

## INSIDE SPERO...

Exploring the Intersections  
of Poverty and Law

Mapping the Financial Resilience  
of Low-Income Canadians

Upcoming Events



Newsletter of the  
Canadian Poverty Institute  
at Ambrose University  
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## Changing Climate, Changing World: Finding Common Ground

In the summer and fall of 2019, a young woman from Sweden, Greta Thunberg, crossed the Atlantic Ocean in a sailboat to address the United Nations. Her message to us was stark. In her speech at the UN she bluntly stated *“People are suffering. People are dying. Entire ecosystems are collapsing. We are in the beginning of a mass extinction, and all you can talk about is money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth. How dare you!”*



Money and fairytales of eternal economic growth. In many resource-dependent economies such as Alberta, economic growth does seem like a bit of a fairytale. Over the past five years as the resource economy collapsed, thousands of workers joined the ranks of the unemployed. Many are still not working. In all of this economic gloom, the hope of a pipeline to kickstart the economy has dangled before us as we watch the competing claims of the economy, environment and indigenous sovereignty play themselves out in legislatures and courts.

Amidst all of this lurks the spectre of poverty. For those impacted by the collapse of the oil sector, poverty has become a real possibility or even a reality. Yet for those impacted by the collapse of ecosystems around the world, poverty is also a persistent reality. In fact, many of the regions most impacted by climate change are also those that have faced the deepest and most persistent forms of poverty, including Canada's north.

Yet even in the urbanized centres of the developed world, the impacts of climate change are disproportionately impacting the most vulnerable among us. Severe weather events such as floods or heatwaves most affect those with the fewest resources to mitigate their effects. Rising insurance costs due to increased weather related claims will impact most those with the least ability to pay. At the same time, efforts to curb climate change and reduce costs, such as improved home efficiency, are least affordable for those with the lowest income.

While the climate crisis presents us with seemingly irreconcilable crises of economy and ecology, what is

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## Meet the Institute: Nketti Johnston-Taylor

In January, the CPI was pleased to welcome Nketti Johnston-Taylor as the Project Coordinator supporting the Justice Sector Constellation. Nketti is a Political Economist and Community Development professional with ample experience in project management, organizational management and development and non-profit profit management. She holds a Degree in Management Economics, a Master's Degree in Development Economics and a PhD in Community Development, Politics and Economics. Currently she serves as an Adjunct Professor of Economics (including Economic Development) at Saint Mary's University and has taught in the faculty of Social Work and Political Science at the University of Calgary. Nketti has a keen interest in using her skills, competencies, knowledge and qualifications towards poverty reduction and towards building tomorrow's leaders.



## New Learning Module Explores the Intersections of Poverty and the Law

Poverty and the law are closely connected. People experiencing poverty are more likely to have legal issues arising from challenges such as landlord-tenant disputes, family conflict, unpaid fines or other reasons. At the same time, those who have experienced legal issues are also more likely to be in poverty due to the cost of legal services, the stigma attached to a criminal record, or due to the nature of the legal matter itself, such as divorce. For many people struggling in conditions of poverty, access to justice in these situations is out of reach due to many factors including cost.

Understanding the complexity of these interactions is important, especially for those who work in human services. There is, however, often a fear among human service professionals about



legal matters leading to them being unaddressed. In some cases we may not understand the legal aspects of the issues people are facing, or there may be a fear of providing inaccurate information. Yet, legal matters are a necessary aspect of working with people in a way that addresses their entire life situation.

This need for better understanding of the intersection between poverty and the law is the driving force behind a new project that the Canadian Poverty Institute and the Justice Sector Constellation are leading. In collaboration with Mount Royal University and Bow Valley College, a learning module is being developed that will introduce students in various fields of study to a basic understanding of poverty and the law.

The goal of the project is to ensure that every student who graduates from a post-secondary human services program is able to not only understand how poverty and the legal system interact, but is also prepared and motivated to support their clients in accessing the right supports, services and resources.

This learning resource will be available as an interactive online module starting in the spring of 2020. The project has been made possible by the generous support of the Burns Memorial Fund. The Justice Constellation is a network of justice service providers from Calgary and across Alberta with a mission to increase access to justice for vulnerable Albertans.

More information about the Justice Sector Constellation is available at [www.povertyinstitute.ca/projects-initiatives](http://www.povertyinstitute.ca/projects-initiatives).

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## Changing Climate, Changing World: Finding Common Ground (continued from front page)

perhaps deeper is an emerging crisis of hope. Once again we hear Greta Thunberg cry *“This is all wrong. I shouldn’t be up here. I should be back in school on the other side of the ocean. Yet you all come to us young people for hope. How dare you? You have stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words ...”*

How are young people to have hope in a world that appears teetering on the brink of collapse? And how are families to have hope in a world where it appears that their financial future has disappeared? In our present polarized society, these two perspectives seem irreconcilable. Yet our future and our hope rests in our ability to find reconciliation. The options of withdrawing and denying both realities is not

sustainable. Nor is the option of attacking our fellow citizens as perceived opponents of our views. Both approaches are counterproductive and only serve to deepen the divisions that are ultimately at the root of poverty. Only in coming together to have respectful conversation will we be able to address the deep and complex challenges before us.

Over the next year, the Canadian Poverty Institute hopes to engage Calgarians in some faultline conversations. This will involve creating safe spaces where dialogue about our most deeply contentious issues can occur. For this we need to prepare ourselves and relearn how to talk honestly with each other about the things that matter. This is a skill that will lead us out of the deepest forms of poverty, especially the poverty of hope.

## What's the Risk? Mapping the Financial Resilience of Low-income Canadians

For many Canadians, managing household budgets can be stressful. While the majority feel confident in their financial decisions, over half do not have access to savings in case of emergency, and a quarter would have trouble coming up with more for an unforeseen expense. For low-income Canadians, however, such stress is much more pronounced. According to the 2018 Financial Health Index, over three-quarters of low-income households report that they are unable to pay their rent or mortgage, almost two-thirds are unable to manage their debts, and over half do would be unable to come up with money for an unforeseen expense.

For low-income Canadians there is a high degree of vulnerability that exacerbates the financial risks associated with daily life. Over the past year, the Canadian Poverty Institute has worked with The Co-operators Insurance Company to assess the financial risks and vulnerabilities of low-income households. Through interviews with people living in poverty or precarious financial situations, we were able to better understand the financial risks that people face on a day-to-day basis and how they respond to them.

While for many people, unexpected events can pose an inconvenience, for those living on low-incomes they can be a disaster. Some of the risks identified by those in our study included housing challenges such as fires, natural disasters, bedbugs, evictions and damage deposits which undermined their financial security. Transportation was another critical challenge where a car accident or breakdown, or a speeding ticket or fine could seriously undermine their financial position. Health issues can also impact financial security if people lack extended health benefits to pay for medications or therapies. Then there are family and community expectations that impose stress such as birthdays, weddings and funerals. Finally, legal costs can place a significant burden on people; in addition to any legal services or financial penalties, dealing with legal matters can involve significant costs ranging from lost income due to time off work, to the need for childcare to attend court.

In the face of these challenges, people found a variety of ways of coping. This could include reducing expenses by compromising on food or transportation, increasing income by working extra hours or under the table, borrowing from family or friends, or going into debt. As many low-income households do not have a bank account, debt often involves use of predatory lending services such as payday loans. All of these responses invoked feelings of panic, depression, or even of giving up on life. One person expressed the desire to “start back from square one” by giving up all of their possessions and moving to a shelter, while others discussed jail as an option.

Given these risks, what options are there that could increase the financial resilience of low-income households? After looking at other communities across Canada and beyond, some innovative approaches were found that could improve people's financial resilience. Micro-insurance is one product that provides basic insurance coverage for minimal cost. Other strategies included savings clubs, micro-loans, crisis grants and financial coaching. All of these ideas are worth exploring further to develop appropriate financial products and services that increase people's financial resilience in the face of inevitable events and circumstances that can knock us off course. The hope is that the impact of these event can be minimized so that what could be an inconvenience does not turn into a crisis.



**For low-income Canadians there is a high degree of vulnerability that exacerbates the financial risks associated with daily life**

## Support the CPI

- The Canadian Poverty Institute welcomes individuals and organizations who wish to support the Canadian Poverty Institute financially. If you wish to become a supporter, please visit <https://ambrose.edu/donate> and indicate you wish to designate your gift to the Canadian Poverty Institute.
- The Canadian Poverty Institute is a community partner of Sponsor Energy. Customers of Sponsor Energy can direct a portion of all profits from their utility bill to the Canadian Poverty Institute. For more information, please visit: <http://www.sponsorenergy.com/community-partners/>



## Upcoming Events

- **The North End Lives On.** Come for an inspiring evening of readings and music, hearing authors Hugo and Doreen Neufeld read from their newest book “The North End Lives On”. Come with us as we revisit the Welcome Inn Community Centre and Church in Hamilton’s north end. Hear inspiring stories of resilient people working together to brighten an often unappreciated neighbourhood. Musical entertainment by Art Koop (singer / songwriter) and Doc Mehl (cello /guitar) along with cowboy poet Doris Daley. Tues. March 10, 7:00 at Ambrose University. Free tickets and information available online at: <https://northendliveson.eventbrite.ca>.
- **Trust and the Common Good.** Come hear Bianca Boyd from Edelman Consulting speak about their research on declining levels of trust around the world. She will be presenting results from the most recent Edelman Trust Barometer, a global survey of public trust in our public, private and civil society institutions. Monday, March 16 at 9:00 a.m. Free tickets and information available at <https://justtrust.eventbrite.ca>.
- **Where We All Belong: The 2020 Poverty Studies Summer Institute.** Join the CPI for our annual Summer Institute. Come and be part of a unique learning community as we explore ways of building strong communities as a means of preventing and eradicating poverty. The 2020 Summer Institute explores the connection between poverty and inclusion, building skills to create a more supportive and inclusive community. Courses and workshops run throughout the month of May. Come for the month, for a week, or just for a day. Residence accommodation is available if required. For more information, please visit [www.povertyinstitute.ca/poverty-studies-summer-institute](http://www.povertyinstitute.ca/poverty-studies-summer-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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