



*Alliance nationale pour les enfants*

---

*National Children's Alliance*

## **Poverty and Middle Childhood**

**Policy Brief prepared for the Middle Childhood Initiative of  
the National Children's Alliance**

**By: Campaign 2000**

**Funding provided by a grant from Human Resources Social Development  
Canada, Community Partnerships Branch**

## **Poverty and Middle Childhood**

Prepared by Jaquie Maund, Campaign 2000

### **1. Introduction**

The tenacity of Canada's high rate of child and family poverty is of particular concern for policy makers and children's advocates across the country. Despite strong economic growth Canada's child poverty rate has been stalled at 17-18% since the year 2000 (1). The latest data for children in middle childhood (aged 6-12) show that 19.5%, or 1 in every 5 children, are living below the poverty line (2).

As Figure 1 shows, poverty figures for children aged 6-12 peaked in 1996 at 24%. Economic growth and social investments combined to drive down child poverty from 1996 through 2001 but progress then stalled. Poverty rates for middle childhood have been stalled since then, and actually increased slightly between 2003 and 2004. Although we do not have data specific to middle childhood, we can assume that poverty rates are higher for children aged 6-12 who have disabilities, and children in Aboriginal, visible minority and immigrant families just as they are for all children (3).

Children are in poverty because their parents are in poverty. Clearly rising employment and strong job creation have not solved Canada's child and family poverty problem. More and more families are working but not finding jobs with sufficient pay nor hours and benefits to help them escape poverty. Almost half of all low income children live in families where the parent/s was in the labour market for the full year (4). For those parents not able to be in the workforce, welfare incomes are well below the poverty line in all jurisdictions. Half a million of the 1.7million people in Canada relying on welfare are children (5). Low wages, poor jobs and a weakened social safety net are key reasons behind Canada's high child poverty rate. The challenges of finding reliable affordable child care so that parents can work or receive training, and the high cost of housing are also factors in the incidence and depth of low income for families.

What steps have been taken to address child poverty? The primary policy tool is the Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCTB) introduced in 1998 with one of its goals being “to help prevent and reduce the depth of child poverty”. Designed to help families with the cost of raising children, the CCTB is non-taxable monthly payment paid to 90% of Canadian families based on the family’s net income, and the number and ages of the children. The CCTB has two components: the base benefit which is paid to low and middle income families with children, and the National Child Benefit Supplement (NCBS) which is an additional benefit paid to low income families with children (6). The CCTB is scheduled to reach \$3,243/year for the first child by July 2007 with no further increases announced. Eight jurisdictions claw back part or all of the NCBS from families on social assistance leaving them no better off in terms of income. For families with a child with a disability, the Child Disability Benefit (CDB) is a monthly tax-free benefit to help care for a child under age 18 with a severe and prolonged impairment in mental or physical functions.

Other pieces of national policy and legislation that affect family income include: Employment Insurance, child care policy, affordable housing policy, and the Canada Social Transfer which provides block funding to the provinces for a portion of welfare costs. Provincial and territorial level policies affecting family income security include: welfare programs; minimum wage legislation; and provincial spending on early learning and child care services, affordable housing and education.

## **2. Policy Goals and Principles**

The years of middle childhood are a period that should ideally build on the strong foundations of the early years and prepare for the turbulence of adolescence. Campaign 2000 maintains that the ultimate goal for Canada with regard to children’s policy should be to create environments where children of all ages can thrive -not simply survive. This means developing the talents, skills and capacities of children to benefit from and contribute to community life and to assume a range of social responsibilities. Poverty and income inequality are major barriers to the healthy development of children, to the

cohesion of our communities, and to the social and economic well-being of the country as a whole.

A comprehensive, multi-year approach with firm funding is needed to achieve substantial and sustained reduction and prevention of child poverty. Federal and provincial governments need to:

- Increase the availability of good jobs at living wages, raise minimum wages and provide better Employment Insurance protection;
- Create an effective child benefit system that provides enough income support to keep working parents (including single parents) out of poverty, and that is not clawed back from social assistance recipients;
- Build a universally accessible system of quality early learning and child care both for young children (birth to age 6) and school aged children aged 6-12. This would support optimal early development of children, and enable parents to work or receive training;
- Expand affordable housing significantly to enable parents to raise their children in healthy communities;
- Renew the social safety net through the Canada Social Transfer and rebuild transfers for social assistance and social services.

### **3.Policy Directions**

These broad policy directions would benefit Canadian families with children of all ages and help to reduce our child poverty rate. With regard to children aged 6-12, a Campaign 2000 'Expert Consultation on the Elementary School Years' highlighted the finding that children in middle childhood spend approximately 33% of their time with their parents, 33% of time in school, and 33% elsewhere (for example, child care centres, recreation facilities, alone at home after school, etc.).

Viewed in this context, Campaign 2000 offers the following recommendations and potential strategies:

(a) **Family life and parent engagement:** The growing number of working yet poor families indicates the struggle that parents are having finding jobs with sufficient hours, pay and benefits to lift their families out of poverty. 37% of all jobs are now precarious: contract, temporary, part-time and self employed. Job insecurity and stress are increasingly important threats to family life as parents struggle to meet their work and parenting responsibilities. Some parents are juggling 2-3 part-time jobs with no time or energy left to spend with their children. Parents trying to survive on welfare incomes are typically struggling to pay the rent and feed their children.

Yet during middle childhood the formation and development of parental and peer relationships is crucial (7).

#### **Recommendations:**

- Support policies calling for more good jobs at living wages;
- Support the call to establish a federal minimum wage at a living wage of \$10/hour with inflation indexation;
- Support calls to restore eligibility for Employment Insurance by introducing a uniform 360 hour qualifying requirement;
- Encourage provincial governments to raise minimum wage levels and strengthen employment standards legislation so that contract, temporary and self-employed workers receive the same labour protection as other workers;
- Encourage more generous family leave provisions in labour standards legislation;
- Call on the federal government to consolidate child benefits into a single program, and raise the Canada Child Tax Benefit to \$5,000/child. This in combination with \$10/hour minimum wage would lift a single parent (working full time at minimum wage) up to the poverty line.

- Call for continued federal investment in a national affordable housing program to provide good quality, secure, affordable housing which can anchor a family in a neighbourhood.

**(b)School life and recreation:** Low income children have low rates of participation in recreational services provided by schools, municipal recreation systems, and licensed child care providers. Constraints include school fees, the high cost of supervised sports, the lack of parental involvement, and the absence of recreational facilities in low income neighbourhoods. Younger children in the lowest income quartile are three times more likely to have never participated in organized activities (sports, music, arts or clubs) than children in the highest quartile (8). As such they do not share in important socialization experiences, and exposure to mentors such as coaches and recreation leaders.

The Government of Newfoundland & Labrador has recognized how school fees stigmatize students from families who cannot to pay for school trips and school materials; in the 2006 provincial budget Newfoundland increased grants to school boards to cover school materials.

With regard to access to child care, children aged 6-12 from low income families are more likely to be in self care, with relatives or neighbours rather than a formal after school child care program (9). The Government of Quebec has taken a leadership role in addressing this challenge from which other provinces can learn. As part of its major reform of early learning and child care, Quebec has substantially improved child care programs for school aged children reflecting principles of universality, accessibility and public funding. There is widespread accessibility for school aged children with many programs available in schools and low fees (10).

## Recommendations:

- Call for public commitment to government expenditure in municipal and school-based recreation programs as low income parents have limited capacity to ensure adequate leisure/recreational experiences for their children;
- Call for federal government investment in “public spaces and family places” to support development and maintenance of inclusive community play spaces, recreation opportunities and family-oriented community centres (as supported by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities);
- Encourage provincial governments to provide sufficient educational funding to cover classroom costs such as field trips and school materials;
- Call for a national universal, accessible and high quality child care system that provides safe care and learning opportunities for children aged 6-12 before and after school.

Campaign 2000’s review of lessons learned from other industrialized countries that have reduced child poverty rates to 5% or less shows that government investments in both social programs and high quality labour markets are key. It is a broad policy mix and long term commitment of funding that makes a difference in reducing child poverty rates and keeping them low (11).

---

## Notes:

- (1) Campaign 2000 (2005). *Decision Time for Canada: Let’s Make Poverty History 2005 Report Card on Child Poverty in Canada*. Toronto: Campaign 2000.
- (2) 2004 data prepared by the Canadian Council on Social Development (CCSD) using Statistics Canada’s Income Trends in Canada, 2004, 13F0022XIE and Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics masterfile data (1993-2004). Low income children aged 6-12 are those living in families whose total income before taxes falls below the Low Income Cut-off (LICO) as defined by Statistics Canada.

The data does not include children living on First Nations reserves, those in the Yukon, NWT and Nunavut, and children living in institutions.

- (3) According to the 2001 census, national child poverty rates are 27.7% for children with disabilities, 33.6% for children who are visible minorities, 40% for Aboriginal children, and 49% for children who immigrated to Canada between 1996-2001.
- (4) Campaign 2000 (2005). *ibid*
- (5) National Council of Welfare (2006). *Welfare Incomes 2005*. Ottawa: Minister of Public Works & Government Services Canada.
- (6) Social Development Canada (2005). *The National Child Benefit Progress Report: 2004*. Ottawa: Social Development Canada.
- (7) Middle Years Matter Coalition (2005). *Middle Years Matter Coalition- Position Paper*.
- (8) Hanvey, Louise (2002). *Middle Childhood Building on the Early Years a Discussion Paper*.
- (9) Middle Years Matter Coalition (2005). *Draft – Making the Case for Out of School Time Programs for the Middle Years*.
- (10) Friendly, Martha and Jane Beach. (2005) *Early Childhood Care in Canada, 2004*. Toronto: Childcare Resource & Research Unit. And personal communication.
- (11) Campaign 2000 (2004). *Pathways to Progress: Structural Solutions to Address Child Poverty*. Toronto: Campaign 2000.