

To: povertyreduction@sparc.bc.ca

March 26, 2018

Re: **BC Poverty Reduction Strategy Consultation Report**

From: Revelstoke Poverty Reduction Working Group

INTRODUCTION

On Friday March 9th, 2018, a consultation was held at the City of Revelstoke Community Centre to provide input to the provincial government's Poverty Reduction Strategy. The consultation engaged a variety of citizens and key stakeholders from Revelstoke and Area as people living in a rural/remote community NOT served by the list of community meetings posted at <https://engage.gov.bc.ca/bcpovertyreduction>.

Our goal was to facilitate a multi-sectoral group discussion, complimenting the consultation being undertaken by Community Connections (Revelstoke) Society with people with lived experience. Service providers that have direct one-on-one experience with a variety of people have a unique perspective and a sense of trends that are perpetrated over time. Revelstoke is small, rural, isolated community with unique characteristics and limited resources. We have been working on poverty reduction since 2011 and have learned much in the process; the consultation represented an opportunity to share our knowledge & ideas.

Twenty-seven people participated, including 2, interested community members as well as representatives from the following organizations and sectors:

- City of Revelstoke Department of Community Economic Development, Social Development (Facilitator)
- Community Futures Revelstoke General Manager
- Community Futures Revelstoke Board of Directors/Small Business Owner
- Chamber of Commerce/Hotel Management
- Chamber of Commerce/ Small Business Owner
- Work BC Employment Centre (X 2 reps)
- Community Connections Housing Outreach/Social Justice Advocate
- Community Connections Food Bank Coordinator / Management Team
- Revelstoke Child Care Society Executive Director/ Child Care Resource & Referral
- Revelstoke Child Care Society / Child Care Providers (X 3 reps)
- Revelstoke Women's Shelter Society (X 2 reps)
- RCMP Victim Services / Vice-Chair Revelstoke PRWG
- Ministry of Children & Family Development
- Interior Health Public Health
- Interior Health Regional Public Health Dietician, Promotion & Prevention
- Interior Health, Regional Healthy Community Facilitator
- School District 19 – District Principal Support Services
- Aboriginal Friendship Society Coordinator
- Aboriginal Friendship Society BoD member / Chair Revelstoke PRWG
- Revelstoke Early Childhood Development Committee / Community Literacy Coordinator
- Interior Health Mental Health & Addictions

Small group discussions took place and lunch was provided. The following outlines results.

THE ISSUES

We heard:

"I can barely afford to take care of myself much less raise a child"

"People are forced to live in substandard housing"

"It's really easy for people to fall through the cracks"

"Provincial politics affect everyday living (e.g. Alberta/BC dispute affecting the price of gas)"

"Low wages just don't match the rising cost of living"

"There's the constant stress of having to juggle everything while having nothing to juggle"

"It's hard to make transit work for our family"

"Poverty affects women with children disproportionately"

"We desperately need more staff for government funded programs"

TOP ISSUES

1. Lack of affordable, safe housing
2. Inadequate income
3. High cost of living (including amount needed for quality child care, good nutrition and food security, supplementary medical costs, and trying to keep up with our consumer-based culture)
4. Stress of living in poverty (including public perception, inability to overcome fears etc.)
5. Need for accessible education & training opportunities / skill development

THE BREAKDOWN

- **Fear** – people are living in fear due to scarcity, job insecurity, trying to raise children, bills, high cost of food, housing, future sustainability, personal safety, aging & capability to cope, independence, interdependence, asking for help, instability
- **Prolonged stress** – constant feeling of 'fight or flight' – having to juggle family life / find good housing / find work that pays enough or with both parents working, less family support available – parents are very stressed / impacts children & family dynamics. Prolonged stress negatively affects both mental and physical health and contributes to chronic disease (such as cardiovascular disease)

- Deteriorating mental & physical stress – the **social determinants of health** impacting and being impacted in a vicious cycle / pyramid of needs – people are in survival mode. Health issues compound and increase.
- Poverty and the ability to get out of poverty very **race- and gender-based** – populations that are the most vulnerable and oppressed are the most impacted.
- **Meeting basic needs** is very challenging – securing housing, food, paying the bills
- Women and children fleeing abuse are **forced to return to abusive relationships** or are not leaving in the first place because they lack the finances to support themselves and their children successfully. This is especially the case when women know they will need a lawyers and cannot afford them – **accessible legal support for family law** is critical
- **Supplementary health care costs** are prohibitive (e.g. eye glasses, dentures, prescriptions, rehabilitation)
- **Inadequate income assistance and disability assistance rates** create deep, institutionalized poverty for people with multiple barriers or just needing to get through a bad time in life
- **Housing** – affordability vs. quality, environment, substandard, pests, health & safety – in Revelstoke it can lead to desperate situations; lack of housing for locals, for seasonal workers, limited social or subsidized housing options, sharing is not always an option; without stable housing families are not able to focus on addressing other issues in their lives; **municipalities do not have enough resources** (staff or financial) to address their housing needs
- CMHC/ BC Housing **'suitability' policies** re: number of children and sex of children per bedroom is unrealistic and limiting our ability to house families in our community; archaic – doesn't meet today's need for smaller units, increased density, and building housing that is affordable.
- **Expectations around future** (instability), career, place in society (particularly at a certain age) – navigating our consumer culture with no disposable income
- **Nutrition & food insecurity** – what is easy, fast, cheap, convenient, available (dumpster diving) – lack of access to healthy, quality foods – having to choose what is affordable over what is good due to expense
- **Time** – deprivation, sleep, lack of time to bond with family & friends
- Lack of time to **navigate 'the system'** / full range of government supports - people need support & help to do this (federal, provincial, local)
- **Lack of family support** – extended family lives away; families separated because one partner has to work away to make ends meet
- Community – stigma, **(lack of) connection**
- **Education** – student loans add to other financial pressures, (lack of) availability of education - lack of local access to educational opportunities
- **Lack of training & skills** / where to start? Takes energy & support
- **Child Care** – availability, accessibility – lack of access to quality child care allowing parents to work and / or upgrade or take additional training / with 2 or more children there is pressure to be home rather than working because child care is too expensive – this impacts the overall economy. Need more **ECE Education** and credentials to increase the number of child care spaces to increase access to work + **ECE wages are too low** – wages for care workers need to be higher to improve recruitment and retention of child care workers, while parent fees are too high. There is no room in child care to increase rates without putting those costs back on the families.

- **Spiritual & personal development** – ability, resources, safety systems – outside the scope of someone living in poverty
- **Policies** around advancement (tax brackets, overhead) – changing rules (e.g. mortgage rules) inhibit the ability to get ahead
- **Waste** - food, recycling – adds to overall life cycle cost
- **Wages** – minimum wage is not high enough - affordability vs. minimum wage – what is affordable? Needs to be defined.
- **Work** – a lot of seasonal jobs in Revelstoke – less career or jobs that pay a living wage – one partner ends of working away (usually males); hard for employers to pay high enough wages/ need to be competitive – the new 'health tax' will add an extra cost for businesses
- **Pay gap for women** in the work force / women are at a disadvantage / burn out / overwhelming – poverty affects women disproportionately – statistics are consistently showing this. Especially women with children.
- Single individuals are also at greater risk.
- **Intergenerational class system** / lack of social skills
- **Barriers** – addictions, mental health / not wanting to change
- **Knowing how to help** & support families properly / where to guide and/or direct – people can't 'navigate the system' without support; this forces service providers to do the work 'off the side of their desks'. The Human Resources office in Revelstoke closed October 1st 2002 and everyone else has been struggling to do this work ever since.
- Lack of support for aging out of **foster care system** – need help and way more supports to bridge gap between foster system & future; no hotels for children in foster care
- Employment / ongoing training for **children & youth with disabilities**
- **Lack of mentorship** for youth
- **Lack of legal support and legal aid options** for low income citizens – creates very negative, isolating and desperate situations.

THE SOLUTIONS

TOP SOLUTIONS

1. Housing
 - Capital and operational funding that will enable communities to bank land and construct a variety of housing types to meet the needs of our community – from a supported shelter for the homeless and good quality housing for families, to supporting our seniors to age in their own community.
 - Policy and regulations – A robust regulatory environment is needed to enable municipalities to get creative and meet the needs of their populations, from working together with private developers (inclusionary or amenity contribution policies) to enforcing standards of minimum maintenance, illegal vacation rentals (Air BnB), taxing absentee home owners or vacant properties, enabling the construction of tiny homes and communal living spaces, and housing families with children in smaller, more efficient units.
 - Municipalities need to have access to sufficient resources to be able to address housing issues in their own communities.

2. Income
 - Guaranteed basic income that will enable individuals and families to meet their basic needs, live with dignity and participate in community life.
 - Increase Income Assistance and Disability Assistance rates to end deep, institutionalized poverty.
3. Navigator 'Hub'
 - Change in service delivery / funding to support individuals and families 'one-on-one' to navigate and access government services and programs, as well as better integrate services to provide 'wrap around' care.
4. Child Care
 - Systemic solutions – funding to ensure education of more Early Childhood Educators to increase number ECE workers and child care spaces; improve wages for child care workers to promote both recruitment and retention as well as pay a living wage; reduce child care costs.
5. Health Care
 - Supplementary health care services / extended medical benefits (optometry, dentistry, rehabilitation etc.) paid for by a basic tax rate.

THE BREAKDOWN

- **Build more affordable housing** – inclusive (pets, more rooms, larger units for families with children); support collaboration between private and public/government sectors; mixed use, mixed demographics, co-op housing etc; provide leadership for municipalities that are struggling with the issues; municipalities need more resources to offer incentives for suites to increase rental density.
- **Changes in housing policy or programs** to support innovative community building – vacation rental policies and enforcement; provincial government to follow through with policies in regards to staff housing with big projects; support municipalities to allocate funds to create and implement creative affordable housing policies and bylaws; policies that encourage mixing of socioeconomic and age groups; change regulations to allow for smaller houses / units (e.g. Japan); government incentives for tiny home with no restrictions
- **Changes in BC Housing policies and regulations** – raise the age cut-off to allow same sex sibling above age 6 to share a room – too much of a barrier in efficient construction of affordable housing units; also allow pets
- More help to get a **mortgage** were renting costs are higher than potential mortgage payments
- **Increase disability and income assistance rates**; explore and implement a minimum **guaranteed basic income** – must ensure a certain quality of life – indexed to the actual cost of living in a community / living wage – the long term cost of poverty is much more than what such programs would likely cost – look to examples in other countries & the Manitoba experiment
- **'Social safety net' must be empowering** and allow forward movement / encourage activity rather than disempowering / penalizing / encouraging inactivity – Stop 'clawbacks' of IA & PWD when people start working - allow them to build up and do a gradual transition to employment if able

- Government needs to **better support the social sector** to support integrated services/ wrap around approach to care – more resources needed for social service providers – more staff / more support – changes in service delivery; More resources for social service providers – more staff & support for vulnerable populations; greater visibility and promotion of social service programs – awareness, support for successful programs
- Better **mental health supports** in all communities
- Bring back **'human resources' or social assistance office** with **Navigators** / case managers need to help vulnerable citizens navigate and access appropriate services – a person would benefit clients much more than waiting for calls and call backs
- Work with the Federal Government to bring back Service Canada offices to smaller communities or partner with agencies like WorkBC to host a part-time SC worker – so many questions at the WorkBC office are Service Canada-based
- Restore **Legal Aid** for lower income and vulnerable populations – make **Family Law Support** accessible and affordable
- **Child care training and subsidies** needs to be a priority – more qualified ECE workers, higher pay for care workers, lower parent portion so people can afford to work and yet have quality care for their children
- **Campaign for 'healthy living' priorities** – effort to create culture of community – balance of work & family life / vacation time, work hours/ days etc. (e.g. like Canada 150 campaign)
- Innovative policies / projects to support better **intergenerational relationships** (e.g. mixing child care & senior care or seniors & students etc.)
- **Education** – reduced tuition, financial support for students during study, deferring repayment of student loans (or minimum salary requirement for tuition loan repayment, no interest etc.)
- **Financial Literacy** – education on unique financial challenges of this age; awareness of financial pressures of the future; money saving strategies.
- Specific policy considerations - health, education, transportation, housing, income support
- **Solution to food insecurity** is also to address guaranteed income & food education – decrease waste = increased security – 'Good Samaritan Clause' re: food that is edible but not saleable e.g. semi-tractor trailer truck accidents / salvage, power outages at the grocery store, road kill, discontinued or 'better before' food items

CONCLUSION

The City of Revelstoke is an active member of Vibrant Communities Canada; the Revelstoke Poverty Reduction Working Group is an active member of the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition. Accordingly, we believe that a successful Provincial Poverty Reduction Strategy will be based on and contain:

- A collective impact approach, involving strong inter-ministerial partnerships, collaboration and open communication. Poverty reduction efforts must be coordinated; a systemic approach is necessary – working with multiple sectors to address multiple areas simultaneously.
- All higher-level government policy must be viewed through a 'poverty reduction lens'.
- Communities need the support of government to take a 'ground up', community-based approach to addressing poverty.

- The strategy must be grounded in a human rights framework rather than a charitable approach.
- Systemic issues that support or aid in the creation of impoverished situations need to be addressed simultaneously – particularly racism and patriarchal or sexist structures, as well as the social stigma and isolation our most vulnerable citizens.
- The strategy must contain legislated targets and timelines and be supported by an implementation framework. A good example is the province of New Brunswick that implemented the “Social and Economic Inclusion Act” – a legislative framework for implementation of poverty reduction strategies. A crown corporation was created to oversee implementation of the act, which included supporting the development of community inclusion networks. In a few years, there was a 12% reduction in child poverty in New Brunswick. We, too, could work together to eliminate poverty in BC.

Finally, we believe that while poverty reduction is a complex social development challenge and urgently needed to stem the mounting associated health and social impacts, it is also one of the most significant economic development opportunities of our time. Poverty reduction is an economic investment for our province. Progress now will impact our province for generations to come.

For further information contact:

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