

# Government of Alberta Social Policy Framework Public Consultation

Focus Group Summary Notes: Old Strathcona Youth Society

Facilitated by the Edmonton Social Planning Council

With support from the United Way of Alberta Capital Region, the City of Edmonton, and FCSS

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## VISION

Question 1: What words would you include in your vision for social policy?

Probe Questions:

- a) If your vision became reality, how would people from outside the province describe Alberta's social policy approach?
- b) What do the words in the proposed vision mean to you?

### What words would you include in your vision for social policy?

- Person-centered (programs and services for individuals in need)
- Equal access (to programs/services)
- Investing in people (skills development/employment training)
- Accountability (both for the individual and governments)

### What do the words in the proposed vision mean to you?

- I agree with some of the proposed vision.
  - There's lots of money being put into some organizations like the Youth Empowerment and Support Services (YESS), HOPE Mission, and the Old Strathcona Youth Co-op where there are social workers that help you. I think it's pretty fair. There are many other places that done have this and many people who don't have access to programs and services.
  - They want to get us off the streets but won't hire us.
- I agree with parts of the statement
  - It's a good place to live, raise family. But if everyone had a job, then none of us would be here using these services. Not everybody can work. Not everyone with a criminal record will get work. Before I was injured, I was sending out 50 resumes every day. I wasn't hired for any of those jobs. I had one job for 5 years but I left after one day because I was suffering from insomnia. They don't want to hire people with a criminal record.
- I disagree with the proposed vision.
  - We have the oil sands, and we are expected to be a booming province, but there are people who are unemployed. After the most recent recession, I lost my job and my wallet, and ended up on the street. There needs to be programs that will help you when you are down. Temporary employers won't hire me because I don't have identification or a Social Insurance Card.
  - Alberta is one of the finest places to live? What's so fine and dandy about living on the street? It's hard to get into programs.

- We need more programs for people under the age of 18. I'm trying to find a place to stay, to sleep. Do you know how many people will offer us drugs on the streets? When you take it, they befriend you and then reel you in. It becomes a case of "now I own you and you will work for me."
- I can tell you where the statement came from, someone with a lot of money. With money, it's easy to raise a family. This proposed vision comes from within government from rich people, who aren't the majority of people in our society.
- No. It just doesn't work for me.
- "I find that the government is going corrupt." The tax money will go to a new arena when it should be going into creating jobs for homeless individuals. I also worry about shelters in the area where the arena is. This is going to force them to re-locate. That'll put people out on the street. In Stony Plain where I'm from, people care about each other. If the arena goes ahead, then what is going to happen to the people who work for Boyle Street? I have mixed feelings about the government.
- I agree with the proposed vision.
  - I love Alberta. I'm homeless, no family but I love it. Go out to the country and enjoy it the way it is. It's a good place to live. That's my statement. Don't like the city of Edmonton, but like my home province.

## OUTCOMES

Question 2: What results are needed in order to achieve your vision for Alberta's social policy?

Probe Questions:

- a) Where are positive social outcomes for Albertans already being achieved?
- b) Where could significant improvements be made?

**For Alberta to become the best place to live, work and raise a family, what would it look like?**

- I am happy the way things are.
  - I guess were already there. We have good transportation centers. Affordable rents. It is fine just the way it is.
- Decrease the gap between the haves and the have not's.
  - Finding ways for people to keep more money in their wallets would help. We pay taxes and this is fine, but if we can find ways for people in low income to keep more money then they will be able to spend it in our community.
- Provide "basics" so people can live.
  - Support our education system and encourage kids to stay in school. Housing should be a given; people shouldn't have to pay more than 30% of their income on housing. We need to take better care of our environment. Use less or replace double to what we take out of the earth. We need to encourage more people to grow food and harvest it because plants are renewable. We need to help people get back to work and we need to allow those in

need to gradually return to work. For homeless youth provide us with job training and skills so we can get jobs; give us a chance.

- People would not be from falling through the cracks by providing housing, appropriate programs and services that meet the individual's needs.
- System overhaul.
  - There needs to be a system that works for the disadvantaged. Helps people who are down and out.
  - There aren't a lot of programs that help really young people (14 year old, for ex.) on the street.
  - We need more programs that provide and require structure. These are the things that will help us as we rebuild our lives.
- Build community.
  - There would be no homeless on the street, people could go to school, have jobs, and peacefully live out the rest of their lives. "I want to be a Red Seal Chef. My father was homeless at first when his parents died. This Co-op group is my real family. Things aren't perfect but the programs should work for the people in need. "

## MOVING FORWARD: STRATEGIES

Question 3: What actions could help achieve the desired outcomes for Albertans?

Probe Questions:

a) What is being done well already? What makes these actions successful?

What is currently working?

- The programs at John Howard help. If they are not right, then they will guide you in the right direction.
- Hope Missions works. When you're in the building, you feel safe. Whenever there's a fight, it's immediately stopped.
- This Co-op program is my family and we take care of each other. "We have perfected communal street living."
- Day program (YESS) - Provides structure. Skills for Life program- Helps you to succeed, gives you life structures.

What could be improved?

- Not all the staff in organizations applies program criteria in a consistent manner. "One person tells you one thing and then another says something else. This is very confusing."
- Need more staff at YESS so that they can open all the beds. "I have gone there on occasions when only 10 beds are being occupied. The others are vacant."

- Programs for youth that are offered outside of the inner city. There are a few but more are needed. “I won’t go downtown because the draw back to drugs is too strong and I want to stay clean. So I struggle because there are few programs outside of downtown.”
- Look at programs being offered in smaller communities in British Columbia. They are more responsive to the needs of homeless youth.
- I have noticed a lot of younger kids on the streets (ages 12 – 14) and I am wondering what is going on. Something needs to be going wrong within families to be causing this.
- We need programs that are persons centered – that provide what the person needs not trying to fit a person into the existing program.

## FACILITATOR’S FEEDBACK

If you wish, please provide your personal feedback on facilitating this conversation or advice you may have to the project team regarding the discussion resources or process.

- Our team rephrased some of the questions to facilitate a more meaningful discussion around the needs of the population we engaged with. The questions we used were as follows:  
What do the words in this vision mean to you?

For Alberta to become the best place to live, work and raise a family ...

- a) What would it look like?
- b) Why is that important to you?

What has to happen in order to achieve what you described?

What’s currently working and what could be improved?