

# Youth Nation question of the day: What would you do to combat child poverty?<sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

**Question:**In 1989, with child poverty rates at a shameful high of 12 per cent, all Canadian parties agreed in the House of Commons to end child poverty by 2000. In 1990, the Canadian government affirmed that commitment by leading the World Summit for Children. Today, however, 40 per cent of food bank users are children and child poverty rates remain at around 12 per cent. Child poverty is a very serious human rights issue and the UN Human Development report has warned that Canada is far behind on human rights and poverty.

What would you do to follow through on Canada's commitments so as to change the situation of the millions of children in Canada who are living in poverty today?

- *Lyndsay Macdonald*<sup>[2]</sup>, 23, is a Registered ECE. Macdonald is a passionate advocate for a national childcare system in Canada.

Candidate's answers:

### **Rebecca Harrison, 27, Green Party candidate, Whitby-Oshawa:**

In 1989 I was six-years-old. I'm nearly 30 and not much has changed. It has become my mission to find that out why. I read reports, spoke to organizations, researchers and politicians that proved to me that Poverty Elimination was not only possible but necessary to protect the human rights of all Canadians. Seven provinces across the country have committed to poverty reduction strategies. Each province varies in their commitments with New Brunswick and Newfoundland boasting strongest political and institutional commitments. Each of these plans depend on support from the Federal government. So now it is the Federal government that is dragging its heels.

Poverty Elimination is the reason I decided to run for the Green Party. I am currently the Poverty Elimination Critic for the Party and as such I ensure that our policies work to eliminate poverty in Canada.

Our Federal Poverty Elimination Strategy includes but is not limited to; a National Affordable housing strategy including new builds, retrofits and inclusionary housing practices that will ensure supply of housing is no longer an issue by 2019; Revamping the 2005 agreement reached between provinces and territories to provide a universal access childcare program; increase benefits for Seniors through GIS and changes to CPP so that no senior is forced to live in poverty; Long term support for Canadians living with a disability through a Guaranteed Livable Income; a national pharma care program, so no one has to choose between food and medicine.

The truth is that it will take many years to eradicate poverty in Canada and it will be the job of several successive governments. So how do we ensure continued attention on this issue?

Greens would augment our current measure of progress, Gross Domestic Product, with the Genuine Progress Indicator, that annually measures how well we are doing on quality of life indicators, including eliminating poverty. So that no longer can any government ignore the level in poverty in Canada by focusing on economic growth.

Greens would also create a Poverty Elimination Commissioner ensuring that a Federal strategy would be responsive to the changing aspects of poverty in Canada, ensure that the process and spending is transparent and ensure that the government is accountable for the results of the program on a regular basis.

Poverty is the most serious threat to human rights. It is a threat that needs to be addressed and it is a threat that can be eliminated. As young Canadians we can see a poverty free Canada in our life time but we need to start now.

### **Andrew Carkner, 28, Green Party candidate, Westmount-Ville-Marie:**

One reason that the other major parties haven't been able to end child poverty is that, for them, the need for economic growth overrides all other considerations. Even when they succeed at that, the benefit goes to those who are already rich or middle-class. The Green Party, on the other hand, considers quality of life to be the most important objective, which leads us to invest where the least money can do the most good; that is, to eliminate child poverty.

Humanity has reached a stage where we have consumed nearly all the natural wealth on earth, and so rather than trying in vain to consume even more, we should focus on a more equitable distribution of that wealth.

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**Danny Polifroni, 27, Green Party candidate, Papineau:**

Poverty is a systemic problem and requires a systemic solution. Once again, the main systemic culprit is economic growth which, if not kept under control, leads to concentration of wealth for a small portion of citizens. However, economic growth is not the only cause. In general, we can say that anywhere there is concentration of wealth by any means (dictatorship, slavery, etc.) there will be poverty. How then can we eliminate poverty? By the opposite of concentrating wealth; by generosity and sharing. This is not to say that individuals should not be allowed to become wealthy by honest means, there is no problem with this. If we accept this proposition, we must be ready to accept that no one should be poor. We have to walk the middle ground.

To eliminate poverty, we have to implement policies that are both logical and compassionate. The policies must have both qualities. It is important to realize, that sometimes we must help people freely. Sometimes, when you fall on hard times, you just need a helping hand, not judgement or terms and conditions. The next important step is to administer the help wisely, so as to actually help the person solve their problem, and not make them dependent on the help they receive. Compassion makes us certain we need to provide help; wisdom gives us the mean to do it properly.

The Green Party proposes a wide range of tools to help kick start people out of poverty, such as:

1. Removing taxes from the lowest income categories so that no taxes are paid by those below the poverty line (Canada's Low Income Cut-off measure).
2. Allow income assistance recipients to keep 100% of the wages they earn up to the Low Income Cut-off level to encourage people to get back into the job market.

This can be seen as the compassionate aspect of the policies. In order to end the cycle of poverty, we need to be smart about it as well. To achieve this the Green Party will work with provincial and municipal governments on how to implement a Guaranteed Livable Income (GLI) for all. The use of a GLI could eliminate poverty and allow social services to concentrate on problems of mental health and addiction. Feel free to ask me questions if you want more details about the GLI.

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**Farah Kalbouneh, 22, NDP candidate, Mississauga South:**

I never like starting this discussion with a cliché, but it's almost unavoidable when talking about child poverty numbers in Canada. So here you go: children are our future. For the wealthy status we enjoy, our performance in this area puts us around the bottom of the list among developed nations. To not be investing in 12% of tomorrow's leaders, innovators, and artists is an outright shame. The reality is that child poverty rates in Canada have remained fundamentally unchanged for decades. I don't know what that says to you, but I know what it says to me: "Where has the leadership been on this issue?" While it's fine to pass House resolutions decrying the situation and vowing to rectify it, it is another thing altogether to pick up the standard and run with it. The issue itself is complicated, and symptomatic of a number of other socio-economic problems. The solution, however, is relatively straightforward and simple from a political standpoint. The first part requires us to address the primary cause of child poverty: adult poverty. In order to tackle one, we must tackle the other. Here's how:

- 1) Increase the Canada Child Tax Benefit to ensure that eligible families are receiving adequate support in dealing with the cost of raising children.
- 2) Increase the federal minimum wage so that parents working several of the "McJobs" created by Canada's Economic Action Plan are earning enough to support their families. No one working full-time, year-round should be living below the poverty line.
- 3) Loosen the requirements for Employment Insurance eligibility and wait times to avoid any interruption in pay in the event of downsizing or lay-offs.
- 4) Build affordable housing to subsidize living costs for eligible families in need (this has the added bonus of creating jobs).

These leadership actions will take care to safeguard the financial security of Canadian families while they get back on their feet. In addition to these measures, others solutions will have to be enacted to combat the issue as it relates specifically to children. They are:

- 1) Creation of a national early education and care system that is accessible, affordable, and high-quality. This will allow parents to work/go back to school while fostering early development in children.
- 2) Ensure access to post-secondary education for students from low income families through funding.

If we can get all this done, we will have leveled the playing field. The above plan will make sure that every child born in Canada has the same opportunity to succeed as every other child. My opponents will look at this and say "We can never afford this", but I ask you: How can we \*not\* afford this?

(no other parties rprovided answeres to this question)

- reprinted from the Toronto Star

**Region:** Canada <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** poverty <sup>[4]</sup>

combat-child-poverty

#### Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/11/06/youth-nation-question-day-what-would-you-do-combat-child-poverty> [2] [https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2011/04/01/meet\\_the\\_youth\\_nation\\_panel.html](https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2011/04/01/meet_the_youth_nation_panel.html) [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7864> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/poverty>