Conversation Circle Findings - Richmond Voices for Increasing Participation For All

Prepared by Colin Dring November 7, 2017

"Anyone who has struggled with poverty knows how extremely expensive it is to be poor." – James Baldwin

Executive summary: Barriers project conversation circles report

The Richmond Poverty Response Committee launched the "Eliminating barriers to participation for Richmond residents experiencing poverty" project in late 2016. The first phase of involved a series of facilitated conversation circles where both individuals experiencing poverty and agency staff could share their stories in a safe environment. Below is an executive summary of the final report based on those conversation circles findings.

According to the Low-Income Measure, it is estimated that just over 22 per cent of Richmond residents would be considered low income in 2011. The percentage of low-income households is much greater than the provincial (16.4%) and national (14.9%) averages. We show that the experience of poverty results in substantial barriers to full participation in communities and in Richmond. Currently, we are failing to reduce the impacts of poverty.

Twenty-four agency staff and members of the public were trained in the Conversation Circle approach representing 15 different agencies. 55 people participated in the Conversation Circles (a dialogue-based focus group approach) in Richmond, BC from February to June of 2017. Conversation Circles were hosted at Richmond organizations and community spaces: CHIMO Community Services, Gilmore Park United Church, Richmond Centre for Disabilities, Richmond Food Bank Society, Richmond Multicultural Community Services, and Touchstone Family Association.

All participants spoke to their experiences struggling to survive and the desire for a 'good life'. This 'good life' was described as able to meet basic needs: affordable and well-maintained housing, an adequate quantity and quality of food, affordable transportation, and a living wage. In addition to these basic needs, participants expressed a desire to contribute to their communities. These arose through an identification of short and long term solutions to barriers to participation in society.

Participants discussed the need for skills and knowledge to put their ideas into action. We proposed the formation of a group comprising people with lived experience of poverty supported by the broader Richmond community; this group's purpose will be to advocate for and support people experiencing poverty.

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Acknowledgements

Sincerely yours,

RPRC Steering Committee

Alex Nixon, Hajira Hussain, John Roeder, De Whalen

> **Poverty Line**
>
> As if one could draw a line and say: under it
> Is poverty. Here's the bread wearing cheap makeup
> Turning black.
> And here are the olives on a small plate
> On a table cloth.
> In the air the pigeons fly in salute
> To the clanging bell from the kerosene vendor's red cart
> And is the squishing sound of rubber boots landing in the mud.
> I was a child, in a house they called a shack, in a neighborhood
> Called transit camp for immigrants. The only line
> I saw was the horizon, and under it everything seemed
> Poverty.
> -Ronny Someck

Introduction

Richmond, at the mouth of the mighty Fraser River, is considered by many to be idyllic, with its views of the Georgia Strait and Vancouver Island, its mix of farmland and dense cityscapes, and its diversity of peoples and communities living side by side. However, this idyllic imagery belies a darker side, one hidden from the minds of its residents, or, if raised, denied or blamed on the indolence and flaws of those experiencing poverty. There is a myth that the city is fair, that it is welcoming, and that is a place to build a home for all.

Richmond Income Statistics

Research has shown that the average income of individuals in Richmond is slightly more than $30,000 after taxes.[1] However, differences exist that impact income in significant ways. For example, the median household income for lone-parents is two thirds lower ($39,950) than the average median household income $63,307 dollars per year (which is less than many other cities in Metro Vancouver[1]).

The Low-Income Measure after tax is an indicator of the number of households that may be struggling to meet their basic needs. According to this measurement, Statistics Canada estimates that just over 22 per cent of Richmond residents would be considered low income in 2011. The percentage of low-income households is much greater than the provincial (16.4%) and national (14.9%) averages.[1] It is also estimated that over 20 per cent of Richmond residents and 30 per cent of children live in low-income households.[2]

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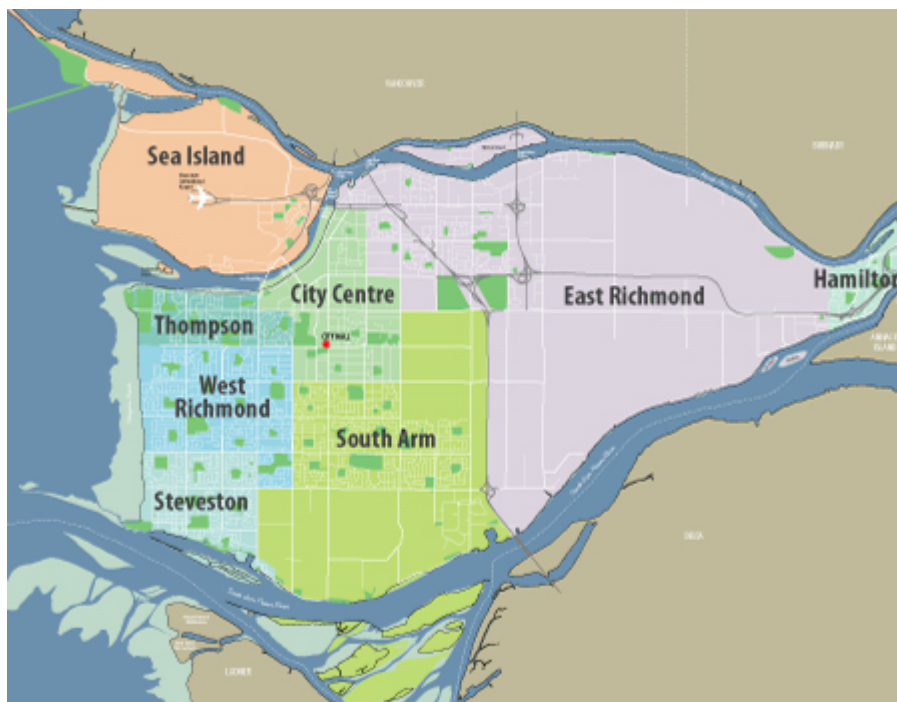
[1] National Household Survey 2011
[2] Richmond Health Profile 2011

Impacts of Living on a Low-Income

People living with lower income and in poverty are at a higher risk of homelessness and substandard living conditions, illness and sickness, depression, hunger, malnutrition, anxiety, and constant stress. These community members have a greatly diminished life expectancy.[3]

As well, stigma, shame, and embarrassment are associated with not being able to meet basic needs for oneself and for one's family. The social pressure of blame and judgement are expressed in overt (e.g. harassment by volunteers or staff) and systemic ways (e.g. social and employment services are geographically dispersed across long distances). This often results in Richmond residents expressing an overall lower sense of belonging and connection compared to other residents in BC.[4]

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[3] http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/82-003-x/2009004/article/11019-eng.htm
[4] Vancouver Foundation Vital Signs Report 2016

Poverty & Participation in Daily Life

Belonging and connection are the basis of healthy social and community relationships. Participation in all aspects of life and community are important factors influencing the health and well-being of people in Richmond. When certain voices are excluded from decisions that directly impact them, we make choices based on incomplete knowledge, which can often result in reactive, cookie-cutter approaches built on short-term, funding-related timelines. Full participation means the ability to be included in meaningful ways (see *Ladder of Citizen Participation* below), where one's voice, opinion, and expertise is heard and legitimized.
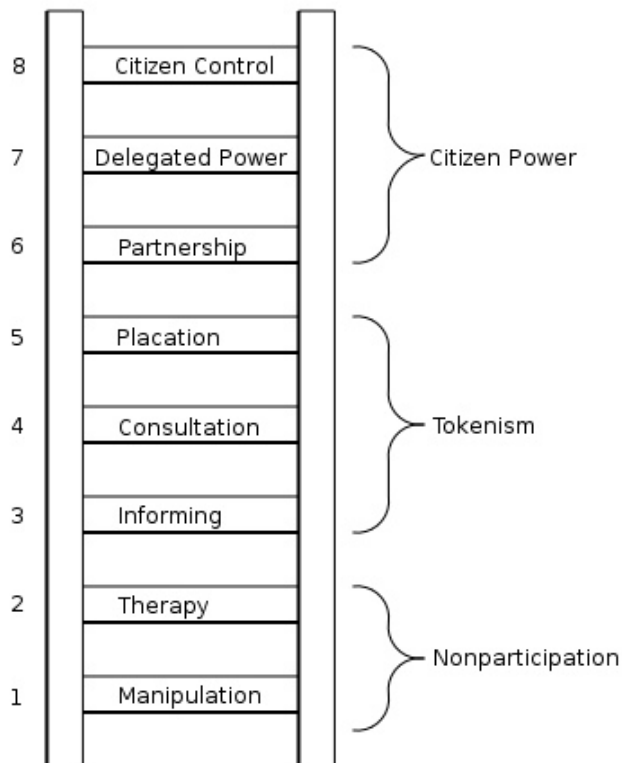
Ladder of Citizen Participation[5]

Poverty is a violation of human rights that disproportionately affects Indigenous people, recent immigrants and refugees, people with mental and physical disabilities, children, the elderly, single parents, and ethnic communities.[1] While poverty has many impacts on the individual and to our community, it goes beyond a simple lack of income. The cycle of poverty actively limits the choices, capabilities and power of individuals leading to stigmatization, discrimination, and exclusion. These limitations can lead to people being unable to participate in decision-making, planning, programming, or community-building.

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[5] Sherry Arnstein – Ladder of Citizen Participation

> *"Participation in society and community is a fundamental right of every human being not just in public affairs, but also in being a part of the solution to poverty."*

Findings from the 2016 Vancouver Foundation's Vital Signs Report identify that community participation in Richmond was generally lower than the rest of BC, but was significantly lower in the areas of volunteering, unpaid help to non-family members, and participation in petitions or other organizing[4]. Participation in society and community is a fundamental right of every human being not just in public affairs, but also in being a part of the solution to poverty. The dual impacts of injustices in resource distribution and the exclusion from participating in decision-making continues to perpetuate a paternal sentiment reflecting what George Orwell stated in the 1920s "How people take it for granted they have the right to preach at you and pray over you as soon as your income falls below a certain level."

Access and Barriers to Participation

Access

All people should be able to use the full range of community services available to them in Richmond. This includes universal access to services that contribute to a high quality of life in a community:

➢ Good employment
➢ A healthy and enjoyable environment
➢ Participation in public issues
➢ A responsive and honest government

Barriers

Barriers are the conditions, policies, or attitudes that prevent or make difficult the use and enjoyment of these services, amenities, practices, products, and information. It includes personal and social hurdles that many people must overcome in day-to-day life.

These can include:

➢ Societal barriers (e.g. unfairness in education or income or employment, stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination)
➢ Institutional barriers (e.g. where the institution is located, difficult rules of institutions, poor or no communication)
➢ Personal barriers (e.g. lack of personal skills, family concerns, greater uncertainty in one's life)

Eliminating Barriers to Participation in Society Project

We share a collective responsibility to ensure that our actions respect, protect and enable the rights of people living in poverty to participate and be actively involved in ending the cycle of poverty. In 2016 the Richmond Poverty Response Committee (RPRC) initiated the Eliminating Barriers to Participation in Society Project. To achieve these goals, a long-term project was

proposed aimed at creating spaces, skilling individuals and communities, and creating more inclusive and democratic approaches to community development and anti-poverty work. The goals for this project 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

(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 first phase of the project was intended to hear peoples' experiences and stories about surviving in Richmond, the barriers they face, and their ideas on how to create change. Employing an approach called Conversation Circles, we reached out to RPRC member organizations holding programs and community spaces to permit us to engage with their members and clients.

Conversation Circles

Conversation Circles are a tool used to ensure that problem solving includes the voices of those who are most impacted. It is tested, innovative and based on the democratic principle of bringing diverse people together for public dialogue to action. It ensures that a range of community members are involved in and informing decision-making. An individual Conversation Circle is typically made up of six to eight individuals plus an impartial facilitator and a note taker.

Description of Project Approach

Conversation Circle Approach

Conversation Circles were used as a dialogue-based approach to facilitating discussion among participants. This approach had been used by the Richmond Poverty Response Committee (RPRC) and other organizations in Richmond to advance dialogue-to-action projects (e.g. affordable housing, intercultural dialogue and programming). As part of this project, it was vital to include and connect Richmond organizations to people experiencing poverty. In addition, through consultation with agency organizations, the RPRC identified that agency organization staff were interested in gaining skills to engage in dialogue with their clients and members.

The RPRC Steering Committee offered training in the Conversation Circle process to Richmond agency staff and members of the public. These participants were identified via a recruitment email sent to organizations working on social issues in Richmond; relevant organizations and people affiliated with the RPRC, or were identified by RPRC volunteers and consultants. Two facilitator trainings were conducted, one in November 2016 and one in January 2017. **Twenty-four agency staff and members of the public were trained in the Conversation Circle approach representing 15 different agencies.**

Conversation Circle Setting and Participants

The study team conducted nine Conversation Circles with clients and members from seven organizations in Richmond, BC from February to June of 2017. These organizations include: CHIMO Community Services, Gilmore Park United Church, Richmond Centre for Disabilities, Richmond Food Bank Society, Richmond Multicultural Community Services, and Touchstone Family Association. **55 people participated in the Conversation Circles, which lasted between 45 minutes and 2 hours.** Participants were asked a set of semi-structured questions that were pre-determined by the project team and through consultation with agency organization staff (Appendix A).

We asked participating organizations and people who had attended the Conversation Circle training to commit to facilitating, notetaking, or coordinating a Conversation Circle. To support organizations in hosting their own Circles, the RPRC consultant and interns created a Conversation Circle Toolkit and offered an orientation to interested parties.

Participants in the Conversation Circle were asked to join the project from a variety of locations and organizations across Richmond. As there was no agreed upon definition of poverty, participants were asked to meet the following criteria:

- Are currently or had been recently residents of Richmond, BC,
- Self-identified as being on a low, fixed, or no income,
- Self-identified with the range of meanings associated with poverty

Participants were not required to provide any proof or justification for their participation in the Conversation Circles. Rather we invited participants to come, share a meal and discuss the experience of living in poverty, and help the RPRC identify solutions and actions to address barriers to participation and the general experience of poverty.

Typically, we sought to work with existing organizations, within programs that convene their members/clients on a regular basis. We leveraged these pre-existing spaces (e.g. Richmond Centre for Disabilities men's and women's support groups, Gilmore United Church's Alcoholic Anonymous group, CHIMO homeless person lunch group) to reduce the barriers to participating in Conversation Circles among program participants. In addition, we organized and held two public Conversation Circles, one at the Richmond Food Bank and one at Gilmore United Church.

Data Analysis

During Conversation Circles, notes were taken on flipchart paper. These notes were collated by the project team, transcribed to Microsoft Word and then were compiled into a master document, organized by each of the questions asked during the Circle (Appendix A). The three members of the project team individually created their own codes, based on the themes, concepts, perspectives and observations identified during the Circles. These codes were then compared by the project lead and organized into a formal coding framework. The results were grouped by themes and categories, and described where required.

Conclusions were drawn, with respect to the project objectives, and were used to develop descriptions and explanations of the observed and reported statements and stories of Conversation Circle participants. Analyzed data was then compared against information drawn from other publications and research to check for alignment.

> **Park Bench**
>
> I live on a park bench.
> You, Park Avenue.
> Hell of a distance
> Between us two.
>
> I beg a dime for dinner –
> You got a butler and maid.
> But I'm wakin' up!
> Say, ain't you afraid
>
> That I might, just maybe,
> In a year or two,
> Move on over
> To Park Avenue?
> *-Langston Hughes*

Conversation Circle Findings

What we heard from the Conversation Circles are presented in relation to the discussion questions. All participant names and identifiers have been removed to ensure anonymity.

Values and beliefs (Conversation Circle Question 1)

We employed the questions: "What do you value in life?" and "What is important to you?" to determine the values, beliefs and desires of participants. There were generally two categories of statements: 1) desire to meet basic needs (food, housing, safety, income, health) and 2) values of fairness, independence, and desire to help others.

All participants stated how important it was to be able to meet their basic needs. For many this was expressed as "a good quality of life" or "a fair wage." Most participants identified a direct link between income and basic needs, while sharing that they did not have sufficient income to meet their basic needs. The value and goal statements are provided in a context where the ability to meet basic needs is inconsistent over time. That is, at any given moment one or more essential need (e.g. rent, utilities, transportation) is met by sacrificing another need. This sacrifice results in household impacts such as hunger, the inability to purchase medications, treating a dental issue, or repairing appliances.

The second category of statements (values of fairness, independence, and desire to help others) represents a state of being where participants want to be treated equally **and** not to be looked down upon. Many participants have a desire to give back in a system where they have been recipients of the charity of others. The desire to give back represents a social connection for participants whereby they want to have the energy and time to contribute to others. Even while experiencing poverty, many participants identify a desire to volunteer at the food bank or community meals, and express frustration at not being able to do so.

What have you heard people saying about poverty?
"Why don't you just find a job?"
"Those people are just lazy"
"If you're poor, how can you afford to smoke cigarettes, you should stop smoking and use that money on food and rent"
"There's no poverty because I see people driving to the food bank"
"We didn't have food banks and we still survived"
"All Chinese people are rich and are taking advantage of free stuff"
"Who cares?" or "Why should I care?"
"Why should I work hard to support them?"
"I don't see it, so it doesn't exist"
"Those people are just cheating on their taxes, they're not really poor"
"Their Dad is living in China and doesn't claim income in Canada, that's why they look like their poor, but they're not"
"They should just get over it…" – people living with disabilities or mental illness

The experience of poverty in Richmond (Conversation Circle Question 2)

The second question posed to participants was to describe what it is like experiencing poverty in Richmond (see Table 1 for a summary of all responses). We clarified that people could tell us what it was like in a typical day or week and to describe their feelings and the aspects of day-to-day living. Across many participants we heard about how difficult their lives are. The stories that participants shared describe lives filled with constant stress and worry, isolation, exhaustion, fear, frustration, shame, and limited time to live. One participant spoke to their having "no work to life balance" and that all their time was spent either working low wage jobs or traveling to services across the city or the region. Many participants identified the experience as 'dehumanizing.'

Living in a society where money is the basis for surviving, many participants discussed the cost of living and the additional costs (or sacrifices) endured every day. While participants ranged from being unemployed to working multiple jobs, low wages or inadvertent costs presented a constant stress and worry- they described often being one pay cheque away from being unable to cover their costs. Any unexpected costs (e.g. medical, dental, housing repairs) resulted in a negative and significant disruption in their well-being. In addition, participants described a deterioration of their mental well-being resulting in deeper bouts of depression and anxiety.

> "The cycle of poverty actively limits the choices, capabilities and power of people subsequently leading to stigmatization, discrimination, and exclusion."

The Barriers to Participation (Conversation Circle Question 3)

Conversation Circle participants noted that full participation in the range of programs, services, opportunities in Richmond are predicated on having the income and resources to pay for them. Many programs & services, whether recreational, civic, social, educational, etc…, have a cost to participate. This cost to access, even when offered at a discounted rate, must be balanced against more pressing concerns (e.g. basic needs and the possibility of unintended costs and unexpected circumstances).

While poverty has many impacts on the individual and the community, it goes beyond a simple lack of income. The cycle of poverty actively limits the choices, capabilities and power of people subsequently leading to stigmatization, discrimination, and exclusion. Being able to participate in decision-making is a fundamental right of every human being not just in public affairs, but also in being a part of the solutions to poverty. Including participatory methods has the potential to build autonomy and social inclusion. We share a collective responsibility in Richmond to ensure that our actions respect, protect and enable the rights of people living in poverty to participate and be actors in ending the cycle of dependency[6].

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[6] Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Ms. Maria Magdalena Sepulveda Carmona on the right to participation of people living in poverty.

Table 1 Statements responding to the experience of poverty in Richmond

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Cannot afford housing

Housing condition is poor, not well-maintained

Cannot afford basics (e.g. food)

Doctors and health professionals treat us poorly, quality of service is lower

Hospitals have long wait times

Mental illness & stress due to low income – social pressure

Cannot join some clubs, recreation, or community programs

No money

Health insurance is increasing

Not enough support for people with disabilities

Families can't save money by using public transit

Valid ID are expensive and difficult to get (e.g. BCID or passports)

No access to or desire by landlord to maintain housing

Difficult to find a job that pays well

Spend most of time taking care of family

Dental treatment is expensive

Housing is too small for the size of family

Not able to save for a down payment or start a business

Lower quality of life

Have no resources

Bullying and harassment by landlord

Want things to change; search for support but hitting walls

Lack of support

Daily and on-going violence

Transit system is not working for people with disabilities

No balance between work and life, working all the time

Being disabled means not being able to get a job

Have to walk everywhere

Unaffordable child care

Walking everywhere

Rolling everywhere

People won't ask to help you out when there is no trust

For many, accessing programs and services - usually related to income or employment services, social services, health services, or housing services – often resulted in a negative experience. Participants expressed their frustration and despair of trying to navigate service agency and government bureaucracy. This bureaucracy was described as: unclear, unfamiliar, unfair and unfriendly. In addition, sometimes the experience with agency staff was perceived as de-humanizing and frustrating. The explanation that participants offered was that staff and volunteers were familiar with their own organization's policies and programs but if you did not

meet the criteria of that organization you would be turned away, staff would rarely have knowledge of where to go instead, or who to speak to. This sets the responsibility on a person who is struggling to survive to become an expert in navigating a wide and complex range of social services, programs, organizations, staff and volunteers, and policies to meet their basic needs.

The lack of knowledge and familiarity results in frustration on both the service provider and the client, however, the organizational staff member has the power to deny access to services; the person attempting to access services knows in the back of their minds that they can be denied at any point in time. These negative experiences result in people experiencing poverty accessing services only during times of extreme need. This strategy to avoid a negative experience may be problematic as: a) many emergency services (such as Chimo) can be easily overwhelmed with an influx of needs (e.g. housing single mothers, the homeless), b) it can result in higher amounts of stress and isolation as people experiencing poverty feel like they have fewer and fewer options for survival, and c) attempting to cope and survive by avoiding service access completely, negatively impacts the individual and their 'household'. As participants continue to have negative experiences, this can reinforce their perception of service organizations.

> "These negative experiences result in people experiencing poverty accessing services only during times of extreme need."

Participants also note that the services that they access are divided into categories (e.g. housing, employment, health, food, transportation) that do not reflect the intersecting and cross-cutting issues facing people experiencing poverty. For example, an individual attempting to access services for single mothers housing would need to go to another agency to access health services, another for food, and so on.

In addition, many of the service providers are unfamiliar with the other services available within their own agency or across other agencies. While this may be an unrealistic expectation on the part of people experiencing poverty that service agency staff be familiar with other programs, there are resource lists that exist and are updated in Richmond. Service provider staff could familiarize themselves with these resources.

The approach of having distinct service areas is common across service agencies and government agencies. As services are geographically spread across the city and region, this results in a significant time commitment to traveling to a from different services on a day to day basis. Participants note the time required to access services can take up an individual's whole day. Also, being passed from one agency to another and encountering staff that frequently provide a low quality of service adds to the barriers experienced by people living in poverty. Couple this reality with participants' description of agency staff as being unsympathetic, impatient, unhelpful, uninviting, and sometimes hostile. The result is of a physically and mentally exhausting experience where people experiencing poverty may limit their access of these services until conditions or circumstances force them to use them. Or rather more

pointedly, people using these services don't have a choice to go to another agency or organization or speak to another person, they are limited to what is available.

While the quality of service is at times frustrating and dehumanizing; the bureaucratic and administrative requirements represent a major barrier to participation in society. For many, the quantity of paperwork and variety of forms can be overwhelming. Add to this, challenges with language proficiency, limited to no help in translating or navigating forms, or challenges with understanding the forms or administrative processes.

Participants also expressed their satisfaction and positive experiences with a range of free programs and services that were offered in Richmond. The Strongstart Program, the Richmond Family Place child minding at the Richmond Food Bank, the Richmond Public Library, and the Richmond Food Bank were generally all seen as positive spaces. These programs warrant further exploration to understand how they can maximize their strengths and assets to further support positive change for their clients, members, and users.

Actions that can be done (Conversation Circle Question 4)

This question was posed to Conversation Circle participants to provide an opportunity for them to identify how they would create action or change when thinking about the experience of poverty and the barriers that they face every day. For this report, we have divided the actions into short term or immediate actions and long term or systems change actions (Table 2, Table 3).

Short-term or immediate actions were suggested throughout the Conversation Circles regardless of the question being asked. Participants would readily share knowledge and advice with one another. When a participant would bring up an issue or barrier, often another participant would chime in and suggest programs, people to speak to, or resources. We observed a wealth of knowledge and resourcefulness among participants through their lived experiences navigating social services and every day survival. Actions ranged as well from individual to community level approaches. These efforts were either aimed at individual or household needs or efforts to inform the broader public and/or decision makers.

Table 2 Short-term or immediate actions identified by Conversation Circle participants

Education/get informed – available resources, services, free classes
Share your story – media, online, discussion or support group
Get involved – volunteering in the community, advocacy, politically
Engage in protest
Create a petition
Organize a bulk-buying club
Get support from friends, family, and community
Vote for change
Self-advocate/speak up/ ask for help

Long-term or systems change actions were identified as actions that may take a longer period of effort or that needed a collective approach to change. These actions identified by participants were intended to address the deep inequities that they face every day. Often participants expressed these actions as being needed to ensure that their children and grandchildren would not have to experience the same life as them. These actions represent fundamental changes to an unfair society that privileges those with wealth and punishes those without.

Table 3 Long-term or systems change actions identified by Conversation Circle participants

Improve the pension amount

Guaranteed basic annual income

Fill in gaps in services

Skill and train people to do outreach and peer to peer support

Collective efforts – advocacy group, support group, discussion group

Flexible and fair work

Have a place to voice concerns (online and offline)

Affordable homes for everyone (esp. homeless people)

Implications

As this report shows, the experience of poverty results in substantial barriers to full participation in communities and in Richmond. Currently, we are failing to reduce the impacts of poverty, signifying that different approaches are necessary. Poverty in Richmond as a collective problem needs to be a priority for all peoples, whether it be different levels of government, non-profit or civil society organizations, funders and business community, and Richmond residents.

All participants spoke to their experiences struggling to survive and desiring a good life. This good life was identified as being able to meet basic needs; that is, affordable and well-maintained housing, an adequate quantity and quality of food, affordable transportation, and a living wage. In addition to these basic needs, there is a desire to give back and to contribute more to their communities and to their families and friends. As one participant noted, they have accessed many of the services in Richmond and want to be a part of helping others in need. The reality remains that neither meeting basic needs, nor giving back are possible for people experiencing poverty.

> "We propose the formation of a group comprising people with lived experience of poverty supported by the broader Richmond community; this group's purpose will be to advocate for and support people experiencing poverty."

Among participants who were enthusiastic about generating actions and giving back to their community, we noted that many were not confident, or lacked the skills and knowledge to put their ideas into action. We propose the formation of a group comprising people with lived experience of poverty supported by the broader Richmond community; this group's purpose will be to advocate for and support people experiencing poverty. This group will require capacity development in the areas of knowledge and skills in organizing, advocacy, planning, project implementation, and evaluation.

This group has the potential to:

➢ Provide a better understanding of the issues and lived experience of people struggling to survive in Richmond,
➢ Identify barriers (institutional, administrative, social, and knowledge),
➢ Drive the development of client-centered approaches (contextualized by cultural considerations),
➢ Emphasize that 'universal' or 'one size fits all' approaches are failing to address the root causes of poverty,
➢ Empower individuals who traditionally have been excluded or marginalized, and
➢ Reduce stigma/humanize/build compassion rather than judgement.

The desire to do advocacy work and to work with people experiencing poverty to attain these skills requires, as a foundation, a supportive and compassionate community. As part of this

community, folks in this group should be supported both through mentorship and peer-to-peer supports. A broader network of agencies in Richmond should collectively organize to build these formal and informal systems of support (e.g. Richmond Community Services Advisory Committee, faith groups, service and club groups, educational organizations).

We recognize that this work has engaged with a small proportion of people in Richmond, and acknowledge that this work lacks the perspectives and experiences of youth, new immigrants, refugees, and indigenous peoples (both urban Aboriginal and *xʷməθkʷəy̓əm* (Musqueam) peoples). As part of a broader project, we aim to continue these conversations with Richmond residents experiencing poverty. As we move forward with a community forum to broaden the conversation in September 2017, we hope to confirm some of these findings from the Conversation Circle and to include a broader range of people including decision-makers, funders, and those with lived experience.
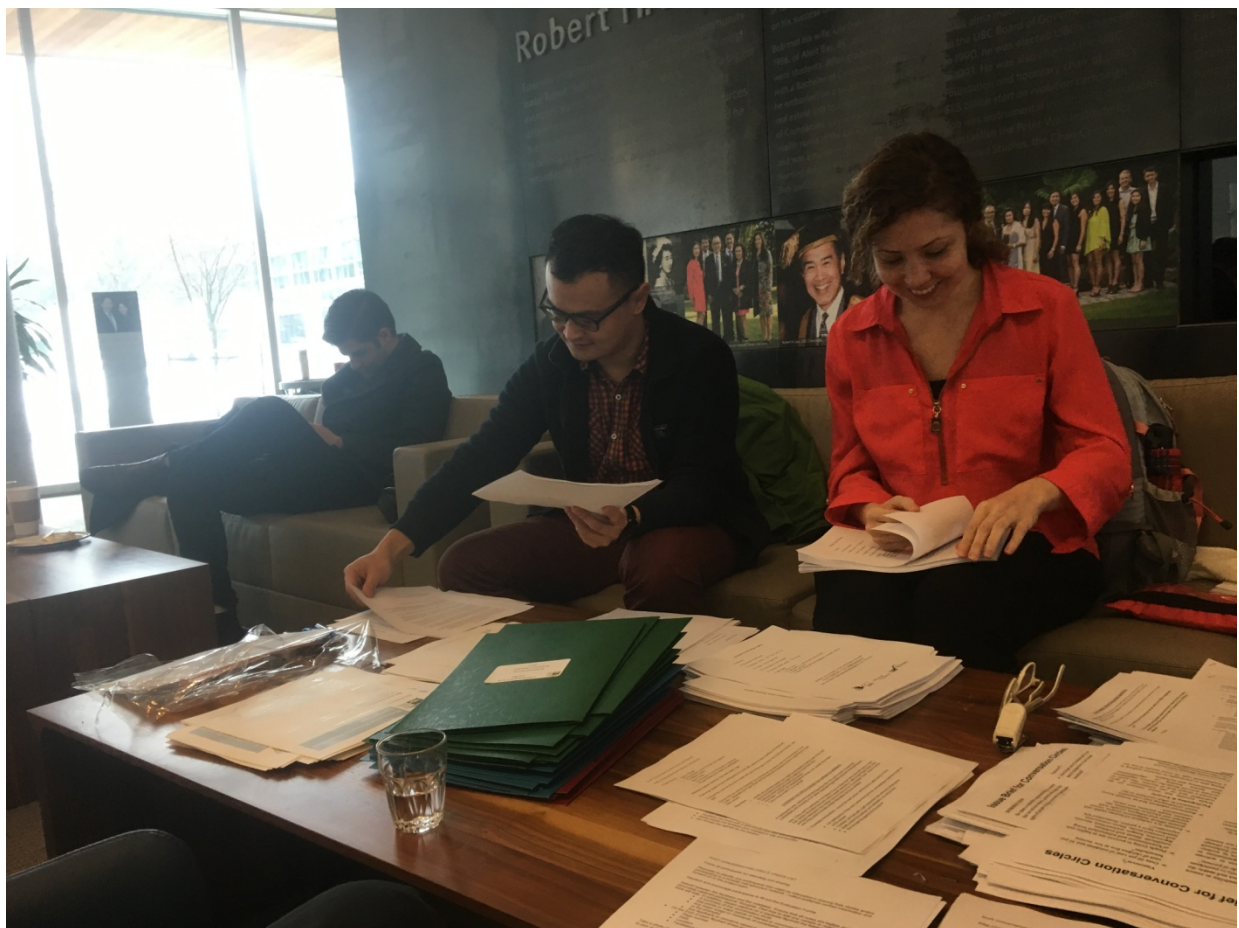
Appendices

1. **Can you tell us some of the things that you value in life? What is important to you?**

2. **Can you share your personal experience of what it's like to be living on limited money in Richmond?**
   Prompts:

   ○ What barriers have you felt accessing services, or seeking employment?
   ○ How do you feel about living in on a low or fixed income? E.g. fear, shame, embarrassment, uncertainty in day to day aspects of life
   ○ What challenges or events have led to your current circumstances? E.g. new employment arrangement or need of child care
   ○ Thinking about your experience, have others made you feel positive or negative about it? How did that make you feel?

3. **Describe a time when you accessed services (community, government or health).**
   Examples of services:

   > *Community* - recreation, food bank, library, community, transportation;

   > *Government* - social services, revenue services, settlement;

   > *Health,* hospitals, clinics, dentists

   Prompts:

   ○ What went well? Can you share any positive experiences?
   ○ What were the main challenges you faced? Did they stop you from using these services?
   ○ What type of barriers have you faced? Education level, religious, cultural or ethnic beliefs, stereotyping?
   ○ Do you feel discriminated against?
   ○ Were the services you were looking for even available and accessible?
   ○ How did the administrative process impact your access to services? Embarrassing, long lineups, rude/accusatory staff, language, understanding, paperwork?
   ○ Do you often receive a customized service or it feels like it is a cookie cutter approach?

4. **What can be done to achieve a good life? What actions could you take to achieve this? How might you be involved?**
   Facilitator note: this question is intended to identify actions that can address the barriers in Question 3. You may prompt them to recall some of the challenges they identified in Question 3.

5. **One of the goals of this project is to empower people living in poverty. Are you interested in joining a group of Richmond residents to work towards change? What do you think about this? Do you want to be a part of this?**