



# *Thrive*

Poverty Reduction Strategy

*Prepared by Anne Burrill for*  
**Social Planning Council of Williams Lake and Area**  
**January 2021**

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January 2021

**Social Planning Council of Williams Lake and Area** is a non-profit organization serving the community of Williams Lake, BC Canada. Our mandate is to enhance, encourage and support social and economic development that enhances social well being for residents in Williams Lake and area.

Additional information, including a condensed version of the strategy,  
can be found on our website: [www.wlspc.ca](http://www.wlspc.ca)

## Acknowledgements

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- Cariboo Regional District
- WorkBC Employment Services
- Cariboo Chilcotin Partners for Literacy
- Cariboo Chilcotin Community Futures
- Downtown Williams Lake
- Williams Lake and District Chamber of Commerce

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## Executive Summary

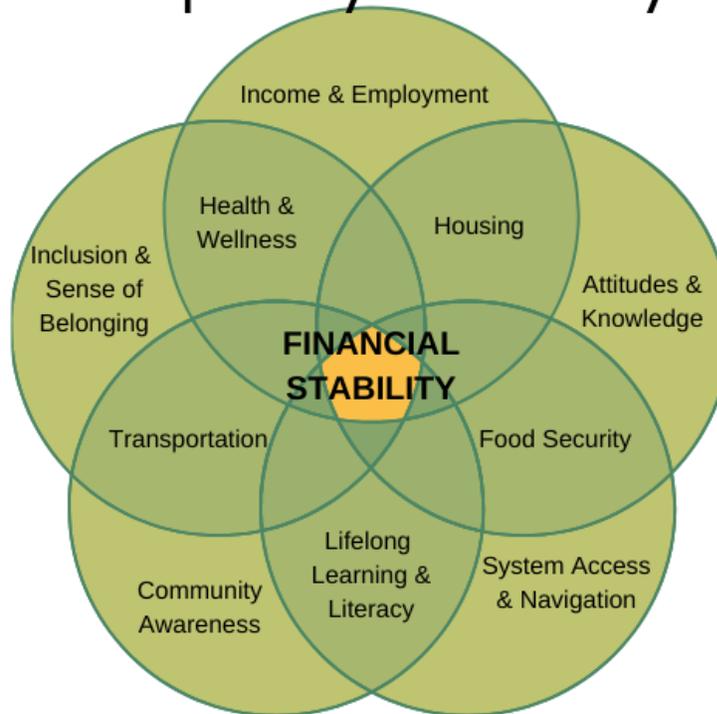
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The Thrive Poverty Reduction Strategy is the culmination of over two years of community engagement, research, data analysis, and planning to identify approaches, practices and actions that are a priority for our community in addressing and reducing poverty. The focus of these activities is on community level changes that will have long-term impacts, including increased self-sufficiency and improved quality of life for those with limited financial means. Poverty is a complex issue, and requires collaborative leadership, creative solutions, and innovation to move beyond alleviation of the effects of poverty and towards solutions that support individuals, families, and our entire community to thrive.

*Poverty is the condition in which people lack the resources, means, choices and opportunities to maintain self sufficiency and a quality of life that supports basic needs, dignity, and meaningful participation in the community.*

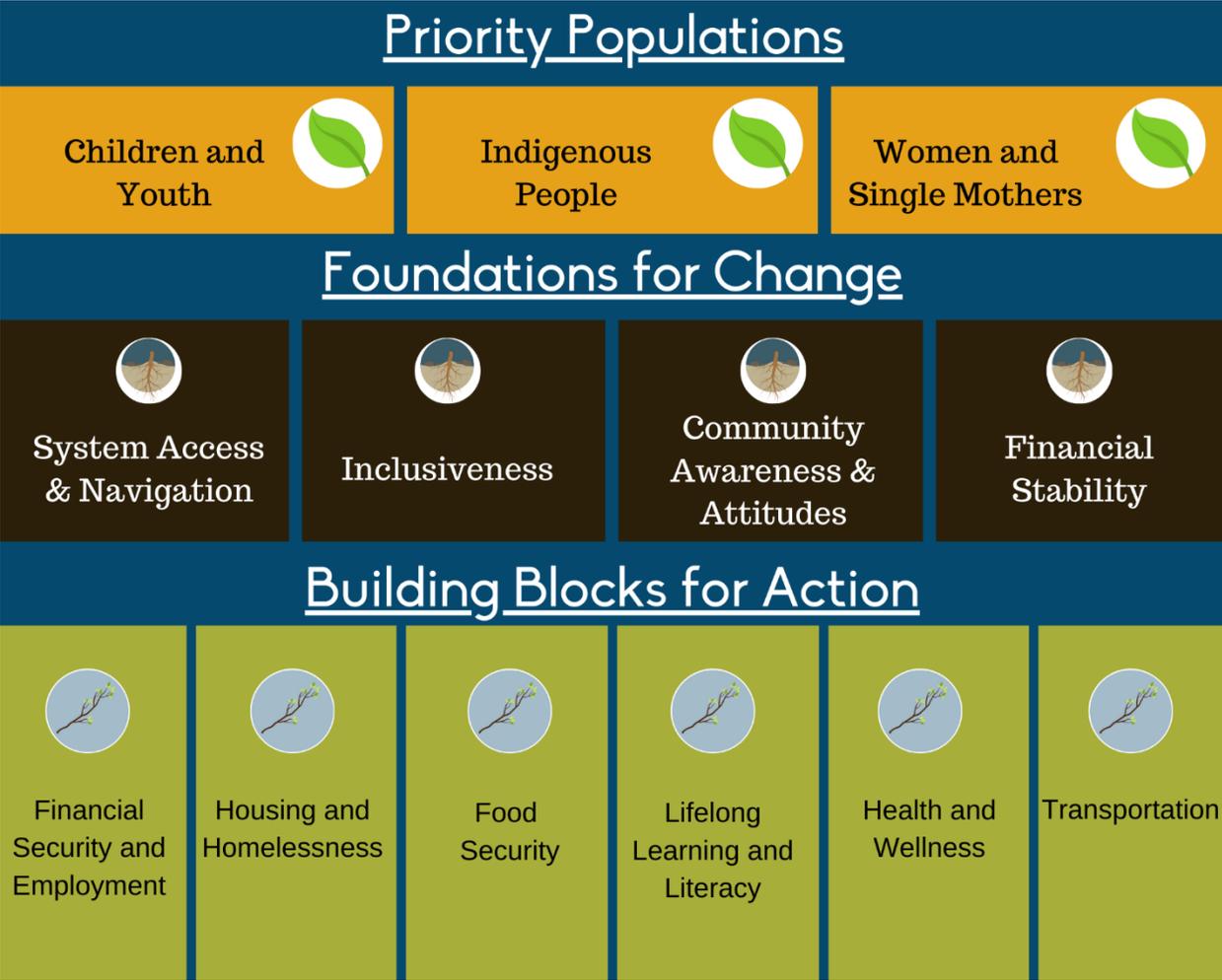
It is our hope that readers of this document, and in particular community leaders, will find inspiration to take up the priorities identified by our community here, and be encouraged to focus on ways they can align the work of their own organizations with the priorities identified in this document.

## Complexity of Poverty



The priorities outlined here are the result of engaging with hundreds of people in our community – from community leaders to people living in poverty, from front line workers to avid volunteers and members of the public who care deeply about the impact of poverty on our community. Their contributions have been the foundation for this work, and for setting the priorities for action outlined here.

Based on the following framework, we have identified two tiers of action items that are a focus for our work as we move forward. The first tier is actions that are already underway, that can be achieved in the shorter term, or that should be initiated immediately to gain leverage as resources become available. Tier One priorities are outlined below while Tier Two priorities can be found on page 36 of this document.



**Tier One Priority Actions:**

**FINANCIAL SECURITY & EMPLOYMENT**

- Advocate for a Guaranteed Basic Income program to support those who are unable to meet their basic needs through employment
- Develop a 'Day Labour' Program to connect those with employment barriers to short-term employment opportunities that build skills and attachment to the labour market
- Increase availability and access to financial education, awareness, and coaching to reduce debt loads and support increased financial stability

## **HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS**

- Ensure everyone who may be eligible is aware of and can access rent supplements and housing loss prevention support.
- Establish a rent bank to respond to crisis situations that put housing stability at risk.
- Build capacity for increasing affordable housing development

## **FOOD SECURITY**

- Ensure maximum use of locally available food – establish mechanisms to ensure any un-used but still safe food is re-distributed to community food programs

## **LIFELONG LEARNING AND LITERACY**

- Every school incorporates trauma sensitive awareness and practices – understanding and providing increased attention to mental health and trauma impacts on students and effects on their learning
- Increase access to literacy and essential skills training programs and support for adults
- Identify gaps in digital access and work with community stakeholders to find innovative solutions that increase access
- Support early childhood development events and opportunities to connect families who have young children to supports and services that strengthen early learning and healthy parenting skills

## **HEALTH & WELLNESS**

- Work together to gather data and develop collective responses to child and youth mental health, including completion of the Prevention Needs Assessment Survey and establishing a Foundry to provide support, early intervention and wrap around services for youth and their families
- De-stigmatize mental illness and support increased access to early intervention and support for individuals experiencing mental health and substance use challenges
- Continue to support development of The Foundry as a youth centred service delivery model
- Support access to primary care services for all community members

## **TRANSPORTATION**

- Explore options for new public transit models that better meet the community needs

# **Implementation**

- Endorsement of the strategy by key organizations and community leaders
- Continue connections to existing community networks and collaborative tables
- Launch, pilot and support seeds of hope to explore new and innovative possibilities
- Coordinate priorities for action from the Thrive Strategy with other community initiatives
- Inspire and engage Leadership Champions to collaborate on specific actions and priorities
- Develop new working groups as required to focus on moving key initiatives forward
- Inspire community engagement through awareness/education campaigns and engagement of individuals



## Project Background

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Thrive Williams Lake is a poverty reduction project hosted by the Social Planning Council of Williams Lake and Area, in partnership with Cariboo Chilcotin Partners for Literacy. The project began in January 2018 with a goal of engaging the community in poverty reduction activities and developing a community level poverty reduction plan. The work of Thrive has been supported by the Stewardship Council – a group of advisors who have guided the project process over the past three years. Thrive has engaged broadly with the community to both provide input into the plan and to initiate and support poverty reduction initiatives underway in other organizations and through network tables. This document outlines the process and provides a framework to guide future work in addressing poverty in our community.

## Introduction and Context

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The purpose of the Thrive project has been, and continues to emphasize the community level changes that will contribute to preventing and reducing poverty. We have not focused on alleviating the affects of poverty, making poverty less difficult or more tolerable. This means concentrating on ‘upstream’ thinking and approaches that can result in lifting people above the poverty line to increased self-sufficiency and an improved quality of life.

The Thrive Poverty Reduction project was launched in the aftermath of the 2017 wildfires that swept through the region and resulted in the evacuation of the entire community and much of the surrounding area. The chaos and community wide trauma of that event continues to be felt, both in terms of its economic impacts (including business stability, and the labour market) and also impacts on community dynamics and sense of security, Indigenous – non-Indigenous relations, as well as individuals’ mental health, relationships, and financial stability<sup>1</sup>.

As this plan is being finalized at the wrap up of the Thrive project, we have been thrust into a global pandemic that has had wide spread impacts that are in many ways similar to the crises experienced in 2017, but deeper and with less certainty about the path ahead. Writing a poverty reduction plan in the midst of a pandemic may seem folly. Although the reality of poverty is in many ways the same, the context of how poverty is experienced and who is experiencing it feels like it is very much a shifting reality. As a result, this document is more a framework than a plan, as the requirement to be flexible and responsive to changing needs in our community is more critical now than ever before.

## What is Poverty?

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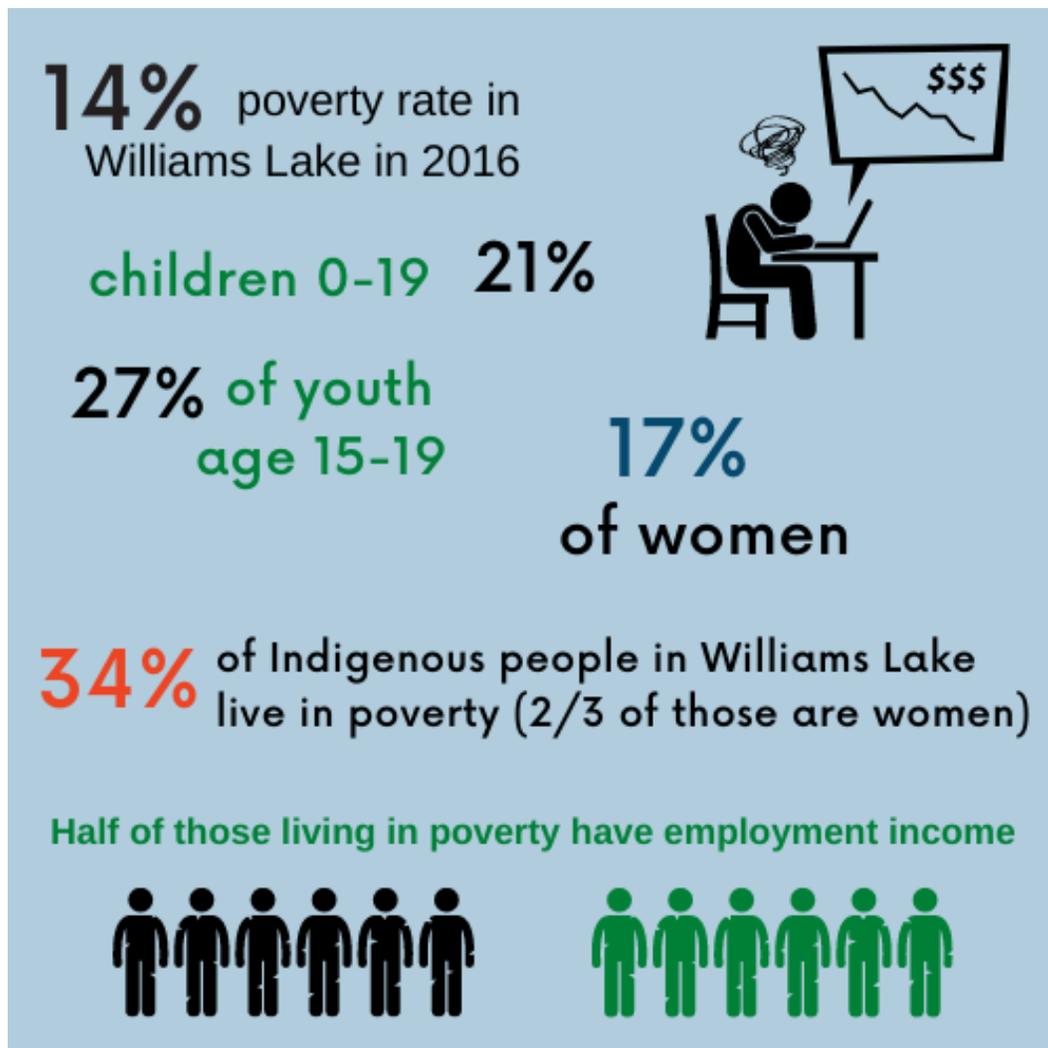
The basic root of poverty is insufficient income to meet one’s basic human needs. At the same time, poverty has multiple dimensions that are not simply a function of dollars and cents. The experience of poverty is often one of isolation, stress, disconnection, shame, and struggle; however, it may also be one of pride, hard work, and self-sufficiency. The foundation of our understanding about poverty is that it is not a personal failing, but a result of and intersection between many factors – including economic systems, social systems, and individual circumstances. The official poverty line in Canada has been

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<sup>1</sup> Cariboo Regional District Wildfire Recovery Management Report (2018)

established based on the Market Basket Measure (MBM). While this measure is not perfect, we believe it does represent the 'best option' currently available for measuring poverty, and we support alignment of measures both provincially and across the country so that we are all tracking impact on poverty reduction using the same measures. At the same time, it is important to remember that the *experience* of poverty is not defined by a line or number, above or below which life is good/better or worse/bad. We recognize that poverty has many dimensions, and that the experience of poverty is diverse. Poverty is not only about income, but it is always about income. The definition below has framed our approach throughout the project:

Poverty is the condition in which people lack the resources, means, choices and opportunities to maintain self sufficiency and a quality of life that supports basic needs, dignity, and meaningful participation in the community.



## Guiding Values and Principles

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*Our understanding of poverty, and our approach to reducing poverty in our community, is based on the following:*

### Poverty is a spectrum not a line.

We are committed to addressing deep poverty (those without any income and those dependent on insufficient government income programs), as well as poverty experienced by those who are employed and still living below the poverty line, and those whose financial situation is so precarious that one unexpected expense or missed paycheck (such as health crisis or lost income due to the pandemic) will result in falling into poverty and being unable to recover financially.

### Dignity and Equal Rights

Everyone has the right to live with dignity and be treated with dignity and respect. This is fundamental to addressing poverty at both an individual and a community level. This requires us to be aware of the impact of trauma, racism, discrimination, crisis, and intergenerational trauma on people's lives. Everyone is entitled to equal rights to justice, education, personal security and privacy, as well as participation in work, and in cultural, political and recreational activities in the community.

### Prevention is critical to solving poverty

We must address both the current reality AND the future needs to ensure that fewer people live in poverty, and everyone has the opportunity and supports they need to thrive. This requires us to provide timely support and resources that people need now, as well as look forward to the future.

### Collective Effort

Reducing poverty requires a collective effort: shared responsibility and shared leadership guided by the voices of lived experience. All sectors of the community have a role to play in making the community a place where everyone can thrive.

### Innovation

Social change requires innovation – if we are to succeed, we must do things differently than we are today. Too many of our current approaches make poverty less miserable but do little to shift people out of poverty entirely. We need to be creative and nimble as we capitalize on and leverage opportunities and resources.

## Vision, Objectives and Goals

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A thriving community has a better quality of life and better outcomes for everyone. When some members of our community are excluded from the economic, social and cultural life of the community, it impacts the well-being of the community as a whole. Much of the current response to poverty focuses primarily on alleviating the pain of poverty for those who experience it and managing the impacts of poverty on the community. The purpose of Thrive is to focus on community level changes that will contribute to preventing and reducing poverty.

Community members have sufficient income and assets to thrive in our community:

- We will aim to reduce the number of individuals/families living at or below the MBM poverty line;
- We will aim to reduce the number of families in core housing need (paying more than 30% for rent and/or in housing that does not meet national occupancy/maintenance standards)
- We will see an increase in the median wage of employed income earners;
- We will aim to increase the number of individuals who have some employment income in a calendar year

Community members live in a strong, supportive and inclusive community:

- Individuals and families are able to easily find and access the services and supports they are entitled to and eligible for, without shame or discrimination;
- Everyone who experiences mental or physical health challenges can easily access supports to help them get better, and will be supported by their family, school, employer and community to do so;

All community members, including those who are Indigenous and/or non-white, feel a sense of belonging and inclusion, and are full and equal participants in community life:

- Diversity is valued and invited in public institutions and leadership roles in the community;
- When racism and discrimination occur, it is openly challenged with a focus on reconciliation practices;
- Community and public services operate in a trauma informed, culturally safe manner;
- Every door is the right door – anyone looking for assistance will be met with helpful resources or will be assisted to find the support they need.

## Roles in Poverty Reduction

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The complexity of poverty as a social and economic issue means that no one level of government or local community can achieve significant progress without the work of the others. Federal, provincial, municipal/local, and community initiatives must align and work within and across their jurisdictions if we are to achieve the changes required to bring those in poverty up to a reasonable standard of living, participate fully in the community, and live with dignity. Much progress in collaboration and alignment have been achieved in the past ten years in our community and across the country, but much more work is yet to be done.

### *Federal Government*

Canada has made a commitment to the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, and Goal #1 is: End Poverty, in all its forms, everywhere<sup>2</sup>. Canada's commitment was solidified in the release of the first national poverty reduction strategy, 'Opportunity for All' in 2018<sup>3</sup>. The document outlined the federal government's commitment to reducing poverty by 20% by the year 2020 and by 50% by 2030. These are bold goals and the plan outlines a range of policy and program investments that will contribute to achieving those targets. Successfully reducing poverty will require an investment in resources that address deep income inequalities. In addition, the plan established the first ever national poverty line using the Market Basket Measure. Measures of poverty have long been a source of debate because the complexity of understanding poverty across a country as vast and diverse as ours is difficult. What poverty looks like in downtown Toronto is very different from what poverty looks like in Whitehorse, or Clinton, BC or in the diverse Indigenous communities in either urban or isolated rural regions across the country. Establishing a set of common measures, and having the federal government track indicators related to those measures, will contribute to a more aligned and transparent understanding of what we are measuring and whether there is progress.

### *Provincial Government*

The province of British Columbia has for decades had some of the highest rates of poverty in the country, particularly for children and youth, and yet is the last province in Canada to develop a provincial poverty reduction strategy. Following a substantial planning process that included community input and engagement with those with lived experience across the province, 'Together for All' was released in 2019<sup>4</sup>. The provincial plan identifies twelve key priorities built on a foundation of four guiding principles: affordability, opportunity, reconciliation and social inclusion. The plan outlines a range of policy and program initiatives and investments, including leveraging federal initiatives. Some provincial initiatives are underway, and the pandemic has resulted in some new initiatives that respond to critical issues made more pressing as a result of the pandemic. The impacts of the pandemic have highlighted how financially precarious many low-income people's lives were and are. In particular, increases in both regular and disability income assistance rates, along with rental subsidies and eviction

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<sup>2</sup> <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

<sup>3</sup> Opportunity for All – Canada's First Poverty Reduction Strategy (2018). Government of Canada. [www.canada.ca/publiccentre-ESDC](http://www.canada.ca/publiccentre-ESDC).

<sup>4</sup> Together BC: British Columbia's Poverty Reduction Strategy (2019). Government of BC.

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/about-the-bc-government/poverty-reduction-strategy>

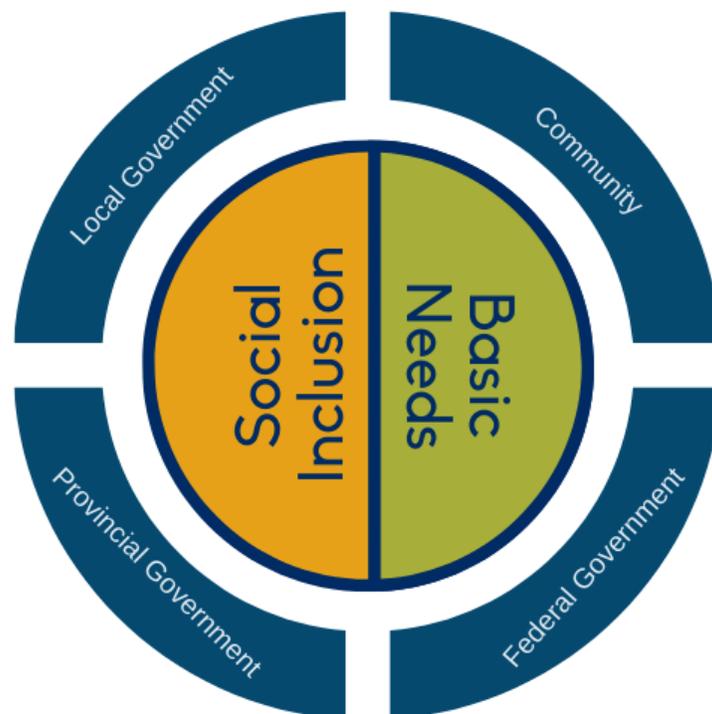
protection have been a critical short-term response that will likely require ongoing commitment until incomes stabilize and the current housing crisis is addressed.

### *Local Government*

In 2017, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, in partnership with the federal Minister of Families, Children, and Social Development, engaged local government leaders in contributing to the federal poverty reduction plan. The result was a report and recommendations submitted to the federal minister, with regard to the municipal role in poverty reduction<sup>5</sup>. While municipal jurisdiction over social issues varies from province to province, it is recognized that municipalities are the order of government closest to people’s lived experiences of poverty and to the impacts of poverty on communities. This report recognized the importance of municipal roles in poverty reduction, both in terms of their own policies and programs, and in their partnerships and engagement with local community initiatives on poverty reduction. The report provides a wide range of examples of ways municipalities are making commitments and progress in partnership with local communities.

### *Community*

Just as all orders of government have a role in poverty reduction, so too does the community. This means not only social sector organizations, but also the business sector, educational institutions, child care centres, faith communities, philanthropists, employers, the media, and individual members of the public. All are impacted by poverty in our community, and all have an important role to play in lifting people up so they, and we, all of us, can thrive. The framework outlined in this document is focused on community level initiatives, including local/municipal government.



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<sup>5</sup> *Ending Poverty Starts Locally: Municipal recommendations for a Canadian poverty reduction strategy (2017)*. Federation of Canadian Municipalities.

## How we got here: Community Engagement and Input

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This strategy/plan has been written based on deep engagement and input from our community. Over the past two and half years, we have gathered input from hundreds of individuals and dozens of groups, and from a variety of perspectives. We talked individually with those with lived experience of poverty and included them in our public engagement events. We met many times with community tables working on issues of housing, homelessness, early child development, food security, education access and outcomes, business development, labour market issues, well-being of children and youth, mental health, and wildfire recovery. We hosted nine major events that brought together community leaders, those with lived experience, front line workers, and interested citizens to explore the issues of poverty and engage in identifying key issues and priorities for our community. We began with an exploration of the Poverty Game Changers and how they exist within our own community; we dove deep into issues related to work and the labour market; we recognized employers who have exemplary human resource practices; and we offered an immersive simulation of the struggle of living through a month in poverty, with all it's challenges. Both our understanding of poverty and our objectives for our work have been enriched by this process, and by the many people who have shared their stories and perspectives.

### The Game Changer Framework



Throughout the Thrive project we have used the concept of poverty reduction game-changers<sup>6</sup> as a framework for breaking the complex issue of poverty reduction into manageable chunks for exploration, discussion, analysis, and identifying potential priorities for action and implementation. A poverty reduction 'Game Changer' is a priority area or strategy that not only aims to deliver on its own specific goals or outcomes, but also elicits an array of other significant, positive outcomes. The additional nuance to this concept, which demonstrates the complexity of poverty, is that each of these topics can be both a cause of, and result from the experience of poverty. For example, low levels of education and lack of access to education often result in poverty, **and** those living in poverty often have less access to educational opportunities or the means to take advantage of those opportunities. Using this framework allowed us to drill down and tackle the root causes of poverty, focusing on long-term thinking and strategies. The goal is to have strong, supportive, and inclusive communities where people can live with dignity and as self-sufficiently as possible.

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<sup>6</sup> The concept and framework of Poverty Reduction Game Changers was developed by Mark Holmgren in his work with the Edmonton Mayor's Task Force on Poverty, and Tamarack Institute's Vibrant Communities initiative.

## The Game Changers

- Income security through employment and non-employment sources, and readiness for, access to, and retention of secure, livable wage jobs where employer policies support employees' needs.

### Income and Employment



- Affordable, accessible and appropriate housing that meets people's unique needs, affordable utility costs, housing retention supports, and protection from eviction.

### Housing



- Literacy, graduation from high school or equivalency, affordable and accessible post-secondary education, and opportunities for alternative learning supports.

### Education



- Affordable and accessible public transportation and innovative rural solutions that accommodate and cater to individuals with unique needs.

### Transportation



- Affordable and accessible health care services that are not covered under provincial/territorial medical plans, and comprehensive, inclusive supports for physical and mental health.

### Health



- Affordable, accessible, sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets dietary needs for an active and healthy life.

### Food Security



- Healthy early child development, school readiness, strong parenting skills, and access to affordable and regulated childcare spaces.

### Early Child Development



- Accessible mainstream banking services, protection from fraud and predatory lending, and ability to build savings/assets, improve credit ratings, and reduce debt.

### Financial Empowerment



In December of 2018 we took nearly 60 community leaders, front line staff, and community members through an exploration of how these game changer topics were showing up in our community, what we were already doing well, and what more we might be able to do together in each of these areas. The discussions from that day built a foundation for new conversations and for community change, based on community strengths and assets.

We followed this with a focus on engaging the business community and employers, looking at labour market strategies through the What Works: Community Employment Summit and Business at Its Best initiative. This prompted the City of Williams Lake to initiate the Williams Lake Hiring Initiative, to support employers with staffing, human resources, and labour relations information and resources. The Williams Lake Hiring Guide was developed to connect employers to local and online resources, focused on helping them both be better employers, and to assist them with recruitment and retention of employees. It addresses issues such as work/life balance, flexibility, and family/child care issues.

During our Poverty Simulation event in October 2019, volunteers with lived experience hosted a simulation of the challenges of making it through a month on very limited income, complete with a variety of 'unexpected events' that participants had to navigate. Fifty community members participated and learned about the complexity of poverty and the difficulties of navigating access to resources and supports.

We invited input throughout the project from those with lived experience via online surveys, individual interviews, focus group discussions, and participation in our community events. Event reports for each of our events are attached in an appendix to this report.

## Community Engagement



**10** Community Events



**117+** Lived Experience survey responses



**12** Formal presentations  
Including two at national conferences

**352** Participants

**20+** one on one discussions with those with lived experience of poverty

**+** Dozens of discussions at community tables

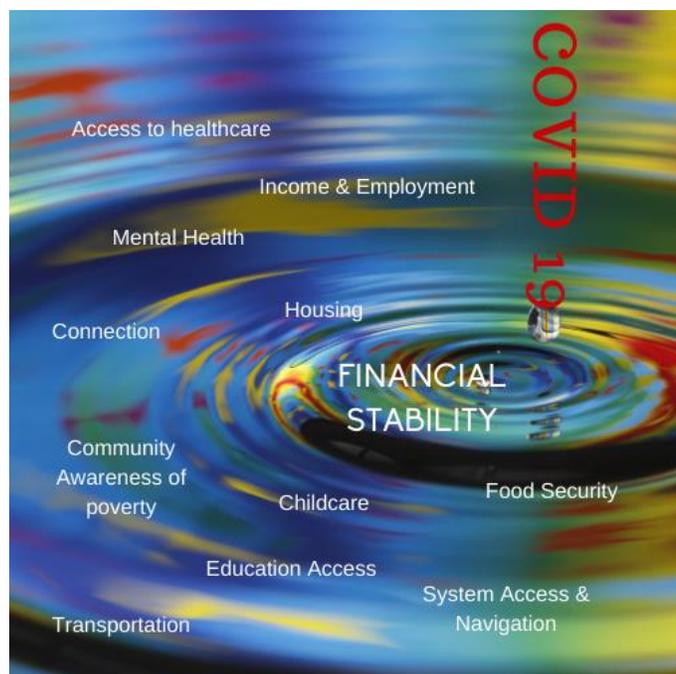
In preparation for setting priorities, we did an analysis of all of the ideas generated through our project and cross-referenced this with priorities and initiatives from similar poverty reduction strategies from communities across the country. We identified 50 of the most promising ideas grouped under the Game

Changer framework. We took these ideas to community tables, and to those with lived experience to gather their input. The culmination of our community input process was the Roadmap to Poverty Reduction event held in February of 2020. With over 60 participants from all sectors of the community, including those with lived experience, we asked participants to dive deep into topics they were passionate about. They focused on synthesizing the input to date and honing in on the most important priorities, strategies and initiatives for a community plan. The priorities were then shared back to the community through a series of virtual presentations, along with an online survey to validate that the strategy reflects the challenges, needs and priorities for tackling poverty in Williams Lake.

## Impacts of the Pandemic on Poverty and Priority Setting

The pandemic unfolded just as we were finalizing and refining the input from the priority setting process. The experience of the pandemic has required us to revisit our priorities in the context of a shifting reality that is still significantly uncertain. That the pandemic has affected people in poverty, and the context of poverty itself, is certain. What is less clear is how those impacts will continue to unfold over time, including major economic and labour market shifts, and how levels of government will continue to respond in supporting individuals experiencing lost income and other effects. The reality is that who was living in poverty before the pandemic may be very different during and after the pandemic, and we won't know the full extent of the impact for quite some time, possibly even years into the future.

What is clear is that financial stability is more precarious than any of us understood. Some of the effects we've seen have included a significantly disproportionate financial impact on women, and those who were employed in low-wage work, particularly in the hospitality, service and retail sectors. Closure of schools and child care facilities have exacerbated this impact, particularly in our resource-based economy where even two parent families have had to give up one income in order to care for children – and this is often the mother's income as hers is likely to be lower. Those who are dependent on government income programs (such as Income Assistance, Disability Benefits, and seniors' benefits (including the Guaranteed Annual Income for Needs, Old Age Security and Canada Pension Plan programs) have been more stable financially as many of these programs increased their benefit rates. However, those increases are set to be phased out in 2021, returning the recipients to extreme poverty. Advocacy for liveable benefit rates for the most vulnerable members of our community is critical work, and must be undertaken in collaboration with other communities across the province. One of the realizations the pandemic has brought is that while increasing access to employment



income has been an underpinning of the strategy, we must balance that more carefully with advocacy for and implementation of universal income support programs that prevent irrecoverable financial crises for those already precariously employed and/or marginally surviving on employment income, or a combination of government supports and employment. Additionally, there is a critical need for short-term financial supports that do not result in long-term or unmanageable debt.

The other thing that is increasingly clear is the connections between financial insecurity, isolation, and mental health. We know that poverty results in increased social isolation and loneliness, and we are more aware than ever that the reverse is also true – loneliness exacerbates the impact of poverty and has direct links to mental health. These complexities have been highlighted over the past several months, and continue to be a significant issue for many.

### Opportunity in a Crisis



In addition, as the pandemic unfolds, there are some key foundational strategies that are clear and immediate opportunities and needs. The financial insecurity created by the crisis has raised awareness about how quickly individuals and families can slide into poverty through no fault of their own, but as a result of circumstances outside their control. This presents an opportunity to educate the broader community and shift attitudes about who and why people live in poverty.

The pandemic has also raised awareness about the impacts of social isolation and the importance of social inclusion. More than ever before, we are aware of how easily and quickly we become cut off from our social connections, and the mental health impacts of loneliness. Community empathy is up, and we have an opportunity to leverage that to shift attitudes toward more awareness, connection, and sense of belonging that a healthy community can contribute to.

Access to and navigation of services and supports is also a pressing issue. People who have never before reached out for help are finding themselves in need of support – financially, but also for food security, housing issues, child care, mental health needs, and other issues. Assisting with access to and navigating the many systems and support services is critical to getting people the help they need in a crisis.

As the pandemic unfolds over time, one of the important issues is the resilience and mental health needs of children and youth. Even prior to the pandemic, we were seeing increases in the incidence of anxiety and depression among teens and young adults, which is now being exacerbated by the pandemic. We need to understand the impacts and ensure we have a collaborative, focused and deliberate prevention and intervention strategy that addresses their needs. The opportunity and need to link the Communities That Care and Thrive initiatives together has never been clearer.

Additionally, youth have experienced a significant reduction in employment during the pandemic. However, as those who are more vulnerable to the virus step back from the workplace, and as the economy recovers, the labour force will likely continue to see a shortage of workers. This will be an exacerbation of the labour shortages resulting from the demographics of an aging population, and more locally the impact of the wildfires, which resulted in severe labour shortages. As young people move into the labour force, and face decisions in response to shifts to online university options vs. local employment, they need to be well enough and supported to make those decisions and to enter the labour force with essential skills and job skills needed for the market. As well, we need to support workers who need to make shifts in their employment so that their income is more secure and stable,

and those who have barriers to standard employment but wish to engage in part-time or short-term employment to supplement income support programs.

## KEY PRIORITIES AND INITIATIVES

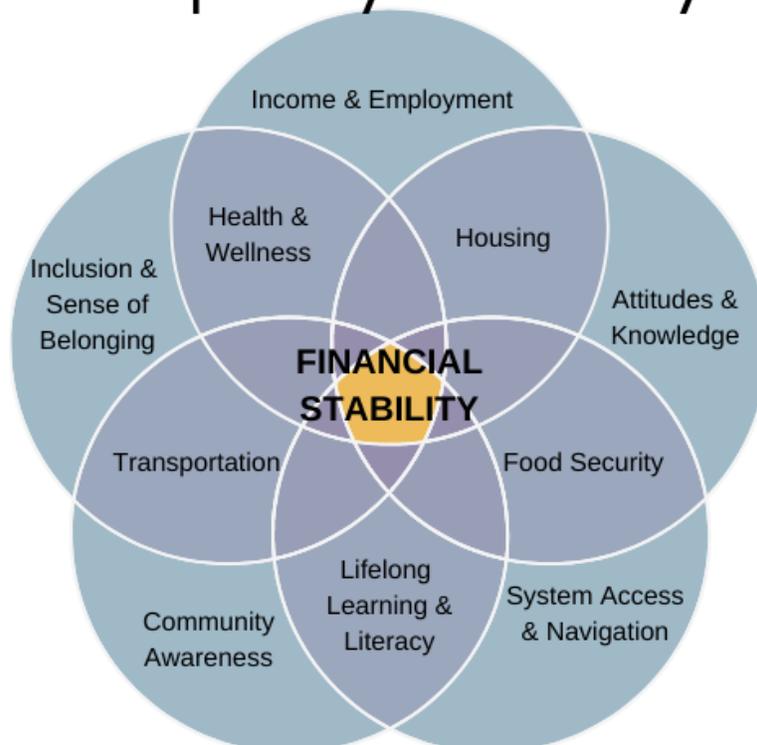
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The implications of the pandemic on setting priorities for a community level poverty reduction strategy are profound. We are planning in a context that is not only completely different from what it was six months ago, but is also incredibly uncertain as we look forward for the next year and years to come. This makes designing a strategy particularly challenging. It must be grounded in the input from our planning process and the understanding we have of our community, while being adaptable enough to withstand an uncertain and changing future.

Based on the priorities identified pre-pandemic, with consideration for the pandemic impacts we are seeing so far, we have identified priority populations, as well as four initial Foundations of Change that we believe to be both foundational and overarching principles that support all the other priorities. They are important in addressing poverty in 'normal' times, but have been elevated to a more critical level as a result of the pandemic.

The pandemic has highlighted that housing and food security, along with income supports and health (physical and mental health) are the fundamentals when global and local systems are disrupted. Our community has risen to meet many needs and the new reality of life during the pandemic is slowly stabilizing. We recognize that there have been and continue to be many diverse experiences of both poverty that existed before the pandemic, and the challenges brought by living in this new context.

## Complexity of Poverty



## Priority Populations



### *Children, Youth, and Young Adults*

Children who grow up in poverty face a double jeopardy. Not only do they live with the immediate effects of poverty in their daily lives, but they have less access to the supports and opportunities that they need to escape the cycle of poverty as adults. Children growing up in poverty have higher rates of illness, family stress and limited resources, and the consequences of the related risks are more severe than for children from higher income families<sup>7</sup>. The poverty rate for children 0-19 in Williams Lake is 21%.<sup>8</sup>

In addition, we know from our work in the Communities That Care initiative that rates of anxiety and depression among youth are alarmingly high. Approximately 50% of youth in grades ten through twelve reported depressive symptoms in 2015. There are real concerns about the additional impacts of the pandemic and associated social isolation measures on youth, who are at a critical development phase during which they are developing social relationships, making post-secondary education plans, and entering the workforce.

Poverty rates among Williams Lake youth 15-19 years is 27% which is the highest of any age demographic<sup>9</sup>. Entering adulthood in poverty is not the launch any of us would want for our children. In 2019, over 17% of youth in the Cariboo region ages 15-29 were not employed or engaged in education or training programs<sup>10</sup>. This compares to 10.6% provincially during the same time period, and is the second highest of all regions in the province. We expect that the pandemic will have a negative impact on this as well, since youth employment is often in the sectors most affected and many youth have not participated in on-line learning options for a variety of reasons, including lack of access to technology.

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“Having a hard time finding help in Williams Lake, as a young adult...”

Lived Experience Survey Participant

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### *Indigenous People*

The community of Williams Lake is surrounded by First Nations communities who are our neighbours. We also were the site of a residential school, which was operational until the mid-1980s and has had an ongoing and indelible impact on individuals, families and communities. All of these people and communities are participants in our economic, social, health, and community life. In addition, many Indigenous people live within the community of Williams Lake – nearly 20% of our population is Indigenous. While less than 10% of non-Indigenous people in Williams Lake live in poverty, for those with Aboriginal identity, that climbs to 34%<sup>11</sup>. Of those who are poor, approximately 2/3 are

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<sup>7</sup> Engle, P.L. & Black, M.M. (June 2008). The Effect of Poverty on Child Development and Educational Outcomes. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1136 (1), 243-256.

<sup>8</sup> Child Poverty Report Card, Stats Canada

<sup>9</sup> Statistics Canada 2015 Census data based on Market Basket Measure

<sup>10</sup> Statistics Canada Population aged 15 to 29 Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) by age and sex, Canada, British Columbia and Cariboo (Economic Region), 2019

<sup>11</sup> Statistics Canada 2015 Census data based on Market Basket Measure

women<sup>12</sup>. Poverty rates for those living on reserves in the surrounding area are understood to be substantially higher, and there are fewer opportunities for employment in most of these communities due to their remote locations.



### *Women, particularly single mothers*

Poverty rates for women are higher across every age category. In Williams Lake, the poverty rate for women stands at 17%, compared to 12% for males<sup>13</sup>. In 2015, the median income for all women was 70% of men’s income. Lone parent families face particular challenges raising children on a single income. The wage gap means female lone parents were raising families on a median income of \$36,941 while male lone parent families had a median income of \$ 53,440 to work with. For single women the gap was similar, though their overall income was slightly less. There are also significantly more female lone parent families in Williams Lake (695 vs 245 male headed lone parent families<sup>14</sup>). Women, particularly low-wage employed women, have experienced a disproportional impact from loss of income during the pandemic. They are more likely to be employed in sectors affected by business closures, and more likely to have lost employment to care for children when schools and daycares closed.



## Foundations of Change: Building a foundation for the poverty reduction Building Blocks and Priority Actions

### *System access and navigation*

Individuals living in poverty require knowledge of and access to all of the supports and services they require and are entitled to. This includes the importance of digital access, which has become particularly relevant during the COVID pandemic. Assistance in navigating the complexity of multiple systems of support is a critical and foundational need. There should be no wrong door when someone asks for help, and social safety nets of existing resources should be trampolines that lift people into a better place.

#### Priority Actions:

- *Design and offer system navigation training for frontline staff, receptionist, volunteers and others who work in roles where they come into contact with people who are vulnerable and/or needing support/assistance, as well as for those with lived experience who are natural and informal helpers;*
- *Ensure community resource data bases such as FETCH and BC211 are up to date and fully populated with relevant information about community resources;*

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“People didn’t know what resources were available – this is an issue in reality...”

Poverty Simulation Participant

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<sup>12</sup> Statistics Canada 2015 Census data based on Market Basket Measure

<sup>13</sup> Statistics Canada 2015 Census data based on Market Basket Measure

<sup>14</sup> Stats Canada 2015 Census

- *Undertake a community information campaign to increase awareness about online resources such as BC211.*

## *Seeds of Hope*

### **COMMUNITY NAVIGATOR TRAINING**

In partnership with Cariboo Chilcotin Partners for Literacy, we are working to embed the principle that ‘Every door is the right door’ into community services. When someone reaches out to ask for help, we want to create a pathway to help them get the services and supports they need without having to knock on multiple doors. We are offering community navigation training to frontline and front office staff, with a goal to give them additional knowledge and skills so that they can connect people to the services they need, not only in their own organization, but wherever those services are.

### *Inclusiveness*

We live in a diverse community. Systems and services need to operate in a way that is culturally sensitive/safe, trauma informed, and based on a commitment to principles of reconciliation and non-discrimination. This is always important, but when typical systems are disrupted, new vulnerabilities appear, and people have to seek assistance beyond their usual networks.

#### Priority Actions:

- *Advocate for trauma-aware, culturally sensitive and reconciliation-based approaches to service delivery in all sectors;*
- *Partner with employers and service providers to support pathways to employment for youth and Indigenous people.*

## *Seeds of Hope*

### **INDIGENOUS COURT**

In December 2020, led by Yeqox Nilin Justice Society, Williams Lake launched an Indigenous Court that has been over 10 years in the making. This specialized court is based on restorative justice and traditional healing practices, and will provide sentencing that balances accountability, rehabilitation and healing for Indigenous offenders who have taken responsibility for their actions.

### **HYGIENE FACILITIES AT SALVATION ARMY**

During the first weeks of the pandemic, we identified lack of access to public showers and laundry for those who were homeless. With funding from BC Housing, the Salvation Army was able to renovate space in their drop-in centre to provide laundry and shower facilities. The program was up and running within a matter of weeks, providing much needed access for personal hygiene to those without any other options.

## Community awareness and attitudes

The fallacy that if you work hard you will be (financially) successful, and the belief that those in poverty are divided into the ‘unfortunate but worthy’ or ‘lazy, unproductive, and unworthy’ categories should be strongly challenged. Those who live in poverty are too often treated as second-class citizens and seen as a drain on services, the community and the economy. This story about poverty can be replaced with a more productive narrative about the role of dignity, connection, respect, humanity and the reality of circumstances. Treating people with dignity and respect will contribute to a healthier community, and to a sense of belonging and self-worth that helps people take steps toward a more stable and secure future for themselves. This can be paired with public awareness and engagement in activities that contribute to opportunities for those living in poverty to participate as full and contributing members of the community, and to make connections to services, supports, employers and opportunities that can help lift them out of poverty.

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“Will make me stop to look at the person struggling as someone who has not chosen to be in this position”

“Felt demeaning to be begging every place you go”

Comments from Poverty Simulation Participants

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### Priority Actions:

- *Design and undertake a public education campaign to raise awareness and change attitudes about those living in poverty;*
- *Encourage the public and community partners, including businesses and employers to contribute to poverty reduction in ways that make a long-term impact.*

## Financial Stability

Financial stability based on access to employment income AND access to government income supports and transfers where and when needed. The pandemic has shone a light on how precarious reliance on employment income is for many people. At the community level we have limited ability to shift individual incomes, but we can invest in supporting employers to provide living wages and jobs that support people’s needs. We can shop locally to support local employment. We cannot influence government program eligibility or support rates, but we can ensure that everyone who needs them can access them with dignity and in a timely manner, and we can advocate for broader access to income supports to fill the gap when employment is disrupted.

### Priority Actions:

- *Advocate for a basic income program for all, and for Williams Lake to be a pilot community if the provincial government is looking to test a provincial basic income program;*
- *Advocate for increases to income support and supplement programs to levels that ensure people are able to meet their basic needs;*

- *Increase access to financial literacy and awareness, and financial services that support financial stability including debt management, asset development, and short-term assistance for crises.*

## *Seeds of Hope*

### **INCOME SECURITY**

Both the federal and provincial governments launched financial supports for those impacted by the pandemic. The federal Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) was rolled out very quickly to replace lost income, and modelled similar to a basic income supplement. It also signalled the recognition that those with lost income need at least \$2000 for their basic needs. The provincial government provided a \$300 supplement for those on income assistance or disability assistance. This also recognized that the current rates are not meeting basic needs, and provide a baseline for advocacy to increase rates to ensure that people can live on them.



## Building Blocks for Action

Based on the original game changers framework which guided our community engagement process, we have defined the following building blocks to guide and prioritize our future work. While they are not listed in order of priority, we generally recognize that sufficient and stable income is a critical underpinning for addressing poverty. Income stability may be comprised of a variety of sources, including government provided supplements, and it must also address issues related to debt and financial management.

### Financial Security & Employment

- Income Supports
- Employment
- Financial empowerment
- Child Care availability

### Housing & Homelessness

- Affordable housing
- Safe Housing
- Reducing homelessness

### Food Security

- Affordable healthy food
- Food secure community
- Minimizing food waste

### Lifelong Learning & Literacy

- Early Child Development
- Literacy
- Education & Training

### Health & Wellness

- Access to primary & preventive care
- Mental health and addictions
- Dental care

### Transportation

- Accessible affordable public transit



### *Building Block: Financial Security and Employment*

Having enough income to ensure everyone can meet their basic needs is the foundation for all other poverty reduction measures.

#### **PRIORITY ACTIONS:**

- **Maximize awareness of rights, eligibility, and access to existing income support and supplement programs available to those on low income**
- **Develop legitimate and affordable options for crisis funds as an alternative to payday loans**
- **Advocate for increased regulation on payday and predatory loan businesses that cause further debt and instability for those already financially vulnerable**
- **Encourage employers to pay a living wage, and to provide flexible workplaces to address work-life balance, in particular sick leave and family care obligations**
- **Support the development of Social Enterprises, particularly those that provide supported employment, training and laddering to the mainstream labour market for youth and those with barriers to employment**
- **Develop strategies to support youth and Indigenous people's pathways into employment**
- **Implement the Williams Lake Child Care Plan to increase access to quality child care**

Adequate income is the lynchpin to poverty reduction. For most of those living in poverty, income is some mix of employment and federal and provincial income supports that make up the social safety net (eg. Employment Insurance, Child Tax Benefit, Social Assistance, Disability Benefits, Old Age Security, rental assistance support, etc.). While we tend to think of those who are poor as primarily those on social assistance, half of those living below the poverty line have at least some employment income, and many are employed full or part-time in low-wage jobs. The pandemic has demonstrated the fragility of financial security for many people, and has hit low wage workers particularly hard. This means strategizing for change at a community level is particularly challenging. Income support programs delivered by federal and provincial governments clearly need restructuring and substantial increases in order to address the financial impact of the pandemic on individuals, communities and the economy as a whole. The fragility of employment, particularly low-wage employment in the retail, service and hospitality sectors will require increased dependence on income support programs to supplement lost wages.

**Everyone needs income to survive and assets to get ahead.**

Increasing costs of living, growing debt and a boom-bust cyclical local economy make for a lot of instability if you live paycheque to paycheque. Financial stress is a major contributor to family and

relationship conflict, and is often hidden and a source of shame. For many who live one paycheque away from a financial crisis, the pandemic has been a disaster that some will never recover from.

All individuals and families should have the knowledge and support they need to manage their financial health and assets in a way that preserves their integrity and dignity. They should have access to information, assistance and resources that can assist them when they struggle. When an unexpected expense or financial emergency arises, they should have options for solutions that do not drive them further into debt in the future. Financial literacy skills along with access to short-term/emergency financial support and debt management and reduction are critical to stabilizing financial security and empowering people to take control of their financial security as much as possible.

Employment practices that are supportive of and responsive to the realities and complexities of people's lives are also important. Labour shortages experienced following the 2017 wildfires, and the early weeks of economic recovery in the new pandemic reality have taught us that workers are a critical resource. Navigating the challenges of sick leave, family care and child care needs, working from home, and employee shortages that result from all of these requires employers to develop new flexible human resource management practices.

## *Seeds of Hope*

### **BUSINESS AT ITS BEST & THE WILLIAMS LAKE HIRING GUIDE**

Community and business organizations came together to identify exemplary employment practices and recognize employers who provide workplaces that support employee health and wellness. Twenty-six local employers were nominated by their staff and publicly recognized.

The City of Williams Lake worked with small business and non-profit employers to identify ways to support the hiring practices and human resource needs of our community and created the Williams Lake Hiring Guide to support employers to be the best places to work in Williams Lake.

### **SOCIAL ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT**

Over the past two years, we have hosted several workshops on Social Enterprise, and are now participating in two social enterprise development projects to identify opportunities to develop social enterprises as a business model and an employment option for those with barriers to employment. This work is in its early stages but there is significant potential for growth and development that will make a difference.

In Williams Lake, there is a significant shortage of licenced child care. Much of this is due to a lack of certified Early Childhood Educators who are available to work in child care facilities. A deeper systemic issue is the lack of value for the work of child care providers and the resulting low wages. System wide change and significant investment is required to increase wages without increasing costs for families. Additionally, the field of child care needs a reputation overhaul to recognize the importance and value of the role child care professionals have in the early development of children. Thanks to the pandemic,

child care has been highlighted as one of our essential services and has gained an unparalleled public profile. Communities and policy makers now recognize the lack of daycare availability as not just a 'women's issue' but as a critical element in the economic functioning of a community. The child care space crisis that existed pre-pandemic has been exacerbated and will require a focused response from all levels of government and the community.



### ***Building Block: Housing & Homelessness***

**Fair and equitable access to affordable, appropriate and secure housing for all is a basic human right.**

#### **PRIORITY ACTIONS:**

- **Ensure everyone who may be eligible is aware of and can access rent supplements and housing loss prevention support.**
- **Establish a rent bank to respond to crisis situations that put housing stability at risk.**
- **Develop a strategy and build capacity for increased investment in new affordable rental housing and staffed supportive housing for those unable to live independently without support.**
- **Maximize development of new affordable and supportive housing that meets the unique needs in our community.**

Access to affordable, appropriate and secure housing is critical to addressing poverty. Shelter accounts for over 30% of the cost of living for many families<sup>15</sup>. With falling vacancy rates, rising rents, and limited investment in new rental stock, the housing landscape is bleak for those living in poverty. Statistics Canada reports that in 2016, nearly 33% of renters in Williams Lake lived in unaffordable housing<sup>16</sup>. While rent increases and eviction for missed rent were frozen during the pandemic, this will not prevent the loss of housing for the most vulnerable renters in the months ahead. Williams Lake has a shortage of quality rental stock, and low vacancy rates means that there is little incentive for improvements to rental units, or in some cases for basic maintenance to keep units in reasonable and liveable condition. In the long term, development of additional affordable rental units will be critical to meeting ongoing needs. In the shorter term, emergency and short-term measures are required to respond to immediate crises.

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I pay \$2300 a month rent for me and my three kids. This is just too much, and rent just keeps going up. If rent was more affordable it would make things much easier.

Lived Experience Survey Respondent

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<sup>15</sup> Canadian Mortgage and Housing measures affordability of housing at a maximum of 30% of total income

<sup>16</sup> Statistics Canada (2017). [https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/chn-biml/CMA\\_CA\\_RMR\\_AR.csv](https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/chn-biml/CMA_CA_RMR_AR.csv)

Homelessness requires a specific and separate response. In general, homelessness is often the result of not only poverty but also co-occurring issues. Those who are homeless due to poverty are generally homeless for shorter periods, and eventually find some type of housing though it may not be appropriate for their needs (ie. overcrowded, sub-renting from friends/family, units without needed amenities such as a kitchen or bath). Subsidized affordable housing is needed to meet the needs of this population.

Those who are chronically homeless frequently have co-occurring physical and mental health needs and/or substance use. The result is that maintaining housing consistently is extremely difficult without support. In Williams Lake, the number of homeless individuals is consistently about 50 people. Staffed supportive housing is critical to meeting the needs of this population, both to keep them housed and to connect them to the services they require for their health and recovery needs. The average cost of services for an individual who is homeless far outweighs the cost of providing staffed and subsidized supportive housing, and the positive impact on both the individual and the community is immeasurable. The provincial

response to the pandemic included housing vulnerable individuals in hotel rooms with staff support on site. This has substantial potential to be scaled as an ongoing response with the objective of shifting those individuals into newly developed transitional or supported housing facilities as available and appropriate.



## *Seeds of Hope*

### **NEW HOUSING**

In partnership with the City of Williams Lake, we have funding to support capacity building in non-profit organizations to assist with developing affordable and supportive housing projects. There are several new potential projects in the early development phase that will lead to significant additions to the affordable and supportive housing available in the community.

### **RENT BANK**

In partnership with the Women's Contact Society and other community organizations, we are working to establish a Rent Bank for the Cariboo. This will provide low-cost loans for those who are facing housing loss due to a short-term financial crisis, and will link those in vulnerable housing situations to additional supports and services as needed.



### *Building Block: Food Security*

**Access to affordable, nutritious and culturally appropriate food is a basic right and necessary for health and well-being.**

#### **PRIORITY ACTIONS:**

- **Move our food security work upstream to address the root causes of community and family food insecurity**
- **Ensure all children and youth have equitable access to food in school to support a healthy learning environment**
- **Ensure all food in the community is utilized to the benefit of the community by reducing food waste**

As food prices continue to climb, a growing portion of a family's budget is needed just to keep food on the table, and nutritious food is often out of reach for poor families. Food bank use continues to grow substantially, and additional food cupboard and meal programs continue to be developed to meet this growing need. While food banks and meal programs fill a necessary gap, they should not be the fall back when people are faced with a choice between paying rent and buying food. For individuals and families, food insecurity is mainly an issue of lack of income. Particularly for families with children, healthy nutritious food at an affordable cost is critical for health of children and their ability to be successful in school.

The pandemic elevated awareness of the fragility of food supply chains and our dependency on outside sources of food. In the short term, re-distribution of food through food drives and food bank services, as well as capturing and distributing unused food from grocery stores, restaurants and food distributors is necessary. Longer term objectives need to include support for local food systems that make more local food available at an affordable cost.

## *Seeds of Hope*

### **SCHOOL FOOD PROGRAMS**

This fall the newly elected BC Government included in the Minister of Education's mandate letter to work with school districts to establish school food programs based on locally grown food. This is great news and a huge step forward towards having equitable access to healthy food for all students in schools.

### **THE LOOP**

The Salvation Army participates in The Loop – a partnership with Save-On-Foods to share unsold food that is still safe to eat but no longer saleable. This food supplies food hampers and meal programs for those who are food insecure, and significantly reduces food waste in our community.



### **Building Block: Lifelong Learning and Literacy**

**Learning is at the core of growing, developing, building skills, making positive decisions and being a healthy member of the community.**

#### **PRIORITY ACTIONS:**

- **Ensure all children have access to quality early learning and development experiences, in their family and any other settings where they spend time**
- **Ensure children and youth have a sense of belonging in school, and adults they trust who can guide, mentor and support them**
- **Provide literacy and numeracy support to children, youth and adults so that they develop the skills they need to participate in future education and employment**
- **Support participation and transitions into education and training opportunities that meet people where they are at and help them to achieve their goals and dreams**
- **Identify and address the impact and needs related to digital and technology access for learning environments**

A robust and supportive education system from early childhood to adulthood is critical to building the skills needed to navigate life, find employment and access services. For children and youth, this means access to inclusive learning that meets them where they are at and supports their development, including foundational literacy, numeracy and technology skills, as well as the appropriate and relevant life skills and competencies that support self-sufficiency.

The early years of a child's life are fundamental to children's growth and development. Having access to quality early learning environments can have a significant impact on future life circumstances. Children who have access to quality early learning environments are more likely to meet developmental milestones, are better prepared for school entry, and have greater success throughout their childhood and even into adulthood.

While the public education system has a major role in education of young people, there are many other systems and supports needed as well. This includes support for parents and families, mentoring programs, mental and physical health supports as needed, and access to cultural, arts, and recreation services to support the development of all aspects of a human being.

Adults who have low literacy and numeracy skills are likely to struggle with finding and maintaining employment, along with other challenges that affect their quality of life, including accessing services and support they may need. Access to education for adults who require literacy skills is a significant challenge when most learning has transitioned to online formats. Ensuring that there are supports in place to assist adults to develop literacy and digital skills, and to support access to adult education and training is critical to helping people achieve income stability as well as improve their quality of life and ability to participate fully in the community.

For those with limited employment skills or opportunities, increased access to skills training, including workplace essential skills, will be critical. In the context of the pandemic, this will be particularly challenging. As many of the training and education programs have moved online, technology and digital access, literacy skills, and learner supports will need to be addressed and enhanced. More work is required to identify potential opportunities for innovation in employment, but there is potential in the social enterprise movement, particularly supported employment models of social enterprise that provide training and job support to those with a variety of barriers to employment (such as low levels of education or literacy, mental or physical health challenges, or those lacking workplace essential skills).

## *Seeds of Hope*

### **FUTURE FORWARD**

A partnership between Denisiqi Family Services and the Child Development Centre, the Future Forward program is a customized youth employment program to link young people with opportunities and supports to assist them to find employment and access skills, training, and job placements. Denisiqi also provides an 'Adulting 101' program to help build life skills for independence in youth.



### *Building Block: Health and Wellness*

**Poverty and individual health and wellness are intricately linked. Along with community-based prevention supports, the health system is a key partner in facilitating timely access to care that improves physical and mental health.**

#### **PRIORITY ACTIONS:**

- **Ensure everyone in the community has access to primary care services, including affordable and accessible dental care**
- **Increase timely availability and access to prevention and early intervention support for children, youth and adult mental health needs**
- **Reduce stigma related to mental health and substance use struggles and facilitate pathways to accessing supports that are culturally appropriate and trauma-informed**
- **Advocate for affordable access to recreation and learning opportunities that support engagement in community life**

The interconnection between poverty and health are clear. When an individual's health is compromised, this increases their chances of falling into poverty. At the same time, poverty has a significant negative impact on health and wellness.

The stress of coping with poverty, reduced access to healthy food and secure housing, costs of preventive therapies and medications, and the physical demands of working shifts or long hours for low pay are all contributors to poorer health. Many of those with mental illness or long-term mental health challenges fall into poverty if they are unable to maintain employment. Stress from financial insecurity negatively impacts family dynamics and functioning, the mental health of parents and children, and the ability to participate in employment, education and social life.

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“As a person with an anxiety disorder by the time your appointment comes around you can’t go. You are so tired and wound up you can’t get to the appointment.”

Lived Experience Survey Participant

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Mental health struggles continue to be the source of stigma and shame and too often this limits those who are suffering from seeking support. The result is silent suffering of individuals and families, as well as increased substance use as people attempt to cope with these challenges. We know that early intervention and treatment are critical to addressing both mental health challenges and problematic substance use. Reducing the stigma of asking for help, and providing increased access to services and supports earlier in people’s journey of challenges can contribute to better outcomes.

## *Seeds of Hope*

### **THE FOUNDRY**

This collaborative initiative led by the Child Development Centre will establish a single youth friendly location for integrated care, focused on mental health, for youth and their families and caregivers. It will be a one-stop shop for youth to access a range of health care and social services to support their well-being. The Foundry is expected to open in 2021.



### **Building Block: Transportation**

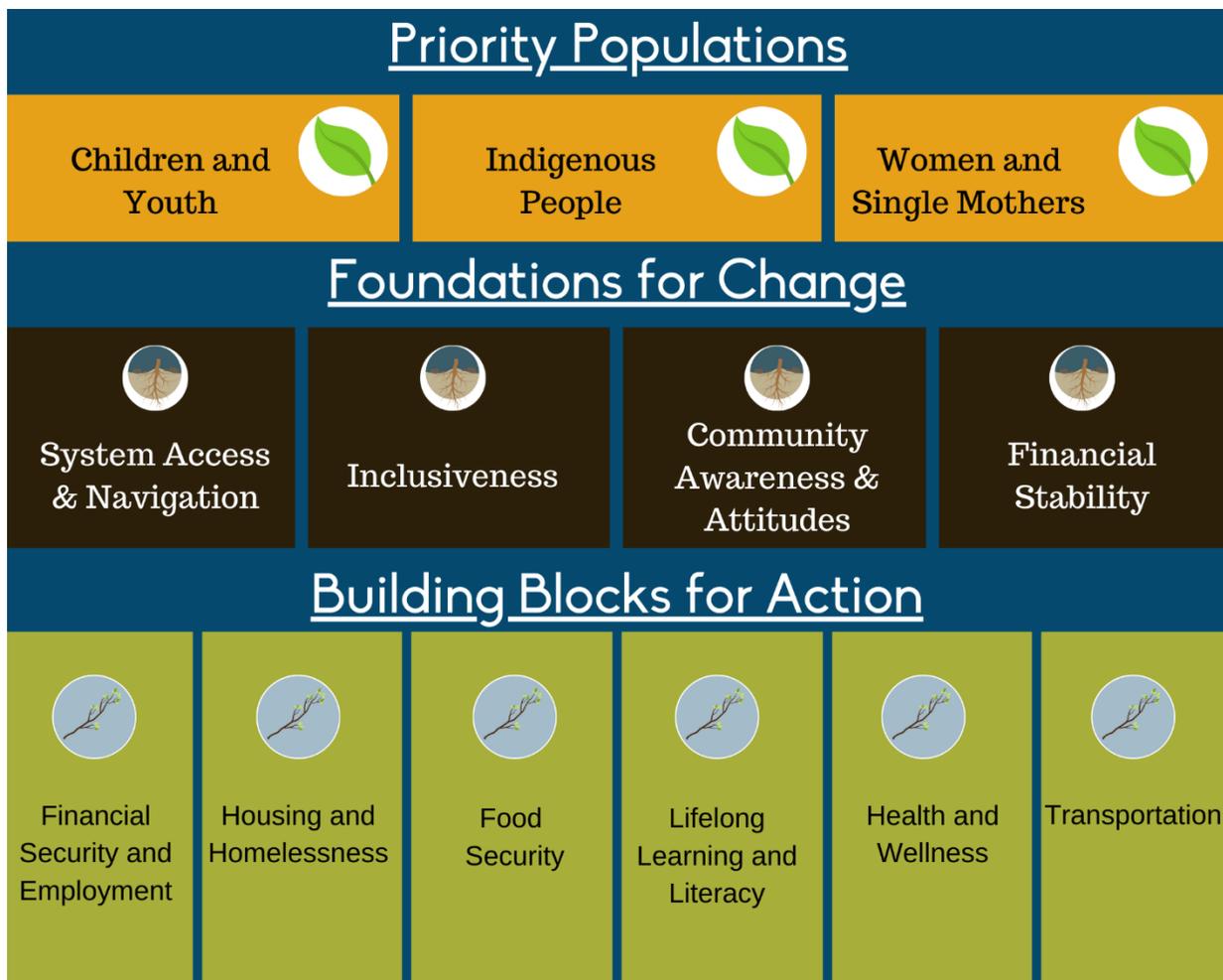
**Affordable, accessible transportation to work and basic services is critical to overcoming poverty.**

#### **PRIORITY ACTIONS:**

- **Expand the reach of public transit to meet the needs of the broader community, including outlying neighbourhoods surrounding Williams Lake**
- **Explore alternative transit models that are more responsive and reflect the needs of riders, particularly low-wage workers in retail and service industries on the west side who work shifts outside regular transit schedules**

Being able to easily travel to access basic services or to attend work or training is something many people take for granted. While our community is relatively small and those without vehicles can walk to some services if they live in the city core, there are many barriers that make this challenging. Walking to get groceries with small children, and carrying those groceries home, getting to a doctor’s appointment when you are unwell, or getting home from work on the west-side after the buses have stopped running on a dark winter night are all significant challenges if you don’t have access to either a car or public transportation. In Williams Lake, there are significant challenges balancing the needs and ridership with affordability of the transit system. New and innovative models are required to better address the current challenges and design a transit system that meets the need of the future.

## Setting Priorities for Action



Distilling the results of the past two years of engagement and input has given us a picture of the priorities of our community. As we began that process, the pandemic arrived on our doorstep and ground the process to a halt as we struggled to support those with basic and immediate needs. Identifying priorities in a completely new and changed context has been a significant challenge.

We have developed two tiers of priorities in response to what we've learned about poverty in our community, and about the precariousness of individuals' financial stability when the usual systems are disrupted. This approach attempts to take into consideration what we are learning about the impacts of the pandemic on the local community and population. Tier one includes priorities that can be undertaken more immediately to make a difference in terms of both addressing the current crisis, and building resources focused on longer term objectives that contribute to reducing the incidence and depth of poverty. The Tier Two priorities require longer term efforts, though activities related to those priorities may begin as opportunities arise and resources become available.

Our focus is on initiatives that have both 'upstream' and long-term impacts. This means that we are working to address ways of preventing poverty, lifting people out of poverty, and ensuring that people can thrive. We also believe that poverty reduction is a whole-community effort. There are many roles at all levels and making a difference includes policy change, programs focused on individuals and families, and shifts in the way we work to ensure that our efforts not only help in the short term, but also help support people to get to a better and more stable place in their lives. Collaboration in this work is key, and many of the initiatives identified will require action beyond the work of the Thrive project. Our role is to support, 'seed' and leverage community resources.

The Thrive project has been working on not only consultation and planning, but also leveraging action. As a result, some of the following initiatives are already underway in our community, many being undertaken by a variety of organizations and community partners. Thrive plays a supporting and facilitating role wherever we see opportunity for upstream or long-term change that helps people and our community thrive.

In addition to these more specific priority actions, we see the need for a substantial community education and awareness campaign about poverty, its causes and impacts, and how the community can play a role in reducing poverty over time.



## Poverty Reduction Initiative Priorities – Tier One (immediate action)

### FINANCIAL SECURITY & EMPLOYMENT

- Advocate for a Guaranteed Basic Income program to support those who are unable to meet their basic needs through employment
- Develop a 'Day Labour' Program to connect those with employment barriers to short-term employment opportunities that build skills and attachment to the labour market
- Increase availability and access to financial education, awareness, and coaching to reduce debt loads and support increased financial stability

### HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS:

- Ensure everyone who may be eligible is aware of and can access rent supplements and housing loss prevention support.
- Establish a rent bank to respond to crisis situations that put housing stability at risk.
- Build capacity for increasing affordable housing development

### FOOD SECURITY:

- Ensure maximum use of locally available food – establish mechanisms to ensure any un-used but still safe food is re-distributed to community food programs

### LIFELONG LEARNING AND LITERACY:

- Every school incorporates trauma sensitive awareness and practices – understanding and providing increased attention to mental health and trauma impacts on students and effects on their learning
- Increase access to literacy and essential skills training programs and support for adults
- Identify gaps in digital access and work with community stakeholders to find innovative solutions that increase access
- Support early childhood development events and opportunities to connect families who have young children to supports and services that strengthen early learning and healthy parenting skills

### HEALTH & WELLNESS:

- Work together to gather data and develop collective responses to child and youth mental health, including completion of the Prevention Needs Assessment Survey and establishing a Foundry to provide support, early intervention and wrap around services for youth and their families
- De-stigmatize mental illness and support increased access to early intervention and support for individuals experiencing mental health and substance use challenges
- Continue to support development of The Foundry as a youth centred service delivery model
- Support access to primary care services for all community members

### TRANSPORTATION

- Explore options for new public transit models that better meet the community needs

## Poverty Reduction Initiative Priorities – Tier Two (longer term)

### FINANCIAL STABILITY & EMPLOYMENT:

- Support the development of Social Enterprises, particularly those that provide supported employment, training and laddering to the mainstream labour market for youth and those with barriers to employment
- A Space for Every Child – Child Care Plan: Ensure affordable, quality child care spaces are available for all families. This requires investments in infrastructure, and a commitment to raising wages and increasing access to training
- Regulate predatory loans businesses and develop alternatives for those in a short-term financial crisis.

### HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS:

- Develop a strategy and build capacity for increased investment in new affordable rental housing and staffed supportive housing for those unable to live independently without support
- Increase access to supports needed to maintain stable housing. This includes rent supplements as well as support services, including tenancy advocacy and assistance

### FOOD SECURITY

- Establish consistent and equitable school food programs to support both food security and school connection that enhances education outcomes
- Continue to work towards enhancing local food production and availability to increase community food security

### LIFELONG LEARNING & LITERACY:

- Provide free and accessible parenting support and skills training for all parents as a 'normal' expectation for the challenges of parenting
- Collaboration between schools and community partners – develop pathways to support increased attention to building a sense of belonging and inclusion in both schools and the community
- Increase access to literacy and numeracy support in the school system to improve future education opportunities and outcomes, as well as connection to post-secondary education and training.

### PHYSICAL & MENTAL HEALTH:

- Ensure every person has access to primary health care services, and leverage that system to support access to and navigation of services
- Increase access to affordable dental care services

### TRANSPORTATION:

- Expand public transit to outlying communities (including Wildwood, Pine Valley, and 150 Mile) and support late-night service to Prosperity Ridge
- Explore feasibility of shifting to an on-demand public transit system that could provide greater reach, longer hours, and more efficient routes that would increase ridership

## Implementation

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Like any other plan, a poverty reduction strategy is only as good as implementation of its actions. In Williams Lake, we have focused on a ‘collective impact’ approach to community change. This means that we agree on a common agenda for change, and that we work collaboratively as well as individually to make change that aligns with that agenda. This requires strong relationships, trust, cooperation, and communication. It also requires resources to facilitate building and maintaining these elements, supporting communication, and linking our various and related common initiatives together.

During the development of the strategy, Thrive has had the guidance of a Stewardship Council. This group has advised and guided the process of community engagement and strategy development over the three years of the project. As we move into the implementation of our strategy, we will need to more deeply engage community leaders who can influence implementation of the actions and initiatives identified in the strategy. Additionally, we will need to consider and coordinate the implementation of poverty reduction work with other strategic priorities in the community that have been developed under other planning process, and particularly those focused on community safety and well-being, as well as priorities for children and youth through the Communities That Care initiative.

### Role of Community Champions and Partners

Any effort to make broad community change requires a collaborative effort. This means shared leadership and shared responsibility, not only at the high levels of decision makers, but also in the community and across multiple sectors. Thrive is intended as a community-wide strategy to guide our collective efforts.

Implementation of the Thrive Strategy will be most successful if it:

- Receives endorsement of the strategy by key organizations and community leaders
- Inspires and engages Leadership Champions who collaborate to take action on specific issues that are focused on the priorities and actions, and who inspire and guide the direction of the implementation process, and who are supported by Thrive to move initiatives forward
- Supports coordination of priorities for action from the Thrive Strategy with other community planning documents, priorities, and initiatives
- Helps launch, pilot and support seeds of hope to explore new and innovative possibilities
- Continues connections to existing community networks and supports collaborative tables who might work together on a specific issue or initiative
- Results in the development of working groups directed by Leadership Champions which are focused on moving key initiatives forward that are not currently under the purview of existing tables or working groups.
- Inspires community engagement through ongoing awareness/education campaigns and engagement of individuals who may be interested in getting involved

A number of initiatives identified in the strategy are already under way, some led by Thrive and others championed by other community partners, or in partnership with Thrive. Continuing with this approach is most likely to lead to opportunities to continue to move priorities in the strategy forward.

## Measuring Impact

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Measuring impact on poverty can be challenging as data and metrics are difficult to collect and track. Thrive, and the Social Planning Council, are committed to transparency and accountability to the community of Williams Lake in our work and reporting. We recognize that Thrive is primarily focused on convening and supporting collaboration on poverty reduction, and is not solely responsible for, nor takes direct credit for the impact of work that is the result of a community collaboratively committed to making change. In addition to reporting on our activities and the impact on individuals and families in our community affected by poverty, and the systems that we are striving to change, we will track the following metrics over the long-term as much as possible within funding and resource availability.

The following data points will be used to track change over time in our community:

- Number and percentage of people and equity/priority populations (women, aboriginal, children and youth) living below Canada's Poverty Line utilizing the Market Basket Measure
- Change in the number of people in core housing need
- Increase in median wage
- Increase in number of people with some employment income
- Increase the number of licenced child care spaces in the community
- Reduction in the incidence of anxiety and depression in youth
- Increase the number of youth engaged in education training or employment
- Increase awareness and access to services and supports
- Increase in the number of community organizations that embrace and operate from a trauma informed and cultural safety approach
- Visible action to openly address racism and discrimination with a commitment to learn and do better in future

We are striving to align our measurement metrics with available data from federal and provincial sources, and in ways that support both the federal and provincial poverty reduction strategies. This is in recognition that poverty reduction requires change at every level of government, and that policy change often makes the greatest difference at population levels.

## Appendix: Community Engagement Events

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### **Community Innovation and Adaptive Leadership Training**

October 2018

### **Game Changer Event**

December 2018

### **Business at its Best**

February 2019

### **What Works – Community Employment Summit**

February 2019

### **Social Innovation Workshops (3)**

September 2019

### **Poverty Simulation**

October 2019

### **Roadmap to Poverty Reduction**

February 2020

### **Cariboo Strong – We've Got You...! Community Pandemic Response Collaboration**

October 2020

© **Social Planning Council of Williams Lake and Area**

**January 2021**

**Social Planning Council of Williams Lake and Area** is a non-profit organization serving the community of Williams Lake, BC Canada. Our mandate is to enhance, encourage and support social and economic development that enhances social well being for residents in Williams Lake and area.

Additional information, including a condensed version of the strategy,  
can be found on our website: [www.wlspc.ca](http://www.wlspc.ca)