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**Edmonton  
Social Planning Council**

**SPECIAL PROJECT  
CHILD POVERTY  
INTERAGENCY  
for 1990**



UNITED WAY OF EDMONTON AND AREA  
AGENCY SUBMISSION RE: SPECIAL PROJECTS FUNDING

1. AGENCY NAME AND PHONE NO. Edmonton Social Planning Council 423-2031

2. PROGRAM NAME

a) AGENCY PROGRAM NAME Edmonton Social Planning Council

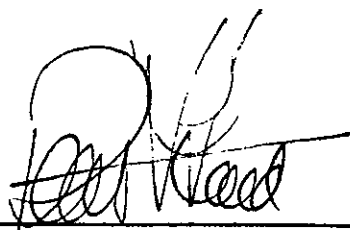
b) UNITED WAY PROGRAM NAME Organized Social Action

c) UWASIS PROGRAM NUMBER 8.0.00.00

3. CONTACT PERSON, TITLE, AND PHONE NUMBER

Peter Faid, Executive Director, 423-2031

4. DATE THIS PROPOSAL WAS BOARD APPROVED Tuesday, October 24, 1989



AUTHORIZED SIGNATURE

Peter Faid, Executive Director

NAME AND TITLE

27th October 1989  
DATE

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Edmonton Social Planning Council  
Special Project Application to United Way  
Children and Poverty Project  
October, 1989

1. The Problem or Need

A. What problem or need will this special project address?

Children are among the most vulnerable people in our society. They depend upon adults to provide for their life sustaining and developmental needs. In Alberta in 1988, the National Council of Welfare estimated there were 93,600 children living in poverty. 70,000 children were dependent on Alberta's social allowance program for provision of their needs as of June, 1989. All of these children live in poverty.

What does this mean for children living in Alberta? Perhaps this problem is best illustrated through an example of one child's life. At the Children and Poverty in the Schools Workshop held in May, 1989, the former principal of Norwood Community Schools spoke about the lives of several of her students.

She told a story about school lunches turning up missing. The children in Grade One class bring their lunches to school and put them in a cupboard where they are locked until lunchtime. At lunchtime, the cupboard is unlocked. Teachers began to see a pattern develop: every day three lunches were missing from the cupboard when it was unlocked at lunchtime. Upon further observation, they discovered that a six-year-old girl was not bringing lunch but was walking up to the cupboard with the other children when it was unlocked. She carefully selected three lunches: one for herself, one to take to her baby brother at home, and a third for the family to share at dinnertime. This very little girl was taking responsibility for a problem that should be and must be attended to by adults.

There are a number of organizations in the community that are addressing the problem of children living in poverty in very important ways. The Edmonton City Centre Church Corporation in cooperation with the principals of a number of schools, operates a school snack program in low income communities. This group recognizes that while a nutritious snack is helpful, it does not ensure that the daily nutritional needs of children are being met. Norwood Community Centre has been running a pre-school program for low income children and their families for some 20

years. Elves Memorial Child Development Centre has been running a Head Start pre-school program for five years for low income children who are at risk for being developmentally delayed. The public and separate school systems in Edmonton are beginning to recognize that some schools exist in "high-needs" areas and are allocating some funds to these schools.

What is missing is organized inter-agency effort to respond to the ongoing needs of children and their families living in poverty. The Edmonton Social Planning Council has begun work and proposes to continue to work with organizations inside and outside government to formulate and implement sound policies based upon locally based research. To this end, we have worked with Edmonton City Centre Church Corporation and others to form the "Child Poverty Action Group" in the Fall of 1989. It is our plan to continue work through this group and to carry out additional initiatives.

**B. Please describe the characteristics of the target population, in terms of needs, location, and other socio-demographics.**

As noted above, in April, 1988 the National Council of Welfare estimated 93,600 children in Alberta were living in poverty. As of June, 1989, 70,000 of Alberta's children were dependent on the social allowance program. All of these children were living in poverty.

Statistics Canada reports that poor children are more likely to die than their wealthier peers. In July, 1989, The Globe and Mail reported on Stats Can's findings. "In the poorest urban areas -- those in the lowest 20 per cent of income -- 90.6 children out of every 100,000 from infants to 19-year-olds, died. In the wealthiest 20 per cent of areas, just 58.1 children per 100,000 died." The Canadian Institute of Child Health says accidents are the leading cause of death in children older than one. Dr. Ivan Pless, a pediatrician at Montreal Children's Hospital has researched children and traffic injuries. He says "rich people get better policing, and live in environments where their kids are less likely to play in the street." Respiratory illness, the third leading cause of death in children under five, is more common among children of low-income families according to the Canadian Institute of Child Health.

Here in Alberta, our Provincial Government allocates funds that are inadequate by their own estimates for feeding and clothing a child living with his or her natural parents who are dependent on social allowance (\$225/month for two boys, aged 10 and 11). This same government allocates \$415/month to foster parents for feeding and clothing these same two boys. And Alberta Consumer and Corporate Affairs estimated in

December, 1988 that the cost of feeding and clothing these same two children is \$310/month. Poor children are clearly the losers in this equation.

Parents working for minimum wages earn \$4.50 per hour or \$9,000/year for full-time work. In the 1980's in Alberta, we lost 34,000 full-time jobs and gained 36,000 part-time jobs. Children in these families are of course deeply affected. They are affected not only by the dollar figures stated here but by the stresses and strains their parents suffer as they try to provide for their families with inadequate resources and uncertain futures.

We know that children are more likely to be poor if they live in female-headed single parent families, in families with parents under 25 years of age or in families of three or more children. Children of Native people are also more likely to be living in poverty (see attached Alberta Facts, Edmonton Social Planning Council, May, 1989).

In Edmonton, we know there are certain neighbourhoods where the incidence of poverty is much higher than in other neighbourhoods (see attached "Profile and Perspectives on Poverty in Edmonton," Edmonton Social Planning Council, May 12, 1989).

When parents are poor, children are poor. When families are poor, they are unable to sustain households, neighbourhood and family ties as they are forced to move from one location to another as rental rates increase faster than wages or social allowance rates. (Alberta's social allowance rates for housing families have not increased since 1982 when they were, in fact, reduced.) When children have to move frequently, they are less likely to do well in school. When children do not do well in school, they are unable to obtain good paying jobs for support of their own families and so the cycle continues (see attached "Poor Now, Poor Later: The Effects of Poverty on Child Development," Canadian Council on Children and Youth, December, 1987).

C. What process did the agency undertake in order to identify both the problem/need and the proposed solution? Please provide details and, if applicable, attach supporting reports, data, etc.

Board of Directors Initiative. The Edmonton Social Planning Council has concentrated its social action efforts in the areas of poverty and unemployment for a number of years. In 1984, the Board of Directors of the Planning Council examined its program and set new direction for the staff in the following years. In this exercise, the Board named several

areas in which staff were to concentrate their efforts. Among these was the issue of Children and Poverty.

Workshop on Poverty and the Schools. The Planning Council joined with the Edmonton City Centre Church Corporation, principals of Edmonton area schools and others to plan and implement the Children and Poverty in the Schools Conference in May, 1989. We provided workshop planning support, the keynote address and leadership of a small group process. 170 people attended the conference. About 60 of these people have indicated an interest in following up to take action to address the needs of children living in poverty.

Alberta Facts. During this same period, the Planning Council invited representatives of community organizations and government to participate on an advisory committee to develop, "Children in Poverty: On the Outside Looking In", one of a series of fact sheets on poverty in Alberta. 5,000 copies of this fact sheet have been distributed with excellent response from the media and community. Requests for additional copies have come from schools, government departments and community groups.

Child Poverty Action Group. The Planning Council co-led a planning meeting in September, 1989 with the Edmonton City Centre Church Corporation as a follow-up to the Workshop on Poverty in the Schools held in the spring. About 40 people representing various organizations attended this meeting. Through the planning session, three issues were identified to be addressed by the group. The Planning Council has followed up by chairing a committee, the Head Start Committee, which has subsequently met and adopted some preliminary goals and strategies. Among these is to measure the effectiveness of Head Start-type pre-school programs now in operation both in and out of government. The Planning Council has offered to conduct the measurement of program effectiveness for non-government volunteer programs in conjunction with the efforts of committee members representing government programs.

#### C1. Possible Initiatives.

The Planning Council is now considering a range of options which we may pursue in our work on the issue of children and their families living in poverty. These include:

*With the Child Poverty Action Group*

- continuing provision of support to and participation in to the Child Poverty Action Group as it works through the beginning stages of group formation.



- coordinating research of existing government and non-government Head Start type pre-school programs to ensure consistency in variables measured, methodology, etc.

- conducting research of the above for non-government organizations

- coordinating lobbying efforts to convince all levels of government of the necessity of providing Head Start programs

*Other possible initiatives*

- conducting a survey of social attitudes toward people who are poor to be followed by producing a workshop on "povertyism"

- producing a video of children, both poor and middle class, depicting their living conditions and attitudes toward poverty

- researching and writing a handbook detailing services available to children, with particular emphasis on low income children.

This proposal will concern itself with focusing on a select few of the possible initiatives mentioned above.

**D. Provide justification for the special project in light of availability of the same or similar services in the community.**

A 1987 evaluation of the Edmonton Social Planning Council pointed out that the role the Planning Council plays in the community is unique. The Planning Council is not involved in ongoing delivery of service in either a for-profit or non-profit context and therefore has no particular vested interest when analysis of a policy and advice to the community is required. In short, there is no similar service existing in the community.

This is true in all that the Planning Council undertakes and is no less true in the area of children and poverty. We are neither a service provider nor a funder of services to children and their families living in poverty. We can, therefore, help to support and guide a process in which we have a much greater degree of objectivity than other government and non-government organizations.

**II. Goals and Objectives**

**A. What are the goals and objectives of the special**

project?

1. To ensure that issues of children and their families living in poverty are recognized as the responsibility of all sectors of Edmonton and Alberta society by:
  - a. Publishing an updated Alberta Facts in the coming year as we learn more about children living in poverty in our own community and distributing them widely
  - b. Working with the media to ensure that children living in poverty receive prominent attention (stories to appear in each month of the funded year)
  - c. Inviting knowledgeable people in the community including of course those people experiencing poverty to contribute to an issue of First Reading on children and their families living in poverty (one in the funded year)
  - d. Developing a section of the Planning Council's Roger Soderstrom Library on children and poverty for community use (section to begin to be available in April 1990, to be added to throughout the funded year)
  - e. Reaching out to the business community to help them see their interest in alleviating the problems faced by children and their families living in poverty (first contact by April, 1990; minimum four contacts in the funded year)
  - f. Speaking to groups in the community about the issue of children and poverty (minimum four times in the coming year)
  - g. Having one of the Planning Council's Evening Forums dedicated to the issue of children and poverty (one Forum in the coming year)
2. To undertake community based research into the nature, magnitude and possible solutions to the problem of children living and their families living in poverty by:

- a. Working with other agencies in the Child Poverty Action Group to develop a research methodology that would examine the efficacy of existing pre-school Head Start programs operating in Edmonton (monthly meetings; methodology to be developed in April 1990)
  - b. Preparing an application for funding of research by the Edmonton Social Planning Council into efficacy of existing pre-school Head Start programs operating in the voluntary sector in Edmonton in collaboration with the Child Poverty Action Group (application to be prepared in May 1990)
3. To encourage greater public participation in the development of social policies and implementation of programs for children and their families living in poverty by:
- a. Working with other agencies to ensure that a Child Poverty Action Group is established and continues to function as an active voice on behalf of children and their families living in poverty (meetings monthly)
  - b. Establishing community based advisory committees for initiatives of the Planning Council that address children and poverty
  - c. Including "What you can do" sections in Planning Council publications
  - d. Recruiting members for the Child Poverty Action Group through publications and events mentioned above

**B. How do these goals and objectives relate to the overall mission of your organization?**

The overall mission of our organization is to facilitate organized social action. In April, 1989 the Edmonton Social Planning Council adopted the following Mission Statement and Goals:

*Mission:*

"The Edmonton Social Planning Council believes that all people should have the social rights and freedoms to live and work in an environment that enhances individual, family and community growth without restricting the same rights and freedoms for others. The Council seeks to

create, to advocate and to support changes in policies, attitudes and actions in order to enhance these social rights and freedoms."

*Goals:*

To undertake research into the nature and magnitude of social issues in the community.

To increase public awareness and understanding of current social issues and to exercise an independent voice in the community.

To encourage greater public participation in the development of social policies and in the implementation of programs.

The goals and objectives of the Children and Poverty Project as envisioned by the Planning Council follow directly from the goals adopted in April, 1989.

### III. Evaluation

Please outline your evaluation plan, including:

1. key elements to be evaluated (e.g., effect on clientele)
2. methodology (e.g., sampling, format, etc.)
3. costs associated with the evaluation (please detail costs and show how much of these costs are included in the special project budget).

Evaluation of the special project would be based on the goals and objectives as outlined above. Specifically for each goal (1 through 3):

Goal 1: To ensure that issues of children and their families living in poverty are recognized as the responsibility of all sectors of Edmonton and Alberta society.

Output measurement. Several of the objectives listed under this goal indicate numbers of items to be completed, e.g., stories to appear in the media in each month of the funded year. These will be measured against the actual numbers distributed/published. This sort of measurement of output is relatively easy to track by a method of simple counting. Of course we may discover throughout the course of the year that we need to adjust the numbers in some way.

Outcome measurement. Measuring the effectiveness or outcome of our efforts is a more difficult task. It is our plan to measure the increase in recognition of responsibility for children living in poverty by: a) tracking the numbers of inquiries to the Planning Council concerning children and poverty in terms of numbers, type of organization requesting information, demographic characteristics of individuals making inquiries, and type of assistance requested.

Goal 2: To undertake community based research into the nature, magnitude and possible solutions to the problem of children and their families living in poverty.

Output measurement. The output will be measured by a meeting count of those interested in conducting research, by the relative success of having all parties agree on a methodology and by successful preparation of an application by May 1990.

Outcome measurement. Outcome will be measured by whether we are successful in obtaining funding for the research. Later measures will include our success in implementing the research.

Goal 3: To encourage greater public participation in the development of social policies and implementation of programs for children and their families living in poverty.

Output measurement. Output will be measured by the number of meetings of the Child Poverty Action Group and by the numbers of people attending those meetings. The range of organizations, individuals and regions of Edmonton and Alberta will also be tracked. The numbers of initiatives successfully undertaken and completed will be measured.

Outcome measurement. Outcome will be measured by the numbers of initiatives that lead to adoption of a policy or program by government, the community or business to address the issue of children living in poverty, e.g., expanded pre-school Head Start programs.

COSTS. The costs of evaluating this project will be included in the overall program costs of the Edmonton Social Planning Council.

#### **IV. Resources**

**A. If applicable, describe additional facilities and/or special equipment required to operate the special project.**

The special project can be operated within the Planning Council's

current facilities and equipment.

**B. Describe the staffing component of the special project (i.e., how many staff are required and major responsibilities). Attach relevant job description(s), if available.**

Staff required will include:

Executive Director	.10 FTE
Social Planner	.25 FTE
Communications Coordinator	.10 FTE
Administrative Secretary	.10 FTE

The Executive Director will have overall responsibility for the special project and will perform some of the public speaking responsibilities and outreach to business.

The Social Planner will have the bulk of the responsibility for planning and implementing the special project including participating in the Child Poverty Action Group, developing the research methodology, writing the research proposal, public speaking, reaching out to the business community, lobbying government, etc.

The Communications Coordinator will have responsibility for implementing functions such as ensuring that media stories appear in each of the 12 months of the funded year, for editing, publishing and ensuring distribution of Planning Council publications, and for ensuring that the Planning Council library includes a section on children and poverty..

The Administrative Secretary will provide overall administrative and secretarial support to the project including typing, mailing, etc.

**C. Will the funding of the special project result in any cost-savings in other programs (both United Way and non-United Way)? If yes, please explain.**

There are no anticipated cost-savings in the Planning Council's program as a result of this special project. We would, however, expect to be able to concentrate more of our efforts on this project and less on fee for service projects that are unrelated as a result of receiving this funding.

**D. Will the funding of the special project result in additional costs in other programs (both United Way and non-United Way)? If yes, please explain.**

We would expect the funds allocated to us for the special project to cover all associated costs.

**E. What other funders are you approaching regarding this project? Please name the funder and the amount you are requesting from them.**

At this time we are approaching no other funders regarding the project as outlined in the goals and objectives. We may well approach other funders in the future for other aspects of our overall Children and Poverty Project, e.g., to produce a video on children and their families living in poverty.

#### **V. Volunteerism**

**Briefly describe the role of volunteers in this program.**

While a number of the participants in the Child Poverty Action Group attend meetings as representatives of organizations, others attend on their own time as community volunteers. When the Planning Council invites people in the community at large to take part in social policy analysis and program planning, we are asking people to volunteer. This will be so particularly in our approaches to the business community and to people who are experiencing poverty. In addition, the Planning Council operates with a volunteer Board of Directors of 15 people who have instructed staff to develop initiatives in the area of children and poverty. In so doing, we are carrying out the instructions of volunteers. In addition, the Planning Council has some 250 members who will be asked to take action on this issue through our publications and events. All of these people will be volunteering their time when they attend an Evening Forum, write a letter or lend their names to an organization to add to its clout.

**VI. Please provide any other information you believe the United Way should know about as it considers your proposal.**

It would be helpful for the United Way to realize that the Head Start type pre-school programs we discuss in this proposal have been "field tested" in the United States for more than twenty years. Longitudinal studies exist to show that when these programs are provided for children and their families living in poverty, the children are more likely to be successful later in life. That is, they are less likely to become pregnant as teenagers, less likely to get into trouble with the law, more likely to graduate high school, more likely to find paid employment and so on. A preliminary study of the Elves Memorial Child Development Centre Head Start Program shows that of 57 families followed after completion of the

program, 51 reported parents were still involved in their children's education through the schools.

The Edmonton Social Planning Council believes that this is one of the answers to the very complex problem of children living in poverty. We are eager to explore other possibilities with the larger community.

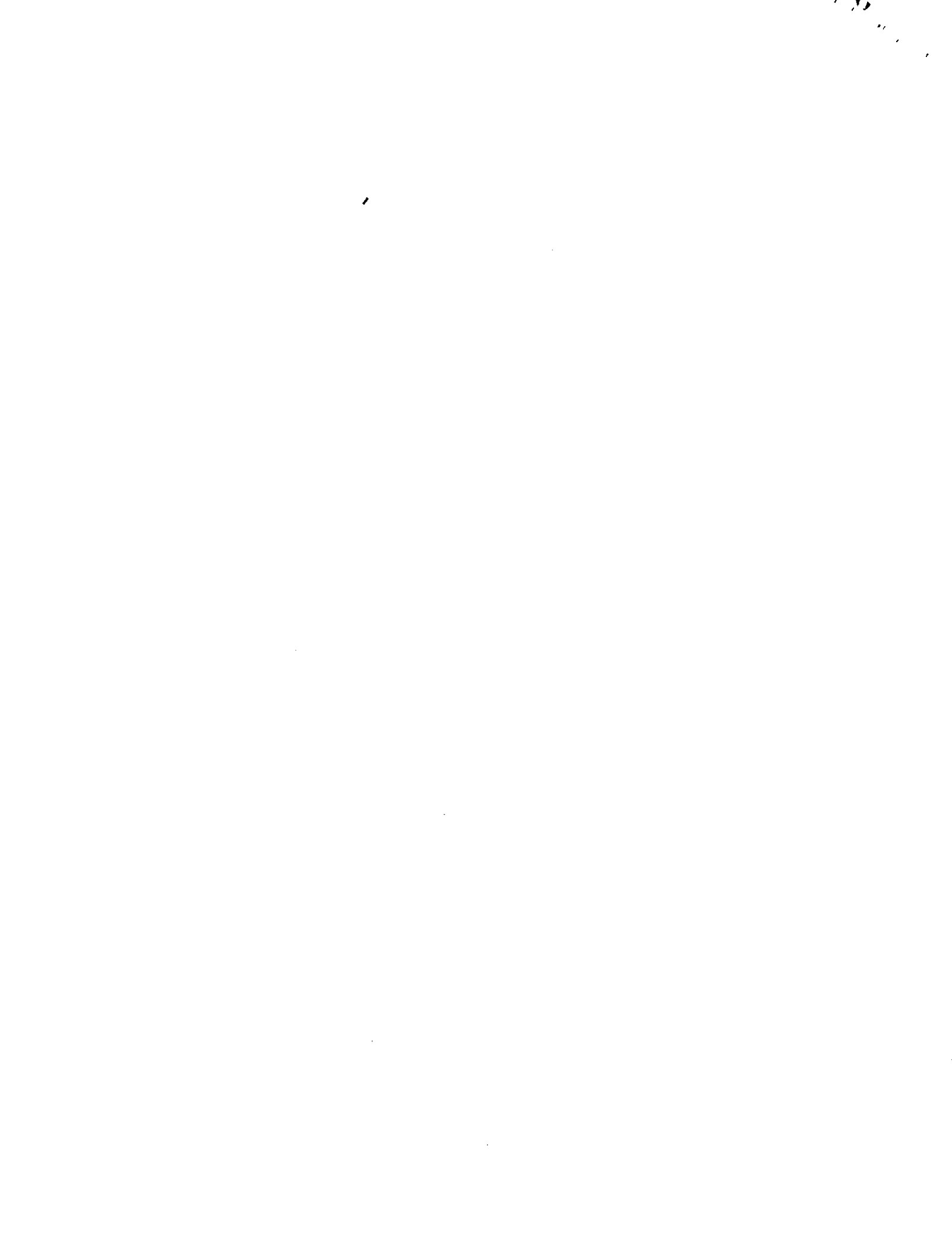


**Special Project Submission  
to United Way  
for Children and Poverty Project**

October, 1989

*Budget*

	<u>United Way Special Project</u>	<u>Planning Council</u>
1. Professional salaries, benefits	\$ 7,000	\$10,442
2. Administrative support	1,000	1,484
3. Supplies, postage, telephone		500
4. Travel		50
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<i>Subtotals</i>	\$ 8,000	\$12,476
 <b><i>Total Special Project Request \$ 8,000</i></b>		
 <b><i>Total Cost to Planning Council (including special project request) \$20,476</i></b>		



# ALBERTA FACTS

Number 6

Published by the Edmonton Social Planning Council

May 1989

## Children in Poverty: On the Outside Looking In

We live in a country where everyone's needs are met, at least those of children — right? **Wrong!** In Canada, one child in six lives in poverty. One child in six does not have basic needs met. In Alberta, one child in six means that **93,600** children live in poverty.



*One Child in Six  
Lives in Poverty*

What does being poor mean to these children?

### What being poor means to Jenny

The average girl living with her mom stands a 50-50 chance of being poor. Jenny's mom doesn't make much money: she earns minimum wage. She can't always afford nutritious meals, so Jenny gets sick a lot.

Jenny and her mom move around often, and Jenny feels she's always changing schools. She finds it hard to have to make new friends all the time.

Jenny has one pair of jeans, and she doesn't have a bike or get birthday presents or have neat snacks to take to school. Sometimes Jenny finds it embarrassing.

But what Jenny finds hardest about being poor is that *she feels different* from all the other children.

### What is a poor family?

According to Statistics Canada, a family is considered "a low income family" if they spend more than an average of about 60 per cent of their income on food, clothing and shelter (depending on where they live and the size of family). According to The National Council of Welfare, these families "live in poverty."

For example, in an Albertan city, the poverty line for a family of four is \$23,521 (before deductions); for a family of three, the poverty line is \$20,411 (before deductions).

### Poverty Line in Alberta

<i>Family size</i>	<i>Income before deductions</i>
Family of four	\$23,521
Family of three	\$20,411

SOURCE: 1988 Poverty Lines,  
National Council of Welfare

## Families of Poor Children

Female-headed single parent families	1 in 2
Families with parents under 25 years old	1 in 4
Families with three or more children	1 in 3

SOURCE: Poverty Profile 1988,  
National Council of Welfare

## Poor children often are sick children

Babies from poor families die at almost **twice** the rate that babies from wealthy families do. For babies from Indian families the picture is much worse. They die at a rate almost 4 1/2 times greater than other Alberta babies.

And, poor children suffer more from cancer, respiratory diseases, congenital anomalies and pneumonia than other children.

These higher disease and death rates are closely tied to nutrition, health care, and housing conditions.

## Are housing costs really accommodating?

The average cost of a two-bedroom apartment in Edmonton was \$482 in October, 1988. After paying rent, the single parent with two children, earning minimum wage, has \$238 left. With this money, she must pay utilities, household, laundry, child care, prescriptions, and travel expenses PLUS buy food and clothing for her children.

This family qualifies for a social allowance subsidy of about \$500 per month. Often people are unaware of this subsidy. Others, who may be aware of the subsidy, wish to avoid the social allowance system because of the stigma attached.

## Does money affect education?

Children from wealthy families are far more likely to finish high school and continue their education than children from poor families. Children from poor families skip school twice as much as children from other families.

Studies point out that family income affects how well children do in school and how much they join school activities.

While no figures exist for all Native people, only 20% of Indian students finish high school—compared to a national average of 70%.

What does this mean for children? People with less education have a greater chance of being out of work and therefore a greater chance of being poor. In other words, poor children are more likely to become poor adults.

## Poor families mean poor children

Poor children are most likely to live in families:

- headed by female single parents
- headed by a parent under 25 years old
- with three or more children
- of Native people

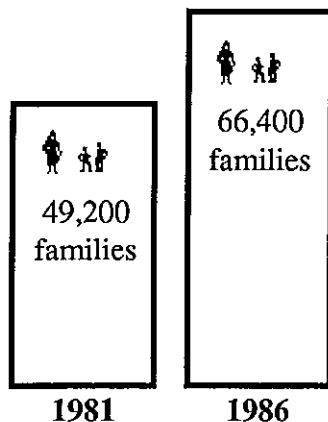
Most low-income families are the "working poor." Although these parents have jobs, they and their families just manage to get by.

For example, a single parent with one child who earns minimum wage has an income more than \$6,000 below the poverty line. *This means this parent would have to work 68 hours per week to support a child at the poverty line.*

## The Working Poor

Minimum wage = \$4.50 per hour  
 x 40 hours per week = \$180 per week  
 x 50 weeks = \$9,000 (gross) per year  
 \$15,258 (poverty line, 2 person family)  
 -9,000 (income at minimum wage)  
 \$6,258 **BELOW** the poverty line

## Alberta's Poor Families Increase



SOURCE: Poverty Profile 1988,  
National Council of Welfare

### Are families a priority for the Alberta Government?

The typical cost of feeding and clothing two boys, aged 10 and 11, was about \$310 a month in December, 1988, according to Alberta Consumer and Corporate Affairs.

Social allowance provides about \$225 for food and clothing for these two children. Foster care provides about \$415. Why do parents living on social allowance and caring for their own children receive less than the estimated cost for food and clothing? (And nothing for toys, books, or Christmas and birthday presents.)

Why is there such a gap between what natural parents receive for their children and what foster parents receive for other people's children?

The Alberta Government says it believes in families and wants to help them. How are they supporting poor families?

*"It is our belief that the dollars supplied for food allowance are sufficient and that if families have a problem managing within that amount, they should seek the counselling that's available to them."*

— Hon. Connie Osterman

When a school lunch program was suggested in the Legislature in April, 1988, the then Social Services Minister Connie Osterman said, "It is our belief that the dollars supplied for food allowance are sufficient and that if families have a problem managing within that amount, they should seek the counselling that's available to them."

## Average Family Incomes

\$49,797

*Married*

\$37,869

*Male Single Parent*

\$23,108

*Female Single Parent*

SOURCE: Statistics Canada, Income Distributions by Size in Canada #13-207, 1987

### The future: more than a family affair

The number of single parent families grew by almost 50 per cent in the 10 years from 1971 to 1981. Single parent families represented 13 per cent of all families by 1986. The number of two-parent families also increased, but only by 22 per cent.

If these trends continue, it is likely that more and more children will grow up poor.

What responsibility do we share for all Alberta's children?

### Questions for Discussion

1. What are the future consequences of providing less than minimum care for Alberta's children?
2. The Alberta Government says it wants to help families. How do you think it can best do this?
3. Who will advocate for Alberta's poor children?
4. How would we all benefit if fewer children grew up poor?

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### **What can you do?**

- Support raising social allowance benefits to ensure that children can be adequately fed and clothed.
  - Support equalizing wages between men and women so single mothers can support their children.
  - Write letters to your Member of Parliament (MP) and your Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) to encourage the above changes.
- 

### **Recommended Reading**

Baum, Gregory. *Ethics in Economics*. Toronto: Lorimer, 1984.

Campbell, C.C., et al. *Hunger, Poverty and Malnutrition: The Nutritional Implications of Food Insecurity in Canada*. Toronto: Food Advocacy Coalition of Toronto, 1986.

Canadian Child Welfare Association, Canadian Council on Children and Youth, Canadian Council on Social Development, Canadian Institute of Child Health, Child Poverty Action Group, Family Service Canada, and Vanier Institute of the Family. *A Choice of Futures: Canada's Commitment to Its Children* [a series of five fact sheets]. Toronto, 1988.

Canadian Council on Social Development. *Not Enough: The Meaning and Measurement of Poverty in Canada*. Ottawa, 1984.

Clarke, Michelle. *Wasting our Future: The Effects of Poverty on Child Development*. Ottawa: The Canadian Council on Children and Youth, 1988.

Deroo, Remy. *Witness of Justice*. Ottawa: Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1979.

The Child Poverty Action Group. *A Fair Chance for all Children: the Declaration on Child Poverty*. Toronto, 1986.

Waxman, Chaim I., *The Stigma of Poverty*. New York: Pergamon Press, 1983.

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***Children in Poverty: On the Outside Looking In*** is one of a series of fact sheets on social issues produced by the Edmonton Social Planning Council. This edition was produced with financial support from the Edmonton City Centre Church Corporation. Copies are available in bulk for classes and study groups.

The Edmonton Social Planning Council is an independent, non-profit social action agency which seeks social justice through policy analysis, applied research, community development, and training and consultation.

For more information about the Council, its regular publications ***First Reading*** and ***Alberta Facts***, or other publications, please contact:



Edmonton Social Planning Council  
#41, 9912-106 Street  
Edmonton, Alberta  
T5K 1C5  
(403) 423-2031

A United Way Member Agency



# Profile and Perspectives on Poverty in Edmonton

*Peter Faid*

*Edmonton Social Planning Council  
Edmonton, Alberta CANADA*

## INTRODUCTION

Periodically our society rediscovers poverty. When we do our attitudes towards the poor generally reassure us that poverty is really the result of individual shortcomings and that our collective responsibility is quite limited. When we see poverty in our midst, we reassure ourselves that there is a comprehensive safety net of income security benefits and community agencies that will always be there to relieve the worst of the financial hardships that the poor must face. When poverty makes it reappear, we feel reassured by our provincial governments officially prescribed optimism that 'we are poised for years of steady growth and job security'. We learn that just a gentle massage to the province's economy and another round of tax concessions to major companies will once again see unemployment and poverty drop to insignificant levels.

In the past few years, many of us in this community have again rediscovered poverty. But this time I am optimistic that our responses will be different. We have begun to question our well worn assumptions about the causes of poverty and the plight of the poor. We have begun to openly challenge the economic and social prescriptions offered by our governments. We have begun to educate ourselves about the extent of poverty in our city and its many damaging manifestations. We have begun the long process of seeking change in our public policies and our community attitudes so that the lives of those who live day by day with the cruel uncertainties of poverty might be improved.

As we begin this important workshop on Poverty and the Schools, I see it as my responsibility to contribute to our collective questioning, challenging, educating and changing. How accurate are our perceptions of poverty and the poor? What do we understand about the impact of unemployment and poverty on families and communities in Edmonton? How appropriate are our current responses to poverty in Edmonton? What is the profile of poverty in this city; especially for our families and our children? Finally, what actions must we as a community of the concerned be prepared to take if we are to deal effectively with the problem of poverty in our midst?

## OUR PERCEPTIONS OF POVERTY

It has been suggested that the most important things that we can ever learn about any society are the things that it tends to take for granted. We tend to take poverty and unemployment for granted because the assumptions we make about those who are poor or unemployed help us to explain away the condition. Why is it

when the evidence of the damaging consequences of poverty and unemployment to our families and our communities continues to mount that our attitudes as a society seem to become even harsher? In the words of Martin Rein, the iron law of welfare comes into play; so that those who need help the most do in fact receive the least.

So what are these assumptions about poverty that we have to be prepared to question? Poverty is a manifestation of individual failure. We must all be responsible for our own welfare for to otherwise would be to weaken individual initiative and make us a burden on the rest of society. If we replace our individual responsibility with a network of publicly funded and operated human services we will simply reward improvidence and encourage laziness. Governments do have a role, but only a very residual one. First call must be on our own resources and those of our family. Then we may call upon the community for help if our own resources are not sufficient. While we all recognise that we do have individual choices to make it is nevertheless abundantly clear that the increases in unemployment that we have seen in the last few years have not been the result of personal inadequacy. The greatest majority of those who have lost their jobs did so because of corporate and business decisions that were quite beyond their control. Yet we persistently reinforce the notion that our unemployed are in their predicament because of some individual failing. Consequently we in turn propose solutions to the problem of unemployment and poverty, such as introducing cuts in already inadequate welfare benefits because of our unchallenged belief that this will somehow restore individual responsibility. Not only are these solutions likely to prove ineffective in responding to the needs of the poor, they are in fact likely to be detrimental and actually increase human suffering. As part of a community response to welfare cutbacks in 1983 a single mother with three children commented:

"The actions of the provincial government make me wonder if I might be cut off completely one day. It is scary to know they don't care about those of us who are living in poverty. I now feel more put down than ever before and it will just make it so much harder to work towards becoming independent sometime in the future."

The second critical assumption, that is obviously linked to the first, is that the poor and the unemployed do not really want to work. We would like to believe that they prefer to remain dependent upon unemployment insurance and welfare. Of course should we ever raise the level of welfare benefits any will they had to work like the rest of us would be completely destroyed.

Again we assume that the fault lies not with society but with the individuals themselves. Studies that have been carried out on the question of the willingness to work of the poor and the unemployed have demonstrated time and time again that they do indeed want to work, that their incentive to work is not destroyed by the receipt of benefits and that whatever changes occur in their attitudes towards work are the consequence of being poor and unemployed and certainly not the cause.

This attitude about the unwillingness of the unemployed and the poor to work also feeds a further obsession. That is the argument that the poor will do all they can to cheat on welfare. The stories about the limited abuse that does exist become exaggerated with every telling and quickly enter the realm of urban myths. Benefit systems and their ministers rush to reassure we taxpayers that they intend to increase their vigilance so that our dollars will not be squandered. Almost invariably when abuse is investigated it is found that the problem lies much more with inappropriate discretionary judgements, poor policies or administrative error. Because of our societal obsession with abuse we take a much more serious view of it than we do tax evasion.

In examining the impact of these assumptions it is important to acknowledge that poverty is not a thing a part. It is, in fact, a condition created by an affluent society which believes that a certain level of poverty is acceptable, and even necessary, if the rest of us are to continue to enjoy our present standard of living.

## THE IMPACT OF UNEMPLOYMENT AND POVERTY

Although we often reassure ourselves that there is a comprehensive safety net of unemployment insurance and welfare to relieve the worst of the financial hardships, there is little doubt that it is the rising levels of employment which have been the direct cause of the alarming increase in family poverty in this province over the past five years. The financial hardship which accompanies unemployment is clearly the major source of distress for the unemployed and their families. However, it must be remembered that work is among the most pervasive of human activities. Consequently, besides the loss of a paycheque, unemployment can bring with it the abandonment of ambition and purpose, the destruction of self worth and accomplishment, the loss of social participation and contribution and the constriction of one's self and family image. Work is therefore the critical link between the family and the larger system. While we may be spending a lot of effort in strengthening family life, we have often failed to appreciate the connection between occupational status, job satisfaction and family stability. The evidence is now quite convincing that decent employment opportunities and adequate incomes are necessary preconditions for achieving family stability.

Not surprisingly the ability to cope with the psychological stress of joblessness will vary from one individual, or one family, to another. However, generally speaking the more prolonged the period of unemployment the more damaging are the effects on the well being of all concerned. It has also been demonstrated that the degree of stress experienced by a family where the male breadwinner is looking for work will depend very much upon the particular stage of the family cycle that they happen to be in. For

example, a young family is much more likely to be less stable economically and perhaps more fragile in terms of relationships and as a result the stress brought on by a prolonged period of unemployment can lead to the total collapse of a once stable marriage. However, the most critical mediating factor in coping with unemployment is the extent to which an unemployed person's need for affection, esteem and approval are met through a social support network of family and friends.

It is also evident that for some families, at least in the short term being without work can lead to an enrichment of their lives, with increasing time together, additional opportunities to follow up particular interests and improved cohesion as they rally together to respond to the stresses and strains of unemployment. However, for the majority of families, the loss of a job brings with it severe economic and psychological tensions which will inevitably threaten the stability and well being of the family and its members.

So what then are these tensions that can destroy a family? A basic assumption is that families are responsible for supporting themselves through work, in order to enable them to purchase necessary goods and services. Unemployment disrupts this important economic function, particularly for families headed by a single parent or those for whom unemployment is a frequent visitor. The loss of a stable and sufficient income leaves families to suspend or give up such family goals as home ownership, higher education for children or retirement plans. As well, families by necessity must reduce their expenditures on food, gasoline, entertainment, recreation and such necessities as dental care.

As well, the symbol of the male breadwinner and family provider remains strongly entrenched despite the major changes in sex roles that have occurred in recent years. Unemployment for a male breadwinner requires a change in role and often a critical adjustment in power relationships, authority and self image. Where the traditional views on role expectations remain strong, the loss of work can inevitably lead to strains in the marital relationship. However, research suggests that unemployment tends to reinforce the closeness or the distance that exists in a relationship before the loss of work. For those relationships that are already fragile, anxiety over finances, the loss of self esteem, the altering of family roles can begin the slide down the slippery slope to marital dissolution. Although the research evidence is rather contradictory, there is growing concern that extended periods of unemployment tend to increase the probability of divorce. In a recent study of marital complaints cited by women as reasons for their divorce, employment problems, including loss of employment, ranked in the top third of all reasons offered for marital breakdown. It is also suggested that the stresses brought on by unemployment rather than leading to the breakdown of a marriage may instead be internalized, with the result that violent behavior between family members becomes a more likely occurrence. The frustration and anger brought on by unemployment, the reorganization of family roles and status and the tension generated by increasing parent-child contact has also been shown to be linked to an increasing risk of child abuse. As a recent report from the United States commented:



“Children become the special victims of their parent’s unemployment. Serious decline in school performance, increase in child abuse and domestic violence and a worsening of parent–child relationship are all real testimony to the costs paid by unemployed families.”

As rejection letter follows rejection letter the hope becomes weaker, a sense of futility sets in and a disequilibrium appears in the family relationship. The management of the family’s financial resources becomes more problematic and every expenditure becomes a major decision and a potential source of conflict. The wife begins to look for work which fosters feelings of inadequacy in the husband because he senses that he has failed to fulfill his central duty in life – to be the family provider. A husband’s sense of demoralization may be increased if his wife manages to find a job, and new prestige, and soon he begins to project his problems onto his children and his wife. If none of the family members are working again within the next few months, domestic conflict can be intensified, with pressure from creditors, the loss of friends and a growing sense of personal failure. With the right intervention and consistent support from family members there can be a readjustment within a family and the gradual acceptance of new standards. Without this adjustment physical and mental health problems begin to appear: tension, sleeplessness, increased alcohol use, depression and irritability.

It’s here that frequently the human service worker – a doctor, a school counsellor, a psychologist, a social worker, a volunteer is brought face to face with the stark reality of unemployment. It is the middle aged man who visits your office complaining of being irritable and depressed. After initial discussion he mentions that he hopes the service you are providing is free because he is having difficulty stretching his money to pay all of his bills. It then emerges that he was laid off from his job almost nine months ago, he’s had to sell his car and now his house is on the market. He begins to talk about what a failure he’s been in life, how he’s never worked up to his expectations or those of his family. He expresses shame and anger because he feels that at this point in his life he should be able to provide an adequate living for them. In describing his life he tells how he doesn’t seem able to perform the home chores that he previously took responsibility for, he mentions that he spends most of his time watching television, eating and reading the newspaper. Oh yes, he’s been applying for jobs but with so many rejection letters he’s not sure it’s worth it to apply for any more. No, he hasn’t been back to see the personnel department of his previous employer. In fact he hasn’t seen any of his former co-workers for three or four months because he doesn’t go out much. As he talks it becomes apparent that his unemployment crisis has now become a family crisis.

What does unemployment mean to the other family members? At the beginning it meant that the woman’s routine was completely thrown off. She didn’t mind this to begin with because it was a bit like a holiday – they were spending more time together. She fully expected he would be back to work in a few weeks and in the mean time some of those jobs around the house were getting done. As the weeks rolled into months her pleasure at having him around the house has diminished; money

is now scarce, they are irritable with each other. She hasn’t followed her own routine for some months, she misses having time to herself during the day and resents him for questioning her about her day time activities. He seems to think he knows how to run the house better than she does – but he isn’t willing to share the work load. Now, instead of enjoying being together more they are fighting with each other during the day.

She will have to go back to work, even though she hasn’t had a job in over 15 years and the part-time job she will be able to get will hardly be enough to survive on once his UIC runs out. Not that she really minds having to go out to work. It is just that she will have to work hard both outside and inside the home, while he sinks further and further into a depression.

Of course, all of this tension and conflict has begun to affect the children. The teenage daughter was used to keeping up with the latest styles, buying make-up and having money to go out with her friends. She was looking forward to getting her driver’s license so that she could go into town to visit her friends, without her parents. Now she isn’t allowed to buy new clothes or cosmetics, and the family car has been sold. And if that wasn’t bad enough they are always nagging her and yelling at her. It has reached the point where she doesn’t want to go home after school. She has started to stay in town after school. One of the older boys who has a car drives her home just in time for dinner. Instead of avoiding conflict, this seems to be aggravating it.

The 11 year old boy is really mad at his parents. He lives, breathes and dreams hockey. His social life in the winter is all centered around being on the hockey team. He can’t believe he won’t be allowed to play on the team this year. He doesn’t know what he has done wrong that his parents are punishing him this way. His weekends are boring and he has started to hang out with a rougher crowd. Last weekend the police brought him home. He had been caught vandalizing the community centre.

The family which used to be close, which used to enjoy life, which used to participate in the community, is now characterized by conflict, stress, isolation and poverty.

## THE MEASUREMENT OF POVERTY

Fundamental to our understanding of poverty in any community, is the method we choose to measure it. As is certainly true of other aspects of our welfare policy, how we decide to measure poverty will be heavily influenced by what we as a society think of the poor and what we believe are our obligations to assist them. The two basic approaches for determining poverty are an absolute measure – that attempts to establish an objective absolute minimum that any household requires for food, clothing and shelter – and a relative measure, where poverty is defined by looking at the standard of living enjoyed by others in the community. The most widely used poverty lines in Canada are those produced by Statistics Canada. In attempting to establish a relative measure of poverty, Statistics Canada discovered that Canadian families spent an average 38.5% of their income on food, clothing and shelter. Since it was apparent that poorer families spend proportionately more of their income on these three basic necessities, a low income cut off was established at 20

percentage points above the average. This effectively has meant that the bottom 20% of those on the income ladder are generally below the low income cutoffs. In order to make their poverty lines even more relative, Statistics Canada takes into account the size of the family and the place of residence. This series of poverty lines is updated each year according to the change in the cost of living. The 1989 low income figures for Edmonton families are shown below.

### Edmonton's Low Income Lines for 1989

Family Size:	Gross income:
1	12,037
2	15,881
3	21,245
4	24,481
5	28,526
6	31,157
7 or more	34,294

It should also be noted that the income referred to is gross, rather than after tax, income and it includes all wages and salaries, investment income, as well as transfer payments such as family allowance, old age security and pensions.

Taxpayers who hear the current poverty lines are frequently given to complaining about the generosity of the Statistics Canada low income figures. Surely a family of four can live quite comfortably on \$24,481 a year, is the cry! However, in 1988, a Gallop poll asked Canadians what they considered to be "the least amount of money a family of four – husband, wife and two children needs each week to get along". The average amount was \$452 a week. By way of comparison, the average weekly poverty level for a family of four in 1988 was \$399. On an annual basis, the average poverty line income was almost \$3000 below the Gallup average minimum income identified by Canadians.

Besides questions of generosity and adequacy, there are other important concerns about establishing a low income measure for poverty. We must also appreciate when we set our demarcation line that poverty also has a depth dimension – that many households have incomes that are far below the poverty line. For example, it has been estimated that a quarter of all poor families earn less than half of the poverty line income, while another 27% fall between half and three quarters of a poverty line income. A further dimension of poverty that we must consider is the length of the poverty experience. We know from recent research on unemployment that it is the long grinding periods of low income living that bring with it the most damaging aspects of poverty.

The Statistics Canada low income lines are therefore at best a rough guide that allows us to measure the number of poor and any changes in the numbers that may have occurred over time. As well these poverty lines are used by welfare administrators as a relative guide for establishing benefits levels and by welfare advocates to demonstrate how inappropriate the established benefits levels are! What is particularly important in establishing a measure of poverty is that it must be based on the bed rock of

community standards – what a family requires to allow it to be full participating members of a community. It must never be linked to mere physical survival. In the words of Peter Townsend, one of Britain's poverty experts:

"Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resources to obtain the type of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions which are customary, or at least widely encouraged or approved, in the societies to which they belong."

The setting of these community standards should ideally never be left in the hand of the so called experts but instead should be determined by the community members themselves. By way of illustration a recent study in Britain attempted to find what degree of community consensus existed with respect to various indicators that would constitute a minimum standard of living and participation. The study showed that two thirds of those surveyed agreed on eighteen indicators that were considered to be necessities. These community-based indicators included such things as:

- a damp free house
- bed for everyone in the house
- a warm waterproof coat
- three meals a day for children
- special celebrations, such as Christmas
- a hobby or leisure activity
- presents for family members once a year

Should not we, as a community, be working to establish a list of basic necessities and determining whether our social allowance payments are sufficient to cover them?

Of course we should also appreciate that our obsessive concern with the subtleties of definition and measurement are of little interest to those who are, in fact, poor. For them, living with a low income is just one aspect of the poverty package. It is not just the level of income that is important but the security and the source of that income and the expectation for improvement in one's economic circumstances that are so critical to economic well-being. Interwoven then with the poverty of income is the poverty of spirit: the social and psychological damage that results when the struggles of daily existence seem almost too much to bear, and the poverty of power, where full citizenship and freedom of choice are automatically denied.

People with persistently low incomes do not simply live scaled down versions of middle class life. They are in fact required to live markedly different lives. The paradox is that the poorer a family the more they are likely to be misunderstood, rejected and excluded by the many, yet at the same time they are dependent on the many – neighbours, employers, teachers and welfare staff. Their lives become frighteningly dependent on the kindness, the good humour, the understanding, the sense of justice and the morality of others. They become dependent on a society that is prepared to intervene in their daily lives, often without their invitation or their consent. Is it any wonder that with this state of fragile precariousness, this feeling of exclusion from ever being a contributing member of a community that the very poor often appear to adopt for themselves the very image that society

has of them?

## OUR POVERTY PROFILE

In 1987 three and a half million Canadians – one in seven – were living on a low income. This number included 777,000 families, one million single people and close to a million kids. Despite these high numbers the country's poverty profile has shown gradual improvement since the peak of 1984 when over four million Canadians were living below the poverty line.

Here in Alberta the same gradual improvement is also evident: from a 1984 level of just over 100,000 poor families to a present level of 66,000. Living in these poor Albertan families are 94,000 children. Of this number 34,000 live in a single parent family headed by a woman, giving the startling poverty rate of 51% for families of this kind. By contrast Alberta's children living in two parent families are five times less likely to be living in poverty than their single parent counterparts.

It is also worth noting that a family led by someone who did not get to high school is four times more likely to be poor as one headed by a university graduate. As well, contrary to popular belief, most poor families are headed by men and women who work. In 1986 56% of low income families were headed by a person in the labour force. However, families whose head works part-time runs a five times greater risk of poverty as families led by full time workers, while families whose head was out of work in the previous year were twice as likely to be poor as those in which no member was unemployed. Occupationally it has been shown that families that are headed by workers in service industries, a heavy employer of women, have the highest risk of being poor at 20%.

When we focus our attention on our own city we quickly discover that many of these features of poverty among families and children are much in evidence. While 14% of Edmonton's families are living below the poverty line, half of our single mother headed families are in this situation. It is estimated that almost a quarter of Edmonton's children under the age of 18 (22.8%), or 41,000 are presently living within low income families. (See attached map)

When we examine Edmonton by community we find that low income families tend to be concentrated predominantly in the city's north east, with other disturbing pockets in the west end and in Millwoods. In order to take a closer look at the characteristics of our communities that have an above average number of low income families the following table examines the large concentration in Edmonton's northeast and contrasts it with Edmonton as a whole.

## Edmonton's Concentration of Low Income Families

	<u>Low Income Communities<sup>1</sup></u>	<u>Edmonton</u>
<i>Incidence of Low Income</i>		
Families	30%	14%
Singles	50%	37%
<i>Employment</i>		
Full-time males	44%	57%
Part-time males	56%	43%
Unemployed males	14%	9%
Full-time females	42%	42%
Part-time females	58%	58%
Unemployed females	8%	6%
<i>Education</i>		
< Grade 9	22%	10%
< Grade 13	31%	29%
Incomplete University	8%	10%
Complete University	5%	12%
<i>Marital Status</i>		
Singles	30%	22%
Married	41%	48%
Widows	6%	4%
Divorcees	6%	4%
<i>Families</i>		
Two parents	81%	87%
Lone male parents	4%	2%
Lone female parents	17%	13%
Children < 6 years old	30%	29%
Children 6-14 years old	30%	37%
<i>Housing</i>		
Owned	35%	57%
Rented	65%	43%

<sup>1</sup> Includes the communities of McCauley/Boyle Street, Central McDougall, Queen Mary Park, Spruce Avenue, Norwood, Parkdale, Northlands, Delton, Eastwood, Alberta Avenue, Westwood, Sherbrook, Balwin, Delwood and Kennedale.

The table shows that almost a third of the families and half of all single people are living below the poverty line, that unemployment is much more prevalent and that the number of single-parent families is higher than the city average.

When we focus even further on the poorest of our communities we find that Boyle Street and McCauley present the most disturbing picture: the lowest median income in the city, the highest male unemployment, the lowest level of education, and the highest number of female headed single-parent families.

Highest Poverty Community: Boyle Street/McCauley

	<u>Boyle Street McCauley</u>	<u>Edmonton</u>
<i>Employment</i>		
Lowest median income	\$10,367	\$32,440
Lowest full-time male income	\$15,560	\$33,026
Lowest part-time male income	\$6,651	\$13,733
Lowest part-time female income	\$5,754	\$8,563
Highest male unemployment	19%	9%
<i>Education</i>		
Lowest education < Grade 9	40%	10%
<i>Marital Status</i>		
Highest % of singles	43%	22%
Lowest % of married	27%	48%
Greatest % divorcees	10%	4%
Greatest % female lone parents	20%	13%
<i>Housing</i>		
Greatest % of apartment dwellings	44%	7%

### TAKING ACTION

How have we responded to this human tragedy that now confronts us? What should we be able to expect from our human service workers?

It is surely a sad and bitter irony that we have for all too long remained silent about the impact of poverty when its cruel outcomes can be so vividly seen in the children and families who seek help at our doors. We must be prepared to use the evidence we have before us to demand that greater public attention be focussed on the appalling human costs of poverty. We must speak out about the mounting evidence of financial, family and health problems that will inevitably follow a prolonged period of poverty. We must be prepared to educate ourselves about the causes of poverty and the political and economic attitudes and actions that allow such a human tragedy to occur. We must become knowledgeable about the policy alternatives that are available to us as a caring humane society, and be willing to demand of our decision makers that greater recognition be given to the social consequences of our economic policies.

Above all then, we must be prepared to forego the conventional, the respectable and the expedient, and in its place be prepared to accept a role that is still at the very heart of human services. We must accept the challenge of advocacy - to work hard for

improvements in the lives of individual families while at the same time be willing to use our positions in the community to press for broader social changes. If we are all to do our part in mounting the necessary community response to this most tragic of human conditions we must all be prepared to become "partisans for the poor."

Thank you for your attention and for the opportunity to be with you on this occasion.

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[Presented to the *Workshop on Poverty and the Schools*, May 12, 1989 at the Centre for Education, Edmonton, AB]

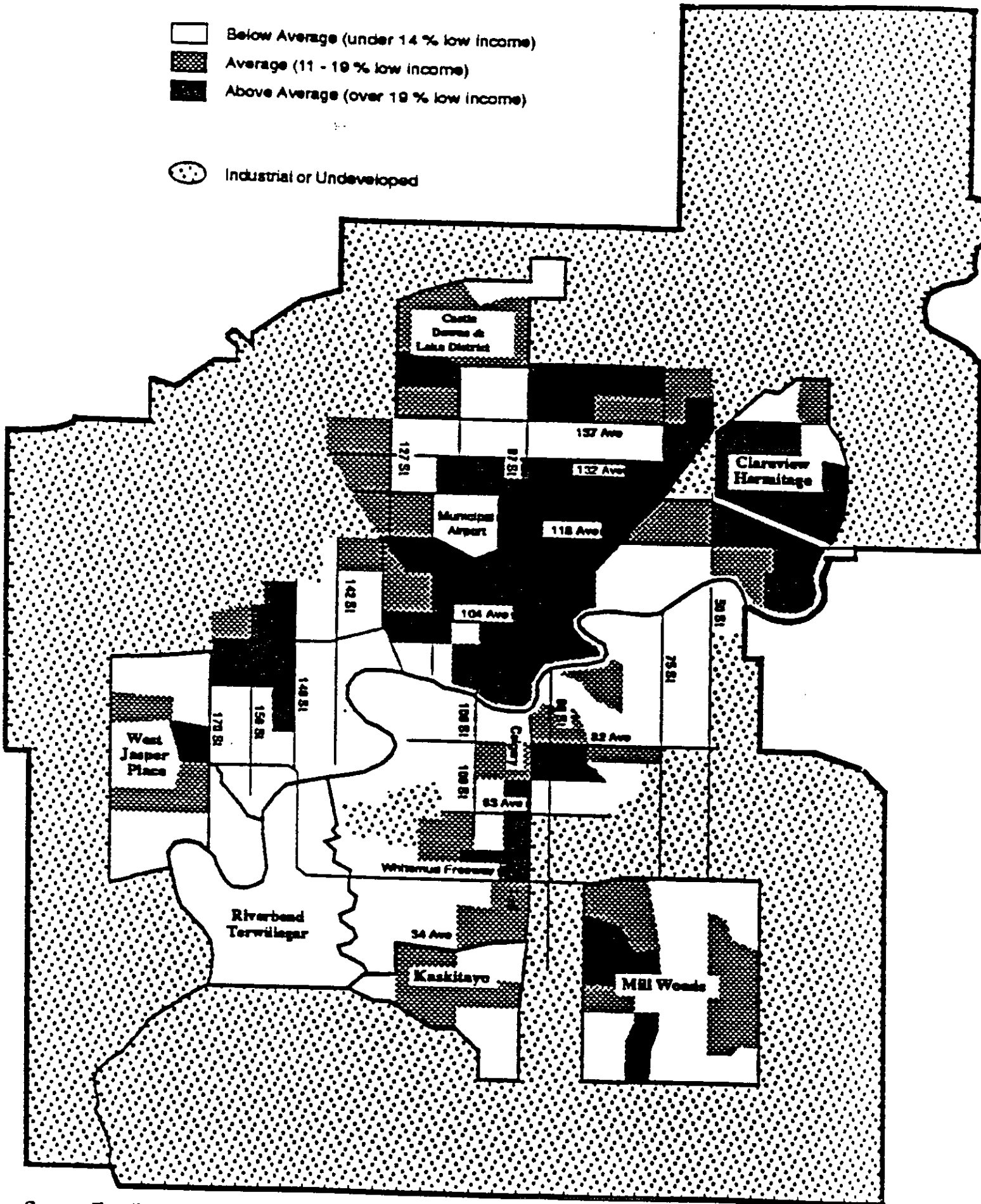
*For more information about the contents of this paper, or to comment on the issues raised, contact the author:*

Peter Faid, Executive Director  
Edmonton Social Planning Council  
#41, 9912 - 106 Street  
Edmonton, Alberta T5K 1C5  
(403) 423-2031

For more information about the *Workshop on Poverty and the Schools*, contact:  
Martin Garber-Conrad, Workshop Convenor  
(403) 424-7543

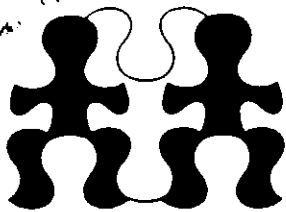
# Incidence of Low Family Income in Edmonton (1986)

-  Below Average (under 14 % low income)
-  Average (11 - 19 % low income)
-  Above Average (over 19 % low income)
-  Industrial or Undeveloped



Source: Family and Community Services and Statistics Canada, Edmonton Profile (Part 2).





Canadian Council  
on Children  
and Youth

Le Conseil canadien  
de l'enfance et  
de la jeunesse

**POOR NOW, POOR LATER  
THE EFFECTS OF POVERTY ON CHILD DEVELOPMENT**

**A Brief to the National Health and Welfare Standing Committee**

**Presented by**

**Landon Pearson, President  
Brian Ward, Executive Director**

**Written by**

**Michelle Clarke, Researcher**

**of**

**Canadian Council on Children and Youth  
2211 Riverside Drive, Suite 14  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1H 7X5  
(613) 738-0200**

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## Introduction

The Canadian Council on Children and Youth is a national voluntary organization with a mandate to identify and research issues affecting children and youth and advocate on their behalf with the various levels of government, the general public and other members of the voluntary sector.

The incidence of poverty in this country and its damaging effects on Canadian children are issues of great concern to the Council. It is our contention that child poverty leads to unnecessary and expensive limitations on human potential and productivity. We are convinced that a system of preventive social policy which recognizes the implications of recent child development research could do much to alleviate the waste and expense of poverty.

The Council would like to congratulate the Committee for its decision to examine this subject and thank it for this opportunity to speak. Committee members, as well as all party research offices, have been provided with copies of the Council's position paper, entitled "Wasting our Future: The Effects of Poverty on Child Development". We will not use this forum to detail all the research outlined in that document. Rather, we would like to present a shorter version of our research findings, our ideas concerning Canadian social policy and our recommendations for action by the Committee.

## The Numbers

There are many poor children in Canada. At least 1.1 million children were living in families with incomes below Statistics Canada's low-income cut-off line in 1985. Statistics Canada says that this represents a 15% increase in the number of low-income children between 1981 and 1985.<sup>1</sup> Some groups maintain that the figures are even greater than that.

The Council acknowledges that research is now pointing to an underground economy which augments some incomes and that certain young families move out of poverty after a couple of years. However, in our opinion, this does not lessen the gravity of the situation. There are still a large number of children who need support. One indication that all is not well for Canadian children is the number of young people under the care of the welfare system itself (53,000 in 1984).<sup>2</sup> The inability to provide for the children financially is often one of the factors which leads to the breakdown of these families.

## The Effects

In "Wasting our Future", the Council looked at the effects of poverty on children's health and educational abilities. The following are just some of the facts outlined in that document.

-- According to the Canadian Medical Association, compared to national averages, infant mortality rates among poor children are twice as high, deaths from infectious diseases are 2.5 times more common and accidental deaths are twice as common.<sup>3</sup>

-- Low birth weight is the single most important cause of infant mortality, especially in the neonatal period (0-28 days). The Ontario Medical Association says that incidence of low birth weight is inversely related to the social class of the mother. That is, the lower the income level, the higher the incidence of low birth weight.<sup>4</sup>

-- Dr. David Offord et al, in an Ontario study, found that welfare children, compared to their non-welfare peers, have over twice the rates of psychiatric disorder, poor school performance and smoking behaviour and greater than 1.5 times the frequency of chronic health problems.<sup>5</sup>

-- Poorer children tend to repeat their grades more often and have more behavioural problems.<sup>6</sup>

-- According to one survey done in the Toronto area, only 46% of children of parents categorized as having working class jobs were in the advanced high school level that allows them to enter university, as compared to 88% of children with middle-class backgrounds.<sup>7</sup>

-- Researchers are now pointing to the links between poverty and the physical abuse and neglect of children. The stresses placed on the families by unemployment and/or low income may lead to situations in which parents, unable to deal with their anger, frustration and despair, abuse or neglect their children.<sup>8</sup>

## The Role of Social Policy

Increasingly, child development research is pointing to the fact that impoverishment damages physical and mental health, learning, socializing and working skills and other abilities. One of the consequences of this, as the American Committee for Economic Development has recently reported, is that people are unable to meet their social, educational and employment potentials.<sup>9</sup> In many cases, poor people do not enjoy healthy and productive lives and are therefore unable to make full contributions to society. Instead, money is spent on expensive curative programs for them.

The Council's argument is that, to a large extent, this can be avoided. We feel that a system of preventive social policy, which recognizes both child development research and the links between all policy fields, could play a major role in ameliorating the effects of poverty. This preventive approach would include such things as prenatal and postnatal health care, affordable housing programs, parent support and education services and early childhood education and support programs. These, linked with income support programs, would help encourage and nurture children from the moment of birth and better prepare them to take their places as creative, contributing members of Canadian society. These programs would not only help the children of families trapped in the poverty cycle but would also assist those young, cash-poor families who may eventually move into the middle class but who often have problems supporting their children in the early years.

Policy-makers will also recognize, however, that action in one policy field is more effective when matched by programs in other fields. One of the most exciting possibilities facing Canadians today is the new child care policy. This policy could be used to implement a broad-based, preventive approach to child care and development. It could, for example, incorporate a range of physical and mental health programs, parent support services and other development-based programs. It could be part of a new philosophy of linking many aspects of a child's life, instead of compartmentalizing them into different fields. We must support children today, in all respects, if we want them to support us tomorrow.

### Successes

There has been much evidence that programs such as we are suggesting work. For example, a prenatal program in France has led to a significant reduction in preterm births and low birth weights. This not only allows French children to get off to healthier starts but it takes some of the burden off the health care system, as preterm births and low birth weight are the major indicators of mental retardation, neurologic handicaps and hearing and visual problems.<sup>10</sup>

The Perry Preschool program in the United States is one good example of the benefits of early childhood education. This project studied 123 black youths, from families of low socio-economic status, who were at risk of failing in school. At ages three and four, the children were randomly divided into an experimental group that received a high quality preschool program and a control group that received no preschool program. The results are extremely encouraging. The rates of employment and participation in college and vocational training were nearly double for those with preschool, the rate of teenage pregnancy, (including live births) and the percentage of years spent in

special education courses were slightly over half of what they were for those who did not attend. Preschool participation led to a reduction rate of 20 percentage points in the detention and arrest rate and nearly that much in the high school drop-out rate.<sup>11</sup>

### Savings

One of the arguments constantly used against any suggestion of expanding social programs is the cost. However, research shows that the kind of preventive programs the Council is advocating actually save money because they cut down on the need for expensive curative programs.

The New York Times recently offered the following facts, drawn from research done by the House Select Committee on Children, Youth and Families:

-- a \$1 investment in prenatal care saves \$3.38 in the cost of care for low birth weight infants.

-- \$1 spent on childhood immunization saves \$10 in later medical costs.

-- \$1 invested in quality preschool education can save \$4.75 in later social costs.<sup>12</sup>

### Committee Action

It is clear to the Council, and to many other organizations working in this field, that the issue of child poverty should be given a lengthy examination. The educational, health, employment and social ramifications are complex and important enough to justify serious attention. As well, the situation in the various regions of the country should be explored. There are many people across the country, working with the poor, who are ready to add much useful information and experience to this examination. The Council knows many researchers in the field of child development, both here and in the United States, who would also make contributions. These people should be heard if the Committee is seriously attempting to examine and improve social policy for Canada's poor.

We know that poverty limits the development of children across the country and that there are important national and provincial programs that could address this problem. This is, therefore, a national issue and one that is a legitimate concern for the Parliament of Canada and this Committee. Perhaps the most significant thing the Committee could do in this regard is to provide a public forum that permits Canadians to confront and deal with the problem. This objective would best be realized through a well-planned, well-publicized series of hearings which

would allow the voices of the poor, and those who work for them, to be heard. By initiating a comprehensive, public examination of child poverty, the Committee could make the effects of poverty on our children apparent, formulate a clear picture of the situation across the country and help bring forward the necessary solutions.

#### The Council's Recommendations

It is with these goals in mind that the Council recommends:

-- that the Committee write a report on the situation of poor children in Canada, building on such valuable but now dated reports as Poor Kids and In the Best Interests of the Child, both by the National Council of Welfare.

-- that this report be based on a series of public, cross-country hearings and private investigations;

-- that a modest national forum be held to help frame the report;

-- that the process surrounding the Obstacles Report act as a model for the Committee.

#### Conclusion

It is the Council's hope that the Standing Committee will decide to make the issue of child poverty a priority in the coming months. Should this be the case, the fullest co-operation of the Council and its network will be placed at the Committee's disposal, to the degree that resources allow. We are convinced not only of the gravity of this situation but of the fact that solutions exist. We hope that the Committee will use its resources to bring those solutions to the forefront.

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# For Children: A Fair Chance

## *Stop Wasting Lives, and Money*

*New York Times*

*Sunday, September 6, 1987*

On Tuesday, a committee of business executives will publish a finding that could, over the next 16 years, change urban America. After decades of disappointment with anti-poverty programs, society is discovering that it knows how to do something that works:

*Concentrate on helping poor children in their earliest months and years of life.*

The business leaders, who joined with educators on a Committee for Economic Development research panel, are not usually aroused by issues like prenatal health or enriched pre-school education. But now they are; something's stirring in the political underbrush.

With presidential candidates already attracted to children's issues, this could be the season to seize the moment.

### *Save Three Children*

Social welfare strategies have rolled in like waves. First it was housing, then services like social workers and clinics, then income strategies. None turned out to conquer poverty. Early childhood intervention won't do that, either. But instinct and social science affirm its powerful promise.

Consider the famous Perry Preschool Project in Ypsilanti, Mich. In the early 1960's, it began offering preschool to 3-year-olds from poor homes and with below-average I.Q.'s.

In a rare long-term study, researchers followed 123 children until their 19th birthdays. They did remarkably well. They graduated from high school and went on to jobs or more education at twice the rate of children without the additional early schooling. They also had fewer arrests, detentions and teen-age pregnancies.

A year or two of early schooling so enhanced the children's confidence and sense of control that, as the researchers reported, their "better performance is visible to everyone."

All the more reason not to wait until a child is 3 or 4 years old. Why not start with prenatal care for

frightened mothers, often children themselves? Why not provide classes in basic skills for fathers? An array of such services could save three children at once: The teen-age mother, her baby and the child she is persuaded to defer at least until she has finished school and gained both maturity and job skills.

### *Spend Where It Counts*

Americans are generous about social welfare when they know it works, as with Head Start or food stamps. But they have learned to feel for their wallets when experts talk grandly about new schemes. Why should they react differently to early childhood intervention? Because it is known to work.

Strong evidence comes from the Perry Project. It cost \$4,818 per child in 1981 dollars. But Ypsilanti recovered \$3,100 almost immediately; the preschoolers required less remedial education and services. Other dividends have mounted as the years pass.

Another kind of arithmetic shows that early childhood intervention pays off. There were 240,000 low birthweight babies born in 1984. Hospital costs during the newborn period averaged \$20,000. Complete prenatal and maternity care would have averaged about \$3,500 — and probably would have produced healthier babies.

Experimental programs are already under way in several cities. One of the most ambitious is the Beethoven Project in Chicago's Robert Taylor Homes, the largest public housing project in the world. The program provides prenatal care and parenting education for expectant mothers, and eventually will offer developmental programs for infants and toddlers as well.

The idea is to deliver to the nearby Beethoven Elementary School in 1992 a class of kindergarten boys and girls physically, mentally, emotionally ready for school. If the experiment proves out, it will vindicate the conviction of the Committee for Economic Development panel that "improving the prospects for disadvantaged children is not an expense but an excellent investment."

(over)

## From Abortion to Consensus

Attitudes about children have changed dramatically in the 15 years since then-President Nixon denounced then-Senator Mondale's developmental day care bill as something like Godless communism. Now, it's possible to identify and energize a potential coalition on behalf of early childhood intervention.

The issue engages basic and volatile issues like the sanctity of the family and parents' right to raise their children by their own best lights. Now, black churches have mobilized to help young women deal with illegitimate babies and minority parents respond to voluntary programs. Teen-age mothers need and want all the help they can get.

People on both sides of the abortion debate who care about family values join comfortably to promote early childhood measures. For instance, Representative Henry Hyde, the Illinois Republican who is a leader of the pro-life movement, sponsors legislation to give Federal health insurance to poor pregnant women.

Several Presidential hopefuls press for early childhood measures; New York City is already developing a program for school at 4. In Congress, the relevant Senate and House committees will conduct a rare joint hearing this week to consider early childhood legislation. Such a consensus is promising. To help children when help does the most good is an idea any citizen can appreciate. Likewise, the consequences of not helping children who lack a fair chance are also obvious.

Imagine a baby girl born into inner-city poverty today, to a teen-age mother. With an early childhood program, she'd be more likely to be born healthy; her mother could give her better care; and early schooling would enlarge her self-confidence. In 16 years, she'd probably be starting her last year in high school and have ambitions for the future. Without such a program, she's all too likely to have something else: a baby. And the heavy cycle will start again.

<b>Cost-Effective Programs</b>	
<b>WIC: Food for Women, Infants, Children</b>	
Reduces infant mortality, increases birthweight. Participation only a third of those eligible.	\$1 spent on prenatal portion can save \$3 in short-term hospital costs.
<b>Prenatal Care</b>	
Increases birthweight and reduces premature births in mothers who otherwise forgo prenatal care in the first trimester.	\$1 investment saves \$3.38 in the cost of care for low birthweight infants.
<b>Medicaid</b>	
Reduces neonatal and infant illness and abnormalities through Early Periodic Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment Services. In 1986 2.1 million were screened.	\$1 spent on comprehensive prenatal care for Medicaid recipients saves \$2 in first-year care.
<b>Childhood Immunization</b>	
Reduces rubella, mumps, measles, polio, diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis. In 1983 more than 3.4 million children were immunized under the program.	\$1 spent on childhood immunization saves \$10 in later medical costs.
<b>Preschool Education</b>	
Increases school success and employability and reduces dependence. Only 20 percent of those eligible participate in Head Start.	\$1 spent on preschool education can save \$4.75 in later social costs.
Source: House Select Committee on Children, Youth and Families	



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## Poor children more likely to die than wealthy peers, study finds

**BY SEAN FINE**  
The Globe and Mail

Poor children in urban Canada are much more likely to die than children of the wealthy, both in accidents among older children and illness among infants, new data from Statistics Canada suggest.

The unpublished study compared child mortality rates by neighborhood in Canadian cities, measuring the median income levels in each neighborhood. The information was gathered from the 1986 census.

In the poorest urban areas — those in the lowest 20 per cent of income — 90.6 children out of every 100,000, from infants to 19-year-olds, died.

In the wealthiest 20 per cent of areas, just 58.1 children per 100,000 died.

However, mortality rates

among children of the poor have dropped for some causes of death since 1971, the last time StatsCan examined the issue, preliminary findings show.

"But the difference between the income groups remains large," Russell Wilkins, who is writing the study for StatsCan, said in an interview yesterday.

For example, infant mortality figures in 1971 showed 11.11 babies per 1,000 in the wealthiest areas died, while nearly twice as many poor infants died — 21.25 per 1,000.

Now, though the gap is similar, "the absolute improvement has been greater for the poor." He would not say what the 1986 figures are by income group, since his study is not yet public.

Accidents are the leading cause of death in children older than one, with motor vehicle accidents the major type, followed by drowning and fires, according to

the Canadian Institute of Child Health.

In 1985, about 1,600 Canadian children died in accidents, of whom 933 died in motor vehicle accidents, 157 drowned and 121 died in fires, according to the Ottawa-based institute.

Why are children who live in poorer areas more likely to die in traffic accidents?

"It's not that rich people are better drivers. I think rich people get better policing, and live in environments where their kids are less likely to play in the street," said Dr. Ivan Pless, a pediatrician at Montreal Children's Hospital, who has done research on children and traffic injuries.

As well, respiratory illness, the third leading cause of death of children under five, is more common among children of low-income families, the Canadian Institute of Child Health reported recently.

