

Check Against Delivery

Central Alberta Poverty Reduction Alliance (CAPRA) Event June 18, 2013 Red Deer Hon Dave Hancock

Thank you for the opportunity to meet and talk with you today.

I want to begin my remarks by making one thing very clear.

I am not here to tell you about poverty and what it means to Central Alberta in particular and Alberta in general.

You know what poverty is.

And you know what poverty means.

You also know that it is a complex problem for which there is no quick-fix solution.

You are the ones who know that poverty is about more than a lack of money.

You know all too well that simply raising the minimum wage will not eliminate poverty.

Charity is not the answer to poverty.

Charity helps, but does not cure.

Just providing affordable housing will not rid us of poverty.

A poor family living in affordable housing is still a family living in poverty.

Creating programs and services that help the poor stay exactly where they are will not eliminate poverty.

You know that just because a family earns above the LICO doesn't mean they're not living in poverty.

You have seen first-hand that poverty is not just about a lack of money – it is often a poverty of opportunity.

You also know that we cannot tweet poverty away.

And that no Facebook post, blog post or newspaper article will actually change the grinding realities of the poor and disadvantaged.

You, better than most, know about the effects of poverty on Alberta and that those effects are broad enough to make poverty everybody's issue.

Having been the Minister of Health and Wellness – Minister of Education – and Minister of Justice and the Attorney General has made one thing very clear to me.

Poverty affects our health system – our education system – our court system – and our delivery of social services.

Too move forward to a better future for all Albertans requires that collectively we accept that poverty is a societal issue for which there must be a societal response.

Government alone cannot eliminate poverty.

It cannot be legislated away.

Communities alone cannot eliminate poverty.

However, government – in collaboration with communities – can – and must – eliminate poverty.

You know that and I know that.

However, that recognition is not necessarily something that is shared by the majority of Albertans.

And that is why I have come to talk with you today.

I am here to ask for your help.

One of the other things you already know is that many of the immediately identifiable aspects of adult poverty are clearly symptoms of problems that were unaddressed much earlier on in life.

Though we must do everything we can to address those immediate issues, we must look beyond them to the root causes of those issues.

And many of the causes of poverty and its negative results begin in childhood.

Eliminating child poverty will require intense, focused direction on the part of government and communities in our province.

That is why the next 12 months will be the year of the child in Alberta.

This follows from the results of Alberta's Social Policy Framework initiative – one of the most collaborative, community-driven, and transparent consultations in Alberta's history.

More than 31,000 people helped create Alberta's Social Policy Framework.

These individuals included Aboriginal Elders, business leaders – non-profit organizations – community groups – service delivery agencies – municipalities, elected officials – Government of Alberta staff – and individuals passionate about creating the future of our province.

The message from these individuals and organizations was clear.

They wanted to see a renewal of social policy with a system-wide focus on co-ownership, collaboration, and transparency.

And they wanted to see all parts of society work together to achieve common goals:

- the protection of vulnerable persons;
- a reduction of inequality;
- increased collaboration; and

- the creation of person-centered delivery and decision-making, aimed at positive outcomes for clients and their families.

Children are some of the most vulnerable Albertans and that is why government has chosen to focus on their needs during the next twelve months.

Alberta's focus on the child began with the passing of the *Children First Act* in May of this year.

The Act includes provisions to strengthen existing legislation and increase support and protection for vulnerable children and their families.

It acknowledges that children are the future of this province.

And that supporting children in becoming successful adults will benefit society as a whole.

The Act also recognizes that raising a child successfully requires a stable family – a caring and engaged community – and the enabling partnership of government.

It also calls for changes to the *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act* to further enable front-line workers to make timely decisions about the children they serve.

It will help us to further address and prevent family violence.

And it increases supports for victims of crime and children's access to justice.

Additionally, it extends the Alberta's Promise initiative for another five years.

Doing so will enable business, agency and community partners to continue to bring forward their inspiring ideas, actions, and investments to help build a brighter future for Alberta's children.

In essence, *Children First* is about breaking down barriers and encouraging collaboration as a way of identifying and meeting the needs of young people.

Children cannot choose the families they are born into.

But with the right supports they have the ability to choose the types of families their children are born into.

Two hundred and ten years ago William Wordsworth wrote:

The child is the father of the man.

He was right.

In the intervening 21 decades, evidence-based research has clearly shown that what we do – WITH – FOR – and TO our children will in great measure determine who they grow to be as adults.

As a result of Alberta's Social Policy Framework discussions, Albertans have been very clear about what they want for the children in our province.

They recognize the benefits that the healthy development of children and families has on our communities – our society – our businesses – and the economy as a whole.

They know that children in healthy environments with opportunities to succeed have a much greater chance of becoming self-reliant, responsible, caring and contributing members of society.

And they know that children who live in poverty – whether that poverty is intellectual – experiential – or monetary – are much less likely to succeed in life.

As we look around our communities, I think most of us would agree that the great majority of children in Alberta DO live in positive environments.

However, despite on-going efforts to support families, not all young people in Alberta are safe and cared for properly.

Some live in dangerous situations that put their future in jeopardy.

Some deal with issues such as poverty, neglect and lack of development and learning opportunities.

And those issues can have devastating and long-lasting consequences for children, families and communities.

I think that we have a common belief in our duty to protect children and to create conditions where they have the best possible chance to succeed.

That is not to say that society trumps the responsibility and rights of parents.

Parents are – and will continue to be – the most important caregivers and teachers in their child's life.

What we need to do is to find ways to work together to better support parents with the difficult job they have in raising their kids.

A child does not come with a parenting manual.

Even the strongest and most caring of families will sometimes face crises and challenges with their children and need help from family and community members.

We need to be there with the right supports and services if and when that happens.

And that is why we have created the *Together We Raise Tomorrow* initiative.

This summer, we are launching a province-wide engagement with Albertans to identify local solutions that create better outcomes for children.

These conversations will inform strategies to reduce poverty, improve early childhood development and to help create a Children's Charter for Alberta.

We want to create open and honest discussions about the complex social issues that affect children and families.

We need active and engaged citizens to continue to drive local solutions forward and implement them.

And that is where you come in.

We need to tap into your expertise, passion and connections with your communities.

I am asking you to engage with your community members to make these discussions meaningful.

I will also be encouraging my MLA colleagues to be part of the process.

I am asking you to contribute your leadership abilities to the transformation of social policy in Alberta – for the benefit of this generation and the next.

You can take the message I am delivering today to your friends – family members – colleagues – and employees and encourage them to participate in the process.

We need people like you to champion transformational change in social policy.

We need you to help people understand that we are not talking about charity.

We are talking about developing programs and supports that will truly enable all Albertans to have the opportunity for success in life.

We need you to help explain why all Albertans have a vested interest in addressing social issues.

They need to know how those social issues aren't just about helping the poor.

They are about determining the health of our economy – the strength of our labour pool – and the safety of our communities.

Becoming actively involved in this engagement is a good place to start.

And you can do that by going to www.socialpolicy.alberta.ca

Eliminating child poverty and improving outcomes for all our children will not be an easy task.

However, we have a clear destination and we will be able to measure our progress toward that destination.

There is already a lot of great work going on in communities in the areas of poverty reduction, parent supports and early childhood development.

We must continue to build on this work and these partnerships to achieve better outcomes for our children.

And you are a critical part of making that happen.

The conversations that will result from *Together We Raise Tomorrow* will be about taking a close look at what's working – what we need to do differently – and how we can work together, to get better results for our kids.

I believe that with the active support and collaboration of people such as you, we are up to the challenge.

Thank you for your invaluable service to your community.

Together, I believe we will create communities where every child and youth in Alberta has the opportunity to succeed and the ability to live with dignity and respect.

Thank you.