

# BC Poverty Reduction Strategy

## Small Group session Report

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**Date of Session:** March 9 2018

**Location:** Surrey 10697 135A street, Surrey BC

**Number of individuals participating:** 30

**Number of individual with lived experience:** 30

**Description of general demographic of those with lived experience:** 29 were living in abject poverty and extreme homelessness. All were living on 135A Street in Surrey. (Note that at the time of this event there were 80 tents and 100 people living on the street with 80 people staying in the two shelters on the Lookout Housing and Health Society's North Surrey site) The meeting was well publicized but due to the marginalized multi-barriered population very few people registered ahead of time. We literally went on the street a couple hours before the meeting and got people to register shortly before the start time. People identified as having mental and physical health issues which included being HIV and Hep C positive and many were active in their addictions. It was observed by the writer that about ten individuals were under the influence. Two people seemed to be so tired and worn out that they actually slept off and on throughout the meeting. Food and the offer of a participation stipend for all 30 people was a big draw as well as getting indoors as it was a cold and wet that day.

### **Issues:**

- Homelessness
- Lack of good food and proper diet
- Income too low, welfare rates are too low
- High Rents and welfare shelter rates have not kept up with inflation
- Prejudice and blaming homeless people for living in poverty
- Stigma, cannot access the pool, library, gym, grocery stores, medical clinics, hospital and public places due to staff not letting them in because of how they look.
- Cannot rent a place because landlords do a criminal record check
- not enough access to support services, shelters and treatment

- When you are homeless you are at risk of having everything stolen from you.
- Stigmatization and disrespect everywhere, sometimes people threaten to call 911 if we don't leave even though we did not do anything wrong.
- If we are not at our camp Bylaws take all of our belongings away.

### **What are the solutions?**

- Affordable Housing with smoking and pets allowed
- Build more affordable rental housing with supports for people who have mental health and addiction issues.
- Welfare and Hardship does not help as it must be increased to match real cost of living
- We need enough money to rent a place to live by our self having a room-mate does not work.
- Help for people who are using drugs, medical supports and Opioid Therapies are needed.
- More jobs and education to get jobs for people living in poverty and homelessness
- Changes to Bylaw enforcement and improve human rights for people who are homeless.
- Day labour and part time employment options
- Welfare needs earning exemptions for employable people as no one can live on such a low monthly income.

### **Top Three Solutions:**

1. Changes to BC Income assistance: Increase welfare rates - Shelter in Metro Vancouver cost on average \$1,000.00 per month for a studio apartment. Policy on earnings exemption needs to increase or allow single people to make and keep more earned income. Give the same benefits to everyone on welfare - free bus passes and dental coverage for everyone.
2. Housing: Build a range of affordable rental housing, some with on site supports that would include mental health and addiction services. ON sit Opioid Therapy services, safe consumption sites and access to prescription Heroin to keep people from using street drugs and dying.
3. Transportation: Free bus passes for people living in poverty. Forgive fines and waive fees - example people cannot get a driver's licence due to unpaid transit fines for riding skytrain without a ticket. "They stay on your record forever and there is no way to pay it as I am living in poverty"