



What We Heard

Carcross/Tagish First Nation, YK Community Conversation Summary

October 21, 2022

CAMPAIGN **2000**
END CHILD & FAMILY POVERTY



Introduction

Below, we've summarized the main themes of the community conversation in Carcross, Yukon with fifteen participants from the Carcross/Tagish First Nation who have lived experience of poverty.

The conversation was hosted by the *Carcross/Tagish First Nation* and the *Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition (YAPC)* in partnership with *Campaign 2000: End Child and Family Poverty*.

This summary is in three sections based on the topics of discussion. Main themes with related content and quotes are presented for each topic. The conversation content will be further analyzed over the next year, alongside content from other conversations across the country, to help create a community-driven indicator framework and recommendations for action.

This summary was created after sending a draft to the participants and host organizations to see if these points sounded right, offer an opportunity for corrections or clarification, and ensure that they had the chance to hold and use this information as soon as possible. This finalized version (March 2023) reflects the feedback we received, and the content will be further analyzed over the next year with attention to that feedback. Thanks to everyone who participated and responded!

We've tried to be true to the content and emotion of the conversation, which touched on the sensitive and difficult topics of experiencing poverty and discrimination, and that may come through in what's presented here.

Since this is a summary, we have listened to what participants shared and reflected that back here. With that in mind, there may be content presented here that does not align with Campaign 2000's values or platform.

Overall, a key theme was the need for immediate action from government that is based on First Nations' lived experience and priorities. The urgency of the overdose crisis, housing shortage, high cost of living, and ongoing separation of children from families were clearly expressed by participants. Participants noted that First Nations perspectives and approaches should be centred in all solutions to these issues.

What is working well in your community?

The land

- The connection to the land and its beauty: “When I feel I have nowhere to go, the beauty, the mountains of this place takes care of that, whatever it is I’m going through.”
- “Because I go through a lot of loneliness, just stepping out my back door and looking at the mountains and being surrounded by trees alleviates whatever struggles I’m going through.”

Personal strengths

- Sense of humour
- Health and wellness
- Communication with children, individual education around drugs
 - “So that they have the knowledge to make an informed choice because I’m not going to be there with them all the time”
- Speaking openly in community about experiences
- Mindfulness

Carcross/Tagish First Nation

- First Nation Health and Wellness Department: programs and services for community members, like brunch for elders, outreach, counsellors
- Supportive staff at band office
 - “I feel grateful I have a safe place to go let it all out no matter what it is. I know there's always somebody there on the Health and Wellness side for me, whatever it is I’m going through.”
- Functions that CTFN hosts in this building

First Nations services/education

- First Nations school boards: “The education board here in Yukon just recently changed the authority over to First Nations members so we have [say] in what the curriculum is going to teach, and we have our people in our schools.”

Living in Carcross and experiences of poverty

Trauma

- Inflicted by colonialism, stigma, discrimination
 - “Sometimes we face excruciating trauma I struggle with trust because of the stigma I am suffering.”
- Trauma of poverty: “Money-wise it’s trauma, it’s really scary because we have nothing to eat. You buy cleaning stuff and by buying stuff for your house, you don't have enough for food.”
- Specifically experienced by youth, who turn to substances to cope: “They're too busy running away from life with drugs and alcohol because of what they're seeing and witnessing.”

Overdose crisis and addiction

- Community impact: “Losing five members from our community in January. I mean, this community is not that big, and you take five people out of the community, that's a lot. That is a lot, you can never recover from that.”
- Deaths are becoming far too common: “People are dying. We just lost another friend this week, OD-ed. There’s just so many you can’t even count them anymore. ... It makes people desensitised to it. ...And that’s dangerous.”
- Lack of action: “And yet, it goes on day after day, and nothing's done about it.”
- Fentanyl and other mixtures in the drug supply make it more dangerous

Lack of activities and supports

- Limited/no activities for youth
 - Limited recreation opportunities and everything is more expensive for children
 - Can’t relieve stress, may turn to other coping methods like substance use
 - Has wider effects: “Us older people, we suffer too, because we witness their sadness, you know, their anguish.”
- Not knowing where to access emotional or mental support
 - “The frustrations of [trying] to reach out and don’t know where to or how to”

Issues with elder care

- Lack of community options for elders’ housing and support: “Elders would rather die in their own house than go to a senior citizens’ home.”
- Nurses and care workers can be unkind to residents
- Family can’t see the residents for months at a time

Sense of hopelessness from lack of action/support

- Coming from government inaction, decades of discrimination against First Nations, broken promises on truth and reconciliation
 - “Lip service from people in charge adds to the hopelessness because we’re pretty much used to it all the way from the Sixties Scoop”
 - “Better do something now, right now. We take, they take, they take on empty promises. Our treaty’s been broken over and over and over. How long are we going to last. I’m too old to fight the battle.”
 - “I struggle with abandonment issues, who’s going to help us, there’s so many of us needy people out there.”
- Hard to ask for help, hard to find help: “I’m used to doing everything myself”
- Hard to find stable, continued support: “Sometimes I feel like we don’t even have a step two. They say they do give us that, they do help you with that, but it seems to me that you just do it yourself mostly.”

First Nations children in care

- Historic and continued apprehension of First Nations children, from residential schools to Sixties Scoop to present day
 - “The Federal Government sees putting our children in homes as a business.”
 - “There were active campaign within CFS services where the director was literally telling us social workers to look for ways to take that child from their home. Especially if they’re Native.”

Housing

- Shortage of housing, very hard to get stable and permanent housing
 - “You’re trying to get your kid to school and trying to get them a decent home but when you come back up from down south there’s nothing here. There’s no housing. There’s nothing. I waited two years for a house. Me and my son lived in a hotel room.”
 - “We’re way behind in housing and have been for many, many years. We shouldn’t have youth and our young people floating around couch surfing.”
- Many people are unhoused, but there are limited shelter options
 - No shelter in Carcross and the shelter in Whitehorse can be unsafe: “It’s a trigger zone down there. You’ve got people that have their drug addictions, alcohol addictions and that’s where they head, right”
- Some houses are unsafe
 - “One person has a house but not running water, no toilet in the house, just got lights and a stove pipe.”
- Housing insecurity affects all other aspects of life

- For example, it can be hard to get employment if you don't have access to a shower or clean clothing: "Some people they can't necessarily clean up for the job interview. Or have a washer and dryer long enough to have clean clothes to show up at work and look presentable."

Challenges with government, including First Nations governments

- Too many levels of government who aren't communicating with each other well:
 - "They're getting orders from the federal government who gives them their annual budget, right. And there's always somebody in power that wants to boss their subordinate around. Working with some people in government, in federal and First Nations, they want it to come from the top. Even when I'm talking with corrections officers they're saying oh, call the Minister of Justice downtown because that's the one trying to dictate how Corrections Canada should be spending their money."
- Governments and politicians are not taking responsibility for people living in poverty

Racism and discrimination

- "Racism on a different level" from social workers
 - Discrimination from social workers based on stereotypes around addiction or alcoholism: "I have my grandkids and my daughter come [stay] for two weeks and the first thing that the social worker said to her is, 'Is your mom sober.'"
- Racism from white community members in Carcross
 - E.g., complaints about creating a First Nations school board
- Deep inequalities, especially compared to people in power
 - "Everybody goes home and us, we're left behind, we live in this muck, we live in this mess, we know what's going on. And then they go home to their fancy homes, and I don't know how they sleep at night."

Health care

- Limited education around medication/prescriptions – people are prescribed medication but there aren't enough local health care resources when they have questions or want to know more about it
- Mental health: people get sent out of the community for treatment, but there are no follow-ups when they return
- Limited capacity at health station – very long wait times for emergency care

Transportation

- In the rural context, it is hard to get places if you don't drive or have a car: "I don't want to bother people to catch rides from over there back here, back and forth."

- Adds to isolation and lack of access to activities

Cost of living

- Very high prices even compared to Whitehorse, despite being less than 1 hour away by road
 - “Some of us cannot always go to the big stores in Whitehorse where a loaf of bread is like \$3 or \$4, but here it’s almost \$10.”
 - “Where’s equality in prices? In our resources?”
- The government doesn’t understand the situation
 - “The government does not understand why rural communities such as ours are struggling. Well, the prices of our groceries, our necessities, our gasoline, our diesel, our house fuel, our electricity are way more expensive than any others.”

Lateral violence

- Discrimination or violence from other First Nations people, including governments
 - “I lost my trust amongst my people within my community because of all I had to go through. Lateral violence is one of the things that we suffer a lot especially within a small community.”

Challenges with sending children to high school

- Families in Carcross have to send their children to high school in Whitehorse, since there is no high school in the community. There is a residence in Whitehorse for rural students. Participants drew strong parallels between residential schools and the current system.
 - “You actually have to make a choice either move yourself to Whitehorse or move your child to Whitehorse. Same as residential school, you got to send them away.”
 - “It reminds me of like residential school all over again because you don’t really have a choice to keep your kids here, there is no tutoring service where they could just even be home-schooled or anything.”
- Cycles of this separation from family: “At the mission school, parents had their children taken away to school, and now the parents who were the children that were taken away have to send their children away to school. It’s still a circumstance of trauma and separation.”
- Children have to become independent at a very young age:
 - “Because they’re so used to doing things on their own now and they’re all grown up and living on their own.”

- “My son is 11 years old right now and for him to be moving out of the house in what three, four years, that doesn’t sit well with me at all. That’s too young to be leaving home.”
- Negative impact of having to leave home at a young age:
 - “Some of the young children grow into young adults who have separation anxiety because they were taken away too young without the knowledge or the support from their families.”
 - Some children don’t finish school because they don’t have the support
 - Not enough individual attention in schools – children are getting overlooked

Actions that the government needs to take are...

Immediate action based on First Nations needs and ideas

- Real action, not just words: “You got truth and reconciliation that needs to be addressed. Right? So, we need people that are working with those First Nations communities to hear feasible ideas and then act on it, implement them.”
- Talk to and learn from people with lived experience
- Make up for lost time and broken promises with urgent action: “I hope before I go to my eternity home that I would see some changes, especially for our youth.”

Housing

- More funding for housing
- Housing that fits people’s needs, including keeping children in their communities: “You know there isn’t one [First Nations person] out there that really needs a single bedroom house because we’ve always got an auntie or uncle or nieces or nephews we’re looking after, right. [We need] a two bedroom house or a three bedroom house to keep our children within the community with family members rather than just automatically they go to a foster home or a group home.”
- Housing policies that support people living on low incomes: “It wouldn’t be too hard for most First Nations to change policy where your first month’s rent can be covered by us.”
- More houses closer to Carcross and inside Carcross
 - In part to address transportation challenges
- Housing and care for elders in their own communities
- More shelter options for those experiencing homelessness
 - A safe house and shelter for men
 - A safe family shelter so couples can stay together
 - A safer shelter in Whitehorse with less allowance for substances

- Systemic changes, but smaller solutions in the meantime
 - E.g., communities of tiny homes all connected to the same plumbing and electricity

Fewer children in care

- If children need to be removed from an unsafe home, put them with a family member or community member rather than taking them out of the community

Health and mental health

- Create a health station that's functional – currently the wait times are unsafe
 - Had to transport an injured person without an ambulance because it took over 5 hours
- Resources for emotional and mental support, especially addressing the isolation that COVID-19 brought about
- More education around medication and less over-prescription of drugs

More awareness around incarceration and support for people getting out of jail

- “You’ve got single mothers that are doing time, and single fathers that are doing time... when they get out they have to start over.”

Government accountability and transparency

- Financial transparency for services and programs
- From First Nations governments:
 - “When somebody’s behind that desk they look down on us as they’re working with us. Especially our own people. We’re trying to crawl out of the system only to have it thrown back in my face amongst my own people. The system does not work. When will we learn to quit being carbon copy of the system? We haven’t learned that lesson yet.”
 - “That money is sitting there, and I wonder if it's being used for housing, you know what I mean?”

Centre First Nations approaches for all services

- Have First Nations members working in daycares and schools: “The way First Nations raised our children, the way we raised our children, compared to what the school board is doing today is pretty different.”
- Centre First Nations approaches to food security: “We're more interested in being able to live off the land rather than starving to death.”

More programs or workshops for sharing and support

- “A program so we can share with each other. How to come out of poverty, or what do you do when you have no money for your kids to go to a picnic or whatever it is at school. Have somebody to lean on, talk to. Instead of suffering all by ourselves.”
- “If you're struggling with something, here's a phone number, talk to somebody.”