



St. John's, NL

Community Conversation Summary

September 27, 2022

CAMPAIGN 2000
END CHILD & FAMILY POVERTY



Introduction

Below, we've summarized the main themes of the two-hour conversation in St. John's, Newfoundland, with 13 participants, aged 19-35, who lived in St. John's and had lived experience of poverty.

This conversation was hosted by the *Community Sector Council of Newfoundland and Labrador's Go-Getters Program* in partnership with *Campaign 2000: End Child and Family Poverty*.

This summary is in four sections based on the topics of discussion. We've listed the main themes with related content below them. The conversation content will be analyzed further later in the project, and we'll create indicator recommendations and a community-driven action plan from that analysis.

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 (February 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 transformative and systemic changes. The interlinked, intergenerational, and cyclical nature of poverty, including how childhood poverty can impact the rest of a person's life, was emphasized. Post-secondary education, public transportation, and food security were other main themes of the conversation, and participants gave clear suggestions for action items in these areas, such as complete student loan forgiveness and an improved public transit system. Self-sufficient communities whose members grow their own food and share and care for each other, as communities in Newfoundland and Labrador often historically did, were prominently suggested as visions for communities without poverty.

Visions of a community without poverty...

Happiness

- “Happiness and joy would be more commonly felt. You wouldn’t have this constant talk in your head being like, ‘Oh, I’ve got work tomorrow.’”
- Basic needs are met – no need to sacrifice one thing for another, no need to worry

Storytelling for culture and identity

- Family storytelling for documentation, passing along history and culture: “That’s a really important thing that people miss out on with families, especially families that have gone through dramatic periods or periods of poverty”

Community care, support, and connection

- Everyone would help the community and environment grow together
- Bartering, sharing would be commonplace
- No need to go to university to get a job to exit poverty – could be self-sufficient instead
- Governments would invest money in communities and neighbourhood organizations

Food security

- Permanent agriculture (permaculture), everyone could grow their own food, city would grow food and care for it, collective farming, community gardens
- Need for self-sufficiency in food systems:
 - Use of public spaces for permaculture
 - Benefit beyond food security: have people who use drugs grow their own safe supply
 - Historical self-sufficient food economies as vision to return to:
 - “People lived in a very communal and cashless kind of society and that goes back hundreds of years. When we think about the good old days of Newfoundland, it’s everyone’s in the fishery, everyone has a garden, housing that you built yourself with your buddies.”
 - It’s “really common in Newfoundland, my nan she goes down and plants potatoes every year to harvest.”
 - “If you know somebody that goes out fishing, they’ll bring you fish. It’s a really big community thing to share what you already have.”
 - Feasibility of this vision due to cultural and historical roots, especially in rural communities
 - Opportunity for elders to share this knowledge
 - Large amounts of available green space

Income, benefits, and jobs that allow for good quality of life

- Higher social service and old age cheque amounts
- Universal basic income
- Job security: enough jobs, easier access to jobs, end of precarious work
- \$20 minimum wage

Childcare and family planning

- Free, accessible, and safe childcare and elder care
 - Childcare for children's safety and support after school
 - Emphasize elder care due to ageing population
- Free and accessible family planning (abortion, contraceptives, Plan B, birth control)

Free and accessible education

- Free or very affordable postsecondary education
 - No fear of loans
- Access to education and skill training

Good quality and affordable housing

- Free/affordable housing, no unsafe conditions, not being obligated to live with people just to afford housing
- End of commercial housing as it is now
- Using vacant houses
- More housing programs, especially for young people, people investing in housing who live in the province

Free and accessible health care

- Free health and dental care for everyone regardless of income and with no conditions
- More mental health care and more accessible mental health care

Safe, affordable, and accessible transportation

- Easy access to affordable transportation
- More buses and better quality buses
- More walkable communities

Different systems

Visions of a community with different systems was a prominent theme that participants emphasized in the discussion.

- No capitalism, no religious pressures, no need to conform to those systems/ideals

- End of productivity culture
- Socialism instead
- End of privatized elder care, daycare, housing: “These are things that people shouldn’t be allowed to take advantage of for a profit.”
- Collapse of gendered division of labour
 - “I feel like all the work and the things that I do are so gendered, that women are supposed to already be doing [them] for free and I just wish that I could be getting paid for it”
- No violence or discrimination in any context, whether it’s abuse in a family, housing discrimination, violence or discrimination against women, or any other forms

Being a young person in St. John’s/Newfoundland impacts experiences of poverty

Transportation

- Links to housing: A lot of people downtown don’t drive, rental properties downtown are in disrepair, but to get decent housing outside of downtown, would need a car since there’s no adequate public transit
- Deepens poverty: Relying on cabs is very expensive
 - “I think that a lot of poverty in these communities comes from transportation because I’m constantly spending money on cabs because the bus stops running at 11 p.m. ...and on Sundays, at 5pm, so you can’t go anywhere...”
 - Cabs have monopoly in St. John’s since there are no alternatives (ride share services), so no competition for lower prices

Housing

- Poor and unsafe conditions for rental housing
- Age discrimination: if you’re young, landlords won’t take a chance on you
- Deepens inequality: Mortgages are less than rent for the people living there. Owners are making money but taking advantage of young people, low-income people who are living downtown
 - “It’s just such a terrible broken system. Most youth now know that they’ll probably never buy a house, right, but they’ll spend more money on rental properties than what they would spend on buying a house themselves.”

Growing up

- Poverty in childhood impacts rest of life
 - Trying to hide poverty at school, fear of others’ judgment, childhood trauma can affect approach to challenges later in life

- Not having nice clothes or feeling welcome can lead to getting kicked out of school, not going to university, late graduation, starting career late, still doing college courses at this point in life
- Growing up in poverty can mean that others don't have high expectations for you, so you might miss out on skills that would help now, like money management or basic math
 - "When I graduated, they asked, "What are you going to do now" and I was like I didn't think I was going to get this far, like nobody really told me."
- Parents and family
 - Always working to provide, kids didn't get to spend much time with them
 - Long lasting effects of abuse: "if there's abuse in the household, sometimes it'll cause the child to have serious mental illnesses in the future and that makes it harder to work."
- Lack of childcare
 - As a kid, not having childcare after school, not being safe or supported in that way, can lead to getting into trouble
 - Older siblings taking care of younger ones: "it just wasn't safe"
 - Can lead to higher risk actions out of necessity like selling drugs
- Growing up in child welfare system
 - Visible poverty: duct-taping shoes together
 - Always moving back and forth and having to adjust to new places
 - Not knowing how to be alone
 - Can lead to homelessness
 - Turning to sex work, provides a kind of security that is hard to get elsewhere
 - "When I left and went on my own I didn't really know how to be alone. So then I went down this rough patch that left me on the streets, sleeping on benches. I turned to sex work for a while because I didn't know what else to do. Even now sometimes, I just want to go back to doing sex work because that's the only way I felt like I could get by. And I don't know if that has to do from not having things as a kid, where I just need that kind of security..."

Postsecondary education

- Wanting to go to school to achieve something better, but having to pay for postsecondary can in turn lead to more poverty
 - "Trying to better yourself... how much harder it is when you're constantly short of cash"
 - Overwhelmed with student debt

- International students
 - Pay up to six times more than national students – can lead to sacrificing basic needs: “Having to think about if I can go to school for next semester or not and also thinking about having a safe place to live or not”
 - Being taken advantage of in rentals

Discrimination and inequities as young people

- Being told that young people don’t have problems
- Lack of hope for the future
 - “It’s just a grim future. I’m not very optimistic about the future at all. Like not at all.”
 - Being condescended to by “the generation that ruined our planet”
 - Concerns for climate crisis
- Constant burden, pressure of poverty as a young person:
 - Always having to sacrifice something, e.g. how to commute to school safely and on time, while also not knowing if you can afford to pay for school next month
 - “I feel like I could never reach my true potential”
 - “If we get sick, we don’t have the money to get proper health care”
- Difficulty in stability
 - Doesn’t feel normal: “It just doesn’t feel normal being peaceful and stuff and making money every day” – comfort in chaos, security in what you know

What is working in your community?

Community organizations

- Organizations with good transitional housing, support with mental health, access to health care, getting work, moving out and getting housing
- Organizations that give out free resources, gift cards, counselling, with no strings attached

Friendships and community

- Queer community and queer friendships
 - “Being in poverty as a young person I rely a lot on my friends. Having my queer friends is so good... having people in my life who have similar experiences to me. So I think community is really working and we provide for each other.”
- Chosen family
 - “My family is all chosen. I don’t talk to any of my blood family for various reasons. But my chosen family are people I chose for myself that are healthy for

me, that respect my boundaries, that meet me on the same level, the same vibration of our souls. Having people to support you can help you so much.”

Actions governments need to take

Wealth redistribution

- “Instead of rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer, we could redistribute the income”

No barrier community organizations/programs

- Free counselling, gift cards, food/supplies with no requirements or asks
- No requirement to be religious or listen to religious content
- Harm reduction programs and services
- Existing community organizations are often over capacity
- Alcohol-free spaces for the queer community

Education/awareness

- About what poverty is at a very young age, in schools for kids, but also for parents who might be feeling the guilt of not being able to afford things for their children. Should provide resources on coping, provide solutions to exit poverty
- Education around addiction, even for health care professionals
 - Harm reduction education
 - Ensuring people are not limited in their access to medication even with family history of addiction

Childcare

- Free childcare, subsidized childcare: ability for families/parents to be at home with kids

Healthcare

- Improve wait times in emergency room as well as for surgeries
 - More health care providers to allow this to happen
- More access to mental health care in communities
 - “Unless you go in the hospital it’s impossible to get a psychiatrist, it’s impossible to get a therapist pretty much. You have to be admitted in the hospital most times before you can even get real help for mental health.”
- Reproductive healthcare: free period products, free birth control, more abortion clinics in rural communities (the only clinic is in St. John’s)
- Harm reduction: Support for people dealing with addiction that is lower barrier, not religious

Taxation changes

- Minimum wage isn't high enough to account for high taxation
- Sugar tax on sugary drinks and food needs to end
 - "It does punish the people that are already low income, right, because it's low-income people that can't afford the fancy orange juice, they get the sugary orange juice"
- Tax on alcohol and cigarettes also needs to be cut
 - "Statistically lower-income families, the families that have traumatic histories are the ones that are spending all this money in cigarette and alcohol taxes and all it's doing is making those low-income families less able to provide for their children and eat healthy"

Provide basic needs and regular benefits

- Bus passes/free transportation:
 - "It's so expensive so I'm scrounging around the house trying to find change all the time. If I do need to go to the food bank or put in my resumé somewhere, I can barely get the bus to go to class let alone to go and do all these things to better myself. And nothing is walkable in the city."
- Monthly provision of necessities: sugar, milk, period products, etc.
- Benefits like CERB: "It would be nice if we could have another little emergency benefit because we're still dealing with it"
- Raise social service and old age benefits, raise minimum wage

Student debt

- Complete student loan forgiveness
- International students: can't get student loans – they should be accessible to anybody.

Food security

- Lower food prices: "It's really hard to eat healthy because of the prices of food. It's easier to just get a frozen pizza and a pack of hotdogs."
- Healthy food options at the food bank
- Local, self-sufficient food economies and permaculture

Housing

- Implement policies/oversight to better regulate rental market