



# Whitehorse, YK Community Conversation Summary

October 19 & 20, 2022

CAMPAIGN **2000**  
END CHILD & FAMILY POVERTY

  
**YAPC** Yukon Anti-Poverty  
COALITION  
anti-pauvreté du Yukon

## Introduction

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Below, we've summarized the main themes of the two conversations in Whitehorse, Yukon with fourteen total participants who live in Whitehorse and have lived experience of poverty.

The conversations were hosted by the *Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition (YAPC)* and *Voices Influencing Change* in partnership with *Campaign 2000: End Child and Family Poverty*.

The first conversation engaged nine people from YAPC's *Voices Influencing Change* program, and the second engaged five additional community members. All participants lived in Whitehorse and had lived experience of poverty. This summary reflects the content of both conversations.

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 (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, the impact of colonialism emerged as a key theme. From ending discrimination in the health care system to addressing the high costs of hunting and fishing, ensuring justice and equity for First Nations in Whitehorse needs to be recognized as an urgent priority.

Valuing and acting on the knowledge of people with lived and living expertise of poverty also rose as a key theme. We honour the knowledge that was shared with us during this conversation.

## A thriving community has...

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*Note: We asked participants what their visions of a community with no poverty would be, but heard from some participants that using the term 'poverty' can itself be triggering or stigmatizing. The language of 'thriving community' is used here instead, though some answers still reflect the original question about poverty.*

### Basic needs fulfilled

- Running water, shelter, heat, food, lights, clothing: “The key elements for someone to feel human.”
- Good physical and mental health and access to healthcare
- Education
- Good hygiene
- Safe accommodation, particularly for children
- Access to a vehicle/transportation

### People who can think about thriving, not just surviving

- One participant noted that the first answers for what no poverty looks like mostly had to do with basic needs, emphasizing that people have had to just think about how to survive, but expressing a desire to move beyond that and have the resources to think about healing and bigger change.

### Justice and equity for First Nations

- Participants noted that in the past, First Nations had no poverty, but colonial policies created it
  - “We had all of that. We had freedom, the freedom to hunt. We had access to food, we had access to water. We had the ceremony, we had a song and dance, and we were there for each other. The love and the kindness, the roles that everyone played a part in. And all of that was taken away by the first colonial policies. Treaties, agreements, everything was signed as a partnership to move forward. And then those agreements weren’t honoured.”
- No poverty would look like being able to live like that again, specifically having:
  - Better access to hunting supplies and country food
  - Fair and equitable pay for resources that were taken from First Nations’ lands
  - Access to and knowledge of First Nations languages and traditions
  - Everyone should have their own land

### Community and relationships

- Healing with community

- Equality within community
- A healthy community where people help each other and build good relationships
- Activities for younger generations, like hockey or First Nations traditional artwork and sewing

### Freedom

- For people to pursue their dreams and purpose
- For people to pursue the arts and education – there would be no need for police, judges, lawyers – instead people would be able to be teachers and artists
- Ability to say yes to invitations from friends, ability to eat at a restaurant

### Ability to be positive

- Happiness, kindness, and caring for others
- No stigma
- Humour and laughter: “Humour is healing”
- Everybody has hope

### Support and equity for people who are marginalized

- Support for treatment (for alcohol and drug use) for everyone who needs it, especially teenagers, teenage couples, and families
- Housing for everyone including people who use drugs
  - No stigma or discrimination in accessing housing
- Equality in employment
  - Programs for newcomers/immigrants to become employed
  - No stigma or discrimination in hiring or employment
- No child abuse

## Living in Whitehorse and experiences of poverty

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### As First Nations

- Colonial policies created conditions of poverty for First Nations: the agreements and treaties weren’t honoured, and still aren’t being honoured
- Residential schools
  - In the past, before residential schools or having to move into town, poverty was there and it was tough, but people helped each other and were happier
  - “We had no choice but to go to a residential school just so my parents could survive. And if we didn’t do, we were totally screwed. And [before that,] living out of town, poverty was there, but we never had such hard times.”

- It is expensive and hard to access things that rightfully/traditionally belong to First Nations
  - Hunting/fishing
    - Expensive to get hunting materials and even a licence in certain areas: “I had to save all summer to be able to go hunting just to afford shells, an axe, food and gas to get the meat that I'm used to living on.”
    - “You’ve got to pay to even hunt. That’s not right, just to get that taste of food that we were grown and raised on.”
    - Expensive to get fishing materials (and a fishing licence if you don’t have your status)
    - “We got to buy our own fish from our own land.”
  - Language: “Residential schools took it away. You have to pay to learn it now. You have to pay for all your rights back.”
  - Land – you can’t just build something on your own traditional land
- Racism and stigma in the health care system
  - Having to look or dress a certain way just to get decent health care: “When I go to the hospital I get in a suit and a tie... If I weren't in there like this, I'd be four, six hours, all day long.”
  - This affects work opportunities:
    - “I want my health back. So how can I work? How do I make money to live? Because doctors don't care. I need to live. I have dreams that I can't fulfil because of my health issues. Because I can't work the way I want to work. I can't move the way I want to. That's right there, poverty.”
- Challenges living both on and off First Nations’ land:
  - Bands don’t give land claim money to people who are in the band but not living on reserve
  - Needing to move to Whitehorse due to various challenges of living on reserve, e.g. leaving abuse, family situations, employment, health care

### Poverty affects every part of you

- Physical, mental, spiritual health: “You get robbed, or beat up, or you’ve got nowhere to sleep, nowhere to stay. Living in poverty affects your mind, body and spirit.”
- Hard to get out of: “It’s disheartening and it’s tough”
- Not knowing what or how you’re going to eat or sleep

### Stigma, discrimination, and violence

- Being looked down on and discriminated against for living in poverty
- Not being able to do things because you can’t afford it or feel like you aren’t allowed to do it

- Stigma/discrimination against people of colour and immigrants experiencing poverty
  - Higher education costs for international students
  - Job discrimination and stereotyping
- Violence against women
  - Can lead to needing to move out of the community/First Nation you're from
  - Can lead to homelessness

### Limited/delayed access to basic resources

- Water: "It wasn't that long ago I was cutting holes in the ice and getting five gallon buckets of water. And that was your cooking water, your washing water, your coffee water, your tea water [...] when you look at life on the outside, when they had washing machines, they had running water."
- Lack of transportation between communities if you don't have a vehicle
- High cost of food

### Climate change

- Affecting food supply: "There was no salmon this year. So it's going to affect the harvesting, the seasons and that. It's going to get hotter for us."

### Employment

- Job-seeking support can be inaccessible
- Stigma and discrimination affect hiring and employment
- Lived experience isn't valued as a qualification: "I'm a man with lived experience. With my lived experience, the government will not hire me. Because I do not meet any requirements."

### Difficult to find housing

- No-cause evictions are major issue and highly discriminatory
- Long waiting lists for affordable housing or supportive housing
- Discrimination in the shelters

### Income and savings

- Income assistance isn't enough to cover cost of living
- No savings: "Everybody in this room doesn't even have a savings account. It doesn't exist for people in poverty. It does not exist. Because we live from month to month, check to check, and we have for all our lives."

### Drug use

- Many overdose deaths in the community

- Challenges with drug and alcohol addiction and limited availability of treatment/supports

## What is working in your community?

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### The land, air, and water

- Clean air and water in particular
- “The medicine, the teas, the berries, the fish, the water, the real freshwater.”
- “This air, this water, the land, the trees, our boreal forest.”
- Land offers respite and healing from stresses of living in poverty and supporting others day to day

### Groups like Voices Influencing Change

- Being able to talk about your experience, knowing your experience and knowledge is making a difference
  - “We’ve helped 26 people that come from homeless[ness], to put a roof over their head, to fix their addiction, to help them move forward in life. And be able to tell their story, and that story is part of the healing.”
- Trusted community leaders who are often called to respond to crisis

### Sharing with community

- Sharing food and taking care of everyone in the community, especially the elders
  - “Every family in that community got fish. Because if someone did good there was that sharing, there was that building.”
- Living in good relationship: “We don’t have a lot, but we share what we have. And it goes back to that building relationships and living in community. And I see even here somebody needs something somehow, we make sure that you get it.”

### Resilience

- Surviving in harsh or challenging conditions: “I think that we’re real survivors here.”
- Staying sober and going to counselling
- Culturally relevant counselling – important for healing from trauma, especially for First Nations

## **Actions that the government needs to take are...**

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### **Listen to people with lived and living expertise and act on their recommendations**

- Have conversations with everyone involved: “The mayor, all the people from the chiefs, the youth, the elders, everybody needs to be a part of this conversation.”
- Take action and set achievable goals: “We not only want to be heard, but we also want to see action. Because action is bigger than words.”
- Government should include Voices Influencing Change and people with lived expertise more in their meetings, work, and decision-making

### **Address trauma in all work towards ending poverty**

- Addressing trauma by creating new equitable systems, not working within existing colonial systems
  - “If we want change, we have to deal with the pain. It has to have a new beginning, with new boundaries, with new laws, that is equal to all people. Not just certain people. Fixing the trauma is by understanding with meaning.”
- Healing from trauma as integral to anti-poverty work
  - “Looking at the trauma, feeling the trauma, understanding the trauma, healing from the trauma, and moving forward without no trauma. A vision, not about no poverty but no trauma. That line of poverty shouldn't even exist.”

### **Listen to First Nations people’s recommendations for First Nations governance**

- Some of these recommendations from First Nations conversation participants included:
  - Community leaders and First Nations governments should prioritize core values as First Nations people – work together, pass down traditions, beliefs, and culture, take care of elders as community
  - Financial transparency in First Nations governments and equitable payments, supports, and services for all band members
  - Improved accountability for First Nations governments
  - End eviction from band housing for people who aren’t technically part of band
  - Support for First Nations people living in Whitehorse, not on their First Nation
    - “I’m stuck in the middle here, where if I want to get housing, I got to go live there, right? And I don’t want to live there. Because I lived there when I was a kid.”
  - More social gatherings with the band and elders



## Address racism and stigma, especially in the healthcare system

- Better training and education: “They need to re-teach how we are here, with our First Nations or Indigenous community. Number one is respect. Respect individuals as a human and treat each other equal. The stigma and the racism here is beyond belief.”

## Increase disability benefits, social assistance, and minimum wage so they reflect a decent standard of living

- Living on disability benefits or social assistance is extremely challenging or impossible:
  - “I for sure can't live one month off of that. Not at these prices in the Yukon. And yet though, how is that possible, if you're on disability that you are less than.”
  - “I just find it hard to live. People on social assistance find it hard to live.”
- Address wealth disparities: “Banks and food chains are raking in record profits. And we can't afford to buy food.”

## Improve health care

- Address racism and stigma
- More doctors and nurses to address the shortage – make education more affordable and accessible
- Treatment and aftercare for addictions
  - More support and programming from the friendship centres
  - Supports based on what people tell you they need
- Holistic treatment for health, mental health, and social services
- More access to culturally relevant counselling

## Improve services and supports

- Prioritize building relationships of trust with community members
- Coordination and prioritization between organizations
  - “Collaborate, who's doing what? What's the most needed to get a home? What's the most needed to get the groceries? What's most needed to get gas?”
- Make funding applications more accessible
  - Remove barriers for community members applying for funding
    - “There's a channel to follow. It's their channel. And by the Lord I'm not allowed to change that channel. I have to stay within their lines that they make. Because if I break one, my funding is gone.”
  - Offer education for writing these applications
- Improve/diversify food available at the food banks: more meat, more dairy, more fresh food
- Increase access to housing and shelter

- More low cost, supportive housing should be built for youth, families, single people, people who use drugs
- Create a shelter for couples: “They still have some people living in tents up here. They can’t find a place and they’re a couple and they can’t go to the shelter and have a place of their own, so they live in a tent just to be together.”
- Create a men’s shelter
- Education and employment needs
  - More job programs, especially programs for immigrants to become employed
  - More out on the land opportunities
  - Ensure courses aren’t all online – not accessible/effective for all, especially considering high cost of WiFi
- Services and supports for men
  - Create a men’s centre or friendship centre: a place to wash clothes, get a hot meal, use computers, get bus tickets, fax machine, donation box, get lunch to go
- Supports for women experiencing violence/abuse
- Provide free cell phones for women and youth
- Supports for youth
  - Lower insurance
  - Free transportation at night
  - Funding to go back to school, do activities and games, go on trips
- Provide items/support based on people’s actual wants and needs
  - “Ask the people at the food bank, what do they want to eat? Or ask the people on the streets, what do they want for their treatment? What do they need to get off their addictions? Or what do they need for food for their family?”