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Newsletter of the
Canadian Poverty Institute
at Ambrose University
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Welcome to Spero

Welcome to the first edition of *Spero*, the newsletter of the Canadian Poverty Institute. The Canadian Poverty Institute exists to heal poverty through teaching, research and public dialogue. *Spero* will be published three times per year to bring you insights, news and updates about our work to heal poverty in Canada.

You may wonder about the meaning of the word “Spero” and why it was chosen as the name of this publication. Spero is a Latin word that can mean “hope”, “believe” or “imagine”. It is also the root of the modern Italian, French and Spanish words for hope. Though the word comes from Latin it has even deeper roots that trace back to ancient languages like Sanskrit, Hittite and Greek.

It shouldn't be surprising that the word has such ancient roots. Hope is at the core of our human experience; it is indeed our greatest resource. Hope lifts us from poverty as those with hope can endure almost anything, while the lack of hope is the greatest poverty of all.

Spero also reminds us of a different meaning.

Although the words are unrelated, Spero closely resembles the English word “sparrow”. Sparrows are small joyful birds that flourish in community. In the Christian tradition, they were used by Christ as an example of God's abundance and care for creation. Community is at the heart of hope and central to our work to heal poverty.

This newsletter *Spero* is an invitation for you to hope, imagine and believe with us in a world without poverty. Like the sparrow we trust in the abundance of creation where people can flourish in community. Let us hope, believe, imagine and heal together.



Derek Cook

Director, Canadian Poverty Institute

Updates / What's New

In 2016, the Canadian Poverty Institute launched the *Child Poverty Definition Project*, a multi-stakeholder initiative to better understand the experience of child poverty.

Recognizing that poverty is about more than just a lack of money, this project is using a human rights approach to better understand what poverty means in the life of a child.

Dr. Rita Yembilah is the senior researcher leading this initiative. She says “Children living in poverty is an enduring paradox in Canada because of limited holistic understanding of how it is lived and experienced. This has consequences on how adults plan interventions.



A multi-dimensional exploration of child poverty could ensure that all children in all manner of impoverished situations are protected from that poverty”.

Over the past few months, Dr. Yembilah and her team have completed a detailed policy scan, organized stakeholder engagement sessions with over 40 representatives from Calgary's social service and faith communities, and conducted

interviews with 20 people who have a direct experience of childhood poverty. A draft of a new holistic definition will be completed in the Fall, incorporating the perspectives of our research participants and policy reviews.

In 2017 the definition will be piloted by various agencies across the city to inform their service delivery.

World Cafés Bring Diverse Perspectives to Issue of Child Poverty

“Because children have only one opportunity to develop normally in mind and body, the commitment to protection from poverty must be upheld in good times and in bad.”¹

UNICEF, 2012

The above quotation recently provided fodder for thought and conversation at two research oriented World Cafés held by the Canadian Poverty Institute at Ambrose University. The events were held to further research for a project aimed at the development of a multi-dimensional definition of child poverty that will inform practice in Calgary. The events were a part of the second phase in the project’s timeline. They brought together practitioners, service providers, parents, and faith community representatives to generate conversation around the reality and experience of child poverty in the City of Calgary. Each group of participants included individuals with high levels of investment and great depths of concern for the city’s children. It was clear that each group was deeply motivated to lend their voices to the research with the hope that the right to a childhood, the kind of childhood during which normal development of “mind and body” is possible, would be upheld in their local community.

Indeed, it was with the concept of children’s rights in mind that the World Cafés had been planned. Prior to the two events, the team made the decision to frame the discussion according to the UN’s Convention on the Rights of the Child². Careful review of the document revealed five primary themes identified as key rights for the preservation of the kind of childhood needed for healthy development. These themes, the right to healthy identity formation, safety, an education, an adequate standard of living, and play, became the central topics of each table at the World Cafés. On the morning of each event, participants cycled through each of the tables and participated in lively and profound conversation regarding the realization, or lack of realization, of each right for children in Calgary. The result? Pages of notes filled with rich information reflecting the depth of experience of those in attendance and new connections between the CPI and the community of Calgary.

Those of us who are a part of the Project Team are deeply grateful to all those who participated in the two World Cafés hosted by the Canadian Poverty Institute. The information collected has since been analyzed for use both in the development of a definition of child poverty and in the third phase of research. As we embark on this third stage, we are intentionally informed by the data from and the experience of the World Cafés. This information will shape



our research as the basis for interview

questions as we begin to interact with those individuals and families who have lived or are currently living in a situation of poverty in Calgary. Not only this, we are keenly aware that our vision of a thriving child, fully able to benefit from and enjoy the experiences of a healthy childhood, is shared by our community. This is perhaps no better reflected than in the final moments of the second World Café when, gathered for discussion as a group of 18 adults, we circled the room with the signpost for the right to play in the middle. Unintentionally, we had placed the quintessential hallmark of childhood at the heart of our discussion. Children, all children, should be able to realize their right to play. As we closed our time together, we reflected on the responsibility to preserve play as an essential marker of a child’s educational development, experience of safety, formation of identity, and freedom from the concerns of an inadequate standard of living.

Here at the CPI, we are hopeful that our work will contribute to furthering the realization of this ability for the children of Calgary and look forward to delving into the next phase of research with that image at the forefront of our minds.

Chelsea Lamb
Graduate Research Assistant

1 UNICEF (2012). Measuring child poverty: New league tables of child poverty in the world’s rich countries. https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/rc10_eng.pdf

2 United Nations Human Rights Commission (1989) <http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

Meet the Institute

Dr. Rita Yembilah, Senior Researcher

In March the Canadian Poverty Institute was pleased to welcome Dr. Rita Yembilah who joined us as our Senior Researcher. Her academic and research expertise spans topics in International and Community Development including poverty and precarious livelihoods, social conflict, African studies, indigenous knowledge, gender education as well as inter-related topics in social problems, social inequality and social justice.

She has taught at the University of Calgary, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (Ghana) and maintains a teaching position at Mount Royal University (Calgary). Her work with nomadic (but sedentarizing) *Fulani* in West Africa have brought her into contact with interesting individuals from Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal, resulting in myriad cross-cultural experiences. Rita says “I like to work in remote locations not only because it is unpretentious but because it is liberating”

Over the years, she has worked as a teacher at a rural elementary school, a library assistant; a Livelihoods Development Consultant and Rep. for SmartKids Ghana, a program that supports gifted poor children remain in school. She obtained her PhD and Master’s degrees from the University of Calgary and a BA First Class Honours from the University of Ghana, in Accra.



“I like to work in remote locations not only because it is unpretentious but because it is liberating”

Updates / What’s New

How can churches and the social service sector work most effectively together to make a difference in their neighbourhoods? This is the question being asked by the *Church Community Engagement Project*. The project emerged from conversations with Lemlem Haile, a social worker working in west Calgary. Lemlem states “churches are an important part of our neighbourhood fabric, but they’re often not included in social work practice.

We must find a way for faith communities and social services to work together to make a greater impact on neighborhood based poverty reduction.” Over the next several months, leaders of Calgary’s faith communities and social service agencies will be meeting to better understand the strengths and weaknesses of secular and faith-based partnerships and to develop principles that can strengthen such collaboration.

Upcoming Events

An Other Kingdom: A Live Conversation with Peter Block, Walter Brueggemann and John McKnight.

On September 12th, join acclaimed theologian Walter Brueggemann and leading community development theorists Peter Block and John McKnight in a live interactive session via direct video-link discussing their new book *An Other Kingdom*. For more information and to register visit <http://newscoop.yyc.coop/events/an-other-kingdom-departing-the-consumer-culture/>. Organized in partnership with NewScoop, a generative journalism news cooperative.

Soul of the Next Economy Forum

The third annual Soul of the Next Economy Forum will be held September 30 and October 1st. The Soul of the Next Economy Forum is where the non-profit sector, government, business, and educational institutions converge. People come together to learn about local and global social and development issues; connect with peers, industry experts and other sectors addressing these issues; engage in sustainable business oriented solutions to these issues, fueled through innovation, collaboration and corporate social responsibility. Hosted by Ambrose University. For more information and to register visit <https://nexteconomyforum.com>.

Human Rights and Poverty Course

Join leading international human rights expert Leilani Farha, U.N. Special Rapporteur on Housing, for an intensive course on human rights and poverty. Learn about the international human rights framework and how it can inform our efforts to reduce poverty. November 7 – 11. For more information and to register, contact the Canadian Poverty Institute at 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>.

New Reports and Resources

Recently published reports by the Canadian Poverty Institute.

- Bailey-Lynch, D. (2016).
The Influence of Policy on Childhood Poverty in Selected Provinces in Canada.
Calgary: Ambrose University, Canadian Poverty Institute.
https://ambrose.edu/sites/ambrose/edu/files/cpi_influence_doc.pdf
- **Submission to the Alberta Ministry of Labour of Labour on Proposed Increases to the Provincial Minimum Wage.**
June, 2016
 - Summary Report
https://ambrose.edu/sites/ambrose/edu/files/minimumwage_brief_summary_report.pdf
 - Background Report
https://ambrose.edu/sites/ambrose/edu/files/minimum_wage_brief_bkgd_report.pdf

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
- The Metro Alliance for the Common Good

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Updates / What's New

Are you interested in graduate studies in poverty? The Canadian Poverty Institute at Ambrose University is launching a *Poverty Studies Concentration* through its M.A. in Leadership and Ministry (MALM) program.

The objective of the Poverty Studies Concentration is to equip social service professionals and ministry workers with the knowledge and skills to work effectively to reduce poverty in their communities. The program will kick off this November with a one-week intensive course in *Human Rights*

and Poverty. This course features Leilani Farha, U.N. Special Rapporteur on Housing and international human rights expert who will be our guest instructor.



For many low-income households, paying the utility bill often involves a choice between keeping the lights on and having food on the table. To make matters worse, many low-income families live in older buildings that are

less energy efficient, leading to even higher utility costs. To address this issue, the Canadian Poverty Institute has convened the *Energy Poverty Roundtable*, a network of utilities and social service agencies dedicated to finding solutions. The work of the Energy Poverty Roundtable will help inform the Climate Change Action Plan being developed by the Province of Alberta.

The members of the Roundtable include the All One Sky Foundation, Aspen Family and Community Services, the Canadian Poverty Institute, Enmax and Sponsor Energy.