



CUISR:

Community – University Institute for Social Research

***Child Poverty in Canada, Saskatchewan,
and Saskatoon: A Literature Review and
the Voices of the People***

by Wendy MacDermott



Building Healthy Sustainable Communities

Community-University Institute for Social Research

CUI SR is a partnership between a set of community-based organizations (including Saskatoon District Health, the City of Saskatoon, Quint Development Corporation, the Saskatoon Regional Intersectoral Committee on Human Services) and a large number of faculty and graduate students from the University of Saskatchewan. CUI SR's mission is "to serve as a focal point for community-based research and to integrate the various social research needs and experiential knowledge of the community-based organizations with the technical expertise available at the University. It promotes, undertakes, and critically evaluatea applied social research for community-based organizations, and serves as a data clearinghouse for applied and community-based social research. The overall goal of CUI SR is to build the capacity of researchers, community-based organizations and citizenry to enhance community quality of life."

This mission is reflected in the following objectives: (1) to build capacity within CBOs to conduct their own applied social research and write grant proposals; (2) to serve as a conduit for the transfer of experientially-based knowledge from the community to the University classroom, and transfer technical expertise from the University to the community and CBOs; (3) to provide CBOs with assistance in the areas of survey sample design, estimation and data analysis, or, where necessary, to undertake survey research that is timely, accurate and reliable; (4) to serve as a central clearinghouse, or data warehouse, for community-based and applied social research findings; and (5) to allow members of the University and CBOs to access a broad range of data over a long time period.

As a starting point, CUI SR has established three focused research modules in the areas of Community Health Determinants and Health Policy, Community Economic Development, and Quality of Life Indicators. The three-pronged research thrust underlying the proposed Institute is, in operational terms, highly integrated. The central questions in the three modules—community quality of life, health, and economy—are so interdependent that many of the projects and partners already span and work in more than one module. All of this research is focused on creating and maintaining healthy, sustainable communities.

Research is the driving force that cements the partnership between universities, CBOs, and government in acquiring, transferring, and applying knowledge in the form of policy and programs. Researchers within each of the modules examine these dimensions from their particular perspective, and the results are integrated at the level of the Institute, thus providing a rich, multi-faceted analysis of the common social and economic issues. The integrated results are then communicated to the Community and the University in a number of ways to ensure that research makes a difference in the development of services, implementation of policy, and lives of the people of Saskatoon and Saskatchewan.

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by
Wendy MacDermott



Community – University Institute for Social Research

289 John Mitchell Building
118 Science Place
Saskatoon, SK S7N 5E2
phone (306) 966-2121
fax (306) 966-2122
e-mail cuisr.oncampus@usask.ca
www.usask.ca/cuisr

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Community-University Institute for Social Research

University of Saskatchewan

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ABSTRACT

This report discusses child poverty from numerous perspectives—that of parents, youth, advocates, and academics—to gain a fuller understanding of some families' experiences. Although many voices make up this report, some have undoubtedly been missed, and while an attempt was made to talk to a wide variety of people, the experiences described in this report may not represent all perspectives. The goal of qualitative research is to provide clarity, depth, and detail to cold statistics. For example, we know that most recent poverty rates reveal that 26% of Saskatoon children live in poverty. We also know individuals with lower incomes have poorer health. Qualitative research is used to try to explain why health outcomes are worse, or why more families find themselves with less money.

The Child Poverty Working Group of Saskatoon Communities developed this research project for the Community-University Institute for Social Research (CUISR) and Saskatoon Communities for Children (SCC) to generate information regarding poverty's realities as experienced by Saskatoon families and to complement a demographic study conducted by Maureen Jackson (2002) (also commissioned by Saskatoon Communities for Children's Child Poverty Working Group). This data will be used to inform strategy and actions to address Saskatoon child poverty.

This report's first section describes the research methods used to obtain this data. The second section summarizes documents that pertain to child poverty in Canada, Saskatchewan, and Saskatoon. It can be seen from these documents that, although child poverty has been deemed a national crisis for over twelve years, we have seen an increase in child poverty rates and depth of that poverty during the last decade. Across Canada, single mothers and young parents are particularly vulnerable. According to census data, Saskatoon has one of the largest Aboriginal populations in Canada (8%). Although this percentage appears relatively low, Aboriginal persons make up 22.5% of Saskatoon's poor population. This translates into a local Aboriginal poverty rate of 65%. There has been substantial research conducted in Saskatoon identifying a number of issues related to poverty, including: school fees; social assistance; children sexually exploited by pimps and johns; neighbourhood demographics; and children not in school.

The third section reviews dental health records of Saskatoon children. The fourth section presents the results of qualitative interviews conducted with ten parents, and three focus groups (low income parents, high income parents, and youth) with twelve participants.

Results revealed that dental health records reflected a clear distinction between low- and high-income neighbourhoods. While Saskatoon children's overall dental health is quite good, poorer areas continue to experience very poor dental health. By examining at the distinction, neighbourhood income might predict dental health.

Qualitative interviews with parents revealed that a lack of transportation and recreation gravely affected their children's lives. Many parents discussed difficulties with school, inability to provide their children with healthy food, difficulties with child care, neighbourhood safety concerns, and general lack of social support. Parents provided concrete suggestions such as more stop signs, park patrols, and cross walk guards to improve the neighbourhood safety for children. Youth reported similar sentiments.

Parents discussed struggles with balancing responsibilities. It is most important to emphasize that parents were not "low income" by choice, but rather because they were on disability assistance, unable to find work to better provide for their families, on student loans, or because they wanted to be with their children during the early and impressionable years.

The following quotes reveal the lived experiences of some Saskatoon families living in poverty:

We will go hungry to make sure she's got what she needs. I've gone without eating to make sure there is enough for her. We give her all we can. I did struggle enough to get grad dress and shoes. We're going to need a truck full of kleenex for [her father] when she graduates. I still have to pay for her school fee (\$130 and Social Assistance allows \$40). On top of that we have to pay to get banquet tickets. And get her some kind of present. I don't know how but we have to. (A mother and father in an interview discussing parenting difficulties associated with poverty.)

[Our children] don't feel safe. They are really being mistreated by schools. There is nothing for families, all services are isolated. Access is a problem and so is cost. There is racism in churches and against poverty. We are looked down on and there are only bandaid solutions. I'm tired of asking for things, and being looked down upon. Even teachers in the schools. And you can't borrow anything cause the person next door is poorer than you. It makes it so you can't be neighbourly. This is what we end up teaching our children. And it makes them feel lonely and alienated- how are they going to feel loved? I think it has affected my daughter's education and her

ability to learn ... My son feels like a nobody and sees no reason to better himself. (Low income parent focus group participants discussing the effects of poverty on their children.)

Poverty affects families and children's lives in nearly every aspect. It is time to reconsider the value that we place on children and reassess the social and deferred costs of allowing children to flounder, rather than helping them to flourish.

The final section provides a list of recommendations that have been developed by the researcher based on the results. The list of recommendations have also been discussed with, and approved by, the Child Poverty Working Group.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, child poverty has become a primary concern at government and grass-roots levels. Increasing poverty among children is particularly disconcerting because the health implications are substantial and it has been shown that poor children tend to grow up to be poor adults. Numerous Saskatoon groups are dedicated to improving children's lives. In order to make headway, however, we first need to understand poverty's nature, source, and impact. The Child Poverty Working Group (CPWG) of Saskatoon Communities for Children (SCC) has included research pertaining to child poverty as one of its four objectives.

This research project was commissioned by CPWG as part of a larger initiative to understand Saskatoon poverty. SCC is a non-profit organization made up of community and government representatives. It does not provide direct services, but facilitates and advocates for changes that would improve the lives of Saskatoon's children. CPWG identifies federal, provincial, and municipal policies, regulations, and practices that need to be changed to better address needs of children and families living in poverty. CPWG proposes recommendations to SCC's Central Planning Table for coordinated action to reduce and ultimately eliminate child poverty in Saskatoon. These actions address but are not limited to: eliminating school fees and reducing school expenses; improving access to public transportation; and increasing public awareness and education about

poverty's causes and its impact on children. CPWG's other objective was to review all Working Groups's guidelines developed by SCC in 1997.

Partnerships with the Community-University Institute for Social Research, Political Action Group on Poverty, and CPWG were formed to conduct a multi-phased research project. The research objectives were to: (1) generate evidence on the extent and nature of children living in low income families in Saskatoon; (2) examine the impact of living in poverty, measured at both the individual/family and neighbourhood levels, on diverse aspects of children's lives; (3) propose recommendations for coordinated, evidence-based action for reducing; (4) eventually eliminating child poverty in Saskatoon; and (5) build research capacity of and use of information by community partners. This current project addresses objectives (1) and (4) and involved qualitative in-depth interviews with low income parents to better understand how children living in low income families grow up. Focus groups were also conducted with youth, high income parents, and low income parents to better understand the impact of environment and neighbourhoods on children.

RESEARCH METHODS

Results were obtained from four different sources: (1) a critical review of selected sources on poverty; (2) oral health data; (3) qualitative in-depth interviews; and (4) three focus groups. This project took place over a three month period. An advisory committee provided direction for the activities, and the research was conducted with the aid of community facilitators for the focus groups.

The goal of qualitative research is to provide clarity and detail to statistics. For example, we know that most recent poverty rates reveal that 26% of Saskatoon children live in poverty. We also know that individuals with lower incomes have poorer health. The goal, then, is to try to explain why health outcomes are worse, or why more families find themselves with less money.

It is important to emphasize that qualitative research does not involve a large number of participants. Accordingly, results cannot be accepted, with complete certainty, as a representation of all persons living in poverty. Conversely, quantitative research provides a narrow picture of the realities faced by alienated individuals. Ideally, qualitative and quantitative research should be used in combination to provide a fuller understanding. This project is a portion of a larger study that includes quantitative research conducted by Maureen Jackson (2002) and others, such as the Canadian Council on Social Development.

CRITICAL REVIEW

Local research reports, books, and academic publications were reviewed to develop a

picture of child poverty in Canada, Saskatchewan, and Saskatoon. This review is not comprehensive, but seeks to provide an illustration of child poverty's depth and impact. This review was conducted to ensure that the current project did not replicate existing work or data.

DENTAL HEALTH

After the literature review, oral health data are presented. Data were collected from each school in the Saskatoon District Health during dental assessments. The data, obtained from Spotlight on Oral Health Newsletter from Public Health, are comprehensive and indicates "good" oral health as well as "bad." The data, broken down by neighbourhood, compare dental health from 1993 and 1998 for children in kindergarten, grade one, and grade six.

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

Questions were developed by the researcher, then reviewed and modified by an advisory committee (see **Appendix A**). Two pilot interviews were conducted. Both pilot interview participants felt that the interview was appropriate and were comfortable with the questions and process.

In total, ten parents were interviewed. Participants were purposefully sampled, meaning that the sample was chosen to represent a population defined as "poor." Representatives from Equal Justice For All were contacted and asked if they could contact clients who met criteria, such as single mother, Aboriginal, persons not involved with advocacy, or youth. Equal Justice contacted prospective participants to determine interest and obtain contact permission. The Equal Justice representative provided the researcher with interested parties' names and telephone numbers. After sending them additional information, interested individuals were contacted be certain that they were still available and to set up a time and place to conduct the interview. Participants were provided with an option of locations. Most wanted interviews held in their homes or at Equal Justice offices. Two interviews were conducted with both parents present, while the rest were one-on-one.

Ten parents—seven women and three men—were interviewed. Four of these seven women were single parents. Two of the women were grandmothers. Three fathers and three mothers were married. Interviewees' ages ranged from 23 to 60. Their number of children ranged from one to six, with ages ranging from 1 to 33 years. Five respondents had children not living with them (three had put children up for adoption, two had children living on their own). Three respondents received social assistance as their sole source of income, one was on assistance and attending an "alternative" high school, two were receiving assistance and working, one was working part-time, and one was receiving a student loan.

One grandmother remarried, three women were single mothers, one divorced mother had a boyfriend, four were married parents, and one was a recently married father. Two participants had Bachelors of Indian Social Work, while one also had a Bachelor of Arts. One respondent was enrolled in a local college, another attended a local high school, two completed grade ten, and one had completed grade eight.

While this group was quite diverse, many had been involved in advocacy or social action groups. Accordingly, this group may have been more sensitive to the issues and biased the results. Conversely, this group may also have been better equipped to speak for others as they have worked with those living in poverty.

FOCUS GROUPS

Two youth (Bonnie Heilman and Kadane Headley) from a local high school were consulted to devise questions relating to life in poverty (see **Appendix B**). These youth had been previously involved in social action work and were interested in pursuing similar work in the future. A primary obstacle to recruiting for the youth focus group was lack of incentive. For example, for one young mother with two small children, readying and transporting them was far too much effort for the reward. However, three additional young people were recruited, in addition to the two consulting youths. In total, there were three girls and two boys.

Questions for the two parent focus groups were identical. They were developed by the researcher and modified by an advisory committee (see **Appendix C**). Two community members (Michelle Michael and Carol Rogers) were invited to co-facilitate the focus groups. It was decided that the researcher and co-facilitators would be equal partners in the process, enabling group dynamics to determine roles. This process also served as a capacity-building opportunity for facilitators.

The initial plan was to recruit from a sample of participants from a Quality of Life study those who had indicated willingness to be contacted again. The lists, however, were brief and few on them were parents. Therefore, participants were informally recruited. The first focus group for parents with high incomes, but unfortunately only two attended. The results, however, were valuable. The second focus group for parents with low incomes was conducted as the first. Four parents attended the second group and, again, discussion was rich. The co-facilitator took notes because it was easier to have one person asking questions in a fairly small group. Tape recorders were also used to verify written notes. After the session, participants were asked if results could be provided, so that they could verify that their sentiments were accurately captured. Again, caution should be exercised about the results' transferability because of limited participation.

CRITICAL REVIEW OF SELECTED SOURCES ON POVERTY

CANADA'S ROLE AND FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH CHILD POVERTY

In 1989, the House of Commons passed a unanimous resolution to eradicate child poverty by 2000. In 1991, Canada ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and made commitments to provide special recognition for children and an adequate standard of living for families. In 1999, the National Council on Welfare released information about a National Children's Agenda intended to signify a serious commitment to the well-being of families and children. Four reasons were provided to indicate the importance of joining forces on children's issues: (1) "We have new knowledge about how early childhood shapes a lifetime"; (2) "We need to reach children before problems occur"; (3) "As society changes, we need to change how we respond to children"; and (4) "We have convincing information about the impacts of poverty."

Presently, rather than an improved situation, we see a sombre reality. Child poverty rates have escalated from 14.5% in 1989 (when the problem was viewed as epidemic) to 20.9% in 1996. Single mothers (a 61.4% poverty rate) have been identified as in particular need and at risk. Child care, inflexible hours, and low wages have all been identified as major obstacles for single mothers.

Child care is largely inaccessible to many families living under the Low Income Cut Off (LICO) line. In 1996, there were more than five million children in Canada, with more than three million of these mothers working. This translates into 64% of Canadian children needing child care. However, in 1995, there were only 425,332 regulated day care spaces in Canada. Furthermore, monthly fees for regulated child care ranged from \$348 in Manitoba to \$536 in the Northwest Territories (\$358 in Saskatchewan) (National Council on Welfare, 1999).

Low wages have served as a disincentive to work for many, especially single mothers. If a single mother works full time at minimum wage, she still lives well below the poverty line and loses medical benefits, something imperative for those with children. Furthermore, low paying jobs are characterized by inflexible and irregular hours, thus limiting time a parent has with her children. At present, there appears to be no easy solution for this problem.

Low wages were addressed in a pilot study initiated by the Federal government and Social Research and Demonstration Corporation. Referred to as the Self Sufficiency Program (SSP), it is a 10-year project in its post-operations phase. "The demonstration period was between November 1992 and December 1999. Survey data and administrative records are still being collected, allowing researchers to follow individuals for up to six years. The final report for the main study will be completed in 2001 and the final report for the applicant study in 2002" (Social Research and Demonstration Corporation, 2002).

The Self Sufficiency Program was initiated in to address poverty among single mothers. It is an innovative project and its successes and failures should be considered when determining social change interventions. The targeted population was single mothers receiving Social Assistance for at least one year. A random sample of single mothers was approached and offered an income supplement if they found a job and worked at least 30 hours per week within one year of the offer. This incentive served to increase the amount of money that a family would receive. The family, therefore, would not suffer financially by leaving assistance. It was additionally believed that working would be rewarding and that a woman would secure a better paying job with time. This supplement was provided for three years contingent on working at least 30 hours per week. Preliminary results indicated that approximately 30% of women approached received the supplement. Reasons for not participating were inadequate child care; inability to work due to disability; inability to secure a job for 30 hours per week; and one year deemed insufficient time to find work. When compared to a control group, participating women were able to increase savings accounts and allot more money for groceries.

PAY THE RENT OR FEED THE KIDS

Mel Hurtig (1999) spoke with various people involved in poverty movements across the country, and, in his book, he discussed hunger and food banks, poverty's origins, and government inactivity to remedy the situation. Although food banks have become an essential service, they are a temporary solution. According to Hurtig and those to whom he spoke, food banks privatize a public issue. The problem is that, because of insufficient employment or meagre social assistance, people do not have enough to eat. In providing food banks and lunch programs we privately treat the manifestations of deep rooted social problems which are properly federal responsibility.

Canadians are poor because of “uncaring and inept politicians and bureaucrats ... In Canada we have allowed Bank of Canada governors, finance ministers, and deputy finance ministers to put their own dogmatic, anti-inflation theories ahead of the welfare of millions of Canadians.” A second major reason for high poverty in Canada is high unemployment and low job creation. A third is “an abundance of poor-paying part-time jobs with few or no benefits, jobs that create ‘the working poor,’ men and women who don’t show up in unemployment statistics, but do show up in Statistics Canada’s low-income counts” (Hurtig, p. 115).

Hurtig also discussed why the poor have been ignored. His first reason was that federal governments over the past sixteen years have been quite fiscally and socially conservative. Prior to this time, both Liberal and Conservative parties brought in progressive social programs that earned Canada much admiration globally. Political power is another rationale for why the poor have been overlooked. People living in poverty rarely donate to, or become involved with, political parties. Therefore, they have no voice. Other reasons “relate to protracted, forceful campaigns by big businesses and by

much of the conservative print media to convince Canadians that” Canada’s social programs are far too extravagant and too costly; the federal government spends far too much money; and taxes in Canada are far too high.

In actuality, Canada spends less on social programs as a percentage of the Gross Domestic Product than most developed countries. Of twenty-six countries, Canada is in eighteenth place. A common government rationalization is that Canada treats its poor better than the United States. However, the United States is the worst industrialized country in terms of poverty and social services. A more useful and reasonable point of comparison and progress is necessary.

The following are suggestions that Hurtig made to the federal government:

- 1) Have the Prime Minister and cabinet meet with various representatives of organizations concerned with poverty, such as NAPO, CCSD, and Campaign against Child Poverty. They should then meet with poverty experts from European countries that have low poverty rates to review taxation, income distribution, and social policies.
- 2) Establish Canadian Child Care Community Centres across the country in most communities (not just low income areas). Meals and snacks should be provided free of charge if needed. Have multi-disciplinary teams to aid children.
- 3) Change the labour-force insurance program back to its original name and intent (to provide workers who require assistance with adequate benefits when leave jobs with good reason).
- 4) Examine costs and consequences of the minimum-wage subsidy.
- 5) Take responsibility for homelessness and poor housing conditions
- 6) Reform welfare to eliminate severe deprivation linked to poverty and reject welfare-to-work programs that result in an increase in poverty. “Workfare is based on two myths: that people receiving welfare are so lazy that they have to be forced to work; and that there are plenty of decent jobs available. Neither of these is true (NAPO in Hurtig, p. 296).
- 7) Reject the trend to classify more people as employable. For example, single mothers with children 6 months or older are now considered employable in Ontario.

Hurtig illustrated the complexity of poverty and called for comprehensive social reform at federal, provincial, and municipal levels. He cautioned that if the poverty rate grows as it has over the last decade, Canada may cease to be admired by the world, and may be viewed as a disappointment.

CANADIAN COUNCIL ON SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

The Canadian Council on Social Development (CCSD) has made investigation of child

poverty a research and policy priority. In 1996, a document was released that investigated and identified child poverty's consequences. It was revealed that children born below the poverty line have higher mortality rates. Although mortality rates have improved in the last thirty years, disparity between the poorest and richest children has not closed. Eight in 1000 poor children die before one year of age, while only 5 in 1000 rich children die. One factor may be that proportionately more poor children (6.9%) than rich (4.9%) have low birth weights. Low birth weight is also associated with learning difficulties, neurodevelopmental problems, and greater risk of sight or hearing loss. Difficulties associated with low birth weight translate into higher incidences of disability between poor and rich children (7.7 versus 3.6 %). Mental health problems, chronic health problems, poor school performance, conduct disorders, hyperactivity, and emotional difficulties were also identified as more prevalent among poor children than their more fortunate counterparts.

Low income children and youth were also more likely to live in unsafe and inadequate homes, smoke, have alcohol problems, become pregnant, and acquire sexually transmitted diseases (the latter two can be attributed, in part, to low levels of contraceptive use).

THE CHILD IS NOT A TOY

Sheila Baxter interviewed adults in Vancouver regarding living in poverty and realized that she was missing an important aspect, that of children's experiences. As a result, she conducted interviews with children, aged three to seventeen. Her book, *The Child is Not a Toy* (1993), presented the interviews verbatim, with no theme analysis. The following observations were made while reading the interview data:

- Children under age five did not report negative experiences. One four year old boy reported, "I'm not poor. Just my mom doesn't get a lot of money, not from anything. She's not rich" (p.42).
- Children over age five described relative deprivation. They felt that poverty meant not having the same as others. School-aged children also reported difficulties at school and in peer groups arising from poverty. One thirteen year old boy said, "Being poor is no money to buy things like your friends have. Living in poor surroundings, scavenging through garbage ... not much food ... not much fruit. Poor kids feel embarrassed. They don't tell anyone in school. They feel sad and frustrated, but happy to have friends" (p. 66).
- Most children who lived below the poverty line did not identify themselves as poor. An eight year old boy reported, "When you don't have any money and you can't get a house and don't have any food. I'm not poor because I have a house and I have food" (p.50).
- When asked what they would do with a lot of money, many reported that they would

give it to poor people or buy small treats like popsicles. One seven year old girl reported, "If I were a queen I'd give them whatever they need. If they needed a house, I'd give them a house, and if they needed clothes I'd give them clothes and money. I'd help all the poor people if I was a queen" (p.45).

- The children identified a number of ways to survive poverty, including: prostitution; break and enter, shoplifting; and "jumping" ("jump on them and rip off their jacket if it is an expensive one, and sell it for food or drugs or something") (p. 66).

The children also suggested solutions to poverty, including: "build all sorts of houses"; have jobs that paid more, have things that cost less; "we can ask them, if they've got a lot of money, if they're so rich, if they could give some money" (p.50); "Well one of my dreams is getting a house, and like helping the street kids clean up, help them get jobs, give them a guiding path ... say, hey, I know what you're going through. I went through the same thing" (p.59); and "I'd move all of the rich people onto the street, and all the poor people into rich houses, and let the rich people see how it feels to be poor ... I'd have school, pre-schools that are good, that teach children how to read and write. What they need is love ... and some attention. But children are not like a toy where you could pick it up and put it down whenever you want." (p.63)

CHILD POVERTY IN SASKATCHEWAN

Although a Canadian perspective is pertinent, the Canadian experience is not homogenous from coast to coast. Saskatchewan has many dynamics that differ greatly from other provinces, and many of the statistics presented above, is based on Ontario data. In Saskatchewan, the child (0-18 years of age) poverty rate was 22% in 1996. However, the rate for children under 5 years was 29%. The proportion of Aboriginal persons is greater in Saskatchewan than the rest of Canada, and Aboriginal persons are disproportionately poor. In 1995, Aboriginal persons living in cities were more than twice as likely to live in poverty than non-Aboriginal persons. It should also be noted that a recent study made the case that Saskatchewan's poverty rate has declined, especially for lone parent families, and that our province is much better off than Alberta and Ontario (Star Phoenix, 7 June 2001, p. A4).

POLITICAL ACTION GROUP ON POVERTY BRIEF ON SOCIAL ASSISTANCE IN SASKATCHEWAN

The Political Action Group on Poverty prepared a brief on Social Assistance in Saskatchewan which discussed poverty's impact on health and made recommendations for action to better the lives of Saskatchewan residents.

Health and Poverty

Persons with high socioeconomic status (education, income, occupation, or residence) are healthier, live longer, and enjoy enhanced quality of life. The disparity between rich

and poor is increasing. In 1973, the top 10% income earners made 21 times that of the lowest 10% earners. In 1996, the gap had grown to a factor of 312. In 80% of cases, the risks of negative child outcomes were higher for children living in families whose annual incomes were below \$30,000.

Saskatchewan Data

Approximately 7% of Saskatchewan's population (31,472 children) live with parents on Social Assistance. Over one-third of those on Social Assistance are single mothers with dependent children. Social Assistance clients are living thousands of dollars below the Statistics Canada LICO rate. For example, a family of four receives \$17,451 annually from Social Assistance. However, the LICO rate is \$27,982. This family, then, is living \$10,753 below the national poverty line. The poverty rate among Aboriginal families is severe. The rate of poverty is highest among Aboriginal children under 15 years of age (61.5%).

Recommendations

Based on the information described above, the Political Action Group on Poverty made the following recommendations:

- Increase the basic allowance for food, clothing, personal and household expenses by 25%. Review Social Assistance rates every four years and allow for a cost of living increase.
- Develop an integrated housing and shelter policy to cover real shelter costs (e.g. building on the current success of not-for profit housing initiatives).
- Reduce barriers experienced by people on Social Assistance who are looking for work. This includes provision for transportation, clothing, and childcare.
- Reinstate the transportation allowance for people on Social Assistance.
- Increase the minimum wage to \$7.40 per hour. This hourly rate would bring a single person up to the poverty line.

REPORT CARD ON CHILD POVERTY IN SASKATCHEWAN 2000

The Social Policy Research Unit at the University of Regina in partnership with Campaign 2000 produced the Report Card on Child Poverty in Saskatchewan 2000. The data presented in this report card was prepared by the Canadian Council on Social Development using Statistics Canada's Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics, 1996-1998. It indicated that the number of Saskatchewan children in families classified as insecure or poor rose from 37.4% in 1996 to 51.6% in 1998, while in the same period the national percentage decreased from 44.6% to 43.3%. This report also indicated that public investment is protecting some children from poverty. When family wage and salary alone is considered, 74,400 children live in poverty. When public investment is included

with family salary and wages, 48,300 children live in poverty.

CHILD POVERTY IN SASKATOON

Considerable work has occurred in Saskatoon regarding poverty's prevalence and impact. CCSD conducted a study to investigate urban poverty in Canada and determined that Saskatoon has unique characteristics that differentiate it from the rest of Canada. For example, Saskatoon has one of the largest Aboriginal populations in Canada (8%) (Census data). Although this percentage appears relatively low, Aboriginal persons make up 22.5% of the poor population. This translates into a poverty rate of 65% for Aboriginal persons (Census data). Vancouver is the only other city with a higher poverty rate (66%), which may be attributed to the smaller number of Aboriginal persons in the city. Structural and interpersonal discrimination may explain the disproportionate amount of poverty among Aboriginal persons. In terms of children, the poverty rate in Saskatoon of children up to 18 years of age is 26.1%. Thirty-one percent of Saskatoon children under age five live in poverty. Furthermore, the poverty rate of single parent families with children under 18 years is 60%.

SASKATOON COMMUNITIES FOR CHILDREN

Saskatoon Communities for Children "is a partnership between community and government organizations that work on behalf of, or deliver services to, children in the Saskatoon Region. The purpose of SCC is to promote the physical, mental, spiritual, emotional, and social well-being of all children 0 to 12 years of age. We give particular attention to the needs of children at risk and their families." SCC chose child poverty as a priority through consensus in 1999. In response to this realization, SCC developed a Working Group to address this issue. CPWG is a planning and advisory body. Decisions are made by the Central Planning Table of SCC and by government and non-government organizations that deliver services to Saskatoon residents. Some specific issues identified by CPWG involve wealth distribution, school fees and recreation user fees, transportation, housing, street youth, and changes in Social Assistance programs.

CLOSER TO HOME: CHILD AND FAMILY POVERTY IN SASKATOON

This was Phase I of the current project. Maureen Jackson (2002) conducted an analysis of Saskatoon neighbourhoods based on dimensions of poverty. Data were obtained from the City of Saskatoon. It was discovered that there was a clear separation of the city in terms of poverty. The neighbourhoods most affected by poverty (39%-72% below LICO) were McNabb Park (airport industrial), Riversdale, Pleasant Hill, Westmount, and Confederation. Other neighbourhoods with high poverty rates (21%-39% living in poverty) were Westview, Massey place, Confederation Park, Pacific Heights, Fairhaven, Meadowgreen, King George, Holiday Park, Mayfair, Kelsey, and Caswell Hill. It should be noted that all of these neighbourhoods are on Saskatoon's West side.

The same trend appears when other dimensions of wealth are investigated. Neighbourhoods whose average incomes were between \$14,300 and \$30,000 per year were predominantly located on the West side. Indeed, only two on the East side fit this category (Nutana and Varsity View). In terms of labour force employment, the highest unemployment rates were in West side neighbourhoods. Nutana, however, was again the exception to the rule. Although children were not the primary focus in Jackson's research, children were indeed affected by the financial situations of their parents and neighbourhoods.

Another indicator that may provide a more realistic picture of deprivation is income adequacy (household income divided by the number of people who need to survive from this income). Again, there was a very clear East/West division, with East side neighbourhoods having much more money per individual.

Ethnicity was another factor influencing Saskatoon's poverty split. Aboriginal persons live predominantly on the West side, where there was a disproportionate amount of poverty. Indeed, no East side neighbourhood had more than 12.3% Aboriginal residents. Although much of this data appears to be intuitive, it suggests West side ghettoization.

FINAL REPORT: YOUTH NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Saskatoon Youth Resource Development Network (1999) conducted a needs assessment with vulnerable youth (i.e. involved in street life) and relevant professionals to determine vulnerable youth demographics, factors causing vulnerability, vulnerable youth's greatest needs, why these needs exist, and what prevents youth from meeting needs.

The following are results from the above questions and are taken from the report:

- "At risk was most often described as those children and youth coming from unstable homes (67%). Unstable homes were described as homes where there were frequent changes in location, parental alcohol/drug abuse, violence, sexual abuse, physical abuse, and frequent youth/parent conflict."
- An unstable home was cited as the factor that most often caused youth to be vulnerable (57%).
- Vulnerable Saskatoon youth's greatest needs, in order of priority, were described by key knowledgeable people as: safe, emergency/short term shelter and environments that foster social skills (57%); empowering social and recreational activities (48%); wholistic, integrated support services to youth and their families and greater financial support and adult and youth role models/mentors (especially male) (33%); culturally appropriate and sensitive support services, and alternate education systems that reach those with sporadic attendance and tumultuous lifestyles (29%) (p.17).
- "The reason most often stated [as to why needs exist] was that many youth fall

through the cracks in systems due to ineligibility for programs or because youth are not aware of the services or cannot access the services for various reasons (62%).”

- The most immediate unmet need was identified as “a need for safe, short-term shelters run by non-governmental organizations (43%)” (p.18).
- “The reason most often identified by respondents for why youth are unable to get these needs met, given the range of services available in Saskatoon, was that youth were unable or unwilling to access services for a variety of reasons (transportation, language barriers, literacy skills, racism, poor problem solving skills, long waiting lists) (67%)” (p.20).

SCHOOL FEES REPORT BY PAGOP

The Political Action Group on Poverty (n.d.) has conducted research examining inequalities that children face within the school system. It was reported that school fees created two-tiered education, separating children who could afford extra services from those who could not. The report further described a number of hardships that children and families faced as a result of school fees.

The United Nations has set guidelines pertaining to children’s rights in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, of which Canada is a signatory. This document states that children must be adequately provided for by parents, guardians, or the state. Furthermore, this document states that each child has the right to education, including higher education, and that measures should be taken to encourage regular attendance and reduce drop-out rates.

From this, we can presume that equitable education is a right, not a privilege. However, the current education system disables equitable access to all facets of education. The institution of school fees and additional expenses has created school systems where only children whose parents have additional funds can participate fully.

The issue is compounded for low income families because of the timing of these expenses. Parents incur additional costs when school begins in September, followed by winter’s need for warmer clothing, and then Christmas. The combination of these burdens in a four month span places a substantial strain on low income families.

The Political Action Group on Poverty sponsored a second project to investigate school fees’ effects on families. Approximately thirty low income parents, predominantly Aboriginal, were interviewed regarding school fees’ impact on their children. It was revealed that school fees created tension and stress in families because children were unable to attend special events. Children would not tell their parents about outings or other events in order to protect themselves and their parents. “Sometimes they don’t even tell me about events, because they know we can’t afford it. I can tell though because

they withdraw. If we can't afford it, they sometimes stay home, but a lot of teasing goes on." Both parents and children face shame. Inability to pay school fees, and thus participate fully, served to alienate children from their schools.

To enable their children to participate, parents often took money from food or utilities budgets, thereby creating delayed hardship. More often, however, the child remained home on days when special events took place. Disengaging from school activities could lead to dropping out altogether. Denial of access due to user fees also limits a child's potential. Children in low income families had fewer options and opportunities for development. As a result of being unable to participate, it was reported that children became angry, rebellious, resentful, depressed, and withdrawn. "My son becomes angry, almost abusive. I found he wouldn't listen to me. He feels he's never good enough. It affects his self-esteem. He doesn't feel he's a part of the school." Parents recommended that these additional fees be absorbed by the government through taxes or by the schools. Another suggestion was that more flexible payment plans be implemented along with accurate information about upcoming fee costs. Parents were also willing to volunteer with school activities in place of paying the additional fees.

CHILDREN NOT IN SCHOOL SHARING CIRCLES

The Children Not In School Working Group, also under the umbrella of Saskatoon Communities for Children, has conducted sharing circles with youth who have not attended, or who are not attending, school to determine why they are/were not attending; what they would like a school to look like; and how the community can support them to reconnect them with school. It is estimated that there are at least 600 Saskatoon children, between kindergarten and grade 9, not currently registered in school.

Youth identified a number of factors that contributed to their discontinuance, including: loss of loved ones; negative labeling; peer pressure; drinking; racism leading to fights; transportation (having to walk too far); no time to make lunch / not eating all day; and inadequate academic support.

Youth reported desiring more physical and after school activities, such as sports and gym time. Sports were viewed as productive ways to work off frustration and anger, as well as being enjoyable. Youth who had academic difficulties suggested more one-on-one support when requested, and being allowed to proceed at one's own pace. One youth reported wanting more physical work training, such as building houses. Another wanted art classes and more time to play outside. Two youth suggested more than one teacher per class to make sure that nobody felt left out.

POVERTY, PEOPLE, PARTICIPATION: THE EFFECT OF POVERTY ON THE WELL-BEING OF CITIZENS AND THE COMMUNITY BY THE PERSONAL ASPECTS OF POVERTY GROUP

This report (1995) described in-depth interviews conducted with seventeen individuals living below the poverty line. Some participants discussed difficulties in raising their children as a result of poverty. One woman on Social Assistance stated that her grocery budget was inadequate for her 15 year old son. She also described how hard it was to ration and deny her children food. Recreation was also a hardship for her children because she could not afford to put them in hockey, scouts, or swimming. Instead, they stayed at home and watched television.

An Aboriginal man with a social work degree was raising his two young children full time and receiving Social Assistance. The following illustrates his hopes, but also the ways that he overcame the limitations associated with low income: "I'm doing the best I can to raise my children. I dress them, feed them, make sure they get the care they need. I give them love so that they can give it to each other. I want them to grow up with the freedom to just be themselves. In winter we go sledding in the park. In summer we visit the paddling pool. Sometimes we go to the river or get together with friends. I wanted to take them to an event at Sask Place but it's too expensive. If we had more money, I'd get them toys or new clothes. I'd take them swimming, I'd take them to visit their grandmother. I want them to live out on the reserve ... not to be influenced by a lot of materialistic values in the city, competing with other rich kids ... they would be more equal ... Then they'll know where they came from and who they are."

Another couple with a two year old child described the difficulties associated with living off of a student loan. Because the family received a student loan they were not eligible for Social Assistance. Family mobility was greatly reduced because they could only afford one bus pass, which was used for the father to attend school. Therefore, the mother and child remained at home. Money had been a frequent source of family tension, and the father reported that, "The current system would provide support for [mother] and [child] if we separated, but not if we keep the family together."

Thematic analyses revealed that participants identified shelter, food and clothing, health care, education, work and income, transportation, recreation, and family as significant issues.

Housing costs determined where families lived. Therefore, many lived in substandard houses with limited access to essential services such as grocery stores, laundry facilities, and clean, safe green space (e.g. parks). In many cases, the housing allowance from Social Assistance was insufficient to cover rent, and money had to be "borrowed" from the grocery budget.

Persons with low incomes experienced great difficulty in regularly providing healthy food for their families. Distance to “bulk” stores provided an obstacle, as did the expense of meat, fruit and vegetables. Therefore, families were unable to eat as well or as economically as they would have liked. Transporting food was also an issue because many used public transit and could only buy what they could carry. Some people received food from friends or relatives or accessed the food bank. Many, however, were displeased because they felt that the food bank did not provide healthy food.

Health care was provided through Social Assistance, but some felt that they received second rate treatment when it was known that they were Social Assistance recipients. Individuals receiving student loans were not privileged with health benefits. This could negatively impact their access to services, which may, in turn, have affected their academic performance. Frustration was also expressed regarding automatic loss of health benefits when a person went off Social Assistance. This was viewed as a significant deterrent to financial independence, especially when children were involved.

“Low income families also encountered barriers in the school system. People reported children being kept home from school because of lack of food, lack of proper clothing, or lack of transportation. Parents reported not having enough money to enable their children to participate in special activities, field trips, or hot dog days at school. There were also concerns that money allocated for school supplies in the fall was not sufficient to cover the expenses that arose throughout the year.” (p.34)

Many people with low incomes reported feelings of isolation from community activities because they could not afford transportation. As a result, they spent considerable time in their houses. Children with limited exposure to stimuli do not perform as well as those who participate in activities where they learn social skills and other essential life skills. Lack of transportation also affected the efficacy with which one could shop for groceries, visit family and friends, and attend church.

User fees for recreational services rendered participation in the community difficult for low income individuals, particularly families. “Parents expressed that their children spent too much time watching television because they could not afford other forms of recreation or entertainment” (p. 51). User fees prevented children from participating in swimming and music lessons, sports teams, and self-defense classes. Appropriate child care was unavailable, hindering parents from participating in the community, putting strain on the parent-child relationship.

Many participants expressed a strong sense of family in terms of wanting the best for their children and mourning their inability to visit relatives outside the city. Some parents chose to stay home and create a nurturing environment for their children, rather than work to pay for childcare.

WORKING GROUP TO STOP THE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN

The Working Group to Stop the Sexual Exploitation of Children, a sub-group of Saskatoon Communities for Children, interviewed a number of youth involved in the sex trade to determine what services they utilized, what they needed, why they remained in the sex trade, and what they would need to exit street life.

Four women formerly involved in the sex trade interviewed forty-six sex trade youth. These women received brief training on interviewing, then contacted and interviewed youth in person or over the telephone. Twenty-one of thirty-two participants who reported their age were under the age of 18 (66%), while sixteen were under the age of 16 (50%). Of the forty-six, five were male.

Youth were asked, “What would you need to get out of the sex trade.” Many (n=17, 37%) reported that they needed more money. One Aboriginal girl of 16 said, “I need money for my baby because I don’t hardly have any pampers or baby wipes or baby food. More money, get a job and get paid going back into school.” Furthermore, seven (15%) specified that they needed more money from Social Services. “Social Services should have a meeting for more money because they only give you 130 [dollars] for one month and is supposed to buy you everything.” Others (28%) also wanted personal support in the form of counseling, peers, or simply someone to listen to their problems and to “give me emotional support and maybe a hug.” “Better, more affordable housing out of the area” was also mentioned by 20% of the youth. Housing problems included close proximity to the stroll, unsafe areas due to limited income, or no safe place to stay. Others (15%) wanted help in order to return to school. A girl of 17 was described thusly: “She wants to go to school maybe get a job, but having to work, she has no time cause she doesn’t get social services. She says that more support and another good source of money would be better than Social Services and would be the best help.” Another 15% reported that drugs were a problem and that they wanted detoxification programs that would address their issues. Three (7%) reported that getting a job would help them get out of the trade. Two youth did not know what they would need.

Youth were asked, “What keeps you involved in the sex trade?” Many (n=17, 37%) reported needing money to survive. Others (26%) also reported that addiction to drugs and alcohol kept them in the trade. Pressure from peers, family, pimps, and friends kept youth involved (24%). Ten (22%) reported that the excitement, fun, and ease of street life kept them involved. Seven (15%) identified police and jail as reasons why they stayed in the trade. They felt that police and other agencies such as Social Services and Kilburn Hall Youth Detention Centre had failed them.

One fourteen year old described what it was like having no money and what she often did with the money she earned.

When I was out there I used to get my money. I’d get my money and

go to a place and go eat like KFC or to the Sev [7-11]. Or buy two big pizzas and bring it home to my mom and [brother]. They'd be waiting at home starving or they'd have nothing, no smokes and I'd come home with smokes for them or a pouch of tobacco or hooties for them. Yeah. Or sometimes I just take off with my friends. Go to the mall and buy shit. Or I go drink up my money" (p. 3).

These youth echoed much of what has already been reported. They strived to survive to the best of their ability. "If I wasn't doing drugs I wouldn't be on the streets. That's all there is to it. If I didn't have a drug habit, I wouldn't be out there. It's not something that they want to do its something they need to do to survive. If I had all the money in the world, I would definitely straighten my act out, buy a house, get my kids back and ... live one day at a time."

SASKATOON DISTRICT HEALTH. HEALTH STATUS REPORT 2000

Saskatoon District Health (SDH) produced a comprehensive report that tracked SDH residents' health, provided information about health indicators, and devised recommendations to address key health issues. Many indicators included were a direct result of poverty. Poverty-related issues and corresponding recommendations are highlighted.

Social Environment

According to the Health Status Report 2000: the cost of living has increased 49% over the past fifteen years, but the basic allowance for Social Assistance recipients has not changed since 1986; in 2000, 47% of food bank recipients were children; from 1990 to 1995, the number of people living in poverty increased; poverty was most concentrated in twelve core neighbourhoods. Single parents, children, youth, and visible minorities were most likely to live in poverty; average income was greater for males than females; unemployment among Aboriginal persons was three times greater than the general public; and an estimated 591 elementary-aged children were not registered in school in June 2000.

Recommendations

- SDH should focus on key populations of children, youth, single parents, and Aboriginal peoples. SDH should also work in partnership with provincial and municipal governments and local communities to develop neighbourhood resource centres that would provide a range of services and supports that fit with the specific needs in surrounding neighbourhoods. This includes utilizing community expertise in the planning and development of such resources with their communities; collaboration among community resources focusing on areas of greatest need; building better resourced communities throughout the SDH region; and greater collaboration across human service sectors.

- More emphasis must be placed on ensuring that all children and youth have resources (especially the basic necessities—suitable housing, safety, and food) needed to attend, participate, and be successful in achieving a formal education. This also includes a need for special education and resources, as well as initiative learning environments outside the two major school systems. SDH should advocate that the provincial Department of Education and local school systems ensure that there are adequate numbers of preschool spaces to meet the number of preschool aged children, with priorities given to core area neighbourhoods.
- SDH should advocate that the provincial Department of Education, Post Secondary Education and Skills Training and Social Services provide opportunities for single parents to resume their formal education. This would require providing well-resourced child-care programs, perhaps including public transportation, for their preschool aged children.
- SDH should advocate and assist with developing a local student tracking system with an overall goal of helping children and youth who are experiencing difficulties attending school.

Adequate Incomes

The SDH Health Status Report 2000 indicated that, while the cost of living has increased by 49% over the last 15 years, Social Assistance rates have not. Food Bank utilization has increased proportionately to the increase in cost of living over the same period.

Recommendations

- SDH should advocate to have the provincial Social Service Assistance rates be increased (both Basic Allowance and Shelter) at least above LICO. Further, Social Services should provide transitional allowances for those moving off Social Assistance.
- SDH should advocate for raising the minimum wage to a level that at least ensures that low wage income levels rise above LICO levels.
- SDH should continue to promote and better enable Aboriginal employment within SDH and other sectors of society.

Housing

According to the SDH report, families should not spend more than 30% on housing. In inner-city neighbourhoods in 1995, however, 40% of renters spent more than 30% of their income on housing. Furthermore, in some urban neighbourhoods, 25% of homes are in need of major repair.

Recommendations

- SDH should advocate to have both provincial and municipal levels of government

become more active in the area of social and rental housing. This involvement includes collaboration with communities to identify problem areas and ways in which to enhance quality of life within and among communities in Saskatoon.

- SDH should advocate for government to direct greater attention and resources to ensure that safe, affordable, and appropriate housing is available to all citizens. Leaving housing exclusively to the private market has contributed to the deterioration of housing stocks and a lack of safe, affordable housing for hundreds of Saskatoon families and individuals. Use of emergency shelters by children, youth, and young families, along with the increasing visibility of homelessness in Saskatoon, are direct outcomes of the present housing system.
- SDH should participate in the creation of social policies around issues of land tenure, social housing, landlord and tenant rights, and land use regulation.
- Furthermore, SDH should participate in and promote health values in the planning and management of socio-economic development, urban land use planning, development and enforcement of housing legislation and standards, and service provision.

DISCUSSION

This child poverty review provides a sense that the issue is a federal, provincial, and civic responsibility that has not been addressed despite many promises and much investigation. Furthermore, people living in poverty face many inequalities because of their low incomes, many of them maintained by our social systems. The majority of the research conducted thus far has concentrated on adults and has been quantitative. The current work aims to put a face to poverty and allow us to better understand the effects poverty has on our children by providing a voice to those most deeply affected.

DENTAL HEALTH RESULTS

DENTAL HEALTH OF SASKATOON CHILDREN

Saskatoon Public Health has a dental health component that travels to schools in the Saskatoon District providing free assessments, dental education, and basic services (e.g. fluoride treatments). Extensive data, organized according to schools, is also collected on the status of each child's dental health. This comprehensive data is collected every five years for children in kindergarten, grade one, and grade six. Data were collected in 1993 (baseline data) and 1998. Raw data were provided to this project for analysis and summary. The results are presented below.

The overall dental health of youngsters in Saskatoon is quite good based on a universal oral health status indicator (def^t/DMFT)¹ (Dental Health Educators Associa-

tion Newsletter, 1997). The World Health Organization had the following oral health goals for the year 2000:

- 5 year olds - 50% cavity free
- 6 year olds - 50% cavity free
- 12 year olds - a deft/DMFT of less than 3.

As **Table 1** illustrates, Saskatoon children's dental health is much better than the provincial average and has improved from 1993 to 1998. On the whole, both Saskatchewan and Saskatoon have surpassed World Health Organization goals. However, in 1993, five schools in Saskatoon reported deft/DMFT scores above 3 (as high as 8.5) and, in 1998, three reported scores above 3 (as high as 5).

Table 1. Dental Health of Saskatoon and Saskatchewan children (K, grade one, and grade six) in 1993 and 1998.						
deft/DMFT*	1993			1998		
	kindergarten	grade 1	grade 6	kindergarten	grade 1	grade 6
Saskatoon	1.32	1.93	1.82	1.28	1.8	1.41
Saskatchewan	1.99	2.74	2.19	2.1	2.61	2.13
NDE**	1993			1998		
	kindergarten	grade 1	grade 6	kindergarten	grade 1	grade 6
S'toon DH	67.11	55.33	43.49	68.9	55.92	52.9
* universal indicator of dental health (low numbers indicate better dental health)						
** no decay evident - no cavities (high numbers are better)						

In terms of cavity-free dental health, children's overall health again far surpasses World Health Organization goals. In 1993, twelve kindergarten schools reported cavity-free levels below 50%, and 30 schools (of 103) of grade one students reported levels below the World Health Organization goal. However, when broken down, Saskatoon children's dental health may not be as commendatory as first glance suggests.

When examined more closely, the picture becomes more troubling. There is a clear disparity between oral health of children in particular neighbourhoods. It could be argued from the data presented below that neighbourhoods influence children's dental health. Neighbourhoods that have lower poverty also have fewer dental health concerns for their children, while neighbourhoods with higher poverty have poorer oral health for

Table 2. Saskatoon Children’s Dental Health By Neighbourhood

Kindergarten, Grade 1, and Grade 6									
Schools with “good” Dental Health					Schools with “bad” Dental Health				
1993					1998				
def/DFMT	CODE 1	def/DFMT	CODE 1	CODE 1	def/DFMT	CODE 1	def/DFMT	CODE 1	CODE 1
< 1.0	0.0	< 1.0	0.0	0.0	> 2.5	> 12.0	> 2.5	> 8.0	> 8.0
Silverwood Heights ^a	Asquith	Bish. Pocock	St. Thomas	St. Thomas	Borden	Pleasant Hill ^b	St Mark	Bishop Roborecki	Bishop Roborecki
Sister O’Brien ^a	Borden	John Dolan	Brownwell ^a	Brownwell ^a	Pleasant Hill ^b	Princess Alex. ^b	King George ^b	Buena Vista	Buena Vista
L’Ecole Canadien	WW Brown	John Lake	St. Peter	St. Peter	Princess Alex. ^b	St. Mary ^b	Pleasant Hill ^b	St. Frances	St. Frances
Lakeridge Element.	River Heights	S’toon Xian	St. John ^a	St. John ^a	St. Edward ^b	Westmount ^b	St. Mary ^b	St. Mark	St. Mark
St. Phillip	Silverwood Heights ^a	St. Bernard	St. George ^a	St. George ^a	St. Michael ^b	St. Edward ^b	Princess Alex. ^b	Pleasant Hill ^b	Pleasant Hill ^b
	Sister O’Brien ^a	St. James	St. Dominic ^a	St. Dominic ^a	Hepburn	St. Michael ^b	Confed. Park	St. Mary ^b	St. Mary ^b
	St. George ^a	St. Matthew	Sister O’Brien ^a	Sister O’Brien ^a	WP Baic ^b	Bishop Roborecki	Borden		
	Valley Manor	Wildwood	Silverwood Heights ^a	Silverwood Heights ^a	Confed. Park	Confed. Park			
	Bish. Pocock	Dr. J. Egnatoff	River Heights	River Heights	Father Vachon	St. Frances			
	Roland Michner ^a	St. Anne ^a	Lawson Heights ^a	Lawson Heights ^a	St. Mark ^b	St. Mark ^b			
	Lakeridge Element.	River Heights	St. Bernard	St. Bernard	Mayfair ^b	WP Baic ^b			
	Lakeview	Stoon French	Venture Heights	Venture Heights	Aberdeen	Caswell ^b			
	Father Robinson ^a	Valley Manor	Valley Manor	Valley Manor					
	Prince Phillip		Stoon French	Stoon French					

- Silverwood, Lawson Heights, River Heights
- Avalon, Churchill
- Lakeridge, Eastview, Brevoort, Nutana Park, Lakeview, Wildwood
- Holiday Park
- Arbor Creek, Erindale
- Nutana, Buena Vista
- East College Park
- Dundonald, Massey Place, Westview, Confederation Park, Pacific Heights
- Mount Royal, Westmount, Caswell Hill, Hudson Bay Park, Mayfair.
- Fairhaven
- Pleasant Hill, King George, Riversdale, Meadow Green
- Kelsey Industrial
- Out of Saskatoon

a - neighbourhoods with 9 to 6.2% poverty; b - neighbourhoods with 39-72% poverty

their children. These neighbourhood demographics coincide with those of Jackson (2002)

Table 2 represents Saskatoon children's dental health in 1993 and 1998. Neighbourhoods have been colour coded and grouped based on physical proximity. Therefore, they may not necessarily reflect the extent of poverty or wealth. Code 1 represents the "worst cases"—children who require immediate attention due to pain and / or infection present, and visible decay that may or will soon involve the pulp.

QUALITATIVE RESULTS

Ten parents living in poverty were interviewed to gain a fuller understanding of what it is like to live with insufficient funds. Although the parents were diverse, it is possible that their experiences did not represent the experiences of Saskatoon families living in poverty. The goal of qualitative research is to provide clarity and detail to statistics we gather.

Responses from the interviews with ten parents were categorized according to question and themes were derived. The order in which issues appear within each theme do not infer order of importance. Some issues were more salient for some families than others. The first paragraph of each theme is a summary of the issues raised by parents as they relate to each theme.

WHY PARENTING CAN BE DIFFICULT

All parents indicated that lack of money and resources made being a parent difficult. Finances affected parents' abilities to buy nutritious food, give their children what they deserved, balance responsibilities, and prepare for unanticipated events.

Parents described how they regularly had to say no and the difficulty in being unable to give their children what they needed, wanted, or deserved: "I can't buy him new clothes, cuz I can't afford it. He wears second hand clothes. He deserves to have nice things. They say 'my friend has this why can't I.' To them you're an unforgivable person. We give what they need and they don't squawk. Although they understand, they're disappointed. When they need help but we can't afford it. Our son, would have benefited from private tutors in math but we couldn't afford it."

Parents also said that it was hard to provide their children with healthy food. Food costs made it difficult to provide these to their children: "I don't always have groceries in the house. Never have enough food, nutritious food for him. It's hard to buy nutritious snacks and fruit. I can't buy fruit." One mother even described having to hide soft drinks when she could afford them because of others living in the home. In families with more than one child, parents struggled to ensure that all children were treated equally. It became difficult for any to receive treats because all other siblings would also need a treat: "If I buy one something, I have to buy the others. It is never fair."

Parents also discussed difficulty balancing their responsibilities: “I would say not being able to meet the expectations of the family [makes being a parent difficult]. The children, my wife, and uh the community, the school, the people that your involved with, that you work with. Because you have other responsibilities around the house, cleaning the yard, the house, doing repairs. Taking the kids out on activities like cycling. Things like that. Then you have all these other responsibilities in the community. When you’re a single parent it makes it very difficult, you’re the mother, cook, cleaner, and you settle fights. And doing it alone, there is no time to get a break. I go to school as well. When I get home from school and picking up the kids, I’m tired and have a million things to do. I try to get to bed by nine because I have to be up by six.”

Parents also expressed fears relating to unanticipated expenses, such as funerals. Their children’s future also caused parents anxiety: “Money makes it hard to plan for post secondary [education] and plans for a career, which affect[s] their interest in pursuing and working towards those goals. Money affects thinking about their university, future aspirations, and their goals.”

SCHOOL EXPERIENCES

School was difficult for some children, but not always for the same reasons. Cost, however, was mentioned, to some degree, by all parents. School experiences were limited because children could not be involved in all extra curricular activities. Some parents also reported that they felt their children were treated unfairly because they did not have enough money.

One youth traveled to her hometown because she wanted to graduate with friends with whom she grew up. As a result, she incurred travel costs and time. This youth also worked part time to pay for the added transportation costs. Parents also mentioned food-related expenses, such as hot dog days or hot lunches. One mother stated, “When it comes to hot lunches and stuff like that. I usually manage to come up with [a] few bucks but now it is up to 4 or 5 bucks. It’s just too much.” One family had to change schools when they moved and her children are having difficulties adjusting to the new school. To make matters worse, they now have to stay for lunch and the mother has to send lunches to school. “Now I don’t know what I’m going to do because the school they are going to they have to stay for lunch because it’s only 5 blocks. Before they could get Kraft Dinner or noodles and it was cheaper but to bring lunches it will be more expensive.”

Many children were unable to participate in extra curricular activities because of the costs involved: “Sometimes she comes home with book fair or hot dog sales and I don’t have the money to get it for her. It’s hard not to see it as wasting money when we need to get laundry done. I give her what I can. I feel bad because I can’t give her enough. There are some things they can’t afford. They would like to do wrestling, tae

kwon do, or piano lessons.”

Some parents described paying for activities beyond their means, which resulted in delayed hardships: “They want to go and do things. I had to pay for 4 skiing trips. I still owe on the ski trips, it was \$35 per child. I managed to save enough for that but had to cut other stuff from budget. I knew it was very important to them to go. If they couldn’t because we couldn’t afford it would affect self-esteem and confidence. So we sacrificed what we need around the house to accommodate their needs.”

Parents also discussed how their children were treated by teachers and peers. Some parents felt that their children were treated poorly because of their financial situations: “She finds it hard sometimes because some of the girls single her out. Little girls they can be little brats. They single her out and tease her, saying, ‘I don’t want to be your friend.’ If I was able to put him in the expensive clothes and shoes, he would have been treated a lot different by kids and by teachers. Teachers seem to look at poverty as, some pity, a lower grade, that they don’t deserve as much. The other day she was late for school and her teacher wouldn’t let her in the class because [she] came late. Also someone had taken one of her textbooks. And the teacher would not give her another one. She ended up taking one when he was not there. Some teachers prefer kids with bucks, farmers. My one daughter has problems adjusting. She had a lot of friends at her other school but now has no friends. Kids are a lot tougher around here. She’s giving me more problems, she doesn’t want to do her work. They don’t know how to manage the kids.”

FUN AND RECREATION

Parents viewed recreation as an unaffordable luxury. At the same time, parents felt that their children should have access to recreation like others. Children’s options were often limited to playing indoors or other “free” forms of recreation, such as city parks. Parents, however, had compiled extensive lists of activities of which they wished their children could engage (e.g. karate, music lessons, hockey, traveling).

Parents reported trying to do little things that their children enjoyed, but that, nevertheless, it was difficult. Often the children stayed in the house and played with their parents: “They mostly stay home, watch tv, play games, and horse around with us.” Children were encouraged to become involved with activities with little associate cost. Parents also tried to take advantage of “free services.” However, hidden costs made it difficult. For example, many parents discussed free swimming: “I’d like to go swimming more often, but it’s hard if you’re alone to transport them, get them dressed, and take them. Then I have to stay in the water with all three of them. My two year old is crazy, he jumps into [the] deep end. Then they want something from the canteen. It is stressful for me.” Another mother applied for free passes and takes her children every week but “[f]or swimming they need bathing suits, then we need to get to the pool. After they have been swimming they get hungry and we need to buy food.”

Other than swimming, parents said that they went to the park and, occasionally, for ice cream. One mother said that she budgeted to go to McDonald's once a month because her son loves it. Two mothers tried to take their children to Rainbow Cinemas. Another mother tried to do something fun once a month with her kids, like taking them out for french fries. One father described getting his children involved in the community by having BBQs, clean up days, and dances. He and the children also went cycling and visited parks.

With disappointment and pride, one mother recounted, "It was very hard to make anything for them. We would go out and build snow men. They built the tallest in the city, taller than the trailer." One mother, who was attending school, described how it was difficult to take her son to activities. Because she was a single mother and student, available services often occurred while she was in school.

All parents had long lists of activities of which they wished their children could be involved. Some families wanted to travel in order to show their children some sights. "I would have liked to take them on trips to the coast, through Alberta to Drumheller to see the dinosaurs." Other parents wanted to travel to visit family, some of whom the children had never met: "I would like to go camping. She likes swimming. We both like horseback riding. The cost is getting there. It is mostly a problem of transportation. My brother has horses and we just can't afford to get there. I would like to go to movies and other outdoor activities. To go camping in the summer and take trips to see family that they have never met."

Many parents wanted to have their children involved in organized sports or to receive other lessons: "I want to get my daughter into karate but it is going to cost me 65 dollars to go once a week. She's not the only child I have to look after. It is too expensive. That makes it hard because I really want her to do it. I could splurge but would end up getting myself in the hole. I would like to get them into self defence so they can learn to protect themselves. There are a lot of people running around here who push them around or might try to do something. I want my kids to know there are other choices. I would like to be able to put them in lessons (music). I would like them to have an interest. I don't have access to instruments or lessons or to get to a lesson. And then there's the little things like getting there and stuff."

One mother eloquently described what she would like for her son and the benefits that he could gain from extra curricular activities. "I'd like him to get into sports, whatever it be—soccer, hockey, swimming, anything. I can't afford to get the equipment or anything. I'd like to be able to let him pick out a toy he wants and buy it for him. When it gets summer it will be easier for him to play outside. He's got so much energy, I'd be the one to benefit. My stress level would go down considerably. Sports are good. As kids we never got to play sports, we were never involved in anything. It could teach him so many things I couldn't teach at home. He's a single child, he can't learn to share well.

He would learn sportsmanship and working well with other people. He would build strong friendship relationships. He's got so much to give and it's locked up inside. And children need to be free to grow and develop properly. It starts when he's born not when he gets into school."

TRANSPORTATION

Every parent interviewed had some complaint relating to transportation; most had substantial complaints. Some owned cars, while others accessed public transit, but, on the whole, transportation was a significant obstacle for many parenting aspects. Gas, insurance, and maintenance costs made keeping and running a car difficult. Expensive bus passes, poor service, and poor accessibility made public transit unsuitable for many parents. Consequently, many families remained in their homes.

One parent did not dice her words: "Transportation wasn't worth a damn. We filled the car on payday and hoped." Some parents had old and reliable cars, while others used the bus system, but, regardless of their mode of transportation, there were limitations.

Parents who owned cars described having to park them because they did not have enough money for registration or gas. Many parents expressed a sense of powerlessness or hopelessness because they could not go anywhere: "Transportation is difficult. We put about \$20 of gas in [the] car about once a month. Maybe a little bit more. Our outings are to see sister once a month in Martinsville. My friend asked when I'm coming to visit. I said when I get the gas to go. We can never go visit. I shouldn't say it, but people in jail are better off. It gets depressing sitting here day after day. Social Services figures we should use bus and taxi. A bus pass is \$45 per month, that is \$100 for the two of us. It is cheaper to put \$20 in gas per month. Up until [the] car died 4-5 years ago it was ok. The car didn't need major repairs but we just couldn't afford them and registration is too expensive. Although, if we look at what we spend on the bus it's probably the same."

Many parents reported that the public transit system did not meet their needs. It was felt that the cost was far too high, services were substandard and potentially unsafe, or that it was too difficult to manage multiple children:

"The bus is disgusting, they never clean it. It is utterly disgusting. They should clean more. I don't like taking the bus. I have a hard time taking my kid on the bus. I don't want him to touch things and then put his hands in his mouth. I find I'm not as sick when not taking the bus. It's not very accessible. You have to stand outside in 40 below with little children. If you go out just when the time is and it is early, you miss it or you are out there and wait and it's late."

“I used to take the bus a lot but I don’t like taking my three children. It’s too hard getting us all on and off and with my 2 year old hopping around and pulling the bell all the time. The stroller is too big and I have to hold [the] 2 year old when we’re getting off. Usually what I do is take a day off and do all things by myself when they are at day care. I took the three of them shopping once. My 2 year old pulled [the] fire alarm and they were all over the place. If I really have to, I do take the bus, or else get my friend to drive me. I don’t really do that too often. I don’t like to and he wants money for gas.”

“It is almost cheaper for [a] cab with a bigger family. Even to try and budget for tickets it is too expensive. It costs \$4 for one adult and two children. I try to car pool as much as I can. It’s hard depending on people, they’re busy. Another thing I don’t like is that I can’t handle taking my kids on the bus when they’re sick to see doctor because sometimes so hot or cold, one extreme or the other. It is really hard with a sick child. Sometimes it is cheaper to take cab, but then again sometimes you need that extra dollar. Sometimes you have walk there then take the bus or cab back. The children don’t get to go [to the doctor] as often or right away, especially when it is cold or raining. Services don’t get to you as fast as you need them. To go and do recreation if you don’t have tickets, it cuts into munchie money. Then you have to walk and they resent that. They don’t like walking but I make them.”

Emergencies become even more frightening when parents did not have transportation to take their children to the hospital. Two parents described incidences when they had to take their children to the hospital and the difficulties that they faced because they did not have readily available transportation:

“Once when we were living out of town, I came to town and picked up groceries. When I got home I found my son was sick. We then had to come back into town. We had to fill up again to get back home and the excess money came from money I had put aside to take the kids out. Always had to borrow money from food or special needs money.”

“When an emergency comes up like going to the hospital you have to rely on a friend to get there and back. We can’t afford proper bicycles so he puts pieces together, the front tire came off and he landed on his face on the pavement. We had to go to the hospital. It was late at nite

and we didn't want our friend to have to wait around. You just have to pray if your kid is sick you don't have to take them to the hospital. It has happened a few times, mostly with our son."

HOUSING/NEIGHBOURHOOD

Parents' responses were diverse when asked about where they lived. Some parents quite liked their neighbourhood, while others were upset with living conditions.

Parents unhappy with their living conditions (homes and neighbourhood) reported that their homes were too small: "Very small, one bedroom. No place for a crib, so we set it up in the front room. Housing itself was very poor, with the amount of rent money you had, you couldn't afford to be in a big place."

One mother, who did not want to move, described her situation and some ramifications of the move: "I live on 20th in a rough area where there is a lot of action. It was a lot quieter where we were before. The children don't like it here. They didn't want to move. They were sad because they didn't get to say bye to their friends. They don't have as many friends as before. They don't fit in as well. We are aboriginal but look white, and so [other children] cut them down and it affects their self-esteem. The school doesn't know how to deal with it so it never got resolved. Kids wanted to see their friends in [the] old neighbourhood. It is quite far away but we don't have car or bus fare to go visit." This mother goes on to describe her neighbourhood: "There are syringes in the neighbourhood and they don't want to wear their shoes outside so I'm scared. As soon as they take their shoes off [the shoes] are gone and I have to keep buying new shoes. Kids around here have dirty feet. There are needles in bushes on my yard. My kids think it is ok to pick them up and put in garbage. Condoms and broken beer bottles are laying around. [The City does not] pick up garbage as often as other places, so garbage piling [*sic*] up. Stinks up yard and house. They come once a month or every three weeks. I called but they say they come more often. The house next door is condemned and kids are in there at night. I don't know what to do about it. I talked to the City. They didn't have it boarded up, now it is boarded up. It's pretty scary. There's a lot of young girls working on the corner in front of our house. They don't seem to respect our family. They stand there when we are walking home. I don't want my girls to see that."

Parents who liked where they lived appreciated its quiet, having resources nearby, and good landlords: "There's a lot of resources around here, a park a block away, children's programming, church one block over, bus stop one block over. Little restaurants around here, good neighbour on both sides, mostly home owners in this area." Two parents who were happy with where they lived had searched for two months from outside the city to find their current home. Their rent also exceeded their monthly allowance for three people by \$115.

Although some parents liked their homes and neighbourhoods, they discussed worries regarding their children's safety: "I don't let my daughter take her bike outside. I get worried about her when she's out playing. Some older kids might come fight her for her bike."

Another mother who liked where she lived described being in low income housing and was eligible because her daughter was Aboriginal. However, her daughter would soon be too old to be a dependent and she feared having to leave after ten years. She also tried to make an arrangement to rent to own her home. This, however was not permitted. Her final complaint was, "It's a bad area for low income housing. It is hard because the community association knows. I tried to be a part of [the] community association, but they made me feel inadequate."

Another family was happy with their neighbourhood because there was little violence or crime and that it was quiet. They felt, however, that their home needed a lot of work. Although they have complained, they said they do not even know their landlord: "The basement leaks like a sieve in the spring and it is not likely they are going to be fixed up."

WHAT I NEED TO BE THE BEST PARENT POSSIBLE!

Parents were asked what they would need in order to do what they wished for their children. Most parents said that they were the best possible parents under the circumstances. Responses varied dramatically, but, on the whole, they were quite modest.

The most common response was support. Parents felt that more support in terms of leadership and information about services or community support would make a substantial difference in their families. One single parent suggested, "They should make it mandatory to give mothers time off, especially if they deserve it. I believe that people need to work hard and I do feel I work very hard. They should make a special time for moms to get that break. Because frustration does build up over time and there are no options but to go out and get hammered and I don't want to do that." Not only should these supports be in place, but it is essential that they are accessible in terms of cost and location.

One mother specifically stated that an extra \$100 per month would make it possible for her to do more for her son: "It would make much more liveable, as it is now I have no money for anything. With an extra \$100 per month I would put money aside for a treat for my son then the rest to groceries." Another mother reported that she needed a better paying job, one that she enjoyed and that paid about 10 to 12 dollars an hour. Along the same lines, two parents described their struggle and needs: "Finances, being able to afford to do things with her. We will go hungry to make sure she's got what she needs. I've gone without eating to make sure there is enough for her. We give her all we can. I did struggle enough to get grad dress and shoes. We're going to need a truck full

of kleenex for [her father] when she graduates. I still have to pay for her school fee (\$130 and Social Assistance allows \$40). On top of that we have to pay to get banquet tickets. And get her some kind of present. I don't know how but we have to." In short, this family wanted Social Services rates to reflect the true costs of living and raising children. They both would have loved to work, but were unable due to heart conditions.

DISCUSSION

From the above comments, it is obvious that financial resources affect parenting and the lives of children raised in low income families. This is not new information. The Canadian Council on Social Development has extensively highlighted disadvantages experienced by low income families. Transportation and recreation appeared to be two areas that most affected this group's lives. All parents had complaints about transportation and wished that they could do more for their children in terms of extra curricular activities, such as sports or lessons.

Childhood should be a period in one's life where responsibilities can be left to parents. However, parents reported not being able to provide their children with the "little things" crucial to childhood, like an occasional ice cream cone. Not only were children confined in terms of recreational activities, they were also missing out on precious educational opportunities that should not be viewed as peripheral, but essential to healthy development. Sports activities and book fairs create a foundation for life-long learning. If our children are not involved in extra curricular activities from school or engaged in productive activities in the community, what are they going to do? A description of the environments in which children with low incomes are raised may provide some insight to the preceding question. Parents told us that children were in the streets with traffic, in unsafe parks, and even involved in the sex trade to support themselves and their families.

Parents reported that they needed more support because, with limited incomes, they were unable to give their children what they deserved. Parents discussed their struggles balancing responsibilities. It is important to emphasize that these parents were not low income because they wanted to be, but rather because they were on assistance because of disability, unable to find work that would provide for them better, on student loan, or they wanted to be with their children during the early and impressionable years.

FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

Three focus groups were conducted with Saskatoon residents. Two focus groups invited low and high income parents to discuss their neighbourhoods and how they affected their children. The third focus group was conducted with youth to determine poverty's effects on them.

HIGH INCOME FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

Parents (n=2) reported that there were three grocery stores, no liquor stores and no pawn shops in their neighbourhoods. Both described their neighbourhoods as quiet. One mother felt that her neighbourhood was safe, but, “My child’s bike was stolen, we are used to leaving things out from living in the country. Now we have to lock things up we feel guarded especially when the bike was at our front door when it was stolen. ... The bike thing really affected them. They still think the bike will be dropped off. They are more cautious now than normal ... Our house is too close to the road, another is too close to the neighbour about one foot between our homes. I love the house but I don’t like the location. If I could lift the house to the acreage it would be perfect. If the house could have had a fence around it, it would probably have made us feel more secure about the children. ... Living in the country there is more of a sense of community. In the city you are isolated, you leave your house go in your car go to work, come home. A community contributes to a child’s development ... Also in the mornings older kids at the bus stop taunt them.”

Another parent said that he would prefer not to raise his kids anywhere else. The father discussed the differences between previous homes/neighbourhoods and where he currently lived: “Pretty nice because we own our own home. It is not as expensive as the east side and the income level around here is pretty good. Not fancy, pretty safe, people get along, lots of kids. We get along with the neighbours ... the kids go to school near. We used to walk them to school but now the neighbour kids are older and they walk with them. I’ve noticed a difference between living on a crescent and on a busier street. Here [on the crescent] people talk more. The school is good the kids get along with others, there are evening programs for the kids, at the community school. There is a park right behind the school and they play on the sidewalks but mostly in our yard with other kids. I built them a wooden swing set and we have automatic underground sprinklers. When we first moved to Saskatoon we were renting and we couldn’t do anything we wanted to.”

The other parent said she that would like to raise her children on an acreage where they would be free to play outdoors and be children: “They were free to get fresh air and not be restricted. Kids just can’t be kids anymore. There would be a little pond to go fishing and boating. We love nature and love teaching our children to appreciate the little things and not to be caught up in video games and all of that. ... [w]e want them to be thinkers and to lead a life of conviction.” This parent also said that they were renting their home and were actively looking for an acreage. They chose the current house because they needed the extra space. Both parents worked out of the home and had a nanny because there were few options.

The parents interviewed were satisfied with their homes. One mother would have preferred to live on an acreage and was in the process of making this change The other

father would not raise his children in any other community. Children in both families accessed recreation and, in the case of one family, took piano lessons. It was noted that when families live in a more quiet area they are better able to interact with neighbours and the children are viewed as more safe. Neither family identified any negative effects the neighbourhood had on their children.

LOW INCOME FOCUS GROUP

Four parents participated and their answers are presented together. The parents lived in Riversdale, Pleasant Hill, and Meadow Green. The themes that arose from the discussion were safety, the sex trade, recreation, parks, and school experiences.

All four parents were unhappy with aspects of their neighbourhoods and, in particular, safety and sanitation. They also reported that few parents were involved in the lives of their children, and that many young children go unsupervised.

Parents said that the City of Saskatoon was not managing the garbage or abandoned houses in the inner city areas as it should: “The City should come more often to pick up the garbage, they should double up and pick up more often. [All agreed]. I have to phone to get them to clean up. ‘Better’ areas get better service. I know I’ve lived in other places. There are abandoned houses. This is ridiculous in a city with zero vacancy. The kids play in there doing drugs and stuff. The City needs to fix these houses up or get rid of them.”

Parents also felt that their neighbourhoods were unsafe, making it difficult for children to “get ahead”: “We get a lot of break-ins in to garage and cars because people think the good half has money. I’ve been out at 5 am before and there are drunk people coming home throwing beer bottles and making a mess. I usually call the police. But the police don’t do much. They just take them somewhere else ... Kids have no opportunity to earn anything for themselves. A kid got attacked on his paper route in the morning and it is too early ... There should be street guards. Kids run out into the traffic and get hit. The street is really dangerous. There is nothing to protect these kids, no stop signs, no speed limit signs ... there is a lot of drug dealers, one on every block, they do busts but don’t tell the residents. It is dangerous with police and dogs running around. I have to keep my girls inside.”

Parents also discussed johns and sexual exploitation: “Even when I walk my dogs I get accosted by Johns trying to pick me up. Young girls are out there and they are getting younger and younger. Johns are constantly driving around and I fear for the girls. We sit on our step and keep an eye. It really makes me mad when government officials use their company car after work to pick up these girls.”

Recreation was considered to be inadequate and sometimes harmful to children: “The guy who runs [a program] yelled at my youngest, and he took away the ball from, they were playing dodge ball. They like going but some staff they like and some they

don't. I phoned the guy- he told me if I have a problem that I should come over and watch them myself. Then he hung up on me. I'm a concerned parent and now my kids don't want to go back there because they don't like his attitude and he is the guy who started the program. City center is good but it is only open certain hours and they don't allow parents. I don't like that at all. They all have different mandates no programs are for families and you lose control of your children. They run programs from the perspective of people who do not live in the areas. We need to spend more time with our children. I don't understand where parents are."

Parks were not described as green areas in which children play, but were considered to be some of the least safe places for children: "There is a lot of drinking and partying, having sex in the parks. The parks are small, a few swings, and a wading pool but only during the summer. Parks aren't safe, there are perverts. A little boy got molested almost right in front of me. Parks are used more by drunks and condoms than by kids. Kids are playing outside late unsupervised."

School experiences also reflected the volatile situations of which families found themselves a part:

"My son almost quit school because he was threatened with a gun on his first day of school. The teachers don't respect kids in poverty. If they had things they could do. We had to move a lot because things would break and the landlord wouldn't fix them. When we moved the kids had to change school. There is no continuity. It creates a lot of violence. A lot is created because children are not supported and kept safe."

"There are a lot of pawn shops. That is the business down here. They feed on people who have to sell their stuff then they come and buy it back for more money and the people get poorer and poorer. It is cause and effect. There is no money at home so young kids go out and try to get it for themselves on the streets. The rich make money off of the poor."

These parents' imagined ideal neighbourhood was modest. They wanted their children to be raised in safe neighbourhoods where community came together and provided support and recreation to families. Parents also provided concrete suggestions as to how their neighbourhoods could be safer, such as cross walk guards, more stop signs, speed limit signs, a curfew for young children, free swimming in the afternoon, and, most importantly, community involvement in programs and decisions that affect them: "I'd like someone hired to watch the parks and kids. We have the space we need supervision and safety ... A lot of outside people come into our community and treat us badly. They

think they know all the answers but they don't know the reality. The community volunteers are standing around doing nothing because outsiders are doing everything."

Parents said that they lived where they did because rent was cheap, it was all they could afford, or there was nowhere else to go. However, upon further consideration, many said that they would stay even if they had more money, but that they would help to make things better. One parent observed that many volunteers came from Pleasant Hill and Riversdale. "I meet children in our neighbourhood who give up seats for elderly on bus, and not in other rich neighbourhoods. There is crime in all neighbourhoods the only difference is that there is less money, lack of nutrition, inadequate clothing." Parents also said that they had seen improvements through greater parental involvement and increased use of elders in schools and various community activities.

Parents described poverty's effects on their families as follows: "They don't feel safe. They are really being mistreated by schools There is nothing for families, all services are isolated, access is a problem and so is cost. There is racism in churches and against poverty. We are looked down on and there are only bandaid solutions. I'm tired of asking for things, and being looked down upon. Even teachers in the schools. And you can't borrow anything cause the person next door is poorer than you. It makes it so you can't be neighbourly. This is what we end up teaching our children. And it makes them feel lonely and alienated- how are they going to feel loved? I think it has affected my daughter's education and her ability to learn ... My son feels like a nobody and sees no reason to better himself."

Most parents described the importance of their spirituality and its daily role in their lives: "I start my day with prayer and meditation. When you are in poverty you have many obstacles so I try to start the day positively."

Two mothers also described their continual anxiety over their children regarding safety and finding food to feed them: "After a while the put downs got too much and I got to a point where I didn't care about anything, even the kids. I wanted to give them away. I've been healing and my attitude has changed. I worry every day about feeding myself and the kids ... I have ulcers, and I get stressed easily because I worry about my kids constantly, I'm always thinking about them. I get anxiety attacks. There are a lot of sirens where we are ambulance, fire, police, I panic when I hear them and panic 'where are the kids.' I would like things to be less crazy. There are lots of crazies and drunks on cheque day. I keep the kids in until after they have spent all their money, then we go out."

Families with low incomes experienced many difficulties in raising their children, which they associated with their neighbourhoods. Parents reported that children's safety was often a concern because of johns, traffic, violence, and crime. Recreational activities were also limited. Although some services existed, they were geared towards children and exclude parents. Outdoor parks were not viewed as safe because of drinking, drugs,

bullies, and sexual activities. Parents indicated that they wanted more safety measures in place for their children, such as cross walk guards, speed bumps, park patrols, and more community input into changes.

Parents lived in their neighbourhoods primarily because rent was less expensive. However, some said that they would stay in their communities even if they could afford to leave. They felt a sense of community and dreamed of improving existing problems. Parents also spoke of changes that they had seen in the community, such as increased participation by parents and elders. Unfortunately, parents felt that the community and the discrimination associated with the area had negative effects on their children, such as feeling unsafe and alienated, and having low self-esteem. Some parents reported that their children were mistreated in local schools, which affected their ability to learn, quality of education, and future potential.

YOUTH FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

Five youth discussed poverty and its impact. To them, poverty meant not having necessities such as money, food, clothes, school supplies, transportation, love, and support. Youth also felt that poverty was associated with addictions and social unrest. It was pointed out that there were resources to help; few, however, were aware of their existence.

Youth felt that they needed love and support and that families and communities should teach values and boundaries. Having someone to talk to and somewhere to “hang out” was the biggest need identified. One youth appeared to be unhappy with the support he had received: “You need trust. But everybody lies.”

They were asked how poverty affects them or others and stated the following:

- Youth resort to illegal activities. “When you have no money you go to the mall and steal.”
- Youth were treated unfairly. “I got kicked off the bus because I had no student card last week, I had to walk.”
- Youth experience inferior educational experiences because they cannot participate fully in school trips and extra curricular activities and because they do not feel as though they belong. “If you can’t buy the books then you get behind. If you lose a book you have to pay for it and you can’t get anymore books until you’ve paid for it. In gym you have to wear uniforms. You have to buy them. Sometimes they have extras you can use but who wants to wear other people’s clothes. If you don’t have the clothes sometimes you can’t participate.”
- Youth were limited in their ability to socialize. They also felt that they could not participate in sports or activities in the community because of service fees and

transportation costs.

- If given the choice youth would like to go to movies, go to the mall to buy clothes or sports equipment, or take part in sports.
- Youth felt that families were under great stress because of worrying about money for bills and having to make sacrifices.

Participants were asked to write down the answer to the question, “How have these things affected you? How have they made you feel?”

- “When you can’t afford certain things sometimes you feel ashamed. Sometimes you can’t even afford necessities and you have to make sacrifices. You may not have nice clothes all the time or you may not be able to go hang out with your friends when they go somewhere with a cover charge.”
- “Left out, uncomfortable the next day with my friends.”
- “It used to make me feel like I was always missing out. It seemed like I was missing out on more than just activities. It felt like I was missing out on a whole other part of life and the world. Because once you get dubbed as a ‘scrub’ then people don’t accept you as much.”
- “Cause you’ll feel bad if you tell someone you’ll go [out somewhere,] but then don’t!”
- “Like you will not feel cut in with the other people. Like you’re a nobody.”

They were also asked what might make life easier. The youth reported knowing of some services, but these needed to be publicized more in places where young people can easily receive the information. For example, information about services in the community should be provided during the first week of school. Youth suggested creating a place where kids could go “hang out” and also make extra curricular activities less costly so that everyone can participate. They pointed out that “if you are involved in activities you are off the streets.” They also stated that more youth services that were free of charge were necessary. More services in general were also recommended. They felt that prejudice and discrimination made their lives difficult, and elimination of teasing would improve their situation greatly.

Youth responses coincided closely with those of low income parents. Youth indeed felt poverty’s effects . They felt that they did not receive a full education, were unable to interact in appropriate ways with friends, and were under tremendous strain. Youth were also affected emotionally and felt as if they do not belong. Suggestions to improve their situation were modest. They would like to see more services, more publicity about existing services, and less discrimination.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

These results do not represent all Saskatoon residents' experiences because of the limited number of participants and convenience sampling. However, many parents and youth indicated that having little money affected many aspects of their lives, notably their ability to access equitable education and nutritious food.

Parents from both high and low incomes placed safety as a priority for their children. However, parents with high incomes had greater ability to ensure that their children were in safe environments. Childcare appeared to be of greater concern to low income families because they were unable to pay well, resulting in less dependable care givers.

Results from youth and low income focus groups and in-depth interviews converged in terms of the needs of Saskatoon families living in poverty. This convergence suggests that the results are valid. The same issues were identified repeatedly: transportation as a major obstacle, children lacking adequate access to recreation, and children negatively affected by missed experiences. Authors discussed in the literature review also identified these issues. The dental health data confirms what parents said and provides a concrete indicator as to poverty's outcomes. The neighbourhoods in which the poorest dental health has been observed corresponds to those neighbourhoods identified from City of Saskatoon data in terms of poverty, unemployment, and Aboriginal populations.

Unfortunately, the data do not show an improving situation. Parents discussed unchanging Social Assistance rates and expectations. Increased involvement by elders and parents in the community, however, was viewed as an improvement. It is time to reconsider the value we place on our children and reassess the social and deferred costs of allowing children to flounder, rather than help them to flourish.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CHILD POVERTY QUALITATIVE RESEARCH STUDY

The following recommendations were presented at a Child Poverty Working Group meeting and circulated through other Working Groups and organizations involved in anti poverty work. The group decided that more discussion was needed regarding proposed actions and for developing a process to achieve the actions. (Recommendations in italics were provided at Child Poverty Working Group meeting on 14 June 2001.)

City of Saskatoon

Safety

1. Increase the number of cross walks in inner city, especially near schools *and play*

areas.

2. Increase the number of cross walk guards in the inner city, especially near schools.
3. Increase the number of stop signs in the inner city.
4. Develop park patrols to keep parks safe and clean for children.

Leisure Activities

5. Lower prices and provide “free days” for children and families.
6. Increase supervision in public/recreation areas for children’s safety.
7. Improve conditions around parks (industry near by creates unclean air.)
8. Provide recreational programs for families as well as children.
9. Have personnel who reside in the inner city involved in programs.

Transportation

Transportation was reported as problematic by all parents and affected all areas of families’ lives.

10. Make free emergency transportation available.
11. Make public transportation more accessible, more often, with later hours, and at lower cost.
12. Investigate alternative transportation methods. *For example, (1) persons with low incomes could apply for a card that allows them to take a taxi (for groceries) at a flat rate. The cab driver would submit a form to Social Services for compensation; (2) develop a cooperative transit system with community members willing to give people rides; (3) develop a cooperative vehicle maintenance program.*

Saskatchewan Health

Dental

13. Reinstate free dental services to all families, especially children. Obstacles to accessibility should also be considered such as child care and transportation. *May be provided in school. However, children younger than six also need dental care.*
14. Locate dental services in the core neighbourhoods, with child care available on site.
15. Provide parents with dental health and nutrition education when children are very young or the child is expected.

Saskatchewan Education

16. Provide training workshops for teachers and school administrators regarding sen-

sitivity to poverty and its effects on children's learning.

17. Provide free tutors for children who would benefit from extra support.
18. Consistent with PAGOP recommendations, school-related costs should not be parents' responsibility .
19. Fundraise for extra curricular activities, so that all children can participate.

Housing

20. Develop housing standards to be followed by all landlords. *Also, possibly develop a licensing system where rental properties are inspected. If a license is granted, the property would go on a "recommended" list. The license would have to be renewed periodically.*
21. Develop rent controls.
22. Develop a "bad landlords" list.
23. Social Services should provide more money to persons receiving social assistance to reflect actual costs.
24. The City should be more responsive to condemned/ dangerous/ abandoned buildings.
25. Develop a local program to maintain houses.
26. Provide information to renters regarding their rights.

Department of Social Services

27. Consistent with recommendations by PAGOP, review social assistance rates to reflect actual cost of living.
28. Investigate food security system.

Miscellaneous

29. Provide children with a safe means to earn money.
30. Cover pornographic materials in public places.
31. Provide more medical services, childcare, laundry, and grocery stores in core neighbourhoods.
32. Provide safe child care.
33. Emphasize core neighbourhoods' positive aspects (e.g. high levels of volunteerism).
34. More publicity of services available to families and children.

35. Provide healthier food from the food bank.
36. Consider racism as a primary factor in poverty in all reform decisions. Include community input into all decisions pertaining to poverty reform.

NOTES

1 deft/DFMT is a universal indicator of oral health status and refers to the average number of decayed, extracted, and filled baby teeth (deft) per child plus the number of decayed, missing, and filled permanent teeth (DFMT) per child.

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Appendix A. In-depth interview questions

1. What makes “being a parent” difficult. What effect does money have on being a parent? (On what you can give or do for your child?)
2. Please describe what school has been like for your child. What problems has he/she had to deal with? Why do you think this is? What could/should be done about this?
3. What do you and your children do for “fun”/recreation? What problems are there with using recreation? What kinds of recreation would you like to do with/for your children? How would your child(ren) benefit from more recreation?
4. Please describe your experience with transportation. (How do you get around, what are some good and not so good aspects of getting around this way). What effects has transportation had on you as a parent? On your children? Could you describe a time when transportation made it difficult for you as a parent?
5. Could you describe where you live? What, if any, problems are there with where you live? How does where you live effect your children?
6. What health concerns do you have for your child(ren)? Probe: When was the last time your child (ren) went to a dentist, eye doctor, had a vaccination?
7. What do you need to be the best parent possible?
8. What, if any, community services have you used that have been helpful? Probe: How have they been helpful, what did you gain from these experiences?
9. Who else lives with you? What is your relationship to this person? What support do you gain from this person?

Demographics

How old are you?

How many children do you have, how old are they? Do all of your children live with you.

What is your family's source of income? (E.g., work, student loan, social assistance)

Are you employed as much as you would like to be?

What is your highest education level?

What is your marital status? (Living with partner)

Are you Aboriginal, Metis, White, other?

Appendix B. Youth Focus Group Questions

1. What does poverty mean to you?

2. How has poverty affected you? How has it affected school life, social life (friends, going out), family life, extracurricular activities?

3. We are asking you to write down your answers to the next question because they might be personal. Please do not write your name. If you are willing to we would like you to share your answer once you have written it.

4. Please write down your answer to this question. How have these things affected you? How have they made you feel?

5. What can be done to make things easier?

Appendix C. Parent Focus Group Questions

1. Please describe the neighbourhood where you live (grocery stores, parks, laundry, schools, pawn shops, liquor stores ...).
2. Please describe the best neighbourhood to raise your kids.
3. How does your neighbourhood compare to the best neighbourhood?
4. Could you explain why you live in this neighbourhood? Have you considered living somewhere else? If no, could you explain why, if yes, could you explain where?
5. What effects do you think where you live has on your kids?
6. What differences do you think you would see if your children could live in the best neighbourhood?

Demographics

How old are you?

How many children do you have, how old are they? Do all of your children live with you.

What is your family's source of income? (e.g. work, student loan, social assistance)

Are you employed as much as you would like to be?

What is your highest education level?

What is your marital status? (Living with partner?)

Are you Aboriginal, Metis, White, other?

CUISR Resource Centre
University of Saskatchewan
289 John Mitchell Building
118 Science Place
Saskatoon SK S7N 5E2 Canada
Phone: 306-966-2121
Facsimile: 306-966-2122
E-mail: cuisr.oncampus@usask.ca



CUISR Web site:
<http://www.usask.ca/cuisr/>

CUISR Community Liaison Office
St. Paul's Hospital Residence
230 Avenue R South
Saskatoon SK S7M 2Z1 Canada
Phone: 306-978-8320
Facsimile: 306-655-4956
E-mail: cuisr.liaison@usask.ca