

What We Heard

During engagement we spoke to more than 800 people in the Central Okanagan. This short summary shares some of the key points they had to share with us.

PUBLIC SURVEY	• Online Survey • 748 Participants
SURVEY OF PEOPLE WITH LIVED & LIVING EXPERIENCE	• Online and paper survey distributed in 2021 by the United Way • 223 Participants
COMMUNITY FORUM	• Online public meeting to discuss poverty, its impacts, and community vision for reducing poverty • 10 Participants
SERVICE PROVIDER INTERVIEWS	• For service providers working with target populations who were unable to make other engagements, interviews were held to ensure their perspectives were collected • 2 Interviews
PEOPLE WITH LIVED & LIVING EXPERIENCE	• A combination of questionnaires distributed by service providers, interviews, and focus groups with people experiencing poverty • 10 Participants
PRELIMINARY PLANNING & IMPLEMENTATION SESSION	• A focused workshop with service providers and local government representatives to begin identifying possible solutions and interventions to reduce poverty • 11 Organizations
LOCAL AREA FOCUS GROUPS	• Local community focus groups with service providers in West Kelowna, Peachland, and Lake Country were held to gather community specific concerns and experiences • 16 Participants over three focus groups
INDIGENOUS ENGAGEMENT	• A combination of interviews, focus groups and workshops with Indigenous community leaders and service providers were held with Okanagan Indian band, West Bank First nation, Métis Community, Okanagan Nation Alliance, and Urban Indigenous services • Urban Indigenous Organizations – 5 engagements, 12 participants • Okanagan Indian Band – 3 engagements, 8 participants • Westbank First Nation – 2 engagements, 6 participants • Okanagan Nation Alliance – 2 engagements, 8 participants

Shared Vision

The vision that was created during engagement was:



Summary of Key Findings

- Future without poverty = basic needs met and sense of inclusion
- Transportation remains a barrier. Transportation ranked among the top choices of services that help or would help people stay employed.
- High cost of housing remains a barrier.
- Some groups of people are disproportionately impacted by poverty: Seniors and Elders, people living with a disability, and children and youth/ young adults.
- More and more people in the RDCO need support with managing costs of daily living such as housing, transportation, food, health, and recreation, etc.
- Indigenous communities who participated emphasized that their experience of poverty is colored by the ongoing impacts of colonialism, capacity challenges, and entrenched racism and stigma. These systems must be addressed for meaningful change to happen.
- Childcare was among the top services that respondents identified would help them acquire employment or remain employed.

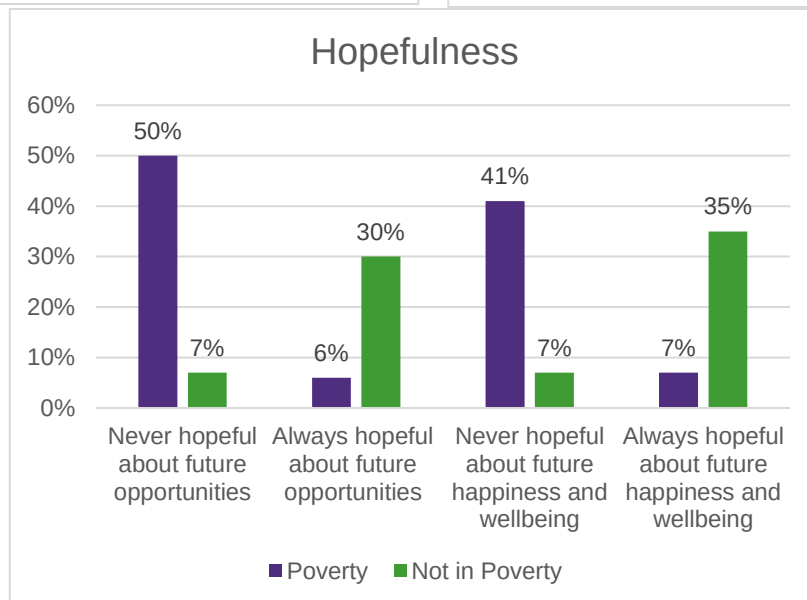
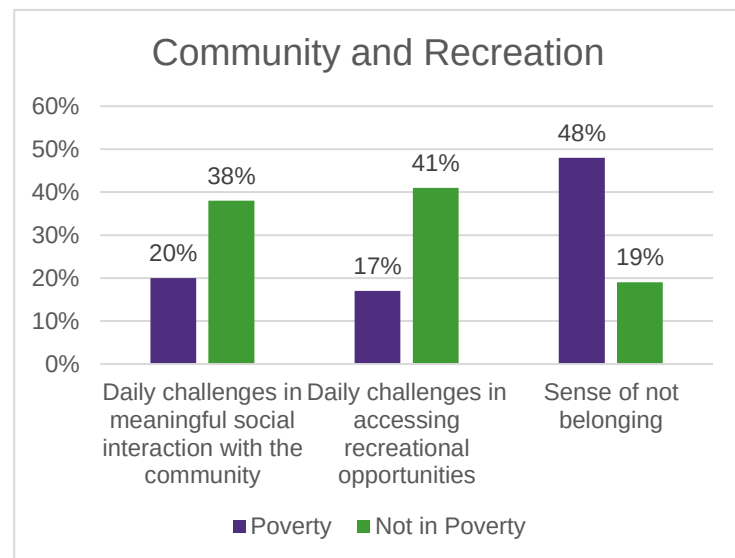
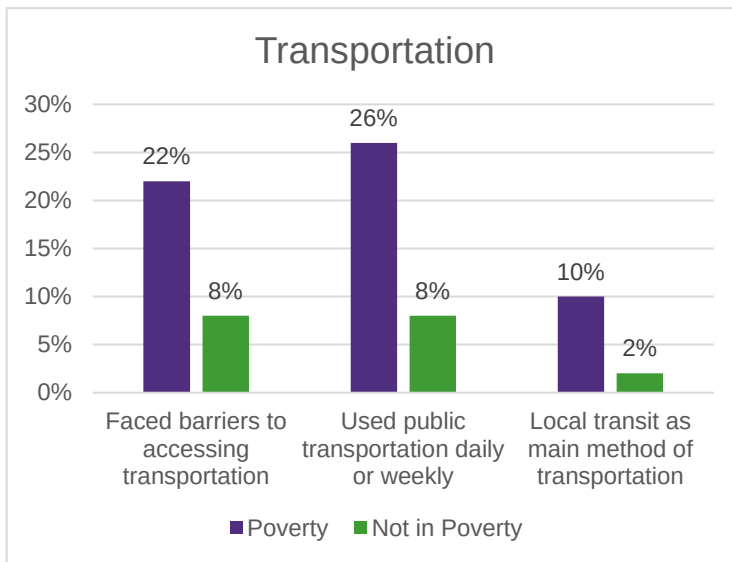
Respondents who identified as living in poverty or having inadequate incomes had more experiences related to:

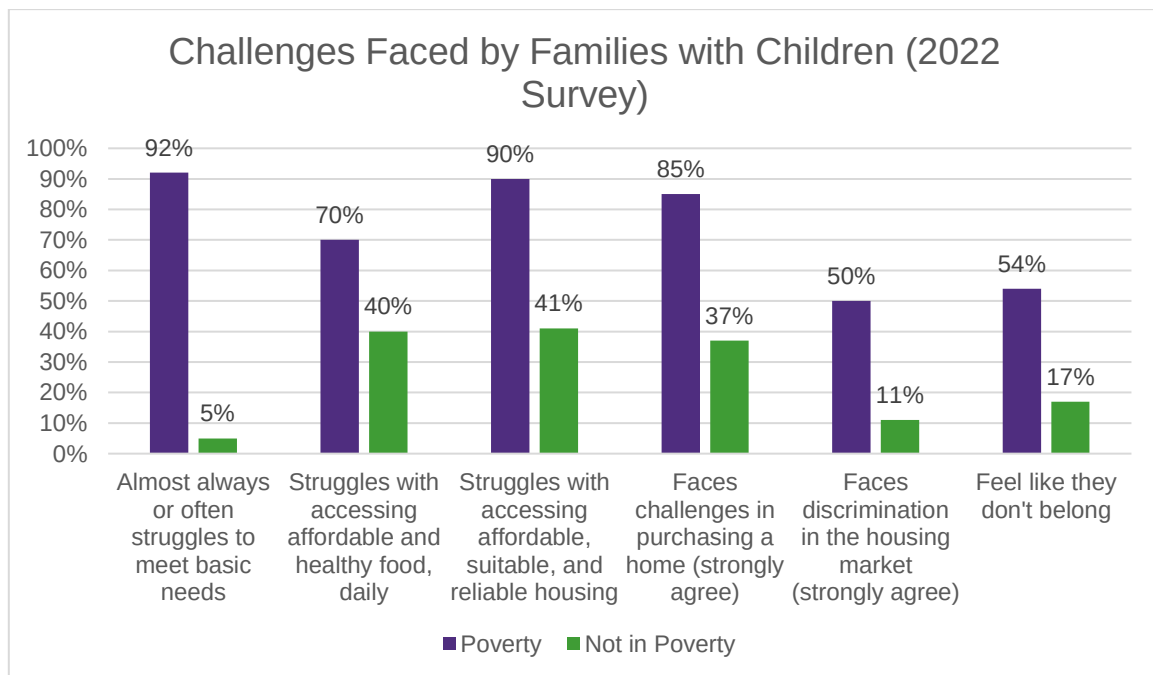
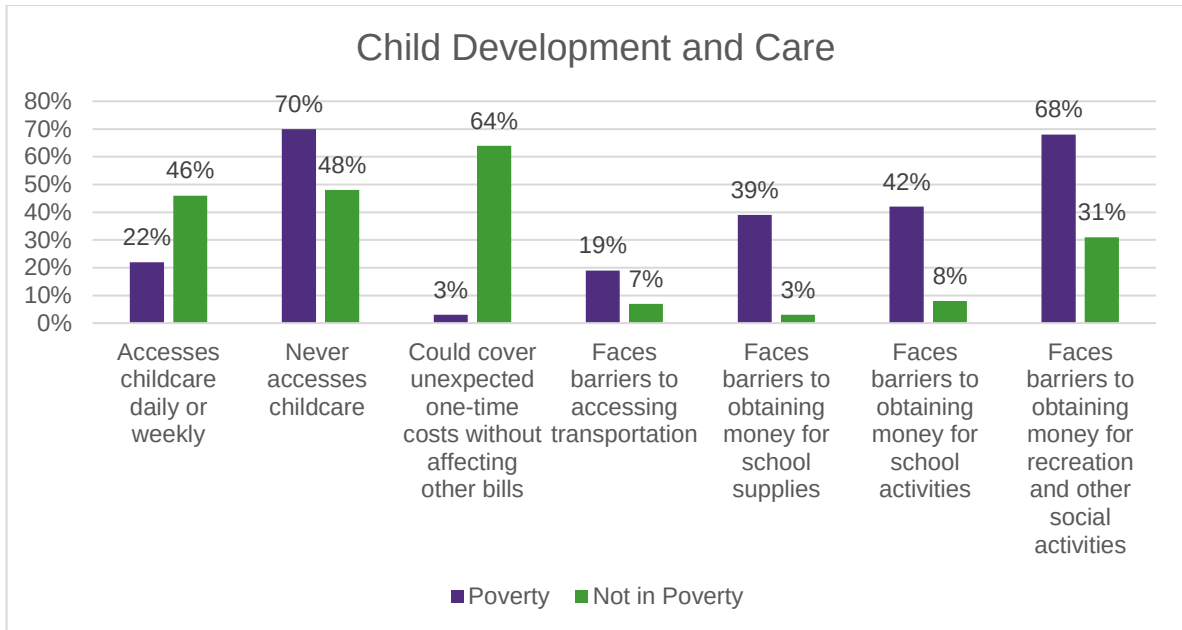
- Barriers in accessing services, programs, and other support
- Being in unstable or unsuitable housing

- Struggles to acquire necessities (e.g., food, healthcare)
- Having poorer mental health and social wellbeing (e.g., feelings of isolation and exclusion)

Survey Findings

These are some of the main take-aways from the Public Survey which was conducted in February and March 2022.





Ideas to Make Change

More than 140 distinct ideas for action were shared during engagement. These ideas are the starting point for the Central Okanagan Poverty and Wellness Strategy. The ideas for action addressed five areas of wellness and were brought up at multiple engagements and reflect the priorities of the community.

Preventative Interventions

Prevention and early interventions can help people get help before they are in crisis. Services for people who are struggling to make ends meet but who are not in need of crisis intervention, like Income Assistance, can help people stay on track. Breaking cycles of intergenerational poverty is also important. This can be done through investments in childhood development and youth services.

Inclusion and Community Belonging

Belonging and inclusion are important for everyone. Stigma keeps people experiencing poverty feeling isolated and prevents people who could use support from accessing it. Relationships amongst diverse community members is an important way to increase belonging and community pride.

Basic Needs

Everyone has the same basic needs: food security, livable income, financial resilience, housing, transportation, and health. It is important that access to resources to meet these needs is available to everyone. To meet these needs, there need to be services, funding for those services, and people need to know about the services and feel welcome to access them.

Reconciliation

Reconciliation is an important path towards an equitable future. The Indigenous experience of poverty is coloured by the ongoing impacts of colonialism, capacity challenges, and entrenched racism and stigma. These systems must be addressed for meaningful change to happen.

Collaboration

Addressing the needs of the community is going to take action from the whole community– from grassroots to the federal government. Having multiple stakeholders and sectors working together is a foundational part of this work.

Below are a few of the specific ideas for actions that were shared.

Preventative Interventions

- Child Development: Use schools as a hub to connect children, parents, and services.
- Youth Wellbeing: Help youth transitioning into adulthood with financial literacy programs to help them learn how to manage their money and expenses.

Inclusion and Community Belonging

- Create more opportunities for people to come together like community meals and activities.
- Host free community events (block parties, picnics, performances, skating rinks)

Meeting Basic Needs

- Design eligibility for programs based on specific needs rather than income.
- Create community hubs where a variety of services are provided in a central location. Hubs can build connections between service providers and help them share resources and communicate.

Reconciliation

- Act on recommendations that already exist within a series of documents (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, In Plain Sight, etc.) to continue moving towards reconciliation in all institutions.
- Bring in Indigenous communities early in projects (before a plan is made for the process).

Collaboration

- Sharing Resources: Create a regional fund which allows people to donate to support local initiatives.
- Building Partnerships: Expand the reach of collective tables to be regional and include businesses, ministries, local government, people with lived and living experience, and service providers.

Findings by Priority Area: Needs to Address

The last section of this summary includes more detailed information about the needs discovered during engagement. The priorities are based on the Central Okanagan Community Wellness Analysis, which identified these areas as important through research, community engagement, and feedback. During our community engagement, new priorities emerged. It also became clear that some people are at a higher risk for experiencing poverty and need some focused support.

Isolation and Inclusion

Needs Identified

- People would like the opportunity to feel more connected or be reconnected to their communities. People rely heavily on recreation, physical activity, and community spaces for mental wellness.
- People experiencing poverty require financial support to thrive, rather than just survive. Also, marginalized or vulnerable populations need to be integrated into communities.
- The inability to afford necessities experienced by people living in poverty has a compounding effect on their mental health and wellbeing. They were significantly less optimistic about their future happiness, wellbeing, and opportunities in the RDCO.

Youth Poverty and Wellness

Needs Identified

- Many families with children experiencing poverty struggle to meet their basic needs, are food insecure, have unstable housing situations, and feel like they did not belong.

Child Development and Care

Needs Identified

- Families living in poverty are less likely to access childcare, have barriers to accessing resources for their children's schooling, and struggle to meet their children's social and physical wellbeing needs.
- Due to constrained budgets and unaffordable housing, families living in poverty have lesser capacity to access development and care options for their children.

Regional Housing and Homelessness

Needs Identified

- Many people living in poverty spend 50% or more of their income on housing, leading to housing and food insecurity and the inability to meet other needs. Affordable ownership or rent were the most important priorities in housing.
- Many people raised concerns that landlords had illegal and/or unsuitable units, contributed to "renovictions", raised rents with no warning, and transitioned units into Airbnbs – all of which add pressure to individual households and the rental stock overall.

Transportation

Needs Identified

- People experiencing poverty made use of public transportation more, but also faced greater challenges in accessing it.
- Some communities are difficult to access, or are not at all accessible, by transit.

- Personal vehicles are relatively more expensive for people living in poverty or on fixed incomes, due to the cost of maintenance and inflation.

Emergent Priority Areas

Financial Resilience

Needs Identified

- The rising costs of living, expensive housing, and inflation erodes people's purchasing power and leaves many vulnerable to unforeseen circumstances.
- People who are at the cusp of poverty do not qualify for social or income assistance programs.
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Reducing Stigma Around Poverty

Needs Identified

- Many people did not access services or programs that would benefit them because of the stigma and shame around poverty.

Mental Health Resilience

Needs Identified

- On top of ensuring the physical needs of people are met, community and social wellbeing are necessary to promote mental health resilience.
- Supporting people with mental health issues and addictions who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness and poverty.

Diverse Needs of Equity-Deserving Groups and Vulnerable Populations

Seniors

Needs Identified

- With many seniors living on fixed incomes, they are vulnerable to the housing crisis and being at risk of housing insecurity and poverty. Additional support was identified as needed for seniors to meet their transportation, service, accessibility, social, and physical needs.

Possible Actions

- Provide seniors with easily streamlined, accessible, and understandable information on where they can find resources for assistance.

Elders

Needs Identified

- Elders, especially those who suffered in the residential school system, have experienced Canada's colonial legacy for a longer time than Indigenous youth and are more deeply impacted. Many Elders are burdened with few resources in retirement. There is a need to address the nuanced needs of Elders in enhancing their social and health wellbeing.

People with Disabilities

Needs Identified

- People with disabilities often struggle with bureaucracy when applying for income assistance.
- People with disabilities may also struggle meeting their needs due to rising costs of living and living on fixed incomes.
- People with disabilities struggle with meeting their housing and transportation needs as many options are not suitably designed for people with disabilities.

Youth in Foster Care

Needs Identified

- Youth aging out foster care often face barriers to further education, employment, and meet other needs. It is important to connect them to services and resources to help them establish a positive life trajectory.

Thank you for taking the time to read this summary of our engagement.

Please take a moment to provide comments or thoughts you have by filling out this short survey (two questions): https://www.surveymonkey.ca/r/RDCO_COPAWS_WWH