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Look after our children

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Editorials - A report for the Canadian Council on Social Development says that the gap between rich and poor remains stubbornly wide.

That's discouraging, especially since full-time work is no guarantee of avoiding the poverty trap.

The report, issued last week, says one in three Canadian children living in poverty in 2003 had at least one family member who worked full-time for the entire year. In 1993, the figure was one in four, so there has been some marginal improvement in the past decade.

The council's report credits direct government transfers, especially the National Child Benefit introduced by the Liberal government of Jean Chretien, with helping to keep the child poverty rate to 18 per cent in 2003. Without the transfers, the rate would have been 27 per cent, the report says.

Obviously, either figure is unacceptable.

We, as Canadians, in one of the richest and supposedly most compassionate countries in the world, are allowing the most vulnerable in our society to grow up in dismal poverty.

Children most likely to live in poverty are aboriginal, recent immigrants, members of visible minorities, and those with some form of disability.

Thank goodness the Conservatives have promised to maintain the transfers.

Maintaining is good, but wouldn't it be nice to see the amount of money invested in these children grow, further reducing the number of kids and their parents who are just getting by?

The Stephen Harper government has also promised relief for families in its first budget today, including the so-called child care allowance of \$1,200 for each child under the age of six. It's small change compared to actual cost of child care for a year.

Ironically, information about the report was published in The Sault Star the same day as local Salvation Army officials talked about the difficulty is raising enough money to maintain all of its services for the poor, including operating a year-round food bank. Last year nearly 1,100 families, representing more than 2,500 individuals used the food bank.

Let's watch the federal budget carefully today. Let's watch for money, programs and ideas to help our nation's future our children.

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