

Upstream Lesson Plan

Learning Objectives:

- To learn and increase critical thinking about the structural causes of poverty
- To understand the difference between downstream, short-term and upstream, long-term responses to poverty and homelessness
- To increase understanding of the differences between social responsibility, social service and social justice

Activities:

1. Start by reading the following story:

"In a small town, a group of fisherfolk gathered down at the river. Not long after they got there, a child came floating down the rapids calling for help. One of the group on the shore quickly dived in and pulled the child out.

Minutes later another child came, then another, and then many more children were coming down the river. Soon everyone was diving in and dragging children to the shore, then jumping back in to save as many as they could.

In the midst of all this frenzy, one of the group was seen walking away. Her colleagues were irate. How could she leave when there were so many children to save? After long hours, to everyone's relief, the flow of children stopped, and the group could finally catch their breath.

At that moment, their colleague came back. They turned on her and angrily shouted: "*How could you walk off when we needed everyone here to save the children?*"

She replied, *It occurred to me that someone ought to go upstream and find out why so many kids were falling into the river. What I found is that the old wooden bridge had several planks missing, and when some children tried to jump over the gap, they couldn't make it and fell through into the river. So I got someone to fix the bridge.*"

2. Draw the river and bridge on a flipchart or whiteboard, and use the following questions to support students in filling in the picture:

- *What does poverty look like in your family, neighbourhood or community?*
 - Fill in the river with the student suggestions. Note that many of their ideas may be stereotypes of poverty or the most visible manifestations of poverty e.g. homeless people, drug addicts, etc. so use the factsheet below to add the bigger context to their comments e.g. “actually most poor people are working but unable to make ends meet.”
- *What kinds of responses to poverty are crisis responses like rescuing people from the river?*
 - Fill in the river banks with the student suggestions. If none, guide them to think about soup kitchens, food banks, shelters, etc.
- *What could we do in relation to poverty to re-build the bridge so that people aren't falling into poverty? What are some solutions that could prevent poverty in the first place?*
 - Fill in the bridge with the student suggestions. If none, guide them to think about income assistance and minimum wage increases, social housing, free education, dental care, etc.

3. Downstream vs. Upstream: Discuss the differences between the solutions on the river bank and the bridge

- **By downstream, we mean giving** help to those who are in need – there is an immediate need, and we fill it. We do this in an altruistic way, not expecting anything in return. So for instance donating to a food bank, or supporting charitable organizations like UNICEF, or fundraising is another example.
- **By upstream, we mean preventing** poverty and homelessness – there are measures that governments can introduce to keep people out of poverty. This is about equity: the fair distribution of advantages, assets and benefits among all members of a society.
- Discuss the following features of downstream and upstream:

Downstream	Upstream
Short-term	Long-term
Effect	Cause
Give	Prevent
Social service	Social justice
Personal	Structural
Dependent	Independent
Shame	Pride
No change	Systemic change
e.g. Fish	e.g. Fishing rod

Factsheet on Poverty and Inequality in BC

- BC has the second highest poverty rate in Canada at 10.3%, using the Market Basket Measure - that's 481,000 British Columbians struggling to get by. BC has been first or second for over 15 years. We use MBM because it tracks actual cost of living and changes by region so captures BC's housing crisis.
- BC's child poverty rate is 1 in 5 using the Low Income Measure. That's 172,550 children, larger than the population of Coquitlam.
- Inequality in BC is one of the worst in Canada. The top 20% own 65% of the wealth while the bottom 20% are in debt.
- The majority of poor people in BC are working – they have a job but they still can't make ends meet.
- About half of BC's poor children live in families where at least one parent has a full-time, full-year job.
- In a typical month, over 100,000 people in BC use food banks and the need is increasing: 1 in 3 are children; almost 1 in 3 are Aboriginal; about 1 in 6 are or were recently employed.
- The minimum wage rate of \$13.85 an hour is barely at the poverty line, and far below for single parents.
- Income assistance (or welfare as it's commonly called) is \$760 a month for a single person in the "expected to work" category and \$1183 a month for a person with a disability, plus a \$52 transportation allowance. The shelter rates have not been increased since 2007 and the support rates have only been increased by \$150 over the last 2 years.
- Poverty is concentrated in specific populations, such as indigenous people, people with disabilities, recent immigrants and refugees, queer and transgender people, single-mother households and single senior women.
- There are approximately 3605 homeless people in Metro Vancouver and an estimated 7,655 homeless people across BC – both of these are recognized as undercounts. In the first youth homelessness count conducted in 2018, 681 youth and children were found homeless in Metro Vancouver, with half being in or from government care.
- BC's government used to build between 1000-1500 social housing units a year between the 70s and 90s, but has built far less since then leaving us with increasing homelessness.
- The consequences of poverty cost the province \$8-9 billion while a poverty reduction plan would cost far less.