



Yukon Territory Poverty Progress Profile

OVERVIEW

The Yukon Government is in the process of developing a plan called, *The Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Strategy*. Lead by the Department of Health and Social Services, the plan will receive input from other departments and NGOs. Since its proposal in October 2009, the plan awaits completion and implementation.¹ This has led to initiatives from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) including the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition (YAPC) to steer the way in attempting to collaborate with other community groups and the Yukon Government on a poverty plan. The Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition supports a “housing-first” approach that puts housing at the core of eradicating poverty. The Yukon Territory comprises of approximately 35,944 people with an estimated 75.9% living in the territory’s capital, Whitehorse.² A quarter of the population (7 580 people) is of Aboriginal ancestry.³ Many of the social services are located within the capital, isolating the rural communities.

Statistics Canada has yet to produce reliable data in the Yukon Territory, including the three measurements of poverty (LIM, LICO, MBM).⁴ Therefore, this document will portray an approximation of poverty in Yukon but will not give an exact analysis of the territory.

Action on the Ground

Since 1996, the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition (YAPC) has used advocacy, awareness raising and action as tactics to address poverty in Yukon.⁵ Poverty and Homelessness Action Week in October is a reflection of their efforts. YAPC communicates the realities of low income in Yukon including that the North has yet to establish a poverty plan, and advocates for a reduction in economic disparity.⁶ With this, YAPC proposes a ‘housing first’ approach as the crux to eradicate poverty. They also push for a collaboration of NGOs, governments and community groups to collectively tackle the issue of poverty. In a recent YAPC report called, a *Home for Everyone: A Housing Action Plan for Whitehorse* they identify housing as a key factor in addressing poverty and make the following recommendations:⁷

1. Emergency Shelter

- Create and increase transitional housing with long-term supports
- Allocate funds for youth emergency shelter - ensure accessibility for youth under age 16
- Create safe emergency shelter spaces for women and their families

2. Transitional Housing

- Revise zoning by-law; create more boarding houses, hostels and transient accommodations
- Provide community support workers to residents of rooming hotels

Yukon Poverty Progress Profile
Canada Without Poverty, May 2012

- Implement Kaushee's^A Second Stage housing project
- Develop transitional housing for people exiting institutions
- Extend emergency youth shelter stays
- Ensure housing for those in discharge

3. Housing With Long-Term Support

- Find opportunities for co-location to those needing residency and services and expand facilities for support service
- Review mandates from Yukon Government's Supported Independent Living (SIL), Home Care, and Healthy Families
- Include families with school age children in the Healthy Families program
- Increase number of workers and funding for SIL and Home Care programs
- Ensure Yukon College regularly offers training programs

4. Rental Housing

- Reduce land costs and provide short-term incentives to builders
- Prioritize social housing within Yukon Housing Corporation's mandate and ensure targets meet demand
- Implement recommendations from Auditor General
- Provide collaborative solutions and leadership
- Use Landlord and Tenant Act report and educate landlords
- Implement rental programs that reflect market rates and consider income levels
- Entrench housing as a human right in the Yukon Human Rights Act

5. Affordable Home Ownership

- Combat NIMBYism^B and release more land for housing development
- Research incentives to develop privately owned land by altering Municipal Act
- Sell 15% of housing lots below market value
- Continue to support Habitat for Humanity and explore financial alternatives related to down payments

MEASURING PROGRESS

Statistical Indicators of Poverty in Yukon (unofficial measurement tools)

The report, *Dimensions of Social Inclusion and Exclusion in Yukon 2010* was written by the department of Health and Social Services to investigate community member's access to full participation in the community. The report has formulated the following statistics based on the 2006 Census and the national Low-Income Cut-Offs (LICOs) for communities populated by 30,000 or less.⁸

Table 1. Identifies after-tax household income in 2005 with size of the family unit

^A Kaushee's Place – a second stage housing project for women and their families fleeing domestic violence.

^B NIMBY – Not in My Backyard

Table 2. highlights the various types of family households with their estimated income. Statistics Canada's Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics is not administered in the territories⁹

Table 1.

Size of Family and After-tax Household Income 2005

Size of Family Unit	After-tax Household Income 2005
1 person	12,899
2 people	15,700
3 people	19,548
4 people	24,388
5 people	27,772
6 people	30,799
7 or more people	33,827

Table 2.

Types of Households Living Below the Low-income Cutoff (LICO) 2005

Household Types	Total Households	Economic Families in Low Income	
		#	%
Total – All economic families	8300	360	4.3
Couple economic families	6510	205	3.1
Couples only	2900	105	3.6
Couples with children	3300	100	3.0
Couples with other relatives	305	10	3.3
Lone-parent economic families	1630	150	9.3
Female lone-parent families	1100	115	10.5
Other economic families	170	0	0

Views From Outside the Yukon Government

The Yukon is home to a small population of 35,944,¹⁰ and many critics say poverty should not exist. Research is being conducted in the capital which consequently excludes rural communities and thus prevents a clear picture of poverty in the Yukon. Populations such as First Nations, youth and women experiencing domestic abuse and are unable to find services to meet their needs. Government support, such as social assistance, does not suffice. YAPC detected in April 2007 that social assistance rates have not been updated in 16 years while the cost of living had increased by 26%.¹¹ YAPC promotes a 'housing first' approach in order to eradicate poverty to its core. During their Poverty and Homeless Action Week, they highlighted the full/over capacitated shelters in

Yukon Poverty Progress Profile
Canada Without Poverty, May 2012

Yukon noting the plan to build a Second-Stage women shelter called Kaushee's Place is still awaiting a signed contract by the Yukon government.

An important document, *Dimensions of Social Inclusion and Exclusion in Yukon* was correlated in 2010 by the Canadian Council on Social Development to determine resident's access to participation in the community. From this document, residents face difficulties in accessing services (healthcare, emergency shelters, education) due to geographical location. Few rental vacancies and a lack of access to affordable housing are common trends as well as discrimination for individuals receiving social assistance. Furthermore, the document found a racial difference between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals where Aboriginals were less likely to receive an education. The 2011 edition is scheduled for completion in December of 2011.

Notes on Critical Thematic Areas

1. **Human Rights:** The Yukon government does not make reference to a human rights framework in regards to eliminating poverty.
2. **Income Support:** The Yukon Ministry of Health and Social Services declared in November 2007 that by June 2008 it would alter its social assistance policy.¹² Several provisions were outlined in the Social Assistance Reform package including:
 - Eliminating the three-month waiting period for the earned income exemption;
 - Allowing recipients engaged in the labour market to keep \$2 out of every \$4 earned;
 - Increasing different rate categories to better reflect current costs;
 - Increasing the food allowance to reflect "market basket" calculations; and
 - Enhancing services with improved access for persons with severe disabilities.¹³

These provisions proceeded in June 2008 along with an increase to the Yukon Child Benefit and Child Care Subsidy. However, welfare incomes were reported lower than the peak rates between 1986-2007.¹⁴

3. **Housing:** The Yukon is seen to be in a 'housing crisis' with housing costs rising, emergency shelters full, and fewer affordable units being built. YAPC advocates for a 'housing first' approach, emphasizing the importance of providing adequate housing as a means to eradicate poverty. In a recent study titled *The Whitehorse Housing Adequacy Study*, it was verified that "the vast majority (81%) spent 30% or more of their gross household income on their rent or mortgage (the Shelter Cost to Income Ratio)."¹⁵ Social housing is provided in the capital of Whitehorse as well as nine other rural communities in the Yukon. Rental vacancy rates have been low, and were reported at 0.6% in June 2010.¹⁶

The Yukon Housing Corporation, administered by the Yukon Government has created a Home Repair Program with eligible applicants granted a loan up to \$35,000 for one year to use towards their home renovation.¹⁷ In November 2011, the Homelessness Partnering Strategy

administered by the Yukon government granted \$19,000 to the Whitehorse Planning Group on Homelessness and the Malloch Consulting Services to advance a plan to address homelessness in Whitehorse.¹⁸

- 4. Education:** The Department of Education of the Yukon Government generated goals, objectives, strategies and initiatives in their recent *Strategic Plan for 2011-2016: Our Commitment to New Horizons*. The document outlines two specific goals:

- 1) Everyone who enters school in Yukon will have the opportunity to successfully complete their education with dignity and purpose, well prepared to enter the next phase in their lives
- 2) Yukon has an inclusive, adaptable, and productive workforce that contributes to and strengthens the economy¹⁹

In order to achieve these goals the document proposes to increase access to post-secondary education, job training and local job opportunities. Together with these, the plan commits to engaging families and communities in the process, providing a responsive learning environment and to enhance critical thinking skills²⁰. The inclusiveness of the *Strategic Plan for 2011-2016* addresses the existing gaps between race and gender. Both Aboriginal peoples and men rank lower in achieving an education certificate (diploma or degree) with 37% of Aboriginal males age 25 and older not having graduated.²¹

- 5. Early Childhood Education and Care:** The government has focused on the well-being of families and children in order to produce a healthy community. Government initiatives exist to support families such as Yukon Child Benefit, Healthy Families Initiative, Kid's Recreation Fund, Yukon Children's Drug and Optical Program, Youth Investment Fund. However in the last decade, these initiatives have not been expanded or updated.²² Aside from this support, challenges remain as 28% of parents struggle to find affordable child care and 31% struggle to find reliable child care²³. For residents outside of Whitehorse, this is an even bigger challenge.

- 6. Health Care:** A *Health Care Review* in 2009 allowed Yukoners to offer feedback on what they believe is working and what is not, as well as what health care priorities should be. In the latest report called *Taking the Pulse*, a steering committee was formed to evaluate the *Health Care Review in 2009*. Accumulating public opinion on health care, the report indicated that overall quality of the health care system is deemed adequate. Several gaps persist including a lack of emphasis on mental health services, prevention programs and family doctors accompanied by extensive waiting periods, long-term and home care.²⁴

As of April 2011, Nutrition North has replaced the Food Mail program in response to the poor nutritional levels in some of the most Northern communities. Old Crow, a Northern community in Yukon receives subsidies on items that promote a healthy diet, a key social determinant of health.

- 7. Employment Support:** As of September 2011, the unemployment rate for the Yukon was at 5.6% with a national rate at 7.1%.²⁵ Much of the employed are struggling to make ends meet (also known as the working poor). The minimum wage increased in 2008 at a rate of 2.5% and is now at a current rate of \$8.58 per hour²⁶ As of November 2011, Yukon will have the lowest minimum wage in the country.²⁷ Furthermore, “at \$8.58 per hour, a person working full-time (37.5 hours weekly) at the minimum wage earns a gross of \$322 per week or approximately \$1,288 per month. After taxes, a full-time minimum wage worker nets just over \$1,000 per month”.²⁸ The Yukon Government is also the largest single employer in the territory.²⁹ Even though individuals are employed and working part or full-time it does not suffice given the increasing expenses in rent, housing and energy costs.
- 8. Community Building/Investment:** The Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition created a Food Bank Association in 2008 without the help of the government.³⁰ Following the creation of this the Whitehorse Food Bank was founded in May 2009. It is a community volunteer based organization. Today it serves over 1000 people every month.³¹ It is estimated that 60.6% of recipients of social assistance are food insecure.³² This is concerning considering the fact that the national rate is 41.2%.³³
- 9. First Nations Peoples:** Self government exists in 11 of the 14 First Nations bands in Yukon,³⁴ protecting various social and economic rights of First Nations peoples with their ability to act and govern law making powers. First Nations are able to meet specific needs through a ‘draw down’ effect because of self government, allowing First Nations to provide input in regards to funding with the federal /territorial government for needed services in each community.³⁵ Unfortunately there are few statistics related to the First Nations peoples and their poverty levels. Much of the statistics in the Yukon focus on Whitehorse alone, excluding many of the First Nations peoples outside of the city. An accurate measure of poverty and homelessness in the Yukon is impossible to obtain when a large portion of the population is excluded from the studies.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Although the unemployment rate is lower than the national rate, Yukon is experiencing high levels of poverty. With a minimum wage of \$8.58 an hour, this has caused a large portion of the population to be classified as the ‘working poor’. The lack of adequate housing, increased rates in rent and hydro have caused many individuals to devote a majority of their pay cheque to these expenses. As many others look to a helping hand from social assistance, the amount only covers a small proportion of rent costs. Community volunteer based food banks are being run dry with three times the amount of expected recipients.³⁶ The *Dimensions of Social Inclusion and Exclusion in Yukon 2010* found several barriers to preventing community members from full participation in society. Organizations await the launch of the 2011 document to check on progress and assess current issues, as well as the completion of *The Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Strategy* from 2009. While the Department of Health and Social Services develops this plan, YAPC continues to

Yukon Poverty Progress Profile
Canada Without Poverty, May 2012

push forward by implementing their 'Plans for Action' outlined in *A Home for Everyone: A Housing Action Plan for Whitehorse*. To ensure the development of housing projects, YAPC continues to seek collaboration with government, NGOs and community agencies.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Canada Without Poverty
@UnderOne Roof
251 Bank Street, 2nd Floor
Ottawa, ON K2P 1X3
613-789-0096 (1-800-810-1076); info@cwpc-csp.ca

ENDNOTES

-
- ¹ BC Poverty Reduction Coalition, "National Plans: Yukon", (2011), <http://bcpovertyreduction.ca/learn-more/poverty-reduction-plans/>
- ² Yukon Bureau of Statistics, "Yukon Statistical Overview", (2011), <http://www.eco.gov.yk.ca/stats/>
- ³ Canadian Council on Social Development, "Poverty Reduction Policies and Programs", (2009), 4, http://www.ccsd.ca/Reports/YK_Report_FINAL.pdf
- ⁴ Human Resources & Skills Development Canada, "Low Income in Canada 2000-2007 Using the Market Basket Measure - August 2009", (2011), http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/publications_resources/research/categories/inclusion/2009/sp-909-07-09/page04.shtml
- ⁵ Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition, "About Us", (2011), <http://yapc.ca/about/>
- ⁶ Nadine Sander-Green, "Coalition Has Pinpointed 100 Homeless People", *Whitehorse Star*, (11 Oct 2011), <http://www.whitehorsestar.com/archive/story/coalition-has-pinpointed-100-homeless-people/>
- ⁷ Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition, "A Home for Everyone: A Housing Action Plan for Whitehorse", (2011), 4-13, <http://www.yapc.ca/assets/files/a-home-for-everyone.pdf>
- ⁸ Health and Social Services, "Dimensions of Social Inclusion & Exclusion 2010", (2010), 14, http://www.hss.gov.yk.ca/pdf/2010_social_inclusion_exclusion_report.pdf
- ⁹ Human Resources & Skills Development Canada, (2011).
- ¹⁰ Yukon Bureau of Statistics (2011). <http://www.eco.gov.yk.ca/stats/>
- ¹¹ Canadian Council on Social Development, (2009), 9.
- ¹² Canadian Council on Social Development, (2009), 9.
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ YK Health and Social Services, "2010 Whitehorse Housing Adequacy Study", (2010), 9, http://www.hss.gov.yk.ca/pdf/Whse_Housing_Adequacy-FINAL-DEC_03-10.pdf
- ¹⁶ Ibid, 7.
- ¹⁷ YK Housing Corporation, "Home Repair Program", (2011), <http://www.housing.yk.ca/hrp.html>.
- ¹⁸ Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, "Government of Canada Helps People who are Homeless or at Risk of Homelessness in Whitehorse", *Canada New Centre*, (9 Nov 2011), <http://news.gc.ca/web/article-eng.do?nid=636489>
- ¹⁹ Department of Education, "Strategic Plan 2011-2016: Our Commitments to New Horizons", (2011), 18-19, http://www.education.gov.yk.ca/psb/strategic_plan.html
- ²⁰ Ibid.
- ²¹ Health and Social Services, (2010), 15.
- ²² Canadian Council on Social Development, (2009), 8.
- ²³ Health and Social Services (2010), 17.
- ²⁴ Yukon Health Care Review Steering Committee, "Taking the Pulse", (2009), 4-5, http://www.gov.yk.ca/news/pdf/yukon_health_care_review_prelim_report.pdf
- ²⁵ Yukon Bureau of Statistics (2011) <http://www.eco.gov.yk.ca/stats/>
- ²⁶ Canadian Council on Social Development, (2009), 6.
- ²⁷ Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition, "Homelessness Action Week Handout: Mind the Gap", (2011).
- ²⁸ Canadian Council on Social Development, (2009), 6.
- ²⁹ Ibid, 6.
- ³⁰ Ibid, 21.
- ³¹ Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition, "Homelessness Action Week Handout: Mind the Gap", (2011).
- ³² Health and Social Services, (2010), 40.
- ³³ Ibid, 40.
- ³⁴ Ibid, 1.
- ³⁵ Ibid, 15.
- ³⁶ Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition, "Homelessness Action Week Handout: Dispelling the Myths" (2011).