

Concerns Regarding BC Poverty Reduction Strategy information gathering in Victoria.

I am a First Nations woman, from Kwakwaka'wakw/Coast Salish nations, who has lived in poverty my entire life. I was a single mother raising 2 children, who are both grown adults and have been successful as, women, mothers, wives and professionals. I am a proud mother and woman.

I was apprehended at nine-months old. My mother was a First Nations woman who herself survived St. Paul's Residential School in what is now North Vancouver. Mother had taken me to the hospital because I was sick. They punished her, and consequently myself, family and community, by removing me from her arms. Devastated she let the hospital, no baby. From that day forward, living a life of despair. Judged by a system that was racist. I lived my childhood in the BC foster care system. I was a First Nation's child raised in a white catholic foster care system. I looked around and never saw anyone that loved me; I was beaten, raped and isolated my entire childhood. No child deserves to grow up like that. I still walk in pain, never able to resolve the trauma I endured as a child, these are my concerns that I share with you.

Many First Nations homeless community, walk in this reality. It is a strong possibility that their parents are Residential School survivors' and that they themselves are survivors of the Sixty's or the Millennial Scoops. Being taught, in Canadian society and institutions, that they, as Senator Murray Sinclair states, that they were inferior. The cultural genocide enacted through the IRSS and the Scoops has had a lasting and permanent effect in dividing communities, families and nations. The outcome of these institutions is that many First Nations never fit in anywhere with their families, communities nor in dominant society. They still struggle to fit in today.

The first and most important part of the *BC Poverty Reduction Strategy* workshops, **is addressing the reality of First Nations' Homelessness and ways to address the issues and trauma created from IRSS, and the Scoops that are both historical and current. These are specific issues only First Nations people experiencing homelessness community members face.**

I am an independent advocate in Victoria; I have a nonprofit "Circle of Sage." We work on many issues facing the First Nations' homelessness. We look at what does that look like and how can we look at ways to resolve challenges. Unlike non-native homeless community members, their history is not tied to historical trauma, intergeneration trauma and high rates of premature death and suicides.

Senator Murray Sinclair has also stated that at the same time that Indigenous children were in the IRSS system being taught that they were inferior, non-Indigenous Canadians were being taught that they were superior to Indigenous peoples. This legacy remains and continues. Racism, interpersonal and systemic, is alive and well in BC.

When people leave reserves because there are no homes for them. They move to urban areas and they never fit into the urban centers'. For many, it almost impossible to find affordable housing in Victoria. Add to this embodying the stereotypical 'Native' look finding anyone to rent to you or offer you employment is further compromised. Many end up sleeping on the streets, rejected everywhere they go. Ministry workers suggest they go back to their reserves. Lack of housing makes that impossible.

When the homeless count was done in Victoria, Feb 10, 2016; the result was that 33% of the count was First Nations people. Last year alone in Victoria we had 17 First Nations living without homes die on the streets. They die neglected, broken hearted and lonely. I remember a young native boy was on the streets "panning." I walked up to him. He just looked at me and said "can you just give me a HUG." He said no one has hugged him in a long time..... This reality. It is real and needs to be address from a FN perspective.

My first recommendation is that people working with First Nations homeless community they need to understand the historical realities of the lives of First Nations Homeless communities, understand about the Sixties' and Millennial Scoops, Indian Residential schools, and the historical and ongoing effects of colonization. There are a number of significant manners in which this can be achieved. First of which is to have all service providers engage in learning to become culturally safe. It is important to understand that a person could have worked with Indigenous peoples for 30 years and still not be providing services in a culturally safe manner. Therefore, it is suggested that all service provided, regardless of experience, take part in culturally safe training. Here are a couple of learning sources:

1. PHSA's San'yas Indigenous Cultural Safety Training: The [TRC 94 Calls to Action](#) throughout each area of Canadian society recommend that service providers become culturally safe. Indigenous Cultural Safety is a unique, facilitated on-line training program designed to increase knowledge, enhance self-awareness, and strengthen skills of those who work directly and indirectly with Indigenous peoples. It is offered on line at this link: <http://www.sanyas.ca/training>
2. [Kairos' Blanket Exercise](#) Is an experiential teaching tool designed to share the historic and contemporary relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada.

I believe that if the BC Poverty Ministry working with the First Nations Homeless community truly need understand and feel the pain and isolation FN Homeless community endure every day. Without this full and comprehensive understanding, it will be difficult to make the changes needed to work with FN peoples.

The second recommendation is hire First Nation community liaisons, to work with the Ministry and the First Nations Homeless community. Many BC and Canadian organizations including Health Authorities are now employing Aboriginal Liaisons to ensure that service provision is not a barrier to care and access. Building trust is the biggest obstacle faced and you need to have healthy and concrete ways of doing things differently. Having Aboriginal liaisons would be a positive step.

The third recommendation: BC Poverty Reduction Strategy should host specific workshops addressing First Nations' Homelessness. First Nations peoples have, as has been outlined above, unique and specific historical and contemporary circumstances. Working with First Nations peoples requires doing so in a culturally safe manner in a culturally safe setting. This is best achieved through holding specific workshops.