

# **Let's Talk Economic Opportunity: Final Report**

Prepared by Jessica Hayes Conroy on behalf of  
TFSC and the City of Geneva  
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## **Introduction**

The Let's Talk Economic Opportunity dialogues (hereafter LTEO) emerged from an effort to ensure that work to promote the "Economic Opportunity" goals of Geneva's 2016 Comprehensive Plan adequately addresses the needs of all Geneva residents, including especially those who experience economic hardship. A partnership of the City of Geneva and Tools for Social Change (a local community group; hereafter TFSC), LTEO took the form of an earlier set of city-wide dialogues in Geneva—the Big Talk in the Little City—which was undertaken by TFSC in order to generate inclusive data for the city's comprehensive plan (CoG 2016b). Like the Big Talk, LTEO was conceived as a city-wide dialogue that sought to collect stories from Geneva's most disenfranchised residents. It was undertaken in the fall of 2017. This report summarizes and analyzes the data (in the form of transcripts and facilitator notes) that emerged from eight LTEO dialogues, amounting to 10 hours and 26 minutes of dialogue time.

LTEO attracted over 50 participants in total. Participants were recruited via various channels, including flyers, social media and online communication, and word-of mouth. The participants represent a diverse sample of those who live and/or work in the City of Geneva. Approximately half of those who participated indicated that they were low income or living in poverty, and approximately half were employed part time or unemployed. One sixth were retired or supported by Social Security disability. Approximately half of participants were non-white, including those who identified as black and mixed-race. More than a third of participants identified as Latinx, Hispanic, and/or Mexican. Approximately one-third of participants spoke multiple languages (often English and Spanish), while one-sixth spoke only Spanish (two LTEO dialogues were conducted in Spanish and subsequently translated). More than a third of participants identified as having a disability. About one-fifth identified as a sexual minority. Over half had less than a college degree. About half of all participants were 29 years old or younger, and about one fifth were over 60. Two thirds of all participants were women. Approximately half identified as Christian, and about one-fifth identified as a religious minority.

Planning for LTEO began with a dialogue among invited community leaders, who were asked to broadly define issues and challenges related to economic opportunity in Geneva. Members of TFSC subsequently worked to narrow these issues and challenges into functional dialogue-based interview questions, which are detailed below (see methods section). Given the priorities for economic advancement outlined in the Geneva Comprehensive Plan, LTEO was envisioned as a first-step action in reducing poverty, advancing opportunities for upward mobility, and addressing quality of life issues for low income residents (CoG 2016a). Toward these goals, LTEO sought to identify both strengths and weaknesses within the City of Geneva, and to encourage solution-oriented responses. Next steps include the development of an Economic Opportunity Task Force (EOTF) that will study and seek to address the opportunities and obstacles that are underscored in the LTEO data and outlined in this report (CoG 2016a).

## Research Methods

The form of dialogue-based research used by LTEO emerged out of the ongoing practice of intergroup dialogue (IGD) that TFSC initiated in 2014 in the City of Geneva in order to “help students, faculty, staff, and city residents *co-create knowledge and expand their civic capacity*” (Hussain and Wattles 2017, emphasis added). In the Big Talks (discussed above), this practice of intergroup dialogue became a method of collecting qualitative, dialogue-based interview data. The LTEO dialogues also utilized the method of IGD in order to co-create knowledge about the lived experiences of Geneva residents who have experienced economic hardship. TFSC again facilitated this process, since its members have long-term experience with engaging in IGD both as a tool for community engagement and a qualitative research method. All LTEO facilitators were also trained in dialogue-based interview techniques.

The use of collective dialogue in research is recognized as an advantageous and important practice in community-based, qualitative methodology, and especially in action-oriented research, which invites community participation and collaboration (Wallerstein and Duran 2011). As scholars M. Brinton Lykes and Alison Crosby suggest, a principal goal of community-based action research is “[the] democratization of knowledge production and use,” where community members become co-researchers who take an active role in data generation, interpretation, and problem-solving, and where “the process and outcomes of the collaboration...benefit those most in need” (2014). Although community-based research can take many forms, using collective, intergroup dialogue is particularly effective for a number of reasons. First, it allows for the generation of *in-depth data* that can help researchers to understand the intricacies and contextual idiosyncrasies of diverse lived experiences. Second and relatedly, it enrolls participants in a *collective process* of knowledge generation, in which dialoguers can listen, find points of commonality, and also offer differing perspectives. This can help researchers to avoid easy, one-size-fits-all solutions, and to appreciate the complexities and contradictions of everyday life. Finally, as evidenced by the success of TFSC (Hussain and Wattles 2017), IGD itself is an important tool for community-engagement that, even apart from a formal research process, can be combined with civic action to empower participants (Hussain and Wattles 2017).

As a potential model for engaged, community-based research, a few details about the LTEO partnership stand out. First, the TFSC dialogue facilitators were also community members, with strong connections to diverse social groups within the City of Geneva. This meant that the facilitators were able to share ideas and experiences as co-participants while also guiding the dialogue as trained facilitators and community leaders. This dynamic is ideal in action-oriented research, where the distinction between researcher and participant is purposefully blurred in an effort to promote a non-hierarchical, collaborative process among all involved, as *co-researchers*. Second, LTEO offered the opportunity for (short-term) paid work, as well as training (in qualitative research methods) and skill development (transcribing and dialogue facilitation). Although this is certainly not a solution to economic hardship in the community, the funds and training offered to facilitators and transcribers acknowledge the importance of financial compensation for such community-based work—recognizing that efforts to end the cycle of poverty in the City of Geneva must not rely on unpaid labor. Importantly, potential barriers to participation in the required facilitator training sessions (e.g. child care needs) were also acknowledged and addressed. Finally, LTEO was a community-led process from question generation (see Table 1), to data collection (the eight LTEO dialogues themselves), to transcription and translation (of the dialogue transcripts), and

even to analysis and interpretation (LTEO facilitators were consulted on a previous draft of this report). Such a community-led process is important both because it prioritizes the needs and concerns of *all* participants and also because it minimizes the chances of “researcher bias,” since the process involves many individual co-researchers who are all (differently) embedded within and responsive to various community needs.

<p><b>Jobs, Education, Workforce Readiness Questions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What has been your experience of work/working or not finding work in Geneva?</li> </ul> <p><b>Housing Questions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What has been your experience with housing in Geneva?</li> </ul> <p><b>Neighborhood and Community Question</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you love about your neighborhood/community? What could strengthen it?</li> </ul> <p><b>Healthy Family Questions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is it like to try to be a healthy person or to raise a healthy family in Geneva?</li> </ul> <p><b>Business and Development:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are your favorite businesses/service provider in Geneva, and why?</li> <li>• Have you thought about starting a business yourself? If yes, what kind of business and what keeps you from doing it/what stops you?</li> </ul> <p><b>Language Questions (For non-native English speakers)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are your experiences as a non-native-English-speaker in Geneva?</li> </ul> <p><b>Wrap-up (Closing) Questions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there anything else that affects your ability to be successful in Geneva?</li> <li>• Given all that we’ve talked about, what are some things that you, the community as a whole, or city government can do to improve things for you?</li> </ul>
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**Table 1: Questions for LTEO Dialogue-Facilitation**

Facilitators followed a “semi-structured” format, where the above questions served as a general (but not strict) guide for the dialogues. Most of the LTEO dialogues touched upon all facilitation questions, although not always in the order seen above. Some participants and groups gravitated toward certain questions or topics more than others. This is an expected and desirable outcome of the qualitative research process, as it ensures that all research participants are able to discuss the matters of most importance to them. Dialogue facilitators were trained to ensure that all participants were given a chance to share their experiences. The eight LTEO dialogues were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed. When necessary, the transcriptions were also translated from Spanish to English. Additionally, facilitators collected demographic data on each participant (summarized above), and also engaged in note-taking during the dialogues. The note-taking was meant to amplify key points from the conversation, both at the moment of the dialogue and after-the-fact, to be used as a guide in the data analysis (coding) and interpretation process.

In qualitative research, a code “is a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldaña 2012, 3). Codes help a researcher to look for common themes or ideas among the

transcripts, to identify patterns and connections between transcripts, and to examine a participant’s unique ideas and experiences within the multi-faceted contexts in which they are articulated. It is important to understand that codes are not simply counted for the quantity of times they appear within transcripts, and that idiosyncrasies within a transcript can be as important as common themes—especially when they help to illuminate marginalized perspectives (Hesse-Biber 2013).

Coding is not a straightforward or linear practice, but rather one of a cyclical and relational nature. Codes emerge through an iterative process that involves reading and re-reading the data in light of both emergent themes (those that come from the data) and analytical foci (topics that are deemed a priori to be of relevance to the research). In the case of LTEO, the analytical foci were determined during the question-writing process, where facilitators discussed the analytical relevance of each question-area to the broader objective of enhanced economic opportunity. Thus, the question-areas themselves served as an important lens in the coding process. In addition, codes also emerged from the data—from the themes, repetitions, and connections that arose through the process of reading and re-reading the transcript data. In total, this process yielded 65 codes, including 16 dominant codes (see Table 2). Dominant codes are codes that stand out, either because of the quantity of repeated instances or the contextual importance of the theme (e.g. in representing a minority position or experience). Dominant codes also tend to be repeated throughout a number of different code patterns, which are broader thematic areas of the data that can be represented or “storied” through a variety of intersecting codes (i.e. codes that frequently appear together in the data).

To present the findings of this research, these codes have been organized into nine multi-layered and interconnected “stories” about economic opportunity, as is detailed in the findings section below. Although there are, of course, many possible ways to organize coded data, such storytelling can be particularly useful for capturing the rich, interwoven realities of daily life that is so integral to qualitative research. More particularly for LTEO, these stories help to highlight the complex ways that economic opportunity is both supported and thwarted by a variety of mechanisms and conditions within and beyond the City of Geneva. Though each story is told individually, the code patterns demonstrate that these stories are clearly experienced as interconnected, and thus should be understood as such (See Table 3).

active_bodies; addiction; <b>affordability</b> ; <b>attitudes</b> ; capitalism; <b>care_work</b> ; city_gov; communication; <b>community</b> ; community_center; context; courtyard_apts; crime_safety; disability; discrimination; diversity_(or_lack); domestic_violence; downtown; <b>education</b> ; empowerment; entrepreneurship; financial_literacy; FLCC; food; <b>health_access</b> ; health_problems; homelessness; homeownership; hope; hostile_workplace; <b>housing_problems</b> ; housing_shortage; HWS; individual; infrastructure; job_satisfaction; <b>job_shortage</b> ; job_stability; lake; landlords; <b>language</b> ; life_course; mental_health; online; part_time; physical_health; police; <b>poverty_low_income</b> ; race/ism; representation; retirement; <b>segregation</b> ; social_network; <b>social_programs_services</b> ; stress; support_network; taxes; tenants_rights; time; <b>trades</b> ; <b>transportation</b> ; undesirable_jobs; <b>wage</b> ; workforce_development; <b>youth</b>
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**Table 2: LTEO Codes (dominant codes are in bold)**

### Findings: Nine Multi-Layered and Interconnected Stories

This section presents nine multi-layered and interconnected stories that emerged from the LTEO dialogues (see Table 3), and—wherever possible—directly engages the voices of dialogue participants in the telling of these stories. The nine stories highlight: the continued need for social programs and services in Geneva, the realities of living in poverty, mixed attitudes and emotions about economic (dis)advantage, barriers to adequate housing in the city, varied experiences of community—or lack thereof, the socio-economic factors that impact physical and mental health, obstacles to employment in the city, opportunities for entrepreneurship, and the need for youth-centered spaces and activities. Again, although these stories are told independently for the sake of organization, the codes, patterns, and relevant quotations reveal that they are—in the lives of the research participants—experienced as interconnected.

<p><b>The Need for Social Programs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Care work</i></li> <li>City Government</li> <li><i>Education</i></li> <li>Financial literacy</li> <li>Infrastructure</li> <li><i>Language</i></li> <li>Social networking</li> <li><i>Social programs (and services)</i></li> <li>Support network</li> <li>Tenant's rights</li> <li><i>Trades</i></li> <li>Workforce development</li> <li><i>Youth</i></li> </ul>	<p><b>The Realities of Poverty</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Addiction</li> <li><i>Care work</i></li> <li>Discrimination</li> <li><i>Health access</i></li> <li>Homelessness</li> <li><i>Housing problems</i></li> <li><i>Job shortage</i></li> <li>Job stability</li> <li>Mental health</li> <li>Part-time jobs</li> <li><i>Poverty &amp; Low income</i></li> <li><i>Segregation</i></li> <li><i>Wages</i></li> </ul>	<p><b>Mixed Attitudes &amp; Emotions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Attitudes</i></li> <li><i>Education</i></li> <li><i>Health access</i></li> <li>Hope</li> <li>Hostile workplace</li> <li>Job satisfaction</li> <li>Mental health</li> <li><i>Poverty &amp; Low income</i></li> <li>Social networking</li> <li><i>Social programs (and services)</i></li> <li><i>Trades</i></li> <li>Undesirable jobs</li> <li><i>Wages</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Barriers to Adequate Housing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Affordability</i></li> <li>City Government</li> <li>Communication</li> <li>Discrimination</li> <li><i>Housing problems</i></li> <li>Housing shortage</li> <li>Infrastructure</li> <li>Landlords</li> <li><i>Language</i></li> <li>Racism</li> <li><i>Segregation</i></li> <li>Tenant's rights</li> </ul>	<p><b>Varied Experiences of Community</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Affordability</i></li> <li>Communication</li> <li><i>Community</i></li> <li>Diversity (or lack thereof)</li> <li>Downtown</li> <li>HWS</li> <li>Infrastructure</li> <li><i>Language</i></li> <li>Police</li> <li>Representation</li> <li><i>Segregation</i></li> <li>Support network</li> </ul>	<p><b>Determinants of Health</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Active Bodies</li> <li>Addiction</li> <li><i>Affordability</i></li> <li>Communication</li> <li>Disability</li> <li>Food</li> <li><i>Health access</i></li> <li><i>Language</i></li> <li>Part-time jobs</li> <li>Physical &amp; Mental Health</li> <li><i>Poverty &amp; Low income</i></li> <li>Stress</li> <li><i>Transportation</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Obstacles to Employment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Care work</i></li> <li>Communication</li> <li>Disability</li> <li>Discrimination</li> <li><i>Education</i></li> <li>Hostile workplace</li> <li><i>Housing Problems</i></li> <li><i>Job shortage</i></li> <li>Job stability</li> <li><i>Language</i></li> <li>Support networks</li> <li><i>Transportation</i></li> <li><i>Wages</i></li> </ul>	<p><b>Entrepreneurship Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Affordability</i></li> <li><i>Attitudes</i></li> <li>City Government</li> <li>Communication</li> <li>Downtown</li> <li><i>Education</i></li> <li>Empowerment</li> <li>Entrepreneurship</li> <li>Hope</li> <li><i>Language</i></li> <li>Social Networking</li> <li><i>Social programs (and services)</i></li> <li>Support Network</li> </ul>	<p><b>Space for Kids and Teenagers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Active Bodies</li> <li><i>Attitudes</i></li> <li><i>Care work</i></li> <li><i>Community</i></li> <li>Community Center</li> <li>Downtown</li> <li><i>Education</i></li> <li>Empowerment</li> <li>Social networking</li> <li><i>Social programs (and services)</i></li> <li>Support network</li> <li><i>Trades</i></li> <li><i>Youth</i></li> </ul>

**Table 3: Codes/Patterns Organized into Nine Interconnected Stories**

### ***The Need for Social Programs***

Research participants throughout the dialogues pointed to social programs and services as both vital resources and opportunities for community development and economic advancement. The social programs and services discussed (and imagined) in the LTEO dialogues include both those provided through federal, state, and municipal funds and those provided through private or not-for-profit organizations. Examples of important resources already in place include Head Start, The Boys and Girls Club, Finger Lakes Community Health, and the African American Men's Association. Some participants also mentioned programs that are no longer in existence, but had been helpful in the past. For example, programs that support new moms or help economically disadvantaged residents get to work were identified as important.

"Head Start does such a great job with empowering parents to be advocates for themselves."

"The first...thing that my counselor introduced me to was the African-American Men's Association. They had a workshop for a couple of days, just getting prepared for college, how to apply to college and stuff, so [that was very helpful]."

"When I was a single mother, I was part of [a social program], I got to be involved, I got to do...a cooking program for mothers that gave them [their] first cook-wear.... And you know, my mom, that was her place, that was home for her...just being able to learn how to speak English there, I mean that was just [very important]."

"I know there was a program... called Wheels to Work. I'm not sure if that's still around but I actually got my first car through Wheels to Work. And to qualify for that, you had to have a child, or kids, a job to get to...cause that's basically what the program is based on, [and] to be getting like assistance, food stamps...I thought that was a pretty good program."

Participants also identified several opportunities for the development or enhancement of social programs, including programs oriented toward vocational or trade-based education, financial literacy, and affordable child care for all ages that would be available before, during, and after the traditional work day. In particular, many participants emphasized vocational training as especially important, but also challenging because of the negative stigma associated with trade-based work.

"Trades. You could start with something as simple as figuring out how to positively communicate to middle school and high school students the positive direction of following a trade. Going to BOCES. I'm hearing from kids that age that they still feel that that's a very negative thing to do. I'd like to find some way to encourage them in terms of pursuing that, if academics doesn't seem to be their thing."

"[We need opportunities for] mentoring either businesswise or trade wise... But that's the way you find out about something is, by having the opportunity to [shadow others]."

"[We need to] put together programs for our community to teach financial literacy because it is really the key that's gonna lift folks out [of poverty]. We can't continue to rely on Uncle Sam and the government...we gotta get some training. We need to know how to balance a

checkbook. We need to know how to save some money. We need to know how to put something aside so that we can give it to somebody else when we're long gone from here.”

“We do offer evening hours where we are, but not all places do. And so, we think about families who struggle with child care. There's 2 daycare facilities here in Geneva and they close at 5:45. But what about all of the individuals that work those second shifts?”

Many comments also pointed to the need for programs for teens specifically, beyond those that are offered through Geneva High School. Some participants also noted that the “live where you work” program could be enhanced to better serve the low-income population in Geneva, possibly in connection to vocational/trade-based education focused on youth.

“[Regarding the live where you work program]. I think the requirements for that would be very challenging for an individual living in poverty, regarding the requirements of what they had to save...Maybe some more could be done around promoting living where you work with different, requirements to try to promote that for individuals that may be more at the lower socioeconomic end.”

“So, what about some type of program that incorporates younger people with the businesses, the banks, the whatever, to rehab these [dilapidated houses]. Then when it goes for sale it goes back into the program? Like you get the kids, they get the training, they work with skilled people, they fix it up, then you're creating housing. It's a multipurpose program.”

In sum, the “story” of the need for social services in Geneva is a story about both the important resources already in existence, as well as the opportunities that exist for the development or enhancement of programs that could help to address a range of needs in the city—from childcare support at non-traditional hours and youth-centered programming, to financial literacy, workforce development, housing renovation, and transportation provision. As some participants noted, there may even be opportunities to address several needs at once. To be sure, the benefits of creatively and collectively addressing these needs are multiple.

### ***The Realities of Poverty***

Many LTEO participants relayed their experiences struggling with low income and/or living in poverty. The cycle of poverty was evident in these stories—for example, many participants discussed the ways that access to housing, transportation, and adequate wages are all related to one another. Residents spoke of the double bind of high rent and low wages, which makes it impossible to save money toward home ownership or a vehicle. This provokes a sense of feeling stuck, which can have residual impacts on one's mental health, stress-levels, and ability to cope with additional trauma or hardship. In addition, participants spoke of challenges with paying other bills, including food and health-related expenses. As one participant noted, poverty often means food insecurity for families and children. Importantly, these comments came both from young participants and also from those who were older—indicating that those of all ages experience similar, overlapping hardships. Homelessness in Geneva was also a concern for several participants. Read collectively, the quotations below speak to the scope and depths of poverty.

“[We're] stuck in a hole cause we're low class basically.”

Facilitator: “So, do you guys find that, would you say that the rent is high or that your jobs are not paying enough?” Everyone: “Both”

“I'm on SSI. I'm on Social Security, you know, and I try and make my 2 checks stretch. It's really hard, ya know, you get food and you pay your rent, you pay your doctor. Ya know, other stuff comes [up].”

“You know the minimum wage....The salary has a lot to do with it. It's, everything goes out of the paycheck, and when minimum wage doesn't go up, [it's not good],”

“Poverty...is the engine that drives so much of people's desperation, depression, [and] you name it. Domestic Violence and the whole thing. It just, it just drives so much. And, the statistics are overwhelming...it's tough.”

“I like the job a lot. It's difficult. A lot more difficult than I thought it'd be. But that's okay because it's something I believe in. The pay is not great. I get paid, I guess a little above minimum wage. Which, you know, is hard... [it] can be difficult to live... Thankfully I had some saved up and luckily for me, if things really go south, I can just move back with my parents...Transportation, you know for me is a little difficult. I don't have a car. So sometimes I bike or you know, friendly people at work have given me a ride, which works out. I don't think, I haven't looked at it too much, but I don't think the transportation would take me [where I need to go].”

“There's like the family's dependence, you know, like the food programs offered at the schools for the children...when most of the students say I need to come before 7:30am, and leave after like their, after school ends because that's when the snacks are given out... Kids can be like brutally honest sometimes, like they will say what's their situation at home. Right? Like, Mom and Dad aren't there. Or my older sister can't cook yet, so this is what I have for the whole day.”

Importantly, some participants also pointed to the existence of a sense of community and a social network among poor residents in Geneva—for example, how neighbors might offer a ride, seek to help one another out, or express concern over another person’s hardship. Participants pointed to this as both a reality and something that could be enhanced through social programs or entrepreneurship opportunities. Relatedly, participants also frequently discussed how Geneva is segregated in such a way that large portions of the broader “community” do not know or understand the realities of poverty in the city (this is further discussed in the “Varied Experiences of Community” section). There was a concern that funding and attention given to the downtown area of Geneva has not adequately considered the needs and realities of those living in poverty, and has potentially exacerbated the problem by enabling further segregation via the commercial spaces downtown. (This is a concern that was also previously addressed in the Big Talks report.)

“Well at the end of the day...I always look at [problems in the community] like this. Whatever you’re on, wherever you’ve been...part of your life, it concerns everybody. It could be someone...way up there, I don’t got to know them, they don’t got to know me, but when they come crossing the street and something happened, trust [me], it affects me. I can’t sleep. You know... I’m praying...I’m thinking of them. I want the best for them, you know ...



so [experience of hardship] affects, it affects all [of us] and that's something [that we can try to improve upon]."

"I've noticed in last couple years, Geneva's really been flourishing downtown. A lot of places are pretty expensive...that's the business models for tourists, [and] that's alright. But I don't know if there's that many spots where you can just sometimes sit down, just have a nice...I mean there are great restaurants around, but they seem to be [for wealthier tourists]."

"Our poverty rate in Geneva is over double of that of the entire county. And yet we aren't serving the people that live here. So, I think about the DRI [Downtown Revitalization Initiative] funds, and are we really then listening to the people that live here? And, you know, when saw...some of the things that got funded and some of the things that didn't get funded, as a resident [who] also lives here, I think that's frustrating."

Ultimately, LTEO participants' comments suggest that the realities of poverty in Geneva are stark and challenging, but also that opportunities for support and change abound. Addressing poverty in Geneva means beginning to disrupt the cycle of poverty that is perpetuated by low wages, high rents, inadequate housing, insufficient transportation, and food insecurity. Many of these issues are further elaborated in other sections. In addition, the comments suggest that addressing the issues of social segregation within the residential and commercial areas of Geneva, and providing spaces for community connection across lines of socio-economic difference, could help to ameliorate quality of life issues associated with poverty and low income.

### ***Mixed Attitudes and Emotions***

Many of the LTEO conversations revealed a mix of attitudes and emotions surrounding participants' daily, lived experiences in regard to work, family, and social life. It is important to note that while emotion is often overlooked in social research, it is deeply connected to lived experience. Attention to emotion can reveal the complexity of lived experience, and the unpredictable, unexpected, or even contradictory realities of daily life. It can also reveal one's motivations for both stasis and change. For example, one LTEO participant was homeless, yet commented that her life was pretty good, and that she was hopeful for the future. Another expressed both anger and empathy for those who rely on social assistance for financial support—admitting that people feel stuck, but also expressing frustration over their presumed laziness. Several participants articulated experiences of both hope and hopelessness in regard to the realities of poverty. Importantly, these seemingly inconsistent ideas don't necessarily signal a lack of understanding or a faulty perception of reality. Rather, such experiences more precisely reflect the chaotic, messy realities of daily life, and perhaps especially so for those in positions of social and economic disenfranchisement. Recognizing that both hope and hopelessness are part of one's experience of poverty—and endeavoring to understand from where these conflicting emotions emerge—can be important in shifting conditions of socio-economic inequality.

"I think like with the whole thing with jobs, jobs are there, people tend to struggle with...I don't wanna work twelve hours a day killing myself to make money to get ahead in life, but at the same time, you know, we have to see it as, you know, if you wanna get ahead, yes and you don't have to work twelve hours, but if that's all that's left and you're looking to get ahead then you're gonna have to settle...it has to be in the person to want to work..."

“He was saying opportunity; I was saying empowerment. Because you have a community that's been taught to believe that there is no hope, so how do you get people engaged in that first step to participate in those activities when all they've known is that they've been ignored for so long...to figure out a way to bridge that gap to provide the opportunity and also provide a way for the community to engage in those opportunities.”

“We're forever renting. And we're forever borrowing someone else's car. And we're forever saying that someone else got the good break and I didn't get it. And a lot of it is due to our lack of being able to handle our finances. And I believe that along with everything, as far as meeting the right people to talk to, as far as your networking and getting your information, there should be local classes taught on finance. To get even families up from the bottom because families are falling through the cracks. Because they don't know how to handle—they don't know how to pay a light and gas bill at the same time. And the rent. Because we're taught to go to Wal Mart and you can always put it on layaway. And they're so focused on just living for today. There is no view for tomorrow.”

“A lot of things is not being made known to communities... we have some of the smartest kids in our community, but there are certain things that they're not being told. Whether it be the school they go to, the family they come from, or whatever, but they're not being really given the real picture. They're being told, oh you're black, so you know it's gonna be harder for you. That's not always the case for every black child... really when I look at things, I was my own hindrance in my life...I didn't wanna go to college, when I first came out of school. That was my choice. I chose to go after I got married and had kids, and realized I couldn't get the good job until I had the college education. So, now I'm working backwards.”

“We have to...take baby steps...they want things to happen overnight and it's not gonna happen overnight. You know, there's just things that have to be, you know worked on, it's gotta go through here, it's gotta go through there, you know. It's, it's gotta go a long way before it, you know, before you get the job done...what I want is...to try and stay strong and try to continue to get out, go to different kinds of meetings, try and get information that I can bring, you know, to other tables and, and just put ideas together...I don't wanna give up, you know this is my home, I love Geneva, you know and I just want things to work out.”

As the above quotations suggest, participants have varied perceptions regarding the conditions and experiences that lead to economic (dis)advantage. Some pointed to the need for an attitude change in regard to work, involving both increased confidence and willingness to work long, hard hours, or to pursue the education required to obtain desirable jobs. Others pointed towards the importance of networks of support and knowledge to help people to find a way out of the seemingly hopeless cycles of poverty (e.g. through financial literacy programs, or community engagement). One additional theme related to attitudes and emotion was the “stigma” carried by various professions and social programs, and the need to somehow overcome such stigma in order to bring change to the community. This was articulated largely in regard to trade-based professions (e.g. plumbing, construction, carpentry, mechanics, etc.) and trade schools (e.g. BOCES). Stigma was also noted in regard to students who attend The Boys and Girls Club, and the neighborhood of Courtyard Apartments.

“They have some wonderful programs there...I mentioned to my daughter I remember in middle school, ya know it would be good if you guys could go there. You could be a positive

influence on some of these kids. Honestly, that's what they need is to be around other kids. Ya know what I mean, and, and, but that's not how they're seeing it. It's these kids and these kids, so how to bridge that. I think that's an important thing we need to have more, or how can the boys and girls club reach out and we can get past what that stigma is, which there is if you go to the Geneva schools, there's a stigma to that. There's only certain kinds of kids that go to the Boys and Girls Club."

"...it wasn't a stigma to go, the ones who went to BOCES, you know they seemed to be [ahead] because they had a marketable skill...you could be a plumber, carpenter, all of these things. And nobody in here makes what a plumber makes...Cause we can't afford boats, we can't afford to take the winters off, in Florida. Plumbers can do that. But how do we get that message, because every young person that I talk to, [they don't want to work trades]. But we have to, how can we reenergize our young [to be interested in vocational education]...Where does that happen?"

Overall, participants' comments revealed a range of emotional reactions to different conditions and experiences of disadvantage. More particularly, the comments suggest that attending to these differences may be helpful for understanding how to facilitate change. For instance, given the above comments, it seems evident that recognizing and responding to the "stigmas" that are attached to certain social programs may be important for their continued success. In addition, understanding how and why the cycle of poverty can provoke a sense of hopelessness—as well as the mechanisms through which hope is sustained under such conditions—seems necessary for developing strategies that can effectively intervene in and ameliorate economic disadvantage.

### ***Barriers to Adequate Housing***

Inadequate and unsafe housing, particularly for rental properties in Geneva, is a problem that the previous Big Talks research highlighted as a serious concern for many disenfranchised residents. The data from LTEO again show that this problem has not gone away and has not been effectively mitigated in the two years since the Big Talks. Many LTEO participants pointed to serious housing problems, which impact residents' ability to live in (and raise a family in) an affordable, safe, healthy, and stable setting. Such stressful and unsafe housing conditions can additionally impact one's job status and performance. One term that participants used frequently was "slumlord," referring to the problems that many residents have faced with unresponsive landlords who rent apartments in damaged and sometimes dangerous conditions.

"As far as housing around here...in Geneva there is really lots of slumlords, not landlords. They have you living in a place that they wouldn't even put their dogs in..."

"I actually know somebody that's having problems [her] landlord. He's showing her apartment while she's living in there, offering her apartment for more money. So, now she's been there for eight years or more [years]...and just because he didn't get more money out of her, he started showing her apartment...He doesn't take care of the apartment, and everybody who moved in, nobody had a fire alarm so if a fire would have happened, everybody in that building would have went down. There is an infestation that he doesn't care about...he takes everyone one by one to court. Instead of dealing with the problem, he gets rid of them so that somebody else will get to deal with the problem."

"I feel like a lot of landlords could do better as far as renting houses or apartment complexes. I lived in an apartment complex for two years and there was black mold in the apartment before I actually knew that it was in there...like everybody deserves to be treated fairly. [People] wanna be safe, especially if you have kids. (Question: How was it handled?) It actually wasn't handled. I moved out, I called law enforcement and they came. The apartment complex was supposed to take care of the situation. Instead, they just painted over it."

"So, there's that stigma that low income, you have to qualify. Okay? Then the next step up are houses that have been purchased, converted, into multiple dwellings from single houses. And excuse my expression, but, slumlords have taken them over. So, you have folks that don't deserve to live in some of the conditions that they are allowed to live in, via city government and code enforcements that are not enforced. Some of them are fire hazards...And then there's houses that no one can afford. And then there is a percentage of housing that has been obtained, accumulated, for rental to the college students."

Substandard and unstable housing creates unhealthy and stressful environments for living, caring for others, and raising children. Such physically and mentally challenging conditions can also impact one's ability to work. Additionally, another frequently articulated problem was high rent, especially for families, and also in comparison to the relatively inexpensive opportunities for home ownership, which are only available if one has the financial backing to own a home. Several participants pointed to the "live where you work" program as an opportunity for improvement (e.g. by making the program more feasible for low income residents). Student housing was also voiced as a concern for several reasons, including especially the negative impact that (HWS) students tend to have on the neighborhood (e.g. noise, littering, etc.) Some participants also mentioned experiencing housing discrimination based on race or familial status.

"Rent is too high."

"Two or three years ago there was a program that the city sponsored, for first time buyers and that came in and went out just as quick as it came in.... Giving courses on how to buy a house, and they were funding that training. And then also had some kind of stipulation for a loan, or a mortgage. And that came in and went right back out just as quick as it came in."

"Then some of [the landlords]...if you got kids, they don't accept that...I had one bad experience where I called [about] an apartment and the guy, he was an older guy, he lived in Florida and after I started talking to him, like after I told him my name and everything, he asked me if I was Black or White and I told him I was black and he was like, oh well you sound intelligent... So when he found out that I was black, he was like oh well I'll give you a call back. I never heard from him and I kept calling him and calling him and I never got an answer. Then a friend of mine, she tried to rent from him and she told him that she was white so when she actually went there to see the apartment [he found out] she was Black and she never got called back."

"And we've experienced, even with clients, almost them being like blacklisted, where they had a bad experience, especially like some of our domestic violence clients...that victim can no longer then get another apartment in Geneva because they were tied to this incident at this other house. So, they end up on this list that...they're not being rented to."

“Well I participated in the live where you work program and was able to purchase my home in Geneva. And so that was a wonderful experience for me, because I was able to participate in that program because I work here. However...although that was a very positive experience for me, I think the requirements for that would be very challenging for an individual living in poverty, regarding the requirements of what they had to save in order to get the match. And so, I just think that maybe some more could be done around promoting living where you work with different requirements to try to promote that for individuals that may be more at the lower socioeconomic end.”

These experiences are consistent with what is already known about housing in Geneva. A lack of housing for all income ranges, including especially for low income residents, was previously noted in the Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) plan (CoG 2017). The Big Talks research also pointed to issues of housing discrimination, high rent, and financial barriers to home ownership (CoG 2016b). The DRI plan also specifically notes that addressing the affordability of housing will help to empower disenfranchised residents and alleviate poverty-related problems. The need to attend to the deteriorating conditions of housing is also noted in the DRI plan. These data further demonstrate the importance of actions that directly tackle problems related to the condition and affordability of housing, as well as the ongoing experiences of housing discrimination, which are no longer able to be addressed by the Geneva Human Rights Commission.

### ***Varied Experiences of Community***

Another set of experiences that weave through the other stories here involves participants' varied connection to “community” in Geneva. In this research, “community” refers to the felt sense of collectivity and cohesion among those who work and live in Geneva. Various participants reflected upon both the barriers and the opportunities for this felt sense of community. One frequent concern, echoing the Big Talks, was how residential and commercial segregation (on the basis of income, as well as language and race) limits the ability of Geneva to be one, cohesive community. For example, many residents cannot financially afford to take part in the social opportunities available downtown (e.g. restaurants, bars, etc.), which can further limit their ability to develop the kinds of social networks that can provide support, mentorship, and economic opportunity. Additionally, some participants pointed toward language barriers, language discrimination, and racism as a barrier to a cohesive community. In these experiences, the financial, language, and racial barriers provoke a sense that the “downtown” of Geneva—including the recent revitalization efforts—is not for low income or minority residents of the city. As one participant noted, issues with transportation also exacerbate this.

“Well I think a concern there is that the local folks...it's an affordability situation. If they don't have jobs, they don't have expendable income to go to those restaurants...”

“Everything is in the downtown area intentionally because this place is so segregated... people who live in charter homes, how are they gonna get there if they don't have a whip?”

“I think inclusion develops community. Okay? As a whole, right now I think, in Geneva there's too many segregated communities.”

“One time I went to buy something at Lowe's and I told [a man] that I only spoke Spanish and [he] said, how many years have you been here...[I said] I've been here many years, more

than twenty years. [He said] You don't speak English?... my wife [was in] Mexico six months and she came [back] speaking Spanish and I [said], yes but I am not your wife."

"Here in Geneva, we've got a... food and wine industry that's burgeoning and really starting to progress. Downtown is starting to kind of revitalize itself, but yet who are the folks that have those opportunities? Largely, it's not folks that look like us [people of color]. ...So, while I am encouraged to see what's going on in downtown, I'm discouraged by the fact that we are not necessarily present in what's going on downtown...people need to see themselves reflected, or people need to see themselves as important enough to be invested in."

Another common concern was the (often) negative impact that HWS students can have on the Geneva community, including those who rent within the city, as well as those who walk through Geneva to frequent bars and restaurants. Several participants shared the perception that the downtown area is specifically geared toward HWS students, as well as to tourists, rather than to the needs of the local community. A few participants noted that HWS students are rude to local residents, and do not have a sense of responsibility to the Geneva community (e.g. in terms of noise levels, littering, or respect for those around them). One noted that the tax-free status of the Colleges does not help Geneva. Several participants also voiced a sense of disconnection from the HWS campus and the activities that take place therein.

"Something...else that I find is an issue is, on the weekends when there's the downtown rush of college students, when they're coming back from the local bars and breweries, etc. they are very rude at the pizza places getting food... A friend of mine, she is a woman of color, works at [downtown pizza place] and she has very negative experiences every single weekend during her 10-4am shift with the college students that are there rushing back to catch the shuttle and get back to their dorms."

"[I have seen] belligerent alcohol use [with HWS students] and a very disconnected sense of where they are. What I find is that it's an excursion, we're going downtown and this is for us. It's a total disregard of [the] Geneva people that live here...It's a complex they have where they're very entitled to every ounce of land that they walk on. So, there's a huge disconnect between the colleges and the community and I think it's really, uh, creates a lot of negative impacts for community businesses."

"Everything is towards the college. I mean, they cater to the college."

"You know at Hobart, they get a lot of land tax free. Everything they build, they're building buildings everywhere. All tax free. And that's not helping."

"I mean I feel afraid to walk into HWS sometimes."

Importantly, LTEO participants also pointed to some of the important features that enhance the sense of community in Geneva—for example, Crusin' Night, Geneva Reads, and other community events. Several participants suggested that we should look towards such events as models for community development.

"And the good thing about Cruisin Night, not to belabor it, but there's an opportunity for different agencies, service agencies to be there and be present. Geneva Reads handing out

books to kids, to all children, ya know, just here's a book. And the looks on these kids' faces, and parents faces. Very appreciative."

"Well, Geneva as a whole, I feel like there is something always going on and something for everyone to always get involved in so you can't ever say that we're a boring community...because there is something for us to always interact with one another..."

Ultimately, LTEO participants' experiences reflect the importance of a cohesive community. Segregation and other barriers to connection limit disenfranchised residents from building supportive social networks, which can lead to feelings of isolation, anxiety and depression. This experience was particularly prominent for Latinx participants, who felt that both language barriers and racial discrimination limited their connection to the Geneva community. These limitations, in turn, have also impacted their ability to locate economic opportunity or to succeed in entrepreneurial undertakings in Geneva.

### ***Determinants of Health***

A physically and mentally healthy workforce is a prerequisite to economic advancement. Accommodations of physical and mental difference are also important to ensuring that all residents are able to take advantage of economic opportunity. The decision to include questions about health in the LTEO dialogues came about because of a recognition of ongoing issues of physical and mental health in the community, and the way that these issues negatively impact the lives of disenfranchised residents. Indeed, LTEO facilitators noted that some potential participants were unfortunately too anxious to even attend the talks. The participants who did attend covered a wide variety of topics related to health, including healthy food procurement, transportation to get food and other necessities, opportunities for physical activity among children and teenagers, mental health and addiction problems, access to medical and dental care, maternity care and child care, and language discrimination in a medical setting, among other topics. The affordability of health-related activities, services, and goods was also noted as a concern.

"the cost of...fitness facilities like the YMCA, to have a family plan is also very expensive. It would be nice to be able to see where your family could go enjoy time together, that wasn't so costly. And I know a lot of like the additional add ons, like your child being able to participate in T ball or baseball, or, to take an extra class is additional funding on top of the regular monthly rate. That's sometimes too much."

"We don't have the ability to collect Medicaid at this point. So how do you work with an individual that needs mental health services? [And] they can't really afford a copay, even if the copay is fairly low. It's different going for a mental health service once a week for \$20 then it is for me to cough up \$20 to go to the doctors once a year. So, I get that copays and just funding in general, is a challenge. And they'd rather use that \$20, even if it's the lowest copay that we have, to provide food for their family or another need or want, than for their own mental health services. So, I, that's my thoughts on mental health."

"Childcare is so expensive. Probably almost three quarters of the kids that go [to a daycare facility] receive DSS funding and support. Childcare is a huge issue. The benefit on the childcare end is, at least for my children's daycare, they cover the cost of food and they do formula. And formula's very expensive. So, to have a childcare site that does pay for formula does save families money."

“They [health practitioners] treat [you] badly for not knowing the language.”

“I have a quick comment on the health care stuff. I just had a child and Geneva got rid of the maternity two years ago. So, if you’re a young family thinking about moving to Geneva or want to have a child in the hospital here, you can’t. You have to go to Canandaigua, you have to go to Rochester.”

“I think like with the thing with the heroin epidemic...I’ve experienced it with my best friend. It’s hard to judge and to say, to say that, you know, it’s hard for them to get the help that they need cause unless you have been a drug addict, you don’t know. Like I can’t tell you, I don’t know what it is to be a drug addict, I don’t know what it is to be around all of that stuff and you know my friend kept quiet...You can push and push and push and say yes and point to information, there are plenty of programs but, being an addict, you can’t, they don’t function, they don’t do anything. So it’s kinda hard, it’s hard.”

Beyond the problems discussed above, participants from one LTEO dialogue also pointed to the importance of Finger Lakes Community Health in providing quality medical and dental care for low income residents, including migrant laborers.

“Medical [access-wise], I think Geneva's in pretty good shape...Because of the community health...And community health also helps to provide a lot of the dental... It originally was created to serve a lot of the farm workers. You know, I mean, I guess it came from that. And, it has expanded to serve- (Question: do you see that as the main way that a lot of low income people are accessing [their] general health needs?). Yes. I think it is.”

The above comments suggest that the physical and mental health status of Geneva residents is a central part of their day-to-day lived experience, and furthermore, that the health status of Geneva residents can also have an impact on their ability to work, engage in the community, and pursue economic opportunities. For example, several LTEO participants pointed to disability and chronic illness as a reason for their inability to work, and/or as an obstacle to their mobility in Geneva. Thus, attention to the financial, linguistic, and social barriers to good health (including issues of disability accommodation) is crucial to the promotion of economic opportunity.

### ***Obstacles to Employment***

Almost all of the LTEO dialogues centered on employment, including topics like job scarcity, hostile workplaces and undesirable jobs, poverty wages, the importance of child care, positive and negative work experiences, transportation to the workplace, and language barriers to employment. Many participants agreed that there is considerable need for full-time employment that pays a living wage, and that the shift toward part-time, minimum wage service jobs (in Geneva and elsewhere) has serious negative impacts on low income residents. Several participants encouraged the city to attract more jobs, including manufacturing and industry jobs. Other opportunities for growth lay in the areas of education (including both vocational training and the path to college), support networks and mentoring of youth and young adults, communication about social programs and workforce development programs, language classes, and attention to issues of transportation.

“Well, [name] was saying that she met a woman who just recently moved here from Puerto Rico and was having a tough time finding a job due to the language barrier and you know,



jobs are hard to find and if you do find a job it's not always gonna pay enough, and it's gonna be a job that's tough and, all that together makes it a struggle.”

“The jobs that I did, I did not like, but I had to do the jobs to get to A or B, to have the things that, that I desire, you know even if I did get the things that I desire, I still had to have that job...Mainly because of lack of education, dropping out of school in twelfth grade, it was only February for me and that is not something that I wanted to do but I had to do it anyway, you know, to live...I think that education is the key to life and that you really need that education because if you, you know, because it's different places that you go, it's different things that you're seeing and...you wanna know what people are talking about...If you don't stay in school for that, you're gonna be broken in some parts.”

“Okay, this is [name] and I was telling [name] we need real jobs, not the fake jobs we have like Wegmans, Walmart, McDonalds. We need real jobs, people that can plan their lives and raise a family on it. I just worked 96 hours a week and I got paid almost nothing.”

“I would push for manufacturing [jobs] of some sort.”

[My work experience has been] pretty positive for the most part. I worked for 14 years at a pizza restaurant. And I had to resign there about 5 years ago because of lack of work. But it was a great experience and virtually everyone, the paying customers and the people that worked there, was really class people. It was a great experience. It's a bummer I had to leave.”

“The only problem is I have to commute a lot. I have to bicycle to take the transit bus. This is, once I get a car on the road that'll help a heck of a lot.”

Several LTEO participants emphasized child care as a significant issue in regard to employment. Some suggested the summer months, when children are out of school, can be particularly challenging. Other participants pointed to the need for more affordable child care options outside the traditional (9-5) work hours. To be sure, for many families, child care is a significant obstacle to finding and maintaining employment.

“And summers are very difficult for families, because there's a limited number of places. Look at the Boys and Girls club, and the Y. And summer school...it doesn't cover everybody and if you're not really on top of it and get your child into one of those programs, then in the summers you're really struggling. And, and for some it's the difference between not being able to work and work.”

“For me more than anything my kids [are what have held me back in employment]. Because the day will come when they grow up, because just imagine, if I get to the English class, I am going to be able to work, eat fast, and go to the class. That is what has detained me the most, my kids. But thank the Lord.”

Overall, the LTEO participants were eager to talk about their experiences with employment. Their comments point toward both problems and opportunities for change. Participants suggested that language translation services could help non-English speaking job-seekers to find appropriate work opportunities. Others expressed frustration over the lack of year-round employment in Geneva, suggesting that many job opportunities only offer seasonal work that is oriented toward the tourist

economy. Still others pointed toward the need for vocational training. Many participants went into depth with their own particular employment histories, and many lamented the increasing trend toward part-time, easily-replaceable labor. More particularly, there was a sense among some participants that the city enabled the transition to part-time work, because of the focus on visitors and the tourist economy. Some participants were also particularly concerned about the agreement (payment in lieu of taxes) that Geneva Industrial Development Agency made with Guardian Glass, which several participants saw as selling out the public good. Taken collectively, these experiences and perceptions serve to heighten a sense of distrust and alienation. The lack of a functional human rights commission to adequately deal with issues of job (and housing) based discrimination also deepens these negative sentiments. Some participants articulated that there seems to be no way to hold people accountable for unethical employment practices, and no adequate resources to deal with the many barriers to employment that people face on a daily basis.

### ***Entrepreneurship Opportunities***

One of the future-looking questions from the dialogues focused on the possibility of entrepreneurship in Geneva. The conversations surrounding this question tended toward a mix of both identifying obstacles to entrepreneurship and discussing dreams as well as plans already in motion. Some participants pointed toward the need for business-centered education as well as networks of support and mentorship within the community, through which a new business owner could learn the ropes. Others mentioned the importance of grants, business partners, and willing employees, and noted that high rents in the city make it challenging to run a successful business. More generally, several participants emphasized the need to encourage the success of local, independent, small businesses in Geneva. Like the Big Talks, some participants sensed that the microenterprise grants and other financial and logistical support offered by the City of Geneva was meant for certain types of businesses and not others; more specifically, these participants sensed that businesses geared toward minority residents would not be welcome or supported.

“She was talking about the small businesses and how she wants to see more support of the small, local businesses and she thinks that [there’s a lot of] people with the potential to make it work, [and] they have the brains to make it work but not the funds. So, to work on getting like that kind of grants...to make it happen. Make more small businesses in Geneva.”

“The rent is too high for businesses to open up now...and that’s why a lot of businesses flop.”

“I used to own my own business here in Geneva...and my biggest problem was nobody wanted to work and I used to start guys off at twelve dollars an hour and we used to do a lot of state work which was twenty dollars plus, but nobody wanted to work. And I would even furnish gas for the cars to come to work or go get them and I finally sold my business because I just had enough.”

“You know I grew up around people that had those middle management jobs and upper management jobs and things like that, but there in that little area we lived...a lot of us felt like that's not something that we can do, ya know? And now myself, being in upper management, I realize that, ya know, all things are possible. But there's a lotta people who don't have that confidence or understanding because of the lack of education.”

Many LTEO participants shared ideas for future businesses (or those already in-the-works), including a restaurant, a clothing store, and a beauty store. Several others shared ideas for mentorship-related social programs or social network development that could encourage business ownership, especially among those with little business experience.

“If I were to start a business, it would be like name brand clothes, but I’ll bring them down [from] present marks so that way the people that wasn’t able to get it will be able to have it.”

“As [for] starting a business, I do plan on starting one in the near future. My husband is a chef from Mexico so he loves to cook and so that’s something that we’re definitely, you know, will take advantage of...it’s something that we’re definitely doing in the next year so, it’ll be a Mexican restaurant.”

“I can’t say that I have a favorite business. I’ll go anywhere once or twice and just try and support somebody’s business. I started my own business and it’s called [Name of Business] where I sell eye-lashes and makeup and wigs and stuff like that.”

“I thought about [starting a business]...I just thought that it would take so much, like you need a business degree. [But then] I found out you don’t need a business degree to start your own business. It’s more of like the accounting that you might need...but I mean if you know somebody that’s really smart with math then you can go from there. I mean, it’s going slow, it’s going with the support, you know, the community, not even the community, just people. You know to build, the grant, and who wants to come along? With starting your own business, I know that comes with patience and availability and pretty much the drive.”

In total, conversations about entrepreneurship possibilities in Geneva suggest that many residents have ideas, and even plans, for business endeavors in the city. Some participants would like the city to consider how microenterprise grants might better serve community needs and desires. Others ask what the city might do to support current businesses that serve a need in the community (e.g. kid-friendly spaces). And, in connection with the need for more community cohesion, some participants also ask: what opportunities exist for supporting the creation of businesses that appeal to minority and low income residents?

### ***Space for Kids and Teenagers***

The last interconnected story from the LTEO transcripts points to the need for more youth-centered spaces. Many participants noted that they wished there were more events and activities for kids, as well as safe, and affordable hang-out spaces for teenagers and young adults. The spaces for adolescents in Geneva tend to be public spaces, including the library and—in warmer months—the parks. Participants’ comments suggest that there is a desire for additional public spaces for adolescents, where youth can gather and socialize. Some participants noted that the community center on Carter Road is helpful (for middle-school aged kids especially) but also far away, and that the Boys and Girls Club is also important, yet stigmatized. One LTEO dialogue specifically took place at the high school, and many student participants there voiced not feeling welcome in the downtown area of Geneva. On a more positive note, one young participant noted that finding part-time employment seemed to be easy for teenagers their age.

“I think you hit out on a particular issue there—the older adolescent population. I have a 19-year-old at home, who would tell you that things to do in Geneva are, it's a dismal scene right now. Because they're not 21, they're not a kid either. So, there's, what do you do? And so, they're hangin out with friends, or work, and that's about it.”

“I'd like to see some all-ages entertainment, like, FLX Live opened and I was telling [name] about a local band that's coming. I said, you should go. And he was like, it's 21 and up. So...students who are not 21 should be able to get their hand stamped and be able to go see live music and in their community and maybe that would be good for business and, you know, safe entertainment.”

“What we could do is pretty much most of Geneva is more projects, summer projects for kids like crafting and arts or, you know, or to the animals. Something like that. Something to keep our kids busy instead of being wandering on the streets...”

“Some people from these community events have told me they wish there were more but for children and teens ...not just more but affordable too, and at reasonable times. Because, yeah, you may not be able to talk to your neighbor, but these community events can also grow, build connections within, different communities in the city.”

“I mean I work at [fast food chain] right now and I still work part-time and I applied, I wanna say on August 23rd then I got the job the 20th of November of last year. I mean, I found it, wasn't very hard. They're pretty lenient with high school kids, they're pretty good with fitting around your schedules and I think they want more high school kids and get them ready and prep them for a career, for their future careers.”

The Big Talk data also confirm the sentiments articulated above. Teenagers and young adults particularly struggle with feeling unwelcome and having no place to go. Participants also noted summer-time as a particularly challenging time for youth. LTEO participants asked, how might we foster more public spaces for kids and teenagers to hang out—at the lakefront, in parks, and also in indoor spaces? In addition, how can we encourage kids who cannot afford to take advantage of the businesses and restaurants in Geneva to still feel welcome downtown? These issues relate to the broader concern of economic opportunity in several ways. Youth who are disconnected from what the city has to offer are likely to also be disconnected to social networks and support systems that can enable mentorship, job experience, and educational support. In addition, many participants (especially mothers) pointed to the lack of child care support as a key issue in their inability to find or maintain gainful employment.

### **Summary**

The LTEO data reveal a complex picture of the day-to-day realities of economic disadvantage, including both troubling experiences and challenging obstacles, as well as promising opportunities for change. In sum, problems include (but are not limited to):

- Inadequate and unaffordable housing, as well as housing discrimination
- Lack of community cohesion, especially across lines of economic, racial, and linguistic difference
- An emphasis on part-time and seasonal work for low wages and no benefits
- Inadequate transportation options to get to and from work
- Language barriers to employment

- Perceived lack of support for minority owned and oriented businesses
- Few spaces for youth and teens to gather, especially in the downtown area
- Perception that downtown Geneva is largely for wealthy residents, students and tourists
- Depression and mental-health issues associated with poverty
- Lack of affordable child care at flexible hours

Opportunities for intervention include, but are not limited to:

- Programs to address housing discrimination and poor living conditions
- Programs to encourage and facilitate home ownership for low income residents
- Events and activities focused on community cohesion across lines of social difference
- Support for the creation of full-time jobs that pay workers a living wage
- Creative attention to ongoing transportation issues
- Support for overcoming language-based obstacles to employment
- Support for the development of minority-owned and focused businesses
- Accessible, affordable downtown gathering spaces and activities for youth as well as adults
- Social programs focused on education and mentorship, including vocational work
- Increased support for affordable, flexible child care

As outlined in the Geneva Comprehensive Plan, the creation of an Economic Opportunity Task Force to consider these problems, and potential solutions, is the next step to enhancing economic opportunity in Geneva. While the diverse experiences articulated by LTEO participants are varied and multifaceted, it is clear that the priorities for tackling poverty and housing problems outlined in both the Geneva Comprehensive Plan and the Downtown Revitalization Initiative continue to be important to the future economic advancement of Geneva's low income residents. In addition, the LTEO data reveal a host of interconnected issues that, when addressed collectively and creatively, can help to promote economic opportunity in the city.

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