

Poverty Olympics Message (draft)

If government made poverty and homelessness as big a priority as they've made the Olympics, they would end poverty and homelessness.

Instead they are spending billions on the Olympics while BC has the highest poverty rate in Canada for the 6th year in a row—in spite of budget surpluses; (*insert your own community data here*); while street homelessness in Metro Vancouver increased 373% between 2002 and 2008; while the DTES has an HIV rate similar to Botswana's; while the average income for poor parents in BC is over \$11,000 a year BELOW the poverty line; and homeless people are dying on the street.

While some provinces and countries are tackling poverty, BC is not. There is a growing campaign sponsored by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) calling on all political parties to commit to a Poverty Reduction Plan for BC that would aim to: reduce poverty from 13 % to 3% in 10 years, especially focusing on the poverty of aboriginal people, people with disabilities and women; ensure everyone has an income at least 75% of the poverty line within 2 years; and ensure that no one has to sleep outside within 2 years and that homelessness is completely ended within 8 years.

To do this governments would have to raise welfare and minimum wage, build thousands of units of social housing, and remove the barriers that stop people in need from getting welfare. Now is a perfect time, during an economic downturn, for governments to invest in low income people. Building housing will create good jobs, raising minimum wage costs taxpayers nothing, increasing welfare means increasing the amount of money spent in local communities that are hurting from the poor economy. Poor people don't spend their money on foreign vacations or speculate on the stock market, they put their money right back into the local economy.

If our governments thought poverty and homelessness was as important as the Olympics, they could end both.

But maybe the government is afraid that voters won't want to end poverty? Wrong. According to polling done by the CCPA, 87% of British Columbians want strong political leadership to reduce the number of poor people; 87% also want targets and timelines to reduce poverty; 91% said they'd feel proud if our premier took leadership on poverty reduction; and 77% believe that an economic recession is exactly the time for government to take action. Those are much higher percentages than the numbers of Vancouver residents who voted in favour of the Olympics.

We're calling on people everywhere, here in the Downtown Eastside, in BC, Canada and the world to pressure our government to put the same energy into ending poverty and homelessness as they do into holding the Olympics.

We hope people have fun today and enjoy our parody of the real Olympics but keep in mind our message: Poverty and homelessness are not inevitable. They can be ended.