

VANDU Meeting for the Poverty Reduction Consultation

Tuesday, March 20, 2018

@ VANDU 380 E. Hastings

Demographics:

Total number of participants: 31

Number of women: 8

Number of Aboriginal people: 20

Number of Aboriginal women: 6

Number of participants who are currently homeless: 10

Number of participants who have been homeless: 31

Number of participants who are currently on welfare or disability: 30

Experiences of Poverty:

Stigma and Discrimination:

- on the bus
- in health care facilities
- shopping (supermarket)
- by police
- by service providers (housing)
- by welfare workers
- "in our own neighbourhood" by people living in new condos and going to bars

"They follow you around the store like your gonna steal something."

"They look at you like you won't be able to afford your meal."

"Bus drivers shame and humiliate you when you don't have the fare, they make an announcement to whole bus that you haven't paid"

(standing in food line-ups) **"its humiliating with all the people passing by and looking at you"**

Housing and Housing Service Providers:

-- constantly having to deal with **"self-righteous people who used to be homeless or addicted and act like they are better than us"**

-- people spend hours waiting in line for a shelter only to be turned away cause there are no more beds

--staying in shelters they always promise you on your way to getting permanent housing but it never materializes:

“We should be able to see the steps we need to take to get housing”

“Shelters don’t let you in until late (9pm) then kick you out early (6 or 7am); how are we supposed to look for work or housing”

-- people have been on the BC Housing list for years and don’t know what’s going on, there is no transparency in the process

(living in shelters) **“we gotta walk around everyday with all our stuff, with our whole life on our shoulders”**

“I’ve been kicked out of shelter for not picking up my meds”

--We have no rights in our own housing (in so-called ‘supportive housing’)

Health Care:

“They can see we have injuries and we’re in pain, but they won’t prescribe pain meds cause we live in the DTES and we’re native”

-- We get hurried, inadequate treatment

“We get treated like shit at St. Paul’s Hospital”

(Methadone doctors) **“squeeze alot of people in, you line up for hours and then see them for 2 minutes, and they’ll only write you a one week script”**

“Went to hospital with a friend and the first thing they asked was when was the last time they had a drink or did cocaine” (even though that had nothing to do with the condition they were seeking help for)

Policing Poverty:

-- we are constantly profiled by police for being poor and/or native

-- police continue to force poor people in the DTES to do the ‘walk of shame’ (walk from the area where they are detained to cells).

-- many people have the experience of being ‘red zoned’ from areas where they go to access services by police as a condition of release

-- police are always stopping us and telling us we **“look like someone”** they are looking for

-- Kicked out of a park by police:

“You are an eyesore.”

“You couldn’t possibly afford to pay for that bike.”

-- Constantly harassed by police for petty things like no bell on bicycle, jaywalking and vending

“Dialing 9-1-1 for help and having the cops come to my room and arrest me, instead of getting the medical help i needed”

“Legal aid lawyers, if they think your a ‘troublemaker’, will sell you to the crown”

Welfare System:

--The current welfare rates are not enough money to survive

- Frequently waiting for an hour or an hour and a half on the phone to speak to someone about welfare
- If you get frustrated at all, they hang up on you and then you have to call back and wait another hour, or give up:
“They treat you like you really don’t count”

Temp Labour Places:

- we get minimum wage or less because they make deductions for equipment & tools
- the middle man makes all the money
“We do the worst jobs that nobody wants to do”

Recommendations:

Welfare & Income Supports:

- Raise the Rates! We need a substantial increase in both the rental and support portions
- return administration of the welfare and disability systems to the community and get rid of the phone based system
- publicly fund transit, lower fares and provide low-cost passes
- eliminate MSP Premiums

Gentrification & Social Housing:

- massively increase funding to build public social housing with rents geared to income
- rent freeze
- build housing in the DTES so we can keep a neighbourhood where we feel a sense of community and ownership
- build 100% social housing at welfare and pension rates at **58 W. Hastings**
- everyone should be covered by the RTA, stop warehousing poor people in ‘supportive housing’

Criminalization of Poverty:

- end the war on drugs
- rescind or re-write by laws that are mainly used to harrass and persecute poor people: vending, ‘public disorder’, public intoxication, etc
- investigate over-policing of the Downtown Eastside and other poor communities

