



Saskatoon Poverty
Reduction Partnership

SPRP 12 Bold Ideas to Eliminate Poverty

**LESSON LEARNED DURING
THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**



Photo by Joshua Reddekopp

Land Acknowledgement

The SPRP is a collaborative group of community partners from across sectors, demographics and experiences that works in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. Saskatoon (ᓇᐳ·ᐱᒧᐎᓂ misâskwatôminihk) is a city with rich histories. It is located on the South Saskatchewan River on Treaty 6 Territory and the Homeland of the Métis. We acknowledge the people of Nêhiyawak, Dakota and the Round Prairie Métis who played a key role in establishing what we now call Saskatoon. We respect our ancestors and cherish our relationship with one another as we work together on a journey to end poverty in Saskatoon.

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Watching the 12 Bold Ideas operationalize over the course of the COVID response

Poverty looks different for everyone.

What impacts some may not impact others, making poverty elimination difficult, but not impossible.

Poverty shouldn't exist.

Poverty is a human rights issue. Which means that poverty is the product of poor public policy and/or governments failing to act.

Access to enough money is a critical part of eliminating poverty but it is not the only thing that needs to happen.

It is important to understand the impact social isolation, trauma and personal circumstances play in causing and perpetuating the cycles of poverty.

Under the COVID19 pressures, people living in poverty were made increasingly more vulnerable because the public policies and public health orders required people to:

- “Stay at home”
- “work from home”
- “Learn from home/online”
- Wash and disinfect hands/spaces
- Self-isolate
- Wear specialized equipment that cost money
- Access supports and services online (or not at all)
- Navigate complicated vaccine information
- Make decisions without adequate resources or supports

In a recent report from Saskatchewan Population Health and Evaluation Research Unit a predominant theme for lessons from COVID was addressed: existing inequalities were made worse. While many leaders and governments

favoured the public position “the virus doesn’t discriminate” to convey the seriousness of the situation and potential risk to everyone, it was painfully obvious to many that COVID-19 disproportionately impacted certain populations.

The social and economic factors that defined particularly vulnerable populations not only interacted with each other to exacerbate people’s vulnerability, but often limited individuals’ ability to respond to the pandemic.

For example, low-paid service sector workers (who tend to be younger, more likely to be members of racial minorities and new immigrants who may already face language and other barriers to accessing support) could not work from home. Keeping their jobs when their children were required to learn remotely at home (also imposing cost of specific technology and internet and access) proved challenging. Even when able to work from home, women disproportionately bore the burden of organizing and accommodating their children’s educational needs, often to the detriment of their employment.

Systemic racism, colonial constructs and policies rooted in white supremacy made the situation worse for Indigenous peoples, racialized minorities, and new immigrants. These groups have fewer resources in their communities and multiple barriers to access services and supports, particularly during the pandemic when many of these services were not offered in real-time and/or in person.

Community members who have incomes close to the market basket measure cut off (the so-called “working poor”), essential workers in sectors and businesses that remained open, people who were homeless or living in precarious housing, were all at greater risk and had fewer resources to access services.

Purpose of this document

During COVID all of the SPRP 12 Bold Ideas were front and centre. Many of them had direct implementation by a variety of jurisdictions and as we emerge out of COVID, and into the new normal, it is important to learn from these outcomes and create space for adapted and improved public policies that address the underlying causes of inequity and poverty.

Using established collective impact and multi-jurisdictional collaboration - working together better to ensure that we are all aligned toward the core outcome - an equitable and poverty free Saskatoon can be a reality.

We need to pivot the conversation to highlight that poverty is an urgent public health crisis.

We know these things are true:

- 29% of children in Saskatchewan live in poverty
- 21.1% of families with children under 18 in Saskatoon are low income
- 54.8% of lone parent families with kids under 18 are low income
- 340 single person households who are under 18 filed taxes in 2019 and every single one of them lives in poverty
- Affordable housing systems score 3.0 or lower on the Median Multiple and Saskatoon is 4.2

- The Saskatoon Food Bank & Learning Centre distributed 49,482 Emergency Food Hampers provided to the community totaling 737,997 lbs
- 50,337 L of fresh milk was provided through the Saskatoon Food Bank & Learning Centre Milk For Children Program
- 3,243 people used the Saskatoon Food Bank & Learning Centre tax program which injected \$8,731,524 into the local economy through tax refunds, GST Credits, and Canada Child Benefit payments.
- More than 500 people self-identify as homeless in Saskatoon and within that data more than 85% are Indigenous, 65% were exposed to the foster care system and 5% are youth
- The YWCA had to turn over 3000 women and children away from crisis shelter in 2020-21
- Unemployment rates are 7.5% and the workforce is under-represented by Indigenous and other people of colour
- During the pandemic, SK has seen the reporting of mental health issues increase four-fold (anxiety from 6% to 25% and depression from 6% to 17%)
- PHR distributed 2400 Naloxone kits. Safe consumption site has seen 724 visitors, provided 371 referrals and managed 1 overdose reversal

29%

of children in Saskatchewan live in poverty

21.1%

of families with children under 18 are living in low income

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- Crystal Meth possession charges have risen more than 2500% in 7 years
- The average age of people who use Crystal Meth is 26.5 but the youngest age reported was 13 (in a recent community survey)
- In 2019, Saskatoon Tribal Council (STC) Health saw 61,695 outreach visits, 812 new clients, over 200 daily visits.
- Prairie Harm Reduction saw 10,965 drop in visits, 694 unique clients were supported, 1141 housing supports provided
- More than 25% of children starting Kindergarten in Saskatoon are not ready for school
- The remains of thousands of missing and murdered Indigenous children were identified at historic sites of Indian Residential Schools

Many community members and their families were deeply impacted by COVID and learned to follow the daily changing data sets. On **July 31, 2021** this was the reality and all data shows that we are bracing for an increasing case load or “4th wave”:

- Total SK cases since beginning 50,024
- 7 Day Average of daily new cases 50

- Total Deaths 578
- Active Cases 479
- Daily New Cases 80
- Hospitalized Cases 46 (including 11 in ICU)
- Recovered Cases 48,967
- Total Tests 962,337
- Total vaccinated 1st dose 213,630 (75% of the SK population)
- Total vaccinated 2nd dose 188,206 (66% of the SK population)

As the response to COVID continued, new scientific methods and data collection were implemented which led the community to watch COVID viral loads in the wastewater. This data was used to anticipate spikes in cases. Often wastewater data indicated high viral loads, for example on August 05 the wastewater monitoring report indicated a 253% increase in viral load.

The SPRP continues to support the community collective action of the Saskatoon Interagency Response to COVID (SIRC) - for more information about this work please connect here: <https://saskatooninteragencyresponse.ca>



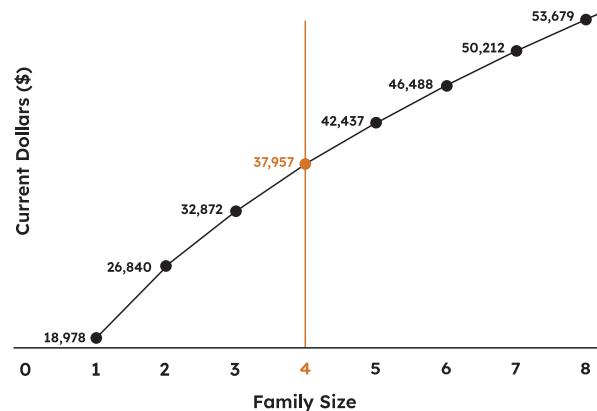
Measuring the Official Canadian Poverty Line: The Market Basket Measure

Market Basket Measure (MBM) is Canada's official poverty line and it is calculated based on the cost of a specific basket of goods and services representing a modest, basic standard of living. It is the amount a benchmark family of 4 (2 income earners and 2 children aged 9 and 13) spends in a month on food, clothing, transportation, shelter and other expenses).

In Saskatoon, the MBM and each of its five components, transportation, food, shelter, clothing, and other items, looks like this:

	Transportation \$2,908 per year \$122 per adult per month
	Food \$11,298 per year \$235 per person per month
	Shelter \$11,427 per year \$952 per family per month
	Clothing \$2,186 per year \$46 per person per month
	Other \$10,152 per year \$212 per person per month
	Total \$37,957 per year \$790 per person per month

Though the MBM is calculated for a benchmark family of 4 the measures is oftentimes adjusted so that it can be used for larger and smaller families (and individuals).



PreCOVID, the SPRP was considering whether the federal calculation for MBM actually reflected the true costs of living above the poverty line for people in Saskatoon. At a community consultation, it was clear that the five components covered by the MBM do not cover all costs, including, and most notably, costs associated with childcare. For more information about the SPRP commitments to childcare and early years investment refer to that section in the 12 Bold Ideas.

Experiences during the COVID19 pandemic inspired a conversation about ways income (and assets) played a critical role in keeping families out of poverty, and a renewed energy to discuss federal policies for a guaranteed basic income are emerging.



Poverty and Racism are Interconnected

Poverty, social inequality and inequity are direct outcomes of the concepts used to 'develop' and 'settle' the territory on which the City of Saskatoon is situated. This process of development and settlement is conventionally referred to as colonization.

Eliminating poverty with the implementation of the 12 Bold Ideas requires an understanding of the concepts that are referred to in Call to Action #47 and the call to reform public and social policy built upon such concepts.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action #47 reads:

*We call upon federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments to repudiate concepts used to justify European sovereignty over Indigenous peoples and lands, such as the Doctrine of Discovery and *terra nullius*, and to reform those laws, government policies, and litigation strategies that continue to rely on such concepts.*

In order to fulfill the commitments to Reconciliation in Canada, we need to address racism in all of its forms. This means looking beyond racism as the simple act of harbouring hatred towards a person of a different skin colour and seeing the interlocking and deeply complex systems of oppression based on race.

Racism affects all of us.

It is embedded in our institutions, systems, culture, and minds. The oppression of one group results in the increased privilege of another and the benefit that privileged groups receive from their ignorance to this seesaw effect perpetuates inequity.

A focus on diversity and inclusion is not enough. Sustainable, meaningful and authentic change can only be achieved through a focus on equity.

Applying an anti-racist methodology provides an analysis to expose racism and the structures that sustain it.

Working collectively on the 12 Bold Ideas to Eliminate Poverty, various sectors including justice, education, health, municipal government, non-profit organizations and interested members of the community are working together to disrupt and dismantle systemic racism. Through community engagement, research projects, social media campaigns, public education and organizational trainings, this work is focused on the engagement of people in a genuine transformative process to unlearn psychologically entrenched racism and achieve anti-racist action in the institutions where we work and live, leading to overall wellness, and the elimination of poverty.

The Saskatoon Poverty Reduction Partnership and the Anti-Racism Network will further unpack the 12 Bold Ideas to Eliminate Poverty, including these lessons learned during COVID19, to determine how recommendations for policy and practice changes are developed with anti-racist/anti-oppressive methodologies and equity based frameworks.

**RACISM
AFFECTS
ALL OF US**

The 12 Bold Ideas to Eliminate Poverty in Saskatoon - Updated Definitions

Income and Assets: The monetary and non-monetary things that people accumulate in order to fully participate in their community. Income can come from a variety of sources, including employment and assistance programs. Assets can be monetary (like savings, insurance and investments) but more often are non-monetary and consist of things like a house, car, other possessions, and can include other safety-net based items such as identification, access to family, friends and other supports.

Social enterprise: An organization with primarily social objectives and an overall mission to serve the public good. In addition to providing social programs and/or support services, a social enterprise will operate one or more profit enterprises to generate earned income, creating opportunities for employment and mentorship.

Access to Good Food: Food poverty, often referred to as household food insecurity, can be triggered by a crisis in finance or personal circumstances, but may also be a long-term experience of not being able to access healthy food or not having facilities to prepare it. It encompasses both the affordability of food and its availability within local communities.

Limited food affordability and availability have multiple negative impacts on health and well-being, including limited consumption of healthy food resulting in consumption of a high proportion of processed foods high in fat, salt and sugar. It is important to ensure that people can access healthy foods in a socially acceptable way and have sufficient certainty about how they will secure healthy foods for themselves and their households.

Health: The Social Determinants of Health (SDoH) are the conditions under which people are born, grow, live, work, and age. They include factors such as socioeconomic status, education, employment, social support networks, and neighborhood characteristics. These social factors have a more significant collective impact on health and health outcomes than health behaviours, health care, and the physical environment. SDoH, especially poverty, structural/systemic racism, and discrimination, are the primary drivers of health inequities.

Poverty is both a cause and a consequence of poor health. Poverty increases the chances of poor health. Poor health, in turn, traps communities in poverty.

Housing: Includes affordability, safety, appropriateness, and availability of housing. Many people are faced with physical conditions, types of housing, location, costs and other circumstances that make their housing inadequate for their needs. People living in poverty are often precariously housed, on the verge of eviction, constantly moving and/or in spaces that are unsafe, creating a cycle that often leads to homelessness. For the purposes of the 12 Bold Ideas, there is a need to look at the intersection of sheltered/housed and unsheltered/without housing, and where/how systems both provide housing and eliminate it.

Justice: The system that is composed of partners that interact with community members from the point leading up to a crime to release back into the community after the conviction (and all the stages in between) involving police, community support agencies, remand, corrections, lawyers, judiciary, the governments(s).

Transit: The City of Saskatoon operates a public transit system. It is important to note that with the removal of the Saskatchewan Transit Corporation (STC) and Greyhound Canada from Saskatchewan, people have no means to move throughout the province/country in an affordable way. While the 12 Bold Ideas is focused on free-to-use City of Saskatoon public transit, there may be opportunities to include policies and practices that address the movement of people into and out of Saskatoon.

Technology: Access to devices and connection to the internet is an essential community and household need. Governments must build public policy that addresses the growing tech divide because it is critical to eliminating poverty, increasing access to employment, education and literacy.

Public washrooms: A public and open space that provides toilets, sinks, supports for health-related needs, supports for families with small children, garbage disposal, sharps disposal and/or a space for people to get access to safe, clean, potable water.

Education: The system that provides the learning environment for children from pre-K to Grade 12. For the purposes of the 12 Bold Ideas, post secondary is not included in the Bold Idea.

Childcare: The formal and informal system that provides care for children when their families are at work, school or other situations where care is required. In Saskatoon, childcare includes licensed facilities/homes and unlicensed private homes.

System Navigation: In complex systems there are overwhelming barriers and roadblocks for people who are trying to find the help they need to access the right local services and activities. How people move through the system(s), where they see barriers, how the systems discriminate and marginalize are all part of this navigation. For the purposes of the 12 Bold Ideas there is a divide between reacting within the current systems to provide system navigation AND dismantling the inefficiencies so that system navigation isn't required. Good public policy and systems that are designed with users for the users is critical in the next steps to eliminate poverty.



12 BOLD IDEAS

A deeper look into the

COVID LESSONS

and

STRATEGIC COMMIT- MENTS

of the SPRP moving forward

Income and Assets

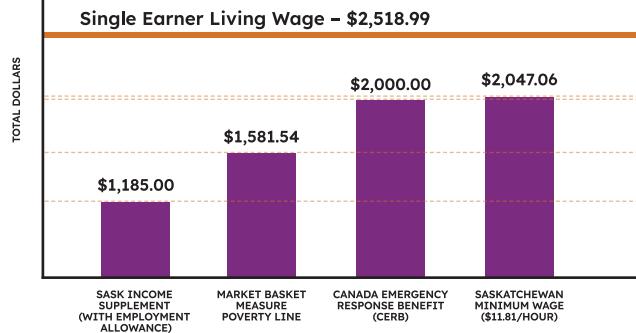
COVID lesson – people need access to income

During the COVID19 response the reliance on “enough income to support a family” became front and centre with the Federal Government’s implementation of the Canada Emergency Relief Benefit (CERB) which provided financial support to employed and self-employed Canadians who were directly affected by COVID19. Eligible Canadians over 15 years of age, you could have received \$500 per week to a maximum of 28 weeks.

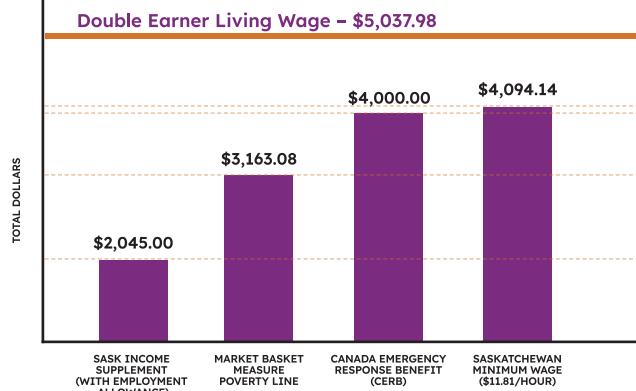
As we emerge from COVID and reflect on this response, it opens a conversation about Basic Income and the lack of financial support that provincial income assistance provides families.

This is a snapshot to compare potential levels of income for people in Saskatoon.

For single earners, **none** of the available income supplements or measures exceed what is considered to be a **living wage**.



For double earners, **none** of the available income supplements or measures exceed what is considered to be a **living wage**.



The SPRP is committed to advocating for a Canadian Guaranteed Basic Income System that is cost shared with the Federal and Provincial governments and is higher than the MBM.

The SPRP is committed to advocating to bring the minimum wage in line with the living wage.

The SPRP is committed to advocating for improved Saskatchewan Income Assistance and increasing awareness to the policies and practices that create and perpetuate cycles of poverty instead of building capacity in community members to ensure they don't need income assistance.

The SPRP is committed to increasing awareness and providing opportunities to access and learn about asset building.

While we understand that poverty cannot be eliminated entirely with income, we also understand that the inequitable distribution of wealth and the public policies that reinforce that distribution are the reasons for the depth of poverty we see in Saskatoon (and across Canada). People need enough money and assets to support their families in a safe, appropriate and engaged way. Once people have that wealth, they can find secure housing, food, address other needs and live without fear and the eternal feeling of survival mode.

**ACCESS TO
INCOME**

Social Enterprise

COVID lesson – diverse options for business is a key recovery strategy

During COVID response we saw the importance of small businesses in Saskatchewan. We know that small business has a direct connection to community investment, that small businesses give back and support local community initiatives and community agencies.

Emerging from COVID we need to hold onto the values of shopping/supporting local economies and take it a next step by investing in social enterprise. Creating opportunities for mentorship, for employment readiness and employee diversification, to create opportunities where for-profit businesses directly invest in the not-for-profit sector building capacity in all involved.

The SPRP is committed to increasing awareness within the business community about the role they can play in poverty elimination and community investment.

The SPRP is committed to working collectively with the partners from the Saskatoon Interagency Response to COVID19 to develop a plan to pivot the research/procurement/ distribution system that was established to provide a social enterprise model for non-profits to increase sustainability and build employment/mentorship opportunities.

The SPRP is committed to supporting existing social enterprise models in Saskatoon.





Access to Good Food

COVID lesson - access to food in every neighbourhood was critical

Early in the COVID19 response it was apparent that people were struggling to get access to food. Public health orders that closed support services and made accessing grocery stores and other food services more difficult created situations for families that pushed them deeper into food insecurity.

Working collectively, the community responded with a delivery and access plan that was designed to meet the emergency needs of families, but was not long term sustainable. Emerging into the postCOVID normal, a renewed interest in where people access the foods they need/want has started. Part of the work moving forward will be the same as it was before COVID - people need access to food in their neighbourhoods. The focus will also continue to look at the complexity of the system and how housing, income and transportation are all interconnected to the access of food.

The SPRP is committed to advocating for policies that support people to get access to enough income to support their food needs.

The SPRP is committed to advocating for access to food for people in Saskatoon in their neighbourhoods, when they need it and what they want to eat.

The SPRP is committed to advocating for public policy that supports access to traditional, cultural and locally sourced (grown/processed and distributed) food options for people (including but not limited to, Indigenous traditional foods (fish, wild meat, berries and medicines), newcomer/immigrant cultural foods, and fresh, locally produced foods) in a sustainable, affordable and safe process.



HARM REDUCTION

Health

COVID lesson - Harm reduction principles must be front and centre

The connection between health and poverty is complex. We understand that poverty is a risk factor for poor health AND that poor health is a risk factor for poverty.

Before COVID, the SPRP was focused on the development of tools for healthcare professionals to better identify and support vulnerable people. Including a response to their immediate health needs & the social determinants of health (SDoH) as a key preventative strategy that breaks the cycle of poverty.

COVID illuminated the lack of understanding inside the system about how the SDoH manifest and present themselves, particularly during strict public health measures that required safe/appropriate housing, access to water/bathrooms, the ability to secure and use PPE. Within days of the response, it was clear that the deep rooted privileges of colonial health system policies didn't consider the fact that many people would not have these things. As the response strengthened, it became apparent that both the understanding of, and value of, harm reduction principles was lacking. In the first few months of the response we saw communities outside Saskatoon responding with incarceration-style responses for non-compliant COVID patients who were unable/unwilling to self-iso-

late. In Saskatoon, the community partners stood in solidarity to ensure that vulnerable people needing isolation supports were provided with what they needed, when they needed it to ensure compliance. This practice highlighted how effective and essential embedding harm reduction principles is to the supports/services for people living in poverty.

The SPRP is committed to working collectively with community partners to ensure Harm Reduction principles are built into policy and practices, including, but not limited to safe consumption, overdose prevention, 24/7/365 access to mental health services, expansion of managed alcohol and other innovative approaches to support people who use substances.

The SPRP is committed to working on the intersection between poverty and the Health system, particularly regarding how vulnerable, marginalized and oppressed populations, who are often over-represented and living in poverty, access and move through the system, including delayed discharge, medical discharge to homelessness and the intersectionality of the other Bold Ideas (with an emphasis on income, transportation, housing and food).

Housing

COVID lesson – there are not enough transitional housing options with supports

Homelessness in Saskatoon is a growing concern. Over the course of the last 6 years numerous community agencies have come together to develop and implement policy and practice to achieve functional zero homelessness. While there have been many achievements, there is still a persistent homelessness crisis in Saskatoon. Over the course of 2020, and with the added stress of a new COVID19 reality, Saskatoon is faced with increasing pressures that both create and perpetuate homelessness and precarious housing circumstances in the city.

Within days of the COVID response it became apparent that the shelter systems and transitional housing options for people with complex situations, coupled with the needs for COVID, were not going to be sufficient. PreCOVID, there was already work underway to investigate how release from systems created situations of homelessness for residents. During COVID this was exacerbated, the COVID housing team saw medical discharge and other release from systems into nothing. This is primarily because there are not enough, no barrier, supported transitional housing options for people.

In order to eliminate homelessness and ultimately poverty, there needs to be equitable investment in all aspects of the housing continuum, including: harm reduction and sobriety based housing, affordable market rentals for a variety of family sizes and for individuals, transitional supported housing options that support people with what they need - when they ask for it, navigation and real-time access to the housing options people need to transition to - from wherever they currently are. In addition, the colonial and systemic racism that is deeply rooted in the housing system needs to be disrupted. 85% of the people who self-identify as homeless are Indigenous, yet there are very few Indigenous-led emergency sheltering services in Saskatoon. There are even fewer options for Indigenous people who are being

discharged or released from a government system. System release policies must ensure that people have income, secured housing and the supports they need (food, transportation, medications, employment, etc.) for a successful release/discharge.

The SPRP is committed to working with SHIP and other community partners to achieve Functional Zero Homelessness in Saskatoon by 2022.

The SPRP is committed to convening 2 action teams to support the Functional Zero Homelessness priority regarding “system taps” to develop policy briefings and recommendations to eliminate the release to homelessness in the Health and Justice systems.

The SPRP is committed to working collectively with community partners to operationalize the housing continuum.

**HOUSING
FOR ALL**

Justice

COVID lesson – there are alternatives to remand

The purpose of this work is to look more closely at the Justice Bold Idea to identify the intersection between the systems (policing, corrections, judiciary, government, etc.) and community resources and supports to ensure that gaps and needs are addressed. The intent of the Bold Ideas is to identify these interconnections and to create a collaborative and intersectoral approach to address current outcomes and trends. In particular, SPRP is interested in the over-representation of women in the justice system and the long lasting impacts this can have on family, child development, community growth and development, the economy, government/community resource allocations and ultimately poverty rates.

During COVID, the province saw the release of people from remand into an alternative community-based placement. Data associated with this response is minimal, though when community partners that provide services to clients who were released from remand reflect on the practice, there are very few examples of complications. Moving forward, this work will look more closely at the process for remand, how it can drive inequities and the over-representation of people living in poverty being in custody, the apprehension of children and other complications from the breakdown of the family unit. SPRP is particularly interested in the role that remand (inside correctional facilities and/or community placement options) plays in decreasing poverty for women and children. In order to fully understand this, a detailed mapping process will capture the current state of the remand process and identify gaps, points of excessive use, policy and practice conflicts and provide analysis or recommendations about system improvements and celebrations.

Outcomes of this work will also focus on the current landscape of the justice continuum (from offence to incarceration to release) and will include a deeper understanding of how the justice system does not exist in a silo - that community, other systems (like health, education, social services), all levels of government, and community members play a role in the process, solutions and investments. In particular, the SPRP has identified system navigation – highlighting the interconnectedness of this work and the need for agencies/systems to support intensive system navigation systems that plug the gaps between system policy and the implementation of community practice.

The SPRP is committed to working with community partners across the continuum of services within the Justice system to map the points of contact from the point of criminal offense to release from the system (and all points in between) to develop policy briefing and recommendations that stop the “revolving door” and address the systemic barriers, racism and inequities that cause recidivism.

The SPRP is committed to create awareness about the inequities facing women and children who are connected to the justice system and how community-based alternatives to remand are required to halt cycles of apprehension and recidivism.

ALTERNATIVES
EXIST





Transit

COVID lesson – Transit can be free to use

The response to COVID brought unprecedented decisions. During the first 285 days of the response, the City of Saskatoon waived all fares as a strategy to keep driver's safe and to provide service to essential workers. This decision was matched by many urban centres across the world. While the SPRP advocated for "free to use" (not entirely funded by the City of Saskatoon) transit before COVID, this response (funded by the City of Saskatoon) is an example of what could happen. Moving forward, understanding the impacts (both economic and social), the use (or perceptions of misuse) of

the service, rider demographics and impacts upon reinstatement of the fares all provide important data to revisit the conversation for a more equitable transit system in Saskatoon.

The SPRP is committed to advocating for a "free-to-use" transit system for the City of Saskatoon.

The SPRP is committed to re-convening the Transit Action team to develop policy briefings and recommendations to achieve a free to use system.

Technology

COVID lesson – people need access to technology

In July 2016, the United Nations declared access to the Internet to be a human right. In today's climate during the pandemic, it has become even clearer that access to the Internet and technology can be a lifesaver for many people.

Throughout the COVID response we saw numerous barriers associated with access to services/supports, access to relevant/accurate health related information, access to personal health needs, bill paying and other critical supports that went entirely online due to COVID closures. This limitation around access was deeply felt by those who were already (pre-COVID) struggling with connectivity, resources to access/use technology.

In the early months of the COVID response, we saw School Boards respond with supports for students that included devices and data. This clearly showed the importance and the limitations around access. It is critical to note that many of these school-based technology supports were used by all family members and provided an essential connection to the ever-changing COVID realities people were facing.

During the SIRC response a detailed report outlining the technology needs and background was produced. The following recommendations came from that work:

1. Implementation of blanket Wi-Fi starting in low-income/disadvantaged neighborhoods, with consideration of further expansion to other neighborhoods/downtown areas (following evaluation of early pilot implementation) is urgently needed in Saskatoon, especially given the current pandemic.
2. Wi-Fi service on city transit should be implemented to increase ease of use of transit services and ensure those moving around the city remain connected. This could be in

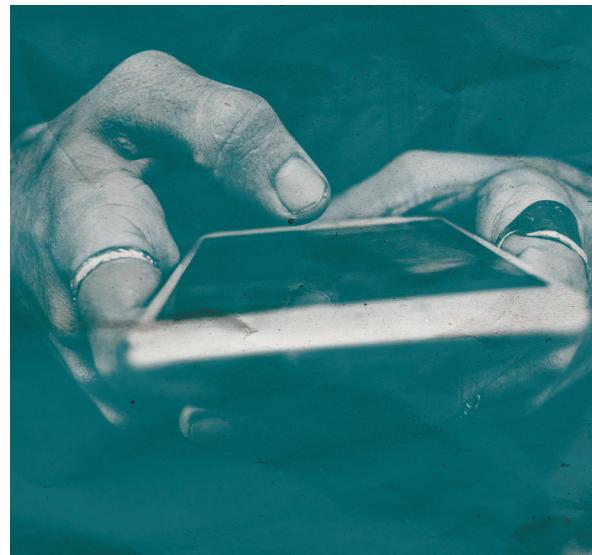
tandem with a pilot project, or a separate expansion of free Wi-Fi services.

3. Access to devices should be considered. Those living on social assistance should be allocated additional funds to purchase devices that have Wi-Fi connectivity in order to utilize internet services. Other programs to offer affordable devices to those in low-income areas should be explored.

The SPRP is committed to working collectively with the City of Saskatoon free public wifi project to develop policy and practical implementation strategies to work towards fully accessible wifi across the city.

The SPRP is committed to working collectively with agencies and partners to determine a sustainable and appropriate process to ensure access to technology (including data and devices) is a priority for all residents in Saskatoon.

The SPRP is committed to advocating for the implementation of the 3 priorities identified by the Saskatoon Interagency Response to COVID (SIRC).





Access to Public Washrooms (and water)

COVID lesson – Access to public washrooms is a basic human right

In 2015, the United Nations General Assembly declared sanitation a universal human right. This means everyone, without discrimination, is entitled to “have physical and affordable access to sanitation, in all spheres of life, that is safe, hygienic, secure, and social and culturally acceptable, and that provides privacy and dignity”. Everyone, everywhere, has the right to a toilet. Our governments should be accountable to ensure this basic need of having a place to relieve oneself is available to the public.

The elimination of waste is a necessary activity that sustains life – it is not a choice. When people are forced to eliminate their waste in public, it is a humiliating and dehumanizing experience. Human dignity is violated. Community environments also bear the burden of human excrement which is neither aesthetically appealing nor healthy for our citizens.

During the beginning of the COVID response, Saskatoon went more than 100 days without access to public washrooms. This impacted ev-

eryone who relies on access to publicly accessible washrooms including City of Saskatoon transit drivers, delivery drivers, utility workers, gas and electric service workers, people doing street repair, local pedestrians, citizens young and old; and people who use park systems -- all users of public washrooms. It is especially critical for seniors, pregnant women, little children, those with some medical conditions, and those who are homeless.

As things reopened it was important to note that individuals who might be discriminated by private establishments e.g. homeless, racialized, and transgender have equal access. Public washrooms are not solutions to discrimination and systemic racism, however they ensures more people get access when they need it without facing discrimination.

The SPRP is committed to working with community partners, including the City of Saskatoon, to develop a 24/7/365 accessible and safe public washroom infrastructure.



Education

COVID lesson – The school systems need to be innovative & K12 plays a critical role in supporting families beyond learning

During the COVID response the role that the K12 system plays in supporting, not only the learning of students, but also access to other essential support services such as before and after school care, access to food, supports for speech and language, critical mental health supports and other connections to health and wellbeing for families. When schools were forced to make the decision to end in person learning, these additional K12 supports became very apparent.

The modification of classroom delivery posed both challenges and opportunities for learning and for families to navigate access. Early on, the system responded by providing access to tech (both data and devices) to families who didn't have these in the home. This short term solution illuminated the need to develop more fulsome policy and practice to bridge the "digital divide" that existed preCOVID.

Before the disruption to the system due to the COVID response, the SPRP was advocating for a deeper look at the industrial school model, particularly the structured school days, need for in-person learning, options for remote or land-based outdoor learning, and potential changes to the school year model (alternatives to the semester system for high schools, quint systems, classes throughout the year with different vacation schedules). During COVID we saw school systems across Canada respond to COVID with a variety of these options.

As we pivot from COVID into a new reality, the SPRP is committed to reconvening the conversation about alternative school models, school calendars and opportunities for a pilot in Saskatoon to look at a new delivery model that takes the lessons from COVID and builds a systems designed for students and their families.



Childcare

COVID lesson – families need affordable and accessible childcare

Saskatchewan has one of the worst records for childcare in the country. Prior to the pandemic, more than 70% of Saskatchewan mothers of children between birth and age 5 were participating in the workforce, but licensed facilities can only accommodate 18% of children—the lowest rate in Canada.

During COVID, we saw how dramatic the lack of affordable, regulated spaces truly is. Nothing highlights the need for childcare more than when the K12 school system is disrupted. The COVID lessons spanned 2 school years, and the community saw how critical access to childcare, and early learning services, are for their children.

The key announcement in the federal Liberal budget presented on 19 April 2021 was undoubtedly the \$30-billion Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Plan. With this, the Liberals have promised to deliver the largest social program in Canada since Medicare. Referring to child care as “essential social infrastructure,” they aim to bring fees for all regulated early learning and child care down to a maximum of \$10 a day within five years, eventually arriving at 50-50 cost-sharing with the provinces and territories.

People often frame child care as a women’s issue, citing the potential for a universal system to boost women’s labour force participation and improve gender equity. Another economic argument for universal child care is framed in terms of the benefits to living standards it would bring to average and low-income families. While these arguments have merit, they overlook the fundamental purpose of child care and early learning programs: to improve education, equity, and long-term outcomes for children.

PreCOVID, SPRP highlighted this issue as a core priority to breaking the cycles of poverty. Copious research regarding the impacts of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and the impact poverty has on brain development exists across the globe.

As we pivot from COVID there will be tremendous needs identified for young children and their families. With child care and the school systems being disrupted, families were left to manage all supports within the family home. Many low-income and families already facing the intense pressures of poverty did not have the capacity to support these critical years.

The SPRP is committed to increasing awareness about investment in the Early Years being a critical investment to stop cycles of poverty and to provide children with what they need for the best start.

The SPRP is committed to advocating with ChildCare Now Saskatchewan for the development and implementation of a \$10/day childcare system for the province.

**INVEST IN
THE EARLY
YEARS**

System Navigation

COVID showed the lack of connectedness between systems – including community

The COVID response showed the community how critical it is to work collectively and to create a space where we understand what each other is doing. As we pivot the work to make poverty an urgent public health crisis, it is important to learn from the over 500 days how we can pivot our commitments, re-energize the preCOVID work, focus on the postCOVID recoveries and work collectively to eliminate poverty in Saskatoon.

During the response we learned that face-face services for community members is a critical service. We also learned how to connect people in ways with unprecedented pressures. The next steps for system navigation will focus on these lessons and ways to make the systems easier to access, while also ensuring that people have entry points they are comfortable with, coordinated responses and ways to ensure that people in need don't slip through the cracks.

Over the next year, the SPRP will focus on the “4 C’s” of their work across all 12 of the Bold Ideas.

Convene - The SPRP is committed to bringing community partners to the table to discuss the complexities of poverty in Saskatoon.

Catalyze - The SPRP is committed to acting as a catalyst to accelerate and/or start a cause, an action or process, understanding that the work follows the energy.

Coordinate - The SPRP is committed to organizing and facilitating the sharing of information and resources so that we can accomplish our deliverables.

Collaborate - The SPRP is committed to the inclusive engagement of people in order to create an environment conducive for achieving the common agenda of poverty elimination in Saskatoon.

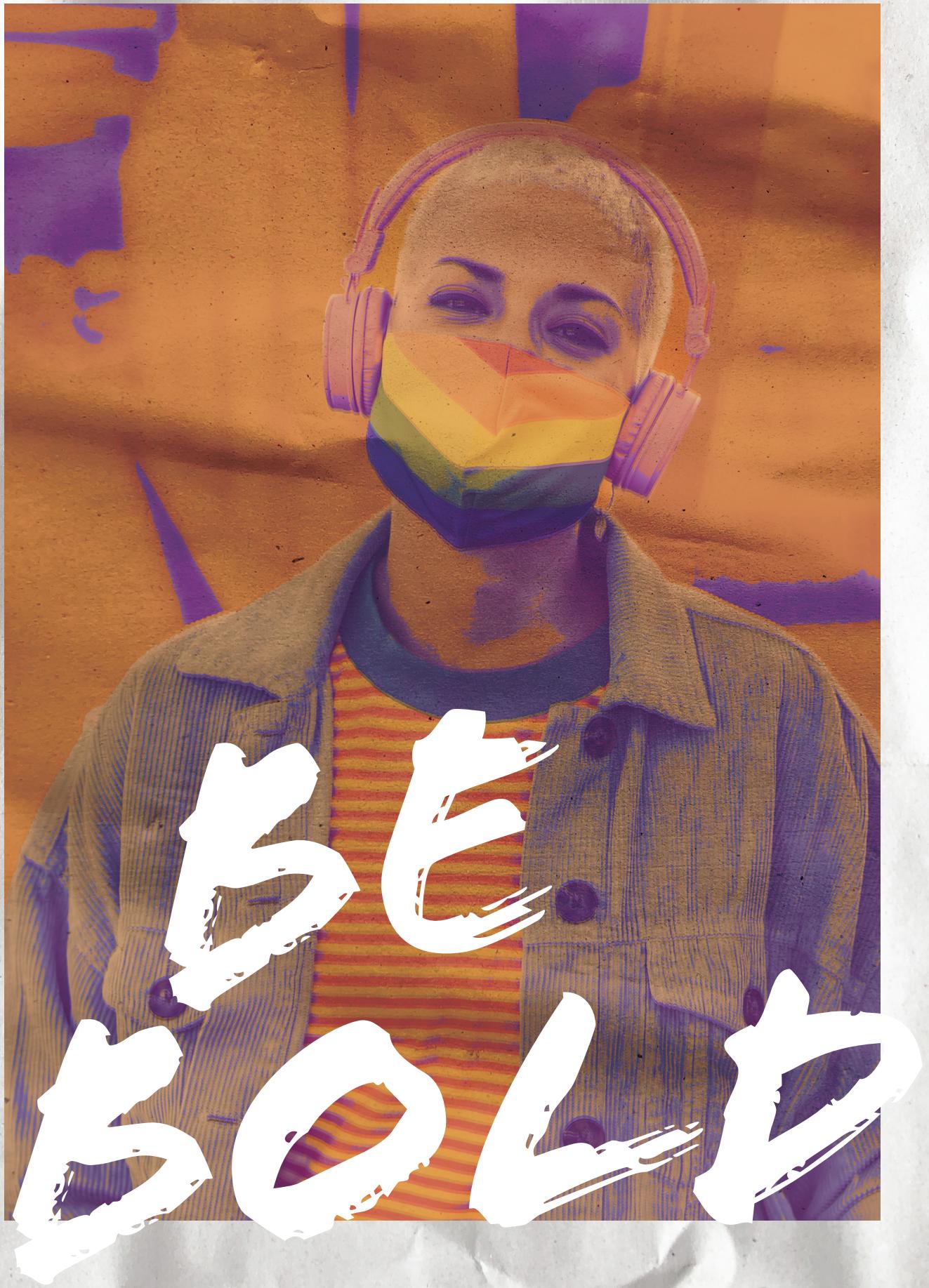
The SPRP is committed to the foundational core priority “**Nothing About Us Without Us**”

The SPRP will continue to convene teams with colleagues who bravely share their lived and living experiences in order to ensure that policies, practices and decisions are made with their voices front and centre.

Most recently, the SPRP is working with a youth consultant and will work diligently to speak with youth about their COVID experiences and how they see poverty and vulnerability in Saskatoon.

The SPRP is committed to the foundational core priority “**We are all Treaty People**”

In the summer of 2021, the SPRP reaffirmed its commitments to the TRC Calls to Action, the MMIWG Calls to Justice, UNDRIP and the Treaty relationships. As part of the implementation process the SPRP will create a document that outlines the collective commitments to Truth and Reconciliation.



Next steps and commitments

As we emerge from COVID19 with many lessons we often reflect on how to ensure that poverty, racism and other human service system inequities are recognized as an urgent public health crisis.

The underlying difference between COVID19 and any other inequity is that many of the leaders tasked with the policies and practice to eliminate poverty are not currently deeply impacted by it. While many can empathize and many may have experiences that build this empathy and understanding, the intense sense of urgency that was felt during COVID by all residents of Saskatoon, is not the same when

poverty, racism, homelessness etc. are being highlighted.

In order to pivot from COVID with the same sense of urgency, SPRP is committed to reminding residents of Saskatoon that poverty is a public health crisis, and that it impacts all of us. While the impacts may not be as overt or obvious as they were during the pandemic, Saskatoon cannot be a vibrant, healthy, safe or equitable community without addressing the poverty crisis faced by so many.

If you want to get involved with any of the strategic commitments please contact the SPRP directly at: SPRPcoordinator@gmail.com

About the data and content

The Census provides a statistical portrait of Saskatoon's social, economic and physical environments. In addition, the City of Saskatoon 2018-2020 Saskatoon Community Profiles provide critical statistical data regarding the context of the 12 Bold Ideas.

In order to supplement the content of Stats Canada data, the SPRP uses local context data from community agencies' annual reports,

monthly dashboards, surveys and other data collection tools. Data from research agencies such as SPERU, CUISR and University of Saskatchewan partners are also included.

For additional details about sources of data please contact SPRPCoordinator@gmail.com

For supporting documentation please email the SPRP at SPRPcoordinator@gmail.com

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