

THE

G

A

B

T

H



PHOTO: KATHY BUSBY

Survival is still the issue.

# United we stand - divided...

By Ian Johnston

A higher profile hasn't helped Darlene Dacey and Brenda Thompson.

After three years of protests, speeches, and interviews, the two members of MUMS (Mothers United for Metro Shelter) are still struggling with the day-to-day troubles of feeding and clothing their families.

"It's disappointing for women who call me and think I can make changes," says Dacey, who has two children and lives on welfare. "Because I'm living in the same situation myself. There's not a lot I can do."

In the past three years, MUMS has become one of the main lobbyists for the single parents social assistance in the Dartmouth-Halifax area. Although their work has concentrated on pressuring government officials for forms of affordable housing, Dacey says a large part of her job is spent simply advising single parents on legal and social service issues.

Both Dacey and Thompson say the group has done a good job in improving the plight of welfare families and those seeking low-income housing. The women list the recent approval of a housing co-ordinator for the city of Dartmouth, and the remo-

val of Nova Scotia Housing Minister Michael Coffin, who they felt was unreceptive to those seeking low-income housing, as two of their major accomplishments.

However, despite its successes, MUMS came close to folding recently when its membership dropped to just Dacey and Thompson.

"MUMS almost died in the summer," says Dacey. "But at the same time, all these women in bizarre situations were phoning me for advice."

"They motivated me. I decided to go on."

Though the group has experienced a lull, Brenda Thompson has not been idle. In the past three months, Thompson has been involved in a verbal battle with Social Services Minister Edward Morris. In June, Thompson wrote an opinion piece in the Daily News in which she criticized social assistance programs. After the remarks were published, Morris told the Nova Scotia Legislature that Thompson twice wrongly named the father of her three-year-old daughter on her application for family benefits.

"That's a breach of confidentiality under the Freedom of Information Act," Thompson says.

Thompson is considering legal action against Morris, but will have to wait until after an October 4 airing of W5, which features her and Dacey. If Thompson were to file a lawsuit

against Morris before then, the network would be in contempt of court.

Two weeks ago, Thompson was finally awarded family benefits.

"I think raising a stink about it had something to do with it," she says.

Dacey says Thompson's trouble is typical of what many

Continued on page 3

## More Homeless...

## Looking beyond the street people

By Donna Mayer and Paul Creelman

There are 1.4 million homeless in Canada, and Jeanne Faye, a Dalhousie Legal Aid community worker, says the nature of this homelessness is changing.

"When someone says 'the homeless', we automatically think of the images from the depression, the single man, the transients and that sort of thing. And I think increasingly as our realities of society change and there are more single mothers, more young people leaving families who are struggling to make ends meet on a minimum wage, the more people we are finding in a homeless situation," said Faye.

Jean Brackley, a social policy planner with the City of Halifax, was involved in the Canadian conference to observe the International Year of Shelter and the

Homeless. She said the homeless constitute a large class of people with problems concerning shelter.

"For the purposes of this conference, we have adopted a fairly broad definition that includes people whose housing is at risk. They may not be on the streets today, but they are at risk of losing their housing," said Brackley.

According to Brackley, people whose housing lacks essential amenities such as water and heat or people whose housing is unaffordable were also included.

"We're trying to look beyond just people who are on the street or in emergency shelters, because we felt that's a restrictive definition that doesn't take into account how complex shelter issues are," said Brackley.

Brackley said permanent homelessness is an issue most people will have to face. "Our common stereotype of home-

lessness is as a temporary condition, that people get into a crisis and then go on. For a variety of reasons we are starting to see there is a certain permanence to the phenomenon of homelessness. It's not something that goes away."

Brackley said the system is at fault in a fundamental way, and sudden housing crises such as earthquakes in Italy or tornadoes in Edmonton are not typical of the problem of the homeless.

The amount of money given to the homeless for support was insufficient, said Faye. She quoted prices of \$539 per month for a typical apartment, or \$624 for a three-bedroom apartment, while the maximum on family benefits for shelter is \$487.

"Right from the beginning, many of our clients are not receiving enough social assistance for the type of housing they need," she said.