

BC Poverty Reduction Strategy

Small Group Discussions in the Alberni Valley

Community Consultation Report
April 2018

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Poverty in Alberni Valley

The 2016 BC Child Poverty Report Card ranked Port Alberni with the second worst child poverty rating in the Province. Thirty percent of children birth to seventeen lived in poverty. Thirty one percent of children birth to seventeen living within our Regional Districts experienced poverty.

The 2017 BC Child Poverty report shows an improvement in in Alberni Valley stats, however, the region is once again holding the highest poverty rating for children birth to seventeen in the Province. Twenty eight percent of children living in Port Alberni and twenty nine and a half percent of Regional District communities are living in poverty according to Census 2016 data.

Alberni Valley residents participated in two community forums this past year. Both were well attended by those experiencing poverty, support services and policy makers. A missing link at both of these forums was the voice of our youth. This report will summarize the feedback from Alberni Valley youth, a grandparent raising a grandchild and two single mothers.

I would like to honour and express my gratitude to the articulate youth and community members who enthusiastically participated in this process with honesty and courage.

Community: Port Alberni

Date of Conversation #1	April 5 2018
# of Participants	13 youth ranging from 13 to 18 years old
# of Organizations Involved	2
Date of Conversation #2	April 6 2018
# of Participants	6 youth ranging from 16 to 18 years old
# of Organizations Involved	2
Individual Interviews:	March 16, 19, 27
# of Participants	3- grandparent, single mother (age 42), single mother (age 19)

About the Participants

Two community group conversations were held with youth participants. Some of these youth had experienced homelessness with their families; most experienced the effects of poverty each and everyday.

Participants were predominately youth between the ages of twelve and eighteen. The first conversation was with thirteen youth from the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) community and their peer supports. The second conversation was held at the local high school and included a diverse group of youth from multiple backgrounds and ethnicities, including students from two local First Nations.

Other contributors of experiential information and solutions included a grandparent raising their grandchild, a single mother in her early forties and a nineteen-year-old single mom with two babies and another on the way.

In total, the information collected to build this report came from twenty-two courageous community members.

Youth Conversations

What are the issues facing you and people living in poverty right now? (Transcribed from notes)

Being called names for wearing thrift store clothes

Not being able to go on school trips

Not being able to afford sports, get to them or have the clothes. Kids Sport pays for some but when you have no money even paying a small bit is not going to happen

Stigma of asking for help, add to that other stigmas and we aren't asking.

Have to make an appointment to get support. One time my Mom and I had to go to four places because my little brother had no diapers. Everywhere we went said we had to make an appointment. And we were walking. (13 year old)

Not having glasses, I struggle everyday to see the board at school. I feel unsafe because I can't see everything when I am walking home.

Living in a neighborhood that exposes youth to prostitution. Prostitution can pay for a roof to live under, food and safety.

Good food aint cheap.

Food hampers- not good food. This is magnified in Port.

It's easier to shoplift chocolate bars than healthy food.

This is a toxic community but I cant afford to move.

Family life and relationships become a struggle to upkeep

Applying to post secondary schools is unaffordable. Often scholarships ask you to pay a submission fee

Birth control/ safe sex protection available without hoops to jump through.

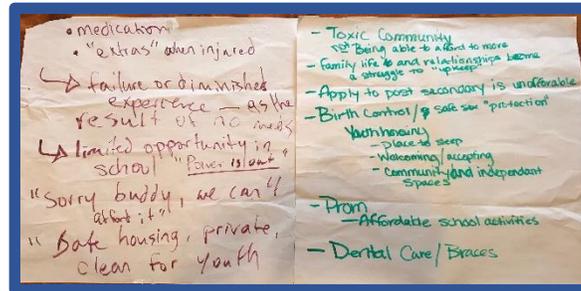
We can get these at school but we aren't comfortable there all the time.

Prom- I can't go to prom, like, who can afford a dress, shoes, hair, makeup and all the other stuff. Rich girls, that's who.

Prom- I saved up my money and bought my prom dress but it was a cheap one. Who wants to go and ask for a second hand prom dress. We already face enough stigmatism being LGBT.

Prom- Why does the school allow rich parents to set the price of Prom at \$200 per ticket. What about those of us who don't have a voice? My parents cant fundraise, they are working two jobs and I am working too. Looks like I am not going to my prom.

My Mom is always stressed. It affects kids.



I can't always have the medication I need, and I struggle without it.

No food

Hydro get's shut off because parents can't afford it.

My friend's hydro gets shut off a lot because her parents can't pay the hydro bill. She calls me crying at night.

Failure or diminished experiences as a result of no meds,

Limited opportunities in school. Sewing class makes you pay for needles, thread and material.

We cant pay.

Why is minimum wage not the same as our living wage?

Even outdoor PE class costs major money. It's not something we can do.

There is another PE class but Counsellor won't let you into it if you are queer.

Unsafe housing is in an issue. A lot of drugs and alcohol and bad things in my neighborhood.

Dental care/ braces. We can't get our teeth fixed. Dentists charge more than healthy kids covers.

My Mom says, sorry buddy, we can't afford it a lot when I ask her for school stuff.

We don't get basic hygiene supplies when we need them. Things like toothbrushes, feminine products etc. should be available.

Can't go to school sometimes when I have my period

We shouldn't have to steal basic need products

We can't afford supplies to support our needs as a transgender person. Ex. Chest binders.

It's hard to gain acceptance as a queer and when you are poor, it is even worse.

How do we get out of this poverty cycle we are in?

School trips. We can't go \$ is a barrier.

Some classes cost money to attend so we can't go.

Graduation costs are a barrier- kids can't afford the cost of graduation.

We can't fundraise like the rich kids.

My parents work and help my extended family-there is no time for fundraising

There is no time for fun things

We don't have all the school supplies we need. When we do, they are the cheap brand that we use. Add to that the thrift store clothes we have on and we feel like crap when the rich kids in nice clothes pull out there expensive supplies.

We don't have enough food, and lots of times we are hungry

Sometimes I have to steal food.

Even if I had food to cook, I don't have a kitchen to cook it in.

I don't have access to safe, healthy food.

I don't fit in with my peers. They often call me out for thrift store clothes and wearing the same thing over and over. I don't have a washing machine.

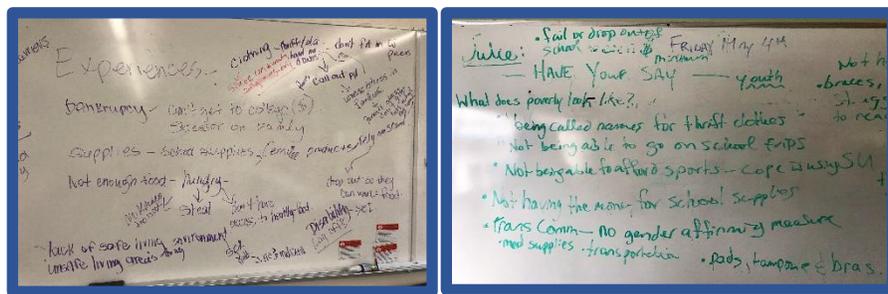
My Mom and Dad are stressed because they can't give me what I need. It hurts.

We rely on school to give us feminine and hygiene products. When kids drop out because they have to work or they cannot take the pressure any more they don't get these things.

I can't get medicine when I am sick.

It's very stressful on my family that we are poor.

Lots of kid's parents are always getting laid off from the mill and are now living in poverty.



Solutions and Actions That Can Make a Difference

Identified Solutions (Transcribed from notes)

Safe housing for youth.

A place where there is an adult, but not one that is all over you. A place to be safe, eat, and stay warm. An adult to talk to once you have some time to think and work through things.

A safe house where youth can go to chill and be comfortable.

Sensitivity training in schools and community.

Healthy food provided all the time at school and in community.

Classes at school be free. I want to take Outdoor Education but I can't pay and don't want to be seen as the freeloader. Asking for help again.

I want to take sewing classes but my Mom can't pay the fee. School classes need to be free.

Access to birth control and hygiene products. Why do we have to steal the basics?

A safe place for youth to hang out. My neighborhood has some very bad things happening in it.

We need a place to sleep, feel welcome and accepted. These houses could be in community and/or independently run.

Make school supplies affordable.

Help my parent's mental health. They always feel so bad that they are stuck and can't get us out.

My Mom gets depression and sometimes she doesn't have money for the medicine she needs, it bothers me that my Mom is sick.

Ya, support for our mental health. I have an anxiety disorder and it isn't getting better with all the crap we deal with.

No money is one issue, add to that being from the LGBT community and we struggle even more. Even some of our teachers don't treat us properly because we are different. Kids at school look down on us because we are poor and call us names because we are queer. It is hard to be at school.

A safe house that is communicated to all youth. Youth wouldn't have to prostitute them selves if they know there is a safe place.

Access to basic hygiene products, regularly.

Access to healthy food, not garbage.

Support that is available when you need it, not when the services are ready.

Access to medication required. Tylenol is expensive and my ADHD medicine is really expensive. I can't function without my ADHD medication.

Support for our parents to link them with supports for our family.

Minimum wage that is equal to each community's living wage.

Stop making welfare the only source of income that people can get. If my Mom works, she has to pay so much in childcare that she makes no money and she doesn't qualify for housing.

Increase rent support to include hydro.

Free childcare.

Poverty and community resource information should be built into school curriculum.

Community housing.

Mental health assessments/supports when people interact with the system.

Free community resources on poverty management- shelters and supports.

Make it a requirement that people actively look for work when they are on assistance and provide the support to them.

Help people get work, go to school and leave the system.

We need internet to do our homework but we don't have it at home.

Youth Identified Solutions

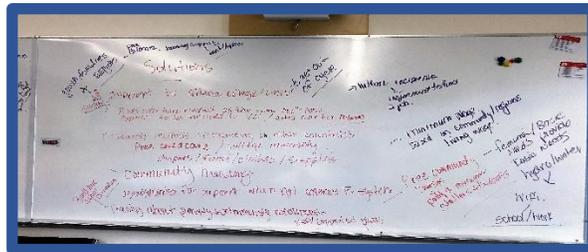
**Youth participants in both groups preferred the conversation and consensus process to the dotmocracy approach. In the first group, a group member was asked by their peers to stand at their brainstorming board and bring each solution forward for conversation and consensus. In the second group, youth preferred to have conversations to identify solutions and came to*

consensus on solutions verbally. The solutions listed in this report are a result of the groups preferred process. Both groups articulated similar top priorities.

What would address these issues and help you or others out of poverty?

Top identified solutions from youth consensus process:

1. Safe, comfortable home for youth to visit and get a break and find help if needed.
2. Access to basic needs such as food, shelter, warmth and basic hygiene products. Access points defined by youth, not just adults. Housing should be a right for everyone.
3. All fees for school need to be eliminated-supplies, course fees, instrument rental, sports and field trips.
4. Increase mental health supports. For our families and us.
5. Make it easier to be off social assistance. It is easier to be on it now. Help us get through school and into College and help our parents return to school if they want. (*Several youth indicated their mothers would like to return but could not because of money problems*).
6. Youth identified ways to communicate to other youth about the supports available. (*They felt youth would not think the only way out was suicide, prostitution, drugs if they knew about available for supports.*)
7. Advocacy opportunities for youth.



Conversation Wrap Up

We finished off our time together with a quick exercise- We asked youth a question and went around the room allowing each person answered.

Share one thing you have not had enough of in your life.

Acceptance
Support and affection
Affection from overworked Mom
Support from mental health services
Support to filter the negative opinions
Love x2
Human touch
Healthy food x2

Movies
People hearing our opinions because we are young
Love. Not enough in my life Money to help my mom
Family. Not enough love of family
Good food. Clothes to wear
Kindness

Interview with a Grandparent

What are the issues facing you and people living in poverty right now? (Transcribed from notes)

We need an increase in support to raise our Grandchildren. Why do Grandparents not receive the same amount from MCFD as the parent does? My daughter is a drug addict and I can't let my grandchild go into the system but I can't always feed and cloth him as he needs. But we get by, barely.

My grandson has mental health issues at 11 years old and I can't get him regular support. He saw the community Psychiatrist once, was given medication and there has been no follow up.

Sports are expensive and I have a hard time covering what kid sport does not pay.

I cannot eat anything processed or my liver flares up and I am useless to my grandchild. I can't eat Salvation Army food as it's not fresh or whole and my body can't tolerate it.

I cannot put money into my pension because I can't afford to work and put him in daycare. With his mental health issues, I am on call for the school in case I have to go get him.

The operator of my trailer court said I had to fix my roof and paint my trailer; otherwise, I would have to leave the park. My furnace is broken so I was heating our trailer with the oven. Now that is broken too and I have no way of cooking. I struggle to buy food, never mind house repairs. Some community groups came to help me and a roofer donated all the supplies to get me a new roof.

I am struggling to do the best for my grandson, and I need counselling for my mental health. I cannot afford to pay for it.

What would address these issues and help you or others out of poverty?

Identified Solutions:

1. Broaden disability insurance to include those who have an autoimmune disorder.
2. Increase MCFD contribution for my grandchild's care. At least to the same level as parents receive.
3. Have healthy food programs in community.

Interview - Single Mom of Four Children:

What are the issues facing you and people living in poverty right now? (Transcribed from notes)

Mom has a 21yr old daughter in university (paying her own way), 13yr old son with Tourette's, 13yr old son with Autism, and a 9yr old girl. She receives minimal to no help from the children's fathers.

I am unable to work as my younger son only attends school part time due to lack of funding for a full time aide for him. The school wants him supported the whole time he is there but only allots him a 4-hour aide.

Older son requires frequent early pick-ups from school. I am very involved in my children's school and volunteer a lot of time there.

My sons ADHD meds aren't covered. I need special approval from the drug company to give it to him free once I prove we have tried other meds that are covered. I tried getting off social services but asked to stay on for medical and dental. They said no. I need their coverage to pay for the boys meds. I once had a social worker say it was 'probably cheaper' for the Government to pay me to stay home then the services I would have to access for the boys in order to work full time.

I don't qualify for disability or person with multiple barriers. I receive child tax credit and income assistance. Every year have to prove why I am unable to work or risk not receiving help. Every year I worry the rules have changed and I won't receive next months cheque. Social assistance gives a family of four \$700 a month for rent. It's currently not even possible to find a two bedroom at that price.

Due to my boys disabilities they have sleep disorders and they are unable to share a room. It usually leaves my youngest daughter and me to share a room or create a third room out of the dining room. I have great rental and personal references but my application is bypassed when employed people are applying as well. We lost our long-term housing because the owner lost his job and wanted the house back. I was unable to secure housing as damage deposit, pet deposit and first months rent is approximately \$3000, not possible with child tax and social services being my only income. I don't qualify for the rental subsidy program because you have

to have worked in the last year. Neighbours lent me their home temporarily while they work out of town. I pay \$1200.00 a month, have no source of heat except plug in heaters and moved in with no smoke detectors in the home. It was this or a motel for my children and me. I applied for subsidized housing last year but there are very few three bedrooms in town, and even fewer four bedrooms. I am on the waitlist for either a three or a four bedroom.

What would address these issues and help you or others out of poverty?

Identified Solutions:

More aides funded in schools.

More options for single parents of special need children.

More subsidized housing options.

Extending the rent subsidy to people unable to work.

Medical and dental offered to low income families.

Interview with nineteen-year-old single mom of two babies and another due soon.

What are the issues facing you and people living in poverty right now? (Transcribed from notes)

Not enough money for food, rent, clothes and medicine for babies.

It seems that social assistance supports are not matched with the cost of living.

I was kicked out of my house when I was thirteen years old. A crack dealer found me and gave me shelter and safety. But I wasn't really safe, I had to trade off things to stay there. I got pregnant at 16 and realized I needed to give my baby a chance. I left in the night and found a safe house. My baby was born and it was perfect, just her and I. Then I met another man. He seems like a fabulous boyfriend until I got pregnant with my second baby as soon as I turned 17. He moved us to an isolated place and lived in an old travel trailer. A few months after my second baby was born, I left while he was away and found another safe house. I have been making a good life for me and my babies. I got pregnant again and am trying to make the best of having no money. I haven't been to school since I was 13 years old and I graduated high school last month via distant learning. I am proud. I am choosing to live a simple life. I do worry about medical expenses for my babies, and things like braces.

Sometimes it all gets overwhelming and I would like to see some one to talk with them. I can't seem to find that resource.

What would address these issues and help you or others out of poverty?

Identified Solutions:

1. Extended health and dental for those living in poverty.
2. Rental support and advocacy.
3. A place where parents could go to receive basic needs, diapers, food, feminine products and peer support. Sometimes it's hard to be the only one (parent).
4. Healthy food programs.
5. More healthy, free activities for young families.
6. Mental health support.

Summary of identified solutions to help community members out of poverty

Safe Housing

- Safe, comfortable home for youth to visit and get a break and find help if needed.
- More subsidized housing options.
- Extending the rent subsidy to people unable to work.
- Rental support and advocacy.
- Access to basic needs such as food, shelter, warmth and basic hygiene products. Access points as defined by youth, not just adults.

Education

- All fees for school need to be eliminated-supplies, course fees, instrument rental, sports and field trips.
- Help us get through school and into college and help our parents return to school if they want. (Several youth indicated their mothers would like to return but could not because of money problems)
- More aides funded in schools.
- More options for single parents of special need children.

Medical/Dental

- Increase mental health supports. For our families and us.
- Broaden disability insurance to include those who have an autoimmune disorder.
- Medical and dental offered to low income families.
- Extended health and dental for those living in poverty.
- Mental health support.

Social Assistance

- Make it easier to be off social assistance. It is easier to be on it now.
- Increase MCFD contribution for grandchildren's care. At least to the same level as parents receive.
- More support for single parents of special need children.

Food Security

- Have healthy food programs in community.
- Healthy food programs.
- Provide support for youth and families to purchase their own food and have a kitchen to cook in.

Advocacy and Community Communication

- Youth identified ways to communicate to other youth about the supports available.
(They felt youth would not think the only way out was suicide, prostitution, drugs if they knew what was available for supports)
- Advocacy opportunities for youth.

Special Needs Children

- More options for single parents of special need children.

Thank you for the opportunity to consult with community and share local voices with policy influencers and makers.

