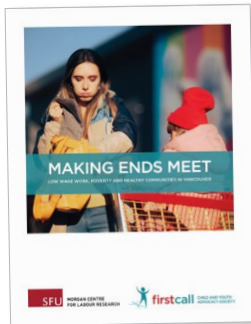
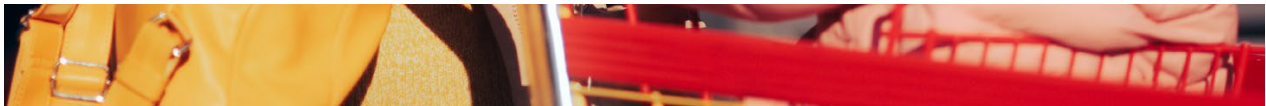




MAKING ENDS MEET

LOW WAGE WORK, POVERTY AND HEALTHY COMMUNITIES IN VANCOUVER

Report Summary



Access the full Making Ends Meet Report at: firstcallbc.org

MAKING ENDS MEET is a peer-led participatory action research project that aimed to gather data about the experiences of Vancouver parents who are living in poverty while working and raising children.

First Call Child and Youth Advocacy Society has been studying child and family poverty in British Columbia for over twenty-five years. Each year, we publish the B.C. Child Poverty Report Card using tax-filer data provided by Statistics Canada. We know from this data that the majority of poor children in B.C. live in families with parents who work in the paid labour force.

While the data tells us something about who is living in poverty, we wanted to hear directly from parents about the economic, health, and social effects associated with trying making ends meet in low wage and/or precarious employment.

The Making Ends Meet research project utilized participatory action research (PAR) methodology. This methodological approach involved the co-production of knowledge where participants and researchers collectively design, implement, analyze, and disseminate research.

Over a period of months during the pandemic, the Making Ends Meet Peer Research team gathered the stories of sixty parents from diverse backgrounds, of various ages, genders, and family structures. All participants were working in precarious or low-wage positions while struggling to provide child care, food, shelter, and other necessities for their children.

Research participants identified child care deficits, unaffordable housing, and inadequate income as the key issues that keep Vancouver families with children living in poverty. As the project progressed, it became abundantly evident that these three problems are at the core of every other issue that arises for low-income Vancouver families.



The absence of affordable child care for ages 0-12 remains the most significant barrier to financial stability for many Vancouver families. When child care is unavailable or unaffordable, parents cannot work. This is particularly true for single parents, where there is no spouse in the home to share childrearing responsibilities. Additionally, a lack of before and after school care spaces keeps some Vancouver families living in poverty until their children reach their teens.



The skyrocketing cost of housing in Vancouver is a serious barrier to financial stability. Parents are working multiple jobs only to spend most of their income on rent. This leaves little money for child care, rapidly increasing food costs and other basics. The housing crisis in Vancouver is a direct cause of ongoing poverty for hard-working families.



Research participants talked about inadequate income including low pay, lack of benefits, and systemic failures to ensure that children receive child support. While low pay and lack of benefits affect all family types, single parents face additional complex challenges and children suffer in deeper poverty when there is an absence of financial support from one parent.

Frustrated with challenges related to living in Vancouver, some participants expressed wanting to leave here and move back to their home countries or provinces, but not being able to afford the cost of moving or the gap in income that would occur during a move.

In the final phase of the project, recommendations were developed by our peer research team and the participants who had shared their stories with us. We asked parents what would make life better for their families. They generously shared what works for them, what creates barriers, and what changes they felt could support their hard work and lead to healthier, more financially stable lives and communities.

Key recommendations from Making Ends Meet participants include the creation of safe, dignified housing for low-income families; affordable child care, and before and after school care spaces for all Vancouver children; and more government-funded food security programs, including direct payments.

While these recommendations emerged from discussions with Vancouver parents, we believe their experiences and observations are broadly relevant for working families across the province. The full list of recommendations is in the final pages of the report.

At the outset of this project there was very little qualitative research about the effects of precarious low-wage work and working poverty on families. We understood that it is not enough to simply look at income to understand the health and social outcomes for families.

It is our hope that this report will contribute to a greater understanding of working poverty and its effects. This research can also inform poverty reduction strategies at all levels of government and help us evaluate the impacts of policy changes on the health and wellness of individuals, families, and communities.