

Introduction

Date of Small Group Meetings Completion: March 29/30, 2018

Community: Abbotsford

No. of Participants: 9

Number of Organizations: 3

About the Participants

AbbotsfordWorks: supervisor and staff member (no-show for others)

Age 52, middle income, married with children

Age 25, single woman, middle income, no children

Abbotsford Community Services:

Group 1: 6 individuals who are working and on income assistance.

Ages 19 – 22, single women with disabilities and live with supportive care

Age 50, married gentleman making less than living wage

Age 65, widowed female

Group 2: Legal aid representative for farm workers

About the Findings Group 1

1. What are the issues facing you and people living in poverty right now?
 - Housing
 - Co-op housing:
 - Is available in Abbotsford, but there isn't oversight of landlords.
 - Long-time residents refuse to move into older age housing sections so younger families can move into affordable rental housing.
 - There are people running businesses, but aren't claiming all of their income. Therefore, they are able to remain in the housing. (lack of oversight and proper enforcement)
 - Some locations have 2 and 3 bedrooms units, others do not. Those are in high demand due to a 0% rental vacancy rate.
 - Rental rates are out of control.
 - Not enough places to rent.
 - You can't walk to work around here because jobs aren't close to where we live.
 - Income
 - We are a rich and sought after province, therefore cost of living is higher. Our incomes don't make ends meet here.

- Direct Services
 - We need more services in more places, but no one wants those services in their neighborhood (NIMBY)
 - Province provides \$7500 for education. However, many people who are trying to work need English language courses. Additional service funding is only for permanent residents, not naturalized citizens. Therefore, if citizens who don't speak English need financial support, it will cut into their professional development training.
 - Two years ago I saw no homeless on the streets of Langley. Now they are all over. Abbotsford has visible homelessness across the city now. We don't see an increase in services in terms of locations or staff to keep up.
 - Nonprofits are filling in direct relief gaps but are not changing the outcome.

- Healthcare
 - Due to no additional medical/dental coverage, one person stated she hasn't seen a dentist in years.

- Transportation
 - Public transit is in the city, but not in the farm areas of Abbotsford.

- 2. What would address these issues and help you or others out of poverty?
 - Housing
 - More co-op housing
 - Rent control
 - Affordable housing all over town, so we don't have to drive further away to work

 - Income
 - Living wages

 - Direct Services
 - Make multi-service organizations that serve on the front line a "hub". An example is Red Cross of Ithaca, NY. As a person is being sheltered, they are serviced by a wraparound approach of assessment then onsite access of services such as food, clothing, temporary housing, mental health, addiction, support for children, what is needed for the person to work, etc.
 - Either more direct government funding to nonprofits for gap filling programs or government create those programs.
 - Direct service locations expand to other locations around the city as those in need are all over and can't get to the current locations.

- Change English language learning programs to serve citizens and permanent residents. You can be born here and still not speak English. It will improve worksite safety for example.
- Healthcare
 - Expand universal healthcare to more comprehensive coverage including dental and glasses.
- Transportation
 - Major investment into transportation, but not just for cars and in town not so more cars can commute. Transit (rapid and local), clean energy, bike paths.

Solutions that Can Make a Difference

(a)

- Rent control
- Landlord oversight
- Expand universal healthcare
- Expand public transit and create a low income program

(b) 1. Rent control

2. landlord oversight

3. Expand universal healthcare coverage

About the Findings Group 2

1. What are the issues facing you and people living in poverty right now?

The following responses were very specific to contracted farm workers. The responses will be submitted to the fair wages commission in addition to the Ministry of PR.

- Transportation
 - A contracted employer must provide transportation. Rather than hire a driver, the employer tasks one of the contracted farm workers to also take on the role of driver. The driver does not receive additional pay to do the role, feels he has no choice but to accept it, and is typically the employee who speaks the best English and therefore is not trusted by the rest of the workers.

The farm workers are given 2 hours on their one day off (if they get a day off) to go into town to purchase groceries, run errands, etc. So really, the workers have an hour to get everything they need to do. They park at one location and must walk to the other locations if they wish to send money home, etc.

- Some farm workers purchase or are provided with bicycles. The roads they ride on are no longer quiet country roads. They are now regularly commuted roads with no bike lane and riders do not have reflective gear.
- Public transit runs in the city, not on the country roads where farms are located.
- Housing
 - Workers are typically housed in one home with anywhere between 5 to 20 men in it. The capacity for bathrooms and kitchen in these homes are small. Laundry is also a problem.
 - The workers oftentimes have pesticides on their clothing, shoes, and skin after a day of work. Regulations for washing clothes, hands, etc. are not adhered to as they oftentimes work 14 – 15 hour days. With only one or possibly two bathrooms and one laundry for all of them, the impacts of pesticide use will be long term.
- Income
 - Workers are paid minimum wage or piece rates, which oftentimes add up to less than minimum wage. The work is only seasonal, so it is not sustainable for year round expenses.
 - They do not receive overtime pay. Work 7 days a week. 14-15 hours a day (and sometimes more).
- Food
 - The costs are out of control. The workers are going broke just buying food after sending money home to their families.

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

- Transportation
 - Government expand roads to include bike lanes on farm roads, municipal level could provide bicycles and reflective gear. Extend transit to country roads.
- Housing
 - Government should improve housing inspections. It is unclear as to which level of government is responsible for this. Inspections should be “real” – in person, photos taken.
 - Housing should not be tied to employment, because if you complain about your housing conditions you can lose your job.
- Income
 - Raise the minimum wage and stop piece rates. Enforce employment law, including paying overtime, time off. Compensate for workplace injury through

insurance. If Service Canada runs this guest worker program, the provincial government should be shouting from the rooftops at them!

- Food
 - Develop interventions that can bring down food costs. Possibly stipends for shopping at farmers markets.

Solutions that Can Make a Difference

1. Expand roads in farm areas
2. Expand public transit in those areas
3. Provide a free or low income transit pass program

Introduction

Date: March 14, 2018

Community: Sardis

No. of Participants: 24

Number of Organizations: 3, Vibrant Abbotsford, Sardis Doorway for Women, Sardis Community Church

About the Participants

All of the small group participants were single mothers who were working and receiving income assistance or disability. The women were Caucasian, Indigenous, or immigrants from a South American country and ranged in age from 19 to 50. Their housing situations included homeless, shelter, and private rentals. Three of the women had been in foster care prior to ageing out.

About the Findings

1. What are the issues facing you and people living in poverty right now?

- Housing
 - Not enough shelters for homeless, especially youth
 - NO RENT CONTROL, rates are too high
 - No landlord oversight and enforcement
 - Low income housing is in very poor condition

- Income or Disability Assistance
 - The amount of assistance or disability and a job wasn't enough to earn a living wage; funds are deducted from income assistance keeping them in poverty
 - Pooled income for those living with a partner needs to be changed
 - Each has their own children and previous expenses; relationships sometimes don't last, leaving the woman with lower income assistance to fend for herself
 - Income assistance is not tied to cost of housing
 - Front line workers are not consistently trained
 - Accessing services contain barriers: costs for certain reports in order to apply for emergency grants; waiting period to receive emergency funds; long lines
 - Lack of mental health support while on assistance
 - Non-residents are accessing resources
 - No resources for children over the age of 3

- Transportation
 - No bus routes in their areas
 - Several women commented they were fortunate to receive rides from the church (*nonprofit filling a gap*)
 - There was a bus route right in front of the church, but lines and stops are few in this area

- Foster youth aging out – SOS!
 - The entire system needs to be reevaluated and changed
 - Youth in care are oftentimes returned to abusive parents that supports a cycle of mental illness and poverty
 - Life skills are not taught as they are growing up
- Healthcare
 - difficult to access doctors: no one had a family doctor; several mentioned clinics were over capacity; clinics are oftentimes far from the hospital
 - MSP does not cover all expenses related to prescribed care: asthma for example
 - Dental and glasses are not covered
 - Mental health and addictions support are separate programs
 - Many stated the two should be working together
- Food
 - costs are too high
 - no access for homeless youth
 - more access to healthy food
- Childcare
 - None were affordable to this group
 - Very few options, especially for single dads
- Taxation
 - Credits reduce as children age, but they get more expensive as they get older

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

- Housing
 - Increase low income and co-op housing
 - Increase second stage housing for families: men with kids as well not just women
 - Create new rent laws:
 - Tie rent to the unit, not the tenant and put limits on rent rates
 - Increase rental stock
 - Build a better community: mixed use and different income levels integrated – not just building more tiny condos close to services in areas and then only wealthy people can afford

- Income or disability assistance
 - Tied to cost of living (market basket measure) – provides accountability for public use of funds and captures regional expenses better
 - Stop pooling income between a person on income assistance and a partner with a job and not on it: would encourage more families to integrate and make the person on income assistance more secure and independent
 - Increase number of income assistance: offices, staff, and consistent training
 - Evaluate and update the grant crisis program from top to bottom
 - Allow for a savings account

- Transportation
 - Create a free driving school program that includes vehicles to practice in, lessons, test
 - For example, driving lessons for youth in care and/or aged out: a vehicle means more safety, independence, and flexibility for more jobs
 - Low income transit pass
 - Invest in a major expansion of the transit system
 - Build in safety measures for those who travel late in the evening

- Foster youth/aged out youth
 - More wraparound programs are needed (*nonprofits currently filling a gap*) with direct government funding
 - A youth worker could provide more wraparound support from a very young age until after the youth has aged out. People need life skills and financial literacy on an ongoing basis, just as any child with parents would receive

- Healthcare
 - Expand universal coverage to include: post-surgical care, dental, pharmacare, glasses, all costs related to diagnosed illnesses (eg asthma)

- Childcare
 - More free or low cost after school care and extracurricular activities
 - Tax bracket for childcare subsidy raised

- Education – access to and programs related to the 0-12 system was a theme throughout the conversation
 - More access to post-secondary education
 - More financial literacy and family planning education
 - More and earlier special needs testing
 - More curriculum in social issue, life skills, and creative areas
 - More wraparound programming for 0-12, especially in areas of food, after school extracurricular, and music/arts/sports

- Government funding for gap filling programs
 - Unless the government can provide more community building, integrating, and wraparound support programs that also provide free childcare and transportation to participants/clients, then MORE direct funding to nonprofits that do all of the above.
- Law Enforcement
 - Harsher sentences for sexual abusers
 - Standard for legal representation
 - Stick to set court dates
 - FMEP more power to enforce court orders

Solutions and Actions That Can Make a Difference

(a) What types of solutions did the individuals who participated in your meeting identify as most important to them?

- Rent control
- Landlord oversight
- Expand universal healthcare coverage to comprehensive
- Stop the pooling of “common law” income
- More second stage housing
- Savings accounts for those on income or disability assistance
- Fresh food “stamps” – local food stamps for fresh food and/or low cost
- Better support for single parents, including fathers
- Building community by building homes of all income levels together
- More wraparound and other services provided through the school system for 0-12
- Childcare completely subsidized
- Raise income assistance and disability rates tied to cost of living in their area

(b) What emerged as the top 3 solutions or ideas based on the conversations and the individual priority setting?

- Raise the rates tied to cost of living in their area
- Rent control and landlord oversight
- Expand universal healthcare to comprehensive coverage that includes dental, glasses, pharma, post-surgery, etc.