



**Toronto, ON**

# **Community Conversation Summary**

**April 12, 2023**

**CAMPAIGN 2000**  
END CHILD & FAMILY POVERTY



**FAMILY SERVICE TORONTO**  
For People. For Change.

## Introduction

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On April 12, the Options and Social Action teams at Family Service Toronto co-hosted a virtual community conversation with five participants living in the Toronto area with developmental disabilities and lived experience of poverty. Below, we've summarized the main themes of that conversation.

The conversation was hosted by *Family Service Toronto* in partnership with *Campaign 2000: End Child and Family Poverty*, whose national office is part of the Social Action program at FST. The conversation is for a Campaign 2000 project about measuring poverty reduction and ending 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 co-hosts 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!

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, we heard about the need for urgent action to address the housing crisis in Toronto, like lowering rents, building more affordable and supportive housing, and improving the quality and accessibility of units for people with disabilities. We heard about the difficulties with health care costs not being covered by disability assistance and the financial challenges that creates. The need for ODSP rates to be immediately increased and indexed to inflation was also clear.

## Prompt 1: Visions of a community with no poverty

- Everyone would have their basic needs met:
  - “A community where people from all walks of life have a decent home, food and well-paying jobs to sustain themselves.”
- Support from government and health institutions to have a good standard of living:
  - People should be able to “receive the backing and support from the government and mental institutions to ensure that [they are] well taken care of.”
- Factors that contribute to longer life expectancy.
  - For example, safe communities, good mental health, ability to lead a healthy lifestyle.

## Prompt 2: Experiences of poverty and disability

- Housing is unaffordable and often inaccessible.
  - Rents are too high.
    - “People are living, you know, \$1,500 in a one-bedroom when they cannot eat.”
    - Even in low-income housing, rent can be unaffordable.
    - Living at home with parents can be an option, but may not be sustainable, and Toronto housing prices limit options: “I have to move out someday and it may be difficult for me to find affordable housing in Toronto as a lower income or disability... Another possibility is I might have to leave Toronto altogether.”
  - Major issues with supportive/low-income housing (Toronto Community Housing):
    - 10 year wait list to get housing.
    - Slow with repairs, even for accessibility needs.
    - Poor treatment, even for seniors and people in wheelchairs.
    - Neglect of units and of people’s concerns: “People with disabilities ... people in Toronto Community Housing are facing neglect, neglect,



neglect.”



- Disability and income assistance rates are too low to cover basic needs:
  - “People like me don’t make enough.”
  - Limits ability to buy enough food:
    - Food bank use is very high.

- Families with kids often can't afford food.
- Health care is too expensive and costs are often not covered by disability assistance.
  - People with disabilities often have higher health care costs. These costs not being covered by assistance can result in not being able to access proper care, and/or going into debt:
    - "Yesterday I talked to my doctor. ...The other medication that I'm supposed to get I had to pay for it, and I don't have any money to pay for it.... Health care is going downhill for people like us and anybody that is on assistance."
    - "I have dental problems, [but] I can't [get dental repairs]. It's not covered by Ontario Disability anymore. The cleaning maybe every three months but repairs forget it."
- Difficulty finding work and going to school.
  - Need more support finding work with a disability.
  - Unemployment is a challenge, in part due to COVID.
  - Education is too expensive.
- Frustration with government inaction and rising inequality:
  - Situation is dire: "People are dying on the street and these people that goes in the government ... they don't do a thing. ...they cut off everything. Since the conservatives got involved and cut off everything we are – the poor people are suffering."
  - Noticing a rise in inequality: "The Ontario government is doing nothing. I should say no, they are doing something, they are getting rich. The rich are getting rich, and the poor are getting poorer."
  - Government is not prioritizing the right issues: "We're going to spend millions of dollars over a new subway, that's ridiculous. People are sleeping on the street but we're going to spend \$1 billion on another new subway up on Barrie, it doesn't make sense."



### Prompt 3: What is working in your community?

- Support from others (agencies, family members, etc.) lets you help other people.
- Programs and services:
  - Programs like Passport that facilitate financial support.
    - There are still issues with this – a participant said that the government should give support directly rather than having to go through programs.
  - Other FST services like person-directed planning – help with looking for jobs.
  - Supportive housing providers.

- Support with medication, cleaning, laundry, grocery shopping.
  - Supported independent living for people with developmental disabilities.
    - Subsidized rent, agency comes a few hours a week for support with budgeting, groceries, etc.
  - Support workers – helping with things you can't do, like house cleaning.
    - Paid for by Passport funding.
    - Sometimes in person, sometimes by phone.
  - Trustee who pays bills.
  - Agencies that support with up front purchases.
    - Passport is a reimbursement program which can be difficult for bigger purchases if clients don't have the money up front. Agencies like Corbrook can support with that, help buy bigger items like a tablet.
- Neighbourhood strengths:
  - Food bank where people have choices of what food to take
  - New condos being built
  - Schools
  - Recreation program
  - Friendly people
  - Library and books on tape
  - Momiji Centre, Japanese community centre and seniors residence with beautiful gardens, for art classes. Closed for COVID but starting to reopen.
  - Shops (but some aren't accessible, no ramp and not enough space inside for wheelchair access)



#### Prompt 4: Actions that the government needs to take are...

- Address housing crisis:
  - Bring back rental caps
  - Better quality housing
  - Lower rent
  - More affordable housing
  - Prioritize faster repairs especially for accessibility concerns
- Help people find volunteer opportunities that are accessible.
- End systemic inequality for Indigenous people:
  - "It's unfair that any of the First People on this land [are] living in poverty ... the Canadian government needs to work in collaboration with Indigenous communities across the land to bring this to an end. ... implement all TRC's calls to action and end the systemic inequalities that Indigenous Peoples face."



- Better treatment from government for people with disabilities.
- Improve health care and devote more government funding to health care.
- Increase ODSP rates and index to inflation.
  - Everybody should work together, regardless of party, to make this happen.

