



# living wage

## for families campaign

WORK SHOULD  
LIFT YOU OUT OF  
POVERTY,  
NOT KEEP  
YOU THERE

## Municipal Election Toolkit 2014



### Municipal Election Toolkit

November 15, 2014 is Election Day in BC municipalities. On that day, eligible voters exercise their right to vote for mayors, councillors, school board trustees (and, in Vancouver, park board trustees).

The purpose of this toolkit is to support you in your advocacy to encourage municipalities to become Living Wage Employers.



### What is the Living Wage for Families Campaign?

A living wage is the hourly amount a two-parent family with two children needs for basic expenses such as rent, food, transportation and child care. A living wage is a bare-bones calculation and does not cover many expenses like debt payments or savings for emergencies or retirement.

Child poverty in BC is very much a low-wage story: 31.8% of poor children in BC – 44,500 children – live in families with at least one adult working full-time, full-year (2013 Child Poverty Report Card, First Call). Earning a locally calculated living wage allows families with children to escape poverty and severe financial stress. It supports healthy childhood development and allows families to participate in the social, civic and cultural lives of our communities.

### How Can You Make a Difference?

Elections are the perfect time to speak up for working families living in poverty. Here are some ways you can contribute to positive change for children and families in your community during an election campaign:

- YOU CAN VOTE if you're 18 or older, have lived in BC for at least six months and in your community for one month.
- Discuss the issues in this toolkit with friends, neighbours and family.
- Spread the word via social media and email.
- Attend all-candidates meetings and ask the question included in this toolkit.
- Write to your local newspaper; find their contact info [here](#) and tips for writing [here](#)
- Contact the politicians seeking your vote and tell them you want them to support a living wage. Use the information and candidate question in this toolkit for speaking points.
- Hold a public forum. It could be as simple as gathering friends to talk about the issues over coffee. Or hold a larger event and invite candidates to attend. Include low-wage workers in the planning and organizing.
- Join a local advocacy group that focuses on a low-wage poverty.
- Encourage any group of which you're a member, such as faith or cultural groups, to promote living wages in the campaign.

Better pay translates directly into a healthier local economy ...

Businesses that have adopted the living wage report higher productivity and reduced staff turnover.



### Great resources for organizing a living wage campaign in your municipality

- Fact Sheet: [Undertaking a Living Wage Campaign with Local Government](#)
- Toolkit: [Organizing for a Living Wage: Local Government Toolkit](#)



## Why are living wages important?

We all benefit from reducing poverty. Poverty costs British Columbians \$1.2 to 3.8 billion a year in increased health-care costs according to the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and BC Healthy Living Alliance, respectively. Families who work for low wages face impossible choices – buy food or heat the house, feed the children or pay the rent. The result can be spiraling debt, constant anxiety and long-term health problems. Canadian researchers have reported that family income plays a significant role in influencing child development. Of 27 factors identified as having an impact on child development, up to 80% were seen to improve as family income increased.

## Local governments can do it!

### The Problem:

- Low wages cost local governments. When children live in poverty, or when parents have to work multiple jobs just to stay afloat, all of society pays the price in additional support service costs. ([See Fact Sheet #4](#))
- Low wages are a key reason for child poverty. High living expenses and low wages mean that tens of thousands of working families are living in poverty in BC. For nine of the last 10 years, our province has had the highest child poverty rate in Canada – unacceptable in a country with so much wealth. ([See Fact Sheet #3](#))
- Low wages cause health problems. Parents in low-wage jobs are trying to bring up children with constant anxiety. A secure living-wage income allows a family to purchase nutritious foods, obtain adequate housing and engage in healthy activities, all of which significantly improve health. ([See Fact Sheet #1](#))

### The Role of Municipal Government:

- Local governments have a responsibility to play a leadership role and set a higher standard. If enough local governments become living wage employers, they will create a market for those local service contractors who in turn pay a living wage.
- Better pay translates directly into a healthier local economy. Low-income families spend almost all their money close to home, and businesses that have adopted the living wage report higher productivity and reduced staff turnover.

**Question for candidates: The municipal government has a responsibility to avoid contributing to the problem of low-wage poverty. If elected will you commit to adopting a municipal bylaw requiring the municipality to pay a living wage to both its employees and contract staff?**