



SPARC BC, First Call, SFU and Single Mothers' Alliance Call for Change

Navigating British Columbia's social assistance system can be challenging. This report shares the stories and experiences of single parent families and the struggle they face in meeting their everyday needs.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Vancouver, B.C., January 15, 2016 – The *2015 BC Child Poverty Report Card* released by First Call noted that “one in five children in B.C. are poor.” Many of these children are living in single-parent family households.

This report, entitled *Walking the Line to Put Their Families First*, looks at the challenges faced by many female-led single-parent families across British Columbia as they struggle to meet the needs of their families. Income assistance rates in British Columbia have not increased since 2007, which means that single parents and their children who rely on this form of assistance continue to fall further behind as the cost of housing and other basic essentials continue to increase.

“At the heart of this report are conversations that are not often heard. The mothers who participated in this study come from a wide variety of backgrounds but are united in their poverty and their desire to give their children the best possible life,” said Lorraine Copas, executive director for SPARC BC, one of the lead agencies in the development of the report.

The Single Mothers' Alliance has been pleased to be a part of this report, said Viveca Ellis, co-founder of the Single Mothers' Alliance. “This report highlights the complex combination of the extremely high cost of child care, precarious work, and the gaps in our safety net and the impact that this has on single-parent families everywhere who are struggling to put food on the table and to ensure that their children have a happy, healthy childhood.”

“As a society, it is not acceptable that one in three female-led single-parent families across B.C. are living in poverty with no pathway forward,” said Dr. Jane Pulkingham, professor of sociology and associate dean in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Simon Fraser University, and one of the lead researchers in the study. “When I look at how little has been done to address

this issue at the government level, I feel like we are actively choosing to leave a whole generation of families and children behind. This is very troubling.”

“This report recommends higher income assistance rates and removing other systemic barriers that trap single mothers and their children in poverty. These are the solutions that could be included in a comprehensive poverty reduction plan for B.C.,” said Adrienne Montani, provincial coordinator for First Call.

This report highlights the need for the government to re-visit many of the policy changes introduced in early 2001 and which robbed families and children of the chance to realize their full potential. While the provincial government has made small incremental changes at the policy level since that time, there is still the need to look at the policies and the choices made to ensure that all families have the support that they need to give their children the best possible start in life.

The Facts:

- There were 149,010 female-led single-parent families in British Columbia in 2011. Of these, households 43,665 (29%) were living in poverty.
- Children living in lone-parent family households account for almost half of all of the children living in poverty in B.C. Based on the *2015 BC Child Poverty Report Card*, there were 81,970 children in single-parent family households who were living in poverty (*BC Child Poverty Report Card*, 2015:15)
- The median household income for female-led single-parent family households in B.C. in 2013 was \$36,050.
- For a lone-parent family household who was in low income in 2013 and who had one child, their annual income was \$14,300 or approximately 59% of the established poverty line for 2013 (\$24,319).
- As the cost of food, clothing and other basic essentials continues to increase, many single parent family households relying on income assistance continue to fall further behind. The last increase in income assistance rates was in 2007.
- Many families also struggle with the high cost of housing in B.C. In 2011, there were 126,040 family households who were renting and who were in core housing need. Of these households, more than one in three was a single-parent family household.
- Data published by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and reported in the *2015 BC Child Poverty Report Card* showed that one in three children in B.C. in single-parent

family households were in core housing need. The data also showed that of all of the provinces across Canada, B.C. had the 2nd highest proportion of children from single-parent family households in core housing need.

- Of the 47,660 single-parent families in core housing need, more than one in four (13,525) were in “worst-case housing need.” These are households that are in core housing need and spending 50% or more of their income on their housing costs. Many of these households are precariously housed and at risk of homelessness through economic eviction.
- In 2011, the average monthly rent for a single-parent family household in B.C. was \$986 per month while the average annual income was \$45,531. For a single-parent family household in core housing need, the average income was \$26,854.
- This report calls attention to the devastating impact of the large gaps in our social safety net and calls for immediate changes in government policies to ensure that every child in B.C. be given a chance for a brighter future.

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