

Voices of Canada's working poor growing louder ^[1]

Author: Gyapong, Deborah

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EXCERPTS

OTTAWA - The working poor continue to make up an overwhelming majority in Canada's poverty statistics, a fact that has helped make the fifth annual Chew on This! campaign the largest ever.

On Oct. 17 - the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty - 80 groups in more than 30 communities across Canada called for a national, anti-poverty strategy to deal with the estimated 850,000 people who visit a food bank each month and the 4.8 million Canadians who live below the poverty line.

Chew on This!, organized by the Dignity for All Campaign, is a joint venture of Citizens for Public Justice (CPJ) and Canada Without Poverty. It calls for a comprehensive plan based on human rights that will be fully funded in the next federal budget.

"Canada needs to develop at all levels a plan to address poverty," said CPJ executive director Joe Gunn. The campaign included handing out 22,000 lunch bags across the country containing a snack such as an apple, a magnet and a postcard saying "We Need a Plan to end poverty, food insecurity, and homelessness in Canada."

Gunn and a team from CPJ were on Parliament Hill handing out lunch bags and encouraging passers-by to mail the postcard to Minister of Families, Children and Social Development Jean-Yves Duclos.

The event coincided with the CPJ's annual October report of Canada's poverty levels in "Poverty Trends 2017."

The latest Statistics Canada figures from 2015 show one in seven Canadians, or 4.8 million people, live in poverty.

"It allows people to have a snapshot in mind of what poverty looks like when handing out a postcard or an apple," Gunn said.

Most people in Canada think of poverty in terms of the "urban poor man sleeping homeless on the streets," Gunn said. "The report points out most poor people are actually working," but at "precarious jobs," with few hours, no benefits and no protections.

"Certainly anyone working full-time in all provinces of Canada but one on minimum wage would be counted as living in poverty," Gunn said.

The CPJ report showed 70 per cent of those living in poverty are working poor. "Youth 15-24 and women are over-represented in precarious work, along with racialized people, Indigenous people, immigrants, people with disabilities, and older, working-age adults," the report says.

The report noted the desperate need for safe water and housing in some Indigenous communities, as well as the high rates of food insecurity, especially in the North. In Nunavut, 46.8 per cent of the predominantly Inuit population experiences food insecurity, it said.

Twenty-three per cent of people with disabilities aged 25-64 live in poverty, the report showed. Refugees and refugee claimants are also vulnerable to poverty once sponsorship and government supports end.

"Chew On This! provides an opportunity to reflect on poverty issues in Kingston and across Canada," said Tara Kainer of the Sisters of Providence of St. Vincent de Paul's Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Office in a release. The Sisters of Providence in Kingston, Ont., joined groups from Vancouver to Yellowknife to St. John's in the campaign to "raise awareness about poverty's impact on health, income and food insecurity, precarious jobs and unemployment, as well as the lack of affordable housing and the need for quality early childhood care and education," Kainer said.

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