

Report on Poverty Reduction Consultation

Salt Spring Island, BC

Date of consultation meeting: Thursday March 15, 2018

of participants: 31

of organizations participating: 4

Profile of participants: A wide range of people participated including several homeless people, people living in social housing, seniors, social service providers, and community leaders. The majority (55%) of participants were those currently living in poverty and/or homeless, with an age range between early 20's and late 40's, and included a fairly equal mix of women and men.

Facilitated by: Salt Spring Island Restorative Justice

A hot lunch was provided for all participants.

Summary: Top Ideas Supported by the Whole Group

Housing

Affordable housing is not very affordable – rents are often too high. Make rents truly affordable for people on very low incomes. Put in place rent control measures to make sure rents stay affordable.

Create diversified housing – types of housing, locations, costs (from coop housing to tiny houses with shared facilities to places for people to put a tent or shelter). Fund coop housing provincially. Look at the Oregon model of housing – small houses with communal facilities that are shared by everyone (garbage, kitchen, childcare, etc.). This is a “wagon wheel” model.

Create a community gathering spot where homeless people can wash their cloths, share food, cook food in a shared kitchen, take a shower, etc. Create a safe place where the homeless can put a tent or build a shelter, where they can keep their belongings safe and dry. Something like a tent city. A place where people can stay until they find homes. People need to meet their basic needs.

Income

Tax people fairly - according to each person's ability to pay. The rich should pay more.

Create a universal basic income.

Increase the minimum wage.

Discrimination

Include poor people in our sense of our community. Educate the community to build compassion and understanding of the poor and the homeless.

Let different people gather together in different ways without being kicked out (i.e. people gathering in parks or the forest).

Advocacy for wealth generation (as opposed to poverty reduction). Raise awareness about discrimination against the homeless. Stop punishing people for being poor.

Don't accept poverty or greed as a given.

Capacity Building

Provide practical support, life skills training for the homeless to help them get themselves out of poverty. Employ former homeless people to help others and advise them. Peer support.

Transportation

Affordable and accessible public transportation is key.

Childcare

Create affordable daycare.

Education

Make post-secondary education free for everyone.

Supporting young families is the key to the future. Investing in early childhood development programs will avoid a lot of problems in the future.

All Input from Participants....

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

Housing

- Access to an address with a postal code would help with job searches and other needs.
- Homeless people always have to move around to access a place to stay in different seasons, so not having mailing address is a big problem.
- There is a general lack of awareness about the challenges that homeless people face.
- Housing and lack of employment are big issues

Quality of housing for poor people is very low. My daughter is living in a tent.

- A place to sleep is basic
- No one wants to rent to poor people. Affordable housing is hard to find.
- Not enough People with a Disability income to afford rent for 1 bedroom apt. so obliged to share. (even in subsidized housing)
- Housing as a right
- People forced to live with others
- The Island's Trust makes affordable housing very difficult, almost impossible to build.
- People are using their housing for vacation rentals, not to house local people year round. This is a crime.
- Homeless people have a hard time keeping our stuff dry. Nowhere to store our stuff.
- It's hard to find a place to live with a decent landlord.
- Sometimes it's easier to live on the street than in bad housing.
- Homeless always have to move around – we are always getting chased out of the places we are trying to live.
- Lack of decent affordable housing
- It is a surprise how quickly someone can become homeless.
- Being homeless is not a choice.
- Need a home base. You don't have it if you have to share with someone else
- Poverty of space (to call your own, to assemble with others)
- Let's build affordable housing

- Water is a key issue (for building more affordable housing)
- Becoming like a “gated community”
- Affordable housing is key. Almost 200 units are proposed or planned.
- Affordable housing is a long shot for many people.
- Some homeless have a hard time living within certain structures
- Co-op housing where rent is 30% of income - your own place also with a sense of community

Government Services

- Accessing government services when you are homeless is a big challenge. No phone, no address, no access to email, etc.
- The ability to understand how the support systems work, getting bounced around the system from place to place. It’s hard to know how to navigate the system.
- Lots of meetings discussing issues, what are the solutions?
- Many local organizations don’t talk to each other – they need to communicate and work together.
- The different layers of local government are disconnected, not working together.
- Government documents are very hard to fill out
- In Scandinavian countries, basic nutrition, medical care, dental care, housing, education is a given. Here it’s out of whack
- Frustration with politics, human being first, politics second
- Unnecessary waste on expensive projects
- Politicians out of touch
- Don’t really need a study/more studies
- Money gets spent solving problems that have already occurred. Best to spend on prevention

Income

- Hard time saving money for the future or for accidents and emergencies.
- Hard to make ends meet even with a job.
- Frustration: How can anyone live on \$375/month shelter income?
- Want to help keep families together but there’s more funding for children in the care of a guardian than for parents raising their own kids.
- Disparity between wealthy & poor

- On an island, it costs money to get rid of my garbage – I can't afford it.
- It's almost impossible to actually get on welfare, you need to show two years of income tax forms which is difficult for many people.
- More financial assistance is needed if you are on drugs than if you are not.
- Why look for poverty reduction when we could be looking for wealth generation?

Employment/Business

- Not having the space to start my own business

Transportation

- Accessible transportation is the only way that poor people can have a hope of a job.

Attitudes/Discrimination

- Technically I am poor, but I don't feel poor. It's a matter of attitude
- People with disabilities living on government support are treated like they are criminals. There is no way to live on such a low amount of money.
- Greed is the biggest problem. We would all have enough if people stopped being greedy
- People with power are making decisions for people without power. Women and students need to take back their power.
- My disability makes me sensitive to noises, and low income housing can be very noisy.
- Service people make you feel like you are low, and make you feel like crap.
- Poverty is actually beneficial for the government
- If your first language is French you are at a disadvantage
- Anxiety can really get in the way
- Lack of exposure to homeless people for the average person. People don't know how to interact with homeless people.
- We are treated differently by businesses than the tourists are
- Prejudice based on appearance
- The community attitude and where it's going: there's a mythology that this is a close, caring community
- Articles about SSI often start with words like "bucolic" or "idyllic" . Many people in the community want to see beyond that.

- Factors for loss of compassion & empathy - eg. people hanging out in the park, getting grubby
- The compounding nature of problems associated with poverty, a bit like medieval torture where you put one block on someone but keep loading them on till the weight crushes them

Community Services

- There is no public laundromat on Salt Spring, or showers. How are people supposed to keep themselves clean?
- We don't have access to clean water
- Homeless don't have access to enough food.
- Let's find work
- One big piece that would help many people - better public transit, including late at night
- A place to do laundry
- A place to check in

Healthcare

- Access to medical care- it's not equal, eg. poor have less nutrition
- It's impossible to get dental care as a poor person
- Healthcare is not good for people on welfare
- Poverty of nutrition
- Huge deficits around equity, eg: access to health care.
- Proposal for a health centre to increase accessibility
- Poor people can't afford dental care or hearing aids – basic human needs.

Capacity Building

- People living on the streets lose the ability to look after themselves. We need life skills and a reason to live.
- Everyone would have the opportunity to contribute (if poverty weren't the barrier it is)
- Our island community needs the same resources as other places – mental health supports, rehabilitation and others.
- There is very little help to get people back to work
- With stress people do things like get loaded, addictions as a way to cope.

Miscellaneous

- When people are just trying to survive, poverty crushes spirits
- We need to think about what poverty is - if you can't afford what you have chosen to have...
- Wealth of helping to provide for others
- Self-isolation is counter-intuitive to human nature (when you are isolated)
- We need to raise the bar, for a variety of things
- Hard to live for people without means
- Not sure that our community is behind those goals
- Where there's a will there's a way.
- Poverty not just a lack of material things. In some places people have almost nothing but they still have a sense of community. People support each other.
- So convoluted. No straightforward easy solution
- Kids shouldn't have to be hungry
- Would like to live in a more natural way
- We're better off from an economic perspective to help those at the lower end of poverty
- "Blocks" are things like housing, food, transportation. If you could remove just a couple of the "blocks"

What ideas do you have to help you and others out of poverty?

- Increase the minimum wage to \$15/hour
- Minimum basic income for everyone.
- Allow for tiny houses to be built – places that people can afford to live
- The Portland, Oregon model of social housing is a great one that we should learn from.
- We need a laundromat – there is no
- Everyone deserves access to shelter, heat, food, sanitation
- Once we got housing, then we are able to help others too
- Tiny houses, with a common kitchen area and other cooperative spaces would be a great fit in a rural community.
- Free public transportation – free bus tickets
- Free post-secondary education is needed
- Guaranteed housing for all
- If there is not guaranteed housing, then folks should be allowed to put up a tent or create the shelter that they need.
- Assistance is adequate to allow folks to eat nutritious food.
- Support for mental health counselling
- Addictions counselling
- People feel better if someone cares to help them
- Advocating for better housing
- Teach better parenting skills so that people raise healthy children
- A better way to distribute food – there is enough food for everyone, but we don't get it to the people in need.
- Homeless people need a place to store their belongings
- Safe supportive housing key for helping people out of poverty.
- Some people could be happy living without plumbing or electricity (need to have a system that accommodates that)
- In Philadelphia, abandoned lots were used for tiny houses (300 - 400 sq. ft) with a diversity of people, street people, students, etc. larger (900 sq ft) homes for people with kids
- Homeless people need foot care and shoes that actually fit our feet.
- More programs around farming. Teaching people to grow their own food and give them a space to do it.

- Pay people to work on farms
- Sometimes small amounts of money can make a big difference, such as \$ to help people get valid ID (without which they can't get welfare)
- Give coupons for people to access food in the farmers market
- Support distribution of food from grocery stores that are about to be thrown away to homeless and others in need.
- Expand access to public housing, temporary shelters, apartments and flats.
- People need housing that will accept companion animals. Just because you are poor should not mean you don't get to have a pet.
- We need more understanding and connections between the homeless and non-homeless.
- There is a lot to be learned from how people with disabilities are cared for – we should apply those lessons to supporting the homeless.
- Create a supervised tent community.
- Global eradication of capitalism.