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Ministry of Social Development and Poverty  
Reduction

Social Planning and Research Council (SPARC  
BC)

BC Poverty Reduction Strategy Report

Small Group Discussion Report

Friends of the Grove

Newton, BC

The group interviewed was very interesting, broad and eclectic, they were able to provide a diverse range of ideas, perspectives and possible solutions for the issues and barriers they face living in poverty.

Solutions and emerging themes regarding these issues were addressed with great thought, resulting in some surprising and worthy solutions presented throughout this report.

### Demographic and Age of Participants

Participants are residents of this low income community complex and people of this Newton, Surrey neighbourhood.

The group includes individuals of all ages ranging from youth, (teenagers to 18 years old), and young adults in their early 20's to adults in their late 50's

Fourteen Newton residents participated, six male and eight female. All shared lived experiences and stories pertinent to this study. Poverty reduction was discussed with one

organization, 'Youth for a Change', a local LGBTQ group that advocate and educate to make positive changes in the lives of youths.

Two of the youngest participants, one male and one identifying as a transgender male, took part in this study. Their perspectives on youth experiencing poverty are admirable and in-depth; they will be stated further in this report.

### Sources of Income

This group again provided an extensively wide range of incomes ranging from a young youth attempting to find first employment to a senior University Professor.

- One participant seeking first job.
- One part time, temporary worker.
- Three full time employees.
- Three participants receiving Income Assistant benefits

- Four participants on Permanent Disability Benefits
- Two participants on Disability Pension

All participants voiced concerns regarding the amount of benefits received as inadequate to meet even basic living needs, and surmised an increase in rate amounts to be a solution, and/or a Guaranteed Income amount.

This was by no means the number one solution to poverty discussed by any participant, and surprisingly came nearer the least important barrier to improve the challenges poverty creates. 100% of the participants were more concerned with the future of our youth having nowhere to live, their safety and programs to train and educate that would cause a shift in opportunities available to rise from poverty.

A constant and recurring theme from all participants is to make available educational support from a young age for special needs children, to employment training for young adults. Healthy food and affordable community recreation programs were discussed as, ‘two of the hardest things to find when you are in poverty. One homeless person states, “It’s an extremely cost-efficient investment for the province to ensure that a healthy lifestyle has no cost barrier, because someone priced out of a healthy lifestyle will instead cost the province even more money through the criminal and health care systems, and through the loss of potential. A single Mom discussed an 800% increase for swimming and gym passes! “The cycle of poverty will continue and the future for youth is dim, unless affordable programs are established to STOP the cycle of poverty.”

## Family Size

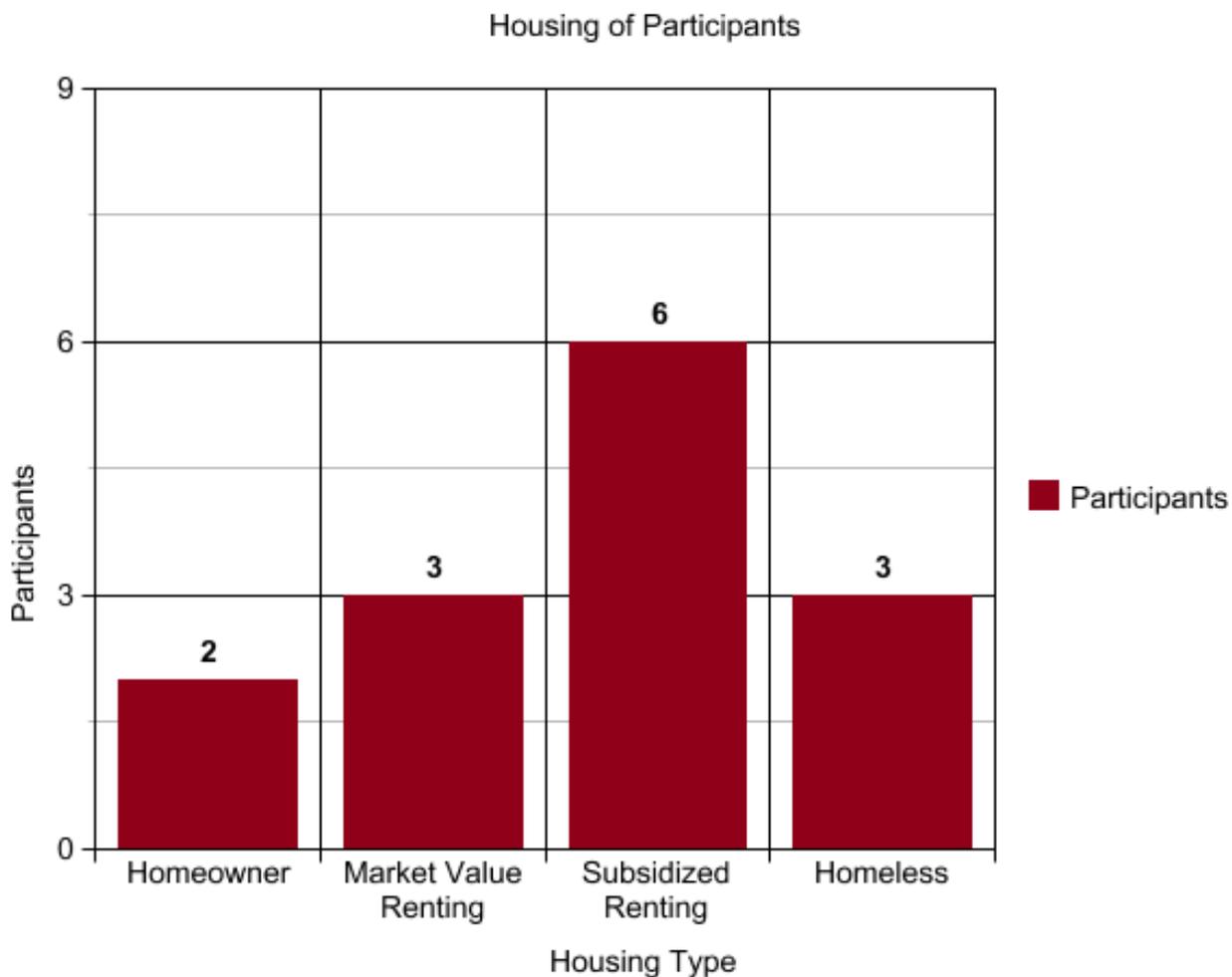
Family sizes range from singles, (single Mothers or young adult males and females), to a six member family of 3 adults and 3 children. This larger family and only two other families of four are included in this report, (the families of four have the only working participants).

Of the singles, two participants are of a couple housed separately. They strongly voiced their concerns of resulting poverty because their benefits would be penalized if residing with their working partners. These regulations cause them much hardship facing ridiculously high rental rates for singles.

A definite trend here arose with the majority of participants unable to survive facing colossal amounts for single rentals, leaving nothing for food or basic living expenses. Regulations

regarding family size were of great concern for all participants in this group.

Grown children were extremely concerned about their own welfare and that of their single parent as benefits are cut drastically and immediately when reaching 19 years of age, then again the child faces the outrageous rental amounts as a single renter, and leaves the parent in a serious emergency situation. Great fear was voiced from families that face this future, and from the children now living apart desperately trying to pay rent and eat anything at all.



**Stated by 100% of the participants as the number one most important issue to address regarding living in poverty is the need for safe and affordable housing.**

Of the participant's market value renting, one is forced to live in a bug infested residence, the only type of residence her income allows her. At present she is facing homelessness as the trailer park where she resides is being demolished. This is the same fear our number two market value renting participant faces along with his severely disabled spouse. They are sadly not alone in this situation as the grown children residing with their single parent will also face the horrendous rental rates and living conditions when leaving their subsidized home.

As one male adult wrote, "There is ZERO help for an adult male in BC; the BC HOUSING waiting list is COLOSSAL."

The participants who do reside in subsidized housing have acquired such housing after being

homeless and in emergency situations where their very life depended on it. At present even that is not enough!

Another participant wrote he is also fearing for his future as he cannot afford to live anywhere with his spouse, (who is severely disabled), when the trailer park he lives in is shut down. One of the participants discusses that the BC Housing Emergency List has a wait of over 5 years.

These are unfortunately common scenarios, all of the participants except for two facing nonexistent home security in their present or future with the cycle of poverty turning in their own and their children's future.

### Housing Solutions suggested;

- Interesting solution discussed was to research methods that worked for poverty

free countries specifically; implement the UK model involving the use of empty buildings, rent out Condos at a subsidy rate.

- Increase number of youth shelter beds in Surrey, link youth to safe housing which gives the stability to continue with school/training/employment.
- Extensive funding for Housing Programs like BC Housing, Koomseh, Emergency Women and families fleeing abuse, with follow up permanent safe housing.

### Health Concerns

Over 70% of the participants discussed improving the food banks; food is expired, mouldy and disgusting. They feel hopeless collecting food in this state, and yet their

families are hungry. Participants have and do become increasingly ill and their ability to function in the community nonexistent.

- Local farm or community free gardens that would provide physical exercise, social scenarios and healthy food! One participant wrote, “The more people supported in the family the more vibrant the community as a whole.

The participants face a choice of food, or adequate health care, benefits are not adequate to cover both, unacceptable to all the participants.

A written example from two of the participants recently requiring dentures explains ridiculous mandatory wait times for upper and lower dentures, only one of the two covered at a time with years in-between wait time to acquire a

full set of teeth. A particular number of teeth, (three in a row) have to be pulled within a set period to enable even a half set of dentures. One participant says the College of Dental surgeons of BC is pleading with the Ministry to end these ridiculous requirements, “ludicrous!” This she discussed with her professional dentist and staff, they are dumbfounded with the regulations and frustrated at the inadequate care proposed by the Ministry. Patients lack the coverage to receive complete proper care, leaving them paying out of pocket, an impossible situation.

Transportation concerns were the least mentioned among the participants, but by far still of great importance. “Improvement of Handy Dart should be implemented, it is costly, limited and can leave you stranded for hours.”

- Free transportation for the disabled was discussed by approximately 40% of the participants, or alternative means of transporting them that they can rely on.

One participant experienced horrendous wait times to repair her mobility scooter. A lifeline to the community and even basic living requirements was cut short and she was forced to use precious grocery money to pay for repairs.

### Summary

So little is made available regarding basic living support and requirements for these people, they care deeply about their neighbourhood and environment. When even the very basic requirements for living are cut or become nonexistent, it is no wonder that over 80% of the participants experience depression,

hopelessness and isolation from their communities.

When I began typing this report, I believed my son to be unique in that he was born into poverty, this is most definitely not the case as close to 100% of the participants experienced childhood poverty and the cycle continues, generation after generation.

Youth to professional participants are more than willing to participate in volunteer, educational and employment training if opportunities are made available. The participants are genuine, intelligent, deeply caring individuals who want the cycle of poverty to stop, now! They desperately want their voices to be heard, and deeply appreciate this opportunity to make them count!

