

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 5, 2013



MIDDLE-CLASS PERCEPTIONS: A sold-out crowd gathered at the Restore in Bracebridge to better understand poverty. Groups were asked to draw what it means to be middle class in Muskoka. Notice the money-smoke escaping from the chimney depicting the need for heat, which is expensive. (Photo by Jennifer Bowman)

■ Muskoka looking to bridge the poverty gap

BY JENNIFER BOWMAN

Muskoka agencies are taking a deeper look at what it means to be poor.

Thirty-three agencies from throughout Muskoka gathered at the Restore in Bracebridge on Monday, Dec. 2 to address not only the difficulties of poverty, but also how it affects the way people think.

Linda Hutt, facilitator for the Building Bridges Out of Poverty workshop, said the purpose was to help local organizations and residents understand the hidden rules of the middle class.

"It's to create an awareness of some of the hidden rules that almost exclude other people from engaging with us," Hutt said.

One example is the expectation of having

a university degree for a job that may not require a degree. Other rules affect how we value people and things, the language we speak and the clothing we wear. While the middle class looks at the future ramifications five or 10 years down the road and the wealthy consider traditions, history and the future of their posterity, those in poverty make decisions based on in-the-moment feeling or survival.

"Looking ahead to something seems meaningless when you're wondering what food you'll have tonight," Hutt said.

Erika Haney, social determinants of public health nurse for the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit, also addressed issues in the

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