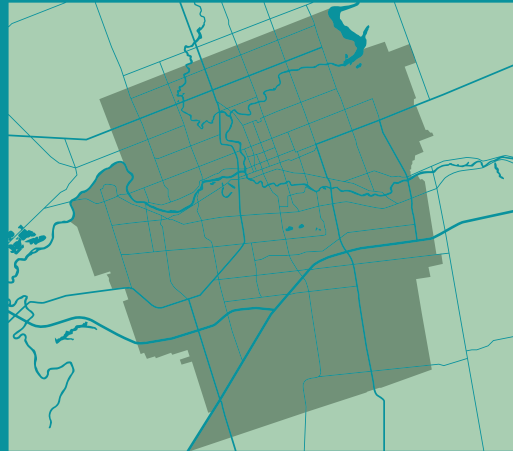
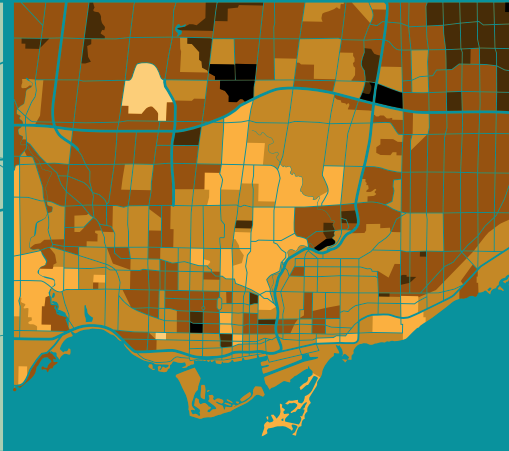


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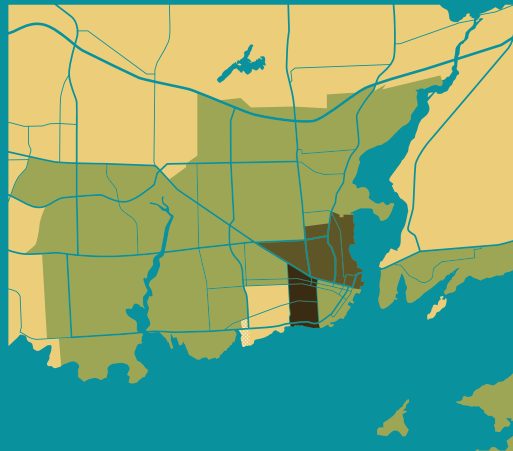
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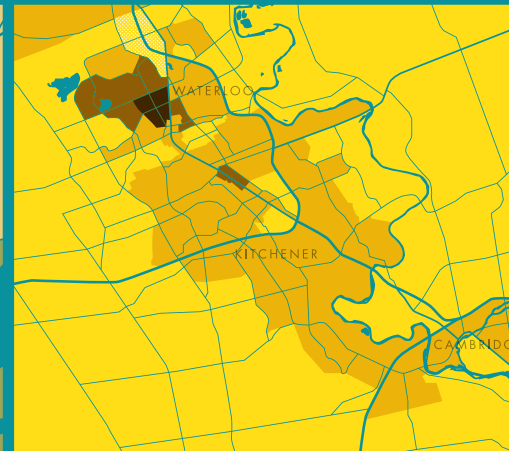
Toronto



Thunder Bay



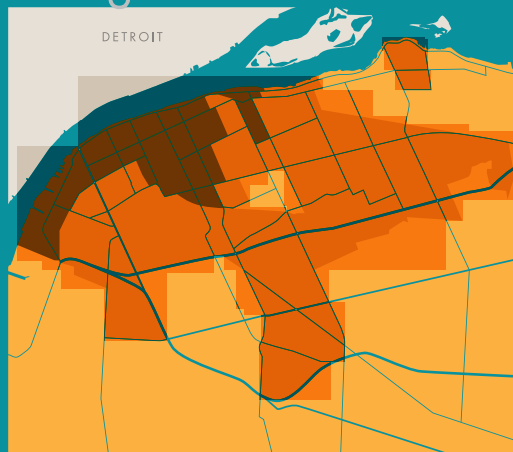
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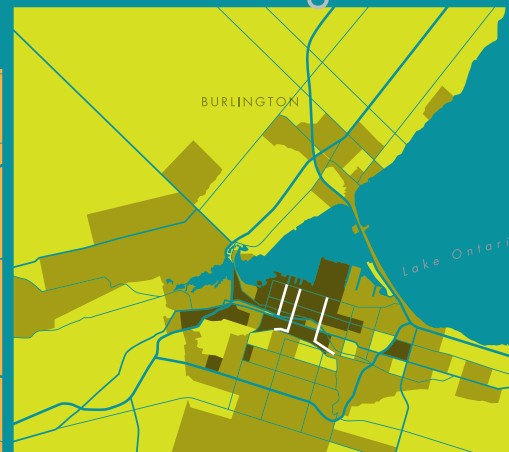
Waterloo Region



Sudbury



Windsor



Hamilton

**Maps you'll never find at the gas station**  
**Ontario's Working Poor**

A periodic magazine examining Ontario policy, published by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives' Ontario office (CCPA-Ontario). The CCPA-Ontario office is located in Toronto and specializes in provincial and municipal issues. We deliver original, independent, peer-reviewed, non-partisan research.

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## Is Working Poverty Coming to Your Neighbourhood?

Trish Hennessy  
Director, CCPA-Ontario

Summertime is about slowing down: taking a road trip, getting off the beaten path, relaxing with a stack of books and your favourite magazines.

This issue of *OnPolicy* gives you a road map to working poverty in nine Ontario cities. It's not the kind of map you'll come across at the gas station or at the tourism bureau.

The stories were made possible by the vision of the Metcalf Foundation, which came up with the mapping poverty by neighbourhood idea. That vision was brought to life through the collaboration of John Stapleton, Metcalf Foundation innovation fellow, David Hulchanski, University of Toronto professor, and Brian Murphy at Statistics Canada — all of whom went to great lengths to mine Statistics Canada data and create data snapshots of working poverty in cities across Canada.

In this issue, we showcase brief snapshots of working poverty in Ottawa, London, Toronto, Thunder Bay, Kingston, Waterloo Region, Sudbury, Windsor and Hamilton.

In some of these cities, the rate of working poverty increased between 2006 and 2012. Some of that increase reflects the changing nature of Ontario's labour market: many good paying jobs in sectors such as manufacturing are being replaced by more precarious, lower paying jobs. In this issue, you'll get a sense of how the rise of working poverty is changing some neighbourhoods in Ontario.

In many cases, neighbourhoods that experi-

enced an increase in working poor residents reflects the reality of low-paying work: you go to where the rent is cheaper, even if that means you're further away from good public transit options that you need to get to work.

If you are working poor, it is not enough that your struggle to make ends meet likely means the money runs out before the month does. The dream of home ownership wanes. Dental work and expensive drugs for medical conditions are very likely beyond your financial grasp, as Isabella Daley writes in her compelling contribution to this edition.

If the reality of being among the working poor isn't bad enough, you have to endure unrealistic portrayals of working poverty.

Some big business lobbyists will dismiss your low wages by claiming your work is of little value. I hear it when I debate them on radio and TV.

They will actually lament "working poor" small business owners without any empathy for the workers struggling to get by on a minimum wage that falls far below the living wage line in every jurisdiction across Canada.

What they are actually dismissing is the daily grind of working poverty: scrounging for transit fare; choosing grocery items with a red "reduced" or "special" tag on them; lining up at the bank hoping against hope the teller will let you keep all of your paycheque without putting some funds "on hold" for 10 days because you don't have a fat savings account or stock investments. I've been there and it isn't pretty.

Working poverty is not an inevitable phenomenon. In this issue, we point to some solutions, such as improving food security and providing dental benefits for the working poor, raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour, improving working conditions for low-wage work in sectors such as retail and tackling precariousness in what used to be a "good job" — academe.

And there is much more to do to uphold the social promise that if you work, it should pay enough to make ends meet. ■





Child poverty, seniors' poverty and poverty among immigrants were issues that had long been discussed and described in Canada's largest province, but working poverty had not been thoroughly analyzed at a subnational level.

To address this concern, the Metcalf Foundation published two reports on working poverty: *The Working Poor in the Toronto Region: Who They Are, Where They Live, and How Trends are Changing in 2012*; and *The Working Poor in the Toronto Region: Mapping Working Poverty in Canada's Richest City in 2015*.

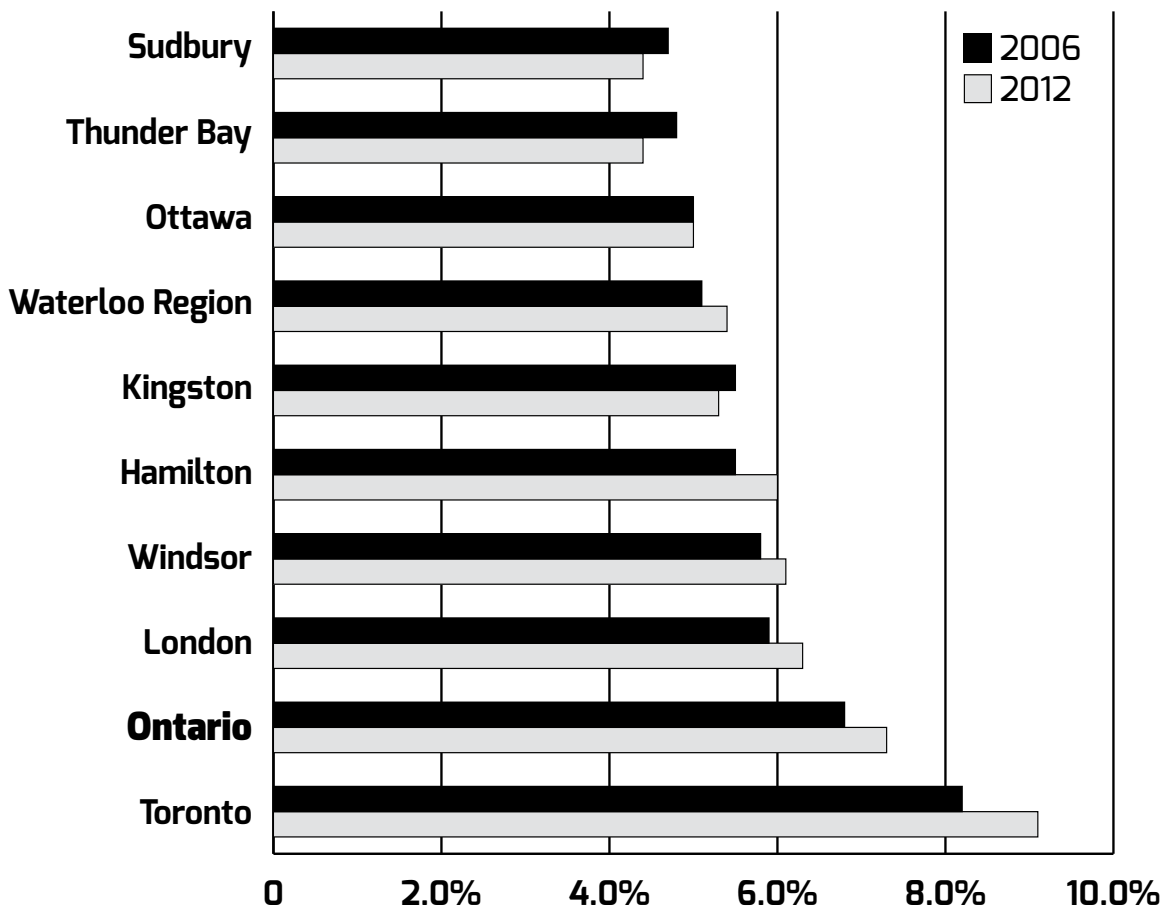
## Documenting Working Poverty By Neighbourhood

John Stapleton

In 2009, during the depths of the worst recession since the Great Depression, many labour market and social policy analysts speculated that poverty would increase across Ontario.

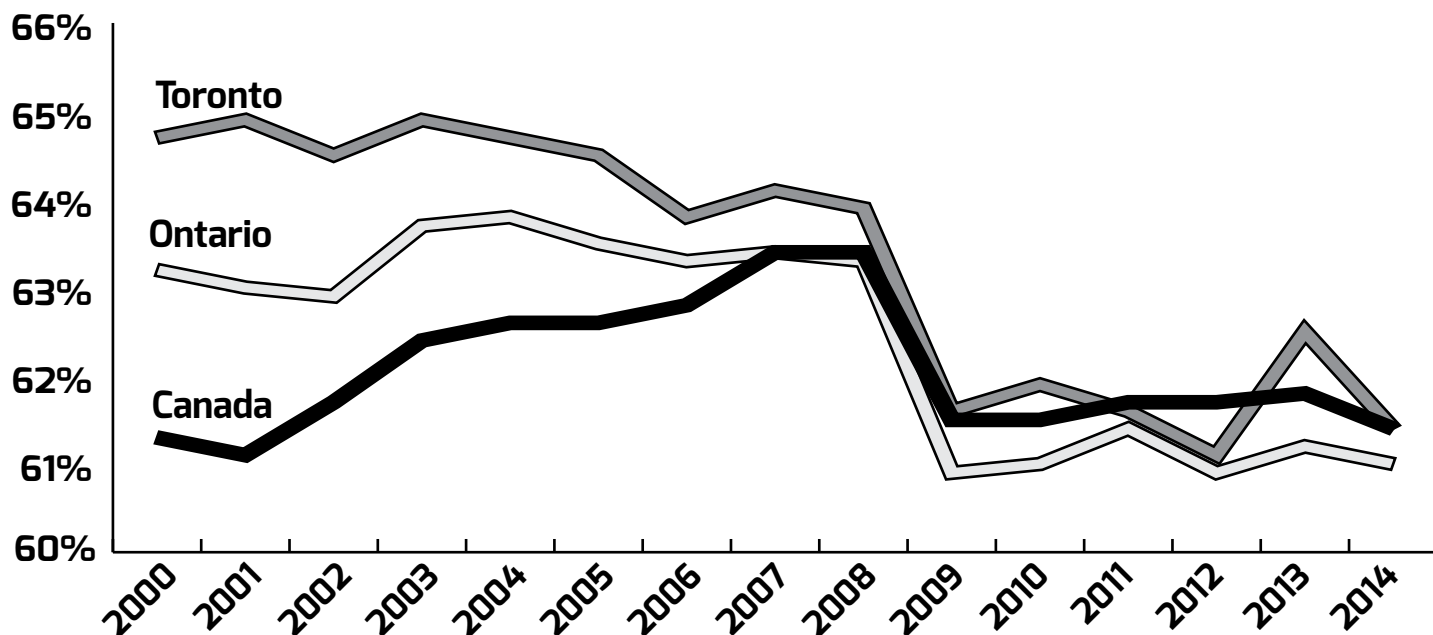
The Metcalf Foundation collaborated with Statistics Canada and the University of Toronto's Neighbourhood Change Research Partnership to purchase and reproduce a suite of working poverty maps for a number of cities across

### Percentage of working poor individuals among the working age population



**Note:** Working age population defined as individuals who are between 18 and 64, non-students and living on their own. Working status refers to persons having earnings no less than \$3,000. Poor status refers to individuals with census family income below the Low Income Measure (50% of adjusted after-tax median income of all Canadians). Working poor status 2006 and 2012 determined from taxfiler data (T1FF).

## Employment rates for Canada, Ontario and Toronto CMA, 2000–2014



Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, Table 282-0055

Canada.

These maps have been provided to a number of municipalities, research consortiums, universities, academics and advocacy groups to do their own analysis and tell their own stories about working poverty across the country.

Until now, the suite of maps for 2006-2012 has only been available for the City of Toronto and the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area (CMA). With this publication, we present the working poverty maps for eight additional Ontario CMAs: Hamilton, Kingston, Waterloo Region, London, Ottawa, Sudbury, Thunder Bay and Windsor.

The Toronto CMA has the highest level of working poverty in Ontario and plays a significant role in raising the overall average for larger Ontario CMAs.

Toronto has the highest percentage of working poor in the country, followed closely by Canada's second largest city: Vancouver.

Working poverty is most highly concentrated in our biggest cities.

Among Ontario cities, London stands in second place, with a working poverty rate of 6.3 per cent. But northern Ontario cities like Sudbury and Thunder Bay all show reductions in the number of working poor between 2006 and 2012. Both show a working poverty rate of less than 5.7 per cent.

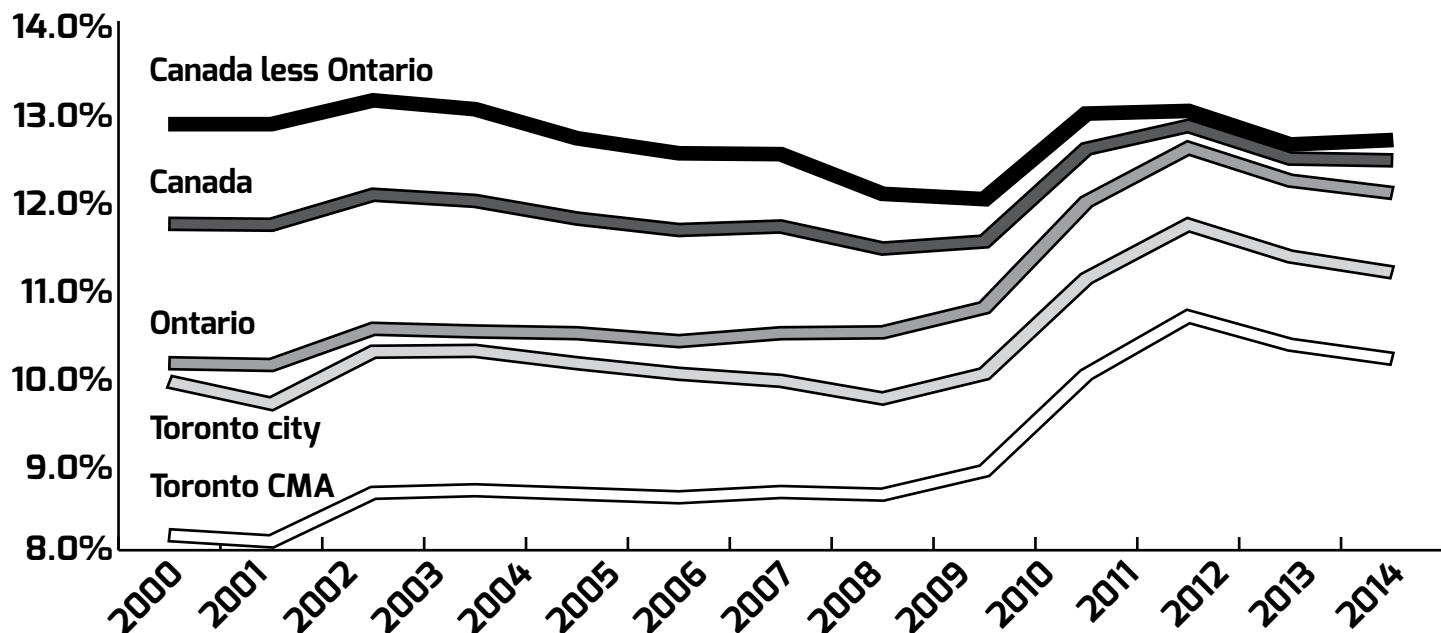
Metcalf's first report showed large increases in working poverty between 2000 and 2005 and a moderating trend between 2006 and 2012.

This message of moderating growth rates is accompanied by two countervailing factors. The first is that a number of social policy interventions — new income supports and minimum wage increases — have helped prevent some people from falling into working poverty.

New income supplements, such as the Working Income Tax Benefit, the Ontario Child Benefit, and the Universal Child Care Benefit, have all put a bit more money in the pockets of the working poor.

The second is that overall employment rates fell. From 2006 to 2012, the proportion of individuals in the paid workforce in Ontario decreased

## Government transfers as a share of total income



Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, Table 282-0055

by 2.2 percentage points, from an employment rate of 64.7 per cent in 2000 to 63.2 per cent in 2006 and 61.0 per cent in 2012.

During this same period, welfare reciprocity increased by one percentage point, from 5.5 per cent of Ontario's population to 6.5 per cent.

Thus, the growth in working poverty that we saw between 2006 and 2012 was accompanied by decreases in labour force participation and increases in welfare reciprocity.

This means that against a backdrop of a shrinking proportion of employed individuals, the proportion of the working poor grew.

There were slightly more working poor people in 2012 than in 2006. In 2006, the working poor in Ontario made up 6.8 per cent of the working age population; in 2012 they made up 7.3 per cent.

For some employed individuals, by 2012 the combination of income supplements and increased wages likely had the effect of tipping their incomes above the Low Income Measure after-tax (LIM-AT).

For others, this increased income may have decreased the depth of their poverty without affecting their inclusion in the low-income category.

Median incomes also increased slightly, so the LIM-AT threshold of \$19,930 was slightly higher in 2011 than it was in 2005 (\$16,163). Yet increases to the number of insurable hours needed to qualify for Employment Insurance (EI) have made it harder for some workers to qualify for benefits.

In Ontario, the general minimum wage was frozen at \$6.85 an hour in 1995. Between 2000 and 2005, the adult minimum wage moved from \$6.85 to \$7.45 an hour — a 60-cent increase over five years.

Between 2006 and 2010, the minimum wage increased from \$7.45 to \$10.25 an hour — an increase of \$2.80 an hour, or 37.6 per cent, over five years.

The minimum wage is now \$11.25 an hour and is indexed.

But in this report's time frame, the hourly wage

rate of some of our lowest paid workers saw an increase that was more than four times greater than the increases during 2000 to 2005.

The Consumer Price Index increased by 11.6 per cent between 2000 and 2006 and by 10.8 per cent between 2006 and 2012. Thus, the largest increase in minimum wages also came during a period when the cost of living grew more slowly.

Between 2006 and 2012, there were also new government transfers and increases to existing transfer payments that contributed to the after-tax incomes of the working poor.

The fact that the slight increase we see in working poverty is taking place at the same time as overall employment figures are declining magnifies the significance of the increase. It points to changes within the labour market itself that are making it harder for members of the working poor to get ahead.

The story of the working poor is embedded in larger labour market trends. For example, a decline in working poverty may indicate that incomes are rising or it may indicate that fewer poor people are working.

Similarly, an increase in working poverty may indicate that more poor unemployed people are working or that the incomes of some employed individuals are declining, causing them to join the ranks of the working poor.

During times of economic growth, as in 2000 to 2005, it is not unusual to see working poverty expand as poor unemployed individuals move into employment.

From 2006 to 2012, however, working poverty continued to grow and employment rates were lower than they were in 2000 or 2005.

There has been a great deal of recent research and analysis documenting shifts in the labour market, and much of the analysis points to worsening labour market conditions for some categories of workers and some groups of people.

### **The Metcalf Foundation defines a member of the working poor as someone who:**

- has an after-tax income below the Low-income Measure (LIM)
- has earnings of at least \$3,000 a year
- is between the ages of 18 and 64
- is not a student
- lives independently

It defines “working” as those individuals with at least \$3,000 in employment earnings. This \$3,000 income floor is the threshold for recipients of the federal Working Income Tax Benefit (WITB).

We posit that many of these worsening conditions have contributed to the growth of working poverty from 2000 to 2012.

Job loss has been the predominant narrative for Ontario’s manufacturing sector. Employment dropped from 1.1 million in 2004 to 800,000 in 2012. Historically, many jobs in this sector have not required post-secondary education and have offered secure, family-sustaining employment to a workforce that was predominantly male and white.

Shifts in the labour market suggest less employment income for a growing segment of the working population. So while good social policy and programs are clearly important tools in the fight against poverty, the social impact of labour market policy is also critical.

Finally, Canada’s two richest cities (Toronto and Vancouver) are becoming giant modern-day Downton Abbeys, where a well-to-do knowledge class relies on a large cadre of working poor who pour their coffee, serve their food, clean their offices and relay their messages from one office to another.

This professional knowledge class relies on the working poor to maintain their gardens, mind their children and clean their houses.

What we see in smaller cities in Ontario in many ways is explained by the Downton Ab-



Photo: by EahJoseph / CC BY 2.0

bey effect in Toronto and Vancouver.

All the other cities have lower rates of working poverty because they do not have a similar fast growing and very well-to-do knowledge class of sunshine listers, bankers, investors and head office professionals.

In addition, the bifurcation between fast growing service entry, working poor jobs and knowledge class jobs versus a very slow growing or declining set of middle class jobs is not as evident in cities smaller than Vancouver and Toronto.

In this light, it is very significant that all three of Ontario's northern CMAs — Thunder Bay, North Bay and Sudbury — all experienced net declines in working poverty between 2006 and 2012.

Kingston and Ottawa — public service towns with constraints on public sector growth during the period — also experienced a decline in working poverty (Kingston) or no growth (Ottawa).

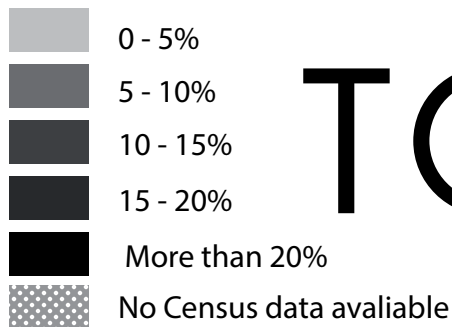
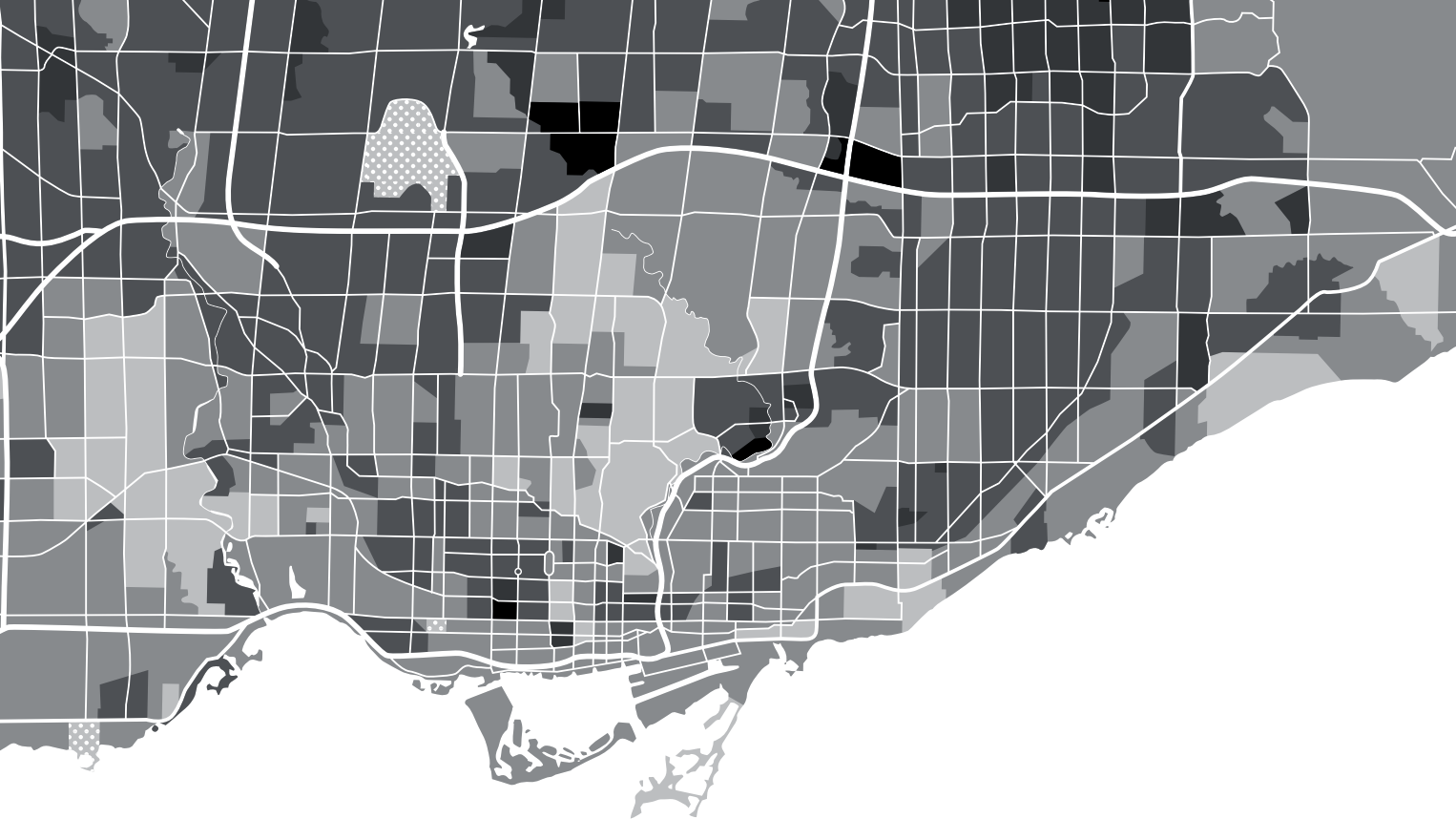
This tells us that we have to be extremely careful with conclusions about seemingly good news: declines in working poverty also signal declines and constraints in good jobs.

But it also tells us something else about the way we live as Ontarians.

Growth in good full-time jobs paying excellent salaries and wages, combined with job security and adequate pensions, should not be a bellwether for a parallel rise in working poverty.







# TORONTO

## WORKING POOR BY NEIGHBOURHOOD

5:25...5:27...5:28.

As the minutes tick by on a hot, stuffy afternoon, drivers crawl toward the intersection of Warden and Ellesmere in Scarborough.

Home is not far but the traffic approaching this intersection, which *The Globe and Mail* once described as one of the top 10 most congested in Toronto, is agonizingly slow today.

Not far from the busy intersection, well-manicured lawns in front of detached homes suggest a pride of residency in the area.

However, for some, life can be arduous.

Residents who live there face longer travel times to land jobs. They also have the worst access to the city's subway system.

These images stand in contrast to the popular descriptions of Toronto: a highly educated, bustling city below the CN Tower with nationally significant cultural and sports venues attended by an upwardly mobile workforce employed in communications, information, and an increasingly important financial sector.

In other words, Toronto is a stratified metropolis — undergoing what John Stapleton and Jamin Kay have called “Manhattanization,” due to rising housing costs pushing poorer people out of the core.

In their report, *The Working Poor: Mapping Working Poverty in Canada's Richest City*, Stapleton and Kay examine data from both the city of Toronto and what they call the Toronto region, a synonym for the more formal Toronto Census Metropolitan Area.

It includes the city of Toronto, York Region, the Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation, Peel Region, Durham Region, Halton Region, parts of Simcoe County and parts of Dufferin County.

The 2008-09 financial crisis hit the Toronto region hard. In 2012, the rate of working poverty in Toronto was 9.1 per cent, up from 8.2 per cent in 2006 — an increase of 11 per cent.

That's the highest rate of working poverty in all of Ontario.

Working poverty is more concentrated in the inner suburbs than in the city core.

For example, working poor individuals among the working age population in Scarborough reached 12 per cent in 2012. Stapleton and Kay also "note a major deepening in the incidence of working poverty in census tracts in the northern parts of Toronto."

They describe two major economic trends affecting workers in the Toronto region: a 50 per cent rise in precarious employment in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area and a reduction in opportunities for worker advancement up the corporate ladder.

Getting by on low income in a city like Toronto can be tough: Toronto's real estate prices are so high, even the Bank of Canada governor has warned that it "is unlikely to be sustained." The Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association says the wait list for affordable housing in Toronto grew by 5.1 per cent between 2014 and 2015. That's 82,414 households who are waiting; and the wait for families could be as long as 10 years.

Child care is also a burden: a CCPA-Ontario report on Toronto's living wage showed that the cost of child care is a young family's biggest expense.

**Nickname:** Hogtown, TO, T-dot, the Six

**Population:** 2,615,060 (Toronto, not GTA)

**Founding population:**  
Mississauga of New Credit

**Profile:** High immigrant population, 160 languages spoken in the Toronto CMA

**Bread & butter:** Financial industry, arts and culture industries

**Economic challenges:** high housing prices, lack of affordable housing, highest cost of living in Canada, increasing contract and temporary work

**Notable:** Capital of Ontario, 12.5 per cent of land base is maintained parkland, largest public library system in Canada

**Working poor:** 9.1 per cent in 2012, up from 8.2 per cent in 2006

**Working poor zones:** Increasingly, the inner suburbs

**City motto:** Diversity our Strength

The City of Toronto has approved a poverty reduction strategy, but without direct funding to make it happen, it remains a plan without action. Social justice advocates are looking to the next city budget to ensure the strategy becomes more than mere words.

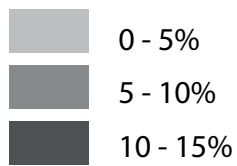
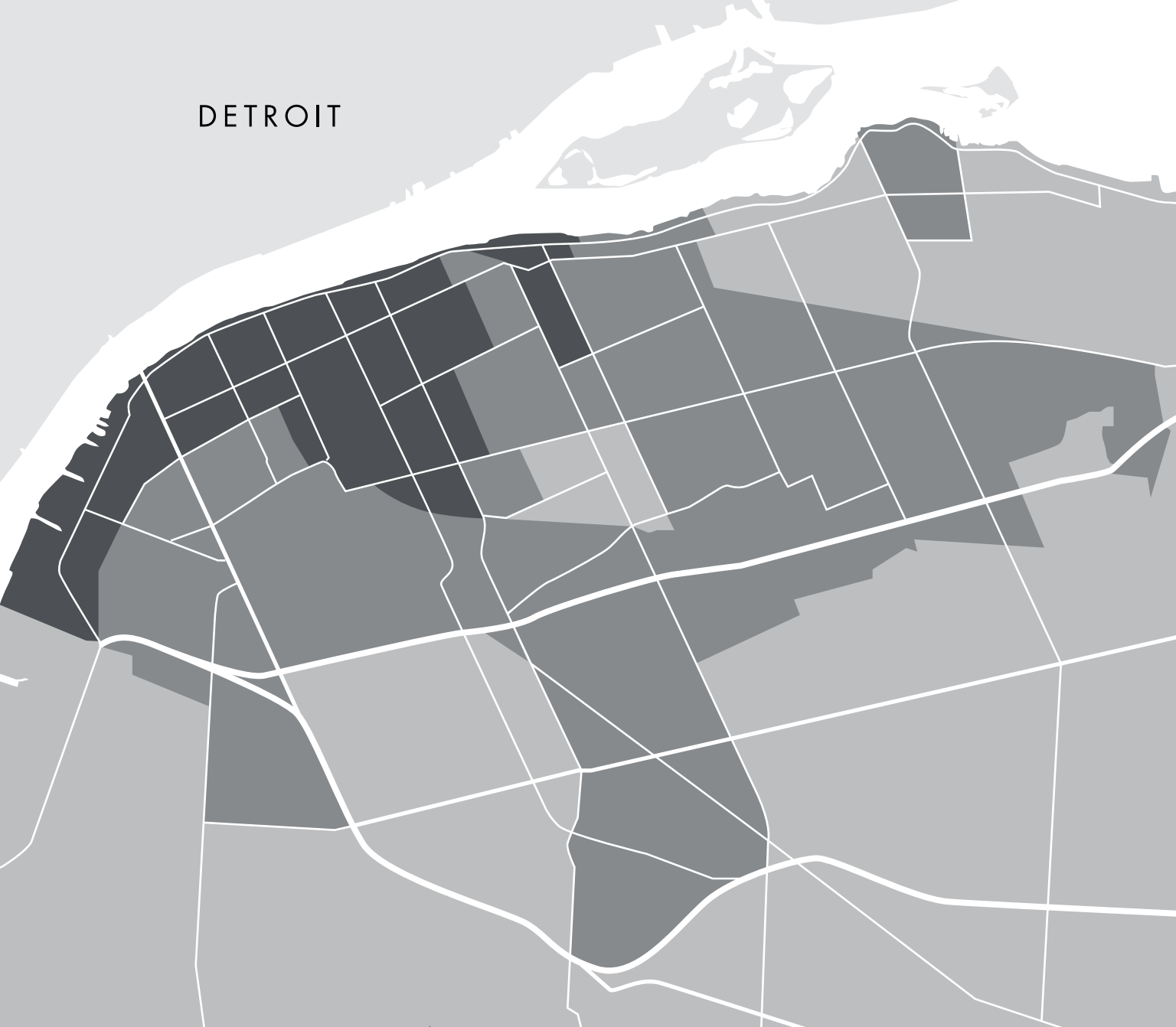
Meanwhile, Toronto remains a city characterized by income inequality, diversity, hope and struggle.

Toronto is a dynamic region but it faces significant challenges, especially outside of its city core. These challenges will likely only intensify if they are left to fester. ■

*Written by Joe Fantauzzi.*



DETROIT



# WINDSOR

WORKING POOR BY NEIGHBOURHOOD

Across the Detroit River from an economically battered American car town sits the city of roses.

Windsor, the “Automotive Capital of Canada,” was headquarters for the Canadian arms of Big Three American automakers: General Motors, Ford and Chrysler.

In 2005, the effects of Canada’s declining automotive industry crept into Windsor.

The 2008 global recession only exacerbated the problem and the automotive industry largely pulled out. General Motors left, resulting in a loss of more than 5,000 jobs virtually overnight. Chrysler downsized significantly, estimated to be another 10,000 jobs lost. Ford closed one en-

gine plant — another loss of 5,000 jobs.

Consequently, Windsor's manufacturing sector declined by 5.76 percentage points.

Windsor residents also relied on a number of service sector jobs that were spin-offs of the dwindling automotive sector, says Rielly McLaren, St. Leonard's House chaplain.

Between 2006 and 2012, the unemployment rate in Windsor increased from 9 per cent to 9.7 per cent — an unemployment hotspot in Ontario. Windsor finished 2015 with a 9.8 per cent unemployment rate but the most recent Statistics Canada data show the rate had fallen to 6.4 per cent in May 2016.

The working poverty rate also increased from 5.8 per cent in 2006 to 6.1 per cent in 2012. During this period, the city's population decreased from almost 216,473 in 2006 to 210,891 in 2011.

Stable, well-paying manufacturing jobs are getting replaced with precarious services jobs, mainly in construction, business services and service jobs in information, culture and recreation.

The housing market in Windsor has also been depressed, due to a high rate of foreclosures and properties decreasing in value, McLaren notes.

This contributed to an increased demand for rental units, which raised the rents downtown. As a result, the working poor became priced out of the main downtown area and displaced to surrounding neighbourhoods, flocking to live in clusters of low-income apartment buildings and attached units.

Such neighbourhoods included Glengarry, Ouellette, Ford City, Sandwich Town and the Prince Road area. These working poor communities have high concentrations of single-parent families, single adults, new immigrants, Aboriginal Peoples and refugees.

As well-paying jobs were lost and property values decreased, suburban neighbourhoods

**Nickname:** City of roses;  
automotive capital of Canada

**Population:** 210,891

**Profile:** A historically white working-class city, 21 per cent of residents are racialized

**Bread & butter:** Automotive sector, manufacturing

**Economic challenges:**  
Declining auto industry

**Notable:** Rum runner during American prohibition

**Working poor:** 6.1 per cent in 2012, up from 5.8 per cent in 2006

**Working poor zones:** Glengarry, Ouellette, Ford City, Sandwich Town and Prince Road area

**City motto:** The river and the land sustain us

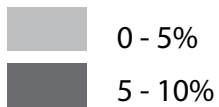
south and southwest of the downtown core experienced an increase in working poverty.

In contrast, the more affluent suburbs of Windsor, such as La Salle, experienced a decrease in working poverty.

There is a high incidence of first-time poverty — those residents who only recently fell into poverty, mostly due to the recession. Poor residents often work multiple part-time jobs, which is not fully captured in the working poverty calculation used in this report, says Adam Vasey, director of Pathway to Potential.

McLaren says the residents of Windsor view Ontario's poverty reduction strategies as "stopping at London." But residents are open to creative solutions to enhance the community. ■

*Written by Joe Fantauzzi with files from Naveed Ahmed.*



# LONDON

## WORKING POOR BY NEIGHBOURHOOD

The City of London lies between Windsor and Toronto, at the confluence of the Thames River.

London is a regional centre for education and medical research. Automotive, insurance and information technology are also significant sectors.

London had a thriving automotive and insurance sector for many years, but studies suggested that the city's economy was depressed due to a lack of economic diversification, as other sectors had little growth by comparison, according to Glen Pearson, director of the London Food Bank and a former Member of Parliament.

The recession hit the city hard: from 2006 to 2012, unemployment increased from 6.2 per cent to 8.7 per cent. Working poverty increased from 5.9 per cent to 6.3 per cent. London's unemployment rate has since fallen (it was 7 per cent in May 2016), but the city's manufacturing sector has been significantly impacted, decreasing by 4.02 per cent.

Factory closures, such as Ford Talbotville, the Electro-Motive plant, and McCormicks' candy and cookies business, were particularly hard on working-class residents.

As the bottom of the manufacturing sector fell out, accompanied by the mutual decline of their supporting businesses, thousands of well-paying jobs were lost. Agriculture and educational services also declined by over a percentage point each.

Losses in jobs and services were complemented with gains in the retail, construction and health care sectors. However, the majority of these positions were part-time, precarious or low paying.

The London Economic Development Corporation was developed to grow and expand local business as well as attract new business, its website states. However some experts, such as Pearson, argue that it has not worked. They say many potentially employable people have moved to Kitchener or Waterloo.

A noted decrease in working poverty in the Old East Village aligns with gentrification. There was a recent police crackdown on homelessness and drug use in that neighbourhood (possibly linked to the mental health hospital closure), while London Care moved many homeless people into housing.

As a result, working poverty increased in neighbourhoods surrounding the downtown core — neighbourhoods with more affordable housing and community services, such as food banks and resource clinics, according to Ross Fair, chairperson of Fanshaw College's St. Thomas/Elgin Regional Campus.

Some good news: the Carling area, just east of

**Nickname:** The Forest City

**Population:** 366,151

**Profile:** 82 per cent of the population is of European descent

**Bread & butter:** Medical research, insurance/financial industries, manufacturing, information technology

**Economic challenges:** Manufacturing slump, a spate of plant closures

**Notable:** Manufacturing sector employs 30,000 people, has become a "secondary immigration stop" for newcomers to Ontario

**Working poor:** By 2012, 6.3 per cent of working age adults could be considered working poor, up from 5.9 per cent in 2006

**Working poor zones:** Pond Mills, White Oaks

Western University, saw an increase in affordable housing (low-income rentals and co-ops), Fair notes. These neighbourhoods did not register an increase in working poverty greater than two percentage points between 2006 and 2012.

The Pond Mills and White Oaks communities registered an increase in working poverty.






Though working poverty is being pushed in most directions from the downtown core, a relative abundance of affordable housing is helping to thwart a full-blown housing crisis. But the waitlist for affordable housing is still four years long. ■

*Written by Joe Fantauzzi with files from Naveed Ahmed.*



# WATERLOO REGION

## WORKING POOR BY NEIGHBOURHOOD

-  0 - 5%
-  5 - 10%
-  10 - 15%
-  15 - 20%
-  No Census data available

**L**ook around you.

Chances are great that at least one person will be using a smartphone or tablet.

It's hard to fathom our world without such

technology — or the Ontario region which, for many years, was among the heart of that revolution: Waterloo.

The Waterloo Region, which includes the cities of Waterloo, Kitchener, Cambridge and the four townships of Woolwich, Wilmot, Wellesley and

North Dumfries, is one of the more robust labour markets in southwestern Ontario.

The Toyota plant is now the single the biggest employer in the region; there are also two universities, two major insurance companies and, of course, a high-tech hub that became home to Blackberry.

Like many other Ontario communities, the global financial crisis of 2008-09 hurt Waterloo Region.

Between 2006 and 2012, working poverty rose to from 5.1 per cent to 5.4 per cent.

“The bigger poverty issue was a growing income gap that was increasingly wider than the national average — our poverty is more invisible, with higher rates among some groups and more predominately in Kitchener,” says Trudy Beaulne, the executive director of Social Development Centre Waterloo Region.

The region’s unemployment rate increased from 5.2 per cent in 2006 to 6.6 per cent in 2012 and the employment rate fell from 67.5 per cent in 2006 to 66.8 per cent in 2012.

During this period, there were modest job gains in some communities in the region in professional, scientific and technical services, as well as finance, insurance, real estate and leasing. The accommodation and food services sectors also saw a small increase in jobs.

But there were significant job losses in the region’s manufacturing sector, which decreased by 5.0 percentage points. Plant closures, such as the shuttering of the local Schneider’s factory, and layoffs in the auto manufacturing sector, such as at Toyota, were a jolt to the working class.

In the city of Waterloo, localized increases in working poverty were concentrated in neighbourhoods around the post-secondary institutions as well as in and around the downtown. This could, in part, be due to the large population of students (approximately 25,000) living in these areas, says Beaulne.

**Nickname:** The Tri-City

**Population:** 507,096 (Kitchener, Waterloo, Cambridge and the Townships of Woolwich, Wilmot, Wellesley and North Dumfries)

**Profile:** Strong German heritage; Lutheran and Mennonite presence; more than 20 per cent immigrants

**Bread & butter:** High-tech knowledge economy, two universities, manufacturing sector

**Economic challenges:** Plant closures, layoffs, lack of reliable public transportation

**Notable:** Home of Oktoberfest and Blackberry

**Working poor:** 5.4 per cent in 2012, up from 5.1 per cent in 2006

**Working poor zones:** Increases in working poverty in Cambridge, downtown Waterloo

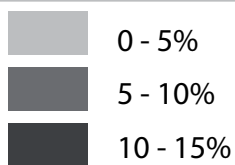
**City motto:** Stability

In Kitchener, an increase in working poverty may be connected to both economic factors, such as the loss of blue-collar manufacturing jobs but also to population changes, such as an increase in immigration, she notes.

An increase in working poverty in Cambridge can also be seen to be due to economic factors, such as the loss of manufacturing jobs, as in other areas in the region, particularly Kitchener, according to Beaulne. Homes that were once affordable with a factory job suddenly became untenable for those who were laid off or whose plants were shuttered.

Gentrification in the central core of the cities of Waterloo and Kitchener, due to construction of light rail transit and the associated increased costs of land adjacent to it, might price the working poor even further out of the local market, Beaulne says. ■

*Written by Joe Fantauzzi with files from Naveed Ahmed.*



# HAMILTON

## WORKING POOR BY NEIGHBOURHOOD

**I**t was once the heart of Ontario's industrial working class.

Everyone knew someone who worked at the steel plant. It was the central nervous system of the city. The smoke stack was its heartbeat.

You could have a job at the steel plant and raise a family on that paycheque.

Time, trade deals and globalization all took their toll on The Hammer.

Between 2006 and 2012, manufacturing jobs continued to decline. They were replaced by job growth in health care, social assistance, accommodation and food services — the service economy.

By the 2000s, Hamilton's downtown core was in



decline. In 2006, it was the working poor who populated the downtown and neighbouring south harbour district. Middle- and upper-income workers fanned out to the Mountain, to the toney Westdale Village near McMaster University or in the quaint community of Grimsby nestled deep in the area's prized escarpment.

The global recession of 2008-09 contributed to the decline in manufacturing. U.S. Steel closed its doors. Between 2006 and 2012, unemployment rose by 0.6 per cent; the employment rate shrank by 2.4 per cent; and there was growth in part-time jobs.

Between 2006 and 2012, working poverty increased by 0.5 per cent, representing 6 per cent of the population.

By 2012, there was an even greater concentration of working poor living in Hamilton's downtown and along the south harbour. But with the advent of improved GO Transit service — a new GO train located in the south harbour is set to open with more frequent service to Toronto than Hamilton has ever had — it may shake up this part of the city.

For years, one of Hamilton's core features was that it was relatively affordable to own a home — especially compared to communities like Oakville and Toronto. With Toronto housing prices at an all-time high, many working families are moving to Hamilton and commuting to the Big Smoke for work.

As a result, the south harbour is gentrifying and housing prices are on the rise. Between August 2014 and August 2015, housing prices rose by 16.4 per cent, a higher increase than anywhere else in Canada.

Gentrification contributes to an increase in housing and rental prices, which helps to explain some decreases in working poverty in neighbourhoods around the core.

Some areas outside the core, such as the Mountain and Glanbrook, also experienced a rise in working poverty between 2006 and 2012. If more of Hamilton's working poor migrate to the Mountain, they may face additional barriers

**Nickname:** The Hammer

**Population:** 721,000 (520,000 in the city proper)

**Profile:** Mix of new immigrants, working-class people and a larger proportion of seniors compared to other Ontario cities

**Bread & butter:** Steel town

**Economic challenge:** Manufacturing slump

**Trend watch:** Gentrification, rise in precarious jobs, spike in housing prices

**Working poor:** 6.0 per cent of the population in 2012, up 0.5 per cent from 2006

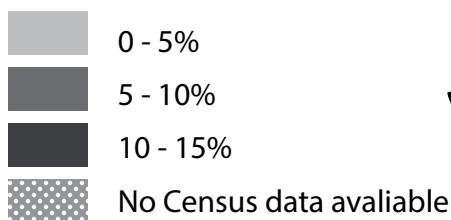
**Working poor zones:** Downtown Hamilton north of the escarpment and south of Hamilton harbour (main industrial core)

**City vision:** "To be the best place in Canada to raise a child, promote innovation, engage citizens and provide diverse economic opportunities."

ers — there is a lack of public transportation and community services serving that area, which means the working poor will have to travel longer for work and have access to fewer resources.

There is hope in a well-organized Hamilton Poverty Reduction Roundtable and the mayor's proposal to invest \$50 million in a new social housing and poverty reduction strategy. The city has also been considering the merits of implementing a local living wage policy. ■

*Written by Trish Hennessy with files from Naveed Ahmed.*



# SUDBURY

## WORKING POOR BY NEIGHBOURHOOD

**T**wo kilometres under the ground in a huge nickel mine, scientists near Sudbury are conducting physics experiments in highly unique conditions.

The laboratory, dubbed SNOLAB, is just one example of an ongoing project by the city, which has historically industrial roots, to diversify its

economy and look to the future.

Greater Sudbury is the largest city in northern Ontario. It was formed in 2001 when the Regional Municipality of Sudbury was merged with previously unincorporated townships and two reserves.

The city was once a lumber and nickel mining centre. Its economy is now diversified, hosting significant education, health care and trade jobs.

The numbers suggest Sudbury soared out of the recession, though there is a deeper story. After the recession, working poverty decreased from 4.7 per cent in 2006 to 4.4 per cent in 2012.

During the same time, unemployment decreased from 7.3 per cent to 7.2 per cent and the employment rate went from 58.6 per cent to 58.3 per cent.

That's a fairly stable labour market picture, but the area's trade and resource sectors took the greatest hits, with jobs declining by 1.33 and 1.47 percentage points, respectively. Jobs in the health care and construction sectors increased (health care jobs increased by 3.83 percentage points).

One factor that helped Sudbury's recovery was the high price of nickel in 2012, so commodity prices were up as residents were looking for work, says Annette J. Reszczynski, the Social Planning Council of Sudbury's senior social planner.

Another factor that may have cast local statistics in a favourable light is that working poverty often looks different in different cities. For example, labour strikes can be the source of financial strife for working families — and there were recently two strikes in Sudbury, according to Reszczynski. During this time, many residents were out of work and were unable to collect Employment Insurance, she adds.

These types of incidents often wipe out the modest savings of workers and can create precarious situations in terms of housing (i.e. not being able to pay rent), she says.

Overall in Sudbury, no neighbourhoods showed an increase in working poverty of more than 2.0 percentage points. Only two neighbourhoods showed a decrease in working poverty: Donovan and Flour Mill.

Reszczynski finds these decreases to be sur-

**Nickname:** Nickel City, city of lakes

**Population:** 160,770 (Greater Sudbury)

**Profile:** Large Franco-Ontarian population, largest city by land area in Ontario

**Bread & butter:** Education, health care and trade work

**Economic challenges:** Lack of public transit, declines in trade and resource jobs

**Working poor:** 4.4 per cent of working population in 2012

**Working poor zones:** Flour Mill has a particularly high concentration of working poverty

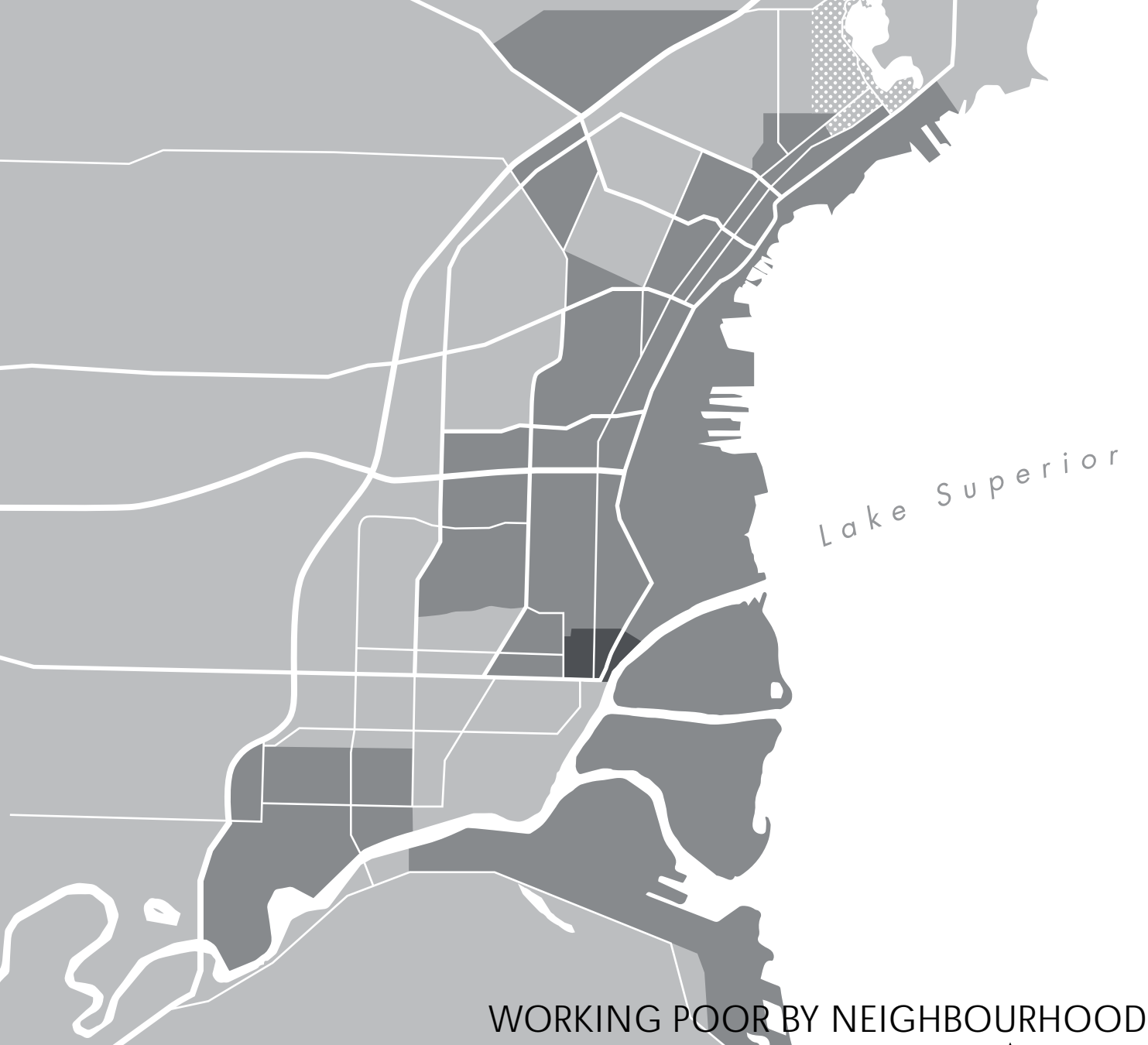
**City motto:** Come, let us build together

prising, since those neighbourhoods have many low-income residents.

One potential reason for the decrease was that there is an adequate amount of affordable and social housing in Donovan and Flour Mill, which may have served to buy time for some of those residents to find higher paying work, she says.

Sudbury does have a number of issues that local residents are working to address. Transportation, for one, is a problem in that the region is quite broadly distributed. ■

*Written by Joe Fantauzzi with files from Naveed Ahmed.*



WORKING POOR BY NEIGHBOURHOOD

# THUNDER BAY

0 - 5%
  5 - 10%
  10 - 15%
  No Census data available

You know you're in Thunder Bay when you're lined up for a breakfast of Finnish pancakes at the Hoito.

You know you're in Thunder Bay when you're nursing a sugar coma after indulging in pink icing-slathered pastries that every local knows

are "persians."

You know you're in Thunder Bay when you summer at "the camp" (cottage for all you southern Ontarians), complete with a sauna and dip in frigid Lake Superior.

Winters in Thunder Bay are for the hardy: the mercury can plunge into merciless deep freezes. But it's a dry cold. The snow crunches underfoot. And the sun shines brightly, as if it is making amends for the reduced daylight allotment in the heart of winter.

There is an indomitable, pioneering spirit in this city with its deep roots in the fur trade, once a resource and trade hub for all of Canada.

In 1970, things started to change for this northwestern Ontario portal when the amalgamation of two cities — Port Arthur and Fort William — resulted in one new city: Thunder Bay.

Since then, population growth has been stagnant or declining.

The recession of the 1990s didn't help: paper mills and grain elevators were shuttered. Since 2006, manufacturing jobs decreased by almost one third, from 8.50 per cent to 5.50 per cent of the total workforce. But working poverty held steady at 4.4 per cent in 2012, just 0.4 per cent lower than it was in 2006.

Those who do well tend to work at the health sciences centre, at the university or in the knowledge economy. But a lot of decent paying, working-class jobs are gone.

It's grown harder to convince young people to stay in Thunder Bay and raise a family. The city's population is aging — those numbers aren't reflected in the statistical picture of working poverty.

Poverty in Thunder Bay is not hidden. For every city, poverty has a face and a place. Aboriginal Peoples are visibly represented among Thunder Bay's poor.

Though pockets of poverty can be found on both sides of the city, Bonnie Kryswaty, a social researcher at the Lakehead Social Planning Council, says the working poor tend to live in the south end of the city: home to blue-collar workers, Aboriginal Peoples, and single-parent families. Decent, affordable housing can be hard to find.

**Nickname:** The Lakehead

**AKA:** Port Arthur and Fort William

**Population:** 108,359

**Profile:** Large Finnish and Italian presence; Aboriginal Peoples make up 8.2 per cent of the city's population

**Bread & butter:** Regional services centre for northwestern Ontario. Home to Lakehead University, a regional health sciences centre, forestry plants.

**Economic challenges:** Manufacturing slump; the local Bombardier plant is undergoing another round of job cuts; population has been stagnant or on the decline since 1970

**Notable:** The Sleeping Giant and the biggest of the Great Lakes, Lake Superior

**Working poor:** 4.4 per cent in 2012, down 0.4 per cent since 2006

**Working poor zones:** Mostly in the south end of the city, but pockets on both sides of Thunder Bay

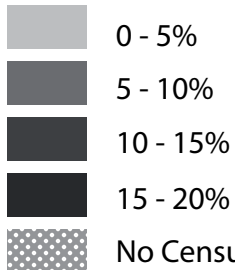
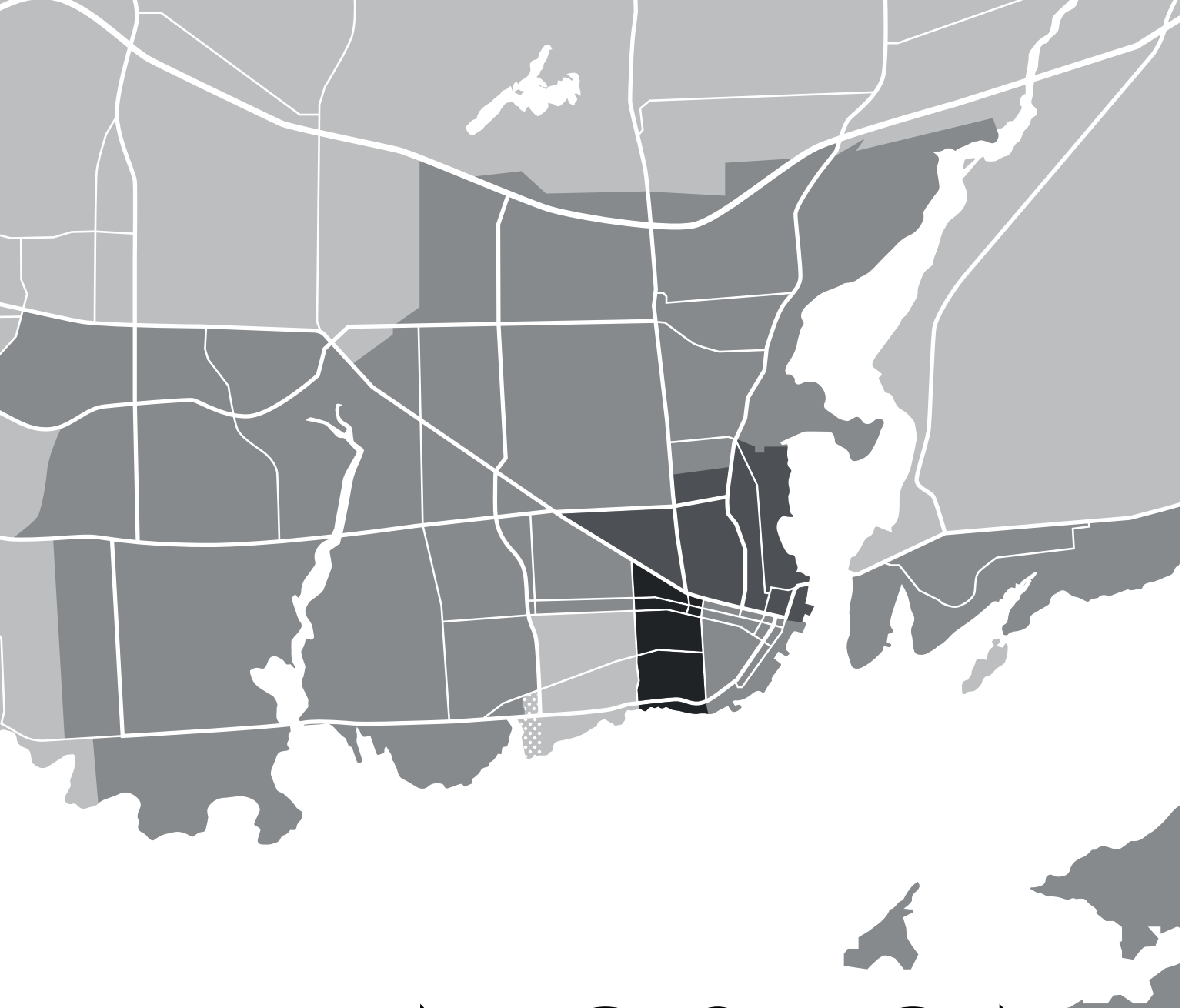
**City motto:** Superior by Nature

In contrast, Kryswaty says the more affluent neighbourhoods in the north end of the city have property values two to four times that of the impoverished areas. The waterfront on this side of the city is Thunder Bay's crown jewel.

The city is exploring solutions: its four-tier poverty reduction strategy focuses on housing, infrastructure (mainly transit), income and community development, and community inclusion and engagement.

Kryswaty says new affordable housing units are being built, but it's still not enough to meet demand. 🏠

*Written by Trish Hennessy with files from Naveed Ahmed.*



# KINGSTON

## WORKING POOR BY NEIGHBOURHOOD

It's a Saturday morning in Kingston and if life is going your way you are likely headed downtown to Market Square to shop at the oldest and longest running market in Ontario.

Shopping for fresh Ontario fruits and vegeta-

bles at the market is one of the many traditions in this historic town. On special occasions, you might come across the town crier, dressed in full regalia. Or you might take your family for a tour of Fort Henry, built during the War of 1812.

It's a government town for many reasons: military, correctional centres, Queen's University, three hospitals. When government austerity hits — as it did post-2008-09 recession, communities like this feel the burn.

Between 2006 and 2012, the percentage of jobs in the education sector in Kingston declined from 15.8 per cent to 12.7 per cent — a 3.1 per cent drop.

The ongoing manufacturing decline that affects so many Ontario cities also shows itself in Kingston's unemployment numbers: between 2006 and 2012, manufacturing jobs in Kingston dropped from 7.5 per cent to 5.6 per cent, with layoffs and closures at factories such as Alcan and DuPont (now Invista Canada).

In 2012, 5.3 per cent of the population was working poor, down a hair by 0.2 per cent since 2006.

Though the share of working poverty has been relatively stable in Kingston since 2006, it is a real and prevalent issue for pockets of residents who are not faring well, such as in the north end area of the city — Rideau Heights and areas north of Princess Street.

Though Rideau Heights did not experience an increase in working poverty between 2006 and 2012, 10 to 15 per cent of the neighbourhood is working poor. The city's regeneration plan is focused on improving the health, safety and affordability of Rideau Heights. It includes a long-term plan to redistribute social housing to other areas of the city and to introduce mixed housing options in the area.

Tara Kainer is executive assistant to the director of Sisters of Providence, St. Vincent de Paul. Kainer says the general area north of Princess Street used to be working class but it is slowly gentrifying.

Kingston is a university town, so it is common to see scores of students working in part-time, low-wage service and retail jobs to pay for their studies. You'll see them slinging beer to the throngs of tourists who pack the historic downtown core on hot summer nights.

**Nickname:** Limestone City

**Population:** 123,363

**Profile:** Students, new immigrants, Aboriginal Peoples, single-parent families, military personnel, and many PhDs

**Bread & butter:** University town, military base, correctional facilities, health care, public administration

**Economic challenges:** Declines in manufacturing; government austerity

**Notable:** First capital of the province of Canada (1841); home to Sir John A. Macdonald, Canada's first prime minister

**Working poor:** 5.3 per cent of the population in 2012, down 0.2 per cent since 2006

**Working poor zones:** Pockets across Kingston, in Rideau Heights and areas north of Princess Street

**City mission:** "To enhance the quality of life for present and future generations by providing progressive, professional services and leadership that reflects the needs of all those who work, live, visit, or play in the City of Kingston."

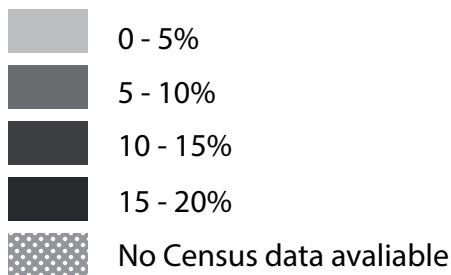
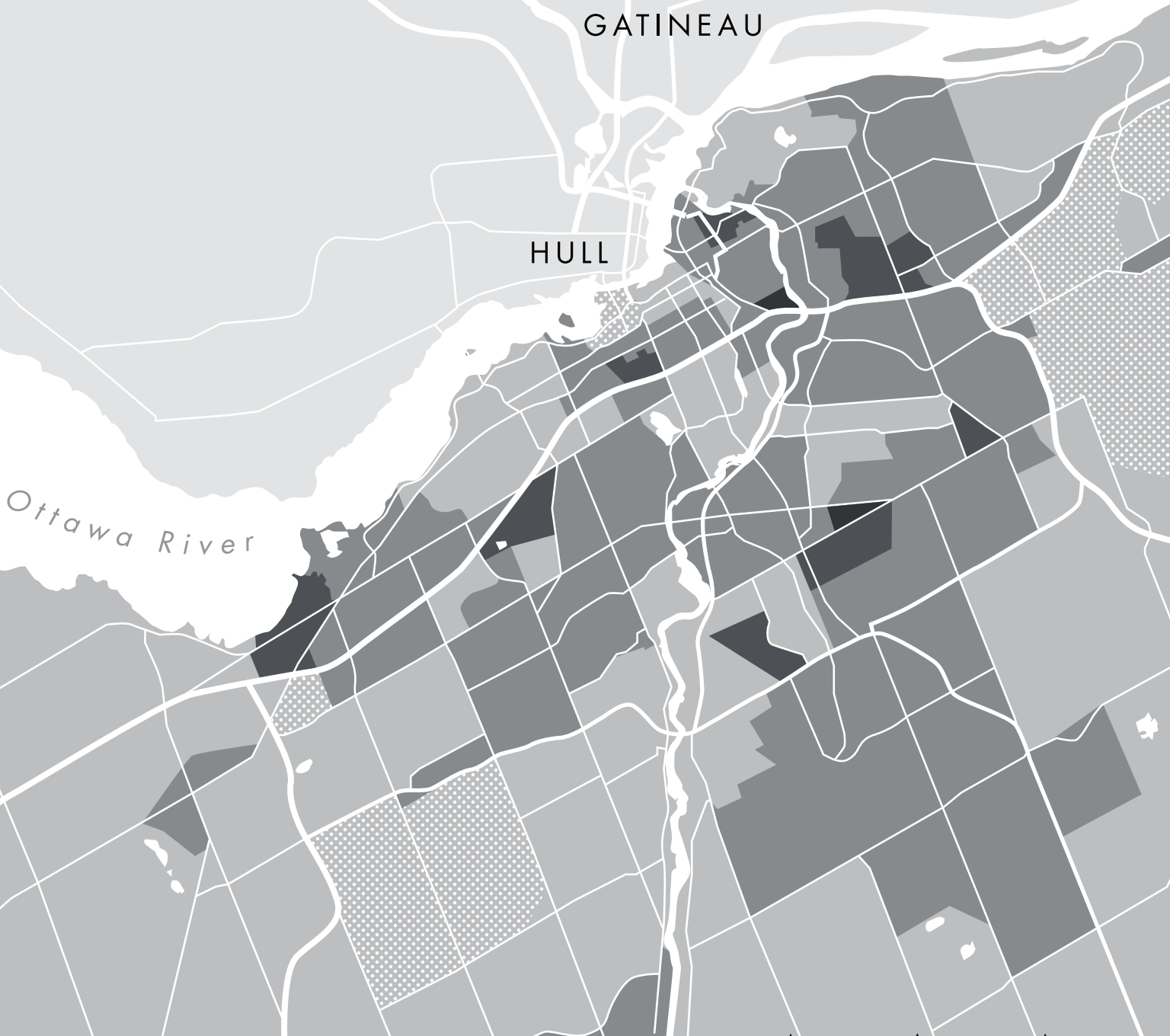
Fresh reserves of students are part of what helps make Kingston a vibrant community, but Kainer says landlords are more likely to give preference to students as renters instead of the non-student poor and working poor.

It can make the search for affordable housing on a public transit route a challenge for someone who has to travel across the city to get to a job.

Kingston has been recognized as one of the best places in Ontario to live and work, but there are stark differences between the haves and the have-nots in this city. 📍

*Written by Trish Hennessy with files from Naveed Ahmed.*





# OTTAWA

## WORKING POOR BY NEIGHBOURHOOD

It's probably hard not to think of Canada's iconic Parliament buildings when you think of Ottawa.

The city is known for having a relatively good quality of life, one of the lowest unemployment rates and a low violent crime rate.

But Ottawa isn't just procedural motions and Question Period.

Unlike some cities in Ontario, the city of Ottawa escaped notable increases in the amount of

working poverty measured between the 2006 Canadian census and the 2011 National Household Survey. In fact, the percentage of working poor individuals among the working age population in Ottawa was 5 per cent in 2012 — the same rate it was in 2006.

Ottawa has experienced notable shifts within various economic sectors in recent years, however. For example, the share of workers working in manufacturing declined by 3.4 percentage points between 2006 and 2012. The construction, health care, social assistance and public administration sectors all saw increases of between 1.0 and 2.7 percentage points. All other industries showed changes of less than one percentage point.

The financial crisis did not strike Ottawa as hard as it did some other Ontario cities. The unemployment rate increased from 5.1 per cent to 6.1 per cent between 2006 and 2012, while the employment rate decreased from 68 per cent to 67.8 per cent.

But while the overall working poverty rate held steady, rates pitched and heaved in some Ottawa neighbourhoods. For example, the working poverty rate rose in Gloucester, but fell in Vanier, according to Linda Lalonde, the chair of the Ottawa Poverty Reduction Network.

These changes were not necessarily the result of a decline in any particular industry; some might be associated with new immigration settlement in key neighbourhoods, experts told *OnPolicy*. Meanwhile, gentrification forces are also pushing low-income residents out of some neighbourhoods in the downtown core.

Ottawa does face certain issues, such as a lack of affordable and public housing.

Due to gentrification, lower-income residents do not feel like they belong in their community and they can't access the resources they need, according to Angella MacEwen, a senior economist with the Canadian Labour Congress.

Transit is a concern for low-income residents who live outside of the downtown core. While there is a fairly high rate of transit use, particu-

**Nickname:** Bytown, O-Town

**Population:** 883,391

**Profile:** Younger than the provincial average; majority of European descent but home to Canada's third-largest West Indian community, fourth-largest African and Middle Eastern communities; highest percentage of refugees and family-related immigration in Canada

**Bread & butter:** High-tech manufacturing, health care and public administration jobs

**Economic challenges:** Lack of affordable and public housing, lack of public transit

**Notable:** Capital of Canada, Parliament Hill

**Working poor:** 5 per cent in 2012, same as in 2006; largely recent immigrants, Aboriginal Peoples, racialized residents

**Working poor zones:** Gloucester, Vanier

**City motto:** Advance-Ottawa-En Avant

larly in the east end of Ottawa, there is a lack of affordable transit options in the city's rural areas, Lalonde says. "It takes nine hours of labour at minimum wage (before deductions) to pay for a regular pass and just over eleven hours to pay for an express pass which is what you need in a non-urban area, that is if there is any bus service at all," she notes.

The lack of service in the early morning and on evenings and weekends is also difficult for low-waged workers and people employed in the service industry and/or doing shift work.

A new light-rail transit extension is under construction, but its path may not be beneficial to those who already live outside of downtown.



*Written by Joe Fantauzzi with files from Naveed Ahmed.*



## This is What Working Poverty Looks Like

Zohra Jamasi

**M**any of Ontario's working poor toil in minimum wage jobs, a share of low-income earners that more than doubled between 2003 and 2011.

They are real people who struggle every day to make a living and fight hard against the realities of poverty. The working poor represent some of the most marginalized citizens of our society, but who are they exactly?

About one-fifth of low-income people in Ontario are youth: 18 years of age or younger. However, it is not only young people who are confined to the ranks of the working poor: the share of low-income Ontarians between 18 and 64 was 14.4 per cent in 2013, followed by 8.2 per cent of low-income seniors.

The percentage of low-income women in Ontario exceeds the percentage of men across all age categories and family types, at 14.6 per cent.

Single people are twice as likely to face poverty in Ontario compared to people who are part of an economic family. The percentage of low-income singles was 27.9 per cent in 2013; 15.6 per cent higher than the prevalence of low-income economic families.

Within the economic family category women are more likely to be over-represented in low-income measures than men: the percentage of women belonging to a low-income family was 12.9 per cent, compared to men in a low-income family, at 11.7 per cent.

Notably, the percentage of young women un-

der 18 in lone parent families — 47.9 per cent — was the largest among all family types.

The working poor includes a high proportion of racialized persons and recent immigrants. CCPA-Ontario Senior Economist Sheila Block has reported that racialized workers are 47 per cent more likely to be working for minimum wage than the total population, and recent immigrants are more than twice as likely to be working for minimum wage.

What does this tell us about Ontario's labour market? Growing income inequality has caused the working poor to struggle harder to keep their households afloat.

These struggles are felt more by certain subsets of the population than others. We have identified a high share of people in poverty to be young people, women, racialized persons, recent immigrants and persons who aren't in an economic family.

These key characteristics allow us to move beyond thinking about the working poor as a number or a homogenous category.

It helps to remind us that these are real people who, like all of us, work hard to earn a living in order to have a roof over their heads, put food on the table and pay for the most basic necessities of life. ■



## Working Poor

### Isabella Daley's story

Isabella Daley

**M**y name is Isabella Daley and I'm here today to share why a living wage could change my life and the lives of many others.

First, let me tell you a bit about myself. I'm a Capricorn, an overachiever, and I am a natural redhead.

I am a mentor, a mother, a fighter, but I am also a lover. By that I mean I love my kids, I love my little dump of a house and I love my condescending cat. I love to cook and I love to write and despite it all, and a run-on sentence, I actually love this life.

The thing I am most proud of, and reap the most spiritual reward from, is the youth work I do for the Anglican diocese of Niagara. As a matter of fact, in 2004 I received a bishop-appointed Order of Niagara, the fourth highest commendation in Canada, for my exemplary contribution to youth ministry.

In my opinion, my crowning jewel, my finest contribution, has been a live action role-playing game called the Game of Life. I planned it out for 85 youth and I created the entire game from start to finish as an experiential exercise for the Niagara Youth Conference.

A lot about the Game of Life was unfair. There were no instructions given and the players were all dealt a different hand. Within the first 10 minutes of the game, a black market broke out. Art imitating life, I guess.

So here's the thing: I have two college degrees, one of which I graduated top in my program

with a 96.8 grade point average. And the only jobs I've ever had were minimum wage, permanent part-time positions.

That means no benefits, no perks and no job security whatsoever. No drug card. No dental benefits. And no eyeglasses allowance. No nothing. Just a paycheque. That's why I am what's called "The Working Poor."

Let me tell you a little bit about the working poor. Being working poor means you experience periodic bouts of financially induced anorexia.

That's when your kid brings their best friend home from school and "really, really, really, please, oh please" needs them to stay for dinner.

You say "yes," of course, even though you know that means you won't get to eat dinner yourself that night but your kid goes to bed thinking they have a normal, middle-class upbringing, even though it's a facade.

Working poor is coming home from a desperately needed shopping trip, clutching that box of cereal you just bought and trying frantically to think of a way to make the kids understand that the box has to last.

Working poor is crying, like the kind of cry that comes from the pit of your stomach when

continued on page 32...



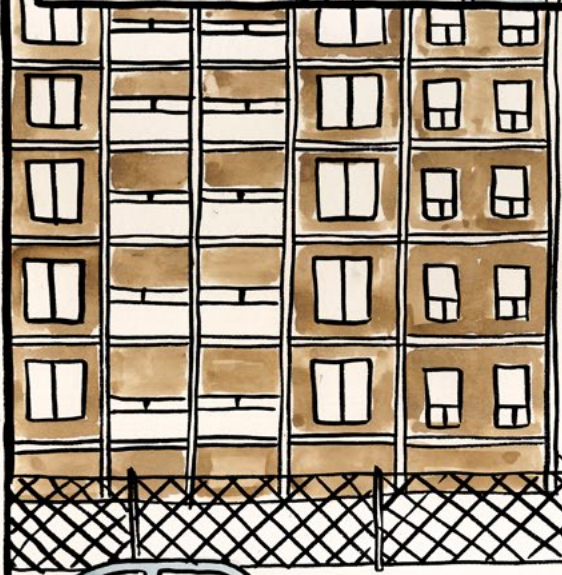
Since my kid's dad left, I've been working full time and raising my kid.

# BARELY GETTING BY



Luckily my mom can look after him when she comes home from her shift at a care home.

I used to work at a coffee shop just barely getting by. So I went back to school to get a diploma in business administration.



But so far I've only found temp work as an admin assistant at a company downtown.



It doesn't pay much and I'm still just getting by.

And now I have student loans to pay off.

It would be nice if I could afford a bus pass but I never have enough money at the beginning of the month so I always end up paying more with tokens.



It usually takes me over an hour on the bus and subway to get to work, sometimes longer.





I'd like to keep working here, but I don't think the manager is happy that I've been late a few times.



My co-workers are nice enough but they don't get it.

Want to come out for lunch with us?

Thanks, but I have to catch up on some work.

Eating out is a luxury I just can't afford.



It feels like there is never enough money.

Email bill due  
HYDRO bill due  
CELL bill due  
VISA bill due  
BANK statement

Something always comes up.



I see some people who seem to have more than enough.

But then I see the rest of us:



Looking after others,



Serving food,



cleaning offices.

Working hard, but barely getting by.

**Working Poor** continued from page 29...

you drop the pot of 99-cent Kraft Dinner and it spills out all over the kitchen floor.

Working poor involves a lot of hoping, at least in my case. You have to hope, for example, that your toothache will just go the hell away. See, when you're working poor you don't go to the dentist until you can't stand the pain any longer and then you hope that it's a cavity and not another root canal because you, at least in my case, already need \$7,000 worth of dental work that involves a specialist and it simply isn't going to happen.

Actually, being working poor involves a lot of health constraints beyond having to pay for three puffers at \$75 each and a \$200 EpiPen I need to stay alive.

You can't go to a chiropractor or a physiotherapist, even if you are in dire need of one.

You can't afford the good brace for your bad knee and you don't go to the optometrist until the headaches and double vision become excruciating; and even then you might not be able to swing the 90 bucks.

Often you end up with a prescription for something you can't fill, like orthotics, or a brace.

So you get a second opinion from my favourite doctor — Doctor Google Search — and then you MacGyver a tincture or a sling or a rehab plan and hope you don't do more harm than good.

Working poor is a lot like having a cough that, no matter what you do, just won't go away.

Being working poor is hoping your kids don't have a growth spurt or a field trip or a passion for anything extracurricular, because you won't be able to afford it and you don't want to

see the look on their face when you have to tell them no, yet again.

Being working poor is knock-off toys and generic names. It means no cable TV, no satellite dish and no data plan for your second-hand cell phone.

It means no hairdresser, no teeth whitening and no vacations for March Break or any other time of year, for that matter.

It means plastic bags inside of your faux Ugg boots and your house is always dirty and your clothes are always stained because the first thing you axe from the grocery list when you're broke is the cleaning supplies.

Being working poor is thinking \$12 an hour is a great job.

## **Being working poor is thinking \$12 an hour is a great job.**

It's about having a penchant for social justice and being made of strong moral fiber yet still having to shop at stores like Dollarama and Walmart because it's all you can afford.

It means being \$6 short on the utility bill after receiving your FINAL NOTICE and having no way you can think of to close the gap before they turn the heat off.

Like I said, there's a lot of hoping.

There's hoping you'll get invited out for dinner even though you know you'll never being able to return the favour.

It's about hoping people don't think you're anti-social because you rarely show up at the bridal showers, or graduations, or birthdays, or baby showers, or retirement parties or baptisms — simply because you can't afford a gift.

Working poor, at least in my case, means that when your son suddenly dies, you don't have money to bury him and you wonder how to put his name on the headstone because, of course,



you pay by the letter.

That experience, just for the record, feels like pure, unadulterated destitution.

If I knew what I could say to convince you, the media, the government, or my condescending cat for that matter, to move from being a spectator in the Game of Life to being an active participant, I would lay it all out for you right here and right now.

I want all of us to play, to participate, and to advocate on the behalf of the living wage community existing here in Hamilton and other communities all across the board.

Because the Game of Life is unfair, we don't get any instructions and everyone gets dealt a different hand.

See, a living wage means I can go to the dentist when I need to. It means the good brace for the bad knee and it means art lessons for my kids. It means warm winter boots and no more crying over Kraft Dinner. And it means no one will ever have to feel the kind of destitution I have.

Living wage is a game changer, and it's people like me and people like you who can make the Game of Life not just more fun to play, but a better existence for about seven million Canadians.

Full disclosure, I don't have a clue what you, the media, the government or my cat need to hear from me in order to chose to become a team player.

All I can do is tell you my story, define my experience and hope that all the words and run-on sentences can somehow make a difference.



## Food Security and the working poor

Rachel Gray

Leaving the office late one night, I was approached by someone looking for our food bank.

I let him know when we were open and encouraged him to join us for breakfast or lunch in our drop-in meal program.

"I can't do that," he said. "I work then."

His experience, as he walked away in the dark, is very much the story of food insecurity for a growing number of Canadians: Working. And hungry.

One in eight of us, including over one million kids, are experiencing food insecurity. Food insecurity means living on a spectrum between worrying about running out of food and going without for days at a time because you can't afford the food you need — "inadequate, insecure access to food due to financial constraints."

There is also a general misunderstanding about who ends up food insecure. The assumption has been that food banks are used by the unemployed or social assistance recipients. In fact, as precarious employment has grown, so too has the number of working people going without food: more than 60 per cent of food insecure households are now made up of people with jobs.

Increasingly, Canadians are working hard, often at multiple jobs, and going to work hungry. As British writer Owen Jones likes to say, people are "getting up in the morning to earn their poverty."

For a growing number of people working without a living wage or living with inadequate social assistance rates, it becomes necessary to navigate a maze of charitable supports in a tangled system full of stigma.

A colleague, who is a single mom with three kids, used to describe the Herculean efforts it took to feed her family through food charity — travelling between organizations, keeping track of opening hours and dealing with means testing — only to receive substandard, nutritionally empty and often culturally inappropriate food.

It's important to make clear that people don't end up using food banks because of an emergency, but because of deliberate policy decisions: precarious work goes unchecked, minimum wages are below living wages and social assistance rates are set at poverty-inducing levels. We describe it as a "predictable emergency" because there's a straightforward cause-and-effect relationship between low incomes and food insecurity.

The data we collected at The Stop reflects national research: 80 per cent of our food bank members live on less than \$20,000 a year and 25 per cent of them go at least one day a month without eating at all.

But food insecurity can be something of a slow boil. Researchers think of it as a marker of material deprivation — the canary in the coal mine of poverty.

By the time it hits, there has already been a cascade of complication and scarcity in people's lives. They are likely in debt and behind on rent, they have borrowed from friends and family, and they may not have filled much-needed prescriptions.

Just about every part of their lives has become intensely difficult to manage.

And just when things have reached a breaking point, we expect the charitable sector to fix the problem — which is what makes food insecurity such a sinkhole. Because even the very best charitable food program can't fix a problem that is based on a lack of adequate income.

In recent decades, many organizations in the charitable sector have come to use food as a powerful tool for connecting people, building community and reducing social isolation

through shared meals, community cooking and gardening programs.

It is dynamic, empowering work. But as good a tool as food is for building community and bringing people together, we also know that food alone does not significantly alter a person's food security.

We've been treating food insecurity with food for over 30 years and it's simply not working. Estimates are that for every person who uses a food bank, four or five others are struggling. For any number of reasons — often stigma and a lack of access — many people are underserved by charitable programs.

There is also a big food shortage. If you use a food program, you might end up with two or three days' worth of food for the month, but not much more.

Even if we could find a way to feed everyone who needs three meals a day, seven days a week, the food alone wouldn't fix their housing, health, employment, child care, accessibility or employment needs.

Food insecurity in Canada is too big to be meaningfully addressed with an occasional bag of food.

So, while there is no question about the extent to which food banks have become embedded in our political and social zeitgeist (annual appeals through our national broadcaster being one clear, surreal indicator), no one should believe that continuing this way makes sense.

The road to food security is not through food, and certainly not through food donations, but through income.

And Canada has the data to prove it.

Newfoundland and Labrador's efforts at poverty reduction led to a significant decrease in food insecurity. By focusing on social assistance — raising rates, indexing them to inflation, and increasing the exemptions for assets and wage earnings — the province saw food insecurity among social assistance recipients



Photo by Zoe Alexopoulos / The Stop Community Food Centre

drop from 60 per cent to 33 per cent between 2007 and 2012.

We also have data that proves the effect a guaranteed annual income support has on food security. Researchers looking at the impact of Old Age Security (OAS) found the level of food insecurity was half as high for Canadians aged 65-69 compared to those aged 60-64.

Once people start receiving the OAS, the increase in income security has a direct impact on food security for Canadian seniors.

University of Toronto researcher Valerie Tarasuk suggests employers have a part to play as well. By improving employment conditions — wages, schedules and benefits — we could have “food secure employers” and a stronger, healthier workforce.

The problem with food charity is exactly that:

it’s about charity. If you’re poor, you can eat — but only if enough people get around to donating this month. Sound capricious? That’s because it is.

A man once came into our drop-in centre for breakfast and immediately became agitated. It turned out that he couldn’t eat what we had on offer that morning.

Our food is healthy and delicious, but he had a dietary restriction that we could not address.

He had travelled far to get to us and it was clear that he had been hungry for some time. There was nothing we could do and he had no options, so it wasn’t surprising that he got angry.

This is what a charitable response to poverty looks like. We should all be furious. ▣

# Retail Jobs

## Emblematic of precarious work

Kendra Coulter

Retail is Canada's largest employment sector and half of the front-line retail workforce is in Ontario.

Over a million Ontarians work in stores selling everyday essentials, luxuries, and everything in between.

Like the products being sold, the people in retail are diverse. Yet regardless of what is being sold, retail often means low wages, and sometimes poverty wages.

The story of retail reveals a lot about how work has evolved in the province, and how workers have been valued, or, in this case, devalued.

Retail stores were created and expanded along with the ascendancy of settler society in the land now called Ontario.

Initially retail meant small stores owned and staffed mostly by men, though some "shop girls" were also employed. As larger department stores were built, a gendered division of labour was established. Men were channeled into warehouse, shipping, and management positions, and women into catalogue offices and onto sales floors.

Over much of the twentieth century, retail was considered a decent career path, especially for working-class women. Full-time jobs, particularly in grocery and department stores where unions were more active, could provide people with a modest income and life.

Nevertheless, in comparison to many other arenas of work, retail has always been a lower

paying sector with more erratic working conditions; precarious work existed long before we gave it that name, particularly for women and people of colour. But things have gotten worse and the problems more widespread.

The introduction and entrenchment of neoliberal economics, politics, and culture left no sector untouched. In retail it meant an aggressive push for more part-time positions, union busting and avoidance, and an adoption of "low road" management strategies that continuously require workers to do more with less.

Walmart is not the first retail megacorp to rapaciously seek profit at the expense of work-

**There  
are exciting jobs,  
meaningful jobs,  
boring jobs, dirty  
jobs – none should  
mean poverty.**

ers' rights (among other things), but it is a formidable machine with substantial influence not only over its own stores, but over political decisions and dominant patterns in the economy. As the second largest employer in the world (second only to the Chinese military), Walmart has amassed a lot of power and buttressed the position of large retailers in general.

I worked in retail for six years throughout high school and into university during a key time in Ontario's neoliberal history — the Mike Harris era.

I was atypical in a sector with high turnover because I worked at the same store consistently. I outlasted two managers and dozens of other part-timers. There were usually 15 employees and there were never more than two who worked full-time, a pattern very common in the sector still today.





Photo: flickr.com/davepatten / CC BY 2.0

I stayed through one corporate ownership change and helped with two moves into different locations within the same mall. Both of my managers were women who worked in retail management for many years. They were kind to me and did the best they could, but we were all paid very low wages and afforded no benefits.

For a couple of years, I served as third key, a common position in smaller retail stores that tasks one part-time worker with added work (opening and closing the store, doing financial calculations, making deposits). These extra responsibilities are often done alone and usually don't mean a nickel more in pay.

In fact, during the entire time I worked in retail, the minimum wage in Ontario was frozen by the Progressive Conservative government.

This, of course, was despite the fact that the cost of living increased every year.

There is still a popular perception that retail only provides temporary or transitional employment and inessential income. Some see retail as “girls’ work” and use this as justification for low pay, volatile hours, and lousy conditions.

This is a deeply flawed perspective. First, “girls” deserve decent work, too. Many have bills, dependants and other monetary commitments; some are trying to pay for post-secondary education or training. There are exciting jobs, meaningful jobs, boring jobs, dirty jobs — none should mean poverty.

Plus, it should not matter who you are, where you come from, or how much training you've

had: paid work should provide people with enough for the basics of life, and with dignity.

Moreover, people of all ages work in retail. Retail is numerically dominated by women, and young people are well represented in the ranks of the front-line workforce, but the median age of the retail workforce in Canada today is 34. Forty per cent of retail workers are 45 years of age or older.

Although there are many more women in such positions, retail salesperson is the most common occupation for both women and men. Retail is not merely transitional or temporary. It is the place of work for one in eight people in this province and must be taken seriously.

Yet unfortunately, retail is emblematic of what we now call precarious work. On top of a lack of job security and benefits, retail jobs do not pay much. Plus, the low hourly wages are compounded by a shortage of full-time positions and hours overall. There is a devaluation of retail work overall and a further devaluing of women within the sector.

When I left retail, I never wanted to think about the sector again. But as an academic interested in fostering a more sustainable, solidaristic society, I began studying retail in 2009.

My early research focused on young women's organizing in the Greater Toronto Area, and interviews with Debora De Angelis and Wynne Hartviksen, both of whom now work in the labour movement, was a visceral reminder of how much disrespect there is in retail.

There were glimmers of hope as workers took action, but also clear evidence of the power imbalance which pits regular people against well-resourced companies that hire savvy human resource specialists, lawyers and consultants.

Workers were and are more likely to simply quit as a strategy to escape poor treatment, rather than to try and collectively resist, even if they simply move on to another retail store across the mall or a few blocks away (where similar problems too often resurface).

However, over the last few years there has been a growing movement of low-wage workers and their allies calling for fair wages and basic rights, or \$15 and Fairness now in Ontario.

Retail workers have been organizing themselves in some cases and retail unions have been investing in different and even creative strategies to build a culture of solidarity within the sector and help workers gain a greater say over their workplaces and work lives.

The public conversation has been broadened and real victories have been won in specific companies, and in certain regions. Policy makers, elected leaders, some employers and concerned people of all kinds are increasingly recognizing the multi-faceted benefits of fair pay, and of boosting the incomes of regular people.

There is, of course, much more to do. Inequities in society and within retail persist. One of the most salient is the gender wage gap. Women are still being paid less than men in Ontario (and everywhere else).

Ontario's gender wage gap stems from a few factors, including the high number of women in low-paying sectors like retail. But there is also a gender wage gap within retail.

To get the facts and better understand the problems, I partnered with Angella MacEwen, an economist at the Canadian Labour Congress (and Research Associate at the CCPA), and Sheetal Rawal, a lawyer with expertise in pay equity issues. Our report, *The Gender Wage Gap in Ontario's Retail Sector: Devaluing Women's Work and Women Workers*, was the first of its kind to unpack what is really going on in the province.

We knew there was unfairness, but the depth and prevalence of the inequities were still shocking.

Women outnumber men across all front-line retail occupations in Ontario except for manager — the highest paying position. Yet men are paid more per hour across every job category, and often a lot more. When trying to get by at the lower end of the pay scale, even dimes and

quarters matter. To add insult to injury, most of the few full-time positions that exist within retail are assigned to men.

So to recap, women are being paid less for doing the same work. And they are being given fewer hours. They are also under-represented in the highest paying position. Plus, women must face discrimination in hiring, promotions and daily work. Some women in retail speak of blatant sexism and harassment from supervisors, co-workers and customers that sounds like it's from another era.

Together, these findings are a stark reminder of how little some things and certain people have progressed. They also provide an unavoidable wake-up call for those within and beyond retail about the need for change.

Retail jobs can be decent jobs. Examples from close to home and around the world prove it. In Sweden, for example, many retailers balance their desire for profits with a commitment to being fair employers.

Public policy in Sweden affords all workers, including those in retail, paid sick days and five weeks of paid vacation, among other social and economic protections and entitlements. Swedish retail unions have secured living wages, overtime pay for evening and weekend work, and the right for workers to know their schedules one year in advance. Yes, you are reading that correctly.

The retail terrain in Ontario will change, but retail jobs are here to stay. We do not want an endless stream of lousy retail jobs. But we do need the floor to be raised and for new good, green, and humane jobs to be created so we can cultivate a more sustainable and just province that respects all who live and work here. It's about fairness and it's about decency. ■



## Revaluing the (Human) Cashier

**30:** per cent of shoppers who used self-checkout and complained that it didn't work properly

**22:** per cent were irritated because they couldn't find a staffer at the front end – industry-speak for the checkout area – to resolve a problem

**14:** per cent of self-checkout shoppers who confessed that they had a hard time simply trying to figure out how to navigate the system

**x5:** the increase in theft – intentional or not – with self-checkout, rather than when cashiers are working

**Sources:** [www.consumerreports.org/cro/news/2015/04/the-pros-and-cons-of-supermarket-self-checkout/index.htm](http://www.consumerreports.org/cro/news/2015/04/the-pros-and-cons-of-supermarket-self-checkout/index.htm) and [usatoday.com/money/industries/retail/story/2012-04-06/self-scanning-checkout/54117384/1](http://usatoday.com/money/industries/retail/story/2012-04-06/self-scanning-checkout/54117384/1)



# Precurity

## in contract academic work

Graeme Stewart

It's likely that a particular image comes to mind when you think about a university professor.

Maybe it's a wizened sage clad in tweed, strolling ivy-covered grounds dispensing wisdom to eager undergraduates before retiring to the faculty club for a quiet drink.

Perhaps it's a determined scientist working in a sleek laboratory surrounded by the latest high-tech equipment that blinks and whirrs pur-

posefully in the background.

When you think of a typical worker in a precarious job, you might imagine someone stuck in a low-wage position in the retail sector or fast food industry, or living contract-to-contract and finding work through a temp agency.

If you were to draw a Venn diagram of these perceptions of the university professor and the precarious worker, there wouldn't be much overlap, if any. In fact, those two circles might



not even be in the same area code.

But the truth — call it academia’s dirty little secret — is that the reality of academic work in 2016 is starting to look a lot more like the second image than the first: overworked, insecure and underpaid. And workers are increasingly angry about it.

The rise of precarious academic work is trapping thousands of skilled and highly educated scholars in insecure work, with serious consequences for the quality of university education.

Beginning in the 1970s, after three decades of growth, governments across the Western world began to cut back funding for higher education on a per-student basis. This process has quietly accelerated over the past quarter century, as low-tax, market-oriented policies have taken

hold of the political agenda.

The Ontario government now provides 31 per cent less per-student funding to universities than it did in 1990. Some of this shortfall has been made up in tuition fees, at great cost to students and their families. But even skyrocketing tuition hasn’t been able to make up for the public funding shortfall. Per student university funding in Ontario is still far below adequate levels.

While funding has fallen, the number of students has exploded. Since 2000, enrolment at Ontario universities has increased by 71 per cent.

Without adequate per-student funding, universities have not hired enough full-time professors to keep up with the growing student population. The number of tenured or tenure-track faculty has only increased by 31 per cent since 2000. This is a serious gap, one that universities have tried to fill with precarious academic jobs and short-term contracts.

The rise of precarity reflects a choice made by university administrators who are embracing market-oriented thinking.

For many administrators — enamored with private-sector logic gleaned from New Public Management and similar corporate philosophies — precarious and contract jobs were alluring for reasons beyond simple financial expediency.

Contract professors created workforce “flexibility,” allowing deans and vice-presidents to quickly reorganize their institutions to conform to their own philosophies and priorities.

Some hoped that a contract workforce would also be a pliant one — without the real academic freedom granted by tenure, contract professors may hesitate to challenge administrators on academic or institutional matters, for fear of losing their positions.

Rising enrolment, declining public funding and administrative opportunism set the stage for a dramatic increase in precarious work at



University of Toronto

our universities.

We know this growth has happened. But because administrators prefer to keep precise data on contract professors to themselves, we still don't know exactly how many people are in precarious academic jobs.

We know that at some universities, more than 50 per cent of undergraduate teaching is being done by contract academics. From the data that is available, the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (OCUFA) estimates that the number of courses taught by precarious professors has doubled since 2000.

Today, precarious academic jobs are characterized by unfair pay and poor access to benefits.

Contract professors are sometimes told they will be teaching a particular course just days before it begins, leaving them scrambling to prepare and reorganize their lives.

Many contract professors piece together a living by teaching courses at multiple institutions, sometimes hundreds of kilometres away. This means long hours on the road, adding to the fatigue and isolation that comes with insecure work.

Contract professors often don't have office space to meet with students.

They are not paid to do the research required to keep up with developments in their disciplines, which isn't fair.

They are also not paid to do service work, like sitting on department or university-wide committees, developing academic programs, or engaging the wider community in research. This work falls on a shrinking number of ten-

ure-track professors, contributing to major workload pressures in university departments across the province.

Precarious academics are often absent from campus while working (or travelling to) other contracts, depriving them of opportunities to mentor students one-on-one.

Contracts are short-term and are often not renewed; for students, this means a beloved teacher may suddenly disappear from campus, leaving them without guidance or perhaps even a needed reference letter.

The rise of precarious academic work also disproves one of the basic assumptions students make when they decide to pursue graduate studies: that a PhD is a golden ticket to a secure, well-paying job.

So what do we do?

We need people to know that the Hollywood image of a university professor is increasingly out of touch with reality. And we need to communicate to people who care about the higher education system — students, parents, and yes, even employers and politicians — that a good university education de-

mands good university jobs. Then we need to set our universities on a better path.

Of course, this is easier said than done. But there are encouraging steps being taken everywhere.

The advocacy organization New Faculty Majority continues to organize contract professors across the U.S. in a fight for better working conditions, new legal protections and high-quality education.

Here in Ontario, OCUFA held a day of action

## **At some universities, more than 50 per cent of undergraduate teaching is done by contract academics.**

this past February, connecting contract academics across the province with each other and their tenure-track colleagues. We launched the We Teach Ontario campaign ([www.weteachontario.ca](http://www.weteachontario.ca)), which allows supporters to sign an online pledge calling for fairness for contract faculty. OCUFA is also working closely with the Fight for \$15 & Fairness campaign.

In addition, the Government of Ontario is currently reviewing employment law in the province, with an eye towards protecting the growing number of contract and precarious workers. University professors have been actively engaged in this process, arguing for equal pay for equal work, predictable scheduling, and changes that will allow contract professors to have access to effective union representation.

A few months ago, OCUFA also held a conference examining the rise of precarious academic work and how we can meaningfully challenge this trend.

In the opening session, the results of a public opinion poll on precarious academic work — one of the first of its kind anywhere — were presented.

On the one hand, the poll illustrated our perception problem and the disjuncture between image and reality. Only 15 per cent of Ontarians think that professors can have precarious jobs.

On the other hand, the poll tells us that Ontarians want and expect academic jobs to be secure and fair — almost 85 per cent of Ontarians think contract professors should have equal pay and equal access to benefits to their full-time colleagues.

Moreover, 94 per cent think that universities should be model employers and support good jobs in their communities.

So let's recognize the reality of academic work — a shrinking number of tenure-track professors facing an escalating workload, and a growing number of academics without secure or fair employment. Let's acknowledge that this state of affairs tends to hit women and racialized

## Key facts:

### 71 per cent:

Increase in enrolment at Ontario's universities between 2000-01 and 2013-14


### 31 per cent:

Faculty increase in that same period

### 29 to one:

Student-to-faculty ratio in Ontario...the worst in Canada

**8,500:** That's how many new professors the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (OCUFA) estimates the province would need to hire by 2020 to catch up with the national student-to-faculty ratio

people harder. And let's support contract professors as they join with workers in other sectors to push back against the rise of precarious jobs everywhere. 



# Working Poor

## Stuck between getting ahead and losing it all

Lisa Rutledge

Unaccustomed to hosting guests at her tiny, dilapidated Hespeler apartment, Marjorie Knight politely apologizes as she sets out two mismatched chairs in hopes of creating a comfortable place for conversation.

“I never, ever expected I would be in this kind of situation,” she soon confessed.

“I never expected to be poor.”

Still struggling to reconcile her current reality with the life she had always envisioned, Knight ponders out loud. She’s not looking for luck, merely an opportunity to prove what she’s capable of doing if given the chance.

“When you sit with me, what do you see ... when you speak with me, what do you hear? I’m an intelligent person. I work. I have a good work ethic.

“Why did I end up where I am?”

Born in Canada but raised in Jamaica, Knight served as an executive manager of a popular Jamaican vacation resort.

As an educated administrator who possessed resourceful thinking and problem-solving skills, Knight earned a solid living for her family.

It was only after she came to Canada — to Cambridge 11 years ago — that she could not secure a full-time job in the hospitality field. A lack of Canadian experience appeared as a red flag on her resume.

Desperately worried about providing for her two daughters, still young at the time, Knight finally found work through a temp agency at a local energy company call centre. The pay



Lisa Rutledge / Cambridge Times

wasn’t substantial, but the hours were constant. She kept her family afloat and was even able to buy a home.

The thin layer on which she had hoped to build a foundation for her family soon shattered when the call centre closed.

Not able to find a job quickly, Knight depleted her savings and pension, and ultimately couldn’t fend off bankruptcy. She had little choice but to swap a permanent address for the temporary residence of a local homeless shelter.

Eventually finding work as a data entry clerk at a Kitchener furniture store, where she still works six years later, Knight can afford a \$700-per-month rental unit in a second-storey apartment in Hespeler.

Despite the fact she works between 40 and 44 hours per week, Knight lives a life that barely hovers above the poverty line.

At the moment of the conversation, she revealed she had but a loonie extra to last her un-



til payday, still five days away. By the time rent is paid and bus passes are purchased — to get to work and back — there's little left but spare change.

"It's literally month to month," she said. "You're paycheque to paycheque."

"I've had days where I sat there and tried to figure out whether I'm going buy food or I'm going to buy a bus pass."

Knight is not alone in living in such tenuous circumstances. She is part of a disturbing and rapidly growing socio-economic class known as the working poor.

This working class may put in the equivalent of full-time hours, yet their low-income wages are barely enough to survive on, let alone thrive. Benefits are a rarity.

According to a report by the Workers' Action Centre, *Still Working on the Edge*, Ontario is developing a "low-wage economy" populated by workers who are "trapped" in part-time jobs that pay minimum wage.

Research conducted by the centre maintains that since the recession, many full-time, well-paying jobs have vanished and have been replaced by part-time, temporary and contract jobs that pay lower wages and often don't come with benefits.

Those caught in this low-wage trap aren't there because they're lazy, emphasizes Knight. It's not for the lack of trying.

"When you talk about the working poor, and people who are economically disadvantaged, there's a whole new set of us out there," she explained.

While there are those who have grown up poor or are well-versed in navigating government

social assistance, there are those who have fallen to circumstances beyond their control.

"There are people who were never there before, who lost their jobs and are unable to find another," said Knight. "And even if you found another job ... to replace the income, you can't."

Tracking the phenomenon of the working poor for more than 10 years, the Workers' Action Centre contends this segment of society is growing at an alarming rate.

According to its report, the number of part-time jobs available is growing faster than the number of full-time jobs. In 2014, 33 per cent of employees worked in low-wage jobs, compared to only 22 per cent 10 years ago.

For Knight, life is a daily walk across a tightrope with no safety net.

"I am a working poor person, because if something happens to me, I have no recourse, and I have no way of doing anything because I have no real savings."

Those living this life are also fighting a stigma that paints them as lazy. It's a myth Knight would like to break. And she walks that talk. The Cambridge woman has done recent mission work in Kenya. She often volunteers at a food bank in the region, yet refuses to bring any items home with her.

"There are so many people worse off than me — how can I just go into a food bank?"

In fact, those who know Knight, and can speak to her work ethic, have on occasion dropped off food and clothes anonymously on her doorstep. The goodwill gestures mean she has a little extra to do something for herself.

Knight is currently studying for her Bachelor of Social Work at the University of Waterloo to

## There's a whole new set of working poor and economically disadvantaged out there.

become a personal support worker, her tuition paid by a relative.

It's a job that's close to her heart.

"I needed credentials to allow me to get a job to do something besides doing data entry," she said. "I wanted to do something that mattered and something that I enjoyed."

Her current employer has just boosted Knight's hourly wage in hopes she would stay long-term. The thought of a few extra dollars on her next paycheque put her into planning mode.

"I'm trying to figure out how can I save some money because I have to get myself some shelter, so that if something happens I have something."

Pat Singleton, executive director at the Cambridge Self-Help Food Bank, knows only too well the growing plight of the working poor. Those who had stable, well-paying jobs and once donated to the food bank are now recipients, she said.

"Twenty-three per cent of our families are working part-time or full-time."

The working poor has become a new focus for the Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries, which unveiled the issue as its theme during the 10th annual poverty symposium on May 27.

"We are hearing more about precarious employment situations," said Linda Terry, executive director at the council. "We are really concerned when we hear about people who work two and three jobs to make ends meet — sometimes — but not always."

Until recently, those caught up in the newly developing low-wage economy have existed under the radar, as they don't qualify for government assistance.

"We need to address this," said Terry. "We're identifying that there is no identifier. There are folks out there that are falling between the cracks." 📷

## From Fragmentation to Unity

### The fight for \$15 and fairness

Pam Frache



Photo: Ontario Federation of Labour / CC BY 2.0

*This article was originally printed in the Cambridge Times and is reprinted here with permission.*



In the fall of 2012, a handful of fast food workers in New York and Chicago walked off the job, calling for fair wages.

Since then, the “Fight for \$15” has spread to more than 300 U.S. cities and inspired a global movement.

Here in Canada, the “Fight for \$15 & Fairness” campaign grew out of Ontario’s successful “Campaign to Raise the Minimum Wage,” a labour-community alliance that launched its \$14 minimum wage campaign just as the Fight for \$15 was emerging in the U.S.

Within a year, the Ontario campaign had forced the Liberal minority government to implement a 75-cent increase to the general adult minimum wage and to promise legislation that would modify the wage each year to keep up with rising prices (indexation).

As a result, the minimum wage will be adjusted every October 1 to reflect changes in the Consumer Price Index (CPI).

The first 25-cent adjustment took effect on Oct. 1, 2015. The 2016 adjustment of 15 cents will bring Ontario’s general adult minimum wage to \$11.40 in October 2016.

Of course, workers need far more than \$11.40 an hour, but these modest gains show that when workers fight together they can win.

The Campaign to Raise the Minimum Wage opened up an important public conversation about the nature of work, especially for non-unionized workers who comprise more than 70 per cent of the workforce in Ontario.

Because it is virtually impossible to talk about wages without also talking about the other factors that conspire to create bad jobs, the Cam-

campaign to Raise the Minimum Wage helped crystalize the conversation about decent work.

It also put pressure on the Ontario government, returned as a majority in June 2014, to go beyond merely tinkering with the minimum wage; to adopt legislative changes that would better protect workers.

Bill 18, adopted in November 2014, implemented modest, but important, measures: to address wage theft, make temporary agencies jointly responsible with their client companies for wages, overtime, and public holiday pay, and to afford a modicum of protection to migrant workers.

But, rather than making us go away, every measure offered by the government has served to broaden the public conversation about precarious employment and to increase expectations for the government to go further.

This dynamic helps explain why the government felt compelled to launch a comprehensive review of both the Employment Standards Act (which sets out minimum employment standards and protections for non-unionized workers) and the Labour Relations Act (which governs the way workers form unions, as well as the way in which employers and unionized workers interact).

The Changing Workplaces Review is the most comprehensive review of Ontario labour and employment law in a generation.

By reviewing both Acts at the same time, the government has presented all of us with an extraordinary opportunity to stand up to the one per cent as a united force — not one that is weakened by the artificial divisions between unionized and non-unionized workers.

It provides workers with an incredible opportunity to build meaningful working-class solidarity, to renew and extend rank-and-file networks inside and outside the unions, to improve the political terrain for workers, to win meaningful reforms, and, in doing so, to build the skills, experience and confidence of all workers for the struggles that lie ahead.

Ontario's Fight for \$15 and Fairness must also be understood in the context of a growing international workers' movement to raise the wage floor, from Bolivia to Egypt and from Thailand to the United States.

## **Workers are finding creative ways to reframe their own demands in order to be part of this growing movement.**

For us in Canada, the U.S. Fight for \$15 has been an incredible source of inspiration.

While Ontario's minimum wage campaign was experiencing significant successes, major breakthroughs in the U.S. Fight for \$15 movement were also fueling the movement in Canada.

Since its beginnings in 2012, when fast food workers and Walmart employees launched strike action to demand a \$15 minimum wage, U.S. workers have been winning victories on the minimum wage, paid sick days, fair scheduling, union rights and more.

The U.S. National Employment Law Project (NELP) estimates that as a result of the Fight for \$15 about 17 million workers across the U.S. have won pay raises, far exceeding the employer-focused approach that characterized the living wage campaigns of the 1990s.

The first tangible breakthrough in the Fight for \$15 came in 2013, when voters in the Seattle suburb of SeaTac adopted labour legislation (ordinance) that raised the minimum wage to \$15 an hour.

Crucially, the ordinance went further than merely wages. It provided paid sick days. It mandated employers to offer work hours to existing employees before bringing in new hires. It directed employers to ensure tips go to the workers who perform the service. It instituted measures to protect workers when contracts end, and more.

Central to the campaign's success were strong labour-community networks that forged unity and solidarity between different unions and community partners. It deliberately sought to build a broad campaign to win better working conditions for workers across the jurisdiction.

The campaign was so popular that right next door in Seattle, Kshama Sawant put the Fight for \$15 at the heart of her municipal election campaign. She generated such enthusiasm for her campaign that she ousted a long-time incumbent Democrat city councillor.

Sawant's campaign effectively turned the municipal election into a referendum on decent work — and soon all candidates were vying with each other to show who was the most supportive of the Fight for \$15.

In the months ahead, several cities beyond SeaTac and Seattle won \$15 minimum wage legislation, including San Francisco (where they had previously won a groundbreaking Retail Worker Bill of Rights) and Los Angeles.

Ballot initiatives were proposed in several other cities in California and elsewhere.

Last year, the New York state wage board implemented a sector-wide \$15 minimum wage for all fast food workers.

Then, motivated by the widespread support for the Fast Food Forward campaign, which demanded a \$15 minimum wage, the state's Governor Andrew Cuomo promised to extend the \$15 per hour floor to all minimum wage earners in New York state.

As a down payment, he instituted a \$15 minimum wage for all employees hired directly by the state government. In this way, the wage

hike for public sector workers wasn't seen in isolation; the public sector wage hike was clearly framed as a step toward a \$15 hourly minimum for everyone.

On April 4, 2016, Cuomo and California governor Jerry Brown both signed into being the first two statewide \$15 minimum wage laws in the U.S.

In keeping with the growing momentum in the U.S., and in light of the pending Changing Workplaces Review in Ontario, Ontario's Campaign to Raise the Minimum Wage officially re-launched in 2015 under the auspices of the Fight for \$15 & Fairness.

What does fairness mean? It means seven paid sick days. An adequate number of paid hours. Fair scheduling with advance notice. Equal pay for equal work. Stronger regulation of temporary agencies. Better protections from reprisals when workers speak up for their rights or organize unions. Proactive and publicly provided enforcement of laws combined with stiffer penalties for employers found to be violating laws. An end to ESA exemptions that leave so many workers without minimum legislative protections. An end to contract flipping that undermines workers' wages, benefits and access to unions. There are many other measures that would make it easier for workers to unionize.

Significantly, these demands emerged from workers themselves — especially those in low-wage, precarious employment. They reflect what workers felt were neither so high as to be out of reach, nor so low as to be meaningless.

In short, they reflect demands that workers are willing to fight for — essential for a campaign that seeks to activate workers from the ground up. This is critically important.

The growing gap in living conditions between workers in decent jobs and workers in low-wage, unstable and involuntary part-time employment undermines the gains unionized and non-unionized workers have won together.

There is an urgent need for a working-class movement to rebuild the floor in wages and



working conditions. Engaging workers in small workplaces, in unstable and low-wage employment is a critical strategic question for the labour movement.

The energy and excitement of the Fight for \$15 has been contagious, drawing previously fragmented pockets of workers into united, concrete activity.

Even sectors where workers more typically identify as “professionals” and therefore separate from working-class concerns are finding their own pathways into the Fight for \$15.

For example, contract faculty in the U.S. joined the movement under the banner: Fight for \$15K — \$15,000 per course, instead of the current rate of \$3,500 to \$4,500.

They formed Faculty Forward, inspired directly by the success of New York’s Fast Food Forward movement.

This shift in consciousness is not surprising: according to a 2015 study by the University of California, Berkeley’s Center for Labor Research and Education, fully one-quarter of part-time university professors rely on some form of public assistance to make ends meet.

The situation for homecare workers is even worse. The data show nearly half — 48 per cent — of U.S. homecare workers are reliant on social assistance to supplement inadequate wages.

But by connecting their collective bargaining strategy to the demands of the Fight for \$15, unionized homecare workers in Massachusetts and Oregon have won a starting wage of \$15 and paid sick days in Minnesota.

Similar examples are coming to light in Canada, where grocery store workers have been able to connect their bargaining demands to the Fight for \$15 and Fairness. They have won breakthroughs in scheduling and in extending the reach of provincial minimum wage increases to more workers by bargaining the same increase to union members within the contract’s pay grid, including those earning more than

the minimum wage.

In doing so, unions have provided a tangible incentive — not just a moral argument — for unity between unionized and non-unionized workers.

These are only a few examples that help explain why the Fight for \$15 has been growing.

Last year’s April 15 day of action saw underpaid workers strike and demonstrate in more than 200 cities in the U.S. and Canada.

This year’s global days of action on April 14 and 15 saw non-unionized and unionized workers strike in some 300 cities across the U.S.

In Canada, Fight for \$15 campaigns have emerged in B.C., Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. Federations of labour in B.C., Ontario, Quebec and Nova Scotia have adopted formal resolutions and are playing leading roles in the movements.

In fact, April 15 was Canada’s first pan-Canadian day of action in the Fight for \$15, with coordinated action taking place across the country. In Ontario, there were 20 different labour-community actions in 16 municipalities. Across the continent, workers are finding creative ways to reframe their own demands in order to be part of this growing movement.

This is one reason why the Fight for \$15 and Fairness has been so successful — it offers a framework that poses demands in class terms — not merely union terms or workplace terms.

It’s also a frame that relies on workers’ own initiative, on networks of activists in unionized and non-unionized workplaces, in communities, and on campuses. No matter where we are situated, any of us can adapt the campaign to suit our particular circumstances, yet still be part of a movement in which a victory anywhere nourishes the movement everywhere.

This global unity and solidarity is, of course, the antidote to globalization and austerity. If we’re in it for the longer term, it has the poten-

tial to offer all of us a pathway toward a radical reinvention of the world.

More immediately in Ontario, however, the stakes are high.

The government's employment and labour law review offers up an important political opportunity to change the laws that contribute to precarity in the labour market and an organizing opportunity to rebuild workers' confidence to demand more from their employers.

The milestones we achieve today will form part of the political and economic landscape in the future. And we are fortunate to be presented with these opportunities in the midst of an international movement that is actually starting to win. ■

*To learn more about the Fight for \$15 and Fairness, visit [www.15andFairness.org](http://www.15andFairness.org).*



Photo: Ontario Federation of Labour / CC BY 2.0

# Working Poor in the Six

## A way out

Sheila Block



In a paper for the Metcalf Foundation, John Stapleton documents that Toronto has the highest concentration of working poverty and the fastest growth rate in working poverty in Canadian cities.

John provides us with a stark characterization of Toronto.

He describes the city as a giant modern-day Downton Abbey, where a well-to-do knowledge class relies on a large cadre of working poor at their workplaces, where they pour their coffee, serve their food and clean their offices.

And at home — to maintain their gardens, mind their children and clean their houses.

Poverty wages are just one part of the equation in Torontonians' experience of working poverty. The Workers' Action Centre has documented the rights violations that are routinely associated with low-wage work.

In our research at CCPA-Ontario, we document the prevalence of low-wage work, unpredictable hours and the lack of paid time off provincewide.

We have also documented that this low-wage work is not distributed randomly through the population but, rather, that it is concentrated among workers who are racialized, recent immigrants, and women.

The causes of increasing working poverty are many and complex. And all of them cannot be addressed by municipal policies. However, the city could make concrete progress by drawing on its purchasing power and by reforming its employment practices — both as part of its poverty reduction plan.

Toronto's poverty reduction plan was unanimously approved by city council and it included commitments that could reduce working poverty.

It committed to champion a living wage standard across Toronto.

It committed to give preference to vendors who pay a living wage to provide goods and services to the city.

It committed to support the provincial effort to strengthen employment standards.

And it committed to develop a job quality assessment tool and apply it to city jobs, city contractor jobs and the city's procurement process.

The city's commitment to living wage policies is important. Here's why: as a complement to a provincewide higher minimum wage, municipal living wage policies can be an essential component to addressing working poverty.

Stepping up to make the City of Toronto a living wage employer would build upon long-standing city policies, such as the fair wage policy. Importantly, the proposal to become a living wage employer extends beyond city staff to contractors.

We know that contracted services, such as cleaning, security and food preparation are very low-wage, precarious jobs. Extending living wage policy beyond city staff to services that the city purchases will raise the floor for both employers and workers in these sectors.

Becoming a living wage employer is only one piece of a larger puzzle in the city's role in reducing working poverty. Regular hours of work, working conditions, occupational health and safety and opportunities for advancement are also crucial.

The city is working on developing a job quality index to measure and rank job measures such as hours of work, working conditions, occupational health and safety, and opportunities for advancement. However, the city needs to move beyond measurement and toward action to improve job quality.

And these kinds of job quality concerns are not limited to the private sector. We found that out in a research study on the impact that contracting out city services can have on public sector

workers. Those who were affected by contracting out saw their work hours, income and access to benefits reduced and they experienced negative impacts on their health and family lives.

That is why the city's approach to collective bargaining in 2015 was such a disappointment. Often we think of public sector jobs as secure and well paid. And, while that is often the case, CUPE Local 79 provided information about how City of Toronto jobs are also precarious. Despite a reluctant employer, new language was achieved in scheduling for many part-time workers, but there is much work still to be done during the term of the agreements.

The poverty reduction strategy also proposes to leverage the city's spending power by developing and implementing social procurement and community benefit agreements. These agreements are a new development here, but they have a longer history in the United States.

Implementing these policies would put Toronto at the policy forefront by using existing spending more effectively to reduce working

poverty — and to encourage the private sector to become fuller partners in poverty reduction.

Work has begun on both of these strategies: the city has developed a social procurement strategy and a framework agreement for community benefits has been negotiated for the Eglinton Crosstown with the Toronto Community Benefits Network. Two recent Atkinson Foundation papers also provide practical advice on how to further advance these kinds of policies.

All of these initiatives could spell real change for the city's working poor, because there is a lot more that the City of Toronto needs to do in order to combat working poverty. ■

## **Regular hours of work, working conditions, occupational health and safety and opportunities for advancement are crucial.**

# Affordable Dental Care

## A gaping hole in Ontario's health care system

Jacque Maund

Chantal was a single mother in Kingston looking for work in the food service sector but couldn't get a job because she was missing two of her front teeth.

She had inherited a gum disease that led to tooth loss, but could not afford the expensive dental treatment needed to fix her teeth and restore her ability to smile.

Mike had just started a new job in Toronto when he was diagnosed with cancer and had to quit. He had no health benefits and few savings. In addition to struggling with cancer, he had dental problems and one night, in desperate pain, he sterilized a sewing needle and pierced the abscess on his gum to get some relief. He couldn't afford to see a dentist.

Chantal and Mike know first-hand how important it is to have access to oral health care. Good oral health is more than just a nice smile — it's an important part of being healthy.

Dental cavities are one of the most chronic common diseases, but OHIP doesn't cover the cost of caring for teeth and gums.

Cavities, tooth decay and gum disease can affect our overall health. They can cause infection, pain and chewing problems that contribute to poor nutrition.

Research shows a link between poor oral health and diabetes, heart disease and respiratory disease. Poor oral health also affects a person's wellbeing, self-esteem and ability to get and maintain work.

Ontario's 84 Community Health Centres and Aboriginal Health Access Centres specialize in serving vulnerable people like Chantal and Mike, so we see the urgency of this problem almost daily. But only one-quarter of our health

centres have dental clinics. Limited funding constrains their ability to deliver cohesive oral health programs for low-income people in their communities.

The disturbing reality in Ontario is that two to three million people cannot get the oral health care they need. The main reason is the cost of private dentistry, according to a report from the College of Dental Hygienists of Ontario.

This echoes the findings of a national study by the Canadian Academy of Health Sciences, which found that 17 per cent of Canadians don't have access to dental care. Cost is the major reason.

The most vulnerable people have the highest rate of tooth decay, pain and gum disease: low-wage workers and their children, immigrants, Aboriginal Peoples and seniors.

The Canadian Academy of Health Sciences report noted that the vast majority of oral health care is delivered by private dentists, but the private sector model is not a good model to provide oral health care to these vulnerable groups.

In a closer look at oral health coverage for Ontario workers, a study by the Wellesley Institute found that only 64 per cent of employees had dental benefits provided by their employer. A breakdown by gender indicates that 68 per cent of male workers have dental coverage but only 59 per cent of women workers can say the same, reflecting the greater likelihood of women working in part-time jobs without benefits.

Further analysis of the working poor shows that people with low earnings are less likely to have medical and dental benefits. In Ontario, almost half (45 per cent) of people earning less than \$30,000 annually do not have



employer-provided dental benefits.

The changing nature of the Ontario labour market and the rise in precarious work will result in fewer Ontario workers getting access to employer-provided health and dental benefits.

So what options do people have in Ontario when they don't have dental benefits or can't afford the co-payments on their insurance plan for expensive dental treatment? Very few: there are no provincial public dental programs for adults and seniors.

Ontario has a very limited patchwork of public dental programs. According to Public Health Ontario, government spending on oral health services represents only 1.3 per cent of all oral health spending in the province — the lowest in Canada.

Public dental programs include: Healthy Smiles Ontario for low-income children and youth under 18, basic dental services for people receiving Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) and emergency dental care for people who qualify for Ontario Works (OW) — though it's at the discretion of the municipality where they live. Emergency dental care typically means pulling out the offending tooth.

The result of the high cost of private dentistry services, the lack of public oral health programs, and the limitations of employer dental benefits is that many people cannot afford preventative dental care.

Some turn, in desperation, to hospital emergency rooms and doctor's offices when problems flare up. In 2014, there were 61,000 visits to hospital emergency rooms across Ontario by people with dental problems. But they could not receive treatment there, only painkillers.

Similarly, there are approximately 218,000 visits to physician offices for dental problems each year, but doctors cannot provide treatment. Research conducted by the Association of Ontario Health Centres estimates the cost to Ontario's health care system for these visits to be at least \$37 million annually, with no treatment provided for the problem.

## Key facts:

**7.3 per cent:** Average annual rate of growth in public sector spending on dental services in 1975 in Ontario. It was 3.8 per cent in 2005.

**1.3 per cent:** Public share of total spending on dental services in Ontario in 2010 (it was 2.5 per cent in 1975).

**\$438.11:** Private sector spending on dental services in Ontario, per capita, in 2010 (up from \$163.80 in 1975).

Premier Kathleen Wynne has committed to building a fairer and healthier Ontario. Health Minister Eric Hoskins has committed to reduce the gaps in Ontario's health care system, with the aim of improving health equity to ensure that all Ontarians receive consistent high quality care regardless of their earnings, location, race or immigration status.

But progress is painfully slow. In the 2014 Ontario budget, the government promised to extend public dental programs to low-income adults by 2025. People in pain cannot wait another nine years.

The Association of Ontario Health Centres, the Ontario Oral Health Alliance and many others are calling on the Ontario government to take action now to extend public oral health programs to low-income adults and seniors in need.

Good oral health care should be a cornerstone of Ontario's public health programs. And it should be accessible — delivered in public dental clinics located in public health units, in community health centres, in Aboriginal health access centres, in nurse practitioner-led clinics and in community family health teams that already serve the most vulnerable people in their communities.

Everyone in Ontario deserves the right to a healthy mouth and smile, not just those who can afford it. ■

# A Growing Movement to end predatory payday loan profiteering

Tom Cooper



**P**rofiteering is a derogatory term applied to those in business who make profits through methods that, while not illegal, could certainly be considered unethical.

Business owners can be accused of profiteering if they raise prices on essential goods in an emergency such as a national disaster or during war.

With 4.8 million Canadians experiencing poverty, many advocates consider the country's high level of income inequality to be a crisis too.

For people who run into financial distress — if they fall short on funds to pay the rent, need grocery money to feed the kids or have a poor credit rating — an industry has emerged to fill a desperate need for emergency cash: the payday loan industry.

And payday lenders sure seem to fit the description of profiteers.

A payday loan is a time-limited loan with quick approvals and often no credit check.

There are more than 800 payday lenders licensed by the Government of Ontario. You've probably seen the outlets: storefront operations with flashy advertisements for "easy cash."

Outlets are often located on the fringes of lower-income neighbourhoods where traditional financial institutions, such as banks, have closed up shop over the last decade or so.

Canada's payday loan sector has grown over the past 20 years, taking advantage of a vacuum of lax provincial and federal regulations.

These lenders are taking advantage of those with nowhere else to turn: the working poor are the main clients of payday loan outlets and most are underserved by traditional financial institutions.

In Ontario, payday lenders are regulated by the *Payday Loans Act*, but many consumer advocates have argued that these provincial regulations do not go far enough to protect vulnerable borrowers.

Payday loans actually exceed the criminal in-

terest rate — that's the maximum rate of interest allowed in Canada. Following changes to the Criminal Code in 2007, the criminal interest rate does not apply to payday loans in provinces that have opted to allow this type of lending.

A \$21 interest cap on \$100 borrowed may seem manageable over a two-week period but annualized, the interest rate of the loan is closer to 540 per cent. Customers often get trapped in a cycle of borrowing and repayments and spiral deeper into debt.

According to research undertaken by the Momentum Community Economic Development Society in Calgary, the vast majority of loans are borrowed to cover ordinary everyday expenses: rent, groceries, utilities, car payments; only 28 per cent are used for unexpected emergencies.

In fact, the business model of the payday loan industry is predicated on customers returning time after time to take out more loans to cover the costs of paying off the previous one.

A 2004 Ernst & Young study commissioned by the Canadian Association of Community Financial Service Providers explained that high operating costs mean they can only be profitable if they turn the vast majority of customers into repeat borrowers. The report said: "On average, payday lenders provide 15 repeat or rollover loans for each first-time loan they provide."

According to Dan Freehan, CEO of payday lender Cash America, "The theory in the business is that you've got to get that customer in, work to turn him into a repetitive customer, long-term customer, because that's really where the profitability is."

And as though raking in 540 per cent in annualized interest through repeat business isn't enough, predatory lenders excel at using slick marketing campaigns to lure customers through the door and keep them coming back.

Posters displayed in outlet windows, on billboards or on TV advertise happy, attractive payday loan customers able to borrow the

## Key facts:

**Six:** Number of provinces that have functioning laws that govern the payday loan industry

**Unlicensed lenders:** Recent provincial reviews, including in Ontario, have focused on the threat posed by unlicensed lenders

**Young borrowers:** A 2005 Survey of Financial Security showed that 10 per cent of young families aged 15-24 had borrowed money using a payday loan

**Vulnerable borrowers:** Low-income families are twice as likely to draw on a payday loan; that said, three per cent of payday loans went to families earning between \$40,001 and \$66,000

**Last resort:** For almost half of families, payday loans were their last resort. They had no one to turn to

**True costs:** Interest rates on a \$100 payday loan for 14 days can range from 335 to 650 per cent — that's higher than the Criminal Code's interest provisions

money they want without a care in the world.

In December 2014, Money Mart, perhaps the largest of these predatory lenders, began offering a "new service" during the holidays to buy back store gift cards — but only at 50 per cent of their value. After an uproar on social media and at Queen's Park, Money Mart backed away from the shameful scheme.

While financial resources are drained from individuals utilizing payday loan services, the companies are making money hand over fist. In a report for the CCPA in 2013, John Anderson noted: "These are extremely profitable operations. DFC, the owner of Money Mart, the largest Canadian payday loan firm, made global profits before tax of \$387 million on revenues of \$1.062 billion in 2012, and 28.7 per cent of their total global revenues for the fiscal third quarter 2013 came from Canada."

The provincial government announced proposals to reform *Ontario's Payday Loans Act* late in 2015, but the changes only modestly address the outrageous levels of interest the industry can charge. The Ministry of Government and Consumer Services sought public input on potential options: to drop the amount the industry could charge from \$21 on \$100 to either \$19, \$17 or \$15 on \$100, or to keep it at its current level of \$21 on \$100.

Some communities have reached peak frustration with predatory lending in their neighbourhoods and they are taking matters into their own hands.

Advocacy groups such as ACORN Canada (the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now) have long advocated for stricter regulations.

Calgary, Alberta and Burnaby, British Columbia have looked at municipal by-laws to limit the scope of predatory lending within city limits.

In Hamilton, City Councillor Matthew Green led an effort, in collaboration with Hamilton's Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, to use local planning authority to limit the proliferation of predatory lenders, calling predatory lending a form of "economic violence."

In February, Hamilton city council voted unanimously to establish a new municipal licensing category for payday loan outlets. The director of Hamilton's licensing department recommended new measures to limit the scope of payday lenders and to "protect the public."

These included new licensing fees, rules about posting the actual annual rate of interest the outlets charge, as well as a requirement to ensure anybody visiting a payday loan establishment is provided with city-sanctioned information on credit counselling services.

Recently, Toronto city councillors voted to look at ways to restrict where payday loan operators can set up shop in the city, to protect low-income Torontonians from spiraling into debt. Working with members of ACORN, City Coun-

cillor Kristyn Wong-Tam has been pushing for new municipal powers in Canada's largest city to stop the proliferation of payday loan outlets. Alberta has taken it a step further. In the speech from the throne in March, Premier Rachel Notley announced the government would introduce *An Act to End Predatory Lending*. The Alberta government would reduce the amount payday lenders can charge to \$15 on \$100 and, like the City of Hamilton, it would require all payday lenders to provide credit counselling information to customers.

Even some corporations have had enough: In early May, Google announced that it would ban all payday loan advertisements, calling them "deceptive and harmful."

Stronger regulations nationally, provincially and locally are critical, but there are deeper issues at play.

A living wage, affordable housing and affordable public transportation would help eliminate the appeal of these predatory lenders.

Traditional banks and credit unions have a central role to play by ensuring financial services are available and accessible for low-income populations. Some credit unions, such as VanCity in British Columbia, have begun developing innovative pilot projects that offer short-term loans at dramatically reduced interest rates.

Similar ideas are taking root at credit unions in Ontario: Hamilton City Councillor Green has convened local credit unions and consumer advocates to discuss local options.

National focus has also turned to the century-old system of postal banking as a potential alternative to payday lending. Many international post offices continue to operate these safe and convenient systems to depositors who do not have access to banks.

With a number of burgeoning alternatives, it's time to limit the damage the predatory lending industry has already done. It's time to end the reign of these profiteers. ■

# *The Last Word*

It's not about divisions.

Middle class. Working class. Working poor.

It's about quality of life. It's about community.

Because what are neighbourhoods if not about community?  
Community health and safety. Inclusiveness. A strong social  
fibre. The promise that all jobs should be decent jobs.

Decency. Fairness. Social justice. Equity.

These are the values that should guide employment  
standards, labour markets and public policy. They guide  
our policy analysis and research at the Canadian Centre  
for Policy Alternatives' Ontario office (CCPA-Ontario).

We specialize in peer-reviewed research on income inequality,  
decent work, and the role of government in Ontario —  
looking at federal, provincial, and municipal issues.

We're trying to change the conversation about decent  
work and what progressive public policy looks like.  
Your donations help make that possible: thank you!

Onward,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Hennessy". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large, sweeping loop at the end of the word.

Trish Hennessy

Director, CCPA-Ontario

Download our reports: [www.policyalternatives/ontario](http://www.policyalternatives/ontario)

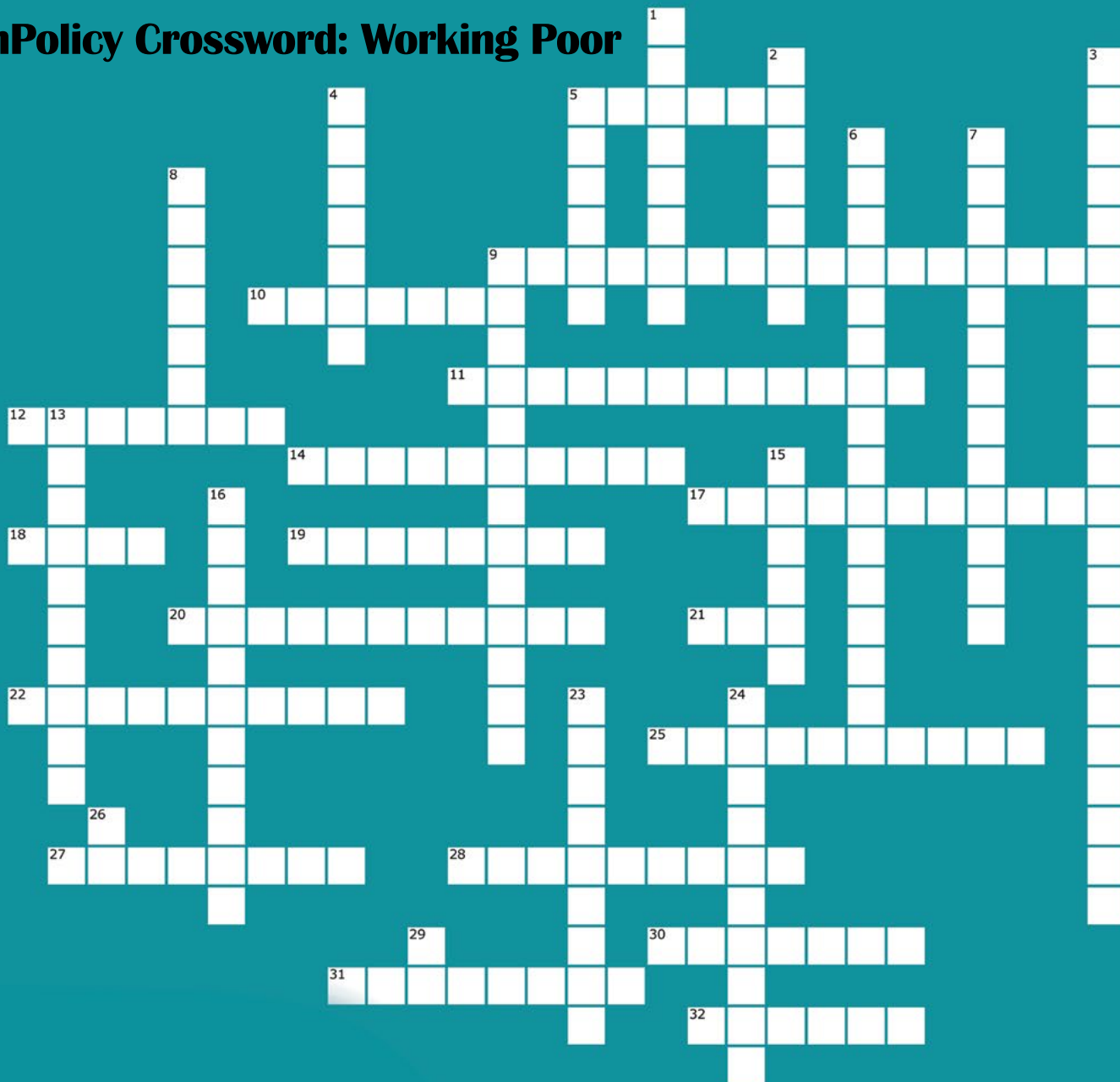
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# OnPolicy Crossword: Working Poor



Answers: [www.policyalternatives.ca/ontario](http://www.policyalternatives.ca/ontario)

## Across

- 5 The working poverty rate in this capital city stayed the same between 2006 and 2012  
 9 Law that would help diversify workplaces  
 10 Job didn't even exist 10 years ago  
 11 Dust Bowl Troubadour  
 12 Province undergoing labour law review  
 14 Lunchpail job  
 17 Working-class people, according to Marx  
 18 The highest paid 100 of these make 184 times more than the average Canadian worker  
 19 Dated term for women who sold merchandise in a store  
 20 It should be \$15 an hour  
 21 They're taking care of business  
 22 The City of Cambridge now pays a \_\_\_\_\_  
 25 Home to paper mill jobs (and the Hoito)  
 27 Where to network for jobs  
 28 Hamilton's claim to fame  
 30 Describes early 20th century system of mass production  
 31 Everybody's working for the weekend band  
 32 He penned the song Working Class Hero

## Down

- 1 Home to BlackBerry  
 2 Job at risk of automation  
 3 It's the Ontario law that covers workers' rights  
 4 This Ontario car town has lost a lot of good-paying jobs  
 5 It was about the 99%  
 6 Middle class symbol  
 7 Sector that lost 280,000 jobs between 2000-07 in Canada  
 8 Job with very low risk of becoming automated  
 9 Your work space should be correct in this way  
 13 Dolly Parton song in 1980s working woman's movie  
 15 This city lost a lot of good jobs to this Caterpillar plant closure in 2015  
 16 This boss writes working class songs  
 23 Ivory tower job becoming precarious  
 24 Unifor and Steelworkers represent them  
 26 Insurance for Canadian workers  
 29 Upscale resume