

## Holes in the social safety net need fixing

Few would argue with at least one expensive, Liberal government advertising slogan: B.C. is, indeed, “the best place on earth” to live. But it’s not the best place on earth for everybody:

- Homelessness has increased dramatically. Between 2002 and 2005 alone, the street homeless population increased by 238 per cent in Metro Vancouver.
- B.C. has Canada’s highest rate of child poverty – a record it has held five years running: 180,000 kids in B.C. (and their families) are living in poverty.
- Thousands of children and youth with special needs and their families, and more than another 2,000 adults with developmental disabilities, are on long and unacceptable waitlists for community living supports and services.
- In 2007 the government increased welfare rates for the first time since 2001, however, welfare incomes are still far below what it costs to live and they are being eaten away by inflation.
- The minimum wage has not been raised in eight years. Women make up 64 per cent of minimum wage earners.
- In 2002, the Liberal government actually cut funding for child care in B.C. – cuts that remain in place today. A poll in 2008 found 85 per cent of British Columbians see lack of affordable child care as a serious issue.

Community social services workers in our communities are also paying the price. Threatened with wholesale contracting out of their jobs, in 2004 they were forced to take \$40 million in cuts to their collective agreements. The government ripped up a promise to give these workers pay and benefits equal to community health workers.

Child care workers face the same struggle. They have seen their wages cut over the years. As in the community social services area, trained professionals are leaving a field that does not pay them a living wage.

And all this happened in what was supposed to be a booming economy. What will happen now that the econ-



omy is broken and government revenues are declining? The talk in Victoria is already about more cuts in services for the most vulnerable people in our society.

More cutbacks in public services and employees will only make the situation worse for people already living on the edge.

### Questions for the Candidates

Here are some questions you might like to ask candidates running in B.C.’s May 12, 2009 provincial election.

1. Do you support the creation of a poverty reduction plan for British Columbia that will cut our poverty rate from 13 to 9 per cent in four years?
2. Do you support raising social assistance rates to reflect the cost of living in British Columbia?
3. Do you support increasing capital and operating funds to provide for adequate facilities and publicly operated programs for adults and children with special needs and to improve counseling and support programs offered in the community social services sector?
4. Community social services workers and child care workers have both seen their real wages fall in recent years. Will you support a program to raise their wages to a level that would allow them to keep working in their sectors?

Authorized by – CUPE BC registered under the Election Act, 604-291-9119