#MakingCentsTO

Community & Youth Services

[Start of recorded material 00:00:00]

Kristyn: Welcome all! Of course, this is a very large budget conversation and we try and make it as simple as possible. As we do with all of our events at the City of Toronto, we like to begin this particular event with a land acknowledgement. We do so by making sure that we reflect the truth and reconciliation conversation and journey that we have been undertaking as Canadians, but also historically for us to just sort of situate ourselves to the land that we are gathered on and reflect upon why are we here. So I would like to begin by acknowledging the Indigenous peoples of all the lands that are here today.

While we meet today on a virtual platform, I'd like to take a moment to acknowledge the importance of the land which we each call home. We do this to reconfirm our commitment and responsibility in improving relationships between nations and to improving our understanding of local Indigenous cultures. We recognize and do this work from coast to coast to coast. We acknowledge the ancestral and unseated territories of all the Inuit, Métis and First Nations people that call this nation home. So please take a moment, with me, as we reflect upon the acknowledgement of harms that have taken place in the past and the mistakes that we are probably still making today, and consider how each and every single one of us in our own way can actually move forward in the spirit of reconciliation for today and the days ahead, and just be a moment.

Thank you. OK, you know, we oftentimes do the land acknowledgement and I think it's important for us to centre ourselves in the conversation so that we take on some sense of responsibility and action on how we can actually change the path. And today's conversation is actually largely about continuing that journey. There are many reasons why we gather in these virtual platforms. I know the pandemic has changed the way we operate because we don't get to gather in large spaces anymore, but the conversations on how we build a city, how we build neighbourhoods that are safe and inclusive, how we can actually foster a community of care. That work doesn't stop. If anything, it actually makes it even more important during the pandemic.

So this is the second episode of Making Cents, which is a panel discussion that we have curated for each and every single one of you who are watching at home. Please feel free to share this video and share this amongst your friends and family and then also engage in your own conversation because we know that your voices are just as important as our panel is today. And today's theme, we are focused on trying to

unpack what does it mean when we talk about youth services and in the context of community. And many times we do recognize that there's lots of effort in trying to engage in dialogue with young people but that conversation doesn't always translate to where some of those resources come from and how it manifests itself into the actual on the ground experiences and one of the biggest conversations that we have in the city is about the city budget.

This thing is massive, over $13.5 billion is our operating budget and, of course, how we spend every single dollar impacts city services that we care about and some of those services are allocated towards youth. And so we want to be able to make sure that this conversation is going to bring us the very best outcome of all that. OK, so our panelists are amazing. You can take a look at their long bios which are on our website and that's krystynwongtam.ca/makingcents, that's the series, and cents spelled C-E-N-T-S. So I'd like to just start by just saying hello to our panelists.

They've all taken some time to join us from our busy schedules, which we are really appreciative from. So I'm just going to go across my grid and sort of hello to them and when I acknowledge them, if they can just give you a little wave or thumbs up when we know who they are. OK, I'm going to start with Ismail Afrah who is the community coordinator of Access to Recreation. He is a dynamic community member from the Regent Park Neighbourhood Association. He's very passionate about all big ideas and he's especially passionate about community development and neighbourhood. I have worked with Ismail myself personally as a local councillor and I can tell you this is a man not just with ideas, he's driven to actions and results.

Some of his results have actually been pretty monumental for the neighbourhood, which includes securing some dollars into the millions of the quantums for the new social development plan and that's just the beginning. So we're going to hear from Ismail a little bit later about all the other work that he's engaged with. Paul Bailey. What can I say about Paul? Well he's the executive director for Black Health Alliance. He is also a strategist and urban planner, which is pretty important for the city of Toronto to have many different voices telling us and informing us how we should build up our cities and neighbourhoods.

Paul has spent the last decade working with young people, youth, and designing interventions focused on these specific things; health and wellbeing, community violence, mental health and addictions, and improving the social service sector in under-served and low-income communities in Toronto. Welcome Paul, we can't wait to hear from you. We're also going to hear from Tiffany Ford. Tiffany many of you might recognize as a former TDSB trustee. She is also an incredible thought leader. She's an entrepreneur. She's the CO of the Ford Globo group and

she's an award winning entrepreneur. I should state that as well. She's also the founder of Beyond "at-Risk" Organization, a non-profit dismantling of reductive and harmful narratives about marginalized youth and she's a mentor with the City of Toronto's Violence Prevention Program and the Project Alchemy Elders' Circle.

Welcome here Tiffany. Sarah. How are you doing Sarah? Sarah is actually the project manager of the SEEN Collaborative at the Kiwanis Boys and Girls Club. So she's actually right in the heart of the Cabbagetown community. I know she's been working for 20, not 20 decades that makes you too old. For two decades I should say working with youth and families across the city. Like Paul, her work is centered around mental health education and she's worked with a cross section of different community partners and we're really glad that she's able to join us.

And then last, but not least, you'll recognize the initials for Dr. Wesley Crichlow. He is a researcher and author and a professor of Criminology and the chair president of the university equity diversity inclusion task force. He's a director of youth transitioning from Care to University and the first past associate dean of equity at the Ontario Tech University. I know that doesn't even come close, to be quite honest, of summarizing Wesley's accomplishment nor have I done any justice to any of our panelists who have a rich history of giving back to the city. So we're really glad that everybody is here today and able to participate in this critical conversation.

I will probably now just want to encourage you folks to lean into this conversation, which I think is vitally important. There's been lots of discussion recently about youth programming, about youth mental wellbeing, especially during the pandemic. This pandemic has changed everything. It's changed the way youth go to school. We know the afterschool programs are cancelled, before school programs are cancelled, and everything in between. Life as we know it doesn't seem to exist anymore. So my first question, I'm going to sort of toss over to Tiffany because she's our former TDSB trustee.

Tiffany, based on what is happening with young people living at home or perhaps in other places, given the fact that we don't have the same level of community-based programming for young people today, knowing that the school structure in the system has now changed, what do you think we need to be aware of as we get ready to go through the budget process at the city? How do we address some of those service gaps?

Tiffany: Yeah, well first of all thank you so much for having me today. I actually just put out a tweet last week with regards to laptops and the fact that so many students right now are actually using their cell phones to access e-learning which is really unfortunate and it kind of just highlights what's

going on with the disparities of not being able to access technology and being able to access school in the way that students are used to learning. This weekend actually, I met a young, Grade 12 student who was using her cell phone to access her e-learning and so I was actually able to connect her with someone who was willing to pay for a Chromebook. So I'm really happy that she is able to hopefully get that Chromebook this week.

But it just shows that so many people, so many students, are not being able to learn because of the high prices of technology, when it comes to internet services just being ridiculously high in the city as well. It's just a lot and Covid is just kind of highlighting what's going on with young people today. And so I'm sure that students are kind of feeling a little bit of despair there, especially with no being able to go to school or not being able to access education the way that they're used to.

Kristyna: That's a really interesting point in terms of bringing the conversation to even access of WiFi or technology so you can actually participate in the learning. Paul, in your work with many different communities across the city and especially I think with black communities, is it an assumption to say that we all have access to internet and that the WiFi connection's always awesome? Or is that a wrong assumption and how do we change that?

Paul: Thank you again for the opportunity to participate. I was going to say, picking up of what Tiffany was saying, that what we're seeing with Covid-19 is a compounding effect of inequality or inequity with relation to all the conversations that we've been having over the last little while is access to mental health services, so services that are no longer provided in person but are done through virtual care formats. And we know preceding the Covid-19 global pandemic, many families, including black families, don't have access to whether it's the technology or the internet to provide access to those kinds of services. What some folks have done through advocacy with federal government, United Way, partnerships with Toronto library etc. is trying to provide more access to those things but what we're finding is that that's not scratching the surface.

We don't really understand the size and scale of the lack of access to people and what it will take to kind of close those gaps that we're talking about; virtual care in the mental health context or access to school as I think Tiffany was talking about.

Kristyna: So the way young folks would generally access services would be through publically funded libraries, through community centres, through the school system. And we've seen a number of those facilities because of the Covid pandemic having to sort of scale back their hours at, at the beginning of the pandemic, having to lock down altogether. So in the absence of that, and I think Paul, based on what you're saying, if kids

can't get into those physical buildings and there may be some challenges in accessing virtual care, which I really like, I like hearing that, if they don't have access to that as well, the virtual component at home, what might be the other options that we could sort of come out with in terms of providing additional support? Sarah, I'm just going to toss this question to you, if that's OK.

Sarah: Sure. Thank you again for the opportunity and I echo the statements that my panelists all and Tiffany have already mentioned. We're trying to be creative on the ground. We don't want to go into full lockdown mode again without being able to provide services. There is a cohort of young people that aren't comfortable accessing supports online and virtually, so we're trying to figure out ways to remain physically distant and follow the guidelines of Toronto Public Health, but by being creative and I'm a part of a collaborative which works with six different organizations in the neighbourhood, in the downtown east, them being Central Neighbourhood House, Dixon Hall, Toronto Kiwanis Boys and Girls Club, Yonge Street Mission, [unintelligible 00:13:46], and we're really trying to work together to figure out how we can still support young people by providing safe spaces.

We're in a climate right now in the city where there's lots of things going on and there aren't a lot of spaces in the communities that are open and that's proven to be challenging. We're also talking about the virtual burnout. We're all feeling that piece as well and so young people and families aren't excluded from that, as well as parent burnout, trying to support parents during this virtual world. They are wearing many hats. They're wearing the hat of teacher, tech support, mental health supports, the cleaner, whatever it is that we do as parents in addition to our general role.

We've taken on this other stuff and we're trying to figure out how we can engage young people and how we can be creative around supporting those virtual learners by creating hubs; places for them to come in a cohort, physically distant obviously and, again, following all the guidelines, but really trying to engage them so they're not isolated, so that they can have contact with that adult, that caring adult, outside the home, and give parents some resources at the same time.

Kristyn: Sarah, thanks. That's a really interesting point. You talked about sort of making sure that you involve parents, perhaps the folks who are the adults in the household. I know that Ismail, you've had some success in the neighbourhood of Regent Park where the students, as well as the parents, were advocating for additional services that were not available to the community. Do you want to share with us the access to recreation success story, which I think is now on its way to becoming a more permanent learn to swim program? And what was the critical component that led to the success?

Ismail:	Yeah, I think with access to recreating, I think communities on the ground. They know firsthand what it's like not to have access, not to have the type of services that everybody else is getting, especially in the community of Regent Park where there's a billion dollar investment that's going to revitalize the neighbourhood, where state of the art facilities are being built. So for a long time the community knew that they were not getting the same level of service that everyone else is getting and that the reason was very complex. So it required sort of a multi-level, collaborative element and luckily the moms and community members have been working in the issue firsthand.

And through conversation and through building strategy, week in and week out, they got the support of the local organization. So this is the formula for the success because it had to be collaborative. So when moms and family members kept on talking about this issue and originally they got the support of two organizations, the Centre for Community Learning and Development and Yonge Street Mission. That conversation was supported with facilitation or supported with identifying key issues and of course, at the time, we luckily were part of the election process and we campaigned and made sure that the new councillor knew about the issue and we handed out a 1-2 page document explaining the issue and I remember chatting with you, Councillor Wong-Tam, in those meetings and you said, "Let's schedule a meeting."

And we did schedule that meeting and we brought the conversation from the local community to the city level and for the first time, we had an opportunity to depute at committee and we prepared, we strategized and we made sure to include a media piece there as well because one of our family members at the day of registration spent the night to make sure that they registered the day of because they knew that because of technology, they didn't have the same level of opportunity to be on the registration system because the faster your internet, the faster you're on the line.

So they knew they couldn't compete technological-wise, so they had to spend the night and CBC covered that so we were on the news at the time of the budget cycle and through work with you, through the committees, we made sure that the item was at committee and, of course, the city has a huge bureaucracy. Committee referred the item through the budget process and we made sure to be there and present at the budget process. We brought young people at the age of seven, 12, 15, to depute at these budget process and one councillor said that this was the most memorable deputation because he's never a 7-year-old deputing around service needs. So I think the strategy we developed was collaborative.

We leveraged every community member's assets. I remember one time, because my background is Philosophy and I can sound like a robot, and what do you call, in a statement where we invited the media, I spent like

five minutes talking and then I stepped out and another community member spoke about the emotional experience of having to walk in day in and day out to get your youth into service and that was captured in another media piece. So I think collaboration, relying on each other's strength, we had to get it right at multiple levels and because we had everybody on board, we were successful in getting a learn to swim program.

And right now we're sitting with the Parks, Forestry and Recreation to explore policy changes to make sure that families that are technologically challenged, that these policies are working for the most disadvantaged and we found out that it's a hard process but when you have champions like your councillor and city staff with you, we can make change.

Kristyn: Ismail, thank you for sharing that story. You know, as you were describing it, I was thinking, "Does every community have to go through such hurdles in order for them to influence the city budget process because obviously you need it to organize your community, identify the need, bring out the champions, and I'm a little bit just tired listening to that big epic journey that you and the community had to go through, even though I was there. But having you retell that story, I'm just thinking, "That's a horrible way to have to force every community that's looking for additional services, support from the city to give it to them in such a fashion."

And not necessarily that's a bad thing, but it is a bad thing if you didn't have the capacity. Good on Regent for having the capacity, but I also recognize that there was bit of a circling around the issue for several years before you landed that. So the issue here, to me, is about structural change as well. It's like, how do we actually make the system work for us as opposed to making us work the system. So Wesley, I know you're in our meeting and we're really happy you're here. Let's talk about structural change for a bit. The City of Toronto has a very large budget. We go through about eight weeks of budget deliberation and there's oftentimes a wall of resistance from councillors and perhaps the mayor about where to spend the money.

We spent a good chunk of the summer talking about how to re-imagine public safety and at the core of that conversation was whether or not we can actually move some money away from the $1.5 billion police budget and reallocate it to community oriented service that will promote safer and more inclusive communities. You were part of some of those discussions as an advisor to the partnership in accountability circle to the city's anti-black racism strategy. Do you think we got to where we needed to go from that vantage point and, if we did not, what do we do about it and how do we reallocate some of those sources of funding to enhance youth services that might produce safer communities at the end of the day?

Wesley: Thank you for the invitation again and for the question and I'd like to say hi to all the panelists and organizers. I think if we don't have a good analysis around exactly what sort of resources is lacking, then the budget itself can't make sense. So while the budget is being constructed, we need to have an audit about what kind of resources are required as we shift from in-class schooling to online and all these different things. To simply just take from policing budget to put into youth services without knowing exactly what area of youth services requires that support would be counterproductive. So I think the city clerk and the city has enough resources to do a quick audit of what programs exist and what do we need now to improve those programs.

Organized sports is still going to remain an issue and challenge [unintelligible 00:23:22] organized sports. Organized sports teaches young people discipline, structure, keeps their health going, [unintelligible 00:23:28] wellbeing, etc. So if we look at how Amazon and big tech companies have made billions of dollars in profit from [unintelligible 00:23:40]. One of the things we need to ask ourselves, given that many of these students don't have access to computers to do their work, what is the role of the big tech giant companies, as in Shopify, Apple, Google, in supporting these communities so that we can ensure that the kind of inequities that they're experiencing accessing technology to advance their full potential is not inhibited by the lack of [unintelligible 00:24:12].

So there's a role, I think, for the big tech companies to play in this whole process by sponsoring more and giving more to communities that are impacted by this. Then there's the other issue of understanding, I think, racial capitalism and the exploitation of racial minorities. How do we understand how racial capitalism is created in this modern world at a form of inequity that only further advances the expansion of capitalist thinking and to really try to find ways to address it in the multiple functions way that we address the socioeconomic status and how that then is tied into health outcomes, education outcomes, etc.? So that racial capitalism has to be a central part of understanding when we talk about removing resources,.

And how do we move those resources so that we don't avoid the risk of minimizing the consequences of one or the other? Reallocating funds also must be cautious around somehow prioritizing communities [unintelligible 00:25:14]. That doesn't bode well for any kind of community organization. So we need to be cautious when we talk about reallocating funds that is not seen as the black community wants this more, the [unintelligible 00:25:27] community wants that more. But we need to understand how these communities intersect so that we don't have each community asking for the same kind of funding to do the same resources, to do the same service in our program, what I mean.

What are the hotspots? There is a role for Amazon and all the tech companies now to create hotspots for students to start doing their online work who can't work at home, who's living in single household units, who don't have a safe space at home to work, who don't have a safe space at home to study. We are underestimating the inability of affordable housing in many of these communities which is going to be worse now with homelessness given that Covid has taken so many jobs away from people and we already had a problem [unintelligible 00:26:11]. I think we're going to see more and more homeless students and more and more homeless professors and teachers on the pavement, hitting the streets.

And don't be surprised when you start getting professors talking about being homeless even because I think many of us have been impacted by this in very different degrees, but homelessness is going to increase because of the lack of jobs. So we need a very rigid homeless policy to address one of the gaps that I think that, well of course advocates for homelessness have been talking for the longest time about affordable housing, but how do we address this now so that when that crisis gets worse, I would say between now and December or when people start not being able to pay their mortgages, we're going to start seeing a whole slew of people living in the streets and homelessness.

So I think social conditions need to be increased in ways that we don't amplify racial inequalities. Social conditions need to improve so that we don't have communities competing against each other and social conditions it's improved in a way where we have an understanding of the intersections of these inequalities and how they're linked to each other.

Kristyn: Yeah, Wesley thank you. You've put a lot on the table for us to consider and I actually saw Paul … Paul I think I saw some of your internal wheels turning there. Based on what Wesley has just described, and he touched upon so many different issues and one of those issues of course is about safety, safety of home, feeling comfortable enough to sort of be yourself. And I would also say, what happens when you don't have a home? Based on the work that you're seeing in the communities that you're working with, what might be some of the biggest challenges that you now see, that perhaps has been exacerbated by Covid? Is it something as straightforward as having a home? Is it about having access to different tools, to different resources? What are the trends that you've noticed?

Paul: There's so much there that Dr. Crichlow spoke to and I think so much in that question. The way that I think about it is again back to this idea of compounded effect. Prior to Covid-19, like when we spoke to the northwest we were seeing elevated levels of gun violence and violence in the community, we were seeing elevated levels of poverty concentrated in particular in areas of city, seeing increased issues around food security, all of which underlined, in the specific case of the black community, by

anti-black racism, but we could talk about anti-Indigenous racism, colonization and racism more broadly speaking. And I think what Covid-19 has done is to compound that effect and complicate the ways that folks have been trying to work to address those issues.

What I would say, I think, to part of what Dr. Crichlow was speaking about, I think so much of my thinking these days is we have so much of these things there. We have Toronto Youth Equity Strategy, there's TSNS 2020, Toronto Strong Neighbourhood Strategy 2020. There's so many of these frameworks that are in place that are designed to speak to the investments that communities need. Sometimes not designed the best to ensure equity and to ensure that we're addressing the specific needs as they relate to the black communities and, in my experience, and I think coming back to what I'm seeing is a lack of ability, as Dr. Crichlow was saying, really understand the issue and understand that issue at scale, talk to people, engage with people, young people themselves so that we can understand what are the stories behind these data points that we're talking about?

So we're talking about elevated levels of gun violence. What are the stories behind what we're talking about here? And leveraging that information base to invest in a sustainable way, I think, lasting. You mentioned the $1.5 billion police budget. I sometimes wonder what $1.5 billion of investment a year, or even $1.5 billion over 10 years, might mean for those communities and those young people. So whether we're talking about big issues, structural issues of built [unintelligible 00:30:39] communities or whether we're talking about investments in the type of interventions, whether it be safe spaces for people to learn or safe spaces for people to just, the after school program.

I think what we're really talking about is how we structure our thinking and our work and our work flow process differently to ensure that we're meeting those outcomes.

Kristyn: That's a really interesting point in terms of being able to sort of work more smartly, I'd say, to structure that work to sort of do a deeper dive because oftentimes we get influenced by headlines. So sometimes the headlines are pretty quick snapshots and we walk away thinking we understand the issue. So one of those headlines back in May I recall was that gun violence and elevated gun violence has gone up 13% this year over last year but then in my conversations with Toronto Police, they have actually said that violence and crime, criminal activity, has come down across the city. So the two don't seem to always gel depending on who is reporting what and also how complete or incomplete that data is.

You know, when we talk about, at the City of Toronto, and I think this happens oftentimes in neighbourhoods, about not having enough. So therefore, not having enough money, not having enough resources and

outcomes and not being able to make those critical investments. Tiffany, you've gone through this in your own experience as a trustee where you have a finite amount of money that's in a budget and then you have a whole host of really big, important priorities that you need to spend on. It's not oftentimes a great place to be in, where you're sort of having to make some difficult decisions.

But is that dichotomy even the way we set it up entirely false or do we have to really lean into it and make those service cuts even though we know it's going to suck and it really does hurt communities, but we do it anyways? Is there a third way out of here?

Tiffany: That's a really good question. It's really difficult because, you know, when you start cutting social services that can actually impact so many things. So, for instance, when it comes to housing, and I like to talk about public housing, Toronto Community Housing especially, and in the community of Firgrove, which I grew up in, the fact that right now it's being revitalized and sort of reducing housing there and moving people out. That doesn't really help at all because we have such a broader system of like young people moving in different communities that they don't feel welcome in or they have issues in. And that starts to spike issues and concerns amongst young people and their families and the safety issues as well.

And so, for instance, when I was a trustee we had about 200 families leave the Firgrove community very quickly, within a couple of weeks really, and move into different communities and how the young people were responding wasn't really that great. They didn't feel welcome per se and they felt like the homes that they moved into were worse off. And so when you start cutting in different areas it spikes up other issues and so there has to be a third way. I think the third way would be best. I don't know what the third way is but we certainly need to find more funding and we need to focus on areas, to me, that would ensure that people are feeling safe, are feeling respected especially when it comes to housing.

I mean when you're in a home that is not safe and you're not able to move because there's a long waiting list of people trying to get on, you feel trapped and so when you feel trapped, you find other ways to get out and that might be hustling on the street. And that does something else, right, for a young person. And so there's just so many different aspects of barriers that people try to get around and I don't even think the city even understands that aspect, right. So, for us, I think what you're doing is great. You're doing a panel but if we can actually get into communities and talk about how do you envision the budget? Where do you feel we should be investing in?

It's really critical for us to be a healthy city and right now we're not a healthy city, in my point of view. We're a struggling city and we really

need to find ways to invest in areas that would bring our health back to not necessarily where we used to be, but to further us along in a progressive way for the future that we envision for the city.

Kristyn: Tiffany, thank you. I apologize if I sort of threw you very much of an impossible question and just so you know, I also have not figured out what that third way is. But I think that, to me, it's a constant self-evaluation, critical system evaluation on how do we continue to do better. And perhaps we can't make better out of the situation because the system was designed to not give us the type of results that we are looking for. Which brings me to a question, I think I'm going to toss to both Ismail and Sarah. In your line of work, you both are service providers in some ways. You are connector of communities.

Currently the way the system is designed, coming back to system, and so currently the way the system is designed, would you say that the existing youth services do enough to meet young folks where they are, and if not, what can be done differently? Who wants to go first? Ismail? Go ahead.

Ismail: For me, in terms of tying in the conversation everybody was having is for the past three years, I've been involved in community development sort of from a volunteer resident perspective to actually becoming a practitioner of community development work as a service provider, and what I've noticed is that you have to work at multiple levels. The problem cannot be solved at one level. Everybody has to come together and to me, at a local level, for instance I see the local community centre, for instance, and I see the local aquatic centre and I see the local library and to me I ask myself, are these institutions doing what they're meant to be doing? Are they serving the needs of the people they're meant to be serving on the ground?

And then I look at and read through their policies, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, I read through what they're planning and their thinking is. And what I've found out is that first of all data is needed to make a case. Anecdotal community suffering will never convince anybody. We did that for five years. We communicated our suffering day in and day out but we couldn't make headway. And the reason we couldn't make headway wasn't because people weren't listening, it's that people are used to listening certain languages. So data is important. So that's why I think the next step we're going was we need to have the data. It's not enough that 1000 community members are saying something is not working, you have to have a report from city staff saying, this is not working.

So for me, what do you call, that's what I'm trying to do. I'm trying to have a conversation with the right people at Parks and Rec, the managers, the directors, to make sure that, hey you have these fancy policies but here it's not working. What do we need to make it work? And there's few pieces that's needed. One is data, we don't have it. The other one is a

champion. If the director of Parks, Forest and Recreation is not interested in your project, you'll be in line forever. But if he's interested, you'll have a conversation. If he gets a push from the councillor, further conversation. And I think in my neighbourhood, we wanted to re-introduce the resident advisory bodies as a formal structure so that we can interact with the city divisions.

That has lost its fad or its meaning, but we wanted to bring it back because we want to leverage our ability to bring people to the table and sometimes you need the right people to move the pieces. In terms of my neighbourhood, we're struggling but I think because we have the commitment from our councillor and the right relationships to bring these people to the table, there's hope that we can make changes. At a citywide level, in terms of the third way you … my background is Philosophy so I'm excited about alternative paths. The third way is collaboration. The third way is a city manager needs to be sitting with communities. It's not only internal city division.

When they're planning the budget process, representatives from the community that are most affected and are most challenged need to be having conversation with the city manager all throughout the year so that this planning for the city is informed by those people. You cannot make these processes internal only. You have to bring everybody on the table and that takes a bit of a challenge because I don't think the Centre for Connected Community, for instance, is one of the people. They have a theory of change which is the connected community approach and they talk about at every level you need to have circles that each community's invited to, right.

So you need to have the people in finance at the table, the community at the table. You need to have a collaborative table at every level, even at the city management level. If you don't have that, then you're not informed about your choices. So I think there is a third way. We just have to take our time implementing. And as I said before, when I did this research about anti-poverty reduction and I went to the city strategies, they have all the answers. It's not as if the city doesn't know the roots of violence and how investing in community and youth will lead to savings later. They know all this because I've read them. The idea here is we need to empower people like Councillor Wong-Tam who's at one level to have conversations with other councillors because, as I said, change is about getting yes from a few people and it's not as difficult if there's collaboration at different levels.

Kristyn: Ismail, you're philosopher background certainly came into your answer s thank you for sharing that. Sarah, the same question over to you in terms of the effectiveness of the youth programs. Are we meeting the needs of the community and, if not, what do we do about it?

Sarah:	Thank you again. Ismail, I echo a lot of what you shared with us and I appreciate that perspective and I think continuing to push our city councillors and the mayor to continuing to put our communities first and community safety. I think we also, in the site so I'm not going to take [unintelligible 00:43:12]. I had written down as well but Paul mentioned how we fund and from a ground level, non-profit perspective, we often go from grant to grant in precarious employment and the city is one of the only governing bodies with core funding for a lot of the full-time permanent positions [unintelligible 00:43:32] as front-line workers on the ground and non-profits that opportunity to have that.
	So it's very challenging for the staff members to be able to continue to work through this when you also have to also think about, oh in six months my contract ends. What am I going to do? And then it leaves a gap. And so we need to really push for more core funding for our communities and we need to continue to push for the agenda, for gun violence, to be an indicator of [unintelligible 00:44:01] of health so that we can keep it on board. And I also think that the organizations that are on the ground need to shift on how they support gun front-line workers. We are trying to do the work that is out there with these young people but the work has changed and with that change, we need policies in these organizations to change so that we're not left out doing the work without being supported by our organizations.
	And by that I mean just how we engage and how youth workers are engaging on the ground and really trying to interrupt this violence that we're experiencing in the city and unfortunately, I don't see a lot of the violence shifting at this point. We're continuing to work and I think the collaboration that we need to do needs to expand across the city. So what we're doing down in the downtown east or there's Regent or St. Jamestown, is we're working alongside those who are up in the northwest. There's a disconnect within our communities from workers as well so that we can better support each other.
Kristyn:	Thank you Sarah. I think you alluded to a point that Paul had made in a chat for ourselves in terms of how the funding comes about and Paul, just coming to your point and this is actually a question for both you and Wesley, Dr. Crichlow. With respect to how we fund, we've heard that, you know, this sort of interim grant funding creates some level of instability. We oftentimes leave organizations on the ground, uncertain about what happens next, so it's really difficult to do long term planning. It also may actually mean that it's difficult to pivot your program if there's a new trend that you need to respond to because you're so busy tying up the loose end of the previous grant.
	What we've seen in the past is, let's just say for example, an episode of violence takes place and usually if it involves young people, young black man or racialized men with guns, the politicians will come out en masse

and sort of condemn the violence. But not a lot seems to happen structurally in terms of formal change afterwards. So there may be a quick announcement about we're going to invest in this or that, more on-duty officers is usually the response, curbing the violence through actions A, B and C, but we don't see the on the ground long term change. What do you think needs to change in order for us to get to a better outcome with safer communities and moving young people away from gang activity or gang recruitment? Paul or Wesley, who wants to go first?

Wesley: OK well I'll go. Thank you Kristyn for the question. OK let me go back. First thing I want to say is that I think the city needs to be more proactive with its budget in terms of educating the public before crunch time for a budget is due. So you should be doing budget 101 community education. As soon as this budget is finished and passed, start educating people and getting them ready. That is called community civic engagement. That is showing people that you have an interest in empowering them, helping them develop some agency ownership and control over their lives. So I think the process is starting too late to try to get feedback on the budget at this stage.

If one does not understand the machinations of the bureaucracy at City Hall and it's big. After I got involved with the city in terms of being [unintelligible 00:47:52] anti-black racism unit, I realized how goddamn big the city's administration is. It's an iron cage. So to break [unintelligible 00:48:01] the iron cage, we require much more work than [unintelligible 00:48:04] educate community members, communication associations, etc. about how the budget works. That's the first thing I think we need to do. So as soon as this is read, I propose that you take that challenge up. You're talking budget, start that challenge right after this budget is passed.

Secondly, we cannot start with a deficit [unintelligible 00:48:23] language of violence because racism is violence. And if we're not going to call racism violence, we cannot talk about violence in communities by talking about gun violence. Gun violence is a problematic [unintelligible 00:48:38] deficit language. We're starting to talk about communities. The minute you speak about violence and you say community and violence, you frame a particular perception of those people as not really knowing better. Therefore anything we give them, they deserve in terms of help, and they should not complain. So we take from [unintelligible 00:48:58] agency when we pathologize them.

We cannot take agency from people and we need to change the narrative for understanding the structure in systemic violence as state sanctioned violence and therefore state sanctioned violence reproduces violence among young people. And understanding the context, the social context, of that violence so that we are not seeing young people as actors of the violence, but rather as victims of that violence. Critical. The other piece

is in terms of understanding how the program funding takes place. Again, I think we need to have more of the agencies at the table trying to understand who is delivering what. After I raised the issue about data [unintelligible 00:49:44] the programs and researched that it's done.

They're both right. This is nothing new we are talking here. There are millions of reports and studies out there of what communities need. My only caution with data at this stage is the misuse of data. So we need to talk data justice if we're going to start talking data. Nobody's talking the justice of data. In other words, how are we going to use this data constructively. Who owns the data and who controls it and when do we release it to the public and how do we educate the public around it? Data justice is important because the data can also be used as a tool to not give them what they want by saying, "Well you don't contribute." Yeah, we have police data saying, "your community is crime ridden and over there that's not crime ridden so we're going to put more in that community and not this one. Data is a weapon.

Be cautious when you ask for data that you're not asking for a weapon of self-destruction. Data can be misused. Be cautious around who controls it and how you use it. I say this [unintelligible 00:50:47] an academic. And I also believe that one of the things is, as we want to know how schools are operating, we need to talk about ethics because schools operate under this parental guidance issue that a kid cannot answer questions without parent's permission. So we need to rethink and include parents more in the discussion around virtual ethics and how it means that we can get some of these young people to have more agency to speak about what their issues are so that we are changing.

We are recognizing that Covid has disrupted our lives but it must also disrupt how we function administratively. Administration cannot continue to function as is, as though nothing has happened, but then still ask us, "What do you want us to do?" It just seems to me a contradiction in terms and a very violent approach to take. And that in itself is a form of violence. How do you understand not changing the way you deliver services as violent? That has to be understood as violence. So we need to talk about how ethics can be done in a way that give young people the right to speak about some things with a certain amount of protection for young people's rights and vulnerability and impressions so that some of what we're talking about is becoming more sensitive and in tune with the precarious nature [unintelligible 00:52:03] living, single unit living, shared household living, homelessness, shelter living, [unintelligible 00:52:09] homes, where kids can't speak, etc. etc. etc.

Now we need to really complexify this to show we're understanding the problematic nature of how people's lives have changed and transformed so that we can then do these kind of surveys differently [unintelligible 00:52:25]. And my last point is food insecurity. I don't like the term.

Food is not an insecure issue. We have made food insecure for people. Again I want to go back to the language. We need to talk about poverty. If we're not talking about poverty, we're making corporations feel great. There's no such thing as food insecurity. We have the most food in the world to waste so we cannot be talking about food insecurity. What we're talking about is state or [unintelligible 00:52:54] poverty, state sanctioned poverty. And we need to address poverty to give people their needs.

So if we're not doing that and we talk about food insecurity and … I don't like the term. Nobody wants to be insecure about food. Everybody wants food. So [unintelligible 00:53:12] poverty is the core of what we are getting at. And we need to talk about racialized poverty, gender poverty, sexual orientation poverty, disability poverty. And so we bring that intersection components analysis for understanding this. And budgets cannot speak to these issues if we haven't taken our time to undo the violence of the language in programming. Budgets are a very violent way to talk about programming.

They may fight from the trough, this multicultural trough, for a little bit of [unintelligible 00:53:39] and make you feel like, oh you should deserve this 20,000 because if not we're just going to give it to X, Y and Z. No, it must not be done like you don't deserve this. It must be done in a humanizing way and we need to humanize the budget so folks can understand what they're asking for. I'm going to stop here because I can.

Kristyn: Wesley, I think you did great and I can certainly listen to you for a lot longer. But I also really appreciate. I want to say thank you for helping us reframe some of these discussions because oftentimes we are just consuming media as it comes at us and sometimes even perpetuating some of the harmful constructs. So I think what you shared with us is critically important. Paul, I was going to give you an opportunity to also speak to that question and if you can just take a minute or two just to share your thoughts on that. I would really value that.

Paul: I'll try and take three. I'm kidding. I think there's so many issues there, right, and for me I think Wesley's point around data I think is critically important. I think we need data but when we're talking about data, for me and for the black [unintelligible 00:54:47] what we're talking about is how we utilize that data and also data governance, all in the same piece of work. I think that underlines a lot of the work that we are talking about and will be doing. Responding specifically to the piece around gun violence, I think language is important. I think understanding that when we're talking about gun violence, we're talking about really the symptom of many different issues, right.

So Wesley was speaking there to a lot of the roots, right. So we are talking about poverty. We are talking about anti-black racism and other forms of oppression and as I was saying earlier, I think it's important to

note that a lot of the frameworks are already there, but in my read and in my view they don't speak effectively to black communities in the ways that they need to. So take a read through Toronto Strong neighbourhood strategy. Take a read through Toronto Youth Equity strategy. Take a read through the poverty reduction strategy and think about whether or not … or just read through whether those policies respond to black communities or not in targeted and specific ways as we understand those specific issues.

My argument would be that they don't. I have two quick last points. Ismail spoke a lot about collaboration and I think this part is key and it connects to the issue around how we fund things. So we've done, over let's say the last three or four years, a lot of conversation about Public Health approach to violence reduction. So the Public Health board, Board of Health, passes a motion here, these folks do some research here. But it seems to not actually translate into actual work. So nobody's asking the question, is Toronto Community Housing's violence reduction plan speaking to the Toronto police service plan? Is the Toronto police even interested in taking a public health approach?

Does that speak now to the violence reduction plan that's coming out of the city of Toronto? For me, that's the first critical point of collaborations is making sure that these systems are working together and responding to the specific issues working with communities. I think the last thing that I wanted to say here, I took some quick notes, is there's so many other opportunities for us to leverage the frameworks that are in place. So Ismail again has done some amazing work around social development plans in Regent Park but without getting too nerdy, these are our critical framework for how we think about addressing social needs as it relates to transformational change that's happening in neighbourhoods.

But my opinion is that they come way too late in the process. When we're having a conversation about at the beginning how this will go, before any shovels are in the ground, that's the place that we should be starting to align whether it's developers, the city, the United Ways, around how we invest to address these impacts of scale. When we're talking about community benefits for jobs, whether or not we're talking about other issues that come out through the work of engaging with communities. I think to close off here, what I would like to say is councillor, it's important that the councillors that are around the table are pushing the conversation forward around this public health approach, that it's responsive specific as black communities.

But we're not having this conversation in isolation of everything else. We're thinking about how the Toronto Stronger Neighbourhood strategy addresses those big roots. We're thinking about how a positive youth development framework strategy, if you will, addresses the needs of all youth, but dials down into the needs for communities facing very specific

issues. And then when it comes now to this issue of taking a public health approach, that we're making sure that Toronto Community Housing, Toronto police, and the city of Toronto is working collaboratively to address these things. And we're not funding these things where we're funding, for example, the city's program that's in development around gun violence for one year.

But we're funding that for at least five years so that we can get some roots on the ground and we can plan, we can work with communities, and we're not trying to figure out just how to keep this thing going because we've only received one year of funding for the city program. A lot said there and I know we're pressed for time so I'll leave it there. But I think it's critical that we bring the conversation down, take a look at what is actually there right now and how it becomes more responsive to communities and making sure that we're not funding these $50,000 here, $75,000 here, but we're leveraging the big budget power of the city to make [unintelligible 00:59:28] investments in communities and to these issues. And then ask the people if they're working together. Ask the people that. Alright, thank you.

Kristyn: Paul, that was brilliant and I think it's probably the best way for us to probably leave our one hour panel discussion. You've all given us so much rich feedback and things for us to consider. Again, one of the reasons why we created the panel discussion is to actually build up awareness about how the city's budget works and also to be critical on whether or not it is actually working for everybody in the equitable ways that we hope to see service delivery. And I think you've all outlined some critical things that are not working, but also given some very constructive and actual doable solutions on how to make those pivots and I really want to thank you and value your contributions.

So this is actually the end of our panel discussion. Of course, we will have three more coming up. The next panel discussion is really about homelessness and housing. All of our discussions, every single one of them, when we've touched around the budget, the issue of housing and homelessness has come up and it did so again today. So I want to thank Ismail Afrah, Tiffany Ford, Sarah Rogers, Paul Bailey and Dr. Wesley Crichlow for being here with us. Your time is incredibly valuable and the gifts that you shared with us will be used as we continue this dialogue of trying to build a better budget at the City of Toronto so it works for everybody. Take care and see you on the other side.

[End of recorded material 01:01:05]