

All I Really Need – Celebrating Family Day

*“All I really need is a song in my heart,
Food in my belly, and love in my family.” - Raffi*

Families in BC would love to celebrate Family Day. Unfortunately, for many, this will prove difficult.

Parent Support Services Society of BC (PSS) works with diverse communities across the province to provide parenting support circles and education, and Canada’s only Grandparents Raising Grandchildren (GRG) support line. In some communities circles operate in Spanish, English, Cantonese, Mandarin and Filipino/Tagalog.

Children are raised by two parents, lone parents, same-sex couples, aunts and uncles, siblings, foster parents, and increasingly by grandparents. (According to StatsCan, the number of grandchildren being raised by grandparents in B.C. rose from 9,940 in 2006, to 11,035 in 2011.) Listening to families, and following the research and news, we know that BC is falling short in meeting many basic needs. Too many families in BC are struggling.

Many cannot afford a roof over their heads –

According to the 2011 National Household Survey, nearly half (46% of people living in the City of Vancouver are paying more for lodging than we can afford. The Royal Bank reports that some home owners in the City are spending 90% of their income on shelter.

Childcare costs are beyond their reach –

The Coalition of Childcare Advocates of BC reports that childcare fees are families’ second highest expense after housing. In 2012, the median annual childcare fee for a toddler was \$10,884. Childcare can cost families more than post-secondary education, with fees as high as \$1915 a month.

Jobs with living wages are hard to find –

First Call’s 2013 Report Card on Child poverty found that in 2012, BC had the worst child poverty rate in Canada - 18.6 %. Those children live in families who are living in poverty. Significant numbers of these children living in poverty (31.8%) live with at least one adult who is working full time. There are parents and caregivers who work two or more part time jobs and still can’t make ends meet. For children living in these families, their poverty is the result of their parent’ or grandparents’ low wages.

Poverty impacts diverse families -

The poverty rate for children living in single mother families was 49.8 percent. Children living in two-parent families had a poverty rate of 14 per cent. BC’s poverty rate for children under 6 years, at 20.7 per cent, was 8 percentage points higher than the Canadian average. Aboriginal and immigrant families face disproportional rates of poverty.

Children’s singer/songwriter Raffi has sung, “All I

*really need is a song in my heart,
Food in my belly, and love in my family.”*

BC’s diverse families are full of love, but find it difficult to sing when they worry about how to afford next month’s rent or mortgage payment and still provide sufficient healthy food and all the other basics of daily life many of us take for granted.

This Family Day, let us all make a commitment to work towards a poverty reduction plan for BC, followed by action so that all families thrive, feel included, and can participate in celebrations for years to come.

Carol Ross

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