

## Alberta Women in the United Church are Mobilizing for Children



Thirty-five friends and members of the United Church women's Child Well-being Initiative (CWBI) visited the Legislature on November 18, 2010. From the Visitors' Gallery, they witnessed government pages delivering poverty dolls to each of the 83 seats in the House. Each doll carried a booklet which begins with a quote from Jesus in Matthew 7:9: "When a child asks for bread, who of us would give a child a stone?"

They watched Kevin Taft, Liberal MLA send their collection of student writing and art to the Premier on their behalf. The CWBI had invited students to paint and write their dreams for a child poverty-free

province. They heard Dr. Raj Sherman, Conservative MLA, table more CWBI petitions in the House. They listened to Dr. David Swann, leader of the Official Opposition, speak on behalf of their work for the 77,000 Alberta children who live in poverty. The first part of Question Period focused on Opposition MLAs asking questions about government plans to deal with this alarming problem.

Lillian Stewart, co-chair of the CWBI, addressed a press conference, along with Dr. David Swann and Harry Chase, Liberal MLA. The story aired on CBC and Global Television.



Dr. David Swann, Leader of the Official Opposition and Lillian Stewart, CWBI Co-Chair at the Press Conference.

Prior to being ushered to their seats in the Visitors' Gallery, the group prayed and sang an adapted version of the hymn, "Let There be Light." Simultaneously, individuals and groups around Alberta prayed for children. In Lethbridge, 30 people rallied on the frigid steps of Southminster United Church in support of the mission in Edmonton.

Read the November 19th front page story in the Lethbridge Herald <http://www.lethbridgeherald.com/>.



In January Carolyn accompanied Raffi Cavoukian to a meeting with Calgary Mayor Nenshi. She presented him with a poverty doll. (Raffi's doll greets visitors to The Centre for Child Honouring offices on Salt Spring Island, BC.)

## Child Well-Being Background, Information and Links

Alberta women of the United Church of Canada are asking our elected representatives to lead the way in implementing a bold, well-resourced, accountable child poverty reduction strategy that attains firm timelines and targets. Quebec ('02), Newfoundland/Labrador ('06), Ontario ('08), New Brunswick and Nova Scotia ('09) have implemented strategies. **Where is our vision, Alberta?**

In 2007, Alberta women of the United Church of Canada launched the grassroots **Child Well-Being Initiative (CWBI)**. As community volunteers, we noticed an alarming increase in the numbers of children forced to access food and housing relief programs. The evolving CWBI action plan began by gathering anonymous vignettes from child care sources about youngsters experiencing poverty in daycares, schools and after school programs. With this, and data from sources like Public Interest Alberta, Edmonton Social Planning Council, Statistics Canada and Campaign 2000, we dialogued with our local MLAs concerning the plight of the 77 595 Alberta children (1 in 10) living in impoverished conditions. (See [www.edmontonsocialplanningcouncil.ca](http://www.edmontonsocialplanningcouncil.ca))

On two occasions, letters addressing our concerns about the high cost of adequate housing, a living wage, food security, as well as public, accessible, quality child care have been sent to MLAs. The CWBI received 25 responses from the 83 sitting members. The CWBI petition, calling for the reduction and systematic elimination of child poverty, was initiated in January 2008. Almost 3,000 citizens from 94 communities have signed it so far. The petition was first tabled in the Legislative Assembly in April by Bridget Pastoor, MLA for Lethbridge East. The same day, 100 concerned citizens rallied at the Legislature. Since then, six MLAs from all parties have extended support for the CWBI by tabling copies of the petition in the house. The process continues. In fall, 2010 Dr. Raj Sherman, MLA for Edmonton-Meadowlark, will table the names of hundreds more supportive Albertans. Petitions continue to circulate with birdhouses inscribed, "Every bird, but not every child, can find a home." One hundred and fifty-nine copies of a 12 minute DVD explaining the CWBI has been presented to churches and to the public in Alberta (and to other interested Canadians from the Yukon to the Maritimes).

Public interest polls indicate that four out of five Albertans strongly support concrete targets to reduce poverty;1 we continue to communicate our concerns with handwritten letters to elected officials.

In 2010, United Church women and friends have sewn hundreds of rag dolls, each a symbolic reminder made with a prayer for an improvement in the quality of life for our 77,595 impoverished children. Each of the 28 Alberta Members of Parliament received a doll prior to the G8/G20 June Summits. Others have been presented to persons of influence in media, politics and the arts across Canada, including Michaelle Jean, Flora McDonald, Mardi Tindal, Maureen McTeer, Raffi, Shelagh Rogers, Maude Barlow, Peter Mansbridge. We also invited students across the province from grade 4 to 12 to respond to the question, "What if...every child in Alberta had a safe home and enough to eat?" Over 120 students submitted thought-filled essays, stories, poetry and art. A copy of each submission will be presented to Premier Stelmach in November. This journey of hope renews our vigour, focus and purpose.

[www.edmontonsocialplanning.ca](http://www.edmontonsocialplanning.ca)

**We believe that children have the right to achieve their full potential, regardless of economic or other circumstance. Poverty is never the fault of the child. As mothers and grandmothers, we intend to add voice to the growing call for social and economic justice for all.**

For more information, please contact:

Sharon: [prenevsh@telusplanet.net](mailto:prenevsh@telusplanet.net)

Lillian: 403-255-7184

Carolyn: [cpogue@shaw.ca](mailto:cpogue@shaw.ca)