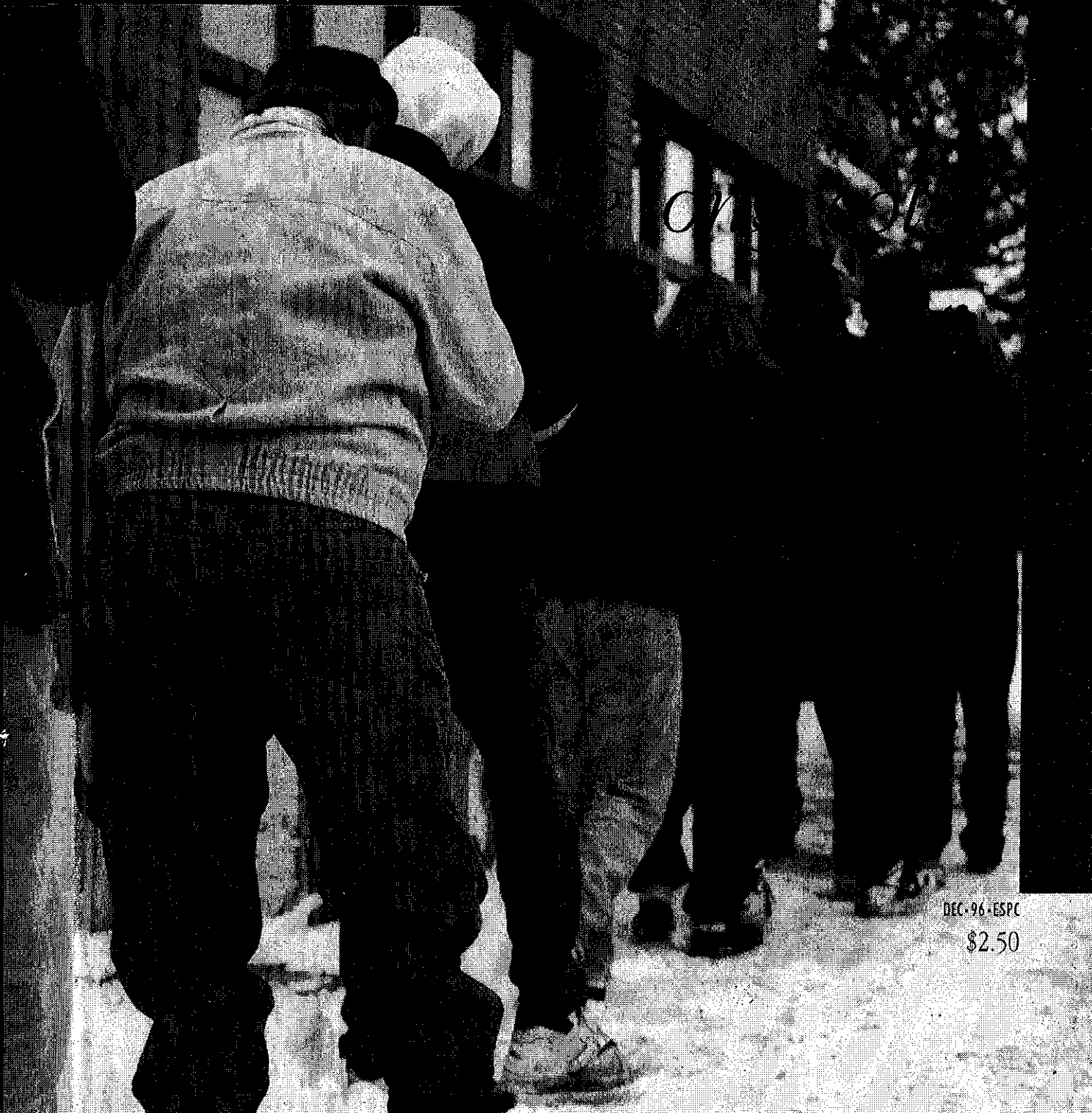


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First Reading is published four times a year by the Edmonton Social Planning Council. The Council is an independent, not-for-profit organization, whose activities include social research, policy analysis and advocacy.

We welcome new members, and the opinions and suggestions of our current members. All membership requests or magazine contributions can be forwarded to:

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Cover Photo: Sheila Hallett-Kushniruk
Food Bank line up at Anawin Place mid-November

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A community where all people have a commitment to social justice and shared responsibility as the foundation for community well being.

Responding to the changing political and social environment, the Edmonton Social Planning Council will:

Identify trends and emerging social issues.

Create opportunities to debate and address social issues.

Initiate and support community action through research, coordination and advocacy.

For most of us, income is the benefit we realize in return for our labors. We do things that we'd often rather not do, and we're paid for our efforts. We use the money to buy the things that we need to sustain ourselves. It's a system that works reasonably well for those of us who can work and who can find work, but what about the elderly, the injured, or the disabled who can't work? Even more problematic are those who can't *find* work. How do we sustain these Albertans and to what level of security and comfort? How do we help them find work? These are the questions that we asked contributors to this issue of *First Reading*.

There is still a reasonable level of commitment in Alberta to those whose obstacles to full employment are clear, such as the physically disabled. The Government of Alberta defines these people as "truly in need." Benefit levels are reasonable, although by no means lavish, and recipients are accorded some degree of respect once they've been determined to have legitimate disabilities. For those whose barriers are less obvious, however, the experience is entirely different.

The distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor is well-established in Alberta public policy, despite the fact that no such distinction exists in legislation. Poverty, recognized until just a few short years ago as a societal problem, thus becomes an individual responsibility. For those found by the government to be lacking the essential integrity to be deserving of public assistance, there will be no public support.

The term income security thus becomes an oxymoron in modern Alberta. There is no longer any true security of income for any Albertan, and if there is no security of income, there is no security of the means to sustain life itself. As a community, we no longer make the commitment to ensure that all of our citizens have the means to provide themselves and their families with the basic needs of food, clothing and shelter. Is this really what we want? Is our financial crisis really that serious?

The debate is a complex one, with strong views on all sides. At the most basic level, we have to remember that what we are talking about is whether or not every Albertan has a right to eat and sleep in relative security, and to benefit from the riches of this province, regardless of somebody's subjective impression of their deservedness.

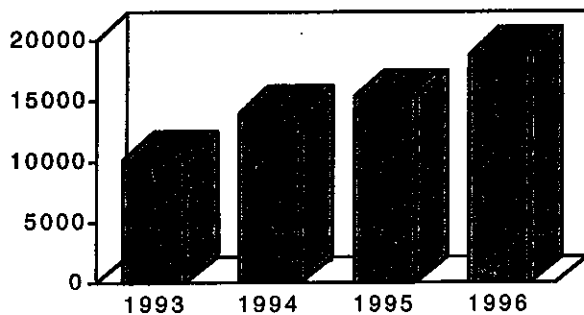
It's not fashionable and it's certainly not politically popular, but if we cannot bring ourselves to affirm this most basic commitment to one another, then what truly is the state of our "civil" society.

Brian Bechtel
Executive Director

Creating Dependence:

Welfare Policy and the Rise of Food Banks

Food Bank demand yearly average—number of people served



A public opinion earthquake is rumbling across the provincial government's health policy agenda. The outcry from concerned families reversed kindergarten cuts two years ago. Meanwhile, the Alberta government's sweeping reforms of its income security system have earned virtual silence. Aside from the isolated voices of a few advocates, the welfare cuts appear to have been met with approval from most Albertans.

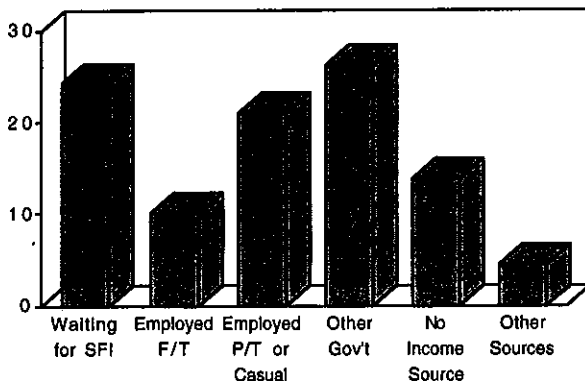
And why not. Welfare, now named Supports for Independence (SFI), has been reformed to put people back to work. If a 17 per cent cut in benefit rates and a more demanding approach to job searches is required to achieve the goal, then it can be considered short term pain for a longer term gain.

Since December 1992, 53,000 cases have been removed from SFI caseload, 60 per cent occurring in Edmonton. These closed files can be categorized in three ways. About 17,000 have been transferred to Student Finance (SFB), as the clients have returned to school to upgrade skills. Another 5,500 are in job placements funded by the government. There is no record for the remaining 30,000 cases.

The government claims most of these people have moved into employment and are now free of government income support. No one, to date, has conducted an evaluation of the SFI reforms and determined the destination of the closed cases.

This summer Edmonton's Food Bank and the Edmonton Social Planning Council (ESPC) teamed up to conduct a comprehensive examination of Food Bank recipients and why they need the Food Bank. Food Bank demand has risen 122 per cent since 1993, and the need for information on who they serve has never been greater.

Current income source of former-SFI recipients



1996 ESPC, Edmonton Food Bank Study

This study is the first to partially examine the effects of the reforms three years ago.

Some of the results are striking:

- 60 per cent of recipients are current SFI clients.
- 82 per cent of recipients have had some involvement with SFI in the past three years.
- In any given month, 20 per cent of SFI clients turn to the Food Bank.
- Over the year, up to 50 per cent of SFI clients will have to access Food Bank services.
- 35 per cent of SFI clients were referred to the Food Bank by their social worker.

Overwhelmingly, SFI-involved Food Bank recipients indicated they do not receive enough to make ends meet. Consequently, they turn up at the Food Bank to try to reduce their budget deficit. Compounding difficulties, they also report not receiving the support they require to find employment. Money for bus passes, work clothing or even telephones is not available. Finding work without these basic tools would be impossible for any Albertan.

By asking study participants about their income history and government program experience during the past three years, we were able to construct a picture of what has happened with this portion of SFI's caseload.

The study was able to provide data for 10 per cent of the cases closed in the Edmonton area during the past three years. Of those who are no longer involved with SFI, a full 44 per cent have no source of income at all. Only 10 per cent have successfully found full time employment. Another 20.6 per cent, have merely ended up on another form of government income support, such as AISH, EI or SFB. This is hardly a picture of prosperity and plenty.

Those without income seem left to the goodwill of family and friends and the casual labour pool. They tend to be unattached individuals, who end up being rather mobile. However, the study left many questions about how these people are able to survive month to month.

Rather than act as a springboard to security, the closing of cases seems to have created a program merry-go-round for low income Albertans. The largest destination of closed cases has been Student Finance.

However, data from the study indicates that 73 per cent of those switched to SFB returned to SFI following completion of their program. Sixty-four per cent of those switched to EI ended up back on SFI a few months later. Seventy-five per cent of those provided job placements found themselves unemployed after the term was complete. Most returned to SFI.

More concerning than the merry-go-round is the destination of those simply terminated by SFI. One in five SFI-involved Food Bank recipients report having been cut off from SFI at some point in the past three years. Another 15 per cent have had their applications denied.

Notwithstanding the fact four out of five disagreed with the decision, it may be justifiable for SFI to take such action. SFI is the program of last resort intended for those with no other route for paying the bills. It should not support those who do not need the help. Unfortunately, 51 per cent of application denials were for reasons other than financial need (age, immigration status, reason for leaving last position). One out of two denials left families with no other form of income support.

As well, 43 per cent of appeals filed were successful in overturning the original decision. The department's own appeal process believes many of the decisions were not based on defensible rationales. (Unfortunately, only 38 per cent filed appeals. The remaining 62 per cent indicated a strong lack of trust in the appeal system to operate fairly, discouraging them from utilizing it.)

The data suggests SFI is taking a cavalier attitude to decisions affecting the very survival of Alberta families. The reluctance of the government to provide income support to those in need is forcing people onto the doorsteps of Edmonton's Food Bank depots.

The dramatic rise in Food Bank need during the past three years becomes less of a mystery when one examines what has happened to Alberta's income security program of last resort. While the study performed this summer cannot be taken as a complete evaluation of SFI policy, it is the first snapshot of post-Klein income security to be found. And unfortunately, the picture it takes has lots of grays and blacks, with few bright colors. ■

Jason Foster is project coordinator at the Edmonton Social Planning Council. He headed the team of researchers studying the rise in Food Bank demand.

A view from the inside...

one welfare worker's perspective

It has been almost four years since the Klein Government implemented its sweeping and radical changes to Alberta's welfare program (Supports For Independence). Mike Cardinal, then minister of Family and Social Services, announced in April of 1993 the Conservative government would be taking a "new" approach to how welfare would be distributed in Alberta. Now four years later Alberta's welfare workers feel no more empowered to make a difference than the welfare clients they are trying to serve.

The 1993 welfare reforms contained two major changes. Firstly, benefit rates were lowered to "deter" Albertans from staying on the system longer than they minimally needed to be. Shelter rates and grocery rates were cut back to \$394 for a single person and \$766 for a single mother with one child. These rates have not increased since that time. Clients state they are under constant financial pressure as they don't have enough funds to meet their needs. Many clients state they are frustrated with the high expectations the department places on them to seek work daily and attend courses when they don't have enough money for busfare or childcare. Not that clients are unwilling to do this, they state they do not have the resources to meet the expectations.

Clients continue to have difficult times securing adequate, safe accommodation for their families particularly in areas of higher rents such as urban centers and Northern Alberta. The financial restraint within the welfare system has tied workers' hand in helping clients access additional benefits that used to be available. Changes to the Social Allowance Regulations prohibits the issuance of supplemental benefits except in very particular circumstances. More often than not, workers are in the position of saying no to a client who has a genuine need.

Initially, this focus seemed positive. Supports were put in place to assist able bodied individuals to seek, accept and maintain employment. Many clients were able to

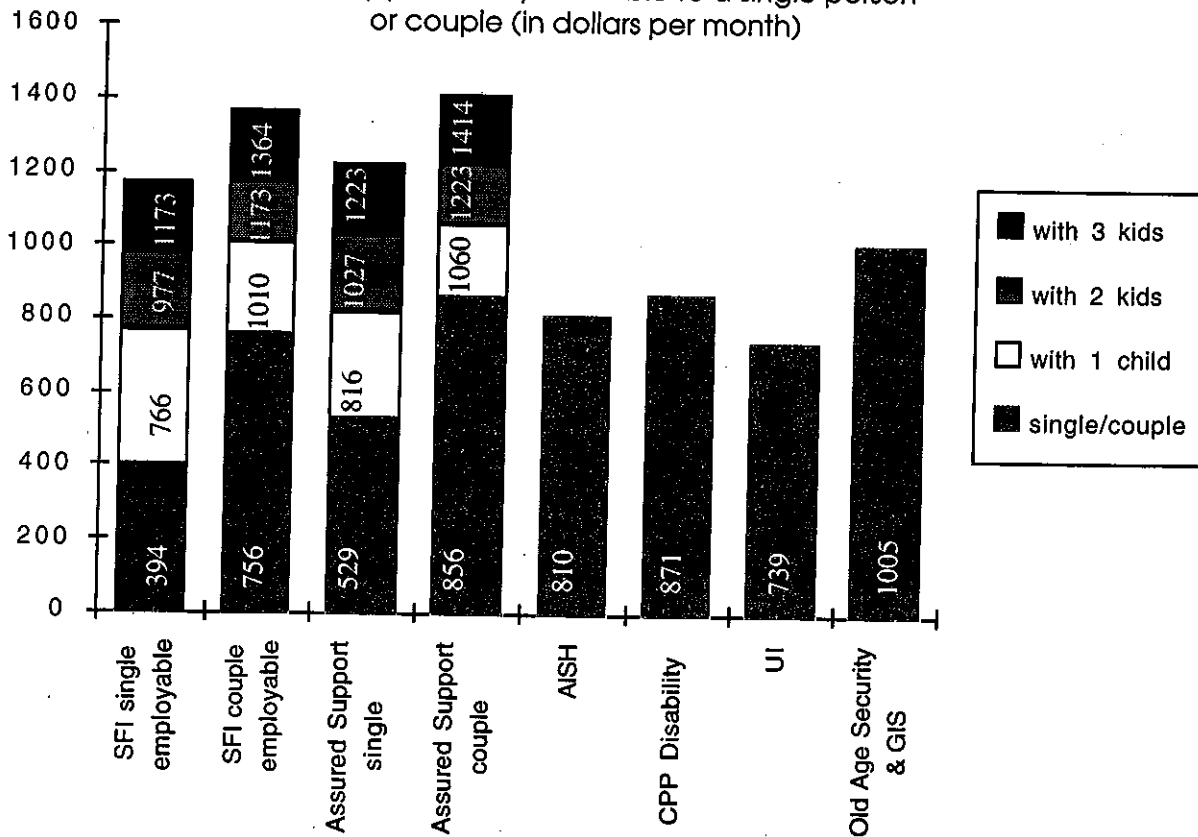
move into full time work and become independent of the welfare system. However, almost four years later the definition of "able to work" has become very broad. With the welfare caseload decreased, attention is now being given to those clients that have more barriers to employment. They may have been out of work longer, or had more children, or more physical or mental health issues, or low self esteem, or low education. There is an expectation to get these clients working to further decrease the caseload. However, the quick fix method is not working with these clients. They are being placed into jobs prematurely and if they lose the job they risk loosing their benefits. Not only do they risk loosing their benefits but this could be a major blow to their self esteem. There are programs available to address the needs of these clients but the programs are costly, spaces are limited and there are waiting lists.

The change to the system has created a very black and white program for both clients and workers. Workers are monitored by the amount that the caseload decreases and by the placements that are made. Although workers strive to attain the "best match" for programs or jobs, but often workload constraints only allow for a quick fix solution. Workers state they are frustrated by the pressure to continue to reduce caseloads when the clients they are working with have more barriers and require greater interventions. On the other hand, clients are aware of the department's employment focus and therefore often take employment they may not be able to do. Clients state that if they had a choice they would not be on welfare—they say the department's expectations are more stressful to manage than working. It would appear that the system, in its attempt to "clean itself up," has become too rigid for both workers and clients. ■

This article was written by a financial benefits worker from the Supports For Independence program. The worker chose to remain anonymous.

How much money do people make on various income support programs

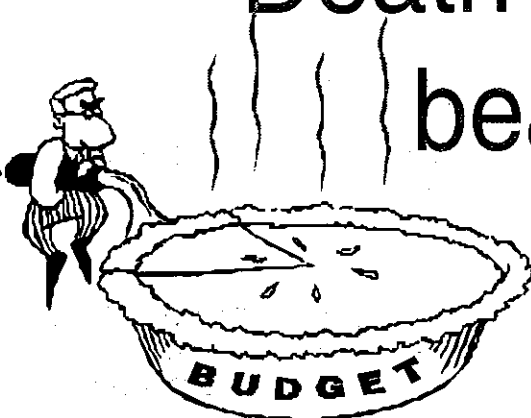
—money potentially available to a single person or couple (in dollars per month)



Note: The Supports For Independence (welfare) rates listed above cover the supplements to earnings, employment and training support and transitional support program. Transitional support also provides an extra \$85 for a single person. The rate for one child pertains to a child under 11 years of age; both children are assumed to be under 11 years of age for 'with 2 kids;' and 'with three kids' assumes two children are under 11 years of age and one child is over 11. The rates listed above for AISH, CPP Disability, UI, Old Age Security and GIS are all based on one person. AISH (Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped) clients with children receive additional funds from Supports For Independence program. CPP (Canada Pension Plan) Disability payment is the maximum a person could receive and the UI (Unemployment Insurance—now called Employment Insurance) calculation is based on previous employment which included a 40-hour work week with an \$8/hr wage. The maximum rate for Old Age Security and GIS (Guaranteed Income Supplement) also assumes the single senior receives \$1,800 per year from the Alberta Seniors Benefit.

Source: The Other Welfare Manual, 1994, Edmonton Social Planning Council; Human Resources Development Canada; Review of Cumulative Impact of Program and Service Changes on Seniors, June 1996, Alberta Community Development.

Death of federal fund bears hard lesson



This April, the Liberal federal government repealed the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP). For 30 years, CAP had outlined a funding formula and some basic standards for social services throughout the country. Although its demise certainly marked the formal end of an era during which it appeared possible Canada might develop and sustain a European-style social safety net, the degeneration of our social programs long predated the Chr. tien government.

In its original form, CAP guaranteed matching federal funding for provinces establishing social assistance and social support programs which met some very minimal requirements. Basically, income support and other services had to be available for anyone who met a test of basic need, although the provinces were essentially free to set welfare rates at whatever level they chose. In addition, each province had to set up an appeal system available to anyone who was denied benefits, and offer the same benefits to newcomers as to long-term residents of the province.

Through the late-'60s and early-'70s, CAP funding encouraged each province to modernize its welfare systems. Alberta, for example, chose to centralize services under provincial control, rather than relying on the old patchwork of municipal programs. Benefits were improved and welfare soon joined education and health care in the "big three" of provincial budget expenditure items. Eventually, relatively comparable programs were available to all destitute Canadians.

A tangled web of interrelated factors brought an end to this rosy period. To begin with, the late-'70s marked the beginning of the resurgence of the right wing in Canada, threatening the Canadian post-war liberal consensus.

A second factor was the sheer growth of the cost of the

programs. For example in Alberta the cost of programs rose by more than 20 per cent each year on average over a 10-year period and this caused legitimate public concern. Unfortunately many defenders of social programs, a group among whose members I must include myself, failed to respond to these concerns, preferring to see the spiralling costs and numbers of families dependent on welfare as a positive demonstration of society's generosity. Our inability to propose reform left a social policy void which the right was only too pleased to fill with its theories of moral and social degeneration, and a program of deep cuts.

Finally, the fiscal situation of federal and many provincial governments had worsened, with most having amassed large current account deficits. Although it was initially simple to finance the shortfall through borrowing, within a few years the cost of interest payments on accumulated debt placed a serious crimp on program expenditures. As the newest and least popular of the three big ticket items, welfare was sure to take a hit. What was less predictable perhaps, was the *extent* to which Canadians and their governments were prepared to stick it to their less affluent brethren.

Benefits were first reduced in Alberta in 1983, and over the next few years suffered a series of further retrenchments, culminating in the massive cuts in April and October 1993, which have led to the elimination of more than half the caseload. Sooner or later, most other provinces followed suit.

The Mulroney federal government followed the lead, and, in a series of measures in the late-'80s and early-'90s, limited the amount of welfare expenditure eligible for cost-sharing. Especially onerous restrictions were placed on the so-called wealthy provinces of B.C., Alberta, and Ontario, so that by the time Mulroney was defeated in 1993, the feds were paying less than one-third of Ontario's tab. The new Liberal government then froze transfers at the already constrained level, making the concept of CAP cost-sharing meaningless.

In his 1995 budget, Federal Finance Minister Paul Martin

announced the elimination of CAP and the creation of a new transfer program which provides the provinces a fixed and much reduced block payment to help pay for health, post-secondary and social services programs. The Canadian Health and Social Transfer (CHST) retained key provisions mandating public health care, but ditched all but one of the rules governing welfare programs, the proscription on residency requirements.

By the time CAP died, it was clear that it had very little effect on provincial welfare policy, at least in the "have" provinces. The feds had long since ceased trying to enforce CAP's standards, and indeed court cases (most notably the 1993 Supreme Court of Canada decision of Manitoba's *Finlay v. the Crown*) strongly suggest that their authority over provincial programs was minimal.

It's hard to discern significant change in provincial welfare programs since CAP ended. Ontario's cuts and workfare initiative were a key part of Mike Harris' election platform, predating the end of CAP, and clearly part of a neo-conservative agenda. Alberta hasn't made any significant policy changes for the past three years, and with one exception the other provinces have only tinkered with their programs since April 1, 1996.

That exception is ironic. B.C.'s NDP government has imposed a three-month residency requirement for new recipients, which manages to breach the only remaining rule under the CHST. The feds have duly reduced transfers to attempt to force compliance, only to be ignored by the B.C. government. Clearly, in B.C. at least, welfare policy is not influenced by the federal funding power.

Unconditional cost-sharing programs such as CAP work well as long as governments have increasing revenues and there is public support for program expansion. By their very nature they do not restrict expenditure growth, and indeed encourage the program operators, in this case the provinces, to expand services by taking advantage of "50-cent dollars."

But no government in the current era of frugality can afford to hand over its right to establish clear expenditure targets by guaranteeing to pay half of the cost of a program designed and delivered by another level of government. While we must pressure the federal government to improve its support for social programs, any new cost-shared programs will and should include clear expenditure limits. ■

Jonathan Murphy, director of population research at the University of Alberta, is a member of the National Council of Welfare, a federal advisory board on social issues. From 1990 to 1995, he was Executive Director of the Edmonton Social Planning Council.

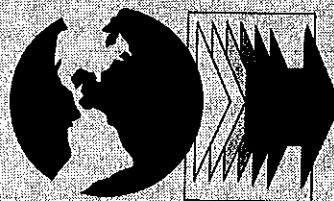
Eighth

Conference on Canadian Social Welfare Policy

SOCIAL POLICY, SECURITY, CITIZENSHIP: CHANGING ROLES AND DEFINING GOALS

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Joan Grant-Cummings, President, National Action Committee on the Status of Women
Michael Goldberg, Director, Social Planning and Research Council of British Columbia
Buzz Hargrove, President, Canadian Auto Workers
Lucie Lamarche, Professeur des sciences juridiques
Heather Menzies, Author of *Whose Brave New World*
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Support payments *key* to providing income security



A November 1993 Statistics Canada report entitled *A Portrait of Families in Canada* classified 13 per cent of Canadian families as "low income." Of these, 60 per cent were single-parent families, and women headed a disproportionately high number of them. There is a strong, clear link between inadequate child and spousal support orders and poverty. This trend is known as the "feminization of poverty." Our Supreme Court recognized the trend and has charged lower courts and family law lawyers with the duty of overcoming the low support assessments. There has been some success. The 1990s have marked a definite trend upward in the amounts of support ordered, at least in the area of child support.

But a support order is only a piece of paper unless someone acts on it. Of all court orders, support orders are probably the most consistently and flagrantly ignored. For the intended beneficiaries of ignored orders, "income security" is a phantom concept. To help them act on their judgements, all provinces and both territories have some sort of maintenance enforcement program, although the programs differ in what they can (or will) do for the creditor. In Alberta, the Maintenance Enforcement Program (MEP) is a taxpayer-funded collection agency. MEP is computerized and centralized in Edmonton. Since the mid-1980s, the court clerk automatically registers all support orders with the program. Creditors (the person who should be receiving payments) have the option to withdraw from the program unless they receive social assistance. In that case the minister of Family and Social Services can require the money be collected through the program because the support payments may be partially or entirely "subrogated" to the provincial government. "Subrogation" means "substitution" where a family is supported at taxpayer expense, the government collects back its share first.

Registration with MEP has advantages. The creditor avoids having to hire a lawyer or private collection agency, there is no collection fee, and the creditor does not have to deal directly with the debtor (the person who should be making payments). Acting on the creditor's behalf, the director has access to information about the debtor that may not be available to a private individual or lawyer. Only the director can use the powerful remedy of continuing attachment, which is like a deluxe garnishee. Continuing attachment has three advantages over a regular garnishee: it extends longer (up to three years), it applies to both arrears and ongoing support, and it takes priority over any other enforcement proceeding (other than another support order).

Registration with MEP has disadvantages, too. Often there are lengthy delays between registration and collection. Private enforcement may be much quicker and more effective at attaching a disappearing asset. The creditor loses control over the enforcement process because, once registered, only the director can take collection steps. Many creditors find this lack of control frustrating. There is a delay between the time MEP gets the debtor's money and the time it is forwarded to the creditor. In the case of a debtor who pays regularly and on time, the creditor may be better off collecting directly. The director has the discretion to refuse to enforce more than three years worth of support arrears, even if more is owing.

Notwithstanding the implementation of the program, many debtors still did not pay. By 1993, there were over 61,000 files registered, most of which were in arrears. To give enforcement more clout, the government amended the Maintenance Enforcement Act. It gave the director the power to prevent a defaulting debtor from renewing a driver's license or registering or renewing

the registration of a motor vehicle. The director lifts the restriction only if the debtor makes satisfactory arrangements with MEP to pay the arrears. To the end of September 1996, MEP issued over 6,000 license restrictions and had threatened many more. As a direct result of these restrictions, MEP has received a variety of payments on arrears. Some are substantial—at least three have been between \$10,000 and \$16,000 and many range between \$2,500 and \$3,500.

Most of the 53,498 children named in registered orders live in Alberta with their mothers. In September 1996, MEP had over 38,500 files and was collecting on 82.2 per cent of them. This is higher than any other program in North America. In that same month, the program collected over \$8 million from debtors, \$500,000 through reciprocal arrangements with other provinces and territories, and \$800,000 in subrogated arrears.

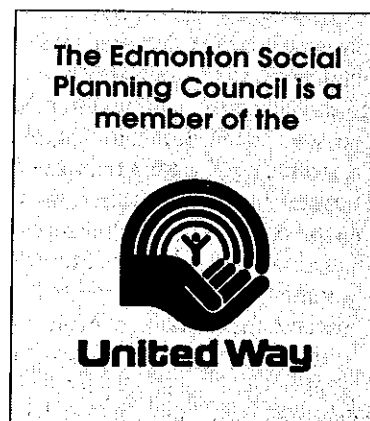
It all sounds very good, but how effective is it? As a lawyer practising family law, I hear numerous complaints from both sides. Debtors claim that the collection techniques are heavy-handed and unfair. Creditors complain the program is too slow, what service they do receive is poor and unresponsive, and debtors get too many breaks. Some creditors have even been told they shouldn't count on the support money to meet their financial obligations! So, despite the toughened enforcement provisions, many creditors are still getting their support payments late or not at all. On the other hand, their financial responsibilities to landlords, day cares, banks, utility companies and other creditors won't wait, or maybe will wait, but at exorbitant interest rates. In the meantime, in the face of a July 1994 Court of Appeal decision *Haisman v. Haisman*) which says debtors should pay interest on support arrears at five per cent simple interest from the date on which each instalment should have been paid, virtually no creditors actually receive any interest. This is because MEP does not automatically calculate interest on arrears. MEP takes the position that the creditor has to go to court to quantify the interest amount before they will collect it.

As for the lump sum arrears payments, rarely does anyone consider the tax consequences to the creditor. Until the tax rules are changed and the creditor gets a

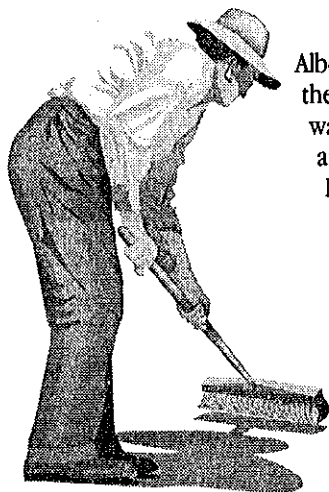
tax-neutral order under the new rules, support continues to be taxable in the recipient's hands. Say a person had an order for \$500 per month in support. This amounts to \$6,000 annually and, in the ordinary course of events, the recipient adds it to her income each year. Then the debtor stops paying for three years. MEP issues a license suspension and thereby forces the debtor to pay up. The recipient receives \$18,000 extra in one year and must declare it all on one tax return. This size of lump sum may well put her into a higher tax bracket. So, not only has she foregone the regular payments for three years, she will now have to turn over a greater share to Revenue Canada. Meanwhile, the debtor has had three years use of the creditor's money at no interest!

Having a maintenance enforcement program is a good start. Strengthening the legislation's clout is another step in the right direction. But we have a long way to go if we want to provide true income security for women and children. ¶

Rosemarie Boll is a lawyer with the firm of Bubel Boll and Sorenson in Edmonton.



Minimum wage hikes do not kill jobs study shows



Alberta is back to having the lowest minimum wage in Canada. We are in fact tied with Newfoundland at \$5 an hour for adults, but Newfoundland's rate will go up to \$5.25 in April of 1997. The last time the minimum wage was raised in Alberta was in April of 1992 when the wage went from \$4.50 an hour to \$5 (for teens it went from \$4 to \$4.50).

Any discussion to raise the minimum wage has historically resulted in cries from small business groups, restaurant and food service associations, the Chamber of Commerce, etc., warning that job losses would result.

Does a rise in minimum wage result in the loss of jobs? Not necessarily according to a book *Myth and Measurement: The New Economics of the Minimum Wage*, written by two Princeton University professors, David Card and Alan B. Krueger.

Myth and Measurement was published in 1995 (Princeton University Press) and is based on in-depth studies of minimum wage industries in the United States. The results suggest there is more to economics than supply and demand. According to a supply and demand model increasing the minimum wage forces employers to move up the demand curve, thereby reducing employment and increasing unemployment. Their studies in fact show that in most cases raising the minimum wage has no effect at all on employment and in some cases there is even a positive effect.

Card and Krueger studied fast-food restaurants in New Jersey before and after the minimum wage increased in April of 1992 and they compare this to Pennsylvania

where no increase was legislated. They found employment actually expanded in the New Jersey restaurants and fell in those in Pennsylvania. "We find that employment growth was higher at restaurants that were forced to increase their wages to comply with the law than at those stores that already were paying more than the new minimum." (p.2) They also collected data from Texas and California and found positive effects there as well.

"It is always possible to find examples of employers who claim that they will go out of business if the minimum wage increases, or who state that they closed because of a minimum-wage increase. On average, however, our findings suggest that employment remains unchanged, or sometimes rises slightly, as a result of increases in the minimum wage." (p.14)

Card and Krueger found that increases in the minimum wage do not appear to be offset by reductions in fringe benefits and that "increases in the minimum wage have reduced wage dispersion partially reversing the trend toward rising wage inequality." (p.3) They studied the impact of news about minimum-wage legislation on the value of firms that employ minimum wage workers. "Stock market event studies suggest that most of the news about the impending minimum-wage increases during the late 1980s led to little or no change in the market value of low-wage employers, such as restaurants, hotels, and dry cleaners." (p.3)

According to *Myth and Measurement* teenage employment is also not adversely affected through minimum wage increases—the effects are said to be insignificant. This is contrary to the opinion which suggests that employers will hire less entry level labor if it becomes more expensive to do so and will choose instead to automate their systems or demand workers have more experience and training for the higher pay.

Low minimum wages can in fact serve as a disincentive to work and an incentive to stay on social assistance benefit programs. As it works now minimum wage fails to take into account the cost of raising children and in

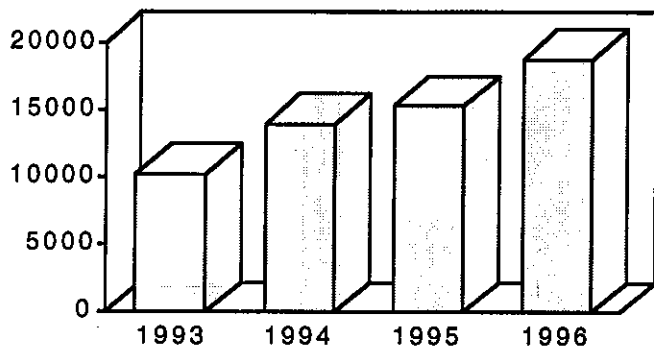
Alberta facts

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HUNGER IN EDMONTON: understanding the need for food banks

During the month of January 1996, Edmonton's Food Bank provided emergency food to 20,546 people. This was a record level of food need in Edmonton. More alarming was the realization this number was 122 per cent higher than three years previous. As the months went by, demand remained at record levels. It was becoming clear that the Food Bank had reached a new level of demand. Food Banks can be conceptualized as a smoke detector for social wellbeing. They provide warning for us of impending social breakdown. Rising Food Bank demand is a signal of larger social and economic issues requiring resolution.

Chart 1: Food Bank Demand



This rise in food need occurred within an overall atmosphere of change in the province of Alberta. Since 1993, Alberta's economy, communities and government have undergone sweeping reforms. Albertans needed to evolve to new realities, becoming more competitive and efficient. Old ways were being left behind and the new shape of Alberta, still uncertain, was slowly evolving.

In particular, Alberta's approach to income security changed. In 1993 the province's income support program of last resort, welfare, was renamed to

Supports for Independence (SFI) and refocused to actively move recipients into employment and training. Benefits were cut 17 per cent to as low as \$394 a month for single employables. More stringent job search demands were made of clients. The welfare caseload dropped from 94,000 cases in March 1993 to 41,000 in October 1996. This represents approximately 106,000 fewer people collecting SFI.

Within the context of sweeping reforms and rising Food Bank demand, Edmonton's Food Bank teamed up with the Edmonton Social Planning Council (ESPC) to examine the reasons for the dramatic increase in Food Bank need. In addition, the two organizations hoped to determine if a link could be found between the record food need and the recent changes in government social policy. The study sought to provide answers to four questions:

1. Who are Food Bank recipients?
2. Why do they need to use the Food Bank?
3. Why is Food Bank demand increasing?
4. What role does government policy play in the increasing levels of Food Bank need?

The study employed face-to-face interviews with food bank recipients at selected food bank depots—816 interviews were completed during

June, July and August, 1996. The sample is a statistically representative cross-section of the entire Food Bank population.

In addition, six focus groups were held with food bank recipients to develop qualitative aspects of the study.

Findings

- The number of SFI recipients who needs the Food Bank is widening, putting more families at risk.
- One in 20 Edmontonians will use the Food Bank at least once in 1996.
- 41 per cent of Food Bank recipients are under the age of 18.
- 20 per cent of recipients are using the Food Bank for the first time.
- 46 per cent of Food Bank recipients do not have a telephone.
- Only four per cent of recipients need the Food Bank due to poor budgeting or bad habits.
- Only two per cent own their accommodation.
- One-half of all recipients have gone without any source of income at some point in the last three years, with an average duration of 18 weeks.

Hunger in Edmonton

The study's first discovery is that the level of hunger in Edmonton is higher than expected. Families who turn to the Food Bank report they do not use soup kitchens, free meals at churches or the school lunch programs. The 36,500 individuals who will need the Food Bank this year do not include the thousands of others who will use these other programs. In addition, there is an undetermined number of people who survive solely through the assistance of their friends and family. The depth and breadth of hunger in our city is uncertain, but is known to be higher than previously anticipated.

1. WHO ARE FOOD BANK RECIPIENTS?

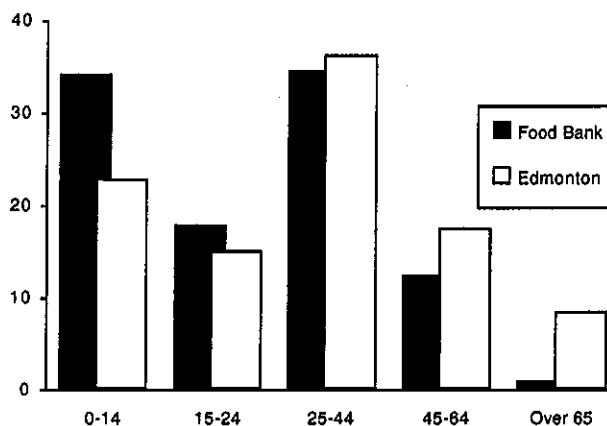
Edmonton's Food Bank serves the city's most vulnerable populations. The Food Bank population is made up of twice as many unattached singles and two and a half times as many single parents as the City of Edmonton (source: 1991 Census). Forty-six per cent of the Food Bank population are unattached singles. Another 25 per cent are single parents. Couples and two parent households make up the remainder.

Within these groups, 79 per cent of unattached singles are male, and 83 per cent of single parents are women. This reflects the higher risk of poverty facing these men and women. Unattached men and single mothers traditionally have the highest poverty rates in Edmonton (34 per cent and 60 per cent respectively in 1995; source: Canadian Council on Social Development-CCSD).

Recipients also come from the poorest neighbourhoods in Edmonton. Northeast and central residents make up over two-thirds of the Food Bank population. Conversely, only three per cent of the study sample came from southwest Edmonton.

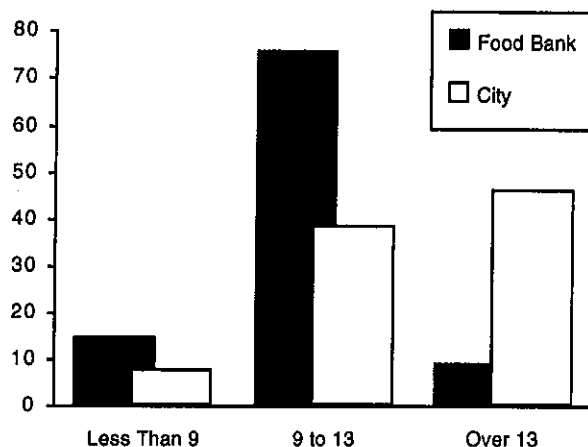
The Food Bank population is substantially younger than the population of Edmonton. The average age is under 25 years. Seniors make up an insignificant portion of the Food Bank client base. (see Chart 2)

Chart 2: Age Distribution



Education levels are substantially lower than the rest of the city. The average level of education among the sample was less than 11 years. Fifteen per cent of adults have not completed even 9 years of education. This figure points to serious literacy and numeracy issues. (see chart 3)

Chart 3: Education Distribution



Income

Food Bank recipients are clustered at the very bottom of the income pool—74 per cent of Food Bank recipients received their primary source of income from government sources during the month of their Food Bank visit. Sixty per cent were receiving or waiting for SFI benefits. Only five per cent hold full time jobs. One in five had no income source whatsoever.

Most households are one or no income households. Only 22 per cent of respondents report more than one income earner.

The average monthly income for all earners in the house was \$705. On average, Food Bank recipients are earning \$1,300 less each month than what is required to even reach the Statistics Canada low income cut-off line or "poverty line." There is not much distribution of income, either—85 per cent of households have income less than \$1,200 a month, compared to only 15 per cent of all Edmontonians (source: 1991 Census).

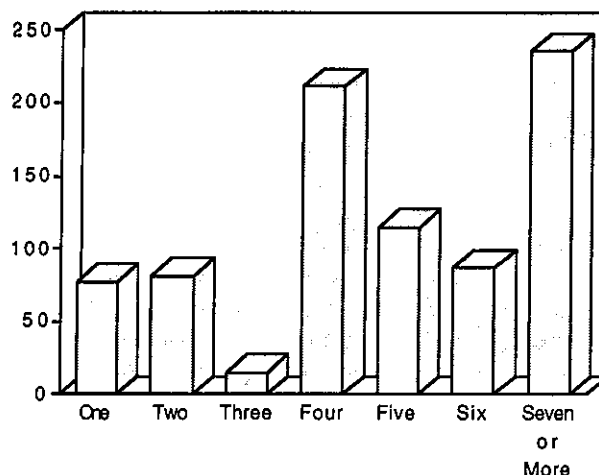
Those who report full time employment income are earning an average of \$6.30 an hour (based on a 40-hour week).

Their connection to the labor market is, at best, tenuous. It paints a picture of a pocket of severe and serious poverty amidst a city of relative wealth.

Expenses

In contrast, Food Bank recipients have an average of \$797 in household expenses. This creates a \$92 deficit every month in their homes (see Chart 4). Out of their monthly income 58 per cent goes to rent and utilities. Another 32 per cent goes to food, although this translates into only \$227 a month. The Alberta Nutritious Food Basket for a family of three would cost \$337 (Source: Alberta Agriculture, February 1996).

Chart 4: Monthly Deficit by Family Size (in dollars)



Note: Differences in deficit magnitude can be partly attributed to the nature of housing economics. For example a family of three may spend less per person on accommodation than a family of four—the fourth member requiring an additional bedroom.

Not surprisingly, 80 per cent of recipients state their income does not last through the month. This raises the question of how they survive with such a marked shortage of money.

How They Survive

With a \$92 deficit each month, it is clear something must be cut to make ends meet. Food, the most essential of necessities, is the first victim of inadequate income. More than rent, health, utilities or child expenses, Food Bank recipients choose to cut food from their budget. Sixty-nine per cent report food is the first thing they cut when running out of money (multiple answers allowed). Other cutback responses included clothing (30 per cent) and transportation (25 per cent). The choice of food as the first item cut comes from its lack of immediate consequences. Not paying the rent causes eviction; not paying the power bill causes disconnection; not eating for a day, on the surface, has fewer immediate drawbacks.

They also try to find other sources of food or money—56 per cent borrow money from friends and relatives; 46 per cent receive food from them and 32 per cent pawn possessions to raise cash.

Once these and other sources have been utilized as much as possible, only then do families turn to the Food Bank for a hamper.

The Food Bank is not the main source of support for most recipients. Neither is it the main source. In fact, it appears to be the last stop for people who are running out of food. Only when their informal support networks and other coping strategies fail to bridge the gap between income and expenses do they approach the Food Bank.

Of particular note is how the 20 per cent of recipients who have no income survive. They appear to move in with friends or relatives to reduce expenses. The no income recipients are a younger group, more likely to be unattached individuals. Many will have no income for only a short period before finding another unstable job. Others have had no stable source of income for the three years covered in the study. While they seem to use the same coping strategies as other Food Bank recipients, the study ultimately leaves unanswered how they continue to survive month to month with no source of income.

Health Consequences of Food Shortage

Living on inadequate income and cutting corners on food and other essentials has consequences. The study reveals a number of those consequences.

- 52 per cent of Food Bank recipients have gone an entire day without food, 48 per cent of whom have done it three or more times in the last month.
- 51 per cent feel their nutritional needs are not met.
- 18 per cent of parents feel their children's nutritional needs are not met.
- 17 per cent of children miss meals because there is no food in the house
- 47 per cent of parents skip meals so their kids can eat.

Food bank recipients are half as likely to report "good" health as the rest of the city. While 85 per cent of Edmontonians feel their health is "good" or better (source: Capital Health Authority), only 49 per cent of Food Bank recipients are feeling healthy.

Their health seems to be worsening—32 per cent feel less

healthy than last year, while only 19 per cent feel more healthy.

As well, Food Bank recipients have an unusually large incidence of serious illness, such as AIDS, cancer or hepatitis. Of those reporting health problems, 12 per cent had one of these serious illness. Another five per cent reported "malnutrition" as their most serious health problem.

Stress is also a factor. Over half (52 per cent) report their stress level as "high." Forty-five per cent feel it is even higher than last year. Of those people that identified sources of stress, finances and the lack of employment are mentioned most often (37 per cent and 15 per cent respectively).

The health picture of Food Bank recipients is not encouraging. They are eating at a level which will invariably, if maintained even for a few weeks, bring about a deterioration in health. Their stress levels also influence their health, producing poor physical and mental health prospects down the road, should their financial situation not improve.

Community Isolation

Living with inadequate income means more than lack of finances. Food Bank recipients report being cut off from the life of their community.

Food Bank recipients move far more frequently than the average Edmontonian. While 22 per cent of Edmontonians move at least once during a year (source: Statistics Canada), 65 per cent of Food Bank clients have moved in the past 12 months.

Almost one half of recipients do not own a telephone. The telephone has become a central communication tool in our society. At least 6,200 households in Edmonton (and probably more) do not have a telephone. This jeopardizes employment opportunities and prevents community participation.

Twenty-six per cent of survey participants have experienced barriers to banks and other financial institutions, such as minimum required balances and permanent addresses. Instead these individuals must turn to cheque cashing businesses and other informal means to make financial transactions. The Edmonton Social Planning Council estimates \$32,500 goes to cheque cashing businesses every month from the pockets of Food Bank recipients. This is money that would be used for food if barriers to chartered banks did not exist.

The children of low income families lose the most—80 per cent of parents indicate their children miss out on activities due to lack of money. These kids cannot join community sports teams, go swimming, take music lessons or join Brownies or Boy Scouts. Children's activities are important for personal and social development.

Food Bank recipients lack a connection to the community around them. This isolation makes it harder to escape the cycle of poverty.

2. WHY DO THEY NEED TO USE THE FOOD BANK?

Reason for Current Use

When asked what caused their present food and money shortage, responses pointed toward three possible situations. First, for most recipients, about 60 per cent, their income is simply not enough to meet the regular expenses of life. Despite coping strategies and frugal budgeting, they still find they do not have enough money left over for food for the entire month.

Second, about 30 per cent of recipients are able to find a way, most months, to make ends meet. However, they do not have a cushion for unforeseen expenses, such as moving expenses, stolen money or family crisis. When such expenses arise, they need to turn to the Food Bank for temporary assistance to get through the month.

Third, the smallest group, about five per cent in the study sample, require the Food Bank due to poor budgeting or addictions.

Factors Linked To Food Bank Need

The study examined what factors and variables increase someone's likelihood to need the Food Bank. Measuring frequency of use, the study found three factors linked to higher Food Bank need.

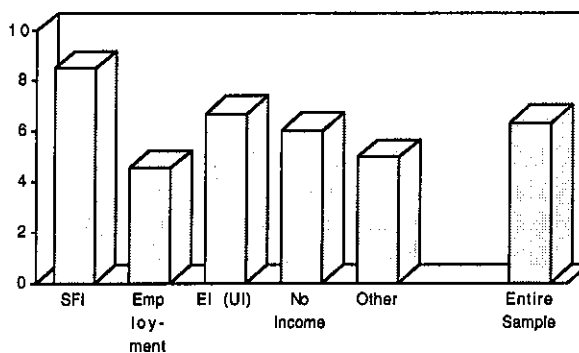
Income is found to be the strongest indicator of Food Bank need. The lower an individual's or family's income was a year ago, the more they needed the Food Bank this year. As well, those who experienced a drop in income during the past year are coming to the Food Bank more frequently. The households with the weakest financial situation have the weakest coping capacity.

The second factor linked to Food Bank need is education. The lower a person's education level, the higher their level

of need. This demonstrates the theory that those with lower education have the most difficulty in the labor market, and therefore have the most difficulty in finding an adequate income.

The third link is source of income—more specifically income from SFI. SFI recipients need the Food Bank 30 per cent more often over the course of a year than people who rely on other income sources, including those with no income source. People receiving employment income needed the Food Bank significantly less often. SFI clients appear mired in a more long-term financial bind even more than other food bank recipients.

Chart 5: Frequency of Food Bank Use by Income Source (past 12 months)



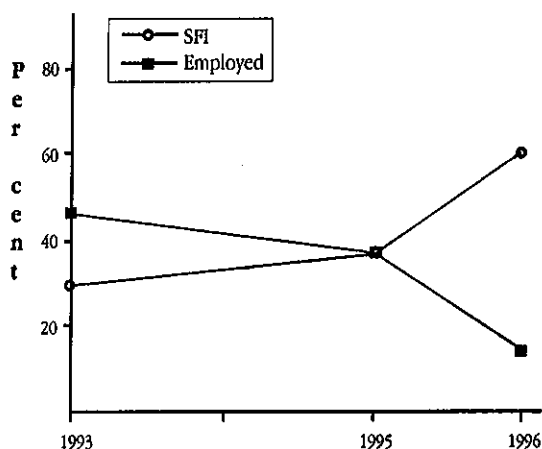
The data related to why people need the Food Bank touch the core issues of the cycle of poverty. We have in Edmonton a large pool of people who simply do not receive enough income to pay the bills. Their low education and lack of a financial cushion mire them in a difficult cycle of economic insecurity.

3. WHY IS FOOD BANK DEMAND INCREASING?

Comparisons to previous studies show the demographic profile of Food Bank recipients has not changed substantially in 12 years—yet the numbers of people coming to the Food Bank has risen dramatically. There are more of the same types of people needing Food Bank services.

Our study is the first to examine the income history of current food bank recipients. It found three years ago 45 per cent of respondents were employed. Only 30 per cent were on SFI. (see Chart 6) Average income was substantially higher in 1993 at \$1,140 a month.

Chart 6: Income History Tracking



Note: Respondents were asked what was their source of income three years ago and one year ago. The chart displays the answers to these two questions.

The data suggests three years ago many current recipients did not need Food Bank services. They were in some form of employment and finding a way to make ends meet. Within the last one to two years something has happened to cause a drop in their income and a loss of their jobs.

This and other analyses performed on the data reveal two subgroups which comprise most of the Food Bank population. The first group, (almost half) as shown above, are recent arrivals to the Food Bank. The second group (about one-third) is made up of long term recipients, who have been shut out of the economy for many years. The remaining recipients come from a variety of backgrounds and experiences.

Alberta's economy is stiffening and polarizing. Jobs are becoming more scarce, and the jobs that exist are either low-end unstable jobs or high-end, well-paying positions.

Food Bank recipients have never been part of the high-end well-educated part of the workforce. What we may be seeing, then, are the first overt effects of the polarization of Alberta's economy. The pattern of who is left out has not changed, instead simply the magnitude of who is left out is increasing.

4. WHAT ROLE DOES GOVERNMENT POLICY PLAY IN THE INCREASING LEVELS OF FOOD BANK NEED?

Food Bank recipients are the working poor and the non-working poor. One in two recipients have gone without income for a period of time in the past three years. These periods are attributable to unemployment and waits or delays in government benefits. Most appear to move through a cycle of employment, to unemployment with possible government support and then back to employment.

Many recipients find themselves in low wage positions with no security and often no eligibility for Employment Insurance (EI). Government policy around minimum wage and job creation appear to have a direct and life-altering effect on this portion of the population. Only 51 per cent of those who previously held full time employment and are currently without income have applied for EI benefits. It is plausible to hypothesize they are not eligible for EI.

Every government income security program has a small portion of its caseload coming to the Food Bank. However, the single most frequent program mentioned is SFI (Welfare). From calculations based on the study findings, we can estimate in a month 20 per cent of SFI clients in Edmonton need the Food Bank. Over the course of a year, up to 50 per cent of SFI recipients will show up at a Food Bank.

SFI is Alberta's income support of last resort. The proportion of SFI recipients needing the Food Bank highlights the need for a closer examination of this program's policies and its central role in Food Bank demand.

- 82 per cent of Food Bank recipients report some involvement with SFI in the past 3 years.
- 38 per cent of SFI clients feel they were treated "poorly" by the program.
- 73 per cent of SFI clients feel benefit levels are not adequate to meet needs.
- 35 per cent of SFI clients were referred to the Food Bank by their social worker.

The shift in SFI policy appears to have affected client prospects for secure income. The study determined three major ways in which policy has affected this group's Food Bank need and ultimate employability.

First, there is evidence individuals with real and demonstrable financial need are being denied SFI benefits. One in five SFI-involved respondents have been cut off SFI at some point in the past three years. Fifteen per cent have had their applications denied.

One in two denials had nothing to do with level of financial need, but instead with past employment, age or other non-financial reasons. These families are left with no means of support for an undetermined length of time.

In addition, 88 per cent of those denied disagreed with the reason for denial. Seventy-six per cent of those cut off disagreed—while the tendency to disagree can be expected, those that appealed (only 38 per cent filed appeals) had the decision overturned 43 per cent of the time. This turnover rate suggests the clients' grievances may have some level of validity and SFI may be implementing policy somewhat arbitrarily.

Second, benefit levels simply do not meet the most basic of life necessities. Repeated evidence in the study demonstrate, despite frugal living and cost cutting, SFI recipients cannot make it through the month on what is given them. Most are paying more for accommodation than shelter allowance guidelines, despite best efforts to find the cheapest place. The expectation that bus passes, school supplies, winter clothes and furniture can come out of the "standard allowance" (designed to meet food and household bills) creates an even larger household deficit.

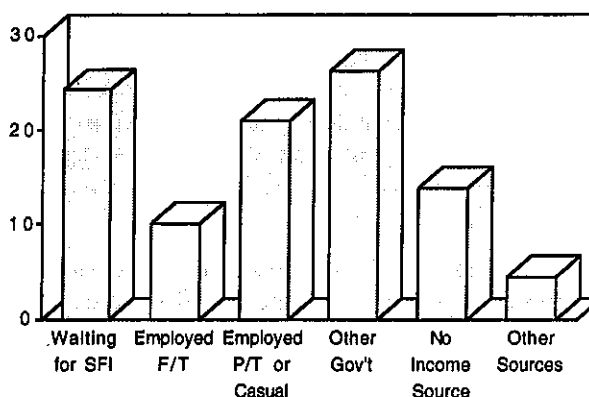
Inadequate income is the largest reason, among SFI recipients, for needing the Food Bank (40 per cent). This reflects directly on the level of benefits provided. If 20 per cent of the SFI caseload in Edmonton needs the Food Bank in any given month then benefit levels are clearly not adequate.

Third, SFI policy appears to make recipients more dependent and for longer. Recipients are receiving no support to help them find work. They receive no resources to photocopy resumes, get appropriate clothing for job interviews, buy a bus pass to get to the interviews, or even a telephone to find out if they got the job. This lack of direct employment support locks recipients into a longer term stay on SFI, at benefit levels inadequate to meet basic necessities.

The priority of SFI officials to reduce the caseload by moving clients into training and employment is not borne out by the study. This study provides evidence for the whereabouts of about 10 per cent of the SFI cases closed in Edmonton in the last three years. Among these closed

cases, only 10 per cent hold full time employment, while 44 per cent have no income source whatsoever (the percentage with no income sources and the percentage waiting for SFI. (see Chart 7)

Chart 7: Income Source of Closed Cases



Instead, there is evidence the policy of reducing caseloads has created a merry-go-round of income support. Many clients were sent to Student Finance for training and upgrading. However, 73 per cent returned to SFI following completion of their program. Others are sent to job placements, but go to EI immediately following the term and then back on SFI when EI benefits run out. Sixty-four per cent of switches to EI ended back on SFI. The caseload reduction policy is effectively reducing the numbers of individuals on SFI at any one time. However, the evidence available in this study indicates it is not reducing the overall level of government dependency.

SFI policy changes in the past three years have had a direct impact on Food Bank demand in Edmonton. Evidence from this study suggests many of the policies implemented to encourage movement into the workforce have, for this portion of the caseload, resulted in the opposite effect. Instead, these individuals are coming to the Food Bank in greater numbers and greater frequency.

Keeping Hope

The study paints a stark picture of families struggling to survive. On one level, it is a discouraging result. Yet the study also finds hope among the Food Bank population. Despite their daily struggles, most are able to maintain hope and belief in a better future. They hold clear career and personal aspirations. They foresee digging themselves out of their current situation and achieving their goals.

Understandably, most hopes revolve around a stable source of employment and a happier, more secure family life. These are universal hopes for all Albertans.

Respondents are taking an active role in achieving these goals. Many spoke of returning to school to upgrade or pick up new skills. Others had detailed plans for securing a well-paying job. Regardless of the route, most realized the path to greater security is through their own personal efforts. They are not afraid or reluctant to roll up their sleeves to change the course of their life. This is contradictory to the common stereotype of low income individuals.

For others, the only path of hope lay on a highway out of the province. Many feel Edmonton and Alberta no longer offer anything for them. So they desire to move to a place with more hope, where they can start fresh and rebuild their life.

Beyond economic security, there was a common sentiment that quality of life is more than money. There is also a strong desire for happier family lives. Respondents want to spend more time with their children or work on a more settled relationship with a spouse.

Respondents do not look to government to solve their problems. They do, however, believe the government has a role to play in removing barriers. They feel the government can do more to create an atmosphere of opportunity in Alberta.

The message of hope from the recipients themselves should be heard by all Edmontonians who wish to tackle poverty and hunger in our city. If those experiencing it feel it can be changed, than the rest of us should take heart as well.

STUDY CONCLUSIONS

In undertaking a comprehensive examination of Food Bank recipients and the causes for their food shortage, this study has shed light on the roots of poverty and hunger in our city. Many stereotypes of low income individuals are challenged by the evidence presented above.

Food Bank recipients are not just looking for a free ride. Three years ago, the largest segment of the population were making ends meet on their own. They have only recently needed to turn to the Food Bank. It is their last resort to offset a sizeable monthly deficit. They are living

frugally and cutting every conceivable corner. They are also making every effort possible to free themselves from poverty and hunger. Yet the number of recipients continues to grow.

The rising levels of Food Bank demand in Edmonton have clear social implications. Edmontonians need to ask themselves if it is acceptable to have one in 20 Edmontonians needing Food Bank services over the course of a year. Whether or not government policy is linked to the rise in demand, the evidence found in this groundbreaking study suggests changes to government policy could reduce Food Bank demand.

An ever-growing number of Edmonton families are needing Food Bank assistance to survive. An even larger number of Edmontonians are barely making ends meet. They are two paycheques away from the Food Bank. If action is not taken, these families will be the next ones to require food hampers.

Income, education and adequate income support systems provide possible routes out of the cycle of poverty. Steps taken to address these issues rest with our community and its collective social and political will to break the cycle.

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Copies of the complete findings of the Food Bank study are available at ESPC for \$3 per copy. For more information about the Council, please contact:

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the case of persons with disabilities, minimum wage does not address the need for personal supports, therefore social assistance programs seem the better alternative. Some would interpret that as showing that social assistance benefits are then too high. Yet, in every province social assistance rates provide an income thousands of dollars below the poverty line (the low income cut off defined by Statistics Canada). Lowering welfare rates would widen the gap even further. Unless minimum wage is raised there is little hope for people to break free from poverty.

An article "Work and welfare-Looking at both sides of the equation," by Christopher Clark (Volume 19, No. 1 *Perception*, Canadian Council on Social Development

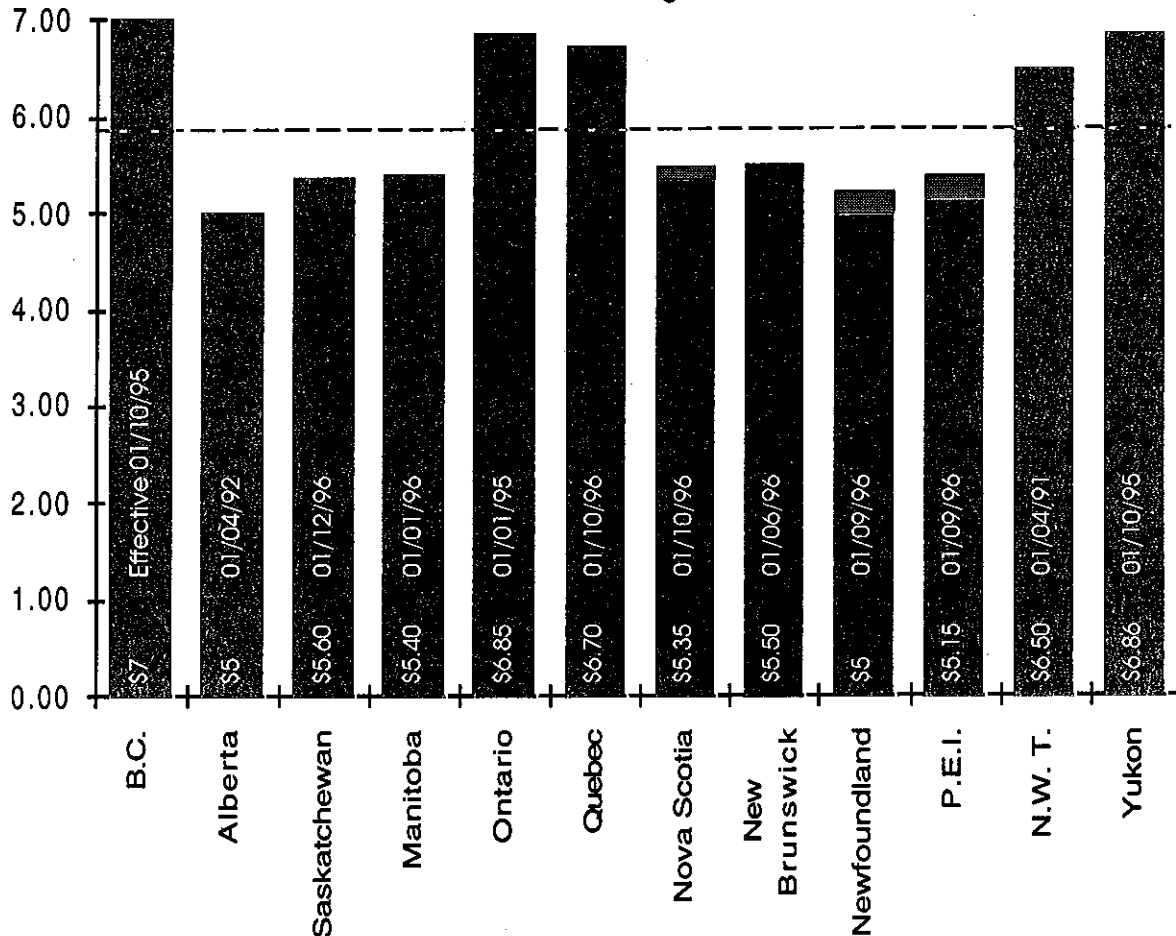
CCSD) points out that "minimum wage has gone from being a relatively adequate source of income to one that fails to ensure better than poverty level income in any Canadian jurisdiction." He also highlights the fact that the number of working poor households in Canada rose by a striking 30 per cent over the course of the 1980s (1994 *Canadian Fact Book on Poverty*, CCSD). He attributes that to the failure of minimum wage to provide an adequate source of income.

With new evidence that raising minimum wages does not kill jobs it would seem to be an opportune time to provide more incentives to people who desperately need some income security. ■

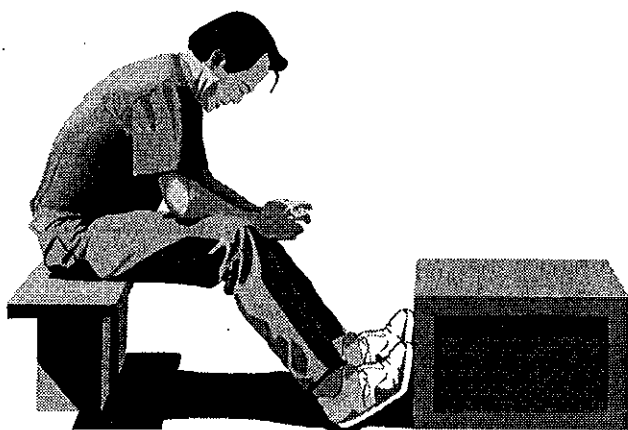
Sheila Hallett-Kushniruk is publications editor of First Reading.

1996 Provincial Minimum Wage (in dollars)

— — — National Average \$5.91



Note: Three provinces have minimum wage increases which will take effect in 1997: Nova Scotia's rate will change to \$5.50 effective Feb. 1, Newfoundland's rate will change to \$5.25 April 1 and P.E.I.'s rate will change to \$5.40 effective Sept. 1.



Split in policies fragment efforts to employ

A great deal has been said or written about the effectiveness of employability programs as supplied by a complicated series of systems run by a variety of government jurisdictions and departments. The suggestions offered to increase the effective long-term impact of employability programs tend to deal with symptoms and largely miss the root causes of the problems. The primary causes of the problems are the separation of social policy from economic policy and the lack of unified effort among local, provincial and federal governments to tackle these problems.

One of the major problems is the definition of "employability program." Usually the term is understood to mean a combination of education and training programs and job-finding programs. This definition assumes that jobs are available for people with the right education or training if they look in the right places, and the assumption goes largely unchallenged in most discussions of employability (in its report to the Canadian Labor Force Development Board, the Task Force on Transition into Employment states that recommendations on job creation are outside of its mandate and that it must assume that jobs are in place for qualified people). However, since even the most skilled and qualified person imaginable finds it difficult to find employment in a region where jobs do not exist or in a period of jobless recovery, a coherent employability program must include harmonized job creation efforts and economic development strategies.

The split between social policy and economic policy within a government's jurisdiction results in the fragmentation of efforts and information within that level. Social and economic agendas are pursued separately, or one is allowed to drive the other without understanding that one is not secondary to the other, often creating conflicting strategies between the departments involved when their spheres of influence naturally collide. The departments in charge of re-education and re-training

of the unemployed do not work with the departments in charge of encouraging growth in desired or important sectors, missing the opportunity to prepare the workplace for Canada's shifting demographics and the workers for our shifting economy.

Further, the information needed to unify these efforts is fragmented among the various departments involved. A further complication is territorial disputes, issues of jurisdiction between the levels of government and their departments. Due in no small part to the difficulties of gathering this information, and also because of the tendency of government departments to hoard information as "departmental use only," there is no comprehensive long-term mapping of hiring and separations in industries or the effectiveness of training programs without which there can be no effort made to match the job creation and retraining programs of various departments and jurisdictions.

The split among government jurisdictions creates its own set of problems. Lack of a unified system, the creation of lots of little systems, programs, courses and incentives, results in duplication of effort but no coherent whole. Duplication of efforts results in expensive and unnecessary redundancies, further aggravated by mismatching of efforts where one government's social or economic policies conflict with another's ideas on the same subject—creating conflict among the various levels.

Another problem caused by the split between jurisdictions is the lack of recognized standards in education and training programs. A training course from one province may not be acceptable outside of that province. Worse, it may not be acceptable within that province if the career the job-seeker is trained for is regulated by its own guild, union or association, and the trainer contracted by the government is not recognized by the occupational organization.

Duplicating the lack of an integrated information system at the department level, there is no single database uniting the efforts of the local, provincial and federal jurisdictions to match job-seekers and jobs and to track industry hirings and separations, resulting in a lack of integrated efforts to encourage growth in desired sectors nation-wide. As difficult as it is for the government to gather and use the needed data, it is near impossible for the job seeker and potential employer (the supposed clients of these departments) to find the information they need.

A major barrier for the unemployed as a result of the above is the almost total inaccessibility to these programs—inaccessible for a bewildering number of reasons. The program is available only for a selected targeted group, or it's offered only one time, or maybe in only one geographic region. Perhaps the program has no lead time, starts one week after approval and no one knows about it.

All of the above problems and a host of other problems specific to individual programs mean that current employability programs cannot be proactive; cannot create conditions, but must be reactive and respond to conditions.

A proactive employability program is a coherent collection of policies and institutions that bring workers and employers together and establish the rules for employment. We lack an integrated employability program, our education and training programs, job creation and economic development efforts are being run by different departments in different levels of government. As well the disparity between provincial programs creates migratory or nomadic populations, seeking the region where they can find work or a social security net that allows them to survive, and this creates tensions between the provinces that generate these populations and the provinces that are asked to absorb them. A unified employability program would not only reduce unemployment, government redundancies and inefficiencies, it would reduce tensions between the levels of government.

If an employability program is to be truly proactive, unified and efficient in reducing the confusion of its users and improving access to its users, it requires a number of features:

1. Good information must be universally and quickly available to job seekers and employers alike as to jobs available, people available and hirings and separations classified by occupation and industry.

The information centres must be integrated into the community as a whole, rather than arbitrarily centralized within a government office. Government departments, industry organizations and unions cannot be allowed to hoard information vital to the operation of the employability program, claiming privileged access.

2. There must be a strong foundation of education and training, both academic and trade, available for everyone. The technical and professional skills gained through these programs must conform to a national system of standards.
3. There must be a universal drop-out recovery system, encouraging those who drop out of the education system before completion and those who drop out of the employment system to return.
4. Government policies and strategies must offer incentives which encourages economic development that creates work.

Obviously creation of an integrated and effective employability system is no small task, as it involves cutting through departments and jurisdictions and knitting together a unified goal from the threads of differing agendas. Worse, creating such a program involves fighting decades of 'We've always done things this way' and vested interest in keeping things the way they are. But if efforts to fight unemployment are to be effective they must deal with more than just the symptoms. Any real attempt to tackle the root causes of the problems in our employability programs will be painful and controversial, but if faced head on with a unified plan the pain need only be short-lived and will give way to long-term benefits.

One hopes that the current negotiations between the provincial and federal governments will address these issues. However, given the motivating force for these negotiations seems to be one of deficit reduction as social programs have been identified as the deficit causing culprit by both governments, it seems likely that we will be served the same old warmed up tripe with perhaps a new sauce. ¶¶

Lorraine Moulding has been working in the fields of employability programs for the past 20 years. She is currently a board member of the Alberta Association of Community Based Trainers. Ian Moulding is a young fiction writer currently looking for paid employment to sustain his creativity. He is a member of the Speculative Fiction Association of Calgary.

Rights, or What?

A brief look at the Employment Standards Code

"I finally found a job, I've been looking a long time so it's great to be working. Only problem is, my employer tells me to show up by 8 a.m. each morning but I'm not allowed to punch in until things get busy, if they ever do. I am only paid from the time I punch in, not for the waiting time. I'm happy to have a job, but is this fair?"

This question is similar to the facts of a case called *Nelson v. The Great Canadian Car Wash* (unreported decision, Nov. 25, 1995, Allford J.), that was decided by a judge acting as an umpire in Edmonton on November 25, 1992.

In Alberta, minimum working conditions are governed by the Employment Standards Code. There are also some additional protections from discrimination created under our human rights laws. Some workers work within a unionized workplace and their working conditions and terms of employment are governed by the collective agreement negotiated by their union on their behalf.

However, the vast majority of working Albertans work in non-union environments and, aside from human rights issues, their only minimum protection from intolerable working conditions is the Employment Standards Code.

What are the main standards provided for in the Code?

- Minimum wage for adults is \$5 per hour \$4.50 per hour for students. Five dollars per hour at 40 hours per week is \$10,500 per year. Statistics Canada lists the low income cut-off for a single person (in 1996 dollars, based on 1992) as \$16,874 per year in a city like Edmonton of over 500,000 people.
- An employer cannot deduct money owed to him by the worker directly from pay owing to the worker without the worker's permission.
- Overtime pay of 1.5 times the hourly rate is due after eight hours work in a day or 44 hours work in a week, unless a special permit has been issued or the worker is a supervisor or manager.
- Workers are allowed at least one day off per week and a half-hour rest period (paid or unpaid) after five hours of work. Employers are required to post a notice of the start and stop time of work.

- Every worker is entitled to two weeks vacation and four per cent vacation pay after she has completed a full year of employment and after five years of employment the worker gets three weeks of vacation and six per cent vacation pay.
- In most circumstances employees who have worked for an employer 30 days in the 12-month period before the holiday are entitled to general holiday pay. When the holiday falls on a regular work day and the employee is not required to work, the employee will receive a regular day's pay. If employees are required to work on the holiday they must receive 1.5 times their regular rate of wages for each hour worked in addition to receiving a regular day's pay. Alternatively, they may be paid their regular rate for each hour worked on the holiday and receive another regular working day off with pay.
- Every employer is entitled to terminate the employment of any worker without any reason or cause if notice is given. The notice is one week if the worker has worked over three months but less than two years, two weeks notice for two to four years employment, four weeks notice for four to six years employment, and so on with the maximum notice available of eight weeks for over 10 years employment. The notice can be working time, a lump sum payment, or some combination of both.
- There are also some limited rights for maternity and parental leave. In Alberta, the minimum rights only protect an 18-week maternity leave even though UIC pays 15 weeks maternity leave and 10 weeks parental leave for a possible total of 25 weeks.

With respect to the above case outlined at the beginning of this article, the umpire did not think the requirement on the employer to post the start and stop times of work was relevant to the case. He said that the woman had agreed to wait the time before punching in without pay and she was bound to that agreement. Her alternative was to quit.

He ruled that the employment contract must be interpreted in light of the custom in the trade. He stated
Continued on page 24—Employment Standards

The Constancy of Hope



The darkness before dawn. That was both fact and effect of the *Edmonton Journal* photo published with an article on unemployment some time ago. No color picture there, only black and shades of grey forming silhouettes of those lined up outside the Bissell Centre in the early morning hours. Men waiting for the Casual Labor Office to open. Men needing work even if it might be only a day's offering. Who were the lucky ones and who lost out? Whatever. The line would form again in the next grey light.

Warm summer's morning. Cold winter's dusk. And here and there throughout the city they go, men and women both, to sell their papers. From day to day many return to particular places where they can become familiar to those who pass by regularly. Familiarity can breed attempt...at a friendly greeting, subsequent conversation, and the purchase of a copy of *Our Voice*. Occasionally, something like "Why don't you get a *real* job?" is tossed their way. Hey, this *is* a real job! But the income is neither sufficient nor dependable and the benefits are nil.

Income security is a serious issue for more and more people on more and more rungs up the economic ladder. But for the poor it is an oxymoron. "Income security" might be apropos if it weren't such an understatement. For the residents of Boyle-McCauley and other areas of our city, making ends meet is a day to day struggle. Their 'bottom line' is basic needs. Their understanding of "deficit reduction" has nothing to do with ledgers. "Reduced" and "deficient" better describe their situation.

Income security is also an issue for those who staff agencies and offer care in the city's core. Fear of being laid off, stress resulting from trying to help ever-increasing numbers of people with ever-diminishing resources, and awareness that funding for their organizations is not exactly dependable, make for some tight muscles and tired spirits.

Where can hope be found amidst this fear, anxiety, and weariness? And please...let us dispense with platitudes. It is true that "hope springs eternal," but this phrase is not likely to be of much comfort to someone who has just learned she didn't get the job, will lose her apartment and has no one to help her care for her children. It does not offer sustenance to a man who has not eaten in some time and craves carbohydrates over colloquialisms.

The phrase itself is often uttered rather hesitantly or worse, pietistically. But a well-spring of hope does exist. Strange as it may seem, it is the one positive continuum in an area of our city where anyone might think despair reigns. It is why most of the residents get up and out in the new day, wherever their beds may have been, whatever their condition, whatever the hour. It is why underpaid, overworked staff in agencies still warm up their cars or wait for the early bus so they may come to their workplaces and hear another day's worth of painful stories and try to help. It is why people from faith communities and other organizations in outlying areas drive miles, sometimes, to do volunteer work in the Edmonton core, to tutor, to pack food hampers, to care for children, to serve meals and so much more. Something pulls us all forward with a kind of anticipation or expectation that puts yesterday's setbacks behind us and lets us begin again. It is that ineffable, invisible, invincible part of ourselves known as the human spirit. And it is from this spirit that hope rises.

"Hope is the thing with feathers that perches on the soul and sings the tune without the words and never stops at all," wrote the 19th century poet Emily Dickinson. Her words could not be more apt. They provide us with an image of something that sits lightly, is delicate, but is constant. It is *there*. It is *presence*. And that is what the continuum called "hope" offers us: a sense of *presence* in and with one another and the resultant building of trust. When we come together,

Continued on page 24—Constancy of Hope



the insecurity of income security **REALITIES AND MYTHS FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**

If you really want to know what impacts government programs and services are having on the general public just ask the population they serve. What could be more obvious?

Why then, when I ask my friends in the disability community to tell me their personal stories about living with Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH), Aids to Daily Living (AADL), Supports for Independence (SFI), CPP disability benefits, private disability insurance, and compensation claims, am I met with an uneasy silence or an abrupt topic change? Are they apathetic or complacent? Does this mean that all their needs have been met? No—these are myths.

Sometimes I hear some standard answers but always in the collective voice. "It's hard when over half our monthly income goes to rent, not much left for those other necessities like food and clothes. Forget transportation money to go anywhere." "My husband would try to get a job but doesn't know if he can manage full-time work. If it doesn't work out, we could lose our AISH—because he is now considered 'employable'—and that includes medical benefits which many employers do not provide, or are hesitant to provide."

These are some of the realities of living with a disability.

Consider some facts: One in four persons with a disability lives below the poverty line. AISH pays a single person with a disability \$810 a month. SFI pays \$565. CPP disability pays up to \$870 per month. These figures are well below (in some cases as much as 30 per cent below) every poverty line. Forty-eight per cent of persons with disabilities are part of the labor force and 43 per cent of those earn less than \$15,000 per year.

Recent changes to the coverage of items through Alberta Health and AADL are creating additional financial hardships for disabled persons on fixed incomes. Setting limits on the number of catheters allowed and removing

the coverage of some medications such as vitamins, suppositories, special dietary needs, and occasionally physician-prescribed drugs, compromise our health. In many cases, individuals are not notified of the changes, only finding out when they try to replace the required items.

There are other absurdities. Hard of hearing individuals on fixed incomes can have their hearing aids covered under AADL, but the expensive batteries required to use them are not. The list goes on.

So how can the system work better? There needs to be some consideration of how disability impacts us daily. First and foremost it is not static. It can increase over time; it can decrease. Some of us have medical issues compounding the effects of our disability, some of us do not. Some of us cannot determine from day to day what compromises our disability might impose on an ongoing basis. The one practical commonality here is that our disability dictates how we function in every given situation.

Inflexible programs that do not take into account the realities of individual functional changes are often more detrimental to our search for independence and well-being than they are supportive. Program criteria that suggest we must be labelled "unemployable" in order to qualify for assistance can never foster self-reliance and self-esteem. What does "unemployable" mean anyway? If we demonstrate that we can take training, our status for assistance could change, even though we have no guarantee of a job at the end of the training, and no certainty that we can complete that program. The most recent figures from Statistics Canada show that national unemployment is rising and unemployment statistics for people with disabilities are among the highest of all minority groups.

This picture would be less bleak if income security programs included incentives rather than disincentives

to employment, and separated medical benefits from living allowances, allocating the living allowance portion on a sliding scale that acknowledged possible fluctuations in earning power based on health and disability status. Volunteer work should be valued for the contributions that individuals can make who choose this option because of the time flexibility it permits, especially when the present economic times dictate that nonprofit organizations in particular must rely on this avenue for maintaining and supporting their work. Instead, we somehow sense that we might be viewed as "too capable" by our case workers who might then question our eligibility for assistance.

Why then the silence from those whose reality is income security programs? We are silenced by the secrecy that cloaks the changes surrounding the programs and services that dictate our very survival. We are silenced by the attitudes and actions of governments who prioritize paying down our provincial and national debt at the expense of health and social service programs which have the greatest impact on those of us who are most vulnerable. We fear falling through the widening mesh of Canada's proudest institution, our social safety net, silenced most by the insecurity of income security. ■■

Diana Brent is a Calgary writer who has spent over 20 years working in the not-for-profit and education sectors. Her background is in telecommunications and computer training, primarily working with persons with disabilities. She serves on several volunteer boards locally, provincially and federally and is an advocate in the community.

Donate-A-Ride

On New Year's Eve you could help the Edmonton Social Planning Council to raise money for an important cause. All you have to do is ride on Edmonton Transit for free between 6 p.m. and 3 a.m. and make a donation in the fare box to Donate-A-Ride. Donate-A-Ride funds will be used to purchase transit tickets to be distributed to a number of social agencies in Edmonton. The Council will also accept Donate-A-Ride donations at our office so please keep this in mind as you plan your seasonal giving.

Voices In Action

As part of the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty the Edmonton Social Planning Council produced a calendar *Voices In Action*, in collaboration with Edmonton's Food Bank, Edmonton Community and Family Services and the Edmonton John Howard Society. The calendar chronicles the struggles and triumphs of 12 Edmontonians who have lived in poverty. Here is just one of the powerful stories. *Voices In Action* sells for \$5 with reduced rates for bulk or agency orders. For more information, or to place an order please call the ESPC at 423-2031.



Shortly after I was married, I was diagnosed with muscular dystrophy (a disorder that causes the ongoing deterioration of my muscles). Physically, I went from being able to lift my baby out of a crib to now having someone lift me out of a car. My ability to perform daily activities as a wife and a mom declined. Four years ago my husband and I separated and with no family close by to help I was terrified. How could I possibly make it on my own with two children who depended on me? I turned to social services and the Supports For Independence Program (SFI). I'll never forget my first cheque—I've still got a picture of it on my fridge. It allowed me to take my first steps towards being independent. SFI and the grace of God gave me the courage to make it on my own. Two years ago when I began receiving maintenance payments, I was able to go off SFI. With the help of a personal care attendant and my wheelchair, scooter, walker and canes, I am able to retain some independence and this gives me confidence and self esteem. The care I get affects the care I can give to my children who are most precious to me.—Denise

Social Assistance in Alberta

the perspective of the Minister of Family and Social Services



Thank you for this opportunity to talk about income security in Alberta. As Minister of Family and Social Services, I see four principles that guide the future of Alberta's social assistance program. This program should:

- ensure supports are available for those who are truly in need.
- provide adequate supports to those who are unable to work due to age, illness or disability.
- get employable people off welfare and back to work.
- ensure wise and efficient use of taxpayers' dollars.

The future

Guided by these principles, we will achieve a number of outcomes in Alberta, including:

- continued benefit programs for persons not expected to work due to age, illness or long-term disability.
- continued reduction in the number of employable people on welfare.
- further integration of federal and provincial programs.

We will accomplish this by continuing to:

- differentiate income security programs for those expected to work and those not expected to work.
- create training and job opportunities for welfare recipients.
- streamline, simplify and integrate programs.

Long-term supports for those not expected to work

Programs such as Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped provide supports for individuals who due to disability are unable to work. I consider these long-term assistance programs to be one of our priority areas. This June we changed regulations to permit disabled Albertans to remain on the AISH program

and access additional personal supports funding so they can live independently in the community. Prior to this change, disabled Albertans had to leave the AISH program and apply for social assistance for the disabled. Not only has this change made it more convenient for recipients, for many, it has also meant an increase in benefits.

A focus on employment

We have made great strides in Alberta to shift welfare from a passive assistance program to an active employment program. In doing this we have accomplished a number of things. The most significant achievement is that through training and employment programs we have assisted thousands of welfare recipients in returning to the workforce. We have worked hard to help people regain their independence. Through the welfare program, we will continue to provide basic supports for those in need, but our emphasis will remain on helping individuals find work and become self-sufficient.

Administrative streamlining

I believe that with any public program we must always be looking for improvements and efficiencies. Through our work with other departments, provinces and the federal government we will continue to build stronger links between welfare and employment programs. By working together, we will further streamline the delivery of services—providing better quality services at a more affordable cost. We are already seeing successes through the Canada Alberta Service Centres where we have come together with Advanced Education and Career Development and Human Resources Development Canada to provide Albertans one-stop shopping for services.

Stockwell Day

Counting Pennies... Counting People

I am a business person who believes that each of us must take an active role in making our community a better place to live and that we have a responsibility to help our neighbors who are in need.

Because of my beliefs I have committed some of my (often limited) time as a volunteer in the community. I am currently the Chairperson of the Edmonton Gleaners Association and have been a volunteer with the organization for 14 years.

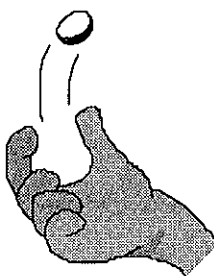
Since the formation of our organization in 1981, we have witnessed and tracked the link between income security programs and issues such as poverty and hunger. For example, during the late-1980s, food bank demand levelled off and even dropped slightly at one point when the provincial government began offering food vouchers to welfare recipients who were in need of support due to extra or unexpected expenses.

Reviewing 1993: The Year of Change

We have witnessed increased numbers of individuals and families needing our services when social programs are reduced or become more restrictive. For example, in 1993 unprecedented policy changes were introduced to social welfare programs in Alberta. It is important to point out that welfare is the income support of the last resort. In order to qualify for welfare, it must be proven that you are destitute and with no other resources.

Hamper demand during the first seven months of 1993 was lower than in 1992. In January of 1993, the federal government changed the child benefits program. Although this program was criticized for not being comprehensive enough, it did put more money into the hands of low income families each month.

When some changes to social welfare programs were introduced in August of 1993, the numbers of individuals receiving hamper assistance through the food bank network increased by 58.3 per cent for the month of August, when compared to August of 1992.



Effective **October 1, 1993**, the province reduced the shelter rates by \$50 for welfare recipients. Shelter allowance for childless couples was reduced by \$100. As well, the standard allowance for each adult was reduced by \$26 a month. What this means is that a single person in Alberta received \$394 to cover shelter, food,

clothing, telephone, transportation and other needs that they may have. Today the rate is still \$394 per month.

In the month of November, 1993, 12,309 people were served by Edmonton's Food Bank, which represented an increase of 103 per cent over November, 1992. (November, 1994—15,525 served; November, 1995—18,563 served).

Counting pennies

Social service agencies are always seeking ways to stretch their limited resources. They rely heavily on donated dollars and volunteers. There are simply only so many resources to go around and hence agency personnel have to make hard decisions about which programs stay and which ones go. This happens at a time when agencies are being asked to provide more services because of government cutbacks.

Edmonton's Food Bank has witnessed a tremendous level of support from the community, but we must also report that our donations have not expanded at the same rate as the number of people needing our service. Why should we kid ourselves... organizations cannot be expected to pick up the slack when governments cut hundreds of millions of dollars from programs.

Boards, staff and volunteers are forced to count pennies. People show great determination and commitment to carrying out their work, while at the same time feeling that their best will only mean survival for their organizations. ¶

Bill deVos is the Chairperson of Edmonton Gleaners Association "Edmonton's Food Bank."

Re: source Readings

POVERTY'S BONDS: Power and Agency in the Social Relations of Welfare
By Patrick Burman
Thompson Educational Publishing Inc., 1996
197 pages, \$19.95

Binding people to poverty

Former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's "pull yourself up by the bootstraps" rationalization for slashing welfare programs has come to dominate Canadian social policy.

Unfortunately, this "tough love" attitude has not eliminated poverty. Economic recovery has proven to be elusive, wages continues to fall and unemployment remains in the double digits. The poor are still very much with us, but their welfare is now the project of private charities, rather than a public priority.

University of Western Ontario sociology professor Patrick Burman points to the reality that without a comprehensive, coordinated welfare system, low-income people must enter a myriad power relations with publicly funded agencies, non-profit organizations, private charities and church groups in order to have their needs met. And not all service provider/service receiver relations are constructed equally.

Burman is the author of *Poverty's Bonds: Power and Agency in the Social Relations of Welfare*. This indispensable book is based on a study he conducted on the attitudes service providers and receivers have toward each other. He found that the narrow goals of each service providing agency, whether public or private, encourages a narrow view of the poor, and a narrow view of the role service workers can play in the larger project to eliminate poverty.

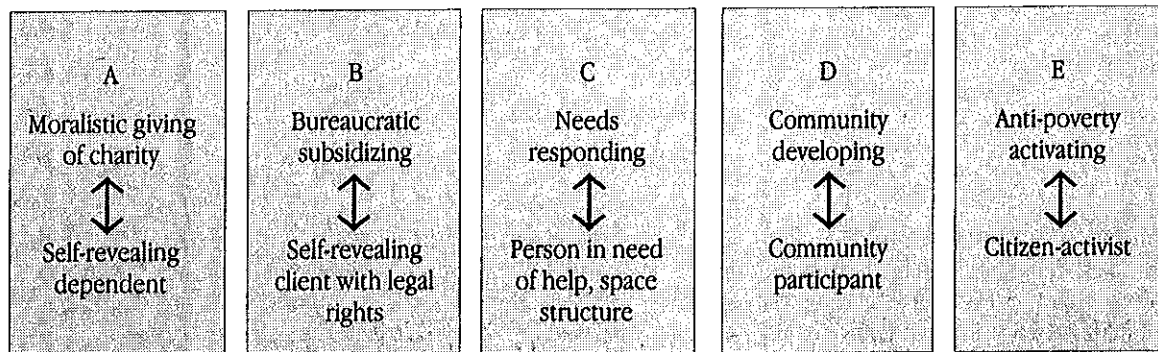
Burman's observations are based on the work of French philosopher Michel Foucault: "Foucault thought that social policy was a mechanism of the state for making use of and channeling power through all parts of the society. Power did not simply descend from a leader or elite but ascended from freely constructed subjects which had internalized means of self-discipline," he explains.

Burman identifies five "configuring modes" of relations between service providers and receivers. They range from relations in which the balance of power is tipped in the provider's favor to more equitable relationships. He did not identify any modes in which the service receiver is seen to hold the balance of power.

The first mode (A) is what Burman refers to as the "moralistic giving of charity." The advantage to service receivers in this configuration is they receive basic, immediate necessities, usually a hot meal and, in some cases, clothing. The advantage to the volunteers and officials at a church charity is a sense of moral satisfaction. The disadvantage is that in many cases, the service receiver is receiving goods with strings attached; for example, they may be required to listen to a proselytizing speech prior to receiving a meal.

Burman found that religious charity workers can become indignant when their missionary subjects do not respond with the proper deference: "This configuring mode presents the provider as clothed in moral righteousness and respectability, standing at the gate of societal goods (and of heaven in a sense), sharing both love and judgment to all who approach. The low-income person is altercast as a self-revealing dependent, who is seen, in a biblical sense, as a sheep that has strayed from the conventional path." Indeed, one food bank official, a fundamentalist Christian, spoke in Thatcherite terms when asked about his attitudes toward people in need: "They have become lazy in looking for jobs; they have become lazy in really picking up their bootstraps and helping themselves to do it."

The "bureaucratic subsidizing" configuration (B) describes the interaction between people and workers at agencies which administer entitlement programs such as unemployment insurance or municipal welfare. It may



be reasonable to expect that entitlement monies be dispensed to those in need automatically, but in reality, both applicants for assistance and agency officials must first satisfy the needs of the system.

Applicants must prove need, a bureaucratic form of begging, often through intrusive leading interviews or questionnaires. Appeals are secretive, designed to hide the mechanisms of decision-making from public view. Agency officials interviewed for Burman's study had a tendency to hint or in some cases state that their own views on the system differed from the official line. Because these programs have come under scrutiny, officials find themselves in the position of secular gatekeepers.

People in need can find physical shelter and psychological support at youth shelters, soup kitchens, hostels or missions. The workers in this "needs responding" (C) mode are open to learning from those in need. He sees a lesser tendency to "trade" assistance for compliance on the part of the people who come to them for assistance.

However, there is a danger of overemphasizing lifestyle as the origin of problems. "The emphasis on empathy causes an impaired vision of power differentials, which are maintained in this mode but euphemized and softened."

Burman credits the "community development" (D) and "anti-poverty activating" (E) modes of relations as approaches that view poverty as a societally or economically constructed situation, while the previous modes saw poverty as almost a character flaw (a view Burman sums up as "pauperism").

The problem with the almost communitarian, "we're all in this together" view of community development is that

it often stops before advocating political action. After including excerpts of a liberal inner city cleric who favors liberation theology over hierarchical church institutions, Burman comments: "We can perhaps see now the hoped-for reward for the provider in the romantic view of community—it is the finding of goodness in a corrupted world."

The most political configuration is model E, the anti-poverty mode. Here, both service providers and recipients are equals in a campaign to confront the active construction of a caste of disadvantaged people in Canada.

By the state's refusal to back full employment and its self-limitation of its redistributive role and by the system's failure to provide enough in social wages to provide a decent living, it is ensuring that people will continue to rely on the cadre of service providers in the social services system. It is priming the pump of the poverty industry.

It is evident that Burman favors this model of social interaction over the preceding configuration, but as with all the modes, he gives the last word to the people who are ostensibly being "helped":

When Sandra got a flier from Joseph's anti-poverty organization, she ran into friends who had been there. They told her, 'Don't go. It's not worth it. They make you get up and degrade yourself.' The organization, it was felt, made people 'talk about their personal life.' Even if the purpose was political and progressive, the humiliation effect might end up being the same. 11

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Employment Standards (continued from page 16)

"I am satisfied that there have been many thousands of similar employment contracts between car wash operators and laborers in the province of Alberta over the years and that wages are not customarily paid for down time." He did not grant the worker pay for the time she waited before she was allowed to punch in. The government did not appeal this decision and it did not amend the Employment Standards Code to prevent this practice.

Well, after seeing the minimum standards and looking at this case, what do you think? For a large portion of Alberta's working people, whose only protection from abusive employment practices is the Employment Standards Code, are there rights... or what? ¶

Leanne M. Chabley has been a labor and employment lawyer representing trade unions and workers for the last 12 years. She currently has a private practice in Edmonton.



In the mid-October 1996, Statistics Canada announced it was going to change the way it determines the monthly rate of unemployment. StatsCan planned to count Canadians who have become discouraged from seeking employment as part of the official unemployed population. Up to this point, the monthly rate has been based on a survey of 52,000 Canadian households and the rate did not reflect people who have given up looking for work.

The change in method would have resulted in an increase in the rate of unemployment, from the current level of nine to 10 per cent to an estimated 13 per cent, which is the jobless rate determined by a Scotiabank study released last summer.

StatsCan's announcement became even more interesting when days later it is refuted by StatsCan itself. After the initial story was reported in daily newspapers across the country, StatsCan said it would not be changing its definition of unemployment. Instead, it would continue to follow International Labor Standards which stipulate that people who are not looking for work be excluded from the official unemployment rate. They would however, phase in questions to the monthly Labor Force Survey to obtain more information from people who have given up looking for work.

Officials with StatsCan then emphasized that separate indicators such as the labor force participation rate and actual employment rates should be considered in addition to StatsCan's unemployment figures for an accurate picture of employment in Canada.

Constancy of Hope (continued from page 17)

the stereotypes recede and unique multifaceted personalities emerge. When hands touch as food is offered or received or, better yet, shared, we can recognize our common humanity. In times of grief or crisis we walk with one another. Learning is a mutual experience, not just one person with more knowledge teaching another. "Us" and "them" are no more. Only "we" remain. Then trust continues to develop and loneliness, the silent source of despair, is dispelled.

It is not possible to wave a magic wand and make the early morning lines outside the Bissell Centre disappear because the Casual Labor Office is no longer necessary. Nor are we likely to see the *Our Voice* vendors going off en masse to jobs with security and benefits. There will continue to be the hungry, the homeless, the jobless, the unacknowledged. But that thing with feathers flutters enough to remind us that we are all one people and can offer mutual help and hope as we go through these harsh times together. ¶

Rev. Suzanne Cowles served the Inner City Pastoral Ministry (icpm) for seven years. The ecumenical icpm supported by the Anglican, Lutheran, and United Churches, has offered a presence in the Boyle-McCauley area for 18 years. Suzanne, a Lutheran pastor, is presently developing the communities-focused "City on a Hill" project.