

THE QUALITY OF LIFE IN ONTARIO

FALL 1998

Written by:

Malcolm Shookner

Written for:

Ontario Social Development Council &

Social Planning Network of Ontario

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THE QUALITY OF LIFE IN ONTARIO

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INTRODUCTION

This is the third report in the series on the Quality of Life in Ontario. These reports are based on the Quality of Life Index (QLI), a composite index made up of twelve indicators covering the social, health, economic and environmental conditions which affect the quality of life in communities throughout Ontario.

The QLI was designed and developed by non-profit, community-based organizations concerned about community and social development - The Ontario Social Development Council (OSDC), working in partnership with the Social Planning Network of Ontario (SPNO), the Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition (OHCC), the Centre for Health Promotion at the University of Toronto (CHP/UT), and the Centre for Applied Sustainability at York University (CASust/YU). OSDC is also working with twenty community partners (see Appendix 1) that are using the QLI to monitor and measure changes in local living conditions, using the same twelve indicators. This enables a comparative analysis of changes in our quality of life at both provincial and local levels in Ontario.

The Quality of Life Index covers all stages of life and is based on the model of sustainable human development developed by the United Nations Development Program and adopted by the World Summit for Social Development in 1995. The QLI is supported by extensive background work leading up to the introduction of the Quality of Life Index for Ontario in October, 1997.

Our first report, "The Quality of Life in Ontario - 1997", describes the origin and development of the QLI, based on a model which links human and social development with health and sustainability. For more information about the background papers for the Quality of Life Index, see Appendix 2. For more information about the Quality of Life Index, visit our website:

www.qli-ont.org

DEFINING QUALITY OF LIFE

Quality of life is defined as:

"The product of the interplay among social, health, economic and environmental conditions which affect human and social development."

The purpose of the Quality of Life Index is to provide a tool for community development which can be used to monitor key indicators that encompass the social, health, environmental and economic dimensions of the quality of life. It is being used to comment on key issues that affect people and

contribute to the public debate about how to improve the quality of life in our communities and our province.

TRENDS IN THE QUALITY OF LIFE 1990-1998

Our first report in 1997 noted a significant decline in the quality of life in Ontario from a value of 100 in the base year (1990) to a value of 87 in the fall of 1997. Progress was reported on environmental conditions, while setbacks were identified in social, health, and economic conditions.

In the Spring of 1998, we released "The Quality of Life in Ontario - Spring 1998" which reported a rebound of the QLI to a value of 90. There were improvements in labour force participation, but bankruptcies continued to be high. Environmental conditions were still positive, but there were concerns expressed about changes in public policies that are affecting our environment. Social and health indicators continued to show negative trends, highlighting the "social deficit" that is being incurred by society and our communities as a result of changes in public policies and major cuts in funding for human services.

Our third report, "The Quality of Life in Ontario - Fall 1998", is being released in November, 1998.

NEW FEATURES OF THIS REPORT

This report provides the latest update on the Quality of Life Index and introduces two new features - the broader context of social, health, economic and environmental conditions, and the first QLIs reported in local communities in Ontario.

We decided to enhance our frequent reporting about quality of life issues with a look at the broader context in which our living conditions are changing. We are making use of data that is only available on an annual or one-time basis to expand the field of view for our twelve indicators. We are also asking experts in each sector for their views on what factors are most affecting our quality of life.

We are also excited to introduce our community partners which have adopted the QLI as a local tool for monitoring and measuring changes in the quality of life. We present them in a chart which compares them with each other and the provincial QLI as points of reference.

CONTEXT FOR THE QUALITY OF LIFE

Social Trends

The major social trends which are affecting our quality of life are:

- < growing poverty and inequality
- < loss of community infrastructure and capacity
- < growing "social deficit"

Growing Poverty and Inequality

The 1998 edition of the United Nations "Human Development Report" (UNDP, 1998) is an annual analysis of the progress of human development, which is defined as "the process of enlarging people's choices". This means expanding human capabilities and functioning. The three essential capabilities are to live long and healthy lives, be knowledgeable, and have access to resources needed for a decent standard of living.

The overall Human Development Index (HDI) ranks Canada at the top for the fifth consecutive year. Canada also ranks at the top of the Gender Development Index (GDI). But new measures reveal underlying problems. This year, a new Human Poverty Index is introduced for industrial countries (HPI-2). Because human deprivation varies with the social and economic conditions of a community, this separate index has been devised for industrial countries. Canada drops to tenth place in the HPI-2 for industrial countries.

The UN report notes, "The top HDI countries, Canada and France, have significant problems of poverty, and their progress in human development has been poorly distributed." The other side of human poverty is persisting disparities. Income distribution in industrial countries shows wide disparities between rich and poor. (UNDP, 1998)

Growing poverty and inequality are also being documented in Ontario and across Canada as the federal and provincial governments download responsibilities for social programs while cutting budgets on a massive scale for health, education and social services. Canadian NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) are preparing reports for presentation to the United Nations which document violations of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, part of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The governments of Canada and the provinces ratified this treaty as the basis for the protection and enhancement of human rights in Canada. These reports reveal the growing depth of poverty in this wealthy nation, as well as the increasing inequality between people with the lowest and highest incomes. As more wealth accumulates in the hands of a very few, many more people slip from the middle class into poverty, or deeper into poverty, to hunger and homelessness. These reports show that conditions of absolute poverty exist in the midst of prosperity in Canada (LIFT, 1998). This is a dangerous path to be on because we are building up a massive "social deficit" of

problems with long term consequences. This is an unsustainable course for Canadian society.

The growing gap in incomes in Canada has been documented by the Ontario Centre for Social Justice (OCSJ) in a report released in the fall of 1998. Family incomes have declined in the 1990s. The increasing reliance on market forces has created a growing gap between the haves and have-nots, a gap which is accelerating in the 90s. An increasing proportion of families are falling behind, despite the growing wealth this nation produces. Those at the bottom are losing the little they had while the fruits of growth are increasingly held by those already privileged.

OCSJ notes that "Historical evidence across all nations shows that, over generations, greater equality leads to better lives for all members of society *and* greater growth in the economy."

Campaign 2000 to End Child Poverty reported in November, 1997 that child poverty in Ontario has grown by 99% since 1989, when the House of Commons unanimously passed a resolution to end child poverty in Canada by the year 2000. This is the most telling trend because of the long term damage that poverty and deprivation can cause on the life chances of children.

When the Ontario government transfers 50% of welfare funding onto municipalities, it off-loads responsibilities from the progressive income tax base to a regressive property tax base. Both policy actions represent a move away from the traditional "redistributive" role of our higher order governments (Social Planning Council of Metropolitan Toronto, 1997).

Loss of Community Infrastructure and Capacity

A new report by the Social Planning Network of Ontario and the Ontario Social Development Council, "Social Planning During a Decade of Change" (Arai, 1998) traces the impact of the changes in federal and provincial policies and the cutbacks in funding, on communities and especially on vulnerable people.

Central to the current wave of change are the changing roles of governments via devolution and decreases in public funding for social welfare. With the introduction of the CHST (Canada Health and Social Transfer) came the loss of a federal vision for the country with respect to social outcomes and equity.

While these changes impact upon us all, great concern arises for specific groups who have "borne a disproportionate share of the burden of deficit reduction including older adults, children, young families and people living in poverty or with a disability" (Halton Social Planning Council, 1997).

Devolution threatens to divide and fragment our society. As government withdraws from public provision, the market model becomes dominant. Devolution threatens to create an even more highly stratified "three tier" social service system (SPCMT, 1997) .

- 1) High end MARKET services based on the well-off consumer's ability to pay the PRICES;

2) Lower quality PUBLIC services for the broad middle part of the population supported by a diminished TAX base;

3) Low end COMMUNITY services for the impoverished and destitute, delivered by voluntary agencies and churches, supported primarily by private CHARITY.

Growing Social Deficit

Policies that reduce a financial deficit have a social impact, albeit infrequently discussed and addressed, and create a “social deficit” - long term social and financial costs of poverty, of high rates of under employment and unemployment. This social deficit is documented by community-based organizations, such as social planning councils (Arai, 1998).

The Index of Social Health (ISH) was developed as an alternative to the GDP (Gross Domestic Product), which is an inadequate reflection of economic and social well-being. The ISH was first used at Fordham University in New York and has been adapted for use in Canada by Human Resources Development Canada’s Applied Research Branch (HRDC, 1997). The Index is based on a set of socio-economic indicators dealing with issues of health, mortality, inequality, and access to services that affect individuals and society as a whole. These indicators cover all stages of life.

When plotted against the GDP, the ISH results explain the discomfort felt by people despite growth in the economy. From 1974 onwards, while the GDP continued to rise, the ISH started to decline. The importance of utilizing both economic and social data for evaluating societal progress is highlighted by this comparison. The pronounced declines in the ISH in the early eighties and nineties appear to be linked to the recessions experienced in those time periods. But a recovery in the GDP is not reflected in the ISH because unemployment continued to be high and real wages continued to slide. The indicators related to children appear to be particularly vulnerable to downturns in the economy.

The ISH was also calculated for each province. The ISH for Ontario shows a steady decline from its peak in 1988 to 1995. This trend is consistent with the QLI trend of steady decline since 1990. (HRDC, 1997)

Economic Trends

The major economic trends affecting our quality of life are:

- < declining incomes
- < declining standard of living
- < unemployment and underemployment

Declining Incomes

A new study by Statistics Canada (1998) found that poorer families have not benefited from the latest

economic growth as much as they did in the recovery of the late '80s. At the same time, government transfer payments have declined, so that the after tax gap between rich and poor grew in 1996, breaking a longstanding trend (Toronto Star, June 23, 1998).

The Growing Gap report (OCSJ, 1998) notes that, since the 1980s, Canada's marketplace has increased the gap between the have and the have-nots. The disparities began with the erosion of the middle class due to the loss of "standard" full-time, full-year, 40-hour-a-week jobs. The differences between us have been further accentuated in the 1990s with the earnings of the poorest actually dropping while the earnings of the richest are increasing.

Declining Standard of Living

The Centre for the Study of Living Standards reports that real per capita disposable personal income, like real per capita personal income, has been on a more or less continuous, seven year downward trend (CSLS, 1997). Real per capita disposable income in 1996 was 8.7 per cent below the 1989 level. If the 1989 real per capita income levels are not regained by 2000, the 1990s will have experienced a worse income growth performance than the 1930s. Whatever happens in the remaining years of this decade, the 1990s, like the 1930s, will in the future be viewed as a "lost decade for growth in the living standards of Canadians."

The CSLS also reports that Canada had the worst performance in terms of real GDP per capita growth. Real GDP per capita was 0.4% lower in 1996 than in 1989, making Canada the only country among 13 OECD countries studied, to experience an absolute fall in living standards over the period (September, 1997).

A new Index of Economic Well-being has been developed by Osberg and Sharpe (1998) to determine how economic trends are affecting our well-being and to look beyond average income trends. The Index includes four components: consumption, stocks of productive resources, poverty and inequality, and economic insecurity. Using this new tool, the trends in economic well-being for Canada were tracked from 1971 to 1997. The Index rose to a peak in the 80s and has fallen continuously in the 90s. The decline reflects a fall in indexes for consumption, equality, and security. The biggest drop has been in economic security since 1989.

This trend is consistent with the Quality of Life Index and the Index of Social Health.

Unemployment and Under-employment

The rise in the official unemployment rate from 7.2% in 1976 to 9.5% in 1995 greatly underestimates the increase in the under utilization of labour in this country. This is because of the massive increase in part-time workers, who want, but cannot find, full-time employment. (CSLC, 1997:2)

The Ontario Alternative Budget Papers (1997) describe "the real extent of unemployment in Ontario." Since the official unemployment rate includes only those unemployed who are "actively looking for

work”, it does not consider those who would like to work but are discouraged by the depressed conditions in the labour market. The official rates do not reflect these people. When the discouraged workers are added into the tally, true unemployment would have exceeded 14% since 1992! This suggests that even the modest decline in official unemployment has been due to the decline in labour force participation, rather in the creation of new jobs. No wonder so many people have not felt the economic recovery. From the perspective of the labour market, there has been no recovery at all. Yet just when workers face the most precarious job market in 60 years, the social programs which were designed to alleviate this economic insecurity have been downsized dramatically.

Although the official unemployment rate in Ontario has declined to 8.5%, there is a large population of unemployed and under-employed people who do not have access to social insurance and are falling into poverty. At the same time, there is a growing surplus of \$19 billion in the Employment Insurance Fund because tighter rules of eligibility have excluded 2 out of 3 unemployed Canadians. There are no accurate figures about those who found low-paid work, or went on welfare, or are living on the street. Anti-poverty organizations in Ontario report that many unemployed people are excluded from social assistance or are being forced to work for their welfare cheques. These are violations of international human rights treaties which Canada has signed (LIFT, 1998). It is also a tremendous loss of human capital and can lead to social exclusion in the longer term.

Health Trends

The major health trends affecting our quality of life are:

- < social and economic determinants of health are worsening
- < major changes in health services and funding
- < impact of downloading on public health services

Social and Economic Determinants Worsening

From the perspective of “healthy communities”, factors which are powerful determinants of health are poverty, inequality, housing, and social supports. These social and economic issues have a profound affect on the daily lives of people. They have at least as much to do with our health and quality of life as access to health services. Health promotion experts say that the biggest issue in health is problems with access to the basic pre-requisites of health, e.g. food security, housing, and adequate income. Growing numbers of Ontarians do not have enough income to provide food, shelter and clothing for themselves or their families. The growth of hunger and homelessness in Ontario is reaching crisis proportions. Their impact on health will be felt for years to come.

Cuts in Health Services and Funding

The federal government has cut \$7 billion from funding for health, education and social services in Canada since 1995. The loss of federal funding to Ontario is about \$3 billion over the same period. Since concerns about the quality of our health care system are at the top of most public opinion polls,

most of the losses have been born by education and social services. While health care funding in Ontario as remained at or near \$17 billion annually, there are major changes taking place in the health care system. The restructuring of health services is resulting in the closure of hospitals, the loss of community health services, problems with access to health services, and the privatization of some facilities. All of these changes are reducing the quality and accessibility of health care to the people of Ontario.

The impact of privatization on health services means that budgets drive the agenda, not service standards. As health services are run more like businesses, what is lost is a commitment to the values of our publicly administered health care system. It also opens the door to two-tiered health services.

The redirection of funds from hospitals to Long Term Care facilities is a good long-term investment for an aging population. But there are short term transitional problems, such as. waiting lists for long term care, which are being monitored through the QLI..

Impact of Downloading on Public Health Services

The Ontario Public Health Association has just released a survey of public health units in the spring of 1998 which was trying to assess the impact of downloading responsibilities and funding for public health to the local tax base (OPHA, 1998). They were surprised to discover that there has been no decrease in funding for public health in 1998-99. In some cases, health units got an increase in their budgets. The availability of transitional funding from the province for municipalities has cushioned the impact in the short term. However, OPHA remains concerned about the future, since the full impact of downloading has yet to be felt by many municipalities. OPHA will conduct a follow-up survey in 1999. The full impact of downloading is not likely to be felt until 2000.

We have noted problems in data collection for the Quality of Life Index which can be attributed to lack of capacity to report on public health issues like low birth weight babies and communicable diseases. This trend is related to the inequity of public health capacity to deliver programs, due to variations in the capacity of municipalities to cover their share of the costs of core programs from their local tax base.

Environmental Trends

The major environmental trends affecting our quality of life are:

- < deregulation and reduced capacity for inspections erode previously established environmental standards
- < Blue Box recycling threatened by downloading and loss of funding
- < retreat from “sustainable development” agenda

Deregulation

Top environmentalists claim that the Ontario government has a dismal record on environmental

protection, according to a new report prepared by the Ontario Environmental Protection Working Group. The report was compiled from 17 Canadian and international agencies - ranging from the Ontario Environment Commissioner to the NAFTA environment office. It points out how deregulation and reduced inspections are endangering peoples' health. (Toronto Star, June/98). The report targets smog, acid rain, waste management, and nuclear power. "The government has taken actions which will make these threats to health and safety of Ontarians worse."

A new report from the North American Commission on Environmental Co-operation, "Taking Stock" ranks Ontario as the third largest source of pollutants in Canada and the United States (Toronto Star, Oct. 12/98). Ontario has stalled proposals to strengthen its outdated standards for hazardous air pollutants, while moving to weaken existing industrial water pollution control regulations. Ontario's Environment Commissioner says, "Ontario Hydro is predicting that its fossil fuel emissions of several air pollutants will rise by 70% between 1996 and 1998." In June, the Ontario Environment Ministry proposed sweeping changes to reduce controls on hazardous wastes. The Commission's report demonstrates that Canadian governments' environmental strategy of weakening environmental laws and standards, while relying on voluntary action by industry to clean up pollution, has failed.

More recent data from the Canadian National Pollutant Release Inventory (1996) indicates a further increase in the total generation of pollutants. Future reports are likely to show the consequences of the enormous reductions in the resources of environmental agencies across Canada, and the weakening of environmental laws that has taken place over the past few years.

Ontario's Environment Commissioner stated in April, "the focus needs to change from one of granting regulatory relief to polluters to improving commitments to the health of residents and the natural environment."

The Canadian Environmental Law Association reports that weaker environmental assessment rules reflect the development-at-all-costs environment in Ontario. All the rules have been changed to favour industry over the environment and fast approvals over democratic process. The impact of these changes on ground water and wells in rural Ontario is a growing problem. In urban and suburban areas, a key issue is smog. Recent reports from the Ontario Medical Association show the health effects of smog, especially on children and the elderly. In the north, there are a range of issues related to resource extraction, including weaker controls on mining, with possible future effects on water supplies, and the effective privatization of control over Ontario's forests. Common elements exist across the board, especially the loss of community control in decision-making on issues that directly affect people's lives.

An Index of Environmental Trends has been developed by the National Center for Economic and Security Alternatives in Washington, D.C. It measures trends in a wide range of serious environmental problems. The study examined 21 indicators of environmental quality and ranked nine countries from least to most environmental deterioration between 1970 and 1995. Canada had the second worst record, showing a decline of 38% (Alparovitz et al, 1995).

Blue Box Recycling

The latest report from the Recycling Council of Ontario shows that the Blue Box recycling program continues to grow in use and popularity. However, the future of this program rests with current negotiations between the municipalities and the province over funding. Data provided by the Recycling Council of Ontario show that there is also growth in other areas of recycling: residential recycling (12%), backyard composting (8%), yard waste pickup (33%).

Retreat from Sustainable Development

Canadians were among the leading voices in the “sustainable development” movement in the early ‘90s, which defined a new relationship between environment and economy. Following the release of Agenda 21 from the Earth Summit in Rio, the Canadian government set up the National Round Table on Environment and Economy to create an infrastructure for sustainable development in Canada. The provinces followed with provincial Round Tables on Environment and Economy. Though these fora provided a way for different groups to come together, they seem to have had no lasting effects on public policies. The Ontario Round Table was closed down in 1995 by the newly elected government. Federal departments concerned about economic and environmental issues continue to work in solitude from each other. The political environment which brought in weaker environmental standards and deregulation of protective legislation is contrary to the direction of sustainable development.

Yet the idea of “sustainability” has caught on in the minds of many people who try to keep in mind the needs of future generations, while meeting the needs of the present. The genesis of the Quality of Life Index in Ontario is the “sustainable human development” model introduced by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). There is grass roots support for sustainable development, but there are major political and bureaucratic barriers to bringing the environment and economy together in a mutually supported way.

These trends in the social, health, economic and environmental conditions which affect us should be kept in mind when analysing the Quality of Life Index and its twelve indicators.

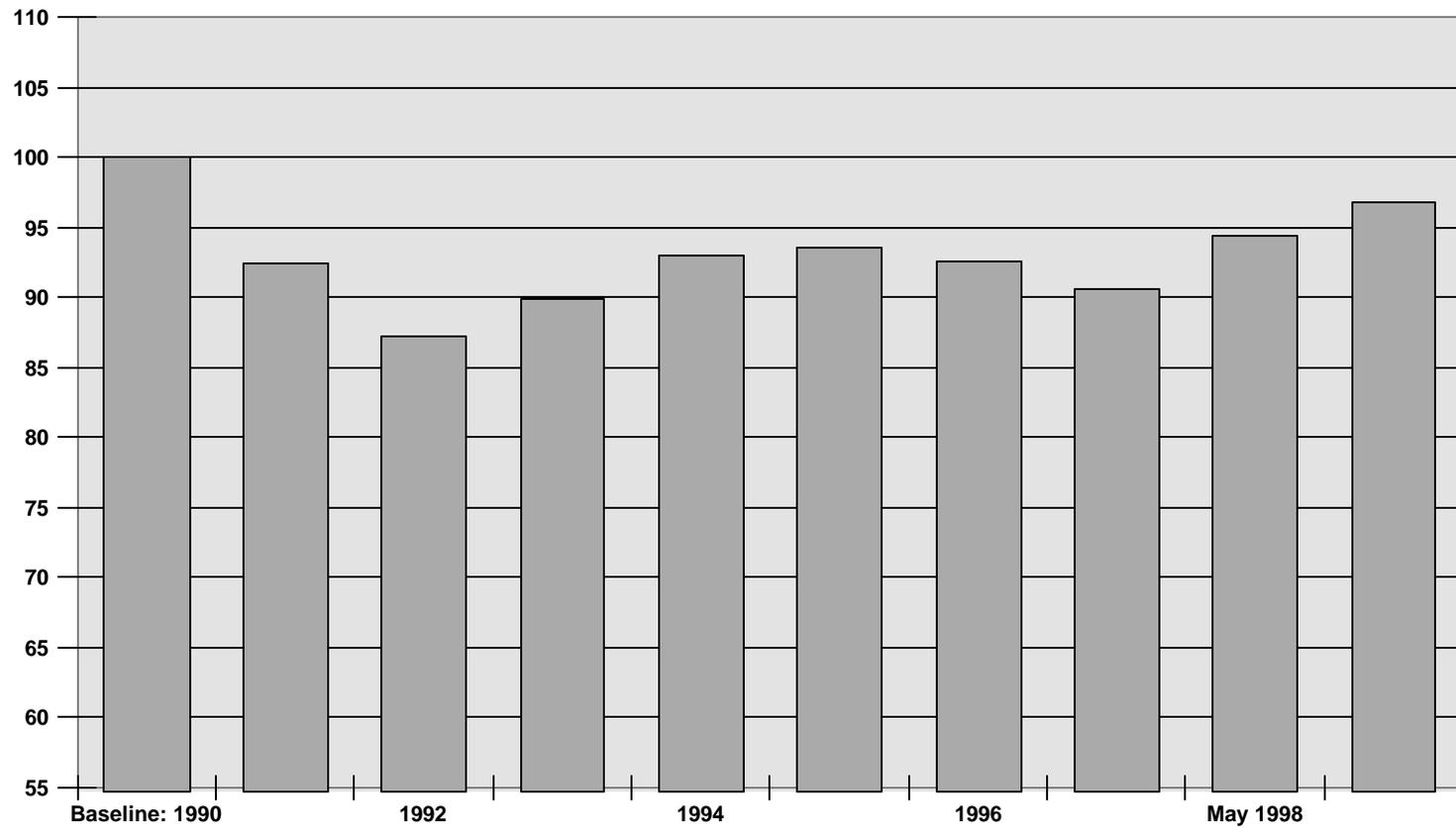
THE QUALITY OF LIFE INDEX - FALL 1998: ***QUALITY OF LIFE IS BETTER - BUT NOT FOR EVERYONE***

The Quality of Life Index for Fall 1998 is **96.9**. This is a positive trend from our earlier reports. We can say that, in general, the quality of life in Ontario has improved over the past year. A closer look at the indicators will show that there are a growing number of people who are not sharing in the overall improvement in quality of life. We discuss these trends in the Context and Progress and Setbacks sections of this report. Nine out of twelve indicators have been updated since our last report in the Spring 1998. See below for a discussion of these indicators.

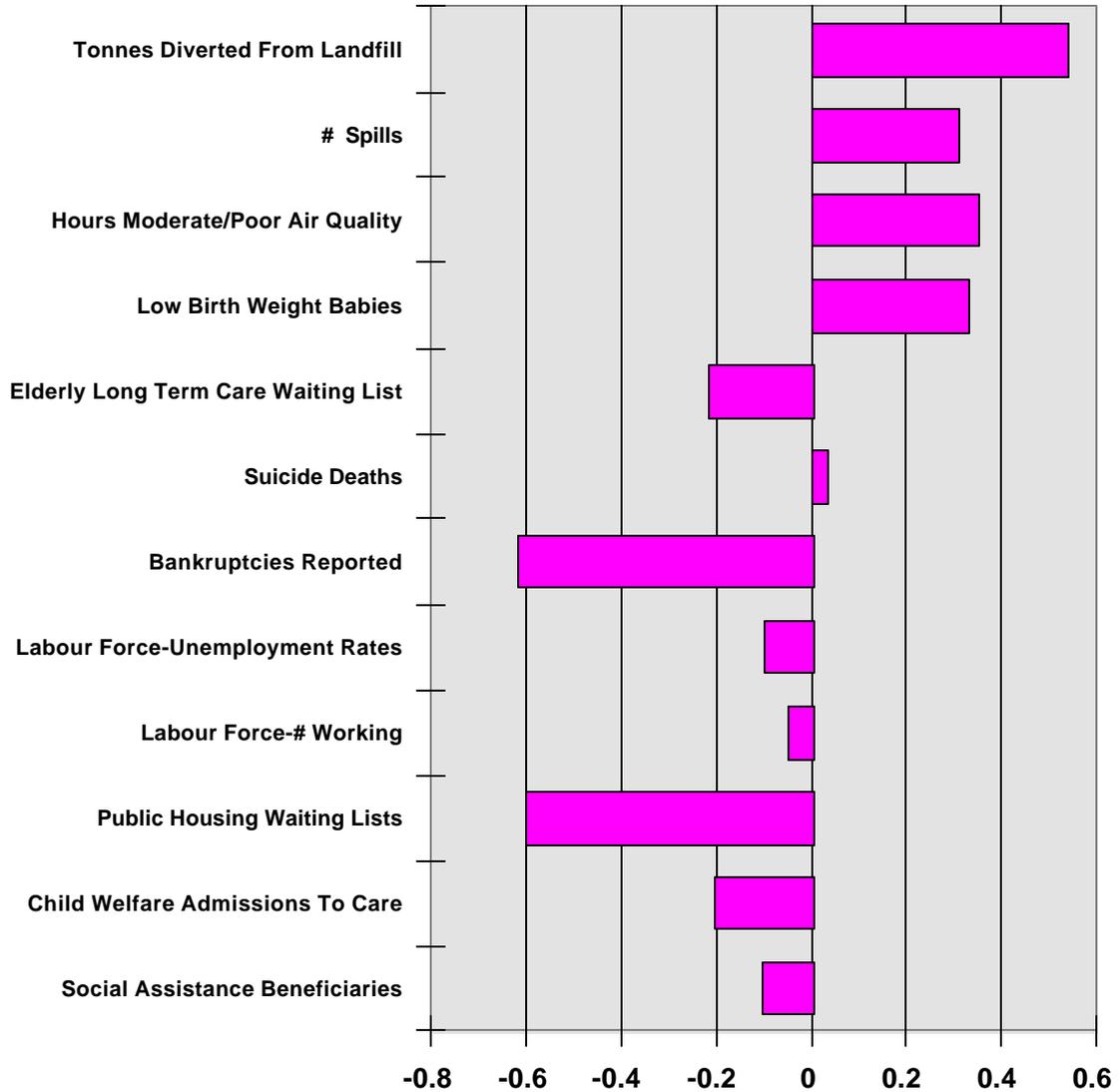
We have also received accurate data for low birth weight babies from 1990 to 1997. This corrects an problem with flawed data provided to us by the Ontario Registrar General for our earlier reports. The impact of this new information on the QLI is positive. There has been a steady improvement in the trend for low birth weight babies since 1990. This probably reflects a substantial investment by governments and community groups in prenatal and early child development programs and a broader recognition that raising healthy children is one of the most important things we can do as a society. This investment seems to have counteracted the negative impact of economic deprivation and poverty on child development. There may be other factors at work which also warrant closer study.

The calculation of the Quality of Life Index for Fall 1998 is in Appendix 3. The Quality of Life Index for 1990 to Fall 1998 is presented in a chart on the next page. Progress and setbacks for the twelve indicators are presented in a chart on the following page.

QUALITY OF LIFE INDEX: 1990-1998



QLI: Percentage Change 1990-98



PROGRESS AND SETBACKS

Progress

Environmental indicators continue to lead the pack, with positive trends continuing for blue box recycling and spills. We don't have recent data on air quality. The Environment Ministry is updating its information system for reporting air quality and has stopped compiling provincial data until the new system is in place. We have more to say about his under Access to Information. The good news should be received in the context of environmental trends we identified which cast a long shadow over future prospects for a cleaner environment.

There is good news on the health front with accurate data about low birth weight babies. There has been steady improvement in this indicator since 1990. This is probably the result of the investments which have been made in prenatal and early child development by governments, voluntary funders, social agencies and community groups. It seems that this investment has also insulated children from the worst effects of the economic recession and growing poverty.

There has been some improvement in the economic trends of labour force participation. The recent economic growth has not yet recovered to the 1990 levels. But there are more people working, although many are in low-wage jobs with no benefits. Considering the growth in the population since 1990, the economy is not performing as well as it did in 1990.

There is apparent progress on the number of people who are receiving social assistance. But this is deceiving, since we know from other sources of information that there is rising poverty, hunger and homelessness. Though there are less people relying on social assistance, the reasons for this have as much to do with restrictions in eligibility as growth in the economy. Tighter regulations are also forcing people off welfare. The introduction of Ontario Works, a work-for-welfare scheme, is diverting those who remain on social assistance into unpaid work, rather than giving them a chance to find a job. This good news story has a dark side which tempers our enthusiasm.

There is another dimension to this indicator. The welfare system is undergoing a dramatic change, starting in 1998. The old welfare programs, General Welfare and Family Benefits, have been replaced by Ontario Works and the new Disability Support Program. Changes in the definition of disabilities are reducing access to this new program and channelling many people with disabilities into Ontario Works, where they'll have to work for their welfare cheques. We are tracking these changes so that we can continue to report on the number of people receiving social assistance under the new regime.

Setbacks

The biggest problem is in the number of bankruptcies being reported, both business and personal. This indicator of economic distress has hit record levels in the 90s, but is starting to recede. Yet it continues to be a major negative influence on the QLI. The dramatic rise in self-employment in the 90s has led to the proliferation of small businesses. With a high failure rate for small business, this indicator will track

the longer term success of self-employment as a labour market strategy.

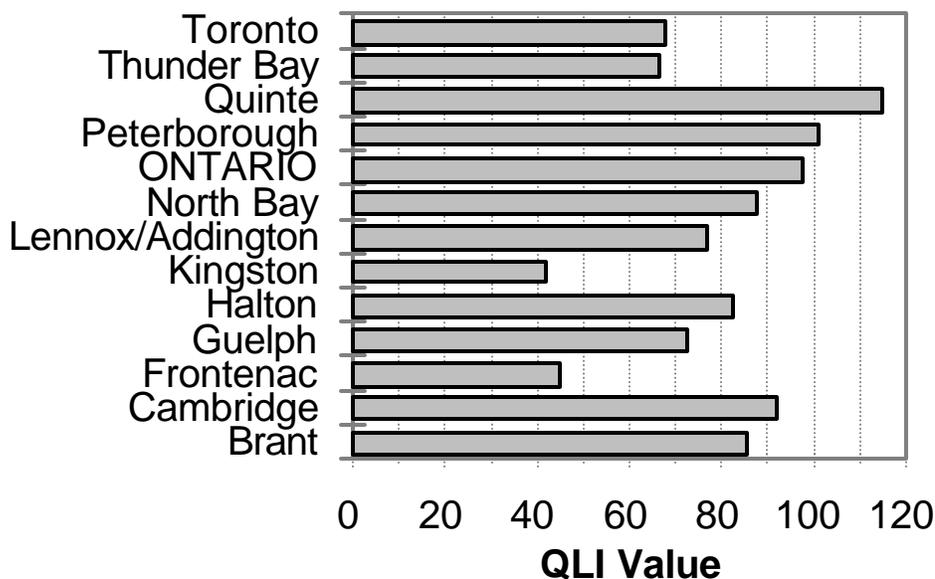
The waiting lists for long term care continue to grow, as the pressures of an aging population are felt by a health care system in transition. Though the provincial government has promised new funding for long term care, it is committed over eight years. Whether it will come on line fast enough to reduce or eliminate the waiting lists remains to be seen. We will be tracking these developments in future reports.

The Quality of Life Index is reporting both the good and the bad news, as it was meant to do. The good news is that the quality of life is improving since last year. The bad news is that there are growing disparities behind these numbers. International research tells us that countries with large disparities between the rich and the poor will not prosper in the long term. We urge you to take comfort in the good news and take action on the bad news!

COMMUNITY QLIS

Our community partners are now using the Quality of Life Index in a growing number of communities across Ontario. They are using it to raise public awareness about issues which affect our quality of life and to mobilize community resources to address them. Local QLIs are being released this month in Toronto, Quinte (Hastings/Prince Edward), Thunder Bay, North Bay, and Cambridge. Local QLIs are also underway in Hamilton, Sudbury, Ottawa, Peel, Sault Ste. Marie, and South Temiskaming. We also welcome new community partners who would like to get involved in this project. The following chart shows the QLI for local communities compared with the provincial QLI.

Local QLIs



As more communities calculate a local QLI, we will be able to make comparisons along various dimensions, e.g. urban/rural, north/south. We can use data from the 1996 census to cross tabulate with QLI scores. We can look at “outliers”, communities with much higher or lower scores than other communities or the provincial QLI, to see what other factors come into play. Each community with a QLI can now make its own comparisons in three ways.

How are we doing over time?

How do we compare with other communities?

How do we compare with the provincial QLI.?

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

We have encounter several problems in obtaining current data for three of our indicators: air quality, long term care wait lists, public housing wait lists. In each case, an ineffective information system is being updated. No more data will be reported from the old systems and no new data will be available for months, or even years, from the new systems. This means that a “knowledge gap” will arise in these areas of public policy. If the government thinks it is important to collect data about air quality, the elderly, and people waiting for housing, it should do so continuously, using the old system until the new one is up and running. To do otherwise seems to be both irresponsible and bad business practice, depending on how you view the role of government.

The earlier problems we had with getting accurate data from the Ontario Registrar General about low birth weight babies have now been resolved. We hope that we will continue to receive up to date and accurate information about this important indicator of child well-being.

Public institutions can do a better job of providing data about important public issues by using information technology such as electronic files and websites. Several of our data sources are now sending data routinely in easy to use spread sheet formats or even posting them on websites. This is a very efficient and effective way of maintaining transparency and accountability of governments. We highly recommend this approach to government departments which are upgrading their information systems in these important areas which affect our quality of life.

LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in the coming months:

Will the economic recovery continue in light of the growing global recession?

Will there be any improvements in living conditions for people living in poverty?

Will the health status of Ontarians be adversely affected by social and economic insecurity?

Will changes in environmental legislation, regulations, and policies adversely affect our living conditions and quality of life?

These questions and many others will be on our minds over the next six months. The next report on the Quality of Life in Ontario will be released in the Spring of 1999. Meanwhile, what can *you* do to improve the quality of life in your community?

Report by:

Malcolm Shookner
Ontario Social Development Council
November, 1998

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Appendix 2- Background Documents

The Quality of Life in Ontario - 1997 (disposiblé en francais)

The Quality of Life in Ontario - Spring 1998

Annotated Bibliography

Literature Review

Methodology Report (disposiblé en francais)

Reference List

Summary of Indicators

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Appendix 3 - Calculation of QLI Fall 1998

INDICATORS	RATE/10,000	QLI VALUE	CURRENT RATE/10,000	% CHANGE	QLI IMPACT	CURRENT QLI VALUE	May '98 QLI VALUE
Social Indicators:							
1: Social Assistance Beneficiaries	780 (1990)	8.3	860	10.3%+	Neg.	7.5	6.5
2: Child Welfare Admissions To Care	8.4 (1992)	8.3	10.1	20.2%	Neg.	6.6	7.1
3: Public Housing Waiting Lists*	40 (1990)	8.3	64	60%+	Neg.	3.3	3.3
Economic Indicators:							
4: Labour Force-# Working	5053 (1990)	8.3	4821	4.6%-	Neg.	7.9	8
5: Labour Force-# Unemployed	339 (1990)	8.3	373	10%+	Neg.	7.5	7.4
6: # of Bankruptcies Reported	19 (1990)	8.3	30.7	61.6%+	Neg.	3.2	2.4
Health Indicators:							
7: # Suicide Deaths *	0.95 (1990)	8.3	0.92	3.2%-	Pos.	8.6	8.6
8: Elderly Long Term Care Waiting List	13 (1996)	8.3	15.8	21.5%	Neg.	6.5	6.4
9: # Low Birth Weight Babies	8.7 (1990)	8.3	5.8	33%-	Pos.	11	11
Environmental Indicators:							
10: # Hours Moderate/Poor Air Quality*	16.2 (1990)	8.3	10.5	35.2%-	Pos.	11.2	11.2
11: # Spills	5.5 (1990)	8.3	3.8	30.9%-	Pos.	10.9	10.9
12: Tonnes Diverted to Blue Boxes	340 (1992)	8.3	522	53.5%+	Pos.	12.7	11.6
QLI COMPOSITE INDEX		100				96.9	94.4