

## Final Report BC Poverty Reduction Strategy Small Group Discussion

Host: Oliver Parks and Recreation/Oliver Healthy Living Coalition

Thursday, March 22 5:00-8:00pm

Oliver, BC (Population 4800)

Number of Participants in Group Discussion = **27**

Number of Organizations = **6** (Interior Health, Town of Oliver, Regional District, Oliver Parks and Recreation, Park Drive Church, Penticton & District Access Centre)

Number of individuals with lived experience = **10**

General demographic and age profile included mostly women (20:7) between the ages of 40-65. Single mothers, senior men and women, people who receive assistance and access the local food bank regularly, support workers, pastors, elected officials.

The facility for the meeting was rented from the Park Drive Church. We promoted the meeting through posters, client referrals, personal invitations at the Food Bank and around town and through social media and traditional media sources. We provided transportation stipends and taxi service to those in need as well as childminding services and stipends to those who incurred babysitting costs to attend. A fully catered 2 course hot meal was provided and leftovers distributed to participants for future meals.

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

- Lack of advocacy and support for individuals
- Lack of long term rental housing
- Limitations on existing rentals (condos, gated communities) such as 55+, no kids, no pets
- High cost of utilities
- Lack of access to daily food sources
- Lack of food storage and food preparation spaces
- Lack of interactions with others, isolation
- Lack of awareness of existing services
- Only 2 affordable clothing stores in town
- Pharmacare is too hard to access, takes too long, no one advising individuals how to access
- No or low prevalence of free emergency dental care, legal consultation services, counselling services and mental health services.
- Disproportionate Disability Pensions compared to the cost of living

- Lack of accessible preventative health care programs
- Affordable extended health treatments including alternative/holistic treatments such as acupuncture and massage
- Lack of incentive and/or support for small business start-ups and sustainability
- Demolition of previous affordable housing units for families that are now just empty lots
- Only 2 low income housing complexes for families and 2 for seniors in Oliver
- Lack of childcare spaces for children with special needs
- Cost of gas/fuel which is hard in a rural community stretched along the highway
- Cost of dental, medical, Pharmacare and utilities is prohibitive
- Average rent price for an individual or small family is \$900 per month.
- Substandard housing and lack of advocacy/support for those marginalized tenants
- There are no shelters/transitional housing for men or women between Penticton and the US Border
- Lack of a youth hostel means no place for young people to stay on an emergency short term basis
- One laundromat only in town
- Seasonal pool (May-August) is the only public location for shower access
- No central hub to go and get support, information about services, employment opportunities and housing
- Living costs for seniors are increasing and will exceed fixed income levels
- Segregation/disconnect of different cultures
- Government services are bureaucratic in nature and departmentalized/silos;
- Complicated system that is inaccessible and hard to break out of once in
- Lack of affordable housing and seasonal accommodation for agricultural and tourism industry workers
- Stories of Bylaw officers ticketing/penalizing individuals for panhandling downtown
- Reported that there are approx. 40-45 documented homeless individuals in Oliver
- Others living in vehicles as only option or to avoid substandard housing with mold, rodents etc.
- High cost of healthy foods and other foods
- Lack of community gardens and shared garden plots
- Very little public transportation options to get to appointments/services and get to employment
- NIMBY attitude towards poverty reduction strategies and a lack of commitment and vision by local government
- Prohibitive regulations and lack of local, provincial and federal support for potential solutions

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

- Centralization of information and resources (i.e. hub/s that include counselling, community kitchen, showers, laundry, meals, information etc)
- Bridge/integrate cultural and spiritual gaps through education, special events, multicultural displays
- Find local investors and donors to help fund poverty reduction strategies
- Additional education and communication about existing services and how to access them
- Provide more free services including medical, dental, alternative/holistic care, spiritual, recreation/physical activity, mental health, addictions support
- Freeze all costs for senior pensioners and disability pensioners
- Eliminate penalization of student loan holders who are collecting EI to reduce youth post-secondary education costs
- Local and transient working poor are assisted through a staffed farm/labour office with advocacy for fair wages, working conditions and access to services
- Offer food cooking and preservation skills classes and additional access to kitchen space for food preparation
- Short-term/emergency shelter for men, women and youth
- Offer free or low-cost transportation options from locations in town out to farms, fruit stands, stores, and medical services.
- Increased subsidized choices for daycare including non-licensed options and more spaces for children with special needs
- Provide tiny home development in Oliver
- Create more affordable housing options: cooperative housing; incentives for increasing occupancy of existing space; innovative housing concepts such as tiny homes
- Get the right people to the table to discuss issues and solutions further to create change:
  - Food Bank Society
  - RDOS
  - Town of Oliver Mayor and Council and senior staff
  - MLA Linda Larson
  - MP Dick Cannings
  - Osoyoos Indian Band Council and Health Services staff
  - Interior Health
  - BC Housing
  - South Okanagan Immigrant Community Services
  - Service Clubs
  - Kiwanis Club of Oliver (manage low income housing units)
  - Church Pastors

- Youth
- Farm/Food Producers
- Local business owners
- Winery owners
- Property managers/realtors

**All of the above solutions were identified during the individual priority setting as important to the group participants.**

Top 3 solutions/ideas based on conversations and priority setting:

1. Create more affordable housing options: cooperative housing; incentives for increasing occupancy of existing space; innovative housing concepts such as tiny homes
2. Provide more free services including medical, dental, alternative/holistic care, spiritual, recreation/physical activity, mental health, addictions support, legal counsel and services
3. Centralization of information and resources (i.e. hub/s that include counselling, employment services, community kitchen, showers, laundry, meals, information etc.)