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To: Members of the Standing Committee on Finance

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This briefing paper focuses on what taxation; spending and other measures should be taken to ensure progress in investing in, and caring for, all members of Canadian society:

Background: The International Centre to Combat Exploitation of Children (ICCEC) is a non-profit society that serves as a conduit between the knowledge and expertise of survivors of exploitation and academics, front-line workers, policy, professionals, NGO's, GO's and IGO's. ICCEC facilitates and promotes the participation of children and youth in the design of recovery and prevention programs as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and works to implement the Declaration and Agenda for Action written and ratified by the youth in attendance at ***Out From the Shadows – International Summit of sexually exploited Youth*** (Victoria, Canada, 1998)

Introduction: Canada reiterated their commitment to combat commercial sexual exploitation of children and youth at the 2nd World Congress Against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Japan 2001. Canada again stated their commitment to those children most vulnerable and in especially difficult circumstances at the United Nations Special Session General Assembly on Children (UNGASS) in June 2002. Canada has long held a global reputation as a nation committed to human rights, peace and as an advocate of child rights as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Currently, Canada is developing a national plan of action as a response to UNGASS with particular attention to those children most vulnerable.

In Canada children are made vulnerable due to increasing levels of child poverty, homelessness, abuse, racism, gender inequality, homophobia, addiction and violence at a time when supports to vulnerable children, youth and their families are decreasing. Youth remain the most underemployed segment of our population, and access to post secondary education becomes increasingly difficult for those that are less advantaged or more vulnerable. Increasingly children face harm through prostitution, child pornography and trafficking for sexual purposes in the growing child commercial sex industry. Many do not survive their abuse and exploitation, fewer thrive. If we are to challenge the terrible circumstances of so many of our children and youth, it will be because we invest in their potential and address them not only as social issues. By creating opportunities for our most vulnerable children and youth, we create an environment wherein human rights are a lived reality and children are encouraged to aspire beyond



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circumstance. Participation of children and youth as a basic right includes visibility, having a voice, opportunities for protection and choice, and citizenship.

Investing in our most vulnerable children today not only challenges us to be inclusive as a society, ensuring the protection of all, but it makes good economic sense as well. As a disproportionate number of Canada's population ages, youth are left with the looming responsibility of and caring for all. With fewer resources and opportunities youth risk becoming reliant on systems that failed them when they were young. We know that to invest in children's education, recreation, arts, and protection, costs less than to support them through the many systems and services as adults. We know that to invest in our children now recognizes that not only are their our future, but they are our present. Investment asks us to be both practical and human. It reminds us that not all of our young enjoy the rights and privileges of a citizen of a developed nation.

There is a First nation teaching that tells us that Elders bring to the circle wisdom, adults bring with them strength, youth with them carry spirit and children hope. We can never take our hopes for granted and we can never squander or allow hope to perish in circumstances that require simple commitment and investment. The truest measurement of a leader is not how far ahead they are, but the well-being of all the people they purport to lead.

Leave No Child Behind

Key Recommendations:

- **Recognize those children most vulnerable and invest in their protection**
- **Recognize those children most marginalized and engage them**
- **Recognize that children exist in, family, community, culture and peers and create opportunities for them to be included**
- **Recognize that education is vital in the struggle against poverty and harm**
- **Create opportunities for mentorship and employment for youth**

Recognize those children most vulnerable and invest in their protection:

As the allocation of resources is considered it is important to understand the circumstances that make children vulnerable. Poverty alone cannot explain the vast numbers of children who are neglected, and physically, sexually, emotionally and mentally abused. Poverty alone cannot explain the vast numbers of our children raped and tortured in the child commercial sex trade. Poverty cannot explain why so many of our children are exploited in the drug trade as well. Homeless and abandoned children and youth appear on our



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city streets daily. Children targeted because of race, gender, homophobia or class discrimination face the daily reality or threat of violence and hate. If we are to understand that these are some of the issues facing many of our children and resulting in serious harm, then we must invest in those programs and services which seek to prevent, intervene and help those most affected exit and heal.

- **It is important that as a nation we challenge community and provide resources for the development of services and programs to those children and youth most in need and vulnerable.**
- **It is also important that those services be community based and accessible to all.**
- **As part of any effective consumer driven service it is important to include and take into account the voices and needs of those children and youth most affected by the issues.**
- **It is important that services and programs for vulnerable children and youth, be realistic in accessibility criteria, meet the real needs of the target population, and be structured in a way that outcomes are measurable, realistic, relevant and develop the capacity of the young people they serve.**
- **As a priority, we must commit resources to those children and youth whom are in especially difficult circumstances in particular those children and youth exploited in all aspects of the child commercial sex industry.**
- **Systems, programs and services, which aim to protect those, exploited children and youth must respect and promote their rights and freedoms as outlined in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.**

Recognize those children most marginalized and engage them

Children typically exist within the spheres of family, community, culture and peers. Children are vulnerable to being marginalized in community and peers because of race, homophobia, poverty and homelessness. When children are marginalized within the context of community and peers they are vulnerable to violence and exploitation. Children at school get picked on because they are poor or of a certain race. Children in the community are excluded from community resources and centres because of background, money or circumstance. Children are vulnerable to marginalization within family and culture sometimes simply because of gender, or even cultural attitudes, which state that children are not deserving of the same rights and privileges as adults and in particular parents. Children are marginalized as they lack



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opportunity to engage and visibly participate. Because of the natural vulnerability of all children and youth they require particular protection and resources as well as support, opportunities, and the invitation to build their capacity and potential. As children are pushed further from existing in central way within community, culture, family and peers, they become more and more vulnerable to violence, abuse and exploitation. If we are to consider violence, abuse, discrimination and exploitation a result of extreme marginalization and vulnerability, then resources and supports that not only address issues but also develop real capacity amongst those most marginalized are essential. Young people affected by issues have an expertise most often overlooked as well as potential for concrete action. Youth participation is not only a right, but ensures the quality and effectiveness of programs and services that aim to address them. If young people are treated not as clients or problems, but as partners in creating a climate of change then engagement and empowerment become a lived reality.

- **Recognize those vulnerable young people and their potential for leadership in addressing issues that affect them.**
- **Fund opportunities for marginalized youth to engage in dialogue about issues and circumstances, which affect them, as well as the development of actions and strategies to address especially difficult circumstances.**
- **Develop and fund marginalized youth driven projects, pilots, services, and programs.**
- **Create and disseminate information to young people about accessing funds, opportunities, supports and resources that encourage leadership, experience, internships, conferences and learning.**
- **Create and fund opportunities for marginalized and at risk youth to engage in dialogue with government, community, peers, public, and conferences about issues and strategies which affect them.**
- **Ensure that access to education; extracurricular activities, sports, technology, arts and culture for marginalized youth are not impeded by money.**
- **Provide funding to marginalized youth to develop outreach, peer support, and peer led activities**

Recognize that children exist in, family, community, culture and peers and create opportunities for them to be included



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Funding for family, community, culture and peer activities is an investment and prevention strategy. Family, community, culture and peers are the natural structures, which provide children and youth with protection and opportunity. By creating resources within those structures young people are offered not only the opportunity to be visible and participatory but also an environment in which to flourish. Although in some circumstances children are at risk within the context of family, community, culture or peers, most children have at least a tenable connection within one of those spheres. In severe marginalization, children and youth are disconnected from all four contexts. Investment in opportunities for family, community, culture and peers to begin to engage those most marginalized children and youth and promote healing and reconnections. A positive connection to a member within family, community, culture or peers for a marginalized or at risk young person, fosters resiliency and genuine potential for thriving despite or beyond circumstances.

Not all prevention programs should focus on risk aspects, but rather opportunities for activities that reconnect those disenfranchised young people with peers, adults and elders. Young people at risk are tired of being dealt with solely as social liabilities. Young people resent being labelled according to their disadvantaged circumstances. Historically, a sports program which targets children and youth in a poor neighbourhood being referred to as a “crime prevention strategy” assumes and instils, that children who face poverty are destined for violence and crime. Similarly, a project or campaign for at risk youth that aims for anti violence and tolerance misses the genuine potential and opportunity for community development and peace building. To assume that marginalized or disadvantaged families, communities, cultures, and peers do not want to or cannot address their circumstances unless they focus on “the issues” creates funding structures, resources and opportunities that further ghettoize and entrench marginalization. It is important to assume that families, communities, cultures and peers love children and youth but that some may lack opportunity, resources, supports, or simply information.

- **Fund disadvantaged and marginalized communities, families and peer groups to develop and implement programs and activities that engage their children and youth.**
- **Resource, hire, train and fund at risk youth to develop skills to be outreach and support workers to peers**
- **Fund programs and activities that focus on relationship building, resiliency, and foster community development and peace building for those most at risk and marginalized young people.**



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- **Encourage the development of family, community, cultural, and peer activities and programs for those most marginalized which promote a positive approach and perspective on young people.**

Recognize that education is vital in the struggle against poverty and harm

One aspect of education is school. Another aspect of education is public campaigns, extracurricular activities, access to trade and skill development, life skills, culture, arts, sports and recreation. Most disadvantaged and young people have access to only the most minimum of education and even in that there are barriers. Some of the barriers to young people and education include poverty, racism, gender inequality, and violence at home or in the school environments. Young people in disadvantaged families or communities have limited or substandard school, sports, and computer equipment. As well, poverty can hinder how a child learns if for instance they go to school hungry, or without necessary equipment or supplies. Poverty can also limit the aspirations of young people as well as influence self - confidence and acceptance amongst their peers. If the school environment has violence, racism and bullying, then children are forced to go to school by law and yet endure abuse. Not all young people relate to school curriculum, many instead are engaged through music, art, sports or social activities. For other young people school is an escape from the troubles and strife at home or in their community. School can sometimes offer a child or youth a safe respite from violence, abuse or neglect, and yet create challenges in learning.

It is important that children and youth have safe school environments free of racism, gender inequality and violence. As well, activities like sports, recreation, computer, arts and culture should be seen as vital to a child and youth's development. It is also important to include life skills, conflict resolution, and leadership as part of education. Not everything can be delivered in a school environment, but is a necessity in the community. Communities and community business must be challenged and encouraged to be part of providing broader education opportunities to all young people. It is important to recognize that vulnerable child and youth populations can be engaged outside normal school environments and hours and that alternative schools work well for many. As well, for those young people whose schooling has been disrupted because of family or personal problems, or have left school for employment or because they weren't able to achieve or simply hated the experience, should be allowed and encouraged to engage in all aspects of school or extracurricular activities. Even if the only way to connect with a young person is through a social activity, at least we are not discarding them or sending them the message that they have no potential or we do not want



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them around. In the struggle against poverty and harm, education in the broadest definition, can provide young people with safe environments, transferable skills, self – esteem, confidence, foster potential, and the realization of a future with promise and opportunity.

- **Fund hot breakfast and lunch programs for disadvantaged children, youth and their communities.**
- **Create safe school environments free of racism, gender inequality, and violence through peer led programs and encourage dialogue about issues and safety among students.**
- **Fund sports, recreation, computer, and art, social and cultural activities that are free for all youth and easily available in school or community environments.**
- **Develop policies that allow for young people who have left school to engage in activities to encourage inclusion and foster safety and opportunity.**
- **Develop and fund curriculum that includes life skills and employment readiness.**
- **Engage, encourage, and challenge communities and the private sector to fund and sponsor school equipment and activities.**

Create opportunities for mentorship and employment for youth

Young people who are at risk, marginalized or in especially difficult circumstances lack some of the most basic social supports like family, community, culture or peers. Young people who are or have been in conflict with the law, exploited in the drug or sex trade, gang involved, homeless or street involved not only as children and youth lack support but risk being marginalized as adults. Connecting with our young people is vital because it sends the message that they are not throwaways, discarded, or without intrinsic human worth. Children do not have to earn or be grateful for their place in the world. It is important that we create opportunities for young people to have mentors. For young people to have mentors, it requires that each of us act as role models and interact with young people. Mentorship provides young people with protection, solace, information, support, and the sense that in some way their life matters to someone. The potential for inspiration and encouragement and the confidence that youth cannot only survive but thrive even when circumstances are increasingly difficult. Youth with encouragement can gain skills, training, employment and support when mentorship is offered in a work environment. Communities and businesses would do well to support, encourage and invite, to hire and to mentor, young people in especially difficult circumstances even when risk is involved. The alternative is to give up, or presume an adult life dependent on systems.



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Communities and businesses should be encouraged and challenged to hire and mentor young people, particularly those at risk. Not all youth at risk want intervention through social programming; many want an income and a job. If marginalized and at risk youth receive intervention through employment, there is a likelihood and potential for them to graduate to tax paying citizenship, and provide opportunities for future youth. Young people who have overcome immense difficulty can act as inspiration and role models to other youth. Youth at risk and those that have overcome difficult circumstances have repeatedly asked to be given the supports and resources necessary to go back and help their friends and their communities. Young people want to move beyond being passive recipients of a service and into active positions of leadership and independence.

- **Small grants, wage subsidies and tax breaks for businesses to hire, apprentice, train, provide job shadowing opportunities, and mentor youth in skills and/or training and employment opportunities**
- **Emphasize or give priority funding to those programs that target marginalized youth and provide accreditation and transferable skills.**
- **Train and employ marginalized and at risk youth in outreach, intervention, crisis and community service jobs.**
- **Access for marginalized and at risk youth to small grants to develop pilot projects, programs and services.**
- **As a priority, support and funding to those organizations that are peer led, or hire as policy marginalized or at risk populations.**
- **Promote youth engagement and participation as funding criteria for those organizations that serve marginalized populations.**

Conclusion:

Supports and services to those children and youth most vulnerable or at risk are crucial, but children and youth do not exist in a vacuum. Supports and services must extend to those families, communities and cultures that children and youth exist in. Priority must be given to those disadvantaged communities, and families. Housing, food, water, heat, health care, and education are vital to all peoples, and it must be understood that not all children and their families or communities have access to the basics. Canadians must invest now in children and youth or face a future wherein the growing senior population is dependent on the very systems and services that have failed so many of our young people.



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What young people ask for is pretty basic. If consulted, many say food; water, love, school and families are necessities, while still acknowledging the need for limits and structure. But children and youth also want freedom, sports, recreation, arts, and safety. Not all of these needs require investment of huge sums of monies, creation of new laws or systems, but rather, government and community commitment, and access to those services, systems, programs and opportunities that exist for others.

It is important to understand that those children and youth in especially difficult circumstances require protection, intervention, support to exit and heal, but they also want to aspire beyond issues and circumstance. If you see them solely as victims then you miss the opportunity to be inspired by their honesty, their strength, resilience, and commitment and courage to aspire and to believe that it can be different. We are obligated to step in when circumstances for children threaten their safety and survival, but we also are obligated to invest in, support and resource their participation in the development of solutions and strategies. As we struggle for answers in how we can protect those most vulnerable, we may find that children and youth have a vital and important voice and role to play. To address the circumstances that harm or marginalize our children and youth, we must first understand their experiences, perspectives and expertise and acknowledge that to not include them not only entrenches their marginalization and harm, but our failures. If we see investment in marginalized children and youth as an opportunity to do what is good for them, we miss recognizing that it makes us better and stronger as a people as well.