

Vermont Child Poverty Council

Public Forum Roundtable Discussion
Questions and Answers
Franklin County, St. Albans
October 29, 2007

What circumstances put Vermonters in poverty and what barriers keep them there?

- Medical crises (missing work=losing job)
- Family discord
- Dysfunctional families-parenting
- Literacy
- Credit issues
- Lack of education limits job options
- No short-term disability programs – drives people to welfare--poverty
- Lack of affordable housing
- Lack of resources to address issues – underfunded programs
- Predatory lending – use of credit cards to cover living expenses
- Homeowners pay mortgage before taxes, hard to get a tax abatement to preserve housing
- Mobility – people mover
- Competition for scarce resources
- Divorce – employment opportunities – loss of state aid
- Cost of living – no housing – section 8 – waitlist
- Community resources – need more staff and offices
- Health issues – keeps you there
- Divorce – domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse (no access to programs)
- Generation poverty
- Low paying jobs with little or no benefits
- Affordable housing
- Unethical labor practices
- Lack of transportation
- Lack of services for mental health issues
- Lack of educational/low self-esteem
- Services are not adequately funded
- Not being able to find safe quality child care – can't afford it
- Health care issues
- Lack of life skills
- Lack of opportunities
- Appearances, health. affect job
- Lack of money – loss of employment, inability to fund

- Cost of heating, fuel, food, medicine, housing increasing, it's too expensive to be poor – no insulation, no insurance, bad transportation, poor health
- Illness
- Lack of jobs paying livable wage
- Lack of skills
- New poor = workers w/stagnant wages, increasing costs, adjustable mortgage
- Lack of affordable daycare
- Rural communities lack public transportation
- Lack of progressive, sliding scale type of support system
- Lack of interstate up to 1960
- Rural nature – isolation
- Divorce
- Lack of education
- Rising fuel costs
- Generational poverty
- Disincentives for work
- Systems
- Lack of jobs in our community
- Inadequate child care resources
- Faulty policy
- Lack of funding
- Loss of hope\no perceived opportunities
- Education – lack of life skills when they leave school – budgeting – kids may leave school due to the pressures of drugs/course pressure/lack of guidance they experience, esp. in high school
- Social pressures – ninth grade brings out the differences in social status – compounded when you have to leave your home town to go to high school
- Child is fearful of saying what's going on at home to bring attention to the family situation
- Lack of resources
- Children who don't have someone who believes in them

What do you think would help Vermonters move out of poverty?

- Living wage, universal health care
- Affordable health care/housing
- Shifting subsidies from industries to people
- The poor not allowed to save: predatory lending
- Discrepancy between school/life
- Increase 21st century vocation education
- Career path jobs; flexibility, creative thinking – change

- Empower people w/choices
- Gain a sense of future – restore hope and vision
- Leadership which projects the future and encourages material age
- Community – sense of power, efficacy & self-worth
- Grasswork networks
- Children need people to believe in them
- Communities may not know what support is there
- Clichés may dominate perceptions – people need to better understand what poverty looks like – it’s families with working parents. People tend to blame the family or even the children
- Break down the cultural patterns between generations
- Make sure people who need help know where to go
- Youth build on example of successfully giving skills and creating housing
- Job corps
- Help kids fight back rather than go against the community
- Pay fines/etc. to help people keep driver’s license
- Reduce number of hoops people need to jump through to get assistance
- Allow families to receive assistance before all resources are gone
- Help people identify which info they get in the mail is most important
- Allow families to build some assets and resources that don’t count in eligibility determinations
- Help people move to home ownership
- Individual development-accounts – retirement accounts
- Case management and service coordination – reasonable caseloads
- Higher paying jobs w/benefits
- Quality day care – child care rates reimbursement
- Public transportation
- Higher education opportunities
- Supportive housing services – more common sense
- Property tax policy changes (maintain income sensitivity) (escrow) – having money ahead of the time to pay taxes
- Availability of housing for domestic abuse and homeless
- Mental health services – access to transportation
- Coordination of services
- Adequate staffing (corrections/court system)
- Job training – parenting skills
- Universal health insurance
- Livable wages
- Nutrition – fresh, local food at affordable price – let families use food stamps to buy CSA shares – farmers’ market coupons – need more, use CSA for that too
- Housing – section 8 – needs to be fully funded (waiting list is closed)
- Advocates who can guide and counsel families
- Flexible spending to meet people’s real and immediate needs

- Housing development
- Help people repair credit
- Work with landlords to upgrade rental units
- More money in HS budget (shelters transition housing)
- More educational funding
- Work incentive programs
- Law change to allow students to stay in school even when parents aren't in community to raise stability
- Public transportation
- Affordable housing
- More child care resources
- More employment opportunities
- More pay
- Raising state income thresholds and extending benefit time
- Transportation reliability
- Affordable housing – size of family – pets
- Knowledge/education on what aid is out there

What is your vision for Vermont, without children living in poverty?

- Working together as a community with families
- Get rid of eligibility barriers for assistance
- Some kind of gradual system so people don't lose benefits – reduce paper work – one-stop shopping services
- Teen mom education programs – works well keep them/funding
- WIC – important/essential
- Better use of food programs
- Raise child care subsidy for the parents –change eligibility to reflect the continued need even if income increases
- Agencies need to be clear about what they expect of folks receiving services
- Medicaid/health insurance for chronically ill (for everyone would be better)
- Tax credits and rent reasonably to families – work with court system about evictions
- Payment programs for rental deposits
- Domestic violence victims are at risk of losing housing
- Feels like everything is getting tighter (rules about eligibility, supply of services, housing)
- Money spent on homeland security starving other programs
- Doors are shut for families who have had a family member in corrections
- Less chips, more vegetable

- Statewide e-mail list among all the people who've attended these council meetings to share ideas, to keep the ball rolling, to let people know of needs for volunteer workers
- Most teachers don't understand poverty, they are middle class. They need first-hand listening opportunities, opportunity to learn about the home environment of their kids and get over their bias.
- Put consumers directly on the council
- Youth build for a nurse or teacher or trade, not just carpentry
- Get more youth involved in community discussions of safety, community assets.
- Help people know more about their community needs and assets
- Need for more infrastructure with bureaucracy
- Need for greater efficiency
- Greater/better outreach to more quality of these meetings with greater representation from people in poverty
- School staff need to be sensitive to issues of poverty
- Recognition of health care as right, not a privilege
- Infrastructure of support education
- 12 months/yr. – yr-round school, summer recreation, gardens for learning
- School=safe harbor – teen centers, what else? – churches
- Food programs input
- Teach teens leadership – sense of purpose
- Violence education
- Articulate vision & mission for sustainability beyond an individual
- Extended family
- Transitional and specialized housing
- Have local decision-making authority over HUD funds – look at allocating them equitably
- More locally run models at town levels – town residents take care of their own (food, housing, etc.)
- Parents are working, children are home alone
- Need transportation for afterschool activities
- Everyone is treated with respect when they ask for/receive services (of all kinds)
- One point person to direct to appropriate office for your questions – not just 211 – broader
- Section 8 shortcuts

What other thoughts, ideas, questions, or suggestions would you like to share with the Council?

- Everyone could have second chance if needed

- We would hear human stories not just look at summary statistics (especially at legislature))
- Families don't have to spend all of their time and energy just to survive
- Good ,accessible public transportation
- Poor are not victimized – by credit, etc...
- Everychild has a home and good nutrition
- Good education, including apprenticeships (need to be diverse and appealing)
- Jobs with benefits and good wages
- Housing
- Transportation
- More lunch options
- Support network – more than 211 question
- Volunteer option for families who need pickup – drop off issues
- Who can help?
- Full literacy for all
- Concerns about children at risk will appropriately followed – family stays together-concerns addressed pro-actively – needs to be a way to help families before there is an emergency
- Schools and state agencies and community organizations will all work together for the benefit of families and children
- Children involved and empowered o engage and help community
- Teach ambition, dreams, hope
- Literacy
- No hunger
- No fear – safe homes, sage streets, safe schools
- Quality daycare, early intervention
- Start with the kids; restore the shelter of community
- Listen to the children
- After school programs
- Tech ed. Could be broader – keep evolving
- Give/show kids pathways to real jobs that actually exist
- Give kids more options after high school that are 2 yrs. And directed at special skills
- Use/create transportation options – unreliable cars, no public transit options
- Child care is expensive and option aren't uncomfortable to me as a parent
- Mentoring works – peer mentoring kid/kid adult mentoring kid/adult
- We need more mentoring/mentors
- More agricultural opportunities
- State will invest now in people in generational poverty
- Assist people to gently transition to independence
- Building relationship skills
- An educated public about poverty issues

- Media portrayals of poverty that are real, accurate vs. sensational
- Housing resources with support services for adults transitioning from incarceration
- A hospital with a psychiatric ward
- No child goes to bed or school hungry
- No children drop out
- Every family feels connected to their community
- Kids not left alone at young ages after school
- Everychild has access to after school programs
- That kids are safe/happy/healthy
- Public transportation system that accommodates all needs
- Leadership by elected and appointed officials