



transition society
shelter, guidance, & hope
for women & children fleeing violence

Hon. Shane Simpson, Minister of Social Development and Poverty Reduction
Submission to consultations on the development of a poverty Reduction Strategy

About Dixon Transition Society

Serving the community since 1973, Dixon Transition Society helps to reduce the impact of domestic violence by providing a safe haven for women and children. Transitional housing programs, counselling, and outreach services form a continuum of care to support women and children to live a life free from violence. We are committed to increasing awareness about the impact of violence against women and children as well as educating our community on these issues. Our role in the community is to provide support and advocacy to women and children fleeing abuse. We believe that addressing violence against women and children is the responsibility of the community as a whole and until we address the systematic barriers that contribute to violence against women and children, we will not be able to eliminate domestic violence. One of the key contributors to women experiencing violence is economic inequality and poverty. According to a 2017 stats Canada [report](#):

- Women in Canada earn \$0.87 for every dollar earned by men.
- Most women are employed in traditionally-female occupations
- Women are concentrated in industries that parallel their traditional gender roles at more than double the rate of men

With this in mind:

Proposed Policy Change

We are asking the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction to change their current policy regarding women fleeing violence and:

Allow women escaping violence to pursue education while receiving income assistance.

Current Policy and its limitations

The current Ministry policy provides women, who have left an abusive spouse/relative within six months previous to the date of their application for support, with income assistance. The financial assistance provided is instrumental to women in transition as it provides them some time to address guardianship and visitation arrangements through family court, deal with the criminal justice system, receive counselling, and settle into their new homes. During the period of time women are exempt from job search, i.e. within 6

months of leaving the abuser or while their child is under 3 years old, women are required to receive Ministry approval and enter into a Voluntary Participation Plan (VPP) with Ministry staff to access ESL classes, finish high school or enroll in a full-time unfunded program of study.

During this time if a client were to receive any type of student funding including grants or scholarships, they would have any portion provided for living expenses deducted from their assistance. A reminder that the amount allocated for living expenses for a single woman under age of 65 is \$335 with \$375 shelter allowance.

If a woman wants to attend any training or school she must first discuss this with her employment plan worker, and if the worker does not approve she may be denied the opportunity. For example if the education or training is longer than 12 months, she can be denied the opportunity or the income assistance support. After the six-month period, or for women with children, after their child turns 3, the women are expected to create an employment plan and start job search.

Women with children may also be able to benefit from the Ministry's Single Parent Employment Initiative. This program provides an opportunity for some single parents to gain employment. However, it is difficult to qualify for, it takes at least 3 months for approval to participate in the program, and most importantly the program limits women to only receive training for programs that have up to 12 months of training time. According to the [BC 2025 Labour Outlook](#) jobs that are requiring specific shorter term training are mostly ranged in the lower wage brackets. This limits income and financial security hence keeping women and their children in poverty or barely above the poverty line. This also limits women to traditionally-female occupations which are often in lower wage brackets.

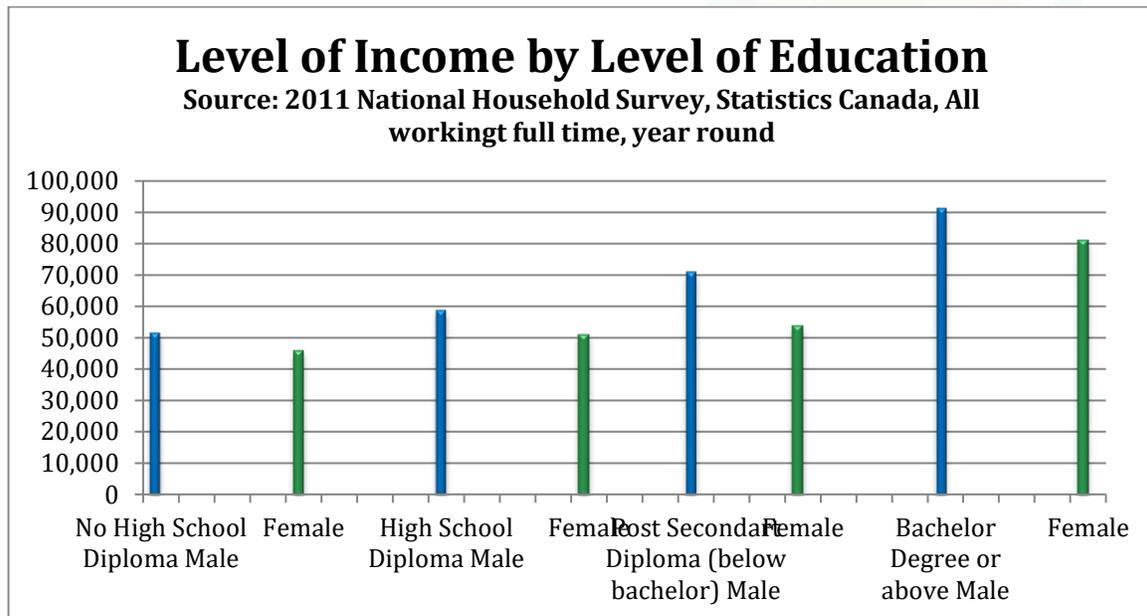
The current policy is not contributing to reduction of poverty and is not effective in supporting women fleeing domestic violence.



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Why?

- Lower levels of education limit women’s opportunities for securing jobs that pay a living wage which enables them to support themselves and their children.
- When women gain financial independence, they are able to rebuild violence free lives for themselves and their children. We know individuals with higher education have a much better chance of securing higher paying jobs.
- A survey conducted by Statistics Canada in 2011 shows this relationship between the income levels and education levels. It is worthy to note that women earn less than men across the board.



- When higher wages are earned, the Government revenue also increases from the higher taxes.
- When women are able to financially support themselves and their children, their likelihood of returning to abusive partners or entering another abusive relationship drastically decreases.

Alternatives and Cost

There are alternatives to implementing the proposed policy change. Dixon Transition Society would be pleased to discuss offered alternatives with the Ministry in detail.

Currently, the Ministry exempts women who have children under the age of 3 from work search. This means women could use this time to take some online courses or attend classes. As the policy currently stands:

- a) Women require approval from Ministry staff which means they may be denied the opportunity for assistance or a chance to access education or training if approval is not granted.
- b) If women apply for student loans or receive grants and bursaries or donations, any portion provided for living expenses would be deducted from their assistance. There is a missed opportunity here to provide women with support without an increased cost to the Ministry.

Mitigating the Cost

Currently the Ministry allocates staff time to meet with women and decide whether they should be permitted to do any training. If there is a policy change this will no longer be required which could decrease the demand on Ministry staff.

If the woman is expected to return to work, that is her children are three years of age or older or her six months exemption has finished, the Ministry bears the cost of a Ministry staff meeting with the client, creating an employment plan and then referring her to a Work BC contracted program.

A pilot implementation of the proposed policy change would allow the Ministry to get a true estimate of the cost and savings from reallocation of the Ministry's resources. Statistical information regarding the number of women who are on Income Assistance, because they have escaped violence, can provide better estimate of the cost of this program. If there is no change, the cost to BC's economy in the long run could be much higher as:

- Cycle of poverty will be perpetuated.
- Poverty limits children reaching their potential.
- Poverty leads to higher social and economic costs for the Government.
- Advances in technology and automation will continue to decrease low paying, manual labour jobs.

Engagement Strategy

There are a number of stakeholders and decision makers that are essential to ensuring the successful implementation of this policy change. Foremost are the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty

Reduction staff. Feedback from the Ministry staff at the regional level as well as the frontline staff providing services is essential.

Dixon Transition Society is committed to leading this process and engaging key stakeholders if the Ministry is in support of this policy change.

Evaluation

In order to measure whether proposed changes will lead to anticipated results and efficiencies a number of outcomes must be measured. These include but are not limited to:

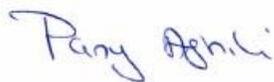
- Number of participants pursuing education
- Number of participants gaining meaningful employment measured by: job stability and regularity, living wage, potential for higher paying positions
- Comparison of participants' level of income to a control group who did not receive this support
- Participants' level of satisfaction with their financial status versus the control group's level of satisfaction with their financial status
- Costs to the Ministry before implementation and after the implementation of the program

The Legacy

Changing the current Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction's policy, to allow women who have escaped violence to pursue an education while on income assistance, can transform the lives of many women and children at a potentially low cost to the government.

It will also put British Columbia on the map as a Province that supports gender equality in a practical and cost effective way.

Sincerely



Pany Aghili, Executive Director