

## Poverty Reduction Meeting March 28

There was 15 people gathered with varied experiences from 5 organizations. A number of seniors were also in attendance. This has been broken up into 2 sections for each question, that was asked of them.

Housing was another common theme expressed tonight. There is not enough rentals, not enough rent controls. There should be more diligence on local govt. to bring in rent controls. Why are developers allowed to build only luxury units? Incentives for developers to build “affordable” housing. But the definition of affordable has been skewed in the City of Vancouver. Salaries are not keeping up with the cost of living and it is driving off the young people. There is an imbalance in the equilibrium in this city. College education have deflated in value and the proportion of debt load to earning power creates long term negative effects. Moving into the suburbs commuting, costs way too much and takes too much time. It is not realistic. Many people have expressed that trying to apply for subsidized housing is very difficult. There is no cohesive list of subsidized housing that shows availability. Accessibility issues with filling out the forms, long waiting lists and shortage of housing were expressed as barriers to housing. Not allowed to have pets increases social isolation. The new minimum wage should be a top priority and it is taking too long to implement. Clothing as a priority is way down the line – *one person said 95% of what I wear is second hand*

Health care was another theme expressed tonight. MSP fees are too high and people are going without medical coverage. The current medical coverage does not cover enough therapies that could help get people back to work. MSP premiums are still too low. People will go without seeing a doctor and therefore feel unhealthy and don’t want to look for jobs. MSP premium assistance is still too low. Seniors and others cannot afford medications – medications are more expensive than food and can force people on the streets – *one senior says, “seniors are living in vans because of the cost of medications”*

Support for mental illness is severely lacking. The promotion of available supports is lacking and public health programs do not help to alleviate poverty.

Accessibility to government service was another concern. Long lines at the food bank can lead to a dehumanizing experience to those in need. There has been no increase of welfare rates since the 90s and the clawbacks keep people from seeking meaningful employment. Help with filling out the forms can be difficult. \$610 can be very hard to get by in this city and food is usually the first thing to go on a budget. The time spent at food banks could be better spent taking care of themselves and the quality of food is lacking. Food should be a right and should be national policy. Build food systems that are accessible to everyone ie. subsidized food system, pay farmers a living wage to grow food for their communities

Technology can be helpful but also detrimental in some situations. Career training is lacking which means kids are leaving school without training to find a job. Such as how to use social media and the internet to create profile. Tuitions fees way too high, cost of textbooks is way too high – digital textbooks should be free. *“Why do seniors get free tuition when young people who really need the education pay and therefore subsidize seniors” – even the seniors in the group agree*

Not having a phone can also lead to social isolation and decreases economic opportunities

Taking care of our elders was another concern expressed by individuals. There is a lack of care aides to assist with filling out forms. The "better at home" program is not accessible and not knowing your rights is a concern for long term welfare. Many seniors do not have pension plans.

Community and Family supports have been helpful when dealing with poverty, although dignity is an overlooked quality with service providers. It can be a demoralizing experience to justify your existence on a regular basis. A basic minimum income would be helpful to many people in the lower income brackets. Building off existing programs and building communities, not service providers. Discrimination (racial & economic) is still an issue and now it's between minorities this makes it hard to find a job – *one person said she is being discriminated against by other minorities more than ever*

The younger people in the group have stated that contract work is more expensive in the long run and can not imagine having children in this city. The cost of living has caused a migration of younger people fleeing the city in search of affordable homes. Income security is an issue employers including the govt. are hiring too many part-time and temporary workers – avoiding providing benefits

## **Part 2... What would address these issues and help lift yourself and others out of poverty?**

On housing, the govt. must incentivize landlords and developers – close loopholes that allow landlords to evict renters so that their family can move in or for renovations – it is too easy for landlords to take exploit these loopholes to get renters out to then re-rent at a higher price. Get developers to BUILD MORE subsidized housing. The city needs more enforcement of its own by-laws.

Make it easier to navigate govt. programs the provincial govt. and federal should set up a system like the City of Vancouver's #311 – number where you can easily find services. Provide free or subsidized cell

phone, and internet services to people that need it – this is necessary for accessing services and getting a job. Provide free computers – keep them out of landfills.

Reinstate subsidized bus passes for people that need them - this enables people to find work, access free services. Graduated bus pass ie. monthly cap  
Some places provide free transit.

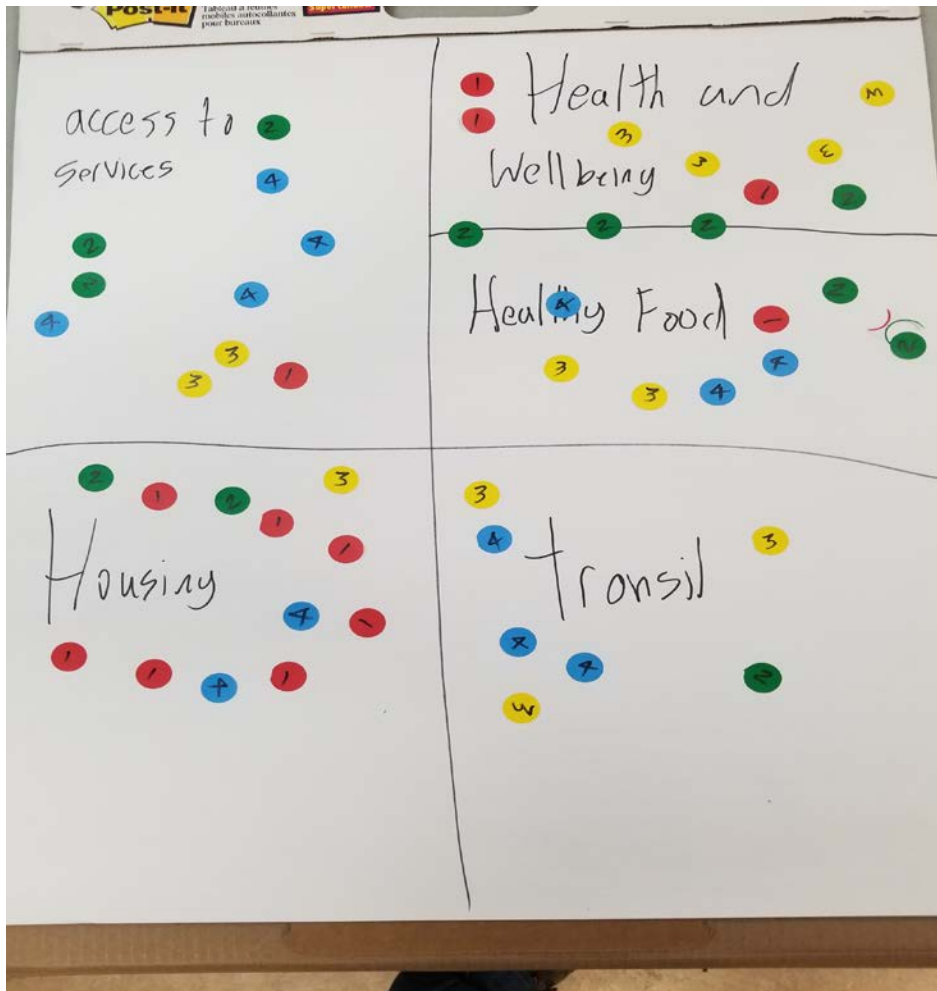
More community discussions and share knowledge. Throughout this discussion participants had discussed ways that they know to access free services and low cost meals.

Need more access to free telecommunication services – this impacts ability to make a satisfactory income and improve a person’s health care being able to research online needs to be available to all

On health care, broaden the coverage for pharma-care (Plan G) promote free and subsidized services such as Naturopathy, Massage Therapy and Dental all provide by students

There was no top three expressed tonight as each concern intersects with the others but if people had to choose in descending order it would be

- 1) Housing
- 2) Access to Healthy food and Health Care
- 3) Transit





There was an internal discussion group that gathered on March 21 2018 at Mount Pleasant Neighborhood House(MPNH). There was 6 people and two organizations. Most of the people present had experienced working with immigrant or refugee clients.

These are their answers to the questions

What are the issues that face you today?

Hunger is a problem for new immigrant. The Foodscape program offered at MPNH helped establish healthy eating habits, improved access to foodbanks, and showed where to find cheap produce. Shopping and Cooking skills were needed to navigate the supermarkets including-reading labels, nutritional content, and developing healthy eating habits.

Many new immigrants have complained that the price of food was too high

Syrians have an attachment to their gardens in their home country and have developed the skills to produce their own food.

Transportation is an issue for new immigrants, traveling in non connecting subway system can be difficult and refugees will often sacrifice clothes, HOUSING, and access to jobs.

Many reported their source of income assistance but that only last for one year. Then most will then apply for welfare. Other countries have different set of family values. Many woman are used to raising children and have reported low levels of education. Which compounds the problems of adjusting to the customs of a new country.

The first year is tough and several themes are emerging for new immigrants. One year of assistance is not enough to learn the language, customs, mobility of the city. A kit for for assimilation would be great for new-comers

Access to community supports such as "Better at Home", "Pathways", or the leisure access card have helped establish a community base to build from. Although many have said that a womans and childrens only timeslot for the pool would encourage more use from some cultures. More work can be done to promote the existing services available to newcomers.

Adult education is hard to access and not language specific An incentive program for peer support system would help with creating a cycle of "old" immigrants would teach "new" immigrants or a one stop shop similar to Work BC model for new comers.

Technology plays a huge advantage such as google translate, Itranslate or similar programs Text to speech. Gordon Neighborhood House offers language classes, online education, typing. Childcare while these programs are going on would help with building new life skills for a new country.

The Welcome centre is a place that new immigrants gather and share stories. It is a stepping stone that offers resources such as Classes for english, a cafeteria, shared common space. This community build ups the strengths around an individual.

There was some negative feedback about the Welcome Centre. Some people never leave the safety of the centre and have expressed that social isolation is difficult as a newly landed immigrant. No outside contact and no friends because of language barriers. People had expressed that a peer support worker to help navigate the applications would be beneficial.

The top 3 issues that were expressed tonight were HOUSING, HOUSING, HOUSING but when further pressed for clarity. Transportation came in at a close second and non-emergency Healthcare ie. dental

Participants had expressed that more food banks with less line ups, promotion of existing services, donations of technology, ie. laptops, cell phones would help combat social isolation by allowing opportunities to socialize with family member back home.