



Poverty Roundtable

Hastings Prince Edward



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Ending stigma: A rights approach

April 19, 2017

“When you live in poverty, your dignity, your security and your rights of equality are stripped away,” Michael Creek, Voices from the Street.

We need to get to the truth about poverty in Canada. *Poverty is about people being denied basic human rights.* <http://www.cwp-csp.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/FINAL-Human-Rights-Guide-August-2015.pdf>

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights includes the

- Right to adequate food
- Right to health
- Right to education
- Right to decent work
- Right to adequate housing
- Right to personal security
- Right to appear in public without shame
- Right of equal access to justice
- Political rights and freedoms

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, General Assembly

“Poverty is the single most vicious, persistent and legal multi-national crime. It is a form of violence, but it’s not illegal. Canada has signed on to the Declaration of Human Rights but has not legalized rights to housing, to food, to education, to decent work.” Adam Vaughan, MP, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development

Poverty related stereotypes and discrimination is still socially acceptable (consider views of people receiving social assistance) but it denies people their rights. People who are impoverished do not file human rights complaints because they need to focus their resources on having a roof over their head and food on their table. Workplace

harassment is an example where people will tolerate workplace harassment rather than addressing it because of their precarity. (Cities Reducing Poverty: When Business Engages, April 3-6, 2017, Hamilton, From Charity to Rights: Reframing Poverty as a Human Rights Issue)

Without addressing systems and processes that put people in poverty we fail our neighbours and our communities. A rights based approach means that every person must be able to access their social, their economic, their cultural and their political rights. We all have a part to play in this.

Human rights are most often thought of as lofty goals to strive for, but they are also practical tools – a way of doing.

Stigma keeps people in poverty, deepens it and denies people their rights. Addressing social stigma means treating people well. This includes how we treat customers, how we hire employees, and how we structure government services.

Getting Started – A Rights Based Approach

1. **Connect with culture:** We begin with changing our thinking from charity to rights. In charity we give to others who are in need out of generosity. In rights approaches we recognize the person is denied his or her rights to access, for example, food – the person has a right to food, and must be able to access food. To be clear we need charity – we need all of the supports we currently have and much more to address local food insecurity and we need an abundance of generosity and kindness. Moving towards rights is to recognize people are being denied access to what is a fundamental right,

and access to food is essential to life, to living, to health; it is a right not a privilege.

2. **Connect with the everyday:** How do we treat each other in stores on the street and in institutions like hospitals and schools?
 - We need to ask ourselves how we are taking rights away from others in our everyday life, in excluding others, including, for example, our employment and hiring practices.
3. **Connect with practice:** Program standards, and involving people with experience of poverty in the development of programs, in employment, in research and in decision making. *Decisions made about me must include me.*
4. **Connect with attainment of rights:** Programs and supports exist so people can access their rights. E.g. in housing, in employment, in health care. This may be support to access, or in continued support in housing.
5. **Connect with rules:** Prevent unlawful evictions, and employment termination. Use laws to ensure people both maintain and access their rights.
6. **Connect with advocacy:** Challenge power, challenge decision making, seek policy change.
7. **Connect with voice:** Ensure people are heard, that there is a place for people's concerns to be heard and acted on.
8. **Connect with knowledge:** That people know their rights and how to access their rights.
9. **Connect with local government:** Municipalities are participating in rights to the city, a movement of cities ensuring rights of citizens around the world, and in Canada municipalities are signing onto municipal human rights charters.

This is not an exhaustive approach, but a place for beginnings. The rights based approach begins when we bring awareness to how we treat each other and start to treat each other better.

Maytree Foundation is leading the work in developing a rights based framework to address poverty in Canada and to see rights entrenched in law and protected. There is an opportunity as Canada creates a National Poverty Reduction Strategy to push for and to incorporate rights based approaches across the country. To access rights there must be funding - e.g. transfer payments to provinces and municipalities create the possibility

to build the infrastructure to ensure rights can be realized and accessed. Increased funding to affordable housing is a step the federal government has taken towards housing for all.

Policy examples, organizations and other approaches utilizing a rights based approach

Housing First in Canada: Supporting communities to end homelessness. *"Housing is not contingent upon readiness, or on 'compliance' (for instance, sobriety). Rather, it is a rights-based intervention rooted in the philosophy that all people deserve housing, and that adequate housing is a precondition for recovery."*

Canadian Association for Community Living: Dedicated to attaining full participation in community life, ending exclusion and discrimination on the basis of intellectual disability, promoting respect for diversity and advancing human rights to ensure equality for all Canadians."
012http://www.cacl.ca/about-us.

Benefits Screening Tool – Online: A system of auditing patients to identify those living in poverty and the benefits they may be eligible for, as an innovative step towards realizing the right to health in Canada by advancing health equity.

HomeComing Community Choice Coalition, part of ACTO: A coalition of psychiatric survivors, supportive housing providers, planners, community-based service providers and lawyers raising awareness of discrimination and human rights issues affecting persons requiring supportive housing options in our communities. Currently working on NIMBY discrimination through legal action and reviewing zoning by-laws in Ontario.

The Community Advocacy & Legal Centre: A non-profit community legal clinic providing free legal services to low-income residents of Hastings, Prince Edward and Lennox & Addington counties.

Further reading

Maytree series on human rights:
<https://maytree.com/publications/re-framing-poverty-matter-rights/>

National Report Card: *Inclusion of Canadians with Intellectual disabilities*
<http://www.cacl.ca/sites/default/files/National%20Report%20Card%202013%20ENG%20Final.pdf>