

BC Poverty Reduction Strategy: Small Group Discussion

Submitted by Bridges for Women Society

1809 Douglas St, Victoria BC, V8T 4K5

DATE	March 14 th , 2018
Community	Lower Vancouver Island
# of Participants	112
# of Organizations	1

About the Participants:

All the participants of the small group discussion led by Bridges for Women Society are women who have been impacted by violence, abuse and trauma attending healing and learning programs in Downtown Victoria, Westshore, Sooke, and on W'SANEC First Nations reserves. These women have experienced a range of violence, from sexual to domestic to child abuse to Residential School abuse and intergenerational trauma. The participants range in age starting at 18 years of age to 78 years of age. Almost all the women have lived experiences of poverty and low socio-economic situations, with the majority supported by income assistance and disability assistance. The group consisted of women living with disabilities, single mothers, Métis and First Nations women, immigrant women, senior women and youth.

About the Findings:

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

Issues:

- Housing – cost of and finding housing; subsidized rent; no stable housing; no restrictions on purchase value of property and foreign buyers; no restrictions on rental costs; no affordable housing; safe housing; considering moving as no affordable living in Victoria or Vancouver; low to no vacancy rate; if owning home, any issues with appliances will be difficult to financially cover to replace or fix; difficult to get out of homelessness; moving costs are high even if they find a place with cheaper rent.
- Employment - minimum wage vs cost of living; casual work doesn't qualify for loans or mortgages; training not available for working people, only those on IA or EI; overworked and underpaid; youth employment programs for summer months, for certification and job shadowing; little experience = lack of employment opportunities; can't find a job with education but little experience after being a stay at home mother;
- Parenting - single parents not getting support from other parents; Help with purchasing school supplies for me and my kids; Tutoring for children falling behind; Affordable activities for children; difficult to be a good, healthy role model; access to helping children heal; kids act up or cry in daycare and the daycare calls to pick up the kids; no daycare open at time needed (6:30am); financially accessible alternative schools for children; lack of mental health services for children, all are short term and cannot afford therapy
- Education - Lack of education; difficult to have energy and focus for education; lack of access to paper and printing; high cost; students graduating post-secondary often enter a life of poverty

- Financial – need better supports; income assistance not equal to the # of children within a family; access to financial counsel; lack of knowledge on money management; cell phone; internet; own computer needed for work and family; hydro (bundle up rather than have hydro due to cost); many do laundry in sink and hang to dry; judicious with toilet paper and Kleenex
- Clothing – unable to afford proper clothing
- Income – emergency income assistance for people having a hard time getting on income assistance because of lack of information because they have been homeless for 10 plus years; getting money deducted from welfare checks; stigma from income assistance; assistance doesn't cover the basic expenses; how to retire financially; difficult to get off income assistance when going off, minimum wage jobs, offer less money coming in and keeping up living standards; PWD just enough to cover rent (\$1000) leaving nothing for meds or food
- Low self-esteem; constant stress from instability; isolation; minimize my potential; lack of self-worth and confidence; living in survival mode; lack of knowledge on healthy relationships, sexuality and sensuality; depression; hopelessness; anxiety; need support for emotional health to build the strength and skills to overcome poverty
- Legal – family court system injustice; legal aid injustice; advocacy
- Daycare: expense and availability; work schedule varies; subsidy wants consistency
- Mental Health & Addictions Services – finding mental health and addictions facilities; sober living support; someone to reach out to; trauma counselling; not enough support with drug issues; wait times for services; substance use related to emotional stresses; lack of appropriate and timely help
- Food – cost is too high after housing cost; not enough income for fresh, nutritious foods; more food vouchers rather than food banks that only provide the food they have; food for animals/pets; choice in variety of foods;
- Transportation – high cost; lack of affordable transit; high cost of gasoline; access to driver's license school; rural communities without buses; using bus pass money for food due to need; cost to maintain a car
- Dental & Health Care – can't afford aids, prescriptions not covered by Pharmacare or IA; need better medical supports; preventative and alternative healing modalities are beyond reach, especially chiropractic, dental, acupuncture, naturopath medicine, yoga, reiki, massage therapy; free counseling; lack of doctors; Health Ministry is disconnected from social development and mental health agencies; lack of coordination between ministries; losing teeth due to inability to afford root canals; no coverage for shower chair, handrails, walkers etc.; homecare services; need more than just basic dental; may be \$100-200 per month and needed to keep them alive; not covered by IA; they use food money to pay for medication; some have been several years without seeing a dentist due to cost; use home remedies if they have tooth pain; get teeth pulled; go without dentures;
- Discrimination & Violence – racism; injustice; vulnerable to exploitation, abuse, trauma; social inclusion; policing of the poor; domestic violence with not enough help and no follow up;
- Lack of opportunities – assertiveness and peace building programs for children and adults; peer support; youth groups; lack of community connections; lack of the right information or the right place to go is missing; supports are missing or the timing is too late; unable to participate in social activities; extra-curricular activities; vitamins and herbs;
- Foster care – aged out of foster care and in need of support and care

This story is specific to many of the senior women impacted by violence had experienced in regards to food banks: – it takes time and energy; have to stand in line and wait for the women with children to be served. Standing can be difficult if they have back pain or physical injury. They get the food that remains (about ½ bag) which is very inadequate (1 potato, 1 apple, yogurt) and not nutritious (cookies, chips, candy; if they get fruits and vegetables they are often bruised and have to cut a lot away. They get 5-6 cans per month and these are high in salt – which is not healthy when they have high blood pressure. They usually have no eggs or dairy. They get frozen meat, but it is not labelled as to what it is. They find bread is plentiful – Cobbs donations to many non-profits. As a result they experience malnutrition – low iron, nails have problems, they are hungry. They also are nervous going as it is near drug addicts' hangout. They have to wait in line for 1-2 hours and sometimes it is outside and they are cold and it is rainy.

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

Solutions:

- Housing – more low-cost housing; better housing programs; incentives for single parents for fair mortgage rates to purchase a home; emergency housing for homeless; green tax credits for people living in the city in small housing spaces using less resources; incentives to assist lower income single parents to make 1st home purchase; more help with housing; less waiting for BC Housing; shared, safe housing without drug users or unmanaged persons that have mental illnesses; restore/renovate small boats to live aboard; cap on rental costs (ie: 2 bedroom max \$1200); monthly grants towards rent/utilities; build more affordable housing; tiny housing; co-op housing; more safe places for those who don't have housing
- Education – free education for single parents; guidance to upgrading; leaves for education; reduced cost for upgrading education; more affordable;
- Parenting – 24/7 licensed daycare; faster access to special needs assessments for children in poverty impacted families; in-school help for special need children needing help with toileting and language; affordable childcare and options for 24 hour care; tax credit on child extra-curricular activities; funding for single parents returning to school; more help with daycare; childcare close to housing; allowance for parents with children with autism
- Financial – not penalized for having RRSP's if want to apply for assistance; share the wealth; stop taxation without representation; help reduce debt; stop deducting money from welfare cheques; no penalties for RRSP's while getting assistance for short term help (shouldn't have to exhaust RRSP's before assistance); seems like you have to be on the street or disability to get any government support; volunteer hours in exchange for tax break credit; hydro payment assistance; group-minded people sharing what they have as a bartering for goods and services; universal basic income of \$2000; higher taxes for upper middle class and upper class earners
- Employment – fair wage and training; more co-ops; higher minimum wage to living average; self-employment programs to create jobs with on-going resources and support to support venture sustainability; minimum one year inexpensive specialty training and small loan approvals; higher minimum wage; employment opportunities and training into stable employment; subsidy available for those who are self-employed
- Services – support groups and agencies; more programs like Bridges for Women; outreach workers to meet with homeless and drive to and from appointments; a place with phones that

can take messages for homeless people; help with resumes; access to self-help groups; improve communication and social participation; yoga class vouchers; put more money toward homelessness programs; more drug awareness and ways to get off drugs; more facilities like Bridges for Women for men and women; support groups for recovery and people helping other people; free dental; increased counseling funding; everyone receives a cell phone with a base service; more supports for men like Bridges for Women Society; increased funding for programs like Bridges for Women; place for teenagers similar to Bridges for Women; more homecare supports; legal support; community involvement with seniors, going to them; remove set number of sessions ie: counseling on certain services; educate the police better about domestic violence

- Foster Care – support to at least 30 years old;
- Food – community kitchens; normalize food banks; give out grocery cards rather than old food, so I can buy what I want to eat; food bank assistance and delivery; more food vouchers; more community gardens and funding for community food security programs; taxi vouchers at the foodbank to help get the groceries home; delivery depots; more local food production; food banks with healthy, fresh foods;
- Transportation – bus pass program for all people on IA; gas vouchers; taxi vouchers at the foodbank to help get the groceries home; free driver's education (how do you learn to drive if you don't own a car, or have someone to teach you or the money for driving classes); car maintenance program
- Education – free post-secondary education;
- Social Norms & Attitudes – radical re-thinking of the way we judge others as 'others'; need to feel valued, cared for, imbued with a sense of power and purpose; restoration of the sacredness of life, all life; high school classes about boundaries and interpersonal relationships; being connected to those who are not in poverty; integration into whole community;
- Health – residential treatment facilities on the Island; free services from doctors for people with no medical insurance; more holistic health services; one-day a week subsidized dental care or free; "I really hate having to prove my mental health challenges"

Solutions and Actions That Can Make a Difference

A) Type of Solutions Most Important to Women Impacted By Violence

- Housing Affordability, shared housing, tiny home housing, coops
- Health & Dental Affordability – free dental, access to alternative medicine, including supplements, increased counselling funding
- Social assistance – reducing barriers, individualized approach, as opposed to one-size fits all with a check box online form system,
- Child care – more affordable, increased hours (24/7),
- Transportation – affordable transit,
- Post-Secondary education – free
- Donating goods and services with tax credits in exchange – making easier

B) Top 3 Solutions

1- Housing – tiny homes, affordable, shared or co-op living

2- Health & Dental support – free, alternative medicine access

3- Income Assistance – universal income, individualized approach, reducing barriers by getting rid of online forms and wait times, should be able to get support before the individual has nothing to their name (ie: need to exhaust RRSPs before getting income assistance)