



POVERTY AMONGST PLENTY

Waiting for the Yukon Government to
Adopt a Poverty Reduction Strategy



Executive Summary

Nick Falvo



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Executive Summary

Poverty, in addition to taking its toll on human lives, has a negative impact on the economy. When fewer people are gainfully employed, the tax base suffers. And when large amounts of people are low-income, health care costs can rise. In short, there are advantages for all when poverty is reduced, and in the past decade, most Canadian jurisdictions have indeed developed “poverty reduction strategies.” But Yukon has yet to implement one, and that is the inspiration of this report.

When it comes to poverty, Yukon presents both challenge and opportunity. The cost of both building and operating housing in Canada’s North is greater than in southern Canada. And in Whitehorse — where three-quarters of the territory’s residents reside — the average house price has increased by 80 percent in the past six years (even after adjusting for inflation). As of March 2012, the vacancy rate on rental units in Whitehorse was a mere 1.3 percent (one of the lowest in Canada). Yukon also has a lower high-school graduation rate than the rest of Canada.

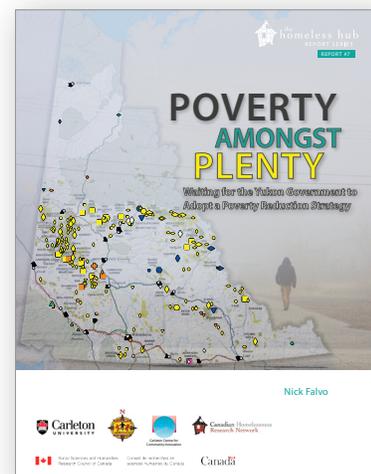
On the positive side, Yukon on the whole has experienced prosperity in the past decade. In the seven-year period preceding the recent recession, the number of high-income earners swelled. During that time, the number of individuals in Yukon earning more than \$250,000 annually more than quadrupled. And while the rest of Canada struggled through the recession, Yukon’s economy roared ahead, growing more than 11 percent between 2008 and 2010. Along with Alberta, Yukon has no public debt.

This policy report provides a broad overview of poverty-related indicators for Yukon. It briefly discusses the economic costs of poverty, poverty-reduction initiatives in other Canadian jurisdictions, as well as basic demographic and cost-of-living information pertaining to Yukon. The situation of lone-parent households and factors leading to child apprehensions are then considered, followed by a look at housing in Yukon. Impending challenges — including declining federal funding — and recent initiatives relating to social housing will then be considered, followed by a section on land development. The report will also highlight challenges with respect to accessing social housing in Yukon.

Conditions at Whitehorse’s only emergency shelter will be discussed, followed by a section on income assistance that includes a look at the Yukon Child Benefit, Yukon’s ‘claw back’ of the National Child Benefit Supplement for households on social assistance, changes to social assistance in recent years, and Yukon seniors’ benefits. This will be followed by a section on education and literacy that will consider early child development, child care, high-school graduation rates and youth. Yukon’s fiscal situation, as well as past initiatives with respect to the development of a poverty-reduction strategy, will then be discussed.

The report ends with five policy recommendations for the Yukon Government. The Yukon Government has made no apparent movement on the ‘poverty reduction file’ in over a year. This should change. The Yukon Government should implement a poverty reduction strategy by January 2013 at the latest. The strategy, once developed, should be overseen by a Poverty Reduction Secretariat that would be arms-length from government. To show that it is serious about the strategy, the Yukon Government should ensure that the Secretariat is headed by a person who is well-respected by local stakeholders and who has at least the status of a Deputy Minister.

The Yukon Government should also capitalize on the success of some of its data collection efforts in recent years; it should continue to collaborate with the Yukon Bureau of Statistics to monitor outcomes. The Yukon Government should also develop cost-effective housing options for marginalized populations, including both women fleeing violence and chronically homeless individuals. Finally, the Yukon Government should remind the federal government that poverty alleviation requires a partnership amongst all levels of government, especially in light of declining federal funding for social housing.



The full report is available at:
www.homelesshub.ca/Yukon