

# Community Poverty Reduction Strategies

## 2015 PROGRESS REPORT



BRITISH  
COLUMBIA

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# Message from the Minister

I am pleased to present the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Progress Report on the Community Poverty Reduction Strategies Initiative.

The initiative began in 2012 as a partnership between the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) and the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM). The participating communities — Cranbrook, Kamloops, New Westminster, Port Hardy, Prince George, Stewart and Surrey — have worked hard to mitigate the effects of poverty for low-income families in their community. The project has brought together existing community resources and encouraged innovative ways to address poverty at the local level, with the goal of helping to alleviate the effects of poverty on individual families.

There is a growing recognition that poverty cannot be addressed by one level of government, one group, or one overarching plan. Poverty is a result of complex, interwoven factors, and it will require efforts at every level if we are to reduce and eliminate its presence in our communities. The initiative recognizes that a multi-sector approach — including local governments, community partners, the provincial government, the business sector and stakeholders — provides the best opportunity to understand the unique challenges and barriers that families face, and to identify how best to meet their needs and make their lives easier.

The initiative is one part of the multi-level approach that governments, community organizations and other stakeholders are taking to develop meaningful, community-based solutions to poverty that address the specific challenges that families are experiencing. Through this initiative, participating communities have learned new ways of collaborating together, have built on the assets that already exist in the community and are working together to improve the lives of people living in poverty and recognize the importance of wanting to expand their efforts to that of poverty reduction.

Communities are at different stages of planning and implementation, but are continuing to work towards developing their own goals and objectives to address poverty and provide direct, meaningful, and concrete improvements to the lives of families who are living in poverty. Some examples of innovative work currently underway include New Westminster's development of a local poverty profile; focus groups with families living on a low income in Cranbrook and New Westminster to help identify barriers/challenges; free transit passes for low-income families in Cranbrook; and, establishing a food bank in Stewart.

The Community Poverty Reduction Strategies, which initially began as seven pilot projects representing a mix of urban, rural and remote communities throughout B.C., will now become ongoing initiatives for those communities who choose to continue to participate. Those that choose to continue will proceed with their work to solidify their poverty reduction strategies and develop ongoing responses to poverty at the local level.

With participating communities moving beyond the pilot project state, UBCM will no longer be an active partner in the initiative moving forward. MCFD will continue to support the work of each participating communities. Family Consultants will remain in the community to continue to connect low-income families with services, and to work collaboratively with community partners and participate on the local poverty reduction planning committees. The role of the MCFD Director of the Community Poverty Reduction Initiative will also continue.

If new communities come forward wanting help with poverty mitigation efforts and/or with creating a local poverty reduction strategy, MCFD will provide support through a local staff liaison that will work with the community's planning committee.

In addition, MCFD has compiled the valuable insight and lessons learned through the initiative into a quick reference guide to help communities that are interested in addressing poverty at the local level. The guide ([http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/pdf/poverty\\_quick\\_ref\\_guide.pdf](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/pdf/poverty_quick_ref_guide.pdf)) provides suggested key steps and considerations that can be taken to mobilize a community to develop a broad-based, comprehensive strategy that will make a difference for vulnerable families – one that is based on the lived experience gained from communities and families living in poverty.

With the help of Jackie Tegart, the MLA for Fraser-Nicola and appointed poverty liaison for the initiative, MCFD will receive updates on the progress that the participating communities are making as they continue to create, refine and implement their own community poverty reduction strategies. We also look forward to supporting more communities, businesses and stakeholders as they embrace their roles in reducing poverty and finding the best ways to support local families.

On behalf of MCFD, I would like to thank the seven communities that have supported this initiative. These communities, along with others in B.C., have demonstrated their commitments to helping local families thrive. The information gathered from each community project helps us to provide a detailed picture of the key barriers and issues that families face as we continue working to reduce poverty across the province.



HONOURABLE STEPHANIE CADIEUX  
MINISTER OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT

# Part One: Introduction

The Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) is pleased to deliver the *2015 Progress Report* for the Community Poverty Reduction Strategies. This annual report follows and builds on the *2014 Progress Report* by setting out:

1. A summary of the key actions, accomplishments, and outcomes over the last year for each of the seven participating communities;
2. Overall observations from the Community Poverty Reduction Strategies; and
3. Next steps to guide the Community Poverty Reduction Strategies going forward.

## ***Background and Context***

In 2012, MCFD and UBCM launched the Community Poverty Reduction Strategies. Recognizing the impacts of poverty, including poorer health outcomes and decreased opportunities for children and youth, there was a shared motivation to work collaboratively with communities to support their efforts to innovatively address the issues and challenges surrounding poverty.

Through the Community Poverty Reduction Strategies, MCFD and UBCM have worked collaboratively with local government, community stakeholders, the private sector and other ministries to support or develop community poverty reduction strategies that are:

- » Focused on working with families struggling with poverty by providing practical support, coaching and mentoring to create personalized plans to move them out of poverty.
- » Comprehensive, community-driven initiatives to ensure more effective government partnerships and collaboration with local communities that result in:
  - Effective, integrated and responsive services and programs that are available for families living in poverty;
  - Practical, flexible and effective approaches to reducing poverty, using existing resources in innovative and more responsive ways; and
  - A collection of information and data that is representative of the systemic themes and issues facing families living in poverty, and that identifies gaps and barriers with existing programs and services.

This initiative helps optimize the use of existing resources across the provincial government, local governments, and voluntary and business sectors to effectively work with and support families who are experiencing poverty. The goal is twofold: in the shorter term, to manage and mitigate the immediate impact of poverty on families; and in the longer term, to work towards reducing poverty in B.C. communities.

In each participating community, a half-time MCFD Family Consultant works collaboratively with community partners to build local teams and community plans that identify the key barriers families face and connect families to the services they need in order to address those barriers.

Each community is at a different stage in its efforts, although all are working towards putting the actions and measures in place that make sense for them. This difference is also reflected in the way that Family Consultants approach their work: in some communities, the Family Consultant focuses on working directly with families to access supports and services; in others, they are focused on developing community links and partnerships.

When the initiative began in 2012, the participating communities — Cranbrook, Kamloops, New Westminster, Port Hardy, Prince George, Stewart and Surrey — created action plans to identify challenges and opportunities in each community, and identified lead organizations to follow up on each action item. Each community focused on different priorities and took different paths as part of their poverty reduction strategies, each responding to their specific local needs and building on their own individual strengths.

Challenges in early 2013 — including difficulties recruiting and retaining Family Consultants in some communities — resulted in a loss of momentum, but by early 2014 those communities were re-engaging in the initiative.

In May 2014, the first Progress Report ([www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/pdf/community\\_poverty\\_reduction.pdf](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/pdf/community_poverty_reduction.pdf)) was released. It provided overall context for the Community Poverty Reduction Strategies, reported on the specific goals and outcomes for each of the seven participating communities, and made a number of suggestions for activities to guide the upcoming year. Specifically, the 2014 Progress Report recommended:

- 1.** *Hosting a second Community Poverty Reduction Strategies stakeholder forum.*
  - A second forum was held in May 2015 — see “Activities Over the Last Year.”
- 2.** *Targeting initiatives towards safe, affordable housing, food security and overall health.*
  - Many of the participating communities’ efforts were targeted at the recommended issues — see “Learning from Communities.”
- 3.** *MCFD to work with its cross-government partners to profile the issue of poverty to the existing provincial cross-ministry ADM social policy steering committee.*
  - MCFD’s efforts over the last year included ensuring that the Assistant Deputy Minister (ADM) social policy steering committee — and government as a whole — considered poverty issues in their work. Some of the results are summarized on Page 22.
- 4.** *Working with major industry and small business to increase employment opportunities.*
  - The inclusion of all sectors, including industry and small business, was at the heart of community tables’ efforts over the last year, as outlined in “Learning from Communities.” As the “Observations” section explains, this is an area that requires ongoing effort.
- 5.** *Supporting the MCFD Family Consultants in each community to raise awareness about available programs and services.*
  - Efforts over the last year are summarized and included in “Learning from Communities” and “Learning from Families” sections of this report.

**6. Fraser-Nicola MLA Jackie Tegart to act as a poverty liaison.**

- MLA Tegart was named as poverty liaison and began visits to participating communities, as summarized in “Activities Over the Last Year.”

Partners involved in the Community Poverty Reduction Strategies recognize that no one party can effectively address the complex issues that both contribute to, and result from, poverty. Understanding that every community is different, and that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to poverty, the communities that are involved in the Community Poverty Reduction Strategies have worked with MCFD and UBCM to develop community action plans to address the barriers that families face in accessing services, and to implement a more interconnected and community-driven approach that helps families connect directly to the services they need.

The role of MCFD and UBCM in the Community Poverty Reduction Strategies has been to support participating communities to develop and implement strategies that are community-driven and focused on efforts and measures that make sense for each community, and to support the existing work that is already underway to address the issue of poverty in B.C. communities. The partner organizations jointly developed public communications and coordinated a forum for participating communities to report on their progress and share best practices.

It is hoped that other communities will find useful guidance in the efforts of the seven participating communities, and that both formal and informal cooperation amongst communities throughout B.C. will result from the groundwork that is being laid through this initiative.

## ***Activities Over the Last Year***

Over the past year, the participating communities in the Community Poverty Reduction Strategies have found themselves at different stages as they organize themselves to develop and implement their own strategies. Some communities’ strategies have involved developing specific or comprehensive plans; others have focused on working on specific projects or plans in the community; others have chosen to focus on working directly with families. Each strategy has responded to the unique needs and challenges of the families in their community. The main actions, challenges, and upcoming efforts under each community’s strategy are described in Part Two of this progress report.

MCFD’s Family Consultants have played a significant role in efforts associated with the Community Poverty Reduction Strategies over the past year. Family Consultants are now in all seven of the participating communities, with the overarching objective of mobilizing, facilitating and working with local resources to address the challenges of poverty in each community. From the beginning of the initiative through to June 2015, more than 150 families have been referred to the initiative, and Family Consultants have directly provided services to 96 families.

Family Consultants produce quarterly reports that are distributed to UBCM, MCFD and their respective communities. These reports reflect both the work underway in the community and the work with families. While each community has developed its own specific approach to addressing poverty, a commonality that they share is the coordinating role that the Family Consultant plays and the valuable role that they serve in working directly with families to help them access the services and supports they need.

Representatives from the Community Poverty Reduction Strategies participated in the UBCM Annual Convention in September 2014. Convention delegates learned about the initiative and its goal to leverage UBCM and MCFD's relationships in communities and offer assistance to families by:

- » Using a collaborative approach to address the effects of poverty on families, while increasing the well-being of community and families;
- » Bringing together existing community resources and encouraging local, innovative ways to address family needs; and
- » Working directly with families to identify the key barriers and challenges they face, develop and implement individual plans, and connect them to services and supports.

In March 2015, the initiative hosted its second Community Poverty Reduction Strategies Stakeholder Forum. Facilitated by Liz Weaver, Vice President of the Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement, more than 50 individuals from the seven participating communities gathered together, including representatives from local governments, community service providers, Family Consultants, and representatives from UBCM, MCFD and other provincial government ministries.

The Community Poverty Reduction Strategies Stakeholder Forum was an opportunity to take stock of the progress made to date, connect and learn from other communities' successes, and begin to build a plan for moving forward, both at the community level and from a provincial perspective. As the facilitator was a nationally-recognized leader in coordinating poverty reduction efforts, the day also included a valuable inter-jurisdictional perspective. Over the course of the day, community leaders shared stories of their progress and also dove deeper in to considering how their community might advance poverty mitigation and reduction efforts. More information can be found at: [www.ubcm.ca/EN/main/resolutions/policy-areas/healthy-communities.html](http://www.ubcm.ca/EN/main/resolutions/policy-areas/healthy-communities.html).

The desire to better understand how best to support families living on a low income provided the momentum to partner with the Canada Revenue Agency to develop a resource to help families understand the range of tax benefits available to them. Through this initiative, it became known that many families were not filing their income tax, so they were missing out on additional income. The resource, which provides information about provincial and federal tax benefits and how to receive help with filing taxes, can be found at: Child and Family Tax Benefits ([http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/child\\_protection/pdf/tax\\_benefits.pdf](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/child_protection/pdf/tax_benefits.pdf)).

Finally, over the course of the last year, Kathy Berggren-Clive, the Director of MCFD's Community Poverty Reduction Strategies Initiative, traveled to each of the seven participating communities to meet with community stakeholders and support, review and consider the efforts that are being made through the initiative. Jackie Tegart, MLA for Fraser-Nicola – in her role as poverty liaison between the participating communities, all levels of government and community organizations – was able to join Kathy when she visited the participating community of Stewart, and both Kathy and Jackie look forward to more joint community visits in the year to come.

The first-hand experience and knowledge shared through these visits will help refine, focus and maximize government's ongoing efforts to support communities as they work to implement strategies, both within this initiative and as part of the larger effort to mitigate and reduce poverty throughout British Columbia.

## Part Two: Learning from Communities

Every community participating in the Community Poverty Reduction Strategies is different, with diverse strengths, challenges and needs. Each has responded to the situation in their community by working on developing and implementing a strategy that is tailored towards their specific priorities. It is clear that there is no one right way to address the challenges of poverty, and each community has approached this in the way that makes the most sense to them: some communities have focused their work on creating partnerships and relationships; some have worked very closely with local governments to bring about dedicated programming; and some have focused on working directly with a small group of individuals and families in need.

This section provides a summary of the key activities, outcomes and next steps that each of the participating communities has undertaken as part of its Community Poverty Reduction Strategy. Each of the communities provides regular updates on activities through their Family Consultant, and these updates form the basis of the summaries that follow, along with community reports provided at the 2nd Annual Community Poverty Reduction Strategies Forum (March 2015).

The following summaries reflect the diversity of the communities involved in the Community Poverty Reduction Strategies: each community is reporting on different priorities and these summaries reflect their own assessment of progress.

### **Cranbrook**

Cranbrook is the regional centre for the East Kootenay, and is the main community that area residents use to access social supports, employment opportunities, post-secondary education, and hospital/medical services.

Cranbrook has identified a number of challenges related to poverty. The key challenges that people face there include: a lack of options for affordable child-care spaces, clothing, and food; a lack of affordable housing and shelters; a shortage of health-care practitioners; and a lack of affordable transportation and education supports.

Like other communities, Cranbrook also faces a challenge in combating the common, but mistaken, perception that poverty is a problem elsewhere *but not here*. This attitude tends to compromise efforts to ensure that poverty issues are on municipal and regional leaders' agendas, and also contributes to a lack of coordinated efforts, communication and information resources for people in need.

Cranbrook's Community Poverty Reduction Strategy includes the creation of a dedicated committee, the Cranbrook Poverty Reduction Committee (CPRC). Efforts to establish a committee originally began in 2012, but lost momentum in 2013. The community-based CPRC was re-established in June 2014. The current committee, jointly coordinated by the Family Consultant and local agencies, is made up of 19 representatives from local agencies, provincial and local governments. The City of Cranbrook has appointed a City Councillor to sit on the committee. The CPRC is a sub-committee of the Cranbrook Social Planning Society. Through the support of Columbia Basin Trust, Cranbrook is a member of the Tamarack Institute — Vibrant Cities.

Over the past year, stakeholder groups and individuals of the CPRC have influenced discussion or action on a number of programs that are specifically related to the identified needs of people in the community, including:

- » Food-related programs (Weekend Backpack Pilot Program and Community Greenhouse discussion);
- » Cranbrook Community Directory ;
- » Cranbrook Clicks – online resource directory <http://www.cranbrookclicks.com/>;
- » Free bus pass program. Through the CPRC’s work to raise awareness, City Council made a motion in March 2015 to provide free bus passes for people on low income; and
- » 3 R Bikes 4 Kids – Restore, Repair, Ride (free bike program for families in need).

As well, over the past year, the CPRC has supported and shared information on:

- » Community Garden program;
- » Cranbrook Family Connections HUB;
- » Cranbrook Farmer’s Market Coupon Program;
- » Cranbrook Food Bank;
- » Street Angels (resource to help people who are living in poverty);
- » Homeless Outreach Program funding increase (to help those leaving domestic violence, institutions or treatment, those aging out of care, and Aboriginal people);
- » Mouth Minders Dental Clinic (free dental care for adults); and
- » United Way – From Poverty to Possibility.

Since the beginning of the initiative, the Family Consultant in Cranbrook has worked directly with nine families, helping them to develop individual plans, and has also responded to specific requests from more than 15 families (e.g. referring to services, answering questions by phone, arranging food hampers for the family). The CPRC’s efforts have helped families move from hotels to stable housing, complete their education or enter new programs, find food through the community garden and farmer’s market coupon program, complete their application for Leisure Services Pass/free bus program and become more resourceful in exploring new agencies and supports.

Moving forward, the CPRC has identified a number of possible strategies to continue to address Cranbrook’s poverty-related challenges, including:

- » Encouraging the hiring of a shared social planner for the City of Cranbrook and the Regional District of East Kootenay;
- » Encouraging the business sector to engage and join the efforts of the CPRC;
- » Building engagement in the community through mentoring programs;

- » Creating a local fundraising campaign for bike helmets/locks for the free bike program;
- » Creating a local poverty awareness campaign during the month of October; and
- » Identifying and advocating for new sources of funding for a community poverty reduction coordinator and poverty-reduction related projects.

## **Kamloops**

Kamloops' poverty reduction efforts have focused on linking and building on the many existing community collaborative tables and initiatives that are currently addressing poverty reduction, and ensuring that the lived experience of families is brought to these forums and shared with existing service providers. Examples of such tables are the Changing the Face of Poverty (<http://www.kamloopsefry.com/programs-services/community-justice/changing-poverty/>), as well as the Homefree Collective ([www.kamloops.ca/socialdevelopment/homefree/#.Vc4xQ5jJC70](http://www.kamloops.ca/socialdevelopment/homefree/#.Vc4xQ5jJC70)) and A Way Home (youth homelessness) initiatives to address housing challenges. Kamloops' efforts have also focused on maximizing and building on existing community resources, such as the *Life Skills Network Committee*. The Family Consultant, in addition to direct work with families, regularly participates at these tables.

Recently, a new Poverty Reduction Working Group was established, which is a sub-committee of Changing the Face of Poverty and will play a role in coordinating the community's poverty reduction projects and initiatives. Membership of this new working group consists of community agencies, including representatives from Thompson Rivers University, the Kamloops/Thompson School District, City of Kamloops, and the Family Consultant. The role of this group is to address the priorities identified by Changing the Face of Poverty. Currently, this committee is researching communities that have subsidized transit in order to leverage support in proposing free or subsidized transit. The second focus is to develop affordable, appropriate child care. To do this, the committee is exploring and researching the efforts made in other communities, working together with the school district to utilize empty space and develop child-care education through "21st Century Learning" and to consider empty space in seniors' homes.

Since the beginning of the initiative, the Kamloops Family Consultant has worked directly with 13 families to increase their access to programs and services, and the city has experienced increased participation in services like the My Place drop-in centre.

People with experience living in poverty have been more engaged and included in new and pre-existing initiatives in the city, providing first-hand feedback and helping with efforts to identify meaningful and effective options to address poverty.

In Kamloops, a key challenge is coming to a shared community understanding of what exactly poverty is, who it impacts, and that addressing poverty is a shared community responsibility. Kamloops is also looking at ways they can effectively engage with the Aboriginal community in poverty reduction efforts. Kamloops is a multi-cultural community with strong representation of Aboriginal nations, both urban and on reserve. Strengthening Aboriginal/Non-Aboriginal relationships has been a priority and work is underway to increase representation, acknowledgement of poverty on Aboriginal people and communities and improve coordination of agencies and implement true collaboration and education.

Addressing these concerns will be a key focus of Kamloops' efforts over the next year. In addition to continuing its work to support individual families and participate in collaborative initiatives, Kamloops has embarked on a process to develop a shared, cross-organization definition of poverty and ensure that this is included in an updated social plan for the city. This work will also focus on increasing education and cultural awareness about Kamloops Aboriginal communities in order to better involve them in addressing their poverty-related challenges and issues.

## **New Westminster**

In Fall 2013, a new Family Consultant began working closely with the City of New Westminster's Senior Social Planner and a decision was made to re-establish the New Westminster Poverty Reduction Committee in early 2014. The City of New Westminster participates on the community committee along with about 20 local organizations, including Fraser Health, MCFD, New Westminster School District, and a number of local community service providers. The work of the committee is focused on three broad streams:

- 1.** Conducting a comprehensive needs assessment, which will provide a foundation for a community Poverty Reduction Strategy and Implementation Plan;
- 2.** Working directly with families to address specific issues and challenges; and
- 3.** Working collaboratively within the community to identify and address the systemic issues and challenges that are contributing to low incomes and poverty.

Over the past year, New Westminster's efforts have included the creation of a poverty profile using the focus groups described in part one of this report, as well as the collection of statistical data; a literature review focusing on strategic frameworks and promising practices; a consultation process with families living in poverty; an exploration of funding and partnership opportunities; and an inventory of resources as part of a community and social services asset mapping initiative. This work has created a solid base of understanding around the challenges and options for addressing poverty, and will inform the committee's formal *Community Poverty Reduction Strategy and Implementation Plan*, which will commence in the fall of 2015.

In addition to participating on the Poverty Reduction Committee, the Family Consultant has worked directly with 18 families since the initiation of the strategy in 2012, helping them connect to programs and services in the community. This work, along with four focus groups and 17 surveys, has provided New Westminster with an effective way to ensure that families' lived experience and voices are being heard and incorporated into actions to address poverty and its underlying causes.

This work supports the City's efforts to create a caring, equitable and inclusive community and builds on initiatives like City Partnership Grants, the Living Wage Policy, the Newcomer's Guide (<http://kidsnewwest.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/Your-New-West-Guide-2012-for-web.pdf>) and the Mayor's Task Force on Housing Affordability and has contributed to an increasing community recognition that poverty in New Westminster needs to be addressed. The City of New Westminster has been an effective partner in this work, and has:

- » Incorporated elements related to poverty reduction and food security in its official Community Plan Review;

- » Prepared a social equity policy, which will help ensure that policies and plans are responsive to the needs of vulnerable populations and that infrastructure, programs and services are accessible;
- » Developed a family-friendly housing policy, which mandates minimum percentages of two- and three-bedroom units in new multi-family projects, as well as addressing housing affordability; and
- » Developed a Child and Youth Friendly Community Strategy, which will inform the design and development of neighbourhoods to ensure that they best meet the needs of families.

Despite these efforts, challenges remain. Key issues that the New Westminster Poverty Reduction Committee has identified include: a lack of service coordination at all levels of government; a lack of affordable, non-market and subsidized housing for families living in poverty; and a concern that not all parties share the understanding that there is a need for a shared response to poverty. To address these challenges, the committee will focus on a number of initiatives over the next year, including:

- » Launching a public awareness campaign to put a face on poverty in New Westminster and elicit the support of the business community;
- » Moving from planning to action by building on the solid preparatory work of the Poverty Reduction Committee and implementing New Westminster's Poverty Reduction Strategy;
- » Developing fact sheets and other information, for use in the community, to help address misinformation and the stigma of poverty; and
- » Targeting intervention supports and services for specific needs by using the neighbourhood profiles and community asset maps.

New Westminster has also identified the need for greater shared resources in terms of best practices, frameworks and templates to inform the work of communities. Improved coordination will help solidify the work that needs to take place in communities, and will help maintain momentum across the Community Poverty Reduction Strategies initiative as a whole.

## ***Port Hardy***

Port Hardy, a community of 4,000 people located on the northern tip of Vancouver Island, has faced significant challenges in recruiting a Family Consultant on a long-term basis to coordinate the efforts of its Poverty Reduction Committee. Despite this challenge, community partners in Port Hardy continue to move forward with a number of initiatives and strategies to address the issues related to poverty in their community — specifically, a number of projects related to food security, financial literacy, and housing and homelessness are now underway.

Capacity remains a significant challenge in Port Hardy. There was a Family Consultant in place for a year during 2012/2013. Then, Port Hardy only had a Family Consultant in place for a six-month period during 2014. However, 10 families received direct services to help identify and address their specific poverty-related needs. As a result, while Port Hardy has a number of initiatives underway to address the issues of poverty in the community, these initiatives are not yet placed within a cohesive overarching strategy.

The loss of a Family Consultant to coordinate the work of the Poverty Reduction Committee has been a specific challenge. In addition to a lack of human resources, the community's ability to develop and implement a poverty reduction strategy is challenged by a lack of physical spaces for programs, aging infrastructure, lack of baseline data, and strong competition for the resources that already exist.

Despite the lack of a Family Consultant for much of 2014, a community meeting was held in May 2014. Representatives from local government and a range of community stakeholders attended and there was a shared commitment to address the effects and impacts of poverty in the community. A city councillor has recently been appointed as the liaison to the Community Poverty Reduction Strategy and will work in partnership with the Family Consultant to move the strategy forward. The community has noted a number of improvements over the past year, including:

- » A reduction in emergency room visits;
- » The development of a food security blog, food sharing group on Facebook, and several community gardens;
- » Enhanced collaborative practice with the Mt. Waddington Health Network;
- » The adoption of an open-door policy and free reading programs in libraries; and
- » The use by the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw Nations of trust funds for innovative programs related to housing subsidies, youth sports and recreation, support of elders, and community emergency funding.

The partnership with the Vancouver Island Health Authority (VIHA) has been key to the successes that Port Hardy has seen to date, and there will be continued efforts to work with VIHA to ensure that poverty-related goals and measures are incorporated into community planning efforts. Representatives in Port Hardy, including a very active Housing and Homelessness Committee, will work over the next year to increase community engagement in general, and also hope to work more closely with other communities across B.C. in order to identify, adapt and implement best practices in poverty mitigation and poverty reduction efforts at the community level.

## ***Prince George***

The Prince George Community Poverty Reduction Working Group was originally established in 2012 and was gaining momentum when the Family Consultant left the position. There was a vacancy for seven months until a new Family Consultant began in February 2014. The Family Consultant worked in partnership with a City Councillor to reconvene the Poverty Reduction Working Group in May 2014. In February 2015, the City of Prince George named its Social Planning Manager as a member of the working group. These steps have resulted in a more engaged committee — one that is currently reassessing its priorities and considering the most effective way to approach poverty mitigation and reduction in the city.

The Prince George Poverty Reduction Working Group has monthly meetings to focus on community partnerships. Since 2012, 21 families have received direct services through Prince George's Family Consultant and the efforts of the Poverty Reduction Working Group. This has included helping families to access income assistance and disability benefits as well as community agencies and services like the Elizabeth Fry Society, Salvation Army, Baby New Beginnings, Family Connections, Active Support Against Poverty (ASAP), KidSport program, and counselling services like the Rainbows Grief and Loss program, Métis Housing, BC Housing, and the Community Care Centre. Through relationships built at the Community Poverty Reduction Strategy table, the Family Consultant has also been able to connect families to the Strengthening Families program delivered in Prince George's schools.

Over the next year, Prince George will address a number of underlying challenges to its poverty reduction efforts. For example, there is concern that more resources are needed to manage the individual and community goals that have been set to address poverty in the city. There is also a desire to better understand the community and the specific challenges it faces, which will be addressed by creating a clearer and more detailed community profile. Prince George will assess its current approach in order to help ensure that momentum at the working group level is maintained and built upon. It will also work to raise public awareness about poverty in the community.

## **Stewart**

Stewart, with a population of about 500, is the smallest community taking part in the Community Poverty Reduction Strategies Initiative. Poverty issues are often overlooked in rural communities, and as a result, the Stewart Poverty Reduction Working Group has had to work harder than others to raise awareness about the existence of poverty in the community.

In August 2012, the Family Consultant worked closely with local government to establish Community Connections which is the Stewart Poverty Reduction Working Group. Since then, the group has held monthly meetings, along with two community forums aimed at identifying poverty issues and ways to address them. This work led to the creation of the Stewart Services Society, which takes a leadership role in coordinating measures to mitigate and reduce poverty in the community. Stewart has also implemented a Poverty Community Action Plan and has updated it twice since 2012. The working group is also working on hiring an outreach worker position for the community. This is a collaborative effort between MCFD, Coast Mountains School District, the Bulkley Valley Child Development Centre and other Stewart partners. The District of Stewart also has an Official Community Plan that includes options to address poverty.

In Stewart, direct work with families has been challenging because the community is so small and it is important to maintain people's privacy. As a result, the Stewart Poverty Reduction Working Group has focused on reaching out to families in other ways, such as holding workshops on healthy cooking, budgeting, recreation options and parenting strategies. Specific services have included the use of tele-health for adult mental health services, a community garden established through a Healthy Communities grant, FRIENDS for Life teacher training and Outreach Early Intervention programs.

Over the coming year, Stewart will work to address the identified challenges in reducing poverty in the community. These include both a lack of specific services such as child care, addictions services and mental health counseling and systemic challenges, such as engaging community partners and leaders. Stewart plans on working specifically with municipal government leaders and partnering with the business community to begin to concretely address the lack of affordable housing in the community.

Stewart also faces challenges that are specific to a small community, including combating the stigma that families face when accessing poverty-related services and the impact that the stigma has on families' motivation to seek help. In this respect, the Family Consultant will play a key role in expanding partnerships and coordinating efforts to raise awareness about the issue and how it affects the community as a whole.

## **Surrey**

When the Community Poverty Reduction Strategies Initiative launched in 2012, it was intended to complement and build on work that was already underway to address poverty and other social issues in communities. When Surrey was identified as a participant in the initiative, the community had already developed a Poverty Reduction Plan, which Surrey City Council adopted in July 2012. The Surrey Poverty Reduction Coalition, which has representation from multiple sectors, was established to oversee the implementation of the Plan and its 75 recommendations. For more information on the plan and the work of the Coalition, visit <http://surreyprc.ca/>.

The first Family Consultant, hired in 2012 to coordinate and lead community teams in developing action plans that addressed the needs of families living in poverty, left the position in the Spring of 2013. An action plan was created but not implemented and it had not been determined if/ how this action plan would fit with the work of the Coalition.

A new Family Consultant joined the initiative in the Fall of 2013 with the focus on working with families and community service providers to identify barriers/challenges for families living in poverty and develop strategies for how to better serve them. The MCFD Executive Director of Service for Surrey is a member of the Surrey Poverty Coalition and attends regular meetings. The Family Consultant also works with the Coalition and provides regular reports.

Since the beginning of the initiative, 22 families have received direct service through the work of the Family Consultant. Support to families has included referrals to services and programs like the food bank, QUEST food exchange, the Rental Assistance Program, StrongStart BC and inclusive family recreation.

# Part Three: Learning from Families

A key component of the Community Poverty Reduction Strategies Initiative has been working with families affected by poverty, and directly learning from them about their experiences, priorities and challenges. Over the past year, the lived experience of people has been obtained two main ways: through a series of focus groups held with families in New Westminster and Cranbrook; and through the direct work that Family Consultants have undertaken on a daily basis within the seven participating communities.

*“There is a lack of respect and understanding from the public, and feeling judged by people is the worst part. When you are poor, you don't feel like you are part of society. We are treated as though we are less than others.”*

In order to truly understand poverty, it is important to talk to those who experience it. As part of their strategy, the community poverty working groups in New Westminster and Cranbrook held a number of discussion sessions with families, in hopes of gaining greater insight about the barriers and challenges that families face in their communities; contributing to community awareness; contributing to best practices for working with families; reducing isolation; and encouraging people with lived experience to participate in grassroots groups and more formal roundtables.

Family participants discussed how poverty affects their daily lives in multiple ways, from their ability to access services to the emotional toll that it takes. This process allowed the community to identify the biggest challenges and struggles for families with results falling into two categories: general impacts on daily life, and specific challenges in providing for the needs of children.

*“I work hard and don't get any benefits. I cannot afford nutritious food, treats for my kids and no outings. I can't seem to get out of the cycle; I try and break it but it seems impossible to get out.”*

General impacts included fear, frustration, stress, embarrassment and anxiety; feeling unsafe and inadequately housed; and an overarching sense of having no choices in life. Families talked about the stress of always being in “survival mode” and feeling judged and misunderstood by the larger community, all of which lead to a sense of exclusion and isolation. Specific challenges and concerns were also identified in areas like finances, housing, food/nutrition, healthcare, transportation, employment and education, connections and recreation, and childcare.

*“There is a lack of understanding about our circumstances and the realities we face: in order to receive benefits, I have to attend an all-day program, but childcare isn't provided, and if I attend an all-day program, I cannot get to the food bank, and I am asked to print and complete a form, but my printer is out of ink and I cannot afford to buy more.”*

Participants also discussed the factors that they thought contribute to people living in poverty and prevent people from getting out of poverty. These discussions were based around personal experiences and identified reasons that ranged from social and emotional challenges to a lack of education and training and from difficulty in accessing supports and services to the basic financial challenge of stretching limited financial resources to cover all the needs of a family.

Importantly, participants also considered what they thought would help them or other people get out of poverty or improve their lives. They identified a range of ideas that were in categories such as child care (e.g. availability of inexpensive or free child care), food security (e.g. farmers' market vouchers), education/training (e.g. assistance in résumé writing), housing (e.g. more opportunities to "rent to own"), transportation (e.g. bus passes for people on low incomes), and community inclusion (e.g. subsidized recreation services). The family focus groups offered valuable insights, not only to the New Westminster and Cranbrook Poverty Reduction Strategies committees but to community partners and planners in other participating communities, and to communities across British Columbia. Similarly, the working groups also gained valuable information through the direct work with families in each of the seven communities.

A new reporting template, introduced in March 2014, allows Family Consultants to collect basic demographic data as well as information about families' goals, challenges, and their progress towards their goals — this approach is helping to better inform communities' responses to the issue and effects of poverty. Data has now been collected from 41 families who received supports through the Community Poverty Reduction Strategies - these included 13 Aboriginal and 5 immigrant families; 29 families with single parents and two in extended family structures; and 90 children. Families also reported the following:

EDUCATION LEVEL RESPONDANTS		ANNUAL INCOME RESPONDANTS (BEFORE TAXES)	
Less Than Grade 9	3	Less than \$10,000	6
Grade 9–12	20	\$10,000 to \$19,999	21
Post Secondary Vocational	4	\$20,000 to \$29,000	9
Trades/Apprenticeship	2	\$30,000 to \$39,000	0
Post Secondary Academic	7	\$40,000 to \$49,000	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>37</b>

In the new reporting form, additional information is captured through entrance and exit surveys. Families are asked to answer a range of questions prior to starting their work with the Family Consultant and at the end. Families identified the following as their top three challenges:

- » Financial – eligibility and adequacy of income support programs;
- » Housing – inadequate safe and affordable housing; and
- » Food/Nutrition – high cost of food.

Families are reporting that their situations have improved, that they have an increased awareness of services in their community and how to access them, increased confidence in their ability to address future challenges that may arise and that the practical assistance and unconditional support of the Family Consultant made a difference in their lives. Families reported feeling more hopeful about their situation and more connected to their community.

Family Consultants, through their direct work with families and community partners, have also been able to identify themes and issues that are important to people living in poverty - the top challenges that were identified are the following:

THEME/ISSUE	CHALLENGES
FOOD AND NUTRITION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to fresh, affordable, healthy food</li> <li>• Lack of food programs at high school</li> <li>• Lack of transportation to and from food banks</li> <li>• Having to prove “need” at food banks</li> </ul>
EDUCATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of recognition of foreign education and degrees</li> <li>• Cost of courses and schooling</li> <li>• Debt accumulated through student loans</li> </ul>
CHILDCARE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shortage of childcare spaces</li> <li>• Need to use affordable alternative care, which can put children at risk</li> <li>• Families applying for Child Care Subsidy must be registered in a program, but families cannot afford child care while they are waiting for approval</li> <li>• Limited English-language programs that provide on-site, no-cost childcare</li> </ul>
HOUSING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High rents reduce income available for food and other necessities</li> <li>• Loss of affordable housing stock due to redevelopment</li> <li>• Lack of housing options for larger families</li> <li>• Long wait lists for subsidized housing</li> <li>• Lack of supportive housing for youth leaving care</li> </ul>
HEALTH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulty accessing or affording dental services for adults</li> <li>• Difficulty accessing healthcare practitioners (location, language barriers)</li> <li>• Lack of PharmaCare coverage for certain medications</li> <li>• Difficulty getting assessments and referrals to specialists</li> <li>• Lack of supports/services for children with special needs</li> </ul>
CONNECTIONS, INCLUSION AND SUPPORT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of social support system</li> <li>• Not being able to access recreational activities</li> <li>• Not connected to culture, family, or community</li> </ul>
COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some families are unaware of what services are available to them in their communities</li> <li>• Lack of access to the internet to access information</li> <li>• Language barriers</li> <li>• Lack of support in applying for English-language classes and finding classes that offer no-cost child care</li> </ul>

THEME/ISSUE	CHALLENGES
EMPLOYMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shortage of meaningful employment opportunities for newcomers</li> <li>• Low-paying jobs</li> <li>• Working two jobs and still not making ends meet</li> </ul>
CULTURAL SENSITIVITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need for more information and education for service providers around cultural differences and understanding</li> <li>• Difficult for refugee families to pay back the federal government's travel loans; impact on availability of funds for food and other necessities</li> </ul>
TRANSPORTATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need for bus passes to help people attend appointments and get children to school</li> <li>• Money used to pay for transportation affects ability to pay for shelter and food</li> <li>• Limited hours of operation in smaller communities</li> </ul>
FINANCIAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inadequacy of income assistance rates</li> <li>• Complexity of benefit application process and waiting period</li> <li>• Lack of support to grandparents raising grandchildren</li> <li>• Student loan debt</li> <li>• Accessing loans and not being able to re-pay them</li> </ul>
LEGAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited access to Legal Aid</li> </ul>

Information such as the summary provided in the above table, is valuable for Family Consultants and community partners, as they plan and implement their own Community Poverty Reduction Strategies. Examples of some of the specific outcomes for families include:

- » Connecting a family with the Rental Assistance Program and increasing their assistance from \$50 per month to \$700 per month;
- » Helping a mom complete her taxes so she could obtain PharmaCare and child support - the resulting increase of income allowed her to secure safe, affordable low-cost housing;
- » Helping a mom access child care so she could attend hairdressing school;
- » Helping families access free recreational activities through KidSport;
- » Connecting families with food banks, food hubs, and a Farmer's Market Coupon Program;
- » Helping families with the application process for Income Assistance; and
- » Helping families locate household items, such as beds, cribs and dressers.

# Part Four: Learnings and Observations

In considering the progress made to date through the Community Poverty Reduction Strategies, the complexity of defining a shared and consistent understanding of “poverty” is an ongoing challenge. This is understandable given that Canada does not have a shared definition of what constitutes poverty. What is shared and consistent across all communities is the recognition that poverty is a multi-faceted issue with multiple causes and contributors that no one single solution will eliminate. The complexity of poverty calls for a multi-partner approach, and this is one of the strengths of communities’ efforts — they are bringing together representatives from many of the relevant sectors, organizations and levels of government to work on a strategy that will best address the issues in that community.

In addition to this overarching observation, the work that participating communities have reported on over the past year — and the viewpoints they have expressed at gatherings like the Community Poverty Reduction Strategies Forum — give rise to the following themes and findings:

## ***Diversity of Communities***

An initial observation is that the communities that are participating in the Community Poverty Reduction Strategies show great diversity in the current state of their efforts to address poverty. This diversity is reflected across the whole of the process, including:

- » Defining poverty and what it looks like in a given community;
- » The priorities the communities identify as a focus of their poverty reduction efforts;
- » The way communities plan and implement their strategies to address poverty and its effects;
- » The measures that are used to assess progress; and
- » The capacity and resources that are currently available in communities to help reduce poverty.

This diversity highlights the importance of the poverty reduction strategies being targeted to the specific needs of each community. The ability for communities to tailor their efforts to their own needs, priorities and capacities is one of the key components of the Community Poverty Reduction Strategies.

## ***Importance of a Dedicated Effort***

Despite the above-noted diversity of communities, a shared factor for success is the presence of a formal and committed team or committee, with a shared responsibility to lead poverty mitigation and reduction work in the community. The communities that have shown the most progress in their poverty reduction strategies are those that have established teams to leverage and focus the efforts of stakeholders, partners, and community members.

Dedicated committees are also critical in marshalling communities' efforts to properly resource and support their initiatives and projects. The ability to leverage resources in order to secure a source of start-up and ongoing funding and support is a key goal of dedicated tables and committees, and a strong indicator of the likelihood of progress and success in the community's efforts to address poverty.

## ***Objectives of the Initiative***

The name of the initiative — Community Poverty Reduction Strategies — reflects the individual approach that each community needs to take in order to address the specific barriers affecting their local families. However, this name also suggests that the reduction of poverty is the primary focus of communities' efforts. This has caused some ambiguity amongst communities that are focusing on mitigating the effects of poverty given the scope of this initiative — recognizing that reducing and eliminating poverty requires a concerted effort from multiple levels of government. While the overall hope remains that the work undertaken through this initiative will help in the larger goal of poverty reduction, communities' efforts are more clearly aimed at lessening the impact of poverty on children, families and individuals.

## ***Best Practices***

As summarized in Part Two of this report, the seven participating communities show great diversity in the plans, programs and projects that will help them address poverty in their communities. They have each taken different approaches with respect to their priorities, partnerships, initiatives, and the way in which they track their progress and success.

While the community-specific approach is important in making a positive difference in the lives of families in these communities, participants in this initiative have also expressed a desire to learn from and build upon the experiences of other communities and organizations. There is a common understanding that, through better communication and by sharing best practices, all participating communities will benefit. Sharing best practices goes beyond the participating communities: through this initiative, lessons have been learned and will be shared with communities throughout British Columbia that wish to undertake coordinated efforts to address poverty.

The ability to adopt, adapt and build on strategies that have a proven record of success would allow partners to focus their work on areas that are likely to have the most positive effects for people living in poverty. Developing, collecting and sharing best practices would benefit all of the communities that are participating in the Community Poverty Reduction Strategies, and would be a useful tool to share more broadly with communities across British Columbia.

## ***Working with Families***

Direct work with families that are living in poverty and dealing with its challenges is integral to the work of the Community Poverty Reduction Strategies. In addition to the daily work of Family Consultants, participating communities have also gained valuable insights and knowledge from the lived experience of families who participate in focus groups and discussion sessions.

Listening to and understanding their diversity of experience is a fundamental component of communities' work; this can form the basis of stronger best practices as they relate to the most effective ways of working and communicating directly with families.

## ***Participants at the Table***

The Community Poverty Reduction Strategies Initiative has now been in place for more than three years, and communities continue to assess whether the right participants and partners are at their community tables. Some communities have well-developed strategies that form part of a larger effort to address poverty, where the focussed participation of representatives from many organizations and from across all levels of government is one of the key measures of their successes so far.

For other communities, however, there remains a lack of clarity regarding the best composition of their community tables, and the key roles of the partners who should be involved in poverty reduction. There is a shared question of whether the right representatives are participating — from all sectors that have a role to play, including all levels of government, social service agencies, the volunteer sector, business sector and individuals and families with lived experience. In particular, there is a common desire to ensure that the business community plays a stronger role and brings its skills to the table, recognizing that healthier communities also result in a healthier business environment.

As noted elsewhere, the causes of poverty are multi-level and interdependent, and poverty reduction and mitigation efforts require a similar shared approach, with all parties taking responsibility and playing a clear and constructive role.

## ***Contributing to a Larger Effort***

Communities have asked how the Community Poverty Reduction Strategies relate to a larger provincial approach to poverty. The Community Poverty Reduction Strategies are one of the many initiatives across government that are aimed at addressing poverty. Other actions include:

- » Providing up to \$660 per year per child under the age of six through the BC Early Childhood Tax Benefit to help offset the cost of child care;
- » Investing in a one-time payment of \$1,200 for every child born in B.C. since January 1, 2007, through the BC Training and Education Savings Grant;
- » Providing cross-government programs for people on income assistance, such as the recently announced Single Parents Employment Initiative;
- » Exempting child support payments from income assistance calculations;
- » Doubling the monthly income exemption for families with children who receive income assistance to make the transition to employment easier;
- » Providing \$1.4 million in community gaming grants to food banks throughout the province, helping these important local organizations assist vulnerable families;

- » Increasing the minimum wage to \$10.45 per hour; and
- » Exempting income tax refunds from income assistance calculations, so families on income assistance can retain their full refund.

While the Community Poverty Reduction Strategies are helping to support the seven participating communities, the initiative is also helping to improve communication about the work that other communities across British Columbia are undertaking in the larger effort to address poverty. The initiative has provided a means to share the experience and lessons learned through work that is taking place in other communities, including:

- » Abbotsford: <http://www.vibrantabbotsford.ca/>;
- » Delta: <http://delta.c-y-c.ca/>;
- » Nelson: <http://spannelson.ca/>;
- » Revelstoke: <http://www.revelstokesocialdevelopment.org/>;
- » Richmond: <http://www.richmondchildrenfirst.ca/>; and
- » Victoria: <http://www.caponpoverty.ca/>.

Although they are not part of the initiative, these communities — and many others — have organized and mobilized themselves by bringing together key stakeholders to tackle the specific priorities of their own communities.

## ***Measuring Progress***

Along with the challenge of defining poverty in a given community comes the challenge in understanding how to measure its impacts and the efforts to reduce its effects. Due to the unique aspects of poverty in each community, it is not always useful or appropriate to adopt standardized approaches, and it is often challenging for communities to define the measurements and evaluation tools that would have the most relevance to them. This is, and will continue to be, a significant challenge when attempting to address the strength of efforts made through the Community Poverty Reduction Strategies.

The initiative provides an opportunity to better evaluate the progress that communities are making in addressing poverty. Sharing best practices can help communities better measure their progress and success; however, measuring outcomes should also take into account the very different priorities, resources and capacities. It is important that communities are encouraged to identify, measure and recognize local outcomes rather than focusing on provincial or national standards, which may not have as much relevance at the community level and to the families these communities are helping.

# Part Five: Moving Forward — Next Steps

As noted in the ministers opening message, the partnership between the Ministry of Children and Family Development and UBCM will end, MCFD will continue with the initiative. Taking into account all of the activities that are summarized in this report, along with the feedback of participating communities through events such as the Community Poverty Reduction Strategies Forum, the following next steps have been identified:

## ***1. Clarify the Focus of the Community Poverty Reduction Strategies***

Participating communities are focusing their efforts on improving the lives of people living in poverty. The primary objective and the focus of this initiative is to mitigate the effects of poverty on individuals and families who are currently struggling to make ends meet. While poverty reduction at a community level may also result from these efforts, this will require focussed and ongoing support from multiple partners across all levels of local, regional, provincial and federal governments, as well as the partnership of other sectors, including education and business.

Through this initiative, participating communities have learned new ways of collaborating together, have built on the assets that already exist in the community and are working together to improve the lives of people living in poverty and recognize the importance of wanting to expand their efforts to that of poverty reduction. Communities are encouraged to develop their own goals and objectives for addressing poverty and will be supported in their efforts to provide direct, meaningful, and concrete improvements to the lives of families who are living in poverty.

## ***2. Support Efforts to Ensure the Most Effective Participation in Community Strategies***

The best mix of participants in any given community will depend on the specific needs related to that community's challenges and priorities. The Community Poverty Reduction Strategies can serve a meaningful role in helping communities reach out to all sectors and ensure that there is membership from all relevant government ministries, the business sector, local government, the education sector, and other areas that are identified as key partners in each community.

## ***3. Encourage the Participation of the Business Sector***

Communities that have the broadest and most fully representative participation will have a better opportunity to create strategies and plans that are tailored specifically to their community's needs. In particular, participation of local businesses should be encouraged as each community develops and implements its own strategy. The business sector is a key part of any community, and has specific skills, resources and expertise to bring to the table when looking at ways to mitigate the effects of poverty and work towards its reduction.

Fuller participation of the business sector would also potentially help to address a need that communities have identified for funding small- to medium-sized projects that are identified at the community tables — not necessarily to fund efforts themselves, but to bring to bear the strategic savvy that is needed to fundraise and apply for funding from other sources. The participation of partners in the business sector would be helpful to identify other ways to fund poverty-reduction efforts. MLA Jackie Tegart will continue to work in partnership with communities to find ways to engage with the business community.

#### ***4. Support the Development and Sharing of Tools and Resources***

Many of the participating communities expressed a desire to share tools, templates, ideas and resources with each other as a way to support and enhance their work in their own community. Efforts should be made to identify best practices that are standardized but easily customized for the specific needs of each community, and to share them amongst participants and other communities throughout B.C.

The sharing of best practices, tools and resources should be as efficient and user-friendly as possible, building on sources and mechanisms that are already in place. For example, developing a website could serve as the location for useful links, communications templates and frameworks.

MCFD has developed an on-line, easy reference tool about the range of government services available for low-income and vulnerable families.

[http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/supporting\\_affordability/index.htm](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/supporting_affordability/index.htm)

#### ***5. Encourage Other Communities to Develop Their Own Strategies***

The experience, knowledge and skills of participants in the Community Poverty Reduction Strategies can be applied to communities throughout the province. As many communities as possible should be encouraged and supported to develop their own poverty mitigation and reduction strategies. MLA Jackie Tegart will continue to facilitate this process through her liaison role as part of this project. MCFD is also committed to ensuring that a ministry staff person will participate on community tables that are established to address poverty.

#### ***6. Support Meaningful Outcomes Measurement***

Communities should be supported to develop, implement and report on meaningful outcome measures. Recognizing that there are very diverse situations, challenges and priorities in each participating community, outcomes should not be based on a province-wide one-size-fits-all approach, but should instead reflect the goals that make sense for each community. The primary objective should be to establish goals and evaluation measures that can aid in decision making about where poverty-reduction efforts should be focused and what should be done to improve the outcome of those efforts.

## ***7. Leverage Available Resources***

Communities should be encouraged and supported to participate in existing regional, provincial and national efforts and initiatives that are aimed at mitigating the effects of and reducing poverty. The valuable experience, guidance and assistance of other organizations and coalitions should be leveraged to more fully take advantage of their expertise in reducing and mitigating the effects of poverty on a local scale. For the seven participating communities, MCFD will cover the 2016/17 membership cost to join Tamarack's Vibrant Communities Canada — Cities Reducing Poverty network. Member benefits include access to population level poverty indicators and access to the annual network, including increased profiles, monthly conference calls, online learning opportunities, evaluation support, access to resources and publications and coaching.

## ***8. Tailor the Role of the Family Consultant***

The priorities of each of the participating communities are different: some are focussed on working directly with individuals and families; others are focussed on creating community-wide partnerships and relationships to address poverty at a more systemic level; and some do both. As a result, the individual consultant role can be tailored to the identified focus of the community but must remain aligned with the overall job description for the Family Consultant role. In the past, the Consultant's duties have ranged from administrative functions to direct support to families to community development work. While flexibility is encouraged regarding how the Family Consultants use their time and efforts with respect to working directly with families and/or focussing on community development, it is important to recognize them as specialized professional staff.



