

Getting off Welfare by Brian Murphy

“Getting off Welfare” for young (especially aboriginal) people is not as easy as one might believe. Many on welfare come from broken or dysfunctional homes having suffered abuse of one sort or another from an early age and have little or no emotional or practical support in any efforts to better their lives.

In many cases young people are school drop outs with minimal literacy or skill with numbers, work place disciplines are foreign to them as is the concept of sustained effort. Businesses are reluctant to hire from a group with a reputation for unreliability.

All of these difficulties contribute to the greatest barrier of all - a low self esteem that in turn leads to an expectation of failure and a self fulfilling desire to give up the struggle.

In addition to all the above barriers the practical costs of getting off welfare are considerable ; loss of daycare assistance , bus passes, food and shelter allowances, a sudden need for better clothing; in return for an entry level wage which may not even cover all the increased costs of working(even during today’s labour shortage). Sometimes these tight circumstances force the making of desperate choices; rent or food or medication or education or winter clothing or a drop back into welfare.

Why should those of us who are securely employed or retired worry about a small (but growing) group of unfortunates?

For most reading this the first answer is obvious - as followers of Our Lord Jesus Christ we must in faith and love do all we can for our brothers and sisters in poverty. The second answer is less obvious and is arguable but might be summed up as enlightened self interest. The more people contributing to society through work and taxes the less need there is for welfare. At the same time there are more people to pay for what is still needed. Money and effort spent to get people off welfare and into work will cost less in the long run than an ever increasing cost to maintain a warehousing system for the broken and helpless.

There are those who argue that the welfare system should be abandoned and the poor left to their own devices but this avenue is not open to Christians and in any event would lead eventually to violent rage and blood shed.

What can we do in addition to prayer that will help people off welfare and into a better more productive life? We will not likely find a way to abolish the need for welfare but there are many ways we can help find a means of escape for some. It would seem best to concentrate any efforts we make on children and youth who are for the most part the least damaged and sunk in despair.

There is a need for elementary school children from welfare homes to build their self esteem by participating in team sports which teach cooperation, leadership, discipline and pride. Unfortunately the cost of uniforms and other equipment is often beyond the means of inner city schools and their pupils. Could we set up a scheme to supply a school with a set of reusable uniforms or help with facility rental fees?

The funding for the Teen Parenting program at Egadz has been cut and any help to keep this valuable project going will be most beneficial for all concerned.

School supplies are a major burden for welfare parents every fall.

A plan for trade scholarships for those completing grade 12 might be possible especially if we could win the cooperation of a group such as the Chamber of Commerce. Their membership has a vested interest in an increasing the trained workforce and declining welfare rolls.

Please guide your Justice and Peace people with your thoughts on how we, as a parish, might help to get people off welfare and please let us know if you would be prepared to help on a project.