

# BC Poverty Reduction Strategy Engagement

## Small Group Responses

### Meeting 1 – Phoenix House

Date: February 22<sup>nd</sup>

#### Issues that People are Facing and Live with in Poverty:

- 1) Limitations on basic necessities
  - a) Food – cheap meals, Food bank use is a necessity, Community Kitchens, regularly eating food that is past expiry dates
  - b) Clothing is 2<sup>nd</sup> hand
  - c) Shelter is low rental with many issues
- 2) Poverty is a “game” – How to live and survive, how to get what you need for less and access help
- 3) Drug and Alcohol use – point made that not everyone has these issues, but also that there needs to be more options for treatment and counsellors in the North.
- 4) Child Care – this is not possible unless there is a subsidy, very hard for parents who poor to go to work and pay for child care.
- 5) Mental Health – is directly tied with Drug and Alcohol use, and self-esteem
- 6) Entertainment – have to do activities with children that have no cost – or subsidized activities.
- 7) People who are ‘knowledgeable’ about the system are much better off as they know where to go to get extra help and how to access services from community and Gov’t. They are practiced at sharing high cost or high demand items to cut the cost.
- 8) Housing a much bigger problem than it used to be:
  - a) Amount of available housing is low
  - b) Cost of available housing is high and increasing
  - c) Quality of housing is substandard at the low end of the market, but problems in getting this looked at in a timely way and getting any changes made. Land lord has upper hand as there is lack of choice.
- 9) Cost of Utilities has increased, and there is a decision made about “food or Heat” ....

10) Amount of money that people can earn while on Social Assistance being quite small does not give individuals the incentive to work part time if they are able. Or the ability to receive gifts and not have it deducted from SA income.

11) Being low income takes a lot of extra planning and work / effort that it takes to gather what is needed for basic needs.

12) Being low income can be a huge contributor to low self esteem – lack of dental (for nice teeth; facial appearance) – lack of work appropriate clothes or for job interview.

13) Child Tax very important as low-income families would not be able to afford basics without it.

14) Medical or Dental – No way to afford things that are not covered by Basic Coverage (over the counter drugs, fillings for teeth, some prescribed medications).

15) Transportation costs. If you do not live where there is a good public transport system you have problems getting everything from groceries to work. Monthly bus tickets not always affordable.

## Solutions

1) Need for employees of Govt Services to treat people with a “professional attitude of ‘care” and communication style that is respectful.

2) Child Care – need for Subsidy that is not hard to access for the people who really need it. More options for child care that affordable, including a variety of hours available for evening employment etc.

3) Better support system for people who are looking for work; more employees at Work BC to give more individualized help. Day Care available for people looking for work.

4) Better Medical coverage to cover medication for children. Dental needs to add better coverage to improve and repair teeth = improved appearance for employment and self esteem.

5) Breaking the cycle of families on Assistance;

- a. Education – more access to job skills
- b. Focus on Life Skills
- c. Information available about trades and assistance to complete training.
- d. Parent education on parenting skills and problem solving

- 6) Housing –
  - a. More apartments or family accommodations available that is low income housing – Staying on waiting lists for too long.
  - b. Increased number of Second Stage Housing

### Top 3 Priorities:

1. Housing – increased 2<sup>nd</sup> stage housing, more affordable adequate housing with less waiting time
2. Better dental and medical coverage
3. Increased social assistance – better self-esteem, child tax a necessity, extra costs such as medical, child care, transportation, healthy foods

### Meeting 2 – Harmony House

Date: March 01<sup>st</sup>

### Issues that People are Facing and Live with in Poverty:

1. Costs of food, especially fresh fruit and vegetables are high
  - “Healthy living is very hard if not impossible” – No one ate much fruit and vegetables and bough only
  - All experienced that in the last week before cheque issue day, they needed to go to the foodbank
2. Transportation was a problem; “How can you get to work at 6 o’clock in the morning when no buses drive at that time? Also, taking the bus is too expensive so “we hoof it mostly or in winter we hardly get out of our houses”
3. Not enough money to buy one nice outfit to present nicely for a job interview. “How are you ever going to get out of poverty if you cannot present decently”
4. Not enough coverage for dental care. Not enough coverage for dentures when on social assistance or PWD. Most women in our group had cavities, broken teeth and missing teeth and in dire need of adequate dental care. There is one “Pain Clinic” in PG and they only pull teeth and you must be there at least one to two hours ahead of time for services. **This topic was heavily debated became a priority in our group**

5. Too low an income via SA and PWD “We need at least \$200 per month or more”
6. A problem for our group was the fact that in different geographical areas you can have a higher or a lower income. One resident stated that when her father moved from Prince George to Burns Lake he received less income, while groceries up north west are even higher. Our group, who all but one struggled with addictions stated that giving one monthly cheque was really hard...they spent it in a few days especially since you were tired of being poor. Yes, drugs/alcohol was being bought, but also take out food was bought such as McDonald meals “because you wanted to make the kids happy and that you cannot really afford”
7. Lack of affordable housing, subsidized housing, adequate low-cost housing
  - Many lived in unsanitary conditions such as flooded basements, cracks in kitchen floors, presents of mice, non-functioning toilets, plugged kitchen sinks
  - Response time landlords are long to make fixes; most landlords were absent and living in the lower mainland
  - High rent and low income forced them to take others in and often brought conflict. Not all were “healthy” and were struggling with substance use and not good for the children as they would witness fights and yelling
  - All lived in the VLA section “the hood” of town. Living there was good for the family in a way because they were close to all Aboriginal schools (Nez Deh Ho) where their children can receive support, meal programs, cultural teachings so it was important to for them to live there
8. Medications are expensive, and some not covered and “when you are on fixed income as in PWD and even a special authority makes them not totally free, then you sometimes do not get them, because you need food first”
9. Living in the North with cold winters our hydro/gas bills are very high, and “mostly we get into trouble for not paying them and between the high rents, the high hydro bills we are always threatened to be evicted (which happened to all 6 residents) and then we cannot get good references and we settle for any shack we can find, which is not healthy for the children (mold, etc.)

10. Lack of proper education “We lack proper education, so we cannot ever get out of poverty”

## Solutions

1. Raise basic income from \$200 to \$300 monthly to help pay for fresh food and vegetables. More money allows for other things such as ice cream or going to the fair
2. Need a raise for the rent part of our social assistance as rents are high
3. Need fixed income to be raised in accordance with inflation
4. Significantly more subsidized housing; BC Housing and Aboriginal Housing to have more funding from the provincial and federal governments for more adequate housing (apartments, town houses, duplexes) mostly in and around town to be close to doctors, social services, and bus routes
5. Include Co-Op housing in Prince George so that a portion of rent would be what you could pay
6. Increase 2<sup>ND</sup> Stage Housing: After Harmony House we would like to live in 2<sup>nd</sup> stage housing to gradually take on responsibilities of independent living but still supported because there is a care taker there 24/7
7. Income to be bi-weekly to budget better for us who struggle from cognitive delays, brain injury, FASD, addictions, mental health
8. Yearly average for Hydro bills to be paid monthly directly from our income before we get our cheques and reconciled when we move if needed.
9. Ability of free access to continuing education while on SA as this is a way forward out of poverty
10. Universal dental care
11. Universal medical/pharmacological/daycare
12. Need SA to be linked to the actual cost of living so that Smaller northern communities are not having higher food prices
13. There should be an arbiter/judicator/ombudsman/inspector you could go to if housing is not adequate. Houses should be checked to see If they are “rent worthy”
14. Yearly bus passes should be paid by government to all people on SA and PWD
15. Once a year extra clothing allowance to buy nice clothing for job interviews

## Top 3 Priorities:

- a) Universal medical care/dental/pharmacological/daycare
- b) More subsidized housing units (BC Housing, Co-Op Housing, Aboriginal Housing)
- c) Increase in basic incomes (SA and PWD) as well as increase in rent portion in respect to inflation rates

## **Meeting 3 – Phoenix House**

Date: March 15<sup>th</sup>

### **Issues that People are Facing and Live with in Poverty:**

1. Housing: not enough affordable, supportive living for people with health issues, addictions, single-parents, pet-friendly, 1-level stairs, seniors. What do people have to give up to get into affordable housing?
  - a) Location of housing that is close to amenities and transportation
  - b) Housing that is healthy, safe, and clean
  - c) Housing that focuses on prevention and community development
2. Healthy, local foods, community gardens, change strategy of commercial marketing and capitalism, access to healthy fresh foods
3. Medication
4. Child care is expensive and there is need for more availability for evening care and part-time care
5. Not enough activities that are low-cost and local parks need to be clean
6. People forced to city for jobs and medical
7. Pay equity for employees working with people
8. Education and experience for people with assistance and low income
9. Life on reserves have little access to town, poverty, access to clean water, power, plumbing, social circles
10. Utility costs are high
11. In the North, change of weather increases costs such as clothing

### **Solutions:**

1. Use of buildings/services already in community

2. Involvement/integration of existing organizations (Catholic Church, PG College)
3. Change of attitude through education-prosperous need to understand issues of poverty, how fast this can occur and how this affects our community
4. Place developed from evening/day/care-involve college/students/ECE/EC
5. Places for people to stay when needing medical services and recovery-supportive-short/long term
6. Culturally sensitive-not institutional
7. activities for people that are positive and fun
8. Men's 2<sup>nd</sup> stage housing (low cost)
9. Housing for mental health-supportive living -needs-space-accessibility-healing programs-attitude-education-genuine caring
10. Counselling services -groups-available-waiting time non-existent
11. Multi generational housing

**Three Top Priorities:**

- A) Affordable housing, safe, clean and close to home community and other resources
- B) Education for people who do not live in poverty and community services that serve people living in poverty.
- C) Use of buildings products (local food) and services already in community to build resources for people and keep them close to home.