



THE CYCLE OF POVERTY

June, 2024

**PUBLIC POLICY DIALOGUE & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
ONTARIO REGIONAL SOCIETY OF SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL**

The Public Policy Dialogue & Development committee (PPDD) of the Ontario region, Society of Saint Vincent de Paul shall address the cycle poverty in 2024. Just as charity and justice are inseparable components of the Society, we cannot talk about homelessness without taking about the cycle of poverty which in its extreme condition, can lead to homelessness. Poverty is a result of the failure of governments, social services and indeed our own personal thinking to listen to our neighbours in need and advocate to change systems that tend to react to the symptoms of poverty and homelessness rather than the root causes. Systemic change is a requirement in these systems and our personal thinking if we are to achieve any substantial improvement in the plight of those living in poverty. Poverty is a human condition that no human being should have to endure in our society. Homelessness is the extreme result of poverty and one that we should not accept as fellow human beings. I would like to list ten causes of poverty and homelessness in Canada:

1. Lack of Education or Skills (mentorship, funding for, access to)
2. Employment (under employment or lack of)
3. Health (Dental, Mental and/or Physical plus drug abuse)
4. Lack of adequate and/or affordable housing
5. Food insecurity
6. Social services (Lack of/or availability/inadequate rates)
7. Environment (geography, rural , transportation,)
8. Criminal justice (release/parole programs)
9. Newcomers (refugees, migrant workers)
10. Diversity, Equity, Inclusion. (DEI)

CAUSES FACTORS ACTIONS

Let us look at these ten causes, with the understanding there are more, and consider some of the factors which contribute to these causes. It should be mentioned here that this list is not in order of importance. In fact, every cause can have a negative effect on people facing poverty issues. We've also added possible actions that we make take to address each cause.

1. Education

The need to obtain a good education, which may include a college degree, can have a major effect on an individual or family's hopes for a better future. One factor in obtaining a good education is dependent on the ability of the child to learn. This learning ability is affected by poverty and lack of food and adequate accommodations. If the student has these and other barriers it may well affect their level of education. Many of us would classify a student as having a lower academic level when in fact they are simply not capable of coping with their home environment and succeed academically.

Actions:

Learn what resources are available in your community and help them connect for assistance. (tutoring, homework help clubs, literacy programs). Encourage parents to contact principle, teachers, social workers as education partners. Ensure every child has a RESP account and are receiving the Canada Learning Bond. Help secondary students access OSAP, bursaries and scholarships.

2. Employment

The lack of employment is a common factor for our neighbours in need. They may have employment, but it can be very precarious, in that the hours of work can fluctuate. The wages are likely at the minimum amount. There is also usually a lack of any work benefits such as dental, eyesight and drugs, which in turn place added expenses on the family.

Actions:

Know community resources that offer assistance with job search, resume writing, interview coaching. Offer to go with neighbour if they are anxious about going alone.

3. Health and Family (Mental, physical, substance)

There is a common issue for many of us in finding a family doctor. This is an even more crucial issue for neighbours in need. Having a family doctor who knows the family and is more readily available for appointments and support. The cost of drugs and dental services can be issued that many simply ignore rather than seeking the proper care. The cost of proper food is factor closely related to a healthier lifestyle. In addition, the health of the family can be affected by physical and emotional abuse, alcohol & drug addiction, single parenting and gender identity issues.

Actions:

Promote Health Connect Ontario (811) to get fast free health advice, including finding services. Build relationship with CMHA. Build awareness of Links Care, One Link. Be aware of various community outreach programs.

4. Housing

We are all affected by the high cost of housing, whether buying or renting. There is a severe shortage of affordable and adequate housing. Some property owners will even take actions aimed at tenants leaving their apartment so that the property owner can then increase the rent for the next tenant. The condition of many homes people lives in need repairs, but the tenant can be hesitant is raising the issue for fear of repercussions.

Actions:

Build relationships with regional housing team, with community legal clinics for referral services. Know what regional, provincial, federal housing funding options are available and how they can be accessed. Ensure every neighbour is on the rent geared to income wait list.

5. Food security

The cost of food is also a factor which affects all of us. Imagine how it affects our neighbours in need. They are forced to buy only the essentials rather than being able to focus on more nutritious food, which the lack of can affect their health.

Actions:

Know all community food resources. Remove barriers to food access such as lack of vehicle or mobility issues.

6. Social services

While most of our social service providers are dedicated to serving those in need of various services, there is also evidence of a real of interest or concern in helping people living in poverty. This is magnified if the person is homeless. The Ontario social service programs, whether Ontario Works or ODSP are badly in need of constructive systemic change which looks at the root causes of poverty. Social services also include child welfare. Child welfare protocol is also in need of change.

Actions:

Contact community social services, OSDP and Child welfare services in order to establish a relationship.

7. Environment, geography, transportation.

Actions:

Are our neighbours in need affected by living close to industrial areas. If transportation is an issue, offer bus tickets to those in need.

8. Criminal justice

Poverty can often force people to criminal activity to pay for food, housing, and medication. This may then lead to the justice system, which does not always favour those living in poverty. Finding bail money, a good lawyer and other supports are difficult. If receiving a prison term, the family of the offender face even more barriers. Former inmates have challenges as they re-enter society including finding employment.

Actions:

Join our Prison Ministry/Restorative Justice (PMRJ) group and attend zoom meetings. Collaborate with local organizations related to PMRJ

9. Newcomers (refugees, migrant workers)

Canada has provided a new home for people from many cultural and religious backgrounds. Often language can make it difficult to find employment or to simply express your needs and challenges. Sadly, many newcomers are faced with a level of poverty they did not expect.

Actions:

Collaborate with local initiatives. Use information from our home visits to develop future modes of assistance.

10. Diversity, equity, inclusion (DEI)

While being the final cause on our list, it is certainly not the least important. In fact, it may be the one cause that for many people, is a major factor. Many of our service systems still have systemic racism components that need change. Our own personal biases can also be a form of racism, even if it is unintentional.

Actions:

Educate our conferences on important issues. Contact local DEI efforts to offer our support.

RACISM AND THE CYCLE OF POVERTY

There is a need to examine the topic of racism and the cycle of poverty with further explanation and discussion. While not alone, the two main groups affected most by racism are the Black and Indigenous population. These two groups have been a part of the North American history for a much longer period than other groups. The Black population can trace their history to at least the 1600's. The Indigenous Peoples of North America, or preferably Turtle Island, goes back centuries and thousands of years. Let us address the Black and Indigenous populations separately. Beyond racism, we are also faced with discrimination based on gender identification. While not defined as racism, this discrimination can have very similar results.

Racism and the Black community:

This can be demonstrated by statistics that confirm the lower high school and university graduation rate for Black students, use of food banks and other related services, prisons, and the criminal justice system as well as childcare and custody issues. Systemic racism as well as our own biases, which include unintentional ones, can be overcome by education and understanding.

Indigenous Peoples:

This history goes back to colonial days and the residential school system. Various laws and treaties over the years were based on eliminating Indigenous culture, language, and laws. Reconciliation needs our support to address injustices in various suffering systems that affect Indigenous Peoples. It is vital to make contact with and invite advice and input from the Indigenous community.

NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US!

Once we have begun to educate our members we must then consider. **WHAT NOW!**

Racism in Canada is founded based on having our laws, institutions and governments being controlled for many years by a predominant white hierarchy. This led to the lack of any formal educational resources and in some cases directed misinformation about various races. How can this be changed?

What can we do as Vincentians? As individuals?

As Justice Murray Sinclair said on behalf of the Truth & Reconciliation Commission, it was education that got us into this state, it is education that will help us get out of it.

We need to educate ourselves and fellow members about racism and poverty.

We need to learn from the past errors and advocate for systemic changes in our government and institutions.

We need to listen to those who have been affected by racism. We need to act.

Special note: LGBTQ2S people represent another form of discrimination and while not racially based, we include this issue as when coupled with poverty, it places additional barriers on those affected.

THE ADVOCACY VOICE

Advocacy can be a very effective of addressing the need for systemic change of the structures that contribute to or present barrier to alleviating poverty. Such structures may be various levels of government, existing social services and our own operations and belief structure. Advocacy should first look at ways we can assist our neighbours in need having a voice and where needed, be their voice. If provided with the proper tools, our grass roots municipal level conference can be effective advocates for systemic change, future programs and actions. Collaboration with other like-minded organizations can be an important component of any advocacy. Some possible actions are:

1. Advocate to all levels of governments the need for systemic changes to issues such as social services, child welfare and criminal justice systems.
2. Advocate for more adequate and affordable housing for those who are homeless.
3. Actively seek out those living in poverty, to both assist them and listen and document their needs and challenges.
4. Consider new projects that help to alleviate poverty.
5. Collaborate with like minded organizations to develop common actions.
6. Seek out those living in poverty to help in all possible ways.
7. Research to see what is being done regarding homelessness in your city or town. Can SSVP act or work with others to develop more forms of assistance?

Homelessness:

The final stage of extreme poverty is homelessness. Let us look at two definitions by reading the two attachments. The first is an accepted definition while the second is an Indigenous definition. As with many Indigenous teachings, we can learn so much from reading and using this definition in our works of charity and justice. Homelessness should simply not exist in Canada, and yet, it is visible to most of us with the results of people living on our streets, camping in our parks, and even sleeping in doorways or over road grates for warmth. While our major form of assistance is the home visit, it does not allow us to engage with homeless people. We may have the opportunity for such engagement in our community meals, food banks and thrift stores, but do we use these venues to really meet and listen to those who are homeless? Are there other ways we can meet those who are homeless? We can accomplish this task by looking at any gaps in services and being creative. One such example is the Street outreach program operated by the Windsor Essex Central Council. You can read about it in the attached document. Please share your comments, concerns, and plans for possible actions and advocacy regarding poverty and homelessness. We would like to hear from you and can assist you to take such actions.

THE HOME VISIT PERSONAL ENGAGEMENT WITH NEIGHBOURS IN NEED

The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul began with Frederic Ozanam and his friends conducting home visits to their neighbours in need. They did this in the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul who first instructed his followers to visit the needy two by two. The home visit continues today as the fundamental form of building a truly relational bond with our neighbours in need. The home visit when conducted without judgement and in a way that includes our listening to those we are visiting, can be a rewarding and informative time for all. The home visit can identify ways that we can help more as well as issues that require systemic change and advocacy. If we are unable to conduct home visits, any place and time we can engage with our neighbours in need can also be beneficial. It may be at a food bank, community meal, thrift store or other form of outreach. The important thing is to always make the visit, wherever it may occur, to be one of respect, understanding and listening.