



The Impact of Poverty on Parents

THE FACE OF CHILD POVERTY IN RICHMOND

The Challenge to Meet Basic Needs

Ontario Deprivation Index

Researchers have found that households that answer 'no' to at least 2 of the questions listed below are likely to be poor.

- Do you eat fresh fruit and vegetables every day?
- Are you able to get dental care if needed?
- Do you eat meat, fish or a vegetarian equivalent at least every other day?
- Are you able to replace or repair broken or damaged appliances such as a vacuum or a toaster?
- Do you have appropriate clothes for job interviews?
- Are you able to have friends or family over for a meal at least once a month?
- Is your house or apartment free of pests, such as cockroaches?
- Are you able to buy some small gifts for family or friends at least once a year?
- Do you have a hobby or leisure activity?

Nutritious Food

Richmond parents find it difficult to get the nutritious food they need for their families. They noted that it is particularly challenging to provide healthy food. This is even more difficult if a family member has dietary restrictions.

The cost of a nutritious food basket for a family of four in the Lower Mainland in 2011 was \$944. Those earning minimum wage, receiving income assistance, or facing other challenges (high rent, child care, or transportation costs, for example) struggle to purchase food.

*I only eat once a day so there is enough food to feed my children.
(Richmond father)*

Housing

Not all Richmond families live in adequate housing and many pay more than they can afford. A surprising number shared that they live in basement suites – suites that are overcrowded, have problems with mold, dirty carpets, bugs, mice and safety concerns. Many had been on BC Housing waiting lists for many years.

Parents expressed concern about the noise their children make, fear eviction and sleep on the floor. They are worried and stressed about the lack of affordable, quality housing available.

Almost 1 in 3 households in BC spend more than 30% of their gross income on housing costs and the situation is far worse for renters. BC also have the highest rate of households in severe housing need, living in unsafe, crowded or relatively unaffordable homes.

Transportation

Most families have no access to a car, and public transportation can be challenging with children because of the cost and transfers. Several fathers wished they had bicycles to make travel easier. One parent shared that a family member lends her a car to go to the food bank once a week but it is a humiliating experience because of the mutterings she hears that if she has a car then she should not be using the food bank.

Health Care

Most Richmond families do not have extended benefits and even if they do, the deductible can still be prohibitive. The most alarming stories focused on dental pain – many of the parents have experienced severe dental pain and for most, extractions were the only solution as they could not afford dental care.

I wish we had come to Canada when we were in our 20's and had no children, we would have been able to survive on minimum wage jobs. But this is not possible now with two young children.

(Richmond father)



Impact on Parenting

When asked about their hopes and dreams almost all the Richmond parents spoke of a bright future for their children – a better life than they had lived. They want their children to be happy, healthy, dream big and get an education. We heard of strong family connections and quality time spent together but many parents were also frustrated and disappointed that they could not afford to give their children many of the childhood experiences they felt they deserved.

Impact on Family Relationships

Some wives expressed concern about their husbands who had supported the family in their home country but who now cannot find work and feel ashamed and depressed. Other parents spoke of working shifts and barely seeing each other or their children.

I work long hours and my work is hard. I am exhausted when I get home. My son wants to play with me but I need to sleep so I can go to my second job.

(Richmond father)

Impact on Social and Community Networks

While some families have strong social networks through their faith community or parent-child groups they attend, many lack a supportive network they can count on. They have little time to socialize and make friends – living in poverty does not leave time available to foster social connections.



Impact on Inclusion

Poverty has a negative impact on families' and children's sense of inclusion. While many of the parents spoke positively about relationships with staff at various community and government agencies, almost all also recounted stories of stigma, discrimination and judgemental attitudes. Parents talked of being invisible and not feeling respected.

Everybody watches what you buy, what your kids wear, and everything you do – but then they look right through you like you're invisible.

(Parent, I'm Still Hungry Report)



Impact on Mental Health

The stories shared by many of the parents spoke of strength and resilience but nearly all also shared that at some point they have been depressed, stressed or unable to cope. Research consistently shows that families living in poverty have increased rates of mental health issues, including depression and anxiety.



Poverty Rates are Higher in Certain Populations

The face of poverty is not homogenous. Some populations have a higher risk of poverty than others.

Family Status

- Most low-income children live in two-parent families
- Lone parent families are higher risk of living in poverty

Recent Immigrant Families

- Children in families who moved to Canada in the last five years experience the highest poverty rates. Almost one in every two recent immigrant children lives in poverty.

Diverse Communities

- More than 1 in 4 (27%) children with special needs live in low income families.
- About 1 in 3 (30%) children of Aboriginal identity live in low-income families.

Best Start Resource Centre. **I'm Still Hungry.** (2010)

Increased Impacts for Newcomer Families

Marginalized groups may experience compounded impacts from poverty.

Refugees and new immigrant families living in poverty not only have to contend with the lack of income but also feelings of isolation and discrimination as a result of being new to the country. They often lack familiarity with the services of their new country, including the school system, health, and social services, causing increased stress. These stressors have similar negative consequences on the physical and mental health and the educational success of children. It is also important to remember that while immigrant families chose Canada as their home, refugee families did not have a choice and the move to a new country was essential to their survival.

We were able to give our children a good life before conflict tore our country apart. We felt we were promised something in Canada because of our skills but now we can't use our training.

(Richmond mother)

Many of the impacts on newcomer families are woven throughout this fact sheet. However some clear differences emerged in conversations staff had with newcomer parents and Canadian born parents living in poverty.

Language and Culture

A new language and new culture have a huge impact on newcomer families. They must learn about services, they need to find their way around, learn about new foods, get used to a new climate, read signs – the list is endless. And some are not even literate in their own language. Literacy is hard to overcome in a country as literate as Canada.

Trauma

Many of the newcomer families are traumatized. They are overwhelmed with the experiences they have been through and arrived in Canada anticipating a better life. They came with a dream. But that dream has not materialized. And they are still carrying many of the traumas from their past.

Loneliness

Many parents spoke of missing family, friends and their home community. They would like to reach out to family back home for support but are reluctant to do so.

I feel sad and defeated. I would love to phone my family back home for support but they have their own problems and think we have a wonderful life in Canada. I miss them so much.

(Richmond mother)

Resourceful, not Resilient

All of the parents shared stories of amazing resourcefulness in providing for their families, they need to be resourceful to survive. Resiliency is the pathway out of poverty. However, not all the newcomer parents were as resilient as the Canadian-born parents. While many clearly had inner strength, a strong faith, and a commitment to providing their children with a better life; many are just beginning to build a network of support. It is difficult to be resilient when coping with post traumatic stress, mental health issues, isolation and depression.

Shifting Roles

Men were the primary breadwinners in their home country. However, finding employment in Canada has not been easy, and for many families the mother has become the wage earner. Women shared concern about husbands who were coping with depression, and some with mental health issues.

Staff with experience and expertise in working with families living in poverty sat down and talked with 75 Richmond parents about the impact of poverty on their children and families. We learned about the human condition of living in poverty in Richmond. And we were introduced to amazing collective spirit, centred on wanting the best for their children. Parents were grateful that we wanted to hear their stories. They truly believe that our interest will help make a difference for their children.



The Face of Child Poverty in Richmond is a project of Richmond Children First. (2013)