

2010 Poverty Olympics Torch Relay Support Package for Communities around BC

Event Resources:

- How to Plan a Successful Torch Parade
- Event Ideas
- Leaflet (black & white, colour) – see separate files
- Contacting the Media (including a sample news release)
- How to Make a Torch from a Plunger
- Sample Banner
- Mascot Button Templates – see separate file
- Gold Medal Templates (forthcoming)
- Poverty Olympics Anthem
- Torch Relay Schedule – see separate file

Background Context:

- Poverty Olympics Message
- Broken Olympic Promises
- Poverty Olympics Social Index – see separate file
- BC Child Poverty News Release
- Resources from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, including *A Poverty Reduction Strategy for BC*
- Juicy Quotes from Rogge (president of IOC) and Poole (president of VANOC until recent death)

How to Plan a Successful Torch Parade in your Community

1. Gather a group of people together to organise the event
2. Contact Trish (info@povertyolympics.ca) to find out the date assigned to your community on the Torch Relay route
3. Check out the rest of the resources in this Support Package
4. Decide on the type of event you would like to plan (see *Event Ideas*):
 - a. think carefully about the location as you want as many people as possible to see you – is there a central park, public square, or main road that gets a lot of traffic?
 - b. think about the time of day that would be most effective for your event – is lunchtime the best option as it is dark before and after work?
5. Get together to make placards, signs, buttons, banners, torches (see *How to Make a Torch from a Plunger*), or any other props you need for your event
6. Highlight the poverty and homelessness in your community through local statistics (contact Trish for poverty rates around BC) and/or personal stories from local people
7. Invite other community organisations, student groups, faith groups, concerned citizens, etc. to join – the more the merrier!
8. Advertise, advertise, advertise – poster the town, contact the local media (see *Contacting the Media* for help, including a sample news release), email and phone your networks, etc.
9. Once the event is over, send digital photos and/or video to Trish – we will be showing a video of the Torch Relay in the Opening Ceremonies of the Poverty Olympics on February 7, 2010

Event Ideas

As long as the focus remains on poverty and homelessness within your local community as well as in BC and Canada, the event details are up to you. Here are some examples, roughly ordered from minimum to maximum effort, but feel free to come up with your own ideas:

- Wear the Poverty Olympic Gold medals (highlighting BC's record of 'wins' in relation to poverty) all day wherever you go
- Arrange to meet with government representatives in your community
- 'Run' (or march) with a low-cost Torch (we have a design made from a toilet plunger), banners and placards, handing out leaflets along the way
 - the march could simply take place along a high-traffic road or it could have a specific departure and arrival point, such as, from a well-known social service/community centre to the MLA's office
 - the march could be livened up by cross-country skiing (if you live in a snowy region), pushing shopping carts, wearing costumes as the Poverty Olympic mascots, etc
 - or alternatively, for a more sombre feel, you could carry candles and march in silence (this would be particularly effective in those communities where it is dark for much of the day at this time of year)
- Perform as a Complaints Choir – put all your poverty woes to music and sing the message out loud and clear
- Perform a street theatre skit, perhaps with involvement from low-income members of your community
- Organise a free outdoor concert with local musicians
- Organise your very own Poverty Olympics within your local community, with Opening and Closing Ceremonies, Games (see the examples from previous Poverty Olympics below), mascots, and official sponsors

Previous Poverty Olympic Games

Curling: Sweeping aside poverty in a world-class Olympic City

Team VANOC: players supporting the Olympic industry, including government partners (Political Pete), business interests (Corporate Corrina), and security forces (Security Steve). Team Poverty: people living below the poverty line, including “Sarah Single-Mom,” “Homeless Harold,” and “Disabled Derek.”

Both teams experience “rough spots” on the ice. Team VANOC’s first rock is blocked by pennies representing deficit of capital for completion of infrastructure sites. But, their rock smoothly makes it to the circle, thanks to Political Pete, who’s pushing a bail out broom to clear the financial deficit. Their second rock glides into the centre with corporate media grease. Their final rock, thrown by Security Steve, is blocked by homeless people sleeping on the street, panhandlers, even some Olympic protesters. Team VANOC sweeps the people away with new by-law brooms. The rock moves smoothly into the circle.

For Team Poverty, all three rocks are disqualified by the rough spots on the ice. The first rock is blocked by “welfare sand,” representing consistently low welfare rates. Their second rock, thrown by Homeless Harold, gets caught up in red tape, representing bureaucratic delay and discouragement, especially when trying to get out of homelessness. Team Poverty’s last rock is stopped by a rope that says, “eviction and rent increase,” representing real estate and housing interests.

Poverty Line High Jump

A top-level government bureaucrat sets the “poverty line” bar for athletes to jump over. The athletes include Nancy Employable, Joe Average, Rachelle Single Mom, and Crystal Refugee. The “top quality” mats on which the athletes land have been gathered from homeless shelter programs.

Announcer: “Our first athlete to approach the bar is **Nancy Employable**, hailing from the region of Basic Welfare Rates. Nancy fell into difficult personal circumstances and lost her job when the company she worked for downsized. She couldn’t find more work, lost her place of residence, slept in shelters while waiting to get on basic welfare, and now survives on \$610 per month – trying to pull herself up by her bootstraps. Despite living in substandard conditions (she shares a room with cockroaches and rats), and spending time standing in food lines, she has been training for this event consistently. Oh, too bad! She fell far below the poverty line bar, coming in at only \$7,320 per year. That’s not even half way up to the bar. Better luck next Olympics.”

Housing hurdles

You need: Announcer

3-4 athletes dressed as homeless people

3-4 hurdle structures labeled “high rents,” “no vacancies,” “bedbugs and mice” etc.

Announcer intro's athletes and says, “get ready, set, go!” Athletes start running and stumble over hurdles. As athletes fall down, stopped from getting housing, announcer explains each label on hurdles: “average rent for 1 bedroom apartment is about \$700 but person only gets \$375 on welfare” “Vacancy rate is less than 1 %; only cheap places full of vermin” etc. At the end no one wins and announcer calls for immediate national housing strategy.

Skating around poverty

You need: announcer

2 athletes dressed as Campbell and Harper (find a photo of each on internet, then print and enlarge it, paste on cardboard and cut eye holes; make cardboard skates in same way, dress them in track suits)

4 other people to sit on stage at 4 points along skating oval with signs that say things like “worst poverty in Canada for 6 years in a row”; “no national housing strategy”; “10-15,000 homeless in BC alone”; “poverty causes 10 lost years of life”

Announcer announces that race begins and contestants literally skate around each person holding up a stat sign. Announcer says “there's Campbell skating around the worst poverty record in Canada for six years running”; “Oh, there's Harper, skating round homelessness”, etc, At the end it can be a tie, they both skate around all the poverty issues equally.

Contacting the Media

- Put together a list of local media contacts with email addresses and telephone numbers
- Send all contacts a News Advisory a few days ahead of your event:
 - include details of the event (location, time, etc.) and a “hook,” something that will entice them to attend
 - do not give them all the information otherwise they have no reason to come
- Send out a News Release on the day of the event (see the sample below)
- Phone all media contacts on the day of the event to remind them to attend
 - emphasise the visuals of the event so they will want to come to get photos or video, e.g. Torchbearer dressed as homeless person running plunger Torch down the Main Street

2010 POVERTY OLYMPICS TORCH RELAY TO SHINE THE SPOTLIGHT ON POVERTY IN [NAME OF TOWN]

On [date], the 2010 Poverty Olympics Torch Relay will precede the “official” Olympic torch relay to highlight the issues of poverty and homelessness in [name of town] and the inequality perpetuated by this major corporate event. [Name of organization] is sponsoring the 2010 Poverty Olympics Torch Relay in [name of town], where the poverty rate was ___% in 2005 (the most recent data available).

[Insert quote about local poverty, more about the work of the sponsoring organization, and details about the location of the torch relay].

The 2010 Poverty Olympics Torch Relay will be staged in a number of communities around BC in January and February to emphasize that people all over the province are struggling with poverty.

Concluding the province-wide journey, the final leg of the Torch Relay will end at the third annual Poverty Olympics in Vancouver on February 7, 2010.

The Poverty Olympics is an annual event held in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside. It involves skits loosely based on Olympic events and features its own Poverty Anthem and official mascots. The purpose of the Poverty Olympics is to advocate for poverty reduction in BC, an aim captured in the slogan *End Poverty: It’s Not a Game*.

Poverty and homelessness are not inevitable. Government can take action to reduce poverty in BC. [Name of sponsoring organization] and the Poverty Olympics urge the following:

- Increase welfare rates by 50%, and index welfare to inflation, so rates go up when the cost of living does.
- Get rid of arbitrary barriers that stop people from getting welfare when they need it.
- Stop clawing back money from welfare recipients when they get child support payments or earn small amounts from part-time work.
- Build 2,000 new units of non-market housing per year, in addition to assisted living (for low-income seniors and people with disabilities or mental illnesses) and emergency shelters.
- Increase the minimum wage to \$10 per hour, and index it to inflation — this would mean a single person working full time could earn a little more than the poverty line.

Find out more about the Poverty Olympics and the torch relay at www.povertyolympics.ca.

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For further information or to arrange an interview, please contact:

How to Make a Torch from a Plunger

1. Get a toilet plunger. If you don't want to wash one that you already have and if you have a Dollar Store in your community, you might go there and pick one up really cheaply.
2. Get some curly ribbons of a nice fire-like colour. A Dollar Store might have these too.
3. Tape the curly ribbons on the inside (concave part) of the rubber plunger.
4. Make your message: Get a non water soluble marker and a piece of wide ribbon or fabric. Write your message on it making letters as big as possible, for example, "End Poverty" "End Homelessness". Leave a gap of no words in the middle of the fabric or ribbon to tie it to the plunger stick just where it meets the rubber.

Voila!: a handy dandy Poverty Olympics torch!!



Sample Banner

Here's the banner Lou Black made for the Poverty Olympics being used to great effect on an Olympic billboard.



photo credit: blackbird

Feel free to use the same design or come up with your own ideas.

Poverty Olympics Anthem

(sing to the tune of “Oh Canada”)

Oh Canada

Our home on native land

A billion for security

Instead of building homes.

Olympic spending has gone sky high

While thousands sleep outside.

From far and wide

Oh Canada

Invite the world to see

A quarter million souls,

Poor and freezing cold

Oh Canada, where is e-qual-i-ty?

Oh Canada, we are ashamed of thee.

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.

Broken Olympic Promises

The Inner-city Inclusive Housing Table (ICI) was appointed by the provincial government to make recommendations to all levels of government and VANOC about how to meet the Olympic sustainability commitments. It was made up of business, government and community representatives. The ICI made 23 unanimous recommendations. Five of them and what action has been taken, are listed below:

1. Build 3200 units of housing (800 in each of 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010)

Number of new units in the inner city likely to be completed before the Olympics:
242 (the Lux and Woodward's low income)

2. Secure 100 units of Olympic Village housing for deep core need; 100 for core need; and 50 for low end of market.

Number of units of Olympic Village housing likely to be available for core and deep core need: 0

3. Eliminate barriers to access social assistance

Action: Barriers still in place

4. Increase social assistance by at least 50% and allow earning exemptions

Action: Rates for some increased by a mere \$50; no new earning exemptions

5. Buy 800 units of existing housing.

Action: Done

**BC CHILD POVERTY RATE STILL THE WORST IN CANADA
WHEN WILL THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT TAKE ACTION?**

For six years in a row, British Columbia has had the highest child poverty rate in Canada tied only with Manitoba in 2007. Figures released today by First Call, the BC partner in Campaign 2000, show BC at a rate of 18.8 percent of children living in poverty in 2007. The Canadian average in that same year was 15 percent.

According to the *2009 Child Poverty Report Card*, in 2007 BC had a total of 156,000 poor children, equivalent to the entire population of Nanaimo and Prince George combined. And this was in a year of a strong economy.

“When will the provincial government take action?” asked Julie Norton, First Call’s chairperson. “We’ve been at the bottom year after year after year, and our elected officials still don’t take seriously the pain and suffering that poverty causes children and their families.”

November 24, 2009 is the 20-year anniversary of a unanimous vote in the House of Commons to end child poverty in Canada by the year 2000.

For 2007, the key findings for child poverty in British Columbia include:

- On all three measures of poverty, BC had the highest rate of child poverty despite a strong economy in 2007. (Fact Sheet 1)
- While the risk of poverty is over three times greater for female lone-parent families, the majority of poor children (51.6%) live in two-parent families. (Fact Sheet 3)
- On average, poor female lone-parent families lived \$12,600 below the poverty line. Poor two-parent families were \$8,200 below the line. (Fact Sheet 3)
- Over half of children who were poor (55%) had been poor for at least four out of six years. (Fact Sheet 4)
- Over half of poor children (55.7%) lived in families where at least one member of their family had a full-time job. (Fact Sheet 5)
- Poor families are getting poorer. Families with children in the bottom five income deciles (10% groups) made no significant gains in their incomes between 1989 and 2007. Two of the groups actually saw a significant decline in their income. (Fact Sheet 7)

BC Campaign 2000 believes that British Columbians and Canadians everywhere have made a compelling case for eliminating poverty.

- Six provincial governments - Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec, Ontario and Manitoba - have committed themselves to poverty reduction plans for their own jurisdictions.
- The Conference Board of Canada, a group supported by major Canadian businesses, took a strong stand for reducing poverty in a report released this fall. The board’s sponsors include Bell Canada, George Weston Ltd., Hydro-Québec, the Power Corporation of Canada, the TD Bank Financial Group, Wawanesa Mutual Insurance Company and Xerox Canada Ltd.

- The BC Healthy Living Alliance, a group that includes some of the province’s leading health experts, has also thrown its weight behind a poverty reduction strategy. It says it sees major disparities between the health of low-income people and higher-income people.
- The latest Vital Signs report from the Vancouver Foundation gave Metro Vancouver a D grade on poverty and income inequality. “Without effective programs to address the root causes and consequences of poverty, we limit opportunities for all types of citizens to make meaningful contributions and feel like members of our community,” the report said.
- Even Premier Campbell’s own BC Progress Board has argued for fighting poverty in all its manifestations. “The fact that one in ten British Columbians lives on the economic margins for extended periods stands as a pressing policy challenge,” the board said. “But one in ten is not an insurmountable challenge.”

Public policy solutions are available to help reduce child poverty in BC. Options recommended in the Report Card include higher child benefits, increases in the minimum wage and welfare rates, commitments to pay living wages, increased access to high quality childcare and new housing programs for people with low incomes.

However, the BC government continues to deny that we have a child poverty problem. It has even rejected the very simplest of steps to help ease the burden on poor people: indexing the minimum wage and welfare rates every year to increases in the cost of living.

“High child and family poverty rates are disturbing and unacceptable,” said Adrienne Montani, First Call provincial coordinator. “Without a concerted plan and leadership from government, things will keep getting worse. The question remains: When will the provincial government take action?”

The 2009 poverty report of BC Campaign 2000 was prepared by the Social Planning and Research Council of BC (SPARC BC) and First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition.

First Call has prepared an updated report on child and family poverty in British Columbia. The report is available from the First Call office in Vancouver and can also be downloaded from the First Call web site at www.firstcallbc.org.

Resources from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives

- **A Poverty Reduction Plan for BC**
 - <http://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/poverty-reduction-plan-bc>

- **2010 Winter Olympics: Progressive Analysis and Commentary**
 - <http://www.policyalternatives.ca/offices/bc/2010-winter-olympics>

- **BC's Growing Gap: Family Income Inequality, 1976-2006**
 - <http://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/bcs-growing-gap>

Juicy Quotes

Jaquie Rogge (president of IOC):

"Until they are fed, housed and trained our athletes can't skate, ski or slide. 365 days a year our worldwide Corporate Partners make the dreams of the Olympic athlete a reality. For that, we — and everyone who lives the Olympic Games — owe them our deepest gratitude."

Jack Poole (president of VANOC until recent death):

Western Investor editor Frank O'Brien [sat](#) in on a talk by Poole and later editorialized that, according to Poole, "the real purpose of the 2010 Olympic bid is to seduce the provincial and federal governments and long-suffering taxpayers into footing a billion-dollar bill to pave the path for future real estate sales."

Indeed this was Poole's opinion. "If the Olympic bid wasn't happening," he told the developers, "we would have to invent something."