

Child poverty soars in suburbs [CA-ON] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Toronto suburbs are seeing child poverty increase at an alarming rate, spurred on by population growth that outpaces the social service support needed to accommodate families moving in, according to a report released today by the Children's Aid Society of Toronto.

In areas such as Mississauga, Markham, Richmond Hill and Oakville, child poverty rates have soared since 1990, closing in on levels once isolated to downtown Toronto, says the report, which used census data from 2006.

While Toronto's child poverty rate (before taxes) is the highest at 32 per cent, up from 24 per cent in 1990, the suburbs have seen more dramatic increases. Markham jumped from 8 per cent to 20 per cent, and Mississauga has increased from 12 per cent to 21 per cent.

"This report highlights the changing face of child poverty," said David Rivard, executive director of the Children's Aid Society of Toronto. "It's no longer just the inner core of the city &em; it's moving out to the suburbs as well."

The report, entitled "Greater Trouble in Greater Toronto: Child Poverty in the GTA," is the first comprehensive look at child poverty rates in the 905 area since 1991, and comes days before the province is to release its first-ever poverty reduction strategy.

"Poverty is so entrenched in the city (Toronto), that it tends to eclipse what's going on elsewhere," said Colin Hughes, a Toronto CAS community development worker and author of the report. "The community really needs to know it's a big problem elsewhere, too. Even though child poverty is not as big numerically (in the 905), the degree of change between 1990-2005 is alarming."

Hughes says the data highlight the effect of urbanization on poverty. Often, low-income people tend to settle in larger communities, where they expect there will be more services, more rental housing and more jobs, he said. As the communities grow, so does poverty.

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Canada doesn't have an official poverty line; however, the number most often cited is Statistics Canada's low-income cut-off, which for a single person in Toronto in 2006 was \$17,570 after taxes. For a family of four it was \$33,221 after taxes. Those are numbers Kala Aranrajh, a single mother of two children in Scarborough, knows too well.

"I don't want them to see me worry, that I can't sleep because I am so worried," she said in Tamil. She survives on the monthly child tax benefit and welfare she receives, which barely cover her rent.

Her language barrier and inability to afford child care limit her access to the resources in the community. In other suburbs, there are few resources to begin with.

For years, Toronto received the lion's share of the funding and the suburbs were largely ignored because it was thought poverty wasn't an issue outside the city, said Paul Zarnke, executive director of CAS in Peel.

Now the situation is reaching a crisis point, he said.

Peel Region lacks resources for special needs, mental health resources, child care and has a 21-year wait list for public housing &em; all issues that are intertwined with poverty, he said.

"Our goal is to do things in a proactive and preventative way to ensure that Mississauga and Brampton don't become Toronto West in terms of the level of social problems and challenges they face," he said.

Without such measures, the future is a concern, he said.

"This study was done in a time of economic prosperity for the province," he said. "Now people are losing jobs and facing economic difficulties. I shudder to think what the numbers of child poverty will look like in the next few years."

- reprinted from the Toronto Star

Region: Ontario ^[2]

Tags: poverty ^[3]

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