

Advocate for Children and Youth Marks Milestone with a Call to Action

SASKATOON — As Canada marks a milestone on December 13 on the 25th anniversary of the ratification of the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, Corey O'Soup, Saskatchewan's Advocate for Children and Youth, notes that "much more work needs to be done, especially in the area of child poverty." In 1991, Canada joined 192 countries around the globe in accepting the Convention, which spells out the basic human rights to which all children under the age of 18 are entitled.

O'Soup points to Article 27 of the Convention that states, "*Every child has the right to a standard of living that is good enough to meet their physical and social needs and support their development. Governments must help families who cannot afford to provide this.*" He is calling on all levels of government to work together to find answers to the alarming rate of poverty among children in Saskatchewan. "Without an adequate standard of living afforded to our children, they are disadvantaged from the start," O'Soup said. "For years we have heard governments of all political stripes talk about the need to address this pressing issue. But unfortunately, as we see today, rates of child poverty continue at unacceptable levels."

A recently released Campaign 2000 study found that one in four Saskatchewan children were living in poverty in 2014 (64,000 children), compared to 18.5% of children nationally. Among Saskatchewan First Nations, a staggering 57% of children lived in poverty. While in an international context, Canada ranked a disappointing 27th among 36 advanced industrial countries in 2013.

Even with the introduction of programs like the Canada Child Benefit, there will still be about 50,000 Saskatchewan children living in poverty. Last month the Canada Food Banks *Hunger Count* indicated that over 75% of Saskatchewan food banks were feeding more people in 2016 and that almost half of those using them were children and youth under the age of 18.

O'Soup says he understands the financial strains on governments at this time. "However, it is important for government to stop looking at this as an expense and to start looking at it as an investment in our children," he said. "They are our future leaders."

As University of Saskatchewan economist Eric Howe notes improving the levels of education and employment for Indigenous people could, over the longer term, add \$90 billion to the provincial economy. "That would mean money saved in areas like social services, justice and health, money that could then be reinvested in innovative programs and services to help all children get a good start in life," O'Soup added.

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