



# Monthly Newsletter



Working locally (Calgary, Alberta) to stop the cycle of poverty for the children

June 2009, Edition 38

## Did You Know?

Putting every boy and girl in the world in a good-quality primary school would cost between \$7 billion and \$17 billion per year –a relatively small amount compared to other government expenditures.<sup>1</sup>

## IT ALL ROLLS DOWNHILL

by Sharon Edwards

Last week economists were quite gleeful when given the opportunity to share their opinions with Canadians about how we are weathering the current global economic situation. Notice I did not call it a crisis; it's not a crisis for Canadians – not on paper anyway. Because Canada has a stronger regulatory system for its financial sector we have, indeed, weathered the storm better than some countries.

And yet, many Canadians have been hit hard by these economic challenges. For many families, high paying jobs have changed or disappeared altogether. At the very least many families with incomes at or below the poverty line have to make tough choices about where to spend the money they have. Tough choices can lead to anxiety, friction, pressure, and in some cases violence.

Women shelters in Calgary and across the country have all seen an increase in domestic violence since the economic downturn. Calls to help lines have increased substantially and the need for beds in homeless shelters has increased. Directors at the Calgary Drop-In and Rehab Centre, Alberta Housing and Urban Affairs, and Inn from the Cold are also noticing another important trend – clients who are returning to their doors because of lost employment

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<sup>1</sup> UN Millennium Project, Task Force on Education and Gender Equality, Toward universal primary education: investments, incentives, and institutions, Earthscan, London, 2005, p. 9.

opportunities.<sup>2</sup> According to John Graham, an expert in homelessness and social policy at the University of Calgary, seeing clients returning to shelters due to lost employment and housing is the 'canary in the coal mine'. Those who are most vulnerable have been hit first and hit hardest by this recession.

The Bank of Canada released a statement today stating that while the banking and financial systems in this country are as strong as they can be given the economic situation, it is household debt that poses the greatest danger to survival in Canada right now. Real net worth has dropped 6.7% from a year ago and household debt is now 140% of disposable income.<sup>3</sup>

It could be argued that this extends the group of vulnerable Canadians beyond those who are returning to use the services of shelters and drop-in centers to middle class families who are feeling the crunch too. Now that begs another question, if the most vulnerable are hit hardest, what is happening to the children living in all these situations?

According to statistics released by Kids Help Phone, counselors were contacted by kids by phone and online more than 2.2 million times last year. In Calgary, the number of contacts increased by more than 30,000 to 98,000 contacts in 2008. Anecdotal evidence suggests that kids are suffering through this economic recession as well. A colleague recounted a story of a young person who, after listening to a conversation between her parents about money, asked if they were all about to go bankrupt. When she was asked to describe what that meant, she couldn't do it but 'knew that it was a bad thing' and was very anxious about it. Imagine being a kid in a family where the situation is more extreme, bankruptcy is real, parents have lost jobs already, violence has broken out because of the money pressures, and nobody is talking to the kids about it. They feel the stress but have few options for help; all that stress and anxiety rolls downhill and lands at the feet of the children. Where to do they go for help?

Kids Help Phone is open for business 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Professional counselors answer phone calls to their toll-free line at 1-800-668-6868 or online at [www.kidshelpphone.ca](http://www.kidshelpphone.ca) Kids can access what is known as 'brief

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<sup>2</sup> *Layoffs Strain Calgary's Largest Shelter*, Colette Derworiz, Calgary Herald, March 9, 2009

<sup>3</sup> *Household debt emerges as greatest risk to Canada's financial system*, Kevin Carmichael, Globe and Mail, June 15, 2009

solution therapy' counseling which means a counselor listens to what the young person has to say, asks questions, and works with the child to come up with solutions that will support them. When a question is posted online, the same counselors are answering them. And statistics show that for every kid who posts a question, another 80 kids are looking over his or her shoulder to read the answer. You can read the posts online. All the services from Kids Help Phone are confidential and anonymous. If you know a young person who is caught up in the middle of this economic recession because of pressures on his family or if you would like to help support this valuable service for our kids, you can donate online at [www.kidshelpphone.ca](http://www.kidshelpphone.ca)

We've weathered tough times before and we will do it again. But it's important to remember that these times are especially tough for kids who don't have the resources that adults have to reason their way to a solution. When the pressure and stress rolls downhill it can land at the feet of the children. And those children grow up to become our future. It's important to recognize the signs of the 'canary in the coal mine' and be sure that the foundation we provide for Canadian children, and all children, is a strong one that will support their growth and their spirits.

To have people added/removed from the distribution list or to provide comments, please respond to:  
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