

Report from Trail Family & Individual Resources (FAIR) Centre Society

Date:	March 6, 2018
Location	Trail United Church Hall
Community	Lower Columbia (Trail, Rossland, Warfield, Montrose, Fruitvale, Beaver Valley)
# of Participants	63 participants, as well as 20 Recorders / Facilitators, (10 tables) plus 8-10 other individuals who helped organize, looked after logistics, food, kitchen, etc
# of Organizations	9 local community organizations worked together to make this meeting happen and provided the facilitators, recorders and others to help organize the food, hall & other logistics

In planning this meeting, the organizers made a deliberate effort to encourage individuals with lived experience to attend rather than circulating the information to the general public or to other specific sectors of the community. The rationale was that the latter had the resources to travel to attend the formal SPARC organized meeting in Nelson, and we wanted to make sure that the voices and experience of those living on low incomes were both heard and recorded

As a result, all but 2 or 3 of the individuals who took part in the table discussions were people with “lived experience” of poverty and were currently living on very low incomes. Most regularly accessed the local weekly food bank (also located in the Trail United Church) and utilized a variety of other services / supports available in Trail. 38 men and 25 women participated in the table groups. Ages varied from young adults through to elderly persons. The facilitators and recorders at each of the 10 tables came from a variety of community organizations. Other volunteers most notably from the Trail Food Bank, helped with publicizing the meeting, hall set-up, lunch, and so on.

We began the noon session by serving a delicious lunch. Local resident, Jan Morton, from the Provincial Poverty Reduction Advisory Committee opened the session with a few remarks about the provincial process. Participants then took part in table discussions based on 2 Questions:

1. What are the issues facing yourself / those you know living in poverty right now?
2. What would work to address these issues and help you / others out of poverty?

The following pages include transcribed notes from the table discussions for Questions 1 and 2, followed by a list of the top 3 priority solutions from each of the 10 tables.

Please note that we have organized the recorded comments under various headings (listed in no significant order) to better understand the issues, solutions and priorities.

Finally we would like to say that we appreciated having sufficient funds to cover the costs of the gathering including a high quality lunch and providing stipends to participants who were very, very grateful for this “thank you” for their time and input. Many have since told us they are looking forward with great interest to seeing what will be the outcome of this process.

Q1. What are the issues facing yourself / those you know living in poverty right now?

Emotional / Social Issues

- Feel nobody listens to people in poverty
- Stigma
- Isolation, loneliness, lack of socialization
- No security re food, housing medical
- Feelings of humiliation, hard to have or take pride
- Point of crazy – panic attack can’t take care of pets... cats are my buddies; keep me alive (tears)
- Friends don’t understand; feeling isolated; friends putting up walls; I’m isolated
- Can’t afford what is needed for survival; forced to panhandle to get through the month. Choice to pick up butts from street or steal; ultimately humiliate yourself
- Health breaks down..leads to poor choices... needs...disenfranchised
- Self harm – after asking for help and people gave a ‘look” and ignore me: embarrassed / humiliated
- Lack of connection with community (world becomes your enemy)
- Poverty looks like running around to ministry for crisis grant, \$\$, services, just to find out they say “no”.
- Addictions: poverty makes it worse because of the stress; don’t want to get out of bed, shut down, anxiety, depression
- Don’t want to face the world; judged, people telling me to get a job
- Took 7 years to climb up and get myself up and working. I was in a rut
- 3 kids, off work, “stress leave” waiting for E.I., waiting to hear if I qualify; gas for car non-existent, coordinating getting my family to appointments, MH issues for myself & my young daughter... “I am on stress leave to be under more stress”
- Can be shameful to go to food bank
- Don’t feel welcome
- Feel judged
- Affects self esteem
- Living in fear : depending on area; doors being jiggled
- Stigmas: bring judged for being on welfare, having an addiction, mental health problems, where they live
- Getting cut off from supports & the shame (Stigma) of living in poverty

Q1. What are the issues facing yourself / those you know living in poverty right now? (cont)

Social Assistance

- Single parent struggling on social assistance
- Struggling just to get by
- Having to choose between basic necessities
- The standard when applying for disability is to be denied on first application; stress of having to re-apply / appeal the denial
- Living on \$200 after rent is paid
- Employed when on welfare/PWD: claw back of funds: allowable amount has increased but still a disincentive to work
- Frozen /Low income assistance leads to theft and criminal activity
- Basic incomes for children insufficient
- Housing / shelter allowance too low

Housing:

Quality/Quantity/Cost/Location

- Rentals too expensive/ not affordable / high rents
- Hard to find rentals to accommodate larger families
- Hard to find family housing
- Lack of affordable housing/ rentals
- Low quality housing; substandard & rundown
- Inadequate housing; mouldy; single pane windows
- Unsafe housing / lack of upkeep
- Unsafe & unsecured; crime
- Lack of Disability access
- Some owner occupied homes need significant work; need grants to upgrade by not available
- Have to live in bad areas

Utilities

- Utilities are expensive
- High heating costs
- Phone unavailability
- Utilities not included

Landlords

- Absentee landlords
- Landlords aren't fair with tenants; uncaring landlords
- Slum landlords abusive & treat you as if you are not a person
- Uncaring landlords

Homelessness

- Homelessness – having to use shelter or couch surfing
- Homelessness /poverty can lead to mental health issues or substance use

Pets

- No companion animals allowed

Q1. What are the issues facing yourself / those you know living in poverty right now? (cont)

Housing (cont)

Other

- Loss of housing due to hospitalization
- Foreign students accessing affordable housing (instead of local people first)
- BC Housing rules about numbers of bedrooms for a family an issue
- Ministry rules for how children are bedroomed (each child own room) a barrier

Food Security

- Prices / cost too high
- Waste at grocery stores is a problem
- Not knowing where next meal is coming from
- Cheap high-carb food leads to poor health
- Can't afford healthy food (x)
- Always looking for a deal; left overs
- Rely on Community Dinner
- Food Bank
 - o Gives out expired food, sometime mouldy
 - o Lack of healthy food; no produce
 - o Need better distribution / faster
 - o Food banks requiring address is a problem for homeless people
 - o Food bank purchases to supplement donations had to reduce juice, detergent, etc because of cost

Health:

Doctors / Medical/Dental

- Not enough GP's accepting patients
- Hard to find a local doctor
- Discrimination re access to health & dental care
- Physical illness from constant stress

Mental Health / Substance Use

- Mental illness and/or addictions
- More people turning to drugs (eg Fentanyl) / alcohol & dying
- Too much money spent on the "revolving door" drug problem...\$\$ needs to go to housing
- Stress
- Mental health professionals are not always available; people slipping through cracks
- See a lot of people doing drugs / alcohol
- No phone : MH can't reach me; How do I get help/what process
- Access to treatment/ detox centre
- Trauma / Anxiety/Fear
 - o Due to unsafe housing / Use drugs & alcohol to cope
 - o Cycle / Long wait times for help

Q1. What are the issues facing yourself / those you know living in poverty right now? (cont)

Health (cont)

Pharmacare / Medications

- Lack of access to medication and alternative treatments
- Can't afford vitamins
- Medication not covered so I go without
- Can't afford medication so I just don't take them
- Pharmacare deductible at beginning of year

Employment / Skills Training:

Wages:

- Minimum wage too low
- Living wage is not the same as the minimum wage
- Single moms working for minimum wage and trying to find affordable child care often working numerous jobs
- Want to start own business
 - o Lack of seed money
 - o Need insurance
 - o No funding to start
 - o Transportation a barrier

Other:

- Job postings can be hard to find
- Lack of training opportunities: issues: course times & course fees
- Most require grade 12
- Can't get a job without clean clothes, a phone, etc
- Lack of employment / jobs
- Age no one wants to hire me
- Criminal records are a real barrier to employment
- Lack of access to funding for education / skills training
- Reduction in eligibility for EI/AI. People are scared to work in case they are fired and lose their EI

Transportation:

- Lack of available, affordable transportation
- Can't have a vehicle if on assistance
- Puts limits on work opportunities & performance
- No buses on Sunday - therefore part time jobs, casual work is difficult
- Bus cost too high; need free passes
- Unavailability of bus scheduling information
- Bus pass not available on regular benefits; how do I get to apply for work?
- Lack of transportation to and from medical appointments
- Buses filled with foreign students – no room for locals – not willing to give up seats to seniors or expectant moms / Buses filled to over capacity – safety issue

Q1. What are the issues facing yourself / those you know living in poverty right now? (cont)

Child Care / Families:

- High day care / child care costs
- Substandard and poorly paid

Clothing:

- Walking around in wet clothes
- Lack of affordable & climate appropriate clothes available at low cost

Other

- Lack of sufficient snow removal: affects mobility
- Government services are all online; some services not available locally (eg enhanced licence)
- Various levels of government don't prioritize income equality

Q2. What would work to address these issues and help you / others out of poverty?

Community Connections / Social Services / Emotional Support

Community Hub

- Create a community “hub of services”
- Friendship centre
- Navigator / advocate in community to assist low income / MH people. Needs to be in a central hub
- Drop in place where multiple services are available to direct me to the right connections, people, services (eg grief counselling, social services, housing, etc)
- Centre like “Open Door (in Victoria)” free laundry, showers, maybe with apartments upstairs, volunteers
- Community walk-in centre provides opportunity for people to mentor each other, exchange ideas, communicate with each other, offer free events
- Resources to help with poverty reduction could be centrally located/ available /accessible

Support /Programs

- More front line support to get people connected to resources
- Outreach programs for isolated people
- More outreach / advocacy workers
- Day programs to keep busy
- Low barrier programs / drop in
- Free programs to keep people (low income/ mentally challenged) involved in community
- Free programs to encourage healthy social communities
- More support groups, access to resources
- More men’s services
- Need someone to talk through issues, problems to keep me motivated
- Need a sounding board: bridges between impoverished and community & help people who are isolated & not able to speak up or advocate for themselves
- Volunteer opportunities where I am appreciated
- Advertising “human services” where we can get the information that matters in a timely fashion (like the welcome wagon)
- Someone to bridge to the services: who is paid to help: not a volunteer who only has some time.
- Care for each other

Activities/Entertainment

- More free community events (similar to this)
- More low cost entertainment
- Affordable activities

Educating the Community re Poverty

- Fundraising, exposure, publicity re poverty issues
- Community needs to be educated on abilities, potential, availability and skills of those on assistance
- Change stigma around homelessness

Advocating for Resources

- Need advocacy for resources
- Need to connect with resources – grants, etc / More money for social services and programs

Q2. What would work to address these issues and help you / others out of poverty? (cont)

Social Assistance (also see other categories (eg Health) that list needed SA benefits

- Increase social assistance & disability rates
- Increase social assistance so we can live
- Higher shelter allowance
- Increase social assistance as per rise in cost of living
- Need enough money to cover all medication; Inclusive coverage
- Medical/dental needs to be available (same as disability rate) for those on basic assistance.
- Increased access to Social Development Services – local officer in each community
- Increased money for more barriered individuals
- Raise limits allowed to earn when on assistance
- Government needs to “top-up” allowance for low income units
- Provide parents with more funding to engage in recreational activities with kids

Housing / Shelter

Quantity/Quality/Affordable

- More affordable, clean, low cost housing / Build low cost housing
- More money for subsidized housing/ co-ops
- Need more housing geared to income / for low income; needs to be clean, dry, warm, safe
- Increase amounts of “real” low-income housing (current proposal is only 4 unit & actually not very inexpensive)
- Need government regulated housing
- Safer environment / security in affordable housing
- Need supportive housing (for addiction, abilities, etc)
- More Assisted living spaces / housing with supports. .Seniors can’t afford current housing
- Make boarding houses an option...creates a safe space & community
- Look at other housing models: eg students living with seniors; students get affordable housing & seniors get help
- Fix up existing housing / vacant space
- Turn abandoned buildings into affordable housing
- Railroad cars or other structures for housing (eg modular housing on coast)
- Change bylaws / zoning to allow for additional housing / tiny housing, etc

Homeless Shelter

- Year round access to a shelter
- Increased shelter spaces / shelter hours

Landlords

- Enforcing the tenancy act when it comes to poor property management/ need advocacy
- Rent control enforcement
- Stricter laws for landlords

Utilities

- Low income utilities support / rebate
- Cap on cost of utilities

Q2. What would work to address these issues and help you / others out of poverty? (cont)

Housing (cont)

Pets

- Allow pets wherever you live
- Allow people in difficult circumstances to have pets
- Eliminate pet surcharges from rent deposits
- Allow renters to have pets (stops women leaving abusive relationships if can't take pet)

Other

- Rent rebates / tax credit for low income
- Registry for housing...too many hoops
- SAFER Program needs to have lower age to qualify (policy changed from 55 to 60 in 2004)

Food Security

- Home delivery of food hampers for elders & less-abled
- Co-ops / community gardens; encourage/compensate vendors at farmer's markets to donate goods; person accessing food can offer help (barter)
- Better quality food available
- Stores give their produce / fruit
- More community gardens & programs
- Ability to give time for food in return
- Food/diet plays into mental health – healthier food at food banks (4 food groups): be able to respond to dietary concerns, diabetes, autoimmune diseases, etc
- Community Farms: work exchanged for food & lodging: promotes sustainable food & sustainable farming.

Health

Medical / Dental

- Walk-in Clinic:
 - o Provide basic health care
 - o Staff with nurse practitioners
 - o Counselling
- Inclusive free dental care
- Increasing funding for dental & medical services
- Free dental & medical care
- Dental care s/be more than for pain management

Pharmacare / Medications

- Free prescriptions & over the counter supplements or an allowance to cover these costs
- Enough money to cover all medications / inclusive coverage
- Lobbying government at federal/provincial levels for all medications covered
- Expand Pharmacare: eg some birth control options are free/others not

Q2. What would work to address these issues and help you / others out of poverty? (cont)

Health (cont)

Mental Health: Children & Youth

- More mental health services for children and youth;

Addictions:

- Legalize all drugs so crime rates go down
 - o expand treatment options
 - o Monitor quality control
 - o Focus on harm reduction

Other

- Local Veterans' services
- Affordable foot care
- Improve discharge planning & follow-up care

Child Care / Families

- More affordable child care; more places like Sanctuary (free after school centre) support for working parents
- Child care needs to become accessible, affordable & reliable
- Affordable childcare/ access to childcare
- Support families so they can stay in own home
- Need support for special needs children
- Parents need lots of support

Pets

- Help with looking after pets: eg spaying, vaccinations, etc

Employment

- Higher minimum wage
- Increase minimum wage NOW
- Post jobs / want-ads at Food Bank, sanctuary, Assistance office
- Post opportunities for training, etc where people gather – give information rather than requiring people to search
- Create a community Bulletin Board at the Library (not everyone uses online resources!)
- Better jobs (higher wages, better benefits, higher minimum wage)
- More volunteering opportunities that can lead to employment
- More access to employment:
- More jobs
- Education of employers to hire more disabled
- More job opportunities for seniors; Mentoring by seniors to young population
- Expunging criminal records
- Offer minimum wage community clean-up program. People then have pride in where they live & in themselves

Q2. What would work to address these issues and help you / others out of poverty? (cont)

Skills Training / Education:

- More funding for post secondary schooling
- Post secondary schools should be free
- Lower tuition costs
- Skill development / job training /transitioning
- Help in returning to school: better access, funding
- Skills training
- Access to adult education, diplomas, certification
- Access to equipment for work – work boots, camera, phone, computers

Technology / Computers

- Help for internet costs; most services online
- Subsidized internet in people's homes
- More computer access & free copying
- Help with computer skills
- Need access to discounted equipment for self-improvement (such as computers)
- Access and training re technology

Transportation

- Improve transit / Increase bus service
- More buses at busy times (end of school/end of day) run later into the evening and Sundays
- Need annual bus pass & service on Sunday
- Free bus passes
- Discounted taxi coupons

Clothing & Household Goods

- Higher quality coats, shoes, etc (eg coats 4 kids model)
- Need bedding – made available other than in thrift stores`
- Free laundry facilities

Police

- Educating RCMP why low income / MH people are doing what they are doing (1 dot)

Priority Solutions: 3 each from 10 Table groups

Community “Hub”

1. Community Walk-In Centre
2. Development of a Community Hub: central location for services, post secondary training/ employment opportunities, health & mental health services, food bank, housing office, etc.
3. Open up free Laundromat , possibly with apartments upstairs , showers & food (Issue: laundry too expensive)
4. Need a Centre (Friendship Centre) with outreach programs for isolated people, day programs, drop-in, low barrier programs, outreach, advocacy, computer access
5. In a central “hub” have advocates/navigators assist people to move thru system

Social Assistance / Wages / Income:

6. Increase Social Assistance to an affordable living wage
7. Increase Social Assistance benefits in line with cost of living
8. Increase minimum wage NOW

Social Services/Programs

9. More money for Social Services and programs
10. More funding to CDS (Career Development Services) to help with the basics...CDS is providing assistance to find housing and help with most issues faced by people in poverty. All at this table find them helpful

Housing:

11. Affordable Housing / Healthy ‘Safe’ housing
12. More Housing that is affordable, clean, safe, geared to income
13. More money for subsidized housing & low cost housing
14. Affordable Housing
15. Increase amount of truly low-income housing / fix up existing housing / vacant spaces
16. Need affordable. clean, safe housing, rent control enforcement, disability access, pets allowed, low utility costs
17. More affordable, clean, low cost housing
18. Some low income owner occupied homes need significant work / need grants to upgrade but not available
19. More supportive housing – addictions, abilities, etc

Priority Solutions: 3 each from 10 Table groups (cont)

Food Security:

20. Improve Food Bank services with strict guidelines, taking into consideration concerns such as diabetes & auto immune issues (Issue: Diet plays into mental health)
21. Zero waste store for groceries for low income people...don't need to throw out food/use near expired food (Issue: hunger, want to eat healthy food (good nutrition) not "Mac & cheese")
22. Need better food; stores should donate produce, fruit. more community garden programs
23. Community farms – work exchanged for food & lodging. Promotes sustainable food / farming

Health

24. Need accessible Mental Health resources that include; working out in community to initiate process, government hiring more workers, online access to a MH professional (Issue: Mental Health Access)
25. Increased funding for Dental & Medical care

Child Care / Families

26. More affordable child care and support for parents

Employment / Skills Training

27. More access to employment : training, more work opportunities, education, increased minimum wage, raise earning limits on Social Assistance
28. Funding for post secondary education with access to a better job with higher wages, better benefits, higher minimum wage
29. More volunteer opportunities that lead to employment or a bartering system

Lobbying:

30. Lobby government at federal/provincial levels for funding (Issue: costs of medication, healthcare, housing)