

PRIORITY AREAS FOR ACTION

a sub report of the Quality of Life CHALLENGE Poverty Matrix Report

Thank you to the more than 150 people who participated in the Poverty Matrix project. The community has identified many exciting potential actions to help move people out of poverty through paid work.

The top solutions identified were:

- Social marketing: information campaign about the CHALLENGE and the challenges and solutions to the general public, employers, volunteers etc; Employer education and buy in, focusing on small business owners
- Employers challenged to hire low income people; gold seal Quality of Life Awards for employers who buy in to the CHALLENGE
- Subsidized work clothes programs for men and women
- Job Mentoring / Coaching for retention and promotion by volunteers, matched and trained; Mentorship program
- Support for people with disabilities to earn the allowable extra \$400 a month
- More free computer training and access to computers
- General help with appearance while looking for employment
- Reduced fee community based dental clinic
- Provide bus tickets at reduced rates for employers to give to new employees
- Improve human resources practices of existing employers through modelling, sharing success and giving information
- Support new employees / hires through job coaches and staff who work with employee and employer

A feasibility study for the recommended solutions will be conducted through the summer of 2003. More information about each of the priority areas is included in the following pages. Participants in the April 16 session were motivated to get started on the solutions. Several Task Forces are being spearheaded to further investigate the options and begin to work towards implementation. These include:

- Employer Engagement
- Advocacy
- Mentoring/Coaching
- Employment Service Inventory
- Clothing
- Transit
- Dental Care

How can you take up the CHALLENGE?

Imagine.....

BASIC NEEDS

Basic needs can include food, clothing, shelter and utilities, tools, childcare, family crisis intervention, emergency medical and mental health care, and emergency detoxification. Community services address some of these barriers to self-sufficiency, but more services are needed.

Transportation

Accessible public transportation is crucial for low-income individuals and families looking for work. For a poor household, lack of transportation affects the ability to afford housing and food. Increasing the cost of travel for poor people increases the pressure on food and housing budgets. Transportation is a crucial link to basic needs (food, shelter, clothing) and to strengthening economic independence. The Community Social Planning Council Ticket Assistance Program works in partnership with the Victoria Regional Transit Commission to distribute bus tickets to agencies that provide human services. In 2001-2002, the program distributed 33% of its tickets (7,900) for employment-related travel.

Dental Care

A survey of low-income people conducted for “Brushed Aside: Poverty and Dental Care in Victoria” (VIPIRG, 2000) showed the need for preventive and regular dental care. Poor dental health has a number of consequences, including direct health effects and social and economic consequences such as loss of self-esteem, impaired speech, restricted social and community participation, and diminished job prospects.

Work Clothing

Many people with low incomes do not have access to clothing that is necessary both for a successful job search and for starting work. Some programs such as Women Work Society provide work clothing for women, but none provide work clothing for men. The demand is greater than the supply. Work clothing is particularly an issue for persistently unemployed and temporarily unemployed people. Haircuts are also important.

Food security

Access to food while looking for work is an overarching concern for all target groups. When housing expenses increase or are set at unsustainable levels, there is less money for food. Lone parents may be more likely to have insufficient nutrition, because parents work in order to keep their children healthy and provide more food to their children.

Child Care

Lack of access to childcare is a substantial barrier that can prevent lone parents from participating in training programs. Only a few agencies cover childcare costs while participants are in programs, including HRDC funded programs and Spectrum Job Training. This barrier continues to affect lone parents after they start work.

Affordable Housing

Several participants cited affordable, stable housing as a key factor in enabling people to find and keep work. Because several groups are working together to develop a community strategy to increase the amount of affordable housing in the Capital Region, this report does not include possible solutions related to housing.

Top Basic Needs Solutions

Subsidized work clothes programs for men and women

General help with appearance while looking for employment

Neighbourhood child care exchanges

Provide bus tickets at reduced rates for employers to give to new employees

Other Recommended Solutions

- A universal bus pass program for low income people
- Reduced fee community based dental clinic
- Labour force transition fund through donations to cover special expenses related to finding work
- More flexible child care - evening weekends and emergency care.
- Telephone access for people while job searching
- A buy-back license program for those who have lost their drivers license
- Financial assistance for new employees to pay for required work clothes

New Solutions identified

- Food
- Medical aids
- Medical services: dental, eye care, chiropractor, etc. provide free service. Private sector needs to help.
- Free glasses
- Advocacy about rights in the workplace

The solutions recommended were varied:

- Most were expected to move medium to high numbers of people out of poverty.
- All high-risk groups were expected to be impacted by at least five of the recommended solutions. The most common groups expected to be impacted were lone parents, recent immigrants and youth.
- All experiences of poverty were expected to be impacted by at least at least six of the recommended solutions. The most common experiences expected to be impacted were waged poor, persistently unemployed and dependent poor.
- All sectors were involved in at least seven of the proposed solutions, with slightly more solutions involving employers.
- Over half of the solutions were identified as new.
- Solutions were on average felt to be moderately easy to implement, with a range from easy to difficult.

A task forces has been struck to address work clothing. Interest has been expressed in task forces for dental care, and transit as well.

HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT

Pre-employment Training

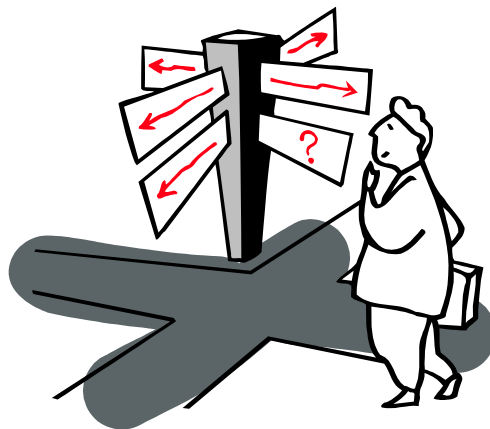
The need for more life skills, communication, and pre-employment training is a major gap in services. The lack of this training primarily affects the 4,132 Persistently Unemployed people in our community.

Job Training

Participants often identified a lack of job training that would enable people to have sustainable employment as a gap, especially for youth and lone parents on Employment Assistance. Without skills, people are forced to take lower-paying jobs. The training must be free and must include transportation, childcare, food and assistance with personal issues, and follow up after the training. There are 2,400 youth under 30 and 1,100 lone parents receiving Employment Assistance. There are six training programs targeted to youth and no training programs targeted to lone parents. The overwhelming majority of programs that participated in the inventory do not cover childcare for their participants.

Overall program flexibility

Lack of flexibility in programs was commonly raised as a barrier for people with low incomes. Lone parents and people with disabilities have the greatest need for flexibility, but this is an overarching problem for all high-risk groups. Hours of service have the greatest impact on the waged poor, who are often at work during regular hours of operation. No agencies reported having extended hours of operation in the evenings or on weekends. Flexibility is also an issue for people who are not receiving employment assistance or employment insurance because most programs are available only for people who are on EA or eligible for EI.



Top Human Resources Development Solutions

Support for people with disabilities to earn the allowable extra \$400 a month
More free computer training and access to computers
Mentorship program
Employer education and buy in, focusing on small business owners
Recognition for those who take up the CHALLENGE (gold seal awards)

Other Recommended Solutions

- Industry-specific training related to actual job opportunities
- Increase access to trades training and apprenticeships
- Expand targeted wage subsidies to all job-seekers
- Replicate a Youth Build project where youth learn construction & build low-income housing
- Ongoing support that follows people through the process of training, finding work and keeping work for over a year.
- Training enterprises that earn revenues and train people, such as a training restaurant / cafe
- English classes that are geared toward employment i.e. literacy and numeracy skills.
- Community services with flexible hours (evening hours)
- Career technical centres to bridge high school and community college training in trades and technology

New Solutions

- Mentorship program
- Employer education and buy in, focusing on small business owners
- Multisectoral partnerships: not for profit agencies working with private sector

Using the notes from the small group discussions, we can see that the solutions recommended were varied:

- Most were expected to move low numbers of people out of poverty.
- All high-risk groups were expected to be impacted by at least five of the recommended solutions. The most common groups expected to be impacted were youth, recent immigrants and First Nations.
- All experiences of poverty were expected to be impacted by at least at least five of the recommended solutions. The most common experiences expected to be impacted were temporarily unemployed and waged poor.
- All sectors were involved in at least one solution, with slightly more solutions involving the general public and service agencies.
- Most weren't identified as new solutions. Only one solution was new: Support for people with disabilities to earn the allowable extra \$400 a month.

LABOUR MARKET

Once people's basic needs are met, once they are trained and job ready, they need jobs. Job creation is often identified as part of a community strategy to move people out of poverty through paid work. Increased economic development and a growth in jobs would particularly affect the temporarily unemployed, who have work skills but are unable to find work. This is the most common experience of poverty for women, youth and new Canadians.

Economic development involves a range of actions, including community entrepreneurship by non-profit organizations, partnerships between public, private, and educational institutions, alternative businesses, and helping grow existing small businesses.

New entrepreneurs can be better supported, and can work together for a better chance of success. 1,394 new businesses were incorporated in the Capital Region in 2001, up 11.8% from 2000. Nine agencies are offering services to entrepreneurs. Start-up capital is available from at least two of these agencies, one of which is only for people with disabilities.

The human resources policies of existing employers can have a huge impact on the quality of employment for people with low incomes. In 1996 4,010 people below the Low Income Cut Off were working full-time year round, and 2,105 people below the Low Income Cut Off were working part-time year round. As well, 13,680 people whose household income was below LICO worked for less than the full year, including seasonal workers. Employers can provide a wide variety of policies to help keep their employees out of poverty. Avoiding split shifts, assisting with childcare costs, providing benefits, and providing full-time work for employees who want it are some examples.



Top Labour Market Solutions

Employers challenged to hire low income people

Improve human resources practices of existing employers through modelling, sharing success and giving information

Support new employees / hires through job coaches and staff who work with employee and employer

Other Recommended Solutions

- Targeted self-employment programs relating to specific skills or industries
- Employers would create targets to hire low income or low skilled people
- More support to micro-enterprises started by low income people through business incubators, on-going business counselling, and collective marketing
- Agencies provide supports for new employees who have disabilities or other challenges
- A tax break for new businesses
- More incentives for employers to create jobs, such as wage subsidies.
- Employers should be encouraged to provide on the job training.
- Improve human resource practises of existing employers – mentoring & training programmes, full-time jobs, provide equipment, profit-sharing, flexible work arrangements, formal orientations, and use of local employment agencies
- A Buy Local campaign to support local businesses.
- Grow existing small businesses through technical assistance, modernization, and business networks to create jobs for disadvantaged populations
- More community enterprises owned by non-profit organizations to create new jobs
- Alternative businesses such as psychiatric survivor businesses

New Solutions

- Employers take on part of the target
- Marketing to employers
- Tax break to hire poor people

BRIDGING SERVICES

Advocacy

A commonly identified gap in bridging services was the need for help in navigating the system. Everyone needs help navigating systems, but this priority area is particularly an issue for youth and new Canadians, who are most likely to be unfamiliar with the services available and how they are administered. There are 10,000 youths with low incomes and 5,400 new Canadians in the Capital Region. Several advocacy and referral organizations in the Capital Region help clients find and use appropriate services. Because local employment services have experienced substantial changes as part of the Provincial Government core review, people may be more confused about which services are appropriate for them. During the process of collecting the inventory of services, some agencies identified gaps in services that other agencies were actually filling. In a project similar to the CHALLENGE, Opportunities 2000 (Waterloo, ON) found that 2,800 seniors who were eligible for the Federal Guaranteed Income Supplements were not getting it. By making the seniors aware that they were eligible for additional financial support, Opportunities 2000 was able to move a number of people out of poverty.

Employer Education

Another commonly identified gap was the need to educate employers about the benefits of hiring employees with challenges. This strategy would primarily affect persistently unemployed people (defined as people receiving Employment Assistance, but classified as expected to work) and people with disabilities. There were 4,132 persistently unemployed people in the Capital Region in January 2003. There are approximately 9,100 people with disabilities in the Capital Region. Persistently unemployed people are present in all of the high-risk groups for poverty. There are approximately 2,400 persistently unemployed youth, 2,000 persistently unemployed women, 1,200 persistently unemployed lone parents, and 800 persistently unemployed new Canadians. There is no information available on the number of First Nations people or people with disabilities who are persistently unemployed.

Many people mentioned the need for job retention services that work with people after they find a job, helping both the employer and the new worker. Some employment programs have this follow up service, and they find it increases the likelihood of success in dealing with both employment and personal issues.



Top Bridging Services Solutions

Job Mentoring / Coaching for retention promotion and/or career development by volunteers and/or staff, matched and trained

Social marketing: information campaign about the CHALLENGE and the challenges and solutions to the general public, employers, volunteers etc.

Disseminate (compile, collate and prepare for easy communication) information about work issues, services and programs

Other Recommended Solutions

This small group felt that almost all of the other proposed solutions fit into the three solutions they put forward. The following solutions are each linked to one of the three solutions above. Each of these strategies would have several components which could be explored more in the feasibility study this summer.

- Classes to introduce people to how the employment system works so people can take full advantage of the services offered (linked to #1 & #3)
- Job retention support – help newly-employed workers keep their jobs by providing support for up to two years (linked to #1)
- A social marketing campaign on the benefits of hiring employees with challenges (linked to #2)
- Job brokering for working poor – help employed people find better-paying jobs (linked to #1)
- Increased information on work issues, services, and programmes for all (linked to #3)
- More job coaches (linked to #1)
- Help recent immigrants obtain Canadian credentials (linked to #1)
- Full day workshops for employers to learn about people with challenges (linked to #3)
- Mentorship programme for foreign-trained job seekers, including job shadowing and work placements (linked to #1)
- An information campaign is needed to inform people about the value of mature workers. (linked to #3)
- Classes to introduce people to how the employment system works so people can take full advantage of the services offered and thus be better able to move into employment (linked to #1 & #3)
- A program that acts like a bridge between youth and the employer and teaches job maintenance and retention skills. (linked to #1)
- Help filling in forms and advocating for people to get what they are entitled to (linked to #1 & #3)