



**Basic Income Guarantee  
Community Forum  
June 11, 2014  
Murphy's Community Centre, Charlottetown**

**Participants:**

Dianne Redmond  
Elmer Redmond  
Jane Ledwell  
Irene Burge  
Harry Kielly  
Tamara McKeough  
Ann Cudmore  
Marcia Carroll  
Michael Dunn  
John Gallie  
George Davis  
JoeAnne Callaghan  
Richard Brown  
Jacinthe Laforest

Pam Martin  
Ashley Godfrey  
Kailen Godfrey  
Rosemary Ghiz  
Shirley Corrigan  
Maureen Larkin  
Lou Richard  
Katie Mazer  
Bonnie Rieber  
Ellen O'Brien  
Debbie Theurekauf  
Charles MacQuaid  
John Getson  
Kathleen Romans

Kerry Duggan  
Leo Garland  
Vincent Coté  
Karine Gallant  
Jennifer Burgess  
Robert Bernes  
Stacy Dunn  
Robin Bakker  
Jiselle Bakker  
Matthew MacLeod  
Kathleen Casey  
Tom Cullen  
Trish Altass  
Mary Gard

**Animators:**

Ann Wheatley

Marie Burge

Edith Perry

**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 what people think of BIG & how it would benefit their communities
- identify concerns/fears would be around BIG
- gather ideas about how to engaging more people around BIG

**2. Presentation about Basic Income Guarantee**

The organizers presented a slide show as an introduction to BIG. The presentation included a video based on women's experience of poverty in PEI. The video showed very clearly the impact of poverty on women's health, family life, self-esteem, and confidence. Also included in the presentation:

- there is a significant level of poverty in PEI – even if it doesn't affect us personally, it is affecting our neighbor and communities on a whole.
- there are costs – up to \$3 million annually – to poverty in PEI
- BIG would ensure that each and every person in PEI would receive enough income to meet basic needs
- BIG has been tried in many countries, and for 5 years in Manitoba
- Basic Income Guarantee is effective
- BIG could be delivered through the tax system, and would be a top up to a livable income level
- we are looking for a 5-year pilot project for PEI
- community support is necessary to implement BIG in PEI
- a BIG PEI pilot program is a necessary first step

### **3. Questions and Comments**

One participant commented, “*No Islander should have to watch their neighbor live in poverty*”.

In response to questions from participants, the animators responded:

- In terms of how BIG would actually work, we still have to look at the best models – there are 3 or 5 of them – and examine how appropriate they are for PEI, and then crunch some numbers.
- About response so far, it has been very good, judging from the forums held in Souris, Rustico, O'Leary and presentations to some individual groups.
- About what a livable income would actually be, in PEI: more than \$15.00/hour, closer to \$17 - 20/hour or \$35,000/year.
- One participant recalled a study that showed that the level of “cheating” on social programs was something like 5% - contrasted to what government “allows for” in its own administration, which is 10%. Some people will find ways to get around the system but we shouldn't allow this to stop us.
- If someone receiving the BIG benefit becomes employed, some of the extra income would be taxed.
- The point was made that we will need support programs to make this work. Drug plans, affordable housing and childcare, disability supports, this all has to be worked out.
- A question was asked about debt load – how would BIG address the indebtedness of students, etc?

### **4. Group Discussions:**

Participants divided into 6 groups and, using 3 questions as a guide, discussed BIG. The questions were:

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

Afterwards, each group shared the highlights of their discussion.

**a) Benefits to Community:**

- people would stay in rural communities – reduced out-migration
- more local spending, supporting services and local businesses in communities
- better mental and physical health, and less crime
- you could choose to stay in your home at age 65
- increased community vibrancy and resiliency
- more volunteers, giving back to the community
- streamlined social supports, and more user-friendly
- more opportunities to further education/training or stay in school
- decreased vulnerability to policy changes, i.e. disability benefits
- sense of control over your life, better mental health
- people may want to have more babies
- families stay together with fewer Islanders going out West
- keep grandparents and their grandchildren connected
- reduced stigma of people on social assistance
- less homelessness
- dignity, self-esteem
- everyone gets to eat
- reduced spending on healthcare and justice
- healthier family relationships, improved quality of life

**b) Questions about BIG:**

- Is there a successful pilot program that can be adapted for PEI? Is there a pilot program somewhere that was adopted permanently?
- How does this work? (Could you present 5 scenarios to explain it rather than just talking about it?)
- How do we make sure everyone files taxes and does everyone have the ability or accessibility to do so?
- How do you qualify? Who qualifies?
- How long will it last?
- How do you determine a livable income? How do you make sure basic is not minimum?
- How do you evaluate it?
- Are the rates adjusted to the cost of living?
- What is the frequency of the payments?
- How do we make it all-inclusive?
- What are the fears in the business community?
- How do you ensure that we don't lose the benefits of programs that we already have? Would it replace EI?
- What about incentives to be employed?
- When will we have it? (!)

**c) *How to get people/communities involved?***

- social media
- present to the Government, stressing that BIG will save money
- decrease the stigma of poverty, support/highlight people who share their stories, so others can relate
- seek out groups (including service clubs) that already exist, to share information, concerns, ideas
- find a spokesperson from general population, to make the point that income inequality does exist and it affects all of us, not just people with disabilities or people who are on low income
- each person's story is different – use scenarios, video, drama, role plays to show how it would affect people
- public meetings
- schools and universities
- human library
- rally
- Cable 10
- Send information out
- Identify it as a cost-saving measure

**5. Next Steps**

In wrapping up the discussion, the animators outlined the next steps for the C-BIG campaign:

- continue to hold forums and make presentations, to encourage discussion
- hold conversations with politicians
- ensure that the planning is community-based
- work towards municipal, provincial and federal cooperation
- put it on the agenda of coming elections

## **6. Evaluation**

Participants completed evaluation forms. Their answers are reflected here:

### ***This evening, I liked . . .***

The structured format, and the opportunity to participate

Learning more about BIG and discussing BIG with others

Great speakers and really good information

Clear questions to guide small group discussions

The number of people and their different perspectives/experiences (including politicians)

Everyone had a chance to share their ideas

The conversation – the enthusiasm and hope

The level of engagement & the opportunity to share concerns

Seeing the number of groups working on BIG

Seeing that there has been movement since Rob's visit last year

The video – the real stories – and the presentation

Comfortable atmosphere

Good facilitation and pre-determined agenda

### ***This evening, I learned . . .***

About how the system would actually work (roughly!)

About the complexity of BIG

That we need BIG

About peoples' efforts

That there is being a lot done and that there needs to be lots more done

That people have great ideas and they want action

That there is more awareness of how people are hurting

We need a pilot programme

About the basic structure of BIG

That there are Facebook and Twitter accounts and a website for this work

The importance of a grassroots effort – to build trust, as people are used to being given something with one hand, and having it taken away with the other

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

How information is being collected regarding people on low income

How it can work

Existing research/outcomes of GAI projects, benefits/costs/pitfalls of certain models – how it was implemented elsewhere, what worked and didn't work?

The actual numbers that would be envisioned for PEI – the process of establishing basic costs

How it would be applied universally

How poverty is propagated

Seniors

What I can do to help

The main arguments against BIG and why they are wrong – “myth-busting”

***For another time, let's . . .***

Make more time for each person, if they want, to have input and share their ideas

Continue “the push”

Have information on a few possible models and illustrations – have a chance to discuss them, critically, before a concrete proposal is put forth

Look at examples (scenarios) of how BIG would work for certain individuals

Find a way to reach more people, especially those who would benefit

Look at how it could be implemented to meet special needs

Try more avenues for promotion (churches?)

Provide water

Propose a concrete model

Do the same!

Present some common arguments that are being used against BIG

Have more events in other Island locations