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place on poverty in large urban centres, and it would be clarifying some of that information.

CLYNE: Glenn, do you know what percentage of those would be children?

HOWLETT: The number of zero- to 14-year-olds in London that live in low-income families is 16,060, which is 24.3 per cent. The number of 15- to 24-year-olds that live in London that live in low-income families is 12,580 -- 28 per cent. That was based on some work that we did and sent to the Boys' and Girls' Club recently from Stats Canada's '96 census for the City of London.

McDONALD: There's no real way, no accurate way, the government can measure every single individual who is above or below the poverty line. For example, there are all kinds of people living in London on monthly cheques, and there is a whole other class of people who are living on others who have monthly cheques. So these people can't be (counted). There are people who are not working and they will not take welfare, and so they're relying on the support of family. And it's . . . that family that's also putting out money and it's very likely they are low-income.

BROWN: At the Help Centre we have a very large percentage of people that have no income at all and they either don't want to go on welfare or they don't qualify or whatever -- but they have a spouse working and they've gone from two good incomes down to one or they're just losing everything. Families are falling apart.

AVISON: So we can debate the actual numbers here but there seems to be some sense that at least The Free Press's assertion of a substantial number of people living in poverty here is on target, that we're not debating whether there's a problem regarding poverty in this city, it's a question of how large it is. Is that the idea?

BROWN: I would say it's larger.

GIRVEN: Larger than the statistics.

HOWLETT: I think one of the figures we often hear is our unemployment rate. And the way that's calculated is another whole scheme, and we come out fairly well, as I recall, against sort of Canada generally as having a lower unemployment rate. So when you see the 50,000 number it sort of shocks you, and there is a difference, I think, between those living in poverty, based on the StatsCan definition, and the unemployment rate.

AVISON: If poverty is as prevalent as we all think it is, why is it that London has this image of being an advantaged city and why is it that so many Londoners aren't aware of this?

McDONALD: I think a lot of Londoners are actually aware of people living without, to some degree. But there's also a great deal of isolation that people are feeling from their neighbours and their co-workers and from their communities. And there's a lot of embarrassment about it as well. We've seen people in our office who live, you know, in affluent suburbs in London -- both spouses losing their jobs . . . and they're ready to lose everything (and they) will still, at 9 a.m. . . . go out for the day, come back at 5 p.m., just to keep up the image of having gone to work . . . There's a huge amount of embarrassment that's sort of bound up with not being independent.
CLYNE: I think there's a variety of reasons why this community -- which is not unlike many others -- doesn't do a good job of coming to grips with this issue. First of all, no community wants to (describe itself) as a place that has a great deal of poverty. But over time, I think, in this community it's been kind of unique in that those who did speak to this issue were seen to represent a very narrow coalition. And further to that, they were, in many instances, perceived to be self-interested. So for example, when some of the folks from LifeSpin go to a meeting and represent that point of view that they do so very well, it's a very hard message to put forward. But it is exactly the issue and it's why so many of us at this table will sit at a party and hear people go on and on with half-truths and some of the mythology we like to repeat and yet none of us will jump in and say, "Hey, hold on a minute now, you know, you are going down a well-beaten, perpetuated untruth."

I think the other thing is that we have also done a wonderful job of sort of geographically distributing our low-income families in small pieces of the community, and that no single community or neighbourhood would say, "We are all low-income families," because there's usually a sort of a mix.

More to the point, a lot of folks can travel in this town, go to all the major institutions and so on, and never really come into contact with communities that have low-income people. They work sort of the north to the downtown strip, you've got 18,000 kids who come here to university for four years, they go downtown and up to the hill, downtown and up to the hill, they leave London and go, "Man, nice place, you should see the houses there, it's beautiful." But they're not really engaged in the full life of the community, which is scattered all over the place.

GIRVEN: Just to add to that, a few years ago I met with Sandy MacNee, who calls herself the Christian presence in Limberlost, and she said the problem is this truly is the Forest City -- and I've never forgotten this. She said, you can't see the forest for the trees. And everywhere you middle-class people drive in your cars, you just see beautiful trees. Unless maybe, she said, you're going to the airport and you happen to take Cheapside, and you happen to look to your left and you see Boullee Street, but other than that you don't see the poverty.

PETERSON: London has the largest inability to (provide) housing for people who are poor.

McDONALD: Yes, there are so many people who are not living in geared-to-income housing at all. They're struggling with living in a highrise somewhere.

PETERSON: The majority of people who live in the segregated housing are not people who are receiving funds, from the statistics we referred to earlier. There's 70 per cent of them are actually working poor families. And they don't leave because they know that they're on that teeter point where, if they do leave and go somewhere else, then they will be poor. Poorer. So we're talking about degrees of poverty.

MacKINNON: Such a large portion of our middle income, middle class find it convenient to talk about numbers instead of people, and issues and support mechanisms and those type of things. Numbers aren't the issue, it's the people.
PETERSON: Do you know that all of the teachers have an ongoing complaint that children are coming to school hungry from all age groups, all classes, even in the higher-income areas? Teachers say that one of the biggest things they want is a food program or an apple program so kids actually can come to school and learn.

CLYNE: There are over 70 elementary schools in this town that have official breakfast programs.

McDONALD: Which says something about the need. At the bottom of it, why is there a need for breakfast programs?

PETERSON: The biggest problem my daughter's kindergarten class is having is the fact that children are actually stealing food from other people's knapsacks to be able to be fed because they've cut the kindergarten snack program that previously was providing breakfast for most kids. And so I send two snacks with my daughter, and spare apples, so she doesn't get her snack stolen. And I live in Old South London and there's kids going hungry every morning. And they come from affluent homes and their parents are paying for their car loans and their mortgages, and these kids are coming to school without food.

McDONALD: Yes, I think that part of the misunderstanding about poverty in London -- perhaps the perception that people don't quite know that it's there -- has to do, too, with people's ideas about services in London. We feel, well, we've got food banks and folks can go down there, we've got these breakfast programs, so why are these kids going hungry? We have all these charitable foundations and things to help kids go to summer camp and that sort of thing. So, you know, low-income people aren't really doing all that bad . . . they're OK, I'm OK. When, really, we need to look at it from the other end. You know, as I said, if we have 70 school breakfast programs, we need to ask ourselves why. If our food banks are overloaded, we need to ask ourselves why and we need to challenge ourselves to do much better.

HOWLETT: I think the food bank statistics show they respond to about 2,500 -- between 2,000 and 2,500 -- individuals a month. So when you look at that compared to the other numbers they're barely touching the surface. Now, they do other good things in terms of sharing food.

McDONALD: And that's under restriction too. You can't go to the food bank all the time. And when you go to the food bank you may very well receive food that you may not be able to put into a meal. I remember one year there were five-pound bags of shaved almonds that were being handed out. This is no fault of the food bank, it has to deal with its own supply, but what this does is it puts parents in a pinch because they can't send their kids to school with shaved almonds. They can't send their kids to school with a can of tomato soup or a can of beans. So the parent keeps the child from school and then Children's Aid gets involved and the teachers get involved and the parent, you know, is called negligent and feels guilty. And the spinoff effects of just a simple lack of food in a box are tremendous.

HOWLETT: I know that many of the clients who come for our services have major housing issues -- trying to search for housing that's more affordable or fits with the cheque that they receive under financial assistance. That's one thing. But the
educational issue . . . I mean, we've been inundated with publicity about the pressure on teachers, and obviously they want to teach and they need to be able to teach kids that have had the nutrition and have the energy and momentum to learn, and that's a key ingredient. And they're under an exorbitant amount of fiscal pressure to keep themselves going based on the provincial prescriptions that they're working under.

AVISON: One of the things that comes up almost inevitably in the media is you hear some commentator who will stand up and say, "Well, no matter what we do we're always going to have a certain amount of poverty in our community." Is a certain rate of poverty inevitable or is it possible to eliminate poverty entirely?

HOWLETT: Can I just say again that when you look at large cities the rates of poverty are pretty similar? And that doesn't mean that we're not accountable as citizens and contributors in this community. I think that's one -- the mayor's action team has taken some steps . . . at least in identifying that long-range plan to put some things into place or some of the pieces of it. And I think the Waterloo example that was in The Free Press was excellent in terms of the way a section of the community can come together and really stimulate change.

AVISON: But how do we respond to people who say . . . even if we provide all sorts of income supplements and programs and services, there are still going to be people who are poor? Is that an accurate statement?

BROWN: I think first of all there needs to be that awareness. And I'm just thinking of United Way being so far behind their goal, and there needs to be an awareness of all the numbers and the people involved. There's a lot of services in the city, there's no doubt about that, but we can't meet the need alone. The community as a whole needs to get involved, and if they feel it's being done well and there's all these services available and poverty's taken care of and kids are being fed at school, we need to let them know what the real situation is.

PETERSON: I think that first we have to sort of define poverty. My teenager and I were discussing what is poverty . . . Are we talking about actually doing without the necessities, or are we talking about the fact that you can't buy the latest toy that's in the magazine or you can't attend the theatres or you can see the ads in the papers for movies but you can't go? . . . What kind of poverty are we referring to? And so, if you want to say that there's always going to be people who inappropriately spend the money they receive . . . even if it's a higher class income, yes, we are always going to have children living in poverty, regardless of what their parents earn. If you're going to say disadvantaged people, then you need to define what disadvantaged is. What I'm saying is that if you want to say what's an acceptable level of poverty, first you have to say, OK, what are we referring to? And then we have to say, OK, how can that be impacted? Yes, there's always going to be people who are disadvantaged, depending on how you define them. But there's also people in this community who can make a difference in that. They exist here now.

AVISON: Maybe we can shift this a little and talk a little bit about if, indeed, there are going to be people who are more or less disadvantaged in our society -- what's the implication in terms of their capacity to
contribute to the community? Graham, in some of the work that you did with Kids Count (an agency which sets up neighbourhood groups to help disadvantaged children) the notion was always that local neighbourhoods had a lot of capacity, regardless of their circumstance.

CLYNE: Well, let me first speak to your question about the issue of it's an inevitability. I don't believe that it's an inevitability, it's a choice that we make.

AVISON: We being the community?

CLYNE: The community, our society. And to pick up on Glenn's point, a lot of the public policy levers are beyond the control of the municipality in terms of the key issues, which relate to housing and other things that are not within the purview of the municipality. And in as much as our political leaders reflect the general public opinion, I don't see that there's a groundswell of public opinion coming forward to say we ought to do a better job on these issues. And I think that's inevitable until we can do a better job of explaining the issues and giving people a way to understand what it is we can do about it. Some of the best and most well-intended people in our community feel absolutely powerless when you bring forward the notion of poverty. Over the last little while there have been some wonderful pieces of business, the mayor's anti-poverty task force amongst them, that identify some of the tangible ways that you can impact on the effects of low income and poverty. I think there is room for us to say, as a community, "Look, we can do a better job and here's some of the things that we can do, tangibly and measurably, to improve things for folks." I think, fundamentally, this stuff is about the relationship between our public institutions and the way they interface with the people that they're supposed to serve . . .

Let's assume that everybody in our community -- as Janet represents very well -- is very, very capable of doing things for their families, for themselves, quite capable. But as a community what we ought to be doing, it seems to me, is setting our public institutions up to facilitate success of people, to alleviate what barriers we present to them and to make sure that, at every opportunity, people are given a chance to participate fully and succeed.

An old fellow was telling me a while ago, when he was growing up in Toronto he needed to only be standing with his swimsuit and towel at the side of the road and the bus would stop to pick him up, because he was going to a swimming pool. That may sound like a far-off notion but that's using a piece of existing infrastructure to make sure that kids can participate by going to the neighbourhood swimming pool.

HOWLETT: Can I just reinforce that the Kids Count theory is based around neighbourhoods coming together -- parents, kids, schools and other community-interested folks. It's efforts like that that are really important. And the other thing is, the label Kids Count goes a lot farther than when you talk about poverty. I mean it's positive, it's about contribution, it's about the investment in our future through children.

AVISON: I think that people become overwhelmed. Like The Free Press has done a terrific job this past week of educating people, of giving experiences
and stories, numbers, and that's fine. Where I think it fell a little short and where we could do a lot more work is talking about the solutions and talking about what we can do in our own community to get creative on these things, to build ideas, to brainstorm on what solutions are out there.

MacKINNON: When we can get the debate and the public away from statistics and back to what is an acceptable quality of life in our community and then set some outcomes from that. And, you know, the big area of child development -- in that area, what is acceptable and what is not, in our community, for children? Let's say what that is and talk about that. And then what are the outcomes that can be done around that. Just noting some things down besides the housing, food, the education part, recreation, a child has to have that to develop. And without that, the child is in poverty. And that's where the debate and the community should be looking. What's unacceptable? What is acceptable for the quality of life in this community for a child? Is it equal opportunity for hockey? Is it equal opportunity to swimming pools? Is it equal opportunity without having the label that I'm not participating, I'm disadvantaged? And there have been some real success stories in the States in a couple of cities where they've made programs universal, and the support for them universal, so the children aren't coming in two classes. There isn't any class warfare. And that class warfare starts with the kids.

PETEY: You also end up with a buddy system that goes for life. The friends that you made in school are the friends that you still check on to see where you fit on the peg. I mean, that's human nature. And so you can connect up somebody that you can bond with and you can buddy up through and go through each of life's next hurdle.

Wortley Village (where residents protested plans to close a neighbourhood grocery store) recently was a prime example of what happens to our communities when we take things for granted about connectedness, how connected we rarely are. If we start buying at the local fruit market, OK, the small guy, not the big conglomerate, because he is somebody who can hire someone who's unemployed, even for a few hours. Then we start really having impact. If we start buying from our local farmers versus buying from the supermarkets that purchase their vegetables in Toronto, then we could have some impact.

I lived in a small community in British Columbia which would get through natural disasters closed in, and instantly the food would start disappearing because the trucks couldn't get in; we had to help each other. So we were a connected community . . . That's what we need to be thinking about -- creating an environment where we're spending -- we're buying our furniture here, we're buying our clothes here, we're buying our cars here, we're providing services for our neighbour even if it costs us a little bit more, because the long-range cost of not spending our dollars here is that we're going to spend our dollars in another way.

AVIS: But how do you play that off against all we hear about the necessity for being involved in a global economy?

McDONALD: Well, you can't support or be part of a global economy if you don't first start at home. You know, if we don't take care of our citizens then we're not going anywhere in terms of a global
economy. And a lot of people think the global economy is just as inevitable as poverty. But things in the world are actually changing now -- local communities are starting to pull back and reinvest in themselves, and this is exactly what Janet is saying. And you know, LifeSpin has been saying for a number of years that when you get a job and you're coming off the welfare system, you can apply for work startup allowance. And this is for some clothing to help you get back to work, whether it be workboots or whatever it is you need. And instead of purchasing these things at a large chain we could have the community services department encourage people to shop at Seigel's. Purchase your outfits or your uniforms from a local uniform maker, a local uniform supplier. If there are none, well then, let's get together and see what we can do about creating some. Creating indigenous resources is what reinvesting in our local economy is all about.

AVISON: What are some of the other kinds of strategies that we have?

McDONALD: I think the thing is that charity, in the future, I don't think is going to be charity at all. One of the things that separates us from each other is sort of a charity model. The idea of the donor and the needy person, rather than seeing these two people as citizens.

CLYNE: Let's use kids as an example, because that's what Jim spoke of.

AVISON: Presumably it could be generalized across the whole population.

CLYNE: For all our good works and all the organizations that are in this community . . . we don't have any sense of shared outcome. So what is it as a community that we are trying to achieve? Is there a collective outcome that we're after that we could all put our shoulder to and agree about and thereby be held accountable to after the fact? We've done a wonderful job in economic areas of setting targets and going after them. It is within our range as a community to say no, we believe that children between such and such an age should have these sorts of opportunities to be successful, to say, we're going to make this sort of investment because it's the best investment we can make. People can get behind that sort of targeted relationship. If you talk to people in the business community they have a sense that their participation goes on ad infinitum, that forever they will be asked to help with this or that program or initiative . . . I think we (need to) make this connectedness so that everybody in this community understands -- going back to our children's example -- that their success reflects on all of our success. So it is in our self-interest to participate.

I don't want to ever throw away the social justice agenda that says, you know, we ought to do this because it is the right thing to do. But I think we also need to bring into play a little bit more of the economic piece that says, we make an investment here and we don't pay down the road.

HOWLETT: There's a balance here and finally it's starting to come out at the table, which is that economic and social together, the community spirit is really important, and working within our communities and supporting our small business operators is really important. Our small business centre is a key in creating an entrepreneurship and new ideas and generating them and giving some guidance. And also, on the larger
GIRVEN: We share the responsibility for creating the kind of community we want. I like what Jim said (about) having some tangibles, some things that we can actually get our head around and measure ourselves against. And work together to make the community happen. I've been involved with a little project called ClothingWorks. We've been overwhelmed at the number of people that want to help that project -- but the first question they ask after they've shared their closet is, "Did that woman get a job?" (ClothingWorks is a centre where women seeking employment can receive appropriate clothing for job interviews.) We know where we want to go but we have to be able to measure ourselves -- are we doing better than we did last year? London is a very competitive community. We want to be better than Waterloo. So we need to put those targets out and say, "We can do it and we will do it."

AVISON: Jim, you've been involved with the United Way and professionally with labour: What's the way in which you could see connections between the business sector, labour and other community organizations in setting these outcomes? Is it likely that one could imagine drawing these groups together and getting some agreement on those kind of principles and outcomes?

MacKINNON: I believe so. One of the things that has to be done is that we have to have our community in general know that not investing in the support mechanisms in this area costs us more down the road. Those people that live and die by balance sheets need to be brought up to speed, that without investing in those areas and support both for child development and the opportunities for adults in the area of poverty, it's going to cost us more down the road -- which will cost them. If you can kind of get that on the table and then get back to the quality of life, what's acceptable and what isn't, then we're talking about a common theme. Stay away from what is, dollar-wise, an acceptable amount of income for somebody. It's not the issue. Child development should be outside of the type of envelope that we talk about defining people in poverty. That should just be there. And then the other side of it is the opportunities for adults. Those type of support mechanisms -- be it training, quality day care, housing -- should also be outside of the basket that we define and talk about numbers on poverty.

BROWN: When the London Economic Development Corporation started up, I approached a number of people and said, "Wouldn't it be great if, as a corporation, you could go to every employer in this city, get the word out for everyone to hire one person, and what a long way that would go to eliminating poverty." But it hasn't gone anywhere. Many people coming into the centre can't even focus on looking for a job because they can't feed their kids and they can't put food on the table. A woman that had just had a baby, whose husband lost a job, they had nothing. I mean, every one of us at the office took our turns running home, getting fresh fruits and vegetables, bringing in things that a woman needs right after a baby. It was pulling all of that together and loading up my truck and driving it over to her place. That's the
kind of stuff that should not be. Someone just has a baby they have other things they have to focus on, but that man needed a job to support his family. So I would like for this whole community to focus on getting people employed; hiring one person is not a lot. (continued...)

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