



Charlottetown, PE

Community Conversation Summary

May 2, 2023

CAMPAIGN **2000**
END CHILD & FAMILY POVERTY



Introduction

Below, we've summarized the main themes of the community conversation in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island with six BIPOC people with lived experience of poverty.

The conversation was hosted by *BIPOC-USHR* and King Kxndi in partnership with *Campaign 2000: End Child and Family Poverty*.

This summary is in four 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 (August 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.

The need to address systemic and interpersonal racism and discrimination against BIPOC and immigrant communities on PEI was a major theme. The strict regulations and lack of opportunities faced by racialized immigrants, the prevalence of anti-Black racism, and the longstanding privilege of white Islanders were clear in the discussion. The high cost of living and inadequacy of employment income are contributing to working poverty. Grassroots community organizations and networks of community care were named as essential to build on and towards.

A community with no poverty has...

Accessible, inclusive programs and services

- Programs and services with fewer barriers, broader eligibility, and more flexibility – a recognition that people’s situations fluctuate.
- Food banks accessible to all.
- Meet people where they’re at, without rigid requirements around income.

Access to basic needs

- Other basic needs approached like universal healthcare (if it were actually universal): “You need to go to the hospital, you go.”
- Access to resources, affordable housing, food, clothing, transportation, mental health care, regardless of income.
- Fulfillment of human rights like housing and food.
- No fear that you will not have basic needs met.

Work and education

- Perspectives differed on work – for some participants, a community with no poverty would allow for meaningful paid work, with aspects of ambition and competition. Others thought a community without poverty would disconnect work from income and the ability to be valued and meet your needs.
 - Meaningful employment, ambition and value in daily work
 - Not having to work or feel like you have to: “It’s OK to not work. Just from a wellbeing perspective, I think it is really important that people don’t feel that their value is tied to just putting money in their pockets. Or putting money into someone’s else’s pockets, in so many instances.”
 - Not having to work when you can’t or when you need a break.
- An education system that is resourced and good quality so that people care about it, feel compelled to do well, and want to be innovative and creative.
- Financial literacy taught in schools.

Community wellbeing and decolonial love

- Community care and wellbeing: “Our wellbeing should be tied to our community and what we’re able to provide for our family and ourselves.”
- Decolonial, queer, BIPOC love as a starting point to find alternatives to capitalism and reduce disproportionate poverty rates: “By decolonizing love and the way that we interact with each other we will invariably and inevitably find that capitalism doesn’t really work with that. Because capitalism is inherently colonial. And it doesn’t allow room for decolonial love. [So] we leave more space for different types of love. Like queer love, BIPOC love. And as a result of that, we find that BIPOC trans people aren’t

going to be experiencing disproportionate rates of poverty. As a result of that decolonial love.”

- Advocacy organizations wouldn’t need to exist.

Different income systems

- Guaranteed basic income
 - “So it’ll be more equal.”
 - So that people can be supported and pursue their passions, e.g., art
- Share profits with lower income communities.

Housing

- Access to a house
- No homelessness
- Affordable rent and home ownership
- Participants noted all these factors are connected: Opportunities for education can lead to employment and being able to own a home.

Ability to thrive as a new immigrant

- Government promises and dreams of a better life are fulfilled: “The immigrant story is you come to Canada, you get a better life. You have all of the things that you never had in your home country or whatever. You get this amazing healthcare system. There is no racism. Life works perfectly.”

Experiences of poverty in P.E.I.

PEI context, history, and approach to work

- The province’s history, geographical context, and typical industries of fishing, farming, and tourism inform what is resourced and how people think about work:
 - “The geographical location of PEI. The number of people on this island right... The way that the economic policies and problems are structured ... is [for] the historical context where it was predominantly fishing, and farming. And some government buildings.”
 - “There's always money for fishing and farming, but there's none for education. Or investing in companies that make something year-round.”
- Some participants critiqued the prevalence of seasonal work and collecting EI in the winter: “This mentality. Where you work during the summer, and then in the winter you collect EI.”
- Some participants proposed a different perspective about the traditional seasonal patterns of work: Capitalism and neoliberalism made it so you have to “work in order to

survive. [But] for so long it wasn't a requirement. You fished, you hunted, you gathered what you needed to. And in the winter ... you spent time with community."

Wealth and income inequality

- Wealth disparities and income inequality are increasing – e.g., grocery CEOs' rising salaries while grocery prices rising too high for people to afford.
- Myth of meritocracy: "The belief that if you work hard, you will reap the benefits of it."
 - This is harmful and untrue; barriers and marginalization make this impossible: "There are so many barriers and impediments that stop so many people from having that simple, linear pathway to success."
 - "The myth that as long as we continue to work hard you will do well, in my opinion, perpetuates a lot of the harm facing folks experiencing poverty."

Experience of immigration to PEI

- Immigration regulations are strict and limiting:
 - "[I am] dependent on a set of rules that at a certain point no longer support my current situation. Yet, I am forced to remain in a situation because of the rules that were created. And they limit my mobility to work, move to another province, seek help, or higher education. ... I'm trapped. And I am not allowed to do what I need to do. Because I have to first fulfill those requirements."
 - Have to save a certain amount of money to come into Canada in certain streams of migration: "Saving all of that money to put into migration? Nobody considers what that takes. Like the toll it takes on the individual."
- Arriving in PEI as an immigrant and experiencing poverty and marginalization, while benefiting Canada:
 - Not having all the information or knowledge about how the systems or laws work, and being taken advantage of by people with more power, like landlords.
 - You have to meet certain criteria to get in, but then you arrive and can't work in your field of study.
 - "You can get here. And obviously you can't work where you thought you would. And you're disillusioned right? ... And you wonder to yourself, 'Why did I move here?'"
 - "Now you try to get rent... you get a good job that pays you well enough. And you pay all of your taxes.... And then you realize you're left with nothing."

Racism and discrimination, particularly against Black people and BIPOC immigrants

- Bias and discrimination based on race, on immigration status, on your name
 - "In public spaces, if you open your mouth and say 'Oh, I am marginalised. Because I am a Black woman.' There's the stereotype of being the angry Black woman."

- Payday loan businesses targeting racialized immigrants: “Right away they targeted me with predatory lending. Because they saw I'm a minority. I might need money. They know I don't have access to the regulated financial services at banks. So they went out of their way targeting me.”
- Barriers to healthcare: “You don't have a health card. And when they find out you're an immigrant, and [Black], that does play a role too.”
- Discrimination in employment:
 - As a diversity hire: “They put you in the environment, and then there's nothing in place when stuff happens. You're reporting things. You're getting intentionally ignored. They put you with a pack of wolves basically and you're on your own. They don't care about you, because they hired you for your diversity.”
 - Benefiting others with no security or benefit for yourself: “You make [your boss] look good. ... Everything that is yours becomes theirs. And they keep you there. Because no matter how hard you work, it doesn't matter. ...When you leave it's like ‘Oh, you're ungrateful. We're giving you the opportunity.’”
 - Lower pay for racialized women
- Networks of connections and privilege for white Islanders, and exclusion from those networks for racialized people and immigrants
 - “The racism perspective and being an immigrant on PEI? Somebody who was born here, or who has lived here for a long time – they may have access to other sources of income. They may be able to borrow from their friends, their relatives,” but those points of access are not available to immigrants and/or people of colour.
 - Different prices for services like plumbing, no accountability for this: “There's always two prices. There's the Islander price, and there's the foreigner price.”
 - Monopolies of ownership and power: “Here in PEI, the corporations are only run by certain people in certain families. You are not allowed to open up a restaurant, build a building or something without being one of [these] families who are in politics. They literally control the food chain. All the way from the top to the bottom. They [support immigration] to build wealth for the top. But then ... they don't allow for that immigrant to integrate.”

Cost of living and working poverty

- Cost of living is extremely expensive on PEI and has increased in recent years
 - “I remember wanting to have a garden just so I could plant vegetables for my mom when I was a little kid. Because she said the price of vegetables was so expensive here. So I was like I just want a garden. And I just want an orchard.”
 - Seeing it even worse now that it was two years ago – you could make it work then, but now, food prices compared to salary, it's impossible.
 - Not being able to buy anything non-essential. No clothes. No savings.

- Even if you have a job, you may be living in conditions of poverty:
 - “You might be in the \$50,000 bracket, but you don't even have anything to show for it. So why are we working so hard to have nothing? The system is rigged to make us all feel like we work, we work, we work so hard. To make so much money, but then at the end of the day how much do you have like when you check it like really? How much do you have like at the end of the day?”
 - “I work so hard and I don't have anything in the end to show for it.”

Housing

- Rental housing is unaffordable
- Seniors are using their retirement savings faster than is sustainable to pay high rent costs
- No accountability from politicians or policymakers around rental housing
- Landlords don't want to rent to people on social assistance or people with housing subsidies
- Renovictions and precarious housing are increasingly common
- Being evicted has a massive impact, puts people into poverty and makes it hard to get out
- Seniors holding on to houses larger than they need because financially it doesn't make sense to downsize – smaller units at this point can be more expensive
- Feels like there is intention behind poor quality and limited housing: “It seems as if they're intentionally doing things. Intentionally not fixing the buildings. They're intentionally putting people out on the streets. So some of the things are intentionally not working for a specific reason.”

Mental health and trauma

- Mental health challenges, burnout, and trauma in communities:
 - “I don't see many people smiling like that around. I don't see much smiles. I know it's a lot of dark clothing too. I think from what I understand it's a lot of depression here.”
 - “Pressure, mental health, burnout. Because we're working so hard to make money. People need to understand that burnout is real.”
 - Cycles of abuse, trauma, drug use, and incarceration: “The jail is full of people that are on drugs. They're on drugs because of trauma.”

Lack of resources, supports, and opportunities

- Small community organizations are an important resource, but they can't do it all – they aren't resourced to provide services like housing, they can't provide food for the whole community sustainably:

- “They have gained the trust of the people in the community. But they don't have the resources. They're not the ones in policy. They're not the ones who create the structures. They're not the ones who make the system.”
- Transportation is limiting:
 - Cars are unaffordable.
 - The bus, while affordable for some and free for students under 18, is not affordable enough and doesn't go everywhere you need.
 - Transit system limits where you can live and what you can do: “It limits me to all of the things that I can accomplish, achieve,” and impacts employment, family, friendships, and social inclusion.
- Lack of activities and opportunities for youth
 - “There's no sports for them. There's no incentives. There's no opportunities. There's no education. Either leave the Island, or literally the kids are stuck at home without transportation, community or anything.”
 - Further isolation/marginalization for racialized and immigrant youth: “Or if they're migrant children, and they're of a minority? Those kids can only associate with other migrant kids. Because sometimes they're not let into the other communities.”
- People are leaving PEI because of lack of opportunities and resources:
 - “There's no opportunities. So I know my child will be going back to Toronto. Because there's more opportunities there.”
 - “People are trying to run away from PEI just because their friends have gone. Just because they have no form of social interaction with other people.”

What is working in your community?

Grassroots community organizations

- Small, community-based projects and funding for them
 - “The government funding small projects like the Black Cultural Society.”
 - Finding community, finding people with shared experiences.
- Trust in grassroots organizations: “It has to be personal. It has to be grassroots. Because that's the way sometimes that we feel comfortable.”
- 2SLGBTQ+ community
- Local community groups

Healthcare

- As a temporary resident, being able to get essential scans done, show up and ask for what you need, but having to self-advocate and learn to navigate system

- Using clinics without a family doctor: “The healthcare system has worked for me. You have to know how to do it. Because a lot of us don't have family doctors. But you have to use the clinics like as a gateway to get to see a doctor right?”
- Self-advocacy skills: “You have to call around and got to show initiative. Got to be assertive, go places. Not saying force them to, but kind of make them do it. Because they'll give you a hard time around here. But yeah, the healthcare system has worked for me. Maybe not perfect, but it has worked for me.”

Access to education and food programs for children and youth

- Free school bus for children to get to school at any age
- Pay what you can food programs at the schools
 - “They have a breakfast program that my child uses every single day. Even though at home we have the same things. But it's because it's a social thing.”
 - “Everybody eats together. ... Instead of targeting people with accessibility needs, you just make it open for everybody.”

Other items mentioned

- Worker’s compensation, but only after pursuing it and self-advocating: “[Worker’s compensation] has worked for me. That was kind of a fight though. And everything needs to be a fight. Like I was never really given anything. Everything was a fight.”
- “My family.”

Actions that the government needs to take are...

Change existing systems and their effects

- Policy and systems change must centre people with lived expertise: “Poverty [is] about the way the systems and structures are designed. ... How do we redesign policies, and programs, and practices, and rules, and guidelines? To make them relevant?... Having that marginalized voice in the discourse, in the design, in the redesign of programs, and policies, and rules, and guidelines.”
- Decolonization
- Dismantle disparities created by capitalism
- Accountability for government and people with power, like landlords and grocery CEOs: consequences for violating regulations, financial implications.
- Break cycles of intergenerational trauma and abuse
- Address systemic racism and discrimination
 - Address higher rates of poverty in marginalized communities “[As a Black woman,] being me shouldn't make me be poor.”
 - Address discrimination, interpersonal and systemic

- Promote anti-racist environments: “Actually promote it and say it out as a rule for even classroom and work settings.”

Health and mental health

- Improve community mental health – more information, more accessible services, more transparency with information and resources.
- Improve coordination and system navigation of health care and mental health care systems.
- Pay people to take time off work to mitigate burnout and promote mental health.

Ensure people’s basic needs are met in a stigma-free and accessible way

- Major priority to improve housing situation.
- More accessible food bank, more than once/month, have more nutritious and varied products.
- Destigmatize EI.

Immigration infrastructure

- Improve infrastructure for immigration on PEI: Population is growing quickly, but housing, infrastructure is not there to adequately support people
 - Cycle of arriving and leaving: “People come here and are more miserable. And then when they leave people say stuff like immigrants are just here to go.”
 - “There's an opportunity when a province is designing immigration policies to account for infrastructure. To support the population that will be incoming.”
 - Valuing immigrants as people not just workers: “Let us prioritise the people who work, like they're human beings. They're not just labour.”