



'What We Heard'
**Québec Community Conversations –
Summary**

May 5, 6, and 12, 2023

CAMPAIGN 2000
END CHILD & FAMILY POVERTY



Introduction

Below, we've summarized the main themes of the community conversations with people with lived experience of poverty in Québec. The conversations were hosted by *ATD Quart Monde* in partnership with *Campaign 2000: End Child and Family Poverty*.

This summary reflects the content of two meetings on May 5 and May 6 with ten and nine people respectively, and a May 12 plenary with 17 people. These meetings were based on eight previous local group sessions with a total of 28 people. The groups represented community members from Rouyn-Noranda, Joliette, Sherbrooke, Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, Thetford Mines, Longueuil, and four neighbourhoods in or near Montréal (Ahuntsic, Hochelaga, Villeray, and a solidarity group from different areas of Montréal). Where the community or city was specified by a participant, this is noted in the summary. All participants had lived experience of poverty except the solidarity group.

The conversations were hosted as part of ATD Quart Monde's People's University program. The last People's University asked questions from the Campaign 2000 Localizing SDGs project. The project questions were altered slightly to fit the People's University format.

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 organization 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 (September 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 'What We Heard' 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, participants described seeing increasing inequalities in their communities, especially wealth and income inequality. Participants noted the government seems out of touch with the urgent realities of poverty people are facing, and identified a need for localized, community-based policy solutions to localized issues. Homelessness, discrimination, and prejudice against people experiencing poverty were named as major challenges. Increased and better supports

for children and families, more community solidarity, and changes in government spending were all named as priorities for action.

A community with no poverty would be free from...

Inequalities

- Income would be equitable: "There would be enough for everyone to live in a correct way."
- Wealth, especially extreme wealth:
 - Take money from wealthy people and redistribute to people living in poverty.
 - [Removing wealth] "would force people to talk from heart to heart, become more humans, more conscious to each other."
- "Everyone would be equal," there would be social justice, and laws would be egalitarian.

Discrimination and injustice

- Prejudice against people on social assistance
- Exclusion, discrimination, and a lack of solidarity in communities
- Stigma of poverty "prevents people from making efforts to get out of poverty. I think about places, streets, neighborhoods where poor people live and [it is] said they are dangerous, we can't walk there by night. Someone who hears that, if she walks there by night, she will discover that it's not true, it's not as what she's been told."
- Prejudice leads to further poverty: "The prejudices come from our thoughts, ... it's invisible at the beginning but the speeches, the actions, the inactions make it so that it's harming people ... It comes from humans, poverty comes from humans who refuse to share."
- One-size-fits-all approach: "Get rid of a standardized treatment, in the idea that there is some kind of mold, and then we expect everybody to fit in this mold so we're treating everybody the same way, without taking into account their difficulties or their strengths."

No accountability or understanding from people in power

- Lack of information and contact with people in power making political decisions: "These people are far from the reality of the persons living in poverty. The lack of empathy. They believe that 770\$ a month is enough to live."
- Ignorance of politicians towards realities of poverty: "I would get rid of the government and the deputies, no more ministers, because it's they who make the laws and they make them badly and it produces poverty."

Exploitation, addiction, and consumerism

- Drug trafficking, drug dealing, and youth drug use
- Cigarettes and cigarette trafficking
- Exploitative sex work
- Casinos and the lottery: "It's the government who gets the profits. People who play lotteries, there are many who are trying to get out of poverty, it's the middle class and the poor people."
- Pawn shops
- Consumerist gadgets that trick people to spend money unnecessarily

Inadequate and unaffordable housing

- Unsanitary, unsafe, and illegal housing
- Expensive rents
- Apartment owners that increase rent
- Property rights – instead it should all be social housing
- Financialization and commodification of housing: "You buy ... houses, not to live in it but only so that the price goes up and they sell it for a profit...You just make the prices go higher by speculating, selling and buying again but the object is not important, it's only to make the prices go up."

Violence against children

- Child abuse: "Children are ... the ones who are building the society of tomorrow, so if they are badly treated, there is more chance that there will be more poverty."
- Family violence: "Since you're young, it can harm you for the rest of your life, when you're an adult too. It prevents you from looking for opportunities, it makes you enter a cycle, a life dynamic that is not very positive."

Community organizations

- Discrimination or stigma from community organizations: "They made me lose my dignity, not just when they were talking to me but also when they were talking to others."
- Maintenance of poverty through surface-level help from organizations: "They don't really help against poverty, they don't know how, and then we hide poverty behind these organizations."
 - They don't have the capacity or resources for systemic change to end poverty: "Community organizations don't always have enough money to do the actions they would like to do."

- Alternate opinion shared in the discussion: Community organizations aren't necessarily about ending poverty, "their role is to break the isolation of people. We talk about mental health, not money."

Sickness and poor health care

- Lack of preventative health care

Barriers to employment

- Required years of experience to get a job

Experiences of poverty in Québec communities

Housing

- Social housing
 - Stigma of living in social housing
 - Villeray: No funds for maintenance of existing social housing. Many empty apartments in social housing projects because of lack of money for repairs.
- Homelessness:
 - Rent costs are so high that it's resulting in homelessness
 - Receiving income assistance can result in homelessness: "Homelessness can happen to anyone because the welfare checks don't give enough."
 - Shelters are closing and people are sleeping in lobbies of apartment buildings.
 - Montreal: Visible homelessness, in the subway in particular
 - Joliette: Youth and seniors experiencing homelessness
 - Villeray: Increase in homelessness
- Renovictions:
 - Increase in renovictions, but people can't afford to move to a more expensive unit.
 - Villeray: Many renovictions.
- Illegal or overcrowded housing:
 - Seeing instances of illegal housing, "like someone who had transformed his parking garage into a room and rents it, he doesn't declare it and it's not up to the housing norms."
 - Ahuntsic: People in gangs are living in overcrowded housing: "They rent apartments 4 or 5 persons together to survive."

Community centres and programs

- Villeray: Closure of a community centre (to be replaced with a school) means that there are fewer community activities: "It impoverishes the neighborhood"

- Joliette: Community centres are underresourced.

Employment

- Montreal: Lack of employment opportunities
- Hochelaga: Fewer jobs available

Lack of awareness and coordination of services/resources

- Organizations and social workers aren't coordinating services or communicating options for support: "Even the social workers who want to help us, they don't talk about the possibilities. Like, because of my condition, I receive a food basket worth 200\$ that I pay only 50\$. People don't know."

Food insecurity

- People aren't able to afford basic items at the grocery store
- Hochelaga: Increase in people using food banks

Greater poverty and barriers in marginalized communities

- First Nations people experiencing poverty stemming from colonialism.
- Montreal: Immigrants experiencing poverty.
- Montreal, particularly Ahuntsic: Migrant workers experiencing poverty.
- Children experiencing poverty.

Isolation and hopelessness

- Feeling like poverty is individualized, people are isolated: "A lot of each for oneself. Not supporting the other, not sharing the information when something happens somewhere."
 - Sherbrooke: "It's divided, each for oneself. When I go somewhere, there's nobody to help me. People who drive cars, they don't let me cross the streets."
- Hopelessness at experiencing poverty, isolation, and multiple intersecting challenges: "I live in misery at the moment, maybe two weeks without eating well. I am alone to pay for everything. I have to go to the food bank. I've asked for a social housing apartment for elderly people. I've taken my son but he stays in drugs. My house is dirty, I go to bed and cry. I've asked him to leave, his friend stays with him, he doesn't give anything."

What is working in your community?

Local organizations

- Help from local organizations, e.g., the local health and social centre

- Organizations like ATD that recognize dignity and humanity of people experiencing poverty, that provide help and access to resources that other institutions and social workers don't inform you about
- Organizations fighting for more social housing
- Rouyn Noranda: Index of organizations working on poverty reduction

Solidarity and support within communities

- Solidarity in communities: "In my neighborhood, it's the solidarity. Because there is no community organization, people meet and support each other."
- Inviting people to eat together
- Learning through ATD to connect with people and understand their challenges: "Through ATD, I learnt to speak to people before judging. Before, I was afraid. Now, I see which difficulties people face."
- City participatory budgeting bringing people together: "All, poor and rich, were able to discuss. These are installations that will benefit the poor as well as the rich, it's good, it brings the city together, it brings people beyond social classes."
- Rouyn Noranda: Shops giving surplus to community centres

Housing projects and supports

- New housing for people with mental health challenges
- Rouyn Noranda: Social housing projects

Other items

- Buying secondhand goods
- Rouyn Noranda: Free public transportation

Priorities for action are...

The groups talked about three levels of change: individuals and families, community and neighbourhood, and government and society. The summary reflects priorities discussed at all of these levels.

Localization and coordination of solutions

- More coordination and information around what is being done locally to fight against poverty.
- Localized solutions to localized problems

Housing

- Lower rent

- Regulation of housing to limit costs
- Better regulation of rents

Community-centred policy decisions

- Consult with “the people before passing legislation. Sometimes, they pass legislation that concern only a fraction of the population and it leaves people behind. There is so much demand that they end up forgetting some people.”

Changes in government spending

- Limit military spending, particularly for weapons: “If less money goes to war, people could discuss more, there would be more dialogue, more education and people would make peace and wealth would be better redistributed.”
- Redistribute government salary bonuses to people living in poverty
- Use unnecessary election spending to support people living in poverty

Wealth redistribution and income equality

- Salary equality for all genders
- Wealth redistribution
- Give more money to families living in poverty

Support and resources for families and children

- Support for parents and children to exit the cycle of poverty: “We want to eradicate poverty, we need to invest in the early ages, in the life of pregnant women who face difficulties so that the child doesn’t fall in the vicious circle of poverty.”
- More support for young families with children
- More support and support workers for children living in poverty and experiencing abuse – improve this process, without breaking up families: “Parents need to be supported, not judged but helped ... poverty doesn’t help, if they had a little more money, it’s mainly the parents who need help and if we help the parents, we help the children.”
- Improve training of everyone who works with children – social workers, teachers, child welfare workers
- More support for children who have disabilities
- Improve quality of education, including classroom conditions, teacher training, resources for children

Community solidarity and support

- Solidarity in communities: “The importance of solidarity and empathy. We can get through this as a human group by concrete actions that show empathy.”
- Individual support: “At the individual level, we have to work individually to support the other person, our neighbour.”

Address discrimination and stigma

- Address prejudice and discrimination, particularly for new immigrants
- Address indifference to poverty
- Support, not judgment, for people with addictions: “The community needs to help the persons who suffer from addiction and dependence, not to judge them.”

Limit opportunities for addiction and consumerism

- More education around consumerism, consumption, and marketing
- Eradicate cigarettes and drugs to improve health and remove pressures on health system

Other items

- Free public transportation

