

The reality is that 80% or 85% of all disabled people in Canada come from social, economic and cultural backgrounds where they lack the primary tools to assimilate into the greater society. (Issue 29, p. 11)

The facts speak for themselves. Nineteen eighty-six statistics show that 14.3% or 2,794,000 disabled persons in the Canadian population are over the age of 15 years. If poverty is defined as those with an income of \$10,000 or less, these people tend to be poorer than their fellow citizens. According to 1985 figures, 15.5% of all Canadians could be defined as poor, but for people with disabilities the figure rises to 50% even in wealthy Ontario. Figures show that women have an even higher poverty rate than disabled men.

The poverty of Canadians with disabilities shows up graphically in terms of actual income including earnings, investment income, private pensions and government benefits. Sixty-three per cent of the persons with disabilities received an income of less than \$10,000. In Ontario, disabled persons between the ages of 15 and 64 had gross incomes which were 46% lower than those of non-disabled Ontarians of the same age. Incomes would have been still lower, except that so many disabled persons receive some type of pension. In fact, almost half the working age disabled population received no earnings at all. Over eighty percent of women with disabilities earned \$10,000 or less and almost 60% claimed to have earned nothing.

Why does this poverty exist? In large part, we feel that it results from the failure to undertake sustained and well-thought-out attempts to encourage disabled persons to participate in the labour force. This, we will leave to the next section of this report. But there are also a myriad of reasons that we will briefly explore here. Income security programs frequently exclude disabled persons precisely *because* they have not worked for pay. Disability benefits offered both by the Canada and Quebec pensions plans, for example, are similar to Unemployment Insurance in requiring a work history which disabled people do not have. In addition to this, the disability benefits systems include eligibility requirements that have little to do with the nature of the disability but rather, with how or why the disability occurred. In terms of benefits provided under these programs, we note that many people told us of their meagreness. Irene Feika, the National Chair of the Coalition of Provincial Organizations of the Handicapped (COPOH) told us that "It is the kind of money where you exist, you do not live." Money available under the Canada Assistance Plan varies from province to province to a maximum of \$720 per month. And there are disincentives to work that come with these benefits. Some people have to class themselves as incapable of holding employment. This makes the individual ineligible for employment-related training.