POLICY RESEARCH AND COMMUNITY ACTION:
THE REGINA CHILD HUNGER COALITION

By
Graham Riches

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Room 464 Education Building, University of Regina
Regina, SK, Canada S4S 0A2 (306) 585-4117
http://www.uregina.ca/spr
social.policy@uregina.ca
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Preface and Acknowledgments

This Working Paper provides one particular view of the origins and development of the Regina Child Hunger Coalition between 1986-1990 from the standpoint of the contribution of policy research to community action. As such it is written as a case study for use in both policy and practice teaching and learning and as well provides a historical record of certain events surrounding the issue of child hunger in one community in Canada in the late nineteen eighties.

The paper could not have been written without the full and active involvement of the Regina Food Bank and the many individuals and organizations who participated in the Regina Child Hunger Coalition whether as volunteers in feeding programmes, community activists or as officials in municipal government. Nor could it have been written without the active support and encouragement of my colleagues in the Social Administration Research Unit: Dr. Gordon Ternowetsky, Joanne Crofford and Sharon Moryski; and Jill McKeen whose careful editing of the manuscript was tireless and exacting. I would like to thank them and my friends and colleagues in the community for playing full parts in contributing to the alleviation of a desperate social issue: child hunger. We all hope that the publication of this Working Paper will contribute to the finding of solutions.

Graham Riches
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Policy Research and Community Action: The Regina Child Hunger Coalition

Introduction

As Canada enters the 1990s child poverty has been publicly rediscovered as a national social issue. It is the subject of increased reporting and editorial comment in the media (Globe and Mail, 10.11.89, 13 &14.12.89, 15.1.90; Macleans, 1990:58-64), and at the federal level of government both the House of Commons and the Senate have established investigative committees (Ross, 1990:15). Such national attention is the result of many forces including public education and policy advocacy conducted in communities across the country by groups such as the Child Poverty Action Group in Ontario, and End Legislated Poverty in Vancouver. This paper explores the process by which a community based organization, the Regina Child Hunger Coalition (RCHC) in Saskatchewan, supported in part by applied social research in the period 1987 to 1990 successfully put child hunger on the public agendas of municipal and provincial government. This influence extended to the federal level as well.

What factors might explain the relative success of the Coalition’s work to date? What have been its achievements and where has it failed? What remains to be done? What have been some of the contributions of community based and applied social research? Moreover from the perspective of such research what lessons are there to be learned for social work education, community practice and participation in the process of public policy agenda setting? What are some of the opportunities, limitations and dilemmas?

Analysis

A case study approach will be adopted in which the development of the Coalition between 1980 and 1990 will be described and analysed. It will first address the question at the community level of why and how the RCHC was established and the process by which initial base-line research conducted in 1986 by the Social Administration Research Unit (SARU) and the Regina Food Bank (RFB) into the problem of hunger in Regina contributed to the formation of the Coalition. What principles informed the organization of the Coalition itself?

Second, within the framework of collaborative and competitive approaches to community action (Lees, 1972:77-89), it will examine the
Coalition's goals and strategies of public education and policy advocacy. Why was it that child hunger and not hunger *per se* was adopted as the key issue? Why did the Coalition decide to respond both to the immediate needs of hungry children and to engage in long term advocacy? How did the Coalition establish and support existing feeding programmes and gain the political backing of the Mayor and Regina City Council in challenging the Saskatchewan Government, the Official Opposition as well as local school boards and the Federal Government to address the issue of child hunger within the province?

Third, the way in which applied social research conducted by SARU, a research unit based in the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Regina, contributed to the process of public education and policy advocacy will be explored.

In conclusion, the paper will comment on two particular aspects of the work to date. First using the conceptual framework and propositions of legitimacy, support and feasibility (Hall *et al.*, 1975:475-486), it will reflect on what has been achieved to date by the Coalition and what remains to be done to have child hunger accorded priority status by the community, the three levels of government and opposition parties.

Second, through examining this experience of applied social research and community action, the paper will consider certain implications for social work education in terms of the relationship between research, policy and practice.

*Cautionary Notes*

In telling this particular story and attempting to analyse events to date, it is important to recognise a number of limiting factors. First the issue of child hunger remains to be solved and the work of the major institutional players in policy formulation cannot as yet be satisfactorily evaluated. The strategy is still evolving.

Second, it should be noted that this review of the Coalition's activities for the period March 1987 to 1990 is being undertaken on a *post hoc* basis. The Coalition’s activities have never included any formal research agenda nor have they been subject to any explicit (i.e., before and after) evaluation procedure. This analysis is by way of a retrospective review of developments to date bearing in mind that the work of the RCHC and the participation of SARU still continues.
Third, and perhaps more significantly, the study lacks a comparative perspective which if included would doubtless contribute to knowledge of the process by which child hunger has been placed on the public agenda. The work of End Legislated Poverty in terms of advocating for school meals in Vancouver (Swanson, 1988), of the Child Hunger and Education Program in Saskatoon (CHEP, 1989) and of the Ontario based Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG, 1986) in advocating for national children's policies are examples of different projects which merit attention.

Finally, the author of this paper could not claim to have an unbiased interpretation of the events in that he was involved in the initial research and evolving policy formulation. While there is value in writing from first hand experience, it is also the case that other interpretations of events may well be excluded with the resulting analysis lacking explanatory depth.

The Regina Child Hunger Coalition:

Origins and Development

The RCHC came into being at a community meeting held in Regina in March 1987 (RCHC, 5.3.87) called by the Regina Food Bank and SARU to release their jointly conducted study On the Breadline: Hunger in Regina which had been completed in late 1986. This meeting formally marked the coming together of the Regina community to begin the task of tackling child hunger.

However, neither the study itself nor the meeting had occurred in a vacuum. It is important to note that the study had been supported by the Regina Food Bank as part of its commitment to developing a policy of public education and advocacy around the continuing issue of hunger (RFB, 27.1.86). The Regina Food Bank was established in 1983 by those working in a range of community agencies who were increasingly concerned about rising demand for food and meals by low income people in the city. As such the reasons for setting up the Regina Food Bank were similar to those which lay behind others across Canada in the 1980s: growing unemployment, inadequate and declining welfare rates and a collapsing social safety net (Riches, 1986:65-70; NCW, 1987:58-64). The Regina Food Bank in terms of collecting and distributing groceries to indigent people understood its role as essentially ad hoc and band aid but it also recognised that if there was to be a long term solution to the problem it would need to conduct public education and help articulate the public policy agenda.
SARU while not officially a part of the Regina Food Bank was indirectly represented in that one of its research associates was a member of its board of directors. Given its mission of engaging in applied and participatory social research including policy analysis and advocacy relating to the human services (Jeffery and Shadrack, 1986; Stalwick, 1986, 1987), SARU was clearly interested in collaborating with the Regina Food Bank in its public education and advocacy activities. It should also be noted that earlier research conducted in 1984-85 into the emergence of food banks in Canada (Op. cit. 1986) and continuing analysis of food bank and social assistance data (Robinson and Ternowetsky, 1986; Ternowetsky and Wiebe, 1987:21-29) provided a strong basis for the relationship.

Following the completion of On the Breadline which sought to establish initial baseline data concerning the incidence of hunger in the city of Regina as well as review children’s usage of existing community school feeding programmes, the Regina Food Bank decided to release the study and to use it as a means to create a "Credible Coalition" in the city to deal with child hunger (RCHC, 22.1.87). The study attributed hunger to insufficient income to purchase the right amounts and quality of food. A variety of measures including poverty lines and Regina social assistance, foodbank and feeding programme participation were used to determine the numbers of hungry people. At the end of 1985, 14,465 individuals were dependent on social assistance in Regina and the monthly average of foodbank users in 1986 was 6,726 (including multiple users). Hunger was found to be primarily a family matter (Riches and Griffen, 1986:11, vi).

The decision to focus on child hunger was partly based on one of the study’s major findings that the majority of food bank users were children (Ibid, 1986:vi). It was also recognised that child hunger as opposed to hunger per se stood a greater likelihood of engaging public and political attention.

A committee comprising food bank board members and known community organisers was established to plan the initial public meeting in March 1987. Invitations were extended to a wide public including professional staff and volunteers in health, education and social services, welfare rights activists, native organizations and women’s groups, provincial and municipal governments, and low income organizations. The meeting was also publicly advertised. The objective of such an approach was to see if the community was not only interested in the issue but was also willing to take ownership of it.
Over 80 people attended, a significant number for a community meeting. Following the presentation of the report, small groups were formed to discuss participants’ own experiences and understandings of the issue. They were asked to make recommendations about how the community should proceed. The consensus which emerged was to support the establishment of a coalition of interested individuals and groups to fight the issue of child hunger (RCHC, 5.3.87)

One of the keys to understanding the continued development of the Coalition lay in the fact that Social Development staff employed by Regina City Hall, who were present at this meeting, volunteered to provide initial secretarial support to the fledgling coalition. This was to be invaluable in the work that lay ahead and was a measure of the progressive approaches which were adopted (and are still promoted) by Regina City Council in relation to this issue. While there was a quorum of City councillors at this first public meeting there was at this stage no conscious municipal plan to become as involved as it later would.

A small steering committee was established to recommend policy and structure for what came to be known as the Regina Child Hunger Coalition (RCHC, 20.3.87). It reported back to a second public meeting held at the end of April 1987 and it was on this occasion that the Regina Child Hunger Coalition came into being (RCHC, 9.4.87).

**Organising Principles**

The organizational approach adopted by the Coalition reflected a commitment to open and light structures (Vaillancourt, 1984:22). There was agreement not to establish a formal structure nor adopt a constitution. This approach did not seem to stem from any formal textbook analysis of how best to organise coalitions, but seemed rather to reflect the gathered opinion of participants whose knowledge and experience of community organising suggested this as the preferred approach. There appeared to be a commitment to the task and agreement to a number of operating principles.

It was agreed that membership in the RCHC should be voluntary and by self-selection and that people should be able to participate either as individuals or as representatives or even quasi-representatives of their organizations. There was a strong view that if the work of the RCHC was to be successful then community ownership of the issue would be the key, only possible through open membership. It permitted the participation of different individuals and organizations in ways which did not necessarily require the formal endorsement of employing bodies. It enabled those working directly in the field both in public and non-governmental agencies (in public
health and community feeding programmes) to be involved as well as those active in the area of welfare rights. It also assumed a non politically partisan approach, though as matters turned out this was not a criticism that the Coalition was always successfully able to escape.

Rejecting a formal constitution avoided creating an organizational structure which would prove too cumbersome and detract from the essential work of the coalition. As activists, participants did not want to become involved in fundraising or time consuming debates about the charitable status of organizations which could act to limit activities in the public and political arena. To date it appears to have been a principle which has served the Coalition well.

While a small group of participants in the Steering Committee of the Coalition (including SARU and the Social Development Division of City Hall) have worked closely together, periodic consultations have been held with the broader membership in the form of open public meetings organized to inform people of developments and to seek input in terms of the RCHC’s evolving mandate. They have also been useful in recruiting new members to the Steering Committee. As in the life of any organization there have been periods of high activity followed by times of low energy and a questioning of whether or not to proceed and if so how. The Coalition tries to work to the strengths and prevailing energy levels of its members. This process seems to have worked to date in that the RCHC has been able to renew its mandate and its commitment as and when needed.

To date the question of gender balance in terms of participation in either the Steering Committee or the public coalition meetings has not been raised as an issue. There appears to have been an acceptable balance in this regard and there has been an informal policy of sharing responsibilities such as chairing meetings, acting as spokespersons and in relating to the media. This is not to suggest that the relationship of child hunger to the broader and systemic issue of the feminisation of poverty has been engaged by the Coalition. It has not. Similarly while Native organizations participate and also assume leadership roles in the Coalition, the broader question of the empowerment of native people and indeed the full inclusion of low income organizations has not been directly addressed by the Coalition. These are all issues which demand attention.

This preliminary analysis of the early days of the RCHC suggest that a number of factors contributed to its birth. First was the initial research work of the Regina Food Bank and SARU and their commitment to
put the research to work in the community as a catalyst for promoting public education and advocacy.

Second, it was clearly evident at the first public meeting that the research spoke to the experiences of those who were in attendance. It was as if the research findings themselves were less significant than the fact that the study provided a validation for the action to begin. This is speculative but judging by the large turn-out at the meeting it would seem there was already sufficient knowledge in the community to stimulate action. The release of the study appeared to be the right trigger to enable community knowledge and experience to be brought to bear on the issue at hand.

Third, it would seem as events later turned out that the decision to focus the public agenda on child hunger was the correct one, as were the organizational approaches of maintaining light and open structures, working with those involved in the day to day running of feeding programmes and those interested in education and advocacy, remaining in touch with the coalition membership, keeping the media informed of the developing strategy and allowing for periods of high activity and relative calm. There can be also little doubt that without the continued support of the City in terms of simple logistics the story of the RCHC might have been somewhat different.

Yet it must also be noted that the short and longterm strategies of the RCHC have been instrumental both in holding the Coalition together and in achieving certain types of success. It is to these that we now turn.

**Community Action: Coalition Goals and Strategies**

As noted previously by the time of the second public meeting in April 1987, the RCHC’s its goals and strategies were relatively well established. In hindsight they have reflected a combination of collaborative and conflictual approaches to community action (Op.cit., 1972). Research, cooperation and education focussing on changing attitudes have been essential to the change strategy as well as the recognition that political factors also must be addressed. It was therefore recognised that advocacy and pressure group activity in the form of joint action would be necessary. The particular goals and strategies which emerged appeared to be based on these approaches and tactics and shared a couple of important assumptions.

First, the issue of child hunger was beyond the capacity of the volunteer community to resolve. It required the direct intervention of federal, provincial and municipal levels of government including the school boards. It was a longterm issue requiring a political strategy which should be built
around the demand for universal and publicly funded school meal programmes, a reformed system of social security, adequate incomes and full employment (RCHC, 9.4.87). The Coalition would need to increase the legitimacy of child hunger as an issue in the community and in order for this to happen would need to find a way of relating in a non-partisan way to all political parties.

Second, it was recognised that children were hungry today and required immediate assistance in the form of breakfast, lunch and snack programmes. There was already in 1987 a number of such programmes providing meals in Regina including the Circle Project, Chili for Children, Rainbow Youth Centre, Youth Unlimited and the Community School programmes. However these services were hampered by lack of finances and staff and were unable to operate on a daily basis. There was therefore a strong feeling that the Coalition must also respond to the immediate needs of hungry children and support in whatever way it could the work of existing programmes and if necessary start new ones (RCHC, 9.4.87). These were and remain important goals.

Such activity by the Coalition also helped to establish its legitimacy as an organization which was seen to be as much concerned about direct service as it was about pressing for more universal and effective policies. As an activity of the Coalition it brought together the providers of services with the activists and helped unite them in a common struggle. In fact the RCHC did initiate a new school meal feeding programme in Regina called Food For Learning. It is now a well established programme operating in four inner city districts.

Essentially then the goals of the Coalition were declared to be supporting and where necessary helping to develop feeding programmes for hungry children in the short term; and in the longterm developing a public education and advocacy strategy to bring together the different levels of government and the school boards to find appropriate solutions. To this end the Coalition established an Education and Advocacy Committee and a Feeding Committee with the Steering Committee acting as the common ground for strategy development and decision making. The Coalition made a commitment in its early days to be both practical and political in the sense of not backing away from pressure group activity.
Public Education and Advocacy

Owning the issue: approaching governments

In terms of public education and advocacy the main strategy of the Coalition was to persuade both City Hall and the Public and Separate School Boards that child hunger was an issue of concern demanding a solution. While it was recognised that both authorities would likely claim that the issue was one which constitutionally was not theirs to resolve and that they lacked the necessary funds, the Coalition believed this local strategy engaged a more significant question. If these local authorities could be persuaded to at least recognise and partially own the issue, perhaps they would then become advocates on the community's behalf in pursuing the issue of child hunger with the provincial and federal governments. How to engage the attention of the provincial government, given its constitutional responsibilities and its spending powers, was perceived to be the key issue.

For the Coalition this point was critical given that the then Minister of Social Services Grant Schmidt had declared that 'the people of Saskatchewan are not living in poverty.' (Regina Leader Post, 8.6.89). Other responses of the minister to the Coalition's claim that child hunger was a significant issue were to insist that the names of all hungry children should be forwarded to him (Schmidt, 17.3.88) and that the Coalition was "playing politics with the children" (CBC TV, 1988). In other words the political climate was at best uninviting and at worst hostile.

The main approach adopted was to present briefs to Regina City Council and to the Public and Separate School Boards asking these bodies to assist in organising a city wide conference to address the issue. Between June and September 1987 briefs using the findings of the On the Breadline: Hunger in Regina study were publicly presented to each of the three authorities. Specifically City Council was asked to play the key role of intermediary with the provincial and federal governments and the school boards and to facilitate such a meeting. The school boards were similarly approached and letters were sent by the Mayor of Regina to the Premier of Saskatchewan and the Ministers of Health, Education and Social Services as well as the federal Minister of Health and Welfare.

None of the councils denied there was an issue and each one agreed either to take the matter up with other levels of government or as in the case of the Regina Public School Board conduct their own study (Regina Board of Education, 1987). It could also be said that local media coverage of
the public presentation of the briefs was heartening. The Coalition was beginning to feel it was making headway.

Yet despite the fact that local representatives met with provincial ones there was little evidence that the Saskatchewan Government was willing to acknowledge the existence of the problem or become involved in a discussion. Faced with this lack of responsiveness the Coalition was not quite sure how to proceed.

Community ownership: The Mayors Board of Inquiry

There were periods in 1988 when the Coalition seemed to lose its sense of direction. However by early 1989 a number of developments internal and external to the Coalition generated renewed impetus.

In May 1988 the Coalition decided to broaden the base of its public pressure and accepted an invitation to meet with Roy Romanow, Provincial Leader of the NDP Opposition and his Social Services critic, Peter Prebble. With an eye to the longer term and a possible change in the provincial government, the Coalition had judged it important to educate the Opposition about child hunger. For the first time the Coalition found support for its work in terms of public education and advocacy (RCHC, 31.5.88). While this meeting did not immediately lead to any particular action, it did lay the ground work for the NDP’s sponsoring of public forums on the issue of hunger in Regina, Saskatoon, Prince Albert and La Ronge in the winter of 1989. Not only did these meetings contribute significantly to public debate on the question throughout the province, they also led to the publication of Hunger and Poverty-Something Can Be Done (NDP, 1989). This report identified the problem and proposed solutions, committing the NDP to tackling it if and when it returned to power.

Another promising event was the establishment of Food for Learning in June 1988, creating a non-profit corporation independent of the advocacy work of the Coalition. It would be an umbrella organization for the establishment of feeding/educational programmes in Regina (RCHC, 1.6.88). While the Coalition was already providing support to existing feeding programmes it was that more were needed to meet demands.

Food for Learning has been one of the Coalition’s important successes and by early 1990 was providing nearly 4,000 snacks and meals a month to hungry children in four different districts of Regina (Regina Food Bank, 1990). Not only are the immediate needs of children being addressed but as noted earlier such activity ensures that the public education and advocacy work of the Coalition is grounded in the reality of everyday need.
However, the Coalition probably received its greatest boost on 26 October 1988 when former city councillor Douglas Archer was elected Mayor of the City of Regina. In hindsight it is evident this created a new context at the municipal level for the Coalition’s public education.

Perhaps this new impetus was not immediately apparent to the members of the Coalition Steering Committee. At a meeting held only two weeks after the municipal election, low morale was evident. It was agreed that the Coalition had faded into the background and was accomplishing little. The question was even raised of whether or not the Coalition should continue. Somehow a way had to be found for gaining the ear of the politicians. In the ensuing discussion the proposal was made to go back to City Hall and ask them this time to establish their own inquiry (RCHC, 10.11.88).

From that point on events moved quickly. On December 5, 1988 a petition was presented by the Coalition to the Regina City Council requesting that they establish a Mayor’s Task Force on Hunger.

In making its request, the Coalition not only identified the need but stressed the responsibility of the City in terms of the Municipality Act (1984) for matters of health, safety and welfare of its citizens. In other words the Coalition’s brief pointed to the statutory obligations of the City to act upon the issue of hunger and also pointed to the fact that the City contributed to the cost of provincial social assistance payments within its municipal boundaries. Given the documented inadequacy of social assistance rates it was suggested that the City should also review this matter.

The particular objective of the Coalition was to invite the City Council to take ownership of the problem of hunger, and not just child hunger, within the City. If a Board of Inquiry, as it was later named, was established this would be the best way of keeping the issue in the public eye and in time moving it to the provincial and perhaps even federal political agenda. Such a development was in keeping with the long term public education and advocacy strategy of the Coalition.

Specifically then the Coalition asked the Mayor’s Board of Inquiry to: investigate fully the issue of hunger in the city of Regina and to include determining the nature, extent and causes of need; make recommendations for action to resolve the problem; and, bring the recommendations to the appropriate departments of the federal and provincial governments, as well as the school boards, for action. In other words the work of the Board would be facilitative (RCHC, Brief, 512.88).
The Coalition’s request was approved in principle by the Regina City Council in early December 1988 and the Mayor’s Board of Inquiry into Hunger in Regina was formally approved at a meeting of City Council in late January 1989 (RCC, 7.12.88, 23.1.89). Its terms of reference and the composition of its membership, drawing on a broad crosssection of the Regina community, reflected the Coalition’s wishes. One member of the Coalition sat on the Board of Inquiry. In retrospect therefore 1988 had proved to be a successful year and the Coalition was beginning to see some results from its public education and advocacy activities.

**A changing political climate**

As in municipal politics, events at the provincial level in 1989 created a more favorable climate. Since the provincial election of 1982, when the Progressive Conservatives achieved power, growing poverty and hunger and adequate social welfare provision had been rejected as issues requiring government priority (O’Sullivan and Sorensen, 1988:82; Riches and Manning, 1989:35-37; Stobbe, 1987/88:36). Yet in 1989 a number of developments, perhaps in anticipation of an upcoming election seemed to create a different context.

These developments included the NDP Hunger Forums held in early 1989, the National Family Conference sponsored by the Saskatchewan Government and held in Regina in the summer, the creation of a new provincial Cabinet post of Minister of the Family, the establishment of the Family Foundation in early October and the simultaneous release of the Regina Mayor’s Board of Inquiry report into hunger.

Yet one particular political event not directly related to child hunger created a favourable political climate for advancing social issues. It was the controversy of April and May 1989 over privatising SaskEnergy, a major Crown Corporation. The NDP refused to participate in the Legislature, organized major protest rallies across the province and after seventeen days succeeded in persuading the government to back down on its commitment. This led to the establishment of the Barber Commission on SaskEnergy Privatisation as a way out of the impasse (Barber, 1989:1) and fuelled a debate across the province which was to undermine the legitimacy of the administration.

This event marked perhaps the turning point itself for the provincial government as the Opposition successfully challenged its pursuit of unpopular policies without the approval of the people of the province. For the moment the creation of the position of Minister of the Family (Sas-
katchewan, 1989:3) and establishing the Family Foundation was one clear sign of a new openness to at least listen to the concerns of its critics. In fact the Minister of the Family was given the responsibility of addressing the problem of hunger in Saskatchewan and signalled the fact that the issue had finally found its way onto the provincial political agenda.

The release of the Mayor's report *An Inquiry into Hunger in Regina* (Archer, 3.10.89) coincided with the new found commitment to Saskatchewan families being promoted by the provincial government. The Coalition reacted very favourably to the Mayor's report and endorsed its findings and recommendations. In particular it approved the finding that 'poverty—insufficient income—is clearly the cause of hunger and not waste, not mismanagement, not laziness, not ignorance about nutrition and not blatant neglect of children' (*Ibid*, 1989:35). And it supported the report's many recommendations in terms of addressing the question of poverty and inadequate incomes, responding to immediate food needs, enhancing opportunities for community living in Regina in a holistic way and for keeping the issue of hunger in the public eye (*Ibid*, 1989:41-50).

It should be noted that the Mayor's report received not only local but also national attention. Indeed Ed Broadbent, the outgoing leader of the Federal NDP commented on the report's findings in his farewell address in the House of Commons when he urged the attention of Parliament to the issue of child poverty and demanded that policies be put in place which would ensure its eradication by the year 2,000 (*Canada*, 1989:6173-6181).

The release of the report also re-engaged the energies of the Coalition on the task of ensuring that the City would follow through on its recommendations and use the report as a basis for discussions with the newly formed Family Foundation. In late 1989 and early 1990 meetings were held by the Coalition, Food For Learning and other community feeding programmes with the Minister of the Family and his political staff (RCHC, 25.1.90) and with officials of the Family Foundation (RCHC, 1.2.90). The Coalition's intent was to build on the work of the Mayor's report and to persuade the Provincial Government to support a universal school meal programme and to address the question of inadequate social assistance payments. During this period the government was also consulting with the City of Regina and with municipalities, school boards and non government agencies across the province.

The result of this activity was the announcement in the Provincial Budget of March 29 1990 that $740,000 was to be allocated to meeting the immediate needs of children who go to school hungry (*Minister of Finance,*
In one sense the Coalition greeted this announcement with mixed feelings. The allocation of monies to community feeding programmes was at last recognition by the provincial government that child hunger was a problem, a victory for the Coalition.

Yet the Coalition felt that the provincial response was inadequate. As the Opposition Finance critic put it, $740,000 amounted to only three cents a day per child living below the poverty line in Saskatchewan, a province with the second highest rate of child poverty in Canada (Shillington, 1990:6). The amount equalled the annual salary of the President of the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan. Further, the Minister did not announce policies for universal school meal programmes or significant increases in social assistance and Family Income Plan rates, though family benefits were raised by $10 per child per month in June 1990 (Regina Leader Post, 23.5.90). It was evident that the government continued to believe that the relief of hunger should remain the prime responsibility of food banks—where demand continued to grow (Regina Food Bank, 1990), of non government organizations and of the unpaid voluntary labour of women. The clear implication of the budget address was that child hunger would demand the continuing attention of the Coalition.

Reflection and Renewal

The Coalition began considering its future role, now that the municipal, provincial governments, and indeed federal were responding with initiatives of their own to the issue.

A series of Steering Committee and public meetings were held to consider this question (RCHC, 15.11.89; 13.12.89; 25.1.90; 17.5.90). The Coalition considered broadening its base and taking on the wider issue of hunger and poverty, but the consensus remained that the more specific issue of child hunger should remain the focal point. In light of the provincial government’s limited response to child hunger, the more significant question perhaps was how the Coalition was to reclaim the issue and continue to help shape the public agenda.

To tackle these questions the Coalition established a series of Action Circles or Study Groups to re-examine the issue of child hunger and develop a more broadly based strategy and set of policies (RCHC, 31.12.89). Currently they are working on issues of income security, employment, intellectual disabilities, public education and advocacy, universal school meal programmes and children’s rights.
The strategic question which now confronts the Coalition is how to reclaim its agenda and then promote it anew in the public and political arena. While success has been achieved at the municipal level, the provincial government's responses still remain muted. The Coalition's response is to reframe the issue; its reasoning is that child hunger is both a provincial and a national issue and links have to be established with groups and organizations working elsewhere. Towards this end a provincial conference on hunger is now being planned the spring of 1991. While its purpose has yet to be defined, its overall intention will likely be to relate the issue of child hunger not only to questions of income security and employment but also to food production and distribution policies and broader questions of children's rights. As yet however a provincial planning group remains to be brought together for the purpose of organizing the conference.

**Applied Social Research**

**Social Administration Research Unit**

As noted earlier the study which initiated the formation of the Regina Child Hunger Coalition was jointly conducted by the Regina Food Bank and the Social Administration Research Unit (SARU) of the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Regina. SARU was originally funded by Health and Welfare Canada on the basis of a Research Group Development Grant awarded in 1982 but is now a part of the base operating budget of the Faculty of Social Work (Ternowetsky and Campbell, 1988:34).

Part of SARU's mission is to conduct applied social research with and on behalf of community groups and organizations.

Reflecting its commitment to community based research, SARU also engages in public education and policy advocacy. It conducts and participates in community seminars and has published widely in the fields of hunger, poverty and welfare; employment, unemployment and underemployment; child welfare and Native social work education; rural social work and northern studies. SARU's participation in policy advocacy flows from its belief that the research it conducts should be put to work on behalf of the communities it serves. In this way SARU expresses the commitment of professional social work to work for beneficial social change (CASW, 1983:3).

Involvement in policy advocacy perhaps sets SARU apart from traditional university research partly because of its normative stand (i.e., supporting the oppressed) and partly because of its social administration
stance which can best be understood in terms of engaging in the 'lobby for facts'. SARU’s contention is that research and action go hand in hand. Research is undertaken to build knowledge but that knowledge must be used to bring about beneficial social change.

It is an activist research stance necessitating direct intervention either with or on behalf of those in need. As such, it reflects the views of Jean-Louis Roy, Director of Le Devoir, who argued in 1984 that social researchers in universities were often too close to governments and not close enough to the volunteer and community associations intervening for social justice and dignity. He suggested that more university social researchers should work to create bridges between their work and the activities of different social organizations and associations connected with the social needs of people (Vaillancourt, 1985:38).

It is therefore not difficult to understand why SARU became and has remained involved in the work and development of the Regina Child Hunger Coalition. Such activist participation is clearly not without its dilemmas. The question that is raised however is what contribution did applied social research make to the public education and advocacy work of the Coalition and in what ways did SARU’s research agenda and the social work education curriculum benefit from this involvement.

Public Education and Advocacy

In the first instance it is clear that the public release of On the Breadline: Hunger in Regina at the community meeting held in Regina on March 7, 1987 did lead directly to the formation of the Regina Child Hunger Coalition. While from SARU’s perspective it might be flattering to conclude that it was the strength of the research which convinced those present at the meeting to proceed to action, there are other factors to consider.

The research study itself was only preliminary. It had simply gathered together what limited information already existed on the topic in terms of food bank usage, social assistance data and school meal programmes. While the finding that children comprised between 40-50 percent of those using welfare programmes was an alarming fact, it was not new. The study had been conducted on a limited budget and was by no means a definitive analysis of the situation. In other words the study itself was not a sufficient reason for the action which followed.

Perhaps of more significance was the fact that the research had been conducted under the joint (i.e., community based) auspices of the Regina Food Bank and SARU, was jointly released and was already part of
the Food Bank’s public education agenda. This strengthened the legitimacy of the research in that both the practice and academic community were, and were seen to be, endorsing the study and its findings. Both the authority and verifiable of the facts were established (Hall et al., 1975:504). Given that the findings also spoke to the experiences of those attending the meeting and there was ample small and full group discussion of the report and participants’ ideas at the community meeting, a legitimate base for action was created (RCHC 5.3.87).

In terms of public education and advocacy what also appears to have been important was the relationship between the research findings and peoples’ experiences. This it could be argued was the critical factor in the formation of the Regina Child Hunger Coalition. In other words research findings by themselves, while they may be necessary to stimulate a process of social action and policy change, are not themselves a sufficient cause. This seems to accord with the view that the exposition of the facts about an issue in no way guarantees it attention and that issues are accorded priority on only the flimsiest factual basis ([Ibid, 1975: 502]). This is not to claim that research is not important but rather that the facts have to be put to work. The facts become politicized and are used as instruments of influence ([Ibid, 1975:504].

SARU’s continuing participation in the work and development of the Coalition was indirect and never a matter of formal recognition. Such participation was shared by all contributing organizations and was facilitated by the informal and light structures. These enabled staff of a variety of organizations including municipal government, non government agencies, churches and the academic community to be involved and contribute as individuals to the Coalition without necessarily committing their organizations to its goals or strategies. In the case of SARU it enabled an mutual and beneficial relationship to be established.

SARU participates in all of the debates and policy developments of the Coalition, with the exception of Food for Learning. It both provides and benefits from the ideas, knowledge and experiences which were shared at meetings of the Coalition. In terms of current discussions, for example, about the future direction of the Coalition, SARU has contributed information about child poverty coalition work in other provinces and has proposed that there should be a stronger network of agencies created to tackle the issue of child hunger using national resources and policies. Such input enables all participating agencies and individuals to ensure that the Coalition’s public education activities are based on sound and up to date information.
SARU is also able to share the task of policy advocacy with other members of the Coalition. In fact there is only a small group of people who are able to take on this task as the nature of the employment of certain Coalition members limits the extent to which they are able to act publicly. For those whose employment is not directly threatened by their assuming an activist public role, as in the case of those with tenured university positions, it is possible to contribute to the Coalitions’ activities in this way. Others of course contribute behind the scenes in their own departments and play significant roles in advancing the issue.

In terms of the public education agenda SARU has contributed in other ways. It acted in a consultative capacity to the NDP Hunger Forums conducted in the Province’s four major cities in early 1989. It also provided support to an analysis of the costs of a universal school lunch and supervision programme for the City of Regina. This initial study was conducted by graduate students in the MSW programme and was then presented to the Coalition and City Hall officials (Pekrul et al., 1990). SARU has also played a major role in supporting the applied research of the State of Regina Children’s Project. While not directly an outgrowth of the Regina Child Hunger Coalition’s work, this project which was initiated by Save the Children Canada and funded in its development stage in part by the Laidlaw Foundation and supported by SARU’s research has also contributed to and benefitted from its relationship to the activities of the Coalition. Its essential purpose is to use the recently ratified UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) as an instrument for documenting and acting upon those childrens’ rights which are not being upheld in Regina.

It could therefore be argued that SARU’s model of applied social research expressed in its undertaking the 1986 On the Breadline study followed by its community based participation in its dissemination contributed in important ways to the establishment of the Regina Child Hunger Coalition. In turn SARU’s active involvement in the Coalition allowed it to contribute to the process of public education and advocacy and the reshaping of the political and policy agenda concerning child hunger both within Regina and Saskatchewan. As events unfolded so SARU was able to support new research endeavours in the field of childrens’ rights.
Conclusions

The Coalition: Anticipating Future Strategy

In reviewing the achievements of the Coalition to date one fact stands out. Child hunger has now been recognised by the City of Regina and by the Saskatchewan Government as an issue meritng their attention. This was not the case in early 1987 when On the Breadline was released. The strategy of first gaining the support of City Council and persuading its members to conduct their own study was instrumental along with a changed political climate in the province to having the issue accepted as legitimate by the Province.

It is evident therefore that the Coalition’s strategy has met the first test of legitimacy identified by Hall as constituting a necessary criterion to be faced by any issue, whose supporters wish it to be accorded priority by government (Op.cit:475-479). It also appears to have met the second criterion of support (Ibid:483-486) in that funding, albeit minimal, was allocated for child feeding programmes in the 1990 provincial budget. And in a limited sense the test of feasibility (Ibid:479-483) was also met in that the provincial and municipal governments have determined that child hunger is a problem with practical solutions.

It is also clear that at the level of direct service the establishment of Food for Learning and the supportive network which the Coalition has been able to generate among feeding agencies has been of great benefit. Without the Coalition and its public education activities it is unlikely that the level of direct service provision would have grown. No doubt also the Coalition assisted in the development of new projects and a growing public awareness of the breakdown of the public safety net.

Yet it is also evident that after three years of Coalition activity the problem of child hunger is as acute as ever. 8,000 snacks and meals are being served daily to hungry people in Regina. Food bank usage continues to climb (RFB, 1990) and new food banks are being established in rural Saskatchewan. Policies of full employment, adequate incomes and social security benefits, pay equity, affordable and quality child care, universal school meals are a long way from the Saskatchewan Government’s agenda.

Moreover despite the fact that attention now being given to the child poverty at the federal level, unemployment insurance and Canada Assistance Plan cutbacks and the retreat from child care suggests that a great deal of work remains to be done before the federal government is persuaded
that child hunger is a legitimate national question. Indeed given Meech Lake
and the constitutional crisis it is unlikely that issues such as hunger and
poverty which are regarded as residual at the best of times will attract sig-
nificant attention. In this sense the Regina Child Hunger Coalition, along
with other similar organizations in different parts of the country has much
work ahead of it in advancing the issue.

Currently the Regina Child Hunger Coalition is thinking that the
time has come to expand its base and work with others including those in
grass roots organizations to create a provincial coalition. One possible out-
come could be the development of a provincial Declaration on Child Poverty
based on the concept of children’s rights and reflecting Canada’s obligations
under the recently adopted UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Such
a declaration could be similar to that developed by the Ontario based Child
Poverty Action Group and set out a clearly defined public policy agenda. It
would need simultaneously to address issues raised by the feminisation of
poverty, the exclusion of native peoples and the particular problems facing
disabled people for it to be inclusive.

**Applied Social Research: Some Implications for Social Work
Education**

The experience of the SARU-RCHC model of applied social research
and community action also points to a number of implications for social
work education in terms of the relationship between research, practice and
policy. There are a number of benefits.

These include the institutional role model that is provided for stu-
dents, faculty, the profession of social work and the community that applied
social research acts upon the professional social work ideal of working to
bring about beneficial social change. It is important that social work re-
search, if it is to have any legitimacy within professional schools which see
preparation for practice as their most important goal, is understood to be
not only about the creation of knowledge but also about the use to which it
can be put in the community to bring about policy change. In this way the
often called for integration between practice, policy and research education
can be clearly made and understood.

In the context of social work education, applied and activist social
research provides a real opportunity 'to teach policy and practice together'
(Woodsworth, 1986:13). However, without putting words into his mouth, for
Woodsworth this would not simply be a technical question in terms of a
more effective form of training, but rather an attempt to identify a commit-
ment to a radically more progressive form of social practice. It asks social
work educators and students to confront the political straightjacket of their practice and to take the side of those who are oppressed. In a limited sense SARU has explored certain aspects of this approach.

In the case of SARU’s participation with the RCHC, it has enabled graduate students as well as faculty to contribute to community practice and social policy development. It also facilitates a continuing research agenda and as such provides a continuing supply of educational material for curriculum development, classroom teaching and practicum possibilities. Yet to date the opportunity to fully develop this aspect of the curriculum has not been taken up.

Activist and applied social research even when conducted from within a professional school of social work is not without its dilemmas. One lesson is that if social work educators step into the community in authentic ways, it becomes very difficult to disengage. In terms of the commitment of the particular researcher this may create problems. On the one hand there is the commitment to working with the community and accepting their agenda and the demands it creates as the process of change develops. This can be very time consuming. On the other hand there are the demands of teaching, administration and other research activities which may not always get the attention they deserve. In terms of workloads colleagues may or may not be understanding.

There is another lesson about community involvement for the applied social researcher which can be more difficult to learn. It is accepting that ones research and actions however rigorous and well intentioned, may well become the subject of acrimonious political debate. Certainly this happened within the context of the public education and advocacy activities of SARU and the Regina Child Hunger Coalition.

Perhaps for the individual researcher involved in such situations this type of issue may not be particularly pressing, but in the context of a political environment where universities are increasingly subject to restraint one has to be sure of one’s facts before stepping into the public arena. Governments rarely welcome public criticism and there is a delicate line to be trodden in terms of helping the community make its case and ensuring that the legitimacy of one’s sponsoring research institution is maintained. The experience of significant cutbacks to the Faculty of Social Work and the School of Human Justice at the University of Regina are still too fresh in facultys’ and students’ minds to allow us to forget that education, research and practice which promotes the well-being of the undervalued in society is sometimes met with a heavy hand by both public and academic authorities.
Perhaps the real question is whether activist and applied social research can be fully accepted as an integral part of the social work education curriculum. If social work is fundamentally about accommodation to the status quo, as Woodsworth fears (Ibid:12-13), then the answer is likely to be negative. If social work is however committed to challenging the significant social issues of the day and in so doing accepts that the world of politics must be engaged then perhaps applied social research will find an active endorsement within social work education.
References


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Regina Child Hunger Coalition (1987-1990). "Minutes of Meetings," 5.3.87; 22.1.87; 5.3.87; 20.3.87; 9.4.87; 31.5.88; 1.6.88; 10.11.88; 15.11.89; 13.12.89; 31.12.89; 25.1.90; 1.2.90; and 17.5.90.


## Chart 1
### Community Action: Chronology of Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>January</td>
<td>Regina Food Bank and Social Administration Research Unit agree to study hunger in Regina</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spring-Summer</td>
<td>Research conducted</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>September</td>
<td>Publication of On the Breadline: Hunger in Regina</td>
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<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>January</td>
<td>Regina Food Bank agrees to release study as part of its public education and advocacy strategy</td>
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<td></td>
<td>March</td>
<td>Community meeting to discuss report and the formation of a coalition against child hunger</td>
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<td></td>
<td>April</td>
<td>Second community meeting; Regina Child Hunger Coalition formally established with Steering Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>June-September</td>
<td>Briefs presented to Regina City Council, Public School Board and Separate School Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>May</td>
<td>Coalition meets with Roy Romanow, Leader of the NDP Opposition and Peter Prebble, NDP Social Services Critic</td>
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<td></td>
<td>June</td>
<td>Establishment of Food for Learning</td>
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<td></td>
<td>October</td>
<td>Election of new Mayor to Regina City Council</td>
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<td></td>
<td>November</td>
<td>Coalition decides to approach City Council for a second time</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>December</td>
<td>Second brief presented to Regina Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>January</td>
<td>Mayor’s Board of Inquiry into Hunger in Regina formally approved by City Council</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>January-March</td>
<td>NDP Hunger Forums held in Saskatoon, Regina, Prince Albert and La Ronge</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>April-May</td>
<td>SaskEnergy Privatisation Crisis: Government backs down in face of massive public opposition led by the NDP</td>
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<td></td>
<td>June</td>
<td>Minister of Social Services declares there is no poverty in Saskatchewan</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Summer-Fall</td>
<td>National Conference on the Family sponsored by the Government of Saskatchewan; new Cabinet portfolio of Minister of the Family created; and establishment of the Family Foundation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>October</td>
<td>Release of the Mayor’s report An Inquiry into Hunger in Regina</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>November</td>
<td>Parliament of Canada agrees to end child poverty by the year 2000</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fall</td>
<td>Coalition meetings with Mayor of Regina, Minister of Family and Family Foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Winter</td>
<td>Coalition meetings with Minister of Family and Family Foundation Costing of School Meal and Supervision prepared by MSW students and presented to City Hall</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>March</td>
<td>Government announce; $740,000 to be allocated to meeting needs of hungry children</td>
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Appendix
Brief from Regina Child Hunger Coalition to Regina City Council, 5 December 1988

Mayor's Task Force on Hunger

The Regina Child Hunger Coalition is asking Regina City Council to establish a Mayor’s Task Force on Hunger. We believe there are several compelling reasons for the City to take such action. These include the serious and longstanding nature of hunger in the city; the lack of any appropriate attention to this issue by other levels of government including school boards, and the fact that responsibility for hungry Regina citizens and children does fall within the City’s mandate.

Let me take the last point first. To what extent are hungry Regina residents the responsibility of the City?

Section 83 of the Municipality Act (1984) states that, subject to the provisions of the Act and other legislation, a council may pass any bylaws that it considers expedient "for promoting the health, safety, morality and welfare of the inhabitants of the urban municipality." The fact that the Regina Food Bank helps approximately 5,500 people each month, of whom 50% are children, tells us of the health, welfare and safety crises facing thousands of our citizens. For the City this must surely be a moral issue. Furthermore we believe these figures to be underestimates of the frugal nature of many people's lives.

Section 139 of the Act, other legislation permitting, also permits urban councils to make bylaws "to provide for the health of the residents of the urban municipality."

Canadian and U.S. data demonstrates the clear relationship between poverty and undernourishment; and between hunger and ill health. We are certainly talking about hunger as a public health issue, a matter which is very much a mandated responsibility of City Council.

It is a fact that the City of Regina pays an annual social services levy to the provincial government towards meeting five percent of the costs of social assistance benefits paid in the city. In other words municipal taxpayers do already accept some responsibility for attempting to meet the needs of Regina’s hungry citizens. In 1987, the City spent $462,074 on social assistance. We believe that City Council should ensure that these monies are meeting the objectives for which they are collected; namely, en-
suring that social assistance benefits are adequate for meeting income and food needs. Given the well documented inadequacy of provincial welfare rates which are thousands of dollars below national accepted poverty lines, we would ask that City Council undertake to examine this issue.

We also wish to record that the City of Regina was one of the few cities in Canada which generously [sic] donated $1,000 to the first National Conference on Hunger held in Toronto in October, 1986. This was very much appreciated and was a clear sign that the City wished to contribute to solutions. The City of Regina Health Department has shown a continuing interest and commitment to this issue. And it should be noted the City's Social Development Department has been very supportive of work in the area of child hunger.

As indicated we believe that the problem of hunger in the city is serious and is not being resolved despite the best efforts of the churches, school snack programs, community based lunches and a number of voluntary groups. In fact there is evidence the problem is becoming more intense. We know that the Health, Education and Social Service departments of the provincial government, as well as the city's two school boards, realize that hunger is a problem. Yet, there has been no action by government.

What then are we asking a Mayor's Task Force on Hunger to do? We believe there are three main objectives:

1. To investigate fully the issue of hunger in the City of Regina. This would include determining the nature, extent and causes of the need.

2. To make recommendations for action to resolve the problem.

3. To bring the recommendations to the appropriate departments of the provincial and federal governments, as well as the school boards, for action. In other words the work of the Task Force would be facilitative.

We would hope that the Task Force, in addition to including representatives and officials of the City of Regina would also draw members from the two other levels of government; from the school boards, and from groups who through their action demonstrate first hand knowledge of the problem. Assistance in terms of any research that might be undertaken would be forthcoming from the Social Administration Research Unit of the University of Regina.

While there would be certain costs to the City involved in the work of the Task Force, we believe these would be at a minimum. We are mindful
of the financial constraints under which City Council is operating. Yet we believe hunger to be a serious and long term issue which demands the attention of those responsible for ensuring that Regina is a fair and equitable place to live for all its citizens.

Graham Riches
On Behalf of the
Regina Child Hunger Coalition
5-12-1988