

# 1Up Victoria Single Parent Resource Centre Society

## Poverty Reduction Strategy Small Group Discussion Report

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Date of Meeting: Tuesday, March 14, 2018

Location: Victoria, BC

# of Participants: 13

# of Organizations: 1

### 2. PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

- 10 women, 3 men
- Approximate ages: under 30 (2); 30 – 39 (5); 40 – 49 (3); 50 – 59 (3)
- 9 single parents
- 5 1Up staff members
- 2 recent newcomers to Canada

### 3. FINDINGS

The discussion focused on the following two questions related to single parents' experiences and perspectives on poverty:

- a. What are the issues facing you and people living in poverty right now?
- b. What would address these issues and help you or others out of poverty?

#### Identified Solutions and Actions that can make a difference:

##### Income (11 dots)

- Guaranteed income (7)
- Living wage \$20.62 (2)
- Lack of training opportunities and lack of jobs with living wage (1)
- Wages not increasing with cost of living (1)

##### Belonging and Connection to Community (9 dots)

- A sense of belonging & community (3)
- Community centres – connections; community; networks; reducing isolation; access to “real” people mentors (2)
- Schools should be community centres, spaces (1)
- Create opportunities for People (ie. Single parents) to come together and create programs/services/groups/solutions from their own experiences (1)

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- Isolation may lead to poor coping mechanisms – children suffer/are impacted negatively by environments with: stress; fear of judgment/being reported/losing kids (1)
- Social isolation (1)

#### Housing & Housing Security (8 dots)

- Affordable, accessible, safe housing that is economically integrated (4)
- Control rental rates; rent ceilings; affordable; maybe shared housing model (2)
- Not enough affordable housing (1)
- High rent & yearly 4% increases (1)

#### Health & Wellbeing (5 dots)

- Mental health issues (2)
- Not enough preventative care; ie. Mental health & counselling to address stressors of being single parent (1)
- Not enough support for single parents with children with special needs > respite (1)
- Funding government & community services for vulnerable populations (1)

#### Systems/Services Navigation (4 dots)

- Guidance through the system; accessing supports; ie. 211 (3)
- Agencies need to do better outreach (1)

#### Child Care (3 dots)

- Child care – affordable, accessible, where/when/how it's needed (shiftwork) (2)
- Day care costs unaffordable (1)

#### Education (3 dots)

- Free education (post-secondary) (3)

#### Safety (3 dots)

- Look at a person from a strength-based perspective – start @ a person's strengths; what's working + possible (2)
- Make reaching out for help a safe decision/no blame, stigma/be heard (1)

#### Food Security (2 dots)

- High food costs = less access to quality food = less health (1)
- Fresh food security (1)

#### Newcomers (1 dot)

- Language barriers; cultural barriers (1)

#### Transportation (1 dot)

- Transportation – bus passes for families; free or affordable

### **Top 3 Solutions or Ideas based on conversations and individual priority setting:**

- Guaranteed income and a living wage was identified as the most significant strategy to addressing poverty, both for single parent families and others struggling with poverty.
- Expressed in many different ways, strengthening families' sense of belonging and connection to community was articulated by all participants.
- Safe and affordable housing, with controlled rent increases.

### **Stories and/or case studies presented/discussed:**

- Single parents of special needs children can be particularly vulnerable, as they are often the sole caregivers and face the additional challenges with very little support. The participants of one group identified a number of issues that impact these families. Often, there are significant financial costs for healthcare related expenses that are not appropriately covered by health insurance. Responsibility for medical appointments, hospitalizations and decision-making related to interventions and treatments are often the sole responsibility of a single parent, and can become overwhelming. Quality time for siblings is limited, and a parent's self-care needs may receive little or no attention. Respite care for the single parent and the siblings is inadequate, leading to high levels of stress, fatigue and burnout.
- Woven throughout all of the discussions were reflections and examples of how poverty substantially limits single parent families' opportunities to access social supports and participate fully in community, and exacerbates stress, isolation and difficult environments for their families. Identification of a sense of isolation and a desire for community/social connection were raised repeatedly during the discussions.
- Also notable were the recurring themes of relationships, connection, safety and resiliency. These parents demonstrated so much determination and courage in the face of sometimes overwhelming challenges. They very clearly articulated the reality for many single parents – that the struggle to survive daily can over-ride most higher-level needs. They expressed a deep commitment to placing their children first, and a sense of frustration that they are unable to offer their children the opportunities afforded to other children.

### **4. TRANSCRIBED NOTES REGARDING ISSUES**

- Affordable, accessible, safe housing that is economically integrated
- Not enough affordable housing
- High rent & yearly 4% increases
- High hydro & car insurance costs
- Not enough preventative care; ie. Mental health & counselling to address stressors of being single parent
- Disability barriers
- Not enough support for single parents with children with special needs > respite

- Issues @ peer support without stigma
- Child care
- Day care costs unaffordable
- Not enough daycare spaces
- A sense of belonging & community
- Lack of social connections to child care if new to community
- Social isolation
- Isolation may lead to poor coping mechanisms – children suffer/are impacted negatively by environments with: stress; fear of judgment; fear of being reported; fear of losing kids
- Newcomers to community – unavailable resources
- Language barriers; cultural barriers
- Navigating difficult issues as a single parent; ie. Legal assistance; daily priorities; scarcity of time to access resources; social isolation; poorly treated by income assistance workers; single parent stigma
- Transportation
- Good paying jobs
- Wages not increasing with cost of living
- Lack of training opportunities and lack of jobs with living wage
- Basic needs are not being met
- Hard to access quality programs for children
- Lack of access for children's activities
- Single parents not able to come to activities due to unaffordability & needing to work
- Surviving, not thriving (cycle)
- Makes people stay in an unhealthy situation due to no financial or social support
- Safety concerns
- Fresh food security
- High food costs = less access to quality food = less health
- Affordable dental care
- Need full dental & prescription coverage
- Access to mental health care
- Mental health issues
- Not enough counselling

## **5. TRANSCRIBED NOTES REGARDING POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS**

- Guaranteed income
- Living wage of \$20.62
- Workplace support for new immigrants (language)
- Guidance through the system; accessing supports; ie. 211

- More frontline workers helping to navigate systems- accessing ideas + solutions (one-on-one; person-to-person)
- Agencies need to do better outreach
- Door-to-door services for those who can't leave home easily
- Funding government & community services for vulnerable populations
- Innovation – finding ways to extend beyond traditional “rules” to initiate new ways of addressing old/ongoing problems
- Schools should be community centres, spaces
- Community centres – connections; community; networks; reducing isolation; access to “real” people mentors
- Create opportunities for People (ie. Single parents) to come together and create programs/services/groups/solutions from their own experiences
- Providing spaces, services & environments that are family-friendly – socially supportive structures
- Child care – affordable, accessible, where/when/how it's needed (shiftwork)
- Child can access extracurricular interests easily – healthy + thriving – our future
- Free education (post-secondary)
- Control rental rates; rent ceilings; affordable; maybe shared housing model
- Financial literacy
- Full dental & medical coverage
- Access to fair & appropriate counselling; accessible; diverse; affordable
- Look at a person from a strength-based perspective – start @ a person's strengths; what's working + possible
- Transportation – bus passes for families; free or affordable
- Access to fresh food, community gardens – builds community + health
- Food recovery – grocery waste access!!
- Not blaming parents; less fear – create supportive systems & ability to access help
- Reducing the negative image of child protection workers – creating a more welcoming system. Dignity.
- Make reaching out for help a safe decision/no blame, stigma/be heard
- Being able to ask for help without a sense of danger or vulnerability

Respectfully prepared and submitted by:

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