



Parent Support Services Society of BC

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Submission for the Development of a Poverty Reduction Strategy for BC

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Parent Support Services Society of BC (PSS) has been working to end child abuse since 1974, running peer-to-peer Support Circles around the province for those in a parenting role. These Circles are run by well-trained volunteer co-facilitators. Not only are our Circles held in English, but also in Spanish, Cantonese, Mandarin, and Korean. An Arabic Circle is in development. We hold Circles in partnership with Indigenous organizations. In addition, PSS offers focus based Circles to parents of children on the Autism Spectrum and to parents of children who are trans or gender creative. We have also had Circles that run in prisons.

Currently more than 1/3rd of our Circles are made up of the growing numbers of grandparents who are raising their grandchildren (or other relatives raising kin).

Parent Support Services Society of BC congratulates the government for your commitment to implement a poverty reduction plan for BC. We are also excited by introduction of the first steps towards a universal childcare program in BC, and encouraged by the steps towards an adequate minimum wage.

Our participants tell us that poverty is an issue for them.

They may be living in poverty, or be one paycheck away.

The families we work with may be struggling with the rising cost of living – particularly housing. Many work more than one job (half the poor in BC are either the working poor or the children of the working poor). Others struggle to raise children on income assistance. Income assistance rates remain vastly below what it costs to live in our communities and these deeply inadequate rates are a leading cause of increasing levels of homelessness in BC.

They may see the impact of poverty in their communities – as their child's classmate arrives at school hungry, or people stop them for change on the street, or their neighbour is suddenly gone from next door because they couldn't make their mortgage payment.

PSS believes that not only is poverty a violation of human rights, but also a form of child abuse. Children in BC face higher rates of poverty than the general population, which is of great concern considering the long-term physical, social and cognitive development implications, not to mention the cost to society as a whole. Evidence shows that a reduction in poverty will improve the health outcome for the entire population.

We know that poverty rates are disproportionately high for our parents and caregivers who are from marginalized groups, including Indigenous families, people with disabilities and mental illness, recent immigrants and refugees, single mothers, single senior women, and queer and transgender people.

The poverty rate for children in single mother-led households is 49%, and 52% of on-reserve Indigenous children live in poverty.

Parent Support Services Society of BC supports the recommendations by the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition. Please see them here: http://bcpovertyreduction.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/BCPRC_SubmissionPRConsultation_Mar15_2018.pdf

Shining the spotlight on the children being raised by their grandparents or other relative (kinship care).

In BC, more than 13,000 children and youth aged 0-19 are being raised by their grandparents or other kin, with no parent in the home. Reasons for this include mental and physical health issues, substance misuse, incarceration, abandonment, child abuse or neglect, violence in the home, and death. The opioid crisis and other socio-economic factors are leading to growing populations of kinship care families. Without the grandparents, great grandparents, aunts and uncles who have stepped up to the plate, these children would be in government care.

Like foster kids, children in kinship care families have often experienced trauma and many have physical, emotional, or behavioural challenges.

39% of kinship care families live below the poverty line, some in deep poverty, and many others are using up their savings to raise these children, and will soon be living in poverty themselves.

The widely recognized benefits of kinship care are maintenance of community and family attachments, stability of cultural identity, a lifetime sense of belonging, minimization of negative impacts, and increased positive outcomes.

We have recently learned that Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) is taking positive steps to reduce the number of children in care (in response to recent reports such as Grand Chief Ed John's, and the Reps office). One of the ways they are doing this is to begin placing more emphasis on placing children in kinship care. This practice, which is in line with their policy and is best practice, also results in lower costs for government as kinship caregivers do not receive the same support/services as foster parents.

Despite best intentions, kinship caregivers are often advised, by MCFD or Delegated Agencies, and/or family lawyers to make arrangements that may not be in the best interest of these children. These recommendations may be made because these frontline workers and lawyers are not fully aware of the financial implications of their recommendation. (This lack of awareness can be overcome with education and changes in practice)

Parent Support Services operates a provincial support line for kinship caregivers. This toll free line, 1-855-474-9777 is staffed by two advocates - one with a Masters in Social Work the other a lawyer. They help caregivers navigate complex legal and social systems, and refer kinship caregivers to our kinship support circles and kinship family respite camps.

Kinship families tell us:

- They receive little to no governmental support.
- They feel like government has downloaded costs onto their shoulders.
- Kinship care families are looking for similar benefits as foster families receive.
- Currently, available benefits are temporary, short term and difficult to access.
- Kinship caregivers, need to be able to receive benefits for as long as necessary.
- These families would like the federal government to allow grandparents on CPP Disability who are raising their grandchildren to continue receiving the children's benefit after they turn 65. (It would help if the provincial government raised this issue with their federal counterparts.)

Above all, what these kinship care families say they need are adequate benefits for all kinship care families, regardless of legal status. Benefits that are available long term, support permanency & long-term resilience. This funding would be attached to the child.

To learn more about the challenges of kinship care families – you can watch our documentary “Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: Telling Our Stories: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sjB_aAkf9zo&t=79s

Again, thank you for this opportunity to give input into your consultation project. We support the call for a **strong, comprehensive poverty reduction strategy with legislated targets and timelines** to significantly reduce poverty, inequality, and homelessness in BC. These measures will make a tangible and positive difference in the lives of the families we work with. However, we are also aware that by taking proactive steps, investing upstream in poverty reduction measures – including adequate benefits for kinship care families – the government will save lives and money in the long run.

Creating a world where children and families are nurtured, valued, and safe

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