



What We Heard

Vanier (Ottawa), ON

Community Conversation Summary

November 2, 2022

CAMPAIGN **2000**
END CHILD & FAMILY POVERTY



Introduction

Below, we've summarized the main themes of the community conversation in the Vanier neighbourhood of Ottawa, Ontario with nine participants who are Inuit and have lived experience of poverty.

The conversation was hosted by the *Inuuqatigiit Centre for Inuit Children, Youth, and Families* 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 (March 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, the connections between colonialism, trauma, and poverty were emphasized. Participants noted that child apprehension, gender-based violence and intimate partner violence, discrimination in health care, and other challenges that the community faces are all linked to historical and ongoing colonial violence. The strength of individuals and the community were also made clear – even in unjust and difficult circumstances, people continue to laugh, share with each other, and support each other.

An ideal community has...

Some participants found it challenging to imagine their ideal community because it can be hard to meet immediate needs and even harder to envision anything outside of that: "It's hard to see anything past tonight. Because everything's short term and everything's immediate and as a single parent, you have to get the kids up, do their laundry, go bring them to school. Do this all alone."

Self-determination and sovereignty

- The ability to pass down culture and teachings: "So that we can start teaching each other or teach the next generation. This is where you come from. This is what happened. This is why our people are like this. Teach healthy relationships, and parenting skills, and all this."
- Food sovereignty
- Being able to speak your own language

Education

- Adult high school with childcare
 - "Adult high school with childcare would be a good solution, a good stepping stone that can get people out of poverty because it's hard to get a job without your high school"
- Every child going to school with enough sleep and a full belly

No systemic racism or discrimination:

- "An ideal world would be going to a store without having to be worried that I'm being followed because I'm Inuit"
- "Not being bullied because of my skin colour, my appearance"

Family

- To have parents and a family who are present: "To be wanted by my biological mother"
- Child protective services stops taking Inuit children away, and instead, tries to help families heal: "You can't replace a mother"

Freedom from abuse

- "Not being sexually assaulted, being raped."
- Support and healing from abuse, not having to feel like it's your fault

Having the time to grieve

- Because meeting basic, immediate needs can be so challenging, “my ideal world is having the time to grieve. Never mind having to pay for gas. Never mind having to pay for a phone bill.”

Mental wellness

- “No trauma or depression or anxiety”
- Community support for mental health: “Adequate, sufficient, mental health services that are made by us, for us.”

Living in Vanier as an Inuit family and experiences of poverty

Some participants felt that poverty can be a difficult or misleading word for their experiences: “Poverty is such a hard word. It's such a word that would make you vulnerable. But in terms of strength, I don't know of any other stronger person than the women that I meet with every day. I've never seen such strength. And they don't define it as strength. They just see it as living.”

Others used the word poverty throughout, and we have also used it in this summary, but wanted to note the differing perspectives on the term.

Participants began the discussion by sharing the various reasons they had moved to Vanier from their home communities in the north.

- It was a difficult choice for many to leave: “I love the north. It's hard... I love my community. I love the isolation. I love that togetherness.”
- Reasons for moving included: gender-based violence and intimate partner abuse; homelessness; health care, mental health care, and treatment for drugs or alcohol; affordability; family in Ottawa; leaving lateral violence (violence within community); school; violence, abuse, and suicide feeling normalized; perpetrators of violence/abuse not being held accountable

Other themes that emerged for this topic:

Child apprehension

- Cycles of poverty, child apprehension, family disconnection, and trauma
- “He had to give up my grandson to CAS because of financial problems. He couldn't keep up with the food and the rent. It became overwhelming for him. So he gave him up. And now he's having trouble with connecting with his son.”
- “That's what these children's aid societies, they're not seeing. Inuit have a different view of family, like the bond, the closeness. Even our family structures are different. A lot of our children have been taken away and apprehended by CAS. And maybe so that the

biological family might have been drinking or what have you. But they don't have that mentality of keeping the family together the way Inuit do."

Being a single parent

- Single income people not receiving child support from the people that left them
- Can lead to food insecurity: "It leaves mothers to eat one meal a day. They feed their kids first. And they're left with crumbs. And they're the ones that are supposed to be holding the house down with very little nutrition."
- Walking eight trips a day as a single mother to take children to school

Intergenerational trauma of colonialism

- Poverty linked to the trauma of residential schools: "I don't mean poverty in a sense of wanting money. Money does nothing. It doesn't fix the trauma that's happened to us. I would have loved to have had an apology from my parents, for not being parents. But it's not their fault. They're survivors of the residential school. I remember thinking time and time again, all I want is my parents to say I love you. But they couldn't, because they never witnessed love. They were stripped of that when they were taken from their parents and brought to residential school. So when we're talking about poverty, this is what I mean."
- Colonization directly led to current conditions: "Before all the colonization, we were poor. But we were a community. We were in harmony with one another, working together, loving each other, and making sure that we're safe. None of that is there today."
- Disconnection from culture: "It's cultural poverty. I'm deprived of my shamanism. I'm deprived of my language literacy. I'm deprived the traditional knowledge that should have been brought down to me from my parents, but they weren't there, they were conditioned to be Christian. So they lost their traditional values."
- Affects future generations: "The other spiritual poverty that I see is not having the tools to provide the generations ahead of me, to continue. To get up to go to work. To get up to go to school. To get up to eat. The root of all poverty is this."

Violence and abuse

- Disconnect from culture and traditions, trauma of colonialism, can lead to violence, and a cycle of poverty and further family separation
 - "There's a lot of violence. And when there's violence there's separation, and if there's fleeing, they have to leave their partner and they lose their financial situation. So when you rob somebody of their culture and their identity, you're stripping away financial security. You're stripping away traditional knowledge, you're stripping away the ability to take what keeps you going."

- Intimate partner abuse and gender-based violence can lead to being a single parent, needing to make difficult choices about work and family
 - “Because I was leaving abuse, I had to leave everything. It was either choose my life with my children or just lose my life with my children and stay with the job. Breaks my heart every day I can't spoil them. Right now we live with my mother because I'm tired of being at the shelters. I just want a stable life for my children.”
- Intimate partner abuse leading to health concerns, affecting employment opportunities:
 - “That's why I do sewing at home. I can't sit long because of my back from abuse. I can't sit long or stand long.”

Mental health, suicide, and addiction

- Suicide is too common in the community
 - “Our young children or youth, their spiritual poverty is having to grieve over suicide. Every weekend there's a suicide.”
 - “We're losing our people who are supposed to be our knowledge keepers to suicide, drugs, and alcohol.”
- Limited options for culturally specific treatment for drugs/alcohol
- Cycles of substance abuse: “I've been living here for 10 years. And I grew up seeing drunks and then I became one. Now I have no choice but to raise my kids here. And all they see is drunks too.”

Health care

- Poverty, abuse, and trauma leading to many physical health issues
- Discrimination leading to being misdiagnosed
- Discrimination in the health care system means you have to prepare beforehand: “To visit the doctor, or if I have to go to the hospital, or one of my children have to go to hospital, then it's a huge preparation for me. I literally have to prepare, mentally prepare myself. OK, if this is said to me, make sure you say something back. Make sure you stand up for your rights. Make sure you know your rights.”
- Inuit often need to travel long distances to access health care
 - “I'm just here for a medical condition and then I'm going back to Thunder Bay, once I've done all my medical appointments, for getting mental health care. That's where I found it.”

Racism and discrimination

- From the government: “That's how the government has set it up. It adds to the poverty of Inuit, all Indigenous people, because there's just so much systemic racism,

embedded in everything in this country. And it affects how we can make money, our confidence levels. How we get treated.”

- Housing discrimination in particular – different treatment trying to view a rental unit when you’re visibly Inuit
- “Constant societal stigma”
- Stereotypes of alcoholism
- Being followed by security in stores – makes it hard to have confidence even going to the store to buy food
- Misconceptions about Indigenous people getting things for free
- Hard choice to have to leave the north but face discrimination in the south: “We have nowhere to reach out to, especially in the north. And then when we come down here, you go to the doctor, and they just assume you're trying to get drugs. What do you choose? You choose no services or these kinds of services? And then you're still stuck.”

Living in Vanier

- Stigma and judgment from other people for living in Vanier: “Just because I'm from Vanier, doesn't mean I'm broke, or I'm dirty, but that's where a lot of people are at in their head.”
- Gentrification in the neighbourhood is making rent higher and deepening poverty
- Connected to systemic inequities, wealth disparities, child apprehension, lack of government accountability: “We’re like this for a reason. They made us like this. They want us to be like this. They've made the system so that we're at the bottom. Nobody's being held accountable. The rich people, they don't care that poor kids are hungry or poor kids see their parents drunk and fighting, taking drugs up their nose every night. They don't care. They just take the kid and that’s it.”

Housing and homelessness

- Housing insecurity is faced by many community members
- Rent is very expensive, even rent based on income
- Discrimination when viewing places to rent: “I have to pretend to be somebody I'm not, just so that they won’t look at me differently or slam the door in my face”
- When moving from the north, women come with their children, but there’s no shelter or adequate supports for them, so “they end up in the streets, no place to go. And their kids are taken away.”

Education and work

- Low graduation rate plays a role in poverty in the community – without a high school diploma, it’s hard to get a job

- Work in care sector is undervalued and traumatizing: “I used to work in the vulnerable sector. I left because it was affecting my mental health and my food security. There were times where I would hear about violence, and it would make me sick [enough] that I would not want to eat. It would affect my ability to sleep.”

Feeling like there’s not enough to go around due to historic and ongoing trauma of colonization

- Two participants linked the violence and trauma of colonization, and the lack of adequate support or reparations from government, to the feeling that there aren’t enough resources for Inuit compared to new immigrants:
 - “[The government] literally tried to kill us with blankets. They were trying to wipe us out. And they don't care about us. There's no empathy for Inuit. They call themselves diverse. The immigrants, they get better stuff than us. They get more pay. And they just move to Canada. And their rents are getting paid. They're education, getting paid. Everything's getting paid. And they're living in condos. All because [the government is] trying to prove how diverse and caring of a country they are. And they're giving millions of dollars. ... It's at our cost.”

What is working in your community?

Participants emphasized the strengths of the community and the people within it, making sure to prioritize this topic before the end of the conversation.

Humour, sharing, creativity, resilience

- Sharing with community: “Sharing your community catch, caring enough to share that.”
- “We laugh a lot, we share stories, we share foods, we share moments like this.”
- Creativity and resilience with budgeting and food, especially by single parents

Skills and services

- Passing down skills to children: “My daughter, I really like how she teaches my grandson stuff, the life skills.”
- Centres like Inuuqatigiit – services run by Inuit for Inuit

Strength as a people

- “It wasn't that long ago that Inuit society was colonised. And to be able to not even 100 years ago, be living on the land, go through this colonisation, and then maybe 30 years later, they just said, ‘No, we're not having this.’ And that's how Nunavut was created and ITK [Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami] and all these places. Because a few strong Inuit voices stood up and said no. ... It's because of that resilience that comes from way back then

where they had to survive in harsh environments and be resourceful and turn nothing into something.”

- “The biggest strength I think is, they tried to kill us, but they failed. I’m so thankful they failed. They tried to kill the Inuk in us and they failed.”

Actions that the government needs to take are...

Prioritize accessible, efficient, and culturally relevant health care

- More accessible health care systems for Inuit so people don’t have to travel so far
- Mental health services
 - More of an Inuit way of approaching mental health, with elders
 - Certify Inuit as mental health professionals
 - “Our trauma is unique. Even when I talk to counsellors, they don’t know how to support me. Because they don’t know what it’s like to come out of colonisation. They don’t know that. But our elders do. The government needs to recognise our inner healing and the way we heal and certify that.”
- More treatment centres for drug/alcohol addiction for Inuit: “Because people get turned away... I ended up having to go to Thunder Bay”

Support and fund Inuit approaches to harm and accountability

- Return to traditional approaches: “What they used to do is, if a person was not changing, the elder and a young person would talk to the person whose causing problems. If there was no change, they would add more, like a committee, and talk to them. And if there was no further change, they would assign an elder and send that person out on the land all by themselves with the elder until the elder saw that there was a real heart change. Not just a momentary change but an inward change. And then they would integrate them back into society. Because they didn’t have jails then, they would bring them out of the camps and have that alone time with them, with their elder.”

Talk to and be truly accountable to people with lived experience

- “Even if we say something, they’re not going to listen.”

Better services and supports

- Support with getting identification documents
- Adult education and childcare in Nunavut
- Social events: square dances, feasts, games, getting together
- Shelter for Inuit women and their children in Ottawa

Equity, representation, and no discrimination

- Inuit representation at high levels of government
- Gender equality in household tasks: “Teach our men that it's OK to cook. That it's OK to sew. Because once they leave the nest, they don't have the life skills.”
- Reduce stigma, discrimination, stereotyping through more education
- Inuit-run churches, schools, daycares, and other services