



**United Way**  
Greater Victoria



# **CONNECTING WITH COMMUNITY: MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER**

SEPTEMBER 2017

**United. We do more.**

**[uwgv.ca](http://uwgv.ca)**

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### **Territorial Acknowledgement**

United Way Greater Victoria would like to acknowledge the ancestral and unceded territories of the Coast Salish Peoples, specifically the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations, on whose territories we live and work and thank them for sharing this beautiful land.

Hych'Ka

Thank You

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

In the spring and summer of 2017, United Way Greater Victoria (UWGV) invited representatives of currently funded partners and selected non-profit organizations to participate in a community consultation process. Building on previous consultations (2010 and 2014), the 2017 consultation provided an opportunity for community partners and key stakeholders to share their understanding of the current and emerging human and social services challenges in our region, provide feedback on UWGV Community Investment Framework and Engagement Activities and to work together to identify strategic opportunities for UWGV to consider as part of its medium and long-term collective impact initiatives.

### **Changes and Shifts in Priority Needs in the Community**

Over 100 participants provided input on the current state of the human and social services in the CRD. As a result, several trends and shifts in community needs were highlighted. The complexity and acuity of need is placing significant demand on our human and social service sector as our population grows and the circumstances faced by our most vulnerable intensify. Lack of affordable housing, increasing poverty, and precarious employment for both individuals and families are adding to the need for services such as counselling, mental health and addiction supports and outreach. Waitlists and service gaps can lead to isolation, trauma and sheer fatigue while increasing the severity of need. Finally, the sector's resources and volunteer base are often taxed as they are focusing on crisis or interceptive responses rather than directed, preventative strategies.

### **Engaging with UWGV**

Overall, UWGV's Community Investment Framework, and three priority areas: All that Kids Can Be, From Poverty to Possibility and Building Strong Communities, are seen to remain relevant in today's context. Community partners expressed a need for additional tools and resources (i.e. online resources) to guide them through United Way's funding and reporting processes. Orientations and site visits were looked upon as positive opportunities for relationship building and knowledge sharing. Agencies also relayed that recent changes to streamline the application and reporting processes were appreciated and suggested that additional information on UWGV's decision making process would build further confidence in the process and improve funding relationships.

## **Multi-year Funding**

Participants encouraged UWGV to continue its multi-year support with a view that a longer commitment provides continuity and stability.

**“Long-term, multi-year funding enables long-term planning.” – 2017 Focus Group Participant**

## **Moving Forward Together - Opportunities for UWGV**

### **Leadership & Advocacy – being a “Voice” of Community**

There is expressed need for UWGV to focus on their social leverage, between and amongst various sectors and interests in the community, on behalf of vulnerable populations and the organizations who serve them. The community wants and expects UWGV to be a “voice” for systemic change in the community while taking on a more active role as a champion and advocate for the sector. In addition, as public awareness and discussions surrounding social challenges such as homelessness, mental health issues, and addictions increases there is a need for fact-based education and compassionate understanding in order to decrease stigmatization and reduce non-factual judgements. Through outreach, expertise, and research, United Way can take an increased role in educating donors and the public by sharing fact-based knowledge with the community.

### **Organizational and Sectoral Capacity**

In response to the stresses being experienced by the human and social services sector, organizations require increased resources to meet increasing demands for services in order to support organizational needs such as training, volunteer management, strategic planning and collaboration initiatives. In addition, a variety of responses is needed to support the network of services, including both large and small agencies, each with their expertise in prevention and intervention services. As one participant put it, “Multiple agencies in one community isn’t a bad thing” and “small organizations are as important as the larger ones.” Through its Community Investment Framework, UWGV is positioned to support a variety of resources to build both capacity and donor engagement.

### **Prevention and Intervention**

To effect dynamic change, solutions must advance from the short-term (interventive) towards integrated, holistic, and long-term (preventative) strategies that address the interrelationship and upstream root causes of barriers to equity, cohesion, prosperity, and well-being.

### **Collective Impact through Collaboration and Partnerships**

The consultations conducted provided strong and consistent feedback on the urgency and necessity of thinking and acting systemically, beyond boundaries and single issues and short term solutions. It is imperative that UWGV promote and advance integrated strategies that focus upon the upstream, root causes of the social challenges we face while driving preventive initiatives on all levels. To do so requires collaboration and engagement with social sector partners, donors, allies, government, and private interests in order to create a cohesive social strategy for the region.

### **Conclusion**

The 2017 community consultation provided UWGV strong and consistent feedback on the current state of the human and social services in the CRD and offered an opportunity for community partners and key stakeholders to lend input into UWGV's role in current and future community impact activities.

With a history dating back 80 years, UWGV possesses a solid reputation within the community at large and this sentiment was expressed by the majority of participating community organizations. UWGV's ability and capacity to take a leadership role to convene key stakeholders and to speak on behalf of the community from a position of influence, as well as the strength of its brand, were cited as highly valuable aspects of partnerships with the community.

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## INTRODUCTION

**“Consultation allows for a more holistic understanding of client and community needs. Our clients are real people, neither research subjects nor statistics.”- 2017 Community Consultation Participant**

With funding requests growing each year, the staff and volunteers at United Way Greater Victoria (UWGV) are challenged with making balanced and impactful decisions that meet community needs while ensuring donor dollars are invested effectively.

In the Spring/Summer of 2017, UWGV convened the community social service sector and offered an open space to their collective voice in order to listen to and address, the changing needs of Victoria residents and the not-for-profit sector. A survey in May invited United Way funded community partners as well as other social service organizations to anonymously assess the challenges and emerging needs of the community and provide insight into how UWGV could best engage with its stakeholders. Information extracted from 60 survey responses provided data and perspective that informed the ensuing focus group process and in turn, helped expand the collective understanding of the shifts and trends facing the non-profit world and UWGV’s role within it.

The consultations conducted provided strong and consistent feedback on the urgency and necessity of addressing community challenges at a systemic level. In order to effect dynamic change, solutions must advance from the short-term towards integrated, holistic, long-term strategies that address the interrelationship and upstream root causes of barriers to equity, cohesion, prosperity, and well-being. This requires collaboration and engagement with social sector partners, allies, governments and private interests to create a cohesive social strategy for the region. This report focuses on providing direction and guidance as to where the emphasis needs to be, framing opportunities for UWGV to adjust their current social approach and strengthen their impact while driving visible systemic change in the region.

## APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

### Background

As part of UWGV commitment to community to involve and engage the community, UWGV periodically convenes key stakeholders to participate in a process of discussion and social issue identification. In 2010, the community was involved in identifying the core issues impacting the region and contributed to the local implementation of UWGV's three priority areas of Kids, Poverty and Community. Since 2011, with the help of the community, localized research, and national data, UWGV continued to further refine its priority areas and in 2014, community partners were surveyed in order to gain insight into the funding environment while reconfirming the Community Investment Framework and funding priorities for 2015-2018.

### Consultation 2017

In the spring and summer of 2017, UWGV invited input on the human and social challenges facing the region from representatives of currently funded partners and selected non-profit organizations who had received UWGV funding in previous years or expressed interest in applying in future funding calls. The purpose of the consultation was to:

- Ensure UWGV Community Investment Framework and engagement activities are informed by current community priority needs (last updated in 2014 and 2010)
- Ensure donor dollars are invested in the most effective manner while meeting the shared goal to achieve the greatest impact for our community.
- Convene stakeholders and provide an opportunity for partner feedback, networking and information sharing.

### Timeline

The **Connecting with Community: Moving Forward Together** consultation took place over six months and included the following key dates:

Dec 2016– Jan 2017	Preliminary conversations with community partners
May 2017	Anonymous community stakeholder online survey
June 2017	Facilitated focus group conversations
September 2017	Report back to community via email distribution/website



## **Anonymity**

Survey respondents and focus group participants were assured that any information provided would not be directly attributed to them. As such, the results shared are displayed in aggregate form and all identifiable data has been edited to protect their anonymity. Unless noted as a direct participant quote, the conclusions herein are meant to reflect the consolidated input from numerous community representatives and hopefully serve as a reflection of the patterns and consistent feedback from participants.

## **Survey**

Using the results of three previous surveys and literary sources, UWGV's Community Investment team distributed an anonymous online survey to approximately 150 agencies and individuals with an anticipated 50-60% rate of return (approx. 75 responses).

Invitations were sent on May 17th with a close date of June 5th, 2017 and a general reminder was sent out prior to the stated deadline.

Sixty organizations responded to our survey – a 54% response rate. Of those, 33 were from organizations currently being funded by UWGV; 17 respondents represented organizations that are not currently funded but had either received funding in the past or were interested in future funding opportunities and 10 respondents did not provide an answer to this question.

Survey respondents represented service providers from throughout the Capital Regional District, including the Southern Gulf Islands and 9 local First Nations. According to their operational budgets, the participating organizations varied a great deal in size:

- 3 survey respondents with organizational budgets under \$100,000
- 25 survey respondents with organizational budgets \$100,001 to \$500,000
- 8 survey respondents with organizational budgets \$500,001 to \$1,000,000
- 10 survey respondents with organizational budgets \$1,000,001 to \$5,000,000
- 4 survey respondents with organizational budgets above \$5,000,000
- 10 respondents did not provide an answer to this question.

## **Focus Groups**

41 agencies and 45 agency representatives (See Appendix # for list of participating organizations) attended the five focus groups that were designed to expand upon and deepen the collective understanding of the community needs and the role of UWGV. A literature review of best practices for effective community consultations highlighted the need for a safe space where the inherent power imbalance between a funder and applicant is reduced in the interest of a free flow of useful and relevant information. As a result, a facilitator was hired to guide the focus group sessions and provide a neutral voice in discussions.

The focus group questions (detailed below) were designed to probe into what is shifting, changing and intensifying in the areas of greatest need for vulnerable populations in the community.

**Part 1: Priority Needs in the Community: Challenges/Successes/Moving Forward**

- What's changing/shifting from your perspective? What impact is that having on your organization/the 'system'?
- What is in place now in the community that needs to be strengthened [assets]?
- What do we need more of in this community to address the identified gaps and needs?

**Part 2: Engaging with UWGV**

- United Way is both a funder and a fundraiser. What does that mean for your organization/the community as a whole? What's working well? What would you like to see more of? Less of?
- What are the challenges and benefits of a multi-year funding structure? What might be refined to make it more effective?
- How can UWGV improve its engagement with community funded partners? [i.e. improving the application process, reporting, transparency of decision-making, and subset: remaining relevant/responsive to emerging needs/issues once agreement is in place]?

**Part 3: Moving Forward Together**

- Coordination, Collaboration and Partnership. Complex issues require coordinated responses for changing lives.
  - What are the qualities of your most effective and engaging collaborations?
  - How does the UWGV support coordination and collaboration in our community? What would you like to see that would make a practical and visible difference?
- UWGV Community Impact Outcome Framework
  - Why and how does your organization use the Community Impact Outcome Framework?
  - What does it mean [or make possible] for you in relation to UWGV Outcomes?
  - What does success in its implementation look like?
- Resilience: the ability to recover from setbacks, adapt well to change, and keep going in the face of adversity.
  - How can UWGV offer support and/or provide leadership?
  - What are the critical issues facing you now: setbacks, adversities, and what do you need most?

Representatives from the 45 participating organizations were grouped according to the three UWGV priority areas: All That Kids Can Be, From Poverty To Possibility, and Strong Communities. A mixed group session was also held to accommodate people who were unable to attend a designated session. (See Appendixes A, B, C, D) for the summary of the specific feedback from each focus group.

### **Report to Community**

This report summarizes and highlights both the opportunities available and the challenges facing the non-profit sector. A synthesized profile of priority community needs, analysis and reflections seek to guide the UWGV's funding directions and engagement activities for the near and medium-term future. Results have been consolidated into the following sections:

- Part 1 summarizes the changes and shifts in priority needs
- Part 2 consolidates the feedback received on the current UWGV Community Investment process and community engagement activities from the community agency perspective.
- Part 3 suggests strategies and initiatives for UWGV to guide funding directions and engagement activities for the near and medium-term future.

## CHANGES AND SHIFTS IN PRIORITY NEEDS

There is a growing public awareness and discussion of social challenges such as homelessness, mental health issues, and addictions in recent years, but often without fact-based education and compassionate understanding, increased stigmatization and non-factual judgements can become entrenched within societal discourse. With its breadth of outreach, expertise, and research, UWGV is seen as a convener of important community conversations and has the ability to take on an enhanced role in sharing education and fact-based knowledge with the community.

To begin, the community survey and focus groups identified the changes, shifts, and challenges facing the community and the impacts on their individual organizations and the ‘system’ as a whole. Respondents pointed to housing, mental health, and increasing poverty as the most pressing issues facing our community. Supports for families, children and youth, persons with disabilities, Indigenous and Metis people, LGBTQI2-S folk, and seniors were also consistently identified as a pressing need within the community. Detailed summary results from the survey and each of the focus groups are found in the Appendixes. (See Appendixes A, B, C, D)

Several common themes emerged which reinforced the complexity and interconnectedness of the issues including:

**“We are working within a 24/7 environment. We put our hearts, heads, stomach acid, and wallets into this work.” - 2017 Community Consultation Participant**

### The Challenges for Social Service Agencies

#### Organizations are Under Greater Stress

Pressure and demand for services is increasing constantly. Agencies are being over-extended and pushed to do more for everyone, often doing work that they are not mandated for or given sufficient training in. The increasing pressure put upon organizations and their staff is making many feel that they’re becoming “clients of their own programs” and when “they’re working within a 24/7 environment,” this puts an increased burden and stress on managers, employees and volunteers. As one participant stated, “we can’t afford to say no.” Programs, agencies and service organizations are finding it harder to secure affordable commercial space - adding an additional stressor - and community social service nonprofits are at capacity. For example, an “average volunteer coordinator has 182 active volunteers to manage and some have upwards of

500 in comparison to the usual manager/ staff ration of 1:12.” A common sentiment expressed by participants was a feeling of “being asked to do everything for everyone.”

The increase in demand for services and front-line interventions has led to an overwhelmed and often exhausted non-profit sector. There is a general consensus that the nonprofit sector in the region is challenged and stressed. The complexity of mental health, addictions, and trauma being addressed by social service providers is contributing to staff exhaustion and low staff retention. Many interventions that would have otherwise fallen to healthcare professionals are now being placed upon non-profits that may not have the training or the capacity to deal with the breadth or severity of a client’s needs.

### **Geographic Shifts in the Region**

With the challenges of unaffordable housing and ever-increasing cost of living, many Victoria residents are leaving the downtown core and re-settling in the Western Communities and Sooke. The move to municipalities farther from downtown has shifted the demographics of the regions and put more strain on Western Communities and Sooke non-profits to meet the growing needs of residents. For vulnerable people, leaving a close network of services that they have been connected to can have detrimental consequences to their well-being, and it is essential that they have access to a continuity of care in their new community.

Additionally, the Western Communities and Sooke have a large population of families with children and youth. Challenges such as childcare costs and availability, transportation, young parent support, and employment options for youth are becoming increasingly evident as the population grows and shifts within the region.

### **The Changing Housing Landscape**

Poverty is deepening in the region, and there is a widening disparity between rich and poor, eroding the middle class. Income assistance rates haven’t changed since 2007, despite the cost of living drastically increasing over the last 10 years, and there is a severe lack of affordable housing. Rental rates have escalated and housing has become a critical issue recognized by governments and social service organizations. However, the response is not fast enough:

- 47% of Victoria renters spend more than 30% of their income on rent and 24% spend half their income on rent. (Source: Times Colonist, Saturday, May 28, 2016)
- In February, 2016, there were 1,387 people identified as experiencing homelessness in the CRD. (Source: Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness Society Count - <https://www.crd.bc.ca/docs/default-source/housing-pdf/pitcount-report26apr2016.pdf?sfvrsn=2>)

Housing barriers are increasingly becoming an issue for families and the emergence of an increased need for youth housing and related supports is evidenced by the fact that more

youth are coming in for services than ever before. One consultation participant commented that a “lack of stable housing, a basic human need, is negatively affecting families. There is a focus on survival rather than thriving.” The loss of safe and stable housing for vulnerable families is accelerating. Owning a home is now a luxury, and rental accommodation is scarce. People are getting pushed to the street and taking on multiple jobs to survive. Pressures being placed on working parents are eroding family stability. Children are losing the one-on-one time with parents and as one participant put it, it’s very “difficult to be fully present with children when you’re overworked.”

### **Prevention vs. Intervention**

Running throughout the consultation discussions was an emphasis on the interplay between prevention and intervention. To effect dynamic change, solutions must advance from the short-term (interceptive) towards integrated, holistic, long-term (preventative) strategies that address the interrelationship and upstream root causes of barriers to equity, cohesion, prosperity, and well-being. While many nonprofits do carry out intervention services in addition to prevention as part of their mission, the intensity of the interventions has increased and placed undue strain on already over-extended social service organizations. Because of the increasing acuity of need, many prevention initiatives are being subsumed by the ‘crises’ facing the most vulnerable. As one participant stated: “Non-profits that should be prevention based are being forced to carry out crisis intervention.”

The push for overwhelmed non-profits to provide intervention services around the clock while encountering complex and often extreme situations, that they may be neither trained in nor equipped to carry out, has led to staff burnout and trauma. Ideally, non-profits should be able to provide prevention and basic intervention over crisis emergency care. There is a growing concern that in the words of one participant, “social service organizations are being forced to become a twin of healthcare,” rather than providing support services for the community. Preventative programs such as mentorship have seen great success and should be supported and continued. Upstream advocacy and leveraging from UWGV and other funders is vital to the sector in order to promote programs and a network of services that both intervene and address the root causes of social issues. “Supports that only help when someone’s in crisis ultimately keeps that person in crisis.”

### **Intensification of Need**

There is a sense that Victoria’s *City of Gardens* tourist reputation masks the reality of addiction, homelessness, vulnerable individuals lacking supports, and a widening gap between the “haves and have nots.” Overdose deaths are at an all-time high within the city and the lack of supported housing options have pushed many people to the streets. Cost of living is becoming increasingly unaffordable for low-income persons and there is a “silent desperation” that is kept concealed below the surface of the city.

## **The poor are getting poorer in this region. Supporting Stats:**

- In Victoria, 13% of residents live in poverty. (Source: BC Poverty Reduction - <http://bcpovertyreduction.ca/2014/12/latest-poverty-stats-show-bc-still-has-one-of-the-highest-poverty-rates-in-canada/>)
- In 2017, the wage required to maintain an adequate quality of life in BC's Capital Region is calculated at \$20.01 per hour. This is \$9 above the current minimum wage of \$10.85 an hour. (Source: Community Social Planning Council. (April 2017). Living Wage: Dialogue on the real costs of living.)
- Seniors' poverty in BC rose from a low of 2.2% in 1996 to 12.7% in 2014 (according to Statistics Canada's LIM or low income measure). A total of 96,000 BC seniors lived in poverty in 2014. (Source: Poverty and Inequality Among British Columbia's Seniors - [https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/BC%20Office/2017/04/ccpa-bc\\_seniors-inequality.pdf](https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/BC%20Office/2017/04/ccpa-bc_seniors-inequality.pdf))

## **Volunteers**

A reduction in funds for volunteer recruitment, support, training, and retention has increased pressure on non-profit staff to do more work “off the side of their desks” and be available outside of general office hours on a regular basis. A common sentiment expressed by participants was a feeling of “being asked to do everything for everyone.” The high value of volunteers cannot be underestimated but expecting them to take on the role of trained social workers in high risk situations places undue stress and trauma on them. Without a robust volunteer base, many non-profits feel less equipped to offer services and supports in an efficient manner.

A consultation participant commented that “It is a worrisome trend to inadequately fund volunteer programs. Volunteers help build capacity and take the burden off of staff.” Volunteer management and support is essential, but more funding, training and support is needed as they too often end up delivering front-line services. Practicum students can be a valuable resource, but need support and training. Currently, there is an acute shortage of volunteer managers/ coordinators and a lack of recognition of their importance to service agencies. It is essential that volunteer capacity and recognition be addressed and provision be made for services to keep pace with the expanding needs of the community.

## **Employment**

Our region is experiencing shifting employment realities. There are very few work training/low barrier job options for people with low literacy, English as a second language (ESL), disabilities, and other challenges. There used to be jobs that were simple and easy for barriered people to access. Now, most jobs are customer service focused and



the longer people are street entrenched, the less employable they become. Criminal records impede some people from working and getting back on their feet. As one participant stressed “housing and employment are interrelated, not two separate things. If you don’t have a job, how do you rent? If you don’t have a home, how do you find work?”

With increased automation in the workplace and an expanding high skill tech sector, employment trends and shifts that create systemic barriers for low-skill workers will likely increase.

### **Connectedness and Belonging**

Participants shared a concern that the community is becoming fragmented and the vulnerable more invisible. Upstream advocacy, public education, fact-based understanding, pro social outlets, empathy, greater compassion, and enhanced supports for children, youth, and families is needed. It is urgent that there be “*an understanding that poverty, addictions, and mental health challenges are hard on everyone.*”

Evidence suggests there is increasing polarization, isolation and insularity in the region as well as a concurrently growing awareness and desire to move beyond the ‘stigma’ associated with vulnerability factors:

- In 2014, 17% of Greater Victoria residents reported that they did not feel at ease with the people in their community, and one in three said that they did not feel comfortable to talk to people in their neighbourhood.
- If they had an emergency, 75% of Greater Victoria residents felt strangers would be willing to help them but the remaining 25% did not feel connected to their community. (Source: Phillips, K., Hilbrecht, M., & Smale, B. (2014). Victoria Capital Region Community Wellbeing Survey: A Profile of the Wellbeing of Capital Region Residents. A Report for the Victoria Foundation and Capital Regional District. Waterloo, ON: Canadian Index of Wellbeing and the University of Waterloo).

**“When you integrate people in need, they come familiar and are no longer strangers to us.” - 2017 Community Consultation Participant**

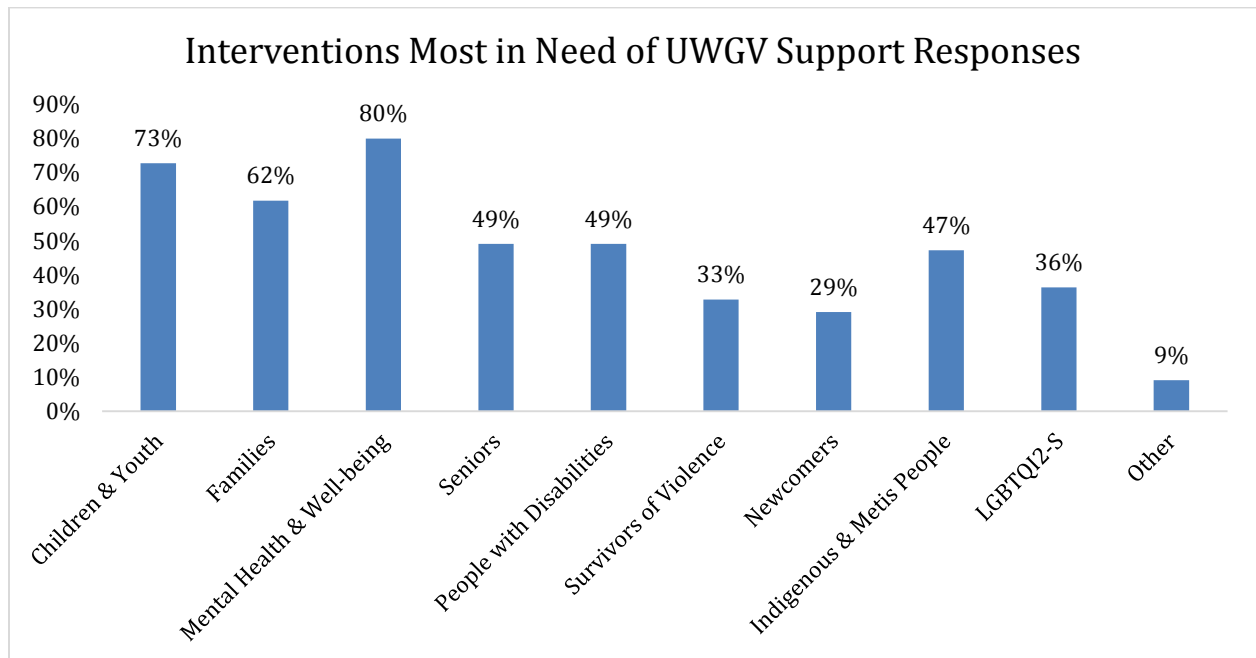
### **Vulnerable People**

Part of the 2017 consultation focused on the challenges and needs of the most vulnerable people in the community. Vulnerable people are defined as those most at risk of the various forms of poverty and the resulting social exclusion and include: families, children and youth, seniors, Indigenous Peoples, persons with disabilities, newcomers, LGBTQI2-S folk, and persons with mental health and addictions issues. It should be noted that people who self-identify as part of these groups does not necessarily make them “vulnerable” or at risk – it is a combination of factors that increases vulnerability.



## **Marginalization**

### **Figure #1**



As demonstrated in the survey results (Figure #1), consultation participants summarized that the perception of the vulnerable in our region is shifting and that vulnerable people in our region are becoming increasingly marginalized. Invisible marginalization affects many Victoria residents whether they be youth, seniors, newcomers, or people with a disability. Often, individuals don't know where to turn when faced with financial instability, age-related health concerns, employment and job skill anxiety, mental health challenges, loneliness and isolation. The housing crisis has pushed many to move outside downtown core and subsequently be distanced from centralized services and outreach opportunities. Immigrant and refugee youth are struggling with integration and belonging and there is a growing demand for culturally sensitive services that aid in building a strong social network for newcomers.

### **Mental health and Addictions**

Mental health and addictions challenges have become increasingly complex, with many clients presenting with more than one issue. While government, community organizations, and the public recognize the pressing need to address this crisis, they are unable to meet the expanding waitlists and demands for facilities and treatment options. Non-profits are increasingly working beyond their capacity to meet the needs of vulnerable individuals in the community.

In addition, there has been a drastic escalation in youth mental health issues. More young people are experimenting with substances and there is an acute lack of community-based mental health supports to meet the growing demand. An unintended consequence of

greater mental health awareness has presented itself in youth adopting a mental health problem as an identity, looking for belonging and seeking support.

On top of the more generalized mental health challenges, the opioid crisis has emerged as a devastating epidemic with an ever-rising death toll in the region. More people are presenting with multiple mental health and addictions issues as well as deep grief and trauma due to the loss of friends and loved ones to the opioid crisis.

Addressing mental health issues is an identified need, but the urgency, complexity and root causes are not sufficiently recognized. We know that:

- 13% or nearly 84,000 BC children and youth aged 4-17 are experiencing clinically significant mental disorders at any given time. Under one third of young people with disorders — just 31% or 26,000 in BC — are estimated to be receiving specialized mental health services. (Source: Child and Youth Mental Disorders: Prevalence and Evidence-Based Interventions - Children's Health Policy Centre, SFU, 2014)
- Approximately one in four people on Vancouver Island have mental health challenges, whether it be depression or anxiety disorders that compromise their lifestyles and their well-being. (Source: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/vancouver-island-more-depressed-than-rest-of-b-c-according-to-medical-records-1.3671610>)
- Since 2016, over 100 Victoria residents have lost their lives to the overdose crisis. (Source: <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/public-safety-and-emergency-services/death-investigation/statistical/illicit-drug.pdf>)
- In 2011, there were 112 suicide related deaths on Vancouver Island. Men are almost 3 times as likely as women to commit suicide. The stigma surrounding depression and mental health keeps many from seeking the help that they require. (Source: <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/public-safety-and-emergency-services/death-investigation/statistical/suicide.pdf>)

## **Families**

Strains on overtaxed families impact children and youth, and by extension, schools and social support networks. The increased cost of living has pushed many parents to take on extra work just to survive and this has a detrimental impact on family cohesion and quality time spent together. Parents are often not getting the crucial supports they need to balance work and family life and two income households are essential and not the luxury they once were seen to be. The housing crisis has also affected family stability and many rental units have limitations on the number of people legally able to reside in an apartment or suite. Finding a permanent, safe place to call home is increasingly difficult. With parents or guardians frequently distracted and consumed with survival, many children and youth are growing up without a strong connection to their family and lacking a supportive figure to rely on when facing challenging issues such as sexuality, gender identity, mental health, substance use, and problems at school. Teachers are often given the role of mentor in addition to educator and this has created a need for more

training within schools regarding emerging and urgent social issues facing children, youth, and their families.

### **Children and Youth**

The urgent, unmet needs of youth and the acute and complex reality of their challenges received particular focus during the 2017 consultation. Social service organizations are seeing an increase in youth with acute trauma and mental health challenges, multiple compounded issues, and often isolation from a family support network. Topics addressed included the increase in transgender and LGBTQI2-S youth seeking services, greater substance experimentation and dependency, the role of technology in the exploitation of youth particularly young females, and lack of entry-level, post high school employment opportunities for young people. As one consultation participant put it “with so little supports and opportunities given to youth, it feels like a ‘homelessness factory’ – youth with lack of parental support, mental health issues, and few opportunities are being set loose after school to struggle and flounder. I would hate to be a 25- year-old today because of the lack of work, lack of hope, difficulty in supporting relationship, a family, or affording a house.”

Specific initiatives seeking to build capacity and collaboration in order to reach more vulnerable youth in the community included:

- Increased youth housing initiatives
- Enhanced outreach to youth and families focused on building resilience, life skills, and the capacity to navigate difficult times of grief, loss, and transition.
- More parenting supports for emerging communities (new immigrants and refugees, parents with children who are LGBTQI2-S, children with behavioral challenges/mental health issues, etc.)
- A youth HUB or youth advisory group that can better inform services for mental health, substance use, peer support, etc.
- Employment needs assistance for youth e.g. the formation of a social-enterprise venture that provides work experience for at-risk or vulnerable youth.
- Focused programs for women aging out of foster care and girls who are either exploited or vulnerable to exploitation.

**Children and youth issues need to be urgently addressed.** Some facts include:

- 16% of children in Victoria live in poverty. Source: 2016 BC Child Poverty Report Card
- Young people who are homeless (ages 13-24) make up 20% of the homeless population in Canada. (Source: Child Welfare Policy Report 2017)
- 58% of homeless youth have histories of child welfare involvement. (Source: Child Welfare Policy Report 2017)
- 1 in 4 queer and transgender youth in BC are forced out of their homes due to severe family conflict. (Source: BC Poverty Reduction Report).

- Almost 20% of youth report not having an adult inside or outside of their family that they can talk to about a serious problem. (Source: *Is Good, Good Enough? The Health & Well-being of Children and Youth in BC*)
- 60% of youth in BC report having a sense of lack of belonging in their community. (Source: *Is Good, Good Enough? The Health & Well-being of Children and Youth in BC*)
- 13% or nearly 84,000 BC children and youth aged 4-17 years old are experiencing clinically significant mental disorders at any given time. These surveys also reveal start service shortfalls in that under one third of young people with disorders - just 31% or 26,000 in BC - are estimated to be receiving specialized mental health services. (Source: *Child and Youth Mental Disorders: Prevalence and Evidence-Based Interventions*).

### **Newcomers**

As Federal funding for Syrian refugee integration is drawing to a close, community non-profits in the province must now meet the gaps in services for newcomers. The CRD has seen an increase in immigrants and refugees in need of culturally sensitive family services, trauma counselling, language coaching, job skill support, housing, and integration in the community. A number of consultation participants applauded the region's warm and welcoming response to the refugees who arrived in 2015/2016 but noted that in terms of services and continued support, there still remains much to be done.

### **Seniors**

Although there is still a growing need for senior's services within the CRD, consultation participants noted that over the past few years, a great deal has been done to address the issues – particularly those facing low-income seniors. Lack of affordable housing, high food costs and nutritional challenges, in addition to mental health concerns, remain a problem for many seniors. Isolation and transportation were also listed as barriers for seniors with multiple health and mobility issues. The reduction in funding for volunteer programs was cited as having a negative impact on seniors by minimizing the number of available volunteer outreach workers, and by limiting the opportunities for seniors themselves to volunteer at organizations in the community. Overall, the direction of seniors care and outreach in the region was viewed as positive. Senior's isolation has been widely recognized and is being addressed by numerous social service agencies. However, the population is continuing to age and the demand for services will likely increase.

### **Persons with Disabilities**

The gaps existing for persons with disabilities were cited as similar to those facing other vulnerable groups in the region. Housing and employability were regarded as the largest barriers to stability, well-being, and financial security. With a job market becoming increasingly competitive and customer service focused, persons with disabilities or complex challenges are frequently put at a disadvantage. Consultation participants also noted that disability assistance is often not enough to adequately cover rent, living, and food costs. It is essential that social service agencies continue to address the needs of persons with disabilities by offering employment readiness programs that help people better enter a competitive job market.

### **Survivors of Domestic Violence and Abuse**

Domestic violence continues to be a problem facing the region and while there are both male and female survivors, more than two-thirds of abuse victims are women. (Source: Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile 2013). The housing crisis has pushed many women to enter into or remain in unsafe relationships or living situations where they are at risk of violence or predation. Participants commented that one of the main reasons women enter shelters is domestic and spousal abuse. The ramifications of violence are far-reaching and complex, often affecting survivor's mental, emotional, and physical well-being long after they are removed from the situation. For survivors with children, the challenges are even more multi-layered. A discussion that came up in the consultation surrounding domestic violence stressed that there is a "fundamental need for strategies that address healthy relationships community wide. It is essential that there be programs designed to address domestic and relationship violence and abuse (as well as) funding for programs that provide healing and supports to men who abuse" in order to break the cycle of violence. Working with men's trauma and abuse risk factors while having supports available that provide intervention prior to an escalation of violence is key.

### **Indigenous Peoples**

Nine First Nations serving organizations took part in the online survey but we recognize and acknowledge that there was a lack of Indigenous representation at our in-person consultation focus groups. Information that was offered during the focus groups concerning challenges facing the Indigenous community included child and youth support and mental health awareness particularly in the West Shore and Sooke, as well as the need for culturally appropriate services within the region.

## **UWGV's COMMUNITY INVESTMENT FRAMEWORK AND ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES**

The 2017 community consultation process asked participants to comment on and rate UWGV's overall investment process, its engagement with community partners, and to make suggestions on how UWGV can best support local social service agencies to meet the shared goal of achieving the greatest impact for improving the lives of the most vulnerable.

### **UWGV's Community Investment Framework**

#### **UWGV's Three Priority Areas**

Survey questions 4 – 7 explored how UWGV's Community Investment Framework outcomes align with current community issues and priorities. Of the survey respondents (25) identified Strong Communities as the UWGV funding priority area that most aligns with their organizational goals, while 16 respondents identified All That Kids Can Be and 15 identified Poverty to Possibility. In addition, each of the focus groups also identified a specific emphasis on what they believed would be a priority area response in the short to medium term.

#### **All That Kids Can Be**

Of those responding to the All That Kids Can Be priority area, 61% ranked *emotional and physical well-being* as the best suited to respond to the community challenges identified in question 1. *Connectedness and community involvement* was ranked second (56%) and 94% of respondents ranked *success in school* third.

Children and youth servicing agencies identified a need to:

- Have a plan! All sectors can increase their involvement in a comprehensive strategy, e.g.: government, businesses, and community. "A system wide shift is needed in positions of authority in relation to housing, mental health support, and family aid."
- Build on what's working e.g. mentorship and preventative programs have seen great success.
- Increase focus on prevention over intervention.
- Promote upstream advocacy.

## From Poverty to Possibility

Of those responding to the From Poverty to Possibility priority area, 79% ranked *housing stability* as best suited to respond to the community challenges identified in question 1. *Employment* was ranked second among respondents (54%), *financial security* (38%) and *food security* (31%) were ranked third and fourth respectively.

Organizations dealing with poverty say, that in the face of crisis and overload, they need more:

- Fact based education on the issues of addictions and mental health.
- Compassion and support for children, youth, and families.
- Organizations working in conjunction with one another.
- Understanding that poverty/addictions/mental health challenges are hard on everyone.
- Collaboration in the region – people working together to carefully plan how dollars are spent.

## Strong Communities

Of those responding to the Strong Communities priority area, 50% ranked *personal well-being and safety* as best suited to respond to the community challenges identified in question 1 of the survey. *Connection to supports* was ranked second (42%) followed by *volunteer engagement and mobilization* (39%). *Neighbourhood and community engagement* (37%) and *organizational capacity building and leadership development* (54%) were ranked fourth and fifth respectively.

Agencies serving the overall community suggest they need:

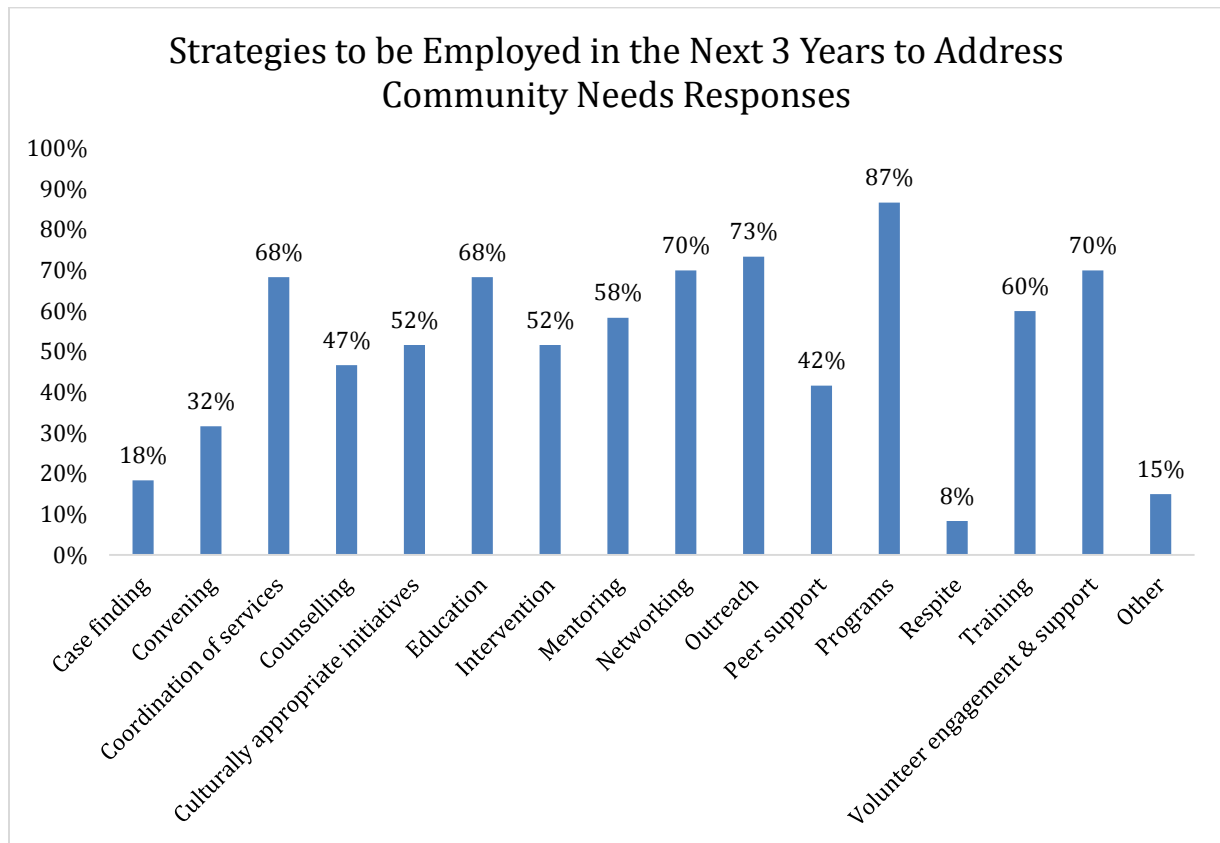
- More affordable, accessible housing.
- Additional opportunities to engage with government; policy change and bidding on regional contracts.
- Increased funding.

The UWGV's Community Impact Framework is also deemed valuable from the community's perspective as it 'nudges' organizations to look at programs through a shared lens. The outcomes framework helps organizations define program details more easily throughout the application process. Most organizations use the framework for the application and reporting. It was noted that enhanced training surrounding the framework and its application would be helpful for organizations. Many agencies stated that they are limited by having to select one outcome and would like to find ways to better accommodate a program or project that spans many issues. Going forward it would be helpful to have a "classification" that considers programs that cross two or more of the three priority areas: kids, poverty, and community. E.g. community wide strategies or systemic prevention.

Survey respondents also highlighted the UWGV short to medium strategies that should continue to be funded (Figure #2).



**Figure #2**



### **Funding**

UWGV funding supports proven, successful and stable programs yet encourages innovative pilot projects that tackle social issues in new and creative ways. Funding for programs that encompass a diverse range of organizations with unique outcomes, targeted demographics, and priorities that meet the unique needs of CRD residents should remain a priority. Some participants asked that UWGV give consideration to separating funding of existing programs from “new or innovative” programs and pilots so as to reduce the risk of jeopardizing solid programs in search for innovation. In addition, emerging needs and funding to assist in the case of community emergencies were recognized as essential funding allocations by UWGV and should continue.

Funding for administrative support continues to be a challenge for some, as one participant expressed: “UWGV should offer more funding for administrative support and volunteer initiatives because without an admin position in an agency, stress falls on the ED and other staff. Does terminology need to change, i.e. ‘administrative costs’ changed to ‘overhead? Administration is the *people* who are doing the work”.

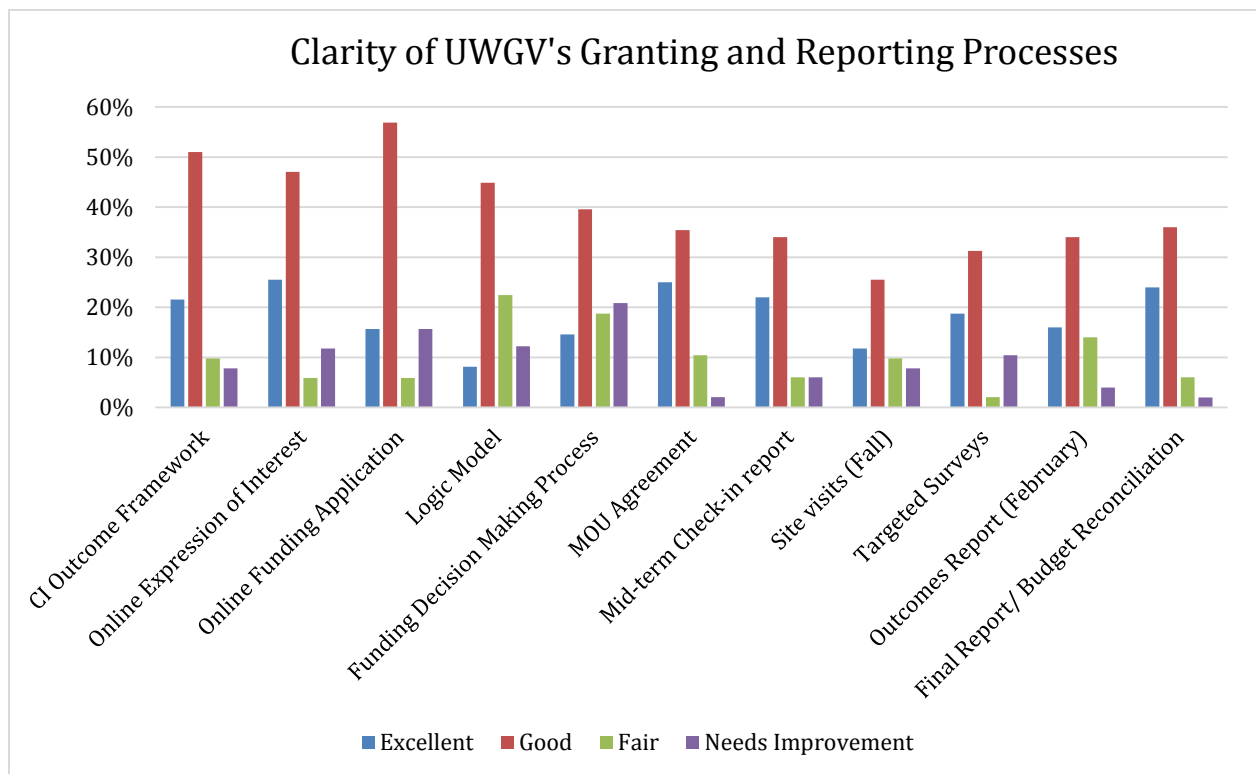


Finally, UWGV's funding limits in recent targeted calls was seen to be somewhat restrictive. Consideration for higher thresholds and/or a scaled application process would allow for bigger programs to receive the appropriate level of funding.

## UWGV Application and Reporting Processes

While refinements were suggested, the perception of the UWGV Community Investment application and reporting process was overall positive and well received by both survey and focus group participants. The majority of survey respondents also ranked each step of the community investment granting and reporting process in terms of clarity. (See Figure #3)

**Figure #3**



Focus group participants offered specific feedback on the online application form, suggesting helpful improvements such as a style guide, orientation for new organizations and sufficient lead time for the application process. Mentorship and support for applicants would be a welcome addition and continue to streamline application process. There was discussion about whether or not an abbreviated application form and more streamlined reporting template might be possible if an organization has a history of UWGV funding or was requesting a smaller amount. While the current form and structure of the application is familiar to currently funded community partners, it was suggested that there needs to be added sensitivity for certain demographics or organizations, e.g.: Indigenous interests, rural vs urban.

In terms of the review and decision making process, focus group participants stressed the importance of transparency, lead time being given for funding decisions, clearer expectations in the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and more feedback on why a program or project was rejected for funding. Questions were raised about the review panel of experts: Who are these experts? And what is their expertise? UWGV staff noted their responsibility to balance the need for transparency with the importance of anonymity at the request of panel members. Participants were encouraged that UWGV has in the past and will continue to include those with lived experience (i.e. a number of panel members do indeed offer this lived experience) and to communicate this fact to the community more clearly.

### **Multi-year Funding**

Inquiries regarding the perceptions of the funding model for example revealed a strong preference for multi-year funding due to the predictability, stability, and opportunity for planning it provides. Higher staff morale and retention, as well as program growth, evolution, and improvement were cited as positive outcomes deriving from the multi-year funding model. Participants shared that multi-year funding shows trust and a belief in the abilities of the funded agency to carry out their stated goals. The Community Impact Outcomes Framework as well was seen to provide clear guidance on funding priorities while aiding programs to remain targeted and focused on their outcome goals.

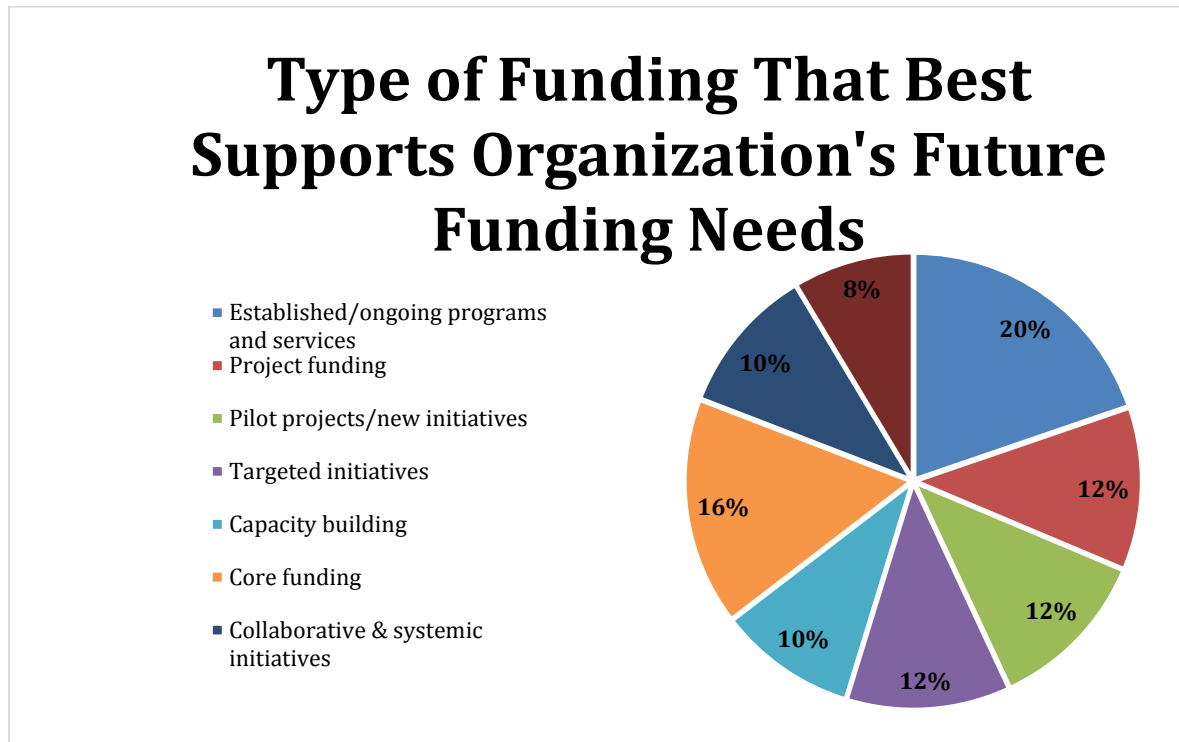
The proposition for a three-year funding cycle was supported assuming there will be some ability to respond to emerging needs as they arise. Single year funding works well for pilot projects and for “testing the water”. It was noted that for unsuccessful project applicants, three years is a long time to wait for another funding cycle, although one organization reflected that it provided a ‘wake-up’ call to their leaders to examine mission, diversify revenue sources, and seek more constructive collaborations.

This reconfirms what was heard in 2014 when social service organizations were surveyed to assess the impact of funding shifts in the CRD. At that time, organizations reported that they “struggle without the security of multi-year funding”. (The View from the Field, p.14)

### **Funding Streams to Support Impact**

The survey asked organizations to give feedback on the type of funding that supports their needs for funding support. Respondents shared that the community as a whole needs access to a variety of funding streams to best support their initiatives and missions. The chart below shows the diversity and complexity of the funding ‘ecosystem’ and provides evidence of varied sources of funding required to address the current and emerging issues. [See Figure #4 below].

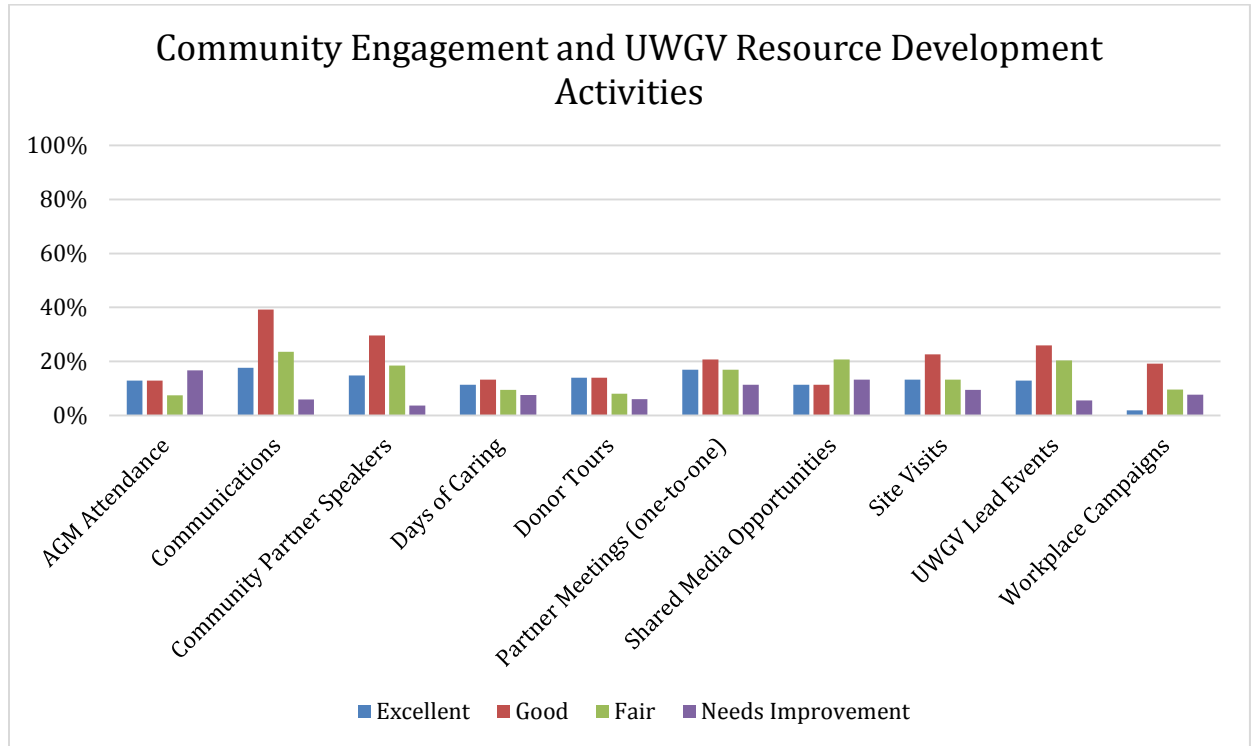
**Figure #4**



### **Community Engagement Activities**

Both the survey and focus group results suggested that organizations are generally satisfied with their engagement relationship with UWGV. (Figure #5, see below) depicts survey respondents' experiences engaging with UWGV. Most community partners appreciated the level of communication offered and the Community Partner Speaker Program is well liked. However, some of the smaller organizations reported being taxed by requests to engage during United Way's Community Campaign. Suggested improvements included the creation of videos to help relieve the pressure on some speakers during campaign. UWGV was also encouraged to foster more sharing and integration with other funders in the region.

**Figure #5**



**Note:** Table excludes non-applicable (N/A) responses.

## **MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER – OPPORTUNITIES FOR UWGV**

Participants discussed the fact that while there are many positive developments occurring in the community and social service sector, there remains unmet systemic needs requiring collaboration, innovation, and integrated strategies that address the needs of the most vulnerable in the region. Participants stressed that there is an urgent desire for the community to come together and as one consultation participant stated: “convening together gives a [deeper] sense and broader knowledge of everyone’s pain and triumphs. There is a great need to work together.”

At various times throughout the consultation process it was suggested that UWGV continue to promote and encourage the values of compassion, understanding, fact-based knowledge and social justice, while expanding its leadership role. Support for community-based solutions through its granting and engagement activities was viewed as essential in order to achieve long-term systemic change.

Although change often occurs at the grassroots level, participants stressed that the community sector must be actively engaged with municipal, provincial, and federal governments in order to effect sustained change. UWGV plays a pivotal role in connecting and convening key stakeholders and acts as a communication and information sharing hub.

### **Leadership & Advocacy – being a “Voice” of Community**

As public awareness and discussions of social challenges such as homelessness, mental health issues, and addictions increase, there is a need for fact-based education and compassionate understanding to decrease stigmatization and reduce non-factual judgements.

As a leader in the community, UWGV is in a position to use social leverage, between and amongst various sectors and interests in the community, to speak on behalf of vulnerable populations and the organizations who serve them and to be a “voice” or “advocate” [i.e. seeking public support for or recommendations of a particular cause or policy] for systemic change in the community.

The human and social services sector is often challenged to communicate and share the scope, depth and range of contributions it makes to community wellbeing. UWGV is seen as a partner who can represent the collective voice of the vulnerable. “We need to let people know that we are struggling in this city – Victoria does a good job of hiding it.” UWGV has an opportunity to use its strengths and position to “raise up community” by:

- Providing fact-based education to donors and the public regarding challenging social issues in order to combat stigma.
- Using their influence and credibility as part of a national movement for change.
- Promoting outreach, innovation, and integration of community services.
- Engaging actively with housing and mental health issues, convening and participating at the policy and decision-making levels.
- Influencing public attitudes and steward community values; help to create a positive, public narrative.
- Building relationships with stakeholders of influence: e.g. donors, businesses, education, unions.
- Increasing involvement with employment related initiatives e.g. Victoria Economic Alliance, South Island Prosperity Project
- Investing in and communicate social justice/citizenship message to donors and the public, moving away from the charity focus.
- Sharing the stories of community realities reflecting the interdependence and relationship of the issues.
- Being an active and visible presence year-round with the public and key stakeholders.
- Promoting the social determinants of health (as identified by the World Health Organization (WHO))

Additional discussion centered around the recognition that UWGV is able to build donor relationships, development, and stewardship to aid the shift from a charitable message to focused social justice and citizen engagement.

**“Conversation needs to be based more around ‘good citizenship’. Everything else stems from that.” - 2017 Community focus group participant**

### **Organization and Sectoral Capacity**

In response to the stresses being experienced by the human and social services sector, organizations require increased resources to meet the growing demands for services and to support organizational needs such as training, volunteer management, strategic planning and collaboration initiatives. Gaps in IT capacity surfaced as a huge issue/need for many agencies. Posters, graphic design, and a social media platform, etc. can be a time and energy drain when staff are not trained in these areas. In addition, a variety of social responses are needed to support the diverse needs of the community, including both large and small agencies, each with their expertise in prevention and intervention services. As one participant put it, “Multiple agencies in one community isn’t a bad thing” and “small organizations are as important as the larger ones.” Through its Community Investment Framework, UWGV is positioned to support a variety of needs to build both capacity and donor engagement.”

The consultation focused in a very preliminary way on some aspects of personal and organizational resilience. Resilience emerges in a culture of adaptation, creative thinking, planning and flexibility. Frontline staff are dealing with more intense work-related stresses, increased trauma situations, and an ever-expanding need for more resources. Personal best-practices shared by consultation participants included: “keeping staff healthy, safe, and engaged through reflective supervision, setting boundaries by not letting staff overwork, and staying true to their organization’s mission and mandate. Executive directors and managers need to practice self-care, have the ability to step away from their job, and provide support for administration, collaboration initiatives, etc.”

The participants acknowledged that in order to build sector capacity and resiliency, longer-term funding is required to support planning and training.

The financial foundation of agencies benefits from stability and an assurance of adequate resources. For example, one participant shared that tenure in a “physical space to hold programs is so important to organizations. If an agency is forced to use a public community space, the program can be put in jeopardy. Rental space is often an issue and the cost of space is high.” Participants expressed an interest in greater collaboration with one another in terms of space rental and infrastructure partnership and support.

### **Collective Impact through Collaboration and Partnerships**

Complex issues require coordinated responses for changing lives. Participants suggested that it is time to convene and implement a coordinated response to the needs of the invisible, marginalized, and vulnerable in the region. The strategy must build on community strengths and on what’s working, while bringing together key players, and recognizing the interrelationship of issues, gaps, and urgent needs. As one participant shared, “vision a social framework that reflects the kind of communities we want to live in and lay out the foundation for how that could conceivably happen. We have to think bigger. These are BIG issues that we are facing, some call them intractable because they have not been effectively understood and deconstructed to date.”

Focus group participants discussed the qualities of effective and engaging collaborations and partnership. If the interrelationship and upstream root causes that are barriers to equity, cohesion and prosperity are to be addressed, the community must work towards integrated, holistic strategies. To do so requires collaboration and engagement with social sector partners, allies, governments and private interests to create an integrated social strategy for the region. It was noted that, “(t)here is a distinction between collaboration and partnership. Partnership often comes out of collaboration. It becomes formalized with MOU expectations/times/deadlines.”

“Collaboration is not an option, it’s a necessity these days. All sectors need to be involved in a comprehensive strategy. There is a lot of informal collaboration in the community that is not publically noted or funded. Collaboration takes time and effort and TRUST amongst organizations [and] it needs to be funded and assisted. Having

dedicated capacity to put all the pieces together makes a substantial difference. If not, collaborative activities may end up being done ‘on the side of the desk’ due to limited capacity and staffing complement.” - quotes from 2017 Community Consultation participants

The commitment to making long-term positive improvements to the quality of life in the region, necessitates a recognition of the complexity and interconnectedness of social, economic, political and environmental issues. In recognizing the UWGV’s unique role in fostering the ‘collective good’, the community is supportive of policy and strategic interventions that build capacity and minimize the ‘stigma’ often associated with the challenges of vulnerable populations. The community both wants and expects UWGV will step up to play a role in bringing parties together to:

- Investigate and implement initiatives that support prevention.
- Build awareness and commitment to the community impact outcome framework.
- Highlight current strengths, best practices and celebrate successes.
- Increase leverage and strengthen partnerships with funders’ networks to address systemic community issues.
- Build partnerships with other levels of government and sector allies.
- Communicate, communicate, and communicate; tell the story for/of the community.

**Comments about Mergers and Other Possibilities** – “Mergers can help build capacity, but you don’t want to lose anything either. Only do a merger if it makes sense. Choice and niches are important – certain agencies have their specialties and should not go underappreciated.” “Revolutionary re-structuring idea: What if you only had a few area specific boards that served multiple non-profits, who generally would work with an advisory committee on a monthly basis etc. Shared boards would eliminate overlap and competition between small non-profits in the community.”

## **Shared Resources**

The community consultation also provided an opportunity for UWGV and agency representatives to share information and exchange resource links. One participant noted for example that *The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Nonprofit Strategy Training* [Victoria Community Foundation sponsored] was helpful.

### **bc211**

The bc211.ca service directory database is a province-wide online service to help British Columbians find the help they need when they need it. [bc211.ca](http://bc211.ca) is an online information service that is an up-to-date, reliable gateway to community, social, non-clinical health and government services. The service directory database includes over 13,000 current entries that document and describe services and organizations available to help people –



it is continuously monitored and kept up-to-date to ensure current and correct information is made available.

Consultation participants noted that bc211 is a welcomed resource for the community and anticipate its value to their collective services.

### **Community Wide Strategies**

As part of the 2017 community consultation, survey respondents were asked to suggest community wide strategies that they would like to see UWGV participate in and support. Community wide strategies are defined as strategies designed to advance a common, self-contained project or initiative by multiple partners. These strategies include a community engagement process, support for overhead costs, outcome indicators, or common funding agreements between partners. The focus groups also probed deeper into the concepts of collaboration and partnership in key areas where community wide strategies are warranted.

#### **United Way has an opportunity to:**

- Focus on building community capacity. *A community with capacity will get to the issues.*
- Support local research on the trends and factors positively and negatively affecting social cohesion the region.
- Develop means to build healthy relationships with indigenous perspectives and needs.
- Explore the needs of rapidly growing outlying areas, e.g. West Shore, Gulf Islands.
- Investigate donor/public attitudes that impact fundraising.
- Determine how best to address under-resourced areas relating to youth [and vulnerable families], food security, and other under-serviced communities.

## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

With a history dating back 80 years, UWGV possesses a solid reputation within the community at large and this sentiment was expressed by the majority of participating community organizations. UWGV's ability and capacity to speak on behalf of the community from a position of influence, as well as the strength of its brand were cited as highly valuable aspects of partnership. Workshop participants appreciated the opportunity to convene in a consultation setting and welcome ongoing dialogue with UWGV.

The shifting climate of social need and philanthropy suggest that UWGV consider moving beyond the long-held charitable model and expand to address social justice concerns through leverage and communication. In an increasingly technologically centric world, a greater number of donors are seeking direct impact through online crowdfunding and support for individual causes, which poses a challenge to UWGV's more traditional fundraising and donation structure. It is important that UWGV continue in its transparency and accountability while fulfilling its mission to build community through individual and collective action.

## Appendixes

### Participating Organizations

AIDS Vancouver Island  
Artemis Place Society  
BC Schizophrenia Society, Victoria Branch  
Big Brothers Big Sisters of Victoria  
Boys and Girls Club Services of Greater Victoria  
Burnside Gorge Community Association  
Esquimalt Neighbourhood House Society  
Garth Homer Society  
Habitat for Humanity Victoria  
HeroWork Program Society  
Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria  
Island Deaf & Hard of Hearing Centre Association  
James Bay Community Project  
James Bay New Horizons  
John Howard Society of Victoria  
Men's Trauma Centre  
Need2 Suicide Prevention Education and Support  
Oasis Society for the Spiritual Health of Victoria  
PEERS Victoria Resources Society  
Pender Island Childcare Society  
Phoenix Human Services  
Power to Be Adventure Therapy Society  
Ready to Rent BC  
Saanich Volunteer Services Society & Community Response Team  
Sanctuary Youth Centre  
Seniors Serving Seniors Association of BC  
Sooke Family Resource Society  
Sooke Transition House Society  
South Island Centre for Counselling & Training  
The Cridge Centre for the Family  
The Horner Foundation  
Threshold Housing Society  
Together Against Poverty Society (TAPS)  
Umbrella Society for Addictions and Mental Health  
Victoria Brain Injury Society  
Victoria Child Abuse Prevention & Counselling Centre (formerly Mary Manning Centre)  
Victoria Cool Aid Society  
Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society  
Victoria Sexual Assault Centre Society  
Victoria Women's Transition House Society  
Victoria Youth Clinic Society  
Victoria Youth Empowerment Society  
Volunteer Victoria  
Young Parents Support Network

## **A. All That Kids Can Be Focus Group Results**

### **The social reality for kids and youth is shifting.**

The impact of social media is on attitudes and behaviors is unprecedented: e.g. a “Netflix production increased texts to the suicide crisis line, all of which get feedback by 115 in the two weeks from its release.” Strains on overtaxed families impact children and youth, schools and social support networks. “With so little supports and opportunities given to youth, it feels like a ‘homeless factory’ – youth with lack of parental support, mental health issues, and few opportunities are being set loose after school to struggle and flounder.” We are seeing a “healthy reaction to unhealthy system.” “I would hate to be a 25-year-old today because of the lack of work, lack of hope, difficulty in supporting relationship, a family, or affording a house.”

### **Mental health issues are increasing.**

In this region, we are seeing a drastic increase in youth with mental health issues. There is an acute lack of community-based mental health supports. It seems that an unintended consequence of greater awareness is some youth adopting a mental health problem as an identity, looking for belonging, seeking support. The opioid crisis is serious. In many ways, the mental health and addictions crisis is a “normal reaction to a very unhealthy system.”

### **The cost of living in this region is skyrocketing.**

“Lack of stable housing, a basic human need, is negatively affecting families. There is a focus on survival rather than thriving.” The loss of safe and stable housing for vulnerable families is accelerating. Owning a home is now a luxury, and rental accommodation is scarce. People are getting pushed to the street and taking on multiple jobs to survive. Because of the pressures being placed on working parents, children are losing the one-on-one time with family “finding it very difficult to be fully present with children when you’re overworked”

### **Agencies and the service organizations for children and youth are under stress.**

Pressure for services increasing constantly. Agencies are being over-extended and pushed to do more for everyone, often doing work that they are not mandated or trained in. This puts an increased burden and stress on social workers, employees and volunteers. As one participant stated, “we can’t afford to say no.” Programs, agencies and service organizations are finding it harder to secure affordable commercial space, adding another stressor.

### **The relationship with and capacity of the school system is shifting.**

Partnering with schools to find children that are ‘off the radar’ is successful. In schools, more services are needed that can identify vulnerable children and get them the help and supports they need (schools can identify the kids much of the time; barriered parents are unlikely to ask for help). New teachers are entering schools without lived experience or the ability or training to discuss mental health issues with students. There are very few opportunities for young people. (e.g. high schools require a certain number of paid work hours in order to graduate, but there are no jobs. Job options for youth out of high school are critically needed.

## **B. From Poverty to Possibility Focus Group Results**

### **The vulnerable in our community are facing increasing challenges.**

Poverty is deepening in this region, and there is a widening disparity between rich and poor, i.e. those who are vulnerable. Income assistance rates haven't changed since 2007 despite the cost of living drastically increasing over the last 10 years. There is a severe lack of affordable housing. What constitutes 'affordable housing' is questionable. Systemic housing barriers are an issue – how many people can be housed in a single unit? Families are being barred from housing that would be acceptable due to regulations, especially with subsidized units. Rent is so high people are turning to food banks to survive. Substance use and mental health issues are increasing. The overdose crisis is ever increasing. Refugee integration and language challenges are creating barriers for newcomers. As government sponsored refugees are moving from federal funding this will become more evident.

### **Many non-profit agencies are operating beyond their capacity.**

Non-profits are continually operating above capacity – the need is more than the resources and organizations can't keep up with the demand for food and goods. Waitlists for every social service are increasing – this leads to frustration from both clients and care providers. "There is a feeling of 3 steps forward, 2 steps back". Provision of meaningful, face-to-face volunteer opportunities in the city are dwindling due to issues with extreme trauma situations. It's very hard on volunteers and they shouldn't be put in that place without extensive training, assistance, counselling, etc.

### **Governments ARE responding and much more is needed.**

There are some promising responses. The government has come to the table with capital funding much more in the last few years due to the exploding housing/poverty crisis. Island Health seems to be changing a bit by offering rapid access clinics, etc. A proposed moratorium on renovations is coming before Council but much more is needed.

### **There is some feeling that there is increasing polarization between the rich and the poor.**

Participants suggested an increase in polarization of attitudes – less tolerance/compassion particularly on social media surrounding issues of addictions and mental health. "Lack of understanding surrounding homeless persons and substance use (especially in online forums) seems to be increasing. It is soul destroying to those serving in the social sector. Is there a growing lack of compassion? Are people feeling burned out? The visibility of drug use and homelessness is a cause of anger and frustration for the general public."

### **C. Strong Communities Focus Group Results**

#### **The impact of the increasing cost of living relative to inflation and living wage is evident.**

Cost of living has risen out of proportion to inflation and living wage stagnation. There are Increasing levels of homelessness due to housing crisis. We need more housing for families, working poor, and youth, not just for people who are street entrenched.

#### **The complexity of addictions and mental health issues is apparent...but!**

Increasing complexity of addictions and mental health: clients present with more than one issue and issues are way more complex. Homelessness/ addictions crisis has brought the problem into public consciousness or “into the light.” There is a substantial lack of mental health supports and facilities dedicated to mental health intervention and support. Outreach tends to be more focused on the street entrenched. The youth addiction system is working up until residential addiction.

#### **The mental health and cost of living ‘crises’ in this community is impacting community social service agencies.**

Community social service non-profits are at capacity. e.g. “Average volunteer coordinator has 182 active volunteers to manage and some have upwards of 500. In comparison to the usual manager/ staff ration of 1:12.” “Being asked to do everything for everyone.” Many services are only available to someone if they’re chronically homeless. This is not helping with preventative measures.

#### **Particular populations are not getting the services they need.**

There is an influx of people moving to the Western Communities due to unaffordable housing in the downtown core, increasing homelessness in area, greater pressure on services and lack of transportation to services. More marginalization and ‘invisible’ populations are falling under the support radar (people with disabilities such as autism, brain injuries, etc.) “If they aren’t coming in to use services, why aren’t they?”

#### **Government shortfalls have been picked up by sector.**

The sector is the “Twin of healthcare.” “BC’s non-profit sector is robust because of the provincial government’s shortfalls.” Over the past five years the municipality is investing more money and time into priority areas, but the need is still high. Highlighting some positive developments: “There are “good developments in the realm of recreational healing – outdoor/ nature therapy for youth with mental health and addictions challenges. Seniors agencies in BC are coming together to craft a common voice and unite the sector – sectors have common needs and common gaps.”

#### **D. Mix of Agencies Focus Group Results**

##### **Shifting youth realities need more focus.**

There is a huge increase in youth with mental health and addictions issues. More young people are experimenting with hard drugs. Immigrant youth are facing challenges with belonging and integration. Youth housing – there are way more youth coming in for services than ever before. Low cost, affordable housing no longer exists (even for people with adequate jobs). “If you’re a youth with no references or added barriers, the cards are stacked against you. Some youth are resorting to saying that they have a disability in order to be shortlisted for housing.” The Local Mental Health Hub for youth starting in the fall is a positive outcome of a 3-4 year discussion on youth mental health.

##### **Housing issues are critical.**

Subsidized housing waitlists are astronomical. Housing complexes that support residents have been successful – Pender Island Seniors Housing Complex, centralized access for affordable housing – ex. Threshold, Pacifica, Victoria Cool Aid Society.

##### **Particular people are facing challenges.**

More immigrants are dealing with some complex situations, struggling with mental health disorders – more incidence of anxiety and depression due to having left family members behind. Complexity of immigrant family structures can include issues with parents and children, domestic abuse, and lack of cultural awareness. Larger families are struggling to find housing that can accommodate them within regulations. Exploitation of women and girls is on the rise. Due to the housing crunch, many young women are living in unsafe situations with abusers in order to remain housed. “The new mental health facility for the sickest people is jail.”

##### **Shifting social realities are being noted by agencies.**

Increased insularity due to a fast moving, technological society fosters lack of interaction and socialization due to increased dependency on social media. Fear based on ignorance in regards to mental health/addictions/homelessness, creates decreased capacity and empathy. “There is a general sense of hopelessness – if you don’t have anywhere where you’re needed, you feel hopeless.”

##### **The social sector is stretched.**

Non-profits are being stretched to capacity. Front-line workers are being traumatized and there’s a lack of counselling, supervision, debriefing, etc.

##### **Our region is experiencing shifting employment realities.**

There are very few work training/low barrier job options. There used to be jobs that were simple and easy for barriered people to access. Now, most jobs are customer service focused. The longer people are street entrenched, the less employable they become. Criminal records completely bar people from working/getting back on their feet. “Housing and employment are inter-related,” not two separate things. If you don’t have a job, how do you rent? If you don’t have a home, how do you find work?”