



'What We Heard'

Regina Community Conversation Summary

June 27, 2023

CAMPAIGN **2000**
END CHILD & FAMILY POVERTY

Introduction

Below, we've summarized the main themes of the community conversation in Regina, Saskatchewan with 16 people with lived experience of poverty.

The conversation was hosted by *SWAP: Street Workers Advocacy Project* 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 (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.

Participants shared a vision of a connected, happy, safe community where people feel a sense of belonging and everyone has what they need. The barriers to that vision that people are experiencing day to day include abuse and violence, inaccessible services and supports, inadequate resources for safe drug use and recovery, and unsafe, unaffordable, exploitative rental housing. The urgent need for better, more accessible, and more widely available supports and services for people who are experiencing poverty, particularly those who use drugs, was clear, especially in light of the overdose crisis.

A community with no poverty has...

Thriving families and friends

- Families who are able to care for each other and show their care:
 - Embrace each other, give kids a hug, tell family you love them
 - “Parents being parents.”
- Enough resources and time to spend with family, parents don’t have to work all the time
- Families spending time in community/neighbourhood
 - Neighbourhood helps raise the kids
 - Gatherings, like barbeques or potluck neighbourhood meals
 - Support for people who need it, e.g., passing the hat around for a construction worker who got injured on the job
- Strong friendships

Happy, safe, connected children

- Children would be educated, safe, and happy
- Resources, activities, and social programs for children
 - More playgrounds
 - Get-togethers for kids after school
 - After-school programs

Cultural connection and community belonging

- Cultural connection
 - Organizations that promote this for First Nations people and people affected by residential schools
- Having an identity, belonging, being a part of a community.
- Strength for one another, especially for children, for the next generation.

Safe and supported communities

- Clean streets and alleys
- Low or no crime
- No drug houses, gangs, slumlords
- Recovery from drugs and gangs

Equality and happiness

- No marginalization, no division, “we’re all equal.”
- Kindness and smiling
- No stereotyping or shame

Everyone has enough

- Everyone should have an income and/or job that gives them disposable income after taxes
- No such thing as poverty: "Poverty would just be a word"
- Everyone would have what they need:
 - "Everybody would be set, the way their life should be."
 - "We have no problems, everybody gives."

Experiences of poverty in Regina

Violence and abuse

- Violence and abuse in families:
 - "There's too much broken families, there's too much broken homes, there's too much abuse, too much, no escape."
- Violence against women, with inadequate supports:
 - Severe abuse in relationship, but not enough shelter beds to escape: "She can be dead in two days, I need help now, I need to get her out of this relationship. And they said, 'Well we don't got no beds.'"
- Gang violence

Using drugs

- Major impact of the fentanyl crisis: "It's killed so many people."
- Lack of supports for overdoses: e.g., witnessing an overdose, calling an ambulance, people were able to save the person with Narcan, but the ambulance never came.
- Lack of supports for people who use drugs and people who want to stop using:
 - No support for people who were incarcerated, are released, and want to stay drug-free: "They go out, but they have no home, so they go to use."
 - People sometimes try to return to jail because it can be easier to detox there – shows the real lack of treatment options: "There's nowhere else to turn."
 - Feeling hopeless about your options if you use drugs because there's such a lack of support – you're just surviving: "You just don't really have many choices other than trying to do it yourself. ...Then you don't have anything... if you're sober then you usually just go back to using, or just doing whatever it is to survive."

Housing

- Rentals
 - Low-income rentals are in poor condition

- Landlords exploiting tenants, renting units in disrepair: “They don’t fix them for people ... they know a lot of us need a home to live in, right. So, they’ll just rent out to whoever will take it and it’s not fair. Sometimes stuff doesn’t work in the homes ... plumbing or there are no stoves, no stove’s working, roaches, it’s just disgusting and it’s sad.”
- Landlords adding more barriers to renting:
 - Asking for criminal record checks
 - Not accepting tenants on income assistance since their rent isn’t paid directly to the landlord
 - Asking for references: “They want references for five years that you’ve been, you had to be living in someplace for a certain amount of time.”
- Homelessness
 - Seeing people sleeping at bus stops, in empty garages, abandoned houses
 - Experiencing homelessness while pregnant and not being able to get supplies or support for yourself or your baby
- Utilities
 - Older, more affordable houses/units aren’t up to code with wiring or insulation – makes bills very expensive: “In Saskatchewan, you do get minus 40, and when you work at a minimum wage job and your wife is working to pay daycare and whatnot, all of a sudden, you’re set up for a \$500 SaskPower, SaskEnergy bill.”
 - Issues with still having to pay utilities bills while incarcerated, even after you lose your home, but can’t get the bills to stop.
- Lack of housing on reserve and long wait list for existing houses – need to reapply every six months to stay on list: “Even on reserve, they want us to go back home, but how can you go back home when there’s no housing, there hasn’t been housing built out there for a long time. I have applied so many times to get a house on reserve, but there’s nothing there.”
- Racism in housing/rental market: Relegating racialized tenants to certain low-income areas.
- Issue of arson and boarded-up houses, landlords doing this for insurance money, or tenants doing it to bad landlords: The boarded-up houses “just sit there forever... They don’t want to fix it because it’s just going to end up the same way.”
- People are living together who don’t want to stay together but can’t afford to live alone, because housing is so expensive: “I see families that want a split, but they know they can’t make it on their own if they split up, they need that income.”

Mental health and hopelessness

- Frustration and hopelessness: “Just want to give up at times.”
- Feelings of hopelessness, nothing to lose: “Well we’re in welfare, you can’t take nothing from us and we don’t care.”

Barriers to services and supports

- Cycle of inaccessible services – e.g., when you lose your ID, “you can't get welfare, because you have no ID ... and they've got no clinics here for ID, where do I start, I don't even have one piece. And a lot of these places want picture ID, well you need money to get a picture ID, to get a picture.”
- Difficulty of accessing addiction/recovery support
 - Not enough spots, even in crisis situations: “‘No, we're filled,’ that's what you hear.” Can result in death.
 - So few shelter beds that beds at detox shelters are often taken up by people experiencing homelessness
 - Arbitrary regulations or prioritization from detox centres (treating drinking vs. drug use differently)
- Long waitlists at women's shelters, or first come first serve with not enough beds
- Long wait times for mental health referrals, even in crisis situations
- COVID impacted programs and services – some are gone permanently
- Lack of transition support when ageing out of child welfare system:
 - “They don't give independency to know how to get our IDs ... when I turned 18 and I aged out of the system, they just basically [said] ‘OK, you can go now’”.
 - “When I aged out, I didn't know how to take care of my own place or how to take care of myself.”
- Existing services don't coordinate, “they don't talk to each other,” e.g., community events or barbeques where there's plenty of food and only a few people show up – poor communication/awareness of what's available.
- Stigma and discrimination from service providers, e.g., if you're not currently working, attitudes of ‘you're bringing this on yourself’ or ‘you're lazy.’

Impact of colonization

- Impact of residential schools and colonization: “My mom was in a residential school and ...she's never given us that opportunity to have ... our culture.”

Lack of opportunities for children

- Parents have to work too much so they aren't connected to their kids
- Children go home and don't have anything to do: “No cable, no TVs, no friends.”

Feeling of powerlessness and frustration at inaction

- Feeling like politicians do nothing
- Feeling like there's no one to turn to for help

What is working in your community?

Organizations and programs

- SWAP:
 - They help you without judgment: “We were heard... there’s no judgment.”
 - Feeling safe: “Being able to feel safe and say what's going on with yourself or with others that’s involved.”
 - They have your back: “They instill trust in you and they always say, I have your back, just be honest with you.”
 - They advocate for you, e.g., to support finding housing, they will call your worker and advocate for you.
- Family food basket “through Reach. And I get it once a month, and you get toothpaste and that, you get your milk, your bread, your eggs, some fresh fruit, and vegetables that are in season at the time.”
- Other organizations:
 - First Nations organizations like All Nations Hope, Friendship Centres
 - Four Directions
 - Marian Centre – open to men and women now too
 - Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Crystal Meth Anonymous
 - Raising Hope, Sober Living Home, Oxford House, Sophia House, The Ranch House
 - These organizations “help with transportation and housing, doctor's appointment, and patients, like methadone clinics and everything.... And they help you with your struggles.”

Community

- The people experiencing poverty: “It's the knowledge of the people in poverty that actually give you more information than the actual services.” E.g., if you line up at the food bank, you can hear more about actual resources available than if you talk to a service provider.
- Community barbeques
- People trying to help – hiring people who use drugs or are experiencing homelessness at their businesses
- Grief groceries: “When a person passes and that family, say the person that passes is the sole provider,” bringing the family groceries
- Each other’s experiences, “all this experience in here.”

Actions that the government needs to take are...

Increase access to services and supports

- Access, awareness, and coordination
 - Have accessible ID clinics, free of charge, get a picture for ID
 - More awareness of resources – in more accessible formats, like flyers, especially for people who don't have access to phones or computers
 - Remove time limits and restrictions on access to resources, supports, programs
 - Improve communication between service providers – change so lunch isn't provided from all on the same day – make it so you always have somewhere to go
- Improve and grow services and supports available
 - More funding for existing resources
 - Better welfare system
 - More cultural-based programming for First Nations: "If they want any kind of reconciliation... they need to make some places for the people. Anything to do with our culture... something to get back into our language, just one big cultural place for all of these, to share our knowledge and get it back."
 - Community fridges everywhere with enough to go around
 - Mental health care should be more affordable
 - Bring back gym nights at schools for kids, useful for mental health, socializing, childcare

Housing

- Create a blacklist for exploitative and unfair landlords
- Welfare system to pay landlords instead of individuals, or address discrimination from landlords against people receiving social assistance
- First Nations should buy up boarded up houses, fix them, rent them to their urban members
- Address unaffordable rent costs
- Shelters
 - More women's shelters
 - Shelters for women, children, and youth experiencing domestic violence
 - Transition housing, for people exiting incarceration and treatment
 - Open up vacant properties as shelters

Drug use and recovery

- More supports and fewer barriers for addiction, recovery, harm reduction supports
 - More accessible and more spots available to prevent overdose death: "I didn't want to do my next hit, because I might be dead, chances are really good for

that ... When people want help, they want it then and now, before they go and do it and they're gone."

- Program to ensure clean and safe streets while still allowing for harm reduction
- Narcan more widely accessible, e.g., in bus shelters
- More funding for drug recovery programs, supports, fewer barriers to access