

A Poverty Reduction Plan for Canada

Notes from a town hall meeting on the role of the federal government in poverty reduction

CAMPAIGN 2000 & THE 25 IN 5 NETWORK FOR POVERTY REDUCTION

JUNE 1, 2009 | TORONTO | METRO HALL

On June 1st Campaign 2000 and the 25 in 5 Network for Poverty Reduction held a Town Hall Meeting to get community input on what the federal role should be in reducing poverty in Canada.

The event coincided with the Toronto hearings of the Federal Standing Committee on Human Resources, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities (HUMA). This is the only hearing in Ontario of this federal committee studying poverty, but many were not able to formally present to the Committee.

This Town Hall provided an opportunity for community groups and people with lived experience of poverty to present to a community panel which included: Bishop Colin Johnson, Anglican Diocese of Toronto & ISARC; Tam Goossen, Good Jobs For All Coalition; Mike Creek, Voices from the Street; Councillor Janet Davis, City of Toronto; Grace-Edward Galabuzi, Colour of Poverty Campaign; Peggy Nash, CAW; and Paulette Senior, YWCA Canada. Some MPs from the HUMA committee were present at the Town Hall.

This report summarizes what was said at the June 1st Town Hall meeting of 150 people convened by Family Service Toronto, the lead partner in Campaign 2000, and the 25in5 Poverty Reduction Network.

What is the Federal Government's Role in Poverty Reduction?

Campaign 2000, a network of more than 120 organizations across Canada, is committed to eradicating child and family poverty in Canada as all members of Parliament all voted to do in 1989. Nearly twenty years later, 1 in 9 children and their families still live in poverty. This does not include the shameful situation in First Nations' communities where 1 in every 4 children is growing up in poverty. Campaign 2000 continues to press for effective government action upon which we can all work together to build a poverty-free Canada.

The persistence of poverty – especially among children and their families - and the growing income inequality in Canada demands strong leadership from all parties in the House of Commons. Effective actions now will help to prevent poverty and will reduce the impact of the recession on low income people.

Campaign 2000 urges all federal parties to work together, in collaboration with the provinces and territories to adopt a Poverty Reduction Strategy for Canada (PRSC) that includes

- targets and timelines;
- dedicated fiscal and human resources;
- accountability including public reporting;
- consultation with Canadians, in particular, with those who have lived experience of poverty; and
- in coordination with First Nations and other Aboriginal communities, Campaign 2000 urges the development of appropriate poverty reduction targets, timelines and indicators for Aboriginal families, irrespective of where they live.

Important levers at the federal level include: Employment Insurance, Child Benefits, Canada Pension Plan and Old Age Security/Guaranteed Income Supplement. In the areas of affordable housing and early childhood education and care, federal/provincial/territorial agreements are essential. The federal government also funds health care, post-secondary education and training. Major responsibility for immigration and settlement issues also is in the federal domain. The federal government also has a unique responsibility for Aboriginal issues.

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END CHILD & FAMILY POVERTY IN CANADA



FAMILY SERVICE TORONTO
For People. For Change.

MAIN THEMES

1. Good Jobs and Employment Supports

I am Fa Lim, and I was a set-up tech at Progressive Moulded Products Limited for 13 years. Progressive Moulded Products Limited was a NON-UNIONIZED auto parts manufacturer in the city of Vaughan. Last CANADA DAY weekend, 2400 workers were dumped on the street, when the company suddenly filed for bankruptcy, shut down and walk away with over \$30 million in severance and termination pay.

We are fighting to change the bankruptcy law, so that workers are not at the bottom of the list, workers should be the first to be paid, to have worker's right, to have justice. Now, most of the workers are running out of their employment insurance (EI). Some are borrowing from the Credit Card to pay for the Mortgage and some are borrowing from Money Mart with 20% interest, just to survive. How long can they last? The government needs to recognize that there is a crisis here, and it is a man made crisis. In this desperate time, we need government to extend the EI benefit another 50 weeks, so we can survive. We need to raise the benefit level to at least 60%, 360 hours to qualify. So workers can at least have the safety net. EI should be there for us when we need it most. The EI system is broken and it needs to be fixed now.

We are fighting to fix EI. It does not mean that we want to live on EI. We need this improvement to help us go through a tough time like this. Tonight my message is to Fix E.I Now. Change the bankruptcy law now, for the sake of Canadians, Canadian Children, and for Canada's future.

2. Income Supports

RENEE Adams, parent activist in Toronto

Rene Adams is a single parent with multiple hidden disabilities. Her family relies on the Ontario Disability Support Program. She is a Wellesley Institute 10 in 10 Urban Health Award recipient, and Honorary member of the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario and an Ontario Voluntary Service Award recipient.

INCOME ISSUES

Poverty reduction is not something that we can achieve overnight, just as the changes at various levels of government policy have had an un-intended consequence of leading more people into poverty were made over time. In order to solve a problem, we must first recognize that we have a problem, and until we recognize that each citizen has the potential to be a contributing member of society, and until we support the abilities of the individual, including those with disabilities we will remain in this cycle of poverty.

OTHER INCOME SUPPORTS

Other programs such as Employment Insurance, & Old Age pensions must be equally accessible to everyone and it is essential that they reflect the true costs of living.

SUPPORTING CHILDREN

I support the enhancement of the National Child Tax Benefit to \$5200 per child per year to all low-come families whether they are working or not. It is essential that these funds be protect from any claw-backs in order to truly help those who are struggling. Having these funds would help me to make better choices in providing for my children's basic nutritional needs, and it would help them to participate in organized sports which would be helpful to the their character development, self-esteem and physical health.

SUPPORTING THE DISABLED

Single people with disabilities must be allowed to live with an income that allows them to live in dignity, and able to afford the necessities of life. They must be supported with proper training that leads to decent jobs, to enhance their participation in the workforce.

CHILD CARE

Many women are trapped in the home due to lack of affordable childcare spaces. They would be better served by having access to childcare spaces that allow them the freedom to work and contribute to the tax base.

IN CLOSING

One cannot build a condo building without ensuring that the foundation is solid and that the proper tools and labour force are in place to support the project. The same can be said for a sustainable Canadian poverty reduction strategy. To remain short-sighted in our decisions is to rob every citizen of Canada of meeting their full potential. This is an unsustainable way of managing our affairs and our country's competitive edge. As leaders and our representatives at the Federal level, ask yourself how you can and what you are willing to contribute to achieving poverty reduction in Canada. Like the dog that can never catch its tail, we will never achieve our targets without taking the steps to truly help people by giving them a hand up.

Selected Quotes

My name is Cheryl Smith. I have worked hard all my life and at 53 find myself unable to house and feed myself. I can do one or the other, but I cannot do both. I have paid taxes, voted and contributed to my community for as long as I can remember. I continue to do so.

In the autumn of my life, I find myself a cancer patient with mental health factors, and in receipt of a disability pension. Of the \$1102.00 I receive each month \$800.00 goes to rent. I have to do everything else on the remaining funds. There is a 12 year waiting list for subsidy, and that is for a slum.

Doctors, hospitals and nurses have all been the finest. But I cannot give my body the nutrition it requires to fight this life threatening illness. Do you know what that feels like? Do you know what it's like to eat kraft dinner and tuna two weeks of every month when you have a cancer diagnosis? Do you realize the added stress upon the body and soul of such a lifestyle? What are my chances of recovery under such a system?

There are hundreds of thousands of stories like mine across this country. Some far worse. There are people dying in our streets. There are new immigrants and Natives alike living this hell everyday. In the current economic climate we are sinking fast and being joined now by the ranks of the working class.

Canada needs to address the issue of poverty within its own borders. Mr. Harper accepted a human rights award yesterday, and we are urged to feel pride in our record. How can we with the pools of poverty and suffering that confront us everyday.

I plead with you, please attend to the suffering in our great country. It is time for a National strategy to combat this rampant and growing disease. In a country as rich as Canada, there is no excuse.

Other comments:

Murphy Browne, Town Hall Meeting participant

Nov 24, 1989, the House of Commons unanimously resolved to eliminate poverty amongst Canadian children by the year 2000. Maybe they didn't realize that those children don't live by themselves.

No long term plan was developed to reach this goal or measure progress.

Feds need to strengthen EI, invest more on tax credits, increase NCB and CCTB, end clawbacks, review adequacy of seniors payments, invest in ECEC, social housing, disability related supports.

Feds, provinces and territories must work cooperatively and in a coordinated manner, and this is the only way there will be a significant reduction of poverty in Canada.

For government to address this epidemic there must be recognition of the creeping economic apartheid that disproportionately affects people from racialized communities, eg, anti-black racism in the school system affects our youth, and they need to be able to graduate so they can get a job and work like real people.

Opal from the STOP Community Foodbank

We are very complacent about having a two-tiered welfare system that only works for the upper class.

Unless we address this we will continue to have crime, homelessness, domestic violence, environmental problems that the poor bear the burden of, and food insecurity.

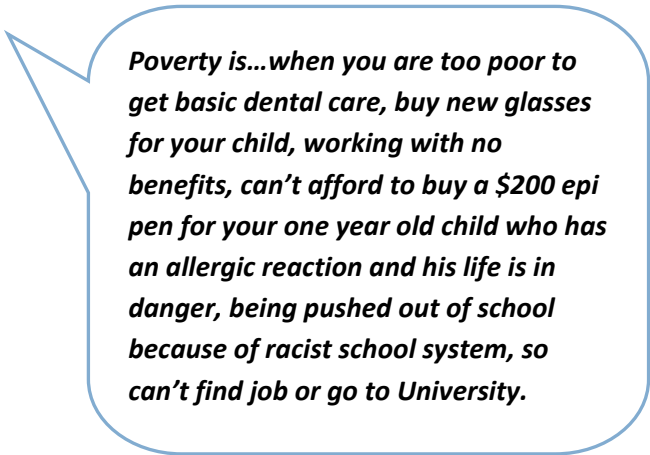
We are waiting until the storm hits our door until we take action.

Can't continue to ignore, dismiss and blame.

The poor need a bailout system also.

Sabrina Gopal, Desiree Mackenzie, reps from the Jane/Finch Action Against Poverty –

- J/F Community – most ethnically diverse – 120 populations, 100 languages
- Highest rates of visible minorities, low-income households, higher proportions of unemployment, rental housing, make under \$30,000
- Rich with people, mobilization, organization
- Highest rates of poverty in former North York – used to be majority middle-class
- Jane Finch pays 7% more than Thornhill for healthy food
- Stigmatized, marginalized
- Demands – clear: affordable housing for all, livable wages, good jobs, value foreign works, universal day care, free PSE
- Immigration – keep husband for a length of time – for two incomes



Poverty is...when you are too poor to get basic dental care, buy new glasses for your child, working with no benefits, can't afford to buy a \$200 epi pen for your one year old child who has an allergic reaction and his life is in danger, being pushed out of school because of racist school system, so can't find job or go to University.

- Single parent = poverty
- Immigration system – stop keeping our partners away from us
- Relationship suffer – back into poverty

3. Affordable Housing

Presentation from ACORN

The Problem

- Canada is the only major industrial nation still without a national affordable housing strategy
- United National Housing Envoy went so far as to declare Canada in a housing ‘crisis’
- The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation points out that as many as 1.5 million Canadians are currently experiencing core housing need, meaning that they are under-housed or face an unsustainable financial burden to maintain their current housing situation.

The Harper Record

- Since become Prime Minister, Harper has been steadfast in his refusal to support a national housing strategy.
- He has opposed the creation of a federal housing minister with wide ranging responsibilities
- Has continued the housing policy of the last government that locked in a decreasing annual budget for housing.
- With the economy declining, the federal government faced pressure from ACORN and others to spend stimulus money on affordable housing; he refused to support the construction of new affordable housing.
- His Stimulus Package gave tax break to people who build decks at their cottages, and pave their driveways but not \$1 dollar for new affordable housing.

The Solution

- ACORN is calling on the federal government to :
- Maintain the current investment in affordable housing (reverse the policy decision of 1996 that locks in a rapidly decreasing annual housing funding cut).
- Meet Canada's international housing obligations by adopting a comprehensive and fully funded national housing program.
- Establish a minister responsible for housing, with wide-ranging mandates and responsibilities.
- Increase the availability and accessibility of money in the stimulus package and Build Canada fund for use by the Provinces for repair of existing social housing and the construction of new affordable housing

Selected Quotes

Baquie Ghazi, ACORN

All of us know that Canada is in big housing crisis although it is a strong industrial nation.

And - it does not have any concrete national affordable housing strategy. According to Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation ; about 1.5 million Canadians are experiencing core housing need. Also, thousands and thousands of people are either homeless or living in Shelters and in very unhygienic conditions.

Ladies and Gentlemen: - I am telling you -

Proper accommodation is an essential part of human rights –

without this - major part of Canada's population is - under oppression and in depression.

So let's be together in strong coalition movement and work together with a goal to **send poverty in the museum - forever !**

Fifie Abdesna: Volunteer tenant rep from TCHC

We need to embrace Canada's diversity; there are human rights violations, abuse happening in social housing, and the living conditions need to be improved for people living in social housing.

Hilda Swirsky, RN, BScN, Med -- a nurse at Mount Sinai, who works with women at high-risk

- Experienced registered nurse – first-hand experience – see effects of poverty on women and their babies
- E.g. – homeless woman – no support from father, living on the street
- No pre-natal care, admitted to hospital with several health issues
- Hospital social worker (SW) contacted CAS – take temporary custody, so new baby not begin life on the street
- SW – called all over TO for affordable housing – yet learned there was housing shortage, and waiting list is very long
- When baby was born – mother became depressed due to apprehension of losing her baby
- With help from SW, she found temporary shelter and services to help her move off street to gain permanent housing and perhaps to get custody of her son in the future
- **We need affordable housing, support for mental health issue, child tax benefit and other programs.**

4. Employment Equity

Atylya Sharman, the Colour of Poverty Campaign (COPC)/The South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario (SALCO)

- Canada is a nation of immigrants
- *Poverty is NOT color-blind*– huge connection between poverty and people of colour
- *Poverty reduction must begin acknowledging that Poverty and Race are linked.*
- *The Federal Government should*
 - Restore funding to provinces and territories for child care programs and to increase funding to best ensure equitably accessible quality child care across Canada.*
 - Implement Pay Equity Task Force recommendations.*
 - Fix EI system*
 - Invest more in International Education and Credential recognition.*
 - Collect and Track disaggregated data across ministries to identify racial groups due to systemic disadvantages.*
- *There is a need for a greater Federal-Provincial-Territorial Cooperation to Reduce Poverty.*
- **We need a Poverty Reduction Strategy with targets and timelines**

5. Early Childhood Education and Care

CHILDCARE IS A RIGHT by Sultana Jahangir, South Asian Women's Rights Organization

My name is Sultana Jahangir, I am an immigrant working woman.

I work with other immigrant women as a community organizer for MicroSkills and as the executive director of the South Asian Women's Rights Organization (Sawro).

Today, I am speaking to you as the leader of a delegation of poor immigrant women from the Teesdale/Crescent Town neighborhood of West Scarborough/East York. I am here to call the parliament to account for lack of progress on childcare and childcare subsidies—a matter of fundamental human rights.

Our community is one of the poorest in City. The lack of daycare is the key cause of this poverty.

Thousands of women in our neighborhood are entitled to daycare subsidies but there is no funding for these entitlements and there are long waiting lists. The situation is the same right across the city and is especially bad in all recent immigrant neighborhoods.

NO SUBSIDIES=NO CHILDCARE=POVERTY

Childcare is a matter of rights.

We are here to demand that the federal government and governments at all levels **do their duty to affirm the rights and dignity** of the women of our community and of all women living in Canada.

Women have the right to participate fully in society—in education, in workplaces, in social and political life. Without affordable, accessible and culturally sensitive childcare, the rights of mothers of young children are denied. This is unacceptable.

Together with its NATO partners, Canada is spending billions of dollars on a war of terror against peoples of the former colonial countries—in Afghanistan and elsewhere—under the banner of democracy and women's rights.

But what about democracy and women's rights in Canada?

Canada wants to be judged by the success of wealthy women—how many CEO's are women? how many MP's are women?

Canada should be judged by whether it **affirms the rights of the most vulnerable** women—the immigrants, other poor working people, first nations women, young women (especially single mothers), the handicapped.

The rights of vulnerable women rights are denied. Canada does not affirm the rights of all. Canada's democracy is only for the rich and powerful. Women in these vulnerable groups are excluded from full participation in society. We are marginalized in civic life and economically impoverished. We are given the choice "Work at Tim Horton's or stay home This is unacceptable.

WE IMMIGRANT WOMEN WILL NOT ACCEPT BEING PUSHED TO THE MARGINS OF SOCIETY! WE WILL NOT ACCEPT BEING LEFT BEHIND!

WE DEMAND THAT THE GOVERNMENT STOP MARGINALIZING IMMIGRANT WOMEN AND DO ITS DUTY TO AFFIRM OUR RIGHTS!

WE DEMAND FULL PARTICIPATION IN SOCIETY ACCORDING TO OUR ABILITIES!

WE DEMAND FULL FUNDING OF DAYCARE SUBSIDY ENTITLEMENTS!

WE DEMAND A NATIONAL CHILDCARE PROGRAM! NOW!

POLITICS OF CHILDCARE

Childcare has become a political football game that **all** the parties in the House of Commons play.

- For 13 years under Chretien and Martin the Liberals talked about a national childcare policy at election time, followed by excuses about “deficit fighting” and did nothing.
- In 2005 the NDP helped Harper defeat a national childcare policy for its own partisan political ends
- Harper has re-introduced the Baby Bonus (which benefits affluent Canadians the most) and called it a national childcare policy

SHAME!

SHAME ON THE PARLIAMENT OF CANADA!

SHAME ON CANADIAN DEMOCRACY!

We immigrant women and families are kept in poverty while these political games are played year after year, election after election.

Once again with an election coming, the politicians are coming into the immigrant communities, peddling their influence, peddling promises about daycare and other issues, attempting to divide our communities along political party lines.

This politicking with our lives is not acceptable.

In Teesdale/Crescent Town we are rejecting party politics and taking matters into our own hands.

Working women, especially trade union women, have made important gains by taking matters into their own hands. But immigrants and many other vulnerable women have been left behind. For us, this is a matter of survival that must be carried to the end.

WE ARE ORGANIZING OUR OWN COMMUNITY AROUND THE FIGHT FOR OUR RIGHTS

WE WILL UNITE WITH OTHER IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES AND OTHER VULNERABLE WOMEN

WE WILL JOIN ALL WOMEN DEMANDING THEIR RIGHTS AND HELP LEAD THIS FIGHT THROUGH TO THE END.

OUR INVESTIGATION AND DISCUSSION

For six months the South Asian Women's Rights Organization has been supporting an investigation and discussion of the issue of childcare in our neighborhood, including door-to-door interviews with 400 women. This investigation and discussion found the following:

- our neighborhood is a portal for new immigrants i.e. 25% of recent immigrants in Toronto from Bangladesh live in our neighborhood
- with a 50% poverty rate, Bengali immigrant women are one of the poorest demographic groups in the City
- almost all the families are entitled to either full or partial subsidies according to City guidelines based on family income
- almost all women consider lack of childcare to be a key barrier to successful settlement in Canada
- only about a quarter of families receive subsidies
- half the women are unemployed involuntarily
- almost all employed women are overqualified for their jobs
- 75% of the women are university or college graduates, with half of this group having post graduate degrees
- many women are isolated and homebound because they lack knowledge about their entitlements
- many women feel that the government is using immigration to solve a Canadian demographic crisis (aging workforce) without putting infrastructure in place for childcare for newcomers;
- many women feel that Harper's Baby Bonus and other policies show that it is acceptable to the government for immigrant women to be "baby machines" to solve Canada's 'demographic problem'
- many women feel that Canada's move to "economic class" rather than "family class" immigration policy is the root cause of the isolation of women immigrants

Other comments

Rosa Gurrero, a parent who volunteers for Thorncliffe, with parent group of mothers

There are more than 3,000 kids in Thorncliffe Neighbourhood, but there is only one daycare that holds no more than 35 kids;

Lack of affordable and accessible child care contributes to poverty, because lots of women want to go back to work, but face a waitlist of over one year for daycare, and the cost is extremely high (e.g., over 70% of Rosa's income), plus transportation is an extra expense when some parents have to go to far-away child care centres where there's space.

Women are very frustrated because they have to stay home – vicious cycle trying to get out of poverty but there is not enough help

Immigrant women can't depend on relatives or families to get help for child care

Would really like the gov to increase number of daycare centres and spaces and lower fees (like the Quebec model of \$7 a day) – Ontario is a rich province, why can't we do it? Manitoba is \$18 a day, Ontario is \$45 a day!

Shamima, a parent participant at Town Hall Meeting

She is part of a group of women, who live in Teesdale Crescent in Toronto; most are affected by the lack of adequate child care; neighbourhood has a high proportion of immigrants; most are poor; 75 % women are college/university graduates, can't access immigrant services due to lack of child care. Immigration policy (focus on economic vs family class) causes isolation.

6. Aboriginal Issues

ONTARIO FEDERATION OF INDIAN FRIENDSHIP CENTRES (OFIFC)

OFIFC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REMARKS TO THE TOWN HALL MEETING ON THE FEDERAL ROLE IN POVERTY REDUCTION

Introduction

The Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres (OFIFC) represents the collective interests of twenty-nine (29) member Friendship Centres located in towns and cities throughout Ontario.

Our primary mandate is to advocate on behalf of our Friendship Centres, administer programmes delivered in Friendship Centres, and assist Friendship Centres with service and programme delivery and community development. The culturally relevant programmes are in the area of health, justice, children and youth, healing and wellness, violence against Aboriginal women, programming for men who abuse Aboriginal women and many other issues. The vision of the Friendship Centre movement is to "improve the quality of life for all urban Aboriginal people". Our clientele is comprised of Métis, First Nations and to a lesser degree Inuit people, and non-Aboriginal people. Our organization is status blind.

Urban Aboriginal People and Poverty – the Role of the Federal Government

The federal government has jurisdictional authority for all Aboriginal people. This authority has been traditionally exercised via the *Indian Act* focusing on status Indians living on reserves; and for the Inuit living in the far north. The connection between the federal government and other Aboriginal groups, such as the Métis, Aboriginal Women and urban Aboriginal people has been less consistent and evident.

The OFIFC feels strongly that the federal government needs to act strategically to end poverty amongst all Aboriginal people. The causes are so distinct from all other groups experiencing poverty in Canada that we feel there is a need to develop a distinct Aboriginal Poverty Reduction that would alleviate some of the inter-jurisdictional disputes that occur between the federal government and the Provinces and Territories. The root causes of our poverty can be traced back to historical colonial governance and legislation that has seen Aboriginal people experience a loss of land their land, traditional lifestyles, values and languages. The introduction of such measures as the Indian Residential Schools and the 60's scoop has fractured Aboriginal families and communities. The loss of self-determination means that Aboriginal people continue to be defined by laws of the government of Canada and not by Aboriginal governing structures.

The OFIFC has a large clientele comprised of Aboriginal women that are single sole support family heads, who have had to flee their communities for their safety. The federal government has been looking to amend laws so that Aboriginal women will not be forced to leave their homes when they experience the dissolution of marriages and relationship. Unfortunately, the consultative process largely ignored conducting consultations with the very urban Aboriginal service organizations that service many of these women through the provision of shelters, counseling, transitional homes, skills training, day care,

children and youth programming, etc. Too many Aboriginal women have been excluded in the consultation process and this needs to be remedied if real change is to happen.

The failures to provide quality housing, education, basic literacy and health services contributes to the rising number of Aboriginal people moving to urban centres to pursue a better quality of life. One of the most critical areas of neglect is the area of Aboriginal Children's Mental Health.

The federal government has funded the Urban Aboriginal Strategy; this is a positive strategy that could be a useful tool in the development and implementation of an Aboriginal poverty reduction strategy. Too often our needs fall between the cracks with the federal, provincial and municipal levels of government. An expansion of the Urban Aboriginal Strategy would be a good place to start.

Legislative Background

- No other race or class of people in Canada is legislated to the degree that Aboriginal people are, primarily through the *Indian Act*, 1985.
- The *Canada Constitution Act* specifically recognizes the rights of Aboriginal people (First Nation/Status Indians, Métis and Inuit people) but does not provide any legal definition of the collective or the individual rights to be accorded Aboriginal people.
- Additionally the *Canada Constitution Act* also stipulates that the federal government has jurisdiction for "Indians and lands set aside for Indians", however lack of clarity of jurisdiction over Indian people regardless of their place of residence contributes to inter-jurisdictional disputes between the federal and provincial governments resulting in gaps in the level and quality of services provided to all Aboriginal people.
- The *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* has recently been amended to remove a previous exclusion that was provided for decisions flowing from government and Indian Bands/First Nations; unfortunately there is still a period of time until this amendment takes effect. This amendment would have provided First Nations women and others redress with the government and First Nations on equality issues, unfortunately judicial process must be followed on issues of equality.

Ontario Aboriginal Population Stats

- In Ontario, the reality is that 80% of Aboriginal people live off-reserve in rural and urban areas.
- The Aboriginal population is very young with more than a third or 35.7% of the Aboriginal population consisting of children and teenagers aged 19 and under, compared with a quarter (25.1%) for the non-Aboriginal population.
- 26.5% of the Aboriginal population is 15 years or younger
- Aboriginal people in Ontario are the fastest growing population in the province, **increasing 28.3%**, nearly five times faster than the 6.2% rate of growth for the non-Aboriginal population.

Poverty and Aboriginal People

We know that 40% of off-reserve Aboriginal children live in poverty.

- It is well known that children from low-income families are more likely to suffer developmental delays and delinquent behaviours - for Aboriginal children the rates of high school graduation and attendance at post-secondary schools are well below the rest of Canada.
- Almost ten years ago the OFIFC released its report *Urban Aboriginal Child Poverty: A Status Report on Aboriginal Children and their Families in Ontario* (2000). It revealed the increasing difficulties Aboriginal families experienced in securing enough money for food, clothing, housing, transportation, basic health care, recreation and the psychological effects of poverty experienced by Aboriginal children and their families.
- Child poverty goes hand-in-hand with food insecurity. Our report, *Child Hunger and Food Insecurity Among Aboriginal Families* (2003) found that 35% of children had gone hungry because their family ran out of money to buy food; 11% of

children had missed school in the last month because there was no food for them; and 7% of the families reported they had been involved with the Children's Aid Society because of food shortages.

- We know the situation has not changed much since the release of these reports. Friendship Centres continue to provide immediate crisis intervention services for Aboriginal families that live in poverty.
- Aboriginal children represent 40%, or 30,400, of the 76,000 children and youth in Canada placed in out-of-home care. The vast majority of these children continue to be placed in non-Aboriginal homes where the preservation of cultural heritage, identity and continuity of care are questionable.
- Poverty, poor housing and substance misuse are the most significant factors leading to the over-representation of Aboriginal children in child welfare care. Aboriginal children do not experience higher rates of harm than non-Aboriginal children referred to child welfare.
- Many studies have concluded that children and youth who experience persistently low socio-economic conditions often fail to thrive in society. Too frequently these youth become prime candidates for continued poverty, poor health, low educational attainment, and low employment, high incidents of abuse (substance, physical and sexual), depression, suicide, involvement in the sex trade, and homelessness.
- The federal Aboriginal Justice Strategy has recognized that Aboriginal youth remain at high-risk because of their continued exposure to these low socio-economic conditions which is compounded by the continuing experience of loss of culture through removal into government care.

7. Supports for Newcomers

Loveleen Kang, Poverty Reduction Coordinator at Council of Agencies Serving South Asians

Fed Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) must recognize that in immigrant communities there is linguistic and socioeconomic diversity – a blanket strategy won't solve all problems.

--Intersectionality – lone mothers, lack of recognition of credentials for trained professionals and trades people, non-Canadian work experience must be appropriately recognized.

--Temporary foreign workers are now disposable pieces of economic units – status should lead to permanent residency and citizenship.

--Immigrant seniors must wait ten years before they can access any kind of income supports by the federal government, to which they are legally entitled – this is inequitable, is against their human rights, we ask that the 10-year wait time be cut down to 3 years.

Other comments:

A LINC Instructor from St. Stephen's House

- Canada, a nation of immigrants – we depend on our Federal government to help us with the many problems newcomers face upon arrival
- Not having credentials recognized means not being able to make it into our systems, or work in professions they are best at and trained for
- Underemployed, unemployed
- Language skills, language support continued, enhanced
- Training for those need it, need credentials recognized
- Do more in harsh economic times; help the people who have been here awhile
- People who find themselves unemployed – need insurance they've paid into
- Reform EI
- See what we can do to make this a more inclusive nation

8. Supports for People with Disabilities

Peter Park, People First

- When you live in poverty – you don't have good health
- Death much sooner, harder to find doctor, specialist that accept OSAP
- People with disabilities need medication, government sees them as non-citizens
- Don't have address, might live in park
- Social assistance doesn't provide enough food, healthy food
- Don't feel good about yourself
- Labeled, don't want to be laughed at
- ODSP rates increased 3% - first time in 10 years, the gov't figures they're off the hook
- Don't take into account cost of living, rents are highest they've every been, transportation costs
- Amongst poorest of poor, can't control your destiny
- Would love to spend money on entertainment (e.g. movies) – probably think food is more important
- Little or no family, ashamed to tell family you are on social assistance
- Want to work, but living with reality – lose benefits
- Don't have access to phones, etc. because live in poverty
- Told we need the system because they know best
- When people live in poverty might not be believed, labeled as someone with an intellectual disability
- Our wonderful system is making the poor poorer, adds to the number of people who live in poverty and isolation

Other comments

Diane Louise – CPP and ODSP

- Wants fed government to know she appreciates cost of living raises each year, but feds and provs don't agree that she should keep it
- CPP less than 50 dollars raise in 15 years – whatever fed government gives, provs take back (the clawback factor)
- Make a big 'too-ha' when they raise rates 2% (like this year)
- Wants Feds to tell provinces that we should get to keep our money

Monianne Monianne on Disability Issues

Anyone in this room who is 64 and is on ODSP – stay that age because you lose ODSP benefit when you turn 65.

Self-employed as photographer most of her life, developed MS, was on ODSP, now on OA pension – rates stayed the same but her rent went up dramatically (rent geared to income).

The government thinks you stop being disabled at age 65, when your ODSP stops. "I was going to dance for you tonight but guess what – I'm still disabled."

Amtul Hussain, widow with 2 children

I am Amtul Hussain, I am Late Deafened and do not know the American sign Language, so my modes of communication are: lip reading, writing, and computer note-taking.

I am also talking with only one side of voice box as other side is paralyzed. I am living in Canada for more than 32 years. I was having a happy life with my husband and 2 children. I was working as Chemical Technologist at Government of Ontario, Ministry of the Environment. My husband was a Marine Engineer.

Almost 10 years ago my husband was diagnosed with Multiple Myeloma and Bone Marrow cancer and he needed full time care. I had also lost my job due to the downsizing of the provincial government. I tried to find part time positions but when not successful, I have decided to do volunteer work and provided support and care to my family. Last year, my husband died and within a month, more shock came to me, when my Widow Pension was only \$440. This amount and also a limited amount from his company pension make me and my family poor:

- It is very difficult for me to pay for housing, transportation and food
- As almost every month there is at least a few cents' increase in food and utilities
- Every year there is increase in taxes and new taxes.

I like to work but struggle to find a job, facing the following barriers: a woman with a disability; age of 55 years; the absence from the job market for providing support to cancer patient and taking care of loved ones.

My unpaid hard work as mother, devoted wife, full time care provider, volunteer as a Community Advocate, and educator is not validated by Society. It looks like that I have to stay below the poverty line for the rest of my life with this limited income.

Most of the women I work with agree that the **following ways will help in Poverty Reduction:**

- Finding employment
- Free & accessible transportation
- Nutrition information and education
- Accessible information about community and social services.

9. Issues Affecting People Outside Toronto

Tracey Vaughan-Executive Director; Community Development Council Durham

I would like to speak about poverty from the perspective of the 905 community, most specifically Durham Region. Poverty in Durham is growing at an alarming rate, our community has been decimated by the loss of manufacturing jobs, and the weakening of the EI program has condemned many to live in poverty.

We have an unemployment rate on 7.2 and it is climbing daily. The commitment that was made in 1941 to put EI into place as a poverty prevention measure was made in tough economic times, and we are asking our government to show the same commitment to Canadians and ensure that EI meets its mandate as a true prevention measure.

Our community has been calling for changes to EI as many residents are either deemed ineligible, or placed in precarious financial positions during the mandatory waiting period, or when benefits expire. Our middle class is disappearing, many of us living one pay check away from poverty. Our government must enhance EI to ensure that it remains a serious poverty prevention measure.

In the last year Ontario Works caseloads have increased by 16.8%, an extremely troubling trend. Yet countless residents do not qualify for assistance due to punitive rules around eligibility. The staggering increase includes people who have never had to access social benefits before. They are "the new poor" and they are shocked to

discover that they are either ineligible for assistance, or that the amount of benefits that they can access does not come close to meeting the costs of living in our community. They are devastated to learn that there is nothing in place to help them.

Our Housing Help Centre has to tell residents daily that there are no programs or supports available for them to keep their family homes, maintain rental accommodations, or even keep their power on. The limited resources that are in place for them are quickly exhausted as the funding runs out before the needs are met, leaving many residents without this much needed support.

More than 42 percent of tenants in Durham pay more than 30% of their income on rent, a widely accepted indicator of poverty. The lack of affordable housing is crippling our community. Durham residents are still waiting for subsidized housing units from their initial application date in the mid to late 1990's. This is a story not outside the norm, as provincial figures estimate that 130,000 Ontarians are waiting for subsidized housing. Despite these ridiculous waiting lists there have only been 286 new subsidized units built in Durham since 1995.

The mechanisms that are in place as poverty prevention measures are clearly not working. We need new solutions to an old problem. There are many indicators in Durham that speak to the crisis we are in;

- Numerous for sale signs as families are forced to give up their homes
- Businesses that are closing up shop as they can no longer afford to maintain their operations
- Child poverty rates are at 12.3 in our community
- Only 1 in 7 children in our community have access to nutritious food
- Increase by more than 20% in food bank usage
- Durham Police services report that Domestic violence rates have increased dramatically as a result of the tough economic situation; reported incidents have increased to 1 every 2 hours
- EMS are also seeing a dramatic spike in calls; responding to increased suicide attempts, accidents and incidents of violence

The toll of poverty on our community is staggering; in a country like ours this is inexcusable.

In Durham we are asking for a national commitment, a poverty reduction plan that includes targets, time tables and legislation that address the fact that poverty is entrenched and debilitating. A strong poverty reduction plan must address children, families and individuals living in poverty, and this is not only a social imperative, but an economic imperative.

The federal government must;

- Expand and enhance EI for it to be a true poverty prevention measure
- Enhance our existing National Child benefit levels

The federal government must also work in partnership with all levels of government to make appropriate investments in the following areas;

- Construction and maintenance of affordable housing units to increase and maintain high quality social housing stock
- Regional and community transit systems that support daily living and working needs

- Enhanced public systems of public early learning and affordable child care
- Targeted strategies for marginalized communities that are differentially impacted by poverty; including but not limited to first nations communities, racialized communities, newcomers to Canada, women, individuals with disabilities and seniors
- A housing allowance outside of social assistance to benefit all people with lower incomes
- Transfer payments to provinces/Regions to address community need
- Drug, Dental and Vision coverage for all residents

Zaineb Zimmerman, Member of the Kingston Community Roundtable on Poverty Reduction

We are all humans and not any one of us is more or less deserving than another to have the opportunity to live life to the fullest.

Opportunity. What a concept! Who would pass up the opportunity to live in safe, adequate, affordable housing? Who would pass up the opportunity to have safe, exceptional, affordable childcare for their children? Who would pass up the opportunity for gainful employment with a living wage and benefits? My guess ~ not too many of us.

The problem as I see it is that such opportunities are not equally – or fairly – divided here in Canada. For example, I am a single parent with a limited income, little support, and limited opportunities. My livelihood is derived from part-time contract work, child support payments, and government supplements.

There is no question that I have some significant barriers before me in the way of moving beyond social assistance and part-time work, but I do have something that thousands in Kingston don't have ~ affordable housing. After living in a shelter for abused women and children for three months, I was able to secure rent-geared-to-income housing for my young son and me.

But, the local United Way reported this week that there are over a thousand names on Kingston's affordable housing wait list, an increase of 10.6% in just three years. This in a city where rents have increased as much as 55.6% in the past five years. The waiting list is so long that the wait time for a single person dwelling is now four years. Just imagine having to wait four long years just to have a roof over your head... a place to call your own, a home.

Kingston's need for more affordable housing is dire. Rental rates are exorbitantly high here. We have too few rental units available in any price range, and what is available is driven in part by the college and university students who converge on our city each September. This week's United Way report highlighted the shocking state of local housing affordability: 48% of Kingston households spend more than 30% of their income on housing, and 21.8% spend more than 50% of their income on this most basic human need.

How many opportunities are missed when an individual or family can barely afford to keep their home? How many opportunities are lost when you don't have a home to begin with? With the housing crisis impacting so many, it is no wonder that temporary shelters, food banks, and breakfast programs at local schools are all overflowing with people in need.

Once my son begins full time school in September, I will be required by Ontario Works to begin a job search. After all, OW is about getting people back to work in the shortest time possible. While I understand the mandate, I

don't understand how I'll pull it off. School hours are 9:05 am to 3:35 pm. Thankfully my education background is in office administration. Generally work hours are regular office hours, Monday to Friday. That helps, but it certainly doesn't address the need for before and after care. To be eligible for a child care subsidy, my son needs to be placed in a licensed child care facility which would be my preference anyway. The problem is there are no spaces available at my son's before and after school program, or across Kingston for that matter. Worse still, the wait list for before and after care is longer than 18 months.

An even greater concern is the looming "hold" on child care subsidies that will strike Kingston once again this fall. Subsidy funding is running out just as it did last year, so the city will be placing a "hold" on all new subsidy requests by the end of September. Talk about opportunities lost?! How can a parent work without safe, exceptional, affordable care for their children? Obviously we can't. Once again those in need of subsidy dollars will find ourselves stuck. The options that remain are less than desirable. Don't work - or seek out and secure less expensive, potentially less desirable child care arrangements. Again, opportunities lost.

So, you can clearly see how the old "Get a job!" adage doesn't really hold water. There are so many factors in getting and retaining employment, let alone employment with a living wage, and benefits. Having a safe, adequate, affordable place to call home certainly helps, as would safe, exceptional, affordable child care.

There is no doubt that the task before the policy makers is daunting. The issues are plentiful, the solutions slow to come. But, imagine being one of the people on a four year long wait list for a home, having to find a bed in a shelter on a nightly basis. Imagine the challenge of searching for employment when you don't have a place to call home. Imagine being offered your dream job, with benefits and having to turn it down because there are no child care spaces or subsidies available for your child. Imagine sending your child to school for breakfast because you needed to borrow from the grocery money to pay the rent.

Kingstonians, Ontarians, and Canadians alike are living with these daily struggles need your help. The task before you seems clear – replace the barriers with opportunities. Let's ALL live life to the fullest!

Christine Watts, Port Hope, ON

- I'm a rural librarian p/t, ODSP p/t
- Live in a small town
- Noticed a lot of people coming in with high needs,
- Sometimes family violence,
- More and more people using our services, can't afford internet, school libraries not open much
- When schools close in rural community is a disaster
- People are isolated, ashamed when dealing with difficulty
- Families, grandparents taking in families, using retirement reserves
- Thought had comfortable future and they don't
- Want the govt – youth to become employed in retrofitting vehicles
- Grants and not rebates
- Improve sustainability for housing
- Because not in a election, but have attack ads
- I don't want them spending our money and resources on this stuff – want them to put it towards child care

10. Other Comments

Linda Coltman, Voices from the Street

Hello, my name is Linda Coltman and I am a member of Voices From the Street - a Toronto based speakers bureau comprised of people who have had direct experience with homelessness, poverty, and/or mental health issues.

As speakers, we work to put a human face to homelessness and related issues and involve people with direct experience as leaders in a public education process.

Categorically I fit into the class that most would consider to be among the "marginalized" of society - belonging to the demographic for whose voice is seldom heard and generally among those stereo-typed not to be considered serious candidates to speak with knowledge or expertise to poverty and related social determinants of health matters.

Voices From the Street provided us with 12 weeks of intensive training in public speaking, leadership, conflict resolution, diversity and facilitation to better enable us as participants to follow our own paths and raise our voice to speak from knowledge and experience to issues of poverty, homelessness and housing need and other inter-related topics in order to educate the public to such and push for change.

Through the instruction period I sought to find my "voice" to become more trusting of sharing my personal story and becoming an effective speaker in order to become an efficient educator and proactive agent of change.

I don't propose to "know all the answers" but I want to make a constructive difference.

While I came to the training with a lot of knowledge and credentials of my own, Voices From the Street provided me with something invaluable in making me feel more comfortable to speak to such issues from my own personal experience - something which I found very difficult and gut wrenching to learn to do after years of bearing the stigma of living in poverty, being single and disabled and a resident in a social housing community.

For people like me living with the long term effects of poverty, we aren't asking for a hand out but simply to be afforded with real opportunities, such as those provided by Voices From the Street, in order that we receive assistance to develop our talents and abilities and essentially receive a step up towards our goals of increased self esteem and personal and community understanding to our pasts and our living conditions.

My personal desire and expectation is to see great leadership united with all orders of government, working with all sectors and especially with people living on low incomes, so that we can create opportunities, remove barriers, and provide supports so that all can live with dignity.

We are faced with serious systemic structural issues and problems requiring creative solutions. There are growing numbers of homeless people, crowded hostels and long waiting lists for social housing.

I stand before you tonight as a person with lived experience to homelessness, disability and poverty and as an advocate speaking and seeking to be part of the solution and my hope is that all those present will seek to join my fellow Voices From the Street graduates and I in being part of the process to eliminate those aspects of unequal social status and inequitable social relationships, experienced as social exclusion, dependency, and diminished capacity to participate that mark the lives of those currently living in poverty in Canada.

Thank you for your consideration tonight and too for your consideration of the summary document which I have offered for the record.

Catherine Sople, Town Hall Meeting Participant

Thank you, Campaign 2000, in conjunction with the support of the 25 in 5 Network for Poverty Reduction, for organizing this Town Hall Meeting on the Federal Role in Poverty Reduction.

I am Catherine Sople, from Clarkson which located in SW Mississauga. So I see both ends of the spectrum, an enclave of privilege which lies just across the QEW highway from an enclave of socio-economically deprived area of Mississauga. Today I want to speak to a "blue sky" idea for a universal program for youth social engagement which would be a way for youth to access post-secondary school:

"Citizen Apprenticeship". This program idea speaks to the federal government's responsibilities for immigration and settlement and also for post-secondary education.

"Citizen Apprenticeship" is an idea for a program which speaks to the idea of why newcomers seek to come to Canada ... it's because of the promise of education and opportunity for children. And "Citizen Apprenticeship" finds a way for all youth to have access to post-secondary education, by measuring and incentivizing activity which already happens inside public education – kids helping kids to learn.

"Citizen Apprenticeship" proposes that: the federal government via Citizenship & Immigration Canada

- build knowledge infrastructure in partnership with regional school boards by funding a policy which determines:
 - time increments of qualified service hours to promote language fluency and literacy
 - collect on a swipe card
 - aggregate to the unique Student Number
 - convert to post-secondary tuition offsets upon application to and registration in a recognized post-secondary program -- Conversion is modelled on existing RESP protocols.

A suggested conversion rate, following the Pathways to Education model, suggests that
500 service hours = 1 year's tuition for university or college or apprenticeship program

This makes it possible for a student starting in Grade 6 to build 1st year's tuition by the end of Grade 9 at an average contribution rate of 3 hours/school week.

Lynne Anne Mulrooney, Registered Nurses Association of Ontario

Expressed support for the actions on poverty and is supportive of others who are presenting tonight on the role of the feds in poverty reduction. She also noted that since RAO would be appearing at the HUMA hearings on June 2nd, she would save time so that other voices could be heard at this town hall.

Conclusion

Concluding comments from Community Panel

Janet Davis, City of Toronto Councillor

Congratulations everyone. Poverty is a human rights issue. People want to live in dignity, have a decent quality of life and participate in all aspects of society. Poverty compounds marginalization, particularly for racialized groups and newcomers.

We need joint action amongst all levels of governments - 'political football' can't stop progress on issue of reducing poverty in Canada.

We need intersectionality – a comprehensive approach that addresses all issues. Accountability, targets, timelines are needed.

We need bailout money – increase transfers so all levels of gov't can be partners in addressing poverty in Canada.

Tam Goosen, Good Jobs for All Coalition

Everyone spoke so eloquently and put elected officials to shame – worked together and showed solidarity, a real sense we are all in this together;

We are sick and tired of political games – serious issues that impact on our lives are being played like footballs; Canada gets so many people to come here on the promise of a dream and dashes those dreams for so many; Need action on all those issues we discussed: EI, affordable housing, post secondary education, and goods jobs for all;

We need dignity, fairness, justice for all – not just for the rich!

Paulette Senior, YWCA of/du Canada

I've heard passionate, intelligent responses and creative solutions. It's a missed opportunity for those MPs who are not here, but I'm sure your voices will be taken forward in the report.

The situations we find ourselves in were created, they did not happen by accident.

They are created by bad policies – EI levels, lack of childcare, lack of affordable housing. It's not by accident or by mistake that people find themselves in poverty.

Similarly, a Poverty Reduction Strategy must be created to reverse those bad policies. We need multiple doors to ending poverty.

We have the ideas, we know what the issues are - we need politicians to listen keenly and respond.

We need a strategic, integrated response from the federal government that ensures dignity for all.

Mike Creek, Voices from the Street

I hear a tremendous amount of frustration and justified anger in this room with the lack of response from the federal government and from Canada. I hear the voices of vulnerable citizens who want a federal government that responds to their issues and ensures that we are part of the decision making. I hear people speaking about the racialization of poverty and gender issues. We call upon all the federal government to get their heads out of the tar sands. The politicization of poverty needs to end today.

Peggy Nash, CAW

Thanks to Campaign 2000 and people for articulate presentations. My fervent hope is your voices will penetrate Ottawa. Poverty is not democratic - it has differential impacts on different groups. The solutions need to recognize the different impacts. The current economic situation is contributing to deeper crisis. Good jobs must be part of the solution, along with reforms to EI and access to affordable child care. People already have identified the solutions here. There is no two-tier system- we are all in this together.

Bishop Colin Johnson, Anglican Diocese of Toronto

In three words, I heard a call for funding, policy change, and coordination among gov't levels. You all have much experience – in working with people in poverty and developing solutions. We need government action in the areas of EI reform, child benefits, housing, and affordable child care. We need to recognize the foreign credentials and experience of newcomers. And we need targeted programs to address issues faced by Aboriginal Peoples, racialized communities, and immigrant families.

Policies that trap people in poverty need to be challenged. We need the federal, provincial and municipal levels of government to “play more nicely in the sandbox” together. The voluntary sector works so hard and does much of the problem solving in this area. But the reporting requirements of government are a burden. The time spent by agencies preparing funding applications for project funding- rather than getting core funding- is a big issue.

Grace-Edward Galabuzi, Colour of Poverty Campaign, and 905 Region

What I heard is that this city is ready to take on the federal gov't on the issue of poverty. There are a lot of voices that are clear about what needs to be done about poverty. Poverty is about citizenship – ensuring that people can be full citizens, inclusion, dignity, human rights. It is really critical for the people with lived experience to be part of discussion on solutions to poverty; we need to have full participation of those who have experienced it.

Poverty is a differentiated experience – we need to recognize the distinctiveness of the experiences of immigrant women, of people with disabilities, and of racialized populations. Issues of employment are critical to addressing poverty: secure, livable wages ensure dignity. Poverty cannot be addressed without leadership from all levels of government, working together. An economy that creates inequality always creates poverty.
