

The Face of Poverty in Surrey



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

An Overview

Nearly 20% of Surrey households were living below the low-income cutoff at the last census (2000).

At the last census in 2000, 62,990 people were living below the low-income cutoff in Surrey. The population in Surrey has increased by 8% since then, and now exceeds 375,000. People in Surrey who experience poverty live in *all* neighbourhoods. In 2000, 18,860 lived in *Whalley*; 18,265 lived in *Newton*; 11,745 lived in *Guildford*; 6,455 lived in *Fleetwood*; and 4,430 lived in *South Surrey*.

Poverty in Surrey has many different faces.

Of the 62,990 people experiencing poverty at the last census:

- 38,105 identified as belonging to a visible minority;
- 20,227 were recent immigrants;
- 11,471 were youth between the ages of 15 and 24;
- 13,075 were on social assistance;
- 9,449 were people with disabilities;
- 9,430 were lone parents (mostly women); and
- 3,310 were First Nations people.

A variety of socio-economic factors may contribute to poverty in Surrey.

Surrey has more students below standard in reading, and more teen pregnancies than the BC averages. In addition, 39% of children in the care of the Ministry of Children and Family Development live in Surrey and White Rock. Surrey's serious crime rate was reduced by 13.7% between 1997 and 2002, but it remained almost 5% above the BC average. Immigrants face severe barriers to practicing in their fields, and refugees face long waits to have their claims heard.

Poverty poses numerous barriers.

The inability to pay for transportation is a common barrier to accessing food and shelter, and to finding and keeping jobs. Another is the lack of affordable, accessible and quality childcare. Lack of access to medical and dental services is also a significant problem.

What is the 'low-income cutoff'?

The *low-income cutoff*, or *LICO*, is a Statistics Canada measure that defines a set of income cut-offs below which people may be said to live in straitened circumstances (source: *the Canadian Fact Book on Poverty 2000*, by Canadian Council of Social Development). In BC, the LICO for a single person is \$19,795. For a couple with 2 children, the LICO is \$37,253.

Welfare support payments in BC are below the LICO.

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Surrey service providers are reporting a large increase in the demand for services to meet basic needs.

Despite the demand, there are often not enough programs to meet the need. For example, Newton has over 20% of its population living in poverty, but it has no food bank. Local shelters and transition houses operate at capacity and regularly turn people away. Service providers have also reported a marked decrease in people's ability to pay for transportation, clothing, medical services not covered by MSP, and dental care.

But at the same time, funding for social services is being significantly reduced.

Social service organizations have experienced drastic reductions in funding and programs provided by the BC government have also been severely cut. As social services in the community disappear, the ability for people to seek redress is also disappearing. Legal Aid, Landlord and Tenancy Branch, and Employment Standards Branch services have been cut or drastically reduced.

You can make a difference.

Across Canada, communities are adapting successful approaches to their unique circumstances. Examples include (1) creating work that pays a living wage for those who have trouble finding or keeping a job, through social purchasing portals; (2) supporting women in breaking the cycle of poverty through adapting asset development accounts that work for them; and (3) ensuring eligible persons know about and can successfully apply for income support programs.

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). 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.



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What is the community saying?

"When getting paid \$8.50 an hour, you only have enough for one meal a day and to pay rent. The hole just keeps getting deeper and deeper."

MURRAY

"I am no different from the hooker on the corner. All I want is love, acceptance and to be safe."

MAGDALEN