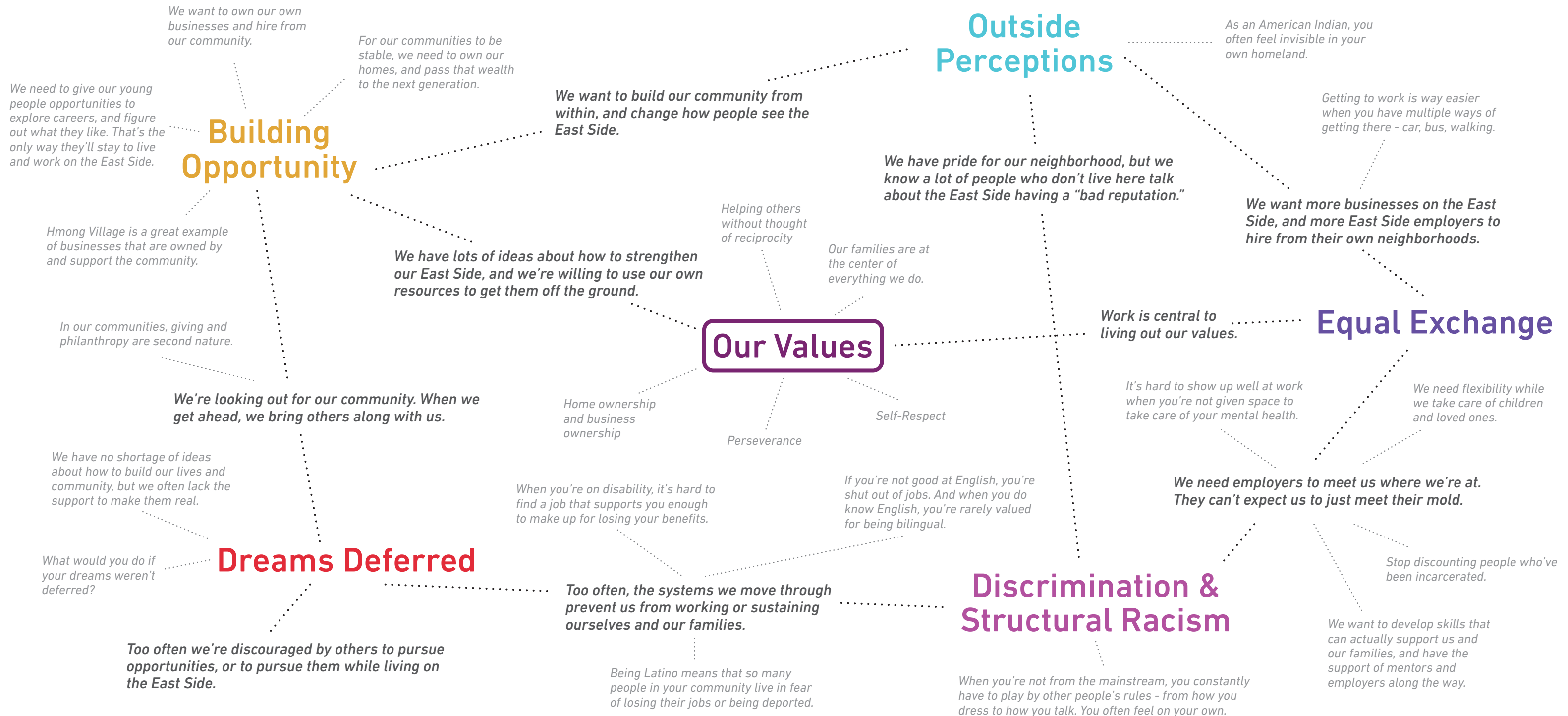


# Employment on the East Side

Between November 2017 and April 2018, the East Side Employment xChange held Talking Circles and interviews with over 60 East Side residents about how employment does, or does not, support them and the things they value most. From the multitude of experiences that were shared, here are **interrelated themes that shape many East Siders' experiences with work.**



produced by Robbie Seltzer (Lukeworks) for the East Side Employment xChange, May 2018

The East Side Employment xChange is 11 community-based organizations working together to create more - and more equitable - employment opportunities for the East Side. We create opportunities through building relationships with employers, with East Siders, and between ourselves as service providers. Through relationships, we figure out how to meet each other's needs, and to see our needs as inextricable from our broader community.

For information about the xChange, contact Robbie Seltzer, [robbie@lukeworks.net](mailto:robbie@lukeworks.net)



# ...when we think about employment, we also think about:

## Our Values

Values shared by participants at one Circle:

Focus on family time · family trust · loyalty · my sobriety · indomitable spirit · devotion · my babies · self control · honesty and trust · self-respect · smudging and prayers · praying · loving everyone even yourself · integrity · truth and honesty · honor · motivation · perseverance · humility · caring · forgiveness

"Ownership is a Hmong value. We support it from all sides. If someone can support it, then we'd all jump on it. Another Hmong value is helping others without thought of reciprocity, so you can nurture the community."

## Equal Exchange

**Q: What do you want from employers? (Responses from one Circle)**

**A:** Education - employers should offer GED opportunities for their employees.

Employers should pay fairly regardless of the person's ethnicity or immigration status.

We need employers to support driver licenses for everyone to bring more security to the community.

Employers should offer transportation.

Employers should market their job posting broadly so the East Side Community can be aware of it.

Employers should announce their job postings to their workers.

"I am lucky I found an employer who is very flexible to my special needs child's life. [...] The CEO also has a special needs child. If I need to flex my schedule for an appointment or anything, all I need to do is tell him. The hard part is I still have to make up the work. [...] I wish I could just have less hours, less pay and not make up the work."

"My son was in the ICU and work wouldn't let me get off. I told them I had to see him or I quit. They didn't understand and my respect was compromised."

## Outside Perceptions

"I have lived on the East Side for 32 years. My wife works outside of the East Side, and I work in Downtown St. Paul. The East Side is not where companies want to be located."

"Some mornings when I wake up with serious anxiety, I can't get out of bed and go to work. I have lost jobs due to this because employers don't understand. They think I don't care about my job or my commitments. Nothing is farther from the truth. I really want to get out of the house and interact with people but I am afraid to start looking for work, and I don't know where to start."

## Discrimination & Structural Racism

"It's not just the East Side, but it's everywhere. Being female in construction, you're treated so differently. They were asking if I feel safe with Black people. I was like, "Uh, people in my family are Black." There are those certain questions."

"I have had a lot of jobs - construction, remodeling, maintenance. I do maintenance right now. My main thing is seeing that when you get at a certain age and not really appreciated by this society and culture. Well I'm only 46 and can't really get no job nowhere."

"For my generation, when you move to this country - not just the East Side - you have no chance to go from the beginning of education. You have a family. A barrier is language [...]. It's not easy to come here and find a job, the exact one you had before."

"We need to be more lenient towards people with a spotty background so they can own houses or get loans. Help people who weren't doing so good to help them change it around when they are trying to."

## Building Opportunity

"If I had my own business, I would hire people that had felonies and had turned their lives around."

**Q: What would you do if you received a huge amount of money?**

**A:** Purchase a home (almost everyone said this)  
Invest  
Keep my sanity  
Provide stability for my family  
Assist the homeless  
Move to South America  
Start a Foundation  
Create jobs

## Dreams Deferred

This poem was shared at one of the Talking Circles. The facilitator then asked: "What would you be doing now if your dreams weren't deferred?"

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up  
like a raisin in the sun?  
Or fester like a sore -  
And then run?  
Does it stink like rotten meat?  
Or crust and sugar over -  
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags  
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

-Harlem by Langston Hughes

## The Talking Circle Process

Job-seekers, service providers, and employers relate to each other through deeply-ingrained patterns. The East Side Employment xChange is premised on renegotiating those relationships, towards creating more, and more equitable employment opportunities for the East Side.

Talking Circles are a first step in renegotiating relationships. With guidance from our partners at the American Indian Family Center, we turned to Circles as a way of creating a space apart from the power dynamics underneath most employment or service interactions.

Between November 2017 and April 2018, we organized 9 Talking Circles for over 60 participants. 8 Circles were specific to cultural and ethnic groups prevalent on the East Side. Each Circle had 6 to 16 participants, a facilitator, and a note taker from one of our xChange organizations. Facilitators were leaders in their communities or experts in Circle process, and adapted their Circle to the culture or tradition of themselves and their participants.

During the Circles, participants talked to each other about their values, and how those values shape their understanding of meaningful and sustaining work. A note-taker wrote down what each person said, without identifying them by name, and later checked that against an audio recording. Each Circle leader then put together a report with major themes from the Circle. This document builds on those individual reports, highlighting common themes and representative details.

For more information about the East Side Employment xChange, or this Talking Circle process, contact Robbie Seltzer, [robbie@lukeworks.net](mailto:robbie@lukeworks.net).