

Bolder action needed to reduce child poverty: Campaign 2000 report card ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

OTTAWA -- Brynn Vincent was only 13 when she started experimenting with drugs and alcohol. Two years later, she was addicted and had run away from home and then she found out she was pregnant.

She sought treatment for addiction at a rehab facility then moved into a homeless shelter.

"Being in treatment with other women who are cranky and coming off of all types of drugs and alcohol while being pregnant was so hard," she says. "But I finally decided I need to change, I need to get better -- I'm having a baby, obviously I can't bring a baby into this type of lifestyle."

Now 19 and sober, Vincent is living in her own apartment with her daughter and is finishing her education at the Youville Centre in Ottawa, a charity that provides mental-health treatment and other supports to adolescent mothers and their children.

But her daughter is one of 1.4 million children living in poverty in Canada, 29 years after the House of Commons voted to end child poverty by 2000. Campaign 2000, a group formed to hold the government to its promise, is releasing an annual report card on it today.

The report calls for the federal government to provide more funding to the provinces, territories and Indigenous communities to expand affordable, quality child care.

Anita Khanna, national co-ordinator with Campaign 2000, acknowledges the Liberal government has introduced important measures to tackle this problem, including boosting the Canada Child Benefit -- a tax-free monthly benefit to help with living and child care costs -- two years earlier than planned. The benefit will now increase annually, tied to inflation.

But while this benefit does help low-income families, it does not fully address the need for better access to child care as a way to help lift families out of poverty, she said.

"A system of cash transfers is not the provision of good child care. It doesn't build spaces for child care, and right now that is a huge part of the problem," she said.

Vincent credits the work of volunteers and staff at both the shelter and at the Youville Centre for helping her navigate the patchwork of supports for low-income teen single mothers.

But her struggles are not over. Her limited income means she regularly has to get help from food banks and other charities.

Her income is only about \$7,000 a year. Without a provincial child-care subsidy, she could never have dreamed of completing her education, she says.

But if the federal government were to adopt universal child care, it would help mothers like her who are struggling to make ends meet while also trying to build more for their futures and those of their children, she says.

"That would take a lot of stress on parents living in poverty, it would just be one less thing to have to worry about constantly," Vincent said. "A lot of working parents in poverty work solely to pay for child care. So if I'm working every day and I'm only making enough money to put my child in daycare so that I can work ... in my eyes that's ridiculous."

Canada now has only enough regulated child care spaces for about 30 per cent of the Canadian kids up to the age of five, Khanna said. Campaign 2000 is calling for Ottawa to send \$1 billion a year to the provinces and territories to build more daycare spaces.

The Trudeau government recently announced Canada's first-ever anti-poverty law, which includes a pledge to reduce the number of Canadians living in poverty 50 per cent by the year 2030. No dollar figure is attached to the bill.

Campaign 2000 applauds the law but is calling for the Liberals to spend \$6 billion on this strategy and to adopt more aggressive targets: it wants to see the 50-per-cent poverty reduction target achieved within five years rather than 12.

"We really feel there's impatience on this for action on this," Khanna said. "Frankly, aiming to lift only half of those children out of poverty in 12 years is not ambitious enough and we know that collectively we can do much better."

Related link: Bold ambitions for child and family poverty eradication^[3]

Region: Canada^[4]

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