

Report on Workshop Sessions on the Development of a Poverty Reduction Strategy

Prepared for:

Department of Human Resources, Labour and
Employment

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.0	INTRODUCTION	1
1.1	BACKGROUND TO CONSULTATIONS	1
1.2	CONSULTATION APPROACH	1
1.2.1	<i>Locations</i>	1
1.2.2	<i>Participants</i>	2
1.2.3	<i>Focus of discussion</i>	2
2.0	CONTEXT FOR POVERTY.....	3
2.1	GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND PROGRAMS.....	4
2.1.1	<i>Provincial policies and programs</i>	4
2.1.2	<i>Human Resources, Labour and Employment policies</i>	5
2.1.3	<i>Awareness of resources</i>	7
2.1.4	<i>Coordination with federal policies</i>	7
2.2	EMPLOYMENT AND ECONOMIC REALITIES	8
2.2.1	<i>Economic downturn</i>	8
2.2.2	<i>Dependency on employment programs</i>	8
2.2.3	<i>Need for a balance of social and economic development</i>	9
2.2.4	<i>Minimum wage</i>	9
2.2.5	<i>The working poor</i>	10
2.2.6	<i>Migrant workers</i>	10
2.3	EDUCATION	10
2.3.1	<i>Early childhood education</i>	10
2.3.2	<i>K-12 system</i>	11
2.3.3	<i>Post-secondary education</i>	13
2.3.4	<i>Literacy</i>	14
2.3.5	<i>The rural experience</i>	14
2.4	HEALTH AND NUTRITION	14
2.4.1	<i>The impacts</i>	14
2.4.2	<i>Issues in Labrador</i>	15
2.5	HOUSING	15
2.5.1	<i>Accessibility of affordable housing</i>	15
2.5.2	<i>Accessibility of transitional housing</i>	16
2.6	COMMUNITY RESOURCES AND CAPACITY	17
2.6.1	<i>Community engagement</i>	17
2.6.2	<i>Government recognition</i>	17
2.6.3	<i>Funding</i>	18
2.6.4	<i>Participation</i>	18
2.7	PERSONAL COPING CAPACITY	19
2.8	ISSUES FACED BY SPECIFIC GROUPS	19
2.8.1	<i>Women</i>	19
2.8.2	<i>Persons with disabilities</i>	20
2.8.3	<i>Seniors</i>	21
2.8.4	<i>Aboriginal people</i>	22
2.8.5	<i>Immigrants</i>	23
2.8.6	<i>Youth</i>	23
2.9	THE CONTEXT FOR POVERTY – A SUMMARY.....	23
3.0	CURRENT INITIATIVES THAT WORK	25
3.1	FOCUS OF INITIATIVES	25
3.2	WHAT WORKS.....	25

4.0	RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION	27
4.1	GOVERNMENT POLICIES.....	27
4.1.1	<i>Provincial government policies.....</i>	27
4.1.2	<i>HRLE specific issues.....</i>	30
4.1.3	<i>Coordination with federal policies.....</i>	31
4.2	EMPLOYMENT/ECONOMIC REALITIES.....	32
4.3	EDUCATION	34
4.4	HEALTH/NUTRITION.....	36
4.5	HOUSING	37
4.6	COMMUNITY ROLE IN THE STRATEGY	38
4.6.1	<i>Shared responsibility.....</i>	38
4.6.2	<i>Foster community capacity</i>	38
4.7	ACTIONS FOR SPECIFIC GROUPS	39
4.7.1	<i>Women.....</i>	39
4.7.2	<i>Persons with disabilities</i>	40
4.7.3	<i>Seniors.....</i>	40
4.7.4	<i>Youth</i>	40
4.7.5	<i>Parents</i>	41
4.7.6	<i>Offenders.....</i>	41
4.8	ACTIONS FOR SPECIFIC REGIONS	41
4.8.1	<i>Labrador</i>	41
4.8.2	<i>Rural communities</i>	41
5.0	CONSULTATIONS WITH PEOPLE IMPACTED BY POVERTY	43
6.0	COMMON THEMES AND PRIORITIES.....	45
	ANNEX B – CURRENT INITIATIVES THAT WORK IN REDUCING POVERTY	52

1.0 Introduction

This report provides a summary of what was heard during the workshop sessions held to inform the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador in its development of a Poverty Reduction Strategy. Goss Gilroy Inc. organized and facilitated these workshops on behalf of the Department of Human Resources, Labour and Employment (HRLE) as the lead department for this government-wide initiative. Since these sessions were held, the provincial government has also received input into the development of the strategy through various other means, including:

- workbook submissions
- input on the toll free poverty reduction feedback line and e-mail, which were promoted through newspaper ads and an insert in the Income Support cheques
- supplementary sessions with organizations focused on poverty or with particular expertise relevant to poverty
- focus groups and other sessions with individuals living in and vulnerable to poverty

The purpose of this report is to summarize the feedback received during the workshop sessions.

1.1 Background to consultations

In the 2005 Speech from the Throne, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador committed to refine and implement a comprehensive, cross-departmental poverty reduction strategy in collaboration with stakeholders.

These workshops were designed to obtain the input of a broad range of stakeholders from across the province at an early stage in the development of the strategy.

1.2 Consultation approach

1.2.1 Locations

Workshops were held in each of the Rural Secretariat regions during the June 27 - July 7, 2005 period, in the following locations:

- Happy Valley – Goose Bay
- Labrador teleconference
- Plum Point
- Corner Brook
- Stephenville

- Grand Falls – Windsor
- Gander
- Clarenville
- Marystown
- Placentia
- St. John's (local/regional organizations)
- St. John's (pan-provincial organizations)

1.2.2 Participants

Participants were identified through a collaboration of HRLE and the consultants, with the assistance of Rural Secretariat staff and various organizations with contacts across the province. In total, there were 161 participants, many of whom played a role in a number of organizations within their communities. The majority were from community-based service delivery and social advocacy organizations; a lesser number of municipalities, economic, business and labour organizations were represented.

HRLE developed a strategy consultation document *Reducing Poverty in Newfoundland and Labrador: Working Towards a Solution, Background Report and Workbook*. Participants were provided with the HRLE website link to the document in advance of the sessions, and were provided with a paper copy at the sessions.

Each workshop was facilitated by a consultant from Goss Gilroy. As well, a representative of HRLE attended each session to set the context for the workshop, respond to any questions, and to observe.

1.2.3 Focus of discussion

The workshops focused on the following questions:

1. What do you think contributes most to poverty in your community/region? How is poverty reflected in your community?
2. Can you identify/describe any current poverty reduction initiative that has had measurable success in your community? Who took the lead? Other players? What elements contributed to its success?
3. What do you think the provincial government's priority step should be to reduce poverty in the province? In your community?
4. Some of you represent specific groups that are vulnerable to poverty. Are there any additional initiatives that would best address poverty for the specific group that you represent?

6. Do you see a role for your organization/agency/business in governments' poverty reduction strategy? If so what?
7. Government plans to hold discussions with people who are directly impacted by poverty in the fall. Are there things government should consider in efforts to include them?
8. Other comments or suggestions?

The remainder of this report presents the discussion of these topics.

2.0 Context for poverty

Participants observed that people live in poverty for any number of reasons including lack of education and related job opportunities, disability (particularly mental health issues), gender and lack of life skills needed to cope with their day-to-day circumstances. Yet, poverty is often hidden. There are few street people in our province and the general public does not always recognize the existing but less visible issues that stem from and create poverty – inadequate housing, increased use of food banks, family crisis and mental health issues.

Participants felt that some people do not recognize that they are living in poverty and have a right to a better standard of living: they try to make do with what they have. Sometimes due to pride and/or due to stigma, people mask their issues - denying poverty exists and doing without basic needs. People were described as living and surviving, not prospering.

The discussion on the context and face of poverty, including contributing factors, will be presented by key themes. These themes, developed from the workshop reports, are:

- Government policies and programs
- Employment and economic realities
- Education
- Health and nutrition
- Housing
- Community resources and capacity
- Personal coping capacity
- Issues faced by specific groups.

2.1 Government policies and programs

The discussion of government policies and their impacts on poverty occurred at three levels: the broad framework of policies and programs across government departments, the specific policies of HRLE, and coordination with the federal government. A summary of the discussion of each of these aspects of policies is presented in this section.

2.1.1 Provincial policies and programs

The concerns with the provincial policy framework were based fundamentally on the role of political leaders in establishing principles and providing direction. People felt that politicians in the province are not sufficiently engaged in the understanding of the realities faced by those living in poverty. As a result, government priorities and policies are not sufficiently designed from a 'people first' perspective.

An observation was made that the strategy consultation document is missing a focus on how policy changes have contributed to poverty. Government policies are seen to have contributed to the "have" and "have not" divide with few steps taken to avoid or bridge this gap. For example, government is garnering significant revenue from gambling, particularly from VLTs, - an addiction which places people in a state of poverty - with few resources invested to address the consequences of this activity.

For most people, financial needs are only a symptom of other issues and concerns. Participants identified that these are not addressed appropriately through a focus on just Income Support or projects – neither of which are seen to address the complex causes and impacts of poverty in a comprehensive way.

While a number of government divisions/departments have prevention as a policy focus, participants argued that this is not their mode of operation. Child, Youth and Family Services, for example, is described as barely staying ahead of the crisis curve even though its mandate is a focus on early intervention and prevention.

Some participants observed there have been numerous consultations undertaken already on the social and economic issues which this strategy should build on. What has been lacking is a report on the resources available to address these issues.

The development of this strategy was taken as an important signal that government now recognizes this and is prepared to develop a comprehensive and funded strategy.

2.1.2 Human Resources, Labour and Employment policies

The impacts of HRLE policies were identified at both the broad level of HRLE Redesign and specific supports and benefits.

Redesign of policies and program delivery

Participants recognized the importance of the increased focus on careers and employment services in HRLE programs as necessary for longer term prevention of poverty and the support of prosperity. However, in most workshops there were concerns raised that these policy changes have led to the erosion of supports for the most vulnerable in our society. In particular, they noted that the HRLE re-design of service delivery has not been examined in terms of its impact on people and on poverty. There is a sense that Income Support is increasingly delivered in an impersonal way, and the full range of needs beyond those related to employment are not being delivered appropriately. Specific concerns with the Redesign are set out below.

Concern was raised by several participants that HRLE has become a call center for those applying for Income Support. The lack of personal contact results in staff being less able to identify supports required for children and their parents. Also there is a gap in personal and financial counseling – a critical service if the system is to help prevent and reduce poverty.

Some participants stated that there has been a growing divide and disconnect between HRLE workers and people on Income Support who have complex needs as the opportunity for personal contact and support continues to erode. This is a particular concern in isolated rural areas, where often HRLE front line workers are the community's only link to government.

Other participants stated that people living in poverty feel they “wear a label” and are intimidated when they have to see HRLE workers: people in these offices are perceived to be the “have's” and those living in poverty are the “have not's”. People feel they are judged and stereotyped and that these attitudes contribute to an individual's sense of embarrassment and shame. Other participants spoke positively about the impacts that some individual front line workers are having on people's lives, because of their supportive approach to service delivery. They noted the need to help strengthen this approach across the system.

The physical office space of HRLE is described as unwelcoming with front line workers increasingly detached from their clients. Participants described the physical barriers they encounter on entering HRLE offices - speaking through holes in Plexiglas, facing locked doors, and having to be “buzzed in”. Other

participants referenced how ineffective it is to phone staff during a crisis when the likely response is an answering machine.

Some participants felt that there was inconsistent application of HRLE policies across populations and regions. There was a sense that programs work against each other. For example, when involved in training programs supported by HRLE, participants identified that there are often difficulties getting funded for needed supports such as child care and transportation. Once programs are completed, people often lose these supports even though these are needed in order to find and take employment.

Income Support

Income Support rates are considered too low and described as "failing miserably" to provide people what they need in terms of nutrition, housing, clothing and recreation. Young singles are seen to be particularly impacted.

It was felt that Income Support policies can actually contribute to conflicts in the continuum of services and increased costs to the system. An example was given of an individual requiring dental work that was not covered by HRLE, resulting in five trips to the emergency department of a local hospital, and a questionable use of the health system's resources.

Drug Card

Participants described how the drug card does not cover all necessary medications and people are forced to choose between paying for the drugs they need and the basics such as food. For those who wish to pursue employment, particularly mental health consumers whose monthly drug costs are high, the loss of a drug card after six months is a significant deterrent to work. While the extension of drug card benefits was seen as a step in the right direction, making it time limited is not considered to be an effective policy.

Disincentives to work

Lack of access to full time and permanent employment, prevalence of minimum wage jobs, lack of employment related benefits, and student debt loads are all cited as disincentives to work. Some identified that people are "better off" on Income Support.

There are many disincentives to employment for persons on Income Support, including limits to how much a person can earn before claw back of benefits occurs; loss of benefits such as the drug card; less access to child care subsidies and rent supplements.

Some participants described how people on Income Support participate in employment programs but do so reluctantly in some cases because of the financial risks they face if they take work. Once off Income Support (to go to school or take a job) it is hard to get back on the system and there can be long wait before benefits are provided for those who have had employment. There is no continuity of support or cushion as people move into and out of situations of need.

Overall, participants generally thought that policies limit the attractiveness of work as an alternative option to Income Support.

2.1.3 Awareness of resources

Participants questioned whether or not people living in poverty are aware of existing community-based and government resources available to them. Some felt that people in receipt of Income Support are not always provided this information. Even some organizations that participated in the sessions acknowledged that they are not as well connected and informed as they should be of what others offer so that they can make appropriate referrals among existing services.

In some cases, the information is available and provided but not accessible to people because it is not in plain language and/or is not provided in a format they can access. (e.g., large print, Braille). Furthermore, it was identified that information on resources needs to be provided using media other than purely technological ones, since there are those who still do not have immediate access to computers/the Internet. Some of those with access are unable to use the technology and/or are intimidated to use it.

2.1.4 Coordination with federal policies

Some participants stated that there is a lack of coordination between federal and provincial policies as well as project and program funding. This disconnect negatively impacts services to people living in poverty. For example, participants referenced that the federal government can only do pilots in areas within provincial responsibility, and then on their completion, hand these over to the province to fund on an ongoing basis even though provincial funding is not available.

A concern was expressed in the Labrador workshop for how the federal Labrador Comprehensive Innu Healing Strategy funds have been used; there are 22 staff at Health Canada in Labrador but it is not evident what impact this is having on the community level needs and development. There appears to be no true commitment to healing. There is a need for more accountability by the federal government in how these funds are used, and potentially a role for the provincial government in calling for this accountability.

2.2 *Employment and economic realities*

Participants described the precarious financial situations of the “working poor” and those who are unemployed. In general, a lack of money was identified as a central factor contributing to people’s financial insecurity and their situations of poverty, and limited employment prospects contribute to this.

2.2.1 Economic downturn

The economic downturn experienced by many communities is considered a significant contributor to poverty in this province resulting in a range of social crises. These include parents' inability to purchase needed goods for their children; an increase in crime; spousal abuse; more single parents due to a growing migrant workforce; more use of shelters and increased addictions (e.g., alcohol, drugs and gambling). In rural areas, the fishery was a recurring theme for participants as its collapse was seen to contribute to people's financial instability and a resulting significant change in lifestyle over the past 10 years.

In some sessions it was discussed how for fisherpeople who turned to Income Support, there was a huge adjustment - particularly for children who were used to being in a “have” family. Participants noted that currently people cannot carry out the subsistence economy (catching fish for own use) to supplement incomes. In the fishery, the aging workforce is a major issue and for this reason some participants argued that an early retirement package for plant workers age 55 and over is necessary.

It was observed that even in a burgeoning resource-based industry such as Voisey’s Bay, some groups face employment barriers stemming from union restrictions. Some also argued that government is not holding the employer to its commitments to hire aboriginal people and women.

2.2.2 Dependency on employment programs

While government is trying to create an enterprising culture, participants felt that government has actually created a culture of make work.

A number of participants felt that the provincial government attitude was to ensure people get enough weeks to “stamp them up” to get them on the federal system. Some participants felt that this contributes to an apathetic approach to work, while others observed this cannot be generalized and does not seem to be an issue in urban areas.

In the rural areas, it was noted that Job Creation Partnerships are leading people to the end of the line. Individuals sign up for these projects in desperation to

marginally increase their income a little for a short period of time. When the project is over, they are forced to move away or go on social assistance..

Many participants also commented on the waiting period for their EI cheque to arrive. Having to endure both a 4 to 6 week waiting period for their first check to arrive as well as a two week waiting period without EI can precipitate a financial crisis. The lack of income during these periods leaves many with mounting bills and no means to pay them. Finally, those who are not eligible for EI have limited options for accessing federal programs.

2.2.3 Need for a balance of social and economic development

The importance of complementary social and economic development was stressed, yet there were concerns that policies appear to be creating a disconnect. Participants stated that Regional Economic Development Boards are being "forced" to shift away from a social and economic focus to one of economic development. This inappropriate separation of economic and social programs by government has led to not having all the groups around the relevant "tables".

Participants stated that all sectors need to see poverty as an issue – it goes well beyond government policy and programming, especially in terms of living wages and employment creation: there is a need to explore the social economy. More specifically, it was noted that there should be more investments in human as well as community resources. At some of the sessions, there was a sense that there exists a cap on investment in people compared to that spent on business development. As a result, it was felt that there were certain limits on social development policy. Furthermore, the perceived lack of attention to community development has made it more difficult for people living in poverty to determine their own needs and be part of the solutions. Some participants were concerned that the more we are driven by an economic model the more this sense of community is lost. Notably, some participants were also concerned about a perceived hidden agenda of rural resettlement, namely it is easier and less costly to service the larger urban communities and neglect the rural areas.

2.2.4 Minimum wage

Participants noted that historically, increases to the minimum wage were too few and too small, and did not keep up with cost of living increases. While the recent increases are beyond cost of living increases, this starting point means that the planned increases are too little and the time period for phasing them in too slow to have a significant impact on poverty. It was identified by some participants that this creates the "underground economy": people cannot survive on minimum wage so they engage in other activities to supplement their small wages.

The amount of income earned in minimum wage jobs is not enough to help people move away from Income Support. This in turn becomes a disincentive to

the development and survival of small businesses as the latter struggle to find and keep staff on these wages.

2.2.5 The working poor

There was discussion of people earning low wages, described as the “working poor” who lack any disposable income. This creates stress for and within families when they are unable to afford the basic necessities including adequate housing, food, and childcare. Participants observed that this population is excluded from society in other ways by being unable to engage in extracurricular activities; or pay for recreational activities for their children (who see their friends participating).

Many highlighted the disparity between people on Income Support and the “working poor” in terms of access to programs, services and benefits such as drug cards.

2.2.6 Migrant workers

While there has always been a migrant workforce, the concern and dilemma for some rural communities is whether or not this kind of economy and work should continue to increase. An increasing proportion of the population is working away, resulting in conflicting benefits and costs to communities. Migrant work opportunities help keep communities in place but have other negative impacts – families are separated; children are housed with other family members/split up or are taken out of school for part of the year; and for some young people, this immediate work opportunity provides a disincentive to pursue post-secondary education.

Participants discussed how when families move away for extended periods, there is a negative impact on the number of children entering the K-12 system in their home communities, and the families themselves lose this extended family support. In addition, there are fewer volunteers in the community to help with providing services to those remaining.

2.3 Education

In all workshops, education and the education system was highlighted as both a contributor to the face of poverty in communities and a key source of the solutions.

2.3.1 Early childhood education

Early childhood education was described by participants as key to addressing poverty. Children living in poverty who enter kindergarten without having had the benefit of pre-school and/or access to computers and technology are already

behind their peers. Participants from the education field noted that at the outset these children may have a visible passion for learning, but their spirit is quickly broken as they struggle to keep up. The recent federal- provincial agreement in principle on early learning and childcare was seen as a positive step, and this needs to be built upon.

2.3.2 K-12 system

System features

A range of issues were cited with the design of the system, which broadly covered relevancy, supports and engagement of parents.

In general, lack of education was described by participants as one of the greatest contributors to poverty. Participants felt that the education system does not provide for the broad range of needs and the required supports. The system is seen to accommodate and cater to children who come from middle income households - those with no issues and no special requirements.

The Pathways approach to education is described by some participants as “not working”. Participants discussed issues of both wrongful diagnosis as well as a lack of diagnosis of learning needs. The Individual Support Services Process (ISSP) also is considered by some to be ineffective: as an example, it was referenced that ISSP sometimes does not start until a child is nearing the end of high school.

Several participants indicated that parents are frustrated with the lack of supports for their children with disabilities, particularly those with developmental disabilities. They are moved grade to grade and are ill equipped for post-secondary education. For youth who are unable to get the necessary supports that they need, many are forced to drop out of school, thereby limiting their future choices. Comparatively, a participant stated that the United States has a “no child left behind” policy and the education of low income children is being monitored there.

Participants stated that some students do not finish high school because it is so strongly focused on academics with limited opportunities for those with interests and aptitudes for the trades. At the same time, it was observed that even though the focus in high school does appear to be on academic achievement, students come to post-secondary institutions without basic mathematics, English and science skills.

Other barriers contributing to lack of success for children within the school system include limited (or a lack of) career counseling. Many suggested that students should get more career exposure before they reach the high school level, particularly in rural areas where children do not always see a range of

occupations in their communities. This career exposure should then be partnered with career development education within the high school curriculum. Concern was also raised over the increased number of distance education courses offered due to declining enrolments. Delivery by distance causes academic difficulties for children who need support from and personal contact with their teachers.

The influence of parents on student enrollment was also discussed. Some students leave high school because their parents do not necessarily value education and as a result of this they do not encourage their children to complete their high school requirements. It was noted by some participants that these parents do not always grasp the notion that in order for youth to better themselves and gain employment, whether in retail or otherwise, high school completion is a necessity. Additionally, some raised the fact that many students, in both rural and urban areas, are making the choice to leave school so that they may be able to support their families financially.

School-related costs/fees

Repeatedly at sessions it was expressed that the financial barriers to education for individuals and their families are not being addressed. Some participants noted that “we pretend education is free when it is not.” Participants identified the need to examine “horizontal” program barriers such as school fees and other costs of education borne by families that make access inequitable, and which prevent children from attending on certain days, thus contributing to their dropping out.

Participants pointed out that children whose parents are among the working poor can easily fall through the cracks at a very young age should they require academic supports such as tutoring or access to equipment (e.g. computers and printers) which their parents cannot afford. For low income parents of children and youth with disabilities, additional disability-related costs further entrench them in a state of poverty.

Personal development

Many expressed how poverty is reflected in the behaviour of students - some lack social skills and suffer academically, particularly if their parents also lack education. Children living in poverty experience stigma and social exclusion in school because of their financial situation which in turn negatively impacts their self-esteem.

Participants identified a general lack of attention to children's personal development (building self-esteem and self-confidence) within the current curriculum. The result is often disenfranchised students. Participants stated that we “lose” some students from the school system because they suffer social

exclusion. Prior to leaving the regular school system many are simply learning that school is a hurtful place where they are marginalized and isolated. The system needs to do a better job of being inclusive for all students, regardless of ability, sexual orientation, etc.

Frustration was expressed that for students who leave the school system at age 16, there are few opportunities for skills training up until the age of 19. In the ensuing years many become so jaded that they are less enthusiastic about re-entering an education system which they view as harmful - not helpful.

2.3.3 Post-secondary education

The discussion of post-secondary education focused on the costs and the resulting debt load. Both impact access to education and the prospects for achieving the prosperity expected from completing higher education.

Living in poverty was seen to be an immediate barrier to post secondary education due to the inordinate associated costs of tuition, books and living expenses. Single parents on Income Support face additional barriers as the shelter component of student loans are clawed back from their benefits. Parents whose income is considered “borderline” have additional financial strain placed on them when their children are turned down for student loans. These students then face increased vulnerability to poverty as they cannot pursue post secondary education. For those who do enter post-secondary education and complete a program, they start their careers with high debt and therefore have little disposable income. One example was given of a graduate offered a job with a \$40,000 salary, which on the surface looked attractive. After living and loan expenses, this person calculated there would be only \$75 a week left. Additionally, some female participants stressed the fact that women generally do not have the same ability to repay their student loans in the same capacity as their male counterparts. Because of this, many women have to extend their loans over as long a period as possible and therefore pay more interest.

Some participants observed that these kinds of situations often deter others in their home communities from investing in a post-secondary education. They often consider the risks too high and the return on the investment too low, even though they face limited employment options without this higher education.

The discussion document speaks of the “temporary state of poverty of students”. One participant was concerned that that it is “outrageous” to say that students are in a transitory state of poverty, given their huge debt loads. This participant also observed that a Charter challenge to the 10-year prohibition to declaring bankruptcy on student loans had been undertaken, but was not successful because the court argued that student debtors did not constitute a group against which discrimination was prohibited by the Charter.

2.3.4 Literacy

The provincial approach to investment in literacy was described by some participants as weak. They felt that the focus must be on supporting people “where they are” and that measurable achievement may require a long term investment in programs that is not being made. Literacy and numeracy skills have huge impacts on the future education and employment success of those who are limited in these areas and so there is a need to focus on literacy in all levels of education.

2.3.5 The rural experience

Several participants noted that many older workers displaced by the fishery do not have the literacy skills to acquire decent paying jobs and derive little benefit from retraining. It also was noted that students in rural areas are not exposed to the wide range of career options available to them and are most often steered toward traditional careers.

People leaving rural areas to attend post secondary institutions in urban areas face the costs and debt loads described above, but the access issues are more pronounced than for those living in urban areas. For example, participants in Labrador described the expense of going out for training, noting that those who cannot afford to leave Labrador for training or post-secondary education are wallowing in a sense of hopelessness.

2.4 *Health and nutrition*

2.4.1 The impacts

A reoccurring theme was that families living in poverty face stress, health and mental health issues. Participants cited a number of impacts on children including increased stress and depression, increased incidence of migraines and stomach problems, and the likelihood of being bullied because they do not have the amenities others do.

Young people are described as disillusioned and parents are seen to go without basic necessities in an attempt to provide for their children. Participants stated that the resulting stress on families can lead to situations in which children are taken into protection when parents are not able to cope.

Participants talked about how unemployment creates a sense of loss in communities as a whole, and leads to stress and increasing mental health issues and illness – both for those affected and their families.

Examples were raised of how people living in poverty often have difficulty managing their diseases, particularly if they incur costs for treatment. For example, people with HIV face very high medical costs (\$1500-2500 a month) and they are forced into boarding houses in unsanitary conditions - a further threat to their health. Many cannot get back to work and current supports are inadequate to address their complex needs.

Participants described the “look” of people living in poverty – they appear unhealthy and poorly nourished. Participants generally felt that families cannot afford healthy foods and this impacts on children’s health and learning. It also impacts on the health system. Participants from the health care sector identified the need to inform parents about budget planning and how they can provide healthy food on limited budgets, as well as the issue of a lack of funds to purchase healthy food.

2.4.2 Issues in Labrador

Participants in Labrador identified a number of issues that affect the health of those living in this region. The geography of Labrador leads to high costs for travel, affecting access to health services and the ability of families to visit or be with relatives in hospital. Examples were given of how many communities undertake significant fund raising to assist people going out for health services, since the travel subsidy is insufficient to meet their needs. This is seen to detract from community investment as people’s limited resources are being directed to pay for what government should cover. Even though communities do help to offset costs, some people feel shame at needing such help and so do not seek the required health care or go without basic necessities to cover travel and treatment costs.

Another issue raised by participants in Labrador is that the fees for prescription drugs are much higher in Labrador than on the island, which has a big impact on the health of those needing medication. An underlying issue is that government does not want to compete with private pharmacies. There is concern that private pharmacies with higher fees could pop up in coastal communities now served by government-run clinics, leading to increases in drug costs.

2.5 Housing

2.5.1 Accessibility of affordable housing

Participants raised concerns about the province-wide lack of affordable, adequate, safe and accessible housing with many noting that the accommodations of those living in poverty are often unacceptable. Examples were given of people living in dilapidated housing which is often structurally unsafe; of people living in boarding homes who due to the mix of residents and lack of safety mechanisms (locks on doors) feel a threat to their personal

security; and of people who are expelled from their boarding houses during the day with no where to go and resort to panhandling for extra money. In-migration to the larger urban areas further exacerbates these problems as people who are marginalized are relegated to inferior housing.

For those receiving Income Support, the benefits provided for rent and the damage deposit are considered inadequate. Participants stated that people spend their core income to pay for their housing costs, thus reducing what they have to spend on basic necessities such as clothes, food, and transportation. Many informants raised the issue of high energy costs which further consume people's core income.

In Labrador it was noted that approximately 95% of people in communities on the coast own their own homes. In that region, the high cost of maintenance and the lack of people qualified to do this work are the key issues leading to poor housing conditions.

Participants also noted housing issues relating to seniors. More specifically, mention was made that the subsidy (rebate) for seniors who use oil for home heating should be extended to those who buy wood or use electricity.

2.5.2 Accessibility of transitional housing

The point was raised that limited access to transitional housing contributes to poverty for women and their children who need this support. There is an inadequate number of shelters/safe houses and second stage housing for victims of violence throughout the province. It was also raised that operational funding for these facilities is often inadequate.

Participants noted that women who are victims of violence often remain in violent situations, particularly if they have children, if their only option is to leave and live in poverty. For some women in abusive relationships, living in a transition house is not an option due to their work commitments and the ages of their children.

Participants stated that many of these women remain in their abusive environments waiting for Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation (NLHC) units to become available. Even though the NLHC places these women at the top of their waiting lists - they are often left waiting for extended periods for housing.

It also was noted that women on Income Support leaving transitional housing are not funded adequately to avail of accommodations that meet their needs.

2.6 Community resources and capacity

Discussions on the community role in the strategy followed two themes: the broader role of the community in working with government and the capacity of community-based organizations to carry out their roles.

2.6.1 Community engagement

Generally, the view was expressed that there is a need to define and promote broader understanding of the role of the community in working with government to effect change. Whole communities and all sectors need to be engaged in this strategy. Participants expressed concern that now this role falls to a few organizations in the social sector. Many community members are not aware of poverty, the impact it is having on individuals and the community as a whole, and the role of all sectors in tackling this as a community-wide issue.

Evidence of this lack of engagement was seen in the participants in the workshop sessions themselves. Most of those attending were from social services-related organizations, and those helping specific vulnerable groups. Business, economic development, municipal governments and labour organizations were generally not represented in large numbers.

2.6.2 Government recognition

Government is seen as often downloading its responsibilities to community groups rather than developing a sound partnership with them. Community-based organizations stated that despite the fact they are carrying out tasks which should be done by government, and leveraging significant community in-kind resources to do so, their contribution is not well recognized nor adequately funded by government.

There is a need to ensure that when new government initiatives have a community component, community organizations are consulted on the design and the potential impacts. For example, there was concern that the new requirements for a number of hours of volunteer service as part of the high school curriculum will mean more work for community groups to oversee these volunteers, without related supports to do this work.

2.6.3 Funding

Participants, in general, highlighted that funding provided to community organizations is not sustaining - rather it is often inconsistent and short term.

Participants felt that when balancing its budget, government tends to make cuts to community-based groups/organizations even though they often provide broad-based support and valuable service to a cross section of vulnerable populations. Volunteers are left to fill the void with the result being that there is an increasing evidence of burn out among volunteers in supportive organizations. The impact of such cuts can be far reaching.

Community-based groups are one of the largest employment sectors and yet they primarily rely on program and project funding to hire employees. Community organizations spend time and energy chasing short term program funding instead of being given the long term funding needed for results. Workers are hired on contract with no benefits and this constrains capacity building and creates the situation where employees in the community-based sector are often part of the “working poor”.

Sometimes successful community-based initiatives are forced to close/end due to an inability to secure additional funding to continue. Additionally, pilot projects are funded on an on-going basis with less funding than is needed to properly test the initiative.

A frequent example cited was that of Community Centres which provide support for local citizens from infants to seniors and serve as a referral source for other resources. Yet, they are funded only by NLHC for a managerial position and minimum operating costs. It was felt by participants that there should be recognition across provincial departments for the impact Community Centres have on their target groups and additional funding secured through relevant departments.

Finally, participants discussed and recognized the importance of community groups’ accountability to government for their expenditures and achieving outcomes. However, many noted that being “held accountable” often translates into onerous administrative activity for the limited staff and takes time away from service delivery.

2.6.4 Participation

A common theme was that a lack of income prevents people from participating in their community. This is compounded for people, particularly children, who live outside the core communities and who have no access to transportation to take part in centralized services.

Some participants noted that community groups funded to run satellite programs are often not held accountable to do so resulting in a dearth of such programming in rural areas.

Participants described an element of the 'poor helping the poor' in community-based programs and services. For those in the system and struggling, most contacts are with those in the same situation. These vulnerable groups need contact with the movers and shakers.

2.7 *Personal coping capacity*

Participants highlighted a number of personal impacts that are reflected in the face of poverty in communities. Poverty is often reflected in people's physical presence - people's clothing and their "haggard" appearance - but it also has an emotional impact. There is a sense of hopelessness and despair expressed by many living in poverty. It is hard to feel empowered to effect personal change, to take advantage of opportunities or engage in self-care when a person has low self esteem. In particular, participants felt that it is difficult to motivate people who want to better themselves when they are third or fourth generation Income Support recipients and have accepted their "lot in life". People feel stigmatized and judged because of their financial positions and historical connection to the system.

2.8 *Issues faced by specific groups*

2.8.1 *Women*

Participants working with and advocating on behalf of women stated that women are the most vulnerable to poverty. One indicator of this is the large number of those in receipt of Income Support who are women and single parents. An underlying cause of this situation is that women have reduced employment choices for a variety of reasons including systematic discrimination.

Staff at Women's Centres described meeting women who live in "absolute and desperate" poverty. Examples were given of women who have not eaten in days because the available food goes to their children and of women who in the winter are freezing because they cannot afford their heat and light costs. As previously noted, the basic living allowance received from Income Support does not meet people's basic needs.

Lack of access to and/or an inability to pay for child care was described by some as an insurmountable employment barrier for women. Participants felt that government has to consider that not everyone has access to regulated childcare and that private childcare rates must be increased.

Women face a lack of work options. Some women who are university graduates are unable to find employment that provides them a living wage; often women

who enter the trades cannot get apprenticeship positions; and older women often have no options for work. Additionally, women's wages, generally, are still lower than men's and employment available to them is frequently part-time and/or in non-standardized jobs. These realities further limit options for those women who are living in violent situations.

Participants highlighted that Legal Aid does not deal with division of property and divorce - which is a significant issue for those of limited means who are undertaking this process. This can be an issue for men as well as women, but for the most part men have a greater ability to pay for legal services than their spouses.

There are many health consequences for women living in poverty. Women are the primary caregivers for their families and often experience increased stress; many go without to feed their children and families, putting themselves at risk of ill health. This then impacts their capacity to find and maintain employment.

At a policy setting level, the lack of real opportunities to undertake leadership roles and participate in political processes was seen as limiting the impact of women's perspective on poverty reduction.

2.8.2 Persons with disabilities

The poverty-related issues faced by persons with disabilities were discussed in terms of supports - for children, education and employment access.

Children

Parents of children with disabilities (including adult children) often face significant financial costs to support their children adequately in their homes and in participating in their communities. It was observed that parents of a child with a disability who are not on Income Support are often "demeaned" in their efforts to prove they are unable to afford services required by their child. Participants stated that decisions are inappropriately based on income/means tests instead of the unmet needs of the children.

There are inequities in funding. Supports paid for those under 18 are income tested with the assumption being the family will cover expenses if they have income over the limit – this places financial and other stresses on families. There is no recognition for the needs and supports required by natural families caring for children with disabilities. Comparatively, if placed in alternate care those supports are provided.

Participants described how upon turning 18, a child is entitled to \$254 a month while living with the family, plus 35 hours of week respite care. This compares to the \$1000 a child of the same age would receive when living in alternate care.

Education

In general, participants indicated that persons with disabilities lack the resources to go into education programs of their choosing. Many persons with disabilities continue to face barriers to post-secondary education including limited literacy skills arising from a lack of disability-related supports within the K-12 system. The latter is compounded by inaccessible schools at all levels of the education experience.

Programs such as Employability Assistance for Persons with Disabilities were described as “good”, but there are long waiting lists and the supports provided during training (e.g. child care) may not be there when a person moves to employment. Opening Doors is seen to have a poor distribution of placements resulting in a disproportionate amount of activity on the east coast.

Employment

Persons with disabilities and their advocates stated that many face isolation due to lack of resources, limited and/or inadequate access to disability-related supports (e.g. home support and accessible transportation), discrimination in the community and systemic barriers. Many continue to live on Income Support and as noted previously, this creates inherent disincentives to employment. Those who have an income, no matter how minimal, generally have the bulk of it clawed back to pay for their supports.

There was discussion of a lack of employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. In particular, persons with disabilities sometimes have to take work in sheltered workshop settings that do not enhance their employability. Supportive employment programs receive inadequate funding from the Employability Assistance for Persons with Disabilities Program due to budget limitations. Further, upcoming changes to the delivery of service by employment corporations may negatively impact the way in which services are provided to persons with developmental disabilities. This population faces the added challenge of trying to get funding for support workers to support their employment and then finding “welcoming” employers.

2.8.3 Seniors

Participants discussed how many seniors are isolated, lonely and trying to cope with a range of issues including financial instability, general lack of supports, health-related problems including chronic diseases, lack of access to transportation and elder abuse. High energy costs are particularly challenging for seniors on fixed incomes who are already having trouble meeting their daily needs. Out-migration has further isolated seniors as their family support is diminished or eliminated.

Care giving is an increasing issue for seniors, many of whom are caregivers to their spouses, adult children with disabilities or other relatives. Many are financially responsible for their grandchildren and/or are providing their primary care because the grandchildren's parents are working away from their communities. Seniors who are on fixed incomes are not supported to have a break and few can afford to pay for respite.

They are often forced to expend their savings (which they had accrued so as to avoid being in financial straits) and become poverty stricken before being eligible to acquire the supports they need to assist them in their care giving roles. Contrastingly, it was also noted by some participants from rural areas that seniors were some of the wealthiest people in their community.

2.8.4 Aboriginal people

The poverty issues for aboriginal people were raised specifically in the Labrador workshop. There are many signs of the serious issues facing aboriginal children and youth living in poverty in that region, including the high rate of suicides and the vulnerability of children who are neglected. A wide range of social and cultural issues are seen to have contributed to this situation. For example, some aboriginal people are only now being identified as having fetal alcohol syndrome when it is presenting in the second and third generation of children. Some participants pointed out that the numbers are phenomenal and yet this is not recognized as a disability for service provision.

The point was raised that the issues in Labrador have been identified through consultations and already researched: there is an expectation that this strategy will use the information already available to inform its direction. Of note, however, some participants expressed concern that aboriginal people are reluctant to speak out about the horror stories in communities since some leaders are not supportive of sharing this information as it is so degrading.

There are concerns with the decreasing numbers of high school graduates in aboriginal communities. For example, this year there was only one graduate from the communities of Natuashish and Sheshatshiu, from among the 30 who started kindergarten in this class. As well, parental support for education is lacking in some communities in part because of the residential schools experience.

Participants stated that in the next few years, assessment of the average income in aboriginal communities will have to be undertaken carefully. Some participants worry there is a perception that the Labrador Inuit Lands Claims Agreement will eliminate poverty. While the land claims agreement is expected to generate opportunities for economic development and associated employment and business benefits, it was recognized that this will not necessarily result in equal benefits to everyone.

Representatives of the Federation of Newfoundland Indians expressed their pleasure in being invited to these sessions but in general feel they are not recognized and included by the provincial government in such initiatives. An example cited was the omission of their populations from the Rural Diversification Strategy document.

2.8.5 Immigrants

Participants with a knowledge of and connection to the immigrant community described how immigrants face many of the same employment problems as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, but these are compounded by cultural and language barriers. Most leave and migrate elsewhere in Canada. For this to change, an appropriate range of programs and services is needed to help them integrate into society in the province. It was noted that the province's planned immigration strategy is an important step in this direction.

2.8.6 Youth

Generally, discussions of issues for youth focused on the education system and the intergenerational nature of poverty. In particular, comments were raised that the K-12 curriculum falls short of meeting the needs of all students, in particular those less academically inclined and those with non-academic needs. As well, there was concern over the accessibility of post-secondary education. More specifically, it was stressed that many students are left with too great a debt load that is very difficult to repay. This is both a deterrent to pursuing post-secondary education and is itself a cause of poverty.

2.9 *The context for poverty – a summary*

In this section, we have presented, in summary form, the wide ranging issues raised and examples of the face of poverty at the individual, community and regional levels in the words of those who participated in the workshops.

The discussion showed that:

- Poverty is influenced by the broad policy framework of government – federal and provincial. The current framework can create disconnects in the continuum of supports as well as an imbalance of effort directed towards fixing problems rather than focusing on poverty prevention.
- The impact of poverty also is deepened by inadequate and limited supports for a wide range of needs. This is of particular concern in the school system where children living in poverty can quickly become academically and socially excluded.

- The consequence of poverty is a lack of opportunities for people to make and act on the life choices that will move them out of this situation.
- Government leadership in developing people focused policies is part of the context for poverty, but only part – many sectors of the province and communities are not sufficiently aware of the issues and engaged in the solutions. Both the social and economic circumstances in communities impact on poverty, and are needed as part of the solution.
- Unemployment, out-migration for employment, and lack of decent-paying jobs all contribute to poverty.
- Many community-based organizations provide support and/or services to persons living in poverty and this must be recognized, valued and supported through financial investment by government.

3.0 Current initiatives that work

Participants were asked to identify current initiatives that are making a difference and factors that contribute to their success. Many diverse initiatives were identified, and these are set out in Annex B.

3.1 Focus of initiatives

The initiatives highlighted in this section are focused on two specific areas – programs and population. This list alone is an indication of the importance of a comprehensive strategy to address poverty:

Focus of programming

- Community capacity building
- Access to services and supports for education
- Employment
- Housing

Groups helped

- Families and children
- Single parents
- Women
- Youth at risk
- Immigrants
- Aboriginal people
- Seniors.

3.2 What works

The following factors appear to contribute to the success of the initiatives that work:

Policies

- Sustained, stable multi-year funding
- Universal access to programming
- Policy changes that remove barriers to supports.

Roles/delivery

- Effective collaboration of government with community organizations, including complementary roles
- Responsive to needs identified by the community
- The skills and positive attitude/approach of staff – in community agencies and front line government workers
- Collaboration and connections among community groups
- Bringing services to where the people are.

Supports

- Initiatives that level the playing field
- Incentives to take work
- Attention to needs in addition to work-related ones.

4.0 Recommendations for action

In this section, we set out the recommendations made by workshop participants for actions to include in the Poverty Reduction Strategy. These recommendations range from the broad policy framework as the basis for action, through to policies and initiatives to address specific issues.

The recommendations are focused both on government and communities, and - importantly - on ways that both might collaborate in reducing poverty.

4.1 *Government policies*

4.1.1 Provincial government policies

Leadership and commitment

Participants in the workshops highlighted that the strategy must be based on strong political leadership and commitment. They commended government for tackling this socio-economic issue but cautioned that it was creating hope through these consultations and its commitment to develop a comprehensive strategy. The participants insisted that there must be follow through. Specific recommendations included:

- Politicians have to buy in and show leadership: “money and guts” are needed to tackle this complex issue. Participants called for a “daring and bold” approach by government to developing a new policy framework for poverty reduction, one that would tackle the big issues at a fundamental level through a long-term approach. Relevant action – not tinkering - is needed. Furthermore, the Premier’s print must be on the process and the resulting strategy.
- Politicians need to understand the human face of this issue. Politicians should take the poverty challenge - let them determine how they would spend their \$630/month if they were a single person living on Income Support.
- Putting people first in policies and developing this attitude among the general public and communities should be a focus of the strategy. Government must work towards removing the stigma and changing attitudes that people consciously “choose to live in poverty”. There needs to be an innovative process to get the public, media and political interest.

Inclusive policy

From a number of perspectives, participants voiced the importance of inclusive policies as a basis for the strategy. The approach being taken to develop the strategy as a cross-government initiative was seen as a signal of movement towards this policy approach. Recommendations included:

- There must be a review of all existing and new policies through a lens of social inclusion. Over the long term this would result in inclusive public policy.
- The system needs to be respectful and flexible, and recognize that one approach does not fit all. There is a need to look at the root causes of poverty – not just the symptoms.
- Policies and programs should empower individuals. It was noted that responsibility comes with empowerment. However, programs must allow for a transition phase for those who do not have the personal skills to make the best choices.
- Poverty must be addressed through both economic and social programs. Further, the strategy should not attempt to prioritize one support need over another.

Social policy as an investment

Another underlying theme in the discussions related to the ‘people first’ orientation of policies. Specific recommendations included:

- The strategy must be appropriately resourced. Solutions must be found, and government cannot simply dismiss issues for which there is no easy low cost solution.
- Social spending has to be considered an investment, not a cost, and therefore there is a need to increase the focus on upfront spending on supports for people, not remedial interventions.
- Ensure early identification of those who may be vulnerable to poverty, followed by provision of a continuum of life long support, financial assistance and monitoring – not just intervention on a crisis basis.

Coordination

Discussions centred on ways of improving the continuity among policies and departmental mandates. Recommendations included:

- Use of an inter-sectoral approach to programming, whereby people are directed to the appropriate resources for their needs, and program continuity is evident.
- There should be a single, integrated application process for those with multiple financial needs.
- Develop awareness across departments of what each offers so that these are appropriate and complementary. This should:
 - start with a full review of all policies and program criteria that impact on poverty and how these inter-relate;
 - include managerial support and leadership to guide the work of front line staff;
 - include identification and elimination of the duplication of services both within government programs and between government and community-based programs;
 - include identification of opportunities to share resources;
 - ensure that policies which are meant to be helpful are indeed helpful and ensure consistency in their application.

Build on what is known

The strategy should not reinvent the wheel. It should build on existing research and successful initiatives. Recommendations included:

- Government should provide adequate and ongoing funding for community-based organizations and programs that work well. This action would be considered a huge step forward in poverty reduction.
- The strategy should build on what has been learned from previous consultations and research including (but not limited to):
 - the recent government work on a recreation strategy;
 - the Rural Secretariat Dialogue;
 - research in various divisions at Memorial University;
 - the previous work on the Income Supplementation Program done through the Economic Recovery Commission.
- The determinants of health research should be brought together into one document to inform cross-cutting policies of various departments.

Accountability

Participants referenced this issue noting in general that there is a need for more transparent accountability to the public for how government funds are spent and the results achieved.

4.1.2 HRLE specific issues

As noted earlier in this report, participants saw many of the current contributors to and influencers of poverty as stemming from HRLE policies and service delivery. A broad range of recommendations was made, as set out below.

Responsive policies and services

- Ensure the changes implemented through HRLE redesign are assessed for how they contribute to poverty.
- Put 'people' back into HRLE program delivery - from having people answering the telephones to having more social workers.
- Invest in staff development. Engage front line HRLE staff who understand how to work collaboratively and successfully with community groups as role models and mentors for other staff.

Income Support

In all workshops, the need for adequate levels of Income Support was identified as an integral component of the strategy. Specific recommendations included:

- Index Income Support.
- Examine the concept of a guaranteed annual income.
- Ensure that the determination of income support entitlements takes into account actual expenses as well as income.
- Increase the amount that may be earned before there is a clawback of income support benefits.

Supports

Supports in general were discussed from the perspective of being tailored to the needs of vulnerable people and provided throughout the life cycle to prevent crises. Specific recommendations included:

- Review the support systems to determine how many supports are tied to employment to the detriment of those who are not employable.
- Ensure that there are social programs that have more than an employment focus – for example, to help people acquire appropriate parenting skills, to learn how to eat nutritiously, and to be self-sufficient in their daily lives.
- Provide persons with disabilities with appropriate disability-related supports, with the caution that for seniors and those whose disabilities pose significant challenges to entering the workforce, all supports cannot just be tied to employment.
- Implement a universal drug card for those on low income to replace the time limited extension of drug benefits for people who are coming off Income Support to enter the work force.
- Improve access to public transportation for employment and services.
- For parents of children with disabilities, set a benchmark income level under which people can be provided the resources they require.

4.1.3 Coordination with federal policies

Participants stressed that the provincial government should collaborate with the federal government on this strategy - not simply inform them after the fact of the results, since both federal and provincial policies have impacts on poverty. Recommendations for specific actions included:

- Federal-provincial-territorial agreements should include principles to guide programs and ensure the policy intent is achieved, as well as an accountability framework to ensure these principles are followed.
- Critical areas such as education policy must be well designed and supported, and not be limited by the federal-provincial division of responsibilities.

- Work with the federal government to examine key programs and policies, including:
 - Barriers people encounter to accessing EI – e.g., there is a need to eliminate the two week waiting period - it leads to a six to 10 week wait for benefits.
 - Federal seniors' pensions – which participants felt should be increased.
 - HST on basic household items (electricity, fuel) for low income households – which participants noted should be removed
 - Human Resources and Skills Development Canada policies in relation to the length of time that Employment Assistance Services and Supported Employment Program supports can be provided to individuals.
 - Examining the extent that the Canada-NL Labour Market Development Agreement has impacted the complementarity of federal and provincial employment programming and the difference this has made to employment results.

4.2 *Employment/economic realities*

The contribution of employment opportunities and economic development to poverty reduction were discussed widely in the workshops. Participants felt that broadly the focus needs to shift to prosperity as the answer to poverty.

Recommendations for government action were:

- Provincial employment equity legislation is essential to the Poverty Reduction Strategy. This was recommended often as a key element to ensure the strategy focuses on prosperity and economic inclusion.
- Further to this, the baseline for measuring the current poverty profile in the province needs societal as well as economic indicators.
- Ensure the strategy incorporates and responds to the needs of the working poor as well as those on Income Support and focuses on building good paying, long term jobs.
- Increase the minimum wage beyond the planned target level and reach this level more quickly than planned in order to remove this disincentive to work.

- As an offset to small businesses, provide funding/subsidies for employers to enable them to pay this higher wage or supplements directly to low income employees.

Employment and business development was the focus of the following recommendations:

- Undertake a comprehensive government and societal effort to change our 'make work/EI' culture to one focused on development and work.
- Create a climate of economic development within municipalities. One action would be to provide more assistance and funding for zonal boards to enable them to be economic agencies for their communities, and allow them to address social as well as economic development.
- Provide more support for small businesses while regulating larger corporations.
- Remove excessive red tape.
- Pay attention to the social impacts (e.g. increased housing prices) of economic developments in rural communities, and provide appropriate controls.
- Provide incentives for employers to hire persons with disabilities.
- Provide paid parental leave for a longer period for people who wish to stay home with their children in their formative years.
- Provide more access to programs such as Skills Linkages.
- Develop social enterprises. (An example given was starting a business in which people on social assistance are trained and hired to facilitate the development of affordable housing - to build, renovate or maintain housing for community-based housing providers.)
- Redesign the Apprenticeship Program so that employers have to hire apprentices and so that the sector is gender inclusive.
- Identify current and projected skill shortages and provide funding for training for these opportunities, in line with studies that have identified this issue.

- Accept that people will migrate, but work towards making this trend to urbanization work for the benefit of regions. (It was concluded that solutions to this issue are not evident.)

4.3 Education

The priority policy area identified most frequently for action in the strategy was education. This was an underpinning of many of the other recommendations directed to economic and social policy changes. Specific recommendations by level of education are set out below:

Early childhood education:

- Profile early childhood education in the strategy as the key poverty reduction measure.
- Adequately address the issue of attracting certified early childhood educators by increasing the wage supplement and providing an allowance for each centre to offset costs.

K-12 system:

- Reframe the education system to make it relevant to all with an overall focus on literacy throughout the education continuum. Provide a range of options for youth to achieve their education, recognizing that the regular school system cannot meet all needs.
- In general, in all sectors, structures and systems must “meet” kids where they are - not force them to conform to an inflexible and unresponsive system. Collaboration and partnerships between government and schools are required to effect this change.
- Provide universal access to education - through inclusion, with the appropriate supports.
- Examine the impact of school fees on access to education.
- Provide adequate funding for teacher allocations.
- Ensure extracurricular activities are accessible to all regardless of income level. Provide opportunities for children to participate in no-cost tutoring and recreational after school programs. (This requires flexible busing schedules as well as the buy-in of parents so they see the value of such activity for their children.)
- In high schools, re-instate course offerings such as industrial arts and

home economics for those who are not academically inclined or who have an interest in trades-related careers.

- Put education back into rural communities. The participants, however, did not agree on how this would be best achieved, although there was a general consensus that more resources were needed.
- Provide education, starting in early grades, on budgeting, smart shopping, and credit management.
- Prevent the stigma against people living in poverty in the school system by teaching children to respect each other.
- Facilitate the collaboration of community groups with the schools on providing supportive programming for students.
- Make healthy living an education policy, enforce only healthy foods in schools and teach children how to eat nutritiously. This is a partnership opportunity for schools, government and parents, that needs relevant policies at the Department of Education level to effect change.

Career education in the K-12 system was raised often as an area for action. Participants felt the new career development course at the high school level is a step in the right direction, and recommended that:

- Career education and awareness be included in the curriculum earlier than high school.
- Exposure be provided to the broad range of options available in all areas, including the trades and university both locally and elsewhere. This was raised as a particular concern in rural areas where young people are often only exposed to a very limited range of careers. Provide opportunities for first hand experience with a variety careers. Facilitate the buy-in of parents and schools to options other than university.
- Foster entrepreneurship.
- In general, encourage youth to make informed decisions about staying or leaving the province – share good information on what the opportunities are in the province.

Post-secondary education:

It was acknowledged by some participants that the recent *White Paper on Public Post-Secondary Education* is good initiative, but additional policy decisions are needed related to affordability of and access to education. Recommendations included:

- Provide free tuition for post-secondary education.
- Provide bursaries for occupations in demand (e.g. physicians).
- Make it easier to acquire and repay student loans (reduced or no interest, tax breaks for students). Further, use the net income after employment expenses in setting the repayment plan for loans.
- Bring back grants, particularly for those who move from rural areas to attend school and incur additional living expenses.
- Stem out-migration by providing incentives (debt forgiveness) for graduates to stay in the province.

Recommendations on other aspects of post-secondary education included the following:

- Undertake research to identify why students drop out and implement measures to address these factors.
- Engage the private sector in supporting life long learning. (One example from the United States is companies reimbursing people for taking further education, with the reimbursement rate being based on marks achieved.)

4.4 Health/nutrition

The adoption of sound health and nutrition policies and initiatives were discussed as being another underpinning of any strategy to reduce poverty. Recommendations included:

Health

- Focus on primary health care and health promotion and develop/fund the capacity of communities to lead and participate in the latter initiatives. Provide incentives and tax breaks for those who live healthy.
- Encourage partnerships to address social problems specific to communities. Identify leaders and community groups who can contribute to sustainability of communities.

- Ensure health care professionals understand how their patients live and the impact poverty has on their overall lives – then they as health care providers can be part of the solutions.
- Develop community-based centres for wellness/lifestyle issues for the whole community, modelled on the Family Resource Centre approach. Invest in community recreation (e.g. walking trails) – encourage participation in communities.
- Support more community-based mental health programs recognizing that these types of supports are critical for addressing the stress associated with living in poverty. Access to such supports may encourage people to “re-engage”.
- Make better use of technology for access to health care.

Nutrition

- Provide access to nutritious food, through increasing Income Support benefits and subsidizing healthy foods.
- Provide resources through the school boards to make school breakfast/lunch programs a part of the school system and less reliant on volunteers. Ensure the role of these programs complements and does not replace the parents' role in their children's healthy eating.
- Provide as needed basic life skills training for vulnerable populations (knowledge and understanding of nutritional value of food; basic cooking skills.) Inform people on how they can make healthy choices within their budgets.

4.5 Housing

Participants made the following recommendations on housing policies and programs:

- Government has to invest in and increase affordable housing options throughout the province by using its own resources and by engaging the federal government to provide additional funding. Further, there is a need to clearly define “affordable” so it reflects the economies of rural communities. To that end, resource rural municipalities to provide housing which reflects the need of those living within the communities.
- Disperse second stage housing throughout the province so women and families leaving abusive situations can have more immediate access.

- Monitor the capacity of the private sector to provide long term sustainable affordable housing as intended under the federal provincial bilateral agreement. Ensure affordable housing is built in areas that are integrated with the community - do not stigmatize people.

4.6 Community role in the strategy

Discussions on the community role in the strategy followed two themes: the broader role of the community in working with government and the capacity building in community-based organizations. Recommendations related to these two themes are provided below.

4.6.1 Shared responsibility

- Define and promote broader understanding of the role of the community in working with government to effect change
- Re-engage communities in supporting their citizens. Make the entire community, including those living in poverty, part of the solution to poverty.
- Examine the construct of communities in the strategy, and based on this, ensure that the strategy takes a comprehensive approach to involving all sectors in community-level action. This will involve the development of a stronger partnership between and among government, community-based organizations and municipalities.

4.6.2 Foster community capacity

- Build and sustain the capacity of community-based organizations to carry out their roles, through infrastructure and long term financial supports.
- Provide more cross-departmental investment to community-based organizations which provide support/services that cross the life span and spectrum of community needs.
- Continue to invest in community partners who understand the need for and can provide a level of accountability but who also bring an approach to services/support that is sensitive and understanding.
- Achieve the right balance in community-based and government delivery of services. Ensure that the system does not contract out services that government should more appropriately be delivering. Recognize and respect that effective programs may not always be in line with government's current priorities: this should not impact funding decisions.

- Recognize and appreciate the value volunteers bring to an organization and community, but also ensure adequate funding for staff support is provided.
- Provide the flexibility to organizations to respond to the identified needs of the community - for example flexibility to move dollars between and among line items.
- Enhance networking between community organizations and government and among community organizations. Provide “developmental grants” to bring community groups and organizations together to ensure they understand what services exist.
- Locate information brokers in outlying areas to build up a knowledge base and become a one stop information source on existing services for community groups and individuals living in poverty.
- Within the Rural Secretariat, dedicate resources to a long term effort of community capacity building and leadership development.
- Ensure that new government initiatives with a community component are well designed with community input, and the impacts on capacity are taken into consideration and resourced.

4.7 Actions for specific groups

In addition to the above recommendations that were seen as ensuring the strategy would benefit all those living in poverty and influence poverty reduction in general, a number were made that related to the issues faced by individual vulnerable groups.

4.7.1 Women

- The strategy must provide women with the capacity to make the social and economic choices required to avoid or move out poverty.
- Ensure that the income support needs of women with children are met.
- Ensure that the employment system gives women access to a wider range of work options.
- Improve linkages of graduates of apprenticeship programs with employers to ensure women apprentices are hired.
- Broaden Legal Aid so that it deals with division of property and divorce.

- Provide universal access to child care.
- Provide appropriate supports for women (particularly seniors) who are care givers.
- Recognize and address the many health consequences for women living in poverty.
- Ensure the wide range of housing, income support and employment needs of women who are victims of violence are adequately met to give them the capacity to leave these situations.
- Provide more substantial support for the needs of Aboriginal women living in poverty.
- Develop opportunities and supports for women to take leadership roles and participate in political processes.

4.7.2 Persons with disabilities

- Provide persons with disabilities with disability-related supports so they can participate in education, employment, and their communities.
- Do not claw back income to offset the costs of disability-related supports.
- Provide parents of children with disabilities with the financial and respite support they need to help them in caring for their children - particularly if they wish them to remain in the family home.

4.7.3 Seniors

- Provide seniors with enhanced options for respite including home care.
- Ensure that seniors do not have to devolve into a position of poverty in order to receive assistance in their care giving efforts.
- Ensure energy assistance programs meet the needs of seniors.

4.7.4 Youth

- Provide information to youth on the services available to them.
- Ensure serving organizations reach those in need. Provide additional funding for outreach to those organizations that have demonstrated

success in addressing the needs of disenfranchised youth.

- Target “youth at risk” for such initiatives - and meet them where they are: for e.g., at local Community Youth Network and Community Centres.
- Implement initiatives such as Youth Protocol Committees to help address the educational needs of youth at risk.

4.7.5 Parents

- Fund parenting initiatives and other such supportive programming - particularly where opportunities exist to build capacity of existing organizations using “train the trainer” approaches.
- Provide “home visiting” programs so that at-risk parents and families can be supported in a range of areas by government staff or community-based service providers - parenting skills; budgeting; etc.
- Increase the budget for transportation for Family Resource Centres and other supportive community-based programs to make these more accessible.

4.7.6 Offenders

- Provide dedicated and funded programs to help offenders gain employment and reintegrate into the community.

4.8 *Actions for specific regions*

Several of the recommendations were related to either Labrador specifically or rural areas in general.

4.8.1 Labrador

- The strategy must respond to the needs in Labrador, and ensure that the ‘degree of difference’ in that region is considered and translated into the kinds of programming, delivery methods and formulas used for funding decisions.

4.8.2 Rural communities

- The strategy must send a signal that rural communities matter, by ensuring there are increased services and programs in rural areas to address poverty.

- The impact of migrant workers on the rural economies and strength of communities should be analyzed with actions taken to address any negative impacts.
- Upgrading of the road system could improve on the economy in rural regions.

5.0 Consultations with people impacted by poverty

Government asked for advice from participants on how to get the views of individuals living in or vulnerable to poverty. Many of those who participated supported the idea of a toll free number as a means for individuals to provide input. In order to promote this number to Income Support clients, it was suggested that it should be advertised through a cheque insert or some other similar means.

In addition to the above, the following recommendations were offered:

Invitations

If consultations are to be held, the invitations should stress the purpose of the sessions and the importance of people's participation

Government should clearly define the target population - who exactly constitutes a person "living in poverty"?

It was recommended that the following groups be included in addition to those receiving income support: the working poor, children and youth, and panhandlers. Some sessions should be held in the rural areas hardest hit by the down turn in the economy.

Settings

The settings should be welcoming - informal, make people comfortable, bring like groups together, provide accommodations for persons with disabilities.

Community meetings were recommended - not necessarily led by government. Government should mentor community representatives in how to hold their own meetings for input.

Supports to attend should be provided: for individuals, provide funds for child care and transportation and an honorarium; for groups holding sessions, provide funding to offset costs of organizing these sessions.

One-on-one interviews may be needed with some people.

Approach

Participants suggested that the sessions on the *Young Offenders Act* worked well, and this process might offer some insights on the best approach.

Government should be prepared for how angry people will be - they live a life of social gaps and have social sores which permeate every aspect of their lives.

The leadership in Aboriginal communities should be informed of the consultation process, but the meetings should involve local people without leadership present to allow for open communications.

Government must report back to the individuals with whom it consulted.

Consulting with front line staff

There is a need to ask front line staff of HRLE to engage in the dialogue as part of the process of developing the strategy and to make it safe for them to participate. They need to be asked for their views on whether what is being done now is the best way to help those who are living in poverty and unemployment.

6.0 Common themes and priorities

All the workshops touched on the above broad themes related to the context for poverty and the recommendations for action. Topics that were most frequently raised and for which there appeared to be broad consensus included:

- The need for government leadership and commitment to comprehensive action on poverty reduction over the longer term.
- A focus on the education system at all levels to ensure that education is accessible, affordable, relevant and meeting the needs of all learners at all stages and preparing them for economic and social participation; to ensure that education helps break the inter-generational impacts of living in poverty and that education helps engage all young people in eliminating the societal stigma associated with poverty.
- Defining and promoting broader understanding of the role of the broader community and community members in working with government to effect change.
- Building and sustaining the capacity of community-based organizations to carry out their roles.
- Addressing the gender-based issues related to poverty so that there is prevention of poverty issues for women, and that those now in this situation have the capacity to make the choices they want and need to make to participate in society and the economy.
- Provision of disability-related supports to ensure the inclusion of persons with disabilities in society and the economy.
- Dealing with the challenges to development and sustainability of rural communities areas.
- In Labrador, addressing the complex social and economic issues that are unique to this region through an approach tailored to the region.

Annex A – Workshop participants

Annex A – Workshop participants

Letters of invitation from the Minister of Human Resources, Labour and Employment were mailed to 727 organizations and 135 participated. Locations and numbers of participating organizations are shown below:

Rural Secretariat Region	Workshop location	Number of participating organizations
Labrador	Happy Valley- Goose Bay	9
Labrador	Teleconference	3
St. Anthony-Port aux Choix	Plum Point	6
Corner Brook-Rocky Harbour	Corner Brook	16
Stephenville-Port aux Basques	Stephenville	12
Grand Falls-Windsor- Baie Verte-Harbour Breton	Grand Falls- Windsor	15
Gander-New-Wes-Valley	Gander	10
Clarenceville-Bonavista	Clarenceville	8
Burin Peninsula	Marystown	10
Avalon (rural)	Placentia	7
Avalon – (urban)	St. John's	16
Pan-provincial organizations workshop	St. John's	23
Total participating organizations		135

Participating Organizations

Labrador Region: Happy Valley-Goose Bay, June 27, 2005

Labrador Friendship Centre
Labrador-Grenfell Regional Integrated Health Authority
Labrador Inuit Health Commission
Labrador Literacy Information and Action Network
Labradorians for Peaceful Communities
Libra House
Mokami Status of Women
National Crime Prevention Strategy
Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation

Labrador Region (teleconference), June 27, 2005

Family Crisis Centre
Hope Haven
Hyron Regional Economic Development Board
Two individual community members

St. Anthony-Port aux Choix Region: Plum Point, June 28, 2005

Department of Justice
Grenfell Anti-Violence Team
Grenfell Project
Labrador-Grenfell Regional Integrated Health Authority – Child, Youth and Family Services
Labrador-Grenfell Regional Integrated Health Authority – Mental Health Services
Labrador-Grenfell Regional Integrated Health Authority – Primary Health Care
White Bay Central Development Association

Corner Brook-Rocky Harbour Region: Corner Brook, June 27, 2005

Canadian Paraplegic Association
Coalition of Persons with Disabilities (representative was also a post-secondary student)
Deer Lake Community Learning Centre
Dunfield Park Community Centre
Employment Preparation Centre
Family Outreach Resource Centre
Federation of Newfoundland Indians
Food Bank Network
Greater Corner Brook Board of Trade
Humber Community YMCA
Kids Eat Smart Foundation
Salvation Army Community and Family Services
Tree House Family Resource Centre
Transition House
Western Region Coalition to End Violence
Western Regional Integrated health Authority

Stephenville-Port aux Basques: Stephenville, June 29, 2005

Bay St. George Women's Council Centre/shelter
Burgeo Diversification Development Board
Codroy Valley Area Development Association
Community Youth Network
Gateway Status of Women Council
John Howard Society
Long Range Regional Economic Development Board
One family
Port aux Basques Employment Corporation
South West Coast Development Association
Taking our Places
West Bridge House

Grand Falls-Windsor-Baie Verte-Harbour Breton Region: Grand Falls-Windsor, June 29,2005

Boys and Girls Club
Central Regional Coordinating Committee of the Violence Prevention Initiative
Community Youth Network
Conne River Health and Social Services
Emerald Zone Economic Development Corp
Exploits Valley Community Coalition
Grand Falls-Windsor Committee against Violence Inc.
Green Bay Community Employment Corporation
Health Central
Springdale and area Chamber of Commerce
SRC - Caregiver's Association
Town of Grand Falls - Windsor
Town of Robert's Arm
Training Wheels – Family Resource Centre
Women's Centre
2 individual community members

Gander-New-Wes-Valley Region: Gander, June 28,2005

Canadian Paraplegic Association
Central Regional Integrated Health Authority
Dover and Area Community Family Coalition
Gambo & Area Employment Corporation - Gander Division
Gander Collegiate
Gander Military Family Resource Centre
Kittiwake Economic Development Corporation

Primary Health Care Project
Salvation Army
Twillingate & New World Island Regional Development Association

Clarenville-Bonavista Region: Clarenville, June 30,2005

College of the North Atlantic
FINALLY
Neighbourhood of Friends - Family Literacy Centre
Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Municipalities
Primary Health Care Project
Rural Secretariat
Seniors Resource Centre - Peer Advocates
Vista Family Resource Centre

Burin Peninsula Region: Marystown, June 24, 2005

Christ the King School
Community Youth Network
Fishery, Food and Allied Workers Union
Grace Sparkes House
Ministerial Committee
Rural Secretariat
Seniors Resource Centre
Sacred Heart Family Aid
Smallwood Crescent Community Centre
Town of St. Lawrence

Avalon Region (rural workshop): Placentia, July 6, 2005

Avalon Gateway Regional Economic Development Board
Baccalieu Trail Board of Trade
Freshwater Community Centre
Genesis Employment Corporation
Health and Community Services - Eastern
Orientation to Trades and Technology
Stepping Stones Family Resource Centre

Avalon Region (urban workshop): St. John's, July 5, 2005

Coalition of Educational Opportunities
Daybreak
Food Security Network
Health and Community Services – Eastern
The HUB
Iris Kirby House
Kilbride to Ferryland Family Resource Centre
The Lantern
Literacy Network Ad-Hoc Group
Regional Coordinating Coalition Against Violence
St. Francis Foundation
St. John's Status of Women Council /Women's Centre
St. Vincent De Paul Society
Stella Burry Community Services
Vera Perlin Society
Women in Resource Development

Pan-provincial organizations workshop: St. John's, July 7,2005

AIDS Committee of Newfoundland and Labrador
Canadian Federation of Students
Canadian Hard of Hearing Association of Newfoundland and Labrador
Canadian Mental Health Association of Newfoundland and Labrador
Canadian National Institute for the Blind
Canadian Paraplegic Association
CHANNAL
Coalition of Persons with Disabilities
Community Services Council
Harris Centre of Regional Policy and Development – Memorial University of
Newfoundland
Huntington Society of Canada
Independent Living Resource Centre
Newfoundland and Labrador Association for Community Living
Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Social Workers
Newfoundland and Labrador Regional Economic Development Association
People First of Newfoundland and Labrador
Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women
Refugee Immigrant Advisory Council
Seniors' Resource Centre of Newfoundland and Labrador
Short Statured People of Newfoundland and Labrador
Single Parents' Association of Newfoundland and Labrador
Social work student

Annex B – Current initiatives that work in reducing poverty

Current initiatives that work in reducing poverty

This section highlights the various initiatives identified in the workshops that have had an impact on poverty in their communities.

1. Families and Children

Family Resource Centres

Family Resource Centres (FRCs) and the broad range of programs they offer to meet identified community needs were frequently mentioned as being an important resource. Military Family Resource Centres and Aboriginal Family Resource Centres were also cited for their effectiveness in serving specific target populations.

Participants felt that FRCs are effective in providing support to families in a safe, sensitive and comfortable environment. They take people out of isolation and support them in parenting, and in forming peer support networks. Since the whole community participates, there is no stigma attached to this program. The expansion of FRCs over the past 11 years was cited as evidence of their success. It was noted that there has been no change in the FRC budget in five years, which is a concern.

Other initiatives for families and children

Participants spoke generally about the contribution of community organizations that try to level the playing field for children by providing activities at no or very low cost. As well, they generally try to mitigate some of the stigma experienced by children living in low income families. One example was the “Food and Fun” camps in Central Newfoundland, a partnership effort which mitigates, at least for short periods, some of the symptoms of living in poverty. Big Brothers/Big Sisters were noted as working well.

Two family literacy programs were noted as being important in breaking down the inter-generational impacts of low literacy - Books for Babies and the PRINTS (Parent’s Roles Interacting with Teacher Support) program.

The Community Education Network Understanding the Early Years project in Western Newfoundland has gained much community and government support and is seen as an effective partnership which is having significant impacts for the education of primary and elementary school children.

Iris Kirby House has been running both an Empowerment and a Youth Group - two successful initiatives with positive outcomes in helping participants move forward from violent situations.

The St. Francis Foundation developed and implemented a Family Support program that works effectively with families in crisis to prevent family breakdown.

Two recent policy innovations were cited:

- The support trust for families allows families to put aside funds for care of adult dependents with developmental disabilities. This is seen as addressing a significant care issue faced by these individuals and their caregivers, many of whom are aging parents.
- The increase in the subsidy for child care spaces under the National Child Benefit was seen as successful in providing improved access to child care even though more spaces are still needed.

2. Single parents

The Single Parents Association of Newfoundland Employment Program has been very effective in helping single parents on income support make the transition to work. The program includes an income supplement of \$300 - \$400 a month, which has proved to be enough to motivate participants to take employment. The program demonstrates the importance of decent jobs - if given that opportunity, people are happy to take care of themselves. It was noted that this program is a good example of how government and community can collaborate to better serve clients and that dedicated front line staff within government is the key to success.

3. Women

Participants frequently spoke about the importance of the varied work done by Women's Centres in addressing effectively the diverse needs of women, including those who face extreme poverty situations. The centres are grass roots organizations that are responsive to local needs.

4. Youth

Various initiatives concerning youth were mentioned. One initiative that was touched upon in several sessions was the Youth Services site on Carter's Hill, St. John's. This particular initiative was considered to be a very successful model because it houses community and government services (Choices for Youth, Community Youth Network, Healthy Baby Club, Health and Community Services) in a site that is accessible to its target groups. As well, this program demonstrates that services must come to the community, where they are

welcoming of those they serve. One of the more effective programs offered by Youth Services that was pointed out by participants was the Youth at Promise Challenge program - a basic literacy skills program for youth at risk who have NO employment or educational options. This particular program was deemed especially important as it is currently filling a service gap that is not met by more main stream programs.

In addition to Youth Services, the potential of the Community Youth Network was also brought up on numerous occasions. In broader policy, however, it was felt that government is 'missing the boat', since adolescents are not deemed to be clients of HRLE and thus not eligible for benefits.

Other than specific community-based projects, mention was given to other initiatives aimed at assisting youth within the province. The Board of Trade in Carbonear, for example, has established a mentorship program in which local businesses and trades provide youth with opportunities to learn about various occupations. In doing so, these young people may receive help in determining their future career paths. This program is tied into the Junior Achievement program in the schools.

Lastly, some participants gave mention to FINALLY – a program that has sponsored a Wild Craft Project within the Métis population in Labrador. This project gives these young people an opportunity to learn about the culture and traditions of their elders and is part of a process to facilitate the development of stronger communities.

5. Immigrants

Two programs for immigrants – Bridging the Gap and Multi-cultural Awareness Workshops have worked well. They bring people together to deal with common issues, and obtain peer support.

6. Aboriginal people

The Labrador Friendship Centre in Happy Valley – Goose Bay provides a wide array of services to the whole community, and is in the planning stage for a senior resource centre. This centre is seen as proactive in linking with the community to facilitate the transition of aboriginals moving to or resident in the community.

7. Seniors

The Seniors' Resource Centre (SRC) Diabetes Program has been successful in getting seniors involved in exercise programs - taking them out of isolation/building support networks and providing them valuable information on their diets and nutrition.

A number of initiatives were identified that relate to broader policy areas. These are provided in the following sections.

8. Education

The Bridging the Gap Program of Random North Development Association links job-related literacy training with local jobs that have the potential to continue after the program.

The Video Conferencing Pilot Project - Career Development and Counselling is an initiative designed to tackle the lack of access to career counselling in rural areas. It links schools with the Memorial University Career Counselling Centre.

In several workshops, the Women in Resource Development Committee's Orientation to Trades and Technology Program (OTT) was cited as an excellent program that introduces women to a range of trades and resources to assist women access decent paying jobs in non-traditional sectors.

9. Employment

The HRLE Linkages Program was mentioned in several workshops as showing results in helping people find employment. Some employers become partners by topping up wages. The group work component is helpful in building the self-esteem of participants. The program is needed on an ongoing basis, and participants felt more funding was needed to meet demand.

The recent policy change to provide for an increase in the earnings exemption of people on income support is seen as a small but useful improvement.

The 11 Canadian Paraplegic Association Employment Offices across the province have demonstrated that "helping people work, works".

10. Access to services and supports

It was noted in many workshops that what makes the most difference is the government employee collaborating effectively with community organizations to ensure services are provided. Similarly, the positive approach of some staff in working with clients directly to facilitate their participation in programs and access to supports has made significant differences in the lives and choices made by individuals.

The Stella Burry Corporation, with assistance from HRLE, hired a support worker who assists their clients in a range of ways from attending appointments with them to joining them for coffee. Such individual support is positive and affirming and often averts crisis. It is also a cost-effective way to assist people.

The Corporation also liaises with one key person in the Department of HRLE which helps with program access.

The province's Mental Health Strategy has resulted in some improved supports, including case managers and home support. It was also noted that, with investment in the right kind of supports, people with complex mental health issues who are seen to be incapable of productive activity are able to work.

11. Housing

The federal Homelessness Initiative, as well as the federal assisted housing initiative, were cited as being effective in building community capacity for addressing these needs and in putting in place a range of innovative housing projects.

12. Community capacity building

A number of initiatives to help build strong communities and networks of community organizations were identified. These include:

The Municipal Capacity Building Program, a zone board initiative in Central Newfoundland, encourages volunteer organizations to engage in collaborative efforts.

Similarly, a Facilitating Community Partnerships initiative has been implemented by the former Strategic Social Plan Eastern Regional Steering Committee in which they are looking to identify a model for communities working better together to address a range of issues.

Opportunity Argentina - a project of the Argentina Chamber of Commerce - is focused on how to grow and develop the local community; how to facilitate access to employment and training; how to assist people who want to work in the area.

The importance of communities working together and sharing resources was frequently mentioned in workshops. In the Labrador session in particular, participants felt that organizations and agencies work well together and are often flexible with their mandates in order to meet the unique needs of the region.

In several workshops, participants felt that the Strategic Social Plan had worked well originally, and led to some good initiatives and sharing of resources among departments. However participants indicated it is not clear if the new Rural Secretariat model will be as effective in bringing departments together.

Smart Labrador was felt to have made a huge difference for access to services for health, justice, and connecting communities. It made a difference for people in

poverty situations and it saved the government money in these service areas. However, funding has been terminated.

A project from Quebec illustrates what can be done through community. Retired judges and lawyers volunteer as advocates – they have guided 20,500 people through the justice system on a budget of \$20,000 a year.

Currently the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Municipalities has carried out a President's Task Force on how to develop sustainable communities. Considerations in the report include sharing services and developing clusters of services to strengthen regions. Collaboration and working together are also stressed.

Finally, it was noted in several workshops that church groups are quietly doing a lot for their communities.

13. Concerns

While participants did not have any difficulty identifying initiatives that are helping address poverty, there was also some concern expressed about this question. It was noted that “everyone can think of a good program – we can see the media release now”. However, it is important to realize that measures to address poverty are long term. It is difficult to say whether or not initiatives in the community have had “measurable” success - although at an individual level, the positive impact of initiatives is clear.

Also it was noted that employment is not the answer for everyone – we have responsibility for many different segments of society and populations of vulnerable people.

Participants often expressed concern that effective initiatives often have to compete for limited funds. There have also been good initiatives that did not continue due to funding.

Finally, a point was made that we need to build on programs that work, not necessarily invent new programs. Examples given included Women in Successful Employment, Single Parents at Memorial (SPAM), and the Independent Living Resource Centre (ILRC).