

My Experience at Martha Justice Ministry: Basic Income & Poverty Eradication

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This semester, I was assigned to Martha Justice Ministry for my service-learning placement at St FX University. During this experience, I collaborated with Darlene, the Coordinator of Martha Justice Ministry. In our initial discussions, Darlene provided information about the various organizations and causes the Martha Justice Ministry supports. When Darlene asked about my specific area of interest, I initially had uncertainty. After Darlene shared a report by Food Banks Canada, I realized what I wanted to learn more of.

The Food Banks Canada [Poverty Report Card](#) graded Nova Scotia an F in relation to poverty. This wasn't a surprise considering 61% of Nova Scotia residents say that they have witnessed an increase in poverty where they live and 53% of people in Nova Scotia feel that they are worse off than they were a year ago. This isn't just an issue in Nova Scotia. Other maritime provinces received low grades such as PEI and New Brunswick compared to the rest of Canada.

After more research I looked into the realities many Canadians face. Poverty is an actuality for at least 2.8 million Canadians and tonight approximately 35,000 Canadians will sleep in shelters, in some form of temporary accommodation, or worst of all on the streets. Poverty affects Canadians in many areas, as it's the best predictor of early illness, food security, poor education, and for some trouble with the law. A Toronto doctor, Dr. Gary Bloch, has said that poverty is more harmful to a person's health than obesity, smoking, and high blood pressure. And the John Howard Society of Ontario stated that "poverty prevention is crime prevention." To make things worse, it's the already most vulnerable populations that are affected the most by poverty. The highest rates of poverty consist of single parents, racialized populations, immigrants, and Indigenous peoples. After this research, I concluded I wanted to work with Darlene on issues of poverty, specifically looking at how a solution to poverty eradication could be through Basic Income.

Over the course of my placement, I got to attend several meetings of the Basic Income Atlantic Canada coalition (Martha Justice Ministry is a founding member), created a podcast for Social Justice Radio on the topic, and did a research paper on the importance of an implementation of a Basic Income. If you are unsure of what a Basic Income is, it's the idea that everyone should be guaranteed some minimum amount of money to meet their basic needs and have an acceptable standard of living regardless of their circumstances. I investigated several reasons Basic Income would be a great benefit to Canadians and step to eradicating poverty.

Firstly, Basic Income is an important step to eliminating stigma around receiving help as social assistance and programs currently in place often make you prove you are "worthy" of receiving help. People often can be judged and looked down on by others for receiving assistance, too. However, if the government transferred money to individuals without strings attached no one would have to jump through hoops to receive the help they need, and stigma would be

eliminated as everyone would be receiving the Basic Income. Furthermore, people who currently do not have assistance programs available to them would not be left out.

Since we are talking about Canada, it's also important to mention seasonal and temporary jobs, a challenge well known to many Canadians. Many people, especially those in the Maritimes, rely on seasonal work. Most Canadians cannot simply rely on their seasonal work income for just part of the year. Considering that there are two-thirds fewer jobs in the winter compared to summer in Canada, this is an issue. Basic Income would ensure people can meet their needs all year long.

In addition to the issue of seasonal jobs, Canada has experienced an increased number of temporary jobs. These jobs are increasing at a much faster rate than the number of permanent jobs, with a 2.58% growth rate since 1997. This causes Canadians with these jobs the uncertainty of whether or where they will be working within the next months or years. Additionally, temporary jobs are unpredictable as hours can vary from week to week, thus, income can heavily vary from paycheck to paycheck. A Basic Income could give Canadians with temporary jobs a sense of ease. Even if they do lose their job, or their hours are cut, they would still have a Basic Income so they can simply survive. This is another reason Basic Income would be beneficial to Canadians and creating equality.

Ecological justice must also be mentioned when discussing the benefits of a Basic Income. As climate change worsens, and Canada works towards a greener future, certain jobs will be cut. A Basic Income would be a source of economic security for Canadians who could lose their livelihood because of this transition. In addition, a Basic Income could enable Canadians to afford "greener" alternatives in their personal purchases. As the reality facing our future changes, it's important to consider this.

It's also important to note how there have been several examples showing just how Basic Income works. A pilot project introduced in the 1970s, in Dauphin, Manitoba, showed how basic income improved poverty rates. Additionally, it showed that hospitalization rates declined by 8.5% in just four years and more students completed high school than they did before the project. Furthermore, in 2020, CERB created a dip in Canadian poverty rates, but once the pandemic benefits were reduced in 2021, poverty rates climbed back upwards. As well, in Finland, a 2-year Basic Income study showed a positive impact on employment, life satisfaction increased significantly, the participants reported better health, higher confidence levels, lower levels of depression, and lastly, higher levels of trust in both the government and their futures.

I could continue to name the benefits and reasons Canada should implement a Basic Income but that might make this article 10 pages long! So instead, I will encourage anyone reading to continue to look at the reasons a Basic Income is important to creating equity and equality in our communities.

My experience with the Martha Justice Ministry this semester was a great learning opportunity and eye-opener on the issues facing Canadians and the need for a Basic Income. As I move into

next semester as a political science student and onto a job after graduation, I will take all that I have learned with me. I can only hope one day a Basic Income will be implemented and poverty will be eradicated. I do know there are many change-makers dedicating their time and efforts to the cause, such as Darlene and the Martha Justice Ministry, whose efforts I believe will one day pay off.

To learn more about the Basic Income Atlantic Canada coalition and to sign the consensus statement, you can go to: <https://www.big-ns.org/atlantic-canada-basic-income-now>