



Because children depend on all of us

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November 27, 2017

Josephine Archbold
Clerk, Executive Committee
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Re Item 29.12 TO Prosperity: Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy 2017 Report and 2018 Work Plan

Dear Executive Committee Members:

On behalf of the Children's Aid Society of Toronto, I am writing to urge you to move forward in 2018 with the implementation of TO Prosperity, Toronto's Poverty Reduction Strategy.

According to a report released by CAS Toronto and other organizations last weekⁱ, the level of poverty in Toronto is disturbingly high. Specifically:

- Based on 2016 Census data, Toronto has the highest rate of child and family poverty amongst large Canadian cities (26.3% of children are living in low-income families)
- Child poverty levels are over 50% in some city neighbourhoods (e.g. Thorncliffe Park, Oakcrest and Regent Park)
- 83% of Indigenous families in the City of Toronto are living in poverty
- Children in families who identify as "visible minority" are twice as likely to living in poverty in the Toronto region compared to non-visible minority children
- 40% of children in female-led single parent families are living in poverty.

The high levels of poverty in Toronto are compounded in this city by long waitlists for basic supports: for example, 100,000 families are on the wait list for subsidized housing, 62,000 residents are on waitlists for almost 200,000 recreation program spaces, and 12,000 children are wait-listed for subsidized childcare.ⁱⁱ

The experience of poverty poses a barrier to the healthy development, well-being and success of children and youth. A report released last year by CAS Torontoⁱⁱⁱ showed that children living in low income families are more likely to lack physical, emotional, social,

cognitive and communication skills when entering Kindergarten, are less likely to be participating in early learning or extra-curricular activities, and are less likely to meet provincial math, reading and writing standards in Grade 3.

The experience of poverty also contributes to poor health and other social problems. According to one recent estimate, poverty in Toronto alone costs governments (and citizens) \$4-\$5 billion a year in health care and justice system costs, as well as lost tax revenue.^{iv}

CAS Toronto provided service or support to 14,000 children and families last year. Our workers visit families in their homes every day and see the poverty and poor housing conditions families and children are experiencing – circumstances hidden to most in our city. Families living in poverty face significant challenges when it comes to meeting the needs of their children. Not surprisingly, CAS Toronto receives the highest number of referrals from some of the poorest areas in Toronto.

CAS Toronto has a commitment to an Anti-Oppression, Anti-Racism model that aims to create more equity in our services and in our work in the community. We work with many families who face racism, anti-Black racism, disparities and discrimination in accessing supports and services, including in our own system.

Poverty is a systemic issue that can be addressed by good public policies, and those actions can strengthen families and communities, leading to more positive outcomes for children and youth.

We are interested in prevention and reducing child admissions to care and believe that the City's Poverty Reduction Strategy is a part of this solution.

We thank you, therefore, for committing to taking action to reduce poverty and inequities in our city by unanimously adopting the Poverty Reduction Strategy two years ago. Important steps already taken as part of the strategy include free transit for children, expansion of student nutrition programs, child care spaces and library hours.

But as acknowledged in the staff report (and given the high poverty rates and long waitlists for critical community services and supports) there is much more work to be done.

Likewise, we urge you to move forward in two key ways.

- 1. Approve the 2018 Work Plan for the Poverty Reduction Strategy.** Approving the work plan – and moving forward with related city strategies like the Middle Childhood Strategy and the Seniors Strategy – will help 1,400 more families access affordable housing, create 1,000 more child care spaces (half with subsidies), make TTC fares more affordable for 36,000 low-income adults, help 13,000 more children access school food programs, 3,500 more children access free swim classes, 2,300 more

children access subsidized after school programs, and 3,000 more seniors access free dental care.

2. Strengthen the Poverty Reduction Strategy by:

- a. Setting clear progress targets and timelines for **all** recommendations in the strategy (the current staff report only outlines targets for increased access to subsidized housing and childcare, and there is no mention of the finalization of the preliminary indicators listed on pages 51 and 52 of the 2015 Poverty Reduction Strategy document).
- b. Re-inserting into the 2018 Work Plan a commitment to find permanent funding for the Strategy, which means moving forward with the completion of the City's Long-term Fiscal Plan
- c. Completing the formation of the Accountability Structure for the Strategy in 2018. Putting in place a Lived Experience Advisory Group is an important step forwards, however there is no update in the staff report on the status of the proposed Accountability Table, or its components including a Private Sector Roundtable, a Monitoring and Evaluation Working Group and a Senior Staff Steering Committee. Cross-sectoral collaboration, with strong involvement of people with lived experience of poverty, is crucial to the development, implementation and monitoring of a strong and effective Poverty Reduction Strategy.

To conclude, we thank you for your efforts to reduce and eliminate poverty in Toronto, and we look forward to working with you to improve access to basic opportunities and supports like good jobs, housing and public transit, and to build a more equitable city where all have a fair chance to succeed.

Sincerely,

M.P.

per Michael Polanyi
Community Development Worker
Children's Aid Society of Toronto

ⁱ Polanyi, M, Wilson, B, Mustachi, J, Ekra, M & Kerr, M. 2017. Unequal City: The Hidden Divide among Children and Youth in the Toronto Area.

[http://www.socialplanningtoronto.org/unequal city the hidden divide among toronto s child ren and youth.](http://www.socialplanningtoronto.org/unequal-city-the-hidden-divide-among-toronto-s-children-and-youth)

ⁱⁱ Toronto Progress Portal. <https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/data-research-maps/toronto-progress-portal/>. Community Recreation 2018-2020 Growth Plan and Waitlist Management, November 6, 2017, p. 6.

<https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2017/cd/bgrd/backgroundfile-108888.pdf>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Polanyi, M, J Mustachi, m kerr & S Meagher. 2016. Divided City: Life in Canada's Child Poverty Capital. 2016 Toronto Child and Family Report Card.

[http://www.socialplanningtoronto.org/divided city life in canada s child poverty capital](http://www.socialplanningtoronto.org/divided-city-life-in-canada-s-child-poverty-capital)

^{iv} Briggs, A, Lee, C & Stapleton, J. 2016. Cost of Poverty in Toronto, November, 2106.

<https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/socialplanningtoronto/pages/523/attachments/original/1480338070/Cost-of-Poverty-R10-Final-forweb.pdf?1480338070>.