

THE CRITICAL ISSUE 2011



helping people create better lives

THE **TRUTH** ABOUT POVERTY IN CALGARY

A STUDY BY THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WELFARE FOUND THAT 40% OF SINGLE MOTHERS IN CANADA LIVE WITH POVERTY.

In a city that is home to some of the country's wealthiest citizens and a handful of the world's most successful companies, it has become all too easy to think that everyone in Calgary shares the good fortune of our burgeoning economy. Along with the city's economic fortune comes one of the highest costs of living in Canada, and as a result, more families are falling behind today than ever before.

THE ONTARIO ASSOCIATION OF FOOD BANKS ESTIMATES THAT POVERTY, AND ITS ASSOCIATED EXPENSES, COSTS CANADIANS UP TO \$86 BILLION A YEAR.

From social services and homeless shelters operating at maximum capacity to the rising cost of healthcare and emergency services shouldered by every Calgarian, the impact of poverty on our community is substantial and undeniable.

A PERSON MUST MAKE AT LEAST \$12.25 HOURLY PLUS BENEFITS TO COVER BASIC NECESSITIES IN CALGARY. MINIMUM WAGE IS CURRENTLY \$8.80.

(Vibrant Communities Calgary)

The salary for many jobs has not kept up with the rising cost of living. This makes it difficult for many Calgarians to find the resources to cover the cost of basic necessities such as food and housing. Low income jobs lack adequate health benefits and sick days are often taken at the employee's expense.

OUR PERSPECTIVE ON POVERTY

WHO WE ARE

Aspen is one of Calgary's largest social service agencies. For over 25 years, we have been a social trailblazer seeking to transform the lives of people in need. Our team works to help children, youth and families in Calgary and surrounding areas create better lives by providing the support, connections and services to develop their capacity to overcome poverty and achieve lasting change. From finding affordable housing to supporting education and strengthening family bonds, we have the resources to guide families and individuals towards a stable and sustainable lifestyle.

PERSPECTIVES

In Canada, the most widely accepted measure of poverty is Statistic Canada's Low Income Cut-Off, or LICO. However, at Aspen we feel the wide range of complex issues that contribute to poverty often go well beyond a simple financial measure. To account for this, we utilize an expanded definition which includes: The "lack of resources, capabilities, choices, security and power necessary for the fulfillment of an adequate standard of living and other civic, economic, political and social rights."

(A Compendium of Poverty Reduction Strategies and Frameworks, Tamarack Institute and Vibrant Communities Calgary)

This expanded definition contributes to our comprehensive approach to sustainable livelihoods and wellness. By providing programs that help people in need work towards not only financial security, but also physical, emotional and social health, we support them in developing the skills to overcome poverty once and for all.

OVER
90%^{OF}
the PEOPLE
we serve
LIVE WITH
POVERTY



Tara*

Aspen has been working with Tara since June 2010. Before coming to Aspen, Tara was struggling to sustain housing for her family and was in arrears with her landlord and utility companies.

Over her first few weeks at Aspen, our team helped Tara find an affordable and stable apartment for her family and assisted her in covering the cost of current arrears. Now, Tara maintains regular payments toward her utilities and ensures her bills are always paid on time.

Once Tara's immediate financial and physical needs were met, she was free to concentrate on enhancing her professional skills by focusing on completing her G.E.D. With Aspen's support, Tara has now applied to Bow Valley College with hopes of one day having a rewarding career.

Tara has also recently decided to begin attending counselling to overcome the emotional scars left by her abusive ex-partner. To help her move towards physical and emotional health, her Aspen family support worker found several options for counselling that are subsidized to fit in with her current budget.

By helping Tara strengthen and improve every aspect of her life, Aspen assisted in removing all barriers to her success so she is able to achieve a stable and sustainable life.

*name changed for confidentiality.

Every year Aspen
helps over 6,000
people work
towards a life
beyond poverty.

Jake*

When Jake was 14, his parents got divorced. This pushed his already strained relationship with his parents past its breaking point. With no other options, Jake left home and began living with a few roommates in a rundown basement suite.

Jake worked hard to pay his bills but was overcome by depression, which was compounded by his involvement with street drugs. His situation was dire, and it seemed like there was no way out.

Shortly before his 15th birthday, Jake moved into an Aspen Community Group Home. Over time, he worked through many of his struggles by actively pursuing counselling and learning the social and personal skills necessary to make a lasting positive change in his life.

With his newfound confidence and independence, Jake has now graduated from high school and is starting to mend his relationship with his parents. He has been accepted at Mount Royal University and continues to stay in contact with Aspen. With Aspen's help, Jake was able to uncover his personal strengths and move on to a bright and healthy future.

*name changed for confidentiality.

OUR COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

Aspen's **innovative** approach works to address all aspects of a person's life, so they can make the changes necessary to live independently.

Our philosophy is to assess and invest in the whole person—financial, social, personal, human and physical. This **comprehensive** approach enables us to empower those struggling with poverty in every facet of life, which results in creating change that is both substantial and, most importantly, sustainable.

Poverty is the single biggest social issue we face as Calgarians,
and we need your help to overcome it.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED!

Volunteering

Our focus on innovation and versatility isn't limited to our programs. It also plays a large role in our approach to volunteers. Every individual has a unique skill set and outlook on the world, and it is important that their capacity as a volunteer enables them to utilize their personal and professional strengths and interests.

If you, or your organization, are interested in volunteering with Aspen, please contact our volunteer coordinator at **403.219.3477** or email us at **volunteer@aspenfamily.org** to get involved.

Foster Parents

Aspen is one of Calgary's leading providers of foster care services. We believe that each child deserves a safe, warm, and healthy home. As a foster parent, you can give a child or youth the positive family experience they need to develop life skills and explore all the exciting new opportunities that go along with growing up.

Our support workers are involved in every step of the process to ensure that you have the training and support necessary to make a positive difference in the life of a child in need.

If you are interested in becoming a foster parent or would like more information, please contact us at **info@aspenfamily.org**.

Donations

The cost of supporting children, youth and families with issues like poverty and homelessness far outweighs the cost of helping people get out of these situations for good. With your support, we can continue to help Calgarians successfully transition out of poverty and create a better city for everyone.

If you would like to make a donation, please contact us at **403.219.3477** or email us at **donate@aspenfamily.org**. Your support is greatly appreciated.



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