
Engaging Edmontonians to Thrive and Prosper: What We Heard

Edmonton Poverty Elimination Initiative

January 2014

A WORD OF THANKS

The Edmonton Poverty Elimination Steering Committees wishes to thank all the participants in the focus groups for sharing their stories, their thoughts and their suggestions. We also want to express our sincere appreciation to our host organizations and partners for offering their staff, their time and their space in organizing and facilitating the discussions.

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*“Poverty is lack of income and productive resources sufficient to ensure sustainable livelihoods; hunger and malnutrition; ill-health; limited or lack of access to education and other basic services; increased morbidity and mortality from illness; homelessness and inadequate housing; unsafe environments; and social discrimination and exclusion. It is also characterized by a lack of participation in decision-making and in civil, social and cultural life. Poverty its various forms represents a barrier to communication and access to services, as well as a major health risk, and people living in poverty are particularly vulnerable to the consequences of disasters and conflicts.
(UN World Summit on Social Development - 1995)”*

1. Introduction

The Edmonton Poverty Elimination Initiative is a city-wide effort involving individuals and organizations from a broad range of sectors that share a vision of ending poverty in Edmonton. Led by a Steering Committee, they drafted, *“Unleashing our Potential: Eliminating Poverty in Edmonton”* in June 2012, a preliminary framework that laid out the Initiative’s foundational approach and intended as a tool for engaging Edmontonians in a poverty dialogue. This document proposed to shift the poverty dialogue and action beyond charity and the alleviation of poverty through an approach based on resilience, investment and engagement.

This dialogue began with Edmontonians, especially those living in poverty, to participate in identifying solutions to poverty. From September to December 2013, a series of focused conversations were held with various groups and organizations. This report is a documentation of experiences of poverty that people shared in these conversations, their perceptions and insights of what causes poverty and their ideas on solutions to poverty. More importantly, their hopes and aspirations for better quality of life in the city.

2. Purpose

The purpose of engaging Edmontonians in the poverty dialogue is to:

- Involve people living with poverty in proposing solutions and actions that will affect them; and
- Increase understanding of people’s experience of poverty and generate support for actions to eliminate poverty.

3. Engagement Approach and Method

Edmontonians experiencing poverty should participate in identifying solutions that affect their well being; their stories will help ensure that actions and solutions to poverty are relevant and responsive to their realities and aspirations. As such, the design and process of engagement in the poverty dialogues were guided by the following principles:

- People living in poverty should be at the centre of the engagement process. The participants in the conversations were people and groups struggling with poverty as well as those who work with and serve them.
- Dialogues should be led and facilitated by existing networks and groups that have connections and relationships with people living with poverty. The focused conversations were hosted by organizations and facilitated by community workers directly serving individuals, families and groups who are impacted by poverty

- The engagement process must align with ongoing Provincial Poverty Reduction Public Consultations. Where appropriate and possible, focused discussions were coordinated with scheduled community consultations on the provincial poverty reduction strategy.

A Community Engagement Working Group¹ from the Edmonton Poverty Elimination Steering Committee was formed to design the process and scope for the poverty dialogues. They selected the focus group method as appropriate in conducting the poverty dialogues based on the following:

- It allows opportunities to explore people’s knowledge and experience on a specific issue through a set of guiding questions that focuses the discussions
- Participants are encouraged to talk to one another, ask questions, exchange stories and comment on each other’s experiences and points of view
- Population-based focus groups allow for targeted and in-depth discussions of their context and realities and creates a level of comfort for participation among similar lived experience of poverty

The Working Group developed a focus group discussion guide for facilitators. The focus group discussions were mostly facilitated by staff of the host organizations since the participants have relationships with them and therefore made them feel safer and comfortable to share their stories. The stories were poignant and heartbreaking; the discussions were often difficult and emotional. Some participants were also in the midst of a personal crisis at the time of the focus group session. Being with their worker and in the place that was familiar to them i.e. agency office, made it easier for them to participate.

Scope of the community engagement process

The focus group discussion covered four key areas: people’s experience of poverty and low income, coping with poverty, ideas on solutions and perceptions on shifting public attitudes on poverty. Facilitators were encouraged to open the discussion with orienting questions to warm-up the participants and introduce the key questions for discussion within the context of the participants’ context. For example, for newcomers, an orienting question would be: “How does it feel to live in Canada, in Edmonton?”. Facilitators would adapt discussion questions that are appropriate to the context and circumstances of participants as long as the four key areas in the chart below are covered.

Areas of discussion	Sample discussion questions
1. Experience of poverty and being low income	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What does it mean to be poor? How does poverty affect you? ● What brought individuals and families to poverty and what has kept them there?
2. Reveal and demonstrate resilience and strength	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How does one cope with poverty and limited resources? ● What does it take for individuals and families to cope with poverty?
3. Suggestions and ideas about solutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What do you think would move people out of poverty? ● What are strategies on income, education and wellness that could make individuals and families get out of poverty?
4. Thoughts about shifting attitudes about poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What can we do to change people’s attitude towards poverty? ● How can we generate public support for actions to end poverty?

¹ Ione Challborn , Yvonne Chiu, Janice Melnychuk and Cheryl Whiskeyjack

4. Participants

From September to December 2013, 214 participants participated in a total of 18 focus groups across Edmonton. The participants covered a wide range of groups impacted by or at risk of poverty including the following: (For details of numbers and groups, please see Appendix A)

- low income single parents who are mostly female
- newcomers from five cultural communities
- Aboriginal parents
- low income seniors
- immigrant youth
- low income wage earners
- people living on AISH
- homeless
- women who have been abused
- community workers serving immigrants and refugees
- those struggling with mental health issues
- university students

Gender and Age Distribution of Participants

A total of 142 or 66% of participants answered an optional question on gender and age. Out of those who responded, women outnumbered men by 3:1 (105 or 74%). The predominance of women in the focus groups could be explained that most of the program participants in the host organizations were women. It also reflects the fact that poverty impacts women, who are either low wage earners or single parents.

The median age of those who responded was between 19-30 years where majority of participants were women between 25-30 years old.

Age	Female	Male	Total Responded	No Answer	Total
18 and below	3	3	6		
19-30	17	9	26		
31-40	7		7		
41-50	9	8	17		
51-60	6	1	7		
61-70	3	2	5		
71-80	8	1	9		
80 and above	2		2		
Sub-Total	55	24	79		
No Answer	50	13	63	72	
Total	105	37	142	72	214

In almost all the focus groups, the participants were willing to share their stories, many times with great difficulty. They were keen to be heard, to listen to others who share their experience and to be hopeful that things may change. The two-hour session was always not enough and some of the sessions ran well over the time allocated.

4. The Experience of Poverty: “a life of never ending journey”

The experience of poverty is a daily reality for those struggling with limited resources and limited choices. To understand how people live it everyday, our conversations delved into what does it mean to be poor, what participants think about what causes poverty and how they cope with poverty.

What it means to be poor or with limited income

Over-all, the meaning of poverty for the participants emerged from their struggle of surviving everyday, feelings of loss and despair from limited options and experiencing discrimination and harassment.

The battle for survival

Making ends meet becomes the top priority - it's all about survival.

Constant battle for families which is as simple as making sure kids have milk or shoes.

Being poor means that everyday, one has to think where to get to money to buy food, where they will they sleep that night, where the rent is going to come from etc. Many participants spoke about a persistent and chronic search for resources for rent, food, bus fares, medications, school fees etc. For those who are homeless and unemployed, even the most basic things that most people would take for granted, such as shampoos, is a strategizing process.

It's all about knowing the key words - if you say you need shampoo you won't get anything but if you say you need personal hygiene, they will open up another \$50 to \$75 a month...Life is different if you don't know the key words to use to gain access.

For those who are receiving income assistance, all of the participants say that it is never enough to cover the necessities. The amount of income support they received does not reflect actual cost of rent and food and other expenses such as school fees for kids.

Food went up, rent went up, for those who are currently on SFI, and they should give us a little bit more money. They give us so little to survive and out of that we have to pay everything, so that you are tempted to high risk things.

For many seniors, poverty means cutting back on medication because they can't afford to buy everything and not being able to buy the right food to eat.

For those who are employed and earning limited income, it is living from pay cheque to pay cheque, working 2-3 jobs to be able to support a family and not having savings for emergencies. For some immigrants, it is also figuring out how much to send money home when funds are limited right here.

Transportation presents a daily struggle for many - whether is it enough money to pay for bus fares, availability of bus routes in work areas, to the food bank etc. and frequency of schedules. Limited mobility and access to public transports further aggravates the experience of limited or no money.

I have to pay my own cab fare home at night after buses stop running.

Hard to get groceries without transportation. Cost of bus going up. If your kid's (bus) pass gets stolen, you have to pay for the full cost of replacement.

Feelings of loss and despair from limited or loss of options

Poverty feels like circling the drain, you keep going down until you die.

All the participants feel they are in a constant worry and stress; hopeless to get out of the trap and with few options to make choices.

Stress wears on you. The ripple effects ... either too stressed to eat well or can't afford to eat well - a cycle of poor emotional and physical health.

If I get sick for two weeks I lose my wages.

For many newcomers, poverty starts from the time they arrive: inadequate settlement supports, limited access to suitable and gainful employment and affordable housing. A cluster of losses aggravate the experience of being poor: loss of family and community, loss of social status from being unemployed or underemployed, diminished ability to help others.

When I was back home I used to own a big business, would send my kids to school, buy whatever I want to buy and help others.. but when I came here because of war, everything was lost. And when I moved to Canada, I was 'supported' instead of 'supporting'

Discrimination and harassment

Experience of discrimination is part of their everyday life of being poor - being treated harshly, ignored, undervalued and disrespected. The most difficult of all in this experience is that they cannot seem to do anything about it because they don't really know who or where to turn to.

One of my clients was asked to shave his beard to get the job; he refused because of religious reasons.

I try very hard not to look poor because society judges you. It's hard to walk across a police station or through a playground without having your backpack dumped. We have rights but not as homeless people... We all try not to look homeless so they will leave you alone.

Also some of the hospital staff in emergency departments don't want to help people who are HIV positive or smell bad. The issue with smelling bad is the lack of access to laundry facilities.

Seniors are a forgotten group. We're the people who built this province and country.

You can't afford justice - I couldn't afford a lawyer.

What Causes Poverty

While personal circumstances could make people vulnerable to poverty, participants also cited a range of economic and social factors that could bring individuals and families to poverty. These include: conditions that create barriers to employment and education, inability or inadequacy of social safety nets to move people out of poverty and low wages.

Personal circumstances and life-chance related factors

Losing a job, a tragic accident that left someone in disability, family separation and divorce, a chronic illness, an abusive situation or a small business went bankrupt, are some of the personal

circumstances that participants experienced that led them to poverty. Most often, at the time when their personal circumstances had changed, their ability to access supports is limited.

Someone has a good paying job...and then gets injured or ill. In that situation, their assessed income from the year looks high, so they're not eligible for help - there's no safety net.

Conditions that create barriers to employment and education

The participants spoke about barriers that hinder their ability to access employment and education opportunities to improve their situation. These conditions include the following:

- Limited education opportunities - participants agree that education is one of the important pathways to changing their life circumstances. The cost of post-secondary education has become very expensive; completing a university degree is not enough to get a good-paying job and many of them are busy working to try to make ends meet that they have no time to pursue or continue education.

Undergrad is not enough anymore... you have to go to grad school to get a better job.

Hard to get education and the cost is prohibitive.

- Devaluation of foreign credentials or international education and work experience - participants from immigrant communities are either unemployed or underemployed because their education and training from their home countries are not recognized in the Canadian work place, especially those professions that are regulated or require professional licensure. This issue is viewed as chronic and persistent barrier for every newcomer desiring to find better work opportunities and succeed in Canada.

Actually I find the jobs are not even there ... a man working at Target for 10 hours a week has either a master or a PhD.

- Having a refugee status upon arrival - when newcomers arrived in Canada, they already carry a burden that can bring them to a downward spiral. It starts with a transportation loan that the federal government will start collecting six months after arrival. This loan covers the plane fare and incidental expenses from the place of origin to Canada. A family of 6 - 8 members will cost about \$20,000 - \$30,000. Many of the refugees have limited English skills or education and will end up in low-paying jobs.

For refugees, the priority has to be start paying the (transportation) loan back to government; this forces them to start their life in poverty.

- Transportation barriers - the cost of bus fares to get to potential employment opportunities and the availability of buses to places of work especially those on evening shifts or working 2-3 jobs were mentioned by participants as adding more barriers to an already difficult situation.

If you can't get anywhere, you can't work steadily.

- Cost and difficulty of getting child care - for many single mothers, daycare is so expensive and limited that they end up taking care of their children thus limiting their chances for employment and brings them to never-ending spiral of low income and poverty.

No proper daycare so single parents can't go to work

- Having a criminal record - having a criminal record poses a significant barrier as it limits

employment options and further pushes one to poverty.

If you have a criminal record, you can't get a job. Everyone wants a criminal record check, or a child welfare check. If you are not bondable, jobs are extremely limited. Push-a-broom type jobs. Some people think they are on welfare because they are lazy, maybe they can't get a job.

Inability or inadequacy of social safety nets to move people out of poverty

Nearly all the participants expressed their frustration over the inability of the social support system to move them out of poverty. Rather than be a resource to individuals and families, available income and social supports overburden them by the unrealistic amount of money to cover actual needs, perceived unreasonable requirements for eligibility and the tedious process of accessing these supports. This was echoed in all the conversations from youth, seniors, parents, newcomers and Aboriginal Edmontonians.

Our welfare system is actually creating homelessness because of the inadequate supports. It doesn't take into account the cost of living... the cost of housing is outrageous. I get families who are couch surfing because they can't find a place that's affordable... For example, bus passes. If you're getting only \$400 a month, how can you expect to pay for bus passes?

Poverty reduction is actually poverty creation. My rent is \$1200/month but I only get \$600 for rent, I'm going broke while I'm on social assistance.

It's hard to find housing if you don't have a good record of residency.

The system is extremely complicated and overwhelming for newcomers. You have of this information thrown at you with the expectation that you'll complete the paperwork. If you are a refugee, you lose all the paperwork and then have to spend countless hours trying to fix the problem.

Low Wages

Most of the participants bemoaned the current minimum wage that they considered to be inadequate to live by. To be able to afford the basic necessities and raise a family, one has to work at least two jobs on a minimum wage paying job. They also spoke about not being able to access programs that could help them in getting opportunities to improve their situation. Staying on low-paying jobs makes them very vulnerable to poverty, if they are not already struggling with it.

*Industry wages have been kept low - making \$12.54/hour after 13 years in the same job. Constant worry about being able to afford housing ... I make just enough to **not** to qualify for subsidized housing.*

Minimum wage job - no way up or out of the struggle.

Low paying job is a key factor. Lots of immigrants are working poor.

Coping with poverty

The question about what participants do to cope with poverty was the most difficult question to answer. Coping with poverty was the most stressful to bear - it means having to come up with strategies to get by everyday which demands both one's mental and emotional abilities. It also making sure that one has enough resources and the determination to survive and live for

another day. Participants used and harnessed whatever was available to them in any situation whether it was applying for jobs, making sure that children get what they need for school, accessing services and resources and just surviving everyday.

What came across in this variety of coping strategies were the resilience, strength and determination of participants to survive and dream of a better life. Some specifics were identified as people or supports who helped them cope.

Support from family, friends and communities

Being able to turn to family, friends and communities as the source of support and sometimes resources was the predominant coping strategy among the participants. Participants spoke about their tight social networks in the streets that looked after each other especially when one of them is in trouble. Seniors are close to their neighbors; immigrants connect with their cultural communities.

My friends on the streets are my biggest support. When they don't see me for a few days, they come looking for me.

When there is good community support... moms help each other with childcare.

I'm not shy to ask help from neighbors ... and also generous to help others.

A community support worker who never gave up on them

Participants currently accessing programs and services mentioned that a significant factor was a unique support worker who had helped them cope with poverty outreach workers in the communities. They were described as individuals who have faith in their ability to change, sensitive to their realities and caring. These workers stay with them for a lengthy period of time as they move from one crisis to another, did their best to find ways within the system to bring resources that they needed even if they themselves are struggling to navigate it.

Outreach workers are my biggest support.

If it wasn't for the outreach workers, I would probably still be on the street. I went to them and they helped.

Unrealistic timelines. I'll help you if you get a job, find a daycare, all within a week. How are you supposed to send resumes, look presentable, if you don't have a home and no phone? It's frustrating for families and frustrating for me to see families struggle and not be able to come up with better solutions. (Community worker)

Faith and spiritual anchor

A number of participants turned to their religion or faith for support. They spoke about finding solace in knowing that a higher being is there to give hope. This trend was particularly noticeable among newcomers and Aboriginal participants.

In our community- we say 'God brought us to this situation for a reason' - they have to have patience and they dream. God will bring us to a better place.

My faith in God is my support and helps me. I play music in the subway sometimes and I have gotten involved in a couple of churches.

Taking personal responsibility

All of the participants utilized a mixture of coping strategies that demonstrate personal responsibility over their situation. These individual strategies clearly revealed their strengths, resourcefulness and their determination to survive on a daily basis. Expectedly, spending less and finding cheaper goods, whenever possible were what most people did. Others enrolled in training programs such as ESL classes, job training and creating extra income (picking up bottles, bake sales, craft sale etc.), using food banks and clothing exchange, participating in collective kitchens. For parents, it was always the children's needs that came first.

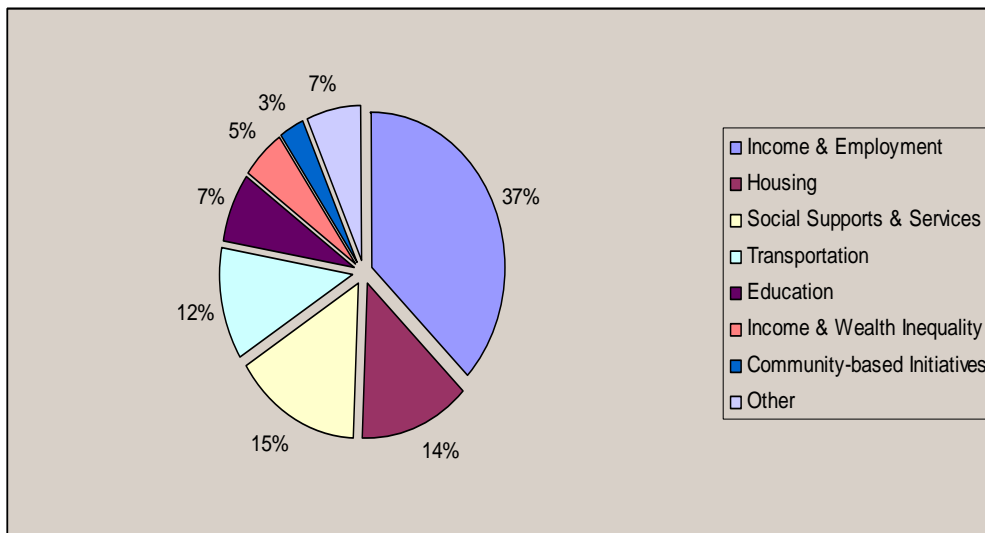
I bottle pick to supplement my income... my buddy sometimes eats out of the garbage can.

Parents don't eat until the kids eat.

I am responsible to pick myself up and get up and brush myself off and say enough is enough. I saw a sign at the Shaw Conference Centre, saw there was a job. It was for a cook. They told me I needed food safety (training) and a criminal record check. I went back to Bissell Centre and took the course for a whole month. Now I am working. I would say that I am responsible for what I want to do. I know I can do it, I have never given up.

5. Key action areas to end poverty

Participants were asked to articulate what needs to be done to move people out of poverty. This was the point when the discussion turned positive, animated and hopeful - participants brought forth a wealth of ideas. In these discussions, participants generated a total of 294 ideas on actions and solutions to end poverty. The chart below shows the top seven ideas frequently mentioned by participants:



● **Employment and income: addressing barriers to employment and decent wages**

From the participants' experience, poverty stems from the lack of or limited access to job opportunities, low-paying jobs and poor working conditions. They suggested removing barriers to employment and the provision of decent and livable wages. The following are concrete actions discussed in the focus groups to achieve this:

- Advocate for a livable or living wage for all which can range from legislation, working with the business sector to the City of Edmonton leading the practice of providing decent wages to its employees and business they deal with
- Outreach or tailored employment supports to assist people with varied circumstances
- Work closely with businesses to act on numerous issues affecting income and employment: better wages and benefits including part-time staff, internships for newcomers, creative employment options for vulnerable populations, Canadian work place experience for newcomers
- Realistic career counselling in secondary and post-secondary schools
- Work with professional associations to recognize internationally educated professionals through support in the licensure process, transition programs into regulated professions and mentoring programs i.e. Nursing Aide training model in Manitoba
- Small business development programs for those interested in self-employment opportunities

● **Systemic change in social supports and service delivery: enabling people to move out of poverty**

Participants spoke immensely of the need to have broad and systemic changes in the way that social assistance supports and services are being provided to those who are struggling with or at risk of poverty. They yearn for supports and services that 'enable' people rather than 'disable' them. These are their suggestions:

- Implement an income support that closes the gap of actual cost of living and ensure livable incomes; this includes rent, food, utilities, school fees, day care, transportation, medication, legal fees
- A new framework for service provision anchored on equitable and responsive access ("treating people differently is not discrimination") and design services that are holistic and considers varying context and circumstances
- Develop with governments a recognition of horizontal accountability - the ability to work across silos to provide better service, achieve increased efficiencies and improve outcomes
- Develop and demonstrate new competencies among service providers that include a shift of thinking to a community perspective - "communities think holistically and not aligned of how (institutional) silos are designed and organized"
- Expand and increase support for front-line workers perceived as having a pivotal role in supporting people living with poverty as well as moving them out of poverty
- Create a network of frontline workers in the non-for-profit sector that builds an intentional link and support across silos and offers opportunities for learning and change in the area of service provision for complex circumstances

● **Housing: affordable housing and meeting changing needs**

Participants said that housing is not just about a roof over their heads; it restores their self-esteem and dignity, helps them to organize their lives and can open doors to many opportunities to succeed. Housing should not just be affordable but should also be responsive to changing needs of the population. The following are their suggestions:

- Control increasing rental cost of housing units
- Stricter enforcement of proper maintenance of rental properties i.e. bug infested houses
- Adequate transition time for those moving out of Capital Region Housing to have time to save to afford rent at market rate
- More housing units for larger families
- Housing units that also supports community building such as co-location of child care facilities, social services and recreation activities

● **Transportation: affordable public transit that brings people to where they work, play and live**

The key issues expressed by participants on transportation were the cost of bus fares, lack of bus routes and/or limited frequency to industrial and commercial clusters, food banks and other social services. Transportation barriers affect minimum wage shift workers, isolated seniors, students, parents with small children and newcomers. To address these issues, the participants suggested the following:

- Low income transit pass, including a family pass and newcomers to the City who are currently taking English classes
- Transit pass could be integrated with other subsidized amenities such as the Leisure Access card
- Improved transit routes that consider transportation needs of low income users i.e. industrial areas, groceries, food banks, medicentres, social agencies, government offices
- Advocate to end the burden of refugee transportation loans

● **Education for all: a pathway to economic mobility**

Participants acknowledged education, the higher one has, as increasing their life chances for moving out of poverty and improving their lives. Many have experienced that the cost of education are continuously increasing and harder to access by those with limited income and resources. Participants offered the following:

- Education from elementary to university should be fully subsidized by the government
- School fees should be fully covered
- More funding available for students with special needs
- Longer support for ESL classes
- Early childhood development programs be part of public school education

● **Community-driven initiatives at the population group and neighborhood levels: empowering people and communities to take actions to end poverty**

Participants also mentioned that communities can be part of the solutions to end poverty. They shared what others are already doing and more could be done to engage people and communities to contribute in the collective efforts of eliminating poverty. These ideas for community participation were:

- Expand and increase support for collective kitchens that assists families to buy and prepare low-cost healthy meals
 - Establish a micro-financing program to foster entrepreneurial skills in the community
 - Support communities interested in shared services such as moms who takes turns babysitting
 - Build on self-help initiatives in cultural communities such as the Prosperity Chain in South Asian communities
- **Income and wealth inequality: tackling the roots of poverty**

While participants spoke eloquently about specific actions that would increase their life chances, a few (5%) of them recognized that ending poverty must tackle its root causes. They mentioned about the growing inequality in Canada in terms of how wealth is distributed among the population and the great difficulty for someone who is poor or low income to move up the economic and social ladder without changing fundamental conditions in society. The depth, complexity and intergenerational impact of this issue also speaks to the participants' difficulty in proposing solutions except to strongly suggest that something must be done about wealth and income inequality.

Poor is the opposite of rich. Rich is an accumulation of resources. Resources aren't just financial - they could be housing resources. The biggest difference between the haves and haves-nots is upbringing. We were not taught how to hold onto resources, and how to access certain services. The rich get taught everything, they get taught at home. They get resources given to them and skills through family. They have houses to accumulate their resource; without that how can we accumulate anything? We can't pass on any skills if we don't learn them.

We need to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor and achieve equality in wealth distribution such as salary equity.

Some of the hardest working population is paid the least.

Business should share benefits and profits.

(We) live in a rich country and yet, do not share the wealth of the country.

7. Shifting attitudes towards poverty

Shifting the conversation about poverty underpins the Edmonton Poverty Elimination Initiative. Participants were asked about what should the conversation be and how the Initiative could bring about changing attitudes towards poverty. These are the overarching themes that came out from the conversation:

Key messages

- The right to a decent standard living

Everyone is entitled to a roof over their head and enough food to eat.

- Everyone is affected about issues on poverty and should take a collective responsibility.

It's not just people on the street who are struggling.

We are in this community together. We should look out for each other and take care of each because this produces a more vibrant, inclusive community.

- Poverty and prosperity involves more than just individual responsibility; societal factors and conditions affect how one prospers or not.

Poor people work the hardest.

The system has a lot to do with how people prosper.

- The public needs to know people's stories about their struggles and also their ability to overcome these challenges; more than that the public need to know why poverty exists and how can people collectively can influence change.

Tell more stories about people's real experiences - but include success stories - can't forget that people have strength within.

Information about poverty should be made public - how many are poor.. who are rich, how much rich people make and why.. This topic should be discussed in the media and classroom

Education is the key in eliminating poverty. Only if people understand something, they can act for a change!

8. Conclusion

This engagement process was an opportunity to listen to Edmontonians about how they understand and frame the poverty dialogue. More importantly, they presented their perspective about solutions and actions that value their strengths and their potential to change their current situation as well as fulfill their aspirations of a better life. It was also a chance to validate the vision, goals and key approaches to the Preliminary Poverty Elimination Strategic Framework. From these discussions, participants spoke about three key beliefs that confirm the directions set by the Poverty Elimination Initiative in June 2013. These are:

- ending poverty is a long-term and enduring undertaking and that indeed a generation is needed
- investing in people means acknowledging their strength and potential towards achieving prosperity
- collective responsibility and public support are vital in ensuring sustained actions to end poverty

What the preliminary strategic framework may need to articulate more explicitly in its subsequent development is where it stands on the issue of equity and inequality as this was brought out by some participants in the focus groups.

As a final note, the conversations in the focus groups were not just about generating ideas; to many of them it meant an opportunity to be heard and be listened to and a desire to know how their thoughts will be transformed into concrete actions.

Let us talk to them, let us tell them our stories... voice our concerns to leaders and politicians.

APPENDICES

Focus Groups on Poverty Elimination

Focus Group	Date	Participants		Hosting Organization
Completed				
1. Friends of Stanley Milner Library	Sept. 4	Individuals who were or currently homeless	17	ESPC GOA Poverty Reduction Consultations
2. CEASE	Sept. 10	Women who have experienced sexual abuse and domestic violence	15	ESPC GOA Poverty Reduction Consultations
3. Boyle Street Community Centre	Sept. 16	Individuals living with poverty and workers	8	ESPC GOA Poverty Reduction Consultations
4. CMHA	Sept. 9	Low income with mental health issues	9	ESPC GOA Poverty Reduction Consultations
5. Recent Immigrants	Sept. 18	Multicultural health brokers and settlement workers	13	Multicultural Health Brokers Co-op
6. Former Yugoslavia group	Sept. 25	Seniors from former Yugoslavia	9	Multicultural Health Brokers Co-op
7. Filipino community	Oct. 19	Mothers with young children	13	Multicultural Health Brokers Co-op
8. Ethiopian community	Oct. 26	Mothers with young children	18	Multicultural Health Brokers Co-op
9. South Asian	Nov. 24	Newcomers, professionals, lived experience	10	Multicultural Health Brokers Co-op
10. Newcomers	Oct 25	Newly arrived immigrants and refugees	10	Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers
11. U of A students	Oct. 29	Graduate students in global health and public policy	8	City of Edmonton
12. Calder Drop-In Seniors	Nov. 5	Low Income Seniors	15	Calder Drop-In
13. Minimum Wage Workers	Nov. 9	Minimum wage workers	1	Edmonton District Labour Council/Brian Henderson
14. Interfaith group	Nov. 13	Interfaith group	15	Interfaith Coalition
15. Aboriginal Parents	Nov. 18	Aboriginal parents	20	Bent Arrow
16. Intergenerational group	Nov. 16	Seniors, adults and youth	10	City of Edmonton
17. Immigrant Youth	Nov. 17	African youth	15	REACH
18. McCauley Apartments Residents	Dec. 10	Low income residents on AISH, income supports	8	McCauley Apartments
Total			214	

Engaging Edmontonians to Thrive and Prosper
A Guide for Community Discussions on Eliminating Poverty in Edmonton
12:30 – 2:30 pm, November 18, 2013
Bent Arrow Main Office
11666-95 Street

1. **Opening Prayer and Smudge Ceremony**
 2. **Welcome and Introductions**
 3. **Why are we here**
 - **Overview of the Poverty Elimination Initiative**
 - **Purpose of the community discussions**
 - To hear and listen to your stories about how you are struggling and coping with challenges
 - To come up with ideas and solutions about how we can make our lives better for ourselves and our families
 - To come up with ideas about how we can change attitudes of people about poverty
 4. **Sharing our Stories**
 - **Big group discussion: What does it mean to be poor? (15 minutes)**
 - **Small group discussion**
 - What brought people and families to poverty?
 - What do people do to cope with poverty or limited resource everyday?
 5. **Thinking about solutions: What would make our lives better**
 - **Small group discussion**
 - What can you suggest to improve your income, increase opportunities for education and improve our health and of our families?
 6. **Closing thoughts and discussion**

Most people think there will always be poor people and that poor people can get out of poverty if they work hard enough. Do you think that this statement is true?

 - If not, what can we do to change their minds about this?
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