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Living wage tips back up in Greater Victoria, rate rises to \$20.46 per hour

(Greater Victoria) Household expenses, particularly housing and food costs, are driving up the cost of raising a family, says the Community Social Planning Council of Greater Victoria, in its 2021 Living Wage report, released today. Greater Victoria is a close second for the highest living wage in the province (following Vancouver).

“With many of the region’s businesses reporting labour shortages, and food banks reporting increased numbers, the Living Wage is a critical number this year,” says Diana Gibson, Executive Director of the Community Social Planning Council, “It is clear that both businesses and workers in the region are feeling the squeeze.”

The Living Wage went down between 2018 and 2019 thanks to government policy - most notably BC’s Affordable Child Care Benefit, but it has tipped back up. “The drop in 2019 shows that good government policy can be an effective tool for reducing poverty,” says David Thompson, policy researcher and report contributor, “and it shows the need for making change in key areas - like housing - that are driving that cost of living.”

A \$20.46 hourly wage is needed to cover the costs of raising a family in Greater Victoria, up from \$19.39 per hour in 2019. The Living Wage is the hourly wage that two working parents with two young children, aged 4 and 7, must earn to meet their basic expenses (including rent, child care, food, and transportation), once government taxes, credits, deductions and benefits have been taken into account. The family Living Wage for our region is calculated annually by the Community Social Planning Council of Greater Victoria (CSPC).

“A \$20.46 hourly living wage may seem high to some, but it is based on a bare-bones budget for a family of four in our region,” said Diana Gibson. “It doesn’t include any savings for vacations, childrens’ education, retirement, caring for elderly parents, or home purchase.”

“When a company’s compensation standard is set at a living wage or higher, it communicates respect for its current and prospective employees, allowing for more of a fighting chance while keeping up with high rent prices, student loan payments, childcare and ongoing living expenses” reports Kaitlyn Matulewicz, Executive Director of the Workers Solidarity Network (formerly the Retail Action Network), based in Victoria. She adds: “The WSN trusts that when a business offers a living wage it reflects positively on their values and subsequently their reputation within a community. It’s necessary now more than ever to regard a living wage as a marker of being better set up for success, both for the employee, and for the business itself.”

Housing and child care continue to be the two biggest costs in the living wage calculation. Over the last year, the median rent for a 3+ bedroom unit in Greater Victoria has gone up by over \$100 per month, more than an 8 per cent increase. In some areas of the region, this increase is much more pronounced.

“The cost of living is on a long-term upward trend. And the cost of living in the Greater Victoria region is one of the highest in BC,” says Anastasia French, Living Wage for Families BC Organiser. Living wage reports for several locations in BC also were released today.

In response to both COVID-19 and the rising cost of living, Spinnakers Brew Pub and Spinnakers Spirit Merchants Stores owner, Paul Hadfield, says, “our staff are front line workers in a pandemic scenario and they need to be compensated fairly. Our goal was to consider the amount of money that customers pay when they go out for a meal and distribute it fairly to our staff. We wanted to get everybody up to a point where they could afford to live.”

Over 30 employers across Greater Victoria, have been certified as Living Wage Employers. These include Spinnakers Brew Pub, District of Central Saanich, the City of Victoria, Pacifica Housing, Urban Solar, and Community Plus to name a few. For information on becoming a living wage employer reach out to diana@communitycouncil.ca.

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