



Monthly Newsletter



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

July 2009, Edition 39

Did you know?

Reprinted from the Canada Without Poverty Spring 2009 newsletter, is the following information:

About one in five persons or is it one in 10 or one in 20? live in poverty in Canada. As recommended in 2007 by the National Council of Welfare (an advisory body to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development), Canada needs “a set of agreed indicators that will be used to plan, monitor, change and assess progress” toward combating poverty and social inclusion. (There’s that inclusion word again, something we likely all take great luxury in knowing we just have it).

Poverty Measure (Source)	Poverty Rate ¹	Number in Poverty ²
60 % of median income (OECD) ³	19%	6.2 million
50% of median income (OECD)³	13%	4.2 million
Market Basket Measure (HRSDC) ⁴	12%	3.9 million
Low Income Cut-off After Tax (Statistics Canada) ⁵	11%	3.6 million
40% of median income (OECD) ³	7%	2.3 million
Basic Needs Measure (Chris Sarlo) ⁶	5%	1.5 million

Human Rights and Poverty

by Richelle Wilson

It is the end of May as I write this and by the time you read it you won’t remember the snow that we had in Calgary yesterday. Jennifer and I are at the “Act Now 4 Change” conference at the Telus Convention Centre hosted by the Canadian Council on Social Development. Six months ago Jennifer was homeless. Yesterday she remarked to me, “Now I feel like I’m included, I’m a part of something.”

¹ Data has been rounded to the nearest percentage point or one tenth of a million, and pertains to 2005, 2006 or the “mid-2000s”.

I headed up to the 7:30 session called **Human Rights = Less Poverty** (presented by Alain Roy from Amnesty International). Do you buy that? Can you follow the linkage between human rights and less poverty? Do you see the link between Jennifer's situation and her feelings of regaining her dignity back and being included in society?

Mr. Roy from Amnesty explained to us how a human rights approach/framework can strengthen our work in addressing poverty.

To strengthen the voice of Amnesty International, the organization Canada Without Poverty (officially the National Anti-Poverty Organization) launched a campaign on May 22nd, 2009 called **Dignity for All**. This is a non profit organization in Canada that is dedicated to the eradication of poverty in Canada.

Poverty is a human condition characterized by sustained or chronic deprivation of the resources, capabilities, choices, security and power necessary for the enjoyment of an adequate standard of living and other civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights.

UN Committee on Economic, Social & Cultural Rights

Alain also talked about the rights related to deprivation, insecurity and exclusion. It reminds me of Dr. Melanie Rock from the U of C, who presented at the recent Brown Bagging for Calgary's Kids (BB4CK) Annual general meeting who talked about those who are food secure vs. those who do not have food security, therefore are food insecure. Among other issues she talked about how poverty and having food insecurity affects one's health and also restricts your right to have any form of choice. She continues by drawing her story out of her research on Kraft Dinner (KD).

What struck me is that I used to eat KD because I had no choice. Now I eat KD if I want to eat it. For those who still eat and feed their kids KD because there is no choice, they are food insecure. It leads my mind to wonder. We have many people in affluent countries who have food security and eat more food than they need. Yet we have in these same countries families who have no choice and are therefore dealing with extra stress, less/inadequate nutrition and live, as Alain at Amnesty says, with a violation of rights leading to deprivation, insecurity and exclusion. If you eat more than you need, did you at one time in your life experience being food insecure and now hoard food as a false sense of security. To continue to ensure your food security because you never want to go back to that again? Can we eat less, therefore dropping the cost of food? Can we provide more choice by thinking about more options when we buy food for the food bank donation bins at the grocery stores?

When we think of Amnesty, do we automatically link the horrible images of human rights violations that don't happen in North America? But think about how we build our governmental policy and systems that creates further food security for those who already have it and less rights and options, choices and inclusion for those who are food insecure. This creates more scarcity for those without. It is that type of community that we are building when we vote or don't vote. The systems will be changed to reflect the people's will and desire NOT by the organizations, but

by the people and individuals who will advocate on behalf of the community to change the organizations and governments to say that the old ways no longer serve us, they no longer reflect our values and the desires of the community have changed.

It is not acceptable for people to NOT be able to afford to support themselves and their families when they work 1 or even 2 jobs. For dual parent, two income families to live under the Canadian Statistical measurement of LICO (low income cut off after taxes). When there is discrimination of fair pay and a living wage or discrimination by age, race, religion, sex, sexual preferences and various other reasons that we deny people their basic fundamental and human rights. When we create these differences, we choose to create less food security for some and revoke their fundamental equality, security, inclusion, *right to shelter, right to healthcare, right to food*².

Think of the people you know, put a face to Human Rights in your life. But let me give you a couple of examples, in case you don't have a face for this story. For years we have become complacent about a single mother's raising her kids in poverty. It's just the way it is. Also at the conference, John Kim Bell points out that the Canadian Native population has become complacent about being segregated and not included in the rest of society. These are two examples where rights are violated and government policy has the ability to make a significant (not token) impact on these situations no longer being tolerated by our Canadian culture. We've been talking about equality, poverty, native issues and bringing women out of poverty for years. If we really meant to fix them, by being bold, then we would have.

This ties me back to the book *The End of Poverty Economic Possibilities of our Time* by Jeffrey Sachs. I highlighted this book back in the June of 2006 newsletter. Mr. Sachs talks of the notion that it is the individual who needs to change the policies of large organizations, because they won't have the impetus to do so without it coming from the people.

<http://www.earth.columbia.edu/pages/endofpoverty/index>

A small group of thoughtful people could change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.

[Margaret Mead](#)

Amnesty International launched their **Demand Dignity Campaign** the last week of May 2009; its campaign goal is to End human rights abuses that keep people poor. Here are some resources:

Amnesty International (Canadian section)

www.amnesty.ca

The Poverty and Human Rights Centre

www.povertyandhumanrights.org

² From the Demand Dignity Campaign of Amnesty International.

The Society Rights Advocacy Centre

www.socialrights.ca

Campaign 2000 – Convention on the rights of the child, this is the 2006 report card on poverty of children in Canada

http://www.campaign2000.ca/rc/rc06/06_C2000NationalReportCard.pdf

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³ The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development tracks the poverty rates of its member states based on 40%, 50% and 60% of median income (50% of median income is typically used for international comparison). Data is for the mid-2000s.

⁴ Human Resources and Skills Development Canada has published poverty rate data for Canada for the years 2000 to 2006, using the Market Basket Measure of low income, which “attempts to identify a standard of living lying between the poles of subsistence and social inclusion.” Data is for 2006.

⁵ In addition to tracking 50% median income as a “Low Income Measure”, Statistics Canada tracks low income using the Low Income Cut-off (LICO). The LICO before and after tax figures are income thresholds “below which a family is likely to spend significantly more of its income on food, shelter and clothing than the average family.” Data is for 2006.

⁶ Chris Sarlo and the Fraser Institute have published four different estimates of “income poverty” using the Basic Needs Measure. The lowest of these estimates in 2005 was a 5% poverty rate (rounded off) in 2005.