



Living Wage Campus Activist Kit

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**For more information, contact
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LIVING WAGE

CAMPUS ACTIVIST KIT

All over Canada, people are working full-time jobs and yet cannot manage to meet their basic needs. Legislated minimum wages in every province and territory are set so low that even someone working full-time at minimum wage falls thousands of dollars below the poverty line.

A *living* wage allows an individual to earn enough money to not be considered poor by all Canadian measures of poverty.

Living wage campaigns in the US and in Canada are demanding significant increases in legislated minimum wages; they are also lobbying municipal governments and educational institutions to voluntarily start paying living wages to their minimum wage employees.

What does raising minimum wages have to do with campus life?

There is a growing trend to privatize higher education institutions. From increasing tuition fees to accepting research grants from corporations to selling goods in vending machines, universities appear to rely more and more on the private sector for funding. It has also become commonplace to contract out services, rather than renewing contracts with existing unions on campus. In order to turn a profit, contractors will pay their employees the minimum wage or slightly above. This wage is typically much lower than what unionized employees would earn.

Universities are not only losing their independence in determining the needs and interests of the communities they serve due to privatization; your university may also be contributing to poverty by underpaying workers on your campus by its choice of companies to outsource services to.

This kit is designed for the campus activist who wants to make sure all workers on campus are paid a living wage and are not exploited by private contractors or service providers. When your university commits to contracting out services to providers that pay a living wage, you are helping make sure that everyone on campus is treated with dignity and that private contractors exploit no one. You are also contributing in a major way to the living wage social movement across Canada.

Bring back some democracy
and social justice to your
University.

Getting started – organizing on
campus:

http://www.protest.net/activists_handbook/campus.html

Let's get started!

Create a Living Wage coalition

There are lots of people who will care
about this issue because they are directly or
indirectly affected.

Here are some ideas on who to approach:

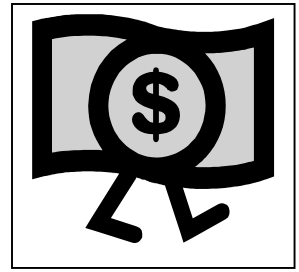
- Faith groups
- Visible minority student associations
- Teachers' union and/or faculty association
- Other socially concerned groups on campus
- Specific faculties (include the student association) such as political science, public administration, social work.
- Employees in minimum wage jobs
- Canadian Federation of Students provincial component executive
- Your student union
- Teacher assistants' union
- Support staff
- Other community groups and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO's) working on similar issues off-campus



The advantage of working with others is not only to share the work, but also to broaden your base of support and the diversity of your campaign. It will be easier for you to keep bringing this issue back to the forefront if you have connections to different perspectives.

How big is the problem?

Find out who is affected by contracting-out on your campus. Information of this sort can be obtained through your provincial Federation of Labour or the unions that represent university employees on your campus. (<http://www.canadianlabour.ca/index.php/federations>)



You'll want to be able to determine information like:

- How many well paying, permanent jobs have been lost due to contracting out? How many employees are paid low wages? What percentage of earnings has been lost (here you could compare the hours worked at previous wages to the current wages)? Has contracting out actually saved the university any money?
- Other interesting information: compare what it would cost to pay all of these affected employees a living wage, and what percentage of the university's (whose?) budget would represent an increase from minimum wage to a living wage for the affected employees. Also compare the salaries of top officials at the university to the salaries of the private contractors' employees.

Develop your strategy

Here is what other universities have done:

- Publicly request in the name of the coalition that the administration investigate labour issues and explore wages and working conditions at the college. Demand that they report back within a specific timeline.
- Offer the support of the coalition to the administration. You can help by:
 - Providing information on what has been done elsewhere
 - Mobilize support for the review
- If you get the brush-off (no response or told to go elsewhere), ORGANIZE!

- Organize:
 - A forum on the living wage -Put together a panel of speakers – representatives from the coalition, plus check out www.napo.ca/livingwage for a list of Living Wage partners who could come out and speak.
 - Write an article in the campus paper
 - Distribute flyers explaining the issue and a call to action (for those who can't attend the forum)
 - Download Living Wage cheques from the National Anti-Poverty Organization website and modify them to be addressed to your President or Chancellor for students to sign (see www.napo.ca/livingwage), collect them and present them to the administration
 - If you don't have cheques, get a petition started by email or paper.

You may be in for the long haul, so here are some longer term strategies to keep drawing attention to the issue

- Monitor administration meetings to flag opportunities to decry the unfairness of their decisions i.e. when a new contract gets awarded, or decision to layoff employees. This will require you work closely with the labour movement.
- Look for new ways to frame the issue and thus involve new members in your coalition. For example, use a new study on the challenges faced by new immigrants to involve visible minority groups and present the issue from that perspective.
- Acknowledge small victories along the way as a strategy for showing the strength of your campaign as well as boosting morale for those working on the campaign
- Pace yourself –have a longer term “what-if” timeline and mix-up your strategies/events so as to keep the attention of the media, the public and your coalition partners

When to *up the ante*:

There are endless options for peaceful protest before you Up the Ante and when you do. Consult www.dallaspeacecenter.org/198methods.htm for more ideas.

- Talk to other activists on campus about what they've done and what worked.

- Weigh the pros and cons of more confrontational tactics then take well-informed decisions about what to do next.
- Write up a list of your previous failed attempts to meet and negotiate with the administration, and distribute this information prior to your action.
- Organize students so that they leave voice mails and send emails to the administration demanding that the students taking action be heard.

At this point you have many options:

- Ask coalition partners who are members of campus committees to persistently introduce motions demanding a review of labour issues and wages during committee meetings.
- As a group, you can enter the office of a VP or the President and demand that the administration stop paying poverty wages and strike a committee to change these contracting out practices immediately. Refuse to leave until you get a commitment.
- Organize a hunger strike and refuse to stop until you get a commitment.
- Organize a strike (limited, selective or general) of affected employees along with information pickets to promote your campaign and demand a commitment to review labour conditions and wages.

VERY IMPORTANT:

Once you have gotten commitment, make sure to follow up with the administration that action is taken immediately. Beware of stalling tactics and denounce these publicly as soon as you can confirm them.



Commonly asked questions... and the answers!

What's wrong with our minimum wages?

Minimum wages were legislated to ensure protection for workers and that they received “fair pay for a fair day’s work”. It was rightly believed that working a full-time job should be a guarantee against living in poverty. That isn’t true anymore. As it stands now, minimum wage workers have the same purchasing power today as they did back in the 1970s!

There are employers who pay a living wage and there’s no reason for universities not to award those employers contracts.

Another problem is the creeping privatization of many of our public services. Imagine how hard life is for someone who works at minimum wage to pay for the growing cost of necessities like health care or education, just two examples of essential services that have been underfunded for the last fifteen years.

<p>DEFINITION: Social wage A living wage <i>plus</i> government benefits that an individual is entitled to, whether universally or according to income.</p>
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What's considered a living wage?

A living wage makes it possible for someone working full-time and year round (50 weeks) to earn enough not to be poor.

We believe someone should make as much money as an accepted poverty line. We use the poverty lines of Statistics Canada’s Low come Cut-Offs

(LICO) to set the wage. (For more information, consult www.ccsd.ca/factsheets/fs_licoo4_bt.htm)

Big provinces like BC, Alberta or Quebec should have their minimum wage at \$10 an hour and indexed to inflation. This allows an individual working fulltime year round to earn as much as the LICO for the largest urban center in those provinces. There has been some progress all around the country to raise the minimum wage.



Who is most affected by low minimum wages?

This data comes from a 2005 study by Ron Saunders of the Canadian Policy Research Networks. Almost two thirds of minimum wage workers in 2003 were women.

Over a quarter of recent immigrants were low paid in 2000, compared to one-sixth of Canadian born workers. Visible minorities are the most vulnerable among recent immigrants. Almost one third of visible minority recent immigrants were low paid, compared to less than a fifth of recent immigrants who were not visible minorities.

Quotable quote: John Jacobs, CCPA, 2005

Seeking to justify paying a low wage because they live at home assumes that young [people] are not paying room and board to parents. It assumes that young people prefer to live at home, whereas they may be living at home because they cannot afford to move out and get on with their lives. Parents and relatives are, in effect, subsidizing the operations of low-wage employers by providing room and board at little or no cost.

As for university and college students, workers under 25 years of age represent one third of all minimum wage workers. Coupled with government clawbacks to post-secondary education, students are experiencing skyrocketing tuition fees and inadequate student financial support. A growing number of students are graduating with a significant debt load. Many others are forced to work for minimum wage in multiple part-time jobs.

Won't raising wages result in job loss for the very workers you are trying to help?

This assumes that the only way for business to offset the cost of paying their employees more is to reduce the size of their workforce. Studies have not supported this assumption.

Companies who have voluntarily adopted higher wages or who have been required to do so through legislated higher wages, will usually find savings in efficiency gains such as investing in operational processes and machinery. They will also save money by experiencing reduced turnover of staff, reduced training costs, as well as the productivity gain that comes along with improved

employee morale. (For more information, check out [Jared Bernstein](#) , a labour economist at the Economic Policy Institute. He specializes in income and wage inequality issues)

What if the type of work done by low-wage workers isn't worth higher pay?

No matter what the job is, anyone working a job deserves to make enough money to feed himself and keep a roof over her head. When companies pay too little, shareholders and corporate executives are the ones who directly benefit from increases in productivity and these profits are not shared with the employees. Also, the relationship between poverty and other social issues like illness, crime, stress and relationship breakdown, means we either pay now or pay later. No wage should allow a worker to be exploited.

Acknowledgements

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Examples from Elsewhere

Sample letter to administration

1) Subject: Negotiate with living wage students! Increase wages!

Dear [Decision Maker],

I am writing to demand that the [] administration start negotiating with the student activists from the living wage coalition, and raise the wages of workers at [] University. Because the [] administration has stonewalled constructive dialogue with the [] Living Wage Coalition, students were forced to occupy [] President's office on Monday April 11, which inhibits the administrations ability to go about business as usual. This will result in reduced efficiency for the [] community, but only you have the power to end the occupation. Negotiating with the students is the most effective way to resolve this event and show that you are in favour of worker rights.

It is disappointing to hear workers at [] are receiving poverty wages and are being forced to work 70 to 80 hour weeks in order to provide for themselves and their families. In fact, a recent independent study found that 75% of low wage classified employees at [] work more than one job, and 17% work three jobs. This is shameful for everyone on the [] campus, and so I am writing to you to demand that [] pay its classified and contract employees fair wages. It is extremely important that all employees receive full time pay for full time work.

I am upset that students from the [] Living Wage Coalition have had to take such direct action in order to gain your attention and create some constructive activity on the part the administration. As part of a national organization of students working to ensure that our universities support worker's rights, I find it particularly unethical that [] has refused to negotiate constructively with the students.

I wish to make it clear that I support the demands of the students occupying [] President's office. I support the demand for raising the baseline salary to \$10/hour and for implementing a living wage policy at the school that will be adjusted annually to the cost of living in [].

As students and workers at [] and across the country, we stand together in defense of workers' rights at [] and call upon the administration to negotiate with the students inside and raise workers' wages. I sincerely hope that arrest can be averted through movement on the part of the University. For this reason, I am writing to urge the University to negotiate in good faith with the students and the Living Wage Coalition.

Sincerely,

[YourName]

[Your Address]

2) Subject: Implement a Living Wage Policy NOW!

Dear [*Decision Maker*],

[] University needs to agree to a Living Wage Policy NOW. Students have been on hunger strike for [] days now and workers continue to be paid poverty wages despite [] years of work on the issue. [] needs to agree to a policy that includes a wage based on the cost of living in [] that is annually adjusted for inflation, and includes non-wage benefits. [] needs to stop making excuses and commit to a real policy. It is time to stop ignoring your employees and students and start living your stated commitment to social justice. It is not enough to simply raise wages; you need to make a real commitment to your employees. I demand that you meet with students and workers and resolve this issue as soon as possible by committing to a Living Wage Policy. You know that it is the right thing to do and that your employees and students should not have to suffer any longer. I look forward to hearing that [] is committing to a socially just Living Wage Policy that sets an example to the rest of the community that morality can exist in a business plan.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

http://www.unionvoice.org/studentsagainstsweat/alert-description.tcl?alert_id=1426752

Sample flyer

<http://jpi.tamu.edu/LivingWage/>

Over xxx Sky workers are struggling to provide adequate food, housing, child care, transportation and health care for their families.
Living Proof for a Living Wage!

Slogan

A full-time job should keep you OUT OF poverty, not IN IT!

Help support a Living Wage
For all SKY University employees!

Sample slogans

Living Wage Now!

_____ University shouldn't be paying Poverty Wages!

Sample newspaper article

UMW STUDENTS OCCUPY ADMINISTRATOR'S OFFICE

Students from the living wage campaign at the University of Mary Washington in Fredericksburg have occupied the office of Richard Hurley, Executive Vice-President and Chief Financial Officer. They have locked themselves down in sitting positions and have declared they will not leave until the college establishes a \$10/hr campus-wide minimum wage indexed to the cost of living. "We will remain here indefinitely and as long as it takes," declared one student demonstrator.

"The college claims to be a community and to care for the well being of its members, but they continue to pay and defend poverty wages," said junior Aaron Samsel, liaison for the group inside. "They don't even care to study the issue," Samsel added.

On April 5 Richard Hurley refused the campaign's request for a study committee to explore wages and working conditions at the college. In an emailed response, Mr. Hurley wrote in part that "there are no plans to form a UMW committee to investigate labor issues" at the school. He continued, "Please consider directing your efforts towards influencing the Federal Government, which is responsible for establishing the minimum wage." At this institution of higher learning, the Chief Financial Officer is not even interested in rigorously exploring the issues, much less implementing solutions.

In recent weeks, Mr. Hurley has declared himself satisfied that the college's funds are appropriately distributed, that his hands are tied, and that there is no money. Yet a half-million dollar decorative tower is planned for the college. A massive indoor tennis court is under construction. And the school just purchased a \$150,000 van for the sole purpose of shuttling the Board of Visitors around.

When so many of our college employees earn poverty wages, these expenditures are a direct contradiction of Richard Hurley's own mission statement—posted on the web—in which he promises to "provide good stewardship of University resources."

The campaign has insisted that if the college had the will it would find the means. Approximately 1,000 students, faculty, and staff employees have agreed by signing a petition in support of the campaign and attending several rallies and other campaign events during the last two years.

In a joint statement, the protestors inside declared: "We invite the administration to use the power it has to improve the living standards of our lowest paid community members: the grounds, housekeeping, and support staff without whom this university would be dirty, ugly, out of repair, and incommunicado. We invite Richard Hurley to respect the dignity of that work, satisfy his conscience, and promote the spirit of this community."

www.unionvoice.org/studentsagainstsweat/alert-description.tcl?alert_id=1426752

Sample student union resolution

Whereas, a day's work deserves a fair day's pay -- no one working full-time to support a family should have to live in poverty; and

Whereas, government and taxpayer dollars should encourage the creation of family-supporting jobs that provide healthcare benefits; and

Whereas, the costs of food, housing, childcare and transportation make it increasingly difficult for low-wage workers to make ends meet; and

Whereas, more workers are finding their wages falling below the poverty level even with [] record low unemployment rate; and

Whereas, **Living Wage** campaigns are winning legislation around the country to lift above the poverty level the pay for employees of firms receiving local tax dollars; and

Whereas, **a Living Wage** will assure social and economic benefits for the community as a whole and a supportive environment for employers who try to maintain fair wages; and

Whereas, **a Living Wage** will decrease the need for public assistance programs by increasing family-supporting jobs; and

Whereas, **a Living Wage** will increase sales tax revenues by increasing consumer spending and will help stabilize the local economy; and

Whereas, a Living Wage will discourage government privatization and contracting out that feeds the growth of part-time, poverty wage work; and

Whereas, a Living Wage will prevent "low-ball" contracting that results in low-quality service; and

Whereas, a Living Wage will result in lower turnover rates that will reduce the costs of recruitment, hiring and training and increase the quality and continuity of job performance; and

Whereas, a Living Wage will provide public vendors and businesses receiving economic development assistance with conscientious workers seeking jobs at adequate wages; and

Whereas, a Living Wage will increase incentives among low-wage workers to work and gain the experience and skills demanded in the job market;

Therefore, be it resolved that _____ supports the goal of raising base pay for employees of firms which contract for services with or receive economic assistance from local government to xxx% of the provincial poverty level for a family of four.

Sample Governing Council Resolution (\$ to be added)

Whereas, the starting wages of non-exempt (hourly) [] University employees currently are as low as \$x.xx/hour; and

Whereas, the starting wages of many [] employees rank near the bottom versus comparable positions at other universities, even when adjusted for the cost of living; and

Whereas, the [] Department of Human Resources estimates that xxx workers currently are working in job classifications with wages of \$10.00/hour or less (\$xx,xxx annually); and

Whereas, wages less than \$xx,xxx annually fall below \$xx% of the current provincial poverty guideline for a family of four (\$xx,xxx),

Whereas, wages less than \$xx,xxx annually may force [] University employees to rely on government assistance; and

Whereas, employees making poverty-level wages face personal hardships and often are forced to depend on public assistance, take second jobs, and live in sub-standard housing; and

Whereas, every employee at [] University is vital to the fulfillment of our teaching, research, and service missions; and

Whereas, the implementation of a living wage would benefit valued employees, and [] University;

Therefore be it resolved that,

1. The [] University Faculty Senate endorses the implementation of a living wage for all [] employees.
2. The living wage be defined as a wage that meets or exceeds xxx% of the provincial poverty level guidelines for a family of four (\$10.00/hour in 2004) plus standard benefits.
3. The central administration of [] University will be responsible for the funding, implementation, and administration of the living wage.
4. The University will make annual adjustments as necessary to maintain the living wage provided to employees at or above xxx% of the provincial poverty level guidelines for a family of four.

5. No increases in work assignments, reductions in force, or reductions in employee benefits will be initiated to cover the cost of providing a living wage.
6. All new hires by the University will be covered under this living wage resolution.
7. As part of its long-term commitment to provide a living wage for all employees, should the University contract out work currently being performed by [] employees, the University will require contractors to pay those workers wages no less than xxx% of the annual annual poverty level guideline plus basic benefits equal to those of [] employees.
8. A report of the University's efforts to comply with this living wage resolution will be included in the president's annual address to the Faculty Senate.