
Canadian children go hungry

By DARREN YOURK

Globe and Mail Update

Monday, November 04 – Online Edition, **Posted at 10:46 AM EST**

A new report paints a bleak picture of increasing child poverty and hunger in Canada.

The Progress of Canada's Children 2002 says that approximately 75,000 families with children under the age of 12 reported being hungry in 1996 (the last year for which data are available) - an increase of one-third from 1994.

"Despite the economic boom of the mid to late 1990s, too many Canadian families and their children are barely scraping by and are just one problem away from economic disaster," Louise Hanvey, senior researcher at the Canadian Council on Social Development (CCSD) and author of the report, said Monday.

"The fact that so many kids are heading off to school on empty stomachs is not the reality one expects to see in a G7 country like Canada that is consistently ranked among the best places in the world in which to live."

The study found that children who have immigrated to Canada since 1986 are more likely than non-immigrant children to have parents who work more than 50 hours per week. In spite of this, they are more likely to be poor — one-third of recent immigrant children live below the low income cut-off, compared with one-fifth of non-immigrant children.

The study also says rich families continue to get richer, while poor families continue to get poorer. Between 1984 and 1999, the average net wealth of the top 20 per cent of couples with children increased by 43 per cent. Among the middle 20 per cent of families, it grew by only 3 per cent, and for families at the bottom of the income scale, it fell by more than 51 per cent.

"What's especially disturbing is the steady erosion of the support system or social infrastructure that low-income families used to rely on," said Marcel Lauzière, President of the CCSD. "Just as our physical infrastructure, our bridges and roads are crumbling, so too are the key pillars of our social infrastructure which are essential if our poor children are to have a fighting chance in life."

The report says a housing crisis continues for Canadian children and families. The number of families who pay more than 30 per cent of their pretax income on dwelling costs rose by 91 per cent between 1989 and 1996. The number of households that pay more than 50 per cent of their income on rent rose by 43 per cent between 1990 and 1995. As a result, families are the fastest growing segment of the population requiring emergency shelter.

The demand for child-welfare services continues to grow. Six of the nine provinces that participated in a CCSD survey reported an increased number of children and youth living in care.

"These trends have serious implications for the health, growth and development of children whose families are struggling to make ends meet," Ms. Hanvey said. "We know that children who live in persistent low income don't do as well in school and they aren't as healthy."

Interactive

- Web Sites: [Canadian Council on Social Development](#)

Copyright © 2002 Bell Globemedia Interactive Inc. All Rights Reserved.