

Livable Income for All People From the Charity Model to a Social Justice Model

In PEI people who are impoverished may be in one (or a number) of the following categories:

- ♦ farmers and fishers, receiving less than the cost of production
- ♦ people at or near minimum wage, who even though working full time, fall below the poverty line
- ♦ low paid women, part of the 62% of PEI women in the paid workforce who earn less than \$20,000 / year
- ♦ seasonal, low paid workers who have to depend on EI and receive just 55% of their regular wage for a period of time which does not extend to the beginning of the next work season
- ♦ people living on Social Assistance
- ♦ elderly women and part of the 50% who receive the Guaranteed Income Supplement, indicating that they live below the poverty line
- ♦ Aboriginal people who do not have sufficient access to livable income
- ♦ youth working in dead-end low wage jobs, some carrying large student debts
- ♦ new immigrants for whom employment entry is difficult and income is inadequate
- ♦ people with physical and/or intellectual disabilities, for whom there are reduced support systems
- ♦ people who spend more than one-third of a low income on housing and utilities.

Citizens and governments can address the above situations with a charity response or by using a combination of both charity and social justice.

ACTS OF CHARITY

(helping people survive immediate crisis)

Community

- supporting food banks
- establishing and maintaining soup kitchens
- sponsoring turkey drives
- distributing Christmas baskets
- holding clothing collections
- transporting and visiting the elderly
- collecting for special health needs
- donating to hospitals and disease research
- donating to educational institutions

Government

- providing emergency pay-outs for farmers
- increasing minimum wage but keeping it at below-livable-income level
- keeping EI at low percentage of wages
- increasing social assistance but keeping it at below-livable-income level
- increasing seniors' GIS, but keeping it at below-livable-income level
- providing inadequate funding for disability supports,

The Farm Crisis From the Charity Model to a Social Justice Model

It is some encouragement for farmers when the community joins in the outcry about the financial disaster facing farmers producing in, and for, the unregulated market. Producers of potatoes, beef, and pork are especially in the forefront, though the public hype has not yet been extended to the potato producer crises. More people in the community are giving voice to the need for immediate solutions.

Responses that have emerged from this are “farmers need financial assistance now” and “we must buy local”. It is positive that these messages are becoming more widespread and almost part of the daily vocabulary in the PEI population. Their repetition and the action/policy they imply mean a new raising of awareness of the plight of farmers and a new commitment of the community to be involved. It is hoped that this community concern will influence governments. Action of this kind is essential to deal with the immediate crisis, which is only too evident in these past years and months.

This action, though necessary, is not sufficient to deal with the root causes of the ever-increasing crises in agriculture. This is where one makes a distinction between action which is based on the charity model and that based on social justice. In the charity model, one deals with immediate causes and short-term outcomes. For example, the problem is presented in terms of the high cost of feed and other inputs, the “glut” in the marketplace, and the de-valuing of the American dollar. The presumption is that these are accidents of history and will pass, if we can just wade through this crisis, which of course we must do, or we will lose more valued farmers.

Beyond this, what does the social justice model demand of citizens and policy makers? It means looking at root causes. This is challenging especially for governments as well as for the community. It means looking critically at the systems put in place in the past. It means having the courage to acknowledge poor judgement and/or excessive conformity to a mind-set which is opposed to the greater good of the farm community. It is amazing how governments, and farm organizations which are in their pockets, refuse to look at the origins of the current difficulties. It is doubly amazing how afraid they are to admit their mistakes and to search for lasting solutions.

At the root of the ongoing crises, is that governments over the years (and an unquestioning community, including many farmers) bought into the promises: bigger and more specialized farms is better; fewer farmers will provide a better living for those who remain; efficiency on the farm will save the day; the free market will maintain a balance; and development of the export market will create untold opportunities. What was hidden under these promises was that farmers of most products were to be placed at the mercy of the market. A major and unrecognized part of the equation was the unmoderated power of the industrial sector: input suppliers, processors, wholesalers, retailers and exporters. People who say there is no money in farming are totally wrong. The industrial sector has amassed and consolidated fortunes over the past thirty years. It is primary producers who have created that wealth and have, in the absence of sensible legislation, become poorer, reduced in numbers and therefore more and more powerless. This way of organizing agriculture, identified as the industrial model, is predominant in Canada.

The industrial model was humanly constructed by successive governments, which sold farmers down the drain and created preferential policy for corporations. Now is the time for governments to deconstruct and to make just policies on the provincial and national levels and at the World Trade Organization. Canada needs a whole new system of agriculture. There is no other response than to create policies which protect the rights of primary producers to a decent living and the rights of all citizens to safe, healthy and affordable food; such policies would also take into consideration the protection of the land, water and air.

COOPER INSTITUTE ACTIVITIES REPORT 2007

With the support of generous donors, Cooper Institute
has responded to many community needs



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Major Programs, Support Work, and Issues

- ♦ Cultural Diversity and Inclusion: Community Engagement
- ♦ PEI Cultural History Walk
- ♦ PEI Working Group for a Livable Income
- ♦ Food Security/Sovereignty: Fair Trade
- ♦ People First Community Promotion and Citizen Engagement
- ♦ Make Poverty History Campaign
- ♦ Issues Workshops and Presentations
- ♦ Organizational Development and Support
- ♦ Window on the South
- ♦ Current Issues

Four panelists with experience in the public sector presented various needs for change in public policy related to social services, education, and employment which would create a reality of belonging for people from diverse cultures.

The forum was especially designed to lead participants to make commitments to action around creating a social and economic atmosphere which promotes belonging and inclusion. There was a strong recommendation that the next phase of work should center around the role of impoverishment in excluding people of diverse cultures from the mainstream of life in the community.

PEI MOSAIC



Cultural Diversity and Inclusion: Community Engagement

The third year of this project, funded in part by **Canadian Heritage**, was completed in April, 2007. The project recognizes and celebrates the variety of cultures living side by side in PEI. First of all it engages the Mi'kmaq community. Other cultures are involved such as: the Black Islanders Co-op; Newcomers to Canada; second and third generation Canadians; and the long-time residents originating mainly in the British Isles and France (Acadians). The project aims to discover and develop ways to influence community attitudes and the formation of public policy to ensure social inclusion.

Work for year three of the project began in the Fall, 2006, forming a working group to develop a PEI Forum, highlighting the ideals of, and policies supporting “**Belonging**”. The first steps involved dialogue with various people working on Aboriginal and immigrant issues.

The Forum entitled, **PEI MOSAIC: Aboriginal People and 100 Countries of Origin - Belonging**, was held on March 3, 2007 with 67 people participating. A keynote speaker, experienced in cultural diversity expounded on the obstacles to, and the recipe for, belonging. An Aboriginal drama group enacted many real-life situations in which Aboriginal people are made to feel that they do not belong.

PEI Cultural History Walk

The PEI Cultural History Walk is partially funded by **Canadian Heritage**. It is a pilot project which consists of a temporary portable visual display reflecting PEI's cultural history and diversity. It is designed so that participants can actually “walk” through the centuries.

The display is made up of various panels including: Aboriginal peoples - the Mi'kmaq, Acadians, British Settlers, Black Islanders, Chinese Islanders, Lebanese Islanders and Newcomers to Canada. A French and English text explains the various historical phases represented in the display.

To experiment, Cooper Institute presented it at three public events between February and June as well as

¹ Lobbying here means any action aimed at changing attitudes and actions of the community and/or of public policy makers.

in three schools, including a senior high school, junior high school and french language high school.

The display provided a script with appendices of learning activities, a trivia game, story-telling and a “string-game” to illustrate the 10,000 year time-line represented by the walk.

The second phase of the project (not yet approved for funding) aims to produce a professional version of the Walk and to coordinate its use in schools and/or community group events.

PEI Working Group for a Livable Income

Cooper Institute is one of the coordinating organizations of the PEI Working Group for a Livable Income. The Working Group is made up of nine community-based organizations: ALERT; Cooper Institute; PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women; PEI Federation of Labor; PEI People First; Société Saint-Thomas-d'Aquin (SSTA); Women's Network PEI; Association des femmes acadiennes et francophones de l'Î.-P.-É. and the PEI Healthy Eating Alliance.

In its work to engage the community in the low income issue, the Working Group held three forums in May 2007 aimed at preparing questions for candidates in the next Federal election. In December, to highlight the need to balance charity with social justice, the Working Group produced and distributed over a thousand Holiday greeting cards. The message accentuated the right to food for all people, and the fact that donating food to low income people does not get at the roots of the lack of access to food. This effort also expressed the Working Group's commitment to food security as its focus.

In its attempt to engage public policy makers, the Working Group met with, and was graciously received by, the Honorable Carolyn Bertram, the new Minister of Communities, Cultural Affairs, and Labour. The Working Group made a presentation to the policy session of the Liberal Party of PEI Annual General meeting, after which the Premier invited the Group to meet with the full Government caucus in the new year (TBA). In December, Shawn Murphy, MP for Charlottetown invited the Working Group to participate in his public forum on poverty to be held January 10, 2008 (carried out).

In 2006 the Working Group along with many other organizations made submissions to the Employment Standards Review Panel during its lengthy public hearings. The Panel's recommendations to Government for changes to the Employment Standards legislation were encouraging to many sectors. Long after the process had finished, the Chambers of Commerce, representing some Island employers, launched a protest against the recommendations. The Working Group has expressed publicly its concern that the late intervention of the Chambers is disrespectful to the public hearing

process. As well, the Working Group felt that the intervention was mean-spirited and not at all representative of the many responsible and humane employers in PEI.

The PEI Working Group for a Livable Income participates in meetings with ***Living Wage Coalition***, a national organization with similar goals to the PEI Working Group.

Food Security/Sovereignty: Fair Trade

Cooper Institute is committed to education and action to promote food sovereignty, which some sectors refer to as “Food Security”. Its position is compatible with that of the Declaration of Nyéléni, at an international conference in Mali (02/07): *Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations. It defends the interests and inclusion of the next generation. It offers a strategy to resist and dismantle the current corporate trade and food regime, and directions for food, farming, and fisheries systems determined by local producers and users.*

A reflection of this commitment is a budding partnership with the National Farmers Union (NFU) in a project called, ***Community Engagement in Developing Prospects for a System of Domestic Fair Trade for Food Products***. Members of Cooper Institute participated as members of a panel on Fair Trade at the 2007 NFU National Convention. The panel addressed Fair Trade from the perspectives of: the success of farmers in the Caribbean; the challenges for Fair Trade in Canada; and the experience of the first town in Canada (Wolfville) to declare itself a Fair Trade town.



Fair Trade Panel: Reg Phelan, Seaspray Organic Co-op (& NFU member); Marie Burge, Cooper Institute (& NFU associate member); Bob Stead, Mayor of Wolfville NS

People First Community Promotion and Citizen Engagement

Cooper Institute worked in partnership with People First in the second year of its three year project, **Road to Inclusion: Working towards healthy public policies for persons with intellectual disabilities**. This involved a five-session community promoter training in West Prince for people with intellectual challenges and their supporters. The promoters organized and carried out a lively and successful community workshop entitled ***Housing and Belonging***.



West Prince Community Promoter Training discussion group: Ann Wheatley; George Charchuk; Heidi Mallett; Adam Arsenault; Eddie Cormier; Kevin Porter

Make Poverty History Campaign (MPH)

The PEI MPH campaign was extended for another year to participate in various national campaigns. Cooper Institute, as one of the active organizations, provided organizational support to the local campaigns. MPH organized a speakers' forum for International Development week and observed the International Day for the Elimination of Poverty, with a Stand-Up action on October 17, 2007. Seventy-five people, including a number of MLAs showed up at the formal Stand-Up in front of the Legislature at 12:30 on that day. Afterwards, the Minister of Social Services and Seniors led a Stand-Up in the Legislature and spoke about the need to work for the elimination of poverty on the local level. He gave honourable mention to ALERT and to Cooper Institute. The number of people all over the world who joined the Stand-Up action was 43,716,440, breaking the Guinness World Record.

Attitude Makes a Difference

This was a diabetes type 2 Atlantic research project. Cooper Institute acted as the PEI coordinator and organized three focus groups, one of which was conducted in French. The focus groups aimed at

getting an overall view of the lives of older rural women on fixed incomes who have been diagnosed with type two diabetes. The participants provided a wide range of living situations. They identified the positive supports and services available, as well as the numerous difficulties which they face. Expenses were a big concern, in particular the costs of medications and test strips. Participants identified gaps in funding for medications, and pointed out that for those under the age of 65, there was no coverage at all. Costs associated with travel were significant, considering that having diabetes required more trips (to doctor, pharmacist, eye doctor, etc.) and considering the lack of affordable transportation in rural communities. The high cost of healthy foods - fresh fruits and vegetables - was also a real concern.

Issues Workshops and Presentations

Cooper Institute organized or participated in the following workshops on issues that affect Island groups and/or communities.

- ❖ presentation on **Root Causes and Effects of Poverty in PEI** to the fourth-year class, UPEI School of Nursing
- ❖ presentation to Christian Council for Reconciliation of Springhill NS on the need to create **Policies and Programs for Prison and Prisoners, based on Social Justice**, dealing with root causes of crime and the over-representation of specific populations (youth and Aboriginal people) in the penal system
- ❖ workshop on **Policy Changes Needed: Jobs for People with Intellectual Challenges** for delegates from PEI People First
- ❖ presentation on **Seniors and Public Policy** for the Seniors United Network AGM
- ❖ presentation on **Feminisms' Principles and Aspiring Feminist Organizations** for the Board of Directors of the Advisory Council on the Status of Women

Organizational Development and Support

Over the past year Cooper Institute provided organizational skills training and support to the following groups:

Public Transportation Coalition - member of committee

Société St. Thomas d'Aquin - participation in Annual General Meeting

Generation XX Summerside - assistance in developing a workshop on the history of Gen XX and on plans for encouraging members' volunteer work

Generation XX Montague - consultation on organizational renewal

Transition House Association - participation in membership meetings around organizational crises. Staff support activity

International Women's Day - member of the organizing committee for 2007 IWD celebration; animation of workshop with PEI women labour leaders; translation; facilitating the IWD forum

Raging Grannies - assistance in organizing and hosting the Maritime Region Raging Grannies gathering

Island Peace Committee - participation in various peace rallies

Growing Circle - organizing a membership/shares drive for the newly formed organic Farmers and citizens cooperative

Electoral Reform: Citizen Assembly Working Group - member of the working group: assistance in organizing one public forum on the process for forming a PEI Citizen Assembly

Inclusion and Empowerment in the Social Economy - participating in research; a community partner; and participating in the Fall Policy Advocacy workshop

Homelessness Initiative - participating in a day-long community workshop

Healthy Eating Alliance - collaborating on behalf of the PEI Working Group for a Livable Income in first steps in the formation of the PEI Food Security Network

Family Reunification - assisting in receiving, and settling of two provincially-nominated Salvadoran immigrant families (8 people) to PEI, where they joined their family members already established on the Island

Rape Crisis Centre - ongoing participation in the Board of Directors as well as in a comprehensive organizational review

Wheatley River Watershed Group - assisting in developing a stewardship plan and monitoring ongoing activities; presented to the committee undertaking province-wide consultations on watershed issues.

Window on the South

Cooper Institute collaborates with various organizations in activities which bring the voice of People from the South to the PEI/Canadian consciousness and vice versa.

Latin American Mission Program - Collaborating in the organizing of the Daniel O'Hanley Memorial Lecture: designing the Lenten Mission Education Program; assisting in the orientation and debriefing session for the DR 2007 Faith and Justice Program for Youth, and in the DR 2009 program.

Rescue Mission Canada - acting as liaison for a relief project

Team/Équipe Canada Healing Hands - acting as liaison for a short-term Rehabilitation Medicine Mission to Haiti

Atlantic Council for International Cooperation - participating in PEI members' educational and promotional events.

Funding for the Work of Cooper Institute

In 2007, as in most years, Cooper Institute's work in and with the community is funded mainly from private sources. This includes: project funding from foundations; income generation, which includes fee for services, arranged with organizations, depending on their ability to pay; and **individual donations**.

Cooper Institute invites more interested people to donate. This can be done through **pre-authorized monthly donations, an annual contribution, and/or a bequest in a Last Will and Testament**. Cooper Institute is a charitable organization. (#10114 4541 RR0001)



Back Row: Marie Hendricken; Leah MacLeod; Darrell Decoursey; Joe Byrne
Middle Row: Eddie Cormier; Michelle MacCallum; Marie Burge; Colette Arsenault; Reg Phelan; Ann Wheatley; Maureen Larkin
Front Row: Irene Burge; Andrew Macdonald; Irene Doyle; Adam MacIsaac