



Winnipeg, MB

Community Conversation Summary

August 2 & October 24, 2022

CAMPAIGN 2000
END CHILD & FAMILY POVERTY



 **SOCIAL PLANNING COUNCIL of WINNIPEG**
A sustainable community that is caring, just and equitable

 **HARVEST**

Introduction

Below, we've summarized the main themes of the in-person conversation in Winnipeg, Manitoba with 6 participants, and virtual conversation with 4 participants, all age 18-35, who experienced the child welfare system and have lived experience of poverty.

These conversations were hosted by *Voices: Manitoba's Youth in Care Network* and the *Social Planning Council of Winnipeg*, in partnership with *Campaign 2000: End Child and Family Poverty*.

This summary is in three 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 (January 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 way that the child welfare system and poverty are linked together, have impacts across generations, and intersect with other marginalized identities and experiences of harm were clear themes of the discussion.

These experiences and systems are part of cycles that are difficult to break. The need for more and better supports to interrupt these cycles, as well as better accountability for those in power, were discussed as key action items.

A community with no poverty has...

Multiple adult supports for children/youth in care and ageing out of care

- Knowing you have someone you can trust: someone to call at any hour for seemingly small or large challenges
 - “I call her at nine o'clock at night, 'I'm making chilli in my crock pot overnight. How many bay leaves do I add?' [Laughs] 'This is an emergency.' But we all need that person, right.”
- Automatic adult support when someone comes out of care
 - “I was ageing out of care and I needed all of the support with rides and helping move furniture and I needed to pay bills and [the supportive adult] was just like, 'I'll do it. I'll do it. I'll do it.' Why doesn't every kid have this person?”
- Peer support
 - “Having other former youth in care people who were allies, who would come and just be present for your kid's birthday.”
- All kinds of support: A buddy, an aunty, a babysitter
- Mentors: Having people there to cheer you on

Basic needs covered for all

- Bills paid – utilities as well as entertainment
- Universal basic income
 - “Just being able to live your life without having to work constantly and break your back”
- Good medical care for kids in care
- Food on the table, food in the cupboards

Equal access to services and supports

- Entertainment, physical activity, green spaces, arts and culture
 - “When I was in foster homes, everything was white and too clean, it was just clinical, it was structured, it was programmed. So therapeutic green spaces with outdoor yoga, fitness, dance, adult sports, and recreation.”
- Safety and cleanliness in those spaces, and free/affordable childcare to improve access to those programs or spaces
- Supports to go to school or get career training
- Accessible childcare and transportation
- Access to different types of therapy
- Organizations that will support you at any age, recognizing that ageing out of the child welfare system has long-lasting impacts

- “Somewhere you can go, no matter what age you are – none of this youth ends at twenty-nine or thirty.”

Supports and healing for youth who were in care who are now parents

- Increased supports available to allow people to break the cycles of intergenerational trauma, poverty, and harm
- Financial supports
- Parents who have healed so their kids can have a better life
- Parents who can have their own kids in their care
- Parents being able to spend more time with their kids

Housing

- Safe and supportive housing
- Knowing where your home is at all times

Connection, culture, community support

- A community with no poverty would be loving and peaceful
 - “[A community with no poverty] would be awesome. [Laughs] It would be great, it would be a loving community. Like they say, Canada is supposed to be a peace country; well, with that poverty gone, it would be a peace country. A really peaceful country.”
- It would be supportive of everyone without judgment – no need to compare self to others or compete with them
 - “If I have something and you don’t have it, why wouldn’t I share that with you? I don’t care if I work today and you work tomorrow, and then I work for the next 10 days because you’re sick.”
- Everyone would help each other, get along, show empathy
- Being able to do what you love for work
- Access to your own culture and food

Absence of harm

- Less crime, drugs, alcohol, violence, conflict, stress
 - “People wouldn’t be dying in the streets”
- Government action and change when issues arise

Being in care impacts experiences of poverty in these ways...

Lack of trusted and supportive adults

- Adult supports who are just there because it's their job, and only when you're in care:
 - "I find when kids are in care, they only really have one support that's not really there ever, and then the adult supports [...] it's just a job to them, it's not really their passion to be working with this kid for the rest of their eight years that they're in care."
 - "Life after care feels like you're kind of forgotten. Like your file is closed and it just goes to the archives and no one opens it anymore."
- Leading to spending time in riskier environments to be around people
- Leading to strategically engaging in riskier behaviour to fulfill needs
- Not having a co-signer for a home or a car – leading to unsafe housing, homelessness, difficulty with employment
 - "I've never been homeless, but I was at risk a few times, because I didn't have a co-signer."
- Having to advocate for yourself and navigate systems and bureaucracy alone
 - "The power of paper"

Abuse and trauma in childhood

- Intersects with many other experiences of harm and lasts across generations
 - Intergenerational trauma of colonialism, residential schools, Sixties Scoop, Millennium Scoop: "A huge part to do with poverty is the loss of culture."
- Having to grow up too fast: "We don't have a choice, it's like survival mode – the first thing in our life happens, it's a trauma response. And so kicking us out at 18 with no training, no guidance isn't fair, especially since we are still kids in care."
- Coping strategies can lead to other challenges:
 - Can result in using drugs to numb pain, then not having enough money, might not be able to pay for food or support children, might lead to homelessness or incarceration
 - "Drugs were taking more of my pain away than anything, and that's what I went to. But it just made it ten times worse. And now that I'm actually off of it, I've actually got a clear mind, more things to think about for the kids and get them whatever they need. Instead of me getting money in my hand and go spending it on drugs, if I get money in my hand, go buy food for the kids and what not."
- Can result in mental health issues and suicidality

Surveillance/monitoring from CFS

- Increased monitoring because you have been in care can lead to your own kids being in care
 - “I ended up getting pregnant, which often happens with our young people when there isn’t a sense of family or community. Then my worker sent an email to Child and Family Services in Manitoba stating that there was no way I could ever parent – like they were just out against me because of my history of being in care and being abused.”
- Having the constant fear of doing one thing wrong and your kids being taken away

Discrimination from people with more power

- Especially when combined with other intersections (specifically named: being First Nations, having disabilities, having learning disabilities, being trans), leading to further challenges and marginalization
- Discrimination from landlords leading to housing insecurity
 - “With the landlords, you get punished for being a youth in care, you get punished for being in poverty.”

Ageing out of care

- Not shown how to budget or set yourself up sustainably with the money they give
 - Can lead to housing instability or homelessness
 - Can lead to not having money for driving lessons, not being able to get licence (which could help with getting out of poverty), might result in engaging in riskier behaviour to get practice in someone else’s car, especially if you don’t have other trusted adults around
- Learned reliance on systems: “I lived in group homes, group care, group, group, group and then they expected me to live on my own, right, and then they wondered why I crashed.”

Housing instability

- Moving from place to place often, in care and after ageing out. When asked about experience of poverty and ageing out, participants often narrated progression of housing situation – this demonstrated how much of a role housing plays in the experience of ageing out of care
 - Can interrupt education, which continues to impact life: “I’ve tried to go back to school but I can’t just live on part-time hours because it doesn’t cover my basic needs. I couldn’t buy food, I could barely pay my rent, I was struggling and then on top of it trying to keep my head above water and try to take on school was another thing. So I’m sitting here at 32 still not being able to find a proper job.”

- Having to find a place really quickly after ageing out of care
- Staying in hotels at a young age, often unsupervised
 - “I think I bounced around five hotels – before they put me in a home. Once I was in a home, I didn’t get to go to school because I was only there for three months.”
- Incarceration as part of this cycle too

Actions that the government needs to take are...

Implementing broader supports with fewer restrictions for youth in care and people who have aged out of care

- Multiple adult supports
 - Funding for organizations to provide those adult supports
 - Specific recommendations for those supports: “At least five salaries for an organization. So we can look at five \$40,000 salaries, for an organization, because that’s usually the starting point for each social worker. But having those adult supports for the specific regions for First Nations, LGBTQ worker, an outreach worker, someone who deals with finances and advocacy on a professional level, and then their director.”
 - Variety of supports that are widely communicated: Life skills, taxes, credit, bills, budgeting, finding apartments, food access, counselling
 - More support specifically in the transition out of care, including flexibility on when this happens
- Support for children in care with disabilities
- Affordable housing for youth ageing out of care and adults who are former youth in care

Better oversight/accountability

- For authorities – should have an independent unit that reports on CFS
- For foster parents, especially oversight for the money given to them
- Background checks on staff and people working with kids in CFS (not just child abuse check, but interviews that get into their character, goals, and bigger picture)
- Checks and balances for landlords

Better training for staff working with youth in care/ageing out of care

- Inclusivity and diversity training, especially for neurodiversity and disability inclusion
- Trauma-informed care for everyone who works with people (social workers, police, etc.)

More resources for organizations/staff working in this field

- Job security for social work/social service work/CFS workers (full time permanent, salaried, benefits, living wage at minimum) in order to have stability for the youth they support

Other policy changes

- More accessible benefits for low income families who don't fit into traditional family/household structure
- More rent controls
- Increase minimum wage and welfare rates