



2018 Municipal Election Context and Questions

Poverty Reduction and Early Child Development

Hosted by: BC Poverty Reduction Coalition and
The Central Okanagan Early Years Partnership



Central Okanagan
Early Years Partnership

Dear Central Okanagan Community members,

Are you curious about where your municipal candidates stand on things that are important to you? Do you want to know about how candidates will support key areas of the quality of life in the Central Okanagan?

The BC Poverty Reduction Coalition and The Central Okanagan Early Years Partnership have launched a targeted plan for the upcoming municipal election. The plan is designed to raise awareness among Central Okanagan voters, with specific reference to poverty reduction and the healthy development of young children in our region. British Columbians believe poverty is one of the most important action items our province is facing.

KEY ITEMS

- 1 - A STRONG COMMITMENT TO EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT
- 2 - INCREASED ECONOMIC EQUALITY
- 3 - AFFORDABLE AND ACCESSIBLE HOUSING
- 4 - TAKING ACTION TO REDUCE POVERTY AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

This questionnaire and the All Candidates Forum present you with an opportunity to hear about how your candidates plan to address poverty and early childhood development at the local level. This document features seven key questions as well as some context. These questions will be asked to candidates at the forum.

Our goal is to let all community members (including municipal government candidates) know that we all have an important role to play in reducing poverty and supporting young children and families. Moreover, we're providing examples of how this is being done in other communities. This is part of a broader, coordinated initiative to drive awareness and action to reduce poverty in the Central Okanagan.

You can find information about the forum at www.coeyp.ca, on Twitter via #OKCOEYP and on Facebook at www.facebook.com/COEYP/.

(Please note: Municipal Candidates for Lake Country, West Kelowna, Peachland and Central Okanagan School District Trustees will have the opportunity to provide their responses to the questions through a digital questionnaire, you can see their responses online at www.coeyp.ca.)

Context and Questions - Municipal Election 2018

KEY 1 - A STRONG COMMITMENT TO EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

Children who do not access quality support in their early years are at risk of lifelong health issues, poor learning outcomes, difficulty with employment, criminality and other vulnerabilities. There are enormous social and economic costs associated with this under-investment in BC's young children.

Without supportive public policy and needed services, young families are stressed by the demands of caring and earning. All young children and their families should be able to access the ECD supports and services that they need.



Young Children's Increased Vulnerabilities

The Problem

- On average, 27% of Central Okanagan children are entering Kindergarten vulnerable in at least one area of their development - be it social, emotional, cognitive, communications or physical. This represents an increase of 2.3 percentage points in the past decade.
- One third of BC's children living in poverty, or 50,280 children, are under the age of six. Young children have a poverty rate of 18.5%.
- BC ranks well below the 1% GDP benchmark for investment in early childhood education and care.

What Can Municipal Government Do?

- Cities are able to offer grants or in-kind support to local services, recreational programming and community events that focus on supporting young children and their families.
- Mayors, city councillors and school trustees can proactively work with senior levels of government to advocate for increased investment in supports and services for families with young children.

Examples from other Municipalities

- The City of Saskatoon provides program grant funding to the 43 community associations in Saskatoon. Annually, the grants support 43 community associations which provide 15,131 hours of programming.

Q 1: If elected, what will you do to reduce the rising vulnerability among young children in your community?

The Child Care Crisis

Affordable and high quality child care encourages a child's healthy development, allows parents to enter and remain in the workforce, enables families to move out of poverty and benefits the economy by reducing social costs and increasing tax revenues.

After years of neglect by previous provincial governments, BC is now taking concrete steps to address the child care crisis across the province. These steps need to solve the following substantial problems:



The Problem

- Fees are too high, ranging from \$836/month for preschool-age children to \$1042/month for younger children (local average).
- Too few licensed spaces - parents can't find quality child care, especially for shift work, as there are only enough licensed spaces for 18% of children in the Central Okanagan. Many parents are forced to leave the workforce to take care of children, which decreases the tax base and increases social costs.
- Early Childhood Educators' wages are too low (average wage is \$18.04) - forcing many to leave the field, thus compromising the quality of the care available to many families.

What Can Municipal Government Do?

- Local government can apply to the Union of BC Municipalities for funding for the Community Child Care Planning Program, engage in child care planning activities and develop a community child care space creation action plan.
- Engage with the local Child Care Action Team to inform your understanding of the local child care sector.
- School boards can ensure stability for the many child care programs that operate on school sites.
- Municipal governments can endorse the \$10aDay Child Care Plan calling on the Provincial Government to begin building a better child care system. 32 local governments support the Plan but they do not have the resources or mandate to implement it alone.

Examples from other Municipalities

- The City of Richmond has a Child Care Needs Assessment and Strategy, providing grants to child care owners/operators, and seeks advice from the Child Care Development Advisory Committee.
- The Regional Municipality of Durham, Ontario has developed a multi-year early learning and child care services plan; the first priority is to maximize financial support available to licensed child care.

Q 2: If elected, what will you do to help increase the number of quality child care spaces in our community?

Q 3: If elected, will you endorse the \$10aDay Child Care Plan?

KEY 2 - INCREASED ECONOMIC EQUALITY

Research has long demonstrated that poverty is toxic to a child's health and development, and to health outcomes for all individuals. From poor nutrition, to family stress, to exclusion from social participation, there are many ways poverty is known to raise the risk of lifelong ill effects on health and reduce opportunities. Growing income inequality in BC is recognized as a threat to the health of children, youth, families, seniors and communities as a whole.

Child, Family and Senior Poverty

The Problem

- The Central Okanagan child poverty rate is 16%, or 1 in 6 children.
- The poverty rate for children in lone parent households is 44% in the Central Okanagan.
- British Columbia has the highest rate of senior poverty in Canada at 8.8%. The number of seniors living in poverty has more than doubled from 2000-2015.
- Living in poverty, even for one or two years can have serious negative impacts on a child's health and development.
- If disadvantaged British Columbians were as healthy as those with higher education and incomes, we could avoid an estimated \$1.2 billion in health care costs.

What Can Municipal Government Do?

- Municipal governments can establish programs and advocate for reduced fare or free transit passes for low-income individuals and families.
- Public schools can reduce or eliminate fees that act as barriers to inclusion for low-income students.
- Municipalities can provide free or discounted recreational services and access to programs for low-income children, individuals and seniors.
- Municipalities can increase food security through zoning that would ensure low-income neighbourhoods have access to reasonably priced, quality fruits and vegetables.

Examples from other Municipalities

- Guelph, Ontario instituted a bus subsidy program designed to increase the affordability and accessibility of public transit for people living with low income.
- Revelstoke, BC has an Access to Recreation program which enables low-income individuals and families free access to the Arena and Aquatic Centre, and 50% off all city-run Parks and Recreation programs, including preschool.

Q 4: If elected, will you advocate for free access to public transit and recreation services for children of all ages and reduced transit fares for low-income individuals and seniors?



Low Wage Poverty

The Problem

- The majority of poor children in BC live in families with parents in the paid labour force, many of them working full-time and sometimes multiple jobs.
- About 40% of people living in poverty are adults working at low-paying jobs.
- Two parents with two dependents working full-time all year would have to each earn \$21.00/hour to meet all their basic needs. This is the Central Okanagan living wage. It is well above the minimum wage of \$12.65/hour.

What Can Municipal Government Do?

- Cities and boards of education can pay their employees a living wage and can agree to only contract for services with companies that pay a living wage.

Examples from other Municipalities

- By becoming living wage employers, cities and school boards can ensure their workers are able to live in and contribute back to their communities. Many municipalities in BC are leading the way, such as the City of New Westminster, City of Quesnel, City of Vancouver, and School District 69 - Qualicum.

Q 5: The municipal government has a responsibility to avoid contributing to the problem of low-wage poverty. If elected will you commit to adopting a living wage policy requiring the municipality (or school district) to pay a living wage to both it's employees and contract staff?

KEY 3 - AFFORDABLE AND ACCESSIBLE HOUSING

Housing is a significant cost for many in the Central Okanagan. Unaffordable housing is a key factor that can drive individuals and families into housing insecurity and poverty. The high costs of housing also drive high rates of homelessness in communities across British Columbia, including in the Central Okanagan. Trauma, mental health and addictions make it hard for people to get out of homelessness.



The Problem

- In Kelowna, 47% of renters spend a third of their income or more on housing - higher than the provincial average (this number is lower in Lake Country at 39%).
- Average rents have increased at a rate that far outstrips wages. In Kelowna, rents increased 15% between 2016 and 2017 and have increased another 6% since this time last year.
- Kelowna has the lowest vacancy rate in the country for rental housing. However, 25% of downtown properties are vacant, not used as a primary residence and are not part of the long-term rental pool.
- Increases in short-term rentals often correspond with a decrease in the availability of long-term rental housing and an increase in average rents.
- Individuals experiencing mental health and addictions issues face increased struggles to get out of homelessness. A 'housing first' approach is much more successful than a 'treatment first' approach.

What Can Municipal Government Do?

- Develop housing strategies that dedicate ample human and financial resources to programs that address housing affordability and accessibility and support a 'housing first' approach.
- Work with the provincial and federal governments to secure funds to build more affordable housing units.
- Require that new developments include affordable rental and social housing.
- Develop bylaws that inhibit investors and speculators from targeting rental housing toward short-term renters.

Examples from other Municipalities

- Vancouver has adopted a unique model and partnership approach to address homelessness and distressed urban areas. They have developed their Comprehensive Action Plan for Homelessness, a homelessness funding model that involves the upgrading of existing housing stock, the construction of new supportive housing and bylaw revisions.

Q 6: (Kelowna candidates) The Journey Home Strategy - the City of Kelowna's recently approved Homelessness Strategy - is an important effort with broad local support. The strategy stands to have positive and tangible impacts on housing affordability and accessibility. What will you do to ensure that this plan is adequately financed, staffed, and monitored for effectiveness?

Q 6: Homelessness and housing affordability is a regional issue that has spills from one community to another. If elected, how will you work with the City of Kelowna to support the Journey Home Strategy at a regional level?

KEY 4 - TAKING ACTION TO REDUCE POVERTY AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

Research shows that the cost of poverty far outweighs the cost of reducing poverty in the first place.

The Canadian Center for Policy Alternatives found that the cost of addressing poverty in British Columbia was between \$8.1 to \$9.2 billion, but that the estimated cost of implementing a comprehensive poverty reduction plan was less than half of that: between \$3 to \$4 billion per year.



The Problem

- A large street-entrenched population in the Central Okanagan has raised community concerns about “safety.” Many people on the street struggle with mental health and addictions issues.
- Making the impacts of poverty illegal is unlikely to address the root causes that engender these issues. Reducing poverty is a more cost-efficient and fair way to reduce social nuisances and crime.

What Can Municipal Government Do?

- Support the Central Okanagan Poverty Reduction Strategy committees’ work to develop a poverty reduction plan that works with local and government partners to address the many local factors that give rise to, and worsen, poverty (as in Medicine Hat, AB; New Westminster, BC and many other municipalities).
- Elected municipal and school board officials can advocate to higher levels of government for their poverty reduction strategies to address poverty and wealth inequality through tax reform and increased social policy investments.
- Repeal bylaws that criminalize the effects of poverty.
- Develop a community Mental Health and Addictions strategy.
- Join over 100 other Canadian municipalities in the Cities Reducing Poverty initiative.

Examples from other Municipalities

- London, ON developed its poverty reduction strategy, “London For All” in 2016. In 2017, the United Way Elgin Middlesex reported that the city had met 27 of its 112 targets - just one year since starting its work. A corollary of this effort, London completed its Community Mental Health and Addictions strategy in 2017.
- In 2017, the City of Medicine Hat, AB finalized its *THRIVE Strategy*. The strategy lays out the ambitious goal to end all poverty in all its forms by 2030 and ensure wellbeing for all citizens.

Q 7: If elected, will you participate in and support the Central Okanagan Poverty Reduction Committee - both with financial and staff resources - to develop a local poverty reduction strategy? Please describe what you see as your City’s role.

If you have questions about this document, or the information contained within it, please contact Myrna Kalmakoff at myrna@coeyp.ca or 250-212-4657.

Resources

We would like to recognize and thank First Call BC for their election toolkit 2018, as well as many local sources for their support in the development of these questions and resources.

Key 1

Human Early Learning Partnership <http://www.edibc2016.ca/>

First Call - <https://firstcallbc.org/>

10aDay - <http://www.10aday.ca/>

Kelowna Child Care Society - <http://kelownachildcare.ca/>

Union of BC Municipalities - <https://www.ubcm.ca/EN/main/funding/lqps/child-care.html>

Key 2

First Call Regional Poverty Highlights - https://still1in5.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/RegionalFactsheets2017_Central-Okanagan.pdf

British Columbia Poverty Reduction - <https://engage.gov.bc.ca/bcpovertyreduction/poverty-reduction-101/>

Living Wage for Families - <http://www.livingwageforfamilies.ca/>

Senior's Poverty Report Card - <https://www.uwlm.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/B.C.-Seniors-Poverty-Report-Card.pdf>

Key 3

Canadian Rental Housing Index - http://www.rentalhousingindex.ca/en/#comp_csd

Padmapper Canadian Rent Report - <https://blog.padmapper.com/canadian-rent-trends>

Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation - <https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/>

Statistics Canada - <https://www.statcan.gc.ca/eng/start>

McGill University - <https://www.mcgill.ca/newsroom/channels/news/airbnbs-impact-canadian-housing-markets-269333>

Key 4

Cities Reducing Poverty - <http://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/citiesreducingpoverty>

London For All: Making Progress and Meeting Targets One Year In -

<http://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/latest/london-for-all-making-progress-and-meeting-targets-one-year-in>

Community Mental Health and Addictions Strategy for London, ON - [https://s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/hdp.au.prod.app.lon-](https://s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/hdp.au.prod.app.lon-getinvolved.files/1815/1577/7804/Community_Mental_Health_and_Addiction_strategy_Final_Nov_22.pdf)

[getinvolved.files/1815/1577/7804/Community Mental Health and Addiction strategy Final Nov 22.pdf](https://s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/hdp.au.prod.app.lon-getinvolved.files/1815/1577/7804/Community_Mental_Health_and_Addiction_strategy_Final_Nov_22.pdf)

THRIVE: Medicine Hat & Region Strategy To End Poverty & Increase Wellbeing -

<http://homelesshub.ca/resource/thrive-medicine-hat-region-strategy-end-poverty-increase-wellbeing>