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In recognition of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty (October 17), this special issue of *Spero* offers reflections on the experience of childhood poverty

Forward to Special Issue


Dr. Rita Yembilah

In spring 2023, the Canadian Poverty Institute began implementing a themed issue approach to *Spero*. This was to be more intentional about informing about our work but framed around topical issues. The change is also to use this platform to contribute to highlighting new voices in these topical issues and supporting lesser-known community organizations working to address various forms of poverty. This issue of *Spero* pays homage to the *International Day for the Eradication of Poverty*. This year's is themed similar to 2022: "Dignity for all in practice." In this issue, we pause to focus specifically on child poverty, centering conversations on protecting the dignity of children and their families as they experience poverty, and as their families navigate systems to improve their circumstances.

The articles in this issue are framed around the Canadian Poverty Institute's *re-imagining of the concept of child poverty*. This research-based framework categorizes experiences of child poverty within four domains, the child's standard of living, their perception of self, the relationships they enjoy, and the degree to which systems of society respond to their needs—generic or more specific to their circumstances. Starting off, Grace Muchira and Grace Dembezeko, practitioners in the field of Social Work and Early Learning and Child Care respectively, map out their vision for supporting black children in Calgary, with a special focus on the dignity and potential of diverse children. Agnes Chen and Rebecca Foshole-Luke, through their initiative Family Advocacy Support Centre (FASC), confront some realities of the Child Services System, looking to support families (and children) with dignity as they navigate through their tough times. Bringing the international flair, Rudo Makoni, newest researcher at the

Canadian Poverty Institute, examines the phenomenon of child labour, reminding us that child labour is not confined to far off places "over there" but can be found closer to home as well, and to remember all children whose dignity may be chipped away anytime they do a job beyond their age and maturity.

I hope you derive some new insights from reading this issue of *Spero*. I hope these articles help us all to spare a thought to all those in Canada and around the world who are down on their luck and whose dignity may be suffering because of their circumstances. I hope this issue also spurs us to not sit on the fence but do what we can in our sphere of influence to free systems so that dignity in accessing help and support will be standard practice, not exceptional practice.

If you would like to contact and support any of the writers, please feel free to contact them directly. 



A FEW FACTS

- **483,000** children (age 0 - 14) lived in poverty in 2021, 8.0% of all children in Canada.
- **87,780** children lived in deep poverty, in families with incomes of less than half of the poverty line.
- A further **491,360** Canadian children lived in families with incomes just above the poverty line.
- Combined, close to **1 million** children are living in families that are either in or at risk of poverty, 16% of all children in Canada.

Source: Statistics Canada, 2021 Census

Childhood Poverty: Re-imagining Support for Families Experiencing Systemic Barriers

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In the ongoing quest to alleviate child poverty and ensure the well-being of families experiencing vulnerabilities, a critical question emerges: How might society's beliefs about parents facing adversity shape the policies and practices that determine the resources, relationships, and support systems their children can access?



Agnes Chen

At the heart of this question lies the mission of the Family Advocacy Support Centre (FASC), to strengthen a family's ecosystem of support by increasing their access to safer resources that promote health, healing, and familial well-being. FASC is a grassroots volunteer-led organization including those with lived experience, who are committed to disrupting the intergenerational impacts of parental substance use stigma and child welfare involvement. FASC was co-founded by Rebecca Foshole-Luke and Agnes Chen who believe that systemic barriers fuel the various dimensions of poverty that increase the risk of families experiencing poverty, beyond mere monetary considerations, necessitating systemic efforts for eradication.

To honor *International Day for the Eradication of Poverty*, this article highlights the work FASC is doing to dismantle the systemic barriers many families experience that exacerbates child poverty. Poverty isn't merely a

lack of financial resources. It is a complex web of interrelated factors, including societal factors, that affect families in multifaceted ways which in turn impact the health and well-being of children and families. We imagine a future where every family can ask for help and receive without fear of discrimination, intrusive intervention, or family separation.

Working with community support circles, resource development, community training, and research, we are boldly re-imagining a future where every family can ask for help and receive support without fear of repercussion.

Indigenous, Black, and low-income families with intersecting identities experience unique barriers when accessing social services and navigating systems. Additionally, parents living with substance use challenges, commonly called an addiction, and other needs (domestic violence, mental health) coupled with housing, food insecurity and financial challenges, are more vulnerable to over-surveillance, and subsequent reporting to child welfare agencies. We believe this is because the current approach to vulnerable

"If my parents had community support, felt they could get help without losing us, maybe they would have gotten help."

*Anonymous Youth, 18-24 years old,
FASC 2021 survey*

parents involves looking at individual and material factors, which can attribute blame to parents for perceived shortcomings. However, we suggest a social justice approach that considers the needs of the

family and acknowledges broader structural barriers and conditions including colonialism, racism, poverty bias, and substance use stigma. Instead of approaching the family questioning "what is wrong with this parent?" We need to implement an approach that asks, "what does this family need?"

Our experience working with families dealing with parental substance use and child welfare involvement exposes that, for many families, it is not safe to ask for help or reach out for support. In addition, "supports" are often conditional, reflected as the services provided to families by organizations or the resources parents are mandated to access.

"I wanted support for my mental health, but I wasn't given enough resources or support. My bipolar was used against me."

*Anonymous parent,
FASC 2022 survey*



Rebecca Foshole-Luke

We believe support must not come with conditions or be used to meet organizational timelines or practitioner assumptions. That type of approach can perpetuate the harm and stigma families experience, seriously undermining any efforts to help families heal from poverty and build more stable lives for themselves and their children.

“It’s not always safe to tell someone especially when the system can’t always guarantee your safety. Therapy needs to be more accessible, and we need a universal basic income.”

**Anonymous parent,
FASC 2022 survey**

It is well known that the health and well-being of children is inextricably linked to the health and well-being of their parents. As a result, systemic failures involving families expose children to the same structural barriers as their parents and engender another generation to the same disrupted identities, fractured relationships, and limited opportunity.

Therefore, to eradicate childhood poverty in all its forms, we need to eradicate the conditions that fuel child poverty, which means wrestling with how our beliefs and assumptions of parents navigating challenging circumstances affects the services we provide.



When our communities come together to strengthen the ecosystems of supports for families, and ensure their health and well-being is supported, we can eradicate childhood poverty and instead promote intergenerational healing and well-being for all.



*We imagine
a future where
every family can ask for
help and receive without
fear of discrimination,
intrusive intervention, or
family separation.*

For us at FASC, that means re-imagining a society where every family can ask for help and receive support without fear of stigma, criminalization, or family separation, and we hope you join us.

To learn more about our how to support our projects, initiatives, and free supports for families, please visit the Family Advocacy Support Center website to contact us at hello@familyadvocacysupportcentre.ca. 🌿

Child Poverty Nexus Child Labour

Rudo Makoni: Researcher, Canadian Poverty Institute, Rudo.Makoni@ambrose.edu

With all else being equal, the children of child labourers are more likely to become child labourers themselves.

Jackline Wahba (2006)

As we come together in our determination to eradicate poverty, we must acknowledge child labor is not just a consequence of poverty; it is a perpetuator of poverty, a cycle that we must break. It perpetuates the cycle of poverty by robbing children of their bundle of rights and puts at risk chances to escape poverty.

Child labor is the practice of placing children to work in jobs that are detrimental for their physical and mental growth, preventing them from getting an education, and from having a childhood free from exploitation. Child labor is a violation of children's rights and frequently takes place in situations where children are compelled to work due to economic constraints. Poverty is closely linked to child labor, as impoverished families are more likely to resort to child labor as a means of economic survival.

Globally, approximately 168 million children between the ages of 5 and 17 are currently engaged in child labour, despite growing global recognition of their rights. This constitutes roughly 11% of all children worldwide (*Government of Canada, Child Labour, 2017*). As of 2022, an estimated 79 million of these children were engaged in dirty, dangerous, and degrading work (*United Nations, 2022*). These work situations expose children to precarious standards of living and affects the children's perception of themselves (likely bleak), and a risk of stuntedness in the growth of relationships important to their growth and development because they are consumed by hard work,

robbed of the chance to run around, play, and develop trustful relationships with others. The continued existence of child labour around the world means that despite all the legislations to the contrary, systems are failing, and children are left defenseless, exposed to the dangers and long-term impact of debilitating child labour.

As we commemorate the *International Day for the Eradication of Poverty*, it bears mentioning the plight of children in many developing countries. Putting children to work impedes economic development, and without economic development, more children find themselves put to work. Child labor has a profound and often devastating impact on children. It affects various aspects of their physical, mental, and emotional well-being, as well as their long-term prospects. Child labor can rob children of their childhood because it frequently denies them the chance to play, socialize, and explore their interests. This can cause feelings of isolation and sadness. The stress and demands of work, combined with a lack of play and rest, can also lead to mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and stress disorders.

Compared to some regions, North America has a lower prevalence of child labor but through consumption patterns, Canadians are complicit in perpetuating child labour around the world. *A recent survey by World Vision* indicated that over 1,200 Canadian businesses are known to import goods that have a high risk of being made by children or through forced labor. Most of these businesses aren't sharing much, if any, information on the procedures,



Rudo Makoni

strategies, and policies they've put in place to address these risks. This means that the typical Canadian is probably exposed to child labor through the common goods we use and purchase. In 2021, the Canadian government evaluated the risks associated with the supply chains for federal procurement, aimed at identifying goods made or produced through child labour, forced labour or human trafficking (*ESDC, 2022*).

To mitigate child labour, the Canadian Government, passed *Bill S-211*, also known as the *Fighting Against Forced Labour and Child Labor in Supply Chains Act* to enjoin Canadian businesses to ensure that none of their products or components were made in conditions that used children or those who were forced to labor in hazardous conditions for meager compensation. Businesses must also report on their efforts to prevent and mitigate the risks of child and forced labour in their operations, enabling Canadians to have confidence that their purchases are ethical. Community-driven initiatives like child labour awareness, educational initiatives and partnerships with governmental organizations strive to reduce child labour and poverty. Customers can make moral decisions by purchasing from businesses that uphold ethical business practices and supply chains free of child labor. Despite these efforts, generational poverty and child labor persist due to systemic economic challenges and limited resources.

The *International Day for the Eradication of Poverty* serves as a reminder that working together can effect change. Eliminating child labor is not some far-off ideal; it is a shared obligation and a moral imperative. 🌱

Addressing Child Poverty in Black Canadian Communities: The Sunny Pathways Initiative

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Child poverty is a harsh reality that persists in Canada, and within this pressing issue, the experiences of Black Canadian children in the city of Calgary paint a troubling picture.

On this *International Day for the Eradication of Poverty*, it is crucial to acknowledge not only the existence of poverty, but also the need for impactful interventions, especially for the most vulnerable members of our society – our children. In our roles as professionals working with children and families, we have had the privilege of interacting with children from various Black communities in Calgary. What we have witnessed is a deep desire among these children to connect with adults who share their cultural background. However, delving deeper into the system has exposed the many gaps that exist within our social institutions, from childcare centers, school systems, recreational centers, and child services.

One observation is the significant number of Black children lagging in developmental milestones due to the lack of adequate support and access to early child intervention services. Additionally, many of these children are unable to participate in recreational activities due to financial constraints faced by their parents. The absence of a solid support system often leads to child services becoming involved, further compounding their

challenges. These circumstances hinder their ability to thrive in a society that has also been greatly impacted by the pandemic and high inflation, pushing families further into economic distress.



G.C. Muchira

What we have witnessed is a deep desire among these children to connect with adults who share their cultural background.

We founded Sunny Pathways, from our shared passion to support Black children. Our mission is to empower Black communities in Calgary by creating a culturally competent environment where children aged 2-12 years, including those with typical development and those with neuro-diverse needs, and their families feel at home, understood, and supported in realizing their full potential. As we celebrate multiculturalism in Canada, it is disheartening to witness racial disparities in income, education,

health, and social and emotional well-being, leaving many Black children vulnerable to the lifelong consequences of poverty.

The inception of Sunny Pathways in 2020 marked the beginning of our journey to make a difference. Under the mentorship of the Canadian Poverty Institute (CPI), we have established a strong foundation for our organization. One pivotal step was conducting a needs assessment within Calgary Black communities to ensure that our response to the problem aligns with the realities of people's lives. The results of this survey revealed a dire need for support that extends beyond economic well-being. Inspired by the holistic framework in the CPI's

"Rights, Capabilities and Obligations: New Perspectives on Child Poverty in Calgary" report, Sunny Pathways introduced the *Multidimensional Child Framework* (MCF).

This framework is the cornerstone of our holistic approach to addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by Black children and families in Calgary. Our MCF is modelled after the 4 capitals in the CPI's child poverty framework, looking at responding to:

- **Structural Capital**, focusing on enabling access to facilities equipped to serve children of various abilities, and staffed by trained professionals.
- **Self-Perception Capital**, working with children to cement their worth, identity, and prospects vital for their growth.
- **Relationship Capital**, nurturing healthy, positive relationships with peers and adults to support their emotional development.
- **Standard of Living Capital**, enhancing the standard of living through parental empowerment to participate in the workforce, with year-round childcare support, including weekends.

These capitals are interconnected, working together to create opportunities for children to develop a clear sense of identity and belonging, within a thriving Black community.

Child poverty within Black Canadian communities is a complex issue with profound consequences for relationships, self-esteem, access to structural capital, and the standard of living. Addressing this problem necessitates a comprehensive

approach that encompasses not only economic measures but also targeted interventions to improve access to essential community resources. This is our vision and goal for black children regardless of their abilities.



G. Dembezeko

The absence of a solid support system often leads to child services becoming involved, further compounding their challenges

Sunny Pathways is a startup non-profit organization that aspires to be a beacon of hope for Black children and families in Calgary.

Our journey has just begun, but we are determined to make a lasting impact.

If you want to learn more about our work or support our cause, please do not hesitate to contact us. Together, we can create a brighter future for Black Canadian children in Calgary. 🕊

“The true character of society is revealed in how it treats its children”

Nelson Mandela

Updates

The Canadian Poverty Institute is pleased to welcome Rudo Makoni to the team as a new Researcher. Rudo is heading up the Institute’s economic inclusion initiatives including the Fair Access to Insurance Roundtable and the New Economy Roundtable. She holds a graduate degree in Economics and brings many years of experience in the public and private sectors.

Support the CPI

The Canadian Poverty welcomes individuals and organizations who wish to support the Canadian Poverty Institute financially. If you wish to become a supporter, please visit <https://www2.ambrose.edu/donate> and indicate you wish to designate your gift to the Canadian Poverty Institute.

About the CPI

The Canadian Poverty Institute is an inter-disciplinary research and teaching institute housed within Ambrose University in Calgary.

Our mission is to contribute to the healing of poverty in Canada through teaching, research and public education.

We are grounded in the Christian tradition of extending compassion while seeking justice and reconciliation for the marginalized and oppressed.

The Canadian Poverty Institute is a member of:

- Vibrant Communities
- Canadian Council of Churches, Commission on Justice and Peace
- The Calgary Alliance for the Common Good

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