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## LETTERS

**Working preferred over welfare**

Editor:

I am compelled to respond to the letter entitled "Poverty's mistakes" (Wednesday, Oct. 30, 2002).

The writer has a very limited understanding of the roots of poverty and what it means to be poor.

In my professional life I see poverty on a regular basis, and I would like to share a few of my observations.

First, people prefer work to assistance. This is borne out by research; a majority of income assistance recipients access assistance on a temporary basis until they are able to get back to work.

There is a correlation between the unemployment rate and the number of people receiving assistance - as jobs are created, income assistance case loads decline.

Secondly, very few of the people I meet who are receiving income assistance splurge on "lottery tickets, the local casino or pop and chips."

Anyone subsisting on the meagre income assistance rates becomes very adept at stretching every dollar to the absolute maximum.

Impossible, given that the monthly rate for a family of four is less than \$1,000.

A voucher system and "pre-choosing" food for those receiving assistance in no way remedies poverty, but simply stigmatizes disadvantaged people even further.

Thirdly, the writer completely misses the fact that a significant number of working people cannot escape poverty.

For the working poor, it can be very difficult to find full-time employment, let alone anything that remotely approaches a living wage.

It is virtually impossible to achieve a decent standard of living in these conditions, so forget saving for retirement.

It is pointless to tell people not to "pierce their tongues" or "what jobs they are qualified for."

Poverty is systemic, and it is going to take a fundamental departure from our habitual ways of thinking if we are going to



make a dent in this issue.

I suggest that the first step is to leave outdated notions of what it means to be poor where they belong - in the 19th century.

The writer recommends that employment centres should be set up.

For the information of your readers, a range of employment services is available in each community - contact your local Human Resources Development Canada office for more information.

Duncan Stephen, RSW  
Burnaby

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