

Housing, child care increase 'living wage' to \$20 an hour ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Greater Victoria's "living wage" rose to more than \$20 an hour in 2015, as housing and child-care costs increased and employment options stagnated, says a report released today.

The cost of raising a family of two parents with two children would require each parent to make no less than \$20.05 an hour working full-time, or an after-tax combined income of \$61,816 annually, according to the Community Social Planning Council report.

That's an increase of \$1.12 an hour from last year and reflects similar increases in Vancouver and the Fraser Valley.

"The calculation is based on this family structure with the idea that, if our society can't support their basic needs, then we're at the point of not being livable," said Dylan Sherlock, treasurer for the non-profit, non-partisan organization.

He noted 28 per cent of families in the region make less than the living wage, according to Statistics Canada. That doesn't include single-parent families, who are worse off, he said.

The living wage is calculated using data that includes local wages and the costs of rent, food, child care and transportation, as well as subsidies available. Sherlock explained the increase this year is due in part to rising costs of child care, but also to the report's inclusion of winter break and professional child-care costs this year.

An increase in rental costs, combined with extremely low vacancy rates, inflation and a lack of high-paying jobs, also contributed to the rise in the living wage.

Sherlock said he hopes the report not only raises awareness about the cost of living in the city, but what solutions are available.

"Not every employer can pay \$20 an hour, but some that we work with are doing other things like providing bus passes," said Sherlock, adding his organization works with employers who want to support living wages.

Better public policy would also help, like a child-care plan that benefits low-income families, he said.

Jen Harrison, community co-ordinator for Work Link Employment Society on the West Shore, said the new living-wage calculation does not reflect the wage range of most jobs available.

"On average, what I see are job postings in the range of \$12 to \$18 an hour," said Harrison, whose organization helps job seekers and employers from Langford to Port Renfrew.

"A lot of those are entry-level, but many also require a range of skills."

Harrison said all of the WorkBC offices in the region are busy with programs filled and job fairs packed.

"We're seeing a lot of people coming who already have jobs but are looking for two or three [jobs] to make ends meet," she said, noting an increase in youth and seniors seeking work.

"But on the other hand, a lot of employers are hiring. On the West Shore, we have a lot of big-box stores with a range of positions."

The Burnside Gorge Community Association offers a three-year program for families struggling to survive on limited budgets.

"The challenges I see for parents are around a few main areas and one of the biggest is the cost of child care," said Linda Marcinkiewicz, program manager of the family self-sufficiency program.

"Food is also a major area. Many people talk about having to go to food banks regularly, even if they're working, and the shame and guilt that comes with that."

Marcinkiewicz said the majority of families she sees are led by single parents and do not have an earner making the living wage or more.

"When I compare that \$20 to minimum wage, it's terrible and painful to think about what families are doing to keep their heads above

water," she said.

- reprinted from Times Colonist

Region: British Columbia ^[3]

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