

Low Income Families Together

Voices of Poverty

Personal Low Income Tales

Getting Off Welfare

Submitted anonymously to Sound, a magazine for social justice in Kamloops BC

So, here you are. All your life you have been self-sufficient and now you find yourself in this place. Feeling a little ashamed, perhaps? Voices whispering in your ear, 'What's the matter, loser, can't you find a job?' No, not yet? Well, while you wait, let me tell you about some of the experiences that are coming your way.

Never been treated as if you were a despicable liar? This service is provided at intake and with each subsequent visit to your local Ministry office. Ask your case worker.

Never been denied basic healthcare or banking services before? This will happen automatically once your source of income identifies you as a welfare recipient. Try to remember that after the first tooth rots in your jaw, any future abscesses won't hurt nearly as much. And once you start losing teeth, you won't much want to be seen anywhere in public, let alone a bank, so the two problems tend to cancel one another out as time goes by. Be patient.

Never smelled bad because you couldn't find a place to wash? It will come. It may even begin to amuse you to offend the noses of polite company. In any event, you won't find many other sources of amusement in your price range. Remember this when passersby curse you for being lazy as you sit on the sidewalk with nowhere else to go. It will help to ease the sting.

Can't understand welfare legislation? In fact, this is not really a problem. Your case worker probably doesn't, either, and anyway, the legislation is changed so often that if you just wait a few weeks none of it will apply to you. This is the beauty of the system.

Troubled by untreated mental health problems? Don't be concerned. Poverty will weaken your ability to cope with reality so much that you eventually won't be able to grasp the seriousness of your own situation. Poor nutrition will accelerate this process.

If nothing else, remember that there is one service the BC government provides with no questions asked. If you die on the street your body will be

promptly removed and cremated. Something about the idea of having decomposing bodies lying out on the street seems to prompt immediate action. You'll have finally found your way off welfare. Rest easy, old friend, your troubles are at an end.