



**Basic Income Guarantee (BIG) Forum**  
**O'Leary Community Centre**  
**May 1, 2014**

**FACILITATORS:**

Ann Wheatley, Marcia Carroll (PEI Working Group for a Livable Income)

**PARTICIPANTS:**

Mary Whitehead, Kevin Porter, Devon Broome, Kerry Duggan, Shelagh Young, Ellen Campbell, Julie Smith (Note-taker)

**1. Goal and Objectives of the Forum** The **Goal** of the forum was to strengthen our (PEI Working Group for a Livable Income) plan for a BIG pilot project and to explore ways in which people can become involved.

The **Objectives** were to:

- present information about BIG
- hear from people what they think of the idea of BIG & what kind of benefit they think it may have to their communities
- to identify concerns/fears would be around BIG
- to gather ideas about how to promote the idea/increase understanding/engage people in their communities

**2. Presentation about Basic Income Guarantee**

The organizers presented a slide show as an introduction to BIG which included a video based on women's experience and portayal of poverty in PEI. The impact of poverty on women's health, family life, self-esteem, and confidence was clear. With BIG we believe we can have healthier families, persons and communities. The presentation included the

following:

- the level of poverty in PEI and what it looks like – even if it doesn't affect us personally, it is affecting our neighbor and communities on a whole.
- the cost of poverty in PEI · that BIG PEI would ensure that each and every Prince Edward Islander would receive enough income to meet basic needs
- that BIG has been in operation in many parts of the world, including for five years in Manitoba
- that Basic Income Guarantee works
- that BIG is the best way to invest in people in PEI
- the cost of BIG is not great considering the how much it costs when people do not have basic needs met
- that BIG could be delivered through the tax system, and would be a top up to a livable income level
- that we are looking for a 5-year pilot project, 1,000 participants in the program, a control group, and a model that could be implemented province wide
- that BIG needs get community support in order to implement on the Island
- that a BIG PEI pilot program is a necessary first step

Participants said they appreciated the video, as a demonstration of how the system is broken, and of how we need to change the process and generate, create a better society for all, and the children.

### **3. Discussion**

The group spent the next hour talking about BIG, using three questions to guide the discussion:

- a) What questions do you have about BIG? b) How would BIG benefit your community? c) How can we engage more people in the community?

#### **a) What questions do you have about BIG?**

- Would the amount over the basic grant be taxable? Is the grant taxable? In the countries that are using this model, has it been successful? Where is it moving and how?

- Is there a small pilot project from a community with data that has been analyzed, that can show the success, in order to show benefits for a community on PEI??
- What are the costs going to be?
- How do you address the issue of education and how do all the pieces work together as there are many other factors to poverty besides income, education being one?
- Would the BIG grant be available per person or household? What age? If you still have a dependant in the house who is an adult would they be given it as well?
- How are you going to 'sell' this for a long term commitment to our government of corporations, if they don't buy into the process, it's not going to roll out?

**b) How BIG would benefit the community?**

- Local businesses would gain, as people would have more money to spend in the community (for example in restaurants and stores).
- People could afford more appropriate housing.
- Less stress: seasonal employment creates a community of people who are struggling to make ends meet, and doesn't allow for any extras in your life. It's stressful. With a BIG, there could be a reduction in mental health issues, family violence, and the overall health of the family unit could be stronger.
- More people could afford to be involved in community activities, volunteering, participating in local sports, and just be out in the community. People would not feel so isolated. The community would be more vital, with more persons who are interacting.
- Because you would not have to focus so much on yourself and finding something to eat, there may be opportunities to support each other, and everyone would be on a more equal footing, and feel a sense of solidarity with others in the community.
- Having to leave the community for work may not become such a necessity it could be a choice, which may be able to strengthen the family unit, community and region.
- In the current system/environment there is such a stress - there are few options,

- it's a struggle, and the power is gone – people wouldn't have to be living under such a cloud of struggle.
- People living with disabilities have the same struggles: living in poverty means your needs don't get met which makes it more likely that you will be excluded.
  - Currently there are barriers to getting more education – child care costs, transportation – BIG could help. It may allow a person to further their education; they may be able to go back for upgrading if more secure with the income security.
  - So this would take the social, financial assistance out of the picture, and you would have a basic income, so that you would not have to go to a social worker and plead to get assistance.
  - BIG has the potential to influence the jobs of government workers – financial workers might be freed up to do social work.
  - The current system involves several disincentives to work (amounts that are clawed back if you are on Social Assistance) and rules about what you are allowed to have in the bank. People receiving Social Assistance are fearful about moving into low-paid work, as inadequate as SA is, because they risk losing drug coverage, and some transportation dollars.
  - With BIG, participants said they could see some empowerment for generations, with the security of income, may help to build self-esteem. People would not have to focus entirely on meeting immediate needs, and may be able to think about developing other interests.

### **c) How do we build support for BIG?**

- Engage the business community-HOW? Get a champion in government.
- Secure grassroots support, so that politicians hear it over and over – this will help them to 'believe' it and then they will move forward with it.
- Show the social workers and administrators in position now that their jobs will not be gone, but reconfigured; if we can alleviate some of the fears within the structure, they may become promoters of BIG.
- Work at getting information out into the community, so that people know what it

- is, what to ask for, and what may be available in the future. So that people who don't understand it aren't distributing incorrect information (i.e. that it's just about raising taxes).
- Use a marketing strategy based on the thing kids say: “when I am big I’m going to have a big house, or be a firefighter”. Change this to adults saying things such as, “when I am BIG, I will be able to paint my house, or buy groceries for my family”. Use YouTube, Vimeo, Facebook. In this way, capture peoples’ dreams, and how BIG would make them happen.
  - Be clear about the message to communities, politicians, persons in the community so you know your message, so that you can answer the questions or at least know the right questions to ask.
  - Stay in contact with each other in an email list, or phone contact so that we can continue to work together. Use Facebook to keep in touch and spread the word on what next steps are.
  - Get this information to the Family Resources Centres, healthy eating groups (summer side) other groups that are engaging in similar areas of concern.

#### **4. Evaluation**

##### **This evening, I liked:**

- Everything
- The presentation – it was well prepared, and well presented
- Being able to connect with each other and chat, and get more information about BIG
- Pulling together community members and persons who are supporting people with disabilities or those who have contact with people living in poverty
- The comfortable setting, the group sharing, the plain language The real life situations The passion of the individuals that came out, sharing ideas The chance to network and watch a dream materialize Interesting to hear and learn about BIG

##### **This evening, I learned:**

- A lot about the plight of those on social assistance
- More about BIG and how it will benefit PEI and our rural communities, persons in vulnerable situations and those with disabilities
- There is a great deal more poverty in my community and province than I was aware of BIG could have a positive effect on so many aspects of life Basic Income Guarantee is a reality we can attain Some information about models of basic income

**I would like to know more about:**

- How the campaign evolves and how I can contribute to its development
- How it is going to roll out and what the scale may be and how it may work for households that include persons with disabilities
- How we can spread the word all over PEI How it would be paid for
- More information about what is happening elsewhere, what models exist and how long they have been in place – how to make it sustainable

**For another time let's:**

- Aim to have a meeting in Summerside and invite regional MLA's and groups of people who are having trouble making ends meet
- Invite business leaders, politicians (municipal, federal, provincial) and representatives of community groups
- Get information that helps explains what it is more, so we can spread the word
- Work on spreading the word and getting support - spend some time creating a clear, concise message – we need various messages depending on the audience, also talk about how we can get the messages out.