

Vermont Child Poverty Council

Public Forum Roundtable Discussion
Questions and Answers
Orange County, Randolph
November 6, 2007

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

- Cost of housing/affordable housing
- Illness (physical and mental) bills
- Loss of transportation
- Loss of employment
- Your job goes away – need new skills
- Job loss in general (factory shuts down)
- Lack of livable wage jobs
- Domestic violence
- Divorce or death of a partner/spouse
- Generational poverty
- Childhood disability
- Cost of living increases
- Unexpected events or experiences
- Wrong jobs skills
- Student loan debt
- Alcohol and drug abuse
- Limited education
- Lack of child care – inc. nights/weekends
- Lack of local jobs
- Public transportation/reliable personal transportation
- “Basic” needs must be affordable – utilities, food, housing, vehicles
- Long-term illness and disabilities
- Lack of supports/follow-up
- Progressive reduction of assistance
- Generational vs. transient poverty
- Lack of skills to move out of “the system”
- Lack of self-esteem/role models
- Cost of living (housing, transport, food, utilities, health insurance)
- Politics
- Importance/reliance on credit history
- Tax system
- Lack of education – poor paying jobs
- Always one step behind
- Inflation of medical/fuel costs

- Lack of affordable child care
- Isolation
- Social stigma/stereotypes
- Housing problems getting worse, housing cost sky-rocketing foreclosures
- People being convinced to spend safety nets-credit card debt
- Higher ed. costs too high – huge debt burdens
- Disconnect between high paying jobs and education for workforce
- High tuition without high aid for VT state colleges – huge debt load without ability to repay
- Lack of investment in early childhood – people cannot afford to work in the field
- Transportation – always
- Lack of transportation, livable wage, affordable rental housing
- Benefit levels too low
- Lack of child care/cost of child care
- Rising fuel prices – heating and gas
- Delays in getting benefits – e.g. unemployment
- Marriage penalty in benefit calculation
- Accessibility of services – too spread out

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

- Education/job training
- Livable wage jobs
- Successful role models
- Hope – visualize what could be and set achievable goal
- Support – someone to believe in them
- Learn hidden rules of middle class
- Wrap-around services
- Desire to get out
- Asset development/protection
- Own care
- Universal health care
- Affordable/available child care/housing/assistance programs
- Higher benefit amounts
- Getting assistance faster – don't have to hit rock bottom
- Get rid of asset tests
- Eliminate waiting period for Social Security disability in event of terminal illness
- Raise minimum wage
- More affordable rental housing
- Fully fund workforce investment board
- More scholarships for lower income students

- Option for reliable affordable transportation
- Change perceptions about people in poverty
- Personal care voucher – laundry, toiletries, etc.
- Expand child care subsidy
- Gradual assistance reduction
- Realistic job training – disabled persons-struggling person
- More state job development for jobs that pay a living wage
- Expansion of public transportation
- Money
- Affordable housing
- Dependable and affordable transportation
- Affordable day care and health care and Headstart
- Livable wage job
- Access to more flex resources
- Early and post sec. ed. affordable and assessable
- Money management training
- Better collaboration among agencies/more IRA and system navigation
- More programs and financial flexibility
- Keep going with the AHS reorg.
- More advocates and sponsors to help navigate the system
- Bring concerns to legislature
- Better systems transitioning – more you make, the more they take
- Marry businesses with students and specific job training and other ed. opps.
- Fix child care subsidy
- Fix benefits cliff – create a stepped system
- Give more flexibility and discretionary money to community level, community action advisors (i.e. CVCAC)
- Raise welfare benefits – give more flexibility
- Provide tax benefits for companies that offer “livable work”
- Fully fund programs working with teen parents (parent-child centers), including prevention programs – focusing on men
- Provide incentives for affordable housing
- Candid sex ed. programs – starting in middle school

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

- Stop the brain drain
- Promote a solid middle class
- A place with affordable housing
- A place with secure jobs paying a livable wage and affordable benefits
- A place with adequate services for elderly and retired and disabled people

- Role modeling and mentoring would be plentiful
- Every child and family living in safe and affordable housing
- No childhood obesity
- Everyone would eat nutritious food – people could choose
- No homeless children/families
- Free education (post sec. ed.)
- Health care for everybody
- Eliminate the need for food pantries
- There would be no poverty
- No violence or crime
- Accessible public trans.
- 24/7 quality and safe child care
- Disposable income for all
- Safety net can hold all people who need it
- Vermonters understand poverty – eliminate stereotypes and judgment
- Stronger community connections –neighborhoods – community gardens
- People know how to cook and eat healthy foods (i.e. beans)
- System is more flexible – more efficient (many rules do not make sense)
ask people what they need (well-qualified people make decisions and
service seekers are more empowered)
- Only in dire circumstances incarcerate; for all others, provide appropriate
treatment and transition
- Stop stupidity – start at the top
- Sliding scale for assistance (change traditional income guidelines)
- Poor/low income people need to vote in their own best interest
- Increase subsidized child care guidelines (not updated since 1999)
- Wrap-around services (i.e. state mental health, etc.) to develop one plan
for family and assist with goal setting
- Fewer families struggling
- Children succeeding in school
- Lower crime rates
- Less domestic violence
- Less substance abuse
- Children earning degrees in higher education
- Food security
- Accessible, affordable medical and dental care
- Affordable, high-quality housing
- Section 8 housing for all with need
- Reliable, affordable cars

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

- Consider the Finnish education model
- Provide meaningful opp. for (18-20 year olds) i.e. National Service
- Longer-term thinking – stay the course/stick with people
- Fully fund successful programs for all (Liz Shorr)
- Get away from “start up” money only and partial roll outs
- School choice
- Teen parent programs
- More (structured) afterschool programs – summer – weekends
- Early prevention
- Continue with Clara Martin/social workers in the schools to help kids who are problems
- Ed. geared to individual needs
- More early ed. available (3-4-year-olds), more school breakfasts free
- How do we handle the tricky business of the need to increase the state revenues when increasing taxes is a taboo
- Talk to the Gov. and legislators
- End the war
- Give the families a chance
- Mentoring relationships
- Affordable higher ed.
- Narrow the gap between poverty and middle class
- Cost of living must become realistic
- Band-aids don’t work long term
- Money needs to be found to fund services for all family needs
- Implementation of transitional programs
- Services should be available with extended and/or nontraditional hours so working families can access them
- Employer acceptance of religious observances – e.g. Sunday hours
- Consider gas vouchers, especially for families with long commutes
- Vouchers for uniforms/work clothes
- Car repair assistance