



Living on Social Assistance video transcription

TEXT ON SCREEN:

Nearly one million people in Ontario receive social assistance, such as Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support program. (ODSP).

Many have disabilities which prevent them from working full time.

Those on social assistance live well below the poverty line...

...but are prevented from making ends meet by rules that claw back extra income or even savings.

Here are their stories...

SPEAKER #1:

I used to work at Walmart back in 2001 and at the time we were only allowed to make \$150. And I was being cut off accidentally all the time because I didn't get my cheque stubs in time or whatever. And now apparently through the [unclear] they tell me we can make \$500 but I'm not sure about that.

INTERVIEWER:

Yeah, the rules are kind of different and we're not always sure what we're allowed, eh?

SPEAKER #1:

Yeah.

TEXT ON SCREEN:

People on ODSP can earn \$200 before income is deducted.

But after this point 50% of any extra income they earn is clawed back from their ODSP payment.

SPEAKER #2:

For me, the barrier right now is just being able to get to a point where I can work the amount that I need to – which I can't yet...

INTERVIEWER:

...To leave ODSP?

SPEAKER #2:

Yeah. It's very difficult because they start taking 50% of what you make, so in order for me to get off there, I'd have to jump straight back into working full time, and I can't.

INTERVIEWER:

That's tough, yeah.

TEXT ON SCREEN:

Changes in work status – or even simple miscommunication – can result in automatic suspension letters that threaten to immediately cut off all income.

SPEAKER #3

Some of the stuff that ticks me off is when they send me a letter, and they tell me that I've been cut off because I haven't submitted my hours – and I have submitted my hours; I got stamps on the back of my [unclear]. Can they word it a little bit different than "cutting you off"? "Can we look into it?" or "Has there been a mistake made?" Why do they got to get you all hot and bothered, right? I don't want to get mad at them, and I know they don't want to get mad at me. But, my God: "cutting you off"?

TEXT ON SCREEN:

It's not just employment that is affected by social assistance rules.

For many, especially those with disabilities on ODSP, being in a relationship can lead to loss of benefits.

SPEAKER #4:

Well, my partner and I are talking about getting married. But you know, there's a thing on ODSP saying you can only get one cheque for \$1500, I think it is. But, you know what? That \$1500 is not enough.

INTERVIEWER:

For two people.

SPEAKER #4:

Yup. Because when you factor in your food, when you factor in clothes, when you factor in your incontinence supplies, when you factor in your cable, when you factor in everything. I mean, at the end of the day, even now I only get minimum. Minimal.

SPEAKER #5:

There's times financially when it's hard because we're both on ODSP, so we live separately. And that's difficult at times.

INTERVIEWER:

Do you plan to live together?

SPEAKER #5:

Um, well, we'd like to but the problem is, it would affect our income so it might not be feasible. So, I mean, for that reason it would be hard. But then if the other person doesn't go on the lease then you could lose your rent subsidy, so that's a danger.

INTERVIEWER:

Oh.

TEXT ON SCREEN:

Overall, many of the rules for social assistance add to the stigma of receiving social assistance without adding benefit.

SPEAKER #6:

It's just too bureaucratic, it just really is. It's like, rather than it being centred on what the needs are and making sure that everybody has a decent living, it's

grudgingly provided as an option of last support, and “Oh, you don’t need all of our support? You get none of it.” And you’ve got to fight tooth and nail, and appeal, and appeal, and appeal, and appeal to try to get anything. And you know what? That just doesn’t work for a lot of folks. A lot of folks who are on social assistance – especially those on ODSP – don’t have the frikkin’ energy.

TEXT ON SCREEN:

Significant changes are needed to the system.

In the interim, amending these rules can improve the quality of life for people living on social assistance in Ontario.

SPEAKER #6:

Because to me, I’m a social worker, right? And I’m, you know, when this hit I’m going, “What is this social safety net they keep talking about?” You know, when it can be yanked at any moment, that’s not a safety net.

TEXT ON SCREEN:

Thanks to People’s Blueprint for Social Assistance Reform for the videos in this submission.

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