

# NO PLACE for Poverty

Anti-Poverty Workshop Report



Northern United Place, Yellowknife, NT October 5-7, 2010



*Alternatives North*



**YWCA**  
YELLOWKNIFE

A TURNING POINT  
FOR WOMEN

# NO PLACE for **Poverty**

Anti-Poverty Workshop Report

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## The Workshop

The *No Place for Poverty* – Anti-Poverty Workshop was initiated and organized by Alternatives North, a volunteer social justice coalition, and YWCA Yellowknife, a non-profit organization dedicated to the well-being and independence of people, particularly women. The Workshop was held in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories (NWT) on October 5-7, 2010. The Workshop followed a series of initiatives over several years to educate and draw attention to the need for action on poverty. In addition to the YWCA’s day-to-day work with people living in poverty, these initiatives included:

- Participation in the GNWT’s Income Security review and preparation of a paper entitled *Poverty: A Whispered Word in the NWT* (2006) in which Alternatives North called for an anti-poverty strategy.<sup>1</sup>
- YWCA Yellowknife’s leadership of pan-territorial research on homelessness published in *You Just Blink And It Can Happen: A Study Of Women’s Homelessness North of 60* (2007).<sup>2</sup>
- Alternative North’s preparation of the NWT paper, *Poverty Reduction Policies and Programs* (2009) as part of a Canadian Council on Social Development cross-Canada series on poverty reduction.<sup>3</sup>

The research, analysis, and advocacy work of Alternatives North together with the frontline work of the YWCA Yellowknife pointed to the need for a broad, comprehensive, integrated anti-poverty strategy to address the many issues that influence, and are influenced by poverty. This led to a public call by 25 social justice organizations and four municipal governments in the NWT for an anti-poverty strategy and for the work now underway within the GNWT on a discussion paper.

The *No Place for Poverty* – Anti-Poverty Workshop was conceived as a way for social justice organizations, non-profit service providers, and community and government representatives to begin a conversation about a strategy and provide advice to the GNWT on its work. Alternatives North and YWCA Yellowknife struck a planning committee to organize the event. Aggie Brockman and Craig Yeo from Alternatives North and Julie Green from YWCA Yellowknife were the main organizers.

1 Available at [www.alternativesnorth.ca](http://www.alternativesnorth.ca)

2 Available at <http://ywacacanada.ca/data/publications/00000009.pdf>

3 Available at [www.alternativesnorth.ca](http://www.alternativesnorth.ca)

## Objectives and Outcomes

The *No Place for Poverty* – Anti-Poverty Workshop had six (6) objectives:

1. Deepen understanding of the experiences and definitions of poverty.
2. Learn about anti-poverty efforts.
3. Consider ways to measure the effectiveness and appropriateness of anti-poverty initiatives.
4. Establish anti-poverty priorities.
5. Make recommendations on a process for moving forward on anti-poverty initiatives in the NWT.
6. Make recommendations on next steps to follow-up on this workshop.

The expected outcomes of the Workshop were:

1. Heightened profile and understanding of poverty.
2. Recommendations on anti-poverty priorities and GNWT actions.
3. Recommendations on a process for developing an anti-poverty strategy for the NWT.
4. Broader engagement in anti-poverty efforts.

## Participants and Guests

Eighty-one (81) people participated in the *No Place for Poverty* – Anti-Poverty Workshop. A list of participants is attached. Participants were people with the lived experience of poverty, groups calling for an anti-poverty strategy, government managers and front-line workers, elected leaders, as well as individuals and organizations fighting poverty. The Workshop also included several anti-poverty leaders from elsewhere in Canada. Lois Little of Lutra Associates Ltd. facilitated the Workshop.

## Workshop Report

The agenda for the *No Place for Poverty* – Anti-Poverty Workshop is attached. This report summarizes the presentations, conversations, and recommendations from the Workshop.

### Day One Discussions

Following an opening prayer by Rev. Ron McLean, participants were greeted by Aggie Brockman, Julie Green, and Wendy Bisaro, MLA, Frame Lake and sponsor of the NWT Legislative Assembly motion calling for a territorial anti-poverty strategy.

### Keynote Address

**Tony Martin, Member of Parliament,  
Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario**

In June 2010 Mr. Martin introduced a bill in the House of Commons to eliminate poverty.<sup>4</sup> The Bill has several goals – to eliminate, not just reduce poverty; deal with the economic barriers of poverty; and promote social inclusion. The Bill uses a human rights framework recognizing that Canada has signed the *UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*. It proposes amending the *Canadian Human Rights Act* by adding ‘social condition’ to the list of prohibited grounds of discrimination. The Bill calls for strong national, provincial, and territorial leadership and public accountability. It proposes a committee of senior ministries and a new office for poverty elimination with a commissioner, an advisory committee, and linkages to the National Council on Welfare, and the Canadian Human Rights Commission.

The Bill supports a comprehensive approach to poverty elimination, income security, affordable housing and social inclusion. It seeks to ensure that all federal legislation is ‘poverty-proof’ and focuses on vulnerable populations, namely Aboriginal peoples, women, lone parents, unattached individuals, seniors, persons with disabilities, visible minorities, recent immigrants, and the working poor.



Tony Martin, MP

<sup>4</sup> HOUSE OF COMMONS OF CANADA BILL C-545 An Act to Eliminate Poverty in Canada  
FIRST READING, JUNE 16, 2010

Legislation with evaluation mechanisms commits future governments to fighting poverty. Three Canadian jurisdictions have approved anti-poverty legislation. Multi-party agreements are another tool to address poverty. Strong relationships and roots in the community are needed to work effectively and address issues such as the impact of the *Indian Act* on poverty.

Public funds need to be spent differently and strategically.

## Anti-Poverty Work within the Government of the NWT

**David Stewart**, Assistant Deputy Minister, Department of the Executive, GNWT Department of the Executive repeated Premier Floyd Roland’s commitment to activities to reduce and eradicate poverty. The GNWT already makes a significant investment in social programs but needs direction from the Workshop regarding gaps, improvements, and priorities for action.

The Premier has asked for materials that define and measure poverty. Mr. Stewart reminded participants that national data collection on measures of poverty may not include the NWT or report data on a territorial level. Further, “there are extreme differences between a community like Paulatuk and a community like Yellowknife.” Living costs, particularly for basic needs, relative to income, create large disparities among communities and among people within communities. As such, the depth and breadth of poverty issues are very different from community to community. Definitions and measurements need to acknowledge these disparities.

The GNWT has examined provincial anti-poverty strategies and the Senate report on poverty.<sup>5</sup> Some common themes are the links among poverty, education, employment, and economic activity. The link between education and poverty is strong in the NWT. “Eighty-two percent (82%) of people who have high school or more have a job in the NWT. Of people who don’t have high school, that’s 42% (who have a job).” Economic activity that generates employment, particularly in smaller communities, is a significant challenge.

<sup>5</sup> *In from the Margins: A Call to Action on Poverty, Housing and Homelessness*. The Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology. December 2009.

“There are extreme differences between a community like Paulatuk and a community like Yellowknife.”

— David Stewart, GNWT



Mr. Stewart agreed with the Senate report that policies that work together are essential. Guidance on how to evolve consistent policy is needed. "...If someone goes out and gets a job and gets whacked on their income support or their public housing rent in a way that makes them say: 'why did I get that job?' then I think there's some sort of problem there." He noted that breaking down silos within government is often put forth as the solution to consistent policy. But "silos are important in government. Everyone has to have a responsibility but we need to have windows and bridges and ways to get the silos connected. That's really what the goal needs to be. We have to know that if someone is working in housing or income support or health and social services that the number one priority is the client."

Based on the advice of Senator Art Eggleton, co-author of the Senate report, Mr. Stewart said that action on poverty requires three basic elements:

1. Actions that help people move forward (e.g. employment).
2. Focus on the working poor (people who are working but having trouble living).
3. Focus on vulnerable populations (i.e. Aboriginal people, lone parents, seniors, and persons with disabilities).

Once priorities for action on poverty are established, strategies for action are required before the GNWT can move forward on public consultations. The GNWT has established an internal working group with members from Education, Culture and Employment, Bureau of Statistics, Executive, NWT Housing Corporation, Health and Social Services, Justice and Industry, Tourism and Investment.<sup>6</sup> The Premier has called for the formation of an external advisory group made-up of a cross-section of northerners. Mr. Stewart and Mr. Dan Daniels, Deputy Minister of Education, Culture and Employment will oversee the GNWT's work on poverty. Their goal is to complete a framework by March, 2011. Mr. Stewart said a framework, rather than a strategy, will provide flexibility for the next Legislative Assembly, to be elected in October 2011.

"We have to know that if someone is working in housing or income support or health and social services that the number one priority is the client."

— David Stewart, GNWT



<sup>6</sup> Gloria Iatridis, Chair of the internal working group on day 2. Members are: Laurie Morton – Director of Income Security, ECE; Sigrun Geirsdottir – Strategic Planning analyst, Executive; Catherine Boyd - Director of Advanced Education, ECE; Andrea Hunter – Senior Advisor, Secretary to Cabinet, Executive; Vishni Peeris – Territorial Statistician; Lisa Cardinal – Director of Policy Planning and Evaluation, Health and Social Services; Paula MacFadyen – Senior Policy Advisor, NWT Housing Corporation; and appointments from Justice and ITI not yet named. Members of the external advisory group have not yet been named.

...it is a significant concern to the GNWT that the federal government is withdrawing from public housing.

The GNWT is not the only player with a role in addressing poverty. Federal, Aboriginal, and community governments also have parts to play. Mr. Stewart said that the “federal government plays a huge role.” For instance, it is a significant concern to the GNWT that the federal government is withdrawing from public housing. This will pose significant challenges to the GNWT’s capacity to respond to housing needs.



## The Face of Poverty in the NWT

Five individuals from Łutsel K'e, Yellowknife, and Hay River described the face of poverty in the NWT.

Members of the Łutsel K'e Dene First Nation, **Gloria Enzoe** and **Stephanie Poole**, described poverty from an historical perspective. The distinct, self-reliant, and inter-dependent Denesuline people viewed poverty as lacking mental well being. Decades of policies of colonization and assimilation have disempowered the Denesuline, and created dependencies, poverty, apathy, lack of encouragement to work, homelessness, and loss of self-esteem. There is no guarantee that high school graduation, or even a college or university education, will provide adequate employment income to survive in today's world. In Łutsel K'e, food prices are double those in Yellowknife. Families with young children and single mothers are likely to purchase cheaper processed and less nutritional foods because of high costs. There are waiting lists for housing which costs \$1,432 per month for a one-bedroom unit and \$2,640 per month for a four-bedroom unit. While there are vacant units in the community, under current public housing policies, "nobody qualifies for these units." Overcrowded housing conditions contribute to serious social and health issues including high rates of assault and family violence.

Ms. Enzoe and Ms. Poole said that, "we need leaders who will stand up and demand an end to the system that creates a majority of poverty and very small minority of wealth for the people of this Earth." They said that we need to draw on traditions and strengths to develop sustainable opportunities and change the policies that contribute to poverty.

**Lydia Bardak** is with the John Howard Society in Yellowknife. She works with people in trouble with the law and people who come to the day shelter for homeless people in Yellowknife. Many of the people the Society serves are destitute. Ms. Bardak said that trends in crime and imprisonment in Canada are magnified in the NWT. Prison populations are growing even though crime rates are declining. Aboriginal people are over-represented in prisons. Closure of mental health services has pushed people with mental illness out of hospitals and other facilities into jails where staff is not adequately trained to work with them.



Decades of policies of colonization and assimilation have... created dependencies, poverty, apathy, lack of encouragement to work, homelessness, and loss of self-esteem.

“I don’t understand exactly why we have wait lists for child care, we have wait lists for public housing, but there are no wait lists for jail. Everyone gets in.”

– Lydia Bardak,  
John Howard Society

“The clients are an interesting group with addictions, mental disabilities, literacy problems, physical handicaps, and low self-esteem. All that sprinkled with depression.”

– Laura Rose,  
Hay River Soup Kitchen

Ms. Bardak said that an under-funded legal aid system and overworked legal aid lawyers contribute to incarceration rates. But there is always funding for police forces, crown prosecutors, judges, and prisons. People in remand plead guilty even when they’re not, “just to get things over with.” Poverty is what Aboriginal people have in common with non-Aboriginal people in jail.

Affordable housing is a significant issue for both the clients and staff of the John Howard Society. In Yellowknife, a family paying \$1300 a month for accommodation needs to earn \$25 an hour if they aren’t going to pay more than 30% of their net income for shelter. The Society struggles to pay staff \$20 an hour and many of its clients couldn’t hope to make this amount even if they could get and keep a job. Ms. Bardak believes there is enough money in the system to address poverty. It is a matter of how money is spent. “I don’t understand exactly why we have wait lists for child care, we have wait lists for public housing, but there are no wait lists for jail. Everyone gets in. Here in the north it’s \$250 per day per inmate to house someone in a correctional facility. Clearly we have enough money.”

**Laura Rose** runs the Hay River Soup Kitchen. The Soup Kitchen was conceived in the fall of 1994 and a year later was providing bag lunches for both of the community’s elementary schools. The Soup Kitchen opened its doors to serve its first five clients early in 1996. Today, the Soup Kitchen serves soup, sandwiches, bannock or muffins, and beverages three hours a day, three times per week. Every other Friday, it provides a full-course dinner rather than the regular lunch. To help maintain client dignity, a limited menu is available to choose from.

Between the lunch program and a food bank service that was added several years ago, the Soup Kitchen has over 200 clients. Ms. Rose said that “the clients are an interesting group with addictions, mental disabilities, literacy problems, physical handicaps, and low self-esteem. All that sprinkled with depression. And yes, some of them are homeless and we haven’t any shelter.” Some 35 or 40 clients are from the Hay River Reserve. About 15 clients are seniors and about one-third of the 30-40 walk-in lunches are served to children. Over the last year or two, the Soup Kitchen has served more families.

In 2009, the Soup Kitchen served approximately 3800 hot lunches and passed on 279 bag lunches to the elementary schools. Each month, an average of 38 households (about 80 people) are served by the food bank. The Soup Kitchen asks food bank users to write a grocery list of what they really need and endeavours to fill it as provisions allow. A few food bank clients have reported that Income Support has deducted \$50 from their cheque because they used the food bank.

The Soup Kitchen is run solely on donations mainly from seniors who remember their childhood and the “hungry years”. A smattering of local businesses and many community service groups also contribute. Ms. Rose said that “for the last 14 plus years, this has been a miracle.” The Soup Kitchen very recently began receiving help from two churches in Ontario, “another miracle.” Ms. Rose reported that the total average monthly operating costs run about \$2600 but she “can see that soon, with more need coming and with some of our senior supporters leaving us, with costs increasing and the economy very slow to turn around, we too could be lost.” Ms. Rose recommended revamping Income Support policies and providing more help to organizations on the front-line of fighting poverty.



“It’s now the people who are working that cannot afford to pay (for) things and to live... the poverty situation is everyone’s business.”

– Kate Wilson, YWCA

**Kate Wilson** runs the YWCA Yellowknife Transitional Housing Program. She says “the situation is urgent. Right now it’s not only the people who don’t have money, it’s now the people who are working that cannot afford to pay (for) things and to live. Pretty soon, it’s going to be those who used to have good money who can’t afford it anymore... The poverty situation is everyone’s business.” Ms. Wilson has seen more people coming to transitional housing who are working two jobs and still can’t make ends meet. She says there is no reason for Canadians, wherever they live, to have to choose between putting food on the table or a roof over their heads. “Children are going to school without food, children are staying at home and not going to school because they don’t have any food, families (are) not eating for days because they don’t have money, families are being cut off income support because they didn’t do a ‘productive choice’<sup>7</sup> and if this is the last place for them to get food to eat, money to buy food and they are cut off, where do they go?”

Ms. Wilson believes that “all the systems that are set to provide help for poor people are not working.” She is hopeful that the Workshop will “put some things together that the government can take, especially the committee that is doing the strategic plan, that they will do something and they will do it quickly” to provide relief from the misery of poverty.



<sup>7</sup> Examples of a productive choice are employment, education, training, harvesting, wellness/treatment, community work, or parenting. By the end of the second month of Income Assistance, individuals must develop a Productive Choice Action Plan to continue receiving youth educational or adult benefits.

## Poverty Defined (or Not)

A panel of presenters tackled the question: Who is poor? They also identified the challenges of defining poverty in ways that make sense to everyone regardless of where they live or their circumstances.

**Vishni Peeris**, Territorial Statistician with the GNWT, underscored the complexities of defining and measuring poverty. She said that the statement that “poverty is intrinsically a question of social consensus, for a given point in time and in the context of a given country” seems appropriate to this discussion.

Ms. Peeris noted that provincial anti-poverty strategies use similar low income measurement tools. Common measures of low income are: market basket measure (MBM), low income cut-off (LICO) and low income measure (LIM). The MBM is an absolute measure. It looks at a basket of basic goods for a family of four and compares the price of the basket to the family’s disposable income. While MBM can be produced for geographic regions, these data are not available for the NWT. The GNWT is currently undertaking a northern market basket measure feasibility study and community price surveys.

Both LICO and LIM are relative measures. The LICO is an income threshold below which the average family is likely to spend 20% more of their income on the basic necessities than the average family. The LICO is also unavailable in the NWT. The LIM which is available for the NWT focuses on the relative differences in income levels. It defines families in low income as those having an adjusted family income of 50% of the median. LIM data for the NWT showed that 35% of lone-parent families had low income in 2007. Ms. Peeris said that there are several factors that affect measures of low income including wealth versus income, income security programs and subsidies, consumption of country foods, and wide variations in spatial price patterns.

Ms. Peeris concluded that there are many more questions than answers when considering how to define and measure poverty. At the same time, there are opportunities for the NWT to find unique solutions that reflect our small, diverse populations.

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There are opportunities for the NWT to find unique solutions that reflect our small, diverse populations.

**Liz Weaver** with the Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement in Ontario stressed the central role that the community has in defining poverty. She explained that a sustainable livelihood framework is one way for communities to understand poverty. The framework focuses on themes related to poverty in five domains – basic material goods and services; relationships and networks; skills, knowledge, education and health; income, savings and sources of financial security; and inner resources (see graphic below).<sup>8</sup>

In general, communities often define poverty in terms of the safety of neighbourhoods, support for early childhood development, affordable and accessible housing, and other social and economic factors. Ms. Weaver noted that other jurisdictions also encounter problems defining and measuring poverty. These challenges are made worse by disjointed policies.

**Sustainable Livelihood Framework Building Blocks<sup>9</sup>**



<sup>8</sup> The sustainable livelihood framework was developed by Mike Classens for the Poverty Reduction Coalition of the Calgary United Way. The framework was developed for discussion purposes only.

<sup>9</sup> [http://tamarackcommunity.ca/downloads/vc/Sustainable\\_Livelihoods.pdf](http://tamarackcommunity.ca/downloads/vc/Sustainable_Livelihoods.pdf)



**Suzette Montreuil** of Alternatives North stated that poverty and social exclusion are major determinants of health and well being. Poor children suffer more from poor nutrition and poor health. They miss more school, fall behind, and are more likely to drop out. As adults, they will have higher rates of chronic illness. With a poorer education, they will earn less, pay less in taxes, and use more social services. These cycles result in higher costs to society. Addressing poverty is the right thing to do. It also makes economic sense. In a recent statement, Premier Ed Stelmach of Alberta reported a homeless person costs the province an average of about \$100,000 a year including health costs. The cost per person drops to about \$35,000 annually if that person is given a long-term home.

The NWT's recent economic boom shows that economic development alone does not address poverty. Between 1999-2006, gross domestic product (GDP) in the NWT increased by 67%. Over the same period, the NWT's growth rate of 13.1% was the highest in Canada. The NWT's unemployment (5.3%) was lower than the Canadian average (6.3%) and the territory had the highest average incomes in the country. But wealth is not distributed equitably. It is concentrated in larger communities and within specific segments of those communities. The uneven distribution of wealth is apparent in the incidence of households with low income. In 2006, 15% of NWT households were living on incomes of \$30,000 per year or less. In the Beaufort-Delta, Dehcho, and Tłı̄cho regions, it was more than 20%. Almost 37% of lone-parent families experienced low income. Social problems are fewer, and social stability and unity are stronger, in societies where income is more equally distributed.

Poor children... miss more school, fall behind, and are more likely to drop out. As adults, they will have higher rates of chronic illness, will earn less, pay less in taxes, and use more social services. These cycles result in higher costs to society.

A recent report showed that addictions are at the core of housing insecurity, evictions, and homelessness in the NWT.

Housing is another factor in the poverty picture. A YWCA report on homelessness showed that there were roughly 1,000 homeless women in the NWT and 500 of them lived in Yellowknife.<sup>10</sup> This is over 5% of the female population. The NWT has the highest percentage of households in Canada with houses in need of major repairs. In 2009, 19% of dwellings were considered to be in core need – double the national average. In small communities, the number of houses in core need is as high as 61%.

Mental health and addictions are major concerns in the NWT. These issues are strongly tied to poverty. A recent report showed that addictions are at the core of housing insecurity, evictions, and homelessness in the NWT.<sup>11</sup>

Ms. Montreuil said that an anti-poverty framework is an inadequate response to poverty. Instead, an integrated strategy is needed to address and tie together all the causes, programs, and services related to poverty. The strategy should have a vision for social development closely linked to an equitable and sustainable vision of economic progress. It should seek results that benefit the poor; set specific targets and timelines; recognize the need for a long-term perspective on poverty reduction; and have an accountability framework that includes measuring and reporting on progress. The strategy needs to connect poverty with gender, education, housing, vulnerability to violence, employment, health, and social and financial supports. It must focus on improving the social, economic, and environmental conditions of poor people and their access to decision making.

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<sup>10</sup> *You Just Blink And It Can Happen A Study Of Women's Homelessness North of 60*, 2007.

<sup>11</sup> *Homeless in a Homeland: Housing (in) Security and Resource Development in the NWT*, 2008.

**Workshop participants** suggested that looking at what people need, and focusing on people in need, may be a way to understand poverty. Poverty should be defined holistically and in plain language so all the factors associated with poverty and how they affect people can be understood. Poverty should be defined to recognize unique northern social, economic, and community circumstances and cultures. A definition of poverty should also recognize such realities as overcrowded housing, addictions, residential school impacts, and elder abuse. A definition also needs to consider the impacts of disconnected government policy and programs, and the economic circumstances that contribute to poverty. In short, it needs to look into the “dark underbelly of economic development.”

A definition needs to show that poverty is about loss of dignity, lack of freedom, and dependency. Poverty is not having nutritional food, shelter, clothing, healthcare, employment, and education, or the ability to be self-reliant and make choices and decisions. Poverty is about losing cultural identity and value and not having the ability, pride or choice to contribute to society. It is an imbalance in mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual needs. In at least two Dene languages, poverty is defined as lack of mental well being.

Poverty is about losing cultural identity and value and not having the ability, pride or choice to contribute to society.

In no order of priority, **workshop participants** suggested several living rather than static processes that might result in a definition and/or broader understanding of poverty. These are:

- Ask the Poverty Alliance to draft a definition and refine it through consultations.
- Bring elders together from throughout in the NWT to define poverty.
- Involve communities in an examination of policies and their development to promote local ownership of federal/territorial government programs and their capacity to meet local needs.
- Do research through consistent resident and community surveys “at the right times not just when trucks and barges skew prices.”
- Involve individuals with the lived experience of poverty and working on poverty.
- Analyse existing data and local experiences and draw on the work of other jurisdictions.
- Focus on public/community education/awareness and community engagement based on strong, clear, qualitative and quantitative information.
- Address misconceptions, acknowledge poverty, encourage coordination/ collaboration and political will, and facilitate “a clear vision and target about what we want to achieve.”
- Tell our stories and support them with visuals so poverty can be understood.
- Hold a poverty referendum or vote rather than debate what poverty is (because “it is what it is”).
- Through consultations and needs assessments, examine services gaps and issues including racism and discriminatory practices.
- Prioritize preventative needs and support current interventions that work.
- Partner across departments, local governments, and communities to build on existing action reports/plans to address poverty.
- Adopt the Vibrant Communities sustainable livelihoods framework to enable case and community specific understanding and responses to poverty.<sup>12</sup>

## Tackling Poverty

**Liz Weaver** with the Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement in Ontario compared various government initiatives underway across Canada to address poverty.

The Newfoundland-Labrador strategy takes a long-term approach to poverty elimination. Strategy development was mainly government-driven although it built on considerable consultation. Like New Brunswick, Newfoundland-Labrador uses the ‘community accounts’ approach to monitor progress.<sup>13</sup> Gender and ethnicity, particularly Aboriginal people, are important focuses of the strategies.

The Nova Scotia poverty reduction strategy recognizes that poverty takes different forms in different places and among different populations. Nova Scotia seeks to prevent poverty by promoting prosperity and creating opportunities to engage citizens. The province’s strategy is mainly government-driven. Although a citizen’s panel was struck for its development, the strategy is not well connected to non-government organizations and communities. Key strategy principles are co-ordination, collaboration, and reporting on progress.

The New Brunswick approach to poverty involves multi-sectoral cooperation for economic and social inclusion. The economic and social inclusion strategy was built on extensive consultations. A Crown Corporation has been established to work with 16-20 social inclusion networks across the province that focus on poverty reduction. The inclusion strategy focuses on income poverty. It has three priorities: meeting basic needs, life-long learning and skills, and community participation.

The Quebec poverty reduction strategy seeks to improve the living conditions of the poorest members of society. Income improvement is a main feature of the strategy.

Ontario’s strategy for poverty reduction was developed through a cross-government working group with input from anti-poverty working group sessions hosted by members of the Ontario Legislature. The strategy aims to increase child benefits, re-examine social assistance, and deal with conflicting rules/public policies.



<sup>13</sup> [www.communityaccounts.ca/](http://www.communityaccounts.ca/)

The more  
that government  
engages  
community,  
the better the  
strategies are.

Poverty related legislation in Ontario, Quebec, and New Brunswick supports anti-poverty initiatives. Legislation protects anti-poverty initiatives in times of political change.

In Manitoba, the focus of the poverty and social inclusion strategy is on housing, income, healthy families, and coordinated services. While the strategy was developed by the provincial government in consultation with advocacy groups, it is not as well connected as it could be. Ms. Weaver stressed the importance of community engagement in anti-poverty strategy work. The more that government engages community, the better the strategies are.

The Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition has 116 members. **Bill Thomas**, co-chair of the Coalition, said that it has focused on housing and social inclusion and advocated for a strategy rather than a poverty framework.

The Yukon Government announced its intention to develop a social inclusion and poverty reduction strategy early in 2009. It has assigned a civil servant to lead the strategy. The Yukon is developing a data base on poverty and homelessness. Five papers are being prepared to:

- define social inclusion and the indicators used to measure it;
- tell Yukoners' stories about poverty;
- report on a survey of 1000 households;
- identify the cost of poverty; and
- report on a housing adequacy survey.

The five papers will be released for a symposium scheduled for January 2011. Mr. Thomas says a main lesson from the Coalition's work on poverty has shown that stories rather than facts move people to action.

Two bodies have been established to move forward on a Yukon poverty and social inclusion strategy – a community advisory committee and an interdepartmental steering committee. The strategy is due in March 2011. In the meantime, progress is being made on housing issues through a supportive and affordable housing project. Other suggested actions on poverty are more urban gardening and cooperative enterprises, including a credit union.

## Anti-Poverty Efforts that Work

In an exploration of anti-poverty efforts that might work in the NWT and what could make them work, workshop participant discussions followed 13 main themes.

### 1. Housing

People need a safe place to live to feel secure, well rested, and ready to learn and work effectively. Community-based solutions are needed to deal with policy barriers. The public housing rental subsidy is a disincentive to work and does not acknowledge 'peaks and valleys' in employment. Rents are unrealistic, inflexible, and unaffordable, and in some communities are monopolized by one owner. Many people living in poverty have housing issues, including past debts/arrears. A program is needed to help these households to repay debts without the penalties that prevent access to essential services. A rental cap may be a way to ensure affordable housing.

Group homes and supportive housing are needed. Transitional housing is also needed for women and for people who have been evicted. Transitional housing policies need to be based on the principle of 'poverty proof' housing and include food supplies so families can get a 'solid start'.

### 2. Child Care

Any effort to address poverty must include quality, accessible, affordable, and reliable childcare and early childhood development options. Universal childcare should be an anti-poverty ethic. The Quebec model is the place to start to develop this 'first domino' of action to address poverty. Subsidies need to reflect actual expenses and eligibility to receive them needs to be fair.

After school care is needed. Child care workers also need to be better paid.

### 3. Income and Food Security

There is a need to overhaul all 17 income security programs in the NWT, not just Income Support. People using income security

People need a safe place to live to feel secure, well rested, and ready to learn and work effectively.

Universal childcare should be an anti-poverty ethic.

programs need to be supported when they find employment or seek training rather than punished or penalized. Barriers and disincentives in both policies and practices, such as claw backs on Income Support, must be corrected. Processes for income security need to be simplified. Programs should support secure/regular access to nutritious food and help people to learn new skills (e.g. expand urban gardens and offer budgeting services).

#### **4. Health and Mental Health**

In order for people to be self-reliant and contribute to society, they need to be healthy in body and mind. Many northern people have past traumatic experiences that need to be resolved. More mental health services are needed. Elders need to be involved in providing these services. Services are needed for people with disabilities particularly to help deal with income issues and health benefits. Policy supports, for example to extend medical benefits for people in training and to assist people returning to work, are also needed.

#### **5. Education**

Education should be accessible to everyone. Barriers to education and self-sufficiency need to be addressed. These barriers include living allowances for food and other necessities, such as shelter, child care, and transportation. More support is needed for adult students including funding for those accessing adult literacy and basic education (ALBE) programs.

Stories of educational success need to be documented. Efforts are needed to determine how the education system can better serve northerners (e.g. crediting what youth are interested in). Good school nutrition programs are also needed because those programs currently in place are “getting good feedback.” Consideration might also be given to a scholarship program for children of public housing tenants (e.g. similar to the Newfoundland-Labrador initiative that has been running since 2006/07).

#### **6. Employment**

The minimum wage in the NWT should be enough to live on so people are not “relegated to living in poverty and [on] income support.” Mentoring should be available to promote employment (e.g. managerial training).

Many northern people have past traumatic experiences that need to be resolved.



## 7. Justice

The operation of the legal system, including enforcement, contributes to poverty. People with low incomes are not always able to access legal aid or get sufficient legal aid to address non-payment of maintenance support. As a result, the NWT has become “a haven for people who want to avoid paying maintenance support.”

Punitive measures, such as imprisonment, contribute to poverty. For instance, imprisonment of a main household income earner can harm the economic security of an entire family. Alternative approaches such as home sentencing or on-the-land programs would be more helpful.

## 8. Elders

Elders/seniors are particularly vulnerable to poverty. Pensions need to be improved. Policies need to be altered so people can pursue opportunities to earn income without penalties (e.g. ‘claw backs’).

## 9. Youth

Community specific supports focused on barriers in youths’ lives and youth week-end and overnight shelter programs are needed. Youth who are 14-18 years of age are vulnerable to homelessness and poverty. They are ineligible for income support and may be unable to be placed in foster care. The Side Door Youth Centre in Yellowknife should be copied in more NWT communities.

## 10. Poverty Education and Awareness

Good communications and education are keys to understanding and taking action on poverty. Education of government employees and the public about poverty, and greater media attention to the issue are needed. There is also a need for more education and cooperative work among decision makers about how/where resources are allocated and the impact they have on fighting poverty.

Interagency committees and groups formed to promote awareness would facilitate understanding of poverty. Northerners also need to be encouraged to tell their stories of poverty and success stories should be promoted.

Policies need to be altered so people can pursue opportunities to earn income without penalties...

Interagency committees and groups formed to promote awareness would facilitate understanding of poverty.

Policies and programs need to shift... to what people need not only to survive but also to succeed.

Government and industry have to link economic and social development.

Language and messages need to eliminate the stigma of poverty. Messages need to stop victimizing the victim (e.g. that poverty is people's own fault). So far, anti-poverty efforts "haven't been able to communicate that economic development comes from solid social development." Messages about poverty need to be linked to businesses' message (e.g. business needs workers: northerners need work, well-paying work).

### **11. Systemic**

All social programs need to work together rather than against each other to address poverty. "We are contributing to the level of poverty by not allowing assistance to work together. This keeps people in poverty..." Policies and programs need to shift away from an attitude of "as little as possible" to what people need not only to survive but also to succeed. Policies and programs must serve real needs. They need to consider affordability as well as accessibility.

Existing public policies and programs are not working together. They create barriers and cause people to fall through the cracks into poverty (e.g. housing policies). Policies and programs need to be revamped, streamlined, and made sustainable so people can help themselves in the short and long term. Resources need to be reallocated to eliminate perverse subsidies (e.g. on alcohol rather than nutritious food) and improve funding of programs that serve people in need. Public policy needs to take a system-wide approach and be developed by a partnership of government, business, non-profit service providers and voluntary community groups, rather than by government alone. Legislated remedies are important because policies and programs are too vulnerable to political change.

Fiscal policy requires fundamental change. Although our territory is rich in resources, mines and other industries are not contributing to the tax system in a way that supports social programs and helps people in poverty. Economic and social development are currently separated in two spheres. They should be treated as interdependent. Government and industry have to link economic and social development. Industry needs to share the responsibility for poverty. Governments need to invest in people rather than industry. Better monitoring and review of impact benefit agreements (IBAs) is also needed to ensure that people are receiving agreed upon

benefits such as employment.

## 12. Leadership

The time has passed for study. “We don’t need any more studies of what is not working.” Too many past and current governments “just talk about what can be done rather than put words into action.” The NWT needs a mix of political will, experts, social agencies, and most importantly, the families affected to take action on poverty. A political/government strategy is needed to meet the priorities of northern people. The strategy needs to recognize that there is no “one size fits all” solution. It needs to respect community strengths and efforts.

In each riding, the MLA should host meetings to identify critical local requirements and priorities for poverty reduction. Policy makers need to meet with front-line workers and NGOs when (re)evaluating programs. “Frontline workers are the experts and know what policies are ineffective and unethical.” It is important that local/community anti-poverty advocates take a human rights rather than a moral approach to actions against poverty to remind the federal and territorial governments of their legal obligations to citizens.

## 13. Ethics, Inclusion and Resources

At least three ethics should guide anti-poverty efforts in the NWT. There should be a commitment to: 1) measure the state of our society and identify minimum standards (e.g. basic living needs, realistic rent); 2) develop and value partnerships that are working toward healthy, sustainable communities; and 3) distribute resources equitably. Inclusive approaches are necessary to deal with poverty within all levels of government to ensure responsibility and accountability including for standards.

“People don’t become poor overnight. There are a lot of factors.” These factors differ among communities, so responses need to differ. Community involvement/inclusion is needed to organize effective and appropriate actions on poverty. Interagency committees should be re-established with clear goals so local groups and citizens can work together to meet needs. “Now the right hand doesn’t know what the left hand is doing. Clients

The strategy needs to recognize that there is no “one size fits all” solution.

“Frontline workers are the experts and know what policies are ineffective and unethical.”

– Workshop participant



can't always speak for themselves." It is a good idea to look at successful community-based approaches that offer different solutions for people in different situations and use different approaches to break poverty cycles. "Community-based efforts to reduce poverty are most effective."

The case for adequate and fairly distributed resources to address poverty should be based on full cost accounting (e.g. to better make the case for capital and operations and maintenance funds to jump start initiatives by showing the true cost of non-investment in social programs). Core funding is needed for NGOs that provide social services. Front-line workers employed by NGOs should receive competitive salaries and benefits in order to retain staff. Acknowledging and respecting community efforts should extend to wage parity not only among the sectors in Yellowknife but among all NWT communities.

**Tony Martin** commented on suggested anti-poverty efforts that might work in the NWT. Housing is common to anti-poverty efforts across the country. "People can't do anything without a place to be safe." Education is key to full participation in society. Early childhood learning is needed to give children a good start. While citizens know what needs to be done, it is a challenge for governments to work together to meet people's needs. Nevertheless, governments have to work together to tackle poverty.

## Day Two Discussions

### Debunking Myths

**Rob Rainer**, of Canada Without Poverty and the CWP Advocacy Network, spoke about eight poverty myths in Canada.

1. **Myth:** There is no poverty in Canada and no one starves to death in this country.

**Fact:** Poverty is both an absolute and a relative concept. It is absolute because there are basic needs that must be met to ensure people aren't poor. Poverty is relative in that inequality in society means that some individuals are "deprived of the resources, means, choices, and power necessary to acquire and maintain economic self-sufficiency and participation in society."<sup>14</sup>

2. **Myth:** People in poverty in Canada are just a little bit poor.

**Fact:** The average depth of poverty in Canada is measured by how far people are below the low income cut-off after tax threshold. Using this measure, the depth of poverty is increasing. On an individual basis, for every \$100 a person in poverty needed to meet basic needs in 2006, he or she was missing \$20. The poverty gap is particularly great for lone-parent households and single individuals including seniors.

3. **Myth:** Canada is getting richer and the number of people in poverty is decreasing.

**Fact:** This is a 'sleeper' issue that urgently needs attention. Few provincial/ territorial poverty initiatives address growing inequality. In terms of net worth, Canadian wealth is increasing but mainly for the top 50% of Canadian households. Income and wealth inequality is being heavily driven by the top 1% of income earners. The highest paid CEOs in Canada only need to work about 13 hours to earn what the average Canadian minimum wage worker earns in an entire year. Over the past decades, Canada's poverty rate (inferred from the low income cut-off after tax) has persisted at 10% to 16% of households.

“Inequality in society means that some individuals are deprived of the resources, means, choices, and power necessary to acquire and maintain economic self-sufficiency and participation in society.”

– Québec Bill 112,  
*A National Strategy to  
Combat Poverty and Social  
Exclusion*

<sup>14</sup> quote from Québec Bill 112, A National Strategy to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion.

4. **Myth:** Getting a job is the key to avoiding poverty.

**Fact:** Having a job lowers the likelihood of poverty and having two working adults in the household further decreases the risk. Canada has one of the highest rates of low-paid workers among industrialized countries. About one in six workers (one in five female workers and one in 10 full-time workers) are earning poverty wages. No minimum wage rate in Canada comes close to reaching the level of a living wage: the highest minimum wage rates pay about 66% to 75% of living wage rates. While single adults and lone-parent families are at the greatest risk, poverty rates have been increasing for two-parent families. The state of the economy influences poverty trends. Often poverty trends for working age adults mirror unemployment rates. But the economy is not the only factor. Social policy or the strength or weakness of the social safety net is as or more important than employment in poverty prevention and reduction. Major changes in social policy have contributed to poverty since the early to mid-1990s. A robust social safety net can reduce poverty in times of unemployment.

5. **Myth:** Education is a way out of poverty.

**Fact:** Poverty rates are greatest for single people and lone-parent families even though these people might have a high level of education. Family status is a more important factor than education. Single individuals living in deep poverty span all age groups. In Canada, 48% are less than 35 years of age. Poverty initiatives need to pay attention to single individuals.

6. **Myth:** People in poverty depend on welfare.

**Fact:** More than half (58%) of poor families relied mainly on employment earnings in 2007. Of poor couples without children 57% relied mainly on earnings. Just 25% of poor single individuals relied mainly on welfare with 47% relying on earnings.

7. **Myth:** Poverty is too expensive for Canadian society to fix.

**Fact:** Canada's total poverty gap – the amount of money needed to bring all people living in poverty up to the poverty line – was \$12.3 billion in 2007. In comparison, Canada's gross domestic

product in 2007 was \$1.5 trillion, 124 times higher. The poverty gap was also the equivalent of only 1.5% of the total market income earned by all Canadians in 2007. We can make the choice to address poverty but so far, as a society, we are not making it a priority. It is cheaper to invest in eliminating poverty rather than to use band-aids or avoid the problem.

8. **Myth:** The poor shall always be with us.

**Fact:** Mr. Rainer quoted Nelson Mandela to challenge this myth. Mandela said that “like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings.”

In response to questions, Mr. Rainer said that investing in poverty is a strategy to reduce health costs. As one workshop participant noted, this is particularly true in the NWT where chronic disease, obesity, and an aging population are driving up health care costs. As an economic issue, poverty hinders prosperity and productivity. Poverty is also a human rights issue. All Canadians have a moral and legal right to housing and food. Poverty advocates need to draw governments’ attention to their legal responsibilities and remind them that Canadians have the right to housing and food security.

Investing in poverty is a strategy to reduce health costs.

## Measuring the Success of Anti-Poverty Efforts

Three panelists described approaches and ideas for measuring the success of anti-poverty efforts.

**Liz Weaver**, Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement in Ontario, said that every community has to identify poverty and local successes that prevent it. She said that “we are all part of the problem and part of the solution.” In an experiment, 13 Canadian communities participated in the Vibrant Communities initiative, a community-based approach to reduce poverty. The 13 communities used the sustainable livelihoods framework (shown on page 9) to generate change in three main areas – policy and systems, community capacity, and individual and household assets.

The results of the Vibrant Communities initiative are impressive. Collectively, for every one dollar invested in the communities to address poverty, \$4 was generated locally.

The results of the Vibrant Communities initiative are impressive. Collectively, for every one dollar invested in the communities to address poverty, \$4 was generated locally. The communities started tax clinics; changed employer practices; brought in living wage policies; made transit affordable; revitalized neighbourhoods; strengthened income supports and early learning; built social ties; improved access to health and education; and influenced substantive change in government policy.

The Vibrant Communities' comprehensive, multi-sectoral and community-based approach to poverty reduction brings people together and builds social unity. Long term funding, leadership, and the courage to take action are essential. At all levels, it is critical to have the will to tackle poverty.

**Rob Rainer**, Canada Without Poverty and the CWP Advocacy Network, stressed the importance of process in tackling and measuring anti-poverty efforts. Looking at the various anti-poverty efforts across the country, New Brunswick is a model for its clear vision and measurable actions. The Newfoundland-Labrador plan also has clear targets and measurable actions. It provides a good example of accountability by reporting progress on the difference that investment in poverty is making. New Brunswick is a model for the equality of participation of the three sectors as well as the involvement of people with the lived experience of poverty. Mr. Rainer emphasized the need to bind governments to a long term commitment to poverty eradication. Legislation is the best tool to do this. He advised that efforts to address poverty in the NWT would benefit from a strong focus on human rights.

**Ed McKenna**, Government of Nunavut (GN), explained the work that is beginning in that territory to reduce poverty. In 2010, the GN established the Nunavut Anti-Poverty Secretariat. The Nunavut Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, a new inter-agency NGO, has been established to support collaboration on poverty reduction among governments, Inuit organizations, the voluntary sector, and the business community. A collaborative approach is needed because "government alone cannot solve the poverty problem." Mr. McKenna noted that government's role in poverty reduction is complicated and requires constant re-balancing within the collaborative process.



The GN is developing an action plan for the fall of 2011. The plan will have a shared vision and goals. Premier Eva Arreak's vision is that by 2030, no child or family in Nunavut will go hungry. Research will be done to understand how poverty works in Nunavut and what social inclusion and poverty look like within the culture of the territory. The territory is also looking at evolving a common definition and data on measures of poverty. A collaborative public engagement process will be launched and sustained to "allow citizens themselves to frame the issue through their experience and knowledge." A collaborative approach to poverty is also described in the GN's *Tamapta Action Plan, 2009-2013*. Mr. McKenna said "process is all important" because of the complexity of poverty and the reality that there is no single understanding, source, or responsibility for poverty.

Nunavut will adapt the New Brunswick public engagement model and draw on the work of Vibrant Communities to empower citizens and organizations to take action on poverty.

**Workshop participants** identified ten key anti-poverty efforts needed in the NWT and within the time allowed, offered some recommendations for ways that they might be monitored and measured.

## 1. Housing

Quality, affordable housing is needed. In Yellowknife alone, there are 928 households spending over 30% of their net income on housing. Every northerner should be involved in the review of affordable housing policies and solutions. There is a need to increase transitional supports, improve access to housing, and review rental structures. Flexibility in programs is needed to allow people to get out of debt. Consideration should also be given to capping rents/ establishing a rental scale adjusted to income, and increasing the portability of subsidies (rather than tying them to public housing). Action needs to be taken to increase the number of housing units, fix existing units, and support home ownership. Government needs to move away from Public/Private/Partnerships (P3s) and work more closely with NGOs to ensure security of housing infrastructure. Action on housing needs to be monitored by collecting data, for example, on people in shelters, housing occupancy, vacancies, level of debts/arrears, and hospitalization rates.

A sustained focus on early learning and early childhood programs are keys to life success.

## **2. Child Care**

A sustained focus on early learning and early childhood programs are keys to life success. The Headstart Program is a model, as is Quebec's publicly funded, publicly delivered, universal, accessible, \$7/day child care program. Training and adequate pay for early childhood workers are needed. The Aurora College training program needs to be streamlined to increase the number of qualified early childhood workers. A child advocate/ombudsperson is also needed.

## **3. Income and Food Security**

People are entitled to a living wage and to having their basic needs met so that they can fully participate in society. Policies should recognize that basic needs vary. Policy support is needed to improve food security measures such as support for the domestic economy and subsidizing traditional and nutritious foods. Income Support needs to reflect the real cost of food. Income security programs need to be supported by life skills/home management programs. School nutrition/breakfast programs should be supported.

## **4. Health and Mental Health**

Mental health and addictions issues including gambling, and the impacts of residential school such as loss of parenting skills need to be addressed. Addictions treatment and aftercare services are needed in every community. Traditional healing/cultural camps are a resource for addressing social issues.

## **5. Education**

Several changes to the education system are needed. Student attendance and success are the main issues. There is a need to address school/community/family roles, the inclusive schooling policy, understanding of different high school streams, different ways of learning, school and transitional counselling, small community schools, and learning disabilities. There is a need to define northerners' education needs and expectations and to make education and the education system more relevant.

## **6. Employment**

A full-time worker should not live in poverty. Living wage legislation that is relevant to each community in the NWT is needed. Flexible programs are also needed to facilitate the transition of workers into the workforce.

## **7. Poverty Awareness**

People need to know that everyone has a role to play to eliminate poverty. Education and awareness of poverty are needed to gain the support of, and see action by, business, politicians, service deliverers, and the broader community. Poverty needs to be defined. Social networking and sharing, including elders sharing wisdom, is very powerful and should be encouraged.

## **8. Systemic**

Locally developed, integrated, and flexible programs that recognize the important role of traditional values and skills are a way to address each community's needs, reduce service gaps, and eliminate the disconnect between policy makers and "those on the ground."

A poverty secretariat should be established to focus poverty elimination efforts in the personal, financial, social, human and physical areas. Full cost accounting is needed to account for the real cost of poverty and the real cost and benefit of eliminating it. Changes are needed to the tax structure to address gaps between low and high incomes and the contributions that business makes to fighting poverty.

## **9. Leadership**

There is a need for broad representation at the policy making table. Political will and leadership are needed to enable communities to take power and to support individuals and groups taking action on poverty.

## **10. Research and Collaboration**

Anti-poverty efforts need to be collaborative and integrated in design and delivery and in the way they are monitored. Local people should be involved in all phases of anti-poverty efforts. Realistic

A full-time worker  
should not live in  
poverty.

qualitative and quantitative indicators and measures that are relevant and have meaning for northern communities are needed to effectively monitor efforts. Some of these measures might be crime rates, the number of people in jail, the number of children in foster care, and the number of people using shelters, food banks, and transitional housing as well as other known barriers/challenges. Community-specific consumption and need surveys might be good monitoring tools. Investments and outcomes should be reported by community and agency/department. Legislation is needed to ensure reporting and a long term commitment to poverty elimination. Monitoring efforts should extend to the media and the work of MLAs in their constituencies. Monitoring can be supported through community stories/films that tell “human stories.”

Partnerships are needed that engages government at all levels, non-government organizations and business...

Anti-poverty partnerships are needed that engage government at all levels, non-government organizations, and business, including business organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce and the Chamber of Mines. The NWT Association of Communities model of asset mapping and capacity building or the Vibrant Communities community development approach can be used to foster partnerships and collaboration. Strengthening interagency committees and core funding for key community service agencies could build local capacity to support collaboration and partnerships.

Government departments and agencies need to improve communications between programs and with clients and front-line workers. Collaboration is needed to support front line workers.

## Priorities for Moving Forward on Anti-Poverty

**Workshop participants** made an extensive list of priorities for moving forward on poverty. In a voting exercise, thirty (30) priorities received at least one vote. These are:

1. Establish a process that involves everyone (18 votes).
2. Address housing issues, namely review affordable housing including rent structure; cap rents; support home ownership; increase access; and increase transitional housing for all in need (17 votes).
3. Increase program flexibility to allow people to get out of debt (11 votes).
4. Follow the Quebec model for accessible, affordable childcare (10 votes).
5. Empower communities (10 votes).
6. Raise awareness of poverty (9 votes).
7. Put in place policy/legislation on living wage (9 votes).
8. Implement food security measures (9 votes).
9. Form partnerships among government/public organizations, business and NGOs (8 votes).
10. Establish a secretariat for the anti-poverty strategy (7 votes).
11. Look at net income instead of gross income for all social programs (5 votes).
12. Recognize the role of labour (5 votes).
13. Invest revenue from resources in fighting poverty (5 votes).
14. Focus on social issues such as mental health, addictions, residential school impacts, and gambling (4 votes).
15. Reflect culture in programs (4 votes).
16. Strengthen political will (3 votes).
17. Have community-specific programs to meet community-specific needs (3 votes).
18. Review the tax structure to reduce income gaps (2 votes).

19. For community data, use northern statistics that matter/not market measures (2 votes).
20. Remove barriers and subsidize traditional harvesting (2 votes).
21. Implement a process for frontline workers to critique public policy (2 votes).
22. Consider replicating elements of the Newfoundland-Labrador model (1 vote).
23. Change social policies (1 vote).
24. Revamp current programs to improve responses to poverty (1 vote).
25. Improve communications among programs (1 vote).
26. Use traditional healing/cultural camps (1 vote).
27. Define poverty (1 vote).
28. Subsidize traditional foods not alcohol (1 vote).
29. Focus on holistic systems for success (1 vote).
30. Review income thresholds (1 vote).



## Moving Forward on Anti-Poverty

**Workshop participants** offered direction and advice on a process for moving forward on poverty. They suggested:

- a territorial strategy for poverty elimination developed from the best model in Canada (e.g. New Brunswick) with regional/ community strategies that empower communities to implement their own solutions.
- a public education and awareness campaign that includes telling NWT stories of poverty.
- overhauling procedures to take a holistic and interdepartmental approach to serving clients and personalizing assessments so they are client driven.
- applying the integrated service delivery model used by the GNWT Department of Health and Social Services throughout the government.
- engaging affected populations and ensuring gender equity in all poverty planning/actions.

**Workshop participants** offered suggestions for moving forward on four anti-poverty priorities.

### **Priority: Establish a process that involves everyone.**

To involve all northerners in anti-poverty efforts, ongoing public education and awareness are needed. A public campaign needs to build on and value personal stories. It might include media coverage of people of influence trying to live on income support for a period of time. Community conversations are also needed.

Political will at all levels is needed to support inclusive and community-specific action on poverty. Inclusive anti-poverty efforts need to involve people living in poverty, front-line workers, public and Aboriginal governments, businesses, the faith community, and voluntary organizations/NGOs in a multi-sector committee to oversee the process. A terms of reference and multi-sector agreements would help the committee and others work together on poverty.

A social inclusion commission funded by government is needed. It should bring together people living in poverty, front-line workers, public and Aboriginal governments, businesses, the faith

community, and voluntary organizations/NGOs. It should be at arms length from governments, be built on best practices, and supported by legislation and policies. The commission should use gender equity principles.

**Priority: Housing**

Vacant houses in communities should be occupied by people in need. Land tenancy issues should be resolved, even if solutions are only temporary. Rent control options need to be pursued through such approaches as rent scale review, caps on rent and/or rent control legislation. Options for affordable housing need to be tried in all communities.

Accountability on public housing needs to be improved. Partnerships need to be forged between local people and housing associations. Public housing tenants, including those in arrears, need to be involved in decision making with local housing groups.

**Priority: Flexibility in programs to allow people to get out of debt**

Flexibility is needed in all income security programs but an immediate priority is housing debt. Public programs need to adopt the goal of helping people out of poverty and provide multiple tools “not just rules” to achieve this goal. In other words, income security programs need to remove barriers and be ‘poverty proof.’ Ways to achieve this include community-based programming, front-line and client participation in solutions, matching benefits to cost of living and income, and increasing income exemptions. More transitional and life skills supports are also needed to enable individuals to take control of their lives (e.g. budgeting skills).

**Priority: Quebec model for accessible, affordable childcare**

The Quebec model needs to be better understood and work must be done to copy it in the NWT, while recognizing our distinct community and territorial circumstances. This work can be supported by dialogue in each community, involvement of men and elders in child care solutions, and more supports for child care workers.



## Recommendations for Next Steps

**Workshop participants** recommended these next steps.

1. A coalition of stakeholders should work together to call on all orders of government, private sector, and non-profit organizations to collaborate on the creation of an integrated, fully-resourced strategy for eliminating poverty in the NWT.
2. Within two months and with appropriate funding and resources, Alternatives North should work with the Poverty Coalition (a coalition of stakeholders) to establish a process that will lead to an arm's length steering group with broad stakeholder representation, to work toward an anti-poverty strategy for the NWT.
3. Legislation should be put in place to establish an independent commission to address poverty in the NWT. The commission will represent all stakeholders 'from the grassroots up'. The commission will have dedicated resources; be empowered to make binding recommendations on poverty; and have a mechanism to hear community voices. As a starting point, the commission will take its mandate from this workshop.
4. Action should be taken to influence political will and grow the movement on poverty, including enacting legislation (e.g. through amendment to the *NWT Act*) to support non-violent direct action on poverty regardless of who is in power, and encourage social development work at the local level. Actions could include MLA candidate forums to champion movements on poverty at the community level and support for community-based interagency work that focuses on poverty reduction.
5. 'Whistle blower' legislation should be put in place with an ombudsperson to enable government workers to speak out on ways to end poverty and on public policies and programs that contribute to poverty.

## Next Steps by Sponsoring Organizations and MLAs

Aggie Brockman and Julie Green thanked everyone for their participation and committed to providing participants with a workshop report and to working with the GNWT to ensure the direction from the workshop is considered. MLAs Wendy Bisaro, David Krutko, and Bob Bromley committed to following up on the Workshop and encouraged people to remain active in addressing poverty.

A closing prayer circle was led by elder Eileen Koe of Fort McPherson.

## Workshop Participants

Adam Speirs, NWT Council of Persons with Disabilities, Yellowknife  
Amanda Mallon, City Councillor, Yellowknife  
Andrea Hunter, GNWT Executive, Yellowknife  
Annemeike Mulders, Status of Women Council of the NWT,  
Yellowknife  
Arlene Hache, Centre for Northern Families, Yellowknife  
Barbara Lacey, Yellowknife Health and Social Services Authority,  
Yellowknife  
Bill Thomas, Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition, Whitehorse  
Bob Bromley, MLA Weledeh, Yellowknife  
Bree Denning, Institute for Circumpolar Health Research/Centre for  
Northern Families, Yellowknife  
Carol Ann Chaplin, Yellowknife Health and Social Services Authority,  
Fort Resolution  
Carol Heron-Colosimo, Hay River Health and Social Services  
Authority, Hay River  
Catherine Boyd, GNWT Education, Culture and Employment,  
Yellowknife  
Cecile Baton, Deline  
Clara Sabourin, Katlodeeche First Nation, Hay River Reserve  
Clarinda Spijkerman, GNWT Justice, Yellowknife  
Dana Britton, Breakfast for Learning, Yellowknife  
David Krutko, MLA Mackenzie Delta, Fort McPherson  
Dawn McInnes, GNWT Justice, Yellowknife  
Dennis Bevington, MP Western Arctic, Fort Smith  
Dyanne Doctor, Tulita Yamouria Community Secretariat, Tulita  
Ed McKenna, Government of Nunavut Anti-Poverty Secretariat,  
Iqaluit  
Eileen Koe, Tetlit Gwich'in Council/TI'oondih Healing Society, Fort  
McPherson  
France Benoit, Territorial Farmers Association, Yellowknife.  
Frank Arrowmaker, Community Government, Gamètì  
Gayla Thunstrom, Union of Northern Workers, Yellowknife  
Georgina Jacobson-Masuzumi, Tuktoyaktuk  
Glen Abernethy, MLA Great Slave, Yellowknife

Gloria Enzoe, Łutsel K'e Dene First Nation, Łutsel K'e  
Gloria Iatridis, GNWT Education, Culture and Employment,  
Yellowknife  
Gordon Ross, NWT Association of Communities, Yellowknife  
Gord Van Tighem, Mayor, Yellowknife  
Helen Balanoff, NWT Literacy Council, Yellowknife  
Herb Nakimayak, Hamlet of Paulatuk, Paulatuk  
Herbert Blake Jr., Nihat Gwich'in Council, Inuvik  
JC Catholique, Association of Social Workers in Northern Canada,  
Łutsel K'e  
Jill Christensen, Yellowknife Health and Social Services Authority,  
Yellowknife  
Joanne McGrath, Food First Foundation, Yellowknife  
Jolene Saturnino, GNWT Education, Culture and Employment,  
Yellowknife  
Joyce Jumbo, Sombaa K'e Dene Band, Trout Lake  
Kate Wilson, YWCA Yellowknife, Yellowknife  
Kathryn Barry Paddock, NWT Literacy Council, Yellowknife  
Laura Rose, Hay River Soup Kitchen, Hay River  
Lisa Cardinal, GNWT Health and Social Services, Yellowknife  
Liz Weaver, Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement, Waterloo  
Lone Hegeman, Food Rescue, Yellowknife  
Lorna Elias, Ingamo Hall Friendship Centre, Inuvik  
Lorraine Hewlett, Public Service Alliance of Canada Women's  
Committee, Yellowknife  
Lorraine Phaneuf, Status of Women Council of the NWT, Yellowknife  
Lydia Bardak, John Howard Society of the NWT, Yellowknife  
Lynn Foley, Yellowknife Health and Social Services Authority,  
Yellowknife  
Mark Mossey, Maliiganik Tukisiinaikvik Legal Services, Government of  
Nunavut, Iqaluit  
Mary Ann Jeremick'ca, Tlicho Government, Whati  
Mary Lou Cherwaty, Northern Territories Federation of Labour,  
Yellowknife  
Mary Poitras, Fort Smith Food Bank, Fort Smith  
Melissa Doctor, Yellowknives Dene First Nation, Yellowknife  
Michelle Gillis, NWT Council of Persons with Disabilities, Yellowknife

Mira Hall, Alternatives North, Yellowknife  
Monica Godard, Yellowknives Dene First Nation, Yellowknife  
Natasha Harris, GNWT Education, Culture and Employment, Fort  
Simpson  
Noella Kodzin, Wekweèti  
Nora Wedzin, Tlicho Community Services Agency, Behchokö  
Paula McFadyen, NWT Housing Corporation, Yellowknife  
Rachel Abel, Yellowknife Health and Social Services Authority,  
Yellowknife  
Rev. Ron McLean, Holy Trinity Anglican Church/Yellowknife Seniors  
Society, Yellowknife  
Rita Arey, Beaufort Delta Health and Social Services Authority,  
Aklavik  
Rob Rainer, Canada Without Poverty, Ottawa  
Ruby Trudel, Yellowknife Food Rescue/Yellowknife Food Bank,  
Yellowknife  
Ryan Strain, GNWT Justice, Yellowknife  
Sandra Lockhart, Public Service Alliance of Canada Aboriginal  
Peoples Committee, Yellowknife  
Sheila Nelson, Yellowknife Health and Social Services Authority,  
Yellowknife  
Shirley Wilkinson, Yellowknife Health and Social Services Authority,  
Yellowknife  
Sigrun Gerisdottir, GNWT Executive, Yellowknife  
Spencer Tracy, Native Women's Association of the NWT, Yellowknife.  
Stephanie Poole, Łutsel K'e Dene First Nation, Łutsel K'e  
Stephen Pretty, NWT Housing Corporation, Yellowknife  
Suzette Montreuil, Roman Catholic Diocese of Mackenzie, Yellowknife  
Valerie Conrad, Poverty Lawyer, Yellowknife  
Vishni Peeris, GNWT Executive, Yellowknife  
Violet Edgi, K'asho Got'ine, Fort Good Hope  
Wendy Bisaro, MLA Frame Lake, Yellowknife  
Yasemin Heyck, Yellowknife Education District #1, Yellowknife

# Anti-Poverty Workshop

October 5-7, 2010

Northern United Place, Yellowknife, NWT

## Agenda

### **Workshop Objectives:**

1. Deepen understanding of the experiences and definitions of poverty.
2. Learn about anti-poverty efforts.
3. Consider ways to measure the effectiveness and appropriateness of anti-poverty initiatives.
4. Establish anti-poverty priorities.
5. Make recommendations on a process for moving forward on anti-poverty initiatives in the NWT.
6. Make recommendations on next steps to follow-up on this workshop.

### **Expected Outcomes:**

1. Heightened profile and understanding of poverty.
2. Recommendations on anti-poverty priorities and GNWT actions.
3. Recommendations on a process for developing an anti-poverty strategy for the NWT.
4. Broader engagement in anti-poverty efforts.

### **Organizers:**

Alternatives North  
YWCA of Yellowknife

### **Participants and Guests:**

People living in poverty  
Anti-Poverty Alliance members  
Government managers and front-line workers  
Elected leaders  
Individuals, organizations, and businesses fighting poverty

### **Facilitator:**

Lois Little, Lutra Associates Ltd.

## Tuesday, October 5, 2010

5:30-7:00 pm Registration

7:00 pm Screening: **Poor No More**

This film is hosted by comedian, actor and activist, Mary Walsh. It offers solutions to Canada's working poor and to those who can't find work.

## Wednesday, October 6, 2010

7:30 – 8:20 am Registration

8:30 am **Call to Order**

**Welcome and Opening Prayer**

Chief Eddie Sangris, Yellowknives Dene First Nation

**Opening Remarks**

Aggie Brockman, Alternatives North

Julie Green, YWCA of Yellowknife

Wendy Bisaro, MLA, Frame Lake, the sponsor of the  
Legislative Assembly NWT Anti-Poverty Strategy motion

**Introductions, Agenda, and Housekeeping**, Lois Little

9:10 am **Keynote Address**

In June 2010, *Tony Martin*, Member of Parliament for Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario introduced a bill in the House of Commons to eliminate poverty. Mr. Martin's address will look at ways that poverty can be overcome when citizens work together.

9:40 am Brief Q & A

9:50 am **Anti-Poverty Work Within the Government of the NWT**

Dave Stewart, GNWT Department of the Executive

10:00 am **Health Break**

*Sponsored by the Northern Territories Federation of Labour*

10:15 am	<p><b>The Face of Poverty in the NWT</b> Lydia Bardak, John Howard Society; Kate Wilson, YWCA Yellowknife; Laura Rose, Hay River Soup Kitchen; and Gloria Enzoe and Stephanie Poole, Lutselk'e Dene First Nation speak of their experiences as service providers.</p>
11:00 am	<p><b>Poverty Defined (or Not)</b> Who is poor? A panel will examine successful processes to deal with the challenges of defining poverty in ways that make sense to everyone regardless of where they live and their circumstances. Panel members will include Liz Weaver, Tamarack – An Institute for Community Engagement, Ontario; Suzette Montreuil, Alternatives North; and Vishni Peeris, Territorial Statistician, GNWT. Following the Presentations, we'll watch the short PSAC video "<i>Pennies for Prosperity.</i>"</p>
11:45 am	<p><b>Poverty Defined (or Not) cont'd</b> Through discussion with others at the table, we will consider how poverty should be defined in the NWT and the processes needed to facilitate definition. Suggestions and recommendations will be posted for others to contemplate.</p>
12:15 pm	<p><b>Lunch</b> (served on site)</p>
1:30 pm	<p><b>Tackling Poverty</b> A panel will highlight key anti-poverty initiatives. Panelists are Liz Weaver, Tamarack – An Institute for Community Engagement, Ontario and Bill Thomas, Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition.</p>
2:30 pm	<p><b>Anti-Poverty Efforts that Work</b> In small groups we will explore anti-poverty efforts that might work in the NWT. We will also consider what could make them work (e.g. the personal assets of individuals? the service model?)?</p>
3:00 pm	<p><b>Health Break</b> Sponsored by the Northern Territories Federation of Labour</p>
3:15 pm	<p><b>Anti-Poverty Efforts that Work cont'd</b> Small groups will share their best thinking on possibilities for anti-poverty efforts in the NWT.</p>
4:00 pm	<p><b>Summary of the Day and Forecast for Day Two</b></p>



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## Thursday, October 7, 2010

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8:30 am	<b>Call to Order</b>  <b>Debunking Myths</b> Rob Rainer, Canada Without Poverty and the CWP Advocacy Network will explore and debunk myths about poverty in Canada.
9:10 am	Q & A
9:30 am	<b>Measuring the Success of Anti-Poverty Efforts</b> A panel will share approaches and ideas for measuring the success of anti-poverty efforts. Panelists are: Liz Weaver, Tamarack – An Institute for Community Engagement, Ontario; Rob Rainer, Canada Without Poverty and the CWP Advocacy Network; Bill Thomas, Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition; and Ed McKenna, Government of Nunavut.
10:30 am	<b>Health Break</b> <i>Sponsored by the Northern Territories Federation of Labour</i>
10:45 am	<b>Measuring Success of Anti-Poverty Efforts</b> cont'd In small groups we will identify key anti-poverty efforts needed in the NWT and recommend ways that they might be monitored and measured.
11:30 am	<b>Measuring Success of Anti-Poverty Efforts</b> cont'd Small groups will share their discussions with others. Anti-poverty efforts recommended in small groups will be listed and prioritized by participants over lunch.
12:15 pm	<b>Lunch</b> (served on site)
1:30 pm	<b>Our Priorities for Moving Forward on Anti-Poverty</b>
1:40 pm	<b>Moving Forward on Anti-Poverty</b> Through discussion with others at the table, we will decide on the direction and give advice on a process for moving forward on anti-poverty priorities. Discussions will be shared in plenary.
3:00 pm	<b>Health Break</b> <i>Sponsored by the Northern Territories Federation of Labour</i>

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3:15 pm

**Recommendations for Next Steps**

In discussion with others at the table, we will seek consensus on recommendations for next steps. Recommendations will be shared in plenary.

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4:15 pm

**Next Steps Expected by Sponsoring Organizations and MLAs**

Aggie Brockman, Alternatives North  
Julie Green, YWCA of Yellowknife  
Participating MLAs

**Workshop Evaluation**

**Closing Prayer** (TBA)

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7:00 pm

**Northern Arts and Cultural Centre**

Screening: **Poor No More**

This film is hosted by comedian, actor and activist, Mary Walsh. It offers solutions to Canada's working poor and to those who can't find work.

Following the film, Mary Walsh will share her thoughts on poverty elimination.



NO  
PLACE for  
**Poverty** Workshop Report

Northern United Place, Yellowknife, NT October 5-7, 2010