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SECONDARY SCHOOL CATEGORY – FIRST PLACE

Basic Income; Replacing Fear With Hope

By Heidi Jean, Maples Met School

Bertrand Russell, 3rd Earl Russell once wrote, “In the daily lives of most men and women, fear plays a greater part than hope: they are more filled with the thought of the possessions that others may take from them, than of the joy that they might create in their own lives and in the lives with which they come in contact.” We live the majority of our lives with an underlying sense of fear or anxiety. This fear or anxiety dictates how we make decisions, and impacts our own well-being along with society’s as a whole. However, it is the marginalized population that feels this fear most. In relation to COVID-19, there is an overwhelming fear of running out of resources, specifically money. With companies laying off workers, more and more people are in a state of uneasiness in regard to their financial well-being. Many of these problems and fears could be solved with basic income in place.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau recently announced an \$82 billion response package to help people and businesses survive these tumultuous times. A basic income of \$30 thousand a year, which is estimated to cost \$43 billion, would ensure that fewer individuals are left living below the poverty line. However, had a basic income plan been in place, Canada would have saved a vast amount of money. Each year, poverty costs billions of dollars, from strain placed on healthcare, justice, social services, productivity, and lost opportunity. A basic income for all Canadians would help everyone be prepared for disasters, today and in the future.

Poverty is the largest issue basic income can address in Manitoba, with the highest child and family poverty rate in Canada. The marginalized population is the most at risk to poverty. For example, 21% of single mothers live in poverty, and so do their children. These children who live in poverty are less successful in school, a disadvantage they aren’t responsible for. Basic income provides equity for disadvantaged students, who have up to a 50% chance of dropping out of high school, and therefore limiting their potential for the rest of their life. As a student, being unsuccessful is at the forefront of my fears. If we cannot be successful, how can we be healthy and happy?

With my last year of high-school coming to a close, the responsibility of earning my own income is fast approaching. With it comes a new sense of anxiety. My hope is to make a living off of my creativity, whether that be writing, illustrating or creating handmade goods. However, as someone who has grown up in a lower-income household, the dream of supporting myself with my passions seems far-fetched. On average, illustrators make \$44,000, yet Canada’s average income was \$61,400 in 2018. While this is a livable income, it makes it difficult to have a car, a home, and raise a family while trying to save for the future. Basic income can benefit us all, by eliminating poverty and fear, and changing our relationship with our work and communities.

Time is money, and when there is enough money, there is more freedom. Marginalized groups would benefit most from a basic income, enabling them to have more control over their time, and help strengthen their communities. I see this as a result of COVID-19. People have found more meaningful ways to spend their time, and acts of generosity and kindness have increased. Deep down, we all want to create change. This is my dream, to live in such a way where we can support each other, and build up our communities.

We live in a world where we must work to earn a living, and are defined by our professions. Yet there are many who don’t have the opportunity to work in a place that satisfies them or provides for their needs. According to Gallup, only 13% of people worldwide are engaged with their jobs. They also found that poor engagement can lead to a reluctance to donate money, volunteer, or help others. Growing up, I found this to be true. I was always aware of not having enough, and I found it harder to share what I did have. The fear and reality of not having

enough money overtakes the desire to have a fulfilling career, leaving people in jobs that do nothing for them but pay the rent. To me this is a scary thought, that I may one day end up in the same position.

Being a woman in our society places me at a greater risk of inequality and poverty, both in the workplace and out of it. It is even more difficult to obtain one of those unfulfilling jobs as a part of the marginalized population. Women are still making less than men, at \$0.74 to their \$1.00, and are expected to do the majority of care giving duties. On average, women complete 254 minutes of unpaid work per day, whereas men only complete 160. If this caring labour were valued at minimum wage, it would account for 40% of world production. While basic income cannot fix this inequality, it can help people live a more comfortable life, and allow them to become more engaged and satisfied.

Basic income can improve all of our lives, but it will have a significant impact on the most marginalized members of our communities. It can minimize fear and poverty, improve our well-being, help us build up our communities and minimize government spending. Our lives revolve around money, and for many a basic income is the tipping point between surviving and having the freedom to flourish. We can replace fear with hope, and create joy in each other's lives. Imagine how vibrant and healthy our society could be. How would your life be different, with a basic income for all?

Basic Income: Breaking the Cycle of Poverty and Achieving Dreams

By Aiyanna St. Cyr, Kelvin High School

In the time of COVID-19, questions about basic income being implemented have come to be discussed again as the Canadian government is providing Canadian Emergency Relief Benefit and other supports for some citizens. In general, basic income would benefit everyone, and during a crisis like this, just how beneficial it would be is hard to deny. Basic income would give a guaranteed support, as well as eliminate poverty, and would personally support me with my post-graduation plans and career. It could allow me to break the cycle of my family's poverty.

Basic income would change everyone's lives. Research has shown it could eliminate poverty and reduce all of its subsequent side effects, like health problems, lack of education – a possible barrier in getting a job - allowing them to live a full, accomplished life, something that should be a human right. In fact, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms states that every person has the right to life, liberty and security of the person (s.7) and to equality (s. 15)” (basicincomemanitoba.ca), but the existence of poverty and the lack of action to eliminate it contradicts this and makes it impossible to be true; I want to live in a country that follows its own laws. I want to live in a more just society, knowing that no one's life is any less than it should be due to a lack of money. One of these disadvantaged people could discover the cure to cancer, but their contribution to the world can never play out because they don't have enough money, something people in poverty generally can't control. Many people disagree with this idea, however, saying poor people are lazy and asking, “why don't they just get a job?” Alas, it is not that simple. Poverty makes it much harder to get a job, because of stereotypes, health conditions, and lack of education, and many other factors that are hard to combat without a job. Having money could provide the things people in this situation would need in order to get a job; though, how will they get money without a job? It's a cycle: you must have a job in order to get out of poverty and increase your health, but you can't get a job unless you first get rid of these barriers. Basic income would benefit my family, as my mother and relatives have been in this cycle. Basic income would give people guaranteed stability, not leave them unsure of their living conditions and future. Basic income could allow parents to save money for their children for university, something I wish my dad had been able to do for me.

My family has been living in poverty for generations, and it would mean a lot to me if basic income were to be implemented. I'd know that the way my family and others like ours have been living would be greatly improved, giving many of them the stability they've always wanted. Even though I was less impacted by poverty than others in my family, all I ever wished for growing up was to not experience the “of course” feeling when my mom said she didn't think we could afford our once-a-month treat— a Tall Grass Prairie cinnamon bun I'd asked for—after going a while without anything but the basic necessities. I wanted to not have to consider the barrier of poverty every time we made a decision. It ran our lives, having to evaluate how buying one thing would drastically affect the rest of the month's money. Yet, I know many had it worse than we did; we were still very lucky to have a roof over our heads and the basics, as well as the odd luxury. After my mom had to drop out of nursing school due to burn-out, she hasn't been well enough to get a job since. My parents have been separated since I was a baby, and my mom has since been a single mother of two. We had support, but not guaranteed, and it was scary to be unstable. Although he put what he could towards university for me, my dad also struggled to get by, going through bankruptcy and many economic issues. With basic income, my dad could have put the money he spent on basic needs towards helping support his children for university.

Aside from in my youth, basic income would make a drastic change in my life now. I am a student in my last year of high school, and have ambitious plans for after graduation. However, I wasn't able to have a job until

late January, and when I finally got one, it got cut off due to COVID-19. Not having the option to work couldn't have come at a worse time. After graduation, I'd like to participate abroad in a work-away program and practice blogging, and then come back to take some university courses on writing and journalism. Using this experience and knowledge, I want to become a traveling photography journalist. However, how am I to make that happen when the costs of these preparations are high and my plans to save up for them have been put on hold? I don't even know how I'm going to cover the basics. Basic income would make achieving my goals and my dreams of breaking the cycle of poverty within my family so much more possible. It would knock down the monetary barrier keeping me from doing this, and take such a load off my chest.

Basic income would change the lives of many. It would mean happiness, stability, the chance to reach one's full potential, and a new beginning in breaking the chain of poverty for myself and others, which would mean so much to me. It is an important social justice goal to live in a more egalitarian society with economic stability for the citizens; working together to help make this happen will take dedication and time, but the outcomes will be worth it.

SECONDARY SCHOOL CATEGORY – THIRD PLACE

Basic Income: What it Could Mean for Me

By Jascha Petersen, River East Collegiate

The first time I heard about universal basic income was through the campaigning of then- democratic nomination candidate Andrew Yang. Many of my classmates first heard of it the same way, and it quickly became a preeminent topic of our daily political discussions during physics class. Prior to the Yang campaign, universal basic income was not a subject that had seen much discussion in mainstream politics. Amongst my peers, virtually all of whom are fellow students in our final years of high school, the general opinion on a universal basic income is unsurprisingly quite positive. The concept of a no-strings-attached monthly cheque to aid through the looming university years is appealing.

Three years ago, the province removed limits on tuition fees that educational institutions may charge. 54% of Canadian undergraduates exit university with student debt averaging \$28,000. That number is up nearly \$8,000 since 2000. Being a student is expensive and is only getting costlier. The benefits are obvious: a monthly cheque given regardless of employment status could be what allows someone to make rent, or pay for next year's tuition, or pay for bus passes no longer offered by the city of Winnipeg. In these times of global economic uncertainty, income security is no longer a given, especially for young people beginning their careers. A universal income would be useful for bridging the times between employment opportunities in today's job market rapidly shifting towards a gig economy.

There are, of course, those who oppose a basic income. Many worry that a basic income would only serve to widen the already large divide between two increasingly defined upper and lower classes. Basic income could be seen not as a way to improve the quality of life and financial stability of the general population, but as a way for the upper class to pacify the commoners. Many worry that providing unconditional income may not motivate people to develop their skills and seek out employment opportunities. The glaring issue, however, is cost. It would be expensive. Federal budgets would need to be recalculated; the economic strategy of an entire nation reevaluated. There is no easy way to implement financial backing for an entire nation.

One needs to look no further than current events to see the benefits of a basic income. The spread of Covid-19 threatens the job security and income of millions of Canadians. In response, the government is expanding the employment insurance program by removing wait times and giving \$2,000 per month to people unable to work due to the virus. More to families with children. The United States is using a similar approach, handing out \$1,200 per person to almost every taxpayer in the country in an "economic stimulus package." It is obvious that boosting the economy by providing financial aid to the workforce is the approach of choice for most western governments. One simply needs to apply this philosophy in times of economic stability to see the potential advantages, not only for the economy as whole, but also for the individual Canadians that help support it.

Manitoba isn't entirely new to the concept; it has seen a universal basic income program before. From 1974 to 1979 one of the most ambitious experiments ever conducted took place in communities around Manitoba, particularly in Dauphin. Dubbed "Mincome", the experiment sought to not only analyze the financial and administrative effects of basic income, but also the effect that giving what essentially amounted to free money to select low income households would have on a relatively small community like Dauphin. While it wasn't a "true" basic income since money received was scaled based on preexisting income, it was arguably the most ambitious experiment of its kind, for the time.

One thing that set the Mincome experiment apart from similar attempts elsewhere in the world was its focus on the effects that the minimum income had on the social aspect of the community. The experiment showed that in interactions with banks and landlords, which can be unnecessarily complex for low income families, people on Mincome reported significantly less difficulty. They also reported spending more time engaging with the community, visiting neighbors and friends, and becoming community leaders. The program also reduced social stigma surrounding a basic income: participants reported feeling less embarrassed being on a basic income program than being on traditional welfare. Today, particularly in Canada, we have become almost obsessed with improving the cultural and communal aspects of our society. Perhaps this is one way to start.

We live in a world in which the top one percent controls half of the wealth in the global economy. Universal basic income does not come from nowhere, it is a direct response to this fact. It would not be easy to implement. It would be difficult for the economy. But if the world were different, it wouldn't be necessary.

POST-SECONDARY CATEGORY – FIRST PLACE

Basic Income, what could it mean for you?

By Maria Sytnick, Faculty of Social Work, Université de Saint-Boniface

As Canadians, we spend our lives paying into our national social safety net with the expectation that help will be there when we need it. That is our agreed-upon system. Unfortunately, as governments tighten the criteria for programs such as Employment Insurance (EI) and Employment and Income Assistance (EIA), many individuals are finding they aren't eligible for the programs they paid towards. Canadians need a universal monthly benefit that will offer financial freedom as we fight for economic equality. A universal basic income (UBI) would be a reliable stream of support for many Canadians to tackle difficult problems such as poverty and debt.

An issue with the current system of social security is that the eligibility criteria is often hard to decipher and complex, especially for someone who is facing difficulties in their life. This brings in a top-heavy system of administration to regulate and enforce rules, including investigating when rules have been broken. This culture of fear around accessing social security has contributed to a significant stigmatization of its users. However, Canada's social safety net is paid for by its population, and it is thus the right of its population to utilize services in a time of need. Our national ideology has shifted to judgment and requiring individuals to prove their need rather than supporting them in solidarity through difficulty. Poverty should not be seen as the failure of the individual, but rather as a failure of our society as a whole. The increasing difference between the poorest of Manitoba and the richest shows that our social programs are failing and a radical reconstruction is necessary. The current culture punishes those who seek help, while ideally Canadians should feel relief from financial support. A UBI would reduce this barrier and destigmatize accessing the social safety net, as all Canadians regardless of personal circumstance would receive the benefit. Individuals should not feel shame for needing help, as helping your neighbor is an essential part of our national identity.

The rise of means-testing for social programs like EI and EIA means that not everyone who needs help will get it. It also means that those who need immediate assistance cannot rely on said help to be timely. A universal benefit bestows less judgment and less hoops to jump through for Canadians to thrive. As a social work student, I have accompanied clients who have applied for EIA. For low-income Canadians, it is incredibly difficult to make continuous visits to the local welfare office, especially for parents with a young child in tow. For those with a limited income, just getting to appointments is a financial and emotional strain that makes a tough situation harder because of the cost of transportation. However, a no-strings-attached UBI that will be there, regardless of how many hours were spent searching for jobs or how many visits were made to their social worker, would be a welcome relief. A UBI would provide true freedom, where there is no constraint on how many job-search sessions one needs to attend to qualify for assistance in the first place. Canadians would have more time and income to invest towards refining skills and shopping from local businesses, which all come back to benefit our economy.

A universal basic income is not a new concept. In the 1970s, it was tested in Dauphin. The cases that came out of this project show an increase in quality of life for the participants. Journalists and researchers found that some residents chose to invest in an education. In particular, women were able to enter the workforce and pursue postsecondary studies as income was no longer holding them back. This contributed not only to self-reported happiness, but to the economic success of the family and the community. Most importantly, a UBI gives marginalized groups the financial freedom to traverse barriers, such as reducing the gender barrier to paid work.

A UBI has never seemed more urgent than now, given the coronavirus pandemic and economic shutdown facing the nation. Justin Trudeau's federal government introduced the CERB, which is a payment of two thousand

dollars per month for up to four months. While this is a welcome relief for some individuals, the criteria to qualify leaves up to a third of Canadians ineligible according to the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. Among the criteria is a minimum income of five thousand dollars in 2019, which leaves out low-income Canadians who would benefit the most from an income supplement. At the same time, the NDP has been calling for the Liberals to make the CERB truly universal. Those who are still ineligible have been waiting over a month for financial relief that has been slowed by bureaucratic gate keeping and red tape. At the time of writing, Justin Trudeau has announced that university students will be eligible for twelve hundred and fifty dollars monthly from May to August. Although this will surely alleviate some stress, the lower amount shows to students that their plight is less important than that of the average working Canadian. All Canadians are struggling during this pandemic, and it is not the time to make decisions on whose financial need is more desperate. Only a universal benefit will show solidarity and equality between all members of our society, no matter their struggles. As well, a universal benefit would provide Canadians with money that can go back into the economy, through making purchases at local businesses and helping them stay afloat in this crisis.

A UBI would benefit Canadians as individuals and as a society. It would provide an important investment in our economy and serve as extra help for those trying to save, secure housing, reduce their debt or upgrade their education. It makes sense for the needs of every Canadian. As we pay into our social safety net, it is important that we advocate to make it work for us. A UBI is the fuel our economy needs to keep going during this pandemic while reducing economic inequality.

POST-SECONDARY CATEGORY – SECOND PLACE

Basic Income, what could it mean for you?

By Delaney Coelho, Department of Political Studies, University of Manitoba

Much of society has been struggling to meet their basic needs within the existing landscape. The current COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted that our society and the current systems in which it functions are not stable and that we can and must do more to support each other. A guaranteed basic income would ensure that all people have access to the minimum finances required to have their basic needs met and to participate in society with dignity and respect.

My partner and I left university with a combined student debt of over \$60,000 for two bachelor's degrees and a master's degree. Despite finding well paying employment shortly after graduation, the debt we incurred has delayed our ability to buy a home, to start a family, and to take chances or risks in our employment that might have led to further opportunities. We worked in the summers and I had a part time job throughout my studies, but we both came from rural Manitoba, which required moving away from our homes and paying for living expenses in the city in order to pursue post-secondary education and it was not enough to avoid taking on debt. I know we are not alone in this. 54% of Canadians with a bachelor's degree graduate with debt while 45% graduate with over \$25,000 of debt. If there had been a basic income guarantee while we were studying we would have graduated with less debt and been more ready to check off 'milestones' such as buying a house and starting a family that our boomer parents told us would only be obtainable if we got an education. It is not just students who have large levels of debt. The average Canadian owes \$23,800 in non-mortgage debt. What happens when there is a disruption to our economic system or when unemployment spikes?

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated already existing inequalities and exposed gaps in Canada's social safety net. Within a few weeks, the system many felt was secure proved more vulnerable and precarious than once thought. Businesses have laid people off, daycares and schools have shut down, people cannot afford to pay their rent or mortgage, and families are in crisis. Governments have responded by providing support through cobbled together stopgap measures that cannot come quickly enough. This has led to people falling between the cracks and desperate situations. Statistics Canada reported one million job losses in March 2020 and an unemployment rate that grew to 7.8%. This has undoubtedly affected the 50% of Canadians who live \$200 away from being unable to pay their bills. My partner and I both come from privileged backgrounds raised by university-educated parents who are still together and own their own homes. Despite this, and the fact that my partner and I make more than the average wage for Canadians of \$52,600 per year we are close to living paycheck to paycheck with a limited capacity for savings. We know that it is the most vulnerable groups who are disproportionately impacted by change resulting from COVID-19 and who are more likely to be excluded from stopgap benefits put in place by both federal and provincial governments. This includes those who are unemployed or underemployed in low paying precarious jobs that lack benefits, people experiencing poverty or homelessness, people with disabilities, women and children experiencing domestic violence, as well as Indigenous and racialized people.

Our lives look markedly different than they did three months ago. There is uncertainty and unease about what the 'new normal' will look like after the dust settles and we move beyond responding to the public health crisis in front of us. The new normal will not and cannot look like it did in the past. It was not working for the majority of people and it has not prepared us for the next social and economic disruption. In addition to being a student, I have and continue to spend my personal and professional time working towards creating an equitable society that I am proud to be a part of. For me, all human beings have the right to be treated with dignity and respect, which should not be dependent on whether or where someone is employed. Manitoba's 1970s pilot of an income

guarantee showed that an income guarantee improved participant's health and community life. High school completion rates increased, hospitalization rates fell, accidents and injury rates decreased, and new mothers spent more time at home with their children. People are happier and healthier when they do not have to worry about struggling to have their basic needs met.

Introducing a basic income guarantee would ensure that everyone would have the ability to meet their basic needs, participate in society on an equal level with others, and live with dignity. People do not want to be called "heroes" for caring for each other during a crisis; we want job security and livable wages so that we can support a basic standard of life for our families, our communities and ourselves. This is simply not a reality for an increasing proportion of society. A basic income guarantee would allow all people to have their basic needs met despite social or economic disruption.

The COVID-19 pandemic has provided us with a window of opportunity where problems (poverty and social inequality), policy (a guaranteed basic income), and politics have aligned to demand an urgent and unprecedented response. With a vision rooted in the belief that everyone has a fundamental right to dignity and respect, we can provide a guarantee that has the ability to reach all Canadians, support healthy communities and ensure bright futures for all of us.

The Case for a Universal Basic Income

By Ava Glendinning, School of Music, Brandon University

In a wealthy country like Canada, there is no reason for any citizen to be without access to food and shelter. It has been argued that Universal Basic Income (UBI) could help provide essential needs to those living in poverty as well as minorities that are at a disadvantage. While these issues are incredibly important, in my argument for UBI I'm going to focus on the areas in which I have more personal experience: the ways in which UBI could support the arts, build community, and contribute to the well-being of children.

As a guitarist who has been performing and teaching in Winnipeg since I moved here from Brandon in 2012, I've met many talented artists and musicians who have worked to build a cultural scene that is impressive for a city of our size. Many of these people struggle to balance art or music with other jobs and are able to dedicate only a small amount of time to their craft; others devote their lives to an arts career despite facing financial instability.

The gig economy is unpredictable; I've seen artists achieve a modest income for months, then experience periods of time without work. The sacrifice these artists face is especially apparent as they gain more responsibilities, have greater need of stability, or consider supporting a family. Many are forced to choose between these responsibilities and their art. UBI could help these artists and musicians grow in their practice, producing more mature, meaningful art as they get older, and advancing our cultural imagination, rather than facing poverty or having to abandon their craft as they accrue more responsibilities. The long history of the arts is proof of their intrinsic value as ways of teaching and building community. UBI would nurture these meaningful areas of life. This act of investing in the arts also has an economic return many times the amount put in (Laura Eggertson).

UBI would also benefit people suffering from illness and chronic injuries. At age twenty, while studying jazz guitar in University, I acquired injuries that caused me to abandon my music degree. Chronic pain made it difficult to work more than a few hours a week at low-paying and repetitive jobs that were the only employment I could find as a young person without a degree. For those who work in such jobs, UBI is an important top-up. Not qualifying for E.I., I spent a number of years living on barely enough to cover basic needs, often reinjuring myself. I am fortunate; I have family with enough means that I wouldn't have starved, and after some years I recovered and returned to my degree. Many others are not so lucky, and would be forced to work jobs that continuously reinjure them, resulting in lives of chronic pain, poverty, depression, and anxiety. Having first-hand experience with these struggles while injured has given me great compassion for those who face them as ongoing obstacles. I believe UBI would help alleviate these hardships and improve the physical and mental health of those suffering.

Perhaps most importantly, UBI would affect the areas of the arts that intersect with the education and well-being of children. I have taught private guitar lessons for years, and am involved in the volunteer-run organization Girls Rock Winnipeg as a board member and teacher. I have the joy of seeing girls at our summer music camp flourish. Many of them are underprivileged and can attend only because of scholarships fundraised by volunteers (some of whom put in long hours outside of other jobs). The girls have opportunities to gain new skills and feel a sense of empowerment and community. Many of them don't have access to instruments or lessons beyond the week of camp, and UBI could help parents afford the kinds of activities that enrich the lives and stimulate the minds of their kids. We know the positive impact music has on brain

development and mental health, and UBI would extend these benefits to more children, allowing them the joy and sense of achievement through music that currently only some enjoy. Studies have also suggested that UBI decreases childhood illness, as well as helping kids stay in school longer (John Lanchester), which could have positive impacts on the work force.

I am able to live on little money; if I received even a modest sum from UBI, I would be able to dedicate more time to rehearsing, performing, composing, and community-building through volunteer work with Girls Rock Winnipeg, while still working as a guitar teacher. I believe some artists would live similarly, while many would prefer greater financial stability, and would continue in full-time jobs. I realize UBI opponents fear that people would leave the work force; however, studies conducted in Manitoba and elsewhere have suggested that negative economic effects are minimal: people far more often seize opportunities to better themselves and their families (Hum and Simpson).

This spring, I will graduate with a music degree and re-enter an economy that has, as of this writing, almost entirely shut down. I am unable to resume the respite work or guitar teaching I expected to return to until the Covid-19 crisis has passed. For me, this means indefinite time at home, accruing a small amount of debt over rent and food. For others, including many artists whose performances have been canceled and who have lost jobs and students, it has more serious implications. Our government has shown, during this crisis, that it is capable of providing financial assistance to many Canadians in a time of great need; with some reorganization of funds UBI could provide assistance to help the economy recover—and to sustain it thereafter. I believe that Canadians would celebrate a government that nurtures those working to create a vibrant, flourishing arts and cultural scene, provide security to the injured and unwell, and foster empowerment, joy, and confidence in the lives of the children, who are the future of this country.