



“When you learn something from people, or from a culture, you accept it as a gift, and it is your lifelong commitment to preserve it and build on it.” — Yo-Yo Ma

ACCEPTING THE GIFTS OF STORY

In engaging with this research, we would like to create an invitation to *accept the gifts of story* – as a community weaver, as a creator of context, and as a catalyst amelioration.

Story as Weaving

Seemingly disparate communities hold shared values and hopes that bridge perceived divides.

In a diverse community with wide ranges of lived experiences, beliefs, faiths, political affiliations, and traditions, finding commonality can be challenging. From the words we use to describe something to how our lived experiences and beliefs inform our perspective on events, there is much that can alienate those who do not share our common rhetoric or experiences. Stories offer a way of engaging with information differently. By engaging through the language of sharing stories, we foster opportunities to empathize with one another and create a deeper understanding of circumstances we may never directly experience. Through this qualitative process we have had an opportunity to analyze stories collectively, pushing past the rhetoric, and revealing shared values across communities that may seemingly share little in common.

Discovering and focusing on the common thread through our collective stories allows us to build a stronger community.

Story as Context

Providing critical information about the everyday circumstances that contribute to outcomes in our data.

As we evaluate and seek to deeply understand quantitative data and the *why* behind the data, the story becomes essential. Each data point in our existing local assessments, whether they be our Community Health Assessments, Healthy Youth Surveys, or other data sets reflect a singular aspect of our neighbors’ lives. These evaluations are useful for looking at big picture trends and gathering aggregate data about populations, but without more information about the story behind these trends, we may not have the details to change the trajectory of a trend. It’s in story that we can understand the details. Qualitative data collection and listening to individual stories and perspectives gives us insight into the daily circumstances of community members.

These glimpses into someone’s life can help identify not only what is contributing to the outcomes in data, but also, may bear strategies for change.

Story as Catalysts

Learning directly from communities about where they see opportunities for healing, growth, and change.

Starting with community members and *listening to learn* from them can manifest opportunities. This is where community members can offer insights and deeply engage in the work of shaping solutions. In a diverse community, no one person holds the solutions, but when we aggregate our base of knowledge, intuition, skills, and assets, residents can work to solve collective challenges. Our recent study offered a platform for knowledge sharing. Through the sharing of stories, community members deposited gems of wisdom by allowing others to learn from their experiences, their mistakes, their successes, their frustrations, and their joy. **Accepting what there is to learn from these stories and leveraging any new understanding gained in that process will support shaping better solutions as one community, one Whatcom County.**

OUR COMMITMENT TO COMMUNITY

When we began our journey of bringing the vision of a Whatcom Racial Equity Commission (WREC) into reality, our focus and commitment was centered on the community: to embed equity in the process itself to elevate, learn from, and leverage the wisdom that can come with lived experiences.

We need to be included, and our historical knowledge and expertise that's been passed on for generations, all the stories. All of that needs to be included in the planning process. Our ancestors were smart, they were legit scientists. No, they didn't have the educational background from an educational institution, but they knew the earth. They knew the environment. And they were the real scientists here. We've survived floods and volcanoes and tsunamis. There's many stories about those survival times of our people. -Member of the Nooksack Tribe

With the support of the Chuckanut Health Foundation, we launched the development and advocacy process in May 2021 with a Community Visioning Summit and now, in partnership with local government leaders, we are delivering a set of recommendations developed by 72 committed, individual community participants, with a core team of 35 stakeholders, through 80+ hours of meetings, many re-writes and even more alignment conversations.

Throughout the entirety of this process, we've prioritized and created mechanisms to uplift the voices, stories, and perspectives of Whatcom County residents. Our county communities are not only racially and ethnically diverse, they also represent the entire range of political affiliations; identify across the entire gender spectrum; practice different faiths; have a wide range of economic statuses; work in a variety of different sectors; and are of all ages.

THE FOCUS GROUP PROCESS

This report includes the results of an intentional and comprehensive focus group process co-designed and co-led with our Stakeholder community in order to acknowledge and include our county's varied life experiences.

Participation Data

- **Over 100 Community Members**
- **Ages 14-75**
- **53.6%** Identified as People of Color
- **20%** Identified as LGBTQIA+
- **66%** were parents, grandparents, or caregivers
- **40.9%** had personally or had family experience incarceration
- **71.8% said they had experienced racism and/or marginalization**

Stakeholders helped develop nine questions related to equity, belonging and subject-specific topics which were informed by the issues and concerns raised in prior local government townhalls, listening sessions, community conversations and strategic planning processes. These questions were used to guide the two-hour, focus group discussions, with the intention of creating conversations that would invite both quantitative and qualitative input.

Stakeholders also assisted in reaching out to different communities to solicit participation and, on occasion, engaged as co-facilitators

of the focus group sessions themselves. Examples include a college student who conducted a higher education student focus group; a community member, who has lived in the Nooksack school district, conducted several sessions with our Everson, Nooksack, and Sumas communities; and a stakeholder with professional outreach expertise engaged with our local Hispanic and Latinx populations to conduct a session in Spanish with our fish and farm working community.

We also had several focus groups comprised of people who opted in through our mailing list, while several others shared an affinity—such as racial identity, being a leader in the faith community, or from a specific professional sector, city, or community in the county.

Over the course of six months, we hosted 32 focus groups, with over 100 participants who chose to contribute more than 60 hours of their time, thoughts, and stories to help us understand how they see our community and how they experience racial equity. Our decision to compensate participants for their time and effort provided evidence of our intention to listen, hear and honor all their contributions.

... I think our worst enemy is ignorance. If we don't educate people, and if we don't share these stories. I think racism is learned. And if it's learned it could be relearned a different way. -Latinx Community Member

It is worth noting there were multiple instances of community members who declined to participate – reasons cited included the belief that their perspectives wouldn't be respected or

believed; a weariness at being asked to share their experiences but not trusting their sharing would have an impact; and a fear for their personal safety and well-being.

Our stakeholders have shared how honored they were to not only facilitate these conversations, but to also bear witness to the stories and experiences of our community members. The WREC team was honored to have our stakeholders as leaders in this process – their leadership and participation created opportunities to build bridges of understanding and to ensure the various diverse perspectives of our county-wide neighbors would be represented in this process.

DATA ANALYSIS

Our team engaged Dr. John Korsmo, Ph.D., Chair Health & Community Studies, Professor of Human Services, Western Washington University, to review, evaluate and report on the focus group data. Both a detailed report and summary of the key findings relative to founding a local racial equity commission will be released in full and are included in our final report.

Dr. Korsmo spent 200+ hours analyzing roughly 1,000 pages of raw transcripts, identifying nine overarching themes and creating 112 pages of data in support of those themes.

A theme is defined as an idea or topic mentioned multiple times within a single focus group, and also across multiple focus groups. The nine identified themes are:

The inductive data analysis process:

- Review of roughly 1000 pages of raw data
- Identification of relevant pertinent information
- Organizing pertinent information for each focus group, and for each individual question
- Identification of emerging common themes within each focus group, and for each individual question
- Cross-tabulation/comparison of themes across questions and groups (seeking common themes)
- Articulating themes and salient information for each focus group, and for each individual question

- **Equal Access and Inclusion**

Means of obtaining, receiving, or approaching something safely, or joining in on something – with equal welcome and opportunity. The practice or policy of providing equal access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized. Entails welcoming encouragement to be a valued participant or contributor.

- **Representation**

People from a particular place or group are present at and engaged with equal influence of people who represent the numeric majority. May include the action of speaking or acting on behalf of someone not present, in their best interest.

- **Call to Action and Consequences**

A prompt or necessity to take action toward a specific aim. Results or outcomes of an action or condition.

- **Safe Places and Accountability**

An environment in which a person or category of people can feel confident that they will not be exposed to emotional or physical harm, including discrimination or harassment. May refer to geographical space, physical location, or virtual

environment. An obligation or willingness to accept responsibility or to account for one's actions – particularly related to acting on awareness/knowledge.

- **Inequities**

Referring to instances of injustice, unfairness, or unequal treatment, including historical discrimination.

- **Organizational Structures / Systems**

The methods by which work flows through an organization or community. Processes and ways of operating in order to achieve goals of an organization or community.

- **Awareness / Funds of Knowledge**

Conceptualization and knowledge including that which has been historically and culturally developed to enable an individual or household to function within a given culture.

- **Prejudice and Racism**

Relating to preconceived opinion that is not based on reason or actual experience. Discrimination, or antagonism directed against a person or people on the basis of their membership in a particular racial or ethnic group, typically one that is a minority or marginalized population.

- **Burden on People of Color**

Referring to the emotional or physical load carried by Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color. May include labor or hardship that is not equally distributed among general, or non-BIPOC population.

Dr. Korsmo has shared that the WREC Focus Group and data collection process is the most exhaustive and thorough effort he's seen to-date in Whatcom County.

We have synthesized and created a working context from these themes to guide our development process – there are three primary conversations:

- Community member experience relative to racial equity issues
- The potential role a governmental entity such as a Commission could play in addressing local inequities
- What belonging currently looks like in Whatcom County and how that could shift as we engage in meaningful racial-equity work.

Examples of qualitative information collected through the focus group sessions includes:

- *“A teacher was bullying my daughter. Thank God, the other teachers took action. The principal took her out of school, but the experience was a little difficult. I had to go to the school district for support, so they could do something. It's my daughter who is still very fearful of teachers because the teacher looked down on her because she was Hispanic.”*

- *“We actually had a teacher send a note back home to my brother that for his silver bracelet¹. He said that it was making too much noise when he was writing on the desk. If he wanted to wear it, he had to tape it to his hand when he was at school.”*
- *“I don't think there's much that has changed in the 20 years since I've been at high school [in Whatcom County]. Nothing has changed, actually. It's almost two weeks ago, my daughter was called a racial slur at school, at recess by a little boy. And I knew that this this day was going to come but I didn't know it was going to come this quick ... it opened my eyes to a lot of things and then also for the school's response to address the situation was not surprising. They didn't do anything.”*
- *“I see white patients in clinic and black patients in the hospital. Because of the preventative care and the insurance that's required to cover specialty [treatments] ... we know a lot of our black patients wait until their heart attack is completed or until they've been dealing with something for so long, and cost always comes up in conversation. How much is it going to cost, how long do I need to be on this medicine, how much is this procedure going to cost. And we hear it every now and again from white patients but not nearly to the extent of our black and brown patients, and the unit just looks different. It's just a different demographic inpatient versus outpatient.”*
- *“I'm just at the end of the day, if I can come back and just be tired from work like regular white people are, and not have to worry about getting harassed or getting spoken to a certain way or not all of that added work that goes into doing labor for white people making myself smaller, trying to avoid situations and all of that stuff, that would be success for me. That's a successful Whatcom County Racial Equity.”*

WHAT'S NEXT

... where the rubber hits the road is when you say, “Okay, we know all this stuff. What are we going to implement, that is going to change people to make them fair or to make the system compensate?” There's the application that is actually the difficult part. We can all know what's going on. And, in fact, people have been pretty good about getting the word out about a number of issues in society in the last couple years, and we're still kind of struggling with implementation. -Member of Our Criminal Justice System

While we are pleased to present these findings related to this current phase of work, we want to emphasize that it represents only a fraction of the potential learning from our focus group process. Participants joined knowing they were not only informing our recommendation process but also providing critical feedback which can be used to inform a seated Commission's areas of focus and work. Subsequent revisiting and analysis of the focus group raw data will be essential in honoring and addressing the lessons to be learned from our community members.

We also want to acknowledge the community members who chose to share their time and wisdom with our team – we have a deep appreciation for their willingness to speak with us and for allowing us to listen to their words. We hold in our hearts a deep sense of responsibility to honor their stories by building upon the lessons they shared with us, and we thank them for

¹ “Silver Bracelet” refers to a *kara*, an article of faith worn by members of the Sikh community.

trusting us with their experiences. As the development of the WREC moves forward into its next phase, we will continue to look to these experiences, and the lived experiences of our stakeholders and community members as well, to shape our project and the process of establishing the Whatcom Racial Equity Commission.

With Gratitude,

The Whatcom Racial Equity Commission Project Team

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A Case for Racial Equity: Perspectives of Whatcom Residents
Whatcom County Racial Equity Commission
Review of Qualitative Data
Dr. John Korsmo, 2022

Overview

In order to better understand the current contexts, needs, and aspirations for a Racial Equity Commission in Whatcom County, we worked to qualitatively engage community members from a wide area of the county in conversation and focus group interviews to learn perspectives from diverse constituencies. This information, or “data” was garnered through deliberate and widely recognized methodologies, outlined below.

Qualitative methods can get at the things that quantitative data don't, such as the reasons for people's actions, the lived experiences of a population, or community history. They can help to identify community issues or needs and provide a basis for planning community efforts that lead to long-term change. Qualitative research methods are valuable in providing rich descriptions of complex phenomena; tracking unique or unexpected events; illuminating the experience and interpretation of events by people with widely differing stakes and roles; giving voice to those whose views are rarely heard; conducting initial explorations to develop theories and to generate and even test hypotheses; and moving toward explanations and deliberate action. Qualitative and quantitative methods are complementary, used in sequence or in tandem. The best qualitative research is systematic and rigorous, and it seeks to reduce bias and error and to identify evidence that disconfirms initial or emergent hypotheses.

Process

To garner insights from a wide swath of Whatcom County and better understand the diversity of perspectives, 32 focus group interviews (Appendix 1) were conducted over a several-month time period, with over 100 participants. Interviews consisted of nine semi-structured (open-ended) questions (Appendix 2). The interviews were recorded and transcribed, to assist in the analysis of participant feedback. An inductive approach was then used to analyze the data, as is commonly the case in health and social science research.

The purposes for using an inductive approach are to (a) condense raw textual data into a brief, summary format; (b) establish clear links between the research objectives (community members) and the summary findings derived from the raw data; and (c) develop a framework of understanding the underlying experiences that are evident in the raw data. The general inductive approach provides a systematic set of procedures for analyzing qualitative data that can produce reliable and valid findings.

A thematic content analysis was then conducted, which involved identifying themes and categories that emerged from the data. While engaging in content analysis, the researchers focus more on the frequency of occurrence of various categories, and during the thematic analysis, it is more about identifying themes and building up the analysis in the most cohesive manner. Thematic analysis can be more in depth and generally provides a broader understanding than

content analysis alone. Content analysis assists us to identify important data to focus on, while thematic analysis helps us identify and understand the descriptive data.

While this is a rather tedious process it helps us formulate a more complete understanding of participants' varied experiences and opinions of racial equity in Whatcom County. When coupled with quantitative statistical data, it helps us to paint a more complete picture of the lived experiences of Whatcom County residents. The data analysis process included:

- Review of raw data
- Identification of relevant pertinent information
- Organizing pertinent information for each focus group, and for each individual question
- Identification of emerging common themes within each focus group, and for each individual question
- Cross-tabulation/comparison of themes across questions and groups (seeking common themes)
- Articulating themes and salient information for each focus group, and for each individual question

Outcomes

A review of over 60 hours of audio-recorded interviews, and roughly 1,000 pages of raw data (interview transcripts) was narrowed down to 112 pages of relevant pertinent information. A cross-analysis of text was conducted, identifying myriad common perspectives, and ultimately 9 over-arching pertinent themes (present in responses to multiple questions, and consistent among distinct focus groups), which will be outlined below.

Overarching Pertinent Themes

Equal Access and Inclusion

[Means of obtaining, receiving, or approaching something safely, or joining in on something – with equal welcome and opportunity. The practice or policy of providing equal access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized. Entails welcoming encouragement to be a valued participant or contributor.]

This theme was touched on by 31 distinct groups involving 8 questions.

Representation

[People from a particular place or group are present at and engaged with equal influence of people who represent the numeric majority. May include the action of speaking or acting on behalf of someone not present, in their best interest.]

This theme was touched on by 31 distinct groups related to 8 questions.

Call to Action and Consequences

[A prompt or necessity to take action toward a specific aim. Results or outcomes of an action or condition.]

This theme was touched on by 31 distinct groups related to 7 questions.

Safe Places and Accountability

[An environment in which a person or category of people can feel confident that they will not be exposed to emotional or physical harm, including discrimination or harassment. May refer to geographical space, physical location, or virtual environment. An obligation or willingness to accept responsibility or to account for one's actions – particularly related to acting on awareness/knowledge.]

This theme was touched on by 29 distinct groups related to 7 questions.

Inequities

[Referring to instances of injustice, unfairness, or unequal treatment, including historical discrimination.]

This theme was touched on by 29 distinct groups related to all 9 questions.

Organizational Structures/Systems

[The methods by which work flows through an organization or community. Processes and ways of operating in order to achieve goals of an organization or community.]

This theme was touched on by 29 distinct groups related to all 9 questions.

Awareness/Funds of Knowledge

[Conceptualization and knowledge including that which has been historically and culturally developed to enable an individual or household to function within a given culture.]

This theme was touched on by 29 distinct groups related to 8 questions.

Prejudice and Racism

[Relating to preconceived opinion that is not based on reason or actual experience. Discrimination, or antagonism directed against a person or people on the basis of their membership in a particular racial or ethnic group, typically one that is a minority or marginalized population.]

This theme was touched on by 29 distinct groups related to 7 questions.

Burden on BIPOC

[Referring to the emotional or physical load carried by Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color. May include labor or hardship that is not equally distributed among general, or non-BIPOC population.]

This theme was touched on by 23 distinct groups related to all 9 questions.

(See Appendix 3: Themes and Respondents for each Question for reference.)

Implications and Community Voice

The following pages outline some of the key takeaways and themes from responses to each interview question. While identifying information such as names have been redacted for confidentiality, direct quotes are used to present precise insights from participants. Respective themes are highlighted and underlined for point of reference.

Question 1: What does [or what could] belonging look like in Whatcom County?

There was considerable appreciation for all that Whatcom County has to offer its residents, from its geographic location and natural beauty, to the services, activities and resources, to the people who live here. It was, however, noted within each focus group that the assets and opportunities of Whatcom County are not equitably accessible or universally experienced. There was a common level of awareness related to the relationship between one's sense of belonging, and their ability to experience **Equal Access and Inclusion**, and to "...*have a space and a community that you feel welcomed in. To feel that you are seen...just being able to say that you have a group that you relate to, that you feel you can communicate with and that can understand you're here, a space where you feel heard*" (NVFL). Related to this sense of being welcomed, is a prevalent desire to feel "...*accepted by everyone else just for being who you are and who you want to be... even if they don't agree with you...*" (SFF). Or as stated by one Sumas area resident,

I think belonging in this area is everybody being free to be themselves, whatever that means to them, whatever their culture background. I think that's probably the biggest thing that I would say is being able to represent your culture and show who you are, whatever it is, and still feel like you belong in the community. And having your background be respected and celebrated and educated about and not seen as something that is just different.
(SUMAS)

This attention to being respected and celebrated for who one is and the richness their family culture and heritage brings to the County was prevalent throughout each region and demographic involved in focus groups throughout the County, and centered on **Safe Places and Accountability** combined with appropriate **Representation**:

...it looks like people feeling safe and comfortable to come together and share ideas, to have safe places to gather. But also sometimes it's not necessarily a physical gathering,

but an ability to gather around a central concept and have community wide conversations that everybody can participate in. (A&C)

I think that belonging is an intentional community. It has an arms open policy that brings acceptance and love to the people that you come across and there's an opportunity for those people to join in and walk alongside each other, and that belonging part comes when we can join in some collective goals and work alongside each other. (NVFL)

I'm just coming from a Mexican American perspective. We have no cultural spaces right now in Whatcom County anywhere. And I think that's what has been one of the biggest issues. The fact that we have no space for different communities to be able to gather and be able to create their own cultural spaces and when I say culture, I mean traditional cultures but also political alignment. Whatever fits that community and that it'd be acceptable. (SJA0)

...in terms of belonging and representation there is a bit of a difference in what culture we share and where we can see each other or see others of our own. (LX)

[We need] spaces where you feel comfortable being who you are, no matter how you identify or what you look like or what your resources are. Also, being a safe, comfortable space to ask for what you need. I think that's a really big part of belonging. (SJA0)

I think it means that you have a sense of safety and security, no matter where you may be. I see it a lot with middle schoolers all day long, belonging to them means very different things than to us. I think it means you feel safe in a situation. And, there's been multiple times from different places where I've just not felt like I belonged... (Pw/U)

I think belonging is about having spaces where you're able to be yourself and ask the questions that bother you and express yourself in ways that are comfortable to you. (NVFL)

Belonging looks like public recognition, besides rhetoric, that actually gives us governance and a voice and we're listened to instead of marginalization (SJA0)

There were common observations and experiences shared that point to a need for intentional attention to understanding and respecting diverse backgrounds and creating opportunity for community to come together across differences, toward common aspirations of health and wellness. These include such themes as acknowledging and addressing **Prejudice and Racism**, as well as awareness of increased **Burden on BIPOC** community members:

Right now, it looks very siloed. There are various groups based on income, social status, or political positioning. It's a very siloed community and belonging depends on your courage to get into spaces where you're normally not in that silo. And it's race, its class, its political alignment. It's also access. It's very stratified. (SJA0)

There's so many barriers to acceptance that are hidden. I don't even know how to express it except that I know that it's complicated and it's a problem for a lot of us white folks to really get our avenues of belonging and acceptance cleared out and barrier free. (Parents)

...Belonging would be not having to fight through discriminatory prejudice, assumptions, stereotypes, or prejudging to do what you want to do. (Parents)

...so that feeling of, you know, people watching you when you go into those stores or whatever. I grew up with that right, and we knew how people felt about people on the rez, right. And then when Obama got in there, I felt like there was hope. Oh my god, it just felt so hopeful, and then all of a sudden, the day Trump gets in there. I was downtown, and I was getting one of our elders [at the] store. And a guy stopped and he just started flipping my mom and I off right by the window, and he said, "Make America great again" and he was just flipping us off the whole time we were sitting there. So we get home and I'm talking to mom about it and mom's just like, "oh I got shot at with the girls in Birch Bay..." and, you know, we talked about all the things that have racially happened to her before. So it didn't even faze her that guy doing that, but for me I felt really bad because I can see my children [also facing this].... (IFG)

[Belonging would be] having spaces that are as free of judgment as possible and that we kept coming back to assuming best intentions of everybody that comes in. I know on an individual level when I haven't felt like I belonged somewhere it was usually rooted in something like that, where it was like their suspicion or lack of trust or something. I think creating belonging involves knowing that you can never really know who somebody is, just based on how you see them and what you perceive. And that's a big ask, but I feel like it's an important thing to cultivate in a community, knowing that we might be ignorant to who someone really is and not just go with our assumptions based on what someone looks like. (A&C)

In keeping with the notion of assuming best intentions, and “doing the work” of getting to know our neighbors was a veritable **Call to Action and Understanding of Consequences**, including consideration for **Organizational Structures and Systems**:

I think for me, belonging is an action word. It's not something that you see that's hung up front of a business as part of a mission statement or a value statement, but it's about the actions of people and what you do. I know in my experience, people remember more about how they're treated from another person than anything else. They might not remember your name. They might not remember where you work, but they remember how you treat them. So belonging is actionable, and being able to invite people in not specifically to your home, but just into whatever circle or wherever they are at that point. So hearing people and treating people with respect and making people feel comfortable. (LEFG)

In some ways the way organizations or institutions are created were inherently racist. And so it's like you have to have changes in some of those structures, whether that's through law, or however you're going to go about changing it in order to solve some of these problems. (A&C)

I have not really struggled with belonging myself, I feel like me in my life, I've been quite fortunate. The systems are all in place for me to feel like I belong [as a middle class White person]. (ML2)

Taken together, the perspectives associated with participants across the board were hopeful for what Whatcom County may become as safe and respectful place.

Question 2: [To what degree] can cultural awareness solve for structural violence or racism?

Perhaps more than any other question, responses to this one were contingent on defining and understanding terms, and how one interpreted the meaning of the question itself. On the surface, participant responses of either a solid “yes” or a solid “no” could lead one to believe there was a marked discrepancy in opinion. There were indeed emotionally expressed responses in both the affirmative (yes, cultural awareness can solve for these things) and the negative (no, of course cultural awareness can’t solve for these things). For instance:

[Of course not]. Obviously white people asked that question. Or politicians that want to just take care of shit. It's like, okay, let's deal with this, give them anti-racism training, give them some cultural awareness, and we'll do A, B, C, and D, and we'll take care of it... (SJAO)

I think that is the only way we can solve this issue of structural violence and racism. It's the only way, once we understand each other's cultures and where we're coming from. (NES)

Upon more thorough consideration, it can be seen that with myriad caveats and explanations, there was actually a very consistent opinion among all respondents, that cultural **Awareness and Funds of Knowledge** (considering the sources of knowledge) is important and necessary, however not sufficient. Whether participants initially expressed belief that cultural awareness can, or cannot, solve for structural violence or racism, such comments were commonly conveyed:

I think cultural awareness is an important thing because it informs your decisions, and whether that's a micro or macro level, if you know more, you make better decisions. (Pros)

I think cultural awareness is like a steppingstone towards a conversation for healing but in and of itself, being aware of some of these cultures I don't think is going to fix the heat in people's hearts. (PDef)

I think cultural awareness will definitely help because in wide hierarchies, if somebody is uninformed it's a good idea to have a discussion with them that you're somehow not less, that you're also a human being, you also have your culture, your representation. And just because you're not so visible in Whatcom County which is majority white. It does not make you less of a human being, and it would help a lot, bringing awareness to people. (AAPI)

I think people tend to fear the unknown. I think cultural awareness can make a really big difference for violence and for racism. I think that at a certain point if someone is determined to not accept others, and he's determined to go out of his way to show violence, to show racism, there's no way that we can really counteract that. I think the best method would be to kind of teach about other cultures from a really young age. (YAS)

To better express themselves, several people shared personal stories of various ways in which awareness toward cultural competence has influenced their lives in Whatcom County, such as:

I think it can definitely help but I think our worst enemy is ignorance. If we don't educate people, and if we don't share these stories. I think racism is learned. And if it's learned it could be relearned a different way. And I'll share a short story about 2020. The previous president was in power. I walked in one of my [construction] jobs with one of my workers. And there was this lady - I walked in and I said, "Hi I'm Stan¹" and her first response was, "Hey Stan, what do you think about our wall?" That was the first question, and I'm like what wall - in your house? She was referring to the wall that the President was promoting right. So, my reaction was like, "Well, I think he's stupid." Of course, that ended up going into a long conversation. I told her my story, and my parents are from Mexico. They brought me here when I was nine, illegally. I grew up in central California for a long time and I moved here and got a job and I had no immigration status, also long process, then I started my immigration process through President Obama. And so, I told her my story, and guess what, they're my friends now. If you don't share these things that we're going through, if we don't let them know the other side of, "oh there was a Mexican here that killed somebody," they see all of us as bad people but when they hear the story... Yes, I came here illegally. Yes, I lived here for a long time. I got married I have four kids, I own a business that I pay probably more taxes for. Once you hear the story - if you share your culture, your point of view they see the other side. If they get out of their minds from "well he's illegal, he should get in line", like where is the line? If they know that there's no line, they think twice for a minute. I think sharing will make better awareness of our culture and things that we go through, and why things happen, ... when they hear the stories I think he changes, he definitely changes. If we don't speak, nobody's gonna know... They were a little aggressive in the beginning but in the end they saw my point of view, and they feel compassion for me. And we stay in contact and it takes us talking, speaking, sharing with them what we go through. We're not bad people. We have the same feelings that they do, and we have the same dreams that they do and this is just this invisible wall that's holding us from getting there. (LX)

This shared experience, like so many others, is an example of the consideration of “funds of knowledge,” or the source of empirical and valid information, such as that which comes from real life, personal lived experience, and not only academia. Another consideration for this type of awareness and information is “indigenous ways of knowing” which gets at the vast variety of knowledge that exists across diverse indigenous communities, families, and individuals. A common thread within each of the interviews was a call for Whatcom County to pay more attention and give more credence to informal knowledge. To learn from the experiences of families who have farmed for generations, or those who have immigrated/emigrated here for work, or those for whom post-secondary education was not an option or a desired choice. Participants discussed an inherent perceived assumption that community members with formal higher education and positions with authority are granted more attention and taken more

¹ Participant’s name has been changed to maintain anonymity.

seriously as sources of knowledge than those without it. Regardless of types of employment or educational levels, 28 of the 31 focus groups discussed the importance of soliciting, valuing, and honoring multiple sources of knowledge, including indigenous ways of knowing, the knowledge of our community members in poverty, those who have been incarcerated, and those for whom English is not their primary language, and others. Suggestions relating to how to solicit and utilize such knowledge pointed to the nexus of education, awareness, and relational engagement, including a **Call to Action and awareness of Consequences**, such as:

I think awareness is foundational but it is not the work. And I don't think it can resolve anything. We have to have a basic understanding that this is happening. (MHW)

I could sit and be told to be nice to everybody and be inclusive, but until you're actually talking to people, and have an actual understanding of what they go through, I think that's where the real movement starts to happen. And I think it has to start on an individual basis, and then collectively, to fight systemic racism. (Pros)

I think, just being who I am, a white female, it would be very easy for me to turn a blind eye to the structural violence and racism because it doesn't directly impact me. I'm not typically someone who deals with discrimination based on my culture and who I am. I think that cultural awareness is a steppingstone, it can help people who would otherwise not understand that structural violence and racism exist in this world. And it can educate people, but it doesn't change it on its own. But it can be the start of that change, educating people so that in their everyday lives, they're seeing the impacts of these things and they're actually in a position potentially to make some small efforts toward resolving what's going on once they are able to see it. (PDef)

I think there are some people who are blissfully unaware and becoming aware is a good foundation. But there also still needs to be accountability. There needs to be action, because people can be aware, and they can also maintain the level of power that they have. (MHW)

I think cultural awareness has to be there. But the thing is, it's just the base. I mean, you're not going to want to feel empathy for somebody if you don't know anything about them. I think that's the very first thing that has to come about is cultural awareness. You have to be aware you have a neighbor, first of all, and what your neighbor's going through before you're ever going to want to step alongside of them. But I think the basic problem is, we think that cultural awareness is enough. And I think it's beyond that. You have to be willing to stand beside somebody. ... I think you have to make individual alliances and individual friendships. Know who my neighbor is. It's got to be personalized... (CE)

...the cultural awareness of individuals has to also be accompanied or followed by action. So awareness, and understanding and empathy on their own don't change anything, unless those people who garner that awareness use it in a way to enact change. (Pros)

Sort of where the rubber hits the road is when you say, “Okay, we know all this stuff. What are we going to implement, that is going to change people to make them fair or to make the system compensate?” There's the application that is actually the difficult part. We can all know what's going on. And, in fact, people have been pretty good about getting the word out about a number of issues in society in the last couple years, and we're still kind of struggling with implementation. (Pros)

I think you can be aware and not act. And so you got to take that awareness and do something with it. And, that means things like strategic plans that include the right kind of focus and compel action in the system. That means willing to take a public stand and make statements about equity and inclusion and diversity and stand on those in the face of attacks and questions and whatever. (SUPS)

...that's kind of part of the problem - people want an easy fix. They want a general solution they can just apply across the board...it takes building relationships, knowing your neighbor, like getting together and cooking a meal but that's harder for folks. They just want to read their Ibram Kendi book and be done with it. (SJAO)

Sometimes you need to bring the bigger guns to get things done, and then do the education part. Then people are like, “oh, I have to do this” or “I have to follow this [law or rule]”. And at the end of the day, you could talk to and educate people, but we have done so much education already. We have done so many things, community service, different things. Sometimes you just need to have a bigger law or something... (SE)

In keeping with the common call to action offered by participants, a distinction was made between a person or community being non-racist, vs. being anti-racist. Action is the key ingredient that differentiates these two. A person or community may not actively support racist or prejudicial behavior or policy, however absence of action against racism and prejudice is complicity.

While there was considerable attention given to the power and potential of education and training relevant to cultural awareness, it was not without its concerns. In considering the ways in which people may obtain professional development around cultural awareness, there was also apprehension about the types of and sources of information and training people receive as well as inherent potential pitfalls or consequences of such training, much of which is deficit oriented, tokenizing, or otherwise absent of localized pertinent, insider awareness:

...whose cultural awareness and what does that actually mean? And where are you getting your information and knowledge? And are you just saying, ‘Oh, I understand this culture because I have one Asian friend and they're okay with XY or Z’. (MHW)

I would add maybe there's a difference between cultural awareness and cultural valuation. And so just because you're aware of cultural differences doesn't mean that you value them

as much. I would differentiate between cultural awareness which is acknowledging the difference of cultures versus valuing the difference of cultures, and so cultural valuation could potentially solve for some of the structural violence because you would seek out and value the equity component. (Pw/U)

The unfortunate thing is sometimes trainings become almost like a deflection so that actual change doesn't happen. You'll have a DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) training or something and then there will still be a really consistent structural problem in an organization and then the answer is, 'but we have that DEI training.' (A&C)

...who's interpreting [cultural awareness], because I feel like that's kind of where structural racism and violence came from. Like, it's very intentional. (MHW)

...my experience with cultural awareness has been ending up in co-opting of our traditions and our celebrations particularly in our community, the Cinco de Mayo stuff that happens in all of these white led organizations where they have, these Cinco de Mayo things with white people putting on Mexican hats and all that stuff and eating tacos and all of a sudden, you know, they're like, that's cultural awareness...the question is bothersome. Do people know what structural violence is? I think people need to first understand what structural violence is. And no, it's not going to solve the problem at all. In fact, it's only going to make it worse. It's been making it worse... I think that white people need to understand what their culture is first. And I'd like to know, what is white culture? You know, because there's a problem with white people not really understanding what their culture is, and I grew up with Danish people, Germans, and Swedes. And it was beautiful, their culture what they shared with me... (SJAO)

It has some value and can be useful and can be helpful and may be an ingredient in the change making. But it's definitely not sufficient. I'm not even convinced it's necessary. So it's nice to have, and I think at the same time it also carries with it some risk that the degree to which these issues are structural is not diminished in some people's minds. (LGBTQ+)

I'm not sure about cultural awareness. I think that people have to really embrace difference, and this is not a community that seems to do that. It seems like the only safe way to interact is to mimic the person you're interacting with. And because otherwise, they will reject you. (CE)

I think it's a mixed bag, because I don't understand why the general white person has to know our background and our cultural experiences to then say, 'wow, I've never known that,' and then they might think of us like a human, or even an equal. (AAPI)

I don't think it does a bad thing unless it leads to complacency where people think okay, 'well now I've done my part. I've learned about these issues' ... that attitude could actually be damaging, but I think to the extent it makes you more culturally competent, more sensitive in our job - more capable of relating with people in a way that feels right for them, it's a positive. But it doesn't solve past problems. (PDef)

I think a big piece of solving for structural violence and racism is really getting on terms with the fact that there's this big struggle of understanding historical challenges and not wanting to take any ownership for benefiting, 'just because I'm white and my ancestors had slaves doesn't mean I did'. (MHW)

This cultural awareness training feels kind of weird to me. It'd be great for there to be spaces for us to share cultures and music and food and song and dance and stories. But it feels like you're trying to take something that's like, really beautiful and unique, and squish it into a box that's easy to digest for white people...there's something about training and cultural awareness that just makes me uncomfortable. And that's not what's really going to solve the problem with structural violence...it feels kind of uncomfortable. (SJAO)

Much of the finer-pointed critique and concern for potential negative consequences associated with considering cultural competency as solving for structural violence and racism relate to **Prejudice and Racism** in Whatcom County, as well as the additional **Burden on BIPOC** when confronting these issues:

I don't think cultural awareness solves structural violence or racism. I think violence and racism comes from a worldview that diminishes the value of people as disposable so we can trample over them. If we view them as worthy individuals to receive our respect and they have an innate value, regardless of where they come from, that there's dignity attached to them, and care along the way that the violence and racism is just an exposure of our view of personhood - whether or not that person is valuable and so I think those things transcend awareness, because it's not a matter of education that fixes these things. (NVFL)

I think it takes more than just the people of color. We need the help of white people as well. And right now, it feels like they mean well. They're there to be supportive against racism, but you have to be anti-racist as well. You have to be part of the bigger change and so we just have a long ways to go. (School)

...are they willing to do their work and not put their head in the sand or pretend? I've seen a lot of people. They get tired. We're all tired. But they get tired of the weight and the burden of having their eyes open, and they take the breaks from the work because their privilege allows them to. (AAPI)

Oftentimes, from my experience growing up in the public school system, and I know I didn't experience racism as much as people before me did, but when I think back, I feel like I did a lot of trying to fit in here rather than embracing my culture and my identity as a Nooksack matriarch in the making. I found myself trying to fit in with the non-native community and the standards of the non-native lifestyle. I think our young people still struggle with that. I do take pride in the kids that are now more involved with our dancing groups or drumming groups, canoe journey, canoe paddling, that being so involved in our culture helps them embrace that identity, rather than trying to fit in. (NT)

Many of the stories directly related to current and historic **Inequities** within Whatcom County and the broader State and Country. Being informed by our past and grappling with our present may compel us to take action for our future:

...it's kind of hard to change something that people have already gotten used to, because now I guess it's almost normal. ...It's very hard to change that because it's been around for so long, and a lot of people use racism in ways that people don't recognize it. And it's just kind of hidden in a bunch of different things. (SFF)

I think it's really coming from how do we educate and integrate the notion that this structural violence and racism was perpetuated and created and people are still benefiting from it? (MHW)

I think that no, [cultural awareness will not solve the problem] because I feel like social racism has been in our history. And that's basically how our country started. So I feel like it's way too dug in our history to fix it, or even if we try to fix it, it's gonna take lots of years and people to be open minded to help. (SFF)

Anything that can resolve is very future looking. It's not considering lifetimes of violence that have already wreaked destruction on communities of color and other communities. So, without reparations without other things that are backward looking, you're just not going to be able to solve anything. (PDef)

...what has historical racism done, with housing and redlining, with economics and loans not being given out to people of color and such, I mean again, there's just so much more that goes into it that cultural awareness is not going to solve. (AAPI)

It's something you can't get rid of because it's been here and present for a long time. So lots of people, even though they don't realize it are somehow still being a little racist. (SFF)

I think these things have been ingrained in us for our complete history. And it's really going to take some overcoming that stuff. We all know from a personal level, when we hold an opinion about someone or their culture and we get to know them, that preconceived idea just changes. And we begin to taste acceptance instead of rejection. And it just happens. I don't think it's going to happen for a long, long time... (NES)

Question 3: What, if any, are the impacts and costs that environmental quality has on your day-to-day life?

The invitation to speak about the environment led to numerous stories of experiences with such natural events as: recent flooding; extreme episodes of both heat and cold; excessive wind; events; impact smoke has had on air quality due to forest fires and other factors related to changing climate and population spread throughout the County. Discussion of the environment for some seemed a bit outside the scope of interest for a Racial Equity Commission, until each group tuned into such realities as **Inequities** of experiences and impact. This related particularly to socio-economic disparities and ability, or inability to mitigate risk and minimize discomfort and harm. Simply stated by one participant as, “*I think a lot of the effect is dependent on the*

resources that you have, which in turn dictates your ability to adapt and overcome whatever you're facing” (Pros). This discussion led to self-awareness that for some of our more affluent participants that, “in terms of the way it has impacted me personally, it's mostly been through inconvenience” (Pros). Additionally, were realizations of disparities of service and supports due to geographic location, challenges associated with infrastructure, and a person or community’s capacity to even consider, let alone, prioritize environmental health:

[Some people are] in a privileged position to be able to re-forest and install solar panels, and I think our community can't afford that. They're just trying to make it paycheck to paycheck, and put food on the table. They would love that privilege of thinking about environmental issues, but environmental issues to that group of people might be how I get some dollars, some grants or public assistance, or EBT, or stand in line at the food bank. You know, that's the environment they're thinking of. We know, historically, it seems as though those areas that are of color or lower socio-economic areas seem to be an area where there's a dumping ground of environmental hazards. I just think of the low socio-economic folks in our community who just can't afford that. (Pw/U)

..who has more resources to find a work around, plug in an air conditioner, pay that extra electric bill, and who does not. (Parents)

I think it depends on how much money you got. If you're rich and doing well, there's very little impact unless a tornado or a heat dome, but then even with the heat dome, if you've got lots of money and you're living in a nice house, you can turn on the air conditioner, and you're fine. Get a generator. You can afford solar panels or whatever. I think the daily impact on your quality of life from environmental issues depends on your class. (SJAO)

I see white patients in clinic and black patients in the hospital. Because of the preventative care and the insurance that's required to cover specialty [treatments] ... we know a lot of our black patients wait until their heart attack is completed or until they've been dealing with something for so long, and cost always comes up in conversation. How much is it going to cost, how long do I need to be on this medicine, how much is this procedure going to cost. And we hear it every now and again from white patients but not nearly to the extent of our black and brown patients, and the unit just looks different. It's just a different demographic inpatient versus outpatient. (B&AA)

...we have rich people who are losing their vacation homes. We have poor people who won't be able to rebuild their homes. (Pros)

Just if you are a person that has access, you can go with the flow during crisis or during environmental tragedy but if you don't have access, economically or your job or whatever, It's tough. (Parents)

...we know that brown people and black people and indigenous people are more likely to be impacted by pollution and environmental effects in general, so our health is already impacted by that. [BIPOC] people are just as likely to suffer with PTSD as folks who serve in the military, and then you add all of these stressors... It reminds me of the lack of access

to health care ...on top of that there's discrimination of like being cut out of that option, or being cut out of my green card. (LX)

Having resources available, you know, the rich will never suffer...There's plenty of [other] people that suffer right now, with the unexpected snowfalls and just getting to shelters and things, so I am kind of blinded to it, because I don't see it. So, it's kind of out of sight out of mind for me. (Pros)

...there's probably a lot of environmental dangers in my day to day that I just don't even realize because I don't think of them. (PDef)

There's pretty distinct lines across Bellingham, about where low income housing was located, what kind of housing was located, your food desert locations. Which is kind of still existing. And some of those impact the quality of life. (School)

I actually acknowledge the privilege I have as a professional person able to teach from home, I can do my research from home. So, while it was an inconvenience, I was able to pay my bills and I ... can still do it on my own schedule versus a population that I work with. If you're having your service or your work in the fields. They didn't have a choice for their livelihood. .. I had a choice. I had a privileged situation because of my education level. Some people didn't have that. So, it's like owning our privilege. And that moment was very painful because I knew it was the draw of luck where I was born, my family, my own path. Had nothing to do with me. What happens to these people in the fields or doing outdoor work when they don't have a choice? (ML3)

Often, discussions of the **Inequities** of opportunity led to discussion of a **Call to Action with Consequences** in order to establish **Equal Access and Inclusion**:

...with the heat and the fire, I live up on a mountain and we have one way out if you're gonna drive, so that's always a concern. ... And you know, Wi Fi can be tricky, and so not everybody has that. So that's been a huge equity issue just because, we still have a large area without cell service. So, if you're stuck somewhere and there's an emergency, you can't call anybody so if I come upon an accident, driving home just to my house, I can't call 911 on my cell phone because there's just no access. (SUPS)

Honestly [internet] should be a public utility. (LX)

People of color, and people in rural areas are feeling there's no health care north of Bellingham. When I had a major incident, I had to bandage myself up and drive to Bellingham to get to the hospital ... if you want anything or help from Bellingham, good luck...I want grocery shopping, I want doctors, I want nurses, I want anything. I have to go to Bellingham to get it. So, I travel to Bellingham almost every day. That's a 25-mile trip each way. So that's why my car's got 150,000 miles on it. Four years old. (CE)

I agree with the stress of the day to day worry and trauma of that. I think it's a kind of an underlying worry that we all are feeling and it's all of these things... it's causing community-wide stress and trauma [that needs to be addressed]. (A&C)

I hear daily from my young adult kids about the anxiety and the issues that people have. (Pros)

...there's an equity issue in our schools. But when the floods happened, I should have known but it was like, my eyes opening to me that there's an extra equity issue in our whole community. So, one of the people that died was a good friend of ours' dad. And they were calling for help. And they were asking for help to search for their dad even after a lot of the floodwaters had passed. And they didn't get any help. And if you would drive by the people that were helping were people that looked like them- so people didn't speak English, people that were Mexican, Hispanic. There was not very many white people there ...If this family had a very popular last name in our community, the whole town would have stopped what they were doing and been searching for these people and that never happened. My wife and I were driving to the houses that were by the flood knocking on people's doors and they had no idea they were supposed to leave. They're like, 'Oh, we didn't know'. There was Facebook posts out, but they don't speak English. There was information that was being passed along but wasn't getting passed on to them. So, there was a group of us knocking on these pockets of low-income housing and they had no idea they were supposed to leave. And we saw that there's a whole equity issue in the whole community. ... But to everybody else, it's not a huge issue. (SUMAS)

Discussion typically cycled back to a realization that inequities of opportunity inherently exist when it comes to socio-economic-status. This related directly to racial equity particularly when considering wage and earning differentials and respective cost of living. More affordable housing is generally situated geographically in areas further away from workplaces and resources, compounding difficulties and burdens placed on those with the fewest economic resources.

These things are always magnified even more for less represented people in society. And along with the environmental impacts, is the cost of it being always basically a 'poor tax' to have something that's like say, nutritionally valuable or environmentally valuable. There's a barrier and costs with that as well. And that gets to children, and once again it gets magnified in their lives. (Parents)

You're not prepared for moving or replacing all your things. And even with things like renter's insurance, they don't cover a lot. It's expensive to pay for. It's like you're just kind of trapped all the time... I just feel like for people of color, the day-to-day impacts are typically less predictable and hit you harder and it is damn near impossible to prepare for. (MHW)

The average lifespan of a farmworker in the United States is 49. And that's because of environmental justice issues in the food system. Toxins, chemicals, exhaustion, heat, smoke, you know, you name it, and so, when you're talking about inclusion and belonging especially in governance, the fact that you're only recognizing the production and the profit from farmers and not understanding the impact on farmworkers...So farm workers are one of the most impacted first in the community and yet we are not listened to... Having

farmworkers on committees is extremely difficult, because we're exhausted and because it's difficult to participate... We've gone through two years with COVID. And now the heat dome and floods, where our communities continuously get marginalized for any kind of support, what we're having to go through right now for our community to be able to get support from the floods is pretty bad. It's not fair. It's not right. And it's racial inequity, because all the farmworkers are brown people in Whatcom County. (SJAO)

Question 4: How can local government collaborate with BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and Other People of Color) communities to better represent people of color?

When considering this question, many groups went directly to **Organizational Structures and Systems**, whereby changes could be made to take into consideration the important issue of **Representation** and personal responsibility.

..people need to be invited to the table, and they need to be at the table, you need to have those voices heard by local government. (AAPI)

I'd like to see especially law enforcement having more people of color, people of different ethnicities and backgrounds, be represented in the town where we live. (Parents)

Well, as it's been told to me many times, we can reach out to them. There are people who advertise, 'hey, I'm willing to speak to a group', 'I'm willing to help educate an office'. There are plenty of people that will speak to all kinds of groups in all kinds of situations. And it's really just up to people who are in these positions to say, 'hey, we have to reach out'. (WYP)

I think having representation of people of color, having representatives that come from community college. There's also the representation of ideas right, like, within the Latinx community there's a huge diverse set of ideas and thoughts and political ideologies but our needs need to be represented somehow. I think it would be wonderful to see Bellingham and Whatcom County reproducing some of those models of democratic indirect participation, like community forums and people's assemblies. I would like to see a space created for community-driven solutions. I think that seeing that happening and definitely bringing those spaces for communities of color for congregating would be really cool, because then we would have an actual proxy of power-sharing in communities of color. (LX)

It all comes down to one thing, it's racism. If people [in government] can stop being racist to other people and the way they look or the way they act, I think that would give those people more confidence to say, 'Hey, I think I can go run for this city council spot' or, 'I can try to do this or I can try to run for that.' (NES)

...having conversations with people in BPOC groups and sitting down and talking about what issues they face, so their voices are heard, so that there's some sense of representation. And not a one-time conversation, but an ongoing conversation. Listening. (Pw/U)

I think our local government can collaborate with those communities and hear their concerns and their observations and experiences and identify solutions that those folks themselves are suggesting they need can be a good start. (Pros)

It's also been about funding, right, like public safety ... police were asked to deal with a lot of things that weren't necessarily their responsibility, because we don't want to - as a society - [fund services]... (Pw/U)

...what keeps coming up for me, is this feeling of tokenization of, 'you're at the table, so we've done our job'. I think I get that a lot from some of the more vocal white counterparts who were like, let's bring you to the table. Let's get you in leadership. Let's do it. I'm like, are you prepared to actually support me in that? And usually the answer is no, or they think they are, but they're not willing or able to support me in the ways that I would need, nor did they ask what support I would want or need. They kind of tell me what they think they need to do for me to be successful. And it's like, well, I don't need you to tell me that - I could tell you, but they don't necessarily make that space. I think what we're seeing a lot too is people not wanting to let go of power. I can get to the table, and say my thing but if you don't listen, if you don't hear it and you don't react and you don't hold yourself accountable and responsible for what you're being told, it doesn't matter. (MHW)

Power. The white culture definitely wants to remain the strong voice for sure in our country. I think that we will give BIPOC voices some power, but not equal power, not most of the power but even just equal representation needs to happen. I mean, it's something that needs to be decided upon and put into regulation and put into our mentality that it must happen. There has to be equal representation and those voices must be heard, like all voices, but especially minority voices, because they've been shut out for so long. (NES)

...just our focus and who we hire and how we recruit and how we invite people of color to be candidates for positions in our system. To get to a point where the people who are working with our kids, you know, really representatively look like them. (SUPS)

I think we have to inform more people of color and help them understand why they should run for government to help our communities because sometimes we need someone of our own nationality or background we can see ourselves in. (SFF)

Additionally, there were voices stating that government is not responsible for racial equity, and that we should not look to government to solve the issues, such as:

I think the first thing we need to do is not look to the government to address issues related to the BIPOC community. I believe we have a problem in regards to how we view people. And that is an issue of the heart that can't be addressed by local government, and I do think that we need more people that stand up for the person that has no power, the person that is overlooked, the person that somehow has been marginalized. And regardless of that person's ethnic background, color, or whatever origin they have. Seeing them as a person of value and worthy of time and energy and worthy of being an advocate for, and so I don't see that as a government thing at all...I just think that it's a failure to look to government

to represent people of color because government is going to miss them because of what government is. Government is not good at taking care of the marginalized people anywhere in the world. (NVFL)

...representation depends on us, not the government. Like we obviously have to elect our representatives. I think that's kind of our community failure more than our leadership failure, even though I think yes, a lot of things need to happen from leadership. (PDef)

A close connection to **Representation** is a need for **Equal Access and Inclusion**, which was touched on by eleven distinct groups, including very pragmatic suggestions such as:

...forums like this are probably going to be the best way because not every person wants to be in those positions of power. It's not something that is appealing to everyone. I feel like actually trying to get out into the community and talk with them and talk one on one and see what the actual issues are and not just talk to people to get votes. (YAS)

I think it all goes back to belonging and people feeling comfortable coming to the table. You know, so it's more than just inviting them, it's making them feel comfortable and feeling like they really belong. And they're going to be listened to. I think, you deal with history and things that have happened in the past where maybe they've been invited but have not felt heard, or they've been invited and they feel like 'well, I'm that one native voice'. (SUPS)

A prevalent ingredient to establish equitable access and inclusion stemmed from the theme of **Awareness and Funds of Knowledge**, whereby government officials, policy makers, and representatives may develop the skills to better engage with cultural humility and valuation. Doing so, from perspectives of numerous participants necessitates a solicitation and honoring of indigenous ways of knowing and diverse funds of knowledge:

We need to be included, and our historical knowledge and expertise that's been passed on for generations, all the stories. All of that needs to be included in the planning process. Our ancestors were smart, they were legit scientist. No, they didn't have the educational background from an educational institution, but they knew the earth. They knew the environment. And they were the real scientists here. We've survived floods and volcanoes and tsunamis. There's many stories about those survival times of our people. (NT)

I would say our local government needs to have humility in order to open themselves to other ideas, structures, even ways of getting things done. That we're very rigid in the process. (A&C)

I'm thinking specifically of anti-racist trainings because the work that people are doing in government, I really appreciate. I think recent acknowledgement that racism is a public health issue and along with that awesome work, I think that anti-racist training should be mandatory for anybody in that kind of position. And not to just be one class, but an ongoing process. I do think that wouldn't necessarily happen easily. The powers that be wouldn't necessarily want that, but in my mind, if there's gonna be some real collaboration, there needs to be some real talk about where this is coming from, why this is important. And to

tap into something deeper than just awareness, you have to have conversations on the history of this. (MHW)

The notion of government utilizing cultural humility and valuing of others was additionally considered to be a necessity the general public would benefit from, displaying personal responsibility and motivation to operationalize anti-racist practices in Whatcom County:

...there is a pervasive xenophobia that is allowed to be present in the room, because I'm always other and I don't want to be other. I just want to be me, and you want to be you, but I can't know you if you're always defending, and you can't know me if I'm always resisting. It's a dilemma for sure. (MHW)

This sense came through most notably for this question when participants raised awareness of the extent of additional **Burden on BIPOC** community members:

I feel like our governments just expect people with trauma to relive trauma in order for them to get more information. (SJAO)

...an emotion I keep coming up with is how happy I am and how proud I am but also how tired I am. Tired. I am aware that I have to do more and want to do more. But my voice and my energy level is low...(MHW)

My experience with my family and myself is if you're not a white person in this town, and a white person says you did something, then you've did it. Be quiet. You're in trouble. (AAPI)

I would say one of the things as a white person I always noticed that our white culture does that is racist, is that we don't care that other people have more expertise than we do on certain subjects. I will tell you, this is like telling the Lummi how to run salmon... in the Sikh culture, one of the first things to do is everybody needs to sit down and eat together. It's absolutely part of the way Sikhs deal with community. Get everybody at the same level ... the mass culture doesn't even bother to imagine that somebody who's a minority would know more than them really pisses me off. (SE)

That's what it is, to be humiliated by seeing how the work in the field looks like. I would like people to go for one day and one day only. I think that with one day they will change their minds. (FFW)

I think when we rely on those communities to come to the government to be heard, that's leaving the ball in their court where there might be some fear, or there might be some trauma around doing that. Or they fear that they won't be represented or heard. And so maybe these organizations or bodies going to them and intentionally giving them a platform to speak of what their needs are of what representation they're looking for, where do they need more support? I think that could help ease some of that systematic problem in the process and that might be received a little bit better because if they are feeling instead of being a problem by speaking up, we're looking to them to speak up because we want them to be heard. (WYP)

In considering what government could do to better collaborate with BIPOC, numerous participants pointed to systemic, practical, and measurable suggestions that lend support to the need for a Whatcom County Racial Equity Commission:

...we need to have numbers [and data] to show it. So that we know that we're not just throwing effort at something that's not even the problem. (Pros)

Putting some of these things into rules. Then it kind of stands out there if somebody does break them. Maybe one person will break them and then they learn from it, or maybe two will break and somebody will learn. (SE)

There should be some type of communication or outreach to know how the hell they're going to impact those communities. It'd be pretty cool if there was like some type of advising team to these councils where there's like a checks and balance before you're going to make a decision, then you need to be able to at least hear and it's recorded and documented and what was shared back to them. So then there's a record of 'hey, this is what the community informed you. That's a decision that you still made that impacted them the way that they said it would impact them in a negative way. You're on record of showing that you didn't listen to nobody'. (School)

Question 5: To what degree do you feel our current local legal system is “just and fair” for the BIPOC community, and why?

Responses to this question centered on the lived experiences of BIPOC communities in Whatcom County and pointed most poignantly to **Inequities** that are present within **Organizational Structures and Systems**, including the current and historic presence of **Prejudice and Racism**, and which put increased **Burden on BIPOC** community members:

You look at our statistics and clearly black and brown communities are over-policed. We have no alternative systems in place, no anti-violence programs, no alternative hotlines, and the lack of transparency in these alternative solutions is really frustrating. Because how do we know they're getting the input from folks who are most impacted by incarceration and over-policing? And there's this conversation about police oversight, and that's being extremely watered down by Bellingham City Council. It's like, again performative. You know, police are responsive, like we need to have better support systems in place to keep people out of jail to make sure people have what they need, but that's not a solution. (SJAO)

I don't think that our legal system is just and fair. I think that for people that English isn't their first language, I don't think it's fair for them. I also think that in a community like ours, if you are to have a hearing, you're supposed to be judged by your peers. Are we really having the right peers on the jury for those people? (NES)

...the legal systems are at fault for that, as well as the bias that goes into policing and the bias that starts with student discipline in schools and the ways in which we have historically

thought about punishment as the route to helping kids do better. It kind of just doesn't work real well. (Sup)

When it comes to policing, there is incredible unfairness towards people of color in larger metropolitan areas. There is generally more cops in neighborhoods of color than white neighborhoods. And it doesn't matter if those neighborhoods are poor or rich or middle class, whatever. If you line up the data, it's like police are engaging with these communities of color sometimes 10 times more than their white counterparts. And just because of that amount of contact, you're having more arrests. You're having more people pushed through the legal system, having people go to court, etc. There's a percent of our population that is people of color, and that percentage is way out of proportion when we look at who's incarcerated. (WYP)

I think about monetary access when a person is arrested, whether or not they're able to make bail or not determines if they're sleeping in jail and also determines what type of access to the attorneys they have, or if they're able to pay a fine to get out... I mean our criminal justice system is just really a way to make money off of poor people, and I feel like that's represented by who's in jail. (Parents)

...we have a one-size-fits-all system. And it is a system that assumes that all people are starting from the same very privileged start where they had all the opportunities in the world to choose from and chose the wrong ones. And of course, that could not be more opposite the truth. And the result is that it disproportionately damages people of color. It's almost not even worth saying because it's so obvious that it's completely unfair, not because it's specifically intentionally targeting people of color. I don't think it's necessarily doing that, but because it pretends we live in some completely fake universe where everyone has the same opportunities in the first place and everyone should be treated like they had it all and just did the wrong thing. (PDef)

I don't think there's any way to reasonably argue that the system is fair overall. I have been convinced the statistical breakdowns of people's outcomes in the criminal justice system are based on the color of their skin, and their background. I have to look at how often I see people of color in my job on the other side of the table, versus how often do I see people of color out in the community at large in Bellingham. I don't think that people of color are more inclined to commit crime. I think that that would be a ridiculous notion. (Pros)

Much of the critique of the local legal system reflected a deep-seeded and historic combination of **Prejudice and Racism**, both of which place chronic stress and undue **Burden on BIPOC** community members:

I feel as people of color, we tend to spend more time in jail than any others... I have spent a large amount of time in jail, and I just don't see that it would have been that way if I weren't of color, you know, and the amount of time that I spent in jail has actually done quite a number on me and I don't like to be around people. Because jail doesn't really help people. It just, really it ruins them. And it changes who they are. (IFG)

I've seen people evicted and kicked out of services and discharged for responding to racism in a way that the agencies have deemed inappropriate. And I'm sitting there thinking I don't know how you didn't hit him sooner. And no consequences for the racist behavior, and I'm dealing with some of that right now in our agency and I'm trying my damndest to make people accountable for how they're making decisions about who can stay in services and who can't. (MHW)

And when it comes down to it, they are not going to believe a person in our skin color over one that is white. (B&AA)

...for me personally, it's just very much a fear-based power dynamic that I can't really shake. I'm always aware of law enforcement and it's just always something that's on my mind, whether I'm driving my car, whether I'm walking around, just simple things like not feeling comfortable putting my hands in my pockets in stores. Just things like the way I've lived my life is very much like I'm always being watched in this kind of othering kind of way with law enforcement and I feel unsafe. (SJAO)

While each of the focus groups discussed challenges with the local legal system and a sense that it is not just and fair; “.....justice in America is ‘just-us’ in America, there isn’t justice for us” (B&AA), there were individual voices who expressed a conviction that it is indeed both just, and fair. Thus sentiments ranged from, “...let's abolish the whole thing- reform doesn't work” (SJAO), to, “I feel like our system is exceedingly fair...” (NVFL). Despite the range of individual perspectives based on lived experiences and personal context, each of the groups presented myriad ways in which the system is falling short and pointed to a role for a Racial Equity Commission to play with a **Call to Action and Consequences**:

...translators are a big deal, because people do not understand what's going on. And court is complicated. And being in a system that you don't know anything about and has a lot of moving parts, that has procedures, and you're being put through it, like a machine. So if we can communicate better, that makes things much more fair, because the people with resources hire people that understand the system. And the people without resources, they go through it not understanding what's happening to them. They can't take advantage of the programs or the opportunities or even motions to dismiss. They get convicted more, all that stuff happens. I think communication is a big key. And we can improve that. (Pros)

And we certainly saw that the women who were using the YWCA services didn't even know how to access the legal system. You know, there's a lot of people that don't know how to advocate for themselves or get connected. I mean, when you're saying “just and fair”, I guess just and fair would mean that everybody equally has representation and that all voices are heard. I think that's part of the structural problem that we need to figure out. (A&C)

You're supposed to be able to have a jury of your peers. That's very difficult if there's no other black people in town. And also, it's difficult for the indigenous people, because most of them don't live in the city. So if you are charged with something you're very unlikely to have anybody on the jury that looks like you, or could identify with you. (CE)

By collaborate, we want more than just sitting at the same table. We want them to actually listen and absorb our history and our experiences and what we need. Most times tribal people are forced to absorb what they're bringing to us. Like assimilation, they're trying to force us into fitting in here, into their system. (NT)

Question 6: Please describe your relationship with local law enforcement, as relate to any personal interactions you've had with them.

Responses from this question dovetailed from those regarding Question number 5, about the legal system being just and fair. There were varying degrees to which participants had engagement with local law enforcement – either on a first-hand or family basis, or in the role as practitioner or caregiver, working on behalf of others. The positive interactions and engagements had an over-arching commonality of those being based on relationship and ability to “get to know” law enforcement officials in a way that was mutually respectful. The negative, or challenging engagement of course varies based on each unique experience, although there was a common undercurrent of a combination of **Prejudice and Racism**, **Organizational Structures and Systems**, and additional **Burden on BIPOC** members of Whatcom County. This included significant acknowledgement of White-privilege, class-privilege, and general **Inequities**:

Oh, this is where my white privilege definitely steps in, man. They're always great to me. I always get just what I need. You know, that's their job to protect white people. And I'm one of them. Yeah, I'm gonna say their job is to protect white people. (CE)

I've had some pretty traumatic experiences at the hands of police so I always kind of look for them and have pretty bad anxiety when I do interact with them... that's something that I still have nightmares about. (SJA0)

I'm just a 30-year-old white dude with glasses. And it seems like all the interactions I've had have just been kind of chummy, like, 'how's it going, man', you know, like passing by on the sidewalk or whatever. And I've never been scared, even getting pulled over, there's never been any element of fear in those interactions. (WYP)

Farmworkers [and] Latinos get racially profiled all the time. They get treated really badly and spoken to like they're nobodies. They're afraid of being stopped by police because of their relationship with Homeland Security. And there is a good old boy network between policemen ... So there is a law enforcement club type of thing going on. Because there's so many law enforcement people in Whatcom County, from the feds, all the way down. (SJA0)

Every single day is a fight. It's like we get up knowing that there's a fight coming. We're still in the fight and that aint gonna change. I think if we go to the schools and we have them teach the Point Elliott treaty, there'll be an understanding. That's where the big misconception is, people outside think that we get everything - that tribes get free everything. No, we don't. I mean look at my dad. He's a strong man. You know, he's 76 years old. And he asks me, 'how you doing, son' when we're hiking. But this is because he's been fighting every single day of his life...I mean, that's just who we are as people. We have to fight every single day, every single day. There's always a fight... So, that's why we

have strong people you know, because they're resilient. They know they have to fight, and they let it just roll off their back because the fight continues. (NT)

[I'm working with] a caregiver that's sharing a lot of frustration about calling local law enforcement and not getting any response or feedback because she has a very thick accent. And so, they never took any of her concerns seriously, until this individual ended up getting hospitalized. And so, this caregiver had multiple phone calls that they made to law enforcement, and they were never taken seriously just because of how they talked, and that English was not their first language. (MHW)

Within each discussion were ideas for how a Racial Equity Commission could potentially play a role in bettering the relationship between law enforcement and broader Whatcom County, particularly BIPOC individuals. These frequently related to themes of **Safe Places and Accountability**, **Representation**, and **Awareness and Funds of Knowledge**. There was perception that a Racial Equity Commission could support the facilitation of making connections, building bridges, and supporting trusting dialogue and engagement:

Yeah, I would say again, representation matters. Everybody on the police department here is white - no people of color. I would say cultural awareness training, and having a professional come in and talk to them about that is a start, but also a lot of people on our police department are from here. (SUMAS)

I did a lot of stuff when I was gang bangin, but, you know, that's my own fault. That's my fault. That's why I want to give back to the community and do a lot of things... Ever since I got out of prison, I'll do stuff with the police... You know, bring out for fallen officers, you know, even just anything for children, women and the homeless, stuff like that. Help the police officers, and fire departments...they're seeing that we're good people and you know, different race and even though we all got tattoos and ride bikes and low riders. But you know, we're just like everybody else. We're good. We're family people. We drive around with our wife and our kids, I get officers to pull up next to us and give us thumbs up and keep going. (CS)

It feels more comfortable when we sit at the table - when we're sitting level to somebody, when somebody doesn't think that they're superior to us. If we're at the table—and it's supposed to be government to government—that we're equal. ...and once you get there, then the conversation goes smoothly. And everybody has an understanding and we walk away with something. (NT)

...the police come to the school fairly often, which I know really stresses the students out. It really makes them feel scared and stressed...I guess I would just say it seems there's a lot of intensity and it comes in this fairly escalated way from the beginning. (A&C)

Question 7: To what degree have you ever tried to access a local service or program and had a negative experience based on your race?

There was a marked difference in the responses to this question based on the race of the respondent. There were no White participants, for instance, who expressed ever having a

negative experience based on their race. This points to what has been pointed out in numerous focus groups (and elsewhere) that the systems, structures, and general social fabric has been established in a way that centers Whiteness and White people. Many of the non-BIPOC participants who expressed never having negative experiences themselves shared contrary stories and examples of experiences of BIPOC clients, students, family, and friends. In the absence of **Prejudice and Racism**, one's racial identification would not be a predictor of such things as the quality of, or access to services in a community:

I think there's a healing portion that we have to do internally within our own community, because there can be bias in services, and sometimes we don't get access. Not everyone in the community gets the same treatment or access. And so you try and get access outside the community and when you're already living in poverty and you're already struggling, it is really not an easy thing to ask for help. I had to ask for help through the [redacted organization], and they literally made me feel like I was a thief or something, and then my non-native friend who was the one that told me about it that was working with me, she got through without submitting any of these documents. She just immediately got through, and I was being grilled, you know, and it's just like jeez you know, how much I made last year? Hardly nothing, right and that's already embarrassing enough, so then you gotta go and make people feel even worse. And then I think about having a vehicle. I got in a major car accident and I thought about these things for a long time but just like going to get your medication and you're using Medicaid and you get there and then your insurance is all messed up and you go back three times and I had to go all the way across town to where they can make my medication. And I'm thinking, what about the people that have to ride buses, and get out there and try to get their medication and then it's not ready. The whole system is just not set up very well, and the whole system's not healthy, and they don't take into account how they're already affecting people that are already struggling. (IFG)

I've definitely heard clients complain about being profiled in medical settings where they keep getting questions about their drug use when it's either not relevant at all, or it was a really long time ago. And it's made it so some of my clients actually didn't even want to be involved with me as a counselor because they just completely lost trust in the system and were really traumatized by the experience of trying to better their health. (MHW)

I think it's especially difficult for black people in Whatcom County to access any services. There's such a stigma and othering and weird tiptoeing that happens that I think just feels exhausting... (A&C)

Many of the focus groups adjusted the question to include community members from lower socio-economic-status more generally, including for low income White people. With this additional caveat there were more instances of White people having negative experiences seeking services – but due to poverty and class opposed to race.

We try to get services for our community. Ninety percent of the time, it's negative and 95% of the time, my community just doesn't want to go. And the only way that they will access those services is if one of our folks goes with them, and then follows up exactly the

processes. In any service in Whatcom County, that it is not equitable to people of color. And it all depends on the people on the frontlines, you know, whoever's on the front desk and all of that. I think it goes beyond that they are serving people of color, it's just the way that the organizations and the institutions are structured. They're overly bureaucratic, they're structured to make it more difficult for poor people of any color- even white people to access the services. It's a clear position of "it's your fault you're poor. Somehow, you got this problem." So, they make it harder for you to get any kind of help. (SJAO)

...if you don't have time as a resource that's even harder to get the things you want. That's always been a barrier for me. I have to work two jobs at a time to make things happen or meet bills and stuff. And so trying to schedule anything outside of that is hard, but that's not really an impact based on my skin color. (SJAO)

This sentiment points to additional burden when considering the intersectionality of social constructs and realities like race, socio-economics, and class. Similarly, when considering the quantitative data related to household income, there is an over-representation of BIPOC community members in poverty, and therefore having negative experienced based on both race, and class.

Question 8: How satisfied have you been with your own, or your children's experiences in local education?

There were responses from multiple stakeholders for this question, including educators, administrators, extracurricular activities such as arts, sports, and support services, parents of students, and students themselves. Many of the focus groups had individuals with positive things to say related to each of the school districts in Whatcom County. Some of those comments were reflections from perhaps decades ago, and some from recent experiences. At the same time, many participants in each group had significant concerns that led to a dissatisfaction with educational experiences – again, some from long ago, and some very recent. Several significant themes emerged related to **Prejudice and Racism**, **Inequities**, and **Burden on BIPOC** families and students:

...when Trump was in office, I had multiple students of color breakdown in our lessons. They were dealing with racist remarks from their peers. Dealing with kids saying really mean things and not having any kind of accountability process available or healing process available. That's what I've observed as a teacher. (SJAO)

People feel okay to bully other people or question other people because they know that the system will support them in some way. They know that they will get that support from the teachers because they know that they won't speak up. (YAS)

I don't think there's much that has changed in the 20 years since I've been at high school. Nothing has changed, actually. It's almost two weeks ago, my daughter was called a racial slur at recess by a little boy. And I knew that this day was going to come but I didn't know it was going to come this quick ... it opened my eyes to a lot of things and then also for the

school's response to address the situation was not surprising. They didn't do anything. (SUMAS)

Recent experiences from current students and parents of students were often interspersed with a sense of lack of power to do anything about racism in the school other than to 'try and ignore it,' such as, "I hear a lot of [racist stuff] at school, but I mean, I just don't say anything because the people who are saying it are white. And I guess they're the higher authority. And you know, they won't get in trouble for saying that stuff. So I just don't report it or anything" (SFF). With this sentiment was a feeling that **Organizational Structures and Systems** are not in place, and there is insufficient **Representation** to support students experiencing discrimination and bullying in school:

I get told about [my race] at school and stuff. I don't really care cuz it doesn't really hurt me. I don't really care about it. I only care if it's like towards my mom and stuff because they take care of me and stuff. I don't really mind it at school because I just hear it every day so I just don't really mind it.... [I hear] "oh, you're a (racial slur)," or whatever. And they're like, "Why are you talking like some Taco Bell stuff?" and I just don't want to complain because I don't really care what they say. (SFF)

I feel like schools need to do a better job with their educator population and retaining staff of color, and maybe having some of the school districts have a DEI (Diversity Equity and Inclusion) director, but they need somebody in each building that students of color can go to. I know it's hard to have a new staff person in every building, and it's not cheap, but you know building that BIPOC network includes having adults in the buildings that are adults of color, because that can just create a safe space. I've heard that from students and teachers who are BIPOC, that all these students of color come to me, and I'm not even the same race or ethnicity but they'll come to me with things, because I'm the only one. I think creating that space is really important. (Parents)

I think our school system is messed up. I feel like it was not designed for minorities or people of color. And so that really has a huge impact on all of us because we see in our school, there's only maybe like four teachers who are minority. And I think it's really difficult to be successful when you don't have anyone that has been in your position or you don't have any support from someone that you know could relate to you and what you've done. ...And you don't see as much male teachers as you see female teachers, or stuff like that. ...I feel it's very hard to learn from a person that doesn't have the same background as you. (SFF)

...the school system isn't really fit for people of color. It's designed for white people or Caucasian people. And it's really set for them to succeed and for people of color to fail. There's not really a lot of colored teachers or you know, just people that we could talk to, to help us get through school stuff that they can relate to. Because when you're talking to a white person about it, it's really not the same, like not at all. It's very different. They see things differently like, "oh, it's easy, like you got this" and this and that. I don't know how to explain it... when you're talking to someone that's white about your school stuff or school

problems and you want to open up to them about the school stuff, they don't really get it. But they say they do because I guess they want you to feel better about it. And just to try and get you to think that it's easy for you to do it when it's really not. The teachers at my school tend to explain things directly to white students, and they don't really clarify things to the kids of color. Like there's Spanish speaking kids that don't know how to speak English and they don't explain things to them. And it's just really hard seeing that. How are you going to be a teacher and not want to help them? It gets me mad because you're a teacher and you say you want to help, and you don't want to help them. It's dumb. (SFF)

I think historically, our school systems have been very inept in working with children with delays or disabilities, kind of regardless of race, but you also see families who are white having more wealth and access to those services once they become aware of it. And so now even though some of those services are in place, our families of color and children of color are the last ones who are getting those services if they need it. And there's also that cultural piece of taboos and this and that, and religions. So it's a tactic that our school systems aren't designed to meet children and families where they're at. And they're designed to continue to churn out these cogs in the machine that meet this very white idea of [success] and it is at the expense of our youth and that's why youth mental health is so challenging right now, because there isn't that support and we're not doing enough work to provide that social emotional piece. (MHW)

Numerous examples and suggestions were shared about a need for **Awareness** and respect for **Funds of Knowledge**, as well as a significant **Call to Action** to increase **Representation** and better address **Inequities**, such as:

If [the teacher] had taken five minutes to do a Google search to educate herself about it, it would have been a completely different situation. If she told those students, hey, let's respect this student. Let's make her belong and let's be open to diversity and equality, instead of shutting me down and keep telling me to keep quiet about who I am. They would have made a world of difference. (YAS)

I think that the biggest thing I have noticed is just a lack of education and cultural competence with the teachers and administration as far as just being aware. We've had so many circumstances where they've just said mostly just really dumb things...And, these seem like very simple things that people in these positions that are teaching our children should be very aware of. And just knowing where a lot of the educators and administrators stand on a lot of equity issues is just discouraging. I really have started to notice it with my son as he gets closer to Middle School... (SUMAS)

I remember when I went to Ferndale. My bus driver told me, she's like, 'you could do whatever you want to do for your religion, but don't talk about it'. We have to hide our articles of faith and they can't be shown. Yeah, I still carry that with me today. I still have a hard time openly wearing my article of faith because of that. Because of that discrimination I faced, it was ingrained into me and it was not just one district and not just one teacher. It was entire school systems within Whatcom County ... I was told by my bus

driver, 'you could wear your article of faith. [But], don't talk about it. Don't show it'. And that was it. And I was in fifth grade ... (YAS)

I'm just horrified by some of the stories that I've heard. One family - their son is black, but the mom is white. And at _____ elementary, he was riding home from school, and a kid from his school followed him on his bike, took off his belt, and started whipping him with a belt. They tried to address it with the principal, and he said, 'sorry, I can't really do anything about it.' ...when I hear those things it makes me just want to pack up and move... (SUMAS)

A story I heard yesterday is about a kid that kept getting bullied and the bully's parents didn't do anything. So, this kid finally got fed up and slapped the kid that was bullying him, and he got arrested, and he will have a juvenile record until he is 18. And myself, I try to teach my kids to stand up for yourselves. And the stuff that keeps me up at night, you know, why is this kid getting an arrest record that will follow him? (Parents)

At this point the school system should be very well equipped with having Sikh students in their classes because it is very large and growing in our community...I think maybe after Spanish, Punjabi is the third most spoken language in Whatcom County. It just kind of is mind boggling to me, how are we still having the same issues when my mom went to the school 20 or 25 years ago, I went to this school 10 years ago, and all my siblings are going to the school today over these generations. How are we still having the same problems every single time? Don't tell me that you don't have education. Don't tell me that you haven't experienced this before. All those excuses are null. It's absolute BS. You don't want to. They absolutely do not. Teachers don't want to take the initiative of learning about their students. Administrators don't want to take the initiative of making a couple of parents upset. They don't want to add more on to their plate. And it's just ridiculous because I know young boys who have cut their hair because of bullying in school. Like these are real issues that we're really facing in Whatcom County and it's just the same every single time. (YAS)

There's a lot of bullying going on at school, on school premises that my children go to. They don't seem to care. They talk to the student and that's as far as it goes. There's no punishment and this is bullying with putting hands on other kids. And we're almost giving up on the school system because it's starting to get so bad. We make reports weekly to the elementary school. We tell our girls to report it as soon as it happens. And it just continues to happen. Same people, same stuff. So, we're almost to a point where it's like maybe they shouldn't have public school. Or maybe we should do homeschooling so they wouldn't be exposed to such bullying at a place that they're supposed to feel safe... I don't know what the problem is. Maybe my kids aren't rich enough or something and the kids that are bullying them happen to be from very well to do families in the neighborhood. That might have something to do with it. But I don't know. It seems like the school is not concerned with bullying. Even as it's happening. (PDef)

Question 9: How would Whatcom County look or feel different if the Whatcom Racial Equity Commission is successful?

There was clear support from the more than 120 participants in focus groups for the creation of a Racial Equity Commission in Whatcom County. While there was a wide range of perspectives on what people envisioned for outcomes of a successful Commission, they all centered on Whatcom County becoming a healthier county with **Safe Places and Accountability**, increased **Representation** and **Equal Access and Inclusion**. People spoke to aspirations of a County willing to intentionally and formally combat **Prejudice and Racism** through connections, relationships, and increased **Awareness and use of Funds of Knowledge**. Responses encapsulated each of the nine identified themes with common belief that success for the Commission would mean decreased **Burden on BIPOC** community members.

It's fear that we're trying to eradicate - the fear that we can see in the people of color. And the fear that we don't talk about that the white population has about them. And I think if these groups are emboldened to not be afraid, they come out, we mix, we mingle, we get to know each other and get to climb the ladder [together]. (NES)

I feel like accountability is a huge place [where change would be seen or felt] because we don't feel safe, or we don't know local government or school officials - we don't know their protocols and stuff. It makes that uneasy feeling you know. I don't feel safe here, you know. We're not heard, and I mean, it's 2022 and we're still fighting for simple things like this. It just makes me really sad. I mean, we live in the most beautiful place. I love Whatcom County and I feel like a lot of people do love it. A lot of people of color that move here and see how beautiful it is - we have the mountain, we have the water, we have Canada, we have Seattle, but then when they encounter these kinds of situations you know, it just makes people want to move and I just really would like to see some change here. So people like myself, we can enjoy the area like all the other people and feel safe and feel heard and the accountability piece is huge because if you don't have accountability, I don't really think we could make change here. (SUMAS)

I'm just at the end of the day, if I can come back and just be tired from work like regular white people are, and not have to worry about getting harassed or getting spoken to a certain way or not all of that added work that goes into doing labor for white people making myself smaller, trying to avoid situations and all of that stuff, that would be success for me. That's a successful Whatcom County Racial Equity. (AAPI)

...if it's truly successful, we'd see massive system changes, whether it's through the criminal justice system or elsewhere. I also think people of color would feel heard, they would feel represented, they would see representation in their community, whether it's in positions of power in the private or public sector. And I imagine it would look like checking back in on a lot of things to continue progress because a point of success is one thing but continuing that change and creating longevity would be another - but best of luck. (Pros)

It would definitely make me feel a lot better [with more people of color in office]. I feel good about myself, but I would be more proud of what my community has done...I'd feel proud because like, damn, they made it. The struggle that colored people have to go through is a lot. And it would be very cool to see someone with my skin tone or color to be on City Council or Mayor. It would make me feel like I could do it myself. (SFF)

It would look like the politicians would protect people of color's voices as much as they'd protect white voices. And I would also see success as having a place for people of color together. (MHW)

When people don't have equitable access, then we're losing out as a community, because we're losing potential, and no I'm not even talking about just monetary potential at all. I'm talking about how people value themselves and how society values them. And it's just such a loss of humanity when we don't give everybody equal value in terms of what they have to contribute. (Parents)

Just going and coming home tired from work like regular white people. (AAPI)

I think there will be more participation. In going back to belonging again, that there would be that belonging and that sense of safety, empowerment, feeling valued, like your voice is valued. You know, from all different groups. Where I think right now, there's a reluctance [to participate] a lot of times because of bad experiences. (SUPS)

I feel that now, enough is enough. It is time for us to be recognized and [for community members] to know that we are contributing. We are not stealing. We are not taking advantage of anyone. Do you understand me? I would like that all this information that you are collecting and all this, that something can be done for the good of all, and that we are all equal in the eyes of the law. Everyone. Because no one is above the law. We should all be treated equally and not just because of our color they think we are doing a crime or we are taking advantage or we are stealing. (FFW)

Numerous suggestions for policy and practice were offered from most of the focus groups, ranging from theoretical to very practical, including:

If WREC establishes an equity hotline or an integrity hotline. And then these people's names start popping up on it, because there is a level of anonymity. People are going to start thinking about what they do before they do it. (B&AA)

I think this organization is going to cause other organizations and other stakeholders to be accountable to this cause. (Pw/U)

Ultimately, it's going to change individual behavior and how we relate to each other. And how we feel about each other, ourselves, and other people. I think that's an amazing challenge to the group, to make that explicit - to really play that out. What I'm getting at are outcomes and what small successes can the Commission identify in the areas of health disparity and law enforcement and housing and education, that ultimately are linked to the

kinds of things that we're sharing with you today. I mean, that's beautiful to try to figure that relationship out. People will look at each other differently and feel different. (ML3)

...to see it had structural impact on how the budgets were made and where those fundings were going...a lot of things would have to be restructured - power dynamics would have to have changed, and outcomes would be different. (SJAO)

...establish some sort of liaison with school districts, so that our kids have a place, and parents have some kind of representation or a venue where things can be fairly looked at and not result in a child having a record until they are 18 years old. (B&AA)

... how will we know what are the outcome based on measurements? What are we actually measuring that we can quantify and show? And how do they connect to action steps rather than just be theorizing or talking about ideas? What can we practically create through action steps and ways of measuring? (NES)

The Racial Equity Commission needs to be involved in hiring people and then needs to oversee the representation in the entire governance system of people of color, and be involved in the hiring, [including] the hiring of white people. Somehow, you do not hire people that are racist to work in city and county government. (SJAO)

The WREC needs to be a public fixture. Because as soon as these organizations go away, society tends to backslide and so I would like to see more funding for the WREC. (AAPI)

The biggest thing you can do to break down barriers is get to know your neighbors...If you want people to understand you, you have to make yourself slightly vulnerable. So when it comes to the racial equity commission, I would hope that they really focus on positives. You know, figuring out okay, so if we find that there aren't as many minorities that are using certain park systems, okay, well, maybe we need to have a park day...I really hope that they work on community involvement for a few years, just give it a shot. See how it goes. Your first job should be education. In order to do that, you're gonna have to have people that are willing to go out there and be vulnerable and be asked questions. I think part of the problem that we have is when people too easily offend and it shuts down those conversations, because now you can't ask questions. (LEFG)

Additional Insights and Suggestions from Participants

While the vast majority of participants were in support of and motivated by the notion of the Whatcom County Racial Equity Commission, there were some voices expressing skepticism related to both the need and efficacy of such a Commission:

If it's successful I think that Whatcom County will function just as it's currently functioning. I think it may function a little better in some ways. But I don't think that success of any external group is going to change everybody in the community, nor should it try to. I don't think that it's going to create a substantive change for every group that does not feel like they have a voice because ultimately it's up to people and the people in the community to speak up for the things that they want. So what will it look like? It'll look just like it does...

I'm pretty happy with the way it is here. While understanding that there's always room for improvement in any group person, anything. (LEFG)

I would like to stop this, us versus them - like this kind of there's either you're in or you're out. And also allow for growth because each of us are different... I think you will feel successful if every one of us can be the best version of ourselves at work and in community like we don't have to hold back. We can just be ourselves. .. I would love to not have these conversations. For me, this is successful if this goes away. Like we don't have to have an institution and foundation leading these conversations. It's part of the air we breathe, and we don't have to talk about it. (ML3)

I understand what y'all are trying to do. But I think - not that we don't need to bring some of these issues to light - but I think the more and more that we spotlight, you know the separation between Caucasian and people of color, the more that we're going to be creating this divide. Instead of "Hey, why are people of color having these unfair advantages or whatnot?" We need to look at the other underlying things (CS)

... we can't use a Racial Equity Commission as a marketing tool to try to paint a picture of something that doesn't actually exist in Whatcom County. I've been asking this question, how much authority is the Racial Equity Commission going to have to fire people, to restructure agencies, to move money, to fund really racially equitable and economic equitable initiatives within the county? And so, as social justice activists with a Racial Equity Commission, what does that mean? Is this Commission going to have authority to change the structure? Or are we just going to talk about it so that there's cultural awareness? I think that's my big question, where are we going with this? I am part of this focus group because I want to ask those questions. And it's getting tougher, but we're not going anywhere. Our (farm worker and laborer) communities still exist in Bellingham, and we're gonna continue to be present as best as we can. But the governance that's supposed to be protecting us and giving us equity doesn't exist. (SJA0)

Focus group participants were recruited in an intentional fashion to hear from diverse socio-political and secular/non-secular perspectives. The diversity of viewpoints and lived experiences garnered through this effort are indeed what makes this qualitative inquiry so powerful. It was commonly stated by participants that they appreciated the opportunity to engage in civil and thoughtful dialogue with people from different backgrounds, and with seemingly different political, social, and religious ideals. Several participants shared that their engagement in the focus group was a significant rare moment for them to learn from others 'from across the aisle.' It was frequently noted that participants would hope that the Racial Equity Commission could systematize opportunities for further dialogue and engagement across socio-economic, religious/faith affiliation, employment sector, race, gender, sexual orientation, political persuasion, educational status, and other diversities and differences. The act of this County-wide qualitative inquiry itself served as a veritable example for many participants of a mechanism by which Whatcom County can bring people together for connections, collective engagement, relationship building, and even healing.

It should be noted that even when there were widely divergent opinions between groups, or between individuals within specific groups, there were markedly common aspirations for Whatcom County. Each of the groups shared hopes for a healthy and safe County that is absent of racism. There was simply disagreement about the finer details of how that may look, who should take responsibility for it, and the degree to which systemic and individual racism is prevalent in Whatcom County. It shed light on the need for a Racial Equity Commission that is informed by a diverse constituency and a combination of qualitative and quantitative data, statistics and public record. On the whole data confirms that there is tremendous opportunity for success with an officially ratified and supported Commission:

I certainly believe that all people should live free of fear. And you know, we always want to join in on that. I'm not a proponent of the equity viewpoint where outcomes are predetermined for every individual. And I can't take responsibility for others to that degree. I think that my vision is to provide as many platforms as possible for people to be successful, regardless of where they come from. And that means that they'll have opportunities to thrive in the community, in the county, and in our state and in the world that they live. I probably wouldn't engage in the idea of equity as far as outcomes are concerned, as much as I would just want to always be a part of stuff that platforms where people have the opportunity to be successful and that there's lots of people walking alongside them in this life, whether or not they're experiencing victory or defeat, that we come alongside and we can lock arms and we can act like a family and care for each other along the way...It's always difficult when you're dealing with this. I don't believe in Utopia. So, I think we're just trying to incrementally improve. And have people have lives that are meaningful and without fear. So we certainly want that to happen. I don't know if what you're doing is gonna bring that about though. (NVFL)

It was evident in the data that in order to move the dial toward racial equity in Whatcom County there is a need for a combination of Cultural Awareness and Action. An important suggestion that was commonly expressed and that is consistent with social change theory is a need to essentially meet people where they are on the journey toward racial equity. This includes attention to language used and methods of invited and nurturing engagement:

I'm experiencing kind of a massive language barrier. Because these questions don't reflect any language really that I use in my daily life. I'm 51, I speak to hundreds of people every month and this is not language that I frame reality from. So if you see my reticence in answering some of these questions, it's because I think partially I'm experiencing like an entirely new language that's hard for me to define... If you put most people in this situation it would be jarring to them and the people would not be receptive in my view... the language itself is different and would be divisive in a conversation with people... So I guess my takeaway is that I feel like this [can be] a dividing more than a unifying thing. (NVFL)

I should be noting that for me the terminology - that there's the language, like a third language, I don't understand it. I rely on people [who understand language of politics and power] to be my voice because I don't have the language. I'm relying on [others] because

of [their] background. And I'm gonna be blunt. They're well educated. I had to go back to school as an adult. So I'm kind of unaware of a lot of the government. I don't understand it. I don't. It's muddy. I don't get it. But I can rely on the people who understand it... It is like another language and it's very intimidating. That's the word I was looking for - intimidating. (NES)

Ultimately, the general sense of participant feedback hinged on aspirational goals of seeing Whatcom County be a welcoming, inclusive, and safe community for everyone. A place with a proven commitment to dismantle systemic racism and its impacts. Or, as simply stated by one of the youngest youth participants, Whatcom County can be a place where you are valued, cared about, and “...very accepted as who you are and who you want to be, and there's a lot of opportunities to be great” (SFF). There is hope for movement well beyond that of awareness, tolerance, and acceptance of diversity, but rather:

I mean, if we were able to not just be culturally aware, but culturally thrilled by diversity, you know, welcomed it, enjoyed it, sought it out, you know, applauded it. Wanted more of it. You know, were hungry for that. That would really, it seems to me, make people more [able to] break down some barriers. (CE)

Appendix 1: Focus Groups

(AAPI): AAPI Focus Group 10-2-21
(A&C): Arts and Culture 12-4-21
(B&AA): Black & African American 10-2-21
(CE): Community Elders 2-17-22
(CS): Experience with Carceral (jail) System 3-22-22
(FBO): Ferndale BIPOC Business Owners 2-22-22* (Data added after initial write up of this report 9-11-22)
(FFW): Fishing and Farm Workers Focus Group 2-24-22
(HES): Higher Education Students 3-2-22
(IFG): Indigenous Focus Group 10-2-21
(LEFG): Law Enforcement Focus Group 3-28-22
(LFG): Lynden Focus Group 2-22-22
(LGBTQ+): Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Queer+ 12-18-21
(LX): Latinx (Latina/Latino) 10-3-21
(MHW): BIPOC Mental Healthcare Workers 12-19-21
(ML1): Mail List Opt-in Volunteers from 3-21-22
(ML2): Mail List Opt-in Volunteers from 3-22-22
(ML3): Mail List Opt-in Volunteers from 3-23-22
(NES): Nooksack, Everson & Sumas Focus Group 2-12-22
(NT): Nooksack Tribe Focus Group 2-23-22
(NVFL): Nooksack Valley Faith Leaders 2-23-22
(Parents): Parents of BIPOC Youth Focus Group 10-3-21
(PDef): Public Defenders 1-7-22
(Pros): Whatcom County Prosecutor's Office 1-6-22
(Pw/U): Whatcom County Public Workers/Unions 2-25-22
(School): BIPOC School Employees 12-14-21
(SE): Sikh Elders 12-8-21
(SJAO): Social Justice Activists & Organizers 12-18-21
(SFF): Students from the Fishing and Farm Working Community 2-21-22
(Sumas): Sumas Community Center 2-8-22
(SUPS): Superintendents 12-1-21
(WYP): Whatcom Young Professionals 2-11-22
(YAS): YA Sikh FG 11-24-21

Appendix 2: Focus Group Interview Questions

1. What does belonging look like in Whatcom County?
2. [To what degree] can cultural awareness solve for structural violence or racism?
3. What, if any, are the impacts and costs that environmental quality has on your day to day life?
4. How can local government collaborate with BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and Other People of Color) communities to better represent people of color?
5. To what degree do you feel our current local legal system is “just and fair” for the BIPOC community, and why?
6. Please describe your relationship with local law enforcement, as relate to any personal interactions you've had with them.
7. To what degree have you ever tried to access a local service or program and had a negative experience based on your race?
8. How satisfied have you been with your own, or your children’s experiences in local education?
9. How would Whatcom County look or feel different? If the Whatcom racial equity commission is successful?

Appendix 3: Themes and Respondents for each Question

Theme	Questions Addressed	Focus Groups Responding to Each Question
<p>Equal Access and Inclusion</p> <p>[Means of obtaining, receiving, or approaching something safely. Joining in on something with equal welcome and opportunity. The practice or policy of providing equal access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized. Entails welcoming encouragement to be a valued participant or contributor.]</p>	One	Q1. Parents, Sumas, NVFL, PW/U, SFF, Pros, School, B&AA, CE, NES, WYP, SJAO, A&C, LEFG, ML1, LFG, ML2, HES, MHW, PDef, FFW
	Two	Q2. LX, NES, FBO
	Three	Q3. Sups, Parents, LX, CE, SJAO, AAPI, MHW, ML2, HES, ML3, FBO
	Four	Q4. SFF, School, MHW, LGBTQ+, SE, Sups, YAS, Pw/U, HES, LEFG, ML3, FBO
	Five	Q5. PW/U, NES, ML3, FFW
	Six	Q6. MHW
	Seven	Q7. SJAO, LEFG
	Nine	Q9. MHW, NES, NT, Sups, SFF, B&AA, A&C, FFW
<p>Safe Places and Accountability</p> <p>[An environment in which a person or category of people can feel confident that they will not be exposed to discrimination, criticism, harassment or any other emotional or physical harm. May refer to geographical space, physical location, or virtual environment. An obligation or willingness to accept responsibility or to account for one's actions – particularly related to acting on awareness/knowledge]</p>	One	Q1. IFG, AAPI, A&C, NVFL, SJAO, LX, Pw/U, NT, LGBTQ+, ML2, HES, Sups, Sumas, MHW, CS, LEFG
	Two	Q. 2 SJAO
	Three	Q3. SE, NVFL
	Four	Q4. Pros, SE, School, IFG, Parents, SJAO, ML1, LEFG, LFG, ML2, CS, CE
	Five	Q5. SFF, MHW, IFG, HES, Pw/U, Sups
	Six	Q6. LEFG
	Nine	Q9. B&AA, Pw/U, NES, Sumas, A&C, IFG, MHW, LEFG, LFG, FFW
<p>Representation</p> <p>[People from a particular place or group are present at and engaged with equal influence of people who represent the numeric majority. May include the action of speaking or acting on behalf of someone not present, in their best interest]</p>	One	Q1. SJAO, Parents, AAPI, CE, LX, SE, ML1, HES, PDef
	Two	Q2. AAPI, FBO
	Four	Q4. MHW, Parents, Pros, LGBTQ+, NT, Pw/U, ML1, ML2, FFW, SFF, B&AA, LX, YAS, PDef, Sumas, NES, AAPI, School, ML3, HES, WYP, FBO
	Five	Q5. Pros, A&C, CE, NT, WYP, FBO
	Six	Q6. Sumas, Parents
	Seven	Q7. A&C

	Eight	Q8. SFF, School, Parents
	Nine	Q9. B&AA, NT, NVFL, A&C, Pw/U, CE, SFF, WYP, SJAO, Sups, AAPI, Pros, NT, ML3, FBO
<p>Prejudice/Racism</p> <p>[Relating to preconceived opinion that is not based on reason or actual experience. Discrimination, or antagonism directed against a person or people on the basis of their membership in a particular racial or ethnic group, typically one that is a minority or marginalized population.]</p>	One	Q1. SJAO, Parents, LX, IFG, SE, YAS, MHW, NT, A&C, NES, FFW, ML1, ML2, CS, ML3, LGBTQ+, B&AA, AAPI, FBO
	Two	Q2. LX, YAS, NVFL, ML1, FFW, WYP, MHW, IFG, CE, AAPI, PDef, SFF, ML3, Pros, Pw/U
	Four	Q4. MHW, SE, CS, FFW
	Five	Q5. B&AA, IFG, MHW, ML1, ML2, FFW, FBO
	Six	Q6. SJAO, Sumas, AAPI, Parents, MHW, PDef, CE, CS
	Seven	Q7. SFF, School, ML3, MHW, FBO
	Eight	Q8. SFF, Sumas, PDef, Parents, SJAO, YAS, NT, ML2, FFW
	<p>Awareness/Funds of Knowledge</p> <p>[Conceptualization and knowledge including that which has been historically and culturally developed to enable an individual or household to function within a given culture]</p>	One
Two		Q2. MHW, NES, NVFL, Pros, AAPI, Sumas, Pw/U, CE, Pdef, YAS, Parents, IFG, SE, NT, HES, CS, FFW, ML2, LX, SJAO, FBO
Three		Q3. NT, SE
Four		Q4. Pw/U, MHW, NES, A&C, LGBTQ+, HES, LEFG, ML1, FFW, NT, Pw/U, LFG, IFG
Five		Q5. B&AA, Pros, Sumas, NES, NVFL, NT, FFW
Six		Q6. A&C, HES
Eight		Q8. YAS, Sumas, NT
Nine		Q9. PDef, Parents, NT, FFW, HES, LFG
<p>Inequities</p> <p>[Referring to instances of injustice, unfairness, or unequal treatment, including historical discrimination.]</p>		One
	Two	Q2. MHW, SFF, PDef, LX, AAPI
	Three	Q3. Pros, AAPI, CE, LGBTQ+, Pw/U, Sumas, PDef, IFG, Parents, B&AA, LX, MHW, SJAO, School, ML3, FFW, FBO
	Four	Q4. MHW, IFG, SJAO, NVFL
	Five	Q5. B&AA, WYP, Sups, NT, Parents, MHW, PDef, NES, Pros, Pw/U, LEFG, LFG, CS, SJAO, ML1
	Six	Q6. ML2
	Seven	Q7. NES, NT, MHW, Sumas, NVFL, SJAO, ML3, HES
	Eight	Q8. SFF, B&AA, NVFL, School, ML2

	Nine	Q9. MHW, Sups, AAPI, Parents, CE, NVFL, LEFG, FFW
<p>Call to Action & Consequences</p> <p>[A prompt or necessity to take action toward a specific aim. Results or outcomes of an action or condition.]</p>	One	Q1.Pw/U, LEFG
	Two	Q2. MHW, Pros, School, LGBTQ+, LX, A&C, SJAO, Sups, PDef, SE, WYP, CE, B&AA, Pw/U, IFG, LGBTQ+, AAPI, LFG, ML2, ML1, Sumas, YAS, NES, ML3, FBO
	Three	Q3. MHW, A&C, Pros, NVFL, LGBTQ+, AAPI, WYP, Sups, FFW, FBO
	Four	Q4. SJAO, Pros, School, MHW, LFG, LEFG, NVFL, SJAO, ML2, CS
	Five	Q5. Pw/U
	Six	Q6. CS
	Nine	Q9. HES, ML3, FFW, FBO
<p>Burdon on BIPOC</p> <p>[Referring to the emotional or physical load carried by Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color. May include labor or hardship that is not equally distributed among general, or non-BIPOC population.]</p>	One	Q1. MHW, B&AA, IFG, LX, LGBTQ+, Sups, Sumas, FBO
	TWO	Q2. B&AA, School, AAPI, NT, NES, LX, MHW, YAS, FBO
	Three	Q3. MHW, FBO
	Four	Q4. MHW, WYP, SJAO, YAS, AAPI, ML2, Parents
	Five	Q5. B&AA, SJAO, Parents, School, HES, ML3
	Six	Q6. SJAO, Parents, WYP, NT, AAPI, A&C, FBO
	Seven	Q7. IFG
	Eight	Q8. FFW
	Nine	Q9. FFW
<p>Organizational Structures and Systems</p> <p>[The methods by which work flows through an organization or community. Processes and ways of operating in order to achieve goals of an organization or community.]</p>	One	Q1. SJAO, ML2, IFG
	Two	Q2. Pw/U, HES, ML2, ML3, SFF, IFG, A&C, LGBTQ+, LFG, CS, FBO
	Three	Q3. Pw/U, SJAO, LX, SE
	Four	Q4. SFF, Sumas, Pw/U, A&C, SE, School, IFG, Pros, Parents, Sups, PDef, MHW, NES, ML2, CS, AAPI, FBO
	Five	Q5. Sups, NVFL, SJAO, PDef, CE, Pw/U, Pros, LEFG, CS, LFG, FBO
	Six	Q6. A&C, NT, CS
	Seven	Q7. A&C
	Eight	Q8. MHW, School, Parents, SJAO, A&C, HES, ML2
	Nine	Q9. SJAO, AAPI, SJAO, Pros, PDef, HES, ML3, FBO

Pertinent Information for Each Question Categorized by Theme

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(NT): Nooksack Tribe Focus Group 2-23-22
(NVFL): Nooksack Valley Faith Leaders 2-23-22
(Parents): Parents of BIPOC Youth Focus Group 10-3-21
(PDef): Public Defenders 1-7-22
(Pros): Whatcom County Prosecutor's Office 1-6-22
(Pw/U): Whatcom County Public Workers/Unions 2-25-22
(School): BIPOC School Employees 12-14-21
(SE): Sikh Elders 12-8-21
(SJAO): Social Justice Activists & Organizers 12-18-21
(SFF): Students from the Fishing and Farm Working Community 2-21-22
(Sumas): Sumas Community Center 2-8-22
(SUPS): Superintendents 12-1-21
(WYP): Whatcom Young Professionals 2-11-22
(YAS): YA Sikh FG 11-24-21
N= 32 (991 pages of transcripts)

Question 1: What does [or what could] belonging look like in Whatcom County?

Safe Place and Accountability

I think this area is notoriously cliquy. I have grown up here and so I have a pretty broad and deep community but it's mostly straight white people. And so, one of the things that you I've run up against my whole life and I think I've become acutely aware of in the last five years and then really accelerated in the last two years is the ways in which all the behaviors and mannerisms I take on and all the things I don't do to sort of increase everyone else's sense of comfort and safety. And in some sense, that's for my comfort and safety. But I think it's rare for me in Whatcom County that I feel a deep, deep sense of belonging. And when I do feel it, it's often fleeting, it's something will happen that then breaks the flow

state or whatever it is. Whether it's just an unknown person walking in the room, or we decide to switch venues and suddenly you know, we're at a place that's a different vibe. I mean, it's hard to kind of articulate. Even with my closest dearest friends here, with whom I do feel quite comfortable, especially one on one and even if they're, you know, straight and white and married and you know, kind of demographically really different. ..But so it was a friend of mine, straight woman, one of my best friends. And so acknowledging, you know, my difference in some ways that she said, "Is there any place in Washington that you don't feel safe?" And I said, "Yeah, north of Bakerview, south of the Fairhaven exit, East". (LGBTQ+)

...a space where you work or live, in which I see mirrored images of who I am outside of that space. (ML2)

I can't help but notice the tremendous isolation that migrant worker communities have, because they pretty much stay within their communities unless they have to go to the grocery store, to go to the bank or the post office. And there's really not any place within the county for them to be actually a part of us. On occasions we'll have events and we'll have actions and activities and people will come together for a very brief time. But it's not something that's done on a regular basis. I don't know that it would feel safe. (ML2)

I don't care if people are undocumented or not. If they're here picking my food then there needs to be a place for them without harassment - without that sense of fear. (ML2)

finding a group of people that have shared interests. And sometimes that's cultural belongings, like where you come from, or how you're raised or socioeconomic status or your ethnic background. But either way, it's just a group that you either form or join that kind of helps you find your place in Whatcom. (HES)

...there are quite a few kids who don't feel like they belong and they don't have a home with their school and they don't find it welcoming (SUPS)

I feel like being able to be yourself. being able to go anywhere- I know for me, certain areas, I don't feel comfortable walking in situations and I should be able to feel comfortable either taking my family to a certain event around here and feel like I can be myself and my kids can be ourselves and be who we are. And for people to accept us for who we are. I think that's a huge struggle for me. Yeah, being in this area sometimes I feel like I have to tone down my blackness or who I am to make other people feel comfortable. (SUMAS)

I guess my number one is safety. If I don't feel safe, I don't belong. And then on like, I mean, if all the boxes are checked, like ideally I'd feel like I have a purpose or place and that there's room for me in to achieve support and access. In Bellingham in particular there are as many places I felt unsafe, but it's not like on a physical level. I feel more like there's this weird tokenism thing that happens like if I go to an event like I have to ask my partner am I going to be the only person of color there am I the only brown person there and sometimes I get this weird vibe I can never tell are they interested in me for who I am? Are they interested in me because of my exotic background or something? And sometimes even with close friends of mine who are white in Bellingham, sometimes I feel like I can't really talk about my culture without dipping like this weird like soup like I feel consumed. Like "Tell me more", you know, and it seems like it comes with a level of enthusiasm that isn't necessarily warranted. I guess safety is my number one for belonging, but also authentic relationships and access to what my purpose would be here. (MHW)

Shared Place (AAPI)

I feel like maybe downtown is kind of a little scary because of like homelessness... I know Samish used to be pretty scary but it's cleaned up pretty good and still they're continuing to make it better. Texas St is always a bad one. And people tend to be scared of Maple Falls and Mount Baker area because there's no reception up there so people get scared of that but it's pretty safe up there, for the most part. (IFG)

...it looks like people feeling safe and comfortable to come together and share ideas, to have safe places to gather. But also sometimes like with Whatcom Reads, it's not necessarily a physical gathering, but it's an ability to gather around a central book or material or concept and have community wide conversations that everybody feels like they can participate in. (A&C)

I think belonging is about having spaces where you're able to be yourself and ask the questions that bother you and express yourself in ways that are comfortable to you. I don't know that those spaces totally exist anywhere. (NVFL)

I think that belonging is an intentional community. It has an arms open policy that brings acceptance and love to the people that you come across and that there's an opportunity for those people to join in and walk alongside each other, even if they're beyond blood relative and that the belonging part of it comes when we can join in some collective goals and work alongside each other in those goals, whatever those things might be. I think that it has a longevity attached to it, that the long haul allows people to settle and feel like they're part of something that's beyond themselves and something that's good. (NVFL)

I'm just coming from a Mexican American perspective. We have no cultural spaces right now in Whatcom County anywhere. And I think that's what has been one of the biggest issues. The fact that we have no space together with community. So what does it look like? What it should look like? Is ownership of building and land for different communities to be able to gather and be able to create their own cultural spaces and when I say culture, I mean traditional cultures but also political alignment. Whatever fits that community and that it'd be acceptable. (SJAO)

...it's been that way with the Nooksacks and the Lummi. They have their land that they quote-unquote, have been given, otherwise they'd have nothing. And farmworkers and immigrants are landless community without any literal place to belong, and, you know, so our vision includes creating those spaces for our communities like the Immigrant Justice Center, directly with our own farming Co Op where our community can see what would it look like if we had our own space? (SJAO)

I think that the place where a lot of people that I dialogue with that are progressive and are brown, and our diaspora, find home in the Whatcom Peace and Justice center, because it is a cultural community like resource and library center that is not secular and so that attracts a different demographic and folks who aren't necessarily people of faith. (LX)

I always think of safety and security. And belonging, I think means that you have a sense of safety and security, no matter where you may be. I see it a lot with middle schoolers all day long, like, their belonging to them means very different things, and probably us. But I think baseline no matter what it means, it means like you feel safe in a situation. And, you know, there's been multiple times from different places where I've just not felt like I belonged or tried to belong. And so for me, personally, I'm not involved with, like the synagogue here, because I didn't feel like they wanted me, it was weird, and

then I haven't gone back ever since, to be honest, and but I got connected with the Jewish community, and political work to be honest. (Pw/U)

We have as a society completely disconnected from each other from the human to human interface. And now it's all via text or via zoom, all that kind of stuff, but it's not person to person, and that's where we need to get back to change the entire dynamic of how people feel of other races or somebody is feeling their prejudice it's because you don't get to spend time with these other people. That's literally what it comes down to. (CS)

belonging to me looks like um, people able to get along and live their lives, even when they don't agree necessarily. (LEFG)

Equal Access and Inclusion

[We need] spaces where you feel comfortable being who you are, no matter how you identify or what you look like or what your resources are. Also, being a safe, comfortable space to ask for what you need. I think that's a really big part of belonging. And making sure that you have access to community and resources to connect with other people. Which could translate to basic infrastructure stuff like public transit, being able to get to the places you need to go but also, just having spaces to meet and congregate. (SJAO)

I feel like belonging is self-initiated. ...you find your belonging by finding your peers that match up with either your morals and your ethics, whether it be through church or sports or band, you know, it's finding people with similar interests and similar values. And in finding a cohesion there, it's not ever with an entire population, it's with people that have similar interests or values and just making that connection on a personal level. (LEFG)

I think in its simplest form, belonging is being accepted in a group or by others. (LEFG)

It is different for different groups sort of like to me belonging means that everybody feels welcome invited has a seat at the table, can walk into a room, just like the other person, whatever your skin tone or your race doesn't matter and that you're invited the same way. I don't think that's what we see in Whatcom County. (ML1)

I think it really it means opening doors to individuals who maybe historically have seen these doors closed. (ML1)

I feel like in Lynden, you're welcomed, and told you belong, if you will change yourself to get along with the majority of people in Lynden. But the onus is on you, as the outsider. So here's some context I look like maybe I belong, but then when I open my mouth, everyone knows I'm not from here. I am now, but I'm not from here. So it feels to me like as an outsider, as long as you go along and conform to the general culture, people will tell you, you belong - you're one of us. And I get a different feeling in Bellingham. My friends in Bellingham more often say, it's just so cool to have all these differences. We'd love you to belong because you're different. (LFG)

I think we are together because we share some common ideas on how we should see the world, I mean, political probably, perspective that we have in common. .. Lynden becomes kind of an exclusive area.. I'm struggling. Because I, you know, I don't share a lot of what my community is saying. Even about wearing masks. So, there's a tough side of it too where I don't feel like I belong. (LFG)

I just never felt access and a welcome channel to come in, I felt this horrible struggle of bland and so that was really a struggle. I almost left just because of that, because the diversity was so-so. (ML2)

looking at Maslow's hierarchy of needs, love and belonging is right in the middle, right? In order to do that you have to have your psychological needs and your safety needs met. And there's a lot of folks in this community that don't have those. And so asking how can you feel like belong if you don't feel safe in your own neighborhood, how can you feel like you belong or that there's love in this community if you can't afford your food or rent or there's never a possibility that you'll own your own home? So it seems very unfortunate that the belonging is sort of like an asterisk or an addendum to those things. That is, is really unfortunate. I feel like we can't really get to that notion of a beloved community or a community that folks really feel belonging if those first two are not met. Like it's important to still try to make a community that does feel belonging or does feel like it's full of love and create a welcoming space. (ML2)

But you can even take that issue of sense of belonging to our homeless and how we react and how we respond to our homeless folks. Or to folks that are mentally ill and out on the streets. That sense of belonging is not there, or for the low income even if they do have homes. So we got a long ways to go and it's not very belonging right now. (ML2)

I personally define belonging like being engaged with your community and like finding these pockets of people who you really identify and connect with and on various levels, and that gives you such a sense of belonging, and I definitely love being parts of groups and communities like that. It makes me feel at home and comfortable and just very generally satisfied. (WYP)

In this county where I have felt both seen and safe, was when I would go out to the Lummi health center once a week and nothing but respect nothing but just being seen and accepted. My voice mattered. I always felt good out there. (MHW)

I guess belonging is being accepted. And not having to worry about possibly like the legal status you have in this nation, having like a sanctuary space on campus, or, I'm welcome county possibly having access to health care as well as social services.. (HES)

I feel that I haven't always known about resources or have access to resources that white people have had access to and it was only through networking with them that I learned about it. ...(Parents)

I actually was surprised I got this email [invitation to participate] because I don't always feel like I belong.. I didn't grow up here. I'm from California. I'm a person of color. I don't really feel like I'm a Bellinghamster. ..I think many people have lived here for generations and have this long history. ..As a transplant and also as a person of color I struggled to find my community and I still feel like I struggle.. I think in terms of belonging, we have a diversity in approaches to the arts, which creates space for everybody. And that's really cool. (A&C)

[I have] the feeling of being siloed and maybe not belonging into community. .. am I able to participate in community being able to afford housing and be able to feel like you can have access to participate in various things, whether it be like art spaces, or like music venues or the Bellingham community? (SJA0)

Having access to things that are available in the community, whether it's the court system, your grocery stores, your schools, basically your social structure, fabric, if you will, and belonging is being able to

access and be a part of that in some manner, recognizing that not everybody feels like they belong within the community. (Pros)

it's important that people feel like the government is there for them. And that when they're interacting with the government, either in court or through land, use things, whatever it may be, they need to feel like we're there to help them not to be an obstacle to them because of who they are or where they're from, or what their socioeconomic status is. They need to feel like the government is there. (Pros)

I just didn't even know they [resources/spaces] existed, sometimes it was through churches that were open to everybody, but I'm Muslim. And so I wasn't aware of those things unless I happen to have the right conversation with the right person. And it always ended up generally being a white person. (Parents)

I think the first thing that comes to mind to me is with belonging in this area is everybody being free to be themselves, whatever that means to them, whatever their culture background. I think that that's probably the biggest thing that I would say as being part of a family is that belonging of being able to represent your culture and show who you are, whatever it is, and still feel like you belong in the community. And having background be respected and celebrated and educated about and not seen as something that is different. (SUMAS)

I think this is something I've always struggled with. There's a Mexican saying that "I'm not from here, or there". I think I've always struggled with that. Because when I go to Mexico and around my Mexican family, I'm not Mexican enough, but also, I don't feel like I'm American enough when I'm around my white counterparts. I've always struggled with a sense of belonging. My wife always says I'm a chameleon because I grew up pretty poor and a lot of gang members in my family, and I can still hang out with those people and get along and have conversations with them. But also professionally, I've been in social work for a lot of my adult life, and I've worked for nonprofits. So I have a lot of friends that are professionals and can get along with them too, but I don't think I can be all who I am around both groups at the same time. I've always struggled with that sense of like where do I really belong? (SUMAS)

[referring to a youth with whom they were working]: I realized belonging to him meant that he was part of something he was part of a little community that knew him intimately or knew a little bit of a story or so he felt his definition of belonging was "I'm part of a small knit community that knows me". (NVFL)

I think you're having a space and a community that you feel welcomed in. feeling that you are seen. I think just being able to say that you have a group that you relate to, that you feel you can communicate with and that can understand you're here, a space where you feel heard. (NVFL)

lots of folks have talked about their kids [being a source of belonging], I had the opposite with my own kids, I felt like we didn't belong. My son went to Harmony elementary school, that's where the life seals program is. So I live out in the county, which is also different. And then living in Bellingham proper. That's for sure. Like, we're county folk, and we're East County folk, and people take pride in that. But, like, going to harmony, we didn't have a connection with the school because my son was in life skills. And they didn't make an effort to even interact. And when we were at the sixth grade graduation party at the Sportsplex, that's where it was, no one talked to us, like, and no one even talked to my son or engaged. (Pw/U)

I think belonging in Whatcom County is just like feeling accepted by everyone else. You know, you don't feel like an outsider. But you feel like you're accepted. You know, just for being who you are. (SFF)

I feel like belonging in Whatcom County looks like nobody feeling excluded like everybody's together All right. (SFF)

Like feeling welcome and like you know? Yeah, feeling welcome and not being left out and stuff. (SFF)

It's like, you're very accepted as who you are and *who you want to be*. There's a lot of opportunities to be great. (SFF)

To like, feel everybody included. So like, even if they don't agree with you, like they still feel welcome. And not like excluded Yeah, (SFF)

it is being recognized as a as or not other, I guess, for lack of a better terminology is being accepted as part of the Bellingham community and not being seen in some ways, like an interloper or an outsider. (Pros)

...not having that anxiety when you walk into like Boundary Bay, you know, you see that other black guy over there who's with a group of white people we both look at each other. Like, I can't believe we're both here right now. I think I just feel uncomfortable. Really... I think a lot of people of color try hard to make sure people come by their house. They feel like it's home. (School)

Sometimes they call it the polka dot syndrome. So walking into a place and you're the only person and you can feel everybody looking at you. ... If you're the one person that's in a certain type of position and having to listen and then whether or not you address what you hear. And then once you do the eyes and ears are on you after that. (School)

I don't think I can answer the question because 14 years of living here, I've never felt like I belong here. I'm always different, always easily identifiable always approached with, you know, just a difference you see how people interact with the folks that they're comfortable with - the folks that you know do belong and then how they, in turn, interact with you and your family and so unfortunately I don't think this is a place where I experienced a sense of belonging, but it is a place where I have created a sense of belonging, with my sister, friends, and families like ours. (B&AA)

I've lived here for about 13 and a half years myself. And it's been interesting. I don't necessarily feel like I belong. But I think given that the way I was raised, personally, I am just I am just here, I exist. I move on and plow through and that's how I get by. (B&AA)

it's a pretty tight knit community, and I think belonging, or a small community, certainly being open to taking all comers and not feeling outside in spite of living here and being here the same way as others do. (Pros)

I think I think that acceptance piece of it, but also, feeling that here is home and that you're an accepted valued member of the community, you have something to contribute. You have meaning and purpose within the space that you're living and working in. (Pros)

It's who you know, who your parents know, what kind of groups you're involved in [like] sports .. I'm thinking specifically for kids too. It's like what are your interests, and then how can you get connected

with people in those same interests, so that you feel like you're belonging to someone or a group.
(Parents)

If you're like me - a white person - and you [aren't] around people of color that much .. you don't want to say the wrong thing. But being across the street [from a person of color] gave us an opportunity to share some meals and become much more human and spontaneous in our conversations. And that's been a good thing for us and our family to see. And I would like to say more that I am interested in some things that we could do to make it more appealing to people of color. (CE)

I just hope that when my kids go to like say middle school and high school they are felt to be included. That people aren't just looking at their skin color or whatever and just making assumptions about them and, like some of the folks were saying here before, inclusion would mean not having people jump to conclusions or look a certain way or you speak a certain way, and just look at people's character.
(Parents)

I think I would say decentering of the normative culture. And so, you know when you belong. There isn't like this comparison of where you belong on this spectrum of right to left, (Parents)

We live over by Lake Whatcom. And one thing I have enjoyed actually being part of is we go down to the lake off and on, and they've recently put in new docks. And it's been quite an improvement for the swimming area, and there's been a lot of Native American people that have come down there to use the facilities. And, you know, I feel right at home, down there, everybody's nice, and it's a nice chance to see different color skin, you know, and move in and out and not be afraid of anything, everybody seems to get along good. And it's very refreshing. You know, because you hear so many stories about going into areas where, if you're the only person of color, or maybe you're the only white person, I don't know, but you know, you tread softly. But it's refreshing to see the kids play together, and enjoy their time down there. (CE)

I think in the earlier years, belonging for me was getting involved in an organization up on campus called the Black Student Union. That's where I felt a belonging especially coming from Brooklyn, New York to Bellingham, Washington was quite a revealing circumstance for me... belonging certainly was in the early years just finding that connection, because I felt kind of lost, not only in a new environment, but not seeing very many people in the community look very much like me.... And creating Bissau Brothers and Sisters of Whatcom, which happens to be more African American centric, because just like myself, they felt lost, many feel lost coming here. And I've formulated a Welcome Wagon for people to feel welcomed and belonging here. Even though they may be bewildered, to let them know there's someone here, who's been here a while you can make it you can be successful, and it's okay. It's okay to operate within Whatcom County. You don't have to be afraid of the police. Although need some guidance and direction from time to time. Overall, they're okay. And if you have an issue, we can go speak to the chief at hand, whoever that may be at hand. (Pw/U)

I've been here since 85. And in my experience, it's shared culture is what makes you belong. And a quick dumb little story when I first got here. I lived up on South Pass in an old house that needed lots of stuff being done to it. And I would come down to the local hardware store and I couldn't get waited on. I come from Las Vegas and was totally white. You know, and I couldn't get waited on. Guys would come in behind me and get waited in front of me and I got really frustrated with that until I grew a beard. Now I know that sounds ridiculous, but that's what it was. Now I look like a logger or somebody who works

with my hands outside. And I was accepted. And I was stunned by that. I thought well, that's crazy. But that's what it was. And I think the longer you're here, the more you're sharing the culture of the county. And so you become to belong. I think the shared culture is what belonging looks like here. (NES)

[My husband] and I have taken a lot of kids into our home. And so I think we come from a spot that a lot of times different people don't belong or don't feel they belong. And it's our responsibility to help people know that they are wanted and needed. That's a really hard thing to do. I have thought back over the last few months since the floods happened and the cleanup day in Everson. We watched people come from all over Whatcom County into our community and really help us, but the core of who was there was our community and it was from every walk of life, from every different background. There were people that were the core that I mean, like that helped set up and like kind of run the thing you know, and it was amazing to see. I think a lot of people felt like it didn't matter if they knew anybody that was part of that setup crew or not, that they were helped and that's something I wish we could make people feel every single day. That day. People felt loved in a dark time. I would like to see belonging be something that people feel even in the good times and I don't know how to do that. I think it's something I wrestle with every single day. I wrestle with it in my home, that we have kids that have felt abandoned and unwanted and unloved. And though you love them, and though you show love and kindness and are meeting their daily needs that maybe weren't met before. There is still that kind of baggage that is still there, and how do you overcome those things and for the greater community? I take a lot of situations that happen within my home and try to apply them out to the greater area and so I think we have to create belonging for people. And it's our responsibility to make sure people feel belonged around us. We can't obviously touch everyone's lives, but every day, we touch someone's life and so how do we do that? (NES)

You get a very positive feeling living in Whatcom County. I think you get a feeling when you are in the schools, when you're working with teacher groups, when you're working with parent groups, and the whole people are very welcoming and they are respectful, and they want everyone to be included. .. it didn't matter your economic class. It didn't matter what color you were, didn't matter if you were Hispanic. It was beautiful. Absolutely beautiful. And I think on the surface, people want people to get enough food, people want people have good housing. People want to love each other. I think when it comes down to power and sharing that power, I think that's where it gets so sticky. And then we start seeing divisions, you know and in all of the time that I've worked with schools, you know, we had parent meetings monthly as a high school for three consecutive years. We had a parent meeting program once a month where we had all Hispanic families meet and we talked about what are ways that they would feel comfortable in the meetings where it was all school meetings where it was mostly all white families. And very few of them felt comfortable because when they sat in there, they felt excluded. They felt excluded by the language, they felt excluded by not knowing what is important in a culture, right, like, preparing for prom. Well, how do we what, how can they contribute to planning for the prom? I would say that on the whole Whatcom County is so welcoming, and it feels really, really good. I think that as you get closer and closer to making decisions and talking about money and giving that's where things get sticky, and I don't think that there's much equality there or a sense of belonging, for diverse groups. (NES)

I've been a stay at home mom for seven years and I felt pretty isolated. And now being in my 30s and working again I'm getting that sense of more of a purpose, and belonging in joining networking groups. (WYP)

I think that how you have set up this group is a great example. giving everyone a chance to voice their opinion. I think part of belonging here in Bellingham comes from people just being really nice to each other. I guess like usually if people even if we don't have the same idea about something, usually if they're open to just hearing where I'm coming from, then I feel like you know, we don't have to agree but at least you know, I'm welcome to exist here and that is not always the case that people think you should exist. So, you know, it just makes a difference whether or not someone can just respect you regardless if they agree or not. (WYP)

I would say that belonging has a lot of different components to it, right? There's a lot of people within Whatcom County that have their family structure here. And so you know, between their kids or their growing up here, they have an extended membership mark. For me a lot of my belonging resided in my role within the fire department as a firefighter locally and then transitioning into union leadership and, and then into some political work. So for me, belonging has been finding groups that I guess I can put some time and effort into, and then working in there to either better myself or better the community in some way. (Pw/U)

...we know that it's a very homogenous racial environment. It's very much a liberal arts college town. That has always been my experience is that it's white, relatively well to do people in the community. I found it was a pretty hard place to get to know people. But on the other hand, it was my first time ever not being in college or law school or somewhere that a social group was pre made for me. And so I have found my community for the first six to eight years through my professional life - it was through socializing with coworkers and meeting people through coworkers and it was only when I had my first daughter who's now three that I kind of found communities through being a mom and having family that way. It's kind of a hard place to find community but like the mainstream sort of dominant thing in this area seems to be the kind of alternative progressive young white thing. (PDef)

For me it's been a nice experience. Thank God I haven't had any problems with my family or my children. It's just definitely, like everything else [others shared], definitely little things in some places where because of the language they don't attend us, but in general everything for me has been very nice. There is very good communication with the schools and very good communication with my children's participation in sports. For me everything was very good. (FFW)

For example, when you go to the pharmacy specifically you go to pick up some medicine and some of the people who serve you pretend not to understand or not to understand your name. The date of birth is not said clearly and they don't give us the medicine that we require. So this is a part that has been a little uncomfortable for me since my children were little, because I had a son with asthma, so it was very difficult to get the medicine because many times they said they didn't understand me, that I had to call the clinic or look for someone to translate for me. And it was very difficult, very sad, nothing else. I have had two very strong experiences and one in the clinic, but thank God they were solved and everything has been fine. (FFW)

Representation

Belonging looks like public recognition, besides rhetoric, that actually gives us governance and a voice and we're listened to instead of marginalization because we don't cooperate or we don't agree that for example, that the Bellingham Police Department is the best police department in the world. (SJA0)

I remember when I first moved here for college I used to count how many black people that I would see. And sometimes I could go weeks and I would be the only one... I still find myself, even with my friend groups and in other community groups where I'm the only one and so I've been the token black person and it's definitely really hard. Sometimes you don't notice it and other days it weighs more heavily on you... And when you don't have that experience when you are the only one it's so difficult, like how do you feel like you belong in a community when there's nowhere that has my traditional foods, there's nobody in Bellingham that knows how to do my hair... (ML1)

having your own cultural group, I guess. Since I'm an Arab American. It's kind of hard to find that little niche of people like that. I feel like for a sense of belonging, more just kind of having access to people who are similar to you and have similar mindset. (HES)

I think just finding a place of belonging is like finding cultural similarities that people have, like being Pacific Islander, it's been very hard. I thought there was gonna be a lot more Pacific Islanders in Whatcom. (HES)

..sometimes you could try to educate people but they just don't want to hear that.. You can only talk to the people if they want to hear it. I think it needs to come from different levels, like there should be more Punjabi signs at the courthouse and different places, to just kind of make more awareness of it. (SE)

Bilingualism everywhere in Spanish and other languages needs to be present. (SJA0)

Belonging looks like representation. (Parents)

I think growing up I never questioned whether or not I belonged here. That was just sort of a given. Because I you know, I went to the same elementary school all the way through and Middle School and high school. So that was a really easy thing for me, but I think now coming back after having lived in San Diego, I'm noticing the different ways that I see myself as not belonging. I know that Bellingham is very active outdoors, people bike, they ski, they do all of those things that I don't necessarily participate in. I noticed that I dress differently than a lot of people up here. So I think that on the surface, there's just, you know, there's a very Bellingham way to kind of live your life. (PDef)

...not that it's a good thing that I'm hearing that other people have these senses of not feeling belonging or comfortable here in Whatcom County. And again, I knew that I wasn't the only one, but it's like I had never met anybody else that felt that way. Most people I meet, and again not to say that it's not a wonderful area at all, but again, you know, not being from here, everybody come across, it'll just be like, "Oh my god, it's so wonderful". I certainly don't have that overall "oh my god it's like the most amazing place"... I'm Korean American and I don't really see that many other Asians very often so it's just like, where are we? Literally, where are we? So just having that disconnect and kind of also feeding into those feelings of not belonging. (AAPI)

I live up in Semiahmoo. So there's quite an Asian community here. But as far as other people of color, I don't see it. And luckily, in our gym, we do have some people of color there. It's so nice to be able to interact with people that have different thoughts. So I find Whatcom County, very sterile, in general, of people of color. And I think the indigenous tribes, don't get the recognition. And they don't seem to be mixed in with the general population like I think they could be. Now that may be due to the fact that some of them live on tribe property and things of that nature. (CE)

I think that Lynden has a bigger Latinx community than Bellingham itself. I've been living near the University for a while and lived a little bit downtown Bellingham too, and, you know, it's really interesting. There's a myth that Whatcom County is completely white because the downtown gentrified areas are predominantly white, but in the surrounding areas we can see more BIPOC folks, so it was really interesting for me when I went to Lynden. There was a community fair that happened in Lynden before COVID and they actually have way more Latinx folks, and I actually felt way more like at home to a certain degree than in many community gatherings... in town. I think that Lynden has various places where it's really challenging to be brown and to be Latina and like exist in its own way, but just to bring up [that we look at] Lynden and Ferndale and all these areas as the bad areas that are too conservative and whatnot. But then we can also find some Latinx representation there and more farm workers that can afford housing ... But like, just in terms of belonging and representation there is a little bit of like a difference in what culture we share and where we can see each other or see others of our own. (LX)

You know what is being centered and valued just when you walk into the store or [by] what's on the walls in your kids' classrooms. (Parents)

What are the holidays or seasons or traditions that are elevated? (Parents)

Youth would feel like they belonged more with more of an even playing field... I don't think it should be proportional to demographics, because then you would center mostly in white values or Christian values. (Parents)

Elevating the culture and traditions and stories of underrepresented groups so that they are not underrepresented. (Parents)

If you're the only kid of color in your classroom. You don't have to just see something that reflects your culture or tradition two days in a year, but it's always there and that benefits all kids, not just the kid of color. (Parents)

Prejudice and Racism

Right now, it looks very siloed there are various groups based on income, social status, political positioning, alignment. It's a very siloed community and belonging depends on your courage to get into spaces where you're normally not in that silo. And it's race, its class, its political alignment. It's also access. It's very stratified. (SJA0)

I think it's a good place to have children. The people are nice. Only once I had something racial in a store. Somebody said to me as I was picking avocados or something from a store. And a gentleman came in and he asked me why I was grabbing the vegetable. "You come to this country to take everything." I realized that I was being a victim of racism. The man wanted to tell me that we came to take spaces that don't belong to us. (FFW)

I've been here for 16 years. I remember something when the pandemic had just started, with a person in a store, when they saw us. I was going with my daughters, my little girl, the youngest one was in the cart and we had already paid and we went outside and we stopped for a while to put my change that they gave me in my purse and the person who was behind me didn't want to get close and suddenly he threw the cart at us, and I was able to avoid it. I threw my daughter. It was going to hit her where she was. My other daughters wanted to know why they did that. I told them not to pay attention, that it was wrong. And he went out to the door where one goes out and stayed there. And then when we went to the exit, he

came back and looked at us again, as if he was looking at us with a grumpy look, as if he was saying, "What are you doing here?" And since then, I have hardly ever gone to buy in that store because they say that it is their store, the Americans' store, and they don't like to see Latin people. (FFW)

This summer my mom came to visit me. I was working and she went to Winco and when she was leaving, a lady started to tell her that she has no right to be in this country and that she should leave, that she didn't want to be in front of her sight. It was a very bad experience for my mom for the first time because she liked it here. (FFW)

I feel like this is my own home and this is my own space. But there's so many microaggressions I've faced, like outright racism... (ML1)

...my gut reaction is to think about when Trump came to Linden, and I was walking the streets, and I would see white women screaming at the migrant workers go home. Go back to where you came from. (ML2)

Um but to have that sense of belonging and to have that sense of community is where people can walk down the street without fearing that the police officer that's walking towards them is coming for them or that some interaction is going to lead to an ugly situation. (ML2)

I started a car club up here. And you know, everybody used to look at us like, we're no good gangbangers. Drug dealers. Yes, troublemakers and didn't like us. And get that funky look every time we drove around or something. And, I'm nice to everybody. (CS)

It's better than it was in the 90s. ..Every weekend, I was getting in fights. Because they was always saying what is my kind doing here, what am I doing here? You know, they'll be sitting around town and parked by my car or something when I come out you know, and I have to protect myself... I guess this is still out there for the kids and I'm worried about my little man growing up. And what school he's going to go to because it's the way kids are still treating other kids from different colors. (CS)

I've never really felt racially I didn't belong in Whatcom County, but I'm someone who came here as a college student and I've been renting this entire time. I still don't own my own property or anything. And there's definitely a feeling that there's kind of a bias against renters ... I'd say that people who own homes and own property probably feel more like they belong in the community than a lot of the renters.. (ML3)

And, but there's so much we can all learn from one another and that'll be the other part of making sure we take time to learn from one another. Because the similarities definitely outweigh whatever differences you may have. (Parents)

There's so many barriers to acceptance that are hidden. I don't even know how to express it except that I know that it's complicated and it's a problem for a lot of us white folks to really get our avenues of belonging and acceptance cleared out and barrier free. (Parents)

I can tell you, just knowing the energy of growing up with my father in the service, and going to 13 different schools and always being the darkest one in my school, and then coming back to Whatcom County and going to Ferndale High School, and Bellingham High School. Just noticing the fear people used to have about coming to the reservation or the perceptions of the reservation, looking at me as different. (IFG)

I think I'm speaking for the Latino, I believe they see us as just labor. And I think there's a reason that they don't allow us to keep going up. (LX)

I'm glad you're bringing up that word belonging, that's a very important feeling. It's so important to belong and when I think of the Whatcom County Health Department's Generation Forward envisioning a future world for Whatcom County, where all children thrive, I had to ask the nurse, how could you envision a future where all Whatcom County children thrive when our indigenous people are erased from our ancestral homelands. ... So within our own tribes. Is [where we have] the most critical place where you have this sense of belonging (IFG)

I do feel like I know Whatcom county fairly well I mean I've grown up all over Whatcom County from Ferndale to Maple falls and Lynden and I've been pretty much everywhere in it. It was hard for me to feel like I belong because I was in two separate homes growing up and also I was in foster care as well but I grew up with my dad and it was really hard for me to feel like I belonged, until I moved home with my mom, and she, her and her family were able to actually show me true love and acceptance. It was hard just growing up but I do feel like I belong with my family and I have my kids as well and I feel like they do a pretty good job making them feel like they belong. (IFG)

I live in Lynden and it is such an interesting mix of people. When we moved here we moved as a family unit, 12 of us all together. Had we not done that Lynden probably would have felt like a very cold, difficult place to break into. I remember for my son and my niece, they were sophomores in high school, and they went almost a full year [with only] the teacher that says your name. Nobody else was talking to you because most of the kids here started in preschool together all the way through so they have their groups already and they did not have a need to extend their friend group, they did not have a need to invite others in because they already have their group. My niece even ran away for a while because she's like, I just can't find belonging I can't find anybody so finally over time, you know, she found her click. My son found his group of friends, but it took a long time and then for us as a family and then because of my coloring. ... a lot of people can look at me and think, 'Oh, she's just Caucasian'. But then when I start speaking Spanish and I start sharing my perspective, it's like, 'oh wait, whoa, you know, what do you mean you're coming in asking about the support system for the English language learners and where are the bilingual teachers in the school district and you're asking about how the funding's being used and all these things like whoa whoa whoa, wait a minute'. (LX)

...in regards to the straight friends, where I feel like especially one on one with those friends, I can totally be me. I can say whatever I want, but you get more than three of them together plus me and it is something will be said at some point that makes me the other and it is never out of malice. It is simply the ignorance of just not knowing that that question or that statement was going to other me. I would say the number one place that I feel that I belong is Rumors. It was the first when I moved here 20 2/3/4 years ago now. I've lost count. But it was the first place that I went where I was like, which was how I felt when I was in Bellingham. I felt like my soul had been home sick my whole life. And I didn't know until I got here. Like the very first time I was here. I was like I am hopefully I need to move here immediately. Like it was something very strong in me. And then again when I got when I just walked into Rumors and this was when I was on State Street if that tells you how long ago it was it was very long time ago. (LGBTQ+)

The nurse at Whatcom County Health Department reached out to me for two years trying to get me to go to their Generation Forward stuff right. And I finally decided to go off reservation and observe systems.

And the first thing that they said there, with all non-natives in the group, in a circle was, “Oh, we have to be careful with what we say today and there's more diversity in the room”, which I'm the only person of color in the room, and then they have to talk about the people in poverty, which includes the Native Americans and the Blacks and the Asians, and then I just got this feeling like they think I'm too dumb to contribute to the conversation. ... I ended up leaving, and I felt like I had to just say to them, no wonder why none of our people show up at these meetings. It's so disturbing. (IFG)

I came to this country when I was 15. You get looked at [in] different ways. And then my kids had a hard time in schools. And then sometimes we experienced like, getting some service done, you know, unless your name is an Asian name. Then they don't kind of like follow up with you or different things you have to keep calling. (SE)

...we live in Lynden , and Lynden is a predominantly Dutch, white town. Christian as well, so I'm having a hard time finding a school, aside from the public school that would not have a requirement for the students to be Christians. ..when I was at work [in Bellingham], I experienced racism firsthand. It's not really good. But here in Lynden, it's kind of quiet. It's like if they like you, which probably doesn't have a lot of chances, but they won't say anything. And if they don't like you it's the same thing, they're not going to react to you at all. So they're just cold either way. It's hard to be a part of the community where Punjabis are very open, you know, to “Oh, come to our house” or “come, let's have tea”, you know, it's coming from the heart. It's genuine. And I don't think I've ever experienced any other person or people community other than the Punjabi saying “come to our house”. (SE)

There's a lot of people who don't know about the Punjabi culture yet. Some of it is intentional, but I think most of it is actually unintentional. There's an opportunity for communities to come out, so that opportunity hasn't been tapped. (SE)

...we need to educate more on the Sikh faith ... I think our community has more than 1300 families here in Whatcom County. .. we are different. (SE)

I am generally uncomfortable in the county and not so much in Bellingham. It's a bit uncomfortable in Lynden, but it's not terrible. Out in the county I don't want to have to stop really if I don't have to. And when I think about belonging, I think it has changed since I've lived in Whatcom County for almost four years. In the beginning, I really thought that it didn't matter. My skin color did not matter. But with the various experiences I feel like it's becoming clear to me that if I am not with my white partner, there are some spaces that I am sort of scrutinized - it's not even outright hostility, but it's just like my movements are being watched. ..I would say generally if you're white, and young and fit, then you definitely belong in Whatcom County. You fit the narrative of what it means to be someone who's a model of the Pacific Northwest, and if you don't fit that, then well, we got to double check everything. (MHW)

We have an identity crisis. And the fact that after 2001 and 9/11, a lot of people just think that we're Muslim, just because we have a turban or we have a beard... There used to be a time when people wanted to be educated about stuff [and] they would be the ones who initiate the conversation and asked about stuff so they can be wiser and educated. But nowadays, people just don't care. I think that would be a good start to just educate them about Punjabi and Sikh and what the culture is or what their religion is, or where they come from and all of that. (SE)

I can be a Chicana I can be very white presenting, I can be very Mexican, very indigenous with my community, but there is no space that's acceptable for everybody to be together comfortably and speak openly. (SJAO)

...we need to be allowed to communicate in the way that we communicate, whether it's rambling or my community speaks in stories. You know, I get so sick and tired of being asked for bullet points. We don't talk that way. We don't want to talk that way. Everybody should be able to speak their truth in every place in Whatcom County, the way that it needs to be spoken. Racial Justice in Whatcom County is performative. And it's more for PR and marketing. (SJAO)

I think one of the things that always makes me not feel like I belong is when people are always so shocked to know how many Sikhs there actually are in Whatcom County. (YAS)

Not being pre judged in all the ranges of what prejudice means (Parents)

..Belonging would be not having to fight through discriminatory prejudice, assumptions, stereotypes , or prejudging to do what you want to do. (Parents)

I had this conversation a little bit ago with a friend where she felt like she has always belonged. She is that thin, white, crunchy type where when you think of Bellingham you think of her. I moved here for my undergrad back in 2004. I think the only time I've actually felt like I belonged was at Western back in the day, but I don't feel like I've ever really belonged since then. It's twofold for me - one because I am plus size and the other because I am Asian. I feel like I get hit on both sides of that. Even trying to navigate into mom groups, there's even that pushback from white moms .. The only place that I have actually been followed in a store was with my thin, blonde, very white best friend in Lynden. We wandered around for like half an hour and it was very obvious that I was being followed throughout the entire store the entire time I was there. And I just kept on looking at my friend who was across the store from me and laughing because we were doing the exact same thing. (MHW)

In some ways the ways organizations or institutions are created were inherently racist. And so it's like you have to have changes in some of those structures, whether that's through law or however you're going to go about changing it. In order for to solve some of these problems (A&C)

[Belonging would be] having spaces that are as free of judgment as possible and that we kept coming back to assuming best intentions of everybody that comes in. I know on an individual level when I haven't felt like I belonged somewhere it was usually rooted in something like that, where it was like their suspicion or lack of trust or something like that. I think creating belonging involves knowing that you can never really know who somebody is, just based on how you see them and what you perceive. And that's a big ask, but I feel like it's an important thing to cultivate in a community, knowing that we might be ignorant to who someone really is and not just go with our assumptions based on what someone looks like. (A&C)

I was born and raised in Bellingham, and I've always felt like this is my home. .. I think that over the years I kind of had to feel out my own sense of belonging ..so it took me a long time to feel like my identity belong. (YAS)

my background is a migrant worker. Education was not even valued growing up because I was needing to work to survive. So belonging to me is different from many of our community members, and people on this [focus group]. Belonging to me are the people that I make connections with that accept me as me –

doesn't matter my background, my baggage, allowing me to when I do feel uncomfortable, I can say, I don't understand, can you rephrase it? Can you help me try to understand it. So belonging is the people that make me feel that it's okay to be me. Back in 1989, when we first moved into the Nooksack Everson area, as a migrant worker trying to set roots for my kid from over the mountains it did not look like that here. And we weren't accepted. And that was hard, and it still is. I hold it so close to heart and memory because it was hard. There's a lot of racism. Unless you walk in my shoes, you see it, or if it's blatantly said [around you]. The biggest memory I have from when we first moved here, my daughter must have been coming out of elementary moving into middle school, and there was a big cross burning on Pole Road. And she remembers ever so vividly. And she was going to night school because we were still trying to figure out, do we migrate back? And so even to today, the fear, you know. I know I belong in the community. I know I don't belong in everyone's eyes. But I can help the community in so many different ways allowing me to branch out, allowing me to belong. I've worked with the school district and I love it, but there has been some very dark moments where I felt I don't belong. But every day, you know, I leave it. I'm very faithful. I leave it in the hands of God and I say okay, Today's a new day when it was bad yesterday. And so, belonging does mean belonging in the group you're around and your community - your community -, not the entire Whatcom community, but my community. (NES)

I've only been here two years, and based on my experience, I think, a sense of belonging would look like being able to go into any store, post office, whatever, and know that you're going to be served, just like everyone else. Not being called out, shamed or made to feel less than. Gosh, I can't even put out of my head, my first time going into the Bellingham post office and being yelled at. In front of all of the other customers. Because I used a label for the express mail. And then going into Papa Murphy's to pick up a pizza on the weekend, and people just treating me terrible because I didn't call it in. So I did not see this as a welcoming community...it definitely was not welcoming ..If you pay attention, it's like every day, but after a while, you become kind of numb to it and you don't you just stop. (B&AA)

...the same day getting a lawsuit dismissed, which was brought against me by a white supremacist, I was harassed by people who she incited on Instagram because the court feed is broadcast online and they actually had a viewing party. And when somebody jumps out of the bushes to startle you on your way to work after court, you tend to have a very strong screaming reaction. And I am not someone who gets startled very easily. Like, at all. So my sense of belonging is mostly about keeping myself protected as much as I can, and staying quiet, publicly, while trying to make a change in spaces like these. That's what belonging looks like for me. (AAPI)

I won't go to Lynden. I've been once in the last 20 something years and I will never go again. The county is uncomfortable for sure. When I leave the house Monday through Friday, I put my badge on the second I step out my apartment door and I don't take it off until I come back in. The Social Service badge gives me a certain level of safety and access that I absolutely do not get in this community if I'm not wearing it. (MHW)

I don't think I could just walk through Lynden. And it's not just me, because I have lived there, [and] I don't feel like you can walk through there.... I get people to look how I walk in a store for instance. And it recently happened to my wife when she went into a store and they were just watching her. Make sure that she wasn't gonna steal something. And she felt so uncomfortable, she was like, "you know what, I'm leaving". And for me, the same thing, I own a painting company so I travel all over Whatcom County. And we're in a place where I have found more racism, Lynden (LX)

I find Bellingham to be almost worse sometimes than out in the counties because at least in Lynden and Blaine and some of those places, I know what to expect. And it's a little bit more overt and I can prepare myself for it and know this is where I'm going, .. but when you're in town, I think we're a community that's pretty laced with like, sort of superficial performative acceptance. .. you also don't know when it's gonna turn or if there are people around you who are actually going to stick up for you or stand up for you or make sure you're safe. And so I think we have a lot of this sort of fake wokeness, or whatever we call it, and we're this small college town. And people come say, 'Oh, I'm in the Pacific Northwest and racism is not real'. I think I find almost more discomfort. When people start being overly like 'we are so accepting here'. 'We're so progressive, I just love it here'. And then I'm like, Ooh, I don't think you know the reality of our county and I don't know that you actually have my back when push comes to shove. That I feel is more threatening sometimes. (MHW)

Being accepted is a big part. Once you're accepted, then you start to make connections with people. So I feel like getting myself out there to the community. And so that they get to know me. And that's ... I'm sorry, I'm crying (through tears). Not to feel that the color of my skin or that I'm from Mexico, or you know, that's something that has been hard, you know. I just want to be accepted so that they don't look at where I came from. I want to be accepted for what I'm doing in the community and who I am. (FBO)

Burden on BIPOC

...so that feeling of, you know, people watching you when you go into those stores or whatever. I grew up with that right, and we knew how people felt about people on the rez, right. And then when Obama got in there I felt like there was hope. Oh my god, it just felt so hopeful, and then all of a sudden, the day Trump gets in there. I was downtown, and I was getting one of our elders [at the] store. And guy stopped and he just started flipping my mom and I off right by the window, and he said," Make America great again" and he was just flipping us off the whole time we were sitting there. So we get home and I'm talking to mom about it and mom's just like, "oh I got shot at with the girls in Birch Bay and, you know, talking about all the things that have racially happened to her before. And my dad at Bellingham High School got pushed into a closet and told, "you get your haircut". So that didn't even phase her that guy doing that, but for me I felt really bad because I can see my children ... my middle son is really dark, and then my daughter has platinum blonde hair and hazel eyes even though we're both indigenous, I prayed for a little girl with blond hair and hazel eyes, and I got a little girl with blond hair and hazel eyes and I dreamed up like 20-30 Some years ago, that they were treated different in school, and so when that happened to me I was worried that our children are going to start feeling this way again and sure enough we had KKK written in our rock solid class and stickers start going around at school, for those groups that are racist. (IFG)

I've never been welcomed, and even when I go out and everything I've never actually felt welcomed and everything, so I keep to myself. (B&AA)

Just being accepted for who I am. As you can see, I have some pictures of my kids behind me. I have a 10 year old daughter and a five year old son. And as Mr. xxx said earlier, you know, the country is in all kinds of places. And it's the kind of stuff that keeps me awake at night. You know, when I think of the statement that former President Obama made about Trayvon Martin, 'that could have been my son'. When I look at a picture of someone like that, I see my son. A nice, sweet kid. I just want to make sure that I'm doing my part... At the end of the day, what belonging means is a place where my kids can grow

up and feel comfortable and secure, and not just worry, about being like, the black kid or whatever. They're respected for people being the people that they are. (FBO)

Inequities

...it depends on who you ask. I mean, there are people who brag about Mount Baker and perhaps I do sometimes too, that we have great relationships with our kids and they are comfortable here, but that really is not true. We have groups of students who do not feel comfortable. I can't tell you how often someone will call me and want to talk to me about an issue or just themselves and start with 'my family's been here for four generations' and presented as an entitlement. You know, so you should be listening to me. You should make this exception so my kid can play in the basketball game. I hear that all the time. I mean, weekly at least... We have kids who are not comfortable on this campus or on any of our campuses and we have data to show that. ..people like to brag about belonging, but it really does not exist for everyone. It depends, depends on who you are and what your name is (SUPS)

it's real different living in Everson. It's a real mix. From the long term locals to the Latinos, there's a real mix here. And in our experience it has been mixed from some racist behavior to the opposite, just very open and friendly behavior. So it's been a real mix. So, belonging, we experience this in small little groups, with, mainly with friends. (NES)

Organizational Structures and Systems

I don't feel like belonging when I see BlackLivesMatter signs on a lot of businesses and not seeing any material change out of that (SJA0)

I have not really struggled with belonging myself, I feel like me in my life, I've been quite fortunate. The systems are all in place for me to feel like I belong. So that's not a struggle that I necessarily have in Whatcom County. (ML2)

So the Black Lives Matters movement really made people shape up for a little while, and hold each other accountable. That was the most perfect time I've ever seen. Non-colored people holding each other accountable, and I just wish that it would continue and not be like the reality TV show where they just turn it off because it doesn't affect their lives. ... in our curriculum development, we are going to focus on cultural safety because it's not a safe place. And it's because of the unsettling truth of the doctrine of discovery, and ... it's not exactly about racism in today's society in a lot of aspects, It's just that we've developed a lot of racist quality policies that benefited white people from the beginning of time, and now these policies are hurting even their own, you know, ... systemic racism it's hurting the people who are in poverty, doesn't matter what color you are, (IFG)

Call to Action and Consequences

I think [having children] was definitely a big factor for us. When we moved here, our kids were very young, one and four years old. And so belonging here meant making connections largely through their world and their activities and school and those sorts of things. But they're grown and gone now and living on their own. And I think for both my husband and myself, we've made it a priority in our lives to actively look for ways to contribute to the community to find a space in the community that feels comfortable to us (PW/U)

I think for me, belonging is an action word. It's not something that you see that's hung up front of a business are part of a mission statement or a value statement, but it's about the actions of people and what you do. I know in my experience, in terms of how people are treated, people remember more about how they're treated from another person more than they remember anything else. They might not remember your name. They might not remember where you work, but they remember how you treat them. So for me belonging is actionable, and being able to invite people in not specifically to your home, it could be, but just into whatever circle or wherever they are at that point. So just hearing people and treating people with respect and just making people feel comfortable, I would say simply just making people feel comfortable. And be genuine about it. (LEFG)

Awareness and Funds of Knowledge

I believe this whole cultural appropriation thing is complete garbage because I mean, the biggest form of flattery is imitation. And so why would I get mad if somebody is running around in a sombrero and a poncho and this and that, like you are literally saying that you like my culture? Why would I take that away from you? If it's something that you care about? Why would I take that away? Why would I say don't do that only my people can have it. That is completely ridiculous. So here we are separating each other more and more by trying to make this exclusive club that only certain people can do or talk or, or eat or make whatever that they want. Otherwise, you're appropriating their culture. It's asinine to me and so if we want to be inclusive, we just need to talk to each other. We need to be around each other. That's literally all that it needs to be. I feel like all of this is getting far more too complicated than it needs to be than literally sitting down and talking with somebody that you don't have any idea about. (CS)

The other aspect of belonging, from my perspective, especially in the context of business is that for 1000s, of years, 10s of 1000s of years, right where we are, there was a sustainable economy, not a debt based monetary system, but one based on generosity and gratitude in the Potlatch where people were thanked for showing up. And that's an essential part of belonging where we have gratitude for those that show up and are present, and active in our communities. (FBO)

Indigenous

For me, you cut my hand and I bleed. My DNA is in this earth. You know, this is where we've come from. I mean, my family's come from here since time immemorial. Ever since I went to school, I look out the window and I daydream about what it used to look like. .. I grew up with the confusion, you know, how come I can't learn about all this here in our home from when I went to school? So belonging is to me, this is my home. When I look at the mountains that's what makes me feel I'm home. The rivers, our fish. Our stories are connected to everything. (NT)

Belonging to us is like our sense of place. And our origin stories and even when we talk about our fishing villages and all the places that our ancestors were before us and how that ties us to this land. I think belonging, it's kind of first for us, we belong to our people then we belong to Nooksack, then we belong to Whatcom County, and then we belong to Washington State, and then it's like, kind of layers of that. And a big sense of our belonging is our identity and we're taught that we're salmon people. And that the salmon has connected us to cedar. All the things we use cedar for in our culture, the ferns, you know, when you look at Nooksack, the ferns are very important to us as Nooksack people. All of those give us a sense of belonging and I wasn't ever fortunate enough to learn the language. I get really sad about that sometimes because I feel I was robbed of that. You know, our great grandfather and great grandmother

and our elders, you know, they were the last fluent speakers of the language and we're fortunate we have some tapes. It's not a lot. And we have very few tribal members can still speak the language and even at that it's not fluent. I think that's a part of us as people that we're missing. (NT)

I immediately thought belonging is how we fit into the community and the culture and the environment here in Whatcom County. Belonging in Whatcom County is in our very existence and our distinct identity as Nooksack people. (NT)

...we also at the same time feel disconnected. It was hard to deal with back [in school]. I didn't understand as much as I understand today. Back then it was a lot of confusion. You know, why am I being taught this and why am I getting in trouble for saying what I know about us? And that hasn't changed that much and we wish it would have. Its 2022 and a lot of our kids today feel that disconnect in Whatcom County. Our kids get on the White Man bus. Go to White Man school, learn White Man history, and return back to Indian Country. And it's a culture shock for kids. You know, and I'm not saying there hasn't been any attempt to understand or fix that. But it's something that we still need. It's something that we're working on continuously. I mean, we're the youngest recognized people here in this state, but we're the oldest people. So at the same time belonging is it's kind of like, you got two sides of everything. (NT)

I was just thinking about how my ancestral ties are not to this place. But growing up as an indigenous person and having exposure to nature and the outdoors. At such a young age and having exposure to it in such a way that really made me feel like this was my home. This was like where I am supposed to be. I feel like belonging in Whatcom County is a lot about nature. A lot of us sort of relate to that and the beauty of the Pacific Northwest and I think in different circumstances I feel like belonging in Whatcom County has been hard for sure. It's not it's not easy. I feel like even just going from one town to the next. There's a huge discrepancy in the way that I feel walking into places and the experiences that I've had. I think of most when I think of belonging is just feeling close to the land. (SUMAS)

When I think of belonging, I don't feel like I belong on this land because it was taken from somebody else. So for me, I'm kind of interpreting it as finding acceptance within Whatcom County and what does that look like? I find it through feeling like I have emerged with other like-minded people. I think it's finding just acknowledgement, acceptance and connection ... it almost feels like entitlement where I don't feel entitled to belong here, but I want to belong here. (WYP)

Question 2: [To what degree] can cultural awareness solve for structural violence or racism?

Burdon on BIPOC

What I understand about my workforce is that they don't have any experience with proximity to black people. So when they encounter them, their mindset about Black is so awkward. So, they struggle to figure out how to interact, at times. So, it takes them a minute, I usually can tell the three or four minutes that they're going through this, and I just continue on, as if I'm not seeing it, and then they come along and eventually forget this is a black person, not that they forget but the awkwardness lessons, but you watch them go through their ablutions while they're adjusting to your race, and that's always the way it's been in the northwest, (B&AA)

I also have seen in our schools, some of the kids don't want to speak Spanish. They feel embarrassed, and some of the parents too. And so that's not helping from where I come from. I'm proud of what I am - I am proud to see our community growing together slowly. But there still are differences in our community. We have to be able to communicate with those individuals... If a child goes home crying, because he doesn't understand a subject or something going on, and the parent cannot speak English, then we have an issue there. (FBO)

One of my parents first brought me here to Lynden. We came as migrant workers in their asylum camp for migrant workers and women, that's where we landed, and it was bad. There were 10 or 15 of us living in one little apartment with two bedrooms and everybody stacked up anywhere that we could find. Just because that's all we knew. And that's all we saw. We didn't know anything better. And at a certain point there is a fear of speaking, especially when I came here back in 1999. .. In Lynden, after July, when the raspberries will be done, the blueberries would be coming in but back then blueberries was a smaller crop than it is now, but in July, the farmers started laying off people because he was done. And, in July, immigration was allowed to pick them up, because they weren't needed anymore for picking the berries because it was done. But between June and July, in the berry season, you can go anywhere in Lynden, and do whatever you want, but once the harvest was getting through then they were allowed to pick us up and I mean, I knew a lot of families that were picked up by immigration, or getting pulled over by the police and because they didn't speak enough English, the translator was calling the border patrol and there they will get picked up. (LX)

A lot of people know that there is racism and violence and they're using that as a tool. ..to leave things as they are so that they can maintain power. (MHW)

I think it takes more than just the people of color. We need the help of white people as well. And right now it feels like they mean well. They're there to be supportive against racism, but you have to be anti racist as well. You have to be part of you know, the bigger change and so we just have a long ways to go. (School)

...are they willing to do their work and not put their head in the sand or pretend, or no, and I've seen a lot of people. They get tired. We're all tired but they get tired of the weight and the burden of having their eyes open, and they take the breaks from the work because their privilege allows them to and when. (AAPI)

And kind of going back to the question you asked before this one about belonging, what belonging means in Whatcom County. Oftentimes, from my experience growing up in the public school system, and I know I didn't experience racism as much as people before me did. But when I think back I feel like I did a lot of trying to fit in here rather than embracing my culture and my identity as a Nooksack matriarch in the making. I found myself trying to fit in with the non-native community and the, the standards of the non-native lifestyle. I think our young people still struggle with that. I do take pride in the kids that are now more involved with our dancing groups or drumming groups, canoe journey, canoe paddling, that being so involved in our culture, helps them embrace that identity. Rather than trying to fit in. (NT)

My son went to Mount Baker school district until 10th grade. And he finally sat his dad and I down and, you know, talked to us and asked us if he could transfer out to Lummi Nation High School. And living out here at Nooksack, getting to Lummi Nation High School is almost an hour and I didn't think that was very realistic at the time. When I talked to him about why he wanted to go to Lummi Nation high school,

you know, a lot of his reasoning was, he never fully felt like he belonged at Mt. Baker, even though he was involved in sports, and, you know, he just wasn't happy there. And then, when we allowed him to transfer to Lummi high school he like lightened up in that he was getting up and going to school and you know, just happy about school again. And I saw that in my own son and you know, how many other Native kids go to the public schools and don't feel like they fit in? And end up dropping out. Struggle. You know, my son was one of those that felt that way, even though, we're an educated family, and we value education and that was a really tough, difficult decision to say, okay, you can go to Lummi Nation High School, and, he's a success story. And he graduated from Lummi Nation last year and now he's doing his first year of college at Northwest Indian College and you know, that generation- our kids generation are still going through that struggle with identity. (NT)

My son is a good example, he went into the Marine Corps and he comes home after Marine Corps and I hear him talking on the phone to his counselor. And I hear Him say "Caucasian", and then you know, he sees that I'm looking at him you know. After he got off the phone I just say what are you talking about, you know, he identified himself as Caucasian. And it rubbed me the wrong way, you know, but he went on to explain to me about going to Nooksack you know, and he never fit in as an Indian, never fit in as Mexican. And he blatantly said he was embarrassed of who he was. And I couldn't understand that. I could not understand. But now, he's going to school. He's in cultural anthropology. And he's starting to start to pick up a lot of stuff that he's learned from when he's growing up. And, you know, I mean, he's starting to see all that and that's our kids you know? Our kids they - and I blame myself a lot of times because I didn't - well I guess I tried to make him do things, you know, do our things, but it's just like, at the school, they didn't see it. The same way his peers looked at him differently. So it didn't help having all the names that he has to. (NT)

I remember walking out the house and mom would give us the blessings and whatnot. And she would say things like be careful. And I was like, but we're just crossing the street. We literally lived right across the street from the school. And after a few years, I realized I don't look like them. This food is not my food. Being told we could not speak our native language. This is back in the 70s. Okay, we still have that, as much as everybody says we're all included. We have different backgrounds. We have different languages. I still personally hear it in workplaces, "they're in America they should speak English". I have some great coworkers that I work with who can read my body language when I tense up - like they can read it because something was said that was hurtful. ... But cultural awareness and violence continues to be an issue. If you walk in this skin, you walk in the shoes we do. It exists. Yes, we're there are huge conversations on what it should look like - what manuals, and textbooks say, there's a lot of teaching. But still, how do you teach it to overcome it? My kids still have to be very aware. We walk to certain places, we're not going to be approached - "Oh, you look like you're looking for something". No, no, no, [my daughter] needs to figure it out on her own. I have to figure it out on my own in certain places. Because we look different. (NES)

...my granddaughter's in eighth grade. And there are certain things that are said in the middle school and she'll come home and I said, "Well, how did you handle that?" She says, "I didn't". I know as years go by I need to do better. I know I need to say "this isn't okay". You know, "your approach is incorrect", or "it was hurtful. That sounded pretty racist". I'm not there yet. I need to be there. I have good people in my life that are supportive. But because I've lived it, I've heard it. I've seen it. It's hard. It's hard. But this is a good place. This is a good place. And how do I take that to my everyday life when I sit in my car and I drive out? And I'm like, "Okay, we're going there. We're going there." And I mentally do that without

even thinking. Okay, so be aware of your surroundings. Don't open your purse when you're out. Taking your glasses out at a department store. To get your glasses held open your purse dig in there, but guess who's right there by me? Security. It's simply just to get my glasses, but I'm aware because it exists. And I've had experiences. So I don't know. I think we'll get there. But not today. Not tomorrow, many years from now. (NES)

Awareness and Funds of Knowledge

...who's cultural awareness and what does that actually mean? And where are you getting your information and knowledge? And are you just saying, Oh, I understand this culture because I have one Asian friend and they're okay with XY or Z. (MHW)

I think with your own self, learning about things like microaggressions towards race and other stuff, and especially with generational stuff, I'm very glad that I'm in this generation, because I feel like our relationships with our children and everything else is gonna break the generational trauma. (HES)

I feel like it can be kind of messy. Like, when we talk about racism, I feel like there's so many different ways that racism shows. I'm Muslim, so I definitely had my share of stuff. And I think that if people kind of understood what's it like to be me, or someone else, I feel that we can come to understand each other. I feel like it all starts with awareness. And that if we start with that, and understand each other better, or just listen, because I feel like there's not enough listening involved (HES)

I feel like I've realized there's really really bad people out there, and they're never going to be able to, change their mind frame and their inherent beliefs to become not racist. Basically, I think it'd be awesome if cultural awareness could continue to increase and improve, because I think it definitely has in the United States, but I just feel like there's always going to be that, like 10, or 20%, or whatever that are very inherently racist people, and they're not going to be able to listen to the other point of view and understand the other point of view. I think cultural awareness can definitely benefit the problem and work towards at least improving the state of structural violence and racism in our communities. (HES)

On a structural or systemic level, I don't think it can do as much as because of just a lot of history behind it. (HES)

I mean yes and no. So there's an understanding of different cultures. And if you understand these cultures, you understand how to navigate certain things. So it's not a bad thing to ask somebody what part of Mexico that they're from, because, there's different ways that people handle different situations or the way that you talk to somebody. There's different ways to navigate certain ethnicities. (CS)

I do think it's important that we do learn other cultures because the truest thing is you're afraid of what you don't know. You don't know what you're afraid of. I mean, when the first time you see somebody walk around with a turban on and you've never seen this kind of person in your entire life. The only thing that you see on TV is that the majority are usually bad guys in movies, right? And not every single Muslim is an ISIS agent or whatnot. Like the Muslim faith is probably the largest religion on earth. And their majority good people. It's like anything right? You have good doctors. You have bad doctors. you got a good dentists and bad dentists. There's a good McDonald's burger flipper. And there's a bad one -

there's no such thing as one bad apple for the entire generalization. So one of the biggest things is the more and more that we spend time around each other, the more and more you get to understand these people... I'm one of these people who I'm not afraid to ask questions. So I'm going to say Look, dude, if I say something that you don't like it's not coming from a place of malice. It's me trying to understand so I'm going to ask you like, what does the dot on The forehead mean? Why do you guys always wear a turban? Why is your hair always wrapped up? Is it true that you bathe in milk? Like I'm gonna ask questions because otherwise it's left to rumors and assumption. Why would I not ask? Why would I not want to wonder why you're doing something? Because I want to get to know you. I want to get to know your culture. I want to get to know what makes you tick, why people are so interesting and let alone other cultures. (CS)

I understand what y'all are trying to do. But I think - not that we don't need to bring some of these issues to light - but I think the more and more that we spotlight, you know the separation between Caucasian and people of color, the more that we're going to be creating this divide. Instead of Hey, why are people of color having these unfair advantages or whatnot, we need to look at the other underlying things (CS)

I don't know if I understood what you mean, but if our culture can overcome aggressions? I think so, because I am very proud to be Mexican, to have been able to emigrate so young without anybody helping me, without anybody giving me money to start in the new country. I am very proud that my parents are not rich, but they can stand up in front of everyone because they have never stolen, they have never taken anything without permission. And I think I have a lot of history and we as Mexicans have a lot of history and sometimes when I hear people say, "Go away, you are not from here." We ARE from the people who were already here. This [land] was from our brothers, the Native Americans. (FFW)

Awareness, we're talking about who's awareness. Dominant cultures aware - the white people becoming aware is going to be a very slow, incremental, generational with a lot of resistance. The young people their whole world is so different than mine. (ML2)

So cultural awareness is like the first step. You will get some people - you won't get everybody, because there's folks out there who don't give a rat's ass. You know about somebody else's culture. They want only their own. ...So you need to go forward that structural is a little more complicated because then you have to start getting into trying to explain to people and work with people on just what our structures are. First off, because there's a lot of people who don't understand what our structures are. And then to go through and identify how those structures are oppressing or oppressive. ... Okay, so that becomes more complicated. It's necessary work. It's long work. It's not something that happens overnight. But you can't do that kind of work without some of the cultural awareness work because we can't go in and fix a system that we don't know is broken. And how it's broken. So cultural awareness is not the end. It's the beginning. It can get some folks but you need to bring other kinds of things in as well. (ML2)

We have more stories being slaves than feeling free if you know what I mean. We had 300 years in slavery and we have 200 of freedom. And unfortunately, slavery left us very ugly consequences. We, as a culture in Mexico did not have corruption.. And we learned corruption, we learned to betray. In other words, our culture was strong. We are no longer slaves, now, we can love each other. We were not treated so badly that we learned to hate ourselves. (FFW)

... sometimes we parents work so hard, we get home tired, we clean, we eat, we just want to sleep and our children are Mexicans, but they don't have what we had because we were born there or because we

were closer to the culture. We have to teach them that and teach them how we were slaves, how we freed ourselves, how we became independent. In other words, we have to teach them all that and learn that they must respect any culture. (FFW)

To be honest with you I'm not sure that I can really answer that question. I definitely don't feel like I personally was raised with a lot of racism or even a lot of understanding of what it was growing up in the Mount Baker School District. I went to Acme Elementary. The only other race really, in my classes, were some of the Nooksack tribal kids, and I didn't, I didn't understand any difference. I probably was well into high school before I understood that there was reservations. Which is probably a super poor job of educating people on what historically we have done to communities and people. But in the same token, I had friends from the tribe. We hung out together, they're still my friends today. I didn't understand that there was this major, you know, difference. And so I kind of just live my life that way. But I have seen racism in our community. I definitely have seen where people are not treated equally. And I don't know how to solve that. I don't know if that's understanding that community or not, because honestly, I didn't understand it. I just seen them as my friends and as the people that I hung out with. I guess that goes back to they just belonged in part of my life. I do think that knowing people's different cultures is super awesome. ... to me that historical part of that is really cool and I'm very accepting but I obviously haven't had a lot of racism against me. That's just the truth. And so I don't know that I can really fully answer if that will solve the problem. I think I need to hear from somebody who has experienced that and what they think and maybe I am being racist by saying that didn't matter to me as I grew up, and so you know, I've struggled with that, like, what do I share with my children about different communities and the isolation in that? (NES)

I think so, because I think the more people know and understand their culture, the less likely they are to act out - when you don't know who you are where you concerned, you don't have that identity or that sense of belonging I think that leads to other things because you're searching for something. And sometimes when you're searching to belong somewhere with a group of people sometimes it's not always the best group of people. And that leads to influences whether they be positive or negative influences and we surround ourselves with people, and sometimes we're not always surrounded by good people. (NT)

I believe it can. I think, you know, going in with the understanding that there's going to be those individuals out there who don't really care - they just want to be ugly. But you know, it's always a big part of the problem is a lack of knowledge, not understanding. But if we go out there and we say what we can say about our culture, and if somebody is willing to understand that culture is not a past tense, it's alive and well today. You know, say for instance, a Christian person will go to their church. And they'll pray every Sunday. You know, and I'm not saying that that's the only day they pray. But that's what non tribal people understand about religion and culture. You know, what is culture? who can define what culture is? And if they go at it with a diverse understanding, then it'd be great, you know, but that's where we begin to teach the outside world what our culture is. (NT)

I think that is the only way we can solve this issue of structural violence and racism. It's the only way, once we understand each other's cultures and where we're coming from. Understanding white privilege doesn't have to be an attack on the white race. I think so many times people feel offended by that, and I understand it, because sometimes it's just carried so far, that people get pinned back into a corner and then they don't want it anymore. They're like, "No, no, I don't believe in white privilege", understanding, you know, the reaction against that. I think providing opportunities for students and people in the

community to get to know each other's culture and understand the way they think and why they do the things they do is the tip of the iceberg. The tip is everything that we can see. We can see that they dress differently, we can hear that they play different music, we can see that they eat different foods, and that's all really fun. You know, we want to see the different foods we want to understand the different things. Those are all really fun. Underneath the iceberg, the things that we cannot see, like how they worship, how did they believe in God? Do they not believe in God? What do they think about politics? Is it a vegetarian culture? Or is it a meat culture? You know, all these things that we can see. And it's like, how do you get people to understand things below that line? And I think that at first, you have to start up here with all the fun stuff. And then bring it down with more serious conversation and more opportunities for people to be in each other's homes, or people to talk and not feel offended or attacked. I think if we could find ways to do that... I think we're great seeing the tip of the iceberg but I think people feel nervous about what's underneath. I mean, so those kinds of opportunities have to happen. I think that's when we stop being so violent, and just understand or stop being racist. And understand yes, there is white privilege, but then how do you stop blaming me for it? You're right. We can't blame you for it. You were born the way you were born. Right. So how do we reach that? It has to be done. I think there's a huge awakening when a white male says I never knew about my privilege and now that I know it has changed my world. I will vote differently. You will ask questions differently. I will understand people differently. So um, I would say yes, that cultural awareness is the only way to stop structural violence and racism. (NES)

I would say first, you'd have to want to know the person's culture and why they do the things that they do. Firstly, you have to be interested in it to actually be able to experience the customs they have and what they do and why they do it. I think once you accept that you would like to learn another person's culture. Well, you might have a different idea about why they do things the way they do but actually if you really took some time to think about what their culture is, what they do, it might relieve tension between you thinking about how they act or what they wear, or you think, well, "that's their culture. That's what they do". And if you open your mind to that, I think you would have a different perspective on why they do it. It might solve some racism and I think if you did that, then you would probably relieve some tension between you and some other people. I think that if you educate and you want to learn about it, it'd be awesome. I've been through many different cultural experiences with many different kinds of people and I always let myself soak it all in and it's just, it's amazing. (NES)

I don't think being culturally aware solves the issues. They can help and can be a part of it, but I think it's more about knowing the person, knowing the individual, and it's more about that actual person and everything they've dealt with. .. every person is so individual, and has such unique stories and unique things they've dealt with and experienced that I feel like when we know the person and what's made them and part of that is their culture, that is a better way to solve maybe some violence. And actually, culture is changing so much and I think in Whatcom we have way more people that are second or third generation of something. And it's so hard to be relevant to what is their culture anymore because it's changing. We are evolving and changing. And so part of me thinks that we'll never win the battle of constantly being aware of what the culture of each person to solve those issues, but we could definitely use it as a way to maybe know the roots to solve some of those issues. (NVFL)

Certainly can't hurt. I mean, I think it's a positive thing. I'm not sure how much effect it'll really have. But it had an effect on me. I didn't quite understand how difficult it would be. Now, I'll rephrase it. I didn't understand how easy it was for me as a white person. (CE)

I think it should be community based not government, because one size doesn't fit all. When you leave it to the community, each community will have different needs, different strengths, different weaknesses that they can work on. I think if I could speak for all we would agree that when a community works together the impact is much bigger. (SE)

I think it can definitely help but I think our worst enemy is ignorance. If we don't educate people, if we don't share these stories right. I think racism is learned. And if it's learned it could be relearned a different way. And I'll share a short story about 2020. The previous president was in power. I walked in one of my jobs with one of my workers. And there was this lady - they're farmers right. And the first question I walked in and I said "Hi I'm Dan", because everybody knows me like Dan in Whatcom County and her first response was, "Hey Dan, what do you think about our wall?" That was the first question, and I'm like what wall in your house? She was referring to the wall that the President was promoting right. So, my reaction was like, Well, I think he's stupid. Of course, that ended up going into a long conversation. I told her my story, my parents are from Mexico. They brought me here when I was flying illegally. I grew up in central California for a long time and I moved here and got a job and I had no immigration status, also long process, then I started my immigration process through President Obama. And so I told her my story, and guess what, they're my friends now. If you don't share these things that we're going through, if we don't let them know the other side of, "oh there was a Mexican here that killed somebody", they see all of us as bad people but when they hear the story. Yes, I came here illegally. Yes, I lived here for a long time. I got married I have four kids, I own a business that I pay probably more taxes for. Once you hear the story of like, Oh, okay. I think if you share your culture, your point of view they see the other side. If they get out of their minds from "well he's illegal, he should get in line", like where is the line? If they know that there's no line they think twice for a minute. I think sharing will make it better awareness of our culture and things that we go through, and why things happen, why our teenagers go into something stupid versus a white person because mom and dad are not at home, like this white teenager that has mom and dad at home because they have everything. I mean the Spanish community we have to work 12 to 15 hour a day, so this kid has nothing to do. Nobody is there, you know, when they hear the stories I think he changes, he definitely changes. **If we don't speak, nobody's gonna know...** They were a little aggressive in the beginning but in the end they saw my point of view, and they feel compassion for me. And they've requested me on Facebook and we stay in contact and it takes us talking, speaking, sharing with them what we go through. We're not bad people. We have the same feelings that they do, and we have the same dreams that they do and this is just this invisible wall that's holding us from getting there. (LX)

I think it can definitely help. I think that of course there will always be racism, but I think that educating more on cultural awareness of course, is going to especially at the younger ages, is something that is so needed, especially in this area. (SUMAS)

Obviously white people asked that question. And politicians that want to just take care of shit. It's like, okay, let's deal with this. Okay, give them anti-racism training, give them some cultural awareness. And we'll do ABCD and we'll take care of it. .. my experience with cultural awareness has been ending up in co-opting our traditions and our celebrations particularly in our community, the Cinco de Mayo stuff that happens in all of these white led organizations where they have, you know, these Cinco de Mayo things with white people putting on Mexican hats and all that stuff and eating tacos and all of a sudden, you know, they're like, that's cultural awareness...the question is bothersome. Do people know what structural violence is? I think people need to first understand what structural violence is. And no, it's not

going to solve the problem at all. In fact, it's only going to make it worse. It's been making it worse. .. I think that white people need to understand what their culture is first. And I'd like to know, what is white culture? You know, because there's a problem with white people not really understanding what their culture is, and I grew up with Danish people, Germans and Sweeds. And it was beautiful. You know, because their culture what they shared with me about being Danish or Swedish or German. (SJA0)

...[some] people know about other cultures and they just choose hate, basically, they don't want to accept other cultures. .. it's not really going to solve it because people don't want it to be solved. They want the division, and they don't want to accept other cultures, they already have that set in stone in their heart kind of thing. And we can only hope that we can teach cultural awareness to more generations and hopefully start moving the needle, but some people are just going to be how they are. And that's what they've chosen. And you can show them all the anguish the other cultures suffered, and they won't care. They've already accepted that, know that I don't want those people around me, or I don't want that ethnic group or, you know, whatever it is, they just hate it. So awareness is out there. But people choose to just not respond to that. It's unfortunate. But hopefully, as we keep going on and progressing, more and more, we will move the needle more. (Pros)

..if you begin your awareness training when they're young, then you're in better shape, because that becomes part of them. They're implementing that in everything they do. (Pros)

.. I know we're impatient, we want to do it quicker. But I have seen through a couple generations that the kids now are better than, when I was a kid. You know, people are more sensitive, nicer, more tolerant than when I grew up in the 70s. So I think that your cultural awareness is important but won't solve it. And it's going to take some time. (Pros)

I think that it's very difficult to overcome the inherent biases that are taught within the home, where individuals grow up. Cultural awareness can start in the education component in the classroom. (Pw/U)

...what does that look like? And how is that actually coming through what we're teaching to children, how are we doing that? We can't be doing that through tokenizing people in the community or pointing out a certain student and asking them to speak for their whole community or their whole family. I think that cultural awareness is just that first part, but then you actually have to sort of flip that the way that people think and that pedagogy about people and having a deeper connection, but that doesn't come before you sort of see the humanity, and that doesn't even come before the cultural awareness. I guess the first thing that came into my head as an example is the contradiction of the Nooksack Pioneers as the mascot. I'm just thinking about the tribal name and the tribal nation and the land that we're on and then having Pioneer's being the mascot. I remember learning about the pioneers and how great they were and how nice they were ...(SUMAS)

...who's interpreting [cultural awareness] because I feel like that's kind of where structural racism and violence came from. Like, it's very intentional. (MHW)

The word 'cognitive dissonance' comes to mind - where you can know something, but it takes a lot more effort to make any changes. So then you slowly start to justify all this BS. And then maybe interpret the cultural differences. It's like inferiority or what have you. (MHW)

I think it depends on whether you're talking in more of a micro or macro level. I think on a case by case basis, ... you can only take the ... facts that you're dealt and how you think those facts best lend

themselves towards a particular resolution or another type of treatment or whatever it is that we have, and the amount of bail that you're asking for because of safety concerns... I think we're not in a good position, even being called trying to be culturally aware to recognize how much if at all those things are actually impacting any specific individual that is in front of us. And we're sort of limited to trying to interpret those things in a vacuum. I think ... the best way to impact those things is at a more macro and larger level or like top down type fashion, in terms of obstruction, and then that's what impacts everyone theoretically, equally, but in practice would likely end up having more specific impacts on marginalized groups. (Pros)

I think cultural awareness is an important thing. Because it informs your decisions, and whether that's micro or macro level, you know, if you know more, make better decisions. And you can certainly take things into account. (Pros)

There's just no way you can be aware or anticipate every kind of culture, or group that you might encounter so the goal isn't to be aware of all cultures, but to have the tools and the skills to not be blindsided, to know when you might be being prejudiced or, you know how to sort of like step back and observe. So I think there's a distinction there between, you know, it's overwhelming to maybe be a teacher or a member of community where what I have to be aware of all these different social constructs. I don't think that you have to know about it all in order to respond in a way that doesn't feel racist or doesn't feel stereotypically like it's having the tools to be savvy, not savvy but just, just be mindful and inclusive so that when you're not taking actions based on assumptions and aware when you are. (Parents)

I think people kind of tend to fear the unknown. So I do think that cultural awareness can make a really big difference for like, violence and for racism. I think that a certain point if someone is determined to not accept others, and he's determined to go out of his way to show violence to show racism, there's no way that we can really counteract that. I think the best method would be to kind of teach about other cultures from a really young age. Because I feel like high school is too far in a person's life. (YAS)

I think it's really coming from how do we educate and integrate the notion that this structural violence and racism was perpetuated and created and people are still benefiting from it. (MHW)

No, it is not going to solve it. But as we also know it means very complex issue right there would have to be a lot more than just a cultural awareness, and even with that phrase 'cultural awareness' I mean what does that look like? So, besides just cultural awareness ... what has historical racism done, with housing and redlining, with economics and loans not being given out to people of color and such, I mean again, there's just so much more that goes into it that cultural awareness is not going to solve. (AAPI)

I would say it does. ...I wanted to try and reach out to our different groups, whether it's within our community, or Native American community, and just reaching out and be a bridge. I've learned so much from fellow Chamber members and people that I now consider friends. And once again, I guess understanding their backgrounds where they're coming from, it teaches you a lot, and I think that is definitely a bridge. I mean, there's definitely different aspects to where we've come from, but there's also a lot of similarities. And if we acknowledge those differences and work on them, and, you know, sharing those similarities, I think that could be a bridge that might be a little bit, you know, higher ideal or whatever. (FBO)

[Call to Action and Consequences](#)

I would say no, I think awareness is foundational but it is not the work. And I don't think it can resolve anything. We have to have a basic understanding that this is happening. (MHW)

Awareness of that culture has to be attached to an understanding of transformation - that my full self-expression will not deny your full self-expression. And I believe racist, people believe that meaning fully expressed and fully out there, stops them - or that they think that that takes something away from them. But in reality, I'll have more to offer them as a full, healthy community member, our relationship will prosper on both sides. And that is a difficult leap from cultural awareness, to equity, to justice, to freedom, but it is a good launching pad. (FBO)

...you can be aware and get no work done. (LFG)

I think that cultural awareness can be a key component. And has its role to play in moving forward. The things that you would have to look at is what happens after and with that awareness raising because you don't just walk in and introduce you cultural aspects and then turn around and walk away. (ML2)

I agree with a lot of what's being said as a cultural awareness as a first start. I do think that when we frame it that way, we limit ourselves to our capacity to relate to a certain number of people or a certain amount of group because we're humans and we have brains that if we're expecting this all to be relational, there needs to be more cultural humility, and put the onus on the oppressors, saying, we don't know what we're doing. (ML2)

I think cultural awareness is a step towards eliminating racism. But I think that if people are educated with other cultures, they have to actually meet the person and get to know them where they're coming from... it is a step towards it, but it's a big leap to having that end result with that. I think there's a lot of variables in between that we probably would need to discuss in order to having that end racism. (FBO)

I think that no, because awareness is not enough. It's not - and cultural awareness, especially in a place where majority of people are not of that culture doesn't equate true understanding to create action because action is always rare. Action that involves cultural, structural, violence and race and racism. (ML1)

I don't think cultural awareness or eliminating structural bias alone is effective. One of the reasons why I think that is I think racism in Whatcom County has increased in the last three or four years. I don't know about Bellingham. I don't spend much time in Bellingham, but I know in the county, I hear the N word more often. I hear of violence more often. It's quite disturbing to me... I think it is happening because we have been attempting to deal with structural bias without changing the way these people think. They react by becoming more racist, not less. And I think it's a bigger problem than just saying we can eliminate structural bias, and it will all go away because I don't think it will, I think it will get worse... I think we actually are facing a much more difficult problem, then what can be answered by just saying, oh, if people will become culturally aware everything will go away. It won't. I think that if we just eliminate structural bias it'll get worse. At least for some segment of the population. I think it's a bigger job. (ML1)

I think really trying at least to get people to think more critically about their place. And the spaces that they occupy won't lead to structural systemic change as far as violence and racism goes, but it'll help. It'll help us start to talk more on the same wavelength. I agree that like cultural awareness alone cannot solve for structural violence or racism. I think it is maybe a part of the solution. I don't mean to say that you know, the "woke culture" is like important. It's purely performative, you know, but, if you engage beyond the surface level, if you ask people to think more critically and sit in these uncomfortable spaces, longer

than just passing through them as is so easy to do in today's society. Then you may get some inkling of an awakening, of a true acknowledgement of these problems and then maybe able to gain some traction, socially, culturally, to try to find some remedy. (ML1)

I could sit and be told to be nice to everybody and be inclusive, but until you're actually talking to people, and have an actual understanding of what they go through, I think that's, that's where the real movement starts to happen. And I think so, you know, it has to start on an individual basis, and then collectively, to fight systemic, your racism or, you know, whatever, (Pros)

I think also, just being who I am, white female, it would be very easy for me to turn a blind eye to the structural violence and racism because it doesn't directly impact me. I'm not typically someone who deals with discrimination based on you my culture and who I am. So I think that cultural awareness is as a stepping stone, it can help people who would otherwise not understand that structural violence and racism exist in this world. And so it can educate people, but it doesn't change it on its own, but it can be the start of that change, educating people so that in their everyday lives, they're seeing the impacts of these things and they're actually in a position potentially to make some small efforts toward resolving what's going on once they are able to see it. (PDef)

sometimes people are dragged kicking and screaming and we're seeing it with the pandemic as well. If you leave it up to people's openness and kindness. I'd like to think that's enough. But it's just not. Not now. (CE)

Awareness happens when people desire to learn. Especially folks that I work with and have friendships with, I have seen incredible changes - leaps and bounds... You may have friends that aren't safe to talk to about certain things. And so you learn to like people on the level that you can, and to get along on the level that you can, and I had several of those acquaintances, who've now become aware and have done their own work, read books, gotten engaged and interested. ... No I don't think that cultural awareness is gonna solve anything, or change anything because, truthfully, it's hard work that we do as individuals working out our own salvation, right, with fear and trembling as the Word says, But, you know, in regular conversation it is not something that people do for show. It's not, it's not a conference or speaker or a Facebook post. It's the way that they see us and treat us and engage with us, and that difference. I have seen that change. I've also seen an intellectualization of black trauma that doesn't translate into being able to say hello to a black person. And that's been interesting to watch as well. Because, I mean I can remember walking downtown in Bellingham with a black friend of mine, a bunch of folks, Black Lives Matter signs we walked right through, and not one of the people darted their eyes away and no one even said hello. And we shared a laugh about that like, there's political blackness. And there's proximity to blackness. And I think that the political piece can change and has changed in some way. But I still think the majority of folks here are not comfortable with proximity to blackness (B&AA)

I think cultural awareness has to be there. But the thing is, it's just the base. I mean, you're not going to want to feel empathy for somebody if you don't know anything about them. So I think that's the very first thing that has to come about is cultural awareness. You have to be aware you have a neighbor, first of all, and what your neighbors going through before you're ever going to want to step alongside of them. But I think the basic problem is, we think that cultural awareness is enough. And I think it's beyond that. You have to be willing to stand beside somebody. ... I think you have to make individual alliances and individual friendships. Know who my neighbor is. It's got to be personalized... (CE)

I feel like it's a start. I feel like it's a foundation of like, maybe where we could start like, that's a good starting point is learning about different cultures and awareness and sharing the different cultures with other people. I think it would open people's eyes to a lot more things and see things in a different light or a different way. But ultimately, I don't feel like it would stop violence. I feel like it's just it's the foundations and starting point. (SUMAS)

It's important to recognize that it's not always easy to stand up and to speak up about stuff. Because it really makes you the odd person in the room. And it's kind of hard too when you're the one person who doesn't agree with everyone or you're going to be the one person who's gonna kind of a create a scene or a ruckus. It's not an easy thing to do, especially if you're not the most outgoing person out there. I feel like that can really make it harder. I regret not speaking up, especially when I was younger, and in school, there were a lot of 9/11 jokes and a lot of jokes about head coverings that I let go that I shouldn't have. (YAS)

I think cultural awareness is an important step, both individually and on a community level. But it doesn't solve the problems. It's not going to solve the issues of structural violence. (Pros)

I think there are some people who are blissfully unaware and becoming aware is a good foundation. But there also still needs to be accountability. There needs to be action, because people can be aware and they can also maintain the level of power that they have. (MHW)

I think we all know that it works from experiences we've had in our lives. I think we have several stumbling blocks in this country to make it come true for everybody. And what is the age of our country? We're a very young country, we're in our teen years, relative to the rest of the world. We've only been here a couple 100 years and 150 of them have been steeped in ridiculousness. So I don't see inviting 200 people to a meeting or a group and having them across the aisle and hug each other and get to know each other is the way to do it because it's not going to work. I think part of the problem is we have been taught from many different avenues that in this world our existence is a zero sum game. That if I lose something, it must mean somebody else wins. Our stock market works that way, our politics works that way, our sports work that way. There can only be one winner. I think that's very detrimental. And the people that perpetuate that idea are the ones who objected to giving trophies and awards to every kid that played on a softball team. We don't want everybody thinking that they're all good. They're not all good. So it can only be one winner. I think these things have been ingrained in us for our very short history, but it is our complete history. And it's really going to take some overcoming that stuff. We all know from a personal level, when we hold an opinion about someone or their culture and we get to know them, that preconceived idea just changes. And we begin to taste acceptance instead of rejection. And it just happens. I don't think it's going to happen for a long, long time in this particular country. It's already happened in other countries all over the world. But it hasn't happened here. (NES)

I think cultural awareness is like a stepping stone towards a conversation for healing but in and of itself, being aware of some of these cultures I don't think is going to fix the heat in people's hearts. (PDef)

I think that it can assist. I think that indirectly, yes, understanding where a person is coming from and who they are in their culture in their community. It can assist but I think that on its own, no. (PDef)

...when we talk about cultural awareness solving structural violence and racism, my first thought is no, because I do that every day in school, making kids aware of different cultures and different perspectives.

... And if it changes hearts and minds, I won't know. But I'm not seeing behaviors change from making students culturally aware. (PW/U)

I definitely don't think that is sufficient. By any means, I think that action and accountability and enough people power to make actual changes and organization is a really big part of it. (MHW)

...the cultural awareness of individuals has to also be accompanied or followed by action. So awareness, and understanding and empathy on their own. Don't change anything, if those people who have that awareness or Garner that awareness, use it in a way to enact change and an action. (Pros)

Mixed feelings with that. I'll be honest, I mean, if you're 35 and over I'm sure you remember that Rodney King stuff. So this is new right? Trayvon Martin's not new. So I went to that Black Lives Matter protest and had mixed feelings about it. ... I think the awareness is good. But I don't know if it necessarily stops the violence or makes people feel safe. It's a strange paradox, because you want people to be aware, but you want to do more than just be aware, right? (School)

So cultural awareness is huge. But unless you're the people that are in a position to make change, or have the power then really, you have the opportunity to have it as a checkbox and then do nothing about it. It's people in power are not going to do anything. (School)

...trying to be aware of those issues [of life circumstance], help inform the decisions you're making on bail recommendations and things like that. And I think on a micro scale, yes, then that I think can help work towards combating some of these systemic issues. (Pros)

... working to make action steps to prevent it or respond to it is different than just merely understanding what it is. So I think it has to be both awareness and action on a micro scale, but I think it would take generations for all cultural awareness to completely change the system in which we live in right now. (Pros)

Seeing the BLM signs go up everywhere see the social media posts. It was a little bit the feeling I have of like, okay, Budweiser is doing their pride packaging and my feeling is it's 100 million times better than the opposite. You know, if big corporations didn't want to march in pride if small business owners didn't want to throw a BLM sign in downtown Bellingham. You know, that would be really bad. I really don't want to live there. So it is good and it is comforting, but what are you really doing? And what am I really doing? And so I think it's it is useful and it does give me some hope. (LGBTQ+)

Sort of where the rubber hits the road is when you say, "Okay, we know all this stuff. What are we going to implement, that is going to change people to make them fair or to make the system compensate". You know, humans are not perfect at balancing the environment or social things so that everything works. I don't think awareness is going to solve it for you. There's the application that is actually the difficult part, we can all know what's going on. And, in fact, people have been pretty good about getting the word out about a number of issues in society in the last couple years, and we're still kind of struggling with implementation. (Pros)

I think the more that we have these opportunities to speak our mind to speak our reality and to come together and say, This isn't right and we no longer have to accept this as the status quo, that the more we have those opportunities, then we can bring that together and actually move forward for change. (LX)

I have been to a lot of cultural awareness trainings and I don't think that changes the system, or the structure. I think it opens the eyes to awareness and the conversations but how we change the structure, that's a whole other conversation, and how we recruit people of other experiences into those positions of power in organizations. I think the majority of us don't know how to do that. (A&C)

I think it's a start cultural awareness. Awareness is always a start to anything. But, I think it's also about changing the culture. So you can have awareness at the start, but I think that there's ongoing work so that there is belonging for everyone. (SUPS)

I think you can be aware and not act. And so you got to take that awareness and do something with it. And, that means things like strategic plans that include the right kind of focus and compel action in the system. That means school boards willing to take a public stand and make statements about equity and inclusion and diversity and stand on those in the face of attacks and questions and whatever. (SUPS)

I think that you need people of color in positions of power. And I don't think that simply having people go to awareness trainings is enough. (A&C)

...that's kind of part of the problem - people want an easy fix. They want a general solution they can just apply across the board. ..it takes building relationships, knowing your neighbor, like getting together and cooking a meal but that's harder for folks. They just want to read their Ibram Kendi book and be done with it. (SJA0)

What comes to my mind is how you know George Floyd is murdered and everybody joins a book club to like learn more about racial awareness and that has a lot of feel good benefits, you know, and a lot of real benefits to be more of a sensitive, culturally-aware person, but it doesn't solve any of the problems that exist. It makes people who had the benefit of not being damaged directly by that violence or racism to understand it and maybe have more sensitivity that maybe is the first small stepping stone toward taking action, but I certainly don't think cultural awareness is going to solve anything, except insofar as it gives people a stepping stone towards action. Otherwise, it's just like, more of a feel good experience for the person who gets to talk and not experience the very physical and real and financial and everything else damage that that the violence and racism cause. (PDef)

Sometimes you need to bring the bigger guns to get things done, and then do the education part. Then people are like, "oh, I have to do this" or "I have to follow this [law]". And at the end of the day, you could talk to and educate people but we have done so much education already. We have done so many things, community service, different things. Sometimes you just need to have a bigger law or something to get people to recognize we cannot have our Turbans be touched... (SE)

I would add maybe there's a difference between cultural awareness and cultural valuation. And so just because you're aware of cultural differences doesn't mean that you value them as much. I would differentiate between cultural awareness which is acknowledging the difference of different cultures versus valuing the difference of cultures and so cultural valuation could potentially solve for some of the structural violence because you would seek out and value the equity component. (PW/U)

I don't think it does a bad thing unless it leads to complacency where people think okay, well now I've done my part I've learned about these issues ... that attitude could actually be damaging, but I think to the extent it makes you more culturally competent, more sensitive, you know, in our job - more capable of

relating with people in a way that feels right for them, It's a positive, but it doesn't solve past problems. (PDef)

I would like to believe that it's an ingredient towards ending those things, but you can educate folks, but what do they do with that education? (WYP)

My first answer was like, “hell yeah”, like of course, but hearing that yes, it's not the cultural awareness part. Obviously it helps. [Thinking of it as an] ingredient is such a good analogy for it because, there's more to the process. You can't just jump straight from cultural awareness to stopping the violence. It's what people do with that knowledge. (WYP)

I think it's a very important piece of the puzzle, but it's not the only one. And it's a process, not a destination. We don't want to be culturally aware to be our ultimate goal. It's part of a bigger conversation. (ML3)

I'm confused what cultural awareness means in this term, but if it means a willingness to learn about other cultures I think it could do something with structural violence and racism, because you could have knowledge that other cultures exist around you. But if it's just like a surface level knowledge, I don't think it'll solve any problems, but if you're willing to go the extra mile and get uncomfortable or talk to people from different cultures, I think it can help in a way that you focus more on your similarities versus your differences. (ML3)

Prejudice and Racism

I don't think cultural awareness solves structural violence or racism. I think violence and racism comes from a worldview that diminishes the value of people as disposable so we can trample over them. If we view them as worthy individuals to receive our respect and they have an innate value, regardless of where they come from, that there's dignity attached to them, and care along the way that the violence and racism is just an exposure of our view of personhood - whether or not that person is valuable and so I think those things transcend awareness, because it's not a matter of education that fixes these things. (NVFL)

Bellingham is this like very liberal and progressive place where everybody is like, “I am not a racist”, and like everybody's a good person. Everybody's great. And everybody thinks that they are progressive. But it does not solve the fact that there is racism and violence in this community. I've experienced microaggressions and I've experienced outright racism and in a way that the system does not support. A couple of months ago I was getting ice cream at Dairy Queen and this white guy walked up to me and punched me in the face 11 times. I didn't even know this guy. I didn't talk to him. I didn't say anything to him. And when the police came they were just like, “oh yeah, you're fine”. Like, “you don't need to go to the hospital”, even though I ended up having a concussion that I couldn't get over for months. I had a significant brain injury. Well, because my skin doesn't bruise the same way that white people do, they don't have an understanding of what that looks like for me medically. ... all these doctors go through all this training and they don't know what symptoms look like for a white person and what it looks like for a black person. I talked to the prosecutors and they're like, “We're sorry, we can't charge this as a hate crime because the person didn't say like, Oh, I hate all black people and I want to destroy them”. You know, like, I'm sorry, is that what it takes for you to charge this person it's really easy to think that you're not racist and to think that you're not a part of this like structural violence when everybody around you has the same experience that you do and looks the same as you do. (ML1)

...sometimes our own family discriminates against us. I have sisters that are light skinned and my aunts will say, "hey, look at your sister so pretty white" and I'm ugly and brown or what? And what's that? I'm not pretty because I'm brown. I am beautiful because God made me, because he gave me life. That is what matters and I think it is time for people to stop saying oh, "well we have this country" and we have to accept that they treat us badly, no, this is America, they came from Europe, this is ours, we are a very strong culture that has history, because we were slaves, we were. (FFW)

..in Mexico we are of all colors. I am not going to discriminate against white people. (FFW)

But just as there are bad people, there are many good people who support us, who help us, who give us advice. And also if we try to live well and try to respect others, there are many people who respect us. That is very important. (FFW)

... we must accept that just as there are very bad, racist and aggressive people, there are also good people. I think our culture makes us better, not to feel more than them, but to understand it and say what is there. They are bad their problem. I go my way and I'm happy. That's it. I think being better without having to humiliate anyone. Without having to think I'm better than you. So okay, you think I'm an invader or whatever you want? It's okay. I respect that. I respect that. But I'm still happy. You keep thinking that. (FFW)

I think cultural awareness is really important and something that should definitely be emphasized, but I don't think it necessarily will solve the issue. I think that, people are aware of other people's culture, but it doesn't change their opinion or change the fact that they think of themselves as better. So I think that it's a step in the right direction, but I don't think it necessarily will solve the problem. (WYP)

I think a big piece of solving for structural violence and racism is really getting on terms of the fact that there's this big struggle of understanding historical challenges and not wanting to take any ownership for benefiting, "just because I'm white and my ancestors had slaves doesn't mean I did". (MHW)

I would say no. So speaking from my position as a trans person, in the media right now, there's a lot of trans awareness of my culture but not necessarily acceptance or even tolerance of that. So you know, you can educate people about all kinds of things, but it really doesn't affect who's in power and how they're going to wield that power. Because it seems like the more people learn about trans people, it almost makes it worse. ... I feel like I am an educator on certain topics, and you can be passionate about something and want to educate people but the awareness has to be coupled with care, with actual caring about other human beings. (WYP)

I feel like we [Sikh people] face a lot of racism when it comes to hate crimes and people not understanding what it is but I haven't really seen us face the same issues with like police or justice that I've seen other colored communities face in the US. (YAS)

I do feel that it I guess lessens the racial stuff but I don't think that it would eliminate it. I mean, a lot of people seem to be closed minded about it, that they won't even listen most of the time. I mean, a lot of us are racially profiled all the time and we tend to be targeted and all that. I think it would help, but not eliminate everything. I feel like there's always going to be some sort of racial type stuff going on, no matter whether people are aware of the cultural differences or not. (IFG)

I'm not sure about cultural awareness, I think that people have to really embrace difference. And this is not a community that seems to do that. it seems like the only safe way to interact is to mimic the person

you're interacting with. And because otherwise, they will reject you. I mean, if we were able to break those, not just be culturally aware, but culturally thrilled by diversity, you know, welcomed it, enjoyed it sought it out, you know, applauded it. wanted more of it. You know, were hungry for that. That would really, it seems to me make people more [able to] break down some barriers. Not only between people but within a person themselves. (CE)

I think it's a mixed bag, because I don't understand why the general white person has to know our background and our cultural experiences to then say, Wow, I've never known that. And then they might think of us like a human, or even an equal. (AAPI)

Just being aware of it, isn't enough. I think white people interpret cultural awareness very differently in ways that still allow for structural violence. And racism (MHW)

Anything that can resolve is very future looking. It's not considering lifetimes of violence that have already wreaked destruction on communities of color and other communities. So, without reparations without other things that are backward looking, you're just not going to be able to solve anything. (PDef)

I know when I am talking to friends who are white about racism and what have you. I often find that some get to a point where I'd say to them, one should just go wear a turban for a week, see how that feels. White people think that if they went out and wore a turban and beard they would have a really hard time getting a job, etc. (YAS)

You know, being Hispanic, being raised in Hispanic culture, inside of an American culture this is a little bit of a double edged sword. Some of the things that you get violence from or racism or stereotypical comments from are from being [un]aware of that culture. So some of the history becomes the very essence of what you get made fun of or comments that you get belittled for or whatnot. I think it goes back to the root of just the heart. Do they care to be sensitive to the fact that we are different and every family is different. I meet some Mexican or Hispanic families that I know are different than my family. And then I think as I was younger, I'd make fun of some of my cousins in the way they were raised from their parents and so I don't know if it necessarily will fix the issue. (NVFL)

... racism has been around for a long time. It might be like, back then [in the past] I felt like there was more stronger racism because of segregation and stuff because, they did all that and people were like protesting, so they have equality and stuff. And people still do that because it's like, they're still like, doing stuff. They're racist towards them about their culture and all that. (SFF)

It's like something you can't get rid of because it's been a long it's been a like, here and present for a long time. So like lots of people like even though they don't realize it are somehow still being little racists. (SFF)

...it's kind of hard to change something that people have I guess already gotten used to, because now I guess it's almost normal. ...It's very hard to change that because it's been around for so long. And, a lot of people use racism in ways that people don't recognize it. And it's just kind of hidden in a bunch of different things. And even just being aware of the cultural thing, I don't think it would solve for structural violence or racism. (SFF)

I think cultural awareness is associated with reducing stereotypes which then can escalate into prejudices and escalates into racism and xenophobia and things like that. I think we have a divide in our county around stereotypes and I think many people of color are reluctant to go east of the Nooksack River on the

Mount Baker highway. They have stereotypes about the community. And then people east of there have stereotypes about people who live in Fairhaven and South Hill and the progressive community. And that leads to the biases and potentially can escalate to racism and then we have the Sikh community who's trying to create cultural awareness to kind of bridge these communities and with an open heart, so a lot going on there, but I do think we have these stereotypes and prejudices. (ML3)

Representation

I think cultural awareness will definitely help because in wide hierarchies, if somebody is uninformed it's a good idea to have a discussion with them that you're somehow not less, that you're also a human being, you also have your culture, your representation. And just because you're not so visible in Whatcom County which is majority white. It does not make you less of a human being, and it would help a lot, bringing awareness to people. (AAPI)

Cultural Awareness is a good starting point. The truth, from my perspective, or how I see what culture is education is about identity and it reveals your identity. And that I know who I am, is evidence of my education. How I know who I am, is from my culture. I went through high school, public school education. Not one educator, had skin darker than mine. in that educational process, I was told almost every step of the way, that there were things I could do as a Lummi and there were things that I couldn't do as a Lummi. And that was how they educated me. So the culture of deciding what freedom looks like to other people. (FBO)

Organizational Structure and Systems

I immediately thought of, I guess public policy... But I'm hoping through public policy that maybe that can make a little small dent, or imprint to say this is not right. This is not right. This is wrong... I'm just hoping that public policy across the nation in fairness, would make a dent to say we got to make some changes and we've got a lot to do (PW/U)

...Cultural awareness is just the very beginning. But I think a very close proximity would be cultural appreciation. Cultural understanding, deep understanding, cultural acceptance, cultural compassion, would be very, very early steps to just getting people to think about the concept of the pie not being enough, as opposed to expanding the pie making a bigger pie and that there is enough. And I think that the work of dismantling structures is really hard work. Because there are long standing structures that are built on very exclusionary and racist policies. And in order to do that, you have to be so courageous, and you can be aware. And you can have really well meaning and great intentions. And you can absolutely have a clouded lens. And so I do think it's important to be aware, and it is absolutely just the beginning. (FBO)

I'll take a slightly more optimistic stance, I think that definitely awareness is going to affect who people hire, and it's going to affect who people associate with. And it's going to affect who people vote for. So you've got to start somewhere... even if it's just kind of starting the next steps. (HES)

I don't think that cultural awareness is the ultimate solution, but it is important. I don't think cultural awareness on its own will actually change the structures that need to be changed. But it can help people to recognize ways that they have made things worse through microaggressions and it can help lessen the pain but it's definitely not the final solution. (ML3)

Cultural awareness can have some significant impacts on individuals. And can help make that shift - because there are a number of people who have never been exposed to BIPOC communities or the disabled community or the the LGBTQ community, they've never been exposed to it. So when they have the opportunity to get that exposure, then a shift can occur for many of them. However, cultural awareness does not mean that something permanent has taken place. So there has to be things in place to follow up in and push people and push the structures deeper into a better understanding and a more cohesive place, a more equitable place. (ML2)

Cultural awareness can help to solve some structural violence. However, I feel like it cannot help racism because racism is a system that oppresses people of marginalized communities that typically aren't representative in spaces. (ML2)

I think having the right people in those systems and spaces to fix the problem and be able to literally it has to be ground up or grassroots up and trickle down at the same time. And yes, education is going to be the strongest and most powerful tool that we can use to help advance our world. It's just who is doing the education. How are they doing that education? Why are they doing that education? (ML2)

I think that no, because I feel like social racism has been in our history. And that's basically how our country started. So I feel like it's way too dug in our history to fix it, or even if we try to fix it, it's gonna take lots of years and people to be open minded to help. (SFF)

I've been thinking about this for a long time, addressing root causes of trauma for indigenous peoples... Yes, cultural awareness is easily dismissed. So how do you get it to the point where we're not dismissing it as a people and it has to be embedded into the systems that have been created for us through colonization so the two systems that have affected indigenous people in nature the most are the educational system, and the legislative system.., kill the Indian save the man brought through the Doctrine of Discovery propels both. And those policies still impact our people today so when we ask for cultural awareness, we literally ask for ways for tangible outcomes that will help create Seventh Generation Change. ... Well our children don't get credit when they're in a field, and our culture bearers don't get paid to teach our children. The whole system is very unbalanced ... giving our children K through PhD credits to be out in the field, to learn about who they are and where they come from, to learn to be present. And in that house of healing, house of learning, and longhouse to be present and to practice and to restore the indigenous foods and plants, and even animals due to the degradation. Without our indigenous environment, our language goes away so that restoration work is absolutely important. And so in order to have thriving cultures and the environment, you need to embed a balance, a Western system that gives our children credit, but still allows equity for our culture bearers and for our indigenous people. We need that culturally safe place, but we need to be the decision makers like our elders. With the Truth and Reconciliation it's great and all, but we're still not the decision makers so we need help from philanthropy, but we can't have philanthropy coming in and saying, "We're in charge". (IFG)

I think laws and rules have to be there not just cultural awareness.

The unfortunate thing is sometimes trainings become almost like a deflection so that actual change doesn't happen. You'll have a DI training or something and then there will still be a really consistent structural problem in an organization and then the answer is, 'but we have that DEI training' (A&C)

It has some value and can be useful and can be helpful and may be an ingredient in the change making. But it's definitely not sufficient. I'm not even convinced it's necessary. So it's nice to have, and I think

at the same time it also carries with it some risk that the degree to which these issues are structural is not diminished in some people's minds. (LGBTQ+)

Yeah, but it's necessary but not sufficient. You can have the cultural awareness that we have to have it. But if you don't also have the institutional space in which to correct the system. Well, it is quite easy for the institutional hierarchy to completely block change. (LFG)

I don't know, structural is the way to go about it because to me, it's there's nothing structured about racism. If you're talking structural about the judicial system, then it's whole nother animal that you have to really dig into. So, the Second Amendment, our gun rights - that is one of the most fundamental racist laws that we have, because it was literally put in place. ..All of that was literally put in place in order for white people to keep their guns and that the slaves would not be able to obtain guns. So fundamentally, that is a racial thought...So do we have laws that punish ethnicities a little bit more than others? I mean, you can go at it and say yes, but I think at the core of it, it comes down to who you pick for your judges because they're the ones who actually hand down the sentencing. So if you're finding that person of color is getting more time than Caucasian person, well, in the law, it says if you do this crime, these are your sentences. (CS)

Safe Places and Accountability

This cultural awareness training feels kind of weird to me. It'd be great for there to be spaces for us to share cultures and music and food and song and dance and stories. But it feels like you're trying to take something that's like, really beautiful and unique and like squishing it into like, a box that's easy to digest for white people. ..there's something about like training and cultural awareness that just makes me uncomfortable. And that's not what's really going to solve the problem with structural violence. I'm gonna think about that further, but initially, it feels kind of uncomfortable. (SJA0)

Equal Access and Inclusion

I love that [some people] have the resources and the capacity to share their story and to be vulnerable, and I think I try to practice that in my own life. But I think that is one example of the interpersonal ramifications of racism. It can be interpersonal, but I think we got to think about how we're defining racism, because if we're thinking about it just in terms of one on one, like aggressions, that is hard enough and worth for us to have a conversation about cultural competency and whatnot, but there's so much more than that. Racism is interconnected to capitalism in the ways that [some people have] to flee their country, and then if you ask why, it's because the US imperialistic policy has impacted the sovereignty of their country and there's less opportunities there. Some of us are aware of that. Some of us think that it's their God given right to be wealthy in this country and they're only arresting the people who are not good enough for this country so that's one of the narratives that we also have to combat, but beyond the narratives and interpersonal racism is a that impacts us differently in different layers. Native folks are disproportionately incarcerated... there's folks who are incarcerated like you're not going to get folks who are incarcerated. Here's the conversation. You're not going to get folks who are houseless here in this conversation. So like in a way some of the most marginalized or like next community members are not going to have access to this space. So I think are kind of curious on also like, why this group was set up for identity. And, and also like how are you doing the outreach into some of the folks that are the most marginalized because I can talk like forever about my own experiences and I know they're just the tip of the iceberg compared to what like many other folks are going through. (LX)

When I came from Texas, I didn't know how to speak English at all, period. Nothing. There was nobody, no Hispanics, whatsoever. Nothing whatsoever. But you know, I thank the Lord there were teachers that were willing to work with me, teach me the words and everything. And so through all my high school, I got quiet, very, very silent, you know. But as I learned, you know, you learn by how you are being treated. And you also learned by keeping to yourself, but yet, trying to understand how the other person reacts to what you're doing, what you're saying, and how your body language and everything else knows the process that I use throughout my high school. (FBO)

I'm maybe talking on an individual basis, as far as my personal learning, as far as the whole idea of white privilege is something that I've been experiencing and learning about mainly because my wife is African American. And certainly, individually learning systemically what's going on in our culture, I think white privilege is something that I was totally unaware of, but I grew up in a completely white neighborhood. There weren't people of color. I really didn't encounter people of color till I got into college. But with my wife, I'm learning that from direct experience that there's quite a difference between the two of us and how we approach life. I mean, she's always on guard. She's always watching for negativity which we experience and that's always a surprise to me. I mean, even just subtle things. Yesterday, for example, we went to a local bookstore, and she came out without having bought a book. I was waiting in the car, and she was upset, she walked around trying to get somebody to wait on her and help her. All the staff there were going directly to all the white customers, like ain't gonna help you. And as subtle as that is, I mean, that's pretty hurtful. I think until people learn that those kind of behaviors are hurtful. I'm not sure if I'm drifting off subject as far as learning but that's something I'm becoming more and more aware of, as a white person and especially an old white man, trying to learn stuff, too. (NES)

Question 3: What, if any, are the impacts and costs that environmental quality has on your day to day life?

Organizational Structures and Systems

... we do have some areas where we could do better environmentally, I think that's what stresses me out a little bit my concern that from an environmental quality standpoint, we haven't taken a long viewpoint for our cleanup. .. (Pw/U)

The reality is Mother Earth is dying. She's sick, and we're ignoring it. (SJAO)

My way of transportation would be different in the way I have access to the things. (SJAO)

I think that urban planning and zoning and all that kind of stuff is a part of the environment. I think housing is a part, air quality and water quality are definitely a huge part... I think that when we think about the militarization of our geographies and the city is a part of the environment I think that there's a lot that comes up beyond the traditional like, Let's build more trails and have access to community gardens... there's so much more that we can think about in terms of environment. I think buses and transportation are a huge one...the city's not designed for [people without a car]...this town is not really designed for people to do public transportation. I live in Happy Valley, and to get anywhere beyond downtown, I have to take two to four buses and it takes a while and love the bus but it's not as fast or how can we think more about that kind of infrastructure let alone if I lived in Lynden or Ferndale.. I know that would be a much bigger struggle. (LX)

I think the planning commission, you know, where the zoning stuff happens, the planning department, people who are responsible for the coast management [the decision making is] so outdated, you know, so what can we do about it? Well, it's not in our hands, you know, they're the people who can do it and are in the legislature and they're the one who can actually do something about it. .. You're thinking about green energy, you're thinking about new energy. What about the things that we still have that we can preserve? ...And those locals who have been here for 50 years we have seen things firsthand. So science is important. But so is experience, you know, and experience is priceless in how the river works. They've seen over the years how many floods there have been, and some might not be on the record. Can we combine experience with science, to be able to come to solutions that actually work when it comes to environmental impact. (SE)

Inequity

I just think of the socio economics of that. [Some people are] in a privileged position to be able to re-forest and install solar panels, and I think our community can't afford that. They're just trying to make it paycheck to paycheck, and put food on the table. They would love that privilege of thinking about environmental issues, but environmental issues to that group of people might be how I get some dollars, some grants or public assistance, or EBT, or stand in line at the food bank. You know, that's the environment they're thinking of. We know, historically, it seems as though those areas that are of color or lower socio economic areas seem to be an area where there's a dumping ground of environmental hazards. I just think of the low socio-economic folks in our community who just can't afford that. ... I immediately think of those who are just trying to put food on the table, I guess, and going paycheck to paycheck, that's where my heart goes and wondering how we can help those individuals... (PW/U)

... we were just talking with my husband about this, how we make good enough money to be okay, but how does a person that makes a minimum? How do they afford the healthy food? How do they do that? ...It's affected us. But we're hanging in there... how do people that don't have the advantages that we do that are in the positions that we are? How do they handle it? (FBO)

...there's an equity issue in our schools. But when the floods happen, I should have known but it was like, my eye opening to me that there's an extra equity issue in our whole community. So one of the people that died was a good friend of ours' dad. And they were calling for help. And they were asking for help to search for their dad even after a lot of the floodwaters had passed. And they didn't get any help. And if you would drive by the people that were helping were people that looked like them so people didn't speak English, people that were Mexican, Hispanic. There was not very many white people there. ..If this family had a very popular last name in our in our community, the whole town would have stopped what they were doing and been searching for these people and that never happened. We have a pretty large Hispanic population here. My wife and I were driving to the houses that were by the flood knocking on people's doors and they had no idea they were supposed to leave. They're like, Oh, we didn't know. there was Facebook posts out, but they don't speak English. There was information that was being passed along but wasn't getting passed on to them. So there was a group of us knocking on these pockets of low income housing and they had no idea they were supposed to leave. And we saw that there's a whole equity issue in the whole community. ... But to everybody else. It's not a huge issue. (SUMAS)

I think the only thing that I would add is the bail issue and people being trapped in cages because they can't afford to post bail and they are in a confined space without the ability to social distance to protect themselves from COVID. They have no autonomy over who they're housed with just dehumanizing. I

think a lot of that has occurred, even more than just the normal dehumanization within the criminal justice system. (PDef)

I actually acknowledge the privilege I have as a professional person able to teach from home, I can do my research from home. So while it was an inconvenience, I was able to pay my bills and I had to get up early to go for a run but then I can still do it on my own schedule versus a population that I work with. If you're having your service or your work in the fields. They didn't have a choice for their livelihood. .. I had a choice I had a privileged situation because of my education level. Some people didn't have that. So it's like owning our privilege. And that moment was very painful because I knew it was the draw of luck where I was born, my family, my own path. Had nothing to do with me. What happens to these people in the fields or doing outdoor work when they don't have a choice. (ML3)

[I'm thinking about] how the rez is and how the government doesn't take care of our people, you know, as they would the whites, like our neighborhoods look really bad and ... they could take care of us better than they do... (IFG)

You know, we were affected by smoke we're affected by heat wave I'm not sure if it was necessarily proportionate, but I really valued the trees that we have around our house, and I was reading about studies here in Seattle with just how much hotter neighborhoods with fewer trees are and how that correlates with poor neighborhoods that have more people of color and more low income and I mean I'm sure the same is true in Bellingham, you know, if you just look at a Google map and the satellites and see where there's more affordable housing and where there's more trees around people's houses and yards and who has yards that can have trees in them... or you know just being able to be outside in a walkable neighborhood that has shade, versus just cement in a parking lot or sidewalks without that. So I just think those things are important and designing cities where that is distributed in a way that's equitable. (Parents)

..who has more resources to find a work around, plug in an air conditioner pay that extra electric bill and who does not. (Parents)

I see white patients in clinic and black patients in the hospital. Because of the preventative care. The insurance that's required to cover specialty like mine, because of how people show up and present, we know a lot of our black patients wait until their heart attack is completed or until they've been dealing with something for so long, and cost always comes up in conversation. How much is it going to cost, how long do I need to be on this medicine. How much is this procedure going to cost. And we hear it every now and again from white patients but not nearly to the extent of our black and brown patients, and the unit just looks different. It's just a different demographic inpatient versus outpatient.. (B&AA)

Oh, I live in the cheapest part of Bellingham where everything is cheaper, and there's more black and brown people. And we have a rat problem. Like they're walking up to your doors and garbage cans and dad my surround and everything and it's been addressed to the management but they won't do anything about it. (B&AA)

These things are always magnified even more for less represented people in society. And along with that environmental impacts, is the cost of it being always basically a poor tax to have something that's like say, you know, nutritionally valuable or environmentally valuable. There's a barrier and costs with that as well. And that gets to children, and once again it gets magnified in their lives. (Parents)

You're not prepared for moving or replacing all your things. And even with things like renter's insurance, they don't cover a lot. It's expensive to pay for. It's like you're just kind of trapped all the time... I just feel like for people of color, the day to day impacts are typically less predictable and hit you harder and it is damn near impossible to prepare for. (MHW)

I go to the words of our respected elders. The Creator gave us the sacred responsibility to the land, to the water, to the reef net, to the salmon, and the language that belongs to it over last 165 years were dislocated, disassociated from our land, territory and way of life, our inherent right to clean food and water is being violated. Today, through the whole thing, our reef net technology is the most respectful sustainable way to produce the most high quality salmon... So, colonization has definitely affected our environment. And I think about being a Western nurse for the last 19 years. And I think, how focused it is around the pharmaceutical industry, and I think about how are we going to be able to protect children who are going to end up having babies that are going to be born with cancers. ... So we're really in a dire straight to now think about our environment and Whatcom County. And the whole racial justice issue, I think about going to Satpal and to our mayor, and how they say they support Truth and Reconciliation and how they say they support anti-racism. However, when we take the issue of Whatcom Creek and the degradation because of the second story buildings that are coming into our county now. Wealthy people can come in and they can break the rules, and then they can degrade our water sources that are spawning grounds for our endangered species, our salmon which ultimately affects our treaty rights. However, our leadership in Whatcom County says that they don't have to have government to government now that we have state government to government and we have federal government to government. And we also have an endangered species site that says that they should be having consultation with the tribes to ensure that our salmon people are protected, yet they say that they don't have to do that. So did they have consultation, is it an endangered species yes it is and. And did they do their SEPA application No they didn't. That's Whatcom County for you, but when you talk about truth and reconciliation which any individual should be able to use to have truth and healing ..., and they say they have to go through the tribe to get a permit to learn or to support truth and reconciliation. To me that's bullshit. And they don't need to do that any individual can educate themselves on the Holocaust, any individual can educate themselves on the state of Maine. So, those little loopholes, they need to be stopped. (IFG)

...we know that brown people and black people and indigenous people are more likely to be impacted by pollution and environmental effects in general so our health is already impacted by that. [BIPOC] people are just as likely to suffer with PTSD as folks who serve in the military, and then you add all of these stressors like being exposed to mining and potentially having cancer and then COVID. It reminds me of the lack of access to health care ...on top of that there's discrimination of like being cut out of that option, or being cut out of my green card. (LX)

I think it depends on how much money you got. If you're rich and doing well, there's very little impact unless a tornado or a heat dome, but then even with the heat dome, if you've got lots of money and you're living in a nice house, you can turn on the air conditioner, and you're fine. Get a generator. You can afford solar panels or whatever. I think the daily impact on your quality of life from environmental issues depends on your class. (SJA0)

The average lifespan of a farmworkers in the United States is 49. And that's because of environmental justice issues in the food and the food system. Toxins, chemicals, exhaustion, heat, smoke, you know, you name it, and so, when you're talking about inclusion and belonging especially in governance, the fact

that you're only recognizing the production and the profit from farmers and not understanding the impact on farmworkers. It's heavily skewed in the politics right now and Whatcom County is controlled by the agricultural industry because it is an agricultural economy. So farm workers, one of the most impacted first, you know in the community and yet we are not listened to in the Food Systems Committee or in the Agricultural Committee. Having farmworkers on those committees is extremely difficult, because we're exhausted and because it's difficult to participate. Again, it kind of goes out to all of these other questions about belonging, access, cultural awareness. Structural Violence, if there is structural violence against our community right now. It is in this area. It is intentional. It is well funded, and it is politically aligned with the leadership of Whatcom County right now. And I'm talking about the executive and the mayor and the mayors of other little towns, they are controlling the ability for farmworkers to have safety and economic justice. ..even right now with the floods I've gone through two years with COVID. And now the heat dome and other floods, where our communities continuously get marginalized for any kind of support, what we're having to go through right now for our community to be able to get support from the floods. It's pretty bad. it's not fair. It's not right. And it's racial inequity, because all the farmworkers are brown people in Whatcom County. (SJA0)

I've been fortunate to not be majorly impacted by the floods living in the downtown area and I do think I have a lot of privilege in what place I can live right now. Beside the fires, which I don't know anyone who hadn't been affected by that. (MHW)

Having resources available, you know, the Ultra Rich will never suffer... There's plenty of [other] people that suffer right now, with the unexpected snowfalls and just getting to shelters and things so I am kind of blinded to it, because I don't see it. So it's kind of out of sight out of mind for me. (Pros)

I think a lot of the effect is dependent on the resources that you have, which in turn dictates your ability to adapt and overcome whatever you're facing. (Pros)

I think it's important to add that I've never had to experience really anything like that. I'm white, and my family has always been middle to middle upper class. I never had to worry about any of those things growing up so I think it's important to get these messages out to people like someone who grew up in a socio economic class as I did about how it's not like that for everyone. I didn't have to worry about being cool when summer came or heat waves came or, you know, the smoke. I always had a house or somewhere to go into and I never had to think about those things so I think it is important that these issues are being brought up, so that people will think about that it's not the same for everyone and, I never really had any that had to think about that either. So I didn't even have a peer person to look at that, that might have struggled with issues like that so I think it's important though that everyone does think about this and that life isn't the same for everyone depending on what they have. (Parents)

...we have rich people are who losing their vacation homes. We have poor people who won't be able to rebuild their homes. (Pros)

in terms of the way it has impacted me personally, it's mostly been through inconvenience, (Pros)

But I also find myself in a position of marked privilege in a lot of ways. I've benefited enough to be in a place and I can afford to make the adjustments, you know, to deal with heat issues, or pipes freezing or getting somewhere else when it's too hot, and managing to be in a place where I didn't have to have a home that got completely flooded out and was able to get to work. (Pros)

I have found the last two years incredibly difficult, but yet I recognize that I've been able to have the privilege of working remotely, you know, I have the privilege of still having a job, all of that stuff. (Pros)

I don't appreciate the benefits that I've got. (CE)

I feel affected by the big picture of climate, and it is causing resource scarcity. And that means that people with more money, who tend to be white, are going to get more resources. So I'm part of the problem, and I'd like to be part of the solution, you know. My house was reasonably priced, but it's just crazy. What happens with housing, people need a house and they need food. And I think it gets down to kind of zero sum of what some people might be willing to give up to, for equity, ... what are we willing to share? To make it more fair? (CE)

Bellingham has nice clean air. I mean, it's got all kinds of things here, I guess I appreciate it, but unless I consciously think about it, I'm not overly thankful for it. I just take it for granted. You know, and I realized that's a constant fight to have that, but I guess, other than being pampered because I have it, and not thankful for it because I don't think about it that much, I guess I would say it doesn't affect me in a negative way. (CE)

I've just acknowledged that I fare pretty well. And a lot of that I think is some real class privilege that I have. Some of that is kind of random. I happen to live on high ground. So when the flooding happened, I was not really impacted. I had to use a different freeway exit to get home, you know, and that's more luck than any thing I mean, I could easily live somewhere more expensive that was more impacted. So I don't think about it a lot. I benefit from the relatively clean air and stable climate that we have here. (LGBTQ+)

I haven't been impacted by a lot of environmental factors and I was able to purchase my house at a time before the prices skyrocketed. But it's kind of funny how I talk about my home too because I live two houses away from the I5 corridor, technically in Roosevelt but I tell everyone that I live in sunny land and then the Sunnyland group because Sunnyland is a white - like it's not as high up as Happy Valley or Columbia - but it still has this image of this white suburb, whereas Roosevelt is a lot more low income apartments etc. And I realized the privilege that comes with that white adjacent ness. (MHW)

I do have to acknowledge the privilege that I have. And also really just say out loud, it's one of the reasons I live here. Because the lifestyle that I create here, I couldn't recreate if I had stayed in Boston. Or Philly or Oakland or what have you. So I'm not impacted. The way a of my younger friends and my friends with less sort of economic safety. ..But on a day to day basis, what I see are the people that I serve and the struggles that they have. For many, we're talking about access to food, and inadequate housing. Many of my clients live in conditions that are appalling to see it. And yet there isn't a whole lot of support for change around that. So impacts of the flood and the weather, anything you can think of impact them in ways that most of us wouldn't even be able to imagine and struggling with that professionally, how to help and also being really aware of my privilege that I'm not impacted by those things. (MHW)

I feel very fortunate that I live in an area that's very clean and safe and we have nice properties around us and so I'm not dealing with the industrial issues that might exist further north in the county area, or make me worried about the air my kids are breathing so I don't have any day to day impact on my life or my family's life. (PDef)

...there's probably a lot of environmental dangers in my day to day that I just don't even realize because I don't think of them. (PDef)

There's pretty distinct lines across Bellingham, about where low income housing was located, what kind of housing was located, your food desert locations. Which is kind of still a little bit existing. And some of those impact the quality of life. (School)

I did not have many people who were taking advantage of the fact that they were selling very expensive air conditioners. I have a little boy, and I can stand the heat, but I had to get something for him to be comfortable. So, you can't find an air conditioner anywhere. All are very expensive. And a man sold me one for \$400, but not to be rude or anything, but it was junk, because when we plugged it in, it was useless. But out of desperation, I had to do what I could do, and it was the hardest thing those days because it fell apart, it was no longer useful. (FFW)

Awareness

...the change of weather and stuff is going to really impact farming... the environmental thing is really impacting farmers and the water issues. And it's all drastically impacted by the environmental changes that we're starting to see and we'll continue to see I mean, plants don't like it when the forest fires are polluting the air. (SE)

I'm going to speak from where I live which is Lynden and I'm going to speak as a farmer because we own a blueberry farm. There's a lot of the decisions that were made in the past without thinking of the long term effects. But when you make a decision, you got to think about its effect, not only on yourself, outside your circle, which means outside your home, your community, your environment, So it's a ripple effect. It's a cause and effect thing. (SE)

Equal Access and Inclusion

The other cost, which I faced directly was even though my ability to earn was seriously impacted by the heat by the smoke. I liked being able to walk, or have a shorter commute to work. But during the pandemic because I was displaced from my residence, I now have to use fossil fuels in my car and I have to drive 20 minutes each way. So that added fuel cost. (AAPI)

I'm just thinking of the cost of everything. Like for instance, I'd love to put solar on my roof. (FBO)

I'm dealing with a lot of kids who lost their housing, so they're dislocated relocated, and building it taking forever to get things fixed. And nobody knows. I mean, we had 200 kids, we couldn't find where they were for a couple of weeks. (ML2)

I'm thinking about a lot of different environments, when you talked about the environment, I think about the unhoused. And how, when I walk past people that are homeless, the image doesn't immediately go out of my head, because I think about them deeply. I think about how difficult it is, you know, to attract black people, and people of color to this area. And one of the factors, it's not just one reason, but affordable housing is a part of that. That's an environmental threat to being able to increase, you know, our state's 1.9% right in our, our counties, probably 2.2%. Um, that's a factor the, the cost of something as simple as groceries, when students come in my office and say that it's a privilege for me to be able to buy a bag of apples, that's an environmental threat. Because they cannot eat healthy without thinking three or four times about whether they can afford this bag of apples. (FBO)

..access to quality of water since we're out here are the berry fields and they do a lot of fertilizing. And so it impacts our water quality. And with the with the flooding. We had issues of trying to get from places to place to place (ML2)

Well, the air quality when we have the heat waves or with the smoke, the heat, both of those things just about sent my daughter into the hospital. We just have to manage every little moment to keep her out of the hospital. She can't handle that. I basically evacuated, I had to find a place to quarter. We don't have air conditioning and she was so sick from it. She couldn't take care of herself. So yes, those are kind of medical disasters when things like that happen. (ML2)

It has a big impact, I think, psychologically, for sure. I think it's totally connected to mental health. And I think that yeah, we talked about access to green spaces and parks. That stuff I think really matters. I think that we talked about belonging, I think access to those kind of places like being able to go to a park to play basketball that gives you a sense of belonging and community. I think being able to connect with nature for sure. I think that probably has a lot of psychological benefits. (HES)

I can speak just as a mom of young kids, I have a two and four year old and environment has been affected. Like for the first couple years of my children's life, the summer times have been so smoky, they're unlike the ones that the sensitive group for like really young people and like really old people, people with respiratory problems. So we couldn't just go outside and you know, invest in good air purifiers and stuff. (ML3)

I just basically anticipate that there's going to be wildfires and that there's gonna be some smoky times and it took us a few years to actually save up enough money to get an AC unit for our apartment and we just got an air purifier last year and it's been a big game changer. Definitely helps us feel better with the breathing quality. And my husband has had some respiratory issues in the past too. (ML3)

I also did live in Birchwood for a while, which is a food desert. And they have the Birchwood food fighters that they would actually set up right at the bus stop near our apartment and they would have free produce for people who needed it. I think that's a great group of people but at the same time, there should be something that we're able to do on a legal level to get the grocery store non compete ordinance overturned because that's affecting a very diverse community. (ML3)

When I'm not going outside all the time, my mental health is like, entirely drained. I think there's not actually that many good spots that are very accessible. I don't have a vehicle. I've always wanted to go on hikes and stuff ...its kind of hard to get to Greenspaces not having a vehicle there. I would love to go to Mount Baker, but I have no idea how to get to Mount Baker from here with no car. (HES)

For me growing up in a low income area or community it kind of took a toll on mental health growing up because we didn't really have access to green spaces and it was a 30 minute walk or an hour walk to go to a green space. (HES)

I did get COVID of last December and my doctor diagnosed me with long hollers, which has been a very interesting journey because I'm mostly okay, but I never fully recovered and so my pre symptoms are worse and one of them is asthma. And so during any of the fire days or heat days I can't trust and rely on my own body, like I used to. And my co pays for one of the inhalers that I used to have don't work anymore. So I have like a breathing machine and the medication and all that, the copay for one of them is \$120, and it lasts me a month, maybe. So that in itself has been really hard. (AAPI)

I was living alone in a studio in the Happy Valley area which collects a lot of moisture. And I had such a bad mold problem and I feel like a lot of people in that area do. (MHW)

...a lot of people in Bellingham in general, and landlords make really cheap housing. So there's more of a housing issue. It's really cheap housing that can't withstand changes in the environment. And then people live in these awful conditions that when you move out you realize everything is covered in mold. And that was actually a really bad health issue that I had to deal with. And I think that living conditions for a lot of people in Bellingham and the reservation and other areas can be a really bad health issue. (MHW)

substandard housing for poor people is a huge environmental impact. And the big issue with farmworkers that live out in substandard housing in the county is mold. So mold is just huge in substandard housing. even here, you know, in my house, it's like it's a constant struggle. To ensure that you don't have any mold growing anywhere. (SJAO)

I think about my personal health, about where I live, whether it be like lead paints or anything like that growing up or any kind of living conditions around housing there. I think there's a lot of fear with the rapid change of like, am I living in a place I'm going to be able to stay, am I going to get priced out? Because folks are leaving areas that are having more fires and other environmental things? we're already starting to see shifts in where people are deciding to live because environmentalism is probably causing rents to increase here and making it attractive and then getting pushed out. .. if the environmental quality was higher, you know, we had maybe potentially have some denser housing the way communities would be designed to be differently. (SJAO)

...am I talking about the environment in terms of weather and climate change? Or am I talking about the environment in which I was raised and currently live in? Those really have evolved and changed over time and also they're kind of intertwined and connected. I think of, at certain times living on a farm, and if we had too much rain or it was not a good crop year, how does that impact you, and then you think about the environmental changes, those things can sometimes lead you to have substance abuse or domestic violence when you're living in a place that's really full of stress, because these needs aren't being met because of environmental weather type changes, and then how that impacts the environment socially, emotionally that you're living in. (MHW)

I think about access to health care and medical care. Oftentimes, you know, as a person of color, woman, someone with disabilities, I recognize I'm getting paid less so I'm living paycheck to paycheck more often than I would like to be. And then if anything happens, my car breaks down and I need my car to do my job because I travel across five different counties. I can't work or I have to go through my savings if I happen to have one and cash it all out to fix the car that's 30 years old that really shouldn't be running anymore, and has over 500,000 miles on it, but I have to keep it intact because that's my only option right now. So yeah, I think they're all very intertwined. And I don't know that you can look at one without the other ...(MHW)

my life is completely different than it was before COVID, and living in Whatcom County I feel like I've aged so much. I feel it on my body and my heart and my soul, spiritually, mentally (AAPI)

...with the heat and the fire, I live up on a mountain and we have one way out if you're gonna drive so that's always a concern. ... And you know, Wi Fi can be tricky, and so not everybody has that. So that's been a huge equity issue just because, we still have a large area without cell service. So, if you're stuck

somewhere and there's an emergency, you can't call anybody so if I come upon an accident, driving home just to my house, I can't call 911 on my cell phone because there's just no access. (SUPS)

Just if you are a person that has access you can go with the flow during crisis or during environmental tragedy but if you don't have access, economically or your job or whatever, It's stuff. (Parents)

when COVID came our community was affected... Kids have nothing to do, .. there's no internet over there because it's too expensive for them. So that was hard for our community. (LX)

Honestly {internet} should be a public utility. (LX)

I quite frankly, sort of resent Bellingham because it doesn't appear to care about anything other than itself...People of color, and people in rural areas are feeling there's no health care north of Bellingham. When I had a major incident, I had to bandage myself up and drive to Bellingham to get to the hospital, ... if you want anything or help from Bellingham, good luck. Ferndale is probably better than Blaine but, you know, I want grocery shopping, I want doctors, I want nurses, I want anything. I have to go to Bellingham to get it. So I travel to Bellingham almost every day. That's a 25 mile trip each way. So that's why my car's got 150,000 miles on it. Four years old. (CE)

I think about the work over the pandemic and the ways we've tried really hard to work on language access, making sure that families whose home languages is not English that there is translation or interpretation services - that they're giving the same level of support in terms of kids accessing instruction, computers in every kid's homes and hotspots, Wi Fi connections, you know, like going literally house by house family by family apartment by apartment to make sure, figuring out how to fund that, and make it happen with our people and we've gone through a period of time where all of the challenges that were already present in our community for families around access to food, housing, language, knowing the barriers that families run into was just exacerbated 10 fold [by COVID] (SUPS)

Burden on BIPOC

... there are so many environmental threats that are constantly on our minds. And I think about racial equity and inequity and impact on businesses that are brown and black, and how we're always, particularly if you're brown and black, you're always scanning your environment. I mean, we are doing environmental scans constantly. And the kinds of scans you have to do to just get up and get to work is heavy. That takes a toll on you. Whether you are working in an environment and doing well, doesn't matter, or whether you're working someplace, and you're really just kind of barely getting by the environmental scan that you have to do as a person of color is really, really heavy. Just to get through. And just to get by, you have to be conscious of your environment at all times. And it's quite an emotional toll. (FBO)

I think it's [emotional environment] impacting my mood and feeling like I have to gear up for whatever the day might hold, and I think the entitlement is what always gets me personally. I feel like death by 1000 paper cuts but yeah, just bleeding. (MHW)

...we had a threat on campus of violence, and how that creates anxiety in the atmosphere for black and brown people... that environment raises anxiety, quite high. (FBO)

Call to Action and Consequences

I agree with the stress the day to day worry and trauma of that. I think it's a kind of an underlying worry that we all are feeling and it's all of these things.. it's causing community wide stress and trauma. (A&C)

I think that with the smoke most of the time people close themselves in because they say it's bad to be outside and to be smelling. You don't go outside happily anymore, you don't go out with your children or go to the park or something like that. And the fires, the truth is, I think it is the beginning of the end. If we don't, if we don't stop, it's too late to go back to the way we were. But to keep it the way we have it, at least like this. Because if it goes on like this, everything is going to be bad. It's going to be very bad. (FFW)

I think about the world that we've handed our children ... and how we have just been irresponsible with our environment and choking our waterways, irresponsible with oil ... We don't have that luxury anymore. We are literally thinking about this planet that we are handing our babies. (FBO)

I think a lot of it is just also necessitating behavior changes, whether it's unhealthy air quality leading to more time indoors, and less access to resources outdoors, or activities outdoors. ... So also just like the emotional or mental toll of thinking about a changing climate and worry about what that can look like, for the future for me and my family and our community, but also for future generations. If action isn't taken, so in addition to some of the day to day impacts, or behavior change, just also thinking about the cost, the future costs or impacts that likely will be made, given where we're at. (Pros)

[There is a] complete and total terror that the world is gonna die in a fiery ball of death. I don't spend all day worried about it. But you know, I have a son. He hopefully at some point will have kids and this is not going in the right direction. It is something I think of it is something that I work towards fixing in my life. (LGBTQ+)

I'm also very outdoorsy, and so just within my lifetime getting to see the drastic changes that we are in climate change is it's a huge deal to me and it does impact my day to day life and in a multitude of ways. Some of those ways are, it creates a lot of anxiety. I just feel like there's definitely this lack of control. I'm just one person and so it feels a little defeating to know that any changes that are really going to make an impact have to happen on a global scale. And it can just leave you feeling really defeated (WYP)

I guess I mostly thought about my human environment and the other people around me. I think that has more of an impact and cost than anything else in my life. And I've also recently had a lot of life changes. So the people that I'm around now are a lot more positive and supportive. But when they are not positive and supportive, I mean, my quality of life is awful, you know. And that also goes back to sort of the belonging question. If I don't feel like I belong in a town or in a community, then I don't feel like my environment's healthy. I feel like it's pretty toxic. So, you know, that could mean that I end up moving that could mean I end up quitting my job. That could mean that I, maybe end up homeless you know, all these things, kind of, especially if every part of my social life is toxic, then those things compound and I no longer want to leave my home or want to get a new job or want to help myself. I feel like if you're not in a community that supports you and is healthy, then you know, it, it will destroy your view of it. (WYP)

[Youth are feeling] we're all gonna die in burning flames and floods, you know, that's the way that they talk to each other. And it's constant. Like, why should I do my homework or it's gonna burn (A&C)

I hear daily from my young adult kids about the anxiety and the issues that people have. (Prosecutors)

I would say hardly any impact on me personally, and do I have power to affect change? I think so. I believe so. If we want our kids to be successful, and some of those hygienes aren't in place, and we're not taking steps to actually address that and help support families in ways that will enable their kids to come to school and engage and feel safe and secure and fed and all of those things. Then we're not going to be able to realize our mission. (SUPS)

Safe Places and Accountability

There was a great coming together too as well inside our communities. Most people tried to support each other who had lost everything in their homes and neighborhoods. (NVFL)

The question kind of evokes a sense of entitlement that other people are somehow responsible to provide a certain level of quality of life for me, which is something that I reject. I don't have an expectation that other people will provide a certain level of life quality for me. (NVFL)

Indigenous and Cultural Relevance

I guess we retained 50% of our harvestable goods. And a lot of the focus is based on salmon. We have our shellfish. We have our water quality, it's important to us both for health and spirituality. We're continuously fighting for our rights to retain these treaties that we have with Washington State that are being revisited or changed, renegotiated with what are called memorandums of agreements or understandings. Every time we go to the table with any agency outside, whatever tribe it may be, they're never walking away with anything after that meeting. And when we sit down at the meeting, we say well, what's your ask? What's your want? You know, just like this meeting here, what's our measurable outcome? What are we expecting to walk away from this meeting with and at the end of the day, we don't walk away with nothing. When it comes to our resources. Growing up, my grandpa would wake me up and say, let's go visit your relatives. He'd bring me up to the mountains, those trees, the waters, the animals, everything, those are our relatives. He put my feet in the water and explained to me, you know, you're not going to be afraid of this area. This is going to be your home. So that's the place I'm most comfortable at is in our mountains. And I've been knocked out for over almost 30 years here at the tribe, right. And it's just like every single day we have meetings to discuss our water rights. You know, like right now from January to mid April, we're discussing Chinook harvest, how much are we going to take this year and how much are we gonna allow them to take? Then we have to explain to them that our take is not a commercial or financial take. Our take is uh, how much food are we gonna put on our people's tables? How much food we're gonna put away for them? Because that's what we do. We collect and we store for our big gatherings. And how much do we have to give up so that the outside can make their profit off of it, make that dollar? That's a concept that we don't really understand - it's not born here in Nooksack. Not born in Indian country. So there's no financial nothing you can attach as far as cost. It's our livelihood. It's our life. It's our culture. (NT)

I'd like to point out when it comes to the Lummi Nation, we just had an infestation of green crab in our Lummi aquaculture and the green crab really interferes with our Dungeness crabs. And so our fishermen - we have the largest fishermen on the West Coast, 550 fishermen, and they're all going to lose their fishing ability. If we can't get a grip on this problem, the other thing is Cook aquaculture brought in the Atlantic salmon, and they were raising the Atlantic salmon and salmon pines. And they're not natural in our Pacific Northwest waters. And they released about what a quarter of a million or so. And they also have an impact on our salmon, salmon fisheries. And you know, it's a devastation for our salmon

fisheries. And the other thing is, we also back in 2014, our local beaches were affected by manure that was coming downstream from the Nooksack River. And it was poisoning all of our shellfish beds, our clams or oysters. And so we have a lot of fishermen that are gatherers of oysters and clams and fecal coliform was being found inside these. And so, of course, the Lummi Nation was not happy about that. So they were going to sue the farmers up river, because they felt that it was their fault. And so they started doing a study and they realize that it wasn't just the farmers, it was other factors involved. So they created this portage bay Partnership Agreement. (FBO)

I think that's where the big disconnect is. A lot of people see us as greedy and think that we take, take, take, take, take, take. Take all the fishery, take all the crab, take all the shellfish you know. But what they don't know is a lot of the stock goes into a big cold storage and we use it for funerals. We use it for ceremonies for our winter ceremonies and for families having a gathering, you know, then they can request fish from the tribe because our fishing fleet is depleted. It's so low in numbers and not a lot of our elders have access to fish anymore. You know, they need that - they don't even have access to our traditional foods. So talking about the impact on our way of life. You know, when we read a lot of things about how the fish used to be so plentiful, the story they could walk on the backs of the salmon. Nooksack is leading a lot of the work in data collection for climate change and millions of dollars for log jams for habitat restoration. We have an excellent team of biologists and forestry workers. (NT)

We haven't commercially fished Chinook salmon for over 40 years in the Nooksack River. We've been asked many times by the state to pull our nets out of the river for extended amount of time so that we can bring the salmon stock back. But you don't see us with big logging outfits. You don't see us with the dairy farms. You don't see us building roads alongside the rivers and ditches going in to these (NT)

Our knowledge, our historical knowledge of Mother Earth and the environment is not even considered or included in environmental and climate change work. (NT)

Fires/Smoke/Air Quality

My brain went to the smoke that happens during the summer, like wearing these [masks] not for COVID. I think it was four summers ago where it was so bad for so long, [the smoke] was trapped. And I have asthma, and I needed a steroid or an inhaler for quite some time. And then it was like, all of a sudden I couldn't breathe. And not only are we losing forests, but the air quality is drastically different. (PW/U)

you go up to Maple Falls or Kendal. A lot of people use wood for their heats. And then you know, when everybody's doing that the air, you know, it's really bad and you know, when there's already smoke in the air because of fires it's that much worse. So there could be a lot of air quality issues that are going on.. (SUFS)

My mind went right to the wildfire smoke in the summertime. And, unfortunately, it certainly seems as though it's not an isolated, summer here and there event, it's probably going to be part of our future, which is just discouraging. (PW/U)

Question 4: How can local government collaborate with BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and Other People of Color) communities to better represent people of color?

Representation

it's really hard to better represent a community of color when people of color are not represented in the group, like in the local government. (ML1)

By creating this group is something that the government has done, and having these small focus groups and getting feedback from people of color like we see in our room today. You know, that's a perfect example of what our governments assisting with to do better representing our people of color. (FBO)

It is very important to have all kinds of points of view in this organization, or this group, because people will listen, you know, and each one of us comes from different backgrounds, the way that we were raised the environment, the COVID, what has happened within the community, all the challenges. So, as we speak, as a community, Latino, Lummi, from wherever, we have an opinion, and we have the power to continue to bring out things that are positive, not trying to put things down and people but let them blossom, let them speak their piece, that we do have a voice. And we'll continue to have a voice as long as we are in agreement, and be able to resolve issues that come up ideas to resolve things, as a community, I think is very important. And I think as part of this community of this group that we have right now. It's like planting the seeds, let us grow, and let it be for everybody. (FBO)

There have been people who have been proposed to be on boards and commissions and task forces and things like that. And they've not been selected to be on and it raises the question well, why not? And you know, the people have the personal experience to be able to walk into a group and be able to impact or influence how those things come out but because we have this idea of certain levels of credentialing and certain levels of experience in certain levels of education are paramount, that somebody who doesn't have that kind of background, but has the life experience to be able to come in and take on some of those positions or participate in some of those things, and we're not doing that. (ML2)

I look at bipoc communities and there's nothing in there about the disabled. I just think of the diversity of this county. You know, there's all the immigrant communities. Ukrainians right now in this community, they look awfully white, but they're awfully different, you know... if we really could put it together and keep it together and do it annually. It could get bigger and better...(ML2)

I think first of all is not to discriminate, not to discriminate against all minorities, because in and of ourselves we are no longer a minority. And how are they going to represent us if we know that if we go to complain they are going to say ah, you speak English? (FFW)

I think we have to inform more people of color and help them understand why they should run for government to help our communities because sometimes we need someone of our own nationality or background we can see ourselves in. (SFF)

Okay, so my thought there would be to actively seek out either people of color or people from the LGBT community to fill [staff] roles. (LGBTQ+)

representation depends on us, not the government like we obviously have to elect our representatives. I think that's kind of our community failure more than our leadership failure, even though I think yes, a lot of things need to happen from leadership. (PDef)

..people need to be invited to the table, or they need to be at the table, you need to have those voices heard my local government(AAPI)

I'd like to see especially law enforcement having more people of color, people of different ethnicities and backgrounds, be represented in the town where we live. (Parents)

Well, as it's been told to me many times, we can reach out to them. There are people who advertise, hey, I'm willing to speak to a group I'm willing to help educate an office. There are plenty of people that will speak to, all kinds of groups in all kinds of situations. And it's really just up to people who are in these positions to say, hey, we have to reach out.

identifying your, your BIPOC community where they are, and then supporting us and ensuring that we get the same support, as every other member of this community. I mean if you want to just take it there, find your best standard, what you would give your beautiful white neighborhoods and communities, and give us that standard as well. (B&AA)

I would love to see a way for the children to be heard. The most egregious stories I've ever heard about racism in this town in this county have come from kids I coached, and my own children telling me what happens in their classrooms, what things are said by teachers by parent educators by adults and by other children. The children will tell you, they will tell whoever will listen. No one's even asking them, and it's mind blowing. And I totally understand not needing to put that added layer of stress and an easy target on people of color and government, but representation matters. Check out the third shift in any nursing home around here. You wouldn't believe how many of us there are in this community, but we're locked out of participating society in the same way. So I think that the representation is just, it's unfair, and it's really emotionally costly, a totally different beast. (B&AA)

I think having representation of people of color, having representatives that come from community college. There's also the representation of ideas right, like, within the Latinx community there's a huge diverse set of ideas and thoughts and political ideologies but like our needs need to be represented somehow. So I think it would be really wonderful to see Bellingham and Whatcom County At large kind of reproducing some of those models of democratic indirect participation, like community forums, and people's assemblies. I would like to see a space created for community driven solutions. I think that seeing that happening and definitely bringing those spaces for communities of color for congregating would be really cool, because then we would have an actual proxy of power sharing in communities of color, and I would love to see that happening one day and happening recurringly because I don't think that the groups in town have the capacity to do that, not even every year let alone every month or every week. (LX)

I know like Satpal Sidhu who's like the county executive is technically a Sikh but I feel like not all representation is equal representation. So just because he has a label of being a Sikh man doesn't mean that he represents me. I don't really want to speak badly about him and I hate to say it but I don't feel like he has represented my community to what it needs to be represented for. .. So I feel like that if that's the type of representation I'm going to get I'd rather go without it. I know that's like a really harsh thing to say but I feel like it's important not to just have people of color in Power but it's important to have the right people of color in power. I feel like another really important thing to recognize is that not all racism is equal. So I don't wear a turban, I wear a head covering I cannot say that I face the same racism as someone who wears a turban. And as a woman, I cannot say that the issues I face with racism and discrimination are going to be the same issues a man faces with racism and discrimination. So even though we're in the same religion, we're in the same culture, we come from the same place and we have a lot of shared experiences. We also have a lot of unique experiences and also people who aren't religious,

but still are Sikh and Punjabi and they don't cover their heads and they're more westernized. I don't feel they face the same type of racism that we would... If you have more doctors of color, they're going to do more studies on people of color. If you have more lawyers of color, there's going to be more judges of color. If you have more police officers that are minorities, there's going to be a better representation. So I feel like having people even in the smaller positions and nurses and everything, it makes a big difference. And then once people are in that power to make sure they're connected with these communities and they're actually going out and visiting and trying to gain information and not just sitting in their seats comfortably. (YAS)

I'd say at a minimum, they can elect and appoint people who are bipoc. I mean, just that I think is a very base level, just representation (PDef)

acknowledgement of the existence of our big tribal communities in this community, .. that significant part of our community. (PDef)

I think representation matters and we have a very diverse group of people that live in the valley and there's no representation for them. I think it needs to start there. Have somebody that looks like them or doesn't look like everybody else and has a different mindset. I feel like local government all looks the same. And not only do they look the same, they all have the same mindset, and they all have the same beliefs. And so that's not helpful for the community because that's not what the community is. (SUMAS)

I agree just with representation, you know, it's just hard work like just petitioning, speaking up at schools even if we can get teachers to get interested in their voter pamphlet, just that simple act. (SUMAS)

You can't set a quota. And since we don't have equal representation in the county, of every minority, you can't get every minority on every committee and make it look like the county. As we learn about each other, we learn to drop the fear and hatred. (NES)

It all comes down to one thing, it's racism. If people can stop being racist to other people and the way they look or the way they act, I think that would give those people more confidence to say, "Hey, I think I can go run for this city council spot" or, "I can try to do this or I can try to run for that". But here in my little community, we just don't have a lot of minorities, we have Hispanic people and maybe a few African American people. Basically the rest is just all white. So till we get more people around here where I live in my area I feel that nothing's gonna change until people stop the way they think about other people and the way they look at the color of their skin. (NES)

So I think our local government can collaborate with those communities and hear maybe their concerns and their observations and experiences and identify solutions that those folks themselves are suggesting they need and having those conversations can be a good start. (Pros)

I'd say having those communities and having government officials being more open and talking and having avenues to talk to marginalized communities is really important, but also to recognize the tools that we need structurally in government. (Pros)

representation in local government is important. (Pros)

Power. The white culture definitely wants to remain the strong voice for sure in our country. I think that we will give BIPOC voices some power, but not equal power, not most of the power but even just equal representation needs to happen. I mean, it's something that needs to be decided upon and put into

regulation and put into our mentality that it must happen. There has to be equal representation and those voices must be heard, like all voices, but especially minority voices, because they've been shut out for so long. (NES)

How can we better represent people of color, like in the legal system, I guess, start a fund and send more people of color to law school (AAPI)

what can be done to get, you know, more, more people with diverse backgrounds into those into those positions. (AAPI)

I've been getting a lot is like, Oh you just need to like understand the system or it's just kind of a slow thing and we're listening, we promise, but we can't do it all at once. And it's all under this guise of like, but we're not going to give up our seat at the table. We still need to be here and it's like, why? because the way you've been doing things hasn't been working and it will continue to not work when you refuse to let go of that. And so I think in collaboration with communities to represent people of color, a lot of these people need to let go of that, and [acknowledge that], 'I might not be the person to make the decisions on how to collaborate with communities of color because I clearly don't know how to do it. And I don't know how to be held responsible for it or accountable to it'. And that's scary and a lot of people don't want to give that up. A lot of people, for whatever reason aren't going to be like I'm a Senator, I'm going to step down because I don't understand BIPOC issues, but I think that's what we need is to have less of these people who claim that you care. And say they want to be our allies and say they want to do this and that when it's like your way hasn't worked and isn't working and will continue to not work. So it's a whole system restructure that we need. (MHW)

I feel like where we live is just generation and generation of people to just stay here and so it's so hard to make change because you know, people don't leave and they like it hearing and they don't see like there's a need for change. And so they want to keep it the way it is. This is why this work is so hard out here is because we have people that are just content with the way it is like my kids are fine and we don't have any issues here. So there's not a lot of crime, but it's hard to kind of explain or show people okay, it might be fine for you, but look at these other people in the community that have a harder time. (SUMAS)

I don't even like saying this, but I'm gonna say it. Voting obviously. What would be interesting to see is to push people of color out to vote. I have never seen that in Whatcom County. Even in an effort to organize people of color in Whatcom County to vote or to even gather is hard to do. So any of those types of opportunities would hopefully impact who's sitting on those councils getting out in the community. If the system is set up to perpetuate the same people being empowered sitting in those seats, then the system needs to change. (School)

having these conversations, you know, like having conversations with people in bipoc groups and sitting down and talking about what issues they face, so their voices are heard, so that there's some sense of representation. And not a one time conversation, but an ongoing conversation. Listening. (PW/U)

Okay, I would say that if you want to better represent people of color to engage in active discussions with them, and not just waiting for them to initiate, as the government, you should be seeking that. I mean, they could they could do something like a focus group like this, where they invite people in the community who are interested to participate. (ML3)

Have more people of color people from more diverse backgrounds being in positions of power. I feel like that's everyone's wish. That would be amazing. Since we don't want just one perspective. I feel like having people who are from these communities in power or just having these positions to speak to actually make that change will make a big difference. (HES)

I think creating like coalitions possibly or like some groups from different communities. (HES)

Equal Access and Inclusion

I feel like a lot of communities lack resources. So like, for the voting system, many people that live like out in the county, they don't have the time or the money to buy gas and go to the little drop boxes. And so I feel like that also has a big impact to where and how many people vote. (SFF)

I think making sure not only official positions, but also informal meetings and stuff like that are accessible to a larger group of people. So whether that's acknowledging that it can be hard for people to leave their jobs or if they're commuting from pretty far outside of Bellingham, still within Whatcom County, just these things could be considered more when creating open space and time for forums just to include a wider array of voices other than those who are physically able to like leave their work or their family or whatever other positions they're taking in, to be able to attend those meetings and really have a say in our local government. (HES)

Accessibility is a really big thing. (LEFG)

I'd like to say one controversial thing. I think it's important for us to promote, empower, and protect white comrades. It's difficult for racists to see a future in America, but to have in this transition, white people that are comrades to the BIPOC community, be empowered, protected, and promoted. When they see that happening, then that is an effective possibility in the future. I think it's controversial because it's important to have people of color in positions of power. That's one thing. But I think it's also important for us to have and to maintain a peaceful transition into that polarity. I think I get emotional when I say this, but your outreach to my soul has been empowering, and kind and patient. And you're an example of what I hope and pray for. As I mean, these have been difficult times. You know, with the flood and everything and, and yet your encouragement, and your friendship, and your engagement. Your outreach, this one person, this individual, I want more people like you no matter what color their skin is, in this world. And we need to protect people like you who empower people. (FBO)

I think it's the way in which we collaborate and communicate, that's got to change. I think a lot of like even town hall meetings in Ferndale, they happen on weeknights. I just think about how, you know, people of color - I could speak from my experience growing up, like my mom, she could only get certain jobs because English was her second language and it was highly accented. So she's hard to understand for people who don't know her, so she could only get certain types of jobs, and didn't have a lot of money growing up. So she was working a lot, didn't have all this extra time, couldn't pay for childcare, to do the things she wanted to do, like go grocery shopping by herself. So she's definitely not going to spend the time and effort to do a town hall meeting. So if you really want to connect with communities that are different than you, you got to learn what's the easiest way to communicate with them? And how do you communicate with them?... Okay, a bunch of poor people who are not used to being asked their opinion, you know, are you still just listening, which is what my mom was always trained to do. It's like my mom would not say anything probably. That's just not her modus operandi. So a little bit of cultural awareness and communication awareness. (ML3)

I was at a function last year, about two to 300 people and I was volunteering at this function. And I was outside and by the way, so at this function, look around, and it didn't take long because I'm just looking in the crowd. And I am the only person of color there at about 200 people but I'm very comfortable. I'm there, I'm volunteering. I'm part of this group. I pay my dues. I pay my membership. I'm part of this group. But two times within an hour a person walked up to me and told me that they were introducing themselves because I stood out among the group. And I asked them in what way, and they say, "Well, you're the only black person here". Okay, so I know we can certainly talk more. ... I would think that how to increase the collaboration would be to acknowledge that there is a need to collaborate. If you don't acknowledge there's a need to collaborate then there won't be any collaboration or any progress. (LEFG)

.. you can't legislate people's feelings, right. So if you're having an issue in the community, you can't pass laws to make people be nice. And we end up with a lot of people that that's kind of what they're looking for. So if you can't legislate people to be nice, how can you make them be nice as a community? I think of what government can do to increase collaboration is do things like support events that are inclusive. So whether it's posting a day in the park, and making sure that it's advertised appropriately to the groups that don't seem to be coming out on a normal basis and getting that feeling included as a part of the community. (LEFG)

I think that the government could help first of all, by recognizing those workers. (FFW)

forums like this are probably going to be the best way because like I said, not every person wants to be in those positions of power. It's not something that is appealing to everyone. And I feel like actually trying to get out into the community and talk with them and talk one on one and see what the actual issues are and not just talk to people to get votes. (YAS)

I think it all goes back to belonging and people feeling comfortable coming to the table. You know, so it's more than just inviting them, it's making them feel comfortable and feeling like they really belong. And they're going to be listened to. I think, you deal with history and things that have happened in the past where maybe they've been invited but have not felt heard, or they've been invited, and they feel like well, I'm that one native voice. (SUPS)

...what keeps coming up for me, is this feeling of tokenization of you're at the table, so we've done our job. And I also think I get that a lot from some of the more vocal white counterparts who were like, let's bring you to the table. Let's get you in leadership. Let's do it. I'm like, are you prepared to actually support me in that? And usually the answer is no, or they think they are, but they're not willing or able to support me in the ways that I would need nor did they ask what support I would want or need. They kind of tell me what they think they need to do for me to be successful. And it's like, well, I don't need you to tell me that -I could tell you, but they don't necessarily make that space. I think what we're seeing a lot too is people not wanting to let go of power. I can get to the table, and say my thing but if you don't listen, if you don't hear it and you don't react to and you don't hold yourself accountable and responsible for what you're being told, it doesn't matter. (MHW)

Organizational Structures and Systems

I know our local officials have a lot on their plate, I'm sensitive to that. But one of the things I think may be of service or help, whether it be at the mayoral level, the council level, or I keep coming back to law enforcement, I just see some type of outreach in an aspect of the people of color like committee or something that this conversation and some interaction and conversations would be helpful. (Pw/U)

I would love to see the government fund, promote and support commissions or subcommittees. And well resource them so that they can go out and do the work so that they can make recommendations on the behalf of all of these sub areas we've been talking about... But it does take stepping outside of the box and looking in the face of these policies that were created and dismantling them... The government can do that. If they're very strategic, if they're counterculture. If they make some courageous moves... I think being able to carve out ways to provide resources and really strategic ways to support people who otherwise might not be supported would be an amazing. (FBO)

I would say our local government needs to have humility needs to learn humility, the people in it need to learn humility in order to open themselves to other ideas, structures, even ways of getting things done that were very rigid in the process. (A&C)

Putting some of these things into rules. Just so then it kind of stand out there if somebody does break them, maybe one person will break them and that they learn from it or maybe two will break and somebody will learn (SE)

There should be some type of communication or outreach to know what the hell they're going to impact those communities. it'd be pretty cool if there was like some type of advising team to these councils where there's like a checks and balance before you're going to make a decision then you need to be able to at least hear and it's recorded and documented and what was shared back to them. So then there's a record of hey, this is what the community informed you. That's a decision that you still made that impacted them the way that they said it would impact them in a negative way. You're on record of showing that you didn't listen to nobody. (School)

I would say, just like snap out of it you know we're not in the old days don't treat us like that, you know, and honor us the way we're supposed to be. And then, you know, don't take credit for something that you know, credit isn't due to you. (IFG)

I think about our reach out to those communities and really actually have an understanding of the issues are, according to them, right. And again, this is where I kind of fall back on the data piece of it, because how can you verify it without the actual data, and I think, you know, to have an understanding of, of what people's feelings are, but then, you know, the reality of the type of business that we're running each day, and how our decision making is affecting the service to the community, and the various segments of the community. But I think, you know, having great data is enormous like that is absolutely imperative for us to be able to do a good job, and to be able to put meaning to the work that we do. And, and I will say, we are getting a case management system. It's just been a long time coming, and the RFP keeps being pushed out rushed out, but I have faith, I think, you know, we will see it sometime this year. And, you know, using that data, then because, honestly, you may not necessarily hear the complaints from the community that you're actually observing in your own operation, you know, in the sense that you're able to monitor and have a better understanding of, how is it that we're treating the people that we serve, and, you know, we could actually beat them to the, to the, to the punch on that, you know, having an understanding that, you know, perhaps we're not being as inclusive or having better representation within county government, that that reflect the values and the needs of the people that we serve. (Pros)

I don't know if there's some way to have an open door policy and predictable routine that on these days and times, it's a space for bipoc to come and talk to the people that represent them about issues and maybe they rotate in topics like education, law enforcement, housing, but just have it be continuous,

because not everybody's gonna be able to make it and not be, “oh, we're gonna do this once every five years”, but just, every month, there's like a town hall and specifically for that, that forum. And so, it's somewhat predictable, and there's multiple opportunities and ways to provide feedback, it doesn't have to be in person, not everybody has the time or the bandwidth. Maybe there's an online form. Just a way to continuously gather feedback and input. (Parents)

I know that I've had conversations in the past about just our lack internally, in our office of even really understanding the complexity of the problem here, because we have antiquated systems of data to even just identify, how over represented BIPOC People are in the criminal justice system. And so even just like the basics of understanding the problem, to then better be able to support those communities or respond to maybe some of the inequities that exist. (Pros)

It's also been about funding, right, like public safety .. police were asked to deal with a lot of things that weren't necessarily their responsibility, but, because we don't want to as a society [fund services through taxation]. .. (Pw/U)

There can be an incentive, and there can be value in the training, right? Because, you know, if you just come to firefighters or police officers or any member of society and say, Hey, we want you to go through this training, and we're going to ask more of you, but give you less resources or whatever, I mean, we've been doing that for so long. (Pw/U)

I'm also talking about, why can't we have more flexible positions because the agency I'm at is very well paid with great benefits, you know, government retirement. Why can't we have more flexible positions while the board which is 90% white men doesn't think it's worth having part time positions and paying for benefits and it's just like, well, that is another part of structural racism. And you're telling me you want to do change, but you won't even change something small, like allowing part time roles with benefits and retirement. And so that's kind of how I want our local government changes, you know, without the small government agency that wouldn't even make some basic changes in their policies and principles. .. shift power and spend money in alignment with what you're saying are your values. It seems so simple. (MHW)

just our focus and who we hire and how we recruit and how we invite people of color to be candidates for positions in our system. to get to a point where the people who are working with our kids, you know, really representatively look like they (SUPS)

Our court system is pretty much across the board one size fits all and we've never talked about having like, tribal alternatives or something. (PDef)

...practically, if we are saying that we want BIPOC to be more represented, can we have a paid internship program where you learn the ropes, you literally learn how government works. You learn how to talk this talk and walk the walk, I guess, I don't know if that even applies to politicians but just putting that out there...(MHW)

the criminal justice system kind of does this one size fits all kind of scheme and you know, maybe that needs to be looked at it. (PDef)

I should be noting that for me the terminology - that there's the language, like a third language, I don't understand it. I rely on people [who understand language of politics and power] to be my voice because I don't have the language. I'm relying on [others] because of [their] background. And I'm gonna be blunt.

They're well educated. I had to go back to school as an adult. So I'm kind of unaware of a lot of the government. I don't understand it. I don't. It's muddy. I don't get it. But I can rely on the people who understand it. I know who to go to. So I take my voice to them so that they can voice it to those branches. You know the people that hold the understanding. So my voice is being heard because of a local person who understands the government. ... It is like another language and it's very intimidating. That's the word I was looking for - intimidating. (NES)

In the last couple hirings to city of Everson [there were] a couple people who are bilingual, with Spanish speaking for a day to day operation to help our community because it has, at least in our eyes grown tremendously in that area. I don't know if that's really true or if we have just opened our eyes to understanding the amount of our Hispanic population. But one of the things is [posts in government in small communities receive] very, very little compensation. It's not really a paid position. So people have to be able to take from their daily lives ... I think about the economics that play into that. How often are they working? Sometimes such extremely long hours or, the single parenting that is taking place in some of these households? How do they then go and volunteer and be a part of these other communities? ... we can't force people to put that time in there. It is a time commitment. There is so much to overcome to get people to that spot. Do you think that Whatcom County as a whole is open to having all races involved in government? ... I think that real change starts with our smaller little cities. (NES)

So it really has to be more truth and grounding, to get to an initial place to start from a restart of what it means to live together. And within that, obviously, honoring treaties, returning land reparations, for many, many people, not only the native group in our area, and then back pay for all kinds of people and other things that could be such good and without that. I mean, you can do sort of all the philosophical stuff you want. But without both the gut soul sharing that just opens wide all the wounds and makes everybody face it, and then tangible things that economically affirm what happened. I don't think anybody's going to really be changed. (ML2)

I don't know. I wouldn't know. You know, the way things is, is like to me what I think, it doesn't matter. That's the way I feel, like it doesn't matter what I say or anything to change. It's still gonna be done the way they want. (CS)

Prejudice and Racism

I would say that one of the things that as a white person, one of the things that I always noticed that our white culture does that is racist is that we don't care that other people have more expertise than we do on certain subjects. I will tell you, this is like telling the Lummi how to run salmon. .. in the Sikh culture, one of the first things to do is everybody needs to sit down and eat together. It's absolutely part of the ways Sikhs deal with community. Get everybody at the same level. .. the mass culture doesn't even bother to imagine that somebody who's a minority would know more than them really pisses me off (SE)

I had a bad experience when I worked at SSC up here, and they're straight, racist. And yeah, its bad they're - even the owner and he knew what was going on, and nobody did nothing about it. And so I got treated bad but as I said, I tried to say something but didn't matter. (CS)

...there is a pervasive xenophobia that is allowed to be present in the room, because I'm always other and I don't want to be other I just want to be me, and you want to be you but I can't know you if you're always defending, and you can't know me if I'm always resisting. It's a dilemma for sure. (MHW)

People don't say thank you because they think that the vegetable just arrived there out of the blue, you know what I mean? I do think that the government should start by recognizing that we the ones who move a lot of that and they should start by recognizing that and if they can help us, they can start by recognizing, acknowledging, recognizing it, instead of denying it and denying it. Because when we make protests and all that, the government remains silent, they understand, at most they let us protest and protest, but the truth is, we have to be honest. ... sometimes you come out of the pig farm and go to the store in passing and they stare at you with disgust, not knowing that you are working so that they have food on the table. They think poverty looks more like chaos than anything else. (FFW)

... field work is seen as a minor job. As I don't study, you don't know how to do anything other than the field. No, you don't need studies. You don't need anything else but to have strength and courage, because anyone who really goes there, to endure such a strong sun and to work bending down, standing up, giving you spines, giving you and everything so that they pay you very little. And to be humiliated. (FFW)

That's what it is, to be humiliated by seeing how the work in the field looks like. I would like people to go for one day and one day only. I think that with one day they change their minds. (FFW)

Well, it does work for the people it was founded for and that love it

Awareness and Funds of Knowledge

these meetings like this have specifically asking for these people of color and the LGBTQ community to come to a meeting and have a conversation. This is how our government can grab a clue as to what is needed. (LGBTQ+)

I feel like that's one of the main roots of our current issues is white people going in and saying, I know exactly what to do, and not listening. (HES)

I don't think it's just local government, I think it is just communities in general. ... I think one thing that we have to do is have this conversation that we're having now and ask people about their opinions. And to realize that when you say government that each entity may not be the same with respect to how they collaborate with bipoc people. So it's important not to cookie cutter the response if you will, to government, but I think you have to open that conversation up. I think you have to do what the Whatcom County racial equity commission stakeholders group is doing to open these ideas up and to talk about it. And they're hard conversations, but they shouldn't be conversations that are accusatory, they should not be conversations that are finger wagging, if you will. But they should be conversations on the government level, where we could say, the truth of what people see and what people feel is really important because sometimes what people feel is not what we see. So sometimes when you talk to people, they say, "Well, I don't see this over here. I don't see it over there". You might not see it, but it doesn't mean that people do not feel it. (LEFG)

I completely agree just because we don't see it doesn't mean that there aren't certain feelings. And so to educate yourself. It is opening up a line of communication with different cultures. I don't know what form that takes, but perhaps it's something like this, or perhaps it's local government perhaps meeting with different tribal members or different members of different races in an effort to better understand how they feel. (LEFG)

Just having that level of awareness about what's going on around you to meet people where they're at and gauge their comfort level when they are interacting with a government official, and taking time to listen

and understand the perspective of the people that you're talking to goes a long way to helping them feel like they had a fair interaction, because it's not always going to be positive. Most people who are not active participants in government, tend to be a little bit skeptical about what the government does or what they have to offer or what they're after. So as long as you can take the time and let a person feel like they're treated fairly, and to remain objective. (LEFG)

I see that a lot with the loudest people get involved in these groups. And I don't feel like it's always an accurate representation of what the true feelings are in the community. I think the biggest problem with this question is not what can our local government do, but how can we make sure that we are getting an accurate representation of those different groups as feedback? Because you can't just take the loudest 10 people. When we looked at camp 210, 100% of those people had no idea what resources were available in Whatcom County. I mean, that's my honest to god feeling because I was standing there on the frontline listening to them scream at us about how we don't have any resources. We don't have this. We don't have that, and I'm sitting there going, we absolutely do. We have all of these things that they wanted to demand we already had in place. So how do we make sure that it's just not these super vocal individuals who are trying to speak for an entire community and in some aspects and in some instances, creating drama that doesn't need to be created? Is this actually a problem? Or is this just something that we should be more encouraging. Maybe the problem isn't necessarily the community in X situation. Maybe it has to do with marketing. Maybe we need to find out how this subgroup of people receives marketing - you are not going to be able to reach most senior citizens via Facebook, right? It's simple things like don't put out flyers in English if you're trying to reach the Spanish speaking immigrant families, you know, it's simple things. I think a lot of it has to do with the government's communication to its people and then how do you get feedback? (LEFG)

I think it's also intimidating for people who don't have a voice to try to like exercise that voice. So I wonder, we do a homeless count every year. what if we decided that we would do some sort of exercise to try to engage people's voices from the non white community and we did it through organizations such as Planned Parenthood or Opportunity Council and Unity Care and all the library places where we would have a period of time maybe it's a month maybe it's a quarter where we just engage with our community. (ML1)

Yes, working in the field is very hard and they pay very little, very, very little. I had joy, for me it was a joy to teach my children to work in the fields since they were very young. So now it is time for them to know how to value a peso they earn and how to value other people's work. It hurt me a lot, as you don't have a daughter, to see them kneeling while they were picking for blueberries, but thanks to that they learned to respect others and to value what I earn. They say they will never go back to the fields, they will never do it, but they know what it means to work in the fields and they have to learn to respect the work in the fields and the others. (FFW)

We need to be included, and our historical knowledge and expertise that's been passed on for generations, all the stories, all of that needs to be included in in the planning process. Our ancestors were smart, they were legit scientist. No, they didn't have the educational background from an educational institution, but they knew the earth. They knew the environment. And they were the real scientists here. We've survived floods and volcanoes and tsunamis. There's many stories about those survival times of our people. (NT)

A lot of the best available sciences that's available today that's used in a lot of our negotiations for salmon. The education they use is based off of what our ancestors left for them. That's what they learn

from. And then they have the audacity to come at us and say, “Well, are you qualified to answer these questions? Are you qualified to stand up and just explain?”? Yeah, we are. I mean, we're the ones affected by it. We're the ones that are ultimately paying the price and fixing it. I mean, all around. You don't see any other agencies out there doing habitat work if it's not included in their budget, you know, we have to fight tooth and nail for any kind of funding that comes to the tribe that goes towards those log jam projects. It goes towards these negotiations. I mean, when we go as tribes, it's something that we do generational. My dad was a director of natural resources here, you know, I hope my son's going to be up here and this is a generational thing. The fight that I'm fighting is a fight that my grandpa was fighting, my dad was fighting, and we're gonna fight it forever. We don't have the turn around like the state - so the other agencies when they have a person that we're conversing with, they end up moving on somewhere else and we have to start all over with the new person and our stories are not different. Our story hasn't changed. It's just their understanding, you know? So it's about the education and it's about sticking to it. (NT)

we have such a diverse experience. Our voices are all so different. Depending on where I am. I think people expect me to represent everyone in the bipoc community. And it just is not the case. I think there needs to be some recognition of energy levels and expertise. And just the voices of the vast variety that we've got in our bipoc community. .. I think that understanding would go a really long way in this community, for growth for change for safety, for that that sense of belonging. (MHW)

I don't have any other like real great advice or insight, but this seems useful, you know, last year, and this year, there were a lot of listening sessions and that probably serves a purpose, but I do appreciate, you know, perhaps in addition to listening sessions, something that's more structured and ongoing and you know, that this information sounds like you know, there are lots of opportunities for people to participate. (LGBTQ+)

But practically, just looking at our city council. What if they reached out and literally went into bipoc communities and spent some time on the reservation, in the community centers, spent some time at the community held at the Gudhwar you know, the Sikh temple, or went to the mosque or to these places, ... Lummi is right here. It's not far, right. Like, go and spend time and build relationships...(MHW)

You need to actually go into the community and find these people, because they're there. They live here. They're not invisible. And let me say that, you know, if I want to connect with the Latin X population, and I don't speak Spanish, guess what? Like, can you trust me I make an effort. I'm not saying that you have to be proficient in the language but like something right. Are we making it a priority? (MHW)

I think training is a huge piece and understanding. ... And so we talk a lot about bringing training to first responders, and for them to be able to understand, if you see a six -three, 250 pound black head, he could be autistic, or some other thing might be going on, and you can't just assume that they're going to be able to follow a command or even understand what you're saying, and or even be able to respond. So I know, that's one huge piece of making sure that we talk to local government and stakeholders and for people to realize there's “twice exceptional” people in those communities, especially bipoc communities, who never talk about what it means to have a kid who's disabled. (Pw/U)

I'm thinking specifically of anti-racist trainings, because the work that people are doing in government, I really appreciate. I think recent acknowledgement that racism is a public health issue and along with that awesome work, I think that anti-racist training should be mandatory for anybody in that kind of position.

And not to just be one class, but an ongoing process. I do think that wouldn't necessarily happen easily. The powers that be wouldn't necessarily want that but in my mind, if there's gonna be some real collaboration, there needs to be some real talk about where this is coming from, why this is important. And to tap into something deeper than just awareness. You have to have conversations in the history of this. (MHW)

Just training is not super helpful in changing people's minds. Even if it's racial equity, even if you give lots of examples, even if you walk them case by case, you know, point by point to George Floyd's murder, it's not going to change their mind necessarily, but they might have an emotional reaction in the moment. There might be some fragility that comes out and oh, yes, we're so sorry. "I, you know, repented for all our ancestors descendants, and everybody in between", but I'm not sure a real change happened there. (MHW)

it's about education at this point. And changing the way that public safety interacts, including firefighters and police officers. and then I think the other component of that that doesn't get talked about very much is that our society has said that guns are a very prevailing part of our society. And that's been a tolerated and accepted thing. And that creates a different level of interaction from somebody, police officers, or even firefighters now, in how we deal with members of society when we talk with them. ... So not to default to training and education. But you know, it goes back to cultural awareness, and then valuation. (Pw/U)

To start is teaching everybody, not just the people of color, the proper education. There's a lot of kids like me, that had to go outside of school to learn the hard things. We are experiencing generations of trauma and pain, with no understanding. Why did this person just say this to me, with no grasp of why this would be occurring to me? So it's got to start somewhere with educating everyone, not just a certain group, it's got to be all of us. (LFG)

There's, there's something happening in our country that is moving ahead, whether people recognize it or not. We're becoming much more of a multicultural society. That's a natural process that's happening. I think local governments need to adapt to that whether it's school boards, pushing more for civics education so people understand or learn in school about government and the Constitution and democracy and kind of the basic ethics around that and naturally accommodating the growing diversity in our culture and have that reflected on school boards or city council's or whatever. (NES)

I think its really important during this learning processes for all non-Indigenous people to know that our Lummi Nation Constitution states no native shall have less rights than a non-native under the US constitution, so us as general counsel or members of Lummi Nation, we still have the same right. And I think that often gets forgotten because of the unsettling truth of the doctrine of discovery. We as individuals are inherent rights holders. The Creator blessed us all with our gifts and our responsibilities, and we don't need any non-Indigenous institution looking at individuals and say, "I can't speak to you, I need to speak to your council"...they need to get over that. If you look on our website we have a ton of information about what it's about [Truth and Reconciliation]. We have videos about what it's about. And I think that in order for non-Indigenous NGOs and non-Indigenous government organizations, in order to be on the same page, of course we want to respect our tribal communities. But, why is it that a non-Indigenous person can go into Whatcom County, and build two stories everywhere. And they don't go to the tribe and ask for permission. Why do you guys get to do all of these things, and you don't go to the tribe and ask for permission, but I'm an indigenous person that lives on a reservation. And then the first

thing somebody wants to say is, do you have permission from the council. Does that make any sense? No, that's a system of oppression. That's a system of oppression, so we want to talk about racism. Let's get to the system that creating oppression of our people today. (IFG)

Call to Action and Consequences

I also want to see some concrete measurable goals change right now. Right, like we're doing this right now. (MHW)

If you have leaders who have a vision, and you have your citizenry who has a vision, good things can happen with public private working. (LFG)

...we like to talk about everything with very little action and all that does from what I see is slow progress down. We can talk too much about things and have very little action that actually gets us anywhere. (LEFG)

I think the first thing we need to do is not look to the government to address issues related to the BIPOC community. We have a problem. I believe we have a problem in regards to how we view people. And that is an issue of the heart that can't be addressed by local government and I do think that we need more people that stand up for the person that has no power, the person that is overlooked, the person that somehow has been marginalized. And regardless of that person's ethnic background, color, or whatever origin they have. Seeing them as a person of value and worthy of time and energy and worthy of being an advocate for and so I don't see that as a government thing at all. (NVFL)

we need to have numbers to show it. So that we know that we're not just throwing effort at something that's not even the problem. (Pros)

They have to start making actual like material changes and show that before they're gonna build any relationships with any other communities. (SJA0)

They've already been told so many times what they can do to support bipoc communities to support marginalized communities. There are already people doing so much work or sacrificing so much, and it just feels like they don't care and they're like unwilling to open up the space to bring people in. I mean, just personally like last year, trying to figure out housing for all of these unhoused neighbors like we have the resources. We have so much money in this community. We have the space. We are capable of housing people and our city government. Our county government is so unwilling to go there. So you know, we need new people in power. It's not just about collaborating with marginalized communities. It's also about having that representation within the government like we should be bringing those people into those spaces and hiring them. (SJA0)

So I think I think listening in and awareness is important in terms of those things beyond representation, but I think actively, like, you know, recognizing that clearly something is or isn't working for it for a given group of people and trying to affect maybe there's suggestions regarding how to make it work and see if that works any better for at least a period of being willing to change without maybe necessarily even thinking in your in your heart of hearts that there's a problem. (Pros)

The feedback I've gotten from people is that you have the data or we have the data. We have asked the questions. We're not listening. Okay, and we need to take what we've gotten and do something with it and

do that accountability piece. But the other thing too is to take advantage when you do have something come up and follow through on it. (ML2)

My biggest thing is you got to get government out of everything. Government is not gonna make anything better. The whole idea of what can government do to make other groups get along. That's like putting two people that hate each other inside the same shirt and say you guys need to make up -it just makes no sense to me. (CS)

Inequity

I'd say, biggest thing the government can do is be competent to people regardless of their race or ethnicity, and I think government is in my lived experience not very competent. And when it's not, it does disproportionately affect people who are poor. (NVFL)

I will say to you if you dig a little you would find that specifically people of color were forced to live in and are still being forced to live in places that were flooded. And the government was slow in helping anyone find shelter after the flood. And again, you had people especially people who didn't own their own homes, people who are displaced who had no place to live, and I think that the biggest problem in the county is government doing a bad job. And the government doing a bad job disproportionately affects people of color. (NVFL)

I think the county, in my experience cares about certain people more than it cares about other people. And if those people who had been displaced were a bit different, and lived in a different place. They probably would have been taken care of a little quicker. (NVFL)

Burden on BIPOC

an emotion I keep coming up with is how happy I am and how proud I am but also how tired I am. Tired. I am aware that I have to do more and want to do more. But my voice and my energy level is low...(MHW)

I feel like where we're at in this community is we just perpetually asked that question. What can we do to make it better? How could we make it better, but I suspect that there's a wealth of data housed in a variety of places, from folks who lived experience and by folks who have told us what to do and we haven't created any sort of accountability measure. (ML2)

You know that we have communities that are undocumented. And the police, insist on working with ICE. It's a problem. It's a really big problem so it's just really ridiculous for local government to expect trust from communities whose trust they betray regularly. I think that they just need to be better about acknowledging it and then holding themselves accountable to the same laws that they disproportionately put on everybody else. (Parents)

I think when we rely on those communities to come to the government or to the communities to be heard, I feel like that's leaving the ball in their court where there might be some fear or there might be some trauma around doing that or they fear that they won't be represented or heard. And so maybe these organizations or bodies going to them and intentionally giving them a platform to speak of what their needs are of what representation they're looking for, where do they need more support? I think that could help ease some of that systematic problem in the process and that might be received a little bit better

because if they are feeling instead of being a problem by speaking up, we're looking to them to speak up because we want them to be heard. (WYP)

I feel like our governments just expects people with trauma to relive trauma in order for them to get more information. (SJA0)

I feel like just having some sort of support from our community outside of our race really helps with issues that we go through.. even the whole Black Lives Matter movement, the reason why it was so out there because everybody, not just the black community, but everybody from other races actually spoke up about it and I think just having that support from our local governments and communities about issues that we face personally as well. (YAS)

When I moved up here, my children and my ex-husband and I are black Puerto Rican and various forms of other cultures, and my husband and I didn't know this town so I've moved them into Fairhaven of our places and that's, that's the only school district they know my boys are excellent football players, and watching their experiences being pulled over as they were learning to drive, walking on the street and sitting in a sidewalk because they're tired, and being handcuffed on their stomach, hands behind their back, because it's illegal to sit on the pavement apparently on the sidewalk. In the middle of the day (AAPI)

My experience with my family and myself, is if you're not a white person in this town, and a white person says you did something then you've did it. Be quiet. You're in trouble. I have a criminal record, because I was in this town, I made it on my own two feet. (AAPI)

I was also threatened with my immigration status, because I'm a resident alien. And because my citizenship application was pending that was used against me. I'm the legal system, any time that I showed up to court for work I was wearing a pantsuit, like, because that is what I did not want to wear a dress, and I was told by no less than three judges that I needed to stop pretending that I'm a man. And to wear a dress, because you can't wear a suit to court. I don't think they would have said that to a white woman at all. (AAPI)

I just left the Community Mental Health world after six years because I was so burned out and I think 2020 was really like the nail in the coffin for me. Because I was that person that was the only one who would say anything to try to make things happen. I tried to push for anti-racist, informed care trainings that would be done by consultants or people who wanted that to be their work. And instead they're like we'll just have you go to the training and then you can come back and train everybody else on top of the job you're already doing, which is already too much. So it's that kind of thing where we all of a sudden have to be the representatives and all of a sudden you have to do more work on top of the work we're already expected to do which is not even paid enough. (MHW)

I used to work for a local government agency- I just left last week. And after George Floyd, our director put out a Black Lives Matter email, blah, blah, blah. I sent an email listing at least 10 to 15 big microaggressions like myself and other bipoc people in our agency have experience and then I got a thank you for sharing, etc, etc. And then I kept pushing because they kept making promises about training. They kept making promises about change. And I kept pushing and kept pushing. They called us impatient. I tried to call him out for like, that's a racist microaggression and then my supervisor who's married to a black man goes and justifies his wording. And so then I'm just like, okay, so I don't even have any backup from someone who says they're so anti-racist because they're married to a black man.

They have black children. And then I basically get to a point where I say, it doesn't feel like our feelings matter. You're saying it takes time. You want to do this intentionally. I was told they don't want to put weight on us. bipoc folks at the agency, they don't want to stress us and they want to do this for us. And so at that point, I called our director, white savior. And I kind of feel like the city of Bellingham does kind of the same thing. They want to take care of us. They want to do all these things for us, without actually getting us involved by telling us what they think we best deserve and what they think we need. (MHW)

Safe Places and Accountability

I think the Whatcom County government is one of the most incompetent local governments I have seen in my entire life. And it functions on favoritism. I'm gonna say good old boy club, even though there's some women involved. So you know, with sexism, sometimes women have to conform to the male patriarchal model to succeed or to survive. .. the structural racism and Whatcom County is just really, really clear. And our community, Latinos and farmworkers, we don't trust the local government to do what they say they're gonna do until we see an action so I think it's like, very clear actionable visible change of behavior is needed. (SJA0)

I feel like local government needs to be accountable, and really recognize and acknowledge and then be accountable for the lack of trust that exists within communities of color towards law enforcement. Last year, I think it was that we did the racial listening sessions. that was the first time I felt like the local government actually was lending in ear to our communities, and giving us an opportunity to speak and actually not saying a word, just listening, and I had a lot of hope with that, and then there was no follow up, and from one of the things I had shared during that listening session was the experience of Bellingham police giving out free lunches one random day, and it happened to be the very first day of Ramadan for Muslim communities which are, you know, a very diverse community. Islam is like the most diverse religion in the world. And so, It was such a loss of access to our community and then also, it was so obvious for me. I remember I was really rushed that day and I found out they were doing that and it was like, there's not going to be a single Muslim person that they see today probably and they're not going to know why and they're not going to even realize we're out here and so I made a point with five minutes left to go over there and be like "Hey, thanks for doing this, I'm Muslim, we're fasting today, you're not gonna see any of us but thanks. I was nursing at the time so I wasn't fasting I said I'll take a lunch, and I just resented that I was even put in that position. And I don't know that anything came of that feedback at all, but then more importantly than anything, I'm really traumatized by the shit they pulled on January 28 with the way that they swept City Hall, the encampment that day. Having snipers on roofs. (Parents)

I think intentionally inviting members of the bipoc community members of the marginalized, unseen and unheard members of our community into the room to talk to and have these critical conversations and allowing folks across the board to have some level of citizen input is a super critical and I think that the classic way of having government feedback sessions, like opening up City Council in person.. I think that's an inaccessible mechanism for people to give feedback. (ML1)

I'm a crisis negotiator. So our team went to a Sikh temple, and one day for training. And we brought with us a member of the sheriff's office, who's East Indian. And he kind of translated and it was really eye opening for our team, certainly for me to hear the things that they had to say and sort of how they view law enforcement. My take was as they don't necessarily think negatively about law enforcement, but was

more that they should be able to handle things in-house, like they should be able to sort of take care of their own problems. And, it was great to open up this line of communication. It was very cordial, with a pretty good group of them. I learned a lot about that culture just in sitting, having lunch with these folks for a couple of hours. (LEFG)

I think that if there are parts of the local government that are interested in getting to know the people in their community, they should do things targeting the people that they're trying to get to know. There's nothing wrong with having events, gatherings, barbecues, that kind of thing, to get to know the people in the community. In my last place of employment, that's what we did as a police department. Because it was a disconnect between where I was policing and the people in the community. So we started hosting events and getting to know people when we weren't doing our job. And if we can do something that simple, I'm sure that people in the local government can do it and they can use social media because it doesn't cost a lot to advertise. And I'm sure that if people are looking to bridge all of these gaps that they will budget for it appropriately. And something like that does not cost a lot to use the government space so that people can interface because it's good for everybody to be in a room with somebody that doesn't necessarily look or think like them. So it doesn't matter what part of the government you're a part of. (LEFG)

I will tell you, it is groups like this. And then they get a little bigger, and they get a little bigger. And it doesn't even have to be formal, it can be just conversations and dialogue. (LFG)

I feel like it's insulting almost to continue to ask what can we do? What can we do? If we're going to ask we have to at least pay them for that knowledge, but I feel like we are starting to do harm in our community by just continually asking and not doing anything with it. to develop some sort of accountability measurements about what have you done with the information you already have, How are you collecting that information? .. we have asked a lot already, and that that information does live somewhere and it's our responsibility to do something with the information that we already have and just try and then reflect that. How did that go and maybe we missed the mark. Okay, it worked for these people and not for these other people. And just actually start taking some risks and doing some taking some, some leaps to try some things. (ML2)

.. that sort of looking back to repair and then thinking about how to go forward to create or to manifest something new and different. It's been occurring to me that what we don't have in this community is we don't have anything where there's a gathering that is honoring all of the differences. You know, we have various heritage parades or celebrations or stuff that goes on in the summer in different corners of the county and different groups in different communities. But it seems like it might just be you know how to get those moments where people really do listen and hear the stories but they also gather and share and they also have some joy and they have a big bonfire and people meet each other and different kinds of people begin to just sit down in the grass and talk and find out that they find new people from all over the county. And there's things that are of interest to a variety of people and we bring in share and you know, that kind of community Potlatch that could happen. (ML2)

When we're all working as one I mean, the whole ski to sea thing - you have Mexicans, white, black, whoever wants to be a part of a team in order to get to the end common goal, and then we all party at the end of the day with each other and that's what needs to happen. What it really comes down to is the more events that we have, where people get out, people see each other, people get to meet each other and things going on. That's the only way that we're going to get it. We need to get off social media, we need

to get off this screen - and get back to person to person - that's the only way it's going to change. ... you need to talk to your neighbor, turn off the TV, talk to your neighbor and you really find out that the world isn't as bad as it seems. (CS)

about different things or like one is create events. Right and don't have them like really accessible so many different places from where people know about it. But I'm also hearing as some kind of a structure that if people do choose to step into a space where they might not normally be welcomed that there's some support and that they won't necessarily get okay. And Travis did that resonate for you as well? I know when we were talking about like the person in the car and you're like yeah, it seemed like you really resonated with that. (CE)

Question 5: To what degree do you feel our current local legal system is “just and fair” for the BIPOC community, and why?

Safe Places and Accountability

I've never really had any problems with the law enforcement but I'm at Sterling Meadows. Sterling Meadows was a problem before but now it's a lot of different thanks to law enforcement and just them helping the community get better and be safe for the kids that live here. I think they've done a pretty good job because it's a lot better. There's no crime. There's nothing really to worry about. (SFF)

I just feel like for police, I think that there needs to be a lot more accountability and there is absolutely no accountability. (HES)

I'm in a unique position in that I get to interact with police at a different level than a lot of members of society and we have this kind of shared experience with them and depend upon each other and they come into our fire stations and that's a safe space for them, where they can take their gun off. They can take their vests off and feel a little less on edge and one of the unique experiences I heard about was where a police officer pulled over an individual who was driving the wrong way down the street. He turned out to be a Hispanic youth. And the police officer actually ... got misinformation from the individual. And so that steered the conversation towards a different position however, the way that played out in the newspaper and through the court system, a lot of that different interaction, it took on a different term. And so, you know, there's two sides to every story. And in talking with that officer, I actually know that officer to be a pretty genuine and good person. And at least my interactions with him have been that and so I think that there's a tough spot that people who are expected to enforce the law are in. ... And so how do we, how do we, as a society, ensure the protection for everybody, but also make sure that people who haven't lived up to the expectations of society are not allowed to continue in that and how do we make it a teaching opportunity instead of a punishment experience, but also not an experience that anybody wants to go through again. ... It's a cultural awareness thing, right. So if we have our police officers, if we have both our prosecuting attorneys and our defense attorneys, and we have our public safety individuals, interacting with members of the community more on an educational style basis, something like this around the table that type of opportunity to actually interact and experience each other is where that awareness and some of that value comes in. ... And, maybe that's where one of the components of the racial equity commission would come in, is authorizing or encouraging our local governments to do this type of small group sessions where, people interact. (Pw/U)

I know I can trust officer [the Chief of Police] because I know who he is. But I am protected within those walls because they see me and they know who I am.

One thing that gets in my craw almost every day and this may seem small, but I think it gets back to really some of the roots of why systems don't change. People's obsession with being nice, particularly white women, and they make up most of our co-workers and leadership and all of that around here. It is a daily struggle for me not to scream at people being nice to coworkers and bosses and, you know, and losing the fact that that niceness is undercutting the basic needs of our clients. You're so concerned with being nice that you're missing the fact that this person is starving. Right, when maybe someone needs a kick in the behind. It's something I think we don't acknowledge enough because we're not willing to call people on the carpet. (MHW)

When I think about the training that our community has, I'm sure that our local jail system doesn't have much training on the adverse childhood experience and whatnot. And our historical trauma. So the empathy factors are not even developed as to why our cycles can continue to repeat themselves. And then how do we support healing, and the jails are not set up to address that. The jails are just set up to continue to keep people in that poverty mindset, and to not give the skills or the support systems long term to help people be successful, and to heal. We can't even get to the healing portion of it, you know. We did several trainings with Northwest Indian College and Whatcom on what Truth and Reconciliation means for Washington State, and I don't need a native to be on a panel for decades and never get nothing done outside of Whatcom County because that's what our hereditary chief said. I sat on panels for decades and then nothing ever changes, you know, you sit there and you get a \$20 like token to say thank you for showing up and then nothing changes. ... Sometimes it's very sad to see grants come through a partner or being able to get grants to do things like this, to address the bipoc people or to address the parents and then we are sitting there telling you what you need, and then you guys just keep using the graphs to go over and over and over and over again and it's a waste of money. It's a waste of time and people are asking for help. They're trying to give you solutions and then it's just like, let's do a little. (IFG)

...in the past maybe less than 10 years ago, a little bit less probably, there was a lot of gang violence and gang affiliation. And it wasn't a safe community to be around. There'd be robberies and police would bring their dogs and go look for people because there's people on the run and the police would be here constantly ... there was a lot of gang related stuff drug related, not a safe community that you'd want a five year old to be in. (SFF)

We call the police when there's activity that happens that merits a police intervention, and that's a judgment call always on the parts of our school leaders, district leaders, and the focus has been to try to deal with things at the lowest possible level and not accelerate things to you know, kids getting arrested and things like that, that can be so detrimental and focusing on teaching and learning at the core again. And we've had officers who really got that, you know, that we've worked with closely who really understood the teaching mission around helping kids to learn and to improve their behaviors in whatever way and then you know, we also run into others (SUPS)

I would say I've had two personal interactions with them, or that touched our family, me or my family. Our son had a minor in possession episode when he was in high school. And actually, that was a really positive interaction. And the part of it that was particularly positive were the consequences that he had

and the hoops he had to jump through and things that he had to do to have that expunged from his record...I thought it was handled really well. (Pw/U)

Inequities

...justice in America is “just us” in America, there isn’t justice for us. (B&AA)

I work really hard to make sure that I'm treating people similarly. (LEFG)

I have worked in this county for a while. 27 years in law enforcement. And I gotta tell you, I mean perfectly honest when I say as far as treatment of people of color, or any minorities, I honestly haven't seen a single thing that I would say is unfair or not okay. I was raised in such a way that I wouldn't be okay with that kind of thing. I've seen one time when I was a field training officer probably close to 20 years ago where the trainee that I was with who lateral from Texas, said in the car with me a racial, racially insensitive work and he got chewed out and I never heard anything like that from him again, and that's honestly the only time I've seen anything remotely close to it. It seems like we handle things pretty fairly across the board. (LEFG)

I will tell you that in Whatcom County, as a whole, the law enforcement officers I've met compared to the different places I've worked are some of the most professional and well trained officers that I've worked with. And I'm not just saying this to put a smile on someone's face. I mean, it's the truth. So, in terms of fairness, I haven't heard anything otherwise. Now, I will tell you that I don't think anyone on this call has the data to really answer this question in totality. I mean, you would really have to dig down, and do some research and do some qualitative type of interviews as well with people so that's kind of where I stand right now. (LEFG)

What's their income status? ...your social status is how that's gonna work out for you. It doesn't include our BIPOC community at all. (LFG)

It's got better than it was. There's a lot of good cops out there. And then there's some still just with an attitude for nothing. You know, like us cruising around and tell us “Oh, you guys come around one more time. You know, we're gonna give you a ticket. It's like okay, let's see. Same people are driving around. And you didn't say that to them. (CS)

I'm being primarily white and white passing, I will never fully understand police brutality, because I have that white privilege. But I think it's unfair, and unjust. There is a lot of history. (HES)

You look at our statistics and clearly, black and brown communities are over-policed. We have no alternative systems in place, no anti-violence programs, no alternative hotlines and the lack of transparency in these alternative solutions is really frustrating. Because how do we know they're getting the input from folks who are most impacted by incarceration and over-policing? And there's this conversation about police oversight, and that's being extremely watered down by Bellingham City Council. It's like, again performative. You know, police are responsive, like we need to have better support systems in place to keep people out of jail to make sure people have what they need, but that's not a solution. (SJA0)

When it comes to policing, there is incredible unfairness towards people of color in larger metropolitan areas. So and this is pretty standard across the United States. That there is generally you know, 10 times more cops in neighborhoods of color than white neighborhoods. And it doesn't matter if those

neighborhoods are poor, or rich or middle class, whatever. It doesn't matter. If you line up the data, it's like police are engaging with these communities of color, sometimes 10 times more than their white counterparts. And just because of that amount of contact, you're having more arrests. You're having more people pushed through the legal system, having people go to court, etc. There's a percent of our population that is people of color, and that percentage is way out of proportion when we look at who's incarcerated. (WYP)

I don't think that our legal system is just and fair. I think that for people that English isn't their first language, I don't think it's fair for them. I also think that in a community like ours, if you are to have a hearing, you're supposed to be judged by your peers. Are we really having the right peers on the jury for those people?

I think the only thing that I can really speak to that I've seen firsthand is our homeless community and how there's definitely an imbalance of marginalized demographics within that community and that there's not the greatest resources for them. It's also about mental health and their receiving the right medical attention and all of that.

Aside from the natural resources part of the legal system, and how fair and just is the legal system for us, it's really not. It hasn't been since the time of settlement contact here because it's evident in all of the different movements we have to make just to get some fairness in the legal system, like the murdered and missing Indigenous women revolution going on and the Violence Against Women Act, the Indian Child Welfare Act and they've written and continue to write policies and laws and how to deal with Indians. You know, public law 280 is an attempt to define jurisdiction between the State and the Tribes. It just all goes to show that the way tribes used to govern themselves before European contact was very effective. Everybody had a place, everybody had a role in our tribal legal system here. We handled matters in in our own traditional ways and this European and Western form of government just doesn't work for tribes. It's not ever going to be fair for tribes and our tribal people. (NT)

when I was in my mid 20s I was a police officer in eastern Texas. And so I have a fundamental knowledge of law enforcement, and I have been here in the Northwest two years, and based on everything I've seen, it is just disproportionately so many black people get arrested, assaulted and murdered by police. I have never seen anything like this, but this is the time that we're in. And it is amazing to me that we have such a small demographic percentage of blacks in this county, and there's such a high percentage of arrests and deaths and injuries to black [people]. It shouldn't be like this. (B&AA)

I think about monetary access, when a person is arrested whether or not they're able to make bail or not determines if they're sleeping in jail, and also determines what type of access to the attorneys they have, if they're able to pay a fine, to get out. Or if fines are going to compound and I mean our system, our criminal justice system is just really a way to make money off of poor people, and I feel like that's represented by who's in jail. (Parents)

I think that our system is like created for like those, those non people of color. And so I feel like that system is helpful towards them and not towards us in some ways, because, after all, our country was founded on colonists and other people that didn't want the best for other people of color. (SFF)

I would say even if I've heard of well-intended police officers coming down onto the scene, but just because of the history of experiences, it's like triggering immediately and has like, escalated the situation even further than was necessary. (MHW)

we have a one size fits all system. And it is a system that assumes that all people are starting from the same very privileged start where they had all the opportunities in the world to choose from and chose the wrong ones. And of course, that could not be more opposite the truth. And the result is that it disproportionately damages people of color. It's almost not even worth saying because it's so obvious that it's completely unfair, not because it's specifically intentionally targeting people of color. I don't think it's necessarily doing that, but because it pretends we live in some completely fake universe where everyone has the same opportunities in the first place and everyone should be treated like they had it all and just did the wrong thing. (PDef)

Very often I'm asked how I can do this job and how I can defend these people. Well, you don't know what these people grew up with. You don't know what happened to them. Everyone has a story of how they ended up where they did in the legal system and it's not in a vacuum. It's not one size fits all. I have a client who has some tattoos that I saw that made me initially not like him very much. But then I did some digging into his history, and I was like, he never had a chance. He absolutely never had a chance with the childhood that he had and what he grew up encountering and trying to navigate was so terrible. And I think that is something that is definitely lost on the legal system that you don't take into consideration that this is a human being this is not just a case number. This is a person who got here the way that they did. And that needs to be contextualized that needs to be taken into consideration. A vast majority of people don't go out and just commit crimes because they want to. It's a necessity. It's something else going on. That created the need for them to do that. And I think that our legal system just doesn't see that whatsoever or doesn't care to see that. (PDef)

...the legal systems are at fault for that, as well as the bias that goes into policing and the bias that starts with student discipline in schools and the ways in which we have historically thought about punishment as the route to helping kids do better. It kind of just doesn't work real well. ...

I fortunately haven't had run-ins. And that's probably for different reasons. Maybe some of the privileges that I have with my lighter skin and my education and lifestyle, but with a lot of the folks that I've worked with, in community mental health, I feel like it was disproportionately like a lot of my bipoc clients who would report run ins and issues with police, especially some of my indigenous clients that I've talked to. (MHW)

I also think we have a system ...where their access to the system and they're experiencing the system is very different than if I was in the system [as a White person], or someone in my family was in the system... (Pros)

[there is] a disproportionate number of people of color, particularly the Native Americans, Latinx and African American. I know, here in Whatcom County, that our African American population is only like 1 to 2%. However, in the legal system, that seems to be skewed a little higher. ...The same goes that that Justice applies to "just us" - harder penalties of severity, harder fines, especially to groups of people who don't typically have high social economic dollars. (PW/U)

I don't feel that it's always just and fair for everyone, especially people of color, who may also experience other barriers to accessing either Legal Aid or have housing security, or have an income to be able to afford an attorney on their own. (Pros)

I don't think there's any way to reasonably argue that the system is fair overall. I have been convinced the statistical breakdowns of people's outcomes in the criminal justice system are based on the color of their skin, and their background. I have to look at how often I see people of color in my job on the other side of the table, versus how often do I see people of color out in the community at large in Bellingham. I don't think that people of color are more inclined to commit crime. I think that that would be a ridiculous notion. (Pros)

I've seen cases where people say, "well, the privileged person got out of it, and the other person got convicted. And my answer is, they both should have been convicted". (Pros)

the fairness of the legal system is very questionable for the bipoc community and I guess in general. I from my perspective with local law enforcement has been that of what you might expect from a privileged white male. I have gotten off with warnings, have gotten off with essentially a slap on the wrist. ... I think we're almost like culturally indoctrinated to be scared of them. And that's not helpful or rather, it's equally harmful to our ability to work well with each other. (ML1)

The fairness of the legal system for the bipoc community is not fair. It's not fair. It unfairly discriminates against people who are of color, who are marginalized community members. (ML1)

Prejudice and Racism

I don't believe that the legal system is fair for bipoc just based on my personal experience and based on experiences of other people in the community that I know and their experiences with law enforcement. ... I had to call the detective on my case 20 times before he even picked up my call. ...at first the person was charged with a misdemeanor, and was just out like that day just walking on the streets, and I couldn't leave my home because I was so scared. And it took me over two weeks for me to get any of them to just pick up my call and talk to me. I want to believe that everybody would have the same experience but at the same time, I feel like if I was a white woman it would have been handled differently. ...being told that "hey this attack on you is not enough - we're not going to charge this, we're not even gonna go there. You know, because we don't have enough evidence" and I'm like, it's literally on camera... But also over the years I've had other interactions with law enforcement where I do my best to go out of my way to avoid them. I don't trust the police. ... I don't want anything to do with them ... I've had an experience where I've gone to Starbucks before and I saw a bunch of officers just sitting there and I just walked right out the door because I don't want to be around them. I don't want to have anything to do with them. I just don't want to be in the same space. I don't want to share space with them. I don't want to share words with them. I want nothing to do with them. I think that ... for a profession that's supposed to protect and serve, that's a very dangerous thing because what ends up happening is that when you do need help and when you do really need that support from law enforcement and when you need that intervention, you are not likely to call. I had a situation just yesterday where my sister, who is in high school. She's 16. My mom was supposed to come pick her up. And she had called her like five times and I'd been waiting for like 45 minutes and which doesn't seem like a long time but my mom wasn't answering like I tried calling my mom a bunch of times my sister, like who's in college I called her a bunch of times and we were so scared we were like in our group chat. We were about to call my uncle like we were like, where's our

mom? Dad is currently out of the country. And we're like, Who do we need to go to?, and we were like, Okay, now is the time that we were like, we should probably like do a wellness check like call law enforcement but at the same time we were like, Oh my gosh, like we cannot call the police. Like we were so scared like we were so scared because we were like what if something happened to our mother, but at the same time, just the idea of calling the police to go do a wellness check on her to make sure that something bad hasn't happened because what if you know, why isn't she answering her phone? And we were like we cannot do that. So we were like scrambling to try to see who else we can call to go check on our mom to make sure that she's okay. And then you know she later answered and said that you know she had fallen asleep and like you know she was on the phone but I remember [the woman in Texas] and somebody did a wellness check because they saw something happening and she was shot in her room by the police that was supposed to go check on her and she was like in her bed and she was shot by the police while her neighbor called because they were thinking something is wrong there and please go check on them. And that was a black woman that was shot in her room. So I don't trust the police at all, and I was so scared for my mom but at the same time, like my fear is not enough for her safety that I would ever call the police because in my mind, once I call the police to go do a wellness check on her, the chances that they would harm her and I would lose my mother is very high. And that's just the reality of the world that we exist. So I don't think the legal system is fair and law enforcement I stay away from them and I want nothing to do with them. Ever. (ML1)

So I don't know much about the laws, but I do know that it's been very hard for the people of color. They don't have the same advantages as somebody that's white, so I know that's very true. (FBO)

My son who's now 14 was bullied all through the sixth grade, we reported to the school multiple times trying to meet with the parents of this boy, they never agreed to meet with us, and the school did nothing. My son, defended himself in his way, which was wrong. He slapped this child in May, after dealing with being bullied since September. My son was arrested at 12 years old, at Shuksan Middle School. He has a record that will follow him until 90 days after his 18th birthday. So he essentially has to be a perfect child just outside while being racially profiled, [for instance], he was bouncing his ball, shooting hoops at our home and a cop drove by and asked him where did you get the ball, and thankfully he didn't answer. He just came inside. So that's what I feel in my heart as a mother who tried and tried and tried, and then of course everyone sees the injustice. Then all the teachers are writing their letters of support, the vice principal writing a letter of support, and so on and so forth, but it was too late at that point because the family is not going to drop their charges. So that has been my experience with law enforcement, I would think that someone might be able to say, knowing what goes on in schools here, perhaps we don't need to be this harsh with a 12 year old, but that was not the case for my family, so I don't have any hope at all that anything fair just would happen. (B&AA)

I feel as people of color, we tend to spend more time in jail than any others.. I have spent a large amount of time in jail, and I just don't see that it would have been that way if I weren't of color, you know, and the amount of time that I spent in jail has actually done quite a number on me and I don't like to be around people. Because jail doesn't really help people it just, really It ruins them. And it changes who they are. (IFG)

... every time that I can, if someone has to be evaluated for detainment, or their behavior is such that we need to call for support I try and make sure that I'm there. Because I know that I'm not going to kowtow to the police, but also my role gives me some leeway to tell them what to do and what not to do. But

when I'm not around, my god the number of broken arms and busted noses and you know rubber bullets being fired at people ... People's racism is laughed off and discussed as if it were a quirk. (MHW)

I've seen people evicted and kicked out of services and discharged for responding to racism in a way that the agencies have deemed inappropriate. And I'm sitting there thinking I don't know how you didn't hit him sooner. And no consequences for the racist behavior, and I'm dealing with some of that right now in our agency and I'm trying my damndest to make people accountable for how they're making decisions about who can stay in services and who can't. (MHW)

But there are really truly, too many horror stories here in this town about the way people are treated. That I haven't dealt with that personally, is really just, I think a matter of dumb luck. .. Most bipoc members of the community understand that. It doesn't mean I'm not terrified when they show up on the scene. And they'll show up 6 or 12 deep or whatever. And I I'm not gonna stand down, but I'm acutely aware that anything could happen at any moment. ..I've had so many friends have horror stories of just walking down the street and you're just a black male and you'd get pulled over. And because something happened, you're the suspect. But in our legal system, it's from my experience. It's not even just the police. It's also the surrounding systems around it. Like I worked closely with the GRACE program, which is really supposed to be helpful for clients and I've heard so much racial micro-aggressions from the grace program case managers. .. Everyone in this system, how they talk about certain clients is really unacceptable. I went to two meetings and then I thought I was not going to go back because the A team meetings were just kind of disgusting, how they were talking about some of these clients. And these are people that are going into the homes and are supposed to be really advocating for them in that system. And it's the prevalence of racism in their systems alone as well just I think perpetuates it, and also kind of helps the police officers justify some of that behavior. (MHW)

I think about that A team meeting. I can't even bring myself to go. I try. I can't do it. I no longer have the tolerance for any of those meetings. I think I'm supposed to go to about 10 of them. I just don't even get into it anymore. They would not know the difference. (MHW)

I reported two years ago to the Ferndale police about my daughter being sexually harassed by a 12 year old in school and on the bus. The school told me to contact the police department I did that, and the police basically said they couldn't do nothing because the little boy was 12. Like where's the justice for her? What justice does she get? I feel like the only reason why she did not get justice, because the little boy was white, and had it been the opposite way around and everything, and my child was the one doing this, my child would have been arrested and everything, regardless of what age she was. (B&AA)

I don't think its fair at all, you know, any student who is a student of color, was always getting pulled over by the police or questioned or just the assumption was always that, you know, they were they were doing something wrong. Just there, you know, it's not that's not just fair. That's just bias. (ML2)

I think the experience is not good. The experience I had about five years ago with my son, his first car he bought, [it was broken into] and we realized it at 5:00 a.m. My son called the police, it was ten o'clock and the police never came. In other words, it was sad. It was my son's first car. They took everything. And they never showed up. We told the apartment manager. The manager called and they arrived in ten, 15 minutes. When we had so many hours waiting for someone to show up. It became very unfair to me from there. My children lost trust and ask why do we call the police, mom, if they never come? (FFW)

And when you are speaking they know you are Latino, right? Or from another country. And that's where they make a difference. (FFW)

Burdon on BIPOC

We have two teenage boys and my youngest is a high schooler, he just asked a girl to homecoming. And the girl is white, and I have already spent my morning crying to one friend, talking with the girl's mom, because I have always had to tell my boys, you know, you can't be alone with a white girl. You just can't, you cannot risk that. And my son's adorable and he really likes this girl, that was very clear. He's a good kid. I'm not concerned that he's gonna do anything, we talk about consent all the time, we talk about all of that, my concern is, how do we facilitate this date so that my child is not alone with this girl, which I'm sure is really fun for him to be thinking about. He doesn't know, but I've already reached out to her mom. I just want to meet the family and, you know, I'm trying to figure out how to keep my son safe. (B&AA)

And when it comes down to it, they are not going to believe a person, in our skin color over one that is white. (B&AA)

..my neighbor's daughter's husband is black, and when he moved to this community, which is we live out in the county, he specifically said he took his beautiful son down to that police station and said "we need to get to know you," He said, "my son is five, and I'm going to bring him and let him meet all your officers so that if ever any of them pick him up, he can say, I know officer Harris". I know he's doing this because he's saving his kid's life. It made me angry and also interested. But it's just unfair, we didn't have to take our [white] children down and meet every cop. (Parents)

for me personally, it's just a very much like a fear based power dynamic that I can't really shake. I'm always aware of law enforcement and very, I don't know, it's just like always something that's on my mind, whether I'm driving my car, whether I'm walking around, just like simple things like not feeling comfortable putting my hands in my pockets and stores. Just things like the way I've lived my life is very much in this like I'm always being watched in this kind of othering kind of way with law enforcement and I feel like unsafe [even], like maybe participating in various protests and stuff or demonstrations I feel like I was just different than everyone else and its easy to like pick me out. (SJA0)

I don't trust law enforcement in general. ... I also am fortunate enough in this community especially during wintertime. I just get pale and I just try and pass and survive. I learned growing up around here certain techniques of how to avoid drawing attention to yourself, right, we all do that. So what kind of car you drive, how fast you drive, are my windows not too dark - but just dark enough where you can't see really what I look like - a lot of different things, making sure your tabs are not expired, obviously it'll give them an excuse to pull you over. (School)

...after Trayvon Martin's murder, [my sons] had these little soccer hoodies with their name on the back, and refused to wear them after that, because they were five and seven at the time and all they heard about was the hoodie. And so they didn't want them and my younger son asked me if he was a bad boy. That same son at the traffic stop, like there was a suburban police car next to us and he just lost it. Screaming, "Mom you have to go, Mom they're gonna hurt us" I talked to my husband, we decided we needed to take a trip down to the police station. I want to say this was around 2015 or 2016 it was in the Herald and not the story I would have written for the Herald. But we went down and said look, you know, we've got to talk, we live here, our kids are terrified. These are the kids that are going to run. Okay these are kids that are going to run. Not because they've done anything wrong but all they've heard their whole life is

police killings of kids that look like them. We had over two hours long meeting where we talked with the officers and offered my children to ask other questions. Our oldest opted not to go at all, she was a senior in high school, but our younger sons when they showed the boys, all the, you know what's in their cars and the guns and what you're supposed to do first, second, third and how a fatal shot doesn't even enter the picture until all these other things have been exhausted. And my children said, "well how come they didn't do that in this case?", and to watch the officers have to answer the needs of the children was really interesting. (B&AA)

I personally do not feel like it's fair. From my own experience, I guess just because I have had negative experiences, unfortunately, with the police in Whatcom County. I also have many friends who are bipoc, who have had very negative experiences that have been very traumatic to all of us, unfortunately. I don't want to get deep, too. It's kind of like emotional for me to talk about, but there is a lot of things that could be done like more trainings, possibly. I've had friends and myself have very negative experiences that I just don't want to get into right now. (HES)

my experience with the families that I work with here is if you are a non legal immigrant, and you don't have the documents, there's the fear that the law will not serve you so in the case of child abuse, for instance, some people will not report because they might be undocumented. So the repercussions of accessing the legal system for the rights of the child who might be American, it's holding people back from reporting. So the fear of what would happen if I bring something that is obviously wrong, like child abuse to my family, or I'm not the breadwinner, by my partner is, so what would I do about domestic violence? So those barriers exist for the undocumented. (ML3)

Awareness and Funds of Knowledge

But we had our own conversation, and [the police] lamented the fact that they are the first ones called for a psychiatric complaint, and they have no safe training, but they are being called into situations that require their hyper vigilance that they're afraid that they're not properly trained. They were pretty vocal about how unsupported they felt, how undertrained they felt... I can see the officers wanting more training and more support, so that they can feel better equipped and I've also been on the other side where, you know, I have the kids who are going to run. (B&AA)

[I had a good experience with the police]. He gave me a 20-day warning. And if I didn't repair it, then I was going to get a ticket. All I had to do was repair it and show the paper where I had that problem fixed and show it at the police station. And that was it. But it was because I got a good cop and a good person. Now, when they prepare people for police officers, for any agency that's going to give a service to the public, they also do these psychological tests, don't they? Why not? From there to put a stop to someone who has racist tendencies or homophobic tendencies. Then they see that someone is not able to serve the public. Don't give him his job no matter how strong he looks to do the job, no matter how smart or whatever he is, if he's not going to serve completely, don't give him the job. (FFW)

What is missing here for our law enforcement officers is regular and consistent training to bring them up to speed on what they need to do. And also, there are programs within cities like Portland and other cities that actually have response units that deal with mentally challenged people that are going through mental episodes. So, if we could develop a unit that was our law enforcement team. This area's not that big. Just a few units with the fire department, and with the police department we would do so much better. Just

working with Opportunity Council gives me a perspective to see how to respond to trauma informed care and things of that nature. And I think as possible, very possible. (B&AA)

I feel like it could be a good place to start with more cultural awareness for sure. I feel like we do try to do our best job to be fair, and make sure we evaluate the cases. But we can only do so with the cases that get sent in to us, [and we see] a lot more minorities, and why is that? Is there something going on there? Do we need to examine that in the sheriff's office? (Pros)

I think this also circles back around to comfort with proximity, because all the trainings in the world, don't change what truly runs through their hearts and minds when they are faced with a black body. And I don't think that we'll stop dying until they have that healing. We talk about our trauma all the time, but they are traumatized, too. Their DNA is traumatized. You don't watch things like lynchings, and you don't come from a lineage of slavers, and not have an epigenetic trauma in your DNA too and I do believe that they are afraid of us. I think it's ridiculous and unwarranted. But it's also deadly. And we won't fix it, until they look at us and see someone they love or care about. If all their loved ones and everyone's goals and all the people that they deal with have white skin, no matter how many trainings they have in the US, they're gonna see us and respond with fear. (B&AA)

We express differently. The way we relate with one another is different and it's okay. White doesn't need to be the measuring stick, the way they communicate, the way they have disputes has nothing to do with me and my household or my community. I don't need to be more like them to be more palatable. They need to broaden what they see as humane, to include me in my community and take us very seriously. (B&AA)

I work in the foster care world, so I'm in court all the time. And data shows us that people of color and indigenous people's children are removed a lot more than white kids. I think because of bias and I think one of the worst kind of biases, people that don't know they have it, because I do believe we all have bias, but we need to keep those in check. I think one reason is just bias towards people of color. (SUMAS)

I think it's very hard these days for the law enforcement people out in the county and I just don't know if the officer is racist, or if they don't like a certain person or a certain race or something.. what did [the officer] do to trigger the guy to say, "hey, your dong this to me because I'm this color?" I'm really torn because is that guy just saying that because he is of color and that's what people say or I honestly believe that why did he get involved [with the officer] anyway? You've had to have done something to trigger them to come up to you or to pull you over or something like that. I'm saying like, they have an extremely tough job these days out there. I mean, people carry weapons. I think it all comes down to if those people would just do what [the police] tell them to do and listen to them. I think half the stuff would happen but for some reason they think they don't have to listen or they have rights not to listen. I think if the people would just listen to what [the police] are trying to do I think everything would be way, way better. ...[This is] both ways. If the suspect and the police could just talk and listen to each other, I think that will solve a lot of these problems. So, I figure there's a lot of "Oh, you're only doing this because I'm this color or this or that. I hear that always first and I'd be like, how did they get to this point, if they would just listen to each other I think everything would just be fine. (NES)

I have two ideas about this. One is that this is a cycle. And it's like a mathematical formula, desperation of someone's life circumstance equals frequency of trips through the justice system and the frequency of that distills in the Justice Department personnel a certain distrust for this person or culture or race, and

that distrust equals maltreatment. Maltreatment equals desperation and it starts all over again. I think if you take away the desperation of people's lives, everything calms down a little bit and cultures won't be overrepresented in our justice system. (NES)

Representation

I'm working with a survivor who doesn't have access to a phone or doesn't have access to transportation or able to afford a bus pass to come to court, and their experience as a survivor in the system is going to be very different than someone who's reliably calling back and coming to court and having their voice heard in different ways. I also have heard comments from survivors in the past about frustrations that there are no advocates in our office that look like them at this point. We have three victim advocates and two of us are white and one identifies as a Latina. But when survivors of color are coming into the office, and [they don't] see anyone that looks like them to represent their community, they will have a different experience than maybe they would working with someone who is from their same community. (Pros)

And we certainly saw there that the women who were using the YWCA services didn't even know how to access the legal system. You know, there's a lot of people that don't know how to advocate for themselves or get connected. I mean, when you're saying "just and fair", I guess just and fair would mean that everybody equally has representation and that all voices are heard. I think that's part of the structural problem that we need to figure out how to overcome legal and government all kind of goes together in that structure. (A&C)

I would like to see more people of color be part of the police. We're lacking people of color in the law enforcement. ...Nobody could actually go and talk to a lot of the immigration officers except me. They accepted me because of my background, and I stood my ground ... it would be nice to have individuals if within Lynden, or Blaine, more people of color, somehow another tied in to the law enforcement, if it'd be for speaking wise or, or mentoring wise. We know our people, we understand. We know our background, we know the courtroom and we have a better handle than other ethnic groups... (FBO)

You're supposed to be able to have a jury of your peers. That's very difficult if there's no other black people in town. And also, it's difficult for the indigenous people, because most of them don't live in the city. So if you are charged with something you're very unlikely to have anybody on the jury that looks like you, or could identify with you. (CE)

By collaborate, we want more than just sitting at the same table. We want them to actually listen and absorb our history and our experiences and what we need. Most times tribal people are forced to absorb what they're bringing to us. Like assimilation, they're trying to force us into fitting in here, into their system. (NT)

I think of law enforcement that there's not a lot of police officers or firefighters or EMTs of color and even out at the reservation.

Organizational Structures and Systems

...translators are a big deal, because people do not understand what's going on. And court is complicated. And being in a system that you don't know anything about and has a lot of moving parts, that has procedures, and you're just, you know, being put through it, like a machine. So if we can communicate better, and that makes things much more fair, because the people with resources hire people that understand the system. And the people without resources, they go through it not understanding what's

happening to them, they can't take advantage of the programs or the opportunities or even motions to dismiss, they get convicted more, all that stuff happens. I think communication is a big key. And we can improve that. (Pros)

I think that the criminal system - they have to dismantle it and rebuild it again, because I think that there's a lot of laws in there that are very old, and they're not beneficial to any people of color. I just feel very strongly that somebody should review all those laws, because I've seen that there's quite a few people of color that the criminal system does not defend, and they don't benefit from it. (FBO)

On the Lummi Indian Reservation, people don't look at us as a sovereign government. And we are a sovereign government we have our own law and order and we have our own court system. However, if you're not a Lummi, you cannot be arrested by a Lummi police officer. The Lummi police officer has to dispatch the current local jurisdiction to come out and do the arrest on our behalf. (FBO)

I don't know what the data says, but I definitely get looked at much more closely whenever I'm seen interacting with a person of color. Because the automatic assumption is that I am doing something to that person that is unjust. And I kind of have that constant look of suspicion when I'm doing my job because of it, and it does make it pretty difficult. I'm not saying that scrutiny is bad. I'm not saying that accountability is bad. I think those are all really good things. But we've really just gotten to a point where we are primed to assume the worst of whatever we see and then just run with it. And that's just become really, really tiresome. (LEFG)

you know, there's a lot of bad cops, no question about it. But there's a lot of good cops. (LFG)

I believe what we deem as unjust comes down to the judges that we elect. .. if we want change, we need to get more of the - and I truly hate the term people of color, just because it's just another way to separate - but in order to get change, we need more people of color to be informed voters, especially who we're electing into these seats, and the seats are the ones that are changing our lives. You know, if a judge decides to go above and beyond or not give someone the justified amount of sentencing or more sentencing than what's required, that judge gets to go home and not even think about it. His life does not change you know, the person's life who goes into jail, who goes into prison- their life has changed forever. Those families are changed forever. (CS)

I'm very concerned about the intersection of mental health and our legal system. (CE)

the jail is always a concern and issue. One of my good friends, her son is Hispanic, and he got arrested for drunk driving on New Year's. And they went to get him. It was a holiday. And then it was the weekend, and there were all these things. He's a 21 year old kid who made a mistake, right? He couldn't get bail for 48 hours, and he was in the Gen pop. It was a pretty scary situation. And we know the jail is unsafe. ..I do think that local jail in terms of looking at the legal system and our bail system and how quickly the turnaround is .. we need to have some structures of, does the crime fit the punishment, you're accused of something, you still have rights, and you're innocent until proven guilty. So why are we locking people up or setting really hard bails or waiting to get in front of somebody to even have your rights to be addressed? So there are some systemic issues with that jail.. (PW/U)

I feel like the city is like working on the alternative Response Team, where they're trying to have a non-violent police response deal and there's just not a lot of public information or ways to connect into the

development of that. I kind of feel like that reflects on how fair these processes are, like, the funding is less than a million dollars or something (SJA0)

if we look at the way our police treat houseless people, the amount of money that it spent to go and bring in Homeland Security and all those folks there could have been directly invested into housing and such. The way we think about how we solve solutions still is completely unfair. (SJA0)

criminal justice is like industry now. Private or private investors. I was listening to an interview with an officer the other day and he said, we don't have quotas, we have expectations, and that was really eye opening, because yeah, they don't have quotas, but the expectation is to have so many arrests every month, have so many stops and arrests and bookings. And so it's like this numbers game almost now, where it's like, we need to do this to justify our budget and if we don't do it, then we're not serving the community. You know, we're gonna have less cops, less cruisers, less technology to do the job when the job needs to be done. .. I think if we were to look at that more closely in a court setting, and have maybe some alternative, more alternatives for those situations, and it could facilitate justice and resolution and all that, but the prosecutor has to get convictions. (PDef)

let's abolish the whole thing. You know, - reformed doesn't work. And, you know, watching how everyone reacted violently to the defund movement is people like a lot of folks with the power and money aren't ready for any kind of change. (SJA0)

I do feel like there's sometime misunderstanding of not just someone's native language or their main language but even just what this language means. We have lots of jargon and codes and all these things that are not for anybody to understand, you need like an expert to understand. I feel like that makes it super unfair for people because there's this jargon, there's this cultural language. It's just so hard to understand. (NVFL)

Equal Access and Inclusion

I was called on for jury duty. And in the screening process, it was a drug case presumed dealer. And what came out in the questioning of the jurors was it must have been upwards of 70% of the people who were questioned, had some serious drug and alcohol abuse in their families. That there was a history of almost every possible juror commenting that there may be a potential bias and that woke me up to the extent to which families are affected by substance abuse disorder in our community. (ML3)

..my eldest son keeps having things happen to him. He says, but they don't come here anymore. I prefer to buy back what I lost. So it's very sad, because they no longer have the confidence to call the police to report something, because they are Hispanic. (FFW)

Indigenous

I can only speak on our treaty rights. Or practicing our treaty rights. Say for instance, we have a 418 Conservation closure. GMU 418 is a General Management Unit where we hunt elk, but it's under. I guess you could say it's a restriction. Bull [elk] only. This GMU closed in 1990 - there was a verbal agreement between the State and the Tribes because the population [of elk] went down. So for conservation purposes, we decided to close this area. The state decided to open the area back in 2006 and they opened it to all hunters under a state tag. Now, that to me, says that the state assumed jurisdiction of this GMU, so we went up there and we talked to them. The conversation with one of the agents out there turned into I guess an apparent threat where they said that I threatened an agent and they called the FBI on me and

they followed me. I was down in Big Bear Lake on vacation and they had suits go there and talk to me about this saying I threatened one of their agents because I brought up the judge Bolt decision. Now since that, we had conversations with the county prosecutors in Washington State because there's nine other tribes who hunt this GMU. It came to a point where the county prosecutors said that if you are caught hunting in this area, because there's two counties where this GMU is Skagit County and Whatcom County. Both county prosecutors said that if you guys are cited in GMU 418 goes to county court, they're going to turn it back to the tribes because this is a treaty rights issue - not a county issue. So it shows that they at a certain level are honoring our rights. And in out of fairness and out of rights, they are saying "well we can't interfere in tribal issues" which they can't really do anything anyways because then it becomes a US versus Washington State because our treaty rights are federal rights. (NT)

Yeah, our treaty rights are like inherent rights. And we're constantly having to fight and explain what a treaty right is. And we're always leery of things going to court because that sets legal precedents once a decision is made, and it not only affects Nooksack, it other tribes as well. So you know, we're very cautious. (NT)

And a lot of people don't understand sovereignty and are constantly attacking our sovereignty. And when you don't understand something, you fear it. I think a lot of people think that treaties are outdated, or, constantly challenged and you know, this is a treaty between two sovereign nations. And you look at all the case law for natives - not only Nooksack, but Lummi, just natives in general that once there's case law it impacts all of us. So, you know, we have our people being arrested for hunting for fishing, you know, look at Billy Frank and his story - how many times he was arrested just for fishing on the Nisqually River. Just because of Billy Frank, and his fight, you know, and we still are fighting, we're still fighting that fight. We may not necessarily be going to jail, but it's still a fight between native and non-native fishermen and crabbers, and you know, it's modern day war. (NT)

[Pleased with Current System](#)

I feel like our system is exceedingly fair. I was a prison chaplain in Southern California for six years. And I visited prisons in Brazil, Peru, Philippines, Indonesia and Thailand. And my experience of walking through those prisons, and then coming back to our prison system for representation for access to lawyers, even if you don't have any money, you know, to cleanliness, food, the whole thing comparatively to what goes on around the world. The United States has the most fair and just criminal system in the world. It's filled with problems. But they pale in comparison to what's happening in prisons around the world. And so, yeah, I think I think it's incredibly fair. (NVFL)

Question 6: Please describe your relationship with local law enforcement, as relate to any personal interactions you've had with them.

[Prejudice and Racism](#)

Farmworkers [and] Latinos get racially profiled all the time. They get treated really badly, and spoken to like they're nobodies. They're afraid of being stopped by police because of their relationship with

Homeland Security. And there is a good old boy network between policemen ... So there is a law enforcement club type of thing going on. Because there's so many law enforcement people in Whatcom County, from the feds, all the way down. (SJA0)

I ran into a lot of bad officers... one time I was on crutches and had an officer sit there and hit me and push me when I was on crutches. I wasn't doing nothing, but because I wasn't walking fast enough. ..but then there's other good officers now. So yeah, it's still rough. (CS)

My personal experience with law enforcement has drastically changed being married to a deputy. And to me it's going to go back to people fear what they don't know. So when any police officer did not know me, of course the way that I look is semi intimidating. I'm tattooed. I mean, look at this mustache, I look about as Mexican as it gets, you know, and so it's one of those things that like people do is they're gonna make an assumption until they talk to you until they get to know you. (CS)

In Everson when we first moved here, and the police chief at the time, actually took a few of his officers to my husband's office, and was basically like, this is so and so - it's so and so's husband. and made sure to make that connection in an effort to be like, "okay, don't mess with him". And I felt like that really says something that he felt like he needed to go and do that. And, of course, like we're thankful for that, because, he was obviously trying to protect him from whatever, but that just really speaks volumes as to you know, being a black man in this community. (SUMAS)

I would say by and large in my own personal interactions, They're fine. Like I don't hate police during witness interviews, and they are nice to me because I'm like, I don't know why, but you know, I don't give them any reason to feel threatened by my actions or my appearance or their judgments about me or anything like that. So like, I have a fine, general relationship, but I've had some really horrifying interactions that include, like a cop who I interviewed who expressed during the interview exceptionally racist beliefs that led to his sort of recognition as a police officer with what's called potential impeachment material in his record because he completely stereotyped and prejudiced people from other races other than his own. And so I mean, I've had some really horrifying experiences with individual officers. I've heard through clients of really sickening behavior with officers. I've come across really terrible behavior by officers, you know, either through their own statements or through what I've learned about them from reliable clients or enough clients who may have questionable reliability but all report the same things that. (PDef)

Oh, this is where my white privilege definitely steps in, man. They're always great to me. I always get just what I need. You know, that's their job to protect white people. And I'm one of them. Yeah, I'm gonna say their job is to protect white people. (CE)

I live right on the border of South Hill and Sehome, and I feel like where I live affects the way I'm treated by law enforcement. It's interesting. There's just a sort of a, almost like a different level of respect, when they show up out here. (Parents)

The actions and the symbolism that they have put out is contrary to all the rhetoric that they give community. One of the strongest symbols or behavior of police is that when they talk to you, their hand automatically goes to their gun, it just rests on their holster and their gun. And that is a very strong, threatening action. And that happens a lot with people of color. It is white fear, I think that law enforcement is afraid of people of color, and that fear creates violence against us. And that violence is physical sometimes, but it's also that micro-aggression type of thing.. they're afraid of you and there's

nothing we can do short of turning white to get rid of that fear that they have about us... it's deep seated in them. And in there, it's almost like they get training on how to be afraid of us and I think that's something they need to address. (SJAO)

Burden on BIPOC

I guess I've had some pretty traumatic experiences at the hands of police so I always kind of look for them and have pretty bad anxiety when I do interact with them. Especially after January 28, that's something that I like still have nightmares about. And just like how violent they were literally felt like we were in the middle of like a war. (SJAO)

I mean, literally, I have a policeman that lives two houses down from me. I have another officer lives across the road from me... And at least with me, the interactions have been positive. Um, you know, my kids being pretty young, you know, they're still at that cute age. ...when does, my little five-year-old guy, you know, what if he grows up to be, six two or six four, you know? I mean, yes, things seem positive, but I mean, things can turn in a second. And despite all the positive interactions, there's always that lingering fear...my dad tried to explain that to me, when I was younger, and I didn't really understand it, but I mean, there's that lingering fear that, you know, keeps me awake at night. Because you just never know how quickly things can turn. (FBO)

I will add that [BIPOC] always think about [interactions with police] whereas like for me, I've never thought about cops. I'm worried that maybe I'll speed, they'll pull me over. But that's it, that's the extent of what I'm worried about. Never have I been worried that they're going to do something bad to me. (Parents)

He always has to think about the police and what will happen [as a BIPOC], whereas I never have [as a White person]. (Parents)

I try to be friendly, you know, they drive around our neighborhood or if I'm out walking, I try to wave so they realize I live here and I'm not a stranger. You don't need to pick me up or anything. Again, I'm the only Asian in my communities so I certainly don't fit in. But I have some of that a little bit of fear that. Yeah, if I did need to call them, they would just be like, you know, do you really live here like, why are you here, because yeah, I obviously don't look like everybody else. (AAPI)

the other day she had a car full of people and they were just leaving church, and all of a sudden the lights are on behind her, and she said it was just so viscerally terrifying, and she pulled over, and he was just letting her know that she had left her purse on top of the car. And she said you know you think that would be like a happy story except that you're still terrified, and your adrenaline's still up, just the way that it made her extra sad that even a good interaction can be poisoned by that realistic fear. (Parents)

...the police come to the school fairly often. Um, which I, I know really stresses the students out. It really makes them feel scared and stressed. Um, we've been having a lot of vandalism at the local high schools. So kids trashing bathrooms breaking stuff. It's been an ongoing issue. And the police are called and it seems, in my opinion, to escalate the kids, they really get stressed out. Yesterday, we actually had a lockdown which was really scary. We were locked down for like three hours. The police came with canine units. There was a credible threat that someone had a gun at school. It was very scary. Um, and it was really intense. And it just, I, I guess it would just say it seems there's a lot of intensity and comes in this fairly escalated way from the beginning. (A&C)

Inequity

Mine have always been extremely positive. I don't make an assumption that they're after me, of course, if they're walking down the street because I just want to get to have my low white bubble entitlement middle class bubble. I'm sort of immune from that. I've had nothing but really excellent interactions (ML2)

I think about this as a question for me. I think what shows up for me is a little bit more patriarchal right. My experiences with cops have more to do with me being a woman in that space than race. (ML2)

I'm just a 30 year old white dude with glasses. And it seems like all the interactions I've had have just been kind of chummy, like, how's it going, man, you know, like passing by on the sidewalk or whatever. And I've never been scared or even getting pulled over and there's never been any element of fear in those interactions.

Representation

Yeah, I would say again, representation matters. There's everybody on the police department here is white and Everson and Sumas - no people of color. I would say cultural awareness training, and having a professional come in and talk to them about that is a start, but also a lot of people on our police department are from here. (SUMAS)

I want to bring up something that's troubling. I am overly concerned recently about this public representation. It's called ammo and grace I don't know if you've ever heard of it but it's good people with good hearts that now I think ever since the situation with all lives matter and then blue lives matter and all that, I think that's when this came up more in my more conscious level, but I'm really concerned and I'm kind of scared about the power that they've had. But their message if I were to interpret it is whether it's a man or woman, goes out to defend people every day, I have to deal with the fact that he or she is in jeopardy, and they're willing to live this lifestyle so back off and quit saying that cops are bad. And it started out as a little message and people are going like, oh all lives matter, oh yes we care about black lives but we also care about the good cops in it. But in the last bit, it's just becoming ugly. And so I guess, as far as I say, with my relationship with local law enforcement, it isn't necessarily local law enforcement, but it's the people of privilege that are defending cops over the fact that something has to change. So that's what's on my heart right now. (Parents)

Equal Access and Inclusion

..a caregiver that sharing a lot of frustration about calling local law enforcement and not getting any response or feedback because she had a very thick accent. And so they never took any of their concerns seriously, until this individual ended up getting hospitalized. And so this caregiver had multiple phone calls that they made to law enforcement and they were never taken seriously just because of how they talked and that, English was not their first language. (MHW)

Awareness and Funds of Knowledge

I know de-escalation with police has been a big issue, but I think that there is a huge problem with that. I think we're trying to address this a little bit as a community, but I think the biggest problem with that is how much police are expected to deal with things that are not crimes. There's nothing really criminal happening, but there's some assumptions that a crime could be happening. And so like homeless camp, or

other things where the police are expected to come into a mental health situation. And I've experienced when I was working in DV SAS, I experienced that a lot. That was our protocol for when someone had a mental health, breakdown, and I think a lot of organizations, that's their protocol, and I've never seen it make the situation better. And it usually exacerbated that person's mental illness symptoms that they were having at that time. I think it's just beyond law enforcement of having more alternatives that actually work . (A&C)

Need more training and relationships (HES)

Safe Places and Accountability

It feels more comfortable when we sit at the table - when we're sitting level to somebody, when somebody doesn't think that they're superior to us. If we're at the table and it's supposed to be government to government that we're equal. ...and once you get there, then the conversation goes smoothly. And everybody has an understanding and we walk away with something.

I honestly feel like it's great. The only time I've ever gotten in any kind of truly negative interaction is in the city of Bellingham. When I get flipped off by random people driving by just because I'm in a uniform. Constantly, I have people drive up while I'm parked on the side of the road and try to hand me a coffee card or just pulling over and thanking us for what we do. I can't go to a coffee shop without having at least one person walk up and say, "thank you for what you do. We appreciate you being out there. We know it's tough". I really think in Whatcom County that law enforcement has a great relationship with their community. And I think we've worked really hard to build that. I can only speak for the Sheriff's Office, but I wholeheartedly believe that all of us are out here doing what we do because we want a safe community. We love being a part of a community and that respect goes both ways. I've run into former inmates outside on the streets. I can't tell you how many times they're all just eager to tell me how well they're doing or you know, it's not a negative thing. I think we've got it really well here. (LEFG)

... almost everybody I come into contact with, from the side of enforcement, almost every interaction is positive. Even if I'm writing someone that ticket, the last thing they say to me is usually "Thank you". ... I think generally we do enjoy a pretty good relationship with people. (LEFG)

We are very fortunate to have the relationship that we have with our community. (LEFG)

A Call to Action and Consequences

I did a lot of stuff when I was gang bangin, but, you know, that's my own fault. That's my fault. You know. That's why I want to give back to the community and do a lot of things... Ever since I got out of prison. I didn't bang. I'll sit there and like do stuff with the police. Like, car shows and stuff, or fundraisers for them. You know, bring out for fallen officers, you know, even just anything for children, women and the homeless, you know, stuff like that. Help the police officers, and fire departments. You know, that's what our car clubs about and pretty much they're seeing that we're good people and you know, different race and even though we all got tattoos and ride bikes and low riders. But you know, we're just like everybody else. We're good. We're family people. We drive around with our wife and our kids, I get officers to pull up next to us and give us thumbs up and keep going. (CS)

Organizational Structures and Systems

...can you get a bad cop? Absolutely. Can you get somebody who just wants to be a dickhead and wants to show that they're a bully - to me those guys were the jocks of the varsity, right - they just want to push around the underclassmen and they feel that they have more power than me because I'm considered just a citizen and they're law enforcement. (CS)

Indigenous

I think between the tribal police and the sheriff's office, we have a pretty good working relationship there. Jurisdiction is still often a topic that gets convoluted. A lot of our tribal lands are trust lands and not reservation, which requires the state and county to be involved in any law enforcement activity on those lands and then our people aren't happy with that because they'd much rather deal with their tribal police than the sheriff's office. (NT)

For general law enforcement, Sheriff, Sheriff's Department, deputies and city police, I don't think we've had issues you know, there have been occasional issues but quite honestly that was a personal issue. However, on the other hand, there's the Fish and Game officers. Those are the ones we have issues with. Those are the ones that are out there trying to tell us our treaty rights. They want to tell us what we can and can't do out there and what their jurisdiction and our jurisdiction is. And that's what happened when I had the FBI called. It was like, "we have an Indian out here, who's talking and who is speaking up". So you know, he's considered an activist kind of thing. The relationship between tribes in WDFW is not a very good one. I think everything that's negative goes towards our resources. And we are fighting for our resources every single day. Our cultural resources and natural resources are like that. They're not different. It's the same. (NT)

Every single day is a fight. It's like we get up knowing that there's a fight coming. We're still in the fight and that aint gonna change. I think if we go to the schools and we have them teach the Point Elliott treaty, there'll be an understanding. That's where the big misconception is, people outside think that we get everything - that tribes tribes get free everything. No we don't. I mean look at my dad. He's a strong man. You know, he's 76 years old. And he asks me how you doing son when we're hiking. But this is because he's been fighting every single day of his life. He's his green eyed, pale skin. You know, not wanted by the outside community and had to fight for his seat here in our Nooksack community. ...I mean, that's just who we are as people. We have to fight every single day, every single day. There's always a fight, even within our own people. So, that's why we have strong people you know, because they're resilient. They know they have to fight and they let it just roll off their back. Because the fight continues. (NT)

I think it's important to mention that when we talk about fighting, we are not coming on with aggression or hostility. Based on our traditions and our values, we usually come to battle with grace. We know that this is our territory, this is our land. And we've allowed settlement here. And so oftentimes tribes are perceived as being aggressive, or wanting to fight in a negative way. And that's not true. We often come with grace and do our best to move forward in a good way. (NT)

Question 7: To what degree have you ever tried to access a local service or program and had a negative experience based on your race?

Prejudice and Racism

I've been in contact at a local food bank, and my father was just trying to grab some food. And there's I think this one lady there like a family right behind us, and I guess my dad was just trying to grab some fruit and they were getting mad and stuff. And they yelled at him, told him to go back to his country, and stuff like that. And my dad doesn't speak English, so it was hard for him to fight back. But there was another man that helped him out and he talked back to the person, you know, so yeah, he had his back. (SFF)

I was trying to buy a house in my neighborhood. So I know my neighbors know who I am right because I'm black and they see me but the person when we did not move forward with the home, kept my deposit and refused to give it back. And when my real estate agent asked, 'why are you holding it?' to the other agent, the homeowner said, 'because we don't believe that she tried in good faith to buy the house'. And so I had to get an attorney to get my deposit back. And all the attorney did was write a letter to say, 'we've reviewed the contract, there is no reason for you to hold this \$5,000 deposit'. And they couldn't respond to that. So they let it go. And it took me like eight weeks to get my deposit back. Only under duress from a letter from an attorney. But it felt like a real it felt like an assault. It means speaking of belonging, that's when I was like this. I don't belong here. These people don't want me here. (FBO)

I did as a mother. One of my children, we were trying to enroll him in that accelerated path, and we had to fill out a form about our family demographics. And it was interesting because they saw from the deficit perspective, they assume because I speak Spanish and we raised the kids bilingual, they put us on a path for what we wanted was a gifted program, not the other side. (ML3)

I've definitely heard clients complain about being profiled in medical settings where they like keep getting questions about their drug use when it's either not relevant at all, or it was like a really long time ago. And it's made it so some of my clients actually didn't even want to be involved with me as a counselor because they just completely lost trust in the system and were really traumatized by the experience of trying to like better their health. (MHW)

We actually tried to take a kid the other day to get a physical at one of the walk in clinics and we made the mistake of the two male councilors of color going with the kid. Suddenly, we were told, "you don't have to have an appointment, come in at this time and it will be perfect". And then they were like, "well come back at one" and then some guy in the back said something like, "no, they gotta come back at six now". It's like six?, okay, that's not going to work. They end up setting the appointment for us a day later, but that kid was unable to wrestle for a day just because he and I got in the car was like it was a mistake. We should have had the white counselor. At least go and interpret for us the need for services. (School)

Equal Access and Inclusion

I'll just say I've worked a lot with getting people into resources. On the behavioral health end, and it doesn't even come up. Like it's a non issue. It's just whether or not they have openings. I mean, Unity care, you're going to be nine months out no matter who you are. So you know, we have an issue getting people in to some mental health programs, but it has nothing to do with race, ethnicity, sex, or gender, it's just, we need more providers. (LEFG)

if you don't have time as a resource that's even harder to get the things you want. That's always been a barrier for me. I have to work two jobs at a time to make things happen or meet bills and stuff. And so trying to schedule anything outside of that is hard, but that's not really an impact based on my skin color. (SJAO)

Inequity

I've had a lot of doctors assume that I was being overly dramatic or that I was lying or that my symptoms weren't bad enough. And one example is, I took Wellbutrin for a while for anxiety, depression, whatever. And I started getting really blurry vision and not feeling well and had some other symptoms. And I went to see my doctor a couple times. And they were like, Oh, you'll get used to it, you'll be fine. A couple weeks later, I had my first seizure. And then over the course of the next six weeks, I had two to three more that we know of - one requiring me to be hospitalized. And when we were at the doctors it was at St. Joe's, we told them I'm on Wellbutrin. I think these are side effects. I know that had been taken off the market many years ago for a period of time because people were experiencing seizures. And they're like, "Nope, that's not it". My mother, a white woman, comes in and says you know, she's on Wellbutrin and it's probably causing her to have seizures and absolutely they all jump to you and were like, "oh my gosh, you're right. That must be exactly what's happening". I'm a grown adult woman and like my mother had to come in and tell them the exact same thing I was telling them for them to take it seriously. Stopped taking Wellbutrin. Stopped having seizures. My doctor was like, "Oh, why didn't you mention that?" I was just anxious and stressed and freaking out and didn't have the wherewithal to file a complaint or do anything about it because I think that's also part of this system is that they make it so challenging and so difficult that even once you realize that your rights have not been followed through with, you don't have the energy or the time or the ability. I work full time and I couldn't take weeks off to go like harass this doctor and make them own up to it or provide proof and evidence and get all my records and they tried to use HIPAA against me saying I couldn't get my own records. ..So then I just got a new doctor because that was the only thing I could think of to do. (MHW)

I'll just say no. (ML3)

No, not because of my race. (ML3)

I have not I am white (HES)

I went to the hospital for two weeks almost. And that's because they basically kind of kept saying that I was overreacting about my symptoms. doctors were basically saying, Oh, you're overreacting, like nothing's wrong with you. And I was actually very sick. They're like, Oh, how long have you been feeling this? I was like, I've been here kind of like two weeks, dude. Like, I'm not feeling good. And some doctor who was bipoc actually listened to me. And they said, Oh, this is your health issue. (HES)

I've had children who were sick and had to be hospitalized and their parent had a thick accent. And the doctor wouldn't talk to them. They talked to me, and I'm not related to them. I was like their teacher in the classroom. I was like their when they had the seizure or whatever happened and went along with the family just as an extra layer of support. And they wouldn't even talk to the Mom. And I was like, "no, I am not this child's caregiver. I'm not their parent. I can tell you what happened when I was with them. But we really need to talk to mom and mom needs to be the decider of what we're doing here". (MHW)

We try to get services for our community. 90% of the time, it's negative and 95% of the time, my community just doesn't want to go. And the only way that they will access those services is if one of our folks goes with them, and then follows up exactly the processes in any service in Whatcom County that is not equitable to people of color. And it all depends on the people on the frontlines, you know, whoever's on the front desk and all of that, but I think it goes beyond that the people serving people of color, it's just the way that the organizations and the institutions are structured. They're overly bureaucratic, they're

structured to make it more difficult for poor people of any color, actually, even white people to access the services. It's a clear position of "it's your fault you're poor. Somehow, you got this problem". So they make it harder for you to get any kind of help. (SJA0)

I had a pretty bad experience with my first pregnancy in Bellingham, with getting refused to be taken on by any of the midwife agencies and then eventually going to Peace Health and them treating me very, very poorly. So much so that I had the midwife call me and apologize afterwards. (MHW)

I think I am a pushy white woman who usually gets what she sets out to do, and I've seen a lot of it. I do think that I've had a few situations where I've been like okay, that guy is not going to respect me because I'm a woman. But I tend to not care. I have the confidence behind me to do that. ...I can't imagine what it would be like for somebody of color and female. I mean, that must be 10 times harder. (NES)

I have over my oldest daughter, when she started acting out and started running away I couldn't come to our tribal community because she's non tribal. She's not registered as a Native American. She's not registered as Native Hawaiian. She's not registered as Hispanic. And then when I went to the county, they say, well you live in a Native community, so. And the way we were treated by the State, was we were unfit to be parents. It's not what they said, it's how they said it. And being a native man, I'm no stranger to how we're treated by the outside community. And the way it was dealt with, our hands were tied and neither party is better for it. You know, my daughter, she's gonna be 30 years old. And she's looking at time in federal prison, in penitentiary, and she lived on the streets for the last decade in LA. Had we had the assistance from the state at the time I know the outcome would have been different. I could say that I'm the only one that feels that way because it was my daughter, but I've seen it happen to other families since my daughter and I've told them and I've shared that story many times with other families. (NT)

Two weeks ago I went to Jagers of all places. I love jaegers but that was not a good experience for my husband and I. We both got to our car and we both said the same thing. I was followed by three different employees. And every one of them asked me what I was looking for. And I told them I was browsing, you know, because we were looking for SmartWool stuff to get us ready for paddling season and I felt really uncomfortable there and that was the first time I felt uncomfortable at Jagers because you know, that's a store that's been here forever. And it was a really weird feeling and just to be followed around and questioned and not even be able to browse the store. And I haven't felt that way in a long time. And I was pretty offended by the third person that asked me and I finally said to him, I'm not going to steal anything. You know, I said it, and the look on his face was like he was appalled that I verbalized it, but he was following me around like I was gonna steal something. So it's okay for him to follow me around and make me feel uncomfortable but for me to say something to him, he is taken aback by it. So that was the first time in a long time I felt uncomfortable in a store that I went to. And my husband felt the same way, and he was followed to in different sections of the store and I was really disappointed in that experience. (NT)

as an adult out here I haven't really experienced anything but I'm very outspoken. I will not take anybody's crap. ... with my wife's new position, there's like a few community members and like even teachers that won't come to her even though like it's her job to work on certain things, they'll still go to the white principal. And there have been parents that have told my wife, [they will only talk to white staff]. (SUMAS)

I have a patient right now who's pregnant and transferred to PeaceHealth and has been talking about what great care she received. But she is a very specific demographic, right, which none of us are. She's white, she's young. I remember thinking of course you would get great care. I don't hold that against her. Like obviously I'm glad she's getting good care. But it's funny there's a lot of people who are saying that they have bad experiences and then you're that one person (MHW).

Personally No. A lot of it's done like online now. So hopefully they don't make choices based off what I look like. But I will say you know I've had comments from other people of color, which is interesting that they have felt that pressure before - or from law enforcement - or from an agency of like, well, it's because "I'm this" which I always thought was kind of funny from my experience. I couldn't relate to that. So I don't know if it's something there the way that we perceive certain interactions and then we have some barriers up already to begin with that then create this tense relationship of like well because I'm of color or whatnot, but personally, programs or local agencies, I've never had a negative experience. (NVFL)

Representation

when I was working at DV SAS and we would have to go to different service providers and it was often assumed that I was the client and so I would show up and be like, "Oh, no, actually, I'm here to support the person. But, I mean, I know I'm pretty fully tattooed. And so there's an assumption that happens there. I think it's especially difficult for black people in Whatcom County to access any services, like there's such a stigma, like there's so much stigma like othering and like, weird tiptoeing that happens that I think just feels exhausting. For black clients that I had, there is just almost like a panic. I feel like that can happen or people just there may be slightly aware of like institutional racism. And so then they end up working with somebody who's black and then they just are on edge kind of the whole time because they don't want to like mess up or something. And I've seen it, I've witnessed what my clients were talking to me about. (A&C)

I would argue representation is a huge solution that if we could have a diverse group of people in power, then that would help a lot. And then, of course, in my own education, teachers, like we need diverse teachers. (A&C)

Organizational Structures and Systems

I've experienced it in my own life and heard similar stories from other people. Like not only having diverse leadership, but cultivating diverse leadership, because I think when people get into these leadership positions, if they're coming from any sort of marginalized background, they're going into these heavily privileged, very affluent, [situations] and they end up leaving because it feels so unsupportive and it feels awkward and they aren't getting the same mentorship and support as the white lawyer that goes into prosecuting or something. I've seen a marginalized people go into that system and then just be like, fuck it, I'm doing something else because they just had such a bad experience and didn't feel like anybody was invested in their career. I think having systems in place that really do connect people who also have similar lived experience. And then build mentorship programs for people that maybe they're the first person in their family to do something. They don't have this background of, you know, my dad was a judge and those persons and so it's more alienating. (A&C)

Burden on BIPOC

I think there's a healing portion that we have to do internally within our own community, because there can be bias in services, and sometimes we don't get access. Not everyone in the community gets the same treatment on access. And so you then you try and get access off the community, outside the community and when you're already living in poverty and you're already struggling, it is really not an easy thing to ask for help. I had to ask for help through the Opportunity Council, and they literally made me feel like I was a thief or something, and then my non-native friend who was the one that told me about it that was working with me, she got through without submitting any of these documents, she just immediately got through, and I was being grilled, you know, and it's just like jeez you know how much I made last year? hardly nothing, right and that's already embarrassing enough, so then you gotta go and make people feel even worse. And then I think about having a vehicle, I got an a major car accident and I thought about these things for a long time but just like going to get your medication and you're using Medicaid and you get there and then your insurance is all messed up and you go back three times and I had to go all the way across town to where they can make my medication. And I'm thinking, what about the people that have to ride buses, and get out there and try to get their medication and then it's not ready. The whole system is just not set up very well, and the whole system's not healthy, and they don't take into account how they're already affecting people that are already struggling (IFG)

Question 8: How satisfied have you been with your own, or your children's experiences in local education?

Prejudice and Racism

I get told about [my race] at school and stuff. I don't really care cuz it doesn't really hurt me. It doesn't like I don't really care about it. I only care if it's like towards my mom and stuff because like they take care of me and stuff and I don't really mind it at school because I just hear it every day said I just like don't really mind it.... [I hear] "oh, you're a beaner" or whatever. And they're like, "Why are you talking like some Taco Bell stuff?" and I just don't want to complain because I don't really care what they say. (SFF)

We've had issues.. we're up in the Lynden School District. So there's, issues with Christian patriarchy. There's issues with non LGBTQ, there's issues with racial things, there's issues with nonconformity of behavior that's perceived as not necessarily normal. (ML2)

Well, I guess one example that we can talk about is the recent protest or demonstration that Lynden school parents or school did against masking... There is always the potential for violence up here, where the passions run really high - you'd be wary and it's a concern. I know that the bullying is horrendous. I mean and the inequity in how some kids have punitive action taken after them. And other kids not. So there's a lot of inequity in that and I mean we're talking even school bus drivers and behavior on school buses. (ML2)

My daughter is in the middle school at Shuksan. I had a very bad experience there, a very bad experience. A teacher was bullying my daughter. Thank God, the other teachers took action. The principal took her out of school, but the experience was a little difficult. I had to go to the school district for support, so they could do something. It's my daughter who is still very fearful of teachers because the teacher looked

down on her because she was Hispanic. So yes, it was very, very difficult....I have been more careful when she tells me she has a problem, I try to be there with her to make sure how serious things are. And right now at school I have to be there. They took her phone away from my daughter because she was at lunch sending me a text and she showed them that it was for me. And the person took it away from her. It made her cry. My daughter still has the trauma from school as a child. So she talked to me crying, [I went to the school] and I arrived angry and crying because I couldn't protect my girl. Yes, we were in tears and frightened and I did not know that the person who was at the door was the assistant principal and I explained to her what was happening and that bothered me a lot, because how was it possible that if there were children of my daughter's age eating, who are American, with the phone in their hands but they only took it away from my daughter. Then she got upset, but since they have cameras she said I am going to check the camera, don't worry, everything is fine and I have anxiety attacks and it was going very badly. She told me not to worry, from today your daughter can send you texts. And it worked. She helped me a lot. (FFW)

I remember when I went to Ferndale. My bus driver told me she's like you could do whatever you want to do for your religion, but don't talk about it. We have to hide our articles of faith and they can't be shown. Yeah, which I still carry that with me today. I still have a hard time openly wearing my article of faith because of that. Because of that discrimination I faced it was ingrained into me and it was not just one district and not just one teacher. It was entire school systems within Whatcom County both Bellingham and in Ferndale, which I think are the two biggest in Whatcom. I was told like my bus driver, she said, she's like you could wear your article of faith. She said, don't talk about it. Don't show it. And that was it. And I was in fifth grade and I'm when you're in fifth grade and people figure out what they see they start to ask you questions about it (YAS)

High School definitely brought a lot of insecurities. I gotta say as a child. I feel like a lot of people went through a lot of insecurities like my biggest one was food. I want to have my Indian food but I can't open it because it smells - it has a really strong smell to it. Or my name is so long - I am not embarrassed, but just insecure of you know openly saying what my name is or how it's pronounced or the way I dress or the fact that I don't shave, I have to hide my legs or I have to hide this and that because I don't want to be looked down upon I feel like till this day I feel like that still is you know happening even in 2021. You still get looked down upon about certain things. (YAS)

I think when going into sports when you specifically have to go up to the coach and ask hey, I'm not gonna wear these short shorts playing volleyball that's kind of embarrassing. You don't want to be the one person who has to wear like tights under their basketball shorts ... people are looking at you when you go to games.. (YAS)

We actually had a teacher send a note back home to my brother that for his silver bracelet¹. He said that it was making too much noise when he was writing on the desk. If he wanted to wear it, he had to tape it to his hand when he was at school. Our silver bracelet is probably the easiest article of faith to keep, and even with that he got a note sent home...(YAS)

At this point Ferndale school system should be very well equipped with having Sikh students in their classes because Ferndale is very large and growing in our community. Ferndale High School is just making a new high school right now because of this large growing population of students. A lot of these

¹ "Silver Bracelet" refers to a *kara*, an article of faith worn by members of the Sikh community.

people are Sikh there's more coming into these communities. I think maybe after Spanish, Punjabi is the third most spoken language in Whatcom County. It just kind of is mind boggling to me how are we still having the same issues when my mom went to the school 20 or 25 years ago, I went to this school 10 years ago and all my siblings are going to the school today over these generations. How are we still having the same problems every single time? Don't tell me that you don't have education. Don't tell me that you haven't experienced this before. All those excuses are null. It's absolute BS. You don't want to. They absolutely do not. Teachers don't want to take the initiative of learning about their students. Administrators don't want to take the initiative of making a couple of parents upset. They don't want to add more on to their plate. And it's just ridiculous because I know young boys who have cut their hair because of bullying in school. Like these are real issues that we're really facing on Whatcom County and it's just the same every single time. (YAS)

I don't think there's much that has changed in the 20 years since I've been at high school. Nothing has changed, actually. It's almost two weeks ago, my daughter was called a racial slur at school, at recess by a little boy. And I knew that this this day was going to come but I didn't know it was going to come this quick ... it opened my eyes to a lot of things and then also for the school's response to address the situation was not surprising. They didn't do anything. And we actually heard it from [someone else]. My daughter's best friends with his daughter. And she was there at the time the boy called her the name but it was kind of frustrating how the school just kind of brushed it away - they didn't even think it was a racial intention at all, which was really frustrating. ... not only did the boy call her a racial name, he pushed her and then followed her after. So I was actually livid and we called right away and said "hey, we need to talk to you about this and we need to justice situation because you guys not address it". We didn't even get a phone call. So we set up a meeting and honestly, I was really frustrated. ...she didn't do any work. She didn't go talk to any of the students. She didn't talk to the teachers. I was told that when the kids ran up and told the recess duty she kind of didn't do anything. (SUMAS)

I'm just horrified by some of the stories that I've heard. One family told me that their son is black, but the mom is white. And at Everson Elementary, he was riding home from school, and a kid from his school, followed him on his bike, took off his belt, and started whipping him with a belt. They tried to address it with the principal, and he said "sorry, I can't really do anything about it." ...when I hear those things it makes me just want to pack up and move to Bellingham. And it's just really frustrating because they don't see that there's an issue out here. (SUMAS)

A story I heard yesterday is about a kid that kept getting bullied and the bully's parents didn't do anything. So this kid finally got fed up and slapped the kid that was bullying him, and he got arrested, and he will have a juvenile record until he is 18 and myself, I try to teach my kids to stand up for yourselves. And the stuff that keeps me up at night, you know, why is this kid getting an arrest record that will follow him? (Parents)

There's a lot of bullying going on at school, on school premises that my children go to. They don't seem to care. They talk to the student and that's as far as it goes. There's no punishment and this is bullying with putting hands on other kids. And we're almost giving up on the school system because it's starting to get so bad. We make reports weekly to the elementary school. We tell our girls to report it as soon as it happens. And it just continues to happen. Same people same stuff. So we're almost to a point where it's like maybe they shouldn't have public school. Or maybe we should do homeschooling so they wouldn't be exposed to such bullying at a place that they're supposed to feel safe. .. I don't know what the problem

is. Maybe my kids aren't rich enough or something and the kids that are bullying them happened to be from very well to do families in the neighborhood. That might have something to do with it. But I don't know. It seems like the school is not concerned with bullying. Even as it's as it's happening. (PDef)

when Trump was in office, I had multiple students of color breakdown in our lessons. They were dealing with racist remarks from their peers. Dealing with kids saying really mean things and not having any kind of accountability process available or healing process available. That's what I've observed as a teacher. (SJAO)

People feel okay to bully other people or question other people because they know that the system will support them in some way they know that they will get that support from the teachers because they know that they won't speak up. (YAS)

I hear people saying [racist comments]. But like, it doesn't really affect me personally because I don't really care what other people say about me. (SFF)

I hear a lot of [racist stuff] at school, but I mean, like, I just don't say anything because the people who are saying it are white. And I guess they're the higher authority. And you know, they won't get in trouble for saying that stuff. So I just don't report it or anything. (SFF)

Yesterday I did the forum on being a person of color in this town, and some of the stories that I heard, made me sick. Absolutely disgusting. And I think of how fortunate and lucky my kids are that they go to a school where the teachers are family friends, you know, we attend family events together as families where all of our kids have grown up together. ... And so because of that, they get treated with a relative degree of respect. Now when they leave the school and they go to middle school or high school, especially after hearing some of those stories yesterday, I'm frankly scared shitless. (Parents)

Inequity

When I was in middle school, they had this career cafe and they brought in a cop to ask her questions. And I wanted to ask a question, but she would never call on me. And all the people that were asking questions were white, and she was a white lady and I had my hand up for the longest time and everyone was like "pick him, pick him, pick him" and she would never call me. And I don't know if it was a race thing or not, or she just never saw me even though I was in the front. At the end she did call on me but it didn't seem like she cared about what I asked... I wanted to ask a second question, but I noticed that it seemed like she didn't care. And so I just didn't ask it. And I just left it like that. I didn't really say anything. I guess it doesn't matter. Now. [What did you want to ask her?] It was like more of a personal question towards her. It was just like, what inspired her to become a cop. And like the just like, like, how does she handle all that stuff that happens? (SFF)

[My kids] had zero trouble with the school district because my kids fit perfectly in that system. They are average children with it. They're just either easygoing in their classroom they're easy to please their teachers like they just slide right in and so we are highly rewarded for that and for just being easy. No trouble family like they and I don't mean trouble with any sort of judgment or anything. Just like we're easy. There's no they don't have no special needs. There's no learning disabilities that we've experienced yet. So it's just like it's all peaches for those kids. ... I have access their teacher with a question and they follow up if I needed more, I could go to the principal. If I needed more. I could go to the superintendent

like I don't feel like my children have or myself I've been punished at all in that system because we fit right into it. (ML2)

I feel like they don't treat our kids equal as black kids and everything, like for instance my daughter had an experience in third grade when she was in Ferndale, she was getting discriminated against. So [she told] the teacher that there were kids picking on her constantly. And whenever she would try to defend herself she would be the person that would get in trouble about the situation and everything. And when I brought up the situation to the teacher and everything, I was called hostile and told my child was lying, or she doesn't remember that happening, Or then she will all of a sudden remember it and she wasn't there at the time and stuff, so you know, they don't take accountability on what is done in the school and neither does the school system and I've brought it up with the school system and everything they don't hold the teacher accountable for what their action are especially with bullying and stuff they allow it, and don't even hold the child accountable for what their actions are. (B&AA)

I don't think they should have to know our children's names, and who their parents are to treat them with dignity and with respect to honor them, treat them like the other children. ... I just don't have warm and fuzzy stories, and my children have a joke amongst them, that there's black and there's Bellingham Black and Bellingham Black is a biracial, or an adopted black kid that doesn't have the same proximity and upbringing and what they deal with for themselves, especially my daughter because she doesn't have the cool boy factor of being a black man or a black young man. I don't think that we should have to go around and meet everybody our kids are going to have to cross paths with in order to have a safe and supportive experience here. I wish there was more solidarity amongst all the black kids here, rather than this very real colorism that they deal with. From the time first grade other kids would tell them, well at least I'm brown and not black. ...And we've not had good experience with even biracial kids, some of course yes but there are some who are being raised believing that they're better than our children and that might not be from home, it might not be from parents, it could just be the way racism and colorism is introduced and spoon fed to our children living here, but it's bad, and I know deep in my heart there's nothing more my husband and I could do. There's nothing more we could do. (B&AA)

I was kind of a quiet kid. And of course I'm a person of color. Just especially then I think there were like two other people of color in my grade. And I didn't talk much. My mom was really fluent in English. My dad doesn't know English, fluent in Spanish. I didn't talk much but I knew English and up until sixth grade I was thrown into this like ELL class- they're helping me how to read and write. I was kind of naive of what was happening. And then one of the teachers finally asked we after one of the tests "why are you in here" because I was testing higher than most of the other people around me. And I said honestly, I don't know. Turns out it's because I'm a person of color. And I never talked much. So it's kind of funny because I was thrown into this class for six years over and over and over and over to help learn how to read and I didn't know. I was just like, oh, just some more time to study or something like that. I wasn't asking questions. It was the teachers telling me this is where I went, and this is what I did. And until a teacher finally realized you don't belong here you know English. You know how to write, you know how to read. You don't need any extra assistance. (NVFL)

I feel like Ferndale school district does a good job with connecting with their Native American/Indigenous students. I feel like our district just don't do that. We should do a better job of that. I feel like that's a population that in data reports says the population isn't large enough for data to report. But it's like 44 kids at Squalicum High School. They have siblings, right? Like we shouldn't say "oh,

there aren't enough of you". That just seems weird to me. Like let's help out the majority minorities, [but] that's not held by the minority minorities. It just feels weird. (School)

I as Latina in the Ferndale School District, I feel like I'm not being seen, like where's the support for my people? I'm not getting that personal fulfillment here, where I was in Mount Vernon, where the Latino population was 56%, where I felt like my skills were truly valued. And so I'm feeling that the main focus is on a single minority. We also have a large Russian population and I'm not sure if it was the correct term, but a Punjabi population, I guess. And so the focus is not on them either. (School)

Representation

I think our school systems is messed up. I feel like it was not designed for minorities or people of color. And so that really has a huge impact on all of us because we see in our school, there's only maybe like, four teachers who are minority. And I think it's really difficult to be successful when you don't have anyone that has been in your position or you don't have any support from someone that you know, could relate to you and what you've done. ...And you don't see as much male teachers as you see female teachers, or stuff like that. ...I feel it's very hard to learn from a person that doesn't have the same background as you. (SFF)

The power of students they see themselves in different positions in the communities whether it's people in their own worlds, not [just] City County, and position of power. Like police. So the students realize that in our community, these occupations, these careers are accessible to them, and it's possible for them. Maybe a mentorship program, but just exposure to and it'd be nice if there was a career fair, where students were able to see that these careers exist in Whatcom County and in those positions, there's people that look like me. I remember growing up around here, I didn't foresee myself doing very much, because there was nobody that represented myself in any kind of, quote-unquote, successful position in our community. (School)

I feel like schools need to do a better job with their educator population and retaining staff of color, and maybe having some of the school districts including Ferndale and Bellingham have a DEI director, but they need somebody in each building that students of color can go to. I know it's hard to have a new staff person in every building, and it's not cheap, but if you know building that bipoc network includes having adults in the buildings that are adults of color, because that can just create a safe space. And I've heard that from students and teachers who are bipoc that all these students of color come to me, and I'm not even the same race or ethnicity but they'll come to me with things, because I'm the only one. So I think creating that space is really important. (Parents)

I do feel like our kids have been a little bit sheltered because I am there to protect them, and I will fight fiercely for anything that does happen. That doesn't mean that there has not been any problems because there have been, especially a couple of years ago, they went to school and someone told her, "get out of my way black girl". And so, my principal called me right away and told me that. And then there was one other thing that happened that day too and I thought that just cannot be a coincidence that the one day that I am home for some reason those things happen, and it just makes me worried like Yep, she's going to middle school next year and I can't be there to protect her on another side of this, and as I mentioned she really doesn't have anyone there that looks like her, that can share the same stories about issues with her hair or just anything. She's never been able to identify with anyone and so I actually asked our counselor. The other day I said, "Can you please reach out to the other counselors at the other school

because there's got to be kids at the other school, who also don't feel like they can identify with anyone” and so she did and she heard right back from another counselor in Ferndale. There was another parent who had also asked a counselor about that. ...Of course she has friends that are of all different races, ethnicity, everything but she wants to connect with those people and it doesn't seem to be any place and nothing in school that I can provide for her (Parents)

the school system isn't really fit for people of color. It's designed for white people or Caucasian people. And it's really set for them to succeed and for people of color to fail. There's not really a lot of colored teachers or you know, just people that we could talk to, to help us get through school stuff that like they can relate to. Because like when you're talking to a white person about it, like it's, it's really not the same, like not at all. It's very different. They see things differently like, “oh, it's easy, like you got this” and this and that. I don't know how to explain it.. when you're talking to someone, that's white about your school stuff or like school problems. And you like want to like open up to them about the school stuff. They don't really get it but they say they do because I guess they want you to feel better about it. And just to try and get you to think that like it's easy for you to do it when it's really not. The teachers at my school tend to explain things directly to white students, and they don't really clarify things to the kids of color. Like there's Spanish speaking kids that don't know how to speak English and they don't explain things to them. And it's just very it's really hard seeing that. Like how are you going to be a teacher not want to help them? It gets me mad because like you're a teacher and you say you want to help and you don't want to help them. Like it's dumb. (SFF)

...when you try to explain something to a white person and then you're in there like they know what you're talking about. They don't, because they haven't been in your shoes and they don't know what you're going through and stuff. And so it's just hard. Like, you have to like at least find someone that's colored that's experienced what you've experienced before? Because like I'm a white person like they're gonna like, not experience that because they're like born into like, oh like family that has like, money and stuff like that. Like they've never experienced anything like that. And someone of color they've probably like there's many people that experience like what they're talking about because they've probably been in like in your shoes and a lot of white people never been like be in your shoes. They don't experience that type of stuff. (SFF)

Organizational Structures and Systems

I just think historically, our school systems have been very inept in working with children with delays or disabilities, kind of regardless of race, but you also see families who are white having more wealth and access to those services once they become aware of it. And so now even though some of those services are in place, our families of color and children of color are the last ones who are getting those services if they need it. And there's also that cultural piece of taboos and this and that and religions. So it's a tactic that our school systems aren't designed to meet children and families where they're at. And they're designed to continue to churn out these cogs in the machine that meet this very white idea of [success] and it is at the expense of our youth and that's why youth mental health is so challenging right now, because there isn't that support and we're not doing enough work to provide that social emotional piece. We're still doing the teaching to the test and making sure that you're meeting your quotas and we don't know how to move away from that in a real sustainable way. Even if you have that one off great teacher or great experience. (MHW)

I'll go into the multicultural room so I can just, you know, be around people who are not just white because then I feel like Oh, I'm fitting in, I fit in here. This is like my space and then I was hearing all that stuff about people saying there's so many white people in there and it like really, actually really hurt. I was like, Am I like not supposed to be here? Because I look so white. I've definitely had that struggle throughout my life.... A middle school teacher literally called me stupid, in front of the whole class. Now, it was very traumatic, and I ended up having to stay in the class for the rest of the year, you know, silently. They didn't understand kids with disabilities that weren't super obvious. ..We also speak Arabic so it's really hard for me to know more complicated English words and I was put into like the special needs kids room. And I felt so embarrassed like there was something wrong. And I hated that they had a separate room, because everyone knew everyone was like think, "oh, that's the room for people who are stupid". And I was just like, so embarrassed that I just like, couldn't tell anyone I went to that class, making sure that no one sees me. Because it was like that embarrassing. (HES)

It's very, very difficult to get any kind of services for behavioral issues, and having to go outside and running into situations where counselors are few and far between and you have to wait six months or eight months in order to get on a waiting list in order to get into to see a counselor. There's pressure from the dominant folks outside to exact punishment without the due process and it's totally inequitable. .. now that's on the whole - there are individuals within the school systems that have been pretty damn good. But they're individuals. They're not the system. And that makes a big difference. (ML2)

My daughter went through the Bellingham public school... and I still have some unresolved anger issues. my kid started out at three because she has disabilities. She gets assessed and she gets this school district required tests, they decide that she's mentally retarded, which is so not right - even at three you can see this child is not mentally retarded. ...I fought like hell, but it took about three or four years to get them to be willing to reassess. I mean, they won't change things because you argue with them. They'll only change it when they run some set of tests. You know, they have to do all this test. And if you can't get access to it, it's months or years before you can get your kid to that person or whatever or you have to pay for it outside of the schools. Then your kid is stuck in this channel. .. the best thing that happened to her by far throughout her entire experience in school was the gift of having one super duper Special Ed teacher who was about ready to retire but she didn't retire for all the years my daughter had her for five years. And that's how she learned anything about numbers and stuff. Because that teacher just said, this kid isn't dumb. She's not mentally retarded. This is what you need. She needs to do this. And so this is what we're going to do and here's what all the other teachers could do- wrote up all that instruction, you know, like, here's the IEP and all that bullshit. You spend more time doing paperwork and satisfying the school's legal requirements than you do getting cooperation from the teachers to actually fulfill the requirements. Or you get the teachers who have been slammed with too many kids and no support. And so the teachers which kid did they pick to just ignore? Well, they pick the hard ones to work with. Those kids are the ones and so my daughter would have a teacher this one year, who would be pretty good. ..The next year she gets somebody who absolutely like, this kids in the back of the room. The kid is just sort of tolerated. The kid is you know, just sort of left alone and my daughter was not wanting to cause trouble. So she didn't get attention that way. She was a quiet little shy thing. And so it's just this bumpy bumpy bumpy thing (ML2)

So being intentional about who's invited to [things like college/career fairs], and not calling it such and such of, you know of color because we don't call it white person career fair. But being intentional about who we put in those places for better visibility. I'm imagining what a career fair would look like that

would be beneficial to our students, and that would be inviting those people of color, but not exactly calling it that. Just be intentional about who were inviting. (School)

I have taken the time to go the extra step and whenever my kids in a new classroom or new school I talk to the teacher. We come during Ramadan and talk about what it means to fast, maybe what make my kids not at school during a big holiday that nobody knows about, why maybe they will not have Christmas presents to share, taking that time to do that. But there's so many other cultures and traditions, and parents who don't have the time, and shouldn't have to have the responsibility to do that and I feel like there should be a way to get to know families at the start of the year, give them a way, even, you know, to be like, these are the things that are unique to our family that we want you to know about. If you are an adopted child, maybe have a parent in the military, maybe you have an accident, you know, just these things that might affect a child's wellbeing, attitude, academic performance, happiness, that you shouldn't have to find out six months into the school year when something happens. Teachers should have a way, maybe even an expectation to get to know their families, and be trained on strategies to do that, where families can just share whatever they want to at the start of each school year, because each year is a different teacher, each year is a different set of students, and to start that work every year is hard. And I get that initiative should come from the school rather than from parents who have maybe the time and bandwidth to do so, and not rely on parents to speak up for or advocate for their kids every time.

(Parents)

My biggest hurdle every single time I try and recruit people of color to come and work in Bellingham is belonging and about finding a community. ...I talk with HR about that all the time, like, at least give these people a signing bonus if I can find someone and pull them out of another place. What is the matter with giving a person of color signing bonus and not giving a white person a signing bonus if we're able to recruit them and give them a reason to at least get in here and find the footholds and find out about some of the little pockets that we have. But if they don't know about those and they don't see them then they're never going to come see. (School)

a few years ago, there was a so called Working Group or task force that was pulled together on immigration in the school district. And we had 20 or 30 people participate, and we took a lot of time giving input on that, in relation to how immigrant kids were being treated in the school district, especially indigenous parents from Guatemala, Venezuela and Mexico. And we gave a lot of really good input with some very interested looking and supportive school district people. And then I believe it was the county - they totally dismissed it. All of it was dismissed. And it was shocking how all of the input from the parents we brought in...was all dismissed. They created their own outline, which was worthless, including, they continue to bring police into the resource offices. We were really opposed. And all of the immigrant parents were opposed to having uniformed police in the school districts because they saw that as homeland security because all of those kids have had somebody detained and deported. And there was a man in an office in a police uniform. These little kids you're talking kindergarten first and second grade. Every day they would walk into the school and see this police officer and every day they were in trauma - is he going to take me away? Is he going to go to my house and take my parents away because somebody like him took my uncle or my grandfather or whatever, or even their own parents and deported them. .. it's racial profiling. It's racist, it's more discipline for kids of color. Oh, the other big thing is the demeaning of parents for not being able to adequately, quote-unquote, support their kids so that they can do better in school. You're talking about parents that don't speak English. Some of them don't even know how to read and write, and never went to school themselves. And so it's just like this treatment of

community members that we work with, that makes them feel totally inadequate, and they are not valued and actually degraded, no dignity, about their capacity to be able to survive in this country and most of them are undocumented. (SJA0)

I think that we have some work to do. I think that redistricting is extremely important. And I think that is something that people don't want to do because of the deep roots that people have of, oh, I want to go to Bellingham High School, or I want my kid to go to this high school. But right now we have this underlying idea that Squalicum is the Brown School and Sehome is the white school. And I think that's wrong. I think that it's deep in this community, it's deep. And I think that even pervades down to the elementary schools and like Shuksan middle school versus, like Fairhaven middle school, they have a really different population. And when you look at the numbers, that's not actually accurate (A&C)

I think that redistricting might help. You just walk into the new Sehome home high school and it's so ostentatious. I think that they've done some really good work. They've rebuilt options High School, and I think that's really, really important. And that really shows a lot of validity. I think that in terms of like, racial equity, I'm actually glad I live in North Bellingham because my kid will go to the brown schools and I'm like, great, like I'm gonna have a brown kid, and I think that's awesome. But I don't think they'll have brown teachers, and I worry about that. A lot of my Brown students get transferred to Squalicum because they'll find a better fit there. That's a phrase that is said a lot. It's pretty insidious. And it makes me sad. I'm always trying to get kids of color into my drama program, man. I am like, that is like my number one. I'm like, Come on, guys. Come on, and like trying to get rides and structural things and like trying to get them into drama, and it's so hard and what happens? They get transferred to another school. And I'm like, damn it. I see that a lot. (A&C)

My biggest challenge with the school system was really, I didn't feel support as a parent for getting my kid into college. I mean, they're not going to stop you and if they want a letter of recommendation, great and you know, they administer the tests and things but that's not a huge priority here and it wasn't a huge priority in my high school either. I was also the first person in my family to go to college and you know, my counselors were like, great, good for you. But it was really hard. You know, at the college level kids think that they're coming out of high school and that every degree in the country is the same and they have equal chance of getting every college and that is not true. That is absolutely not true. And that there are a lot of kids in a lot of schools in this country that have a lot more advantages for getting into school. And so, you try to temper the expectations of your child based on where they're coming from and trying to supplement that as a parent and I only know this because I went to college, right and I experienced that. And you know, a lot of parents in our community don't know that and do think that the school is doing everything that they can to get the child into college. And so there's a lot of those unspoken things, I think out there. (A&C)

Awareness and Funds of Knowledge

If [the teacher] had taken five minutes to do a Google search to educate herself about it, it would have been a completely different situation. If she told those students, hey, let's respect this student. Let's make her belong and let's be open to diversity and equality. Instead of shutting me down and keep telling me to keep quiet about who I am. They would have made a world of difference. (YAS)

I think that the biggest thing I have noticed is just a lack of education and cultural competence with the teachers and administration as far as just like, being aware of we've had so many circumstances where

they've just said mostly just really dumb things. Like, a teacher saying to another teacher, "hey, he was dancing in PE" and another teacher being like, well, of course he can dance... here are two adults saying something just so casually racist and stereotypical. Are these people teaching our children? ... my son has longer locks and had a teacher be like, "Can I touch your hair?" and touch him, and then I go to the administration and say like, "Hey, this happened. This is not something that should happen at school. He was very uncomfortable. And no adult teacher that is teaching kids should know that this is not an appropriate thing to do", and have their response be like, "Oh, well, we've all done things like that and all made mistakes" and like, "maybe you can meet with this teacher and let her know why that's not appropriate". And I'm like, that is not my job. Your job is to tell that teacher to keep her hands off of my child and not pet him. And, these seem like very simple things that people in these positions that are teaching our children should be very aware of. And just knowing where a lot of the educators and administrators stand on a lot of equity issues is just discouraging. And the other place that I feel like I really have started to notice it with my son as he gets closer to Middle School is in the disciplinary actions of things. So just like there seems to be a pretty big difference between - we went and had a conversation once because my son was this child was sort of bullying him and had a lot of behavioral issues towards my oldest child - and we just sort of brought up instances like my our son had been involved in one behavioral issue on the bus one time and they had said, If this happens again, you are off the bus for the rest of the year. Like very clear cut, you get one chance. That's it and like, this other child is having these issues perpetually over and over and over and there's just no discipline action taken and we said, hey, that seems like two very different situations in the way that you're treating this and we've heard a lot of that especially as you know, kids of color get into middle school in high school how you know, discipline actions are very different. (SUMAS)

Burden on BIPOC

The first thing [my daughter] suffered was when she was a little, at Alderwood, when she was bullied by a bunch of people. She still has that trauma. (FFW)

Indigenous

When I was in grade school, I got laughed at. I had deer jerky and smoked salmon and biscuits made for lunch. That's what I bring for my lunch. And the kids made fun of me all the time and I had a complex you know. I'd always throw my lunch away when I'd go to school and I'd starve during the day. Then I get in high school and the same kids that made fun of me about my smoked fish, they want to buy it, you know.... the public school system for my kids, it wasn't a place for them to embrace who they were. For Nooksack people, it was always hard for us to be in the front and talk about who we are or whatever, unless you have ADHD you know - then you're okay. But other than that, you're always taught to speak only when spoken to. You're taught to sit in the back of class in the public school system. But if you grew up in Lummi, you see Lummi people, they're always in the front. They are confident, they're always strong, because they came from K to 12, they're talking about their people. Because they have the school on their reservation. Then they have the Northwest Indian College on the reservation. So they're prepped, they're prepped, they're prepped, and they're strong speakers and strong in their culture and their beliefs. That's what they're taught. And us, when we go to public schools where we don't get that strength. So it could be a lot of change there. We could do things a lot differently in public schools. (NT)

I went to Ferndale high school. And I had an excellent experience. I had a really wonderful high school experience and then we moved. My kids ended up going to Mount Baker. My oldest son got through it.

... but then I told you about my youngest son and he is a whole different story. So I think it's individual case by case child by child. (NT)

I didn't experience a whole lot of racism. I played basketball I was the homecoming princess but I did witness other Native kids - some of my cousins who were treated poorly because of the clothes they wore or their appearance, and they weren't so actively involved in the extracurricular activities and I think that made them more vulnerable to racism. My eldest son said he hated it. Hated Mount Baker, but he was pretty popular. He's the funny kid who can make anybody laugh and make friends anywhere. But my daughter, she dropped out at 15 years old I believe it was and tried to go into alternative school because she just didn't have a good experience at the public school. She has a lot more darker skin than me or my other kids and she did deal with racism amongst her peers. She was treated differently by kids more than the faculty. (NT)

I remember being called back there by the principal because of certain individuals who hung out together. And the principal told me they're in a gang. The gangs called the family. So I'm telling him, their family. You know, he asked me why they're all hanging out, and I tell him because their family. I mean come on now, we have kids that have been lost. Or they lost a family member, but we have in our culture, they have to wear their bandanas - we have certain times, certain things that happen where a person goes back to school they have to wear their covers. You can't walk down the hallway with a group of kids because they're all wearing the same color. It's hanging out and yet you can have these white guys walking down the hallway with their Letterman's jackets on and everything and that's okay. You know we have kids that have Canoe Club jackets and they walk through the hallway and you have to take those off. Why because it's Nooksack Valley school? But it's Nooksack Indian. (NT)

It was difficult. Um, it was strange. I think mostly for me because I am adopted. And my family here is white. As well as they got divorced when I was in elementary school. So then there was all that sort of confusion. Over like, who are you and, which parent are you and all kinds of things I definitely had people question me a lot in school. And question me when I was presenting my family as well at school events or something, like, where's your family and they're literally standing right next to me. I had a lot of experiences negatively in science classes. My understanding of the world is different than what a lot of people believe. And part of indigenous culture is that we are on this living, breathing thing and that we are all living and breathing. Our bodies are made up of water and this earth is made up of water. And we're all connected. And in that sense, I believe that the water is alive and that the wind has characteristics and speaks and travels and does all kinds of things and you know, there was never any room - not only in science class - just sort of anywhere to express a different idea than what was being taught or what was in the textbook. My textbooks you know, we're from the late 90s and had Bellingham High School stamps, Squalicum High School stamps, and then Nooksack High School stamps. I noticed just sort of a struggle with me and other students of color. But me not necessarily fitting into the sort of pre ordained groups that are here as we've been saying, like generational people kind of stay here and build families. And, and so that was sort of hard for me to try and find that box to fit into also because I wasn't raised Christian. I didn't go to church. I had classmates tried to convert me and tell me that the things I believed or that the way that I did my hair was wrong. (SUMAS)

[Strong Schools/Positive Experience](#)

I think we have a really strong public school system in Bellingham. I think on the whole we do have a positive, caring community that genuinely wants the best for students in terms of holistic care, and they

do really want to do well. And I don't think that's true everywhere. So I think that's really a win. I think we have issues within the school system that needs to be addressed, but on the whole, I do feel positively about having my kid go to Bellingham School District, and I think that they will get a good education and be become a good person through the school system. I think that I really believe in Bellingham schools and I wouldn't work there if I didn't. (A&C)

I went to a small school here in Whatcom County, and you would assume that they wouldn't have the best support however, I have a younger sister who is disabled and they showed up for her in so many ways that it was a very, very positive experience for her. We anticipated her life to be really, really hard and we thought school was gonna be a little traumatic for her but they surrounded her with a lot of care and kindness to the point where she doesn't really know what bullying is. And I feel like that is a huge gift that we were really lucky to have.

But for me, my children are pre K, and they go to the CDC. And the only reason we were able to even get into that Western Child Development Center Program was because of the pandemic opened up some spots and my husband works at the university. And we feel really good about the support that we received there. My older daughter definitely stuck out as bipoc in her class last year, especially at three years old. I felt like I had a really good conversation with the teachers about my concerns that my children are celebrated for their diversity and not stripped of it, because when I came to play I was definitely stripped of it. I feel like there's a lot of support, and they've reached out to me to provide resources and books and even do like a Islam kind of thing with the teachers, and I appreciate all that, it definitely has taken up my time, and emotional labor, so it'd be really awesome if that works. ... and then with my younger daughter she just started this year and I'm really thrilled with her class size – its really small and pretty diverse. There's a little girl in her class who only speaks Spanish at home. So, I speak Spanish a little bit with my kids and I have encouraging her to talk to her. And then there's just a lot more diversity. So, I guess. Overall, the more diversity I find in an environment, the safer I feel like my children are. (Parents)

My family's Jewish and my girls are being raised Jewish and so something that matters a lot to me is that they have been really inclusive and interested in trying to include input from me about traditions that come up around Christmas time. (PDef)

I think the school system (in Lynden public schools) as a whole is great. (LEFG)

we've had zero issues (in Nooksack) and love the district (LEFG)

Question 9: How would Whatcom County look or feel different? If the Whatcom racial equity commission is successful?

Representation

If Whatcom racial equity commission could do anything, establish some sort of liaison with Bellingham public school district, so that our kids have a place and parents have some kind of representation or a venue where things can be fairly looked at and not result in a child having a record until they are 18 years old. (B&AA)

... you think about the voice of all of us and all of our different ethnic backgrounds. And if we're all working together, we could be so much stronger than we could if we weren't working together. We are stronger together. Just even in these conversations we've had here. I mean, there's so much power behind all of our voices. And I know like for me when it comes to stuff like race and whatnot, I'm a bit of a wallflower when it comes to stuff like that. And, hearing your collective voices and stories empowers me to want to do more. So having something like this commission I hope not only empowers us here but encourages others to go out and do more. So then that way, you know, you don't have that worry in the back of your mind when you're interacting with someone like, what does this person really think of me and just knowing that your voice has power. (FBO)

it wouldn't feel like in every situation that I'm in the there's an obvious majority culture, and in Whatcom County, it's always white majority culture. So it's like you go to the doctor's office, it's a white majority culture, you act like a white person in those settings. At Western it's the same. The school districts is the same. Going in the library, it's the same - following the white rules for doing things so if they are successful, I could act like myself. (ML3)

I think it would be nice to see more celebrating of other cultures. So that people feel welcome here. (ML3)

let the officials ask indigenous people and ask people of color their opinion instead of just being like this is what we're doing. Just to give a broader insight and more perspective, because everyone has a different perspective and unique things that they can bring to the table. (HES)

educating people on you know, the history of the land that they're on. I would love to see that actually as a curriculum in schools where these students get to understand and learn about not only these tribes and the history and how we got here, but also what it's done as far as the damage of their culture and the struggles that they face as a community themselves. I think just building that awareness, and hopefully empathy is a really good step to solving a lot of these problems on an individual base. Um, the other thing would be just more representation. I know our local government, I don't see a lot of representation of some of these communities, of people of color. And I think if that could be more of an intent where maybe there's grants or funding for these people to campaign so that they can make it on the polls would be fantastic.

Who am I to define what success is and what success to each person is going to be so different and unique. So providing a safe place where those that we do not see or don't even know about maybe that are on the edges can find a place for them to feel like they can express themselves and they can communicate, they can find someone who would be engaged with them. So maybe that's what it is successful is that place for those people together. (NVFL)

I was thinking we talk so much about our youth and I think a lot of times they aren't heard and they're the ones that are impacted the most by these discussions, by the racial inequities and why not ask them and have a youth led group just similar to what you're doing here. (??)

The racial equity Commission needs to be involved in hiring people and then needs to oversee the representation in the entire governance system of people of color, and be involved in the hiring [including] the hiring of white people. Somehow, you do not hire people that are racist. To work in city and county government. (SJA0)

think you'd see more leaders of color in jobs like ours. You know, in city council races and you know, mayoral races, you know, all kinds of leadership roles. (SUPS)

having diversity in all the positions that we just talked about. It would be lovely to see diversity in the police force and law enforcement, in the courts, in other supervisions in the school, that would certainly be a wonderful step. (AAPI)

If it's truly successful in terms of bringing about racial equity, I think seeing an uptick in racial diversity in the area. I would expect it to happen because that's the sort of information that would filter out I mean, I guess it depends on what the definition of success is, just improvement or an overall complete change. (Pros)

It would definitely make me feel a lot better [with more people of color in office]. I feel good about myself but I would be more proud of what my community has done...I'd feel proud because like, damn, they made it. The struggle that colored people have to go through is a lot. And it would be very cool to see someone with my skin tone or color to be city on council or Mayor. It would make me feel like I could do it myself. (SFF)

I would say more people at the top who are BIPOC in leadership roles, because there you can change policies. And that is essential. (CE)

They would reflect the community in terms of privilege, power, position, representation. (PW/U)

I think getting at some of the things we've been talking about so far like shaking up maybe what has been the standard group of people in charge of the community. I think switching that up so that there's more people from different perspectives that more accurately reflect our actual community in the higher positions of power and decision making positions, but also doing something to shift the same toxic culture. I think doing more of that culture shifting work, and maybe challenging some people that really need to be challenged. And in the best case scenario, they have a come to Jesus moment. I think beyond just people in positions of power, seeing an impact on a wider perspective of like the average person in Whatcom County maybe feel more heard and like they have a place to go to. (A&C)

Safe Places and Accountability

If WREC or Whatcom racial equity commission establishes an equity hotline or an integrity hotline. And then these people's names start popping up on it, because there is a level of anonymity. People are going to start thinking about what they do before they do it. (B&AA)

The biggest thing you can do to break down barriers is get to know your neighbors. ...If you want people to understand you, you have to make yourself slightly vulnerable. So when it comes to the racial equity commission, I would hope that they really focus on positives. You know, figuring out Okay, so if we find that there aren't as many minorities that are using certain park systems, okay, well, maybe we need to have a park day.. I hope that this commission focuses more on those positive interactions. ..I really hope that they work on community involvement for a few years, just give it a shot. See how it goes. Your first job should be education. In order to do that you're gonna have to have people that are willing to go out there and be vulnerable and be asked questions. I think part of the problem that we have is when people too easily offend and it shuts down those conversations, because now you can't ask questions. (LEFG)

Racial unity. (LFG)

I would like to see is that there would be more respect towards us Hispanics, both in the schools and in the techniques that not because we are Hispanic they try to make us less or. Or try make us feel like we're not worth it here for them. And how would it change? It would change that everything would progress, we would move forward, it would be much better. (FFW)

I think if we're successful, people in our community would be able to express themselves their views. without it feeling like it had to go through a safer channel to be able to be correct. (LFG)

I think this organization is going to cause other organizations and other stakeholders to be accountable to this cause. (PW/U)

... how will we know what are the outcome based on measurements? What are we actually measuring that we can quantify and show? And how do they connect to action steps rather than just be theorizing, or talking about ideas. What can we practically create through action steps and ways of measuring? (NES)

I want accountability for the people that are making decisions and educating our children. I want to know that the structures that are in place are going to give them a safe fulfilling environment to grow and learn because they spend so much time there... help get some framework in place so that there's some accountability. (SUMAS)

I feel like yeah, accountability is a huge place because we don't feel safe, or we don't know local government or school officials - we don't know their protocols and stuff. It makes that uneasy feeling you know. I don't feel safe here you know. We're not heard and I mean, it's 2022 and we're still fighting for simple things like this. It just makes me really sad. I mean, we live in the most beautiful place, like I love Whatcom County and I feel like a lot of people do love it. A lot of people of color that move here and see how beautiful it is - we have the mountain we have a water we have Canada we have Seattle, but then when they encounter these kinds of situations you know, it just makes people want to move and I just really would like to see some change here. So people like myself, we can enjoy the area like all the other people and feel safe and feel heard and the accountability piece is huge because if you don't have accountability, I don't really think we could make change here. (SUMAS)

Regulation of things as well. Is there a process for screening people in districts or in law enforcement? is there training? Is it comprehensive? Is it ongoing? Just putting all these in place so it can be successful. You know, each time something happens, this is our rule. This is our process. (SUMAS)

I don't know if this is in your plans but some sort of grievance option, because when I worked at the DV Commission, we would get the equity grievances and we would be like, "this is definitely related in some way to what we do, but we don't have the infrastructure to address these issues". And there were so many people who were doing some sort of law enforcement reform, and so often those issues would come to us and we'd "be like, "well, there isn't an official complaint system for this really". So having a place where people can tell the system what's going on in their experiences and having a structure in place to hold some people accountable, I think would be amazing. And yeah, I think having people feel heard is the most important part. (A&C)

I think having a group that has this eagle's eye view of what's happening and being able to see how things are related, you know, because our BIPOC communities, you know, they walk through the world. They

drive to school, they go to school, they leave, they see this and it's like, there's all of these things that are connected, and then it's like, but I only see what I'm connected with. Like I'm only part one part of our community. I only see my little slice of the day, and to have a group that's having this more eagle eye view of like, what's happening and how is this interacting with this and seeing some trends can create a more proactive and united response to some of these structural problems, rather than just reacting? They can see some trends and see some structures and say, "Hey, this is affecting this, which is probably affecting this". And we don't live in these little bubbles, and being able to like make some changes from that. Rather than simply reacting all the time and actually addressing some of the roots of our issues. I need some grievances now, because the structural stuff takes a long time. That's what's so hard about it, right? Like we're talking 510 years or whatever, whereas okay, let's hold this specific incident accountable for this moment. So it's not lip service and patting ourselves on the back for being this wonderful place to live but shaking it up and saying how can we be better? I think that would be really important. (A&C)

...we are trying to bridge relationships for a long time between native and nonnative at a National Monument, or parks, or learning in the Salish Sea retreats and that is one of the things that we hear when we bring elders in... We don't want to be the only indigenous people in the room all the time, we want to make sure other people feel like they're within their cultural values and comfort zones, and then they don't immediately get scared off and never come back again. You know what I mean. And I'm sorry I advocate for those kinds of things. I advocate for what our elders have left for us and it makes me very uncomfortable because it goes against our cultural values and I have to go to counseling for it, but at least I'm going to counseling to work my way through a lot of things. I do want to create an open space for other people when they do come in the room. (IFG)

Would like to see a gathering celebration place of joy for BIPOC people. (MHW)

Don't be afraid to support Truth and Reconciliation or truth and healing without confirmation from the tribes, don't be afraid to support tangible facilities like a healing house and learning house at Whatcom Creek, it's available to any non native so it should be available to have people support putting the longhouses back where there was a village site there. And then to allow the people to have the ability to be the decision makers and allow a friendship center or a place where we can share who we are and where we come from outside the bounds of the reservations in a beautiful building. I can see the vision of what that L shaped longhouse looks like. It would be a place of knowledge, democracy, housing upgraded programming, and wraparound services, native led nonprofits, and housing native principals and native teachers and native employees and giving us a safe place to share who we are with the community. I would like to see that supported. (IFG)

Inequities

It would look like the politicians would protect people of color's voices as much as they'd protect white voices. And I would also see success as having a place for people of color together. (MHW)

I think it creates advocacy at the government level that doesn't exist for all the independent communities. (SUPS)

I'm just at the end of the day, if I can come back and just be tired from work like regular white people are, and not have to worry about getting harassed or getting spoken to a certain way or not all of that added work that goes into doing labor for white people making myself smaller trying to avoid situations and all

of that stuff, that would be success for me that's what a successful Whatcom County Racial Equity.
(AAPI)

Whatcom County would look a lot different, it would mean that I would earn on the dollar what a white man earns on the dollar. (AAPI)

we would also see, more equity at the city and county level, as far as budgets and kind of walking the talk
(SUPS)

I think if a commission like that we're going to be successful, then every kid going to school would have the support they need to be successful and competitive. When they graduate, they can go wherever their talent can take them. (LEFG)

I don't know how it would look different. I'm seeing it through the eyes of a white person, so I don't know how it would look or feel different, to be honest. (LEFG)

When people don't have equitable access, then we're losing out as a community, because we're using potential, and no I'm not even talking about just monetary potential at all. I'm talking about how people value themselves and how society values. And it's just such a loss of humanity when we don't give everybody equal value in terms of what they have to contribute. (Parents)

It only is the people of color who be held to a higher standard, even when they get into those positions. And I'll use the Whatcom [County Exec]? ... 10 to one, he's being held to a higher standard than the guy who was before him was. (CE)

Yeah, hey, I want to just feel less burdened or equally burdened, as the Caucasians in our community who have privilege. (AAPI)

Just going and coming home tired from work like regular white people. (AAPI)

I certainly believe that all people should live free of fear. And you know, we always want to join in on that. I'm not a proponent of the equity viewpoint where outcomes are predetermined for every individual. And I can't take responsibility for others to that degree. I think that, my vision is to provide as many platforms as possible for people to be successful, regardless of where they come from. And that means that they'll have opportunities to thrive in the community, not only our community here, but in the county and in our state and in the world that they live. I probably wouldn't engage in the idea of equity as far as outcomes are concerned, as much as I would, just want to always be a part of stuff that platforms where people have the opportunity to be successful and that there's lots of people walking alongside them in this life, whether or not they're experiencing victory or defeat, that we come alongside and we can lock arms and we can act like a family and care for each other along the way. (NVFL)

I think if someone's able to live without fear of being marginalized because of a person of color. I think that's success in regards to ability to continue and improve life. (NVFL)

It's always difficult when you're dealing with this, I don't believe in Utopia. So I think we're just trying to incrementally improve. And have people have lives that are meaningful and without fear. So we certainly want that to happen. I don't know if what you're doing is gonna bring that about though. (NVFL)

We would have more confidence in our authorities and in our services than what they give us. (FFW)

[Equal Access and Inclusion](#)

I just want to not see policing happening. to switch from the current incarceration model to something healthier, more rooted in relationships. (MHW)

Well, that we were more included, more that they really made us part of Whatcom, to feel like real members, not to feel like outsiders, that we are here crouching down so that they don't say anything to us, surviving, that's what I mean. I don't want to feel that I came to this country to survive, I want to feel that this country is coming to work and to build something for my children. And I maybe didn't have in every way both security and better things to go. (FFW)

I would like to see that something has been done in the future to make a difference so that there will be the same job opportunities for Americans and Latinos. Not just because they are recruiting purely American people. But that they also give the opportunity to Latinos who are also prepared and everything and can also with the positions that can be given to them. And maybe they would even put more effort than an American. (FFW)

I think that it would be nice to have conversations where people are in need with whatever that is, and then not be afraid to go to the next level of the system. Whether that's law enforcement, the government, people that are in any sort of authority. I would like to see the fear gone. And so success to me would mean people not being afraid. I think we would end some of the cycles of trauma. (NES)

It's fear that we're trying to eradicate - the fear that we can see in the people of color. And the fear that we don't talk about that the white population has about them. And I think if these groups are emboldened to not be afraid they come out, we mix, we mingle, we get to know each other and get to climb the ladder [together]. (NES)

We might have a better sense of belonging instead of trying to fit in to the system and the frameworks that the state and county agencies have implemented. (NT)

you have to hear a whole lot of what I would call contempt for investigation. You know, like leaping to assumptions and operating on the basis of bias as opposed to actually inquiring about differences and exploring those differences and a healthy learning perspective on those differences in ways that might actually enrich our lives beyond measure. If we were to embrace that as a collective community. (SUPS)

I think it would add authenticity to our work as well. I think as we talk about hearing those voices and finding ways for those voices (SUPS)

I think there will be more participation in going back to belonging again, that there would be that belonging and that sense of safety, empowerment, feeling valued, like your voice is valued. You know, from all different groups. Where I think right now, there's a reluctance a lot of times because of bad experiences. (SUPS)

greater participation. (SUPS)

I think we would feel more included I guess and more heard. (SFF)

I feel like an island sometimes. I was that kid that grew up in elementary school, the only black kid or the only other. It was always me and the other black guy.

I feel like it would be more inclusive. Because you get to see people that look like you on city council and you feel inspired if you see somebody like if say the mayor's Hispanic or something, that would inspire people to be more like him. It would inspire more kids to want to be like him. (SFF)

There's something about like representation but there's another thing about accessibility and seeing actual change happening on that level. So not just like access to those positions of leadership but like for people across the board with access to basic things that so many people are struggling with. Including like food and health care and childcare and all that good stuff. (MHW)

I like having people feel heard. That is really a strong way of putting it that where it builds bridges across the various cultural groups within our community and recognizes that we're all here and I think it goes back to that concept of belonging at the beginning. I think everybody wants to be heard in some way. Allow for communication to happen. And growth, I guess, in terms of recognizing everyone. I don't think it's ever going to be over either. I think it's a constant ongoing process. So being recognized county wide as kind of a source for these conversations and building these bridges and yes, like constant - let's work on this together. (A&C)

Organizational Structures and Systems

the city council [would take a] position on a people's initiative for essential workers, which are mostly people of color, (SJA0)

I'm reminded that after the last Spanish flu pandemic, people were so happy to take off their masks and gather and get around that the roaring 20s ignited. And, I mean, it was short lived, and jazz music. People of color were actively being promoted and listened to, and enjoyed and danced to and, and Art Deco type art was prospering and, and, and then radio was brought in and, things fell apart. I believe that if we are truly effective, if we are effective making this happen, that we can change the world from here from this area. You know, the world economy can be impacted by our successful integration of cultures, there will be a kaleidoscope of arts, culture, education, prosperity, and I really believe that the potential for changing the world can be from right here in our hometown. (FBO)

Usually whenever I walk into a space, I am one of two people of color, and I don't want people to come up and say problematic things to me. I don't want in a professional setting, to have to explain to a white man or a white woman, why they cannot call me a savage.. I detest that I was called a field n-word, and their explanation was we cannot control our clients and they use it in music.

The WREC needs to be a public fixture. Because as soon as these organizations go away, society tends to backslide and so I would like to see more funding for the WREC. I also would think that we wouldn't be surface liberals, because a lot of people who think they're very woke and progressive, they're like, "Oh no, Whatcom County and Bellingham was rated as a safe place for visiting people who come here for a vacation and that's very racially safe because they give it a four star rating". We need more diversity we need to have structures in place that can make all people feel welcome. (AAPI)

if we could have this place of a person like me who has a record now, it doesn't matter if I did it or not, I have a record so I'm guilty. How do I live my life, how do I finish my degree, how do I rent a freaking apartment or house. (AAPI)

so if we had a place or a person that we could vomit this shit at, and we still want to be protected, productive members of society. We still have goals we still have plans we still have things that we want

to do, how do we do that in this white place, that would be freaking amazing to be acknowledged to be heard to be seen, and also to be validated that we're trying to work. We're not sitting here living off the government. Before I got this job as a work study student with food stamps I had more money in my pocket than I do now. I have less money and I have a full time job with benefits I get no assistance. The only thing I get is free lunch at school, I get \$0.00 for anything else because I make too much money, but I have less money now. But that never can be talked about, because I am a single, divorced woman of color with a record. That's who I am. I'm a felon, that's my identity that's how I'm seen (AAPI)

to see it had structural impact on how the budgets were made and where those fundings were going. You know, we have like some huge budgets for certain departments. So would we restructure them and put that money in other places? ..a lot of things would have to be restructured - power dynamics would have to have changed, and outcomes would be different. (SJA0)

if it's truly successful, we'd see massive system changes, whether it's through the criminal justice system or elsewhere. I also think people of color would feel heard, they would feel represented, they would see representation in in their community, whether it's in positions of power in the private or public sector. And I imagine it would look like checking back in on a lot of things to continue progress because a point of success is one thing but continuing that change and creating longevity would be another - but best of luck. (Pros)

I would hope for a more up to date criminal justice system. I'd like to see the schools that are underfunded right now get more funding like Alderwood you know, Birchwood it's not necessarily under resourced, but they could always use more (PDef)

I think it would look like a way smaller criminal court system because we would have made the investments up front in younger generations. (PDef)

I would definitely hope for some sort of reform or system being implemented in schools of various levels to just get on a more equitable level. (HES)

Ultimately, it's going to change individual behavior and how we relate to each other. And how we feel about each other, ourselves and other people. I think that's an amazing challenge to the group, the organizing group, to make that explicit - to really play that out. What I'm getting at an outcomes is what small successes, potentially can the commission identify the areas of health disparity and law enforcement and housing and education, as small successes, that ultimately are linked to the kinds of things that we're sharing with you today. I mean, that's beautiful to try to figure that relationship out. People will look at each other differently and feel different. (ML3)

[Awareness and Funds of Knowledge](#)

way more awareness about our neighbors and people in our community who are members of the tribes, it would mean there wasn't hearing just like disgusting comments from people about, oh, they get everything they get better hunting rights and fishing rights and all this like, Oh, you think they're lucky? (PDef)

I feel that now, enough is enough, that it is time for us to be recognized and to know that we are contributing. We are not stealing, we are not taking advantage of anyone, do you understand me? I would like that all this information that you are collecting and all this, that something can be done for the good of all and that we are all equal in the eyes of the law. Everyone because no one is above the law, we

should all be treated equally and not just because of our color they think we are doing a crime or we are taking advantage or we are stealing, (FFW)

My mind keeps going to like other groups in our community like the Punjabi community, there's a huge community here but you don't hear necessarily about their contributions to Bellingham. You don't hear the Lummi tribe's contributions to Bellingham. I think, if we were to put that out there and kind of advertise it a lot. It just become a normal thing. People will be more aware of what's going on in their cultures. Maybe it would clear up some ignorance on the members of our community. .. it's easy to hate somebody until you know their story and then once you know their story, it's really hard to go back to that initial feeling you had because then you're like, Oh, I understand why you did the things you did now. (PDef)

we would have special days where we would go to the Whatcom Museum and it would focus a lot on you know, Lummi culture and the native peoples. And that would not be just a special day. That would be something that is just seen part of you know the core educational system that it's not just one day it's every day... I would love to see just more of a seamless integration of everyone, not just white history and white culture and not having to point out these things and just having it be natural. And I think that potentially at some point we could get there. It would take a whole lot of work. And I think that starting with the younger generation growing up and then having that be the norm rather than the different. (PDef)

all of the white people would stand back and listen. We would be diligent about the beautiful words that were said that children need to be celebrated for their diversity not stripped of it, not just children but our neighbors , and people, in fact, would wake up, pay attention. Be open to learning to taking a backseat. (Parents)

It'll just feel better when I know that people have chosen to change course from our predictable comfort zone. What's gonna change in order for it to feel better for me is to know that I don't have to be bringing up issues with people that I think are intelligent, and good, but they don't get it. To know that they keep doing that. (Parents)

what has bothered me my entire life - Bigtime is a when you were in school and you have black history month you have the Chinese, the railroad, all this stuff is negative and they're speaking about it and all this stuff happened to these people that came over to America when America was being built. But when you got to the Native American it was about how we were resistant. We were savages and it's just the way we're portrayed in the history books. It's the way we're portrayed in schools, that even Mexican kids that came and say, Oh, the Indians are bad people. Black kids, you know, they say oh, the Indians were bad people, and the Indian kid will say, Well, you guys are all bad in our eyes. Because, this was our land. Where's our recognition? And it seems like every generation from the time of the first contact, we've always been trying. What about us? What about us? You know, we send troops over to other countries to fight because what they're doing to the Aboriginal people in those lands. We send troops over to fight for their protection. Yet we allow this to continue here in our own homeland, to us - to our people. And you know some day that's got to change. We don't need somebody coming in and trying to tell us how to govern our people. We don't need nobody telling us how to be Nooksack. But we do need people to understand what it is to be Nooksack. Because it's always the lack of education. What you don't know scares you. What you don't know puts up your defense against that person. And that's why there's a

lot of misunderstanding between non tribal and tribal. If they taught about our history accurately, I think it'd be a different story, instead of sugarcoating everything. (NT)

There would be more cultural awareness of who we are - not just Nooksack, but Lummi and even the inner relationships we have with tribes across the border – that border wasn't here. And we struggle with issues with the border as well. Our tribal people do. (NT)

There's so much that's been taken away from us already when it comes to our culture. And because of social media, a lot of it's in jeopardy again today. A lot of what we have left is in jeopardy. We don't want to share everything we have with the outside world. (NT)

Definitely some sort of training for the police force. (HES)

Education and awareness are critical (LFG)

Call to Action and Consequences

what can people who are elected do about this? Because there are a lot of great conversations like ours that are happening. But turning that into, like, policy is really different stories sometimes. ..it would look like elected representatives who are really transparent and who are really engaged with diverse communities for sure. (HES)

... we do have the potential to be a model for the country, because we are just in a very unique place. I've heard many times about the Bellingham bubble. I'm beginning to understand what it means. But I also think that we have enough courageous leaders, just enough courageous leaders, to make some real impact. And to be a model for the rest of the country. We sit at what feels like a crossroads where we're very dichotomous in terms of how we represent. We're sitting in a space that's very conservative and very liberal at the same time and quite progressive and everything in between. How beautiful that is, right? If we could get our neighbors all over the city to manage to tolerate and love and be compassionate and work with the tension of opposites, recognizing that we don't have to always agree. But if we come to the table with respect and honor and love, and everybody's voice counts, then I think we absolutely could be a model because there's racial progress...if we really embrace that, and we get our government sector and our public sector and our citizens to come together in ways that the Commission can facilitate so that these spaces become more the rule than the exception, I think that we will absolutely change the world one community at a time. (FBO)

I think having set goals possibly to what you'd like to do with each community of color (HES)

I would like to stop this, us versus them - like this kind of there's either you're in or you're out. And also allow for growth because each of us are different.. I think you will feel successful if every one of us can be the best version of ourselves at work and in community like we don't have to hold back. We can just be ourselves. .. I would love to not have these conversations. For me, this is successful if this goes away. Like we don't have to have an institution and foundation leading these conversations. It's part of the air we breathe and we don't have to talk about it. (ML3)

I think that two things have to change. I understand that they have to do their job but everything in their own way, they can't be making people feel so uncomfortable or assuming that one wants to be stealing, because I am not hateful, I expect many changes, hopefully with time if the government doesn't make them, then we are going to have to look for ways to achieve all of this. (FFW)

Burden on BIPOC

We would feel more confident to talk about this. I personally am going to be honest with you. When [redacted] came to me to participate, I told him no, I don't want to talk to other people about things, I don't want to get into trouble, I don't want to get into trouble, I didn't want to beforehand. I was afraid, I didn't want to get in trouble with anyone or anything, so there was more security, I think for oneself to be able to express what you feel. (FFW)

Additional

If it's successful I think that Whatcom County will function just as it's currently functioning. I think it may function a little better in some ways. But I don't think that success of any external group is going to change everybody in the community, nor should it try to. I don't think that it's going to create a substantive change for every group that does not feel like they have a voice because ultimately it's up to people and the people in the community to speak up for the things that they want. So what will it look like? It'll look just like it does... I'm pretty happy with the way it is here. While understanding that there's always room for improvement in any group person, anything. (LEFG)