

Transcript: Community Meeting on Poverty Reduction

Grand Forks BC
March 23, 2018

Introduction and Event Summary

On March 23, 2018 The Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction hosted a community meeting in Grand Forks, BC to discuss poverty and poverty reduction with residents of the Boundary Region. The 3 hour event brought together 31 participants, including residents with lived experience of poverty, municipal and regional district representatives, non-profit groups and organizations, and community volunteers.

The event was facilitated by Lorraine Copas, Executive Director, Social Planning and Research Council (SPARC BC), who guided the conversations. Participants engaged in six round table discussions in groups of 4 – 8 per table.

There were two rounds of discussion focused on the following questions:

1. What are the issues facing you and people living in poverty right now?
2. What would address these issues and help you and others out of poverty?

Following the discussions, participants were invited to place sticky dots beside the strategies or solutions that were most important to them. Following the individual priority setting exercise, participants were asked to determine the top three (3) priorities at each table. The top three priorities (solutions and issues) were reported back to the group. Following the workshop, participants were invited to join together for a light luncheon and circle prayer.

The following report is a breakdown of issues identified, potential solutions and priorities. It should be noted there were several duplications identified at each table. Issues and Solutions have been broken down into categories, recognizing there is cross over in many categories as the issues of poverty are complex and intertwined.

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

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

- People living in tents – widows who haven't worked in their lives
- Housing is a huge issue – security
- Lack of space for Housing - Need to find a couple of acres for multi-unit housing

- Housing is over-regulated, extras not needed
- Hidden costs, extra cost (strata)
- More apparent with young, but there are many seniors in substandard conditions – cannot afford rent
- Predatory landlords take advantage
- How to develop housing to help break the cycle?
- Seniors: society assumes that nursing homes are taking care of them
- Metis & Aboriginal housing, how can the community make things happen?
- Limited occupancy in shelters – lots of empty facilities not being utilized
- We now have poor neighborhoods, rich neighborhoods
- Security – unable to leave campsite to access services for fear of theft of belongings

FOOD SECURITY

- Affordable Food
- Hunger
- Community kitchen (Whispers) does not have community support
- People have no means of preserving food long-term
- Foodbank – cannot make deliveries for people with no access to transportation
- Foodbank hours do not accommodate everyone

TRANSPORTATION ISSUES

- More community transportation needed – bus
- Parents need hospital to provide child car seats for transportation to & from hospital

LACK OF AFFORDABLE AMENITIES

- No access to sanitary services
- No public or pay phones available anymore
- No or limited access to internet

HEALTH ISSUES

- Mental
- Emotional
- Hopelessness - Deadly depression, self-fulfilling prophecy, easier to go to sleep, emotionally exhausted
- Physical
- Dental
- Spiritual

LACK OF ACCESS TO SERVICES

- Gap & shrinkage in professional & essential services
- Lack of corrective counselling services
- Limited access to addictions services – the ones that do exist are set up to fail
- Shortage of social workers
- No service if you do not fit into the box
- Wait times are too long
- A lot of hoops to navigate / very bureaucratic
- Current services are ‘issue’ centered instead of ‘people’ centred
- Paperwork / red-tape for ‘rights & needs’
- No other services for people with these issues
- Some will refuse to use services offered by the church
- Access to medication
- Lack of affordable childcare
- Those who complain the loudest are those who can afford to help
- Criteria for WorkBC limited (requires EI reachback status – means must have been employed)

STIGMA/SOCIAL ISSUES/ISOLATION

- Racism / discrimination of indigenous people
- Get tired of picking self-up and still not being good enough
- Loss of self-esteem
- Must prove you deserve food
- Social isolation - Poverty brings boundaries / social walls
- Being judged, labelled
- “Not in my backyard” mentality
- Pass the blame on
- Welfare workers tell you when you have to have an appointment – not ask when would be convenient for you - degrading
- Given Gov’t response – instead of Human response
- No feeling of purpose
- Lack of Community acceptance, fellowship, limited networks
- Reduced community events, like dances
- Mounting public frustration
- Gender issues
- Intergenerational issues
- Poor as a child – no way to break the cycle – vicious circle
- Family composition
- Hand-up Vs. Hand-out
- Closed doors / prejudices
- Social skills: share / receive respect
- Coping skills - Willingness to adapt, risk failure in order to grow and be successful
- Vulnerability
- Resentment: attitude that permeates a reaction

EDUCATION LEVELS

- Low literacy levels
- Lack of opportunity for Education: post-secondary or advanced – access to
- Better education - University

FINANCIAL ISSUES

- Lack of money
- Lack access to banking because of no ID
- Cost of living – insurance, bank fees
- Parents losing child tax credit – being accused of fraud
- No living wage / minimum wage not enough to live on
- Have to choose between meds or food
- Have to choose between paying utilities or food
- Income assistance issues / Disability assistance issues – amount too low
- High Cost of living
- Employment – uncommunicated opportunities
- Poor economy
- Living paycheck to paycheck
- No living wages given from employers
- No financial education / training in schools (preparation in schooling or society)
- Employers restricting hours to avoid paying benefits

LEGAL STATUS

- obligations
- Lack of ID – documentation
- Criminal records - Revolving door of Judicial system perpetuates poverty
- Rising crime
- Living in poverty by choice (?)
- Safety: Family, personal, possessions
- Continuous trauma
- Change: scary, not always welcome
- Finances not sustainable: Federal / Provincial / Municipal
- Inability for communities & organizations to plan long-term due to short political cycles, limited incentives
- Regionalization of services - Difficult to ask for help – more difficult because don't know where help is.
- Organizations forced to 'compete' for funding
- More responsibilities have been thrown back on the Municipalities
- Municipalities listen to the 'Have's' (not the 'Have-not's')
- Lack of equality: systemic equality factor
- Childcare availability – especially for shift work
- Gap between the wealthy & not-wealthy is growing

- Privilege has a 'fall-back' – poverty has nothing to lean on
- The whole social fabric has changed because of closure of most mental institutions & hospitals

COMMUNICATION

- Not everyone has access to cell phone, computer
- Misunderstanding / misinformation about poverty
- How to change perspective about who is rich & who is poor?
- People do not trust Gov't – (accurate info – ie: lead paint in crock pots)
- Global warming will increase poverty
- A.G. Review
- Lack of communication forums

2. What would address these issues and help you and others out of poverty? (Solutions)

Solutions were brainstormed amongst participants. The Top 3 priority solutions were identified by each of the six groups. Similar solution patterns appeared, as well many solutions cross over into multiple categories. The solutions in bold indicate priority level 1, 2 or 3.

PRIORITY #1

1) Develop working community group (Church, extended family, clients help to benefit self-worth issues) to identify, prioritize & work on local – Regional issues)

1) Outreach services

1) Guaranteed Living wage/guaranteed income

1) Address Social/economic inequality (including gender, racial, cultural concerns)

PRIORITY #2

2) Save our community kitchen / Foodbanks

2) Opportunities for better education – Access to training / Education for all

2) Use all resources (including empty buildings, existing NP's by altering red tape, using building codes, bylaws, etc to address community concerns (poverty, mental health etc)

PRIORITY #3

3) Affordable and Available Housing for all – need a whole palette of housing

3) Community Transportation

3) Offer all Government Services in a single hub with workers in each community via a solution-based coherent approach

DEVELOP A WORKING COMMUNITY GROUP

- Effective, solution-based
- Call people out to collaborate – DO something
- Look at what resources we have – Food? Garden – knowledge of growing? Housing?
- Strategic Community Plan
- Strong economic development plan
- Poverty reduction – Living wage, benefits
- Ending homelessness
- Asset map
- Need more leadership
- Communication

FOOD SECURITY

- Offer cooking classes (Supervisor with food safe)
- Food storage – rent a freezer locker at local butchers
- Use locally sourced food
- Hosting potlucks
- ‘Good Samaritan Act’ for feeding homeless
- Revamp ‘unused food’ laws – as in France
- U CAN – (you - Cannery)
- Food safe, going to teach at people’s homes
- How to grow a garden, canning, preserving, etc. & gov’t regulation on keeping chickens, etc

HOUSING & AMENITIES

- Rent based on income
- What is a home? - A place to stay forever
- Garden suite, basement suites, tiny houses – all to code
- Co-operative program
- Habitat for Humanity – a stable place for children – Habitat has community support
- Facilities in to accommodate: e.g. old Hardyview Lodge
- Lower the bar on housing – choices, because we are all different e.g. zoning /building codes, safety, bank financing Facilities for community use: remove barriers for service by providing public gathering spaces
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- Teaching how to build – cooperative housing – rent to income or purchase Provide free campsites (supported)
- Use empty facilities – cut red-tape, building codes, bylaws**

- Open high-barrier shelter to compliment low-barrier shelter
- Need an experimental housing zone
- Full spectrum of affordable housing options**
- Agriculture Land Reserve
- Agriculture Review

TRANSPORTATION

- Connect communities with shuttles
- Supply gas cards & vehicles
- Transit

OUTREACH AND SERVICES

- Creating resource hub** (1-stop-shop for community services) where all (rich & poor) can gather to learn to relate to one another
- Interagency Improved communications*
- Need more outreach – go to the people instead of expecting them to come to you
- Need more opportunities to support each other
- Positive / supportive approach needed
- Focus is on qualitative results Vs. quantitative
- Assessment & connection
- System navigation piece
- Access to local healthy food, water, shelter transportation with no hoops to jump through – free internet for all
- Harm reduction committee
- Upgrade criminal justice system
- Decriminalize addiction
- Provide legal aid
- Crises response team
- Advocacy hubs*
- Bring auxiliary police back
- Mental health back to ambulance (not RCMP)*
- Decriminalize / legalize substances
- Value volunteers & service
- Eliminate wait times – have operators available*
- Transparency & ease of use services available ***
- RCMP as part of community: on bike, foot – PR for community accountability*
- Outreach workers in the field

EDUCATION/EMPLOYMENT

- General skills
- Upgrading essential skills / literacy
- Remove stigmas
- Some can make a choice – Many do not have the capability of making choices
- Can give opportunity to make choices to be here today

- Need a Community Center
- Adopt a Swedish Social System
- Mentorship programs*
- Job training / education
- Inclusive cultural education
- Clean industry such as modular home plant
- Public education on poverty – start from within
- Wages & spaces

HEALTH

- Most people want to better themselves, but give up
- Funded ambulance service
- Universal dental services
- Pain clinic
- Cultural healing opportunities
- Provide free counselling
- Re-hab support
- 4-pillar approach: prevention, policing
- Harm reduction, treatment
- Gender equality: housing, wages counselling services*
- People in tough living situations need to be given quick wins with some work with no hoops to jump through
- Stewardship of children – invest in children
- All children are wired differently
- Help children believe in a destination
- Engender within children to be what they want
- Avoid learned helplessness
- Focus on traffickers & predators
- Fix childcare

FINANCIAL

- Restore Volunteer Subsidy (on income tax returns)
- People on disability should be able keep their benefits if they work
- Living lean can be a choice if you have the time, intelligence & skills and know how to live without high costs
- Look at what the definition is for Poverty – is it just about money?
- Accessible internet & phones

LEGAL STATUS

- Easier access to replace ID
- Restorative justice**