

Mom2Mom Poverty Reduction Workshop Report

Introduction:

Date: March 17, 2018

Community: Low-income mothers

Number of participants: 8

Number of organizations: 1 (Mom2Mom Child Poverty Initiative)

About the participants:

The majority of Mom2Mom participant moms are Indigenous, live on social assistance (either income or disability assistance), live in East Vancouver and have a history of trauma.

Most of Mom2Mom's participant moms are between the ages of 30 and 49 years of age with children between the ages of 5 and 12 years old.

Approximately 50% have had some high school education or graduated high school and 23% are currently in an educational or training program.

Most of Mom2Mom's participant moms identify as food-insecure and do not have secure housing.

About the Findings:

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

GENERAL

- Constantly have to be negotiating priorities and sacrifices due to a lack of funds or sufficient income
- Lack of choices (having to just take what you can get) causes feelings of disempowerment and loss of dignity
- Stigmas exist about people in poverty
- There is a lack of recognition that most people living in poverty are working
- Fear that children will not be provided with enough resources and opportunities for the cycle of poverty to be broken

ACCESS TO RESOURCES

- Cannot pay the fees to replace IDs and documents, but need them to access government resources
- Government bureaucracy is difficult to communicate with and feels like a full-time job to navigate for parents
- Strict income cut-offs to receive assistance and subsidies: discourages people from getting out of poverty because as soon as they make more money it is taken away from them through clawbacks
- Child care is necessary but unaffordable, especially for single parents

HEALTH

- Poor health and/or disabilities are obstacles to accessing work and education
- Lack of MSP funding and insurance for dental services and prescriptions (families can't afford to get their children's wisdom teeth removed)
- Mental health
 - Narrow criteria and requirements that make resources difficult to access unless you're at the point of crisis
 - Lack of follow-up or ongoing support: staff don't express care unless you are an emergency case (i.e. suicidal)
 - Lack of long-term help for anxiety and depression specifically for those faced by poverty
 - Not enough pro-active mental health services considering the high rates of sexual assault trauma experienced by women in poverty
 - Too much bureaucracy and criteria for children's mental health resources including through the Vancouver School Board
 - Problem that the Ministry of Child and Family Development (MCFD) is the only easy way to access mental health services

TRANSPORTATION

- New Translink fare system has made access more difficult by having to pay again to transfer from buses to trains
- Monthly passes are too expensive, especially for children

HOUSING

- Very few options and resources for single men in poverty
- Increases in various essential bills have a large impact (BC Hydro bill has doubled in the past couple of years for same amount of usage)
- YWCA housing requires tenants to purchase additional insurance which many can't afford, but it is also hard to face the risk of damage without insurance

FOOD

- Difficult to buy groceries without accessible transportation
- Foodbanks: often impersonal while staff show favoritism to some individuals, only allowed to visit one per week
- Cost of food is constantly increasing (subsidies and income not increasing at the same rate)

EDUCATION

- Postsecondary
 - Unaffordable tuition; student loans are a burden for low-income people
 - Income assistance doesn't allow people to go to school while receiving funds

- Children and youth
 - Special needs kids are guided through school but not given the attention and therapy they need (set up to live in poverty for the rest of their lives and the cycle continues)
 - Lack of extra tutors in schools because the teacher's union won't allow them
 - Difficult for kids with special needs and mental health concerns to handle constant changes in teachers and school programs (need consistency to help remain stable)

DISCRIMINATION

- Experiences of women
 - Commonality of sexual assault: difficult to report and deal with through legal bureaucracy
- Experiences of Indigenous moms
 - Systemic racism
 - Mental and emotional repercussions of trauma experienced in residential schools through generations
 - Need for more reconciliation besides monetary disbursements from the government (money can't make up for the trauma)
 - Influences vulnerability to substance abuse, addiction, and mental illness which are too common in Indigenous communities
 - Intersection of gender and racial inequalities (especially difficult for Indigenous women to find work)
 - High rates of incarceration and child apprehension

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

IMPROVE MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

- More staff and funding for affordable mental health services so criteria can be broader and people can get help *before* they are in crisis
- Strengthen services for children and youth so they can access ongoing therapy
- Safer space for parents who need mental health services but may be concerned their children will be taken away if they voice their struggles
- Not having MCFD be the gatekeeper for mental health resources for parents (improve the availability of resources that advocate for people in poverty)

CREATE EASIER ACCESS TO GOVERNMENT RESOURCES

- Create attitude of trust so people in poverty don't constantly having to feel like they have to prove themselves to be given access to resources

- Develop a wrap-around coordination service that can advocate on behalf of parents in poverty, navigate bureaucracies, and communicate between different services to help struggling families
- More consistency between social workers and government staff regarding the level of care and helpfulness so that accessing resources is not dependent on personal judgements
- Less red tape and approval/referrals for services

REFORM GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE AND SUBSIDIES

- Raise amounts for income assistance, disability assistance, and rental subsidies
- Allow more independence regarding where people spend their welfare money
- Stop the claw-back: support low-income people for at least one full year once their income is higher than the cut-off for assistance and subsidies
- Reform policy so that families do not have to claim dependent children's income on housing subsidies and income assistance
- Allow people to pursue education while on income assistance

HOUSING

- Generally more flexibility regarding criteria for families
- More subsidized housing options for young single men. For those mothers living in social housing, once children have grown up, they are not allowed to be counted as children and must find alternate housing. This causes extreme stress for families who are housing insecure and who have children who stay at home beyond the age of 18.

YOUTH IN TRANSITION

- Create supports for young people who are no longer dependents to establish themselves outside of their parents' home
- Stop the cutting-off of services based on age. Establish a transition plan to help with supports including housing, income, etc.

Solutions and Actions that Can Make a Difference:

Based on discussion, Mom2Mom participants focused on three main solutions that would have the most impact on their daily lives.

- 1) Raise social assistance rates
- 2) Increase long-term mental health supports for low-income people that serve those who have mental health needs over time, not only short-term support for times of crisis
- 3) Support youth in transition to adulthood