



Turning the Pyramid Upside Down

Several years ago I had the opportunity to speak with a small group of residents at the Mustard Seed, a large homeless shelter in downtown Calgary. We gathered for breakfast one morning to discuss the condition of poverty and what poverty means for someone living on the street. When reflecting on the most important issue facing a person in this situation, I expected people to mention basic survival needs such as food, shelter or clothing. To my surprise, the response from the group was “my rights.”

Usually we think about our needs as a form of a pyramid with our most basic needs at the bottom. This pyramid of needs was developed by the renowned researcher Walter Maslow. According to Maslow’s pyramid, physiological needs such as food, water and sleep, are the most basic of our needs as human beings, followed closely by our need for safety and security. Other needs such as respect or freedom from discrimination, are much higher-order needs that we turn our attention to once our basic physiological and safety needs have been met. Not so, said my friends at The Seed.

In fact, people I know who live in poverty frequently question this ordering of needs. Why, they ask, should their need for respect and acceptance take a back seat to the need for food and shelter? The group that gathered for breakfast with me at The Seed that morning took it one step further and flipped Maslow’s pyramid on its head. Their most basic need, they said, was for respect and freedom from discrimination; everything else comes second.

There may be great wisdom in this perspective. There is no guarantee that meeting a person’s physiological needs will necessarily lead to them meeting their needs for respect, esteem and freedom from discrimination. Slavery, for example, can certainly meet one’s physiological needs without offering any hope of meeting the need for respect and self-determination.

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Is it possible, however, that the opposite may be true? If our most basic needs are for respect, belonging and freedom, perhaps by meeting those needs our other needs for security and physical well-being might just be met. This is the starting point for looking at poverty from a human rights standpoint. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights which most of the world agreed to in 1948 recognizes that people have a right to work, fair wages, food, housing, education, health and participation in cultural life. From this perspective, when people aren’t able to meet their needs for security and physical well-being, this is a violation of their rights as human beings.

St. Ambrose of Milan famously stated that “If you have two shirts in your closet, one belongs to you and the other to the man with no shirt.” According to this view, our physiological needs are in fact

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The Messiah Performed in Support of the CPI

While Handel’s classic work *The Messiah* is most closely associated with Christmas, the Ambrose University Music Department recently mounted a performance to coincide with Easter. Music Director Don Quantz explained that, not only was *The Messiah* first performed at Easter, not Christmas, it was also originally performed as a fundraiser for an orphanage. This connection to a concern for the vulnerable among us provided the rationale for a performance in support of the Canadian Poverty Institute. On March 23, approximately 200 people gathered for the performance and to learn more about the work of the Canadian Poverty Institute.



Creating Stronger Community Through Research: Research with Residents about 1000 Voices Community Hub

Many people living in Calgary's northeast "North of McKnight" communities are passionate about creating a stronger, more connected community.



According to the findings of a new community assessment, conducted by the Canadian Poverty Institute (CPI) at Ambrose University, in partnership with 1000 Voices, residents in the north of McKnight communities see their communities' diversity, openness, friendliness and helpfulness, as well as their schools, as their biggest strengths.

And in terms of their communities' greatest needs, residents outlined 12 target areas: child development, youth engagement, seniors' services, low income opportunities, First Nations engagement, immigrant integration, employment, clean and safe communities, volunteers, isolation, mental health, and unity of resources and funding.

The CPI – which works to heal poverty through research, teaching and action – partnered with 1000 Voices – whose goal is to design a sustainable hub that

meets the community's needs, and is managed by Aspen Family and Community Network Society – to conduct the community assessment and participatory action research initiative, to evaluate whether the programs and services offered at 1000 Voices reflect the needs of the north of McKnight communities.

"The process has been most important for allowing the north of McKnight communities to tell their own story. Our aim is to empower and support the community," says Canadian Poverty Institute director, Derek Cook.

According to Katherine Leonard, a researcher for the Canadian Poverty Institute, this has been "an incredible project. The beauty of the type of research we are doing, is that it brings residents into a place of taking initiative," says Leonard – who together with the community research assistant, project steering committee and CPI research team – has been conducting the project's community assessment component. "This is a really strong approach to community development through research."

Leonard believes this project has implications not only for 1000 Voices – it can also serve as a model for other community hubs in Calgary and beyond. "What I'm really hoping will come out of this, is a lot more collaboration between community residents and agencies," she says.

What the research has shown, she explains, is that residents are not always aware of the programs and services that are available, or there may be barriers that are preventing residents from accessing them.

Looking ahead, Leonard hopes that agencies and organizations like 1000 Voices will be able to connect with community leaders, and for those leaders in turn to connect with the rest of the community, to keep people informed about the programs and services that are available to them. She also hopes that, as a result of this process, agencies will understand the community better, and that residents in turn will better understand their own community, feel connected, and be ready to take on a leadership role to help make their neighborhood a better place to live and work.

Jacqueline Louie

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rights to which we are entitled by virtue of being born as a unique human being. As St. Ambrose further elaborated "*The rich man who gives to the poor does not bestow alms but pays a debt.*"

Recently the Government of Canada released a National Housing Strategy which recognized housing as a human right owed to all Canadians. This is an important first step in acknowledging our social and economic rights. Later

this year the government will release a National Poverty Strategy. We trust that this strategy will also recognize the many rights our fellow Canadians bear as living, breathing, creative, hopeful citizens of equal dignity and worth.

Restoring respect to our friends at the Mustard Seed and countless other shelters, food banks, workplaces and kitchen tables across the country is the first step in creating a society in which poverty cannot take root and flourish.

New Project **FOCUS** ES on the Role of the New Economy in Poverty Reduction

A strong economy is central to lifting and keeping people out of poverty. Yet, economic growth alone has often not been enough to reduce poverty in many communities. Across Canada, the rise of precarious work has left many workers and their families mired in, or vulnerable to, poverty. The Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce has been tracking employment quality in Canada for the past decade and reports a consistent decline in job quality over that time.

While economic growth is important, equally important is the kind of growth. The transition to a new economy presents both risks and opportunities. Emerging business models and new forms of economic activity could create a more inclusive kind of economy. This includes “shared value” business practices that focus on the importance of generating social as well shareholder value through corporate strategies such as social procurement, living wage policies, or diversity-focused human resource practices. A related development is the emergence of the “social enterprise” that conducts business for a social purpose. New models of economic activity are also emerging, such as the “sharing economy” that operate outside of the traditional economy and provide real material benefit for those on the margins of the economy and society.

While knowledge is emerging in these inter-related fields, it hasn’t been brought together in a way that would allow us to get a clear picture of the state of this new economy, or its

impact on poverty across the country. To address this, the Canadian Poverty Institute has partnered with the Ontario Trillium Foundation to conduct research that will answer these questions. Over the next 8 months the CPI will be reviewing literature and conducting interviews to provide an overview of the development of the new economy and assess the potential impact of these emerging practices for poverty reduction in Ontario and elsewhere.

For more information about this project visit www.povertyinstitute.ca.

Project Updates



- **Access to Justice.** Over the past year, the Canadian Poverty Institute has been conducting research to improve access to justice services for vulnerable persons. Funded by the Law Foundation of Ontario, this project engaged stakeholders in a “systems mapping” process that produced recommendations for increasing coordination among justice service providers. The final report of this project was released in May 2018 and is available on the CPI website at www.povertyinstitute.ca/justice-sector-coordination-research.



- **Energy Poverty Roundtable.** The Canadian Poverty Institute, in partnership with the All One Sky Foundation, is working with a roundtable of stakeholders to address the issue of Energy Poverty. Energy Poverty exists where households are spending an exorbitant amount of their income on utilities. In November, approximately 60 industry, government and community representatives gathered for a provincial workshop in Edmonton to discuss and develop policy recommendations to address energy poverty. The forthcoming recommendations will inform the Government of Alberta as they continue to develop a provincial climate change strategy.

More information about the Energy Poverty Roundtable is available on the CPI website at www.povertyinstitute.ca/energy-poverty-roundtable.

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Upcoming Events

KNOW Poverty – The 2018 Poverty Studies Summer Institute

Join a unique and diverse learning community as we explore the material, social and spiritual dimensions of poverty. May 28 – June 15.
www.povertyinstitute.ca/



Soul of the Next Economy Forum

Where business, the non-profit sector, government, and educational institutions converge to change the way we do business and impact society. Fueled through innovation, collaboration and corporate social responsibility, we come together to learn about local and global social and development challenges; connect with peers, industry experts and other sectors addressing these challenges; and engage in sustainable business oriented solutions to these challenges.
September 28-29. <https://nexteconomyforum.com/>



Ride for Refuge

Support the Canadian Poverty Institute by joining the annual Ride for Refuge. Form a team or join one and ride to raise funds for the CPI. September 29. For more information please contact povertyinstitute@ambrose.edu.



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://www2.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/cpi>.



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 Metro Alliance for the Common Good



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New Reports and Resources

The following report has recently been published by the Canadian Poverty Institute.

- Individual and System Resilience: A Review of Concept and Implications for the Calgary Regional Immigrant Employment Council.

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