

SOFI  
Qualitative Data  
Analysis Report

January 2022

## Introduction

The Securing Our Future Initiative hosted ten focus groups in September 2021 to glean qualitative information directly from families experiencing poverty on their thoughts regarding poverty and employment. The goal of the focus groups was to better understand what families experiencing poverty think is important in terms of obtaining employment that will pay their bills. Seventy-five community members and agency staff members provide 399 distinct responses to five focus group questions. Based on the conversations, vocational training, job pay, access to services, childcare, racism, and transportation all significantly impact employment and poverty. In addition to informing the facilitators on what is preventing them from becoming economically self-sufficient, the participants provided feedback on what would be useful for them in terms of pulling themselves from poverty. Community members and agency staff seemed to have differing opinions on what may impact families experiencing poverty; a few agency representatives indicated that poverty is caused by the attitude or mindset of the person experiencing poverty whereas families experiencing poverty indicate that poverty is caused by systemic barriers they face. It is recommended that the Community Services Department fund programs that provide vocational training opportunities and car repair funding.

## Methodology

In September of 2021, the Securing Our Future Initiative facilitated ten focus groups virtually. The Securing Our Future Program Evaluator and the Strategic Planning and Research and Evaluation Team Planner I trained the facilitators. The facilitators were volunteers from the Citizens Advisory Committee on Health and Human Services, Community Services Department staff, and the Securing Our Future Initiative workgroup.

The Securing Our Future Program Evaluator and Strategic Planning and Research and Evaluation Team Planner I developed the agenda and focus group questions. The questions were as follows:

1. Please introduce yourself and tell a brief story about your experiences with poverty.
2. What do you think is the root cause of poverty in your community?
3. What do you believe is preventing you from obtaining a job that will pay your bills?
4. What resources do you think you believe you need from the community in order to obtain a job that will pay your bills?
5. What, if anything, do you have to add to the conversation tonight?

The conversations were an hour and a half in length and facilitators ensured all five questions were answered by anyone in the focus group that wished to respond. Facilitators were trained to ask follow up questions to glean more detailed information on the responses. For example, if a participant said they needed vocational training to gain a better paying job, the facilitator was trained to ask what types of vocational training the participant thinks they need. This method ensured detailed feedback was provided on all questions.

Each focus group was recorded for the purposes of analysis. The analysis followed a strict methodology:

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Each conversation was transcribed using Google Transcription. The Securing Our Future Program Evaluator, then re-listened to each focus group to correct any errors made by Google Transcription.

Once the transcriptions were complete, the Program Evaluator read through the transcriptions to find themes. Upon identification of the themes, the Program Evaluator entered all themes into a spreadsheet and conducted an =countif formula to identify how many time the themes were mentioned. Data was uploaded to Tableau® to create two visualizations to clearly demonstrate the data. Once the data visualizations were created, the Program Evaluator read the transcriptions again to select a handful of quotes that are related to the top six themes.

**Data**

Seventy-five community members and agency staff participated in the ten focus groups. From the seventy-five participants through the ten focus groups, we received 399 distinct responses from all five questions. The response counts are as follows:

Question #1: 106 responses

Questions #2: 110 responses

Figure 2

Question #3: 83 responses

Question #4: 85 responses

Question #5: 15 responses

From the 399 responses, thirty-one codes were identified.

The results are as follows:

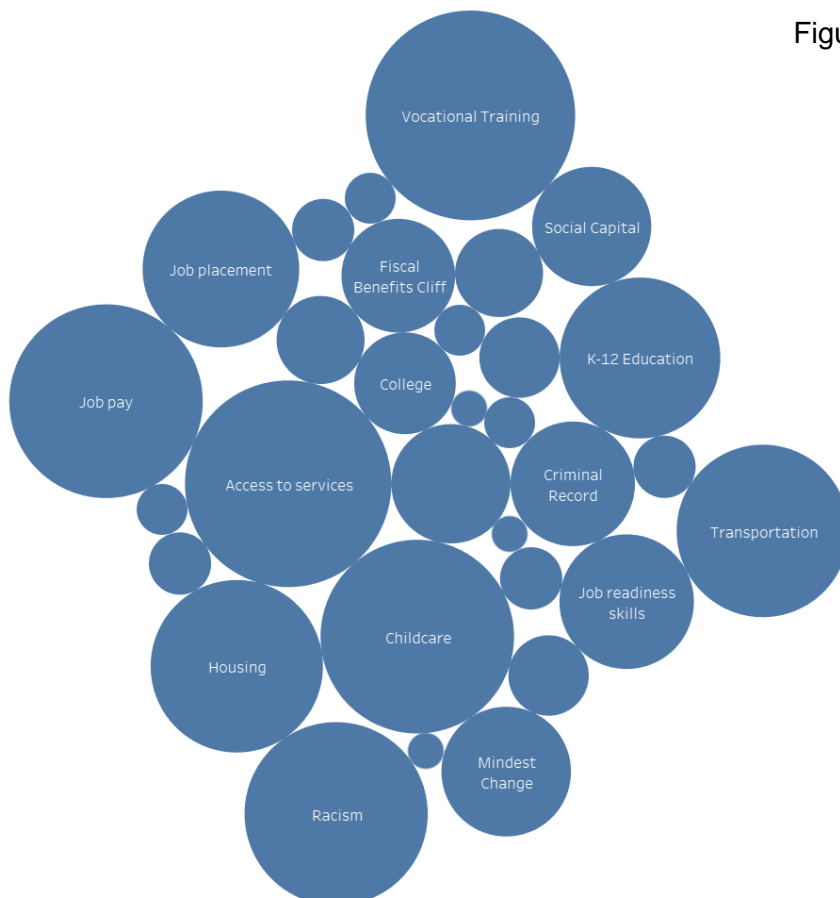


Figure 1

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Bar Graph of Issues

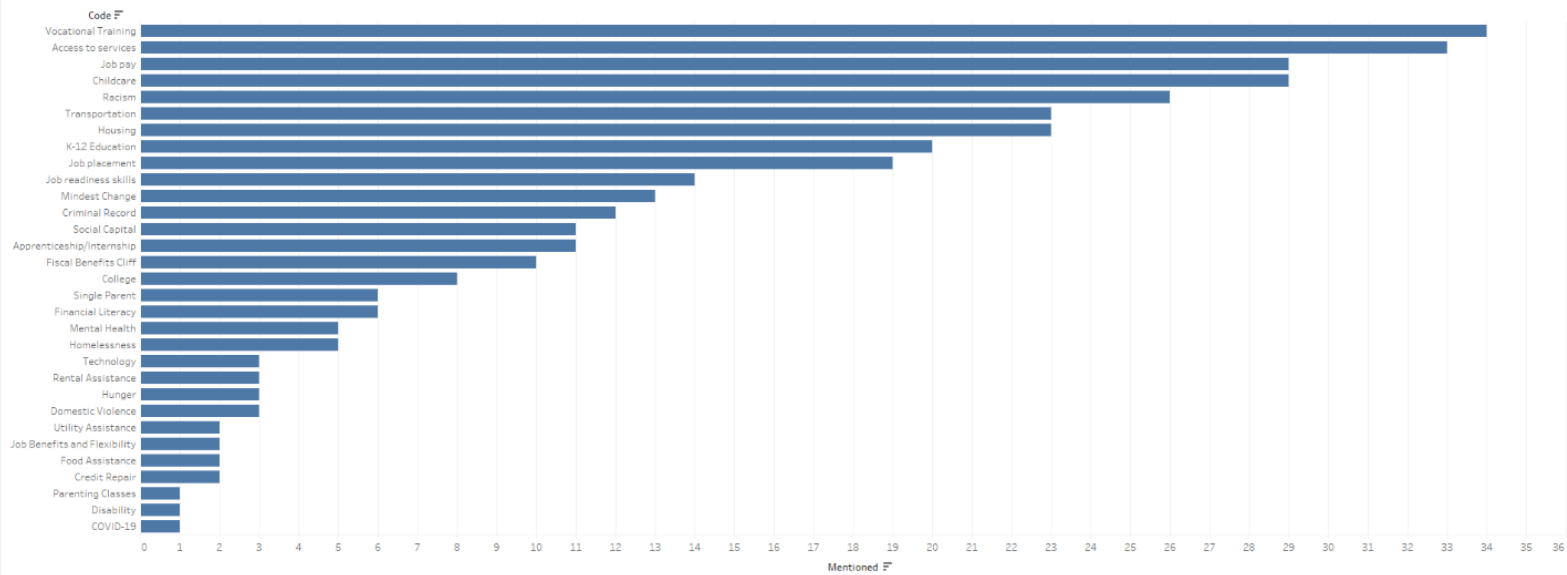


Figure 2

## Analysis

Vocational Training, Job Pay, Access to Services, Childcare, Racism, and Transportation all significantly impact employment and poverty. COVID-19, disabilities, and credit scores were least impactful on employment and poverty. Utility assistance and rental assistance were not of significant importance to the population attending the focus groups.

The root causes of poverty and needs/gaps were mirror images of one another and so they were analyzed together. For example, some participants indicated that a lack of vocational training was a root cause of poverty that is preventing them from obtaining a job to pay their bills (question #1 and #2), and vocational training was a service they needed from the community (question #3).

Major points from the focus groups by theme are below:

### Vocational Training:

*“Lack of trade programs in high school...not everyone wants to go to college.”*

*“Don’t just force college.” | “Many people are not interested in traditional degrees”*

*“Not equipping people for the jobs that are available today and tomorrow.”*

### Job Pay:

*“A single person needs \$45,000-\$50,000 a year just to make ends meet.”*

*“Most people need to work more than one job.”*

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*“Most high paying jobs require a college degree.”*

Access to Service:

*“The system penalizes you for working.”*

*“Most assistance programs don’t actually get you out of poverty – they don’t build wealth.”*

*“Increase income eligibility – most programs only help the most poor, leaving out most people.”*

Racism:

*“I was expecting someone else.”*

*“It’s like we [black families] are playing monopoly. White people already own all the property. Black people are joining the game late, trying to catch up, but are constantly landing on property owned by white people.”*

Transportation:

*“Public transportation is unreliable – it doesn’t run when we need; it takes three hours to get anywhere.”*

*“Stop giving us bus passes – give us money to fix our car; give us gas cards.”*

In addition to the major themes discussed above, there were a few interesting items to note:

- Most agency representatives said the mindset or attitude was a major cause of poverty. No family representatives indicated mindset or attitude to be an issue.
- Most families agree that college is not the answer even though they say most high paying jobs require a college degree.
- Despite the availability of services, most families agree that services are inaccessible.
- Despite the high cost of housing, housing is not in the top 5 issues related to poverty.

## **Results and Recommendations**

Based on the data collected, a few recommendations could be made.

- Fund more agencies that offer vocational training.
- Pay for car repairs instead of bus passes.
- Increase the income eligibility for childcare vouchers.
- Advocate for anti-racist policies that will reduce racism in hiring practices.
- Collaborate with the business community to increase salary for entry level jobs and encourage promotion from within to allow families of low-income to “work their way up”.

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Community Services Department should strongly consider the above recommendations in future funding opportunities. These recommendations are a direct response to the focus groups and can be considered of high importance to families of low-income in our community.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, after speaking with seventy-five families experiencing poverty and social service providers, the Community Services Department could consider funding organizations that provide vocational training, and car repair services as opposed to rental assistance and bus passes. Additionally, the Community Services Department should be working towards developing stronger partnerships with local businesses to offer apprenticeship programs to families of low-income.