

## Revelstoke Poverty Reduction – Creating Shared Prosperity

### ~ Low Cost Transportation ~

*by Jill Zacharias, Social Development Coordinator*

There's an old saying, "build it and they will come". But what happens if 'they' have a hard time getting there? In the past few weeks, we have shown how important a variety of strategies, programs and services are to reducing poverty – from employment to early learning. For some, simply getting there is half the battle. Transportation costs can affect people's ability to access everything available in our community that can help meet needs and reduce poverty. Access to low cost transportation is a critical link, and improving low cost transportation options is a community goal in our Poverty Reduction Strategy.

It has been said that cars are a 'voracious wealth destroyer' because they burn both gas and money. To help people understand the true cost of owning a vehicle, the Canadian Automobile Association (CAA) created a "Driving Costs Calculator" (see [http://caa.ca/car\\_costs/](http://caa.ca/car_costs/)). The CAA maintains that people vastly underestimate the annual cost of owning a car. Apparently, the average cost per year is about \$9,500. I couldn't resist plugging in my own information (older car, less annual mileage), and came up with \$6,500, which is still a lot. Lucky for us, it is relatively easy to walk or bike in Revelstoke – unless you have young children or mobility challenges or it's mid-winter and walking conditions are challenging. Fortunately, there are other options.

Thanks to a couple of local residents with foresight, Revelstoke is part of the Kootenay Car Share Co-op. Carsharing provides members with access to vehicles when they need one, and you only pay for what you use. There is no personal insurance, maintenance, repairs or other costs to worry about. Initial lifetime membership is \$500, repayable if you decide to leave the co-op. There are payment plan options for members with a fixed income. The co-op maintains that being part of the carshare is easier, less expensive and (of course), more 'green' than owning a car. Currently, Revelstoke has a 4x4 truck, a van, and 2 cars available for members' use (see [www.carsharecoop.ca](http://www.carsharecoop.ca)).

Public transit is another option and has been available in our community since the mid-1990's. In 2012, the City of Revelstoke responded to community input and worked diligently with BC Transit to make bus routes more efficient for a town our size. Instead of one long route, an additional bus was brought in and two routes were created to get riders from the outlying areas to the downtown core in much less time. In response to seniors' feedback, a bus stop was installed at the Revelstoke Seniors Centre/Community Centre. Today, public transit provides service Monday through Saturday. Buses are wheelchair-accessible and equipped with bike racks. You can pick up a rider's guide or purchase a city bus pass at the Community Centre or City Hall. At \$2.00 a ride or \$45 per month (less for students and seniors, children 5 and under are free), public transit is a more affordable option. Further, the BC Bus Pass Program offers a reduced cost, annual bus pass for low income seniors and individuals receiving disability assistance. While public transit use has increased marginally since the changes, ridership is still fairly low. We must all realize that public transit is an expensive option for a city of our size, and if we would like to maintain it, more people need to ride the bus. The ski resort shuttle is a privately run business, and gets workers, residents and visitors to the ski hill quickly and cheaply in the winter months.

Revelstoke also fought long and hard to bring in HandyDART service into our community. HandyDART is a door-to-door transportation service for residents that have a disability severe enough that they cannot use public transit. Although HandyDART hours are limited, at \$2.00 a ride, it is affordable. The Health Connections bus is a partnership between BC Transit and Interior Health and provides transportation to non-emergency medical appointments en route to Kamloops on Tuesdays, and Kelowna on Wednesdays. The cost is only \$5 each way. Further, the Seniors' Association Volunteer Medical Transportation program has filled a significant need by offering rides to out-of-town medical appointments when people have no other options.

On top of this, some social sector organizations in our community, like Community Connections and now, the Early Years Centre partnership, have specific programs to help clients access services, including free bus passes, gas cards, and other supports. Further, at Council's discretion, the City of Revelstoke provides free bus passes each year to Community Connections to assist low income families with transportation costs. It is important to realize that for some families, transportation issues are a symptom of deeper, more complex challenges. Transportation assistance can open the door for other support that may be needed.

Information about Revelstoke Public Transit Service, Resort Shuttle to RMR, BC Bus Pass Program, the Health Connections Bus, HandyDART and Taxi Pass and Disabled Parking Pass can be found on the City of Revelstoke website ([www.revelstoke.ca](http://www.revelstoke.ca)), under the 'Community' Tab. Low cost, public transportation is important to get people to work, connect them with all that our community has to offer, and participate in community life.