

BC POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION REPORT

Lead Agency	Lower Mainland Purpose Society
Facilitating Program	Burnaby Youth Hub (off-site LMPS program)
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INTRODUCTION

Date	March 27, 2018
Community	Burnaby
# of Participants	19 – 4 service providers, 15 youth
# of Organizations	2 – Lower Mainland Purpose Society, Burnaby Public Library

On Tuesday, March 27th, 2018, the Burnaby Youth Hub hosted an engaging and inspiring youth dialogue on poverty reduction in BC.

The intention behind hosting this small group discussion at the Burnaby Youth Hub was to create a space to honour and centralize the voices, experiences, and insights of youth. We also recognize that individuals, especially young people, have a multitude of ways of learning and engaging, and in hosting this dialogue, we wanted to provide the opportunity for youth to participate through a diverse set of modalities. These activities and components (which included: creative expression, word associations, tactile integration, opportunities for confidential contribution, and auditory stimulation) helped to generate perceptive, comprehensive, and engaging conversation that was accessible and adaptive to a diverse group of participants.

While we had representation from two community agencies, workshop facilitators encouraged these service providers to remain peripheral to the conversation, reiterating that the dialogue was an opportunity for young people to hold power and space in a conversation that can often be exclusionary and inaccessible.

Recognizing the intention behind this conversation, these service providers actively listened and provided support to the conversation where necessary.

The Burnaby Youth Hub, and the Lower Mainland Purpose Society, is grateful for the generous support of SPARC BC to host this small community dialogue. This funding helped to create an incredibly empowering opportunity to highlight the voices of young people in our community, and ensure that these young people are acknowledged for their expertise and contributions to the provincial conversation on poverty reduction for all British Columbians.

PARTICIPANT PROFILE:

The youth who participated were between the ages of 14 - 20, and represented the following communities across the Lower Mainland:

- Burnaby
- New Westminster
- Vancouver
- Coquitlam
- Surrey

The participants also come with a variety of backgrounds, personal experiences, and connections to living in poverty. While each participant has a unique and complex set of experiences and circumstances, there were a few dominant demographic trends that were disclosed over the course of the discussion. It is important to note that this information was disclosed at the discretion of the participants, that some of the participants chose not to disclose their personal experiences, and that these trends are not mutually exclusive:

- A small group of participants who are newcomers to Canada.
- A group of youth with experience being supported by the Ministry of Children and Family Development, such as on Youth Agreements.
- Some youth who identify as Indigenous.
- Some youth who identify as LGBTQ2S+.
- Some youth living with a disability.
- Some youth living with or having experienced mental health challenges or diagnosed with mental health disorders, including anxiety, depression, or bipolar disorder.
- Some youth who currently have or have a history of substance use and misuse.
- Some youth who have been homeless at one point in time, including:
 - Being street-entrenched;
 - Couch-surfing;
 - Living in shelters; and
 - Evictions/'demovictions', etc.for a multitude of reasons, including:
 - Conflict with family or roommates;

- Fear for safety and security (at home);
- LGBTQ2S+ identity;
- Housing issues: cost of housing, lack of affordable or accessible housing within same community as school/work/support network, etc., lack of pet-friendly housing;
- Mental health or substance use; and
- Demolition of housing and rezoning (especially notable in Burnaby).

INSIGHTS & FEEDBACK:

What are the issues & challenges facing you and people living in poverty right now?

- Mental health challenges
 - Inability to access timely, appropriate services
 - Inability to get and maintain sufficient employment – employers often do not understand mental health challenges
- Substance use & addiction
 - Inability to access timely, appropriate services
 - Addiction sometimes begins with health care system
- Basic needs not met (food, water, shelter, clothing, safety, education, sanitation, and health care)
 - When basic needs aren't met, how are you able to get out of poverty?
- Barriers to access timely, appropriate health care
 - High cost of prescriptions not covered under MSP
 - Long wait times, burnt out staff at community/walk-in clinics
 - Feelings of 'sub-standard' care
 - Some services cannot be accessed without a Care Card
- Relationship conflicts – including family, friends, partners
 - Can both contribute to and be a result of living in poverty/being homeless
- Low education/inability to access further education
 - High cost of education
 - Without proper nutrition/shelter/support (basic needs), people may not perform well in school
 - Inability to perform well in school, inability to access further education means that people are unable to access better employment opportunities to get out of poverty – contributes to cycle of poverty
- Minimum wage is less than the living wage
 - Many youth with minimum wage jobs must resort to live in unsafe housing, are unable to find housing in home community, or unable to find housing at all.
- Barriers to obtain and retain employment

- For those who are homeless – where do they store their belongings to attend an interview? How do they ensure their resumes do not get wet or damaged?
- Without computer/printer – how do they write/print a resume?
 - It was noted that access to the computers in the public library is often limited to 15 minutes intervals (and limited to only 15 minutes during peak hours)
- Not having a fixed address is often a barrier to employment
- Lack of employment skills, such as: resume writing, interviewing skills
- Lack of safe, consistent shelter
 - Especially when street-entrenched, youth must carry all of their belongings, and are frequently displaced (by store owners, police officers, community members, fear for personal safety, etc.)
- Cycles of physical, mental, emotional abuse
 - Including generational trauma for Indigenous youth, abuse experienced by LGBTQ2S+ youth that push youth to leave family home
- Lack of proper sanitation & hygiene can lead to higher rates of disease or physical, mental illness
- Lack of nutritious, consistent source of food
 - Youth and families often resort to fast food because of lack of time, high cost of fresh food, lack of knowledge of how to cook, lack of cooking supplies & tools (i.e. pots, pans, working appliances)
 - Continues cycle of disease and illness (as mentioned in lack of proper sanitation & hygiene)
- No 'luxury' items, such as: car, cell phone, work-appropriate clothes, books, popular products, access to recreation & extracurricular activities
 - Difficulty in obtaining or keeping a job without items like car/transportation, cell phone, work clothes
 - Feelings of being targeted/alienated by peers without items like popular (and not used) clothing brands, and without the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities
- Young people resorting to stealing, dealing drugs, sex work to obtain money
 - Getting caught up in criminal justice system with no opportunity for better education or employment outcomes
- Widespread feeling that taxes (particularly income taxes) are too high for low-income earners
 - Discussion: taxes help to provide public services and support

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS:

INDIVIDUAL LEVEL:

- Share information with others regarding community resources & supports

- There are many resources that are under-utilized because people don't know they exist or don't know how to access them
- Focus on **social justice** (activism, changing stigmas around mental health, poverty, substance use, homelessness) vs. **charity** (just giving things that you don't want anymore)
- Ask questions, be empathetic, and challenge social stigmas around poverty:
 - For homeless people: can I buy you anything? What do you **need**?
 - For youth: recognize the complex reasons why a young person is unable to get or keep a job (such as mental health), why they may be homeless, or why they are using substances
 - Host more awareness events and campaigns for the community

COMMUNITY LEVEL:

- Opportunities for individuals to volunteer their time or resources in exchange for food, clothing, basic needs, counselling, other resources, etc.
- Free, drop-in counselling and mental health supports
 - For those services that already exist: **better advertising and community outreach**
- 'Free' stores & markets
 - Free exchange of items and services
 - Towards community-driven reciprocal economy
- Training for employers on issues such as:
 - Mental health;
 - Poverty & social justice issues;
 - Substance use; and
 - Working with LGBTQ2S+ folks,
 working towards greater empathy, less fear or misunderstanding around hiring young people experiencing or living with those experiences and identities.
- Community hygiene facilities & free hygiene products (showers & bathrooms; clean razors, shampoo, soap, free menstrual products)
- Community secure storage, such as for during interviews, work shifts, etc.
- Safe, low-barrier emergency housing and shelters for LGBTQ2S+ youth
- Safe, low-barrier emergency housing and shelters for all youth (especially younger youth & children, i.e. ages 10-14)
- Free, unlimited (within reason) community access to computers and other technology
- Free menstrual products

GOVERNMENT LEVEL

- Lower taxes for low-income earners
- Higher housing taxes for large and expensive homes
- Better understanding and breakdown of where taxes are being used
 - Using plain language/images/infographics about what is funded by taxes

- Free/highly subsidized menstrual products (especially for people who are homeless or street-entrenched)
- More subsidized, affordable, safe, and properly maintained housing
 - Make mandatory with all new development
- Greater focus on prioritizing **affordable** housing for citizens of BC (especially low-income and high-risk)

SOLUTIONS & ACTIONS THAT CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE:

a) The following solutions were identified as most important to the participants:

- Free, drop-in counselling and mental health supports
- Training for employers on issues such as:
 - Mental health;
 - Poverty & social justice issues;
 - Substance use; and
 - Working with LGBTQ2S+ folks,
 working towards greater empathy, less fear or misunderstanding around hiring young people experiencing or living with those experiences and identities.
- Safe, low-barrier emergency housing and shelters for LGBTQ2S+ youth
- Safe, low-barrier emergency housing and shelters for all youth (especially younger youth & children, i.e. ages 10-14)
- Free menstrual products
- Lower taxes for low-income earners
- More subsidized, affordable, safe, and properly maintained housing

b) The top three solutions/ideas identified by the youth participating in the discussion were:

- 1. Safe, low-barrier emergency housing and shelters for LGBTQ2S+ youth.**
- 2. Safe, low-barrier emergency housing and shelters for all youth (especially younger youth & children, i.e. ages 10-14).**
- 3. Free menstrual products.**

The Lower Mainland Purpose Society thanks SPARC BC for their generous support of this initiative.