

WHAT WE HEARD

from Northerners about Poverty



"Even when there is poverty here in this community, there's nothing that I am more grateful for than this beautiful land and lake, and what it has done for my people. It provided excellent service of fresh clean water, firewood and animals to my people. Many people around the world are striving for these things.

Even though there is poverty we have these things to use, we can always build a cabin for shelter, we can always trap and hunt for food, and we can always use firewood for heat, and we can always have fresh clean water. I'm grateful that the elders left these things for us."

August 2011



The front page and other photos in this document were taken by adult learners in five communities who participated in PhotoVoice projects. The story quotes that go with the photos were produced by the adult learners as narratives to their photos.

PhotoVoice is a participatory research method where participants explore issues through taking photographs and develop narratives to go with the photographs. Participants capture different images and tell stories that reveal their perspectives on the research issues and real life experiences.

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1. Background

People's wellbeing is critical for the overall wellbeing of the Northwest Territories (NWT), our communities and our families. There are many programs and services that aim to help Northerners improve their overall wellbeing and achieve the 16th Legislative Assembly's vision of:

Strong individuals, families and communities sharing the benefits and responsibilities of a unified, environmentally sustainable and prosperous Northwest Territories.

Nonetheless, many Northerners continue to struggle.

Last year the Legislative Assembly called upon the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) to develop an anti-poverty strategy for the NWT. The Premier committed to developing an overarching discussion paper that would address issues of defining and measuring progress on poverty, summarize current programs and strategic direction related to reducing poverty, and identify further areas for action. The discussion paper will serve to inform the next Legislative Assembly as it considers its priorities and direction.

A GNWT interdepartmental working group was established to do this work. The working group members are from the departments of Education, Culture and Employment; Executive; Health and Social Services; Industry, Tourism and Investment; and Justice; as well as the NWT Housing Corporation. An Advisory Group of external stakeholders was also established to provide advice on the process and materials.

Reducing poverty in the NWT is not something that the GNWT can do alone. Individuals, their families and communities, other governments, and volunteer and community organizations all play a role. That is why it is crucial to get broad input from residents and stakeholders across the Territory on the complex issue of poverty.

The GNWT provided support for and participated in the *No Place for Poverty* workshop organized by Alternatives North and the YWCA in Yellowknife in October 2010. Participants at the *No Place for Poverty* workshop identified priorities for action to reduce poverty.

To get broader input and hear from more people the GNWT engaged in discussions about poverty with Northerners across the Territory between January and April 2011.

Discussions were held in all regions of the NWT in a cross-section of our communities. Two-hundred-and-fifty people from across the Territory took part in these discussions. We heard from residents and stakeholders, from front line workers in different fields and people who access various programs and services, students, elders, representatives from faith communities, businesses and non-governmental organizations, as well as community and Aboriginal leaders.

The key questions that Northerners were asked in all the discussions were:

1. *What is being done and works well to address factors of poverty in your community?*
2. *With programs and supports available, why do people continue to struggle?*
3. *What other things can be done to reduce poverty and what should the top priorities be?*
4. *What are the roles of residents, community and governments in efforts to reduce poverty?*
5. *Other comments or suggestions?*

Various methods were used to engage in discussions with Northerners about poverty.

Focus group discussions are discussions in an interactive group setting where participants are free to talk with other group members as they discuss and answer the questions. We held thirty focus group discussions in thirteen communities.

One on one interviews where the interviewee discussed and answered the questions were also used. We conducted ten face to face and phone interviews with people in seven communities.

An on-line questionnaire was posted and advertised on the GNWT's website. The on-line questionnaire provided the opportunity for people to respond and submit their answers to the questions in writing. Thirty-one responses were received to the on-line questionnaire.

In addition to the questionnaire, we embarked upon PhotoVoice projects. PhotoVoice is a participatory research method where participants explore issues through taking photographs and developing narratives to go with the photographs. Participants capture different images and tell stories that reveal their perspectives on the research issues and real life experiences. Adult learners in five communities participated in the PhotoVoice projects.

Details on the various discussion activities and participation, are provided in Appendix A.

This summary report reflects what the people who participated in the poverty discussions told us. It includes the various views we heard and may present contradictory viewpoints. No assessment has been made of what we were told. This report does not reflect the GNWTs position; it is simply a summary of what we heard from Northerners in response to the key questions we asked.

2. What we heard

We heard that poverty is complex and that poverty is influenced by many factors. We heard different opinions and beliefs about poverty and poverty related issues. Although the many people we heard from held different views on what poverty is, they all recognized the need to address poverty related issues and we heard various views on how best to do that.

We heard about different needs in communities, as well as a range of opinions on the various themes that emerged in these discussions. We were told that poverty affects many people and our communities as a whole. We heard that everybody has a responsibility and a role to play in reducing poverty. Reducing poverty is not something the GNWT can do alone, but it can strive for policies and programs that address gaps and remove barriers for people that are struggling with poverty.

The following five sections summarize what we heard in response to each of the five key questions asked.



“Poverty also can be defined as living with your sister or relative. Sleeping on the sofa or in the spare bedroom.”

“Having a place to sleep is important to everyone. A sofa or a spare bedroom with a spare bed to Sleep, on.”



*“When we were young,
We listened to lots of good stories from our elders.
When old people told me a story,
I took it and put it into my mitts.
When an elder talked about how to make a good living,
I took it and put it into my mitts.
A person who listened to elders
Lives a long good life.”*

2.1 What is being done and works well to address factors of poverty in your community?

In summary, what we heard is being done and works well in addressing factors of poverty in our communities:

- **Support programs and services**

There are many successful support programs and services in our communities. These include various emergency supports, continuous everyday supports and transformative supports. Coordinated programs and services that involve the community are the most successful.

- **Collaborative approach**

A collaborative Interagency approach works well in many communities and was pointed to as needed where it was absent. Interagency and community development approaches serve to connect all who have a role to play in addressing factors of poverty in their community. Good communication, collaboration and coordination of efforts are key to effectively addressing factors of poverty.

- **Strong sense of culture, community and family**

Strong families and traditional values are strengths that work well for people. Traditional community events play an important role in our communities. Community based solutions work best and have the most impact in addressing factors of poverty.



"Sharing of traditional food's with the community when some people have hard time's to get food for their families. As long as we remember ... people always give food to elder's, single parent with kid's and whoever that didn't have enough food to last them for long, as long as there is caribou, fish, ptarmigan, rabbit we should be okay."

2.1.1 Support programs and services

We heard about many support programs and services in our communities. We heard about emergency supports such as shelters, food banks and soup kitchens. We also heard about continuous everyday supports such as home care and child care, school breakfasts and lunches, income assistance, housing programs and power subsidies. And we heard about transformative supports such as Aboriginal Head Start, Brighter Futures, Aboriginal health and wellness programs, education, literacy and skills training, restorative justice, addictions treatment and transition supports. Most successful are the supports that help people to break the cycle of poverty.

We heard the most effective support programs and services are grassroots that involve the community in the planning and/or delivery. We heard of successful initiatives like community gardens and greenhouses, and recreation support programs like Shorty Brown's Skates for the North.

Coordinated and integrated family focused programs - such as the support programs offered in some friendship centres that include coordinated pre-natal, post-natal and early childhood programs with parental and family support programs - were pointed to as examples of successful supports that reach across generations to build and support healthy families. Youth and elder councils and programs were also brought up as examples of supports that work well.

We were told that community coordinators and government service officers who provide information and help people access various support programs and services are important community resources.

2.1.2 Collaborative approach

We heard that a collaborative interagency approach works well or where it is absent, it is needed. We were told we all need to work together and communicate, collaborate and coordinate our efforts to successfully address poverty related issues.



" There are so many things here ... to help poverty. There are schools that have programs for the kids, like the Breakfast Program and the lunch program. The lunch program is for the kids so they don't need to walk home in the -40 weather. Also there is rehab for the people that need help for drug addictions. There's a Healthy Babies program for young mothers to help gain parental skills, and the Youth Center to help the teens and keep them out of trouble. The food bank is there for those that need food, and there's a homeless shelter to help the homeless stay off the streets in the cold winter months and gives them hot meals... The big one is the ECE to help people in need with everyday living. "

" My opinion is that the government is already doing everything it can to prevent poverty ... If people live in poverty it's because they're not using their resources well. "



" ... justice committee helps young kids and adults make the right choices for themselves and the people in this town. They make sure people stay in school or work. People get the help they need like: counseling, anger management, having to get a job or be in school and other programs. "



“There are community care workers that take care of elders who can't help themselves because of poor health or lack of communication from the public.”



“Living with a relative means knowing there's somebody who cares and is willing to help you out while you are going through a tough difficult time.

When you have so little you feel like you can't do anything, what do you do? You go to your relative or your friend and ask for help.”

We heard that there are many good programs but little integration between them. We were told of real challenges in the implementation of support programs and services, and of a disconnect between some programs which can create systemic barriers for people in poverty. We also heard that sometimes there are not enough resources for needed support programs which then have long waiting lists, such as transitional housing.

We heard the need for interagency and community development approaches to connect all those that have a role to play in addressing factors of poverty in their communities. We were told that the best way to address poverty was for people and groups to work collaboratively to address local issues such as housing, cost of living, food security, and childcare. Good communication, collaboration and coordination of efforts were seen as key to effectively addressing factors of poverty.

2.1.3 Strong sense of culture, community and family

In several of the discussions, we heard that a strong sense of culture, community and family is important. Strong families and traditional values are strengths that work well for people. But we also heard in some places that sense of culture, community and family is weak and needs to be strengthened.

We heard that traditional community events such as community feasts and community hunts play an important role. We were told that community based solutions where the community is involved in programs and services work best and have the most impact in addressing factors of poverty.

We heard about people helping each other, families and neighbours alike. We were told that parents need to teach their children what is right and that family values are passed down from parents. We were told that people draw strength from their culture and identity and that we need to respect our traditional values. Listening to elders sharing knowledge helps build self esteem, sense of culture and community.

2.2 With programs and supports available, why do people continue to struggle?

In summary, although programs and supports are available, some people continue to struggle because of:

- **Lack of wellness**

People may lack hope and motivation, some struggle with addictions and/or mental health issues, some of which are related to the unresolved trauma of residential schooling. This affects our culture, identity and strength.

- **Lack of education and skills**

People may lack formal education and life skills, such as financial literacy and/or parenting skills. The value of education is not appreciated by some people and the education system is not seen as meeting all needs.

- **Housing challenges**

Issues related to housing programs and policies as well as availability and cost of housing keep some struggling. Housing debt may at times start the cycle of poverty. Housing programs need to encourage self reliance and not be a barrier.

- **Lack of employment**

Lack of long term sustainable employment, particularly in small and remote communities, make it hard for people to become self reliant. Criminal records may keep people from being able to work.

- **High cost of living**

The high cost of living, particularly for necessities such as food, housing and utilities, combined with low income, is a challenge for many. These costs tend to be highest in the smaller and more remote communities where people have fewer opportunities to earn income.

- **Program barriers**

Some programs and policies may be creating dependency and keeping people in poverty through lack of incentives for people to work and become self sufficient. Available supports are not always well communicated and/or coordinated.

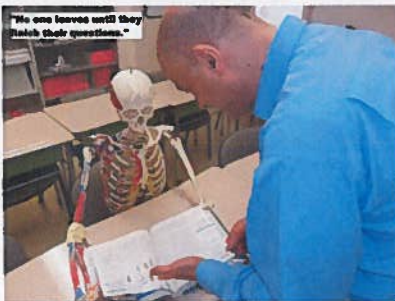
- **Lack of leadership and accountability**

We heard that there is lack of leadership and accountability on all sides, and that we can't rely on short term solutions for long term challenges, such as residential school impacts.



"Drugs and alcohol is the worst problem in town, their addiction gets in the way. The cost for drugs and alcohol is expensive and most people would put that first instead of food and clothing that is why they keep struggling."

"There are lack of jobs in the community and the region. There is barely any training for jobs so, people don't meet certain requirements. And to go for some training you need education but most people around town didn't graduate and don't have schooling."



"Education is a big problem ... because funding is really hard to receive from some places."

2.2.1 Lack of wellness

We heard that lack of wellness is one of the reasons people continue to struggle. Some people have lost faith in their ability to succeed at anything. They lack vision for the future, self esteem and motivation to improve their well-being. This erodes the traditional family and community values.

Various addictions - alcohol, drugs and gambling - are a challenge for many. People pointed to a lack of drug and alcohol workers and treatment centres, and in particular lack of aftercare supports for those who try to address their addictions. People can leave their communities for treatment but when they come back they return to the same environment that led to or sustained their addiction. Without ongoing support they may fall back into unhealthy habits.

We heard that healing from the residential school experience has yet to happen. Many people lack parenting skills, because they were taken away from their parents and some have turned to alcohol and drugs to deal with the emotional effects.

We heard that depression and other mental health issues cause people to struggle. We were told there is a lack of diagnosis and treatment, including lack of specialists/counsellors, to help people cope and deal with mental health issues, cognitive impairment, and the effects of abuse and neglect, which is often intergenerational.

We also heard that while we can't help people who don't want help, the support they need has to be in place for when they do want help.

2.2.2 Lack of education and skills

We heard that a lack of formal education and skills, including life skills such as financial literacy or parenting, is another reason people continue to struggle.

People who lack budgeting skills and financial literacy may make poor financial choices and find themselves

in debt which is hard to escape from. When people lack parenting skills it not only affects the families involved, it affects the whole community.

We heard that some people don't see the value of education and that the education system may not be meeting the needs of all Northerners. We heard the need for relevant and quality education programs, and clear roles and accountability for all involved. Schools, teachers, counsellors, students and parents all have a role in student success.

We heard that at times it may be hard for people to obtain funding for basic training. We were told that the education system is key to making sure that people can gain the education and skills they need to improve their overall wellness, get a job and be self sufficient.

2.2.3 Housing challenges

We heard that housing related challenges are another reason people continue to struggle. We heard about challenges related to housing programs and policies, as well as concerns with the availability and cost of housing. Overall, we heard the need to review the GNWT's approach to housing programs and policies.

We were told that housing programs should encourage self reliance and not be a barrier. We heard concerns that the rent scale for public housing is a disincentive for people to work and become more self sufficient.

We also heard concerns that overcrowding is a result of policies that don't work. And we were told that there is hidden homelessness in communities because of couch surfers who can't get into public housing.

We heard there is lack of available and affordable housing in many communities and that housing debt can be a starting point for poverty in some cases.

We also heard that some people take government housing programs for granted and that pride of home ownership is lacking.



"Poverty ... is there's not enough shelter for the people that has no place to go. So many people that live on the street ... start to drink, drugs or committing crime to have some where to go. In other words their in not enough work to keep the people off the streets."



"Affordable housing is one of our community's biggest problems... Also, rent is so expensive not many people can afford it."



"This is where homeless people ... sleep when they are under the influence of alcohol and or drugs and cannot enter the homeless shelter. The majority of homeless people ... do drugs and are addicted alcohol."



“Young and single parents have a hard time trying to buy milk and pampers because they are so over-priced, along with other things like vegetables, meat packs, and clothing. Also people cannot get all the necessities they need to last a month until the next time they get money.

The prices of necessities we need should be less expensive or come in bulk.”



“Everyone here burns wood. Cutting wood keeps us from getting lazy. Wood is free but a barrel of fuel costs over \$300.00.”



“Housing is a big problem in the community because the cost of living in a housing unit is expensive. Not only do they pay monthly but pay for power, light bill, food, clothing, cable, water and sewage. And alot of people staying in a house with a lot of people.”

2.2.4 Lack of employment

We heard that the lack of long term and sustainable employment, especially in smaller and more remote communities, is another reason people continue to struggle. There are few opportunities in most smaller and more remote communities for employment and to earn income. It’s hard to move to self sufficiency without sufficient income.

We heard that lack of skills and motivation to work is also a challenge. We heard that governments may be creating dependency with supports that don’t include incentives to work and that employment is key to getting out of poverty and being self reliant.

We also heard that criminal records impact peoples’ ability to participate and work in the community.

2.2.5 High cost of living

We heard that the high cost of living - particularly for necessities such as food, housing and utilities - is another reason why people continue to struggle. These costs tend to be the highest in smaller and more remote communities that typically have less opportunities to earn income.

We heard people may resort to illegal activity such as selling drugs or bootlegging to make ends meet.

We heard that low wages for some jobs combined with the high cost of living cause people to struggle with meeting their families’ basic needs. In some of the communities we heard concerns about accessible and affordable childcare.

We heard that some people can’t afford healthy foods and that in some cases the cost of maintaining a healthy lifestyle for families is difficult. We also heard that living a traditional lifestyle has become very expensive due to costs of equipment and gas needed to be able to go out on the land and hunt, fish or trap.

2.2.6 Program barriers

We heard that some government program policies act as systemic barriers and cause people to struggle. For example, support programs that lack incentives to work may actually be keeping people in poverty.

We heard that support programs and services are not always consistent, well coordinated or integrated and a lack of flexibility may be keeping people from getting ahead and out of poverty. For example, income assistance programs may not be providing sufficient incentives for people to work and criminal records may keep people from accessing housing and getting a job.

We heard the need for better communication and information about available programs and services to ensure they are accessible to people in need.

We heard the concern raised that some government programs and policies create dependency and do not encourage people to be self sufficient. We also heard about the lack of transitional programs and supports to help people break the dependency cycle.

We heard about lack of infrastructure and services in some of the smaller communities and the need for community based solutions.

2.2.7 Lack of leadership and accountability

We heard that leadership and accountability is lacking all around. We heard a call for more leadership and accountability from all players and at all levels.

We were told we can't rely on short term solutions for long term issues, such as residential school impacts.

We were also told that leaders need to listen to people and consult with them on priorities.

We heard that there is gender inequity in leadership and on boards which makes it harder to bring up and deal with some social issues, such as wellness and health.



"This is the ... Housing Authority for residents who are less fortunate and make low income. But still when you are on the waiting list depending if you're a single person or a family you may wait up to two years for an available unit. I do not think this is fair because there are single mothers or fathers with children and single students who are in college and have nowhere to stay."



"Junk food makes you poor. We know it is not good for us but we have a hard time saying no when others ask us for money."



"We all live in a world where poverty always exists even if man tries their very best. In this community poverty is someone living in an old wooden house with no electricity and no running water where houses such as these tend to get abandon because they're unaffordable and probably get caught up in a fire."

2.3 What other things can be done to reduce poverty and what should the top priorities be?

In summary, people had many suggestions about things that can be done to reduce poverty and pointed to the priorities of:

- **Wellness**

Improve wellness through actions that address addictions and underlying unresolved trauma. Provide support for people with mental health issues. Focus on healthy living and build community spirit based on cultural and traditional values.

- **Education**

Ensure quality and relevant education, both formal education and informal training, such as life skills training, that meets the needs of all Northerners. Education is key to people gaining the skills they need to improve their wellness and be self sufficient.

- **Housing**

Address issues related to cost, availability and affordability of housing and ensure that housing programs and policies do not create dependency. Different approaches may be needed for housing issues in the smaller and more remote communities as they are different from housing issues in larger communities.

- **Economic development and job creation**

Build the economy and job opportunities through a focus on community development. Wages need to be in line with the cost of living.

- **Transitional programs**

Support people to transition to more self sufficient life whether it be from unemployment into work, from addiction to a healthier lifestyle, or from incarceration back into the community.

- **Communication and coordination**

Improve communication, coordination and collaboration through interagency approach for programs and services that better meet the needs of people. More outreach and communication on available programs and supports.

- **Leadership and accountability**

Strong leadership, political will and commitment is needed to reduce poverty. Everybody has a role to play and we all need to be accountable.

2.3.1 Wellness

We heard that improving the wellness of Northerners is a priority and that in order to do that we need to address addictions.

We were told about the need for alcohol and drug workers in communities, the need for treatment and rehabilitation services and also supports for longer term recovery, such as transitional and aftercare supports in their home communities.

Addictions are often symptomatic of underlying and unresolved trauma. We were told that residential school healing has yet to happen for many people and that healing must start with oneself.

We also need to deal with mental health issues in order to improve the wellness of Northerners. We heard the need for better diagnosis and treatment and more specialists/counsellors to help people with a range of mental health issues, cognitive impairment and the effects of abuse and neglect, which may reach across generations.

We heard about the need for affordable recreation in communities. Recreational activities encourage people to participate in a positive way and to be active in their communities. It encourages healthy living and helps build community spirit.

People talked about the need to get back to their cultural and traditional values. It was suggested that role models be used to inspire and encourage people to get healthy and well so that they can better participate and contribute to their families' lives and to their communities.

2.3.2 Education

We heard that relevant and quality education is a priority.

We were told that formal and informal education, including basic life skills training such as budgeting



"Abandoned houses are everywhere. Some were poorly built and poorly maintained; many were damaged beyond repair by tenants with alcohol addictions. Drinking is a big problem. People who drink are not motivated to do anything. They don't care about getting a job or keeping a house, just drinking. People who try to stop drinking have a hard time because they are still around friends and family who drink. People need more help to deal with alcohol addiction. Kids see their parents drink and they grow up thinking that is normal, so they drink. The cycle continues. Someone has to be strong enough to stop the cycle."



"Today no one appreciates hard work. All they want to do is watch movies and run to the store. Helping someone with hard work makes you feel good inside."



"If I finish grade 12, I will be able to get a good job and get my family the things they need to live. Getting people educated is the only way to not be poor. Too many people drink. Booze is the major reason for poverty. Alcohol is the most important thing in lives. We have to stop drinking and get educated for our community to move forward and keep our culture alive."



"Having a homeless shelter that lets people live there for free. It is good because they have to make productive choices that are arranged by Education Culture and Employment."

and debt counselling, parenting and healthy lifestyles, is an important factor in improving peoples skills and their chances of being well and self sufficient.

We heard that our education system should strive to meet the needs of all Northerners with quality and relevant programs. Schools, counsellors, students and parents all have a role to play in student success. We were told that it is the role of parents to support their children and make sure they attend school.

People talked about the value of education and that education is the key for people to get the skills and training they need to improve their wellbeing and success in life.

2.3.3 Housing

We heard that addressing housing related issues is a priority.

We were told that housing programs and policies should be reviewed to ensure they are achieving set goals and not creating more dependency through lack of incentives to work.

It was suggested that different approaches may be needed in smaller and more remote communities who face different housing issues than do the larger communities that have a private rental market.

We heard that many of the smaller and more remote communities need people with the skills to maintain or fix houses and that some people don't have the means to fix their houses.

We were told that there is not enough affordable housing in some of the larger communities and that one way to deal with that is to subsidize rent in the private rental market for low income people in need.

We heard of the need for safe houses and transitional housing. We were told that shelter is a basic need and housing issues affect the safety of our communities.

2.3.4 Economic development

We heard that building the economy and employment opportunities is a priority.

Linking community and economic development with a focus on community development was suggested for creating job opportunities. We heard that wages need to be sufficient for people to pay for the cost of living in their community and that employment is one key to getting out of poverty.

People suggested that skills and opportunities be matched and local people be trained and hired for jobs in the communities, both permanent and temporary contract jobs. We heard that many communities lack skilled trades people and journeymen to train apprentices.

We heard that improving infrastructure, such as building all weather access roads where there are none, would lower the cost of living and result in better opportunities for economic development and employment in the affected communities.

2.3.5 Transitional programs

We heard that improving transitional supports is a priority, including supports that help people transition from school or unemployment to work, from addiction to a healthier lifestyle or from incarceration back into the community.

We were told that people need the help of transitional supports as they take steps to improve their lives and get out of poverty. We heard that transitional supports help people become more self sufficient and prevent them from falling back into poverty.

We were told that social programs and policies need to be coordinated and linked in real and meaningful ways with a focus on people and what they need.

We heard that to break the cycle of poverty we need to make sure that government policies encourage self sufficiency.



"The government should subsidize child care so people can afford to go back to school or a program to get a better job or get enough to go on their own feet and not to rely on income support or their family to help them."



" The government should look at fixing houses that can be used for families who need the housing but can't get it because they are not being used or fixed.

... needs more programs for people with addictions and gambling problems, many people spend their money at the bar or gambling like bingo, pool, and card games. People need more job opportunities."



“This is what poverty looks like Poor living condition that people live in around The North they find a source of shelter to get out of the harsh weather conditions year round. “



“People need a place that offers clothing and a place to sleep. We already have these things, but I think there's more to offer and more to be done.”



“... have little confidence poverty will be solved here”

2.3.6 Communication and coordination

We heard that talking and working together is also a priority, including between different government departments.

An interagency approach is seen as a vehicle for better communication, coordination and collaboration that would be beneficial and provide for better services to people. We heard people talk about the need for better coordination of efforts and the need for all stakeholders to work together to deal with poverty related issues.

We heard that policies and programs sometimes lack flexibility and coordination and may be keeping people in poverty instead of allowing them to get ahead.

We were told more communication and promotion of available programs and services and how to access them is needed. We heard that having the information available on-line is not sufficient. We heard that there is need for someone in the community to act as interdepartmental referral agent, such as a community wellness worker.

2.3.7 Leadership and accountability

We heard that strong leadership, political will and commitment is needed to address poverty. It was suggested that we need to be proactive and work to prevent poverty.

We were told that everybody has a role to play in efforts to reduce poverty. We heard people call for accountability from all, including our elected officials. It was suggested that we are only as strong as our leaders and that leadership is needed at all levels.

We heard that it is the role of politicians to listen to the people and set priorities but that program rules and program policies should not be political.

We were told that leadership, culture and honour are essential to having healthy and vibrant communities.

2.4 What are the roles of residents, community and governments in effort to reduce poverty?

In summary, everybody has a role to play in efforts to reduce poverty in our communities. We need leadership and accountability at all levels. Many roles were suggested for:

- **Residents**

Be responsible for yourself, be well, live a healthy lifestyle, lead by example, help each other, be involved in the community, volunteer, share traditional foods, instil family and cultural values, and hold leaders accountable.

- **Communities**

Set goals and action plans, identify needs and solutions, raise awareness, engage and bring people together, provide support, infrastructure and services.

- **Governments**

Provide the legislative framework and funding, critical services and infrastructure, spur economic development, engage communities and Aboriginal governments, consult, communicate, collaborate, monitor and report progress.



"My role in reducing poverty ... is to get my education and to help others get their education, that is one way to reduce poverty.

I will help my friend, she is a single mother. She can babysit for me and I will pay her and let her have a break too.

Other people in the community should try to help others also to reduce poverty. They can let people stay with them for a while, let them do little jobs you need help with to pay them and give them a reference to get a job."



"What we think the residents, community and governments can do to reduce poverty is to have organization jobs such as more training on the job. More course available like, first aid, WHIMS, safety course, etc that can keep us busy. Have more support from the community, organizations, governance by providing assistance with income. We think that if there were daycare available in the community it would be much easier for the single parents to go to school, work or do the best they can to keep up with this modern way of living. We need more than help and support from one another because the people that do help and support one another are also struggling to help their family."



" To show teenagers that there is a better life that drinking or drugs. To stay in school and be able to have a good job for themselves in the future."



*"I VOLUNTEER AT THE SPCA
I take in dogs and help them get back to health and I help people with the vaccines if they can't afford to pay for them."*



"Planning to donate the things that are no longer needed once a week. I will donate clothes and stuff I don't use to the next to new shop and donate food once a week to the ... Food Bank."

2.4.1 Residents

We heard that residents need to take individual responsibility for themselves, be role models, helpers, volunteers, champions and advocates.

We heard that it is the role of residents to be well, to live a healthy lifestyle and to lead by example. We were told that individuals have a responsibility first to themselves. They have a responsibility to seek the supports they need to improve their wellness, including support to address addictions, and to obtain education that will allow them to get a good job and be able to provide for themselves and their families.

We heard that it is the role of residents to help each other and take care of each other. They should be involved, volunteer and serve their communities. We were told that residents should share, particularly traditional foods, and that it is their role to instill family, cultural and traditional values.

We also heard that individuals have a leadership role to play in efforts to address poverty. We were told that residents need to increase the awareness of poverty related issues and hold leaders accountable.

2.4.2 Communities

We heard that communities should bring people and groups together to plan for the future, as well as provide support and organize community events, such as community hunts and feasts.

We heard that it is the role of communities to set goals and develop action plans for the community. We were told that communities have a role in identifying needs and issues - such as who, when and why people slip into poverty - and to find solutions. Communities need to raise awareness and educate people on the issues they face. We were told that communities should motivate and engage people in the community and bring people and groups together in interagency and community meetings.

We heard that communities also have a role to play in providing support programs and services. We were told that community groups can provide many services more efficiently than governments, including provision of meals and clothing to those in need. We were also told that communities shared with residents the role of holding leaders and governments accountable.

2.4.3 Governments

We heard that it is the role of governments to provide the legislative framework and funding for critical services, programs and infrastructure. We also heard that governments have a role to provide critical services, programs and infrastructure, such as good health care, quality education for all and to address crime. We were also told that governments have a role to consult with communities and residents, and monitor and report progress.

We heard that governments need to ensure programs and policies are coherent, integrated and effective, and that they do not present barriers for people in poverty. Broad review of government policies was suggested with the aim to provide better solutions and incentives for people to be more self sufficient.

We heard that governments have a role in spurring economic development and job creation, particularly in smaller and more remote communities. We were told that the GNWT should engage with and empower communities and Aboriginal governments.

We heard that governments should talk to people and discuss the challenges of poverty. They should also communicate and collaborate with communities and non-governmental organizations. We were told that governments have a role to inform people of available support programs and services and ensure these supports are available in all communities.

We were told the GNWT needs to take a leadership role and monitor success of efforts to address factors of poverty in the NWT.



“The government should help the youth centre and more activities. Because a lot of youth start to drink and drugs. Also because if a youth that come from a poor family or if their parents drink and most likely become like them or will be pressured by one of their peers.”



“My opinion is that the government should lower taxes overall. They should increase the Canada Child Tax Benefit. They should INCREASE THE SIN TAX ON ALCOHOL.”



“To let the government create more jobs by getting courses going ... “

2.5 Other comments or suggestions

Northerners appreciated the opportunity to discuss poverty related issues and to have their voices heard.

The people we heard from recognized how complex the issue of poverty is and how it is influenced by many interrelated factors. We heard people question how poverty is defined and how progress is measured. The question of what standard is appropriate to measure poverty and what it means to be poor came up frequently. We heard it suggested that the GNWT should define what it means to be poor and use its definition of poverty to measure progress towards reducing poverty in the NWT.

We were told that the focus of our efforts should be primarily on poverty related issues such as addressing addictions, improving education and skills, improving the housing situation and creating jobs. We heard that success in addressing these issues would result in reduced poverty in the NWT.

We heard about the need for self sufficiency and the warnings about too much government dependency. Elders and many other people emphasized the need for individuals to learn to be self reliant.

We were told that communities would continue to spiral downwards until addiction issues are adequately dealt with. We heard about the need to heal from the residential school impacts.

We heard that spending dollars now to deal with poverty would result in more healthy, educated, working people in the future. Prevention was a focus of comments from several people.

Finally, we heard several people encourage all Northerners to talk and work cooperatively together to address poverty related issues in the NWT.



*"Our elders taught us to make a good healthy living.
They taught us how to survive on what mother nature provides.
And we were healthy and happy."*

3. Next steps

What we heard from Northerners about poverty will be considered and reflected in the overarching discussion paper on poverty that the GNWT is developing. The discussion paper will be ready for transition to the next Legislative Assembly.

The overarching discussion paper will address issues of defining and measuring progress on reducing poverty, summarize current programs and strategic direction related to reducing poverty and identify areas for further consideration.

Recognizing that many of the key elements of poverty reduction strategies are areas where the 16th Legislative Assembly has been making investments, the discussion paper will provide the information needed to consider next steps in reducing poverty in the NWT.

Actions stemming from the discussion paper will be for the consideration of the 17th Legislative Assembly.

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Appendix A: Discussion Activities and Participation

Focus group discussions

Focus group discussions were primarily used to capture the views of front-line service providers and people who access programs and services, but also other interest groups such as chambers of commerce, non-governmental organizations, leaders, seniors and college students.

About two hundred people participated in thirty focus group discussions that were held in the communities of:

- Behchoko
- Hay River
- Inuvik
- Fort Good Hope
- Fort McPherson
- Fort Simpson
- Lutselk'e
- Norman Wells
- Tuktoyaktuk
- Ulukhaktok
- Wekweeti
- Wrigley
- Yellowknife

Interviews

Face to face and phone interviews were primarily used to capture the views of community and Aboriginal leaders and business people, but also some front line service providers.

Ten one on one interviews were held with people in:

- Fort Good Hope
- Fort Simpson
- Norman Wells
- Inuvik
- Tuktoyaktuk
- Wekweeti
- Yellowknife

Discussion Activities and Participation, continued

On-line questionnaire

An on-line questionnaire was used to capture the views of organizations and individuals from across the NWT who chose to participate by responding in writing to our questions. The on-line questionnaire was advertised and posted on the GNWT's website.

We received thirty-one responses to the on-line questionnaire from both organizations and individuals

PhotoVoice projects

PhotoVoice projects were used to capture the views of adult students in communities.

Close to twenty people in five communities participated in PhotoVoice projects where participants used photos and story lines to respond to our questions.

The Participants in the PhotoVoice projects were from:

- Colville Lake
- Deline
- Fort Liard
- Inuvik
- Whati