



# Creating a Culture of Inclusion

*A practical guide for community groups & employers to include people with the lived experience of poverty in their work.*

*“Nothing About Us,  
Without Us.”*

**sprp** Saskatoon Poverty  
Reduction Partnership

*April 2017*

# Introduction - Creating a Culture of Inclusion

If you and your organization work with individuals and families living in poverty, you know how important and rewarding this work is. No doubt you are equally aware of the difficulties and frustrations that can arise as you strive to support people who are responding to multiple, complex challenges in their lives. It can be hard to find the energy and passion needed to keep doing this work over the long haul.

The purpose of this guide is to create a shift in the way we see the intended users of programs and services, from 'clients' or 'consumers' to individuals who have valuable experience, knowledge and skills that can benefit your organization. Rather than dividing people into '*those who give*' and '*those who receive*,' this approach recognizes that each of us has something to offer and we can all learn from one other.

Many organizations understand that the best way to design effective, relevant services and programs is to seek direction from the people who will be accessing them, and that the skills and knowledge of their employees need to be complemented by the expertise of individuals with lived experience of the issues.

Putting this new perspective into practice raises many questions:

***But how do you actually do this?***

***What additional resources are needed?***

***What does this kind of relationship look like?***

***What are the challenges and how can we be successful?***

## Speaking the same language:

It is critical to the process that the people working together have a common understandings. The following definitions are offered as a starting point but groups are encouraged to work together to increase understanding and to build a culture of inclusion that is specific to the work of your group.

**Lived experience** can refer to any issue or situation (poverty, homelessness, illness, social exclusion, historical trauma, addiction, parenting) that is relevant to an organization or project. The term acknowledges that those with personal experience have invaluable insights and understanding that those without such experience lack, no matter what their level of education and training.

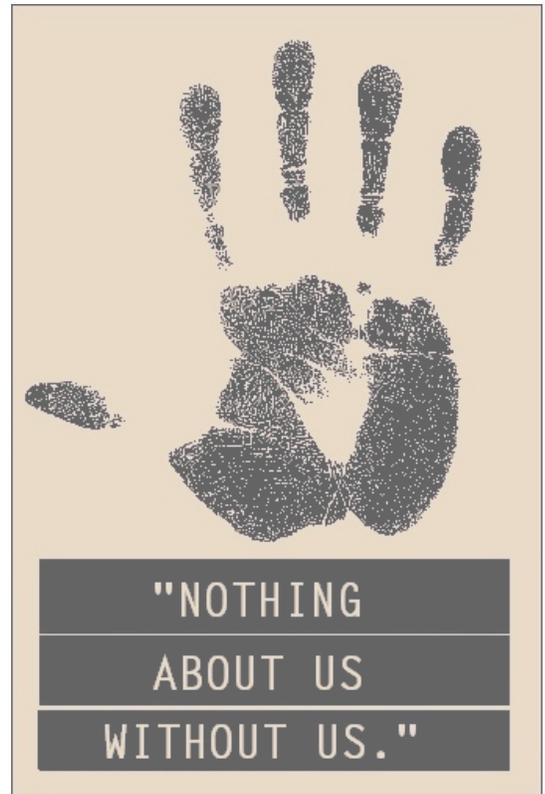
First Voice (FV) and Essential Voice (EV) are examples of program models designed to include lived experience.

The SPRP is committed to the inclusion of people with lived experience of poverty.

**Poverty** is a word that can be defined in many ways. This is how the SPRP defines poverty reduction:

***“Creating conditions which enable all members of our community to develop their talents and abilities, to have the choice to actively participate in economic, cultural and social life and to enjoy a good standard of living on a sustainable basis”***

It is important to recognize that there is great diversity among the experiences, perspectives, needs, and abilities of those who identify themselves as living in poverty, and each person's experience of poverty is unique.



# Why is Inclusion Important?

## It's good for your organization.

Hearing from the people who access the services and programs you provide, or who are impacted by policies, is essential if you want your organization to be as relevant and effective as possible. Individuals with lived experience bring knowledge, experience and skills that those without this experience lack. Nothing teaches us better than learning from experiences. It may change the way you work, the way you are seen by the people you serve, and improve outcomes. Often these community members are better suited for certain roles, such as those that involve connecting with others from that community, providing hospitality, story telling and engaging with media.

*If it weren't for that program, I probably wouldn't be working FT. I'm very quiet and shy and not the type to talk to just anybody, and it opened me up a bit more when I started speaking at different churches about the program."*  
Angela, FV program participant.

## It's good for people with lived experience.

Having input into services, programs and policies is empowering and decreases the frustration with the system that many people may experience. Self-esteem and self-confidence grow when individuals have the chance to develop skills and knowledge to contribute to community. Mental and spiritual well-being are increased when people are listened to with the respect and the worth of their lived experience recognized. Being involved in the work of a community can widen and strengthen individuals' social network and increase their sense of belonging. It creates a better understanding of issues in the community and of how organizations work. Being compensated for contributions is not only helpful financially, but it reinforces that they are valued. For many individuals, the confidence, skills, and connections they develop through these opportunities can help them make further positive changes in their lives (ex. education or employment). And of course, all will benefit from improved services and programs that are more relevant and effective.

*They are making themselves vulnerable, risking themselves in a new environment with a different language & culture. The Professional Staff is setting aside what they know, their role, and their expertise in order to be a student of another's experience.*

Janet, ICM

## It's good for you.

As an individual, when you adopt a "nothing about us without us" vision of inclusion it breaks down divisions of us vs. them and giving vs. receiving. By opening yourself up to learning from those with a very different background and life circumstances from your own, you will mature in ways you may never have expected; enriched by new relationships and with deepened understanding, compassion and empathy. You can find greater satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment in your work.

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## What can this way of working look like?

Including people with lived experience in your organization can be done in a variety of ways. It depends on goals, resources and supports, but also the skills or abilities of the individuals involved. There is a spectrum of inclusion, outlined on the following page, that ranges from employment opportunities to inclusion in governance and human resource processes. It is important to understand that this spectrum of inclusion is not weighed as one opportunity being better than another and that, regardless of where on the spectrum of actions the work is it is critical to have the following components:

- communication that builds a human relationships
- appreciation for complexity of circumstances
- empathy
- patience and understanding
- willingness to learn

# The Spectrum of Inclusion - practical examples

## What could including people with lived experience of poverty look like for you ?

The following table provides a few examples along the spectrum of inclusion. Starting with basic connections for practical work, moving through more relationship based opportunities and ending with inclusion in governance and strategic directions.

	practical work	consultation	education and story telling	community outreach	policy, planning and strategy
Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• outdoor work</li> <li>• seasonal work</li> <li>• office work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• focus groups</li> <li>• single event participation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• media events</li> <li>• sharing personal stories</li> <li>• educational events</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• hosting at outreach programs</li> <li>• interacting with community members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• advisory committees</li> <li>• board of directors</li> <li>• human resources</li> <li>• working groups</li> </ul>
Supports Required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• prompt &amp; fair payment for services/ expertise</li> <li>• Training and orientation</li> <li>• Basic Employee Supervision</li> </ul>	ALL previous column supports PLUS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assistance with transportation</li> <li>• Sensitive, skilled facilitation</li> <li>• clear explanations about format/ purpose</li> <li>• emotional supports</li> </ul>	ALL previous column supports PLUS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• trust &amp; relationship building</li> <li>• short-term check ins and debriefing</li> </ul>	ALL previous column supports PLUS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• on going relationship &amp; trust building</li> <li>• mental health supports</li> <li>• co-mentorship</li> </ul>	ALL previous column supports PLUS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• governance training and mentorship</li> </ul>
Benefits to the Individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• increased sense of belonging, self confidence and sense of value</li> <li>• income</li> <li>• build personal strengths</li> <li>• accountability and ownership</li> </ul>	ALL previous column benefits PLUS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• creates opportunities to raise awareness</li> <li>• builds connections &amp; trust</li> </ul>	ALL previous column benefits PLUS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• public speaking opportunities</li> <li>• ability to influence others</li> <li>• help others process experiences and find meaning</li> </ul>	ALL previous column benefits PLUS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• builds deep connection with community</li> <li>• develop strong self confidence</li> </ul>	ALL previous column benefits PLUS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• develops awareness</li> <li>• creates feeling of being part of the solution</li> </ul>
Benefits to your organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• demonstrates commitment to community</li> <li>• gets work done</li> </ul>	ALL previous column benefits PLUS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• get feedback about services</li> <li>• builds credibility and relationships</li> </ul>	ALL previous column benefits PLUS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• impact and enhance direct services</li> </ul>	ALL previous column benefits	ALL previous column benefits PLUS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• builds a better understanding of your services to clients</li> </ul>

# Practical Supports - Guidelines

It's important to understand the unique needs of all of your team. Many aspects of poverty make it difficult for people to participate consistently. Not having reliable transportation, access to a computer, the Internet, and phone service; inadequate nutrition and housing; mental health and addictions; lack of supportive relationships are some of the challenges people may face. The following are examples of common, practical supports that many people with lived experience face:

## Early years support

Many people you are working with have young children. In some cases, it may be appropriate to invite them to include their children, or you may be able to offer access to childminding on site. Alternatively, providing compensation to arrange their own childcare may be the best option. For caregivers of older children, activities that happen during school hours are generally easier to attend.



## Transportation

Many people do not have their own car and must rely on taking the bus, cycling or walking. The location of activities can make a big difference in how easy it is for them to attend. Safety is also a factor, as people may be unwilling to come to activities in places that they see as dangerous, especially in the evening. Take into account how people will be getting to your location, and consider covering the cost of bus fare, gas and parking, or a cab.



## Nutrition

Providing healthy snacks or meals, depending on the time of day, is always a good idea. By offering something to eat, you are directly supporting people's well-being. Have some clean containers on hand so people can take any leftovers home with them. If you wish to meet over coffee or lunch, be clear when inviting the person that you will cover the costs. Ask about dietary needs ahead of time to ensure proper nutrition, health and cultural needs are met.



## Compensation

Paying people for their time and expertise shows that you truly value their contributions. Most organizations provide compensation in the form of an honorarium. Other benefits, like gift cards may also be appropriate. Clear communication about compensation, ahead of time, is key.

### What is a fair honorarium?

The concept of a [living wage](#)--the amount needed for an individual working at least 35 hours a week to be healthy and productive, gives an idea of what to aim for. In 2015, a living wage for Saskatoon was calculated to be \$16.77/hour.

Depending on your funding, you may not be able to provide this level of honorarium, but it is something to work towards. It is also important to recognize that people with lived experience have varying levels of expertise in this work; just as with employment, greater levels of experience and skills should be compensated accordingly. Provide honoraria regularly and promptly, in the form of cash rather cheques if

possible, as not everyone is able to cash cheques easily.

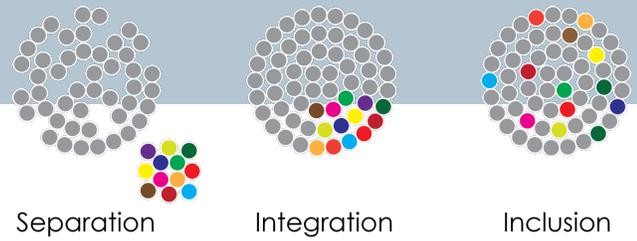
**Remember other expenses:** When people are asked to travel to meetings or conferences, additional expenses will arise. Planning ahead with the person to ensure that everything will be covered will reduce their anxiety and avoid any problems. For example, hotels that require credit cards and ID or special events that require appropriate clothing.



“Asking is better than assuming or waiting for people to tell you what they need”



# Where should you start?



## How to find people and invite them to participate?

As you identify or create these opportunities for including people with lived experience, give some thought to the kind of person or persons who would be a good fit for the position(s). All people are diverse in many ways, including their skills, knowledge, interests, and ambitions. Some are interested in and capable of taking on a long-term position with increasing responsibilities; for others, one-off or short-term activities may be most appropriate, at least initially. A clear understanding of the skill set and personal qualities you are looking for will help greatly. If your organization provides services or programs to a particular group of people, it makes sense to start by looking within this group for individuals who would be interested, and able, to work with you. If you don't have a client base to draw from, talk to others you know who do. Placing ads or putting up posters does not seem to work as well as word-of-mouth and personal contacts (but they can be useful to let other organizations know what you are doing, so they can help look for potential applicants). When recruiting people, your interview/ screening process will depend on the nature of the position. If you need to conduct a more formal hiring process, remember that job interviews can be extremely intimidating, particularly for those who have had little or no experience with them. Think about how you might reduce stress when considering where to hold the interview, who to involve, what kind of questions to ask and how to prepare the lived experience colleague.

If you offer paid work to individuals who have been clients of your organization or program, bear in mind that they will not only need to adjust to their new role, but also deal with a shift in their relationships with other clients.

[Working with EV] has brought me confidence, having a stable structure—listening to [co-mentor] and her listening to me. There's mutual respect, and it's opened my mind and my heart. It's another stepping stone for me—it's created more life within my life.

Faith, ICM EV program participant

## Training/Orientation

Both individuals with lived experience and your organization will benefit from an orientation to the process of inclusion. Include conversations about how your system works, discuss various acronyms and terms, introduce team members and create strategies to include story telling.

In consultation and board opportunities, communicate expectations around how meetings function and be prepared to modify the business-like tone of work. Colleagues with lived experience tend to share more personal thoughts and experiences, reflecting the expertise they have been asked to bring, which may not fit with the traditional format and tone of meetings in organizations. Topics to address could include: explanation of the facilitator's role; how to interject and participate effectively in a meeting, how the organization operates. It is not just the individuals with lived experience who are expected to adapt to the ways of the organization, but the professionals will also be open to modifying the way they do things to be truly inclusive.

Those with lived experience may also require additional training, depending on their previous experience and the role they are playing in the organization. Individuals being asked to serve as hosts may benefit from training in cultural competency, compassionate communication and dealing with mental health concerns. You should also be prepared to support the emotional and cultural well-being of people with lived experience.



“There are different levels of participation by First Voice people. I can meet with people from [a large organization] because I understand them and don't feel intimidated, but other First Voice people may not be able to participate in this setting. People who have had the chance to process their experiences of poverty, by talking about them with others and get to a point where they don't see themselves as a victim, are better able to engage as First Voice.”

Vanessa Charles, FV Advocate

# Building Personal Relationships

## Communication

The importance of communicating openly cannot be stressed enough. Rather than assuming you know what people with lived experience need and how they are feeling about things, ask them. If you model openness and respect right from the start, you make it easier for people to voice their concerns and share their opinions honestly. You will make mistakes as you navigate this new territory, but with good communication, differences and misunderstandings can be resolved and your relationship strengthened. Confidentiality is something to consider at all times. When working in a group setting, it's critical to discuss guidelines for protecting privacy. In practical terms, find out what form of communication people prefer. Some may not have good computer access or a reliable cell phone, for example. Also, diversity, experience and perceptions may create misunderstanding. Be aware of your language and allow time for a check-in at the end of every meeting, or debriefing one-on-one, where each person is invited to share things that were said or done that they didn't understand, or moments when they felt misunderstood or judged. Having everyone address these issues is key to making this work.

## Sharing Experiences

Stories are very powerful and can complement facts and figures when describing the population you serve. The first task is to decide how many and what type of stories would be appropriate.



Remember that each story is unique and there are many different lived experiences of poverty. Plan to spend time working to help them prepare and practice telling their stories, while recognizing that it is their own experience. You can carefully offer feedback to help them present it clearly and in a compelling manner. It is often effective to have someone from your organization present along with the individual in order to provide the broader context. Consider the audience with which the story will be shared. Speaking to the media can be very difficult. Individuals often find sharing their stories empowering, but at the same time, reliving difficult experiences can be traumatic. It's vital to find out what kinds of supports they would like throughout the process of preparing and sharing stories, and provide adequate time for debriefing after each presentation in order to avoid re-traumatizing.

## Mutual Mentorship

One of the fundamental principles of inclusion is that everyone has something to teach and something to learn. Depending on their background, individuals with lived experience may have little familiarity with how organizations are structured and operate, how meetings work, time management, etc. On the other hand, people working in organizations, who may not have similar lived experiences themselves, generally lack a deep understanding of the issues. Mutual

mentorship encourages both parties to be curious and open to learning from each other, with respect for the other's expertise. It is critical that the relationship has boundaries. Effective mentorships have distinct lines between personal and professional relationships. It is not the intention of an inclusion policy to create power dynamics, perpetuate charity based relationships or create guilt among the team. Build a solid communication strategy and support learning, while respecting personal boundaries.

"It helps me in my day-to-day work, having created a lasting relationship with [co-mentor and co-worker]. What I like is that I can build bridges in my community. This is truly reconciliation that we're doing here."

Lynn, ICM EV program participant

*"I was surprised by how much I was affected by my work with Essential Voices staff. We worked through some difficult moments--miscommunications, cultural misunderstandings, unspoken needs, anger. There were times when I wondered if we'd be able to overcome the extreme differences in our backgrounds and perspectives--had we even been at the same meeting? And then there were times when I wondered if we'd be able to achieve anything practical because so much time went into relationship building and debriefing! But we kept coming back to the table, and kept coming back to our goals, and we were able to build a level of trust and even friendship that is a source of deep satisfaction to me. Plus we had influence and impact in very (to me) unexpected ways. I don't always get to see the change happen. In my relationships with Essential Voice staff I saw people change and grow--them and me--and this has been inspiring and given me new energy for my work."*

Karen, ICM

# Trust and Conflicts

## Building Trust

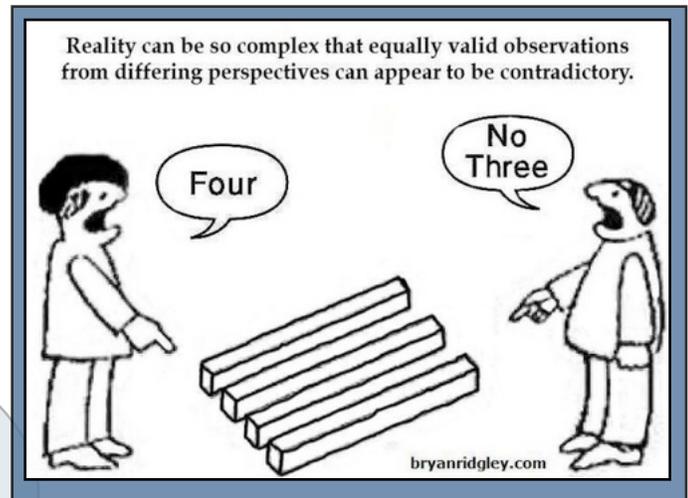
People with lived experience of poverty may have not had many positive interactions with individuals in positions of power. Their experiences and perceptions may mean that they do not trust people working in organizations, and initially, they may not be comfortable being completely honest. It takes time, commitment, respect, caring, empathy and openness to build a trusting relationship. Trust is the foundation of successful, meaningful inclusion.

"It keeps your heart soft toward those who are socially marginalized, and you're much more able to think critically about policy—you come from a grounded place. It helps round out your learning about policy, theory and so on. I didn't understand why people were continually poor before I started doing this work and learning from the EV staff. They are our strategic partners rather than our target group."

Janet, ICM

## Conflict Resolution

Realizing that disagreements occur in any relationship and that conflict is not in itself a problem can help prepare you and the individuals you are working with to respond productively and respectfully when conflict does arise. It can be useful to share ideas in advance of disagreements about how they will be handled, e.g., taking a short break, setting a time to return to the table, giving each person time to share their point of view. Handling conflict successfully creates a stronger relationship, because it builds trust and shows that it's okay to disagree. Be sure to include all members of the team when designing a conflict resolution strategy and be mindful of personal boundaries and cultural norms.



"I can't believe how much I've opened up. I had skills I couldn't figure out how to use. I constantly struggle with depression, this gave me the opportunity to work around it, use my best self in everything I do. I can't begin to describe how important it's been to find a place in the world where I was respected for what I know. I feel like I have a place in the world, and it's an important place. It's a long time since I felt that way. When you live in poverty for a long time it wears you down and wears you out."

Betty-Anne, ICM EV program participant

One of the Integrated Community Ministries' (ICM) programs is a weekly coffee time, held at their office building, which is located in a core neighbourhood. ICM hires an "Essential Voice" (EV) person with lived experience of poverty as the coordinator. This Coffee Coordinator recruits and organizes volunteers, who take turns providing refreshments (usually soup and sandwiches). The coordinator is the main host, welcoming the volunteers and guests, making people comfortable, setting up and cleaning up. This initiative is seen as a valuable way to increase the understanding of poverty and related issues among United Church volunteers and to foster relationships between them and members of the community in which ICM works. Having an individual with lived experience serving as the coordinator works well because it creates connections with the community, increasing trust. People are more likely to attend and to feel at ease because they can relate to the coordinator.

*Janet Clarke, Community Minister with ICM, says "Over the past seven years, with five different Coffee Time Coordinators, we've seen great friendships develop among those involved."*



# Creating Meaningful Inclusion - Examples



The Saskatoon Mothers' Centre is run by community women, with lived experience, who live in the core neighbourhood. Paid by honorarium. Their role is to greet and engage the women and children, help keep the Centre clean and tidy, serve snacks and refreshments, and connect women to community resources. There is also a paid Host Coordinator, to manage the roles/responsibilities associated with being a host. Kathie Cram, Community Development Consultant with Population and Public Health (Saskatoon Health Region), says that having women with lived experience hosting the Centre helps both the women and the Centre itself: *"They see that they have something to give, and that's awesome. My experience at the SMC has taught me that women have a strong desire to give back to their community. They get a little stronger because of this. As well, they know the services on the ground maybe more than some professionals would."*

Writing an autobiography is a key element in STR8UP's approach to helping gang members free themselves from this lifestyle and begin to heal by understanding how they got where they are.

Executive Director Alex Munoz says, *"The story is like a mirror in front of your face."* Members are encouraged to share their stories with schools and other community groups, as well as at meetings with funders. One member explains how sharing their stories can benefit both the audience and the individual: *"The presentations are just to help create awareness of gangs, that there are people out there who are struggling with problems that the youth in schools are going through, and that they're not alone, so we're there to create awareness. And for the members, the presentations help with healing, self-healing, encouragement, and just learning how to be open and have self-confidence."*



The Poverty Costs campaign organized focus groups to gather stories about living in poverty. The information collected was then used to create four composite stories that were shared online. Two individuals with lived experience helped guide the process and a third was hired using the Essential Voices model to enlist participants and help run the focus groups. When interviewed afterwards, participants reported that they found sharing their stories in the focus groups to be a very empowering experience. They felt the information they contributed would be valuable in creating realistic stories to be used as campaign materials, and helpful in creating policy for poverty reduction. Poverty Costs also consulted people who reviewed the campaign's social media material to ensure it was appropriately written, understandable and inclusive.



AIDS Saskatoon regularly hires clients to do casual work. Danielle Genest, Executive Director, says, *"Many of the people who are employed by AIDS Saskatoon in this capacity have grown in the areas of employment skills, communication, accountability, and resilience. We have created a community of support and respect. Many people utilize these skills in becoming more gainfully employed or educated and it creates a safe space to try out new ideas in the realms of advocacy, advisory, and governance. As well, these opportunities give PWAS [people who access services] the sense that they belong and have some ownership of the space. In this way, we foster mutual respect from us to them, but also from them to us. Feeling like they are as much a part of AIDS Saskatoon as the paid staff fosters a very trusting open relationship that is beneficial if and when they are ready to address any of the obstacles they face in their lives."*



# Community Partners

AIDS Saskatoon



Essential Voices



Quint Development Corporation



Saskatoon Anti-Poverty Coalition



Saskatoon Mothers' Centre



STR8 UP



Saskatoon Poverty Reduction Partnership

River Bend Integrated Community Ministries (ICM)

Poverty Costs



*"One of the big challenges I face in working more inclusively is identifying 'deliverables,' and showing what we're accomplishing. I argue that the aim is for me to be influenced by people with lived experience—not just me influencing them—so then I can change the way my organization works."*  
Jon, community advocate

*"People who use services are very good evaluators of the efficiency of programs, for example, around the lack of coordination between services."*

Colleen, SPRP coordinator

*"A big learning for me was how much people want to volunteer and give of their time. There's a myth around poverty, that people will only do things for money."*  
Janet, ICM

*The Mother's Centre has given me a sense of community!*  
-Participant

Get Connected....

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# Acknowledgements

The Saskatoon Poverty Reduction Partnership would like to thank the following people and organizations for making this tool kit a reality. Our teams spent countless hours consulting community members, developing and evaluating content and creating this tool that can be used by employers, community organization and boards to create a culture of inclusion in their work.

## SPRP First Voice Inclusion Action Team:

Saskatoon Health Region, Population & Public Health - Health Promotion

Saskatoon Anti Poverty Coalition & Passion for Action Against Homelessness

Unitarian Congregation of Saskatoon

Saskatoon Food Bank and Learning Centre

First Voice Community Member Advocates

AIDS Saskatoon



## Consultations and Contributors

The SPRP First Voice Inclusion Action Team would also like to thank Kathryn Green for her expertise and commitment to developing, implementing, evaluating and reporting on numerous hours of community consultation events, including 1-on1 interviews and focus groups with advocates, agencies and Saskatoon residents who currently live in poverty.

*"Sharing information about barriers and supports in order to include more FV persons brings me hope.... I was happy to have my voice included the process of making this important community tool"*

*Ruth - FV advocate*

*"I have heard many times that creating a practice of inclusion is difficult. There are so many unknowns. Sometimes people are afraid to do the wrong thing. This tool is designed to help get started."*

*Colleen, SPRP coordinator*

*"First voice inclusion can create community ownership and credibility among agencies who are working together to reduce poverty"*

*Heather, SPRP partner*

Nothing About Us, Without Us.

Content for this report was gathered through community consultations, interviews and conversations with community partners and colleagues from diverse backgrounds. The team was purposeful in hosting conversations that provided perspectives from people with the lived experience of poverty.

The purpose of this project was to collect stories, learnings and examples of how to include people with lived experience of poverty in policy and practice to enrich community.

The team acknowledges that there may be many forms of inclusion that can occur in the community, that lived experience can be defined by the type of project being done and we encourage projects to develop priorities to include representation of the people you are working with/for:

**Nothing about us without us.**

For the purposes of this guide, it is important to the team that we focused on the inclusion of lived experience of poverty. We encourage organizations, businesses and community to use this guide but also to reflect, and possibly modify, it for the various other types of inclusion you may doing.

The team would like to challenge systems to step outside of the box, and redefine how work is done, what barriers are created and how to build inclusive communities.

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Without Us.”*