

Introduction

Date: March 14, 2018

Community: Sardis

No. of Participants: 24

Number of Organizations: 3, Vibrant Abbotsford, Sardis Doorway for Women, Sardis Community Church

About the Participants

All of the small group participants were single mothers who were working and receiving income assistance or disability. The women were Caucasian, Indigenous, or immigrants from a South American country and ranged in age from 19 to 50. Their housing situations included homeless, shelter, and private rentals. Three of the women had been in foster care prior to ageing out.

About the Findings

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

- Housing
 - Not enough shelters for homeless, especially youth
 - NO RENT CONTROL, rates are too high
 - No landlord oversight and enforcement
 - Low income housing is in very poor condition

- Income or Disability Assistance
 - The amount of assistance or disability and a job wasn't enough to earn a living wage; funds are deducted from income assistance keeping them in poverty
 - Pooled income for those living with a partner needs to be changed
 - Each has their own children and previous expenses; relationships sometimes don't last, leaving the woman with lower income assistance to fend for herself
 - Income assistance is not tied to cost of housing
 - Front line workers are not consistently trained
 - Accessing services contain barriers: costs for certain reports in order to apply for emergency grants; waiting period to receive emergency funds; long lines
 - Lack of mental health support while on assistance
 - Non-residents are accessing resources
 - No resources for children over the age of 3

- Transportation
 - No bus routes in their areas
 - Several women commented they were fortunate to receive rides from the church (*nonprofit filling a gap*)
 - There was a bus route right in front of the church, but lines and stops are few in this area

- Foster youth aging out – SOS!
 - The entire system needs to be reevaluated and changed
 - Youth in care are oftentimes returned to abusive parents that supports a cycle of mental illness and poverty
 - Life skills are not taught as they are growing up
- Healthcare
 - difficult to access doctors: no one had a family doctor; several mentioned clinics were over capacity; clinics are oftentimes far from the hospital
 - MSP does not cover all expenses related to prescribed care: asthma for example
 - Dental and glasses are not covered
 - Mental health and addictions support are separate programs
 - Many stated the two should be working together
- Food
 - costs are too high
 - no access for homeless youth
 - more access to healthy food
- Childcare
 - None were affordable to this group
 - Very few options, especially for single dads
- Taxation
 - Credits reduce as children age, but they get more expensive as they get older

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

- Housing
 - Increase low income and co-op housing
 - Increase second stage housing for families: men with kids as well not just women
 - Create new rent laws:
 - Tie rent to the unit, not the tenant and put limits on rent rates
 - Increase rental stock
 - Build a better community: mixed use and different income levels integrated – not just building more tiny condos close to services in areas and then only wealthy people can afford

- Income or disability assistance
 - Tied to cost of living (market basket measure) – provides accountability for public use of funds and captures regional expenses better
 - Stop pooling income between a person on income assistance and a partner with a job and not on it: would encourage more families to integrate and make the person on income assistance more secure and independent
 - Increase number of income assistance: offices, staff, and consistent training
 - Evaluate and update the grant crisis program from top to bottom
 - Allow for a savings account

- Transportation
 - Create a free driving school program that includes vehicles to practice in, lessons, test
 - For example, driving lessons for youth in care and/or aged out: a vehicle means more safety, independence, and flexibility for more jobs
 - Low income transit pass
 - Invest in a major expansion of the transit system
 - Build in safety measures for those who travel late in the evening

- Foster youth/aged out youth
 - More wraparound programs are needed (*nonprofits currently filling a gap*) with direct government funding
 - A youth worker could provide more wraparound support from a very young age until after the youth has aged out. People need life skills and financial literacy on an ongoing basis, just as any child with parents would receive

- Healthcare
 - Expand universal coverage to include: post-surgical care, dental, pharmacare, glasses, all costs related to diagnosed illnesses (eg asthma)

- Childcare
 - More free or low cost after school care and extracurricular activities
 - Tax bracket for childcare subsidy raised

- Education – access to and programs related to the 0-12 system was a theme throughout the conversation
 - More access to post-secondary education
 - More financial literacy and family planning education
 - More and earlier special needs testing
 - More curriculum in social issue, life skills, and creative areas
 - More wraparound programming for 0-12, especially in areas of food, after school extracurricular, and music/arts/sports

- Government funding for gap filling programs
 - Unless the government can provide more community building, integrating, and wraparound support programs that also provide free childcare and transportation to participants/clients, then MORE direct funding to nonprofits that do all of the above.
- Law Enforcement
 - Harsher sentences for sexual abusers
 - Standard for legal representation
 - Stick to set court dates
 - FMEP more power to enforce court orders

Solutions and Actions That Can Make a Difference

(a) What types of solutions did the individuals who participated in your meeting identify as most important to them?

- Rent control
- Landlord oversight
- Expand universal healthcare coverage to comprehensive
- Stop the pooling of “common law” income
- More second stage housing
- Savings accounts for those on income or disability assistance
- Fresh food “stamps” – local food stamps for fresh food and/or low cost
- Better support for single parents, including fathers
- Building community by building homes of all income levels together
- More wraparound and other services provided through the school system for 0-12
- Childcare completely subsidized
- Raise income assistance and disability rates tied to cost of living in their area

(b) What emerged as the top 3 solutions or ideas based on the conversations and the individual priority setting?

- Raise the rates tied to cost of living in their area
- Rent control and landlord oversight
- Expand universal healthcare to comprehensive coverage that includes dental, glasses, pharma, post-surgery, etc.