

## A Brief History of LIFT

Low Income Families Together began in response to Ontario's review of social assistance during 1986, when a group of single mothers came together to make suggestions for reform of the system. This group later expanded its membership and the scope of its activities to become a voice and an active group for low income families in the province.

At a 1988 provincial conference of low income people LIFT members were asked, by those present, to form a resource centre to provide access to equipment and information otherwise unavailable to low income people.

During 1994 LIFT developed and received resources to promote and advance community economic development (C.E.D.) projects among low income people and to develop and share community education resources

Members are involved in systemic advocacy, creating workshops on rights, economics, and solutions, policy development, public consultations, and gaining access to government, media and non government organizations.

LIFT staff and members continue to develop information and resources and make them available to our members and other low income people in Metro Toronto and throughout Ontario.

## A review of some of our accomplishments during the last 16 years



2001-2002. LIFT completed the Bulldozing Human Rights popular education comic book on the conflict between trade rules and human rights covenants and the impact of economic restructuring on communities in North and South America. LIFT acted as a secretariat for the International Ngo Cttee on Human Rights in Trade and Investment-INCHRITI. We developed, designed, published and distributed a 4 page pamphlet on human rights and trade and investment in 4 languages, organized two forums and a workshop for INCHRITI at the world social forum in Brazil as well as a workshop on human rights education. In April, LIFT opened it's community access program, offering free internet, training and assistance with resume preparation, including a snack program for homeless site users. LIFT also began offering a community dinner for homeless and low income people in collaboration with St George the Martyr Church every two weeks. LIFT also carried out a series of focus groups across Ontario to gather input from recipients on the problems with OW service delivery for Workfare Watch.

1999-2000. LIFT completed and presented a report on Civil and Political Human Rights in Ontario to the U.N. CPR cttee in New York. LIFT produced a popular Human Rights kit called 'Human Rights; Use them or Lose them' with an educational advocacy manual and a video describing Canada's experience at the U.N. cttee on ESCR and making links to broader issues of economic globalization. LIFT also held a province wide human rights training conference for anti poverty activists. LIFT was also involved in the International Poor People's Summit in New York and the U.N. Millenium Assembly where we contributed Canada's perspectives to the declaration which presented to the U.N. General Assembly. LIFT developed a discussion paper on Human Rights Reporting in Canada for the National Anti-Poverty Organization-NAPO. We also submitted an in- depth brief and recommendations about strengthening economic human rights to the Canadian Human Rights Act Review.

1998 . LIFT, along with a team of community partners, is preparing a report to the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights to examine the federal and provincial governments. compliance with UN conventions. Due to eight months of preparation the media coverage was very successful and many organizations are now using ESCR rights in their social

justice efforts. LIFT also began producing the 'Survive and Thrive' Guide to resources for low income people in Toronto.

1997 . LIFT C.E.D. Department secured federal support for the continued development of community businesses in local Toronto neighbourhoods. The project also delivered community education workshops as a way to encourage individual and community action among neighbourhood citizens. Citizens are encouraged to act on local or social issues, take part in developing a community business or seeking employment. The project has been funded for up to three years.

1996 - Introduced a barter program into the operations of LIFT. The C.E.D. Department launches the first business of the Community Business Project. C.A.f.E. or Computer Access for Everyone is incubated within the LIFT facility in order to generate the capacity and resources to survive and prosper in the market place.

1995 - LIFT secured funds from the Trillium Foundation for popular education materials and workshops for low-income communities. Among other project activities, Trillium funds helped run a popular education-training program, produced a poster and comic book on the debt/deficit problem (distributed across Canada by NAPO), and organized over twenty community meetings to discuss low-income issues.

1995 -- Executive Director attended World Summit on Social Development in Copenhagen as Canadian observer on domestic Issues.

1994-96 -- Community Economic Development Partnership Project with the Ontario Ministry of Economic Development, Trade, and Tourism as the low income sector partner. A survey of low income groups in Ontario, symposiums on low income CED, recommend enabling policy for community economic development are some of the partnership project activities. LIFT also completed feasibility studies on a computer access business, a temporary employment coop, and a composting business.

1993-94 -- Participated with NAC in federal Social Security Review consultations in Ottawa. Hosted weekly self-help workshops for members to address economic and social development issues and network people with similar interests to develop initiatives. Developed new constitution, By-laws and financial management systems for LIFT.

1992-93 -- Held a low-income summit for women at Regent Park in collaboration with NAC. Managed referrals and individual advocacy program serving over a thousand people. Co- Sponsored a province wide conference on the Time for Action report of M.C.S.S. Participated in Low Income Working Group of the Fair Tax Commission. Sponsored and raised funds for the

Coalition for Social Assistance Reform, in partnership with the legal clinic. s Steering Committee on Social Assistance.

1991-92 -- Province Wide Consultation with Social Assistance Recipients--met over 1,000 recipients in 35 locations across Ontario. Assisted in the development of the Council of Consumers for M.C.S.S. Worked with Greenpeace and Foodshare to retrofit social housing units so low-income people could afford utility bills.

1990-91 -- Worked with COMSOC Transitions team to devise and monitor implementation of STEP (Supports to Employment Program) which took account of costs related to employment for social assistance recipients including child care, supported dental and specialized medical care. Began advocacy and referral service, won a court case to return children from Children. s Aid to their mother.

1989-90 -- Secured funds from the Children. s Aid Foundation. Opened first office established first formal board and hired an Administrator and outreach staff. Ran a pilot Children. s Program in a 7-week day camp in Donmount Court for low-income children. The program focused on building self-esteem and encouraging human values over material values. LIFT became incorporated as a non-profit education and resource center.

1988 -- LIFT organized an Ontario-wide Poor People. s Convention funded by PLURA to discuss social assistance reform, the poverty industry and alternatives to clinical social work. They published the first LIFT newsletter and started giving workshops on rights for single mothers.

1986 - A group of Single Moms in Toronto get together to make specific recommendations to the Thomson Social Assistance Review Committee on a portable children' s benefit, consumer participation in policy development and evaluation, and supports for employment while on assistance. The group established itself as Low Income Families Together and begins to expand.