

Common Assumptions

About Richmond Families Living in Poverty



It all starts with listening to families living in poverty. In 2013, Richmond Children First hosted a series of conversations with Richmond parents to discuss how poverty impacts the lives of their children. 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.

There is no child poverty in Richmond.

Child poverty is everywhere! Why would Richmond be any different? The challenge – and the blessing – for us is that we have mixed neighbourhoods. Mixed neighbourhoods provide a protective factor which can make it challenging for many of us to see the face of child poverty. Mixed neighbourhoods are also a blessing because they can decrease developmental vulnerability in children. Children from vulnerable family backgrounds who grow up in mixed income neighbourhoods tend to fare better than those who grow up in uniformly low-income neighbourhoods.

Poverty is hidden in Richmond. I have gone to visit a family and pulled up to a large, grand house. It does not look like there would be children in poverty at that address, yet at the back – where I am going to visit – there are 2 or 3 small basement suites where children and families are living.

(Public Health Nurse)

Just because I am poor does not mean I'm a bad parent.

Parents' socio-economic background, including education and income, do have a huge impact on child outcomes however income alone does not predict the quality of parenting. Positive parenting styles are the same regardless of income.

Just because I am poor does not mean I am too lazy to work.

High child poverty is first and foremost about low pay and insufficient work. The vast majority of BC's poor children live in families with some paid work. In 2009, over half of BC's poor children lived in families where the adults work the equivalent of a full time, full-year job.

Just because I am poor does not mean I need to go to school to get a job.

Immigrants and refugees, on average, have higher levels of educational attainment than native-born Canadians. However, employed newcomers (men) earn 63 cents for each dollar received by Canadian-born workers. Many work 2-3 part time jobs to support their families – that is if they can find work!

Just because I am poor does not mean I have access to services and supports.

There are many barriers inherent in how services are organized; these barriers prevent families from using the services. Parents talked about needing referrals, having to have their income assessed, the length of time it sometimes took to qualifying for support and the many rules they needed to follow.

Just because I am poor does not mean I will ask for help.

Richmond parents spoke of the stigma associated with living in poverty and the shame and embarrassment they felt in asking for help. While some parents spoke of individual professionals who treated them respectfully and helped them access help, others indicated that they hide their poverty from family, friends and service providers.

The families who speak up the least are often the ones who need it the most. The stigma of needing help prevents many families from asking, especially in the newcomer populations. Even with few barriers it is still too much.

(Child and Youth Worker)

Just because I am poor does not mean I am financially irresponsible.

During the conversations parents spoke of being judged for buying their children designer running shoes, iPods and investing in RESPs. Financially irresponsible? For these parents, having their children feel a sense of belonging - or investing in their future - was more important than putting food on the table – and it was always the parent who did without. One mother shared that she walked over 2 hours a day for 2 months to get to her work so she could use the money she usually used for her monthly bus pass to buy her son a bike for his birthday.

Families are overwhelmed already with the requirements of basic needs (food, clothing, housing), that other things that service providers try to encourage (dental hygiene, eating healthy, field trips, after school activities) are just background noise.

(Community Nutritionist)

Making do on a limited budget.

"I cook all our dinners once a week and freeze them – that way we won't run out of food."

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"New clothes? (laughter) Luckily we can we can easily get to the thrift store to buy clothes."

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"I can walk to Kin's Farm Market. I use some of my money to buy \$10 gift cards and then use only one a week – and I buy bags of discounted fruits and vegetables."

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"Everything we buy is second-hand. We've gotten quite handy at fixing things."

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"My husband and I share a bus pass."

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There will always be poverty. There is nothing I can do to help.

The formal programs and services and informal community supports in Richmond are already making a difference! We recognize that many of the solutions to poverty can only be resolved at a provincial and federal level. However, as we have seen by the extraordinary work happening in Richmond, there are many ways we can make a difference at a local level.

