



RICHMOND ACTION FORUM: EVENT REPORT

Eliminating Barriers to
Participation

COLIN DRING
November 2017

Executive Summary

On September 28th 2017, the Richmond Advocacy and Support Committee and the Richmond Poverty Response Committee hosted the first annual Richmond Action Forum – Eliminating Barriers to Participation. The objectives for this project and for this event are:

1. To help those living in poverty develop a space/community to share their stories,
2. To educate local service providers on the wide range of issues contributing to poverty, and
3. To create opportunities for like-minded folks to meet (via community forums, neighborhood gatherings, city council meetings, etc.) and create positive changes in Richmond.

The Action Forum was a full day workshop gathering 50 people from different areas of Richmond (people with direct experience in poverty, community and government staff, ministerial representatives, university students, and the broader community) to identify key issues, root causes and actions. These issues, root causes, and actions covered six topics: Housing, Food & Water, Health, Transportation, Childcare, and Safety.

Participants described the range of issues that were impacting their lives in small table discussions. These issues were then prioritized for further discussion and analysis. Root causes for priority issues were identified and discussions generated actions to address these root causes and issues.

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Acknowledgements

The Richmond Poverty Response Committee (RPRC) is a group of community volunteers comprised of local social services, the faith community, community organizations and members of the public, including *those with direct experience with poverty*. Founded by several Richmond-based organizations in response to the inequities and impact of poverty in Richmond, our goal is to work towards alleviating the effects of poverty in our community.

The Richmond Advocacy & Support Committee (RASC) is a group of community volunteers with direct experience in addressing and challenging the impacts of poverty through advocacy and building relationships. This committee was established over the process of the Eliminating Barriers to Participation project coordinated and led by RPRC members.

This work would not have been possible without the generous support of our funders. We would like to thank the Richmond Community Foundation, City of Richmond, Vancouver Foundation and Literacy Richmond for their contributions and desire to tackle these challenging social inequities with local organizations and people.

Sincerely yours,

Members of the RPRC & RASC



vancouver
foundation

Literacy
Richmond

Action Forum Background

In 2016 the Richmond Poverty Response Committee (RPRC) initiated the Eliminating Barriers to Participation in Society Project. The goals for this project, and the Action Forum, are:

1. To help those living in poverty develop a space/community to share their stories,
2. To educate local service providers on the wide range of issues contributing to poverty, and
3. To create opportunities for like-minded folks to meet (via community forums, neighborhood gatherings, city council meetings, etc.) and create positive changes in Richmond.

One of the outcomes of this project was to create a space where people with direct experience can convene, discuss their issues, create peer-to-peer relationships of support and ultimately advocate for change from inequities impacting individuals, households, and the broader community.

The Richmond Advocacy and Support Committee was established as a group of Richmond community members with direct experience in addressing and challenging the impacts of poverty. These community members historically or presently are struggling to survive in the context of a society that consciously and unconsciously excludes them from full participation.

The Action Forum was intended as the public facing aspect of the project wherein members from all walks of Richmond's society could attend and learn about the Eliminating Barriers to Participation project and the outcomes of the RPRC's community consultation & relationship building project – Conversation Circles.

Coordination and organization of the Action Forum was done through the RASC and RPRC. The process for developing the program and event logistics was facilitated by a consultant. RASC and RPRC members met over the course of April to September 2017 to discuss and develop a program and set of activities, themes, and objectives of the Action Forum. Participants were involved in the planning and design of the forum and were ultimately decision-makers for the forum.

The Action Forum was held on September 28th, 2017 at the Sheraton Vancouver Airport Hotel from 9am to 4pm (see Action Forum Program below). The day consisted of an opening address, group agreement, icebreaker activity, speakers with direct experience in advocacy against the impacts of poverty, a presentation on the findings from the Conversation Circles, and activities examining issues, root causes and actions on a variety of themes. The day wrapped with groups summarizing the process and outcomes at their tables and an evaluation of the forum.

Action Forum Program

| | |
|---|----------------------|
| Registration | 8.30am-8.50am |
| Welcome & Icebreaker Activity | 9.00am |
| Speakers | 9.20am |
| Group agreement | 9.50am |
| Issue identification - Rounds 1 & 2 | 10.10am |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Brainstorming○ Issue prioritization | |
| Lunch break | 12.10pm |
| Root causes & actions - Rounds 1 & 2 | 12.50pm |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Root causes identification○ Actions identification | |
| Health & wellness break | 2.50pm |
| Report back presentations | 3.00pm |
| Forum feedback | 3.40pm |
| Action Forum Close | 3.50pm |

Attendees

A total of 50 people attended the Richmond Action Forum. Participants came from a range of backgrounds, from community members with direct experience in poverty, service providers, government staff and Ministerial representatives, and students from local universities.

Speakers & Presentations

Guest speakers: Fraser Stuart & Debbie Henry. Fraser talked about his experience as a person with disabilities and the challenges in trying to get supports from the government. Fraser noted the administrative barriers and the short timelines that render accessing these state supports challenging. Debbie talked about her experiences and struggles as an indigenous woman raising two children on her own. The lack of supports and difficulties that she faced in an urban setting like Metro Vancouver reinforced the oppression and sense of marginalization experienced by many urban indigenous peoples disconnected from their communities.

Conversation Circle Findings were presented by Colin Dring. This presentation described the eight Conversation Circles hosted across Richmond with different community-service organizations over the course of February to May 2017. These focus groups identified issues from a range of people directly experiencing poverty in Richmond, BC.



Event activities

Action Forum participants were involved in a set of activities designed to identify key issues, their root causes and actions that can be taken. These issues covered six broad topical areas: Housing, Food & Water, Health, Safety, Transportation, and Childcare.

| | Priority Issues | Root Causes | Examples of Actions |
|-------------------------|--|--|---|
| Housing | Availability of adequate, safe, and affordable housing Location Support to navigate the housing system | Housing market = free market Empty houses Not enough special housing Stigmatization and discrimination (e.g. racism, sexism, classism, homophobia) | Community organizing Rent control/freeze Legislated targets and definitions of 'suitable and accessible accommodations' Streamlined dispute resolution Design housing with users |
| Food & Water | Foods are expensive Getting to food banks and meal programs | Cheap food = unhealthy food Community gardens are for the rich Food banks don't provide enough food Food imports results in variable prices | Food system map or booklet (include water) Active communication and outreach by food providers Locate food services in areas with greatest demand |
| Health | Navigating health- care system Accessing healthcare services Transitions & supports (e.g. from emergency care to wellness) | Stigma – mental health Lack of available GPs and doctors Poor self-care/nutrition Lack of insurance/ coverage | Student nurses/doctors involved in minor ailments Preventative health care – free/low cost More doctors – recognize immigrant credentials |
| Transportation | Limited transit network Handy Dart program | Focuses on economy rather than services people need to access Transit planning – not enough routes & connections for buses Lack of funding for Translink | Social assistance users access to low-cost bus passes Donation/funding system to assist people in need Transit planning focused on service access Driver training on needs of elderly/disabled |
| Childcare | Limited to no affordable child care available | Childcare subsidy Other expenses are too high Not enough | \$10 a day childcare After-school childcare available to all Childcare for children with disabilities Fewer rules/regulations for use of childcare subsidies |
| Safety | Community supports | Lack of empathy and compassion Gap between people is increasing | Build community trust Create safe, public spaces Network people together |

Voices from participants

Participants generally expressed that they were pleased with the Action Forum, the way that it was organized and the degree of learning and discussion that happened over the course of the day.

“I enjoyed this Action Forum and pray we will gain and implement what we have learned and discussed for the betterment of the poor, compromised and society in general.”

“This has been an eye-opening experience. Hearing different perspectives from other people and the topics that are important to them.”

“Good job overall pulling together a diverse group of people to talk about some really critical issues!”

We also heard from participants that there were demographics that were under-represented such as people with direct experience with mental health, children & youth, and indigenous peoples. There were calls for more testimonials and understanding how people have overcome adversity and challenges in their lives.

“I want to see what kinds of actions can be done in the future”

“No discussion about childcare, First Nations in poverty”

We noted that the venue was problematic for people with disabilities accessing washrooms, for donating extra food, and that the parking fees were prohibitively expensive.



