



REDUCING CHILD POVERTY



Canadian Teachers' Federation
Fédération canadienne des enseignantes et des enseignants

www.ctf-fce.ca



REDUCING CHILD POVERTY

In 1989, the House of Commons passed a unanimous resolution “to seek to achieve the goal of eliminating poverty among Canadian children by the year 2000.” Two decades later in 2009, the House of Commons voted unanimously to “develop an immediate plan to end poverty for all in Canada.” The urgency of tackling poverty has been the focus of several major reports over the past few years, for example the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology’s report, *In From the Margins: A Call to Action on Poverty, Housing and Homelessness* (2009).

Despite some initial success at reducing child poverty from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, the Conference Board of Canada reports that the rate increased between the mid-1990s and the late 2000s to 15.1%, ranking us 15th out of 17 peer countries (earning us a “C” grade). More than one in seven Canadian children is living in poverty – in one of the wealthiest countries in the world.

Certain vulnerable groups continue to experience higher levels of poverty than others – Aboriginal peoples (one in four First Nations children lives in poverty), recent immigrants and racialized communities, female lone-parent families, and persons with disabilities.

The Conference Board also gave Canada a “C” grade on income inequality, ranking us 12th out of 17 peer countries. It found that “income inequality in Canada has increased over the past 20 years” and that “since 1990, the richest group of Canadians has increased its share of total national income, while the poorest and middle-income groups have lost share.” There is growing international recognition that income inequality can hurt the economy. The economic argument that equality and efficiency are trade-offs is disputed in this finding from a 2011 International Monetary Fund study (cited by the Conference Board):

“When growth is looked at over the long term, the trade-off between efficiency and equality may not exist. In fact equality appears to be an important ingredient in promoting and sustaining growth. The difference between countries that can sustain rapid growth for many

years or even decades and the many others that see growth spurts fade quickly may be the level of inequality. Countries may find that improving equality may also improve efficiency, understood as more sustainable long-run growth.”

As important as they are, statistics cannot begin to convey the stark reality of child poverty. Teachers see first-hand the consequences of poverty in their classrooms and schools – students too hungry or tired to concentrate; students who feel excluded because they can’t participate in school programs and activities; students in low-income families with two working parents struggling to pay the rent or buy food, often forced to turn to food banks.

Poverty’s negative impact on student learning and development is well established. According to the Canadian Education Statistics Council,

[f]amily income can influence various developmental outcomes, academic results, and life transitions. For example, living in low-income circumstances may impede the school readiness of preschool children, reduce the likelihood of success in educational achievement throughout the educational trajectory, reduce the ability to afford postsecondary education, and increase the likelihood of living in low-income circumstances as an adult.

The economic and social costs of not addressing poverty run into the billions of dollars annually – according to Campaign 2000, “child poverty impairs our long term national interests because it leads to higher healthcare costs, spending on social support

services, lost productivity and limited opportunities. Child poverty also compromises too many people's dignity, mental health and well-being."

Addressing poverty is fundamentally a human rights issue. The UN notes that a human rights-based approach to tackling poverty recognizes that in addition to a lack of economic and material resources, poverty also contributes to social exclusion and is a violation of human dignity. It is a denial of basic rights to such things as adequate food, housing, education and healthcare.

The positive impact of government transfer payments in reducing the poverty rate is significant. Campaign 2000 calculated that "in 2010, the child and family poverty rate was 12% lower with transfer payments than it would have been with market income alone."

Some progress is being made at the provincial level in reducing poverty. Seven of ten provinces have put in place poverty reduction plans or strategies – for example legislated commitments to reduce poverty in Newfoundland/Labrador, Quebec and Ontario have resulted in the lowering of poverty rates in these jurisdictions.

We firmly believe the time has now come for strong federal leadership on this issue, as do a wide range of other organizations. The *Dignity for All* campaign for a poverty-free Canada of which CTF is a member is calling for vigorous and sustained action by the federal government to combat the structural causes of poverty in Canada.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Strategies and policy recommendations that could have a positive impact on inequitable educational opportunities linked to family socio-economic status and ensure that all children are better provided for, should include but not be limited to the following:

- Commit to a comprehensive federal poverty reduction strategy for Canada that includes realistic targets and timelines developed in broad consultation with provincial and territorial governments, Aboriginal governments and organizations, non-governmental organizations and people living in poverty.
- Restore and expand eligibility for Employment Insurance to better support individuals separated from their employment. This would involve easing eligibility requirements, extending benefit durations, and increasing benefit rates.
- Increase the Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCTB) from the current maximum of \$3,582 per child to \$5,300 per child.
- Develop a national strategy on housing and the elimination of homelessness, and that such a strategy reference the right to adequate housing, and have targets, timelines and accountability measures.
- Replace the current Universal Child Care Benefit with a universal child care and education system providing dedicated funding for high quality care and early intervention and school readiness initiatives for all children.
- Address rising income inequality and the needs of low-income families by restoring fairness to the Canadian tax system.



REDUCING CHILD POVERTY

References and other resources

Caledon Institute of Social Policy (Feb. 2013). "Guiding principles for social policy budgets." Ottawa. <http://www.caledoninst.org/Publications/PDF/1004ENG.pdf>

Campaign 2000 (2012). *Needed: A Federal Action Plan to Eradicate Child and Family Poverty in Canada – 2012 Report Card on Child and Family Poverty*. Toronto. <http://www.campaign2000.ca/reportCards/national/C2000ReportCardNov2012.pdf>

Canadian Education Statistics Council (Dec. 2009). *School-age Population Living in Low-income Circumstances* [Fact Sheet]. Ottawa. <http://www.cmec.ca/Publications/Lists/Publications/Attachments/218/school-age-low-income-12-16-2009.pdf>

Canadian Teachers' Federation 2012-2013 Handbook – Policy on "Children and Poverty".

Citizens for Public Justice (2012). *Poverty Trends Scorecard – Canada 2012*. Ottawa. <http://www.cpj.ca/files/docs/poverty-trends-scorecard.pdf>

Conference Board of Canada (2013). *How Canada Performs: A Report Card on Canada*. Ottawa. <http://www.conferenceboard.ca/hcp/details/society.aspx>

Dignity for All Campaign For a Poverty-free Canada.
<http://www.dignityforall.ca/>
<http://www.dignityforall.ca/en/dignity-all-policy-recommendations>

Townson, Monica (Sept. 2009). *Women's Poverty and the Recession*. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. Ottawa. http://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/National_Office_Pubs/2009/Womens_Poverty_in_the_Recession.pdf