

CONTRIBUTORS

Opinion | Hamilton's next city council should make child poverty a priority

The number of children in Hamilton who live in poverty could fill TD Coliseum and Ron Joyce Stadium.

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Carts of food head to Helen Detwiler Elementary School classrooms where for some students, school meals are their main source of nutrition. Instead of eradicating child poverty as promised, the situation is actually getting worse, Doreen Nicoll writes.

John Rennison/Hamilton Spectator file photo

By Doreen Nicoll

Doreen Nicoll is a journalist and podcaster in Burlington. doreenn.substack.com

On May 26, the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton released its report on child poverty, [Family and Child Poverty in Hamilton](#) by Ted Hildebrandt.

This is the first time Hamilton used the Campaign 2000 framework to examine family and child poverty using tax filer data to highlight that Hamilton's child poverty rate of 21.1 per cent in 2023 is higher than both the Canadian (18.3 per cent) and Ontario (19.9 per cent) rates. That means one in five children in Hamilton live in poverty. That's more than 24,000 children who could fill both the TD Coliseum (18,000 capacity) and Ron Joyce Stadium (6,000 capacity).

[Campaign 2000](#) was launched in 1989 by the federal government under Brian Mulroney. The goal was to eradicate child poverty by the year 2000. Solving child poverty has eluded both Conservative and Liberal governments despite funding brilliant research that offered viable solutions.

Campaign 2000s report card, [Investing in Tomorrow](#) (February 2026), lays bare that national child poverty rose for the third consecutive year, with nearly 1.4 million children living in poverty. At the pace the Liberals and Conservatives are going, eradicating child poverty will take 400 years.

When first introduced, the [Canada Child Benefit](#) (CCB), raised children out of poverty, but it no longer has the power to do that. During the Ontario Basic Income Pilot and while folks were receiving Canada Emergency Relief Benefit (CERB), families were able to improve their social determinants of health. Under CERB the national child poverty rate declined 40 per cent from 2019 to 2020 — the largest year over year decrease since the federal government decided to eradicate child poverty.

We know the solutions and we have the money, so what is keeping governments from implementing the basic, sustainable solutions that would keep Canadian children out of poverty?

Professors Dennis Raphael and Toba Bryant just finished writing a paper titled, "Is Promoting Health Equity Through a Well-being Economy a Trojan Horse for a Post-Capitalist Socialist Economy? Will it Make it Through the Public Policy Gates?"

It disproves the well-being economy which essentially is an economic model designed to prioritize the health of people and the planet over Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth. This is the type of economy in which all Canadian children would thrive.

Unfortunately, Liberal and Conservative governments are more than happy to fund robust research into the various ways child poverty could be eradicated. What those governments lack is the political will to create and implement policy that would effectively end child poverty.

Instead, these governments wait until researchers become frustrated and leave their field or move onto a different field of research. Incoming researchers who are enthusiastic and naïve are given a new strategy to investigate and research, like say, the well-being economy. Despite being thorough and meticulous with their research and recommendations, the work sits on a shelf somewhere and is never implemented. And, so the cycle goes because ending child poverty does not improve the GDP as much as military contracts or building pipelines or even cleaning up major oil spills.

Governments are over a quarter century past the original deadline of 2000, yet during those 37 years child poverty increased and it has, I would argue, reached epic proportions.

The well being economy is as much a Trojan horse for bringing post capitalist discourse into the public policy arena as Campaign 2000 was for ending child poverty.

It's time to push beyond the familiar and embrace politicians and parties that are actually going to generate the necessary changes that will lead to realistic, lasting policy changes that really benefit Canadian children.

This fall, ask municipal candidates how they plan to lift Hamilton's children out of poverty; improve their housing, education and health care; and how they will motivate the provincial government to live up to its obligations for implementing \$10 per day child care and building truly affordable housing. Because Hamilton's kids deserve better.

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