2023

Social & Economic Wellbeing Assessment

CASTLEGAR

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Executive Summary

What we did

Working with community-serving organizations with direct relationships with lower-income and unhoused residents, we conducted a Social and Economic Wellbeing Assessment to learn more about the lived experiences of poverty across outcomes of economic and social wellbeing, and access to stable housing. We trained nursing and social work students to work with community-serving organizations to deliver a survey to targeted populations from May 10 to June 2, 2023. 71 people responded to the survey.

After the assessment, we presented an earlier version of this report to the members of the Castlegar Integrated Collaborative Services, many of whom were partners on the project. As part of that presentation, we workshopped recommendations across housing, employment, services, and transportation to help create specific, implementable actions.

What we learned

- We learned that **people really love the sense of community** in Castlegar, and that there are places, services, and businesses where they feel especially safe.
- We learned that r**espondents feel judged and stigmatized in the community** and that there are some specific areas and situations where they are made to feel unsafe.
- Many respondents felt that **Castlegar doesn't provide enough employment opportunities, accessible and affordable housing, or social services.**
- People experienced a number of **impacts due to COVID-19**, including challenges with housing, employment, and financial impacts; feelings of isolation and loneliness; and uncertainty with shelter access.

- **Housing costs and overall affordability**, coupled with lack of housing choice results in frequency of moving and housing instability. People also shared that housing is inadequate and unsuitable for their households and that people are experiencing complications with landlords.
- **Meeting basic needs is still a priority and focus** for most of the respondents to our survey. We learned that food bank, shelter, clothing, rental assistance, housing assistance, social assistance, and training and education are services in high demand in the community. We know that people who are struggling to meet basic needs also struggle to thrive.
- There were **varying experiences with employment** across respondents. We learned that the more compounding factors a person experiences, the more difficult it is for them to make enough money (e.g., people with disabilities, those with poor credit are less likely to be employed, those unable to secure full-time employment).
- Respondents shared comments about the **need for improved transportation and transit,** extended public transit hours, and more affordable transportation options (e.g., lower fare taxis). There was also mention of accessing transportation in other communities.

Recommendations

- To **ensure community members feel a sense of welcoming and belonging,** our recommendations focus on the need to keep doing what is working well, and to work with the broader community on addressing experiences of stigmatization.
- To **address accessible and affordable housing**, our recommendations focus on encouraging diverse housing forms to support people across ages, abilities, and household composition, additional supports with making rent payments, creating shelter spaces in the community, providing more services to keep people in housing, and creating a tenant displacement policy to protect renters.
- For **responsive social services**, our recommendations talk about advocating for more local services, developing partnerships for service delivery, advocating for more services to help people age-in-place in their homes, and support for moving through interrelationship conflicts (either personal relationships or tenant/landlord relationships).
- As part of **recommendations for supporting employment**, we talk about advocating for a universal basic income, supporting people with poor credit with education programs, providing better connections to jobs, and helping people complete high school diplomas.
- To support more **consistent, reliable, and regular public transportation**, our recommendations include working with transit users to understand their transit needs more fully, advocating to BC Transit for more regular and responsive services, and providing safer transit stops and transit experience.

Introduction

The City of Castlegar adapted the Rural Development Network's Guide for Homelessness Population Estimate to develop a process for delivering a Social and Economic Wellbeing Assessment for lower-income residents. We wanted to understand the lived experiences of poverty across outcomes of economic and social wellbeing and access to stable housing. At the time of writing, 12.7% of Castlegar's population are low-income cut off.[1] As a smaller centre, Castlegar shares social service resources with the neighbouring municipalities of Trail and Nelson, and residents can experience a service desert in Castlegar depending on what services they need to access. Accessing services is exacerbated by access to economic wellbeing (i.e., lower income communities experience more barriers to social and economic wellbeing which is also reflected in the stability of their housing). Specifically, these barriers can look like:

- **Housing availability and affordability.** People don't have access to housing that meets their needs and / or can't afford housing in their home or preferred community of Castlegar. This means some must move to more rural locations or locate to different municipal centres, taking them further away from support networks, friends, and family. Having access to secure, stable housing in the community where your support networks exist is important for people to thrive.
- **Access to services.** Because of the regional nature of the communities in the Central Kootenay area, the plethora of services needed by community members are distributed across the geographic region, and mainly in the three communities of Castlegar, Trail, and Nelson. Without access to a motor vehicle, transportation between communities can be challenging, and travel time can impact the ability of people and families to meet other needs.
- **Employment/income opportunities.** The ability to make a reliable living wage or receive benefit payments that cover the costs of living is a challenge across all sectors, particularly coming out of COVID. This can impact a person's ability to find and retain stable housing. Not having a steady income can also impact a person's ability to have a good credit score, impacting their ability to find and retain secure housing and meet basic needs (forcing them into difficult decisions between eating, putting fuel in a vehicle, or paying for shelter), keeping them in a cycle of poverty.
- **Mobility.** The ability to travel is exacerbated by the rising cost of fuel, transit availability, timing, and routes. This means people are spending more time in transit and commuting than tending to other life responsibilities and doing things they enjoy.

1   The low income cut-offs after tax (LICO-AT) are income thresholds below which a family will likely devote a larger share of its after-tax income on the necessities of food, shelter and clothing than the average family. Source: Statistics Canada. Available on-line: https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1110024101. Last accessed: November 23, 203.

What we know

Experiences of poverty are complex and influenced by a number of factors, including:

- access to clean water and nutritious food
- access to basic physical and mental healthcare
- experiences of inequity
- conflict and instability
- lack of education
- lack of access to jobs
- climate change
- lack of government support
- lack of a personal financial safety net

Having experiences with several of these factors can keep people in cycles of poverty. The impacts of these experiences can also be passed onto future generations, thereby making it even more difficult for people to break the cycle of poverty. This is a systemic problem. You will see that each of these factors shows up in what we heard through this work.

Observations

General

WHAT PEOPLE LOVE AND WHERE THEY FEEL SAFE

People love community programming, the sense of community in Castlegar (ability to get involved, diverse ages, kindness, inclusivity, etc.), community infrastructure (farmer's market, parks, small-sized community, etc.), social services (food bank, medical services, services for unhoused community members), recreation opportunities (hiking, swimming, fishing, etc.), and the natural beauty of the area.

People feel safe at home, in certain shops (Common Grounds, Humble Bean, Salvation Army Thrift Store, Shoppers Drug Mart, Tim Hortons), in nature, at church, with their family, at certain services (e.g., Kootenay Family Place, Food Bank, Library, the emergency winter shelter, hospital, IRIS program, Community Connection Centre, the police department), and at work.

> ### WHY PEOPLE LIVE IN CASTELGAR
>
> The majority of respondents have always lived in Castlegar (27%). The top three reasons people came to, or live, in Castlegar are:
>
> - To visit friends or family (23%)
> - For the lifestyle the community offers (20%)
> - To look for work or start a job (18%)

STIGMATIZATION, DISCRIMINATION, AND LACK OF SAFETY

When asked what they don't like, respondents reported experiences of being judged or stigmatized for being unhoused (seen as "junkies") and feeling unsafe in, and excluded, from the community. There were reports of anti-queer experiences from LGBTQIA2S+ respondents and stigma against those perceived as being "foreign".

Respondents don't feel safe in public spaces (parks, downtown, uptown, beside roads, the Complex, walking in the dark (where people use drugs, etc.), or in commercial areas where staff are not welcoming (hotels, restaurants, gas stations) and mention of gang activities. They also feel unsafe in outdoor spaces (in the bush, along the river, in the woods); some noting wildlife such as bears and cougars in the area. Some reported not feeling safe at the food bank or the emergency winter shelter, and with police. One respondent said they don't feel safe in their apartment building.

People experienced a number of impacts due to COVID-19. These include:

- **Housing.** No available housing, increased cost of housing, increased rent (due to increased demand for rental housing), more people living with them.

- **Employment and financial impacts.** Although it is easier to work from home, vaccine mandates jeopardized jobs, and some lost their jobs due to this. Others experienced reduced work hours, accumulated debt, and lost rental home while the cost of living has increased.

- **Isolation and loneliness.** Social isolation was reported by several respondents.

- **Uncertainty of shelters.** A temporary winter shelter was open during COVID and is now closed. There were more shelter spaces for men than women when the shelter was in operation.

Themed Observations

Many respondents feel that Castlegar doesn't provide enough employment opportunities, accessible and affordable housing, or social services.

ACCESSIBLE AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Housing costs and overall affordability, coupled with lack of housing choice results in frequency of moving and housing instability. People also shared that housing is inadequate and unsuitable for their households and that people are experiencing complications with landlords.

- **Housing instability and affordability.** Respondents cited a number of reasons for affordability / instability including:

  + **Costs/affordability.** Not making enough money (48%), rent or mortgage payments are too high (34%), and poor credit (22%) are cited as the top reasons for affordability issues. People who are employed are finding it difficult to pay rent (61%). 57% of respondents who have disabilities and who have trouble paying rent, are sleeping in vehicles. Almost 65% of respondents said that their household income does not cover living expenses. The majority of respondents earn less than $30,000 a year. Most respondents don't pay rent or mortgage (30%) and 24% are paying between $500 and $999

> "[I was] illegally evicted and wasn't paid over 200 hours of working hours. [The] landlord kept rent and took our damage deposit

for rent or mortgage a month. 58% of responses received indicated they strongly agreed, or agreed, with the statement: It is a challenge to cover my home heating and energy costs.

+ **Frequency of moving.** For those respondents with disabilities or a medical condition (32%) and those who use substances (62%), they have moved three to six times in the past 12 months. Single parent household respondents have not moved in the past 12 months (66%).

+ **Choice of housing.** Older adults (60+) shared there is nowhere to move in Castlegar to downsize and waitlists are long for seniors housing. People with disabilities are living with partners or extended family (89% of respondents identified as having a disability).

+ **Stability of housing.** 35% of the responses received indicated they strongly disagreed, and disagreed, with the statement: My housing is stable and secure (e.g., available year–round).

+ **Complications with landlords / tenants.** We heard that being evicted with no financial payout and health complications that are not accounted for in rules for independent living, create difficulties in landlord/tenant relationships. A respondent, who is a landlord, shared they experienced housing instability because a renter stopped paying rent.

· **Adequate and suitable housing.** Homes in need of major repairs (inadequate) (49% of responses strongly disagreed or disagreed that their home does not require major repairs) and homes too small for household size (not suitable) (42% of responses strongly disagreed or disagreed that their home meets the needs of their family). In addition, we received comments about unsafe backyard/playground and homes with no emergency exits. Approximately 49% of renter respondents said they have no amenities in the home (i.e., indoor plumbing, sufficient heat, safe drinking water, refrigeration, electricity, cooking facilities, fire protection) and there are approximately five single parent households whose housing is not meeting current needs.

> "I am elderly and must remain independent in order to stay in the park I am in. If I had a stroke or accident where I needed help, I would be forced to move as I can't have anyone live with me – rules of park

· **Experiences of homelessness.** There are approximately 19 respondents who identified being unsheltered and two people who described situations where they experienced being hidden homeless (i.e., staying with other people). 22 of the respondents would have made use of shelter services were there not barriers. Respondents shared stories of sleeping in vehicles, makeshift shelters, outside, and there were 26 responses (participants could select more than one answer) of people living in dangerous situations (e.g., staying with someone they didn't know, staying in a home where they experienced violence or abuse, enduring unwanted sexual activity, or stayed in a place unwillingly because they had no other choice, or stayed in a home with unsafe conditions (exposed wiring, physical construction, etc.)). The majority of respondents who declared they have an illness or medical condition are currently unhoused (45%); respondents with a physical disability also experience being unhoused (33%).

SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

Meeting basic needs is still a priority and focus for most of the respondents to our survey. We learned that food bank, shelter, clothing, rental assistance, housing assistance, social assistance, and training and education are services in high demand in the community. We know that people who are struggling to meet basic needs also struggle to thrive.

- **Basic and financial services most accessed.** Basic needs (food bank, emergency shelter, clothing donations, etc.) and financial support services (rental assistance, housing assistance, training and education, social assistance, etc.) are the most commonly accessed services for all respondents (77% and 35% respectively). Single parent households access basic needs most often (food bank, emergency shelter, etc.), and told us they especially access food banks. For Indigenous respondents, financial support (rental assistance, housing assistance, training and education, social assistance, etc.) (56%), then family or parenting support (33%), are the most accessed services after basic services. For those who use substances, after basic needs, hygiene services are the most accessed support services (67%).

> "Homelessness is not a choice generally speaking. We need affordable housing. People need help and love and we as a community, and as human beings it is our nature to help. So let's get the party started already.

- **Health and wellness and public toilets are the next most accessed services** across all respondent groups (26% and 21% respectively).

- **Food bank**. Single parents and older adults are the two respondent groups who told us they are most accessing the food bank.

- **Government support services** (help with forms, accessing government programs, access to technology, etc.) are accessed mostly by those making lower incomes (50%).

- **Services accessed outside of the community.** Two respondents shared that the hospital (in Trail) and Service Canada (in Nelson) are services accessed outside the community.

- **Lack of recreational activities for children.** Respondents shared there is a lack of recreational opportunities for children with disabilities, and overall lack of activities and places for children to play.

SERVICES ACCESSED IN COMMUNITY...

- **Basic needs** (food bank, emergency shelter, clothing donations, etc.)
- **Financial** (rental assistance, housing assistance, training and education, social assistance, etc.)
- **Health and wellness** (substance use support, mental health, physical health care, spiritual or cultural wellbeing, etc.)
- **Public toilets**
- **Transportation needs** (access to basic services, education, employment, medical or dental appointments, etc.)

SERVICES ACCESSED OUTSIDE THE COMMUNITY...

- **Income assistance**
- **Work BC**
- **Therapy**
- **Advocacy Centre (Nelson)**
- **Service Canada (Nelson)**
- **Hospital (Trail)**
- **Disability worker**
- **Career Development Centre (Trail)**

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND SUPPORT

There were varying experiences with employment across respondents. We learned that the more compounding factors a person experiences, the more difficult it is for them to make enough money (e.g., people with disabilities, those with poor credit are less likely to be employed, or have access to full-time or regular employment).

- **Not working full-time.** 100% of the men who responded to the survey are not working full-time jobs. Those with disabilities or medical conditions are not working full time (50% are working seasonally, and 50% are working part-time). Respondents who are Indigenous reported work as a primary reason for coming to Castlegar (30%, and of this 30%, 25% are employed part-time and 50% are employed seasonally), they told us they lack work due to COVID-19.

- **Lack of secure employment.** For those who are employed, they are working contract (10%) or seasonal work (14%) or are self-employed (19%). Younger respondents (20 – 39) told us they don't have secure employment (26%), they find it easier to work from home, and experience a lack of work. Some people with disabilities or medical conditions have seasonal, contract employment. The majority of those who did not complete high school are either unemployed (62%), or casual or part-time employees (50%).

- **Not making enough money.** The majority of respondents earn less than $30,000 a year (64%). Younger respondents (20 – 39) are not making enough money (58%).

- **Not employed.** The majority of respondents (72%) are not currently employed. The majority of respondents who did not complete high school (63%), who said they have a disability or medical condition (82%), who reported having poor credit (71%), or who use substances (89%) are not employed.

> "I am working 3-4 jobs while being a full-time student and I still struggle to make rent and my bills. I know my rent isn't as high as it could be, but not making rent and ending up homeless is an area of concern for me. I don't have a lot of family supports, and I'm working ridiculous hours every week just to survive."

- **Support payments as main income.** Disability benefits (37%), GST refunds (33%), and income assistance (33%) are the main sources of income for respondents. Employment income (19%) and seniors' benefits (16%) close out the top five.

- **Poor credit.** Men and women equally experience poor credit (47% of men and 47% of women respondents).

TRANSPORTATION

Within the open comments section of questions on the survey, there were 10 comments related to the need for improved transportation and transit, extended public transit hours, and more affordable transportation options (e.g., lower fare taxis). There was also mention of accessing transportation in other communities.

- **Travel to services.** The majority of respondents (43%) travel five kilometers or less to access services. Approximately 33% of respondents travel 21 or more kilometres to access services.

- **Transportation services are not meeting needs.** When asked if Castlegar provides enough transportation services, respondents were mostly neutral (26%) with a total of 40% strongly disagreeing or disagreeing.

- **People with disabilities are traveling long distances.** 50% of respondents who are disabled and 50% who have a medical condition are having to travel 21 or more kilometres to access services; the majority use personal vehicles (15%), transit (14%), or walking as modes of transport.

- **Lack of access to transportation is impacting housing security.** Respondents (16%) shared that lack of access to transportation is impacting housing security, and those who are disabled specifically shared that access to transportation is a challenge for securing housing (50%).

- **There are diverse, gendered views on transportation.** The majority of men who responded agree that the community provides enough public transportation services (68%). Women were split on their agreement with the statement. The majority strongly disagreed or disagreed (42%) that the community provides enough public transit. 21% of women respondents think the community provides enough public transit, while 28% were neutral and 6% strongly agreed.

- **Transportation is a support service.** 21% of respondents said they use transit to access support services. For those traveling 50 kilometres or more to services, transportation was the major support service accessed (60%).

- **Shelter access impacted by lack of access to transportation.** A smaller number of respondents (9%) said they couldn't access emergency shelter services due to lack of access to transportation.

Other

- **Lack of sense of community.** Respondents shared experiences of a lack of family and friend

support networks, lack of neighbourliness (friendliness), and substance use.

· **Mental health and stress.** People are experiencing PTSD and anxiety, some are working multiple jobs and attending school, others are experiencing hopelessness.

Recommendations

We provide recommendations based on trends we observed in the aggregated and disaggregated data below.

WHAT PEOPLE LOVE AND WHERE THEY FEEL SAFE

We learned that people really love the sense of community in Castlegar, and that there are places, services, and businesses where they feel especially safe. To keep these feelings alive, we provide the following recommendations.

Recommended actions

- **Continue to foster a sense of community** by maintaining good relationships with the key community services and businesses respondents identified (e.g., farmer's market, food bank, services for unhoused community members, etc.), and use those relationships to keep in contact with community members so you can be supportive and responsive to needs.

- **Continue to create inclusive programming** and promote the Leisure Access Program so lower-income community members can access recreation programming.

PEOPLE WANT MORE OF...

- **More housing and more affordable housing for all** (lower-income, seniors, supportive housing, rentals, different housing sizes, etc.)
- **Better transportation and public transit** (cheaper taxis, extended transit hours, etc.)
- **More work opportunities**
- **More food options and affordable food**
- **More support programs** (substance use, social programs for seniors and children, health and wellness, technical support for those without computers, etc.)
- **More opportunities for community to come together and support each other**

STIGMATIZATION, DISCRIMINATION, AND LACK OF SAFETY

We learned that respondents feel judged and stigmatized in the community and that there are some specific areas and situations where they feel unsafe. To help build compassion and increase a sense of safety and belonging, we offer the following recommendations.

Recommended actions

- **Build compassion across all community members** and work to eradicate stigmatization through sharing stories and humanizing peoples' lived experiences.

- **Ramp up 'bear-aware' and 'cougar-aware' programs** and share resources across community members.

- **Provide training to local businesses** (e.g., hotels, restaurants, gas stations) on anti-oppression and inclusion.

- **Work with the food bank and emergency shelter** to make people feel safer accessing services.

IMPACTS OF COVID

We learned that people lost their housing or experienced an increase in housing costs; that people lost their jobs; and that experiences of isolation and loneliness are prevalent. Also, the winter emergency shelter, which was open during COVID, is now closed (though the City is actively working with BC Housing to secure funding to reopen). Considering these learnings, we share the following recommendations.

> At the time of writing, we anticipate increased cases of COVID through the fall of 2023 and winter of 2024. A new mask mandate begins in early October in healthcare settings. We believe the impacts of the on-going COVID pandemic will be felt for a long time, and that some of the impacts are not yet understood or articulated.

Recommended actions

- Advocate to higher levels of government for a **universal basic income.**

- Advocate to higher levels of government for **support payments for on-going impacts of COVID-19**.

- Advocate to higher levels of government for i**ncreased access to mental health supports** for those feeling isolation and loneliness.

- **Create and support programs to encourage neighbours** to know each other and check in on each other.

- Continue working with BC Housing for **a permanent shelter space that supports all genders.**

ACCESSIBLE AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

We learned through this project that there are several issues facing households that impact housing stability, affordability, adequacy, and suitability and that these are tied to low-income, complications in relationships, lack of housing choice, and unsafe alternatives. These experiences also result in increased frequency of moving and homelessness. We offer the following recommendations to support housing stability, affordability, adequacy, and suitability:

MAIN REASONS FOR HOUSING INSECURITY...

- **Lack of affordable housing or cost of housing and utilities is too high**
- **Being evicted** (some renters evicted illegally)
- **Nowhere to downsize** (for seniors)
- **Home needs repair** (some safety issues)
- **Discrimination**
- **Mental or physical health**

Recommended actions

Affordability

- Provide or advocate for **additional supports to help people pay rent and energy costs** (i.e., rent subsidies, universal basic income, access to better paying jobs, rent geared to income, variety in housing types, etc.).

  + Promote the BC Housing Rent Bank program for secondary market rental subsidy.

- Provide **financial support to encourage more housing on the secondary market**.

- Consider **reducing the property tax burden for older adults** to prevent struggles with housing security.

- Provide **clear guidance and direction in the Official Community Plan** regarding the need to support a housing continuum within the City of Castlegar.

  + Take advantage of StrongerBC initiatives (e.g., building more homes near transit, building more multiplex housing, preventing short-term rentals that remove secondary rentals from the rental market).
  + Consider implementing rental-only zoning or expanding manufactured home park zoning in the city for low barrier entry to housing.

- Initiate **a funded and coordinated homeshare matching program** that would match single renters with homeowners that may have surplus space available (e.g., students with seniors, etc.). This could be accomplished by utilizing online matching tools, like Happipad, as mentioned in the Castlegar Housing Strategy.

Emergency shelters

- Provide, or partner to provide, **more responsive emergency shelter options across genders**.
- Work with shelter providers to offer **safer emergency shelter environments**.

- Create **more family-focused programming**.

- Encourage and enable s**econd stage housing programs** to help residents transition from emergency to subsidized housing. Second stage housing should include wrap around supports, and support transition to the open rental market after a period of time.

- Establish **barrier-free emergency shelter services** to accommodate more residents in need.

- Establish a **permanent site for an emergency shelter** that incorporates onsite support for individuals (healthcare, housing, employment, counselling, etc.).

- Make sure **all potential emergency shelters meet the BC Fire Code and BC Building Code** with respect to having "life safety systems" in place. Consult with local authorities prior to signing off on occupancy permits.

Transitions out of foster care

- Advocate for **better transitions out of foster care**.

  + Advocate for better on-going mental health support for people in, transitioning out of, and who were in foster care.
  + Advocate with the Province for better foster care transition programming and bridge funding.
  + Advocate for, and promote more, opportunity and support for youth who are in the care of the Ministry as they get older (18+) to secure housing and employment.
  + Host or support workshops and education for youth about transitional housing.

- Work with the Ministry to **attract new and specialized foster parent households** in Castlegar.

Responsive housing

- Provide **supportive housing options** in the community to help people gain stability in their housing.

- For younger adults, **provide and encourage more entry level options to independent housing** for people living on their own for the first time (e.g., smaller units, units that are designed for shared living (i.e., roommates), different housing typologies, shared indoor amenity spaces (e.g., small kitchen in each unit, larger shared, communal kitchen)).

- Provide **a variety of housing types** and tenures so people can successfully relocate to care for family members.

- Provide **more housing options and support for people to age in place** (not necessarily in their homes, but in the community).
  - + Promote intergenerational living (e.g., look at Happipad as a model to partner students and seniors or non-students with others who are overhoused).

- Provide **more flexible living arrangements for women** to accommodate living with more dependents and/or roommates.

- Provide **accessible housing options across all types and tenures of housing**.

- Provide and advocate for **more housing for people with disabilities that are deeply subsidized.**

- **Attract developers with experience with diverse housing types** across the continuum of housing.

Housing services

- Provide or advocate for **more services (and more subsidized services) for older adult care** to alleviate the pressure on family members to relocate with few housing options.

- Advocate for **expanded provision of residential substance use treatment and recovery programs locally**.

- Advocate for **more hours for Freedom Quest's Castlegar Youth Substance Use Counsellor**. (The current contract is part-time and covers the Slocan Valley up to Slocan).

- Provide **accessible public washrooms throughout the year.**

Landlords and tenants

- Create a **tenant displacement policy** for all landlords in the city to abide by to minimize the impacts of evictions for sales, renovations, and landlord family members moving in.

- Provide **access to or information about services** to support landlords and tenants to work through issues to prevent evictions.

- Host **educational meetings for landlords to encourage inclusive renting** (i.e., to international students, newcomers, immigrants, and people with disabilities).

- **Expand the HOT–PHA Home Ownership Assistance program** that allows people to apply income assistance toward mortgage payments, including educational and outreach components.

SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

We know that community members are accessing basic and financial services the most, followed by health and wellness services. We also know that, because of the regional nature of service delivery, residents are not able to access all the services they need in their home community. We offer the following recommendations to support responsive social and community service delivery.

Recommended actions

Increasing local services

- Provide and advocate for **more services locally, especially for people with disabilities**, to reduce the impact of travel.

- Advocate for and **support shared service locations** (i.e., existing services agencies providing space for outreach / itinerant services (e.g., Service Canada, Income Assistance, Harm Reduction, etc.)).

- Support the **set–up of a housing specific non–profit society** to develop affordable, subsidized housing in Castlegar.

Food security

- Encourage and **support cooking on budget programs.** These programs work with people or families about stretching their money. Provide food at the sessions.

- Advocate for, or **provide transportation, to and from food bank services** for better access (drop offs / delivery to outlying rural residents).

- Advocate to the Province of BC for a **universal basic income** (Newfoundland just announced a UBI program for those aged 60–65).

- Expand **community garden provision** in City parks or on City–owned land.

- Support the **growth and expansion of the Castlegar Farmers' Market**.

- Support **backyard growers and food producers** through promotion of existing allowances and assistance in wildlife safe practices for growers.

- Advocate for a **National Healthy School Food program** by supporting the BC Chapter of the Coalition for Health School Food.

- Work with existing region-wide networks to support **regional collaboration on food access and availability** (West Kootenay Regional Community Food Hub) and on regional farm production, distribution, and market enhancements (Central Kootenay Food Policy Council).

- Network with Circle Of Indigenous Nations Society (COINS) to see how the municipality can **support the food security needs of Castlegar's Indigenous community** members.

- Expand **support for international students** through college food bank services.
  + Support a food program at Selkirk College for students.
  + Work with service providers to create a Good Food box program. This program is low barrier and provides increased access to healthy foods. Delivery will increase access to Selkirk students, those without transportation, etc.

- Work with service providers to **identify culturally appropriate food** so the food bank can provide these food options to clients.

Wrap around services

- Work with local health authority to **provide in-community wrap around services** for those who need support with mental health and substance use.

- Support the introduction of **Foundry in Castlegar** (Foundry works to provide wrap around services to support youth to live a good life through health and wellness.).

- Advocate for and support the location of **a youth shelter, local detox program, and residential treatment program in Castlegar,** as well as for a local continuum of care for addictions to substances and recovery.

- Advocate for **trauma-based treatment programs** (e.g., detox, treatment, and second stage housing) in the community to meet the needs of people living in Castlegar (i.e., adults with kids, youth, etc.).

- Advocate for and work to **identify a place for those who are unhoused or precariously housed to store and keep their belongings safe.** Provide washrooms, showers, laundry services, etc.

- Advocate for and support **supervised consumption sites** that incorporate other supports in addition to harm reduction.

- Advocate for **transportation for those who need to attain opioid agonist therapy** (OAT) and prescription medication, especially when very frequent prescription pick up is required.

Interpersonal relationship support

- Provide **support for moving through interpersonal relationship issues and conflicts** (within households, and extended family and friend networks, and between renters and landlords).
  - + Create or support the creation of public awareness and education campaigns to de-stigmatize relationship conflict.
  - + Advocate for and support communication and interpersonal skills training and resources in programming where possible.

- Advocate for and **support counselling services delivered by a trained counsellor** who is able, and available, to work through emotional and personal challenges at a minimal cost to community members according to income.

- Support **equitable access to Advocacy Centre programming**.

- Advocate for **expanded legal aid services**.

- Advocate for and **support programming and services for men** that is targeted to meet their unique needs.

- Promote **public information campaigns for services that are available to those who are not typically interacting with service providers** and may not be aware of services available.

- Work with service providers to **triage family supports and counselling**.

Keeping older adults in the community

- Provide or advocate for **more services (and more subsidized services) for older adult care** to alleviate the pressure on family members to relocate with few housing options.

- Attract more service providers who **help people live in their homes longer as they age** (e.g., work with Kootenay Career Development Society for expanded contraction employment in partnership with the Better at Home program (a program for housekeeping, etc. to enable staying in homes longer for seniors).

- Create a **hub for services as a one-stop shop for older adults.** Look for existing ways to do this (e.g., coordinate with existing seniors programming at the Recreation Centre).

- Continue to **provide non-digital services for older adults** (and others) who don't have access to or ability to understand digital technology (e.g., paper bills for essential services).

- Advocate for **better and more transportation options for older adults** to ensure independence.

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND SUPPORT

We know that lack of high school completion, lack of universal basic income, on-the-job or other injuries, and poor credit scores all impact a person's ability to thrive. We also know that there are a lot of respondents who rely on government support payments as a primary source of income, and that some respondents are not able to work for a variety of personal life situations. We offer the following recommendations to help with employment opportunities and support.

Recommended actions

- Provide or advocate for a **universal basic income**.

- Provide **education programs to support those with poor credit** to improve their credit scores.
  + Support the implementation of and promote community financial literacy programming and support / training.

- Advocate to the Ministry of Education and Child Care to **create a secondary school curriculum about financial literacy**. Work with people with injuries or medical conditions to determine the extent to which injuries impact their ability to remain in secure housing (i.e., injuries can impact ability to work and/or result in extended hospital stays where housing can be lost due to inability to pay rent).

- **Work with lower-income communities on employment opportunities.**
  + Advocate for targeted employment programming based off of recommendations (programming geared towards low income that provides financial incentive, funding, etc.).
  + Support and participate in a local job fair.

- Work with service providers to **raise awareness about training support programs and funding that already exists** (e.g., Single Parent Employment Initiative – SPEI, Work BC Programming, etc.).

- Provide **better connections to job opportunities for men** and support for them to stay in jobs successfully.
  + Advocate for support groups for men that provide education, mental health support, and physical health support. Make it broader than just finding jobs.
  + Advocate for better and targeted service provision for men who identify as being at risk.
  + Advocate for and support land-based programming for men (e.g., hunting, fishing, etc.)

- **Work with those who have partial completion of high school to complete high school diplomas** to gain access to a broader job market and / or connect people to job training programs.

- Work with and promote programs at School District 20 and service providers to support people with tutoring that meets client needs.
- Work with Selkirk College and service providers to promote the College' free BC Adult Graduation Diploma.
- Advocate for and raise awareness about financial incentives for eligible residents to attend Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs through Work BC and Selkirk College.
- Support the promotion of the Adult Upgrading Grant (AUG) that provides adult learners with tuition, housing, and living allowances while pursuing post–secondary education.

TRANSPORTATION

There is a need for more consistent, reliable, regular public transportation. We know a lot of the respondents need public transportation as a major support service and that some people travel more than 21 kilometres to access services. Without access to a private automobile, transportation between communities can be challenging. Respondent groups that will most benefit from more reliable, safer transportation options include people with disabilities, women, and single parent households.

Recommended actions

Understand transit needs

- Provide a **survey for West Kootenay residents to understand the impacts and needs of transit users.**
  - Work with regular transit users (especially people with disabilities, women, and single parent households) to understand their transit needs more fully.
  - Work with single parent households to better understand the experience of public transit to better meet needs.
- Continue with street outreach programs to help with transportation.

More regular transit service

- Advocate to BC Transit for **more regular service.**
  - Provide accurate and current statistics to BC Transit / regional districts that could inform more accessible and responsive transit service.
  - Advocate to BC Transit for more direct routing to service locations and request stop programs.
  - Advocate for changes to transit times that align with service provider program hours and hours of operation and provide broader options for transit service.

Shuttle bus to services

- Provide **regular, accessible shuttle bus service to Trail and Nelson** to facilitate access to services.

Safer transit
- Ensure transit has **appropriate lighting at transit stops, and that buses have security features** such as cameras, and emergency buttons.

- Work with service providers to **create a community toolkit for staying safe** (e.g., naloxone kits, de-escalation techniques, buddy system, etc.).

Understanding transit needs of single parent households
- Work with service providers to e**nsure programming timing aligns with transit schedules and routes.**

- Advocate for and support **carpooling, hosting programs on days when there is good transit service** (e.g., not on Sundays).

- Reach out to providers serving single parent households to **gather information on transit needs.**

Conclusion

Working to alleviate and eradicate the experiences of poverty requires systemic changes and tools and approaches different from those used to create the system. Partnerships, advocacy, innovation, building compassionate communities, and risk taking are all needed to care for the most vulnerable and marginalized members of our community.

Directly including people who are vulnerable and marginalized, as well as those who work directly with them, will lead to responsive solutions that can have great impact on people's lives.

This work will not result in overnight successes, but it can have lasting and sustained positive impact by consistently making small and responsive changes and building momentum for larger and more impactful change over a longer time period. This systemic change work will take generations. Castlegar has a committed community of care workers to lay an important foundation.