



Single Mothers' Alliance BC

Small Group Poverty Consultation

Date: March 20 th , 2018
Location: Elizabeth Fry Society Ellendale residential treatment centre; Whalley, Surrey
In attendance: 9 women currently living at the opioid addiction centre, some with children in their care in the facilities for women with children at the treatment centre.
Demographic information: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• All have children• All single mothers but one recently married• All have a history of addictions and currently living at Ellendale residential treatment• Majority of their children apprehended or living with family• One very young mother with a baby• Another with a baby as well; has partial custody of her baby, in process of getting access to other children• Demographic profile—women who have experienced homelessness, addictions, mental health challenges, apprehension, sexualized violence, domestic violence and abuse and lived experience of poverty.• Participants mainly Indigenous and racialized women as per our grant application goal• Age range from teenage to 50's, majority in 25-40 range

NOTES

CHILD CARE

- Lack of daycare funding especially for infants
- Baby age for infants: not enough spots
- Not enough or ZERO spaces for special needs kids
- Subsidy is not enough to cover needs of special needs kids
- Staff are not trained or have no one too devote attention and knowledge to special needs kids in childcare whether licensed or not
- Poor quality unlicensed childcare is “un-regulated” and all there is for poor moms
- Too many kids per day care: see this all the time, breaking the rules=dangerous

HOUSING

- For parents with small children there is much discrimination in the rental market
- Landlords won't rent to children/single mothers alone
- You get rejected when they find out you have little kids, single mother
- Single mom housing discrimination takes the form of extra security deposit 'for the kids', higher utility charges for extra kids and use of appliances—they try to 'extra charge'
- Residential tenancy act is too confusing and process is complicated
- Filing complaints is inaccessible and there is no help for tenants
- 7-year wait list for BC Housing—been on list for 7 years
- Not enough housing for families—more units with more bedrooms needed
- Two bedroom in Surrey is \$1550 and more=too much
- Cost of living so high
- Housing costs (paying rent) out of support is too much—you have to choose to eat or not to house yourself, then need food banks etc

EDUCATION

- On welfare, education is unavailable/limited to help get off welfare
- You get stuck in a cycle of welfare and can't get out
- Single Parents Employment Initiative too limited, options for school too limited
- SPEI only one year and certain programs—what if you don't want to be a Medical Receptionist?
- Grade monitoring of SPEI program is punitive/punishing, with the minimum grade requirement you get kicked out if you go below, but it is very high and hard to score that high; makes it all intimidating and like they are 'watching you' in school

WELFARE

- Welfare rates are too low to cover basic expenses such as rent
- There is a cap in rent allowance no matter family size (cap on family of four)-isn't fair
- Problem is you can't access it unless you are homeless, if you are homeless you get on top of list

ADDICTIONS SERVICES ACCESS

- Difficult to access resources to find out about treatment options
- Participant overdosed again and again but was always released from hospital with nothing, just walked out the door—no offer of treatment, help, recover options available, or pathway to get apprehended kids back—no future hope
- Wait lists for psychiatry are very long

APPREHENSION

- Apprehension after relapses are not investigated properly
- Apprehension is addressed through court system & advocacy because apprehension is mishandled
- Social workers make apprehension “personal” and get grudges
- On-going apprehension of infants despite doctor’s recommendations to maintain an infant bond with mother
- Foster family screening is very bad
- Not enough special needs training for foster parents with special needs training
- One participant had one of her children die in foster care, at age 9 months. They said it was SIDS, but baby was in withdrawal, mom knew foster mom had no knowledge of dealing with a baby in withdrawal, then baby died in crib.
- Foster care is too lenient—they shouldn’t split up the kids, and the training is inadequate for those doing infant care
- Kids witness violence, domestic violence, then have trauma but not enough programs for the kids

GENERAL INPUT

- Food banks too hard to access when ID required, why do they require ID to feed hungry people?

IDEAS FOR CHANGE: SUMMARY

28 PRIORITY ACTION AREAS IDENTIFIED

HOUSING

1. Access to affordable housing; build more affordable housing
2. Make sure affordable housing has options for families, larger families
3. Keep rent affordable not always skyrocketing
4. Address housing discrimination in rental market against poor women and children
5. Enforce residential tenancy act to ensure landlords don’t break the rules and protect single mothers and their children from discrimination in the rental market

TRANSIT

6. Transit passes for all poor single moms and kids—passes for kids too very important
7. Transit pass for welfare recipients that includes all adults and kids not just for PWD
8. Make sure no food banks require ID

WELFARE

9. Expand SPEI to all school and program options, not limited list
10. Take away strict grade average requirement to stay in SPEI

11. Raise the rates up
12. Let moms work more while on welfare and PWD
13. Support single moms properly to get off the system not just push off to minimum wage

APPREHENSIONS AND ADDICTIONS

14. Respite for single moms with addictions and mental health challenges instead of punishing moms who ask for help with apprehension and investigations—"you don't get help, you get persecuted"
15. Ensure government follows its own laws and regulations—enforcement of laws and legislation
16. Stop "policing poverty" with rules
17. Address how foster system is abusive because "it does apprehension rather than support" families, parents; we need to find a way shift this
18. Screening of foster families should be improved/better
19. Moms who have had their kids apprehended need more access to kids in foster care
20. Much more screening and better screening of foster parents
21. Foster parents need education on addictions and infants eg: breastfeeding
22. More access to counselling for abused children and kids who have witnessed violence and abuse
23. Make sure women with addictions get access to possible treatment and recovery service options when they are hospitalized; don't let them just walk out

CHILD POVERTY

24. Allow family members taking care of kids to keep their Canada Child Tax—why can't family members collect it while they are taking care of the child?
25. Ensure Canada Child Tax Benefit available to family members who care for kids and kids when they are in foster families: they should not have to miss out
26. Education is the #1 priority to get out of poverty; education should be accessible to all on welfare, "I don't want to be here, on welfare, my whole life, but I need a long-term plan for me to get my kids back, I need education and to get a good job, to get **there.**"
27. More tax breaks for single moms would help, much needed, "when we start working"
28. More money management workshops important