

One in seven B.C kids lives in poverty, child advocacy coalition says ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

One in seven children or about 121,000 kids in British Columbia were found to be living in poverty in 2008.

The poverty rate among B.C. children below the age of six during that year was 19.6 percent. This means that one in five in this age category didn't have enough to lead decent lives.

These and other figures will be unveiled today (November 24) by First Call: B.C. Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition when the group releases its latest report card at a press conference at the office of the B.C. Teachers' Federation at 550 West 6th Avenue in Vancouver, starting at 9:30 a.m.

Below is the text of a press release issued by First Call on this issue:

A TIME FOR LEADERSHIP IN FIGHTING CHILD POVERTY

Children need the political leaders of British Columbia to step forward and commit themselves to fighting poverty, BC Campaign 2000 said today in its latest annual report on child poverty.

"Child and family poverty simply won't disappear on its own," said Adrienne Montani, provincial coordinator of First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition. "Political leaders in other provinces understand this, but in BC we are still waiting for courageous leadership on this issue."

The child poverty rate in British Columbia dropped to 14.5 percent in 2008, according to the latest figures published by Statistics Canada. The number of poor children was 121,000 - or about one of every seven BC children. Alarming, the poverty rate for children under age six was 19.6%, or one in five young children.

Montani said 2008 could have the lowest poverty figures of the decade. The recession that started in late 2008 is almost certain to produce higher poverty figures in 2009 and 2010. Indicators such as increases in 2009 and 2010 in food bank use and families on income assistance signal this anticipated rise.

Other key findings in the report include:

- The risk of poverty for female lone-parent families is 31% , two and a half times greater than for children in 2-parent families, but the majority of poor children (67%) live in two-parent families.
- The vast majority of BC's poor children live in families with some income from paid work, with over one third having at least one adult working full-time, full-year.
- Inequity is growing. The gap between the incomes of the richest 10% and poorest 10% of families with children grew from a ratio of 11 to 1 in 2007 to 14 to 1 in 2008. Families in the three lowest income groups (deciles) saw an actual decline in their incomes between 1989 and 2008.

Seven provinces and territories have either enacted or committed themselves to enacting anti-poverty strategies, and at least one other province is said to be ready to join the majority. Both the House of Commons and the Senate have recently issued reports urging Ottawa to commit to an anti-poverty strategy of its own. In November 2009, the House of Commons passed a unanimous resolution to develop an immediate plan to eliminate poverty in Canada for all.

Despite growing pressure from a wide variety of voices within the province for BC to follow suit, BC's children are still looking for this kind of leadership. The Liberal government has regularly denied the severity of the problem, and promised for over a year that a "cross-ministry initiative" will be coming soon. Poverty has yet to become an issue in the prelude to the BC Liberal leadership race. The NDP has called for the government to introduce a poverty reduction plan with targets and timelines, but has yet to put forward the details of their own plan.

"Each of us in all of our communities have a role to play in working to reduce child poverty, but it is time that at both the Federal and Provincial level we get the kind of leadership and investment that can help to make this happen," said Lorraine Copas, Executive Director of the Social Planning and Research Council of BC. "The window of opportunity for healthy development for each child is short and those growing up in poverty cannot be asked to wait any longer."

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BC Campaign 2000 is part of a national network that marks the anniversary every November 24 of the 1989 pledge by the House of Commons to work to end child poverty by the year 2000. The 2010 Child Poverty Report Card for BC was prepared by First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition and the Social Planning and Research Council of BC (SPARC BC).

-reprinted from the Georgia Straight

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