

From: Christine Cunningham <christycunningha@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, September 26, 2018 9:37 PM
To: Burnaby Homeless
Subject: Christine Cunningham response to School Board Questionnaire

Dear Burnaby Task Force on Homelessness,

Thank you very much for your excellent summary regarding homeless issues.

I am running for School Trustee with the Green Party in the upcoming Burnaby election. Here are my answers to your questions.

1. As a parent, I discussed the issues of homelessness, poverty, addiction and mental illness with my sons as they were growing up. I pointed out that people who have economic stability can nonetheless be challenged by addiction and mental health concerns so they would understand that it is not just people living in poverty who may have these issues. When my sons were in about Grade 5, I took them down to the Hastings and Main area and showed them the outside of rooming houses and I described that many people live only in one room and others do not have a place to live at all. It was our practise as a family to give small amounts of money to street people without question. When he was about 14, my eldest son took the initiative to gather clothes and get bread from local bakers to make sandwiches. He gathered some friends and went down to the poorer areas of Vancouver to offer people sandwiches and clothes. He made it fun by getting them to try on different clothes and joking around in a friendly way. He did this each year. As an adult, my younger son made a feature film, "Forgotten Man", which explores issues related to economic and social disparity and makes the point that all people are deserving of respect. I mention these things, because fostering awareness at a young age can mobilize young people to take positive action.

If elected, I would like teachers, parents and students and organizations such as yours to communicate and collaborate to identify different possible approaches for raising students' awareness of homelessness in a manner that would be sensitive and compassionate for the students and for people who are homeless or home insecure.

2. One of the most powerful ways to reduce stigma and myths would be for school children and youth to meet a person without a home or living with poverty and listen to their story. This could happen as simply as the student approaching a person panhandling on the street and asking them how their day is going? and then having a conversation where the student does most of the listening. Another way to make contact with a person living in poverty would be for a student to volunteer at a soup kitchen.

To help students put poverty in context, it might also be useful for them to have some basic information on how much things cost and how little money some people receive from social assistance or other sources. Since many children live in poverty, I think one would have to be careful not to make them feel shame or despair. I think it would be important to show schoolchildren that there is much that can be done to assist the homeless and others living in poverty.

3. I believe that others have already gathered statistics regarding children living in poverty in Burnaby so I would seek information from these people and organizations. In terms of reducing poverty, it may

be useful to look at systemic causes of poverty to see if some of the causes can be addressed. For example, single parents on social assistance used to be cut off social assistance if they took a training course because then they would not be available for work if work called. This situation has, I understand, been rectified by a change in the law which allows a single parent to keep receiving social assistance while they are pursuing job training. Besides trying to address systemic causes of poverty, it is equally or more important to have strategies to mitigate poverty. For example, providing free public transportation to all students, free breakfast and lunch programs, and free after school activities would not identify/stigmatize children living in poverty and would help families preserve money for the family's basic needs.

Thank you for asking for my comments.

Kind regards,.

Christy