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# Planning to Eliminate Child Poverty:

Thematic overview of child  
poverty policy in Canada



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# Planning to Eliminate Child Poverty:

Thematic overview of child poverty policy in Canada<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is the 2nd of 3 commissioned by the Canadian Poverty Institute on poverty policy in Canada. The first, *The influence of policy on childhood poverty in selected Provinces in Canada* (Bailey-Lynch, 2016) can be accessed at [https://ambrose.edu/sites/ambrose.edu/files/cpi\\_influence\\_doc.pdf](https://ambrose.edu/sites/ambrose.edu/files/cpi_influence_doc.pdf). This paper complements some of that literature and vice versa, but studies some of the same policies deliberately through a four-part poverty lens.

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***“Children should be  
well born, well treated,  
well housed, well fed,  
and well taught.”***

***Maude Riley  
(1882-1962)***

## Executive Summary

This paper is the result of a provision in the Child Poverty Project agreement requiring a policy scan that will shape the study. The objective of the policy scan was to collate from the federal to the municipal level, past and current efforts to address child poverty in Canada. Research for this report commenced in March 2016 with a revised completion date of May 2016 to accommodate practical problems. Needless to say, the research in progress was used at all project team meetings, helping the project team select an emphasis for the 2 World Cafes held on May 13th and May 27th, 2016.

Addressing child poverty has been on the Canadian radar historically but 1989 is arguably the resolution year in terms of concerted efforts to prevent a paradox of child poverty in this country. Irrespective of 1989, this scan examined child poverty policies from the Federal level dating back to the 1940s, gradually turning attention to contemporary times at the municipal level. Specifically, provincial policies from Newfoundland and Labrador, Ontario and Alberta were examined, finishing up with child poverty reduction efforts of the municipality of Calgary, where the research is anchored. The scan does not belabour the debates for policies adopted but instead reports them as found.

To frame this policy scan, four dimensions of poverty – monetary, social exclusion, participation and capabilities – are employed. The purpose of these distinctions is to provide background for linking the poverty literature to Canadian child poverty policy. The second reason is to make it easier to spot policy gaps. Briefly explained, monetary poverty deals directly with the inadequacy of financial resources for basic living. Social exclusion poverty refers to the marginalisation a person experiences as a result of monetary poverty or circumstances not directly emanating from the lack of money but which can make a person's life poor nonetheless. Participatory poverty describes poverty in the words of poor people, and not as interpreted by a researcher. The significance of this dimension of poverty is the contention that poor people are not quick to prioritise money when they describe what it means to be poor.

The final organising concept used is the capabilities view of poverty, which deals with the inability of a person to exploit their *capabilities and functionings* to live a life of

freedom, dignity and attainment. In line with the Canadian Poverty Institute's view of poverty from material, social and spiritual dimensions, and also that poverty is not just a deprivation concept but a social injustice concept, it is important to capture these interconnected views of poverty. The idea is to show that although monetary interventions to poverty are a step in the right direction, the depth of the intervention makes a difference in whether or not a dent is made in other experiences of poverty. In this paper, policies are not categorised under these themes; instead glaring or implied attention is drawn to their occurrence.

As Senior Researcher on this project, I met with experts to fashion a direction for this paper and the unfolding research. All meetings were informative and thought-provoking, helping a fuller development of scattered ideas into reasoned themes. So thank you Dr. Jake Kuiken, Ms. Martha Fanjoy and Ms. Susan Brooke, and also to the project Community Advisory Committee: Ms. Joan Farkas, Ms. Sarelle Azuelos, Ms. Heather Schmidt, and Ms. Janet Eremenko for passing along tips.

One outcome of the Federal policy scan is that 1989 is *not* when Canadians began to worry about child poverty. Dating only to the post WW II era, successive governments had put in place measures to tackle child poverty. Corollary to this, Federal level child poverty policy had a decided monetary quality, although the policies have changed through time from a *social equality* bent – where all children got transfers payments through their family irrespective of their family's socio-financial circumstances, to a *social justice* approach, where monetary aid for children was inversely related to the family's income.

Federally, (and generally) across Canada, child poverty is constructed through the financial circumstances of a child's parents, revealing the monetary bias in the conceptualization of child poverty. Interestingly, child poverty is also framed as a moral imperative from the perspective of the New Democrats and also as a middle class Canadian issue as seen by the Federal Liberals. Significantly, policy interventions by governments hint at Capabilities sensitivities easily picked up by near constant use of "potential" to justify tax breaks for Canadian families. It however appears that the assistance provided to families have not been enough to deal a blow to child poverty in Canada as child poverty remains high at between 13%-15%. The current government has introduced a Child Tax Benefit to help low income families with benefits of up



to \$5400 per child. Whether this will make a difference in the participatory, capabilities and exclusion experiences of poverty could be the subject of an in-depth study.

On the provincial level, Newfoundland and Labrador has a province-wide Poverty Reduction Strategy but not a child poverty reduction strategy. Policies instituted that could affect children living in poverty were thus extracted from the main poverty reduction strategy. Although there is a strong monetary bent to the strategy, there is an acute awareness of Social Exclusion poverty-it is specifically identified. No concrete policies to address the social exclusion of children from the standpoint of poverty are mentioned but lack of participation in school, in health care and in one's community are recognised as important aspects of social exclusion. The capabilities aspects of poverty policy involving children are present in the prevention emphasis where the idea is to pre-empt child poverty so that children can develop to their full potential. There is an infant food security policy, a Home Visiting Program to boost early childhood development, an effort to increase funding to NGOs to improve childhood literacy and a program for struggling youth to transition from poverty into self-sufficiency. Overall, although Newfoundland still treats child poverty as a consequence of parental poverty, it is cognisant of all aspects of poverty except the participatory one.

Ontario has a robust Poverty Reduction Strategy themed "Realising our Potential". Admittedly, its policies for children are deduced from this document, but its focus on children in 3 chapters of the PRS is noteworthy. Ontario's PRS includes a Student Nutrition Program to fight food insecurity; the problem, albeit, is that readers do not get a sense of how food insecure children are identified for assistance. The PRS tackles the social components of food insecurity by allowing aboriginal communities to run their food program. There are interventions for children's mental health through the *Open Hearts, Open Minds* program, and capabilities orientated education emphasizing narrowing achievement gaps between rich and poor children. Besides these, the province has revamped its child care program backed by the Child Care Modernization Act, hinting again at capabilities priorities. It supports PLASP, an NGO affiliated with cities and charity organisations providing government subsidised care for children 0-12 years of age.

Alberta does not have a poverty reduction strategy; neither does it have a child focussed strategy, which puts Newfoundland and Labrador and Ontario ahead of the curve. Alberta took steps to develop a child poverty strategy stemming from its Social Policy Framework launched in 2013. Founded on the Children First Act and themed around "raising tomorrow", Alberta held consultations toward the development of a Children's Charter, a child poverty eradication strategy and an Early Childhood Development strategy. The details of these policy proposals, ranging from de-stigmatizing poverty to hearing children's voices could well have been taken from the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is uncertain whether the change in government would elicit a change in focus but the new government has pledged to develop a child poverty reduction strategy. Policy-wise, the new government has expanded the eligibility for the Family Tax Credit and introduced the Alberta Working Family Supplement.

Calgary has a Poverty Reduction Strategy, putting it ahead of the province in this regard. As may be expected at the level of government closest to the people policy-wise, the city implements the Low Income Pass for Youth and Adults at \$44 per month, subsidises recreational facilities for low income families up to 90% of fees to a maximum of \$100 per program or up to \$250 per year and offers free or low cost afterschool programs for children ages 6-16 funded by Family and Community Support Services to help children and youth stay out of trouble. In the summer months, low income children can elect to participate in age-matched, no charge activities such as Park n' Play, Stay n' Play programs geared toward children's social and emotional development and seeking to address the social exclusion and capabilities dimensions of poverty.

Poverty discourse across Canada is skewed toward monetary approaches. On the other end is the near absence of participatory discourse. There is an interest in forging capabilities and social inclusion dimensions but whether the monetary responses harnessed to do this have worked is the question. It however appears that the focus on monetary measures of child poverty is part of the problem.

## Introduction

“Poverty” lacks a universal definition, but it is always marked by some kind of deprivation. As there are thinkers about poverty, there are ideas of what it constitutes. Worldwide, monetary measures to delineate the poor from the non-poor have proliferated. In Canada generally, Low Income Cut Offs (LICOs) have been used to measure poverty rates, so have Low Income Measures (LIM) and Market Basket Measures (MBM) (Canada Social Council, Cool & Campbell, 2009, p. 6; 2012b, p. 1). A lot of energy has also been spent on how to delimit the poverty line – should it be based on gross income or on net income? Should poverty or non-poverty be tethered to income or to consumption patterns? Or should it be examined according to a person’s life course? (Echenberg, 2012b).

Although monetary approaches tracking whom to include in the ranks of the poor in Canada is dominant, monetary measures miss other aspects of poverty. Chambers, critiquing the hegemonic dependence on monetary measures of poverty pointed out in his discourse-shaping paper *Poverty and Livelihoods*, whose reality counts, that “in assessing conditions, and seeing what to do, professionals’ realities are universal, reductionist, standardized and stable. Those of economists dominate, expressed in poverty thinking concerned with income-poverty, and employment thinking concerned with jobs” (Chambers, 1995, p. 173). Through his work, Chambers articulated the participatory perspective of poverty focusing on the views of poor people, suggesting that it is flawed to have the voices of the non-poor represent what it means to be poor. To illustrate, he discussed the results of poor people’s ideas of poverty, observing that “the criterion ‘more income’ was the ninth or tenth one listed (out of a total of about 20 criteria). ‘More time at home’, ‘ability to get involved in neighbours’ joys and sorrows’ were listed earlier...” (Chambers & Conway, 1992, p. 187). This view is exemplified by a poor Calgarian who shared that “emptiness, destitute, hopelessness, helplessness, sadness, darkness, lost, no identity, no self-esteem, coldness, ashamed, no voice, no family, no grandchildren, no smiles, no privacy, no laughter, no happiness – this is what living in poverty means” (City of Calgary et al., 2012).

Another dimension of poverty, which shed light on poverty as more than the lack of money, and developed mainly to speak to poverty in affluent contexts, is best construed as an aspect of, and a contributor to poverty. Through this lens, poverty is seen as a process through which individuals or groups are wholly or partially excluded from full participation in the society in which they live (European Foundation, 1995). This is Social Exclusion poverty and is constructed as a particular rather than a general concept. Social Exclusion poverty is characterized by: *relativity* (exclusion is relative to a particular society); *agency* (people are excluded as a result of the action of an agent or agents); and *dynamics* (future prospects are relevant as well as current circumstances) (Laderchi, Saith, & Stewart, 2003). Thus understood, Social Exclusion poverty is not restricted to a person’s inability to participate in desired activities but importantly considers the actions or inactions of society and/or policymakers that elicit intended or unintended consequences; effects that are nonetheless opportunity-shaping for the lives of people living in poverty or on the brink of poverty.

Nobel laureate Sen and his colleague Nussbaum, have been instrumental in operationalising the capabilities idea of poverty, which can also be seen as a compendium of ideas on how poverty can be addressed from the individual level and up. The capabilities perspective emphasizes a ‘valued life’, noting that poverty is a “failure to achieve certain minimal or basic capabilities, where basic capabilities are “the ability to satisfy certain crucially important functionings up to certain minimally adequate levels” (Sen, 1993, p. 41; Sen, 1999). Sen argues that the relationship between capability and income is *relative so in some circumstances, relative income deprivation results in absolute capability deprivation* (Authors’ emphasis). Capabilities poverty transcends any litany of ‘cannots’ to examine the mechanisms people harness to improve their life situations-functionings. Functionings has been appropriated to various uses because of its versatility but Sen cautions against developing a “cemented list of capabilities” that are seen as finite and fixed (Sen, 2005, p. 158). Thus approached, functionings can, and should be contextually determined, looping back to Chambers’ relativity idea of social exclusion poverty.

Capabilities/functionings approaches may have been written thinking about the plight of the poor and marginalized, but it applies to all peoples' circumstances – they either have too many or too few capabilities, too many or too few functionings. It can also be linked to a persons' asset pentagon (Ashley & Carney, 1999; Farrington, Carney, Ashley, & Turton, 2004) – it is complete, empty or somewhere in-between – on many levels drawing the boundaries of inclusion, exclusion, privilege, and the risk of living in poverty. Such is the versatility and transformational power of the capabilities arguments, the Sen-Nussbaum collaboration underpinned the UN's Human Development Index (HDI).<sup>2</sup>

A full grasp of these four interrelated concepts illuminate the fact that poverty experiences do not exist in isolation. Addressed in combination, they produce social justice where lived experiences of poverty are not only addressed superficially, but at a systemic level, sometimes outside the control of individuals living in poverty. This implies that a discussion of poverty need consider the monetary manifestations as well as of the institutions and processes that increase peoples' susceptibility to poverty.

A policy is a “definite course or method of action selected from among alternatives and in light of given conditions to guide and determine present and future decisions” (Merriam Webster). This paper considers Federal to municipal level policies to address child poverty, where child poverty is one of the country's most enduring paradoxes. The next section discusses some discourses around child poverty, followed by a Federal policy scan, provincial policies from Newfoundland and Labrador, Ontario and Alberta, and finally from the municipality of Calgary. After that, the paper will be concluded.

## Child Poverty: Local and International Discourses

In Canada, much energy has been expended toward ‘eradicating’ child poverty but the *identification* of poor children has been aligned with the monetary perspective. Similarly, *definitions* of child poverty have been largely modelled after the monetary approach. In spite of initiatives to eradicate child poverty by 2000 under Campaign 2000, a policy brief on the causes of poverty in Canada omitted child poverty “on the assumption that resources are shared among family members and that children who are poor have poor parents” (Echenberg, 2012a, p. 5; see Guest, 1997). Much as this is true, the halting focus on child poverty unveils a gap in the thinking about child poverty which transcends the income status of the children's parents. Yet, the dominance of income measures of poverty is unassailable.

The OECD prescribes that children living in households where disposable income is less than 50% of the median income in their country are living in poverty, adding that, the prevalence rate of poverty is the proportion of children (0-17years) living in a household where equivalized post-tax and transfer income is less than 50% of the national median equivalized post-tax and transfer income (OECD, 2015). Canada scores a “C” on an A-D scale in child poverty prevalence rates; a rating that has remained virtually constant over the last 30 years (Conference Board of Canada, 2013). In 2013, Canada ranked 15th of 17 countries, recording a 15% prevalence rate for child poverty (Conference Board of Canada, 2013). Keeping income measures but focusing on income inequality based on the aggregation of child poverty, education and health indices (reminiscent of the capabilities-inspired HDI), UNICEF reports that Canada ranks 26 of 35 countries on the *child inequality index* and 17 of 25 on the *child wellbeing index* (UNICEF, 2016). Interestingly reflecting the participatory viewpoint of poverty, UNICEF reports that “when children reported their own sense of wellbeing” Canada ranked 24 of 29 (UNICEF, 2016, p. 3). It is little wonder that in spite of deliberate policies, Campaign 2000 reports their sadness and distress linked to “the abysmal lack of progress in reducing child poverty in Canada” (Ferns et al., 2014, p. 2).

<sup>2</sup> The cube root of a nation's Gross National Income, Education and Life expectancy indices.

Poverty in general has been at the forefront of development policy worldwide. Especially since WWII, poverty discourse has been accompanied by an interest in the collective human vision of economic prosperity. This focus helped consolidate the econo-centric bias, which is why a recent proposal to delink income and material deprivation indices from the British Poverty Act perplexed British experts. The current British Poverty Act is based on equalized *household income* and *access to essentials* (Authors' emphasis) so the proposed changes to emphasise *workless homes and educational attainment* concern experts who point out that 60% of poor children in the UK live in households where at least one adult has a job (Main, 2016). It is also interesting that proponents tether child poverty to educational attainment, prompting the question of whether a high education renders an individual immune to poverty. Bureaucrats and academics may not be privy to the education criterion but "in doing so the government is acting against the majority of expert advice it has received on the matter" (Main, 2016, p. 2).

An interesting aspect of the British debacle ties into the notion that poverty emanates from "individual and cultural" vases, and "poverty is the result of poor individual choices and behaviours" (Main, 2016). In the Canadian context, similar is argued, albeit emphasising how governments may enable poor choices by incentivising people to not work (Echenberg, 2012a; Guest, 1997), whilst others see the same view as encouraging attachment to the workforce (Government of Canada, 2006). Some Canadian poverty reduction and child poverty policies (roped in through parental poverty) are based on this view.

However, this train of thought fails to recognise that circumstances related to poverty develop intersectionally (Hancock, 2007; Saatcioglu, 2014; Walby et al., 2012) and not linearly, in which case policies to mitigate and/or eradicate child poverty should be approached intersectionally.

Another part of current discourse on poverty, covered in the British Poverty Act (until the suggested changes), concerned access to essentials, which squares with the global discourse on child poverty. UNICEF puts out a yearly report on child poverty worldwide and among developed countries. The 2012 report focussed on childhood absolute and relative poverty using the Child Deprivation Index which tracks the lack of 2 or more of 14 items<sup>3</sup> in a child's lived experience. Central to the report is the recognition that children have only one opportunity to develop in mind and body, and it is society's obligation to ensure that that development occurs (UNICEF, 2012). The proposed de-emphasis on material deprivation thus risks eroding the basis on which other pieces of poverty could be dismantled. Policies influence actions that need to be taken and are relevant to the outcomes of government processes (Laderchi et al., 2003). Wrong premises for policy can devastate futures, which is why a cross-national exploration of child poverty policy is vital to developing a definition of it.

1. <sup>3</sup> *Three meals a day*
2. *At least one meal a day with meat, chicken or fish (or a vegetarian equivalent)*
3. *Fresh fruit and vegetables every day*
4. *Books suitable for the child's age and knowledge level (not including schoolbooks)*
5. *Outdoor leisure equipment (bicycle, roller-skates, etc.)*
6. *Regular leisure activities (swimming, playing an instrument, youth organizations etc.)*
7. *Indoor games (at least one per child, inclu. educational baby toys, board and games, computer etc.)*
8. *Money to participate in school trips and events*
9. *A quiet place with enough room and light to do homework*
10. *An Internet connection*
11. *Some new clothes (i.e. not all second-hand)*
12. *Two pairs of properly fitting shoes (including at least one pair of all-weather shoes)*
13. *The opportunity, from time to time, to invite friends home to play and eat*
14. *The opportunity to celebrate special occasions (birthdays, name days, religious events, etc)*



## Changing Approaches to Child Poverty Policy at the Federal Level

Child poverty policy in Canada has shifted over time informing how governments approach rectifying the problem. It may be true that 1989 is the banner year for action on child poverty, but social assistance has deep roots in this country (Guest, 1997). This Federal policy scan is traced back several decades, to 1. Illustrate that child poverty has been of historical concern in Canada and 2. Show the stagnation around intervention, sometimes bordering on the political (Guest, 1997), although tackling child poverty need not be (UNICEF, 2012).

**a. All children are deserving:** Canada's post-WWII crack at assisting children was based on the philosophy that all Canadian children deserve the support of their nation. Family Allowance (as the policy was called) did not discriminate on the basis of income, instead payments were structured to increase with the age of children in the household<sup>4</sup> (Guest, 1997). Thus this policy was not based on social justice and was not a child poverty policy per se. Families received payments whether or not they needed assistance.

**b. Parental poverty, child poverty:** Between the end of WWII and the 1970s, the now dominant perspective linking parental poverty to child poverty emerged. The intervention implication of this reasoning was to peg child assistance to parental income, with lower income families receiving more assistance.

In the early 1970s, a senate committee, headed by David Croll was struck to research the state of Canada's welfare system and of the experience of poverty in order to make recommendations for changes. The 1971 Croll Report was instrumental in highlighting poverty as a serious social issue, specifically pointing out that poverty is a unique injustice done to children because poor children are helpless victims, whose dreams are out of reach from the outset of the lives (Croll, 1971). The Committee noted that children neglected by society "lack the education, the opportunity, and often the motivation to escape from their environment" (Croll, 1971, p.viii), which amounts to a tragedy for these children. The Committee recommended action items to begin long term changes to tackle poverty in Canada. This was the impetus for a Canadian anti-poverty

program for the 1970s simultaneously marking an important policy shift in the approach to poverty in this country. For instance, the Committee acknowledged that the environment a child is born into and the family from which they come are crucial in determining whether the child develops the skills and experiences to enter the workforce well. Recognising also that the income-level and education of the parents influence the goals and aspirations of children, the report was one of the first documents in Canada to discuss poverty in inter-generational terms. It noted the circumstances of children born into poor families, especially those born in rural or underdeveloped areas, those whose parents are unemployed and, in particular, those whose family is headed by a woman are such that a child's chances of lifting him or herself out of poverty are further reduced (Croll, 1971).

Among its recommendations, the Committee advocated for a preventative approach to service delivery that focuses on early life (pre-natal, post-natal care or early childhood) or identifiable transition points since the level of support children receive affects their adulthood (Croll, 1971). The report recorded that the best place for children to thrive is in a supportive family, albeit recognizing that parents increasingly face challenges to creating such an environment and have less support from extended family members. The report also noted that education had become a luxury for the poor, particularly when indirect costs such as clothing, lunches, and extracurricular activities were included. First Nations children, it opines, experience these difficulties at greater rates. Thus, the Committee recommended that service provision should assist parents to create an environment in which children can aspire to success

Catering to family size issues and the fact that parents on limited resources could devote more funds to each child if they had fewer children, the Committee recommended that family-counselling and family-planning programs be made more accessible to those in poverty (Croll, 1971). It also recommend the recognition of child care as a necessary resource for families, accompanied by public subsidies to ensure all Canadian families are able to access these services. The Senate Committee's plan for poverty reduction in the

<sup>4</sup> Under-fives received \$5, 6-9 year olds (\$6), 10-12 (\$7), and 13-15 (\$8) per month.

1970s was based on a Guaranteed Annual Income Plan, improved social services directed at the needs of the poor, and a research council that would evaluate and research in order to support implementation of the plan (Croll, 1971).

Responding to the parental poverty, the child poverty rhetoric of the time, government instituted policies to improve the monetary status of lower earning parents but these were not enough to correct the system as deeply as the Croll Committee would have wished. In 1979, the Refundable Child Tax Credit (RCTC) of \$200 for families making \$18,000 or less annually was instituted to embed family support within the federal tax regime. This held until 1985 when similar assistance was instituted, but benefits were linked to *the amount spent on children*. Practically thus, the policy benefitted families that could afford to spend on their children, shutting out poorer children (Guest, 1997). In 1988, child care was prioritised in the tax policy to bridge the “conservative-liberal gap of social assistance abreast market driven child care services” (Guest, 1997, p. 224). This policy came into effect because of the perception that the welfare system encouraged reliance on its benevolence (Guest, 1997, p. 225). To prioritise child care, Child Tax Exemption was eliminated and a non-refundable tax credit introduced. Unfortunately, “families with no taxable income [were] unable to qualify for this additional help, a majority of whom would be among the poorest” (Guest, 1997, p. 224). Inadvertently, some Federal level policies resulted in regressive taxation; further increasing the risk that the children from poor families will live in poverty because of their parents’ income status (Guest, 1997). In 1989, the Broadbent tabled a motion to eliminate child poverty in Canada, which was adopted by the House of Commons in a multi-party pledge (House of Commons, 1989).

**c. New child tax credit; momentum from the UN?:**

During the 1991 UN symposium on children held in Canada, it was emphasized that 1 in 7 Canadian children live in poverty, poor children are at risk of dying from just about any disease and the life expectancy of aboriginal children was 8 years below the national average (Guest, 1997). Canadian delegates seized the opportunity to push for the

*introduction of universal child care, ... a substantial tax credit for the poor to remove them from the burden of federal and provincial tax liability, increases in the minimum wage, control by Aboriginal people over education and other programs affecting their children and a call from the child poverty action group and the social planning council of Metropolitan Toronto for protection against child poverty in Canada’s constitution (Guest, 1997, p. 240).*

Eager to cement its sensitivity to child poverty, the Mulroney government introduced the New Child Tax Credit to help parents and children. The 1990s thus heralded a new regime of tax relief for families with children as part of the strategy to overtly assist “children in low and middle-income families” (Guest, 1997, p. 226). In 1993, the New Child Tax Credit was paid at varying times during the fiscal year with benefit pegged at \$1020 per annum per child under 18 if the family income was less than \$25,921 (Guest, 1997). The main drawback of the policy was that it was “designed to reinforce the work initiative [so] families without a working member would not qualify” (Guest, 1997, p. 227). Amid a flurry of details, it emerged that families will keep only 55% of benefits and that about half of Canada’s poor children lived in families that would not be eligible for the income-based credit (Guest, 1997). Child poverty advocacy groups<sup>5</sup> objected to these new policies arguing that they were detrimental to the “living standards of the low-income families, the segment of the population the government stated it wanted to help” (Guest, 1997, p. 241).

**d. Continuing the trend? Canada’s National Child Benefit Program**

*There can be no more worthy effort than a new partnership on behalf of Canada’s children. ...today, we are devoting significant new financial resources to meeting this challenge. ... Opportunity denied in childhood too often means chances lost as an adult. The future of Canada’s children is the future of the country itself (Martin, 1997, p. 23).*

Thus begun the National Child Benefit (NCB) that run between 1997 and 2015. The policy was crafted to be delivered collaboratively between the federal government and the second level of government so more funds would be available to “provide children

with the support and services so needed in their formative years” (Martin, 1997, p. 22). The government set aside \$195 million to benefit families earning less than \$26,000 yearly, predicating benefits on the number of children in a family. Also announced was \$600 million per year for the new Canada Child Tax Benefit” (Martin, 1997, p. 22).

In 2006, the NCB was revised to emphasize the plan to reduce the *depth of child poverty* whilst “promoting attachment to the labour market by ensuring that families will always be better off as a result of working” (Government of Canada, 2006). The new government also continued the Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCTB) monthly payments to low and middle-income families with children, by virtue of which more than 80% of families with children benefitted, even as payments decreased as family net income rose above \$37,885 (Cool & Campbell, 2009, p. 2). In addition to the CCTB, families that received less than \$21,287 per annum were eligible for the full amount of a National Child Benefit Supplement (NCBS), still taking into consideration the number of children in the household.

Another policy change to the NCB involved the Children’s Special Allowance (CSA) to assist children in the welfare system (Government of Canada, 2006). It has 3 variants:

- *Social Assistance Offset Approach (SAOA)*: Child benefits remain within the social assistance system but are reduced in response to increases in NCBS. Provinces and territories could deduct the NCBS as an unearned income charged against social assistance or reduce benefits for children<sup>6</sup>.
- *Integrated child benefit approach with adjustment*: Here, benefits are administered through a separate income-tested program that is built into the CCTB. Increases in the NCBS are offset in full or in part against the provincial child benefit.
- *Integrated child benefit approach without adjustment*: This is where basic benefits are divorced from the social assistance program and provided through a separate program integrated with the CCTB. There is thus no offset of the NCBS against provincial child benefits.

As with the New Child Tax Credit of the 1990s, the National Child Benefit had a clawback mechanism to discourage benefit dependence. Alberta, Ontario and PEI clawback benefits but Quebec, Manitoba and Nova Scotia do not. The NCB held through successive liberal governments, continuing albeit slightly changed, through the Harper years that ended in late 2015, but the spirit of the system remained intact. For instance, the Harper government introduced the Universal Child Care Benefit of \$100 per month in conjunction with the CCTB to help families balance work, family and expand their choices. As of 2012 families earning \$24,183 or less received the maximum benefit of \$6725 from the combined CCTB and the NCBS (Government of Canada, 2013).

A 2013 report suggests that the NCBS has on balance been favourable to “anti-poverty effects” because “with regard to reducing child poverty, every \$1000 of NCBS received resulted in a decrease in the probability of a single parent household falling below the LICO of between 8.5-9.3 percentage points. The report also revealed reductions in social assistance estimated at \$1800 in areas with 100% offset provisions versus \$338 in the ‘no-offset’ areas. Alberta achieved 100% offset as a result of reductions in social assistance (Government of Canada, 2013). The report was, however, undecided on the ‘anti-poverty’ impacts on couples with families, hinting that more precise measurements need to be developed to assess the policy’s impacts on family circumstances (Government of Canada, 2013).

#### e. **Prioritising child poverty? Rights-based approach to child poverty**

As the tax-related interventions to parental and to some extent child poverty were being made, the federal government was making an effort to get a better grip on poverty in general, including child poverty. In 2007, the commissioning of *Children: The Silenced Citizens* would represent another refocusing opportunity on child poverty in Canada. The goal was to assess Canada’s implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, including whether it has been used to aid the development of policy and services to address challenges faced by children in Canada (Andreychuk

<sup>5</sup> E.g. the Child Poverty Action Group, National Council of Welfare, Canadian Council on Social Development.

<sup>6</sup> Alberta uses the latter.

and Fraser, 2007). Going over already familiar statistics such as the 15% prevalence of child poverty in Canada and the increased risk of poverty for children in single parent female homes, the study emphasized that youth homelessness exacerbates the impacts of poverty on Canadian children.

The study found that addressing the prevalence of youth homelessness in Canada is a primary concern for the implementation of the convention in Canada and that a comprehensive strategy must be developed for affordable housing in addition to funding organizations that assist homeless youth and at-risk children. The Committee believes that “the way out of child poverty in Canada needs to be founded on solutions that reach all youth at risk, not only those who come to the attention of the government or social services, nor only the ‘poorest of the poor’. This is a rights-based approach and the Committee recommended using the Convention as the “yardstick for measuring success” (Andreychuk and Fraser, 2007, p. 151).

Further to *The Silenced Citizens*, and indeed as a result of it, a national poverty reduction strategy was proposed by the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance’s 2007 pre-budget consultations (Collins, 2007). The report, *Poverty Reduction in Canada - the Federal Role*, cautions that until a comprehensive strategy is developed, the federal government should strengthen Employment Insurance, invest more on federal work tax credits, increase the Canada Child Tax Benefit and the National Child Benefit Supplement and end clawbacks whilst increasing investments in early learning and child care, social housing and disability-related supports (Collins, 2007).

Stumped by the lack of progress on child poverty, another committee was constituted, this time to study the social conditions in Canada’s cities in relation to poverty (Eggleton and Segal, 2009). This Senate Committee found that government social policy frequently had two negative effects:

- Even when a person was benefiting from the system in every way possible, the amount of support they received was inadequate to actually lift them out of poverty.

- The structuring of policies and programs, when operating at their worst, further entrap people in poverty by creating dependencies on the system.

To this end, the Eggleton-Segal Committee, seeking to ensure that programs and policies effectively address poverty reduction prioritised education, training and employment as a way out of poverty for all Canadians. One of its main recommendations is that the federal government adopt a poverty reduction strategy that is designed to lift people out of poverty rather than merely make the conditions of poverty more manageable (Eggleton and Segal, 2009). In addition to this main recommendation, the following are also proposed:

- A national federal/provincial initiative on early childhood learning in support of initiatives designed to help disadvantaged youth maintain enrollment and engagement in school
- An increase of the National Child Tax Benefit to \$5000 (in 2009 dollars) by 2012
- The extension of the EI program to include parental insurance benefits to self-employed individuals
- The federal government explicitly cite international obligations ratified by Canada in any new federal legislation or legislative amendments relevant to poverty, housing and homelessness.

#### f. Canada child tax benefit 2016

Going into the 2015 election, the Federal Conservatives, Liberals and New Democrats pitched lines that they said were best for the middle class and their children. Upping the ante on the running UCCB and CCTB, the Conservatives substantially revised their platform, introducing a “family tax cut” that allows couples with children under 18 years of age to split up to \$50,000 of income for a maximum non-refundable credit of \$2,000, increased their UCCB from \$100 to \$160 a month for children under age six and announced a new monthly benefit of \$60 for children age 6-17 (Fekete et al., 2015).

Tapping into their historical success with the multiparty pledge to end child poverty in Canada whilst accusing their opponents of having done “nothing or made token efforts to tackle this problem” the NDP charged that “one of the most important ways to judge the



conscience of our country is how we treat our most vulnerable citizens” (New Democratic Party, 2015a). With specific regard to children, their policy response to this assertion was a pledge to continue the expanded Universal Child Care Benefit introduced by the Conservatives, promised a \$15-a-day national child care program, and 1 million affordable child care spaces across Canada (New Democratic Party, 2015a; New Democratic Party, 2015b). These are not child poverty policies per se, just proposals, but to the extent that they helped shape the discourse of the election, they are worth a mention.

Touting that “our plan provides middle class Canadian families more money to help raise their kids” the Liberals promised a tax-free monthly Canada Child Benefit (which will replace the UCCB and the CCTB of the erstwhile government) with payments capped at \$533 per month per child. Tethered to a minimum income of \$15000 annually, a family with one child will receive \$6400 whilst a family with two children will receive \$11800. At \$200,000 in annual income, families will not receive assistance from the government but at around \$140,000, a family will be eligible for \$1695 for a single child home and \$3125 for a two child family (Liberal Party of Canada, 2015). Introducing these policy changes, current Finance Minister noted that poverty “is particularly challenging in the case of children and its effect can be long term. When children are lifted out of poverty, they are better able to develop to their fullest potential” (Morneau, 2016, p. 57). These policies, though monetary, attempt to get at social justice and at the depth of child poverty (as a result of parental poverty) but its effect remains to be seen.

The preceding account of Federal policy aimed at combating child poverty unearths a clear bias towards monetary interventions. It works with the conventional (albeit accurate) notion that poverty is inextricably linked to money or the lack of it. The segment has shown that policies by successive governments treat child poverty as a by-product of their parents’ economic circumstances. Missing from the policy-scape are explicit references to poverty-induced social exclusion

in children and children’s accounts of what it means to be a poor child. It is also implied that assistance to children via their families will help with capabilities and functionings development. The Campaign 2000 goals attempt to bridge this gap, but the inching pace of progress leaves much to be desired. Commitments to aiding the circumstances of the poor are largely ideological which is why the multi-party adoption of the motion to erase child poverty from Canada is remarkable. In a monetary sense, these quantifiable arguments can be, and are made, but in terms of decisively helping with capability development and the social inclusion of children, the impact of these monetary interventions can only be assumed.

## Thematic Poverty Policy Scan at the Provincial Level

This segment explores the dialogue that has guided the framing and implementation of child poverty policy in Newfoundland and Labrador, Ontario and Alberta. Although this paper focusses on child poverty, much of the information is extracted from extant poverty reduction strategies (as with Ontario and Newfoundland and Labrador) and in progress (in the case of Alberta).

### I. Child poverty: Newfoundland and Labrador (NFLD)

In 2006, NFLD released a strategy to reduce general poverty in that province. Introducing the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS), Premier D. Williams revealed his government's bias for dealing with poverty – reducing disincentives to employment and increasing the inclusiveness of the educational system (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2006). Pivots of the new PRS are:

- barriers to education and employme
- coordinated service delivery for low income earners
- poor health in the province
- improved early childhood learning.

The NFLD PRS is constructed for all ages, does not specifically address the question of who is a child and only identifies the susceptibility of children to poverty as subsumed under the susceptibility of adults (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2006). Nonetheless, the following have been gleaned as they relate to children.

*Emerging themes for dialoguing about Child Poverty – Newfoundland and Labrador*

- a. *Income-related intervention* geared toward strengthening child benefit programs.
- b. More accessible *early literacy programs* augmented by increased funding for NGOs to support the delivery of early literacy, the inference being if children, irrespective of socio-economic status have solid foundations in terms of education, their chances of economic success later in life will increase.

- c. *Poverty prevention strategy*: In NFLD's strategy, child specific phrasing is concentrated around the Poverty Prevention Strategy where the government targets individuals in "the early years to ensure that all can develop to their full potential" where early childhood counts from pre-birth (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2006, p. 2). The policy also covers youth who need additional support to become self-sufficient (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2006).
- d. *Beam on social exclusion*: The Government recognised that there is more to poverty than lack of income. No specific policies to address the social exclusion of children from the standpoint of poverty are mentioned but lack of participation in school, health care and in one's community are identified as important aspects of social exclusion influenced by the provincial LICO after tax.
- e. *Healthcare and vulnerable supports*: NFLD instituted a basic dental coverage for children from ages 12-17 who do not have private coverage. They put in place a Home Visiting Program to support parenting and early childhood development and increased funding for low income housing to mitigate the consequential nature of expensive rent, a mostly non-negotiable expense.
- f. *Infant food security*: A significant policy move involved increasing the Mother-Baby Nutrition supplement from \$45 to \$60 per month, harkening back to poverty prevention pre-birth. This is significant in light of the high profile case where a baby allergic to milk including her mother's, faced food insecurity because an insurance company will not cover the \$600 claim her parents submitted (CBC Edmonton, 2015). The company later honoured the claim (CBC Edmonton, 2016), but the story brings into focus how child poverty can occur even when the parents are not cash trapped and why a program such as this could benefit infants even if all they need is regular formula.

For this scan, NFLD's social safety net, early childhood development and better education goals can resonate regardless of whether a child is absolutely or relatively poor. On the stronger safety net, the government identified "improved access to necessities for those most vulnerable to poverty" (Government of Newfoundland

and Labrador, 2006, p. 18) specifically introducing a low income prescription drug program, eliminating school related fees and increasing funds to Kids Eat Smart.<sup>7</sup>

The Newfoundland and Labrador PRS coalesces around food security, health and education themes, although the government still sees poverty from a monetary standpoint and subsumes child poverty under adult poverty (Echenberg, 2012b). The identification of groups susceptible to poverty (p. 5-7) does not include children (even with a qualifier) however it offers insights into how child poverty could be defined from a comprehensive standpoint.

## II. Emerging themes on child poverty in Ontario

Ontario re-released its Poverty Reduction Strategy, “Realizing our potential”, in 2016 so themed because

*... children growing up in poverty have the innate potential of youth. Individuals starting over in a new country see great potential to contribute to their new homeland. ... People recovering from mental illness or addiction are rediscovering their potential. Poverty has many faces, and there are countless circumstances that lead to poverty. But we know there is one overarching path out of poverty: realizing this human potential”* (Government of Ontario, 2016, p. 1)

The chapter “Poverty Interrupted: Continuing to break the cycle for children and youth” sets forth ongoing policies to help its children. As usual, there, is a focus on increasing incomes for poorer families, but it quickly turns to strategizing about tackling poverty, with a particular focus on children relating to:

- a. *Monetary relief:* Ontario unveiled a new Child Benefit program which raised benefits to \$1310 per year as of July 2015. According to the province, this new benefit will assist about 1 million children.
- b. *Food security:* Through the Student Nutrition Program that provides breakfast, lunch and snacks to school aged children and youth, the Province tackles childhood food insecurity. It intends to spend \$10.6m per year setting up breakfast programs in elementary and secondary schools although it is unclear how children needing assistance to be food secure will be reached.

- *Aboriginal food security:* Within the food security theme is a plan to expand the Student Nutrition Program to on-reserve First Nations schools, giving “First Nations communities the opportunity to lead the development of Student Nutrition Program models that will address the unique strengths and needs of each community” (Government of Ontario, 2016, p. 16). This theme is of interest because it addresses both economic and *social food insecurity*.
- c. *Child-centric health benefits.*
  - The province has extended health benefits and services for children since good health is an important part of preventing poverty.<sup>8</sup>
  - Healthy Smiles Ontario expanded its income eligibility so that 70,000 more children can receive vision care, mental health and assistive devices.
  - After discussing the implications of mental health on future self-sufficiency, including the risk that 70-90% of adults cannot work because of mental health problems, the province announced \$93 million a year for *Open Minds, Healthy Minds* – a 10-year mental health and addictions strategy in which the first 3 years are dedicated to early intervention. The strategy focusses on availability of and “fast access to high quality services” (Government of Ontario, 2016, p. 18).
- d. *Aboriginal children’s mental health:* This strategy involves channelling additional supports to aboriginal children to ensure that their mental health problems are treated early. Thus, there is a Tele-Mental Health Service to Aboriginal, rural, remote and underserved communities. Ontario has hired around 80 Aboriginal mental health and addictions workers to develop and implement a provincial youth suicide prevention plan. Much as this is an interesting focus, it is valid from a policy standpoint to question what went wrong that resulted in the debacle of Attawapiskat, the First Nations community that is wrestling with an epidemic of suicide involving youth (Rutherford, 2016).

<sup>7</sup> A foundation in NFLD that is committed to ensuring all kids have a meals that put them in good stead for learning. (<http://www.kidseatmart.ca/about-us-2/vision-and-mission>).

<sup>8</sup> How can we integrate the issue of actually getting parents and their children to access these provisions and services?

e. *Capabilities-focused educational policy for children:*

This policy is intended to help children and youth realise their potential. The provincial government makes special effort to highlight the improving potential of their children and youth, for instance stating that in 2003 54% of 3rd-6th graders met the provincial standards of numeracy and literacy, by 2015 that number had risen to 72%; and as of 2015 83% of children completed high school. Ontario prides itself as “one of the best places in the world not only to for having higher than average achievement in reading but also lower than average differences in the performance of students from different socio-economic backgrounds” (Government of Ontario, 2016, p. 20).

- This speaks to the capabilities idea of poverty where all children have an opportunity to thrive. Education here can be construed as a functioning that children from humble beginnings can capitalise on and not feel so poor, and/or excluded in comparison to their counterparts because intelligence and talent are compensating abilities.

f. *A head-start with full-day kindergarten:* This policy was implemented in September 2014 to dial back the disadvantages children from poor socio economic backgrounds face compared to those from higher income families. It is available to all kindergarten aged children and is seen as “one of the most significant improvements made to Ontario’s education system in decades” (Government of Ontario, 2016, p. 19). The policy is to predispose Ontario’s children to the “social, emotional, academic and physical skills that provide a good foundation for success in school and in life” and in a manner that narrows achievement gaps (Government of Ontario, 2016, p. 22). The full-day kindergarten policy saves parents and guardians \$6500 annually in child care costs, freeing up time and resources for parents to develop their human capital.

- *Child care modernization:* On August 31st 2015, Ontario’s Child Care and Early Years Acts took effect responding to the view that child care services needed updating. These pieces

of legislation are supported by the Child Care Modernization Act of 2014 (Government of Ontario, 2016). Among others, the new laws seek to strengthen the quality and consistency of early childhood programs and introduce more transparency in the funding of child care (Government of Ontario, 2016).

- *PLASP (Peel Lunch And School Program):* PLASP is a popular third party portal offering child care services from infancy through grade 6. It is a non-profit organisation that has provided these services since the 1970s. Its reach is extensive within the province evidenced by a litany of collaborators including the cities of Brampton, Toronto and Mississauga, Peel Catholic School District and the United Way of Peel Region (PLASP, 2016b). In 2016-2017, bi weekly fees for children 6 weeks to 18 months old are \$697, \$536 bi-weekly for toddlers for 5 days and \$461 bi-weekly for preschoolers and kindergarteners (PLASP, 2016a), costs which can be subsidised or absorbed by the province if parents are eligible.

Ontario has made much of its capabilities orientation to child development, it remains to be seen if these policies will evolve to more fully address child poverty.

### III. Alberta preparing to launch: planning to address child poverty

Alberta also adopts a monetary approach to the issue of poverty in general, treating child poverty as an extension of parental poverty. Alberta currently does not have a general Poverty Reduction Plan, neither a child poverty reduction strategy. During the 2015 rendering of the NDPs provincial budget though, a pledge was made to develop a general Poverty Reduction Strategy that would work with an “aligned social service system for low income families” (Canada Social Council, 2015). Meanwhile, the current government has announced policy changes that would help Alberta’s lowest earners and the children that depend on them. Thus, Alberta’s new Family Tax Credit raises the eligibility income from \$36,778 to \$41,250 and introduced the Alberta Working Family Supplement refundable tax credit on earnings up to \$41,220 (Canada Social Council, 2015).



### Alberta's Social Policy Framework (SPF)

In March 2013, Alberta's Minister of Human Services, Mr. D. Hancock announced the Province's Social Policy Framework as "a vision for social policy that defines who we are as people and communities, one that reflects our aspirations for a province that offers all Albertans the opportunity to reach their potential and to benefit from the highest possible quality of life" (Government of Alberta, 2013a, p. 13). The framework aimed at reducing inequality (although it does not specify what type), protect vulnerable people and "create a person-centered system of high-quality services" inter alia (Government of Alberta, 2013a, p. 11). Specifically, the Social Policy Framework contains the prioritised "transformational initiatives" (Government of Alberta, 2013a, p. 19) earmarked by the province:

- Early childhood development
- Poverty reduction strategy
- Common services access
- Primary health care initiatives
- Results based budgeting
- Safe communities
- A 10-year plan to end homelessness
- Partnerships with First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities.

This SPF was crafted for the development of all Albertans, but aspects are trained on children. Fig. 1 depicts the organisational process of the SPF and attendant policy proposals, the future of which are uncertain as a result of the change in government in May 2015. But it is safe to concede that consciously or not, these documents will feature in poverty-related dialogues in Alberta and those concerning child poverty in particular.

### Together we raise tomorrow

This policy proposal is the anchor for the implementation of the SPF with regard to children. It aimed at supporting the well-being, safety, security, education and health for Alberta's children (Government of Alberta, 2013d). As per Fig 1, Together We Raise Tomorrow has four aspects – the Children First Act, the Children's Charter, the Poverty Reduction Strategy and the Early Childhood Development (ECD) initiative which has enough detail in Fig. 1 to satisfy the context of this scan.

### Together we raise tomorrow: The Children First Act

The Children First Act, adopted in May 2013, is the legislative spine for the prioritization process to improve the health, safety, education and wellbeing of Alberta's children and youth (Government of Alberta, 2013b). It focusses on how services are delivered to children, placing some premium on assisting children in situations of family violence, children with disabilities as well as on the regulation of day homes (Government of Alberta, 2013b). Notably, the Children First Act was written for all Alberta's children and not those that live with poverty per se. Some themes mainly for exemplar purposes are to:

- develop a Children's Charter to establish government wide obligations for Alberta's children,
- enhance mechanisms for sharing a child's personal and health information for service provision,
- permit the Victims of Crime funds to support groups that help child victims of crime through the use of counseling, mental health services and other tools that help children to overcome these traumas.

### Together we raise tomorrow: Alberta's Children Charter

The Government of Alberta initiated a consultative process to establish a Children's Charter. Drawing on the Children First Act, the process sought to gather thoughts on 3 themes: Eliminating child poverty and overall poverty in Alberta, improving early childhood development and developing the Children's charter. The Children's Charter will establish government-wide principles, priorities and roles to guide the development of policies, programs and services affecting children (Government of Alberta, 2013c), where principles are construed as "standards and ideals that guide and orient decisions, behaviour and action" (Government of Alberta, 2013c, p. 6). Subsequently, 5 principles were identified as foundational to the Children Charter:

- To treat all children with dignity irrespective of their circumstances
- To respect a child's heritage holistically in their familial, cultural, social, and religious contexts
- Make children central to planning about children,
- Prevent and intervene early to address children's difficult circumstances,
- Reiterate that families, communities and government share responsibility for children's well-being.

# Social Policy Framework

## Together We Raise Tomorrow

Supported in Legislation by the Children’s First Act

Children’s Charter	Poverty Reduction Strategy	ECD Priority Initiative
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*(described in An Alberta Approach to ECD)*

Actions include: EC Map, Early Years Continuum, Provincial ELC Framework, ELC Curriculum Framework, ECL Demonstration Project, ASAP, Frontiers of Innovation, Healthy Parents, Healthy Children, Maternal Infant Health Strategy, Infant and Preschool Screening Framework, A Comprehensive Parenting Resource Strategy, FASD, Tobacco Reduction, Preventing Family Violence, Healthy Relationships

*City of Edmonton, 2013*

In addition to these principles, another set of themes, emanating from consulting almost 6000 Albertans tie in with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. These include safeguarding children’s health in a manner that meets the “physical, emotional, intellectual and social needs of the child” (Government of Alberta, 2013c, p. 8), an opportunity to engage in play and cultural activities and cultivate the spirit and skills of lifelong learning to help them attain their potential. The wish list also highlights fostering inclusion and equity through promoting universal access to programs and services and allowing children’s voices to be “heard and reflected in the charter and in any policies which directly affect their wellbeing” (Alberta Government, 2013c, p. 9). The aspect of including children’s voices in the Charter is interesting as it hints at the oft-overlooked participatory dimension of the experience of poverty.

One final big theme was participants’ recognition that a child’s family is his/her primary care locale and protectors but government ought to have a leadership role in promoting the principles of the Charter and sharing information about programs and services to make it efficacious.

### Together we raise tomorrow: Alberta’s Child Poverty Reduction Strategy

Launched in June 2013, Alberta’s Child Poverty Reduction Strategy scoped out themes on how to inter alia support the well-being, education and health goals for Alberta’s children (Government of Alberta, 2013d). This was released on the heels of the Children’s First Act (May 2013) and focussed on themes relating to eliminating child poverty and improving Early Childhood Development (Government of Alberta, 2013d). Themes with direct bearing to the Child Poverty Definition project that are extrapolated from the public consultations are as follows:

- a. *Destigmatizing poverty in Alberta:* Albertans were concerned about the stigma attached to poverty and were interested in raising awareness around the barriers to social inclusion – discrimination, stigma from mental illness, family violence, race and poverty. These were seen as part of the preconditions for “improving the well-being of children and creating opportunities for them to succeed” (Government of Alberta, 2013d, p. 5). This suggests a strengthening of the ‘capabilities message’ where barriers to the attainment and utilisation of functionings can be more directly identified and addressed effectively, but also hints at the intersectionality of poverty.

- Albertan's also wanted to "create a culture" where it is acceptable for parents to seek information and support. To this end, sentiment was expressed around restructuring "traditional supports" (Government of Alberta, 2013d, p. 5) in a way that creates empowerment and maximises ability. The suggestion also emerged to involve poor people in the decision making processes that shape their lives. This speaks to the growing need to have more participatory dimensions represented in the poverty reduction strategy so that the province can respond appropriately.
- b. *Supporting parents to support their children:* Another big theme to emerge from the child PRS consultations coalesced around how to support parents to give their children the best possible start in life. Also emanating was officially recognising that some parents will need more support in providing secure environments in which their children can thrive (Government of Alberta, 2013d). This relates to cultural capital - the skills and competencies that people acquire as they go through life and use in various ways and in various circumstances to instigate a wide variety of inclusion and/or positive outcomes for themselves and their loved ones (Abel, 2008; Bennett & Silva, 2006; Ciabattari, 2012).
- There was an appetite for funding resources such as Parent Link Centres widely advertised and easily accessible so poor parents can physically and economically access them. Consultees were unanimous for a well-coordinated "high-quality early childhood development system" so parents can access the right supports at the right time (Government of Alberta, 2013d, p. 6).
- c. *Systemic improvement in the delivery of services to families and children:* There was high priority for the improvement of access to, and coordination of social services, the rationale being that many poor Albertans experienced problems reaching public supports as is the need to deliver "timely, holistic and effective social services that are tailored to individual need" (Government of Alberta, 2013d, p. 6). Since Alberta's PRS is yet to be developed, the test of the success of the PRS for children will rest with the provision of these timely services tailored to individual needs.
- Consultees identified coordination problems between early childhood development and poverty reduction services due to the dispersal of services across departments. This problem is widely recognised, raising the question of what effective coordination of activities will look like. It is also a relevant line of thought for Stage III of the Child Policy Project where we look to align research findings with policy.
  - Related to the preceding point and coming through forcefully was the phrase "continuum of supports" which involved recognising the balance between "intervention and prevention" where social changes could be addressed before they become more complicated, expensive and damaging" (Government of Alberta, 2013d, p. 7). Can the child poverty project appropriate this idea to establish a *continuum of supports for children* in response to the rigid cut off stages of supports for children in poverty? Will this approach address gaps in the current system of assistance for children at various stages of their experiences of poverty? How will this inform policy toward children's self-sufficiency in adulthood?

Much as little exists outside of tax policy to specifically define child poverty, the Together We Raise Tomorrow set of proposals could be a good foundation for increasing government's obligations to Alberta's poor children, absorbing more roles that municipal governments and the charity sector have increasingly filled. The next overview of policy focusses on how the municipality of Calgary has approached child poverty.

## Municipal Policy to Address Child Policy: A Beam on Calgary

Addressing child poverty policy in Calgary requires recognizing the unique aspects of a child's experience of poverty so policymakers can articulate appropriate interventions. The Calgary Poverty Reduction Initiative, adopted in 2013, recognizes that children are at a greater risk of poverty because of the vulnerability inherent in their life stage - children are dependents; additionally, families with children are at greater risk of poverty (City of Calgary, 2013a). Recognizing this vulnerability is an excellent starting place for further action towards reducing and/or eradicating child poverty in Calgary. This scan of Calgary's child poverty polycscape suggests that significant progress is desired toward a child-focused initiative that would define and address poverty in this city.

### Child poverty in Calgary by the numbers

In terms of the prevalence rates of child poverty, Calgary is a microcosm of national and provincial numbers, with rates stubbornly hovering around 15.8%. In Calgary, that is approximately 38,000 people under the age of 18 (Family and Community Support Services et al., 2011). For context, the number of people overall living in poverty was 10.9%, but poverty rates were higher among children, and at 14.1%, highest among children under the age of 6 (City of Calgary Community and Neighborhood Services et al., 2011). Although data from the 2016 Calgary census are yet to be released, a convergence of evidence suggests that the number of children whose basic needs are unmet is rising.

In 2015, 1 in 9 Calgarians accessed the foodbank, 40% of whom were children. This patronage of foodbank resources is actually 5% higher than the national average (The Calgary Food Bank). Still in 2015, Brown Bagging for Calgary's Kids, also addressed Calgarians' food insecurities by serving 2,900 bagged lunches to children in the public school system, 900 more lunches per day than they did in 2014 (Brown Bagging for Calgary's Kids, 2015). In the 2014/2015 service year, Calgary's drop in youth health services centre at the Alex served 283 children under the age of 12, culminating in a total of 25,746 visits. Of those visits, 57% did not have a permanent home (The Alex, 2014-2015). Finally, Calgary's Inn from the Cold, a shelter that prioritizes families with children, saw a 130% increase in shelter demand in 2014 as compared to 2013. Of those who sought shelter at the Inn, 2,297 people in

total, 1,244 were children 17 years of age and under (Inn from the Cold, 2014). The reports from these organizations document the growing number of children in Calgary whose enjoyment of life's essentials is being compromised. Such realities are concerning for service providers in the city, including Inn from the Cold's Executive director, Linda McLean who acknowledges that continuing to "allow children to suffer deprivation is a concern. The ripple effect of a generation who will never reach their potential because of this deprivation constitutes a crisis" (Inn from the Cold, 2014, p. 4). McLean's perspective, one that is shared by others in the field, is reminiscent of the stifling of functionings which precedes capabilities poverty in that interventionists recognize that meeting the basic needs of children, for example a healthy lunch will improve a child's chances of reaching their optimum human potential throughout life.

### Emerging themes related to child poverty in Calgary

The primary way of measuring child poverty in Calgary mirrors methods used at the federal and provincial level where the measures of poverty are monetary. Specifically, the number of families living in poverty is identified using either the Low-income Measure After-Tax (City of Calgary Community Neighbourhood Services, 2011) or more commonly, the Low Income Cut-off (Family & Community Support Services and City of Calgary Community & Neighbourhood Services, 2011). Poverty, then, is identified as the number of persons living in low-income households and childhood poverty is defined by whether or not a child is dependent on an individual who is receiving government supports (Family & Community Support Services and City of Calgary Community & Neighbourhood Services, 2011). Poverty, as measured and defined monetarily, is in turn seen as a cost to society in the form of moneys spent on health care subsidies, crime prevention, and in "lost economic opportunities for children and people living in poverty" (City of Calgary et al., 2011a, p. 9).

In addition to the Poverty Costs theme, there are several other themes connected to childhood poverty in the literature produced by the City of Calgary. These include:

- a. *Basic needs:* Poverty is closely linked to an inability of families to gain adequate access to basic needs. Children who are identified as poor are also more likely to experience food insecurity, housing insecurity, and inadequate access to health services (City of Calgary et al., 2011a).



- b. *Loss of capabilities and potential:* Inadequate access to basic needs is acutely connected to loss of future capabilities as children move through childhood into adulthood. Children who experience childhood poverty are at risk of compromised access to early childhood education through quality childcare facilities, which are often only accessible to those who are able to afford substantial fees (City of Calgary et al., 2011a). Additionally, children who experience long term poverty are less likely to complete secondary education and as a result, struggle to attain sufficient employment as older youth and adults (City of Calgary et al., 2011b). Indeed, unemployment is a greater concern for older children and young adults<sup>9</sup> who tend to “have greater than usual difficulties in obtaining and keeping jobs”; unemployment rates among youth, are significantly higher than they are for adults at 8.6% and 4.1% respectively (Family & Community Support Services and Calgary Community Neighbourhood Services, 2011 p. 24). This is a particular concern for understanding child poverty because many of these youth may already be attempting to support themselves independently of their families. The literature related to childhood poverty focuses on the long term impact of poverty as children move into adulthood. While in the short term “quality of life” may deteriorate for children, in the long term, childhood poverty perpetuates itself by creating adults who continue to be dependent on social services for their basic needs (Family & Community Support Services; Calgary Community Neighbourhood Services, 2011 p. 12).
- c. *Compounding impact of marginalization:* Though receiving less attention in the literature, there is awareness in city documentation that poverty is associated with marginalization and social exclusion. For children who live in poverty, issues of marginalization are often compounded so that poverty is not the only factor that causes social isolation. Children of visible minorities are more likely to experience the challenges of racism and discrimination that lead to greater difficulty finding sufficient employment and accessing education (City of Calgary et al., 2011b). Apart from race-related marginalization, the City estimates that between 20%- 40% of youth

living without stable housing identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (City of Calgary et al., 2011b). Thus, there is recognition that social exclusion, at least on a large scale of social, cultural, and racial differences are closely related to the experience of a child living in poverty.

With increasing awareness of the reality of poverty in Calgary and its adverse effects in multiple facets of life and living, the city moved towards the development of a poverty reduction plan. After 9 months and ballpark 15,000 hours of work in 2012, The Calgary Poverty Reduction Initiative (CPRI) issued final reports regarding poverty in the city and proposals for reducing it.

### **The Calgary Poverty Reduction Initiative (CPRI)**

In 2013, the City of Calgary approved its poverty reduction plan aimed at reducing the percentage of Calgarians living below the poverty line to 5% by 2023, which Vibrant Communities Calgary is now responsible for implementing. Many of the themes related to child poverty noted in the City’s literature, featured in the report. It should be noted that the report is not essentially about reducing child poverty. Rather, it describes poverty in more universalizing terms. Where children are explicitly mentioned, they are associated with their family unit. This was a point of tension for the Child and Youth Poverty Reduction Constellation (CYPRC), a focus group that contributed to the research process of the CPRI. The CYPRC advocated for a child-centric approach to poverty reduction based on the UN’s Convention for the Rights of the Child (Children and Youth Poverty Reduction Constellation, 2012, p. 3) but this was rejected, leading to the more generic poverty policy for the city.

As is the case in much of the literature, the LICO is used to measure poverty. However, the CPRI recognizes the multi-dimensionality of poverty experiences by those who live below the poverty line and seeks to address “underlying forces,” such as community disintegration, lack of financial planning and stability, and the inaccessibility of support services that lead to poverty. As a result, it seeks to address these issues directly rather than to merely “alleviate the effects of poverty” (City of Calgary, 2013c). Emerging themes related to poverty and which are associated with the experience of children include:

<sup>9</sup> The document defines youth as those individuals between the ages of 15 and 24 years.

<sup>10</sup> The report emphasizes the need for affordable and accessible childcare as a basic need for Calgary’s families. However, this is associated with the ability of a parent to attain employment and education rather than with the child’s need for early childhood education adequate for healthy development.

- a. *Basic needs:* Children’s basic needs should be met, including childcare,<sup>10</sup> education, food, housing, transportation and access to the justice system (City of Calgary, 2013c).
- b. *Healthcare:* Children should have access to adequate healthcare including childhood fitness and early vision, hearing, dental, and developmental screening (City of Calgary, 2013b).
- c. *Education and employment:* Children should have access to education and employment opportunities to curb the compounding nature of poverty and prevent children from a “lower income in adulthood, few employment options, lower wages and higher unemployment” (City of Calgary, 2013b, p. 9).
- d. *Family and social supports:* Children need family and social supports to develop resiliency. However, the reality of family breakdown is often the cause and/or result of poverty (City of Calgary, 2013b).
- e. *Trauma:* Children who experience poverty are also more likely to experience violence, trauma, homelessness and to be involved with the justice system (City of Calgary, 2013b).

The CPRI Report puts forward a community oriented approach to poverty reduction centred on 3 goals:

- that Calgary’s communities would be strong and supportive,
- that everyone in Calgary would have the assets needed to thrive,
- supports, resources and services would be easily accessible for all.<sup>11</sup>

The orienting principle of the report, “My Neighbour’s Strength is My Strength,” is indicative of the report’s focus on the connection between social exclusion and poverty (City of Calgary, 2013c). Its first set of goals is specifically intended to address a growing sense of social isolation and community breakdown by increasing points of community collaboration and connection. Other aspects of the CPRI’s report hint at capabilities emphasis in their orientation towards increasing the potential of impoverished families

and individuals to successfully function and participate in society. Finally, the report includes some participatory dimensions of poverty by stating resident’s views that “(poverty) takes a little part of your soul,” “poverty is a psychological disease,” and poverty means being “*bullied by others, not having the same clothes or things that other people have*” (Calgary Poverty Reduction Initiative, 2013, p. 9). Although the immediately preceding italicized quote appears to have come from a child, for each of its goals, the report does not include content specifically concerned with a child’s experience of poverty.

### **Moving forward: developments in city policy for greater social equity**

Through the CPRI, Calgary has implemented several policies and programs to meet some of the CPRI’s goals. The City transit system now offers a Calgary Low Income Pass for Youth and Adults at \$44 per month (City of Calgary). Also, the City’s recreation facilities offer fee subsidizing for families who wish to enroll their children in city run programs. The policy covers up to 90% of fees to a maximum of \$100 per program or up to \$250 per year. Those eligible (determined by proof of need, including AISH, Alberta Works: Income subsidy/support, Alberta Health Benefit, Resettlement Assistance Program, Independent youth letters, Canada Revenue Agency: Notice of Assessment or a letter from a Registered Social Worker) may also receive 75% off drop-in fees for aquatic and fitness facilities (City of Calgary). Finally, Calgary offers free or low cost afterschool programs for children aged 6-16 from 3:00-6:00pm on school days; a service funded by the City’s Family and Community Support Services and designed to help children and youth “stay out of trouble and to achieve age-appropriate developmental milestones” (City of Calgary). In the summer months, the City offers three separate programs for children and youth free of charge. These include: Park n’ Play for children 6 years and over, Stay n’ Play for children between 3-5 years and Youth Days for children between 12-17 years of age. While not explicitly stated, each of these services and programs aims at addressing the social exclusion and capabilities dimensions of poverty by increasing children’s ability to interact with their peers and develop the skills needed to realize their potential and improve their life situation.

<sup>11</sup> One of the goals related to the accessibility of services is the development of a point of access portal that would foster ease of access for clients and reduce the duplication of services. This is reminiscent of the PLASP initiative, an access point for childcare services. PLASP may provide a helpful model in developing a similar, but more comprehensive system in Calgary.

### Spotlight: Aboriginal child poverty in Calgary

The fourth goal of the CPRI's final report states that "all Aboriginal people are equal participants in Calgary's prosperous future" (City of Calgary, 2013b, p. 1). Such a goal is critical in a poverty reduction plan because the experience of poverty in Calgary is racialized (Pruegger, Cook, & Richter-Salmons, 2009). One in 4 aboriginal children in Calgary live in poverty, compared to 1 in 6 non-aboriginal children (City of Calgary, 2013b). Many of the themes earlier highlighted regarding child poverty manifest with respect to Aboriginal children, but are exacerbated because of the aforementioned compounding nature of marginalization and social exclusion. For example, while completing secondary education is a concern related to the effects of poverty generally, there is greater concern for the lower standard of education Aboriginal children receive because of lack of funding (City of Calgary, 2013b).

Aboriginal youth face greater difficulty finding summer employment and internships, which leads to greater difficulty in gaining qualifications, experience and references required for employment opportunities and post-secondary applications. This holds back functioning development, reducing the potential to gain success and healthy life outcomes (City of Calgary). An article published on the City of Calgary's webpage demonstrates a particular concern for the participatory nature of poverty by noting that many aboriginal youth identify social and family problems including racism, alcoholism and domestic violence as naturally leading to a life of homelessness. This has been identified as their internal image of normalcy (City of Calgary). Any definition or strategy targeting child poverty in Calgary must then take into consideration the particular needs and challenges faced by Aboriginal children.

At the municipal level, despite the fact that poverty is consistently identified through monetary measures, there is an awareness of the multidimensionality of poverty. This is demonstrated by the attention given to lost potential for children's future success be it through family breakdown or lack of peer interaction. Although there is attention given to the participatory and social exclusion aspects of poverty, the primary focus for child poverty is with the capabilities. This is evidenced in the literature's repeated concern with the children's lack of access to

basic needs such as food, housing and healthcare, which in turn, leads to reduced performance in school and long term difficulties finding employment. While this concern is well founded (as the increased usage of Calgary service providers indicates) it demonstrates an inadequate emphasis on addressing all aspects of child poverty as experienced by the child. As the CPRI's final report gave little attention to the unique needs of children in poverty, instead focussing attention on adult and family poverty, Calgary needs a more robust way of defining and interacting with child poverty, one that takes into account the multiplicity of situations that constitute child poverty as well as the unique experience of poverty by Aboriginal children.

### Concluding Comments

This policy scan has made a few things apparent regarding defining child poverty in this country. There is an acute sense among Canadian policymakers that attaining potential is the best gift society can give to its children. This is apparent at the Federal, provincial and municipal levels. The plethora of ways in which children can be assisted to achieve this potential get clearer the closer policies are to the beneficiaries – food security, transit programs, medical and dental benefits – but the coordination of these activities is a problem that risks having needy children fall through the cracks. Out of the Calgary municipal literature is the construction of poverty as a *cost* to society in many ways. Is this an angle that can be explored and included in an encompassing definition of child poverty?

In Canada, child poverty is inextricably linked to parental poverty. Although this is a logical position, some aspects of child poverty can be missed because outside of the dependence on their parents, other issues could constitute child poverty. This is a clear absence of the participatory dimension of poverty, which could be pertinent to deciphering a definition of child poverty. Could it be parent's poverty plus or minus some things?

The policy exploration has shown that different parts of the country are at different stages in terms of planning to do something about child poverty. Doubtless, in Canada, child poverty is seen as an important issue, but poverty

policies dedicated to children are rare. If Alberta is able to develop her pledged child poverty strategy, it could be a Canadian first. At all levels of governance, *child poverty is demarcated but not defined*. ‘Demarcated’ in the sense that using the monetary measures of poverty, criteria are used to determine who is poor, but these do not capture the totality of circumstances a person experiences. A definition transcends a list of criteria and monetary measures are limited in that sense.

Lastly, but not least, it is observable that poverty comes in many interrelated forms – monetary, social exclusion, capabilities and participatory. These intersect to build a complete view of what it means for anybody (including children) to be living in poverty. Intersectionality is a versatile research tool that could allow researchers derive an intersecting schema that could capture the experiences of child poverty besides the inadequacy of income. This could allow for a definition of child poverty that cuts across many demographics in a multi-cultural country such as Canada.

These decisions remain to be made.

***“It’s the greatest poverty to decide that a child must die so that you may live as you wish...”***

***Mother Teresa***



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