

Vermont Child Poverty Council

Public Forum Questions and Answers for Discussion
Windsor County
October 2, 2007

What is it like to be economically disadvantaged and what are the choices Vermonters have to make?

- Effect of DHMC – to WRJ and the Community
 - Need to make difficult choices:
 - Pay for: Meds, Food, Heating, Electricity, Car? Maintenance of Homes?
 - Choice: Immediate Crisis – think about the next ... Difficult to plan out \$ and needs
 - Economic Barriers: Education, Child Care, Transportation, Inadequate Minimum Wage (“livable wage”), Access to Health Care and Dental Care
 - Transportation Issues: Concentrate low-income individuals along the interstate
 - Long Term Effects: What you live with is how you grow up – “What is the Norm?”
 - Here and Now – vs – Future!
 - Impact of Stress!
- Short-Term Issues:
 - Nutritional Deprivation
 - Lack of Dental Care
 - Bad Choices
 - Limited Choices
- Long-Term Issues: Bitterness and Despair, Cycle of Poverty
 - Health Issues
 - Appearance
 - Bitterness
 - Drug and Alcohol
- Very low income – what do they qualify for? – income guidelines for various programs
- Choices – buy food or pay rent?
- Impact on children – feeling of hopelessness, not able to get ahead, role modeling – follow in the same footsteps as their parents
- Generation cycles
- Families move around – effects on health care
- Lack of knowledge – how to budget, purchase food to last (not able to accomplish this due to ? in life)
- Choosing priorities to spend \$ on food or shoes, gas, etc. choices forced by bills that are due – changes constantly.

- Not easy to be poor, stressful (constant stress) (organizations struggle to have impact when poverty stressors interfere, affects entire school population, etc.)
- Unpredictable, live with worry
- People are “poorer” than 50 years ago (wages don’t keep up)
- “Always coming from behind” – benefits and services that offer support if you start to get ahead
- Isolation, stigma of receiving services, community sees you differently – not supportive, services seem less discriminatory than 50 years ago

Define Success

- Economic Barriers:
 - Cost of housing, need supply of decent affordable housing
 - Finish high school – raise expectations
 - Livable wages
 - Take better care of kids
 - Kids in custody, better prepare kids for independence
 - Training
 - Education
 - Money management
 - Case managers better mentors engaged in kids’ lives
 - Reduce vulnerability
- What is it like to be economically disadvantaged
- Feels like: Disempowering, Embarrassing, Frightening, Stressful, Limiting, and Reduces Opportunity Physically/Mentally/ Unhealthy/Hungry/Tired
- Barriers – job market, lack of affordable quality child care, and lack of transportation, lack of affordable housing, affordable credit or credit card debt
- Short-Term impact on children: lack of education and support in-house, undercuts, can’t afford extra activities, confidence; criminal/negative behaviors may be a result, stress of poverty – clothing for school, lack of hope, may not consider college, day-to-day survival mode = no future stories, teens may feel trapped – low paying jobs

What circumstances and barriers put Vermonters in Poverty?

- Cost of living higher than what you can make
- Vermont – one of lowest for child care subsidy. Even 100% subsidy does not cover fair market value
- Child care not available for weekends and evenings – may be only work low income families can find
- Quality child care more costly – parents of low income may not be able to access low quality child care may be a disadvantage to children in school.
- Situational poverty vs. generational poverty

- Low/poor job skills – less educated, keep people in poverty – usually more than one factor – complex solution
- \$ Habits – need immediate gratification because future is bleak (want vs. need)
- To Help: increase subsidy – identify factors that can bring families out of situational poverty to prevent downward slide, having policies that move children out of poverty – regulations prevent families from moving forward
- Overlapping and Competing Services are incongruent
- Drivers
 - Lack of adequate wages
 - Lack of education
 - New skills versus old skills
 - Lack of health care – mental health, untreated chronic ills
 - Poor economic decisions
 - Underfunded child care
 - Lack of sufficient funding for existing programs
 - No foundations for parenthood and adult responsibilities
 - Drug and alcohol abuse
 - Seasonal expenses are higher
- Wages – too low (not livable)
- Lack of education, skills, training needed for higher \$ jobs
- Eligibility/flexibility of programs – getting ahead affects eligibility
- Work with existing systems – share school bus, be creative
- Circumstances – abuse, losing job, spouse, mental illness, violence
- Generational poverty
- Pride
- Housing costs (% of income toward housing) – also energy costs, food
- Single parent household complicated/difficult to manage commitments, costs
- Takes more time – no transportation, going to laundromat, receive services
- Can't access more reasonably priced goods
- Rural nature – transportation, service access, bus routes don't reach people with transportation needs
- Prevention – start supports early; invest in education, public transportation, and public housing
- Unaffordable and unavailable housing
- Substance abuse issues
- Lack of child care – nontraditional hours
- Domestic violence
- Lack of humility – same cycle
- Transportation
- Lack of education
- Medical affordability
- Teen pregnancy

- Mental health
- What can be done?
- Education, teachers have too much responsibility – they can't do it all – need other resources
- Structure/Parenting skills in the home – children are raising themselves
- Try not to stereotype – circumstances beyond control can put you in poverty
- Many are born into poverty – examine generational vs. situational poverty?
- Generational Poverty
 - Many are born into it!
 - Alcoholism
- Situational Poverty
 - Break up of relationships
 - Job loss/child care
 - 1/10 single moms receive child support
- Prevention
 - Improved transportation
 - More affordable housing
 - Livable wage
 - Education – proactive programs to encourage H.S. Diplomas
 - Family planning
 - Health care
 - Educational component to prevention
- Drivers:
 - Low wages/cost of housing
 - Domestic violence
 - Transportation
 - Lack of education or training
 - Low expectations
 - Poor role models
 - Lack of resources
 - Substance abuse
- Mental health issues
- Reentry from corrections
- Prevention
- Develop life skills in H.S.:
- Money management
- Social skills improvement
- Improve workforce training
- Indicators
 - Food shelves, Dr. Dynasaur
 - Tax Dept, catch people who hold multiple jobs
 - Lack of attendance at school activities

How do Vermonters move out of Poverty?

- Moving Out
 - Work from strengths
 - Interagency cooperation & planning
 - Break cycles
 - Better help for short-term disasters
 - Keep short-term disasters from destroying family
 - Health care coverage for all
- Envisioning
 - Can't ghettoize/need socio-economic diversity in neighborhoods
 - Caring communities – community support
 - Bonnie Clack – life skill management cars and transport
 - Redefine success
 - Encouragement
 - Benchmark/babysteps
- Education
 - Building relationships
 - Become hopeful, feel comfortable and capable
- Life skills training
 - Health and nutrition education
 - What resources are available
 - Remedial skills – planning, setting goals
 - Keep students in school
 - Offering “nontraditional programs”
 - Transition assistance
 - Review what programs are working well & implement in other communities
 - Start career training in middle Schools
- Strategies
 - Increase outreach & education to individuals eligible for food stamps and other programs (M/A, Medicare, WIC, LIHEAP, etc.)
 - How do you deal with conflict between wages and benefits? (wage increase/state benefits decrease...)
 - Legislative need: offset benefits rather than a loss
 - Health care – mental health, depression: Raise the awareness
 - Affordable, well-funded child care –_encourage the availability and affordability
 - All parents want their children to have better lives; Unrealistic expectations
 - Information for potential clients – what do they qualify for?
- Fuel assistance that actually covers fuel costs
- Address lack of section 8 certificates
- Increased child care subsidy
- Cultural mind shift – families in poverty are important – needs higher value

- Are the policies we are creating moving people out of poverty/off welfare or just handling it, i.e. more prisons
- Create a mind set – create political, cultural shift to care for/about families
- Increase public transportation
- Increased community-based values. Place more emphasis on how communities function
- Realize we are all part of the answer
- Legislation – incentives for community-based solutions
- Vermont as a state is small enough to have and create types of relationships to do something more radical
- Do present federal/state policies encourage families to move out of poverty or remain in poverty?
- Transportation for Headstart
 - Expanded ed. to pre-school
 - Need to change subsidized housing to mixed model of incomes
 - Change the “Poverty Guidelines” to a realistic formula
 - Wrap-around services – 1 family at a time (learning together program)
 - Accountability of those receiving services
 - Fully fund DCF and social services and hold them accountable
 - No dropouts at 16! Have flexible education. College isn’t the answer for everyone
 - Trade programs and apprenticeships need to come back
 - Equal wages for women!
- Policy change uses: for buildings, buses, etc. to offer opportunities to kids, parents, could allow parents and kids to have lunch together at school
- Headstart programs work
- Hours for day cares don’t always support working parents (9-noon). Offer financial support for high quality care
- Educate employers of the need for work/family balance
- Vote education, empowerment – parents can be role models for their kids
- Outreach – knowing what’s available for education services/resources
- Housing options (and expanded subsidies)
- Eligibility guidelines, be flexible, less restrictive
- Encourage policies that allow people to build assets
- Policy for contracts (state) to provide livable wages
- Tax credits, Social Security exemptions
- Sponsors or mentors to help individuals/families
- Flex funding for assistance programs – fuel, transport, and weatherization
- 211, referral services

Are there questions that have not been asked but should be?

- Why haven't past attempts to address poverty succeeded?
- How will this effort be different from previous efforts?
- Will Bridges out of Poverty training be provided to the Council?
- What are we doing about educating parents about how their decisions impact their children?
- What are we doing about oral health care for children?
- How are we addressing the needs of the young adults who are "slipping through the cracks"?
- What are we doing to help transition families out of state-assisted programs?
- Review fair housing laws
- Need better & more legal guidance on economic burdens
- College for community living
 - Armory
 - Raise drop-out age to 18
 - Raise age of custody to 22

What does F.I.S.H. Team Do?

Dick and Polly Ellis, long-time Royalton community members, made a commitment to find ways to serve families in need of support.

For many years, Dick has believed that if you give a man a fish he'll still be hungry tomorrow, but if you teach him to fish, he can feed himself for a lifetime. This belief guides our team. We know there are families in our community that could use some help finding ways to better their lives.

First, we want to meet with you to find out what you need:

- Gather some history about your family and your circumstances
- Listen to your goals
- Identify what is needed to help you succeed

Here are some of the ways we might be able to help:

- Budgeting, education, reliable transportation, weatherization or other home repair and safe, dependable child or elder care

What should people not in poverty do? Read: "A Framework for Understanding Poverty" By Ruby Payne

- Make data more local: How many people in your town, county live in poverty?
- How do we support providers in their roles and activities (helping them deal with stress, deal with compassion rather than use hostility)?

- How could legislators reach out to the poor?
- What do those living in poverty say they want/need?
- How is the gap between “haves” and “have nots” nationally affecting children?
- Could we have a voter registration campaign (and why don’t more people vote)? What more can be done to increase participation?
- What needs/issues do youth express?
- How do we find the commitment to find our solutions?
- Is there a relationship between poverty and professional politicians?
- Is it a good enough goal to reduce childhood poverty by 50%?
- How can tax reform for single parents be reduced to zero?
- Has the economic situation in this country made us less sensitive to poor people?
- What will Vermont look like when we have gangs and guns as in big cities?
- Should our approaches in addressing the needs of the working poor and people on state aid look different?