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CONTRIBUTORS

# Opinion | Keep the promise to end child poverty

Nov. 15, 2014



In the 25 years since the promise to end child poverty was made in Ottawa, many Canadians have settled into thinking of child poverty as normal, inevitable and permanent.

Dreamstime

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By Arthur Bielfeld , Mary Jo Leddy

It was a rare, brief, shining moment in the House of Commons. It was also real. On Nov. 24, 1989, in a unanimous all-party resolution, the political leaders of this country resolved to end child poverty in Canada by the year 2000.

This promise was made 25 years ago. It is all too easy to lament the fact that this is a promise that has not been kept. There have been steps backward and forward in the struggle to eliminate the scandal of child poverty in this very wealthy country of ours. Yet the poverty remains and the dreams of too many children are deferred.

Adults can afford to wring their hands and shake their heads at the complexity of the problem of child poverty. Grown-ups seem willing to wait for the perfectly practical solution. Older politicians can hide in their silos of ideological difference.



But who will speak for the children?

We are convinced that it is the children themselves who are the most able to speak for each other. It is the children of this country who look us in the face and tell us they cannot wait for another study, for another set of statistics, for another committee or conference, for another empty promise.

This is why a national campaign called [Keep the Promise](#) has been gathering steam. In 30 schools across the country, kids are learning about child poverty, what it means and what they can do to alleviate it. On Nov. 18-19, representatives of these schools will gather in Ottawa to speak for themselves and for kids across this country. The gathering will be live-streamed so that it will gather the voices of thousands of kids who have the moral integrity to look at child poverty and say “it’s just not fair.”

These are the voices we must listen to when we discuss child poverty. Theirs are the eyes we must see through. They are the only votes that matter when we develop our public policies and political priorities. For their sakes we must sit at the table until we make real and effective decisions that will begin to move the morass of apathy in this our promised land.

In the 25 years since the promise was made to end child poverty, many Canadians have settled into thinking of child poverty as normal, inevitable and permanent. We adults can say that to each other but we cannot say this to the children. Not when they look at us and ask “why?”

We cannot keep on saying “tomorrow” to the children of this country. They take promises seriously; they know when they have been broken.

As the Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral has written: “We are guilty of many errors and many faults, but our worst crime is abandoning the children, neglecting the fountain of life. Many of the things we need can wait. The child cannot. Right now is the time his bones are being formed, his blood is being made, and his senses are being developed. To him we cannot answer ‘tomorrow.’ His name is today.”

***Rabbi Arthur Bielfeld and Mary Jo Leddy are the national co-chairs of Keep the Promise.***

Opinion articles are based on the author's interpretations and judgments of facts, data and events. More details

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