

INSIDE SPERO...

A New Definition of Child Poverty
Meet Beth Stovell
Improved Access to Justice
Upcoming Events



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If All We Have is Our Money

“Some people are so poor, all they have is their money.” That is one of the most important insights I have kept with me from the founder of the Canadian Poverty Institute, John Rook. This is a particularly important insight as we contemplate and welcome a national poverty reduction strategy. If we are to do anything meaningful about poverty, we must first have a deep understanding of what poverty is.

On the surface, poverty seems straightforward. At the end of the day, it’s really no more complicated than a lack of money. If people simply had the financial resources to meet their needs we wouldn’t have to worry about poverty and its many horrific impacts. Questions about why people are poor boil down, in the end, to questions about why they don’t have the financial resources needed to live a meaningful life.

If this is our diagnosis, then the solution is equally stunningly clear. Providing people with an adequate income is the most efficient means of wiping out poverty, just as the solution to homelessness turned out, in the end, to be nothing more complicated than giving people housing. The “housing first” model recognized that providing permanent stable housing was the important first step in stabilizing lives, and was also exponentially cheaper than warehousing people in shelters. When someone is injured, we must first work to stop the bleeding.

In Ontario, the government just announced the launch of a pilot program to bring a guaranteed annual income to three cities throughout the province. Under the program a

single person (aged 18 – 64) is guaranteed an income of \$17,000, and a couple an income of \$24,000. Various studies have calculated the cost of poverty and suggest that we could save billions of dollars by ending poverty, savings that would greatly exceed the cost of a basic income scheme like Ontario’s.

As poverty is associated with a wide range of individual and social issues, such as poor health, eradicating poverty could potentially lead to improvements in a wide range of areas. The government of Ontario intends to monitor the effect of the program on things like food security, stress and anxiety, mental health, health and healthcare usage, housing stability, education and training, and employment and labour market participation.

But what if we have the diagnosis wrong? What if a lack of money is itself a symptom of poverty rather than a cause? If so, a basic income program will have solved an important financial problem, but it will not have addressed poverty. Just as the “housing first” model recognizes that housing alone without supports is insufficient to end homelessness, so too we must be cautious about viewing basic income as a magic bullet to end poverty.

What was learned from “housing first” is that the presence of a supportive community around someone

continued on page 2



CPI Summer Institute

The Canadian Poverty Institute is excited for the launch of the first annual Poverty Studies Summer Institute. Over three weeks in June students and poverty workers will gather at the Ambrose University campus for an intensive study of the

causes and impacts of poverty in Canada. Guest instructors include international human rights expert Leilani Farha who will be leading a course on human rights and poverty; Mark Holmgren from the Tamarack Institute who will be instructing a

class on Collaborative Leadership; and Eric Tusz-King who will be teaching a course on Co-op Development for Poverty Reduction. For a full list of courses and instructors, please visit <http://www.povertyinstitute.ca/poverty-studies-summer-institute>

A New Definition of Child Poverty: Report Launch Draws Enthusiastic Crowd

In March, over 75 community members gathered for the release of the Canadian Poverty Institute's latest report "Rights, Capabilities and Obligations: New Perspectives on Child Poverty in Calgary". This report provides the findings of a year-long study to understand the experience of poverty from the perspective of a child.

According to senior researcher Dr. Rita Yembilah, children's poverty is different from the poverty experienced by adults. For children, the experience of poverty goes far beyond simply a lack of money, and the definition of poverty for children should reflect this difference, she said. The goal of the research was to develop a new definition of child poverty that takes into account the multiple dimensions of poverty that children experience. Over the past year the research team led by Dr. Yembilah

conducted interviews and workshops with families and children who are experiencing poverty as well as with various organizations that work to help those children and their families. The stories and insights that emerged led the team to identify four different types of childhood poverty.

The first type of poverty children can experience is a poverty of self-perception where children have a dim view of their future. The second type of poverty is a deficit in the institutions and social supports that are supposed to support the child's development. Children can also experience, thirdly, a poverty of relationships where children lack nurturing and trusting positive relationships with adult figures. Finally, children can experience a poverty in their standard of living which is not good enough to meet

their physical and mental needs. Where children experience all four of these types of poverty they are said to be in deep poverty.

These new ways of understanding poverty could change the way children's programs are designed and delivered. Over the next year, a number of Calgary organizations will test and use these new definitions and then evaluate whether it improved their programs and the outcomes for the children. If a better understanding of what poverty means to a child improves the well-being of a child the project will have been a success. More information about this project and a copy of the report is available on our website at <http://www.povertyinstitute.ca/multi-dimensional-definition-child-poverty-informing-practice-calgary>.

If All We Have is Our Money *(continued from front page)*

is critical for their success in remaining in their new home. Similarly, if poverty is as much a social and spiritual condition as an economic one, paying attention to the economic dimension without also attending to the social and spiritual aspects of the human experience will be counterproductive. While we are supportive of basic income as a tool in the poverty eradication toolkit, we also emphasize that it is but one tool in the toolbox. As we continue to develop basic income as an important policy and program tool we should also be attentive to the following considerations. In order to truly address poverty basic income alone won't be sufficient unless we also address:

- structures of racism, discrimination and colonialism;
- structural inequalities that enable and reward precarious employment;
- patterns of social exclusion that prevent people from participating in the social, economic, cultural and political life of the community; and

- ideologies of individualism and competition that strip meaning from our lives and undermine our collective identities as neighbours and citizens.

These are the deeper poverties that money can't heal and for which the lack of money is a powerful symptom. Until we find the courage to heal these deeper wounds, basic income itself will remain but a bandage. It is an important bandage, but we need to do more than just stop the bleeding; we also need to understand what it means to be well. This may lead us to consider whether the goal of poverty reduction work is simply to increase our spending power and make us better consumers, or whether it is to envision an inclusive society where material, social and spiritual poverty cannot take root. Until we grapple with that question then we may all remain so poor that all we have is our money.

Meet the Institute

Beth Stovell, Faculty Associate

Beth Stovell (Ph.D. McMaster Divinity College) is a Faculty Associate of the Canadian Poverty Institute. She has taught at Ambrose since 2014 and is currently Associate Professor of Old Testament. Previously, Beth taught at St. Thomas University in Miami Gardens, Florida.

Beth became involved with the Canadian Poverty Institute during its formation in 2014. Her interest arose out of her previous work with the Center for Community Engagement at St. Thomas University where she worked in situations of poverty including connecting with organizations in inner city Miami, with migrant workers in Central Florida, and with people in Port-de-Paix, the poorest region of Haiti.

As an Associate with CPI, Beth has participated on the grant writing process and community support for the Child Poverty Project. She recently wrote a chapter entitled “The Gospel as Good News for the Poor: God as the King of Justice and Reconciliation,” that will be published in *Is the Gospel Good News?* (Wipf and Stock). The article explores how Scripture provides “good news” to those living in poverty and draws together Beth’s poverty research with her biblical studies research. She sits on the Faculty Advisory Council for the CPI. This June, Beth is teaching a course for the Poverty Studies Summer Institute entitled “Biblical Theology of Justice,” in which she will be combining a study of the theme of justice in Scripture with practical steps towards transforming our cities today.

Beth’s desire to see change in her city has encouraged her work not only with CPI, but as a representative for Ambrose with the Metro Alliance for the Common Good (MACG). MACG is an affiliate of the Industrial Areas Foundation that brings together people from the labour sector, faith communities, and community service providers to work together toward social change. Beth’s past work with community organizing in Miami made her keen to continue such work in Calgary. She is one of the leaders for MACG’s research action team working towards reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous communities in Calgary.

Besides her work with the CPI, Beth loves writing and researching. She has authored *Mapping Metaphorical Discourse in the Fourth Gospel* (Brill), edited *Making Sense of Motherhood* (Wipf and Stock) and co-edited *Biblical Hermeneutics: Five Views* (InterVarsity) with Dr. Stanley E. Porter. She is currently co-writing a book on biblical interpretation (InterVarsity Press) with Dr. Stanley E. Porter and writing commentaries on the Minor Prophets (Zondervan) and Ezekiel (Baker).



Rundle College Students Explore Poverty in Interactive Workshop

Issues surrounding poverty is one of the topics all junior high students study at Rundle College. This private school in Calgary strives to foster compassion and understanding of others by deepening their students’ understanding of the daily challenges faced by those living in poverty and to bring attention to solutions to the problems of poverty. In order to provide insight into this issue, Junior High teacher Tonya Seyer invited the Canadian Poverty Institute to lead a discussion about poverty with her students. This is all part of the school’s commitment to fostering citizenship and developing compassionate students who are prepared to make a difference in the community.

On April 27, a small team from the CPI led a group of 50 Grade 8 Rundle College students through a series of interactive sessions that gave a new understanding to the meaning of poverty. An urban dance workshop exposed students to the vulnerabilities we all experience and the importance of having supportive people around us. A role play activity provided students with an appreciation of the privileges many of us take for granted. And a video and group discussion allowed students to reflect on the many different meanings of poverty and the impact it could have on someone’s life.

Through these activities students are continuing their journey to building empathy and understanding for all members of our diverse city.

New Study Aims to Improve Access to Justice

“There is a strong link between multiple unsolved legal problems and social exclusion, poverty and disadvantage.”

This observation by the Canadian Bar Association is the basis for some important work being done by a group of organizations who provide justice services in Alberta. Recognizing that it is difficult for people living in (or near) poverty to find help with legal issues, the Justice Sector Constellation is working to find ways to make it easier to get legal advice and help.

Janice Pasay, chair of the Justice Sector Constellation, says that *“Legal services and resources should be available to those with low income throughout every aspect of the justice spectrum.”*

One of the barriers that prevents people from finding the legal help they need is the fact that justice

information, services and resources are not well coordinated, she said.

Improving the coordination of justice services is the goal of a new research project being launched by the Canadian Poverty Institute in partnership with the Justice Sector Constellation. With funding from the Law Foundation of Ontario, this new project will work with organizations providing justice services to find new ways to work together. When organizations can share information and work better together, people will be better able to get the legal help they need, regardless of their income.

More information about this project is available on the CPI website at <http://www.povertyinstitute.ca/justice-sector-coordination-research-project>.

Upcoming Events

June 5 – 23 • Poverty Studies Summer Institute • Ambrose University

Join students, practitioners and ministry workers for an exciting three weeks of learning about poverty and best practices in poverty eradication. Information and registration available at <http://www.povertyinstitute.ca/poverty-studies-summer-institute>.

September 13 – 15 • EconoUs Conference • Calgary, Alberta

A unique national conference celebrating the heart and soul of local economies. Information and registration available at www.econous2017.ca.

September 29 – 30 • Soul of the Next Economy Forum • Ambrose University

A unique gathering where the non-profit sector, government, business, and educational institutions converge to engage around global and local social and development issues. Information and registration available at www.nexteconomyforum.com.

New Reports and Resources

The following reports have recently been published by the Canadian Poverty Institute.

- Yembilah, R. and C. Lamb (2017). **Rights, Capabilities and Obligations: New Perspectives on Child Poverty in Calgary.** Calgary: Ambrose University, Canadian Poverty Institute. (available online)

About the CPI

The Canadian Poverty Institute is a 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

Support the CPI

The Canadian Poverty welcomes individuals and organizations who wish to Support the Canadian Poverty Institute financially.

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For more information, please visit: <http://www.sponsorenergy.com/community-partners/cpi>.

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