

BC Poverty Reduction Strategy Small Group session Report

Date of Session: March 20 2018

Location: 5714 Glover Road , Langley BC

Number of individuals participating: 35

Number of organizations participating: 4 - Stepping Stones, Fraser Health, Vineyard Church, Diverse Organization Providing Education and Regional Services (DOPERS)

Number of individuals with lived experience - 31

Description of general demographic of those with lived experience: of the people who participated who were currently living in poverty; 25 were on provincial income assistance of which 50% were on Persons with Disability benefits all but two stated they did not receive any shelter allowance and two people were on CPP benefits. Of the 31 people living in poverty 28 were homeless living rough on the streets or in shelters, one was in hospital recovering from an operation to remove toes from right foot due to living rough on the streets for ten plus years. Two were currently housed but had experienced homelessness in the last year and were unsure if the housing was going to be sustainable. A few people identified as having Mental Health issues and about one third talked about having addiction issues or currently living on the street/ in camps and active in substance abuse.

Participant story: Don (not his real name) wanted to share his story and met with the writer after the group discussion. He talked about owning his own house and his history of working for a living in trades and retail. Due to a work related injury that was not covered under WCB and subsequent relationship break down, he went through a divorce and lost his home. His ex-partner was active in addictions and Don did the best he could to help. Now he is working day labour and not on income assistance. Don is unable to pay rent to live on his own but tried to rent a room off of someone. This situation did not work out and he is currently homeless and living on the street. Unable to get into the local shelter as it is full all the time, Don continues to work as a day labourer whenever he can. He finds resources through the community. He is well respected by his peers and helps others when he can. He felt that creating a sustainable community like coop housing with employment opportunities on site would be a good way to help lift people out of poverty. Also the government should build more affordable housing with supports and creating part time work and opportunities for homeless people to help elderly neighbors and keep the city clean.

Participant story: Jessie (not her real name) has lived in Langley all of her life. She has been living rough for a while and said that she believed that living in a small camper or tent as an alternative to paying the high rent that she could not afford. Up until a few years ago she did not feel that she was part of the street homeless population as she had shelter but not a roof, also that she does not use drugs. She feels that she successfully manages to live without running water or hydro and now that she is on CPP she has more money than someone on welfare has. The biggest issues she feels is the stigma and prejudice that other people treat her with. Why can't they accept her way of life as alternative housing? Why can't the government see living in tents, campers and self built structures as an alternative to main stream housing? The people who are mentally ill and on drugs need help and should get supported group housing. Jessie is well informed and goes online when she can get free WI FI. She remembers a plan that was launched in 2008 that said more housing was to be built using construction containers to be set up in church parking lots. "Whatever happened to that plan?" We need affordable private housing for people but that takes time and right now we need access to bathrooms, showers, laundry, resources and food. Can the government support a Langley drop in center that would have all of these things?

Issues:

- Bylaws harassing us if we are living on the street, taking our belongings and throwing them around.
- No housing, not enough shelter spaces, not enough supported living accommodations.
- Not enough supports, services for Mental Health and Addiction issues
- Free Public washrooms, showers and laundry access
- Welfare Rates are too low, Rent money is not enough to even get housing
- What happens to the rent money we don't get when you are homeless? there is no accountability with how welfare dollars are used by the ministry.
- Cost of rental housing is too high
- Even if you do find a place to rent it takes welfare workers so long to get the damage deposit to you that you lose the place. I need cash in hand to secure the apartment right away.
- No affordable housing for single person, cannot rent anything on my own for 375.00 and when I live with room -mates it always goes wrong.
- Feel like we are living in forces homelessness, no choice or option to get out once you are homeless. no room in the shelter so you have no choice but to live on the street.
- There is no regulated Detox and recovery places for people in Langley
- No Protection from unregulated recovery homes who often steal your money and kick you out or worse are set up to victimise you.

- Not enough Mental Health services for people living in poverty
- We need housing now not five years from now
- Rental stock is shrinking and being torn down for expensive condos and Town houses. Developers are making lots of money but we are living in poverty and not able to find affordable rents. Many stated that they have lived in Langley most of their lives and have been pushed out of the rental market.
- Why can't we have a plan that includes different housing options other than expensive apartment buildings?

What are the solutions?

- Raise Welfare rates to enable us to afford a place to live
- Increase earnings exemption for people on welfare working day labour or part time, that is how we could afford a place to live and enough money to feed ourselves.
- Increase rental stock, build more affordable housing units for single people,
- Welfare should pay for storage to keep your belongings
- use empty buildings to create affordable housing
- Shipping containers could be converted into housing creating a cooperative community
- training for life skills, budgeting, employment and support
- Camp ground designated for people living in poverty, creating a community run by us for us.
- We need individual autonomy to manage housing solutions for people who are homeless.
- Self sustainable community could be built with tiny homes, shipping containers or workforce housing.
- More services and supports for us to stay housed and manage living in poverty on welfare or disability benefits.
- We need a place to access public toilets, showers, laundry, food, clothing and support services.
- Build affordable supportive housing
- Build more shelters, we only have one shelter and it is full. No one can move out because there is no housing for them to move into.
- Bylaws need to change so that our human rights are protected even though we are living in poverty and homeless.
- Change legislation and regulations so that people who are landlords cannot breach our human rights such as doing a criminal record check before they will rent to anyone.

Taking our belongings when we are homeless and treating us like criminals just because we are poor.

- It should be a human right to have access to medical services for mental health and addiction issues.
- No access to doctors or medical clinics. (not enough access)

Top 3 solutions:

- Build more shelters and affordable supported housing with the ability to keep our personal items(storage) pets and smoke. Build a 24 hour drop in that would include safe healthy amenities that we can access: washrooms, showers, laundry, food, clothing, phones, computers and support services. Support services would include workers to help us find and keep permanent housing. Government welfare dollars that currently not being spent on shelter portion for people who are homeless should be used to build this kind of affordable supported housing.
- BC Income Assistance changes needed: Increase Welfare rates to reflect the real cost of living \$1,100 for rent at least. Improve response time to get damage deposits quickly (same day) and have the same benefits for single people as those on disability. Increase earning exemptions.
- Increase supportive housing options that have services on site for people dealing with Mental Health and addiction issues.