

Community Poverty Reduction Report

Introduction:

Date:	March 26, 2018 and March 27, 2018
# of Participants	25
# of Organizations	7

Participants

The community meeting was attended by 10 people. Everyone worked or volunteered at an organization that served vulnerable populations in the community.

15 foodbank clients were individually interviewed during a distribution day at the Lakes District Food Bank. 100% of the individuals interviewed were living in poverty. There was a mix of single men, young mothers and the elderly interviewed.

Regional Demographics

For the purpose of this report the Lakes District represents the boundaries of the Local Health Area 55 and includes the communities of Burns Lake, Southside, Topley and Granisle. This area is the traditional territories of the Dakelh (Carrier) and Wet'suwet'en peoples. People from the Cheslatta Carrier Nation, Lake Babine Nation, Nee Tahi Buhn Band, Skin-Tyee Nation, Burns Lake Band and Wet'suwet'en First Nation, consider the surrounding areas to be home. The Lakes District Region is a vast area covering 30,000 km². There are approximately 7000 people living in this region and 32% of the population is of Indigenous ancestor and 70% of the population lives outside of the village of Burns Lake boundaries.

The population in the region is shrinking about 1% per year since 2006 and the median age is 42. During this time the youth population (0-19 years) shrunk by 29% and the population over 60 years grew by 19%. There is a shrinking labour force and the unemployment rate is at 12.7 %, almost twice the Provincial average. The labour force is overwhelming reliant on the resource sector and has lower than average educational attainments.

** Regional Demographic information is from Statistics Canada data: Census, National Household Survey, and Long Form Census**

Community Meeting and Interview Findings:

Issues:

- Housing
 - Lack of reasonable affordable housing
 - Need small houses for single men – there is no men's shelter in the area
 - Lack of on reserve housing – people are leaving the community because there is no where for them to stay

- Food Prices
 - Without the foodbank I would starve
 - 40% of people who access the foodbank are working, but can't make it through the month on their paycheck
 - Prices keep going up, but income doesn't
 - I want to feed my family healthy food, but it is too expensive. Cheaper to buy junk food that fills the belly

- 60 % of foodbank clients are children or elderly
- Hydro rates
 - Hydro rates keep going up- very expensive in the North
 - Old age security is not enough even to pay Hydro bill in the winter
- Income Assistance is not adequate
 - "I always have to make a choice of what bill to pay and what to put off – will I pay the hydro bill or buy food?"
 - Everyone should have access to a living wage, despite employment situation
 - "If you are on welfare, landlords that will even consider renting to you. They just slam the door."
- Health
 - Dental Care is too expensive.
 - Often only solution is to pull teeth (children, adults and elderly) – makes it difficult to get adequate nutrition, hard to find a job if no teeth
 - Indigenous medical plans are underfunded
 - Substance abuse is a symptom of poverty and trauma, it is not the cause -service providers often have it backwards and they tend to blame and shame
 - Cost of medication is often preventatively high for elderly
- Lack of education/training
 - Need life skills training for a lot of people
 - Self care, parenting, basic budgeting, job search
- Lack of jobs that you can live off of
- Child care
 - Needs to be affordable and more versatile hours
- Transportation
 - Little public transportation around town or to rural areas. "It is better now that there is the bus that goes between towns, but you have to walk everywhere if you have to get to an appointment in town and if you live out of town you have to depend on friends or pay a taxi."
 - "Sometimes there is work out of town, but there is no way to get to it because I don't have a vehicle."
 - No drivers license – can't afford the licence fees
 - Lack of drivers training
 - Accessing a vehicle to practice on
 - Lack of adequate literacy skills to take the test – no options to do it orally
 - All decent entry level jobs in the North require a driver's licence and vehicle to get to the job
- Mental Health
 - Poverty is a fulltime job- navigating systems and trying to figure out how you will pay a bill or put food on the table
 - The system knocks you down until you have no self esteem left

- Creates hopelessness
- Huge gaps in service -needed to take kids to Kamloops (743 km away) to see someone about mental health issues – there was nothing local
- There is a lot of isolation in the rural areas. People have little access to transportation and there is stigma to asking for help
- Barriers to basic services
 - “Can’t go to school if you are on Income Assistance, so how can I upgrade my skills?”
 - There are some programs you can collect Income assistance and go to school, but the application process is overwhelming and a barrier for many
 - When disaster strikes there is no opportunity to get back on feet – one emergency away from losing everything
 - “I was told that I would have to sell all my assets, before I could access income assistance. I would have to become homeless first. I just needed a little help to get back on my feet.”
 - No access to reasonable credit
 - Auditing – a client was fleeing an abusive relationship with several kids, and was asked to submit notice of assessments and all sorts of paper work. Everything had been lost there was no way to submit any of the paperwork, the system was very difficult to work through...
 - Often service providers will listen to the ‘white’ advocate but ignore the ‘indigenous’ client
 - Indigenous people have more agencies to navigate. Often these agencies refuse to serve someone and send them off to another agency – getting bounced between agencies
 - People on disabilities often have to fill out paper work several times (Federal, Provincial, band).
- Poverty is often the presenting problem in child protection issues – if you solved the poverty issue, you would solve the child protection issue
- People living in poverty are more vulnerable to being a victim of fraud, the criminal justice system, theft, sexual exploitation etc.

Possible Solutions:

- Geographic Location
 - Northern and rural areas need different solutions. They need to be locally developed and locally implemented. Parachuting solutions in from the south will not work.
- Stream line systems
 - There should be one form/application form– if you have a disability designation, then you are automatically enrolled in all the programs and benefits that you are entitled to.
 - I am expected to be handing out resumes every day, there just aren’t that many employers in town and even fewer that are hiring
- Need a safe, welcoming place where people can go to access services – computers for job search, advocates, training etc. A place where people can feel part of the community, some where they belong
- Not enough services in rural areas – in the city there is always somewhere to go (soup kitchen, shelters, supports etc.)

- Need a basic income – a living wage regardless of employment status. Something that can pay for housing, utilities, food, health care, communication and transportation. Something that is reasonable
- Preventative dental care should be covered by MSP – so dental problems don't become a major health issue
 - If everyone had this, there would be reduced healthcare, justice and social service costs- it would pay for itself
- Vulnerable people – elderly, young mothers, people with disabilities need to have access to local advocates to help them navigate systems
- Females are under an employment obligation after 3 years (down from 5) despite the fact there is inadequate childcare and job prospects. Needs to be raised to 5 again.
- The entire system needs to be overhauled – this will take 10 years, so need a bipartisan agreement to work beyond a 4 year political mandate
- Programs and services are often short term. It takes time to build relationships and to see real progress
 - Band-aid solutions are addressing basic needs, but need to break the cycles of poverty and move beyond just surviving
- Systems need to be streamlined to remove barriers for vulnerable people

Actions:

Housing

- Creating stable, affordable housing is the priority for people living in poverty. Once this basic need is taken care of, other social determinants of health are also taken care of.

Living Wage

- Everyone needs to have access to a living wage regardless of employment status. Something that can pay for housing, utilities, food, health care, communication and transportation. Something that is reasonable, so people can get back on their feet.

Systems and Structural changes

- Systems need to be streamlined to remove barriers for vulnerable people. This will require community-based programming and leadership as well as provincial and federal leadership in policy development.