



# **Transcript: Community Meeting on Poverty Reduction**

**Fort St. John, BC  
March 23, 2018**

## Introduction and Event Summary

On March 23, 2018, the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction hosted a community meeting in Fort St. John, BC to discuss poverty and poverty reduction with local residents. The event brought together approximately 50 to 60 participants including people with lived experience of poverty; poverty reduction front line workers and advocates; people from the non-profit and business sectors; and other community members from all walks of life.

The event began with a welcome from Elder May Apsassin and Elder Arlene LaBoucane followed by opening remarks from Shane Simpson (Minister of Poverty Reduction and Social Development).

Participants then engaged in round table discussions in groups of 8 to 10 people per table. Each table had a dedicated facilitator from a local community group or from SPARC BC who helped to guide the conversations. Each table also had a dedicated note taker who helped to record the discussion.

There were two rounds of discussion which focused on the following questions:

1. What are the issues facing you and people living in poverty right now?
2. What would address these issues and help you and others out of poverty?

Following the discussions, participants were invited to put a sticky dot beside the strategies or solutions that were most important to them. Each participant received four (4) sticky dots. Following the individual priority setting exercise, participants were asked to determine as a table the top three (3) priorities from the evening and to report these priorities back to the room.

The Minister of Social Development and Poverty Reduction shared some closing remarks.

## Document Organization

This document contains the transcripts from the flip chart notes from those in attendance. The flip chart notes have been transcribed verbatim, correcting only for spelling and grammar as needed. The notes are organized according to the feedback received to the two questions beginning with:

1. What are the issues facing you and people living in poverty right now?
2. What would address these issues and help you and others out of poverty?

## Question 1: What are the issues facing you and people in poverty right now?

- Housing
  - o People need access to affordable housing without restrictions
  - o People also need access to housing subsidies to help cover the cost of housing
  - o There might be models or approaches for mixed income housing/shared living models
  - o One possibility might be shared living arrangements between seniors and community living
  - o There are more individuals coming to community living but there is no housing for them
- Children and Youth
  - o Children going from MCFD support to CLBC system can fall through the cracks
  - o Residential homes have to be provided by BC Housing
  - o If BC Housing isn't adding any more units where will these people live?
- Site C
  - o Site C is being built
  - o Jobs are being given to people out of town
  - o Something like this should benefit the local workers – i.e. There should be provisions that require that a percentage of jobs go to local workers
  - o People thought dam would bring a lot more jobs here than it has
- Housing
  - o There is the need for more low income housing geared to single women or families
  - o Need more housing for single men and people with disabilities
  - o BC Housing looks at the community as not needing housing. As a result, Fort St John did not get the amount of social housing that was promised
  - o There is the perception that Fort St. John has a transient population
  - o Non-profit run housing has to fund replacement through fundraising
  - o Some of the buildings that are privately owned need to be condemned
  - o A lot of the rental housing stock is owned by slumlords who don't care about the tenants
  - o There are missing roof tiles and the ceiling is ready to cave in
  - o The landlords blame the tenants for the problem they say that the tenants didn't clean the snow off the roof but that was 14 years ago and the landlord still has not fixed the problem
  - o In many of the units you can see black mold on the walls
- Employment
  - o People have issues getting jobs if you use marijuana
  - o When using medical marijuana you should still be eligible for employment
  - o Employers should only test for illegal use of marijuana
- Food security
  - o There should be better access to food for everyone
- Health Care
  - o There should be MSP coverage for the working poor
  - o Many people can't afford the cost of medication
  - o Dental care is not covered
  - o Glasses are not covered
- Transportation
  - o It is difficult for people to be able to afford bus fare/transit fare

- Transit fare should be covered for people who are low income/working poor
- The Greyhound bus service is closing down. This is going to hurt the community
- Accessing HandyDart can be difficult
- The timeframes for HandyDART are not good
- Accessible taxi services are not available
- Children and Youth
  - There should be hot lunch programs for kids
  - No agendas go back and forth for children whose parents don't pay school fees
  - People who are low income do not have money for school supplies
  - Parents have to engage in continuous fund raising for basics
  - It is hard to pay for the busing/transportation fees for kids to get to school
  - It is especially hard for parents who do not have the resources
  - School fees raise issues of inclusion because some parents simply cannot afford the fees
- Access to Ministry Services
  - People who do not have access or cannot use technology need help to access Ministry services
  - The lack of access to Wi-Fi can create a real barrier
  - There are long wait times for Ministry services
  - Not everyone has enough minutes on their phone card
  - Not everyone has access to a phone
- Services/Supports
  - It is difficult to access legal services
  - Sometimes people need help with legal hurdles to get jobs
  - Non Profit and volunteers can burn out from trying to help without the proper funding/resources
- Health Care
  - People do not have the resources that they need to travel for medical services
  - There needs to be better response times for primary care
  - People need easier access to medication, glasses, food
- Judgement/Stigma
  - People are labelled because of their family history
  - People are not given the opportunity to change
  - People who are poor feel written off by society
  - There is a certain amount of racism – one property management company said that they would not rent to anyone with a specific last name – it did not matter that they didn't know the individual
- Mental Health
  - People have long waiting times for appointments
  - Lack of early identification of mental health issues can lead to more serious problems later
  - Lack of access to help delays changes for the better –people don't get the help they need
  - There are significant medical issues but doctors are not available in the community
  - Grande Prairie or Alberta are the closest locations for rehab services
- Education/Special Needs
  - There are long waiting list in schools for Special Education Assessments
  - "People have to label in order to enable"—creates inherent bias against those with condition

- It is possible to get more funding and support if a child has a learning disability that is found in time
- It is important to ensure that the supports are there for the children who need them – ADHD
- Unemployment
  - Unemployment is hard for people
  - People feel a real sense of shame if they are not employed
  - Fort St. John has a low unemployment rate, but it is still hard for some people to find employment
- Housing
  - Manufactured home units should be affordable. Pad rent is \$550 per month + taxes (2 dots)
  - For a working mother – it is the cost of the pad rent that gets her
  - 1 Bedroom = \$800 – \$900 for a basic rental apartment (before the economy changed)
  - 1 Bedroom now rents for \$500 to \$550 per month + utilities
  - The rents came down after the oil and gas bust
  - Before the change in the economy, the vacancy rate was less than 1%
  - The most important priority is to have a roof over your head
  - If you have a roof over your head you can likely manage the rest
- Income Assistance
  - For clients with barriers people have to agree to full support
  - Not everyone can access PWD assistance
  - If you can't get PWD you have approximately \$710 per month
  - A rent of \$550 per month, hydro of \$50 per month means there is no money for food
- Food Security
  - Food security is an issue
  - The Friendship Center (FC) and Salvation Army provide food
  - The Friendship Centre offers food cards for milk, yogurt, vegetable
  - The Salvation Army provides access to dry food
  - Many people run out of points which means that they really struggle to feed themselves and their families
  - The kitchen ran dry last year – there was not enough food for everyone who needed it
  - We are not only feeding the community, we are feeding people who come to the community looking for work – it puts a strain on the system
- Employment and Access to opportunities
  - I saw an expensive truck with 4 men pull up – they were driving from community to community looking for work and sleeping in their truck – they had no food and barely enough money for gas
  - They said that they came to Fort St. John because they thought that they could get a job
  - There are not enough jobs or opportunities to go around – competition for the jobs can cause poverty for the people who live in the community
  - People look like they are doing ok but in behind they are not
- Transportation
  - The community is going to be severely affected when the Greyhound bus service is cut
  - The airline already stopped running some flights (1 dot)
  - The community is becoming increasingly cut-off
  - It is difficult to get around in the winter time – people don't always keep the sidewalks clear

- HandyDART hours are limited and there have been some recent cutbacks in the hours
- Changes to HandyDART have made it more difficult for many of the seniors who rely on this service
- Housing and Homelessness
  - Rents are high
  - The highest vacancy rate in Fort St. John was during the month when the Site C camp opened
  - People are trying to find housing but the rents are still too high for many
  - Homeless individuals face particular challenges finding housing
  - Too many clients face multiple barriers
  - Property managers talk to each other. Some of the property manager go back 10 years and deny people housing
  - A number of the property management companies are from elsewhere (outside the community) – they don't care about the community
  - Landlords are experts at going to court – they take your damage deposit and evict you – you have no way to get your damage deposit back – they know what to do
  - Some of the property managers are better than others but a lot won't fix up the property
  - If you do not have a bank account – they will not rent to you
  - The First Nations housing in the community has a 3 year waiting list - a number of the units were sold to pay for repairs – now there is less housing available to meet on-going needs
  - 2 gentlemen getting water at 6pm because it was minus -15°--They go there because shelter doesn't open until 8 pm
  - The shelter does not have the staffing or resources to stay open all day
- Site C and Employment
  - People come to Fort St. John looking for work
  - They come from all over the Province (Victoria, Vancouver)
  - They use the services that are available in the community –shelters/food banks
  - It makes it harder for the people from the community who are struggling and need the service - people who really need the services can't always get them
  - People moving to the community take the place of local workers
  - They stay outside of town at the Site C camp – they even have their own doctors there
  - The issue is that money is not coming back into the community
  - People who don't come from the community don't feel a connection to the community
  - People are really here to work and then to go back home
  - The transient nature of the population has resulted in increased crime and violence – there are also more drugs
  - The environmental consequences of Site C will be worse than estimated. There is a lot of valuable agricultural land that will be destroyed not to mention the traditional Indigenous territories. There is natural medicine that is grown in this area and that may never be recovered
  - Estimate 19.4 million cost – the government should use the money for alternate technologies like solar, wind, and geothermal instead
- Policing/Law Enforcement
  - There is no First Nations officer to work with people on reserve
  - RCMP officers are designated to specific geographic areas
  - If one (1) of the RCMP officers is on holiday, then you have to call Prince George

- Affordability/Cost of Living
  - o My Hydro bill for 2 months was \$284, and I live alone
  - o The Friendship centre and BC Housing hand out subsidies to pay for utilities - it doesn't make sense – one government Ministry paying the other
  - o People have to choose between paying for hydro and eating
- Food Security
  - o Groceries are expensive
  - o Flour, baking powder, water, everything is expensive
  - o When the goods are on sale we buy for 4 families
  - o We have to buy bottled water because the quality of the water on reserve is poor - people can't drink the water on reserve
  - o People have to steal from Walmart because they have no food
- Health Care
  - o There are only 2 walk-in clinics in town
  - o The emergency room waiting times can be seven hours
  - o A family doctor is only available on reserve two times a month - there are always huge line ups - people have to make appointments 3 weeks in advance
- Affordability
  - o People can't afford gas, food, cigarettes, etc.
- Housing
  - o The last social housing in the community built 20 years ago
  - o Need more housing assistance in Fort St. John
  - o It is a money issue in building more affordable housing (4 dots)
  - o Fort St. John may have enough housing but incomes are not high enough
  - o People with disabilities can't get housing
  - o Housing rules are too strict
  - o There is the need for more low cost housing for low income people
- Income Assistance
  - o The earning exemption for PWD is too low
  - o People with disabilities struggle
  - o The cost of hydro is too high
  - o Why does it cost so much for hydro when we have the facility in our backyard?
  - o \$1,200/month for hydro – some Elders pay even more
  - o People are afraid to earn for fear of losing benefits or maxing out – if this happens they could be left without cheque for months
  - o The \$375 for shelter is too low
  - o Rental rooms start \$500 per month
  - o Apartments rent for \$690 (rent + water/sewer for bachelor)
- Access to Ministry Services
  - o There is no face to face support
  - o If you have a problem, you don't have the ability to find a resolution
  - o Ministry staff don't always communicate
  - o People who are unsupported by Fort St. John community face a real struggle
- Transportation
  - o HandyDART ends at 5pm (Monday to Friday) and Saturday has only limited hours of operation
  - o The city bus runs until 7pm (start at 6:45 am)
  - o The City bus does not run on Sundays or on stat holidays

- In the cold weather minus 40° and snow is falling makes it hard for people to get around
- The cost for a round trip is provided you complete it within 2 hours
- Fuel \$1.30 litre – big portion of pay cheque
- Health Services
  - There is limited access to medical services available here
  - There are no specialists. People have to go to Vancouver or Edmonton to see a specialist. Flight to Vancouver costs \$600
  - There is a 17 day wait for mental health services
  - Some people have to wait anywhere from 60 days to 1 year. The situation can escalate during this time
  - Once you are out of hospital in Vancouver, Kelowna, people have to find (\$) for their own way back
- Seniors
  - Seniors are relying on Old Age Security and home sharing
  - OAS increase over time, but CLBC funds decrease when OAS goes up
  - Many elderly have medical issues
  - Rents in general go up when service/needs go up
  - Elderly have more medication and medical expenses but no way to cover these costs
- Education
  - Kids can't catch the school bus or have a locker without paying a fee
  - If a family is struggling to make ends meet it is often hard
  - Post-secondary education is not really for low income families if they can't eat
  - The cost of living is expensive – people need to have a living wage
  - The economy was booming in 80s so a lot of people left school in grade 8-10 to work in oil patch – they are now 50 year olds who don't have an education
- Economy and Education
  - In 2015/2016 when oil prices went down a lot of people lost their jobs
  - People had to walk away from homes
  - Now you need at least Grade 12 to find work - without Grade 12 you can't even push a broom
  - People need help to get the training they need
  - Certificates and tickets are needed for everything
  - Signed up for computer skills, budget, resume + interview skills (Work BC)
  - In early 2000 you could apply to 5 or 6 jobs and get calls from almost all of them with job offers
  - When the going gets tough there are no rainy day funds
  - When the downfall happened people had to abandon their houses, cars
- EI Support
  - There is too much red tape to get EI
  - Over the last 10 years it has been harder to get EI
- Child care
  - Reliable childcare is difficult to find - spaces and hours are limited
  - Many people (mostly women) work in the hospitality industry – this means that they work later hours. They need daycare that are flexible
- Food
  - People cannot afford to buy meat and produce. It is cheaper to buy Ichiban
  - People feed kids Ichiban + Kraft dinner for \$.0.27

- It is hard for people with dietary restrictions. The prices at Price Smart and Save on Foods continue to go up
- There is a new No Frills – so prices are getting better, but you can't always find what you need there
- It is hard when you live in a more remote community – you pay \$3 for cucumber, and you have to eat it right away
- When you buy veggies you have to cut away where it is already going over
- Canned goods are bought on sale, case lots, e.g. corn, pork + beans
- Services and Supports
  - Living on PWD you have \$1,133/month – rent is \$850 + hydro, food, personal care – there is not a lot for entertainment and not a lot left over
  - Salvation Army offers alcohol and drug support
  - People who want it can get it
  - First Nations people also get support through their Band – including the Band will send people out for treatment
- Employment
  - Newcomers and outsiders come from other areas – they spent funds to get to Fort St. John and then cannot find work
  - They have no money – they take jobs and services away from the local people
  - Employers keep people on the hook, inconsistent work
  - Not paying on time means that staff/individuals have issues paying bills
  - Oil, gas, forestry, mining nearby, some tourism
  - The economy is generating service jobs as well as seasonal employment along the Alaska Hwy
  - There is the need for more professional jobs/services
  - Provides locally – one with no waiting list
  - boom + bust cycle
  - Living cheque to cheque
  - If a cheque is missed, people are in trouble
- Supports and Ministry Services
  - There is the need for more early childhood supports
  - There are too many hoops to jump through – there are too many questions
  - Issue with having used savings, i.e. how did you afford before
  - Economy went down, people need help while it picks up
  - I waited a month to hear that I didn't qualify for support
  - Social assistance doesn't cover rent
  - Staff are gatekeepers to support
  - Their focus is on the prevention of abusers/fraud
- Housing
  - People are living in over-crowded conditions because of the high cost of rent
  - There are no vacancies for apartments
- Addictions/Substance Abuse
  - The rehab and treatment services are in Prince George
  - Need proper rehab centres
  - They have a waiting list – it is always full
  - Want to have no wait lists
- Education
  - The college offers some programs

- Jobs BC has some support but have to fight for it
- Some people are abusing the system, others turned away
- Employment
  - The lack of work, skills/training (tickets) is hard
  - Changes in the industry since 2009/2010 have meant that some people are facing greater challenges finding work
  - If you don't have a ticket, you don't have work
  - The economy was busy – there was lots of work until 2009
- Housing
  - Housing is expensive
  - Rentals are expensive
  - 1 bedroom \$1,200 to \$1,500 per month plus living costs
  - Gas + hydro are at least \$250 per unit.
  - Fort St. John has a high cost of living
- Transportation
  - The cost of running a vehicle is expensive
  - There are limited transit options
  - Service frequencies are poor
  - There are only limited houses of operation on Saturday and no service on Sunday
  - There are no buses out to the job sites
- Homelessness
  - There is some homelessness
  - People have to be resourceful
  - There is the Salvation Army Shelter, the Women's Resource Centre, the Foodbank, and the Extreme weather shelter
- Mental Health and Addictions
  - There are not enough resources for people with mental health challenges
  - People have to go to Dawson Creek for help
  - The waiting times are long – sometimes it can take 6 months to get an appointment for a referral
  - People lost jobs - many people felt stuck which led to an increase in substance abuse/drugs
  - There are not enough mental health professionals
  - There is no rehab centre, the only one is in Prince George
  - The hospital offers 1 bed for detox
  - The women only rehab centre in Baldonnel – it is run by a religious organization which can be a barrier
- Health Care
  - Medical/dental is not covered
  - GPs are in short supply
  - It is hard to get an appointment
  - Travel to see a specialist is expensive – people have to pay to see a specialist in Vancouver
  - Bus fare between cities for medical appointments is expensive
  - Specialists in Vancouver
  - 6 hours to travel to Prince George
- Training/Education
  - Student poverty is a different issue

- Training is expensive
- Basic tickets are \$600 and have to be renewed every 3 years for renewal
- Access to Government Services
  - Access to Ministry services is limited
  - 2 people in Service BC, familiar with Ministry guidelines is limited
  - Given # same spot for Drivers License – 35-40 min/person
  - The employment Assistance Workers are not from this area – you have to call Terrace, Kelowna, Vancouver
  - The office takes the paperwork only – there is no assistance with applications
  - The Ministry has downloaded the services to non-profits when they amalgamated Service BC (2 yrs. ago)
  - The service is poor, the old system was better
  - The old system used to take 20 minutes – now it takes 40 minutes
  - Everything is done online
  - Some clients do not have access to computer/email
  - Computer literacy is low among many clients
  - The library is closed on Mondays so there is no place to upload documents
  - The 1866 number doesn't work because applications fail
  - It can take 3 to 4 days of going back to the Ministry queue to resolve their issues
- Transportation
  - The Greyhound ends in June – it is going to have a devastating impact on the community
  - People with seasonal jobs relied on the Greyhound
  - People in high risk relationships won't be able to leave town – this will impact poverty
  - Northern Health bus is restricted to health
- Health and Transportation Issues
  - The beautiful hospital has limited utility because limited number of doctors
  - Basic healthcare – people have to wait over 1 month for an appointment
  - There are limited services - no cardiologist
  - The charitable status is jeopardized if bring in contracted services/partnerships
  - People have to go to Grand Prairie/Prince George for medical appointments
  - Northern Health Bus can sometimes take 2 to 3 days
  - People with disabilities can get transportation but people can be banned from Northern Health Bus
  - When the Greyhound service ends soon no way to get to appointments
  - People on income assistance don't get coverage for hotel rooms or bus tickets
  - Driving conditions to Prince George can be dangerous in winter
- ID
  - There are issues with having an ID
  - Some people may not have it – especially if it is lost or if they are fleeing violence and had to leave without it
  - There should be an ID bank
- Employment
  - Need more jobs & job opportunities
  - Need bridge with employer/employee to help people find jobs
  - Train people, organize programs to help people find jobs
  - Employment Connections provides 1 day training but it doesn't connect you to jobs
  - Eligibility criteria does not always fit - too narrow (PWD)
  - McKenna requires you to type 60 wpm to be eligible

- No assistance to help people get back into workforce
- Northern Lights College – is great for trades connections
- You can't access Employment Connections if you use/have an addiction
- WorkBC/Employment Connections is not working the way it was intended
- Staff turnover is high – people are not confident in their roles
- People are treated disrespectfully
- Even service providers/advocates coming in with clients receive poor treatment
- The oil/gas industry is transient, it does not allow for deeper community
- Communication/awareness across service providers
- Access to information across sectors
- I moved from Alberta – there are same issues there no jobs
- Food security
  - "I lost 20 pounds in 6 months due to food insecurity"
  - It takes energy to look for food
  - Poor diet can have significant health effects
  - Food costs are high
- Mental Health Supports
  - People with MH/addiction issues need support
  - Many are banned from the Ministry offices
  - There are no emergency crisis workers
  - There is a 1 month wait for psychiatrist, even when you are threatening suicide
  - "They don't care about me"
  - Hospitals lack treatment for people with mental health & addictions they give you an Ativan and discharge you
  - Service provisions & funding stops at Prince George
  - Funding is divided up in so many ways that it does not make a real impact – there is no ongoing/multiyear funding
  - The amount of funding and support is inadequate relative to the need and is too short term for service providers
  - Friendship Centre & Community Bridges receive funding for urgent assistance--they serve 10 people/month
- Housing
  - The rents are very high \$600-\$1100 before utilities (high risk, unsafe)
  - Senior/Family/PWD have affordable housing only
  - There is nothing in place for other people (single women with children)
  - People are forced to live together because the cost of housing is too high
- Affordability
  - There are a lot of people who are at risk of becoming homeless – you must choose between food & electricity - it even more complicated when you have kids
  - Men earn more than women historically
  - The cost of living matches the incomes of the high-income earners (People working in oil fields not in the service industry)
  - I am living in shelter and losing weight because there is not enough food
  - There is no middle class in Fort St. John
  - People may have lots of assets but they can't pay for food
  - People are working on 80-90 hour work weeks just to pay their bills
  - Even university educated service providers feel the pinch
  - People can't survive on \$30/hr because the cost of living is high

- If people with education can't make it what does it mean for people who are non-educated?
- Employment
  - The work in oil fields is precarious
  - There are certification issues even if jobs are needed that match individuals' skills
  - Need French teachers but can't get employment in the field
  - Not more diverse employment opportunities – oil and gas is the dominant industry – we need to have the forestry industry but it has died - what happens when oil and gas does the same? - It is not good to have all the eggs in one basket
  - Jobs are the biggest issue
  - 60% of clients lack stable hours
  - 25% are mentally incapable of working as well as 15% of youth less than 24
  - Only low pay jobs are available but even then clients are not accepted into these jobs
  - First Nations find it – hard to find work
  - There is racism against First Nations and other populations
- Food
  - The Food Bank & Food Pantry is dependent on donations
  - There is not enough to feed the families who use it
- Community Issues
  - People working against god's plan
  - Hate & rejection from citizens for those in poverty
  - Churches aren't providing the support citizens need
  - We need to protect the land in the Northeast region
  - Decisions are ruining the Peace River Region
  - Site C is bad decision for the community
- Seniors
  - Seniors' housing is full – people are taking CPP early just to pay rent
  - There are long waiting lists for the subsidized housing that is available
- Childcare
  - Lack of affordable daycare
  - Not enough spaces
  - Single moms must stay home because there are not enough licensed spaces
- Affordability
  - It costs a lot of money to live in north
  - Food costs are high
  - Vehicles/gas and maintenance costs are higher
  - If your vehicle has troubles you can be pushed into hard times
  - If you lose jobs you have to rely on the food bank
- Transportation
  - People have to cycle through snow to get to work
  - Buses do not go to where people work
  - The greyhound bus service is ending
  - There are many poor clients who rely on the Greyhound
- Addictions and Substance Use
  - Fentanyl and crystal meth is big
  - Cocaine was cheap but now crack
  - There are no treatment facilities in Fort St. John – people have to leave the community for treatment

- Addictions are not seen as a health issue but rather as a human failing. There is this bias or perception in the community
- Even older adults often have addictions (alcohol)
- 80% of women experience abuse because of alcohol
- Parents with addiction – trauma, intergenerational
- Health Care
  - “Health care is dysfunctional”
  - Going to emergency is bad
  - Suicide - numbers are high (attempted)
  - There is a long waiting list for treatment
  - Men must commit a crime to access services
  - Many service workers, RCMP transfer out (including medical workers)
  - Northern Health is short 47 nurses
  - Prescriptions start people into cycle of medications
  - People only get 7 minutes if doctors are busy
  - Doctors only have time to prescribe something
  - The doctors will only hear 1 issue at a time – when you are homeless in cold temperatures, the body breaks down – it is never only one issue
- Services and Supports
  - Poverty has a greater impact on women and children (abuse)
  - Men seeking help face barriers – often it is hard to connect – sometimes men do not feel ready to ask for help
  - When family unit breaks down it causes stress for everyone –
  - Lack of access to legal aid is a challenge for both men and women
  - There is gender inequality - the incomes of men in Fort St. John are much higher than a women
- Housing
  - Housing costs keep going up - a 1 bedroom was \$500 1 yr. ago; now \$750
  - Landlords claim that the patch is coming back so they raise rents
  - It costs \$1800 for a 2 bed apartment (+utilities)
  - Landlords even make money from the water bills
  - Tenants have no choice either they pay or they move – they have no resources
  - The low vacancy rates mean that tenants have less choice in terms of what they can afford
  - There are 50 units being built under BC Hydro
- Ministry Services
  - People do not have access to a computer or cell phone
  - It is hard to complete applications on line
  - People do not have a computer and lack computer literacy
  - People have to jump through hoops to get simple services (others are even more in need)

## Question 2: What would address these issues and help you and people out of poverty?

- Supports
  - o The community needs more AA + NA programs
- Taxes
  - o Use household taxes (education tax) to go to school
- Transportation
  - o Provide bus service so families don't have to pay
- Education
  - o People need more access to education programs
  - o Educate the community about the different programs available for education and training
  - o Basic mathematics training will help move some people further ahead
  - o WorkBC provides courses for people to upgrade their basic skills
  - o WorkBC also offers basic courses in math and English
- Employment
  - o The Native Friendship Society offers tickets to work in the oilfields and this work is available to Indigenous and non-Indigenous people
  - o There are several job boards with different jobs are around town
  - o Some people don't want to work but there is work available
  - o Client eligibility for employment services
- Discrimination
  - o Businesses are often reluctant to hire people with a disability
  - o There is fear about hiring someone with a disability - there is a need for education for employers about the benefits of hiring people with disabilities
  - o Businesses do not always want to hire single parents
  - o People need to help others find suitable jobs
  - o There is stigma or fear of the unknown – there is the need for more outreach and education to help employers to hire (5 dots)
  - o Government should create incentives to encourage employers to hire people with disabilities and low income people
- Income Assistance
  - o The Ministry has to increase the \$375 shelter allowance
  - o A room at the Richmond Hotel is \$400 a month (5 dots)
  - o Shelter cost should vary by region, but the Ministry should ensure that the shelter allowance covers the full rent
  - o The Province should look to see how other Provinces handle this issue
  - o Need to increase the overall amount that is available for shelter
  - o Without increasing the shelter portion, a lot of the support dollars are going to rent leaving families with very little to live on
- Homelessness
  - o The Salvation Army offers housing and food for people with low income
  - o People have to pay for their housing and pay for food
  - o It doesn't matter who they are they shouldn't have to pay for food
  - o The extreme cold weather shelter is for people who are low income and low barrier

- Those who fit low barrier do not have to pay, but those who are low income do have to pay
- Out of a monthly cheque of \$710 there is nothing left over
- The shelter is only open at 8:00 p.m. In extreme weather there is the need to have the shelter open before 8 p.m.
- It is dangerous not to have the shelter open earlier in extreme weather (5 dots)
- People hang out, sleep, or pass out where they can to stay warm
- The extreme weather beds close on the Easter long week. It is still cold outside– there is the need to keep the shelters open longer (2 dots)
- Services/Supports
  - People need assistance with the cost of hydro
  - Food banks need to provide more help
  - There should be more housing subsidies available
  - Each person gets 35 points for the month
  - 35 points do not go very far. Most people run out of food before the end of the month
  - You have to be able to show ID to get food
  - There is the need for financial supports
- Transportation
  - There is the need to look at the ways to improve the timing of HandyDART
  - People should be given vouchers for transit (2 dots)
  - There is the need to subsidize travel for medical care beyond the Northern Health Bus route (2 dots)
  - Volunteer transportation (1 dot)
  - The schedule for local buses needs to improve – there is the need to add more buses
  - There should be more routes and the buses should come more frequently
  - It is really hard to be waiting for transit in temperatures that are minus 30
- Education
  - People need training in technology
  - People need training in financial literacy
  - Relationship and life skills training is also needed
  - People need assistance with school fees (2 dots)
- Medical and Health Care Supports
  - Provide incentives to professionals to provide services
  - People need hearing tests, eye tests (1 dot)
  - People need better dental coverage
  - People need sleep aids (2 dots)
  - Provide possible tax breaks for professionals to help (1 dot)
  - Get people out of the office and into the communities (1 dot)
  - Expand school programs for all age groups to check health(1 dot)
  - People should have access to services to test eyes
  - People should have access to flu clinics (shots) (1 dot)
  - People should have access to blood testing – i.e. checking for Hepatitis C
  - More resources and employees are needed to help with mental health issues
  - More services and supports for children diagnosed with special needs at schools (3 dots)
  - Eliminate MSP payments
- Housing
  - Expand low income housing and transportation
  - Housing should be accessible both financially and physically (wheelchair) (1 dot)

- There is the need for more low income housing
- The Yukon will pay up to \$900-\$1400 for housing during winter + \$400 supports
- Food Security
  - Establish a food waste program
  - Many people face issues of food security –need help at grocery stores (2 dots)
- Stigma and Judgement
  - Need to develop a campaigns to educate British Columbians on the definition of poverty
  - Need to build acceptance and understanding
  - There should be a dedicated day in BC to reduce poverty (e.g. Poverty Reduction Day)
- Impact of poverty
  - Poverty is not just about money
  - Poverty is about creating opportunities for people to improve their situation
  - Poverty is about ensuring that people have access to the basic necessities
  - People deserve food, shelter, clothing, health care, education
  - People face many barriers that prevent them from escaping poverty
  - Need to better identify who is suffering from poverty
  - Need to create positive experience in how we engage people/help them. (3 dots)
  - How do we support both the poor and the people helping them
  - Volunteers often become burned out
  - Need to get out into the community – go to where the people are
- Homelessness
  - There are outreach vans for reaching out to those who are homeless
  - Outreach workers provide different items to the homeless (2 dots)
  - Support includes food (i.e. sandwiches) (1 dot)
  - Homeless outreach workers also provide socks, toothbrushes, toothpaste, and soap
  - For women who are homeless support includes feminine hygiene products
- Education
  - Need to find ways to keep youth in school
  - People need a minimum of Grade 12 to help get tickets
  - There should be more dual trades programs and apprenticeships (1 dot)
- Youth
  - Open custody for youth should be an option instead of jail (1 dot)
  - Establish youth achievement centres to allow youth to work at their own pace
  - Provide access to free sports and recreation
  - Create an alternate school
  - Identify opportunities to mentor youth
- Food Security (4 dots)
  - People used to trap Lynx – 1 Lynx was worth \$1000 – you could live for 2 years
  - We had a massive family (17 kids) – and we were never hungry. We raised our own food
  - Community gardens could be part of the solution
  - We should engage the community in taking care of the community
  - One thing might be to ask members of the community who garden to plant an extra row that they donate to the food bank – “grow a row”
  - Grow a Row – It could help the community help itself – plant 1 extra row (potatoes, peas, lettuce)
  - Healthy Eating Active living – Northern Health
  - If could get farmers & citizens to grow 1 extra row it could really make a difference

- You could give out seeds at farmers market & explain the concept
- Teach kids in school to grow gardens – they could teach their parents
- NEAT – has a canning program - pick up fruit, teach people how to can
- It's a matter of getting people to HEAR it! – get it out there
- Transportation
  - It is cheaper to go to Prince George by Greyhound than to drive - some people don't have cars
  - Greyhound – is the lifeline for people along Alaska Hwy (5 dots)
  - Prince George to Prince Rupert will also be losing their service all the way to Whitehorse
  - Even if you reduced the number of buses the service would at least still be there
  - Maybe smaller buses are an option
  - There was a mayors meeting on this – many people attended because this is a vital/crucial link to the community
  - The planes are going too – Central Mountain Air has cancelled flights – there are no planes to Watson Lake or Fort Nelson
  - The Northern Health Bus will still be running but you need to be sick to take it
  - Greyhound knows people along highway - family will let the bus know that they need a ride by putting a red flag in the tree
  - Losing the bus is not only about transportation – it is about safety – more people (young women) will have to hitchhike
  - Without the bus more women could go missing
- Income
  - Guaranteed monthly wage
  - Refugees get \$2500/month to help them in transition
  - OAS comes in at \$900/month
  - Social Assistance/Disability/OAS should be increased to \$1970 per month and indexed (2 dots)
  - The rates have to better reflect the cost of living
- Food Security
  - People used to have enough money to buy food, but now people need help to get food
  - There is unopened food from workers' camps, hotels, and hospitals. This food should be donated
  - Need to find a way to get past the regulations & liability issues
  - We should make better use of food donations
  - Food is so expensive
- Information
  - Need more and better information about the community and how it is changing
  - We should be doing the Census yearly
  - We need to find out where the gaps are and really focus on how to address them
- Community Capacity
  - Non-profits also provide a lot of support, but many have seen their funding cut (1 dot)
  - There is the need for more funding for Detox
  - More computer access – various locations. (4 dots)
  - 1 in 10 seniors and people with long term disabilities live in poverty
  - 1 in 5 children live in poverty
  - Seniors can't afford their medication
  - There are no dedicated services to support men (2 dots)

- Ministry Services
  - o People have to prove innocence to get service
  - o The Ministry then turns people down too much
  - o Companies used to cover the cost of your ticket, but now people have to pay
  - o Review labour code with employers
  - o Need to hold employers accountable
  - o Steps Program – gas cards, gear, hotel, funding
- ID
  - o Build a formal ID bank so people can access their IDs
  - o It costs money to replace IDs
- Transportation
  - o Use small transport companies (20 - 30 people) (2 dots)
  - o Government subsidies to keep transportation system (North Peace Bus) (1 dot)
  - o Subsidized charter, once/week at least! Low cost
  - o There are benefits to keep daily service especially women fleeing violence
  - o Medical transportation would get more use if it was more frequent
  - o Multi use transportation system, passengers & cargo
  - o Don't ban anyone from Northern Health Bus – if they are banned there should be a review period. People shouldn't be banned indefinitely
- Food security
  - o Keep growth land (Site C threatens this)
  - o Stores have 3 days' worth of food
  - o Breakfast/lunch & dinner provided every day in shelter
  - o Provide a lunch bag for people who work - bigger portions! (1 dot)
  - o Government funding for the Food Bank & Food Pantry
  - o More formalized food programs are needed (1 dot)
- Mental Health and Addictions
  - o Need more registered nurses and doctors in Fort St. John
  - o There is a need for grief services and counsellors
  - o it's great if you can plan your MH crisis from 8am – 3pm “Monday – Friday”
  - o Recognize that people don't fit in compartments - when someone needs mental health support at 3am, there should be someone there to help
  - o Need more flexibility with MH support workers (1 dot)
- Education/Training
  - o Add Nursing school to Northern Lights
  - o Diversify from the Trades programs (1 dot)
  - o Focus on training that goes beyond the trades & keeps people in community
  - o Diversify the employment opportunities
  - o Train & use local people who know the community and the climate (1 dot)
  - o Remove red tape/obstacles to employment/training programs
  - o Even professionals (doctors) are saying it's too expensive to live here!
  - o Improve Fort St. John so that local talent stays
- Health Services
  - o Build a Rehab Centre
  - o Build a detox centre with shower! (1 dot)
  - o Reduce/remove the 14 day sober clause for detox
- Access to Ministry Services
  - o Contract/sub-contract so the community can properly support its citizens

- Provide funding for another poverty law advocate (6 dots)
- Ministry should increase the number of trained staff
- It shouldn't take 30-40 minutes per client
- Reduce the call back wait for the 1-866 number
- It can sometimes take 3 to 4 hours for a call back
- Bring back local government staff members & offices
- Better integrate the services into the non-profit community services sector
- Loosen up/grow thicker skin when working with individuals with MH issues
- Stop banning people from services like 866 #, Northern Health Bus
- Change policies/procedures to recognize that people are human and that sometimes they are frustrated
- The customer should come first (1 dot)
- Ministry staff need to be trained to de-escalate, non-violent crisis intervention
- Support not timely – sometimes it takes 3 to 6 weeks after the request is made
- There are too many barriers to getting support
- Employment
  - Provide an incentive to employers to hire locals (3 dots)
  - Site C: at least 25% of all workers should be local
  - Specialist jobs can go to people from elsewhere but train local people for other jobs
  - There are inconsistent hiring practices - people are told they are over/under qualified for the jobs that are available
  - Some people don't try/burn out/depression
  - Economic opportunities – LNG announcements, good jobs, well paying
- Supports
  - There should be a balance of supports
  - Doctors, professionals, friendly staff
  - Have time to work one-on-one (work OC) (2 dots)
  - People need to have help to get out there and find a job, door to door, etc. (3 dots)
  - The library is the new community hub for computers, employment supports
  - Support more frontline non-profits, services, etc.
- Training and Education
  - Provide financial literacy training for youth
  - Young make money, then lose their work and are not prepared (1 dot)
  - The economy has a cycle of boom/bust people need help planning for this
  - At 50 years old it is hard to find work
- ID
  - People have to provide proof of ID
  - This can be difficult for some
- The Impact of Poverty
  - Houses are going into foreclosure – this is stressful for many families
  - A lot of people are 1 to 2 paycheques away from disaster
  - But people don't ask for help until too late (pride, denial, lack of financial literacy)
  - The lack of a clear response plan can lead to trouble
- Food Security
  - Children go to school hungry
  - Some schools offer breakfast programs
  - Is this enough and can it be sustained?
  - The community need a better response to food issues

- Food security is an important issue in the community (1 dot)
- There was too much crisis during the wild fires
- Food must be shipped in and depends on the number of factors
- There is a short food growing season
- Flooding good land
- The breakfast program at Friendship Centre provides an important support
- The Women's Resource Centre also helps to supplement clients with food
- The community also has a Meals On Wheels Program
- Income Support
  - Guaranteed Income (4 dots)
  - People don't have enough money
  - A guaranteed annual income would be cheaper in long run
  - People need access to health/dental
  - Some argue that if you help people too much they will just get lazy
  - People working part-time need benefits (1 dot)
  - There should be a living Wage
- Affordability
  - Need to find ways to address the key stressors (1 dot)
  - Taxes
  - Utilities
  - Gas/vehicle/transit
- Health Care
  - Get a nursing school; to live, train, get treatment
  - Less crisis management (2 dots)
  - Provide detox centre
  - Focus on prevention
  - Upstream approaches, which is the preferred model
- Education
  - Provide access to free post-secondary education
  - Help people to break the cycle (single moms) (2 dots)
  - More dual credit programs
  - Provide support to help people get their diploma and high school completion simultaneously
  - Invest in the Northern Opportunities Program
- Health Care
  - Need for funding (2 dots)
  - Medical supports
  - Doctors, nurses, etc...
- Services and Supports
  - Need to invest in the community-based sector
  - Business is an important partner but needs education on the needs (3 dots)
  - Educate the government about the community needs (1 dot)
  - Some services get all the love (Women's Resource Centre)
- Housing
  - BC Housing to invest in prefab homes
  - Change municipal bylaws to access modular housing
  - Compel developers to dedicate 1 or 2 units/sub division as affordable
  - Identify key stakeholders who can make difference

- Build capacity in the community to take on big issues like affordable housing
- Transportation (2 dots)
  - The new hospital is on edge of town – it is hard to access
  - There is no one in town to drive cabs
  - The community does not have accessible/affordable transportation
  - Need Government support for transportation
  - There should be toll systems on the roads
- Geographic Differences
  - There is the need for a Northern Living Allowance
  - Education, medical, transportation costs are all high
  - Prince George is not the North
  - Education support for those who stay & work
- Supports for Northern Communities
  - Government enforce taxation rules
  - Funds not coming to local community
  - Establish an M.O.U. with corporate interests
  - Provide incentives for young, educated people to stay in community
  - Recognizing the credentials of immigrants (example of Russian doctors not recognized by BC)
  - Do more research on what is done in other jurisdictions - standardize practices with other Provinces