PERCEPTION

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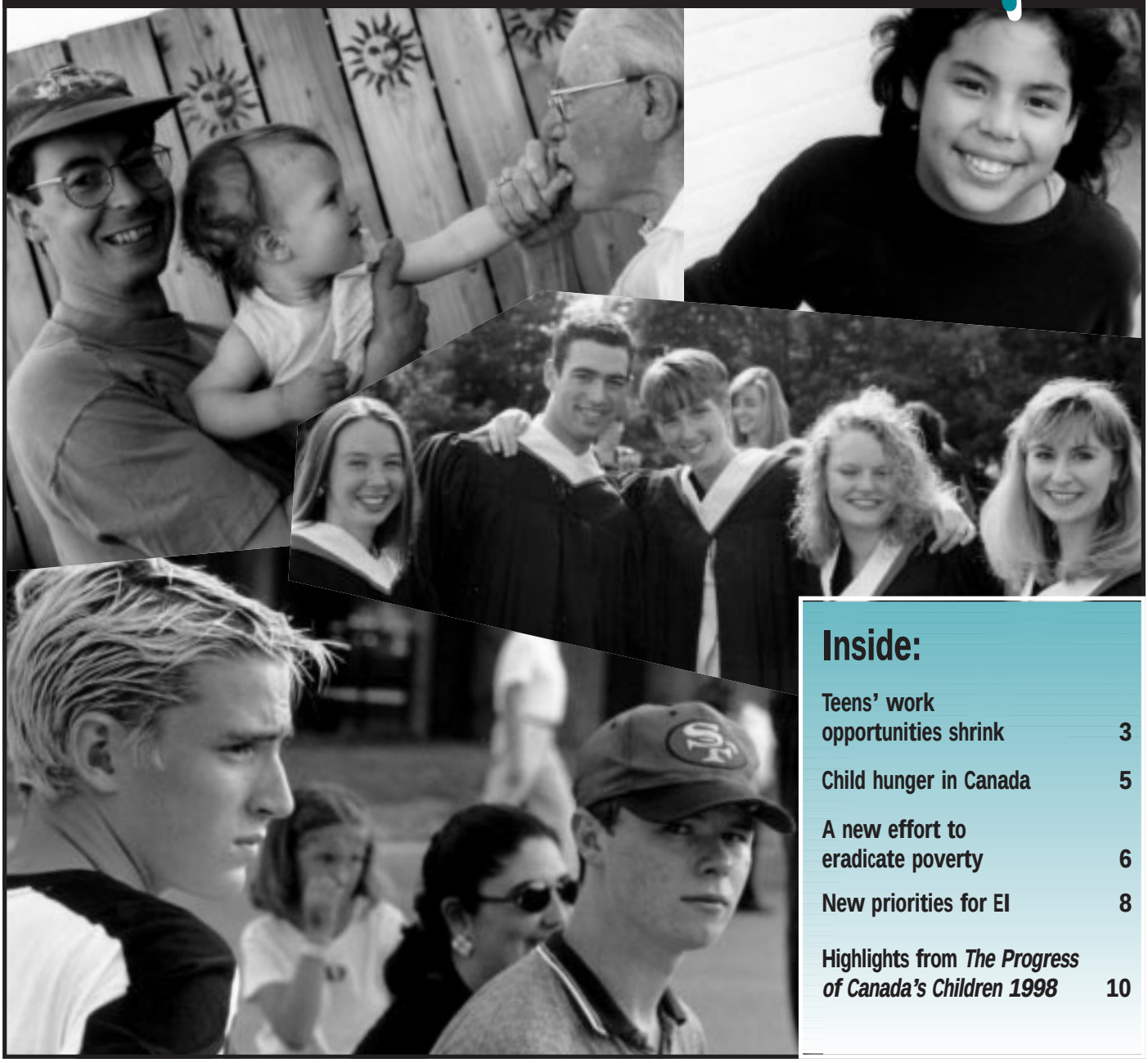
CANADIAN COUNCIL ON SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Focus on Children and Youth



Inside:

PERCEPTION

Volume 22, No. 3, December 1998

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Hot off the Press

The CCSD is pleased to announce the recent release of two major publications: *The Progress of Canada's Children 1998* and *Youth at Work in Canada*.

The third edition of *The Progress of Canada's Children* focuses on youth and contains a wealth of new data about how kids are faring at home, at school, with their peers, and in the community. It is essential reading for everyone who works with or cares about children and youth. (72 pp.)

Youth at Work in Canada: A Research Report is a companion report to *The Progress of Canada's Children*. It provides a portrait of the employment situation for teens, documenting rates of employment, wages, types of work, and the effects of work on teens' school performance and lifestyle habits such as smoking and drinking. (32 pp.)

Each report costs $10. Order both for $18, plus $3.50 shipping and handling – or use your CCSD member discount and get at least 15% off. Send your prepaid orders to: CCSD Publications, 441 MacLaren, 4th Floor, Ottawa, ON K2P 2H3, or via fax: (613) 236-2750, e-mail: publications@ccsd.ca or e-comm: www.ccsd.ca. Also available at Renouf Books.

NET BENEFIT
The CCSD'S Pre-eminent On-Line Auction

A big **Thank You** to all the contributors and bidders in the CCSD's first Pre-eminent On-line auction. NET BENEFIT was a tremendous success!

Bidders from British Columbia to Newfoundland participated in NET BENEFIT, thus meeting one of our main objectives – to hold a fundraising event that was open to CCSD members and supporters in every region of the country.

- Every item received bids.
- Many items were sold for 75% of their retail value, and several items were sold for prices exceeding their value.

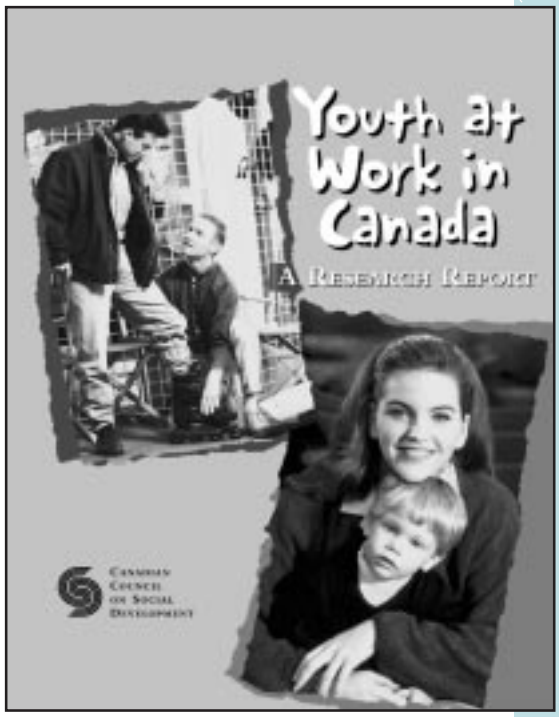
There were also a number of good bargains, particularly on the performing arts packages. In the end, NET BENEFIT raised $3,300 for the Council, and plans are already being discussed for a 1999 auction.

Congratulations to all the successful bidders. We hope you enjoy the item you purchased.

Teens' work opportunities shrink

The following is excerpted from the report, Youth at Work in Canada, *to be released by the CCSD as a companion publication to* The Progress of Canada's Children 1998.

Between the ages of 15 and 19, the majority of young people bring home their first pay cheque – one of the important changes that marks their transition from childhood to adulthood. As youth progress through their teenage years, their chances of employment increase and their job options widen. However, opportunities for teens to find paid work are linked closely to the state of the economy. In periods of economic recession, a significantly higher proportion of young people are unemployed than during periods of economic growth. The drop in job opportunities for youth has been particularly marked in the 1990s, and it has remained poor through the latter part of the decade, despite a healthier economy and an improved job market for adults.



Between 1989 and 1996, the share of teens who worked during the year declined by 21 percentage points. The decline was particularly evident among youth aged 15 to 17, dropping by 20 to 30 percentage points. Teens' weakened involvement in the labour market is also evident in the stark decline in their labour force participation rates. In 1989, almost 60 per cent of teens aged 15 to 19 were either working or seeking work. By 1997, that proportion had dropped below 50 per cent. Despite Canada's economic recovery between 1993 and 1997, the teen labour force participation rate continued to decline and it now stands at its lowest point in 25 years. Teens are frustrated and discouraged about their employment prospects, according to their comments in recent CCSD focus groups.

The proportion of teens who have never held a job is far higher now than it was in the 1980s. For example, in 1989 only one-quarter of all 16-year-olds had never had a paying job; by 1996, this proportion had more than doubled. Overall, young people who reached their early and mid-teens during the 1990s are less likely to have had a paying job than were teens in previous decades.

If these trends continue, there are both short-term and potentially long-term implications for teens. In the short term, young people's ability to earn spending money after school and during the summer is reduced. Also, their ability to find employment once they reach their twenties may be weakened by a lack of work experience, thus aggravating an already difficult situation.

Teens' work and earnings

The type of work that young people do and the amount of earnings they receive shift throughout their child and teen years. For most young Canadians, their first exposure to the labour market is through babysitting, delivering newspapers, or performing home-based chores such as snow-shovelling. By the time they reach age 17, most teen workers have become employees in the formal sector of the economy, where they are subject to legal provisions set out in minimum wage legislation and in federal and provincial labour codes.

> "You can't be motivated when you know there is no opportunity to work. I know that it is hard to motivate myself when I don't know whether there will be a job when I'm done school."
>
> (Tom, 23)

The majority of younger teens work in small firms: nearly two-thirds are employed by companies with fewer than 20 employees. Among older teens, a somewhat larger proportion work in medium-sized firms with 20 to 100 employees, or in large firms with more than 100 employees. A teen's first job is likely to be in a small establishment such as a corner

store or a family-run business. As teens get older, they are more likely to find work in large fast-food chains, retail stores or other larger job sites.

The work experiences of boys and girls are different

There are significant differences in the types of work performed by young men and young women. Of all young women aged 15 to 16 who had jobs in 1996, more than one-third were self-employed – most likely as babysitters – while just over 10 per cent of young men this age with jobs were self-employed. It seems that despite the huge influx of adult women into the labour force in recent decades, the traditional roles that women play as family caregivers, and that men play as workers outside the home, affect the work patterns of young women and men, beginning with their first jobs.

"What scares me is that there are people with two or three degrees who are still working in retail."
(Stephanie, 22)

Among younger teens, 41 per cent of boys with jobs work in services and sales – in stores, restaurants and fast-food outlets. Another 45 per cent work in blue collar jobs – on farms, construction sites or in warehouses. By contrast, almost two-thirds of 15- and 16-year-old girls work in clerical and service jobs, with only negligible numbers of them employed in blue collar jobs.

How much do teens earn?

The hourly wages of teens tend to be low due to their lack of previous work experience and training. As they get older, however, their wages improve. Only about 40 per cent of young people aged 15 and 16 earn $7 or more per hour, but over 50 per cent of older teens are in that wage category. Most employed teens aged 15 and 16 earn less than $100 per week, and the vast majority earn less than $200 per week. The weekly earnings of older teens are somewhat higher. Although the distribution of weekly earnings is similar for both boys and girls aged 15 and 16, it diverges for older teens. Forty-one per cent of young men earn $200 or more per week, compared to about 25 per cent of young women.

"If you want a good job, you have to get more education."
(Rebecca, 17)

Only about 10 per cent of young people are unionized or receive workplace benefits such as health or dental plans. That is because most young workers are employed part-time, they have held their job for a short time only, they are employed in a small firm, or they often work in the service economy.

Work and school

The effect of employment on school performance varies depending on the number of hours per week that students spend working. As long as their working time does not exceed 20 hours per week, employment does not appear to impede a student's school performance. American research shows that among boys, those working more than 20 hours per week are more likely to drop out of school than those who are not employed. For girls, however, drop-out rates are higher among those who are not employed than among those who work more than 20 hours a week.

Rather than working too many hours per week, the evidence shows that the biggest problem faced by most young Canadians today is an inability to find any paid work. The share of students aged 15 to 19 who had summer jobs declined sharply through the 1990s, and it is lower now than at any other point in the last two decades. In 1997, less than half of all teens held a summer job, down from two-thirds in 1989. This is a significant concern, given young people's need to save for further education, earn spending money, and gain work experience.

See page 2 for ordering information about *Youth at Work in Canada*.

Child hunger in Canada

by Delaney Turner

The following article is based on "A Glimpse of Child Hunger in Canada," *a research paper prepared by Lynn McIntyre, Sarah K. Connor and James Warren for Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth. Their paper was presented at the HRDC conference "Investing in Children," held in Ottawa, October 1998.*

It's not difficult to see the relationship between low income and hunger. Families living on low incomes have less money to spend on rent and even less to spend on nutritious food. What may not be as easy to see, however, are the long-term effects of hunger – not only on children, but on their parents as well. Until now, no data have existed on the extent of hunger in Canada. But new research released at the "Investing in Children" conference provides a glimpse of the problems faced by Canada's hungry families.

To Canada's great shame, an estimated 57,000 children under 12 went hungry at some point during 1994, representing 1.2 per cent of all children. Most hungry children live in large urban areas with 500,000 or more inhabitants, and they are most likely to live with lone mothers on social assistance. Although almost half of the hungry children are Canadian or of British descent, Aboriginal children are four times as likely to experience hunger as other children. It is not surprising that low levels of social assistance have resulted in more hungry families. However, one-third of the children who reported hunger lived in families in which both parents were employed – the working poor. According to McIntyre, "the difference in income between families who experience hunger in Canada and those who do not is about $5,000 per year. The long-term costs of ignoring this problem could be significantly higher."

Perhaps the most surprising finding was the relationship between hunger and education levels. While popular assumptions hold that higher education is the best way towards economic self-sufficiency, particularly for women, the researchers discovered that more than half of the mothers who reported being hungry had some post-secondary education, and more than one-quarter had completed a degree.

Equally surprising was the finding that hungry children do not always come from poor households. A related study in Nova Scotia found that the children who were most likely to go to school without breakfast were girls between 8 and 9 years old. The reason for this was not, the researchers suggested, because of a lack of food in the house, but rather the girls' concerns about their body image. And school breakfast programs, although they are easy to co-ordinate and generate favourable press coverage, may not be the best way to ensure that kids start the day with a full stomach, according to McIntyre.

In addition to the immediate discomfort that hunger brings, it can also lead to long-term health problems for both children and adults. For children, the effects of hunger are usually evident in an inability to concentrate, which can translate into poor grades at school. For mothers, hunger can lead to chronic illnesses including migraines and back problems. Such debilitating conditions can severely hamper a mother's ability to carry out even the simplest daily tasks, and the cost of medications to deal with these problems may cut into the family's food budget. Hungry mothers are also more likely to smoke, which can lead to asthma in their children. It is still unclear whether

Continued on page 7

A new effort to eradicate poverty

by Delaney Turner

Eradicating world poverty. It's a tall order, but the organizers of *in common* are taking it to heart. Organized under the auspices of the Canadian Council for International Co-operation (CCIC), *in common* is a multi-year, multi-faceted campaign with three main objectives: raising awareness about poverty in Canada and abroad, moving poverty to the front of the public agenda, and proposing a set of achievable policies aimed at eliminating world poverty.

Alain Roy, communications co-ordinator for the campaign, says it's important for Canadians to believe that poverty is not an inevitable condition, but rather the result of choices that governments and citizens make every day. And unlike other anti-poverty campaigns, Roy says *in common* presents its goals in achievable steps. "There seems to be a sense among leaders, politicians and the public that poverty will always be with us," he says. "We want to convey a sense of possibility."

Working with over 100 Canadian relief agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), *in common* differs from traditional aid programs. Roy says that although direct monetary aid can ease some of the effects of poverty, organizers have to look at its root causes and work towards establishing a better social infrastructure, particularly in countries where democratic institutions are weak or non-existent. "It's important that we continue our aid programs," he says, "but it's also important to go beyond that and look at the ways Canada interacts with other countries." To achieve this, *in common* stresses the importance of understanding how issues of food security, gender and the environment combine to entrench poverty in developing countries. Roy also believes it's important for Canadians to examine how their investments affect the lives of people in developing countries, and how those who are concerned about poverty can work to eliminate it by choosing to buy fairly traded goods at home. "We try to engage people on more than a donations basis," he says.

Another way *in common* differs from previous anti-poverty initiatives is its emphasis on dialogue among governments, NGOs and concerned citizens. "It's not enough just to say that poverty is a problem," says Roy. "We need to propose concrete options and alternatives." The most telling evidence of the campaign's commitment to dialogue is its 10-point agenda, which outlines positive steps that governments, businesses, NGOs and citizens can take towards achieving sustainable development, gender equity, food security and citizen participation, among others. Rather than present world poverty as an insurmountable obstacle, the 10-point agenda illustrates how local, inexpensive activities such as volunteering and letter-writing campaigns can help foster more positive attitudes towards change.

"We need to send the message that it is possible to make progress towards eliminating poverty through individual and collective actions," says Roy. Also included in the agenda are suggestions aimed at governments to encourage them to honour their international commitments and devote more funding to development organizations such as the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). To encourage participation, the campaign literature contains a guide for leading public discussion groups and a list of participating organizations, contact numbers and relevant web sites. "This 10-point agenda represents our best thinking about what can be done and what policies we can look at," affirms Roy.

Although the five-year campaign is only into its sixth month, *in common* has received a positive reception from both sides of the House of Commons. Bloc Québécois MP Daniel Turp, New Democrat Libby Davies and Liberal Jean

Augustine, among others, were part of a fact-finding tour of Asia to examine first-hand the effects of that continent's economic meltdown. Organizers of *in common* have also "adopted" 47 Members of Parliament to lend their support to the campaign. "All parties are concerned about this issue, so there should be a non-partisan approach used to tackle the problem of poverty in Canada and abroad," suggests Roy.

Campaign organizers also met with Finance Minister Paul Martin over the summer to discuss the often disruptive social consequences brought about by sudden movements of capital. Among the many suggestions proposed by *in common* are cancelling the $1.2 billion debt owed by developing countries to the Canadian Wheat Board, and implementing the so-called Tobin Tax, a small levy placed on international currency transfers. "We don't accuse people of certain motives; we're saying let's look at solutions. I think politicians have appreciated that," says Roy. Campaign organizers are also looking at ways in which different federal departments with operations overseas can co-operate with each other and with the campaign. "We feel that our aid program should be judged as much by its influence on other Canadian policies as by its effectiveness in the field," says Roy.

In common has also generated impressive media attention in its first six months. The campaign has been an interview topic on *Pamela Wallin Live*, CBC Newsworld and TV Ontario's *Diplomatic Immunity*. In January, CBC Radio's *Ideas* will devote two hour-long programs to lectures sponsored by the campaign. Surprisingly, *in common* has also received attention from Canada's business press. "We've put a lot of our issues out there," says Roy. "We like to think we've had an impact already on the way some government officials talk about these issues."

Related Web Sites:
www.incommon.web.net
www.web.net/ccic-ccci

Child hunger in Canada

Continued from page 5

being in poor health leads to hunger, or whether being hungry leads to poor health. Regardless, children born into these situations are very likely to suffer the adverse effects of hunger, according to McIntyre.

Families facing a shortage of food usually turn to two coping methods – food banks or seeking help from relatives. Families that depend on food banks for all or part of their food needs are most likely to be headed by a lone mother and to live in Ontario. This coping strategy often results in a hungry mother with a barely-fed child. Families that rely on relatives are most likely to have fewer children, to be in better health, to have both parents living at home, and to be earning higher wages.

How should policy-makers combat hunger in Canada? McIntyre and her colleagues offer a number of suggestions. First, governments should address the problems of families who are trying to keep their children fed on minimum wage incomes. For dual-income families, few options remain for them to increase their household income. Second, the effects of the new National Child Benefit (NCB) on families that are dependent on social assistance must be examined. Because the NCB may result in social assistance benefits being clawed back, the researchers fear that Canada's most vulnerable families are likely to become even more vulnerable.

Finally, the researchers believe that efforts must be made to develop non-charitable models of food assistance that are more accessible and more reliable than food banks. Critics in Ontario have charged that food banks have been quietly institutionalized as part of the province's social support system. But food banks and other charitable food services like soup kitchens are poor solutions to the hunger crisis and to family food insecurity. Because these charitable efforts must rely on community services and local businesses, food supplies are often limited and inconsistent, and the food may not provide sufficient nutritional support. And when resources are low, food banks must limit the amount of food they can distribute to each family. They may even have to turn away people who depend on their services.

For more information about the HRDC "Investing in Children" conference papers, please contact Susan McKellar, HRDC, tel: (819) 953-4230; fax: 994-2480; e-mail: susan.mckellar@spg.org

Setting new priorities for Canada's Employment Insurance program

by Pierre Laliberté

With the announcement that the federal budget surplus for 1998 will likely top $10 billion, the cry is growing from opposition parties and other government critics for more action to stimulate the economy. Critics are calling for actions ranging from income tax cuts, to Employment Insurance (EI) premium reductions, to greater investments in social and health programs. However, we should stop for a moment and remember why the surplus exists in the first place: it is largely the result of a growing pot of money that the federal government collects through EI premiums but does not pay out to EI claimants. Since 1993, the EI program has generated a cumulative surplus of over $20 billion which the federal government has used in its fight against the deficit.

With the federal government's books now balanced, there is something profoundly amiss in the continued misuse of this dedicated payroll tax at a time when the unemployment rate is still high – and particularly when the EI program now covers only a fraction of the unemployed. In 1997, only 42 per cent of the unemployed actually collected EI benefits – down from 83 per cent in 1989.

It is therefore natural to wonder whether the decline in the number of EI beneficiaries has resulted in the surplus in the EI account. Shouldn't Ottawa be more concerned with improving the EI program, rather than milking it for other uses?

Why did EI coverage go down?

A study released in October by Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) sheds new light on the reasons for the reduced number of EI beneficiaries.[1] According to the study, EI coverage declined between 1989 and 1997 for two reasons – new program restrictions and changes in the composition of the unemployed.

The study found that, had the program's eligibility rules remained the same in 1997 as they were in 1989, about 63 per cent of the unemployed would have qualified for benefits – an increase of 20 percentage points over the number of people who were actually covered. More than one-quarter of a million unemployed people thus failed to receive benefits as a result of tightened EI eligibility rules, resulting in a net savings for the federal government of about $3.5 billion. The savings were, in fact, probably even higher because HRDC's calculations did not include the effects of the reduced *level of benefits* and the *length of the benefit period* – both of which were tightened through legislation in the 1990s.

The other important reason why EI coverage has dropped so dramatically is the changing composition of the unemployed population. HRDC's research shows that the proportion of the unemployed who *had not worked in the past 12 months* and were, as a result, ineligible for EI benefits rose significantly in the 1990s – from 18 per cent to 38 per cent of all unemployed. Most were people who had some previous work experience, but not within the last 12 months. However, about one-third were people with *no previous work experience*.

As might be expected, young people under the age of 25 comprised over 75 per cent of the unemployed population without previous work experience. Women were also over-represented in this category. The largest number of youth without work experience lived in Ontario, followed by youth in Quebec. In the case of the long-term unemployed, the distribution was more evenly spread across age and gender groups. However, more than one-third of the long-term unemployed (excluding those with no work experience) lived in Quebec.

Although the number of self-employed grew substantially between 1989 and 1997, this does not account for much of the increase in the number of unemployed who are excluded from EI benefits, because unemployment rates among the self-employed are relatively low. However, a rise in the proportion of part-time workers – from 17 to 19 per cent of the total labour force – probably contributed to the drop in the number of unemployed people eligible for benefits because it takes longer for part-time workers to qualify for benefits than it does for full-time workers.

What can be done?

When the federal government reformed the EI system (then known as Unemployment Insurance) in the early 1990s, its stated objectives were to make the program financially solvent, eliminate some of the alleged behavioural aberrations it induced, and adjust the program to "the realities of today's labour market."

The reforms have been so successful at meeting the first goal that the federal government could, in theory, finance the next two years of regular EI benefits using the accumulated surplus. Indeed, it is because the surplus has grown so large that the government now faces a legal obligation to reduce EI premiums. However, cuts in premiums would further entrench the current – and inadequate – levels of coverage, without providing any guarantees to stimulate the economy. The standard business mantra that 'payroll taxes kill jobs' is simply that – an unproven belief that employers will create more jobs when their costs, such as EI premiums, are reduced.

Before settling on a course of action, the federal government should undertake a careful review of the economic and social impacts of the last round of EI reforms. One objective should be to improve eligibility and benefits to EI contributors who lose their jobs. Another goal should be to improve the level of benefits for those who take maternity or parental leave, for this group also saw their benefit levels drop as a result of the reforms in the 1990s. With the current accumulated EI surplus, the government has the means to provide better benefits to EI contributors who must leave their jobs to care for children or other dependants.

The surplus generated by the EI fund also offers the government a source of funds that could be used to help the growing number of long-term unemployed, including new entrants to the labour force who cannot find work. Although these people have not recently, or perhaps ever, contributed to the EI system, the 1990s reforms included a new emphasis on so-called active measures to help the unemployed reintegrate into the labour market. In fact, the federal government has already committed itself to reinvesting a significant portion of EI savings as a result of the reforms into labour market support measures to be negotiated with provincial governments.

Given the growing number of people who cannot enter the labour market or who are experiencing long-term unemployment, more resources should be directed to the 'active measures' programs, and every effort should be made to ensure that these people have full access to these programs. Ottawa should also extend and improve its commitment to programs such as the Youth Employment Strategy and the Transitional Jobs Fund.

The federal government also needs to consider what will happen when the next recession sets in. The growing number of people who are excluded from the program because they are self-employed, never employed or long-term unemployed will need some source of income stabilization if the economy again turns downward. Traditionally, Ottawa has played a strong role in providing income support, but in this post-Canada Assistance Plan era, with lower federal funding under the Canada Health and Social Transfer, provinces, municipalities and individuals will be left with a larger financial burden than before, at a time when they can least afford it.

This makes it all the more imperative that the federal government use *all* the macroeconomic levers at its disposal to stimulate the economy, and that it does away with, once and for all, the anti-inflation theology that pervades the halls of government today. With the federal budget now balanced, this should become the government's next priority.

Pierre Laliberté is an economist and research associate specializing in labour market issues at the Canadian Council on Social Development.

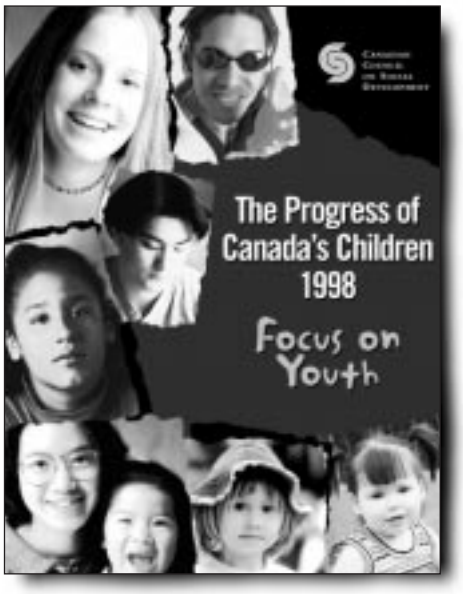
ENDNOTE

[1] *An Analysis of Employment Insurance Benefit Coverage*, Human Resources Development Canada, Applied Research Division, October 1998.

Insight
AN INFORMATION SERIES
Prepared by the Centre for International Statistics at the Canadian Council on Social Development

Highlights from *The Progress of Canada's Children 1998*

The long-term goal of *The Progress of Canada's Children* is to measure indicators of the well-being of our children and youth from year to year. The third edition, released this month, reveals changes that have occurred over the 1990s. It also presents new data on areas where Canadian children are doing well and others where concern is warranted.



PORTRAIT OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH

- **A growing number of Canadian children and youth were born outside the country.** Between 1991 and 1996, the number of immigrant children grew by 26 per cent, and the number of immigrant youth (aged 15 to 24) grew by seven per cent. In Toronto and Vancouver, more than one in four youth aged 15 to 24 was born outside Canada.
- **Young people make up more than half of Canada's Aboriginal population.** Less than one-third of Aboriginal youth live in large urban areas, compared to nearly two-thirds of all young Canadians.
- **Street youth form a small but troubling group of Canada's youth.** A Montreal study found that over 60 per cent had left abusive homes, and 40 per cent were intravenous drug users. There are no reliable estimates of the number of Canada's homeless youth.

What contributes to child and youth well-being?

Family Life

- **The number of children under 12 whose parents separate or divorce has tripled in the last 20 years.** The majority of children under 12 remain with their mothers after separation.
- **Children in lone-parent families are at greater risk of poor development than other children if their family is very poor or lives in an unsafe neighbourhood.**

Economic Security

- **Long-term unemployment among families with children fell between 1994 and 1996.** The number of families worried about job losses also decreased. However, in 1996, average family after-tax incomes were $43,400, down from $43,700 in 1994.
- **Spending on essentials ate up less of family income in 1996 compared to 1992.** However, lower-income families still spent more each

month on all expenditures than they earned, while high-income families increased their savings ability.

- **The gap between rich and poor families grew by more than $3,000 between 1994 and 1996.** The number of poor children grew from 1.36 million in 1994 to 1.5 million in 1996, raising the child poverty rate from 19.5 to 21 per cent.
- **The poverty rate for urban Canadian youth grew** between 1991 and 1996. Youth poverty rates are highest in Montreal, Vancouver, Halifax and Toronto.

Physical Safety

- **Young people's use of bike helmets increased between 1994 and 1997, but those who wear them are still a minority.**
- **Canada's crime rate declined for the sixth consecutive year in 1997.** The murder rate hit its lowest point since 1969.
- **Canada's rate of child deaths due to gun use is among the worst in developed countries.** Among 26 developed nations, only the United States, Finland, Northern Ireland and Israel have higher rates of gun-related deaths.

Community Resources

- **University costs are rising.** The average undergraduate tuition fee increased by seven per cent between 1997 and 1998, and the average undergraduate student debt load upon graduation has risen by nearly 50 per cent since 1995.
- **Housing is less affordable for a growing number of families.** Between 1991 and 1996, housing affordability problems grew, particularly among young and lone-parent families, and social housing construction stopped in most provinces.
- **Health care is the top issue of concern among Canadians.**
- **Cost restricts access to recreational activities for low-income families.** Less than half of low-income families with children spend money on user fees for recreational activities, compared to 72 per cent of high-income families.
- **The number of people using food banks in Canada has more than doubled in the last decade.** Forty-two per cent of people who depend on food banks for all or part of their food are children and youth under 18.

Civic Vitality

- **Municipal youth-friendly initiatives are growing.** Seven of 21 Canadian cities surveyed have a youth advisory committee, up from three of 19 cities surveyed in 1997.
- **The number of Canadians volunteering their time rose by two million between 1987 and 1997, and the number of volunteer hours rose by nine per cent.** Nearly 40 per cent of volunteer hours were spent on social service and recreational activities, many of which benefit children and youth.

How are children and youth faring?

Health

- **An estimated 57,000 Canadian children under 12 experienced hunger due to lack of food or money in 1994.** The majority of hungry children lived with lone parents and a high proportion were Aboriginal.
- **Teen smoking rates have risen dramatically between 1990 and 1996 – from 21 to nearly 30 per cent.**

- **Sexually transmitted diseases among teens have decreased since 1990, but pregnancy rates have increased.**
- **The rate of injury deaths among teens aged 15 to 19 decreased from 49.7 per 100,000 population in 1991, to 42.4 in 1995.**
- **About 15 per cent of young people aged 20 to 24 are overweight, although twice that proportion of young women think they are overweight.**

Social Engagement

- **More young Canadians are volunteering their time.** Between 1987 and 1997, the youth volunteer rate nearly doubled – from 18 to 33 per cent.
- **More than 90 per cent of young people aged 12 to 24 say they have someone they can confide in and count on.** Young women are more likely to have high levels of social support than are young men.
- **Youth crime rates dropped for the sixth consecutive year.** For the second consecutive year, charges against youth for violent crimes dropped.
- **Bullying among children is a serious concern.** New data indicate that one in seven Canadian boys between four and 11 bully other children, and about one in 11 girls do so.
- **The number of missing children increased by almost 2,000 in 1997.** Runaways make up the largest proportion of missing children, and 60 per cent of them are teenage girls.

Learning

- **More young women are earning post-secondary degrees.** Their rate of enrolment in all fields of study is at least 25 per cent higher than a decade ago, although they are still under-represented in engineering, applied and physical sciences, and mathematics courses.
- **One in three Canadian youth aged 16 to 25 have the highest level of literacy skills,** second only to Swedish youth. However, Canada also has the third largest proportion of youth with poor literacy skills – 10 per cent.
- **Children's access to extracurricular learning opportunities varies according to family income.** Children in high-income families are three times as likely to participate in such activities as children from lower-income households.

Labour Force Profile of Youth

- **Teen unemployment has risen significantly.** Less than half of teens had summer jobs in 1997, down from two-thirds in 1989.
- **Young parents' employment rates and earnings dropped dramatically in the 1990s.** However, more parents under 25 are attending school, which improves their long-term earning potential.
- **Most homeless youth are unemployed.** An estimated 30 per cent have legitimate jobs. The rest turn to panhandling and the drug and sex trades.

Policy Initiatives for Children and Youth

- **The National Child Benefit came into effect in 1998.** Each province has announced complementary initiatives intended to decrease child poverty and increase work incentives for low-income parents.
- **Changes to the Young Offenders Act have been proposed to increase sentences for youth convicted of serious crimes.** Meanwhile, the federal government has increased funds for a national community safety and crime prevention initiative.
- **Newfoundland has adopted a strategic social plan to reduce youth unemployment and child poverty, among other goals.**
- **Ontario has launched a new program to provide greater support to families with young children who are at increased risk of developmental problems.**

See page 2 for ordering information about *The Progress of Canada's Children 1998*.