual bacon and eggs for toast and yogurt. I did have a moment of reverse discrimination where I was feeling quite disgusted with the waste and felt a bit of animosity towards the people around me that seemed to have the money to afford so much. That was a bit unsettling, I guess it can work both ways. So.. I had a bit of a chat with myself about how I was feeling and tried to understand how it might be for those who had to live on such a restricted budget for so long, sometimes forever. I guess I settled at balance, as long as I am able to afford more, working, making good money, if I do what I can to contribute to and advocate for the less fortunate, I can live with that. I do think this experience will stay with me for a long time... I hope so.. and I hope it touches many others in the process.

**Dave Cain****Community Services Officer, Ontario Provincial Police**

*Husband of 1, father of 4, grandfather of 5 1/2. Regular fun loving kind of guy Enjoys long walks along the beach. Crave attention Enjoy new challenges – especially if they include eating peanut butter while getting attention- walking along the beach*

**Food Weakness:** peanut butter is my nemesis – cannot get enough

**Average Cost of Weakness:** Peanut Butter every two weeks \$ 5.00

Whole wheat bread \$ 10.00 (two weeks)

Spoon to indulge in weakness while making toast “PRICELESS”

**What would your typical daily menu look like?**

Toast with PB for breakfast, sandwich for lunch, regular meat & potato kind of guy for dinner

**What do you anticipate being the most difficult in the challenge?** Keeping track of what I eat in order to stick to the \$35.00 budget

**Why did you decide to take the challenge?** I figured it would be an eye opener

An opportunity to be part of a worth while community challenge

Love to Blog – something to do with craving attention

As many of us probably figured out, this experience would give us an insight into our world. I say our world because this is our community. OK enough of that cause it sounds way to deep ( I'm just a simple man).

Shopping for \$25.70 in groceries took me just about 1 hour. I must say that I found myself in a weird situation as I scanned the product and went back and forth I can say that I was feeling a little embarrassed, not quite sure what that was about. It hit while I was picking through a small pack of chicken legs when someone who knows me in the community laughingly stated " Dave I'm sure you can do a little better than that ". My response was " not everyone can ". After talking he realised that I was participating in the challenge and wished me well. Reality hit home moments later when a young lady ahead of me in the check out line had two debit cards rejected. She pushed her cart to the side and said that she would return ( I somehow doubted that would be the case). What are the chances of that happening - it was a message and to me a confirmation that I will not exceed my amount!

Staying healthy - while that's a challenge. So what did this camper buy? # 1 on the list was peanut butter ( as stated in my bio, there is nothing in the world that replaces pb. I am certain in my case that this is the glue that keeps these old bones together.)

Should be an interesting 5 days.

Homees Dads grocery list ( homee dad is my alter Blogger ego )

1 box of granola bars	2 packages of frozen mixed Veges
1 loaf of 60% whole wheat bread	6 small packs of noodles
1 pck of hamburger	1 small container skim milk
1 pck of chicken legs	

Lets not forget the HST and 15 cents for two bags!

### Day 1

Well I woke up this morning with a little excitement to begin the challenge. I can imagine this would be equal to the excitement that the black pawed ferret from the prairies experienced as they realize this week that they were no longer on the endangered species list. ( yeh I listen to CBC ).

Breakfast - toast and peanut butter, where can that go wrong? Well its clear that not all things are equal. Peanut butter housed in a small bucket with yellow wrapping and red lid DOES NOT compare to the BIG K sporting those two cute teddy bears. Its like apples and oranges - well in my case for the next 5 days just apples cause oranges were to expensive. Also I would comment that the no name 60% whole wheat bread at a third the cost of my 100 % whole wheat Rye bread - well its like jumping out of the shower and realising you do not have a towel (something is missing) I really do not want to sound like a food snob - but I think I am.

Challenge of the day - " you have a fever. buy some medicine"

In the rules it stated that you must complete each task at the completion of each day. Well I live out of town so this task is somewhat challenging. Rules state a trip would cost me \$1.00 of my \$35.00. Plus the cost of medication? Will need to think this through.

\$35.00 - \$25.70(groceries) + .25 cents ( found) = \$9.55 Homees adventure continues

I will continue with my Friday as I was tasked with the challenge of dealing with a fever. First of all lunch consisted of a package of noodles and an apple, nothing to drastic not bad even. My approach to the fever was both frugal and adventurous ( I need a life ).

My daughter decided that she would Google natural remedies for bringing fever down, we reviewed a few and made a choice. The two options we considered were:1) soak raisin in water for a few hours, crush them into the water and drink the juices. I considered that chugging a bottle of wine may be the same since it is in a way raisin juice. You will be glad to hear this thought although entertaining was just fleeting. By the way the juice tasted nothing like the aforementioned bottled raisin juice.

2) spread peanut butter over your face and forehead ( well in my case its a five head - too big for a forehead ). After spreading said peanut butter soak paper towels in milk and lay them over the pb. Well the fact that pb was considered grabbed my attention immediately, Did I tell you I LOVE PEANUT BUTTER!

After great deliberation and staring at the jar, I felt that spreading anything over the body generally caused people to wander off into other adventures..... but this was not the task for the week. So raisins it is. As well consuming a good amount of water and sucking on ice cubes, I am sure my fever will join the ranks of the dinosaur and be a thing of the past.

My daughter had to go to work so she graciously sourced out and purchased the raisins, she also located a real cheap box of tea. The cost for today included raisins, tea and of course the \$1.00 fine for gas \$9.55 - \$4.38 = \$5.17

Dinner consisted of half the hamburger I purchased and half the bag of mixed veggies. I now learned why they mark certain packages of meat with big red stickers. For Sue ( my wife and generally the thinking part of the relationship ) this means continue on. But no for Home it means great deal I should have caught on when browning the hamburger because it really didn't brown - it went grey? Adding the veggies added some visual appeal but watching it all swimming in the lake of grease ..... well it made me consider a pb sandwich for dinner. I did soldier on and am here to tell the tale. Just enough left for dinner tonight, will get through that - probably!

Tuna and salmon, eggs and a legumes will have to provide the protein, will miss the meat for sure. Also fresh fruit and veggies, had to do canned for veggies, but green and yellow beans, tomatoes and corn will provide some variety. All I was able to purchase to substitute fruit was a carton of orange juice, unsweetened, but from concentrate, I will be longing for some fruit before the week is up! Will be starting on Wednesday and then I will see how what I bought actually measures up!

### Day 1

Breakfast was a serving of Banana Nut Muslix, 1/2 cup Activia Probiotic Strawberry Yogurt, 3/4 1% cup milk, and that will be breakfast every day this week! Pretty healthy good fibre content, caloric count not bad. Lunch a tin of Salmon, no mayo or seasonings so little bland, but 20 Grams of protein and low sodium and 110 calories, two slices of 12 grain bread buttered with a no name marg. I had a business obligation in the evening Chamber AGM, didn't have anything but water to drink, coffee smelled good, but not in the budget, passed on dessert and only ate a third of my dinner, trying my best to stay on track. Had to meet my husband at HoJoe's for my ride from work to the event, and visited while he had a coffee and I had nothing, felt a little uncomfortable, and deprived.

Well, my challenge today was someone stole my shovel, I can't afford to replace it, have no way to get to anywhere to buy one anyway! Big problem, I have someone coming to interview me for a potential job, in an hour! I don't have a phone so it's out on foot to see if any neighbours might be home, have a shovel and be willing to lend it to me. Then get the shovelling done and "clean up" to look my best. I know it's not real, but can you imagine the panic I would feel if it was.

I had a function to attend for work this morning, the coffee, muffins and fresh fruit looked AWESOME, but if I want to take this challenge seriously, I have to think about the fact that I wouldn't be here, ergo no potential for free food at this venue. Yes...I stayed strong, just got the info and left the rest. I did get a chance to talk about the challenge as people kept offering me the food and coffee and I kept declining. People DO notice when you are NOT partaking, WOW!

It's 5 pm and I'm just heading home for supper. I am HUNGRY! Guess I didn't realize the "snacking" I did during the day and I didn't plan for snacks in my budget. I will be cooking a mix of brown/wild rice (gosh takes 20 mins to cook hope I can wait that long) and having that with some bean chili. Thank goodness I left my yogurt out this morning and can have it for dessert, I am feeling deprived. I haven't had coffee all day, did I say that before?? Seems to be my mantra right now. I hope tomorrow's challenge card doesn't take coffee away again, I am starting to obsess about coffee. One thing I've noticed is my lack of energy! Will have to see if that continues, could be a real detriment to those looking for work trying to get off Ontario Works, hard to be "on" in an interview with no energy! Because I have to work this week, I shopped on Saturday. Spent 32.50, wanted to leave a bit for coffee or rides if necessary. Shopped 3 different stores, Everyday brand at Shoppers pretty good prices and Great Value at Wal-Mart, then got a few "brand" name items at Zellers, no grocery stores? Checked the fliers and did the best I could. Shopped pretty healthy, but will not have much variation in diet from day to day. I usually get an 8 pac of Activia yogurts, variety of flavours, settled for one large strawberry, 100mls less than 8 pac but 1/2 the price.



Lets see last time we communicated I mentioned that since I was to cheap to purchase any socks, and stealing them would be less appropriate. I decided to spend the day sockless, it could have been worse - the challenge could have mentioned other items of under garment? Here's a tip, police boots and bare feet do not really work. It really was not all that bad as I switched to my runners while having kids 1/3 my age run around me during the basketball game at Thomas Aquinas. Thing is I sort of like socks, you know the type black knee highs and sandals!

Anyway the thrill was Monday nights dinner, chicken legs and frozen veggies ( before you say it - I cooked the veggies). All in all not a bad meal at all. Went to sleep realizing I had one day left.

#### Day 5

Challenge card for the day " Moms birthday - need to buy her a gift" Yeh I have \$5.49 left in my pockets. Anyone who is about to say "**its the thought that counts, the amount really shouldn't matter**" Mothers are just older girls!~!! They also have the major trump card - you know the one " Oh don't worry about me, I'm just the mother that carried you for 9 months, went through the delivering of you and your twin sister, put up with the post ..... BLAH BLAH BLAH. My point - she's a girl, They do rule the world.

**Hold on - Focus - Reboot** - back to the matter at hand \$5.49 for Mommy. Well the first thought would be a picture ( of me of course - full size - Canadian speedo ) STOP, that will not work. Instead I will go to Wal-Mart and use their fancy machine to blend pictures of the 5 grand children ( great grand for mom ) and purchase one of those \$1.50 simulated real wood frames.

I can do this - toast and pb for breakfast, last noodle package for lunch, an apple, and finish with the remainder of the veggies and three cold fresh from the fridge chicken legs.

**So what did all this mean?** To me it forced me to look and not just assume. Living off \$35.00 for 5 days for food really was not that difficult. I can't say I was hungry - there was lots of food. The difference is the quality of the food. I really cannot see eating this way always, but identify that some do not have the choice. They may not go hungry but they may not eat healthy.

Not really sure what the answer is - I suppose education for both those like me who before this had no clue, and those who have no choice. How do you argue the fact that chips are cheaper than apples when you need to feed an entire family.

Looking forward to tomorrows meeting with the other participants. I know there are those who were able to purchase quality food. Should be some interesting discussions

Signing off

Stay real

honey, and ginger. I have onion left over in my fridge, so that will be chopped up finely and put on my oozing wound – after I clean it with mild soap and water first, of course.

Disappointed. I couldn't make the egg dish because surprisingly the hotel is full (January and February are usually pretty dead months)! No rooms for me to go to use the microwave. And since I didn't have anything else with me to eat, I had to call Mitch and ask him to bring some of those leftovers (preheated at his house) from Sunday. So I've eaten the same thing for dinner for the last three days. I'm definitely tired of it, although it was delicious the first two days! If this was my budget for long periods of time I think I might get scurvy – well, maybe that's a bit dramatic, but I would not be getting an adequate amount of fruits and veggies either. I for sure cannot wait for a salad and smoothie tomorrow. I also realize that if I didn't have a microwave or anything and lived on this budget, I would have been stuck going hungry until later – but I have to study and I need energy for that! If I'm hungry, than my studying is not effective as then I would just be thinking about how hungry I am.

#### Day 5

I guess I'm having some trouble making some real insights tonight and yesterday. I just have school on my brain. But this has definitely been an eye-opening, thoughtful and interesting challenge for sure. It's made me see things from a different perspective. And I would do it all over again, except maybe not ending in the week where I have a bazillion school things to do! Oh well, I guess that's life – roll with the punches or get knocked over. Sadly, I will not be in attendance tomorrow at the Fellowship Center. I really want to come but I had to make a tough decision. Fun or responsibility? School is my number one responsibility right now, and I am definitely going to need that lunch hour to review my test review (which I still need to start!) and make sure everything's fresh in my brain. Plus if I go to the luncheon I risk being late for class, which means I may not even be able to write the test! I cannot get a zero on anything because that drastically lowers your mark and I try my best to keep my marks above 80%, which I've been having trouble doing in the class which I have a test for so far. I wish I could come, and I hope everyone has a good time there. Sorry I can't make it :(

Anyhow, I realize I'm blabbering about things that don't have much to do with poverty, so I'll add on that at the college we are doing a pyjama day on Thursday to encourage people to put donations in our donation box for Making Kenora Home. The pyjama day was Jen's idea (she works in the Contact North office). I will also be baking muffins (I'm thinking blueberry ones and chocolate ones) for Thursday which people can purchase for a donation. Jen will be making rice crispy squares as well for that purpose. The baking will be done tomorrow night, on top of writing an essay and studying for a test in the morning. Yup. My brain may explode from overuse. We are also doing a clothing and food drive at the college too. Anyhow, I need to get back to studying.

Day 4

Today is Valentines Day, which I've never really cared about anyways to be honest so I'm not too worried about it, but it's also the beginning of Action Week Against Poverty and everyone should wear red today! I know I am, in fact I had to buy a red shirt since I didn't have any. Actually, I bought a white t-shirt and a bottle of red tie dye (these were bought a couple weeks ago though!) and tie-dyed it. It's red, but there's some pink too as well. Anyhow, better start getting ready I guess.

Speaking of which, I realize that makeup and hair products are not a necessity – you do not need them to live. But I can't imagine what it would be like to not wear at least cover up and to not use my hair straightener – I would lose a little self-esteem for sure. I didn't shower or do my makeup Saturday, and yesterday I only put on cover up and a little bit of blush. Today will be the same. I realize that if you had a limited budget makeup and hair would not be a priority, but I can't bring myself to go to school without concealer and blush. I just have to. But I will not be wearing mascara or eye shadow. I think this is a good compromise?

I haven't gotten around to looking into the shoes and socks. It's been a busy day for me – heck, it's a busy week for me! I have a test tomorrow, a test on Wednesday and an assignment due (which I still need to start), another test on Thursday, and an essay due Thursday too. It's crazy. The essay is only 3 pages, but still, with everything else this week! So I will have to look into that tomorrow I guess, I'll call at lunch. There is no way I can actually visit any places though. Tomorrow we have to set up bins for food and clothing drives at the college as well. I'm so busy my head is spinning. Time for dinner. I need nourishment. Some last thoughts though: I can't imagine what all this would be like if I really did need to find shoes and socks at a low price, on top of everything else I have to do. I'm glad I don't have to worry about money while I'm in school, because that would be extremely stressful and could affect your grades for sure. Anyhow, my tummy is screaming 'feed me' so I'd better go heat up my leftovers! Blog later to upload pictures and give a more insightful blog maybe (unless my brain completely shuts down by then...)

Oh yeah, I have a test on Wednesday at 1 pm, so unfortunately I will not be able to stay long at the fellowship centre – basically, I'll have to leave at 12:45.. but there is a possibility that I may not even be able to come which is disappointing as I wanted to be there. We will see though.

Sadly, I don't think I will be able to go to the fellowship centre tomorrow at lunch as I have a test at 1 pm that I am not prepared for at all. I work tonight so I can study tonight but I think I will need to study at lunch as well to make sure I'm prepared. Plus I have a case study assignment due tomorrow as well that I need to do tonight – which will cut into my studying time forcing me to need to study at lunch as well. I really would have liked to attend the lunch, but school has to come first.

Anyhow, my challenge today is **"The cut on your hand is oozing. Purchase something to stop the infection."**

If it was a large cut, I think I would probably go to the hospital. If it was a small cut, then something would need to be purchased – but I definitely don't have enough money left. Therefore, I will need to find some at-home remedies. I found one website with some interesting information, but some of it definitely costs some money, but there is some interesting information and good tips so I will post the link here:

<http://www.mothenature.com/Library/Bookshelf/Books/47/39.cfm>

Anyhow, the last one has some that I never would have thought of, such as onion, garlic,

## Allan Rundel



### Senior Pastor, Lakeside Baptist Church

Married for almost 30 years with two great kids and one daughter in law. Have lived in Kenora for 4 years and love the community and the area.

Average weekly budget for “basic needs”: \$200

Food Weakness: Ice Cream, coffee and fast food

Average Cost of Weakness: \$45/week

What would your typical daily menu look like? Light breakfast – usually toast or oatmeal and an extra large coffee. Lunch – soup and sandwich or McDonalds burger and fries. Dinner – stew/fish/chicken/roast, potatoes and veggies and dessert.

Average cost of typical day's meals? \$25

What do you anticipate being the most difficult in the challenge? Coffee (Tim Hortons is a daily expense I will have to give up)

Why did you decide to take the challenge? To gain a greater awareness of dealing with poverty in a seeming life of abundance.

Although the challenge has not yet officially started for me I have already tried to see things through new eyes. I don't know how many times I have driven, in a nice warmed vehicle, through the downtown core on my way to work and not noticed how many people are walking the streets. Not those who are coming out of HoJo's or making their way to their work place, but those who are just walking. There are many! And I see the same faces.

I had to leave and gather my thoughts. I flashed back to 15 years ago when my wife and I had just arrived back from 2 years in west Africa. We had just gone to the store to buy some cheese. Simple, right? Not when you had been used to 2 years of choice -do you want it or not? When we were in Africa we had a single choice -take the cheese or leave it. And there we stood with a plethora of choices and we were overwhelmed. We could not decide and had to leave. I faced a similar situation yesterday as I shopped for my 5 days. I had prepared a list of options for food-stuffs, with what I thought was reasonable. Then I went pricing. My reasonable turned out to be over \$50.00. Now the dilemma, the list had to be shortened, adjusted and choices made. I stood in the middle of the aisle, list in hand and, well, had to leave. I went and sat on the bench in the front of the store and began to go through the list. I crossed off most of the fresh fruit except apples and bananas, vegetables were easy since I not much of a veggie guy. The hard one was meat. What do I do about protein? I managed to get the list pared down and set out again, this time basket in hand, and picked up all the generic brands I could. Final tab, \$27.67

(including paying for 2 bags -that was just poor planning on my part and I paid the price, little as it is!)

**Day 1**

And so this morning I awakened to the start of this experience. I made a nice pot of oatmeal (thanks Howard Hampton for that tip) and took bowlful and added a banana. I sat down and opened one of the challenges -It read "Out of toilet paper." Make a The start of the day went well. The trouble I had was with coffee -or lack thereof. My usual routine is to stop at Tim Horton's for an extra large. Not today. \$1.72 of my shrunken resources would be better spent elsewhere. And as necessity demanded in my challenge of the day, I ran out of toilet paper. I did find some and spent \$1.46 on four rolls. This time I had a bag in my pocket so no extra money paid out there. But when the money is short even the tax adds up. Only 17 cents. But you begin to add it up. When the harmonized tax came in most of us grumbled but went along. I kind of ignored those who were expressing concern over the burden it would be on those who didn't have much. It's just a few cents here and there, right? That few cents can add up to a significant percentage of your expenses. In such a small way I can appreciate this seemingly hidden expense that must be accounted for.

Through the day I had to say "no" a lot. No to lunch, no to coffee, no to going to a bake sale tomorrow to help out a charity. As Thelma Wilkens-Page expressed in her comments on Wednesday, having to say no to lunches or going out for coffee can affect ones self-esteem and bring a feeling of being cut-off, especially to helping someone out in buying some of their baked goods. I also had to decline an invitation to go ice-fishing for a day because I could not afford bait, bringing a lunch or the transportation. It does open ones eyes to the limitations that are there.

**Day 2**

First breakfast -toast, jam, peanut butter and a banana. Sat and opened the challenge. "You found a toonie on the street. Give yourself 2 bucks." Not really a challenge, more of a reward I thought. First thing that came to my mind was "Woo-hoo! Tim Horton's coffee!" But just as quickly I shut that down because \$2.00 is \$2.00! And who knows what tomorrow is going to bring. So I set it aside and added it to my small stack of change. Now onto the day.

Reflections: Some of the thoughts I had last night were in regards to my faith. Being a minister I come in contact with people in need all the time -emotional, spiritual, physical and more. Within our church we have a natural connection and support system. We largely care for each other and when there is a need there are many people who step forward and help. As a person of faith no matter where I am, I would find a local church to connect with. In this experience I would imagine myself living in or near downtown and so the choices of churches I would seek to become a part of are several. Would they accept me? Would they welcome me? If I had not shaved or showered in a few days because I could not afford soap or a razor would I feel welcome? Or, would I be embarrassed and just not go? Would they see me as someone wanting to worship with them or as someone there for a handout?

Knowing the churches and their leaders in this community I would say that I would be welcome at any of the churches. But that comes from being here for a few years and getting to know them. If I had moved here, looking for work, making ends meet on Ontario Works and maybe not fresh and shiny on Sunday Morning would I be welcome? That is the thought in my mind. Would I be welcome at Lakeside Baptist?

We do see few people who are in the above scenario come to Lakeside, not because we are unwelcoming, but because of location. It is about 4 KM from downtown and not convenient.

The type of people we see a lot of are those who are passing through town -stuck out on the highway trying to catch a ride or are on the bus and need a meal. We usually help as we can in providing enough for a meal but then they are gone, not here long enough to even sit in a church service.

And so, this experience has begun a process in me of evaluating how our faith community

(although I think plastic disposable water bottles are evil, it is a kind of okay way of recycling them I guess..). I took pictures of the ones I did this afternoon because I figured it might be useful to someone? Anywho, here they are:



Last night I just hung out at Mitch's house. I made a yummy dinner - it was lean ground beef, garlic, onion, a little green onion, can of diced tomatoes, can of spinach (which looks nasty when you open the can - and it stinks..) and spiral noodles. It was delicious. I took pictures, of course, but I forget my camera at Mitch's house :(

Anyway, yesterday at Megan's I made a baked potato with garlic and green onions stuffed inside and I didn't realize how long it takes to cook a baked potato! Wow. I ate a couple pieces of whole wheat bread with my crunchy peanut butter. After an hour the potato was pretty much done but it could have been cooked more; but I ate it anyhow, I was way too hungry! Besides, it tasted pretty good anyhow. I did cheat a little and put a wee bit of butter on it.. So, right now I'm not sure what to do for breakfast. I forgot my frozen Egg McMuffins at Mitch's so I can't do anything with that :(

I have eggs here which I would really love to eat, but I don't really feel like cooking.. but I don't feel like peanut butter and toast.. Well, I'm really hungry so I think eggs it is! This challenge is going pretty good so far. I'm not worried about whether or not I have enough food, but I am worried about my lack of fruits and vegetables. Although not too worried as the last day is tomorrow. Wednesday I'm going to make a huge fruit and yogurt smoothie and a big spinach salad! It's going to be soo good. I'm thankful I get to go back to my regular eating habits. And it makes me think how many people don't have the means to eat healthy fresh fruits and vegetables. I was reading a post by Dan yesterday about how our wealth is so unevenly distributed, and its true. The rich keep getting richer, and hoarding their money or buying more merchandise than they could ever need - who needs 5 cars and a mansion with 5 bathrooms for only a few people living in it?! It just doesn't make any sense. But that's capitalism. As Ghandi once said, "There is enough in the world for everyone's need, but not for anyone's greed". Anyhow, it's definitely breakfast time! I'm hungry!

My challenge card today is "**Interview for a job today. You only have runners. What will you do?**" Not too sure, since before opening this I grabbed a cup of coffee that my Dad made - so there goes 50 cents and I now have **\$3.17** instead of 3.67.

I'm pretty sure I can't find dress shoes for 3 bucks.. I'll have to check out the Sally Ann, which I need to check out anyhow for socks - which I am also going to need for this interview anyhow. I might call Wal-Mart as well and see what they have on sale in their shoe department (when I worked there I remember things being marked down to pretty low prices sometimes, so I might get lucky!)

The thing is, I can't physically go to any of these places for real because I have class from 1 until 3.30ish, then I work at 5 until 10! So my day is kind of packed full, no time to walk to any of these places. And if I drive I won't have money for the shoes or socks due to the dollar for gas. But I'm going to call around and post my discoveries on here later on. Maybe I could borrow shoes off a family member? We'll see.

It's plus 1 out there! That's gorgeous weather, I think I can do without socks for the day, especially as its Sunday and not too many places are open and most close quite early anyhow. But of course I know how Kenora weather goes and I'm sure it will get cold again so I would want to find some socks tomorrow for sure. I would go to the salvation army and check that out, or, if I knew how to knit, I could knit socks. Too bad I don't know how, that would be a valuable skill for someone living on this income. I'm positive that buying wool or whatever would be cheaper than buying already made clothing. That's another thing I will have to look into.

Also, it has been interesting trying not to text. Sometimes, I've forgotten because I've received a text and automatically started typing back – its kind of a habit, something I'm just so used to doing. As soon as I remember though, I stop typing back and instead grab the house phone and dial their number to call them back. Although texting can be very convenient, it is actually better to talk to someone on the phone. There's more of a connection there, instead of just technological messages. I think trying to use the actual phone instead of texting will be something I keep doing after this challenge.

I was thinking to that maybe instead of going to Megan's house to work on our assignment, she could come to my house. Then I wouldn't lose a dollar to get to her house, which is in town so definitely not walking distance. Especially since I have no socks.

I clean the bathroom at my house once a week. I don't mind doing it at all, since I live here I feel that its important I contribute to the household chores and what not. I understand the importance of chores, as without them I may not have a work ethic or understand how much actually goes into keeping a house clean. Anyhow, my point is that if you were living on a fixed income on Ontario Works, or even working but with low wages, would you be able to afford cleaning products too clean your bathroom, kitchen, etc. Would you own a vacuum to clean your carpets? A mop to clean the kitchen & bathroom floors? Cleaning fluids for the mop bucket and cleaning fluids for the counter, toilet, sinks, etc.? And when its a decision between cleaning and eating, eating is obviously a bigger necessity and higher on the priority list. Therefore, the cleaning of things could become neglected, which maybe would not bother some people but would definitely bother me. I like things to be clean, as in sanitary, and organized as well. Sure, my bedroom gets messy, but that is because I am busy with school and stuff, and often come home late at which point my siblings are sleeping and therefore I should be quiet. It always bugs me when it gets messy and cluttered and I always end up cleaning it ASAP when this happens because it annoys me. But if you had a low budget, you wouldn't have a vacuum for the carpets, or cleaning fluids for the washrooms and what not. So I started thinking, what about regular household items that could be used as cleaning supplies? Wow, Google is amazing. I found a website that has lists of things to use for cleaning! I was just going to type them in here, but there are so many I will instead attach the link: <http://www.ecocycle.org/hazwaste/recipes.cfm>

Just thinking about laundry too. At my house, we have a dryer but we also have a clothes line set up in the basement. Its pretty neat and definitely energy saving. There's also a fan down there to keep the air moving so the clothes will actually dry. This means we don't have to use the dryer as often.

So Megan picked me up and we went to her house and finished are assignment, which I'm quite confident we did a great job on! I figure since she offered me a ride, it doesn't count as a dollar for driving? That's just what I figure.. if that's not the case, let me know and I'll subtract a dollar. :)

### Day 3

Okay worked out this afternoon in my room. Basically, a while ago I went through all my cosmopolitan magazines and ripped out all the work out pages. I would jog, but its freakin' winter! Anyhow, these exercises need no equipment, as a water bottle can be used as the weight

sees the homeless and those in poverty. I notice that the meals offered in our community are through churches. Maybe not exclusively support by, but each day a meal is offered in either Knox United Church, Jubilee Church or the Fellowship Centre which is under the Presbyterian Church. But what about some of the other churches that, like Lakeside Baptist Church, are outside of the downtown core? What are we doing? What can we do? Clearly the teachings of Jesus Christ show that we are to be caring for those less fortunate. Are we? And how?

This day went normal and quickly. Having the challenge of finding a toonie helped take some pressure off of filling a need. I did find that it was hard giving up the coffee. I found myself thinking, "where can I get a free coffee?" I know there are some places that offer them to customers but I would not be a customer. For example I know a car dealership, perhaps all, offer coffee in their waiting area. But not having a car for this experience, nor being a customer, I could not just go in and have some. I am sure there are places that coffee can be had for free or little cost. On a cold day it would certainly be much more welcome.

### Day 3

This day will be different for me. I usually do not eat breakfast on Sunday but this morning I had some leftover oatmeal and a piece of fruit. Coffee will be no problem today as I will be at church. As mentioned yesterday my faith would play a part in this experience for me and therefore going to church would be natural. Since I did drive to Lakeside Baptist I will take out \$1.00 from my resources to come here as a "guest." One of the things that is offered is coffee in the foyer, so I will have some of that. Afterwards I plan on going to Jubilee Church for the lunch. My dilemma is for this evening. My wife and I are part of a small group that meets each Sunday Evening and shares a meal. Question: if I were living on a very fixed income and limited in my abilities to travel (to this meeting) and to share in the food (each week the host home provides the meal but it rotates each week and I would be unable to host a meal)? Would I even be a part of this group? On the other side we are open and have had some people participate who could not host or provide the meal. We have the freedom to invite others to join us, even for a short time, to participate. If I were to walk into the church today and be invited to join this group for tonight, would I go? Could I go? Would I feel embarrassed to ask for a ride? And so I wrestle with this today and will share what happened tonight.

Now onto my challenge: "Someone stole your only shovel. A potential employer is coming to your house for an interview in 1 hour. Find solution." Could be interesting. At first I thought I would just go and ask a neighbour, my neighbours have several, but then if I was in this situation in life for real, I wouldn't live in this neighbourhood and my neighbours otherwise would be less likely to have a spare shovel around. My next reaction was to go and buy a new one but even on sale they can be relatively expensive. My solution, based on previous blog entries, was to approach my church community. I checked first and determined that I have been in the community for 6 months -long enough to have made some friends in the church community and gain a little level of trust. I asked one church leader if I could borrow a shovel from the church for a few days -at least until I got paid for the potential job I was interviewing for. (I assume with the time of year that the shovelling would be with a snow shovel).

He was hesitant to agree. What if I broke it? I agreed that I would replace it if I broke it. Still hesitant. I offered some kind of collateral but did not know what. I asked if a reference letter from someone would be okay. He agreed. I made contact with Pastor Frank Kowal, Jubilee Church, and he agreed to be a reference for me. Shovel "in hand" I was ready for the interview. After the whole process the man I asked about the shovel said, actually he was going to be getting one from Canadian Tire since they were on sale and I

could just have one of the old ones. In fact, he said, he could just get me one! Lunch at Jubilee was very good. I saw a few other participants for the challenge there, which was good. We helped set up the tables and chairs for lunch and then got in line to receive our food. The Way Fellowship provided the meal today. There was plenty for seconds and even thirds for those who desired it. There were a few, very few, who had something left on their plate and threw it away. We even had cupcakes for dessert! That is the first "sweet" I have had in this challenge! I asked Pastor Frank about how many they had come out each week and he said it averaged out 150. That was a bit surprising. Everything wrapped up about 2:00 when Pastor Frank announced the rides to Minto were leaving. We helped clean up putting away the tables and chairs and others mopped up the floor. Just about everyone present chipped in, even if putting away a couple of chairs. I had also decided that I want to give something to the church as an offering. I chose to give a tithe, which is 10% of my money, which for this experience is \$3.50 plus the toonie I found yesterday. Tithing is a normal part of my religious experience so this is nothing new. So \$5.50 of my small pile is gone leaving me with \$2.37 for the next two days.

#### Day 4

Well, it is Monday morning. I contacted OW and was connected with Tannis who agreed to act as my case worker for the remainder (albeit just two days) of this experience. Since yesterday was Sunday and I somehow got a job interview requiring me have a shovel I was under the gun to replace my stolen shovel within an hour. I managed to do that on a Sunday through church connections. On further thought I decided to contact OW and find out directly what can be done. I should know this but I didn't and now I do. Tannis said that I needed to get a letter from the employer stating any equipment, tools or specialized clothing (e.g. steel-toed shoes) that would be required. I was to price these out and find something suitable -not cheap but also not the Cadillac version. I would then bring these prices to my case worker, Tannis, who would approve and get me a voucher to acquire these. Fairly simple but would involve legwork. To accomplish this in an hour would be difficult especially with the back and forth travel to say, Canadian Tire for a shovel that would work. This would also eat into my budget as I would likely have to take some form of transportation.

I don't know if I got the job but I have another interview today with another potential employer. Today however I have to purchase a razor and look clean cut. This will cost me almost all of my remaining money I am sure. I appreciate having the advantage of reading others posts. Dan indicated he found razors for \$1.13 and we can get it back from OW. Out of pocket for now but redeemable. Great! I am just tempted to take my good skinning knife and use a little Irish Spring for lubrication, but since the challenge says purchase I will be true to the challenge. Oh, one more thing. I ran into the gentleman from church who said I could borrow the shovel. I told him I did not get the job so I returned the shovel unbroken and unused. He wished me luck on my next interview today. :)

Just looked at Jada's Blog. Nice picture with some "stranger" kissing her on the cheek. I am forwarding this one to my wife before any rumour's start! And found another on Adrienne's page with myself, Scott (whose family has helped out several times for the Sunday lunch at Jubilee), and Adrienne's husband. Pastor Frank is standing in the background. I know these are posted on other blogs, but they add something other than words to my own.

One of the amazing things I find is that people do want to help. Often they don't know how. They see there is a problem and often are overwhelmed by the size. Back in the 1970's I remember (yes I am telling my age some here) my mom using the "there are starving kids in Biafra who would gladly eat that!" when my brother sister or I did not want something on our plate (like Brussels Spouts). And then in school talking about the starvation that was happening "over there." That and other huge events like the recent

think of me. At the same time, had I grown up living off this amount would I then care more? If I were constantly having to do things like that to make ends meet then how would I feel? Also, I feel like I have more protein items than I necessarily need but not as many fruits and vegetables as I would like. Before this challenge, I had made the decision to eat a lot healthier and take better care of myself – including quitting drinking. I only have one kidney, and recently (about a month ago) had a pretty bad kidney infection that scared the crap out of me. So I decided I would become a rabbit – well, pretty much, but mainly I mean I would eat a lot fruits and veggies, and as much protein and dairy as the Canada Food Guide recommends, and cut out all the unhealthy stuff except for once in a blue moon occasions. Including salt, as that is also a weakness of mine. Now it does not interest me, as I know it can cause kidney stones, which can cause scarring. But its crazy how much salt is in things that you wouldn't expect to have salt in them. Anyhow, the point of this is that if \$35 was my weekly budget for life it would be extremely difficult, almost impossible, for me to eat tons of vegetables and fruits. Even now, I've been consuming lots of peanut butter and bread for snacks instead of fruit for snacks. This is definitely eye opening.



I did not have a shower yesterday or do my makeup. That felt weird for sure. Me and Mitch (my boyfriend) went to my friend Chantel's house and watched a movie she had. We just hung out, relaxing and chatting on the couch. But there goes a buck for gas since I was at Mitch's house all evening and we drove to her house. She lives in Keewatin though, so I walked home after. Which isn't really anything new to me, I've never owned my own car and don't even have my G2 yet (I'm working on it though!) and have always been used to walking, catching the bus, or finding rides from family and friends. Although the past 2 years I have been more use to driving places, as Mitch has a jeep. Anyhow, its funny how its a dollar to use a vehicle – but it's 2 bucks to catch the bus. It makes me not have any interest in riding the bus, but in reality people on this budget would have no choice as they wouldn't even have a vehicle. I'm going to have to find a way to town this afternoon as me and Megan are supposed to get together at her place to work on the assignment we have due tomorrow. We started it on Friday when I was at work, but we're not quite done.

For breakfast this morning I had french toast, and I borrowed cinnamon from my parents and added to the egg before putting the bread in it. Since I wasn't going to be having syrup, I at least needed cinnamon! Right now I am drinking a delicious cup of coffee, but there goes 50 cents on that one. Its worth it though.



Pumpkin "Loaf" and Pumpkin Muffins.. See how they have sunk in and aren't raised like a muffin should be? Too much pumpkin, but they are still delicious – and super moist! The loaf is raised in this picture, but it has sunk in now too.

I just figured out exactly how much money I have left, counting my scratch ticket winnings, and my cup of coffee this morning, and I have \$3.67. That's not a lot considering there's still today and two more days to go. Speaking of which, I should open my challenge card! It says **"You do not have any socks. It's your choice."** (This one makes me laugh a bit, I got to admit, because its only February so therefore Christmas was not long ago and therefore my sock drawer is overflowing with socks). One thing I wonder is how I am out of socks? Where did my socks go? Are they just all dirty? Or do they all have holes in them? If they were all dirty I'm sure I could just wash them in the sink and hang them to dry. If they all have holes I'm sure I could sew those holes. If I were to actually not have *any* socks at all, I would have to buy some *because* it's February and therefore cold out, but seeing as I am out of socks and it is a Sunday I would find out what the weather is like.

onion. I have a feeling it would have been way better in the oven with even more lemony-flavour! Although I must say, it sure as heck isn't anywhere near as good as walleye.

Oh yes, my challenge card. I have run out of toilet paper and must buy some. Well, I would have no money left if I bought toilet paper. I figure, many people living on this budget would ask their neighbours, so I figure that is what I would do and then make that toilet paper roll last as long as possible. This would be hard if you had children, as they tend to use more than necessary. If I went ahead and spent money, than I would have 0 left for the next couple days and that would make things difficult if I ran into an issue where I needed.



**Day 2**

My challenge today was that I bought a scratch ticket for \$2 and won \$5, therefore a \$3 profit. Which means I now I have \$6 -- Woohoo! But I am supposed to report to Ontario Works, which I am quite positive most people would not actually do. And I'm pretty sure a \$3 random increase in your earnings, that I am highly doubtful would happen again, would really affect how much you receive from Ontario Works anyhow. Also, many people who win that much on scratch tickets usually just buy another couple scratch tickets, usually leading to not winning anymore and being \$2 less than they were originally. This is also part of the reason so many people gamble when they don't have the means to do so -- because they think they *might* win something and therefore have more money than they did originally. And then disappointment follows when they do not. It's kind of ironic that this is one of my challenge cards, as we had a guest speaker in the addictions class Thursday afternoon who came to talk about gambling addictions. There was a lot of insightful discussion, good information and we received highlighters and books about gambling addictions. I think part of the reason gambling addictions develop is due to positive reinforcement and reinforcement schedules -- namely, intermittent reinforcement schedules. Basically, positive reinforcement is when you receive something desirable for a particular behaviour, therefore causing that behaviour to be repeated. Reinforcement schedules are basically schedules of *when* the positive reinforcement occurs. There are four, but I am just going to mention intermittent reinforcement schedule, which is when the positive reinforcement (winning money) does not occur every time the behaviour occurs, but instead very randomly. This is the most successful schedule in causing behaviour to continue of all four, so you can see from a psychological viewpoint how one could become addicted to gambling. And this isn't something discussed in class, just something that makes a lot of sense. Anyhow, enough psycho-babble for today (although I do find psychology very interesting!)

For breakfast, I ate wholewheat toast with peanut butter and a glass of milk. Then I went to work and cleaned rooms.. Then ate a peanut butter sandwich while still at work (its all I had with me..). Then when I got to my boyfriend's house I decided to bake some muffins. I used the package of oatmeal muffin mix, the package of slivered almonds and the can of pumpkin. I also borrowed some cinnamon, nutmeg and ginger from my boyfriend's mom. It turned out pretty good, although if I make that again I would use only half a can of pumpkin.

For dinner tonight, I'm using that dollar package of shrimp (what a deal, I really got lucky on that one!) and I'll be making a pasta dish with it using some garlic, the rest of that lemon, some green onions, butter (borrowing that one..) and pasta of course. I'll boil those frozen veggies to go with it. Oh, and I just ate a little sandwich about an hour ago with a whole-wheat English muffin, cheese and tomato and a glass of milk.

I was just thinking about how when I bought my groceries and had to put some things back because it was going to cost too much. Two aisles away a woman and a man also had to put things back. It was kind of embarrassing having to take things off, but at the same time I'm not the type to care what people



Tsunami or the earthquake in Haiti or any other major event that cries out for help can become overwhelming. Even the case of our little corner of the world in dealing with hunger, homelessness, poverty can be overwhelming. People want to help but feel they cannot, or it is too much, or my little bit won't make a difference.

But put a face to it, make it more personal and people step up. I found that over the past few days I have had so many people come up and ask if they can help me in some way -buy me a meal, give me a Timmies card, give me some money. They want to help because they know me.

I direct them to give to someone who needs it -I certainly do not. I guess that is the idea of such organizations as World Vision or Compassion Canada where you sponsor one child for \$xx dollars each month. It becomes personal, doable. You can make a difference even in just one life. Perhaps that may be something to explore in this area of poverty -make it personal. People can help and make a difference even in just one person or one families life. Just a thought. Maybe that is one of the purposes of this experience -making it personal.



**Day 5**

Last day of the challenge. It has gone by quickly. I know that having an end to this is not something that those struggling with poverty have. There is no end in sight. This morning I heard on CBC an interview with a gentleman who not only was dealing with poverty but cancer. He expressed the constant strain of not having enough to get to the end of the month. And here I am so short sighted looking to get to the end of 5 days! I do plan to keep going with some of the eating that I have been doing -oatmeal in the morning and a lighter lunch. Cutting out much of the eating out is also in the plans. Surprising how much of my income goes to just that! My wife and I have talked over using some of the "saved" money and giving it to one of the charities in town dealing with homelessness and poverty. Won't be much in the overall scheme of things (see yesterday's blog) but at least it is something that may make a difference in some one's life.

This is the last day of the challenge. In some ways the easiest. A routine has set in of simple meals, completing a challenge and writing down some thoughts. But in so many other ways it has been hard. Realizing that this is just the end of 5 days. My "normal life" returns tomorrow. And that is bitter sweet. To realize that many in our community do not have the choice. They will not awaken tomorrow to a day of being able to get a Timmies coffee and have the choice of a doughnut or a muffin. They will face the sometimes harsh reality of making decisions that could mean either the rent is paid or they eat. Or, facing a day of no job and no prospect of getting one. I can smile and joke about the minor inconveniences I have had to deal with but they only begin to touch the many issues that face those who live in poverty in our community. I believe, I hope, that I am more aware of these issues. And I hope I can do something, be it even small, to help someone.

I did allow someone to buy me coffee today. He needed to talk. Who was I to argue? Didn't enjoy the coffee as much as I thought I would. Enjoyed the conversation much much more. I don't know if this will be my closing thoughts on this experience, that is on this blog site. But I do know this experience will not stop with the end of this challenge. May God grant me -grant us, compassion and vision to "see the hungry and feed them, the thirsty and give them something to drink; to see the stranger and invite him in, or needing clothes, clothe him." (from the Holy Bible, Matthew 25:37-38)



## Adrienne Penner



### Registered Dietitian

I moved to Kenora this past summer with my husband, Jay. I am currently working with Kenora Chiefs Advisory to promote diabetes awareness & prevention in the Aboriginal communities surrounding Kenora. I work as a consulting dietitian in the community, and at TD Bank. I enjoy meeting new people, jogging, curling up with a book at a local coffee shop, spending time with friends, experimenting with ethnic foods, and travelling.

Average weekly budget for "basic needs": \$75

Food Weakness: hot drinks

Average Cost of Weakness: \$4/week

What would your typical daily menu look like?

B- piece of fruit, mini wheats/milk, almonds, tea AM- yogurt, water, tea

L- sandwich, fruit, yogurt, tea/coffee

PM- latte, granola bar

D- vegetarian chili/soup with toast, diet Pepsi HS- popcorn, tea

Average cost of typical days meals? \$7

What do you anticipate being the most difficult in the challenge? Not being able to freely spend money on a coffee, or when hanging out with friends, lack of having access to a vehicle when I want... just lack of options in general.

Why did you decide to take the challenge? After I went to an impoverished area of Mexico in 2006 to help build a church building, my perspective on life has changed drastically. It's so easy to take what I have for granted, and I think this will be a great chance to be reminded of how fortunate I am. I hope that by participating in this awareness event, I will be able to contribute to a happier life for people affected by poverty in our community.

### Day 1

Well, it has arrived... day one of the challenge! Feeling pumped, as well as slightly unsure, as I have no clue what the next 5 days entail. Breakfast this morning? Oatmeal with milk and an apple. Quite delish actually. Biggest challenge so far? A baby shower tomorrow... realizing I

### Day 1

I did all my grocery shopping this afternoon. I did not eat breakfast this morning and at 10 am arrived at the Knox United Church for the Agape Table soup kitchen where I volunteer. I also ate lunch and had tea there. I walked to Ted's No Frills where I did my grocery shopping. Wow. I spent just over \$30. In reality, I wouldn't have been able to spend that much money on food if I needed money for other things, but I didn't really think of that when I bought the food. I was just thinking of how much I would need for the next 5 days and while still trying to have healthy foods, especially at least some fruits and veggies. It really made me think about the fact that if that was the budget for my whole life, I would not be eating healthy and good food, and I would be eating way less. I took a picture of my food, but I can't post it until later when I'm on my own computer. Right now, I am at my Grandpa and Grandma's visiting until my boyfriend gets off work and then I must go to work as well for 5 pm. I had to spend a dollar for my Grandpa to pick me up and bring me to his house; it's not too far of a walk, but carrying all my groceries it would have felt like it! And my arms would have been so sore too. If it were summer, I would have pushed the cart to his house but its winter and that would have been even harder. So a dollar for gas it goes. Now I have \$3 left. And its only the first day.

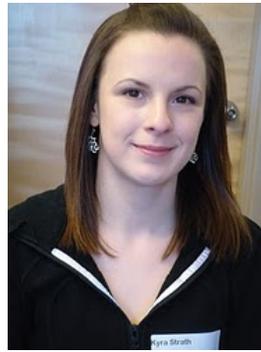
It really makes me thankful for the fact that I usually don't have to worry about this type of thing.

that money. So I'll borrow from my neighbours to make sure I'm prepared for an emergency. I began in the vegetable section where I grabbed 1 potato (0.48) (think baked potato, yum!), 1 tomato ((1.07), 1 garlic clove (0.13) (cheap seasoning..), and 1 yellow onion (0.92). Then onto nuts and bread. I wanted to get peanuts as I'd planned on baking muffins and adding nuts and banana to them, but all the 1 buck peanut containers were salted, no thanks! Then I got a loaf of whole wheat bread, which was 1.49, meanwhile, the white bread of the same exact brand was on for 1 dollar! Like c'mon! I went with wholewheat. Then I seen whole wheat english muffins for 1 dollar, but wait, a package marked 50% off – that's only 50 cents! Bingo... On to meat. One package of lean ground beef.. the regular ground beef was cheaper by a bit, but I wasn't interested in compromising on that one. so 2.78 on that. Next eggs (2.07) and cheese (3.44) and 1L of milk (1.77). Then fusilli pasta noodles (the twirly ones.. 0.99) and big can of diced tomatoes (0.88). Then for my muffin mix, organic oatmeal (1.99) and I never seen discount bananas, and there's no way I'm buying new bananas and letting them get old to bake with.. so, hmm.. what's this? Canned pumpkin (here's the upset.. the sign said 0.88 but my receipt says 1.49.. guess I should have checked that in the store before I left!). And I wanted nuts in my muffins, what's this? Slivered almonds (1.99). Okay. Crunchy peanut butter (2.77), can't go wrong. Canned spinach? Never even knew they canned spinach (0.87), its cheaper than fresh or frozen and I can put that in the pasta I planned for Sunday! Frozen mixed veggies (1.97). What's this? Package of mini frozen shrimps for 1 dollar?! Done deal. And frozen tilapia fillet for 1 dollar?! Another deal! Then I doubled back to the vegetable area as I remembered I wanted green onions (0.50). And while there, seen a lemon (0.47) that could go with my seafood-deals. And grabbed one orange (0.55) and two bananas (0.60). Total: \$31.83. I felt like I spent way too much, but since I've seen in the blogs that other people have spent around 30, I feel a little better.

Tilapia (\$1), Green Onions, Garlic & Lemon Slices. Total Cost of Dinner: \$2 at the most! Woo-hoo, not bad at all! And it tasted pretty good too! I chopped the garlic real small, put some butter in the pan then put the garlic in the butter. (I know I didn't buy the butter, but this will be my small cheat? I borrowed it from my boyfriend's mom) Let that cook for a minute then put in the tilapia fillets, then I added the green onion. Once done, I plated it and added the lemon slices on top. It was pretty good. I'd never had tilapia before, it has a fishy taste to it and would have been gross without the added flavour from the lemon, garlic and



## Kyra Strath



### Student and Room Cleaner at Laurenside Inn

*I was born and raised in Kenora, and I love camping, fishing, swimming, and just enjoying life in the beautiful outdoors. I am taking the Social Service Worker course at Confederation College in Kenora, and plan to attend University and attain a degree in Social Work. I am very close to my family, and am in a long term relationship with my wonderful boyfriend. I also had cancer when I was 8 and now have just one kidney.*

**Average weekly budget for "basic needs":** \$50-100 (depending on pay-check and includes cost of my cell phone bill)

**Food Weakness:** Tim Hortons!

**Average Cost of Weakness:** \$5/week

#### What would your typical daily menu look like?

Breakfast (8-10 am): cereal or toast, with a piece of fruit and 1 cup of cranberry juice. Sometimes bacon, eggs too (when I feel like cooking). Coffee with cream and sugar.  
Lunch (12-3pm): sandwich of turkey or ham, fresh spinach, cheese, tomatoes and mustard, sometimes with veggies to dip in ranch or fruit. Yogurt.  
Dinner (4-7pm): 1 serving of protein (usually chicken, fish, pork, beef, pizza, or bacon and perogies) with a salad (usually spinach with an assortment of different veggies and different dressings depending on what I feel like) and potatoes often.  
Snack: Fruit-yogurt smoothies, fruit, cheese and crackers, popcorn, cookies, etc.

**Average cost of typical days meals?** Not to sure, since much of the food I eat I do not buy. I do spend about \$20-30 per week on fruits, vegetables, yogurt and my favourite cereal and bread. I do not buy milk, eggs and my dinners as I live at home and also often eat at my boyfriend's house.

**What do you anticipate being the most difficult in the challenge?** Eating less -- I love food. Also, not eating things when they are right in front of me will be difficult since I live at home and there is always lots of good food to eat at my house! Also, cutting back my product use and gas. I live in Keewatin, so there is no other way than to drive into town and back. I do my hair and make-up everyday, so to not do so would be difficult -- I will cut down how much I use though and attempt to only have a 5-10 minute shower. I will also only use my cell phone when I absolutely need to and not text at all.

**Why did you decide to take the challenge?** I think it would be a good learning experience and a challenge.

need to drive to pick up a gift- a gift too big to carry on the bus- after work (another dollar gone) and get there tomorrow (make that two) and then the cost of a gift, appetizer.... how would one without the extra income participate in events like this? I've decided to carpool with another friend whose doing the challenge and also attending the shower, so we can save a dollar. We're going to split the cost of appetizers. I was also wanting to get some exercise today... can't afford the gym right now... going to head over to the walking track instead. It's free. Just looking at the bus schedule here.... doesn't run on Sundays, and they stop running at around 6pm each evening. I am realizing how convenient it is when you have a vehicle, to arrive/leave places when I please- and go places in the evening and on Sundays! Each day we get a challenge card. Today's challenge was to buy toilet paper. Picked up a 4 pack at tbs for \$1.50. Also realizing how much thought goes into every decision I make... it's rather exhausting! Trying not to use my cell much... yet seeing how important it is in making plans with people... I think my social life would drastically change if I didn't have a cell. The library has free internet, but it's still not as convenient as home... wouldn't be able to communicate as frequently with friends. Enjoying the challenge so far... certainly eye opening!

#### Day 2

Today is my lucky day- my challenge card for today said I bought a lottery ticket and won- cost of ticket was \$2 and winning amount was \$5- meaning a profit of \$3. Excellent! I turned down the heat in the house yesterday and man, it's hard living in a cold house!  
This morning I ate oatmeal with milk and an apple. Yesterday I ate the same for breakfast, an English muffin with tuna and a banana for lunch, a glass of milk and popcorn and bowl of peas (yes, rather random) for supper. I must admit... I added some Becel to my english muffin... it was just too dry! Other than that, I've tried hard not to add anything extra to my meals, like sugar or cinnamon to my oatmeal, and just plain frozen veggies. Sounds delicious, I know. Tomorrow I plan on going to Jubilee for the morning service and lunch. I'd like to head to the Fellowship Center tonight, but that means sparing another dollar in order to get there, as the buses stop running at 6pm.  
Just called Keewatin Place to enquire about laundry facilities. \$2 per load, \$0.25 for 5 minutes dryer time- the lady I was speaking with says average dryer time is 20mins, so another \$1. Total: \$3 per load. The other issue would be getting your laundry to Keewatin Place. Kinda awkward on the bus... ??

I was going to try to take the bus to the shower this afternoon. According to the City of Kenora website, bus drivers no longer sell tickets- but you can buy them from a bunch of places in town. I called three of the places listed, but they said they didn't sell bus tickets. Coop in Keewatin gave me the number for Greyhound, but I was unable to get through. I'll try again later. Wondering if by saying bus ticket they thought Greyhound- and punch cards are how tickets are purchased here? Was also confused with the map/pick-up times. I'm new to Kenora and am not familiar with Rideout and North end- the two pick up locations in Kenora that will bring you to Keewatin. If I didn't have internet, I wouldn't be able to google them, and there was no reference to where these locations were on the map. Kinda strange. Anyways, I may just take the extra \$3 I won from my lottery ticket today and splurge on a drive to Kenora... it's so much easier! Starting to really appreciate my little golf :)

Well, day number two almost done. Am starting to wonder whether I'll have enough food... going through it quicker than I thought. I can see why calorie-dense foods like chips, chocolate bars, noodles, KD are so popular- they're filling and super cheap. Whose going to buy a bag of baby carrots for \$2 that'll give you maybe 200 calories, when you can buy two boxes of KD that'll provide you with like 4 full meals for the same price! Not as healthy, but makes sense when you're eating to stay alive.  
Went for a run outside this morning. Love how we have the walking track here in Kenora. I'd quite enjoy a gym membership, but at this point, it's not a priority to spend \$600 a year for one. So I try to be more creative- using the walking track on my lunch, getting outside to run whenever the weather lets me, getting exercise DVDs, doing weights at home, using my

fitness ball... I've always thought the government should pitch in and reduce costs for gym memberships and use of recreation centers.

This would help reduce health care costs and improve the health and wellness of our community. Regular activity has so many positive effects- mentally, socially, etc.

### Day 3

Opened my challenge card and I am out of dish soap. Tried googling how to make your own, but I'd need a bunch of ingredients I don't have. I thought about adding some free hand sanitizer I got somewhere to hot water... kinda as a dish sanitizer... or using dishwasher detergent... or trying to find some other cleaning solution I could be creative with, but nope, nothing quite substitutes for dish soap. I remember seeing soap and small bottles of random things at the thrift store, but I think they're closed on Sundays. Might just have to hit up the bargain shop. Can't say I didn't try.

Right now I'm sitting at \$16.5 left for the next 3.5 days. Will enjoy lunch @ Jubilee today, a potluck tomorrow night, a lunch at work on Tuesday. Starting to crave peanut butter. I've actually found the eating restrictions not bad... it's somehow tempted me less to snack and munch on random things, because I know what I can eat and what I can't. I think most people have the opposite problem! Living with a limited amount of food makes me feel I need to be less active, to conserve my energy. But I'm kinda an exercise junkie... gotta get out or else I get a little cabin-feverish.... just ask my husband....

Great time at Jubilee today... left with a lot to think about. If I were living on the street, where would I find hope? See beauty? Where would I find belonging? Someone I could identify with, but that would be a positive influence. Allan Rundel had eluded to this in his blog too- as we both attend the same church- but is Lakeside Baptist a place where everyone, regardless of their background and walk of life, welcome? I felt very welcome at Jubilee. The place was full of love and peace, and hope. People care about each other. There was a joy that kinda surpassed challenges in life- something bigger to lean on. Loved it.

Other thoughts for the day... my challenge was to buy soap. One of my friends on facebook said I could use shampoo, hand soap, body wash... so hey, I'm going to take her up on her suggestion. I walked home from Jubilee to save \$0.50- sounds ridiculous, eh? I live in Kee-watin. It took me an hour. But that's what people without a car have to do if they want to get somewhere! I apologize to any cars on the highway that I may have startled... some of the sides of the highway aren't cleared very well, and there's not much room to walk... anyways, I made it home safely. There's a lot of time to think about life when you're not working full time, and especially when walking. Walking can be quite peaceful though. I enjoyed the walk.

### Day 5

What a day. Just got back from the fellowship center with Lauren, we spent the later part of the evening chatting with some people, including Elizabeth & Annette, two beautiful and incredibly self-less ladies who work so hard serving those who come through the doors at the center. People who are sober (not only from alcohol, but all forms of drugs, etc) are able to come at 8pm, get a meal, shower, get laundry done. Lights out at 10pm, up at 6am. Breakfast and outta there by 7am. They close the doors for an hour (unless it's super cold) and re-open at 8am. Supper tonight was soup (looked delicious and quite healthy too- barley with veggies and beef) and a bun (brown might I add) with spam (might I add everyone adds a huge dollop of mustard and/or ketchup... not appealing what so ever) and sliced oranges for dessert. Not too shabby. Minus the spam.

sleeping in unpleasant places and the thought of spending a night in a room full of snoring men just doesn't appeal to me. I was impressed however with the way the shelter is run. It is not simply a place to flop when you're drunk and it's too cold to walk the streets all night, which I've also done. Of course I was drawing a policeman's salary to do it and I was sober, but it still made for an awful long, cold night when it was 30 below. To spend a night at the shelter a person must first shower, eat and accept a clean change of pyjamas and clean bedding. Fail to follow the rules or show up intoxicated and you're out the door.

When I got home Brenda produced a big, heart shaped box of chocolates that my little friends from next door had dropped off to thank me for being their guest. "Do something nice and it comes back to you tenfold" I was once told. So true. I'll save those for after the challenge ;o)

### Day 4

My challenge today says, "You do not have any socks. The choice is yours." Really? I'm pretty sure I had socks when I went to bed last night. Should've kept them on my feet I guess. There's obviously someone with a sock fetish on the loose as several other participants have had this happen. I hope the police are out looking for someone who has boots three sizes larger than normal to accommodate the extra layers of socks and of course, smells like old socks. It's pretty easy to see why poor people tend to live in town. There's no way I could own a vehicle if I was really this poor. I should've created a persona for myself at the start of this challenge. Someone who lives in town, which is where I'd more likely be if I was on OW at this rate. Drive to my supposed neighbourhood, park and then walk to Zellers or Wal-Mart with no socks and walk out with socks on my feet. Challenge solved and no dollar spent for travel.

Fortunately, I've still got \$7.11 left so I'm going to penalize myself a dollar and pretend I drove to town and bought a pair of socks for \$1.97. I'm sure I've seen cheap socks for under \$2.00 and 97 cents appears to be the pricing suffix that's in vogue. Adding HST, my total cost will be \$3.23. That'll leave me with \$3.88. Would I be so cavalier about spending \$3.23 if I didn't know this was the last day of the challenge? Not likely.

Now that I think about it, I could stuff my boots with moss. I've got lots of that ;o)

Well, I made it with coin to spare! With no unknown challenges ahead of me and \$7.11 at the start of the day I invested \$1 in a ride to town this afternoon and bought my socks and that long awaited beer. The Making Kenora Home board had it's visioning meeting tonight and it was potluck so I made a fried rice dish with rice, peas and diced pepper from my supplies as well as an onion I bought from Brenda for 50 cents. We didn't eat until well into the meeting and my stomach was growling, so I rummaged in my coat pocket and found a couple of Tootsie Roll candies (hey, I'm a Grampa). I thought I snarfed them down unnoticed, but nothing gets past Nan so I docked myself another 20 cents because they were just little candies, not full Tootsie Rolls. That leaves me with 93 cents from my original \$35 as well as two cans of tuna, 3/4 of a pound of margarine, half a litre of milk, half a bag of apples, 4 cookies, a couple pounds of rice, a pound of macaroni, four eggs, half a pepper and a lot of ketchup.

So, what did I learn from this?

- 1) Brenda's a way better cook than I am.
- 2) Macaroni without Cheez Whiz is edible, but it's better with Cheez Whiz, although you can still have fun with it ;o)
- 3) Sphagnum moss appears to have certain medicinal qualities.
- 5) With a little thoughtfulness I can reduce wasted spending on myself and have more to give to others.
- 6) A gift made out of cookies and love can be just as satisfying for both the giver and the recipient as something bought at a store in a hurry.
- 7) The company of mothers and little children should be treasured.
- 8) I'm damn lucky to have what I have.

I'm left wondering: How long after this experience will I remember these lessons? How long before I slip back to my usual self centred ways? It's been great sharing this with everyone. Thanks for the support. Now go out and be nice to someone who needs it ;o)

What if OW notices the improvement in my lifestyle? "Mr. Jorgensen, our sources inform us you were seen walking out of Ted's No Frills with a 64 pack of toilet paper. Tired of wiping your butt with moss or did you come into a little EXTRA cash? Hmm?" Duh-oh! Do I get a warning and have to pay it back or is it a criminal charge of welfare fraud and "Bye, bye benefits"? At the very least OW will be watching me very closely afterwards so I better read the "Ontario Works and Having a Job" pamphlet that came with my challenge package and see how to handle this. "For the first 3 months in a row that you are on OW, the full amount of your net monthly earnings from employment will be subtracted from your income support." I might as well sit on my derriere and eat macaroni, albeit without Cheez Whiz. I guess this creates a bit of an incentive to go find a job that pays better than OW, but if I'm on OW I'm guessing I'm either unemployable or I'm really stuck and can't find a decent paying job. If I can't get a job that pays more than OW, why work at all? I'm only screwing myself out of benefits. So, what happens after 3 months? Let's see...I qualify for "earnings exemptions". They'll only subtract half of my net earnings from my benefits so I'll be ahead by a dollar for every two that I earn after the tax man is done with me. That's a little better, but I wonder what the reasoning is behind the incentive to lie around for 3 months and then go look for a job. Maybe it's a 3 month test to see if I'm really serious about being poor or just toying with the idea.

Here's something interesting. OW will help me with costs related to looking for a job. I can ask for money to help me buy clothes or get a haircut for a job interview or new job. Sweet! I can get the \$1.13 I spent on razors back. Whoo hoo! And check this out, I have to report my income on a report that has to be filed as soon as possible after the 15th of the month and it will be subtracted from next month's benefit. Ha! This challenge wraps up on the 16th so as of today I'm still ahead by \$2 plus the \$1.13 I'll get back for the razors, except I won't get that back until next month. Who cares? What I thought I'd lost has been found! Carpe diem! Seize the day!

Speaking of days, it's Valentine's day, but I still haven't figured out what to do for Brenda, not that that prevented her from rubbing my face in it by leaving me a card and a chocolate rose. Can I treat that like the banana bread at church(?), which I figured was OK since other folks were eating at Jubilee Church yesterday. What constitutes a "soup kitchen"? Do the challenge rules allow me to gnosh on a Valentine's Day gift from my beloved? Probably, but not until I've given something in return.

I'm really getting the most out of those Peek Freans cookies. I carved two hearts out of one and used another for the base. Of course I ate the crumbs. I found some plastic flowers and made a card and what I think was a pretty nice arrangement for Brenda to find when she came home from work. I definitely saw a little smile when she found it. That's a good sign ;o)

Our neighbours have four little ones, the youngest two of whom are in Junior and Senior Kindergarten. I was asked by their Mom the other day if I would mind being the girls' guest at a Valentine's Day Tea at their school. I'm not really a tea drinker, but how could I say, "No" to these little ones? I bought two little Valentine's Day cards from Brenda for a dollar and took another buck out of my budget for gas and an apple for the road and arrived at the school at the appointed hour this afternoon. That's when I found out that the term "Tea" means tables full of free food and fruit punch. We made little paper hats, filled our faces and were entertained by the little ones with the cutest renditions of "Skinna-marinky-dinkey-dink" and "I Love Getting Valentines - From You and You and You" I've ever seen and heard. Complete with hand movements and everything!

After the school event I went to the Fellowship Centre to ask some questions about accommodations in the shelter there. I was relieved to learn the men's dorm has been full every night so I had a reasonable excuse for not spending a night there. The participants in this challenge have been encouraged to spend a night in the shelter, but I've already had experience



Don't really know what to say... kinda soaking it all in.... talked with two guys in particular, who essentially consider the center their home- learned first hand what it's like to live facing poverty. Tried explaining what we were doing, and to be honest, found it difficult. Felt totally like the superior one, and I struggle with that. But, I soon realized that these two guys are just as human as I am, and we laughed over reminiscing about childhood tv shows and yeah, soon found lots in common. Super easy guys to chat with. Fun loving. Lots of questions going through my mind... is \$35 reasonable? Living on welfare can't be too comfortable, or else there would be no incentive to get yourself off it and living independently. Yet it seems that there are a lot of resources available to anyone who would want to change... I think addictions and other behaviours get in the way... very unfortunate. If welfare increased, would it be used for the right reasons? Some people may, some won't. So complicated. Tough questions. I'm thankful I got to take part in this challenge.

Now the question that seems to fill my mind is what's next? What am I going to do with all of this now that the challenge is over? Definitely not stopping here :)

This blog may be a little scattered... I'm just about done for the day. Tomorrow we have our wrap-up at the fellowship center at noon. I have \$6 left, but that doesn't include the \$10 spent on the shower. And I surprisingly still have a fair amount of food left. I've been lucky to have several potlucks and such this week. I'm so ready for chocolate and peanut butter.



## Lauren Mandamin



### Student

*I am a single mother of two but I am doing this challenge as an individual. I am an outgoing person, friendly, helpful and strong willed. I am also going to school to further my education in my career in policing but also doing some upgrading.*

Average weekly budget for "basic needs": \$20

Food weakness: Chinese

Average cost of weakness: \$15

What would your typical daily menu look like? breakfast -eggs and toast with juice or sometimes skip a meal lunch-soup and a sandwich or sometimes skip a meal supper-spaghetti or skip a meal

Average cost of daily typical meals? \$15

What do you anticipate being the most difficult in the challenge? the eating three meals a day instead of skipping meals.

Why did you decide to take the challenge? it is a great opportunity to voice an opinion about poverty. The challenge is also putting myself out there being a Ontario Works recipient and knowing your resources for support as a young aboriginal single mother.

I am realizing that I start in the challenge tomorrow. I am feeling a bit nervous from what to expect and also budget but am sure I will do fine. :D  
To start off my day tomorrow I have a dentist appointment which will be quite interesting as, I also gotta do my shopping afterwards and if I am going to have the energy to do so. In case your wondering why am so nervous, I am getting my first root canal done and not sure what to expect after that appointment. Like wondering how am going to be, putting money in the meter while am at the appointment, and my day activities after that. From what I hear of the other participants are doing fine.  
This challenge will be quite interesting for me, as am currently on Ontario Works but not as a single person. I have myself and my two kids on Ontario Works, no spouse. In case your wondering, we split awhile back. That itself is another story.  
I haven't quite figured out how am going to budget the \$35 for five days but am sure I will figure out something.. After all I am a single parent raising two remarkable children. I intend to attend at least 2-3 of the soup lines and plan a night at the local fellowship centre. That itself will be an experience for myself. And also having to expect I have no idea what from the daily challenge cards. Am sure I will do fine.



I told that story to coppers in the bar at the police college and I think some of them figured I made it up. We never left the city limits the whole time. Having no toilet paper evokes strange memories, doesn't it? Know what that stuff is? It's sphagnum moss warming up to room temperature in my house. My problem is that I live in the country. Yesterday the challenge forced me to drive to my Mom's. If I have to drive into town every day for every challenge that's 5 bucks down the old porcelain speedway just for travel and that's before I even look at a roll of what last night's macaroni & ketchup is making increasingly important to me today. I'd rather make do until I have no option but to go to town for something I can't substitute for and then buy several things at once, so I decided to go from blogs to bogs and I hit the trail for a spruce swamp not far from home.  
After looking for a mound under the snow that would signify a suitable site for harvesting some of Mother Nature's scrubbing pads I started digging through the snow and found not only my bush T.P., but also some Labrador Tea. Bonus! A good source of vitamin C and it's supposed to be very mildly narcotic so I figured I'd see if I could take a trip without leavin' the farm, so to speak.

The tea just made me a bit sleepy, but the moss "worked like a Charmin" once it had warmed up to room temperature. Initially I thought it'd clog the toilet, but the clumps just blow apart in the initial spin and then get sucked into the vortex like there's a Black Hole down there. I may never buy toilet paper again. Use moss, save a tree, right?  
Brenda went to Winnipeg today so at least I didn't have to watch her eat the Cheez Whiz I couldn't afford to put on my macaroni, like she did last night. I decided to cook rice for lunch so I diced up an apple and threw that in to add a little more zip. My hunt for organic \*ss wipe had pretty well used up the apple and 2 cookies I had for breakfast so I cracked a can of tuna while the rice cooked. It was a bit dry, but a squirt of ketchup fixed that up. The apple rice was good enough that I went back for seconds.  
Brenda ate a peanut butter cup in the car today while I was driving. The other night she smothered her vegetables with the Cheez Whiz I couldn't afford to put on my macaroni. Considering she's on a diet and I've never had to diet in my life, I've suspected that she's drawing a certain amount of pleasure from my situation, but this effort to torment me just seems twisted. I put this to her and she happily confessed that she is indeed deliberately torturing me. I asked her why she would do that. "It's not me," was the reply, as she licked the peanut butter cup sensuously "people have actually been encouraging me to do it." I'd have torn it from her lips and scarfed it down right there, but I didn't want to forfeit the challenge and besides, she can beat me up.  
So, total expenditures today amounted to \$5.34 including gas money. I sure hope I get one of those winning scratch ticket challenges, but I'm beginning to think Fay would not let me off that easy.

### Day 3

Well it's the afternoon of day 3 of the poverty challenge and so far I have \$7.11 left of the original \$35. Like most of the others involved in this I'm not concerned about starving, but I'm not sure I'm getting all my vitamins and minerals. Almost everyone in our group has commented in one way or another that they're doing ok, but are glad this is only for 5 days and not a lifetime.  
My challenge for the day: "Every week you shovel the neighbour's drive. She paid you \$2.00. Don't forget to report your income." I'm a pretty honest person, but the temptation to just put the \$2 in my pocket and pretend it didn't happen was strong. Then my conscience started working on me. It was more paranoia about getting caught. Is that conscience or fear of consequences? What if I fall out of favour with my neighbour? "Hi. That bum Dan Jorgensen who lives next door to me has been shovelling my drive and doing a lousy job of it even though I've been paying him \$2 a week for doing it."

After our rice porridge lunch I pulled out the dessert du jour - a Peek Frea'n's Chocolate Shortbread cookie for each of us, a candle on hers. We talked and she told me a story about when I was about 15 months old and her and Dad moved from Athabasca, Alberta to Midway, B.C. He found a job right away, but money was tight and so we lived in a tent right at the garage where he was working until they found a house to rent. After about a month he decided it would be better in Vernon, B.C. so we moved there and guess what?

We were back in the tent for a few more weeks until they found another house to rent. Dad was like that. It was all about the adventure of a new place. Planning didn't enter into it. I went to 3 different kindergartens in one school year. I asked Mom how long we lived in the tent altogether and she said, "Long enough that I don't like camping."

We may not have had a house, but I never got the impression she felt we were homeless. She grew up during the depression and the conversation led to looking at some pictures from her childhood and teen years. After that I helped her clean up a bit in the basement and around 3:30 I left. We both had a good afternoon together so I guess it's not the calibre of the meal as much as the calibre of the person you share it with that counts.



## Day 2

Opened my challenge card first thing today and I've run out of an essential paper product. So, options, options, what're my options? Cr\*p! Or not to cr\*p, that is the question. I wonder how long I can go without going? 4 days? Don't think so. Why couldn't I have pulled this card on the last day? I could hold it for a day without too much physical pain.

Eaton's catalogue? Nope. They're out of business. Besides, my butt served me well over a couple of decades of riding in police cars. It deserves something a little softer in retirement.

There's gotta be a cheap way around this. Another ride to town puts me out of pocket another dollar, plus where do you buy 1 roll of toilet paper? I only need one roll to get me through this crisis.

I could go out in the bush behind my place and dig up some sphagnum moss, the stuff you find in spruce bogs. It works great in the bush, like a natural scrubbing pad, it's totally organic and oh, so soft ;o) You just find a spruce bog, lift up a clump of moss, make your deposit in the hole, do the "paperwork" and put the clump back on top. Stealth pooping. Leave no trace. It'd probably clog my toilet though.

Folks are going to say, "Where are you going to find sphagnum moss in downtown Kenora?" Well guess what people, some of our poor are squatting in pockets of bush around town. Thirty years ago Ray Csuzdi and I followed a local street lady on footpaths for about 2 miles to the north side of Tunnel Island where she and her partner had been living all winter in a hut made of saplings covered with old chunks of carpet, tarps, plastic and cardboard. There was a fire pit outside with a cast iron pan and a dozen sausages frozen into a half an inch of lard. Hungry? Start the fire, thaw out a few sausages and let the rest freeze in again. That's healthy eating. Fat is a food group, right? Who cares if the mice have been gnawing on it and pooping in the pan.

This lady's partner was lying face down on the ground and when we rolled him over I was sure he was dead. His face was flattened from lying on the ground for hours. It was grey, lifeless and it didn't "spring back" the way a live person's face does when you roll them over. All of a sudden he drew a rattly breath that startled Ray and I both. It was early springtime and he was a big man. We sure weren't equipped to carry him out so I went looking for some decent poles to make a stretcher and found a canoe a couple hundred yards up the shoreline. It looked reasonably seaworthy and there were two paddles so I dragged it over and we rolled him into it and slid it out until the ice got thin from the river current and started breaking. We paddled a mile and a half to the Rideout Landing where an ambulance met us. The lady had to walk back out. Her partner died in the hospital a couple days later. A short while later she stopped drinking and got her life together.

## Day 1

Well this morning is so far so good. Up and ready to see what my challenge card is: its every week I shovel my neighbours drive and she pays me \$2 a week, and don't forget to report your income. I know for a fact with \$8 Ontario Works cant deduct you. Its if you make more then \$20 in a month, they deduct you. So, no worries for any deductions like that.

Still gotta do my shopping for the next few days. So am without breakfast this morning til I go shopping. Just going to have a glass of water, as also my dentist appointment is this morning. I haven't quite figured out how am going to budget the \$35 yet but am sure something will come up. Seems like everyone else in the challenge is just worrying mainly about transportation and food. I am going to get more walking done in this challenge when doing my own activities, I have done so before without having a vehicle, and still do to this day, after owning a vehicle. The cost of gas is however quite expensive, so that limits my activities for this challenge. And also the dollar for the ride.

Today was a quite interesting day. Had my dentist appointment for a root canal and now am in quite a bit of pain. Really sensitive to eat things, so the next few days will be interesting as to what I will be eating.

My grand total for what I spent out of the \$35 was \$26.15, which is including a dollar for my transportation to get my shopping done. This also includes me buying bags for the food. Out of this total I did manage to buy out of the food groups which was pretty hard to manage but I did manage. My change that was left out of the \$35 was \$8.85. :D

No frills Cost was \$18.82

2 packs of no name noodles for 25 cents

egg creations \$1.00 (9 eggs in this lil carton, egg whites not to mention, cheese & chives also)

Fruitopia strawberry juice \$1.97(good source of vitamin c, size is 263L) :D

Maple brown sugar oatmeal \$1.99(the kind that's in a box with 8 packets)

No name California mix of frozen veggies \$2.49(750g)

Primo soup \$0.99 (roasted chicken &noodle,30% less sodium, low fat, made with white meat)

uncle ben`s fast and fancy rice \$0.99(fine herb and wild)(165g)

yoptimal immuni \$2.99( 2 probiotics)

ground beef lean \$2.83 with a 30% off sticker which made it \$1.98(0.726kg)

lily chicken sausages \$2.99 with a 30% off sticker which made it \$2.09(375g)

5 fairly decent sized bananas \$1.57(1.47kg)

also including the hst at 26 cents

Zellers

2% milk \$2.33(2L)

Minto Parent and Child resource center cost was \$5.00

3 rolls of toilet paper 75 cents

2 cups of coffee \$1.00

1 can spaghetti sauce \$1.00

bodywash-free

1 package of spaghetti whole wheat noodles \$1.20(375g)

2 cups of sugar 50 cents

2 lighbulbs-55cents

toothpaste -free (note free items are donated to Minto Centre)

toothbrush-free

shampoo-free

Also for lunch I went to the Minto Centre and has a beef barley lunch with bannock( :D ) . I also had some coffee and made an apple crisp to take home. The apple crisp is part of a group snack for diabetes group that some women are doing at the Minto Centre. I made the apple crisp to sample for my own taste as I had not tried it that way of making it. I had tried with ice cream but not alone. It is amazing though the apple crisp. The Minto Centre is a remarkable place. It also has a lil store upstairs in one of the rooms, to assist people with buying food at a decent price. Also seeing all the people that go thru the Minto Centre are great. Seeing the pamphlets on various information, the workshops Minto Centre has there and also many other things. In the basement they also have a room where people also donate some belongings such as toys, books, clothes [decent shape] and other things. Its interesting what goes on at the Minto centre and its in a good way. :D

For supper I had some leftover beef barley soup with bannock that I had taken home from the Minto Centre. And also made the apple crisp there which was my dessert. My shopping, wow was that an experience. haha. Seeing the looks people give you when you keep looking at the price, and the nutritional facts. Makes you wonder sometimes but after awhile, I am sure some people knew I was one of the 12 participants. Some people I knew and were amazed that I participated. Wow, though how a person feels when things go thru the checkout and seeing you have enough is a sigh of relief. Amazing though to experience that.

My final thought of the day was wow, today had brought on some challenges, managing ways to get places, and also not to mention for after my dentist appointment picked up my prescription of acetaminophen and ibuprofen to help with the pain from my root canal. I quite wonder how a single person on Ontario Works manages this. Its quite peculiar. Wow, you do learn a lot. Even for myself, being a single parent on Ontario Works with my kids, is sometimes a task but also I get child tax which is another benefit for a bit more money, not just having Ontario Works as my only source of income. I don't get child support though, I get deducted for it, even though my ex does not pay nor work. I wonder why though but at the moment its fine. I do know that whenever he does start paying I wont get a deduction cause Ontario Works took there money off what cheque I do get. I know am not going to be on Ontario Works for long. Just this experience has made me realize how tough it must be for a lot of people. Also a knowledge for knowing your resources kicks in but what if some people don't know the resources?

My appointment wasn't that bad, I wasn't sure what to expect but man was it long. My medications were covered under my drug plan. As I am writing this blog, my lower jaw is getting in more pain but I am sure I will endure it, since I went thru labour twice, ha-ha... So far no swelling of my face but man is my jaw sensitive. I hope that was my first and last root canal appointment. I know the next few days are going to be quite interesting, as per my eating habits. I got quite the variety of food though, to assist with some cravings. Like for instance my urge for coffee in the mornings bought some at Minto along with sugar and toilet paper :D), cant live without my coffee. It gives the wake up call I need in the mornings sometimes. I do have food from the four food groups, which is another plus. I was kinda hoping for cheese but managed to get some in the egg creations as it has cheese and chives. :D Anyway, am going to read a book, and last but not least relax my jaw :( then see what tomorrow has in store for me. OoOoOhh...

## Day 2

Today my challenge was "the cut on your hand is oozing. purchase something to stop the infection"

I know first hand that not all the time you buy things. You sometimes gotta make do with what you got and right now am trying to budget \$8.85 til this challenge is over. Realizing today about my first challenge card I forgot to add two dollars to my amount, so that means I know have \$10.85. (WOW). I am quite assured I will do fine throughout this challenge. Whatever with me rambling on about things. I am going to say that personally I would just run my hand under some cold hand to ease the bleeding and let soak in the sun. Let it air dry and take in some sun :D If that way didn't help with my hand then I would walk to the hospital, wait the how many hours to see a doctor, get bandaged up, then walk home, depending if I wasn't prescribed anything for my cut. Also my drug plan covers a fair amount of my medications, I have no worries about paying for them.

Before I forget to mention, where I live the pastor from the jubilee church, gives out cakes, breads depending on what a store has given him. It usually seems to be Safeway giving him the items and he gives out to families and also I do believe keeps some for his church for the lunch they do there on Sundays. I have intentions on going there tomorrow and seeing the

the meat. Holy moly! C'mon Ted, gimme a break. I can't afford this. No wonder the street people are standing outside the store and not in it. I know...hamburger's cheap, where's the burger? Yikes! Better try dairy. Margarine. I'll need some of that. How many different kinds of margarine are there? They all cost different prices. Here's a yellow block for a buck. Right on, that's within my budget. Now, milk, milk, milk where's the milk? Oh look, eggs. Eggs are dairy? So there's no poultry food group? OK, must be dairy, meat, fruit, carbs and hey, there's tuna at two cans for a buck. Get four of those so the fish food group is done. Now for some carbs, I'm sure carbs are a food group. What has carbs? Macaroni. I like macaroni, with melted Cheez Whiz and ketchup. Mmmmm! Say, 900 grams for a buck 97, that's pretty cheap. I'm beginning to see a pattern here. The stuff in the yellow packaging is the cheapest so let's go find yellow Cheez Whiz. Back to dairy. There's no yellow Cheez Whiz. I guess I'll get the regular stuff. Holy cr\*p! My wife pays that much for Cheez Whiz? It's not even real cheese! OK, no Cheez Whiz in my macaroni. It'll be OK. As long as I can find yellow ketchup I'll be OK. There's no yellow ketchup. Geez, ketchup's pricey too. What's this? \$1.97 for ketchup. It's not yellow, but it's cheaper than the Heinz, that's for sure and what's with the 97 cents all the time? How the heck am I supposed to add all this up in my head? This basket's gettin' heavy. I must have enough food by now. What've I got in here anyway? Still need meat. There's rice. Rice is nice. I love steamed rice with Chinese food, chicken fried rice, sushi. It goes with anything. \$2.79 for 2 kgs and it's in a yellow bag too so it must be a good deal. That's like almost a pound a day! I could live on that alone for 5 days! What've I got all this other stuff for? Hey, a box of Peek Frean's chocolate shortbread cookies for a buck. Whoohoo! I didn't think I'd be able to afford cookies. Jam 'em in there. That's another food group taken care of, the Peek Frean's group. They don't teach you this stuff in school! This basket's getting full, but I still need meat. This really sucks. I like meat. Should've had a Big Mac before I came in here, I'm starting to salivate looking at all this meat. Can't afford any of it. What about bacon? This one's not a bad price, if you like fat. Weiners? Breakfast sausages. 1, 2, 3...14 for \$3.09. That's nearly three sausages a day. They'll go good with the eggs, but they look gross when they're not fried. I'll close my eyes when I cook 'em. OK, so the total bill is \$21.55. Looks like a pretty good selection of stuff. That wasn't as bad as I thought it was gonna be. I've gotta have a chat with Brenda about all that whining she does about groceries. I'm gonna have grub left over when this is finished and maybe enough change for TWO cans of beer at the end. All I gotta do is stay home, drink water, watch TV and eat for 5 days. I'm up for it.

Tonight it's gonna be a big fat juicy steak with a whopping huge baked potato and as much beer as I wanna drink and I'll be good to go tomorrow morning. This won't be so bad. Once you're into something it's never as bad as you thought it was gonna be.

## Day 1

Got up just after 6 am and opened my challenge card, which read, "It is your mother's birthday. Purchase her a gift." Gonna have to use my imagination here. Had 2 fried eggs, 3 sausages and an apple for dessert. CBC Radio called 5 minutes early while I was brushing my teeth, but I'm told the interview went well. Left as soon as the interview was done and helped my son-in-law, who was having a bit of a work emergency and got to my Mom's at 12:30 with everything I needed for her birthday lunch - rice, milk, cookies and a homemade card with a poem in it. "Roses are red, violets are blue. Who's the world's best Mom? It's gotta be you." Not bad, huh? Asked her what she wanted for her "birthday" and she said having me for a son was good enough. She's the best ;o)

## Dan Jorgensen



### Retired police officer

53 year old middle class retired guy with a wife, two kids and three grandkids and living a comfortable life.

**Average weekly budget for basic needs:** I have no idea as my wife handles our money.

**Food weakness:** Going out for supper a couple times a week and having a beer or two with supper.

**Average cost of weakness:** I'm going to guess I drop at least \$100 to \$150 a week on a couple of nights out with my wife and/or friends.

**Typical daily menu:** A bowl of cereal for breakfast, a couple of snacks, sandwich & milk for lunch, snacks, meat & potatoes with a couple of beer for supper, bowl of ice cream or other bedtime snack

**Average cost of daily menu:** No idea as my wife buys the groceries.

**What do you anticipate being the most difficult challenge?:** No treats, no beer and limited variety in the menu.

**Why did you decide to participate in the challenge?:** I've spoken out about the problems of poverty and homelessness and I figured this event will raise public awareness and putting my "money where my mouth is" in a public venue will be a good thing to do. It should also raise my own awareness since I've never gone without anything really and it's good to reflect on what others endure. I've no idea what it's like to be poor.

### Day 1

OK. I like challenges. I've got \$35 for 5 days, but I don't want to spend it all at once after seeing how Thelma got burned yesterday by her first challenge card. I'm sure I'm gonna get the "you need aspirin" challenge card too. I'll mooch them somehow or raid Brenda's purse and give her 50 cents. My goal is to keep the groceries between \$20 & \$25 so I have a reserve for the challenges and enough change to buy myself a nice, cold, tall can of beer to celebrate my last night as a poor person (I hope).

So here I am at Ted's No Frills trying to remember the 4 food groups. Let's see: dairy, poultry, carbs? Nope. Meat. Meat must be one of the food groups. Geez, I took this in high school. Hey look, \$2.97 for a bag of apples. There's 13 in the bag so that's about 2 and a half apples a day. Fruit is a food group. "An apple a day" and all that stuff. OK, got that one covered. Move on to

work the church does there. They also have a clothing depot like the Minto Centre. They as well do various activities throughout the week. Also having talked with Pastor Frank, he says they also help families with items they need for home and other things amongst giving rides to also attend activities or go to the church services on Sundays. The church does seem very active in the community. Did I not mention I got a cake out this conversation with pastor Frank? Yes, I got a carrot cake. The expiry date says tomorrow but am sure is fine. I know for quite a few of items, you could eat or drink whatever at least 2-3 days max past its expiry date. :D

Today, I have been enjoying a few cups of coffee that I had purchased at the Minto Centre. Did I not mention about the Minto Centre, the store itself pays for itself. Like the items you buy in that lil store upstairs there purchases itself again to be bought by another person later on. They also accept donations of pampers too for donations, same goes for the church. Wow, what resources are out there but its knowing them, and also accessibility. Well, til later on. take care

### Day 3

Today is off to a slow start, not having much energy. Usually my mornings start with a Timmies coffee, mmmmm... But that wont be happening anytime soon. Am still budgeting the money I have for the remainder of this challenge.

My challenge for the day was "lost your toothbrush. buy a new one. "

Why should I buy a new one when I got two off the Minto Centre. I made sure I got the "basics" for his challenge. And am glad I did. So, there goes my challenge card. All done. But say if I still needed the toothbrush I would go to the fellowship centre or check out jubilee church. Am sure they might have some for donations. I did have the intentions of checking out jubilee but am lacking the energy today. For breakfast I did two packets of oatmeal and a banana with a big cup of milk. I also snacked on some yogurt I had bought for this challenge but didn't have the chance to eat yet. For lunch am thinking soup with a cup of juice. Then I still have abit of my apple crisp I made Friday. Yummy! Enjoying my cups of coffee in the morning but could most definitely use a orange crush right about to fill in my sweet tooth for pop :O I never realized budgeting would be like this tough for a single person. Not being able to have things or do things that I would normally do. I was going to check out the rec centre yesterday for a free swim that Neechee was putting on but realized that after it was over :(

Today my challenge card was " your out of socks, the choice is yours". So what I did was go sockless and checked out some places. And the prices of socks are quite interesting and with the money that I got left, it limits to what kinda brand or how I want my socks to be. They obviously weren't the comfy ones that I normally wear but hey am outta socks. So, instead I checked out some donation places and nothing. Instead I borrowed a clean pair off a family member. Thank god I got some relatives that close by. If not then I would been stockless til I had more money to buy a decent pair.

### Day 4

I am feeling lazy lately, not having the energy to do much but at least am having a full tummy. I also forgot to mention that they night before broke and went for my weakness: Timmies!! I had a large tea with 3 sugar and 2 cream with a Boston cream donut. Mmmmm! I enjoy tea and that was my first cup of tea since this challenge began. I do have another day in this challenge and wondering if my funds will last til then. After my timmies I now am left with \$4.64 to last my til Wednesday at noon. My last night am planning to stay at the fellowship centre to at least have an experience there while am on this challenge. I know so far out of the 12 people doing this challenge am the only one staying there. This itself will be quite interesting, as am not sure quite what to expect. I hear there quite sanitary there and the people are nice. That there sure brings up how I feel about going there for the night until the lunch there to wrap up this event. I am seeing how it is for a single person to be on Ontario Works and man do you

really have to budget and know your resources because if there weren't any resources then this would be an entirely different challenge. I can't imagine what a person goes thru just to make it stretch month to month with so little income. til later on take care

**Day 5**

My challenge card to the last day was "out of dish soap. Find a solution". Well, seeing as am low on funds here. My ultimate way is just using hot water and letting the dishes soak. If you really think about it, how did people from hundreds and hundreds of years ago do there dishes? Am sure they didn't have dish soap or liquid laundry detergent. I could borrow some dish soap off a neighbour but ultimately am just going to resort to using hot water. Well altogether this experience has been quite interesting. It goes from reading the other participants blogs day to day activities to life itself. This challenge was a big realization that you really do gotta know your resources and how to budget but also at the same time, its not quite healthy living with such limited funds and what a person is spending there money on. I am also tired of repetition of foods and also noticing that not eating a wide variety of foods. This whole challenge was quite the challenge from beginning to end.

My last night was to be spent at the fellowship but a personal matter came up. So, i did however attend there with fellow participant Adrienne and learned a lot about the centre. For one it is not how its portrayed to the public. Meaning how people think of it as. It is a amazing place with unique people. And also them having rules to enforce safety for the people that both work or attend the centre. I went to the centre 8ish pm and discovered that they (centre) get the people to shower, provide clothes and bathing items (towels, soap etc.) and feed them a meal, along with a snack.

The workers there seem to be enjoying the work they do and the impact it has on people is remarkable. It is people from all ages and backgrounds that go here. The Fellowship centre also has a no tolerance rule for drug/ alcohol use on site or the state a person is in. They also have some other rules but in case the wondering person is to ask, was a drunk person there while I was there? No. The people there were all kind and friendly people.

Did I also mention that they also take donations? To assist people that go there with clothes (jackets, socks, skibbies, foot attire, personals as well for male and female) and money for the centre itself. As also on a daily basis when the people that go to the centre shower, the centre gives them a set of clothes which the centre washes and also that all linen is cleaned and washed on a daily basis.

It must be beautiful to wake up to in the morning, as the centre is located by the lake. And has a great view of Kenora's beauty and the things people take for granted. I also forgot to mention that the Fellowship centre is a welcoming place with amazing people. Just looking at the wall with all the artwork with people that have gone thru there was amazing. And its people that have sometimes nothing, give it all. They are the people with the biggest hearts and help in a part of this community. Everyone does there own share and the fellowship is a remarkable centre that helps out a lot of people on a daily basis. :D

FYI: Me and Adrienne had a joyous time at the Fellowship Centre, having conversations not only with the staff but also the people that use the centre. The topics were all over the place, talking about this challenge, kids, TV shows and people we know. The people at the centre are so welcoming and generous. The feeling I wanted to mention about this centre, is its almost like a home away from home. For some it is just that. A home.

What Kenora needs is more affordable housing as a fair amount of people do notice how rent costs, along with other costs are here. The biggest issues are two: Affordable housing and the money.



**You can donate your money.** There were over 5,000 hits on our blogs – if everyone who read these donated a dollar to a food bank, they would make that money go a long way! Everyone can be a little more aware of how they spend their money, and save a little to make a big difference in another person's life.

In Kenora there's a soup kitchen every day; either at the Fellowship Centre, Knox's Agape Table, or the Jubilee Church. Other support is available at the Minto Resource Centre and the Salvation Army. And donations are ALWAYS welcome at these locations.



**You can donate your time.**

You can raise awareness, listen to those who are suffering, help give them rides to appointments, etc. Everyone is welcome at the Kenora Fellowship Centre. It's important to break down the barriers between people in Kenora. We are all people!

**BUT THERE MUST BE MORE...**

If there was a never ending supply of money and volunteers, would that stop homelessness? I think our government has sadly shown us that the answer is, *No*. Throwing money at a situation will not make people better. It may help in the meantime, but it will not CHANGE things.

**I think the problem has to be fixed on a deeper level.** Kenora has 2 locations where people can go to counsellors can go for help. Other areas where they can have counselling and a safe place include the Hospital and ACTT. And there are important places that help children that are in these situations, like the Lake of the Woods Child Development Centre, and Creighton Youth Centre. But as with most government run organizations that are here to help the public and the less fortunate, **the employees are over worked!**

Based on experience, research, as well as many amazing movies like Goodwill Hunting and The King's Speech, people who are suffering will benefit from facing their issues in a safe environment, with someone who is consistently there. **Counselling is needed!**

But even this will not help unless they can get a safe place to stay, away from the negative influences in their support group. **More safe and affordable housing is needed as well!**

You can rationalize it however you want...either thinking of the tax money that goes into these services that will be re-directed when more people are helped, or by empathizing with the person who is suffering...

**SOMETHING NEEDS TO CHANGE**

I think one of the big things with society is our connections. Our connections make us, or break us. Today I was sitting at the cafe in the hospital, and I noticed a doctor grab a cup of coffee. He went to pay for it, and the girl waved him off and he got it for free. Why is it that the rich get things for free, and the poor have to struggle?

If you are raised in negative situations, with lower income, and you learn these cycles, it is harder for you to excel and reach the top...but if you are raised in positive and encouraging environments, with higher income, it seems easier for you to reach the top. This point is being brought to our parliament's attention by NOSM students re: the LOW proportion of low -middle income med students! Yay NOSM!

And then being on assistance gives you SO little to live off of. How are you supposed to get ahead? How are you supposed to keep your hope? I did it for 5 days, and I had to spend what little money I had on a chocolate bar...a comfort food. And the end, the light, is right around the corner for me!

### Day 5

Today we had a wrap up at the Friendship Centre. It was really something. We were all given a delicious meal. Everyone had an opportunity to talk about their experiences. Some of our audience members were those who are homeless. Some of them were not entertained. They wanted to tell their story, and not hear ours. They were defensive. They had questions. And I couldn't blame them. They've been through SO much more than we have. It felt very weird hearing our 'complaints' about the 5 days; we were a little hungry, we couldn't go out drinking with friends, we couldn't just do what we want....and we're looking at people who live with abuse and addictions, who are discriminated against, who don't know if they'll eat again before the next soup line, who don't know if they'll have a safe place to sleep tonight. And our complaints seemed ... ridiculous.

I don't want to diminish what we have done...because I feel that it has truly changed my perspective, not only on OW and the homeless, but it's changed my life. I have a new value to money. I have a new respect for those who make it on this kind of allowance. And I feel we have really raised awareness! Our collective blogs have had over 5,000 hits from all over the world! But I feel there is a deeper awareness that needs to be made...

At the beginning of this week, I brought up my challenge to a few people who believed that no one should get something for nothing. Others have said how nice it would be to live on OW, not work and get paid. I would say there are a good proportion of local people who feel the same way. I certainly see the benefits of working, and the gratification that comes when you work hard for the things that you have - the feeling of accomplishment.

HOWEVER, I think within that belief, there is an assumption being made;  
***That everyone is given the same playing field, the same rules, and the same skills.***

When you have a mental illness and/or have suffered from abuse, it affects your reactions and your actions. Others tend to have a lower tolerance level, they tend to impose more rules, they tend to discriminate and jump to assumptions. It is VERY hard to break the cycles that have conditioned your life

People say that this person is seen as a **'drain on society'** This breaks my heart. This person is a person. He is a victim of his circumstance. One of the quotes from today was, ***"a sure way to make God laugh is to tell Him your plans"***

There is a large number of Kenora-ites that are homeless.  
**So what can we do about it?**

## Jada Puls



### X-Ray student of Confederation College

Currently doing a year placement at the Kenora District Hospital. I was born and raised in Kenora. After going away to get my BSc in Psychology, I had the opportunity to work with ODSP, ACTT and Triple PLAY in Kenora before going back to school. I have worked with so many people who have suffered from poverty, and I would love to have a better understanding of how it feels to walk a week in their shoes.

Average weekly budget for "basic needs": \$175

Food Weakness: Chocolate

Average Cost of Weakness: \$5

What would your typical daily menu look like?

10am Oatmeal and banana	12noon Chicken sandwich and veggies
2pm Cheese bun	5pm Pasta/Rice with meat and veggies
8pm Snack	

Average cost of typical days meals? \$11

What do you anticipate being the most difficult in the challenge? I think budgeting for food while being healthy, and limiting social outings with friends and family will be very hard.

Why did you decide to take the challenge? I would like to broaden my awareness of life in Kenora, and share that knowledge with those interested.

I would like to go from sympathy (I feel bad for you) to empathy (I know something about how you feel). And then I would like to take the step towards compassion (I will help you.).

Another part of the reason is to raise public awareness of our local issues, and the experiences the 12 of us will face.

There is a personal part too; I have noticed that I will spend as much money as I have. Whether it's a little money, or a lot of money, it's gone. When I finish school I will have the opportunity to make a steady income again, and I don't want to fall into my old habits. I want to be more aware of money - and what I chose to spend it on. Because I think whatever we spend our money on, we support. And I don't want to throw money away, knowing that so many go without. I would like to live comfortably, but not waste the excess on STUFF - I want to use that money to help. I want to make this world a better place.

"Be the change you want to see in the world." - Mahatma Gandhi.

Unfortunately, I will be disclosing some of my classic Jada-Character-Flaws right up front.

#1 - I am a geek. 📺 And proud of it. I went to some stores and did price checks. I wasn't going to, because people on OW don't have the opportunity to do so without a vehicle or the time - but then I

decided that's a GREAT reason to do so...this way I can let "the people" know! This is what I discovered (based on lowest price possible in that location):

Walmart	Safeway	Shoppers	Zellers	No Frills	
Sauce	\$ 1.87	\$ 3.58	\$ 1.99	\$ 1.29	\$ 1.29
Soup	\$ 0.93	\$ 1.09	\$ 0.59	\$ 0.99	\$ 1.07
Taco Seasoning		\$ 1.72	\$ 1.99	-	-
					\$ 1.05
Crackers	\$ 1.00	\$ 2.05	\$ 1.99	\$ 1.49	\$ 0.99
Pasta	\$ 1.46	\$ 2.55	\$ 2.79	\$ 1.00	\$ 0.99
Bread	\$ 1.67	\$ 1.49	\$ 1.09	\$ 1.69	\$ 1.00
Oatmeal	\$ 2.49	\$ 3.69	\$ 2.99	\$ 1.00	\$ 1.49
Cream Cheese		\$ 2.98	\$ 4.79	\$ 3.79	-
					\$ 3.29
Cheese	\$ 3.27	\$ 4.87	\$ 5.49	-	\$ 3.44
Margarine	\$ 0.97	\$ 2.99	\$ 3.99	-	\$ 1.00
Canned Corn		\$ 0.87	\$ 1.39	\$ 0.99	\$ 1.09
Lettuce	-	\$ 1.99	-	-	\$ 1.27
Peppers	-	\$ 5.99	-	-	\$ 5.97
Apples/lb	-	\$ 0.99	-	-	\$ 2.97
Frozen Fruit	-		\$ 5.99	\$ 4.99	-
					\$ 5.29
Beef	-	\$ 3.40	-	-	\$ 4.56
Eggs	\$ 1.97	\$ 2.09	\$ 2.99	-	\$ 2.03
Tuna	\$ 1.17	\$ 1.42	\$ 0.57	\$ 1.19	\$ 0.50
Dog Food	\$ 4.95	\$ 5.39	\$ 5.49	\$ 3.99	\$ 3.39



It's "that time" so I had to get some "feminine products" :P for \$2.99

**#2 – I am a procrastinator.** :) Possibly one of the best I went tonight to price out items I wanted to pick meals that I would normally eat, so that I would see if this 'life-style' is sustainable, so I knew what I was looking for. Little did I know it would take 2 HOURS! WITH A CAR! AND I didn't even get to Wholesale! AND I priced everything and thought I would buy at No Frill's, because they say they'll match other prices...so, the store is closing, I'm the last one there, I bring my food to the till with my list of items and the different prices at the different locations, and it turns out you need a flyer to prove the prices (which I should have guessed), but lucky for me, I had taken pictures in Wal-Mart (until a very nice lady told me a story of how she got in trouble taking pictures in stores one time, then I stopped), and I could prove 2 of the 8 items that would have been cheaper elsewhere (better than nothing!).

**#3 – I'm one of THOSE dog people.** And I wanted to budget for my baby (Nalla, the Chocolate Lab), but I ran out...so I'm going to work on that... I am living with two fantastically wonderful people, Mike and Kim, who are environmentally conscious, and have substantially raised my awareness with regards to living clean. It turns out being environmentally friendly is cost effective!

- My car has been down and out for the last month, so I've been walking everywhere. Plus, I'm happy to walk for environmental and health reasons.
- In our house we keep the heat down to conserve energy.
- I generally only shower every other day.
- We don't have cable – and I don't watch that much TV anyways.
- I rarely drink anything but water, and never with disposable cups!

**Day 4**

Today's Challenge:

**You've lost your toothbrush. Get another one.**



So, on my walk home from work I stopped at the Bargain Shop, and saw toothbrushes on for \$1.50. I figured I could find cheaper than that, so I headed to Shoppers, Lakeside Dental (but they were closed), Zellers, The Dollar Store, and No Frills – and no dice! So I headed back to the Bargain Shop, only to find a toothbrush on for \$1! (\$1.17 after tax) Geesh! You have to be observant and on the ball to play this game!

So that was an added hour and 15 minutes to my 25 min. walk home! I was tired, hungry, and grumpy! BUT THEN I went to Tabitha's! I had made her a valentine's present; flowers and candy! It's a home-made flower, and I grabbed some candy the Rehab dept was giving away to the public (I might have had a few of them too)! SHE got me chocolate donuts from Safeway! She won for best present!



As I didn't use my ipod for my walk this week (because people on OW can't afford ipods!), I was thinking a lot...I was thinking about how I've been in situations where I didn't have money. Many situations where I didn't have money. And I'm not talking, I didn't have a lot of money – I mean, I didn't have ANY money. But I've never been in a situation where I didn't have support. I come from a very big family, and I could count on them for anything. I have had so many people offer me meals this week, that I have graciously turned down, and I am moved by their kindness. I am really growing to appreciate how very lucky I am.

I also noticed that I've been thinking a lot this week about HOW people spend their money – which seems silly. I've always thought how people spend their money is up to them and none of my business. But when you don't have anything, it's frustrating to see people spending \$50 on flowers – when you think the world is on your side when you're up a toonie! I couldn't help but think; what if they spent \$25 on these flowers that are just going to die anyways, and put \$25 towards food for the soup kitchen, or spend time raising awareness about the lack of low-income housing in Kenora. And I feel bad and judgemental thinking these things. But the thoughts came none-the-less.

The Relay for life LUNCH, was actually a Relay for Life LAUNCH...and it wasn't at lunch, it started at 6:30pm. Yup. So I didn't pack a lunch, and I ended up eating oatmeal for breakfast AND lunch (lunch had some fruit too). SO, with my 37 cents, I purchased a slice of a co-workers rice crispy cake. Not nutritious, but filling – and might have attributed to the giddiness of the day.

Tonight I had some friends over for a pot luck. Which seemed like a great idea – but then afterwards I just felt guilty. I mean, one couple brought home-made borscht. And the saying is "cheap, like borscht" – and it's true. The entire pot cost \$3 and there was a lot that! Another friend brought home made guacamole and chips. Another brought pie and ice cream. Tabitha made apple crisp. And I had my soup. So I am now SO ridiculously full – and I feel like I cheated.

Day 3

Today I slept in – because you’re not hungry when you’re sleeping – and then headed to the Jubilee Church for their open meal. It was quite the thing! It was a wonderful and inviting community of people. There were kids running and playing and happy to be there, beautiful music, and people asking for help and receiving it. I got there for the end of the service, where the pastor was expressing his gratitude for the progress the community has made with regards to steps away from alcohol. And then everyone worked together to get ready for lunch!

I had hoped to talk to more of the people who were there, but in the end stuck to the group of challengers. Some of the pamphlets suggest talking to the homeless people in Kenora to get to know their story – but I am finding it hard to bring that up. For one, it means I’m assuming their homeless or on OW – and there is a negative stigma associated with that. Two, why would someone want to talk about it with me? Can I fix the situation? I just don’t know. I would love to hear their stories, I just don’t know how to start...

But I did know one gentleman there, who actually saw me this week at the hospital, so I went to talk to him. He, of course, was wondering why I was there, as I “work” at the hospital. I explained that I am not working there, but am a student there, and have to pay them to be there. None-the-less, I felt like I didn’t belong. Not that I wasn’t welcome. But that I didn’t belong. And I worry about how my presence makes the people who really need the lunch feel.

I did ask him about the bus situation though, as we weren’t entirely sure about how to get a bus ticket. You can buy one on the bust for \$2. Or you can buy them at City Hall, 20 for \$36. That’s a lot of money!!!

Talking with fellow challengers, some items came up...like the things we take for granted: When you go on OW, or ODSP, there is a “Start Up Allowance” that you can use to get your house set up for living. But it’ll only get you so far. Things that might fall into the “extra” category that we rely on regularly include:

- A MICROWAVE!
- Different pots and pans, cooking sheets and muffin trays
- Casserole dishes
- Dishes and cutlery
- The cost of water
- The energy bill when using the stove



Today I was craving more VARIETY of food. Sometimes there’s things you want because you can’t have them...and sometimes you just want chocolate because you’re single on Valentine’s Day! Ha ha (AKA Singles Awareness Day - Lorna’s line!) Splurged on a \$0.57 chocolate bar...I have never claimed to make practical decisions...hence the BSc!

Day 1

I woke up early this morning, packed my breakfast, snack & lunch, and bundled up to walk to work – a 25 min. walk, in -29 C with the wind along the Harbourfront! Brr! I very much enjoyed all my food today, and was amply full.

I have, however, been very concerned about my dog. Especially when transportation is an issue, having a pet makes you not feel so alone. They’re there to snuggle and relax, or to walk and get exercise and be social. So I’m concerned that I haven’t budgeted for her food! If I did my shopping all over again, I would have gotten eggs and not beef. And then had it not been “that time” I would have had money for my Nalla’s food!

So I’ve been brainstorming on how to make more money. I was thinking I could return shopping carts. And then I thought I would be able to sell my gold for cash, but my jewellery is at my mom’s house in Keewatin, and I was too tired to walk to Keewatin!

Plus, I had a horrible head ache today, so when I got home I was ready for a nap. And then I don’t like walking when it’s dark out, so that was the end of that. In reality, I would have fed her my food – plain beef, she likes lettuce, and plain pasta (rice would have been better). But I won’t wreck her diet, because she won’t get the learning experience from it like I am. :)

Today’s challenge: **You have a job interview, and you only have running shoes. What do you do?** This challenge is fairly easy for me, because I live with Kim, who has slightly bigger feet than me, but is kind enough to let me borrow a pair today! (Thanks Kim!) However, I think the challenges presented to me naturally with my life were trickier –

1. As mentioned in my purchasing blog, I had to purchase feminine products. I asked around, and apparently there’s a Diva Cup that you only have to pay for once. I’ll spare the men reading this the details, but it would be MUCH less expensive in the long run, and MUCH more environmentally friendly as well. Check it out!
2. I had a horrible head ache today. I usually don’t take medication. The reason is, I want the drugs to work when I’m REALLY sick, and I think pain is the body’s way of telling you that something is wrong; so it should not be numbed out and ignored. But it’s annoying when you don’t have a choice!
3. Having to feed my puppy. Sigh.

Day 2

Yesterday I talked about how having a dog makes being socially isolated easier, and today really proved it. I met up with some friends (who also have dogs) and we went to Tunnel Island for a walk. Not only is it nice to meet up with friends, but our dogs have an opportunity to run their energy out (a tired dog is a good dog!), it’s wonderful exercise, and it’s important to take the time to appreciate the beauty of our home!

I struggled a bit on the drive there. Had Kim (my house-mate) not gone, I would have walked (and been EVEN MORE tired today) – but she was driving anyways, so I took the ride without payment...because it wouldn’t have cost her any more or less gas to take us, so I figured it was like hitch hiking?! Tricky.

I wandered over to the free lunch today for 2:00 – which I thought was at Knox/Agape...another classic Jada blunder! (Note: I am not in the [www.makingkenorahome.ca](http://www.makingkenorahome.ca) link picture because I was late for the press conference, because I thought the meeting was at the Kenora Chamber of Commerce, but it was actually at the City of Kenora Chamber Room...yeah, nice one Jada).

So, I went from Knox to the Salvation Army, thinking they would know where the meal was...I passed the amazing smell of Subway fresh bread, past the mouth watering chip truck, past the HoHo Chinese Restaurant \*salivating and starving\* ...to find out the Salvation Army is closed on Saturday and Sunday. I walked back home (past all the amazing aromas again). Looked at my sheet, FRIDAY was Knox Agape. But because the lunch was only ½ an hour long I would have been late...and I was STARVING...I ate some lunch



Side Note: I couldn't help noticing the Saturday afternoon rush at Safeway. One of the best parts about walking places is that you can really observe things instead of passing them by, and you have the opportunity to think about things in a slightly clearer way. As I passed I thought of the price check I did in my pre-blog, and how all of these people are choosing to overpay for their food. Why is that? I mean, I do it too sometimes. Sometimes there's stuff there that I haven't found anywhere else (their donuts and oatmeal bread ...mmmmmm.....). Sometimes it's because I'm walking and it's cold, and Safeway is closest to my house. But imagine if they spent a little less...and gave a little more? I have mixed emotions about charity, but I love philanthropy! Helping through empowering! **"Give a man a fish, he'll eat for a day. Teach a man to fish, he'll eat the rest of his life."** The funny thing I've noticed this week about charity is when I have extra to give, I LOVE GIVING IT! I love it! But when I don't have extra, I HATE RECEIVING. It feels weird, I feel bad, and I feel like I owe them something (which is weird, because when I give, I don't feel like people owe me anything.). When I work for something, I have no problem receiving! Something to think about...

I checked out my challenge card: **You have a cut that's oozing. Purchase something to stop the infection.**

OK...on to the computer for home remedies I go! DID YOU KNOW: If you apply natural honey to the wound it has a cleaning effect? "Honey dehydrates the bacteria in the wound and thus kills them. So applying honey in a fresh wound minimizes the chance for further infection." (<http://www.goherbalremedies.com/blog/home-remedies-for-cut/>)



So my initial plan was to walk to Ted's cafe and purchase an individual honey (like the jams for toast), but Ted's moved. So I went to my lovely house-mates. We bartered: I shovelled the entire front walk, for a dab of honey, and \$2 worth of rides. DEAL!



This was a neat challenge, because a couple weeks ago I did have a cut that was infected...NOT FUN! You really do take these small things for granted!

My ground breaking thought of the day is, it's easier to save money if you have expensive stuff!

- I can walk places because I have great boots with good grip, long johns, a warm down jacket, toque scarf and mitts, and lots of clothes to layer, and switch when I sweat through an outfit.
- I have the company of my dog and the social aspect that brings, because I had the money to purchase her (and give her shots and get her spade etc. etc.)
- I'm able to look stuff up on the internet and blog because I have a computer - I admit there are ways you can "borrow" internet, but you need a wireless computer to do so! = \$\$\$
- I can take pictures for my blog (and I take a lot of pictures in general for life), but only because I have a camera, a battery charger and a device to transfer my pictures to a computer.
- You can get a pay-as-you-go phone, but you need a phone.
- Showering & going to the bathroom - you need soap, toilet paper, a towel to dry your hands, shampoo, plus the cost of water! - weird how going pee costs you money!
- A night in, watching TV/movies - you need a TV, DVD player, a couch, movies (I own a lot of movies!) = \$\$\$
- Sleeping - you need a bed, sheets, blankets, pillows = \$\$\$\$\$
- I play hockey - now, the league does have goalie equipment (because goalies are NEEDED), and most of my stuff is hand-me-downs from my little brother, and you can purchase VERY inexpensive equipment from Triple P.L.A.Y. during their sale (while supporting a wonderful Kenora based non-profit organization!), BUT that equipment costs money!
- I play guitar - I have one guitar that is lent to me, and I've been using that this week, because it technically didn't cost me anything, but I will go back to playing my other guitar that I purchased as soon as this is over...guitars aren't cheap!
- I can go cross country skiing or snowboarding on the lake or at the golf course, because my mom lent me her cross country skis and I own my own snowboard...SO expensive!
- I have a gym membership, but I haven't gone this week because I can't afford it. I own a recumbent bike that I could be using - but who, on OW, would bother owning a recumbent bike?! Especially when they walk everywhere!
- I can listen to music and write in my journal, because I have a CD player, CDs and a journal = \$\$
- I could paint, knit, or crochet - but that's because I have bought the supplies for those hobbies (so I haven't been doing those things)

How do people who have NOTHING pass the time? Especially when they are stressed, and scared, and hungry? While I worry about grades, where I want to live when I'm done placement, the struggles of meeting friends in Kenora, and money - some people in our town are worried about where they're going to sleep at night! Especially with the Fellowship Centre having bed bugs!

It really puts some things into perspective.