

The Guardian

COVERS PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND LIKE THE DEW

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BIRTHPLACE OF CONFEDERATION



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Students Samara Furness, left, and Taylynn Blackett join teacher Edwina Arbuckle and fellow students at Montague Consolidated in the first steps to launch the Order of Good Cheer to fight child poverty. GUARDIAN PHOTO BY STEVE SHARRATT

SYNOPSIS

Biography of former premier Alex Campbell now available in audio-book.

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QUICK WEATHER

TODAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
High 5	High 1	High -3
Low -2	Low -6	Low -8
POP 40%	POP 80%	POP 30%

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Students pick fight with child poverty

Montague Grade 5-6 class launching Order of Good Cheer

By STEVE SHARRATT
THE GUARDIAN

MONTAGUE — An Order of Good Cheer is being formed on Prince Edward Island in an effort to ward off the pangs of winter, much like a similar event held more than 400 years ago.

But while Champlain's event in 1606 was to boost morale, the Grade 5-6 class at Montague Consolidated

School wants to ward off the pangs of child poverty.

"We shouldn't have poverty and we all need to help prevent it," said student Samara Furness during a class presentation here this week. "We want to get a petition going where every kid across P.E.I. signs it to oppose child poverty."

The school was selected to attend the "First Keep the Promise" national student

summit Nov. 17-19 sponsored by the Canadian Teachers Federation social action program. They joined 60 other students from across Canada for the Ottawa event.

Teacher Edwina Arbuckle attended with students Furness and Taylynn Blackett and returned enthused with ideas to address a problem that is now

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Students

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celebrating a 25th anniversary.

It was in 1989 that all federal parties approved a unanimous resolution to eradicate child poverty in Canada by the year 2000. Needless to say, that effort falls short of success.

Today, one in seven children lives in poverty in one of the richest countries in the world, 38 per cent of food bank clients are kids, and the annual cost of child poverty is more than \$70 billion a year.

"As a class, we wanted to do something proactive," said Arbuckle. "And so our version of the Order of Good Cheer has begun."

The order plans to host and sponsor a major event that will help raise money for the local food bank and take on other assistance projects over the course of the winter. Not unlike the Order of Good Cheer started by explorer Samuel de Champlain 408 years ago to raise the morale of the Port Royale settlers in 1606 Nova Scotia.

Students will be studying poverty and the effects of a malady that is no stranger to Prince Edward Island. At the Montague food bank alone, clients include 150 children.

"Poverty is not new and it's not cool," said Taylynn. "One of the highlights for me was meeting Lawrence MacAulay."

Arbuckle and her charges met with Cardigan MP Lawrence MacAulay during the visit and noted that the Liberal MP was one of the elected officials who approved the 1989 resolution.

"The whole idea is to get politicians and the public to re-visit this important promise to end child poverty," she said.

The Order of Good Cheer follows the recent release by Campaign 2000 this week which showed more Islanders are struggling with poverty today than in 1989.

Single-parent families lead with almost 45 per cent dealing with poverty across the Island.

Montague students return from Ottawa summit better informed about country-wide poverty

By Erin McCabe

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Two Montague Consolidated Grade 6 students and their teacher were the only Island representatives to attend a recent Keep the Promise summit in Ottawa.

Keep the Promise is an initiative to bring awareness to the realities of child poverty and re-ignite discussion about a unanimous motion made in the House of Commons in 1989 to eliminate child poverty in Canada by the year 2000.

Montague Consolidated teacher Edwena Arbuckle heard about the seminar through the Canadian Teachers Federation and she introduced the initiative in her classroom.

"To participate in the summit, there's a three tiered project involved," Ms Arbuckle said. "The first part of the project is to use a booklet about what poverty is, written by Canadian children in Grades 5 to 8, as our social studies focus."

The book was produced last spring and made in anticipation of the youth summit, according to Ms Arbuckle.

The students had to research and answer questions concerning child poverty. Their teacher narrowed down the scope of questions to Prince Edward Island and the eastern part of the province specifically.

The questions were then uploaded to the Internet, making them available for anyone across the country to view.

Ms Arbuckle said the timing of this initiative and the class's participation coincides perfectly with a report recently released by Mary Boyd of the MacKillop Centre for Social Justice which revealed more Islanders are living in poverty in 2014 than in 1989.

Child poverty on PEI saw an increase from 17 to 19.7 per cent across the province and in Canada, one in seven children are living in poverty as well as one in four Aboriginal children.



Grade 6 students Taylynn Blackett, left, and Samara Furness, from Montague Consolidated, along with their teacher Edwena Arbuckle, attended a youth summit in Ottawa which focused on the growing problem of child poverty. The summit was part of the Keep the Promise initiative, which calls on members of government to remember their declaration made in 1989 to eradicate child poverty by the year 2000. Erin McCabe photo

Ms Arbuckle and two Grade 6 students, Taylynn Blackett and Samara Furness, then travelled to the nation's capital to participate in Keep the Promise's first ever youth summit along with about 60 other students from across Canada.

The trip was funded entirely through the Canadian Teachers Federation.

Taylynn Blackett said they learned a lot about child poverty and the effects it can have at the summit.

"We learned how poverty affects education," she said. "We also learned about all the different places in Canada and how much poverty they have there."

"We learned how it affects yourself - how you can't eat right or sleep right and then you get tired out," Samara added.

One of the events at the summit was a Town Hall, Ms Arbuckle said, where Taylynn gave a little presentation.

"Samara carried the PEI flag onto the stage," she said. "They both did an awesome job. There were a number of people there of world wide influence - Mary Jo Leddy for example."

Samara said she wished they could have spoken with someone from the government, or one of the event organizers.

"They said everyone would get the chance to talk to someone from government, but only two groups did," she said.

However, they met briefly with Cardigan MP Lawrence MacAulay, although he was busy in caucus.

"We left some of the information with him," Ms Arbuckle said. "His assistant, Matt (Gillis) gave us

a tour of the Parliament Buildings and we discussed things a little bit with him."

The class will now move on to the third part of the initiative, which is to engage in a social action project. The students decided to hold a benefit concert.

"It's called Order of Good Cheer," Ms Arbuckle said. "We're beginning the planning process of having an evening of entertainment to raise money for the food bank."

She said, across Canada, 38 per cent of people who use food banks are children, so donating their proceeds to the food bank here was an obvious choice.

Ms Arbuckle said everyone in the class will have a job to do for the event and hopefully they will get it organized soon.

Taylynn and Samara want to increase awareness about child poverty and hope people recognize what needs to be done by government in the near future.

"People should really care about the society of kids," Samara said. "We're the future. Kids are the future."

On the web

Department tries to connect consumers, local producers.



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More Islanders living in poverty than in 1989

By MITCH MACDONALD

THE GUARDIAN

A new report showing the level of poverty in Prince Edward Island is “extremely disappointing,” says a well-known social activist and author of the report.

Mary Boyd, of the MacKillop Centre for Social Justice, said the report shows that poverty rate for P.E.I. now stands at 17.5 per cent.

That is a 26.8 per cent increase since the 13.8 per cent in 1989, the same year the House of Commons passed a unanimous resolution to seek the goal of eliminating poverty for all Canadians by the year 2000.

“It’s almost hard to find words to describe a situation like this,” Boyd said in an interview with The Guardian.

“And to find words describing what kinds of choices and priorities our leaders have when they allow a situation like this to happen.”

Campaign 2000, which is a network comprised of 120 groups across Canada working for the realization of the 1989 resolution, released its 23rd report card on child and family poverty in Canada over the weekend.

The report, which marks the first time that P.E.I. has produced a report card on child poverty, shows the small province isn’t the only

The figures of poverty on P.E.I.

Lone-parent families are among the hardest hit in terms of poverty on Prince Edward Island.

A report card on child and family poverty in Canada released this weekend by Campaign 2000 showed the numbers of Islanders struggling has increased since 1989.

Single-parent families in P.E.I. had an average poverty rate of 44.9 per cent, compared to the poverty rate for couples at 8.9 per cent.

Geographically, child poverty was spread rather evenly across the province.

According to the latest figures in 2012, the rate for child poverty in Charlottetown was 17.3 per cent, while Summerside saw a rate of 19.7 per cent.

The rest of the province stood at 17 per cent.

The paper also looked to a 2012 report on household food insecurity as an indicator of the rate of poverty in P.E.I.

According to the report, P.E.I. had the highest rate of food insecurity outside of Northern Canada with a rate of 21.9 per cent.

P.E.I. also led the country in the proportion of food insecure households relying on wages and salaries at 79 per cent.

In addition, 38 per cent of the Islanders using food banks are children, while people on social assistance and EI are evenly split at 24 per cent each as food bank users.

Urban residents who rent houses or apartments are also the most common users of the food bank at 68.7 per cent.

one to see an increase.

Since the 1989 resolution, the level of poverty in Canada has increased from 1,066,150 (15.8 per cent) to 1,331,530 (19.1 per cent) by 2012.

Boyd said that P.E.I. showed the third highest rate of increase in the country, despite a provincial government promise in 2009 to implement a poverty eradication strategy.

“In one way, it’s not a surprise because we’ve been watching this,” said Boyd. “What we are surprised at is the lack of leadership on this very vital issue by our leaders.”

Boyd said while there have been a few weak attempts to combat poverty in P.E.I., there has been no progress and the province has to be the first to tackle the issue.