



Vibrant Abbotsford Community Conversations

As part of the research, and as a way to ascertain the level of grass roots support, Vibrant Abbotsford has been talking to the community about poverty. To that end we've held conversations with 100 members of the community, and recorded their responses.

These conversations were done on an anonymous one-to-one basis, and every effort was made not to bias the response. People were approached at random and asked to give their ideas about three questions:

1. How and why is poverty an issue for Abbotsford and its citizens?
2. What do you think of when you think of poverty in Abbotsford?
3. What efforts do you think you/ the community could make that would have the biggest impact on reducing poverty in Abbotsford?

This was in no way intended to be statistical, but rather to elicit information and opinions. Our researcher, Sarah Campbell, spent time outside the mall, at the Bourquin bus loop, and at an event that brought together low-income people and service providers. Though most responses were completely individual, certain concepts came up over and over.

There was a perception of poverty meaning the homeless; 25 people mentioned homeless when asked Question 2, only 6 people mentioned single mothers. When asked for solutions 36 people wanted to see more affordable housing. In addition, the responses ran the gamut from people who view poverty as a problem of people's own making, to those who wished there was more understanding. These conversations highlighted the role of education on some of the wider ranging aspects of poverty. It should be noted that in over 80% of the conversations, the respondent felt that poverty was an issue for Abbotsford.

"Everyone out there has their own stories – nobody's listening and it's not right."

"We have financial assistance, poverty isn't a problem unless you're a drug addict."

"You know it's a problem when we offer free dinners every day of the week."

"We need more compassion."

"I work, but I'm two paychecks away from being homeless."

"I've been there."

"We have all kinds of services, there's plenty of help out there."

"I would love the dignity of work"

"Poverty affects the lives of everyone, not just the poor. Poverty has become normal – that's why we need to fight it."

"Don't talk to me about poverty. I started out poor, worked my ass off, now I'm rich. That's the only way to do it."

"I had no idea how little social assistance gave people. I think if most people knew what it was they would have more sympathy."

How and why is poverty an issue for Abbotsford and its citizens?

- Homelessness is an issue in Abbotsford (12)
- "I see it everywhere" / "look around" (7)
 - o "Poverty is a huge issue for Abbotsford, especially since they just shut down the planned housing opportunities. We should not pretend poverty isn't there."
 - o "Poverty is visible"
- Poverty is an issue for every city (5)
 - o "I think it's wider spread than Abbotsford"
 - o "It's an issue for the world, not just Abbotsford. We have it better than many"
 - o "There will never be an end to poverty – it's unavoidable"
- It's a complex problem (4)
 - o "It's not one thing, it's many things"
 - o "A lot of social forces have made poverty worse"
- Poverty is not a problem (4)
 - o "Poverty is not a problem here, we are very rich compared to Brazil"
 - o "There are not too many poor people in Abbotsford"
 - o "Poverty here is not like poverty anywhere else, look at Africa, people should consider themselves lucky"
 - o "We have financial assistance, poverty isn't a problem unless you're a drug addict"
- Drugs (4)
 - o Drug / Alcohol Abuse (1)
- Abbotsford is a growing community (3)
 - o "People from Vancouver keep coming this way"
- It's not as bad as Vancouver or Surrey (2)
- People don't understand how far below the poverty line those on assistance really are (2)
- Lack of jobs (2)
- Cost of Living (2)
- Housing issues (2)
 - o "I'm surprised to see the lack of housing"
- Poverty is a "self-made" issue (2)

- “A lot of people have put themselves there – wasting [money] on drugs instead of the things they need”
- Mental Illness (2)
 - The Closing of Riverview: “it’s not going to go away”
- “I started out poor, worked my ass off, now I’m rich. That’s the only way to do it.” (1)
- You read and hear about poverty a lot (1)
- Poverty is hitting the “little guy” – the working poor (1)
- Poverty among youth is an issue for Abbotsford (1)
- “It affects all of society especially youth” (1)
- I don’t know (1)
- “You know it’s a problem when we offer free dinners every day of the week” (1)
- “I’ve volunteered in soup kitchens and I’ve seen it” (1)
- “Poverty is an issue, I’m living below, or around the low-income line” (1)
- “Everyone’s poor these days” (1)
- A lack of awareness on the issue of poverty (1)
- “There are job services, but it’s a hard ladder to climb” (1)
- “People are unwilling to help, or understand people who are a lower status than themselves” (1)
- Lack of Education (1)
- System problems i.e., the need for addresses, skills, etc (1)
- The priorities of the government have shifted – placing the responsibility back in the hands of the people (1)
- “I remember reading about young women prostituting themselves for a bath, and this in the middle of the bible belt” (1)
- “Not if they got off their ass” (1)
- “It’s easy to tell the good area from the bad area” (1)
- “Too many wealthy people that have way too much and there is not enough sharing” (1)
- “People who don’t have home and families to spend the holiday’s with” (1)
- “Every night that people are out there [on the streets] is a night they might not live through” (1)
- “Everyone out there has their own stories – nobody’s listening and it’s not right” (1)
- “You never know when the wheels are going to fall off your life” (1)
- “The time is urgent to tackle this problem” (1)
- “Poverty is a situation that the government instigates, the government is trying to put a Band-Aid on a situation that we shouldn’t have in the first place” (1)
- Because there is a lack of “education to bring people out of their mindset” (1)
- “Abbotsford seems to allow discord in certain areas and not in others” (1)
- “Poverty affects the lives of everyone, not just the poor. Poverty has become normal – that’s why we need to fight it.” (1)
- We need the service providers, town council, government all working on the same idea, then they might come up with solutions (1)
- “It’s sick and sad, being the bible belt they should do more” (1)
- “People need food, shelter, and a little extra” (1)

- “We need more compassion” (1)
- “Homelessness is out of hand. Something has to be done about it. It’s getting to the point that I don’t like paying my taxes given the poverty and level of crime.” (1)
- “There are two types of poverty, some people are not working, but there are also new immigrants that have a lack of skills” (1)

What do you think of when you think of poverty in Abbotsford?

- Homelessness / Street People (25)
 - “The guy who lives off the garbage at the bus depot, I see him everyday”
 - “The money that it takes to get people off the street is being used for other things”
 - It seems like it’s getting worse
 - “I think of guys living on the streets, who don’t work, can’t work, or don’t get help”
- Addiction: Drug Addicts (10) / Alcohol & drugs (5)
 - “I think they got to start helping themselves. A lot of the poverty is due to drugs” (1)
- Single Mothers / Women and Children (6)
 - “A fair number of single parents (women and men) who are struggling, trying to work with the responsibility of children”
- Jubilee Park (5)
- “There should be some way to help them” (4)
 - “It’s sad there’s not more done”
- Lack of necessities (4)
 - “Having not enough money to live”
 - “Not eating, not smoking”
 - “Kids that don’t have food”
 - People that don’t have proper nutrition
- Youth (4) / Children (1)
 - Young people who should be at home, but aren’t because of family problems
- There will always be poverty (3)
 - “There’s always poverty wherever we go, [the poor] will always be with us”
 - “There are tons of churches – but there is no place immune to poverty”
 - “In democracies there are the fortunate and the unfortunate”
- Disabilities (3)
 - “I’ve noticed a number of people who don’t seem capable of getting good jobs, due to disabilities”
- Emotional responses to poverty (3)
 - “It’s sad”
 - “It sucks”
 - “I feel sorry”
- Working Poor (3)

- "I work, but I'm two paychecks away from being homeless"
- "The working poor are very much overlooked, they get the least resources"
- Elderly (3)
- Beggars (2)
- People who can't afford transportation, so they walk or take public transit to work (2)
- High School Drop-outs / Kids that don't go to school (2)
- Downtown Abbotsford (2)
 - "It's like a hobo town"
- "The rich are getting richer, and the poor are getting poorer" (2)
- Mental Health Issues (1)
- Lack of Awareness (1)
 - "I think it's a lot more of us than we know, and if we're not living in it now we're a few months away if we hit hard times" (1)
 - "It's there, but it's under the radar"
- "People who are living above their means" (1)
- "I don't, as long as I survive that's all that matters" (1)
- There are lots of jobs out there (1)
- "People on a less than constructive path" (1)
- Health care issues (1)
- People on welfare (1)
- Don't Know (1)
- "I've been there" (1)
- "A lot don't have to be on the street" (1)
- People on limited income who spend hundreds of dollars on frivolous expenses "just to feel normal" (1)
- "Myself, I'm on welfare." I rely on the food banks and the Salvation Army, and I can use my welfare cheque to buy crack. (1)
- "There should be Zero Tolerance for poverty" (1)
- Multiple- Barriers (1)
- "Lack of resources" (1)
- "People trying to scrape and save to get by" (1)
- "I always donate to the Salvation Army" (1)
- "They're not paying attention and people are falling through the cracks" (1)
- "The government has created work, not jobs" (1)
- Drug related crime (1)
- "Desperation" (1)
- "A lot of friends" (1)
- "Since Riverview closed the bus drivers and police are babysitters" (1)
- Not being able to get what you need (1)
- "I lived on the street too long – I don't want to go back" (1)
- Young families that are struggling, you see them when they come down to the Salvation Army for food. "That's got to be the worst, to be below the poverty line with young children". (1)
- People having a hard time finding jobs and homes (1)

- “Politicians are doing a bad job, there will always be poverty because politicians suck” (1)
- “Ladies of the night” (1)
- “It’s disgraceful, it’s politically wrong – I’m glad there are churches. I believe that pointing fingers is wrong, and we pass judgment too fast” (1)
- “Homeless people have a sense that we’re not worthy” (1)
- “There’s more poverty then is acceptable. If we empower them we can have a much richer place” (1)
- “We have all kinds of services, there’s plenty of help out there” (1)
- “People who smoke while they panhandle” (1)
- “We have a community so committed to homelessness that plans for social housing attract huge opposition.” (1)

What efforts do you think you/ the community could make that would have the biggest impact on reducing poverty in Abbotsford?

- Affordable / Accessible Housing (36)
 - Insure that it’s not segregated from the rest of the population
 - The government should use their empty buildings to house people (1)
 - Rental costs should be more reasonable (1)
 - Apartments for homeless that have supervision (1)
 - “Something that can be afforded on social assistance”
 - “You have to have a place to start from – to wake up in the morning”
 - “We have too many slum landlords in Abbotsford” where the plumbing doesn’t work, there’s mold, and no one checks up on them.
 - Welfare should buy the buildings and manage them, and the rent they collect should go into job training programs.
 - “You have to choose between eating and a roof over your head”
 - “Build apartments and offer them without judgment or blame”
 - “There should a house built for everyone.”
 - Use the hospital for temporary housing; use the current rooms to create space for housing and training.
 - We need more housing options so that low income landlords don’t have all the power.
- Work / Employment Programs (13)
 - “Find them jobs”
 - “You have to give them jobs; you can’t just dole it out.”
 - We need job programs that are specifically tailored to the homeless, that include things like workplace etiquette and can help people get accustomed to the workplace. (1)
 - “Put them to work. I’m old fashioned – if you want something you have to work for it”
 - “Train people so they can help themselves”
- We need more shelters / bigger shelters (12)
 - More night staff at shelters (1)

- “The Salvation Army could open their doors more – and open their minds more.”
 - People should be able to live at shelters for a month while they save up first and last months rent for a place. “The hard part is getting started” (1)
- Don’t look down on people in poverty / create a sense of humanity / engagement / hope (7)
 - “I don’t like being looked down on”
 - “We are all human, we are all angels, we all got stories to tell”
 - “The homeless haven’t committed a crime”
 - “Give people a sense of love and hope, get people out of hopelessness then they will bring themselves out of poverty. A lot of poverty is self-induced – due to hopelessness”
 - “Get more engaged with the poor – we can’t expect them to come to us. The general public needs to engage with people, understand what their needs are, at the very least the connection is empowering”
 - “There are better, more compassionate ways to help people”
 - “You’ve got to make them feel they’re worth something. Help needs to be internal – not just external”
- The closing of Riverview: re-open facilities for the people who were released (5)
 - Help for those with mental illness (2)
- Drug programs / Alcohol programs (5)
 - “The wait is too long to get in”
 - “Make a good treatment center that requires a long term commitment, not just some place to crash for a few days. They have to get help, but they also have to help themselves.”
 - “Recruit workers in addiction”
 - Get rid of the drugs and alcohol (1)
 - “Just stop spending money on drugs and alcohol” (1)
- Awareness of the issue of poverty / Recognize the poverty in the community (5)
 - “Stop treating it like it isn’t there”
- Change the attitudes of the young regarding work / work ethic (4)
 - “Some people are able to work and they just don’t want to – young kids just don’t want to work”
 - “The new generation wants easy money”
- Lower prices and make things more affordable (4)
- More volunteers offering food and clothes / warm blankets (4)
- There are already a lot of services (4)
 - “I think the community is doing as much as they can”
 - “The churches already do a lot”
 - There are already a lot of programs
 - “I think the community does a good job – there are lots of resources through Community Services. The changes need to happen at a government level”
- Need to give the poor a sense of dignity (3)
 - “I would love the dignity of work”

- Centers for kids and teens to keep them occupied (3)
 - o Occupy the youth with challenges
- Information about services / Accessible services (3)
 - o “Getting the word out – we have such great programs, but people don’t know how to access the aid, so they sit back helplessly”
- People don’t want to work (3)
 - o “There are lots of jobs in Abbotsford, the poor just don’t want to work”
 - o “It’s self inflicted, people just want to take the easy way out”
- Allow people to set up tents, as there is no affordable housing (3)
 - o Create a special area – like a campground with public washrooms / showers
 - o “They shouldn’t go and throw people’s tents away. We’re on the street and they go and throw away everything you own”
 - o “Parks are for everyone, but there should be somewhere to tent” A campground should be created, people could donate older trailers that would work as housing, and there could be laundry and wash facilities.
- Work study programs (2)
- Advocacy
 - o Welfare rates (2)
 - o New social safety net and a tax shift (2)
- Transportation (2)
 - o “Last year I had 12 bikes stolen”
 - o “We need housing close to public transportation, and close to work”
 - o Better Bus Service
- Free Childcare (2)
- Stop spending money on foreign aid (2)
- An after hours place to wash clothes and shower after work. Perhaps a partnership with a local coin laundry and the wave pool to provide free services (2)
- Social Assistance Reform (2)
 - o Change the rules that insure that couples get less then they would as individual people.
 - o Make it easier for people to get onto disability
- Work on root causes / early stages (2)
- “Nib it in the bud, it’s cheaper and you have more time to find the correct solution. If you wait it will be more expensive and difficult. There is no one remedy – they have to be treated as individual cases.”
- Education (2)
 - o Better education
 - o More funding into schools, reduce the drop out rate by offering trade programs
 - o Free schooling / subsidized schooling for mothers (1)
- Government needs to do more (2)
 - o “More programs”
- Services need to work together (2)
 - o “Insure that services are working co-operatively”

- "Give the homeless the option of getting on a program to get shelter, or get out of town. No one has to live on the street. I know welfare won't do much, but it's still something." (1)
- Prevent rent being raised after tenancy, rent control like Vancouver (1)
- There should be drug testing at shelters that let people stay longer because they're waiting for a spot in a rehabilitation facility. These people are just "using the system", because they can stay at shelters longer than other people – even if they're still using drugs on the side, and it's not fair to everyone else. (1)
- "It the fault of the people that are doing a lot of talking, with no action" (1)
- Raise Minimum wage (1)
- "It's complex – there are a lot of issues that come from childhood and what your upbringing was" (1)
- "Try to get people back into society" (1)
- "The government has realized that it won't get anything from the poor, so they're ignored. Human beings are not on the agenda – ever." (1)
- "Feed the homeless, guide them. What they don't know is all they got to do is ask." (1)
- Increase the general publics understanding of social assistance (1)
 - o "I had no idea how little social assistance gave people. I think if most people knew what it was they would have more sympathy."
- "More should be done, we're paying for our lack of support though our police, etc, and surely we could be doing something more compassionate. Shelters are good, but they're not an answer." (1)
- Don't lump all the homeless together, there are very different communities. There are street people [drug addicts], the homeless, and the ladies of the night. They have different needs and should be treated differently.
- "We need better communication with the police department, we need to educate people on what it means to be good Canadians" (1)
- Bigger Paycheck (1)
- "Something got to happen, the government needs to step up to the plate" (1)
- "Support people who are homeless and continue to support them at every level" (1)
- "People need support, but they also have to take responsibility, and pull themselves up by their socks" (1)
- Criminal Justice system – "people learn from jails, how to cheat the system, and they lack trades" (1)
- More consistent church involvement (1)
- "Stop creating tax cuts that benefit the wealthy" (1)
- Bring back conscription, send them to the army (1)
- Medical and dental programs (1)
- "We're paying the wrong people" i.e., social service workers (1)
- Mentoring programs for the young men in the community (1)
- Legalize Marijuana (1)
- The change would have to be larger than just Abbotsford, transfers from the government are almost always directed towards infrastructure rather than social programs (1)

- "I think people should turn their cell phones off, and actually have a conversation" (1)
- "I don't know" (1)
- Share the prosperity of the Fraser Valley (1)
- "Get off their high horse and help" (1)
- When events are planned – think about those going to the event and their needs - not the providers (1)
- It's a problem for which there is no easy solution – it will require cooperation from service providers and government. (1)
- "People need something besides drugs and alcohol to keep them occupied. (1)
- More free recreational programs for children (1)
- "There is a lack of help, resources are limited" (1)
- "If we had the resources to do [Abbotsford Connects] on a daily basis" (1)
- Change the government (1)
 - Instead of reducing redundancy within the agency, the government cut funding to ministry in charge of foster care – 700 children have died in ministry care "and not a ripple"
 - Create a truly democratic / representative system and things will change
- Create a people army, [a civil army] that takes the homeless provides them shelter, food, training and puts them to work. They could use the old logging camps and have them plant trees. They could save their pay until they were ready to leave. (1)
- Well-located services that would help people get ID and proof of income. (1)
- Get rid of the food banks for the first two weeks of the month, and force the poor to spend their money on food rather than drugs. "I can live for free, get my clothes from the Salvation Army, and food from the food bank. What motivation do I have to get off crack?"
- "Get rid of the poor in _____ area":
 - Mill Lake Park (1)
 - Downtown (1)
 - Jubilee Park (1)

For More information please contact:

Vicki Austad – Coordinator

vickiaustad@shaw.ca

Sarah Campbell – Researcher

scampbel@alumni.sfu.ca