

Government of Alberta Social Policy Framework Public Consultation

Focus Group Summary Notes: Project Adult Literacy Society (PALS)

Facilitated by the Edmonton Social Planning Council

With support from the United Way of Alberta Capital Region, the City of Edmonton, and FCSS

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VISION

Question 1: What words would you include in your vision for social policy?

Probe Questions:

a) What do the words in the proposed vision mean to you?

Responses:

1. The words that I would include in a social policy vision:

- Diversity (not all Albertans are the same)
- Equitable (benefits and services are available to all)
- Personal responsibility
- Community (helping to build our community)

a) The words in the proposed vision mean the following:

- I agree with the proposed vision.
 - Seems like Alberta is a “multicultural” place; it’s a friendly people; they teach you a lot too because their personalities are different. It’s a very good statement.
 - Grown up in Alberta all my life, so it is the finest place in the world to live. I’ve had no problems. Lucky to be employed all my life. I agree with the statement.
 - Agreement with the statement that Alberta is one of the best places. Opportunity to work and to raise your family. I enjoy life here. I’ve been here for 4 years and I like it here.
 - I think we’re living [in the best place to live work and raise a family] right now, if you take advantage of the opportunities that are out there. And it depends on what you want for your family. Improvement is dependent on the individual.
- Words in vision could be clearer.
 - The wording in the vision statement is difficult to understand, need for plain language (in the statement). I understand everything until the last sentence. [the vision statement]
- Alberta is not one homogeneous group.
 - We all have a different culture/background and if you ask someone else what that means, they might have an opinion that’s different than mine. This [vision statement] is a blanket statement. Some people don’t have anything and not everyone has the same opportunity. It doesn’t apply to ALL Albertans. Economic, social and cultural life is very

vague and going in different directions. Different opportunities based on people coming to Canada from different countries.

- I feel it is not equitable for all.
 - With immigrants coming into Canada with a degree, they receive help getting the training they are missing, and don't have to take the entire thing over again. More training and practice with English. I feel [government is] giving them more than us [Canadian-born]. Should be equal rights [for all of] us. Government makes itself look good to people who are just coming into Canada by helping them out. But help others too.
 - Level playing field for everyone regarding access to programs and services.

OUTCOMES

Question 2: What results are needed in order to achieve your vision for Alberta's social policy?

Probe Questions:

- a) Where could significant improvements be made?

Responses:

2. What results are needed in order to achieve your vision?

- Stronger community life.
 - More low cost activities and places to take your kids.
 - As a single mom with two kids and no car, it's hard and it's cold. Enhanced transit system or a program to pick up kids in the winter to take them to play and activities for low income families with no car. That would be helpful.
 - Where I live, there is a community hall that hosts community programs and activities and events. A bus brings in people from the outlying communities who can't afford to drive to the centre on their own.
 - If they want to help children out of crime, get them into sports and activities so they don't get into trouble. They get into trouble when they are bored. They'll learn about team work. More out of school activities.
 - We're missing that sense of community.
 - Parents should be more involved with their kids.
 - Develop programs that provide incentives to get more people involved in the community. This will help tie the community together.
- Better delivery system of program information for immigrants.
 - The information on how to become a Canadian citizen is out there but we can't get to it. Some of us can't read it and don't have a phone number. When I was in school, no one knew that I was left-handed they thought it was something worse and there was no help or

information for me. There is a need for better access to information for programs and services to improve their quality of life.

- Improve people's abilities to integrate into society.
- Comprehensive adult literacy programs.
 - Better funding by governments of literacy programs.
 - Consultation with adult literacy learners when developing programs.
 - Adult learners can connect with and help children learners as classes these days are too big for the one teacher. The schools are so huge and are overwhelming for the teacher. Adults need to be trained to read and write to find the information for the kids. Together we can break the cycle of illiteracy. Show kids who want to drop out of school the adult students in the literacy program [PALS] to show them how they might end up, or even as a way to get the kids to talk about their problems because sometimes they aren't being talked about. We can help by getting them to talk about whether or not there's a problem and then work on addressing it. This will build the confidence of children. The people who work in government have no clue about what's going on in the field. They don't know what it's like.
- Assistance for individuals living in low income.
 - Rent increases everywhere for low income people and the cost of transit goes up too so it's hard to make ends meet. If income goes up, it's ok. So rent should go up when income goes up.
 - Struggle to pay bills when the rent and the power go up and then the groceries go up and how do you put your kids in sports?
 - Government should give people land so people can have their own gardens, grow food and lower some of their living expenses.

MOVING FORWARD: STRATEGIES

Question 3: What actions could help achieve the desired outcomes for Albertans?

Probing Questions:

- a) What is being done well already? What makes these actions successful?
- b) What could be improved?

Responses

- a) What is being done well already? What makes these actions successful?
 - There are a couple of good community programs in Mill Woods. It's run on donations from parents and to keep the kids out of trouble. It's provides kids with a place to go to after school. The school lets the parents use the gym when it's cold outside.
 - The Leisure Access Program for low-income people to access City of Edmonton recreation services.

- Capital Region Housing for subsidized housing which is all good.
- People have to be heard to make the improvements. Some good social policies are in place but we need more.
- Low income transit passes for AISH recipients so that they have more ability to get out and avoid isolation.

b) What needs improvement?

- Immigrants are not respected for what they do know and they can't share that. We expect them to know more about Canada than we do. People can work with each other and learn from one another.
- More communication between government and the public.
- School system has to be completely overhauled. School should provide afterschool 'playtime' where the parents can let the kids be kids with other kids. But from age 10 to 16, there's nothing available and that's where the kids get into trouble and gangs. Start fixing it so it doesn't get worse. More afterschool care is needed that doesn't cost much for parents. Maybe it needs to come from the community. The community needs to come together.
- Nothing right now is working.
- Improve transit system to include less wait times and more buses to commonly inaccessible neighborhoods.
- It would be nice if politicians worked with literacy programs. They say they are going to help but they don't. It's going to get worse if they don't start doing something. Politicians should be more accountable.

FACILITATOR'S FEEDBACK

- Our team rephrased some of the questions to facilitate a more meaningful discussion around the needs of the population we engaged with. The questions we used were as follows:

What do the words in this vision mean to you?

For Alberta to become the best place to live, work and raise a family ...

a) What would it look like?

b) Why is that important to you?

What has to happen in order to achieve what you described?

What's currently working and what could be improved?