

# BC POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY

## Trans and Non-Binary Poverty Discussion Report

Date	Sunday March 18, 2018
Community	Trans and Non-binary individuals
Host	Saige Community Food Bank Kiwassa Neighbourhood House
Report prepared by:	Megan Gerbrandt and Tiaré Jung for Drawing Change
# Participants	20 *
# of Organizations	5

\* Participants in this discussion were widely varied in all demographics. Three light skinned participants identified as (2) mixed race and (1) indigenous. The graphic recorder and facilitator were the only other visibly racialized people in the room and contributed lived experiences to the discussion as well. There were three youth under 24, one was accompanied by her single mother advocate and also 3 seniors (2) working and (1) sex worker. Three people were on diverse types of disability and two others currently living in shelters. Two of the older participants identified as immigrants and six of the group work within the Queer/Trans Community in health care on various levels. We also had a person who was hard of hearing and read lips and a deaf person who couldn't attend due to the inability to find an ASL interpreter. The gender spectrum was varied from he, she, they and non-conforming to no gender identity at all.

**Additional work could be done with trans and gender non-conforming people who have multiple intersectional identities as they are likely to face higher levels of poverty.**

### INCOME & SERVICES

*What are some of the experiences you have had trying to access income and services?  
What would make these things accessible to you?*

These things would make income and services more accessible to trans and non-binary people who experience poverty:

- All staff trained in gender and sexuality sensitivity or trans/non-binary staff available
- Health care: long term doctor - GP, knowledgeable staff
- Mental wellness services including counselor – long term
- Gender affirming/transitional services
- Identification that aligns with desired name/gender expression - including no gender option
- ASL/ Deaf/ Hard of Hearing accessibility
- Social services: welfare/income assistance, persons with disability benefits
- Employment services / opportunities – non biased
- Advocates – both allies and peers from our own community
- Discussions/training by peers to educate about local services and accessing them

## HOUSING & SAFE SPACE/ PEOPLE

*What is your current living situation? Does this situation give you what you need?*

*What are some of your experiences trying to find housing? What would make finding housing easier?*

*What are the public spaces you feel safe in? Why?*

*ie: Hillcrest pool - trans friendly posters/Saige food bank – no ID required*

*What public spaces do you avoid that you would like if you could access and what would make these places accessible to you?*

### Immediate priorities: housing and safe space/people

#### Networking & Outreach

Funding for the coordination and delivery of both in person and online (Slack, Telegram) networking platforms for trans and non-binary individuals to build community and exchange resources, for example:

- Safe counsellors (who are also racialized, gender variant, queer)
- Safe housing (ie: Raincity youth housing)
- Transitional Services (clinics, community groups, ie: Trans Care BC, Catherine White Holman Wellness Centre)
- Suicide/ crisis response: Trans Life Line
- Youth employment opportunities: Out in Schools

### Priority areas: housing and safe space/people

#### Access to Mental Wellness

The ability for trans and non-binary people to access mental wellness support, especially counseling, that is:

- **Trained** and trans and non-conforming inclusive, preferably delivered by a trans/non-conforming practitioner
- Trauma informed (both about institutional and individual trauma)
- Financially accessible to low income people
- **Long term**, which was a key recommendation. (lack of stability in counseling causes insecurities, frustration, trauma, lack of trust and abandonment of needed help.

#### Accessible Income

The ability for trans and non-binary individuals to access income, with two main recommendations:

1) Remove barriers:

- Ensure there is inclusivity/ sensitivity training mandatory for all employers
- Skill building available specifically for trans, non-conforming individuals (while at the same time maintaining confidentiality)

- Remove barriers, and protect human rights of those engaging in non-conventional forms of work: busking, street performing, sex work

2) Ensure the right to quality of life:

- Remove welfare/income assistance requirements, and raise welfare rates
- Provide guaranteed minimum income: living wage not minimum wage

## **Housing**

There is a critical need for housing, especially in Vancouver's housing crisis, that is:

- 1) Affordable: how can \$1600 (City of Vancouver) be considered the affordable housing rate when welfare/income assistance is \$600
- 2) Varied, safe, and specific for trans, non-conforming, and queer individuals, particularly for youth, families, elders, Indigenous people, and people who are racialized/ anti-racist housing.
- 3) Low income buildings with nontraditional spaces – not specified to one bedroom.  
ie: Caregiver, translator, child, support partner
- 4) Pet friendly – not only for safety and companionship but also to help with anxiety, trauma, trust, and addiction. Animal companions have proven to help with numerous physical and mental issues.

## **Discussion Responses**

### **INCOME & SERVICES: barriers and challenges**

#### **Health & Wellness Services**

- 2 year wait lists for low income mental health services are an URGENT concern and need immediate attention
- Lack of gender informed physicians and medical staff, training should be mandatory for health care providers either private or government (hospitals/clinics)
- Re-traumatization and misgendering or being outed in hospital/ER, government offices.  
ie: voting
- Lack of gender and trauma informed therapists and counsellors
- No access to LONG TERM low income mental health services
- Erasure of the constant and permanent traumatization of trans people in current social climate.
- Lack of safe medical environment leading to avoidance of treatment; worsening of curable/preventable/manageable conditions both mental and physical

*For example: A low income trans person with a daily experience of misgendering, micro-aggression and violence can only access 12 free/subsidized counselling sessions through current outreach facilities, often after long wait list period.*

#### **Inaccessible Services**

- Social services/advocacy that is run through religious institutions inaccessible due to transphobic attitudes of institutions

- Rehabilitation programs for drug use pushing religious politics
- Internet, electronics, printing, communication services are not accessible
- Medications/hormones due to ID discrepancies, low income
- Training, schooling for those with lack of experience or social anxiety

### Workplace Discrimination

- Visual targeting in hiring processes
- ID, financial pay stubs constantly outing you if your legal name and pronouns don't align with your lived identity
- Silent and active discrimination in the workplace

*Example: A trans person arrives at an interview. The hiring manager isn't sure if the applicant is "a man" or "a woman" and the applicant's name doesn't convey any clues either. This makes the hiring manager feel awkward and confused. When the next applicant comes to interview, clearly a woman, the hiring manager feels slightly relieved...or just back to normal. The hiring manager is no longer distracted by wondering what gender the person is and the hiring manager finds it easy to strike up a conversation with the woman.*

- Work environments that don't respect trans persons' identity/are unsafe due to transphobia in the workplace
- Refusal to use gender neutral "they" pronouns or respect pro-noun changes
- Refusal to use appropriate name, if the name does not match the individual's documentation
- Lack of gender neutral washrooms
- Addressing employees or dividing employees by "ladies" and "gentlemen"
- Lack of clear appeal or advocacy process for trans people in the workplace facing discrimination
- Gender and sexuality should be part of mandatory harassment training
- Unemployment due to lack of safe working environments
- Minimum wage is inadequate

### Alternative Jobs

- Barrier: paying for legalities and permits. ie busking
- Stigma ie. sex work, street vending

### Welfare/Income Assistance

- Paperwork is a barrier, time restraint, inaccessibility is traumatizing
- Stigma associated with accessing welfare, the way you are treated in the welfare line is traumatizing
- ID, lack of gender neutral bathrooms in government offices, untrained staff

### Criminalization

- Criminalization of alternative forms of work, ie. sex work, street vending, street performing
- Stigmatization of incarceration, especially in small towns, a lack of confidentiality

### Inaccessible Social & Public Services

- Services inaccessible to people who have not done their taxes and cannot prove poverty
- Lack of advocacy in navigating government bureaucracy and paperwork
- No sensitivity training to government staff, social services providers or welfare and disability offices
- Sensitivity training to library staff, creating barriers to accessing technology and communications, and community services.
- Public transit: bus drivers abusing position of authority, visual targeting of low income trans people, harassment on public transit
- Gender neutral washrooms still only sometimes are available in public spaces
- Backlash from service providers when confronted with dangerous or violent behaviours

- that they are enacting
- Service providers' denial or erasure of the real damage inflicted by traumatizing experiences:

*Example:*

*There is no public gender neutral washroom. A trans person asks a staff person if they can use the wheel chair accessible single stall washroom that requires a key. The staff person responds, "Why can't you just use whatever bathroom..." The trans person continues to ask for the key, not wanting to out themselves or explain why. The staff person becomes irritated and dismissive, "Why can't you just calm down... there's the male or female washroom." The trans person feels frustrated and really must go to the washroom. The staff person threatens to have them removed from the premises. "Well it says \_\_\_\_\_ on your ID, why can't I call you that..."*

### **Inaccessible Gender Affirmation & Transitional Services**

- Convoluted process to do a legal name change, including medical records, government issued identification, CRA/taxes
- Transitional services are inaccessible as well as surgical recovery care
- Identification: the expense of the fees, medical records at doctor's office need to be changed, issues with Canada Revenue Agency mistakenly declaring people dead during name change process
- Mandatory finger printing
- Voting: changing name and gender in the system ie: change name, continuously get sent both old name AND new name voting cards. Staff not trained to deal with confidentially

### **Deaf/ Hard of Hearing Services**

- ASL interpretation inaccessible to low income communities

## **INCOME & SERVICES: solutions and needs**

### **Networking & Outreach**

\* see priorities above

### **Mental Wellness Services**

- Access to low income mental health services that are long term and gender and trauma informed
- Access to immediate care for mental health needs, shortened wait lists, increased number of available services

### **Advocacy & Training**

- More health navigators and advocates
- Paid roles for trans and gender-nonconforming individuals (those directly affected) to educate service providers including:
  - medical practitioners, doctors, nurses, hospital staff, counsellors
  - government employees in service provider roles, case workers
  - police and paramedic, fire and first response providers
  - library staff, pool staff, public & recreation service providers
- Continuity in case worker relationships
- Advocates/ health navigators to accompany people to receive care

### **Legalities and Identification**

- Removing barriers to legal name change, removing fees, fingerprinting, CRA and medical records complications
- gender neutral markers on ID
- ASL interpreters specifically for transitional services

### Creating Safer Spaces

- Community spaces for accessing advocacy and advice, resources and information
- Funding and encouraging groups like Trans Care BC
- Education campaigns to reduce stigma in schools, government facilities, workplaces

### Livable Income

- Raise welfare rates
- More accessibility in application process for welfare/disability

## HOUSING & SAFE SPACES/ SAFE PEOPLE: barriers and challenges

### Housing Crisis

- Slumlords: landlords don't follow regulations for safe housing neglecting tenants living with mold, water damage, rat infestations, broken plumbing, fire alarms not up to code, furnace not up to code
- Cohabitation: unsafe neighbours, predatory behaviour, targeting of young trans/ non-binary individuals because they are perceived as more vulnerable
- Trans and non-binary people are forced to stay in unsafe and traumatizing environments because they have no place to go
- Legal name and gender don't match banking/reference information – causing confusion, trauma, discrimination, being “Outed”
- Renovictions: home owners are not able to afford or keep up with renovations needed

*Example: A shared house of trans and non-binary friends have been living in a home for years. This house is a recognized safe community space and one of the few affordable living situations because the lease has been maintained by a long-standing tenant. The house is over 100 years old and has mold issues. The landlord is neglectful of basic maintenance such as fixing the plumbing and ensuring the furnace is up to code. The tenants smell gas one night, and when the gas company arrives to check for safety, the tenants are informed that their furnace hasn't received maintenance up to standards and had been leaking gas as well as fatal carbon monoxide. The technician informs the tenants, “If you had gone to bed without noticing this leak, you probably would have died in your sleep.” Bringing these issues to the property manager, the tenants are blamed and verbally abused by the property manager, who accuses the tenants of breaking the furnace. Due to the frequency of demolitions of old houses, rat displacement and relocation is common. Rats find a hole in the house and live in the walls, the basement, and the kitchen. After over a month of written notices to the landlord informing them of their legal obligation to address the rat infestation, the landlord finally agrees to pay for pest control. The plumbing is so neglected that use of the kitchen sink results in flooding the basement. The property manager insists the tenants must pay for the plumbing because the landlord paid for the rat removal. After a month of using a bucket system to do dishes the tenants opt to move out rather than continue to live in these conditions and receive abuse from the property manager. They consider pursuing legal action, but decide the stress, unpredictability, also trying to find and lawyer to serve papers to their absentee landlord is not attainable.*

- Racialized and gender discrimination within co-op housing selection processes

*Example: A lighter skinned individual knew a darker skinned trans person was on the waiting list before them. And yet, the lighter skinned individual was offered the housing and the darker skinned person was passed over. Shadism.*

## Public/ Service Spaces

- Lack of lighting in public space
- Parks close at 10pm - criminalization of existing outside
- Hyper security: Spaces where you are required to present ID, go through security, and your gender and name are scrutinized. Also, there are many spaces where gender neutral washrooms may not be available including: airports, government ministry office, hospitals, community centres/pools, VPD/RCMP (the intake is not gender appropriate), government offices, banks and schools.

## HOUSING & SAFE SPACES/ SAFE PEOPLE: Solutions & Needs

\*please see note in priorities on housing

- Caring rather than punitive responses
- Location: displacement and removal from central community (renewiction, affordability, upgrading) means losing safety networks, access to amenities, and isolation, therefore we need housing options located in central areas of the city
- Affordable housing without illegal rent increases, or illegal evictions do to class/ financial discrimination
- Legal Rights re: Housing
  - legal rights, trained advocates specifically for trans and non-binary individuals
  - pet allowance
- Variety of LGBTQ safe housing
  - collective/ community: allow mortgages outside of biological family and marriage (friends)
  - disability housing: 1 bedrooms, housing for caregivers and kids, new buildings up to code

## Safe Spaces in our Communities

- Community Centre/ Pool/Parks: gender neutral washrooms and change rooms (Vancouver Parks Board)
- Libraries
- Community Groups – need funding/grants
- Social discussions

## Solutions Across the System

\*Please see note in priorities on training

### **Services: Training**

Across the board, participants agreed that training for all service providers (public services, health care, housing) require mandatory trans inclusive training. This training should be delivered by those directly affected, trans and non-conforming individuals, through the creation of paid advocacy positions. Also the simple need for **long term** care by Doctors and counselors alike. SOLUTION: Jobs created for trainers for mandatory trans inclusive training, courses, handouts.

### **Linking records**

Navigating the bureaucracy, especially when providers constantly misgender you, are a huge barrier. Participants discussed a centralized database where the individual's records are available for both government and health services. "Circle of Care Communication" can be used as an example of removing the responsibility from the individual to the system.

SOLUTION: Personal file linked to your Care Card number with general information

### **Universal Services**

Universal services were discussed as an alternative to universal income. Universal service means everyone would receive adequate livable housing, health and mental wellness services, internet access and cell phone use, education, etc.

*Example: An individual experiencing poverty who has been using drugs as a coping tool, when provided with only a higher income, but still faces the same stigmatization from housing, employment, and social spaces may still be alienated and under supported in participating in society in a healthy way. A person who is provided with safe housing, mental wellness support, and adequate income to meet other basic needs has a much more integrated support system for developing healthy relationships and contributing to their community.*

### **Recognition and Application of Human Rights**

Participants called for the human rights of trans and non-binary people to be:

1. recognized - for data to be collected via census to broadly identify needs of trans and non-binary people
2. to be protected and reinforceable by policy/ anti-discrimination law, particularly in respect to an individual's lived names and gender expression

## Conclusions

**In conclusions, the focus group identified a wide range of pressing issues that affect trans and non-binary people experiencing poverty in Vancouver.**

**Trans and non-binary people face unique systemic and institutional barriers to meeting their basic needs of shelter, food, transportation and personal security. Additionally, intersecting structural oppressions including but not limited to racism, anti-Indigenous racism, disability, and ageism create unique barriers to trans people who are seeking employment, accessing health care that upholds their gender expression and identities, interacting with public services, or buying goods and services like anyone else. The precarity of housing combined with barriers to accessing income in an expensive city like Vancouver is huge concern. Trans and non-binary people regardless of income have the right to be treated anywhere they go in a manner that upholds their dignity and safety, and to be treated in a caring way by people who are informed and trained about trans and non-binary issues.**