

this

TRANSPORTATION / HOUSING / INCOME / SUPPORT

IS HOW WE
END POVERTY
IN SURREY

A Collaborative Research Project on Poverty in Surrey

our next steps towards ending poverty in Surrey

The work done to date in Surrey is making a difference. Our research is encouraging. It has helped to give us confidence that together we can continue to successfully address poverty in our city.

This fall, we will launch a campaign to engage the broader community in a dialogue on actions that can be taken to tackle poverty and low income. We are calling the campaign **“this”**. Our dialogue and community forums will focus on four key areas:

- **transportation**
- **housing**
- **income**
- **support**

We believe that by working together on community-based solutions, using facts and broad discussion, we will find ways to break the cycle of poverty. Early in 2012 we will report to Council on the results of our community engagement process and will suggest specific recommendations for action.

about this initiative

Over the past six months, our project team has been looking at poverty and low income issues in Surrey. This collaborative research project was initiated by **Vibrant Surrey**, the **Surrey Homelessness and Housing Task Force** and the **Surrey Homelessness and Housing Society**. We have worked closely with the City of Surrey’s social planning department, the Fraser Health Authority and the Social Planning and Research Council of BC (SPARC BC).

This overview of the key highlights emerging from our work outlines some proposed actions and next steps.

the current state of poverty in Surrey and Metro Vancouver

Our findings indicate that many of Surrey's efforts and initiatives are showing results. There is a lot that members around the table can feel good about. The 2006 Census data reports that the poverty rate in Surrey was below that for Metro Vancouver and for B.C. This is encouraging.

At the same time, the most recent Statistics Canada data shows that the overall poverty rate, both within B.C. and across the region, is going up. This will have implications for the City of Surrey.

successful partnerships and initiatives address the problem

The good news is that the City of Surrey is coming from a position of strength. The collaborative efforts of Vibrant Surrey and the members of Surrey Homelessness and Housing Task Force have been encouraged and supported by the Surrey Homelessness and Housing Society.

The partnerships and relationships that have been established in Surrey are working. The most recent homeless count data published in May 2011 showed that, for the first time since 2002, there was a reduction in the number of homeless people. This included a significant reduction in the number of street homeless. People were able to find space in emergency shelters or gain access to transitional and supportive housing projects. There has also been important work done to help prevent people from becoming homeless.

how we are going to build on Surrey's accomplishments

Our research points to transportation, housing, income and support as critical elements in helping to break the poverty and low income cycle for many households and individuals.

TRANSPORTATION

AFFORDABLE AND ACCESSIBLE transportation is essential for people to find and get to employment. Of Surrey citizens in the workforce, only 32 per cent work here. This means significant transportation costs for many households.

the Survey of Household Spending reported that in 2009, households spent an average \$5,720 to operate a vehicle. Fuel costs alone were roughly \$1,920 annually.

- Approximately 76 per cent of those who live in Surrey and are in the work force drive to work. Another 11 per cent take public transit.
- The Survey of Household Spending reported that in 2009, households spent an average \$5,720 to operate a vehicle. Fuel costs alone were roughly \$1,920 annually.
- Public transit costs a Surrey household at least \$151 per month if they work in Vancouver.

Transportation is essential for people to have access to employment opportunities, education, food, medical care and support services. As transportation costs rise, it can have a significant impact on the budgets of those already facing challenges. ■

HOUSING

THE HIGH COST of housing represents a significant challenge. Housing costs are typically the single largest expenditure in a household's budget. The average rent in Surrey is \$811 per month according to CMHC's rental market report.

housing costs, for both renters and owners, are among the most affordable in the region. At the same time, there are many families and individuals who continue to struggle to make ends meet.

For a household with limited resources, a larger percentage of their budget will be consumed by the cost of their housing. This leaves less available for food and other essentials. Surrey's housing costs, for both renters and owners, are among the most affordable in the region. At the same time, there are many families and individuals who continue to struggle to make ends meet.

Approximately 1 in 3 renter households in Surrey spend 30 per cent or more of their income on housing. One in 10 renter households spends 50 per cent or more. Our research also shows that the number of families and individuals on BC Housing's Applicant Registry are increasing as are families receiving income assistance. ■

INCOME

SURREY SUCCESSFULLY provides a high quality of life for many residents. The median family income here in 2006 was \$69,119 —comparable to the median family income for the Metro Vancouver region as a whole.

in June 15, 2011 *The Surrey Leader* reported on survey findings that the municipality is "considered to be the third most promising City in Canada" in which to find a job. At the same time our research shows that there are some sectors of the community experiencing high levels of poverty and low income.

This includes new immigrant households, seniors, Aboriginal people, single parent families, the working poor and those who rely on income assistance or disability pensions. The National Council on Welfare reports that a two-parent, two-child household in BC received \$21,016 in 2008. This provides each person with \$5,000 a year or \$300 per month to cover basic needs. ■

SUPPORT

SOME LOW INCOME households can benefit from services and support. These could include affordable childcare, access to education as well as a strong social safety net. Our research indicates there have been significant improvements in the "after tax" poverty rate reported by Statistics Canada. This means

Some low income households can benefit from services and support. These could include affordable childcare, access to education as well as a strong social safety net. Our research indicates there have been significant improvements in the "after tax" poverty rate reported by Statistics Canada. This means that programs and initiatives introduced by senior levels of government are making a difference. According to our research the number of families in low income in Surrey fell to approximately 12,000 after tax from 16,000 before tax. The family child tax benefit and other initiatives have played an important role. The after tax poverty rate for seniors fell dramatically going from 16.4 per cent before tax to 8.7 per cent after tax.

After housing, child care is the next highest cost for many BC families with young children. According to First Call, only 5 per cent of all children under the age of three can be accommodated in existing child care spaces, and fewer than 40 per cent between ages three and five are enrolled in licensed day care. The shortage of affordable child care presents a barrier to workforce participation for many parents.

Finally, access to affordable education, job training, counselling and life skills programs can offer pathways out of the cycle of poverty and low income for many families and individuals. ■

“The good news is that the City of Surrey is coming from a position of strength ... The partnerships and relationships that have been established are working”