

# The Face of Poverty in Surrey

## Community Feedback

Front-line service providers who work primarily with people living in poverty were asked to tell us what they felt were the most pressing issues in Surrey today and what responses might be most effective. We also asked for examples of local initiatives that could make a difference. Here is a summary of what they had to say.

### More people need emergency services.

Homeless shelters, food access services and other crisis services are working at capacity and having to turn people away. Front-line agencies are being pressed to provide food, clothing, temporary shelter and access to bathrooms even though these are not in their normal range of services.

### Minimum wage earners are running out of options.

Some minimum wage earners sleep in shelters at night because they can't find affordable housing, or find themselves deeper and deeper in debt in an effort to make ends meet. Others are resorting to tapping into the underground economy, buying and selling drugs or working in the sex trade to survive.

### Health can be a critical issue.

There has been a marked increase in people with dual diagnosis (mental health and addictions) left without sufficient support. More and more income assistance recipients and working poor have major dental issues impacting their overall health. Others do not have medical coverage because they haven't the ability to file their tax returns, a mandatory condition in order to receive the MSP subsidy.

### People are at risk for exploitation.

As health is eroded, isolation increases and depression sets in. More and more people are falling victim to family breakdown, relationship violence and drug and alcohol abuse. Women and youth of both genders are particularly at risk for exploitation, often tolerating unhealthy and even dangerous conditions in return for shelter and food and some measure of protection.



A collaborative, multi-sectoral effort to reduce poverty and the issues related to poverty. Learning nationally, acting locally.  
WWW.VIBRANTSURREY.CA

'Childcare for a pack of smokes'

"Families can't afford quality, accessible daycare even with the (social assistance) subsidy. They have to compromise in order to go to work or to go to important appointments and so may make inappropriate arrangements. They are stuck."

SERVICE PROVIDER

# The Face of Poverty in Surrey

## Community Feedback



A collaborative, multi-sectoral effort to reduce poverty and the issues related to poverty. Learning nationally, acting locally.  
WWW.VIBRANTSURREY.CA

### People can't access affordable transportation and housing.

Lack of affordable transportation is the number one barrier to accessing food and shelter and finding and keeping work. Other significant barriers include low literacy and numeracy skills and affordable, accessible, quality childcare. An acute shortage of affordable housing often forces two or more families to share accommodation leading to overcrowded and unsafe conditions. Housing that is affordable is too often poorly maintained, unsafe and overrun with vermin.

### Service providers are responding in a variety of ways.

Some agencies are responding with emergency programs (a donated van delivers food to a central point because the food bank is out of reach), and others are responding by targeting service gaps (senior abuse shelter, in-house psychologist, literacy program for young children). Others still are responding by increasing outreach efforts to connect with the most isolated people (a community kitchen with childcare attracts refugee mothers who can be connected to a health care worker).

### But the wish-list of interventions that could make a significant impact remains long.

Interventions include bus passes for those with low income; a mobile health and dental unit for the elderly, shut-ins and young families who cannot travel; programs that would ensure children are connected to community and to their culture, from an early age; access to legal services for immigration, tenancy and family law; affordable housing, particularly single room accommodation; and a revision of social assistance eligibility criteria and application procedures to make more accessible.

### Vibrant Surrey is working collaboratively to reduce poverty and issues related to poverty.

We have joined with 15 other communities across Canada, under the Vibrant Communities initiative ([WWW.VIBRANTCOMMUNITIES.CA](http://WWW.VIBRANTCOMMUNITIES.CA)). We are inviting leaders from the business, social service, and government communities and all our neighbourhoods to work together to enhance the quality of life for all who call Surrey home. Please join in this challenge of building economic and social opportunities for everyone.

What is the community saying?

"There is no point in struggling to bring at-risk youth in off the street and teaching them life skills and job skills if they can't find work paying a living wage and employers who will give them a chance."

SERVICE PROVIDER