

Truth carries a painful user fee [CA]^[1]

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See text below.

EXCERPTS

There's a reason you didn't know until this week that Toronto's poverty trends are starkly different from those in the rest of the country. Statistics Canada never released the information.

The United Way of Greater Toronto had to pay the agency \$28,000 for government data showing that family poverty deepened in Toronto between 2000 and 2005, while low-income households made modest gains everywhere else.

It had to spend its donors' money to prove that Toronto has the lowest median income of any major urban centre in the country.

It had to dip into its charitable givings to marshal evidence & already collected at taxpayers' expense & that a one-size-fits-all poverty strategy won't work for Toronto.

Frances Lankin, president of the United Way, does not think this is right.

But without access to Statistics Canada's unpublished numbers, her agency could not have delivered this week's groundbreaking report, *Losing Ground: The Persistent Growth of Family Poverty in Canada's Largest City*. It could not have demonstrated that the drop in the national poverty rate in the first half of this decade excluded Toronto. It could not have exposed a vital hidden truth.

Undoubtedly, the \$28,000 was money well spent.

But why should Statistics Canada, a federal agency with a \$600 million annual budget and a mandate to "help Canadians better understand their country," charge a non-profit organization for a missing chapter of the poverty story?

Why should the United Way have to ferret out a disturbing exception to the positive developments highlighted by Statistics Canada?

Why should reliable figures on poverty & which have little commercial value & remain out of reach for non-paying clients?

(The United Way is not the only victim of Ottawa's "cost-recovery" policy, which dates back to Brian Mulroney's first term of office. Social service agencies, child poverty organizations, universities and libraries are all affected).

The United Way report illustrates the drawbacks of letting Statistics Canada decide what the public needs to know.

Until Monday, Canadians had legitimate grounds to believe Toronto was whining needlessly, exaggerating its woes, wilfully ignoring the fact that poverty is easing.

Torontonians themselves had reason to suspect their civic leaders and social activists were deliberately downplaying the progress of recent years.

It turns out that the progress was taking place everywhere but Toronto.

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This time, the United Way of Greater Toronto managed to set the record straight. Next time, the public might be misled.

- reprinted the Toronto Star

Region: Canada^[2]

Ontario^[3]

Tags: poverty^[4]

statistics^[5]

