



BC Poverty Reduction Strategy: Small Group Discussion LMO

Lii Michif Otipemisiwak Family and Community Services (LMO) is a delegated Métis Child Welfare Agency in Kamloops, BC and one of the two delegated Métis agencies in the province. LMO has been caring for the safety and wellbeing of Métis people in the Kamloops area for over 18 years and strives to work with all levels of government to promote strong, healthy Métis children, youth and families by offering family programming and child safety services that are delivered with love, compassion and respect. By ensuring their services are consistent with Métis traditions and values LMO cultivates a nurturing sense of belonging in the Métis community. In April 2017, the BC Government publicly announced that LMO was the recipient of \$3.9 million dollars to develop and operate, “Kikéyelc: A Place of Belonging”.

There is a clear, straight line from ageing out of the provincial child welfare system, to homeless, incarceration, addictions, and death. This path is even more defined for Indigenous youth. Kikéyelc is a 31 unit supported, affordable apartment building for Indigenous youth associated with Indigenous child welfare, University students, professionals and elders. LMO is the first Child Welfare Agency in BC to develop and operate their own housing, and one of the only housing developments in the province that offer a continuum of culturally appropriate and supportive housing for youth ageing out.

LMO held two Small Group Discussions at LMO:

- (1) Youth, Poverty and Indigenous Child Welfare: Indigenous Youth Discussion.
- (2) Indigenous Child Welfare and Poverty: Professional Discussion.

This report was written on March 30, 2018 on Traditional Tk'emlupsemc Territory of the Secwepemc by Natika Bock (BSc (Hons), BEd) Indigenous Youth Housing Manager LMO and Appointed Member of the Poverty Advisory Forum with Minister Simpson.

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Respectfully and Maarsii.

Otipemisiwak

The Metis were-and are-a people distinguished by their independence, individuality and resilience.
The Cree referred to Metis people as Otipemisiwak, which, loosely translated, means
“the people who own themselves” or “the people who govern themselves”.

Youth, Poverty and Indigenous Child Welfare: Indigenous Youth Discussion

Date: March 23, 2018.

Community: Indigenous youth associated with child welfare services, between the ages of 12 – 23 years in Kamloops.

Number of Participants: 15

Number of Organizations: 1

About the youth participants:

- Indigenous youth associated with child welfare services, between the ages of 12 – 29 years.
- About half of them aged out of provincial child welfare.
- 10 of the youth were Metis, 3 were First Nations and 1 was non-indigenous (her infant son was Metis).
- 4 were single mothers.
- 14 identified as female and 1 identified as male.
- 5 of the youth have been committed one or more times under the Mental Health Act.
- 10 of the youth have struggled with substance use, mental health and homelessness, including hidden homelessness and couch surfing.
- 3 of the youth have a history of cutting.
- 11 of the youth are connected to LMO outreach services.

About the Findings:

(1) Issues:

- Ageism and not being taken seriously. Not much respect is given to youth.
- No housing. Need references for housing that youth often don't have. Discrimination because they are youth and/or because they have children.
- Not enough resources for mental health and not feeling safe when admitted to psychiatric ward at hospital (when committed under the Mental Health Act). Conditions at the hospital are not appropriate. Difficulty to find local help.
- Abuse (mental and physical).
- Racism and stereotypes. Racial judgement.
- Addictions.
- Cost of living not matching income.
- Transportation barriers.
- Employment barriers. Minimum wage is too low and judgement based on appearance. Need employment references and experience that they don't have.
- Need to take care of Canadian youth.
- Stigma associated with alternative school and needing support in school.

(2) Possible Solutions:

- More or improved agencies for self-harm.
- Better outreach/media communication to youth about programs and opportunities that are happening or ongoing.
- More housing for youth with disabilities.
- Job training and mentorships opportunities within organizations to build skills and work experience, in a safe environment that youth are familiar with. More transition programs and programs that pay part of your income, to reduce risk for potential employers.
- 24/7 youth drop-in centre to access showers, storage, laundry.
- Harm reduction facilities with trained harm reduction staff and safe injection sites. More needle disposal boxes.
- Rubber mats for all playgrounds so that needles/paraphilia doesn't get lost in rocks/woodchips.
- Coverage for all dental and vision care, including travel and accommodations if you have to travel out of town for an appointment.
- More affordable rent and better options. More housing supports.
- Support with going to post-secondary school and navigating the system. Support with grants and bursaries, and funding opportunities for continuing education. This includes a better understanding of Agreements with Young Adults, band funding and Metis specific funding.
- At least \$2,000 per month as a standard wage for everyone. For people with children, the basic living would be more than \$2,000.
- Support and funding to obtain a driver's license.
- Better social groups and peer circles.
- Better supports for our young children (specifically medical and dental).
- Having a community of people to be there to support you.
- More public washrooms.
- On-call support/outreach workers 24/7 and safe youth transportation 24/7.

Solutions and Actions that Make a Difference:

(3) Important Solutions:

- Support with going to post-secondary school and navigating the system. Support with grants and bursaries, and funding opportunities for continuing education. This includes a better understanding of Agreements with Young Adults, band funding and Metis specific funding.
- Job training and mentorships opportunities within organizations to build skills and work experience, in a safe environment that youth are familiar with. More transition programs and programs that pay part of your income, to reduce risk for potential employers.

- Better outreach/media communication to youth about programs and opportunities that are happening or ongoing.
- 24/7 youth drop-in centre to access showers, storage, laundry.
- Lifetime instructions and supports.
- Better supports for our young children (specifically medical and dental).
- At least \$2,000 per month as a standard wage for everyone. For people with children, the basic living would be more than \$2,000.
- Support and funding to obtain a driver's license.
- More affordable rent and better options. More housing supports.
- More public washrooms.
- On-call support/outreach workers 24/7 and safe youth transportation 24/7.

(4) Top 3 solutions and priorities:

- Support with going to post-secondary school and navigating the system. Support with grants and bursaries, and funding opportunities for continuing education. This includes a better understanding of Agreements with Young Adults, band funding and Metis specific funding.
- 24/7 youth drop-in centre to access showers, storage, laundry.
- On-call support/outreach workers 24/7 and safe youth transportation 24/7.

Indigenous Child Welfare and Poverty: Professional Discussion.

Date: March 27, 2018.

Community: Professional workers for Indigenous Child Welfare Organizations in Kamloops.

Number of Participants: 26

Number of Organizations: 2

About the participants:

- Indigenous and non-Indigenous Elders, social workers, counsellors, outreach workers, housing providers, and administrators who work directly and indirectly with children, youth and families associated with Indigenous child welfare services.
- The experience of the professional workers was between 1 to 10 years.
- All the participants identified as female.

About the Findings:

1. Issues:

- Youth are ageing out too young at 19 years old. In the North West Territories they age out at 24 years. When youth age out at 19 years old they lack basic skills like cooking, budgeting, shopping, banking, maintaining housing, bills, etc. Youth not only age out of care, they also age out of most of the services they are connected too, like mental health and addiction services.
- Community Living BC (CLBC) needs to start working with youth before they are 19 years old.
- There is a constant turnover of professional relationships with youth as they age from infants to children to youth; as programs come and go; going from foster home to foster home; and with professional turnover. The result of this is, youth are in constant transition.
- Personal touch is missing from services.
- Parents lose their child tax benefit, which is money they rely on. This loss often leads to loss of housing and then children can't come home. This starts the cycle of parents involved with provincial child welfare services due to poverty, not child safety concerns.
- We lose connections with our youth after they age out and then these youth are forgotten, with no connections anymore.
- When children/youth are removed, parents often suffer from mental health issues and/or addictions due to trauma. This perpetuates the cycle of trauma.
- Addiction from poverty resulting in poverty. Addiction rooted in childhood trauma, loss of culture, community and language. This void that is never filled.
- Racism. There is so much racism when you're an Indigenous minority.
- More support for foster families than birth families and extended families of the child in care.

- Funding reports don't acknowledge Indigenous values (such as "connection" and "community") as measures of success or reportable outcomes.
- There is currently less support for single people and more support for families.
- Transportation barriers, including the cost of a vehicle and gas, and the bus doesn't go everywhere.
- Minimum wage doesn't reflect the cost of living and the cost of living in BC is higher than many other provinces in Canada.
- Low-income access to secondary education is needed.
- Literacy can be a barrier, especially when it comes to paperwork, comprehension of what is required for programming, and navigating transit schedules, etc.
- The qualifications for income qualified affordable daycare is low, but affordable daycare is an issue for many families outside the eligibility range.
- Accessibility.
- Lack of jobs or employability.
- Discrimination when applying to rent a home, including stigmas around single parents, pet owners, Indigenous people, and folks on income assistance/PWD.
- Criminal records for minor infractions are a barrier.
- People living in poverty are committing fraud in order to avoid cutbacks from the EI, income assistance, and PWD benefits.
- Current doctors shortage in BC.
- Lack of mental health services.

2. Possible Solutions:

- There needs to be one organization who is the gatekeeper of our youth until they are 25+ years old.
- Meeting clients where they are at.
- Stop cutting off the child tax benefits and reducing welfare rates when children are removed on temporary custody orders.
- Increase mental health services from 19 years cut-off to 30 years.
- Increase mental health services for everyone.
- More services are needed for infant mental health.
- We need to do a better job of nurturing connections and maintaining them.
- Ongoing cultural competency training for staff and clients.
- More affordable and supportive housing. Also a rental cap on market rentals and more housing for survivors of domestic abuse. No more waitlists for housing.
- More support for outreach services, harm reduction and mentoring.
- Need to increase basic living income and standard of living.
- Need for a one-stop shop for mental health and substance use resources. Also, this hub would include all amenities such as childcare resources, housing, and counselling.
- Need more consultation with Indigenous agencies when non-Indigenous organizations and groups are developing and operates services in the urban community.

- A 24/7 mobile team that Indigenous people of all ages can access.
- More traditional healing circles and practices, rather than always needing to refer to mainstream solutions.
- There needs to be equality when applying for funding without the competition. Competition only breeds mistrust and disconnection.
- Affordable childcare.
- More funded work training programs other than just Work BC.
- Cap on real estate, so that more people can purchase a home versus renting and more affordable property taxes.
- Easier navigation and quicker processing time for income assistance, PWD, court ordered payments, and reissuing child tax and welfare benefits (when children are returned home).
- More support for youth in financial planning and life skills.
- Barriers to accessing affordable healthcare and/or lack of culturally appropriate healthcare services.
- Re-evaluate the Residential Tenancy Act to better support families.
- Housing should be safe and a human right.
- Easier pardoning process for criminal records for minor infractions.
- Increase in wages for ECE and ECD workers. Transportation included in childcare supports and standardizing quality childcare across the province.
- Elected advisory for all organizations in a municipality to work on the issues of poverty.
- Pre- and post-pregnancy support services.
- Increase in kinship (family) connections.
- Trauma-informed practice models and Signs of Safety.
- Having more homes where the child/youth lives permanently and if there is a change in foster families, they move, not the child/youth. Also more homes where families can live with support staff, so they children will not be removed and parents learn proper parenting and life skills.

Solutions and Actions that Make a Difference:

3. Important Solutions:

- The age for youth ageing out needs to be increased to 25 years old.
- Preventative services need core funding for programs instead of grant-dependent programming. This will ensure programs are consistent and energy goes into implementing programs rather than ongoing and never-ending application processes. Also, grant-dependent funding increases competition between agencies and we really need to work together, not against each other.
- Need to increase basic living income and standard of living.
- More support for outreach services, harm reduction and mentoring.
- A 24/7 mobile team that Indigenous people of all ages can access.

- There needs to be equality when applying for funding without the competition. Competition only breeds mistrust and disconnection.
- Affordable childcare.
- Increase in living wage.
- More affordable and supportive housing. Also a rental cap on market rentals and more housing for survivors of domestic abuse. No more waitlists for housing.
- Easier navigation and quicker processing time for income assistance, PWD, court ordered payments, and reissuing child tax and welfare benefits (when children are returned home).
- More support for youth in financial planning and life skills.
- Re-evaluate the Residential Tenancy Act to better support families.
- Housing should be safe and a human right.
- Need for a one-stop shop for mental health and substance use resources. Also, this hub would include all amenities such as childcare resources, housing, and counselling.
- Increase in wages for ECE and ECD workers. Transportation included in childcare supports and standardizing quality childcare across the province.
- Elected advisory for all organizations in a municipality to work on the issues of poverty.
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- Trauma-informed practice models and Signs of Safety.
- Having more homes where the child/youth lives permanently and if there is a change in foster families, they move, not the child/youth. Also more homes where families can live with support staff, so they children will not be removed and parents learn proper parenting and life skills.
- Increase mental health services for everyone.

4. Top 3 solutions and priorities:

- The age for youth ageing out needs to be increased to 25 years old.
- Preventative services need core funding for programs instead of grant-dependent programming. This will ensure programs are consistent and energy goes into implementing programs rather than ongoing and never-ending application processes. Also, grant-dependent funding increases competition between agencies and we really need to work together, not against each other.
- Stop cutting off the child tax benefits and reducing welfare rates when children are removed on temporary custody orders.