

Quaker Concern

The time for a guaranteed livable basic income is now

By Sandra Wiens



GLBI means vibrant communities.

Poverty is increasing in Canada, and income inequality has reached the highest levels in recorded history. These problems are having a major collective impact and as such, require a collective solution. This is an issue that intersects across all areas of Canadian Friends Service Committee's work, leading us to speak out—in solidarity with many networks, coalitions, and ecumenical partners across Canada—to ask for a Guaranteed Livable Basic Income (GLBI). This special edition of our newsletter *Quaker Concern* will focus on GLBI from different angles. If you're inspired, page 7 lists important actions you can take.

As you will see, GLBI offers an innovative and efficient solution to a systemic and pervasive problem that is growing. As a non-partisan issue, GLBI can get buy-in from people of all political stripes, if it's well understood. It's a system that benefits more people, is efficient, cost effective, and ultimately reduces poverty. Who could be against all that?!

What is a basic income?

There's an important difference between universal and guaranteed basic income. A Universal Basic Income (UBI) offers uniform cash payments to all people regardless of income. Guaranteed Livable Basic Income (GLBI), on the other hand, is a universally accessible payment that is income tested. It provides a top up for

those earning below the minimum requirement for a sustainable and secure livelihood. CFSC is advocating a GLBI, not a UBI.

While there are costs associated with such a program, data shows that Canada can afford it without causing harm to the economy or increasing inflationary pressures. The truth is that poverty has its own costs from poor health to lost productivity. The price tag of poverty in Canada is between \$72-\$84 billion a year! Economists say that provinces alone spend over \$20 billion per year on piecemeal income assistance programs. Responding efficiently and appropriately to poverty with a GLBI is forward thinking policy that could save money!

“GLBI offers an innovative and efficient solution to a pervasive problem that is growing.”

Data from many promising pilots and programs both nationally and internationally shows that people don't stop working when they receive a GLBI (with the exception of mothers who tend to spend more time looking after young children rather than rushing back to work, and young people who may return to and/or finish school). One can say that a GLBI is good for workers and an opportunity for innovation.

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Weekly tips for better conflicts

We're excited to offer a fresh series of short tips for better conflicts. Years in the making, this series distills expert knowledge on what works in difficult conversations down to simple bite-sized videos. It's a calendar, one tip to reflect on each week for a year. Download all of the tips in one PDF, find a new tip video on our social media each week, or sign up to get your weekly tip delivered right to your email!

<https://QuakerService.ca/Tips>

New on our website

- **Staff picks of 2024**—were you wondering what CFSC staff listen to, watch, and read when they're not at work? Check out our staff picks! <https://QuakerService.ca/StaffPicks>
- **Most popular content of 2024**—we created a lot of great resources in 2024. Here's what you clicked on the most: <https://QuakerService.ca/MostPopular2024>
- **Ten Quaker groups leave Twitter/X**—in December CFSC joined nine other Quaker groups in disengaging from X. Find out why: <https://QuakerService.ca/Twitter>
- **Anniversary of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**—joint statement reflects on how far implementing the Declaration has come in Canada and what remains to be done: <https://QuakerService.ca/DeclarationAnniversary>

Toolkit for responding to wars

People of conscience, especially those who believe that killing humans is never alright, are deeply challenged by violent conflicts in our world. Our hearts ache from the pain and suffering we witness, and our heads race with questions. CFSC has produced a brief toolkit for Quakers or anyone concerned by wars and violence. It explains the responses we recommend. The toolkit is broken down into six sections:

1. Expressing our sympathy and solidarity
2. Exploring historic context
3. Violence won't solve the problem
4. Nonviolent alternatives to war
5. Government calls to action
6. Tools and resources

<https://QuakerService.ca/ViolentConflicts>

Psychology Today posts

CFSC's Matt Legge continues to blog for *Psychology Today* (<https://QuakerService.ca/PsychologyToday>). His latest posts are:

- **The surprising truth is that people change all the time**—one reason people give up on conflict transformation processes is that they believe change is impossible. But this surprising evidence says otherwise.
- **The fine line between confidence and closed-mindedness**—an example from basketball shows why “just following the evidence” is so tricky, and how that impacts conflicts.
- **The two hands of active nonviolence: oppose and propose**—active nonviolence means both opposing harms and offering ways forward together.

Lots more great content is available on our website. It's organized in rows just like your Netflix. Have a look around!

QuakerService.ca/Resources

Quaker Concern

Quaker Concern is the newsletter of Canadian Friends Service Committee, the peace and social justice agency of Quakers in Canada. Since 1931, CFSC has worked for a world where peace and justice prevail.

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Breaking free: a guaranteed livable basic income and transformative justice


By Karen Ridd

A GLBI in Canada would begin dismantling inequities.

Stats



The wealth gap in Canada is increasing. The bottom 40% of earners now account for only 2.8% of total wealth. This, together with increased cost of living, is driving more people into poverty.



1 in 10 Canadians live in poverty.

What is GLBI?

Usually when people discuss basic income they're either talking about *universal* or *guaranteed*. When it comes to Bill S-233 in the Senate, it is proposing a GLBI.

Universal basic income	vs	Guaranteed livable basic income
Everyone gets a uniform cash payment regardless of their income or need.		is when cash payments are universally accessible and income tested. Which means it provides a top up for those earning below the minimum requirement for a sustainable and secure livelihood.

The “expensive” myth

This is one of the most common misconceptions out there and needs to be addressed! While there are costs associated with such a program, data shows that Canada can afford it without causing harm to the economy or increasing inflationary pressures.

The cost? In 2021 the Parliamentary Budget Officer (PBO) costed a GLBI at \$85 billion.

The truth? Poverty has its own costs from poor health to lost productivity. The price tag is between \$72-\$84 billion! Current poorly administered, **overly expensive, and piece-meal**

One of CFSC's handouts on GLBI. Read it at <https://QuakerService.ca/GLBI>

“Darla” is currently incarcerated in a federal institution in Canada. She deeply loves her three children. She also struggles with mental health issues. She’s concerned about her upcoming release from incarceration. She’s not sure how she’ll pay for food and shelter for her family, and is afraid that she won’t be able to access the free medicines for her mental health that she can receive in prison. The city she would call home has a housing crisis. Darla anticipates that she might have to stay in a “tent city.” If she does, her children will be taken from her.

She tells a friend that at least when she is “inside” she can access her children semi-regularly, and when they see her she’s relatively stable and clean. Darla is already considering re-offending or “breaching” upon release, so that she can be re-incarcerated.

In 2024, the Office of the Federal Ombudsperson for Victims of Crime, in Remarks to a Standing Senate Committee regarding Bill S-233 (the Senate Bill calling for the creation of a national framework to begin studying a Guaranteed Livable Basic Income (GLBI)) reported these comments by a Canadian woman:

My husband tried to kill me. I had to find a way to get out while keeping the kids safe and getting them out too. I did everything to keep them safe, including leaving everything behind. We left with the clothing on our backs... My husband left me with 14 cents. You have cupboards to put your food in, and I keep mine tucked and hidden in my vehicle with my kids. We went to eating once a day. Kids always had food. I went without, but they always had at least one meal a day. My vehicle has been ticketed so much...¹

A Guaranteed Liveable Basic Income could give Darla

(and her children) a safety net on her release from incarceration. And a GLBI would give people in abusive situations more options, including support to get themselves and their children to safety.

Harm and wrongdoing are expensive—emotionally expensive to those who have been harmed, but also to those who have done harm, and to their families and communities. Crime is also extremely financially expensive to governments (especially when we respond through policing and incarceration).

Undeniably crime/wrongdoing is often catalyzed by financial struggles. It also exacts a financial cost, not only on offenders (and their families) but on those who’ve been harmed. It’s not surprising, then, that in CFSC’s transformative justice work we see multiple ways that a GLBI could help achieve Quakers’ goal of penal abolition.

Since a GLBI has not (yet!) been implemented, we don’t have data to prove how it would impact incarceration rates, or help those who’ve been harmed by crime. But here are some likely consequences:

- **Reduce poverty:** poverty has been proven, time and again, to be a key driver of involvement with the carceral justice system.²
- **Boost mental health:** mental health challenges increase the likelihood of someone coming into contact with the justice system. According to the Mental Health Commission of Canada, over 70% of federally incarcerated people meet “the criteria for one or more current mental disorders.”³ Financial stress exacerbates and creates mental health challenges. A GLBI would work to alleviate these.

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Breaking free continued

- **Encourage education:** when a GLBI was provided to households in Dauphin, Manitoba, one outcome was that young men stayed in school longer.⁴ Since lower educational achievement is correlated with higher risk of involvement with the criminal justice system, encouraging young men to stay in school could impact incarceration rates.
- **Opportunities to access employment:** people with criminal records often face significant barriers to finding employment and housing. A GLBI would not only give people financial support on re-entry, but would also enable them to more easily attend job training, therapy, and other rehabilitative programs.
- **Better support for victims of harm:** an example of this would be people who are in situations of intimate partner violence. The Federal Ombudsperson statement cited above also points out that:

Intimate partner violence disproportionately pulls women out of the workforce. Many have to start their lives over without access to the resources they need to secure first and last month's rent, buy new clothes for themselves and their children, toys, technology, food, school supplies, furniture, transportation, and to pay legal fees for ongoing child custody battles in family court.
- **Opportunities to stay connected with family:** CFSC advocates that a GLBI be offered to all Canadians who qualify, including people who are incarcerated. A GLBI would allow people in prison to contribute to the wellbeing of their family on the outside and would reduce the financial strain on the families of people who are incarcerated.
- **Support for children of incarcerated parents:** for over a decade, CFSC has advocated for the needs of children of incarcerated parents. This is a humanitarian issue. It's also a practical one. Adverse Childhood Events (having a parent in prison is one) increase the likelihood that someone will end up incarcerated as an adult. One impact of having a parent incarcerated is a reduction in household income and support: this would be minimized with access to a GLBI.
- **Shifting paradigms:** a GLBI could reduce the stigmatizing of people who live with poverty, which could reduce the over-policing and over-criminalization that marginalized communities all-too-often face. Additionally, a GLBI is itself a shift

away from a punitive response to social issues and towards more preventative measures—the very type of paradigm shift that we need to transform our current justice system.

For Darla and for people in situations of domestic violence, a GLBI could provide much-needed practical support. Additionally, a GLBI could reduce incarceration rates by addressing some of the root causes of crime, such as poverty, lack of opportunity, and economic stress. Most importantly, however, a GLBI would signal a major shift. The societal focus would move away from narrow punitive responses to wrongdoing, and towards preventive and social measures. In this way, a GLBI could contribute to a truly transformative justice system that prioritizes prevention and social wellbeing over punishment and incarceration.

For additional reading on the topic of a GLBI, check out these two sources: *The Town with no poverty: the health effects of a Canadian guaranteed annual income field experiment* <https://utppublishing.com/doi/10.3138/cpp.37.3.283> and *The case for basic income: freedom, security, justice* by Jamie Swift and Elaine Power (Published by Between the Lines, Toronto: 2021).



Karen Ridd is CFSC's Transformative Justice Program Coordinator. For the footnotes to this article read it online at [QuakerConcern.ca](https://www.QuakerConcern.ca)

GLBI: a pan-religious case for justice and compassion by Mel Burns

As a Quaker, I believe that Guaranteed Livable Basic Income (GLBI) has the potential to resonate deeply with our values of equality and the inherent worth of every individual. Rooted in the testimony of simplicity and George Fox's call to recognize "that of God/Good/Light" in everyone, Quakers are uniquely positioned to champion a policy that addresses economic insecurity and affirms each human life's sacred and inherent value. However, Quakers aren't unique in those values, and because Quakerism is so inclusive in its belief, I wanted to briefly examine what other major religions might have to say. Exploring sacred texts from Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, and Buddhism reveals that GLBI could be both a pragmatic solution and a spiritually aligned response to a universal moral imperative. Let's start with how CFSC is rooted in our Quaker values.

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Pan-religious case continued

The Quaker foundation: testimonies of simplicity and equality

Friends have long been guided by the testimony of simplicity, which encourages lives free from the distraction of excess and focused on the essentials. GLBI aligns here, by ensuring that everyone can meet their basic needs without significant financial instability. Additionally, the testimony of equality calls us to recognize the divine Light in everyone, rejecting societal structures that perpetuate major inequality and harm. GLBI would address systemic injustices by providing a baseline of security that honours every person's intrinsic worth, affirming the image of God/Good/Light within.

A Christian call: faith in action

From a Christian perspective, GLBI resonates deeply with the teachings of Jesus and the moral imperatives found in the *New Testament*. The *Epistle of James* is particularly striking in its critique of performative faith devoid of action: "If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled,' without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?" (*James 2:15-16*).

“Our wellbeing is bound up with that of others.”

This passage challenges believers to move beyond words and towards tangible acts of care for the marginalized. GLBI operationalizes this call, providing direct assistance to ensure everyone can access food, shelter, and other necessities. By advocating for policies like GLBI, Christians can embody their faith in ways that transform society, alleviate unnecessary suffering, and preserve the dignity of life.

Islam and zakat: a model of economic justice

Islamic teachings on zakat, or almsgiving, provide another profound perspective on GLBI. The *Qur'an* asserts: "And in their wealth, there is a rightful share for the one who asks and for the deprived." (*Qur'an 51:19*).

Zakat is more than charity; it is an obligation to redistribute wealth to ensure justice and equity. GLBI expands upon this principle, creating a systemic approach to addressing poverty and inequality. By

institutionalizing support for the vulnerable, GLBI offers a modern interpretation of this timeless value. For Muslims who want to emphasize the importance of economic justice and the stewardship of resources, this alignment underscores the spiritual and ethical necessity of ensuring no one is left behind.

Hinduism and the sacred value of life

In Hinduism, the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* also notes the dangerous nature of the accumulation of wealth: "One is entitled to keep only as much wealth as is necessary for one's maintenance (the rest must be given away in charity). If one accumulates more than one's need, one is a thief in the eyes of God, and will be punished for it." (*Bhagavatam 7.14.8*)

The hoarding of resources is presented as harming the person doing it, and we are encouraged to give away our excess. GLBI embodies this principle by recognizing and addressing one aspect of structural inequality (economic disparity or accumulation of wealth) that denies many their basic needs. The Hindu concept of living simply mirrors the Quaker belief in simplicity and the call to create a society that reflects divine harmony.

Judaism and tzedakah: the pursuit of justice

Judaism provides a robust framework for understanding GLBI through the lens of tzedakah, a concept that blends charity with justice. The *Torah* commands: "If there is a poor man among you, one of your brothers, in any of your towns in the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward your poor brother." (*Deuteronomy 15:7*).

This passage reflects a divine mandate to care for those in need, emphasizing the relational nature of justice. GLBI offers a modern mechanism to fulfill this command, ensuring that resources are distributed equitably and no one is left in deprivation. For Jews who uphold the *Torah's* sense of community and who seek to mend the world's brokenness, advocating for GLBI could be a natural extension of this spiritual commitment.

Buddhism and compassion: reducing suffering

Buddhist teachings on compassion and the alleviation of suffering further reinforce the moral imperative of GLBI. The *Mangala Sutta* offers a universal aspiration:

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Pan-religious case continued

“May all beings be happy; may all beings be without disease. May all beings experience the auspicious. May no beings suffer.”

Buddhism calls us to address the root causes of suffering. By providing a stable financial foundation, GLBI alleviates a significant source of human distress, promoting wellbeing and the conditions for spiritual development. For Quakers, who seek to bring about peace and justice, this alignment with Buddhist principles highlights the interconnected nature of spiritual and material wellbeing.

The practical and spiritual case for GLBI

GLBI is not merely an economic policy; it's a manifestation of spiritual values shared across a range of religious traditions. In practical terms, it addresses pressing social issues such as poverty, homelessness, and health disparities. Spiritually, it reflects the call to honour the inherent worth of every individual and to create a society where all can thrive.

For Quakers, this vision is deeply resonant. The testimony of community reminds us that our wellbeing is bound up with that of others. The testimony of integrity challenges us to confront systemic injustices that perpetuate inequality. And the testimony of peace compels us to build a world where economic violence and insecurity are replaced with equity and dignity.

The Quaker commitment to living out our faith in the world calls us to action. As Friends, we could use our voices to advocate for GLBI as a policy that aligns with our spiritual convictions and addresses the pressing needs of our time. Whether through lobbying efforts, public education, or direct support for pilot programs, we have a unique chance to lead in bringing this vision to fruition. We can build bridges across faiths, fostering a collective movement by grounding our advocacy in the shared values of humanity's spiritual traditions.

In George Fox's words, “Walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in everyone.” GLBI is a modern reflection of this timeless wisdom, offering a means to honour the divine in all people by ensuring that their material needs are met—regardless of their economic contribution to society.



Mel Burns is CFSC's Peace Program Coordinator.

GLBI as justice: addressing colonial inequality

by Jeremy Vander Hoek

CFSC envisions a world in which dignity, justice, peace, human rights, and harmonious relationships with creation are fostered and upheld. We hold this vision for all Peoples, including Indigenous Peoples. In Canada these have not been upheld equally. It's worth considering the relationship between our advocacy for a Guaranteed Livable Basic Income (GLBI) and this inequality. It's a matter of justice.

The title of the summary of the *Final Report* of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada is *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future*. Let's begin by honouring the truth. Colonialism defines Canada's history. The goal of colonialism was and is the enrichment of the colonizers and their descendants. In resisting colonialism's extraction, Indigenous Peoples in what is now called Canada have been systematically targeted as defenders of their human rights. As the report puts it,

For over a century, the central goals of Canada's Aboriginal policy were to eliminate Aboriginal governments; ignore Aboriginal rights; terminate the Treaties and, through a process of assimilation, cause Aboriginal peoples to cease to exist as distinct legal, social, cultural, religious, and racial entities in Canada.¹

Colonialism remains a dominant force in Canada today, as do the consequences of its enforcement. Not least of which is the disproportionate rate at which Indigenous people experience poverty in comparison to non-Indigenous people. This is especially troubling when considering the inequality faced by Indigenous children.

“It's a matter of justice.”

Indigenous children face higher rates of poverty than non-Indigenous children in Canada. A report notes, “The prevalence of poverty among status First Nations children is 3.8 times higher than non-racialized, non-Indigenous children. For non-status First Nations children, it is two-and-a-half times higher and for Inuit and Metis children, it's twice as high as non-Indigenous children.”² This is simply unacceptable and strays far from CFSC's vision of a world where all people, including Indigenous children, are upheld. As the report goes on to say, “we must, as a society,

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continue to investigate, challenge, and respond to the role of racism as a driver of child poverty in Canada.” This stark difference in child poverty is an ongoing consequence of colonialism. Our efforts towards reconciliation must therefore respond to this inequality with just policies to correct it.

This inequality also extends to the violence faced by Indigenous women, girls, two spirit, and LGBTQ+ people. As the *Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls* states, colonial Canadian policies have contributed significantly to this disproportionate and endemic violence. Their conclusion characterizes these policies and the resultant violence, as genocide.³ They also note a significant link between this gender-based violence and poverty. One of the commissioners, Qajaq Robinson, said, “It was pretty much everywhere in the country that we heard about how poverty and economic insecurity played a role in the violence.”⁴

As a response, the report explicitly calls for a GLBI. Recommendation 4.5 states,

We call upon all governments to establish a guaranteed annual livable income for all Canadians, including Indigenous Peoples, to meet all their social and economic needs. This income must take into account diverse needs, realities, and geographic locations.

No child should live in poverty. No person should face violence as a result of economic insecurity. A GLBI is a step towards ending these injustices. It can also be part of recognizing and correcting the colonialism that has caused such tremendous harms and injustices for Indigenous Peoples in this country.

GLBI policy must therefore be developed in cooperation and consultation with Indigenous Peoples, and adhere to the standards of free, prior, and informed consent. This standard is guaranteed in the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*, which affirms that the *Declaration* is part of Canada’s positive law.⁵



Jeremy Vander Hoek is Assistant, CFSC Events and Indigenous Rights. For the footnotes to this article read it online at [QuakerConcern.ca](https://www.quakerconcern.ca)

How to take action

1. Learn more. Check out the articles in this edition of *Quaker Concern* for lots of great information. Join a session of our monthly online discussion group to talk about GLBI <https://QuakerService.ca/DiscussionGroup> Read the two handouts about GLBI on our website, perfect for printing and sharing at meetings or events! <https://QuakerService.ca/GLBI>
2. Contact your municipal councillor. You can ask them to support or develop a municipal resolution for a GLBI. As a tangible example, recently Kingston City Council in Ontario declared a food insecurity emergency. This follows a resolution made by the City of Kingston in 2015 calling for a national discussion on GLBI and coordination between the various levels of government to “consider, investigate, and develop a Basic Income Guarantee for all Canadians.”
3. Contact the Prime Minister. You can write to: pm@pm.gc.ca. Please write your own letter or express in your own words the need to be bold, innovative, and equity seeking in establishing a GLBI program in Canada that will provide people with dignity and a healthy life. Please cc me at Sandra@QuakerService.ca on correspondence in support of GLBI that you send to elected officials so that I can track progress and follow up.
5. Engage with your community. Share our GLBI webpage and resources and chat with people. Invite them to our discussion groups. Get the word out there! Contact us if you need more information.

Sandra Wiens is CFSC’s Government Relations Representative.

Stay Up to Date



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Friends on the move



TRANSFORMATIVE JUSTICE PROGRAM

Coordinator **Karen Ridd** was present at the National Restorative Justice Symposium in Ottawa (CFSC was one of the sponsors), as well as speaking to Ottawa Monthly Meeting together with CFSC's Government Relations Representative **Sandra Wiens**. Karen will be presenting to Halifax Meeting (virtually) at the beginning of February.

Karen and **Jeremy Vander Hoek**, Assistant, CFSC Events and Indigenous Rights, also presented at Christie Gardens—a retirement home in Toronto—on the subjects of restorative justice, transformative justice, and Indigenous Peoples' human rights.

COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR MATT

Legge presented via Zoom to West Hill United Church in Scarborough, Ontario on the topic of overcoming destructive conflicts.

PEACE PROGRAM COORDINATOR MEL BURNS

will also be speaking via Zoom to West Hill United Church about

bridging social divides. She will also give five conflict transformation and peacebuilding workshops in St. Stephen, New Brunswick, hosted by Saint Stephen's University and St. Croix Church.

IN NOVEMBER CFSC'S INDIGENOUS RIGHTS

Program Coordinator **Jennifer Preston** presented virtually to a class at Concordia University in Montreal. Jenn's presentation discussed the work of CFSC and others in the creation of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* in Canada.

Jenn then went to Aotearoa/New Zealand in December to meet with Indigenous and non-Indigenous activists and academics from the Global Indigenous Rights Research Network. The group gathered to share their expertise regarding implementation of Indigenous Peoples' human rights in various global contexts. This is part of the Decolonizing Settler States project that CFSC is a community partner on. Gatherings like this one allow experts to share knowledge, relay best practices, and strengthen solidarity.



Jenn Preston (left) in Aotearoa/New Zealand with activists and academics from the Global Indigenous Rights Research Network.