

BC Poverty Reduction Strategy

Report Back – Whistler Community Services

Event Hosted: Monday March 26th, 2018

Report Completed: Tuesday March 27th, 2018

Number of Participants: 24

Number of Organizations: 2 non- profits, and one Municipal Councillor

About the participants:

4 single parent households

4 two parent households

3 seniors (65+)

1 youth (16-19 years old)

17 with lived experience of poverty

2 homeless individuals

17 from Whistler

7 from Mount Currie

What are the Barriers and Challenges the Participants Identified:

- Hunger – if the food bank was not available some identified that they would face starvation.
- Housing:
 - Homelessness
 - Under Housing, for families AND for single adults
 - Forced to take unsafe housing, with no options to improve circumstances due to high cost and general lack of any housing (affordable or not)
 - Stress is compounded by housing situation
- Lack of money
- Lack of education or training, and difficulty accessing training due to financial issues and transportation
- They get to a point they feel like, “Giving Up”
- Distance to services – and costs associated with traveling that distance
- Having to triage personal needs “Do I pay for rent or buy food this month?”
- Inconsistent Government Messaging – when clients try to get answers they are given different answers from different people
- High turnover of physicians, hard to get a family doctor
- Bureaucracy

- The amount of money they receive in supports (SA, Disability, EI, etc) is not enough to cover basic costs of living.
- A resort community comes with inflated costs of things, especially housing (rents)
- Government systems that are meant to help are hard to get and the system to get them is a barrier in itself:
 - Difficulties getting CPP/PWD
 - The funding is not enough when you do get it
 - Not indexed to inflation, so as cost rise the benefits do not
 - Even with help filling out forms (advocate) it is a difficult 'impossible' process
 - Hard to find advocates that can assist you through the maze of bureaucracy
 - Especially hard to follow the process to receive supports when you are dealing with Mental Health issues and/or English as a second language and/or Intellectual challenges.
 - The process can be re-traumatizing for people with Mental Health challenges
 - Most face to face services (like Service Canada) are in major centres, even when rural communities like Whistler have some limited Service Canada services, it is usually limited or just printed out information – not physical help.
 - Lots of demotivators in place – certain benefits that are taken away if you achieve something, so there is a disincentive to get out of the situation you are in. As soon as you start working a benefit may be removed and then you lose supports that you are still in need of. No recognition of the time it can take to catch up on costs and get our head above water. So the cycle continues.
- High cost of additional health supports, like pharmacare, optical health, dental, physio, etc.
- Ageism – in all sectors of employment that make it a challenge to find work when you are older, but especially in the service industry.
- Frustration with this very process (of this poverty reduction discussion)
 - A feeling that they won't really be heard and that nobody in social services has listened up to this point – that there is no interest in people's personal stories
 - That government won't take any action
 - That actions will only benefit urban centres
- Transportation:
 - Reduced transit between Mount Currie, Pemberton, Whistler
 - Distance to services, whether the services are in Pemberton, Whistler, or more often...the Lower Mainland.
 - Mount Currie residents outlined the vast availability of work in Whistler, but a barrier to getting there (even if they got jobs – see racism)
- Racism:

- Lots of jobs available in Whistler – businesses are pleading for workers – but there is a reluctance to hire Indigenous folks or once they are hired, they face discrimination or alienation at their place of work.
- Businesses are unwilling to put in the work to hire indigenous workers, such as make transportation work for that employee or educate themselves or other coworkers on reconciliation, residential schools, etc.
- Once people are hired, there is nothing to educate other workers on reconciliation so it is up to the Indigenous person to conform rather than come to a workplace that understands where the person is coming from.
- People assume Indigenous folks get certain benefits that they do not and assume that they are unwilling to work hard, when that is not the case.
- Young graduates (and others with applicable education) from Mount Currie can't get work even with all their education – they are told they can get a dishwasher job, etc. They are told they must start at the bottom, while another non-Indigenous worker with the same or similar schooling would be able to get a middle management or management position.
- Increased racism in rural communities
- Difficult to find a stable, living wage job. Easy to get work, but not to find a job that will provide a wage that can sustain the cost of living.
- Difficult to get out of poverty – get into a loop of getting services, start to get better, services removed before stable, return to poverty. System seems set up to fail.
- Misinformed assumptions of the public about poverty
- Living in a Capitalist Society that puts profits before people
- Broken Political System

Solutions:

Transportation Ideas:

- Transit that reflects local economy
- Public transit to and from rural communities – Intercity
- Financial Assistance in the form of a bus pass and/or gas vouchers for people trying to get into the workforce (currently it is available only for people on PWD as a bus pass, but not for receiving other supports).
- Travel subsidies (gas money or bus passes) from employers to encourage employees from outside communities traveling to where the work is (ex: from Mount Currie to Whistler).
- Train service that is affordable between Vancouver and Mount Currie

Solutions to Racism:

- Educate Canadians from a young age about colonial practices in Canada – including past injustices like Residential School as well as current realities like racism

- Educate Immigrants to Canada, as well as people temporarily living in Canada – such as young workers coming to Whistler for the season.
- Host Indigenous Cultural Days and Events in communities and places of business
- Provide interpretive cultural signage throughout Whistler about the vibrant history of Indigenous heritage in the area. Not just at the Squamish Lil'wat Cultural Centre, but at each point of heritage in the area (Nesters, Green Lake, Whistler Mountain, etc)
- Indigenous Cultural Safety Training for Employers and Non-Indigenous Employees to provide a more supportive working culture for Indigenous employees.
- Indigenous Representation working in Social Services and in levels of Government – Indigenous people would feel more comfortable seeking supports or speaking with levels of government if they saw at least one indigenous person working there.

Equality for Employment (Ageism and Racism):

- Provide a subsidy for hiring older workers (like programs for hiring youth)
- Challenge local employers to hire first nations and older workers who are looking for work.
- Have a provincial advocate for employment justice

Education Ideas:

- More training opportunities
- Make sure training opportunities are more accessible for those with transportation challenges
- Job Placements
- Transitional Supports – so funding doesn't stop as soon as you find work or work too many hours to still be eligible

Fixing the Process/Services that Exist

- Streamline social assistance process
- More services in rural areas
- CPP and Income Assistance Programs raised to a living wage and indexed to inflation
- Have more Ministry Specific Advocates/Ombudspersons for ALL Ministries that need them...i.e., one for Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction.
 - Their role would be to lobby government (at all levels) and support individuals.
 - Should be someone who has had to face poverty at some point in time, so they can relate to the issues involved
 - Can work to reduce duplication of forms, paperwork, and bureaucracy that impedes people
 - Would be independent from government
 - Similar or the same as Ministry of Children and Family Development has

Housing:

- Provide more affordable housing
- Provide more social housing

Mental Health:

- Raise Awareness about mental health – through education
- More supports
- More funding for reduced barriers to access
- Advocacy for persons with mental health

Income Ideas:

- Guaranteed Income – where all individuals under a certain income level receive a guaranteed income that is enough to cover basic costs and allow themselves to move out of that income level if possible. Guaranteed Income Programs are successful in other countries and is being piloted in Ontario.
- Increase minimum wage

Other:

- \$10 a day child care OR affordable child care
- More support for Rural Social Programming (more financial support to community run social services)
- Protecting the land and enforcing current laws to protect the environment
- Political Reform
- Revolution!
- Anti Poverty Activism – a non-partisan organization that lobbies government and advocates for action. In all communities.

Top 4 Solutions, as Voted on By Participants:

1. Ministry Specific Advocate/Ombudsperson to lobby government and support individuals that is independent of Government. (12 votes)
2. Affordable Housing (11 votes), there was no distinction made between affordable housing and social housing, but in Whistler where the Whistler Housing Authority creates what is defined as affordable housing, it is important to point out that WHA is not affordable for many of the people who access social services.
3. Education and Advocacy for Mental Health (8 votes)
4. Guaranteed Income for all individuals under a certain income level to replace SA, PWD, etc that do not cover costs and are difficult to apply for (8 votes)

Other Solutions that Received Votes:

- First Nations Representation working for social services and government (6 votes)
- Educating Canadians and New comers about Colonial System in Canada (5 votes)
- Raise CPP/PWD/EI/SA etc to a living wage and index to inflation (4 votes)
- Travel – increased intercity transit that reflects local economy (3 votes)
- Travel – train service between communities that is affordable for locals (3 votes)
- Travel – Gas vouchers (1 vote)
- Indigenous Cultural Safety for Employers and Non-Indigenous staff (3 votes)
- Expanding Essential Health Services (optical, dental, etc) (3 votes)
- More non-urban essential services and more supports for those local service (3 votes)
- Indigenous Cultural Days and Events in Communities and Places of Business (2 votes)
- Increase Minimum Wage (2 votes)
- More supports for rural social programming (2 votes)
- Protecting the land and enforcing current laws to protect the environment (2 votes)
- \$10 a day daycare (1 vote)