

Poverty Reduction Meeting March 28

There was 15 people gathered with varied experiences from 5 organizations. A number of seniors were also in attendance. This has been broken up into 2 sections for each question, that was asked of them.

Housing was another common theme expressed tonight. There is not enough rentals, not enough rent controls. There should be more diligence on local govt. to bring in rent controls. Why are developers allowed to build only luxury units? Incentives for developers to build “affordable” housing. But the definition of affordable has been skewed in the City of Vancouver. Salaries are not keeping up with the cost of living and it is driving off the young people. There is an imbalance in the equilibrium in this city. College education have deflated in value and the proportion of debt load to earning power creates long term negative effects. Moving into the suburbs commuting, costs way too much and takes too much time. It is not realistic. Many people have expressed that trying to apply for subsidized housing is very difficult. There is no cohesive list of subsidized housing that shows availability. Accessibility issues with filling out the forms, long waiting lists and shortage of housing were expressed as barriers to housing. Not allowed to have pets increases social isolation. The new minimum wage should be a top priority and it is taking too long to implement. Clothing as a priority is way down the line – *one person said 95% of what I wear is second hand*

Health care was another theme expressed tonight. MSP fees are too high and people are going without medical coverage. The current medical coverage does not cover enough therapies that could help get people back to work. MSP premiums are still too low. People will go without seeing a doctor and therefore feel unhealthy and don't want to look for jobs. MSP premium assistance is still too low. Seniors and others cannot afford medications – medications are more expensive than food and can force people on the streets – *one senior says, “seniors are living in vans because of the cost of medications”*

Support for mental illness is severely lacking. The promotion of available supports is lacking and public health programs do not help to alleviate poverty.

Accessibility to government service was another concern. Long lines at the food bank can lead to a dehumanizing experience to those in need. There has been no increase of welfare rates since the 90s and the clawbacks keep people from seeking meaningful employment. Help with filling out the forms can be difficult. \$610 can be very hard to get by in this city and food is usually the first thing to go on a budget. The time spent at food banks could be better spent taking care of themselves and the quality of food is lacking. Food should be a right and should be national policy. Build food systems that are accessible to everyone ie. subsidized food system, pay farmers a living wage to grow food for their communities

Technology can be helpful but also detrimental in some situations. Career training is lacking which means kids are leaving school without training to find a job. Such as how to use social media and the internet to create profile. Tuitions fees way too high, cost of textbooks is way too high – digital textbooks should be free. *“Why do seniors get free tuition when young people who really need the education pay and therefore subsidize seniors” – even the seniors in the group agree*

Not having a phone can also lead to social isolation and decreases economic opportunities

Taking care of our elders was another concern expressed by individuals. There is a lack of care aides to assist with filling out forms. The "better at home" program is inaccessible and not knowing your rights is a concern for long term welfare. Many seniors do not have pension plans.

Community and Family supports have been helpful when dealing with poverty, although dignity is an overlooked quality with service providers. It can be a demoralizing experience to justify your existence on a regular basis. A basic minimum income would be helpful to many people in the lower income brackets. Building off existing programs and building communities, not service providers. Discrimination (racial & economic) is still an issue and now it's between minorities this makes it hard to find a job – *one person said she is being discriminated against by other minorities more than ever*

The younger people in the group have stated that contract work is more expensive in the long run and can not imagine having children in this city. The cost of living has caused a migration of younger people fleeing the city in search of affordable homes. Income security is an issue employers including the govt. are hiring too many part-time and temporary workers – avoiding providing benefits

Part 2... What would address these issues and help lift yourself and others out of poverty?

On housing, the govt. must incentivize landlords and developers – close loopholes that allow landlords to evict renters so that their family can move in or for renovations – it is too easy for landlords to take exploit these loopholes to get renters out to then re-rent at a higher price. Get developers to BUILD MORE subsidized housing. The city needs more enforcement of its own by-laws.

Make it easier to navigate govt. programs the provincial govt. and federal should set up a system like the City of Vancouver's #311 – number where you can easily find services. Provide free or subsidized cell

