



'What We Heard'

Vancouver Community Conversation Summary

June 2, 2023

CAMPAIGN 2000
END CHILD & FAMILY POVERTY



Introduction

Below, we've summarized the main themes of the community conversation in Vancouver, British Columbia with eleven people with precarious immigration status and lived experience of poverty.

The conversation was hosted by *Watari* and *Sanctuary Health* 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.

The need for permanent immigration status for all was a prominent theme. Participants described the ways that having precarious immigration status contributes to poverty and affects every aspect of life, from exploitation and poor treatment at work with no repercussions, to a lack of access to health care and the mental and physical toll that takes, to limiting children's opportunities because of fear of being reported to immigration officials or getting injured without access to healthcare. Participants called for more supports and programs open to all, regardless of status, better regulated workplaces, and more opportunities for people to gain legal status.

A community with no poverty has...

Equality, support, and respect

- A community with no poverty would be “a community with equality, where you feel free, you feel you are on the same level as everyone else.”
- Equality for all comes through the ability to support each other:
 - “Supporting each other, lending a hand to others so that we can all rise and no one is left behind.”
 - People helping each other
 - Finding strength in supporting each other
- It would have status for all, which means equality for all.
- Respect and inclusion: Everyone would feel valued
- No envy, no stereotyping, no superiority
- Equitable access to rights: “Everyone benefits from their rights equally.”

Freedom, harmony, and security

- Freedom of movement, of feeling: “You can feel it, but you cannot see it. It can take you in any direction. There is no beginning or end.”
- Peace and no borders, as described in a song: “The song is called ‘Lucias,’ and he says to his son: ‘The world, your country,’ because there are no borders. That you should take advantage of the whole world. To me, this would be liberty for all. That there would be no borders or war.”
- Security, safety, no fear: “To be able to leave your house without being afraid, to be able to take your kids to school without being afraid.”

Access to services and housing

- Good quality public services: No garbage on streets, good street lighting
- Social programs available to everyone, like Watari offers
- No one would live on the street
- Food programs, housing support programs, all kinds of programs open to people with precarious immigration status

Employment and education

- Everyone would have the opportunity to have a good education
- School for adults without status to help them integrate into the community
- More work opportunities in all areas, particularly for people with no status
- Recognition of people’s careers and skills they gained before coming to Canada: “They can also practice what they know or what they studied.”

Health

- Access to health care for all
- In a community with no poverty, everyone would have good health and mental health

Experiences of poverty and precarious immigration status in Vancouver

Everything is affected

- Poverty and having no status affect every part of your life, and only let you focus on day to day survival and meeting your basic needs: “[I am] constantly thinking about how to make ends meet for a month. It is mentally tiring when you have to think about it all the time, day after day, how to survive, how to have the right to have a decent house, to have food, to have your children do well in school and to have access to different activities.”
- The day to day uncertainty and feeling of powerlessness is deeply challenging, especially having left things behind to come to Canada: “I know I am not in a position to make demands, and maybe that’s why it takes work for us to think about actions to be taken by authorities. However, being here with others in the same situation, I would like to express and share that it is not easy. We have left many things behind and it’s tough being here with the uncertainty what we have to live with each day.”
- Exclusion in many areas of society as a person with no status: “We are excluded in many aspects, aspects in which we cannot take part, given that we cannot economically or legally access many of these services.”

Challenges with work

- It can be difficult to find suitable work: “Those of us who do not [have] status cannot accommodate ourselves to the best in something we are good at or are prepared for because, since we do not have those rights, we do not have the opportunity to demonstrate our skills.”
- Gender discrimination in the workplace is common.
 - Harassment and bullying:
 - “Women are bullied for putting up with any job.”
 - “A colleague told me that I had to speak ‘nicely’ to the boss to ask for a raise. Speak nicely, or rather flirt, with the boss and allowing him to do the same. That made me feel degraded.”
 - Pay inequities:
 - “There is a big difference in payment for women for the same job. It is sexism and it impacts poverty.”
 - “I was working in demolition. I would go into the trucks like the men, and they would earn \$5 more than me. My boss told me it was because I

wasn't as strong... It is hard to be a woman here in our situation, where they measure you by your physical strength."

- Exploitation due to precarious status and poverty
 - Poor treatment and conditions with no repercussions: "Because of the poverty we are facing, we suffer a lot from work exploitation. We aren't even talking about the precarious things one does for work. I know that many of us here are in construction and... we aren't even talking about how they treat us."
 - Being allowed certain benefits, like bringing your child to work, but your employer then uses that as leverage for mistreatment: "I have been feeling abused at work, they take advantage of letting me take my son. I have to keep quiet because I really need to be there. It is frustrating because I can't say they are mistreating me. ... Because of our situation, employers condition us and we have to put up with mistreatment at work in order to move forward. We are in a pyramid and I am at the bottom and they do not see you as a human being but as a number. So, I feel that this is very cruel, because you need it so much that you have to stay."
- Precarious work conditions impact quality of life: You can't miss a day if you're sick "because they deduct the day and then one cannot pay the rent. This is losing quality of life."

Lack of access to healthcare

- No access to healthcare system with no status
- The cost to access healthcare is a major barrier, but also the potential of being reported to immigration: "Here, we don't enjoy the ability to go to the doctor or an emergency room. We are in constant fear of going to see the doctor because something could happen with immigration. It would be so cool to have access to the hospital without being afraid."
- Limiting children's activities because you can't take the risk of injury: "I have a thirteen-year-old daughter who would like to play hockey; it is her dream. I will tell you the truth, no, [Name], because if you break something, what will I do? It is frustrating. I start thinking to myself, "Geez, I'm such a bad mother because I have to crush my daughter's dreams."
- Not being able to afford to stay in Canada if you get injured, because most work is physical labour: "If you break something here at work, you'll go back to your country because you will not be able to afford to break a leg here in Canada. How are you going to pay three months rent while you heal if you have nowhere to go and no one will hire you with something broken? It sounds harsh but your strength is your only power here, your means of staying here. If you can't, I'm sorry, but there's no way to survive here."
- Impact of lack of access to healthcare on mental health

- Results in “stress, anxiety and falling ill, thinking about the doctor and you realize that you do not have that or cannot access it.”
- Can create cycles of stress and sickness, not being able to get care, or not being able to afford it: “There comes a time when you feel that you don’t even have the right to get sick, because if so, what will you do? Where will you go? Will you have to pay? And this causes more stress and anguish which triggers more illness than you can handle.”

Housing is unaffordable

- Rent costs are far too high compared to income: “The truth is that here you’re in a race against time to pay your rent, your home.”
- Rent is “the greatest challenge.”

Childcare, education, and parenting

- Fear of being reported to immigration when registering children in programs or education, e.g., anxiety around trying to enroll child in preschool and not knowing what questions you’ll be asked.
- Fear of immigration officers approaching children at school: “According to the UN, we’re told that all children have the right to an education. However, here in Canada, that’s not true. ... My daughter is a citizen and she will have the right to go to school, but if my wife wants to drop her off at school, we have heard stories from others who have let their children go to school, and immigration has gone to them there. This leaves me very worried.”
- As single mom, managing children and work is very difficult – people without status can’t drop their kids off at daycare: “It should be a right, and not having it is very tough.”
- Having to choose between work and spending time with children: “I have a young son and I would love to go to his activities like other mothers, but I cannot because I either need to work to pay the rent, or I enjoy time with my son. This is very frustrating for me, losing out on spending quality time with [my] children.”

What is working in your community?

Community strength, identity, and connection

- Coming together for events and meetings: “Gathering together helps us to not lose our identities as people and as a community.”
- Identity as a community:
 - “We are fighters.”
 - “We are united.”

- Connection within families: “As a community, this keeps us well-balanced in our identity and keeps us humble and strong.”
- Clear visions of the future and a better life for families:
 - “We have come to fight for our dreams.”
 - “It’s hard to be away from our families who stay behind, but we do everything for them, and many of us are here to give our families a better life.”

Programs, services, and gatherings

- For children:
 - Being able to drop your child off at daycare
 - Children going to school and having more opportunities
 - Latino recreation programs for kids – some in Spanish, some in English
- Festivals that include everyone
- Neighbourhood meetings in the park
- Programs at Watari, like the women’s class, a chance to get to know each other and learn self-care, or the program where you can bring children, or food pantry programs

Work ethic

- Desire to work
- Being a hard worker, even though if given the choice, you would be at a different job

Actions that the government needs to take are...

More accessible and varied programs and services

- More participation in Latino recreation programs for kids, more awareness of these programs, more accessibility in these programs
- More groups for teens and youth in the community, offering different activities
- More programs like the existing ones at Watari (food pantry, women’s class), “that we could access without fear, in our situation of not having status.”

Better employment regulation and protections

- Fair pay and protections for work, especially in the case of accidents or exploitation
- Improved, realistic employment regulation: “Opening options to regulate our work situation. And that the requirements be realistic to our situation. Asking percentages of English that are not realistic; they’re just obstacles. We also have other practical work knowledge, which is what we are bringing. ...The truth is that there is a lot of classism and racism, and by not having papers (status), they pay us unfairly and we have to accept it because it is a necessity. One has dreams. We left a lot behind in our countries, and we arrived and realized it’s not like that. It is very difficult, but a lot of

times we get into debt over there to come here. So now, we have to work hard because we cannot go back empty-handed, out of pride and self-improvement. I tell myself I cannot go back alone and with nothing, I have to work hard. That is why the government should standardize our work options while we are here. That way, they will not exploit us at work and we would have job protection.”

More accessible opportunities for immigration status

- Recognition of the value people are bringing to Canada, through opportunities for status, studying, employment:
 - “As a community, we have a lot to offer Canada, and we want to find a way to provide our work here legally, but there have to be opportunities for our situations to be legalized so we can provide all we know with dignity. In my country, violence and insecurity is very strong. Now that I have a daughter, going back is unthinkable. I am not in a financial situation to obtain a study permit, nor can I study because I have to provide for my family. I only want to work hard, but how can I do that properly if there are not programs for that?”
 - “We all have lots of potential, and if Canada recognized that, we could provide valuable qualities to make it an even better country.”
 - “If the government opened, let’s say, annual opportunities, where they can value our work, our contributions here, and our résumés, we could contribute even more here.”