

Poverty reduction strategies for BC

Shane Simpson, Minister of Social Development and Poverty Reduction
**Submission to consultations on the development of a poverty
reduction strategies, 2017**



Boys & Girls Clubs of Canada

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About Boys and Girls Clubs

As Canada's largest child- and youth-serving organization, Boys and Girls Clubs provide vital programs and services to over 200,000 young people in nearly 700 communities across Canada. During critical out-of-school hours, our Clubs offer safe spaces where young people can explore their interests, develop their strengths, and realize positive outcomes in self-expression, academics, healthy living, physical activity, mental health, and more. Our trained staff and volunteers help young people build the confidence and sense of belonging they need to overcome barriers, form positive relationships and mature into responsible, caring adults.

Boys and Girls Clubs mitigate the effects of poverty by providing the opportunities and social supports that children and youth need to succeed and thrive. Clubs are primarily located in low-income communities, where we help meet the needs of children, youth and families.

Boys and Girls Clubs in BC support approximately 47,800 children, youth and families in 101 Club locations throughout BC. We have been offering high quality social, recreational, educational, job readiness, and leadership programs for over 80 years.

Boys and Girls Clubs provide programs that inspire, teach, challenge and respond to local needs and the challenges of preparing young people for their future. This helps young people realize their best potential in a complex world. All of our programs are closely monitored, measured, evaluated and adapted to address changing needs and opportunities.

Summary of recommendations

Boys and Girls Clubs commends the Government of British Columbia for developing a provincial poverty reduction strategy. In this short brief, we recommend three actions the government can take to mitigate the effects of poverty among children and youth, thus helping to break the cycle of poverty.

1. Continue to partner with Boys and Girls Clubs to deliver quality programs that mitigate the effects of poverty and improve life outcomes for children and youth in low-income and vulnerable communities.
2. Increase participation of low-income and under-represented youth in post-secondary education by investing in Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada's *Raising the Grade* program.
3. Address youth homelessness and its lasting health and employment effects by prioritizing funding for prevention-focused Housing First approaches for youth.

"Growing international research has shown that non-cognitive development in childhood (e.g., self-control and mental health) may be more influential on adult outcomes, including post-secondary educational attainment and employment (Heckman, 2000, 2006; Tough 212)."¹

1. Community support networks mitigate the harms of poverty

Living in impoverished conditions exposes children and youth to difficult social environments, poor material conditions, with few incentives and supports for positive development.

Youth from low-income families have an increased risk (not a certainty of) poorer cognitive, physical, and social development outcomes, poor educational attainment, and lower employment success.

It is important to note certain children are at greatest risk of these harms, namely, Indigenous and racialized children, children of recent immigrants, children with disabilities or who have parents with disabilities, children whose parents are on welfare, and children whose parents were poor when they were children.

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Effects of poverty	Quality after school programs offer...
Lack of adequate food and nutrition	Access to nutritious foods, food literacy programs
Inadequacy of supportive organizations and institutions Family stress	Social supports for families
Inadequate opportunities for health promoting activities	Recreation, sports and other programs that support physical, emotional and intellectual development
Stigmatization, discrimination, social exclusion	A supportive place to belong, with mentors and peers from all social backgrounds
Inadequate network of relationships	Access to training, volunteering, and jobs opportunities
Poor educational and employment outcomes	Education, training and youth engagement programs

Nearly two decades of research² has shown that children who consistently participate in after-school programs are more likely to become physically and emotionally healthy adults who are involved in a variety of caring relationships, who are self-sufficient and independent, and who participate fully in society.

Structured, supervised, and nurturing after-school environments have lasting positive effects on children's emotional and physical well-being and their academic development. Children benefit most from a range of high-quality programs that include recreation, play, arts, civic engagement and learning, a mix most often found in quality after-school programs.

A poll by Angus Reid, commissioned by Children First Canada, found that after-school programs are an important part of the support network of children and parents in low-income situations. Lower-income children were significantly more likely than their more privileged peers to say that they would like to take part in more clubs, sports or lessons, but that their family could not afford it. The majority of low-income children shared this experience. Children wanted to *improve the places kids can go to play sports and games* (36%), and they wanted *more things for kids to do* (34%).

After-school programs do much more than keep children busy – they improve health, well-being, and education outcomes, especially for children of low-income families.

Boys and Girls Clubs have long been leaders in after-school programming. We know from experience that providing the optimal conditions for the healthy development of children involves the entire community and quality programs that meet the needs of children, youth, and families.

As part of its poverty strategy, we invite the government to continue to work with Boys and Girls Clubs and its private sector partners to ensure children and youth from low-income families have access to quality after-school programs that ensure equal opportunity to education, employment, health and well-being outcomes.

2. Prepare youth for jobs of tomorrow

Accessing post-secondary education is an essential milestone in a young person's life, contributing to independence and self-reliance. It provides the foundation for participating fully in Canada's growing economy. Youth who receive career counseling and mentoring when they are considering post-secondary options are more likely to complete high school and pursue avenues that will give them a competitive advantage.

Poverty **significantly** reduces the resources available to students from low-income households and communities – youth from low income families are less likely to enroll in post-secondary education.

The government has invested in programming that aims to address low-income as a source of disadvantage. While these are welcome measures, more is needed to ensure the well-being of children and youth. The inequities that create unequal chances for success later in life need to be addressed. As McEwen & Steward note, "much of the correlation between lower income and worse child outcomes is explained by other factors that go along with lower income – lower education, less employment, a risky neighbourhood". Focusing solely on income to close the gap in educational outcomes for low-income children and youth is insufficient.

Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada has partnered with the Rogers Youth Fund to help youth from low-income communities graduate from high school, explore promising career options, and transition to post-secondary education.

Launched in 2012, Rogers Raising the Grade reduces barriers to education for youth who face multiple barriers. Currently offered to over 2,000 youth in 36 locations across the country, including five sites in BC, the program:

- Supports youth learning through technology centres that provide a designated space with computers, high-speed Internet access and software.
- Provides academic support and career mentors to youth aged 14 to 18.
- Increases high school graduation rates and improves access to post-secondary education.
- Matches youth with a mentor who helps them discover their own career interests, select the right high school courses to reach their career goals, study for and succeed in their courses, and fill out applications to post-secondary institutions and scholarships.

Why is Raising the Grade needed?

Higher education is essential for reducing poverty and improving life outcomes. Young people from modest socio-economic backgrounds lack the opportunities that help their more privileged peers finish high school, explore various career opportunities, transition to postsecondary education, and enter the workforce. Rogers Raising the Grade helps level the playing field and ensure youth are prepared for 21st century jobs.

Over time, we expect the following outcomes:

Youth participate equitably in post-secondary education

- Graduate high school, apply to and enroll in post-secondary education
- Persist in and graduate from post-secondary education

Youth have skills and credentials to succeed in the labour market

- Identify educational and employment goals and identify the resources and steps needed to achieve them
- Connect to the labour market through a meaningful first job experience
- Self-sufficiency and independence

Boys and Girls Clubs asks the government to partner in delivering our Raising the Grade program and reaching young people across the province.

3. Prioritize Housing First for youth

The Homeless Hub has developed a Housing First framework for youth, developed with input from lead experts and thinkers on youth homelessness, including youth themselves. The following core principles underlie a Housing First approach for youth:

- Immediate access to housing with no preconditions
- Youth choice and self-determination
- Positive youth development and orientation
- Individualized and client-driven supports
- Social and community integration

Young people who experience homelessness are more successful in moving forward with their lives if they are first housed. The need to get young people into housing with appropriate supports as soon as possible is paramount.

According to the Homeless Hub, a Housing First approach to youth homelessness:

- Increases housing stability
- Reduces unnecessary emergency visits and hospitalizations
- Improves health and mental health outcomes, stabilizes or reduces addictions
- Reduces involvement with police and the criminal justice system
- Improves quality of life

Insecure housing is also an important barrier to youth finding employment. The progress that a young person makes in an employment program can be compromised because he or she is sleep deprived and has no access to facilities to manage their personal hygiene and clothing needs. More youth would find and keep jobs if they had stable housing arrangements.

Boys and Girls Clubs are strong proponents of a Housing First strategy. All young people deserve a roof over their head, a safe place to call home, and trusting relationships with adults. Boys and Girls Clubs' programs and supports for vulnerable youth offer much more than a bed.

Government should favour a Housing First approach that provides homeless youth and those at-risk of homelessness with stable, affordable, developmentally appropriate, and safe accommodation. A place to call home is the foundation youth need to address underlying mental health, addictions, or other barriers that stand in the way of their safety and autonomy.

Federal housing programs and federal-provincial partnerships to address homelessness should adapt to individual communities and to the needs of the most vulnerable youth. This should include culturally relevant programs and supports for Indigenous youth and sensitive and equitable supports and programs for LGBTQ2S youth – both of whom are overrepresented among the homeless population.

Youth who have experienced homelessness have a tremendous amount of expertise to offer policy makers. Government should work with youth-serving organizations to enable youth participation in consultations that aim to inform the development of a National Housing Strategy and a National Poverty Reduction Strategy.

In Conclusion

Eliminating poverty is not just about increasing income but also about mitigating the effects of poverty on the next generation. Out-of-school programs, like those offered by Boys and Girls Clubs, are proven to improve life outcomes for children and youth in low-income and vulnerable communities, helping to break the cycle of poverty.

We encourage the Government of British Columbia to invest in out-of-school programs and extracurricular activities that encourage a sense of belonging in young people, promote youth mental health and increase participation of under-represented youth in post-secondary education and the labour market.

¹ A. McEwen & J. Stewart. 2014. "The Relationship Between Income and Children's Outcomes: A Synthesis of Canadian Evidence", CRDCN Synthesis Series, April. https://crdcn.org/sites/default/files/synthesis_stewart_and_mcewen.pdf

² The Harvard Family Research Centre Project has a database and bibliography of research supporting the positive outcomes of after-school programs for children and youth ages 5 to 19 years. <http://www.hfrp.org/out-of-school-time>