

FROM POVERTY TO POSSIBILITIES 2023

Disrupting the Status Quo

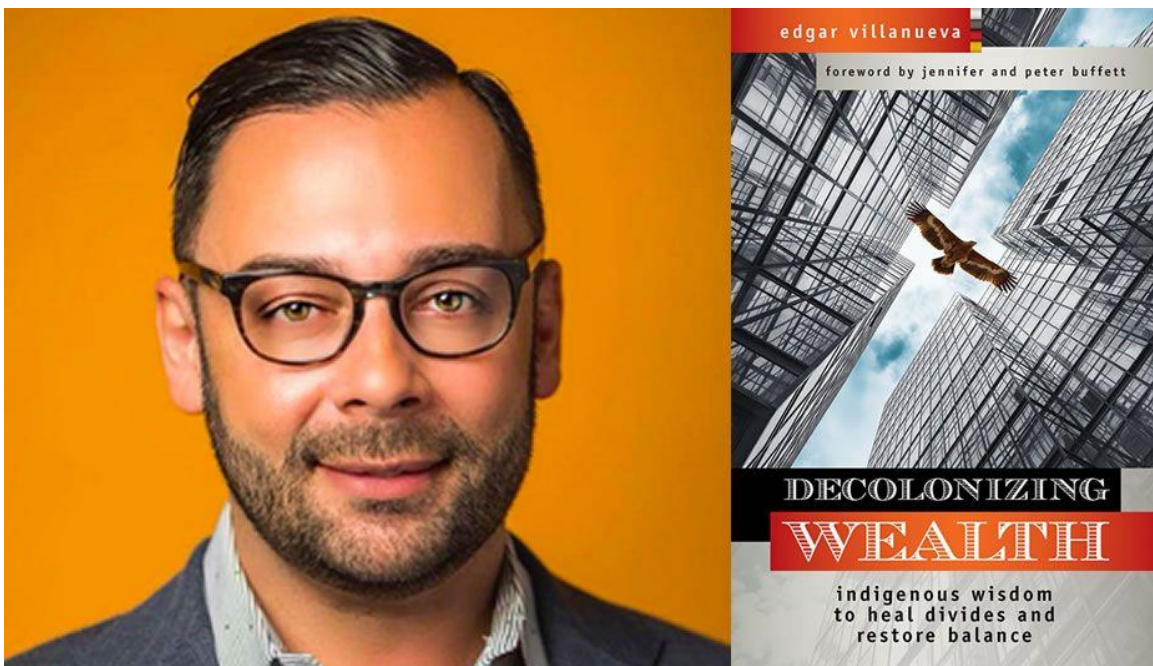
The COVID pandemic exposed persistent economic challenges faced by low-income families. These challenges are even greater for BIPOC households. With job losses, stagnant wages, and mounting housing and childcare costs, more and more families struggle to make ends meet. United Way of Pierce County (UWPC) continues to work toward achieving our bold goal of lifting 15,000 households out of poverty by 2028 and moving them into self-sufficiency. By addressing the interconnected issues affecting children and families in our community, we are ensuring that families are stronger, individuals gain stability and kids are more successful. We know one organization alone can't solve our community's toughest problems. Moving the needle on challenging, complex issues like poverty requires individual and cross-sector collaboration that is focused on results. United Way can and does facilitate that work--one family at a time.

In 2014, 2016, 2020, and again in 2022, we commissioned ALICE studies to measure populations in our communities who are Asset-Limited, Income-Constrained, and Employed (ALICE). The ALICE population represents those among us who are working but are living paycheck to paycheck due to childcare costs, transportation challenges, high cost of living and so much more. These are individuals/families who are one paycheck away from being 'in the system.' According to the research, the 2022 study revealed that nearly **one in three** Pierce County households were considered ALICE, with 8% of households living at or below the poverty line. Dona Ponепinto, UWPC President & CEO, peels back the data layers to reveal that while 31% of Pierce County residents are considered ALICE, in the Black community that number jumps to 48% of households. For Native communities, the percentage of households classified as ALICE is nearly 50%. For our Latino/a/x/e neighbors, the percentage is 44% ALICE.

To achieve equity for all, however, we must disrupt the status quo in systems that are simply managing poverty while also working to address the scarcity mindset that continues to hold us back. "Disrupting the Status Quo" is the theme of this year's From Poverty to Possibility summit. **You can view the From Poverty to Possibilities summary video [here](#).**

“We still have much to do to change that story for ALICE families in our community, and to change it, we must disrupt! We must look at ways to dismantle systems that are barriers. The systems that - for the most part - are keeping everyone at status quo.”

-Dona Ponепinto



Key themes from this year's summit were:

1. **Nothing about us without us.** Stop thinking that we know what's best for others. Value lived experience and make sure those with lived experience have a seat at the table.
2. **We are all connected.** Understand that we are all part of the system that we all criticize and remember none of us got to where we are without the help of others.
3. **Be intentional.** We must always reevaluate ourselves to where we are along this equity journey and to be an advocate for others.
4. **Communities are worthy not risky.** We always give reasons why someone needs to be more qualified, to have more experience, to make more money, or that their board needs to look a certain kind of way. The ways that risk has been defined is racist. We need to embrace all people everywhere as worthy.

“I envision a community where we can all thrive and live our best lives. We want to be grounded in our culture and our family and be part of communities and systems that are working for all of us”

-Edgar Villanueva

Edgar Villanueva

“Money as medicine.”

- The path to equity is first understanding who you are and where you come from. You can tap into that to have a clear understanding of where you are situated in history and how you can make your own unique contributions.
- On comparing philanthropy to a plantation: *“Every single day I drove to work at a beautiful place that was a former plantation. I held the contradiction of working with money that was acquired from land taken from Indigenous peoples and an industry built on the backs of unpaid, enslaved Africans who worked on the plantation. Fast forward to the RJ Reynolds factories and the issue of exploited labor used to produce a product that was harmful and killed lots of people. I held this history and felt a certain way about it, and then I faced barriers trying to fund Black-led organizations. To face barriers, where they (foundation leadership) are basically saying those organizations aren't good enough, was a philanthropic injustice that ate away at me and pushed me to want to do the work I do now.”*



“The House Tobacco Built – RJ Reynolds Tobacco Company”

- Edgar spoke of the “colonizer virus”. It shows up in philanthropy in very subtle ways because philanthropy is a sector that is about the love of people. People working at nonprofits, government agencies, and in philanthropy do this work because they care and want to make a difference. To diagnose the virus is to ask questions like:
 - Where did this money come from in the first place?
 - Who has the power to decide?
 - Who is benefitting from our resources, and who is not benefitting?
- The antidote to the colonizer virus is healing. We cannot undo what has happened for hundreds and hundreds of years on this land since the first point of contact. What we can do is think about healing from colonization and all the connected struggles in our history, acknowledge that they happened, and tell the truth about it.

“We think about colonization as something that happened a long time ago, but it is still very much at play. The dynamics of colonization are about separating, controlling, dominating, and extracting. Those dynamics are at play across every system, touching every policy and institution.”

-Edgar Villanueva

- Edgar’s organization has been supporting a decolonizing wealth project where they are working with institutions that have been around for 100-plus years and asking questions like, “Where did the money come from?” and “Who was harmed in the process of generating this wealth?”. The trustees, family members, or whoever started the foundation were good people, but they historically benefitted from policies and systems at play at that time that gave them advantages to accumulate wealth and others did not have the same opportunities.
- Liberated Capital ‘liberates’ donors from a ‘donor identity’. It’s inviting people into an experience and a community of healing. Everyone comes together for collective responsibility to change our communities, address our shortcomings, to push back on the ways that we perpetuate oppression in our work. We think about our collective healing as we are deploying resources in a way that changes the paradigm of funder-recipient or donor-grantee. We are just all people who move our resources together in a way that facilitates liberation for everyone involved in this process.
- One of the byproducts of colonization is the scarcity mindset. It is an us versus them paradigm. We need to move from that place to understanding that we are all inherently connected. We have a collective responsibility for stepping up to change our communities to take on the matter of healing together.
- Justice is not an intellectual exercise. You can read all the books and go to all the workshops and say all the right things, but if you are not doing some type of healing practice that opens your heart and your spirit to justice, you will never get it. Edgar calls it “the spirit of reparations”, where you are doing that ancestral healing work. Put it into practice and have grace with yourself when you make mistakes and have grace for others when they make mistakes.
- Can we address poverty, racism, etc. without moving away from the current state of capitalism in the U.S.? It’s complicated. Malcom X said, “You can’t have capitalism without racism.” Our current system was built upon the trading, marketing, and commodifying of Black bodies. The path of understanding is that we have to first appreciate human dignity and love the planet. When we begin to divest or move away from harmful and destructive ways of doing business that continue to hurt people. Even in philanthropy, as a \$1 trillion industry that only gives away about 8% of its assets in grants every year, much of those resources are invested in extractive industries. We have to divest from private prisons, fossil fuels, and other things that are hurting, and then reinvest that money in communities and what we call using money as medicine.
- There are incremental ways to shift power dynamics in philanthropy and ensure historically marginalized communities have a genuine voice and influence in decision-making. Great things are happening that we need to do more of, like putting people with lived experience on governance boards. We need to look at where our money is going...What does the leadership look like? What does accountability for organizations look like? Shift money to BIPOC organizations and privilege them. We can get to a place where we give wealth back to underserved communities and allow them in a self-determined way to use that capital in a way that suits their needs.

Panel Discussion

Carol Mitchell moderated a panel, featuring Dr. Ali Modarres, Katie Condit, Steven Cole-Schwartz, Cassandra Mitchell, and Drayton Jackson. *You can view the [From Poverty to Possibilities panel discussion](#) [here](#).*

Key takeaways

- *For this year's event, we are focusing on how we can – individually and collectively – disrupt and deconstruct the narrative and move towards disrupting systems that create barriers for those in poverty. We must ask ourselves, "what is my role in disrupting the status quo?" We must lean into being comfortable with being uncomfortable. – Carol Mitchell*
- *Rather than talking about how to end poverty, we should be talking about how we would manage poverty. We have always known the elements. We know it is about lack of health care and health insurance. We know it's about housing and quality of education. Everything we can think of in terms of inequity contributes to the rise of poverty. – Dr. Ali Modarres*
- *Per capita income is lower than the national and state averages. One-third of Pierce County residents make less than \$40,000 a year. Obviously, you need more than \$60,000 per year before taxes to barely afford housing and food in this area. So about one-third of Pierce County makes so much less that it doesn't matter how much they work, they are always behind. About half of our population makes less than \$50,000 a year. So when you begin to think about the consequences of that, you realize it is not just about employment, it is also about wages and how we pay people and what we consider to be worthy service. – Dr. Ali Modarres*
- *I have watched for the past ten years incomes basically stay constant, not even catching up with inflation, while housing prices doubled and rent has gone way up. This is gradually pushing people out of the wealth generation zone, and that has real consequences for the future. We are growing faster now by older population than younger, and for the first time in this country, there will be more older people than younger by 2050. And we do not have adequate services for this older population. We rely on a social security system that's about to fall apart, so for this aging population, by the time they retire, they will have two options, either work until they reach the finish line or live in poverty. If we do not help the ALICE family now, they are not going to be able to save and invest, which will have an impact on their retirement years and on our banking industry. – Dr. Ali Modarres*
- *WorkForce Central does its work in partnership pushing for living wages for Pierce County residents. We found this to be an opportunity for us to hold up a mirror. We as an organization cannot be paying ALICE wages. Nonprofit funding is part of the problem, but we are proud to say that our entry-level wages are now \$68,000 a year. Another example is Tacoma Housing Authority paying \$32/hour as their starting wage. – Katie Condit*
- *WorkForce Central focuses on 'earning and learning' opportunities like paid apprenticeships. City of Tacoma and Pierce County fund stipends for upskilling to living wage jobs. – Katie Condit*
- *As a system, we need to consider lived experience as valuable experience. Look at revising hiring practices to consider education and work experience and lived experience. Work with people to help them showcase these valuable skills. Also, there is value in lived experience for board membership standards. – Katie Condit*
- *The Group Health Foundation changed its name to the Initai Foundation commemorating a shift in focus from health equity to racial equity and justice. Initai means "across" or "the other place". They now focus on how to reach those furthest from access and support organizations deeply rooted in communities. They are funding organizations for who they are as much as what they do. – Steven Cole-Schwartz*
- *Key Bank is moving to support BIPOC communities. The demographics are changing, and we need to represent the communities served. We are not perfect, but we are making progress. We recognize gaps and the need to show up in communities. – Cassandra Mitchell*
- *The focus is on intentionality. Analyzing how our products may be excluding people and do something about it. Looking at the language we use, staffing composition, products, and lending. If criteria is creating barriers, we need to reevaluate the criteria. Providing resources like financial education to help get people ready, making affordable housing investments, and investing in nonprofit partners. The way to combat institutional racism is to*

make sure we are asking the right questions and having the right people at the table – Cassandra Mitchell

- *I've had two decades of homelessness lived experience. I was going to work in Seattle, seeing all of these encampments, and wondering why isn't anyone addressing. The system was made to destroy a certain type of people, but it is hurting everyone. – Drayton Jackson*
- *Homelessness and Poverty Management is involved in a \$47 million project building a 10,000 ft² day center with showers and congregate space, but when we get to the funding part of it, like Edgar pointed out, every application the response is "you don't have enough experience." So I started hanging out where rich people hang out trying to get some investors. I got elected to the school board. I was around people I normally would never be with, and I'm telling them about poverty and how you can't pull yourself up by your bootstraps if you don't have boots! – Drayton Jackson*
- *Because of some private donors, we were able to put the building program together. But the organization is about more than just housing. Poverty is intergenerational if we don't have anything to be passed on to our children. So with our program, everybody leaves with college funds, insurance, burial insurance, a housing deposit, etc. Each resident has an account, and when they leave our complex, they will leave with \$80,000 and with insurance. This is why you have people with lived experience sitting at the table. Lived experience is the key to making sure we change the systems. – Drayton Jackson*

Breakout Panels

Participants selected one of three breakout sessions to attend. Following are summaries for each:

Breaking Down Barriers Through a Guaranteed Basic Income

Presenters: Liz Berry, WA State Representative, Gyanendra Subba, Project Manager, Workforce Development Council of Seattle-King County, Patanjali de la Rocha, Program Director, The Nest, Hummingbird Indigenous Family Services, Debbie, Guaranteed Income program participant

Facilitator: Abigail Lawson, UWPC

In this session, leaders from around the state discussed a guaranteed basic income (GBI), its impacts, and how local pilots like United Way of Pierce County's are being used to push forward statewide advocacy for a basic income program in Washington.

A GBI is a recurring, no-strings-attached cash investment made directly to individuals. There are over 100 different localized pilot programs being run across the country and initial findings report that unconditional cash assistance can: alleviate poverty, stimulate mental and physical wellness in the recipient and their children, improve interpersonal relationships, and remind families that they are deserving of care and belonging.

In 2021, UWPC launched the GRIT program which served 110 ALICE families with \$500 a month for 13 months. Just recently, Patanjali and Hummingbird Indigenous Services launched the Nest program that will serve indigenous pregnant people with unconditional cash every month through their child's third birthday. Gyanendra, also a GBI administrator oversees the disbursement of cash grants through multiple nonprofits and they are getting to extend their work following a cash grant program being ran through Washington's Department of Commerce.

Following the multitude of GBI programs across Washington as well as a feasibility study from DSHS that found a statewide program would benefit Washingtonians and our economy has led to Representative Berry sponsoring the HB1045, the Evergreen Basic Income Pilot that would provide unconditional cash assistance for people across the State. The bill is still in the socializing phase but is being moved forward by advocates like Debbie willing to share her personal story as well as foundations and nonprofits willingness to donate to these causes and step out of historically harmful narratives and myths that people in poverty can't be trusted to make their own decisions.

- Debbie, "Without this program, this wouldn't be possible" Getting herself and her oldest grandson debt-free, success means continuing to strive for financial stability for herself and her family, with a goal of a forever home for her youngest grandson who is on the autism spectrum.
- Gyanendra, there are a lot of systems out there in King County, but none are moving the needle, starting their GBI program allowing \$500 a month for 5 months showed financial growth and success for these families, Seattle-King

County Workforce Central is now implementing \$1,000 a month for 12 months. The success of our system should be looked at long term, people who are working in any trade should be able to cover their basic needs without additional programs like GRIT, as wages and salaries don't cover the cost of living.

- Patanjali, working with the Indigenous community to resolve racism through disparities in healthcare when creating their program, collaborated with the community and elders to see what resources were needed. Due to the tax law, they cannot exceed \$16,000 a year without the individuals being taxed on their additional income. Their program gives \$1,250 a month to 150 people, specifically for pregnant people until the child is 3 years of age. Success is lowering the fatality rate for pregnant indigenous people, giving people more time to spend with their babies.
- Rep Berry, Bill HB1045 is her next goal to create a Basic Income Pilot Program, Evergreen Basic Income Trust that would provide individuals Washington with a GBI, her bill is looking for the funds for \$200 million. California has passed a bill similar; Washington is watching their moves to replicate what we can do for our state. Success is for the bill to be passed along with a 0% poverty population throughout Washington.
- Abigail, Challenges for a racist narrative for Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous communities, the blame of poverty is on the person instead of the system. Success is trust works, learning from these programs the metrics prove cash helps these individuals grow from poverty to self-sufficiency.

Connecting Resources for Pierce County Residents

Presenters: Shellie Willis, WorkForce Central; Tamar Jackson, WorkForce Central; Kelly Brickhouse, WorkForce Central; Norman Brickhouse, City of Fife

Facilitator: C. Lynn Willis, UWPC

Are you the Loop or the Lobby?

- Leadership —understand the community needs.
- Organizations want to create equitable access.
- Look at the Organization Structure.
- Increase Outreach.
- Need LISC to support our work in a shared vision.
- If we come together, we can do more than what we can do alone.

Kelly: How to bring our vision to life.

- Being part of the task force and tired of systems that don't work and are hard for people to navigate.
- Bring organizations together and join with others that have different expertise from ours.

Norman: As a community partner how did you see the partnership developing?

- See power and unity by working together to solve problems.
- Being able to quickly see where you need help and don't have the expertise and calling on others for help.
- Think out of the box and dare to be disruptive.
- Better serve the community by working together.
- Develop programs and seek help in the community.

Lynn: What encourages you?

- We've seen WorkForce Central coming to support and help CSF.
- New Drone pilot training through Amazon and employment CSF coaches will screen individuals.
- Teaching coaches how to use AI to write letters of support or references faster.

Shellie: Talk about the data.

- A driver to tell a different type of story to show the impact.

- Lived Experience Data: Collaboration for a Cause was born out of the community during the pandemic. The first event was handing out material goods at Goodwill and morphed into listening to community needs and doing events.
- The Job Fair at the Tacoma Dome event had 1,260 attendees.
 - People from all over Washington, not just Pierce County.
 - 60% had bachelor's degrees (probably have student loans and need to work).
 - Age Demographic of 47% were 30–40-year-olds.
 - Transportation for this event went out to rural Pierce County but no one got on the bus, but some did come to the event.
 - We have a missing middle demographic.

Tamar: Impact being the most important part of the work.

- City of Fife Collaboration for a Cause was a success in that people came out with a job and valuable resource.
- Come expecting one thing and be surprised. We have a preconceived idea of outcomes and were surprised by the additional benefits that resulted.
- I work with those struggling the most and they aren't in Tacoma where the resources are.
- Start to think outside the box on getting resources to those who need it where they are.
- Dare to think outside the box and ask for help.
- We helped employ people we could only do so through partnerships.
- Double down on efforts.
- We justify why we do what we do. We built Collaboration for A Cause to navigate a person, not a system we can't understand.
- Help those struggling is a relationship.
- Stop asking those we help to prostitute themselves to receive help.
- Put ourselves behind those we serve.
- Outreach is tender, not 8 hours a day.
- We don't need leaders to do, but to support.

Kelly: "Communi-vation"

- Website
- Improved Structure
- Private/Public Facebook Group
- Amplified Marketing Strategies
- We put 50% of our budget into marketing.
 - Social Media
 - Business Ads
 - Faith Communities
 - Challenge
- It's not about the title, but about where we're trying to go.



Norman: Fife for Life (School District)

- The only daycare we had is gone. How can we or will we help with this?
- Fife needs a grocery store and it's on our list.
- WorkForce development is there and will work on it
- Benefits Cliff — how many choose not to work because it's better for the family as they can receive assistance and don't have to pay childcare costs?
- Seniors — They cannot get any help in University Place and are getting priced out of housing. We need to help 55+.

Leave with a Call to Action

- Connect with government officials to communicate the need and the work.
- Advocate.
- How Interconnected are we — we have a choice to work together and tell our government officials about the challenges and the work.
- We need elected officials tell us when we need to advocate bills and legislation.
- Show up for the work; not at Kodak moments, but to better understand the need and work.

Table Discussion Takeaways

What was something you heard that resonated with you? What is one takeaway?

- Billion-dollar industry 8% to black and indigenous
- Lived experience, work experiences = education
- End with discrimination: help low-income people to get house, takeaway: we need to keep working together
- People with lived experience should be on boards
- Hassle free grant reports/operation.
- One car accident away from homelessness
- Show up, be bold, I will remember community is worthy
- Trust the people & build power together
- Philanthropy = plantation
- We're not going to social service our way out of a complex problem
- Moving beyond trauma and heal & move forward. Sorry we have not funded BIPOC communities, accept the past, do better, letting go of the fear and move forward. Take ownership and accept equality. More older than younger-2050 no services adequate, we don't have any, helping folks meet Alice.
- Race has no place but you went data-demographic
- Capitalism guarantees a wealth gap
- 2034 more older people than young
- Let go of fear to move forward, commit to doing better
- Transactional vs Transformational funding
- Nonprofits investing in staff beyond ALICE wages
- Honor life experiences, collective healing
- Capitalism wealth gap
- Collective action & working together by Edgar Villanueva
- The 7th generation rule
- Once a man, twice a child
- We need to do an equity audit of our processes
- Racism is alive and well in America, the struggle continues
- Give "IT" a name that personally means something, His name is John Henry Thaynes, my friend who taught me about what I did not know about caring
- The power/value & importance of lived experience
- We need to support each other rather than 'build fences' round individual wealth
- We cannot fix what is broken until we acknowledge it was broken in the first place
- Collective healing
- North Carolina has good ham. Who's your people? House Negroes. We can't fix the issues and damage until we acknowledge the past

- Identity is complex and some push down their race, ethnicity or belonging to be acceptable.
- Pay 60,000 livable wage
- Lived experience counts & matters
- Current colonialism continues
- Healing & Collective responsibility
- Exclusion
- Trust organizations doing the work
- We are a part of the systems we continue to talk about Immunity to colonization
- What is my collective responsibility
- How can I reframe my work around this idea?
- Same belief
- Collective healing and responsibility
- It takes all of us, you are who your people are
- Remove the historical message that you do not work for a nonprofit to make money.
- How to engage fighting for others when you are barely getting by and feel you are part of what you are fighting for.
- How for philanthropy has to go to change practices to truly achieve equity in underserved or underrepresented communities

As a result, what might you do differently to disrupt the status quo in your sphere of influence?

- Have the conversations outside of professional settings
- Spirit of the reparations
- Community Learning Grant
- Check where money is going and make sure it's getting to the right people
- Change how you use the model for bringing on board members, bring on more people with lived experience
- Coming together to make a difference in the lives on a new level
- Addressing the colonization process:
 - separating-controlling-extracting
- We cannot be a system when we are paying ALICE wages, when we are paying ourselves higher
- Community to bring community out of ALICE
- Living valuable experience in the workplace, listing that experience equals education
- Organizations that talk about DEI are performing poorly
- Just to do it for the funding, not for what the person can do
- Show up and be bold
- Remember communities are worthy, not risky
- Dismantle scary mindset
- Connect and understand that we are part of the system
- It all begins with you
- Continue to understand myself and my me
- Continue to be an active advocate in the community
- Stand up and advocate for respect of lived experience
- Approach my clients with empathy and an eye toward their unique story and experience
- Embrace all of my people and who I am
 - Contribute to acknowledge harm done to others and to help heal collectively
- Going to the resource and the root to help navigate ways to solve the problems

- Challenge current school curriculum taught
- Facilitate and promote an accurate program that explores the effects of colonization and suppression
- Remove the barriers race, age, all barriers
- Treat everyone on the same level.
- Open up the table to all whether in the higher staffing, the board
- The funding all aspects to get a true think tank with lived and not perceived ideas
- Advocate for more internal pay equity

What is our collective role?

- Remember all communities are worthy, not risky
- Financial Coach
- Be intentional
- Where did this money come from
- Who has the power to decide
- Who actually benefits
- Healing and grieve the pain
- Invest back into the community in the best way possible
- Living experiences are the key to possibilities
- Commit
- Show up
- Communication & Innovation
- Learning, voicing, building, healing
- Continue to fight for equality
- Support each other, however that looks
- Show up and do the work
- Acknowledge what happened and the trauma it caused
- Be honest, trust people
- Accountability
- Acknowledge and apologize and change the behavior
- Equity is an every moment decision, a way of living
- Connecting and building relationships with all partners so people don't get turned away or dismissed.
- Networking/collaboration/ support each other
 - Network with others that are in line with your organization's beliefs, no to isolate but to empower
 - To uplift BIPOC & LGBT overall any and all marginalized communities out of poverty and into security and safety, stability

Other thoughts comments.

- Put a comma on your conversation!! Love that quote by Carol Mitchell
- Centers for Strong Families, Collaboration for a Cause
- We need to all come and work in the same direction, share ideas, and get more resources for our people
- How come so many non-profits make it so hard to apply for grant dollars
- Thank you for the opportunity to learn and grow
- Is there a resource to learn about all attendees organizations? A way to collaborate and know what each of us offers to support our community, a way to reach out to each other
- The need to dominate and control

- You all need to start including Latino folks in your panel. We are over a million in this state, the largest pop. In ALICE and still none of our stories, experiences or faces made it up.
- My grandparents hoped and prayed for equal access and my parents continued to pray, and at 76 years old I continue to work and pray in our community.... Will anything actually change????
- Empathy and love for what you do
- Realize that we can't change the past, but we can redirect the future. But we cannot follow the path we were on but move into an equal realm for all. Edgar was amazing, we need more voices and fire like his in the community