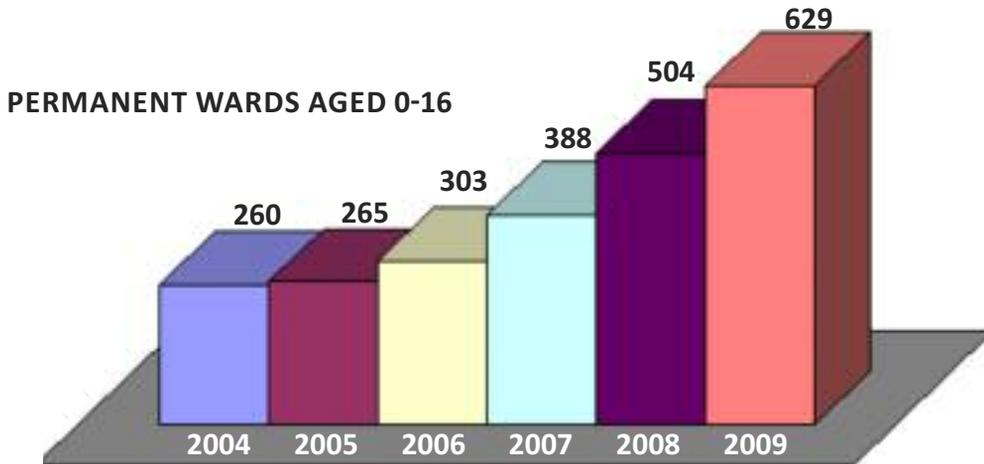


CHILDREN

"I want my future to be (with) my kids, but right now it's not looking like that."

Since 2007 there has been a dramatic 68% increase in the number of Saskatchewan children who have become permanent wards of the state. It is up to the Saskatchewan Party to explain this trend which began the year they took office.



"Three times the number of Indigenous children are now in state care than during the residential school era. In most cases it is not because of abuse, but because of neglect due to poverty."

- Amnesty International

Canada: Submission to the UN Universal Periodic Review.

Fourth Session of the UPR Working Group of the Human Rights Council, Feb. 2009.

WHY IS THIS HAPPENING?

As Amnesty International points out, children are most often removed from their families because of the effects of poverty. In recent years, Saskatchewan has seen an economic boom that has driven up the cost of housing and daily necessities. At the same time, there has been little in the way of increased support for families that are struggling to keep up. In particular, social assistance rates no longer meet the cost of housing.

WHAT PEOPLE THINK

In 1989 Canada pledged to eliminate child poverty by the year 2000. Since then, Canada has recovered from the recession of the early 1990s, and Saskatchewan is booming. People are better off today than 20 years ago.

THE REALITY

Child poverty hasn't been eliminated. There are 33,000 Saskatchewan children living below the poverty line. The child poverty rate is 15.2%, slightly higher than the national average of 15%.

FACTS

15.2% of Saskatchewan children were living below the poverty line in 2009. This was a decrease from 20% in 2008, however the rate is not falling as fast as economic growth should allow, and it is difficult to determine if it will become a trend, considering the significant increase in housing costs since then. As well, dramatically higher rates of poverty among Aboriginal children and children of single mothers indicates that the most at-risk children are being left behind.

ABORIGINAL CHILDREN

According to the last census, in Saskatchewan 45% of Aboriginal children under age 15 live in low-income families, compared with 13% of non-Aboriginal children. For children under age 6, the disparity is even greater: 51% of Aboriginal children and 15% of non-Aboriginal children live in poverty.

CHILDREN OF LONE-PARENT FEMALES

Overall child poverty fell in Saskatchewan between 2008 and 2009 but the poverty rate among children of female lone-parent families rose, from 48.6% to 52.4%. Women raising children alone experience much greater challenges than those in two-income families. Saskatchewan women earn 71 cents for every dollar earned by a man, and Aboriginal women earn a mere 46 cents. Added to this wage disparity is the stress of juggling rising housing costs, lack of affordable quality childcare, inflexible workplaces and precarious part-time employment.

ALTERNATIVES AND ACTION

In 2010, the Child Welfare Review Panel looked into the situation of Saskatchewan's children and made several recommendations. The panel decided the first step is to acknowledge that poverty drives child neglect and related social problems. The panel concluded that the provincial government should make significant improvements to income support, affordable housing and disability services.

Such supports work. According to a report released by the Social Policy Research Unit, there would have been 51,900 Saskatchewan children in poverty in 2008 — equivalent to a rate of 24.5% — had it not been for government assistance. With social assistance and other forms of economic support, 19,100 (36.8%) of these children were lifted above the poverty line. From this point, children have far greater opportunity to do well at school and form hopes for the future. But more far-reaching societal changes, such as reducing racism and sexism, are needed to ensure all children benefit equally.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

This fact sheet is based on information from *Child and Poverty in Saskatchewan and Canada: 2010* by Fiona Douglas and Paul Gingrich, and *Poverty in Canada and Saskatchewan in 2011: No Closer to the Truth* by Garson Hunter. Both papers were published by the Social Policy Research Unit, University of Regina, and are available online at www.uregina.ca/spr.