

Scanning the Terrain



**A discussion document
for poverty elimination**



Bissell Centre

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for poverty elimination

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Introduction

For the last 25 years in Canada, the poverty rate has remained quite stable (with fluctuations that mostly follow economic cycles), in spite of billions of dollars that have been spent. There are thousands of journal articles and books on poverty theories, its effects, and possible remedies. And yet more articles in academic journals, websites, newspapers and magazines that describe a vast array of poverty programs. All this activity and yet poverty rates have remained stuck.

Obviously, something isn't working. If all this activity has not worked, then what does? There is a movement towards questioning past approaches and looking for new ones. The questions are not easy: Why haven't we reduced poverty? Are programs simply making people more comfortable in poverty, making it bearable? Are programs actually helping to keep people in poverty? What can we do to actually reduce or eliminate poverty?

And perhaps, the key question is: What is your intention? Is it to *reduce* poverty? Is it to *eliminate* it? Or is it to help people survive in poverty; to make them more comfortable? If agencies want to set their compass towards ending poverty, and not just serving an unending stream of people, then what can they do differently? The quest for answers to these questions can lead in exciting new directions.

Navigating this report

This document starts with a brief overview of the purpose and the major issues and challenges in poverty research. A "menu" of promising initiatives follows, each of which addresses a different approach to poverty elimination. They present challenging issues and questions and will hopefully generate much thoughtful discussion of potential directions.

Following the description of each promising initiative, there are questions that can help generate discussion. They are as follows:

1. What insights and ideas from this initiative stood out for you?
2. Does this challenge what we are currently doing? In what way?
3. What ideas can we use from this example?
 - Are these ideas something we could apply/adapt in an existing program?
 - Would we need to try something new?
4. If we did want to pursue this, what would be the next step?

Finally, the report ends with a summary of the similarities and differences between national, provincial/state and local poverty reduction initiatives.

In each section of the report, there are sideboxes that offer additional information:



indicates further related information.



indicates resources that can give in-depth information.



indicates additional ideas related to the topic.

Purpose of this report

This report is not a comprehensive literature review. It is a “scanning of the terrain” with a quite narrow focus:

- To identify efforts and programs by other organizations on a similar scale to Bissell Centre that have helped people move out of poverty—specifically, that have reduced or eliminated poverty at the individual and/or community level.
 - A further research criteria is that the efforts must be related to Bissell’s Ends (Essential Supports, Quality of Life, Children Have a Chance and Increase Awareness).
 - It was also decided that homelessness programs would not be a part of this project. This was due to the research and work already being done by the Edmonton Committee to End Homelessness, of which Bissell is a member.
- In addition to efforts at the individual/community level, a scan of national/provincial level poverty reduction/elimination initiatives was also undertaken. This provides a context for the larger trends and initiatives that impact communities.

Limitations to the research

There were several limitations to the research including:

- In other fields, one would use the search criteria “best practices” or “evidence-based practices” to find the programs with the most empirical support for effectiveness. However, the poverty field is in the beginning stages of developing best practices—at this point in time, there are no quality “evidence-based practices” for reducing or eliminating poverty. In fact, there is little agreement as to what one would look like (Oyen and Cimadamore 2002).
- Few programs used reduction or elimination of poverty as their goal. Most poverty programs had multiple goals and activities (the variety is staggering) but they did not indicate if the people served actually moved out of poverty and stayed out.

For example, the following results were given by the Hamilton Foundation: “\$3.4 million in grants to reduce poverty: gave young parents job training and parenting workshops, gave treatment to mothers with addictions, gave North End children tutoring in math and literacy” (and 5 more items). All are worthy, but there is no indication if any of these activities actually reduced or eliminated poverty for the recipients.

Some agencies view these goals and activities as stepping stones to moving out of poverty, but that link is not proven. In fact, this highlights an even larger issue in poverty research—that of defining and measuring poverty. This is such a key issue that we take a look at it in the next section.



A key question

What can we learn from what’s out there on how to best contribute to the elimination of poverty at the individual and community level?



The main goal was to examine diverse examples of initiatives that teach us something about reducing or eliminating poverty.

What are you trying to eliminate?

The answer to the above question should be simple, but it isn't. There is no official definition of poverty in Canada. If you never define poverty, you can't be held accountable, which is why many governments avoid an official definition. One of the first steps in reducing or eliminating poverty is to define it and then develop measures that can tell you if progress is being made. Other jurisdictions have established official definitions, but they vary from place to place. This makes it difficult to compare programs and progress as they target and measure different things.

Point-in-time measures

There are two major approaches to defining poverty; both are **point in time** measures—they measure poverty at one point in time only. They tell us little about the movement of people in and out of poverty.

Relative measures measure poverty in relation to others—"you are poor if your means are small compared to others in your population" (Fellegi 2002). The approach is one that argues that poverty is to a high degree "social exclusion" and consequently poverty is the state of being "marginalized" from others in society because of a lack of income (Sheridan 1996).

To date, the "unofficial" measure of poverty in Canada has been the Low-Income Cutoff or LICO. A LICO is an income threshold below which families or unattached individuals spend 20% more than average on food, shelter and clothing. LICOs are calculated for various sizes of households and communities.

To further confuse things, there are before and after-tax LICOs. The after-tax LICO is generally regarded as being more useful as it accounts for the progressive tax system (the rich pay more taxes) as well as government transfers (such as child benefits, Old Age Security, etc.) which increase standard of living. There will be a lower poverty rate with after-tax LICOs than with before-tax LICOs.

If a relative measure is used, poverty cannot be eliminated. In addition, relative measures can distort progress and backtracking in poverty reduction efforts.



The recent experience of Ireland with a relative poverty measure is instructive. Ireland grew rapidly in recent years with real growth in incomes throughout the distribution including the bottom. However, because the middle grew a bit faster than the bottom, a relative poverty measure shows an increase in poverty. Thus, we have a situation of nearly everyone being better off, but poverty nonetheless rising. Another troubling example is a recession during which median income or consumption falls. A relative poverty measure might very well say that poverty was reduced in such a situation, even when absolute deprivation rose (Meyer 2008).



Even when there is an "official" definition/measure, it doesn't mean everyone will agree with it! New York City has launched a major poverty reduction initiative. One of the first things they did was to develop their own definition of poverty because they found the "official" US definition and measures lacking. This is an issue which is unlikely to go away.



What do we call "the poor"?

Words are important. When we use "the poor," are we taking the human being out of the equation? Some advocate the use of "people experiencing poverty" or "people who live in poverty" (although these terms can be awkward). In this document, we use "people experiencing poverty" unless quoting or paraphrasing another source.

Absolute measures determine the ability to purchase a specified basket of goods and services deemed necessary. With absolute measures, you are poor if you cannot afford to buy the items in the basket. There is considerable disagreement over what should be included in the basket!

Some absolute measures such as the Fraser Institute’s Basic Needs Poverty Line include only necessities for survival in the basket, while other absolute measures such as Canada’s Market Basket Measure (the MBM) are more generous. When an absolute measure is used, poverty can be ended.

The central controversy

Relative and absolute measures of poverty reflect a central controversy in poverty. It basically splits into two camps—one camp favours defining poverty as deprivation—the inability to purchase the necessities of life. This camp tends to prefer absolute measures. The other camp favours defining poverty as inequality or “social exclusion” and prefers relative measures. There are valid arguments on both sides which are beyond the scope of this paper.

When poverty is defined narrowly, such as by an absolute measure (e.g. the ability to purchase the things needed for an adequate living standard), the solutions are quite clear and can be measured readily. Does the person have enough resources to move above the absolute measure (and stay above it)?

When broader definitions such as social exclusion are used, the solutions and measurements of success get more complex. The “solution” to exclusion is to work towards including people, i.e. social inclusion. And if defining poverty is difficult, defining social inclusion is even more so. There is no official definition of social inclusion and some of the existing ones offer a confusing array of items (see the sidebar).



Relative poverty measures are in essence inequality measures. Some will argue that we should keep poverty and inequality separate because they are separate ideas (Meyer 2008).



The risk in using broader definitions is that of “losing sight of the goal.” Addressing the many areas to reduce social inclusion may take precedence over helping people exit and remain out of real deprivation.

Dynamic measures

Dynamic measures capture the movement of people in and out of poverty. There are two key measures: **persistent** poverty, when people spend lengths of time in poverty and **recurrent** poverty, where people cycle in and out of poverty.

Most people do not spend a lot of time in poverty—they tend to move out of it quite quickly. The vast majority of people who are poor at one



Some social inclusion definitions:

The Social Planning Network of Ontario: A variety of conditions exist and interact to exclude, “leave out,” or “distance” people in many groups and sub-populations in our society. Social and economic inclusion focuses on these multi-dimensional inequities and the changes needed in policy, institutions, systems, organizations and practices in order to “close the distance” between excluded groups and the larger society.

Inclusive Cities Canada defines social inclusion in 5 parts: diversity, human development, civic engagement, living conditions and community services.

point in time will not be poor at the next time of measurement. This is called **transient** poverty. The reality is most people get themselves out of poverty without the help of agencies, although we know little about this process. In one study, only 2.2% of Canadians remained low-income for all 6 years between 1999 and 2004 (Statistics Canada 2006).

Depth of poverty

Depth of poverty measures how far a person is below whatever poverty line is used. The further below the poverty line, the more deprived you are likely to be.

5 “at-risk” groups

In Canada, 5 groups have higher rates of poverty and more persistent poverty. While comprising only 26% of the population, members of the 5 groups made up 56.2% of low-income people in 2000 and 62% of those in persistent poverty between 1996-2000. These groups are: lone parents, unattached individuals 45-59, recent immigrants, work-limiting disabilities, and off-reserve Aboriginals (Hatfield 2004).

Individual vs. household poverty

Poverty (and income) is often measured for **households** rather than individuals. This masks the poverty of individuals within the household who are economically dependent. This has been a large factor in women’s poverty—women who stay at home with no pay are vulnerable to poverty when they become single.

Problems using income

Almost all poverty measures use income. While income can be a powerful determinant of economic well-being, it is not always an adequate measure. Income is used primarily because there is plentiful statistical data for incomes. Income does not always reflect standard of living for a variety of reasons.

Assets have a large impact on standard of living and are not included in income measures. Assets refer to the accumulated wealth stored within a household. Assets may be tangible (savings accounts, stocks and bonds, retirement accounts, home equity, real estate, business equipment) or intangible (access to credit, education, work experience, special skills) (Corporation for Enterprise Development 2008).

Official measures of income use only legal income. This can mask the actual resources of many poor neighbourhoods and people. One study of poor neighbourhoods in Oakland found there was a \$400 million “hidden market.” This thriving, resourceful activity is hidden by traditional measures of income.



Further reading

Smith, Noel and Middleton, Sue. 2007. *A Review of Poverty Dynamics Research in the UK*. York, UK: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

One of the best easy-to-read summaries anywhere of poverty research, definitions, dynamics and policy implications. It’s too bad we don’t have an equivalent for Canada, although most of the statistics are similar.



New measures

New methods are being developed to measure dynamic movement in and out of poverty. They combine new economic theory (particularly about poverty traps and a newer concept—relief traps), statistical analysis and asset-based approaches. They may be able to predict where people experiencing poverty are likely to be in the future and what determines their movements (a major breakthrough). These measures may lead to more effective policy solutions.

A similar issue was raised in Waterloo in meetings for their poverty reduction effort (Opportunities 2000). Local farmers who grew and ate their own food and were self-sufficient in other ways were called poor when using income measures. Sometimes a **subjective** definition of poverty is used (you are poor if you think you are poor), although there are no standardized measures.

Implications for poverty reduction

These concepts raise important issues about measuring success in poverty reduction.

- One of the most stunning things about poverty “success” rates is that there is little long-term follow-up. Is it “success” when people move out of poverty, only to fall back into it a year later (recurrent poverty)? It would make sense to ensure that people permanently exit poverty.
- Since most people move out of poverty on their own, it is a waste of resources unless services help to speed up this movement, reduce the chances of recurrent poverty, or prevent people from becoming stuck in persistent poverty. The state of the economy plays a large role in this dynamic—there is less poverty in a strong economy and more poverty during recessions. What role do programs have in the face of these larger cycles? Do people need programs when there are simply not enough jobs in the economy?
- There are many programs serving people who live in persistent poverty, but do they serve to make poverty more comfortable or work to help people move out of persistent poverty? Most programs give outcomes indicating increased comfort, with few or none indicating exit from poverty.
- Programs may help to move people out of poverty, only to increase the odds that they will recycle back into it.
 - Some programs actually increase the odds of recurrent and persistent poverty. Income support and welfare programs that require people to run down or eliminate their assets (particularly cash), and/or not accumulate any assets, make it more likely that these people will stay poor or return to poverty at their first financial crisis. Programs that require people to be unemployed, below a certain income, homeless, etc. may also contribute to persistent poverty. Requiring people to prove they are deprived to access services can serve to keep them deprived.
 - Some programs don’t help people move out of poverty at all—they merely shift the burden to the person or families in poverty. The very best welfare-to-work programs have helped people get good-paying jobs (while the not-so-good ones help people get poorly-paying jobs). However, even the best programs do not increase people’s earnings because

they reduce or eliminate welfare benefits (such as childcare, housing subsidies and healthcare) when people get jobs. The recipients often join the ranks of the working poor which makes them more likely to experience recurrent poverty.

- Given that there are some groups at higher risk for persistent and deep poverty, it would make sense to target these groups with specific programs and strategies. This has not been consistently operationalized at agency, community or national levels.
- In the absence of any “official” poverty definition, agencies must decide on what definition and measures they will use to track progress. And this links to intention—to reduce or eliminate poverty or to make it more comfortable.

Key questions for poverty programs

At this point in time, there are no quality evidence-based practices for poverty elimination. In the absence of any, we must develop some key questions or criteria to establish whether a program is effective at poverty elimination.

In their book about evidence-based practices for poverty, Oyen and Cimadamore (2002) summarized the essence of what would determine a poverty best practice [terms used in the section on defining poverty have been added]:

- Does the program reduce poverty [transient poverty]?
- Does it reduce the worst kind of poverty [persistent and deep poverty]?
- Does it keep poverty at bay permanently [recurrent poverty]?

Other criteria are important for poverty elimination initiatives and could include:

- Does the initiative help people who would not have moved out of poverty on their own, or significantly speeds up the progress of those who would move out on their own?
- Is it accountable for money spent, who was it spent on, was there a cost-benefit analysis?
- Does it return equal to or more than it costs?
- Do the benefits go directly to the people experiencing poverty or do the benefits subsidize landlords or employers?
- Has it clearly defined poverty with established indicators to measure success?

These criteria were used as much as possible when selecting the initiatives in the following section.

Promising initiatives

In this section, diverse examples of initiatives that teach us something about reducing or eliminating poverty are presented. For each initiative, the following are presented:

- a brief description of the initiative,
- a list of its innovations,
- the results of the initiative (particularly for poverty elimination), and
- questions to generate discussion.

Putting people in control: Family Independence Initiative



Further reading

Miller, Maurice Lim; Castuera, Marisa; Chao, Michelle and Sadowski, Katherine. 2004. *Pathways Out of Poverty*. Oakland: Family Independence Initiative.

www.fiinet.org

- FII's website has videos of the people they work with, a series of Working Brief Papers, and more information.

Description

The Family Independence Initiative (FII) was established to explore whether focusing on shared strengths and mutuality among families, as opposed to needs and services, could inspire those currently stuck in poverty to move to self-sufficiency. Self-sufficiency is defined as having both control over one's life as well as the social and economic asset base to stay stable in the face of problems. Pilots were implemented in Oakland and Hawaii.

The goals were to:

1. Gain a deeper understanding of the pathways which naturally occurring communities of people follow in striving for self-sufficiency;
2. Determine where small infusions of financial incentives, seed capital and connections to opportunities can catalyze or accelerate the development of long-term social and economic assets, eventually reaching a tipping point where families are stable and independent; and
3. Develop policy and legislative recommendations that support communities of families not only to help themselves but to also take a primary role in poverty alleviation efforts.

The target group was very low-income families between crisis and self-sufficiency. Incomes were below 50% of the local median income.

The approach of the project was to allow families to:

- Shift the initiative for solutions from professional staff to the families themselves.

- Provide the families monetary benefits and the networks of referrals that middle and upper income families utilize to expand their asset base.
- Reward families that help one another within their own cultural networks and who develop ties to new networks that can present opportunities to all.
- Recognize and reward emerging leaders and role models who can pave the way for others to follow.

The initiative works with four groups of 6 families each. The core family was selected by FII and then chose their own “affinity group.” The families then worked together towards self-sufficiency.

Each family received \$250, a computer with internet access, and an Individual Development Account (IDA), an asset development account that provides a 2:1 match for every dollar a family saves toward a home, a business or education expenses. In addition, up to \$3,000 was available to each family in quarterly payments that rewarded progress in areas of employment, education, finances and health care. The money earned by efforts to build self-sufficiency came with no strings. Families could spend it however they chose.

“The structures governing the large majority of philanthropic and public dollars and expertise allocate funds to low-income families through intermediary, non-profit and other organizations, implying, however tacitly, a lack of trust in their ability to manage money. Very few programs place responsibility for breaking the cycle of poverty directly upon the communities with whom they work (Miller et al. 2004).”

The average cost for a family was \$4,500/year or \$9,000 over the two years—about \$800-\$1,000 per individual.

Innovations

The project allowed families to be the decision-makers. A range of activities could be chosen to earn payments. FII staff did not tell the families what to do or how. FII found that staff who were trained in the “helping” professions had difficulty adapting to this “non-help” model. The staff had to honestly trust the families to work out their own solutions.

This program deliberately broke the taboo of giving “no strings” money directly to the poor. The families earned money for accomplishing certain tasks. Once the money was given, there were no stipulations on how it could be spent. The project developers stress that this is no different than money given to higher-income earners through tax refunds from pension savings, mortgage deductions, etc. Allowing the families to decide how best to spend their money was key to the successful outcomes of the project.

FII did not tell the families who to include in their affinity groups. They left it to each family to choose who to include.



Asset-based development

FII is an example of a newer direction in poverty reduction—asset-based development. Without adequate assets, people will remain at risk of all types of poverty (transient, recurrent, persistent and deep). The most promising approaches being used to help low-income families develop an asset base include:

- Individual development accounts (IDAs) are savings accounts for particular investments that are matched by public and private sources.
- Microenterprise development provides loans and support services to start businesses.
- Financial literacy programs to manage their finances and make wise economic choices.
- Financial incentives include earnings supplements, job guarantees, reductions in the amount by which public assistance benefits are reduced because of earned income, child support incentives, child care support, and health benefits.
- Earned income tax credits (EITCs) provide cash directly to the working poor through tax refunds.
- Unemployment insurance provides a cushion during periods of involuntary unemployment.
- Home ownership assistance .

(Institute for Social & Economic Development 2006).

The project was patterned after how the Irish and Asian immigrant communities in the U.S. created micro economies that forged paths out of poverty for the generations that followed. It was also patterned after venture capital funds—invest money directly in a portfolio of low-income families based on their concrete actions.

Results



“This is clearly one of the best grants we’ve ever made,” said East Bay Community Foundation CEO Michael Howe. “We’ve never seen families come so far so quickly.”



- After 2 years, FII reports that 25% of the families are in control of their lives and another 50% are well on their way to self-sufficiency.
- Household incomes jumped an average of 26% over an 18-month period from 2001 to 2003, a time of recession in the Bay Area.
- The families’ net worth and savings nearly doubled in that same period.
- Because the groups pooled their money to help each other make down payments, 9 of the 25 families have become homeowners in the pricey Bay Area real estate market.
- 88% were involved in some kind of formal and/or informal business enterprise.
- 100% had savings accounts, 40% for the first time.

Discussion points

The following questions can generate discussion about the information in this section:

1. What insights and ideas from this initiative stood out for you?
2. Does this challenge what we are currently doing? In what way?
3. What ideas can we use from this example?
 - Are these ideas something we could apply/adapt in an existing program?
 - Would we need to try something new?
4. If we did want to pursue this, what would be the next step?

Shifting the mission: Institute for Social & Economic Development

Description



If you hear your clients ask for cash assistance because they “lost their cash” from their monthly benefit payments; or, if you have chronic unemployment in your agency’s service area and don’t know how to move beyond just handing out emergency assistance, then you need to read this community action executive leadership guide to asset building strategies (Institute for Social & Economic Development 2006).



The issues highlighted at the beginning of this document are not new to agencies serving people who live in poverty. Many agencies are questioning the role they play in poverty reduction/elimination. In the U.S., some community action agencies realized they were more focused on ameliorating the conditions of poverty than on creating opportunities that enable people to emerge from poverty. They were part of the larger shift in thinking towards asset-based development.

In 2005, the Institute for Social & Economic Development (ISED) began a community action agency Executive Leadership Training project that included a series of national, state and agency workshops on Asset Building for Family Economic Security. As a result of this, a guide was published that detailed many agencies’ efforts to shift their mission from “serving the poor” to “elimination of poverty.” The guide includes examples of eight programs that sought to help low-income people build assets for economic self-sufficiency.

Innovations

This guide is the only document found that addresses the issues of shifting an agency’s mission towards poverty elimination. It gives a clear path as to what needs to happen to make this shift.

One of the key innovations is their development of a continuum of agency services that work together towards poverty elimination (they call it Family Economic Security or FES). It is pictured below:



Further reading

Institute for Social & Economic Development (ISED). 2006. *Asset Building Strategies for Family Economic Security: Implications for Change and Best Practices*. Washington: Author.

- A guide for executive leaders that discusses strategies, organizational change required to shift the mission and gives examples of programs.

Discussion points

The following questions can generate discussion about the information in this section:

1. What insights and ideas from this initiative stood out for you?
2. Does this challenge what we are currently doing? In what way?
3. What ideas can we use from this example?
 - Are these ideas something we could apply/adapt in an existing program?
 - Would we need to try something new?
4. If we did want to pursue this, what would be the next step?

Comprehensive, multisectoral initiatives: Vibrant Communities

Vibrant Communities was launched in 2002 as a network of Canadian cities that have undertaken larger-scale, collaborative approaches to poverty reduction. The members of Vibrant Communities are committed to five key principles:

- To reduce poverty rather than simply alleviate it.
- To address the inter-related root causes of poverty rather than focus narrowly on specific symptoms.
- To engage a broad spectrum of sectors and organizations in a collaborative effort rather than have each work in isolation.
- To embrace an on-going process of community learning and change rather than seek out short-term, quick-fix solutions.
- To emphasize and build on community assets rather than deficits.

At the heart of Vibrant Communities is the Pan-Canadian Learning Community, which includes representatives of member communities and national sponsors. This group provides opportunities to share learnings and experiences.

From this larger group, six communities known as Trail Builders, are undertaking local, 3-year poverty-reduction initiatives which are tracking and sharing their learnings and outcomes closely. The Trail



Further reading

Leviten-Reid, Eric. 2007. *Reflecting on Vibrant Communities (2002-2006)*. Ottawa: Caledon Institute of Social Policy.

Cabaj, Mark; Makhoul, Anne and Leviten-Reid, Eric. 2006. *In From the Field: Exploring the First Poverty-Reduction Strategies Undertaken by Trail Builders in the Vibrant Communities Initiative*. Waterloo: Tamarack: An Institute for Community Engagement.

www.tamarackcommunity.ca

- A large website with links to all the participating communities, resources, updates, etc.

Builder initiatives are focused in 6 areas: income support, employer practices, housing, workforce development, early childhood development and education and affordable goods and services.

Innovations

Vibrant Communities is building an extensive knowledge base on community collaboration to reduce poverty. They are compiling and sharing their learnings into how to get a diverse range of players to the table and working together. They are learning how to change systems. They are piloting many innovative strategies and evaluating the results. Combining the efforts of multiple communities into a whole is unique among initiatives and is already saving other communities from “reinventing the wheel.”

One of the most innovative of their approaches is that Vibrant Communities attempts to avoid the temptation to pursue short-term, one-time projects that benefit only a relatively small number of people. Their approach strives to bring about systemic changes that have longer-term and broader-reaching consequences. Resisting the “push to programs” has proven to be difficult, yet possible.

Results

Vibrant Communities is a collection of many local initiatives that is testing the belief that using comprehensive, multisectoral approaches to reduce poverty can assist a large number of households to move out of poverty. It is too early to know if this will indeed hold true, although some initial results are promising.

The amount of information generated by the initiatives is overwhelming. Much of the reporting to date describes the process used to build a collaborative group, the process used to build a framework to address poverty (and then to describe the framework) and descriptions of the activities undertaken once the organization has been completed—for each of the 16 communities involved. Outcomes on actual poverty reduction are preliminary at this point and have been mixed—some initiatives have had an impact on poverty reduction, while others have not.

The initiatives have found it difficult to evaluate outcomes for comprehensive, multisectoral approaches as existing evaluation methods are inadequate. They are working to develop new evaluation processes.

Poverty reduction results reported by the six Trail Builder sites as of 2006:

- 16,200 low-income households have experienced substantial benefits in six pathways (number of households follows each pathway): improved income support (10,220), more affordable goods and services (8,118), better education and early childhood development opportunities (525), new and

improved housing and increased assets (347), new jobs (135) and changed employer practices (108) (Leviten-Reid 2007).

Discussion points

The following questions can generate discussion about the information in this section:

1. What insights and ideas from this initiative stood out for you?
2. Does this challenge what we are currently doing? In what way?
3. What ideas can we use from this example?
 - Are these ideas something we could apply/adapt in an existing program?
 - Would we need to try something new?
4. If we did want to pursue this, what would be the next step?

Designing for the other 90%: International Development Enterprises and D-Rev

Description

Through his work with International Development Enterprises (IDE), Paul Polak developed market-based solutions to poverty that are recognized as some of the most successful poverty elimination initiatives ever. It is a simple concept— “treat those in need as customers and not charity cases.” In doing this, he has helped in the design of simple and inexpensive products that have lifted millions of people in developing countries out of poverty (two such products are the irrigation drip system and the bamboo treadle pump).

“ I hate books about poverty that make you feel guilty, as well as dry, academic ones that put you to sleep. Working to alleviate poverty is a lively, exciting field capable of generating new hope and inspiration, not feelings of gloom and doom. Learning the truth about poverty generates disruptive innovations capable of enriching the lives of rich people even more than those of poor people (Polak 2008). ”



Further reading

Polak, Paul 2008. *Out of Poverty: What Works When Traditional Approaches Fail*. New York: Berrett-Kohler.

www.ideorg.org

- The International Development Enterprises website where the original work is ongoing.

www.d-rev.com

- The website for the design revolution.

Polak finds opportunity in the most poverty-stricken places on earth—slums, rural shareholder farms, etc. He notes that most products are developed for the wealthy 10% of the world’s people. He sees opportunities and a billion-person market (the other 90%) just waiting for affordable products that will make their lives better by allowing them to make more income. Over 20 years, he has developed a 12-step model to make this innovation happen:

“Although each of them is simple and obvious, many people find them difficult to apply. For example, most poverty experts spend little or no time talking with and listening to extremely poor people in the places where they live and work, although that is exactly where I have been guided to most of the practical solutions to poverty that I describe in this book (Polak 2008).”

”



Designing money

What can a community do when there’s more time and ingenuity than money? Some have created their own money! One of the leaders is Ithaca, New York. They invented the Ithaca HOUR, a local currency set at a rate of \$10—the local average hourly wage. You can buy almost any good or service using various denominations of HOURS. Over \$100,000 worth of HOURS are in circulation (www.ithacahours.org).

1. Go to where the action is.
2. Talk to the people who have the problem and listen to what they say.
3. Learn everything you can about the problem's specific context.
4. Think big and act big.
5. Think like a child.
6. See and do the obvious.
7. If somebody has already invented it, you don't need to do so again.
8. Make sure your approach has positive measurable impacts that can be brought to scale. Make sure it can reach at least a million people and make their lives measurably better.
9. Design to specific cost and price targets.
10. Follow practical three-year plans.
11. Continue to learn from your customers.
12. Stay positive: don't be distracted by what other people think.

Polak believes this approach can work in North America. When asked for an example, he used homeless people where he lives in Colorado. He found that storing their belongings during the day was a major barrier to everything else in their lives—finding a job, going for meals, etc. It also put people at risk of further poverty when they had their belongings stolen. Why not start a locker bank and charge a quarter a day for storage?

He stresses that you have to design and develop not just entirely new products but also distribution and marketing systems so the products reach people experiencing poverty. He has started a new project called D-Rev (design revolution) to teach designers, design schools, entrepreneurs and business people to “design for the other 90%.” His major task is to get designers and business people to see the poor with new eyes—as potential customers.

Innovations

One of Polak’s chief innovations is using market-driven mechanisms in areas where it wasn’t believed there were markets. Polak just sees different markets than mainstream business (he sees the other 90% of the world’s market).

Rather than adapting existing products which were designed for the middle and upper classes, Polak encourages designers and business people to innovate and invent entirely new products to service a billion underserved customers. It takes different thinking—it is a design revolution.

People in the third-world have already developed amazing products and services with no money—but a lot of creativity. Polak encourages Western designers and entrepreneurs to *believe* it can be done—it’s simply a design challenge.

Results

Polak states in his book that IDE has lifted 17 million people out of poverty.

Since IDE’s inception, every dollar invested in the development of pro-poor markets has resulted in more than \$50 of net additional income generated by smallholders.

IDE has facilitated an annual net income increase of more than \$200 million in the hands of the world’s rural poor. This does not include less tangible benefits such as improved nutrition, increased school attendance, gender empowerment, reduced workloads, and increased self-reliance.

Discussion points

The following questions can generate discussion about the information in this section:

1. What insights and ideas from this initiative stood out for you?
2. Does this challenge what we are currently doing? In what way?
3. What ideas can we use from this example?
 - Are these ideas something we could apply/adapt in an existing program?
 - Would we need to try something new?
4. If we did want to pursue this, what would be the next step?



Design for human nature

Neoclassical economic theory cannot explain “irrational” human behavior (spending too much, saving too little, borrowing more than you can afford, using predatory financial services, not having a bank account or applying for income support)—other than to call it irrational.

A newer area of study called behavioral economics uses psychology to explain these “irrational” behaviors. Turns out they are not so irrational after all. By applying the theory, simple design changes to programs have resulted in large changes in behavior. For example, putting money into savings accounts automatically (before you can spend it), reducing “hassle factors” such as the paperwork to open a bank account or get income support.

Social entrepreneurship: REDF



Further reading

BTW Consultants. 2005. *Social Impact Report 2005: What a Difference a Job Makes*. San Francisco: REDF.

www.redf.org

- REDF's website is a treasure trove of social enterprise information. It has extensive resources for download, links to other social enterprises, webcasts and videos, etc.



Social enterprise

Social enterprises are businesses owned and operated by non-profit organizations that evaluate performance based on a "double bottom line," expecting returns that are both social and financial. The social returns benefit the employees and the larger society. The financial profits can be reinvested into funding more programs. Social enterprises offer a new way to fund non-profit ventures (BTW Consultants 2005).

Description

Located in San Francisco, REDF (formerly known as The Roberts Enterprise Development Fund) funds a portfolio of social enterprises that create jobs and opportunities for homeless and low-income people who face significant barriers to employment. Before hire, 44% of the employees were homeless or at risk of homelessness, 43% had mental health issues, and 27% were convicted of a crime at some point during their lifetime.

Since 1992, REDF has invested in 13 non-profit organizations and 35 enterprises, employing more than 3,000 low-income individuals. The enterprises have spanned several industries, including retail, service, and manufacturing. Many have developed regional and even national markets for their goods and services. In addition to providing jobs, the enterprises offer a range of supports to help workers expand their skills, stay employed, and advance economically.

REDF provides start-up capital and links to business and philanthropic networks. They also share business advice through their experienced staff and MBA interns and fellows. They do not actually run the enterprises—they act in the role of venture capital provider. REDF's focus is on supporting and documenting model approaches and sharing this knowledge widely.

To measure its social impact, REDF supports an ongoing assessment process that involves face-to-face interviews with enterprise employees at the time they are hired and then at six-month follow-up intervals for up to two years after hire. In addition, they have developed one of the most widely used models for measuring social return on investment (SROI).

Innovations

REDF developed a model for measuring social return on investment (SROI) that is now taught in schools around the US, such as UCLA and Harvard Business School. As leaders in the measurement of social enterprise, REDF is currently evolving SROI to address what they see as its shortcomings. SROI focuses on reporting cost savings to society. REDF is now working to expand this capability to account for the ways that social enterprise employment improves peoples' lives.

Results

Poverty-specific outcomes from REDF's enterprise portfolio include:

- By the two-year follow-up, enterprise employee wages increased by 32%, to an average hourly wage of \$10.43, just shy of San Francisco's living wage standard of \$10.51/hour.

The employees also experienced major improvements in housing stability, transitioning to jobs in the community, criminal recidivism, education and public assistance.

Discussion points

The following questions can generate discussion about the information in this section:

1. What insights and ideas from this initiative stood out for you?
2. Does this challenge what we are currently doing? In what way?
3. What ideas can we use from this example?
 - Are these ideas something we could apply/adapt in an existing program?
 - Would we need to try something new?
4. If we did want to pursue this, what would be the next step?

Work as a way out of poverty: Employment programs

There have been thousands of employment programs over the years. This is one area of poverty research that has a large empirical base, particularly in US-based work-to-welfare programs.

Work first

One of the newest developments in the “hard-to-employ” sector is the questioning of previously stated best practices.

“ The primary way in which these practices have been updated by more recent practitioners is that the idea of “stabilizing” or achieving some threshold of “readiness” prior to enrollment in employment training has been questioned, similar to the way in which “Housing First” has questioned the traditional continuum of shelter-transitional-permanent housing. In recognition of the motivation and stability that employment can provide, programs in some parts of the country have shifted to helping homeless people find work, concurrently with treatment and other stabilization efforts. (cont’d on next page...) ”



A non-profit IPO

The Next Key Center is an innovative job-training and housing center financed in part by the first-ever nonprofit IPO (Immediate Public Opportunity). They raised \$760,000 by selling \$32 “shares” (Warren Buffet was one of the purchasers).

The Next Key Center is designed to be financially self-sustaining through fees from space rental, catering and below-market rents from the apartments (www.hbofm.org/next_key.php).



Further reading

Manitoba Research Alliance on CED in the New Economy “Innovation Framework” Research Team. 2005. *Identifying Employment Opportunities for Low income People Within the Manitoba Innovation Framework*. Author.

- A review of the literature to identify “best employment” practices. The report then evaluates Winnipeg’s employment programs (who serve disadvantaged people in poor neighbourhoods) using the best practices framework.

“ The current US Departments of Labor and Housing and Urban Development Ending Chronic Homelessness Through Employment and Housing initiative is showing that chronically homeless individuals can move into permanent housing directly from streets and shelters with 51% entering employment. This work takes the form of training, day labor, supported employment or other traditional employment, and suggests, that given the opportunity and support homeless people, including chronically homeless, can be engaged in employment-related purposes from initial intake (Taking Health Care Home Initiative 2007). ”

Other programs have found that emphasizing work first works, even for the most disadvantaged populations. This means encouraging people (when possible) to get a job first, rather than starting with long training programs, education upgrades, etc.

Connecting people to work

One of the largest issues in employment for the “hard-to-employ” is connecting them to the jobs available (particularly high quality jobs).

The Department for Communities and Local Government in London, UK (2007) researched how to decrease “worklessness” in deprived neighbourhoods. A key group was people who faced multiple challenges to employment. The research found that much of the problem was not in improving the employability or decreasing the barriers, it was in employers’ hiring practices. Most jobs were through word-of-mouth which meant that people without connections to the employers never heard about the jobs.

The research recommends that employment programs involve employers and link their clients with jobs in the community. The Annie E. Casey Foundation has done extensive work in this area – it calls this process “job pipelines.”

You can’t go it alone

After reviewing the literature, Manitoba Research Alliance on CED in the New Economy recommends:

“ No group can do workforce development alone. Neighbourhood community-based organizations, community colleges & vocational institutions, government, unions, and especially employers need to collaborate to get people into jobs. A labour market intermediary works to bring these diverse stakeholders together. ”

A continuum of services makes all the difference

Most successful programs stress that each client has different needs and the program must be able to meet those needs. While most emphasized “Work first,” the most successful were flexible in meeting clients needs. For example, if a client was not able to complete a job



Cascade Engineering “welfare-to-career”

Cascade Engineering makes plastic injection-molded products such as office chair seats, waste and recycling containers, and automotive parts. They have 1,100 employees of which 99 are “welfare-to-career” (W2C) employees.

The program consists of classes about the hidden rules of class and on-site support workers who help with “poverty-induced obstacles” to work. The support is ongoing and long-term. The program has a 69% retention rate of W2C employees which is comparable to other employment programs.

search, the Portland JOBS program had a variety of program alternatives to choose from (e.g. GED, job club, life skills training).

The best initiatives combine not only technical (hard skill) training and basic education, but also soft skills (“job readiness”) training and job search/placement assistance. Furthermore, they provide a range of support services (child care, transportation and financial assistance, drug/substance abuse counselling, etc.) to help clients overcome their barriers to employment (Manitoba Research Alliance on CED in the New Economy 2005).

Long-term retention (12 months of steady work) is a critical measure of success. “Job readiness” services are a crucial tool to help the least job-ready workers achieve a three-month retention, but “hard skills” (i.e. job-specific training) is the most important factor for achieving 12-month retention. Also, access to employer-subsidized health and leave benefits results in higher retention rates (Padilla 2005).

Support should not end when the job begins

Successful programs continue with supports after a person is employed. This increases job retention rates.

Not just any job... high quality jobs needed

The experience of many work-to-welfare programs has shown that simply getting a job does not necessarily move people out of poverty. This has highlighted the need for jobs that pay above-poverty wages, that provide room for advancement and good benefits.

Limits to employment

There are some people who cannot work, particularly in traditional work environments. In Vancouver, a large-scale study into moving hard-to-employ individuals from welfare to work (The Downtown Eastside Case Coordination Project) found that a large number of the people they worked with were not able to work in mainstream or traditional employment.

The best of the best do not move people out of poverty

There are several work-to-welfare programs that are regarded as being “gold standards.” They include the Riverside GAIN program, Portland JOBS, and Canada’s world-famous Self-sufficiency Project. Their impact on reducing poverty was not sustained over the longer term:

- Portland JOBS had no significant effect on participants’ total income, because increases in job earnings was offset by their lower receipt of welfare/food stamps. Also, 5% lost health insurance coverage by moving to employment – a huge negative consequence (not statistically significant, but it was significant for those families!). Riverside GAIN had the



A simple employment program?

A Portland, Oregon study found that car ownership outweighed social connections and education on employment outcomes. Low-income car owners were 4 times more likely to be employed, had average weekly wages approximately \$275 higher, and worked 11 weeks more than non-car owners. The results were more pronounced for men than for women (Sullivan 2003).

The first U.S. program to repair donated cars and provide them to low-income people reports similar success: 73% reported increased income, 51% reported reduced Food Stamp use, 78% had more hope for the future, and 83% attributed their ability to keep their job—all due to having a car (www.goodnewsgarage.org).

same result—no higher earnings or financial gain because of the removal of benefits.

- Riverside GAIN’s effects on average annual earnings, quarterly employment rate, and annual rate of welfare receipt diminished to near zero for all participants after 7-9 years (compared to the control group).
- Canada’s Self-sufficiency Project provided a significant supplement to single mothers who went to work. It did reduce poverty in the employed mothers—until the supplement was removed. The program increased employment, earnings, and income considerably during the years when the supplement was available, while having little or no impacts after the supplement was no longer available (Michalopoulos 2002).

Discussion points

The following questions can generate discussion about the information in this section:

1. What insights and ideas from this initiative stood out for you?
2. Does this challenge what we are currently doing? In what way?
3. What ideas can we use from this example?
 - Are these ideas something we could apply/adapt in an existing program?
 - Would we need to try something new?
4. If we did want to pursue this, what would be the next step?

What words to use: Framing poverty

Description

A “frame” is the words used to communicate an issue, i.e. gun safety vs. gun control, right-to-life vs. pro-choice, Frankenfood. Frames impact how the public “hears” an issue and whether they will support it. Below is a chart showing the contrast between 2 different poverty frames (Bostrom 2002):

Responsible Economic Planning	Sympathy for the Poor
The issues are the economy, jobs, and the future of prosperity.	The issues are poverty, the poor, and the working poor.
The relevant values are responsibility, vision, stewardship, interdependence.	The relevant values are sympathy, disparities, the Golden Rule, and generosity.
The economy is a system that can be influenced; humans have power to influence economic conditions.	The economy is irrelevant, or it is cyclical, uncontrollable.
Trends, broader influences are integral to the story.	Profiles of sad individuals are integral to the story.
The reader’s relationship to the problem is connective; it is about “us.”	The reader’s relationship to the problem is separate; it is about “them.”
Solutions are the focus; the problem is manageable.	Problems are the focus; the issue is overwhelming.
Responsibility for fixing the problem lies with citizens collectively. Strengthening communities is one of the objectives for action.	Responsibility for fixing the problem rests with the individuals who are having the problem.

Innovation

Using advanced communication strategies can increase the ability of non-profit agencies to build support for poverty elimination.

Results

The most comprehensive study to date of framing in the context of low-wage work and poverty was funded by the Ford Foundation. In a series of focus groups and survey analyses conducted in 2001, 2002, and 2004, Bostrom identified several alternative frames that might be able to break through the US public’s persistent belief that poverty is a matter of individual failure.

They tested 3 frames: sympathy for the poor, responsible economic planning and responsible community planning. Responsible economic



Further reading

Nisbet, Matthew. 2007. *Communicating About Poverty and Low-Wage Work: A New Agenda*. Washington: The Mobility Agenda.

- A review of the research into framing US poverty issues.

www.frameworksinstitute.org

- An extensive website with information and tools for “changing the public conversation about social problems.”

Two Penny Project. 2008. *The Two Penny Project Guidebook: How to Build Public Support For Human Services In Massachusetts*. Author.

- A guide to developing frames that help build public support for human services.



Child poverty frame

One poverty frame that has gained power is that of “child poverty.” Obviously, this frame excludes a significant number of people experiencing poverty. Status of Women Canada also has concerns about this frame. A report discussing the implications of this frame for women (the paper is not in favour of using the child poverty frame) is available at www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/pubs/pubspr/index_e.html (Wiegers, Wanda. 2002. *The Framing of Poverty as "Child Poverty" and Its Implications for Women*).

planning was the most favourable – when policies were presented with this frame, they were supported 4-11% more than those using sympathy for the poor. It also tested well across a variety of groups that traditionally oppose sympathy frames (self-identified “working class,” non-college-educated and older men, union voters, and older voters without a college education).

Discussion points

The following questions can generate discussion about the information in this section:

1. What insights and ideas from this initiative stood out for you?
2. Does this challenge what we are currently doing? In what way?
3. What ideas can we use from this example?
 - Are these ideas something we could apply/adapt in an existing program?
 - Would we need to try something new?
4. If we did want to pursue this, what would be the next step?

Practice-based evidence: Client Directed Outcome Informed Service



Further reading

Duncan, Barry and Miller, Scott. 2000. *The Heroic Client: Doing Client-Directed, Outcome-Informed Therapy*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Duncan, Barry. 2005. *What's Right with You! Debunking Dysfunction and Changing Your Life*. Deerfield Beach, Florida: Health Communications, Inc.

www.talkingcure.com

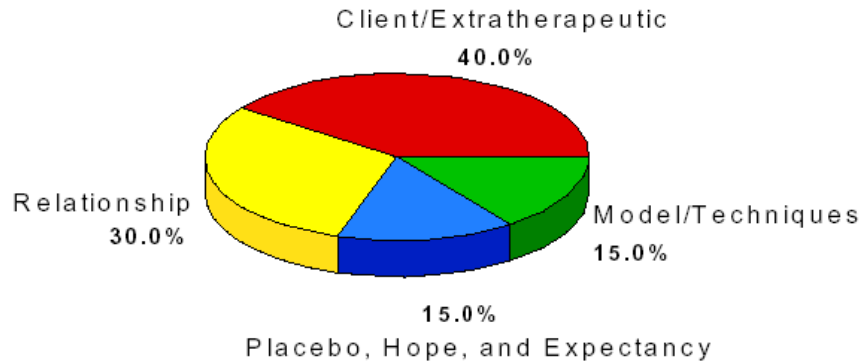
- An extensive website with articles, courses and training, updates, etc.

Description

As discussed earlier in this document, there are no evidence-based practices (EBP) for poverty reduction—yet. Work is underway to develop them and this process parallels what other fields have already been through. With years of effort (and millions of dollars), the mental health/psychotherapy, addictions and medical fields have developed well established EBP. Yet in spite of all the effort, EBP do not tell what works when trying to help another person. They only account for 15% of outcomes across fields. It is likely that the poverty field will encounter similar results. Although the following approach is not specific to poverty, it is being included as it has potential to improve client outcomes with little additional expense. It also answers the question: If EBP do not tell us what works, then what *does* work?

Duncan, Miller, & Sparks (2000) found that there were common factors that predicted outcomes across thousands of studies and that these

factors could be used to design effective interventions. The factors hold true across mental health, addictions and social work studies and are likely to hold for any helping relationship. The common factors are as follows:



Extratherapeutic factors. The research literature makes it clear that the client is the single most potent contributor to successful outcomes in psychotherapy [and addictions], contributing as much as 40% to the improvement that occurs through treatment. In fact, the total matrix of who they are, their strengths and resources, the duration of their complaints, their social supports, the circumstances in which they live, and the fortuitous events that weave in and out of their lives matters more than anything the therapist might do.

Relationship factors. It is estimated that as much as 30% of the variance in successful treatment is due to relationship factors. Studies further show that the quality of the client's participation in the helping relationship is the single most important determinant of outcome. Clients who are motivated, engaged, and who join in the work with the practitioner benefit the most from the experience.

Expectancy, hope, and placebo. Hope is strongly influenced by the helper's attitude toward the client during the initial moments of counselling. Pessimistic attitudes conveyed to the client through an overemphasis on psychopathology or the difficult nature of change is likely to negatively impact the outcome of treatment. This factor contributes an estimated 15% of the variance in successful treatment.

Therapeutic theory and technique. The data indicate that the therapeutic model and/or technique contribute only about 15% to successful outcomes. This means that in spite of the profession's investment in technical and theoretical factors, their actual contribution to successful outcomes pales in comparison to extratherapeutic and relationship factors.

Duncan, Miller, & Sparks have developed an approach that incorporates what works in treatment outcomes. They call it Client Directed Outcome Informed (CDOI) service. It involves:

- Enhance the factors across theories that account for successful outcomes.
- Use the client's theory of change to guide choice of technique and integration of various therapy models.
- Obtain valid and reliable feedback regarding the client's experience of the process and outcome of treatment.

While this approach is not geared specifically to poverty reduction efforts, it could be adapted to ensure that poverty helpers are focusing on the areas that will most likely lead to change.

To shift helping relationships to be client-directed, the client gives the practitioner feedback on progress in every meeting. This is done using 2 feedback tools measuring the alliance (done after every session) and progress outside of the agency (done before every session).

They are as follows:

OUTCOME RATING SCALE (ORS)

Looking back over the past week, including today, help us understand how you have been feeling by rating how well you have been doing in the following areas of your life, where marks to the left represent low levels and marks to the right indicate high levels.

Overall:
(General sense of well-being)

|-----|

Individually:
(Personal well-being)

|-----|

Interpersonally:
(Family, close relationships)

|-----|

Socially:
(Work, School, Friendships)

|-----|

SESSION RATING SCALE (SRS)

Please rate today's session by pacing a hash mark on the line nearest to the description that best fits your experience.

Relationship:

I did not feel heard, understood and respected |-----| I felt heard, understood and respected

Goals and Topics:

We did not work on or talk about what I wanted to work on or talk about |-----| We worked on and talked about what I wanted to work on or talk about

Approach or Method:

The therapist's approach is not a good fit for me |-----| The therapist's approach is a good fit for me

Overall:

There was something missing in the session today |-----| Overall, today's session was right for me

Innovations

One of the striking things about this approach is that it puts the client in the driver's seat. It is an innovation to continually seek feedback from those we are trying to help, in every session and, when it is not working, to brainstorm with the client what might work. It is a way for agencies who say they are client-centred to "walk the talk."

Most client feedback systems are time-consuming, involve a lot of paperwork and are infrequent. The feedback cards were developed with extensive research into their practicality in real life. Practitioners find that they can implement their use into their daily work with clients. Research has also found that they have a large impact on service outcome and the results of the feedback scores can predict outcome between a helper and client.

The authors have also applied their findings to help people change themselves. They challenge what they call the “Killer Ds”—disease, deficits, disorders, dysfunction, disabilities—labels which are often given to people experiencing poverty. Their approach focuses on inner resilience and using what’s *right* with people to change their lives (an approach which is compatible with asset-based approaches).

Results

Miller et al. (2004) reported the following findings that are applicable to an agency like Bissell:

- Providing practitioners with real-time feedback regarding the client’s experience of the therapeutic alliance and outcome cut attrition rates in half and improved outcome by as much as 65%. This was obtained without any changes in services, treatment, or training.
- One agency implemented CDOI with dual-diagnosis clients (addictions and mental health). It resulted in an estimated savings of \$489,600; such cost savings did not come at the expense of client satisfaction with services—during the same period, satisfaction rates improved significantly.

Discussion points

The following questions can generate discussion about the information in this section:

1. What insights and ideas from this initiative stood out for you?
2. Does this challenge what we are currently doing? In what way?
3. What ideas can we use from this example?
 - Are these ideas something we could apply/adapt in an existing program?
 - Would we need to try something new?
4. If we did want to pursue this, what would be the next step?

Public policy poverty reduction/ elimination initiatives

There are numerous poverty reduction or elimination initiatives at the national, state/provincial and city levels. There seems to be some momentum towards establishing poverty reduction or elimination goals and backing it up with action.

Key features of poverty reduction strategies

The following table summarizes the similarities and differences in public policy initiatives. It includes the initiatives of Ireland, the UK, Quebec, Newfoundland, New York City, Hamilton and Waterloo.

Area	Similarities	Differences
Process	<p>Most started with a consultation process involving a wide range of community agencies, business, government, etc. The results of the consultation process were usually incorporated in the final plan.</p> <p>Most conducted research to develop a baseline picture of poverty for their jurisdiction.</p>	<p>Initiatives differed in how much they involved people who live in poverty.</p>
Who's in charge	<p>Most have some organization in charge of the initiative's implementation and who is accountable.</p>	<p>This varied between establishing a new organization or using an existing government body or department.</p> <p>Ireland has established a number of new agencies which makes it difficult to find centralized information.</p>
Coordination of services	<p>Almost all emphasize the need to better co-ordinate existing services before adding new ones.</p> <p>Most have identified a structure or process for doing this.</p>	<p>Hamilton's Roundtable for Poverty Reduction found the pressure to move to establish programs was constant. It deliberately made its role one of coordinator rather than "maker of new programs."</p> <p>New York City is launching 31 new programs but will attempt to coordinate all these programs as well as existing programs.</p> <p>Waterloo found at its mid-term evaluation that it could not adequately coordinate the programs it did have. They recommended not adding any new programs.</p>

Area	Similarities	Differences
Definition of poverty	<p>Most have an “official” definition of poverty</p> <p>Most have some social inclusion or exclusion component.</p>	<p>New York City developed its own poverty definition.</p>
Reduction or elimination?	<p>Initiatives vary between adopting elimination or reduction as their goal.</p>	
Measures/ indicators for success	<p>Most have developed (or are developing) measures/indicators for a wide range of areas that correspond to the definition used.</p>	<p>Quebec has not adopted a poverty line measure.</p> <p>Waterloo’s <i>Opportunities 2000</i> had a goal of 2000 people out of poverty by the year 2000. When it became evident that this would not be reached, it changed its goals. It appears there was intense disagreement about the goal.</p>
Strategies	<p>Key strategies include increasing labour market participation of those able to work and to enhance income security for those with severe work limitations.</p> <p>Most initiatives are also recognizing the importance of developing an economy that produces quality jobs.</p>	<p>City-level initiatives have more limited ability to enhance income security.</p>
Approach	<p>All use a multi-dimensional approach aimed at providing better access to early learning and child care services, affordable housing, health care, essential public services, income supports, high-quality education and training, and jobs that pay a living wage.</p>	
Timelines	<p>Most have multi-year action plans with dedicated human and financial resources.</p>	<p>New York City has long-term plans but is emphasizing areas where quick gains can be made.</p>
Target populations	<p>There is an ongoing debate about the merits of targeting actions toward those most at risk of poverty or who are living in poverty versus providing services on a universal basis. Most policies and programs adopt the principle that different at-risk groups require different policies and target programs toward specific populations such as children, lone parents, seniors, people with disabilities, members of ethnic minorities, and people with a history of low or no participation in the labour market (Collin 2007).</p>	<p>Hamilton and the UK selected children as their sole target.</p> <p>Newfoundland addresses women’s poverty, particularly how it is related to domestic violence (in addition to a variety of target populations).</p> <p>New York is targeting poverty groups with the capacity to make demonstrable progress towards long-term financial stability in a few short years.</p>



A Canadian success story

When there is the will to make policy changes, great strides can be made in poverty reduction. The Canadian seniors poverty rate has declined from 11.3% in 1989 (the last cyclical peak), to 9.8% in 1996 (when the poverty rate for all Canadians last peaked), to just 5.4% in 2006. Canada's rate is now lower than Sweden's (6.6%) and hugely below the United States (21%), the UK (16%) and most large European countries.

Canada implemented a series of income measures including Canada Pension Plan, Guaranteed Income Supplement and Old Age Security which are largely credited for the decline (in addition to the increased rates of private pensions during this time).

Best practices for states

The National Governor's Center for Best Practices (2008) identified the ways in which a state could reduce poverty:

- Expand safety-net opportunities, such as unemployment insurance, for families in crisis; increase the returns on work by, for example, creating or expanding state earned income tax credits;
- Promote savings and asset accumulation by connecting families to banking opportunities, savings accounts, and financial literacy programs;
- Improve the consumer environment in poor neighborhoods by enacting antipredatory legislation and expanding consumer options;
- Increase access to education and training by, for example, expanding financial aid for working adults;
- Improve access to work supports by coordinating policies for benefit programs and expanding benefits when feasible;
- Invest in young children through, for example, home visiting initiatives and prekindergarten programs; and
- Strengthen family relationships through teen pregnancy prevention, responsible fatherhood, and marriage and relationship education programs.

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